A pleasant day in Tripoli, a “mother to the poor”

Tripoli, caught between social welfare and spite

Cities are about culture, and not status

We work and raise our voice for Tripoli

The Abu Ali river: sentenced to death

Tripoli’s religious monuments: the eloquence of stones
**Tripoli**

Tripoli is the gateway to a unified Lebanon

It gives me great pleasure to put into the hands of our readers a special issue dedicated to the city of Tripoli. The importance of this issue stems from the role that Tripoli has played historically in the consolidation of national unity in Lebanon. In the past year, Tripoli has experienced violent clashes, and most recently the tragic Jabal Mohsen bombings. Some feared such incidents could be the sparks to ignite civil conflict. Tripoli’s inhabitants, however, have resisted these provocations. Its people have maintained their determination to continue to live in harmony and peace, reflecting the resilience of the Lebanese nation as a whole. This echoes UNDP’s objective manifested in its recently adopted global mission statement “empowered lives, transformed societies.” This supplement sheds light on the hidden realities of Tripoli, which are often distorted by the incorrect representations of the city as a hotbed of violence and conflict, not to say terrorism. In effect, Tripoli remains one of the rare cities in Lebanon that has preserved its original character, rooted in Arab history. Moreover, Tripoli is a central hub for the economy of North Lebanon and the surrounding areas continue to rely on Tripoli for their daily business transactions. Through its traditional alleys and specialized souks, Tripoli persists as a real arena where people from all walks of life, different social status and religions, come together and turn the city into a living space.

Despite the above, the city is home to the highest rate of poverty in Lebanon. Tripoli continues to be regarded as the poor cousin of Beirut. There is a need to energize major projects such as the port of Tripoli and the Rashid Karami International Fair. In addition, the city boasts cultural and historical sites that deserve urgent attention for their historical, preservation, rehabilitation and promotion. In a region undergoing turmoil and upheaval, Tripoli is not only a major gateway to Syria, but more importantly the gateway to a unified Lebanon.

Ross Mountain
UNDP Resident Representative

Why Tripoli?

I fully endorse the editing team’s decision to choose Tripoli as the main topic for the newspaper supplement on the UNDP Peace Building Project. Tripoli is a city with a rich history dating back to the days of the seafaring Phoenicians. It is at the same time a modern city, our city, a Lebanese city. While the city—or rather the port—has been the gateway to a unified Lebanon, we should promote fishery, agricultural industry, woodworking as well as other traditional light industries, given that they are export- and job-creation oriented. I believe that the improvement of employment conditions for the youth is the key to the development of North Lebanon. In Japan, there are many cities and villages that have marginalized due to their aging and declining population. We launched the campaign called “Vitalize Our Own Town” by inspiring ownership and teamwork spirit. City and village authorities encourage volunteer groups and youth chambers of commerce to hold various events and festivals to extend help to each other and to create a better atmosphere among communities. Soft power is also essential for the revitalization of cities.

Seiichi Otsuka
Ambassador of Japan

A development plan for Tripoli

According to the United Nations, 57% of the population in Tripoli is poor or deprived. This situation has been recently worsened by the protracted Syrian conflict. Tripoli has the East Mediterranean Sea’s greatest port and the glorious history of being the most prosperous commercial center in the region; therefore it has tremendous potential to become highly developed in the future. We consider that supporting a development plan that would revive Tripoli’s historical privileges is essential. Besides increasing the humanitarian aid to reduce the extra burden resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees, we should promote fishery, agricultural industry, woodworking as well as other traditional light industries, given that they are export- and job-creation oriented. I believe that the improvement of employment opportunities for the youth is the key to the development of North Lebanon. In Japan, there are many cities and villages that have marginalized due to their aging and declining population. We launched the campaign called “Vitalize Our Own Town” by inspiring ownership and teamwork spirit. City and village authorities encourage volunteer groups and youth chambers of commerce to hold various events and festivals to extend help to each other and to create a better atmosphere among communities. Soft power is also essential for the revitalization of cities.

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Tripoli, our city

Tripoli is not the same as it used to be. History and events change, based on our view of them; geography also changes, as countries take shape and then disappear. No matter how high a station that people attain and how rich they become, rich and poor are rendered equal in the end, by the inevitability of death. Tripoli is called Lebanon’s “second capital.” We grew up hearing this title, which Tripoli deserved because of its historical importance, area, population, people, industries and diversity. Tripoli springs from the true nature of its people, who are in no way a breeding-ground for terror; this tiny aspect of Tripoli is something imported from other areas, which suffer from chronic poverty. People from these areas came to Tripoli and settled in its poor neighborhoods and suburbs. They came to form, as with the Civil War Beirut, a belt of misery that was primed to explode. It might be the case that these people receive only weak levels of attention, if anything at all, because they do not vote in Tripoli, and the same goes for most of the residents of the surrounding cities and towns. They receive only a minimum level of social welfare since their ballots are of no benefit. However, the movers and shakers of Tripoli made a big mistake by neglecting the poor suburbs because these areas turned into security “no-go” zones and their residents became militia leaders, fighting among themselves and engaging in murder; they have worked to destroy the city, in its human and physical aspects, and turned the city’s nominal leaders into their hostages. We see this when government ministers and MPs from the Parliament meet with a number of local militia leaders, and express their hope that they will halt the killing, in return for a sum. Tripoli, like Beirut, Zahlé and Sidon is our city, a Lebanese city. While the state hasn’t done enough for Tripoli, as with every other place, the city’s own people have also failed to do enough for themselves. Their influence has receded and they have thus helped create a different public image of our city.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor in chief
Annahar newspaper

Forgive me!

My father would tell me about Tripoli. He was the heart of this city and everything around it, while my grandfather’s military career gave him the opportunity to get to know all of Lebanon. In school and university, and then in my job, I had many friendships with people who came from North Lebanon, and especially Tripoli. They were well-educated people - the children of educated parents - and they stood out in their school, university and work because of their learning and seriousness, and their attachment to education and knowledge. Most of them left the country in order to continue their studies. Some of them returned, but the majority of them could no longer find a place for themselves in the land of the Cedars. It was through them that I learned the Tripoli dialect well, along with the city’s traditions and special places: the Corniche and the cafes, the old souks, the soap makers, artisans and coppersmiths, and the few cinema houses, whose doors are probably closed today. I did a lot of reading about the poverty gripping the city, about Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, and the tragedies of these two neighborhoods and others. I was mistaken in many things that I didn’t know existed in my country, even though I’m from an area that is poor and neglected, namely the Bekaa valley. I have always had a deep affection for Tripoli, the place where I was born. I was regularly going there for business and for vacation. Today, I can’t stand to think of the things that I didn’t know existed in my country, even though I’m from an area that is poor and neglected, namely

Hanady Salman
Managing Editor
As-Safir newspaper

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The van stops as the voice of the popular singer Ali Deek is heard in front of Abu Arab’s cart. Looking down on us are the tourist “chalets” which, after the Civil War, went from being factories that employed hundreds of residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh and surrounding areas to a set of seaside resorts. My friend from Beirut is shocked, because the first thing that a visitor to Lebanon’s poorest city encounters is this wonderful scene.

The driver buys a cup of coffee and then asks the young vendor, in a hollow voice, to pass out more cups. “Pour some coffee for the guys,” he says, as he looks back to make sure that everyone has received a cup; it’s a pleasant custom on the part of minibus drivers who find “strange” passengers in their vehicles.

A forty-something woman asks the driver to let her off at “Sahat Allah,” or the well-known roundabout whose middle area prominently features the name of God. From the intonation in her voice the passengers realize that she is from Baharri, or Zghorta; they call Abdel-Hamid Karami Square “Sahat al-Nur.” My friend gets out of the bus and tries to take in the many scenes of a city where people live on the margin and are forgotten by the media, which links Tripoli to extremism. The scene of the sous al-Nour, which links Tripoli to extremism, is that of a winter resort for the people of Zghorta and Ehden.

We leave the café and the three of us walk toward the Khan al-Khayyatin. We meet Bilal, who has come from Jabal Mohsen; he tells us that this café is his favorite. He is afraid to go to cafés in his neighborhood because of the suicide bombings. “Tripoli is a city for everyone,” he says, denying that he feels like a stranger. He invites us to visit his neighborhood, affirming that it “is open to you and to people from Tripoli.”

We leave the café and the three of us walk toward the souks. We head in the direction of Souk al-Arid, and cross the gold souk. We arrive at Khan al-Khayyatin.

My companion is enticed by the smell of soap from the Khan Sharkas, and purchases some. We walk near the Abu Ali river. He stands, amazed, in front of the homes and streets of the neighborhood of Babsa overlooking the river, which used to be a winter resort for the people of Zghorta and Ehden.

“The city used to be different,” says a clothing vendor in the used clothing market. He tells us about this neighborhood, which used to be patronized by people from Zghorta, and recalls for us the time the river overflowed its banks, in 1955. We walk with him for a bit, in front of a cart bearing the name “Abul-Fuqara,” or father of the poor. We purchase some winter shoes and then we decide to walk back and have lunch, as he bids us farewell with a shy smile.

We arrive at the Koura roundabout and enter Jammoul restaurant, built in 1936. We have stuffed grape leaves, roast kibbeh and some kanafeh, with a plate of babaghannoush. Our friend is overjoyed with the restaurant, which didn’t cost us more than LL 20,000. We then go to the new part of the city. We leave the downtown, which is full of noise, people and taxi drivers, the smell of perfume, food and spices, and the sweat of people walking to work, or to their period of joblessness in the Mansheh public park. They pass the time around coffee vendors and people selling clothing and mobile phones. We enter another city, divided from the other one only by a single street, called the Boulevard. It’s an extension of the city and its communal fabric between Zahrieheh and Azmi Street and the Damm wa Farz neighborhood, up to the port. We eat sweets from Almawi’s and then go to Mina. On the peaceful Corniche we take a short boat trip.

