

14. SCHOOLING AND EDUCATION IN LEBANON: A REVIEW ESSAY

Angela Evangelinou-Yiannakis

As the Syrian War continues to rage, with devastating results not only for its citizens but also for the global community, the book *Schooling and Education in Lebanon: Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian Refugees Inside and Outside the Camps*, by Nina Maadad and Grant Rodwell (2017) and published by Sense Publishers in Rotterdam, is timely and an essential read for all those involved in education, policy and reform. The authors present a poignant study, pricking the conscience of the reader, especially where the plight of Syrian refugees is concerned. The call for a humanitarian solution to the problem of schooling and education for the children of Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian refugees could not be louder. Furthermore, the focus of the book, being the schooling and education that is being received (or not being received) by the refugee children, points directly to the future and the effects that today's schooling and education will have on this generation of young learners.

Today's efforts by government and education authorities in Lebanon, and world charitable organisations, are shaping the future of our global community, not just those of war-torn Syria and a recovering Lebanon. The book suggests that it is everyone's concern to try to help in some way and on some level that will have a positive impact on the young victims of this long-standing and complex civil war. It also poses questions of equity and fairness in its exploration and exposition of the 'pedagogy of the displaced'; a term used throughout, and at the end of each chapter wherein the authors summarise the perspectives of the key stakeholders and how these, in turn, affect schooling and education for refugee children in Lebanon. What is being done, and what more can be done to give these children a fair, even

remote chance of success in life, or at least a break from the chains of migratory despair, is a key theme running throughout the book. By the end, the reader is left saddened, yet also hopeful that more can be achieved in relation to the magnitude of this humanitarian crisis.

The book is set out in a logical sequence. In Chapter One it outlines the setting. On this, it deals with the geo-politics of the area, the conflicts of the Middle East over the past decade, the communities affected by these conflicts, and the plight of the refugees and their children. Chapter Two focuses on the refugees in Lebanon, thus outlining the specific context of the study on which the remainder of the book is based. The third chapter deals with the provision of schooling and its challenges, specifically in relation to the refugees inside and outside camps in Lebanon. Chapter Four hones in on the experiences of the children, offering centrality and credence to the purpose of the study reported in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five moves outwards from the centre, looking specifically at the concerns of the parents in relation to the education that their children are receiving in the host country. Still within close proximity to the central focus of the children's experience of schooling and education in Lebanon, Chapter Six is concerned with the perspectives of the teachers and the challenges they encounter in relation to the education on offer. A further step back is the approach adopted in Chapter Seven, which deals with the community's concerns and responses. Finally, Chapter Eight provides insight into the support offered by the State and into its policies, as well as the role of the global community through various charitable organisations. A concluding chapter then follows, reiterating the key results of the study and offering recommendations for improvement. The content of each of these chapters is outlined in more detail later on in this essay.

An appendix and a comprehensive reference list at the end of the book point to the thorough and careful approach undertaken by Maadad and Rodwell in conducting this well-documented, logically-organised, and highly relevant study. Also, a poignant and most apposite quote is found in the Dedication, taken from the Lebanese poet and writer, Gibran Khalil Gibran's book, *The Prophet* (1923). This sets the scene and tone of the book. Reiterated below, the quote demonstrates the timeless philosophy of the value and 'place' of children in society through the ages:

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you (Gibran Khalil Gibran, 1923, as cited in Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 7)

With this moving statement about children, the book proceeds to offer the reader the results of the study, the questions raised along the way, and the challenges that need to be overcome so that children of refugees can "have a normal childhood and to dream of their future; a future they create for themselves so that they can live their lives as we did before them." (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 7). In thanking various people within the

acknowledgements section of the book, the authors repeatedly refer to the concern they had about their safety when conducting the research and how various individuals protected them within the volatile environment in which they found themselves.

