«Where are you from?»

Empowering Syrian children in Lebanon

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Abstract

There is a growing number of Syrian children that are being born in Lebanon and a growing number of Syrian children that fled Syria at a young age and therefore have few memories of the country. A vast number of these children might not be able to return to Syria in the foreseeable future, and they will most likely have very limited rights and opportunities in life if staying in Lebanon, which might be the only option for some. This thesis will investigate ow an NGO providing non-formal education, mostly by and without exception for Syrians, is attempting to empower Syrian refugee children as proud Syrians by looking at their Identity and Peacebuilding classes. This became an important subject for the school as many children started claiming they were from Beirut when getting the question, "where are you from?".

Information was collected through fieldwork during the fall of 2017 by the means of interviews and participant observation in the classrooms. The thesis discusses the challenges of teaching children where they are "from" despite many being born in Lebanon. The aim of the NGO's focus on Syrian identity is to teach the children to be proud Syrians and to try to make them feel committed to Syria while creating a feeling of responsibility of one day returning to rebuild the country. As the Syrian civil war is still ongoing, and as the war is only hours away from the children's classrooms in Beirut, the school also tries to make the children feel like a united people despite the disputes within the community.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

This thesis follows the transliteration system IJMES. Details on this system can be found here: https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/IJMES_Translation_and_Transliteration_Guide.htm.

I have chosen to only transliterate a few words and short sentences in Arabic when showing examples from the classrooms. However, for words and names that are well known in English, I have chosen to write them in their most popular form, in accordance with IJMES' word list which can be accessed here: https://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/WordList.pdf. Such as Hizbullah, Hafiz al-Asad and hijab. As names of living people are to be written in their most popular form, Syria's president's name will be written as Bashar al-Assad. The Islamic State is also a new word and the name of an existing group; it will be referred to as Daesh as that is the common way of spelling it in popular media and some research.

Table of contents

Abstract iii
Acknowledgements v
Note on Translation and Transliteration vii
Table of contents ix
1 Introduction 1
2 What is national identity? 9
3 Observing the process of empowerment 17
4 Jusoor 23
5 Where are you from? 29
6 How is Syria brought up in class? 31
7 How is Syria *not* brought up in class? 39
8 Peacebuilding – Bina' al-salām 43
9 Conclusion 53
Bibliography 55

1 Introduction

In a classroom in Jusoor's school in Beirut, a class of Syrian children was asked where they are from. Many answered Beirut, some Aleppo, one said Tripoli in Syria.[1] Geography can indeed be very complicated, especially for children that have never been in their "home city" or even their "home country". A few years back, almost all the children in this school claimed they were from Beirut, or more precisely, the neighborhood they were living in. As the Syrian war is now in its seventh year, many of these children were born in Lebanon, and some of those that were born in Syria only have vague memories of it, if any memories at all. The older children usually remember more, often things that no child should have memories of. Some of these children were in a way right; practically, many of them are from Beirut, but that does not make them Lebanese.

Jusoor is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) providing non-formal education for Syrian refugees in principle between the ages of five and fourteen.[2] Non-formal education prepares the children for public school. It is needed as some of the children need to get prepared academically and socially before enrolling in the Lebanese school system, which is quite different from the Syrian school system in terms of language and curricula. Additionally, the non-formal education centers make it possible for the children to go through the curriculum at a slower pace. This can be needed for children suffering from traumas or because they have been out of school for many years or all their lives. The children in Jusoor's schools also get the opportunity to learn about Syria, which Syrian children in public schools do not.

In addition to preparing the children for public school, Jusoor is trying to empower the children as Syrians, teaching them about their background and where they are "from", with pride. Although many of the children were born in Lebanon, the Lebanese government has claimed that the Syrians are only temporary guests.[3] This might point to a safe and peaceful Syria, to which they may eventually return, being the only hope for the future of the majority of these children.

[1] Tripoli is the name of a city in North Lebanon and the name of Libya's capital.
[2] The official age range, however there are students in school between the ages of four and fifteen.
[3] Norwegian Refugee Council, "NRC in Lebanon."

The goal is that the children stay with Jusoor for a year before enrolling in public school, however, some children stay for two years. For some, non-formal education is a plan B if the child did not get a spot in public school. According to several of my informants, some parents also send their children to non-formal schools for their children to learn how to read and write without having a plan to send them to public school later on.

As many of the children in Jusoor's school in Beirut[4] claimed that they were from Beirut, the school introduced identity classes to teach the children about Syria. One of the aims of Jusoor's identity class is: "[…] Identity Building emphasize to the children that as Syrians, they are part of a strong and dynamic community with a rich history and that they will be expected to participate in rebuilding their country when the time comes."[5] I identify this as an attempt to empower the children as Syrians. Askheim & Starrin describes empowerment per se as giving people strength and power to do something about their hopeless situation, and as something that is meant to give people more influence over their own lives.[6] I believe this fits well to what Jusoor is doing, as their goal is to make the children feel stronger and more confident in their identity and background, in addition to, and in order to, making them feel responsibility of rebuilding Syria when the time comes.

This thesis will look at identity building during an ongoing civil war, using Jusoor as an example by looking at their Identity and Peacebuilding classes. How are the children responding to these classes and the teachers' approaches? The Syrian children that are enrolled in Lebanese public schools only have the academic classes, such as Arabic, English, math, and science, and are therefore missing out on self-developing classes and activity classes such as sports, arts, and peace building. Jusoor and some other non-formal schools have non-academic classes as well, which may give the children space for self-development. Looking at how Jusoor is dealing with these matters might set an example for how other schools and/or NGOs can follow or build on their program.

Teaching the children about a common Syrian identity while the country is undergoing a civil war might seemingly be challenging. The war in Syria is only hours away from the children's classrooms in Beirut. There is a strict policy of not talking about the war or politics in school;

[4] Jusoor has three schools in Lebanon, one in Beirut and two in the Beqaa-valley. My research was conducted at the school in Beirut.
[5] Alkateb-Chami, Roots, and Tutunji, "Jusoor's Educational Model for Teaching Refugee Children." 12
[6] Askheim, Starrin, and Winqvist, *Empowerment i teori och praktik*. 18

nevertheless, the children hear the adults around them talk about such topics and naturally they bring some of the things they hear at home or in the streets to school. How is Jusoor capable of keeping conflicts related to the war from occurring in school? This relates to the research question which is: *How is Jusoor attempting to build a national identity among their students?* One of the school's goals is for the children to develop a strong feeling of belonging to Syria and an urge for the children to want to return and rebuild the country when it is time. For that to be possible, the children need to feel united as Syrians and to learn to respect and understand the country's diversity and individual differences. How is Jusoor working for this to be a conceivable possibility in the future?

The Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011 after a round of non-violent protests inspired by the Arab Spring. The government did not accept these protests and answered with executions and imprisonment, which in short developed to a civil war. The war in Syria is complicated in a myriad of ways. Even though it is called a civil war, it is also a proxy war as different countries are involved, supporting different factions with money and arms, and also fighting on the ground in Syria.[7]

A group of defectors from Assad's army created the Free Syrian Army (FSA),[8] which at first became the main opponent of the regime forces. The FSA received support from Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi-Arabia.[9] Iran, Russia, and Hizbullah, a Lebanese political party with its armed forces, are the main supporters of Assad's regime.[10] However, the opposition is far from one united group; there are today a big number of oppositional groups, and the foreign states that started by supporting the opposition as such are now supporting different/opposing groups within the opposition. The situation is complicated as the society is highly fragmented.

Moreover, political freedom has not been existent under the Assad-regime, not under the current Bashar al-Assad regime, nor under the preceding regime of his father, Hafiz al-Asad. Under the Assad-regime, opposition has been highly surveilled, and politics has not been an issue openly discussed as the regime is known for having a vast intelligence service (Mukhābarāt and shabbīḥa). Every house was said to have ears because before the civil war, it

[7] Hughes, "Syria and the Perils of Proxy Warfare."
[8] Abboud, *Syria*. 88
[9] Ibid. 90
[10] Ibid. 120

was not safe to speak out, even in one's own house.[11] No place was safe to discuss "illegal" topics, i.e. politics and opposition/questioning the regime. One could not trust one's neighbors, and not even one's own family members. This has created distrust between the citizens, which has led to the possibility of "everyone" being a potential enemy.

Naturally, the feeling of distrust is even more present during a civil war, and the Syrians living in Lebanon might bring this feeling with them as the war is dangerously close. Suspicion towards others in regard to talking about politics has been imprinted in many Syrians for decades. In addition, Hizbullah's fighting along with the regime in Syria can make Lebanon feel unsafe as well. Several of my informants claimed that many of the children in their school do not want to share anything from their background in Syria. Can this level of distrust and skepticism be a reason why?

As a result of the Syrian Civil War, half the population have fled their homes. 6.1 million Syrians are internally displaced, and 5.4 million Syrians have fled the country.[12] These are numbers registered by UNHCR, which might indicate that the numbers are even higher, as an unknown number do not register with the organization.

As of August 2018, the Assad-regime is recapturing more and more areas that have been under oppositional control. Idlib is the last area that the various oppositional groups have control over; Assad's forces are now trying to recapture this area as well.[13]

The relation between Syria and Lebanon

Lebanon was a part of Greater Syria under French mandate until 1920,[14] when France created Greater Lebanon which was meant as a Christian state. The French followed a "divide and rule" policy and included cities with Muslim majorities that did not want to become minorities in a Christian state.[15] The French establishment of Lebanon meant that the "Christian" state had a large Muslim population as well.

