



Dealing with trauma

Voices from Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Germany

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Cover: Boarding school children at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman
(EMS/Buck)

Back cover: Training course for budding cooks at the the Theodor Schneller
School in Jordan. (EMS/Gräbe)

Dear Readers,

many of the projects we had announced in the last issue could not be implemented. To date, no formal farewell ceremony has been organised for George Haddad, former Director now retired of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon, such as an organ concert, for example. His successor, Odette Makhoul, as well as the new President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Martin Accad, both took office in the midst of an escalating crisis. One of Mrs Makhoul's first official acts was to close the JLSS for one very long month on the orders of the Ministry of Education because the region was being bombarded with rockets.



It is war. In the meantime, the JLSS has reopened and children can return to a safe, friendly haven. But the JLSS is not an island unto itself. The general impoverishment and brutalisation caused by the war are probably the reasons why burglars broke into the school's new carpentry workshop and stole expensive tools and monitors.

How people deal with trauma – that was the main theme we decided to focus on in this issue before the current Middle East war spilled over into Lebanon on such a massive scale. The spectrum of articles spans many people in Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Germany and Syria and is huge – in many cases they are more than enough to cover the topic. But even if some things are alarming, we should at least listen to them – always!

For me, one thing is of paramount importance whenever reference is made to the Shoah, the mass murder of European Jews under National Socialism: that it was not simply another act of devastation alongside other mass murders and 'ethnic cleansing', but rather the culmination of an ongoing, worldwide hatred of Jews. Only when it comes to the Jewish people does the delusion prevail that the world can only "heal" once they have been completely wiped out.

Of course, this in no way diminishes the traumas that other groups have suffered.

Let peace finally come! This Christmas wish I send to you on behalf of the editorial team.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Uwe Gräbe, pastor

Bonding with others who are hoping

The Middle East is also called the Near East – near yet so far in many ways. Near because many readers have ties to the region. They know people, they have connections with the Schneller schools or other institutions or have even visited them. Near because the Middle East is within easy reach, because it is only a few hours from Europe by plane. Far because it is only a few hours away by plane. Who knows if they are flying there at the moment. Are the airports open? Is the airline you've chosen flying there at all? Questions like these have been cropping up over the years but recently they have become more urgent and sweeping than they already were.

In October, I was in the centre of Paris at the Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine – or La Madeleine for short – and I just happened by chance to stumble on a Lebanese Catholic wedding. At the beginning of the service, the priest emphasised that some of the guests could not come to France because of the events that were taking place. So the guests were both near and far at the same time, happy and sad, certain about the yes, but uncertain about the political future of their homeland. The wedding took place with people missing and yet it was complete. The couple was making a

Thomas Galler/unsplash



statement with the service and the marriage: we are few in number but we are still braving the circumstances. We see further than today and tomorrow. We are planning further than the war and conflict parties. And we are planning full of hope.

Planning full of hope? Why not? If hope is built on solid ground, then you can rely on it. Viewed as a whole, it will not let you down. On the contrary. It shapes the way you think, act and feel. In this way, it pits its invisible strength against what people call harsh realities.

These harsh realities can be tempered. That is what the couple in the church in Paris is doing. The priest at the wedding is doing it with his prayers. The supporters of the Schneller schools are doing it. The students at Talitha Kumi in Beit Jala are doing it. The list could go on and on. And that is precisely what nourishes hope. There are many people who are not giving up. There are people who stand up to external pressure. They all have one thing in common: they do not give up hope.

That is why it is important to bond with others who are hoping. When you read this magazine with its stories and the people behind them. When you visit the

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

(Romans 15:13)

near-but-far region as soon as possible and in any way you can. Through prayer and thoughts. By donating time and money. There are so many ideas and possibilities.

Through connections like these, the far-away East gets closer and closer. Maybe not by plane but in the mind. And that comes before everything anyway: the spirit of hope. May it embrace and inspire more and more people.

Dr Jörg Schneider heads the Department for Theology, Congregation and the Global Church in the Evangelical Church of Württemberg.

Learning to live with stress

Trauma-informed education in the West Bank as an opportunity for all

Manar Wahhab, a Palestinian Christian living in the West Bank, is familiar with the profound impact that conflict and Occupation have on the youngest members of the Palestinian community. At House of Hope to the east of Jerusalem, she helps children and young adults to deal with their traumas and sees this as an opportunity for social change.

House of Hope is located to the east of East Jerusalem in the West Bank. The daily lives of the staff, children and young adults are determined by Israeli military control. Children who are the least responsible for the violence surrounding them often face the greatest hardships. Palestinian children growing up under Israeli Occupation face a range of Adverse Childhood Experiences, including exposure to violence, loss of loved ones, forced displacement, poverty and constant fear.

These experiences create toxic stress which impairs their mental and emotional health as well as their ability to learn and develop. They have difficulty concentrating, which affects their ability to succeed in school. Yet, the Palestinian Ministry of Education mandates conventional teaching methods that do not meet the therapeutic needs of these children.

As a graduate student at the Academic University of Non-Violence and Human Rights (AUNOHR) in Beirut, I wanted to explore whether trauma-informed education could help lessen the effects of toxic

stress in Palestinian children and support their development.

Trauma-informed education focuses on the emotional and psychological healing of children while fostering their learning abilities.

- **Regulatory abilities:** Helping children regain control over their emotions and reactions through mindfulness, sensory integration, rhythm as well as a regular daily structure and breathing exercises.
- **Attachment:** Rebuilding disrupted relationships with peers and teachers to create a sense of community.
- **Psychological resilience:** Teaching children to find strength in positive emotions and resilience narratives.

