

CORNERSTONE

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IN THIS ISSUE

Being Faithful Witnesses: Serving God in a Changing World <i>Jean Zaru</i>	p. 1
Armenian Community of Jerusalem: Surviving Against all Odds <i>Dr. Bedross Der Matossian</i>	p. 4
The role that Jerusalem plays in Armenian issues <i>Dr Gaby Kevorkian</i>	p. 8
Moments like August 4 <i>Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian</i>	p. 10
On the Armenian Genocide and Denial: Interview with Palestinian director Mohammad Bakri <i>Elise Aghazarian</i>	p. 16
We are still here <i>Nora Arsenian Carmi</i>	p. 20
On the ports of Haifa: chronicles of an Armenian family Conversation with Palestinian author Maisoon Assadi <i>Elise Aghazarian</i>	p. 23
The Good Will Win, Eventually... <i>Dr Hrayr Jebejian</i>	p. 27

BEING FAITHFUL WITNESSES: SERVING GOD IN A CHANGING WORLD

Jean Zaru

Sisters and brothers,

From the heart of Palestine, a land besieged and violated by Israeli military occupation, I have come to join you today. From the midst of Palestine, a tortured nation held in captivity, I stand with you today.

Both my life experience in Palestine and my ecumenical work in many corners of the world requires that I share with you the story of my people, a story of human hurt and hope. I represent a narrative of exclusion, the denial of basic human and community rights. But, I have a message of hope. A message of hope embodied in the spirit and will of all those who refuse to submit to the forces of oppression, violence and injustice, structures of domination, colonialism and foreign occupation.



The situation in Palestine calls on all of one's resources: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. And in the darkest nights of the soul, we seek your affirmation and actions, especially as governments and power systems have failed us because of their power politics, absence of will and shortsighted self-interest.

The current atmosphere in Jerusalem is highly charged, and the situation in the Holy Land is surely far more complex than that which we encounter in Luke's presentation of the first century. Even my identity as a Palestinian Christian is not easily explained to anyone living outside my immediate context. You see, I am Christian, and I am Palestinian. One part of my identity cannot be separated from the other. And as such, we, Palestinian Christians, are often referred to as the embroidery work of our people; that is, we are an interwoven and an integral part of the whole society.

Although we are the modern heirs of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem and despite our rich contributions to the Middle East, we have become unknown, unacknowledged and forgotten by much of the world. We are a highly educated community with deep historical roots, a community that is, unfortunately, diminishing every day as a result of political and economic pressures. Our future is uncertain; the pressures are enormous.

And as we are part and parcel of our society, not outside of it, it is a daily challenge to remain faithful, to witness to our faith in these, the

direst of circumstances, where today as Palestinians none of our rights are guaranteed. We stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers at the margins of life in Palestine, sharing a common reality of prolonged suffering and waiting, and acting together in hope for a brighter future.

Seventy years ago we were cast outside the course of history, our identity denied, and our very human, cultural and historical reality suppressed. We were victims of the cruel myth: '*a land without a people for a people without a land.*' And we continue to be victims of an exclusive agenda—an agenda that has usurped our rights, our lands and confiscated, as well, our historical narrative.

Our country is becoming one gigantic prison and one vast cemetery. The people, land, houses and trees have been brutally treated. Fear and insecurity have replaced compassion and trust.

Relations have become hard and tense. When almost every aspect of life is framed in oppression and humiliation, moral space is diminished. Our own humanity is threatened and role models for our children become hard to find.

People are tired and depressed. They are traumatized by the violence that is perpetuated against them which affects both their physical and mental health. My people need time to mourn, to heal their wounds, to pacify their children and to find their daily bread.

Our oppression and the Israeli occu-

pation could not have lasted so long without outside assistance. Proportionate to its population, the state of Israel is the recipient of more U.S. aid than any foreign state in history. This aid, combined with political support from the U.S., enables Israel to tighten its grip of occupation and make our lives more difficult, more unlivable. The truth has been so twisted that anybody who dares to speak out for justice is now associated with terrorism or anti-Semitism or, according to the theology of some, against God as they understand God's purpose in this world.

This is all done in the name of the so-called Christian Zionists, and as indigenous Palestinian Christians we have no choice but to answer to that claim and to the many religious leaders who exploit the Bible to endorse the legitimacy, policies and conduct of Israel. These Christians have established a linkage between biblical Israel and the modern nation state of Israel. Evils of discrimination, oppression and dispossession are justified by reference to biblical texts. David Ben-Gurion called the Bible the Sacrosanct title deed to Palestine for the Jewish people.

As Palestinian Christians we must liberate our theology from such an understanding. God for us is a God of justice and compassion, not a God of vengeance and exclusivity. As Palestinian Christians, we have long been forgotten, even unknown, and certainly unacknowledged. We have suffered, as have all our people from dispossession, displacement and oppression. And we are then

blamed for the history, politics and theology of others.

In spite of our different life experiences, we are very much influenced by each other's contexts. Where Islam is demonized, we are asked to love our neighbors and not to bear false witness against them. Western missionary movements, past and present, in spite of their good works have sometimes been a source of embarrassment and division, especially in Palestine.



The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem is another story. Politically, it is pro-Israel in its expansionist policy with regard to settlements and is against any peace process that will end occupation. I find their theology violent and exclusive. It is pro-Israel but anti-Jewish. Fortunately, there are many faithful witnesses in Israel/Palestine. The Christian Peacemaker Teams, the members of the accompaniment programme of the World Council of Churches, the International Solidarity Movement joined by local Palestinians and Israelis, all bear witness to peace and justice. We have many others who join us in our non-violent struggle on many fronts and do support in any way possible.

Both my context in Palestine and my travels throughout the world have

brought me into relation with many religious traditions. Many thinkers struggle with religious diversity. Others, as activists, are concerned with militarism, the degradation of the environment, racism and sexism. Many are working from a faith based on peace and justice issues. Often times, I have found that dialogue within the Christian tradition and among these various groups is not easy.

Some of these difficulties concern our understanding of witness, mission and the Bible. Let me begin by stating that I personally cannot take the Bible literally.

The stories in the Bible reveal people's perceptions of God but not the full reality of God. The view that the Bible is to be understood in a literalist way must be surrendered. There are many narratives that are problematic, containing texts of unsurpassed violence, which are an affront to moral sensitivities. Every effort should be made to rescue the Bible from serving as a blunt instrument in the oppression of one people by another. In Palestine, the Americas and South Africa the Bible has been used as a tool of oppression rather than liberation.

If we want to know what God has been up to in the world, the Spirit bids us to keep our eyes and ears open to the witnesses of others. After all, the Spirit is about movement, and the presence of God. The Spirit fills, inspires, teaches, reminds and comforts. The Spirit both nurtures contemplation and empowers action.

Many Christians differ in their understanding of witness and mission. In many of the places I have visited, the churches' concerns about evangelism relate to its growing influence in their context as well as mine, of sects and new religious movements. The stories are very similar from Russia to the Pacific, from the Middle East to South Africa. The churches are disturbed by a massive influx of Christian charismatic and fundamentalist groups and by the aggressive methods of recruitment they use. I am disturbed by their theology where they generally advocate nationalist or religious exclusiveness and the subordination of women. They reject many of the political and ethical values of modern democracy, basic human rights, pluralism, freedom of speech, sharing of power and responsibility. Their literal understanding of the Bible is frightening and violent and, more often than not, justifies my oppression and dispossession as mandated by God. This is serious, even dangerous.

Must we not re-focus our efforts towards articulating a religious vision that can contribute to a global outlook and a discourse of radical, democratic human community and well being for all?



So, too, are we not challenged to articulate and then realize a liberating

spiritual vision of justice? Biblical studies must be re-thought in such a way that they can contribute to the articulation of spiritual understandings that envision human dignity, justice, inclusivity and diversity in new ways.

On many occasions the witness of action has cast doubt on the witness of the Word. To witness to Christ is to follow Jesus' way and mission as expressed in Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Jean Zaru, Palestinian Quaker, was a founding member of Sabeel Palestinian Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Friends International Center in Ramallah.



ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF JERUSALEM: SURVIVING AGAINST ALL ODDS

Dr. Bedross Der Matossian

The Armenian presence in Palestine dates back to the fourth century CE, when Armenian pilgrims began arriving in Jerusalem after the uncovering of the holy places of Christianity. As of the seventh century, the Armenian Orthodox Church had its own bishop in Jerusalem. The Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem in its present form came into being in the first decade of the fourteenth century, when the Brotherhood of Sts. James was established in the Holy City. The Armenian Church occupies an important position with its joint guardianship – shared with the far larger and more powerful Greek Orthodox and Latin (Roman Catholic) churches – of Christianity's holiest sites of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of the Nativity, among others.

In addition to clergy within the Patriarchate, a small Armenian lay community had existed for centuries around the Cathedral of Sts. James in what came to be known as the Armenian Quarter, which occupies about one-sixth of Jerusalem's Old City. Some of the lay population descended from Armenian pilgrims who came to the Holy City centuries earlier. In addition to the Armenian Gregorian Church and the lay community, a small Armenian Catholic community also existed in Jerusalem as of the mid-nineteenth century. The Catholic community was concentrated in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, its Patriarchal Vicariate being located on Via Dolorosa street.

Prior to World War I, Jerusalem's Armenians saw themselves as part and parcel of Ottoman Palestinian fab-

ric. Their first language was Arabic, though they also spoke Armenian and frequently European languages as well. The end of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival of British rule in 1917 profoundly altered the nature of the Armenian community in Palestine. The sudden influx from 1915 onward of thousands of Armenian refugees fleeing the Armenian Genocide (1915–1923) transformed its demographic composition. The Armenian population of Palestine on the eve of World War I numbered between two and three thousand persons. The majority lived in Jerusalem, with smaller communities in Haifa, Jaffa, Ramla, and Bethlehem. By 1925, there were about 15,000 Armenians in Palestine concentrated mainly in Jerusalem with smaller numbers in Haifa and Jaffa. In 1947, some 1500 refugees repatriated to Soviet Armenia, inaugurating the decline of Palestine's Armenian population that gathered momentum with the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Inevitably, the almost-over-night demographic transformation of the community in the early 1920s caused strains.

With the refugees soon constituting the majority, the primary political involvement of the community became intra-Armenian diasporic affairs, which mirrored the tensions and the struggles existing among other diasporic Armenian communities especially between the two traditional political parties: the Dashnaks and the Ramgavars. The indigenous Armenians of Jerusalem never became involved in these issues and their sympathies were solidly with the Palestinians; their preoccupations

were henceforth elsewhere. They suddenly found themselves vastly outnumbered by refugees who knew no Arabic, spoke only Turkish and Armenian, and had different ways and traditions.

In 1921, Archbishop Yeghishe Turian (1921–1929) was elected patriarch and immediately faced the monumental task of providing shelter for the refugees still pouring into the country. Working with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Near East Relief Organization (NERO), the Patriarchate of Sts. James took in more than eight hundred male and female orphans from Dayr al-Zawr and elsewhere in Syria, setting up mixed orphanages in Sts. James Cathedral (Araradian Orphanage), the Holy Cross Greek Convent, and Nazareth.

