

The Peace Building in Lebanon

News Supplement



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Beirut Explosion: Healing the Wounds

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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.

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Building Lebanon Forward

Celine Moyroud

UNDP Resident Representative

The explosion that rocked the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020 has the potential of being a critical tipping point for the whole of Lebanon. It has served to uncover the current fragile equilibria that have masked structural fractures, some with deep roots in the past. It may also usher new ways of thinking about how to support the people of Lebanon recover; perhaps helping all stakeholders to look at the huge task at hand through a future-focused and a people-centered lens bringing fresh ideas and casting new lights on old ones to build Lebanon forward. After a decade of hardship brought about by the spillover effects of the conflict in Syria, this explosion came in the middle of other crises: a dwindling economy fast approaching collapse, triggering unprecedented protests demanding accountability, transparency and inclusion, and an outbreak of an unprecedented global pandemic that is not abating. These crises have hit human development in Lebanon very hard, and together they have tested the coping capacities of the Lebanese people beyond their limits. Globally, the direct impacts of COVID-19 on health, combined with the impact of measure that were necessary to contain its outbreak on education and economic activity have caused human development to decline this year for the first time since UNDP introduced its human development Index in 1990. In Lebanon, like the rest of the world, the COVID crisis revealed structural fragilities in health systems and systemic unpreparedness of governance arrangements necessary to deal with such a major crisis. More importantly it exposed and exacerbated prevailing vulnerabilities and inequalities. The crisis affected everyone, but not in the same way, nor to an equal extent. The most vulnerable were hardest hit—impoverished communities, refugees, migrant workers and groups subjected to systemic inequality like women and girls. Inequalities can also exacerbate intercommunal tensions and threaten social stability. The exact same can be said about impacts of the economic crisis and most recently the Port Explosion. Crises also reinforce an almost primal propensity for solidarity. In all the recent crises in Lebanon, we have witnessed community mobilization against inequalities with people questioning the taken-for-granted distribution of wealth, services, and social protection networks, and calling for change based on equality, solidarity and sustainability. Taking the Port Explosion as a point of departure, articles in this edition of the supplement come in that vein—examining the impacts of the manifold, mutually compounding crises in Lebanon. They invite us to rethink past legacies and to think afresh of new potentials and modalities. Whether it is leveraging experiences from past crises; how the international community must transform its support; new roles for the very important Lebanese diaspora; an empathetic understanding of refugee perspectives; or new approaches to addressing core issues like belonging, preserving the living urban heritage or disaster risk management, the set of articles here prompt us to future-think, beyond the “business as usual,” as we consider how to bring everyone together to contribute to building forward Lebanon.

Our Media is Not Weak

Ghassan Hajjar *Editor in Chief, An-Nahar Newspaper*

The explosion of the port on August 4, 2020 must not go unnoticed nor be tolerated, with the attempt to influence and intimidate the media by accusing it of exaggerating and provoking public opinion. Every time, politicians try to throw the weight of their sins, negligence and complicity on the media. And as usual, they seek the media service, and collude with media professionals, but if they do not achieve the desired result, or are resented by the heads of their blocs, parties and benefactors, they turn on the media, accusing it of distortion and inaccuracy. With the huge explosion, which not enough time has elapsed yet to ease its impact on people, psychologically, physically and materially, politicians have tried to evade responsibility, and to this day the investigations have not yet determined the actual responsibility, prompting officials to invite the media not to be provoking, as if the media was the one who killed 200 innocent people, injured 600 others, displaced about 300 thousand from their homes, damaged 70 thousand housing units, destroyed economic institutions, and inflicted moral damage on half the Lebanese people. They forgot that the international media broadcasted live scenes from Beirut, ignored that the authorities cheered the explosion considering that it contributed in ending the isolation of Lebanon, and they do not recognize that the media contributed to providing aid to Lebanon. The Lebanese media conveyed the pain of the people, who are its family, neighbors and relatives, those who do not have a voice, and no one listens to them, were it not for the media pressure. Does the authority want to suppress people and prevent them from crying and screaming? Will it prevent a mother from crying over her only child? It was not the media that caused the calamity, but rather it did its moral and conscientious duty... and most importantly its professional duty. Therefore, thank you to all fellow media professionals.

All Hands on Deck to Support Beirut

Mr. Sascha Stadtler *Director, German Development Bank KfW, Lebanon*

There are no words for the terrible tragedy that hit Beirut on 4 August.

The scenes of destruction in the wake of the explosion brought back to people's minds the still vivid memories of the Civil War with families torn apart, homes and business lost, and fear for the future. Paired with the worst economic crisis the country is witnessing and a Covid-19 pandemic that seems to have spiraled out of control, the prospects looked bleak indeed for the country. Still, the tragedy revealed the many friends that Lebanon can count on; friends that included volunteers from all over the country flocking to the wounded capital to help the victims, Lebanese expatriates mobilizing support online and foreign governments sending aid any way they can even as the Beirut port is still struggling to recover. German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas said Germany would "not leave the people of Beirut in the lurch," pledging a further €20 million in humanitarian aid and development cooperation funds.

Faced with a disaster of such magnitude, the most pressing priorities are providing basic needs like medical supplies, food and shelter for all afflicted people, before restoring their faith in a better future by creating livelihoods, promoting better economic inclusion and nursing psychological wounds. In such times of heightened uncertainty, another more pernicious danger threatens people's lives and wellbeing: fake news spread panic and fuel violence. One more way we have joined hands with the many friends of Lebanon is by helping combat this “disinfodemic.” Through UNDP, KfW has been funding trainings for editors and reporters of the National News Agency (NNA) on combating fake news. Using their newly acquired tools and knowledge, the NNA journalists have started operating a website dedicated to detecting and debunking fake news focused on people's health on health-related news. As events continue to unfold and become distorted, safe and positive media spaces are vital to promote constructive dialog and reduce inequalities. The Peace Building in Lebanon News Supplement you are reading is one such space. The supplement is published with funding from Germany through the German Development Bank KfW and through the common vision of peace building shared by journalists, activists, researchers and artists in Lebanon. While voices for peace can still be heard, actors for positive change can still write a bright future for Lebanon, standing united by the first words of the Lebanese anthem as they demonstrated so well in the aftermath of the explosion: “All for the country.”

Lebanon's Press: Suffering When It Is Needed Most

Nadim Ladki *Editor in Chief - The Daily Star*

At no time in Lebanon's history has the country been more in need of reliable information delivered by its established news media, particularly its trusted newspapers. With the country caught in the whirlwinds of multiple storms, citizens are desperate for facts, for an accurate picture of what's happening on the ground and perhaps more importantly of what has yet to come. Yet it is tragic that at such a crucial point in Lebanon's history the country's media, vulnerable to the same ills buffeting the country, are at their most disadvantaged, suffering blow after blow until their voices have been nearly stifled. It is no secret that traditional newspapers have been on the decline globally for years due to the increasing prevalence of social media and the rise of digital platforms. The ensuing shift in readers' preference for online sources has naturally resulted in a contraction in ad revenue for print publications. In Lebanon, however, the difficulties have been more acute. The media industry was already struggling prior to the protests that erupted last year on Oct. 17, but the subsequent economic paralysis and financial crisis and constraints further undermined what was left of any revenue to speak of, particularly from the banking sector, a major source of advertising revenue for newspapers and other media. The nationwide lockdowns following the detection of COVID-19 cases in Lebanon made matters even worse, further constraining the economy and rendering even the notion of future ads revenue implausible. Even financial support from political avenues, traditional sources of media income in the region, has dried up.

Then came the devastating Beirut Port explosion, which along with killing nearly 200 people, injuring thousands and destroying thousands of homes across the capital, wreaked material damage on the offices of essential established media outlets including The Daily Star and An-Nahar at a time when both are struggling and unable to cover their costs. Meanwhile, while the country's trusted media are scrambling to repair the damage, social media channels are bombarded by fake news which distorts reality and muddies people's perceptions at a time when they desperately need to know what's really happening. With established outlets lacking the resources to professionally deliver information, audiences are subjected to false, biased and manipulative content that further compounds sectarian tensions in a country on the brink. Moreover, in a country known traditionally as the beacon of free press in the Middle East region, media freedoms are growing increasingly restricted while journalists, who are struggling to make ends meet as much if not more than anyone else, are facing nonsensical lawsuits over even the most trivial articles, social media posts and statements. Now, more than ever, Lebanon's established media need support to return to the vanguard of news reporting. They need help in order to be able to cut through the rumors and innuendo that are heightening tensions, to push to the wayside the fabricated news that is plaguing social media and to once again become the organizations people turn to when they are most in need of factual and quality coverage.

Starting from Scratch

Gaby Nasr *Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements*

As if the economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic were not enough, the double explosion at the port of Beirut poured more salt on the wound of the Lebanese people, already in distress. And as long as political division keeps on eroding the country, there is not even the slightest glimmer of hope that the reconstruction of the devastated areas will take place any time soon. It should be made clear that almost everything in Lebanon must be redone from scratch. Before we even think of setting up construction sites, restructuring the economy, and developing plans for structural reform ... it is the entire education system and the entire system of thinking that need to be reshaped.

The port disaster has revealed, in the most striking way, the amount of carelessness and incompetence that went as far as having no public utility capable of assisting the population in times of crisis. A fact evidenced by the wonderful form of solidarity among residents of neighboring quarters and civil society associations who rushed to provide first aid assistance to the inhabitants of the destroyed neighborhoods, and who were then actively involved in the clearing of rubble and broken glass.

Long before this series of misfortunes that has been afflicting Lebanon, the successive governments were never able to come up with credible solutions for basic needs, such as electricity, water, phone, waste management, and of course, security. So many questions that constitute the very definition of a State.

Political debates have always topped the list of priorities. Certainly, freedom of debate is a sign of good democratic practice. But, debating cannot constitute an end in itself. At a given moment, it becomes necessary to proceed to action. Yet, Lebanon, a country run by perpetual consensus, a practice exaggerated to the point of nonsense, is doomed to inaction.

Having to deal with an absent State of which only remains the constitutional skeleton, the Lebanese people became used to relying on themselves. The reaction to the carelessness of the State can, in fact, generate great initiatives based on the know-how, mutual aid, and solidarity. However, it also has its downsides, very often synonymous with a lack of seriousness, selfishness, incivility, and for some people, an excessive appetite for trickery and scams.

How can we be surprised, since we have examples at a high level?

How can we hope for anything else, when the State had practically resigned more than 50 years ago, and the population has been released into the wild?

Beirut Explosion: How did the State Manage the Disaster?

Mustapha Raad
Environmental Journalist

The official confusion in dealing with the Beirut port explosion disaster on August 4th, 2020, which was not managed according to the requirements of the "Sendai" disaster risk management agreement, signed by Lebanon in 2015, was evident amid the lack of coordination among all agencies operating in the field.

This apparent confusion by each and everyone, is not exclusive nor new to all ministries and departments which disengaged themselves from the responsibility of a national disaster of this magnitude. Despite Lebanon's remarkable international work in preparing national disaster management plans over the past five years, the failure to activate the work of the Disaster Risk Management Unit has negatively impacted the disaster response, resulting in a delay in commissioning "the Lebanese Army to manage the disaster the next day," according to a local media report.

The lack of coordination between the agencies has negatively affected the work of the rescue teams working in the field. The source adds that "in the first 48 hours, civil defense teams were not equipped with enough flashlights and rescue equipment, which was a major obstacle in searching for survivors in the rubble, forcing them to stop searching at night and rescue survivors using primitive methods and mobile phone detectors." Furthermore, "the lack of preventive instructions on the emerging COVID-19 virus (Coronavirus), contributed to raise the number of infections among men and women volunteers in the rubble removal operations."

There are several factors which led to the explosion, and the absence of the security authorities in performing their duties which will be revealed by the investigation, did not contribute to alleviating the risks. The same source stresses that "no one has been negligent in responding to the disaster, but the confusion of powers between official agencies and the failure to implement response plans designed to deal with disasters has had a negative impact on all operations," starting with "the lack of distribution of roles in establishing the security perimeter, determining search and rescue mechanisms for survivors, identifying bodies, obtaining DNA samples, as well as not establishing a central communications center."

