



Cover photo by Hadeel Al-Kadasi

UNTITLED 09

spring 2025

TRIBUTE

To the memory of our dear friend
Rahaf Khalifah

POEM

Some Hearts Stay Full

PROSE

مازو ونيث شروينغر

PERSONAL PHOTO STORY

The Contradictions of Being a Student

PHOTO STORY

صور قديمة

PROSE

I Am Still Here

CREATIVE WRITING

السبات

POEM

B(i)tterflies

POEM

A Tale of Two

PROSE

Hanging on in Quiet Desperation is
the English Way

CREATIVE WRITING

الغربة جفاء

PROSE

Chained by Tradition, Freed by Knowledge

POEM

A She

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Nourane Zarour

ASSISTANT EDITOR IN CHIEF

Hadeel Al-Kadasi

CONTRIBUTORS

Soufiane El-Hamry
Zahra Hussein Jabbar
Moamen Mahmoud
Abdallah Almomani
Abdulrahman Al-Zaatari
Mohamad Osama Kurdi
Nourane Zarour
Nour Al Ghadban
Yousuf Al-Aqeeli
Marwan Soltan
Manar Haydar
Nedjla Harrat

MANAGED BY

Raffi Chilingirian

CONTACT

mepi@lau.edu.lb
http://mepit.lau.edu.lb/
+ 961 1 786 456, ext. 2822
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authors and do not necessarily
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University or the U.S.-Middle
East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)
Tomorrow's Leaders Program.



Cover Photo
Hadeel Al-Kadasi

This publication was produced by students of the Tomorrow's Leaders Program at LAU. The program, a collaboration between the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the Lebanese American University (LAU), was launched in 2008. Coordinated by LAU's Student Development and Enrollment Management unit (SDEM), it provides higher education opportunities to youth from around the MENA region who demonstrate outstanding leadership potential but who may otherwise not have the chance to study in an American educational system. 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.

UNFILTERED

This issue of the magazine is quite special because it wasn't tied to just one topic or story. It tells tales of friendship, love, faith, university life, and everything in between. It touched on sensitive issues, including patriarchal societies and systems of injustice. It's a collection of all the moments that MEPI students have lived, felt, and carried with them – not just this year, but across the years. At its core, this edition is all about showing unfiltered expression of ideas and human vulnerability.



TRIBUTE

To the memory of our dear friend
Rahaf Khalifah
page 4

POEM

Some Hearts Stay Full
page 6

PROSE

مَا رُو وَبَيْتٌ شَرُودِنَغَر
page 9

PERSONAL PHOTO STORY

The Contradictions of Being a Student
page 10



PHOTO STORY

صور قديمة
page 13

PROSE

I Am Still Here
page 14

CREATIVE WRITING

السيات
page 15

POEM

B(i)tterflies
page 16

POEM

A Tale of Two
page 17



PROSE

Hanging on in Quiet Desperation is the
English Way
page 18

CREATIVE WRITING

الغربة جفاء
page 19

PROSE

Chained by Tradition, Freed by Knowledge
page 20

POEM

A She
page 22



STUDENT INITIATIVE

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Tomorrow's Leaders Program at the Lebanese American University
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a grant from the United States Department of State."

With all love

This issue is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend

Rahaf Khalifah

Rahaf was a TL student from Yemen whose strength, warmth, and spirited nature continue to inspire us every day. Although cancer took her from us far too soon on June 5, 2025, it could never diminish the joy she brought into our lives or the legacy of kindness and courage she left behind. She faced her battle with grace, humor, and determination, reminding us all of what it means to live fully, even in the most challenging times.

Rahaf, we miss your laughter, your wisdom, and your generous heart. This work is for you and because of you. Your light lives on in every word and every moment we shared.

Forever and Always we love you. Rest in peace 

Rahaf also contributed her personal piece titled "My Unrevealed Journey" in the TL Magazine Spring 2023 edition, a heartfelt reflection that continues to touch and inspire us. You can read it here:



TL Debate Committee Competition



Rahaf winning 2nd place in the creative writing Competition at LAU



Meeting in Egypt



Ramadan Iftar Fall 2023



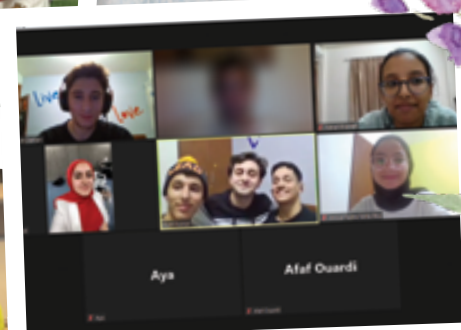
Football Game Gathering



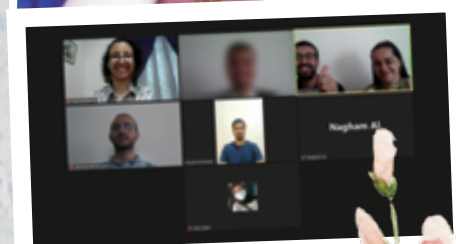
Celebrating Rahaf's Success



Humans of TL April 2023



Debating in Arabic- The Qatar Style Workshop



Spring 2023 Rahaf Debate Workshop for LOYAC



Volunteering with AiW



Fall 2022 : Welcome Party , Byblos

Some Hearts Stay Full

written By Soufiane El-Hamry

I don't know how to feel about you
when sunlight wraps around your face
like it knows you're something sacred.
You laugh slow, like you mean it
like joy takes its time with you.

When you stand beside me, close
but not close enough,
a shoulder almost brushing mine
as if the universe measured the distance
and decided to tease me.

You don't know
how my breath catches
when your eyes meet mine
and hold just long enough
to make me wonder
if you're saying something
without words.