Night falls, with a soft light, on the people and their homes, on top of each other. Our walk takes us to Yacoub Labban Street, known as Minot. We decide to spend the evening at the Times Bar, with its din of music, dancing and drinking. My friend is surprised: “You have a nightlife in Tripoli?” I answer, “Have a beer and celebrate the end of your day in Tripoli.”
There’s a stereotype that’s quite prevalent when it comes to the identity and heritage of the city of Tripoli. The stereotype goes as follows: it’s an “authentically Islamic” city and in fact the most authentic in Lebanon, as it derives its meaning and strength by being compared to the image of Beirut. The prevailing image of Beirut in Tripoli is that it is a modern city, a hybrid, and one whose Islamic identity and heritage is weak. It is said that Beirut robbed Tripoli of its status when it became the capital of an Ottoman province in 1888. However, the most important period of Tripoli’s marginalization and loss of status came when the French Mandate established the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920 and made Beirut the capital of the new state. Even today, Tripolitians retain the “wound” of that date and its repercussions in their memory. They feel that the Lebanese state and successive governments marginalized and neglected their city, along with the neighboring rural region of Akkar. They usually ascribe this to a kind of discrimination or punishment of Tripoli because the city’s history, heritage and identity saw their day and its repercussions in their memory. They feel that the Lebanese state and successive governments marginalized and neglected their city, along with the neighboring rural region of Akkar. They usually ascribe this to a kind of discrimination or punishment of Tripoli because the city’s history, heritage and identity saw their day and its repercussions in their memory. They feel that the Lebanese state and successive governments marginalized and neglected their city, along with the neighboring rural region of Akkar. They usually ascribe this to a kind of discrimination or punishment of Tripoli because the city’s history, heritage and identity saw their day and its repercussions in their memory.

Tripoli’s distinctive modern history appears in a number of key events:

*Between 1982 and 1986, an armed, fundamentalist Islamic emirate was established, led by the emir of the Tawhid movement, Sheikh Saad Shaaban. This “emirate” left its fingerprints on Tripoli society.
*Numerous civil associations and religious institutes emerged.*
*Syrian intelligence relied on small groups, prisoners, and Salafi and fundamentalist cells in the city for various purposes, whether local, regional or international. These objectives served Syria’s security policies when it exercised “tutelage” over Lebanon, and afterward: the Fatah al-Islam group was a prominent example of this in 2008.*

*There have been periods of civil strife and long-standing wars between two neighborhoods in Tripoli, which are mired in misery. Bab al-Tabbaneh, which is Sunni, is the most impoverished and densely-populated area of Lebanon, and Jabal Mohsen, which is Alawite, and also impoverished. The two neighborhoods have seen a series of tit-for-tat episodes of attacks and violence, springing from the large-scale massacre carried out by the Syrian regime in Bab al-Tabbaneh in 1986.
*The uprising and war in Syria, and Hezbollah’s fighting alongside the “Alawite” Syrian regime, gave a big push to the renewal of sectarian tension and clashes between the two neighborhoods, to the point where suicide attacks began to be used.*
It is from these events that distinguish Tripoli, and the long-held feeling of marginalization, injustice and neglect in the framework of the Lebanese state, that the city’s particular type of ongoing internal dilemmas and crises arise; they take on different forms, according to the local and regional circumstances. However, the most powerful of these phenomena and images are connected to the events related to small Salafi-jihadi groups, an attractive topic for local and international public opinion and media. Thus, there are exaggerated images in the media of the city, portraying it as the stronghold of these groups in Lebanon. No doubt, Tripoli is a traditional and socially conservative city, more so than Lebanon’s other coastal cities. But this is due to its economic stagnation and lack of development and job opportunities. In order to meet their daily needs, these extremely impoverished residents of the most desperately poor and densely-populated neighborhoods (especially Bab al-Tabbaneh, Mankoubin and Qibbeh) rely on a type of wide-spread “social welfare,” a policy followed by the city’s leaders and nouveaux riches, who provide assistance to families in order to cement their social-political status and influence and enlarge their voting base. All of these leaders have their own followers and armed elements in the neighborhoods; the young people of Bab al-Tabbaneh are drowning in social fragmentation, illiteracy, unemployment, petty and deviant behavior, sectarian tension and violence. All of this feeds the national level of tension, and is fed by it, to the extent that it is organically connected to this period of sectarian tension between the Alawites of Jabal Mohsen and the Sunnis of Bab al-Tabbaneh. This tension is fed by Shiite Hezbollah’s participation in the war in Syria and its wide-spread, complex regional repercussions. Perhaps the policies of Hezbollah in Lebanon since 2005 and in Syria since 2011 have contributed to the sectarian tension and the recent emergence of groups and individuals of the Salafi-jihadi strain in Tripoli, who act out of spite against Hezbollah’s sectarian jihad in Syria.

**Tripoli, caught between social welfare and spite**

Mohammad Abi Samra

These images and feelings on the part of Tripoli natives were quite appropriate for the political stances and inclinations of the city’s traditional politicians. They also played a decisive role in the formation of civil, pan-Arab and pan-Islamist groups in Tripoli, and in their hard-line political stances and behavior throughout Lebanon’s modern history. This hard-line position by civil and political groups, who were proponents of Arabism and Islam, was a feature of Tripoli during times of civil peace and crisis, from the domestic-regional Civil War to the resulting sectarian and civil tension and unrest, which continue to have strong repercussions today in Lebanon and the Arab region.

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Tripoli’s religious monuments: the eloquence of stones

Dr. Mustafa al-Hilweh

If two people engage in dialogue their mode of communication is speech, which is irreplaceable. And if stone speaks to stone, if they are practically one, then we are confronting the “discourse of stone,” and how eloquent this is!

Despite their eternal silence the pyramids of the Pharaohs speak to us via a history of civilization that goes back thousands of years, and this dialogue exists to this day. It is on this basis that we deal with the discourse of stone, which we follow from the mosques and churches of Tripoli, steeped profoundly in the city’s history. The discourse of stones in Tripoli is but a faithful translation of the discourse of intimate daily life, the discourse of coexistence.

You are in a city adorned with mosques and churches, everywhere you see. Religious monuments are located in the old souks, both Mamluk and Ottoman; they make up a “religious museum” that is unparalleled, one where the name of God is invoked and the Almighty praised. A number of Tripoli’s religious monuments, especially its churches, were taken over by the state. Mutran Street takes its name from the Maronite Diocese located on this street. Rahbat Street is named after the Sisters’ School, which was in this neighborhood. The most prominent Christian street, called the Street of the Churches, is named so because of the churches that are located next to one another (Maronite, Orthodox, Catholic, Latin), while Saydeh neighborhood takes its name from the church that was built there by Bohemond VII in 1286.

To express this state of affairs, viewed through the discourse of stones and people, our literary minister Rashid Derbas says, “…the call to prayer rises from the minarets and the bishop calls his flock to prayer; Rahbat Street still lives up to its name and its school as it receives the ringing of the bells, echoing out over the girls of Tripoli, from all denominations.”

The Diaspora author Habib Masoud, from Bsharri, tells of the time he passed through the religiously-mixed neighborhood of Qibbeh in 1948. He heard the bells of Qibbeh spread the word that a local Muslim notable had died. He yelled out, like Archimedes, “Eureka, I have found it! I have found what I was hoping for. These bells of the Christians ring out in sorrow for a Mohammadan, and commiserate with Moslems over their loss. The Christians are mourning a good man and slave of the same God that they worship, but in a different manner.”

A more significant incident took place when the mufti of Tripoli, Mohammad Kamel al-Zeini, issued a fatwa in 1824 forbidding prayers in the Asaadi mosque, which was built on land taken from the Ghorayyeb family. He ordered the property returned to its owner. Tripolitanians labeled it the “unlucky” mosque (jami’ al-shu’um) and avoided praying in it.

What reinforces the credibility of the discourse of stones is that some churches and mosques are built cheek by jowl. Visit the Hamidi mosque in Khan Askar, so that you may take in the discourse of stones. I will conclude this discourse of stones with a human one, as testified to by the Tripolitanian poet Saba Zureiq (d. 1974), as he praised the large delegation of Muslims during Christmas at the Orthodox diocese: “Behold, a miracle that speaks truthfully of the Orient For I witness the cross of Christ framed by a Crescent”
Tripoli used to comprise three neighborhoods: for people from Tyre, Sidon and Arwad, with adjectives from these cities becoming commonplace; its residents belonged to diverse religious communities. This explains the city’s name, which is derived from this interaction among three Phoenician cities that contributed to the establishment of Tripoli.

I’ll present a quick selection of images of the course of this common experience of the civil fabric of the city of Mina, historical Tripoli, as an example of the lifestyle of this northern city, steeped in its authentic tradition of concord, just like Tripoli. They have deep roots in the simple life of their residents, their openness and affection, and their capacity for giving to others for nothing in return.

To affirm how Tripoli has experienced openness in terms of its evolving demography, I’ll note that in 1932 it had a population of 13,400 people (based on the first and last census, conducted that year) and had 8,535 people in 1913. This increase helped the people of Mina, as immigrants arrived – Cretans, Armenians, Greeks and others. The steady growth in population in Mina is evident in its official records. The Civil War from 1976 to 1989 contributed to this demographic growth, as the population rose by 43 percent, after its people demonstrated their refinement, openness and acceptance of those who were different from them. They showed their city to be one that was both sedate and attractive.

This new demographic weight didn’t prevent people from growing more deeply attached to living in the old city, where Mina’s diverse civil fabric, was characterized by the spontaneity associated with the neighborhood’s economic character. It brought people together as they shopped and secured the items needed for their daily lives. In order to preserve its old stone heritage and social fabric in 2009, the Municipality of Mina came up with a zoning project for 500 old properties so that the area’s identity could be preserved as a maritime community. This area served as the outlet for the western part of Tripoli. This area emerged after Port Said and Mar Elias streets were built in 1954, dividing the port into two parts: one an interior area, dedicated to maritime-related activity, and the other, called the western part, with modern buildings.

Life in Tripoli, the city of ‘bread and salt’

Dr. Jean Touma

Tripoli has always been a city open to the sea. The sea has brought faces and communities to the shore, so it is logical that this city on the sea, throughout its long history, has been linked to the function for which it was built. This is why the people who lived there exhibited diversity over the city’s history. There were: the Canaanites, the Persians, Greeks, Seleucids and Arab tribes from the Hawran and elsewhere in Syria.

