



THE DISPLACED OF LEBANON



The average length of displacement is 8 years, and 40% of displaced persons have been living in forced exile since 1975.

Lebanon has been at war for more than 15 years and a significant proportion of its citizens have had to leave their homes to escape the fighting.

Many aid organizations working in Lebanon, Lebanese as well as international, have shouldered the responsibility of providing needed assistance. The distribution of food, clothing, and medicine has been regular and relatively efficient.

The displacement that people believed would be temporary, in many cases, became permanent. After several years of war in the early 1980s, displaced people were already the country's greatest problem, one to which no one was capable of responding for lack of appropriate knowledge and understanding of the needs involved.

The Applied Social Sciences Research Institute (Institut d'études en sciences sociales appliquées), formed as a result of cooperation between a group of Lebanese researchers affiliated with the Université St-Joseph in Beirut and researchers at Laval University in Quebec City, thus embarked on a comprehensive study to provide a more accurate picture of the needs of displaced Lebanese to enhance the effectiveness of aid organizations.

The study is being directed by a Lebanese university professor and was made possible by funding from IDRC and the Ford Foundation. Involved in the study are psychologists, social workers, sociologists, geographers, and a demographer.

"Emergency assistance is available," said André Beaudoin, Professor of Social Work at Laval University and a member of the research team. "But after 15 years of war, other needs,

albeit less obvious, have moved to the forefront. There is an acute shortage of resources aimed at helping displaced people organize themselves. It appears that all the aid organizations occupy the same niche — emergency assistance."

The research team has defined four major objectives, each with its own program: to measure the extent and the characteristics of the internal migration; to identify the living conditions of this displaced population; to study the psychological, social, and family impacts; and to identify the most appropriate forms of assistance in the context of reconstruction.

Field research in the social sciences is rarely easy, but when the field in question is Lebanon, the task becomes a great deal more complex. Lebanon has been the arena for many violent clashes and consists of areas that are virtually sealed off from one another.

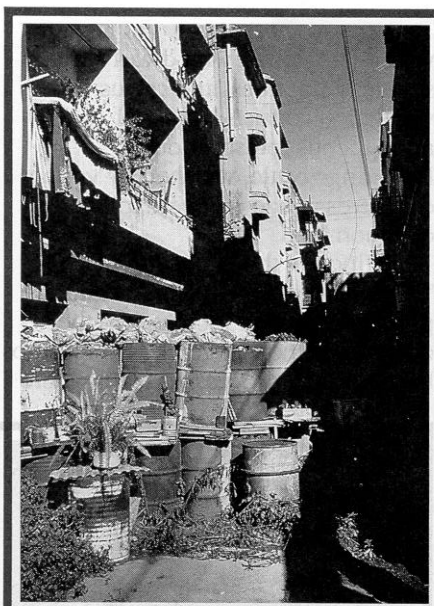


As a result, it has taken more than 5 years to complete just two of the research programs. There was a lot of ground to cover. Lebanon's most recent population census was in 1932! No one could agree on the number of displaced persons, or on their ethnic origin. Each group, Palestinians, Sunnis, Christians, has its own statistics...not necessarily of unquestionable objectivity. The first study, therefore, took the form of a census of more than 55,000 households, some 10% of Lebanon's population. It found that the number of households displaced by the war ranges from 574,000 to 662,000, out of a total population of between 2.83 and 3.28 million. These results were most revealing: this estimate is today considered by many the most reliable available anywhere in Lebanon.

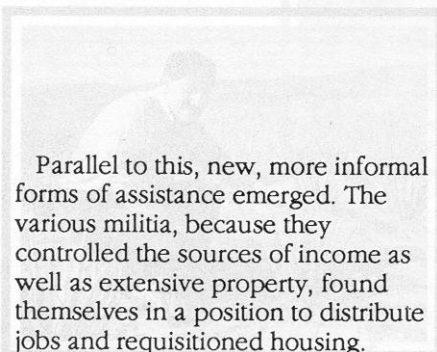
Contrary to the general belief that East and West Beirut were the primary areas affected by the exodus of their inhabitants, it became clear that all areas of the country had been affected to an almost identical extent. The phenomenon did, nevertheless, affect different social classes differently: farmers, owners of businesses, and tradespeople are much less mobile than employees or professionals. André Beaudoin commented "Such people normally turn their backs on their livelihood only as a last resort."

The study also revealed that, more often than not, temporary moves become permanent. At the time of the survey, the average length of displacement was 8 years and 40% of displaced persons had been living in forced exile since the beginning of the troubles in 1975.

The team then selected 2,000 displaced households, to whom it administered a more comprehensive questionnaire on living conditions. This questionnaire revealed that the wartime conditions did not bring about the disappearance of traditional family assistance. Wherever possible, families forced to settle in a new area were taken in by relatives.



Beirut walls form barriers to research as well as to citizens.



Parallel to this, new, more informal forms of assistance emerged. The various militia, because they controlled the sources of income as well as extensive property, found themselves in a position to distribute jobs and requisitioned housing.

Heads of displaced households, despite fairly long periods of unemployment, generally find work, sometimes under better conditions than those they left behind.

Living conditions for displaced families, nonetheless, remain very difficult, even years later. Some have been living for years in requisitioned motels, many without running water or bathroom facilities.

The third study, which is currently under way, targets the aid organizations directly. The research team's aim is to record the views held by those involved with the problems and needs of displaced persons and define the type of assistance they

provide, where, and to whom. "The results," notes André Beaudoin, "can help the Lebanese to equip themselves with a more effective aid infrastructure than is possible for the existing groups, which suffer from ethnic and cultural compartmentalization and from being concentrated almost exclusively in Beirut." He, nevertheless, admits that the aid groups are somewhat suspicious and do not willingly come forward to answer the questionnaire, which might limit the scope of the findings.

The fourth aspect of the project involves some 30 families who will undergo in-depth interviews. The team hopes to measure the impact of displacement on relationships within the family and on parent-child relationships. Who is the authority figure? What impact does internal exile have on children's progress in school? What relationships do families develop with the militia? The fourth aspect hopes to answer all these questions for the Lebanese and thus sharpen their focus and understanding of their current situation.

The challenging field conditions notwithstanding, the Applied Social Sciences Research Institute hopes to be able to complete this ambitious project within the next few months.

Louise Gendron in Quebec City



M. Abou Selim
Université St-Joseph
Faculté des Lettres
et Sciences Humaines
PO Box 293, Beirut, Lebanon