



**Poem Self-exploration and
unleashing one's self by
unlearning the quote** لا أرى لا
أسمع لا أتكلم

Poem آفة

Poem Home

First Person Omnigender:
life experiences and social
environments shape what we
call gender roles

Poem Instructions

First Person An Email

Photo Essay LAU UNHCR Visit

First Person المنبؤ

**First Person Behind the Veil of
Ignorance**

**First Person The Definition of
Change**

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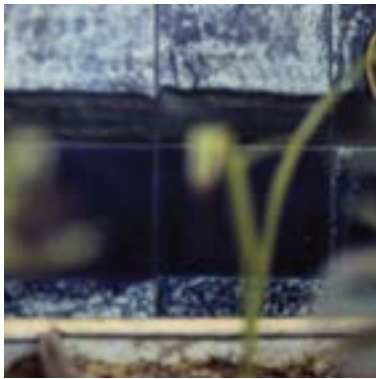


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The program's mission is to prepare future Arab leaders for the complexities of the 21st century. Through high-quality academic support, leadership development activities, and civic engagement opportunities, the program fosters professionalism, ethical conduct, and tolerance in order to enable students to become globally competitive leaders and agents of change in their respective societies.

UNLEARNING

Comfort Zone, Mind-Shaping, Choices, Discovery, Belief, Experience, Change, Understanding, Customs and Traditions, Unintentional Manifestation.



FIRST PERSON The Definition of Change page 4

SHORT STORY آفة page 6

POEM Instructions page 8

FIRST PERSON An Email page 10



FIRST PERSON Behind the Veil of Ignorance page 12

FIRST PERSON Embracing Identities: My Life As An "Omnigender" page 14

POEM Home page 17

FIRST PERSON أرى page 19



FIRST PERSON المنبؤ page 21

MEPI NEWS Jbeil Municipality Trip page 22

FIRST PERSON Learning Gender Equality page 24

MEPI NEWS UNHCR Field Trip page 26



Produced by the students of the Middle East Partnership Initiative Tomorrow's Leaders scholarship program at the Lebanese American University

The Definition of Change

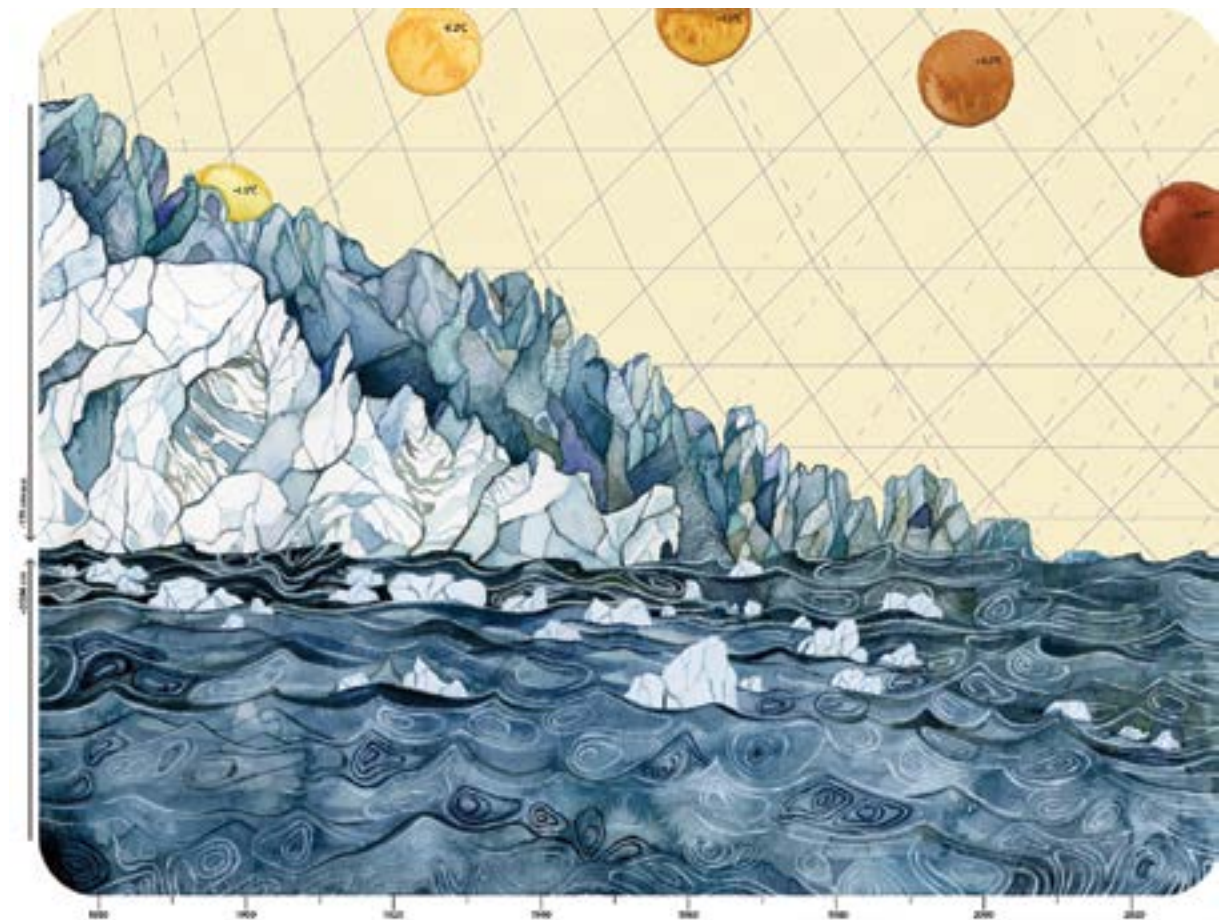
written by Siraj Belgasium

After much contemplation, I have decided to begin my essay with an Oxford dictionary definition of the word "Change":

Change (*n*): An Act or process through which something becomes different

However, during the last few years, this definition no longer expressed nor encompassed all that I have experienced.

Thus far, my life has comprised many changes. Changes differed in origin, influence, and lesson learned, although all have greatly contributed to shaping me into the person I am today.



Of all these changes, only one stands out for having the most profound impact on the way I perceive and ultimately define myself.

On September 15, 2010, my family and I boarded a plane from London to a country I had not seen or heard of in more than five years: Libya. A country I had left as a mere eight-year-old and of which I possessed nothing other than a small collection of childhood memories that had never come to mind... until now.

After we had arrived, I became dedicated to hating the country I never knew before, Libya, and showed my hatred at every possible opportunity. Looking back, I now realize that what I was experiencing was not only a change of location, but a change in those around me as well. The way I had to fit in an environment that was in far from special, becoming an outsider in an environment I should be able to adapt to, as well as the unreasonable consideration I had to give to others' opinions were drastically transformed. Not only had my identity been stripped, but I was also given a small range of choices as to who I could be. I was petrified at being pulled into that same mentality. After all, Libya was a country that had remained unaltered for more than 42 years. Here was a country that was so focused on its extensive oil industry that a person wishing to study the arts would be dismissed as "wasting time on meaningless things," knowing that following a passion that wasn't either for medicine or engineering was cause for people to look down at you.

Fortunately, it was not long after that another change came about: The February 17 Libyan revolution – a much welcomed and needed change. It was after the revolution that I had started attempting to take part in rebuilding the country I once despised. The fact that I had almost nothing to offer did not faze me. I soon became a part of the civil society, which I saw as meaningless at that time, and volunteered in as many

events and fundraisers as possible. I was also accepted into a high-school scholarship program, which shaped me into the person I am today.

