

The Peace Building In Lebanon



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Special Edition

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The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists from Lebanon and Syria; they cover the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, employing objective approaches that are free of hatred and misconceptions.

Joint news supplement

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Lebanon and the impact of three large-scale migrations



Consistent commitment

Lebanon has been hard hit by the Syria conflict – having to house more than a million Syrians fleeing the fighting and dealing with spillover violence, the spread of which has triggered Lebanon's worst instability since its own Civil War more than two decades ago.

Germany has shown continuous support for Lebanon. Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs Steinmeier reiterated during his last visit two months ago that the German government «will not leave Lebanon alone to shoulder such a responsibility.»

With great admiration for the Lebanese people and a consistent commitment to help, Germany has allocated more than \$280 million to Lebanon, and has overall spent about \$960 million to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis since 2011. I would like to highlight that Germany has pledged (since 2011) to admit 100,000 Syrians on humanitarian grounds, more than the rest of Europe, Australia and Canada combined. Since 2012, Germany has consistently surpassed France as the European country with the most asylum seekers overall. By 2016, the number will probably reach 150,000 persons from Syria alone. In addition, German municipalities have spent around 520 million Euros on humanitarian efforts connected to the crisis in Syria. Part of this amount has helped build reception centers for refugees across Germany. Germany's commitment springs from a sense of responsibility, after being itself hit by a similar refugee crisis after World War II. Successive German governments have become a reliable and efficient partner dealing with humanitarian aid and economic cooperation all over the world.

Carsten Meyer-Wiefhausen
Chargé d'Affaires of the Federal
Republic of Germany

Tragedies and hope

The Middle East is boiling. Iraq, Yemen and Syria are on fire. Refugees fleeing from wars and massacres provoke a mixture of compassion and anxiety, especially in more deprived countries which are shaken by a population imbalance, economic instability and a lack of resources in the public health sphere.

Journalists, analysts, commentators and experts in the region decided to unify their voice under the banner of the UNDP. We are trying to provide a deeper understanding of this tragedy, which could detonate the situation if it isn't contained, as we await a presumed solution. It's an initiative that L'Orient Le Jour wanted to be a part of.

However, the ray of light indicating hope usually emerges from darkness. Through managing the crises of the peoples of these countries, fine examples of solidarity and loyalty emerge. These are the result of the interaction between refugees and host communities, which enhances a culture of tolerance among people determined to confront their difficulties.

At the heart of things is a dynamic of both tragedy and hope; it appears that the Lebanese Civil War, which we have barely overcome, predicted the conflict of today on a wider scale.

Gaby Nasr
Managing Editor
L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

Humanitarian response

In the early days of the Syrian uprising, the trickle of refugees across the border brought out the best in Lebanese hospitality, with many people opening their doors and their homes to strangers, offering them much-needed food and shelter.

But after four years, and with over one million refugees in the country – representing a fifth of the total population – the relationship has often become strained.

Tragically, in some cases the situation has provoked not only an inhospitable response, but an overtly racist one. Local municipalities have – without government sanctioning – hung up signs prohibiting Syrians from walking in the streets after dark. Syrians have been attacked and refugee tents burned.

This humanitarian crisis – one of the worst of our times – deserves a human response, and not one that treats refugees as if they somehow wish to be rendered homeless, with no idea what their future holds.

Nadim Ladki
Editor in Chief
The Daily Star

Syrian refugees are a national issue

Speaking to An-Nahar newspaper, Rashid Derbas, the minister of social affairs, says that «there's no use in ignoring the magnitude of the problem of Syrian refugees in Lebanon or expressing outrage at the negative or racist public reactions to their presence because this helps exacerbate the problem. Likewise, the issue of Syrian refugees should not be a political football; it shouldn't be exploited or bargained over, or used in domestic strife. It's an issue that affects the interests of all Lebanese. We should agree on a treatment that avoids polarization.»

«It's a national issue,» Derbas says, «that requires declaring a state of political emergency – all national energies should be mobilized, whatever their affiliation may be. This issue is sufficient to unite Lebanon's national will.»

These are fine, significant comments, and Derbas might have played a large role in the government's decision to limit refugee entries; it wouldn't have been possible for a minister from another sect to adopt such a project, because of the confessional dimensions as well as the humanitarian dimensions, which should be respected in any case. The laws and measures should not be implemented when it comes to the lives of people exposed to murder. Laws are enacted for people, and not vice versa.

However, the minister's proposal might be a dead letter if a party doesn't step forward to begin adopting the treatments, or at least producing an approximate statement of vision for them.

There's a need for a draft document to become a plan after an exhaustive debate takes place, before the issue of Syrian displacement comes to resemble its Palestinian counterpart – simultaneously temporary and permanent. Syria is facing a massive catastrophe with no solution on the horizon or vision for a road map that could involve partition, as some are promoting, which will eliminate the possibility of the return of many people to areas or states where life will not be livable.

Thus, the social affairs minister's call for the declaration of a state of political emergency in dealing with this complicated issue is an urgent one, despite all of the other crises that are buffeting Lebanon, because the refugee situation is, in essence, a time bomb. Derbas might be required to take the initiative for convening workshops, with possible Syrian participation, to set down clear frameworks for dealing with the issue, so that Lebanon is treated justly and Syrians retain their dignity and human rights.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor in Chief
An-Nahar newspaper

The needy among the needy

Her beloved voice is distant and deep over the telephone. We're in contact less and less frequently because of my feeling of guilt; it's the first time that I've been away this long from the valley that used to be green.

Her beloved voice takes me back to the streets of my village, to the face of my grandparents who are gone, but who continue to live in both my soul and tired heart, as well as my mind and my conscience.

My aunt's voice is troubled.

«Thank God,» she keeps repeating. «No water, no electricity, things are so expensive. Roula is spending long hours at the Health Committee and has become quite exhausted. There are many displaced people, simple people, their women are always pregnant, and their children get sick a lot. They quickly catch bacteria from each other.»

She goes silent, and I am silent in protest. She continues as if she is talking to herself. «But on the other hand... God help them. Ill-educated, poor, needy, and away from home. God protect us from that. But we're also experiencing poverty and need, us too feel like refugees in our own country.»

She lives with her husband in a three-room home; they both suffer from chronic, painful diseases. Also living with them is their divorced daughter and her teenage daughter. On the weekends, their sons arrive from the suburb of the capital and the three rooms become a refuge for more than seven extra people.

My aunt is unique. A loving soft lady who doesn't even throw away a crust of bread; she gives it to the neighbor's chickens. She recycles everything instinctively and with a wisdom that only villagers like herself possess.

My beloved aunt, who instinctively feels for the poor, having experienced need and exile herself. She had to mature early in life, while helping raise her many siblings. She practically disappeared as a person in order to guarantee that they would be successful and distinguished. Later, she raised her own four children. When one of them died at ten, her life changed forever.

My beloved aunt, who would give up her own children's food if someone needed it, is annoyed these days by refugees whom she is unable to help. It's not exactly annoyance – it's that she doesn't know how to respond to their presence.

My aunt speaks to me on the phone like she's talking to herself. «Don't they know that they shouldn't get pregnant?» she says. «But at least there's someone trying to provide them with a roof, enough food, and medicine. And here we are, no one paying any attention to us. But they're poor people, my niece, treated unjustly, exiled. Misery, on top of exile. Poor people among poor people. The needy among the needy. Their stories would melt even a rock. May God protect us from what is to come. They never let us down when we needed them. But we, we can barely survive ourselves, how can we ever return their favor?»

Hanady Salman
Managing Editor
As-Safir newspaper

The responsibility of religions in the time of war: serving people and building peace

Fadi Daou*

There are people who prefer not to link religions to issues related to conflicts and their political and economic dimensions. Some believe that religion is too lofty a matter to be discussed in the context of intellectual struggles and narrow interests. Far too easily, they absolve the religion of the ugly acts that are committed in its name, relying on the distinction between a religion and its followers. All extremism and distortion are attributed to individuals who deviate in their understanding of religion and apply its teachings wrongly. They place all the blame here and sometimes go as far as to accuse their detractors of failing to respect the sanctity of religion when someone dares to blame religious institutions and their rhetoric for these deviations.

On the other hand, others believe that religions have no role in confronting crises and solving conflicts because these religions, or their leaders, are unable to deal with matters that are essentially political and worldly – the approach to these issues differs radically from the approach to matters that are spiritual and sacred. These people believe that it is better to restrict religion to its own, special scope for individuals, based on the notion of respecting freedom of belief and religion; they favor involvement in matters connected to daily life based on a comprehensive, non-sectarian basis.

However, our region is witnessing developments – especially those connected to the Syrian crisis and its humanitarian and social consequences – that include the disintegration of the social fabric of this country and the displacement of millions of people from their homes, villages and towns. Large numbers of these individuals have sought refuge in neighboring countries, and particularly Lebanon. These developments demonstrate how urgently we need to transcend these two stances and adopt a third. This third approach should acknowledge both the danger of using religion as a tool in a struggle, as well as the role of religious institutions and authorities in reining in this phenomenon, limiting the politicization of religious discourse, and preserving its humanitarian and values-based comprehensive mission in the face of lethal sectarian and partisan conflicts. Moreover, every day we see the positive and necessary role that religious institutions can play in reaching people through their wide-scale religious networks, with the objective of defining their needs, serving them and protecting them from the dangers of extremism and violence.

