

The Peace Building In Lebanon

Joint news supplement

Issue n° 14, December 2016



Implemented by:
KfW



Empowered lives.
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Special Edition

This supplement is produced by the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project, funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development through KfW. The original Arabic version is distributed with An-Nahar and As-Safir newspapers while the English version is distributed with The Daily Star and the French version with L'Orient-Le Jour. The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists residing in Lebanon they cover issues related to civil peace in addition to 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.



Installation by sculptor Marwa Abu Khalil

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Dbayeh Camp:
As If Nothing Happened,
or Did It?



© Alia Haju

Youth as Champions of Peace

Lebanon's young people are facing numerous challenges such as the possible impacts of regional instability, the ever-changing political conditions in Lebanon, as well as economic uncertainties. Armed with resilience and determination, they are greatest asset Lebanon can have, and they will undoubtedly play an important role in building a peaceful environment for generations to come. However, to be able to promote change, these young people need avenues to express their wishes and their grievances. In this issue of the UNDP

"Peace Building in Lebanon" supplement, funded by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, we listened to them and brought together a colorful mix of topics moving and inspiring youth in Lebanon. This issue of the supplement you have in hands does not just deal with Lebanese youth, but also with Syrian and Palestinian youth residing in Lebanon. The articles here explore values, challenges, fears, aspirations and success stories, and show many common grounds between youth from different nationalities. The need to

invest in youth, to include and empower them, to work and listen to them, to recognize and value their efforts, are needed today more than ever. By doing this, Lebanese youth can take their full part in building a stronger and a more inclusive Lebanon. With the right support, young people can build peace, foster reconciliation and achieve democratic governance!

His Excellency Mr. Martin Huth,
Ambassador
Embassy of the Federal Republic of
Germany in Beirut

The World They Want

Very often, Lebanese youth express their unwillingness to sit around and wait for the politicians to act. They want to take action themselves. With a sense of determination and optimism, they want their voices to be heard, they want to participate in politics and be the initiators of inclusive civic engagement. They face many challenges - from unemployment to poverty and exclusion - and yet, they are rising up to challenge every economic, social, and political structure, and speak out for justice, nonviolence, and human rights.

Lebanese youth have always been heralds of the values of democracy and have shown the world that they can positively contribute to peacebuilding. There can be no sustainable development in the country if Lebanese youth remain on the sidelines. More urgently than ever before, there is a need to give them a voice, to place them at the center of long-term change and strengthen their role as drivers of peace and stability in this war-torn region.

The youth can be crucial elements in achieving peace and security if methodical and realistic youth participation is promoted. This approach was highlighted and echoed in UNDP's recently published report "Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality," which calls upon Arab States, including Lebanon, to invest in their youth and empower them so they can engage in the development processes. The region's young people face numerous difficulties related to education, labor markets, unemployment, and exclusion from the formal economy, as well as the struggle of maintaining independent households and starting families, among other things. New and more durable foundations for stability cannot be established without the participation of empowered and engaged youth who must voice their concerns and express their ideas.

The report does not merely call for developing youth policies and strategies; it also suggests a more comprehensive reformulation of sectoral and general policies in the Arab region based on a new development model to meet the needs and aspirations of young people, particularly in light of the region's changing economic, political, and social reality.

Using this supplement as a medium and a forum, we wish to discuss both the realities and hopes of Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian youth in Lebanon, and possibly one day, the entire Arab region. The themes addressed in this issue are centered on youth residing in Lebanon and include delinquency, statelessness, problems related to historical narratives, education-related issues, and many more. These young people deserve strong, functional state institutions that can respond to their needs. Hopefully, and following the end of a two year power vacuum and political paralysis, the Lebanese state can deliver a more solid foundation upon which to grow.

I hope you enjoy reading the exciting and inspiring articles that we have compiled for this supplement. We look forward to a new year with less violence and more peace!

Luca Renda
UNDP Country Director

Comparisons are Odious

History Proves that Comparisons are Odious.

It certainly appears that in Syria, Russia and Iran, on one hand, and Western countries and Saudi Arabia, on the other, are fighting through proxy combatants, as was once the case in Spain between Germany and the Soviet Union. But in the case of Syria, the rivalries between Sunnis and Shiites in general, then between Arabs and Kurds, and finally between the latter and the Turks, only complicate matters in a region where lies and betrayal run in the bloodline!

But what a disappointment for the United States, Europe and the UN, which have since 2012 desperately tried to find an alternative to the power in place among the confetti of rebels who cannot agree on a credible power change. For this lack of cohesion among the opponents of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, the rebels have paid and continue to pay dearly. Beyond the tragic losses and destruction for which the power in Damascus and the rebels bear a heavy responsibility, the great ideological disparity among the opponents, which run the gamut from a radical Islamist majority to moderate rebels scattered across the Syrian territory, has only provoked skepticism in Westerners who have developed over time an increasing reluctance to deliver the weapons they sorely need. Faced with the dramatic prospects of a repeat Iraqi or Libyan scenario, the international community has opted for multilateral diplomacy that has yet to bear its fruits.

A situation that has spurred Russia to take up position, thus multiplying many times over the firepower of the Damascus regime, to the chagrin of the Syrian population present on the fighting ground and the hundreds of thousands of refugees who, year on year, lose sight of any prospect of returning to their country.

Gaby Nasr

Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

End of Lebanon Deadlock Good News for Refugees

Since the advent of the Syrian conflict nearly six years ago, the number of refugees seeking refuge has well exceeded the million mark, and unofficial estimates place that number at a great deal more.

It is not difficult to grasp that such a massive influx of people into a country which itself is suffering from aging infrastructure and a weakened would tax the resources of Lebanon, and it was inevitable that such a strain would raise tensions between the host communities and the displaced Syrians.

But while until now there seemed to be no way out of this conundrum, today there is hope. For over two and half years Lebanon had been without a president and with no accord among politicians and leaders from rival camps, a state of affairs that left the most basic requirements of the country's own citizens unaddressed and left host communities incapable of tending to their own needs let alone those of their wards.

But the election of a new president opened the door for change for the better. The remarkable decision to put the country's needs ahead of personal gain is certain to restore confidence in the country, while a new government, once formed, can finally work to revive the economy and restore basic services.

All this in conjunction can, hopefully, precipitate the receipt of aid pledges for the Syrian refugees as well as for the host communities, while the state can finally find itself in a position to address the needs of its citizens, improve conditions for the displaced and devise solutions to the hardships they face. It is not unreasonable to expect that such a development will go a long way toward easing tensions on the ground and result in circumstances that allow all concerned to live in dignity, while affording refugees a semblance of the security and stability that they enjoyed before the war until such time that they can return to their homes.

Nadim Ladki

Editor in Chief - The Daily Star

"We Ask Our Syrian Brothers to Remain Indoors"

At the entrances to Lebanese cities and towns, we encounter the same phrase, in the vein of "we ask our Syrian brothers to remain indoors from 8 pm to 6 am under pain of penalty". Signs put up by municipalities without a single resident contesting them.

Such a phrase communicates contradictions, discrimination and racism. For how can someone set a timetable for his brother limiting his mobility and movement and deciding when he leaves his house to visit a relative or buy food or medication? What we should ask ourselves is whether we would accept similar measures if we were to travel, by choice or under compulsion, to any foreign or Arab country.

We do not want to fail to take heed of the problem of Syrian displacement to Lebanon, as it is a migration that goes beyond the capacities of this small country—economically, financially, socially, and, most importantly, security-wise. These are the words we hear over and over again from officials and the media on our TV screens. However, the reality contradicts these statements in this country of wonders, although it does not negate some of the negative repercussions of the burden. The flagging economy, and despite all that plagues it, is still intact and has not lost its dynamism, and it will be able to recover at record speed under the right circumstances.

As for security, the situation is the most tight not only in comparison to our neighboring countries but probably to the whole world. Figures are obtained based on the number of violations, contraventions and crimes per day and subsequently reckoning the number of these that can be linked to Syrians refugees in Lebanon. The fact of the matter is that figures show that there has been no increase in the crime rate in Lebanon, and whatever daily violations, disputes, gunfire and smuggling are recorded is all associated with the Lebanese, who have mastered breaking the law since before the war, not to mention the violations committed by militiamen who have pervaded all the sectors of the State.

Caution is a duty, and the security forces are performing their duties, and the country is stable. Therefore, there is no need for measures that harm the Syrians and Lebanese alike.

Ghassan Hajjar

Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

Peace be Upon You

Will we ever achieve peace?

What a strange world we live in. Science is making discoveries. Technology is spreading. Knowledge is deepening. Medicine is extending lives. A revolution is changing the world of communications. The Earth is a global village. Education is an appeal to reason. Media is swift in facilitating exchange... And yet... Violence is consuming parts of the world, poverty is keeping more than a billion people out, wars are spreading the area of mass graves, making the world a living hell, exporting refugees into distant exile...

This is all taking place as our hearts are filled with deep sadness. Sadness guarantees man's moral condition. Excess sadness is a sign of paucity of conscience, values and ethics in the perpetrators, and an expression of the nobleness of spirit in those who are forced to bitter exile.

Peace is a condition of life. Peace does not look like it is coming to the Orient. Violence is relentless. Violence has the power of spreading like a disease. Violence is committed by religious, ethnic and racial intolerance. Violence is the result of repressive powers, terrorist organizations and international condoning.

A world that has lost its values of equality, justice, freedom and dignity is a world trained for cruelty and arrogance and human downfall. What a shame this violence is. It is the striking failure of prevailing international institutions and governance systems. And while we wait for better times, we must insist on regarding peace as humanity's noble goal, a goal worth fighting for. A goal worth fighting for even if attempts fail. The string of violence is bound to break someday.

Let peace be our greeting always. And peace be upon you.

Nasri Sayegh

Deputy Editor in Chief
As-Safir newspaper

The Four Components of Permanent Civil Peace in Lebanon

Antoine Messarra*

What are the components of a permanent civil peace in Lebanon? What are the foundations for building a collective memory for the new generation? History does not repeat itself except with unenlightened peoples who do not learn from history but are always in history. A description of the events that took place between 1975 and 1990 in Lebanon is of utmost importance if we are to build a collective memory. What happened was not a «Lebanese» war or a «civil» war... Part of it was indeed Lebanese and civil, but the rest were multi-national «wars», with an s. Thus, shall Lebanon be an arena for internal and regional conflicts or shall it be a nation?

There are four components of permanent civil peace in Lebanon:

1. The supremacy of the law and constitutional institutions: Institutions are the enduring place for dialogue and a safeguard to resolve conflicts peacefully. Every dereliction by parliamentarians or government officials in performing their duties within the institutions and voting and deciding within institutions undermines civil peace, particularly that the existential national dialogue ended in Lebanon by virtue of the National Reconciliation Accord, or the Taif Agreement.

