

Glimpse

Into the Syrian civil society

Children labor & beggary

Counting and awaiting the next attack

Survival of the Ba'ath jails



Kesh Malek

Glimpse aims to shed the light on the Syrian Civil Society which was revived after the Syrian revolution in 2011, showing the civil initiatives and sharing inspiring stories led by grass-roots and civil society movement inside and outside Syria. Glimpse is envisioned to be a reliable resource for readers interested in knowing more about Syria, the history, the society, and the thousands-year-old civilization.

As a youth workgroup Coinciding with the beginning of the Syrian revolution in Aleppo Northern Syria "Kesh Malek" was formed. Its first activities were sharing and taking part in the peaceful movement, demonstrating and spreading demonstrators' demands of "Freedom, Justice, and Dignity." The paigns driven by the group's long term vision to reach a better future for Syria. As "an Independent Democratic Pluralism state, respects human rights and devotes citizenship and justice values."



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The idea will never die

At the end of 2013 while working to recover schooling in Aleppo city a new project was born out of the suppression Syrian were suffering from by the Syrian authoritarian regime and extremist groups in Syria. In Orem Al-kur-ab village in the north-west Aleppo countryside, the "A Country's Identity" idea was born. The essence of the initiative was articulated to be run a number a (minibusses) caravan or buses between Syrian cities and villages.

The initiative was developed to be in the form of a local center in the city of Orem where awareness campaigns and capacity building courses were being held targeting local stakeholders. Through its efforts in the center, Kesh Malek aimed to counter the Assad regime as well as ISIS ideology and propaganda that they had similarly worked to cut Syrian individual relations as citizens to Syria. The centers worked to revive- throughout many cultural activities, workshops, and courses- the idea of citizenship and belonging to free Syria.

Before establishing the centers, Kesh Malek ran its projects on a small scale inside Eastern-Aleppo before launching its first center in Orem Al-Kubra, followed by Kafarnaha and Abzemo centers, and finally in 2018 Marea. The idea crystallized throughout the first few months of work and encompassed later new initiatives that were developed by the locals themselves such as, early marriage, literacy, computer skills, capacity building, accelerated education and so on.

A Country's Identity id Kesh Malek's vital element in the Ngo's long term vision to change and develop the Syrian society. The renewed projects underscored the future vision of free new Syria where freedom prevails be practice and citizens enjoy equality and equity. The centers were working to scale-up a pattern of freedom of expression breaking the old inherited stereotyping and inequality against women. Instead of being subordinate to men and neglected from the social change progress, it had worked to enable females to be the center of the action and represent their own agent.

The centers held activities in the village where local residents come to attend different capacity building courses. "the local participation expectation figures during our preparation to launch the project was not very optimistic, however, locals impressively showed and took part in the projects that the center continuously introduced." Khaled is one of the founders of A Country's Identity centers.

"Women participants in different projects were always on demand by females to encompass, extend and develop the ongoing activities and workshops that help them to learn and accelerate individual development to become a community leader community leaders and learn more."

The center focused on citizenship empowerment and building a confident understanding of what are the rights we are entitled as citizens to which Assad and ISIS have been trying to conceal from Syrian.

A Country's Identity designed various range of public capacity building to the locals, such as first aid, dropping off schools, children's

“ The centers had brought the local community to band together and made it a home for everyone in the city to spark new revolutionary ideas and activities.”



rights, women's rights, school drop off. "The high quality and beneficial interactive nature including people in the change-makers of the society making them centric.

The range of activities was planned to include marginalized groups such as youth-enhancing their capacity and knowledge. "We aimed to boost the participants' work to spread among their families, friends and the society as a whole." These plans came to light with (Youth citizens' Club) and (Women Citizens' club) This made the energy and knowledge circulate within larger numbers of people who later to the center increasing the number of members and participants in the activities held in the center.

"The centers had brought the local community to band together and made it a home for everyone in the city to spark new revolutionary ideas and activities."

It acquired people with new tools that made them more open to change, discuss and bring different sides into group discussions or reading of different books in the center in order to bring together locals' perspectives.

Throughout speaking and engaging with one another the center could recover the social contract that Assad and ISIS have always worked

to shatter. A Country's Identity task is to fight the indoctrination of the totalitarian authoritarian regimes and their extreme ideology. "From 2013 until 2020, the centers succeeded to restore the liberty value and loyalty to the Syrian citizenship and employ the individual initiatives to best of the collective social and development." Said the center founder.

Before the displacement in February 2022, the centers in Ourem, Kafarnaha and Abzemo had to stop and close its door fearing deliberate bombardment and civilian casualties. In a few days following the regime militants' advancement in Aleppo rural, the villages lost its people in a couple of days before joint Assad and Russian militants occupy the city after bombarding the city with a wide arsenal of internationally prohibited weapons.

Kesh Malek may have lost one of the main change-making spots in northern Syria; however, the people holding the ideas and power to work have survived and that is what matters.

"The ideas and values people have survived with will never die," Khaled said

Our mission will carry on spreading the ideas and knowledge of liberation, freedom, and dignity which is what Assad is trying to abort.





Youth Changers

The journey to change has just begun

When the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, the most distinguished theme observers could see was the youth's domination in participation in the country's civil movement. However, as the militarization unfolded in the subsequent years, they were marginalized significantly and lacked the platform they yearned to take part in the social changing movement. Since the Assad regime brutally suppressed peaceful demonstrations led primarily by youth. Over 500,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

The Baath brain poisoning policy

According to the United nation population Fund [\(UNFPA\)](#), young people in Syria, aged 10-24 represent 36.3 percent of the total population, and youth aged 15-24 constitute 22.2 percent. Overall, there was a lack of adequate and practically satisfactory representation for Syrians in local authorities and syndicates as most of these were controlled by people affiliated to the Baath narrow circle. While (THE BAATH VANGUARDS ORGANIZATION) & [\(REVOLUTION YOUTH UNION\)](#) which are organizations related directly to the Ba'ath party, had all the power to spread the Ba'ath ideology among the children and youth even in schools. Joining these organizations was mandatory in Alassad's school, Besides, the association of Youth and Sport was established, ostensibly to support youth and adolescents in Syria and

help them to magnify their contribution in the society, however, this corpus was, alike most Syrian governmental bodies, corrupted and used by the regime as a tool to organize the state's strategies to contain ideologically the growing educated youth population in the country.