The preface of the book makes a distinct political statement through its direct reference to former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, and his funeral on 27 March 2015. It refers deliberately to the significant number of Vietnamese refugees present, thus making an indirect but pointed comment on Australia's current tight, if not unnecessarily frugal, response to the almost decade-long Syrian refugee crisis. The outward-looking, philanthropically-motivated Fraser is positioned to stand apart from the recent past and current inward-looking and economically-driven Australian prime ministers and their politics. In fact, the authors refer to the current Australian political scene as being a "dark shadow" (p. 13) as far as immigration policy is concerned. This comment is then followed by a direct reference to the Australian Coalition government's policy of Operation Sovereign Borders as being a 'closed book', in relation to asylum seekers and a blemish on the very moral as well as the political fabric of the country. Reference could also have been made to Fraser's predecessor, Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, whose government completed the dismantling of the White Australia Policy. Together with Whitlam's advocacy of a multicultural Australia, it paved the way for Fraser to continue in this vein.

In the preface also, Maadad reveals her identity and motive for undertaking her study. In doing so, she outlines the desire she has, as a Lebanese Australian to investigate the Syrian Refugee Crisis at close range in order to collect data and report on the issue of the education of Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian children displaced by circumstances. Maadad also attributes her motivation to travel to Lebanon to undertake her study to fellow Lebanese Australian, Joseph Wakim (2013), and others like him who claim that "Australians have much to learn from Lebanon in respect to refugees" (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 18).

The figures quoted with regard to Lebanon's acceptance of Syrian refugees are intended to shock and point the finger at an inward-looking Australia; one that the authors determine is lacking in a "global perspective" (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 14). Again, one or two other examples of what the authors believe constitutes a 'global perspective' would have helped to enhance and cement the point being made. Examples such as Greece's humanitarian efforts in accepting and accommodating multitudes of Syrian refugees, albeit in relatively spartan conditions, and in what is known to be a long-term era of economic crisis for the country, is an equally inspirational example; an estimated 5,000 Syrian children attend schools in the Greek education system (Lakasas, 2017, p. 36).

The Introduction to the book clearly states the goal, which is to "provide insights into the education and schooling of children inside and outside Lebanese refugee camps" (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 15). It elaborates on this by adding that the book seeks to present the perspectives of the various stakeholders, including the children, their parents, teachers,

community leaders, politicians and bureaucrats regarding the schooling provisions and education opportunities on offer. Brief background information is provided on the camps and on how they are scattered all over Lebanon. Specifically, the work centres on two Syrian and two Syrian-Palestinian camps, and eight schools within these. The 48 respondents represent the stakeholder groups mentioned. The study is directly related to the “refugees that fled Syria during the armed conflict of 2011” (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 15).

The qualitative nature of the study undertaken becomes apparent from the explanation of the way in which the researcher conducted the study ‘in the field’. Accordingly, a face-to-face, personalised approach was taken. This involved speaking with the various stakeholders in an effort to understand how they are dealing with the enormous changes in their lives because of their dislocation. The authors expound on the methods of data collection and analysis used, and the theories that emerged regarding the schooling of refugee children. They then refer to the “pedagogy of the displaced” (p. 22), which they attribute as being based on Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” (p. 22). They also refer to ‘conflict theory’ which has, in turn, informed their own theories.

Part one of the Introduction concludes in an uplifting way, offering hope for the human condition through the sheer will and persistence that humans have to succeed against all odds. Furthermore, the book can be seen as being a ‘call to arms’ for future teachers and for universities, through their work in initial teacher preparation programs, in addressing such global issues as the mass refugee crisis of Syria and Palestine, and how to deal with the education of the children of such crises.

Part two of the Introduction is entitled ‘an international tragedy: The tragedy of the displaced’. It provides specific background information on the Syrian conflict, including facts and data, thus putting the reader in the midst of the crisis, and giving a sense of the enormity and magnitude of the human tragedy at hand. It sets the scene clearly for what is to follow. Even more pertinent is that we, the readers, are asked to see the tragedy from the perspective of the children and from the perspective of their education, or lack thereof.