These are the principles that are applied in the House of Hope kindergarten and school. We surveyed the parents of our kindergarten children. Almost three quarters said that the Occupation had a negative impact on their child's life. Just under half gave the House of Hope the highest score for helping overcome their child's toxic stress.

Two students, Jana and Hazem, are taken as examples. At the start of the school year, Jana suffered from frequent fever and anxiety around male teachers. Hazem showed social withdrawal and hyperactivity. By the end of the school year, Jana displayed fewer stress symptoms, she



It takes many hands to move a full-size brightly coloured swing cloth.

had improved her relationships and found joy in nature. On the other hand, Hazem showed greater focus, reduced hyperactivity and formed stronger connections with his peers and teachers.

As a Palestinian Christian and educator, I believe that trauma-informed education is not only a means of healing individuals but also a tool for social change. By addressing the emotional and psychological needs of children affected by the Occupation, we are nurturing a generation that can lead by compassion, resilience and a commitment to justice. By fostering resilience and emotional healing in child-

hood, we pave the way for more peaceful societies.

House of Hope is proof that children can overcome toxic stress, even in conflict areas, and learn to be active in non-violent ways. This will help them grow up to become leaders who will work towards peace and justice in the future.

Manar Wahhab is Co-Founder of the House of Hope and Director of Trauma-Informed Education. She opened the first Waldorf kindergarten in the West Bank.

Holding onto hope – despite everything

Trauma work in the West Bank lets people experience a healing community

When people survive violence and war, it often leaves emotional scars that shape their entire lives. “Healing trauma, building peace, living reconciliation.” This triad describes the vision that the Wings of Hope Foundation and its partners strive for. Given the current situation, this seems almost unattainable.

The shortest definition of trauma is ‘disrupted relationships’. There is a loss of connection to one’s own feelings, to one’s own body, to fellow human beings and to the world. This affects one’s life, social relationships and social interaction. At the present time, we are witnessing how trauma that is passed down through generations contributes to the emergence or escalation of new violence.

What does trauma work mean in this time of menace and insecurity? Loneliness, helplessness and powerlessness are the core experiences of a traumatic situation. To overcome these emotions, we need to experience the opposite. What was separated needs to be reconnected. Experiences of violence must be balanced by other experiences such as a sense of community, trustworthy relationships, a sense of security and experiencing the ability to actually do and achieve something. And it needs the hope that things can get better.

“I wonder how long our minds can hold out without us becoming ill. The constant burden of trauma and war takes its toll and pushes us to our limits,” says Ursula Mukarker, head of Wings of Hope for Trau-

ma in Bethlehem. The entire society is affected by the war and this is what makes the healing process more difficult. “We therapists are ourselves affected by the traumas we have experienced. So in this context, we do not talk about stability and healing – it’s more like just mere survival.”

And yet Wings of Hope is working to bring about the opposite experiences that are needed, offering space to rebuild connections and talk about what has been experienced, about fears and lessons learned. This is achieved by individual counselling and therapy as well as in many group settings.

Wings of Hope for Trauma also works with women and children affected by domestic violence. When outside pressures increase, there is also a rise in domestic violence. Women affected by violence attend regular group meetings to share their experiences, enjoy a healing community and learn ways to stabilise and encourage each other. They build connections to each other, to themselves and to their own bodies. “The women’s group helps me love myself and become more aware of what my own obstacles are and what decisions I have to make,” says one participant. Another says, “You needn’t fight in silence any more.” And a third says, “The support I get here means that despite all the darkness, you can see the light of hope.”

Painful experiences must be listened to and seen. Simply realising that what happened to me is bad is an important step in overcoming trauma. Victims of violence can shed their role of victim and become



Children are able to process experiences of violence through play.

survivors who can rebuild their lives. Children are especially vulnerable to violence. In groups at the centre in Bethlehem, they learn they are not alone with their fears and difficulties and they are shown how to calm and stabilise themselves, for example through art, music and methods from play therapy.

In recent weeks, the team from Bethlehem has also been supporting children from Gaza who were brought to Bethlehem. It was plain to see how much the war has affected these children. They are a prime example of the lasting consequences of this violence. What the violence is doing to the souls of children today will continue to have an effect for many decades.

And where does hope come from? "Our only hope is that the war will end soon and that people will be able to live a normal life called peace. This is the only way to overcome the suffering of recent years,

the only way for victims to become survivors who leave their suffering behind," says Ursula Mukarker.

We are striving for this hope together. In a training course lasting several years, people from care professions learn how to support others who have suffered traumatic experiences. For many, the training also involves working on their own experiences. In October 2024, another group of professionals will complete this training and pass on their knowledge – in advice centres, schools, kindergartens and other institutions. All of them are beacons of hope.

Paths to peace only become possible after the experience of violence is overcome – both internally and externally. Working with trauma is peace work – even now.

Martina Bock is a pedagogical trauma counsellor and CEO of the Wings of Hope.

Living in a perpetual state of survival

The trauma of persecution is part of everyday life in Israel

When I was asked to write an article about how people deal with trauma in Israel, I was delighted. I am a Spiritual Caregiver and consultant and End of life supporter & grief consultant. All my life I have also been involved with interfaith initiatives and it was important for me to share my experiences in this way, even in these turbulent times.

But as time goes by, worries begin to creep into my heart. Is it the right thing for my article to be published on this platform at this time? The more I asked myself what was causing this fear, the more I realised it has something to do with the trauma I was going to write about. I was born in Israel. My parents immigrated there from Morocco and they are descendants of the Spanish Jews. Firstly, I grew up in a home that was open to people of all religions and nationalities because of my parents' work and interests; and secondly, my home was full of the aromas of Arab-Jewish culture and its warmth, hospitality, food and the sound of Andalusian music. At home, we only spoke French and the television was also tuned to broadcasts from Lebanon, which at that time was considered the "Switzerland of the Middle East".

