

# The Peace Building In Lebanon

Joint news supplement



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## Special Edition

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The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists from Lebanon and Syria and Palestine; 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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«We'll be back in six days... God willing»

A work by the  
Palestinian artist  
Abdul Rahman Katanani

This work represents a  
refugee family fleeing the  
war. In 1948, the Arabs  
promised Palestinians  
that they would be back  
to their villages in six  
days. The phrase «God  
willing» was used to  
reaffirm this. However,  
ever since the Nakba in  
1967, the Palestinians  
have remained refugees.



© Agial Art Gallery

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Boosting Municipal  
Capacity in Light of the  
Refugee Crisis



## Catalyzing change

Despite some skepticism preceding the process, Lebanon has managed to hold the four-stage municipal elections on time and successfully. In many ways, these elections reflected Lebanon's deep attachment to democratic values and the ability of government institutions, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities particularly, to organize the process. They also displayed the capacities of the Lebanese Army and Internal Security Forces in providing a safe environment during the voting.

Throughout the month of May, citizens practiced their right to have a say in who is going to run their municipalities for the upcoming six years. Heading to the polls, Lebanese nationals across the country were given the opportunity to hold their local representatives accountable and decide how their communities will develop for years to come.

There were many positive indicators regarding these elections, but I would like to highlight two

in particular. First, the number of women elected to municipal councils, in comparison to the 2010 elections, increased by 15%. Despite the fact that this does not represent a significant increase in the total number of women in municipal councils, it is step in the right direction and indicates a shift in attitudes and behaviors. The second positive indicator is the increase in the number of youth who ran for elections. Their creativity and dynamism was welcoming and emphasized the strong will to engage in governance. It is the youth, after all, that will pave the way for a better future and add some vibrancy to the political decision-making process.

The newly elected leaders – like their predecessors – are confronted with the arduous challenge of not only governing the affairs of Lebanese residents, but also coping with the implications of hosting a large number of Syrian refugees within their communities. On top of its already existing local hardships, Lebanon has

been exceedingly generous in providing for refugees. Municipalities, with extensive support from UNDP and other partners, have been able to accommodate and provide for displaced families, although the situation remains difficult.

I would like to conclude by discussing the new supplement at hand. The stories included in it shed light on how communities are facing different challenges. We at UNDP believe that such ventures encourage public discourse about civil issues and provide room for expression. Through such mediums, the increasing negative trends of prejudice and discrimination can be alleviated, both publicly and within the media.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

**Luca Renda**  
UNDP Country Director

## Municipalities: The cornerstone of peace building

Spearheading efforts to respond to the needs of host communities and refugees, municipalities have proven over the past five years to be active local players, doing their best to meet the growing challenges of the Syrian refugee crisis.

They have been at the forefront of local entities responding to the crisis, working on the ground to provide services to meet basic social and health needs, in addition to those related to transportation, economic development and safety.

The recent municipal elections have highlighted the crucial role municipalities can play in encouraging and facilitating the participation of various actors in peace building. Municipalities have initiated dialogue, consultations and campaigns to reinforce their role in conflict mitigation and developing relations at once with local communities and refugees. The idea that strengthening the capacities of municipalities at the local level would contribute to preventing violence in conflict-prone villages and cities in Lebanon has been a recurrent theme during the recent municipal elections.

Certain municipalities have adopted innovative ways in responding to the needs of citizens and refugees, which have been welcomed by some and denounced by others. Other municipalities have adopted solutions of a more unilateral nature to problems relating to refugees, including curfews on "foreigners". We are convinced that more should be done to empower municipalities so that they are able to better respond to the crisis and to make sure that they are primary actors in the response strategy alongside the central government, humanitarian organizations and, of course, donors.

**Ambassador Martin Huth**  
Chargé d'affaires of Germany

## Beware of the same refrain...

The Lebanese political class is desperately incorrigible. Nearly 70 years after the exodus of the Palestinians, the same refrain about the fear of resettlement has been picked up again but this time against the Syrian refugees flooding in. Undoubtedly, concern in Beirut is fully justified considering the Palestinian precedent, which had triggered the civil war, especially that the number of the newcomers is incomparable with that of their predecessors. But do we have the right to rewrite the same story? Lebanese leaders are without equal in putting the blame on others by obscuring their own dereliction. At the time, they had allowed the gangrene of politics infiltrate Palestinian camps, tuned a blind eye to weapons of all caliber entering the camps under the pretext of the fight against Israel, watched in indifference the rise of groupuscules that loathed one another... until they formed a true State within the State, shamelessly meddling in all the intricacies of Lebanese politicking.

Today, our leaders appear set on playing the same hand, repeating the same derelictions and violations against the displaced Syrians: chaotic registration of newly arrived displaced persons, impossible conditions for obtaining residence permits, cronyism and influence peddling, not to mention the strategic error of digging their feet in refusing to establish clearly organized refugee camps similar to what has been done in Jordan and Turkey. The result is perfectly clear: mushrooming of wild camps, lack of hygiene and inexistent infrastructure, helpless refugees without the right to assistance from the UNHCR disappearing into thin air.

And herein lies the danger of resettlement! It is the sum of all these errors that will lead to making this transplantation take root and become permanent over the years. It will obviously not happen as part of an improbable conspiracy of an official ceremony for handing out Lebanese passports and offering Lebanese sweets to celebrate.

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

## Help end Syria crisis for the sake of the refugees

A couple of weeks after Lebanese officials angrily voiced their indignation at U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's suggestion that host countries should consider granting citizenship to the refugees under their care, the uproar appears to have died down.

The international community, it seems, has finally recognized the harm that could befall Lebanon if the country were to go along with Ban's proposal. Lebanon's fiercely protected delicate sectarian balance is essential in maintaining stability and security in a country located in a region rife with turmoil, and naturalizing over a million Syrian refugees, more than a quarter of the country's current Lebanese population, would disrupt that status quo and likely lead to internal conflicts.

Furthermore, neither the country's infrastructure, which for the greater part remains in need of an overhaul since the Civil War, nor the economy, which is seriously troubled in large part due to the conflict Syria, is in any position to accommodate the weight of such a huge number of people. Both, in fact, are strained even now as a result of the refugees being hosted.

As for the refugees themselves, no one should assume that they're looking to permanently leave their homeland. The majority of Syrians being hosted by Lebanon, other regional states such as Turkey and Jordan, and even a most of those who have reached Europe, have fled their country for fear of their lives, and in order to be able to feed and house themselves and their children in a safe, secure environment for the duration of the war. And a great many, even among those in Europe, have expressed their desire to return to their homeland as soon as possible.

In the meantime, the best thing the international community can do to ease the refugees' suffering is to provide adequate aid to host countries in order to improve refugees' living conditions, and to make serious efforts to finally bring the Syrian conflict to a conclusion so these desperate people can return to their homes.

**Nadim Ladki**  
Editor in Chief - The Daily Star

## To Syrians: Turn Down Naturalization

I wish to address the Syrian refugees themselves in the present editorial to ask them to take the initiative, out of brotherhood and solidarity, in refusing all resettlement projects and proposals that pop up here and there. Resettlement is an unachievable idea because Lebanon is no longer able to hold its own people, let alone those residing on its land. If actual projects emerge to this effect, they would surely lead to divisions likely to bring back the specter of civil war to this country, which has embraced its brothers and neighbors. Any imposition on Lebanon to this effect would lead to its disintegration, which would mean a lack of a favorable living environment for its people and its refugees of all nationalities. Any proposal of this type fuels hostility between the Lebanese and Syrian peoples, and fosters hatred and rejection so that refugees reside in a hostile environment instead of experiencing an embracing environment that was characteristic at the beginning of the Syrian war, when all Lebanese groups empathized for their Syrian brothers. Some embraced the opposition, backed it and provided it with the necessary support, while others hosted those loyal to the regime deeming them allies. But all believed themselves to be returning the favor to their Syrian brothers who had stood by Lebanon in the wars that hit it. Therefore, it may be best, in the interest of maintaining what is left of this brotherly relationship, if the Syrian refugees in Lebanon were to declare their insistence on returning to their homeland and their attachment to it, and not accept an alternative homeland. This way they would put the mind of the Lebanese at ease so that the situation does not turn from neighborly relations and welcome to a state of hostility that would damage both societies. Despite the fact that there is no one party representing the Syrians in Lebanon, it is necessary that this is voiced out loud and that there are clear actions in this respect.

**Ghassan Hajjar**  
Editor in Chief  
An-Nahar newspaper

## Two Tests

The refugee is synonymous with tragedy. Fleeing a country ravaged by war. Into a country that fears him. His country has turned into hell. The country of asylum looks at him as a perpetrator, by his mere presence, deprived of any protection. These are Lebanese titles for a humanitarian case, which is turning into a political cause, into a popular sectarian bargaining, or into fragile sovereignty. The Syrians displaced to Lebanon are an extra burden. Lebanon's burdens are many. The politicians' apprehensions are considerable. They are afraid for the country's very existence. They are sensing a demographic inferiority. They reckon that the temporary residence will be lengthy, or become settlement. By virtue of such a discourse, the refugee transforms from a burden into a danger. He is seeking nothing more than survival. His concern is providing food and medicine. The thought of escaping Lebanon to other parts of this small world crosses his mind. He fails. He is relieved when he provides books and schooling for his children. He steers clear of legal procedures. Humiliation cuts him to the quick, soliciting robs him of his dignity.

But this is not all. Asylum, after a certain time, turns into permanent residence. Future opportunities might inspire him to take up arms. This has happened repeatedly in places of asylum. This happened in Africa. This happened in Jordan. This has been tried in Lebanon. Perhaps this danger lies hidden somewhere, kept in check today. Who knows when arms would become the refugees' project for returning to their country? Who knows? Yet, is it legitimate to hold someone responsible purely for his intentions or based on anticipation? To top that, economic burdens, Lebanon's dereliction of duty and the world turning a blind eye... To top this, job competition, and complete stagnation of the labor market. In addition to this and that, a refugee is not a number... He is a human being with all the rights guaranteed to him by international laws. A difficult test for Lebanon, and an even more difficult test for the refugee.

**Nasri Sayegh**  
Deputy Editor in Chief  
As-Safir newspaper

# Season of Migration to Lebanon: A snapshot of the Palestinian Displacement from Syria

Jaber Suleiman\*

**There is no doubt that Lebanon was and remains the country most affected by the repercussions of the Syrian crisis that has been going on for more than five years, due to the influx of waves of displaced persons from Syria, including the displaced Palestinians. Thus, the repercussions with their economic and social dimensions have had dramatic effects on the state and society in Lebanon, not to mention their effects on the Palestinian community inside and outside camps. In the midst of this rush, we shall highlight briefly the effects of the Syrian crisis on the life of Lebanon's Palestinians and the Palestinians coming from Syria.**

Before the outbreak of the crisis, the Palestinian community in Syria was deemed to be one of the most stable and integrated Palestinian refugee communities into their host community in the Arab Mashriq. The Palestinian refugees in Syria enjoyed special legal status that granted them a wide range of economic, social, cultural and civil rights, which came very close to full citizenship while retaining their Palestinian nationality. This special legal status had exceeded according to many experts the ceiling of rights set by the 1951 Refugee Convention or those stipulated in the 1965 Casablanca Protocol.