The regime has always been utilizing youth and abducting their future throughout Al Ba'ath governmental bodies, instead of amplifying their voice and enhancing their contribution to society." Ahmed said,

Ahmed Alnouri, a project manager of Kesh Malek, an organization based in the Turkish city of Gaziantep that also operates a series of projects in northern Syria hopes and works to change this.

"Syrians are under a severe deterioration of freedom. They have lost all hope and the concept of 'citizenship'



has utterly vanished," he said

While the constant military attacks against northern Syria jeopardize each effort to recover from the war; civil society continues their endeavors to grapple the crucial circumstances and facilitate their work on the ground.

Kesh Malek's official explains that since the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, youths' purpose has always been grappling for authentic implementation for the concepts of freedom, democracy, citizenship, and equity of participation in the national and local sphere. The negative distorting influence of weapons and deterioration of the economy exposed Syria's young generation to child labor, armed recruitment, and early marriage. Ahmed explained that to contain these tragic outcomes, a long-term systematic intervention needs to be implemented.

“ Kesh Malek sees that youths' role is as supreme in this period of Syria, therefore it is vital to raise their capacity to become socially active citizens

Civil society: between adequately planning and risk assessment

The main focus of most non-governmental organizations is to provide basic services; nonetheless, our purpose is beyond daily needs, it aims to build-up Syria's future actors, investing to produce more Syrian active youth citizens. Ahmed explains that the vast majority of Syrians have been left without equal and sufficient representation in the decision-making process, especially marginalized groups like the youth, women, and internally displaced people.

"In order to incorporate youths and transfer them to an active citizen in society, our policies' compass needs to be changed, in the larger NGOs sphere, to its main mission and vision towards equality of opportunities and inclusion of all segments of the Syrian society," he said

In 2018, Kesh Malek launched a Youth Citizen Club in northern Syria with aims to amplify the voices of the youth and help motivate them to be more involved in public life inside Syria. Kesh Malek's long term vision is to work with enthusiastic young individuals who are eager to lead change initiatives in their communities, while also supporting those who lack opportunities to help them express themselves and unleash their

potential to lead their communities and become actively engaged in the social change movement.

Campaign lead by Youth Citizen Club champions

Omar Mansour, a 19-year-old youth team leader at the Orem Al-Kubra Kesh Malek's center, where the Youth Citizen Club members (YCC) were gathering and participating in the training. Since its establishment, Omar has participated in multiple workshops about many topics such as advocacy, women's rights, gender equality, children recruitment, special needs rights, and social communication skills.

"Such initiatives are rare and integral for the future of Syrian after the war," he said, "I was thrilled to have the opportunity to open my eyes on different horizons and seek knowledge that would, in essence, help my community, and I wouldn't have known anywhere else."



Following the training, youth-led many advocacy campaigns focusing on social problems like girls' education, human rights, women participation in civil life.

"We visited local stockholders in the village of Orem and spoke to families to discuss what we want to change and to help in improving the society we live in."

"I took part with the group of YCC in my village in multiple campaigns, one of them was devoted to illustrate and tackle the misconception and society ill-treatment of special needs," Omar said

Ahmed explains the structure of Kesh Malek's initiative, which starts with building the youth's capacity in advocacy and community mobilization to then conducting several volunteer activities and campaigns.

"We facilitated a series of meetings between the YCC representatives and all stakeholders in the Orem region (where the YCC is based) including speaking to NGOs workers and activists. We witnessed a positive outcome, where people took part in the public sessions held in the town, with a lot of interaction by the elders of the community."

Aspiration for expansions and challenges to carry on

This success inspired more work and training by Kesh Malek, to support the youth with new materials and skills encompassing conflict analysis, peacebuilding strategies, and dialogue planning.

Kesh Malek sees that youths' role is as supreme in this period of Syria, therefore it is vital to raise their capacity to become socially active citizens. It facilitates with its capacity the required means to magnify their skills and inclusion in civil life and social change.

"However, the security instability in the north has become a major challenge as well as the dramatic drain in funds from major donors and will significantly drain the youth beneficiaries as a result," Alnouri said

"Keeping youths marginalized, unsupported and unrepresented will derogate Syria's future in both the short-term and long-term recovery process to which must be prevented by our efforts in the civil society."



The Day After

The Day After the organization launched a workshop, focusing on Advocacy & campaigning in Azaz city in Aleppo. The workshop targeted 16 female and male trainees from (Amad Team) and (a Nation fingerprint team), which are local volunteering teams working on advocating social issues, community cohesion and, civil projects.

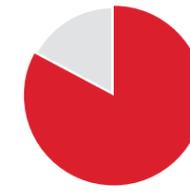
Over three days, the trainees were able to address one of the social issues and design an advocacy campaign following the methodical steps, as assigning the cause, define the target and how to achieve it. The importance of this workshop as Maha Afadli, the manager of TDA office explains "it's the first of its kind as it's targeting youth teams, also it's aiming to build the capacity of the participants and prepare them to be able to design advocacy campaigns and advocating the social issues in their local communities. The workshop included the main points of designing advocacy campaigns and explaining the used tools and strategies in advocacy"

The Day After (TDA) is an independent, Syrian-led civil society organization working on supporting a democratic transition, justice, and sustainable peace in Syria. TDA believes in universal human rights and equal citizenship for all Syrians.

In August 2012, TDA developed a comprehensive report on managing the challenges of a post-Assad transition in Syria. The initial Day After Project brought together a group of Syrians representing a large spectrum of both the Syrian opposition and civil society

Children labor & beggary

Unrecognized phenomenal that finally gets a glance by civil society



An estimated **83 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line**, and people are increasingly vulnerable due to the loss or lack of sustained livelihoods.



