

# Civil Society Review

Issue 2 - December, 2016

## LEBANESE, REFUGEE, AND MIGRANT WOMEN IN LEBANON: FROM SOCIOPOLITICAL MARGINALITY TO TURNAROUND STRATEGIES

“No salvation out of the Hezb.” Female militancy in the Lebanese Hezbollah *In English and Arabic* / From Syria to Lebanon: Migratory and militant trajectories of three Palestinian women *In English and Arabic* / Navigating the minefield of power. Domestic workers labour union organising in Lebanon *In English and Arabic* / On mixed identities, racism, and activism in Lebanon; a discussion with Nisreen Kaj / “Like an ant that digs into the rock.” Wadad Halwani and the struggle of the families of the missing and the forcefully disappeared / Le processus identitaire d’une femme palestinienne : de la douleur à l’action *In French and Arabic*



diakonia  
PEOPLE CHANGING THE WORLD



# Civil Society

*Issue 2 - December, 2016*

# Review

LEBANESE, REFUGEE, AND MIGRANT WOMEN IN  
LEBANON: FROM SOCIOPOLITICAL MARGINALITY TO  
TURNAROUND STRATEGIES



Published by Lebanon Support, Beirut, December 2016.  
ISSN: 2519-6375

Editorial Team: Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi (Head of Research, Editor), Léa Yammine (Director of Publications), Miriam Younes (Associate Researcher)

Copy-editing and translation: Nicole Azzi, Randa Baas

Project officer: Rola Saleh  
Research assistants: Charlotte Peltre, Maria Sebas

Art Direction: Léa Yammine  
Graphic Design and Layout: Lama el Charif

This special gender issue of the Civil Society Review is part of Lebanon Support's Gender Equity Network [<http://civilsociety-centre.org/gen>], and is carried out with support from Swedish development cooperation. The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of Lebanon Support nor its partners.

Lebanon Support © 2016 all rights reserved.

### ***About Lebanon Support***

Lebanon Support is an independent, non-profit, information and research centre for and about civil society.

Lebanon Support aims to be a space for reflection and discussion bridging between researchers, experts, civil society and NGO practitioners, and activists in order to develop knowledge about issues relevant to civil society, in addition to disseminating it and facilitating access to it.

We operate three programmes:

- *Daleel Madani*

Online portal for civil society actors, aiming to enhance the availability of and accessibility to information about civil society, in addition to strengthening civil society cooperation and enhancing the sector in Lebanon. [[daleel-madani.org](http://daleel-madani.org)]

- *Civil Society Knowledge Centre (CSKC)*

Online research and information platform on civil society and public action issues. It is composed of thematic projects and makes available original research and analysis (papers, reports, etc.), interactive mappings, info-graphic visuals, and aggregated thematic libraries, among others, with the objective of producing localised knowledge, filling knowledge gaps, and informing interventions and policies. [[civilsociety-centre.org](http://civilsociety-centre.org)]

- *Civil Society Incubator*

Officially launched in 2016, with the aim of sharing Lebanon Support's expertise of over

10 years, the Incubator is designed to foster the creation, development, and growth of local civil society and public action initiatives, organisations, or projects. Incubation at Lebanon Support is done through an array of services such as provision of office space, coaching and mentoring on technical issues, management, administrative matters, research, advocacy, networking, and web development among others. Lebanon Support's Incubator programme does not follow a ready-made format, but is rather designed and tailored based on the needs of the partner.

### ***About the Civil Society Review***

The objective of the Civil Society Review is to bring civil society practitioners, experts and researchers together to develop and disseminate knowledge, as well as to innovate new tools and practices so as to strengthen Lebanon's civil society.

The Civil Society Review produces evidence-based research and analysis, and disseminates findings and recommendations to promote civic engagement, shape policies, and stimulate debate within the civil society spheres in Lebanon.

In addition to Lebanon Support's multi-disciplinary team, the Civil Society Review draws expertise from practitioners, experts, researchers, and policy makers. First published in print, the Civil Society Review is made available online at a later stage.