Another source adds that "the State has not yet assessed the "multiple risks" to determine whether the explosion occurred naturally or was a deliberate act," due to "the absence of a joint operations room between all relief, scientific and security agencies."

The source also points out that, "it would have been possible to improve the response to the disaster if disaster-trained teams in all sectors had been used," especially since "a similar simulation took place a few years ago to train in response to a disaster of an explosion in a public facility," but the scene of "official confusion brought back to mind the scene of the Fassouh building collapse on the night of December 15, 2012 in Ashrafieh, and the death of 27 people at that time due to lack of coordination."

Does Beirut municipality bear partial responsibility?

Locally, Beirut municipality bears partial responsibility for the port explosion, along with other official agencies. Article 49 of the Municipalities Law defines that the responsibility of "the municipal council is to monitor the functioning of public utilities and to prepare reports on their work progress to the relevant departments" (including

The Order of Engineers and Architects conducts damage survey

Organizations and unions did not stand idly by watching the devastation of Beirut. 1,200 engineers from the Order of Engineers and Architects volunteered to help the "Lebanese Army" conduct a survey of the damaged residential facilities and bridges. Engineer Firas Mourtada, President of the Urban Planners Association at the Order,



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the port of Beirut), as Dr. André Sleiman, representative of the "Democracy Reporting International in Lebanon" organization points out in an exclusive interview. He adds that the task of "the head of the executive authority in Beirut municipality, namely the Governor, is to focus on means to prevent fires, explosions and water intrusion, organize the fire service, monitor the storage locations of explosive materials and fuel, determine their quantities, how to store them, and ways of prevention, in accordance with Article 74 of the same law."

Sleiman points out that the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) has already trained relevant municipal authorities on how to deal with disasters within the "Comprehensive Urban Resilience Masterplan for the City of Beirut" program in 2018, with \$1.1 million in funding, for the training on flexibility and urban resilience, but "it was not applied when the disaster occurred."

explained in an exclusive interview that "40 teams of engineers assisted the army to survey the damage done to the facilities, and they were distributed over 97 areas, to survey more than 1500 buildings in addition to inspecting the bridges. The information was uploaded to a private server on the internet managed by the Order and the army through a mobile application, in addition to forming a joint operations room between them," which will help local and international stakeholders in facilitating the reconstruction of destroyed buildings.

What to do?

After the disaster, it becomes imperative to work on "rebuilding better," according to the informed source, adding that "there is a necessity to compensate the economic and psychological victims of the explosion in the long term, and to help move the economic wheel by supporting emerging small and medium-sized companies, and to re-create jobs for all people who lost their jobs and places of work," explaining that "residential buildings, government and private centers, must be rebuilt in a more solid engineering manner, since they are the most vulnerable to tsunamis and earthquakes."

The International Community and the Beirut Explosion: The Required, the Expected and the Possible

Fatima Moussawi
Lebanese Researcher

The deafening explosion that devastated Beirut port incurred losses at all levels and revealed an extremely fragile and negligent political system that was unable to deal with a disaster that afflicted the country amidst the worst economic crisis in Lebanon's history and while the COVID-19 was still spreading. Certainly, everybody noticed the absence of any governmental action in the post-explosion scene. State agencies failed to assume their duties. We did not witness as well a significant and proactive role for municipalities or any initiative to equip public hospitals so they can receive those who were in dire need for urgent care and were not able to find a facility to get treated. Yet, people who were not affiliated with state agencies were there to treat the wounded and rescue those trapped under the rubble. They took the initiative to clean the roads and offer aid to people affected by the explosion. All of this took place in the absence of an effective governmental role in rescuing, assisting, and removing the rubble. The government that did not attempt to take any serious and responsible steps simply resigned a few days after the explosion.

An International Community Active in the Post-Explosion Scene

During the past few months, many countries isolated themselves to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the Lebanese economic crisis became even more severe, for there was no possible external intervention that could come to aid. Furthermore, regional political factors have reinforced a rigid international position vis a vis Lebanon. But the size of the explosion had clearly broken this stalemate. The event was horrific, and the state of shock it produced worldwide was comparable to the one felt on the domestic level.

The international community did take action. In this context, we must shed light on the initiatives taken by the United Nations organizations and the plea made by international organizations to contain the crisis on the ground. The United Nations agencies active in Lebanon, along with many other bodies and missions, developed visions and plans and proceeded with the implementation phase in partnership with other international and local organizations and public institutions. In this regard, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conducted a comprehensive survey in Beirut, especially in the affected areas, in order to estimate the losses. The UNDP also developed a plan to support the initiatives set up to provide social and financial protection for Beirut residents, carried out an assessment of the extent of destruction and the environmental damage incurred, and provided legal assistance as well in cooperation with the Bar Association. As for the World Health Organization, it launched a plea to shed light on the fact that the explosion occurred amidst the spread of Coronavirus. Therefore, it emphasized the double duty in meeting the needs of Beirut residents affected by two tragedies at the same time. The WHO also developed a plan to overcome the trauma and furnish surgical and medical supplies. It mobilized active civil medical organizations to provide treatment for the wounded and, in response to a request made by the Lebanese Ministry of Health, equipped units specialized in the mental and emotional well-being. Besides, the WHO cooperated with other international organizations to provide temporary shelters and cash donations to those affected by the explosion. UN-Women noted the multiplier effect of this explosion on women. The organization launched a rapid response and called to allocate a significant part of the aid to women, especially those in charge of their families.

The International Labor Organization ILO, as part of its intensive recruitment program, created 100 urgent jobs reserved for Lebanese and refugees who have lost their



jobs due to the explosion. Most of these jobs have to do with removing the rubble and providing relief aid to the most affected areas. With the Beirut Municipality's help, the ILO is trying to reach the most affected areas in terms of job losses, conduct the appropriate survey, and provide cash assistance, in cooperation with other UN committees. The World Food Program also has its plan to distribute cash assistance to families in need of food and support local food distributors to deliver food products not available. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, has allocated \$4.4 million for medical, psychological, financial, and housing assistance to children and youths and provided an adequate quantity of clean water for families. It also launched programs to get young people more involved in cleaning up the city. Through its emergency unit, UN-Habitat cooperated with other United Nations agencies to develop a plan for the reconstruction of demolished houses and for the provision of shelter for the many families who have lost their homes, partially or entirely. It also launched an initiative to collect the rubble that cannot be recycled to safely bury it, avoiding therefore previous bad practices in this matter. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR has allocated \$35 million to help citizens, refugees, and migrants secure shelter and protection in the months to come.

The UNESCO statement focused on the enormous cultural and architectural damage and called for many meetings to be held with the Ministry of Culture and specialized organizations. The purpose is to assess the extent of these damages and channel efforts towards urging the international donor community to rescue and restore the threatened Lebanese heritage.

It is noteworthy that the work carried out by these organizations is primarily a relief operation, which would lift this burden off the shoulder of the Lebanese civil society, who should remain focused on its responsibility in seeking development and demanding accountability.

In parallel, many statements were heard at the international level expressing a willingness to stand by the Lebanese people. Many countries, especially Arab countries, sent immediately field hospitals and various aids, which

showed that, on the regional and international level alike, there is no clear "understanding" of the extent of the tragedy that accompanied or resulted from the disaster itself. Assistance included food, medicine, raw materials, and petroleum products. Some countries also expressed their willingness to rebuild some facilities, such as the Kuwaiti initiative to reconstruct the destroyed wheat silos. Unfortunately, no official comment was released from any Lebanese political authority in this regard. A Qatari initiative was also launched to restore and repair damaged public schools. The initiative will handle the project directly without going through the Lebanese authorities. Several French initiatives were announced. Most of them will focus on the restoration of damaged old homes.

Many Lebanese demanded that any aid to the Lebanese state and its organs be stopped immediately; instead, assistance can be delivered directly to civil society associations present on the ground. This plea was approved by a wide range of Lebanese who lost confidence in the authority's capacities in managing the situation. Other Lebanese not only lost faith in the authority but in the associations as well. Besides, there were rumors that the Lebanese authorities have seized humanitarian aids and sold them in the market. Whether true or not, the news has spread panic among the Lebanese people, a fact that raises serious questions about the extent of mistrust between the people and the authority. This mistrust stems from previous painful experiences involving disasters' bad management and the chaos in distributing humanitarian aids. The experience dates back to the civil war and extends to the port disaster. In this case, the responsibility falls on the agencies providing help to secure safe delivery channels that will lead to the people who need it most. The question remains whether the international community in intervening so might be leading to the reproduction of the same ruling class. The humanitarian aids might boost the Lebanese authority in power, which will also gain international legitimacy and, therefore, the ability to survive just like it did in the past. Or, will the international community intervene only to a certain extent that will not affect the attempts to change, should they take place?

Like Our Parents Before us: New Generation Battles Beirut Blast Trauma

Laudy Issa

Managing Editor at Beirut Today

For an indefinite period of time, Beirut will only be associated with the port explosion that left 300,000 homeless, injured thousands, and claimed around 200 lives. Two weeks after 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate exploded close to the heart of the tiny city, the blast's effects are still seen everywhere we turn: In the dents on the cars that stop next to you when traffic lights turn red, in the broken glass now haphazardly piled up near garbage bins, and in the rubble of buildings still being cleared out. Eventually, all physical damage will be repaired and the sympathies of the world will turn elsewhere. Meanwhile, those who survived the blast are left with haunting new memories of a war waged against Beirut. The repercussions of the ongoing war are not so different from those of the one our parents endured between 1975 and 1990, when a civil war was fought by politicians who remain in power to this day.

In both cases, people were forced to abandon their homes, shut down their businesses, and toss their ambitions aside to focus on how they would get through the next day. The war riddled historic buildings with bullets, and the August 4 explosion has now destroyed them completely.

"People who lived through the Civil War tell me they've never seen anything like what happened after the August 4 explosion," says Karem Monzer, a video reporter who works with me at Beirut Today. "Years of work, everything that people had built, were destroyed in a few seconds."

Since the Civil War, our political ruling class has not been held accountable for its crimes. Accountability for today's crime –the biggest non-military explosion in modern-day history –may also never be achieved.

Karem was on the streets documenting the aftermath less than an hour after the explosion, giving himself just enough time to check up on the safety of his loved ones

before diving into work. On the ground, he lived through the chaotic scenes that could have been mistaken for a movie on the Civil War.

"I don't understand. Nothing's left," his voice quivered over the phone that night, the sound of sirens blaring in the background as he walked through the rubble. At the time, he was filming almost robotically. Now, he has processed enough to recall the finer details –the smell of blood, the crunching of glass beneath his feet, and the screaming of the injured as they sought out hospitals they didn't know were also wiped out in the blast.

The imagery of the explosion shattered the worldview of yet another generation of Lebanese youth. Despite the country's economic and political instability, many of us mocked our parents for fearing the return of a sectarian war. The world seemed like a relatively safe place, but the destruction of our city pulled the rose-tinted glasses right off. When the explosion happened, my immediate response was to assume that Beirut was being actively bombed," says Lynn Sheikh Moussa, another Beirut Today journalist whose window frames were blown out entirely by the shockwave. "I was instantly reminded of the 2005 explosion that killed ex-Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and the 2006 War that came after that."

Similar to most, my mother thought that an Israeli jet had struck a nearby landmark. Without thinking, my aunts grabbed their crying children and huddled them near the exit of their homes. Because of how powerful the impact and sound of the explosion was, similar stories emerged from across the country.

"My mom and uncle assumed it was the beginning of a war. I could only cry and calm my grandmother down until news came out of what it really was," reflects Lynn.

Perhaps a war would have been easier to understand and accept. Instead, years of unmet promises, political corruption, and criminal negligence have decimated our city and shattered any wavering hope we had left.