“ School became a luxury to me, every day I look to other children going to school, yet my family of five brothers can not afford me going to school

While walking around in Idlib’s main streets, it is quite likely that you will find a child on the street or perhaps walking next to you asking “Would you give me some, please, please” or to “Would you like to buy this from me.” walking around the streets with a box of cheap biscuits, water bottles or tissue bags that they sell throughout the day to give to their families who are in dire need. Families are forced to push their children to the street to help them afford living costs to have some food on the table and survive the hardship of life.

A fraction of money helps to put food on our table

This is how Asma, a 13-years old girl has been spending the past two years of her life in Idlib city. “After I was displaced with my family from East-Ghouta in 2018, I have been away from school, and instead of going to school in the morning like how I like to, I go to the street to sell people my goods,”

Narrating her daily routine Amsa displayed that she wakes up every morning at six o’clock to prepare to begin her day selling, walking

between the public minibusses passengers, to people walking on the streets what she carries of sweets or water sometimes that her father buys in a cheaper deal to sell back and get more money.

“I walk daily for nearly ten to twelve hours and eat only one wrap that my mom makes me at home to eat during the day until dinner time at home when I come back in the darkness,” Asma said

The amount of money Amsa and other children of her age on the street earns can barely amount to three dollars of full day work maximumly. “School became a luxury to me, every day I look to other children going to school, yet my family of five brothers can not afford me going to school and not go to work on the street while they have no food or medicine and milk for

my infant baby brothers,” Asma said, Asma’s brothers, Ahmad also works in another district in the city, and Ammar works in a gasoline street booth, while her father has lost his left leg limb and incapable of working while the mother has to stay to assist the father and the other two infant family members.

[Child labor in Syria](#) was a problem prior to 2011, but the conflict has greatly exacerbated the situation. Children are working in more than [75 percent](#) of households with almost half of them being reported as providing a “joint” or “sole” source of income.

Similarly, Jamal, a 14-year-old adolescent from east Aleppo whose hopes of becoming a teacher in the future as he said are pending in limbo. “I tried to go back to school over the past three years when I was in Aleppo with my family where our school was bombed multiple times before all of us later forcibly were displaced in December 2016,” Jamal said,

Jamal registered a few times in the local schools in his area but had to drop-off because his family’s financial need was drastically increasing.

According to the [UNHCR](#), Some 6.2 million people are internally displaced and more than 2 million boys and girls are out of school in Syria. An estimated 83 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line, and

people are increasingly vulnerable due to the loss or lack of sustained livelihoods.

Jamaal tries to sell water bottles, tissues, biscuits on the street to people walking on the street, car drivers endeavoring at the end of the day to help his poorly paid father whose low income of his rather unstable carpenter profession can barely afford with Jamal’s contribution to bringing enough food for the family.

“I had hoped in the past to study and normally live, but I have to go out every morning to work and, I wish not to continue like this forever, I hope to study someday and do not have to beg people to buy from me,” Jamal said

The joint report between Save the Children and UNICEF estimated that around [2.7 million youth](#) in Syria are not in school. Moreover, Human Rights Watch estimated approximately half of the refugee children outside of Syria do not have access to formal education. One in three schools cannot be used because they have been damaged, destroyed or now serve as centers for resettlement or military activity.

Asma, Jamal and hundreds of children have been forced children laborers earning a humble amount of money to help their family in their daily endeavor to survive, while, unwillingly dropping-off their future.





This growing phenomenon is parallel with the drastic exodus of forced displacement in northern Syria by which have affected almost half a million Syrian families whose children amount nearly to half of the displaced civilians.

Inception by volunteer tackling child labor

A new initiative in Idlib city has begun, by Damaa women lead association that has, over the past weeks, conducted initial local scanning of street children labor. The study listed in its first scan nearly 320 children in the city of Idlib solely.

Monthna, Damma' office manager who runs the civil society organization alongside volunteers the new initiatives. She hopes to introduce their data to the donors about the large-scale problem to act in accordance with the needs sooner.

We are willing to introduce a plan that supports street-children with reintegration programs to education

and schooling and more important material assistance, [i.e. financial and clothing support]. The program will aid their families to send their children to resume education

"We aspire to conduct this project by those children who through them we believe and foresee a better future for the families and society as a whole" the manager said,

The program, which is currently being designed, is working to encompass psychological support for children due to the abuse and trauma they have been exposed to while working on the street. Especially girls who get harassed and abused by people on the street while they try desperately to sell some of their goods and earn a living.

Even if we start small now, it is better than nothing, I believe that we will gradually expand and one day eliminate the widespread children labor phenomena or at least limit its proliferation."



Children of one world organization launched a children activity in Sarmada Northern Idlib countryside. The activity aimed to provide psychological support for the children and integrate the displaced children in the host community, mainly after the huge number of displaced people following the Russian and Assad's military campaign against Idlib and Aleppo.

Ahmad Hamsho, the activity supervisor explained the activity "we implement the activity in a primary school in Sarmada, Idlib. The activity targeted thirty children from the hosting and displaced communities," speaking of the positive impact of these activities Alhamsho added "the most important objective of this activity is to reduce the negative effects of war on children, especially in the displacement and shelling circumstances, which may affect their relations with the others, and as a result, it will have negative impact on the child in school,"

During the last Russian and Assad military campaign against Idlib and Aleppo countryside which resulted - until writing this article - more than 900 thousand displaced civilians the vast majority of them are children, the child protection and psychological support organizations are working at their best to rehabilitate and integrate the children in the society under extremely difficult situations.

Children of One World is a civil society organization working on child protection to achieve child welfare. The organization established in 2012 in Aleppo city.





Survival of the Ba'ath jails enormous needs and humble support

“When you get released from detention back to the free life, then you wish that you have never existed..”

A statement that resonates with hundreds of former detainees from Assad's detention facilities following their release.

When you ask them about their situation after being discharged from the detention, their life and struggle to overcome the trauma and rebuild their lives from scratch. The circumstances “survivors” are living under, perhaps, like the other millions of Syrian people in the north of the country. However, the differences between them and normal people are beyond contemplation to those who have not experienced life in the Baath regime prisons.