Fixing fishing nets. Pictures taken from the book, “Tripoli, City of all eras,” published by the University of Balamand in 2011.
People in the old part of Tripoli were attached to their neighborhood’s interior alleyways, where their lives were self-sufficient. They built their mosques, churches, and cemeteries here (before it was moved to its present site in 1875, while the name remained for two principle public squares – the Turf for Muslims and another for Christians).1 This self-sufficiency generated a type of civil cooperation, to the extent that the expression “from my Mina” became commonplace. You find Christians who donated for the construction of the Omar bin al-Khattab mosque, as evidenced by the donations book published in the 1960s.2 You find Muslims who personally worked on the renovation of churches, as with the Prophet Elias church, at a time of civil strife in Mount Lebanon in 1861, and after a storm almost did away with them.3 Perhaps this solidarity came from the salt of the sea and the joint effort to make a living by reaping its wealth. The original community of Mina was also comprised of artisans, going considerably back in history. Its people-manufactured sandstone and worked with chalk for painting walls. They were quite proficient and producing construction tools. Perhaps the ancient memories of people from Mina and their records summon the skill of ordinary people, working in cooperation, who built mosques and churches based on ancient architectural designs such as stone archways and arcades. The “dean” of the construction sector was Antoine al-Kik (1885-1981), who received his title4 from the mayor of Mina in the 1930s,5 Abdel-Sattar Alameddine; Kik built an additional part of the minaret of the Hamidi mosque.6 Gorges Touma (1882-1933)7 and his workers constructed the Ayubid mosque in the 1930s in the New Quarter (al-Hara al-Jadida). This interaction in construction8 also applied to the façade of the Mar Gorges church in Mina in 1735, where Mamluk-era architecture is expressed by the interplay between the black and white marble. There were leading Muslim architects, such as Zuhdi Abas (1911-1997) and Misbah Hawla (1888-1972), who relied on skilled workers from Mina in historical arcs and building over sandstone, which was prevalent in the old homes in the city. Moving from the domain of stone to that of people, at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, we have a physician who was widely popular among Muslims and another for Christians). Moving from the domain of stone to that of people, at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, we have a physician who was widely popular among people of this civil fabric kept 21 president of Lebanon; all of Mina took part. Sheik Malek Shaar, a parish delegation to congratulate the new mufti of Tripoli, its parish were from Mina. During a visit to the Great Mina mosque, he said he would accompany them or send a teacher with them; all the students in our class took part in Friday prayers at the Great Mina mosque. He would attend prayers with a group of students who were in our class took religion as a subject, and this caused no embarrassment. The Religion teacher at the time was George Khodr.12 What about the Armenian Orthodox church in the north? The overwhelming majority of its parish were from Mina. During a visit to congratulate the new mufti of Tripoli, Sheikh Malek Shaar, a parish delegation told him, “We have no bishop in Tripoli; would your eminence supervise our affairs because we have confidence in you?” The delegation announced this to the media, so that the gesture would not be understood merely as an act of protocol.13 As a final note on these images of coexistence in Mina, the seaside city, we find a photograph from the Ottoman era. It gathers the elite of Mina, including Ibrahim Habib (1857-1947)14, in the front row. On his chest is a cross, displayed openly on his official garb, without angering anyone. This is Mina15; living its days out in a casual spontaneity; its natural coexistence was pioneered well before today’s era of “dialogue between civilizations,” which is another term for “clash of civilizations.”

As with stones and people, the same goes for the field of learning and opinion. The martyr Sheikh Sobhi al-Saleh consulted the current head of the Mina parish, George Khodr, for his opinion about Saleh’s16 document on Islamic systems before he sent it to be printed.17 The late mufti Sheikh Munir al-Malik wrote a historical almanac that mentioned Christian religious occasions, as a reflection of his distinguished relations with his fellow residents of Mina 18, of all denominations, because he served as a true authority for them. These relations were based on mutual respect for one’s beliefs. In discussing the Mar Elias school, established in 1900, Sheikh Nasser al-Saleh says, “The principal was Makarios Musa (principal from 1933 to 1957, died in 1964)19, who ensured that Muslim students could attend Friday prayers at the Great Mina mosque. He would accompany them or send a teacher with them; all the students in our class took religion as a subject, and this caused no embarrassment. The Religion teacher at the time was George Khodr.”12 What about the Armenian Orthodox church in the north? The overwhelming majority of its parish were from Mina. During a visit to congratulate the new mufti of Tripoli, Sheikh Malek Shaar, a parish delegation told him, “We have no bishop in Tripoli; would your eminence supervise our affairs because we have confidence in you?” The delegation announced this to the media, so that the gesture would not be understood merely as an act of protocol. As a final note on these images of coexistence in Mina, the seaside city, we find a photograph from the Ottoman era. It gathers the elite of Mina, including Ibrahim Habib (1857-1947), in the front row. On his chest is a cross, displayed openly on his official garb, without angering anyone. This is Mina; living its days out in a casual spontaneity; its natural coexistence was pioneered well before today’s era of “dialogue between civilizations,” which is another term for “clash of civilizations.”

1-A city that comprises, along with the city of Tripoli, Baddawi and Qalamoun, the qada of Tripoli. However, the Municipal Council changed its name from al-Askila to Mina in Qalamoun in Decree No.1979 signed by the president of the republic on 21 December of that year. It changed from “Village” to “city” in 1996 by virtue of Law 507; published in the Official Gazette in Number 24, June 13, 1996.
4-Antoine Nasr, Mina in Tomorrow’s Memory. Mina Development Committee, Dar al-Insha, 2001, p. 73.
5-Hikmat Shah, The History of Tripoli al-Sham, from Earliest Times to the Present Day, 1323 HE, p. 236 (manuscript), Dar al-imam and Dar Hikmat al-Sharif, Tripoli, 73.
6-Darass 665, 7 November 2008.
7-The High Mosque, Hamidi Mosque, Ghazi Mosque, Saint Georges Cathedral, Sayyidat al-Najat Church.
9-Dakiz Mosque (Omar bin al-Khattab). It was built a member of the Dakiz family during the Ottoman era. After its destruction during the civil strife of 1958, along with the Saraya Tower, it was rebuilt in 1967 and called the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque. Mina: City of the Sea Tells Its Story, Mab, Tripoli, 2000, p. 39.
10-Donations and expenses statement for the construction of the Omar bin al-Khattab Mosque, 1069 (1369 HE).
11-Jean Touma, The Orthodox: People and Buildings, p. 80.
12-Based on personal documents.
13-Mina Municipality archives, 1934.
14-Born 1849, was mayor of Mina (1932-1934), and died in 1964.
15-Built in 1902 on the ruins of the first public school built by the Turks in Mina Abdullah Kabbaba, p. 39.
16-Based on personal documents.
18- Graduated as an engineer from Istanbul University in 1911 (Order of Engineers archive, Tripoli).
19- Graduated from Lebanon’s Engineering Institute (Order of Engineers archive, Tripoli).
20- From the plaque on his statue at the square bearing his name.
22-Born in Mina in 1826, he graduated in religion from Al-Azhar in 1947 and received a Ph.D. in 1949. He received a degree in Arab literature from Cairo University in 1950. He left for Paris and received a doctorate from the Sorbonne based on two dissertations. He returned to Tripoli in 1954 and was a researcher and writer. He was assassinated in Beirut on 7 October 1986 (Ahmad al-Janabi, The Martyr Sheikh Doctor Sobhi al-Saleh and his Linguistic Efforts, al-Jinan University research paper, 2001, p. 5).
23-George Khodr, Mina in Tomorrow’s Memory, p. 34.
24-Born in Tripoli in 1884, he took up religious studies at the Greater High Mosque in Mina for more than 30 years, and was then appointed to head the timing of the Mina, followed by Dar al-Ifta in Tripoli from 1944 to 1947. Died in 1947.
25-Handwritten manuscript.
26-Jean Touma, the Orthodox, p. 17.
28-Elected mufti of Tripoli and North Lebanon on 27 January 2008.
29-Mustapha, 16 April 2008.
30-Records of the deceased at St. Georgios Orthodox Church, Mina.
31-Photo on display in the Mina Municipality hall.
Cities are about culture, and not status

Jean Rattel

In response to being asked to write for the Peace Building supplement on my city it occurred to me to talk about myself! I’m one of those people who, when asked to participate in a forum of some kind, usually say everything they can about an imaginary, but certain, relationship for them and their high status. It’s as if the topic is prepared especially for their distinguished persons, as a fixed foundation of the real and virtual world. As for the “footnotes” in such discussions they may be left for later on, although they should be the heart of the topic!
If I try to do something less traditional here by imagining another context - for example cultural activity in Tripoli, which I closely follow - I will end up drowning in a sea of the usual type of complaining, which the city’s elite engage in periodically. These complaints revolve around the following themes:

A-The Anga Theater, smoothly accompanied by a donkey, which makes up for the absence of its owner.*
B-The “Dome” or village theater, which is closed. It has been under construction since the Niemeyer workshop for Lebanon’s International Fair on 23 September 1963; ever since, it has been scheduled for completion in four years’ time!
C-I’ll try to avoid mentioning the Olympic Fair that cost $19 million.
D-The first civil peace project, with Suheir Dandashi and the Friends of the Disabled Association in 1986, wouldn’t have transformed the area between the train station and Sbaa Tower, if not for the engineering work of Nuha Nikro and Fawaz Sankari and the pharmacist Khaldoun al-Sharif.

But since we’re talking about peace, I don’t want to go on and on with proposals of “sustainable criticism.” What if this nostalgia wasn’t actually justified? How many times, how many generations, how many cameras, photos, exhibitions, plays, how many words have turned into bombs, and explosive belts? This expression isn’t an accident; it’s a reference to the last novel by Jabbour Doueihy, “Amerikan Neighborhood,” which was set in Tripoli. One of the characters goes to Iraq to join al-Qaeda, where he is asked to blow himself up with an explosive belt, but he doesn’t and returns to his home, in a search for his private peace. After this, Adnan Khoja undertook something new with a symposium whose work he supervises, and deliberately left us a number of vitality works in its wake. Mohammad Ghaleb has created and brought to the city. Mohammad Ghaleb recently decorated a large mural rendering the sea with its wide blue and far-off seagulls gathered in a flock. We can’t forget the Sisyphus stone, remaining from the Beit al-Fann activity, dedicated to logical weight of the Municipality of Tripoli.