Pursuing his goal of raising the educational and cultural level of the community, Patriarch Turian enacted a series of reforms aimed at improving conditions within the Brotherhood. In 1929, he initiated the building of the Gulbenkian Library, which today is considered the largest Armenian library in the diaspora, and the Holy Translators (Srpots Tarkmantchatz) school. He also revived the Sts. James Press, which resumed publishing quality works by the patriarch and other clerics. Similarly, the Patriarch relaunched Sion (Zion), the official organ of the Armenian Patriarchate established in 1866, a monthly publication devoted mainly to religious matters. In 1926, he built the new theological faculty and modernized the curriculum.

Under the British Mandate, the Armenian community of Jerusalem witnessed the flourishing of its civil society organizations and institutions. Education was a high priority for the leadership. In addition to the Holy Translators school, Armenian students in Jerusalem, whose family could afford the tuition and fees, also attended non-Armenian schools such as Bishop Gobat and St. George (British), St. Joseph and the Frères (French), and Schmidt (German).

The Mandate period was especially notable for its immense proliferation of Armenian sports and cultural societies in Jerusalem, especially in the 1930s. One of the oldest organizations was the Jerusalem Armenian Benevolent Union (JABU) founded in 1925. There were also political clubs, and it was not uncommon even for clubs devoted to sports or other activities to have memberships that were either Dashnak or Ramgavar. A multiplicity of Armenian sporting clubs – of which the most prominent was the Homenetmen Club (The Armenian Physical Education Society established in 1932) – distinguished itself in soccer and boxing and the Hoyetchmen Club (The Armenian Young Men's Society established in 1929) distinguished itself in basketball. They competed not only against each other but also against Arab, British, and Jewish teams and all-Armenian matches were covered by the local press, most notably the Palestine Post. All of the above-mentioned clubs exist today and are very vibrant. Armenian cultural societies were also very visible, with active lecture programs and cultural events. Concerts and music

recitals, sometimes held in the auditorium of the YMCA to accommodate large audiences (Armenian and non-Armenian), were also covered in the local press.

Gradually, the material condition of the Armenian community of Jerusalem began to be developed. By the 1930s, Armenian community as a whole enjoyed relative prosperity. The number of Armenian businesses and shops began expanding. Except for the shops along Armenian Street within the Patriarchate, most of the Armenian businesses were in the Christian Quarter, concentrated especially along Harat al-Nasara, as well as outside the city walls, notably in the Jaffa Gate and Mamilla areas. Armenians of Jerusalem were particularly prominent as goldsmiths, silversmiths, shoemakers, tailors, and tinsmiths; they also worked in photography and ceramics.

After the 1948 war, around 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their ancestral homeland. The War left a deep impact on the Palestinians who found shelter in dilapidated refugee camps in the surrounding Arab countries. During the war, Armenians from all over Palestine converged on the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City for safe haven. As a result of the war, major dislocations followed: The Armenian communities of Jaffa and Haifa and other areas that became Israel were reduced to 'a tiny fraction of their previous population'.

By the end of the 1948 war, some Armenians in Palestine became refugees for the second time. Around

three thousand displaced refugees arrived in the Sts. James Convent and the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. Their property was confiscated by the Israeli government and was put under the control of the Custodian of Abandoned Properties. Eventually, most of them immigrated to Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, and the West through Jordan. Despite this, a small number of Armenians stayed in Jaffa, Haifa, and west Jerusalem.

The Armenian Patriarchate after the 1948 war faced another challenge, namely the election of a new patriarch. After a bitter intra-ecclesiastic conflict which lasted for more than a decade, Archbishop Yeghishe Derderian was elected as the Patriarch of Jerusalem to become the 95th Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem. He served for thirty years until his death in February 1990.

The first important task Dederian performed during the third year of his tenure was presiding over the restoration of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1963. Under the tenure of Patriarch Derderian, major strides were achieved. In 1975, the Alex and Mary Manoogian Theological Seminary was inaugurated with the aim of making Jerusalem the center of providing priests to the Armenian diaspora communities. That year, the Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum was also established in a 200-year-old building that once housed the Armenian Theological Seminary. The museum went through a major overhaul and soon will be open to the public. Despite losing a large portion of its original population after 1948, the Armenian

community of Jerusalem continued to live in East Jerusalem against all odds.

After the Six-Day War of 1967, more Armenians from Jerusalem emigrated to different parts of the world. The Old City of Jerusalem came under the Israeli control and the Patriarchate now resumed its full control of its properties on the Israeli side. The war also led to the cutting of ties between the Armenian community of Jerusalem and its counterparts in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, causing serious damage to the shrinking community. Most of the Armenians in the occupied territories retained their Jordanian citizenship and the Armenians of East Jerusalem received the legal status of Israeli permanent resident. Despite the decline of the community members, the remaining Armenians continued to pursue their businesses in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The deteriorating political situation within the occupied territories led to the first Intifada. The grim economic and political situation in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem had dramatic impact on the Armenian shopkeepers. Eventually, many of them emigrated to the U.S., Canada, and Australia. This was not only confined to the Armenians of Jerusalem as it impacted the entire Christian community as well.

After the death of Derderian in February 1990, Archbishop Tor-kom Manoogian, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of America, returned to Jerusalem from New York and was elected on 22 March

1990 as the 96th Patriarch by securing wide-ranging support. Patriarch Manoogian's task was to reform the internal situation of the patriarchate. He revamped the Theological seminary by bringing new faculty from Armenia with the objective of preparing new and qualified cadre in the service of the Armenian Church. He also improved the living conditions of the members of the Brotherhood. However, like his predecessor he failed to deal with one of the most important factors for the decline of the Armenian community: the housing crisis. Housing has been and is one of the biggest problems facing the Armenian community of Jerusalem. On 12 October 2012, Patriarch Manoogian passed away. Archbishop Nourhan Manougian was elected as the 97th Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Armenian Catholic Community of Jerusalem



The founding of the Armenian Catholic Church in Jerusalem took place in the second half of the nineteenth century when Jerusalem began gaining more religious, political, and economic importance internationally. In 1856, Patriarch Asdvadzadourian sent Rt. Rev. Serope Tavitian to Jerusalem on a mission to find a suitable property for a church.

The church was built in the Muslim Quarter where the Third and the Four Stations on Via Dolorosa are now located. The construction of the Vicariate ended in 1885, whereas the church was completed in 1905. Like its Gregorian patriarchal counterpart, the Armenian Catholic Vicariate had remained vacant during the turmoil of World War I. It was filled only in 1921, when Rt. Rev. Hovsep Moumdjian, formerly dean of the Levonian School in Rome, arrived in Jerusalem. As head of the community from 1921 to 1930, he oversaw the resettlement of the Armenian Catholic refugees and the renovation of the Armenian Catholic Church. A community center was created to meet the spiritual, material, and cultural needs of the refugees due to the fact that Armenian Patriarchate was not able to accommodate all the refugees.

The successor of Moumdjian, Rt. Rev. Hagop Giragossian (1930–1948) played a dominant role in rebuilding the national infrastructure of the Armenian Catholic community. Known as the reformer, Giragossian undertook the modernization of buildings and the installation of electricity and running water within the convent. He also opened a school run by the Armenian sisters' congregation of the Immaculate Conception. The newspaper Yerusaghem (Jerusalem) began to be published. Giragossian also created sports and cultural associations and scout groups, the most important of which was the Arax Club, established in 1935.

Despite being much smaller in number, the members of the Armenian

Catholic community, like their Orthodox counterpart, established themselves as jewelers, craftsmen, pharmacists, teachers and owners of businesses. In the 1930s and 1940s, their situation began to improve. However, their numbers began to decline as a result of the 1948 war. Under the Jordanian rule, their situation was somewhat stable.

The relationship between the Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholic churches and communities were cordial. This was due to the common national and cultural heritage, especially given that both groups included a large population who survived the Armenian Genocide. During the tenure of Rt. Rev. Hovhannes Gamsaragan (1961–1978) the conditions of the Armenian Catholic community generally improved. In the 1980s and 1990s the community began to decline as the Vicariate suffered from internal schisms, mismanagement of finances, and maladministration by lay community members. This trend had started in the aftermath of the 1967 war, when many Armenian Catholic families immigrated. The arrival in 2002 of Most Rev. Kevork Kahazoumian raised some optimism, which were dashed with his sudden departure to Istanbul in 2006. Today, less than 50 Armenian Catholic families remain. Once a vibrant community, it is today struggling to keep its church and identity alive.

Conclusion

The history of the Armenians of Jerusalem is that of perseverance and uncertainty in the face of many

crises spanning their existence in the Holy City from the fourth century until today. For the most part, the modern community was shaped by the influx of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide. One of the major factors that led to the decline of the community was the Arab-Israeli conflict. Today, the shrinking Armenian community counts around one thousand, and is on the verge of demise, leaving many of its members hoping for some drastic reforms that might prevent its collapse.



THE ROLE THAT JERUSALEM PLAYS IN ARMENIAN ISSUES

Dr Gaby Kevorkian

On September 27, 2020, the Republic of Azerbaijan, with Turkish, Israeli, Pakistani military support, mercenaries from Syria and Libya, as well as mujahideen from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, and ISIS members from all over the world, launched a brutal and surprising attack on the Armenian people of the Republic of Artsakh / Nagorno-Karabakh, in the South Caucasus.

The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire/armistice agreement ended the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. It was signed on 9 November by the president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of Russia Vladimir Putin. It ended all hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region from 00:00, 10 November, 2020, Moscow time. The president of the self-declared Republic of Artsakh, Arayik Harutyunyan, also agreed to end hostilities.

On September 30, 2020, His Be-

atitude Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, sent a letter to Mr. Reuven Rivlin, the president of the State of Israel. By this letter, Archbishop Manougian appealed to Mr Rivlin to interfere with his government to stop supplying weapons to Azerbaijan, saying: "You are a person with a peace-loving character, and someone who knows well the sufferings of your people through Holocaust and pogroms, therefore, we rely on your conscience and judgment to do your best to stop Israel supporting an aggressor enemy, Azerbaijan, to harm the peaceful population of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia."

On November 20, 2020, Archbishop Manougian sent a letter to Mr Vladimir Putin, the President of Russian Federation. By this letter, Archbishop Manougian appealed to Mr. Putin to protect the Christian Armenians in Artsakh, saying: "Mr President, the new signed ceasefire declaration would open a new reality for Arme-

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nians in Artsakh and the Armenian people in general. Regretably, after the Armenians surrender some regions, the declaration leaves unprotected, and to the mercy of Azerbaijanis, all historical Armenian Holy shrines, monasteries, cemeteries, etc., that were erected centuries ago; they would be desecrated or destroyed.

Today there is evidence that such vandalism has already begun by the Azerbaijanis. We believe that the protection of those holy shrines should be mandatory. Therefore, we appeal to you to consider this important issue in the next negotiations to include them within the border of Artsakh in the final agreement.” What is the historical and religious importance of the Armenian Church and the Armenian Jerusalemite community in the Christian world in general and in the Armenian world?

