

ETHNOGRAPHIC DIARIES

CAPTURING THE EVERYDAY IN CRISIS

PREFACE

The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) is pleased to be collaborating with *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal* on this publication produced by the ACSS working group on “Ethnography and Knowledge in the Arab Region.”

ACSS working groups aim at bringing together Arab scholars from the region and the diaspora, across generations, disciplines, geographies, and methodologies to explore themes and topics that open up new research agendas that help us better understand the Arab region. The working groups also encourage the design of innovative and diverse outputs targeting different audiences within the region and beyond.

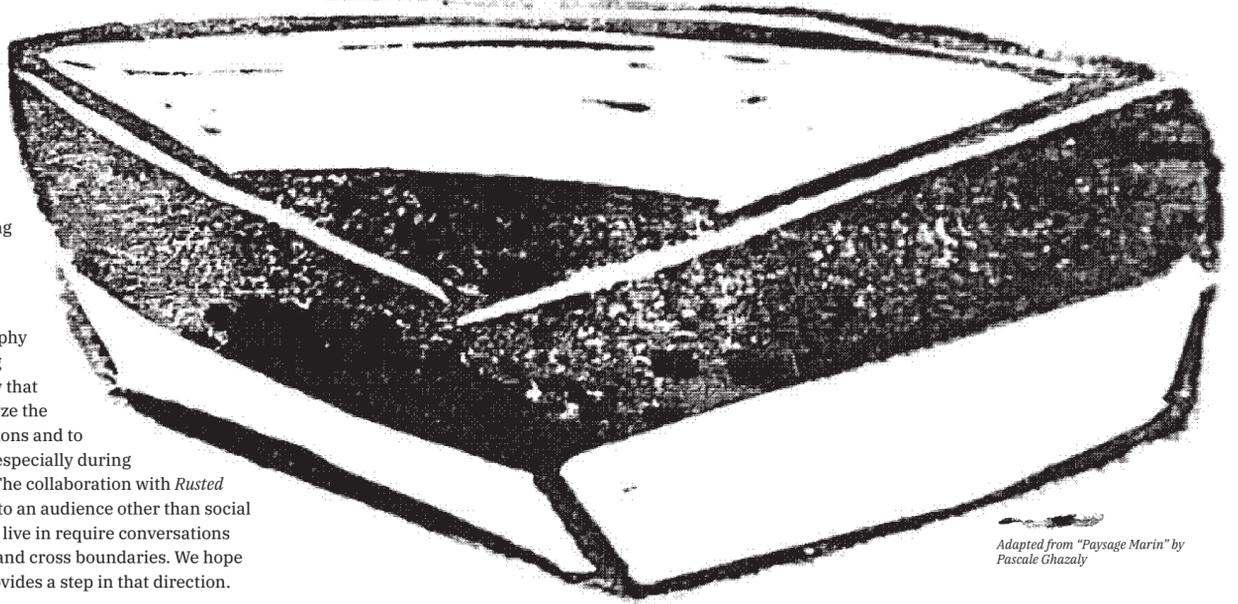
The Ethnography and Knowledge Working Group was launched in 2019, aiming towards understanding how ethnography can counter dominant regimes of knowledge about Arab countries and produce a more nuanced understanding of the Arab region today.

The “Ethnographic Diaries” is a true embodiment of ACSS’s mission as an institution. This collaborative work did not only allow the researchers to network effectively and share academic knowledge, skills, and experience, but it also encouraged interdisciplinary

research and built a community of twelve writers. The space thus created proved to be therapeutic for those involved, a space to work on their writing and reflect during turbulent and highly charged times.

This project reflects the importance of ethnography in our times as a writing style and a methodology that allows us to better analyze the knowledge transformations and to foresee a better future, especially during crisis and uncertainty. The collaboration with *Rusted Radishes* provides a link to an audience other than social scientists. The times we live in require conversations and debates that break and cross boundaries. We hope that this publication provides a step in that direction.

Jana Chammaa
Senior Program Officer
Arab Council for the Social Sciences



Adapted from “Paysage Marin” by Pascale Ghazaly

INTRODUCTION

The morning of August 4, 2020 started out as another day in the capital. We were oblivious to the catastrophe that would come to be.

Within a few months, the reverberations of this devastating event—coupled with the spread of a global pandemic, successive lockdowns, and the collapse of the economy—amplified the overwhelming sense of a downfall and collapse. The haunting aftermath of Beirut’s explosion exacerbated people’s embitterment towards an unbending ruling elite whose only consistency was the service of their own interest at the expense of the country. An intense year of hopeful protests instigated by the October 17 Uprising had amounted to little change. Most of us were fatigued, some nursing their defeat and battling numbness, and yet others yearning for the next moment of protest that would, in the least, sustain remnants of hope towards change.

As two anthropologists familiar with Lebanon through our professional and personal lives, we wanted to create an ethnographic record of the intricacies of the turbulent times we were living. We wanted to focus on people “living in” (Moghnieh 2017)¹ the crisis and privilege their voices and experiences. But how to capture extraordinary moments when we are in the eye of the storm, consumed by fixing facades of broken glass and managing life with everyday power cuts?

Our project aspired to chronicle the fluctuating textures of everyday life before our experiences became too routine to deserve attention, blending into Lebanon’s sea of troubled normality. In “Ethnographic Diaries,” we sought to provide a space in which we could share our individual accounts and process, together, the events

unraveling around us. We hoped that this exercise would ultimately construct a broader story that would resonate collectively as we and others read our diaries; that they would serve as a point for future contemplation and comprehension. As researchers who have been using ethnography within the confines of academic writing, we were keen, through our collaborative project, to explore ethnographic writing as a means to transcend the divide between academic and non-academic forms of knowledge production, and to tap into ethnography’s potential for alternative and creative ways of writing. We are delighted, therefore, that our diaries found a home in *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal*.

Apart from a few people who knew each other through their professional circles, the twelve writers had never met. They were residents of different cities across Lebanon and comprised ten women and two men; Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian nationals; ages ranging between early 20s and late 40s. Michelle coordinated the project from the UK, where she was spared the everyday anguish of living in Beirut but was still consumed by the concern for it, and supported the process of writing. Our group wrote and spoke in Arabic (both standard and colloquial) and English. We explored how the shift in language opens up at times and closes at others, also affecting form and tone. As project coordinators, we were open to interpretation when we asked our writers to observe and document everyday life around them. We invited them to be attuned to space, materialities, emotions, interactions, journeys, ambivalences, absences, and presences.

The task of writing for a group of strangers was intimidating at first. The everyday we were hoping to

pin down seemed too broken to simply reconstruct in a diary. A sense of bewilderment hindered our ability to make sense of the moment. In the midst of collapse, the act of writing, even for some of us who wrote for a living, appeared too challenging. Was writing a privilege? Was it a luxury that transcended Lebanon’s violent reality and the hold that its chaos had on our lives? Could we proceed without guilt over such an indulgence when we were surrounded by despair and death?

As members of the group read each other’s diaries, our relationship to writing morphed. We found that writing allowed us to face our own internal turbulences, to open up and to find relief in expression. Pascale Ghazaly felt that “writing is a desperate act and a glorious one at the same time. It is like when everything blurs out and we take roughly-made torches to discern where we are.” Zainab Chamoun realized that “writing is a right, not a privilege. Whoever you are and no matter what skills you have, you have the right to put your thoughts into words and experiment with language. In such turbulent times, the least we can do is write.” Writing peeled away some of our inhibitions as we delved into the murky depths of what it means to live through destruction and what it takes to reconcile with complex layers of loss and the estrangement we felt towards our upended social world. Our writing helped us survive; in a landscape of wounds, it was a “construction of the soul, so it recovers from its pains” (Matar 2016).²

As we talked about our diary entries in our bimonthly meetings, we found solace: We were not alone in our vulnerability. Our stories connected, our observations aligned, and as our worlds shrank to the confines of our isolated bedrooms and corners of our living rooms

during two lockdowns, our introspections resonated. Through small screens, power cuts, intermittent WiFi and frozen faces, we found intimacy and friendship. We expressed frustration and loneliness at our isolation. We shared anger at our politicians. We lamented the sudden exodus of people we knew, desperately seeking safer pastures and a more predictable life outside of Lebanon. We shared our acquired survival strategies to secure daily services and discussed how these practices invoked war-time memories we thought we, and our parents, had forgotten. We alerted each other to spaces of beauty, hope, and imagination that chose to persist in our surroundings in spite of the overbearing sense of melancholy. And we found humor in the absurdities of re-learning what we once took for granted: filling the car with fuel, withdrawing money from the bank, or expecting an item in a shop to retain its price from one day to the next. Our individual experiences and affects began to draw together a collective picture.