The state is the protector and guarantor of civil peace and the rights of citizens. The state enjoys exclusive monopoly on organized force. Any armament outside the state is a threat to the relations between the Lebanese people and independence, sovereignty, Lebanon's role and its mission. Neither the Parliament nor the procedural power or official bodies are places for registering and ratifying sectarian quota allocation, mohasasa, or interested accords outside the institutions.

This entails respect for the Constitution and conventions, i.e. national covenants.

No constitutional amendment, or for that matter any permanent civil peace, parliamentary or presidential or federal or central system, may be regularized if two basic foundations of the state are present: the first is the exclusive power of the state over foreign affairs and the state's exclusive monopoly on organized force through the military and national security forces.

2. Collective memory: Collective memory acts as a deterrent against the mechanism of recurrence. The fault line between Lebanon's leaders and its citizens is one running between those who have drawn lessons from the wars in Lebanon and those who have not.

3. Balanced social and economic development: Lebanon is a solid socio-economic unit. The surfeit of checkpoints and roadblocks over the course of 15 years (1975-1990) was not able to shatter the social and economic unity in Lebanon, which is sturdy. Socio-economic policies and practical daily realization of social and economic rights are a deep-seated unifying component because these rights cross primary affiliations.

4. A culture of caution in foreign relations, all foreign relations: Lebanon is great in its role and mission, but minor in the nations game. There is a need to forgo internal strong-arm tactics and shun the arena in favor of the nation.

In the film of the Swiss film director Lorne Thyssen titled *Labyrinth*, which screened in Beirut in 2004 and tackles certain stages of the wars in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990, the film's hero, a university professor who wishes to learn about the course of the wars in Lebanon on the ground, appears before an audience. He picks up an ashtray from his desk and explains: «Some say that this ashtray is a Zionist conspiracy, others say it's an American conspiracy...» So a member of the audience asks: «What do you say?» The professor responds: «I say it's an ashtray!» The ashtray drops from his hands and is shattered into pieces! By that, the director attempted to show that whatever the interpretations and analyses, attitudes and postures, you are all under threat while you are distracted with interpretations. The film's diagnosis (it is a shame that many Lebanese viewers missed the point) is that Lebanon has always been a trap for all those intervening in its internal and external wars.

Do the Lebanese need more wars and terrorism, which spare no one in different periods and in accordance to

changing regional conditions, in order to collectively realize the extent of the shared danger that looms over them?

In conflict and accord, Lebanon's history provides, perhaps more than the history of Switzerland, Netherland and others, a lesson and a Freudian psychological trauma if the Lebanese manage to decipher it.

Educational, cultural and dialogue programs contribute to civil peace if they proceed from and lead to these four components.

Three Types of Memory, or the Memory of National Repentance

Peoples have three types of memory. The first is **recurring memory**. Unfortunately, the Arabs excel in this type of memory. In spite of defeats, victories and reversals, things keep recurring, and not because this is how we are genetically made up, but rather because we do not learn from the past. What happened in 1860 is virtually identical to what happened in 1975, but for a change in names. Whatever the armed conflict to come, they will be similar to what already happened in 1860 and 1975, unless we draw lessons from history, with only a change in names.

The second type of memory is **resentful memory**. Such memory is often to be found in families, so that family disputes are transmitted from parents to their offspring and subsequently their grandchildren. Israelis master this type of memory. They go to the ends of the earth in search of any person who contributed decades ago to the genocide to incriminate him. We reject and condemn the genocide, but hatred fuels more hatred. Resentful memory runs completely contrary to the Japanese model. The Japanese do not remember the Hiroshima bomb and hurl hateful statements at the Americans, but recall it in repentance so it does not happen again.

The third type of memory is **the memory of national repentance**. That is what we need, along the lines of Japan. Following the wars in Lebanon, there were celebrations commemorating martyrs that were held between 1990 and 1995 by each party individually, in memory of its own martyrs. Things changed later and April 13 was chosen as a day of collective commemoration. In fact, the martyrs of all the parties are all martyrs of the nation. Each of them who was killed is a martyr because we are against killings. The forcibly disappeared represent an exemplar of the nation's martyrs because they belong to all parties and denominations, and all affiliations and non-affiliations. We ought to erect a memorial to the martyrs on Martyrs' Square because they are the most prominent embodiment of collective suffering. This is the memory of national repentance.

Lebanon becomes a nation when we close the windows and doors to outsiders, when we acquire the culture of being cautious from both siblings and cousins alike, as they have all regretted intervening in our affairs

Nadine Labaki's film, *Where Do We Go Now?*, represents an example of the latter memory. Filmmakers, novelists and playwrights are more aware of the danger of the recurrence of war than historians and academics. In addition, the film of Bahij Hojeij, *Here Comes the Rain*, is important in this respect. We do not hear a single bomb, not even a bullet in the course of the film. However, it manages to sketch out all the psychological scars left by war on people and the psyche.

A Culture of Caution in Foreign Relations: Kids Shouldn't Play with the Big Boys

Since the invention of nuclear weapons, armed conflicts came to an end between states, with the exception of border disputes in some of them. Wars between nations now end quickly and there are no victors in them, just victims. Consequently, wars between nations take place by proxy nowadays.

Man usually draws his historical memory from his environment, i.e. his father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, parties and events. We in Lebanon have a gap between the history set down in the books and the lived memory, and this should be remedied. School children learn history in a book and unload what they learnt in an exam, while their historical memory is shaped in the home, neighborhood, village and party... We need to bridge the gap between the two.

We lack a science of memory. Collective memory is what safeguards Switzerland today. Reading the history of Switzerland hits the reader with a salvation shock, as it reflects the cost of conflicts, the benefits of solidarity and the danger of foreign intervention. The principal at school tells pupils during the break: Kids shouldn't play with the big boys! We in Lebanon have national leaders and there have been numerous assassinations. Those who offered financial support or arms for a cause, even if the goals were noble, have come back to demand payment, and those who refuse to pay, often for high-minded reasons, are assassinated, like the Mufti Hassan Khaled or the Imam Musa al-Sadr, and Kamal Jumblatt, and Bashir Gemayel... The Israelis were deluded to believe that they could implement their plans in Lebanon.

Lebanon becomes a nation when we close the windows and doors to outsiders, when we acquire the culture of being cautious from both siblings and cousins alike, as they have all regretted intervening in our affairs.

In memory of the American landings in Normandy in France, following World War II, French television broadcast all day long interviews with French citizens who were there at the time. They recounted what happened and what they did in relation to this landing. These interviews included a nurse, a school teacher and a shopkeeper who was ninety years old. He recounted how he helped the wounded and victims and how he supported the resistance. Each tragic stage in the history of humanity produces by its nature individuals who perform heroic acts. Robert Jungk wrote a book titled *Children of the Ashes*. In it he did not talk of the dropping of the Hiroshima bomb, but rather narrated the stories of ordinary people who became heroes following the catastrophe and rushed to the aid of their fellow citizens. There should be reconciliation with all of history. Hatred reproduces hatred. Hatred should be overcome by purifying memory and disseminating national repentance.

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An Urgent Call to Action to Lebanon's Policymakers: The Need for More Social Inclusion of Lebanon's Young Men and Women

Jad Chaaban*

The Lebanese society excludes young people from decision-making and from playing an active role in their lives, while discriminating against them in areas such as housing policy and in labor markets. Being un- or underemployed often means living at home under rules imposed by the family, delaying social and civil independence and limiting chances to start a family, with marriage closely linked – through cost and social norms – to employment. Youth end up delaying their marriage, and basically living a life of frustration, because a lot of sexual relationships are forbidden outside of marriage.

Economic growth in Lebanon, fueled by rising oil prices and foreign transfers, has been neither labor intensive nor job creating. Instead, the bulk of employment creation has been temporary and informal. Unemployment has surged among secondary school and university graduates as more educated young men and women enter the labor market. Moreover, educated youth in Lebanon prefer to migrate and find economic opportunities abroad than those scarcely available in the private sector. The freeze in public sector employment and the stagnation in formal private sector jobs, especially during the last few years, have resulted in very long

periods of unemployment among young people⁽¹⁾. The exclusion from labor markets also disproportionately affects young women. The gender gap is seen in the labor participation rates of women, which are the lowest in the world, as only one in four working-age women are in the labor market (compared to a world average of 50%)⁽²⁾. This can be attributed to cultural norms and women's own choice to focus on their roles as caretakers, and also

(1) Chaaban, Jad. "The Impact of Instability and Migration on Lebanon's Human Capital", in Dhillon and Yousef (eds.), *Generation in Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, 2009

(2) J. Chaaban and A. El Khoury, *Spotlight on Youth in Lebanon*, UNDP, December 2015.

to their frustrations at poor labor market prospects. Young women also face an unemployment rate much higher than that for young men. Low labor participation and pervasive unemployment means that most women in the region are systematically excluded from labor markets. The loss of educational investment in women that this entails is enormous, not to mention the constraint that this imposes on their right to economic and social emancipation. The frustration among Lebanese youth is compounded by social exclusion, as the lack of job opportunities results in lack of access to housing and delayed marriage, which hinders the transition



to independent adulthood. The average cost of housing in Beirut is one of the highest in the region, and there are no housing policies that favor young people, who have no effective means by which to borrow against their potential future earnings. This is added to malfunctioning rental markets governed by inefficient laws.

The harsh living conditions experienced by most young people in Lebanon have largely contributed to a significant outflow of emigrants, mostly young males seeking jobs in other countries. One third of all youth wish to emigrate at least temporarily and 77% of emigrants from Lebanon are below the age of 35. The emigration share was equal to 14.4% of the total resident population between 2010 and 2014, among the highest in the Arab world. The high rate of graduate migration (35-40% of graduates) poses a problem of a loss in human capita⁽³⁾. Skilled migration is causing shortages of qualified labor in certain sectors or a drain on scarce qualified resources. Given the importance of youth migration in the country, it is surprising that we do not yet have an articulate and explicit outward migration policy or have only a passive one promoting migration as a way of reducing labor supply, easing social tensions and generating remittance revenues.

Promoting youth economic integration in Lebanon

(3) Ibid.

by stimulating job creation in the formal sector should be a top priority. The problems affecting the job market are not chiefly attributable to the excess supply of job seekers, but rather to institutional and structural impediments to meaningful job creation. The Lebanese government should pursue a socioeconomic development path that promotes labor-intensive and job-creating growth, while at the same time reducing social inequality and exclusion based on age and gender. Policies that encourage job creation in the formal sector should be highlighted, including the establishment of a better operating environment for businesses through the reduction of red tape and the reform of outdated business legislation, and the active reduction of the cost of doing business for firms. For instance, establishing a new company takes on average a month and a half compared to one week in developed economies. Borrowing interest rates are also among the highest in the world, despite all the various subsidies, which imposes serious restrictions on private enterprise development and, therefore, job creation.