In 1973, the Yom Kippur War began totally unexpectedly. It is the holiest day when nobody drives their cars and there are no media broadcasts. Many people fast and go to the synagogues. Suddenly,

people were walking through the streets, calling on men to report for reserve duty because a war had begun. My father quickly got ready to leave home the house. I remember rushing to the shelter in the middle of the night when the sirens were wailing. My heavily pregnant mother carried me, a five-year-old girl, in her arms and helped my grandmother at the same time.

An unbearable tension

During the 1991 Gulf War, Israel was bombed by Iraq. I was in my twenties and living in Tel Aviv. Our old building had no shelter. When the sirens filled the air, I was paralysed. I put on my gas mask and because of the stress and fear, I forgot to open the cap and almost suffocated. The tension was unbearable and my then-partner and I moved to a relative's apartment in a quieter neighbourhood.

In 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, I was myself a mother and was responsible for my children. I was at home alone with them but we were fortunate enough to have a safe room. I decided to furnish it as a bedroom and arrange mattresses from wall to wall along with a few essentials such as water, a flashlight and a radio with batteries. During that time, we slept in this room and when there was an alarm at night, I quickly got up to close the window and the security door. This was not the moment to deal with my own fears.



After the massacre on 7 October: cars left abandoned along the evacuation route

In recent years, I have been living in Germany and every Saturday there is a siren test. When I hear it, my heart skips a beat and I have to catch my breath.

Like a common thread

I am privileged – mine is only a very mild case that is not even defined as trauma, and I myself help people deal with a wide range of life situations. But what I am trying to describe here is a trauma that runs like a common thread throughout the daily lives of the people living in Israel. There are those who experience it directly, for example – residents who live close to the borders are regularly exposed to rocket attacks, or those who are directly affected by terrorist attacks. But what they all have in common is the dimension of collective trauma – and it is transmitted from generation to generation. It's in our DNA.

“And in every generation, they rise up against us to destroy us ...” is a sentence from the Passover Haggadah. This and other passages from our prayers remind us that we are a minority and that there are forces in the world that want to destroy the Jewish people. I thought that prayers and reality had nothing to do with each other, but times have changed. My children went to an Arab-Jewish school in an Israeli Arab village. And in my work, I support everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation.

In my life, I have experienced many more wars than I have mentioned here. I know the history of my people, the stories of pogroms against Jews in Arab countries and also those that took place in Israel when the state was founded. The Holocaust happened not so long ago when

viewed in terms of eternity. I have accompanied Holocaust survivors in Israel and, since I've been living in Germany, also Germans from 'the other side of the barricade' in their final years. There is trauma everywhere, but lately it has become even more pronounced.

A cold-blooded, thousand-fold murder

On 7 October 2023, all the cards were thrown into confusion. More than 3,000 terrorists committed a second Holocaust. It made no difference who was hit – blood is blood, whether it was a Jew, a Muslim or a Christian. Many of those killed were people like me who were committed to peace initiatives. There is no one in the country who has not been harmed by this act of the devil. Thousands of people were murdered in cold blood, and for many of the hundreds of people who were abducted and survived the massacre, the trauma will never disappear from their souls. Friends of my children were murdered. Hundreds of thousands of people from the south and north of the country have been displaced from their homes; many children are in a state of regression and soldiers will be disabled for the rest of their lives. The list is too long to describe the extent of loss and grief. Israel is in a war for its survival and has no idea when it will end.

Like a beehive defending its queen

When I think about the source of our strength, I see the image of a beehive before my eyes. When the hive is in danger, every bee is called upon to protect it. Even without words, every bee knows what its

National Library of Israel/Meitar Collection



1948: The young state had to fight for survival in the Arab-Israeli war.

role is. There is a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support.

The State of Israel is the beehive. The queen that everyone defends is the existence of the Jewish people. As soon as there is an existential threat, everyone does their job even if they are thousands of kilometres away from the hive. There are only 15.2 million Jews in the world but our hearts beat on this small piece of land in the Middle East.

The boys break off their journey around the world and return home to fight alongside their comrades in the unit. Countless citizen initiatives immediately go into action for the affected population, be it in the search for housing, food, essential goods, transport services, etc. – even before the official authorities in the country start to go into action. Hundreds of therapists around the world – and I am one of



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2003: 23 people died in a Hamas bomb attack in Jerusalem.

them – have volunteered on an emergency hotline, and many therapists in Israel have offered free treatment. Even if there is disagreement between parts of the population in times of peace, when there is a national emergency, when trauma is rampant, everyone unites. Since the massacre, most ultra-Orthodox and most Israeli Arabs declare that they see themselves as fully part of the Israeli society and therefore feel obliged to do their part. They are an integral part of the very special fabric of this country.

When will the scars heal?

We have not yet reached the post-traumatic stage when the time comes to draw conclusions. For many people in the Israeli society, 7 October 2023 is not yet over. It will take a long time for the scars to heal. But it can be said that togetherness is the most powerful intuitive instrument for dealing with trauma.

The rule of thumb is: the sooner a person who has experienced traumatic scenes is treated, the less likely they are to develop traumatic symptoms. The necessity of the reality we live in naturally gives rise to many guidelines for trauma therapy and unfortunately, there are many more aspects surrounding this topic to write about. I hope that one day this reality will change so that there are no more people on either side who have to suffer from traumatic events.