The dangerous ammonium nitrate was stored at the Beirut port –near hundreds of thousands of residents and the city's main grain silos– for six years before the blast. Politicians knew, but failed to act before the explosion shattered our right to peaceful living.

For the past six years, we've unknowingly held meetings, celebrated birthdays, and gone to university in places within the blast radius of the deadly chemical material that was sitting in our port. These places, and with them our lives, are now in ruins. We see ourselves in the people who lost their lives, loved ones, and homes. That could have been any one of us, a sentiment shared by our parents growing up in times of war.

Even before the explosion, people in Lebanon were finding it hard to make ends meet in the middle of the greatest economic collapse the country has ever witnessed. Today's profound economic hardship is unmatched even by the Civil War.

"We were already holding on to some form of hope for the country before a blast wiped out a fifth of the city," Lynn says. "I thought there might be hope for me to stay, but I can't imagine myself staying put for just another explosion to occur in the coming years."

I watch the funeral procession of 15-year-old Elias El-Khoury, who died two weeks after the blast due to sustained injuries. As his school friends carry his white casket, an overwhelming sense of helplessness takes control of my thoughts. I think of all the first experiences that he will miss out on, who he could have become, and what comes next for the inconsolable people he left behind.

The bombings, assassinations, and Civil War of the past 40 years exposed our parents to the notion that anything could happen at any time. A new generation now shares the same collective trauma of the one that came before it. Today, nightmares plague our sleep, we have an aversion to windows, and we flinch when loud sounds take us by surprise.

COVID-19 and the Blast: A Response Amidst Multiple Crises

Eveline Hitti

Chairperson of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the American University of Beirut Medical Center

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged health sectors across the globe, placing tremendous pressure particularly on systems in low resource settings. In Lebanon, just as the country was about to resume lock-down to contain a rise in cases after border re-opening, Beirut witnessed an explosive blast on August 4th leaving more than 175 dead, 6000 injured and almost 300,000 displaced. The events that followed further exacerbated the challenges that Lebanon was facing in responding to the pandemic effectively.

Lebanon went into the pandemic amidst an economic and banking crisis that led to a newly appointed government assuming the COVID-19 response. The initial challenges were common to many low resource settings: the country's fragmented health system is highly privatized and concentrated in urban areas; neighborhoods are densely populated with multigenerational households; and supply-chain is highly dependent on imports. The August 4th blast strained the system further: six major hospitals were severely damaged; the density challenge was potentiated with thousands displaced; and, finally, the resignation of the governmental cabinet jeopardized the credibility of the response effort and its ability to mobilize the various sectors.

Initially, the approach Lebanon followed was one of aggressive containment to build its health sector capacity. It closed schools, daycares, pubs, gyms and malls, with full

lock-down of borders and stay at home orders when case counts were still at 99. In spite of successfully containing the outbreak initially, with a case positivity rate of 1.5% and only 251 cases per million prior to border re-opening, imported cases soon started driving community clusters. Following the blast, which occurred amidst a second lock-down, the positivity rate spiked from 2.1% on July 25th to 10.5% on August 22nd, quickly overwhelming the designated COVID-19 inpatient beds.

The challenge today remains one of mobilizing the predominantly private health sector to care for COVID-19 patients, at the cost of significant financial burden for hospitals that step up: the equipment needed, facility standards and personal protective equipment (PPE) for COVID-19 care are costly; most third-party payers continue to exclude care of COVID patients; and lost revenue from elective cases who may avoid COVID-designated hospitals is an additional financial disincentive. As such, the care of COVID-19 patient has shifted to public hospitals, in spite of the overwhelming capacity of the private sector. With multiple COVID-designated hospitals either totally non-functional or with reduced capacity from blast-related damages, the few hospitals that have stepped up are even more strained post-blast. Rethinking the resourcing of public hospitals is necessary for future planning, as is providing incentives and support for the private health sector, including working with third party payers to address COVID-19 exclusions.

An additional challenge, exacerbated further by the blast, is the heavy reliance on foreign supply chain where low/middle income countries have little leverage to compete for critical resources. With continued disruptions to this

supply-chain, multiple initiatives have started locally including some efforts towards designing and producing ventilator machines and basic PPE. In addition, health facilities have quickly had to resort to crisis standards for reuse of supplies and PPEs. Post-blast, Lebanon has seen an influx of donations of supplies, field hospitals and PPE. However, most donations have not taken into consideration more long-term needs beyond those of acute trauma care. In addition, the flood of donations and the logistical challenge of matching supplies to the different needs has exposed the need for a centralized national disaster response unit that would coordinate efforts and which was missing in Lebanon pre-blast.

Finally, while Telehealth use has become widespread in many parts of the world with clear practice standards, its absence in Lebanon was acutely felt during the pandemic, especially post-blast as case counts rose and workload of damaged hospitals spilled to others. In countries where it is available, Telehealth not only reduced exposure of staff and patients to COVID-19, but it also compensated for some of the lost professional fee revenue from reduced in-person visits for many practices. A few health centers in Lebanon began to offer formal Telehealth services during the pandemic. Practice standards and the legal framework remain unclear however. In addition, lack of coverage of Telehealth services by third-party payers continues to be a major limitation to its widespread use.

Along with COVID-19 came the opportunity to rethink health care in low resource settings where historically entrenched practices and policies exposed vulnerabilities that need to be addressed to survive this and future health crisis.

Family and Community Support for Child and Adolescent Mental Health in the Aftermath of the Beirut Port Explosion

Tania Bosqui

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The port explosion that ravaged through Beirut two weeks ago, killing at least 200 people, injuring thousands, and leaving hundreds of thousands of homes damaged or destroyed, has taken an unprecedented toll on the mental health and wellbeing of the population. The blasts come at a time when people were already living under stress, suffocated by the devaluation of the Lebanese lira, fuel and electricity shortages, intermittent lockdowns and covid-19 containment measures, and widespread anger and protests at government corruption and mismanagement. Almost half of the Lebanese population, and at least two thirds of the refugee population, are now living under the poverty line. The port disaster has re-ignited anger at the ruling elite, who ignored warnings about the lethal capacity of the explosive materials stored improperly in the port. The pre-existing daily experiences of chronic stress, the trauma caused by the explosion, and the continuing exposure to uncertainty and fear, are a perfect storm for the emergence of significant and persistent mental health difficulties.

After the port disaster, affected parents reported concerns about their children's trouble sleeping, silence and unresponsiveness, clinginess and anxiety, fear of another explosion, repetitive play and a preoccupation with explosions and loud sounds. Parents struggled to cope with these reactions in the midst of their own traumas,

which for many opened old wounds from the civil war and subsequent wars and violence. Parents asked heartbreaking questions: 'How can I get my child to forget? Can I cry in front of them? What should I tell them happened? Will they be normal again?' In one psychosocial group with adolescents and parents, run through the NGO Embrace, parents were surprised to hear the depth of their children's understanding of the situation. Young people reported worrying about whether they can afford their home anymore, what will happen if the government doesn't resign, if the explosion will trigger a civil war, if the hospitals – many of which were damaged in the blasts – will be able to treat them if they contract the coronavirus. The complex and layered worries are clear to see in the minds of the city's young people.

Research has shown consistently that war, armed, conflict, and natural disasters are significantly associated with an increased risk of mental disorders in children (Attanayake et al., 2009). What is particularly concerning about the potential impact of the port explosion on mental health, is that this appears not to have been a deliberate act of war, nor a natural or man-made accident. This was the consequence of a political elite so paralyzed by sectarianism and corruption, that they shamelessly risked the lives of their own people. These innocent people are not martyrs

who died for a clear cause, but are rather victims of senseless negligence. The fallout of anger and despair from this reality is likely to fuel post-traumatic reactions to the explosion, where a meaningful narrative of the grief and loss cannot easily be constructed. Socio-political injustices of this scale in other country contexts have been linked to poorer mental health, increasing the risk of depression and anxiety (Giacaman et al., 2011). In Lebanon, collective experiences of war, regardless of personal exposure, was associated with elevated anxiety (Nuwayid et al., 2011), indicating the importance of the shared and social nature of the distress. The port explosion shook the whole country, literally and figuratively; the fear, pain, and anger are also experienced collectively. Children are not immune to this collective pain, and are impacted by their parents, families, and communities experiences and reactions (Diab et al., 2018).

In the same way in which the pain of the port disaster is experienced collectively, coping and resilience can also be cultivated at the collective level. While long-term residents of Lebanon are tired of having to be resilient, the strong social and community support networks that exist all over the country are massively protective for children's mental health. Following the port explosion, despite reeling from the disaster, people descended to affected areas in their hundreds, cleaning away debris, covering blow-in doors and windows, offering food, water, and shelter, and providing a compassionate listening ear. People were flooded with support from their friends, relatives, colleagues, and local businesses and organizations. These forms of community level, naturally occurring, intervention can be strongly protective for child mental health (Betancourt et al., 2013). Such protective mechanisms can be nurtured through capacity building and support for parents, families, and communities. For example, in one of the most affected low-income areas, Karantina, a public park that had been closed by the municipality was reopened and is being used by NGOs (UNICEF, War Child Holland and CatalyticAction) as a safe space for children and parents away from the chaos around them. The playground space was a community initiative, designed in 2016 using a participatory approach, and is being reimagined post-disaster, by CatalyticAction and the AUB's Neighborhood initiative, in collaboration with the community and children themselves. International guidelines on mental health and psychosocial care after humanitarian emergencies strongly recommend a community-based approach, which draws on community resources, and is available for the whole affected population (IASC, 2007). Whilst specialized mental health care and focused psychosocial support will be needed on a large scale in the weeks and months to come, community-level initiatives like the Karantina playground can help to foster the capacity of the collective to encourage and support natural recovery and coping. Given the scale of destruction and the collective nature of distress following the port disaster, such strengthening of communities will be vital to protect the mental health and wellbeing of children.

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Beirut's Tragedy Reviving a Lost Sense of the Lebanese National Belonging

Zainab Chamoun

Journalist and Researcher

In the aftermath of Beirut's explosion, the daily life of citizens in Lebanon was defined by one prominent scene: Lebanese and non-Lebanese manpower, from all ages, genders, areas and religious backgrounds relentlessly crowding in Beirut's distorted streets to help the city get back into shape. The daily grind consisted of huge numbers of repaired windows and doors, distributed food parcels, secured shelters, cleaned streets and infinite needs assessments. We never knew just how much we loved Beirut until we lost it. We never knew the full power of our unity until we were all felt equally targeted.



A few hours after the catastrophe, relief efforts had already taken over on the ground and social media. Torn by the survivor's guilt, almost everyone in Lebanon took full responsibility in fixing what happened. People didn't wait for the government to respond, knowing that it would fail them again. Their personal pages were re-appropriated as megaphones announcing needed and available aid. Still sensing the shockwave that ripped Beirut and our bodies apart, the Lebanese virtually joined efforts to respond to the most urgent needs – providing shelter for the homeless and locating lost victims. Through Instagram stories, people offered their own flats to host afflicted individuals. Many social media pages were created for securing aid – each embracing "Beirut" into its title and targeting distinct needs.

The Lebanese collective response was not the outcome of the Lebanese's "passive resilience" – the Lebanese, although they have endured a lot of crises, do not simply adapt to or live by the state's rude and insufferable performance. Their collective efforts came out of a collective disbelief in

the ruling system. They wanted to promptly fill an urgent gap that they knew authorities would not raise a finger to address. Until today, the government's efforts are minimal and do not measure up to the work done by individuals and volunteer-led initiatives. Citizens in Lebanon have zero trust in the government and the ruling parties, and they have all the reason not to. At the end, it is the government that sought and hid a latent nuclear-like bomb in Beirut right next to innocent workers, commuters and residents living in the heart of the city or by the sea. It is the government's negligence that made us lose souls, walls, cultural heritage, lit roofs, coffeeshops and streets that used to hold treasured memories – all of which have evaporated into the mushroom cloud.