The Cathedral of Saint James, or Saints Jacobs Armenian Cathedral, is a 12th-century Armenian church in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, near the quarter's entry, Zion Gate. The cathedral is dedicated to two Christian saints: James, son of Zebedee (James the Greater) (one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus) and James the brother of Jesus (James the Just). It is the principal church of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, also known as the Armenian Patriarchate of Sts. James. It is located near the Church of the Holy Archangels. The local/native “Kaghakatsi” Armenian Community call this church “Der Al-Zatouneh,” which means the Convent of the Olive Tree. This convent is located in the Armenian Quarter of the Old

City of Jerusalem. It is the house of Annas who was involved in the trial of Jesus. Inside the convent is an olive tree, to which Christ was bound during his trial under Annas. There is also a chapel associated with the flagellation of Christ and a prison where Jesus was held before the judgment under Annas. The fruits of the sacred olive tree are miraculous. The Convent of “Al-Zatouneh” stands on the threshing floor of “Araunah the Jebusite,” where David saw God standing between heaven and earth, with a naked sword in his hand stretched out against Jerusalem. The foundation of the convent was laid by Queen Helen in the 4th Century AD.

The Armenian presence in Jerusalem dates back to the 4th Century AD [some sources assert Armenians first came to the region around 90BCE]. Under King Tiridates III, Armenia became the first country to adopt Christianity as the state religion of Armenia, thus making the Armenian Kingdom the first state to embrace Christianity officially. Following that, many Armenian monks came to the cradle of Christianity—Jerusalem, which is considered the essence of their faith. The construction of St. James' Armenian Monastery began in the same century. An Armenian scriptorium was established in the 5th century. A secular Armenian community was established in the 6th century over an area neighboring Mount Zion, inside the Old City walls. This Armenian community (nowadays called the citizens “Kaghakatsiner”), was mainly composed of merchants and artisans. The Armenian patriarchate was es-

tablished in the 7th century, while the Armenian Monastery was last expanded in the 12th century.

The Armenian Quarter developed gradually around St. James' Monastery and took its modern shape in the 19th Century. Before World War I, the number of Armenians in Jerusalem was around 2,500 people. During the British Mandate of Palestine, thousands of 1915 Genocide survivors found refuge in St. James' Monastery from 1918 and onwards. In 1925 around 15,000 [some sources put the figure at 25,000] Armenians have lived all over Palestine, mainly in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. In 1947 around 1,500 Armenian Genocide survivors repatriated to the Soviet Republic of Armenia (East Armenia). In 1967 East Jerusalem and the West Bank were occupied by the Israeli forces (which was under Jordanian rule). This occupation resulted in a sharp drop in the Armenian population in general.

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the independence of Armenia (1991), more than 3,950 mixed marriage Armenians immigrated to the state of Israel. The majority of them (3,500) settled inside Israel, and only 150 of them are living now in Jerusalem, while the rest are scattered all over Israel. Nowadays, the number of Armenians who live in the Old City of Jerusalem is exceeding one thousand. From what was mentioned previously, the Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land can be classified into three categories: (1) Local/native Armenians, who are the Armenians living in the Holy

Land before the Armenian Genocide (before 1915). (2) The Armenian immigrants, who are the Armenians who came to the Holy Land after the Armenian Genocide (after 1915). (3) Armenians with mixed marriages (between Armenians and Jews), who are the Armenians who came to the Holy Land after the collapse of the former Soviet Union (1991).

Israel and the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It is very sad and painful for me to say that the Jewish state has refused to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Despite Israel's history and the collective trauma of the Holocaust, Israel has not recognized the Armenian Genocide, nor does Israel place emphasis on educating about the Armenian Genocide. The Knesset has repeatedly failed to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide for various reasons, which indicates its moral and principled failure. The Jewish state concluded its inappropriate behavior by providing military and moral support to Azerbaijan in its sudden religious and political attack against the descendants of the Armenian Genocide!

In Jerusalem and Bethlehem we pray for the Peace of the world in General, and the peace of Jerusalem and Artsakh in particular, hoping that Israel will recognize the Armenian Genocide one day!

Dr Gaby Kevorkian is a general practitioner who works at the Palestine Red Crescent Society. He is an active member of the Armenian community and the online platform "Armenians from Jerusalem"



MOMENTS LIKE AUGUST 4

Nayiri Baboudjian Bouchakjian

Beirut is a city of contradictions—all types of contradictions: warzones and peace; rebels and party supporters; dirty alleys and cleaner neighborhoods; old, dilapidated buildings next to luxurious ones; painful losses and then... painful rebirths.

Morning of August 4:

I wake up early on August 4th, 2020. My students have an exam and I need to prepare for that. I need to be in the mindset of a final exam, even if my students are the ones writing the exam. As Beirut wakes up slowly, my husband and I sip black Lebanese coffee on our balcony overlooking the famous Mar Mikhael or Vendome stairs and Rmeil area in Ashrafieh. Many times we hear "happy people" climb up the Vendome stairs (named after a Cinema that used to be located at the bottom of the stairs) late at night and we

know they are coming from Mar Mikhael or Jemmayze. Both are very popular areas with thriving nightlife and pubs/restaurants. My husband reads the news and chats with Ara, my dad's cousin, who lives across the street. I feel the impact of the Beirut August heat even that early in the morning; August sticks to your skin early morning. There is something majestic about Beirut in the early hours: part of it is the buzz of waking up, neighbors greeting each other despite their masks, shops opening, shopkeepers burning bakhour (incense) and hope coming back to the city. I take a minute to admire the plants that my father cared for and nurtured for years; the cactus on the far right has grown so voraciously that it is almost touching our neighbor's balcony on the third floor. Facing our balcony is the newly erected tower in place of Cinema Vendome building which

has blocked our view of the sea. This building strikes me as artificial and steals our view of the blue, fairy-tale like glow of the Mediterranean.

Corona cases are well under control and we feel somewhat relieved about that. Ara lives right next to the Armenian Evangelical Central High School and Church. Our buildings face each other, and how convenient that has been through the toughest lockdown periods. We call Ara at times from the balcony, just to see another human being. He opens their bedroom window and sticks his head out: then my husband and Ara have a conversation about politics and the virus. Not very different in many ways. "I bet these stupid people are happy because of the virus" yells Ara from his window. He has a point: since the start of the Pandemic, and since March 2nd –the first day of the lockdown for most universities – people have been demonstrating less. The revolution is tired.

During our balcony conversations, which are mostly loud, we simply forget that some other people also understand Armenian.

Heading to work:

That day as I walk to work, I complain to myself mostly about the weather. It feels sticky and I don't want to be late. Nor sweaty. I also realize that I wore my brown flat pumps instead of my tennis shoes. The mask makes it hard for me to breathe. Our home in Ashrafieh, Beirut, is five minutes away from the University of Balamand (UOB), Ashrafieh Campus, where I have

been teaching for the past 18 years. It is not only my workplace, but also a place that I identify with. Our campus is just one building which urges all students, faculty members and staff to co-exist and get used to each other's presence. No secret lingers on for too long in our campus. On larger campuses, secrets somehow disappear or are kept hidden in longer corridors. We, however, know the students who are dating each other; when we stop seeing them together, we wonder why, and wish them well. We know the ones not showing up to classes, and even the ones struggling with family issues. We call them up and ask about them. Invisibility is not an option: neither for teachers, nor for students. As I climb the few stairs leading to the University of Balamand, I notice that construction works are well underway in the Saint George Hospital Medical Center (or better known as Moustashfa el Roum). Moustashfa el Roum and Balamand are on opposing sides of the street. At the front desk of the university, I greet the ladies and I know everyone expects me to struggle to find my keys and ask for the spare one. The secretaries already know that I am a monster when it comes to keys. I lose them. I lose spare ones. I even lose the spares of the spare ones. They hide the keys from me. They know I will lose them again. I promise not to lose them; but I still do. They are as sweet about it as possible. Suhaila, my friend and long-time mentor, and I will supervise together from the Computer Lab. My English 244 (Modern Drama) students will write an essay about isolation and hope. We have spent our June and July in

semi-isolation, reading Wilde, Miller, Williams and Beckett. Students have found Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* disturbingly true and up to date in this Pandemic. Needless to say, there are no students on Campus. We will monitor students on screens as they write their exams. Through a system that our University has initiated, we will also be able to monitor their screens. Teaching has been lonely since the start of the Pandemic and the resulting lockdowns. I wake up every day, try to look as decent as possible, wear a respectable top and colorful scarf, brush my hair (just in case the camera is on), and talk to a screen all day long. My dogs must think I am troubled. At around 11:30 am, we are done supervising. I think about locking myself up in my office and correcting from campus. I sometimes do that. Something tells me to go back home and to wear the more comfortable shoes. I obsess about not wearing my black Sketchers. It's this annoying voice in my head that keeps on telling me to get into more comfortable shoes.

Home by noon:

When I get home, all sticky and sweaty, I wash up. There is a whole new routine that we follow now: wash up, remove clothes, place them in the washing machine. Wash up again. Now wearing my comfy slippers, I prepare my working space. It is Tuesday. I have to hand in my grades by Thursday.

To get away from the heat, I put the AC on in the salon and enjoy being indoors. I close all the windows and doors to get maximum effect of the

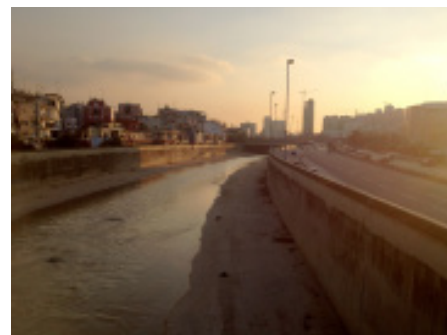
AC. August sticks to your skin early morning and leaves you breathless by noon time. As I start to read student papers, and delve into the world of Wilde and Beckett, my mind wanders. It's my birthday in a week. I am getting comfortable in my 40s. I lost my father in January, after a long journey with Alzheimer's, but I have not yet had the luxury of grief. The last time I saw friends and cousins was on my dad's fortieth. It has been one lockdown after the other, and Beirut has been on the brink of an economic and political explosion. My husband and I have been discussing moving to Armenia. He is somehow convinced that a better life awaits us there: so many of our friends and even family members have moved back to Armenia. Repatriation they call it. Repats heading back home. He convinces me on a daily basis. I am guilty of not feeling this urge: guilty of feeling that Lebanon is my home. Guilty of feeling a powerful and unshakeable connection to a country that does not welcome me a lot of the time. After all, I could only wish for a Lebanese passport. My Father is Syrian Armenian and so, naturally, I am also Syrian Armenian. Of course, I was born in Beirut; of course, my mother is Lebanese; of course, I never lived in Syria except for some summers spent in my grandfather's village, Kessab. Living in Lebanon with a Syrian nationality has been a struggle throughout. Growing up in Lebanon, I have witnessed how women have minimal rights; how a messed up patriarchy has managed to play the quota card to make sure women cannot pass on their nationality to their children. I remember when

I was growing up, my Syrian-ness was not public knowledge. Nobody needed to know. I hid my Syrian identity from my closest friends. When some of my friends found out I was bullied about it; bullied gently, harshly, jokingly, privately. Being Syrian meant different things to different people, ranging from being an outsider to being a traitor, and one not worthy of living in Lebanon. Therefore, I hid my paper identity even more carefully. Only shared it when necessary for work or paperwork. I did not mind being Syrian in private, except that deep down inside I was also guilty of not feeling truly Syrian. I loved a city that did not welcome me in its dust and pollution. I was in love with a city that even despite its unbearable August heat had something inextricably magnetic about it. And toxic. Beirut: you want to leave, but something holds you back. You cannot leave. You leave and you carry Beirut in your heart. You are heart-broken. You live with "Garod" (yearning in Armenian) and want to come back. I explain to my husband that my Armenian-ness even is more rooted in Lebanon than in Armenia. This is not to negate what I feel for Armenia. I miss Armenia: I miss reading road signs in Armenian, restaurant names in Armenian. I miss the art, the music, and the intellect. I know that one day I may feel comfortable in its folds.