In fact, religion cannot be separated from its comprehensive, humanitarian and values-based dimension without losing the meaning of its mission, and becoming an ideological project that imprisons its followers within dogmatic systems that are outside the context of history and human civilization. This applies primarily to Christianity and Islam, despite their differences. They affirm the inevitability of merging belief in God with loving people and doing good deeds. The holy texts remind that the origin of humankind is one (Adam and Eve), which renders people part of a common human family in which they are all brothers. Islam teaches that people are all the family of God. Thus, it imparts the bond of solidarity with a sacred, institutional dimension, based on the linking of all people with God: “All people are the family of God, and the dearest to the Lord is the most beneficial to his family,” according to a saying of the Prophet.

Peace constitutes a central social value that these religions call for as a part of man’s mission on the earth, and as the completion of divine will. Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Islam links faith with love and spreading peace, according to the Hadith of the Prophet: “O people, you shall not enter Heaven until you are believers, and you shall not believe until you love one another. Do you not wish me to guide you to acts that will cause you to love one another? Spread peace among yourselves.”

This is combined with achieving justice, on the legal but also on the social level too. Justice is the social face of the value of peace; without it, the concept of peace is a hollow shell and an empty slogan. Religions have called for making justice a fundamental basis of practicing belief and implementing divine teachings. In the Quran, we read “O ye who believe! stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do” (Al-Ma’ida, 5: 8).

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah about the awaited Messiah, we find this beautiful description, which Christians say is achieved in the person of Christ: “He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give

decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist” (Isaiah, 11:3-5).

Thus, it should be evident that we need to benefit from religious resources and the ability of this discourse to affect people, in order to encourage people to make efforts to achieve justice and peace, secure the dignity of all people, and show solidarity with those who are most in need, with no sectarian, ethnic or class discrimination. In doing so, religious communities and institutions show their concern for not only those who belong to their particular group, but also for all people as well and encourage believers to do so.

In addition, this stance prompts religious authorities to shoulder the responsibility of developing religious discourse in coherence with the value-based dimension of divine messages, as well as in an appropriate way to the circumstances and their effects, while preserving the principle that religion exists for the good of man, and not the opposite.

«Adyan» Foundation has adopted this approach since the beginning of the Syrian crisis and dealt with its consequences on this basis. It has been able to gather various religious authorities in the framework of a program to build peace through reconciliation and fostering social and interfaith resilience to confront violence and its impact. Adyan worked with Christian and Muslim authorities in Syria and Lebanon, coming together around a joint vision to confront extremism by developing educational curricula, including a faith-based approach. The work involves the development of training for preachers in a way that suits the surrounding conditions and challenges. Significantly, they collectively asked for training people active in relief and humanitarian work on the culture of respecting difference, religious diversity, and human solidarity, so that humanitarian work doesn’t become a source of discrimination and tension between various communities. Instead, it should serve as means to preserve the diverse social fabric and opportunities for reviving coexistence on the basis of respecting differences and global solidarity with all people.

In fact, religion cannot be separated from its comprehensive, humanitarian and values-based dimension without losing the meaning of its mission, and becoming an ideological project that imprisons its followers within dogmatic systems that are outside the context of history and human civilization. This applies primarily to Christianity and Islam, despite their differences

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The streets of Lebanon suffocate Syrian children

Abdel Rahman Orabi*

Syrian children who are begging in the main intersections of Beirut don't only ask for money some of them ask for food or water and point with their small hands to the rest of their family members, perched on the sidewalk.



A small girl with eyes lost below dusty eyelashes finds no embarrassment in asking for the bottle of water next to the driver because «my mother is thirsty,» or asks the drivers for the price of «a can of noodles because I'm hungry,» placing her hand on her stomach in a childish expression of hunger. In some cases the children hide behind sacks of tissues, pens or roses, which earn them a bit of money as they try to take on the grown-ups' job of providing for the family.

At the busy intersections and side-streets, the beggar children move from stores to restaurants, selling roses, tissues, or pens. Ola has become a daily guest at a restaurant in Tripoli, where she sells roses and is welcomed by the management. But other children don't always have such good luck with the owners and employees. A Syrian boy was beaten by an employee from a restaurant at a well-known café in Hamra Street in Beirut. It was followed by a wave of online anger and then a one-off protest in front of the café, asking that the employee be disciplined.

But the owners and employees of commercial establishments continue to abuse children, in most parts of the country, and it's not restricted to beatings. Fatima was run over in Sidon while trying to sell the roses that she had left with her, just before midnight. The driver hasn't been identified; a group of young people in Sidon have organized «the rose-seller» campaign, in a bid to shed light on the dangers faced by Syrian refugee children in the streets of Lebanon. Several local television stations have cooperated, by getting the campaign's message out through hosting its organizers, who explain what children face, physically and psychologically, in the streets, and highlight the fact that these dangers rise at night and in isolated places.

According to a report by UK Care in June of last year, «more than 50,000 Syrian refugee children work under difficult conditions, for 12 hours a day, in order to help secure food and shelter for their families.» No more than 30 percent of Syrian children receive schooling in Lebanon, the study also

finds. These children exhibit many signs of physical and verbal abuse, due to the widespread use of sectarian and racist terms, and even the carrying of light weapons; they also suffer from isolation or fear of society.

As a response, local and international organizations try to introduce social and psychological support programs to buttress the students' school curriculum. As for the street children, who are at greater risk of experiencing social, psychological and even physical problems, they are deprived of this support because they aren't in special schools for refugees, as the parents of some force them to beg or work to secure the requirements of daily life.

According to a report by Lebanon's Labor Ministry, the ILO and Save the Children in February, Syrians make up 73 percent of Lebanon's street children; most suffer from «domestic and physical violence, and sexual exploitation.» During the release of the study, Sejaan Azzi, the minister of labor, called the children «time bombs and potential

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terrorists» while highlighting the importance of dealing with them on a humanitarian basis «because they are part of us.» He promised to complete a study on building a shelter for refugee children by March but this has yet to take place; the ministry has merely launched a website for the «Unit for Combating Child Labor.»

On the ground, Internal Security Forces personnel decline to detain children unless they are selling or taking drugs, because there are no specialized detention facilities for juveniles at police stations, while the existing juvenile prisons are already overcrowded. Some officers say they are obliged to avoid dealing with many criminal cases with street children for these same reasons.

Observers fear that the phenomenon of Syrian child labor will become more widespread and that the various social problems posed by their presence in the street will become more complicated. These include early marriage, as girls are offered for money or in order to protect them from the problems of being unwed, or to keep them out of prostitution. The possibility of children joining gangs of thieves, or becoming religiously hard-line, or becoming child soldiers – these all appear to be realistic scenarios, as Lebanon's street children problem grows. The UN links the treatment of Syrian refugee child labor to seeing to the families' nutritional needs on a regular basis, «because halting food assistance has a dangerous impact on children, «as it is very likely that families facing additional pressures will have to force labor or early marriage onto their children.»

In the end, the poor state of official statistics on Syrian child labor only clouds the picture, whether in terms of the figures, or the solutions.

* Journalist at Al Arabi Al Jadid newspaper

Contagious diseases spread in poor communities

We can avoid them with prevention and immunization

Rola Moawad*

Contagious diseases aren't racist like people, but they are opportunistic. They take advantage of poverty and poor health conditions to kill their victims, irrespective of the community to which they belong – and impoverished conditions serve as their principal “home.” These diseases result from a deterioration in socio-economic conditions in communities that suffer from overcrowding. However, some people are unjustifiably afraid of refugee arrivals, after the recent events in the region. The various diseases, viruses and microbes can be avoided through immunization and prevention.

The flight of refugees is usually accompanied by the outbreak of contagious diseases, which can generate a climate of fear in local communities, especially since there is a lack of awareness and orientation for safe and healthy methods of prevention. These diseases emerge as a result of deteriorating socio-economic and social conditions accompanying displacement, and the scarcity of potable water that is free of germs and pollution, and even water used to wash fruits and vegetables and personal use. Moreover, there is the problem of disposing of solid and liquid waste in refugee communities.

The awareness campaign includes paying attention to personal hygiene, especially washing hands on a regular basis, providing safe drinking water, and safely disposing of waste and changing social conditions, in cooperation with concerned ministries, municipalities and civil society. Health security affects everyone and the problem isn't restricted to a certain group of people who have been displaced. Thus, people should abide by the immunization calendar adopted by the Ministry of Health; they shouldn't spread panic – we can reduce the danger of infection through vaccinations and personal cleanliness.