During the Lebanese Civil War from 1975-1990, many Lebanese fled to Syria; this is one reason why Lebanon in the beginning of the Syrian war opened their borders. Many Lebanese

[11] Pearlman, "The Surprising Ways Fear Has Shaped Syria's War."
[12] UNHCR, "Syria Factsheet."
[13] AL JAZEERA NEWS, "Explosion Kills Dozens, Including Children, in Syria's Idlib."
[14] Lebanon and Syria were a part of the Ottoman Empire previous to this.
[15] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 218-219

have this fresh in mind and wanted to return the favor. Yet, the relation has not always been great. Israel occupied parts of Lebanon, even the capital Beirut, from 1982 until 1983. The country had an ongoing evacuation until 1985, yet, Israel still occupied parts of the South of Lebanon until 2000.[16] The Lebanese president at the time asked Syria for help, which Syria responded more than willingly to, and Syrian troops were stationed in Lebanon.[17] Syria was forced to withdraw from Lebanon in 2005 after being blamed for the assassination of president Rafiq Hariri earlier the same year.[18]

Syria has had some political influence and military presence in Lebanon; additionally, many Syrian workers have come to Lebanon for work for decades, usually in construction and agriculture. The difference in terms of economy before the Syrian Civil War and now is that the money is now remaining in the Lebanese economy, as most of the workers used to go back to Syria with their Lebanese income before the war. Yet, the high number of Syrian workers in the country has created tensions between low-income Lebanese, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and Syrians as the two former groups claim they have lost their jobs because Syrians are willing to work for a lower income.[19]

The situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The Lebanese government opened their borders when the civil war in Syria first broke out. In 2015 the country got stricter and closed the borders. Lebanon is a very small country, a little bit smaller than the Norwegian county of Buskerud. The country is struggling with having such a big refugee population. The official number of UNHCR is around 1 million Syrian refugees present in Lebanon.[20] Additionally, Lebanon has around 175,000 Palestinian refugees in the country[21] and a smaller number of refugees from other countries. The total number of refugees is high for a country of around 4.4 million inhabitants before the influx of Syrian refugees. Additionally, many Syrians are in Lebanon illegally and have not registered with the UNHCR. The real number is likely to be between 1.5 million to 3 million according

[16] Ibid. 386, 389
[17] Ibid. 389
[18] Ibid. 548
[19] International Labour Organization - Lebanon, "Matching Skills and Jobs in Lebanon: Main Features of the Labour Market – Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations."
[20] UNHCR, "Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response."1
[21] Abby Sewell, "Palestinians in Lebanon Less than Half Previous Estimate, Census Shows." The official number Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has for decades been close to 500 000, however a new census of 2017 claims that the number is remarkably lower.

to my informants. Syrians can enter Lebanon legally as tourists if they have a hotel reservation and a certain amount of money.[22]

Most Syrians in Lebanon are living in poverty; making enough money for daily life is difficult, and many have restrictions on their freedom as they are in the country illegally. The Syrian children are also vulnerable in numerous ways; as mentioned, many of them are out of school, many have to work, the children in the cities live in crowded areas and apartments, and some girls are being married away at a very young age. The list goes on. One of my informants also told me about a ten-year-old boy in her class that one day told her that he was not a child, that he had to work when he was not in school, and therefore said that that makes him an adult. He was not happy. Many children are in the same situation.

The Lebanese are afraid of the Syrians becoming permanent inhabitants, as with the Palestinians. Official refugee camps were never set up in Lebanon, and the country has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention as this would require Lebanon to give more rights to the refugees in the country, which could also make them permanent citizens. This would in turn change the country's demography, which is a delicate topic in Lebanon as the political system is based on the demography.[23] However, there are unofficial refugee camps in Lebanon. Some of these have been forced to move several times as the land owner can evict the people from the land if so desired.

The Governments of Syria and Lebanon have cooperated in organizing the return of Syrians that wish to do so. The Lebanese General Security had by June 2018 received 3,000 applications for return, which are waiting for approval from the Syrian Government.[24] As of 13th of August 2018, around 2,000 people have returned to Syria since April 2018.[25] As the Assad-regime is regaining more and more power in Syria, it might be safe for those that have no connection with oppositional groups to return. For many young men it is impossible to return to Syria as they are obliged to serve in the army. [26] That was a reason why many men had fled. According to several of my informants, a number of families they know have returned because life is too difficult for them in Lebanon, and therefore they feel forced to

[22] refugees-lebanon.org, "'Procedures for Syrians Entering Lebanon.'"
[23] Janmyr, "No Country of Asylum." 450
[24] Hamdan, "Lebanon-UNHCR Feuding over Syrian Refugees."
[25] AFP, "More Syrians Leave Lebanon in Organised Return Home."
[26] Perry and Creidi, "Syrians Trickle Home from Lebanon, but Most Stay Put." The government has claimed that they will not force young men to join the army earlier than six months after return. That means that these men might end up in the army after all if returning.

return to Syria. However, some came back to Lebanon again after discovering that their houses are no longer there, and as life in Syria is even more difficult than their hopeless situation in Lebanon.

Moreover, Law no. 10 was promulgated by Bashar al-Assad on April 2nd, 2018.[27] The goal of this law was to redistribute land that has been destroyed by the war and areas where people are no longer living, as buildings and villages are bombed to the ground. The Syrian Government gave the owners of these properties a month to claim their land back, which was impossible for most of those concerned. The land that the Government confiscated was mostly land that had been in the hands of the opposition. This move is seemingly a punishment for Syrians disloyal to the regime, and it will make it almost impossible for these people to return later on, as long as Assad is in charge. The land can be redistributed to regime-loyal Syrians instead. Many opponents of the regime are naturally scared of returning, as this may cause a lifelong punishment or even their death.[28]

Many Syrian refugees living abroad, but also those internally displaced, will have nothing to return to when the war one day ends. The Syrian regime seemingly does not want Syrians disloyal to the Government to return, and therefore it wants to ensure that those returning are not a threat to the regime's existence. Besides, the number of around 3,000 people that have now returned is a very small number compared to the 1-1.5 million (if not even higher) Syrians that are still in Lebanon. Many of them will not be able to return as long as Assad is in charge.

Generation of lost education

There is now a growing generation of Syrian children that are missing out on their education. There are around 500,000 Syrian children of school age in Lebanon; approximately half of them are out of school.[29] In comparison, there are around 250,000 Lebanese children of school age[30], i.e. the number of Syrian children of school age that are out of school is the same as the number of Lebanese children of school age in school(!). Some of these Syrian children have never been to school, and some were taken out of school and never got back in.

[27] Yahya, "The Politics of Dispossession."
[28] Ibid.
[29] Shackle, "How the Lebanese School System Is Segregating Refugees."
[30] Human Rights Watch, "'Growing Up Without an Education' Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon."

In 2014, Lebanon introduced the second shift system which opened the public schools for Syrian refugees in the afternoon. This made it possible for more Syrian children to go to school. However, this "solution" did not come without obstacles; many of the public schools are far away from where most of the refugee families live, and the cost of transportation is too high for many families, making it impossible for these families to send their children to school. Another big problem is the language of instruction; the language of instruction in Syria is Arabic, while it is English or French in Lebanon. Therefore, many non-formal education centers, including Jusoor, focus on language to prepare the children for Lebanese schools.

In addition, some of the parents of these children are illiterate, and some do not see the value of sending their children to school. One of my informants even claimed that in certain agricultural circles, education is looked down on. According to UNESCO, the literacy rate in Syria as of 2004 was approximately 80%;[31] however, my informants at Jusoor claimed that most of the parents of their students are illiterate. They say that the official number of 80%, or what is sometimes even claimed to be higher than that, is purely propaganda. Whether these numbers are correct or not will not be discussed further in this paper.

Although the public schools in Lebanon theoretically are open for all Syrian children, the schools do not have the capacity to welcome all in need. Moreover, as the Syrian children are enrolled in the second shift, many teachers are exhausted and tired when this shift starts.[32] This may, in turn, reflect on the quality of the education given. Several of my informants also claimed that many of the teachers in public school lack enthusiasm and empathy for the Syrian children, and that they give their lectures and leave regardless of if the children learned something or not. Some parents chose to send their children to non-formal schools such as Jusoor as they have a better reputation. As Jusoor uses mostly Syrian teachers, the teachers are more or less in the same situation as the children, and they therefore know what the children are going through. This might create an environment that is filled with empathy and a feeling of being understood, which in turn might be advantageous for the children in school.

[31] UNESCO Institute of Statistics, "Syrian Arab Republic."
[32] Shackle, "How the Lebanese School System Is Segregating Refugees."

2 What is national identity?

Jusoor introduced the class hawiyyatī (my identity) because most of the children did not know much, if anything, about Syria. The main target of this class is "[...] for the children to develop confidence in themselves as Syrians and gain an understanding of and pride in their home country and culture."[33] In addition to building a national identity, Jusoor has another type of identity building through their Peace Building (PB) and Circle Time (CT) sessions. These classes give the children an arena to develop mutual trust in their peers, learn how to peacefully solve problems and express their feelings and thoughts, in addition to listening to and understanding their peers. Jusoor is attempting, by the content of these classes, to build a national identity within the children; but, what is national identity?

Before getting into the discussion of what national identity is, it is important to clarify the difference between a state, a nation, and a nation-state. A state is the highest authority that has the power of a geographical area or a territory that usually is called a country. Criteria's from the UN to be a member (i.e. to be a state, although they call it the United *Nations*) is: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and capability of having a connection to other states.[34]

A nation, on the other hand, can exist without a state. A nation is, according to Berg, a group of people with common social and cultural identity which often claims a state.[35] One is, for instance, talking about Kurds as being the biggest nation without a state. The idea is that the members of a nation are having the same perception of history, culture, traditions, and language, in addition to having the same ideas and values and following the same norms. Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an "imagined community", as all the inhabitants within a nation share something, namely the feeling of belonging to the same community. Yet, the very majority of these so-called members will never meet or know of each other.[36]

A nation-state is a state where the population is fully, or to a very large extent, based on one nation, i.e. in terms of language, culture, traditions, and common history. The idea behind nation-states is that every nation should have their own state. However, this is difficult to

[33] Alkateb-Chami, Roots, and Tutunji, "Jusoor's Educational Model for Teaching Refugee Children." 30
[34] Knudsen, "stat."
[35] Berg, "nasjon."
[36] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 6

fulfill as there are minorities in every state. Therefore, according to Knudsen & Ryste, there are hardly any states that can be defined as nation-states today.[37]

The imagined community during a civil war

A broad definition of the Syrian national community are all individuals/citizens living within the Syrian national borders and those that have lived within these borders who have now fled because of the war. These individuals may have felt or are feeling a connection to the Syrian community. However, they might have different perceptions of the various symbols connected to the national identity such as history, traditions, values, and norms, to mention a few. Nevertheless, the situation is more complicated for the children that are born in Lebanon to Syrian parents, as they have never been to Syria. They do not only have to imagine the community as every other citizen, but they have to imagine the imagined, as they have never been a part of the Syrian Syria.

When a civil war breaks out, the fellow members of the same national community can be the biggest threat and enemy. Many Syrians have fled because of the regime. In a civil war, the state, represented by the regime, is no longer a unifying power for the citizens. The state is the enemy for a big percentage of the inhabitants. The imagined community gets shattered. It might no longer be possible to trust one's neighbor. Despite this, the idea of Syria remains, and most members still define themselves as Syrians which will be of main importance when the country is to be unified again when the war ends.

As most of the Syrians that have fled to neighboring countries are only seen as temporary guests, they seemingly have to return to Syria one day. These Syrians will be important when the country is to be rebuilt. However, there is as mentioned a growing number of children that have never been to Syria. How is it possible to "make" these children Syrian, and create a desire in them to return to their "home country", when they have never visited it?

Levels of identity

How a person defines one's identity often depends on the context and who the person is talking to; identity is hierarchical and may have different levels such as national, regional,

[37] Knudsen and Ryste, "nasjonalstat."

ethnical, familial, tribal, religious, or gender. Syrians from within the national Syrian borders will perhaps identify themselves as Syrians to people from outside the borders. However, when talking to fellow Syrians, the person will most probably identify oneself with the tribe, ethnicity, region, city, and part of their city or village, all depending on the context and who the "other" is.