Needless to say, the donor community, as well as Lebanon as a host state, considers the task of providing relief for Palestinians displaced from Syria to Lebanon, if not protecting them, to fall within the remit of the UNRWA, especially that they are originally refugees registered with it in Syria. It is a known fact that the High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR does not provide any legal protection or relief to Palestinian refugees residing in UNRWA's five areas of operation and that is for generally known reasons relating to its mandate not including those refugees pursuant to Article 1D of the 1951 Convention on refugees and article 7(c) of the Statute of the UNHCR itself. Since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011, the number of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria to Lebanon has been on the rise, and reached following the battle of Yarmouk Camp (December 16, 2012) and in early 2013 roughly 80,000 displaced, coming down to 44,000 by the end of 2014. According to UNRWA estimates, the figure at the end of November 2015 was 42,000 displaced persons, while some Palestinian NGOs estimate the number of displaced persons at much less, currently not exceeding 35,000. More than half of those displaced have come from Yarmouk Camp.

According to data provided at the onset of the displacement by UNRWA and some Palestinian NGOs (The National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training, also known as Beit Atfal Assumoud), the majority of the displaced persons are over the age of 18 (60%), and women accounted for most of them (51%). The biggest part of them went to Saida (32%), while the rest were distributed almost equally among the other regions: Tyre, Beirut, Beqaa and Tripoli, both inside and outside the camps. In addition, most of them headed to the camps (54%) compared to (46%) outside of camps, with Beqaa receiving the biggest share of those living outside camps (33%), followed by Saida (32%). The Ain al-Hilweh camp got the biggest percentage of those who went to camps (28%), while the remaining displaced persons are distributed among the Mieh Mieh camp (Saida) and other camps in Tyre, Beirut, Tripoli and the Beqaa. Overall, most of them settled initially with relatives or acquaintances living inside camps (45%), or in rented houses inside and outside camps.

The reasons for the decline in the number of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria are many, including: tough restrictions imposed by the Lebanese state on the entry of Palestinians into Lebanon since the second quarter of 2014; the temptation for many of them to migrate abroad and/or join their children or relatives who had left there before them; returning to Syria due to their inability to afford the high costs of living in Lebanon; the scarcity of the assistance offered by NGOs, the PLO and Palestinian factions; and the reduction of the aid provided by the UNRWA for those displaced persons following its adoption in September 2014 of the so-called "eligibility criteria" and that led at the time to cutting off aid from 1,100 displaced households in one go.

Although it was expected that the international donors would enable host refugee communities in camps to absorb the Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria and adapt to the state of emergency by providing adequate support to UNRWA so that it is able to carry out its humanitarian duty properly, the response of those donors did not live up to the level of the crisis. In this regard, the UNRWA Director in Lebanon Matthias Schmale issued a statement (May 22, 2015) in which he announced the intention of the agency to stop emergency cash assistance for housing for the displaced starting July 2015. Earlier (May 14, 2015), the UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl declared the intention of UNRWA to cut

services offered by UNRWA in various fields in its five areas of operation due to its budget deficit. It is worth noting that the emergency appeal of the UNRWA relating to Syria mobilized a mere 21% of the funds required for 2015.

One of the main reasons for UNRWA's budget crisis may be the big financial burden incurred by the key countries of the donor community as a result of unprecedented migration waves from Syria, and the Arab region in general, mainly to Europe, as part of the repercussions of the Syrian crisis, which turned the support required for Palestinian refugees in general, through UNRWA and others, into less of a priority. As a result, the crisis of the Palestinian displacement from Syria to Lebanon has led to exacerbating the difficulties and pressures that Palestinian communities hosting the displaced persons suffered originally, especially in the camps that absorbed relatively large numbers (such as the Ain al-Hilweh camp). More importantly, the circumstances of the crisis have caused a large number of crises and living problems for the displaced Palestinian themselves.

As for the camps that took in large numbers of displaced Palestinian families from Syria, they were already suffering economic, social and spatial marginalization and problems that have accumulated over six decades: poverty, unemployment, fragility of the infrastructure, overcrowding, absence of decent housing, poor environmental health conditions, etc. The arrival of the new displaced persons in those camps with high population densities only exacerbated the severity of those problems and increased the pressure on the already poor services, fragile infrastructure and the camps' limited resources. For example, the Ain al-Hilweh camp, which was already overcrowded with its own population and which is under a kilometer and a half square meters in area, absorbed around 2,400 displaced Palestinian families at the beginning of the crisis, a figure that went down to 1,400 families in mid 2015. Add to this the displacement of more Syrian families to it, some of whose members resided in the camp before the crisis and who worked as casual menial workers in and around Saida or owned small commercial shops inside the camp. The same applies to the Badawi Camp whose population almost doubled as a result of the displacement of part of the population of the Nahr el-Bared camp to it, and this before it took in the newly arrived displaced persons.

In a related context, the conditions of the crisis and its circumstances overwhelmed the active Palestinian sides in the host Palestinian community (embassy, factions, NGOs) and which were not adequately prepared to deal with this type of emergency and complex crises, despite previous experience in dealing with similar, albeit not identical, crises (the Israeli invasions, the displacement of the Nahr el-Bared camp). Overall, the Palestinian performance in dealing with the crisis has been characterized by disarray and poor coordination. Palestinians displaced from Syria to Lebanon have faced many difficulties and challenges in their attempts to adapt to and cope with the new displacement conditions relating to housing and living conditions, education, health, freedom of movement, legal residency in Lebanon and even their personal and social security:

The winter of 2015, which saw a lot of blizzards, was harsh on the displaced communities in the Beqaa region that was hosting around 16% of the displaced families, i.e. roughly 2,260 households. The tents and zinc sheet roofs were carried away and water flooded the houses. The absence of heating caused the spread of diseases (such as colds, respiratory infections and asthma), particularly among the children and elderly. The reduction in assistance, poor preparation on the part of the UNRWA and the relevant Palestinian parties, slowness and difficulty of relief processes due to the wide distribution of the families in the region exacerbated the severity of the problems. In Badawi camp, dozens protested in front of UNRWA centers (January 5, 2015) against UNRWA's delay in distributing winter aid.

With regard to education, the UNRWA had provided in its schools, which operate on a double-shift basis, places for displaced students of all levels. Those who were able to

complete the Syrian school curriculum for the secondary level were reluctant to go to Syria to sit for official exams for fear of not being able to return due to the measures taken by the Lebanese General Security to restrict the freedom of Palestinians entering from Syria into Lebanon. Add to that the slim chances of enrolling in Lebanese Universities for those who do obtain a high school Baccalaureate, while free university education was available to them in Syria before the crisis.

In addition, ninth graders (who also have to sit for official Brevet exams) who had studied the Lebanese curriculum also faced similar difficulties relating to the need to settle their legal status in Lebanon with regard to residence permit and payment of the required fees and authentication of their previous school certificates from Syria as a precondition for sitting for the official examinations. Moreover, students who had studied the Syrian curriculum and wanted to sit for the exams in Syria faced the dilemma of settling their residence status in Lebanon to guarantee their return.

Moreover, there is a widespread phenomenon of dropping out of school among displaced students at all levels, as the living conditions of many of them have forced them to join the labor market under the unjust conditions characterizing the child labor in Lebanon in general.

Any comprehensive and serious study of the reality of education of the Syrian Palestinians will reveal over the coming years the deterioration of the indicators related to education.

Apart from the security problems, that could reach up to detention or ban on entry, that Palestinians displaced from Syria face, especially the young men, for reasons to do with requirements for legal residency, those who did move into the camps faced the usual security problems of fighting inside camps between certain armed groups that have become known (such as the Ain al-Hilweh camp clashes, August 2015). These conditions, and under the pressure of difficult living conditions, led some displaced young men to be subjected to blackmail by one faction or another to join their ranks. There have been recorded cases of denouncing some young men to Lebanese security authorities by some fighting factions in the framework of Lebanese-Palestinian security cooperation.

In addition to the aforementioned, cases of illegal migration from Lebanese ports (Tripoli) and some ports in the South towards Cyprus and Turkey are on the rise. There have been cases recorded of some migrating families being arrested or detained by Lebanese security forces. The migration of husbands and sons has led to an increase in the number of displaced households provided for by a woman (the wife or sisters). In Ain al-Hilweh camp alone there were 253 households supported by a woman by the end of 2015 and 270 more households in Beirut's camps (according to the annual report of The Action Group for Palestinians of Syria AGPS, January 2016). This situation has imposed additional economic, social and psychological burdens. On the other hand, this migration has led to more family breakdown with all that it entails in social problems resulting from the collapse of the traditional value system of normal times. This is a common phenomenon in refugee and immigrant communities in all places and times. We conclude by saying that Syrian Palestinians have been subjected, like other Syrians, to the devastating consequences of the Syrian crisis on the fabric of their society, particularly in camps, and their social well-being and various aspects of their daily lives, which have forced them, like other Syrians, either to be displaced inside Syria seeking relative safety or taking refuge in neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon, in search of a safe roof. At the same time, many of them have migrated abroad, risking their lives and the lives of their children in death boats and international border crossings, in search of a decent life. There are those who made it to safety and those who did not reach their destination and were swallowed up by the sea.

\* Palestinian researcher and consultant in refugee studies

# A refugee through the eyes of a refugee

Zeinab Srour\*  
Mourad Ayyash\*\*

**The end of a mandate is usually the first step towards liberation. In the Palestinian case, it was the contrary. The mandate ended for the occupation to begin. Great Britain felt powerless in Palestine, so it was decided that the «mission is completed». On October 29, 1947 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181. The resolution recommended the partition of Palestine into two states, an Arab one and a Jewish one, and placed Jerusalem under a Special International Regime, thus disregarding the right of Palestinians to self-determination, a right considered to be one of the peremptory norms in international law, inalienable and permanent in time.**

After Britain's withdrawal and the entry of Zionist gangs, the lives of Palestinians changed. They were no longer mere citizens. In the diaspora, they got a new name: «refugees» in neighboring countries.

## Before Palestinian Refugees

The displacement of Palestinians did not bring forth the concept of «asylum». The right of asylum is one of the oldest attributes of civilization. This theory is reinforced by discovered texts dating back to 3,500 B.C. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the concept of «asylum» began to expand. In the 4th century A.D. churches were filled with refugees seeking refuge from the injustices they were subjected to by the Roman Empire. That case spurred Christian clergy to work on a «Christian asylum law».

From the late 19th century to the 1930s, Europe saw the movement of several huge asylum waves of German and Austrian Jews to Palestine. Three years after the Nakba, the 1951 Refugee Convention was adopted. A refugee was defined as «A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.»

## The specificity of Palestine refugees

Given the international focus on reintegrating refugees, the international community chose to exclude Palestinian refugees from the convention and from the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR. It wished to grant special consideration for Palestinian refugees, so it gave them a special definition.

The UN granted Resolution 194 (the right of return and compensation) to Palestinian refugees. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) did not define the Palestinian refugee in purely legal terms. However, with the aim of providing assistance and relief for Palestinians who were expelled from their homes, it had to designate the refugees that the UNRWA would provide its services to. Therefore, the UNRWA developed several definitions that were altered in the course of developments on the ground.

The UNRWA defines Palestine refugees as «persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict».

## After

Palestinians are no longer the only «Arab refugees». The scourge of wars that the Arab countries have been blighted with for a time has made this single cause branch out to become multiple causes and turn the citizens of those countries into refugees, despite the specificity of the origins of the Palestinian asylum status resulting from an act of occupation act not internal wars, as is the case in many countries in

the Arab world.

