

The Peace Building In Lebanon

Joint news supplement



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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.

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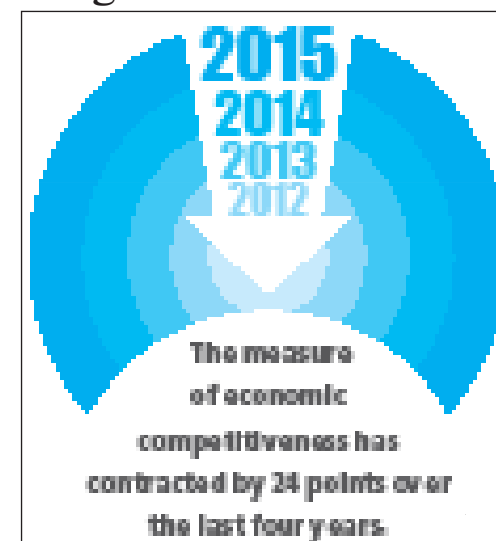


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The Lebanese Economy is shaped by the refugees but cannot bear the structural damage



Germany ready to meet a generational challenge

Germany has taken in some 150,000 refugees from Syria since 2012, and it expects at least as many spouses and children to follow. The vast majority of Germans have embraced those who are fleeing from war, civil war or political oppression. Ordinary Germans have made private donations of food and clothing. Some have even offered accommodation in their homes for an intermediate period.

By and large, Germany welcomes refugees. Of course, we should not be naïve. We are at the beginning of a much larger task to integrate hundreds of thousands of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds for the duration of their stays in Germany. This will take much more than donations and empathy. It will require years and years of effort, good will and resources.

It is a great task, one for a generation, yet it is one we can handle, and we should therefore approach it with a good measure of confidence. At the same time, Germany has made it clear that the burden must be shared, not least among EU countries.

The media plays an extremely important role to support this positive outcome. It influences attitudes through speech and framing, and it can foster understanding by explaining the underlying reasons for different perceptions. Honest and compassionate at the same time, a healthy and spirited press can diffuse conflicts and solve problems.

As new head of the German Embassy in Beirut, let me congratulate UNDP on its important effort to provide a comprehensive and balanced coverage of the enormous challenges that face Lebanon today. I would also like to thank the government of Lebanon and the Lebanese people for their generosity and humanity towards the 1.5 million refugees that this small country hosts.

Ambassador Martin Huth,
 Chargé d'affaires of Germany

«Celebrating 70 years of service for Lebanon»

As the Secretary-General conveyed in his message, the 70th anniversary of the United Nations is an opportunity to reflect, to look back on the UN's history and take stock of its practice. It is also an opportunity to spotlight where the UN – and the international community as a whole – needs to redouble its efforts to meet current and future challenges across the three pillars of its work: peace and security, development, and human rights.

The UN is not only a 70-year-old institution, it is an ideal shared by the peoples of the world that is brought to life every day, by humanitarian workers, human rights advocates and peacekeepers – and by the people they serve. I see the marking of the UN's 70th anniversary as a good moment to reflect on the past, and an important opportunity to reflect on what we can do to build a better future.

I want you to imagine the Lebanon you want in 2030. What does it look like? What do the Lebanese want to change in their little corner of the world? Actually, we the people of the UN, have a chance to meet the challenges facing the world today because getting the future we really want will depend on each one of us. To put it simply; the world has changed. We are more interconnected and interdependent than ever. Many challenges, such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, climate change and global security can only be addressed if we join forces. Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) 2030, we are aiming to provide quality

education for all, better access to jobs and health care, to end injustice and eradicate extreme poverty and to sustain the essential integrity of every human being.

The ambitious SDGs will build on the gains of the past two decades during which hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. We are committed to finishing the job while going further to build effective institutions, stable societies and enable lives of dignity for all.

I am looking forward to our upcoming Climate Change Conference, to be held in Paris in December, as well as the meeting on the proposed SDGs and the Financing for Development conference that will precede it, in New York and Addis Ababa respectively. These events are crucial milestones along the UN's journey towards combatting climate change and ending poverty once and for all.

I know that many of you are wondering what your future will look like and that uncertainty has become the norm. But the one thing that I am in no doubt of, is that we can and should transform the challenges we face today into opportunities for tomorrow.

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini
 Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator
 UNDP Resident Representative

Greater than the hardship

The people of Lebanon and of Syria have harbored mutual distrust for many years following their independence, despite the close relations between them and especially along the border areas. Such suspicion was natural, considering the political and economic regimes of the two countries: for Lebanon, it was liberalism and the free market; for Syria, it was nationalism and a guided economy. The atmosphere naturally deteriorated during Damascus's unchallenged custodianship over its smaller neighbor. Today, Syrians are suffering from a storm of tragedies and the Lebanese are living through anxiety and disturbance. Even beyond this hardship, though, is the mutual sympathy and concern. It is the independent will of these two peoples that makes it possible to know the other and, in many cases, to assist one another. It is a wonder, and one that would have been difficult to believe just a few

years ago.

However, friction still exists between the two peoples, and we must consider some of the regrettable incidents that have flared up. Not everything is black and white in this part of the world that is disrupted by tragedies and conflicts, and no one can blame the Lebanese government for associating the refugee issue with security-related concerns. The Syrians and Palestinians constitute one quarter of the country's inhabitants, and cooperation between them and the Lebanese does not mean abandoning notions of sovereignty, which are still dominant.

Gaby Nasr
 Managing Editor
 L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

Support migrants and displaced people

An-Nahar newspaper recently published an article by World Bank President Jim Yong Kim about migration and in which he wrote: "In 1964, I came to the United States from South Korea, then an extremely poor developing country that most experts, including those at the World Bank, had written off as having little hope for economic growth.

"My experience as a migrant was not easy, but it was nothing compared to the odysseys endured by the millions of refugees who have been moving by foot, train, boat, and car, first to neighboring countries and more recently into Europe, to flee unrelenting brutality.

"The differences between refugees such as Syrians, whose lives have been torn apart by war, and economic migrants like me are enormous."

Kim's essay outlined the psychological and social realities of migration, ones which the Lebanese experienced during their 15 years of civil war. Some Lebanese emigrated, others were expelled, though many met their end before either scenario could materialize. Death came by indiscriminate rocket fire and deliberate killings; the massacres resembled sheep slaughters.

When we see the deep misery the Syrians are living in today, we remember the past. We have all migrated from one area to another, displaced, in one form or another. We can feel the Syrians' pain and injury, and we must be the first to protect their right to live and move to safer areas.

Most people of the Middle East and Africa, and many Latin Americans, aspire to attain residency and then nationality in Europe or the United States, where they can feel that they are human beings to whom rights belong and not slaves to the whims of dictators and hereditary rulers.

It is true that Europe is not a free inn for all those who seek refuge, but its member states have an obligation to contribute solutions to the refugee crisis if they can do so. Their participation can be to end the war, to create safe zones for those who have been internally displaced, or to welcome refugees into their own lands and support them. This third option is hardly detrimental: Europe is an aging society and needs young labor.

Ghassan Hajjar
 Editor in Chief
 An-Nahar newspaper

The picture today

It seemed, those past two months, as if the Syrian refugee crisis has faded to the background in Lebanon.

It has been overshadowed by the country's own dilemmas. For once, internal crises have spilled into the foreground here, with bustle and demonstrations flooding the streets and squares.

Perhaps, in fact, the refugee crisis, since its very beginning, never did really command the landscape, but for the purposes of exaggeration, profiteering, and political gain from a forced presence. No one really knows the exact number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, nor has any one an accurate map of their geographical distribution.

Instead, we have been preoccupied by the pictures of refugees sinking at seas, their daily flights to the unknown, the ongoing destruction of ruins and archeological sites by ISIS, and the agreements between Western countries on the share of each of educated, young Syrians, the ones able to produce a better tomorrow, those who have been rejected by their own country and the neighboring "brotherly" countries. However, Maryam is still sitting in the corner of both Hamra and Saroula streets, with her three children, except that she's been sitting there for the past three years. Sadness still shows in her eyes, and the fear of emptiness and the unknown still emanates from deep within her. Her children appear less burdened, as though they are accustomed to the place, and it no longer frightens them. Seemingly, they have become familiar with their routines.

But the greater tragedy is that the family's daily sentry, stretching back for three years, has become familiar in the eyes of all the passers-by.

Hanady Salman
 Managing Editor
 As-Safir newspaper

The Syrian presence in Lebanon: The numbers lie, even if they are to be believed

Mohammad Ali Atassi*

Towards the end of the 1990s, one statistic in particular was continuously bandied about: «1.5 million Syrian workers in Lebanon». At the time, there was an atmosphere of growing conflict in Lebanon between the local representatives of the Syrian regime and the political forces awakening to the presence of an occupying Syrian military. That statistic was among the most important lines of attack and excuses in the battle to mobilize the masses and win over public opinion against the Syrian presence.