The extracts presented in this issue, while they comprise only a portion of the wealth of entries from our writers, speak to these themes. Accompanied by a timeline that contextualizes the events taking place in Lebanon through the period of the project (November 2020-February 2021), the diaries, we hope, will shed some light on everyday experiences in extraordinary times.

Muzna Al-Masri and Michelle Obeid
Coordinators and Editors of “Ethnographic Diaries”

¹ Moghnieh, L. (2017). “The violence we live in”: Reading and experiencing violence in the field. *Contemporary Levant*, 2 (1), 24-36. DOI: 10.1080/20581831.2017.1318804

² Matar, A. (2016). “الكاتب في اللحظة التاريخية مستهدفاً وضحية” [The Writer in Historical Junctures: A Target and a Victim]. *Jadaliyya*, 9 Sept. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/25053/وضحية-مستهدفاً-والكاتب-في-اللحظة-التاريخية>

MEET THE TEAM

ZEINA ABLA | WRITER | is a researcher and independent consultant specializing in Development Studies and focusing recently on social research. She lives and works in Beirut.

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MUZNA AL-MASRI | PROJECT EDITOR AND WRITER | is an anthropologist, researcher, and consultant. She is a co-founding member of the Ethnography and Knowledge in the Arab World Working Group.

SHERIN ASSAF | WRITER | is an urban planner, researcher, architect, consultant, and activist. She has a Master’s Degree in Architecture (2015) and a Research Masters in Urbanism “Planning of Territories and Urban Environments” from the Lebanese University and is interested in the bottom-up approaches of planning in post-conflict communities.

ZAINAB CHAMOUN | WRITER | is a Lebanese journalist and researcher. Her interests lie at the intersection of community-led development, religion and politics, decolonization, and affect studies. She is passionate about collecting stories worth telling through words and photographs.

AMR DUKMAK | WRITER | is an independent, transdisciplinary writer and researcher. Through localizing social phenomena in the region, his writings aim at grasping the complex and continuously changing nature of civil and political actors and their actions across Syria and neighboring countries.

NAY ELRAHI | WRITER | is a feminist researcher, writer, and co-founder of HarassTracker, an initiative to fight the normalization of sexual harassment in Lebanon. She has published in platforms like *Assafir*, *Al Modon*, *Sawt Al Niswa* and *The Guardian*.

HAMMOUD EMJEDL | WRITER | is a sociologist and a child protection and non-formal education activist. He is also a researcher and has published a number of articles.

PASCALE GHAZALY | WRITER | is a feminist artist and researcher. Her work focuses on personal stories, documentation and the alteration of memory and spaces. She lives and works in Beirut.

MENNATULLAH HENDAWY | WRITER | is an interdisciplinary urban planner. She was a doctoral fellow at the Orient Institute Beirut and received her Ph.D. in Planning Building Environment from TU Berlin in Germany on the visualization of urban planning as imaging of power. Hendawy is co-founder of The Counter-Mapping Laboratory and Cairo Urban AI, a project working on exploring the potentials of using artificial intelligence to develop just and sustainable cities.

AIDA MUKHARESH | WRITER | is a Beirut with roots in Yemen, Syria, and Denmark. She is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she thinks, teaches, and writes about youth subcultures, political imaginaries, affect, gender, violence, and space.

WATFA NAJDI | WRITER | is an architect, urban planner, and researcher focusing on the intersection between urban and refugee studies. Watfa is the project coordinator at the Refugee Research and Policy Program at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (AUB).

MICHELLE OBEID | PROJECT EDITOR | is a social anthropologist at the University of Manchester. She has done ethnographic research in Lebanon and the United Kingdom, focusing on themes of postwar sociality, state and borders, displacement, and home.

NUR TURKMANI | EDITOR | is a Lebanese-Syrian researcher and writer in Beirut. She works on economic development policies, gender dynamics, and secular movements in the Middle East. She is Managing Editor of *Rusted Radishes’* Webzine and her creative work has been published in *Jadaliyya*, *Eclectica*, *The Adroit Journal*, *London Poetry*, *Discontent Magazine*, among others.

LIVIA WICK | WRITER | is associate professor of anthropology at the American University of Beirut.

The pieces herein may also be viewed on www.rustedradishes.com along with a podcast featuring other pieces from the “Ethnographic Diaries” project.

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DEAR REEM,

Greetings from Beirut.

Yes, I finally visited Beirut again on Thursday. It took me a lot of time to plan and negotiate my full-time job and curfew hours. It was raining heavily all the way on the highway. We even had floods yesterday! Nothing new, right? Excuse my complaints so early in the letter, but I'm challenging the system. I'm now complaining regularly because this is what people normally do in such uncertain times. Complaining needs to be normalized again in the face of toxic positivity.

You left almost three months ago. You traveled all the way to London, our spirit city. Like many young Lebanese, you chose to leave. How does it feel starting a new chapter?

You forgot your books in the backseat of my car. You got five used books from that small bookshop we drove to in the village above Batroun. Remember how far that

bookshop was? It was during our last road trip together before you traveled; and our last one before the explosion. The bookshop was the highlight of our day; but other than that, everything around us was uncomfortable. I can still remember how dim Beirut was, with its frequent power cuts, monopoly over fuel and

generators, turned-off traffic lights, the speeding reckless cars, and numerous thefts. Beirut resembled Gotham City—gloomy, chaotic and hazardous. We were already living on the edge of tragedy, wondering if things could get any worse. The explosion answered that question.

Reem, these days, my mother rushes to the gas station to fill up all our cars. "I don't want you to suffer," she says. "We experienced the hardship of diesel cutoffs during the war; I don't want you to live it again." Is she being manipulated by the news, by a government disseminating false alerts and

claims about our basic needs being threatened? Maybe she is, I don't know anymore.

We are just desperate to remember what a decent life looks like. How did a walk in Gemmayze used to feel?

The other day, I went there for a cup of coffee with Caroline. I parked my car and walked. There was still rubble on the street. Some buildings were covered with gigantic announcements with the names and logos of the NGOs in charge of reconstruction. Others were left alone to collapse—if not today, in a few months. Everything was closed, but Sip never shuts its doors to loyal customers. We grabbed a latte and a cappuccino and sat on the edge by the shop's front. I was facing the stairs of Saint Nicolas. Remember the Coffee Room? That cozy coffee shop halfway through the stairs? It's not there anymore. Aaliya's Books, as well, is not there anymore. I remember the last Persian poetry night we attended there.

Do you think we will ever enjoy those small moments or host those kinds of events anytime soon? Everything sounds luxurious now. Going out is luxurious. I lost the ability to imagine a simple future.

All I know is that the heart is so heavy, and we are not ourselves anymore.

Best,

Zainab | December 2, 2020

Like a shadow, this feeling of impending doom accompanies us. As though everything is in this slow, incomprehensible process of collapse. But maybe it's not so slow. It's at a strange speed—somewhere between the steady crumbling of an old house over time, and the sudden destruction of a building because of an earthquake. Everything is falling apart, but not too fast that it takes us by surprise, and not slow enough that we can do anything about it.

THE SWING OF COLLAPSE

أرجوحة الانهيار

Like a shadow, this feeling of impending doom accompanies us. As though everything is in this slow, incomprehensible process of collapse. But maybe it's not so slow. It's at a strange speed—somewhere between the steady crumbling of an old house over time, and the sudden destruction of a building because of an earthquake. Everything is falling apart, but not too fast that it takes us by surprise, and not slow enough that we can do anything about it.

Muzna | November 16, 2020

There is a common phrase reiterated at the end of every conversation: "It will only get worse from here—بعد ما-مشقوتوا دي." This phrase seeps through the cracks. As though everyone, but me, has seen this horror movie before. They know how it ends while I scream, out loud, the moment someone tries to open the closed door.

Bottom line: You cannot hide from the crisis.