There's a kindness in you
that undoes me.
You touch the world gently
your smile,
your voice,
The way you listen like it matters.
Like physical matter.
But,
do I matter?

So I,
a quiet mess of hope and heartbeat,
want to tell you
how the world feels different
when you're near.
How even the silence feels full
of something soft
and unspoken.

I don't know how to feel about you
except that I do.
In ways I don't yet have the courage
to name aloud.

But if you ever reached for my hand,
just once,
I think the sky might open.



Photo story by Soufiane El-Hamry

مَارُو وَبَيْتُ شُرُودِنَغَر

بقلم زهراء حسين جبار

لَطَالَمَا تَحَدَّثْتُ غَيْرَ عَنْ قِطَّتِهَا يَحْمَاسٍ فَائِقٍ وَشَغَفٍ يَمْلَأُ عَيْنَيْهَا. كَانَتْ مَارُو تُمَثِّلُ الْعَدِيدَ مِنْ الْأَشْيَاءِ لِغَيْرِ، لَرُبَّمَا أَهْمُهَا السَّعَادَةُ وَكَوْنُهَا مَهْرَبٌ صَغِيرٌ يَنْبُتُ فِي لَحَطَاتِ عَيْنَيْهِ فِي يَوْمِ صَدِيقَتِنَا لِيَأْخُذَهَا بَعِيدًا عَنِ الْحَيَاةِ الرَّتِيبَةِ إِلَى عَالَمٍ لَطِيفٍ الشُّعُورِ كُنُوعَمَةٍ فِرَاءِ مَارُو وَجَمَالِ الرَّقْعِ الْمُخْتَلِفَةِ الْأَلْوَانِ عَلَى جَسَدِهَا.

وَلَكِنْ الْيَوْمَ، تَحَدَّثْتُ غَيْرَ عَنْ مَارُو بِشُعُورٍ مُخْتَلِفٍ عَلَى غَيْرِ الْعَادَةِ، كَانَ فِي عَيْنَيْهَا لَمَحَةٌ حُزْنٍ وَهِيَ تَكْبُحُ اغْرُورَاقَهُمَا يَمَّا يَعْجَسُ عَنْ مَا كَانَ يَجُولُ فِي ذَهْنِهَا وَتَفْسِيهَا. لَقَدْ كَانَتْ الْحَرْبُ قَدْ بَدَأَتْ عَلَى أَرْضِ الْأَرَزِ الْهَائِنَةِ وَضَجَرَتْ مَارُو مِنْ صَوْتِ الدُّخْلَاءِ الْمُتَكَرِّرِ فَتَرَكَتْ خَلْفَهَا مَلْجَأَهَا فِي أَرْضِ الْأَرَزِ السَّعِيدَةِ إِلَى حِينَ عَوْدَةِ الْهُدُوءِ الَّذِي تُقَدِّسُهُ مَارُو كَثِيرًا.

عَلَى مَا يَبْدُو، فَإِنَّ مَارُو كَانَتْ عَلَى اسْتِعْجَالٍ مِنْ أَمْرِهَا لِيَتَنَسَّى أَنْ تَتْرَكَ خَلْفَهَا رِسَالَةً وَذَاعَ لِغَيْرِ أَوْ لِغَائِلَتِهَا، وَلَمْ تَذْكُرْ شَيْئًا عَنْ سَكْنِهَا الْمُؤَقَّتِ أَوْ حِينَ عَوْدَتِهَا. قَدْ يَظُنُّ الْبَعْضُ أَنَّ هَذَا لَتَصَرُّفٌ شَائِعٌ لَدَى الْفِطْطِ، وَكَمْ أَنَّهَا نَاكِرَةٌ جَمِيلٌ وَلَا تَذْكُرُ فَضْلَ مَا لِكِهَا عَلَيْهَا.. فَهَاهُنَا قَدْ رَحَلَتْ فِي أَوَّلِ فُرْصَةٍ سَنَحَتْ لَهَا. وَلَكِنَّ مَارُو لَمْ تَكُنِ الشَّيْءَ الْوَحِيدَ الَّذِي رَحَلَ. بَيَّتْ غَيْرِ يَقِفُ قَارِعًا، وَحِيدًا فِي غِيَابِ غَيْرِ وَسَائِرِ غَائِلَتِهَا.

إِنَّهُ لَا يَحْمِلُ شَيْئًا غَيْرَ الذُّكْرِيَّاتِ، وَغَيْرِ لَدَى تَحْمِلِ شَيْئًا بِسِوَى الْأَسْئَلَةِ.

"لَقَدْ كَانَ بَيْتًا صَغِيرًا يَا زَهْرَاءُ، أَتَعْتَقِدِينَ حَقًّا أَنَّهُمْ سَيَسْتَهْدِفُوهُ؟"

أَتَذْكُرُونَ قِطَّةَ شُرُودِنَغَرٍ؟ يَبْدُو أَنَّ مَنْزِلَ غَيْرِ فِي ذَاتِ الْمَوْقِفِ، لِاعْلَمْ لَنَا إِذَا كَانَ وَاقِفًا أَمْ حَتَّى إِلَى أَنْ يَكُونَ وَاحِدًا مَعَ الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي يَقُومُ عَلَيْهَا، مُحْتَضِنًا كُلَّ الذِّكْرِيَّاتِ الَّتِي فِيهِ وَأَخِذَهَا إِلَى عِنَاقِ دَافِئِ طَوِيلٍ... بَعِيدًا عَنْ صَخَبِ الْعَالَمِ.