Several political factions exploited this statistic to ring alarm bells about Lebanese identity and its sectarian balance. Certain journalists went so far as to say that «there is one Syrian living on Lebanese territory for every Lebanese». Perhaps it was difficult during that period to emphasize the need to distinguish between the Syrian people and the regime, while attempting to verify this astronomical statistic, and to keep political exaggeration at bay regarding Syrian workers.

The matter was dropped from political discourse after the Syrian military's withdrawal following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Then, the July 2006 war with Israel further pushed the Syrian residents of Lebanon away from the glare of public attention.

It was not to last. With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, the presence of Syrians in Lebanon leapt to the fore, and with urgency. Syrian refugees were arriving in Lebanon en masse, fleeing atrocities meted out by both the Syrian regime and the revolutionary army.

There are slightly more than one million Syrians registered as refugees in Lebanon, according to figures from the Lebanese government and various international organizations (such as the UNHCR, ESCWA, and UNDP). Other estimates put the total number of Syrians in the country at around 1.5 million. These are the numbers that circulate in reports by international organizations (such as the World Bank), in the

hallways of the UN, and in meetings between representatives of the Lebanese government and international donors. They are meant to sound the alarm about «the disastrous situation» in Lebanon to attract aid to the country.

Now, everyone from UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, to High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, to most international and Lebanese politicians agree that a quarter of Lebanon's inhabitants are Syrian citizens.

The aim isn't to cast doubt on the veracity of these figures, although it is important to note that there are no effective mechanisms to corroborate them. It is not just that the tallies of Syrians who enter the country and register with the UNHCR are imprecise, but the same can be said of the tallies of those departing to Turkey or Europe, or returning to Syria. Lebanon is the main point of crossing for refugees from regime areas traveling onwards, and many of them have no desire to remove their names from UNHCR's records.

These statistics – with all their negative connotations relating to the welfare of Lebanon – have made it difficult to remove some of the adverse stereotypes tied to the presence of Syrians in Lebanon. In public debates, it is almost impossible today to bring up some of the positive consequences of the influx.

For example, it used to be that one of the pretexts for hostility towards Syrian workers was remittances – that they would spend little of their earnings here in Lebanon and send most back to their families. Now that whole families have moved to Lebanon, they are consuming and spending here. They are not just burdens on the economy.

In reality, the consequences of the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is far richer, greater, and more complicated than its portrayal in the politics of refugees and aid. The Syrian workforce is vital to Lebanese agricultural, industry, construction, and the service sectors. That was the case before the revolution; it is still the case now. Syrian workers

benefit the Lebanese economy as much as they benefit from it.

There are Syrian capitalists who have made billions of dollars available to Lebanese banks and the economy. (It should be noted that the banks, unfortunately, are unwilling to release the precise figures.) There are tens of thousands of well-to-do Syrians who now live, spend and rent in Lebanon. New decrees permit General Security to grant yearly, renewable residency permits to Syrians provided they can demonstrate that they have over 40,000 USD in Lebanese currency deposited in local banks. Then, there are those Syrians whom the Tourism Ministry has labelled «forced tourists». They have salvaged Lebanon's tourism industry – especially its hotels and restaurants – in the absence of affluent visitors from the Gulf over the past three years.

At the level of commerce and trade, Lebanon now exports oil, food, metals, and consumer goods to Damascus and regime-controlled areas, which have been cut off from all border crossings except those with Lebanon.

If it is true, as they say, that «one-quarter of Lebanon's inhabitants are Syrians», then it is equally true that Lebanese civil society has shown a tremendous capacity to work with, support, and adjust to their presence. Lebanon has been able to shoulder many of their concerns and difficulties, while at the same time benefiting from their energy and potential. It is an affirmation of the deep-seated brotherly relations between Syrians and Lebanese, despite the usual political discourse.

* Syrian documentary filmmaker and writer, with articles published in several newspapers - residing in Lebanon since 2000

About Younis... or the generation that «will never return»

Hassan al-Kalesh*

Younis's story didn't begin the day he rode the sea from Libya to Sardinia. It began way before that; he had been a victim of three revolutions.

The Libyan revolution erupted the year Younis attained his Baccalaureate. He lived its dangers and tragedies, and moved with his mother from one shelter to another to flee battles. His father was besieged in another city, and they could not contact him.

They returned in the calm that followed the fall of Muammar Gaddafi and tried to resume their daily lives. But normalcy proved illusory as security deteriorated and fear, chaos, and cleansing spread. The atmosphere made university life impossible, especially as Younis had lost many of his friends during the revolution and after it. Life had become dangerous.

In these conditions, he was compelled to travel alone to Ukraine, his mother's country, to complete his studies. But Ukraine also witnessed its own revolution, and its economy fell on hard times. Once again, Younis was destined to failure as the university refused to admit him except on conditions he could not fulfill. He returned to Libya, hopeless. As it was impossible to return to Syria for his studies, as he had dreamed, there remained just one option in front of Younis: to travel by sea, in the direction of Europe. It was distressing, not just for him, but for his parents as well, as they would have to part with their only child.

On January 23, 2014, Younis arrived in Nice, France through Italy. He disembarked at the train station broken and sad, as though a foreign and barbaric world had swallowed him up whole. He resisted the urge to cry.

Younis awaited Nasser, a 40-year-old Tunisian who was one of Younis' father's students in university, but his pleasure to see him did not last. Nasser's only assistance was to direct

him to the place he could ask for asylum. Apart from that, Younis' interactions with the man were humiliating and coercive. He spent what little money he had on Nasser and his wife on the pretext that they had shared their despicable home with him. Nasser would take him from one place to another to feed him off donations given by charities and organizations that tend to the poor and to shelters where he spent two and a half months alone, between the homeless and drug dealers. He finally allowed himself to cry, chocking in silence, afraid to show any sign of weakness in an environment where there was no place for the weak and where he was the youngest of all.

Those were the most miserable days for Younis, a pampered, middle class child who was knocked to the bottom by the prevailing circumstances that let him pick up a coin dropped by a passerby instead of calling him back– only to buy bread and cheese. What remained of the umbilical cord between Younis and his parents was cut, and he matured to the point that he appeared older than his age. Younis did not complain or grumble, but hid his hardship from his parents, instead. He did not tell them, for example, of the incident in the mosque where he received a slap from a Chechen man who had suspicions about him, and who tossed him out of the place while Younis' friends watched and did nothing. His relationship with the mosque he sought for nothing other than some peace of mind, ended; in any case, he was never religious but an open-minded secularist like his family.

Being a minor, Younis was not entitled to financial assistance from the government, though he received some money from his father and moved in with a friend. He could not take advantage of the free language classes until his asylum paperwork was processed, which took around nine months. Still, he was determined to acquire the language

and become self-reliant, and he succeeded in doing so in a period of four months at one of the institutes. Younis' confidence grew. He approached a youth protection agency, where he met Lolita, a social worker, who arranged his stay with an organization that works with youth. She and Nikola (another social worker) became responsible of his case after Younis was granted the right for Asylum.

Younis found himself at a major crossroad and it was Lolita and Nikola's mission to help him shape his life in France. Yet he struggled between their divergent orientations. While Nikola pressured Younis to find some work, Lolita believed in him and his desire to realize his dream and study cinema. In the end, both of them won as Younis embarked his university studies this last September 7th getting his wild dream closer to reality.

Meeting Younis has had a profound impact on my life. Our friendship consoled me at a time I was dying from longing, defeat, and anger in my diaspora. My love and gratitude for France grew with him, for what it provided for me and my son Ward before him; he made me proud of him. I now believe in the capacities of the Syrians and their love of life, unlike what others imagine.

Every time I came across Younis, I saw Ward within him and I would hope he would maintain his courage, cleverness, and aspiration as an adult. Younis and Ward became the symbol of hope in our dispersion and exile. Whether they return to a home they never knew or not, what matters to me is that they survived the tragedy and they found another country that deserved them and that they deserved.

* Syrian writer and journalist

The people are conspirators and do not deserve to desire

Rudayna Baalbaky*

In the few bloody hours that marked the transformation of the 22 August 2015 movement in Beirut from a public demand movement focused on lack of waste management policies to one of political dimensions, following the use of coercion, repression, and violence by security forces against peaceful protestors, a sense of «euphoria» prevailed over the general public, enveloping Lebanese and Syrians together.

Some had suspected that Beirut was immune to the culture of repression that the regimes had endeavored to spread across the whole region. The regimes desired to sully every peaceful facet of the popular protests, especially those that erupted in early 2011, and the ramifications of which were felt across the Middle East region and the world. They foisted a new model of governance upon the political class and shaped military strategies at the global level. Authoritarian regimes in the Arab world confronted the popular protests with all forms of violence, from official security repression to the use of «civil» actors such as the «baltagiye» of Egypt and the «shabiha» of Syria (both meaning «thugs» in English), to «bringing down the country on the heads of the citizens», specifically in Libya and Syria.

In Syria, pushing the revolution to its militarization, as its only option, was not enough for Assad; he also endeavored with great success to cultivate extremist groups that made a profession out of terrorism, forcing the peaceful rebellion to choose between two options: either submit to extremist terror and insecurity and stop the protests, or shed their blood under the banner of battling terrorism.