Several of my informants said that sometimes when they meet Syrian adults in Lebanon, they can hear from their dialect that they are hiding the truth about where they are from. According to my informants, many Syrians claim that they are from Damascus, as the capital is a big city that rarely reveals the stances of the person in question. In contrast, they may not tell someone that they are from Raqqa or Darʿaa, which are cities that have a "reputation" for being with different parties. Being from a certain location might be dangerous during a civil war, as one might be categorized as an enemy based on where one is from. According to my informants, this seems to be imprinted in almost all Syrian adults, so how is this affecting the children in Jusoor's school?

The "other"

PRIO (Peace Research Institute Oslo) conducted a study among Norwegian high school students to see how they define what it is to be Norwegian. In the study most of the interviewees claimed that being Norwegian is more important when being abroad. Even for those Norwegian students born in Norway by immigrant parents who claimed that they do not feel fully Norwegian, felt so when abroad, and especially when visiting their parents or grandparents home country.[38] This is a great example of how the feeling of national belonging is not something fixed, and that what matters changes dependent on the context and who "the other" is. Ethnicity matters as well as different ethnic groups might feel belonging to the same national identity, however the ethnic belonging might be of greater importance depending on the ethnicity of the "other".

As for Palestinian refugees born in Lebanon and now a growing generation of Syrians born in Lebanon, their connection to Lebanon will be strong as this is the country they have lived their whole life in. However, they are still officially "abroad" as they are refugees and as they have very limited rights in the country they were born in. Many feel a strong belonging to the

[38] PRIO, "Norskhet I Flertall."

country of origin or the country of their parents' origin and identify themselves with the national identity of that country. The Palestinians in Lebanon are to a large extent keeping their national identity alive even though several generations have now been born in Lebanon. The Palestinian identity is according to Fincham mainly being kept alive by family members, teachers and fellow community members.[39] Additionally, Palestinians are being defined as the "others" by the Lebanese. In a sense they have no other option than to define themselves as Palestinians, as they have very limited rights and cannot become Lebanese. The Syrians in Lebanon will perhaps be forced to follow the same path if they are not able to return to Syria.

Language and minorities

Having a common language to communicate in, despite the different dialects within a country, is something that may unite the citizens and contribute to a feeling of sameness and unity. A study conducted by Pew Research Center found that language is the "cornerstone of National Identity".[40] Arabic is the main language in Syria. Nevertheless, there are several minorities with their own language, such as Kurds, Armenians, and Syriacs. The minorities have been oppressed to different extents and for different reasons. The Kurds have, for instance, been oppressed for decades; they have not been able to learn or speak the Kurdish language (Kirmanji) in school and Syrian Arabs have been moved to Kurdish areas to "water out" the Kurdish cities.[41] Armenians, on the other hand, who could stay in Syria after the genocide in 1915, have had Armenian schools in Syria and more freedom of expressing their own language, traditions, and religion.[42] Armenians are not perceived as the same threat as the Kurds with their big population and area, and with their Kurdish neighbors that also desire independence.

However, all minorities in Syria with their own language have still learned Arabic in school, which has been crucial as all public communication and education in the country is in Arabic. A common and unifying feature for all people living within the Syrian borders has been the Arabic language, although some of the people living inside the Syrian borders have another mother tongue.

[39] Fincham, "Learning the Nation in Exile." 132
[40] Stokes, "1. Language."
[41] Phillips, Christopher, *Everyday Arab Identity*. 44
[42] Ibid. 44

After the Syrian civil war broke out there are approximately 1.75 million children in Syria out of school[43] and 2.3 million Syrian refugees out of school globally.[44] This means that there might be a large number of minority children that are not learning Arabic as they are out of school and as they have another mother tongue at home. This can create trouble for the future and distance between the people in Syria. This is a topic worth being aware of; however, it is not within the scope of my research to investigate it further.

The official name of Syria is the Syrian *Arab* Republic which in the view of the regime points to a close relation between being Arab and Syrian. Bashar al-Assad has often referred to "Arab" when talking about Syria.[45] Which essentially seem excluding of other ethnic groups.

Citizenship

Citizenship, on the other hand, comes with concrete legal rights and duties that are the same for all citizens. This gives the citizens a judicial belonging to the state, and it may bring with it a feeling of "sameness" and belonging to a community of fellow citizens. However, one might have a citizenship without necessarily feeling a strong belonging to a national community. For instance, asylum seekers granted citizenship in Norway may not immediately feel a strong belonging to the Norwegian national community. Some might never develop this feeling of belonging, despite living in the country for decades and/or for the rest of their lives. On the contrary, people without a state citizenship can feel a strong belonging to a nation as such, or an imagined community, be it for instance Kurds without a state or Palestinians without citizenship living in other countries. Despite this, both perceive themselves as a nation; i.e. national belonging is something that is felt.

Not all people with the same citizenship are the same or do the same things. In Norway there have been several discussions on what it is to be Norwegian. Former Norwegian Minister of Immigration and Integration, Sylvi Listhaug (FrP, the Progress Party), claimed that it is Norwegian to eat pork, drink alcohol, and "show our faces"[46], which is a very simple definition that will exclude many Norwegians, also ethnic Norwegians. However, there is no

[43] Abu Rass and Jensen, "Syria's out-of-School Children."
[44] Brussels Conference Education Report and WoS Education, "Preparing for the Future of Children and Youth in Syria and the Region through Education: London One Year On." i
[45] Phillips, Christopher, *Everyday Arab Identity*. 59
[46] Tjernshaugen, "Listhaug." "show our faces" is a refence against wearing niqab.

clear definition of what "ethnic Norwegian" is[47]; for some it is to be born in Norway, as for others it means having parents and grandparents born in Norway, and as for others again it is a certain look— a third-generation immigrant will to some never be ethnic Norwegian due to being, for instance, Indian-looking, although "looking" Norwegian will not make you "ethnic Norwegian" either, if you are, for instance, born in another country. However, gradually and over time, one might become a part of the national community and identify with the national identity.

Returning to Syria, several Kurds in Syria have been stateless for decades. As protests were increasing in Syria and the country was facing a civil war, the regime decided to give a number of Kurds the Syrian citizenship as this had been a cause the Kurds had been struggling for over time. The Kurds could become a bigger threat in an already tense situation. According to McGee, many Kurds felt they got their Syrian citizenship for not rallying against the regime, as they only received it at this point, and not earlier. Nevertheless, some saw this as an opportunity to apply for a passport, which could give them a chance to seek refuge in other countries, while some claimed that they are only granted citizenship in theory and that they have not received any rights in practice.[48] According to McGee's research, it seems likely that the granting of citizenship will not increase these people's feeling of belonging to the Syrian national identity as many see it as an act of bribery, and as some have claimed they only want to take the citizenship in order to be able to flee from Syria.

Stateless children

There is a growing number of stateless children in Lebanon. These are children born by Syrian parents that cannot, or will not, register their children because it is too expensive or too dangerous, or because they do not have the legal documents to do so. However, as of August 2018, the Lebanese Government eased the procedures which will make it easier for Syrian parents to register their children from now on.[49] Yet, it is likely that many children will remain unregistered. These children will probably have a hard time returning to Syria, and if staying in Lebanon, they will have very limited rights, if any at all. An estimate from 2016 claimed that there were around 50,000 stateless children in Lebanon that year, respectively.[50]

[47] Karlsen, "Hva vil det si å være etnisk norsk?"
[48] Mcgee, "The Stateless Kurds of Syria."
[49] Cherri, "Lebanon Eases Birth Registration Rules for Syrian Refugees."
[50] Davison, "A Generation of Syrian Children Who Don't Count."

The same issue is present in the other neighboring countries as well. All in all, the number of stateless children is high.

The stateless children in Lebanon will most probably not get the Lebanese citizenship. Lebanon is frightened that the big number of Syrians in Lebanon, mostly Sunni Muslims, will change the country's demography; which, as previously mentioned, the whole political system is based on, which is also *one* of the reasons why the Palestinians are not granted citizenship.

Palestinians in Lebanon – "Lost" case

After the establishment of Israel in 1948, al-Nakba, around 110,000 Palestinians were forced to flee to Lebanon,[51] and an even higher number were forced to flee to other countries. The Palestinians have very limited rights in Lebanon; they cannot vote nor own land, and there are a number of job positions they are not allowed to have. A law was changed in 2005, and amended in 2010, which made it possible for Palestinian refugees to have some of the jobs that were previously prohibited, and work permits became free as of 2010; however, only 2% of the Palestinians have received work permits as of 2012.[52] The Palestinians in Lebanon are still seen as refugees. There is no reason to believe that the situation will be any different for Syrians.

In addition, in Lebanon, only fathers can pass on their citizenship. A child born in Lebanon to a Syrian father and a Lebanese mother will officially be Syrian. This law was proposed to change earlier this year; however, if the law changes according to the new proposed amendment, it will include an exception for Lebanese women that marry Syrian or Palestinian men.[53] These women will not be able to pass on their citizenship. This means that a Lebanese woman married to an American or German man, for instance, will be able to pass on her Lebanese citizenship, but a Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian or Syrian man will not. This means that the law will remain discriminatory, even if amended.

There is no doubt that national identity and national belonging is something complex, and even more so for children growing up in a country that will perhaps always define you as the

[51] Fincham, "Learning the Nation in Exile"
[52] ILO News, "Palestinians in Lebanon Working under Precarious Conditions."
[53] Abby Sewell, "Lebanon Nationality Law Set to Change, but Critics Say Doesn't Go Far Enough."

"other". These people must learn how to be members of their national communities from exile. This is one of the challenges Jusoor is tackling.

3 Observing the process of empowerment

Choice of methodologies

After I decided that I wanted to look at Jusoor's way of empowering their students as Syrians by teaching them about Syrian identity and giving PB-classes, I believed that the most proper way to collect data would be through volunteering/assisting at the school. I believed this would give me firsthand experience with the children, and it would give me the chance to observe both the children and the teachers' ways of handling conflicts, talking about Syria, and so on. Basing my research purely on conducting interviews would not give me the same wide understanding. I read beforehand that Jusoor has Syrian teachers in their schools, which I found very interesting and important, as I believe it is a great initiative to use the resources where they are. This can be beneficial for both the teachers and the children, due to the Syrian teacher's possible potential of more easily understanding and therefore empathizing with the Syrian children as they are all in Lebanon for the same reason. In addition, they were filling in for the lack of teachers in Lebanon due to the vast number of Syrian children in the country.

I met with the academic counselor in Beirut in June 2017 where she showed interest for my research and told me I could become an assistant at the school in Beirut when the fall semester starts. She also invited me to join a workshop for all Jusoor's teachers, from all the three schools, in the Beqaa-valley the week before the children started school. The workshop was held by a Lebanese neuro scientist who talked about how the brain functions and taught the teachers how to teach most efficiently, especially in a crisis situation. I only conducted research at Jusoor's school in Beirut.