There are other sails at the entrance to Mina; they represent a belated tribute to of the sculptor Mohammad Haffar, and are one of the many “samples” scale model he created and brought to the city. Mohammad Ghaleb recently decorated a large mural rendering the sea with its wide blue and far-off seagulls gathered in a flock. We can’t forget the Sisyphus stone, remaining from the Beit al-Fann activity, dedicated to logical weight of the Municipality of Tripoli.

 Shoot as you walk 62, organized by We love Tripoli, Al-Tal, Tripoli.

“...The city has its public squares, its streets, its downtowns, which over the years have received a large number of sculptures. Most famously, Mario Saba has left us his works in Mina, and perhaps one of the first such haunting sculptures in the city. It is a permanent storm sweeping away the remnants of school desks and computer junk that have quickly deteriorated due to the evolution of their modern programs and size. Mario has left us but his storm remained, which always tells us about the coming fragility, if we don’t take in the moment...”

Gharroubi roundabout, which leads to the arch honoring Dr. Boueiz as part of the legacy of the American hospital. There are also murals that are said to be coming to cover public squares and areas, as part of graduate work at the Art Institute, whose first wave has yet to appear. What’s unfortunate is that some of this work has been marginalized.

We should acknowledge that there isn’t much publishing in the city; it’s probably restricted to a few amateurs and professional status-seekers. However, the North Lebanon Cultural Center follows the documentation of the press, theater, poetry, poets and famous personalities. It’s now working on a book on north Lebanese novelists. It has prepared a study on the river society by the late Talal Munajed and worked to get it published in a book. Talal’s stories of the Abu Ali river relied on Claude-Levi Strauss’ comment that anthropology moves forward, while insular historians retreat, asking: what made the nucleus of the city neglect its arteries? In recent years also a number of youth associations dedicated to the spread of music have emerged; they’ve brought dance to the street at spontaneous events that accompanied public events of all occasions. Perhaps this has brought a bit of energy to theaters and cultural and artistic centers, which usually suffice with hosting what’s produced outside the city in most cases. There is an attempt to bestow “status” without getting involved in the labyrinth of stimulating local production, with the exception of the Faihaa chorus, which might be the one proving the rule. It has become a situation of planting seeds, which in the end bring out individual talents. I could go on, since I never tire of telling these stories, as a gift to a city that has allowed me to see it as it is, not how many speak of it. The first thing to arise in such discussions is war, so what’s the last? You wait until you hear them say: Salaam alaykum.

*This is a reference to the story of the donkey of Hasan Anga, who, like the ruler of the region during the days of the Ottomans, would send his donkey to any celebration or social occasion, to ensure order.
The women of Tripoli

Dr. Wafaa Shaarani

The title of this article might seem strange - are the women of Tripoli different than those elsewhere? Women are like cities, and the women of Tripoli are like their city, left to sleep with open arms under a sun suffused by light. This comes at the expense of a cause; I greatly fear the day of a wide-scale claim by people who argue that they're in control of the city, and that they know what people need, and what can be secured for them. They don't realize that their city is being affected, without their knowledge, by parties outside this city.

In his painting The Souks of Tripoli, Mohammad Aziza places a woman wearing a shawl in the center of the painting, with a featureless face. The painting is dear to me; it evokes memories of a bygone age that was followed by the "modern" hats worn by girls at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, in the second decade of the third millennium, the women of Tripoli live on the periphery, like their port. They have adapted to their environment and have confronted the situation of women. But when fear descends on the city, they become noticeably withdrawn. The "city of the Syrian revolution" has changed; its sound foundations, which merged the demands for revolution and freedom, have been abandoned.

Hanaï is a student of mine and I offer her comments as an example of the situation throughout Lebanon. She doesn't surprise me by wearing a hijab, one of the growing number of such women at the Lebanese University, where I used to teach Islamic philosophy. After she left her rich fiancé and his opulent chalet and resort she married a bearded young man, who was also one of my students in the Philosophy Department. Today she talks about the women of the Quran, of Khawla bint Thaalaba, and the wives of Noah and Lot, and Zulaikha, the wife of al-Aziz. She says that everything she knows comes from religious courses focusing on the Quran.

Hanaï rejected the idea of taking part in a dialogue project bringing together people from the neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, in a bid to discover tolerance on the ground based on heavenly teachings. She also rejected taking part in writing about the National Plan to Protect Women. "There is nothing shameful in a woman being the female companion of the man," she says. When asked about her rejection of violence against women in the home and school, and of the stereotypical image of Tripoli women, she answers with certainty that any questions about the conditions of women won't be helped by the National Plan, for this is God's domain alone.

Female religion teachers are accorded considerable respect. Coalescing around them is a young, united female bloc, but the changes that they're undergoing aren't exactly clear. The repercussions of the formation of this group of women are confusing; they belong to the passive bourgeoisie. All of these initiatives take their religion courses seriously; the mosque becomes more important to them than Islam. I am not here to request that they devote themselves to renewing Islamic culture and stop dragging up the religious past, or let religion become something that opens up new spiritual horizons for them. Instead I want to ask about where women in Tripoli are headed, after they have proven themselves competent here, managing orphanages and charity associations in a city where we learned the Quran, language, love and poetry. Will women from Tripoli become separated from reality and life?

Unveiled women walk freely in the city and on various occasions you see them dressed up to the hilt, side by side with hijab-wearing women. At seaside resorts women from Tripoli wear bathing suits and such places have a dream-like quality. At precisely noon the guard of the women-only beach establishment calls out that it's time for the men. The swimmers don their abayas and the sandy coast quickly becomes very silent. In my community these beach resorts are located on the edge of the city, in a mixture of beauty and ugliness. I hesitate to talk about what is hidden here, because I don't understand the schizophrenia of this city. It's not diversity. There is another group of women, with no religion teachers, mired in poverty, marginalization and humiliation. I see them on the streets of Bab al-Tabbaneh, Qibbeh, Dahr al-Mughr; wearing abayas and hijabs. They are divorced; they are victims of violence; they are the wives of Islamists who are in Bloc B in Roumieh prison, and followed by the media. There is no life here, only a death that is enforced on them.

This fear is generated by the city's descent into a conflict beyond its powers. Before it closed, I used to patronize the Jamil café, located on Tripoli's most beautiful street. The owners served alcohol and hosted musical performances. It was a literary café par excellence, frequented by poets and artists, before the city had exited itself. Politicians don't have the power to eliminate backwardness but traditions must be changed, and a healthy economic, civil and cultural life established.
The media on Tripoli: injustice, slander and shortcomings

Ghassan Rifi

The injustice that has been suffered by Tripoli isn’t limited to the lack of state attention or the city’s lack of development and social marginalization, which has led to a rise in poverty, unemployment and school drop-out rates and a frightening humanitarian and socio-economic crisis.

This injustice has also spread to the print, radio and television and even electronic media, which deals with Tripoli only from the standpoint of “security” incidents. All of these media outlets contribute, whether deliberately or not, to building a wall of isolation around the city. These media portrayals of the city have begun to affect tourism and commerce and the very economy of Tripoli, putting establishments on the brink of collapse. They have had a negative impact on Lebanese in general and particularly people from the north; they have begun to view Tripoli as a city of fear, one that cannot survive.

This has prompted these people to refrain from visiting or shopping in Tripoli’s historic soups, while everyone is agreed that Lebanon’s northern capital cannot survive, prosper and develop unless “outsiders visit,” as the locals say, and this aspect of Tripoli has begun to disappear in recent years.

The firing of a bullet, or tossing of a hand grenade, or a fight in any given neighborhood – each is sufficient to attract the media, as talk of weapons and terror quickly emerges. In other parts of the country, the media ignores such security incidents. It’s no secret that the horizontal poverty in Tripoli has prompted some political and religious currents, and certain parties with suspicious agendas, to exploit some of their young people and tempt them with money and weapons at a certain political moment and against the backdrop of a lack of general security; this has rendered the city an open arena for settling local and regional scores. During over 20 rounds of civil strife, the victims have been Tripoli’s poor.

However, this doesn’t mean that Tripoli has become a city of war only in the eyes of the media. It has become the destination for everyone trying to get a scoop, engage in inclement or achieve fame. But during the “lean times” of public security the city has seen artistic, cultural and sporting events, both local and international, take place. These activities indicated that people in Tripoli have a level of awareness and are unified, against a backdrop of diversity; they coexist, they are committed to civil peace, and they reject the tension. But none of this, unfortunately, has been spotlighted. The smallest act, or eruption of celebratory gunfire in the city, would herald the arrival of live tv broadcast trucks, while summer festivals, the city’s marathon and bike-a-thon, and its musical performances and exhibitions would only receive a few seconds’ coverage in the media. The media wasn’t satisfied with this. Some television stations continue to ignore the many thinkers, public figures and representatives of civil society from Tripoli; they would host individuals who claimed to speak for the city, deranged people who would insult Tripoli and its people, portraying them as isolated extremists who reject others.

It wasn’t possible to challenge all of this media injustice suffered by the capital of the north in order to alter stereotypes. In fact, Tripoli is a very vital city, thanks to its many organizations and despite their modest capabilities. The civil sector’s activities outpace those of many organizations in other, “favored” parts of the country, but the media ignores this and the number of participants drops. Thus, it’s correct to say that Tripoli is made absent by the media unless it involves violence; this absence is compounded by the fact that most members of the media act under the directives of their central offices, which give priority to “security news” – whatever its type or magnitude – while these correspondents and journalists have no impact on management at their outlets. They also lack positive initiatives such as highlighting Tripoli’s culture and history, especially the Mamluk city and the old souks and the traditions they retain today.

In fact, the many political and non-political newspapers published in the city are primarily dependent on political funding, meaning that they act in accordance with the parties that fund them. Most newspaper editorial teams also lack a development-based vision, making them primarily local and lacking in impact. If we want to treat Tripoli fairly and change the media’s behavior there should be a “media lobby” that can have a positive impact, since the media is an indivisible part of the comprehensive development process that the city needs.