Wafaa | December 2, 2020

I was stress-shopping last night, minutes before the 5 p.m. lockdown curfew. Soon after I'd paid for my goods, my hands, in a swift and clumsy jolt, failed me. I heard a soft smash and looked down at the carton of eggs on the ground. I picked them up, one by one. They had all cracked. Their yolk spilled onto my fingers through the jagged cracks trailing the circumference of the eggs.

Since August, my brain has felt foggy. My reactions often feel suspended in slow motion. I looked around helplessly, and the young man who stocks the shelves at the grocery shop—the one who often greets my dog by name every time we walk by—was peering at me. "Quick, take it home," he said. "You can salvage the eggs if you cook them now, *haram* to throw them away." I stood there with the yolks of six eggs dripping down my hand, an inner conversation simmering: Yes, it is *haram* to throw away food, but I cannot walk home like this. Is cooking it unhygienic? How will I even carry them home?

Amid the looping thoughts, I turned from him, opened the trash, threw the slimy package in, and walked away, ashamed to find his eyes again.

Aida | November 16, 2020

Today I bumped into a friend. In previous years, I would see her exercising every single day at the AUB Greenfield, and always wondered how she had so much free time. While catching up, I asked how she was managing without exercise and she said she spent her time worrying. I told her I did quite a bit of that too. And from one thing to the next, we began to talk about access to money in the bank.

She said, "I had to go back to exercising. I couldn't take it anymore. All I did before was think of my daughter. She was a mistake, you know. I had the first two and thought that was it but then the youngest came along and since then we have had surprise after surprise with her." She no longer knew what to do. She worried because her daughter, who was graduating from AUB, was applying to universities abroad.

"What if she gets into an excellent university?" she asked me. "What do I tell her? *Sorry dear I can't pay for that, I lost my life's savings!*" At this point in the conversation, she began to cry softly under her eyeglasses.

"What should I tell her? *You can't continue your studies? or Your dad and I are too old to emigrate and find a job?* If my husband could work abroad, even part-time, then at least we would make some fresh dollars. What options do we have? Ask my sister for money? Ask my sister-in-law for money to pay for an MA program? Those are not good options. How would we ever be able to repay them? We keep saying *hamdillah* we are better off than others; but tell me, Livia, how will I face my daughter if she gets those acceptance letters?"

Livia | November 13, 2020

A Syrian camp in Tripoli has been burned down to ashes. What a tragedy. One that announces, loud and clear, that our lives in Lebanon—whether refugees or host communities—is cheap. More than 300 refugees were forced to flee because of a personal clash between a Syrian and a Lebanese. This is collective punishment; it is simply incomprehensible that the refugees, the victims, are being blamed.

Zainab | December 27, 2020

I glimpse an odd familiarity through my neighbor's door. Hints of daily life suddenly halted; a broken place where layers of dust and abandonment accumulate. There is at once a sudden interruption, and an ongoing sense of continuity. This is how the rest of the city feels. A cafe closes down on Hamra Street. The chairs and tables are neatly tidied up inside, as though it is closing for the night only. But it won't reopen tomorrow. The dust

will accumulate on the chairs. Passers-by will throw garbage on the terrace. Even garbage ages. Another shop that sells silver jewelry has now been closed for several weeks. But I am waiting for it to reopen to try the earrings in the left corner of the window display.

Muzna | November 8, 2020

I read somewhere that the price of 20 liters of gasoline, which is currently around 25,000 LBP, will increase to 70,000 LBP. This means that if I want to go to the South to see my parents, as I usually do every weekend, I will have to pay around 300,000 LBP per month for gas, excluding my daily trips to work or anywhere else. The circulated numbers must be less than what the actual cost is going to be, no? This calls for a feasibility study—but I am going to put it off until the inevitable hits.

While writing this, I received a text message from Lebanon Taxi reassuring us, the customers, that "Despite what will happen, despite what has happened, we will not change our prices." The message went on to say that they will be keeping the same fair prices in order to "meet our brothers' and Lebanese sisters' budget and satisfaction."

This reminded me of the ads that stores used at the beginning of the financial crisis: "الدولار عاب ١٥٠ ل.ل", "ليرتنا قوية", "The dollar is at 1,500 Lebanese Pound. The Lebanese Pound is strong!" Well, we all know how long that held up. Let us wait and see how long this one will last.

Wafaa | December 10, 2020

Our contracts will end at the end of the year. Till now, we have no idea what is next. Will they renew our contracts? If yes, whose will be renewed? What is certain is that not all of us will be retained. We are awaiting the funders. Although we had always been aware that our contracts were temporary, we had hopes of renewing them. Everyone in this room is concerned and stressed. Losing this contract is another crisis in the list of crises. Everyone in this room is struggling.

Sherin | December 18, 2020

I work more than ten hours a day. I open my eyes in the morning to this fact, my anxious palpitations are a reminder that this is wrong, unhealthy, odd. Does our new economic reality justify such working conditions? Am I simply whining? I think I am; at least, this is how society might describe me. Who could complain about work in such a brutal economic system, in the middle of a global pandemic?

I love my job, but I despise the system. I'm not happy with the chronic body aches at the age of 26. It was never the norm to work from bed. But the system is pushing us to normalize what has never been normal.

Zainab | November 25, 2020

Tripoli is in the headlines as protesters take the streets. The demonstrations turn violent, and the army interferes to brutally attack protesters under the pretext of protection from vandalism. Protestors are angry because of the socio-economic situation. Some TV stations insist and report that it is a politically driven show, that it is instigated by external parties. I talked to a friend from there; she maintains the protests are not "normal." I was somewhat glad that, finally, anger and the refusal of injustice is manifesting. But now what?

Zeina | January 26, 2021

In the spring of 2020, I started hearing about colleagues leaving too. With the devaluation of the Lebanese Lira, AUB employees, both faculty and staff, lost a significant amount of their purchasing power.

The upper administration received their large salaries (even in comparison to US standards) in US dollars and with the devaluation, they gained purchasing power. Faculty often talked about the widening inequality at the university. The gap between upper administration and faculty and staff was widening. Employee rumors had it that the upper administration made "fresh dollars" while other rumors had it that some upper administrators were paid in "fresh dollars" and others, like the deans, were paid in "dollars." I don't think we will know which of these is true. But in any case, the upper administration's salaries were gaining value relative to what they were before the collapse and relative to faculty and staff, and this was always in the background of any discussion at the university.

Over the summer, AUB fired 800 employees, mainly staff at the University Hospital. With every passing month, administrators presented the worsening financial situation of the university. "Maybe we will have to close programs," they said. Those programs that faculty, staff and students had spent decades building, piece by piece. No wonder faculty were resigning or taking leaves without pay. In addition, with the university's pandemic containment policies, including the shift to online teaching and meetings, AUB was losing its role as a dynamic institution that brought people together at conferences, lectures, exhibits, and memorials. Then in the summer of 2020, AUB announced that it would pay full-time faculty \$20,000 for the year 2020-2021 in a bank account abroad. And increased staff salaries by about 400,000 LBP. At the same time, they announced to faculty that this was a one-year plan and that in the future faculty needed to apply for grants and cover parts of their salaries. Those parts would be paid in fresh dollars. This was a reinvigoration of the role of faculty. This increased the pay gap between full-time faculty and part-timers and staff. And faculty worried about the wide range of reforms the university would implement during the crisis.

Livia | January 7, 2021

My generation does not have the luxury of time. Today, I was struck by the notion of temporality: We are not at a critical juncture, this is not an interim. We are burdened with daily crisis management, figuring out how to respond to the different realities we are submerged in. The repercussions of Lebanon's crises will last years, even if we start rebuilding the economy as of now. I know this. I have always known this, but when I read today's article in the newspaper, I was startled, as though I were waking up to an unbearably loud alarm. The article noted that it would take thirty years to build an alternative economy. I will be my mother's age, and my daughter will be my age. Thirty years. That is double the duration of Lebanon's Civil War.

Zeina | January 7, 2021

Two days ago, I was calculating the end-of-year building expenses with my elderly neighbor. She is seventy-seven, and still the person in charge of managing the finances. She writes everything in two tiny little copy books. Those two books carry over ten years worth of data on our eight-story building.