I stayed with Jusoor for seven weeks during the months of September and October 2017. During my fieldwork, I was an assistant in the different classes at the school in which I used participant observation as my methodology to collect information. Participant observation gives the researcher good insight in the object of study as the researcher participates and stays with the community in which one is conducting research.[54] I was given the chance to observe the teachers, students, and daily activities as I was participating myself.

[54] Blevins, "Participant Observation."

In the beginning my presence did not feel very natural, as there were a few problems with the communication. The teachers were not well informed on why I was there, which I at first thought they were. However, as the communication improved and as I explained why I was there, my presence in the different classes felt more natural, and I was able to contribute by, for instance, helping the children with their tasks, helping the teacher distribute papers, and preparing homework and other tasks for the children.

As I obviously could not be in all of the classes at once, and as situations of relevance to my study could occur at any time in any class, I also conducted interviews with the teachers, the head of the three schools, the counselor of the three schools, and the principal of the school in Beirut. These interviews gave me a better understanding of why the identity classes are needed, how they have developed, why the children are hesitant to tell where they are from, in addition to the policy and goals of the school, and how they are dealing with conflicts. They also shared experiences from the years before and compared the current situation to how the school environment had been the previous years.

Gatekeepers

My first e-mail correspondence with Jusoor was with one of the former teachers who put me in direct contact with the academic counselor, who turned into my main gatekeeper. She was very helpful and told me that I could interview whomever I wanted to, and that I should decide with the principal which classes I should attend. The gatekeeper can possibly control which informants one is getting access to, which can affect the research to a big extent.[55] I feel it is safe to state that this is something I did not encounter due to my gatekeeper's flexibility.

Anonymity

Jusoor is publishing pictures of the staff and the students on their social media pages. The parents must agree to this before the child is registered in school. However, when writing about people in a vulnerable situation, it is important to make sure that I will not put them in an even more difficult position. Therefore, I will give my informants pseudonyms to protect their identities as I do not want anything they have said or done to be used against them. As the school is open and posts pictures online, they are not seeing this as a threat themselves,

[55] Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, "Methodological Dilemmas." 544

although publishing names and stories can potentially be a more delicate matter. This is a risk that I am not willing to take, as I believe changing my informants' names will not affect my research in any way.

Frontstage and backstage

As I spent time with the teachers in their classes and in the teachers' room during some of the breaks, I got to know them quite well. To a certain degree I became a part of their team, although not fully as I was not in their situation at all, and as I did not have their responsibility. However, I got to observe the teachers both backstage and frontstage which gave me a good insight into their philosophies and ways of teaching.

It is well known that almost all people say different things in different contexts, without having the intention of doing so, and without being aware of their actions not always coinciding with their statements. By conducting interviews and by spending time with the teachers, I got a wider perspective of the situation in the school and how they handled various situations.

Some of the teachers were not at all happy with how the organization was led. None of the teachers spoke to me about this in the beginning, but as I got to be a part of the team, and as they got to know me better, they opened up to me. This also gave me the chance to observe and discuss different situations with them.

Process of data collection

It took me a few weeks to adapt to my role as an assistant. This field was completely new to me. The different teachers also had different rules in their classes, in which case I found it difficult to help, as I did not want to send the children mixed messages by doing something the teacher would react differently to. After a few sessions in the different classes, I felt that I had "cracked the code", and I felt more useful in class as I assisted the children with their exercises. These could be everything from helping them solve math problems, to helping them write and talk in English, to making sure that every child only chose one crayon when they were to draw, in addition to preparing their homework.

All of the classes were held in Arabic, and all of my communication with the children was in Arabic. Yet, English terms were used in most classes as this is needed for Lebanese school.

For instance, in a math class while teaching shapes, the teacher would speak in Arabic but use the English terms such as "circle", "square", etc.

Most of my examples are taken from situations that occurred during PB or identity class, however, it is worth emphasizing that Jusoor teaches academic classes as well, and that situations also occurred in these classes. I was mostly present in the PB and identity classes. In the beginning of the semester, I would start in the class that according to the schedule was supposed to have identity or PB class. However, the principal asked me after a few weeks if I could spend most of the first shift with a Kindergarten class, as this was a big class that needed extra assistance. I mostly spent one session of the first shift with one of the other classes that had PB or Identity class and then returned to the Kindergarten class as this was what the principal and I found as the best solution. During the second shift, I would start in one class and change class during the shift in accordance with who had PB or identity class. Some days during the week the teachers would have these classes at the same time, so I chose to assist in the one teacher's class one week, and the other teacher's class the following week. At times when none of the teachers were having PB or identity class, I would just stay and assist in the academic classes or assist in the administration.

I did all of my interviews at the end of my fieldwork, as I wanted to observe as much as possible first. This gave me a better understanding of the situation and made it possible for me to adapt my questions to what I had observed myself. I started by interviewing the administrative staff and then the teachers. Both the teachers and the administrative staff at first claimed that they did not experience conflicts in school because of the ongoing war in Syria. The school has a clear policy that one is not to talk about politics and religion in school. However, when I asked certain questions or asked them about cases I had observed myself, it became clear that they indeed had experienced such conflicts.

My interviews were semi-structured, which means that I had an interview guide with questions that I wanted the answers to. My questions were mostly open-ended, and I therefore expected my informants to answer several of my questions at once as they had the chance to give an extensive answer. Sometimes their answers went in a different direction than my intention, in which case I asked follow-up questions if I had any. Then with the help of my interview guide, I led with questions back to what I wanted to talk about.

I conducted most of my interviews with the teachers purely in Arabic. I also conducted some of the interviews with the teachers in both Arabic and English, in terms with the teachers'

own preferences. I conducted interviews with the academic counselor, the counselor, and the principal in English as this was the most natural language for us to communicate in. I experienced some problems with some of the teachers that tried to reply in English, as they had trouble expressing themselves; but as soon as they switched to Arabic, and understood that I understood them, the interviews got a better flow, and they opened up more. I made it very clear that they could choose between English and Arabic, or mix the languages, all dependent on what they were most comfortable with.

I decided to conduct some of my interviews in school as many of the teachers had other jobs, some were studying, and some had children to go home to. I did not want to take too much of their time, especially if I knew that there might not be much information to gather from their interviews. This was true with the teachers of the kindergarten classes that did not experience the same situations in class. As a result of my attendance in the classes and my interaction with the teachers before the interviews, I had some idea of what to expect from the interviews.

The combination of participating in the classrooms and conducting interviews gave me an incredibly valuable insight into the school's way of empowering the children as Syrians which will be demonstrated in the following.

4 Jusoor

In one of the classrooms, a group of twenty children were sitting by their desks. Their ages were between nine and fourteen, but they were all in the same class, studying at the same level. What they had in common is that none of them had been to school before, and they had all fled Syria. The children were looking down on their empty papers; with full focus, they started drawing. Some drew airplanes, some drew bikes, and some drew cars. They were asked to draw something they wish for. When the teacher asked why they drew these things, they answered that they wanted these means of transportation for them to return to Syria. They were not happy in Beirut.

The school in Beirut was centrally located in a busy street behind a blue gate. From the outside, one could not see that it was a school there, but one could hear it if walking by during the school day. There was a small schoolyard of concrete where the children lined up every morning and where they had their breaks. There were no swing sets, basketball hoops, or other equipment there; the area was too small. In the end of the school yard there was a small house where the children's restrooms were located with two separate entrances, one for the girls and one for the boys. The school yard was pink, green, and blue, and the walls inside the school were blue, yellow, and purple. There were a little over 200 children enrolled in school that year.

Picture taken during sports class in the school yard.[56]

[56] As the school has an open policy on using pictures of the children I have chosen to do so as well as all names in this thesis are anonymized. The children are only mentioned as students which makes them impossible to identify.

Jusoor was established by Syrian expatriates in 2011 and opened its first school in Lebanon in Beirut in 2013 and two schools in the Beqaa-valley in 2014.[57] The organization also grants scholarships and has mentor programs for Syrian university students. My focus will only be on the organization's work on educating children in Lebanon, by looking at their school in Beirut. As mentioned in the introduction, the Jusoor schools are providing non-formal education, which means preparing the children for public school. The children will not get an official certificate from Jusoor as one gets in public school, which in turn gives an opportunity for higher education.

The Jusoor schools teach the academic classes of Arabic, English, Science, and Math, which is taught with English terms as this is needed in Lebanese public school. Additionally, Jusoor gives lessons in the non-academic classes: identity, peace building, art, and sports. Every morning the school day in each class was supposed to start with Circle Time (CT), which lasted for 10 to 15 minutes where the children could talk about things that had happened previously or share their feelings about previous events or other matters they were thinking about. This was meant for the children to be "[...] practicing listening skills, sharing openly and connecting to their feelings, reaching agreements on how to treat each other[...]"[58] which Jusoor also considers a part of their peace education.

CT did not always turn out as it was intended; sometimes the teachers would start directly with the academic classes or with repetition of what the class did in, for instance, Arabic class the day before. For the Kindergarten classes, personal hygiene was usually on the agenda during CT. During CT on Mondays, the children often shared what they had done during the weekend.

Jusoor places the children in the different levels based on their academic level and not by their age. The children must do a placement test in Arabic, and based on the result they will be placed in the most appropriate class. As mentioned, some classes could consist of children from the ages of eight to fifteen. It was clear to see that some of the older children had a lack of confidence as the younger children at times would learn more quickly and would develop their skills faster.

When I asked the administrative staff how many of the children enroll in public school after a year or two with Jusoor, they told me that they do not have the chance to follow up on all of

[57] Jusoor, "Refugee Education Program."
[58] Alkateb-Chami, Roots, and Tutunji, "Jusoor's Educational Model for Teaching Refugee Children." 30

the children as this would mean that they need more volunteers for such a project. In addition, some of my informants claimed that public schools will not let them enter the schools, so in turn they would need other means to reach the former students or their parents. They however believed that around 40% of their former students enrolled in public school, which is a quite low number as one of Jusoor's main purposes is to prepare the children for public school.

There are no school fees for enrolling in Jusoor's schools. It is also possible to register without having official documents of previous education and/or identity papers, although the school prefers having such documents. The children are given backpacks and basic equipment such as notebooks and pencils, which are provided by other NGOs.

The teachers and the administrative staff

The teachers at Jusoor were a quite diverse group of people. There were seven homeroom teachers, which are the teachers responsible for the class and the teachers who give all lectures except English classes. Five of the homeroom teachers were teaching two shifts each, while two of them only had one shift each. There were three English teachers. There was diversity in the teachers' teaching methods, in the way they were dressing, their ages, gender, and in their religious beliefs. Yet, at the beginning of the school year, all of the homeroom teachers were women, two out of three of the English teachers were men, and only later on there came two more men, one who was assisting in the class, and the other who became a homeroom teacher.

