

# The use of storytelling and the experience of teaching in a Syrian Refugee Camp in the context of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, its various actors, and its lasting effects



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## Hlstory of NGOs in Lebanon

- Voluntary Social Service entities originated in Lebanon in the late 1800's[1]
- Non-Government Organizations, or NGOs, began to grow after Lebanese independence, and a majority of NGOs came into fruition during and after the end of the Lebanese Civil War[2]
- Since the civil war, these NGOs have been the primary humanitarian respondents to conflicts[3]
- NGOs specialize in services they provide and range in their scope from the local, national, and international levels[4]
- Due to lethargic governmental response, UN organizations and NGOs have inherited and faced many of the problems the refugee crises have brought[5]
- NGOs own and operate many schools and hospitals; furthermore, they own nearly 70 percent of the primary health facilities in the country[6]

## Overview of Syrian Refugee Crisis

- The refugee crisis began in 2011 with the Syrian civil war and has continued to this day[7]
- Lebanon has the most refugee concentration per-capita world-wide with over 1 million Syrian refugees which is more than a quarter of the Lebanese population[8]
- The response included an influx in funding and the creation of a “national strategy” [9]
- The NGOs and Lebanese government provide services ranging from education to healthcare for refugees across the country[10]
- Most of the humanitarian organizations aiding the refugee crisis in Lebanon are non-Lebanese entities, they are mostly UN organizations and international NGOs[11]
- Lebanese government policy towards Syrian refugees is quite vague which puts the refugee population at a precarious and vulnerable position[12]
- Refugees are restricted on various occupations and travels[13]
- Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon are unofficial and size is limited due to government fear of camps acting as terrorism catalysts[14]
- Over a third of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in housing that do not meet “minimum humanitarian standards”[15]

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Jad Zeitouni

## Introduction

The beginning of this journey began with a jarring, but all too common image in Lebanon. Refugee children walking the crowded streets of Beirut selling items ranging from water to roses. Children as young as four were knocking on my window as we drove through Lebanon to my family's hometown of Aley. I had just graduated high school and had my mind set on the future. However, the image remained. Studying the Syrian refugee crisis and striving to make a difference was a goal set from my first semester of college, and with the immense help of Dr. Aliza Wong and Dr. Gary Elbow, we created this project. I began this project that consists of two sections: 1) a historical analysis on the implication of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, and 2) teaching through storytelling and self-narrative within a school in the largest Syria refugee camp in Lebanon: Jurahiye.

## Field Work

The field work of this project took place over the summer of 2019. I worked in the Jurahiye refugee camp with Jusoor NGO. This was the largest Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon. I taught at a school within the refugee camp. Through this month long summer school, I designed a curriculum and schedule. I also collaborated with my students on a story telling project. This project was carried throughout the entirety of the school session. The children within my class were taught about the importance of story telling, the writing process, and the importance of symbolism. They then each wrote a story over a period of two weeks.

## Conclusion

After funding was cut by UNWRA in late August of 2018, a trickle-down effect occurred on many NGOs in Lebanon including SaveTheChildren. According to a late September email from Mr. Chidiac, the management was still deciding on new proposals and projects. Furthermore, the inclination was given that this lapse in funding had caused a problem that NGOs were still adjusting to well into the start of the school year. For the following year focus of the research has shifted to look at history of NGOs in Lebanon and the effect of this decrease in funding. This project then took a different turn through the work at the Jurahiye school and the storytelling project. My students were overwhelmingly interactive, collaborative, and had a love for learning. I truly admired the resoundingly positive outlook they had towards education and life despite the trauma they had endured. Everyday they embraced the science, art, math, and English assignments I had prepared. They were brilliant and creative, even designing original theatre plays. Many of the children would work in the evenings while attending school in the mornings; however, they always had the energy to engage and learn. The care and compassion these children had was moving; they would selflessly try to give gifts and food to their fellow classmates and myself. It was a truly a privilege to teach these children. Their resilience, intelligence, and compassion was moving.



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## Stories

Story one - Bader

This story revolved around a ferris on a white horse. In Arabic, the term ferris means a warrior or hero. This warrior would help people in need and therefore was beloved by all. One day, the ferris went to a small store to eat and while he was there, criminals attempted to rob the store. The warrior thwarted the burglary and saved the store owner. To thank him for his bravery, the store owner insisted that he receive free food. The day only got worse when, after stopping the robbery, the warrior returned home to find that his town has been pillaged and his family killed. Devastated, he returned home to find a note from his mother that pleaded with him to avenge his family against the people who had destroyed his town. The hero made vengeance his mission, found the murderers, killed them, and rode off on his wife's horse.

Story two - Hadeel

This story focuses on a family with two parents and four children. The mother becomes pregnant and to pay for her hospital bills, her father sells a family heirloom made of silver. The mother then passes away after childbirth. The father works to provide for the family but passes away soon thereafter. After his passing, the older brother must care for his siblings. He works in the streets selling gum and roses (a common job for refugee children in Lebanon). He also helps his siblings with their education. Once his siblings become educated, the older brother also completes his own education. The story ends with the siblings becoming successful and staying close.

Story three - Mohammed

This story revolves around a poor child and a rich child who look very much alike. These kids meet and become friends. They come up with a plan to switch lives. The poor child can live in a castle, eat as much food as he wants, and change clothes multiple times because his closet is overflowing. The rich child lives in the poor child's home and notices the hardships he must endure. The rich child realizes that wealth is not that it appears to be as he is bullied by his new friends. The both children miss their families dearly. When the children return to their respective lives, they arrive with newfound knowledge. The rich child realizes how he could not adjust to the difficulties of poverty and live the other's life. The poor child gains a new gratitude for his family despite their lack of wealth.