Lebanon is a special case. There are two blocs on its land outside its «original» fabric: one Palestinian and the other Syrian. The former has features that it acquired from the features of the original cause. The latter has features that it acquired as a result of the relations that brought the two peoples together. It is easy to say that there is fusion between the two blocs given their backgrounds: war. But delving a little into their depths brings the problems to the surface.

What came out of the Syrian crisis brings about the question: how does a refugee view another refugee?

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees went for two options. The first option was residing inside refugee camps provided by the UNHCR. The second one was living in rented houses. There are many possibilities in the latter option. One of them is Palestinian refugee camps. The camps have huge numbers of Syrian refugees. The Palestinians have welcomed the refugees. In camps, things are not always a matter of «charity». Many Palestinians see the Syrians as a source of income. As result of the terrible economic situation they live in, many Palestinians inside camps have divided their already small houses into sections and lease them to refugees. Due to the high demand, rent prices have gone through the roof. In the Bourj el-Barajneh camp, the rent for a «pseudo-

apartment» reached around USD 400 a month (equivalent to the average rent price of a three-room apartment in a middle class area). The issue goes beyond «economic benefit» to move into the territory of identity.

The Palestinian has long considered himself the number one victim in the Arab world (his alternative identity). Today, this no longer holds true. Or at least he is no longer seen as a priority. The Syrian activist in Lebanon Hamed Saffour sums up the matter. He explains how the «Syrian crisis overshadowed the Palestinian cause». The marginalization of the Palestinian cause has brought forth anger. In addition any comparison between the Palestinian cause and the Syrian crisis is out of place and unjust. This is naturally reflected on the refugees, their rhetoric and practices.

The Palestinian refugee Usama Qais does not deny the consequences of the «Syrian crisis» that have cast a shadow over the «Palestine refugee», attributing this to the fact that «the Palestinian is originally denied the right to work and other additional rights». But he refuses to generalize manifestations of negative reactions that may come from Palestinian refugees towards the Syrians and deems them to be purely isolated reactions and irresponsible acts. Saffour agrees with this view, noting the possibility of «the existence of discriminatory practices on the part of a very small number of Palestinians who are suffering a difficult economic situation».

«Solidarity is the main thing we feel and extend to our Syrian brothers, because they are our companions in tragedy,» says Qais.

«In Palestine, it's the occupation. In Syria, the revolution has turned into a civil war. There is no place for comparisons between the Palestinian cause and the Syrian crisis.» In spite of this conviction, Qais reproaches the Syrians for leaving their land. «How did they accept to leave their land in Syria? Why didn't they try to stay there?» Qais goes back in his memories and nostalgia. «These are the words with which we reproach our ancestors.»

There is a clear difference between the Palestinian refugees and those of other nationalities. The UNRWA ensures for Palestinians «the right of return and compensation» while the UNHCR undertakes to provide for the other refugees an «alternative homeland». For Saffour, asylum is a concept subject to change, and every case adds another dimension to it. His view that «the Syrian refugee experience has changed the concept of asylum» supports that theory.

Qais too goes beyond the «concept founded by the United Nations». He considers that «the differentiation that governments make obscures the focus of the refugee on his core issues, such as the occupation». In Qais' words there is an allusion to the integrity of the concept in its «current UN» form. In his opinion too only the size of the catastrophe is what gives an additional media dimension.

In his argument, Saffour tries to steer the debate from «a refugee against a refugee» course to «a refugee against the host state» one. Lebanon is not unfortunately an exemplary «host state». Saffour believes that the problem is the «absence of an integration foundation in Lebanon (between the refugees and the state, and its impacts on the refugees among themselves). He

gives the example of Syria. «In Syria, there was more of that foundation, the refugee was treated just like Syrian citizens.»

Saffour justifies «the absence of an integration foundation» with the «pervasive fixation on resettlement and which gets the upper hand over the humanitarian factor».

Qais too leans towards the argument of «refugees vs state». In his view, refugees are equal before «the discriminatory rhetoric on the part of some Lebanese under the slogan that refugees are the ruin of the country», saying mockingly: «As if the situation was better before the Syrian crisis.» Although he acknowledges that the crisis have strengthened «empathy for the other», Saffour falls into the trap of drawing comparisons again. He considers that «discrimination against the Syrian refugee is much greater than that towards the Palestinians, seeing that there are 52 municipalities that have imposed a curfew based on nationality.» However, he regrets «the backlash and the demonization by Syrian intellectuals of the Lebanese».

## Adrift between Oslo and Geneva

Qais says with a lump in his throat: «After Oslo, everything changed. The agreements absented me as a refugee because it recognized the occupant and dropped his occupant status. As a result, it is only natural that I would feel that I have lost as a refugee my right to return to my village in Palestine (Nahaf).» He puts the responsibility on those subjugating the interests of the Palestinian people as a «corrupt» bunch playing with and controlling our fate. Qais believes that there are many similarities between Oslo and the conferences being held in Geneva and the world for the Syrian refugees, as Geneva did not fulfill the aspirations of the Syrian people overall.

Saffour avoids talking about this subject directly but his views do not deviate much from Qais's. In his opinion: «The concept of asylum is getting uglier as corruption and injustice increase...»

So, we are facing a terrible reality that forebodes of worse things to come. A state of lack of knowledge of how to approach with matters relating to refugee and dealing with them in a healthy and correct political and legal form. A terrible economic situation experienced by the refugees. Oppressive laws that support the deteriorating economic situation. Huge pressure on Lebanon. The impact of these circumstances on the different aspects of the refugees' lives: social, psychological, coexistence, fusion, among one another and between them and the Lebanese. Near inexistent international support.

What is happening between the «two poles of asylum» is a social state reinforced by local and international laws. A social state that requires an in-depth study of all its aspects, otherwise the international community is before moral failure, primarily, with regard to the refugees. To have reached a state of anger of a refugee upon seeing an extra hunk of bread with a refugee of another nationality signals a catastrophe, an out-and out catastrophe.

\* Lebanese journalist  
\*\* Palestinian activist



«The Hot Air Balloon»

A work by the Palestinian artist  
Abdul Rahman Katanani

This work shows a little girl and a little boy flying in a hot air balloon, which holds all the utensils and tools that are symbolic of the refugee camp. The little girl is pointing to something that is making her happy. The hot air balloon represents the freedom that refugees are seeking, by flying and arriving at the goal (for instance, Palestine).

«To go on, we have no other choice but to smile»... In this page, we give you 3 stories for young men and women of three different nationalities, living daily with the idea of «taking refuge» in Lebanon.

## I say tomayto, you say tomayto

**Mourad Ayyash \***

I was working for a research and statistics center on a project surveying a number of food commodities. So, I had to visit shops and businesses to ask them about the products they sold.

I started in the Bsharri region, «the most dangerous region for a Palestinian», according to one of my friends. He advised me not to go there as it was considered that Palestinians were prohibited from going there, as they were a persona non grata by the region's inhabitants. In addition, the survey supervisor recommended that I work on my Palestinian accent and try to talk with a Lebanese accent so as no one would trouble me or harm me. But unfortunately, and in all honesty, I was no good at changing my Palestinian accent.

The next day I set off with one of my friends to Bsharri to get to work. My friend decided to accompany me for fun after going through the trouble of sitting for exams. It was his first visit to Bsharri and on our way there he began talking to me about his apprehensions, which I did not understand very well, and he used sentences with the following words:

«There's vengeance between us, they hate us, God help us there»... Our tour began and we began filling out the forms. But my friend was refusing to get out of the car. I was surprised that he refused

to budge from the car, but I carried on with my tour without giving much thought to whether my friend wanted to stay or get out of the car. The interaction with the inhabitants of the region was a lot of fun. Some of them would invite us for a cup of coffee and that day I had so much coffee that I thought I had stocked up for weeks to come. My friend was still resolved to stay in the car despite the intense heat. On our way back I asked him to get out for a pack of cigarettes.

He refused and said nervously: «I don't speak their language.» I was surprised at his comment and said: «You fool, they're Arabs just like you, they speak the same language...» But he refused to get out nonetheless. Since I had to go out for my cigarettes myself, I decided to fill out one more form. So I bought a pack of cigarettes and asked the woman if she wouldn't mind taking part in the survey. Following several questions in the form, there came the question about «tomato paste». I decided to use tomato paste in English to avoid saying bandora [Palestinian pronunciation of «tomato» in Arabic], to which she said: «Do you mean bandora paste?» with a genuine Palestinian accent... That was when I realized that in Bsharri, bandore is still bandora, for there is no other option and Palestine is THE Everlasting



Usama Qais, a Palestinian in Lebanon

© Mourad Ayyash

Destination; and today it is in the image of an old Palestinian woman who has raised her family there...?

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## They've finished off all your bread...



Hala Taizini, a Syrian in Lebanon

«Your Fate is Unknown» was one of the sentences I heard when I was offered to marry and travel.

My answer was: «Of course not.» I know my fate very well. My fate is to go back to Syria, full stop.

Although I believe that the most important stages in my character development took place here in Lebanon, I was displaced from

Homs to Tripoli when I was 14. I did not find a school that taught the Syrian curriculum legally so I enrolled at a school that was not certified by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, I had to travel to Syria to sit for my exit exams. After obtaining my high school diploma, I wanted to enroll at the journalism faculty, but I could not afford the expenses and fees for this specialization.

After much effort to find a job so I could pay for university tuition, I got a job as a floor manager in a store. It was a nice experience, but not without some problems. I cannot forget the day when my manager asked me to try to speak with a Lebanese accent so I wouldn't get troubled. I remember him being very embarrassed for bringing this issue up and wouldn't stop justifying himself and apologizing when I expressed my indignation at his request. But he was right to a certain extent. For I would often overhear some customers whispering and grumbling, saying:

«As if there were not enough Lebanese, they had to hire a Syrian!?!» Frankly, I'm grateful to those people a little because they were my key motivation force to take the decision of confronting and resolving to integrate into any society I find myself in. Perhaps the main problem is that the Lebanese thought that the Syrian crisis wouldn't last long, so they were more welcoming in the beginning. But the crisis is growing and is putting pressure on all members of society.

My resolve to integrate and assimilate allowed me many opportunities and made me a proactive person. For example, with a group of friends, we founded a team that we called «Colored Fingerprints» through which we wanted to say that we accept and believe in collaboration. My work and contact with such initiatives has made me very interested in social issues and topics and naturally reflected on my educational choice as I joined the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Lebanese University. And there was the main catastrophe, as my appearance did not suggest that I was Syrian, as some justified it with «you don't look it», and it was my Syrian accent that gave it away.

«Welcome» to the Lebanese University. There, as soon as I get into a cab, my daily adventure starts. I can sometimes sense the driver's grumbling. I understand that on that day he could be in a bad mood and that Syrians can be an excuse to «blow off steam» for him and for others. And instead of the radio, he plays the old broken record: «Syrians have taken all our work, and the electricity and water, and they've finished off all our bread...»

At times I feel disappointment and sadness, and at others I simply don't care. But the most fun moments are those when I respond with a broad smile, saying: «So you're saying that we've finished off all your bread?» And I laugh. For I have no other choice, and I will go on...