The currently disappointing of positive efforts, creative ideas and civil and media solidarity in Tripoli is insufficient to establish the bases for new ways of dealing with the city by the media. A city that doesn’t defend itself won’t find people to defend it; many observers affirm that for Tripoli to be treated fairly by the media it should recall the situation 20 years ago. Back then, there were four stations that were competitive with national outlets. However, they were quickly closed because of a lack of means and support. Since then, the city hasn’t seen any attempt to improve its image in the media despite the massive financial capabilities that exist.
We work and raise our voice for Tripoli

Adib Nehmeh

The injustice that has been suffered by Tripoli isn’t limited to the lack of state attention or the city’s lack of development and social marginalization, which has led to a rise in poverty, unemployment and school drop-out rates and a frightening humanitarian and socio-economic crisis.

While writing this article I was confused on several levels. I didn’t know if I wanted to write to the people of my city Tripoli, or to Lebanese in general. But I will address the young people of Tripoli and particularly those from poor and marginalized neighborhoods, especially those with whom I had discussions on a continuing basis. Also, I didn’t know if I should write as a researcher or an expert trying to come up with a development plan for the city. Or would I write as a Tripoli native, while leaving aside all of my unchecked biases and emotions? However, necessity requires that I give priority to explaining what we are trying to do, rather than what we feel. I will lay out the general idea of what the Social Affairs Ministry is doing, in partnership with the UNDP and ESCWA, to produce a comprehensive development project for the city.

On Jan. 10 of last year we presented the results of the study on urban poverty in Tripoli, Social Affairs Ministry, in cooperation with Escwa and UNDP, 2015.

Chronic marginalization
There is a general conviction among Tripoli residents, as well as those in North Lebanon and Akkar, that they are the victims of chronic neglect going back decades. This general sentiment is based on firm facts that have been verified by studies, and the available data at the national and local level. There is also a consensus on the development gap on various levels between national averages and indicators in peripheral area in general, and especially Akkar, Dinnieh and Tripoli, even though it is Lebanon’s second city.

We can sum this up as follows:
- The percentage of poor families in Tripoli, based on national criteria, reached 51 percent in 2011, according to the national poverty income index (the last time it was calculated nationally in 2005 it stood at 28 percent), and 40 percent according to the cost-of-living index (the last time it was calculated nationally in 2005 it stood at 30 percent). Meanwhile, the percentage of families who were eligible to benefit from poor family program assistance in Lebanon stood at 23 percent compared to 8 percent nationally, and the project was designed on this basis.
- Secondly, the urban deprivation index (designed recently and applied in Tripoli in 2011) stood at 57 percent of families and reached 87 percent in Bab al-Tabbaneh – Swaiqa, while the percentage of economically-deprived families – according to the same index – stood at 77 percent and reached 95 percent in the neighborhoods mentioned above.
- Thirdly, North Lebanon and Akkar’s share of total bank credit was only 4 percent (the same as other peripheral governorates) and this rate has remained steady for decades, while also demonstrating the private sector’s reluctance to invest in these areas.
- Fourthly, the percentage of families covered by health insurance in Tripoli is no higher than 24 percent while it’s approximately half nation-wide. In addition, the governorates of North Lebanon and Akkar record the highest rates of fertility and infant and mother mortality rates in the country.
- Fifthly, two-thirds of students are in public schools (compared to one-third nationally) while Tripoli has the highest dropout rate (16 percent) for those 13 and older; the rate rises to around half at high school, according to many indicators, and this percentage has risen since 2011.

A poor city with pockets of affluence
In addition to the repeated security confrontations since 1980, which have stopped recently after the implementation of a security plan for the city, Tripoli finds itself overrun by poverty and deprivation, to the degree that it should be considered a poor city in general terms with pockets of affluence; while the opposite would be assumed to be the case (a city with general affluence and pockets of poverty).

In addition, all of these difficult and complex conditions have been dealt with by the media, which has – deliberately or not – punished the city by constructing a stereotype about Tripoli, as a city “outside” Lebanon and outside the law. This has contributed to slowing down the economy as the main city of two governorates, North Lebanon and Akkar. It has also harmed the country’s economy and contributed to frustrating modest attempts to restore confidence, which aimed to encourage investors to invest now and in the future.

Study on urban poverty in Tripoli, Social Affairs Ministry, in cooperation with Escwa and UNDP, 2015.
Developing Tripoli is an opportunity for Lebanon

The continued marginalization and impoverishment of Tripoli constitutes a direct challenge to the security and stability of all of Lebanon. Likewise, embarking on the path of comprehensive development (and the north and Akkar) serves as a political and economic opportunity for Lebanon; it will build a true national capacity for sustainable economic development on the immediate and medium-to-distant future. This will help bring the Lebanese economy out of recessions, especially because of structural reasons, such as the following:

There is a spatial (or geographic) concentration of economic activity in Beirut and Mount Lebanon compared to other parts of the country, while opportunities for geographical investment and the two chief components of production – real estate investment costs and labor force – are present in Tripoli, the north and Akkar at a low cost compared to elsewhere (a comparative advantage).

Sector-based concentration also exists, especially in real estate, finance and tourism, such that sustainable and integrated economic growth in Tripoli, the north and Akkar, will offer opportunities for investment in new sectors. This growth will play a leading, pioneering role in meeting the needs of the national and regional labor market.

The need for comprehensive development plan

In Tripoli, it’s not about partial steps. We are facing a dynamic deterioration and collapse of the city’s development capital, as well as its economic, social, cultural and architectural capital. Our response should be to mobilize institutional, human, financial, economic, social and cultural resources to launch an alternative, positive dynamic. This effort should take the city from its path of marginalization and deterioration to one of development and progress, positioning at the heart of development activity on the national and regional level.

Therefore, what we’re currently trying to do isn’t about providing some services, or undertaking partial or sector-based interventions. It’s also not limited to treating the problems: it goes further than this, and is aimed at incentivizing the participatory process to produce a future-oriented vision for the city of Tripoli and its role. It also aims at launching a development path that is promising, instead of the path of frustrating marginalization. It’s a question of replacing one path with another, and not expanding the distributional modes, which currently prevails.

Much money has been spent according to this model, but the impact of these interventions has been localized and limited and they haven’t helped reduce rates of poverty and deprivation. A comparison of the current spread of poverty with that of a 2001 study by (Hermendian) shows that all of the areas of poverty at the time remain so today and new areas have been added. In simple terms this means that the former (and present) intervention did not succeed in halting the course of impoverishment and marginalization, and a new course is needed.

The alternative approach is based on the idea of linkages and complementarities in an organic way between policies and socio-economic interventions, in addition to integration with other dimensions. What we need is to design wide-scale social interventions that sufficiently reach wide numbers and swathes of people, so that there’s truly an impact on the whole city. We should go beyond the distributional mode of empowerment and move toward launching a social dynamism that contributes to social cohesion characterized by openness to the widest degree and also help encourage promising social movements.

Three paths

In line with a comprehensive approach and the necessity of linking paths, the major objectives of the urban development strategy that should be generated are the following:

1-On the political-institutional level: guarantee security and stability since they are necessary pre-conditions for any development plan for the city.

2-On the economic and socio-economic levels: embark on urban economic dynamism that merges and integrates with the national economy. This should be based on creating job opportunities (especially for young people) that have a strong social content and help fight poverty and disparity. It should also be in tandem with comprehensive, sector-based social intervention, and aided by this dynamism, so that we can move toward more gender justice and equality, with the support by the participation of young people.

3-On the social-cultural level: the city’s image should be changed, while citizen-oriented values and behavior should be inculcated as part of coming up with an attractive image of the city for its people – so that they feel an affiliation to the city, one free of discrimination – and for all Lebanese. There should be attention paid to improving the level of education and skills of residents and particularly young people.

What else?

This partial presentation is no doubt insufficient. But we put it forward in order to gauge what Tripolitians think, and in the coming weeks we will be organizing large-scale meetings to discuss these ideas, and the ideas of people whose opinions should be respected in drafting plans for the present and future of the city, which belongs to all of us.

It’s a beginning, and we hope to see you soon.

Study on urban poverty in Tripoli, Social Affairs Ministry, in cooperation with Escowa and UNDP, 2015.
Jabal Mohsen, caught between death and deprivation

Rania Hamzeh

To begin with, Jabal Mohsen can’t be separated from Bab al-Tabbaheh. In state records they form a single entity, while they also act as a single arena when it comes to the battles that are waged as part of regional and international political agendas. While it’s true that the war is receding, it leaves its mark — in the form of fire, destruction and blood — on the homes of the innocent and the impoverished, although such matters rarely concern the militia leaders and the merchants of death.

When you say “Jabal Mohsen” you are waging the war of ideas and political positions; there is a picture of Bashar Assad at the entrance to the neighborhood and the word “Alawite” appears in people’s civil records. There are memories of a war that has taken hundred of people’s lives since 1975 and the many pre-determined stances which differ from one person to another, depending on his or her political affiliation and general positions. But what is missing the most in people’s minds, amid the many theories and speculation, is that the people of the “Jabal” are people of flesh and blood. They are in need of those who will give them peace and provide the necessary welfare to them, so that they can cling to life.

If you don’t know Jabal Mohsen, there’s a story that’s told by the local mukhtar, Youssef Houri, about a leading Sunni merchant who used to own olive orchards located on the Jabal today. When the Civil War broke out the areas were divided and the sects formed their own cantons, the Alawites settled in Jabal Mohsen while the landowner moved to the city, leaving his name behind. “We were one family,” Houri says. “We didn’t know the language of ‘Sunni’ and ‘Alawite.’ The mother of Dr. Mustafa Alloush is Alawite, and so is the maternal grandmother of Saad al-Masri, one of the leading fighters. Even today the area continues to have people of all sects.” Jadid, Qibbeh, Muhajirin Street, Saydeh, and American... people don’t hear about these neighborhoods unless someone is killed in a battle there. But no one cares about entering their alleyways and discovering what is worse than the killing. When you walk in the alleyways of these neighborhoods at first you feel as if you’ve entered a cemetery; as for the people who live there, they’re like “refugees in their own country.” The walls are decrepid and the doors cracked, and no light enters. Mattresses are set down on concrete for people who can’t pay for a bed.