The concierge's salary is a recurring expense; the water and municipal tax are yearly; and the contract for the elevator maintenance is paid bi-annually (up from 250,000 to 600,000 LBP every six months). We should have regular electricity bills, but the electricity company has not been collecting. We used to pay 400,000 LBP for a generator subscription for the building—it would have been over a million per month now, one that operates the elevator and the water pump when there are electricity cuts, but we did not have the budget for that and stopped early in 2020. In total, our budget is between 15 and 18 million LBP a year. In dollars, a little over a year ago this was something between 10,000 and 12,000 USD. Today it is no more than 200 USD. Same happens with the salary of the concierge; it used to be equal to 400 USD a month, now it is about 70 USD.

Muzna | January 7, 2021

I have been trying to distract myself all day. I play solitaire. My nerves are stretched. I am scared. I don't know if crying helps. I feel lonely, numb. Today, after arriving home, I ate and tried to sleep. I could not because of the sound of airplanes. I haven't slept well in the past two days.

Rumors say there will be another lockdown. We should buy food before that. I cannot adapt to this. How are people adapting? I feel too soft, almost like snow. I feel weak, I feel resistant to any coping mechanism for this economic collapse.

And what scares me most is the fact that I will look back on this day, months from now, and think of how lucky I was back then (now) because things have gotten much, much worse.

Pascal | January 10, 2021

The World Bank is lending Lebanon almost \$250 million to be used as cash assistance for the poor. But the poor will get the money in Lebanese Pounds at an exchange rate below the market rate by at least 40%. The dollars will be kept with the Central Bank, and the Central Bank will use them to subsidize basic goods (which will not necessarily benefit the poor). This will last a few months, no more. The cash assistance in Lebanese Pounds to the poor will contribute to weakening the pound; the subsidies will ultimately be removed, and the World Bank assistance will be another debt to pay off. This is Lebanon's social protection system. And we are not even really sure what exactly the Central Bank is doing with the dollars, as it continues to do accounting tricks to cover its losses. The commercial banks are doing the same. The result: the poor are getting poorer with no resistance and the rich are prevailing and escaping the situation!

Zeina | January 25, 2021

على شرفة مشمسمة، هدوء جميل مصحوب برققة عصفائر وهديل حمامم. أحاول التركيز لالتقاط كل الأصوات. أسمع هديرًا مستمرًا يصل من بعيد. هيدا موتور أكبردا ثم فجأة يتناهي إلى مسعفي صباح ديك يتكر عدّة مرات، وحديث راجين يتبادلان المتالح الواجبة للرض. سيارة وحيدة تقطع مسرعة، أنا أبيضوت من بالضيق في أحد الشوارع رأس بيروت الأكثر رجمة عادةً اليوم، بندر خضور لاللة، ولكن تكثر الأوساخ في الشارع كل الأصوات التي رصنيتها موقفة، إلا هدير الموتور ورققة المصافير لا تزال مسعومة. بعد أيام من للرض، أقفز أنشياء بسيطة تتناسلها عند انشقاقنا بوظائفنا الحياتية اليومية، كالقدرة على الوقوف في الشرفة والاستمتاع بالشمس، أو الاستلقاء على فرشاة ووسادة والحصول على الدواء للتخفيف من ألم جسدتي ورأسني.

فكرت بالسجناء للرض ومن خسروا بيوتهم وحقارتهم للراحة لو أصيبوا بالعدوى. أنا لم أصب بالكورونا بس العوارض باللي عشتها هي نفسها عوارض الكورونا. أما الوصول للدواء، فهذا كمان مش شي سهل، حتى الأدوية البسيطة مقطوعة، الناس عم تحزن الأدوية تحوزا من مستقلب خطر، والسلطات مش قادرة تطلق الناس أو تغطي بدل، ما في أي نوع من حماية للإنسان ولا ثقة بأي

جربة، كل واحد بيدتر حاله، يعني شريعة القاب، بلد قاتان إدارته مبنية على التخويف، التخويف، الدائم من الآتي ومن الآخر

رينة | كانون الثاني ٢٠٢١



Adapted from "Case 1" by Charbel Al Khoury

Adapted from "Mazaj-Mood" by Ayham Jabr

اولات

ATTENTIVENESS:

أولاة SURVIVAL/RESISTANCE

I hope that no matter what *they* do—no matter the trauma, the pain, the destruction—we can continue to imagine the possibilities. To dream. To bring to life new worlds, worlds we are deserving of.

Aida | January 26, 2021



The more stressed I am, the more attentive my gaze becomes. I search for the tiniest manifestations of nature in my periphery. This is how I survive the daily wounds of this city.

A red dragonfly on a car's license plate. A tiny lizard crawling the sidewalk in the parking lot. A Palestine snubird feeding off my balcony's flowers.

I am begging Beirut to hand us beauty so we can survive.

Muzna | December 1, 2020



On Friday, the last day before the total lockdown, I drive to work. On the way there, I look closely at the other drivers, mainly because I need to predict their moves. Will they stop for me or keep going? But it's also because I enjoy observing people and trying to guess what they are thinking. This is the best and only form of entertainment today. Morning radio is too depressing, and I am almost never in the mood to listen to music.

A woman near me drives a Toyota. I see her stop and wait for the traffic light to turn green. This traffic light has been off for weeks now. I feel bad for her; she seems confused. Probably hoping that the light will somehow work and save her the risk of crossing on her own. I think, deep down, she knows it will not. After a couple of minutes, the other drivers start honking at her for holding up the traffic. Angry drivers shout, *Wlooh yalla, khatinat! Oh come on, enough!* I admit I sometimes am one of those, but only when I am late for work.

The sound of the horns grows louder, and she suddenly moves forward. *Come on, go for it*, I silently encourage her in my head. The commotion of repetitive horns. I think, can spike sudden courage in people—or is it fear? Forced to cross the road, she moves forward slowly, carefully checking the intersecting road, hoping the traffic from the other side will simply slow down. And then she starts honking too, signaling to the other cars: *I am coming through, please stop!*

Watfa | November 23, 2020



My kids, amused, break the news of the Baabda prisoner escape to me.

My immediate thought is: I feel sorry for those killed in the accident. Some have been jailed for months with no trial. What are their stories? Where do they live? How are their families dealing with this? Where are they going? What are their hopes and dreams? Hiding (after their pictures were disseminated warning against them)? I cannot incriminate them. I cannot see them as harmful. I see them as victims.

Zeina | November 21, 2020



These older buildings down the street often house South Asian migrant workers. The workers hang out on the large sidewalk below the buildings and shop in the small stores on the ground floor of residential buildings. The stores sell phone cards, change money, and repair phones and small hardware products. There is an Ethiopian hairdresser. There is a new small grocery store with pickles and olives. I hear the shopkeepers talk about how much cheaper the rental of commercial space has become.

Livia | November 25, 2020



In times of crisis, how and why is real estate still promoted as an "investment"?

While looking on Facebook for a place to rent, I found an advertisement for a new

property in Beirut. It made me question the ways in which real estate is promoted worldwide as investment while I tend to think that it is a myth.

Mennatullah | November 25, 2020



My mother calls me on Thursday to remind me to fill my car with gas. *لما ما تقطقي*, to not run out. I had not planned to leave the house that day—I was definitely not prepared to deal with long queues of cars outside the gas station.

But the station in Ain Mreisse only has a couple of cars. No queue, nothing unusual. Maybe my mom's WhatsApp rumors are not true after all. At least for now. This phase of rush-to-the-gas-station, though, will probably return soon, and it won't be a rumor.

I pay 38,000 LBP for the gas and 2,000 LBP to the man who cleaned my windshield. Do you wonder if it is enough to give 1,000 or 2,000 LBP as tips anymore? What do they buy these days?

Well, these thoughts do not seem to stick for too long. I convince myself that *قد* is *واحد همه* *ع*, everyone has their own problems. I have a full tank now. Mission accomplished. Time to go home.

Watfa | December 2, 2020



While driving through Kantari, I am suddenly met with a crossroad. The one with the traffic light that has been out of service since—hmm, I'm actually not sure when. I am deeply disturbed. How can I cross? When? Will I be hit by the cars rushing from the intersecting road? At the same time, I feel somehow normal, if not matter-of-fact. Of course there are no traffic lights; this is a failed state, and everything is falling apart. Why should anything work?

I cross through. I manage.

This makes me think of all the major events over the past few months. Moments when I thought well, then, this is the end of our road. But then, somehow, the incident was normalized and we adapted and carried on. Is this resilience? Or are we just numb?