In parallel to promoting an economic environment conducive for job creation, the government should tackle the expectations and skills development of its young workforce. This should be done firstly by upgrading the educational system away from the focus on national exams and the accumulation of degrees towards the buildup of skills that promote

employability. Secondly, systematic training and internship opportunities should be introduced to improve the job experience of first time employment seekers. Thirdly, public sector employment should be upgraded by implementing civil service reforms that promote productivity and merit-based pay. High school graduates applying to universities must be informed of what the economy needs in the short and long run. They must be exposed to data that reveal the current economic situation and what sort of jobs the country needs. High school students need professional guidance and hence this step could decrease the waiting time in between graduating and finding a job. Accordingly, universities must also be informed and exposed to similar economic data. They must be encouraged to develop their curricula to meet the needs of the developing economy. There are sectors that can create jobs that have not really been put on top of the agenda, especially in areas like sustainable development, alternative energy, and also areas that are pertaining to agro-food production, and especially the water sector. The Arab region is facing tremendous challenges in terms of its food security, and there are many resources that are untapped, especially using water projects or massive public works projects to create some kind of infrastructure for better agro-food industries.

The government should also provide basic social services that are targeted at the youth population through the provision of more inclusive public goods. These include better social protection, unemployment insurance, housing subsidies and public programs that support housing for young people, and other forms of social aid that would ease the transition of young men and women into adulthood. Moreover, special attention should be given to the issue of the exclusion of young women from labor markets by providing public support for working mothers, investing in more kindergartens and daycares, and reforming outdated labor legislation to allow greater maternity leave and flexible, and protective employment contracts. The emigration of the region's youth should be tackled as a symptom of the lack of integration this population segment suffers from in the domestic economy rather than a valued source of foreign currency through remittances. This shift not only requires a change in the general mindset of policymakers, but also the active involvement of the international community through the strengthening of international migration organizations and treaties. More investments should be particularly made in building the capacity of the public sector to implement active migration policies, and to promote national human capital and employment promotion programs.

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The Musings of a Former Committed Monk

Fadi Halisso*

I arrived in Lebanon in September of 2010 as a monk and student of philosophy and Arab civilization. But my stay turned out to be a rich journey in which what I would learn exceeded all my expectations, personal and academic alike. During the very first months of my arrival, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to volunteer for one of the Lebanese non-governmental organizations that works to raise awareness about the dangers of drugs. Although my volunteering work with the Soukoun organization was short, and was limited to data entry, I found the idea of volunteering for an advocacy project in Parliament to change the laws that criminalize drug users with the aim of encouraging them to seek help and treatment very interesting. This experience came as a strange surprise by its very nature for a young man coming from Syria, where concepts such as civil society, mobilization and advocacy sound like concepts from an alien planet. Later, I would meet through my studies a number of amazing non-governmental organizations and initiatives, such as *Offre Joie*, which on two occasions undertook tremendous efforts with the affected people of the Ashrafiyah neighborhood where I lived. The first one was following the collapse of the building on Fassouh and the second after following the bombing on Sassine Square.

Later, in September of 2012, after my return from a mission with the local church in South Sudan with young men and women from Lebanon and Egypt, I met by chance groups of Lebanese and Syrian friends who were in the process of launching non-governmental initiatives in different regions to help the large numbers of Syrian refugees who were beginning to arrive in Lebanon. They were trying to secure the refugees' basic needs, in addition to helping their hosts prepare shelters. We announced the initiative and our need for clothing and blankets, and anything else people could donate. The mobilization was impressive. We received large amounts of clothing and food that we collected in the basement of the church and in a warehouse offered by some friends. And when we launched, with the start of the winter, a campaign to collect 200 blankets, we received 2,000. We subsequently received generous cash donations that we were able to use to establish an emergency fund for medical cases.

Six months later, thanks to the in-kind and cash donations that were granted by Lebanese families who sprang to help, we were able to organize big relief campaigns: from Majdal Anjar in Bekaa to Shebaa in South, and the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut to Abu Samra in Tripoli. Later, during an evaluation session in March 2013, it became clear to most of the volunteers that the humanitarian catastrophe that we were witnessing was not about to end any time soon. We wondered whether there was anything we could do that would help us take the reins of the initiative instead of resigning ourselves to simply responding to the different waves of displacement, or the disasters that hit Lebanon from time to time. Moreover, the six months of close cooperation between the volunteers of different nationalities—Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, and even foreign students—had offered us a glimpse of what non-governmental action founded on cooperation and mutual respect could achieve. We saw in our partnership an opportunity to redress some of the preconceptions that we held of one another, and a step towards achieving

reconciliation that was much-needed by our peoples in this difficult conjuncture. During our search for a way to capitalize on what had already been achieved, Lebanese members of the group proposed that we register as a Lebanese non-governmental organization, so that we would be able to institutionalize our work and manage volunteers better. Thus was born the «Basma and Zaitounah» organization, whose board of Directors I have the honor of chairing.

I consider myself lucky for fate bringing me to Lebanon at this stage of my life. I am indebted to my stay in Lebanon and to my Lebanese friends whom I met and who touched me for learning so many invaluable skills. I learned, for example, that fear of the other can give way to understanding, with a little effort to get to know this other personally, away from stereotypes. I personally admit that my fears relating to coming to Lebanon in 2010 and the rejection that I could come across, given the long bitter history between our two countries, dissipated faster than I had imagined, and I gained friends with whom I established partnerships and alliances. I learned to look beyond the bickering on social media, so as to see in the human solidarity, compassion and generosity shown by the Lebanese families in support of the organization, humanism that is absent from the prevailing narratives in the media. I learned that the Shatila camp was not just a hotbed of corruption and criminality as it was widely represented, but that in spite of the neglect and deprivation it had suffered for decades, it had so much warmth and love, that made it the small house that was big enough for thousands of friends coming from Syria. I learned that human beings lived there who dream of a normal life, clean water to wash, uninterrupted electricity, clean streets and sun-flooded houses. I learned and I continue to learn a lot from the organization's volunteers in Tripoli el-Qobbe who carry out a variety of programs for civil peace between two Lebanese groups that share a difficult history, about the kind of challenges that we will face in Syria once the war is over.

I learned from the struggle of my colleagues in the Lebanese human rights organizations that rights are not distributed by the kilo—five kilos of rights for Lebanese citizens first, and then granting five grams for foreign workers, refugees or the displaced—and that any social or rights achievement is a gain for all. I also learned from my Lebanese friends to be bolder in expressing my concern that the current policy in dealing with Syrian refugees in Lebanon cannot continue to go down the same road without leading the country to an explosion.

According to the Legal Agenda NGO, the instructions for the residency permits for Syrians issued in January of 2015, and their subsequent draconian application, turned around 70% of Syrians in Lebanon into illegal residents who are afraid to leave their homes for fear of arrest. The danger in this does not only lie in the loss of such a large proportion of Syrians of their legal status, but in that it makes these people invisible to the Lebanese authorities and the security services, and opens the security of Lebanon and Syrian refugees alike to risks. Is there a need to state the obvious here, that all this runs contrary to the purpose of issuing these regulations in the first place? Moreover, reports published by many Lebanese human rights and non-governmental organizations, such as Alef and Lebanon Support, mention the negative impact posed by these residency procedures, coupled with depriving Syrians of working legally, on the rise in child labor rates and the increase in school dropout rates. The recommendations of the policy brief published by Lebanon Support to the Lebanese government include expanding the three sectors to which the work of Syrians is limited to other sectors. Such decision will not only help Lebanon fulfill the commitment it made at the donors conference in London to provide 100 thousand jobs for Syrians, but would also organize Syrian labor in Lebanon, which in turn would bring additional revenue to the treasury through taxes paid by these workers. In addition, such a move would open the door to foreign investors, whom we meet and

who wish to support Lebanon's economy, through creating jobs for Syrian refugees and their host communities alike, and who have so far abstained from undertaking this in the absence of a legal framework to govern the employment of Syrians and incentivize such investment.

I realize, as do the other Syrians living here, the economic and social pressure posed by the presence of 1.5 million Syrian refugees in a country of such small area and limited resources as Lebanon. Let us not kid ourselves by underestimating the magnitude of the challenges posed by this reality. And while we long to see the day when we would be able to return to our country and land, without fear or threat, we never forget the hospitality extended to us by our Lebanese brothers in different regions, and we will forever remain indebted to them in the hope of returning the favor one day. However, our commitment to maintaining the best possible relations between our two peoples, today and tomorrow, drives us to insist that the solutions to the refugee crisis cannot in any way ensue from permanently persecuting them, especially in the residency and work permits dossier, which increase tensions and add layers to the crisis. The efforts of the Lebanese civil society to redirect the debate about Syrian refugees to a rights-based approach really warms the heart. However, this should be accompanied by intensive work with policy and decision-makers in the country to achieve advanced policies that take into account the rightful concerns of large segments of the Lebanese people, and at the same time takes the burden off thousands of Syrians, until they are able to return to their homes. I believe we have before us a crisis and an opportunity, and the way we tackle the challenge will either exacerbate the severity of the crisis or open more opportunities for success, learning and investing in the future.

* CEO of «Basmeh & Zeitooneh» - Relief and Development NGO

Bus N° 24, Packed with Concrete Creatures

Marwa Abu Khalil*

It is my thirteenth house in the course of three and a half years in Beirut. A process of abandonment during which each time I cut down many of my belongings trying to rearrange things and priorities. Each time I leave a house, I go back to the moment of the first moment of homelessness that required collecting all of life into one suitcase.

When I first reached Beirut, the sea trumped the anxiety in face of the unknown, for it was the first time I had seen such a blue expanse of sky and water. The sea held me in awe perhaps for months, before I claimed the sadness and fatigue concurrent with the life of Beirutis. The city poses such a large number of questions to its inhabitants that they feel lost in search for answers that they never obtain. «Do not look for what lies underneath things here, the reality of the city is on its surface,» someone once told me the moment I arrived to Sadat Street in Hamra. There I became the closet girl, living in a very small room that is usually reserved for the maid in a house. But I do not exaggerate when I say that I had always dreamt of this room. Small enough for me to control its space, turning its walls into other dimensions with pictures and sketches, and falling asleep in the smell of paints. I liked that small wooden cabinet, just like the ones where glassware is stored in homes, that was my clothes closet and above it a magnifying glass, an empty glass with brushes, an eyeliner pencil, a magazine about universes and planets, a pack of cigarettes, and many other things.

When I left the monotony of family and community to

go into the world on my own, I lost the smoothness of circular time that goes back to the same point every day. Life here takes time by surprise and dismantles it. I often fail to recall moments in their chronological context. Thus I do not remember whether I moved to Furn el-Chebbak in my second or third year of university, but I still keep the meaning of memory abstracted from its context.

From Mathaf to Hamra, going through Corniche el-Mazraa and Verdun, I experienced bus number 24; like a mobile box packed with human beings. I do not really know whether this abstraction is in favor of art or against it. But what I know is that bus number 24 chips away at the importance of individual experience in the city, making it part of a public scene in which tired experiences are reproduced. The place is not individual, as rumored, it allows people to be individuals if they resist the collective group strongly enough.