“A large segment of the population is below the poverty line,” Houri says. “There are no jobs or top government posts available for Alawites. We have two MPs in Parliament, but they don’t come here. I doubt the current MPs know the area or care about the place. The only solution for most families is for their sons to go into the army, so that they can provide for their families.”

Discussing the economic situation in the area automatically raises the issue of the impact of repeated wars on the socio-economic situation of residents. The husband of Nadine (not her real name) was sniped at during one of the battles and partially paralyzed, and the tragedy was reflected on the family’s life. The children abandoned their dream of continuing their studies; the home where they live is being paid for on installment, but they are unable to keep up with the payments. They might lose the house while the larger struggle involves securing a livelihood for a sick father and five children on a salary that’s no higher than LL 1 million (roughly $650) a month. Ranim had planned to complete her university studies. But when she was beaten up at the campus because she was an Alawite, her father forbade her from returning, out of fear. Then he was killed for the same reason; she became the breadwinner for the home. Spurred by these tragedies and the neediness of this area, a number of families began to collect donations for the needy and formed the Beit al-Hikmeh association, which provides, with help from the International Red Cross, daily meals and clothing to around 200 families and sometimes a mattress. “The government should conduct a survey of the extent of deprivation and it shouldn’t act as if the MPs of the area are responsible (for its welfare). We are Lebanese and have been here for generations, and we deserve what others get,” he says.

Thus, the term “deprivation” is bound up with the history of Jabal Mohsen and in a country where sects divide up the government like a cake, there remain those who are outside this formula, and in fact are merely a tool for the settling of scores. Those who want salvation resort to changing their sect, while those who retain their affiliation have built their homes on the possibility of death, whose arrival date remains unknown.
Wael didn’t expect to find a role model where he lived, but he got to know one of the militia leaders, who fought in one of the many battles that tore apart Wael’s childhood. This leader’s name is Masri, and he’s the one who introduced Wael to his own nickname, “Abu Faour,” which has nothing to do with the recent media spotlight on the minister bearing the same name. Wael says he picked up his nickname six years ago, when he was doing carpentry work in the office of Walid Jumblatt in the city of Tripoli. One of the people there called him Abu Faour, because his first name is Wael. The nickname carried over to his home neighborhood in Tripoli. His friends wrote the name in big letters on a wall in Syria Street, which had yet to be painted over in blue and white after the fighting ended. “He just casually went into effect,” Wael says.

Wael’s relationship with wood goes back to an early age. When he would walk to school in Zahrieh he would watch the many carpenters in the area and observe how they make doors and furniture out of wood. “These few minutes were my only outlet to the outside world because my mother prevented me from going into the street,” Wael says. His family finally gave in and allowed him to work as an apprentice to the carpenters during the summer months. During the first summer, the 12-year-old made LL10,000 a week. He was very happy with the sum and didn’t shy from the tasks assigned to him. He would stack up the wood and sweep up, while always watching the workers’ hands very closely. “I learned half of the trade in three months,” he says.

His wage rose to LL25,000 a week and he would give the money to his mother out of love. Even though Wael was good at what he did, he continued to work part-time. He’s an exception because that gap in Bab al-Tabbaneh, who drop out of school to work in carpentry, metalwork, or as delivery boys at grocery stores. He would save his wages for something unknown in his future, and he didn’t like to spend the money unless it was necessary. He had to put his money away from relying on this money even though they didn’t have many breadwinners; his father drove a taxi to raise his five siblings, while his mother was a housewife. Wael also fell in love at an early age. He describes his transitory relationships with girls as something that “happens with every guy my age,” until he met Fatima by chance at Mina.

“I was 17, and they did everything they could to keep me away from her,” Wael says. The situation represented another challenge, namely for Wael to become “an important person,” as his friend put it. “I’ve been married,” he promised himself, “even if I have only one day left to live.”

This disappointment with marriage coincided with the wedding of his brother, whom his parents struggled to help rent and furnish a home. “I insisted on my financial independence,” Wael says. In the summer of 2011 Wael wasn’t the only one feeling this. But all of Bab al-Tabbaneh was wrapped in black as the prayers were heard from mosques, announcing the death of Khodr Masri, a militia leader who died of his wounds sustained in a clash with the authorities.

“When they told me that he died, I was busy planning to make banners expressing the hope that he would recover,” Wael says. “I asked the sign painter to replace it with eulogies. It’s the last thing I remember before I fainted.” In answer to a question, he says that Khaled al-Masri was a leader in every sense of the word. “Just by giving us a look, he knew everything we were thinking. He was smart, and generous. He would give all of his money to a beggar or someone poor, and then turn around and leave, without anything left in his pockets.” At the beginning of the new school year Wael figured out how to invest his savings. He didn’t pass the Lebanese University entrance test, so he went to the Lebanese International University to study interior design. He spent all of his money on helping his father and didn’t have enough funds when the second year approached. His friend told him about a new institution that was giving scholarships to volunteers from Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. This tiny bit of information spurred him to find out whether the news was true. After appearing before an examination committee he became one of the first batch of volunteers at the Rawad Development association. Rawad is a regional, non-profit group that works with communities trying to overcome marginalization in Jordan, Egypt, Palestine and recently Lebanon, trying to address this problem through voluntary educational and youth-oriented programs. Unlike the majority of groups and associations active in Tripoli, Rawad is politically neutral and is devoted to civil, secular efforts, as a means to foster openness to various groups in the community. It seeks to build a nucleus of young people to change the existing situation. It focuses on material support offered by business entrepreneurs who believe in supporting the spirit of initiative in order to promote the community and to overcome the lack of social equality in the Arab world. As a necessary condition to receive the scholarship, Wael volunteered — and he’s still a volunteer — in carrying out one of the programs of Rawad during specific times each week along with more than 100 volunteers from Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh. In addition, there are activities for cultural enrichment and developing practical skills that mainly take place in a building on Syria Street, which links the two areas.

Wael has widened his social circle at university and at Rawad. He has met another group from the neighborhood. He takes in his time in describing the group as he searches for the precise words. He suffices by saying they are a group of normal guys, who meet with a Salafist sheikh from Bab al-Tabbaneh who had just come back from Australia. Abu Faour allowed him to perform the call to prayer in the Abdullah bin Masoud mosque. This wasn’t difficult, as he’s been trained at the mosque since he was 15. He began his service at the mosque at the age of 15, bringing him together with another local militia leader. This was “brother” Khodr, whose death devastated him. At this time, the situation in Bab al-Tabbaneh was merely a truce between two battles. He became enthusiastic about the fighting, especially since the new “leader” liked him and singled him out from the others, who would wink when he rode behind him on a motorcycle. He quickly trusted him and made him come up with the furniture and carpentry for his entire apartment. “Do whatever you want,” he told him. Wael has only emotional justifications for his entry into this group. He remembers well the high point of his involvement, and he talks about this incident as he plays with a small piece of cardboard in his hands. It was the next to the last battle, when he went to the area.

“I bunkered down with some young guys in a fortified position, along with a rifle I bought with my own money. It was quiet until the other side saw an IED explosion; they said it left a crater. The Jabal Mohsen area started firing bullets in our direction. I immediately fled from there and went to the battle, but I’m completely sure that I suddenly realized that all the fighting around me was a lie. And I was about to be killed, for the cheapest price possible.”

The developments of the last six years have failed to eliminate Wael’s desire to enhance his own vocational development. He first began by contracting his own carpentry works, which he does at a workshop.

He has established a small group of people specialized in electrical works, aluminum and plumbing. They take on the entire job of getting an apartment ready at a lower price and more quickly. Wael quickly suggested that a friend join him, after two years, as a real estate agent. “I bought land and have taken on 25 projects. I study the cost, the profit, the investment percentage and consult middlemen,” he says. Wael currently runs a group centered along with the equipment. The workers make everything by hand but he insists on assembling things himself, or performing the “finishing work,” at the customer’s home. He has taken on projects for apartments for the head of the faculty and the professors and he describes his experience at Rawad as a “gift from the heavens.”

“Some training and advice sessions supported my sense of taking the initiative. I wasn’t afraid to say to Rawad or my projects, but with carefully-studied steps,” he says. Wael talks about his accomplishments and ambitions to wait for this energy to dissipate but it only gets stronger. He asks, smiling, “When was the Prophet’s birthday?” He links this day to the day of his engagement to Fatima. Thus, several years later, this slight-of-stature boy years surprised his parents, who were visiting Lebanon, when he showed up as “Ustaz Wael,” as his acquaintances at the airports and restaurants and in the area call him. “They realized that I could afford a home and a family. Her mother said to me, ‘I won’t leave Lebanon until you’re wearing an engagement ring.’”

Wael stares for a bit before he continues. “I insist on continuing my university studies because number one, it gave me the moral support. When you’re a graduate, everything changes in the way people look at you. When I was an army charity, they asked me as an engineer, and this removes the accusation that I’m from Bab al-Tabbaneh.”

Despite everything or perhaps because of everything, Wael’s family recently moved to Mina.

“My parents don’t want to worry,” he says. But the son still goes every day to his neighborhood, to Rawad, the workshop and his friends. “I go back to Mina just to sleep.”

What angers Wael the most are the eyes of customers uneasy because of his boyish looks and slight frame. They ask if he can really be the workshop foreman they spoke to on the phone. He quickly offers them his portfolio containing his most important works and he asks them not to be too quick to judge his appearance. “Our society doesn’t trust young people. But I hope that all young people try to experience this different life and not depend on their parents.”

Bab al-Tabbaneh is made up of a larger society that excessively discriminates its sons, like Wael, who is very aware of his home neighborhood’s particular characteristics. Bab al-Tabbaneh has become used to humiliation, and people are satisfied with this. If young people leave the circles they’re used to and work with their hands so that they can come to understand their own value, things would be much better.”
Tripoli needs love

Salim al-Lawzi

Opinions differ when it comes to the activities of civil society in Tripoli. One group of people maintains that civil society associations work overtime to improve the general situation in the city, due to the absence of state institutions and local figures, but the efforts are wasted because of poor organization, with the exception of those committed to their causes. Another group says that these associations raise money but don’t spend it, and thus fail to generate any significant changes in the situation. A third group, meanwhile, believes that the word “civil” means civil marriage and rejects these associations in their entirety, without realizing that these groups do not necessarily work for the enactment of civil marriage, especially in a city such as Tripoli.