Virtual collective efforts from the first night translated into practical action on the ground the next morning. Traumatized, grieving and in rage, people rallied to Beirut's most devastated neighborhoods. Under the heavy sun, taking as much precautions as possible against the pandemic, people moved from house to house to help. Armed with brooms,

sweepers, gloves, masks and helmets, they cleared rubble and glass, sealed broken windows and doors, and checked on residents of damaged houses. People from all walks of life and all over Lebanon worked in areas that they had never visited before and carried out unusual heavy physical work.

The scene was emotionally moving – how could a nation that just experienced one of the biggest explosions in history wake up with a collective willpower to rebuild its damaged capital? Everyone in Lebanon either felt the sway or heard the echoing sound of the explosion. They were all affected, either physically or emotionally. Walking through the hardest-hit areas, including Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael, one could not but notice the rich diversity within. Big aid buses arrived from every area and strangers formed groups spontaneously. Religious differences were visible through dress-codes and names. While Lebanon is a religiously diverse country, such scenes of en masse communal solidarity are relatively novel. The country is violently divided by sectarian 30-year-old politics. Still living the

residues of the Civil War, each area is dominated by one color. To this day, we prize examples of diversified communal belonging when witnessed on the ground. The grotesque explosion woke us to collect what is left from our scattered identity and reframe it into one unified perception of what a "Lebanese Nation" can look like. The Lebanese tend to romanticize scenes of unity and solidarity, hoping to normalize them again.

To live under the mercy of a dysfunctional government means to live in a constant state of cautious, responsible and sustainable thinking. From spontaneous chaotic reactions, the Lebanese initiatives developed into more organized response plans. "Nation Station" is one of the representative examples of sustainable ongoing relief efforts. Starting with a group of locals, Hussein, Aya, Josephine and Mazen, the station was established in the Geitawi area to provide food and show solidarity. Later, John and his team from "Nylon's Generation" joined their efforts, turning the station into a relief center for the neighborhood and vulnerable communities. With effective organization, data collection, donation distribution and coordination with volunteers, the station is evolving into a long-term, self-sustaining community hub that also promotes social interaction and a sense of community. Like most initiatives, it embodies a better alternative for the government – one that embraces diversity instead of abusing it to create endless cracks within the Lebanese society.

Since the explosion, the Lebanese responsibly multitasked with a broken heart – cleaning the city, mourning victims and protesting with a utopian dream of a civil inclusive state, social justice and accountability. One lesson we can learn from the tragedy is that power lies in our united efforts. We are not destined to rebuild what corrupted hands have ruined every time. Instead, this tragedy has given us a stronger motive to revive the demands of the October 17 Revolution and focus on what we need: justice for the victims and decent living for those who survived.

Volunteer Testimonials

Amidst Dust and Shards of Glass

Nassim S. Zoueini [Niha - Chouf - Mount Lebanon](#)



Ashrafieh, 25 seconds later

" - Allo Mama, a huge explosion happened in Beirut and I am perfectly good

- What?

- A huge explosion happened in Beirut and I am perfectly good

- Oh my god! I just heard it!! Mama are you sure there is nothing wrong with you?

- Yes, that is why I am calling you. I have to hurry check my neighbors, love you, bye! "

Unscratched, I sat down for a moment, examined the ripped off doors, windows and the traditional red wooden shutters all over my furniture, kitchen floor and my bed.

I stood up, still feeling the grains of dust that scratched my ears for fractions of a second and opened my backpack. A bottle of water, a bottle of alcohol, a pack of tissues, masks and latex gloves. I took a look from the balcony, it was horrific.

I ran to check my 80-year-old neighbor, she's fine.

I rushed over the stairs and reach the street. It was anything but a street....

I ran back towards my building, grabbed my bicycle helmet and so the journey began.

For a moment I was supposed to be walking on a street, but instead I was walking on glass shards, branches of trees, broken aluminum, shoes, pillows, ripped off doors and even satellite receivers... A horde of screaming zombie-like people were finding their way in the middle of this chaos. While my eyes were in total disbelief of what I am currently seeing, all the damages, the smoke, the blood, the voices of shouting kids and heavily moaning elderly were sharper than sirens wailing on that day. I recall all the faces that I saw, I can still hear those who called for my help, I can even still remember the type and size of the wounds of each one of them. I remember all of those with big gratitude that I was physically unharmed and able to help, yet in the background of this chaotic scene, a single frame never disappears from my sight something that even the most imaginative Hollywood production has never showcased: the blown-up funeral services store with broken open coffins dispersed on the floor of the shop and all over the nearby sidewalk...

My instinct to help guided me to run towards the Saint George Hospital, as I assumed all wounded will flock there to get treated, so I could donate blood and help calming people down and give first aid around the entrances of the hospital. I helped cleaning some of the wounded's faces on my way, and giving them towels to press on their wounds. I kept walking, I found no hospital...

25 minutes later

People, injured, medical crew and beds were coming out of the hospital instead of running in... I shivered ... "this is the place where people come to seek help" I said, but it is out of service ... At this moment, the dust turned into fog in my eyes, all the wailing, the sirens, the sound of glasses shattering under the feet of those running in disbelief, all of these disappeared for a few seconds.

Suddenly a sharply screaming voice broke this virtual silence: "Someone comes to help me, quickly "dakhilkon" someone comes to help me". I looked left and right to see a woman rushing back into her apartment from the balcony on a high floor from a neighboring building. I counted the balconies, it's the seventh floor and started dashing over the stairs, stepping on broken wooden doors, aluminum rods, glass shards and falling ceilings. As I moved upstairs counting the floors until I reach seven, I watched five parallel red lines spiraling upwards on the wall of the staircase. A line that I did not know on which floor started, yet I was telling myself "good, good... I'm glad he made it and walked out..."

SEVEN

"Madame... Madame... I am here ya Madame" I shouted. "Please come in quickly" she shouted, "My daughter is trapped inside, the door was violently shut and Jen is not replying to me 'yadelleana' ". I stepped on the blown-up furniture and the torn off partitions and doors, going towards the indicated door and told myself: "I do not want to find someone beyond help, please not now, please not yet"

"Jen if you are hearing me get away from the door" I held the handle and started kicking the door until it opened. To my right, a light-brown haired girl in her twenties was lying on her back, the face was pale and the eyes were closed. No blood over her body, a dislocated knee and behind me a screaming mother who thought her girl was not hers anymore. I touched Jen's wrist, the pulse is there. "Don't worry ya madame, she only fainted because of the shock, she is still with us". I sprayed some alcohol on a piece of towel, made her smell it and screamed her name until her eyes opened. I forgot about the apocalypse and got stuck in that moment. I asked her: What's your name? "Jennifer" she said. I turned my face towards the mother and said "See? She's alright, she's a hero!" then I look towards Jen who was still holding the alcohol pad and smelling it, I fixed her neck, looked into her eyes and told her: "I am smiling a very wide smile to you now, it is under the mask, but trust me it is very wide, hero!" Very worried about her dislocated knee, I could not move her, yet I was even more worried about how could they carry her over the broken staircase for seven floors, and above all, the gruesome worry was: which hospital is going to receive her? It was only a matter of a few moments pressing on her hand to help her stay conscious until a relative to the family dashed through the door, and I felt reassured that now they are not alone so I could run for my next mission in a corner that I do not know...

Countless times have I told this story to my friends and family, almost to anyone who asked me about those moments while volunteering in the damaged area. I only left the streets to take a rest at night, never expecting for a reward.

Beirut in the Eye of a Volunteer

Ghadi Bachnak [Mount Lebanon](#)

From the land of tourism, love, and livelihood to a land of ruins, debris, and tears. Beirut became a wasteland after the 4th of August explosion that shattered every window, door, and hope within miles from the blast zone. As a volunteer from day one it pains me to see a piece of my heart bleeding innocent blood from corruption and government neglect. Coming all the way from the mountains to help all of my Lebanese siblings, I saw a side of Lebanon I haven't seen a while, besides the broken hearts, massive need for money and repairs, and tears of the Mentally and physically injured; I saw hope and unity in a nation that has been in fear of civil war. People were and still are picking up Beirut piece by piece and cleansing the dirt of what used to be an economy in hopes of building a religion free and corruption free country for all its patriots.

Let's build a new home for the people who deserve this country and haven't destroyed it.

Let's free our minds from what led us here.

Let's build a restriction free and chain free country.

Let's shed tears of joy and hope in country where people love to live.

Hope Remains

Sandra Shehayeb [Mount Lebanon](#)

Few months ago, I dedicated my English poem portfolio at the university to Beirut. I wrote poems describing its details. The old buildings and the new ones. The streets and the sense of poetry at every corner. As a girl living in the mountains, I always had a certain passion for that city. A plan for an upcoming life and career in Beirut. Now if I have to describe the first week after the explosion I would say it was consistent. Wake up. Take the bus. Get to Beirut. Separate into groups. Help and aid. Go back home. A very big group from Aley headed daily to help. Taking certain type of precautions into consideration, masks and hand sanitizers were present all the time. I have to admit that I didn't focus at the time, all I wanted to do was help. I offered my first aid skills as a nursing student. Help lifted doors and broken windows. Cleaned blood stains of beds and of the grounds. For the first week I felt complete numbness, and all I could hear was the sound of broken glass being cleaned. Days after that, it hit me. Beirut with all our memories and dreams is shattered. I don't think words have the power to describe such a devastating feeling. However, with the power of the youth, hopefully we will rebuild Beirut.



Does Beirut Deserve This Treatment?

Doja Mkahal [Riyah - Bekaa](#)

Beirut is the first cry of the sea as the poet Mahmoud Darwish once expressed, and 'set el dounya' (the Beloved Lady of the World) as the great Nizar chanted ... Beirut the civilization, the art and the civility ... Beirut cried out of pain, and how poignant is the cry of great cities. Is this how Beirut is treated? Is this how we treat great cities? "I could not bear to see what happened to you, sweet Beirut! to your homes, to your people, to your streets, to your roads, to everything that has befallen you. I couldn't but be there the second day of the incident, offering all my energy and help for any kind of assistance, despite my energy being drained upon seeing you destroyed, sweet Beirut! But I collected myself because I believed that no one is going to pick up your ruins except your youth, your family, and everyone who has a pleasant memory in your streets, as they are the ones who can bring you back to life. And indeed, we were able for a week, as volunteers, to soothe some of the wounds, wipe your tears, sweet Beirut, and heal, and clean your roads with a broom and a shovel, which every young man and girl were carrying on their shoulders, and heading to remove the ugliness that deformed you, O lovely Beirut, because you deserve nothing else but beauty!

No one can assassinate you, Beirut, nor erase your smile. Maybe they succeeded for a day or two, but you will come back like before ... for the sake of civilization, for the sake of the blue sea, for the sake of the people who got civilized and learned art in this great city.

Forgive us O Sweet Beirut...Forgive us!

An Indescribable Tragedy

Ramona Khoury [Jezzine - South Lebanon](#)



It is one of those memories, which lingers and becomes a nightmare. Minutes, seconds, have managed to have a greater impact than years. On a seemingly normal day, I was at the warehouse of the association I work for, filled with enthusiasm. The whole feeling evaporated in a fraction of an instant, and turned into a total lack of knowledge. An earthquake? An explosion? A whirlwind? I immediately rushed onto the infinite steps of this warehouse to find my colleagues, to see if life still reigns in this indescribable chaos. The anxiety-filled heartbeats were perceptible to the naked ear. A drama, a black veil darkened hope. Calling my family, my friends, my loved ones to see if they are still alive... despite the confusion. The next day, I went for a usual round in the narrow streets of Beirut. I was looking, with hand over heart, for the little children who have only the street for mother...

More Than Just a Duty

Darine Darwish [Tripoli - North Lebanon](#)

At the time of the blast, at first glance, we all had a sense of fear, immediately followed by a sense of rush to help and immediately head to the site of the blast. Despite the poor health situation, a sense of responsibility awakened in everyone including me. It can be said that the psychological state that prevailed in all of us after the explosion prompted us to think negatively and affected everyone, especially the people of Beirut living around the port. But when you access the affected area or areas, your tongue can't describe or comprehend the magnitude of the human and material losses! And what amazes you is that despite the tragedies present before you, you see people helping those who are more affected than them. All this prompts you to forget the fear and to learn strength from the people of Beirut, and you witness your feeling liberated from being a mere act of duty to become a feeling of brotherhood and belonging.