Chapter One is entitled ‘Geopolitics, Middle East Conflicts, Communities and Refugee Children’. It opens with a reference to the large number of refugees from North Africa who were making dangerous journeys to Italy in leaky boats in 2015. It then stands back to provide some historical background to the trouble brewing in the Middle East and in North Africa (‘Arab Winter’), tracing it back to December 2010. This set the scene for the ongoing and current conflict in Syria.

‘Social conflict theory’ is brought into focus at this point in an effort to explain some of the events, at least, in part. Functionalist theory is mentioned as offering a balance to ‘conflict theory’. These theories prepare the reader to think critically about the schooling and education that the refugee children receive in the camps visited by Maadad. The reader is also introduced to the concept of the Islamic State (IS). The link between ‘power politics’, social conflict theory,

and the refugee camps across the Middle East is then explained. In particular, the role of schooling and education in assisting in community building is posited. Charitable organisations and global conventions for protecting the rights of children are highlighted near the end of Chapter One in an effort to draw attention to the efforts they are making. The concept of 'educationalisation' is also brought into focus, and the role that it plays in the education of refugee children becomes the new reference point of the book from here on in.

Chapter Two is entitled 'Refugees in Lebanon: The Context'. It relates the Syrian refugee crisis to that shared by many other countries, making the fundamental point that everybody suffers and, in particular, children, whose chances of receiving an education and, therefore, a livelihood, are robbed because of circumstances beyond their doing or beyond their control. It focuses also on the nature of the support provided to refugees in Lebanon, and the education offered to refugee children. A key theme running throughout is the robbing of children's futures through the collapse of public institutions, including schooling through civil wars, and governments not being able to maintain social order. The chapter includes a literature review, supporting the authors' claims that such crises have 'roll-on' effects on education and, in turn, on economic development and social policy.

The chapter then focuses on the type of schooling offered to Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian children of refugees in the camps in Lebanon. It discusses one of the key outcomes of education; that of community building, supporting this notion through the literature reviewed. Furthermore, the chapter sheds light on the types of refugees who exist within the one context, and how their experiences can differ significantly from one region to another. It ends with reference to formal and non-formal education, and the benefits of each.

Chapter Three is entitled 'The Provision of Schooling and Challenges for Education for Refugees Inside and Outside Camps in Lebanon'. Here, the distinction between 'schooling' and 'education' is made early on, the contention being that Syrian children suffer from a lack of provision of schooling rather than education. Maadad and Rodwell (2017, p. 52) say that schooling "is culture-bound and not universally accepted."

The schooling of girls is raised as an area that is still posing challenges, with twice as many girls as boys not attending school for discrimination reasons. The authors bewail this fact. They make the point that educated women serve themselves, their families, and their communities well and are, therefore, a benefit to society as a whole.

The chapter goes into considerable detail regarding the social construct of refugee communities, referring to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy theory of 1970, and to how such theories can help to change host and global communities, as well as the displaced themselves. They see schooling and education as the key to addressing the limitations of such socially-constructed communities, and a way of liberating refugees from economic helplessness. They also see it as a way of regaining a lost generation of children.

The 'pedagogy of the displaced' concept is developed further in this chapter through a description of the types of schools in Lebanon and the access that refugee children have to them. The description is based on data collected while travelling through Lebanon, witnessing the types of schools that exist whilst interviewing school leaders, teachers, parents and children. The chapter concludes with the poignant point that children are the same everywhere in the world; and have the same needs, wants and rights. Yet, Syrian refugee children have very few, if any, rights, despite the efforts being made by governments and education authorities, including in Lebanon.