According to the Health Ministry's Monitoring Program (available on the ministry's website), refugees, since the winter, have suffered from a wave of mumps, with 177 cases reported this year. We have also encountered Hepatitis-A (109 cases), Leishmania (12 cases), Meningitis of various kinds (99 cases), Hepatitis-B (16 cases), and acute flaccid paralysis (four cases). No Polio cases have been reported. The ministry obtained the figures from hospitals and health centers throughout the country. The Health Ministry, moreover, doesn't deal with Syrian refugees as an independent unit – it's a part of the public health system. There are no borders or nationality when it comes to contagious diseases, according to Dr. Atika Berri, the head of the preventative health center at the ministry. «When a contagious disease emerges, the ministry deals with it as a source of danger for society as a whole, and for everyone present in Lebanon,» she says. «Thus, the measures taken are unified ones, which is in the health interest of everyone.»

Berri also outlines the effort to deal with mumps: «The ministry advises checking the immunization calendar of every afflicted person, and compensating for the deficiency in immunization with more



protection in the event that a person is affected, especially among schoolchildren and university students.

«The patient must stay home for five days, or until the symptoms of swelling in glands dissipate. The most prominent symptoms are high temperature, swollen glands until they appear on one or both cheeks.»

As for Leishmania, summertime is upon us. The ministry recommends that all trash be disposed of on an ongoing basis; it also recommends pest control, especially sand flies, which are smaller than mosquitoes – their bites cause the disease if they are carrying parasites. They gather around refuse, and this is why pest control is

important. The treatment should cover the affected area to decrease the chance of infection.»

As for avoiding hepatitis-A, Berri says that «it's important to use safe water, adopt the principles of safe nutrition, eat germ-free good and properly prepare and serve food shouldn't be mixed them together, especially during preparation.»

«Symptoms include a high temperature, nausea, and vomiting, with the likelihood of diarrhea. Jaundice is another symptom, for those over seven years of age. For those who are younger, jaundice doesn't appear in around 70 percent of the cases; we must monitor other symptoms in children and

infants,» she says.

The ministry stresses the importance of awareness for parents and teachers. Doctors' prescribed treatments should be adhered to – we shouldn't resort to haphazard treatments that involve antibiotics, which make cases worse, especially with Hepatitis-A because they could lead to dangerous complications. It's important to isolate patients until they are cured so that the disease doesn't spread. Some refugee students suffer from leprosy and lice because of crowded living conditions and the lack of basic health requirements. The leading symptoms here are recurrent itching in the afflicted areas (such as with head lice, for example); this itching could lead to open sores that could become affected because of the bacteria that usually spreads on a person's skin. It's a parasitic disease that is treated through cleanliness, changing sheets, pillows and clothing on a regular basis, and topical treatment.

The Health Ministry, moreover, doesn't deal with Syrian refugees as an independent unit – it's a part of the public health system. There are no borders or nationality when it comes to contagious diseases

* University professor, journalist at An-Nahar newspaper, TV program presenter and producer

The intersectional faces of violence against female Syrian refugees

Maya El Helo*

Within the current geopolitical situation, migration from one country to another due to war or socio-economic conditions has become one of the most violent situations people undergo.

The UNHCR has described the Syrian refugee crisis as one of the biggest crisis of displacement since World War II. As border protection measures are beefed up, migration has become more complicated and fraught with many dangers, on the borders and inside host countries.

It's nothing new to say that violence against women is deeply entrenched in most societal structures. But if we add all these factors to the violence resulting from displacement, we find that female refugees, and especially Syrians, face a particular difficulty that results from the socio-economic conditions imposed by living as a refugee.

Refugee camps are far from cities and have few job opportunities; camps turn into prisons because of the latest complications imposed by the state, and especially General Security, on male and female refugees. This includes complicating their entrance to Lebanon, completing their official paperwork or residency procedures, etc., thus limiting their ability to move around. In addition, there are curfews that have been imposed by some municipalities, inside and outside Beirut, which turned the life of refugees into a prison inside a prison. Many female refugees (depending on their social class) are unable to leave Lebanon to return to their country because of the war, or travel to another country, for financial reasons or the difficulty of obtaining entry visas.

For all of these reasons, female refugees live in an environment in which they are subjected to violence, while the institutional regulations set down to «organize the refugee situation» have placed them in fragile situation, where the possibility of them being exploited at work, or even on the street, is rising. Many female refugees are subjected to harassment and they can't hold an accountability process against those who exploit or harass them; even policemen subject them to mental, verbal and even physical abuse in a lot of cases.

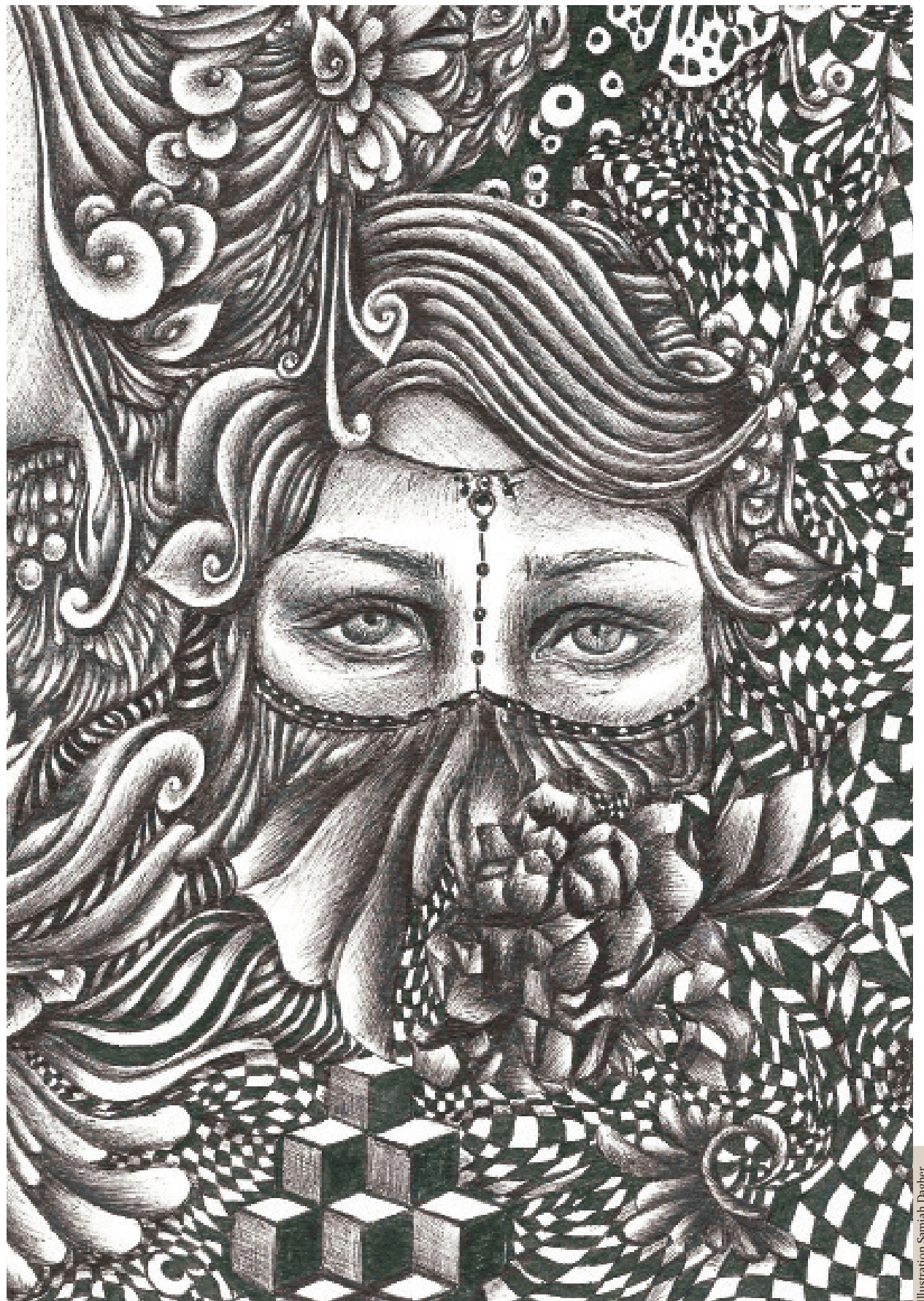
These factors complicate the entry of female refugees into the workforce, as they search for a way to make a living; they rely on the services of local and international NGOs, which can no longer cover their needs because the magnitude of the crisis has grown. Moreover, Lebanon's Labor Ministry a while ago specified the professions that Syrian refugees can practice; there is a particularly class-based aspect to this, as these professions are ones in which the pay barely meets the minimum wage. This allows employers to exploit male and female refugees financially, and even sexually sometimes.

But this cycle of violence isn't restricted to the public sphere, as it extends to the private sphere as well. A number of NGOs have recorded a rise in domestic violence. Despite the attempts of many associations to secure safe places for women where they can talk about violence and receive assistance, some female refugees complain that some of these associations conduct many dialogue sessions to study the needs of female refugees. But when time comes to carry out projects or distribute aid, these associations pay no attention to the refugee's needs, but rather suffice by applying agendas that are disconnected from the needs the refugees voiced out and work within methods that are pre-determined.