Though I cannot deny that it had taken me a considerable amount of time to accept "change," it was through change itself that I learned the most valuable lessons. I am now positive that my geographical location can never hinder the fulfillment of my dreams, goals, and aspirations. Moreover, I am inclined to try harder and pursue my passion to continuously expand my horizons and knowledge.

I realized that I was a unique individual with ideas, hopes, and nothing but time to make them happen. I no longer want to witness the ripples of change. I am destined to take part in creating them. And so, I have become a person who seeks change in every aspect of life, convinced that just because the momentum of change of Libya has slowed down does not mean that mine will too.

Soon enough, I came to disagree with the Oxford Dictionary's definition of change and wrote my own to inspire others to avoid the mistakes that I had made.

Change (n): A transformation in an individual or their environment that may render one disoriented and lost, though once viewed from a different perspective and accepted will force one to rediscover new horizons and abilities.

Adam's condition is not one experienced by many. He just might be special enough to suffer from this, alone.

The bed confined his limbs as he stared at the stained ceiling. It took a few seconds before he realized it was 10:20 am, because that was the exact time his ears were greeted with the buzzing sound of the mosquitoes injected in his throat.

Adam got up as he pushed against the umbilical cord that hung from around his torso to the corner of his bed. The morning routine.

The neurotransmitters shook Adam's temples, orchestrating an eccentric Ardah¹ dance, demanding their daily dose of nicotine and coffee. But after a hellish – yet not-out-of-the-ordinary – night, the cigarette buds overfilled the ashtray, the dirty cups were devouring the kitchen's sink and... there were pages. The apartment was layered with white and yellow paper that neatly covered every piece of wall. Adam read one of the pages as he made his way down to his acquaintance, Raven. A trusted provider for Adam's urges.

The rusty lighter flickered seven times before spitting out a shy burst of flame, ashes covering his shoes. He overheard a conversation that spilled on the sidewalk next to the small store.

The group was composed of four kids around 16 years old, give or take. They seemed surrounded with white noise, until I pricked my ears to hear why one of them had a forehead marbled with veins.

I had to light another cigarette to cloud the air and my presence around them. The first guy quickly revealed the topic of the conversation: "That's it man. Time to get fed. We're failing this. The exam is tomorrow and I only managed to study three pages!"

"I ripped them off from my biology book, folded them very neatly, then I bruised my skull till it became so soft. I took those three pages and I tucked them between my two hemispheres, nice and cozy up there. So now, I

could tell you everything you need to know about the mitochondria!"

The curiosity displayed by the group exceeded three pages. One of the members with his hair down to his shoulders asked: "What does it do?"

After pausing for a bit, and adjusting his posture for a full-on power stance to deliver his answer, "It's the powerhouse of the cell!"

"Yeah, but what color is it? What does it smell like? Is it gooey? Rubbery? Does it make noises when you squeeze it? Why is it good for you? What does it do?"

The mitochondria man was clearly annoyed: "It's the powerhouse of the cell, dude! That's what those sticky pages in my head say, this is all I need to know."

The introverted fellow shook the structure of the group and began asking questions, growing more curious: "So, since you have already filled your head with those three sticky papers, how are you going to put an extra page in there for when you want to draw a green elephant, or an extra page for when it is sunny outside, and your toes are hugging the warm ground and there is a smile peeling off your face. Is there going to be room for a page like that?"

Their noises poured into different alleys as they walked past them, and my shoes befriended five buds that helped me blend into the background and listen to the stories those kids told. It was incredibly essential to listen to what they were saying.

Adam is aware of his condition... to a vague extent. He is aware of his lack of stories.

He goes up to his apartment and starts writing the conversation he just encountered. Leaning over the page as if he is trying to dive into it. The way Adam wrote always seemed unorthodox; he treated the page like a flame about to die, and he was prepared to use every inch of his skin to protect it.

Adam cannot make stories. He is unable to produce, generate, create, or synthesize them. He is merely a spectator, a hudhud² that never touches the land, constantly flying, and eternally sick of the clouds.

The closest feeling to a rush that stories make in his stomach is through the snippets of life he overhears from conversations around him. Conversations with which he keeps veiling the walls of his apartment.

I promise. I was not even trying to steal people's spirit this time. Sometimes I feel like stories follow me, they want to befriend me, they want me to be their god. I wish I could be their god. I understand that my love for Death can seem eerie but in my opinion, Death is a poem everyone should taste.

What matters in all my mindless words is that I have found a story. In an unorthodox sense, it was a conversation – unorthodox because the man was talking to himself.

He sat beside the empty street, wearing a pair of faded jeans that were drawn on with a blue ballpoint. The way he spoke twisted my guts. He spoke as if he were three characters living three stories. I listened, I promise, I was just walking by and even though no one was around him, he spoke like there were fields of people listening. I just joined them.

... And this is exactly the point I'm trying to make, creative expression is a liberation, salvation. It's the only way to take off our blindfolds and see.

How am I supposed to create art when I have a silver brick for either protection or a friend? How can I express myself, slit myself open, liberate myself as you say when all I have within me is just coal, cement and expired eyes? How can I see when the blindfold I was forced to wear is made from gentle steel, heavier than I have ever been? Vengeance is all the creative expression I see, feel or hear. Bodies hugging bullets and tears wiped with dirt. This, is art.

There are worlds inside of you. Your lungs are breathing a false sense of toxicity. The steel blindfold you're wearing isn't only for you to take off. You have my left arm and his stubbornness.

These aren't your eyes and that isn't your tongue who is saying these things. So, stick with me, forget the blindfold and your fragile brain. Peel off this heavy skin of yours and run with me, please; until your eyeballs start running down your cheeks. Keep running! RUN! RUN! RUN! RUN!"

I did as he told me, I did until I threw up.

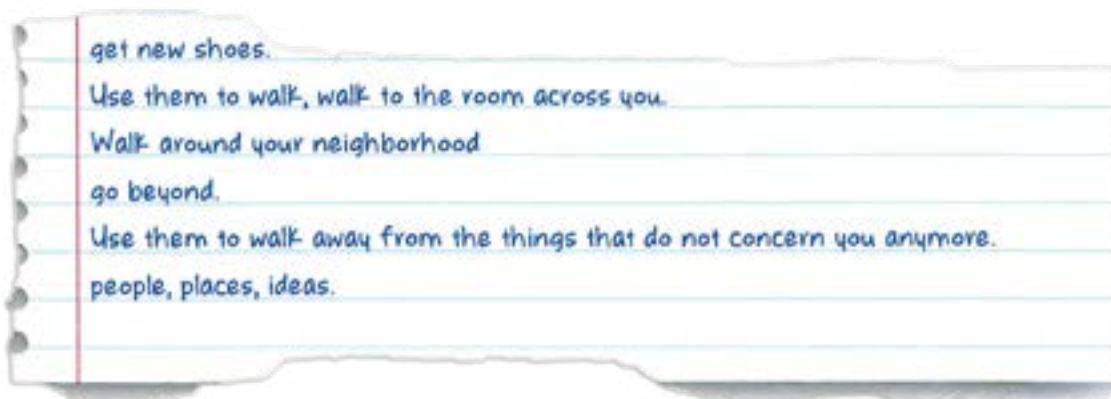
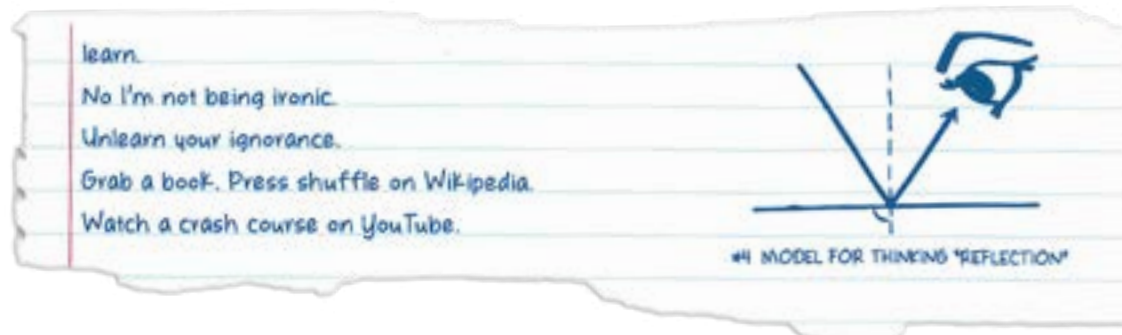
There are blank spots on the wall that yearn to be covered and I have to write stories and never live them.