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## «My heart has been embittered by too many lemons»\*

To live in Lebanon is to understand that it is the country of problematics. Many often get my nationality wrong – sometimes I'm Saudi, at others I'm Syrian, Emirati – and very few ever get it right and realize that I'm Iraqi.

Questions here are somewhat deep and penetrating. A single question can cost you an entire set of baggage of prejudices for a very long time. So I would suggest you provide accurate, clear and concise answers...

Currently I live with three people: two Syrians and an Iraqi. Our friends have always referred to us as «carefree». This is good to a certain degree since we don't care about penetrating and deep questions...

We often watch soccer games in one of Tripoli's cafes, where my friend and I have gotten used to getting interrogated by the waiter. He always asks: «Where are the gentlemen from?» Especially following arguments relating to the use of the word *laimoun* [Arabic for lemon] and *burtuqal* [Arabic for oranges]. In the Lebanese dialect, *laimoun* is used for oranges. I wonder who ever put that in their minds. But that's unacceptable. *Laimoun* is

lemon and *burtuqal* oranges, my dear man. I won't back down; it's the language.

«Where are you from, guys?»

«Iraq...»

And the conversation begins with no end in sight... The interlocutor tries to talk to me about everything he has in stock on Iraq. Sometimes talking to me about the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, and Iraq during his times, lamenting the current situation there, to finally get to Kadhim Al-Sahir and his most recent hits.

These things have led me to study journalism here in Lebanon to try to bring the Iraqi scene to the fore again, because as they say here in Lebanon frankly: «My heart has been embittered by too many lemons», and I mean lemons as in *laimoun*...

[\*Lebanese saying meaning I've had too many disappointments to be able to survive any more]



Abdulrahman Walid, an Iraqi in Lebanon

© Mourad Ayyash

\* Palestinian activist

# Palestinian Gatherings: More on the Expanding Margins

Abd-Al-Rhman Jasim\*

«When we left Syria, it was all over.» That was what Umm Mohammad told us when we met with her. Perhaps the conversation was far removed from the idea in the beginning, but it is the tale of the Palestinians who leave every place as they wait for their return to Palestine that resurfaces in all images and scenes. This long wandering journey, which is nothing short of the famous Greek mythologies, makes any words used pale in comparison to the actual daily life of Palestinians. It is the tale of Umm Mohammad who has come from the Nayrab camp in Syria with her family of five to live in the Lebanese capital Beirut, and specifically in the «Said Ghawash» Palestinian gathering, as they are referred to in Arabic (located behind the Sports City stadium). This small gathering – to this day not considered a camp under any legal or social provision – includes roughly 225 Palestinian/Lebanese/Syrian households (and Syrian Palestinian) and has grown according to a UN survey (conducted by UNDP and UNHABITAT in 2014) by 17 percent (roughly 100 households) following the Syrian crisis. One of those households is Umm Mohammad's family.

Umm Mohammad's family fills in the blanks of the tale: they had come from Syria under intense shelling and sniping, fleeing to Lebanon since her relatives originally come from this region (since leaving Palestine in 1948). So she could not have found a safer place than here, for she knows the environment and the place, and the relatives would certainly provide a protective shield. Of course, this tale repeats itself with Syrian (or Palestinian Syrian) families that have come following the intensification of the impact of the crisis there. They believed that their relatives here would «host» them until what they believed would be a prompt return to «Syria», for example. Many had not visited Lebanon before and some did not even know that they had relatives in this area. But brutal circumstances lead to even harsher ones. Surely migrating to «gatherings» is no happy choice. These gatherings already suffer terribly. Usually, when there is talk of miserable conditions, camps are mentioned as a token and there is talk of the difficulties and hardships of living in camps given the poor development, social and living services – experienced by the majority of Palestinians. But when you see the so-called «gatherings», you understand that even in the concept of living «hardship» comes in degrees and what you thought was harsh in the camps could be «paradise» in other considerations.

These Palestinian gatherings (which by the way number 42 distributed around the capital city and other Lebanese regions – Beqaa, the South, Tripoli – and which include more than 110,000 Palestinians and later upwards of 30,000 Palestinian and Syrian displaced following the Syrian crisis), according to the UNDP project «Improving Living Conditions in Palestinian Gatherings Host Communities», have not come into existence with the Syrian crisis as many tend to think, rather these events have brought them to the fore again. Perhaps this could be a good thing in one way or another as it could improve the lives of both their old and new dwellers. But let's not forget the other aspect of the issue of course: the «capacities» of these gatherings are limited to begin with, thus this increase in population and numbers could represent a catastrophe in itself. The Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies (2003) defines Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon «as neighborhoods located outside the boundaries of the official camps and where 35 or more Palestinian households live together, constituting relatively homogenous communities». As previously



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mentioned, they appeared in the beginning in the Nakba year (1948) and later more were formed during the Civil War (1975-1990) as a result of fighting and destruction of some camps and demographic expansion. The «Daouk» gathering, for example, was created when the original property owner Omar Daouk donated the plot in 1952 to the Palestinian people until their return home (a court order confirmed it in 1966). The man obviously did not suspect that the «expatriation» would drag on and that the status quo would remain unchanged for over 60 years.

Gatherings do not receive direct development and social services neither from the Lebanese state nor the UNRWA. According to the UNRWA, gatherings do not fall under the definition of camps and, naturally, are not an «extension» of it because it operates «inside camps» according to the nature of its work and mandate. For its part, the Lebanese state does not see the matter that way. It deals

with these areas with a mixture of caution and watchfulness – to be noted that local municipalities that host gatherings are at times not able to provide services for «lack of resources». Electricity, water and health services are basics of normal daily human life and it is not unusual to hear that in 2016 in Lebanon, a country considered to be a Middle Eastern «beacon» of development and civilization, there are households in the capital that have no electricity, no lighting and not even «lighting» poles (or even power poles) nearby to «get light» from! The story may seem fantastical to a large extent, for how could this be? All of this can be witnessed in a visit to one of the gatherings scattered around the capital city: Daouk, Said Ghawash or Gaza building. On another note, these gatherings host besides the Palestinians and the displaced Syrians, families from East Asia, particularly those from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This is due to the fact that housing rental prices, which are closer to housing rental prices inside

camps, make them «cheap» compared to their Beirut surroundings that are more expensive to «rent». In addition, prices of «goods» and everyday purchases are obviously less expensive there than in neighboring areas.

In the midst of all of this, the «Improving Living Conditions in Palestinian Gatherings Host Communities» project is being actively implemented. It is a UNDP project, funded by governments of Germany, Switzerland, Japan and the US, that falls under the framework of the Stabilization and Recovery Program launched by UNDP earlier to reinforce stability in communities impacted by the Syrian crisis (from 2013). This program came as a response to help to reinforce these communities in adapting to the huge Syrian migrants crisis following the conflict there. The program covers many aspects that are not covered by anyone else; therefore, it receives much «support» in the local milieu inside these gatherings. What it has provided to date, no one else cares to provide at all. In addition, it represents «care» of sorts for the humanity of those people, the fact which motivates them in one way or another to improve their lives, and thus take care of themselves and those around them more. According to official statistics issued by the UNDP, more than 63 infrastructure projects have been provided through the program as well as 600 houses to displaced Palestinian families from Syria with their rehabilitation and linking them to water and sanitation networks in more than 30 gatherings, not to mention of course more than 350 jobs for Syrian Palestinians who were in dire need of them. In this framework, the hygiene awareness campaign carried out by the project comes as a necessary and important activity to reduce the rate of diseases spreading in such environments and a pre-emptive attempt to prevent them. Thus more than 5,380 hygiene kits have been distributed to displaced families and children as well as 4,000 people have benefited directly from that campaign (according to a 2014 project booklet). Despite these huge and strenuous efforts on the part of the UN team, the project requires more efforts than what it is offering. At the end of the day, the matter requires an international definitive solution for the issue because these gatherings will definitely not be able in any way to «host» this large number of people, especially seeing that the number of displaced people may increase with the indefinite future of the Syrian crisis.

# Between work and school, Mehdi and Mohammad have lost their childhood dreams

Patricia Khoder\*

Both have not yet come out of childhood, both have been forced to take on responsibilities too heavy for their little shoulders, and both are worried about their parents. Mehdi and Mohammad have never crossed paths. Yet, they have plenty in common. The two teenagers work to help their families make ends meet as well as go to school. Mehdi is Lebanese; Mohammad is Syrian.

«Ouzai», a center created by the NGO Beyond, was set up just under two years ago to help vulnerable children, whether Lebanese or foreign.

Mehdi, 14, comes from Ras el-Ain in Baalbek and goes to the center every day. He comes here every morning to study. He takes non-formal mathematics, Arabic and English classes. A year ago, not having his ninth grade official certificate, he dropped out of school. His father, a newspaper salesman in the morning and a cakes distributor in the afternoons and evenings, was getting impoverished by the day. So, he decided to take his children out of private school. And since he could not afford to pay Mehdi's tuition fees, the little boy was not able to obtain a certificate that would allow him to be admitted to a public school.

«My sister still goes to school. My older brother works. He sells computers and tinkers with all that has to do with electricity,» says Mehdi, who looks much younger than his age.

So, in the mornings he goes to the Beyond center and comes back home at 1:00 pm. From 2:00 to 7:00 pm he works in his cousin's hair salon. He is the shampoo boy. Then, he leaves to help his father distribute cakes and comes back home to sleep.

«The hairdresser pays me a salary and customers tip me. Everyday I make 10,000 Lebanese pounds on average, I give them to my mother and keep some pennies for myself,» says Mehdi, who loves to play football with his friends in his free time.

Many of them do not work. The teenager does not envy them. Meekly accepting his fate, he says with a smile:



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«That's how it is» «I have to help my father. I worry about him. He can't provide for all our needs by himself. He's tired all the time. Besides my brother wants to find him a good job and when I grow up I'll buy him a house,» he adds with resolution. What does he want to become when he grows up? «A soldier in the Lebanese Army,» he says. What is his favorite time of the day? «At one in the afternoon, when I come back home to eat and rest a little before leaving back to work.» Sometimes he also manages

to make some time for rest and recreation with his friends when he leaves work early.

On weekends, he sometimes goes to the village. «I will go pray at my maternal grandfather's grave. He died four months ago. He loved me very much. I did too,» he adds.

## «Adopt the Lebanese Accent»

Nabaa, main street. Mohammad, 15, is a Syrian refugee who lives with his family in a small apartment, all clean, in this poor neighborhood in Beirut's eastern suburb.

Every morning Mohammad goes to the Uruguay public school in Sin el-Fil. In the afternoons and evenings, he works as a waiter in a company that provides various tourist services. He is called up when there are weddings or receptions. The teenager has two sisters and a young brother who go to school and do not work and an older brother, who is currently in difficulty. «He has stopped his schooling and doesn't want to work. He says that there's no point in working since we're going to give the money to our parents. I'm worried about my family. We have to pay the rent. My father works by the day, he works intermittently and now after falling from a ladder he has broken three vertebrae in his back,» says Mohammad, who was dreaming of becoming an astronaut before the war in Syria. Today, all that he wants is to get his ninth grade official diploma and learn a trade.

A native of Aleppo, Mohammed's father worked in construction in Lebanon before the war in Syria. With the war, the whole family moved to the land of the cedars. «Everything has changed for me. The language, I had to learn the language with the right accent, make new friends, get used to a new neighborhood and the main thing go to work,» says Mohammed.