Unforgettable pain

I was Kidnapped by Latakia's security forces and sent to Latakia state prison where Jomana was inhumanely tortured for providing medication to those so-called “terrorists' patients” in Salqen town northern Idlib rural who were in fact injured civilians by the Assad regime airstrikes. Jomana Al-Hussaini, a 47-years-old survivor was detained for approximately one year and a half and was released in 2018 in prisoner exchange deals between rebel forces and the Assad regime.

Following her release, Jomana lacked support and was on the edge of the destitution, her husband married a different woman, her dad and mother died before she was released. “I felt worthless, unwanted and despised by everyone, even my close family, let alone my physical situation which was in a dreadful need for medication, let alone the mental distress that I was suffering along. The contemptuous way people were observing me, even my closest friends, made me feel judged and ashamed of what happened and being arrested was something that I did to myself, no one showed any support after my survival.”

After resettling in Sarmada, Jomana lived with a friend of hers and started to reach out to a local NGO called “Start-Point” a civil society organization which supported her psychologically with training and rehabilitation sessions in their center amongst other survivors “The training helped slightly to overcome what we suffered from trauma that I have undergone. let alone a low financial aid they were able to support me with to afford some living expenses.” She said

“I also received training and advocacy workshops that raise women's rights values, family coordination and technical training on computer software to help us acquire more abilities and tools to use when we will apply for a job.”

Joanna's experience reflects that the support from the civil society groups to the survivors lack quantitative and quality. “The NGO's support offered training and support that neither helps us in the long term of recovery mentally nor financially or socially... After the

turmoil and detriment of spending years of our lives in prison how come such a short program would help us recover?”

A few months later, Jomana found one of the life-changing assistance that helped her to restore somewhat a glimpse of her normal life. “Through a different organization program, I finally got back on my feet finally,” she said, “I received assistance from Kesh Malek through their well-known program Ta'afi or [recovery]”. The program supported Jomana with networking assistance sharing her CV amongst their NGOs who were looking for medical workers of her expertise. “I was lucky to have found and got that support that got me to work again and earn a living. However, there are a lot of survivors who do not have experience or something to do to help them survive and build up their life again.”

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, the numbers of detainees and enforced disappeared are estimated at around 144.889 prisoners from March 2011 until August 2019.

“The difficulties to document and assist those who were released are immense in comparison with the limitation of resource and security concerns inside Syria, that restrain donors from investing more to empower this marginalized group.” According to Wala'a a founder of “Realise me” organization in Syria

“On the other hand, woman survivor is baring the worst circumstance of disgraceful shaming, negligence, and ill-treatment,” she said





Walaah noted that the vast majority of survivors need rehabilitation to revive their hope in life and enable them to find work or study to rebuild up their future, their families and ultimately continue the long fight for freedom for those who are still in detention, let alone justice and accountability from the perpetrators.

“Realise me” organization was originally founded in eastern Damascus suburb by a group of women community leaders to assist survivor mothers to look after their children after their release from Assad’s prisons. “We worked voluntarily to look after the children and give the survivor mothers who were let down by society instead of getting double support.” “Realise me” organization has been working on getting training programs to enhance women’s capacity to engage them in the political sphere and to be an advocate for those who are still in prison and bring the criminals who tortured them to justice in the future.

On the same token, Kesh Malek Ta’afi’s project manager shared the long-term view of their programs that they are working on to advance women’s skills

and capacitate them in their pursuit of equity, justice. Ta’afi’s project encompasses 40 former prisoners inside Syria and another 40 in Turkey enabling them to recover their healthy life and build up their future.

According to the program manager “Ahmad Helmi” who is a former detainee himself, The program works on providing accommodation, physical, psychological support and training programs as well as pairing them with civil society organizations and getting a job that meets their field of expertise and ultimately feels somewhat back on track.

“There is scant help available for survivors of detention, as needs exceed the capacity of the regional civil society organizations and local initiatives in Syria,” Helmi said

“Our role as survivors and civil society is to champion survivors’ struggle and help them endeavor better life and advocate for the thousands of the innocent disappeared in Assad’s prisons and help them to hold the responsibility of these crimes to the dock of justice.”

solidarity stands for Idlib

Female volunteers in the Woman support and empowerment unit and activist in Aleppo North Syria organized two solidarity stands for Idlib, in Qabassin and Izaz in Aleppo Northern countryside.

The stand was in solidarity with Idlib after the latest military campaign against the province.



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Theater and the civil society..

Overlooked while trying to survive through individual endeavours.



“ It is all about freedom and that is what we are trying to teach our children

A medium-sized, makeshift tent stands proud in Al-Bab, Syria. Scrawled across its inner canvas are brightly colored, hand-painted pictures. This is the work of a group of local schoolchildren aged 12 to 15, who gathered here regularly throughout the week to learn the dramatic arts, as part of director Salman Ibrahim's theatre group, "Bread Way". "Each child drew what he thinks, loves or dreams of," Ibrahim said. "Some of them painted homes, some painted the Syrian revolution flag and freedom motto." They did this to fit the theme of their new play, Dreamers Theatre, in which these same children share their ambitions, circumstances, and memories of war.

A theatre is a recovery tool for the children and people from war-trauma. It gives them the platform to express themselves and collectively overcome their shared anguish by giving them the place to see, talk, take part in theatre plays. "Al-Ibrahim"

Al-Ba'ath perception of Theatre

Civil society looks to the theatre as a mediocre unnecessary activity to which they think to include in their to-do list for school children.

The root cause of this problematic negligence can be traced to the inherited Ba'athist approach in Syria. Al Ba'ath utilized theatre and controlled its content scrutinizing word by word that is being said on the stage." Said Al-Ibrahim



Theatres' role in Syria has always been to support the totalitarian regime. The inelegance personnel acknowledged that theatre's role in the society is to stimulate people's thinking towards freed and liberated society.