Sandra Ahr-Vahrenhorst is Spiritual Caregiver and consultant and End of life supporter & grief consultant. She comes from Israel and has been living in Germany for the past few years.

Devastated country – traumatised population

Life in Syria 14 years after that start of the war

What began in Syria in 2011 quickly escalated into a full-scale war, leading to the deaths of thousands of people and the displacement of millions more. The war has devastated the country and its population physically, economically and emotionally, leaving scars that will take generations to heal.

Syría is a nation in despair. In 2024, more than 16.7 million of the 22 million Syrians across the country were in need of humanitarian assistance, a 9% increase over the previous year. Their level of need has never been greater. The war has reduced much of the country to ash and rubble, with many cities destroyed, the infrastructure obliterated and basic services – such as healthcare, electricity and clean water – deteriorating rapidly.

The economic situation in Syria is also worsened dramatically. The Syrian pound has plummeted in value, inflation is rampant, and the cost of basic goods and services has soared beyond the reach of most families. People are forced to choose between food, medicine or other essential needs.

The situation is exacerbated by natural disasters like the earthquakes in February 2023 and August 2024. The physical toll is enormous. What is even more profound, however, is the psychological impact on an already traumatised population. The fear and uncertainty triggered by these disasters – coupled with mass panic – have further eroded the fragile mental state of millions of Syrians.

Syria's displacement crisis is one of the largest in the world. More than seven million people are internally displaced and nearly six million have fled the country to Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey. Since September 2024, more than 30,000 Syrians have returned home due to the war in Lebanon. They have only limited access to shelter, food, clean water and healthcare. They face a daily struggle for survival.

A silent epidemic

The constant displacement, loss of homes and disintegration of communities have left Syrians feeling rootless and abandoned. For many, the psychological toll is just as devastating as the physical hardships they must endure as refugees. Children who have grown up knowing nothing but war and uncertainty are especially vulnerable to the long-term effects of displacement.

While the destruction of buildings in Syria has garnered international attention, the mental health crisis facing an entire population has received far less focus. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the number of cases of depression in Syria has doubled, while stress-related disorders have risen sixfold. Fear, uncertainty and grief are constant companions for millions of people in Syria.

Children are particularly vulnerable. Many of them have only ever known war and displacement. Almost half do not attend school. 26% of families report that depression and unhappiness are reasons why their children refuse to attend school. The long-term impact on Syria's younger



Petra Antoun

Aleppo, near the citadel: the war damage to the houses is still visible. Mental damage, on the other hand, often remains invisible.

generation are incalculable as the trauma they have endured may affect their emotional, social and cognitive development for years to come.

The Syrian healthcare system has been devastated by the war. Mental healthcare in particular has suffered greatly. Millions of Syrians are living with untreated trauma. Many have developed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),

anxiety, depression and other stress-related illnesses. If the psychological wounds of the conflict are not treated, Syria will struggle to get back on its feet.

The constant feeling of hopelessness

Many have lost their sense of safety, community and identity. The constant fear of violence, loss of loved ones and economic instability have created a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Many Syrians feel →

trapped with no way to escape the cycle of violence and poverty that has consumed their lives.

Trauma can also have physical impact on the body. Many Syrians experience chronic pain, headaches, fatigue and other stress-related health issues.

One of the most damaging effects of trauma is the isolation it causes. Trauma survivors often feel cut off from their surroundings, as if no one else can understand their pain. This sense of isolation is exacerbated when social networks such as families and communities are torn apart. Many Syrians, especially those who have fled abroad, have lost their support systems and are struggling to cope on their own.

The trauma that Syrians have experienced is overwhelming. Despite all this, healing is possible. With the right support, individuals and communities can recover from the psychological wounds of war. The most important thing is to acknowledge the trauma. Then, professional help is needed to develop coping strategies.

Not dwelling on the pain

Healing begins with acknowledging the trauma. This first step often fails because survivors are reluctant to confront their experiences again because they are afraid of cultural stigma or because the pain feels too overwhelming. But acknowledging a trauma does not mean dwelling on the pain or reliving the traumatic event. Rather, it is about accepting that it has a profound impact on one's life. That is not easy. Many survivors struggle with feelings of guilt, shame or helplessness.

Petra Antoun



Children on a homemade swing in Tartous.

Professional psychological support is crucial for overcoming trauma. Unfortunately, access to mental health services in Syria is extremely limited. This makes community-based interventions all the more important. Peer support groups, where survivors share their experiences and offer each other compassion and understanding, have proven helpful in overcoming trauma.

To heal from trauma, it is important to learn healthy ways of dealing with difficult feelings such as anger, sadness or fear. Breathing and mindfulness exercises such as meditation and yoga can help them to focus on the present moment if these feelings become too intense. These practices cultivate a sense of calm and inner peace. Physical activity is also an effective means of coping. Exercise releases endorphins which can improve mood and reduce stress. Walking, running, dancing or even gardening can provide an outlet for pent-up emotions and help individuals to regain a sense of control over their own bodies.

To overcome trauma, it is important to regain a sense of stability and safety. The homes, communities and livelihoods destroyed by the war must be rebuilt. This will take time but the process must begin so that a sense of normalcy can slowly be restored.

It is important for refugees to find a safe and stable place to live, whether this means resettling in a new country or rebuilding a home in Syria. A safe home can be the foundation for emotional healing. Access to education, healthcare and employment is also needed so that people can become emotionally stable.

From survival to healing

The international community has a crucial role to play, both in terms of humanitarian aid and long-term development. Many international organisations, including the United Nations, the WHO and various non-governmental organisations, are already working on mental health projects. However, many more

mental health services are needed. Local healthcare workers need to be trained in trauma-informed care, and it is essential to reduce the general stigma attached to mental health. Furthermore, the international community must continue to work towards a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. Without peace, there can be no lasting recovery.

