

# The Peace Building in Lebanon



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## Special Edition

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The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists residing in Lebanon. They cover issues related to civil peace in addition to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, employing objective approaches that are free of hatred and misconceptions.

## News Supplement

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## Social Mix in Higher Education



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## Children are our Future

Every child has the right to an education. All parents – including myself – have one major wish: to give their kids a chance to learn, to play and to discover the world – and in the end to create a better future for them and for all of us.

Unfortunately still many children in Lebanon are not attending school and have no access to formal education. This remains a challenge for all of us – we owe it to the children and to the future of this country to improve this situation! The international community has therefore pledged to improve education worldwide. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments has the objective to «ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all».

In the past years we managed to bring more children into school and to improve the quality of education. In the past four years German support helped educate more than half a million kids in Lebanon. More than 150 Lebanese public schools were rehabilitated, with our support. Another EUR 50 million will be committed by Germany to the Lebanese Programme «Reaching All Children with Education» (RACE), bringing the total German contribution to this project up to EUR 250 million since 2014. This is an impressive joint achievement which we should be proud of.

Germany stands ready to support Lebanon – not only by contributing to the RACE programme but also by investing into the infrastructure of Lebanese public schools and by supporting the Ministry of Education in strengthening their capacities to ensure quality education for all.

**Dr. Georg Birgelen**

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Lebanon

## Education, a Weapon for Peace

As Lebanon marked the somber anniversary of the beginning of Lebanon's civil war, this supplement will examine and reflect on how education can sustain peace, and the deliberate policies and strategies that need to be put in place to maximize the positive effects of education on peace. Specifically, it will seek to tackle the complex issues that affect education across the Lebanese society – from administration to culture, from child protection to curricula. It will do so by focusing the various articles on and giving voice to the teachers, academics, those working in agencies supporting education, and most of all the children and students who long for learning. As we look to the issue of education and peace, three main elements have globally been highlighted in the last decade. The first area relates to concerns to the protection of children in situations of crisis, and the response to the negative impacts that conflicts will have on their education. A second focus prioritizes “do no harm” to ensure that education does not reinforce inequalities or fuel further divisions. A third area relates to education and peacebuilding more specifically, with a focus on reforms to the education sector itself and its contributions towards broader

political, economic and social transformations in post-conflict settings.

The focus of our supplement is both important and timely globally and in Lebanon, as further emphasis is being placed on the achievement of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The role of education in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals is clear, as outlined in Goal 4 with a focus on ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all, and imparting knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Just like for previous supplements, we hope that it will stimulate dialogue on collective approaches and strategies to strengthen the contribution of education towards long-term peace building in Lebanon, where an important alternative to violence lies in a vibrant classroom.

**Celine Moyroud**

UNDP Resident Representative a.i.

## A Forced Marriage

One of many legislative aberrations in our country has been to couple the salaries of private sector teachers with those of the public sector. Thus, under the pretext that at one time their Union did not have enough influence to negotiate the sector's demands, the government at the time decided to hitch their fate to the caravan of the public sector. Meanwhile, the great advantage of having their salaries raised regularly along with those of civil servants was dangled before private-sector teachers.

However, over the years, the number of civil servants has almost quadrupled. It thus became practically impossible to revise their remuneration without further widening the public deficit and increasing public debt, with all that comes with it in terms of threatening the stability of the national currency. The latest salary scale for civil service, arduously pushed through Parliament last year, has had serious repercussions on the government budget because of the huge gap between

appropriations and the amount that must actually be disbursed, hugely inflating the government's wage bill. Added to this is the recruitment of thousands of additional public servants, uncontrolled as much as it is illegal, as a result of corruption and political clout.

What has become of the teachers' rightful demand? The part that concerns them in the new salary grid is so vague that it ended up creating an inextricable muddle of the relationship between the private school administrations, employees and parent committees, with the looming specter of rising tuition fees.

The urgency today for private teachers is to regain their union's autonomy by quickly extricating themselves from this forced marriage with the public sector, to try as much as possible to recover their rights, away from government mismanagement and cobbled-up approach.

**Gaby Nasr**

Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

## Political Exploitation Hurts Refugees

There is talk of a new wave of refugees from Syria to Lebanon. This time the reasons are economic and related to living conditions. The Syrians are suffering from extreme poverty in many regions, especially areas remote from the capital Damascus, as they lack the basics following the destruction of infrastructure, factories and plants, and agricultural land.

The news—the expected inflow of refugees spread by politicians close to Damascus and not the opposite camp—does not serve, in any case, the interest of Syrian refugees coming to Lebanon, because it fuels the fears of the Lebanese of a new wave of refugees that the small country cannot accommodate at any level, whether in terms of living conditions, finance or security.

Some politicians manipulate the refugee card for political pressure. They accuse others of not wanting to send them back to their country, and then promote figures of new refugees as a means of fearmongering to push the other toward political options they may not want.

They take the refugee card out of its humanitarian context to the political, and instead of empathizing with refugees, who are not to blame, promote a state of hostility that balloons to the point of revenge and intimidation. And with it the hostility between the two peoples deepens.

Politicians should stop exploiting the issue of refugees to personal ends and for personal interests, upstaging one another and continuing to try to impose duties of obedience and loyalty. Leave the issue to those directly concerned to be dealt with within the legal and official frameworks adopted in similar cases. The Lebanese State, through a meeting of the Council of Ministers, should set its policy and convey it to the world in a unified letter and project to exert pressure effectively, instead of appearing divided internally, in a way that neither the State nor refugees-victims benefit.

**Ghassan Hajjar**

Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

# Peace Building Through Education: A Central Concern

Fadi Yarak\*

In the early part of the twenty-first century, new aspirations have emerged for sustainable peace, dignity and freedom in different societies and parts of the world, including Lebanon. Many questions have been raised about the fundamental role that education plays in achieving these aspirations, and in confronting the flood of violence, extremism, and cultural and religious intolerance sweeping over our societies, placing entire generations at risk of alienation. There are serious calls for rethinking the role of education, and the ensuing debate about the kind of education we need. What type of citizens do we want to shape? What are the skills that we want to reinforce? What are the best pedagogical approaches to adopt?

In light of this reality, education is undergoing major transformations globally. At the Ministry of Education, we are keeping up with these transformations by starting a discussion around a renewed educational vision for equitable and effective human development, through a curriculum development workshop that promotes respect for diversity, by combating discrimination and cultural domination, and by establishing education policies that contribute to improving teaching and learning outcomes. In addition, we are doing this by implementing programs and activities that promote a sense of responsibility toward others and develop twenty-first-century skills, with peacebuilding, dialogue, critical thinking, conflict resolution and communication skills being at their forefront. We believe in the importance of education as a key factor for sustainable peace, where all educational institutions play a role in instilling the values of coexistence and building a dutiful national identity, rather than simply passing on information and knowledge. Education has never been as important as it is today, as it plays the crucial role of advancing knowledge and behaviors required to foster a sense of citizenship, of reinforcing individual responsibility in achieving peace and fighting against hatred and violence. Education can help voices of moderation, solidarity, reason and respect prevail, as peace requires, more than ever before, dialogue between communities and greater intercultural engagement.

Henceforth, we need a new education for these new times and conditions. We need, more than before, an education that contributes to preparing our children and our youth to live in a diverse society in which others are respected regardless of their differences. Certainly, we are not aiming to cover one subject, but rather work on integrating and teaching this new education through direct and indirect activities, covering all subjects and educational activities inside and outside the school. Books alone are not sufficient to teach and spread human values; it is important to complement their work by providing leadership and practical application. Here, I applaud the role of the highly qualified teachers at the Ministry of Education, and highlight the efforts they have invested in promoting the system of values and noble principles.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education is expending all its efforts to build a culture of peace and non-violence in its institutions, taking inspiration from our cultural heritage rich in diversity, from our common ancestral human values rooted in our culture, and from the teachings of both the Islamic and Christian religions, and building on the laws and international conventions that Lebanon is committed to implementing.