I transformed from a little girl with long hair, shy and taciturn, into someone else. I set about chasing off habits imposed by my old community, one by one. I experienced independence from my family at a young age. My crossing of the border between Lebanon and Syria was enough to

break the many components of power in Syria. Of course, I got myself a boyish haircut, and I liked the idea of working at the Metro al Madina theatre where a new part of Beirut was revealed to me, at night and underground.

I used to feel that Beirut was just a stop on my way, but I kept questioning this idea out of fear that its source might have been my inability to achieve anything here. I do not know whether this has to do with my desire to leave Beirut by any means, or that the place is of little importance to me compared with my strong desire to find a small inner boat to sail in wherever I wish and in all directions and places.

I was trying to reach a single point in my head, reducing the experience and condensing it into an idea. I ended up making small concrete creatures resembling one another in their anxieties, worries and obsessions, ruled by giant monsters that sweep away their desire to live, and make of them copies resembling one another and obeying the large cement block: call it tyranny, capitalism, neoliberalism, your grandfather the village headman... or whatever you wish.

* Sculptor



Dbayeh Camp: As If Nothing Happened, or Did It?

Rabie Mustafa*

I did not know at the time that my chat with that woman would lead me to the wonderful discovery that I would later make and to come into a sense of affinity with a place that I had only visited once before meeting her. When I saw her with her cane collecting litter in the abandoned school, which flew the UNRWA flag, I thought to myself that she would beat me with that cane if I dared approach to ask about the working hours of the UNRWA official in this Palestinian refugee camp that was established in 1956 on a hill belonging administratively to the Mount Lebanon Governorate, some 12 kilometers from Beirut. She passed me without taking heed of me. I moved to a different spot, awaiting someone else to pass by. However, I was surprised to see her heading my way and then ask me about what I was looking for. I said that I was looking for the UNRWA official and asked her whether the building outside of which I was standing was indeed his place of work. She said yes, adding that it was Saturday, which meant that he would not come in today, before she headed towards her home, which, incidentally, was right next to the man's office. I stopped her and explained that I was a journalist. This loosened her tongue about the water that suddenly dries up in «faucets» and electricity that rarely made an appearance in her home. After she was done, I inquired about her nationality. She said that she was Lebanese. So, naïve as I was, I asked her about her relationship to Palestinians. She said that she had Palestinian and Syrian friends and had never had any problems with them.

We were standing precisely at the entrance of the camp and above our heads stretched a banner bringing together the leader of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea and the Change and Reform parliamentary bloc leader Michel Aoun, who would just two weeks after this meeting become the President of the Lebanese Republic. My conversation with her did not end at this, for I did not want to let her go before she had led me to an employee of the UNRWA. I asked her on which days I would be able to find the official in his office. She said that Semaan, the agency's cleaning man, knows better and she showed me to a flight of stairs leading to his home. I thanked her and went in the direction she had indicated.

An undisturbed sleep

I got to the street where Semaan lived. I inquired about his house and I was given directions. When I approached the house, I saw two men standing next to it. I asked one of them about the door to Semaan's house. He pointed to it, adding

that he would be sleeping at this time because he starts work very early in the mornings and that it was not a good idea to wake him up. I did not knock on his door and decided to come back on another day. The man asked me what I wanted to see Semaan about. I repeated what I told the woman, and asked whether he would like to talk about life inside the camp. He did not mind talking and being recorded. Thus, Joseph Moussa began talking about the artists of Dbayeh Camp, of whom he knew much being a percussionist. He spoke of the difficulties Palestinians faced, including being unable to travel to take part in concerts outside of Lebanon and not benefiting from being unionists. Putting artists aside for a while, he moved to talking about the suffering of others, like the surgeon Fahd Farah who was not able to open his own clinic inside the camp since Lebanese laws prohibit him from practicing his profession. So in order to make a living, Fahd went about taking contracts with companies to treat their employees and continued to help the camp's inhabitants for

free until he gave up and left Lebanon leaving the mission of treating the camp's ill to Christian nuns who offer primary medical care. I asked him whether there was a clinic inside the camp. He said that there was an UNRWA clinic, but all that patients received from it were some painkillers, if there were any in the first place, whereas those who did not have the means died outside hospital doors following the drop in the Agency's aid recently. At this point, he went back to where he had started and the name of the musician Raji al-Asaad popped up. Joseph spoke of his teacher, who had died two years before, saying that he was the song writer of «Mama Ya Mama», which was performed by a young Armenian on the Studio el Fan talent show in 1973, before being performed by George Wassouf without crediting the man who wrote it.

Hunting for Robert al-Asaad

Speaking of Raji el-Asaad, Joseph mentioned his grandson Robert, who had inherited from his grandfather his love for



music, and told me that his uncle Abu Omar, the man who was standing next to him, could take me to him. I said goodbye and took off immediately with his friend to the young man's house, talking to whom would become a goal that I decided not to give up on as I had done in Semaan's case, after seeing his room from behind its glass door packed with musical instruments.

I saved Abu Omar's phone number and told him that I would call him later to set a meeting with his nephew. And I walked away among the houses of the camp... among the icons of the Virgin Mary lined up on the doors of these houses. I reached the street that leads outside out of the camp, and I walked downwards towards the sea, which was not visible except from this street, its view blocked from the residents of the camp's horizontal streets interconnected with stairs by the Le Royal hotel, towering on a hill overlooking the Beirut-Tripoli highway. In my mind, questions were building up about this place. A place which 40 years ago was one of the theatres of the war between the Lebanese National Movement and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), on the one hand, and the right-wing parties first and later those parties allied by the Syrian army on the other. A place which was under heavy shelling from the Kataeb Party, while the party's fighters besieged the refugee camps of Tel al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha. How did Dbayeh Camp escape the ground-zero fate of the other two camps? How did Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians live in such a small geographic area on a mere 0.8 square kilometers, displaying the harmony typical of the residents of a single village? A communist who had taken part in the Lebanese Civil War once told me that he noticed with the breakout of the revolution/war/events/crisis in Syria the propagation of many stories about the incidence of rape among the parties to the conflict and that such stories were rare throughout the 15 years of warring in Lebanon, and that this was what, in his opinion, would make the return to coexistence in Syria that much more difficult. Is this the answer? Are those living in Lebanon coexisting in the first place? Material and conceptual barriers are clearly visible from the north of this small country to its south, and from its mountains to its coast. Is it the shared religious identity that brings together the residents of this serene hill? Is this coexistence in the first place, or are those «victors» imposing their terms on the «defeated» in their area of control? Maybe it is the affairs of everyday life recover the upper hand after the sounds of guns and rifles have gone quiet? Questions about the meanings of things in this region of the world are too many for people to find answers to all of them.

I went back to Dbayeh two weeks later. I had called Abu Omar the evening before and agreed with him to meet next to Mar Gerges Church where he worked. I called him again after passing by the UNRWA office and finding it closed, and having learned from a young man who worked at a nearby car repair shop that the director came to the camp on Mondays and Thursdays only. I did not hear the voice of my friend this time but rather the voice of a girl, perhaps his daughter, who told me that he had forgotten his phone at home. I thanked her and went back to the mechanic and asked him about the location of the church. He pointed to it. Once there, I asked for Abu Omar, but I was told that there was no man of such name working there and that there were two other churches bearing the same name in the area. I asked about the direction to one of them, hoping to find him there and not have to search for the third church.

I arrived at the Mar Gerges Church number two, which stood in the middle of the road between the camp and the gigantic hotel. There was no one to be found around, so I knocked on the main door and then a side metal door. I heard a voice from behind it that offered me hope. The door opened. «I'm looking for Abu Omar.» The door closed in my face. I laughed and went my way looking for church number three. «At the top of the mountain. By the Lebanese Forces' project.» I did not see anyone in that secluded, lofty place and went back from there in the company of an amiable driver and the voice of Wadih El Safi coming from the Sawt Lebanon radio station empty handed. I asked the driver to take me back to the camp which he did. I went again to church number one and asked again a man in his sixties. He said that there was a monastery at the top and perhaps Abu Omar would be there. I ascended the hill. On the side of the road was the building of Sawt Lebanon (I later discovered that this building did not belong to the Phalange Party but to the Modern Media Company that had set up its headquarters there following a dispute with the company of the Party, which ended with listeners getting two radio stations of the same name). I took a turn past the building, and a cross appeared before me at the top. I set about looking for the door to enter the monastery, but all the metal gates appeared to be out of use. I looked up and saw a man watering. I waved to him from afar and he approached me. I asked him about the entrance to the monastery and he directed me with an Egyptian accent. I asked him whether Abu Omar worked there; he said no. I waved goodbye and turned around. From there, the camp houses resembled one another very closely and not one of them stood out, while the hotel looked very far and very small. The sea seemed within arm's reach. I thought of taking



© Alia Haju

out my camera to take a picture, but I remembered what my colleague Alia Haju had told me. The mission to take pictures of the camp that she had embarked on, ended with her being asked to obtain a permission first. I did not want my search to stop here, so I forgot about the shot and left the camp intent on coming back the next day. And so I did.

This time I decided to take a cab so as not to be late for my meeting with Abu Omar that I had arranged the night before. Before getting into the car, I noticed a huge poster of General Michel Aoun on the side of the coastal highway almost concealing Le Royal from view with the phrase «History Loves the Strong» written in a huge font underneath it. On our way up the hill, I asked the driver whether he knew anyone who had been residing in the camp for a long time, in anticipation of surprises. He told me to ask for the barber Elias Abu Merhi. I arrived at the camp and called Abu Omar. I heard his restless and reproachful voice for the delay on the other end. I apologized to him and thought about going to see the barber, but I realized that I knew the way to Robert's house and cursed my stupidity, which had made me go on a search trip, that had seemed now absurd, the day before—although it was not in fact so, as it had helped me get to know the field that I had been moving around for the past month better. I walked down the road that I knew would not be difficult. I reached the alley where the house of the object of my wanderings easily, and it was Semaan's house that provided the indication that I was going in the right direction. The door to Robert's house was open this time.