1. Ardah عرصة is a type of folkloric dance, accompanied by drums and poetry. It is performed with two rows of men opposite one another, each of whom may or may not be wielding a sword or cane.

2. Arabic for Eurasian hoopoe

Instructions

written by Ruba AlSharqi



Reconsider.
 Grab a pair of gloves.
 And empty out your beliefs into a tray.
 Shake them up.
 Examine them one by one.
 Bring out the soap and clean them.
 Put them back carefully.

Let go.
 The trash has a purpose.
 Crumble your litter.
 Toss them away.
 If you miss,
 Try again.



*5 MODEL FOR THINKING "DIFFRACTION"

Forgive yourself.
 You are not stoic.
 You are human.
 Constantly changing
 Repeat.

- instructions on
 unlearning the
 healthy way

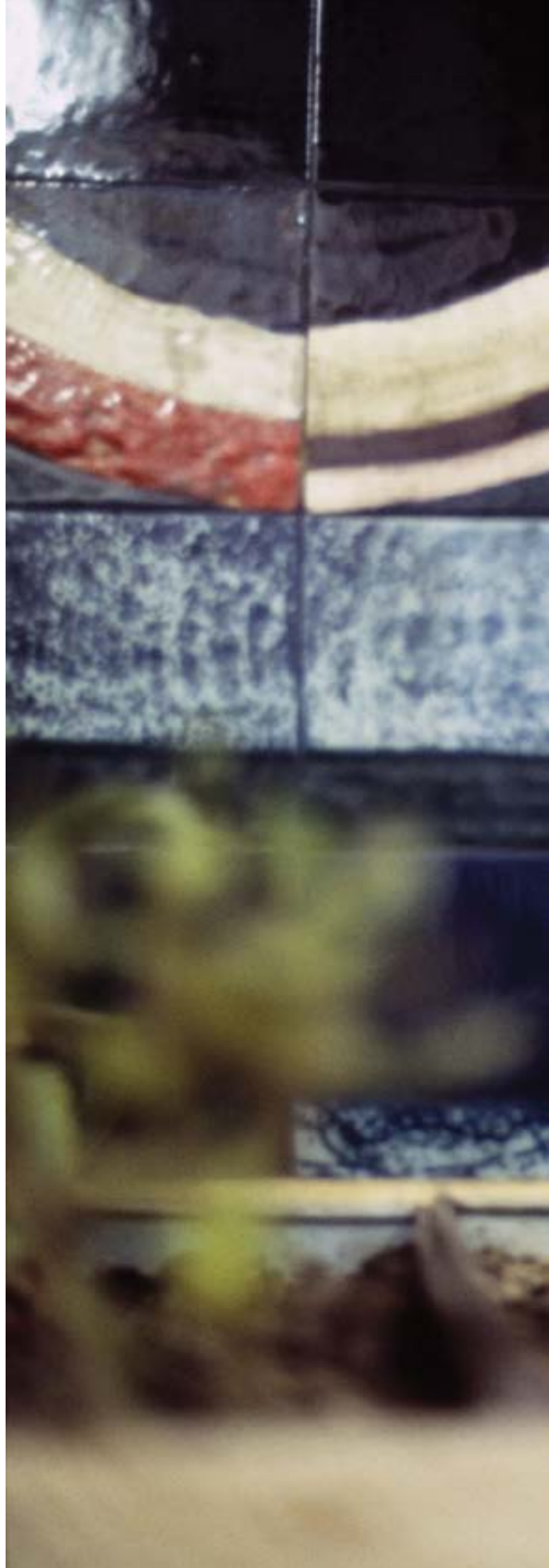
An Email

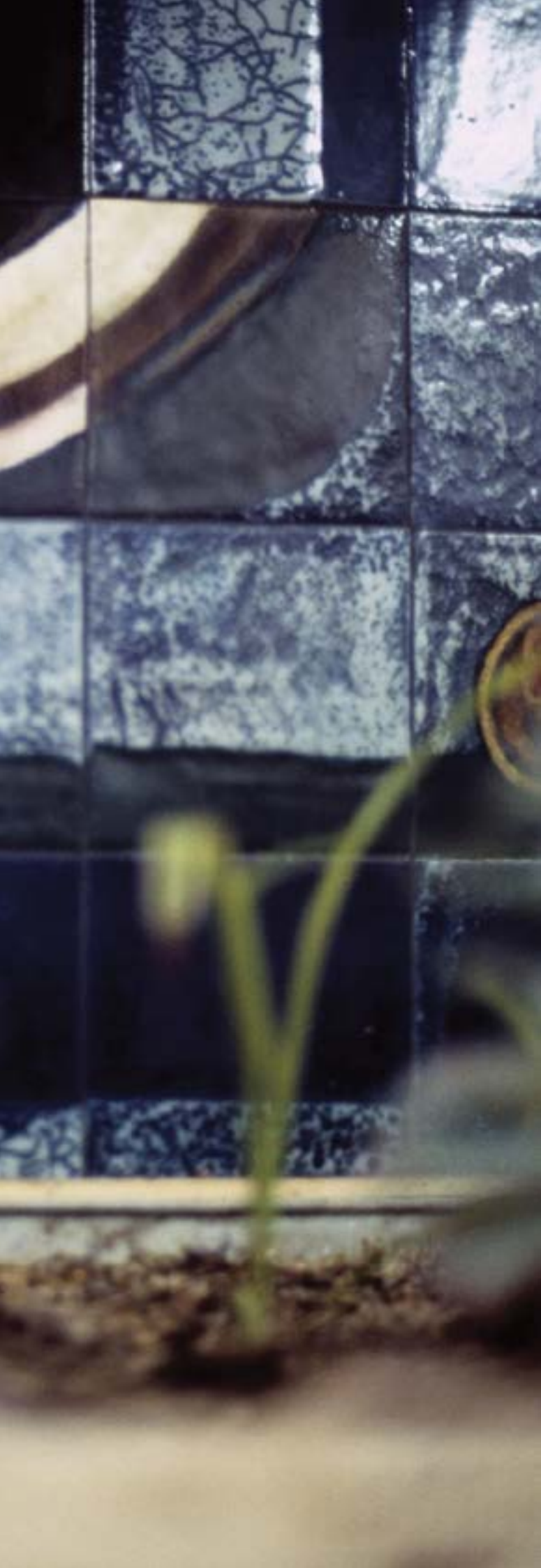
written by Shahd Magouri

You can read so much, consume so much information to anticipate how you would feel during a certain situation, but nothing really comes close to how you actually end up feeling. One email was all it took for many things to change for me. It's difficult to think about that one moment when you supposedly realized that everything had changed. Sometimes you might wonder, was it an actual moment? Or was it a series of events that got you to that point? I haven't yet figured it out myself, but I know that I'll always try to remember.