\* Director General of Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education

# Teachers Syndicate: A Story of Legal Empowerment

Lawyer Ziyad Baroud\*

The Teachers Syndicate is not new on the scene in terms of issues, unionizing and fighting for its rights. Its leading role in the Union Coordination Committee and in other causes relating to rights is well established. I would like to shed light on two aspects that I have had to deal with by virtue of my position as lawyer and legal counsel to the syndicate since 1996: The fate of the salary scale and the mechanisms of legal empowerment within the framework of claiming the rights of teachers, given the impact of these two issues on social security.

## 1 - The salary scale:

It is known that the passing of the scale under Law 46/2017 was the result of a legal struggle led by the syndicate with the Union Coordination Committee over the years. The parliamentary elections of May 2018 may have been an incentive for certain political forces to see the scale through on the eve of the ballot. The law was enacted and became effective in accordance with legislative procedures. However, the issuing of the law was not necessarily accompanied by its implementation. Some school administrations objected and only applied it in part, while others refused to apply it altogether, and others still applied it literally and in full. In the context of a severe economic and social crisis, teachers were framed in confrontation with the administrations of some schools. The parents objected to the increase in tuition fees. Everyone unfortunately clashed and an official response was missing, leaving the partners in the educational process floundering in implementing a law enacted by legislators who failed to follow up on the process. This has led to, among many things, other problems before the Compensation Fund for private school teaching staff, which has slowed down the settling of end-of-service compensations and pensions. All this has threatened social security as it affects large segments of society, particularly teachers and parents, depriving the former of rights owed to them as recognized by the law and imposing on the latter additional burdens. Not to mention that some schools (especially in rural areas) already suffer from accumulated deficit.

In the absence of a decision by competent officials, there is growing concern today regarding potential re-examination of the rights recognized by the law already in effect—rights granted by some schools and obtained by those eligible. Legislative stability is a cornerstone of social stability. There should be no improvisation in legislation, especially since there are already available solutions that may allow for a sustainable response, provided that the State assumes some of its responsibility with regard to basic education that has been compulsory since 2011.

## 2 - Legal empowerment:

Meanwhile, the Teachers Syndicate continues to seek the empowerment of teachers, as it has done since the mid-1990s. In addition to the work of its executive board and its branches in the regions, the syndicate offers free legal advice on a weekly basis. It also conducts correspondence with the relevant

official bodies and takes legal proceedings in matters of principle. It is perhaps the only syndicate of its size in Lebanon that offers this type of services to its members free of charge. Experience has shown that supporting teachers through legal empowerment contributes significantly to securing their rights and preventing loss of such rights due to ignorance of the law. In the same context, the office of the legal counselor of the syndicate issued booklets and books on:

- «The Rights of Teachers in Questions and Answers», a booklet that includes a simplification of knowledge about rights.

- «The Rights of Teachers in Legislation», which is a collection and compilation of various laws and regulations relating to teaching staff in private schools. It has been issued in two editions to date.

- «Dismissal from Service and the Rights of Teachers», a book on the various aspects of dismissal from service with jurisprudence references and case law. It has been issued in three editions to date.

- A number of articles and comments on judicial rulings concerning teachers, especially in the journal «Al Adl» (Justice) issued by the Beirut Bar Association.

In all of the above, the syndicate plays a very important role in raising awareness and assisting teachers, who form an educated group in society so that they are able to communicate with the school administrations in a way that lives up to the educational space they share with them.

In the end, despite the noise, confrontations, strikes and anger rounds that it brings at times, it is clear that the syndical experience also raises the level of debate and reinforcement of rights, pushing towards dialogue with partners in the educational process: from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Parliamentary Education Committee to unions of educational institutions, school administrations and parent committees.

This is the way toward achieving social security. Not only because of the number of stakeholders in the educational issue, but especially because of what this issue means for the future of Lebanon. Here people are edified and here every one learns the meaning of rights and the meaning of respecting them. And from here will emerge the future leader of the country. Here real development begins and is carried on sustainably...

\*Appeals lawyer, Lecturer at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), Former Minister of Interior and Legal Counselor to the Teachers Syndicate of Lebanon

# The Role of Educational Curricula in Peace Building in Lebanon

Dr. Nada Ouweijane \*

Today, we face a chasm between two unequal worlds: one struggling for growth and catching up with rapid developments, and the other rushing to use its advanced knowledge to control the less fortunate. This is a grim description of a world in crisis, which will inevitably result in more violence, conflict, war, displacement and migration. Since its independence, Lebanon has been living in a state of instability that has fluctuated between dormant violence, open conflict and declared war, and the consequences of migration, displacement and the threat of collapse. A critical reality and a race into the unknown prompt reflection on peace building through education, in particular official education, that is, the current curricula (1997) and the curricula that the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) is developing.

First, let us examine the many problems: Does peace education mean not going into conflicts? Is it an education to yield and surrender? Or does it mean bringing up generations living in a hypothetical peaceful state, which later collide with the reality of conflicts in the world? Is peace education sufficient to build peace?

## Peace building in Lebanon

Peace can be understood as the absence of war and conflict; human and social well-being, and reconciliation with oneself; and respect for human rights, and the right to defend oneself and one's land against despots and usurpers. The concept includes the values of freedom, equality, justice, solidarity and cooperation in a society of equal relations that solves its conflicts through dialogue to preserve human dignity and the establishment of mutual understanding, shunning violence and conflict, and all forms of discrimination, exploitation, bullying and exclusion. This is passive peace. Active peace manifests through a set of constructive actions that make the world a better place for humanity. This means the need to cultivate people who are tolerant, cooperative, critical thinkers, good listeners and communicators, accepting multiple perspectives, are socially responsible and take into account all differences (gender and other). The concept of education for peace is an educational initiative to mitigate the consequences of war on society and humans, and UNESCO has made it one of the education goals for sustainable development. Are public education curricula in Lebanon cultivating peace-building citizens?

## Current curricula and the curricula under development

Education for peace has been the most important goal of the Plan for Educational Advancement by «promoting national belonging and fusion, and

spiritual and cultural openness», and «Lebanese values such as freedom, democracy, tolerance and non-violence». It was founded on Lebanon's role in the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its democratic system based on «respect for public freedoms», «freedom of opinion and belief», «social justice and equality among all citizens without discrimination or bias» in pursuit of «forming citizens working to strengthen peace in themselves, between individuals, and in national social relations». The required advancement is a path from division to unity in order to build sustainable civil peace. Peace building is based on justice, equality, the rule of law, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, dialogue, among other things. CERD has completed the preparatory documents in the framework of advanced curricula design, identifying the traits of learners/citizens who are tolerant, critical, cooperative, interactive,

researchers and creators, adapting to the skills of the 21st century, adopting the approach of competencies and strategies for the integration of the disabled, making sure to benefit from the developments in technology and informatics.

## The curricula of civic education and national education as a model

The values of education for peace were explicitly included in the general objectives of the curriculum of national and civic education: peace-loving, cultural and human openness, nonviolence, equality, social justice, freedom, acceptance of the other despite gender, color, religion, language and culture difference, acquiring the skills of critical thinking, dialogue and problem-solving through dialogue (one of the basic skills to live together in peace). The specific goals of the curriculum include basic skills that contribute to peace education, such as: the rules of listening and dialogue, literary audacity, helping the weak, and establishing a culture of respect of the law, and resorting to it when conflicts and disputes cannot be solved through dialogue. The objectives of the curriculum and the subject of civic education are reflected in the textbook, and in the teaching/learning methods that stimulate critical thinking, teamwork, solidarity and participation.

Finally, education for peace and its values requires teachers who adopt the values they are teaching and reflect them in their daily conduct, attitudes and teaching methods, acting as role models. Thus, teaching/learning with them is transformed from mere knowledge instruction to an education by identification and a balanced life philosophy that shuns contradictions.

**Active peace manifests through a set of constructive actions that make the world a better place for humanity. This means the need to cultivate people who are tolerant, cooperative, critical thinkers, good listeners and communicators, accepting multiple perspectives, are socially responsible and take into account all differences**

\* Acting President of the Center for Educational Research and Development

# Contractual Workers in Public Education or «Precarity Management»

Fady Noun\*

According to the Educational Center for Research and Development's figures for 2016-2017, the total number of teachers in the public sector is 43,500 for 328,171 pupils. However, about half of them, i.e. 21,500 teachers, are contract workers, working part-time and not full-time.