[For more information: [lebanon-support.org](http://lebanon-support.org)]

# Table of Contents

P.06 *Introduction*

P. 08 *Meet the authors*

P. 10 *Analyses*

⌚ P. 12 “No salvation out of the Hezb.” Female militancy in the Lebanese Hezbollah  
ERMINIA CHIARA CALABRESE

⌚ P. 28 From Syria to Lebanon: Migratory and militant trajectories of three Palestinian women  
VALENTINA NAPOLITANO

⌚ P. 46 Navigating the minefield of power: Domestic workers labour union organising in Lebanon  
FARAH KOBASSY

P. 70 *Itineraries*

P. 72 On mixed identities, racism, and activism in Lebanon; a discussion with Nisreen Kaj  
LÉA YAMMINE

P. 80 “Like an ant that digs into the rock.” Wadad Halwani and the struggle of the families of the missing and the forcefully disappeared  
MIRIAM YOUNES

⌚ P. 86 Le processus identitaire d’une femme palestinienne : de la douleur à l’action  
MARIE KORTAM

⌚ P. 172 *Arabic Section*

# Introduction

## LEBANESE, REFUGEE, AND MIGRANT WOMEN IN LEBANON: FROM SOCIOPOLITICAL MARGINALITY TO TURN AROUND STRATEGIES

While women's issues and rights have been at the forefront of public and civil society debate, academic, and activist publications, women's inequalities and the discrimination women face in Lebanon have been notably undermined, whether as citizens, refugees, or migrants. However, if the publicising of the "issue of women in Lebanon" has prompted the production of more "gender-related" information and knowledge, it has oftentimes adopted the rhetoric of denunciation and victimisation. Hence, there is a scarcity of in-depth and sectoral studies on the logics of exclusion and discrimination in comparison to the number of studies adopting holistic approaches to the conditions and status of women in Lebanon.

This issue of the *Civil Society Review* aims to bridge this gap by addressing the lack of empirical data and gender-based analyses on the experiences of women in Lebanon, including refugees, workers, and migrants. In contexts increasingly essentialising women, the various contributions in this issue dissociate from a fetishist representation of "warrior women" – yet another exotic cliché – focusing instead on women's role as actors of change. Although all local and foreign observers unanimously recognise

that women in Lebanon are almost absent or invisible in the official political sphere (government, parliament, national public functions, etc.), few are, alas, interested in other forms of women's public engagement, as if women are only secondary or marginal actors in social mobilisations. Worse still, some sociological, journalistic, or militant literature delves into the irenic and romantic representation of women in Lebanon as "mediators" or "peacemakers," thus denying their capacity to play a central role in bringing about and influencing the course of sociopolitical conflicts. However, history and current conflicts in Lebanon demonstrate that women are not only "peacemakers" or "auxiliaries" in conflicts spearheaded by men, but are also increasingly instigating and fuelling social conflicts, based on their two-pronged rejection of the dominant political and sexual order.

The paper of Erminia Chiara Calabrese analyses the stories of women within the Lebanese Hezbollah. She explores the terms of their engagements, often as mothers of fighters, shedding light on the plurality of their motivations, their lived political experiences, their everyday practices as well as their intersubjective commitment, which adds nuance to the widespread (mis)conception of the party's ideology being lived as a totalitarian experience.

In a similar perspective, Valentina Napolitano follows the itineraries of women

fleeing the Palestinian camp of Yarmouk in Syria, in their journey to their Lebanese refuge. She retraces the transformation of their humanitarian engagements and the modalities in which the precariousness of their status takes new forms of engagement in exile.

Lastly, Farah Qobeissi's research focuses on women migrant workers' engagement in the creation of a union, while navigating mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation even within supporters of their cause (NGOs, and Lebanese unions), in a context of state discrimination towards foreign labour. Through the study of the formation of the union, the author poses broader questions related to the feminisation and internationalisation of labour that tends to question pre-existing trade-unions structures.

While the predominant exotic representations of women tend to depict women's bodies as objects of submissiveness and masculine violence and victims of dominant patriarchy, this constitutes a partial manifestation of reality. Those representations do not help grasp the concrete logic behind the "social domestication" of women's bodies, which is not only limited to sexuality (women as an object) or victimisation (abused women) discourse. In fact, domestication can also take more ordinary and banal, thus less visible forms that merit to be highlighted. In this vein, Marie Kortam, takes us on the

personal journey of Nour, a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, and her struggle for agency in her private life.

In an attempt to shed light on women's roles in social change, whether in collective action engagement or in more private spheres, this issue also proposes a series of portraits of women whose engagement conflates the private and the public, and that can be invisible and often overlooked.

Miriam Younes retraces Wadad Halawani's struggle on the issue of the families of the missing and the forcefully disappeared, contributing to reverse the stigma from victimhood to activism, while Léa Yamine, in a conversation with Nisreen Kaj, discusses the issue of mixed identities and the intersectionality of racism.

This issue is articulated around two main sections: a first one offering in-depth papers that delve into individual or collective trajectories of women engaged in different spheres, from anthropological, sociological, or political science perspectives.

The second section, through conversations with several women, explores different stories of lived engagement and attempts at reclaiming agency over their experiences.