In the shadow of this bilateralness (terrorism and «Daesh» on one hand, and the dictatorial regime on the other), Beirut remained detached, despite the political and constitutional crises that wracked its government. The Lebanese continued to enjoy the right to demonstrate, with even the protection of the security forces – despite the powers-that-be in the government – whether to protest against internal matters, or to share in the protestations of the Syrians living in Lebanon against massacres that accompanied the Syrian revolution.

The Arab world and many of the Syrian people in particular, saw in the March 14 revolution the hope and possibility to bring change peacefully, something the Lebanese themselves did not fully appreciate at the time.

So in the aftermath of the March 2011 Syrian revolution, which encountered violent repression from the very beginning, it was natural that the massive Beirut demonstrations of August 22 and 29, 2015 would stir nostalgia within Syrians who passed through here, whether they remained in Lebanon or continued onwards.

They awakened to memories of peaceful demonstrations of the Syrian revolution, which had become a station in their exile. The youth had been woven into the fabric of their society and thrown into the cauldron of their politics, which oppressed their popular Intifada.

Beirut's peaceful protests awakened memories of the peaceful demonstrations of the Syrian Revolution for Syrian youths living in Beirut or to whom Beirut has become a station in their exile; they have been woven into its social fabric and political cauldron, largely related to the oppression of their popular Intifada.

This was accompanied by surprise at the unprecedented way security forces dealt with popular protests in Beirut. Security forces repressed demonstrators' rights and arrested participants, while, in parallel, the political



class denounced Beirut protests as a «conspiracy». It reached the point that security agencies were producing official statements warning the Islamic State had infiltrated the protests and accusing the popular movement being part of a destructive conspiracy led by «a small Arab nation».

In this way, the peaceful movement in Beirut elicited two responses from the Syrians. The first was nostalgia and grief to the point they almost envied their Lebanese counterparts, at the margins of the wide-ranging freedoms to organize and execute demonstrations. Syrians had been horrified by the violence brought to bear against their peaceful demonstrations, which transformed parts of old-city Damascus and Ghouta and other cities into festivals of freedom, while the repression amounted to death in Daraa and Homs. Beirut demonstrations had scratched an old wound, and not a few Syrians were perplexed that the Lebanese considered tear gas, batons, rubber bullets, and firing into the air to be «state violence». The Syrians desired for the opportunity to peacefully demonstrate, if even for just one hour. In this context, one activist said, «We would prepare for weeks to execute a peaceful demonstration that would last for less than a minute before the security forces arrived. But if this were the «repression» we encountered from the regime in Syria, we would have toppled it four times over».

The second response was to the reprehensible and frightening moment after the Lebanese movement was accused of being a «foreign conspiracy», financed by «a small Arab nation». The Syrians feared that not even in Beirut could civil society peacefully cry out for change, on its own terms, without facing the slur that it is a «conspiracy» that will lead to Islamic State rule.

In this critical and transformative time of their revolution, the Syrians needed a symbol to show the world that revolution is possible and that their demands for freedom are just and lead to democracy and not detention centers and graves. They desired that Beirut would be a bell to ring the conscience of their citizens in Syria and the Arab world, where the sitting regimes had managed to convince a large portion of their populations to forsake their demands for change, because they do not deserve freedom. In the midst of these setbacks, at a time when «revolution» had become a synonym for destruction, the demonstrations in Beirut disproved the conspiracy theories that the Damascus regime and its regional and global allies hung on every peaceful corner. How could the Syrian opposition be expected to restrain its excitement? Or to keep itself from whispering advice to the Lebanese, eager to protect their revolution from what happened to the Syrian revolution?

Perhaps this passing phase for Beirut, with its rightful, popular movement, will remind us that in this miserable part of the world, our journey has many enemies. They are the conspiracy theorists who seize any signs of disgrace or inspiration, and the cynics who have allowed disappointments to defeat their faith in authentic moments that occur spontaneously, without conspiracy.

If our regimes had one victory that opened the path for all their other victories, it is this: to convince us, individually and as a society, that we are a people who does not deserve to desire.

* Lebanese foreign Politics researcher

Phobia or Terror?

On Syrian refugees who again face insecurity

Nawal Mdallaly* - Mohammad Hussein*

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are feeling increasingly insecure as the conflict in their country wears on. It is a perception that is exacerbated by security problems within the camps and conflicts between the refugees and the host community. Just as a society breaks down in wartime and marginalizes individuals, many here have chosen to chance the sea to reach personal and material security.

There is no doubt that prejudice and discrimination against the refugees has forced a mutual aversion between them and the host society and sewed anxiety among the two sides.

From the scenes in the camps in the Bekaa:

- Mona is 15 years old, from the city of Idlib. Her mother got married and left her with her brothers, so they married her off more than once to collect her dowries. Each time, she was obligated to live with a stranger, then divorce him and return to the camp. We raised her case to an association that battles violence against girls, which expressed its willingness to help, but we faced two difficulties. First, obtaining a protection order to enter the camp, and second, the impossibility of her returning to the camp. If her brothers, who are her guardians, accept, the association can only protect and host her for two months.

- Raja is 16 years old, from the city of Aleppo. Her mother used to leave her alone while at work, only to discover that she was using drugs with her friends and having it provided by a young Lebanese boy from the town where she lived. So the mother filed a complaint with the mayor, who arrested the boy and jailed him for a month. Then, she tried to protect her daughter by taking her to work with her or locking her in her room, but it was to no benefit, because Raja was afflicted with addiction. She suffers from bouts of yelling and insanity when her withdrawal grows too strong. We looked into the case and put the mother in touch with an organization that is currently working to treat Raja. However, no one can guarantee that she won't fall prey again to the wolves when she returns to the town. For that reason, we have put the case under the direction of UNHCR.

- After every security incident in Lebanon, security forces storm the camp at Bar Elias and demand the IDs of the residents. They would arrest anyone who doesn't possess official papers or expired residence, and they would only be released after interrogations. Wissam, a resident there, says, «It's terrifying when they storm the camp, even though it's their right to do so. But what frightens us more is the contemptuous way that they treat us. Once a soldier threw a young man on the ground to search him, so someone screamed in the soldier's face, 'We aren't animals!'».

- One of the camps in West Bekaa suffered a large fire, so we decided to hold a workshop for traumatized children, in the school



across the street from the entrance. We arrived in the morning and waited for the sergeant to come with the key. There were around 100 children gathered around us, and a number of them climbed the gates. The supervisor showered them with blows from his cane and turned to us to give us a harangue. Following this incident, the sergeant threw us out, and we moved the workshop to the Bar Elias camp. The sergeant usually treats us with this insolence, and no authorities hold him accountable. He is not answerable to the associations that supervise refugees. We have prepared a complaint about this, with photos appended, for anyone interested in following up.

- One of the municipalities was distributing coupons for diesel oil to refugees in the community, and the announcement asked for girls to come pick them up. A girl steps up to take a coupon from a council member, and he asks her for her number and if she has WhatsApp service and writes her name and phone number. An elderly lady was watching this interaction while waiting for her turn, and when he didn't call her, she stepped up to him and asked, «Where is my coupon?» He replied, «There is none for you, come back another day». So she stood in the middle of the hall and yelled in her loudest voice, «I don't have WhatsApp... Is that it?» The policeman then threw her out of the building.

- The sergeant owns the land on which one of the camps in Bar Elias was built, and he charges between 100,000 LL and \$100 in rent for each tent. The girls at this camp used to attend school, but after five years of displacement they have become 14 and 15 years old, so the sergeant made them work on his land. Even though he is married to a Syrian woman and has three children, he married a minor after her father was promised an exemption from paying rent. After a year, the sergeant married another minor, so he now had three wives. He is the highest authority in the camp, and he plays favorites among the residents, especially when it comes to distributing aid. Everyone has to get on his right side or else, he showers them with his anger.

- Mohanad is five years old. He goes for the first time to school, and he walks carrying his backpack proudly, like a peacock. He returns home, and the neighbor hears him screaming to the sounds of his mother cursing and hitting him. She intervenes and asks the mother, «Why are you beating him so badly?» She answers, «I've been teaching him for two hours and he isn't memorizing a thing». The neighbor, who is a primary school teacher, looks in Mohanad's folder and finds that the teacher assigned 13 alphabets for him to memorize in one night! Turning back to the mother, she says, «You are forbidden from hitting him, and he shouldn't be memorizing these». The

neighbor goes to the school principal to explain what that teacher has done, saying it is the teacher who needs education.

- Maryam Diab, from the city of Idlib, was 17 years old Idlib when she gave birth to triplets in a hospital under contract with UNHCR. She died 24 hours post-birth from severe bleeding. There was no investigation. The next day, the hospital gave the father permission to take his children home, while each weighed just one kilogram. After a week, we visited the family and found one of the babies, Khaled, was having difficulty breathing. We consulted with a Syrian pediatrician, who requested to put the triplets into a hospital incubator. Two days later, Khaled died. His brothers returned to the tent after a week, and we assigned a private nurse to them.