Here, the questions are: How can we provide safer environments for refugees, and especially female refugees? How can the state, the host population and the various associations alleviate the oppressive structures they find themselves under?

There are many questions, but the situation doesn't change; after all these years of crisis and constant war migration flux, there is still no safe place for female Syrian refugees.

* Feminist researcher



The culture of tolerance: concept and practice

Najib Nseir*

Arabic-language media outlets have for a long time been full of talk about what they term the «culture» of tolerance, in the belief that it goes without saying that tolerance is a type of culture!

To this end, we are told that the concept is abundantly present in Arab culture or cultures, as anecdotes from history or heritage are mobilized for discussion. However, these examples are subjected to forced interpretations in order to prove they are sound – so that they suit a notion of «tolerance» that is actually haphazard and exaggerated, whether through written texts or oral discourse. It assumes the position of «culture» that only requires highlighting in order to become effective. This is an irresponsible mixing of concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, peace and «the Other,» as well as other concepts that regulate social and individual action.

Thus, describing this tolerance as «culture» contains an inaccurate metaphor, especially since it is part of a legislative, ethical and heritage-based system of values, which warn against violating or abandoning this culture. The objective here is to prevent this tolerance from becoming excessive, or even worse – such as imitating the west, for example. The notion of tolerance becomes stuck in its embryonic state; it has no effective presence and becomes a presumed «culture» but with no significant loyalty to it.

Discussing tolerance is a crisis and predicament of development, especially in a culture that considers itself to be completely self-sufficient in terms of its knowledge and labels «the other» as being harmful, or intending to cause harm, and unworthy of being believed. This debate becomes a crisis of the self that leads to extinction; it then returns to collide with the conditions and criteria that eliminate it once again. There is a stubborn clinging to the term «tolerance» and attempting to prove that it exists as culture and can be used to solve some problems of human society – albeit if tolerance doesn't become too excessive – just because it exists as a word in the language.

However, the open-ended nature of all these possibilities, explanations and judgments show that the debate on tolerance and its violent implementation result from denying the value of modern values and concepts, compared to inherited values, as the decisive judgment relies on what is «sacrosanct» – thus ending every debate.

It's difficult to deny the existence of tolerance as a concept and lofty human value, but it is strictly a social one. It tries to serve the interest about which society is in agreement, in the sense that it's necessarily a modern, enlightened concept. Therefore, tolerance doesn't appear as a concept, value or necessity in a pre-modern society. Its place is thus taken by the cultural aspects of dictatorship, strife and sectarianism, and the other cancers that eliminate interests upon which a modern society can be organized.

It seems deceptive to claim that this kind of tolerance exists in human society. Social tolerance can't exist without equality, personal freedom, free initiative, and human dignity. It isn't a gift from an individual, group or ideological current; it's an attempt to preserve interests that bind us together and that affect everyone, so that it appears as a solution in cases where laws are unable to provide a solution in an appropriate period of time, and might lead to an explosion of violence.

There is no empirically-based definition of tolerance

in Arab society except for those suggestions that are based on mere language or on emotional and existential approaches that are designed to glorify heritage, and exaggeratedly praise tolerance as a charitable act that involves voluntarily forgiveness instead of vengeance or aggression. Here, tolerance resembles a legalistic, freakish term that is based on the decision by a victorious party to be magnanimous toward the vanquished.

We should question the concept of tolerance toward others in the current era, in a clear and non-deceptive fashion. We are now witnessing this non-interest based mobilization toward the dichotomy of tolerance versus revenge. We can ask: What has a modern Sunni done to a modern Shiite, and vice versa. Or, what has a Muslim done to a Christian, and vice versa, to make us resort to tolerance and/or forgiveness? Or, what have the Spaniards done so that we forgive them (or not) for reclaiming their country after the period of «Arab conquest»? How can we forgive others for things that they haven't done and make them feel indebted to us for our forgiveness, only to discover that this tolerance that we claim exists is complete form in «our culture» is only a vile delusion that lacks any meaning?

It is a lie that reflects a deficiency in knowledge or understanding. Based on the evidence, we do not forgive and are not forgiven because, in fact, there are no logical or rational topics where we can apply the act of forgiveness. Culturally, as one example, we haven't forgiven the Spaniards for taking back their country. We haven't forgiven the Crusaders even though we defeated them and expelled them from our land. The

people of a single sect haven't forgiven each other for a given dispute, not to speak of the situation between different sects and religions. So how can we talk about and brag about a «culture» of forgiveness? The mere existence of difference is sufficient for holding others accountable whether we forgive them, punish them and take revenge or exterminate them.

Forgiveness takes place only when there is total legal equality between two parties, and this is radically lacking in our non-worldly, inherited culture. Equality is impossible; this is due either to our legislation or the subversion of existing constitutions and laws, and at the least this is evident in practice.

If there is no equality, there can be no forgiveness. Equality is impossible as proven by reality and the experiences of sects, tribes and religions, and also dictatorship. Thus, the only solution lies in adopting the Human Rights Charter in constitutions and laws (without accommodation, contradiction or equivocation). If this takes place, we'll be able to view tolerance as a social value based on legal achievements in an attempt to transition to a modern society, instead of entering the vicious circle of empty theoretical wrangling as we advocate the «virtue» of forgiveness.

This virtue can't be highlighted as a legal concept that regulates a society guaranteeing equality. The huge amount of interpretation and accommodation that is used to prove the existence of the virtue of tolerance in our heritage lies outside the modern value of tolerance. These attempts have helped bring about the killing that we are experiencing today, as we labor under the delusion of «authentic,» inherited values, and the true meaning of tolerance in our history.

Based on the evidence, there is no tolerance in our culture, whether as a virtue or as a human value derived from the worth of the individual. Moreover, we also lack the clear and openly expressed legal system that others have arrived at; this accompanies the establishment of a society, which in turn should produce a state.

What we are seeing and experiencing is stubbornness and an insistence on entering a bloody dark age, based on the notion that others are different from us, and should not be imitated; their human experience shouldn't be imitated. Perhaps this is the type of tolerance that we understand.

Forgiveness takes place only when there is total legal equality between two parties, and this is radically lacking in our non-worldly, inherited culture. Equality is impossible; this is due either to our legislation or the subversion of existing constitutions and laws, and at the least this is evident in practice

* Syrian author

History

Lebanon and the impact of three large-scale migrations

Hassan al-Zein*

Over the last century, Lebanon has been on the receiving end of three large migrations, with the number of refugees exceeding the country's population of 3.5 million. The Armenians fled from the Ottoman massacres in 1915, the Palestinians arrived with the establishment of Israel in 1948 and after 1967 while the Syrians have been arriving since 2011. This article will provide a concise look at the phenomenon in socio-economic terms, avoiding both the dominant rhetoric and the vagaries of politics.

The historian Fawwaz Traboulsi believes that the three migrations have several things in common, from the question that is posed when the migration begins – where will these people live? – to the possibility of benefiting from them as a work force, as well as other aspects.

Armenian migration

«The Armenians first worked as tradesmen and laborers,» Traboulsi notes. «There is no precise history of when the Armenian middle class arrived or took shape in Lebanon. The Armenians in Lebanon benefited from assistance provided by the Armenian Diaspora, which helped them assimilate, particularly in political life. After Independence in 1943 they had MPs and ministers and didn't only join Armenian political parties, but also Lebanese right-wing and left-wing parties. They lived here peacefully; they engaged in socio-economic cooperation with Lebanese migrants from the south and the Bekaa,» Traboulsi says.

Looking at this migration today, he continues, we find a «positive success.» The Armenians who arrived in the region before the declaration of Greater Lebanon (1920) played a role in industry in two important periods of the country's history.

The first was when Europe and its armies required civilian goods and products during World War II, and the second was during the Civil War, when the Armenian areas – and especially Burj Hammoud – turned into an industrial zone that exported to a number of countries in the world.

The same positive view is echoed by economic expert Elie Yachoui, who says «the lack of openness of Armenian society didn't prevent people from migrating to Lebanon and starting from scratch.»

«A small number of them came with money. A number of them were able to generate wealth by working in industry, commerce and banking. With the exception of the initial period, the Armenians weren't a burden on Lebanon, its state and its society. They took part in the prosperity after WW II, but the Civil War was very difficult for many of them, prompting them to emigrate. Their numbers dropped from 500,000 to 250,000,» he says.

The emergence of the «positive view» of the Armenian migration is echoed by former Bar Association president Shakib Qortbawi.