The conflict in Syria has left deep scars on the country and its people. It will take a long time to heal from this trauma. But it is possible. In the end, Syria's future depends not only on rebuilding its infrastructure, but also on healing the emotional wounds of its people. The road to recovery will be long, but with compassion, resilience and international support, Syrians can move from survival to healing and, one day, to a future of peace and hope.

Petra Antoun lives in Tartous, Syria. She is married to Presbyterian minister Elias Ousta Jabbour. Since 2018, she has been working on a trauma project for the Mennonite Central Committee. This article was written before the fall of the Assad regime.

Pursuing our right to truth

The trauma of war in Lebanon past and present

War has returned to Lebanon. Just like forty or fifty years ago, bombs are falling from the sky and bringing death. Those who were children back then are now parents themselves – and they may be asking themselves the same question that their own parents had no answer to back then: How do we save our children from lifelong trauma?

One Sunday morning, I am sitting in the pews of a small church congregation in the Beirut district of Ashrafieh. I look around at the hunched figures of the worshippers around me. I look at their eyes, their grey hair, their tired bodies, and my eyes glaze over. Forty years ago, they were sitting where I am now before their hair turned grey and my head went bald. They listened to the bombs raining down from the sky outside. Now it is the low humming of drones with their soft, cruel, ceaseless buzzing overhead. The sound of bombs in the distance is like the pitter-patter of autumn rain. From time to time, the pitter-patter turns into a loud crash of thunder. But this thunder brings no rain or new life after a scorching summer. It is lifeless and without rain. It is the thunder of death.

Forty years ago, these tired men and women, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, were thinking about their children – about me, they were thinking how they could keep us and themselves safe from all the killing and destruction. Today, their children are sitting in the seats where I sat forty years ago. My wife turns to me and peers into

my eyes. She notices my agitation and gazes at me with inquiring eyes. I lean over to her and whisper in her ear: “Djèa vu...” She looks at me compassionately.

Sixteen years ago, she left the relative safety of Jordan to be with me. Since then, she is committed to a country desecrated, destroyed, weighing under the heavy burden of a long history that has never really known peace, a history of trauma.

Childhood memories of war

Even in God’s presence, I am overcome with anger and helplessness as I reflect on my own emotions. I am triggered by memories from the fifteen years of civil war during which I grew up. I was three when the war started in 1975 and eighteen when it supposedly ended in 1990. My children are now fifteen and twelve. How can we protect them – our children – from lifelong trauma?

I must resist the trauma of remembering, my memories of the war. Otherwise, I cannot support my children in this new cycle of violence and death. When the war was brought to an abrupt end in 1990, we were not told why. Warring militias were simply ordered to stop fighting and surrender their weapons. No reflection was made about the causes of the war, nor were the nearly 200,000 dead and 17,000 forcibly disappeared persons laid to rest or any criminals brought to trial and held accountable. Instead, in 1991, a general amnesty law was signed by a parliament in which several former militia leaders had been integrated to fill the vacant seats. In



Beirut, September 2024: Rescue work after an Israeli air raid.

short, criminals of war offered themselves the gift of amnesty at the expense of their victims and their families. We have cultivated a culture of impunity.

An archaeology of violence

Four years ago, two of my colleagues and I started a new initiative: “Truth and Reconciliation Lebanon”. We want to tackle our conflict history with a multiple narrative approach (Editor’s note: In this approach, historical events are reconstructed from different perspectives, in parallel storylines and in different narrative styles). So far, we have dealt with two major events from the early years of the Lebanese civil war and are currently working

on two more. The “Archaeology of Violence” excavates the most lethal moments of the war and uses competing narratives to facilitate dialogue between deeply divided communities.

Since we were denied the right to justice, we pursue our right to truth. The Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa took place in the 1990s. At the same time in Lebanon, the political and religious leaders of the various factions were pursuing political posturing and meaningless handshakes. It was a fake reconciliation without truth. Because of the 1991 amnesty, commissions based on justice like those in South Africa are not possible



Beirut 1990: After the end of the civil war, entire city districts lay in ruins.

in Lebanon. But the pursuit of truth can never be denied. Jesus said to those who believed in him: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

The context of Jesus’ words is different from ours. He was speaking of spiritual freedom brought on by God’s truth revealed in his life and teaching. But the principle holds: knowing the truth can free our hearts and lives free from horrific traumatic memories that lead to a cycle of violence and revenge.

The pursuit of truth is essential to public and political theology. The Near East School of Theology is committed to public theology. It is the church’s role to facilitate a process of truth-telling, confession, forgiveness and ultimately reconciliation. The global church will have to give account one day for the massacres currently happening in Palestine and Lebanon. But if we seal our lips to the truth, we cannot be a community healing from trauma. I fear for the future of the global church.

Martin Accad

Dr. Martin Accad has been President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut since September 2024. He took over the directorship of the university at the same time as Israel’s war against Hezbollah began in Lebanon. The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has been closely associated with the NEST for decades.

Currently, lectures at the NEST are only online. All NEST students and teaching staff have left the multi-storey building in the densely populated Beirut district of Hamra and have found accommodation with relatives and friends in safe places in Lebanon or abroad.

At a public online meeting with the EMS at the beginning of November, Accad reported on the situation in Lebanon and the challenges facing not only the NEST but also Lebanese society as a whole. He also addressed the suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the West Bank.