Fine, then let’s put things in their proper perspective. In the course of lengthy discussions with a large number of Tripoli activists, all of them noted their disapproval of the work mechanisms of the city’s civil society groups. And because this article tries to highlight the importance of civil society, I’ll begin with the associations whose work was saluted because they act based on what they want to accomplish, and they do this openly.

These associations target groups they want to work with in sound fashion and organize their efforts in a way that suits everyone, in order to promptly accomplish their goals and achieve true change. One example of this is the activity undertaken by Rawad Development, which targeted residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen; the association undertook the necessary training, assistance and educational workshops and other activities to help people distance themselves from the climate of ideological and sectarian tension that has spread over this area. Moreover, we shouldn’t forget what the campaign for a weapons-free Tripoli contributed in this regard – it put forward a vision of Tripoli that its residents were accustomed to, free of the arms that have exhausted and overburdened the people and their city.

One of the activists uses the word “bazaar” to describe the work of a certain association, as the group’s director used it to employ his family members; he persistently employs the largest number of people possible, for personal gain. The association’s work is restricted to vague activities that involve no social, developmental or even entertainment value for the city. Some activists maintained that the reason for the problems faced by these associations lies in poor management and abundant funding; Tripoli is fertile ground for parties who shower the area in money but the way in which it’s spent offers no benefits to local residents. Activities are chaotic, they are based on favoritism, and they are a waste of time.

Tripoli, which is home to areas in which people live under the poverty line, has clearly-defined needs. People are known for taking up the professions of their ancestors, from soap-making to wicker furniture, copper items, wool, local foods, weaving and textiles. Job opportunities are needed and so are healthy marketing outlets, as these sectors are now in recession year-round, especially since the fighting in the area has isolated it from its surroundings. People in neighboring cities are afraid of Tripoli; these people used to come here to purchase goods at low prices, something which the city became well-known for. According to unofficial statistics unemployment rates in Tripoli are very high, and are both seasonal and structural. In addition to poverty there is an elevated school dropout rate, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Inflation and the high cost of living prompt many families, in a bid to secure their minimum level of requirements, to save money by taking their children out of school and having them earn a living.

Tripoli certainly doesn’t need a marathon to spur development, or workshops on how to manage income that people generally don’t have in the first place, as debts eat away at their pocketbooks. The city requires fair development to compensate for the lack of an active municipality, as its work is restricted to opening drainage canals in the winter, banning a billboard advertisement, or imposing its opinion on a given issue. Tripoli needs life, a new life, to return it to its former vitality. It requires associations that can competently utilize the skills of residents who hurry to renovate after every terrorist explosion.

In short, Tripoli needs love.
The Abu Ali river: sentenced to death

Saffouh Munajjed

When the Mamluk Sultan Qalawoon liberated Tripoli from the Crusaders in 1289 and took control of the city, he ordered that it be razed. The city had been built by the Phoenicians in the 3rd millennium B.C. on the Mediterranean, as a capital of the Phoenician cities: Sidon, Tyre and Arwad. Qalawoon ordered that a new city built in the interior, on the banks of the Abu Ali river some three kilometers from the shore, to ensure its protection from maritime invaders.

The Abu Ali river is in fact the Qadisha river, whose source lies in the mountains of the Cedars and takes its name from the Holy Valley that lies below. The river’s newer name appears when it enters Tripoli and empties into the sea; it might have been named after one of the leaders of the Banu Ammar tribe who ruled Tripoli at the end of the 10th century.

When the Mamluks oversaw the construction of Tripoli they respected the same urban planning model that they used in building Cairo. On the banks of the river, they constructed markets specialized in certain goods, and in doing so ensured that different types of products were not mixed – gold, perfume, copper, coal, meat, carpentry, clothing, home furniture and shoes were all separated. The outlines of some of these markets remain visible today.

Overlooking these markets are various types of buildings, such as mosques, while nearby are public fountains, tekkiyehs and schools, where religion, languages and mathematics were taught. Also close by are public baths, and khans in which travelers and animals stayed, along with other types of infrastructure.

While these markets were built along generally straight lines the buildings and residential neighborhoods that arose behind them are narrow alleys, of around a meter or two in width. They were built crookedly, to prevent military forces from entering. Also, the doors to residences were not constructed facing each other, which prevented neighbors from seeing inside; in addition, the doors were low, to prevent mounted soldiers from entering.

Tripoli is considered the Mamluk world’s “second city” after Cairo; its defensive features were enhanced by the construction of seven gates, which would be locked at sunset until dawn the following day. The buildings were close by, and only one or two stories high. The souks were covered with wooden panels and it was possible to walk from one end of the city to the other while remaining under a roof the entire time.

The Abu Ali river provided Tripolitians with their drinking water and washing needs; the river was also used to turn stone mills. On its banks, the modern society of Tripoli took shape in its early form. The souk was considered a place for men par excellence, while the home was for women. This was applied to coffee shops that sprung up at the corners of some souks and neighborhoods; the patrons were all men, both young and old. It was a strange sight when a woman would enter, inquiring about her husband or brother. She would stand outside, a veil covering her entire face, and ask a passer-by to enter and inquire whether so-and-so was inside and request that he step outside. It was a very embarrassing moment for a man, in front of the coffee shop patrons, because speaking to women in the street was frowned upon.

The public baths had a different schedule. In the mornings they were restricted to female visitors while in the afternoons and the evenings they received only male patrons, young and old. This division was respected when theaters and cinemas were established at the beginning of the 20th century. There were areas allocated for families, far away from the eyes of men.

The Abu Ali river was a place for the city’s residents to forget their worries, as they would frequent certain places with their families. One was Marjeh, where the river entered the city; another was Burj Ras al-Nahr at its mouth. People would spend holidays there and go on picnics during the month of Ramadan. They would bring their food and beverages with them and their water pipes, grilling food and engaging in song.

The river would occasionally “rebel” – by overflowing its banks from time to time, possibly around once every decade. The last instance of this was in 1955 after a rainy night, when it flooded bridges after dirt and mud had clogged drainage systems. The souks and buildings were flooded, resulting in the deaths of 120 people; 60 homes and 500 stores were destroyed.

In the wake of the civil strife of 1958, the Lebanese government embarked on carrying out the Abu Ali River Project, which required building a road, 60 meters wide, along the course of the river. As a part of this project, buildings on the Abi Samra and Qibbeh hills overlooking the river were razed, which ruined the beautiful sight of these buildings rising gradually from the banks of the river. In addition, the project saw the destruction of entire souks in neighborhoods located far away from the course of the river, such as the Nahhasin (coppersmiths’) souk.

At the time, it was said the “flood” was exploited by some in order to build roads and prevent any protests in the Old City quarters, even though dozens of archeological and heritage sites that distinguished the Old City were destroyed in the process.

Making things worse was the region’s further disfigurement by the so-called “Cultural Heritage” project, whose construction works did away with the community that had been in place on the banks of the Abu Ali River, dating from the establishment of Tripoli. Thanks to this project, the geographical scope of the river was saddled with a host of problems in a bid to deal it a death blow, and turn it into merely a closed canal. Perhaps the most painful question is the following: was it really necessary to cover the river, due to aesthetic considerations?
Foutoun Raad

It is said that a person doesn’t have one soul but many, which accumulate over time; we gather them in our bodies, which become overflowing prisons, where they spend their days in a search for salvation. Meanwhile, we move around in a search for an outlet for them, fearing that we will be suffocated by their sorrow.

Perhaps all of these souls will find an outlet for themselves in Tripoli, where a visitor may leave behind one of these souls in a suitable place and when he leaves, maybe some of this weight will be removed.

The recent dual suicide bombings in Jabal Mohsen, which targeted the Omran and Majzoub cafés, took with them an uncountable number of souls, especially since young men from all of Tripoli including Bab al-Tabbaneh would go to these cafés. The Omran café is the oldest in Jabal Mohsen, and its patrons say it has the best water pipe. The number of patrons was on the rise after the reconciliation between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh.

These two neighborhoods have witnessed repeated clashes, and people who don’t know Tripoli well began to hesitate to visit the city. In reality, even at the height of the battles life would continue practically as usual throughout the city. The sounds of rockets and bullets would drown out the bubbling of water pipes, but even so, people would try to ignore the death that was taking place around them; this death became even uglier when it became a normal occurrence. For example, Damm wa Farz street used to be known for its activity throughout the day and night. Up to the end of the 1980s the area was a large expanse of orchards and along its edges, restaurants and cafés then sprung up like wildfire from the Salam to the Nini roundabouts. But not everyone from Tripoli patronized this area, because of the high prices, and the monotony of the décor. This décor was not the concern of Abu Mashur’s tiny establishment, on the side of the Salam roundabout, in the direction of Beirut. Residents of Tripoli could get a cup of espresso or an instant coffee for a low price, before heading to work outside the city.

The cafés and restaurants of Damm wa Farz basked in the glow of Mina Street, or what young men from the city referred to as their Lover’s Lane – its heyday was in the 1990s and the first years of the previous decade. When students would finish their day they would head to these cafés, to mix with older patrons or monopolize each other’s other time, while other, quiet ones would study there.

In the direction of Mina, which is outside Tripoli, the sea makes people who frequent the area languid. The cafés of fishermen are full of the smell of their weariness and their unending tales. A fisherman tells stories about his imagined heroic exploits and is aware that his listener might not believe him. Nonetheless, the listener enjoys the suspenseful telling of the tale and the teller’s bright eyes, which highlight his dark skin.

In the narrow alleyways of Mina where cars are not allowed, there is Minot street. It used to be noisy, home to around 17 bars and nightclubs, in addition to six restaurants that served alcohol. Today there is only single restaurant that serves alcohol, and around half a dozen nightlife establishments. The owners closed their doors for either personal reasons or because they weren’t making money, or because of a deliberate policy of chasing them away, which was adopted at a particular point in time. Despite everything, Mina has preserved its down-to-earth spirit, one that can be felt in the Old City souks of Tripoli and Azmi street. Pinky’s café is located at the Azmi Street traffic light and it continues to receive the same patrons – journalists, artists, former and current political party members. They haven’t changed their habits of spending the mornings there and they’ve been doing this for the past 30 years. Some of them have begun to turn gray-haired, while others dye their hair regularly. For them, nothing can replace a newspaper and a cup of Turkish coffee, which give them the fuel for heated discussions.