Many aspects of my life have changed dramatically over the past few years. It was a shock change; it didn't happen gradually nor was it expected. One minute I was home with my family and the next I was all alone (or at least that's what it felt like). I've been living in Lebanon for almost two years now and it's been quite the experience. These aren't just the homesick words of a kid living abroad; I'd like to think it's a bit more complicated than that. Life's a bit more complicated than that. I'm from Libya. You may or may not know that my home country has been going through a lot over the past few years, and all I can be sure of at this point is that every day is a new day and nothing is unexpected.

A few months into my stay in Lebanon (with my newfound false sense of security), I started realizing just how hard it is, to see the news and see what's going on at home and to be thinking about my family, ill thoughts consuming me frequently. My family holds back a lot and I don't blame them. It can't be easy telling your child over the phone that a relative has died, or someone we know





was kidnapped. I always find out eventually, although not in the best ways. When I went home during my first winter break, I can't remember what we were talking about, but my mom accidentally let slip that her uncle had been kidnapped. He managed to escape and he's fine now, but I was never told. I can't explain how I felt in that moment. Was it a feeling of betrayal? No, it was most probably guilt.

My latest trip home put life into perspective. For the first time, I saw things for what they were. A tragedy. A tragedy that I had no control over. A mess. Complete and utter chaos. How can you go from safety and comfort to tragedy in a matter of a few hours? How can you be expected to overcome the numbness? You can't. You cry and dry your tears, then you go back to comfort and safety and fight the sleeplessness and guilt with the sugar-coated comfort of daily university life. We get so wound up in the everyday miseries of college life that we forget what really matters. We forget what is real. You cannot make peace with it.

You can read so much, consume so much information to anticipate how you would feel during a certain situation, but nothing really comes close to how you actually end up feeling. One email was all it took for many things to change for me. It's difficult to think about that one moment when you supposedly realized that everything had changed. Sometimes you might wonder, was it an actual moment? Or was it a series of events that got you to that point? I haven't yet figured it out myself, but I know that I'll always try to remember.

Are humans evil or good? Rational or instinct driven?
Cooperative or competitive?

The topic of human nature has been long debated by numerous philosophers and theorists. For instance, the existentialist French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre strongly believed that there is no such thing as a given “human nature” that determines how people act or behave. He claimed that people are free to choose their destiny and decide for themselves, breaking free from innate and deterministic factors and without any external interference.

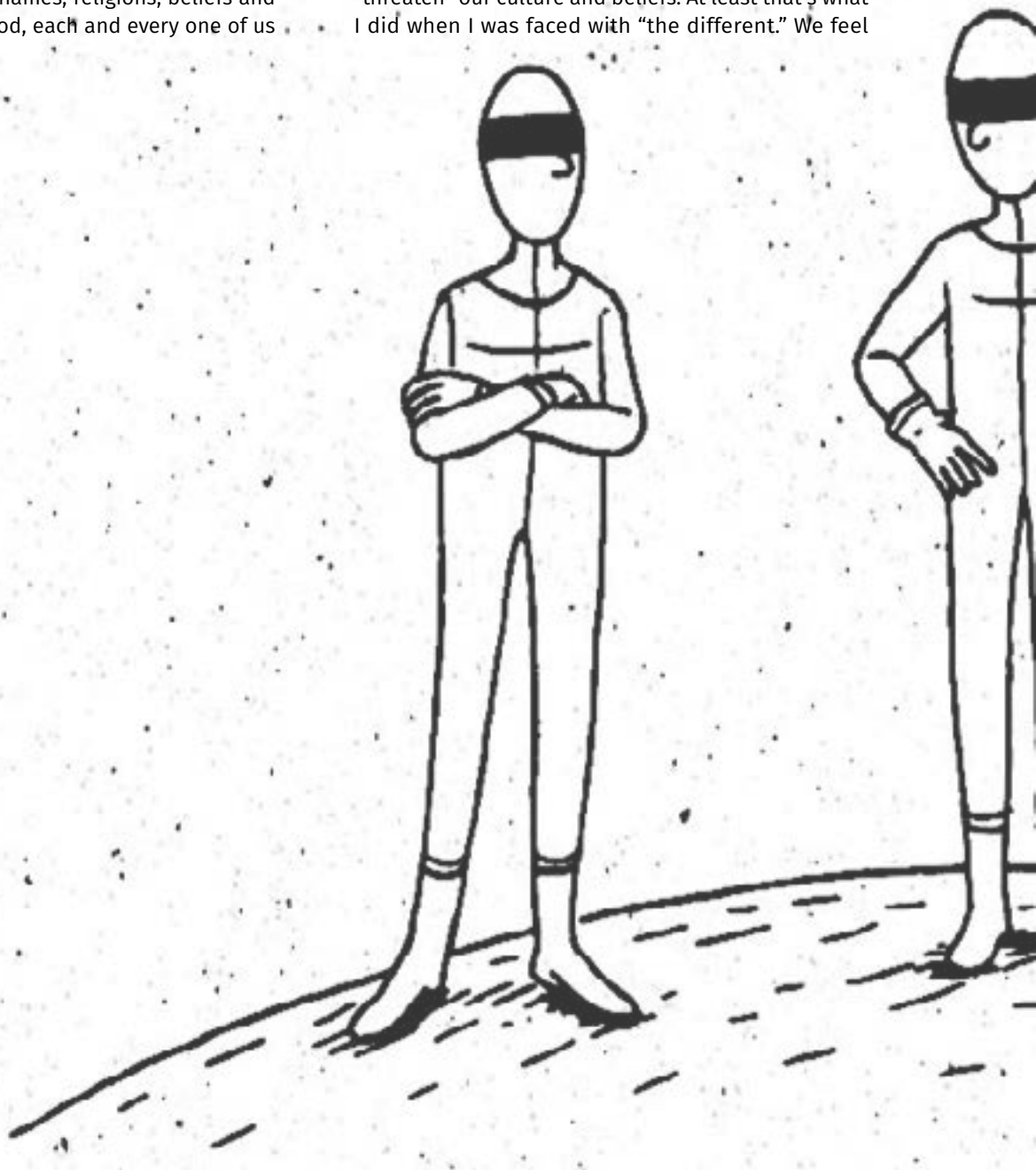
Nevertheless, no one can deny that humans are born within a community that influences them on a daily basis. No one is truly free since we were never asked to choose our names, religions, beliefs and habits. Since childhood, each and every one of us

is taught to trust and have blind faith in certain beliefs, even if they are incomplete or wrong. We are taught that they are the right ones and anything else is wrong and misleading. We grow up thinking in a certain way and believing in certain principles. Education and society contribute to reinforcing these beliefs to convince us of their value. We end up living in a community that is all alike – with the same beliefs, same habits and same way of thinking. And there is nothing wrong with that until we actually decide to get out of our “comfort zone” and experience “the different.”