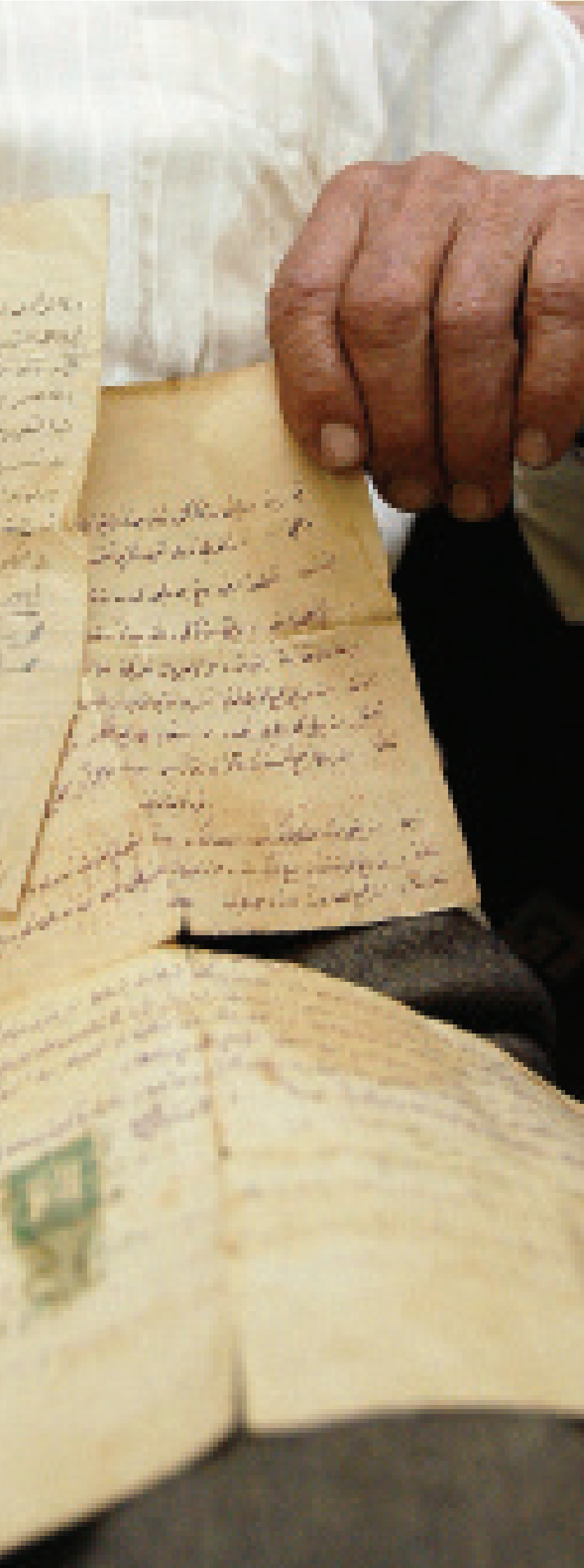
«The Armenian migration is different from the other two in legal terms,» he says. «The largest number of Armenians arrived in Lebanon during World War I, or before the establishment of Lebanese identity and citizenship. On Aug. 30, 1924, it was decided that every Ottoman residing in Lebanon would become Lebanese unless they chose another nationality. This means that the Armenians who were subjects of the Ottoman state received Lebanese citizenship legally when Greater Lebanon was born.»

Palestinian migration

Traboulsi argues that Palestinian refugees did not pose a socio-economic burden on Lebanon until the mid-1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, and that «they didn't take part in the movements and struggles to achieve socio-economic demands.» Prior to this, i.e. before Palestinian guerrilla activity from Lebanese territory and the signing of the Cairo Accord in 1969 and the eruption of the Civil War, «most Palestinians worked in agriculture, construction and petty trades; only a few worked in education,

Armenian migration was positive, Palestinian migration wasn't a dangerous socio-economic burden, and Syrian migration remains unclear





industry, trade and banking. UNRWA was responsible inside the camps for relief and education.»

Qortbawi affirms that «the Palestinians did not come here to gain Lebanese citizenship,» while Traboulsi believes that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon did not pose a socio-economic danger to the country.

«The Palestinian presence might not have contributed to the explosion of the war (in 1975) if the two parties to the Lebanese conflict had been in political agreement,» he argues. «Kamal Jumblatt himself, the ally of the Palestinians, supported trading the armed Palestinian presence outside the camps for political reforms that would grant Muslims wider participation in the regime and the state. He didn't support the permanent settlement of Palestinians and most of them were Muslims, even though everyone knows that the naturalization of the Armenians, most of whom were Christian, tilted the sectarian balance in favor of the Christians.»

Yachoui believes that although the majority of Palestinians live in the 12 camps, «the drop in education levels for most of them, and the fact that they lacked skills that would allow them to work in mid-level professions, have posed a Lebanese-Palestinian socio-economic problem, especially since the majority of the educated and those with their private income have emigrated from Lebanon.» Yachoui says that Syrian migration to Lebanon has involved two types of direct impact: «their use of (Lebanon's) infrastructure, and their competition with Lebanese labor and the related rise of unemployment for Lebanese.»

«There are 7 to 8 percent who are well-off and spend money in Lebanon (cost of living and education) but more than 90 percent are poor. I don't think the material assistance that reaches them from international organizations is sufficient.»

Traboulsi doesn't deny that Syrian refugees are «consuming infrastructure, despite the fact that (the level of this) is sometimes exaggerated.» He believes that another type of exaggeration has emerged, with

the notion that «Lebanon has lost around \$7 billion because of the Syrian refugees.»

«How can the World Bank make such an estimate, which is adopted by the Lebanese state, without estimating the gains?»

Lebanon, he adds, «has gained quite a bit of relief because of the (previous) competition from Syrian agricultural products. It has begun to import goods and export them to the Syrian market.»

As for the competition from cheap Syrian labor, he believes that «in the first place, this hurts the Syrian workers who were already here in Lebanon.»

Nonetheless, Yachoui and Traboulsi say that despite the emergency and on-going nature of Syrian migration, the phenomenon remains unclear and is colored by politics and interests.

Three migrations have taken place but the Lebanese have been tolerant of only one of them, that of the Armenians. One hundred years after it took place, the Lebanese view it positively; they have accepted that the refugees became part of their country and took its nationality. However, the Lebanese forget the second migration, of the Palestinians, and how the refugees are besieged in camps, with limited work opportunities. There are many reasons for this, from the fear of permanent settlement of Palestinians to the memories of the Palestinian role in igniting the Civil War in 1975, while we shouldn't forget that the Arab-Israeli conflict has yet to end. This means that the Palestinians remain refugees and their fate is tied to the resolution of this conflict. The third migration, of the Syrians, has been the most dramatic of all of this movement in the direction of a small country with a complicated social make-up. As usual, the Lebanese have been divided in their reactions; some believe that their state is unable to regulate the arrival of refugees in the first place, with the Syrian tragedy set to continue - with no sign of when it will end, or when Syrians will be able to return to their country.

How to define a refugee

Bissan Tay*

What does it mean to be a refugee?

The question has been lost amid the demonization of refugees or turning them into merely victims, by those who control how we deal with the issue of Syrian refugees. Refugees – or displaced people, according to the official terminology – have become part of the discourse of both sides, despite the total contradiction between them. In essence, a refugee is a person who absorbs the repercussions of forced displacement and reacts – based on his personality – to the new circumstances.

What does it mean to be a refugee?

Many refugees ask this question of themselves, in the presence of their fellow refugees, since it defines their situation. The question is widespread among young adolescents, or those approaching this age group. «I'm a refugee, this is what I'm now called, I'm a refugee,» says Umayma sharply, speaking with a Deraa accent. She left her city more than three years ago. In her mind, this definition weighs heavily on her as it defines her identity and the social class to which she belongs, i.e. the refugee community. It defines her as a person who has lost the basic elements of life.

«My name is 'refugee',» says a little girl. «Meaning – no home, no new clothes, the school is neglected, and I have to put up with freezing cold winters and hot summers.» What Umayma acknowledged is rejected by others. At the Qabb Elias camp, young boys gather around Abdullah, 15. They are deep in a discussion that is much older than their years, using words that aren't from the dictionary of a teenager. They talk about «an impossible future,» «dead-ends,» and «delayed solutions.» They hate the word refugee and as Abdullah himself insists, «Don't call it a camp. It's a workshop. One that we're forced to live in forever.» The word refugee for him and others is tantamount to an insult.

In the project «Seeing the Self» managed by the artist Sabine Choucair and the director Eliane Raheb, and supported by UNICEF, teenage refugees produce short films that express what they think about their conditions as refugees. One of the films is called «Zeez,» and is less than five minutes long. The word «zeez,» the annoying and useless cicada, is repeated in the movie dozens of times, as it is daily in the lives of refugee teenagers, and it is also used by Lebanese teenagers.

Perhaps one can say that seeing all of the films produced by «Seeing the Self» allows one to come away with answers about the meaning of the word refugee.

To be a refugee means that a teenager is exposed daily to insults and beatings; in other words, other people make them feel that they are their masters, and can intervene in their affairs.

A refugee means being a teenager with no protection.

A refugee means being a teenager who likes the lifestyle of the people in the host country and tries to imitate them, but remains ugly in their eyes.

A refugee means a teenager doing physically exhausting work for low pay.