At the root of this complex phenomenon is the war and the barriers set up between regions, which have allowed the proliferation of hiring teachers on contract basis. In the 1990s, for example, contract workers accounted for almost 90% of the teaching workforce in the public sector according to an academic source at the Lebanese University.

Today, this imbalance has been redressed but it has not fully disappeared. As a result, contract workers in public education regularly demonstrate, demanding permanent employment, and the precariousness of their situation is a potential driver of social instability.

«With contract-based employment comes instability,» said a member of the Primary School Teachers' League. «Do you know, for example, that contract workers are paid once a year only? Do you know that they are paid based on number of hours of actual teaching and that official holidays are not paid? Not even March 9, Teacher's Day! Do you know that the hourly wage rate of contract teachers does not change or take into consideration seniority or level of education? And finally, do you know that contract workers are not registered with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and do not receive commuting allowance or end-of-service indemnity?»

In addition, inequality in terms of employment complicates the issue further, with contract

workers teaching only four hours per week while others teach twenty.

«Finally, there has been an additional injustice to contract workers when the competition for the recruitment of new

teachers was opened to everyone in 2008,» adds the source. «While contract workers had asked that this competition be exclusively reserved for them, as was the case in 2004. In any event, some teachers spend their entire professional career in precariousness.»

«Recruitment throughout the public sector, including of teachers, is only a vast enterprise of precarity management,» said

an official source at the Lebanese University who requested anonymity.

The distribution of teachers across the 1,257 public schools in Lebanon is a good example, with over-employment or shortages depending on the region, given that there is on average one teacher for every 7.54 pupils in the public sector, whereas the figure is 12.40 in the private sector. That's a significant difference.

It is obvious that this state of affairs has repercussions on social peace. However, with the policy of spending cuts set down by the CEDRE conference donors in Paris, this situation could become more complex, especially with the decision to stop new hirings in the public sector.

How will the Ministry of Education fill the positions of retiring teachers every year?

There is no clear answer to this challenge yet.

According to our source at the Primary School Teachers' League, it is the currently working teachers, whether working on a permanent or contract basis, who will temporarily take on additional teaching hours, «which is not a bad thing».

But according to a source in charge at the Ministry of Education who requested anonymity, this approach is only viable in the short term. In the long term, a feasibility study is underway at the Ministry of Health to include the 1.8 million Lebanese citizens who do not benefit from any social security in the NSSF and thus remedy to the precarious situation of contract workers. At the same time, training sessions for the professionalization of the teaching profession, with the prospect of a new competition, are also planned.

\* Author, journalist at L'Orient-Le Jour



# Student Protection: Top Priority for the Ministry of Education

**Hilda El Khoury\***

**In accordance with Article 10 of the Lebanese Constitution, which enshrines the right to education; in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Lebanese State, which provides for the universal right to education and protection from violence; and in compliance with SDG 4 (2015-2030), which calls for a safe school environment, and based on our belief in the need to provide quality education for all; because there is an urgent need to consolidate and improve the measures to protect students from violence; the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched the “Policy for the Protection of Children in the School Environment” on May 11, 2018.**

The General Directorate of Education of the Ministry of Education aims to unify and activate the measures to protect children, both in terms of prevention of violence and responding to it, to be implemented in all Lebanese schools. The Ministry of Education’s vision is to ensure a safe and positive school environment that provides favorable conditions for learning. This will be achieved firstly through prevention, which is provided to pupils through periodic psychological and social

support and individual meetings, and secondly through responses, which cannot be activated without cooperation between the concerned ministries. In this context, the mechanism for dealing with cases of violence has been developed. It begins with early and safe monitoring of such cases, followed by a description of the case and taking appropriate measures, and end by a subsequent follow-up on the child after taking the appropriate actions. We also note that these measures give teachers a

role in protection, a fundamental component of the policy. The implementation, evaluation and adjustment of the policy at the central level is pursued through the Educational Guidance Unit of Counseling and Guidance Bureau, which includes a child protection team and which supervises the work of educational mentors who follow the policy in schools. The protection of students is a common responsibility that requires, alongside the Ministry of Education’s measure, the

combined efforts of each actor who plays a role in children’s lives, including the local community, international and local organizations, partner Ministries and, in particular, parents. After all, the shaping of citizens begins with education.

*\* Director of Counseling and Guidance, General Directorate of Education, Ministry of Education and Higher Education*

## Ensuring Lebanon’s Children are Protected from Violence is Vital to Future Peace and Regional Stability

**Emily Lewis\***

**The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Syrian children in Lebanon since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011 has put additional pressure on Lebanon’s already strained education system. The added squeeze on schools’ resources was accompanied by an increase in children’s vulnerability to violence and abuse, says Nahla Harb, the school counseling coordinator at the Lebanese Ministry of Education.**

Faced with the prospect of an unsafe academic environment, many children choose to skip school, or drop out altogether, according to a 2018 study on bullying in Lebanon by Save the Children. In even more troubling findings, the World Bank has identified that «a lack of schooling today is likely to [...] exacerbate the risk of future conflict and destabilization in the region.»

Until recently, there was no integrated child protection policy in Lebanon’s schools, meaning teachers were often ill-equipped to deal with violent incidents and were instead reliant on training and intervention delivered by NGOs.

To address this, last year, the Ministry of Education, in coordination with UNICEF, launched the «Policy for the Protection of Students in the School Environment». After piloting it in 20 schools and receiving feedback, it was rolled out in 300 public schools to mainstream the implementation across the country.

The draft policy provides a framework for training school staff on how to identify signs of bullying or abuse, and make referrals to specialists at the ministry. For Nisrine Tawily, a child protection officer at UNICEF, such a policy should be «the minimum standard» for any entity that has direct contact with children.

Besides equipping teachers with the tools to spot violence, the policy aims to help children build nonviolent relationships and to develop safer school environments. This safe educational setting in turn ultimately allows children to focus and learn more effectively, according to Tawily.

Helping to create safer schools is a team of dedicated psychological support counselors from the ministry, who run sessions with pupils that cover five skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building and effective decision-making. «Transecting all these activities is the

overarching theme of nonviolence,» Harb explained.

One of the activities introduced to younger children is «the star of gratitude»: They are each given a paper star and asked to write the names of five people who have supported them. The feeling of gratitude triggers the release of oxytocin, a hormone that has been proven to repair emotional damage and maintain well-being, Harb said.

Only Syrian children, whose curriculum is more flexible than that of their Lebanese counterparts, currently benefit from the presence of permanent psychological support counselors. For Lebanese students, a rotating team of «mobile» counsellors delivers the peacebuilding activities and trains teaching staff.

Harb said the ministry is «dreaming» of having full-time counselors available for Lebanese children, but said that this hope has not yet found its way into legislation.

Of course, violence against children does not begin and end at the school gates. A high level of tolerance for violence against children remains in many Lebanese communities, said Tawily.

While the Ministry of Education’s mandate does not extend to children’s homes and the wider community, officials are confident that the support offered by the policy will encourage children to talk about problems at home. «Our main message [to children] is that you can ask and that’s okay—you won’t get in trouble,» Harb said.

The initial policy roll-out allowed its creators to receive feedback and finetune the policy’s format in the hope of building a more peaceful future for the next generation of Lebanese and Syrians.

*\* Journalist at The Daily Star newspaper*

# The Dangers of Video Game Addiction

Dr. Nazir Hawi\*

As studies started showing empirical evidence of the existence of non-substance addiction, particularly with the preoccupation of some people with digital games, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders introduced in its fifth edition (DSM-5) that is published in 2013 the Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) as a potential mental disorder. Recently, in June 2018 the World Health Organization (WHO) classified gaming as a disorder due to addictive behavior in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

Today, a significant percentage of the population is affected by these new addiction diseases as technology use has invaded almost every household, with no distinction between poor and rich. Alarming, at the level of children, the impact of the rapidly advancing technology on their developing sensory, motor, and attachment systems is devastating, with long-term adverse effect on their physical, psychological, and behavioral health. Furthermore, we are witnessing people of almost all ages get addicted to smartphones, video games (Fortnite, PUBG, Apex Legends, etc.), social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc.), and even to just texting (WhatsApp). Published studies conducted in several countries found statistically significant associations between addictive or problematic use of technology and comorbid psychiatric disorders (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Samaha & Hawi, 2016).