The principal and the vice principal were both men, and the academic counselor and the counselor were women. Most of the teachers were in their 20s and early 30s, while a few were in their late 30s and 40s. One of the teachers was married, one was widowed and lived alone with her children after losing her husband in the war, one was divorced living with her children, and the younger teachers were unmarried. Those that were unmarried and with no children were usually active in other organizations as well. All the teachers were Syrian except for one that was Lebanese. There were three Lebanese working at the school in Beirut: the academic counselor, the counselor, and one teacher. Although the rest of the staff were Syrian, most of them were from different areas such as Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, and Homs to mention a few.

Furthermore, the teachers also had different educational backgrounds such as law, fine arts, engineering, and physics, among others. The academic counselor said that in addition to having higher education, it is a requirement that the person applying for a job at Jusoor's schools has some kind of experience of working with refugee children. Some of the teachers had previously volunteered or worked with other organizations in Lebanon, and some of them had done so in Syria before they came to Lebanon. The Lebanese teacher had no previous experience working with refugee children, however, she was the only one that was educated as a teacher, and she had previously worked in a private school in Lebanon, i.e. she had valuable experience in the Lebanese curricula.

The teachers had different motivations for working with Jusoor; the majority of them wanted to contribute to the hopeless situation for Syrian children missing out on education, but for very few it seemed that it was the only way for them to have an income.

The interaction between the teachers varied a lot. The principal told me that a lot had changed since the year before. At that time the teachers barely interacted, but now they gathered in the breakroom, which we decorated during the first week of school. He wanted the breakroom to look more inviting for the teachers to sit together and socialize more. Some of them were at times gathering after work as well. The principal wanted the teachers to interact more as he believed this would make the teachers happier at work. He hoped that this would result in more motivation from their side, and thought this would result in better classes for the children and less turnover of teachers.

In the breakroom, the teachers would talk about all kinds of subjects; however, I never heard them discussing the civil war in Syria. Jusoor has a strict policy of not talking about religion or politics. One of the teachers went to Damascus during a weekend, and when she returned there was talk about how the situation was, and all the road blocks and check points in the city. She also said that "kull l-ʿālam fī sh-shām" (everyone is in Damascus)[59], claiming that there were much more people there now than before, as many Syrians from other cities and areas have fled to the capital. Some of the others agreed and asked specific questions about Damascus, but none of the teachers had further comments that could have started a discussion related to politics. Sometimes the teachers would not interact much in the break room, but they rather would sit on their phones, either in the break room or in their classrooms.

[59] Literally: the whole world is in Damascus. She used the word "Shām" for Damascus instead of the official word Dimashq, as many Syrians do.

In the following, I will give a short presentation of the principal and two of the teachers that I have most examples from.

Yusuf – The principal

Yusuf is Syrian and was in his late 20s/early 30s. He was full of creative ideas and highly motivated in his work. He had worked as a teacher for six months before he was promoted as the principal of the school in Beirut. He had studied international relations and told me that he at first saw the job at Jusoor as something temporary as education was not his field; however, when I met with him he had stayed with Jusoor for a little less than a year, and he said that he found his job very rewarding and important, and that this was a field that he might want to stay in for a long time. He was also volunteering with another NGO in the evening.

Yusuf had many creative ideas for making the lessons fun for the children, as he believed this would result in them learning more. He wanted the schools to learn from teaching methods used in the West rather than sticking to the traditional Syrian way of teaching. Additionally, he was engaged in gender-issues, which reflected on some of the classes and the decisions made at school.

Yusuf also found it very important that the children learn to empathize. He usually solved problems between two students by trying to make them understand how the other was feeling, which he claimed was a very efficient approach.

Lina – Level 1

Lina is a highly-motivated teacher in her early 20s. She is Syrian and studied law there. She had taken several peace building classes for Syrians in Lebanon and used some of the exercises she had learned with her class. Lina wanted to work with Syrian children and education as she saw this as a great opportunity to change something within the children. She claimed that it is the children that can make a change for the future, and that it is very important to give the children the idea of being able to make a change for the better. She found it very rewarding to see the changes she could make within the children.

Lina was one of the teachers that used most variation in her exercises during her PB and identity classes. She was very concerned with the children having fun while learning, as was the principal, and she wanted to give the children the feeling of the school and their class

being a safe place for them. Lina also found empathy important and wanted the children to learn and reflect on how their "bad" actions affect the other children. The children's ages ranged between six and eleven.

Sara – Class for older children that had never been to school before

Sara is also from Syria and in her early 20s. Sara was a newly graduated engineer. She had been working with Jusoor for a year, and she was also working part time as a research assistant at one of the biggest Universities in Beirut. Sara had worked with an NGO that also educated refugee children in Syria before coming to Lebanon.

Sara was also highly motivated in her work, and she was very concerned about empowering the children as Syrians. Sara would always use her breaks to talk to the children, mostly about Syria and in asking them where they are from. She tried to make Syria a natural part of their conversations, but she also talked to them about their favorite toys and what they did over the weekend and other topics.

In the beginning of the school year, Sara did not have her own class, but she assisted as an English teacher where it was needed. After almost a month, she got her own class with students that registered late, mostly because they did not get a spot in public school. Her class consisted of children that have never been to school before. The children's ages ranged between nine and fifteen.

5 Where are you from?

The answers to the question, "Where are you from?" had in general changed over the years according to several of my informants. However, at the beginning of each year, there was still a high number of children that either did not know where they were from, or they did not want to share this information with their peers. How were the teachers trying to change this, and why were they doing it?

Why is this question important?

Is it wrong of the children that are born in Beirut, to claim that they are from Beirut? Is the question of where these children are from of any importance at all? Indeed, it is important for several reasons that these children learn about their background/their parent's background. When the war ends, peace building and rebuilding the country will be essential. According to my informants, this will be the task of the children, as they are the generation of tomorrow. One of Jusoor's goals is that the children will learn positive things about Syria in order for them to have an urge to return and rebuild the country when it is time for that. Additionally, empowering the children as proud Syrians and teaching them peaceful and respectful manners might be a vital building block to a future peaceful Syria.

Moreover, these children will most probably *not* have a bright future in Lebanon; they will most likely *never* become Lebanese. The counselor told me that it is "important to keep the Syrian identity alive for the children, although they have lived all their life in Lebanon, they need to understand that they are not Lebanese, they are Syrian and one day they will have to return to rebuild Syria." Yet, it is likely that a number of the current Syrian refugees in Lebanon will never be able to return due to losing everything in Syria. As with the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon that have been in the country for decades, it is likely that the Syrians that will remain in Lebanon will follow a similar path, which means that these Syrians will always be seen as Syrians and second-class residents in which Syrian empowerment can also be important.

National identity in the view of Jusoor

During Jusoor's identity classes, the children are to either develop a stronger feeling towards their country, or to create a feeling towards Syria if they were not aware that they are Syrian or if they do not know anything about Syria. As many Syrians in Lebanon are surrounded by negative speak about their country, the school found it important that these children learn about the positive things as well. As mentioned, the goal of Jusoor is that these children learn and feel committed to returning to Syria and contributing to the rebuilding of the country in the future. In order to create this feeling, Jusoor has focused on certain aspects in their identity classes. The main focus, according to their guidelines[60], is on:

- Syrian geography
- Syrian food, music and art
- Syrian historic sites
- The country's ethnic diversity

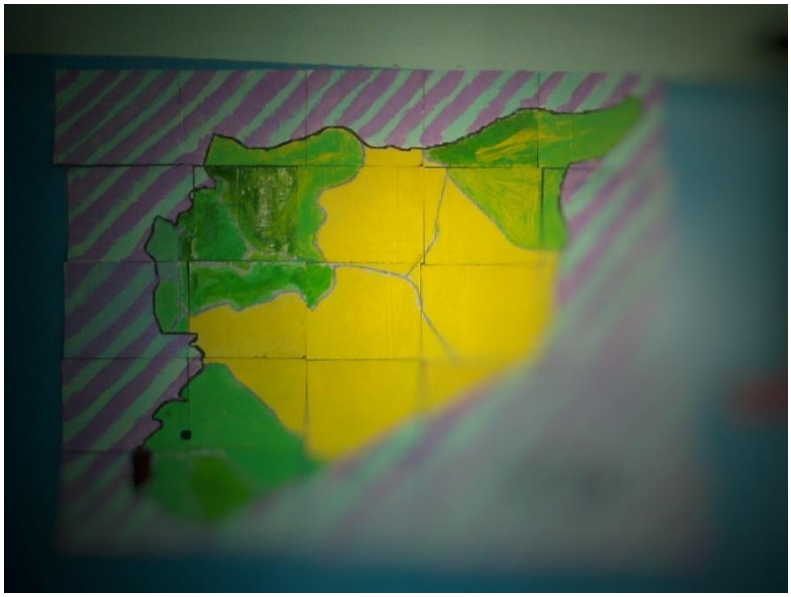
As I conducted my fieldwork during the beginning of the semester, geography was of main importance during all of the classes I assisted in. During my interviews, several of the teachers told me that they usually talk about Syrian food, music, and other forms of art, in addition to historic sites in their identity classes. However, none of the teachers mentioned specifically ethnic diversity as a topic they teach. Yet, several of them mentioned that they teach the children what the different cities are famous for in terms of food, clothes, and arts, which might include some aspects of ethnic diversity.

Moreover, the teachers had different religious leanings. Although, as far as I know, they were all Syrian Arabs. Some of the children were from cities that are mainly Kurdish, although none of these children claimed being Kurdish as this was not a topic. There are also Arab Syrians living in Kurdish areas, and I therefore do not know if there were any Kurds or other ethnic groups present in school. However, at least in the beginning of the semester, this was not something that was discussed.

[60] Alkateb-Chami, Roots, and Tutunji, "Jusoor's Educational Model for Teaching Refugee Children." 30

6 How is Syria brought up in class?

Lina's class, which had students in the age range from six to eleven, was one day sitting in a circle in the school's hall. A big map of Syria was on the wall next to them. One of the teachers made it with his class a few years back. The different provinces are marked, but not named.[61]



The children were asked to name the different provinces of Syria. Most of them mentioned cities in Lebanon, such as Beirut and Tripoli; one child mentioned Germany. None of them knew any of the Syrian provinces. Lina showed the children the different provinces on the map, focusing on the provinces that the children are from. She also brought a globe and asked the children one by one to come up to her to look at the globe. She showed them Syria, and she asked the children, also one by one, to mention one place they wanted to visit, which she also showed them on the globe. The children mentioned countries such as Canada, Sweden, Germany, and Algeria. They did not say why they chose these countries, but they might have relatives or friends there, or heard other people wanting to go to these places.

In this class it became very clear that the children's knowledge of Syria was very limited. Most of the children that mentioned other Lebanese cities probably did so because that was where they lived before coming to Beirut. These might also be the only other cities they have

[61] Names on the picture are censored as I do not write any real names in this paper.

visited, or because they have friends or family members living in these cities. By using a globe in class, and by showing the children Syria and the other countries that the children wanted to visit, Lina is showing them that the world is much bigger than the reality they are living in right now. The world is big, and as it is written on her classroom door, "The sky is the limit". Although, in practice, most of these children will possibly have few opportunities in life if remaining in Lebanon, in addition to limited opportunities of leaving the country.