People who do things differently, who pray differently, who think differently and maybe who dress differently – in the beginning, we tend to put a barrier between “us” and “them” as if they are the “enemy” and somehow “threaten” our culture and beliefs. At least that’s what I did when I was faced with “the different.” We feel

Behind The Veil of Ignorance

written by Marwa Ben Khalifa

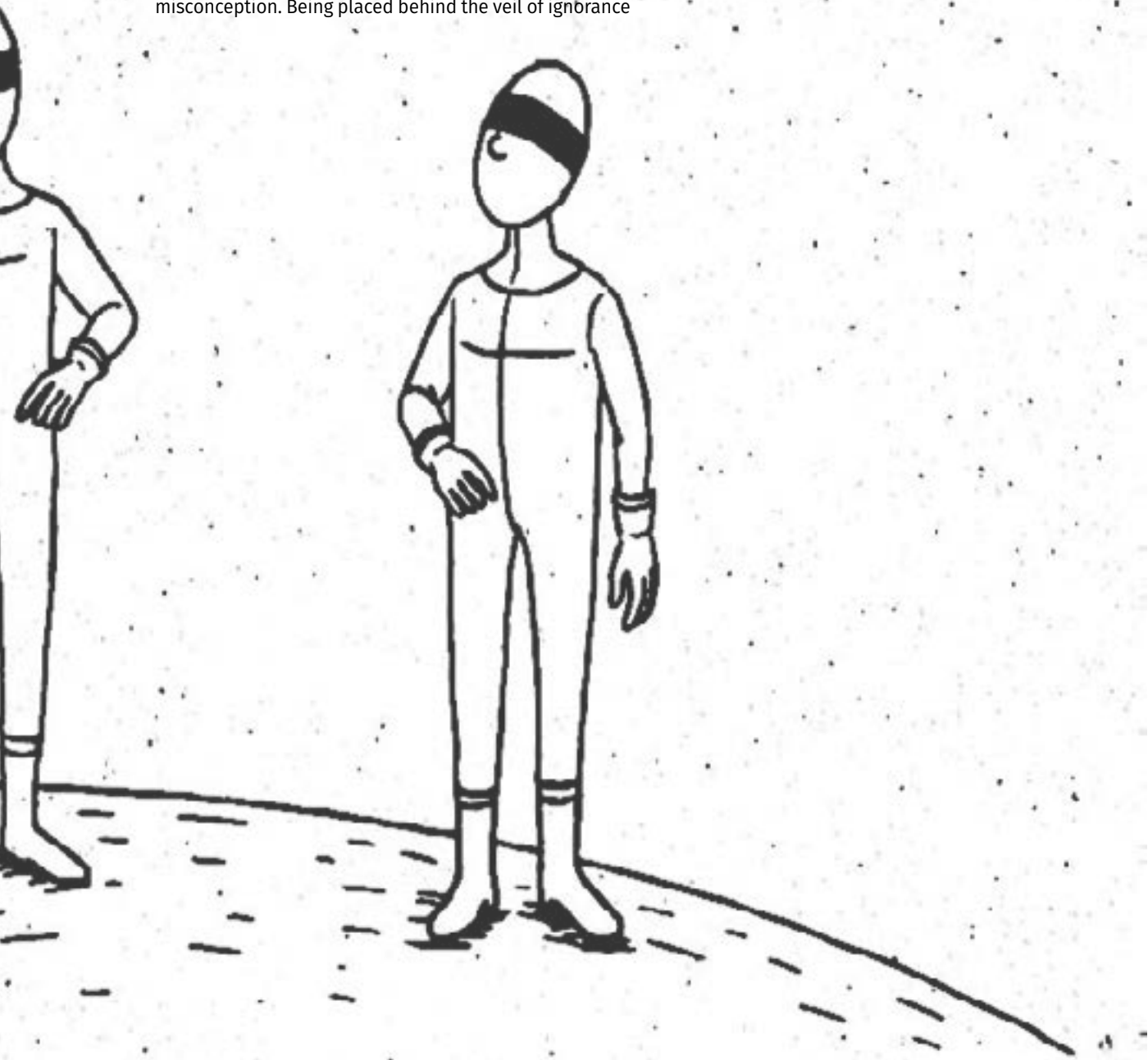


frightened and in danger. We realize that we no longer live in a community where everyone is the same. Now, we are faced with diversity.

As scary as it may seem in the beginning, this diversity pushes every one of us to put themselves behind the “veil of ignorance” (a state where we have no knowledge of our sex, race, religion, nationality, or individual tastes). The moment we put ourselves behind this veil we acknowledge that it is totally OK to do things differently. Other people’s beliefs are fine and not threatening because we see ourselves doing the same things. Behind this veil, one can be Muslim, Christian, straight, gay, rich or poor. We just don’t know our situation or status. If each one of us were to put himself behind this veil, we would all opt for a much fairer society than the one we have now – a society free from ignorance and misconception. Being placed behind the veil of ignorance

makes us question the knowledge we have accumulated throughout the years, and the beliefs that we have inherited from people who are no longer with us. We had absorbed these tenets without even understanding them; we just did because they told us to do so. However, it is never too late for us to place ourselves behind the veil of ignorance and avoid being victims of subjective education and upbringing.

The world we live in today is changing in many ways, and if people keep being scared of the unknown and the different, wars and conflicts will never end. For this reason, the veil of ignorance is a great tool that we should all use when faced with something new and different. Eventually, we will realize that no matter how different we are, we are still alike as long as we accept and respect each other.



Embracing identities: My Life As An “Omnigender”

Ridiculous or not it may be, in a world many would feel to be breaking traditions, I find tranquility and inner peace as an omnigender.

written by Kareem Nofal

When I was at elementary school, my sisters would shame me for playing with girls more loudly and energetically than how I played with boys. I was lucky enough to go to a private co-ed school and meet other middle-class kids, telling jokes and discussing what life as a 3rd grader meant for boys my age. Though, I didn't exactly think of it that way; I was just running around with girls and acting in ways that might be considered effeminate. Summertime wasn't any different. After I beat Tekken 5 on my PlayStation 2 for the fifth time, I decided to carefully take my sisters' game, Bratz: Forever Diamondz, and give it a try. Lo and behold, I enjoyed it just as much as I enjoyed the fighting game. In fact, I revisited the makeup and dressing game again as a teenager, and I still haven't gone back to Tekken! This behavior wasn't new to me; I've always known I was open to new ideas, and I've always been familiar with my lack of amusement and instant boredom with older ones. Fast forward a decade, and here I am in college, wearing your run-of-the-mill, Average Joe clothes, eating junk food, and playing video games. I've been finding conversations, sharing laughs, and just generally “clicking” with straight guys so much, heck, I might even call them, or myself, the obnoxious “Bro!” When did you ever hear a woman tell you such a story about herself? Yet, at the same time, I wash out my hair to a screamingly flamboyant color for a guy, watch a soap opera (whose protagonist also happens to be a fanatic about the French culture, who complains about living a mundane life as a mother and wife to an uninterested—and uninteresting—husband). I find myself imagining whether I could live like her: she meets her man in shining armor and decides to live with him after divorcing her husband, so she could finally have her “fin heureuse.” When did you hear a “man” tell you that story? And that is briefly how I coined the term omnigender while discussing the urge to look beautiful for my partner.