Beirut, My City

Hassan Chamoun [Nabatieh - South Lebanon](#)

It was a tragedy for Lebanon. I wasn't a guy who liked going to Beirut, but after seeing the spirit of people there I fell in love with this city. We were working with strangers from different religions, background and towns as a family. I never felt safe in a bombed city before as I did in Beirut, and it's all because of the people and unity that resulted from this tragic catastrophe. Although I am from Nabatieh, but now I feel like Beirut is my home town.

Beirut... Born in a Sheet of Rubble

Perla El Rahy [Aaqeibeh - Mount Lebanon](#)

Beirut, which my eyes beheld, is not 'the Beloved Lady of the World' (set El dounya). The Lady came back as a child in the world of miserable childhood. Her features have shifted from a solid, coherent and steadfast old woman to a fragile, senseless and vulnerable child. Her face paled, her laugh faded, and her innocence removed. Once a Lady sheltering thousands, she became a homeless child crying tears of blood amid the rubble. Is that what childhood is like? He who gives birth to a child deprived of life will surely see her get outraged and revolt against him one day. But Beirut was not left behind. Her young women and men have removed the ashes from her and are still trying to make her sorrowful birth a resurrection and a renewal for their homeland. She will grow up on their hands, and her heart will beat in revolution. It only remains for the "little girl Beirut" to learn the importance of accountability in order to become an unbeatable Lady one day.

A Glimmer of Hope

Fatima Naim [Kfarsir - South Lebanon](#)

The fifth of August, the day after the port explosion, the capital Beirut did not wake up to Fairuz's voice, but rather to the mothers' wailing and the fathers' cries. As for me, I woke up to a pain in my chest, and a voice inside me said, "Stop crying, get up, find a way to help." I headed to Martyrs' Square, where a number of young men and women gathered to provide assistance, depending on each one's ability. We were divided into three groups. The first group was tasked with removing the rubble and debris, the second distributing food, and the third included male and female paramedics. I joined the first group and waited for my turn to get a broom and gloves like those used in construction, and a helmet that protects the head. But my wait was long. The equipment wasn't enough for everyone, and we tried hard to find someone who donated other equipment. After three hours of waiting, a car loaded with equipment arrived and I was able to get my tools. I went with a group of girls to the Geitawi area, and when we got there, I was shocked by the scene, and the universe stopped for a while. Is it really the same city that buzzed with parties? Are they the same people who never lost their smile in recent days? Where are we going to start and how are we going to finish? The pain is big and the destruction is bigger. We started cleaning up the street which was full of glass and other things that fell out of houses, like a book of a 20-year-old guy who might have read it two minutes before the explosion, a toy of a little girl whose fate I ignore now, and a medicine for an old woman maybe, who couldn't afford to buy anything else. After a certain time of work, it was time to hand over the tools to someone else who hadn't been so lucky to help yet. I left, tears running down my cheek. Anyone who visited Beirut knows that she is the beautiful bride of Lebanon, and a Lady who does not get old no matter the stormy days, but now the bride has lost her husband and the Lady started to age... But, in every disaster, there is a glimmer of hope. This hope I saw through the eyes of the young man who offered us food, and the passers-by in their cars who generously offered us water, or at the very least a kind word of appreciation for our hard work ...

Something Inside Us Was Broken

Ghinwa Melhem [Batroumine, Koura - North Lebanon](#)

My name is Ghinwa Melhem, I am 19 years old, in my third university year. I study physical therapy. I live in Batroumine-Koura. On August 4, I was in Jbeil at 6:08. I heard two strong sounds, I thought something had happened in Jbeil. Within 5 minutes my father and mother started calling me to come home immediately. The two sounds remained unknown, I do not know the cause or the source. The news and beliefs began until I reached home, and saw how powerful the explosion was. I stood up and said what a disaster this is. The next day, after watching all the devastation on social media sites, I felt something strange in me like an anguish. I am always involved in humanitarian sports activities (like basketball on wheelchairs), or any assistance people need. But this time was different, because I felt that there was a national duty calling me as important as the human duty. I called my father to tell him how I wanted to go down to Beirut. He was hesitant at first due to the distance and the health situation, but he agreed and bought me thick gloves. The next morning, I woke up at 5:00 a.m., prepared myself, and went to Batroun. We gathered in a group and headed towards Beirut. When we started diving in the affected areas, I was seeing the amount of damage, and I felt an anguish that was growing as we progressed further into the affected areas. I arrived at Geitawi Hospital, shocked by what I saw. I saw the building or the place, where people are supposed to feel reassured that there are services that help them recover, destroyed. There was blood on the stairs, glass everywhere, on the patients' beds, in the emergency unit where cases are received to be treated quickly, or hospitalized for treatment, destroyed. The cleaning started. We were young men and women, all together, climbing up floor after floor and entering room after room. We felt the terror that existed at the time of the explosion. After that, I went to the "L'Appui" Center in Ashrafieh. It is a center for physical therapy / remedial education / speech therapy / dorms. I was stopped by something I couldn't forget. There was a whole glass office, and the pressure of the explosion hung the pieces of glass in the opposite wall, leaving small gaps in it. I was imagining if there was a person or a little boy who had been cut by the glass. The dorms rooms were broken and destroyed.... When I took a break, I found a lot of glass dust on my forehead, so I wondered about the glass that ripped people's bodies. What struck me in the affected neighborhoods were the stories of the people. I saw people wounded and their house in wreck, sitting on a chair outside their home, a woman who lost her family and her home and carrying the only bag she owned on her way to stay with her sister. All this, while my tears were betraying me. When I was heading to Beirut, I didn't think how far, or dangerous the distance was, knowing that I returned back by bus and was not afraid. The distance in the country itself is the same, we all unite throughout Lebanon when anything affects our homeland. The circumstances did not allow me to go down to Beirut much. But I didn't give up, and took part in arranging aid packages for Beirut and I also participated in the university. Most of us were not present at the time of the explosion, but we felt something shattered in our hearts. The sound of the explosion, the sound of the cracking, the sound of the screaming mothers and children, the tears of the relatives of the martyrs, all will not be forgotten. Until today, I wanted to leave Lebanon. But after I went down and participated in restoring the spirit to Beirut, I saw young people from all over Lebanon, from North to South, from the Bekaa... These young people did not participate in any previous elections to build the old State. They were the majority who participated in the clean-up process, and they were the State in its absence. Now, I can see a glimmer of hope for Lebanon and its source is all these young men and women. May God rest the souls of the martyrs!

Until Beirut Rises Again

Dima Qasem [Al Qobba, Tripoli - North Lebanon](#)

My name is Dima Qasem, I am a 19-year-old student in my first year of business administration at the Lebanese University, from Al Qobba, Tripoli. I am a volunteer at "Shift" Association campaign "Together For Beirut" to ease the effects of the terrible explosion of Beirut port, which has taken a huge toll on the region and the entire nation. Since I learned about this volunteering, I've had a tremendous sense of helping in any kind of area; I underwent the experiment on the first day, and since that day, I felt as if my presence was important and my participation even more important, especially when one of the victims said to me, "You made me forget my worries, we are proud of you and you are the pride of Lebanon." I was more enthusiastic and encouraged to participate. My daily talk became Beirut, the explosion and the affected families... This encouraged my sisters to participate, and this is where my family volunteering journey began. For the first time in my life I participate in a volunteer work, this experience has taught me a lot and has given me a lot of experience and knowledge (such as organization, leadership and the spirit of cooperation in society). I am now very proud of myself in terms of

educating my younger sisters and encouraging them to participate in such works, and I thank "Shift" Association for its moral and developmental support. I am persistent and will continue in this initiative until Beirut rises again, and I will master and learn everything that could benefit the affected areas.

From My Heart, Peace to Beirut

Marah Atieh [South Lebanon](#)

The house shook and my heart trembled in fear. I rushed to the television thinking that an earthquake has struck. On television, it was a surprise. Most of the satellite channels carried one story, "A huge explosion shakes the Lebanese capital Beirut." The details appeared, the explosion was in the port of Beirut, and it seemed to me as if a monster swallowed the bride of Lebanon and burned it, spraying sadness and tragedy in our hearts which broke with you, Beirut. Beirut is a city that has always shimmered brightly, nestled between the sleeping sea on its shore and the mountain on which it leans. The next day, amid the heat of events, I received an invitation to join a youth initiative at the "Al Jana" Center in Wadi El Zeina. The announcement made clear that the initiative was supported by UNICEF to heal the wounds and clean up the devastated areas of Beirut afflicted by the disaster. I joined the initiative with many young men and women. We went to Beirut, and when we got to the affected areas, I realized the difference between a picture you see on TV and a reality you see with your eyes. The streets of the most affected areas by the bombing, such as Gemmayze, Karantina and Mar Mikhael, were difficult to describe. The streets became filled with dark black ash, as if the earth wore black in mourning for the beloved Beirut, I saw houses whose walls fell down peering at the unknown. The glass scattered all over the place. The cries of mothers on television and their wailing in their homes when we entered them crossed my hearing. Years of fatigue, gone in a moment. Perhaps our presence as volunteers in this initiative, and other initiatives from various regions, religions and sects, contributed to the softening of the wounds of Beirut and its people. In a house whose people lost their shelter, the faces of the youth among them became a shelter, even a moral one. Those families felt that they were not alone, and that a group like ours, which consists of Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians cleaned the streets and the houses, removed the rubble, and wiped a tear of a mother who wished she could embrace us one by one, as she said. The scene left a clear impact on me, as if a part of me was martyred, and despite all the painful events we remained one hand, supporting each other; And the doors of our homes are open for your people, Beirut. Oh Beirut, I am the daughter of a camp. I lived as a Palestinian refugee in Syria, and I came to Lebanon to escape the war there. And what happened to you, Beirut, is a tragedy, as if it were war ... And you, Beirut ... Oh Beirut ... you are accustomed to love as well as war ... How much you pained us, Beirut ... How much we love you, Beirut... From my heart, peace to Beirut ...

Restoring Beirut

Anthony Feghaly [Ashrafieh - Beirut](#)

August 5, 2020, the first day after a black night in which we haven't slept at all. The first day after the ruin that befell the city of Beirut, causing extensive damage to the capital. I did not think twice about heading down to Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze streets to help, even though I live in the Ashrafieh area and my house had been badly damaged. Mar Mikhael and Gemmayze streets were not as usual, they were miserable, they were indeed a disaster area, cars were destroyed, crushed glass filled all the streets, and the buildings resembled war buildings stripped of windows and balconies. I was wondering if this area would return to what it was before the disaster and resume its night life. We were two people, and we did not have any cleaning tools to help, so distributing food was the first means by which we helped the people of the area, until we got to know a number of young men and women, who also got to know each other in the street, and we went together to a house at the end of the Geitawi area. "Really, you're helping for free? " was the first question the owner of the destroyed house asked, as we surprised him, and he started telling his neighbors about us as young men and women coming to help. "Did you talk to each other and carried brooms and came?" "No, uncle, we do not know each other, each of us is from a different region, and not all of us are from Beirut." Indeed, we only met few minutes ago. The young men and women who were present on the ground were really from all regions and from all confessions, working hard to restore Beirut to what it was before. It is the first time that I see my city in this way, devastation and destruction in all its neighborhoods, it is the feeling that prompted us to continue helping throughout the week. The people are the State, it is the State that every citizen wants, and as for the sentence that I have been hearing since my childhood until today: "What will come out from a lazy generation that has its face stuck to the phone all day?", it is this generation who is building Beirut today, and will continue to build it until Beirut really becomes the Switzerland of the East.