يَا لَيْتَ عِنْدِي إِجَابَةً أَسْئَلَةَ غَيْرِ وَأَمْثَالِهَا مِمَّنْ كَانُوا يَبْتَخُونُ عَنِ الْخِلَاصِ وَالْإِرْتِيَاحِ مِنْ عَتَبَةِ أَمْوَاهِ الْآخِرِينَ. حَزِنْتُ جِدًّا عَلَى مَارُو، لَا بُدَّ أَنَّهَا كَانَتْ خَائِفَةً فِي خَضِيمِ كُلِّ مَا جَرَى. حَزِنْتُ عَلَى أَهْلِ ذَلِكَ الْبَيْتِ الَّذِينَ تَرَكُوا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ لِمَصِيرِ غَيْرِ مَعْلُومٍ. عِنْدَمَا نَتَذَمَّرُ نَحْنُ عَنْ صُعُوبَةِ التَّوَضُّعِ وَالرَّجِيلِ إِلَى أَرْضِ الْوَطَنِ، لَمْ نَكُنْ نُدْرِكُ الْإِنْعَمَةَ الَّتِي لَدَيْنَا؛ مُتَسَعِّعُ الْوَقْتِ وَخُرَيْةُ الْقَرَارِ، مَاذَا نَصْطَحِبُ وَمَاذَا نَتْرُكُ؟ هَلْ يَأْتِيكَ كَانَ خِيَارَ تَرْكِ الذِّكْرِيَّاتِ وَشُعُورِ الْإِنْتِمَاءِ مَا جَرَى فِي ذَهْنِهِمْ لِيَوْهَلَهُ؟

هَلْ يَشْعُرُ الْجَمِيعُ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَدْ خُذَلُوا أَوْ خَذَلُوا؟ هَلْ خَذَلَتْ غَيْرِ أَهْلَهَا بِكَوْنِهَا بَعِيدَةً عَنْهُمْ؟ أَمْ هَلْ خَذَلُوهَا هُمْ لِغَدَمِ إِصْطِحَابِهِمْ أَشْيَاءَهَا الْمُفَضَّلَةَ حِينَمَا غَادَرُوا؟ هَلْ إِنْتَظَرَتْ مَارُو يَدًا تَنْتَشِلُهَا فِي لَحَطَاتِ فَرْعِهِمْ لِجَمْعِ مَا هُوَ مُهِمٌّ؟

سَتَبْقَى هَذِهِ الْأَسْئَلَةُ رَهِيْنَةَ الْقَيْدِ إِلَى حِينَ لَمْ يَشْمَلِ كُلُّ مَنْ جِئْنَا عَلَى ذِكْرِهِ، وَفَلْنَأْمَلِ أَنَّ بَيْتَ غَيْرِ لَا يَزَالُ شَامِخًا يَتَوَاضَعُ حِينَ عَوْدَةِ أَصْحَابِهِ إِلَيْهِ. وَيَا لَتَأْكِيدِ، مَارُو هِيَ أَهْمٌ مَنْ يَنْبَغِي عَلَيْهِ التَّوَاجُدُ حِينَهَا، فَهَنَالِكَ الْكَثِيرُ مِنَ التَّوْبِيخِ بِإِنْتِظَارِهَا.



Photo by Zahra Hussein Jabbar

The Contradictions of Being a Student

From the racy pen of: Moamen Mahmoud and Abdallah Almomani

In the words of the great Dwight D. Eisenhower, or Ike as he came to be known, "The true purpose of education is to prepare young men and women for effective citizenship in a free form of government." Before he was upkeeping worldly peace as president of NATO and the United States, Ike served as the president of Columbia. The US President lived his life under the motto to only take your work seriously, not yourself. So for this year's entry, we decided to reflect: (1) seriously on our journey as students practicing citizenship, and (2) not so seriously on our journey as travelers and youth.

Seriously

We cannot say that everytime we volunteered, we have been able to contribute within the same vicinity of impact. Over the past 3 years, we have volunteered with 16 institutions, clubs, and committees across Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and the United States. With some, we could directly apply our technical expertise from our majors, while with others, our work was simply packaging food for charity. We view both types of volunteering as equally enriching. Nevertheless, the most rewarding active involvement we have had in our journey is not volunteering- it is mentorship. This is because for us, mentorship is a cycle. The mentorships we have given our younger peers, both officially and unofficially, are a part of this cycle. Older TL students walked us through adapting to the new environment, and for the current entering cohort, they will offer that to others in the future. Lastly, we debated what made our academic journey so special. Our courses and professors supplied us with rigorous academic and applied knowledge, but so do universities everywhere. We believe the fact that we have studied abroad, across three different campuses, itself holds intrinsic value. We learnt how to work in teams within different cultural contexts, how to communicate our ideas to a multitude of people, and how to address setbacks with agility.

Not So Seriously

Our life as students has rather been a mixed bag, full of novelty and excitement at times, but also challenges and many dreadful days at others. And from time to time,



Photo by Soliman Kraza

it is necessary to just sit down undistracted, and think about everything that has been, perhaps with a cup of tea to your side. On one particular day, we were having tea as usual, one thing led to another, and we were there squeezing our hearts out on a sheet of paper, jotting down every feeling and experience we were having then, like true snobs. What we ended up with was also a mixed bag.

The first feeling we recorded was Cynicism– we still face difficulties getting used to people. Another was Exhaustion– we were overwhelmed, uncertain, stressed, and unable to unblur the line between a day and the one preceding it. We felt Insecure– about many different things from our abilities to our looks and interactions. We feel Anxious– oh well... It's complicated. Yet, we felt Pumped up– for things like presentations, going to the gym, new people, and going to bed at the end of the day. Lastly, Hopeful– for the next day to come, forming friendships, and new beginnings.