Perhaps, when the United Nations acknowledges its dereliction to protect refugees, we can tally its restraint as another virtue in its history, though this will not be clear until we consider the arc of the refugee crisis in its totality. But sometimes, human interactions require an immediate response, and they cannot wait for staid or official reports. Bureaucratic protocols have emptied the humanitarian task of its meaning and undermined the UN as a symbol of our humanity.

* Lebanese human rights activist
* Syrian journalist and a human rights activist

A reading of the human rights situations before the judicial and security authorities

Diala Chehade*

For jurists who are closely following the Syrian refugee crisis, it is difficult to describe Lebanon as a “sanctuary” for those fleeing death and torture. Unfortunately, sanctuaries that guard against death but do not alleviate hardship are plenty.

Syrians come to Lebanon seeking peace in refuge, only to wind up as victims, anew. They are entangled in a web of hardship made of the official measures taken to regulate refugees, to the point that they begin to feel that they are being “punished” for seeking refuge in Lebanon; which, to begin with, is not a choice.

Syrian refugees are “punished” in all dimensions of their existence in Lebanon. It is sufficient to outline the treatment they receive at the hands of the General Security administration, the courts and the police, and fraudsters and fraud rings. And with the absence of any protection from the Ministry of Labor, Syrians are exploited by Lebanese employers, too.

The Judiciary: Maintaining Security Instead of Applying Justice

While judicial authorities have established a precedent of moderating judgments against Syrian refugees, considering the mitigating circumstances and the body of international humanitarian law, Lebanese courts have not always respected it. They have instead, in numerous instances, chosen to apply the laws narrowly, without consideration to the humanitarian context, to sentence refugees in accordance with the accusations made against them and impose prison sentences that normally range between one and six months and fines between \$200 and \$400. Most of those sentenced, though, are refugees whose crimes were to interact with fraud rings, as pursuers of their papers, in order to acquire documents at hefty prices that would allow them to enter Lebanon through its busy border crossings.

Lebanon's prisons, especially Roumieh, are filled with hundreds of Syrian refugees, arrested without evidence tying them to the security incidents in the country. Most

of them were subjected to military tribunals after harsh interrogations at the hands of the military intelligence (many Syrians spoke about the ill treatment and how they were forced to sign papers while blindfolded).

They were accused of terrorism, but without sufficient proof. Most have been waiting for more than a year for an indictment by the military tribunal to proceed with their cases. They are, in the majority, Syrians from the (secular) opposition groups who took refuge in Lebanon shortly after many border regions fell under Syrian regime control or extremist militant groups in 2014. They settled with their families in Aarsal and west Beqaa hoping that somehow they will be able to resettle in the West. Some of the detainees include children under 14, also accused of terrorism. It is apparent, based on testimonies, that any Syrian is liable to accusations of terrorism, following any security incident in the country. Worse still, such accusations make it difficult for judges to release the detainees while the trials plod to a final decision; which can take years.

Because security forces are quick to arrest Syrians over the slightest suspicion, Syrian refugees are afraid to approach the judiciary, even when they are in the right, knowing they may be imprisoned for any accusation, especially if they have been unable to settle their residency permits. As a result, Syrians are left vulnerable to networks of fraudsters and thieves, who can threaten and blackmail the refugees if they consider complaining to the police about exploitation. There are many of these gangs who have robbed Syrians, baiting them with promises to secure visas and passports or even promises to finish the intractable bureaucratic paperwork with the General Security! And a number of these gangs employ Syrian employees to perpetrate crimes; turning them into “scapegoats” if they even consider asking for their rights through the Lebanese law.

General Security: Current resources are overburdened

Under Decree No. 139 (issued June 12, 1959), the General Security in Lebanon became a general secretariat that deals directly with the Interior Minister, headed by a general secretary. Its responsibilities include: «Monitoring foreigners in Lebanon, including their entry, exit, and movement; and safeguarding the security of foreigners in the country», and «apprehending or preventing entrance and exit of foreigners», as well as «gathering political, economic, and social intelligence for the government, for security purposes».

The General Security is given near absolute authority over Syrians in Lebanon. Syrians must maintain legal documents even to move around the country, and must notify the General Security of their movements. And before Syrians are sent to court, they are interrogated by General Security intelligence officers, who treat them with varying degrees of severity depending on the severity of the suspicion of their arrest. Even after completing their sentences, Syrians are not released until after they are transferred to the General Security detention center in Beirut, where they are interrogated one final time. As such, Syrians without proper residency permits are not allowed to leave Lebanon without receiving permission from General Security first, through difficult or complicated procedures which might take months. In early 2015, the General Security imposed new regulations on Syrians looking to enter, settle, and leave Lebanon. Syrians were convinced that the new regulations were not put in place for security reasons, but to make their lives harder and to force them to leave Lebanon as soon as possible. Apart from the relatively high annual fees (\$200) that the secretariat imposes on each Syrian resident over 15 years of age, and apart from the fines they pay for illegal entry (between \$400 and \$633), the General Security obliges each Syrian refugee to find a Lebanese family or employer to sponsor their stay, and a residency owner to legalize their settlement. Sponsors are





then legally responsible for these duties, under threat of penalties. The General Security also has the authority to deport Syrian refugees and prohibit them from reentering the country – even while still in Lebanon!

The General Security will sometimes show leniency to refugees depending on their age (over 60) and their place of residence (Arsal).

In contradiction to the laws, the majority of General Security offices are refusing to allow refugees to register with the UNHCR in the place of a sponsor, as of mid-2015, knowing that the UNHCR is not registering new refugees since months ago.

General Security detention centers across Lebanon are packed with Syrians, who enter and exit each month by the thousands. They are kept in deteriorating conditions, without access to lawyers, as they are interrogated by the intelligence branch, as they wait for the decisions to present them to the courts or to set them free.

At the General Security offices, too, Syrians wait for hours in long lines to process paperwork that is never complete before several visits and bureaucratic delays. There is no doubt that the large number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (More than 1 million refugees according to the latest UNHCR statistics) has constituted a heavy burden on the General Security, which as an institution has limited financial resources and personnel, and at the same time is responsible for

monitoring all refugee movements within Lebanon. It has gotten to the point that these immense burdens left the institution incapable of applying the many circulars that it publishes and amends every two months, including those relating even to the simplest tasks, such as: reviewing deportation decisions, settling residency permits, and retrieving identity documents. These simple tasks now take months, as paperwork and IDs are lost in drawers and under piles of other documents. The truth is, the General Security administration has made an effort to meet its commitments in terms of residency papers, departures, and so forth, especially those that have to do with the Syrian refugees. The administration has succeeded in the previous months in reducing the pressure on its main and regional offices by allowing a large majority of refugees whose residency permits have expired to complete their exit papers at border crossings. It has also allowed incoming refugees to settle their statuses in a reasonable amount of time. But the bigger truth is that amid the ongoing war in Syria, the General Security is hard-pressed to fulfill its responsibilities, not without modernizing and expanding its administrative and personnel resources and adapting its circulars to the requirements of the current and fluctuating conditions. This is an urgent matter, one which officials cannot ignore. General Security needs an overhaul to ease the burdens on both

Syrian refugees and administrative employees, who are forced a number of times to work even during their days off and holidays due to the additional pressure they are under. The current essay cannot accommodate details of the form of the administrative improvements required from the security and judicial institutions in Lebanon; this would require another article.

On top of all this, the Ministry of Labor is not granting Syrian refugees work permits, leaving Lebanese employers free to exercise the most preposterous exploitation imaginable. Syrians lack the legal protections enshrined in the Lebanese Labor Law. They are forced to work for long hours, without proper wages, in jobs that do not meet basic humanitarian standards, just to survive day by day and avoid homelessness.

The matter of the deteriorating human rights status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is long; with emphasis on that the current essay addresses, exclusively, these human rights conditions as manifested by experience before the Lebanese judicial and security authorities. The essay however is not concerned with discussing the status of the Syrians in terms of humanitarian relief operations for example, or plans of medical and educational support and others. Also, this essay has not even touched on the other personal issues and affairs that refugees struggle to deal with such as birth, death and divorce certificates or obtaining Syrian passports (even after the issuance of Syrian Decree No. 17 last April) and so forth.

There is a lot to be said, and we have barely touched the tip of the iceberg. In the absence of the necessary political will, Lebanon will continue to treat Syrians as though they came by choice, and not as refugees with rights enshrined in international law.

Lebanon's prisons, especially Roumieh, are filled with hundreds of Syrian refugees, arrested without evidence tying them to the security incidents in the country. Most of them were subjected to military tribunals after harsh interrogations at the hands of the military intelligence (many Syrians spoke about the ill treatment and how they were forced to sign papers while blindfolded). They were accused of terrorism, but without sufficient proof. Most have been waiting for more than a year for an indictment by the military tribunal to proceed with their cases.

** International criminal law Lawyer expert and former lawyer and Arab media spokeswoman at the International Criminal Court between 2009 and 2013*

The Lebanese Economy is shaped by the refugees but cannot bear its structural damage

Rasha Abu Zaki*

It has been over four years since the start of the Syrian revolution, and throughout this period, several Lebanese politicians have tried to shift the blame for the country's economic crisis on the Syrian refugees.

