

This is not a preface; it's a face, an aspect, a figure, a forefront, an element, an encounter, an experience worth a thousand words... It is a face that we choose to show or hide in society.

Figure, part, element, forehead, angle...  
Hidden face, preserved face, two-faced...  
Face.

This book is a multifaceted mirror.  
Face to face with the others, we keep looking for ourselves.

For the time it takes to flip these pages, we wanted to share the many stories told by people we met throughout Lebanon and in the Lebanese Diaspora of Montreal; to capture thousands of images, people, landscapes, myths, sacred spaces, and encounters; to flavor our journey and give it an extra hint of depth with many researches.

Through the eight *mohafazats*\* or regions of Lebanon, we traveled millennia of history, took a flood of pictures and met exceptional people. In each village, neighborhood, home, we have been so warmly and generously received by everyone that we felt like we belonged to their families. Leaving them behind was a hard thing to do. With each person met, we became Catholic, Sunni\*, Orthodox\*, Shia\*, Maronite\*, Druze\*...

*Hyphen Islam-Christianity* is not a political book, nor a religious one, nor a scientific or an academic one... It is a testimony, a confidence, a whisper heard with the eyes. It is a way of finding the way back home following the magical stones left by many civilizations that passed by this land and imprinted with the untold stories of friendship and fraternity.

*Hyphen Islam-Christianity* reflects an oral and photographic tradition. It is the face of a country which, in spite of all the wars and clashes, in spite of its geopolitical situation, has managed to keep an amazing openness and strength for life.

The French poet Pierre Reverdy said "the most solid and durable hyphen between humans is the barrier"; a paradoxical barrier between two worlds that are totally opposed but closely knit together by human nature. The hyphen between different human beings is and always was their ability to understand, to know, to recognize, to learn...

In spite of wars and conflicts, suspicions and mistrust, words and criticism, coexistence is a reality. We cannot but identify with the stories told; we live and relive some events, with a smile, and we feel like starting the journey again, with pictures to show, stories to illustrate and images to live.

Lebanon is but an example. If the hyphen is possible here, it can exist everywhere else: In Quebec, where the debates of "reasonable accommodations", the wearing of the headscarf and carrying of the kirpan are still an issue; in France where the same debate is a heated one; in Canada where the word multiculturalism is a trendy one...

Researchers would use the words inter-religious, inter-personal or inter-community to explain these dialogues. We prefer shared memories, life stories, encounters and hopes.

When we come face to face, we look for a reflection of ourselves...

A reflection that becomes a hyphen.  
A hyphen that creates a reflection...  
A relation...  
A bridge...  
An invitation...  
A link...

**Nada Raphaël**  
translated by Joëlle Sfeir



Many will wonder about the message of this book: How come no political and sectarian views are expressed in it, in spite of its title? How is it possible even to talk about Lebanon without having a political bias? How can we put aside our emotions and prejudice while presenting our country to the world?

Nizar Qabbani, a Syrian, Muslim and Feminist poet wrote: "*Ya Beirut, ya Beirut ya sit el dounia ya Beirut! Naatarifou amam Allah al wahed naatarifou...*" (Beirut, Mistress of the World! We confess before the One God...)—a poem that thousands of people around the world have carried in their hearts through the vibrant voice of Christian singer Majida El Roumi.

For many, Lebanon is limited to Beirut, and Beirut has only war and fear. Countless "Oh my God, it looks like Beirut!" comments have we heard in depictions of chaos. Many Canadian and American journalists described September 11 by saying, "The streets of New York look like Beirut!" How many times we wanted to scream, "No!"

September 11, 2001. This date changed the course of our history. Once immigrants, we suddenly became terrorists, exotic, objects of curiosity, victims of racism, and so on.

With the 2006 war, Lebanon made the headlines of national and international news media. The country was, yet again, a dangerous destination to be avoided.

For many centuries, wars, destruction, separations and killings, not to mention massacres in the name of money, religion or identity involving the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Franks, Mameluks,\* Crusaders and Ottomans\*... Lebanon has witnessed all of these and still bares traces of their effects. Greek Catholics,\* Druzes,\* Orthodox Greeks,\* Sunnis,\* Maronites,\* Armenians,\* Shiias,\* Latins,\* Aalawites\* and others—they have all been, at some point, at war with each other (see *Lebanon and its communities: a historical overview* written by Carla Edde at the end of the book).

Looking for an answer, we scanned through our experiences, our environments; we rediscovered familiar faces, personalities and names such as Joëlle, Mohammad, Nasrallah, Pamela, Aabdo, Elsa, Hassan, Grégoire, Natasha, Tarek, Hussein, Leyla, Philippe, Christine, Afaf, Sylvie, Anne, and many others—friends from all walks of life and with different political and religious backgrounds.

In spite of all the hatred, wars, conflicts, encounters on battlefields, friends have still remained friends and nostalgia for happy times has taken precedent over dwelling on the hurtful past.