In Lebanon, two pioneer research studies were published by Dr. Maya Samaha Rupert and me several months before WHO's classification of digital gaming as a disorder. Given the magnitude of the problem, Dr. Maya Samaha Rupert and I decided to make a scale available to the entire Arab world. We conducted a study that validated an Arabic version of the IGD-20 Test, which is a standardized psychometric tool that assesses the Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) according to the nine IGD criteria put forward by the American Psychiatric Association in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). This Arabic version of IGD-20 is intended to help identify Arabic-speaking pathological gamers and stimulate cross-cultural studies that could contribute to an area in need of more research for insight and treatment. Our study titled «Validation of the Arabic version of the Internet Gaming Disorder-20 Test» showed that the Arabic version of the IGD-20 Test is a valid and reliable measure of IGD among Arabic speaking populations. It was published in the prestigious journal «Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking» in 2017.

The next target Dr. Samaha Rupert and I set ourselves was to conduct a research study in Lebanon to determine the prevalence of video gaming, and examine the associations between video gaming and symptoms of psychiatric disorders, demographic factors, depression, anxiety, personality traits, and other comorbidities. The intention of this study was to build a sound evidence-based prevention strategy, propose policy and motivate researchers from Arab countries



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to conduct similar studies. The research study was published in 2018 in collaboration with Dr. Mark Griffiths, titled «Internet gaming disorder in Lebanon: Relationships with age, sleep habits, and academic achievement». This study showed that the pooled prevalence of the video gaming disorder was 9.2% in the sample. Also, it demonstrated that the gaming disorder was associated with being younger, fewer hours of sleep and lower academic achievement. While more casual online gamers also played offline, all the gamers with the gaming disorder reported playing online only. Those with the gaming disorder slept significantly fewer hours per night (5 hours) compared with casual online gamers (7 hours). The academic grades average of gamers with the gaming disorder was the lowest among all groups of gamers, and below the passing average. The aforementioned findings form a partial list of what has been uncovered about this disorder, presenting significant consequences to those suffering from it.

While video games can be great fun for children and adults—teaching players problem solving and logic, managing resources, hand-eye coordination, quick thinking—parents should be aware of which games their kids can play, for how long, at what times, where, with whom, number of in-app purchases, and most importantly engage them in alternative hobbies. It is noteworthy

that the American Psychological Association Task Force on Violent Media concluded that violent video game exposure was linked to increased aggressive behaviors, thoughts and emotions, and decreased empathy. The murders perpetrated by a boy who killed his father and three other people in Zuqaq al-Blat in 2017, the Parkland shooting in Florida in 2018 killing 17 students and staff members, and the Christchurch mosque shootings killing 50 people lead people to question the effects of violent video games.

\* Prominent Thought Leader on Digital Addiction

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# Social Mix in Higher Education

**Dr. Adnan El-Amine\***

I felt like an outsider during my first week at the Faculty of Education, Lebanese University, in the fall of 1966. It was not that the class was big; it was just that none of my 15 classmates looked anything like me. None of them knew my village, Chaqra, in southern Lebanon. Neither did I know the hometowns of my classmates. They were from Kousba, Bishmizzine (Koura district), Kefraya, Hasbaya, Tripoli, Mazraa, Achrafieh, Aley... Sunnis, Shiites, Orthodox Christians, Maronites, Catholics and Druze. And given that the professors also came from diverse geographical backgrounds and religious persuasions, diversity became the main feature of our classroom and of the Faculty of Education at large at the time. This diversity conferred on the class the warmth of differences of opinion and multiple viewpoints, and the curiosity to learn about others.

## Classroom Warmth

Birds of a feather often do not care about what their classmates, professors, or students say as much as they would expect it, and when they do notice it, it's usually either because one of them has conjured up an imagined different group and attacked it-and they applaud-or said something different-and they decry it. Birds of a feather prefer normative discourse. I did not realize the advantages of diversity and the dynamism it unleashes in a classroom until I returned as a professor to the Faculty of Education, in the 1977-1978 academic year, in that same building in the UNESCO area. The Lebanese University had expanded, and the place where I had studied was now called «The Faculty of Education, Branch 1». The scene here was now practically homogeneous: The staff were Muslims, the professors were Muslims, and the students were Muslims (95 percent). Branch 2 was now located in Al-Rawdah (Dekwaneh), with Christian administration, professors and students (95 percent).

The difference between a homogeneous class and a diverse class was later reaffirmed when I taught the master's program. The master's degree is offered in the building of the Deanship, in Furn al-Shabab, which is diverse. It is open to students graduating from either of the two branches. I recall choosing then the topic of religiosity (and measuring it) for education research methodology. In attendance were believers and non-believers, Muslims, Christians, Druze, nuns, political party members and non-partisan students. Whereas the bachelor's degree classes would tediously drag out, we were always short on time in the master's degree class because of intense discussions and enthusiastic participation, and the curiosity of successive discoveries of the variance in meanings—not only among students, but first and foremost between the facts and positions, on the one hand, and perceptions and prejudices, on the other. The blaze of these discussions would often spread from the classroom to the end of the corridor.

## Idea Generation

Mix of any kind is a boon for everyone—be it regional, sectarian, religious, social or gender. Segregation—all segregation—is a hindrance at the emotional and intellectual levels. Civilizations developed precisely through the intermixing of people, the intermingling, interaction and cross-fertilization of ideas. The principles of human rights, in terms of equal opportunities, or the principles of social justice, in terms of giving more to those who have less, are only





guidelines for this idea of human mix and upholding dignity for the human person.

In the Faculty of Education, until the mid-1970s, the cafeteria and lecture hall were as important as the classrooms. This may be referred to as a «parallel curriculum». The parallel curriculum is free and open in production, application and modification to its actors, who include the students, professors and administrators. At that time, there were left- and right-leaning groups, both in terms of political parties and moods. There were conservatives and liberals, traditional and innovator. Male and female. From the same generation. Since students were full-timers thanks to State scholarships, they spent all their time at the faculty, between the classroom, the cafeteria and the lecture hall. In this mixed climate, there were meetings, interaction and cross-fertilization of ideas, and artistic, intellectual, political and youth trends, which would not have seen the light otherwise, were generated. This was



the beginning of the student «Awakening movement», which was initially formed by Christian students who stood up against the Phalangist Party and became a non-communist leftist organization. The movement got engaged in student union and national action and spread to other universities. And thus, arose new schools in literature and poetry, brought forward by the meetings and panels that flourished at the faculty. Later, from that mixed generation, the Association of Full-time Professors at the Lebanese University was formed. It gave the Association a mixed structure, defended it even during and after the war years, and helped it survive to this day.

After the division of the Lebanese University into branches, the new students at the university engaged in the new political conflict and the Students' Union of the Lebanese University (mixed) was dissolved-never to be re-created. So was the fate of the Awakening movement, which played a crucial role in its creation. The student Union was replaced by student councils formed separately for each branch. These councils inherited one another-with or without elections. Each branch now had its own parallel curriculum, inward oriented and repeating itself with slogans and events associated with the political party controlling the branch.

### Social Mobility

The mix of different social groups and categories tilts the balance of the agenda of the students, professors, and administration towards public issues. Isolation in a political group, with a unique identity, fuels the fanaticism of defending the rights of the group and reinforces the protectionism system. This is done at the expense of competency and merit criteria. The quality of education declines, and with it the opportunities for social mobility, that is, the opportunities of those who are lower on the social ladder shrink with regard to educational and social advancement.