When asked what he expected from Western churches, he replied: “As churches, we preach the message of the cross. Therefore, we should be more touched and led by human suffering than by one-sided partisanship. The churches should put themselves at the service of justice with their hearts and minds.”

The feeling of not being seen as a human being

The trauma of Palestinians in Germany

The Arabic term 'Nakba' (catastrophe) refers to the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians during the foundation of the State of Israel between 1947 and 1949. This event has been etched into the collective memory of everyone with a Palestinian identity, no matter where they live in the world.

Palestinians no longer regard the Nakba as a traumatic turning point over 75 years ago. Instead, they see it as a traumatic process of expulsion and dispossession that they have been subjected to since 1947, not only in the occupied Palestinian territories but also in Israel itself.

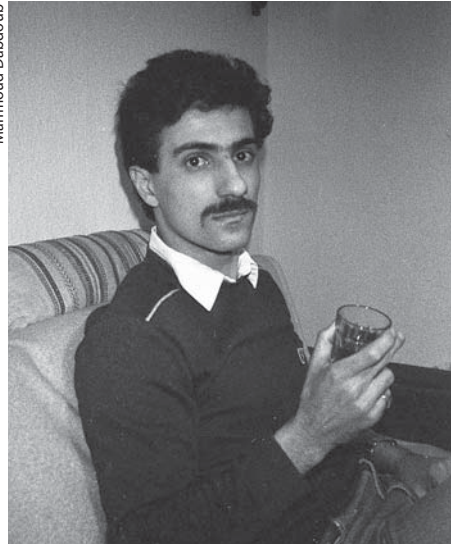
By contrast, the Nakba has been marginalised in the German collective memory and public debate, and Israeli state violence against the Palestinian people is generally treated as a taboo subject. Although the Nakba is profoundly interwoven with the history of National Socialism in Germany, the Nakba and the Shoah are not thought of as parts of the same historical process. In public debate, the connection with the history of National Socialism is only one-sided, namely the link between the Shoah and the creation of Israel as a safe haven for Jews, not only after the Holocaust but generally speaking after the Jewish people had suffered a centuries-old history of exclusion and expulsion throughout Europe. The systematic expulsion of Palestinians during the foundation of the Israeli state and its self-im-

age as a Jewish state is not discussed as a consequence of National Socialism, let alone mourned. For Palestinians in Germany, where the largest Palestinian community in Europe lives, the consequences are serious.

The act of tabooing an experience of violence deepens a trauma

Psychoanalysis tells us that trauma is not just a consequential reaction to an event that overwhelms a person's mental health, it is a trauma that must be regarded as a process. How society deals with it is essential to overcoming the experience of violence. Repeated experiences of marginalisation, the collective denial of the experience

Mahmoud Dabbouh



Arriving in Germany but not accepted: a young Palestinian man of the first generation

of violence, and the disregard and systematic denial of one's own awareness can all have as additional traumatic impact.

The tabooing, that is, the social repression of the Palestinian experience of violence from public discussion, was experienced by Palestinians in Germany in a similar way to the physical violence that they and/or their relatives suffered at the time of the systematic expulsion from their homeland. This is what gave the trauma its intensity. It was aggravated by the violence of debates that normalise and legitimise systematic violence against the Palestinian people as soon as it threatens to become visible.

The first generation of migrants in Germany

All this mainly affected Palestinians of the first generation who migrated to Germany. They internalised the debates mentioned and as a consequence, they felt the violence they had experienced as something shameful and self-inflicted. This led to self-dissolution: to guilt and shame on the inside and self-negation on the outside; to feelings of insignificance, to fear of visibility and political activism on the one hand and to the fear of feeling or expressing anger and grief on the other. All this led to melancholy, to social death, withdrawal from society, family and other Palestinians, but also to drug use and other self-harming behaviours. Many began to hide their Palestinian identity in public in order to avoid the pain of being stigmatised instead of mourned.

The second generation

For many members of the second generation, the Israeli military offensive in Gaza in 2014 marked a turning point. The tabooing and justification of Palestinian



Mahmoud Dabboub

In the 1960s: Young Palestinian men search for news from home in Arab newspapers.

experiences of violence increased in Germany at the same time as the Israeli military offensives. The disproportionate use of force exerted by the Israeli army resulting in the killing of hundreds of civilians was usually portrayed as necessary in public debate and Israel's narrative of a war of self-defence was unreservedly adopted. Palestinians in Germany who protested against this were not perceived as individuals with their own history, but as part of an anti-Semitic Palestinian collective.

In many cases, this strengthened their mistrust of the society in which they had grown up and the feeling of living in exile in the country of their childhood. While many first-generation Palestinians still forgave the lack of empathy due to ignorance, they now interpreted it as anti-Palestinian racism. They shook off the self-denial that had often been imposed on them by their parents, overcame their isolation and fear of visibility and activism, networked nationally and internationally, and worked against fragmentation. They also discovered the grief and



anger that their parents had been denied and began to articulate themselves as a group of affected people. They reclaimed their lost history and identity which had been rejected by society. Guilt and shame were transformed into pride – from the powerlessness of traumatic existence into the power to act.

The demonisation of Palestinian identity

Since the beginning of the ongoing war in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, this development has intensified, especially

since Israel is being supported with arms supplies from Germany. In German political and public media, the Israeli attacks in Gaza, which repeatedly hit the Palestinian civilian population and have already led to tens of thousands of deaths, are usually justified as a war against Hamas and its anti-Semitism. This so-called war against anti-Semitism is increasingly being extended to Palestinians in Germany. The demonisation of Palestinian identity is becoming increasingly institutionalised, resulting in restrictions on Palestinian visibility in public spaces and increased police violence, among other things. For Palestinians in Germany, the boundaries of 'here' and 'there' are becoming increasingly blurred. They feel – as their ancestors and relatives once did in historical Palestine – that they are not seen as human beings, but are deprived of their status as citizens of this country.