"Theater boost people's to questions about the social, political and local state of their country, and who is responsible...etc" the director added

"The theatre stage metaphorically displays in a sarcastic or ironic theme sometimes the state of corruption inequality, discrimination in the country making people both laugh, think and question," Al-Ibrahim said

One of the old rare initiatives in Syria was following 1967, the defeat of the [six days war] with the Israeli occupation, when. Sa'adallah Wanos directed a play that shadowed how the Syrian authorities were the reason why the war was lost. After the theatre play ended, people sparked to the street demonstrating calling for freedom and overthrow of the regime which was ruled by Hafez as a minister of the defense and Salah Jadid who the president of Syria (1966-1970) who repressed and arrested many of the protesters.

"In a nutshell, the theatre was stripped from playing its fundamental role in any community," Salam said

The Syrian regime established the ministry of art and theatre, ostensibly to amplify and empower artwork in Syria opening up broader dimensions for actors, artists, writers to be more creative. However, this body was utilized to cater to and instill Al-Ba'ath's rule and ideology of so-called resistance. The Ba'ath regime amplified the view of being the Arab first forefront in the Israeli occu-

pation ultimate battle for freeing Palestine and consequently oppress any initiative that would not suit the criteria that do not suit.

After the revolution in March 2011, despite the insecurity circumstances, broader dimensions to run artwork to which was introduced and conducted by revolutionary and self-funded from the actors and friends' network who believes in the message and value of theatre add to the society.

Dakaken means (shops), Ibrahim's first play was performed in Aleppo that year by local activists and volunteers, but ensuring a nightly run became difficult due to instability in the city at that time. This uncertainty saw him move to Idlib in 2017, to focus on teaching, before he moved to Al-Bab in 2018. Since then, he has been able, despite the barriers, to work with children and introduce them to the theatre.)



'Dreamers Theatre'

"Dreamers Theatre is freedom of speech, writing our scripts and conducting plays our way," the 37-old director explains.

He's been penning plays since he graduated with a degree in Arabic literature from the University of Homs in 2005, but, for censorship reasons, it wasn't until 2014 that one finally made it to the stage.

Children Bread Way group, a space of imagination and stretching creativity.

One of these young actors is Nesren Al Ward, 14, who came from Erben, in East Ghouta, where her two brothers, Ahmad and Ala'a, were killed in an airstrike. "I was sieged and deprived of going to school or playing because of the bombing," she says. She spent three months living in a basement with her parents and two

surviving brothers, Aref and Bara'a, before moving to Al-Bab. "We were unable to do anything at home, but with my mother and brother we spent time acting in the sleeping room of our house, inspired by local actors I used to see on TV which was how I started acting."

In Al-Bab, Nesren is able to study again, although she has been moved back by two grades. "It makes me feel sad to have lost those years, but I am studying now again and that is what matters," she says.

"When I came here, I finally found somewhere to sleep without [the sound of] bombs every night. It feels normal now, but for years, I could not have peace like this or at least no fear of being bombed or killed and losing my family."

Children like Nesren, who have been most affected by the war, that both Ibrahim and NGO worker Clare Payne wish to help heal through theatre.

Payne, who is from Northern Ireland, works in Romania and is supporting Ibrahim independently, helping him to raise money for his plays. They first met at a peacebuilding course in Turkey last year. "One of my main purposes with Salman is to restore social dialogue, via theatre, as it's the first brick in the path of new generations that should not keep paying the price of war," she says. "Theatre is a way that communities can express themselves and find relief from the oppression they are living under."

Abdul Razak Kharar, 13, was bussed out of Aleppo with his two brothers, one sister and parents in December 2016. Just like Nesren, Abdul Razak had found it difficult to go to school regularly due to the bombings. Thankfully, his whole family survived and now, in Al-Bab, he is able to live

normally, returning to his studies and learning how to act in his spare time.

For two months, four days a week, Abdul Razak headed to that tent, rehearsing the play, watching theatre on TV and talking through the script, ahead of the show's opening night, which took place last month in Al-Bab. "I have enjoyed working with Salman and my friends together every day," he says. "I was shy, partially still now if I am honest, but I am hoping to stay longer with them because I do not have many friends from my city, as all of them are scattered across northern Syria and some were killed, too." Before he joined Ibrahim's theatre group, Abdul Razak used to watch shows on YouTube and TV, and particularly enjoyed the work of Egyptian actor and comic Adel Emam and Syrian actor Abdul Rahman Eid. "Acting for me has become a way to express so many feelings I have," he says. "I want to become an actor because I want to make people smile."

'Theater is a key for peace'

While Payne strongly believes theatre offers light moments of relief, she also sees her involvement in this initiative as an opportunity to build peace, which, she says, is complicated in Syria. "The communities have become shattered and unable to integrate with one another; thus, the process of peace will take time."

"However, if we invest in more work with children ... we will advance quicker."

One of the ways Ibrahim ensures the children are always learning is by giving them opportunities to discuss sensitive subjects and ethical dilemmas through the content of their performances. For example, at certain points in the

play, he gets the guests involved. "This manifests when the actors on stage ask the audience's opinion and what to do to solve this problem, [sparking] a public debate about local matters and making the society itself come up with a solution." An example of this is when Abdul Razak, who portrays the father in the play, tries to prevent his daughter from going to school. "The actors move this conversation to the audience and try to find solutions and reasons behind this behavior from the parents," says Ibrahim.

Addressing this scene, Abdul Razak, who knows well the pain of not being able to study, says: "I liked my role but not the idea of preventing anyone from going to school."

As a result of Ibrahim's teachings, Nesren and Abdul Razak both say they have seen a marked difference in their confidence levels. They now want to pursue careers in the arts. "I want to become an actor," says Nesren, "because I love and enjoy watching and acting. I want to make people happy and smile, and to



"I had hoped in the past to study and normally live, but I have to go out every morning to work and, I wish not to continue like this forever, I hope to study someday and do not have to beg people to buy from me,"

make my family proud of me."