The term omnigender is one I have created that gives me the ability to identify as a man, woman, boy, girl, and all that is in between. I came to terms with myself after notable connections between my ideas and beliefs with different genders and gender roles, other than the one I was assigned at birth. At first, realizing I was

omnigender stunned me for a while; I was always happy being called a “boy” or a “man.” I'm not trans either; I'm perfectly happy with my body and genitals the way they are, but I was also happy, even proud, when someone would jokingly call me “gurrl.” I was just yearning for something new.

I was always mockingly criticized by my uncle for not talking with a lower pitched voice, not walking with a straight backbone, and (ugh, again) for befriending girls too. As I grew older, my education about life began to happen outside of what he would teach me. I was searching and self-educating about gender roles more objectively than what he taught. Sadly, I now see him using the same tactics, perhaps more aggressively, on his own son. This, alongside my observation of a louder, manlier presence of men in a male-dominated society (did I say men enough?) made me shift the criticism back at the culture of men and made me repelled by those actively football-cheering creatures who don't take life seriously, but rather with obnoxious, lowest-common-denominator jokes. I considered those to be negative attitudes, so I found refuge in my womanly side.

Perhaps the closest family member to me is my mother. She raised us, four children, away from my father, and I've always found myself related to her, mentally speaking. She was much like Ward, the protagonist from the soap opera. She was playing the role of the non-complaining wife in front of my father's family while running wild about life...in her imagination...but, of course, she'd complain about routine in the commonly nagging wife attitude. I learned a lot from her.

I was in no way raised away from conflict: I was born in it, lived with it, and integrated with it. Thus, a conflict such as this one with my gender identity comes as no surprise. I feel like if I were exclusively a man, I would've been accused of something I didn't intend, and if I were exclusively a woman, I would've been so too! Whether it is about games or roles, clothes or television, as ridiculous as it may be, in a world many would feel to be breaking traditions, I find tranquility and inner peace as an omnigender.





Home

written by Fatema AlSaffar

HOME
ON THE WAY HOME,
THE AIR IS DUSTY AND HEAVY,
BUT IT SMELLS LIKE HOME,
THE SHOPS ARE OPEN,
THE TOWN IS WILD,
THE CHILDREN ARE PLAYING SOCCER IN THAT EMPTY FIELD,
THE ABANDONED ARMCHAIR, NEXT TO THE ELECTRIC ROOM, HAS COMPANY NOW.
AS I APPROACH THIS NARROW "TUNNEL-LIKE" STREET,
I SPOT A FIGURE COMING FROM THE DARKNESS,
IT'S MY NEIGHBOR,
I AM URGED TO SHOW MY MANNERS AND GREET HER.
I GO ON AND THEN MY EYES LIGHT UP,
MY BROTHERS ARE PLAYING SOCCER AGAIN WITH AN EMPTY WATER BOTTLE,
I SPOT MY SISTER WHO'S CHEERING THEM ON,
I AM ENTRANCED AS I JOIN HER.
BUT IT ALL FADES,
NOW HERE AM I,
WALKING IN THIS HAMRA STREET,
A STREET CROWDED WITH CARS AND PEOPLE NOT,
NOT THE CHILDISH PLAYS AND ECHOES OF JOY.
PEOPLE HERE JUST KEEP WALKING,
I BLEND IN,
NO ONE RECOGNIZES ME,
I AM FREE,
I FEEL JOY,
THE UTMOST JOY A CHILD FEELS WHEN HE'S A FLOWER SHORT FROM HIS BUCKET OF SORROWS.
BEIRUT IS LIBERATINGLY REFRESHING,
DIRAZ IS THE KEY TO MY HEART,
SO, NOW WHERE IS HOME?
IS IT MY FREEDOM OR MY CONSTRAINTS?
MY FAMILY OR MYSELF?
OR IS IT JUST A FEELING YOU GET USED TO?

أتكلّم،

ليس بغرض الثرثرة

فأحاديثي باتت مملة و مُكرّرة

لكنني قد أُلقي عليك هذه القصيدة

قد أخبرك عن غربتي و تلك المرة

التي صعدت بها على متن القطار و لم أقطع تذكرة

و قد أجلس على الهامش بصمت

لكنك تعلم أنني أتكلّم

و أسمع

و أرى

و أتّي

أفعل؛

قلتُ لا للـ«لا»

و لعلّ الكلام علّ

أنّي بفاعل و لستُ بتمفعّل

و كأن ما بي من الحياة يفوقها

و ما بالحياة مني قليل

ففي هذا الجسد بلايين من ذرات لا تهدأ

في هذا الجسد كوّن يحوم حول نفسه

و يحول دون ملجأ

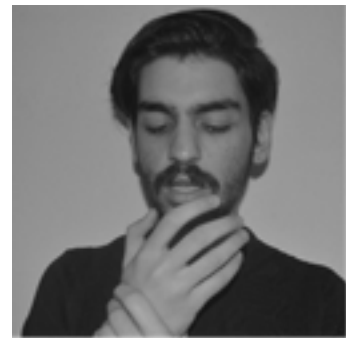
فأركضُ و أطوفُ و أرقصُ

و أحياناً أخضع و أركع و أتألم

أحياناً يحل ضبابٌ عليّ و أتلعثم

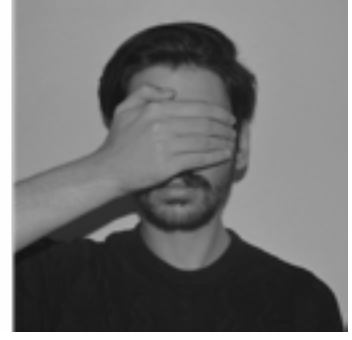
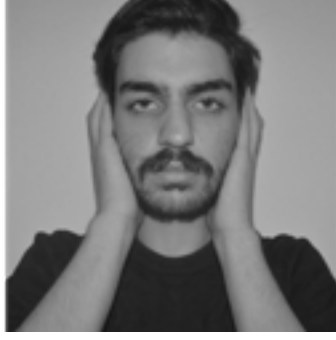
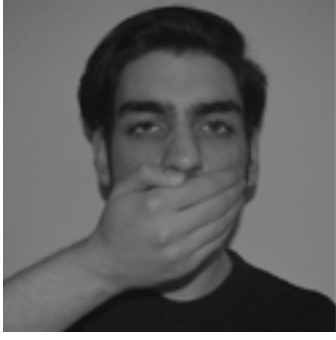
و لكنّي

أرى. أسمع. أتكلّم.



بقلم سامي عبد الباقي





أرى. أسمع. أتكلم.



أسمع؛

ليس بغرض التنصت

فالجدران لا تغري الآذان

و إن كانت هشة

بل أعثر على صدفة ما تلائم منحنيات أذني

و كأن البحر بها تجلّى

و تفسّى

اعذرني سيدي

لكن آذاني ما زالت يافعة،

لن تفضل أحاديثك التي تنقلها بصوت هامس يوماً

على سيمفونية بيتهوفين التاسعة

أرى. أسمع. أتكلم.