Beirut Loves Its Refugees

Iyad Tayseer

Palestinian Journalist

Beirut Loves its Refugees

It is 7:00 PM. Ahmad is late for his barber's appointment. The barber was surprised. Ahmad's engagement is today, and he has confirmed his appointment several times. Alaa, the barbershop owner, waited for a while. Time is running and it is eight in the evening. Alaa was sure Ahmad was not coming. The engagement party will start at nine. There is no way Ahmad would be able to get ready in just one hour. Ahmad did not even attend his engagement. He sent his sweetheart Razan a short voice message informing her that the party is postponed and asking her to tell his family because he has no time to do it himself. Ahmad was so excited about this day. He made it through all the financial obstacles. His dream was about to become true and he will soon tie the knot with Razan. He has been reconfirming with Alaa every day, all week long. He bought the outfit and invited all his friends. Finally, he will be engaged to Razan, the love of his life. The massive explosion took place. Just like other Beirut inhabitants, Ahmad saw the smoke cloud. Hundreds of people were shouting for help on TV screens. Ambulances sirens were heard all over the streets of the capital. Ahmad forgot all about his engagement party. He forgot about all the things that he dreamt will do on this special day. He also forgot about all the gossips that Beirut does not like the refugees. He rode his motorbike in a hurry and headed from the camp in Burj Al-Barajneh to Beirut's port, the site of the explosion. Ahmad was not the only Palestinian who rushed for help. The Palestinian civil defense teams also headed to the port. Many Palestinian youths rushed to hospitals to donate blood. Hospitals inside the camps, despite their limited capabilities, admitted several people with injuries. Not only refugees in closer camps expressed their love for Beirut, but several youth campaigns were also launched from the Palestinian camps in southern and northern Lebanon to help with rubble removal and

restoration. Unemployed young people, deprived according to the Lebanese laws from practicing many professions, enduring the stigma that their camps are hotbeds of corruption and outlaws, and still, they headed to rebuild Beirut, though they are prohibited from rebuilding their own houses without a permit. They spent out of their empty pocket. They donated from their empty kitchens. They headed to Beirut to draw a new picture that surpasses all rumors and all those who placed obstacles in the way of the city's love to its refugees and to prove that Beirut is indeed Jerusalem's sister. Also, no one can forget how foreign domestic workers took in their arms the children they care for and protected them. That was the best example of caring. Despite the horrific explosion and the initial shock, those who are seen as slaves by many reacted quickly to save Beirut's children. Many of these workers suffered from the unfair sponsorship system. Many of them were kicked out in the streets as if they were expired products. Enduring such inconveniences could have harbored feelings of hatred and grudge. But what happened was the opposite. The same streets that witnessed the abandonment and humiliation of the domestic workers saw their caring touch in dressing the capital's wounds. They rushed to help and expected nothing in return. They were broken from inside, but their message was clear. Beirut is unbreakable. Fortunately, their exemplary behavior was documented by cameras. Their intention was not to show off, rather show a love they have always tried to express in a broken Lebanese accent. The image of an arrogant city, an image that was imposed on Beirut, has always prevented them from unveiling this love. Then, the terrible explosion took place and the beautiful dark skin ladies said their word. They also love Beirut. Abu El-Abed, a Syrian construction worker who has lived in Lebanon for seven years and who is now participating in lifting the rubble, says as he leans on his broom: "Beirut is a tough city. But it in a beautiful way. Just like a mother towards her children. Can you hate your mother just because she was once strict and rigorous? Of course not,

this is how we, Syrians, feel towards Beirut." Abu El-Abed is a clandestine worker in Beirut. He is an illegal resident because of the authorities' restrictions, which include finding a Lebanese sponsor, paying a certain amount of money, and providing some documents. Abu El-Abed looked out of his workplace, carried his broom, and headed to Beirut's streets without thinking twice. For a long time, he had not walked in public for fear of being arrested. But this time, he did not think about the seriousness of his situation. He could not stand by as a spectator while Beirut is bleeding. He was there to wipe the tears of a grieving city, he who shed many tears in Beirut's dark nights.

If we were to measure the amount of racism and discrimination endured by certain categories, Syrians in Lebanon would indisputably top the list. These refugees have been through hell during the years of war. They never stopped saying that they ran away from death in their country to live it again and again in Lebanon. For this reason, many were surprised by the tears shed by the Syrians over Beirut. The Syrians wept Beirut just like they wept Syria before. They competed among themselves to show their love for the city. Some of them opened their pastry shops, their only source of livelihood, to the volunteers. Some of them traveled kilometers from the north and the Beqaa to participate in resurrecting the afflicted city. Other Syrians went too far in their offerings and gave their soul. They died in the arms of Beirut. In the category of foreign victims, the Syrians are by far the most afflicted, as if they were saying, they are indeed our brothers, even in death. Beirut explosion gave its foreign residents a chance to prove their love. Their lived experiences and their different accents prevented them in the past from expressing this love. Not because Beirut had rejected this love, but because of the image imposed by the guardians of the city, an image that showed Beirut as a city that hates the refugees. Those same guardians set the way for the blast to happen, while the refugees rushed to the heart of a city that always loved them and whom they have always loved.

A Piece of Home that Never Leaves: The Lebanese Diaspora's Role in Rebuilding Beirut

Fatima Dia

Journalist

The impact of the Beirut blast on August 4 hit every Lebanese person worldwide. There are approximately 4 million Lebanese living in the country, and the diaspora makes up 6 to 9 million. As I kept repeating the visual of the explosion in my head, imagining the crumbling of the capital, the Lebanese diaspora had sprung into action instantly. They seemed to tell Lebanon and Beirut "this hurts you, and we've got your back." The role of the diaspora has been quintessential, and above all, critical. Wherever they were, the Lebanese expats were quick to send money to loved ones impacted by the blast, create online fundraisers for humanitarian aid to be donated to the Lebanese Red Cross and other trusted NGOs, as well as send packages with medical supplies, food, and even clothes. Above all, they spread awareness to non-Lebanese people, spurring them to come together and help however they could as well. "The diaspora has been the guardian angel of the Lebanese economy throughout history," said Dubai-based Lebanese fashionista Paola El Sitt. El Sitt, in partnership with the Emirates Red Crescent and Al Mawakeb School, managed to raise more than a 160 tons of aid supplies within three days. "It's a national duty for each and every expat to stand next to Lebanon today in every way possible." Impact Lebanon, a non-profit organization based in London and founded by members of the Lebanese diaspora, created a disaster relief fund that raised around 6.5 million pounds to help trusted organizations on the ground. "We have a firm belief at Impact Lebanon that change needs to be owned and driven locally and

domestically, and we view our role in the diaspora as catalytic to such change," said Bilal Malaeb, co-founder of Impact Lebanon. "The diaspora has enough emotional distance to be able to mobilize, but also strong enough an emotional connection and access to local networks. We believe that rebuilding Beirut is a national effort that the diaspora is part and parcel of, but it needs to be domestically owned." The explosion happened against the backdrop of one of the worst economic crises Lebanon has witnessed—one only worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. An assessment conducted by the International Labour Organization, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, the United Nations Development Program, and others, showed an overall deterioration in the living and working conditions of the people in Lebanon as a result of the pandemic. In addition, due to the economic crisis, unrelated to the pandemic, Lebanon has been facing issues of famine akin to the Great Famine of 1915 as food prices have gone up 56 percent since October, based on a report by Business Insider in July. According to the UNDP, approximately 300,000 people have been displaced—plus the country's main source of imports, the port, is currently under rehabilitation since the blast, based on a report by Dar al Handasah. "The suffering and misery are real, and we are entitled to feel them and mourn what we had lost, so we do not take that away from our friends and family," said Malaeb. "That said, throughout the recent crises it was also clear that the Lebanese have resolved to taking their lives and their futures in their own hands." The organization is one way the diaspora expresses their loyalty to their home country—the initiative sprung out of the need of the Lebanese outside of Lebanon to help their country from a distance—and since the explosion, this sort of devotion

has only amplified.

German-Lebanese Maria Haag and English-Lebanese Rasha Chahine prioritized spreading awareness about the situation in Lebanon since the blast and, through their university in Kent, England, they started a campaign to donate money to local NGOs. They described having a crippling feeling of seeing your home destroyed and not being able to help "hands on," as Haag said. Chahine also added that as a member of the diaspora they knew they had to do everything possible to raise awareness on what happened on August 4. A Michigan-based Lebanese American medical student, Majd Faraj, with the help of the Lebanese community in the city, raised almost \$70,000 in medical supplies to send to Lebanon. The Centre National Libano-Canadien also instantly created a go-fund me page aimed to raise money for medical supplies, housing, food, and more. The Brazilian-Lebanese community spurred into action immediately; the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce launched a donation campaign in partnership with the Lebanese-Brazilian Medical association to provide food, medical equipment, medicine, and building material for immediate relief, according to their website. What Beirut saw was that her children are there for her no matter how far they are. "Each and every one of us has a duty to contribute in bringing back Lebanon on its feet," said El Sitt. "Recovery is going to take time, but we will get through it when we join forces." At 2:55pm on a Sunday two weeks after the explosion, I was sitting at the window and smiling, albeit sadly. It dawned on me then that it doesn't matter if I live in another country. Once you live in in this place, you never really leave—and with that, there are still hopes for a better Lebanon.

Contemplating a Green Reconstruction of Beirut: Tips for Eco-Renovations

Mohamed Mortada

Sustainability Architect at EcoConsulting

After the shocking explosion that hit Beirut on the 4th of August 2020, we stand traumatized amidst the rubble of a city we love; and we mourn the dead along with the crumbling buildings and streets that were once bustling with life. It's hard to think about recovery in the shadow of such an event but as people's needs for shelter and livable neighborhoods grows more pressing, our margin for idle grief is narrow. Quick reconstruction is an urgent matter that will also serve some justice to the victims of destruction. From a technical perspective, we see that a green reconstruction of Beirut is a window to improve people's lives and well-being after the explosion.

Because of the severe financial crisis in Lebanon, reliance on imported and expensive building materials should be minimized. A green reconstruction strategy would prioritize fixing and mending broken building components over replacing them altogether. Along with selecting whenever possible from re-used materials and furniture, this will help reduce the need for brand new materials and decrease renovation costs.

Toxic materials that may be present in old buildings, such as asbestos (in flooring, piping, roof covers) as well as mercury-filled CFL lamps should be handled with extra care: we suggest wearing masks with filters and thick gloves. Spaces that used to host toxic materials should be well-ventilated for at least a day before renovation to ensure that no harmful airborne contaminants linger in the air. CFL lamps along with any unusable electronic equipments should be sent to electronic waste collection facilities that safely disposes and recycles them abroad.

Many buildings have suffered structural damage. Recycled wood or steel can be an eco-friendly substitute for this purpose. Wooden electrical poles that have been checked for structural integrity can, for example, be used to support a roof if in good condition. Otherwise, steel with a high-recycled content is widely available without additional cost from non-recycled steel from different manufacturers.

Some materials such as glass can only be imported. Choosing double-glazing will help in reducing buildings' heating and cooling loads, as well as providing sound insulation which has been a concern in some of the badly affected areas in noisy neighborhoods. This is especially important in heavily air-



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conditioned spaces and where windows have high sun exposure. Sunny façades could be covered by reflective glass - even if single glazed - or with louvers to minimize heat gain and cooling needs. It is advised to always choose low-VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) water-based paints over traditional oil-based paints which are both toxic and carcinogenic. Such paints are manufactured locally within the same price range and will ensure a healthier indoor environment. For an environmentally-friendly finish, plastering walls could be done using

raw earth with soft straw for the first layer. Lime or a small percentage of cement stabilizes the plaster which becomes much more durable. Indeed, stabilized earth is a traditional plastering material in old houses in Beirut. This will reduce the demand for expensive cement (trabeh) and the work could be done by the tenants themselves. Given that a lot of mechanical and electrical systems have suffered damage, energy efficiency should be taken into consideration in the reconstruction. This includes energy-efficient HVAC

systems (e.g.: AC units with inverter, heat pumps), lighting (LED bulbs) and appliances (such as A-rated fridges, washing machines, dryers, TV, etc.). Such equipment helps reducing the electrical load, allowing them to function on the limited generator power supply while at the same time lessening utility bills.