Watfa | November 23, 2020



If you take the steep hill towards the top of Koreiteim, you can see the trees creeping down the edge of Hariri's palace. There are barely any guards outside the palace anymore. Maybe one guard sits at the front of it. The Saad Hariri poster is torn. Some of the glass windows are broken. The palace is abandoned.

Livia | November 25, 2020



It's Saturday! Our first *السبت* Saturday cruise, after the lockdown! People who have visited Nabatieh before know how important and symbolic this event is to the people of the area—at least to our generation. A generation who grew up on the songs of Hamada Hilal, Hani Shaker, and Mustafa Amar echoing in Nabatieh Square every Saturday afternoon. Such a desperate generation!

The starting point of the kazdoura is near Hassan Kamel Al-Sabbah's statue at the entrance of Nabatieh, right next to Janoubi Coffeshop. You can see tens of people in their cars driving slowly, repetitively, with weird smiling facial expressions. Many faces, silent looks exchanged with fellow drivers. Saturday after Saturday, and you would be able to tell a loyal Saturday rider from a fake.

Espresso kiosks are spread on the street's sidewalk, left and right. Over the years, the kazdoura has become a speed-dating event. Ladies and gentlemen have been seen exchanging mobile phone numbers on a small piece of paper from the windows of their cars.

My friends and I usually drive in rounds; we always stick to a three-round kazdoura. Anything more than that, and we might ruin our reputation in the town. Ayyb, shame. Rumors follow women who regularly partake in the kazdoura. In other words, *النت* يلي يتخلل سيارتها *ع* كزذورة *السبت* بتفشمس. The girl who takes her car down for a Saturday cruise is often named and shamed. My friends and I don't really care, but we still stick to a three-round kazdoura only so that our cars and faces are not memorized by the

"gentlemen" chilling with their *argulehs* on the sidewalk.

I like to think of the kazdoura as a social event that brings

people together at a time when human connection is predominantly virtual. With so much unpredictability, Kazdouret El-Sabet is one of the few constants. If you want to visit Nabatieh, make sure it's on a Saturday.

Zainab | December 5, 2020



My thoughts are interrupted by the time I reach the airport tunnel. (Do people who, like me, were not raised in Beirut, perceive the tunnel as a symbol of the capital?)

A woman in the car next to me is listening to Julia Boutros's "*Butra Shi Nhar*." I hate Julia; I love the song. The woman and I exchange looks.

We are so close, I can't stop myself from telling the woman, "Nice song, which radio channel is it on?" "99.9 Fame FM," she responds, laughing.

The cars start to move.

"*Yen 'ad 'layki,*" *happy holidays.*

"*Yen 'ad 'layki,*" *happy holidays.*

Zainab | January 26, 2021



There is a small lot next to Fouad Siniora's house. It has recently been fenced and paved over in asphalt. My now-cosmopolitan Lebanese street dog Goobi and I spent our first days in Lebanon, after returning from the U.S. in September 2019, looking for tiny bits of grass or dirt where she could (politely) go to the bathroom.

In Ras Beirut, we found two spots—one of which was this lot next to Siniora's house. It was one of the only plots of land that was not paved, and that actually had some sort of sand/earth/dust for Goobi to get to her business.

Almost every night, we would walk there, and Goobi would do her thing. At the height of the protests, I even called it my everyday act of resistance, muttering curses in the direction of Siniora's apartment and the police who protected his building.

But a couple of weeks ago, with that lot paved (another piece of dirt taken away from public use) and a huge fence protecting it, I saw Siniora walking laps in there. He was flanked by a bodyguard who just walked in circles around this small lot, and an unusually big army of cops standing outside the fence, suspiciously eyeing everyone who walked by.

He looked ridiculous to me, and on the inside, I laughed. I knew that Fouad Siniora, a corrupt member of the elite, was walking on mounds of dog shit.

Aida | December 5, 2020



My father has a new hobby: gardening. Every day, while he works in the backyard, he knocks on my window to chat. Since the pandemic, my dad—and many other men from his generation—has found more time for himself. He's built three small agricultural tents in the backyard and has planted beans, lettuce, broccoli, potatoes and more. He's even built a house for our outdoor cats.

Zainab | January 26, 2021



Lately, as someone who is locked down in a rural area and not in the city, I'm finding tranquility in nature. Here, in Nabatieh, the lockdown is not as strict as in Beirut. We don't feel very isolated or lonely. We go for walks in the empty streets and picnic between the olive trees facing my house.

Zainab | January 25, 2021



There is so little access to nature in Beirut. The first lockdown made this starkly clear. The seaside corniche, the only space we have to breathe, was closed off to pedestrians.

I went on urban walks with my two children, maneuvering through garbage bins and tin pavements taken over by parked cars, vegetable shops, and men with nothing else to do but smoke arguileh. We invented makeshift playgrounds, in parking lots and outdoor shopping centers, but the city still felt tight. The parking lot is too small for their energy. I advise them to run in a spiral, from the center outward to allow them a longer run.

Like Alyssa of Carthage, who founded an empire on a piece of land that can be encircled with an oxhide, I reinvent the tiny parking lot into a stadium for my boys.

Muzna | December 1, 2020



And somehow there are still small, daily acts of resistance by this city's superheroes. The woman who jumped over a railing of the first-floor, walking the edges of a balcony, to save a terrified cat. The person/s putting up wheat-paste artworks to depict the struggles of people. The women of Egna Legna Besidet who organize and mobilize non-stop. Even me. Though I often feel passive, when I take walks and drop into a conversation, something simmers underneath my skin. When I look at an empty parking lot, I imagine in its place a mini park between the buildings. Our dreams, they matter too.

Aida | December 10, 2020



Unpopular opinion, but I like getting stuck in traffic. I perceive it as a sign of life—a collective social experience, something to share with strangers on a regular basis. What if we enjoyed our time on the road more, what with all it has to show and tell? But I must say, today's jam is a deadly one because of the holidays. Hundreds of cars are going now, with me, to the South.

Zainab | January 26, 2021



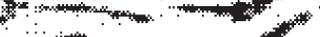
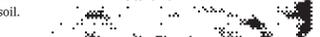
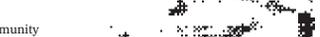
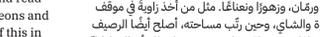
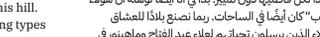
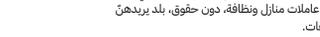
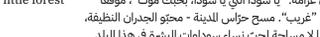
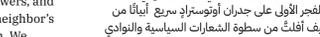
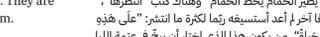
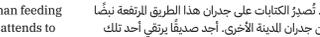
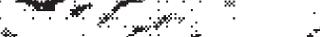
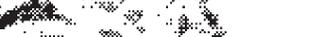
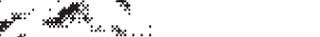
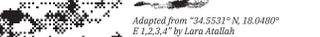
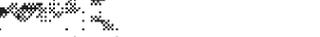
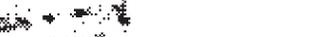
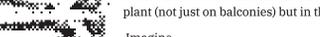
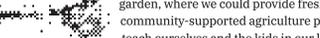
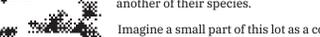
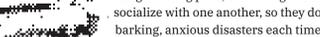
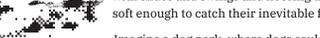
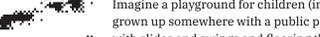
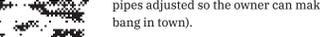
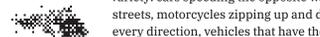
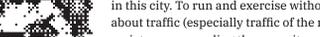
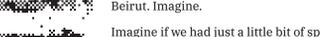
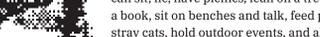
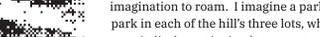
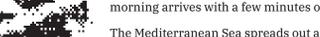
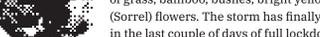
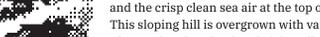
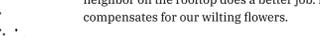
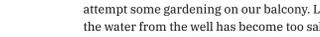
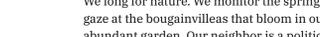
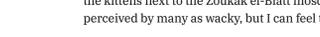
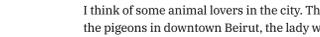
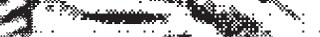
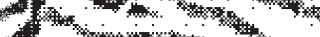
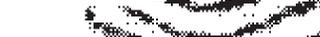
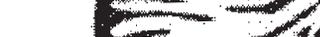
Last year, [this street] witnessed people marching and chanting for change—a very daring movement in Nabatieh. People were literally saying, "*Harameh Harameh, Nabih Berri Harameh*," Nabih Berri is a thief, a thief, in the heart of Nabatieh. Also, this time last year, the street witnessed Nabatieh protestors being threatened and beaten up by the we-know-who thugs. It also witnesses, on a daily basis, the many ladies visiting the famous Fou-Bijoux Hassan to get makeup, perfumes, accessories and much more. It's a trademark in Nabatieh. When you reach the finish line in Kazdouret El-Sabet, you can see a poster of Nabih Berri, slightly torn from the corner.