صور قديمة

بقلم عبد الرحمن الزعتري

Photos by Abdulrahman Al Zaatar



سنوات كاملة في لبنان، درسا فيها جدّ وخلقاً أيضاً حياة مختلفة كنت أنا جزءاً منها. كنّا ندرس سويّة ونأكل سويّة ونتعرّف على بلادنا سويّة، ففهمنا أنّنا إخوة، وأنّ الحدود ليست إلّا خطوطاً وهميّة تزيّن الخرائط المعلّقة، وأنّ الصداقة التي بنيناها لا تأبه لاختلاف ألوان جوازات السّفر.

في أميركا زرت خالي الحبيب، الذي فارقنا للدراسة والعمل هناك منذ عشر سنوات، كنت في تلك السنين العشر، أترقب زيارته الموعودة إلى لبنان، لكم أحببت رؤيته، ولكم تطلّعت إلى قدومه الجالب للفرحة إلى قلبي الصّغير المتلهّف حينها، كان يسمعني ويجلب لي الألعاب ويخرجنا مع جدّتي إلى مختلف المطاعم، ومرّة بعد مرّة، وزيارة بعد زيارة، كانت ملامحي تتغيّر، فأكبر فجأة، وكانت تجاربي تتكاثر فأنضج، ولم أكن وحدي أتغيّر، بل تغيّر الجميع وتبدّلت علاقاتنا وأشكالنا وأحلامنا، فمنا من ازداد براءة ومنا من لم يعد يعرف لها معنى، وقد كنت في كلّ زيارة أسأل نفسي، ما هو شعور خالي عندما يأتي ويذهب؟ وها أنا الآن، وقد ذقت القليل ممّا لاقاه، لا يسعني إلّا أن أكتب عن مرارة هذا الأمر، وعن البطولة التي قام بها خالي لهدف أكبر وأسمى. إلتقينا هناك ولكن تبدّلت الأدوار، أنا قمت بالزيارة، ونزلنا إلى جامعته التي قضى فيها جلّ شبابه، وبينما كنّا نطوف في حرمها، كان يتذكّر بعض أيّامه هناك، بعض الحكايات التي أيضاً لم نكن جزءاً منها، ذلك المقعد الخشبيّ فوق الجسر الذي احتضنه واحتضن حواراته الفلسفية تحت ضوء القمر مع أقرانه، المكتبة التي نحت فيها أبحاثه وتعرّف فيها على أستاذه، كلّ ذلك لم نعهده، كلّ

تلك الأيّام، كلّ تلك الحكايات، كلّ تلك الخلايا التي سقطت على أرض جامعته لم تخالط خلايانا ولم يكن لنا فيها نصيب إلّا بزيارة مدّتها أربعة أيّام بعد عشرة سنوات من الإنتظار، والحمد لله. نزلنا إلى ساحات نيويورك، إلى تايمز سكوير، فأخذت صورة أنا وإياه رافعي الأيدي، مقلّدين صورته الأولى في أميركا، في نفس المكان، قبل عقديّ من الزّمن.

ذهبت إلى واشنطن، إلى جامعة جورجيتاون، الجامعة التي احتضنت خالي الآخراً أيّام الماجستير، خالي الذي أحمل اسمه، تنزّهت فيها وحيداً، فخالي قد ترك هذه البلاد لأنّه لم يستطع أن يتحمّل آفة الزيارات والتغيّرات، وسنحت له الفرصة أن يكون أقرب لأهله في لبنان. مشيت في أروقتها التي مشى فيها يومًا، رأيت مبانيتها العالية، صلّيت في مسجدها، دخلت مكتبتها، ثمّ ذهبت إلى حديقته فرأيت طيفه الشّاب يضحك بشعره الطّويل وينظر إليّ بكلّ فخر، تمتدّ أنامله لتدوس على أزرار مخيلتي وتوقفها فتخالجني أفكار كثيرة، نراها كرزنامة أيّام، إلّا أنّها شريط فلم مدّته سنتان وأحداثه فيها البكاء والابتسامة والشوق والحبّ وأصدقاء جدد وغرباء لا نستطيع نسيانهم لأنهم يشكّلون قطعة من قصّتنا المنسيّة، حكايانا التي لا يعلمها إلّا نحن ولا نجد من نلقيه عليها إلّا أقلّ القليل، فكيف أقصّ خمسة أشهر، أو سنتين أو عشر سنوات، من دون أن أظلم تلك اللّحظات، أو أن أنسى قصص القطار ومن آنسني في رحلاتنا الطويلة، كيف أنسى بائع الخضار، وصديقي المصريّ الذي رأيته يوم العيد فقط، وسائق الحافلة السوداني عثمان الذي أوصلني من المطار، كيف؟! أصلحت وقفتي، ثمّ أخذت صورة قرب المبنى الرئيسي للجامعة للشّابه بذلك صورة خالي المعلّقة في غرفته...

حان موعد سفر صديقيّ المغربيّ والأردنيّ من لبنان، تجمّعنا في آخر ليلةٍ لهما، ضحكنا، استرجعنا بعض الذكريات، تكلمنا عن المستقبل، تواعدنا أن نلتقي كلّنا في كأس العالم في المغرب سنة ٢٠٣٠. إن أمّد الله في عمرنا، ثمّ أخذنا صورة جماعيّة لنا ريثما تأتي سيّارة الأجرة لننقلهما إلى المطار،