Later on, during the same class, Lina told the class her name, age, which area/province and which city she is from, and that her nationality is Syrian. Then, she asked the children to share the same information about them. Several of the children did not know or want to share where they are from. After the teacher emphasized that it is safe to share this information with their classmates, several opened up and told the others. However, for those that still did not know, the teacher asked them to go home and ask their parents in order for them to tell the class next time.

The fact that Lina asked all the children to say that their identity (hawiyyatī) is Syrian seems to be a way of internalizing this by repetition in their minds. All the children repeated that their nationality is Syrian when they were to say these things out loud. A few forgot to do so, so as this was the last thing they were to say (name, age, area and/or city, then that they are

Syrian), Lina always reminded them. During this class the children could see that they were all Syrians, which might have created a group identity for the children, as Syrians. In addition, as all the children were to express this individually, also with their name, age and area/city they are from, this was very individual and personal information. The children connected being Syrian to them personally, which seemed to be new to several of them.

It was clear to see that the children enjoyed these classes; they happily went out to the hall where they were sitting in a circle together. There was also a noticeable difference from week to week with the children learning more about Syria. They became more relaxed and open towards each other. In the very beginning of the semester, several of the children were hesitant to share where they are from, as some probably have been told by their parents that they should not share this information. Others truly did not know. However, during my stay with Jusoor, all children ended up sharing this information. The children's development of being more open and trusting of each other, and their increased knowledge of Syria, shows the impact these classes might have on the children.

In the teacher Nora's PB-class, which she introduced as art class, she asked the students to draw something they like or feel strongly about. Some of the students drew beautiful houses. "This was my house in Syria," most of those drawing houses said. One boy drew a flag—the Lebanese flag. He said he drew it because he is thankful for being in Lebanon as Syria is not a safe place to be. Another boy drew the Syrian flag and wrote "Sūriyā ʿumrī" (Syria my life) on it. Most of the drawings had one thing in common, namely Syria. This class was the highest level at Jusoor, level 2. Most of these children did not remember Syria well, but some of them did. In addition, some of their parents have showed them pictures of the houses they used to live in in Syria: big, spacious houses with beautiful gardens in the countryside, some of them with pets. Some of the parents have told the children how much better their lives were in Syria. The contrast is huge to the life most of them are living today with big families, sometimes several families, in one tiny apartment or room in the city.

This was an interesting class as two of the children drew flags. Flags came up as a subject several times when I interviewed the teachers. In previous classes, some of the children had drawn the Free Syrian Army flag and not the official Syrian flag. The principal told me that he did not want the children to do so. He said that it is okay that people want change in the country, but he rhetorically asked if that meant that everything had to change, such as the flag. He also said that the FSA flag is the same as was used during the French-mandate. When he

told me this, he sarcastically laughed and again asked rhetorically, "What do they want, do they want to go back to the French-mandate?". He also told me that he would usually explain to the children that the flag might change later, but as of now there is only one flag for Syria, as other countries and the UN do not know the FSA flag.

The flag is interesting as it is one of the main national symbols. Among the teachers that I interviewed, none of them told me that they would correct the children if they drew the flag of the opposition. The teacher Adam told me that, "We don't tell them that this is not right. It is not our job. We don't talk about politics." Another teacher that had previously worked with Jusoor for three years, and who was working as a substitute teacher for a week while I was there, told me a story from a few years back. When the children in her class drew the different flags and would start discussing them, she would ask the children why they drew as they did. When they claimed loyalty to the different sides, she would say that it is okay to draw both flags, but that the children needed to respect each other even when they do not agree, and "We are in school to learn. We need to understand that we are two sides. We need to go back and rebuild together". She said that the children did not immediately understand, but step-by-step they got used to the idea.

Even though Jusoor has a policy on not talking about war and politics, the teachers deal with this in different ways. Regarding the flag, some of the teachers say they do not interfere in this matter, while others talk to the children and ask them why or tell them that Syria only has one flag. The teachers interpret the policy in the way they see fit and perhaps dependent on how they feel the children will react to it.

Syria is mentioned in different ways in the different classes. Several of the teachers emphasized the importance of talking about Syria in all classes, and not only during identity class. Amal, the academic counselor, also said that the long-term goal is that talk about Syria and Syrian identity becomes integrated in the other classes as well; so far there has not been a good way of doing this, so for now the identity class is needed as a separate class. There was big variation in how the teachers organized their classes and how much they brought Syria up, either as a subject, or just as a casual example of something.

Do you want to return to Syria?

During identity class, the question of if the children wanted to return to Syria was often brought up. Once, in Lina's class, a few of the children said that they did not want to return because it is not safe and that they are scared. Lina emphasized that it was okay to be scared and to not want to return at that moment, but rather when the war is over. When Lina said this, one boy suddenly said, "The war is over!" The other children looked confused. Lina quickly said, "No. The war is not over." During the same week, the teacher Adam asked me if I had heard the news that the UN claimed that the war is over; his American friend had told him that she had read that. The news was that Staffan de Mistura, the UNs Envoy to Syria, had claimed that the war in Syria was soon to be over, and that the opposition needed to accept that it had not won the war.[62] That story had clearly also reached some of the children, but not all. The children listened to Lina when she firmly claimed that the war is not over. The children seemed to listen to her and the question around if the children wanted to return or not continued. Those who at the beginning were hesitant to say that they wanted to return, seemed to change their mind when they heard the other children say that they wanted to return. Lina also said that she wanted to return, and that they all together would rebuild Syria.

When the same question of return was mentioned in Hiba's class, more of the children said that they wanted to return now regardless of the war being over or not. These children were older and most of them have some memories of Syria. It was in Hiba's class where most of the children drew planes, cars, motorcycles, and bicycles when asked to draw something they wish for, as they wanted these things to be able to return to Syria. They claimed that they miss their houses. Although, for some of them, their houses are no longer there. Usually the younger children would say no or be more reluctant towards returning to Syria, which might be natural, as they have never been to Syria. They do not know what it is like, except for what they might see on TV or hear their parents and other adults talk about.

One of the aims of Jusoor is, as mentioned, that the children will want to go back to rebuild Syria. Asking the children if they want to return might be important in order to keep the idea and possibility of that alive for the children. In addition, this is again an example where the school uses internalizing by repetition as a method as the children are to repeat that they want to return several times. As for the class with the older children where several claimed that they want to return now, the teacher had to emphasize that the children need to be patient and

[62] Miles, "Syrian Opposition Must Accept It Has Not Won the War."

that they will be able to return and make Syria even more beautiful than it was, but that the time for that has not yet come.

Conflicts with the "other"

One day in Sara's class, which consisted of children between the ages of eight and fourteen that had never been to school before, one student refused to talk to his classmates. Sara asked him why. He answered, "Because they are Lebanese. I can't be friends with Lebanese. I don't even want to talk to you; you are also Lebanese (referring to Sara)". The other students sat at their desks quietly; some looked at the student speaking, some looked at the teacher, and some looked down at their desks. Sara replied calmly and kindly, "No, everyone here is Syrian. There are no Lebanese here. We are all from the same country. But we need to be grateful for the Lebanese letting us stay here until we can return to Syria. We need to be kind to those that are kind to us". First, the child refused a bit, then he seemed to have his mind full of thoughts before he restlessly went back to his chair.

There is a certain level of hostility between Syrians and Lebanese. Sara told me during the first week at school that Lebanese people are not treating Syrians well. She is feeling the discrimination herself. She told me, "The Lebanese don't like us. We hear it all the time. Especially when driving in service (a shared taxi). They blame us for all the problems in this country." She told me that she usually adapts her dialect to the Lebanese, as it is easier that way. She also said that the children experience the same things when they are outside. They hear adults talking down at them and speaking badly about Syria and Syrians, and she claimed that some of the children start believing it and start talking badly about Syria themselves. She explained that some children get violent and speak like the boy in her class did; some say that they hate the Lebanese. Sara told me that she always tells the children that not all Lebanese are bad people, and not all are good, just as there are both good and bad Syrians, but she firmly stated that, "We need to be good to those that are good to us." Sara tried to teach the children how to be proud of Syria and at the same time be grateful for Lebanon letting them stay there. She also emphasized that one cannot generalize, and that many Lebanese are good people. Again, respect and understanding were an important part of identity class.

The academic counselor told me a story from a few years back that one of the former students refused to participate in one of the teacher's classes. He would not even talk to the teacher. At first no one understood what the problem was, but after talking to Amal and the previous

principal, the student said that he would not participate in this teacher's class because he was a Christian. Amal talked to the parents, who were shocked. They did not have values like that in their home, they claimed, and the parents did not understand where the child got these ideas from. After a few weeks, the parents contacted Amal and said that they now understood more. The child had often been with his uncle when he was watching the news. This uncle would comment negative things about Christians, and Amal told me that it later came out that his uncle had returned to Syria to join Daesh. The academic counselor said that they try to pick up on behavior like that quickly, and that they do not tolerate it in their schools. The children must respect each other despite having different religious beliefs.

Triandafyllidou argues that "[...]national identity has no meaning per se. It becomes meaningful in contrast to other nations."[63] i.e. the "other" is needed for a group to feel belonging. This is evident in very many countries today as the world and especially Europe is entering a more nationalistic direction. It is also evident in Lebanon as both Syrians and Lebanese in general are seeing "the other" as very different from oneself. As the boy in Sara's class claimed that he cannot be friends with the Lebanese, he is clearly aware that he is Syrian, and he seems to have a perception of Syrians and Lebanese being so different from each other that they cannot interact. Even though Sara expressed to me that the Lebanese in general do not treat Syrians well, she repeatedly stated to her class that they need to be grateful that they may stay in Lebanon and that they need to behave well and be good for the Lebanese to do so in return.

[63] Triandafyllidou, "National Identity and the 'Other.'" 599

7 How is Syria *not* brought up in class?

One day in Lina's Arabic class, she was absent that day and Khalīl was her substitute teacher, the students were learning the letter "ب". They were asked to say words that start with a "ب" or have "ب" in it. After a few rounds, a boy said the word/name "Bashshār". Another boy said "mīn Bashshār?" (who is Bashar?). The teacher quickly said that Bashar can be the name of a young boy and an old man. He continued by saying, "In this case let's say it is Bashar, a young boy". A girl entered the conversation and said, "There is only one Bashar, the big Bashar". All the students looked at what was going on, but only three of the students said something. Two of them seemed to be talking in favor of Bashar al-Assad, claiming that there is only one Bashar, the big Bashar. While the third one asked, "Who is Bashar?" with skepticism all over his face. The teacher again said, "Now we are talking about Bashar, a young boy," and he continued with other examples of words starting with the letter "ب". The students followed the teachers lead and the discussion ended.