Sarah El-Bulbeisi works at the Orient Institute in Beirut and is an expert in the field of trauma research in the Arab world and in Western migration societies. Her book „Tabu, Trauma und Identität“ was published by Transcript-Verlag in 2020 and is based on her PhD thesis.

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In Becoming a community of life in times of fear

EVS General Meeting overshadowed by the war in the Middle East

There have been more cheerful annual festivals in the long history of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). At this year's General Meeting, it became evident once again how much the two Schneller Schools are affected by everyday life in the societies in which they are situated. And that life is currently overshadowed by a brutal war.

There is not much that can be planned in the Middle East at the moment. Even those who are not directly affected by war and displacement have difficulty arranging their own schedules. Originally, Reverend Habib Badr from Beirut and Odette Haddad Makhoul, the new director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Khirbet Kanafar, were supposed to attend the EVS General Meeting in Karlsruhe-Ettlingen on November 17. But both had to cancel at short notice because they are responsible for others whom they cannot leave alone. One of them is Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut located in the middle of the Lebanese capital that has seen repeated heavy bombing for weeks. Since October 1, the other has been Director of the JLSS in the Bekaa Valley which has also been the target of repeated bombing.

Despite all this, the EVS did not entirely go without voices from the Middle East. Reverend Khaled Freij managed to fly from Jordan. And Reverend Rima Nasrallah from Beirut took over the sermon at short

notice. She had evacuated to the Netherlands a few weeks before for family reasons. The fact that she had received news from Lebanon an hour before the service started, informing her that her home village near Beirut was being bombed at that very moment was something that most people only found out after the service. In her sermon, however, everyone was drawn into the tragedy and challenges of the people in the small country on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, even without knowing anything about the background story.

In her interpretation of the passage taken from the 27th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the theologian drew attention in her sermon to key points of the shipwreck experienced by the Apostle Paul off the island of Cauda. The people on the ship were unable to control the ship and



had lost all their belongings in the storm. Summarising the passage, Nasrallah surmised that they no longer knew which direction they were going in.

A storm signifying the end

In Lebanon, too, the wind has been blowing hard in people's faces for several years, blowing them in directions they didn't really want to go, she said. The country has collapsed both economically and politically. The explosion in the port of Beirut four years ago robbed many people of the final bit of courage. And now the war that Israel is waging against Hezbollah in Lebanon has cost so many lives and destroyed so much infrastructure that everyone's future is in question. "This war is the storm that means the end for us," said Nasrallah. So it should come as no surprise that people are depressed and discouraged. "We are losing our security and our faith in democracy and international cooperation."

The people on the ship with whom Paul was travelling must have been in a similar state of mind: sailors, merchants and prisoners. But what does the apostle do

in this situation? He first criticises those who decided to set sail despite the warnings. Then he speaks words of encouragement, good words that God has given him. But no one listens. "Everyone is just too busy trying to survive any way they can," Nasrallah continued, recalling the moment at the end of September when it became known that Israeli intelligence had detonated 1,200 Hezbollah pagers. "From that moment on, everyone in Lebanon realised that the long-feared war between Israel and Hezbollah would break out very soon," said Nasrallah.

At the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut where the theologian lectures, students and staff are said to have panicked. Everyone was just frantically searching the internet for the latest bits of information, getting in touch with relatives and thinking about what the next step might be for them. "We only managed to calm everyone down when all we sat down and put our mobile phones away. We looked each other in the eye, talked to each other and ate something together. It was then that we became a community again," Nasrallah said.

Just like Paul so long ago. He gave them something to eat and from this emerged a community that could not save the ship but could save lives. That is precisely what this is all about today. "As churches and Christians, we are called upon to speak, even if no one is listening. And we must act. We can promote community, create sheltered places where people can meet again as people." That is exactly what the Schneller schools are – places where

EMS/Buck



"No boarding home is really prepared for war," said Khaled Freij, Director of the TSS, in his keynote address.



After the service (from left to right): Reverend Andreas Heitmann-Kühlwein from Ettlingen, Reverend Khaled Freij, Reverend Rima Nasrallah, EVS Chair Kerstin Sommer and EVS Executive Secretary Uwe Gräbe.



EMS/Buck (2)

children hear words of encouragement in times of war, insecurity and menace, where they eat together and so become a community of life.

It slowly dawned on the EVS delegates how the Schneller schools become places of life at the General Meeting that took place after the service in the neighbouring church hall. There, hard-working volunteers from the congregation of St Johannes hosted the EVS with great hospitality. In Lebanon, which closed all schools in October due to the war, 85% of children and young adults have now returned to the JLSS. The immediate surroundings of the school appear to be safe. Having said that, the roads in the Bekaa Valley are not safe at all. And the children and young adults whose families live in the north around Baalbek cannot come to school due to the bombing. EVS Executive Secretary Uwe Gräbe reports that the new director is currently in the process of building up food reserves in case the school is cut off from the outside world for a longer period of time. During the meeting of the EVS Executive Committee the previous day, it was decided to make €20,000 available from the reserve funds for this purpose.

Protecting children in times of war

Reverend Khaled Freij reported in person on the situation at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. Jordan has not yet been drawn directly into this war, but most of the children and staff at the TSS have Palestinian roots and fear for their relatives and friends in Gaza and on the West Bank every day. In his keynote address, the Director focused less on the specific situation at the TSS than on the general challenges faced by a boarding home that bears responsibility for children and young adults in times of war. And these challenges are enormous, no matter which war zone you are in.