Almost dinner:

My husband calls me around 4:00 pm. He works in Dawra, an area which is close to Bourj Hammoud—an area that used to be highly popu-

lated by Armenians. He tells me that he will make my favorite foul لوف dish today; he will pamper me because I am stressed out from corrections. Foul is a typical Lebanese dish that people usually have for breakfast or brunch. The fava beans are cooked until tender and then lemon, olive oil, cumin, garlic, and just a sprinkle of parsley do the magic. On busy days, we love eating foul for dinner. Raffi comes home at around 5:15pm. He parades through the salon and makes fun of how I love closing all windows. He turns off the AC and opens all windows and doors. I usually keep them closed. But I say nothing. He is full of news of what is going on in the streets, in the shops, in the businesses. Some other shops have closed in Dawra. "And you remember Vartan's Dad's shop in Bourj Hammoud, Arax Street?"



They also had to close. Imagine closing after 40 years." He speaks of upcoming revolts and dollar-Lebanese inconsistencies. As I kiss him on August 4th, he looks into my eyes and tells me that he fears a war, and that we should leave Lebanon. "Drama again" I laugh. I sometimes ask him about why he felt a war would happen on that day... he does not know why he said that. Just like I don't know why I chose to come

back home and correct from home.

I have been correcting from my dad's book room: we call it the book room but in reality it is our dining room. My dad's book collection takes up most of the room, so it is actually the best place for inspiration of any academic work. I am proud of my pace. By 5:30 pm, I have already corrected 10 final exam papers. As Raffi cooks up the fowl, the long corridor of our home is filled with the enticing smell of fava beans. Two months ago, we picked up the courage to hang all the paintings we had in our corridor. We sometimes joke about our corridor resembling a mini-gallery. I leave my laptop on the desk in the book room, not able to resist the aroma of Fowl, I join Raffi in the kitchen. I set the plates as Raffi mashes the garlic and adds cumin to the mesmerizing Fava Beans. "I want to eat them with onion hokis (my dear/soul in Armenian)," I tell him as I peel an onion. "You are the only person I know who eats tabboule with bread and fowl with onion," we both smile. Then, without any preambles or forwards, without any predictions or apologies, we both look at each other in horror. We squint as we hear an airplane fly above our building; I am sure this is a mistake; it is flying very low. The noise is deafening. There is no time to think. Raffi grabs my hand and almost drags me to the corridor. Living through the Lebanese Civil War, and also the Israeli invasion of 2006, we have both been programmed to run to corridors and safer shelters when we sense danger. Especially danger from wandering airplanes. From 1977-1990, our corridor was our safe haven and shelter. Neighbors

from the fifth and sixth floors would join us as we would sleep in the corridor. We would spread blankets and mattresses and somehow, with the company of neighbors and cousins, we survived the war. We were all convinced that second floor corridors are very safe.

On August 4th, at 6:07 pm, my husband and I stand in the middle of our long corridor and look at each other in complete disbelief as we feel the earth move under us. Our building dances: and I know this is one evil dance. It moves left and then right. The movement reverberates throughout my body as I hear paintings falling and people screaming. Not one person. Not two. I hear a city screaming. So this is what an earthquake feels like? I hug Raffi; everything else is falling apart; I hug him tightly and I am so scared that he will also go. So this is how we will die? So this is how it will all end? I feel items in our house flying: paintings, doors, windows, books, vases. I remember screaming: Screaming so loudly just to hear myself. Screaming so that Raffi can hear me. Screaming so that Raffi won't leave me. "Please Raffi, Please hokis, I don't want us to die." I want another chance to reconstruct and continue our narratives. "Jesus Christ" I repeat to myself. Raffi holds my trembling arms and tries to calm me down. He is the optimist. "Raffi please, hokis, we are dying. I don't want to die. Tsoler needs me." Tsoler, my sister, lives in New Jersey. She moved to the States with her husband in 1998. We lost our father in January of 2020. Just as demonstrators blocked the roads and burned tires in front of the

Central Bank in Hamra Street, my father took his last breath as Tsoler and I held his hands. Baba took his last breath on January 18th, 2020, a few blocks away from the demonstrators at the American University of Beirut Medical Center. Without any warning or premonitions, Tsoler was diagnosed with breast cancer late in June. With Baba gone, it is just us. I keep on telling myself I cannot die because I cannot leave Tsoler alone in all of this. What will she do? How will she cope alone? I cannot leave her. I don't know how Raffi and I walk from our long corridor to the sitting room. Maybe we don't walk, maybe we are pushed somehow. Just as I want to open the door to check up on my neighbor, I feel the impact of another, even stronger earthquake that shakes my whole body and deafens my ears even more. But this noise feels like some dull vacuum-like power sucking out sofas and people to a zone of death. It is not only the deafening noise, it is not only the shattering glass, it is not only the smoke, it is not the screams and the cries of the people, it is all of these with the uncertainty of not knowing when it will get worse. The second time around, there is an electricity cut. The second time around, the impact is much stronger, but I don't hear it as much. I feel my body has become somewhat numb, my hands tingling with a weird sensation of heat, but I am still standing. The second time around, I am sure we will not survive. The first one prepares me for the second one. Just like the airplane flying near our window prepares us for the first one. I close my eyes, and I cling onto Raffi in complete

darkness. But somehow, I feel that Raffi is on the floor. Up until today, he does not remember falling. I don't remember hitting myself anywhere. Later on during that week, we both discover that we have bruises all over our body. Purple and blue: my arms and legs are covered in patches of purple skin. Raffi's hip is completely blue. When I finally manage to open the door of our apartment, I notice that Raffi is still holding my hand, but struggling to get himself out of a painting. One of my Dad's favorite paintings by Seta Manoukian is around Raffi now. He is caught up in the frame of Seta's painting. The canvas, of course, is somewhere in the salon, or living room, under the rubble, under the glass. He removes the frame and then we look at each other, not knowing if there will be a third strike.



"Stay inside," he whispers. "Susu," I tell him. Susu is our neighbor, who is more like a sister to us. There are some other people at Susu's house, as she has just lost her sister-in-law. August 3rd was her funeral. People are here to pay their respects, but it's only close family because of Covid-19 restrictions. Her niece sticks her head out and tells me that they are alive. "What happened? What happened?" Georges, who just lost his wife, tells me to calm down

and that they are all alive. I am still screaming for Susu and I want to know what has happened. My mobile rings, and I realize that it's in my pocket. It's my colleague from the Koura (North of Lebanon) Campus. "Nayiri, are you OK?" When I hear her voice, I cry and scream at the same time. "Please tell me what happened. I think there was a bomb. We have no internet. No electricity." I plead with her to tell me what is happening. "Hamdel-lah (Thank God in Arabic) you are Okay; probably an explosion. Port of Beirut. Just stay inside. Wear a mask if you can. Please come stay with us..." Raffi is up now and wants to find water. I don't need to open the door anymore, as I realize the lock is not there. I look around, and see our house transformed into a warzone. This is the apocalypse, I tell myself, expecting the third strike. Raffi tries to walk to the salon, but there is glass everywhere. Our two dogs, Snowy and Lolo, who usually bark at the smallest distraction and noise, shadow us without barking. Even they tiptoe to avoid injuring themselves. This is just a bad dream. This is not real. I will pinch myself and I will wake up. I know I will wake up. I will wake up in a world where August 4 moments do not exist.

Our friends living in Mrouj, a beautiful village 30 kilometers away from Beirut, hear the planes and feel the explosions. Other friends in Cyprus fear an earthquake as their windows vibrate.

The Aftermath:

The day after, I step out on our bal-

cony, my happy place no more. My dad's cactus is uprooted and lies flat on the floor. Windowpanes have disappeared. I see one of our doors near Ara's building, and I cannot comprehend how it got there. My dad's plants are not even identifiable; their house has become their cemetery, just like so many people living in this part of town. They are trodden and demolished. Covered with glass. Beirut buildings are naked now without their doors and windows. Unprotected. There is so much glass and all in the wrong places. There is so much dust and black soot from the smoke. Ara's building has lost one of its balcony walls. Raffi has gone down in search of a lock. "It's August" he says, "We don't need to worry about rain for another month or two." I notice the affected building... I wonder how many people in that building died... I wonder how many of the residents there took the impact for us.

A week later, when I go back to what used to be our Campus, I realize that I don't need to worry about keys and doors anymore. There are no locks and few doors for that matter. All offices are open, and there is still blood on the floor. It is the blood of the Librarian who was badly injured. Some students and colleagues were also hurt. I notice that in my office specifically the ceiling has fallen onto my desk and glass is everywhere. The drawers of our filing cabinet are in my friend's office.

The foul that Raffi cooked on August 4th stayed in the pot for several days. It had an extra ingredient though: glass. So much glass. I have never

seen so much glass. I have never heard so much glass shatter. Shatter. Kill. For days, I hear the glass in the background. I know that had Raffi not opened the windows that afternoon, the damage would have been much worse. August sticks to your skin early morning, leaves you breathless by noon time and almost kills you by 6:30 pm. If it does not, then you somehow move on, try to make sense of the nonsense, and deal with the guilt of being a survivor. I will always remember August 4th as a Tuesday. Of all the wars that I have seen, August 4th destroyed the most and in just a few moments. Of all the explosions, assassinations, and bombs that I have lived through, August 4th killed simply with glass. Beirut was destroyed, ravaged, looted and transformed in just a few moments. There is a life that we used to live before August 4th and another life that we live now, after August 4th. There is a Beirut that we knew of before August 4th, and one that we know of now. And then there is us as we used to be before August 4th, and us as we are now. I am tired of being resilient and then embracing one trauma as it prepares me for the other one. I just want a way out of all these cobwebs of trauma.