With the increasing power outages nationwide, we believe that solar technologies are a good investment, which is also promoted by the government. Photovoltaic panels or solar water heaters can be easily fitted when reconstructing schools and hospitals that have a significant energy load during sunny hours. Solar water heaters are also highly recommended for residential buildings that have enough roof space. The benefit of these systems extends beyond reduced utility bills to increase the community's resilience and ability to cope with possible future shutdowns of the centralized infrastructure.

Some of the recommendations mentioned in this article come at an additional cost, which is hard to justify given the difficult economic situation of the country. However, if viewed over the lifetime of their use it will certainly be lower. The higher cost could also be reduced if reconstruction compensation funds are allocated to cover at least the preexisting building conditions. The mechanism of this financial compensation should be made clear as soon as possible in order to allow owners to make an informed decision on the amount that they can invest in choosing the right materials.

We hope that the reconstruction of Beirut will be rapid and fitting to people's needs and means. This is crucial to ensure that some justice is attained after this devastating event.

Protecting the Tenants: A Core Issue in Recovering a Viable City

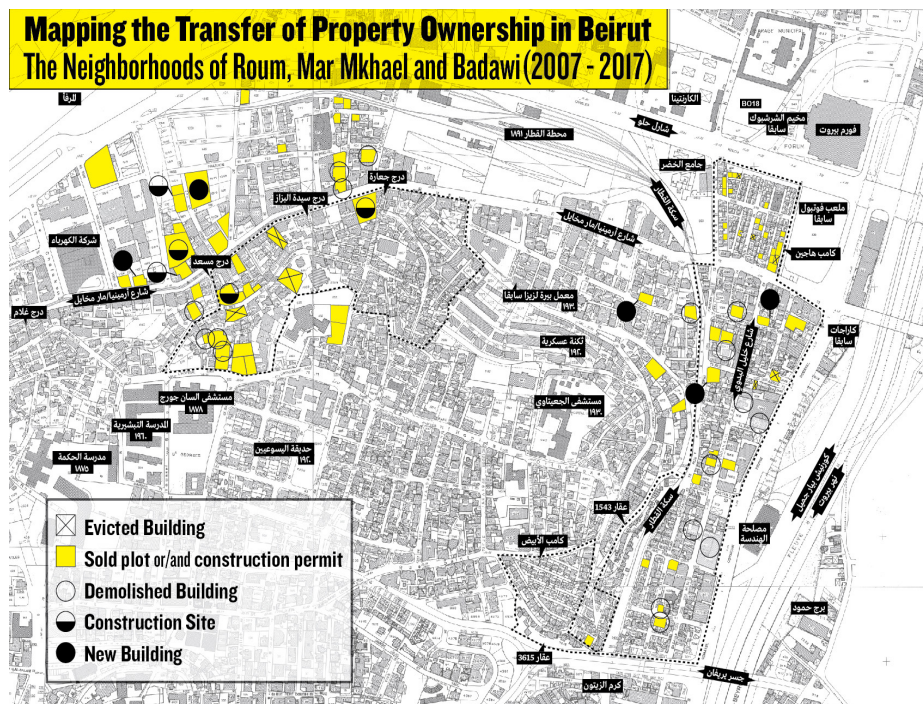
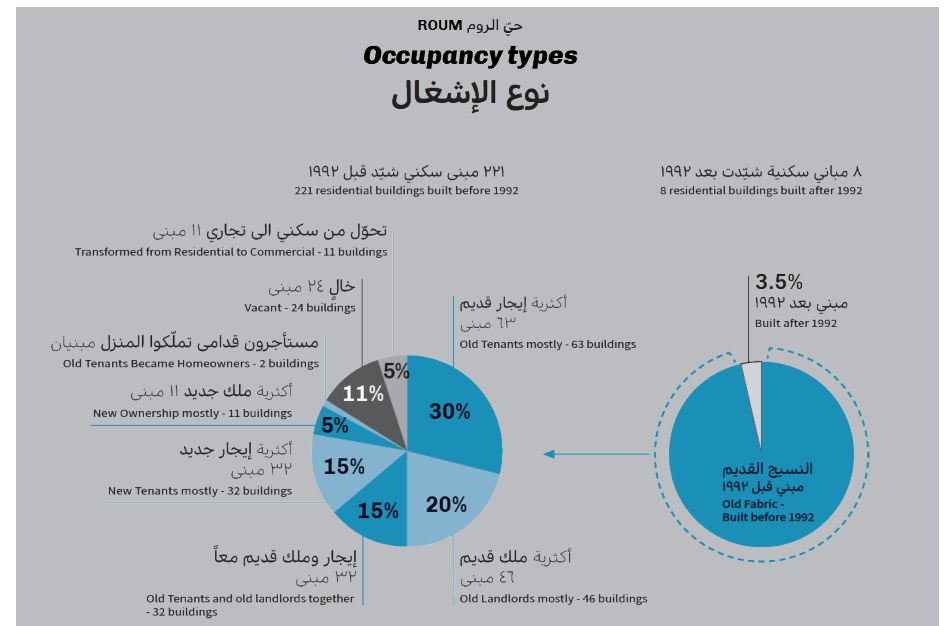
Nadine Bekdache and Abir Saksouk

Public Works Studio

Since the Beirut Port explosion on August 4, 2020, dozens of buildings in the neighborhoods surrounding the port have been evacuated. Damage and trauma are the reason why these neighborhoods became empty of all residents, old and young, born there or recently settled, tenants and owners, Lebanese or foreigners. The structures of boutiques, workshops, offices, restaurants, bars, schools, and many other facilities were all cracked. Electricity and water were also completely cut off in many affected neighborhoods. All of this made many residencies unsuitable for living in. These factors promptly drove the population outside the area.

However, this departure is a serious threat to the recovery of a viable city and the neighborhoods' revival. There is a real danger that this rapid depopulation will turn into permanent migration, especially since most of these neighborhoods had been subject to fierce real estate speculation during the past ten years. Let's take the Mar Mikhael area as an example. Multiple generations of displaced people have settled in this area close to their workplace. Then, starting in 2006, the local economy underwent a major transformation. Restaurants and bars replaced old factories. The low rental rates and the unique urban and social character were a pull factor. As a result, the land price in these neighborhoods increased by 200 percent. This coincided with an acceleration of ownership transfers from owners to real

vulnerability and to the legal framework that regulates their presence in the city. Tenants are divided into three categories: - **Old tenants:** They inhabit the old buildings in the cities. Their rentals are regulated according to the old rent law, which ceased to be in force starting 1992. This group is at risk of being evicted and displaced. Meanwhile, there are no housing alternatives because of the new law regulating old rents (approved in 2014 and amended in 2017) that deprived many old tenants of their rights to stay in their residency.¹ - **New tenants:** according to the new rent law: This is the only rent law that regulates rentals in the city. This law stripped tenants of their right to stay in their residency and transformed their relationship with the residence into a mere investment relationship



estate companies and investors (see the map of ownership transfer). Most of the affected neighborhoods are made up of old or historical buildings, inhabited by a large population of tenants. Rent is the primary means of accessing housing in Lebanon's major cities. In Beirut, tenants make up 49.5% of the inhabitants (According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Development Program in 2008). In the Mar Mikhael neighborhood, the percentage of tenants is about 55% (see the chart). They are threatened today to become permanently displaced due to their

in which the landlord determines terms. According to the new rent law, the contract threatens the sustainability of housing, limiting the rights to staying in the residency to only three years. There are no provisions to regulate the rent increase once the three-year contract comes to an end or to guarantee tenants are not evicted at the end of the three-year duration. These contracts are also not linked to any markers that regulate the rental fees or determine the currency of the rental allowance payment. This matter is wholly left to the landlord's discretion and opens the margin of profit-making.²

- **Tenants without contracts:** The absence of housing policies and programs that would secure residency for a large segment of the limited income population gave place to other residential arrangements, which consist of dividing apartments into rooms, sharing, or bed renting. Many of these shelters lack adequate housing conditions. They are characterized by overcrowding and the absence of sanitary and engineering standards. The residents are mainly students, workers, migrants, and refugees. They suffer from the absence of rental contracts, which leaves them in a fragile legal situation. The explosion disaster was exacerbated further by exploiting these groups who are anxious about their housing and their future in the neighborhood, especially that the state is not fulfilling its duties and assuming its responsibilities. Besides, residential rights are not protected. Under the pretext of cracked buildings, residents face eviction pressures from landlords on the one hand and from security forces implementing the governor's decisions on the other. Large numbers of tenants resist these pressures. No guarantees were provided for their return, and no housing alternatives were offered until the reconstruction is completed. However, the security forces exert even additional pressure forcing those residents to sign documents that would hold them liable for refusing to evacuate. Fears of permanent displacement are due to previous practices of the authority regarding the right to housing. They are exacerbated by catastrophic scenarios of previous reconstruction experiences. Beirut and its

suburbs have been destroyed several times before. We have witnessed the destruction of other Lebanese cities, villages, and camps. They were rebuilt in a way that reproduced the same causes that initially led to the destruction, in the sense that reconstruction fostered class and other societal division, or served specific interests. As a result, an additional population was displaced. The local economy was destroyed, and a large gap was created between the past and the present. That being said, the process of rehabilitating and reviving the neighborhoods of Karantina, Mar Mikhael, Gemayzeh, Jeitaoui, Roum, Fasouh, and Badawi, will constitute a real political struggle. The authority will try to exploit the destruction to trigger a network of interests linked to the real estate and construction sectors. We will try to establish pathways that put the entire population at the center of the recovery process and provide legal and social support to the most vulnerable groups. Therefore, we launched a socio-economic survey initiative that will cover the affected neighborhoods. We urge all those who were affected and the social workers to report damages and threats related to housing.

1. Old rents amount to 20%.
2. If the landlord does not find tenants who can afford the rent, there are no incentives to put the house in the market since there are no taxes on vacant residencies. Vacancy rates in Beirut have reached world records. In some neighborhoods, they exceeded 30% of the available apartments.

Heritage Recovery In Context: Beirut, Post-Blast

Mona Fawaz

Professor in Urban Studies and Planning and the Coordinator of the Graduate Programs in Urban Planning and Design at the American University of Beirut

The dust of the Beirut Port August 4 2020 explosion had not settled when voices rose to speak of the loss of the city's architectural heritage. Since then, homeowners, preservation advocates, and others have rushed to survey damages, estimate the costs of repair, buttress crumbling walls and roofs, prevent demolitions, and when possible assemble the rubble to rebuild what is gone. Estimates count 60-80 historical buildings in need of considerable repair. Their admirable efforts coalesced under the banner of an organization of volunteers, which includes many of the individuals who have been actively invested in Beirut's architecture preservation for decades. If we are to save the city's urban heritage, however, it is imperative that we read the effects of the Beirut explosion within the context of the transformations that preceded the blast. Rather than a rupture, the blast precipitated a destruction well underway with several hundred buildings lost in the past two decades. To change this course, there is a need to contextualize the ongoing mobilization and widen its scope to address the trends that undermined heritage protection prior to the blast.