Some ascribe the persistent electricity shortage to the refugee presence. But the sector's production rates have not improved despite annual expenditures exceeding \$2 billion; the crisis is in fact the same as it was before the displacement of the Syrians to Lebanon. Accusations concerning water, telecommunications, the Internet, and other sectors naturally prove baseless, as well.

Some even blame the refugees for rising crime rates, citing statistics that show that the number of Syrians under arrest is swelling. But they know that the arrests are for not carrying residency papers that the government has only recently required the Syrians to acquire.

Between politics and economy, there are the facts and figures. According to a UNDP study, «The Effect of the Humanitarian Aid on the Lebanese Economy,» expenditures for aid for refugees totaled around \$800 million in 2014, which contributed a 1.3 percent growth to the economy.

The principal spenders were UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Program, and UNDP.

As the number of refugees mounted, aid grew proportionately. Of the \$800 million spent, 44% went to direct, beneficiary aid (a large portion of it as food vouchers), 40% was injected as real purchases from the Lebanese market, and 14% was disbursed as salaries to employees of the UN and its local partners. Each dollar spent on humanitarian aid stimulated \$1.60 dollars of production in the local economy, according to the study; so the \$800 million spurred \$1.28 billion of economic growth.

In terms of the sectorial distribution of the spending, food production accounted for 27% of the aid expenditures, followed by real estate (rentals) at 14%, then chemical materials (pharmaceutical production) at 9%, and education and social services at 7%. The injection of aid money contributed to growth in local production, labor extraction, capital returns, and customs and tariffs.

For his part, Nassib Ghobril, the chief economist of Byblos Bank, analyzed the effects of the Syrian crisis on the Lebanese economy, and confirmed that much of what the politicians are saying about the effects of the displacement on the Lebanese economy is populist rhetoric and political posturing.

He says: «The Syrian labor force has been present in Lebanon since the 90s, and fluctuates seasonally according to demand from the agricultural and real estate sectors». He considers that the Syrian domestic worker is just as good as any other foreign domestic worker, who works in sectors that the Lebanese usually don't dare enter.

He confirms that the industrial sector, especially heavy industry, has benefited from the growing number of displaced Syrians in Lebanon, contrary to what is commonly being said. How?

«The displaced Syrian worker needs work, and he

accepts lower wages than the Syrian worker did before the start of the crisis. So Lebanese institutions began to employ this segment of Syrian workforce, and reduced the cost of production, while they were unable to control other operating costs».

A World Bank report titled «The Effect of the Crisis in Syria on Commerce in Lebanon» reveals the outcomes are two-sided; official statistics from commerce permit researchers to evaluate the repercussions of the Syrian crisis. The report states that the decline in Lebanese commercial exports that was recorded between 2011 and 2013 appears to be the result of factors not related to the war, but to the retreat in jewelry and precious metals exports, particularly to South Africa and Switzerland.

Looking at Lebanese exports to Syria, the study found that exports of drinks, tobacco, and some food products grew, as Lebanese production replaced declining Syrian food production. For example, wheat exports to Syria multiplied 14 times between 2011 and 2013. At the same time, other food product exports were negatively affected.

Export services, which count much more towards the Lebanese economy than commercial exports, contracted due to the war, the study explains, and the tourism sector was the exemplar. Travel restrictions against the country, especially from the GCC nations, and mounting insecurity negatively affected the sector. Yet the demand resulting from the Syrian refugees in Lebanon catalyzed service production in the country. For every 1% increase in the number of refugees registered, service production grew by 1.6% after two months.

Ghobril stresses that internal factors – and the weakening of economic reforms – are what shapes Lebanon's economic reality. The level of economic competitiveness retreated by 24 points over the last four years, and this is tied precisely to the worn-out infrastructure, and the state of the electricity and insurance, and administrative routines, and the absence of structural reforms to improve the investment climate. Ghobril asked, «Was it the displaced Syrian who stopped the laws to improve the investment climate, or blocked the public budget over the last 10 years?».

He added that the growth forecast at the start of the year was at 3%, but today it cannot be estimated save between 0 and 1%.

Credit to the private sector declined from \$2.2 billion in the first half of 2014 to \$926 million for the same period this year, Ghobril's study finds, and bounced checks reflect the liquidity crisis in several sectors. 119 thousand checks were returned in total in the first half of this year, compared to 112.5 thousand over the same period last year, while the value of the returned checks reached \$794 million, an 11% increase over the same period last year.

Nabil Itani, the president of the Investment Development Authority of Lebanon, says that the investment crisis is not directly tied to the Syrian refugee presence. He instead attributes it to the ongoing war, and the associated repercussions to Lebanon's internal affairs, which have disposed Gulf capitalists to abstain from the country's market. «The border closures, the impediments to reaching regional markets in some of the Arab countries, and the Gulf country warnings in 2011 and 2012, in addition to the general atmosphere in the Middle East region – all these factors impacted the anticipated investments from Arab and international institutions, which used to consider Lebanon the nexus for projects in the Middle East», Itani says.

Lebanese investors at home and abroad have covered a meager portion of the retreat in the investments, according to Itani. He points out that the volume of investment in 2010 was around \$4.9 billion, which fell to \$3.8 billion in 2011, and \$2.7 billion in 2012, but rebounded in 2013 by 5% and in 2014 by 6% to reach \$3.15 billion. In comparison with what is happening in other countries in the area, the retreat is not a disaster, despite the collapse of the economy's annual growth rate. Still, for 2015, in the event of no positive surprises in the remaining months, growth will be anemic, and investment will remain within the bounds of \$3.2 to \$3.3 billion.

A recent World Bank study reports that Lebanon needs an investment of \$2.9 billion to return to the pre-crisis economic reality.

While the value of the Lebanese exports in 2014,

Anxiety is the companion of refugees in the North-Bekaa

Boumadiane Sahili*



«I worked many days without receiving my pay. Either it was because the landlord was losing money so he refused to pay his obligations – and none of us found the courage to raise a complaint against him because he belonged to a known family, where as we are simple people who have no one but God on our side – or because the police officer who was arranging our work was taking the money but denying it». «The soldier at the checkpoint asked the driver to pull over to the right. We were thirty women and girls stuffed in the back of the small truck, which the owner of an apricot grove had sent to pick us up so we could harvest his trees last May. The soldier kept us for three hours in the sun without asking us any questions then ordered the driver to turn around and go back. The next day, the same thing happened again, and we were not able to know why. We refused to go on the third day with the same driver; less than an hour later, the grove owner came and showered us with insults and threats». That is just the tip of an iceberg of what one Syrian refugee narrated to me – the abundance of her suffering – in the North-Bekaa. Her circumstances compelled her to work, along with her children, during the harvest season, to earn one dollar per hour. She pleaded not to mention her name or any clues of her identity because she was living in fear of a security forces raid. She whispered, «You might not believe it, but I sleep with one eye open».

* * *

Most Syrian refugees in the North-Bekaa don't wake up to old worries; theirs are repeated every morning. This section of land stretches from Laboua through the villages of Nabi Othman, el-Ain, Jdeideh, el-Fakiha, Ras-Baalbek and Qaa' and its projects, to Hermel and its northern border at al-Qasr. Some of the Syrians used to know the inhabitants here through the ties of neighborliness, or through work in a bygone era, but things are no longer the same. There are refugees living among the homes and groves of al-Qasr, but most camps are spread in the area of al-Qaa' projects and the two sides of the road connecting the Syrian and Lebanese border posts. A few camps fall among the northern border, in the direction of Hermel and outside Ras-Baalbek and al-Fakiha. Year after year, the condition of the refugees slips backwards, as does their hope of returning to the land that bore them and in which they lived. Meanwhile, their hardships mount: -Because of the prejudice of the Lebanese, which hardens every day. This region is dominated by a political force that is effectively an extension of the Syrian regime, and the inhabitants are suspicious of the refugee presence. To them, the refugees look like partisans, either for or against the regime, depending on their sect. Distrust deepened after «Nusra» and «ISIS» kidnapped Lebanese soldiers in Aarsal, and after some Syrian militants departed the camps with their ammunition in tow. So, the Lebanese security forces upped their surveillance and their intrusions of the camps

and the homes of the refugees, and many of the refugees have had to put with night visits, which do not even spare the guardians of the camp.

-Because their rights are violated each time they go to a government office, where, especially at the security offices, the standard scene is to see Syrians standing under the sun, waiting for the attention of a government employee. There is no oversight or accountability, and this is confirmed in reports by human rights organizations, which accuse Lebanon of violating the rights of foreigners on its soil.

-Because the UN has reduced their allowances by about 55%, to the point that each refugee receives just \$13 a month for food and clothes, while knowing full well that refugees are forbidden from working under Lebanese law.

-Because misguided educational policies have made it so that their children are effectively out of school. This will lead to a new, social disaster in the near future, because the children's circumstances are worsening day after day.

-Because health insurance is covering no more than 65% of emergency cases and medical expenses - bills are enormous and unregulated – while knowing full well that refugees are deprived of any regular or preventive care.