A refugee means a teenager facing obstacles to studying in schools that engage in exploiting refugees; they exit with no diplomas.

Being a refugee naturally has dozens of other meanings, which should be understood by living with refugees for a month and not by imposing our opinions and agendas, or the product of our imaginations.

** Journalist and documentary film maker*

My story of being a refugee

Mahmoud Sattouf*

My family and I sought refuge in Wadi Khaled in north Lebanon in mid-2012.

On the first night, I was full of despair and unable to breathe. I asked myself, «What I am I doing?»

Things around me were becoming overwhelming, and I was shrinking away inside. How could I hide my despair, or tension and the feeling of being lost? Syria, which I left yesterday, is no longer Syria, and my home has changed, along with the way I look at life. For three days I didn't leave the house. I was now in a new world, with new people whom I didn't know. I was the only breadwinner in my family, made up of my mother, my three siblings and their children; one of them has lost her husband and the husband of another is been detained in Syria. We had no news about him for two and a half years. My father was deceased.

My new small home was on the bottom floor of a building. The host lived on the top floor. He provided me and my family with all forms of assistance and helped us with the smallest of details (drinking water, electricity, etc.), and asked for nothing in return. The smile never left his face. My family and I had food coupons but they weren't enough. I couldn't sit alone at home, doing nothing. I needed to do something to leave behind this painful situation and, first of all, do something acceptable, as well as provide daily sustenance for my family.

This is how I entered my new world. In Syria, I got as far as being a first-year student in the Faculty of Law but I couldn't continue my studies because of the crisis. I was determined to attend cultural and vocational courses, such as male hairdressing, and one on health awareness, at the cultural center; I was one of the top students. I benefited from this expertise to build a beautiful palace where a sense of humbleness and being satisfied with the will of God Almighty prevailed, along with the struggle for a better life despite my limited means.

I looked for a job, and worked. I came to own several men's salons and I rented a place to practice my profession and achieve something for myself. Today, I dedicate this success to every Syrian or Lebanese young man and I say to them, don't give up, no matter what. Be positive as much as possible. A person with the proper appearance and behavior will make an impact on everyone he meets and enjoy the respect of everyone.

My experience in Wadi Khaled was a useful and a «modern» one; it taught me a great deal, which included the modern techniques of managing dialogue and self-development. I took part in the Tafawwuq wal-Saade Association's project on «youth spreading a message of peace in times of crisis.» After these training courses I became better-informed about life and I participated in several activities, such as English language courses and children's activities, and others. Finally, I say that inside all of us is a dark tunnel, but not all of us are able to move the stone away, so that the light shines through.

This is my story, a story of displacement with many chapters, as I await the final one, which might have a bright ending.

** Syrian displaced in Wadi Khaled*

My experience in Lebanon

Suhaib al-Khatib*

I was born in Deraa province in Syria and majored in accounting. In 2004, I began traveling to Lebanon to work during the summer, to save money for my studies in Syria during the winter. When the Syrian crisis worsened I was unable to continue my studies; my parents, siblings and I became displaced and we ended up in the Marjayoun area.

During my period of residence in Lebanon– I'm someone known for being active, and loving life – I was able to establish friendship with Lebanese of all political stripes, social backgrounds, and sectarian affiliations. I appreciate the hospitality and good treatment that I received from most of them. But I was also angered by the stereotypes that some of them have about Syrians, namely that they are backward, only because of their financial situation or the way they dress, or the type of work they do.

One cold winter day I went to the local «manakeesh» place, as usual, and had some coffee, as usual. I was well-dressed that day, which wasn't usual. After looking at me for a while, the proprietress said, "It's good that the Lebanese have taught you how to dress." I felt angry that I had to put up with such things.

My humble experience in social work didn't prevent me from joining a Lebanese-Syrian committee that was active in Marjayoun and Hasbaya to help Syrian refugees.

This committee attracted a number of Lebanese and international relief organizations, which helped in the gathering of statistics and the distribution of assistance to Syrians. However, my colleagues and I noticed that the displaced were being dealt with in a negative fashion. Their dignity and their humanity were being violated, until the committee began cooperating with the "Youth Network for Civic Activism (YNCA)," a local association in the south that helped the Lebanese-Syrian committee to improve its internal organization. It trained me and my colleagues in communication and outreach skills. This cemented my conviction, in practice and not in words, that relief for refugees represents a right and not charity. Thanks to this network, I established social relations and friendships with my Lebanese peers, in a number of towns and cities. I took part in conferences, relief activities, and a play, as well as various activities inside Syrian refugee camps. We planted a smile on the faces of children, the elderly, those in need, and those who have suffered injustice. We helped establish sound ties between them and the host communities while avoiding preconceptions and racism (by both sides).

This experience returned me to my true self. It restored my self-confidence and taught me that the only option in life is to be positive and spread joy, and call for peace wherever possible.

** Syrian displaced in South Lebanon*

Initiatives

Initiatives to boost social coexistence in the Bekaa

Nisaa al-Aan center: a step in the right direction

Mohammad Ziadeh*

The Nisaa al-Aan center in the Bekaa aims to empower Syrian women in various domains. It also seeks to empower young people and children in terms of their family situation, after they were displaced by the battles raging in their country. However, the need to assimilate these people in Lebanese society has prompted the organizers of the center to hold joint activities to bring together Lebanese and Syrians, aided by the efforts of some Lebanese.

The activities aimed at achieving cultural and social coexistence, began in July 2014 in the town of Saadnayel, with an Eid al-Fitr festival for Syrian and Lebanese children. It was staged with the supervision of the center's Syrian staff, with the help of the municipality and a number of young people.

Majd Sharbaji is the director of the Nisaa al-Aan center «The festival offered a mini-amusement park, along with theater and music show,» she recalls. «Around 3,000 Syrian and Lebanese children attended, which helped boost social solidarity between young people and their elders on this occasion».

In order to arrive at coexistence and cultural assimilation, even in a narrow scope, the center employed Lebanese trainers and trainees along with Syrian ones in the courses that are offered.

Ghina, 24, is a French language teacher from the Bekaa who

currently works at the center; she describes her experience in teaching women: «At first, I was afraid that they would reject me because I'm Lebanese and a stranger to them. Their damaged psychological state, because of the war in their country, presented an obstacle for me. But I think this disappeared quickly, after a few days when the trainees responded to me quite well. I didn't feel like there were any barriers between us,» she says.

Ghina added that the good relationship between the Lebanese and Syrian people requires a bit of interaction in order to grow.

«I became friends with my students and we went places together; I always catch up on their news» she says.

This is what Marwa, a 25 year old Syrian student, recalls: «Ghina was able to quickly fit in with us,» she recalls, «and added some fun to the lessons. She would repeat things more than once until we understand them. I didn't expect this from a Lebanese woman; I had preconceptions. But after I met her and her family, I changed my negative view about Lebanese.»

In order to encourage Lebanese and Syrians to come together, the center, along with some Lebanese activists, opened a club called the «Bekaa Sports Academy» in Jalala, a neighborhood. At the Academy, where Lebanese and Syrian youth are joined together on a single team in order to

merge them together and develop their skills.

Lawyer Rami Zammar, 36, a friend of the center said that the project was one of the initiatives of Nisaa al-Aan that impressed him.

«It helps ease the process of coexistence through sports and group competitions noting the lack of sporting facilities in the area. We gave them the space for the project and the center was responsible of the planning and execution,» Zammar says, noting the Lebanese contribution to the project.

Sharbaji ends by saying that the club will be ready soon and that it will work on developing Lebanese-Syrian sporting activities, and protecting young people from extremism and racist and social problems.

Several other similar initiatives have emerged recently in the central Bekaa, aimed at promoting coexistence between Lebanese and Syrians, such as the cultural center sponsored by «World Vision» in Kfar Zabad, and life skills courses organized by «Save the Children» in Bar Elias, Qabb Elias, and elsewhere.

* Journalist at «Enab Baladi»
civil society activist and media official at Nisaa al-Aan center

Theater

«Sakakine» – a Lebanese-Syrian play

Ali Dia*

When they learned that they would be taking part in a joint Lebanese-Syrian play and that the work would be performed before their fellow displaced, some Syrians cried.

The play «Sakakine» (Knives) was staged following extensive discussions during workshops, under the supervision of the Youth Groups Network. The network was determined to facilitate and moderate these discussions between the young people of the Syrian Committee in order to deal with the daily relations between Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees from different aspects – economic, security and social. This play, then, is the fruit of the efforts of dozens of young Lebanese and Syrians who met and engaged in frank discussions and were completely candid. They agreed to tell the truth – that there are knives in Syria, and knives in the soft Lebanese underbelly. Everyone agreed that the writer was portraying what is taking place in Lebanon and Syria as a maelstrom in which no way out is seen, except through frank dialogue and peace.

The final scene of the play portrays this never-ending situation through a collective Mawlawi-style dance, in which the dancers revolve around themselves like a clock's hands, which don't rest unless we take out its batteries or if we replace them with doves of peace.