Overall, this issue aims at shedding light on various spheres of engagement of women in Lebanon.

# Meet the Authors

## ERMINIA CHIARA CALABRESE

Calabrese is a LabexMed postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim world (IREMAM) in Aix-en-Provence. Her work focuses on the sociology of mobilisation and that of commitment. She also works on political Shiism. Among her publications: “al-Ghâlibûn: Le Hezbollah et la mise en récit de la ‘société de la résistance’ au Liban,” *Journal of Muslim worlds and the Mediterranean* 134, December 2013; “Hizballah: muqawamah ou le tournant culturel,” *La Rivista di Arablit*, III, 5, 2013; *Militer au Hezbollah dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth*, Beirut / Paris, Ifpo / Karthala, forthcoming, 2016.

## FARAH KOBAlSSY

Kobaissy is a socialist activist and a researcher in gender, labour and migration. She holds an MA in *Gendered Political Economies* from the American University in Cairo and an MA in *Political Science* from USJ. She is currently working at Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University in Beirut (AUB).

## MARIE KORTAM

Kortam is a sociologist, member of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, and an associate researcher at the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO - Beirut). She is the author

of numerous journal articles and book chapters on violence, conflicts, inequalities, radicalisation process, Palestinian refugees and segregation. She holds her PhD in *Sociology* and an MA in *Clinical Sociology* from the University of Paris-Diderot. She has a professional MA in *Information-Communication* and an MA in *Social Work* from Saint Joseph's University in Beirut. She was invited as a visiting research fellow to the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen. Previously, she worked from 1999 to 2004 as a social worker in urban deprived areas in Tripoli, and has worked with UNRWA. She is the author of two books: *Jeunes Palestiniens, jeunes français: quels points communs contre la violence et l'oppression?*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013; *Jeunes du centre, jeunes de la périphérie: discours sur la violence*, Berlin, Editions Universitaires Européennes, 2011.

## VALENTINA NAPOLITANO

Napolitano received her PhD in *Political Studies* from EHESS, Paris, and presented a thesis entitled “S'engager à Yarmouk. Sociologie de la militance palestinienne en Syrie” relevant to the theme of militant commitments in a context of conflictive and authoritarian situation. Among her latest publications: “La mobilisation des réfugiés palestiniens dans le sillage de la ‘révolution’ syrienne: s'engager sous contrainte,” *Cultures et Conflits*, no87, Fall 2012, pp. 119-137; “ Hamas and the Syrian Uprising: a Difficult Choice,” *Middle East Policy*, vol. 20, no3, fall 2013, pp. 73-85;

“Palestinian Civil Organisations in the Syrian Uprising. Militant Conversion and Forms of Self-management in Crisis Time,” *al-Majdal*, no57, Summer 2015, pp. 11-16.

## LÉA YAMMINE

Yamine is the Director of Publications at Lebanon Support, and has collaborated on developing online and print publications on several themes including conflict analysis, gender equity, historical conflict and transitional justice, and civil society interventions. She holds a BA in *Graphic Design* from the American University of Beirut, and an MA in *Culture, Creativity & Entrepreneurship* from the University of Leeds, UK.

## MIRIAM YOUNES

Younes has previously worked as research assistant at the German-Orient Institute Beirut, conducting a project on “The Reorientation of Communist Groups and Marxist Intellectuals after 1989 in Lebanon and Syria.” She has studied *Middle Eastern Studies, Political Sciences and Sociology* at the University of Freiburg in Germany. Currently, she is working with Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Beirut, and is finishing her PhD thesis entitled “Living leftism in Lebanon. A historical anthropology of leftist intellectuals in Lebanon, 1930-1990” at the University of Roskilde, Denmark under the supervision of Sune Haugbolle/Samer Frangie. Miriam

focuses in her thesis on the question of political activism and ideology production in general, and the historical conditions of communism/socialism and leftism, in Lebanon from the 1930s on. She is also a Lebanon Support research associate. Of her recent publications: Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, Myriam Catusse, Miriam Younes, “From *isqat al-nizam at-ta'ifi* to the Garbage Crisis Movement: Political Identities and Antisectarian Movements,” in Rosita di Peri, Daniel Meier (eds.), *Lebanon facing the Arab Uprisings. Constraints and Adaptation*, Palgrave 2016; “‘A tale of two communists’ - The revolutionary projects of the Lebanese Communists Husayn Muruwah and Mahdi ‘Amil,” *Arab Studies Journal*, Spring 2016, pp. 98-116; “The Specters of Marx in Edward Said's Orientalism,” *Die Welt des Islam* 53, issue 2, 2013, pp. 149-191