This is an example of a situation that quickly could have developed to a big and unpleasant discussion. However, the teacher used avoidance as his strategy as he smoothly avoided getting further into the subject by not taking part in or giving the children room to express their feelings or attitudes. The children did not look bothered when he continued asking the other children for words starting with the letter "ب", after he firmly stated that Bashar was a young boy in this case. The children know that they are not allowed to talk about the war or politics, but naturally things like this come up as the children have associations with certain words.

However, one day Sara did the opposite during her identity class. Sara asked the students where they are from. Her class was rather quiet at this point. There was little to no talk between the students. At first, most of them said that they do not know where they are from. After a while, Sara told them that it is okay to share with their classmates where they are from. One of them said he is from Aleppo, and then more children said they are from Aleppo. According to the school's administration, almost 80% of the children at the school are from Aleppo. One boy said he was from Idlib, the trust started to grow, and the conversation got more participants.

Suddenly the boy who just said he was from Idlib started talking about Daesh. Sara asked him, "How do you know about Deash?" He looked confused. The teacher repeated, "From where did you hear about Daesh? You said you are from Idlib. Daesh is not in Idlib." The student still looked confused, and another girl started talking about when Daesh came to her house and forced her, her mother, and her aunt to fully cover up. Another boy started talking about when his house was bombed. He said that there was blood everywhere and that his uncle died. The ice seemed to be broken. But the initial question was where the children are from, and only a few of the students had answered that question before the conversation took a very different turn.

This situation demonstrates how the conversation among the students went from one rather simple thing and ended up at a totally different place. It also reveals how the students are reluctant to share where they are from, and how traumatic experiences and things they might have heard are lying on the surface waiting for an opportunity to come out. One thing that is important to emphasize is the initial question, "where are you from?". Some of the children might relate where they are from to these traumatic experiences, while some of them might have gotten triggered by talk about Daesh or the other children's stories.

In this class, Sara chose to dig further into the subject rather than avoiding it, as she was asking questions about where the boy had heard of Daesh. However, she never asked about anyone's opinions, only about where he had heard about them. Likely because she wanted to see if he was connected to them in any way, as had been the case with the former student that refused to talk to his Christian teacher.

However, it is not odd that most of these children have heard about Daesh, when Daesh might be the reason why many of them were forced to leave Syria. Daesh has been a central group in Syria, and therefore it is almost impossible not to hear of it, even as a child. As mentioned, most of these children live in crowded places where it is impossible for the children to avoid the news if the radio or TV are on, or to hear the discussions that the adults are having.

During a civil war, the inhabitants of a country are in conflict because they want different things for their country. The Syrian refugees have fled for different reasons. Some have fled to avoid joining the military service, regardless of whether they support the regime or not. Some have fled from the government, some have fled from Daesh, some have fled from other groups, and some have fled because their area is no longer safe, and/or they no longer have a place to live, among other reasons. Living as a Syrian refugee in Beirut, only hours away from

the Syrian border and in a community with other Syrians, can create conflicts based on the war. Politics is not to be discussed in Jusoor's schools, but naturally topics related to politics and the war occur. The teachers are mostly using avoidance as their strategy for discussions and conflicts not to occur. However, some of them choose to dig deeper into some of the topics that the children mention, perhaps because they want to learn what the children know in order to discover if they are in danger of being radicalized or to see if they have experienced things which could be useful for the counselor to talk to them about.

8 Peacebuilding – Bina' al-salām

In one of Sara's PB-classes, she asked the children to line up in two lines facing each other. The person they were facing was their partner during the exercise. By turn, the children in the two lines were in charge of doing different movements for their partner to copy. Approximately half of the children immediately found this exercise amusing and did everything from dance and sport movements to different facial expressions. Some needed to look at their peers for inspiration before they started themselves. However, a few of the students did not want to participate and did not do any movements. This led the partners of those refusing to participate to copy the student next to them instead. Sara said that everyone had to participate and that they could do whatever movement they wanted. Those that participated mostly laughed and giggled and seemed to have a good time.

This session was during the first month of the semester, and Sara wanted the class to get to know each other better and for them to have fun and build a bond between them. There had been little communication between the students of her class, and it was in this class that one of the boys had claimed that he could not play with his classmates because he believed they were Lebanese. PB-class seemed to be a good way for the children in Sara's class to grow confident and trust each other as most of the children laughed and loosened up.

As cited by Struckland and Duvvury, Peacebuilding is according to The Canadian Peacebuilding Initiative Strategic Framework, "…the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict."[64] In Jusoor's PB-classes, the children got a chance to express their feelings and reflect on their thoughts. The aim is for the children to learn to respect each other despite their differences, learn how to communicate, admit to and apologize for their mistakes, and forgive their peers, in addition to building trust. All these features will be valuable when the children one day return to Syria, but they are just as important in their current daily life, and they may help by improving their lives and daily communication with peers, family, and friends.

According to my informants, the students are getting calmer each year, and they claimed that there were less problems that year (2017) compared to the years before in terms of fights

[64] Strickland and Duvvury, "Gender Equity and Peacebuilding: From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way."

between the students and individuals acting out. The academic counselor said that there are several reasons for this. She mentioned that one of the reasons might be the implementation and development of peacebuilding and identity classes. In addition, many of the students are siblings of former Jusoor students; the parents know the way and the children learn from their siblings. Also, as most of the new students are born in Lebanon, they do not suffer from trauma themselves, but from secondary trauma, which might be another reason. Secondary trauma means that these children have not witnessed traumatic or war-related situations themselves. However, their parents are traumatized, i.e. they are brought up by people with trauma, where the majority of them are not getting the help they need to deal with these traumas.

However, another possible reason why the children are calmer, that randomly came to my knowledge, was the fact that the school at times kicked students out if they did not behave properly, i.e. if they were too noisy or were bothering other students. The principal briefly mentioned to me after an incident with a boy that was noisy and bothered his classmates, that "he cannot be in school if he cannot behave". When I read about Jusoor before I did my fieldwork, helping children with trauma and special needs seemed to be one of their targets. However, they might not have the capacity to give extra assistance to all the children that need it, as Jusoor is an NGO with limited resources. However, it is not odd that the students are calmer if the students that are not calm get kicked out. I did not get to ask the principal more about this subject as it seemed to be a sensitive topic. Therefore, I do not know how many students this happened to.

Nonetheless, I noticed a difference myself between the first weeks at school and the weeks before I returned to Norway. Some classes changed a lot. Lina's class especially became very peaceful, quiet, and respectful to each other. She was the teacher most engaged in these classes, which might also point to the results these classes could give if all teachers were as engaged. However, the principal was well aware that there were different levels of commitment to the PB-classes. He told me that he was not fond of the school's manual for peacebuilding, and that he wanted to change it as several of the teachers are confused about how to arrange these classes.

Art as therapy

A common exercise during PB-class was drawing. The students were asked several times to draw something they like or want, either for the future or now. Sometimes the teacher asked the students to talk about their drawings and what the ideas behind them were; at other times, the students drew, put the drawings away when they were done, and then started the next class.

Art class may have different effects on the children. It can give them space for expressing feelings, memories, and their wishes. Additionally, it may help with reducing stress as the children are sitting quietly and focusing only on creating something on the empty paper. This again may function as a way to empower the children as their confidence may increase as they are creating something themselves.

Several of my informants that had been with Jusoor for several years claimed that there has been a big transition from war-related drawings, such as bombs, blood, tanks, and warplanes, to more peaceful drawings such as the children drawing their old houses or their future houses, flowers, pets, and the like. According to my informants, the main reason why this has changed is because more of the children are secondary traumatized as mentioned earlier. Going only a few years back, more of the children appeared to be traumatized and had war-related memories from Syria and their escape. Each year a higher number of the children enrolling in Jusoor's schools are born in Lebanon.

To some extent I experienced a difference between the oldest children and the younger ones. The conversations about Daesh and stories told about bombings, blood, and war were only told by the older children. These children might have been traumatized themselves or have heard detailed stories by those that are older than them.

Art class may also be a way of empowering the children as it gives them an opportunity to sit down with their own thoughts and dreams, which they can transform from the blank sheet. They can create something. In every class there was always someone who claimed they did not know how to draw. This occurred both in the classes with the younger students and with the older ones. Similar for both was the excitement in their eyes when they were pushed to draw, and when they succeeded. Drawing may give them peace of mind while they are working on their art pieces. They might get empowered as they can see how they can create something themselves; and as many of the children draw things related to Syria, this class also helps them connect to their Syrian background and identity.

Building trust through yoga and meditation

Lina told me that during the summer voluntary program,[65] one of the volunteers taught yoga as this is a good way for the children to deal with their stressful lives and their trauma or secondary trauma. Sometimes Lina would teach yoga in her PB-class. Most of the children were usually very excited about this. During one of her sessions, the children did some breathing exercises and were later asked to go together in pairs. They were asked to stand towards each other, the one student's palms against the other student's palms. Then they were supposed to lean towards each other, balancing on one leg, leaning forward as much as they could. They were dependent on each other and on their communication and trust to stay in balance. Some of the children managed to stay in balance quickly, but most of them needed several attempts to succeed. The attempts were filled with laughter.

This exercise taught the children to trust each other, and it taught them to look each other in the eyes to cooperate with their peers in order to succeed. It also gave them a good laugh which may also create trust and communion among the children. The children were paired up regardless of gender, which Lina also found important. Lina ended the class with meditation; some of the children were giggling, while some of them seemed to be very peaceful in their own world and did not want to stop when the class was over. The teacher gave them peace building in this form as it calms them down, and as meditation can be a good tool to help PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), she said.

Building trust by confessing and forgiving

During one of Lina's PB-classes, she again gathered the children in the hall. Lina asked the children one by one to tell her and the class which of their peers they had bothered, and that they were to apologize for it. After the apology, the rest of the class applauded the student for her/his honesty and apology. It was clear to see by the expression on their faces that they at first were a bit scared to admit what they had done; some of the students would at first deny that they had done something. Lina would then ask more questions. If the student still denied it, she would ask the class if anyone had been bothered by the person in question. Usually

[65] Jusoor welcomes a limited number of volunteers from all over the world during the summer to have activities for the children and the teachers.

someone said yes and what the person had done. Some of the children would continue to deny it. Lina then said that they were only to tell what they had done and apologize for it, and that it was okay if they had done something wrong as long as they were honest about it and apologized for it. After a while all the students loosened up and started admitting what they had done with a smile on their face, and an even bigger smile when they got their applause after apologizing. A couple of the students in the class had not bothered anyone; they got their applause as well.

This exercise was meant to encourage the children to be honest, remorseful, and forgiving. Lina claimed this will bring the class closer to each other. In addition, the principal told me that the essential for succeeding with peace building is being able to admit and apologize for what one has done, being able to forgive and have a non-violent behavior. Lina's exercise in class can be seen as training on doing exactly that. Many people have hurt each other during a civil war, many people have fought on opposing sides, and apologies and forgiveness will be an important key to building peace and remaining in peace when that day comes.