Abdul Razak wants to be both an actor and a director, just like Ibrahim. "I want to perform my own ideas, which is what Salman is teaching us to do, and become famous in the future," he says.

Ibrahim is convinced that this confidence has been built as a result of giving the children the freedom to develop their own ideas. He simply

points them in the right direction. "People were deprived of freedom's tools and it's my quest to bring it back to life," he says. "It is all about freedom and that is what we are trying to teach our children: to learn, practice and do it as a lifestyle, and that is what will bring Syria back."

Individual initiatives overlooked by civil society

Transformative theatre experience is moving towards a more creative method born out of the difficulties it is suffering from, notably financial support to buy the tools he needs for his plays. These limitations did not stop Salman's plans who altered into different ways to keep his plays running. By recycling unused useful materials that can be used to make puppets that children will later use in the new coming plays.

Trainers are teaching children how to create from scratch their own characters and help them to develop first of all a new skill of design and crafting their favorite puppet then use it to come up with a sketch that will use the puppet in the performance in a later stage.

Nawar Bulbul, a 46-years old, Syrian TV and Theater actor, writer and director said that throughout his work, he has been trying effortlessly to contribute, work and propose for theatrical projects in and outside Syria to the civil society organization across Turkey, Europ, however, their contribution had done more harm than good.

"The civil society has failed the theater movement in Syria and, intentionally neglected the artistic movement despite the importance and value it holds to the people and

Syria."

Both Al-Ibrahim and Bulbul work have relied on donations from a small circle of people who believe in the theatre message and its principal value to the Syrian society.

Al Ibrahim notes that civil society ought to realize and ultimately adopt these small projects and merge them in their educational programs at school to develop children's skills and creativity.

While Bulbul believes that the civil society's funds will always be biased and relying on them will not contribute to the improvement of theater in Syria. However, Al Ibrahim envisions in the future that civil society would work to support independent theatre bands that organize artistic theatre.

"The content of the plays does not need to be professional, the key thing is to establish an organized body that is devoted only to produce regular theatre plays that engage with the people and reflect their life," Al-Ibrahim said

"The fruits of the support will contribute to the long term an artistic experience that will eventually make the coming generation involve children and people to practice, through theater, freedom and heal from the trauma," Al-Ibrahim said

"Theater is like the bread we eat to survive daily... we need theater to live democracy and develop liberties and render society members to be actively engaged and citizens in the future of their country... in the future of better Syria."

Counting and awaiting the next attack..

What does a war-work-place look like?

Is it next hour, is it tonight, today, perhaps tomorrow? A question that loomed in Abdul Razaq Ja'ar's head every day thinking and worrying. Ja'ar's could not help taking his mind off thinking about the bombs and warplanes when he used to walk to his work in Ferash Radio a few months ago in the town of Kafranbel in Idlib rural.

In his daily routine, Ja'ar heads to the office in the afternoon, preparing the daily news brief. "From my home to my workplace, I was always accompanied with nonstop shelling or warplanes flying around the town, shelling sometimes and only flying very closely to the ground which is equally frightening." Ja'ar's said,

Expecting massacre

The daily horror in the Union of Revolutionary Bureaus (URB)'s headquarters that encompassed 150 employees approximately was indescribable frightening. "It made me think of the image of the aftermath of any direct target against the building, it could have been a bloodbath." He added. Once, while taking his time to go to the office in May 2019, the atmosphere in the town was intense, the smell of the city and the earth-shaking sounds of explosions made the town look like a ghost-city "I made it that day to the office's building the attacks became closer." Ja'ar said. The harrowing shelling circumstances were a normal part of people's lives in the past months in northern Syria in general. Assad-Russian led campaign against the demilitarized area did not stop since September 2019.



Ja'ar had to ignore these distractions and put together the afternoon news hour, however, the next attack were 20 meters far from the building to which turned into an utter anarchy state, "we did not know where to go or hide, no underground basement was available to shelter during the bombardment." the radio producer said. "Miraculously there were no casualties, and the whole building was evacuated, and we were sent home while the jets and bombs could be heard not far far away from me."

According to [Reporters Without Borders](#), Syria stands at the 174 level among 180 countries around the world in terms of hazardous for media and press. According to the [Committee to Protect Journalist \(CPJ\)](#) annual report in 2019, five journalists were killed in 2019.



According to Reporters Without Borders, Syria stands at the **174 level among 180** countries around the world in terms of hazardous for media and press.

Risk management

Osama Ahamd, the 40-years old administration member of the URB explains that following the escalation against the city and northern-Syria, overall, the organization initiated the emergency plan in the building to only rely on the minimum staff capacity to run the building. "We planned to only have the least number of members of staff to avoid loss of life, at least until a ceasefire takes place. The NGOs offices across Syria were under bombing alike all civilian targets, we were not an exception," UBR manger said

After a harrowing day at URB's HQ when the staff underwent was on the 25th a nearby attack to the head-quarter took place, "The staff have immediately evacuated the building,"

The horror of the evacuation recurred once again "It felt like walking to death, knowing that an attack will happen in any minute and seeing everyone rushing away from the building which was later attacked, but thankfully the building was empty and the damages were minor,"

After that day, the administration, given the worsening security reasons, decided to stop its offices across the city. The Radio station, nonetheless, kept relatively functioning and streaming news but changing the office regularly in the city for security concerns. The instability carried on for months and the attack waves were constant making the capacity of URB and other local NGOs capacity to carry harder and rather reckless act, Ahmad explained that, despite the difficulties, their teams are scaling up their efforts to help the largest numbers of people affected internally displaced people and cooperated with other NGOs.



Grave escalation

According to the Response Coordination Group 2019 final report, the humanitarian workers counted 38 casualties including aid workers, medical workers and civil defence. The report also cited that nearly. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) has confirmed over 1,300 civilian deaths, including over 300 children, since the launch of the offensive campaign, nearly all of which are attributable to the Syrian government and Russian forces. There have been at least 68 documented attacks on healthcare facilities. Attacks by government forces have dramatically increased since the end of December, with entire villages razed and civilian evacuation routes reportedly targeted. The hostilities have resulted in over a million displaced and the numbers are still rising.