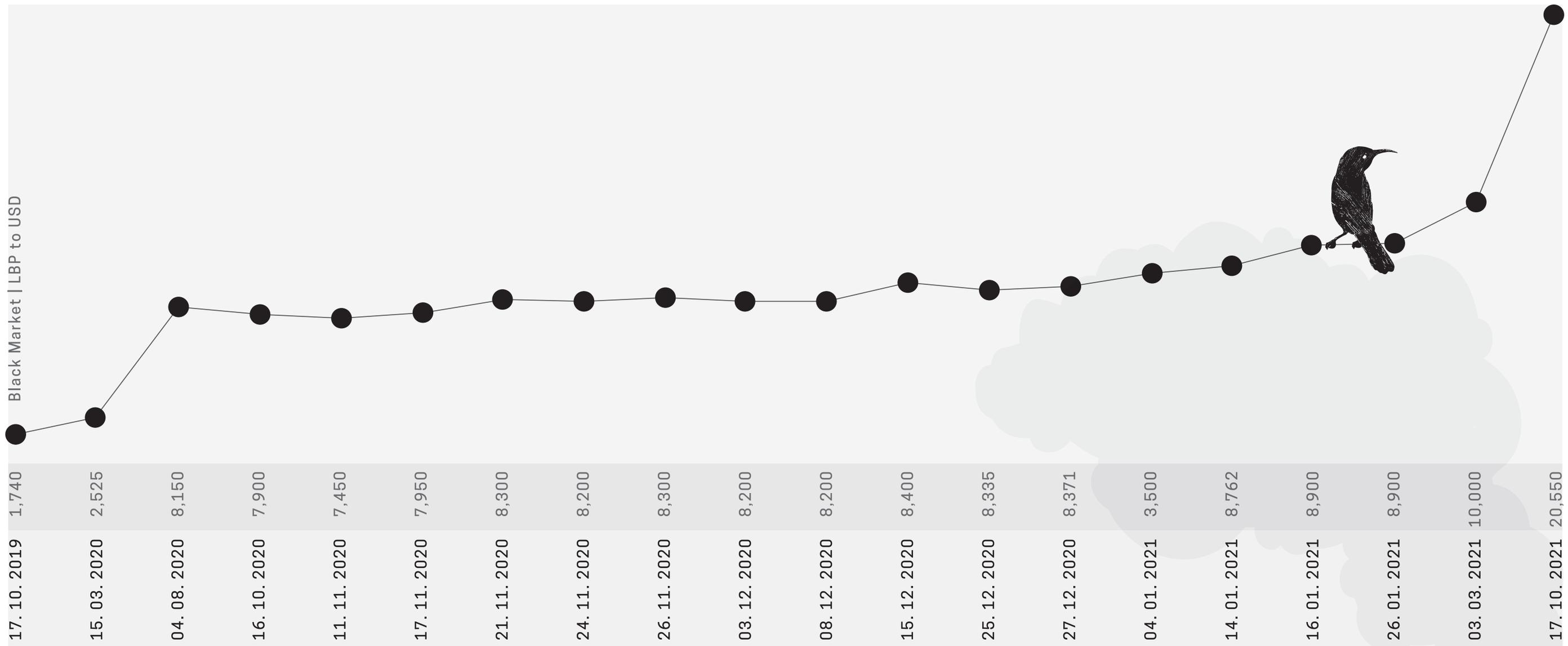
The poster happens to cover another older poster of Nabih Berri, covering another older poster of Nabih Berri, and so on. There are layers of Nabih Berri all over the city that lives under his shadow.

Zainab | December 4, 2020



Adapted from "34.5531° N, 18.0480° E 1.2.3.4" by Lara Attallah





COVID-19 HITS LEBANON HARD

Lebanon goes into lockdown, closing its borders and shutting down the airport.

START OF PROTESTS

Thousands of protesters take to the streets in Beirut.

BEIRUT EXPLOSION

At 6:07 PM, a blast rips through the city, killing over 200 people, displacing over 300,000, and destroying half of the city's physical infrastructure.

الإعلان عن مشروع المدونات الإثنوغرافية

"كيف ندرس كباحثين/ات اللحظات الاستثنائية في البلدان التي تشهد تحولات واضطرابات؟"

الاجتماع الأول لمشروع مدونات إثنوغرافية

"عندي ادمان على التوثيق وآخر فترة عم يكون في توثيق لا ارادي وفوضوي لهيك امرار بكتب وامرار بصور كرمال هيك عم شارك بهيدا العمل" - باسكال

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE INDEX

"It does not surprise me to read that only 4% of Lebanese consider themselves as thriving."

- Aida

PROTESTERS CONFRONT THE RULING ELITE

"A Palestine sunbird feeding off my balcony's flowers. I am begging Beirut to hand us beauty so we can survive."

- Muzna

المدارس لا تزال مغلقة بسبب فيروس كورونا

"تواجه المدارس في لبنان ربما أصعب أيامها."

SYRIAN REFUGEE TENTS SET ON FIRE

"What a tragedy. One that announces, loud and clear, that our lives in Lebanon — whether refugees or hosts — is cheap."

- Zainab

ارتفاع عدد الإصابات بفيروس كورونا يحتم الإغلاق العام

"حالة من الخوف والقلق والأناية بين الناس فانطلقوا كحافل بشرية إلى محلات باتت برفوف فارغة." - حمود

SECURITY FORCES RESPOND TO TRIPOLI'S ANGER WITH TEARGAS & RUBBER BULLETS

"But now what?"

- Zeina

الاجتماع السابع والأخير

"وإذ كلنا عم نحكي عن نفس القصص." - ناي

PRISONERS ESCAPE FROM BAABDA

"What are their stories? Where are they going? What are their hopes and dreams?"

- Zeina

ALVAREZ & MARSAL WITHDRAW FROM FORENSIC AUDIT

"Another reminder that this state will do anything to ensure we remain stuck."

- Zeina

الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية على خطى الجامعة الأميركية في تعديل الأقسام الجامعية

"دولة الأقساط لن تمر، فقد أعلن الطلاب أنهم هم الجامعة ومثى إدارتها." - ناي

ISRAELI JETS FLY THROUGH BEIRUT

"There are decorated Christmas trees near the Port of Beirut."

- Zainab

GOVERNMENT FORMATION STALLED

"Why don't we leave? Why do you want to stay?" I'm not sure how to respond to that. But her questions weigh heavily on me.

- Livia

WORLD BANK APPROVES \$246 MIL.

"The Mediterranean sea spreads out and I allow my imagination to roam."

- Aida

TWO YEARS SINCE THE UPRISING

"Even though revolutions might not change the reality of where they happened, they certainly change us."

- Mennatullah

أم غضب أم إنك

تأخني السنوات بعدها إلى تشرين الأول من العام الفائت. كنت متردداً جداً في دخول وسط البلد وساحة الشهداء.

دخلت يومها من شارع الحميرزة. كان معظم من شاهدت يتناقلون أخبار ساحيم الكتفزة بصوت عالٍ. الحانات مليئة في وقت مبكر ومقاهيها فارغة. وصلت. كان هناك حاجز عسكري، تجمع العديد من عناصر الأمن حولهُ. أوقفوا دخول السيارات عبر حاجز حديدية أغلقت الشارع تماماً، نادراً ما كانوا يوقفون داخلي هذه الساحة. أبقوا لهم معزراً واحداً أو اثنين لا يستوعبون سوى عدد محدود من العابرين.