During the writing of the script, Lebanese and Syrians spoke up when it came to the issue of rights and duties. The Syrians asked to be equal to Lebanese who were displaced in Syria, for one reason or another, while the Lebanese complained



about labor competition in all areas, even in Syrian television drama. Everyone relied on the opinion of the Youth Group Network and familiarized themselves with the opinions and real participation by local media employees and professional artists from among their friends and acquaintances and the writer's colleagues, among them myself. I proposed that the dramatic solution lie in circling around one's self in trying to express the reality of what is taking place, to speak truthfully about what the two peoples are suffering. In addition, I proposed that there be a complete dialog between them - in the open and in secret. All of this helps us exit the predicament of the knives that are forced on both people.

The discussions about «Sakakine» certainly turned into candid sessions over time,

followed by clarifications and questions. Friendships grew between Lebanese and Syrians, especially over the issue of Syrian-Lebanese coexistence, and not only for the participants, but also all of the displaced in the south.

We should note here that the towns and villages of Jdeidet Marjayoun, Kham, Qlaiaa, Kfar Kila, Kfar Shoub and Ibl al-Saqi all enjoy certain particularities in terms of daily life. Moreover, each has its own socio-political opinion. Thus, the participants tried to discuss daily life and traditions, which allowed them to arrive at solutions acceptable to both sides.

For example, Ibl al-Saqi is known for its young people. It's also known as a southern town with little in the way of a Syrian presence. However, the interaction between the participants created a new

atmosphere and closeness, in leisure time and the ongoing meetings, for candid daily discussions – even political ones. These discussions were characterized by the understanding that was shown, and the raising of topics such as what wasn't known about the two sides.

In conclusion, friendships and family visits and sessions took place and continue to do so; these activities produced means of cooperation in all areas, especially the economic one.

Merely sitting down side by side allowed for friendships and sincere, candid debates that will certainly help coexistence between Syrians and Lebanese, especially if this moves from young people to their families and even children.

The training covered the completion of scripts and the techniques of theater: lighting, sound, effects, music and the use of the studio, in addition to the accepted foundations of acting and enunciation and even singing. All of this was part of the theater training, along with debates and listening to all opinions in a serious and honest attempt to have a positive impact on the participants. It was designed to allow them, and especially the Syrian displaced, to express their human opinions, leaving behind the political dimension.

In reality, «Sakakine» was a modest attempt to extend a hand by the Lebanese, even through theater, to help people exit - even if psychologically - the Syrian crisis, which is shot through with gray.

* Media professional,
theater actor and activist

Beirut has really changed you, my friend

Omar Shaker*

«Beirut has really changed you, my friend» is how Tareq ended our last Skype call, as he declared that he had given up on trying to change the opinions of others. He believes that I've «deviated, because of my personal desires,» while seeing himself as the only one who has retained his firm beliefs.

Four years ago Tareq was an ordinary university student, who left the neighborhood of Jobar in Damascus for the Engineering Faculty in my city, Homs. He had light-colored hair and blue eyes «that could melt the hearts of virgins,» which gave him an advantage over other young men. He would spend all his time chasing the pretty girls at the university, and they would chase him as well. At the time, I was like his conscience, which would try to restrain him while he was a jolt of energy that helped me do away with my rural shyness.

When the protests began in 2011 the wall of fear collapsed quickly for me, as it did for most residents of Homs and its surrounding countryside. The only place I could see myself was among the demonstrators; I later became a media activist with the Coordination Committee for Baba Amr, which overnight went from being a small, neglected neighborhood, in a neglected country, into an Arab and foreign media center. While the neighborhood was besieged, army defectors and the civilians who joined them waged the fiercest battles on its outskirts; it was pounded by rockets whose names we had never heard of before, and Tareq was watching, and sympathizing with us... but from a distance.

But his fear of taking part in what was going on didn't last long. He was quickly forced to, by the regime. He was

detained arbitrarily when he happened to be in the vicinity of a demonstration. A few days of torture and insults were enough to move him into the center of the opposition. He helped form a coordinating committee dedicated to writing slogans on walls and organizing demonstrations calling for freedom while his neighborhood in Damascus, Jobar, was in the firm grip of the regime.

Jobar was 200 kms from Baba Amr, but this didn't prevent Tareq from keeping in constant contact with us. He used satellite internet, to avoid the government network, which was under the surveillance of the intelligence agencies. We were now in the same position - that of opposition activists calling for a free Syria for all its people, without dictatorship. A few months later, our paths began to diverge. Baba Amr fell to the army and I ended up in Beirut. Jobar, meanwhile, was now out the control of the regime and Tareq ended up as the leader of the «Freedom battalion» group, which promoted «securing demonstrations, liberating Syria and establishing a state of justice and equality.»

Tareq and I remained in touch, but it became more difficult. Jobar and most areas of the neighboring eastern Ghouta were now at the mercy of the regime's blockade, and death. The pace of killing accelerated, as the air force deployed various types of weapons while the Arab world and the international community remained lethally silent about the daily holocaust. Tareq's ideas became more extreme and his rage grew; more and more, he sought vengeance against the «hypocritical» international community.

With every opportunity for us to discuss things, I felt that Tareq's ideas and political stances had experienced a bigger change. The idea of democracy that I thought united us

a few years ago had become «a fetish used by the west to confront the possibility of Muslims coming to power, as in Palestine, Egypt and before it Algeria,» as he put it. This increased his conviction that the only solution was Islam, and depending on the west and its «false aspects.»

At the end of 2013 the Syrian army shelled rebel-held areas in the eastern Ghouta with chemical weapons, massacring 1,300 people. The west made its threats but did nothing as the days went by. Tareq survived this massacre, but the soul of a peaceful person searching for freedom had died. He was against everything.

A few months ago, one of the opposition factions in rural Damascus detained Tareq on the charges of belonging to ISIS, according to what some mutual friends told me. Some said that he declared his allegiance to the group, while others said the militants had approached him, but failed to attract him to their ranks.

The Tareq I know is not part of ISIS. He's an ordinary university student who went from the Damascene neighborhood of Jobar to the Engineering Faculty in my city, Homs. He had light-colored hair and blue eyes «that could melt the hearts of virgins.» He would spend all his time chasing the pretty girls at the university, and they would chase him as well. But it seems that he died, several times, with the last of these deaths came during the chemical attack. All that remains of him is a ghost named Tareq, who only wants out of this life to take a brutal revenge that «heals the hearts of the believers.»

* Syrian activist



A Syrian «king» in Beirut

Ziad Itani*

Abu Obeida used to have a sweets shop with eight different branches in Damascus and Homs, but he lost them all when the war began in Syria. He gathered his family together and they fled to Lebanon.



As soon as he arrived to Beirut, he faced the most difficult question from the Lebanese: «What is your sect?» He would answer, «I'm Syrian; that's more than enough.» This took place before the Syrian uprising began to take on the features of a sectarian struggle.

Abu Obeida went to one of the areas of Beirut and opened a sweets shop with a small amount of money that managed to bring with him from Homs. But he couldn't escape the harassment and the making of needed «pay-offs» here and there. He was obliged to leave the area after only five months. He looked for another place but found the rents to be high everywhere in the capital. He finally went to the lower-income neighborhood of al-Tariq al-Jadideh, which still has places at reasonable rents compared to elsewhere, ranging from \$600 to \$1,200 a month.

There, Abu Obeida met Hajj Abu Mahmoud, who rented him a shop and a house in the same building. His wife's Lebanese nationality helped facilitate the official formalities for renting and residing in the capital.

Abu Obeida faced another obstacle this time. Al-Tariq al-Jadideh is known for its local sweets shops, which people from all over Lebanon patronize. He had to come up with a way to compete with them. He noticed that the success of his venture would be linked to making specifically Damascene sweets,

which the neighborhood lacked. He capitalized on this and dedicated al-Malik Sweets to making only Damascene sweets such as baraziq, ghraybeh, and Damascene ice cream.

His plan worked; there are about 200,000 residents in the area and they share a love for Damascene sweets, which they always used to bring back with them from any trip to Syria. The residents became al-Malik Sweets' primary customers. Working with his brother, Abu Obeida employed ten Syrian workers as chefs and salespeople and secured housing for them in a common room in the same building as the shop. They lived there during the week and on the weekends they

would go to Tripoli, where their families lived. They couldn't afford the high cost of living in Beirut, as it is relatively lower in Tripoli.

Abu Obeida's success in al-Tariq al-Jadideh didn't prevent some people from harassing him. He considers this natural and attributes it to the feeling that people in any country might have about strangers. However, his shop has a good reputation and because he mixed with people from this neighborhood over these three years – not just through the shop but also the street, the neighborhood and the mosque – it was a deterrent to any individual harassment, and prevented it from becoming the general state of affairs. Three years later, it's difficult to picture the narrow Maqassed Hospital Street without Abu Obeida's al-Malik Sweets. Neighborhood residents can only acknowledge the success and enjoy the Damascene sweets that the Syrian uprising has brought to their area.