As the anthropologist Aida Kanafani-Zahar puts it, Christian-Muslim intercommunity and interpersonal relationships have little in common. Thus, it is very important to understand that when the Lebanese people say they get along well, they really mean it, even if this is rarely demonstrated in Lebanese history and political life.

Our team is composed of people from different political and religious backgrounds who have done their best to discuss, examine, discover and share what they heard and saw in order to create this book. Our only purpose was to gather and unite people, putting our own prejudices aside—or at least we did our best to be as impartial as possible

*Hyphen Islam-Christianity* is a book stripped of all overt political or religious views. We bring you, through photos, the faces of the many people we met, the villages, temples, mosques and churches we visited, and the magnificent landscapes that captured our hearts. We offer you, in the form of comic strips, some of the stories we were told that made us smile—comic strips that are not meant to be sarcastic nor wry, but are intended to show the gentler side of life in Lebanon. Many testimonies, popular narratives, votive pilgrimages\* and legends are illustrated here, and academic research (see two academical researches *Islamic-Christian Dialogues* by Pamela Chrabieh Badine and *Ziyârât "visits of saints"* by Nour Farra Haddad) provides scholarly information about the forms of dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

We wanted to share our discovery of the country's history, places of worship and stunning landscapes in order to cohere and express a national identity often ignored by historians and the media.

In more than 1050 villages (unfortunately, the pages were not enough to mention all of them), people expressed feelings of distrust and fear and extremist views; yet once these feelings were shared, they were magically transformed into experiences of fraternity, friendship and interreligious marriages. We heard many comments that began with "*Lil 'assaf* (unfortunately), Christians, Muslims and Druzes\* don't get along" or "left the village" or "killed my family"; these we chose to keep, these "*Lil 'assaf*" that they all shared.

This is a trip through a country full of contradictions, where antagonisms lead to daily clashes, where buildings destroyed by war stand next to brand-new five star hotels; where hatred can lead to friendship, or even love.

This is a trip through ignored or forgotten hyphens.

Despite the bruises and the scars, the relationships we encounter carry the promise of a *aaych mouchtarak*\* in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world.

Dear reader,

Even if you might find some images or testimonies shocking, disturbing or contrary to your personal views, we hope you still enjoy the book, and we hope you will not allow your sectarian or political biased beliefs twist what you see or read.

Enjoy the trip!



La pierre raconte et le vent murmure l'histoire du Aakkar à la plaine verte et fertile. La montagne à l'est écoute et rapporte l'écho du passé aux nouvelles générations qui ne savent plus l'écouter...

Les villages du Aakkar sont riches en histoire : tombeaux datant de 2000 ans avant l'ère chrétienne, vestiges phéniciens\*, romains, byzantins, croisés, mamelouks\*... C'est une région malheureusement méconnue et dédaignée par bien des Libanais à cause de sa grande pauvreté économique. Que de commentaires sarcastiques ou apeurés lorsque nous annoncions fièrement que nous allions dans le Aakkar !

Conduire à travers le *caza*\* nous a permis de découvrir des sites trop souvent ignorés par les Libanais eux-mêmes. De paysages en paysages, de collines en collines, nous avons fait de magnifiques rencontres. Avec des décors pittoresques, intouchés encore par l'urbanisation ; avec ses habitants ; ceux qui nous ont indiqué le chemin, ceux qui ont répondu à nos questions et ceux qui nous en ont posé : « Vous venez d'où ? Passez prendre un café ! Venez manger un morceau... » Quels que soient leurs malheurs, les habitants de la région, comme ceux du pays entier, ont su rester accueillants, chaleureux et affables.

Si nous avons choisi de nous arrêter ici et non pas là, c'est pour plusieurs raisons.

The story of Aakkar's green and fertile plain is whispered by the stones and the wind. The mountains in the East pass on to new generations who no longer know how to listen...

Tombs dating back to 2000 years B.C.E, remains of Phoenician, Roman and Byzantine empires, the Crusades, the Mamluks\*... All are scattered in the region, making it rich of a long forgotten past. Sadly, Aakkar is poorly known and negatively perceived by many Lebanese because of its great economic poverty. Sarcastic comments rained on us as soon as we announced we were going there!

Driving through the *caza*\*, we discovered sites too often ignored by the Lebanese themselves. From landscape to landscape, from hill to hill, we experienced magnificent encounters: picturesque landscapes, untouched by urbanization; its inhabitants; those who showed us the way and answered our questions, and those who asked us: "Where are you from? Come and have a coffee with us! Share our lunch..." Whatever their misfortunes, inhabitants of the region, as much as those of the entire country, knew how to remain welcoming, warm and friendly.