More questions

I did not know anything about Robert except that he was the grandson of Raji al-Asaad, the unsung songwriter of «Mama Ya Mama». I did not expect to meet a young man barely aged 18, who was working in a recording studio, played thirteen musical instruments, and aspired to learn to play more of them... who wrote lyrics and music, and sang. Our conversation got going quickly. I learned that his uncle had not told him anything about me, so I introduced myself and immediately asked him about the origins of his love for music. When he was five years old he heard the song «Ghannili Shway Shway» performed by Umm Kulthum in the company of his grandfather, so he began to sing along with her. His grandfather asked him to sing it again, and continued to repeat the request until one day he put him on stage to sing «Shway Shway» for an audience. Later he watched with his father Umm Kulthum singing the same song on television and burst into tears, protesting to her performing his song. Thus his path was laid out for him and it led him to take music lessons with Professor Robert Lamaa in Beirut. His grandfather was his biggest supporter, so when the latter passed away Robert was plunged in a depression phase that ended only recently with the help of his passion for music. This passion runs in the family. His father and uncle are musicians and his aunt a singer. This passion also offered me the chance to hear him play the piano that morning, and see him pick up his grandfather's oud, which had been left as it was since the old man died. His eyes welling up, I heard the song «a small house in a country that is not

mine», whose lyrics and melody he had written, to express the lump in the throat he experiences from living in an «alternative homeland». Hearing the song made me ask him about his sense of belonging and relationship to this place. He expressed his love for Lebanon, which had taken him in and his attachment to the camp and its people. Our meeting ended after he told me about his band «Jazzabiyat», a name that integrates jazz, a music form that transcends all rules, and the strict eastern Bayat musical mode, and about his ambition to obtain a doctorate in philosophy of music that would allow him to open a music school for Palestinians and the Lebanese. I said goodbye to Robert knowing that I will come back to see him some day. I set off to the barber shop of Elias Abu Merhi, after the «music prodigy» had given me directions of how to get there. It turned out that Abu Merhi was a Lebanese who had lived in the camp for 37 years. He was originally from Damour (South), displaced by the war to Dbayeh. He had tried to live outside the camp subsequently, but the simplicity of life here and the affinity with his neighbors brought him back. There was also Abu Hanna in the shop, who was granted Lebanese citizenship in 1994 along with those residents of the seven southern border villages with Palestine. Abu Hanna talked about the partaking in «misfortune» among the Palestinians, the Lebanese and the Syrians in the camp. But when Abu Merhi went out to prepare some coffee, he said a sentence in passing that made me re-examine the paradise of coexistence that I believed to be sincere in the mouth of the barber, but my skeptical mind refused to believe its existence. «Those who are proud enough have left,» said Abu Hanna. Abu Merhi returned and talked about many things, from the loss of his wife and the grief that he still experienced from this loss, to visits to Tripoli (North), which he loved. I spent quite some time listening to him and the few interventions of his contemporary, laughing along with them, putting off my questions and doubts. Then I took a picture of them and left. Later that day, I met Raafat and his wife Marah, two Syrians who had settled in the camp almost a year ago. Marah had not lived elsewhere in Lebanon, while Raafat had been working in Lebanon for many years. She did not talk much compared to her husband who was more voluble, and who informed me that there were about 50 Syrian families in the camp and that he had no experience of any ill-feelings on the part of anyone in the camp, but imputed it to being hard-working, which offered him economic power and made his neighbors respect him and treat him as an equal. The meeting did not last long, so I said goodbye to the young couple and I said goodbye to this place whose occupants, to whom I talked, all agree that it is more of a village than a refugee camp.

I came in an outsider in search of stories and came out looking forward to going back and bearing conflicting ideas about the best way people should adopt to manage their lives after they are done with their wars. Robert said he did not know anything about what had happened during the Civil War, so I will put my earphones and listen to him sing his song; the one appropriated by Umm Kulthum!

Palestinian Youth in Lebanon: Who Shall Bell the Cat?

Samaa Abu Sharar*

A blind young Palestinian in his twenties compelled to seek illegal immigration in a trip fraught with many dangers and risks encapsulates the despair and lack of prospects that young Palestinian refugees experience in Lebanon. Shadi Said's handicap, which constitutes an additional obstacle in his way, does not deter or discourage him from the idea of immigrating. «Anything would be better than the hell of living in Lebanon,» says the young man.

Shadi graduated in 2012 from the Lebanese University in Saida, and began looking for work immediately. Neither his handicap nor being a Palestinian refugee were going to get in the way of his ambitions. But soon a series of disappointments were in store for Shadi as a result of not finding a job.

Nevertheless, he did not throw in the towel. Instead he tried to launch a modest project outside the boundaries of Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp where he lives, but the high rents for commercial spaces forced him to abandon the idea.

Shadi went on to attend a number of training sessions so as not to be a prisoner of his difficult circumstances. There was no one he did not approach for help to find him an honest job so he could earn a living. In vain.

Shadi is not an isolated case. Many young Palestinian men and women in Lebanon are currently abandoning their dreams in favor of immigrating to any country that would afford them a dignified life.

According to a survey conducted by the Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness)⁽¹⁾, 70.3% of 18 to 20-year-old will immigrate if they get the chance. Feelings of anger and bitterness are palpable when talking with Palestinian youth in Lebanon. In their views, they are bearing the brunt of the unfair Lebanese laws since the first exodus in 1948, which deprived them of the majority of their civil rights.

These young people have inherited from their parents a burdensome legacy that prevents them from working in more than 72 jobs and professions, owning property in Lebanon and constructing inside the camps, in addition to restricting their movement, whether by means of the checkpoints that dot the entrances to their camps or constantly checking their identity documents, and to marginalizing them socially and economically.

The racism exercised against them in general by the host community and making them constantly feel inferior compounds their isolation and makes them shut themselves off

inside their communities.

The unfair Lebanese laws, decrees and decisions directly impact young people, especially that half of the Palestinian population in Lebanon is under twenty-five. The majority of these expressed, through a sample we selected to talk to for the purpose of this article, that their number one concern was the absence of job opportunities regardless of their educational qualifications, in addition to exploitation at work, which they are often subjected to if they do find a job, such as underpaying them or depriving them of health and social security that is available to the Lebanese.

Rampant unemployment among youth and poverty, which is as high as 65% according to a study conducted by the American University of Beirut and UNRWA⁽²⁾, result in an increase in social ills inside the camps. Thus, these camps transform over time from havens for Palestinian existence and identity into fertile environments for security issues and growing social ills, such as religious extremism, the proliferation of arms, drugs and domestic violence, and sexual exploitation of children, among other things. Despite conflicting figures with relation to dropout rates among Palestinian students in UNRWA schools, this issue has also become a widespread phenomenon that raises a flag and that reflects the frustration and lack of prospects that students experience when they see those older than them unemployed or working simple jobs bearing no relation to their qualifications. The young people all agree that the Lebanese state bears a large part of the responsibility for their worsening situation, which has become even more difficult following the Palestinian displacement from Syria to Lebanon and the resulting economic and social consequences. They, nevertheless, emphasize that the official Palestinian side, across the board, is also shirking their responsibilities towards youth, not granting them an active role in their local communities, and not involving them in the decision-making process. Instead, it sometimes exploits the capacities of youth to fuel its factional divisions.

The young people also point the finger at UNRWA especially in terms of it «failing to perform the role that it was established for», especially in light of on-going and growing cut-downs in its services.

«To be a refugee does not mean that I'm a dead corpse,» says Ruba Hamad, who sees in her refugee status a source of strength and defiance that helps her carry on despite the enormous difficulties she faces.

Despite the bleak situation, the majority of Palestinian youth does not resign and continue to try to find whatever little prospects they have for a dignified life. This was manifested recently in a number of youth initiatives in the camps and gatherings to promote youth, build their capacities and talents, enable them in several areas and create job opportunities for them. They count on this kind of initiatives that despite their modest nature constitute an outlet for them, and they demand that civil society organizations support these initiatives and invest in the capabilities of youth through the projects they carry out to enable them and find job opportunities for them.

The dreams of Palestinian youth in Lebanon are modest in comparison with those of their peers of other nationalities. They range between education, work and starting a family. These dreams may seem ordinary, but they are impossible in Lebanon, even for the most optimistic. «In order for the goals of youth not to be directed at the sea,» says Hiba Yaseen, there should be a comprehensive review by all the relevant parties of this painful reality to address it before this «ticking bomb explodes because when the stomach is starving the minds stops working» says Maaz Khalil.

Those concerned may ignore this painful reality in the foreseeable future, but they will inevitably have to come to grips with its inevitable and grave consequences in the longer term!

The success stories of Palestinian youth in Lebanon may seem different compared with those of their peers of other nationalities due to their harsh conditions, but they remain stories of defiance and perseverance for a better tomorrow... Here are two such stories:

(1) Field Study about the reality of Palestinian youth in Lebanon, Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness), 2014-2015

(2) Survey on the Socioeconomic Status of Refugees in Lebanon, American University of Beirut and UNRWA, p. 58, 2015

Ruba Rahme

A young Palestinian woman displaced from the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria has left her mark on her peers in the Ain al-Hilweh camp. Ruba, always smiling and cheerful, has devoted her time and efforts to youth by seeking to lift them out of the void and disaffection.

Ruba has established an artistic troupe to teach the dabke folk dance, theater and singing, thus embracing various young talents. These young people used to move around for training sessions between Ruba's home in the camp and Saida's maritime promenade, before settling in the Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA) where Ruba works as a volunteer.

Ruba is seeking to obtain funding for her troupe in an effort to save the greatest number of young people. Ruba's energy and her positive influence have imposed change for the better in the lives of young men and women. Some of them have replaced the knives that they did not part with before with the language of dialogue, while others have quit smoking, so that the families of some young people are turning to Ruba to help them solve their children's problems. Despite the migration of her family, Ruba is in charge not only of her younger brother,



Ruba stands in front of a mural she painted at the forum of the Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA), Saida

whom she supports financially too, but also the education of a young man in Saida's vocational school, because, according to her, she wants youth to depend on themselves. Today, she is trying to establish alongside few youth from Ain el-Hilweh, away from existing divisions, a

free space that is similar to that of El Moltaqa of DPNA that includes cultural and artistic events. Her big dream is to be able to help the largest possible number of young people before making her own big dream come true, reuniting with her family under one roof.

Ahmad Halabi

Ahmad Halabi, from Shatila camp, greets us from his own barbershop located behind al-Madinah ar-Riyadiyyah stadium with a broad

smile that reflects the extent of his pride with his achievement. This young man pulled himself up from the gutter to become what he

is today. Ahmad's arduous journey began when his mother left him, his sister and his father, when he was not three years old yet.

In the absence of care from his mother or father, Ahmad dropped out of third grade and entered real life, moving between a number of barbershops in different areas of Beirut. Thus began his journey with homelessness, imprisonment, alcohol and drugs. Ahmad would only come out of the abyss that is this bleak world following his shock at the death of a girlfriend from overdosing. So, he began writing rap songs and performing them and at the same time he continued to learn about hairdressing until he opened his own shop, Moudi, two months ago.

Ahmad has chosen to stay outside the boundaries of his camp, in order to escape what he dubs as an atmosphere that might take him back to what he was in the past. Ahmad, who is known as Pharaoh in the rap world, has become a role model for many children in the area where he resides through his singing and shop... «I want to dream like other people, I want to develop my shop Moudi and open branches, and go back to school to learn to read and write Arabic, and get a chance in the rap world,» says Ahmad as we are about to leave.