James Coleman's report of 1966 showed how the black and white mixed public-school benefited black students more than segregated black schools did. The reason is that the social mix increases the chances of learning from peers. Similar results were found in a study on education and social mobility in the city of Saida in 1980. An analysis of the distribution of students at the American University of Beirut (AUB) during the period in which the Hariri Foundation offered scholarships to low-income students to attend the university (in the 1990s) also showed that the population of the university had changed in terms of social class. In the same period, a study of university students in Lebanon showed that AUB was characterized by higher sectarian mix with Christian and Muslim students enrolled than all other private universities and the Lebanese University. I have no documented data on the state of universities today.

There are multiple initiatives to provide social mix today, and consequently social mobility. Several years ago, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education began to award full scholarships to students who excel in secondary examinations; this has had a similar social spillover effect. One of the most important «initiatives» is the so-called «unified faculties» at the Lebanese University. These are faculties without branches. Students are accepted by passing competitive examinations. To enroll, there is strong competition among gifted students. Thus, these faculties provide two types of social mix, sectarian and social. It is further evidence of the relation between social mix, moral openness, quality of education and social mobility.

These success stories are still limited in scope, especially that in the 2016–2017 academic year,

students of «unified faculties» accounted for only 4.7 percent of all students enrolled at the Lebanese University. But they merit consideration and examination of the opportunities to adopt their principles in the Lebanese State's public policies, whether in relation to private education or the Lebanese University.

### University Unifies

University in the Arabic language comes from the root *jamaa*, meaning «to unify». In Latin it refers to *universitas* and *universus* (whole, entire).

Since the 1990s, there has been a trend of private universities opening up branches left and right. As for the Lebanese University, it has seen a widespread practice to open branches and divisions in the regions, with the total number of branches and divisions currently standing at 68. This «servicing the audience» idea belies the meaning of the word university. Private universities that open branches are searching for clients (in the economic sense), and the Lebanese University is looking for clients (in the political sense).

In the private sector, universities go after their potential clients in their villages and towns. And offer them education «from the comfort of your home» and «at low prices». Whereas the Ministry of Education and Higher Education is keen on granting licenses and avoiding exercising control, currying favor with those who are seeking a service from those in power. Those seeking a service from those in power are either using universities for commercial purposes or for serving their own groups. At universities that target certain groups, the education of students is «facilitated» in order to provide social mobility for them, if available, from «within the same group» or to ensure for the production of the group's elites.

Instead of building a prestigious university complex in the north (or for that matter the south or Bekaa), where the Lebanese University would provide all the necessary facilities and equipment, attract the best professors, and offer assistance to low-income students from outlying areas, it is establishing branches in towns with the lowest standards. The stated pretext—the State is serving the people from outlying areas. The implicit explanation is exploiting this work politically, as evidenced by the huge political crowds and applauding what was opened. This is also an opportunity for politicians to appoint professors and directors of branches, enroll students, and win the loyalty of a region's people. It is a populist policy, if you will.

The university, after bringing together different people, must go on to create a new space in which students feel that they have come to a new world with new horizons. The university is not a higher-level school in the same environment. When a university gives out degrees, these degrees must have professional and intellectual value. The university is not a higher institute for technical education. It is not a specialty. It is a place where students pursue a specialty, and at the same time gain new knowledge and meet new people. It is a place that provides sufficient space in terms of time and place for students to interact with their peers in real activities (parallel curriculum), including getting to know the other gender. Absent that, how can university contribute to increasing its graduates' social capital compared to secondary school graduates? How can it contribute to social change?

# Media Education and Cultural Transformations

Dr. Jad Melki\*

In a country notorious for recurrent civil strife, religious sectarianism, racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and a weak sense of citizenry and identity, what role can media education—or media literacy—play to bridge divides and transform cultures of contention, contradiction and exclusivity to cultures of universal humanism, communal harmony, and inclusive justice? Lebanese media continue to reproduce social and political divisions and the entrenched, corrupt confessional patriarchal system. Weak levels of media literacy among the public and lack of media education at schools and universities means that such troublesome media recreations of social ills go unchecked, unchallenged and often unseen. Media education has the potential to transform individuals and communities from passive docile consumers of divisive media content, to active and empowered producers, reinventors, and disruptors of media messages and processes, thereby becoming agents of cultural transformations.

Media education has much to offer Lebanon and the region, yet it remains in its infancy, struggling to find a footing in schools and universities, despite many advances in the past decade. But problems directly or indirectly related to low media literacy levels extend beyond the political sphere and may be linked to Lebanon's widespread consumerism and a growing materialist culture, obsessed with physical appearance, titles and status, and additionally complicated with a conflicted identity that strives for modernity—particularly a superficial interpretation of western modernity—yet clings onto contradictory traditional oppressive values. Add to that widespread discrimination against women and many minorities, who remain severely underrepresented in positions of power, especially in government and media industries, and face an oppressive regime of discriminatory laws, matched only by rampant sexually objectifying media stereotypes and a paradoxical culture of sexuality that conflates postmodern sexual body display with traditional expectations of heteronormativity. Not to mention the pandemic of digital addiction that has plagued youth and adults equally, but its adverse developmental effect—mental, physical and social—on children is yet to be reckoned.

Media education instills a sense of almost reflex-like criticality that compels students to ask analytical questions about a message's author, intentions, purposes, design, persuasion methods, creative techniques, targeted

audiences, and the lifestyles and values represented. It empowers them to respond with voice, text, pictures, sound, video and data that are packaged persuasively and credibly, and channeled effectively. We know from students we have engaged in our research that media education develops a nuanced understanding of the media industry and a sophisticated understanding of media influence and processes. "The course changed my view about the world and my role in it" is a common statement by many students who have taken a course or workshop in media literacy, even years after they graduate. Henry Jenkins noted that media education helps foster a strong participatory culture, and accordingly helps youth become empowered and engaged citizens able to confidently create diverse cultural expressions. And that is only the tip of the iceberg. We seek a brand of media education that instigates real, deep and significant change in Lebanese and Arab societies. The time is ripe for advancing media literacy education in Lebanese schools and universities. We urgently need a shift in education that offers a pedagogy of liberation and cultural change.

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\* Chairperson, Department of Communication Arts, Lebanese American University

# Syria's Youth: A Forgotten Case

**Dr. Rouba Mhaissen\***

**Most of the development discourse about Syrian refugees today is focused on leaving no child behind. Governments, international organizations and civil society groups are all working hand in hand to ensure that Syrian children enroll in one of the multiple channels that are now championed for them in Lebanon. However, youth is ultimately left behind in this equation even though they hold in their hands the torch for a future Syria at peace.**

Today, Syria's youth in Lebanon have very little to live for. Having been out of school for many years, working as daily laborers in the informal labor market, involved in sex work and trafficking, or being married young to ease the burden of their families, there is very little space for dreaming left to them. Of the 80,000 registered Syrians between the ages of 15 and 18, only 5% are attending formal secondary schooling<sup>(1)</sup>. The rest are mostly out of school or in some form of informal education with no ability to obtain certification, or pursue higher education or vocational training. To add to the challenges faced by youth, the NRC reports that about 90% of youth in this age group have no access to legal residency, leaving them more vulnerable, and with almost no access to services, which include education. This also means being subject to undignified treatment, raids on the camps and evictions, and limitations on their freedom of movement.