-Because of the ongoing efforts to establish a central camp to gather all the refugees to the side of the road between Qaa' and Hermel, considering the indications that the Syrian conflict will last longer still and arriving at any resolution will be difficult. There is, too, the possibility of another Palestinian exodus. Most camp refugees will not be able to return to their lands easily, for that is illegal. In Qusair and the villages around it, journalists are reporting the start of the school year and the renovation of some residences there in preparation for the transfer of the Shia populations of the besieged villages near Aleppo and Idlib, within the framework of a transaction with the armed opposition in Zabadani, as a return to north Syria, where Daesh controls, is impossible. Most of the refugees here are from that land.

-Because the depletion of job opportunities day after day, especially in the agricultural sector, due to the losses this year owing to the difficulty of exporting produce to the Gulf countries.

-Because of the residency laws, which deprive those who were not able to bring their identification papers with them to exile. They are given a six-month residency permit, with the condition that they make the impossible return to Syria afterwards.

* * *

The Lebanese state has abandoned its former self. It has succeeded in forsaking any humanitarian commitment to lessen the hardship of the refugees who have fled from the hell that is the Syrian War.

* Lebanese journalist and writer

A success story

Bassam Khalifeh*

Wadi Khaled is home for 35,000 people. It is located in Akkar governorate, along the northeast border with Syria. Its area is 50 square/km².

Most of the people of Wadi Khaled work in agriculture. They live day-to-day off of the trade that spanned the Syrian border.

There is a story often told that when displaced Syrians came to the border, the people of this area awaited them there and offered to let them stay in their homes. They recalled the hospitality the Syrians had shown them during the July 2006 war, when they were the ones who were displaced, and they were determined to repay this favor. To them, displacement is a humanitarian issue.

Displacement is often discussed in negative terms, with reference to its effect on the social, economic, and cultural fabric of a host community. But the reality in Lebanon, and especially in Wadi Khaled, is that residents have responded with generosity, goodness, and patriotic pride.

From the economic perspective, displaced Syrians have expanded the Lebanese commercial market, and they have brought with them innovations in the fields of industry and work. Among these, for example, are sweets and jewelry production and handmade crafts. From the social perspective, displaced Syrians have refreshed the modes of coexistence, through intermarriage and mutual support, which manifests itself most of all in times of medical crisis, when Lebanese citizens gather donations to help refugees pay for expensive healthcare treatments.

We have learned from the refugees about the will to live, despite pain and suffering.

The saying is true, regrettably: «One people's disaster is another's benefit.» The Wadi Khaled area, once forgotten, has now seen a degree of activity and prosperity. But it has always prided itself on its patriotism, and it has always demanded to be included in the heart of the nation, and it still recalls the verse of poetry:

Though my country tyrannizes me, it is dear,
 And though its people constrain me, they are noble.
 And so the displacement issue had made it clear that every matter has a positive aspect as well as a negative one.

It has cast light, as no one expected, on once forgotten Wadi Khaled, whose municipalities have long requested that international organizations come face deprivation on the front lines.

Now, these organizations are executing projects in development and infrastructure, and they are helping Akkar surmount real challenges. It was the displaced Syrians who finally drew the attention of these organizations here.

* Mayor of Al-Amayer - Rajam Issa in Wadi Khaled

Success

Fathiya the Seamstress... A Syrian refugee in charge of her family

Mohammad Zaatari*

Syrian refugee Fathiya Hussein al-Diab prevailed over the tragedy and cruelty of displacement. She took matters into her own hands in her tent in Lebanon. She learned the skills needed to be a seamstress, from which she derived the determination to face life's austerity and demands, which had multiplied after a stroke left her husband disabled and herself responsible for sustaining a family of five.

«Were it not for the assistance from Lebanese charities and the UN, my family would have died from hunger, poverty, and suffering,» 45-year-old Fathiya says. In her words, she is substantiating the importance of human solidarity among the society of nations, which, she says, has not yet been stripped of its humanity, despite what is otherwise said. Inside her tent in the wilds of the Ouzani region, along the southern border, Fathiya tells her story: «I fled with my family from the Raqqa province two years ago. We fled from the killing and death brought by the aerial bombardment and from the tyranny of Daesh and other armed factions. My husband had a stroke that left him bedridden, even though he could still pronounce words and use his memory. When we arrived to Masnaa [a Syria-Lebanon border crossing], we were received by a Lebanese humanitarian organization, while a UN agency managed our transfer to the Ouzani camp for Syrian refugees».

Syrian women usually work in agriculture, but this was not an option for the asthma-afflicted Fathiyah. Her children worked

in the fields as day laborers, instead. Her pride would not allow her to ask for assistance, but she received it anyways. «The international organizations and, for that matter, the people of the surrounding villages never once withheld their embrace, and they provided us with life's necessities,» she affirmed. «They never make us feel like strangers».

Fathiyah attended sewing and embroidery lessons that some Lebanese associations had arranged for Lebanese and Syrian women. She quickly learned the fundamentals of the trade and translated them into her benefit. With a 200,000 LL loan, she purchased a sewing machine, and she began her work to bridge her family's needs. In this way, too, her husband would not have to feel any shame or disgrace about his incapacity.

Though the Syrian refugee crisis grows in complexity every day, UN and Lebanese civil society organizations never stop striving to prevail over the challenges and undertake their humanitarian missions. When we visited Fathiyah, we saw delegates providing medical aid to refugees in the camp.

Behind her sewing machine, Fathiyah began to weave a garment modeled on a skirt for the women working in the fruit and tobacco fields. She sang love songs to the sounds of the stitching to calm her shaking, which she shares with most Syrian refugees. She tries to conceal her tears, so she returns to the conversation about her creative profession. «A lot of girls from the clans work in farming, and it's the responsibility



© Mohammad Zaatari

of women to conceal all their charms. They bring me colorful cloths, and I stitch them into garments,» Fathiyah said.

She makes long skirts that fall from the midriff to the soles of the feet, and long dresses that conceal their bodies during their work.

«If she can't choose a style, I choose one for her,» Fathiyah said, laughing, «and she has to accept it. The style is one thing and the cut is another. The only thing that changes is the color, and sometimes you'll see a group of girls all wearing the same color dresses». She charges 5,000 LL per dress and can make 3 dresses in a 10-hour workday. That is \$10 per day, though sometimes she only makes around \$5, if a lot of women come in for stitches and patches.

Would you like to sew men's clothes, we ask

Fathiyah. She quickly replies, «It's like the saying goes, 'Sew someone else's needle'». Fathiyah refuses to beg from anyone. «My husband used to work like a horse, without tiring or getting bored, but God decided he should be crippled,» she said. «So I took over as the head of the family, and with my work and that of my son and daughter, we are able to eat and pay back the loan we got to purchase the sewing machine».

The pain and cruelty of displacement does not temper Fathiyah's aspiration to become a skillful seamstress, so she can accrue more income. But, she laughs, «Of course I won't be sewing for artists and starlets, but self-reliance is important».

* Lebanese photographer and reporter for the Daily Star and the Associated press (AP)

Incident

The death of Syrian children who don't know Syria

Majdoleen Shmouri*

A mother is stronger than death. Only she can postpone it. She can keep it distant from her children.

No one understands the relationship between a mother and death. It's as if she has an agreement with it. Whenever death comes to steal one of her children she tricks it, delaying it temporarily. When her tricks run out, she tells death: take me instead of my child. Take me before my child. It has nothing to do with life's natural trajectory. No one says that the mother, as someone who is older, must die before her children. But it's an agreement that all mothers have concluded with death since eternity, and can be summed up as «take me before them.» Any exception to this is death's betrayal of this eternal agreement.

This time, death betrayed Hajer.

Hajer is sitting in her new tent after the old one burned down last June in a fire at the Jarahiya refugee camp in al-Marj, a town in the Bekaa Valley. The fire destroyed 85 tents inside the camp, along with a medical clinic. The refugees lost their tents, their possessions, and all of their official papers. Hajer lost her tent, her possessions, her official papers, and «Hammoudi.» Hajer, her husband and her two-year old Mohammad, or «Hammoudi,» had an early lunch that day. His father was being playful with Hammoudi, taking his picture on his mobile phone and eating from his hands. Hammoudi said «Mama» a lot. He used the word, which she loves, after finally learning it. She didn't have to ask him to say «Mama» or entice him with a bar of chocolate to do so. He did it all by himself, as if compensating for the many coming days in which her will not call her «Mama» anymore.

After lunch, her husband went to the Monday market in the camp. Hammoudi played on his small red car and went up to the roof with his mother. He pulled on his mother's abaya

every day, to let her know that he wanted to go up to the roof. There he would take a handful of pebbles and throw them at the pigeons' nests before calling her over: «Come here, come here.» Then, he would return to his tent.

Hajer tried to take a short nap shortly before noon, taking advantage of both of her other children being in school. However, her little boy doesn't sleep and doesn't let her sleep either. That day, and for the first time, he did what she said. He went to sleep, and she did also, on the sponge mattress next to him. And in the first place, sleep is training for the state of being absent. It's the «sleep of death,» as Hajer calls it. Hammoudi fell asleep, and didn't wake up again.