Since August 4th the Vendome stairs have been empty. Streets, in general, are usually empty after 6:00 or 7:00. People have not been hanging out in pubs and restaurants as much. We don't hear the happy ones climbing Vendome Stairs anymore. Ashrafieh looks more like a ghost-town and we don't know who to blame: the Covid-19 virus or the political viruses that are so resistant to vac-

cines. The political viruses that made August 4th possible and not only that, they left the victims and their families in an abyss of uncertainty, anger, and inconsolable grief. No one has claimed responsibility for leaving almost 3000 tons of ammonium nitrate unattended at the Port of Beirut. Accountability is a foreign concept to most Lebanese politicians. It is always someone else's fault. As the country drowns in its own stench of corruption, we still mourn the ones who left us on August 4th. Students, friends, neighbors, Armenian, Lebanese, Syrians, Filipinos. Some are still missing. Unknown. Nurses, pedestrians, employees, fire fighters.

Easter 2021:

As we are getting ready for Easter, we decide to make maamoul (Lebanese Easter or Eid cookies stuffed with dates, almonds, or nuts). After kneading the dough, my husband finds the mold for the Easter cookies. We use only one mold this year. It is the oval one. We make 22 maamoul not only because butter is extremely expensive, not only because eggs have become so unaffordable, not only because we don't know if we will find more semolina next week, but also because every time Raffi hits the hand carved wooden mold onto the kitchen table, so that the Easter cookie comes out, I jump in fear.



For the first two or three cookies, I scream at Raffi: "Don't be so loud!!" "Sorry. There is no other way to get the maamoul out," he boasts, proud of the product. By the 22nd one, I feel exhausted. Each time, as I await yet another explosion from the mold, I feel shaken and scared. I prepare myself for the other one, yet I am equally scared.



When it comes to making maamoul, keep in mind that walnuts are a delicacy now. You can manage with dates though. Make sure you stock up on flour. And semolina.

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ON THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND DENIAL: INTERVIEW WITH PALESTINIAN DIRECTOR MOHAMMAD BAKRI

Elise Aghazarian

One film I like on the Armenian Genocide is entitled “The Lark Farm” (2007) by the Italian Taviani brothers. The movie is an Armenian family saga during the deportations and genocide of 1.5 million Armenians by nationalist Turks in the first half of the 20th century, based on a novel by the Italian writer Antonia Arslan. Shades of life evolve in trauma, and characters are confronted with questions related to life, values, and resilience. As a Jerusalemite Armenian and descendent of Armenian Genocide survivors, I felt deeply moved to see renowned Palestinian actor and director Mohamad Bakri among the international cast acting in the film. I felt that someone from

the Palestine I had grown up in consoling me for a past my grandparents witnessed a hundred years ago. Bakri exhibits connection with collective pain in his moving and complex role and touches upon the dilemmas of solidarity, denial, and compassion.

Mohammad Bakri grew up in the Palestinian village of Al-Ba’nah (Bi’ina) (East of Acre). His village had surrendered to the Israeli military army in 1948. In the early 1970s, Mohammad enrolled to study Arabic literature and acting in Tel Aviv University and followed a career in the field of cinema. Bakri presented epic roles, a distinctive voice, and a special acting and directing

aura throughout his career, leaving a print to be remembered in Palestinian, Israeli, and International movie productions.

In spring 2002, news spread that the besieged Jenin refugee camp inside the West Bank, populated by Palestinian refugees, was being invaded by Israeli soldiers. A staunch believer in humanitarian ideals and genuine solidarity, Bakri found himself venturing into the refugee camp and directing a movie investigating the matter. The film was subjected to a series of controversial trials in Israeli courts that have lasted around 18 years to date. The trials have revolved around banning or allowing the film

and triggered questions such as: Is it a crime to photograph soldiers in conflict situations? Are soldiers considered responsible for orders they receive from the higher command? Is a whole community to be punished for acts perpetrated by certain members in the community? The media blunder around Bakri's case also triggered never-ending discussions such as: is it ethical to make analogies and compare one collective suffering to another? Why do authorities use the shield of denial? And how can we liberate ourselves from the pains of injustice?

In this edition of Cornerstone highlighting the Armenian Genocide, I decided to interview Mohammad Bakri to learn more about his participation in the film and his reflections on these issues.

Tell us more about your participation in a film on the Armenian Genocide.

"It was a very memorable and special experience for me. I enjoyed working with the crew and the Taviani brothers. They often highlight issues related to oppression and freedom. They had adapted the script based on a novel, "La Masseria Delle Allodole" by Antonia Arslan. When I read the novel, I was deeply moved. I love Armenians in general and have met some Armenians in different parts of the world. I feel solidarity with them. Armenians remind me of us Palestinians and have gone through oppression like us. I do not intend to compare between one tragedy and the other. Each collective suffering is unique in terms of how it was planned and its historical circum-

stances. Turkey lies by denying it, but I believe the Armenian Genocide was systematically planned, programmed, and perpetrated. It did not just happen out of the blue.

I played the role of Nazem. Nazem's character is complicated and was not easy to act. The character transforms during the film. You see him betraying in some moments, and you see him caring in other moments. You live that internal human battle and conflict and sometimes feel angry from some of his behaviour and positions. You ask yourself: why would someone harm people who were kind to him and stab them in the back? As an actor, I wanted the audience to feel the personality and connect to that reality. I enjoyed the challenge and those complex nuances.

I remember a friend of mine suggested that I join him in screening the film at an Armenian Church in New York. We went there anonymously. Despite our agreement to conceal our identities, I saw him in the spur of the moment standing and announcing: "And the actor of the role of Nazem, Mohammad Bakri, is here with us today". That came unexpectedly. A lot of people hugged me affectionately and were giving me a warm welcome. I felt a strong bond and solidarity in that memorable evening. The vibrations made me feel we are all connected, and I felt that I was among my brothers and sisters.

The shooting of the movie was not easy physically and emotionally. We had to be clothed in thick costumes under the burning sun in Bulgaria, and march like Armenians did

during the deportations. I had to constantly think of all those refugees displaced from their homes and my fellow Palestinians. The challenge felt like being in labour or witnessing a rebirth. You go through suffering, but at the end of the tunnel, you deliver a humane message. It was one of the movies that I am proud to have taken part in and remember it with a lot of affection."

In the film, a lot of personalities are seeking to survive. How do you view survival? How can someone deal with oppression?

"Sometimes there are common denominators between those who are suffering or going through injustice. A certain magic or aura. They need to build up strength day after day, connect to who they are and develop coping mechanisms to go on. Even in the animal kingdom, if we look closely at different creatures in this universe, we notice that God has gifted them with characteristics that help them remain alive. Historically we see how many oppressed minorities have special talents and skills and a certain connection to existence values. Maybe they build it over time or when they feel they need to go on.

Oppressors also have things in common. They use different means to demonize the oppressed, label them as inhumane, and justify the abuse. They try to deny any responsibility for their actions, leaving the victims carrying a heavy load. Sometimes oppressed people feel that no matter how hard they are trying, the reality is tough to bear and that they are constantly being blamed and unable

to defend themselves. Feelings of frustration, vulnerability, and despair come to the fore in such a context, and one simultaneously resorts to hatred and contempt. This is a natural reaction, but I believe hatred is not the answer. Hatred is a trap. It chains and torments us. Hatred is a reaction and not action.

Liberating yourself from pain does not happen quickly. One cannot wipe away relations of abuse with one apology or open a new page easily. I have to say some events and flashbacks will remain engraved deep inside your heart. Nelson Mandela spent many years of his life in prison. He survived those years, but those years will not be wiped out from his memory. I once asked my late Palestinian friend Taha Mohammad Ali, deported from Safouria, a Palestinian town destroyed in 1948, about his reflections on returning there one day. He said: 'If I return there, say after 40 years, what will I do?' He explained that Safouria is not just monuments, stones but is more about the stories, people, birds, plants, childhood, adolescents and all your engraved memories, and if those things are seized away, you will feel very estranged and will continue suffering.

It is not so simple. We, humans, carry our pains with us, and being stripped of your homeland is not something to be taken for granted. You cannot forget that easily. Liberation requires time and patience, but most of all, it requires dealing with your accumulated emotions and moving from despair to affirmative action. You have to keep getting up

each time and challenge representations that justify abuse."

We see in the film the character Nunig going through different challenges as a deported woman. Could you tell us more about that and women challenging injustice?

"The status of women is not something to be generalized. It depends on their position: status, ideas, decisions, rights, actions, and the general context. There are women who are oppressors and women who challenge oppression or take part in liberation. Here in Palestine, the main protagonists of the first Palestinian uprising were women and children. They resisted with their voices and with stones.

If we look at history, Prophet Mohammad rejected femicide. We see in Islamic history a lot of women taking part in changing history. A lot of leaders, like Habib Burqeiba in Tunisia, have worked on legal reforms. Yet unfortunately we see radical superficial groups like ISIS using falsified and simplistic interpretations that do not reflect true religion or spirituality. They are destroying nice things in our world and persecuting women under different allegations. Egyptian feminist doctor Nawal Saadawi passed away recently. I believe she did not receive the recognition she deserved, even though she had authored publications that were translated into several languages. I feel this is reflective of how women are not always valued for their accomplishments.

On the theme of the film I am glad that one of the main heroes is a woman. Armenian women have sacrificed a lot during and after the Armenian Genocide and have exhibited a lot of strength. I enjoyed observing the role of Nunik. She was a hero for her people. I hope we can all learn more from history and give women the rights they deserve."

When the film was first screened at the Cinematheque in West Jerusalem, you were blamed by some critics for making analogies between the Armenian Genocide and Jenin. What is your opinion on that?

"Again, I believe that we cannot compare one pain and another, or one massacre with another. Each case is unique in a way: the Jewish Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, the Palestinian Nakba, or what Kurds or other nations have gone through in Africa and other parts in the world. At the same time, there is no monopoly over suffering and pain. For example, I, as a Palestinian, have no monopoly over my pain. We have to be in solidarity and compassion with the pain and collective suffering of each other and be courageous to learn more about that. In a way, it involves getting out of your comfort zone and listening to what others are going through and feeling the collective pain. I extend my loving solidarity to all those who have been oppressed throughout history."

You mention the issue of denial. This is a sensitive point for Armenians because until now the Turkish govern-

ments have been denying the Armenian Genocide. The Erdogan regime has even taken part in the invasion on Artsakh in 2020 together with Azerbaijan leading to new Armenian refugees and thousands of new Armenian martyrs. Unfortunately, Israel denies the Armenian Genocide and even some Palestinians are being brainwashed by Erdogan's neo-Ottoman ideas on this matter. How do you see the dilemma of denial?

"I would be very embarrassed if I heard a Palestinian deny the Armenian Genocide. I believe it is not a coincidence that Turkey is denying the Armenian Genocide and even the United States and Israel are denying it. It is part of the way these political systems are functioning. This is also about the issue of the monopoly of suffering and political interests.

I believe there is a common denominator between abusers and oppressive figures and regimes. Again, relations of oppression involve justifying abusive relations under different allegations, dehumanizing the other side, brainwashing people, and rewriting history. Oppression involves building a certain façade and escaping from reality and responsibility. In such relationships there is no balance of power. It is not a reciprocal relationship. It involves an abuser and an abused. On one side there is violence, prejudice, hypocrisy, justification of abuse, and on the other there are general feelings of shame, guilt, grief, repression, and anguish. The same applies to Israelis. Israel is still denying a lot of its atrocities and emphasizes only the pain that Israelis have gone through.