Next to Pinky is Tal, or the downtown area, containing the essence of this oppressed city. The area gave its name to a popular café, the “Upper Tal,” while it also is home to Fahim café, which is said to be the second oldest in the Middle East. There you can hear the laughter of elderly men gathered around lively card tables, oblivious to the world outside. From Fahim to Musa to Bab al-Raml, a café that never sleeps. During Ramadan it becomes to one of the best places to spend the night, up to the dawn, as the smell of Tripoli’s signature kaak is the most delicious food to have during suhur.
The umbilical cord between Mont Michel & Qibbet al-Nasr

Talal Khawaja

Elites in Tripoli have questioned the wisdom in selecting Mont Michel, adjacent to the neighborhood of Bahsas, at the entrance to Koura, as a site for the new Lebanese University campus because it will require moving LU branches from Qibbeh.

The area was selected as a result of discussions between the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, then-President Emile Lahoud and a large follow-up committee that represents academics and unions and associations. The committee was formed as a result of the protest by the Science Faculty, which led to re-launching the unified LU project, a source of support for civil society in the north. Meetings, seminars and conferences were held and saw unity on the part of all currents and leading figures from Tripoli, despite the considerable divisions among them. While some tried to exploit the accomplishments for their own particular groups, the Follow-up Committee managed to overcome all of the problems, including the assassinations that have rocked the city, and the loss of the project’s chief supporter. Meanwhile, the entire country and particularly Tripoli entered a phase of violence and chaos.

The selection of Mont Michel was meant to restore confidence to people in the north from all persuasions - including the confidence of Tripolitians as well - in LU’s North Lebanon branches, which had become divided by sect to a great degree. While there have been some socio-economic repercussions for Qibbeh, I’d like to make the following observations:

One: The LU branches, which are dislocated, do not have a wide economic impact. A number of small “plastic chair” cafés and establishments for photocopying and lamination and stationery have been established.

Two: The dispersed LU faculties in Qibbeh can’t be turned into a unified campus that creates a different climate, which leads to effective socio-economic change.

Three: The building of a Mont Michel campus makes access from all of North Lebanon’s qadas easier, and this includes Jbeil in Mount Lebanon. This will have positive, unifying socio-economic repercussions for Tripoli and the north in general, especially if a research and technology center is built. Tripoli will benefit from its maritime location, to help soft tech companies especially if a research and technology center is built. Tripoli will benefit from its maritime location, to help soft tech companies.

We barely began to see some achievements with Mont Michel, such as transferring ownership of the location and expanding it through additional expropriations, and the completion of studies on the eight faculties in the spring of 2004, before the idea of Beaux-Arts emerged. This began as a project to renovate the dilapidated wall of the Science Faculty’s in Qibbeh and execute murals, in a salute to a new faculty and to the region, especially as it occupies the location that was the center for the French Army, then the Pere Blanc vocational school. Syrian forces then occupied it when they first came, after 1976. Afterward, the Science Faculty gradually took over the area.

At the beginning of the Civil War the edges of this region were front line areas; some of this aspect has reappeared with the rising problems between Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. The wall attracted leading painters and sculptors from Lebanon and abroad. They worked for years on completing this special structure, while a statue commemorating Beaux-Arts was erected.

The Beaux-Arts movement launched a considerable wave of modernization and art in the city, especially after the assassination of Hariri and the emergence of the Cedar Revolution. The campaign renovated the Science Faculty and adjacent buildings and it also influenced The Tripoli Art Institute and the Letters and Law complex. The owners of cafes upgraded their establishments to bring them in to line with the surrounding street, which took on a new look thanks to the Beaux-Arts movement. We now raise the issue of transforming the Science Faculty buildings into a center for development and culture, which will embraces a region that continues to exhibit diversity, and characterizes people from the north to a large extent. This will only take place with cooperation between the French, the owners of the site, and perhaps the U.N., not to speak of the municipality, the university and many state and civil bodies.

The street contains important institutions and is a main artery in the city, which in practical terms has become many cities in the recent, difficult years. This means that the street can play a role in gathering all sides together, and especially the impoverished, as well as enhancing linkages with some neighboring qadas.

The impact of the Beaux-Arts movement hasn’t only affected Qibbeh; it has spread to Tripoli and elsewhere in the north, such that “each street has its wall, and each village has its Beaux-Arts.” In addition, Beaux-Arts has become a civil association and spread to various areas. It has cooperated with a diverse set of institutions, associations and activists from civil society, to confront violence and demand security stability and economic and development projects, especially those that lead to job creation.

“ The selection of Mont Michel was meant to restore confidence to people in the north from all persuasions - including the confidence of Tripolitians as well - in LU’s North Lebanon branches, which had become divided by sect to a great degree. While there have been some socio-economic repercussions for Qibbeh, I’d like to make the following observations ”
No to neglect and passivity

Rashid Derbas
Social Affairs Minister

I used these two terms, neglect and passivity, to describe the situation in Tripoli during a speech I gave at the launch of the study on urban poverty at the Chamber of Commerce in January 2014. It wasn’t an off-the-cuff observation; the terms weren’t an emotional expression. I have experienced the depth of the city’s problems for decades, as a citizen and public activist in the political, social and legal-vocational spheres, before I took up my duties in the government. My latest post hasn’t changed my previous convictions; rather, it has confirmed the view I formed over past decades.

The city of Tripoli, and along with it the governorate of North Lebanon-Akkar, has suffered from chronic marginalization and deprivation. This has reduced the area’s weight in national politics compared to other parts of the country. There has been a high degree of decentralization, since Independence, in political life, the bureaucracy, the economy and culture in Lebanon. This is the prime reason for the accumulating, chronic problems that the city suffers from today. To this I may add that Tripoli, since the 1980s, has become an arena for armed confrontations and security tension, playing out over a number of stages. The parties involved have changed over time, but the arena, the combatants and the victims all remain the same.

This is the first aspect of the problem related to neglect, but the picture isn’t complete unless we note the second, complementary aspect. This is represented by the striking passivity of the city’s vital forces, leaders and figures, and even its citizens, in confronting this abnormal state of affairs. Tripoli appears to have lost its internal vitality and its ability to advocate vocally for its rights. It seems unable to draw on the hopeful experiences of past decades, when it avoided the vacuum that resulted from the absence of the state and its institutions in the most difficult periods of the Civil War. Never once, not even for a moment, did it move away from the state’s obligations.

This irony appears in the sharp contradiction between the situation on the ground and the mood of people who continue to cling strongly to the notion of the state, and the image of a city outside the state at the same time.

Tripolitians have been unable to organize effectively to express themselves and defend the interests of their city, for the sake of a sound cause and using sound means. This has generated a vacuum that has been filled by groups who have imposed certain types of thinking, behavior and objectives that have nothing to do with the essence of this city.

My presence today in a position of official responsibility renders me certain when it comes to these facts. It has revealed to me other details, ones that I would have been unable to see clearly without being in this post. My current position also renders me responsible to try and eliminate this deprivation or marginalization, or at least limit it.

My colleagues and I in the government have made great efforts to ensure that the city secure some of its rights, about which promises have been made for years. But this isn’t sufficient unless we together succeed in re-launching the dynamism of comprehensive development.

The Social Affairs Ministry and its partners are working to create an integrated development plan for the city of Tripoli and secure all of the conditions for its success, in order to enhance the city’s weight in national politics, secure all of the conditions for its success, and work on improving the quality of life for all residents.

The UNDP’s ‘Peace Building in Lebanon’ project aimed since 2007 at enhancing mutual understanding and social cohesion in a participatory approach with youth, educators, media, NGOs, municipal council members and multilateral local leaders.

In response to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and in order to alleviate the growing tensions in the country, the project works on enhancing the capacities of different society groups from local leaders to educators, media and civil society, on crisis management, peace building and conflict resolution.

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

A unified religious discourse

I urge the state to get the city’s free zone up and running. It should endorse the executive orders connected to establishing a board of directors for this facility. It should also work on seeing that the Port of Tripoli and the Rashid Karami Fairgrounds become active as well; these are vital economic facilities that will help stabilize the security plan, and promote development. I hope that the state lives up to its promises and takes in at least 1,000 young men into the military. The problem isn’t religion or sectarianism; it lies in poverty, unemployment and a lack of job opportunities. I also hope that the state will add Tripoli to its list of tourism sites because the city contains hundreds of archaeological landmarks.”

Mufti Malek Shaar

“If we go back to bygone days, we can recall the important role played by the ‘hangars’ at the entrance to Tripoli. These industrial facilities used to employ 10,000 workers – but look at them today, and how they’ve become a playground for rats. The same goes for the petroleum refinery. Young people today don’t have jobs and they wait for assistance from politicians who are pushing them into battle, instead of investing money in development projects.”

Bishop George Abu Jaoudeh

“In our meetings with religious figures we always stress the two fundamental points. One is to have security; a prospering economy is directly linked to stability and it requires anti-corruption efforts. The impoverished people of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh can come together with the mere disappearance of the foreign hands stoking extremism among them. The scenes of extremism and violence that we’re seeing today have nothing to do with Islam.”

Bishop Efram Kiriyakos

“Tripoli is a city whose history, authenticity and Arabism should be preserved. We ask our distinguished officials to work on achieving balanced development in the entire, deprived northern part of the country. They should work hard on the subject of National Education in the curriculum and encourage students to love their country and other sects, of all kinds. We stress the necessity of preserving our brave army and security forces and state institutions, so that we can serve as a model for peoples who grow, manufacture and make their living from this production. Dear residents of Tripoli, our country is the responsibility of the men and women of Lebanon. He who has no homeland has no dignity; God has created us as a single family, the Lebanese family.”

Sheikh Assad Assi

The UNDP’s ‘Peace Building in Lebanon’ project aimed since 2007 at enhancing mutual understanding and social cohesion in a participatory approach with youth, educators, media, NGOs, municipal council members and multilateral local leaders.

The project supports these groups in developing both medium- and long-term strategies for peace building. UNDP is the UN’s global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We work on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

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