المطار؟.. كنت فيه البارحة صباحًا أغادر بيروت إلى أميركا ودموع والدتي تسيل على خديها، ثمّ عدت ليلاً إلى بيروت، من مطار أميركا، حاملاً ألبوم الصّور الذي صنعه أصدقاؤني هناك ليخلّدوا ذكرياتنا الجميلة، ومغامراتنا التي لا تفارقني، ودموعهم التي تتساقط مع دويّ الكلمات، "أنا ما عشناه حقيقة، أستكون فقط يا عبدالرحمن فكرة في مخيلتنا عند رحيلك؟"، وها أنا أنادي بهذه الكلمات الآن لصديقيّ، أتصبحان فقط نسيجًا من الخيال، هل نلتقي مجدّدًا، وهل نعود مجدّدًا لسلسلة الزيارات مع خالي، وهل ستمضي الأيّام فلا نعلم فيها ما نأكل ولا الأمور التي تضحكنا ولا المشاكل التي تبكيها، أتمرّ الأيّام فلا يشاركنا بساطتها أحد؟ وهل تبقى حكايانا يتيمة لا تجد لها مستمعًا، ولا تجد لأنفسها فينا كلماتٍ تنصفها وتعطيها حقّها، وإلى كلّ تلك الصّور الحديثة، التي التقطتها أجدد العدسات، في أقرب الأيّام، كأني عندما أحملها بين يديّ أرى ألوانها تزول لتصير بيضاء وسوداء، وتصاب عيناها بومضاتٍ تصير أناملتي أنامل عجوزٍ اخترقتها التجاعيد وسمرّتها شمس الأيّام الماضية لتلتحم الأيّام، وتلتطم أمواج البارحة باليوم، بينما تتساقط الدّموع على جامعة جورجيتاون، وعلى شال خالي في نيويورك، وعلى وجه صديقيّ المغربيّ ونظّارة في أميركا، وعلى شعر صديقيّ المغربيّ ونظّارة صديقيّ الأردني، وتصبح صوري الجديدة صورًا قديمة وصوري القديمة صورًا جديدة في ألبوم حياتي، ألبوم الحكايا الضائعة وكلمتيّ إلى اللّقاء.



Photos by Abdulrahman Al Zaatar

I Am Still Here

written By Mohamad Osama Kurdi

There was a time when I could measure my sadness in reflections—how hollow my eyes were, how heavy my chest felt, how my existence felt more like an echo than a voice. For two years, I lived in a mind that was a battlefield and a body that felt like a prison. A cell where I would listen to each heartbeat, I would notice how the intervals between them grew shorter, quickly evolving into a panic attack.

I tried to fight. I fought for myself, for a sense of normalcy. But depression is not something you defeat in a single battle. It creeps into the cracks of your life, making everything heavier. There were days where even breathing was an obligation, where exhaustion came not from any particular effort but from simply existing.

I remember the isolation. The way I could be in a room full of people and feel totally invisible, the way being around people was like a performance where I had to pretend I was fine. The loneliness was suffocating, yet at the same time, I couldn't let people get near. I was scared that if they truly saw me, they would leave.

I documented my thoughts in words, small pieces of myself scattered in writing:

"My mind attacked me when I confronted it;
my soul fled from me when I searched for it."

When I tell my story to someone and they ask: "How did it all start?" I can never answer with a single, clear reason. People often want to trace pain back to a single moment or spark—as if an origin will somehow explain what came next. For me, it is not a question of why it happened but of what it was that shaped me. Often there is no dramatic beginning or clear cause to uncover, and whatever reasons that can be found leave out the real lessons found in the journey.

Because the reasons change each time I think about it but what stays the same is the journey.

Yet, despite how deep the darkness felt, I never stopped moving. I didn't know it then, but each small step was building something within me. There were days where nothing was worth the struggle, where I wanted to give up, let go and drown, but something—maybe stubbornness, maybe hope—kept me afloat.

There is something profound about looking at old pictures of myself and noticing the difference. I used to dread the vacant eyes staring back at me, I used to avoid them. I used to fear that I would never escape that version of myself, that I would always be trapped in that state of mind. But time has a way of proving us wrong. Now, I see someone who fought even when it didn't seem like it. I look at a part of myself who held on to life, even when it seemed futile. I am no longer ashamed of who I was. I honor him. The past still lingers, but it no longer controls me. In those old pictures I don't feel shame or sadness, instead I feel recognition —I know that person, I understand him, and I honor what he survived.

Looking back now, I no longer see those years as wasted time or as something to regret. I see them as the foundation for who I have become. I see a person who endured and emerged

السبات

بقلم يوسف العقيلي

لنُعطي نفسك بعض الوقت لتتسنى محيطك الحالي، واسبح بخيالك بعيداً...

تخيل نفسك في سباتٍ عميقٍ مليءٍ بالأحلام الوردية، أحلامٍ بعالمٍ يُنادى فيه بالعدالة والمساواة بين جميع بني الإنسان بمختلف ألوانهم وأجناسهم ومعتقداتهم، عالمٍ تُصان فيه حقوق كل نفسٍ بشرية، ويُمنح فيه الجميع حق الحياة الكريمة واختيار مسارهم في هذه الحياة.

عالمٌ يضمن للطفل أن يكبر محميّاً في كنف والديه، وأن ينام هائئ البال في حضن والدته. عالمٌ تُصان فيه حقوق المرأة أينما كانت...

فجأةً... تستيقظ من سباتك...

ها أنت ذا... في عالمٍ غير عالم أحلامك...

السماء مغطاة بغيومٍ سوداء... قدائف من نارٍ تتساقط من السماء، فتحرق كل ما حول الأرض التي سقطت عليها... دمارٌ ودماء... عويلٌ وبكاء...

هنا البشر درجات... لا تتساوى أهمية أرواحهم وأرواح أطفالهم...

بعضهم تُسيّر البارجات الحربية دفاعاً عنهم، والبعض الآخر لا يهتم هذا العالم المظلم لأمرهم كثيراً، حتى لو رأى دلائل تعرضهم لإبادةٍ وحشية...

هم ونساؤهم وعجائزهم وأطفالهم سواءٌ كالأنعام عند حكام هذا العالم...

هنا ليس كل طفل كالآخر، ولا كل امرأة كالأخرى...