What would you do if you were the president?

During Lina's PB-class another week, her class was again gathered in the school's hall. The teacher brought the class's doll, which they called Mr.Mutaḥaddith (Mr. Spokesman). Only the child with the doll was allowed to speak, either on behalf of herself/himself, or on behalf of the doll. This was a way to make the children open up. If they spoke on behalf of the doll, they might be able to share more as it is less frightening to talk on behalf of "someone" else. The teacher asked the children to think about what they would do or change if they were king/queen/president. Most of the children said that they would help the people by protecting them and giving them money and food. One student mentioned something negative about Deash, but the teacher quickly said, "no talk about politics," and the conversation continued. Several of the children said that they would give money to the poor and/or beggars. The teacher said that it was wrong to give beggars money as this would only make people lazy. She continued by telling them that the right thing to do is to create jobs and encourage people to work.

When Lina said that one should not give money to the poor, the children looked confused. Some of these children work on the street when they are not in school; usually they sell paper tissues or chewing gum. Some of them might be begging in the street as well, which might

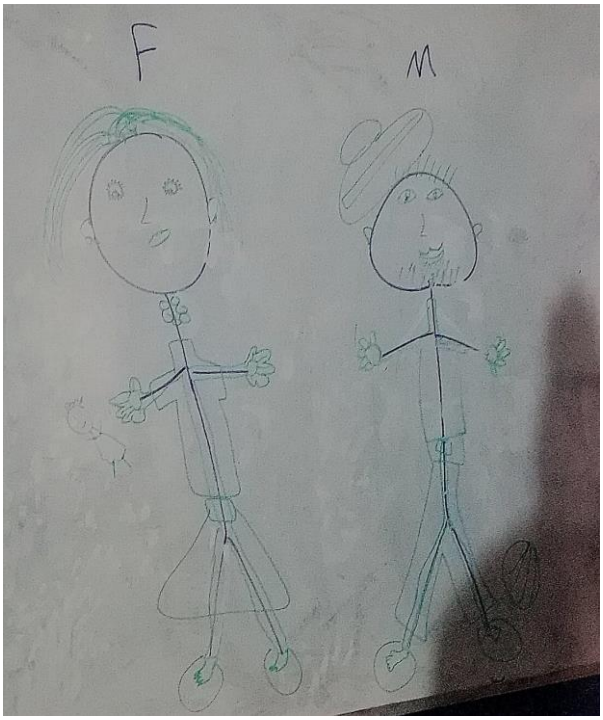
lead them to question if they are lazy themselves or if their parents or siblings are lazy and "bad" people. The message did not seem to get through the way Lina intended.

After my interview with her, I know for sure that she meant it well. She told me that she always stops and talks to the children in the streets. As for the children that sell things, she buys from them; but she never gives money to those who beg. She gives them a conversation instead, as long as they are alone and not with their parents or siblings. As for those who tell her that they are not in school, she tells them the importance of education and that they need to go to school. She said the reactions are very different; some of the children start crying because they do want to go to school, but for various reasons they cannot. Others reply by being "tough" and "rude". They do not need education, they claim. Lina is fully aware that most of these children do not have a fair choice. Lina's intention concerning telling her class that begging is not good, was that she wanted the children to know that they have other options in life. Several of the teachers told me that many of the former students at Jusoor end up in the streets/go back to the streets after a year or two in their school. Lina wanted to change something within the children.

Understanding and respecting the genders

"It is impossible to establish peace, or even begin with peace building, without understanding and respecting the genders," Yusuf told me one day when we were preparing for a PB-class. He continued by telling me that the children need to know that it is only the body that is different and that both genders can accomplish the same things in life. Putting gender exercises on the agenda is also a way of empowering the children, as it increases their self-awareness and gives them a chance to break some of the stereotypes that are imposed on them by their upbringing and the society.

In class, Yusuf started by drawing two identical stick figures. He called one girl and the other boy. The children were then asked to come up to the whiteboard and draw details/features on the figures. Yusuf did not give them any examples; it was all up to the children to draw whatever they wanted. Yusuf told me before we entered the class that the drawings tend to be almost identical in all the classes; first they draw the eyes, nose and mouth, then long hair on the girl and short hair on the boy. They put a skirt and t-shirt on the girl, pants and t-shirt on the boy, and in the end, toys are usually drawn—a football by the boy, and a doll by the girl. This was exactly what happened in the class I attended as well.



When the children were satisfied with the two drawings, Yusuf started to make small changes to them. First, he drew long hair on the boy, and asked "what now, is it still a boy?" The majority of the children said, "No, now it's a girl". He said, "No, just the hair changed. It is still a boy". Then he drew pants and a shirt on the girl and asked, "What now? Is it still a girl?". The majority of the class again said, "No, it's a boy!". Yusuf repeated, "Only the clothes changed. It is still a girl. Most of the girls in our school don't wear skirts. They wear pants and t-shirts. Does that make them boys?". This time the class said no, this did not turn the girls into boys. Yusuf continued by drawing a football by the girl, and a doll by the boy, continuing to ask them if these features change their gender. After repeatedly getting the question, the children started to understand that it does not change their gender, or at least they understood what Yusuf was asking for. Yusuf ended the class by telling them that the difference between a boy and a girl is their body, but both genders are equal, and can do the same things.

As mentioned, the principal found this exercise important because he claimed that the genders need to respect and understand each other. He also wants the children to know that their gender does not limit them. This exercise gave many of the children a different perspective to the reality most of them are living. According to my informants, many of the children are taught to have complementary gender roles, and therefore the boys and girls have different roles at home. Many of the girls are helping out at home with their siblings, cooking and

doing other kinds of housework. Several of the boys are working in supermarkets or selling fruits and vegetables in the streets, bringing money to the household.

Several of the children looked a little confused during the exercise. Putting understanding and respect of gender on the agenda might give the children more opportunities in life. In addition, they could see for themselves that many of the things that they said, based on the drawings and what was important to define the different genders, did not coincide with the reality they live in. As mentioned, the children drew the girl with a skirt, but very few of the girls in the school actually wore skirts. The girls played with footballs as well during sports class; this for sure did not turn them into boys.

However, in their daily life, the gender roles will for most of them continue to be complementary. Yet, putting this idea in their minds is meant to give them hope for the future, and most importantly, the principal wants to build understanding and mutual respect between the genders as he believes this is one of the essentials for establishing peace.

Gender issues also came up as a topic in other ways. A woman that had applied for a job at the school came to try out for a few days so that the principal and academic counselor could check out her ways of teaching to see if they could hire her. On the paper she seemed to be a strong candidate as she had studied English literature. Teachers that were proficient in English were highly needed. Despite her English skills and previous teaching experience, she did not get the job. *One* of the reasons was that she was separating the children during sports class. Boys and girls were not to play together. The principal and the academic advisor strictly said that they did not want that type of mindset in their school.

Regarding the teachers, the academic counselor mentioned that some of the former teachers, especially in the Beqaa-valley, had problems with having a female boss. During her interviews of new teachers, she always had to ask if this was going to be a problem or not. In some cases it was, which meant that these teachers would not get the job; or if it was discovered later, they would be let go.

Another gender-related discussion occurred between the principal and one of the other employees, as the employee had told a nine-year-old girl "mabrūk" (congratulations) when she came to school with hijab. The principal said that this is not something that should be encouraged. The principal said that he has nothing against hijab in itself, but he said that he believes that the girls need to know and understand what it is when they are old enough to make that decision themselves. He said that when young girls come to school with hijab he

usually talks to the parents and tells them that in this age it is not good to start wearing it, as often when the girls play in school someone will pull it, or she will lose it. He said that the parents usually listen to him, and the girl mentioned above took it off.

Having a principal and teachers that are involved in gender issues in the ways that are demonstrated above is also a way to empower the children. The intention is to show the children that they are not limited by their gender and that they might have other opportunities in their life than what they might believe is destined for them. Whether or not these children will bring this with them in the future remains to be discovered.

9 Conclusion

This thesis has tried to demonstrate *how Jusoor is attempting to build a national identity among their students* by looking at how classes are organized and how the teachers are approaching this very complicated task. Indeed, it is inevitably challenging to teach the children to be Syrian and to make them feel a strong connection to the Syrian national identity when many of them have never been to Syria. However, I observed that several of the children increased their knowledge about Syria and that they to some extent got empowered as Syrians; most of them changed their views regarding wanting to return to the country and all the children in the classes I attended started to share where they are from in Syria. Those I observed also started expressing that they are Syrian. The transition was big from the beginning of the school year where a large percentage of the children claimed that they do not know this information or did not want to share. They surely became more confident in their identity and started developing a feeling of belonging to the Syrian national identity. Some of the older children that remember more from Syria had this feeling from the beginning.

A common way of empowering the children as Syrians was internalizing that thought through repetition. The children were to repeat several times that they are Syrian and to talk about where they are "from". They also listened to their peers talk about their "home cities" and the teachers' lectures about other parts of Syria. The teachers would always do so in a positive way that emphasized what a great place Syria was and will become again in the future. In addition, several of the teachers mentioned that they find it important to talk about Syria with the children during their breaks and to mention Syria during the other classes as well, in order to always keep Syria close to them.

Peacebuilding classes seem to have a great impact as well. Only during my relatively short stay with Jusoor I noticed how some of the classes got remarkably more peaceful and respectful towards each other. This can perhaps also be explained by the children getting to know each other better and being more confident with their peers, as I observed some level of change in all the classes from day one until my departure. Yet, there was a bigger difference and harmony in the classes with the teachers that were the most motivated in peacebuilding, which might point to the effect of these classes if more of the teachers had various exercises.

However, *did the school manage to keep war-related conflicts out of school?* From what I observed, they did. Several of the teachers used avoidance as their strategy when a sensitive topic arose; the teachers would lead the conversation in a different direction when the children started talking about the war, or Bashar al-Assad as one of my examples has demonstrated. Some of the teachers would also express a simple comment as "no talk about politics" if the children said something that they were not supposed to talk about and then continue with the class's subject. According to my observations, the children fully respected this and followed the teacher's lead.

These children are still young, and it is impossible to know how their mindset will develop over the years. According to one of the teachers, the education at Jusoor is too short, and many of the children end up back in the streets when their year or two with Jusoor is over. However, as most of these children are living stressful lives, they will most probably remember their time at the school as something fun and safe as this experience is very different from their everyday life. Jusoor will most probably always stay with them as a good childhood memory in a chaotic situation.

The school has ambitious goals, and I feel it is safe to say that their impact on the children they reach is remarkable. Hopefully these children will remember what they did in this school and seek more education when they get the chance. Perhaps some of Jusoor's former students will be vital peace builders if they one day return to Syria. At least, there is hope that they will bring techniques and wisdom from the school with them in the future. Hopefully as many as possible of these children will feel stronger and empowered in their lives. However, the long-term effect of their attendance in this school will only be possible to discover for researchers in the future.

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