About 30 minutes later, Hajer went to the neighbors'. A few minutes passed before she and her neighbor went out and saw the tent, completely ablaze, as the flames spread to the neighboring tents.

Everyone panicked and tried, and failed, to put out the fire. The Civil Defense sent trucks to the camp more than two hours after the blaze broke out. The woman stood in front of the tent without moving, looking at the flames and yelling, «I killed him.»

Today as well, Hajer is crying, and saying, «I killed him.»

«I don't know how God made me leave my son.»

She has taken sedatives since that day and tried to convince her husband and the neighbors that she didn't kill the boy, but to no avail. Everyone blamed her and she blames God, and herself. Hajer can't stop herself from crying and blaming God, who unexpectedly sent them the fire. None of the neighbors' children was killed. God took Hammoudi in particular and she asks him how He can make it up to her - after she spent so much time with him, for raising him, and for bearing him. No one and nothing can compensate. Ibrahim and Fatima lost

their little brother and Fatima always sees him in her dreams. In her last dream, Hammoudi cut his hair, went around all of the tents in the camp, and learned how to say her name.

Hajer didn't see the body of her child, who was buried by her husband and the people from a nearby town. She spent two weeks with her own family in Barr Elias after the accident. When Hajer returned, she went to all of the tents in the camp; each one had come up with a different story of how Mohammad burned to death. She listens to all of the stories and once again asks herself, with only one question in her mind, «Did he suffer before he died?» She doesn't ask God anything now - only whether He took Hammoudi from her with no pain; perhaps she will feel less guilty.

Time passes with difficulty for Hajer and it's most difficult when it's time to sleep. Mohammad no longer stops his mother from sleeping, but she doesn't sleep. She goes to his grave every week, in the belief that visiting the deceased will comfort them. She lost all of Hammoudi's things in the fire; all she has left are pictures of him on his father's phone, and his voice, saying «Mama,» in her head.

Hajer will not forget her child and will not become used to his absence. Sorrow? It will never disappear. Sorrow disappears only when love does. As for us - who see this news every day - Mohammad will remain another unknown child who has passed away, joining the list of children who have died of cold, disease, or fire in the refugee camps from the beginning of the Syrian uprising until today. Later on, when Syrians obtain their freedom and return to their country, they will leave these children behind them. They were born in Lebanon and are buried here.

* Lebanese journalist and writer

Shahbandar's Daughter: Searching for the beautiful time

Hozan Akko*

Perhaps it is an indulgence to bring up the past and its beauty in this current time.

We are waking up to ugly news, every day – from images of suffocation, to anxiety and fear of the future, then flight and notions of emigration – it's almost so bad, it ruins the taste of our morning coffee, the only habit we've been able to keep through all these crises.

Which era should we talk about? Each is full of its own wonders, some of which are recorded in history while others forgotten. There are people who practice a form of selective memory, recalling some particular periods over others. The goal is always the same: to evoke the beauty of things lost.

Fine. Let's let go of our present, and look for a new time - less horrible if possible... Let's look into humans' living conditions, not their political or social circumstances. No doubt they had lots of beautiful habits that we might be able to take on and use as a pretty window through which we peek at our foul present.

Time: Now.

Place: Beirut, where I, a Syrian writer, have lived for the past three years.

We are in the year 2015. I will take out a book from my library, the one I brought with me from Damascus; it is Beirut by Samir Kassir. I will read from it, and as I do so, it summons to my mind a story I wrote in Damascus, about two brothers whose destinies are tied to a woman, who, as circumstances would have it, happens to be the daughter of Shahbandar, the great trader.

The story is set in an alluring period. Is it possible to set it in Beirut? Yes, Samir Kassir tells me in his book. It was not unusual to see Syrians in Lebanon in that era, just as it was not unusual to see Lebanese in Damascus, or in any of the cities of Syria. The deeper I went into this book, the more confident I grew in my idea.

Let me choose a year from that period... 1890, Beirut – that is, one hundred years before the end of the Civil War. A Damascene family resides in a neighborhood in Beirut; the destinies of two Damascene brothers are tied to the daughter of Shahbandar, a Lebanese trader of great influence. No one needed a passport or a reason or even a proof of residence to travel to where he or she desired in that era. It was enough to prove your good conduct and sound reputation, to fit to the role society determined for you in the context. If so, there was no regional or sectarian discrimination so long as neighbors respected and looked out for each other, then every person could keep his or her religion and world.

It is an arrangement that could work in these disgraceful times but I won't be too ambitious. At best, we will talk about past relations between Syrians and Lebanese, to lift the shadow they've casted on ties between them in this tragic era of Syrian displacement.

We all agreed, as a team of Syrian and Lebanese producers, directors, and actors, that this was an alluring window into the past. The series aired during Ramadan this year on Arab and Lebanese channels, and is still broadcasted from time to time.



It is a love story that revolves around two brothers, Ragheb and Zayd, with Nariman, Shahbandar's daughter.

The story begins with a conflict between Ragheb and his father, Abu Ragheb Salhani, which leads Abu Ragheb to throw his son out of the neighborhood, where the family held prestige, and to cut him out of the inheritance.

Later on, Abu Ragheb asks Abu Hassan al Shahbandar to marry his daughter Nariman to Abu Ragheb's younger son, Zayd, in an effort to further improve his standing in the neighborhood. Nariman loves Zayd, but Zayd had other ideas, far from marriage and inheriting his father's wealth. And, moreover, it was Ragheb who had fallen in love with Nariman.

Zayd disappears after the marriage, though, under shady circumstances, forcing Abu Ragheb to call on Ragheb to find the missing brother. Ragheb embarks on a bitter and agonizing journey, which ends with him finding his brother and bringing him back to Nariman, from whom Ragheb must forever deny himself.

The series brought up a number of questions, the most urgent of which were: Could a Damascene family truly have lived in Beirut

and had such prestige and influence as to play a role in the social sphere, as the family of Abu Ragheb al Salhani did?

But this never really came up between us on set, and, truthfully, it was not such a strange idea to us. We all lived together at the time, and it wasn't strange to hear, «I swear, brother, this really is how the world was back then». We were reliving that past era, in the present!

It was only after filming, when the series aired, that those involved in the project began to ask, «Lovely, but was it really like this?!».

They wondered, could a Damascene live in good standing in Beirut? Could he live in the city in complete respectability and work, as well?

Some of them hint at the 1990s and the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and sneakily imply that the leading role of Ragheb (played by actor Qusay al-Khawli) is a recall or an affirmation of a coming time! It is as if relations between Syria and Lebanon began in 1982 whereas in our story, Ragheb was a notable figure in the neighborhood, though the real authority was in the hands of the Lebanese Shahbandar family. This sound and equitable relationship did not

impinge on the independence of these two neighboring countries – or, «vilayets», as they were called in the Ottoman Empire.

«It was a difficult time, economically and politically speaking, and there was a great desire for liberation from Ottoman rule. But it was a beautiful time, as well», one viewer in his seventies told me, based on what he had heard from his father about that era. «I am a Beirutite, to the core, but my heritage is Syrian!» he added.

He filled with wonder as he recalled the Syrian families that lived in Beirut and vice versa. When I told him about how the scenes have perplexed some viewers, he said, «That's OK. Those who ask, will discover. The important thing is that you told a sweet story».

I am not the kind of person to say we should return to the past, or to pine for a bygone era. Still, a flashback from our present situation is a study on the beauty of a wondrous time. The elderly man and I opened a window, delicate in its beauty, to look at the sad street, and he continued his conversation passionately on that beautiful era.

*Syrian writer

On The Repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon

Views of Lebanese and Syrian artists reflected by their art

Goddess of War

This portraiture is inspired by the Syrian myths of ancient civilizations, dating back to before Christ. It illustrates the Goddess of War and its power to ignite wars and extinguish them, and to defend the land and people against the covetous. The image of the Syrian woman manifests the region's bitter reality. It is an attempt to reclaim the influence of the deity and her authority and might, and to reclaim faith, as well. It is hoped her colors can liberate her again, to stop the war.

Ahmad Nffoory - Syrian musician, composer and painter



Walking on a thread



About my brother who filled a boat with his body and went far away in search for a new hope surrounded by whales. About smugglers who come up with creative ways to fill our bodies in tanks of chocolate and oil. About our choices that became rare; destiny became just like a fisherman who throws his hook in a sea of memories hoping his bate will catch a thread of power, a suitcase to emigrate as far as possible in this world, a bullet to kill or get killed by, or an empty bottle to lock and isolate yourself in. You just need to make a choice that suites you, because the sweetest of them choices is still bitter.

Mohamad Khayata - Syrian visual artist and photographer

Ray of hope



Lena Merhej - Lebanese painter, narrator and visual arts researcher for Comics, cartoons, and children's books

**With
silence, we
face the
disaster
today.
Tomorrow,
the
meltdown**



Mayssam ElHindi - visual artist, residing in Beirut

Voices from Syria inject life in Beirut

Mohammad Hamdar*

I didn't know that my visit to Damascus in 2010 would be my last. I stayed in Bab Sharqi longer than I usually do to prepare a documentary film, and was hosted by a family in a traditional Damascene 19th century house,. From the window of my first-floor bedroom, I came to know the music of Syrian youths for the first time.

