

## **We Have Already Overpowered the Beast:**

### **What Fear Taught Me**

In days of lack of food, electricity, water, and heat, I sit at home in Damascus, contemplate the darkness and the Calligraphy on the wall by the Syrian Mouneer Alshaarani, which my roommate Lina hung on the wall: “Scared I am of that the heart trusts in,” a known verse by Ibn Arabi.<sup>1</sup> Then I think of a neighbouring picture: “Fear is an infinite number,” from the poem, *Identity*, by the Lebanese poet Ounsi el-Hajj.<sup>2</sup> The word fear triggers me. “But fear! What is fear?”<sup>3</sup> I know I am brave on different levels, yet fear costs me much thinking. I think of it when I hear fights, when I am deprived of sleep, of water when I hide from missiles, when I lose friends and relatives, when I see people living in the gardens and on the road paths of Damascus hospitals. Is it precisely fear, deep sadness, or is it anger?

During this global pandemic of COVID-19, while doing my Ph.D. in the US, I restore these contemplations on times of lockdown and lack of sources. I retrieve these educational and healing lessons from around 2014/2015. When the pandemic started, I felt anger. How could this happen again in one age? How can people around the world, who witnessed wars, poverty, death, violence, displacement, discrimination, sickness, unemployment, or how come those who experienced the attacks of September 11 in New York, can live such a big crisis again? It is not fair; we are already done with our severe battles. I isolated myself late, similar to many in the academic field, and thought, what did I learn from a long tragic war?

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<sup>1</sup> -“منير الشعرائني - Mouneer Alshaarani - Posts.” Accessed May 21, 2020.

<https://www.facebook.com/153316014743719/photos/a.321689127906406/476482482427069/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>2</sup> -“أدب .. أنسي الحاج : هوية.” Accessed May 20, 2020.

<http://www.adab.com/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=73625>.

<sup>3</sup> - Ibid.

Here is my roommate talking about her unique relationship with her boyfriend. She is a political, highly educated person, and I am impressed by how much she is living the moment, involved in the conversation without bringing any war narrative, which occupies all my thoughts. In Damascus, I appreciate people's endurance against my mourning the lost, divided country. Sometimes, we stick at home, avoiding explosions. Here are other friends who embrace me at their house. They watch *Sponge Pop* and laugh a lot. We play *Wii*, dance, and sing with it. Such experiences help me to forget what is happening outside for moments. The stubbornness of Syrians to prettify every day; to celebrate occasions, to make new friends, to love, to get married, to cook professionally, and to laugh, shock me.

People can be more resilient, brave, patient than what we think. Displaced nations crossed on feet thousands of miles to peaceful places in Europe. When their boat's motor stopped working, Sara and Yusra Mardini swam for over three hours, pulling the sinking boat with its passengers to safety.<sup>4</sup> The young girl Khaldiya turned herself into a teacher to educate other kids in the camp. In her documentary *Another Kind of Girl (Khaldiya, 2016)*, she describes, when she arrived at the camp, encountered the severe conditions, and heard children crying all the time, from that time, she changed into another person. She does not know how, but she became a brave girl.<sup>5</sup> During the crisis of COVID-19, I was also amazed by the synergy, management of the US communities, and the sacrifices of the frontline workers. These people are the brave superheroes media fantasize.

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<sup>4</sup> - The Independent. "Syrian Refugee Who Dragged Sinking Boat to Safety 'in State of Disbelief' after Being Imprisoned in Greece," September 6, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sara-mardini-yusra-refugee-crisis-mediterranean-greece-syria-ngo-a8526446.html>.

<sup>5</sup> - *Another Kind of Girl* #SHORT DOCUMENTARY #YMK9. Accessed May 12, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0yXZzDXpCI>.

A Syrian designer, Abdulla Karam, created an art, successful video game, *Path Out* (Causa Creations, 2017), to educate and tell about the refugee trip.<sup>6</sup> The history of digital pedagogy and educational video games started with the beginning of media and computing. Some examples which harness games for more productive and political ends than leisure, are *SuperStruct*, and *World Without Oil*, (2007), which expect a similar pandemic to ours now and a lack of oil. They invite players around the world to collaborate on solving these global problems.<sup>7</sup> Jane McGonigal, who collaborated to create these games, advocates the potential for games to prevent PTSD in trauma victims and refers to the various productive uses for games to raise awareness on our issues and to cultivate positive motivation and psychological reinforcement.<sup>8</sup> Our media need to highlight such aspects of healing and educational purposes. This applicable knowledge will be meaningful for our students to study during urgent, difficult times.

Similar to others, I am concerned about the uncertainty of life. Whenever I feel it, I follow the popular lessons of meditation to contemplate and learn from it. I learned that we would keep getting something from problems as long as we face them and go ahead through the waves of change. Here, I conjure up the speech of the well-known Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous on World Theater Day (1996): “What

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<sup>6</sup> - “Path Out – Causacreations.Net.” Accessed December 16, 2019.

<https://causacreations.net/portfolio/path-out/>.

<sup>7</sup> - “Lesson Plans: World Without Oil.” Accessed March 15, 2020.

<http://writerguy.com/wwo/metateachers.htm>.

“Superstruct Wiki.” Accessed March 15, 2020.

[https://superstruct.fandom.com/wiki/Superstruct\\_Wiki](https://superstruct.fandom.com/wiki/Superstruct_Wiki).

<sup>8</sup> - Naomi Clark. *What Is Queerness in Games, Anyway? Queer Game Studies*. Edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, p. 11

happens today cannot be the end of time.”<sup>9</sup> What I learned from the pandemic here, and the war there, that we should never give up the efforts towards global peace. All the world collaborates on levels of scientific research and sympathy. We sound more unified at a global, medical concern, so why do not we stay friends at standard times and other levels too? We need one universal sympathy and tolerance, even against what one considers an enemy. We literally experienced how tragic it is to be deprived of sun, air, nature, and socializing. We should never give up the efforts towards protecting our environment for the next generations as well as for our safety. Some things to be kept after we finally leave the quarantine, are longing for deep communication, concerning better public health policies, inventing more sustainable styles, the love of nature and healthy food, the less use of cars, and expanding our dating choices. For post-quarantine, let us keep the rising awareness of; how much negative impact we have on nature, how fragile some aspects of our labor systems are, that our health is the most important gift, that we do not need many things to stay balanced, and that the unity of human beings is a possible truth. We should open more borders of global friendships, produce and teach more integrative and holistic communication, and make more efforts towards helping our vulnerable members. We keep trying hard to overpower the beast, to live, to help others live, to document, to invent, and help others create.

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<sup>9</sup> - mlynxqualey. “On World Theater Day, the 1996 Message from Saadallah Wannous.” & *Arablit* (blog), March 27, 2013. <https://arablit.org/2013/03/27/on-world-theater-day-the-1996-message-from-saadallah-wannous/>.

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