Could this situation for youth have been prevented? At the beginning of the crisis, the lack of action on education was mainly related to the lack of funds, and the expectation of the international and the host community that the war will end soon, and thus, children will be back soon to their schools inside Syria. Other obstacles emerged on the way such as the limited capacity of Lebanese public schools, open for public shifts to cater for the big number of children who need schooling, among other things. Is this a cultural issue? Do Syrians resist education? As a practitioner in the field, I still remember vividly how our first educational support center—the first in Lebanon, in fact— came to life. It was the beginning of 2012, and we were distributing food baskets to the newly arrived Syrian families. A young woman followed me in the camp, and called out my name. She went on, «Hello, my name is Omayma, and I was a teacher in Syria. I have two kids. I don't want a food basket. I want you to help me buy some books, and I am happy to host 20 kids daily in my tent to teach them.» Like Omayma, all Syrian families, even the illiterate amongst them, wanted

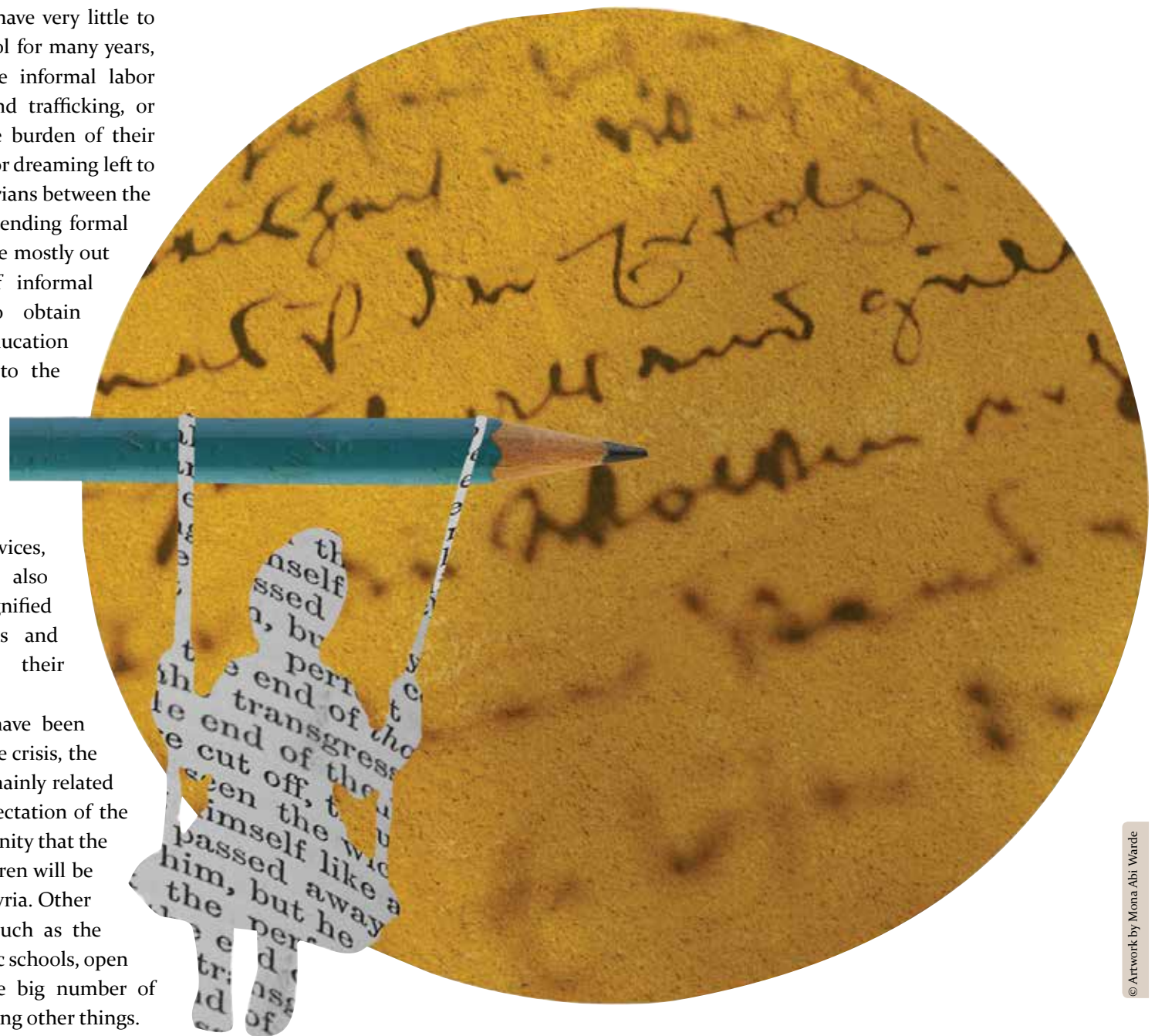
education for their kids first. Within one week from that day, 200 families had registered their kids with Omayma as news spread across the camps.

The same kids who were in the tented school Omayma had lobbied so hard for are today young men and women with no future ahead of them. But we can still do something to save Syria's youth. The space for civil society in Lebanon to support Syrian refugees should be preserved. Localization should be ensured through projects owned and run by civil society in collaboration with the communities themselves, and with close collaboration with international organizations and the government.

Programs addressing youth should be strengthened to support them in either re-integration into schools, joining vocational trainings or equipping them with professional and soft skills crucial for them to be independent and proactive agents in society. All such projects should be coupled with psychosocial support and initiatives that put the voices of the youth at their center, so that they are young people who have ownership of their lives and are able to design their future, and eventually, that of their country.

\* Founder and Director of Sawa for Development and Aid

(1) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/17/lebanon-positive-step-refugee-children>



# Why Bother with History?

Nayla Khodr Hamadeh\*

People live in the present and prepare for the future, so why will they bother to study the past? Why would they care to study history if historical information is available at a click of a thumb? We, at the Lebanese Association for History, are often challenged by these questions thrown at us when people learn about our mission to develop History Education. We believe that history is a powerful science that allows us to enter into the laboratory of human experiences to better understand the present. Learning history has significant impact on who we are and who we will become. It is a vehicle to peace building.

The importance of History Education has shifted in the last half century. Traditionally, history was seen as a discipline making individuals more 'cultured'. It allowed them to quote important figures from the past, recall events, and sound as if they know everything that took place in the past. This vision required retention of names, dates, and events. However, with the internet providing us with a wealth of historical information at our fingertips, the purpose of teaching history has shifted. The current trends consider history a discipline with its own concepts and tools that contributes to higher order thinking. History Education has significant impact on our individual, civic, political, and moral identities.

The main reason why nations choose to include history in their national curricula remains building citizenship. Although governments frequently exploit it for political aims, history can contribute to building responsible citizens. It empowers individuals to approach events from many perspectives, looking into causes and effects, understanding

change, evaluating significance and analyzing conflicting interpretations.

History helps us understand better the present. If we want our young learners to understand why politicians behave as they do, how society functions and how our world came to be, they need to study the past. It is the past that sheds light on the complexity of today's societies. In the process, they consider divergent narratives and how we can reconcile with their divergence. Students' ability to examine evidence, consider interpretations, draw their own conclusions and engage calmly in focused conversations about any topic are essential for responsible citizenship, as well as for preparing future political leaders, business people, and professionals.

History also engages pupils in moral contemplation. Students reflect on who they are by examining how others behaved in the past. Hence the importance of teaching about ordinary people, families, neighborhoods not only about leaders and extraordinary men and women. History also develops thinking and

communication skills essential for individuals to interact positively within society and environment.

## How to teach history

For the past five years, we at LAH have been working on developing a classroom model for students in Lebanon. We focus on building historical thinking. What does this mean in reality? Students learn to think like historians. To understand the past, they start by asking big questions such as «why did a war start in Lebanon in 1975?», they use many sources that provide different perspectives, they analyze them, compare them, draw their conclusions and develop their own interpretations. Thus, students are trained to think critically, consider perspectives, make decisions, and contribute to a wider conversation about the past.

This classroom model also entails teaching strategies that develop skills and dispositions needed in our current, and future, societies. In history classrooms, students ought to learn how to find and use evidence; how to talk and write clearly and purposefully; how to communicate ideas in person or electronically; they learn how to engage in dialogue; how to interact in a democratic society; how to take individual and collective responsibility; and how we can reconcile with the past, and thus with the present. Indeed, history education becomes a critical vehicle to the development of the individual and the safeguarding of societies, a vital component of Education.

With the protraction of the curricular deadlock in Lebanon, it is time that we reconsider how we think about history, its aims, and strategies. We cannot continue to marginalize the teaching of history leading to generations of young people ignorant of their own past and how the past has led to the present. And, while we acknowledge the role of politics in issuing curricula, it seems that it is time to rest the task of designing the history curriculum in the hands of academics and specialists away from political wrestling.



# The Suffering during Civil War through the People's History

Rosette Fadel\*

On April 13 and 14, 2019 at the American University of Beirut, tenth grade students in eight public schools, in a closing exhibition for the oral history program titled «From Local History Toward Better Understanding of the Past», shed light on social stories based on real life events, personal experiences and impressions, and various aspects of the daily lives of people from different parts of Mount Lebanon, a region that has witnessed violent conflicts over the course of Lebanon's modern history.