Here images play a strong role and deconstructing these symbolic representations is part of the liberation process. For example, I remember my role in the film "Hanna K." (by Costa Gavras) in 1983. I played the role of a Palestinian and emphasized the issue of the right of return. It was one of my early acting careers and I fondly remember it. It was a time when a lot of Israelis wanted to deny the existence of Palestinians. At that time, you could not come out with your Palestinian identity and even carrying a flag or writing the word Palestine on a wall were strongly censored. In that film I felt in the small details of my role that I was confronting the dilemma of denial and emphasizing my symbolic existence.

I have confronted such questions also in my film "Jenin Jenin". I was trying to investigate what had happened during the invasion of the Jenin refugee camp in spring 2002. This led me to an 18-year struggle so far. First the Israeli authorities prohibited it in 2002. Censoring the film made it gain more public attention, so I do not find that policy wise from their side. Following my appeal, they allowed it in 2004. In 2006 some soldiers who show up in the film pressed charge, blaming me of defaming them, and requested compensation. They lost the case after a couple of years. Two years ago, one Israeli officer sued me again and asked me to pay a high amount, in addition to the legal costs. They asked to censor the film and remove all copies of the film everywhere. I made an appeal. Now we are awaiting the ruling of the supreme court

of justice."

There have been many films by Palestinians that were not censored. In your opinion why did this particular film get so much attacked?

"There might be a couple of reasons. First, Israelis are claiming that the army attacked the camp and civilians without perpetrating war crimes. But what I saw was that the invasion destroyed a large part of the refugee camp. There were over 52 martyrs, including unarmed women and children, and hundreds of wounded people. The Israelis also lost 23 Israeli soldiers who were ordered to take part in the invasion. They did not want it watched by the Israeli and international public.

They claimed that Jenin was a terrorism hub that targeted Israelis. They sought retribution and were punishing all the West Bank, especially Jenin, for that.

Another reason was my participation in the film. I was a figure who was considered an icon who believes in peace and fair reconciliation. They were shocked that I covered this matter. They sought to distort my image and demonize me. They blamed me of lying and being funded by Palestinian sources. The film has put me under fire, and I have gone through character assassination by some journalists. This has been a struggle for 18 years so far and has not been easy. Yet I follow the Palestinian motto, "I stand up like a mountain in front of the wind." I insist on holding on to my values and challenging the policy of collective punishment and

connecting to the oppressed everywhere.”

Any other reflections and message for the upcoming generations?

“I feel films and cultural productions are lately not receiving the attention they deserve in Palestinian media. I worked on many productions that I would have wished people discussed more than the issue of “Jenin Jenin”. I believe in freedom of speech, and it is important that we encourage each other and see where we are coming from, express our intentions and provide true solidarity with each other. This requires being courageous to get out of the comfort zone, share, listen to, and understand.

I would tell the upcoming generations: never cease to express your opinion, even if it not heard or different from the crowd. Love one another, seek to live the best of your life, remember who you are, keep the struggle, and never be afraid to be yourself and deal with your inner fears and struggles. Hold on to your values. The pain you might be going through might not go away quickly but in the long you have made some change.”



WE ARE STILL HERE

Nora Arsenian Carmi

This is a semi-personal account of one Armenian family in Palestine who lived and served its Armenian Palestinian people wholeheartedly.

For human beings who believe in equality and dignity for all people, it cannot be difficult to understand the link between being Palestinian and Armenian, especially if one is indigenous to Palestine, the cradle of monotheistic faiths, where God and humanity have met. This statement may sound complicated to the listener, but it is my experience and heritage as a Palestinian Armenian, which has not been smooth sailing.

One important strong point that both these **intertwined groups** share is the pain and suffering they face even today. One can find injustice among many nations, where the methods of systematic oppression may differ; they are essentially artificial and oppose moral values and laws. Very few are those who in the

21st century still do not know (or do not want to admit) the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian Catastrophe, the Nakba, or about the first genocide of the 20th century perpetrated against the Armenians. While planning the Holocaust, Hitler had commented: “*Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?*” And though the atrocities of the Turkish Empire did not spare Assyrians, Greeks and others, the testimonies that Turkey officially insists on denying until today are proof of the evil-minded rulers. At that time, the American Ambassador in Istanbul, Henry Morgenthau, a Jew, described the horrible events of the period with the following words: “*I am confident that the whole history of human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared with the sufferings of the Armenian race in*

1915.”¹

The plot to eradicate the just Palestinian cause was concocted to assert the myth about a “*land without people for a people without land*” and the claim of divine rights given only to Israel/Jews who can remain above law and should not be accountable to international laws or be sanctioned into acting as equal creations of God. Might is right, goes the saying in both the Palestinian and Armenian tragedies: military power, arms trade and nuclear power blinds rulers and kills the greedy conscience of the oppressor, but what about international laws and all conventions to ensure the rights of ALL peoples? Where are the global resolutions that have been taken but not implemented to ensure equity and prosperity for all? It is clearly evident that the superpowers are also biased at least in these two concrete cases and did not attempt to impose sanctions. More tragedies have followed and continue to be carried out around the world. Now and then, we hear soft-spoken words but no pressured actions for justice to prevail after a century. **BUT we are still here both as Palestinians and Armenians.**

I have been truly blessed to belong to these two surviving civilizations. As a woman, born and rooted in Jerusalem, I have been molded by history in all three statuses: Palestinian until 1948, Jordanian until 1967, and as a permanent resident in Occupied Jerusalem (as internationally recognized since then

(except for Mr. Trump and some small countries). My name Nora (Noura in Arabic) and the maiden family name Arsenian (that ends with IAN) refer to my roots. Only eight members of The Arsenian family miraculously survived the death march and genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Turks and intentionally found refuge in Palestine in 1916. Once safe, my grandfather, Hagop Arsenian, wrote: “*I have great hope that by reading these life memoirs, my children will learn some lessons for the future: namely, instilling in them the desire for boldness and diligence, strengthening their self-confidence as well as sharpening their sense of caution and far-sightedness.*” (p.21 *T. Golgotha*).” My father, aged three, became a refugee from Adabazar in Nicomedia (modern Turkey), and grew up in Gaza, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem/Palestine. Not all Armenians reached Palestine after the genocide, but many, like my mother’s Krakirian family, were original “Kaghkatsi” (indigenous). It is not a secret that the Armenian quarter is 1/6th of the Old City of Jerusalem. Since Armenia became the first state to officially become Christian in 301AD, many faithful chose to live in Palestine in the land of their Savior. Evidence of Armenian presence can be found in the inscribed tiles within the Dome of the Rock. Like many minorities, the Armenians stayed close to their places of worship, school, and the museum, under the protection of their patriarchate and seminary in the St. James Convent. However, the need to integrate and share, despite their poor Arabic (there is no masculine or feminine in the Armenian language), urged them to prove their

skills as goldsmiths, photographers, watchmakers, potters, shoemakers, printers, and as pharmacists and doctors all around the country. Yet, the strategic location of the Armenian Convent in Jerusalem has made it vulnerable to repeated attempts of control and threats.

My Armenian heritage instilled in me faith and the language. Still, above all, it gave me the will to persist in the search for justice as my grandfather had advised: “*It is also hoped that they will learn to scorn injustice and face hardship, never get discouraged, and become leaders in control of their lives and models of behavior to others.*”² The Krakirians had lived in Haifa and Jerusalem, where my grandfather Khatchadour Krakirian was the Manager of the Ottoman Bank. The Shuman family still remembers that my grandfather urged and encouraged this Palestinian family to start the Arab bank. The Krakirian house was founded on the family property in the Christ Church area in Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem and close to the Armenian Convent. It was the first house that was blown up and destroyed in the 1948 war! The Arsenians had been pharmacists in Nicomedia (modern Turkey) and lost two pharmacies to the Turks. In Jerusalem, they started a pharmacy with the Harami family on Mamilla Road, which they lost, with other possessions in 1948! They were refugees in Lebanon and Syria until the Lutheran World Federation brought back professionals to Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1950s to build

1. <http://www.towardsgolgotha.com/>

2. <http://www.towardsgolgotha.com/>

up the new reality. My father served at the Augusta Victoria Hospital as a pharmacist and established, with Dr. Mohammad Naquib Husseini, the x-ray department.

When it became evident that there was no going back home to West Jerusalem, the family rented the Alami house and did not become confined in the Armenian Convent. In 1951, the Jerusalem Grand pharmacy was established on Rashid Street and continued to serve the community, even from those from rural areas from 1951 to 2000. No wonder that the Jordanian minister of health gave both father and son, Hagop and Noubar (my father) the title of Sheikh Assaydaleh (elder pharmacists)! The family continued to treat everyone equally and worked hard for peace in both Armenian and Palestinian communities.

Being brought up in Gaza, Noubar's Arabic was flawless. In all associations he joined, he kept impeccable reports of honest commitment and support to the Palestinian community, who encouraged him even to run for municipal elections. The Jerusalem Grand pharmacy was not only a healing place, but it became a symbol of co-living and gatherings for medical and social milieus. The Arsenian drugstore, managed by my late Uncle Norair, provided the country with medical products from Germany (ASTA) and the then-popular male aftershave "Old Spice."

Yes, we were blessed that the tribulations of this family that had already suffered so much did not break them or harden their hearts to become ego-

centric into a closed ghetto mentality. All children attended schools that were not purely for Armenians. We learnt to interact with our Muslim neighbors sharing joys and sorrows, to be involved together in all peaceful actions, and to stand against unjust measures only because we were Palestinians. Together and through the years, we maintained a unique relationship with the Jarallahs, Abdul Hadis, Kleibos, Kamals and Husseinis, with whom we grew up and within our Christian circles. We have worked hand in hand for the welfare of civil society.

With such a background, how could I not end up marrying a Palestinian Arab, George Carmi with whom for forty-five years, I consciously raised children to respect and love all members of society. As a human being who believes in the merciful God, I know that my community and peace work for over forty years stemmed from my dual Armenian and Palestinian roots. As oppressive methods take new forms in technology and even psychological warfare, we first resist by clearly refusing submission or dehumanization of the oppressed. However, as the blaring new laws and regulations strangle and cripple the population still under occupation after 53 years, losing more land, homes, and children, the rising discriminatory actions defying internationally accepted laws pose new global threats. We cannot accept the collaboration of oppressors threatening world peace for vested interests in oil and weapons (as evident in the Middle East and the Caucasus) in which many human lives are lost. The fact

that we are still here is our way of resisting.

The following quotes by William Saroyan and Mahmoud Darwish summarize all struggles and aspirations of people who must live in dignity. They also teach us the things that make for peace.

"I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia."(Saroyan)

"Poetry and beauty are always making peace. When you read something beautiful you find coexistence; it breaks walls down." *"On this earth there is that which deserves life."* (Darwish)

Nora Arsenian Carmi, a Palestinian Christian born just months before Israel was founded, is both a leading peacemaker and refugee in her own divided city of Jerusalem. Educated in Catholic schools and Protestant universities, Carmi is actively involved in Palestinian society as a community organizer and has worked with the YWCA, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, and Kairos Palestine.