The teenager's family is currently helped by the Libami association. «Before taking this new job, I had another pace of life. I would go to school in the morning. Then I would go to the Libami premises where I would eat and where they would help me a little with my homework, and then I went to work. I prepared hookahs in a cafe located below the premises of the association. Then, one day while I was pulling the motorcycle of the delivery boy, because he was late and we had to close, the army intelligence services caught me,» he says.

Mohammed, who was 14 at the time, was detained and beaten. He also lost his job.

«Nowadays, I get 24 dollars a day when there are receptions. It's good money. I have to work from 2 pm until 2 in the morning, sometimes parties continue into the night. It's tiring but it's also quick money in a way,» he explains.

The teenager has also taken other small jobs, for many months, he has worked in Hamra carrying the shopping bags of customers in a supermarket.

Has he been the victim of meanness? «No, never. People are nice. Kids my age that would come with their parent smiled at me and the adults gave me good tips.» Has he ever envied these children? The question surprises him, Mohammed replies: «Not at all. They have their lives and I have mine. That's how life is.»

## Drawing on a sidewalk in Beirut

Nasser and Mohammed-Ali Darwish are brothers. They are Syrian refugees from Aleppo, 11 and 9 years old respectively and they love drawing. Not only that, but on August 8 they will exhibit their postcards with the vivid colors and naïve drawings in Venice, Italy.

It all began a few months ago when the two boys, whose mother died in Syria and father was not working, started drawing in public by setting up a table and two chairs on a sidewalk in Mar Mikhael, a boho neighborhood of Beirut, every Saturday exhibiting their drawings on a clothesline between a tree and a power pole.

The idea was that of the two brothers who were encouraged by the owners and employers of pubs, restaurants and businesses in the neighborhood. A bookseller began to print their drawings in postcard format, restaurant owners put up the small colorful cards and the employers of the pubs and restaurants made them something to eat, whether it is when they were at their table outdoors drawing or when they went inside soliciting customers.

The residents have known them for more than four years. Before beginning to draw, the children begged for money on the sidewalks of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh every evening.

«Even if they wander the streets to sell their postcards, these children are protected by the neighborhood's



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inhabitants who are very kind to them,» says Samer Kozah, the gallerist from Damascus who lives in Lebanon, owing to whom the two boys have become famous.

«It was a simple Facebook status post that was shared thousands of times,» he says.

Today, after many articles in the press and various TV reports, the children are sponsored by a printing shop in the neighborhood that prints their drawings, and artists have offered to teach them the various drawing and painting techniques.

Now they go to school and naturally dream of becoming painters, real painters, when they grow up.

# Boosting Municipal Capacity in Light of the Refugee Crisis

Sami Atallah\*

Over the last few weeks, Lebanon managed to hold municipal elections on time despite the risks or worries that the governing elite would postpone them as they did with parliamentary elections and presidential elections. This is a promising development, particularly as elections will usher in new leadership at the local level at a time when many municipalities' capacities are near a breaking point amid the refugee crisis. Not only have local governments been asked to bear the brunt of the refugee crisis in Lebanon—as the national government has been slow in implementing policy since the crisis began—but municipalities are also a key driver of development in Lebanon, a role that now is of the utmost importance.

Municipalities are bestowed with wide prerogatives comprising work of a public character or utility within a given municipal boundary. This entails maintaining public infrastructure such as roads and lighting systems, building and maintaining school systems and hospitals, delivering public services such as garbage collection, urban planning, and engaging in cultural activities. However, despite the wide range of municipal duties, there are numerous structural and governance issues which prevent local leaders from being able to adequately carry them out. For one, there are too many small municipalities with a weak tax base to be able to carry out their responsibilities as stated by law and be fiscally independent. Lebanon today has more than 1,000 municipalities, up from 708 in 1998, totaling twenty-five times more than Cyprus (which has forty municipalities), a country with nearly the same surface area as Lebanon, and more than twice the number of municipalities as Croatia, which is five times larger than Lebanon. Moreover, 70% of these municipalities have a registered population of less than 4,000 people. Effectively, these municipalities have almost no tax base to be able to generate their own revenues. After all, 90%

of the revenues for such small municipalities come from the Independent Municipal Fund (IMF). With such a low revenue stream, these municipalities are not capable of building administrations and hiring the personnel needed to perform their duties.

Looking more closely at existing municipal administrations, one can deduce that many municipalities cannot provide developmental services either because they have weak administrations or suffer from a bloated bureaucracy. Those with weak administrations have a small number of full-time employees, averaging four. Furthermore, many municipalities suffer from vacancies: Four hundred municipalities have only one employee and 87% of municipalities have up to six employees. In other words, only 13% of municipalities—about 130—have more than six employees, a number considered standard for carrying out the duties of a municipal administration. Also, only half of municipalities have bothered to generate a reliable cadre of employees and based on a relatively new survey, 70% of municipalities are in need of new employees. Furthermore, many municipalities rely on part-time workers rather than full-time ones,

which exacerbates the pressure on the administrative and institutional capabilities of municipalities. The share of temporary workers to the total number of employees is about 50% compared to 28% of full-time employees. Weak administrative bodies that are unable to provide adequate services and collect the necessary amount of municipal revenues feed into each other, as local revenue collection is constrained and poor financial resources hinder the establishment of sound administrative bodies. To boost municipal revenues, most of the talk concerning revenue rests on the IMF and whether the government has distributed money from it or not. However, the focus should be elsewhere. For one, it is necessary to highlight the size of the fund i.e. how much money has gone into the IMF in the first place, which remains a state secret. Also, there is a need to discuss the distribution criteria of the IMF, which is currently based on the registered population and revenues collected in the last two years. The current criteria favor municipalities with a large registered population and correspondingly larger revenues collected directly. Since the latter is highly dependent on real estate—rental value fees on residential and commercial units—this





means that the criteria favor urban rather than rural areas. Boosting local revenues should also be a local affair. That is, municipalities must exert efforts to directly collect their own fees. Municipalities rely on thirty-six direct fees, of which three form 85% of total collected revenues. The weak direct revenue collection faces its own sets of challenges that include valuation of real estate, collection of fees, and managing accounts. For instance, most municipalities are unable to revalue properties—both residential and commercial—to revise rental value fees, which is an important source of revenue. Municipalities should have the ability to count the number of both residential and commercial units, develop valuation criteria, and revise the values of properties every three to five years. None of this is happening in most, if not all, municipalities in Lebanon. The problem is not limited to revenue but also budget preparation and execution, as municipalities are unable to separate the different functions of administrative and executive jobs to ensure there is not an obvious conflict of interest.

A key factor that ensures better municipal performance is accountability. This has been undermined at various levels. For one, the discrepancy between the registered and resident population has prevented voters from having the chance to make their voices heard in elections. For instance, there are 42 municipalities whose resident population exceeds the registered population by at least a factor of two. These municipalities have a total registered population of about 230,000 people but more than 900,000 live in them. This means that there are roughly 670,000 people who have no say or voice in municipal affairs. On the other side, there are 324 municipalities whose resident population is less than its registered population by at least half. Such municipalities have a registered population of

over 1 million people but only 336,000 live in them. This effectively means that about 700,000 people who have left their towns of origin are either less interested in participating in the election process or engage in it with a different calculus. In both cases, the discrepancy between resident and registered population undermine electoral accountability.

But accountability is not confined to elections. Citizens should monitor and demand that their municipalities provide services to them. This, however, requires that municipalities disclose information more clearly and transparently and that voters organize themselves to study and advocate for better services.

Citizens have often forsaken such efforts and some have called instead for the creation of municipalities whose voters are from the same sect. The logic of the argument is that municipal council members will then deliver services to their constituents who are of the same sect. A 2014 LCPS study challenged such assertions and demonstrated that municipalities that govern areas with citizens of the same sect do not provide more services than municipalities whose voters are of mixed sectarian composition. This suggests that the idea of citizens of the same sect being better off in small homogeneous municipalities is unfounded. Rather, a key guarantor of development is accountability.

The refugee crisis has brought these issues to the forefront as it is often stated that the influx of Syrians has created a crisis in Lebanon, but this could not be further from the truth. The descriptions of local governance offered above would have been as accurate prior to the crisis as after. The reality is that municipalities are the first and most direct link between Lebanese authorities and refugees, and with this level of interaction an opportunity arises whereby

local administrations are more capable of playing an active role regarding the policies and projects implemented to help Syrian refugees.

For this to happen, there is a need for proactive central government leadership and vision in dealing with refugees, which supports local governments and designates tasks to them. In this way, the work of municipalities is part of a larger efforts conceived by the central government, supported by international organizations and donors, and implemented by local governments. Based in part on discussions with local leaders and national government officials in the last year, a number of recommendations can be made. Specifically, the central government should help municipalities by transferring money from the IMF in a timely manner so local leaders can have access to needed funds. They could also encourage them to ease the conditions to hire municipal staff. The government should come to appreciate the need to collect data at the local level to design policies that are beneficial to local governments as well. In parallel, oversight agencies must audit the work of municipalities to ensure proper management of resources. In the meantime, donors ought to recognize and support the specific needs of local governments while international organizations must coordinate with municipalities to ensure coordination and complementarity.

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# Municipalities: A Services Bridge for the Displaced

Lara al-Sayyed\*

**Lebanon's municipalities have been in a state of alert since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and the start of the influx of refugees, who now constitute more than a third of the population. They are distributed across all of the «land of the cedars», which has opened its doors to thousands of displaced families for humanitarian and ethical reasons.**

Municipalities and civil society institutions have turned into active cells that accompany and care for the needs of the displaced at a time when international and local organizations have abandoned providing services to them. As a result, the displacement has become a great burden that has exhausted municipalities and depleted their capacities due to the accumulation of problems, exacerbation of needs and hampering of ways of offering shelter and aid. The displacement issue has thus turned into a social crisis impacting the local community as a whole.

Decisions and measures have been imposed, including curfews and limitations on the number of residents in some regions. The background is not «racist», but rather an attempt to ensure security following fears of it being undermined, according to municipalities that have worked on providing water and electricity, sorting out sewage and garbage disposal for the displaced, and opened communication channels with the local and international associations to limit the repercussions of the crisis, awaiting the desired solutions of ensuring an environment that would take into account the segment of society that has become part of the local community.

## A link to reduce wastage

Saida has become a positive model in dealing with displacement, as it has been ranked the number one city to respond to the crisis according to Kamel Kazbar, the person responsible for the dossier at the Municipality of Saida, saying that «since the beginning of the displacement crisis, a Union of Relief and Development Institutions in Saida and the South has been established to monitor and document the number and needs of displaced in Saida, who number 5,627 households or 32,531 persons distributed across Saida, its suburbs, and the Ain al-Hilweh camp.»