Young people from Damascus and outside of Damascus organized musical performances in a small square in Bab Sharqi on a weekly basis. These were spontaneous and beautiful performances, with limited resources, free and open to all, and performed by new and diverse groups. We had never heard of them in Beirut; unlike Lena Chamamy, Kinan Azmeh, Kulna Sawa, Bashar Zarqan, Bassel Rajoub, and other well-known artists who have collaborated with Lebanese musicians in recordings and live performances.

One of these young musicians informed me that there was a new musical movement that goes beyond Damascus and was different from the experimental

projects executed in Beirut. The movement was however in need of theaters and venues that would welcome these new voices that convey the new realities experienced by the Syrian youth. They also need less limitations of the freedom of expression. Comparing the music scenes in Damascus and Beirut, a musician friend who played percussion with some of the best-known artists in Syria told me «[...] here, we don't discuss politics...».

This aspiring young musical movement was destined to witness what Syria had witnessed in 2011. It was a journey of hope-turned-tragedy during which artists began to depart Syria, one after the other. Beirut was naturally their

first stop; though not only because it was the beloved neighbor. To them, Beirut was the capital of culture, art, and freedom of expression, it fostered audiences hungry for new underground music.

The beginning was rough. The cost of living in Beirut was so high that even its own people tried living elsewhere. Khaled Omran, Tanjaret Daghet's bassist, recalls the difficulties he faced, from searching for accommodation even though just a small room for three people – to high prices, to the conditions that prevailed when they left Syria; the only difference here was that immigration or displacement were not an option but an obligation..

These same circumstances faced most of the bands whose members began infiltrating into Beirut, into its bars and with its musicians. And a new start began, one that they desperately needed to ventilate.

Consequently, since 2012 and particularly in 2013 and 2014, names of good Syrian bands began to emerge in Beirut's music scene, among which are Tanjaret Daghet and Khebez Dawle (rock), As-saaleek (Oriental fused with Latino), Latlateh (hip-hop), Abo Gabi (a Palestinian-Syrian writer and singer), Hello Psychaleppo (electronic), and others. In addition, several valuable contributions by Syrian musicians in Lebanese bands during music



performances emerged, as well many other musical attempts, though not all were successful.

Beirut audiences quickly fell in love with their music, especially as it encompassed such a professional range of genres, from electronic to hip-hop, rock, fusion jazz and oriental. The success and creativity of these Syrian musical groups ensured their longevity on stage, drawing Lebanese producers into collaborations to record and produce their works.

The question asked here is, What is the secret behind these musicians' quick success? And what qualities have attracted Lebanese audiences, producers and musicians? What innovations have they carried to the already-rich Lebanese art scene?

First, it must be said that most of the activity that followed the Arab revolutions made a small scandal out of the vacuity of the majority of the alternative musical projects in Lebanon; they were devoid of any content that reflected the genuine social reality, and did not reflect in any serious way what was happening in the country and around it.

The exception to this was hip-hop. Hip-hop artists naturally followed the productions of the rappers arriving from Syria: Sayyid Darwish, Latlateh, Khebez Dawle and Abo Gabi who sang several music genres. Collaborations materialized, such as «The Third Way», which includes: al-Ras, Nassereddine Touffar, Sayyid Darwish, Khebez Dawle, and Latlateh. Osloob, of the Palestinian project Kateebah 5, produced the album «'al-hafa», featuring Syrian artists, including Abo Gabi and Sayyed Darwish.

Second, the National Conservatoire of Damascus, despite its harsh teaching methods and its emphasis on classical music instruction – as recounted by some of its students-, aided students to develop their individual talents and burnish their performance abilities.

Those musicians, with the skills they enjoyed, have added a new spirit to several Lebanese bands. Members of Tanjaret Daghet, for example, played with several groups there and guitarist Tarek Khulukki performed with drummer Dani Shukri at Eileen Khatchadourian's album release party for «Butterfly» (Farasheh). Khaled Omran collaborated with several musicians, most important of which was Ziad Rahbani. About the experience, Omran said: «The sundry rhythms of Ziad's music cross over



© Mohamad Khayata - As-saaleek



© Nather Halawani



© Photo of "Tanjaret Daghet" taken from the band's Facebook Page

between jazz and Latin jazz, and funk and oriental sometimes. I think I can play them all because I love them all». He added that he grew up learning from his father who was a rhythm musician and a connoisseur of oriental music. Most of these musicians, according to Omran's experiences, met to make music that they liked to listen to but couldn't rehearse at the Conservatory. Most of them performed at whatever

occasion available, including wedding parties, in order to save up to continue their studies in Europe, where the opportunities were supposed to be better.

These artists have infused Lebanese music with new styles. Recently, Qanunist Leila Mahmoud (24 years old) and oriental percussionist Ramy al-Jundi came to Beirut to take part in the Lebanese fusion band «Kameh»,

known to play fusion music production that was manifested in different recordings, in addition to concerts at Radio Beirut, hip-hop productions that were already mentioned, «Hijaz Hareb» album for Abo Gabi with «Kameh», and Tanjaret Daghet's first and second to-be-released album produced by Raed Al Khazen, a Lebanese musician, composer and producer.

Also, Hello-Psychaleppo has recorded hip-hop tracks with Nassreddine Touffar and al-Ras while Lebanese-Syrian As-saaleek are also preparing to release new material.

Lebanese theaters and bars, from Mar Mikhael to Hamra, thirsted for new music, and two of them hosted Syrian musicians on a regular basis- Radio Beirut and Metro Al Madina – while all of them hosted the names mentioned here incessantly.

Unfortunately, this musical odyssey is not destined to settle without difficulties; Beirut, as "Watar of «Latlateh» says, has provided him with a space for expression and introduced him to other musicians and was musically generous with Khaled Omran by providing him ample opportunity, but has grown too small for its guests. Syrian musicians have to put up with provocations in Lebanon on a daily basis. It is not easy for them to hear of insults or attacks in the news, nor to be faced with prejudices. Add to that, the General Security and residency laws have made it very difficult for them to sing, play music, stay in the country, or even move around, while security checkpoints have become a cause for fear.

«If I will ever miss Beirut, it'll be because of the music there, not the checkpoints», Watar said. He has already departed to Europe, as have Abo Gabi and several other Syrian musicians and artists.

Omran, who still lives in Beirut, said that the city has forced him to interact with it sometimes, making him play just like it and Syria play, «violently». Perhaps, in the future, these musicians and what they have produced together in Beirut will constitute the first brick to rebuild what wrongful Lebanese prejudices and politics have broken, and what the fires of Syria have burned. These collaborations will have to continue in one way or another, then, to salvage anything positive from the war that still wrecks Syria.

«The long processed dying»



By Ghassan Saleh, Lebanese artist of a Palestinian mother

A nation emptied of its people, and a prosperous market for collective emigration

Fadi Noun*

The Chaldeans Patriarch Rafael Sako expressed his anxiety about how Europe and America opened their borders to the profusion of migrants, considering there is a hidden stitch behind these mechanisms: "Why do things start to move suddenly after we've let the situation deteriorate over this past while?"

In a conversation with Vatican Insider, the Patriarch denounced what he called "the market for collective migration," expressing his regret over the "concealed agendas of agencies and societies to encourage Christians to depart their countries." Declarations that call for them to leave Iraq, he said, are "irresponsible," even if they are made with good intentions.

He said, "These declarations circulate through Syria, as

well, which is falling apart in front of our eyes. There's an outpour of people from these two countries, and most of whom are women and children, to Europe through Turkey, which is regarded as a large reservoir of refugees."

"I can confirm, too, that it is not just displaced persons who are departing," he added. "Many migrants are well-to-do, according to the priests, and they have good sources of income, as bank employees, for example. They have no causes for their voyage, but they take advantage of the favorable opportunity in front of them, before the doors are closed in their faces."

This reasoning reverberates throughout Syria. The Vatican Ambassador to Damascus Monseigneur Mario Zainary has commented on it, too, saying, "When four or five people

get together for coffee, they talk about ways to leave Syria. It applies to Christians as much as to Muslims. It is tragic, and it points to the loss of hope for a better future for Syria." It is tragic; too, that so many of those leaving are young and energetic. Most of the refugees who arrive in Europe are between 20 and 40 years old.

"It is truly a tragedy that we are watching a nation being deprived of its youth, and with it, its future," the ambassador regretted. "The social fabric is torn apart and no one can help repair it except for the young, educated elite."

"Can we watch this unfold, remaining idly, without any care that, someday, history will curse us for not having helped a nation in peril?" he asked.

* Lebanese journalist and writer



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For more information:

Peace Building in Lebanon Project
 Arab African International Bank Building
 Riad El Solh Street
 Nejmeh, Beirut - Lebanon
 Telephone: 01- 980 583 or 70-119160



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UNDP Lebanon

Designed by:
 Omar Harkous
 Hassan Youssef

Translated by:
 Philip Issa

Edited by:
 Layal Mroue

Photos by:
 Anwar Amrou