Ahamd recalls what happened, In December 2019, when the URB HQ was targeted with two airstrikes and destroyed a significant part of the building with zero-casualties. The building only suffered from major damages and almost full equipment losses. A month later the building was deliberately crashed again by two airstrikes that turned the whole building into rubble.

“ Over 3,800 humanitarian workers are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of Syrian regime forces

“Our staff is scattered across northern Syria and our capacity to work efficiently as we used to be has dramatically been affected” said Ahmad.

While international laws afford aid workers certain protections and privileges, the Syrian-Russian forces, has followed far away from the ethics of war according to the international norms and rules of engagement in war-zones. The civil society organizations found themselves caught between a pledge to protect and a reality in which political powers try to co-opt, restrict or attack their work.

The local civil society groups are gradually due to bombardment or high risks in the work environment, their workplace is shrinking, their staff who are being targeted, killed or displaced, and eventually, the donors take the shortcut backstop and stopped their programs leaving the Syrian civil society in limbo years of work and fading away their efforts to support the syrian society.

[Over 3,800 humanitarian workers](#) are still detained or forcibly disappeared at the hands of Syrian regime forces.

“The international community should be looking for solutions, the attacks should be stopped and enforcement measures should be applied to maintain peace and support the nemours numbers of displaced civilians.” The UBR administrator explained, “The alternatives, rather ongoing plan, is more death and rising enforced displacement of Syrian people and ultimately prolonging the efforts of recovery from the war that Assad nor Russia stopped waging against the Syrian people.”

Idlib Under Fire

Between November 2019 - February 2020

Over 612

Vital facility were attacked as follows:



	36 Camps
	170 Educational Facilities
	83 Medical Facilities
	29 Bakeries
	33 Public Marketplaces
	20 Civil Defence Centers
	98 Service Facility
	131 Mosques
	14 Ambulances

Historical Glimpse on Syrian civil society

Part 2: Military Domination

The struggle between the military and civil state

In 1949, the first coup took place in Syria after a relatively stable, civil rule in the country. Led by Husni Al-Zaem, the coup ousted Shukri Al-Kwatle, which was the beginning of nearly a twenty coup that took place between 1949-1970. At the onset of his rule, Al Zaemn announced a series of decrees and laws that solidified the modern civil state model that Al-Zaem predecessor had worked to establish. Improving women's rights, limiting religious figures power in the State Act. Throughout his policy, the large segment of the society could adduce that Al-Zaem was trying to attract the emerging sectarian parties in the country.



These steps subsequently, after the unfolded news about Al-Zaem's relation with the Americans which sparked a local descent movement against him. Al-Zaem counter-reaction was suspending many parties in the country, nullified various rights and liberties of journalism, media and all aspects of political dissent activities. As a result, the subsequent coup took place by Sami Al-Henawe which was applauded by the Syrian people. The new coup leader endeavored to embed civil rights in the country. He restrained the military's interference in the civic life and political sphere. A plurality of party policy was embraced allowing the establishment of new parties to freely work in the country, yet except for socialist parties. Even though the Hashem Al-Atasi was elected as a president, the army domination was relentless. He supported women's participation in the newly elected parliament. Al-Henawe's significant endeavor was to form an Arab Union with Iraq; however, this step led to his overthrow by Adeb Al-Sheshakle who maintained relatively the civic life in the country. Al Sheshakle dominated his power grip in the country and turned into a dictatorship military state. He dissolved the parliament in 1951. In 1953, he appointed himself to be the president after a public election to which had only him as a candidate in the country. However; he willingly stepped down to Hashim Al-Attasi, to temporarily run the country until a new president is elected, due to his worries of significant division that was to paralyze the Syrian army.

During Al Attasi's rule, the Syrian people attempted to end the military's intervention and prevent a comeback of the similar military state of Al Attasi predecessor Al-Sheshakly by civil movement and mass protests. As a result of the immense public pressure, the new regime enacted the 1950 constitution in the country after being halted during Sheshakly's rule who derogated people's rights and liberties in the constitution version that was adopted and implemented during his rule. The democratic movement was steadily improving forward, conducting both parliament and the presidential election. The electoral outcome accredited Hashem Al Attasi as the democratically elected president who democratically ruled Syria between 1954-1955.

The Syrian-Egyptian Arab union

While the union was popular and publicly demanded by both nations; however, the conversion to the new



Hussni Alzaeem - First military coup leader

union was not established through a transparent way between both state's formal authorities. The army did not consult the government nor parliamentary or had presidential consent to which was considered as a coup against the legitimate and democratically elected authorities. The new union brought a new united constitution which was written down by prominent military coup champions in 1952. Liberties, political rights and parties' plurality were abolished by the Nasri loyalist agents in Syria. The civil and political life were exclusive to the Nari and previous Baath supporters. The military authority established the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs aiming to facilitate the operation of civil associations, organizations, clubs and all political practices and in the country, which officially kicked off in 1958. The state new organ working to dominate the civil society organizations and impeded any anti Nasserist initiative in the country.

Obstruction civil society movement, freedom and rights

Before the announcement, laborers had by law rights to protest, strike from work and organize labor associations. In 1958, two weeks post to the union's imposition these rights were squashed by the new regime to dismantle and re-mobilize the working labor force. Throughout the ministry of labor and social affairs, led by the Ba'athist former member and military officer Mostafa Al-Hamdon the new regime worked to dis-function the labor civil society bodies. It continuously interfered with trying to restrain their efforts and degrade their work in the internal election and/or closing their official offices.



Labor demonstration in the fifties

Efforts to restore labors and civil rights

According to Kamal Deeb's book 'Syria's history', approx. Of 300 laborers associations representatives assembled in January 1960 in Damascus calling out for Abdul Naser to uphold labor's rights, end the Arabic Socialist Union prevalence in the labor sphere and amend labor laws to be fairer for the working class. The authoritarian regime's reaction was to arrest the participants in the protest. The mass arrest led to the resignation of the Executive Committee of the Labour Union in solidarity with the arrested protesters; however, the authorities did not make any policy change to resolve the intense situation. In fact, the Nasir's government appointed a new pro-socialist union committee who were fully subordinate to the Union military leadership.