Those familiar with Beirut's history recognize the neighborhoods in the vicinity of the port as emblematic of the city's built heritage. Indeed, Beirut only expanded beyond its small population of 10,000 once its port began to play the role of a regional economic anchor in the 1830s. It was then that the city's Quarantine was established, the site where sailors were forced to isolate for two weeks to prevent the spread of diseases, before they were allowed to mingle with other city dwellers. The site continued to play the role of hosting those functions and peoples deemed undesirable for many decades. Today, Karantina is home to a vulnerable population of migrant workers, refugees, and low-income Lebanese population who were severely affected by the blast. It was also in the 1830s that the city began to expand beyond its walls, eventually generating the districts that would bridge between the Armenian Camps of Bourj Hammoud and Beirut's historic core, along the length of Armenia Street, over a century later. Unlike the nearby neighborhoods of the city's historic core that fell under the savage bulldozers of the post-civil-war reconstruction in the 1990s, the districts surrounding the port maintained a generous number of old

stone buildings, many of which embody the unique character of Beirut's first decades of the 1900s. Their charm and unique character has attracted over the past two decades a population of young

modest architecture of the districts with imposing high-rises –many of which failed to bring a new life to the neighborhoods. They were able to do so because the absence of incentives and support for

of the heritage classification and a lucrative investment now authorized with a revised and excessively permissive building law. As we move forward in developing a narrative for the recovery of the city's urban heritage, a critical task by all accounts, it is imperative that the support flowing towards the protection of the city's heritage embodies a larger understanding of what falls under this category. Heritage is a lived entity. Unlike relics in museums that people visit to study what no longer is, urban cultures exist with the people they embody. In combination with streets, pathways, staircases, stores, and their connections, buildings anchor the multiple forms of inhabitation, the practices, imaginations, and interactions, individual and collective. They form the frames in which people dwell and engage each other. As such, these spaces embody the accumulation of people's practices, historical and contemporary, and it is this accumulation that makes for their importance as heritage, gives it its lived value, makes it personify objective histories and individual memories, which eventually reflects shared communal histories and identities, capable of bringing people together. When the practices of these communities are eviscerated for the sake of real estate speculation, the marks of their histories are erased. Consequently, if we are to stop the destruction of our heritage and recover what remains of these urban districts, we must create a new reality for their residents and users. We need to bring them on board as champions for the restoration. Side by side with the palette of restrictions typically deployed in heritage preservation (e.g., no lot pooling, respecting the architecture typology), we need to address the larger urban and economic frameworks that reduced the urban economy to speculative investments. As such, it is imperative that a holistic vision for urban regeneration is introduced, one that invests in the productive economies of the districts and proposes public projects and integrated urban interventions. There should also be incentives and compensations directly targeting neighborhood residents, prioritizing their return and the recovery of their businesses. Only by bringing life back to the districts can we secure a path of heritage recovery, one that recognizes our culture as lived and in constant need of positive reinvention.



© Sarah Kammourieh

creatives, including studios and workshops, restaurant and bar owners, as well as their clients and visitors. They cohabitated often uncomfortably with the aging residents of the district who suffered from the noise and late night activities... Still, more buildings were lost than preserved. Indeed, powerful real-estate interests and their business partners in the political and bankers' classes found numerous opportunities to replace the small, often

property owners had rendered their ownership a burden. Trapped between expensive repairs, on the one hand, and an outdated rent control that had exponentially increased the rent gap in the districts, on the other, landlords –many of whom shared property in uncomfortable family inheritance conditions- had often been forced to let go of their property to more powerful individuals, sometimes for peanuts, as the latter could secure a lifting

Simple Tools that Enable Anyone to Uncover Fabricated Information

Mahmoud Ghazayel

Journalist and news verification trainer

The COVID-19 virus and the Beirut Port explosion were two new tests of how people, as well as the media, responded to the spread of fabricated news. Unfortunately, both incidents revealed the vulnerability of some in rejecting misleading information, as well as the ability to create rumors exploited for political and/or personal purposes.

Contrary to the prevailing belief that only a specialized journalist can put an end to the spread of fabricated information, technological development has allowed everyone to access free open-use tools, through which one can confirm what is going on in the "Infodemic" world.

During the first months of 2020, it was noticeable how a wide range of news websites in Lebanon carried news, without mentioning any source or even verifying the information, which were mostly used as part of political/religious accusations; including allegations of deliberate transmission of the virus from neighboring countries, or allegations of finding containers of the virus inside some embassies, or even the transmission of the virus through parcels coming from China.

The same is true with the spread of panic during the circulation of a photomontage screen shot, which was said to originate from the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) to warn about "the necessity to stay at home because the port explosion released toxic nitric acid gases". This was denied by the Medical Center which published several explanations for not issuing any statement on the matter.

On the other hand, there was a prominent condescending view formed by some due to their lack of knowledge of the virus and its methods of spreading, and which particularly targeted people with Asian features, the "Coronaphobia". And its damage was revealed when visiting Chinese student Wang Yu, who refers to himself as "Amir Wang," broke his silence.

He complained through a Video on the racism of some who addressed him in abusive terms, causing him to fear the possibility of violent reactions, which led him to refrain from leaving his residence, before being embraced again, after the spread of his message, amidst his confirmation that the main reason behind the negative feelings was the media exaggeration associated with the spread of misinformation about COVID-19.

The same thing happened again after the huge explosion that occurred in the capital



city of Beirut, on the evening of the 4th of August, with the spread of allegations accompanying various incorrect or fabricated videos that the port was targeted by an air missile. The inspection shows that they all transmitted mismatched sightings of the alleged missile, and that most of what was seen was actually a group of birds, and that the objective of their publication was, apparently, to induce the interaction and rapid fame from "Like" and Share".

Therefore, anyone can counter the spread of misinformation, in steps that are not exclusive to specialists or technicians, including:

Thinking logically and consciously

Users re-post messages that they consider useful to others, but often this information is re-shared without checking the content of these messages, even if what they read really makes sense.

Among those messages is when posing as a company or an institution and asking users to access links to get free internet packages or financial assistance, claiming that it is "a gift to the medical personnel", or that it is a result of "the current difficult situation." This is what "Alfa" and "Touch" have always denied, while asserting that they will only address users "through their official channels". And also the Internal Security Forces who repeatedly warned of suspicious electronic links which might be targeting "access to personal data... for

later use in fraudulent acts."

In a related context, it must always be borne in mind that there are always techniques and means of fabrication that one may not be adequately aware of, contributing in one way or another to the production of fabricated materials. We refer here, to a video which is said to be done in "thermal imaging" technology, showing a missile approaching the port of Beirut before the big explosion took place, to prove later that it has nothing to do with thermal imaging, but merely the use of the "inverted colors" technique found even in mobile phones, to which a picture of a missile approaching the ground was added later. It was revealed that the original video, in real colors, was taken by a CNN employee, and there was no trace of the alleged missile.

Verifying the sources

Users occasionally receive "compelling" texts that are usually accompanied by links to websites, to convince the reader that the references are correct, but a quick look at those links may reveal that the information does not match, and sometimes even belongs to unofficial and questionable entities.

The Google Chrome browser, on the phone or computer, allows the translation of any text that appears on the screen, helping to verify information written in a language other than Arabic.

Also, the main keywords of any information can always be copied and pasted inside Google.com to conduct a search that reveals the actual source of the news, if any, and even the date of the information's first appearance on the internet. This is what happened repeatedly with some fabricated statements, falsely attributed to Health Minister Hamad Hassan about the lockdown of cities and districts where there was a COVID-19 outbreak.

Among the fabricated news that spread due to the belief of all what is posted on WhatsApp, is that "An-Nahar" newspaper quoted on January 29 "Reuters" News Agency reporting that "a strong secrecy surrounds the news of the death of a demonstrator in Beirut's largest hospital from Coronavirus". It turned out later that what was being circulated was part of an extensive report published on the newspaper's website indicating that the news of Reuters itself was fabricated.

As with regards to the verification of photographs, the "Reverse Image Search" app can be used for instance on Android or iOS, allowing a reverse image search, through the most popular search engines Google, Bing and Yandex.

This technique was used to confirm one of the images that spread at the time of the Beirut port explosion, amid allegations that "the (Israeli) occupation media is publishing an aerial image of the explosion site", but it was later revealed that the image belonged to an earlier explosion in 2015 in the northeastern Chinese city of Tianjin.

Of course, it is not possible to overlook the problems of the circulation of videos, which may not be related to Lebanon or are old, but recirculated again with different content. For example, when a clip was published at the end of February, with the beginning of the spread of COVID-19 in Lebanon, entitled "Look who was in Iran!" showing Speaker Nabih Berri, it was discovered later that the video was filmed during Berri's presence in the city of Karbala, Iraq, during a visit in April 2019.

One of the most important tools that can help detect the falsity of videos is "InVID". Any video file or link can be entered to view what appears on it, as well as the hidden information (Metadata) that it may contain.

Of course, the most important advice remains that any news should be viewed as false until proven otherwise.

Beirut Explosion: The Agonizing Wait of Families in Search of Missing Loved Ones – Increased Difficulties Due to Poor Coordination

Mariam Seif Eddine

Journalist



Talks about 52 missing persons in the aftermath of the port explosion were a matter of concern and polemics among the Lebanese for several days. The lack of official figures in this regard has reinforced these fears. The Secretary-General of the Lebanese Red Cross, George Kettaneh, revealed that seven people were confirmed missing as at August 25th, including four Lebanese, two Syrians, and one Egyptian. According to a security forces source, four people are still missing, including two whose presence at the explosion scene could not be confirmed. Regardless of the number of missing people, it is indeed an agonizing wait for the families and friends to know the fate of their loved ones. They might have no hope of finding them alive, but they are still waiting for a body so they can hold a funeral and reach closure.

While the families are waiting to know the fate of their loved ones, it seems that many impediments obstruct the search operation. Several questions were addressed to parties concerned with the search operation, such as the Ministry of Health, the Lebanese Army, and the Internal Security Forces ISF. Apparently, the poor coordination and the lack of experience in dealing with a disaster of this magnitude delayed the task of locating and finding the missing people. However, a

Lebanese army source and an Internal Security Forces source confirmed that they are pursuing the operation. The ISF is also asking employers to report any missing migrant workers. We were also informed that the remains of some migrant workers' bodies took more than two weeks to be released to their families, who had to come to Lebanon for some tests before the procedure was finalized.

Not only did the explosion threaten the lives of the people of Lebanon, destroy part of their capital, and cause them deep anguish, it also revived painful feelings. The word "missing" brought back to mind those who were declared "disappeared" during the civil war and whose fate, decades after the war, had not been revealed yet. Of course, the issue is not the same between the civil war and the port explosion. The circumstances are different, and times have changed, but the feelings of loss are no different for the families. Talking about the missing awakened the emotions and memories of the president of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, Wadad Halawani. She addressed the missing persons' families on her Facebook page and told them: "We don't want you to suffer like us."

This lady who has been searching for her

missing husband for 38 years now said: "I could not face any mother or father because I would not be able to control my reaction when I see new victims, who will have to wait for a missing person to come or not to come, and what is even worse is the lack of official figures regarding the number of missing people." Halawani is afraid the state would not do enough to search for the missing ones and would make up excuses to tell the families, just like it did with those who disappeared during the civil war. If that is the case, then the families would face our fate; they would be living and not living, they would be just waiting. Waiting for loved ones to come back or ignoring their fate is harder than facing their death. Despite the cruelty of death, once the funerals are over, life will go on. There is no cure for the feeling of loss but to clarify the fate, to know the truth, whether a body or only body parts were found."

Fearing that the state would not fulfill its duties is justifiable. Several people searching for their relatives complained of the poor performance of the concerned parties. The family of Ghassan Hasrouti said it out loud. His son, Elie Hasrouti, contacted several relevant authorities searching for his father, each party referred him elsewhere. He was even told: "you manage!"

The Executive Director of the Legal Agenda, attorney Nizar Saghie, noted that, based on the Geneva Convention and Lebanon's international obligations, the Lebanese state was supposed to establish an office that would track missing persons in case of a war. "The mission of this office is to collect information about the loss of any person quickly. Since the 2006 war, we have repeatedly called for the establishment of the office, and the Red Cross has repeatedly asked the army to establish it. The office can be used to search for missing persons in the event of a disaster. If it were established, we would have had more experience dealing with the issue of missing persons today." Per attorney Saghie, the main problem is that Lebanon is not prepared to face any kind of disasters. "The country is in a state of decay. The people are left to their own fate."

Although the number of missing persons has declined, the humanitarian cause and the suffering of the families waiting for any piece of information are enough reasons to intensify the efforts until those people are found. They should not become just numbers on the lists of missing persons. The state of confusion that followed the disaster is a stronger reason to reconsider the country's readiness for disasters in order to preserve human rights and dignity.



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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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