However, none of this renders al-Tariq al-Jadideh a substitute for Homs or Damascus, according to Abu Obeida. He is grateful to the Lebanese who helped him and says, «Lebanese are honorable people, and so are we, and Syria is our homeland.»

Abu Obeida's success in al-Tariq al-Jadideh didn't prevent some people from harassing him. He considers this natural, and attributes it to the feeling that people in any country might have about strangers

* Writer and theatrical actor

We'll Meet Tomorrow (Ghadan Naltaqi) by Rami Hanna

A realistic, professionally-done television drama

Nadim Jarjoura*

The television serial *We'll Meet Tomorrow* (Ghadan Naltaqi, 2015) is a superior dramatic show in its approach to the conditions of a certain milieu, and people. It examines the paths of characters who are taken from the events of the current, confused moment. It also examines a particular social environment, with its own particular features and rules. There is forced displacement, which exacerbates various conflicts, whether personal (between an individual and his self) or public (between the characters themselves, in their daily lives). The makers of this drama (director Rami Hanna, who co-wrote the script with Iyad Abu Shamat) have relied on social realism to portray Syrian characters and a Syrian environment in the daily events of their Lebanese "exile," while the sensitiveness of the troubled and confusing relationship between Lebanese and Syrians finds its own special scope within the dramatic course of the work, because of a script that doesn't deviate from its reality; it doesn't offer pre-judgments, or post-judgments, and it doesn't patronize when it comes to tangible incidents.

Stories

The stories are told by the people who live them: Syrians fleeing the destruction in their country to a place in Lebanon in search of salvation, a way out, or refuge until the time comes to return. The stories aren't different from those known about people who follow conservative traditions and customs in religion, culture and education. They don't offer anything new per se about Syrians whose daily lives are known by the overwhelming majority of Lebanese. But these stories are linked dramatically via a technical, visual style that balances them, as dramatic, aesthetic and humanitarian themes become intertwined, and clash with each other. The viewer also discovers a bit of the hidden in terms of people's spirits, minds and actions. This dramatic linkage plays a primary role in transforming the stories from mere stories about daily life into a cohesive, integrated structure. The show is full of mirrors that reveal and tell us things, based on the basic predicament. A popular uprising in Syria erupted on March 18, 2011, demanding humanitarian rights and social justice. It then turned into an excessive, many-sided act of bloodletting. This predicament prompts the characters to take refuge in Lebanon and live in a school, the principal setting of this 30-episode series.

The uprising and its subsequent transformation into a destructive war aren't the only dramatic nucleus of the television script, although the various players, impact and climate of these events are certainly part of it. At the least, they are the motivation for what people do and say; they might cause pain or anger. However, their presence in the dramatic script is open to questions of ethics, and of every-day life: the meaning of the homeland, and belonging to it. The meaning of «defection» that takes place among Syrians themselves (within a single family also) amid the destruction of the country and its society, people and buildings. There are other questions as well: identity, relations with

the other, and above all the relationship with the self. Migration, and places of exile. Feelings, love, and clashes with others. Anxiety about the present and a fear about the future. The makers of the show aren't exceptionally concerned with discovering permanent and certain answers to these questions, so much as they want to pose them aesthetically, via the paths, relations and fates of characters, against a diverse backdrop of television episodes.

Thus, the script uses the uprising – and the subsequent madness of killing, violence and deliberate subverting of the uprising – as a purely dramatic foundation, derived from the nature of the existing relationship between people/characters. It doesn't introduce them from out of nowhere, burden them with contrived dialogue, or force them wherever possible into scenes that are out of context. For example, the latent tension

in the character of Jaber (Maxim Khalil) results from the reality of the general situation, and from an inability to escape the hells of both Syria and Lebanon. However, Jaber's open, radiant nature often emerges in harsh, spontaneous and honest dialogue with his brother, the writer and poet Mahmoud (Abdel-Monem al-Amayri), about what is happening in Syria. Jaber is «with» the regime and Mahmoud is «with» the uprising. This is where the aesthetic level of the dialogue emerges, with its harsh realism, and casualness that is honest in both dramatic and human terms. It also reflects how the self, one's actions and one's thoughts are being destroyed. In contrast, a second example sees this casual aesthetic move toward other places and situations. It's as if the character Wardeh's lack of affection for the singer Fairouz, for example, is connected to memories of her with her family, and linked to what is taking place every day before they leave for school. This is how the script's artistic and realistic honesty is completely free of any vapid ideological or rhetorical stance.

Credibility of the treatment and the events

There are the bloody, daily Syrian «events», and an attempt to respond to the reality of individual feelings about issues or details of daily life whether or not they are linked to these events. A young woman is in love with a married man; two teenagers are in love; people work in various professions to get by; they look for a way to emigrate, even if illegally; they might join an armed group fighting in Syria; the relationship between a father and his son collapses; a woman has certain spiritual-physical needs, etc. The show is in synch with this spontaneous expression during a time of destruction. It's as if what is taking place on the small screen are the details of daily life; it's as if the characters moving in and around the schoolrooms (where the Syrian displaced live) are the same people who can be found here and there in Lebanon,

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as they truly are: real people experiencing the pain of displacement, the predicament of the present, the pain of residing in an environment that doesn't exactly «embrace» them, for reasons of politics and sect, and Lebanon's well-known racism.

Above all, they live according to the social, educational and cultural requirements of their Syrian environments, which have been handed down over the generations. This appears within the script and its dramatic-narrative context, or in the general environment more realism of daily life is discovered in the television script. The vitality of the characters, their paths and their destinies in the series is a natural extension of the vitality of Syrian refugees, as they search for a dignified life in a country whose people have a confused relationship with them, or for an outlet (any outlet) to exit the brutal destruction that is devouring the entire region.

However, many moments reveal the brilliant script and acting when it comes to dealing with the details. The humorous-sarcastic sense sometimes appears in harsh moments. Jokes – even if bitter – reduce some of the weight of the tragedy at the required moment. This isn't

comedy, but rather an actual reflection of people who are skilled at extracting a joke from the depth of a bitter, harsh moment. This isn't usual, however, because it remains a "positive" attempt to make situations and characters honest in expressing what they say and do.

Many positive observations may be made about this series from the 2015 Ramadan season. The writing encompasses a visual ability to touch on the real lives of people on the brink of various types of collapse (or in the heart of this collapse at times). The dramatic approach to the conditions of these people preserves a harsh reality in telling the stories of individuals, which serve as testimonies of the meaning of pain, loss and flight, and hope as well. These testimonies reflect a reality and relate the chapters of the hell of living amid human destruction, as well as political, security, physical and economic destruction. They show us the hidden side of shattered souls with hope sometimes overcoming the efficiency of death, which comes in different forms, trying to seize any moment of joy or pleasure.

This is portrayed visually in a way that sees the dark colors dominate, allowing us to approach

the predicament of characters who are burdened with weariness and anxiety. The camera sometimes leaves behind the close spaces of the rooms and their surroundings (around 80 percent of the scenes were shot in a single place inside the school in Smar, Jbeil), but the director of photography (Tunisian Mohammad Maghrawi) retains the generally dark tone, as a synonym for the environment dominated by gloom, anxiety, defeats, disappointments and contradictions. The editing (by Mazen Saadi) affirms the balance between the stories and their narration; this harmony leads to an integrated general scene.

In short, *We'll Meet Tomorrow* is a television testament to a purely human situation in all its various aspects. The show, which was produced by Abu Dhabi Channel Network in coordination with the Syrian production firm Claquet, should be further debated because it managed to penetrate people's daily concerns, posing questions and searching for answers that remain suspended for now.

*Journalist



Lebanese have managed what few, if any other, countries could have achieved

My assignment in Lebanon on behalf of the United Nations is about to come to an end. I had the pleasure and honor of serving here in the late 1990s and was back for a brief period again after the 2006 war. This time Lebanon has been faced with the existential threat of the Syrian crisis and the country and its people have confounded and impressed the international community by somehow managing to retain stability amid this unprecedented influx of refugees. Despite all the differences, political, and sectarian divisions the Lebanese have managed what few, if any other, countries could have achieved. I hope the Lebanese population recognizes what an extraordinary credit this is for their own resolve. I have again been privileged to work alongside Lebanese from all walks of life - mayors, civil society activists, politicians, and aid workers inside and outside the UN - and to again appreciate the extraordinary talent the country has at its disposal.

The challenges that are confronting the Lebanese population and the unfortunate Syrian and Palestinians who have fled the catastrophe of the Syrian civil war are very real and look set to continue. Lebanon will require all of its resourcefulness to remain stable amid these challenges and it must be able to count on the generous and unstinting support, politically and financially, of the international community. Lebanon cannot be expected to bear this extraordinary burden alone. Such investments in Lebanon are in the interest of not only the Lebanese but the international community at large.

Ross Mountain

UNDP Resident Representative
UN Resident Coordinator
UN Humanitarian Coordinator

Cloud of redemption



By Syrian Artist: Diala Brisly



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The project supports these groups in developing both medium- and long-term strategies for peace building.

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