ON THE PORTS OF HAIFA: CHRONICLES OF AN ARMENIAN FAMILY CONVERSATION WITH PALESTINIAN AUTHOR MAISOON ASSADI

Elise Aghazarian

Sometimes certain events happen that change the course of our lives. This happened to Palestinian writer and journalist Maisoon Assadi, when one evening a neighbour knocked her door asking for a favour, leading her to the world of Armenians in Haifa.

“A Mother is searching for her Son”

“In 1993 I was living in a building in Haifa. I was a freelance journalist from Deir Al-Assad and mother of two children writing in Al-Ittihad Newspaper (an Arabic newspaper based in Haifa). I was approached by an elderly woman living in the same building. She told me her son had gone missing three days ago and requested that I help her find him. I wrote an article entitled “A mother is searching for her son”. It

was a time when there was no online social media. People reacted and started looking. Five days later, his body was found. He had fallen in a hole on a hot sunny August day and had passed away. The event eventually created a kind of connection between me and the bereaved mother. We spent many evenings sipping tea. I got to know her sons and she became like a second grandma to my children. She told me

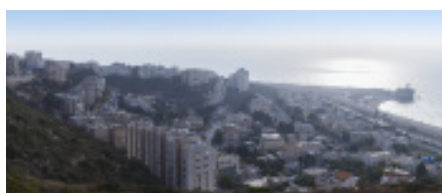
many stories about her family history. I soon found myself on a journey in the world of Armenians: their traditions, cuisine, music, poems, and oral history. I felt those stories need to stay alive. In 2015 I wrote a book in Arabic, documenting some of these testimonies. It happened to be published around the time of the Armenian centennial."

We interviewed Assadi to hear her reflections six years after the novel came out, published by Dar Al-Raseef in Ramallah. Through a family chronicle, the novel describes a community that is not only dealing with the deeply rooted collective trauma of the Armenian Genocide deportations of 1915, but multiple deportations and migrations to follow. This includes witnessing the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 and life in Haifa and Europe after that. In a very simple daily language the voice of the author is guiding us in this ordeal. The writer hopes to introduce the reader to one community of the Haifa she knows, connecting to its complex identity in a non-judgemental way. She noticed that Armenians are not much represented in Arabic literature. She portrays her contact with community members, and how it is being represented and represents itself in local society. In some parts, it almost feels like a quantum leap, with flashbacks going back and forth on a symbolic day: the ritual of the blessing of grapes at the Armenian church in Haifa in mid-August.



Journeys and ports

The interactions of Armenians with water, the Mediterranean coast, and ports is visible in the novel. In contrast to hiding in caves during the Armenian genocide, and feeling threatened to expose their Armenian identity, we see the characters finding refuge on the ports of Haifa and beyond.



A lot of international literature has discussed how Armenians of Jerusalem and Armenian communities in the West Bank and the north of the country, like Haifa or even Jaffa, have been marginalized in one way or another. Following the genocide, a number of Armenian families settled in Sheikh Breik, on the coastal Atlit (south of Haifa). Maisoon mentions that the area was known among local residents as the "Armenian village". Armenian refugees, reminiscing over their lost lands, were planting crops there until the 1940s when the area was captured by Zionist forces. A number of Armenian families were displaced after that; some of them migrated or became refugees, and around 25 families managed to stay in the area until 1985. It became customary for Armenians to still go back and visit Atlit every now and then.

The narrative depicts how a lot of Armenians who are moving away or remaining are carrying their accumulated belongings, stories and lan-

guages and inscribing them in their new ports. They are seeking places in which they can live their values. They are at times feeling estranged, but many times they are incorporating various cultural elements and reidentifying the complex concept of "home".

Simon Simonian, the father of the bereaved elderly lady, was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. His parents were killed in the genocide when he was a child. He hid in a cave for seven days when Turkish officers were ordered to kill all Armenian males. He was saved by kind Turkish fishermen who took him to a nearby doctor. He marched to Syria, Lebanon, Jerusalem, Tiberias, and eventually found his home among the residents of Haifa, mostly populated by Arabs at the time. His wife Mihranoush also remembers hiding in a cavern to stay warm during the deportations, losing her sister Golonia in the cavern. She and her husband Simon gave their oldest daughter the same name: Golonia, who was later the neighbor of the author. Golonia was born in a refugee camp in the coastal Iskenderun (on the Syrian-Turkish borders) after her parents had gone out of the caves and marched as refugees searching for a place they could remain.

The father of Golonia worked as a tailor but lost his job after the war of 1948 and eventually found himself working in the port of Haifa. The genocide and war trauma, as well as the Ottoman upbringing, left an unhealed scar on him. He had nervous outbursts every now and then, which he projected on his

wife and daughters. Golonya found freedom and consolation in the sea. She eventually eloped with a man who worked on the port, marrying him. His name was Vartevan (named after an Armenian feast where people pour water on each other).

Golonya and Vartevan have five children who inherit the love of Armenia, Haifa, and the sea and depart on different voyages: Vartkes travels on ships to different countries for fourteen years, but makes stops in Haifa four times a year; a daughter named Azniv who studies in the German Schmidt's Girls' School in Jerusalem and later marries an Indian diplomat; a son named Vasken who suffers from down syndrome and dies in 1993 after being found in a hole; and a child on a famished road to eternity who dies before being born. Then there is a son who is most covered in the story. He is born two years before the war of 1948 and given the name "Gaytsak". The name literally means "lightning". The author sheds light on his symbolic name, describing it as: "Lightning normally happens due to an attraction between positive and negative charges, leading to a unique light and rain that is fruitful to the earth".

Gaytsak, the Armenian "lightning" of this story, appears in Haifa and moves back and forth between different places. He works in mining and on ships, joins hippies, works in restaurants, and eventually owns a popular restaurant in Oslo. He marries three times, gets divorced and always finds ways to move on. Even though he does not physically stay in Haifa, Haifa stays part and

parcel of his identity. To some extent he reminds us of Emile Habibi's "Pessoptimist". He makes gains then loses them, starting all over and making deeper gains. We see him in Haifa, Paris, Cyprus, Norway, Armenia, and other places. He has a strong belonging to Armenia and lives his identity with a compassionate and open perspective:

"My grandfather told me not to hate Turks and to differentiate between Turks and the Turkish governments. He also taught me the Turkish language and told me his Turkish neighbours hid him for two days in their house during the Genocide and helped him escape," says Gaytsak.

Gaytsak eventually closes his successful restaurant in Norway and decides to travel and move to Armenia for a while. Assadi mentions that she is still in contact with Gaytsak online.

"In the city of Haifa Cilicia was born"



A symbolic sentence in the book is: "In the city of Haifa Cilicia was born." She is the sister of Golonya. Her name represents a diasporic longing for a lost Armenia and an Armenian rebirth in diaspora, in Haifa. We see her in the novel as an elderly woman, serving Harissa (a salty Armenian dish cooked with

peeled wheat and lamb), red wine, and grapes with a warm hospitality to her friends and acquaintances in Haifa.

In our interview with Assadi she reflects on exile, voyages, and the concept of displacement. For Assadi, exile is a state that is not restricted to deportation. "You might live in exile even inside your homeland," she tells us. She views it as a place where you are deprived of your rights and where you are not treated with dignity.

This might also refer to some Arabs living inside the Green Line who live in their homeland but are not always treated with equality.

The neighbourhood of Wadi Nisnas in Haifa, where the Armenian church and club are based, holds a certain symbolism or concept of "home" for many people, according to Assadi. People from different backgrounds (Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Syrians, and other minorities) mingle in the neighbourhood. Maisoon notices that Golonya is being consoled by a Romanian Jewish neighbour when she found out her lost son was dead. Assadi values this neighbourhood life and human connection. A lot of other areas were destroyed or too modernized by the consecutive Israeli governments, but Wadi Nisnas has managed to preserve some of its landmarks, according to Assadi: "In Wadi Nisnas we still find some authentic stones, houses and communities". She worries about gentrification plans in the area.

Golonya in Haifa: the making of Little Armenia

Golonya, the mother of Gaitsak, feels at home in Haifa. She speaks fluent Arabic with a distinctive beautiful accent, according to the author. She still remembers reaching the port of Jaffa as a child following a difficult journey and her childhood in Jerusalem, then moving to Haifa in 1933 following political turmoil in Jerusalem. She studied Armenian and English in Armenian schools then moved to non-Armenian schools and learnt Arabic.

In 1948 Golonya decided to stay in Haifa and teach Armenian to children on Sundays and organize cultural events. She was deeply moved in 1965 to find out by chance that Armenian-American writer William Saroyan was visiting Haifa. News spread and the church bells rang. Armenians of Haifa were thirsty for such gatherings. They were meeting up with Armenians from Jaffa and Jerusalem every now and then, and shared intermarriage with them, but they had to work harder to preserve the Armenian community given their dwindling number and dispersion.

Golonya visited Armenia in 1992 and voyaged in Europe to visit her children.

“You do not need to suffer and mourn alone. We are with you. Allow us to support you more”

Assadi believes global imperialism is dividing people, including Armenians and Turks, and imposing lies that are distorting reality, but that history is stronger than that. She believes people have to challenge

borders and distortions imposed by such regimes. Upon her visit to Armenia Assadi comments:

“I am deeply moved by the injustice Armenians have gone through. I also feel solidarity with the Russians who were killed during the second world war, the six million Jews who died during the Holocaust and the 800 Arab villages that have been attacked in 1948. Teaching creative writing to Arab children, I do not only teach Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, I also teach translated Armenian songs and poems, and Jewish poems like the works of Lea Goldberg that I enjoy. I believe that is part of my feminist, progressive and human voice and values”.

Assadi adds that her Arab students enjoy learning about these sources and this helps them connect to various cultural traditions. Commenting on the Artsakh war she adds:

“The latest Artsakh war was very ugly in the way certain powers manipulated vulnerable people. I was very much in solidarity with Armenians but also felt sorry for the Syrian militants whose poverty was taken advantage of and were driven to take part in the Azerbaijan army. It was painful to see the unfolding of events. I felt compassion with the different victims”.

Assadi hopes to continue her Armenian journeys and to translate the novel to English and Armenian. She concluded the conversation by talking about demonstrations and rights, saying:

“I tell Armenians: ‘You do not need to suffer and mourn alone. We are with

you. Allow us to support you more. Invite non-Armenians to Armenian demonstrations. Let us work hand in hand to combat injustice here in Haifa and in Armenia. We are all connected in one cause. It is our human duty to stay in solidarity.”

Elise Aghazarian was born and raised in Jerusalem and lives in the Netherlands since 2009. She has an M.A. in Social Sciences from the University of Amsterdam and is specialized in the Arabic language. She currently teaches at the University of Amsterdam language institute. She was formerly content editor on SRHR at the Radio Netherlands Worldwide and has taught Sociology in Palestinian Universities. She has worked for 10 years in NGOs in the Middle East on projects related to governance, women and children. Elise spends her time writing and translating between English and Arabic, coaching, taking part in cultural activities and raising her child. Elise is also active at the Surp Grigor Naregatsi Armenian School in Amsterdam



THE GOOD WILL WIN, EVENTUALLY ...