البشر درجات... يختلفون في الأهمية حسب أماكن ميلادهم، وإقامتهم، ومستوى ثرائهم، ومعتقداتهم، بل وحتى لون بشرتهم...

تنظر في وجوه المضطهدين وأطفالهم في هذا العالم، فتلاحظ أنهم يشبهونك ويشبهون عائلتك...

فيعتريك شيءٌ من الحزن والغضب... الكثير من الغضب...

استيقظ من سباتك... عد إلى الواقع... عد إلى كرسيك أو فراشك المريح... واقفك ليس كسباتك، فواقفك أقل ظلمًا بكثير... مش هيك؟

B(i)tterflies

written By Soufiane El-Hamry

You keep showing up in my dreams
like memory never learned how to sleep.
No matter how far I drift,
you're always there
eyes gentle, voice low,
the way I wish you looked at me in life.
I wake up

with the echo of your name
pressed into the back of my throat,
and a hollow kind of warmth
that disappears with the light.

I don't want to see you again.

Not because I stopped caring

but because when you're near,
it's like something inside me forgets
how to breathe without aching.

The air fills with the kind of silence
that knows how impossible
this has always been.

I carry this feeling
like a fire I can't put out,
burning through every room I walk into,
quiet and invisible,
but still consuming.

You'll never know.

You'll never look at me that way.

And I'm starting to understand
that love,

even platonic love,

wasn't built for people like me

the ones who found themselves outside
the places it lives.

It's not bitterness,
not anymore.

It's something sadder.

A Tale of Two

written By Nourane Zarour

I used to fill a void for one
Now I fill a void for two
How silly could I believe
Words of men
so false and so untrue
How silly could I believe
Utterances that came from you ...

They spoke of love

They swore it grew

Yet left behind

A heart so blue

Were they villains or just humans?

Nobody in that town ever knew ...

Do they ever think of me?

Do they ever look behind?

am I just a fading dream

A memory lost in time?

Oh.. how I truly loved them..

Was I so blind?

Could I have made up

Those stories in my mind?

Should I have been prettier?

Should I have been blonde?

Should I have achieved more?

And dared to look beyond?

This tale of two never ends

It keeps going on —

Always revived by their whispers,

And by one holding on...

Hanging on in Quiet Desperation is the English Way

written by Marwan Soltan

There is a unique sort of absurdity to the lives we have here. We leave home, alone and, for the first time usually, given a large amount of freedom, a fair amount of responsibility, and begin to start lives of our own. Most succeed, perhaps more than expected. In talking to the seniors, I've realised how established the lives they've built are: their knowledge of the country, their connections, and their experiences. There comes to be so much tying them to this world, only for them to need to leave it all behind in 3 or 4 years. And the word "world" is not hyperbole to me; this program is my education, my income, my friends, how I introduce myself, the whole reason I'm here. It is present in almost all my decisions. It is all-encompassing, for better or worse. I can't help but feel the need to completely throw myself into it, but how can I when I know I need to find a way out in such a definite amount of time?

Throwing myself into this world has been a joy. It's this sense of community I've always looked for: the shared stories, familiar experiences, and the commitment to each other. It's exhilarating, and I value it so much. Yet, always somewhere shifting between the back and front of my mind, is the acute awareness that I will have to say goodbye to it in some 3 years. I feel an anxiety about time, which is something I don't see in other first-year students. With the joy of making myself a part of something I find so deeply fulfilling comes the twin dread of leaving. I'm familiar with that vague feeling of instability, having spent long periods of my life away from home. I'm used to the temporary life of a foreign home, but here it is consistently amplified with the reminder of that hard deadline of a graduation, so clearly stated from the very beginning.

When I would think about this early into my first semester, my sense of time would prevent most of the dread. Three years felt like a minor eternity, a period of time with an end point I couldn't imagine. I would comfortably fit in everything I wanted to do with time to spare. Then the war came and went, and with it, my perception of time. Time seemed to contort and twist in all directions, rushing, dragging, collapsing in on itself — this incomprehensible,

borderless mass that became the only thing I could focus on. The only thing I could do was wait, and all there is in waiting is time. It seemed to spite me. Days would go on and on, hours became an insurmountable mountain of time, each ending in exhausted celebration. Then I would blink, and I'd realise a whole month went by without leaving any memory of it in my mind. The solid definition of a day I once had continued to fail with every all-nighter and bout of insomnia. It's an incredible privilege that the war for me was only between my psyche and time rather than the real physical dangers many actually faced — it's an injustice. But even with my awareness of my luck, I lament the feeling of control I lost. I no longer pretend to understand time; I only fear its effects and desperately dread its scarcity.

Now, 3 years aren't what they used to be. The greater part of a first semester is already completely lost when I have what feels like so few. So much I want and need to do, yet it feels like I've barely started. This strip of time I want to hold so tightly is burning away too fast for me to even collect the ashes.

This feeling of fleetingness has come to define this second semester. I see it everywhere: the friends about to graduate, the speed at which exams seem to approach, the plans I make for myself that fail simply because an evening is too short. Looming over every new person I get to know is the number of interactions I will ever have with them before we almost certainly go our separate ways — and it's a number that only goes down.

Perhaps I'm naive in thinking these feelings are unique. In putting them into words, it struck me that I'm just describing life, *fleeting and temporary*. It shows my age that this realisation is new to me; everyone says it's part of growing up. I suppose I just didn't expect it to affect my perspective so much. I wish I could end on a complete solution — God knows how much I would like one — but the best I've found so far is to try to ignore it. Enjoy these moments anyway while they last. Time flies when you're having fun; the problem is I refuse to stop having fun.