Maqam Aabed El Nabi Barri, Srar



## CHEIKH TABA

111 km de Beyrouth, 220 m d'altitude | 111 km from Beirut, 220 m in altitude



« Le temps n'a pas changé les choses. Chaque fois que je retourne au village, tout le monde vient me rendre visite. Les musulmans me demandent des conseils sur leur vie. L'été dernier, par exemple, un musulman du village est décédé. En tant que chrétien, je respectais le fait de ne pas pouvoir être près du caveau. Le cheikh\* a insisté pour que je reste parmi eux et m'a invité à prier à ses côtés au sein même de la mosquée. »

"Time has not changed things. Every time I return to the village, everyone comes to visit me. The Muslims ask me for advice about their lives. Last summer, a Muslim from the village died. As a Christian, I respected the fact of not being able to be too close to the burial place. Still, the sheikh\* insisted I stay among them and invited me to pray by his side, right in the heart of the mosque."



Devant l'église : Diwane, Monseigneur Simon, Père Hanna et Père Johnny  
In front of the church: Diwane, Monseigneur Simon, father Hanna and Father Johnny





Ancien puits au couvent de Saydet Ras Baalbeck vénéré par les chiites\*. D'après le Frère Asfar, ces derniers croient que la tête de l'Imam Hussein\* y est enterrée.  
Old well in Saydet Ras Baalbeck convent worshiped by the Shiias\*. According to Brother Asfar, they believe that the head of the Imam Hussein\* lies inside the well.

Dans le monastère de Ras Baalbeck, construit au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle sur l'emplacement d'un sanctuaire byzantin lui-même élevé sur le site d'un temple romain, il reste une chapelle qui conserve encore une icône miraculeuse de la *Sayde*\*. « En 1917, un incendie s'est déclenché dans la chapelle. Tout a brûlé sauf la photo de la Vierge dont seulement un coin aurait noirci. Lorsque les prêtres ont retiré l'icône pour en mettre une autre, plus récente, l'originale a retrouvé sa place le lendemain, par miracle. »

In the Saydet Ras Baalbeck monastery built in the 16th century on the site of a Byzantine sanctuary, which is itself built on a Roman temple site, a chapel of the byzantine period remains and holds an icon of the miraculous *Sayde*\*. "In 1917, a fire broke out in the chapel.

Everything burned down except the icon of the Virgin, of which only a corner was blackened. When the priests withdrew the icon to put in another more recent one, the original was found at its place in the morning."



Aziz El Khoury et Wajih Chalak

Wajih Chalak et Aziz El Khoury sont amis depuis plus de 50 ans. « Au décès de ma femme, Aziz recevait les condoléances avec moi et ma famille. Nos grands-pères, l'un maronite\* et l'autre sunnite\*, sont morts ensemble, frappés par la foudre. »

Kefraya, c'est la passion de la *dabké*\* et des femmes pour Wajih qui a plus de 75 ans. Il se qualifie de « *Hajj*\* sport et moderne » qui n'aime pas que les femmes se voilent. D'ailleurs, « lorsque mes petites-filles, adolescentes et jeunes femmes, ne sont pas assez à la mode, je leur somme de faire un peu plus d'efforts... J'ai rencontré une femme voilée un jour qui était choquée de voir mes petites filles s'habiller à la mode d'occidentale. Elle m'a demandé comment, un *Hajj*\* comme moi, ayant fait son pèlerinage à la Mecque, acceptait que ses petites-filles s'habillent à la mode. Je me suis énervé et je l'ai tout de suite remise à sa place. Je ne l'ai plus jamais revue », dit-il en éclatant de rire. Malgré son bras cassé, Wajih se lève et met de la musique traditionnelle pour honorer notre présence. Il danse quelques pas de *dabké* en riant aux éclats et, mi-figue mi-raisin, nous demande si on est mariées ou si on a envie de boire un peu d'alcool. Pour lui, l'alcool est important dans la vie à condition de ne pas trop en abuser.

Wajih Chalak and Aziz El Khoury have been friends for more than 50 years. "At my wife's death, Aziz received condolences with my family and me. Our grandfathers, one Maronite,\* and the other Sunni,\* died together, struck by lightning."

Wajih, more than 75 years old, is all about passion for *Dabké*\* and women. He calls himself a "sporty and modern *Hajj*\*" who does not like women to be veiled. Moreover, "when my granddaughters, teenagers and young women, are not fashionable enough, I implore them to make a little more effort. I met a veiled woman one day who was shocked to see my grand-daughters dressed in what she saw as Western fashion. She asked how, as a *Hajj*\* having done a pilgrimage to Mecca, I could accept this. I got irritated and put her back in her rightful place. I never saw her again," he says, bursting into laughter. Despite his broken arm, Wajih decides to get up and put on a bit of traditional music to better welcome us. He does a few *Dabké*\* steps and enigmatically asks us if we are married, or if we feel like drinking some alcohol. For him, alcohol is an important part of life, as long as it is not consumed in excess.