According to Kazbar, the Union coordinates among the associations to facilitate in-kind assistance reaching the displaced, noting that this «has reduced wastage, as all households now receive assistance and we are now aware of the needs of each family. As a result, this coordination has contributed to alleviating suffering and reducing problems at both the security and social levels, the Union being able to ensure it in displaced housing complexes.» Four years after the arrival of Syrians to Saida and its suburbs, Kazbar says that «there is a kind of financial stability for these families, especially owing to empowerment and support projects carried out by the institutions, in addition to the ability of Syrians to work in various fields and for relatively small 'wages'. He also added that, «the municipality provides for the needs of the displaced according to priorities. Regarding shelter, the percentage

of displaced living in apartments and buildings and paying rent reaches 98%, while less than 2% live in free complexes. Thus, they receive help in paying for the rent and providing healthcare services, in light of UNHCR's great reductions in offering healthcare services to the displaced, which adds to their burdens. The same applies to education, as after providing free education for displaced students by the government and international institutions, there was an urgent need to provide transportation for these students. And work has been done in this area in confronting the culture of fear.» The displacement crisis has been a heavy burden at all levels. The Lebanese government and international donor organizations have endeavored to provide support to unions and municipalities and to offer projects that reinforce stability and fight injustice, including infrastructure and services projects, finding job opportunities, organizing the displacement, establishing clear mechanisms in dealing with the displaced, and dealing with the security repercussions on municipalities and the series of increasing numbers of theft incidents.

From the Lebanese people's fear for their security, which was undermined by the Irsal events, and the tragic reality of more than 1.2 million displaced emerges an image of a widespread culture of fear and the increase in precautionary measures targeting the displaced, sometimes bordering on «racism».

Akkar, which is home to 106,000 displaced, and after the death of six of its inhabitants during clashes between the Lebanese Army and armed men in Irsal, now regards Syrians as a grave danger, the fact which has prompted municipalities to take precautionary measures such as night curfews and banning Syrians from using motorcycles.

The head of the Hrar municipality Khaled

el-Youssef reiterated «these measure are not against the displaced but for the benefit of both Syrians and Lebanese, and to reduce the incidence of problems and to maintain security». He said, «the Syrian refugee and others have the right to work and do whatever they want but within certain limits, and we as a municipality provide them with the necessary relief. And we have collaborated with the Mada organization in implementing projects that contribute to consolidation of the relationship of the displaced with the residents of the region and provides for their needs.» He also noted, «the municipality seeks to provide the necessary assistance to them within its capacities, especially regarding healthcare services, if there are health cases that require treatment or help not covered by international organizations, they are provided.»

According to Youssef, despite the fact that increasing numbers of displaced have negatively impacted all life areas such as services, businesses and rents, «most of those living in the region were able to integrate into the local community.»

According to Ahmad al-Qasir (a Syrian displaced), municipalities in the North have been an embracing environment for all the displaced and they have sought to help them within their abilities to reduce the burden of displacement,» noting that the measures taken have varied depending on each region and the circumstances.

He said, «restrictions imposed on some Syrian workers in security cases or tourist regions like Jbeil, Halat and others is justifiable, whereas in the other regions, curfews on displaced riding motorcycles after six pm and restrictions on their movement makes Syrians feel like they're in a prison. What is required is to reduce the curfew measures by pushing it to ten pm as a first step, in order to avoid provoking a sense of discrimination between the

displaced and the host community.»

Yahia Hashem (a Syrian displaced) shares this view and notes that municipalities have the right to restrict mobility on motorcycles, as they are the most widely used means of transport by sleeper cells to carry out operations breaching security. But it is wrong to generalize that all who use them are carrying out acts to breach security and public safety. He also affirmed that what the Lebanese have done through municipalities, associations and as citizens for the displaced, who have been scrambling in conditions where they have to make ends meet is undeniable. Thus they are not competing with the Lebanese for jobs, and are not even trying to; their sole concern is to secure a decent living until their return to their homeland.

Legally no municipality has the right to impose a curfew on any person according to the lawyer Nivine Habbal, as this infringes human rights. However article 79 of Decree no. 665/970 of the Municipal Act has allowed municipalities to prevent anything that could affect comfort, security and public health. Under this article, and seeking to maintain security in each region, municipalities have taken what they have deemed to be «precautionary measures», especially following security problems and increase in cases of theft where motorcycles were used.

Habbal says, «municipalities did not enforce this strictly, and have sought to facilitate the movement of the displaced, especially in cases of necessity.»

## A crisis that has dwarfed forecasts

Syrian displacement in the Beqaa has reached a level that has dwarfed forecasts and that poses a social, economic and housing crisis, the fact which has put municipalities before a tragic reality that demands that they meet the needs of both their inhabitants and the displaced.

Bar Elias, which houses 55 big camps and 45 smaller camps, is an example of this reality. The head of the municipality Saadeddine Maita says, «the displaced are offered relief by providing them with water and electricity, and sewage and waste disposal. In addition, we are in contact with associations to provide social, food and educational services and necessary amounts of heating materials.»

He also stressed, «what is required is organizing the displacement. The reality of the camps is bad despite the support of some associations. It is also necessary to increase the benefits offered by international organizations to municipalities for projects to do with waste sorting, sewage treatment, power supply lines for the benefit of Lebanese citizens and Syrian displaced.»

**The displacement crisis has been a heavy burden at all levels. The Lebanese government and international donor organizations have endeavored to provide support to unions and municipalities and to offer projects that reinforce stability and fight injustice, including infrastructure and services projects, finding job opportunities, organizing the displacement, establishing clear mechanisms in dealing with the displaced, and dealing with the security repercussions on municipalities and the series of increasing numbers of theft incidents**

# Curfews and human rights within the Syrian context in Lebanon

Palig Taslakian\*

Oxford dictionaries define the word curfew as follows: «a regulation requiring people to remain indoors between specified hours, typically at night». While the concept itself is rather ancient, it started being used in the early 1900s as a crime control strategy concerning juveniles.<sup>(1)</sup> Even though these measures can be very efficient from the criminological point of view, they raise serious concerns with regard to fundamental rights. Freedom of movement and assembly clash with public order, more specifically public security and safety. In Lebanon, management of circulation and protection of public safety and security are under the jurisdiction of local authorities and more specifically municipalities, under section 74 of the Municipal Act number 118 dated the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1977. In a context of Syrian crisis, armed conflict in Syria that shares large borders with Lebanon and terrorist attacks perpetrators on Lebanese territory, security and public order have become a priority for local authorities and State law enforcement offices, especially after summer 2014. Municipal prerogatives with regard to the management of the consequences of the Syrian crisis within their territorial jurisdiction have been enlarged by the Minister of Interior. Curfews have been installed by municipalities throughout Lebanon as a preventive method in a more systematic way than usual, curfews being an exceptional measure, usually undertaken as a response to a security threat, potential or real. With the increase of refugee population in Lebanon, sometimes exceeding the number of Lebanese citizens in certain areas, especially villages, these measures are imposed by municipalities subsequent to attempts to persons or properties, verbal or physical harassments, according to a municipality in South Lebanon for example. In other words as a response to disturbance to public order and as a prevention to further disturbances, which is why they are recurrent in border areas more likely to be influenced by the armed conflict in Syria and subject to unofficial cross border activities, such in Bekaa. Therefore, within the scope of their territorial jurisdiction, municipalities use curfews as a mean to maintain public peace and tranquility and/or prohibit attempts to it. They are also used as a mean to control demography. More interestingly, some municipalities clearly stated they had to take this kind of measures in order to prevent self-protection measures by Lebanese citizens and further tensions between Syrian and host communities. Curfews are justified by local authorities as enabling them to protect local population and maintain public order. In order to analyze the situation of curfews imposed to Syrian refugees, one should examine the conditions of its installment as per Lebanese laws. Local practices show that curfews are usually imposed at night starting 7:00, 8:00 or 9:00 PM till the early morning, usually end around 6:00 AM. In many areas they contain gender limitations, targeting men only. Surprisingly, in some areas, women movement and gatherings were allowed at night while male gatherings were strictly prohibited even during daytime, since women are not perceived as a security threat or having a tendency to participate to illegal activities. Concerning sanctions, it has been noticed that municipalities apply a gradual response mechanism. Violators of curfews are often warned when caught for the first time and arrested if the act is repeated. Also, in many areas, exceptions allow breach of curfew such as emergency medical situations. This being said, the use of such prerogatives by authorities have to be examined with respect to fundamental rights and liberties. In fact, implementation of curfews raises several human rights related questions: attempt to public liberties, more specially freedom of movement and arbitrary arrest, since violators of curfews may be arrested by local authorities. Articles 8, 9 and 13 of the Lebanese Constitution protect freedom of movement, conscious and assembly. However,



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the exercise of these freedoms is limited by Law and public order. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes a person's right to freedom of movement and choice of residency within the territory of a State. In this perspective, installing curfews reflects a practice that attempts to individual liberties guaranteed by both national and international instruments. Therefore, deprivation of liberty is the exception and has to be subjected to strict control. Lebanese case law supports this interpretation of constitutional rights<sup>(2)</sup> that need to be guaranteed. Judicial control is exercised to control the consequences of municipal action since the judicial judge is the «guardian of individual liberties». Any unlawful attempt to such right may be subjected to judicial review under cumulative conditions: material action taken by the administration, attempt to the right to property or individual liberties and extensive violation that taints the action of administration. In this regard, questions can be raised concerning the duration of arrest or detention, the necessity of an administrative control or the possibility of a judicial control in practice, the necessity of clear instructions to limit the discretion of local authorities to the strict requirements of specific security situations concerning their territory. In case of abuse, the administration must be held accountable. As preventive measures, curfews are proportional to the perception of threat in a certain area. This explains the difference of application noticed between rural areas and Beirut for example. Small villages being geographically easier to control, most curfews are imposed in rural areas where the effective and strict implementation is more possible than in the capital city. It has also been noticed that curfews are less likely to be observed in districts like Ashrafieh or Hamra and law

enforcement officers are more likely to be permissive and less inquisitive than in rural areas. This fact creates a discriminatory situation within refugee population based on their social and financial status. Direct interaction with Syrian refugees in the Bekaa valley allowed to have an honest feedback from the latter regarding curfews. While all interviewed persons agreed on the fact that these measures were restrictive, especially in case of emergency at night or in terms of having a social life and paying visits to friends and relatives, the tradition «Sahar», most of them understood the security motivations. However, they wished authorities could use other methods to ensure public safety without penalizing an entire community. Refugees also expressed the feeling of being discriminated against since curfews were only imposed to Syrians and no other nationalities. Discrimination appears also in the abovementioned articles of the Constitution protective to freedoms since they are listed under «Chapter 2 the rights and duties of the citizen». In other words, its scope does not clearly include non-citizens, refugees or not. The latter will have to seek the protection of international instruments regarding violations of these rights.

## Conclusion

Distinction between educated and uneducated Syrians by the Lebanese administration. While this has been reported as a positive treatment from Lebanese authorities towards Syrian nationals of a certain social status, thus distinguishing and acknowledging their social and educational background, one may wonder if persons not belonging to a certain social category should be treated with the same regards.

(1) Crime and Punishment: A History of the Criminal Justice System, Second Edition, Mitchel P. Roth, page 31.

(2) Judge for expedited matters of Beirut held a decision on the 20th of June 2014, (Adel, Part Two, 2015, page 1049).

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# The Syrian camps shawish: A man of power and the one controlling the conditions of refugees

Malek Abu Kheir\*

The shawish or superintendent... You have to get his approval before undertaking anything. He alone is the decision maker in the entire camp. For instance, you see him there if you wish to offer aid. He could deprive certain families from getting aid if he deems them undeserving of assistance. Sometimes he proceeds to distribute the aid directly and does not allow you to supervise... Whether it has been distributed properly or not.



