



UTS
ePRESS

PORTAL Journal of
Multidisciplinary
International Studies

Vol. 19, No. 1/2
December 2023



© 2023 by the author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International [CC BY 4.0] License [<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>], allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

Citation: AL-Akl Khoury, L. 2023. The Smile of Misery. *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 19:1/2, 76–77. <https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v19i1-2.8817>

ISSN 1449-2490 | Published by UTS ePRESS | <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/portal>

CREATIVE WORK

The Smile of Misery

Loulou AL-Akl Khoury

Corresponding author: Loulou AL-Akl Khoury, loulwa14.akl@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5130/pjmis.v19i1-2.8817>

Article History: Received 16/09/2023; Accepted 02/10/2023; Published 22/12/2023

Abstract

Amidst an unforgiving winter in Lebanon, a once-thriving society grapples with an economic collapse that has dissolved the middle class and pushed many into dire poverty. From the tangible anguish of forgoing one's favourite chocolate to the broader struggles of volatile grain prices and inaccessible meat, survival becomes the primary focus. Scarcities such as water and fuel force innovative adaptations, while 'fresh money' dictates school admissions. Juxtaposing the concerns of finding luxury items like "foie gras" with the devastating reality of people burning discarded clothes for warmth, the narrative paints a grim picture of Lebanon's descent. In this context, it becomes clear: when hunger grows, luxury loses its appeal.

Keywords

Hunger; Luxury; Economic Disparity; Survival; Hardship

My favourite: chocolate stuffed with almonds and raisins was offered to me. I thanked the gift giver, looked at it and put it aside. "Take it," I told my son. "Mom, this is your favourite!" I kept numb.

It is a frozen winter. We wake up, not knowing whether we will be able to buy our loaf of bread. I love brown bread, but it is more expensive even though its production is cheaper. No more brown bread. Meat is out of the question. Chicken is more affordable, but what about tomorrow?

With our savings, our lifetime hard work, swallowed by gargantuan usurpers, life becomes ... Grain seeds could replace proteins, but lentils, crushed wheat, beans, chickpeas grown in the Bekaa, the breadbasket of the Roman Empire, have volatile prices. Citrus fruits, varied and rich vegetables grown on the fertile seashore of Lebanon have reached their peak prices. Hardly can I pay for these basic ingredients!! Lucky am I for having no youngsters at the university anymore, but they are jobless.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. **FUNDING** The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

What about my fellow countrymen?! No middle class anymore, just upper and lower classes. The upper class, aware of the economic seism, managed to withdraw their investments. The middle class and academics belong to the poor class at present. They were not aware that Lebanon ‘the piece of heaven on earth’ has become Hell Living. Some Lebanese, it is said, are borrowing the HCR card to receive dollars and buy their basic needs. The Syrian refugees are working and receiving financial aid. The Lebanese are jobless and receive no aid. I, myself, hop from one vegetable shop to another to buy low price vegetables and those that are ‘on sale’ i.e. yesterday’s vegetables. Lebanese working abroad came to visit their relatives to help them and said, ‘Lebanese are on the edge of eating each other.’ A patriotic general said, ‘We are not fair with each other.’ There is no water in his apartment tank. He drives his car, if fuel there is, to the spring village, fills six 20 litre gallons and pours them in his apartment reservoir. Most families can’t send their children to Kindergarten 1. My suggestion was, ‘Google what children learn at this level and do it yourself.’ But schools do not accept children who do not enter KG1.

Besides, schools need ‘fresh money.’ Where does this term come from? It is not a dictionary word! ‘Google it,’ said a friend ironically.

I am surrounded by creatures who worry about not finding *foie gras* for a special occasion, and others who sleep early to avoid dinner, widows who can’t pay the generator bill, bills and bills. Some are picking torn clothes and worn shoes from the garbage and burning them for some warmth. The smell of burning rubber is nauseating. Strange is my country, ‘*Le Pays du Cèdre*.’

‘When we live with hunger creeping in,

luxury becomes meaningless,’ I then answered my son,

with The Smile of Misery.