أرى؛

ليس بغرض التجسس

ولا الاختلاس أو التلصص

فما همّي أن أزيد همي هموما؟

لا يعنيني ثقب المفتاح

ولا شق الباب

لا ما بينهما ولا ما وراءهما شيئاً

إلا بضعة نزوات و غيوما

لا تأتي إلا لترحل

ما يعنيني يا سيدي

السموات و الأرض

و ما بينهما و ما وراءهما و ما بعدهما

عيناّي و إن اتخذتا في وجهي جحراً

باتت عليّ كالفرص

لا تستقر و لا تقرّ

تتوقا لرؤية درب العودة المعهود إلى المنزل

صور أمني في عمر الخامسة

حتى درب التبانة و أطيافه الهامسة

عليه أن يكون هو القارب والمجدّف الأول، فله بيان ولا كتاب يمكنه أن يقول له ما يفعل وإلا فهو مقلّد يأخذ بنا خطوة إلى الوراء، ذلك هو العدو فلنحذر.

ولا بدّ أيضاً أنه في كلّ واحدٍ منّا ثائرٌ فكريٌّ صغير، ولكن ما يضمن لهذا النموّ والبناء في ضاحية المنجزات الفكرية هو أن نطلق العنان له، على أن نعني قبل ذلك معنى الحرية ومقاصدها، وما يمرّ به ما حولنا من إشكاليّات تطوّر. إن الحرية هنا يجب أن لا تؤدي بنا إلى الوصول إلى القيد الآخر، حيث تشبه الأفكار البشرية بشكل أو بآخر الجزر في البحر التي يفصلها نهرٌ صغير عن بعضها البعض إلا أن مسار النهر هذا يؤدي إلى البحر الكبير الذي بإمكانك أن تبهر فيه وتنشئ جزيرتك الفكرية. فإذا ما اختلط النهر والبحر -وهذا ما يحدث للمجدّف غير الماهر وغير العارف- فإن المفكر سيجد نفسه منتقلًا من ضفة قيدٍ إلى ضفةٍ أخرى من دون تغيير حقيقي أو التزام بماهيّة التجديد. فبالتالي فإنّ إطلاق سراح الفكر لا يعني ألا نخضع إلى المحاسبة، إلا أن المحاسبة هنا هي محاسبة النفس عند كل حرفٍ يُنطق وعند كل فكرةٍ تولد بعد مخاضٍ عنيف في الداخل الوجداني والعقليّ، هل ستؤدي إلى الضفة الأخرى أم إلى البحر الكبير؟ وبذلك تختلف آلية المحاسبة هنا عن طريقة الديكتاتوريات السياسية منها والاقتصادية والفكرية. إن الوعي في مجالات القيد والحرية ونسبيّة كل منهما هو أسمى ما قد ينطلق منه المفكر في بنائه لناطحة سحابه - في جزيرته.

أما من شرد عن قطيع الأقران المتّبعين، وأبى الانضمام إلى قطيع المحتجّين، فقد حكم على نفسه بالنضال إلى يوم الدين، ذلك أنه الآن حالةٌ نادرة. فكيف يجرؤ على العيش دون أن يخبره شخصٌ أو كتابٌ أو بيانٌ عمّا يجب أن يفعله الآن، كيف يجرؤ على أن يتخذ إلهه هواه، وأن يعمل عقله فيتدبر بنفسه ما يشاء ويستعين بالمعنيين متى يشاء. كيف يمكن لما يفترضه عالم اليوم آلة وعالم الأمس عبداً أن يتحرك دون وحي من السيّد والمدبّر. هل ظننت يوماً أن البشرية تتعلّم مما ترتكب من عثرات؟ ها نحن ذا ما نحاسب حتى الساعة من يترك ما ألفينا عليه آباءنا وأجدادنا، ونضطهدهم كاضطهاد أصحاب النبیین في عصور الظلام. ألسنا في عصر ظلام؟ أليس من يخرج عن الصندوق اليوم هو نبيّ بلد وحي؟

في عصر القولية والتأطر والانسحاق الأعمى لكل ما هو سائدٌ وسهل المظهر، من يخرج عن السرب هو منبوذٌ قد لا يعني ما سيواجهه في المواجهة المنتظرة، إن المنبوذ هو ذلك الذي تخلى عنه العالم لأنه رفض العمى، إنه حامل التغيير الدائم، إنه المستثنى طبيعةً والمُنتظر فكراً. يقال أنّه في حتمية الفكر التاريخية لا بدّ من أن يظهر بين طهرانيّ البشر من يتلو عليهم منجزات ثورته على ذاته مؤسساً لصرح فكريّ جديد على أنقاض ما استهلكته البشرية من معتقدات. وما يجعل من مهمة ذلك الثائر ذات طابع رسوليّ هو انعدام المرجعية المطلقة، فمن أراد الثورة على ذاته وقيادة بني آدم إلى الضفة الفكرية المقابلة على طريق التقدم البشري - بدل تركهم منتظرين على حافة النهر في حالة ركودٍ وضياح-



المنبوذ

بقلم عبد القادر فتوح

عن أن تنطبق عليه قوانين الطبيعة في الارتقاء والانهيار. غير أنه وفي عالمنا البائس، تذوب تلك الثقافة في ثقافة التبعية العمياء والعبودية الخرقاء. نحن قومٌ نفخر بمن يهيننا، ونهتئ من يطغى علينا، ونقدس من يظلمنا، ونجعل ممن يستعمرنا فاتحاً مبيناً وسراجاً منيراً ليخرجنا من غياهب تاريخنا وراثنا إلى قالب العولمة ذي الحواف غير المعرفة بعد. إننا نعيش في برّية من نوع خاص، نلعب فيها دور مجموعة من الخراف التي تتسابق في الانقياد للراعي، وإذا اخترنا التميّز ذهبنا إلى راعٍ آخر وعيّرنا القطيع التخر بواقعه القديم الجديد، واقتتلنا على الرعاة بالنيابة عنهم، إننا لا نتقن دور الرعاة ولن نفعل ما دامت ذهنية الانسياق تسود يومياتنا وحيواتنا.

لم يكن يوماً كائننا فضائياً ، أو بشرياً غريباً عن الأطوار، إنه كان فقط يكره القوالب الجاهزة والأطر الناجزة، تلك التي تكيف مجتمعه على هضمها والسير بها ومعها ولاحقاً باتجاهها ولأجلها. إلا أن تلك القوالب كانت تأتي لتعتدي على تفرّده وتميزه، كيف لا وقد انطبقت قواعدها على عديد المتقولين والمتأطرين النجيبين، فكانت تلك القوالب أصنام حياتهم. أمّا من تعدى حدود القالب فويل له من بئس المصير، أو فلنقل، بئس الحرية.

في التأطير والقبولبة ثقافة أمم، منها ما قد خلا ومنها من لا يزال يظن أن جدران قالبه ليّنة على المتقولين قاسية على المتمردين وبذا يظن نفسه أعلى مقاماً وأرفع شأنًا



Jbeil Municipality Trip

written by Tahani Husain

When we engage in a political conversation, we tend to blame leaders, governmental organizations, the state, but never ourselves. We have been conditioned to not hold ourselves accountable; it is a lifelong reflex passed on through generations. A reflex is an action that is performed without conscious thought as a response to a stimulus. And the stimulus here is any problem that we want to be solved for us. Expecting to live luxuriously

without giving a hand and then blaming elites as corrupt won't solve the issue. Jbeil is one of the cities in Lebanon combatting this reflex.