This trailblazing and exemplary step, launched by the Lebanese Association for History (LAH) in partnership with forumZFD, includes more than 200 students who have carried out projects to collect oral history through interviews conducted with figures chosen from their communities to talk to them about daily life in their areas during the violent conflicts, and help them form a picture of the social, cultural and economic changes that have affected the day-to-day life of the Lebanese. Some groups chose to highlight the effects on education, such as the conditions in which students attended school, while others chose to examine changes in modes and means of mobility, or displacement, and other topics such as women's role during these difficult circumstances.

## A People's History

«This approach is new in Lebanon with regard to teaching history, as we have focused on the people's history,» said Nayla Khodr Hamadeh, LAH president. According to Hamadeh, what is more important about this two-year project is that «it has contributed to introducing new approaches for curriculum makers so that they focus on social human history when dealing with critical stages, and enhance students' critical thinking skill so that they draw lessons from the past and better understand the present.» She added, «What students gain through this experience, through collecting oral stories and histories, from basic learning skills, such as formulating questions, and analyzing historical narratives and transmitting them. The most interesting component of this project is that it gives students the ability and self-confidence to make a unique contribution to the historical record on a subject that is of great significance to their present and future. It also shapes a clearer view of the past. And helps them build their own understanding of the past with a greater ability to accept difference, diversity and respect for others.»

«We thought it would be better to review the recent period of Lebanon's history by delving into the experiences of ordinary people,» said Jenny Monroe, project leader at the Forum Civil Peace Service. «The project seeks to engage many groups in a discussion about violent conflicts in a way that is unifying and respectful of diversity and difference, by launching a cross-generational conversation between students and people who have witnessed conflicts with their own eyes, and working with teachers and students, based on our conviction that this course will encourage an approach to many stories that steer clear of political analysis and description of battles,» Monroe added.

«In fact, oral history allows us to shed light on various narratives and perspectives about the past, making it



Visitors sharing their experience during the Civil War © Joelle El Dib - LAH

a particularly useful and effective approach to dealing with the past, especially when this past is contentious,» Monroe said.

«We have worked with the students to prepare the narrator's questions, with a possibility for students to interact with any question during the narrator's recounting of his story,» said one of the teachers involved in the project. «Students found that the suffering of people is the same during violent conflicts. No one wins when violence is used, everyone loses and people's pain is the same in all the stories.»

## A Bottom-Up Approach

What is oral history, and what is its significance? «Oral history is an academic discipline that includes the recording of the verbal inventory of people who lived at a certain stage, and the storing of their memories and interpretations,» said Dr. Maria Abunnasr, an expert in this discipline and the consultant for this program. «As an academic discipline, it requires many approaches and perspectives, allowing history to be told bottom-up, and not vice versa, that is, the story of people in the face of the story derived from those in power,» said Abunnasr. «It focuses on recording what is on the lips of people who are often not included in the 'official' narrative of history.»

Abunnasr also talked about project logistics, noting that teachers have learned «over the course of four workshops about oral history in theory and in

practice so that they can work with their students on collecting oral histories in their communities.»

One of the participating teachers in the workshops assessed the project as being «based on the personal experiences of the people of the region, having nothing to do with politics or political intervention in recounting the incidents, transmitted by the people themselves.» She expressed that she was looking forward to the opening of the closing exhibition with the participation of students, administrative and educational families, people of the areas covered by the studies, and civil society so that we can all learn about our social history. «We have learned in the workshops the methods of teaching the subject in interactive ways, and we contributed through a full class every week to making students not just mere recipients of the information, but rather active participants,» she said.

Thus, oral history is practically an ideal approach to bridging the distance between the emerging generation, and it is a smooth and exciting educational method through which students learn that the suffering and pain is the same in times of distress, fear, and war. Oral history can serve as a lesson for deterring war among people, and for commemorating April 13 so that it is «remembered but not repeated».

\* Journalist for the An-Nahar daily specialized in educational, social and cultural affairs and media advisor to local and international organizations, and to private universities

# When the Missing Contribute to Building Civil Peace

Wadad Halawani\*

«As long as George hasn't come back, I don't care about peace in Lebanon nor about reconstruction.» That was what George's mother told a journalist when asked about her thoughts on peace and the start of reconstruction.

Peace was declared in Lebanon (1990)\* without heeding the tragedy of missing persons and their families, which means that peace was and remains imperfect, fragile and at risk of relapsing into conflict. What is regrettable about an official course that got it wrong when closing the book on the war has now become laughable as this «official» side has now turned to accusing the families of the victims of undermining the civil peace and laying the ground for a new war, every time they demand for their right to know the fate of their missing.

What is most revealing of the fragility of this «peace» is the return of officials to belligerent discourse at every chance they get and with any disagreement, and their supporters taking it to the streets, threatening people's security and safety.

Twenty-nine years after the proclamation of that peace «a top down», externally enforced proclamation of peace, a law was passed a nationally driven grassroots, «bottom up law» was passed aiming to strengthen civil peace by revealing the fate of the missing and the forcibly disappeared according to its

explanatory statement.\*\*\*

The families of the missing and the forcibly disappeared succeeded in enshrining their right to know the fate of their loved ones in a legal document. The application of the provisions of this law is the inevitable path toward real reconciliation. Only the truth about the fate of the missing-alive or dead-would open the door to forgiveness. Recognizing the war crimes and the extent of injustice inflicted on their families will contribute to alleviating their chronic suffering and delivering them from their «victimhood».

Knowing the truth is a right enacted by the families. It is, first and foremost, a societal right that applies to knowing all the facts, and lays the groundwork for rebuilding the state on the basis of a unified memory, and of equality, justice and democracy. The State's formal approval of the search for missing persons means searching for them as human beings, as equal citizens without any sectarian, religious or regional discrimination rather than as subjects of religious groups. This is the first foundation of peacebuilding

and of inoculating society against a relapse into war. Some may say, enough with speculation and cheering for this law, there's no government in Lebanon to implement it, surely, you're dreaming?!

It is our right to dream of a homeland after our «chickens have hatched». To raise them, we need a «trough» of information from everyone, perpetrators and non-perpetrators alike. Let everyone benefit from our exchange of knowledge for forgiveness because we look forward to the resurrection of a nation that comes together on the basis of the true values of civil peace.

We ask the State to give us a hand and contribute to building civil peace.

\*On November 5, 1989, the Parliament ratified the Taif Agreement, by virtue of which hostilities were ended in Lebanon

\*\*Ibid., i.e. The meeting of Lebanese MPs in the city of Taif, Saudi Arabia, and the approval of the Taif Agreement

\*\*\*On November 30, 2018, the Parliaments enacted Law No. 105 (Law for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared), as a result of the 36-year-long unflagging struggle of the families of these victims

\* Head of the Committee of the Families of the Disappeared and Missing

## The Fate of the Missing: The Right of Families and the Duty of the State and Society

Paul Ashkar\*

In the 1990s, thanks to the struggle of women from Latin America, the issue of missing or forcibly disappeared persons entered the international justice arena, and the legal framework for addressing it was formulated in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006). Of course, the issue of missing persons did not begin in the 1990s—it is an issue that is as old as the history of the human race and the history of war. What is new after 2006, however, is the classification of the crime and the availability of legislation to families of missing persons to restore their right to know the fate of their loved ones.

Conflicts among people, especially civil wars based on sectarian, ethnic or tribal partisanship, always require, when they are over, a kind of amnesty for crimes committed by all sides, especially when the different sides have to go on living side by side. But this indispensable amnesty should not be discriminatory (that is, an amnesty for some but not for others), and it cannot be separated from the other associated components, such as knowledge, truth and forgiveness, among other things. Just as memory has no meaning and cannot exist without forgetting. In Lebanon, the civil war, which ravaged us since the 1970s, ended with an amnesty law that incorporated discrimination and forgetfulness. To the exclusion of everything else.