Ahmad stands in front of Moudi barbershop behind al-Madinah ar-Riyadiyyah stadium

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Absence of Civil Peace: The Case of the Stateless

Berna Habib*
 Samira Trad**

The understanding of civil peace varies depending on whether it is viewed in political or social terms. Thus, definitions of civil peace differ under the influence of this concept on the basic principles of each. At the political level, the concept of freedom may be taken as a starting point, as some policies are founded on suppressing freedoms, and intellectual and political speech, and subjecting them to the terms and whims, as well as the trends and interests of the state. In addition, some groups are excluded from the exercise of certain civil or political rights, without paying heed to their human rights that begin at birth and that are guaranteed in international treaties and conventions, and which include the freedom of speech and expression, and the right to a nationality. On the social level, civil peace is based on the rejection of marginalization, violence and coercion; accepting diversity and difference; treating different people in a peaceful and civilized manner; and equality among all residents on the territory of the state, whether citizens, foreigners or even stateless.

Thus, there is direct correlation between the concepts of political and social stability and the concept of civil peace. For civil peace is the cornerstone of a politically and socially stable state, one that is capable of progress and development, and where all segments of society participate in political, economic and social decisions, and in drawing up national plans.

Accordingly, an organic relation is established between civil peace and the absence of marginalization in all its forms.

If we take the Lebanese case, we find that multiple categories in society—such as homosexuals, street children, ex-prisoners, and battered women—suffer from marginalization at the political, social and legal levels, a fact that turns the spotlight on civil peace. How can a state with a large portion of those residing on its territory marginalized and excluded from participation in public life and from exercising their fundamental rights, which establish the individual's entity within the state, build or achieve civil peace? How can a society that is built on a fragile balance and rejects difference, if not fears it, live in an atmosphere of true civil peace?

In Lebanon, «national» political participation is built on communal, sectarian or factional affiliations or loyalty to a leader. Each outsider to any such affiliation would not find a real place in the entities existing within it, since he belongs to the entity built on his denomination, if we were to consider the differences among the citizens; differences that in themselves create a rift in any true understanding of civil peace.

There are in Lebanon today, besides the Lebanese, hundreds of thousands of refugees who have come to Lebanon in pursuit of security and a decent life. They suffer from social discrimination and a negative and scornful attitude, compounded and exacerbated by their increasing numbers, while the Lebanese state fails to regulate their influx into its territory. The policy of «absence of a policy» that has been applied in dealing with this phenomenon so far is a reflection of the weakness and vulnerability of the system as a whole, where this approach is subject to all political whims and a sectarian and demographic equilibrium that surface at every mention of ensuring minimum rights for refugees. What is more, these refugees are now being used to deprive the Lebanese of certain rights, with the most striking example being fears of granting Lebanese women the right to give citizenship to her family on the pretext that this would open the way for granting Lebanese citizenship to hundreds of thousands of refugees, and if we are to give women this right, we should exclude those married to Syrian or Palestinian refugees! Is this not marginalization? Of refugees or Lebanese women, or both?

Marginalization also affects the refugees' legal status and their chances of living in freedom and security, in light of Lebanon's state policy of even greater restrictions on their entry into Lebanon and their legitimate stay. This policy has led many refugees to resort to illegal entry, smuggling in inhumane conditions, or become illegal immigrants because of residency requirements and costs. So they are joining the marginalized groups that cannot take in part public life, and have to hide and live in fear and marginalization.

In addition to the arriving refugees, the individuals who have been living in this country for decades or even centuries, but are not citizens and do not enjoy any nationality, are in the same boat. They are exposed to

all forms of discrimination, ostracism and exclusion, as they do not enjoy the basic rights that would allow them to integrate into the fabric that participation is built on within the factional structure, the fact which contributes to their marginalization and exclusion from public affairs and from defending their rights or even claiming them, as a rights-based participatory approach is absent under the pressure of marginalization and discrimination.

People who do not hold any nationality in Lebanon or any other records, known as *maktoum al-qayd* (MAQ) or whose dossiers are *qayd ad dars*, i.e. «under study», are persons belonging to a class that was and remains forgotten by the state, a state which has never included the abolishment of statelessness in its political agenda. This is the case despite the fact that statelessness in Lebanon goes back in time as far as the creation of the Lebanese nationality and despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the stateless have strong and deep ties to Lebanon—not least of which being born in it—to ancestors who hold its nationality, or were present in it when the state and its nationality were created, or are born to mothers who hold its nationality⁽¹⁾. Moreover, their cause has remained absent from all policies and governments, and even the agendas and priorities of the civil society and public opinion. Can there be any greater marginalization?

This marginalization is exacerbated by the fact that any effort to develop policies, laws or procedures, if put forward, remain confined to the Lebanese, and do not include all those residing in Lebanon who are equal to them in terms of duties, if not with additional duties imposed on them by not considering them «citizens» in the narrow sense of the word, which is still in application in Lebanon today. This narrow concept is still applied to people who hold the Lebanese citizenship, as the Lebanese do not enjoy the rights of political and civic participation outside their place of registration or *qayd*, regardless of their place of actual residence or the duration of their residence there, in addition to the condition of belonging to the predominant sectarian category in this place, as the sectarian political structure works to marginalize all other groups. At a time when many countries around the world have adopted a broader understanding of the concept of citizen, which is based on residency and participation in duties and in public life, regardless of whether the resident holds the citizenship of the country or is registered in his actual place of residence. If this is the case of the Lebanese inside this old and outdated political and administrative system, what about the residents who do not hold the Lebanese nationality? Is it possible to imagine a system or a policy more marginalizing than this?

Add to that marginalization that the Lebanese state, which has never accorded priority to the issue of statelessness, has not ratified the international conventions that guarantee the rights of stateless persons, and has not put in place policies and legal frameworks to provide

them with protection and grant them rights. They are as if non-existent before the law, lack any legal status or identification documents, and are deprived of the possibility of exercising many of their fundamental rights. And the absence of a legal protection framework and rights puts them in a fragile position, open to exploitation and serious violations, thus they may be classified as an extremely vulnerable and marginalized population⁽²⁾.

The stateless, as a result of being deprived of many of their rights, belong to economically disadvantaged social categories, since they cannot work in many fields, including the liberal professions, and, of course, cannot hold public office, and as a result many of them lack the incentive that would prompt them to look for opportunities to develop their living, educational and social status. This contributes to further marginalization.

This situation is not limited to official policies or the neglect of the state, but goes beyond that to include social marginalization and discrimination, as the society and public opinion are either not aware of their existence, or perceive them negatively, reducing them to the category of those «who could pose a threat to national security because they are ignored and neglected by the state, and are susceptible to recruitment by terrorist or extremist movements or at least susceptible to delinquency». If this fear rings true for some, and can be seen as a red flag, policy-makers and the society have to pay heed to it to lift some of its members out of these dangers. Nevertheless, the society's dealing with the stateless should not be reduced to this. The society should provide a supportive environment for them and provide them with the possibility of making their voices heard and claiming their rights, to make their way out of the state of marginalization, instead of increasing their marginalization.

We only talked of two «marginalized» categories in Lebanon, as a result of politics and the attitude of the society. But it must be emphasized that these are not isolated categories, but rather other people who suffer from different forms of marginalization and exclusion can be added to them, with the space provided for this article not enough to present their situations. In addition, the marginalization of the discussed categories is extreme, as it is at the point of denial.

So, to conclude, if civil peace is founded primarily on the absence of marginalization and if the Lebanese society includes categories that can at best be called marginalized at all levels, how can Lebanon build and promote civil peace? And how can we talk of civil peace in light of a policy that pursues marginalization and deepens its problems, rather than working to put an end to it?

(2) Frontiers Association, *Statelessness in Lebanon – Submission in View of Lebanon's Second Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council*, <https://frontiersruwad.wordpress.com/2015/03/24/statelessness-in-lebanon-submission-in-view-of-lebanons-second-universal-periodic-review-by-the-human-rights-council/>

(1) For more information on this phenomenon, see the study «Invisible Citizens: Humiliation and Life in the Shadows», Frontiers Ruwad Association, available on www.frontiersruwad.wordpress.com

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Juveniles in Lebanon: Infringement and Violations on the Way to Obtaining Protection!

Ibrahim Sharara*

«The juvenile to whom this law applies [the law to protect juvenile offenders or juveniles at risk] is a person who has not yet completed eighteen years of age and who commits a crime punishable by law, or is at risk...»

Wassim (not his real name) has got used to selling napkin boxes at an intersection on a main street in Beirut. This «modest» career of his did not deter the owner of a next door shop from threatening him. «If you stay here, I'll send you to jail!» But the boy had found in this place the opportunity of selling more, so he did not budge.

One day, a security officer arrived. Wassim understood that the man would carry out his threat. He decided to run, but the «cop» was faster than him. He surprised him with a slap that threw him to the ground. Then he dragged him by the neck to a side street. «I'll take you to the police station, you thief!» He hurled insults and threats at him. Then he slapped him again and left shouting, «If I ever catch you here again, I'll throw you in jail!»

In a hypothetical development of events, the security officer could take Wassim to the police station to interrogate him on some charge. Then he could refer his case to the court. He would be sentenced to prison in the Juveniles wing at Roumieh or at the rehabilitation center in Fanar. The judge may instead take a measure that would not deprive him of liberty. In another case, the judge could consider whether the juvenile is at risk and decide whether he needs protection procedures.

Arrested juveniles take different courses in Lebanon as stipulated by Law No. 422, which the legislators were keen to call the law for protection of juveniles, whether offenders or at risk. However, these courses are subject to infringements and violations and some of them require limiting their use, amendments and new procedures.

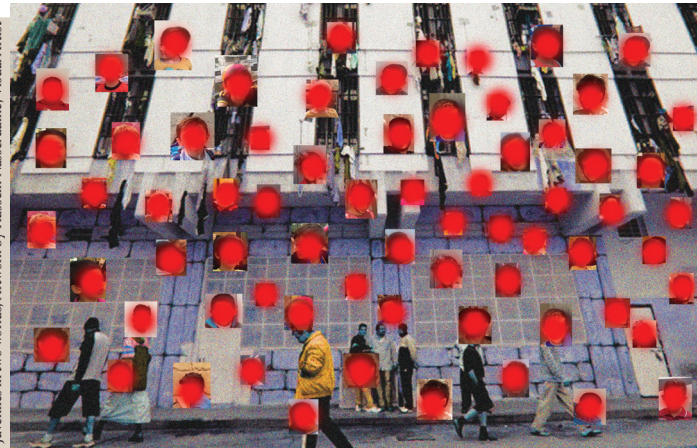
To the police station...

«The juvenile who breaks the law benefits from fair and humane treatment... and juveniles shall not be detained along with adults.»