Chapter Four is entitled 'Children's Experiences'. It hits home hard with a discussion about the exploitation of children in refugee communities, inclusive of child brides, who are often deemed by their parents to be one less mouth to feed. Health and social issues also emerge from the bartering processes involved, often with parents trading their daughters in return for rent-free accommodation for themselves. A consequence is that traumatised children are being forced prematurely out of childhood.

The authors also detail other challenges that exist in the schooling of refugee children in Lebanon, and the variations in education found across the country. The picture is bleak. Makeshift or 'tent schools' have been set up to accommodate children in the camps. However, sub-zero winter conditions, no heating, little food, and inappropriate clothing, all seriously hamper efforts to educate children. Anecdotes from refugee children interviewed by Maadad pepper this chapter, adding credence and an element of emotion to the data presented. The 'human spirit' is referred to as prevailing under such dire circumstances and conditions, and reference is made to the first steps towards community building through a "process of having students working with a teacher in a relatively planned and structured manner, complying with acceptable standards." (Maadad & Rodwell, 2017, p. 78)

Broader issues, such as the growing tensions between the Syrian and Lebanese communities within Lebanon are also touched on in this chapter, and reference is made to the government's efforts to relieve them. Specific reference is made to challenges that present themselves in the schools, such as the medium of instruction being French or English and not Arabic, as is the case in Syria. However, the authors also highlight the support structures that the Lebanese authorities have put in place to help Syrian children. They include afternoon shifts in schools dedicated primarily to refugee children, and extra language classes to lift their competency levels. The chapter concludes by reminding readers that refugee families place less value on education and more on survival.

Chapter Five is entitled 'Parents' Concerns Regarding Schooling'. The central guiding question underpinning the research project on which it is based is outlined as follows: 'What are the parents' concerns regarding the schooling of their children in the refugee camps and elsewhere?' Two related sub-questions are: 'How do parents support their children's schooling?' and 'How do parents address the concerns regarding their children's schooling?'

The qualitative approach adopted in the research project is exemplified well here. It involved the researcher visiting the homes of refugees to conduct interviews. The refugees described the desperate situation of their circumstances. The results reveal that for many refugee families the affordability of education is non-existent. As a consequence, their children are often sent to work as soon as they can so that they are able to play a part in supporting the family. Some families are luckier than others but the possibility of the children of all receiving a post-secondary school education is slim.

All families interviewed reflected on a past and better pre-civil war life in Syria. Some positive comments regarding the support provided by the Lebanese government were articulated but, for the majority of families, survival comes before education. Positive statements were made by some of the families interviewed regarding the support offered by Lebanon's Ministry of Education, including no school fees, free school equipment and study materials, after-school classes for extra tuition, and transportation. Additionally, support received from private sources and from charitable organisations was mentioned. Overall, the chapter balances the mixed views held by parents on the teachers, some of whom are deemed to be compassionate and supportive, whilst others are deemed to openly favour the Lebanese children.

Chapter Six is entitled 'Teachers' Perspectives and Challenges'. The chapter begins with a literature review of this topic. It then presents the researchers' general observations on teachers in Lebanon. The chapter provides an outline of the types of schooling that exists in Lebanon and the rules regarding teacher registration. Schools, desperate for teachers, have employed under-qualified staff or volunteers, some of whom have remained in the system. The anecdotes from various school principals are poignant in regard to the humanitarian aspect of the teaching profession, that is, employing people who have a compassionate edge and can help the traumatised refugee children. This is seen by some school leaders as being more important than employing a registered teacher. Nevertheless, strict registration compliance exists in Lebanon and heavy penalties apply to schools that employ non-registered teachers.

The chapter introduces the reader to camp schools, in which most teachers are non-registered. These teachers are very capable individuals who are helping to lift the morale of the refugee children, whilst also providing them with basic literacy and numeracy skills. Some provide special classes, including in dancing. Life skills are also taught.