Dr Hrayr Jebejian

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7- NIV)

I was born in Beirut, Lebanon, on February 8, 1957. I am a Lebanese-Armenian who has lived with dual identities and histories all my life—ones filled with struggle and wars. The two, unfortunately, have several things in common, as you may tell: mainly the struggle to build a life amid uncertainties. Being born into a Christian family, topped with my Christian education at the Armenian Evangelical Church, very much shaped my career to bring the Word of God to communities worldwide. I was lucky enough to be part of this mission with the Bible Society, one of the most international ministries in the world.

I sometimes wonder if the Middle East will ever know peace. The number of times this region has had to rebuild and lift itself again

is mind-blowing and frankly quite depressing. In the 63 years, I’ve been alive, I’ve seen Lebanon “die” and rise again about five times. Setting aside the physical destruction, the Middle East constantly finds itself in an ethnic and denominational power struggle: who will rule whom? Who will have the last say? If only all this pain and destruction were worth it. Take the Israel-Palestine conflict. It seems unresolvable, no matter how many people suffer and die.

All this seemed too unfair to the young adolescent I was, growing up in warzone Beirut. Until recently, I was strip searched and interrogated in every airport, just because I had a Lebanese passport. The prospect of that peace seemed to be getting further away.

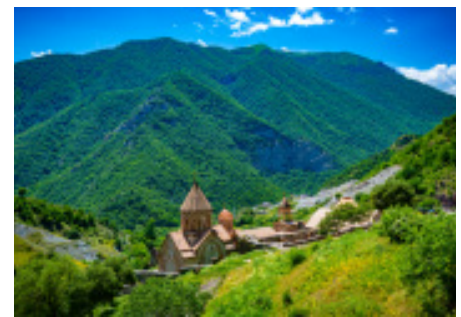
A few things changed when I moved to Cyprus in 2005 and subsequently received Cypriot citizenship. However, getting a European passport didn’t

seem to alleviate the pain and struggle that come with being Armenian and Lebanese.

Regardless, I found myself having three different identities and “homes”. I suppose two homes, as I’ve never really lived in Armenia... or been able to.

I’m a third-generation Armenian living in the diaspora because my ancestors were forced to flee in 1915 during the Armenian Genocide. Although my generation didn’t directly witness the Genocide, we carry the pain of it. We carry the pain of our ancestors who were massacred and the pain of being deprived of living on our land that is rightfully ours.

In the years since the Genocide, Armenians have learned to live and prosper in a diaspora, away from home, but never, not even for a minute, giving up on that hope that we will one day go back home. Albeit home (historical Armenia) is not “reachable” at the moment, the republics of Armenia and Artsakh are.



I was fortunate enough to visit Armenia and Artsakh several times. On my last visit in September 2019, I was in Stepanakert, Artsakh, presenting my book *Armenian Diasporan Lives: As I Saw Them* at the National

University of Artsakh. I also had the privilege of meeting the Minister of Foreign Affairs with whom I shared my love for the land. I enjoyed the beautiful country and my fellow Armenians living in Artsakh. Armenians have an incredible passion for their land and for Armenian identity. The landscape is so beautiful and the people even more so. One year on, and I am still in awe of its beauty. It is truly life-changing.

The 44-day war on Artsakh, a de facto independent state, predominantly Armenian (99.7%), by Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Islamist jihadists was much more than a matter of life or death for Armenians. It was a matter of fighting for the 1.5 million Armenians who were killed during the 1915 Genocide. The war ended with Armenia's defeat and over 4000 young soldiers killed. We also lost quite a bit of land, which included historical churches and monasteries. Azerbaijan and Turkey consist of more than 90 million people, whereas Armenia and Artsakh are barely three million together. I cannot help but be reminded of the story of David and Goliath in the Bible, mainly when looking at the power discrepancies, which I will touch on more towards the end of my piece. Is history repeating itself? Most likely, yes. One hundred and five years on, we are faced with the same power trying to bring us down to our knees. The pain seems to be never-ending. When reflecting on the idea of how pain and suffering can bring people together, I stumbled on Walter Brueggemann's work. Brueggemann believes that getting people to engage with their experiences of suffering

and death energizes and links people to hope. This hope then helps the individual cut through the despair, which might otherwise seem unsolvable or unending.

The human and physical destruction of the recent war has been a significant setback for Armenians, but it can still generate this same hope. According to Brueggemann, newness in one's life is given by God and is supposed to be the only real energy source. He explains his assertion by linking Exodus with what Jesus did on the cross. For Brueggemann, Jesus' death-resurrection was the absolute Exodus, showing that ultimately hope is always given to us and not necessarily generated by us. This is how I choose to describe my journey.

Maybe wars and destructions have, in very rare occasions, served as forces for good. But violence generates more violence. What is most needed today, as Apostle Paul says, is "fighting the good fight."

The good fight does not need Su-2s or drones. The good fight is a life-changing process, initiated by the acceptance, understanding, and respect of the Other, which I've come to realize in my last 40 years in the Gulf is a vital component for peace, regardless of the latter's background.

Today, as I look at a shattered Artsakh, I know that no war or physical force can eradicate its beauty, but that's from a patriot's perspective. From an Armenian's perspective living in a scattered diaspora, I see bloodshed and unrest: a very high price we continue to pay in our

struggle for peace and justice. As a Lebanese and Middle Eastern, I am much too familiar with that feeling.

Perhaps if these wars were the right kind of wars, assuming there is such a thing, the world could become a better place.

I don't think my pain and struggle will ever go away, and I have somehow come to terms with the fact that I may never, in my lifetime, see peace or fair retribution. One thing I know, though, is that I will carry on fighting the fight for the Good, regardless of whether I make it to the finish line or not.

Reverting to the biblical story of David and Goliath, David beats Goliath even though the fight and power dynamics are uneven.

David beats Goliath because he is fighting for the GOOD cause.

Fighting the good fight is not easy, but it is worth it. That's the only way I see forward.

The GOOD will eventually win.

Hrayr Jebejian is General Secretary of the Bible Society in the Gulf. He holds a Doctor of Ministry degree in Bible Engagement from the New York Theological Seminary. Jebejian is the author of three books, along with articles published in academic journals and encyclopaedias. He is a recipient of the Ambassador of the Motherland Medal from the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia.

Sabeel Narrative Report 2020

2020 was a year of many challenges and amazing opportunities. Even though COVID 19 has changed life as we know it, it did not nothing to dull the determination or faithful witness of Sabeel. Below is a list of the most important news and activities of Sabeel in 2020.

Sabeel elected a new board:

President: Sandra Khoury - first female President of the board since our founding. Sandra was born in Jerusalem, in 1965. Married with three children. Sandra holds an MBA/ International Finance from the George Washington University, School of Business, Washington DC (1987) and a BSBA, Finance from the American University, Kogod School of Business, Washington DC (1986) and a High School Diploma from Schmidt's Girls College, Jerusalem (1982).

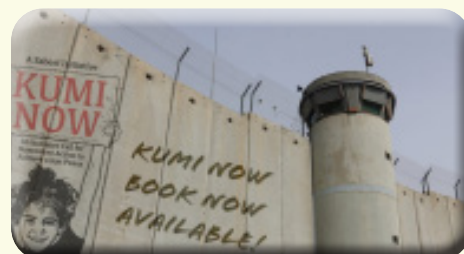


Sabeel Strategic planning has resulted in nine different meetings over the course of 2020 with our different stakeholders in the preparational process for our upcoming Strategic plan 2022-2026.



Sabeel Bible study groups help ordinary Christians to use the bible as a tool for justice and peace. The need is not only to critique the violence and the evil which is being perpetrated in the name of God and the Bible, but equally to point out the rich biblical tradition in both Old and New Testament. This can help us in our pursuit of peace and freedom based on the biblical teachings of justice, truth, and nonviolence. Today Sabeel supports over 32 contextual bible study groups spread out across the West Bank and Israel. The groups are formed of youth, young adults, and women. Before COVID 19, The groups met on a regular basis, to read the bible and explore what it means to be a Christian living in the land of our Holy One. During COVID 19 the groups began to meet less frequently, some moved to online meetings. Sabeel has worked intensively in 2020 to work closely with the group facilitators to raise their capacities. Sabeel also used 2020 to work and develop ecumenical contextual bible study material.

Kumi Initiative: An initiative of over 60 Palestinian, Israeli, and international organizations, giving people the opportunity to rise up in support of Palestinians through simple nonviolent actions on a weekly basis. Since June 2020 Kumi sessions have taken place online on a weekly basis drawing different members of our communities both locally and internationally. Please check www.kuminow.com



Working with the Arab Tourist Guide Union, Sabeel has co-hosted weekly online meetings. The weekly sessions have focused on a variety of topics, such as Palestinian Liberation theology, the Samaritan Community, Jews in the Arab world, Astronomy and Mythology.



Sabeel began working a health insurance plan in 2020. Many of our local communities have expressed concern regarding the absence of an effective health plan in our local meetings. In 2020, inspired by the early church, Sabeel launched an initiative to bring local churches, schools, and organizations together to develop a unique health care system that would address the needs of our community. Over 2000 families and 90 Christian organizations representing the mosaic of churches of the holy land have submitted their information to join the health insurance plan with plans to launch in 2021.

Sabeel has conducted research on prominent church and Christian leaders in the middle East region and reviewed their publications and material. Sabeel hopes to build new relationships and share experiences with our Christian brothers and sisters in the Arab World to learn how the church preaches the good news with a context of political instability, religious extremism, and complex ecumenical relationships.

Sabeel created special online liturgy and prayers that address the epidemic and deteriorating political situation in Palestine-Israel. One worship service focused on Jerusalem as the city of crucifixion and resurrection, and a special reflection presented the nativity story in a contemporary reflection



Over 35 joint online events and conferences with friends of Sabeel, partner organizations, and Churches.

Sabeel trained 40 young people from Jerusalem on the usage of research techniques and storytelling benefiting from online tools. Young people used the project to develop material on their own communities and neighborhoods to present the beautiful mosaic that constitutes the many Jerusalem communities.

Anti-Semitism: since 2018 Sabeel has been studying Antisemitism. Antisemitism is one of the root causes of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Antisemitism, unfortunately, seems to be gaining momentum in many parts of the world. We hope in 2021 to publish this research which has, and continues to be, reviewed and commented on by over 70 clergy, academics, and others from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and secular communities.

Sabeel Publications:

Sabeel has published a number of publications over 2020. These range from a number of booklets by Rev. Naim Ateek including Religion and Politics in Israel/Palestine and the Question of Toleration/Intolerance, Remembering Michael Prior, Confronting the Suppression of the Prophetic *A Call to Action*, and The Significance of Jerusalem "A Vision for Peace".

Sabeel also published a Cornerstone edition (82) on the impact of COVID 19 in Palestine.



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PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABEEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns.

It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

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