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In short, he is the President of the Republic of each camp. He is in charge and the most powerful decision maker there. He is appointed in one of several ways. The shawish may take on lease a plot of land from an owner and set up tents there. He then brings refugees there and supervises taking the rent from them, of course we are talking here of rent between USD 100 and USD 200 for each tent and naturally he takes a large portion of the profits. The shawish can also be appointed by the property owner directly without a lease contract as a supervisor of the situation in the camp, hereby giving him full powers to act in relation to any person in the camp. He has the right to use his discretion in rejecting people, allowing them to stay or giving them aid, etc. Zaher is «a young Syrian man who works in volunteer relief work». It is sometimes difficult for him to distribute aid in some camps, as the shawish does not allow it for various reasons. According to Zaher, «the reasons vary between one camp and another. There's the shawish who wants us to give him a quarter of what we distribute and only distribute the rest to the camp residents. Of course the camp residents cannot object to this. I don't accept it and dupe him. I wait for the residents of his camp in another camp to distribute the aid and assistance to them. Then you find another shawish who insists on distributing the aid himself. As a result, he discriminates between the residents of the camp. Sometimes he deprives some of them depending on his personal mood. So, I don't deliver

aid to him and sometimes the residents of the camp are deprived of aid on his account.»

The policy of deciding the fate of many of the displaced families is not confined to the adults, but applies to children too. In one of the camps in Bar Elias in the Beqaa in Lebanon, a shawish prevented the children of his camp from going to a school that had undertaken to provide free education to all children who go there. The children of that camp were forced to go to a different school that was on hire to pursue their academic education as the shawish had a share of the fees paid by the students there.

Many are the stories circulating about the shawish and his excesses and many are the testimonies that camp residents are afraid of talking publicly about for fear of expulsion from the camp. After all those same refugees who fled a life of shelling and the Syrian inferno, a life of repression and arrests, and rebelled against it, are today at the mercy of another authority that is exercising the same role but within the grip of «controlling the aid».

There is no place here for revolution and rebellion. They have to adapt to the status quo. The camps' residents see the discrimination during distribution of aid and realize that the shawish has the final word on the legitimacy of their stay at the camp. And although they know all the excesses against them, they choose to keep quiet and avoid making media statements about this issue. Most of their replies when asked about the role of the shawish come

down to: «We have to be patient and endure this until we can go back to Syria. We are now in a position of weakness and cannot claim our rights. But when we go back, we'll get to call the tune.» The camp shawish knows that camp residents are helpless and he also knows that there is no authority to protect them from his tyranny, even using it sometimes to his advantage. In one of the camps in Tripoli in Lebanon, the shawish prevented all children of his camp from receiving an education because one of the schools would not pay him the sum of USD 8,000. And when one of the parents objected, the shawish threatened to hand him over to the Lebanese authorities under the pretext that he has no ID documents or «residency permit in Lebanon». As a result, he risked being imprisoned for a long time. It is a widely known fact that Syrian refugees do not have residency permits due to the complex procedures and the high cost of the required sponsorship.

Despite all that has been mentioned above, there are camp residents who praise the shawish. This is owing to his good temperament and management of the camp and his good and just treatment of them, in addition to distributing both financial and food aid equally among them. Unfortunately, these remain a minority who can be counted on the fingers of one hand amidst a general policy that decides the fate of Syrian refugees at its discretion.

\* Syrian journalist

# It Still Stands With Us on the Bank of Our Dream

**Hussein al-Maghout\***

**Everybody passed through here. No one will ever forget a single step they took in these alleys and streets. Unfortunately this country that has forcefully occupied a part of the heart will merely be a stop where we will remain for a short time only and will only leave it reluctantly.**

The city that did not only become a neighboring geographical spot has allowed escape to it from the death circle that was slowly closing its jaw. Even over the remains of the bustle of what it had lived through in the middle of the past century, it is still beautiful as seen through the eyes of a child, who sees it only as a big green mountain, and a sea that can carry away all this isolation crowned with the beauty of Beirut's colorful streets, that would never harm anyone.

\* \* \*

I really long for Damascus with all its old walls that are being eaten away like we are eating away at each other away from them. I really long for Damascus like I long for Beirut now while living in it. Here when you let your imagination go a little, while sitting in one of its cafés, its streetlights move away from you. When you look at it for the last time from the window of a plane, everything will seem so distant, everything that will follow it will seem ugly. Only those who have really loved Beirut stay, just as I walked its streets and learnt who this bereaved was that everyone was talking about, it is the love of Damascus that is found here everywhere.

\* \* \*

I wish I could go back a little, just to those few hours I

had spent at the border to cross here. Not for anything but to discover the city anew. I still remember the first time I walked down a street full of elderly people. They were right with their laughs at my slightly dirty and torn pants. Lebanon will recover despite everything, in dirty and torn trousers, in suits and offices, everything but those camouflage uniforms, they do nothing but create wounds that no one gets used to.

I wish I could go back to walk again for the first time down a street running along what remains of the blue sea. It is that same sea that has swallowed greedily those who put on life jackets and tried to flee. It blue color only comes close to Beirut's permanently open windows. The music that emanates from each window is totally different from those raging drums that beat daily in Damascus. And Damascus is always forced to listen to them, just as Beirut once heard them too and has turned them into those voices that sing to this day to suppress that destructive impulse of so-called «man».

\* \* \*

Every day some artists go out – whether musicians, painters, filmmakers or theatre directors – all together and try to throw all that the blackness that the war has left through their works. They try to cover all that smoke

with the colors of freedom that is fighting to come out and expose fifty years of injustice. The first step of this exposure has been Beirut. Beirut has opened its galleries and theatres to them, and they just had to do what they were good at. It gave a chance to what would have only been a wooden box in Damascus. They survived indeed and succeeded with failure to be the protagonists embodying their work. They transformed everything into things that empty all the years of oppression in minutes. They forced out of Damascus, so Beirut embraced them.

\* \* \*

We all stand here in Lebanon on the bank of a dream, trying to intensify our presence so we have a stronger flow to achieve it. We ride all the boats that sail every day from the old ports in order to catch what remains of the ruins of the dreams of all those who have fled by sea and not reached the safety of a land. They remained there amidst the details of what they left behind of cities, villages and streets, which eagerly awaits the return of everyone. We all stand here on the bank of just dead nostalgia, trying to make up for it with love for Beirut.

*\* Syrian youth*

## Beirut is my home and family...

**Raya Abu Kheir\***

**Every morning I go to my window and look at the place around me and a question that I have always tried to escape comes to my mind: could it be that I have lost my sense of patriotism? I think of three years of following the news of the revolution, martyrs, bombs and conspiring and interested countries, and I feel suffocated... What is patriotism anyway?!**

Two years ago, I suddenly stopped listening to the news, and the question kept going through my mind: could it be that I no longer care for what's going on?! Could it be that I no longer care for all those images that news agencies report?!

Could it be that I've lost my attachment to my country?! For I no longer miss it, and I just want to preserve a «handful» of the beautiful memories that I experienced there lest they be replaced with images of destruction and devastation.

My name is Raya and I'm 26. I came to Beirut two years ago...

My experience here is far removed from the experience of many others, which makes me feel like Beirut is my home. I was lucky that I didn't have to look hard for work. I started working 15 days after my arrival and I'm still working in it. Most of

those who know me here know me as the Syrian with the Lebanese dialect, the fact which makes many people doubtful about me being Syrian as my accent has become truly Lebanese. There are also people who are surprised and reproach me for abandoning my mother dialect (the Syrian dialect), so sometimes I try to justify it and sometimes I don't.

Here I've met a lot of people, most of whom have become close friends, so much so that I feel that they are closer to me than those I knew in my country. This gives me a certain sense of safety. This is the first job that I have kept for almost two years in six years, as I have never kept a job for more than a few months before. Here no one has bothered me and I haven't felt any racism, superiority or sectarianism.

Very often I defend the people expressing

their vexation at the huge presence of Syrians in Lebanon. I cannot blame a country with a population of four million and that has welcomed two million Syrians. I also criticize people who compare what is happening now in Syria with what happened in Lebanon during the war and the fleeing of some Lebanese to Syria. And with humor I say a joke: if each and every Lebanese moved to Syria, they won't trouble the Syrians seeing the area of Syria compared with that of Lebanon (we wouldn't notice them). But the difference between Syria and Lebanon is that my country gives preference to foreigners: a foreigner works for double the Syrian's salary there, whether Lebanese or of another nationality.

What I want to say in conclusion is that the problem is not us as peoples, and the term

Syrian or Lebanese, this is what they taught us and planted in us, those who govern our work, salaries and ways of life, those who offer us opportunities or give them to others to create classes, racism and hatred between nationalities and religions.

The conclusion that I arrived at is that I've been living the best days of my life here for the past two years. I've established the nicest and most beautiful relationships of my life. I've worked hard and labored here. This has become my second country, for a country is generosity, love, honesty and friendship and not a piece of land to fight over its ownership.

Finally, I say that Beirut is... my home and family.

*\* Syrian citizen residing in Beirut*

# Between Damascus and Beirut: Scents of Thyme and Orange Blossoms

Amal Shehab\*

Going back to Damascus from Beirut seemed like moving between two worlds separated by a deep rift. My surprise upon returning to Damascus for the first time, after obtaining the residence permit in Beirut, was like that of a tourist visiting a country for the first time, wishing to collect images and observing people... Who are they? How do they think? How do they live? Beirut was the only destination that I headed to when leaving the Syrian hell. It is the most European city of the East among all the capitals of the Arab world. Therefore, the differences generated by the subconscious mind were huge and uncontrollable, first of which was the absence of gunfire and bomb blasts and ending with a bustling nightlife.

The striking difference that the recently arrived Syrian notes is not the reduced or inexistent chances of being killed by a shell or an explosion, or enjoying a walk on the sidewalk of a safe country. After all, this has been internally programmed in Syrians to the point where it has become natural. The difference was in the essence of people who have not experienced «even if for a long time» a civil or world war such as the one in Syria. I would look at them as a different human species; I would actually look at myself among them as a different human species. I would take refuge in silence and smiles – «my alternative passport». The same feeling came over me when I returned to Damascus despite the short period I had spent in Beirut initially (15 days). But they were enough to make me feel that I was in Damascus in a complex human combination: the Syrians had cautious looks, filled with confusion. Despite the skill of people in inventing happy times by going out to restaurants or attending occasions, it was clear how feigned and unreal they were in the country of death par excellence.

In this place too these images have their own details, life, people and secrets... It too is the life of humans in flesh and blood... I wanted to come closer to the people in the street... Hear their conversations... Their tones of voice... I wanted to approach the lives of others with the conscience of a tourist.

I set out from the Charles Helou Station in Beirut. The station was neglected and miserable, and the services very poor. The ethics of the drivers are guided by financial gain and boredom resulting from long waits (which could be as long as 24 or even 48 hours) until their turn comes, organized by a man responsible for arranging trips to Damascus. In addition, taxi drivers have to pay to the station administration an estimated sum of LBP 20,000 for their three or four passengers. As a result, they treat customers commercially because they know that they are merely occasional customers, and not permanent ones. Sometimes some drivers ask for a certain sum of money from the passengers to facilitate and speed up their trip, such as paying one of the brokers to speed up getting your papers stamped at the border crossing, etc.