الغربة جفاء

بقلم نور الغضبان

لطالما سمعتُ أن الغربة جفاء، لكنني لم ألحظ يومًا اشتياق أحدهم لبلاد الغربة، فظننت: "الحنين للأهل يشكل أساس اللهفة للعودة إلى الوطن"، إلى أن خضتُ تجربة الرحيل بنفسِي.

منذ صغري، ترعرعتُ بين أحياء عاصمة لبنان وريفه، وبين أهله وسكانه، فلم أعَ يومًا تفاصيل الحياة الصغيرة: صدى تحيات المارة في الأزقة، ضجيج السيارات في الشوارع المكتظة، رائحة الخبز الطازج من الأفران، وضحكات الأطفال بين أحياء المدينة. والأشد من ذلك، عدم مبالأتي بالحضارة ومقوماتها من عادات وتقاليد، إذ كان فكري مقيّدًا بأصفاة خيالية تغيب عنه تقدير سمات الوطن الجوهرية. إذ إنّه غالبًا ما يفقد الإنسان حس الملاحظة لأبسط التفاصيل دون أن يعي تأثير الثقافة على شخصيته. فكنتُ في حالة تغيب عما اكتسبته من طفولتي عبر الانخراط في المجتمع. إلّا أن هذا الواقع ما لبث أن تغيّر عندما فتحتُ ذاتي لاكتشاف الحضارات الغربية.

منذ صغري، لم أكن يومًا متشبّثة بهويتي وثقافتي اللبنانية، وربما يعود ذلك إلى معتقدات سادت بلادنا وانتشرت بين أهلنا، جوهرها تعظيم وإجلال بلاد الغرب، نظرًا لاحتلالها منصبًا مهمًا في كافة المجالات، ولكونها مرآة للتطور والتقدم في عصرنا الحديث. طالما كانت الهجرة مصدرًا للتفوق في الحياة العملية؛ حيث اعتُبر من هاجر ناجيًا، ومن عاش في لبنان ضحية أمة خسرت مكانتها لسنوات عديدة. لذلك، طمحتُ للوصول إلى مرتبة تخوّلني التحرر من اليأس الذي يحتاج حياة عدد غير يسير من شباب وطني.

لذا، عندما أُتيحت لي الفرصة للسفر لمدة لا تتعدى الأشهر، اكتشفت مدى عمق وتأثير البيئة الحضارية على شخصيتي وتفكيري. فرغم معرفتي بأسس الحضارة الغربية وتشكيلها، إلّا أنني شعرتُ بالضياع والتشتت. وما كان هذا الإحساس نابغًا من حنين كما ظننتُ سابقًا، بل نشأ من تضارب أسس الثقافات وجوهرها، حيث أعدتُ اكتشاف ذاتي وتقبل الآخر.

فانخراط الحضارات أمر مربك، بل ومستحيل أحيانًا، بسبب التباين في العادات والتقاليد التي تُبنى على أساسها مميزات الشعوب كافة. فعندما تصطدم نفس الإنسان الواعية بواقع جديد تتخلله أفكار وطقوس بعيدة كل البعد عن حياته ومعناها، من الطبيعي أن يدخل في حالة من الصدمة، بسبب تشبّثه اللاواعي بما تربى عليه من مقومات ثقافية منذ الصغر، ومحاولاته المستمرة للتعرف على كل ما يكتشفه في بيئته الجديدة. عندها يدرك الإنسان تأثير مجتمعه على كل ما بناه من شخصية وأسلوب في كافة مراحل حياته. ومهما حاول التغير والالتحاق بما يشهده العالم الغربي من تطور، يبقى عاجزًا أمام جوهره ومضمونه.

وأنا بنفسِي، رغم حنيني لعائلتي ومحيطي، إلّا أنني أفتقد الألفة، الاستقرار، والثبات، إذ إنّ حس الانتماء مبنيّ على محيط الإنسان ومجتمعه. ولا أعني بذلك مكانًا أو زمانًا أو أناسًا معينين، بل أعني شعورًا يعرفه القلب والعقل، وقريبًا من النفس والروح.

ختامًا، نلاحظ أن تفاعل الإنسان مع محيطه يتخلله عدة تفاصيل تشمل كافة سمات الحياة اليومية من عادات وتقاليد وطقوس.

وانتماء الإنسان لمنطقة أو بلد معين ليس شعورًا واعيًا يمكن السيطرة عليه؛ فمهما حاول فصل نفسه عن دياره، يترك وراءه خيطًا خفيًا يربطه بقيمه وأسس. فشخصية الفرد ونفسه ليستا إلّا نتاج ما نسجته الحياة عبر التجارب المختلفة.

وقد لا نملك، كما ظننا، القدرة الكاملة لتغيير وتحسين أنفسنا من كافة النواحي. وعليه، رغم أهمية الانسجام بين الحضارات المختلفة وما يقدمه من معرفة وتطور للإنسان، يبقى عاجزًا أمام الجذور التي طالما تعيده إلى ذاته.

Chained by Tradition, Freed by Knowledge

written by Manar Haydar

An everlasting struggle torments me: What am I defined by? What represents me? No, what do I represent? Is it my social being? Or my religious symbolism? Between the peace brought upon me by walking through God's path, and the need to carry on through life with ambition in my heart and a drive for knowledge in my mind, it has not been an easy juggle.

I come from the rich community of the Druze sect, a lively minority in Lebanon, residing in its rural parts and occupying the areas of Al Chouf district, Aley, and the Bekaa Valley. For the curious minds reading my story, here is a small summary of what this sect is, although it will only serve as a complement to my thoughts and does not constitute the main purpose behind me writing this. The Druze faith originated in the early 11th century during the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt. It began as an offshoot of Isma'ili Shi'ism, and then developed into a distinct religious tradition under the leadership of Hamza Ibn Ali. The name is derived from Nashtakin Al-Darazi — one of the early preachers of the faith — although we prefer to be called "Al Muwahhidun" or "The Unitarians" because our faith emphasizes the belief in the absolute oneness and indivisibility of God. This ideology reflects commitment to the unity of existence and the ultimate truth of a single, eternal creator.