In a trip to visit the municipality of Jbeil, tables were turned. The MEPI TL-ers had a meeting with the mayor of the city of Jbeil, Wissam Zaarour. The mayor explained the achievements of the municipality throughout



the years, and the administrative and governmental challenges in the absence of decentralization. It is the same obstacles that face any municipality here in Lebanon. An administrative approval takes around six months at least, and receiving the funds takes even longer. An automated response to this stimulus would be blaming the ones elected for not doing what the town/city needed in time. However, the process and preparations behind the curtain is not as known to the public. The mayor, Mr. Zaarour, shared information and openly answered questions. The municipality of Jbeil adopted a different attitude to other cities. With a youthful team running the municipality and ready to achieve change on the ground, they were able to debunk the habitual reflex on similar matters.

When needed, the municipality depends on donations and help from the local community instead of relying on the central government. This allows for achievements to be done quicker than usual. What is interesting is that they proved that even with the existence of long administrative procedures, communities coming together and contributing to see their city flourish is the main key to development.

After listening to Mr. Zaarour answer questions, a tour was given around the historical city of Jbeil and ended with a visit to the 12th-century Byblos castle. The tour proved that if it was not for defying the reflex, Byblos would not be as aesthetically and historically preserved as it is now. Byblos was the first city built by Phoenicians, and the community understands and appreciates the significance of its historical background.

30 km

North of the modern city of Beirut, Lebanon.

It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in the world.

1984

The year Jbeil was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Ernest Renan

The French historian who led a survey of the area and rediscovered ancient ruins of Jbeil.

The ruins

They consist today of the Crusader fortifications and gate; a Roman colonnade and small theatre; Phoenician ramparts, three major temples, and a necropolis; and remains of Neolithic dwelling.

Learning Gender Equality

written by Yasmine Agoun

My father raised me as if I were a boy, teaching me how to be independent, explaining to me how a clutch disk works and how to fix a power cut. My mother raised my two brothers as if they were girls; they know how to cook, vacuum and iron. Neither did my parents nor my older brother stop me from pursuing my studies in Lebanon ALONE because I was a girl.

After missing my flight because of some papers, I arrived late to Lebanon. My driver was waiting for me, then helped me with my huge suitcase and together we headed for LAU Beirut. Along the way I was scrutinizing everything, preparing my mind for what would be my home for four years. STOP! What? All along Hamra Street were coffee shops with music, men and WOMEN smoking, all together. This was the first welcome I received from Lebanon.

For international students, the first two months are the hardest. When culture shock reaches its peak, suddenly your social behavior is not innate anymore. During this period, you start noticing the big change between the two different societies. Change is not always negative, and if there is one change I liked, it is women's lifestyle in Beirut.

Here, taking the bus or walking down a street without the stomach aching, being afraid of a bad encounter or being harassed do not exist anymore. Everyone is busy, nobody notices your presence or scans your look or the way you tied your hair. Here, women are not banned from cafés and public places. Here, a woman riding a bike, breathing the oxygen of freedom with the wind running through hair is not wrong. One of my best memories of my first days in Lebanon is hearing Adhan Al Maghrib, and I am still outside alone (without a man's company) – a trivial thing that I had never tasted, because from sunset, the dark outdoors is dangerous, as if daylight brings its share of safety.

We as girls have always learned that we are the weaker gender, and irrational beings that surrender to their emotions as if nobody has heard about emotional intelligence. We have always learned that we are weak in scientific courses, and that is why the instructor is more interactive with male students than female. We have learned that girls cannot be Tomorrow's Leaders



and that they cannot study abroad, where the expression “Simply because you are a girl” has become a widely tangible argument and accepted answer that means NO.

All these ideas hover around society solely because that is what we have learned inside each family. FAMILY; the first yield of socialization and where gender equality

has its start. The majority of Algerian parents use two distinct ways when it comes to childrearing, which itself is focused on the leak that sank the boat (society). A girl requires more protection, should keep an eye on her acts and sayings because she herself bears the whole reputation of the family. Apart from going to school or for medical purposes, she should not leave the house, and if she does, she must be back right after. What is most outrageous is that after the authority of the parent, there is the brother, and if a girl is lucky enough to be married (because it is considered a goal in society), she will be under her husband’s wing. Women never taste independence, make their own choices, assume the repercussions of their acts or learn from their mistakes. In her lifetime, she never surpasses 18.

On the other hand, the boy does not bend to any of these rules because the street is his school. He is the MAN of the house, protecting the family wealth from being stolen by his sister’s husband.

Of course, not all women are that free and aware of their rights in remote places of Lebanon, and neither are all women’s freedom that restricted in Algeria. Some Algerians are real businesswomen, entrepreneurs, PhDs and engineers who enter the man’s labor market. The question is what made them that bold? EQUALITY from the parents, then mentors and finally society. Malala Yousafzai’s father has talked about how he raised an advocate for girls’ education: “People ask me what is special about my mentorship that made Malala so bold and so courageous and so vocal and so poised. I tell them: Do not ask me what I did, but what I did not do. I did not clip her wings, and that’s all.”

I am aware of how fortunate I am to have the support needed from my male mentors, but I would like to emphasize that parents’ rearing is the change that will result in society, because gender equality starts in the small cells of society, and it lies in the hands of parents.



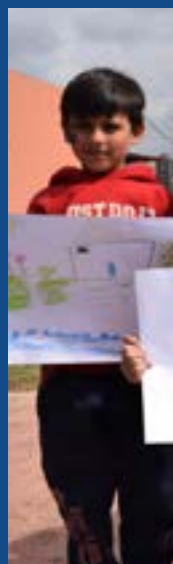


UNHCR Field Trip

On a Friday morning at the end of March, MEPI-TL at LAU organized a trip to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) headquarters in Tripoli. We had the opportunity to get acquainted with two LAU alumni, Mr. Khaled Kabbara and Mr. Fidaa Al Fakih, who now devote their lives to working with the UNHCR to help refugees.

We were impressed by high degree of organization of the UNHCR headquarters which has a fully functional system that runs background checks on each refugee who enters the organization. They also possess a database that contains all refugees within the informal settlements that they look over. The amount of work done to ensure that the refugees receive full benefits that the UNHCR offers – from educational to financial – is huge. It is remarkable how the team achieved so much with so few resources and such a great number of refugees.

The headquarters is not the only place where refugees and UNHCR employees can be found. There are also camps that are now called informal settlements by the government. These informal settlements are a sad example of the facilities refugees live in and the struggle they go through every day, such as trouble





written by Siraj Belgasium

with land owners and maintenance of their living area. During our tour through the informal settlements, we encountered kids with bright smiles who had amazing spirits and were so happy to see visitors from outside the camp. They sang songs for us, and their excitement was indescribable. On the other hand, we came upon some devastating stories from adults who were living in the settlements, one of whom was a man who had to leave Syria just as he was beginning university, and now, due to the lack of resources, he is not able to achieve that dream anymore.

Then we moved on to a house for disabled people in Tripoli that hosts events and activities for refugees and is organized by a group of Syrian volunteers. Called the Outreach Volunteers, they take care of Syrian children, some of whom are handicapped. We had the opportunity to sit and chat with them and get to know these kids through games and activities.

Despite the lack of resources, the instability, the torture of abandonment and the struggles of life, these refugees still maintain a great spirit. Reaching out and spending time with them can only brighten your heart, and it there that humanity resides.



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