The driver that I chose as soon as I arrived from among the hawking of scores said that the wage was acceptable before 2011 as the station was teeming with Syrian and Lebanese passengers and other nationalities going and coming from Damascus, whereas after the breakout of the war the figure went down by around 80 percent from its former activity and is limited to Syrians with a very small number of Lebanese. The Lebanese used to go on an almost weekly basis to shop in Syria where the quality and prices of goods were better than those of Lebanon, and especially to the Al-Hamidiyah Souq. According a Lebanese friend of mine, this station always reminds her of the aroma of thyme and Aleppo soap that cars smell of on their way back from a trip to Damascus, not to mention the religious visits to shrines, mosques and churches like the Sayiddah Zaynab Shrine, Sayiddah Raqiyyah Shrine and the Umayyad Mosque.

The car took off and there were four of us – a lady and two guys. One of them was a painter who was returning to his country after five years of being away to avoid military service. He had rented a studio in Beirut and saved a sum of USD 8,000 (the equivalence of a Syrian employee's average salary of 16 years) to pay as a fee to the army for exemption and be able to see his family. The lady was going to Damascus to get a bride for her twenty-year-old son. «I want to marry him off and put my mind at ease. Young people get lost in Beirut and lose their minds.» This was

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her response when I asked her surprised: «Isn't it early for him to marry?»

The third passenger kept silent throughout the whole trip, looking watchful. He looked like a Syrian menial worker in Beirut, just like thousands like him.

We arrived at the Lebanese border crossing and as usual the queue was long. There were only two windows out of ten to give an exit stamp. But this paled in comparison to the queue of those coming into Lebanon. There were many currency exchanges, coffee vans, brokers and many others. There were those who break the law or get their entry ticket stamped with an entry ban because of overstaying their allowed period and the offender paid USD 200.

We crossed the Lebanese border and the tension was clear on the face of the young artist as we approached the Syrian border for fear of a mistake in his paperwork or even a change in the laws regarding those who may pay a fee to be exempt from service, and being forcefully conscripted. We were waiting for the driver to come back from the Syrian room for ID checks with the young man perplexed and fearful until the driver returned and gave us our IDs back. And we left the border in the direction of the plain... before descending from Mount Qasioun to Damascus again... A

descent similar to taking a plunge and drowning in the love for this elderly city that sleeps reassured of the love of all its victims for it.

Those who have not lived in a city during war will never know it... The places are no longer as they used to be... Bread, stone and violets have to be returned to the love of its noble silence; cement screens fill the place, rifles and angry faces passing by quickly in cold and in heat. An old pulse returns to you. There are beautiful women in neighborhoods and happy people, soldiers carrying their Russian rifles around corners, and posters of martyrs fill the streets.

The next day I went to the old Al-Buzuriyah Souq and got Aleppo soap and thyme for my friend as an attempt to bring a whiff of Damascus to its sister Beirut. For cities too have nostalgia nagging at their memories. I thought that I hold too the old scent of Beirut to Damascus. The scent of oranges and orange blossoms... The smell of the sea and the songs of porters... faraway... very... very faraway... from the smell of lead bullets and garbage.

\* Syrian journalist

# Metro al Madina: Beirut's Beautiful Side

Rayan Majed\*

**Metro al Madina is located on Hamra's main business street in Beirut. It is an underground «cultural cabaret», part of Al Madina Theatre, but managed independently. It includes a bar and a stage. «It is a place that hosts everything that is beautiful and that is musically and theatrically diverse. It is open to anyone who has something to say and any Arab or foreign artistic experiment,» says Hisham Jaber, dramatist and artistic director of Metro.**

Those who take the first stairs down to Metro al Madina are transported by its positive energy away from the burdens of the city and its sometimes harsh life. Walls plastered with the colorful posters of cabaret shows, plays and music bands and an atmosphere of friendliness and joy greets visitors at the entrance to the bar and through to the stage, which hosts various artistic performances throughout the week by groups mostly comprising artists from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt among others.

«From the beginning of our work, we have met very talented Syrian artists. It was the first time we had the opportunity to meet each other, Lebanese and Syrians, away from psychological barriers and negative emotions, which prevented us from communicating previously,» said the director Bassem Breche, one of the managers of the place.

«We have received artists from many Arab and foreign countries. But since most Syrian artists are residing in Beirut, they have played a major role in creating music groups, introducing the various instruments that they play, the fact that has enriched the artistic and musical movement in the city,» went on Hisham. He added that in this respect Metro has played the role that Beirut used to fill in the past. «When there are crisis in neighboring countries, Beirut used to welcome artists forced to leave their countries because they had lost the possibility of carrying on with their work there. It used to embrace them, just like Metro does today.»

Hani al-Sawah, a Syrian rapper, had come from Homs to Beirut in 2012 and found in Metro al Madina a situation that differed from the other places in the capital. «The existence of such a place has made me the person I am today in my relation to the audience, my presence on stage and my performance. Metro represents the positive and comfortable side of Beirut, the full half of the glass. I feel at home there. The relationship with those who work there is clear, institutionalized and familial. This is what has led me to stay in the city.»

The existence of Metro al Madina helped Maryam Saleh to take the decision to leave Egypt for the first time in her life and move to Beirut. Maryam is an Egyptian singer and musician who had spent her childhood and a large portion of her life moving from one place to another in Egypt with the «Surdaq» troupe for popular theatre, which was founded by her father Saleh Saad in 1938. The most beloved character she played was the clown. She also played roles in cinema, worked in theater workshops for children, and founded several music groups. Her primary concern was contributing to popularizing the works of Sheikh Imam «who didn't get his due» and to show his diversity and theatrical capacity that he had in his tunes and performances.

«The first place I visit when I come to Beirut is Metro al Madina; I feel embraced there. The last person I knew who had provided such a comfortable atmosphere in theater work and brought forth this beautiful feeling in a team was my father.» What Maryam admires most are the human relations between the employees at Metro and the artists and the managers.

The sense of adoption that Metro provides for its employees and the friendly relations between them have also left a mark on Marwa Abu Khalil, who came to Beirut three years ago at the age of 18 from As-Suwayda region in Syria. Marwa studies fine arts at the Lebanese University during the day and works at Metro at night.

«I don't feel tired working here. It's nice and comfortable. There's care and love here; no one harms the other as it happens above ground.» She comes to Metro outside her



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© Issam Abdallah



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working hours to paint, listen to music, relax as if it were her home. «Beirut for me is Metro,» says Marwa.

«It has always been the case that during wars underground shelters turned into cabarets; people above ground fight and underground they have fun,» said Bassem, and over more than five years, Metro al Madina has become a place for entertainment and experimentation, supporting artists and artistic groups in addition to social and humanitarian causes. Its managers believe that this is the foundation of the cultural movement that they seek to push forward in the country.

Metro had organized in the past years in the exhibition hall, which was previously used by the General Security to censor films, several auctions, the first of which was in

support of «The Uprising of Women in the Arab World» campaign. The second was in support of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and the third in support of freedoms in confronting censorship. It also used the Bar Farouk show to support the Beirut Madinati candidates list that had run for municipal elections outside of the political and sectarian blocs in the country.

«Among our duties at Metro is the support for causes we believe in and campaigns that offer useful social ideas for the city because the country's cultural movement is linked to the vitality of its society,» concludes Hisham Jaber.

\* Lebanese journalist

# The Syrian crisis as experienced by the Lebanese

The cartoon highlights one of the aspects of the dominant discourse on the Syrian crisis and those that deal with it as a military crisis and a crisis of belligerent parties, and it is a discourse that undoubtedly works in the Lebanese context to distract people and enable the current system to reproduce itself. However, the Syrian crisis and the Arab crisis in general, forebodes of additional blights that may someday hit Lebanon, and hit the people in their daily and urban lives, and unmask the deceit of the dominant discourse, albeit a bit too late unfortunately.



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## The Urgent Ethical Mission

Nahla Chahal\*

Wars are often absurd. After they are over, it is revealed that they did not achieve the objectives in the name of which they were launched (whose is for a person not a «thing»)... Wars are futile. All of them: be it among nations, invasions, occupations or colonialism... There is no dispute that cannot be resolved by other means... that is if we assume that the origins of wars are disputes, which is rarely the case! Of all wars, civil wars are the most aggressive and destructive ones because they occur between groups that supposedly share many things, including the land they live on, i.e. between «siblings». They disrupt the social fabric of existing societies (unlike «external» wars where the sense of «national» unity prevails), which makes hostilities more flagrant and the horrible crimes committed unforgivable and unforgettable without a purposeful and ardent effort.

The scenes of a constructed civil war in Syria are playing out before our eyes. They conjure up in the minds of those who lived through the Lebanese civil war bitter memories, where it is useless to be arrogant and pretend that the Lebanese experienced it «differently». Although the elements are the same despite their density: Can we say to a mother who lost a son that our war was «more merciful»? And to the one who has spent her life looking for a missing one who remains missing to this day, or to the one whose home was destroyed leaving her family on the streets waiting for the Lord's mercy and people's charity... And what about those who were raped? Whether ten or a thousand: each violated person is a tragedy, each death is the end of the world for them and sometimes for their family.

The war raging in Syria is spilling over into Lebanon: by virtue of the numbers of displaced arriving to it and which are staggering (a quarter

of the country's population at least), and the lack of international aid and donations leaving Lebanon to do with what it has, but especially because it puts these displaced in conditions not worthy of human beings. The war spills over too in various exploitations of local political conflicts, which often revolve around clout and power and are undertaken by all parties regardless of their bias for the warring Syrian parties and the external parties supporting them.

But what is more hideous than any of that is the fact that wars reveal flaws in concepts and values that are adopted and voiced, whether openly or tacitly (which, even then, are still legible!): the racism manifested in condescension towards those «poor helpless people», the cruelty excreted towards them, the exploitation of their situation under various pretexts.

It is true that forgetting is part of the human nature, but there is something we could describe as a «dissociation from similarities» or of the possibility of comparison in the racism manifested against the displaced: it is a «fear» of one's own self more than anything else... This fact does not justify at all these positions and feelings but exposes the horror of the Lebanese civil war that has officially ended 25 years ago but which scars have not healed yet in the souls of people, they can be felt and can still fester! For the case of the Lebanese civil war was closed with denial, official amnesia and a folkloric ritual, contrary to other experiences where those involved went into the trouble of working through accountability for themselves and others before a real decision on mutual forgiveness could be taken. The examples, even if not many, do exist and have been documented...

Despite what appears to be a lengthy bloodshed and destruction in

Syria without a visible end in sight, it is a war and it will end! And, hopefully, it will be over as soon as possible, to minimize losses, which are already great, and to focus on the more difficult task of healing rifts, which are deep, wide and terrible. This is a process where the Lebanese, or some of them who have thought about it, could help; humbly, and not arrogantly as one «teaching a lesson». This mission is as necessary as taking care of the needs of the displaced, or as providing food, clothing, shelter, safety, medical care or education for their little ones... Which are basic human rights according to all the laws of the earth and heavens. This mission should be designated and «named» from today because it would allow establishing an ethical system of values where there are no givers and takers, i.e. without an assumed hierarchy. It would gradually create a mutual, common fabric of shared convictions: weren't slavery and discrimination based on skin color, or the inferiority of women, etc. «acceptable» in a not-so-distant past, and in places where they are now considered crimes and looked upon in condemnation and loathing? This should be the fate of wars! This ethical mission should be adopted as a global concern so that the issue of asylum is no longer an issue of «instilling fear» and especially in nearby Europe... A fear that sets the stage for other tragedies here and there, and represents a setback for humanity in general.

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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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