نسيت تماماً من كنت رفقتهم، ذهبوا بأعلامهم وزيبتهم إلى الداخل. كان ذلك غريباً فيهم سعداء جداً وهادئون، أرى أيضاً العديد من الأطفال الداخلين برفقة أهاليهم، ولكن عند اقترابي من الساحة الآن، لا أمزج أمام عيني سوى هؤلاء اللدحين بالألسحة، وكأننا وحننا في هذه الساحة.

عدت أترجي، توجهت شمالاً نحو جسر سليم الحص، ها أنا أصغي بخط مواريلها للتظاهرين الفاضلين والسعد، أيضاً كل الاتجاهات التي مكثت فيها انتهت بمقابلة حراس الساحة حيث تجد حواجزهم الحديدية، كانت ذلك تقريباً على جميع أطراف الساحة، وكذا في كل مرة تواجه وحيدين تماماً، بعد أن أرى العديد ممن جمعو للدخول إلى هذه الساحة يتخفون وراء هذه الحواجز الحديدية. أنظر إلى هؤلاء الحراس، لا يبدو عليهم الغضب، يحرسون هذه الساحة، من كل الاتجاهات، يهدمون من نقل عنهم، ومن تفل المزم، أو حتى من تفل هذه الحواجز.

عمره | ١٥ كانون الأول

خلال حديث جري الأسبوع الماضي حول تأثير اللفا على وضع الأولد الضفي، تطرقنا إلى تجربة الحرب الأهلية التي عشناها بكاملها ولكن بدأت أعياها منذ الثمانينيات، سألتني محبتي: "لتر تشعري بالخوف خلال الحرب يوم كتب بعمر أولادك؟" حاولت أن أتذكر هذه الفترة التي طبعتم طفولتي، تذكرت أول مشاعر الحزن التي اتاحتها عندما عادرتا بيتنا واقترقا عن جنتي مدة طويلة في العام ١٩٨٢ إثر الانتحاج ومجدداً في العام ١٩٨٩ نتيجة حرب التحرير، ثم استحضرت لحظات قلق قصيرة كانت تساورني وتجلج سريفا عندما كنت انتظر عودة والدي من العمل وأخاف عليهما من الخطف أو القتل، خصوصا مع امتلاء طريق العودة من مركز العمل إلى البيت بحواجز الحطف والقتل على خلفية الهوية. كانت بطاقتا هويتهم نظريان ما هو كثرين تعرضيما للمخاطر. هذه هي لحظات الخوف التي بقيت مري. أقرانيا بالخوف من مفقومات العيش لسنوات طويلة، إذ أن أكبر ما يتملكني من هذه اللحاف هو إعادة السيطرة المنظمة نفسها التي أوصلتنا إلى الأزمات. أفكر برده المخاوف وأجسداً أئسد ببطأ من خوف الطرولة، سابقا بسبب تقدم عمري ودوري العائلي- الاجتماعي وثقائبة ذاكرتي التي تحافظ مع مرور الوقت على اللحظا السعيدة وتمحو الصعوات والألم، لا أعرف جدوى للقرار، ولكن أول ما يتبادر إلى ذهني شعور بغضب هائل مزوج بالخوف، لا أعرف إذا اخترته سابقاً، بحتت عن عوامل أخرى قد تقصر ذلك، فاستنتجت أمرين.

الهم، رعدت، فيلمت أمي، أنا بكرة الشقي ويتعرجني صوت الرعد لي، بش يخاف منه، بحياتي ما بكيت من الخوف من أي شي أصلاً. بش مباح بتروح إنه كيف بيدي ضل عايشة لحالي هيك؟ يمكن أنا ورايحة أو جاية من الشغل حدا يكون لاحقاً! أو إذا دي نهار جيت للبليل (بعد ما يفتح البلد) يمكن ويمكن وممكن... فحبت فابيسوك وبلشت دور على غرفة للإيجار بسبت مشترك. تذكرت أول ما نزلت ع بيروت من شي ١١ سنة قديه كان صعب مزوجة من أهالي لي صران بيومن بش مع بحتوكي لحق قفل المابرين تبع هلق. بزهي، برجع للأفكار السودة لي براسي، بتذكر كيف صالر بيومن البيت (أنا البالدة بس بشفل الباب الحديد)، هنّ بيس عرفوا إنه الجيران باني حني بنفش الطابق فلوا زاد خوف.

صراحة، بروف شوي يرجع فجةً بخدا حلال ما يجرب يفوت من البرندا. بسمع غنية أو بشوف من بعدة فابق أحي معه أتبي شوي، بترجع أفكاري بتروح إنه كيف بيدي ضل عايشة لحالي هيك؟ يمكن أنا ورايحة أو جاية من الشغل حدا يكون لاحقاً! أو إذا دي نهار جيت للبليل (بعد ما يفتح البلد) يمكن ويمكن ويمكن... فحبت فابيسوك وبلشت دور على غرفة للإيجار بسبت مشترك. تذكرت أول ما نزلت ع بيروت من شي ١١ سنة قديه كان صعب مزوجة من أهالي لي صران بيومن بش مع بحتوكي لحق قفل المابرين تبع هلق. بزهي، برجع للأفكار السودة لي براسي، بتذكر كيف صالر بيومن البيت (أنا البالدة بس بشفل الباب الحديد)، هنّ بيس عرفوا إنه الجيران باني حني بنفش الطابق فلوا زاد خوف.

هي القصة بقتت من لا حضرت تدريب عن "الأمن" افترض علينا بالشغل كرمال تعرف نتعامل مع أية وضع ممكن ياتر على أماننا الشخصي.

أول سؤال سألتنا إياه المدربين "عزف عن حالك ومن شو بخاف؟" كان جوابي بلا ما فكرر "وأنا ما يخاف من شي" بش خلصت جولة الأسئلة بلشوا يعطوني بطاقة عامة عن الوضع الأمني للبلدان. مع لي للدرين كانوا من هولندا بشي كان عندن اطلاق متبوع على كل الأحداث يلي صارت ومع نصير أكثر شي عاقلان براسي إنه صبح ما لي خطر من أي هجمات راهابية أو أي حرب علي الحدود، بشي الوضع الأمني كثير مزاج وسبغ وتفوهات إنّه رايمن عندي عشادة بين ٢٠٠٨ و٢٠١١، بتتذكرو هالفترة؟ وقتها فقت عايش بالانفجارات، وقت أحداث عبرا ونهر اليرداد وغيرها. بشي أنا وقرينا ما مكنت خليفة مكنت هون وكنا بوقف ساعة على الجارز وناطرين لقطع وخ وعم بششوا السيارات.

كان في كثير تحذيرات وتدابير بشي ما كنت خافا طب لي هلق هيك؟

هلقي يمكن مع بالي وبمكمن مع فكرر زيادة بشي يلي بعرفه ما عيالي كفي حياتي ببلد بدي خون خافية فيه، بدي حتى بامان بشي.

شعيرين | ١٥ تشرين الثاني

طافت الدني من بيومن، وظائف معها الطرافات، رعدت وبعصفت، فاطقع الإنترنت، وراحت الكبرياء. حتى شاشمة التنفزيون بيت أهلي انطفقت. رعدت رعدة كثير قوية. هو أوكيد ما ال بيت، بشي أنا حسبيته هنّ هلقه كان الصوت قوي.

من أنا وصغرة ما بحت بصل الفتا. كل شي مرتبط بالهشفت بذكرتي بقلتنا من الجبل، من الضيفة – محليا – بي عينا الشنوي اللي حد للدرسة بالرابية، ما مكنت حت هالفترة من السنة لأن نزلتنا من الضيفة كانت تعني الانفصال عن أهل والدي- عمومي وولادهم – اللي كنت أقرب إلين من أي حدت تاني بالعيلة، فأنا بعرف ليه ما بحب الفصل. بشي لي عيامل بؤس نبوية مرتبطة عينا بفضل الشتا. كل كبرياتي وكل الصور اللي بيالي عن الفاصل.