University exams 1950s

political rights and parties' plurality were abolished by the Nasri loyalist agents in Syria

The past political and civil rights Syrians have gained radically got decayed. For instance, labor lost their rights of assembly or establishing organized bodies that represent and advocate for their rights. During the unity Syrian lived the authoritarian regime where police, intelligence agent's role and power inflated. Cases of enforced disappearance, torture, death under extreme torment in the intelligence secret detention center experienced dramatic surged. For example, a well-known anti-Nasseri/ Baath figure Farajallah Al-Helo the secretary-general of the Syrian Communist Party was abducted, tortured and killed in Damascus in 1959.

The Nasserist authorities continued to deplete the political life in Syria. The original parliament was replaced with what so-called [Nation Council] whose members, unlike the previous preliminary elected members. The Nation Council members were being appointed by Cairo's dictatorship leadership.

Death of the Republican Arab Union

In 1961, the partition was implemented by colonel Abdul- Kareem Al-Nahlawe. The colonel transferred the country to its democratic government institutionalized country form by assigning a temporary transitional government to run the country and the transitional period.

The appointed government's high priority was to end the Emergency Statues in the country, restore the freedom and liberties in the country, namely freedom of expression and journalism. However, its endeavors were being relatively in conflict with the remaining Nasrist agents in the state's governmental bodies. Successfully, these efforts dismantle the authoritarian state arms and enacted the civil liberalities, ended emergency status and relatively reintroduced civic rights in the country.

In June 1962, mass movements took off to the street to demand democratic implementation and amplification of civil rights for the people. The popularity of this movement contributed to lifting the ban on the media and freedom of speech and the party's activism.

According to Al-Deeb's book, a sum of twenty pamphlets were published only in two weeks of lifting the ban on the party's activities. The publications urged the government for more reforms and enact a large spectrum of liberties in the country. The emergency statue was lifted and after drafting a Party Act, a new parliamentary election was planned in July 1963.



Adib Alshishalkli - Syrian military 1950s



Abdul Nasser & Shukri AlKwatli - United Arab Republic 1958

In contrast, the initiative did result in zero gains and the military interference dominated the state's executive and governmental institutions. In parallel, The Baath party officially controlled Iraq's rule after a bloody coup in the county in February 1963, where the military sector removed the civil authority. However, his intervention did not have the same impact in Syria. Until a new military coup once again by Abdul Kareem Al Nahlawe. He worked to constraints any enterprise that worked to uphold social and civil rights. In fact, he instilled military intervention control in the government and the state's ministries. Eventually, Nahlawe's was overthrown by what became the final Baath coup which led the defense minister Hafez Al-Assad to become the Syrian's presidency on the 8th of March coup.

Coups within the military circle: March 8th, 1963: Militarized state and abolishment of civil society role and civil rights.

Battle was ongoing amongst the Baath's military divisions and figures endeavoring to render the rule of the country under their superiority. With the Iraq Baath branch collapse losing power in Iraq after a coup led by Abdul Salam Aref, the Syrian Baath branch members were overwhelmed with fears the same fate. Therefore, it imposed again martial laws, military authorities expelled and uprooted any endeavor that tried to topple or challenged their power trying to avoid recurrence of what occurred in Iraq.

Since 1963, the Baath occupied Syrian's rule. Its leaders endeavored to prevail in their hegemony over the civil society movement and civic associations. The party's widespread policy of Baath's ideology upon all state, domestic associations. Their intrusion aimed at the executive level of leadership and worked to change the system from the democratic electoral system to an



Damascus 1950s



Damascus University end of 1950s

appointing one. In this way, the party ensured that the high level of these bodies is loyal to the ruling party. Associations were transferred to have full Baathist loyal members. For instance, the farmers' union, established in 1964, had rejected any member who is not faithful to the party and worked to replace any member of staff of the association whose loyalty was equivocal.

Similarly, the Student's Union which enjoyed freedom relatively from the Baath dominance; However, in 1966 all members of the union mass arresting campaign took place by state intelligence of the union's members and replaced them with loyalist ones. The union became like a sub-Baath branch, fully funded by the party endured and spread Baath ideology among university students until the time being. In 1968, the Revolution Youth Union (RYU) was established to be the Baath arm in the country to indoctrinate youth and recruit them. The union's members' age range was between 14-20, in a

later stage, the membership to the RYU became compulsory in the governmental schools.

On the one hand, the Baath party established and controlled local, towns, province councils as well as public associations and professional bars that banned all forms of politically affiliated activism. On the other hand, the parliament was used to amplify the Baath dominance. It passed the Local administration law which controlled small local bodies and tied them directly with the regional command of the socialist Baath Arab party.

Local organizations played in the military state to prevail and expand the Baath's power grip across the country. It has been working as an agency to scrutinize and censor locals and suppress any decent endeavor before it even begins...

“ In 1968, the Revolution Youth Union (RYU) was established to be the Baath arm in the country to indoctrinate youth and recruit them. The union's members' age range was between 14-20, in a later stage, the membership to the RYU became compulsory in the governmental schools.

In 1969, the military state reproduced the transitional constitution, which pronounced the solo party ruler and leader of the Syrian state and society.

The constitution eliminated people's rights that grant or allow any level of freedom, assembly or speech. Utilizing arbitrary arrest throughout the advantage of the emergency status in the country, the Baath continued to overturn any political party, labor association, farmers club or student institute to work but under its policy. Both Baath's incumbent and old policy had been to bring together all civil society bodies to operate under its rule using force or intimidation to bring people all together under their umbrella.

This mural was made by Kesh Malek on 14 February to shed light on the displaced children dying because of extremely cold weather in Idlib



Over **one million** children
in **Idlib** are facing the same fate
of The **Little Match Girl..**

SAVE THEM

Kesh Malek
كش ملك

Syria Banksy