The procedures for prosecuting a juvenile offender begin with taking him to the police station in handcuffs. This is contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to the former minister Mona Ofeich, president of Father Afif Osseiran Foundation that engages in the rehabilitation of the juveniles in the Roumieh Prison. But infringements are not limited to that, as juveniles are subjected upon arrest to beatings and ill-treatment sometimes, on the street or at the police station, according to Omar Iskandarani, President of Juveniles and Child Rights Committee at the Beirut Bar Association.

While Iskandarani affirms that Law No. 422 is applied to all juveniles in Lebanon, regardless of nationality, one of the activists engaged in monitoring violations against Syrian refugees says that there are abuses taking place outside of the law. Syrian juveniles are treated as the weakest link, starting with how they are treated on the street by some security personnel and all the way to the treatment of other detainees in prison.

The law prohibits conducting investigations with juveniles at the police station without the presence of a social worker to protect juveniles from possible abuse or intimidation. The law provides a maximum deadline of six hours for the worker to arrive. However, while waiting for the social worker, juveniles are sent to the



Juveniles in two worlds. Artwork by Hussein Nasseridine, Visual Artist



detention cell along with adults detained for various offenses, despite the law prohibiting this practice, according to Iskandarani.

Violations of the law do not end at this. According to Ofeich, sometimes social workers do not arrive within the prescribed deadlines, due to understaffing. In such cases, the person responsible for the investigation might not fulfill the imposed conditions and may proceed with the initial investigation with the detained juvenile alone. However, the lack of workers does not justify that, as Article 47 of the Code of Criminal Procedure states that each detainee has the right to contact a family member and to the presence of a lawyer of his choice.

In the sequence of the prescribed actions, the initial investigation ends by contacting the Prosecutor General. And the lack of prosecutors specializing in juvenile cases mean further delays in procedures. In addition, the law does not impose the presence of the worker at this stage, which is a demand lodged by the relevant organizations.

To the Palace of Justice...

«His prosecution procedures [of the juvenile] and his interrogation and trial are subject to some special rules, that try to spare him as far as possible judicial proceedings...»

The detained juvenile is transferred from the police station, if the Attorney General so decides, to a Palace of Justice, where he is placed under pre-trial detention. The Law has set the period of custody to 48 hours, with possibility of extending it by another 48 hours if required by a decision to expand the investigation. At this stage, the juvenile is also detained along with adults in a cell that is usually crowded with detainees on various charges. However, violations take a far more dangerous turn when the period of detention exceeds those set by the law, according to Ofeich.

The next step leads to the investigating judge. According to the law, any juvenile has the right to appoint a lawyer. If his parents are not able to do that, the judge can appoint an «available» lawyer, without taking into account the specialization requirement. To limit this practice, the two committees in the Beirut Bar Association, Juveniles and Legal Aid, seek to secure specialized lawyers, a list of whose names are sent to judges.

As a result, starting with the police station and

its security personnel, to the Prosecutor General and the investigating judge and the lawyers appointed in a rush, juveniles are subject to procedures carried out by non-specialized persons. The investigation phase is concluded with referral of the case to the juvenile court judge. In specific cases, the ordinary judiciary examines the case, especially in the event of a juvenile participating with a non-juvenile in a crime, where similar cases take a lot of time to decide.

The latter case raises several problems, most importantly the issue of confidentiality. Ofeich says, «Adults may request public hearings for their trial, and the court is obliged to grant this demand, and therefore may not fulfill to secrecy requirement when trying the juvenile, and this is a flagrant violation.»

To the prison...

«The juvenile needs special help to rehabilitate him so he can fulfill his role in the society... In any case, the interests of the juvenile must be taken into account to protect him from delinquency...»

In the Juveniles building in the Roumieh prison, detainees are divided between those who have been sentenced to prison and those who are awaiting a decision. The delays in deciding on the cases of detainees apply to juvenile cases as well, according to Iskandarani. But the effects of this delay are compounded for juveniles, in light of the spirit of the law aiming to protect them. With the rising number of detainees, especially in the year 2016, sometimes up to 15 juveniles are detained in one cell in poor humanitarian conditions. Although the statistics have not been completed yet, Ofeich attributes this increase to the rise in the number of Syrian detainees.

Talk of the high number of Syrians detainees in recent years has neglected the diversity of the charges and the cases relating to them. According to a table of offenses, there were 2,882 cases in 2014, according to the latest available statistics on the Ministry of Justice's website. Out of these cases, there are charges relating to, for example, identification documents (550 cases, the biggest category), mendicity (51), illegal residence (152), public order (83), shoe shining (46), street selling (128), five cases of scarp collection and eight cases on charges of going through the trash!

Moreover, in the juvenile prison, established procedures do not separate those accused of using drugs from those accused of trafficking, for example, or those arrested on charges of theft from those on charges of murder or attempted murder, which runs contrary to the principle of taking into account the interests of each and every juvenile so as to protect him from delinquency.

The detainees are subject, under the law on the protection of juveniles, to a rehabilitation process under the supervision of specialized teams. But this care provided by the law is limited in time and ends daily by the afternoon! Ofeich says that the organizations working with rehabilitating juveniles are subject to the rules of the Roumieh prison, and therefore are under obligation to vacate the building at precisely two in the afternoon. In the absence of such teams, the responsibility of following up on the situation of the prisoners falls with the security forces. Although Ofeich denies that juveniles come in contact with adults inside the prison, Iskandarani affirms that the Juveniles building is used as a general prison due to overcrowding in the Roumieh buildings, which according to him constitutes «a clear and flagrant violation».

Such discrepancies only contribute to more ambiguity instead of setting the record straight! In the mornings, when the rehabilitation teams are present, a team of «rehabilitated prisoners» is also present, charged by the prison administration to supervise the juveniles. After two in the afternoon, these prisoners remain alone with the juveniles in a room located in the same building, without supervision of the organizations who work in the prison, which entails the likelihood violations and contact between juveniles and adults, in violation of the law, and most recently rape!

While Ofeich avoids expressly confirming any rape cases, she does pose questions in the same vein: who guarantees that the adult room remains locked in the evenings? Who oversees the actions of those prisoners? And is it permissible that an adult prisoner supervise a juvenile prisoner in the first place?

On the other hand, Iskandarani confirms the rape incidents and violence used by adult prisoners, supporting his statement with confirmations of that from one of the judges specializing in juvenile cases.

Embracing Opportunities for a Multicultural Education

Zeina Abla*
Muzna Al-Masri**

«We don't believe anymore what circulates about the Syrians.» This is what a Lebanese student in Akkar claimed when referring to the Syrian refugees in his school. The same Lebanese boy says that a few years back he had a completely different image in mind; a negative one that he formulated based on what he had heard at home and within the family.

This change in perception was reported in a qualitative study conducted in the summer of 2015 by the authors on behalf of International Alert, an international peacebuilding organization based in Lebanon⁽¹⁾. The study collected data in two areas, one rural (Akkar) and the other urban (Burj Hammoud) with a total number of 99 participants including Lebanese and Syrian refugee students aged 10-15 years, their parents and teachers in both areas, as well as with school principals and aid workers in the same areas. The aim was to understand how perceptions and relationships among Syrian and Lebanese students were affected by the schooling system, whether mixed Syrian-Lebanese or segregated by nationality.

The study found improved level of cohesion in public school morning classes. Syrian and Lebanese students in morning shifts had better relationships and positive perceptions of each other and where capable of combating stereotypes. Unfortunately, students who did not attend mixed classes had negative perceptions of the other and were more easily affected by negative representations of the other. In the morning shift, the Lebanese students⁽²⁾ interviewed said they have heard statements such as «the Syrians kidnap and rape the Lebanese,» but as time passed and they interacted more and more with the Syrian students at school, their opinions changed. The study noted that the Lebanese students did not refer anymore to Syrians by their nationality; «the Syrian» as being their only identity. The daily contact between Syrian and Lebanese classmates allowed them to form their own perceptions and contest negative stereotypes, as a result of regular interaction.

Talking to some Syrian refugee students in Akkar and in Burj Hammoud about their impression of the Lebanese, similar positive impact of mixed schooling was conveyed. The interviewed Syrian students described their Lebanese classmates as «very supportive and helpful». Some



even noted that close Lebanese friends or neighbours would stand up for them and their families against any hostile or unpleasant encounters. That said, and while both Lebanese and Syrian students reported friendships within the school, in most cases this appeared not to go beyond the walls of the educational institution and only a few reported seeing friends from a different nationality outside or during the holidays.

The perceptions and relationships are generally less positive in segregated classes. Syrian students attending afternoon classes. Syrian students enrolled in the second school shift in public schools of the same regions expressed resentment towards the Lebanese and a few had a grudge against them. They reported they have heard, from certain Lebanese, insults, unheard of previously in their lives. Some also expressed fear of the Lebanese generally, because, according to the students in case of incidents occurring, the Lebanese can defend themselves by resorting to the police that would raid Syrian homes and frighten their families. When they first arrived in Lebanon, these Syrian students thought the Lebanese were «good-hearted», which in their opinion turned out to be untrue. They considered that the Lebanese students look at them with disdain. They said: «the Lebanese consider us their servants». Some of the Syrians stated that they didn't know why the Lebanese do not like them. Others explained this behaviour saying

that the Lebanese feel: «we took their country». They rationalised the Lebanese's attitude by the fact that the Lebanese think the Syrians are seizing their rights and receiving aid that the Lebanese should be getting. They have come to such an explanation as, according to them, Lebanese youths directly tell them: «you damaged our country.»

In fact, the interviewed Lebanese students attending public school classes with no Syrian classmates confirmed this situation by describing Syrian refugees as «dirty» and «criminals» and considered them as the main cause of harm done to the areas they take refuge in.

Out of almost 160,000 Syrian refugee students between the ages of 3-17 years attending formal education (January 2016), around 60% are attending the afternoon shift at public schools⁽³⁾. The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education started the second shift in classes in December 2014 catering exclusively to non-Lebanese, namely Syrians and Iraqi refugees, primarily because of the rising demand. In addition, it justified this by the difference in academic levels between the newly enrolled refugees and the Lebanese⁽⁴⁾. This arrangement was considered helpful to teachers in adapting to the special needs of Syrian refugee

students academically. Other reasons provided by some school principals and administrators surveyed in a study done in 2014 included considering segregation to protect Syrian refugee students from harassment and discrimination or being exposed to different socio-economic backgrounds of the Lebanese⁽⁵⁾.

While this is a rather limited study, the results are significant and invite further exploration concerning not only the relationship between Syrian and Lebanese children and their community, but also the kind of education and the learning environment we seek to nurture in the Lebanese education system.

Studies from around the world suggest a link - though not a clear causal relationship - between segregation in the schooling system and inter group tensions and conflicts. This has been the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Mozambique, Northern Ireland, Rwanda and Sri Lanka where institutional structures, just like in Lebanon, are a mirror image of the political and social divides that characterise society at large and that contribute to deepening the divisions that exist⁽⁶⁾.