Despite having a significant role in the history and politics of the regions they inhabit, the secretive aspect of the faith, along with the tendency to avoid social prominence, has made them less visible on the global stage. And for those who are wondering, no, we do not worship the veal! It is only God and His prophets. We are a resilient community with a strong sense of belonging. Now back to my story: I come from a religious household and was initiated into the spiritual hierarchy when I was a child. For men and women who become religiously committed, the future is fraught with intricate expectations that weigh heavily on both genders, but undeniably, women bear the greater share. The women in my society, religious sheikhas, much like in other reserved communities, are expected to marry, bear children, and raise them according to the faith's principles. For them, education is a luxury rather than a need. Their value is determined by their silence, obedience, and ability to keep the customs that bond the society altogether. If they are lucky and come from an educated household, like myself, they will be allowed to continue their education and get a career, though not without restrictions and bumps along the way. I want to change that.

While I am a Sheikha, I grew up in a somehow different environment. My father is a judge, my mother a nurse, and most of my family members are educated. However, that doesn't mean that I can walk my path as I see fit; it all has to be within the confinements of my society and the borders of my city. But I have always dreamt of knowledge, of negotiating university hallways, of arguments and discoveries. However, due to the many challenges I faced, my dreams were greeted with opposition from inside me as much as from my surroundings.

I had been working since I graduated from my BA studies, but I wasn't religiously committed at that time yet. I became a Sheikha in 2016, and two years after, I got married. That's when the conflicts in my heart about my future and my career started. Was wanting to pursue more knowledge betraying my family? Was seeking academic freedom violating my faith? In that sense, no. However, it was challenging the beliefs of my environment; it was enlightening the road for those women who will come after me and who will want to live this for themselves as well. Is it a right? Absolutely. Is it realistically fathomable? Far from it. I was told that I was running after a mirage and that pursuing this would only bring me misery and unnecessary pain. Still, I persisted.

Photo by Amira Zayan



For the next chapter, I decided to walk the path of self-awareness, knowing what I really want and drawing my plan around the frames of my boundaries. I finished several certifications and then applied for my master's degree. As if the law of attraction was not revealing itself enough, soon after, I received the news of being accepted as a MEPI scholar for the program of HR Management at the Lebanese American University. For someone with my background, this was almost too good to be true. I had been adamant to see this through — from the minute I set foot in the university, to the people's looks and whispers seeing my outfit, to people asking me from which country I came, expecting some remote tribal part of the world.

Luckily, I was not walking this road on my own. Often considered another hindrance for women, my marriage turned out to be an unanticipated anchor. Though fiercely fixed in custom, my husband became my quiet friend. Conservative in his views but in favor of my aspirations, he stuck by me, juggling the old and the new, the right from what was expected.

Now, I believe I am someone who holds the weight of her history and the promise of her future. Not only am I here for myself, but for any female who has been told that her place is anywhere but in a classroom. It is for the girls and daughters and wives of my community who might one day want to glimpse the same horizon that used to draw me from beyond the hills.

Neither tradition nor growth must be rivals. One can live with ambition and faith. Above all, no woman should have to decide between her dreams and who she is. And I want to be the firm evidence of that. The traditions may still stand, but so do I.

A She

written By Nedjla Harrat

A woman, they said,
 To love, to carry, to handle,
 Still call him the leader.

A woman, they said,
 To be feminine, gentle, and most importantly silent,
 Still call him the most patient.

A woman, they said,
 To sacrifice, to be resilient, and not even complain,
 Still call him the most certain.

A woman, they said,
 To be selfless, compromising, nurturing,
 Still call him the sacrificer.

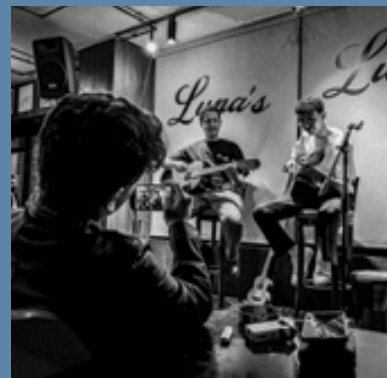
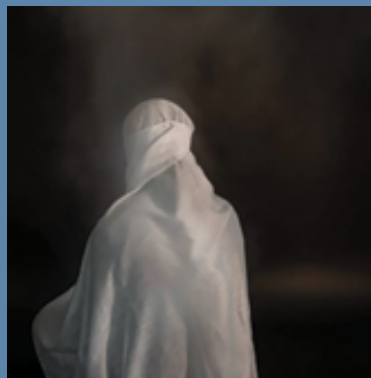
A woman, they said,
 To do it all, give it all, with no expectation,
 Still call him the hero.

A woman, they said,
 Will create her own heaven
 And call herself the Heroine of Eden.

*Note: Heaven in literature is the symbol of peace,
 eternal happiness, divine reward, and ultimate truth.
 In this world, women need to create their own heaven on earth
 " Eden" in order to be heroines.*



Painting by Reem Barakji



STUDENT INITIATIVE

BEIRUT CAMPUS
P.O. Box 13-5053 Chouran
Beirut 1102 2801, Lebanon
Tel: +961 1 786 456
+961 3 791 314
Fax: +961 1 867 098

BYBLOS CAMPUS
P.O. Box 36
Byblos, Lebanon
Tel: +961 9 547 257
+961 3 791 314
Fax: +961 9 944 851

**NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS
& ACADEMIC CENTER**
211 East, 46th Street
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: +1 212 203 4333
Fax: +1 212 784 6597