Children are affected physically, mentally, emotionally and in their overall development by the violence, fear and insecurity around them. All of this is magnified if they do not live in a stable family situation, said Freij. Accordingly, this places high demands on the adults in a boarding home. On the one hand, they themselves are often afraid for themselves and their own families, but there again, they see how much the children in their care need their security and protection at this time. This can quickly lead to enormous



Everyone at the EVS General Meeting found the hospitality of the local congregation of St. Johannes in Ettlingen very refreshing.

stress on the staff. “No boarding school can ever be prepared for such a situation from the start,” said Freij.

But what does help is the fact that the TSS has always given special attention to children who are exposed to stressful situations in their families, such as extreme poverty, a lack of prospects, domestic violence and crime. “The teachers are trained in how to deal with children from broken families.” Work has always focused on providing children at the TSS with a sense of community and on the wish to live together as a family. Everyone is treated the same, no matter where they come from. Respect for one another is also given high priority. And finally, Christian love for one’s neighbour is a cornerstone that anchors work with the children in practical terms. “As a Schneller School, we are like a family,” said Freij.

This “family” has a strong supporter in the form of the Schneller Association. The day before, the Executive Committee had approved €250,000 from the reserve funds which will be needed to cover the increased costs of the major refurbishment of the boarding home facilities. The

original estimate of €700,000 is no longer feasible.

The fact that the EVS was able to approve such a large sum so quickly is partly due to the Association’s overall good financial standing, not to mention excellent management in recent years during which reserves were built up based on realistic considerations. The donations received last year are also a source of hope. They were higher than ever before, although this was mainly due to a large donation of €350,000 from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg for the refurbishment project at the TSS and bequests totalling almost €400,000. Overall, the EVS received nearly €1.6 million in revenues in 2023 from private donations, grants, collections and legacies.

The fact that there were only a few questions at the General Meeting can be seen as a sign of confidence in the Executive Committee whose actions were approved without any opposing votes.

Katja Dorothea Buck

TSS: Progress in refurbishing the boarding home

Amman (TSS/EVS). Renovation and refurbishment work at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) boarding home in Amman is making astonishing progress. The pipes for hot and cold water and waste water have now been laid in the showers. The cable ducts for electrical wiring have been installed. The first double-glazed windows have also been fitted – this will have an enormous effect on the energy balance of the entire building.

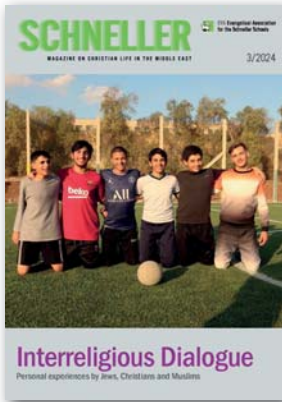
Sixty years after its construction, the building was in urgent need of a complete refurbishment. However, the other buildings belonging to the TSS, such as the

school building, the workshops and the guest house, also need to be completely refurbished. “Since children are the heart of Schneller,” as Director Khaled Freij says, work has now started on the boarding home.

The total costs for the basic refurbishment of the six residential groups were estimated at around €700,000. In the end, it will probably cost €950,000. The children and young adults were involved in the planning of the interior design on purpose. After all, they are the ones who will later be using the new rooms and need to feel safe and comfortable there.

New utilities, new electrical wiring, new windows: Sixty years after its construction, the building was in urgent need of a complete refurbishment.





Letters to the editor

Zu SM 3-2024 (Interreligious dialogue – Personal experiences)

Once again, I read the Schneller magazine (3/2024) with great interest. For months, I have been following the terrible events in the Middle East with sadness and horror. And just when you think things cannot escalate any more, something even worse happens. Since I have visited the affected countries on various occasions, I have been able to get to know the people there much better in good and bad times. So, the daily news shocks me all the more now!

How refreshing it is, therefore, to receive a completely different perspective in the Schneller magazine, a positive one in terms of interreligious dialogue – which, by the way, is also the subject of the 2/2024 issue, entitled “A New Reality”. These positive facts are far too little known, probably almost buried under all the negative news. Whenever the subject comes up, I would like to pass on the “positive signs”.

Magdalena Zantow, Plüderhausen

It is extremely rare for me to write a letter to the editor. In fact, only when an article touches me very deeply. The article “Holding on to hope together“ did exactly that. This is why I would like to express

my heartfelt thanks to you. As an explanation, I must elaborate a little. As chance would have it, the latest Schneller magazine arrived at the same time as the news that Nasrallah had been killed by the Israelis. There is news that is so appalling that we can sense the consequences will be horrific. In the last few years, there has been a lot of such appalling news.

Putin’s attack on Ukraine, Hamas’ terrible attack on Israel, and now the assassination of Nasrallah. What is the situation like in the Bekaa Valley and at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School? How scared are the children and how much new hatred will arise from this?

Johannes Weiss, Germersheim

Your magazine on interreligious dialogue is once again an excellent publication that is an antidote to the media. I can feel how you yourself are moved emotionally and at the same time objectively by the many pressing problems and perspectives of the harrowing conflicts in the Holy Land, while at the same time giving voice to those struggling and fighting for dialogue.

Rabbi David Rosen with his international interreligious activity, Nihal Missaoui as a Muslim student with her Christian and Jewish fellow students in Münster, your own position with our ever-challenged faith: Katja, I have again learned so much by reading this issue. Keep up the good work of opening people’s eyes!

Johannes Lähnemann, Goslar



*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and
the glory of the Lord rises upon you.*

Isaiah 60, 1



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