A few months ago, thanks to an exemplary struggle led by a handful of women (and some men), and after many decades and so much waiting, a law was passed by the Parliament establishing a national body whose only task is to search for the persons who went missing during the Lebanese war (or wars), that is thousands of citizens and residents, men and women alike. This law enshrines the right of the families of the missing to know the fate of their loved ones. It is a right that has been established in international instruments, in addition to all secular and religious laws.

The right to know is the exclusive right of the families of the missing. In order for this right not to remain a dead letter, the State and society must now—unlike

what they did (or didn't do) at the end of the Lebanese war—fulfill their duty. At the time, the State did not search for the missing, who are its sons and daughters. Society chose to close its ears and look the other way. Law No. 105 of November 18, 2018 offers them a new chance to do what is right: It is the duty of the State to establish the national body and ensure that all conditions are met so it can carry out its work seriously and tranquilly. It should also, educate coming generations about what happened so that it does not happen again. As for society, it is its duty to come to terms with what happened in order to embrace our brothers and sisters the moment they learn the truth about their missing loved ones.

\* Coordinator of the «We Have the Right to Know» campaign

# The Secrecy of an Investigation or the Shame of Open Trial?

Doha Shams\*

Nothing compels a criminal, even if repentant, to disclose information about the fate of his victims to their families, especially forty years after the crime. We live in a country of forgetfulness and amnesia. Prevarication, rehash, and stalling—wearing down the claimants so that they waive their rights. But the families of the kidnapped and the missing of the Lebanese civil war are indefatigable. Their persistence—despite all the stalling, delay tactics and dismissal—has finally led to passing a law that, if applied, would partially redress damages. But what would compel a criminal to confess to his crime and give information about the fate of his victims in the absence of evidence against him and of anyone accusing him? As long as his former leader is today's ruler in power, with a spotlessly clean judicial record—just like any other innocent citizen—thanks to a general amnesty issued by his comrades, who themselves took part in the war, following the Taif Agreement?

The perpetrator did not come clean about his crimes. How can a conscience settled comfortably in its life, awakened for the sake of a mother who wants to know the fate of her children who were kidnapped or forcibly disappeared? The heart of a criminal, even if repentant, would not skip a beat for a son or a father who wishes to have evidence of his loved ones' fate: Are they alive? Are they dead? In both cases: Where? How? When?

The general amnesty issued by the majority of the participating forces in the Lebanese civil war (1990–1975) impeded the path of justice, which should have been the basis for building a sound ground for the future of any country that experienced a destructive civil war. The path presupposing confession, remorse and giving information to earn forgiveness and redeem oneself. For this reason, the struggle of the families of the missing and the forcibly disappeared has been going on for nearly four decades in search of the decisive fragment of information about the fate of their loved ones, as they carve their way one step at a time closer to their goal. As for the criminals and perpetrators? They are leading normal lives with «the innocence of children in their eyes».

So, in spite of the great joy about the passing of the long-awaited law of missing persons, it seemed to many, including me, that the slogan of the Commission «forgiveness in return for knowledge» in fact rang hollow. For what for is the forgiveness of the families of the missing? As long as no one levels charges at the perpetrators, opens an investigation or brings them to justice? Is forgiveness an incentive for those who pushed their crimes out of their mind or maybe justified them over the past forty years? They have lived their lives, got married and probably told their children their own accounts of the war. It is probably an account in which the perpetrator plays the role of the aggressed victim.

The criminal was pardoned, so what's the point of confessing? Why return to the spotlight? What is the sense of this



© The Waiting Woman. An early work by the visual artist Firam Murad. Dedicated to Widad Halawani, who saw it and believes it encapsulates all waits

forgiveness to be received from the families of the victims as long as they benefit from the absence of evidence of their crimes? The families of the kidnapped look like a bunch of idealists or naive optimists about human nature, and although they are worthy of admiration for it, what do they get out of it?

Yet, by examining the provisions of Law No. 105, i.e. the missing persons law, with a cool head, and consulting

with the Committee of the Families of the Missing on these questions, we have found other possibilities implicit in the body of this law. And the idea can be summed up as follows: «a choice between public shame and secret confession».

It is known that the crime of kidnapping continues if it is not proven that it ended and happened during the war, i.e. during the period covered by the general amnesty. In

addition, the responsible parties for many of the kidnappings are known, given that the location of the crimes was geographically under the authority of a certain militia that participated in the kidnappings and «counter-kidnappings». They are an «open secret» of sorts, and therefore, as in military laws, officers are not prosecuted but rather their superiors, i.e. those who issued the commands. Thus, leveling accusations at the political parties responsible for those points where kidnappings took place is possible and somewhat easy through the National Commission for the Missing and the Forcibly Disappeared, which was established by Law No. 105 and by virtue of which it was granted all investigative powers. It therefore becomes incumbent on these parties to answer publicly to the investigator about the fate of the missing persons whom they are accused of kidnapping or disappearing, and to prove that they have been killed—providing the Commission with information about the burial sites—or that they handed them over to third parties, to be verified. If they choose to voluntarily provide information to the Commission, they will benefit from the confidentiality condition. That is, their identity will be withheld. This applies to individual perpetrators or witnesses, to facilitate confessions and access to information. In short, it would be useful to give two options to those involved in kidnappings: provide information voluntarily, in return for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of personal data, or be investigated, and if found guilty, undergo trial in which they will publicly be made to bear the shame of their crimes.

Perhaps, in this way, we may see the ending of this painful and shameful dossier. An ending we are loath to call happy.

\* Journalist specialized in the file of The Missing

# The Role of Education in Building Peace

**Akram Chehayeb**

*Minister of Education and Higher Education*

Peacebuilding, and the dissemination of values of tolerance and the principles of justice and equality between individuals and the various components of society are not merely a lofty goal, but an arduous process that requires the establishment of a way of life based on respect for human rights, freedoms and dignity, and setting them as the goal that is safe from unlawful practices.

Peacebuilding is a national human responsibility, a goal that must always be pursued and established in a world that has suffered and continues to suffer the scourge of war making and destruction, and the dissemination of a culture of hatred, discrimination and exclusion.

Education plays a central role in peacebuilding, and in ending war, chaos and violence. It also has a central role in fostering a culture of resolving differences humanely and peacefully. This requires modern approaches to teaching the challenges of achieving peace, developing nonviolent skills and promoting peaceful attitudes.

Because wars are born in the human mind, the role of education in peacebuilding and laying a solid foundation for it are not limited to school and university, but are a joint effort to be undertaken by parents, educators and teachers. Hence the importance of education on peace, which plays a key role in changing the mentality and working to control the psychological factors that lead to violence, to dispel prejudices, activate dialogue, promote mutual respect and the building of bridges across differences.

Within this framework, the contribution of education to building the desired peace should be through the development of modern educational curricula that are capable through school and university education of contributing to laying the foundation for the following concepts:

- Promoting the concept of a culture of peace and non-violence at the social level through various ways and means.
- Disseminating the concepts of tolerance and focusing on the principles of civil peace and peace in general on the grounds that diversity and plurality in all their forms are a source of wealth for human life.
- Focusing on establishing a culture of respect for human rights and freedoms guaranteed by all divine laws, international instruments and national laws in all circumstances.
- The importance of equality between all and non-discrimination for any reason between men and

women, or between individuals of different affiliations.

- Consolidating the principles of democracy and the values of the peaceful transition of power, and moving away from prejudiced rhetoric and any racist behaviors and practices.

The achievement of the above requires a genuine partnership between the official and social actors to move forward toward a promising humanitarian

horizon, one in which education plays an active role in establishing the culture of acceptance of diversity and in resolving differences—that will always be there—through dialogue and all human methods that ensure respect for the right of difference and regulates it within the framework that preserves civil peace, and peace more broadly, in a stable and sustainable manner.

## Proud of my Language, Proud of my Identity



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

### For more information:

The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» Project  
 Arab Bank Building, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Riad El Solh Street,  
 Nejme, Beirut - Lebanon

Telephone: 01- 980 583 or 70-119160

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**Designed by:**  
 Omar Harkous  
 Hassan Youssef

**Translated &  
 Edited by:**  
 Loyal Mroue