Detail pertaining to the curriculum in Lebanon is then provided, and the specific problems of the language of delivery are highlighted for the reader to understand further the complexity of the situation. Stories relating to internal politics, such as Lebanese families complaining to school principals about the free education received by Syrian refugees in contrast to their own situation of having to pay for the same services, are also related. The chapter concludes by stating that the Lebanese government has responded positively to the crisis but, despite its efforts, many thousands of refugee children are missing out on their 'right

to education'. The solution offered is the provision of more funding for more schools and for the training of teachers.

Chapter Seven is entitled 'Community Concerns and Responses'. A global, holistic picture of the situation is provided. Problems such as having only temporary camps, and penalties that apply for having permanent camps, are discussed, as are the stricter laws and restrictions on entry to Lebanon that have applied since 2014. These, in turn, affect the children as families who do not have the necessary paperwork cannot register their children in formal schooling. Consequently, many refugee children are educated by volunteers in camp schools, offering an informal education that is not recognised by the Lebanese government. Known as Education Centres, they are funded by NGOs but when the funding runs out they close. As the centres have no official standing, the children do not receive official achievement documentation at the end of their studies. Hence, their education is often not recognised by other formal schools.

The chapter also relates tragic stories of personal loss. The work of organisations such as UNICEF to provide affordability of schooling and safety for the children, is praised but the key goal of these families is again stated strongly; namely, survival over education. Despite the best efforts of such organisations, the tragically high statistics of child labour paint a dark picture. Again, with Lebanon's schooling resources being stretched to the limit, the authors propose that more funding is required.

Chapter Eight is entitled 'The State and Policy Support'. This chapter is concerned with the support that the Lebanese State provides as a host to the refugees in terms of the schooling of refugee children. It outlines both the positives and negatives of the Ministry of Education's initiatives, and offers solutions. Much of the good that has been put in place is undermined by ongoing violence, hostility, discrimination, and lack of education support for refugee children. Whilst the afternoon shift in classes has assisted in overcoming some of the challenges, tragic housing and living conditions can undermine efforts.

The chapter also discusses the value of non-formal education programmes, which focus on water, sanitation, and child safety issues. It is stated that such programs have been positive in many ways, including by providing an affordable option for refugee families. The chapter goes on to list the key education provisions offered by Lebanon to Syrian refugees.

The final chapter provides a summary of the key results of the study reported and the main points made throughout the book. Reference is made to the 'politics of hostility' versus the 'politics of hospitality'. The reader is invited to consider these and then to act. We are reminded that refugee children are the victims of a socially-constructed catastrophe not of their making. The chapter ends with a comment on teaching, stating that it should proceed from the point of existing knowledge possessed by the children and how the children make meaning of the world. The challenges are formidable for teachers, and even more formidable for society. The book calls everyone to do something about the crisis at hand.



Figure 14.1: Beautiful Lebanon.



Figure 14.2: Historic Lebanon.

Conclusion

The authors present a balanced study. The chapters are well sequenced in terms of taking the reader on a journey through Lebanon, experiencing along the way the perspectives of the various stakeholders on schooling and on the education of Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian refugee children. Within each chapter are headings and sub-headings to guide the reader and provide clarity. Another strong feature of the narrative is the use of photographs, with children

being shown in their various schooling situations. The photographs in each chapter evoke an immediate emotional response from the reader, enticing one to continue reading.

Maps, charts, graphs, and other tables are used effectively to support key points made. Each chapter has a conclusion and a list of references at the end, while there is also a comprehensive reference list at the end of the book. This is important for those contemplating engaging in future studies in the field. The writing style is straight-forward and honest, without losing its academic edge. Overall, the book is an important study on the plight of refugees and on the schooling and education of their children in Lebanon. It should command attention and respect from its readers. It is also likely to inform those who are distanced from the tragedy of the Syrian War, and to leave an indelible mark on their conscience. Furthermore, it invites engagement in similar studies on the schooling and education, or lack thereof, of refugee children elsewhere.

References

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