For the past 25 years, Lebanon struggled in its efforts to improve its educational system, particularly in ways it can contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation in a country burdened by years of civil war and its aftermath. Support provided to Syrian students in formal education provides Lebanon today a golden opportunity to make use of incoming financial resources to improve the public education system for all students, Syrian and Lebanese. Most importantly, embracing diversity within the classroom and cultivating a multicultural environment in the school opens up opportunities for Lebanese students to learn about empathy and combatting stereotypes, both necessary skills on the rough path towards national reconciliation.

(1) Muzna Al-Masri and Zeina Abla, The Impact of the Schooling System of Lebanese and Syrian Displaced Pupils on Social Stability (Beirut, Lebanon: International Alert, December 2015) <<http://international-alert.org/resources/publications/better-together>>.

(2) In this report, «students» refers to female and male Syrian and Lebanese students alike and the opinions expressed here reflect those of both sexes.

(3) UNHCR Lebanon, «Back to School» <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=1133> (accessed 24/11/2016)

(4) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2015/10/lebanon-education-ministry-syrian-refugees-children-school.html> (accessed 24/11/2016)

(5) Shuayb, Maha, Makkouk, Nisrine and Tuttunji, Suha «Widening Access to Quality Education for Syrian Refugees: The Role of Private and NGO Sectors in Lebanon» Centre for Lebanese Studies, September 2014

(6) Smith, Alan «Contemporary challenges for education in conflict affected countries» Journal of International and Comparative Education, 2014, Volume 3, Issue 1 125

Former War Combatants Document Lebanon's History in a Message of Peace

Caroline Akoum*

In a move aiming to bridge historical gaps between the generations, the website of Fighters for Peace (FFP), a Lebanese NGO, speaks in the name of those who fought in the war and documents Lebanon's history, which remains a divisive issue on which most Lebanese sides disagree and which has frustrated all efforts to issue a unified history textbook.

Even though it is consistent with the requirements of our times, the importance of this venture lies in its new approach to a sensitive and sore subject in Lebanon and the region, which is war and civil peace, especially at a time when many Arab countries are living to the beat of civil war. Therefore, a person reaching a stage where he can present his experience as a participant of a war and the lessons drawn is certainly a unique move in itself, especially if it tells the story of this person's transformation from a «fighter of war» to a «fighter for peace». Hence, bringing together video witness accounts through this website, which will become an interactive platform, to cover diverse backgrounds and affiliations is certain to paint a picture of the history of the war and of the future if this experience was to start all over again in the present without drawing on the experiences of the past. «Access to knowledge has become quite easy with the number of channels available, but the difficulty lies in accessing the truth,» says Ziad Saab, ex-combatant and head of Fighters for Peace. «We aim to communicate with the Lebanese, whatever their alignments and present our experience through which we were able to go from 'fighters of war' to 'fighters for peace', using various channels, including direct meetings held with students at schools, having held in the last one year and a half 85 sessions and met with 6,000 students, in addition to launching this website aiming to speed up the delivery of this message to as many people as possible and to communicate with people with similar experiences,» adds Saab.

«This website, (<http://fightersforpeace.org/>) which was preceded by the organization's accounts on social media, aims to break the barrier between ex-fighters and any Lebanese citizen who may see in their experience a documentation or historical narration of the war, in addition to enriching the experience and expanding the circle of people aware of it, not just in Lebanon but also those in the diaspora and the world, including Arab countries, where we hope this experience would be a starting point for similar endeavors, especially in view of the wars ravaging them today,» says Christina Foerch, responsible for the content of the website, which was created with the support of the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project and the Norwegian Embassy in Lebanon. «This platform is regarded as an identification card of the organization and its 25 'fighters', and it aims to become in the future an open platform for everyone, providing a platform for anyone who wants to share their memories of the civil war, whether there were fighters, volunteers, paramedics or simply citizens, regardless of their political, regional or religious affiliations.»

«The website is under development and we would like it to become a tool we use to

contribute to documenting the collective memory of the civil war in Lebanon in the absence of a unified history book by presenting different points of view, approaches and narratives,» Foerch adds, saying that «the goal remains presenting change experiences and not promoting violence.»

«The depth of this experience lies in the fact that it does not reflect a single point of view, as a result of the diversity of combatant affiliations,» Saab believes, «while it is virtually impossible to arrive at issuing a unified history book in Lebanon that would require agreeing on a 'unified logic' to write it from a neutral point of view.» He adds, «such accounts by fighters about the Lebanese civil war and the paths towards change that they have undergone have never been part of a history book and will never be.»

Saab does not deny that their position of «former combatants» in the eyes of young people puts them face to face with the challenge of breaking stereotypes and prejudices about combatants. He also notes, «after overcoming this stage, young people receive the message incredibly positively and are affected by it far more than adults. This is achieved through raising their awareness about the reality they are living and comparing it to the similar reality we were living before the war and that led us to take up arms and fight the other, and subsequently call on them to avoid any similar adventure or experience.» Saab explains, «nevertheless, we are keen on not presenting ourselves as holders of the truth. Our role is to encourage people to search for it themselves by planting doubt in their minds and thus pushing them to search for this truth themselves, and this is what we do and we are seeing its results through our interaction with young people directly or through social media, and finally by launching the interactive website.»

In view of the chasm running vertically in society among the Lebanese lately, both political and religious, Saab says, «this reality is sounding the alarm bells for many actors in Lebanon, namely schools, whose principals are now keen on contacting the organization to organize meetings with their students, and the organization has held meetings with students in more than 85 schools in the past year and a half, while only 35 were planned.»

«History can be documented in many ways,» Foerch says, «Documentation by means of recounting personal suffering from the mouth of the concerned person has the most impact on the hearts and minds of people and youth in particular, especially if it is recorded in video, and this is what the FFP platform is trying to offer.» She adds, «These fighters will be gone eventually, but these live accounts will form the memory of this country and will be left for future generations for them to learn from their predecessors. I hope that these lessons



will not be limited to the Lebanese, but that they will go beyond to the citizens of the Arab world, which is in turn witnessing civil wars and internecine fighting between the children of the same country.» She reaffirms, «this platform will be open to everyone, whatever their affiliations, away from politics. In addition, it has never been and will never be biased towards a party or be politicized, and therefore the experiences that will be shared are personal, staying away from accusations of parties or politicians, or even religious communities, because the goal is raising awareness to reject violence, which has never been, and will never be, a solution to any problem.» This is echoed by Saab, «differences in views does not influence the message that

we are trying to deliver to the society, and we, as ex-combatants in the organization that started with five people and now has 25, are a clear reflection of this difference and of what we were in the past in terms of our different political affiliations and the beliefs that we fought for. We are brought together today around a single and fundamental creed and that is rejecting violence, without this implying that we have the same views regarding principles and politics, which goes to reaffirm that difference does not necessarily lead to conflict, which applies to our current reality and what we are trying to deliver to young people and the society, that no matter how much we disagree, there are many things that can bring us together and keep us away from war and fighting.»

With the outbreak of violent clashes around three years ago on the streets of Tripoli in North Lebanon between the Sunnis and Alawites, recalling the Lebanese civil war that raged between 1975 and 1990, and following fears that the fighting might spill over to reach other regions and drag them into another war, a number of ex-combatants from different religious and political factions decided to come together and raise their voices against violence and hostility, and the FFP organization was established.

The mission of FFP, the only organization in Lebanon that brings together former combatants from different political, religious and social backgrounds, is not limited to engaging young people and civil society activists, but also seeks to include more former combatants with the aim of building sustainable civil peace and establishing real reconciliation in Lebanon. In addition, the «Fighters For Peace» seek to go beyond the borders of Lebanon to support neighboring countries torn by civil wars and violence too, from Libya to Iraq and Syria. The former combatants having become fighters for peace, aim to present their stories and experiences to create a space that former fighters can use to find ways of breaking the circle of violence, achieving inner peace and establishing peace in their local communities.

The organization's work focuses on peace building, social cohesion and reconciliation through:

- School, university and refugee camp visits, in addition to other organizations and holding discussions there;
- Creating an electronic museum that holds the accounts of former combatants, and thus contribute to Lebanon's collective memory;
- Communicating with the local community through a selection of activities;
- Providing a safe space for reflection and contemplation and providing psychological and social support to former combatants;
- Offering training on peace building and reconciliation;
- Communicating with current and former combatants in other countries.

What it Means to Be a Refugee

Fouad M. Fouad*

Humans have been moving from one place to another since the dawn of history. This is how the world was made. From the early migrations, driven by lack of resources and climatic changes, to subsequent migrations seeking to improve living conditions and forced migrations fleeing war and natural disasters, human groups have been moving from one place to another, and integrating or re-establishing civilizations. Examples of this movement abound in history, making up virtually all of human history. However, with the emergence of the nation state, which traced borders and divided the world into residing citizens and aliens, or citizens and immigrants, or citizens and refugees, the refugee problem surfaced as an unexpected group to join the resident group at best, and at worst, a huge burden, a source of troubles and an inferior category to those who enjoy citizenship rights. This problem, which dates back no further than 150 years at most, did not acquire its founding form until after World War II, with the big migratory waves that took place across Europe and from Europe, prompting the emergence of a new world order to take care of this category of people, that would become known as the international humanitarian aid system. This system basically views this forced migration as temporary displacement, and integration, or lack thereof, in the host countries as a sovereign matter linked to the internationally-agreed geographical borders of these countries, and the role of this system as guaranteeing minimal basic livelihoods or "rights" of the individual. And herein lies the problem. The system of international humanitarian aid, which presents itself as a purely humanitarian system, i.e. "neutral" and thus non-politicized, finds itself struggling under the weight of political bickering, barely able to deal with some and failing with many others, which include residency rights, employment rights, freedom of movement and other rights associated in one way or another with state sovereignty of the host country, which is at its core a political matter.

Hence, the refugee problem is usually represented as a group deserving of "aid" or a guarantee of rights at best, as noted above, or a group presenting a significant burden and an economic/demographic/moral crisis that needs to be resolved. In all cases, refugees are not seen as equal human beings under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, who can be an addition, not a burden, and a resource, not a crisis.

The refugee crisis is a political crisis arising from a specific political and historical conjuncture and framework, and it cannot be resolved without taking into account this historical and political dimension, where integration is as much a right as the right of return; settlement is as much a right as the freedom of movement; and human rights (of every human being) are as fundamental as the rights of the citizen.

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**The flower: I grew up where the wind had planted me
The traveler: I shall follow the wind, for maybe we
meet again**



Artwork by artist Majd Kurdiah



The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project works since 2007 on enhancing mutual understanding and promoting social cohesion by addressing root causes of conflict in Lebanon. The project has been also lately working on addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on social stability in Lebanon. The project supports different groups from local leaders and local actors, to educators, journalists, youth and civil society activists, in developing medium and long-term strategies for peace building, crisis management and conflict prevention.

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