هي مشاهد ناس علفانة بعجفة، وسيارات غرقانة بالي، وسبول ما بتخليها نمشي بالطريق ووجوه مرهقة وناس مع قوتو بعضيها. كل شي براسي أصلاً بروج يتاجه واحد ع طول – إنه ما في حدا مسبول عن شي برابيلد، وإنه للسؤولين فيه فإفاجير كل شي كأنه أول مرة بصير حتى الشقي بكوابين. أوف طافت، وصار في زواقع، والجراري قتلن، والسبول، سكرت الطرافات، العما كيف باقتننا هالشنوة، نحنا عايشين بالصحرا أصلا حيث مستحيل نشقي!

بعرف إني بربط كل شي بالسياسة، والبولية وبتقصيرها. وبانعدام الأمن والأمان الاجتماعي، وبرأ متروكين لحالنا بدون شبكة تهيئنا إذا وقعنا. مثل اللي بسيارة عم نكر نزل بدون فرامل، يعني مثله، الناس اللي تفكرت بيومين ب ء ب، شو عمالوا؟ شنت عليهم وهنّ بلا سقف؟ خافوا من الصوت؟ ركضوا ع ولادهن بيخوهن أول ما رعدت؟ ركضوا تخبو بالزوايا؟ هلقي زوايا ببالبيوت أصلاً؟

REDEFINING CONTINUITY: DENIAL OR ACCEPTANCE? RAGE OR HELPLESSNESS?

What are we going to do in the years to come? I've never had this question be so central to life. It is everywhere.

Livia | January 7, 2021

The road to Bekaa, from Beirut, seems peaceful and beautiful, as if everything is alright. How does the sun rise as if nothing has happened?

The fields at the side of the roads look like they do every year. So do the trees, and the bright green grass. It almost feels like the other side of the story.

A peaceful calm morning can hide the hunger, the lack of medicine, the feeling of incapacity. My high school teacher used to say:

الشمس شارقة والذئ بألف خير.

The sun is shining, the world is in good hands.

Is it? And if so, is this illusion a needed break or a dangerous form of denial?

Pascal | January 26, 2021

2. Numbness, denial, and confusion

These were the first emotions after the blast, and the most persisting. We belong to a generation who feels as if this state of being will never end. There is a magnified sense of floating in the unknown with too much anxiety about what will come next.

3. Anger

I am enraged that the younger generation—the children, the teenagers, the twenty-somethings—have to live with what we thought we'd left behind.

Pascal | November 20, 2020

I do not like to see people anymore. Well, not all people. Just those who sit in cafés or go about their days as though everything is normal. Unaware that there are others who can no longer make ends meet. Apologies in advance if anyone reading this enjoys sitting in a café. This is not against you. This is against normalizing what we are going through until one day we no longer have electricity or internet or food or medicine, knowing that what we still haven't seen anything.

Watfa | December 2, 2020

This afternoon, I had a long conversation with a friend. She argued that the October 17 protests were not radical and violent enough to impose change and that this could be due to the attitude of the older generation and the upper income class protestors who refused violence. I could not argue for or against; I am not sure if more or less violence would have made a difference. Who has the right to decide on the nature of street mass movements and freedom of expression? Who has the right to decide on anything?

Zeina | November 26, 2020

I am on the dark highway from Nabatieh to Beirut. My hands on the wheel, I remember how the 2006 war started. The bridge I am on was bombed; and it can be bombed at any moment now.

We feel the presence of death at all times. There is a constant state we're trapped in—one of deep dissatisfaction and fear. I call it the "Post-Beirut Explosion Melancholy." We feel nostalgic about a really distant golden past we never lived. Dissatisfied with an uneasy and torturous present. Anxious about an uncertain future.

Every time, on this dark highway, I think of how much easier driving would be if these roads were lit. Every time, on this dark highway, I remember that there's only one street where one of the politicians in the South lives that shines all the time, day and night. How humiliating! Every time, on this dark highway, I wonder: What if we had a train? A tramway?

But even if we had a train, I probably would never take it. In a country like ours, the last thing I would want is to die because of a train accident caused by neglect.

Zainab | November 16, 2020

I don't want to write from a place of despair, but this is where it is closest and most immediate. How do we cope with the anxiety of not knowing what comes next—that even when you think it can't get any worse, it does?

Sometimes, I miss the insurrectionary moments under tear gas. Where there was solidarity, urgency, the space to scream and shout, a sense of a clear enemy.

Aida | November 16, 2020

We are not budging. The economic collapse continues to hit people mercilessly. The prices of food items have increased in a mind-boggling manner—422% between September 2019 to September 2020. More than 70% of Lebanese households received a monthly income below 2,400,000 million LBP in 2018.

The rage is still there. Why are we stuck? Is this a learned helplessness?

I have to admit: I miss the protests of last year. Though I am sad: They raised expectations and built a strong sense of hope, created an elusive power, and then... disappeared.

Zeina | November 25, 2020

My body crashes—with hesitation at first, then with the weight of exhaustion, like a crumbling building. Small signs trigger my alarmed reactions: a flickering of light, a deep earthy sound, a shaking...they put me on aimless alert.

On rare occasions, my memory blurts out incidents I didn't know I had stored from the explosion. It is as though time was elastic on August 4, and that some scenes play too fast while others are stuck in slow motion. I don't want to write another tale of that day; there are so many testimonies, and I am nothing in the sea of destruction. But I really just want to sleep. To sleep endlessly, to access real rest. But the loop persists, a tiring loop grinding future thoughts and deafening connections to the present.

Pascal | December 7, 2020

Elias El Rahbani died. What awful news to start 2021. My mom and I reminisced about the golden age as we watched reports about his legendary journey. She said people were more innocent, art more authentic, and time slower. Isn't it fascinating how we continue to long for that time, this past we've never lived? Our nostalgic attachment to old songs, dusty pictures of Beirut, fading Lebanese movie posters, traditional taxi cars, the Beirut tramway, Beirut, and *Wasat El Balad*—I'd like to think this through. We think we know those days; we tend to think that people were not politically affiliated or that politics was not as integral to their everyday lives. As though the 15-year civil war never happened. You know, those times, the golden ones, were also ridden with killings and displacement, and the haunting skeleton of Lebanese politics.

Zainab | January 26, 2021

I've noticed, recently, that I always start conversations or cut my rants short with *el hamdillah*. I was talking to my friend about the explosion the other day; even when I give myself permission to express my feelings, I feel the need to balance my discontent with an *el hamdillah* every once in a while.

Pascal | November 25, 2020

I try to speak to friends and realize the gap between my non-Arab friends and me is growing exponentially. Have I suddenly become culturally introverted, or have the differences between us lost gravity and are suddenly floating in space, blurring my sight?

More and more, people outside of Lebanon seem to be operating in a parallel universe. Wait, what do you mean you have hot water at home? No frozen water pipes? No carrying gallons of water home so your mother doesn't have to make the trip twice?

Leadership and direction? Exhaustion? Detachment?

Pascal | December 4, 2020

A year ago, I took to the streets with my son every day. Why have we not returned? Is it the pandemic and the fear of death? Economic hardships? The lack of a political vision? Leadership and direction? Exhaustion? Detachment?

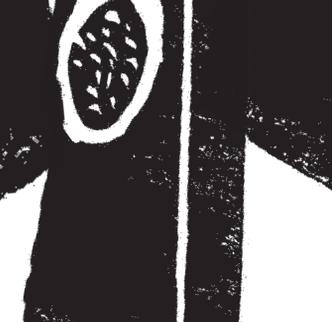
Zeina | November 25, 2020

I turned the radio on once I got into the car. It was Fairuz's birthday and most channels had her songs on. People dialed in from across the country to talk about how much Fairuz means to them; how much she reminds them of the "real Lebanon," the "Lebanon we all love." Aren't we past this fantasy? Did that Lebanon ever exist? This lamentation reminds me of kids who believe in Santa; and I feel old, so old, because I no longer believe. Once that thought invaded my mind, I could no longer enjoy Fairuz's voice, so I turned the radio off.

Watfa | December 2, 2020

This road to Beirut, from the Bekaa, is a path of and to memories. The mountains haven't changed much. Some buildings also haven't changed. I remember that when we used to get closer to Beirut, we would begin to see destroyed houses on the sides of the roads. Lines of rubble and empty rooms with broken walls. My brain paints the scene in gray, a color my brain connects with the feeling. A city dipped in gray. I saw a similar scene last August. That is not a nice reminder.

Pascal | January 26, 2021



Adapted from "Untitled" by Charbel Al Khoury

