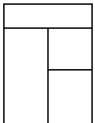


مُمتَلَكات

MUMTALAKAT



ABOUT MUMTALAKAT

Meaning “belongings” in Arabic, the word *mumtalakat* is derived from the Arabic root to own, to govern. Thus, *Mumtalakat* has to do not only with the materiality of objects, but also with a phenomenology of dominance, of power. As a title, it considers the ways in which objects shape interaction, inviting reflection on their ability to hold multiple meanings and perform personal and cultural functions. It also engages various understandings of objects as conceptual entities that carry affective memories of the migration experience.

With an emphasis on process, each iteration of this multi-part oral history project functions as a site of encounter where new discourses can be articulated. The project as a whole considers the complexities of collaborative processes, questioning conventions of the researcher/educator as main author, prioritizing participants’ perspectives, and investigating how to negotiate these relations and viewpoints through an exhibition and public events.

This installment in the Gallery’s vestibule features personal objects belonging to five Arabic-speaking immigrants: an icon, teddy bear, identity cards, rescue tools, diaries, sewing notebooks, house key, rosary, book, Keffiyeh, school note, postcard, and travel souvenirs. As remnants of remote oversea experiences, these objects open a space in the here and now for looking and reflecting on notions of home, identity and belonging.

By placing personal objects and narratives under the category of the aesthetic, *Mumtalakat* considers visibility and its constraints. Prompting encounters between the public and the private, it questions how different forms and strategies of representation test the limits of the personal and how these approaches can extend the interpretive potential of oral narratives and embed objects in their larger cultural contexts.

Participants: Malaka Ackaoui, Alexandre Ackaoui Asselin, Wissam Assouad, M.B., Maher Kouraytem, Farah Mustafa

Interview with Wissam Assouad

Interviewer: Emma Haraké

Date of Interview: 26 October 2017

Length of Interview: 47 min. 9 sec.

Place of interview: Interviewee's home

Language of interview: Arabic (Lebanese Dialect)

Objects: Religious icon, Red Cross card, toolkit

Transcription in Arabic: Emma Haraké

Translation into French: Chirine Chamsine

Translation into English: Emma Haraké

Comments

The italic text indicates when the interviewer or interviewee communicated in French or English during the interview. Text in square brackets [] is used to identify non-verbal communication or add context. Parts of the interview were deleted on the request of the interviewee.

Biographical details

Wissam Assouad was born in 1984 in Lebanon and grew up in Ein el Rimaneh with his siblings and parents. In addition to his work in outdoor education, Assouad volunteered for three years with the Lebanese Red Cross. Assouad arrived in Montreal in June 2014. At the time of the interview he was a master's student at Concordia University.

I am Wissam Assouad from Ein el Rimaneh, Chiah, Lebanon.

When did arrive in Montreal?

July 2014.

Why did you choose to come to Montreal?

My father used to live here, a long time ago, before he got married, I mean. I am talking about more than thirty-six years ago. He had a [Canadian] passport. When he returned to Lebanon after his marriage—he got married in Lebanon, came here [Canada] then returned to Lebanon again—so, when he went back to Lebanon, the embassy offered him the chance to get [Canadian] citizenship for his children. Me and my sister got it [Canadian citizenship] from our father. I had a Canadian ID card, but I waited until my twenties to apply for a Canadian *passport*. My brother was born here [Canada].

Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your life here in Montreal?

No, it's cool. During my first year, I stayed with my uncle in the *South Shore*. I felt I was too far away. I mean, it was still a new region, and I couldn't explore Montreal that much. A few years later, I moved to *Pointe-Saint-Charles*, close to *downtown*, and I started working and studying. So, that's it.

[1:19]

Which object do you want to first talk about?

We can talk about the icon. To be honest, I didn't open the icon; I may have opened it twice since moving to Canada. But when my brother gave it to me, he said, "Keep it with you." When he came to Canada more than 10 years ago, I think, he brought it with him and yeah... like this, like, he gave it to me—he handed it over.

Where do you usually keep it at home? Or...?

I used to keep it in a *trousse*, along with my important things, I mean. I kept it hidden. But when I was searching in my stuff, around a week and a half ago, I took it out and put it on the mirror. I told myself, "Why am I hiding it? I'll put some where to be seen."

It was your brother who gave it to you...

Yes.

And did you hesitate when you took it with you?

My brother was a major *support* for me because he was here [Montreal] before and he knows the region. My brother and I are very close, so when he gave it to me, it was like “Of course, I will accept it from you”. And yeah, I have a very strong relationship with my brother. I mean, he was the one who kept me going during the past three years and a bit I have been here [Canada].

Your brother?

Yes. I mean, he is the person who talks to me the most, the one who helps me the most. He is also the one I vent to the most when I have problems.

And he was here [Montreal] before...

He lived here, he lived. He was doing his *maîtrise* at *UdeM* [University] as well but he didn't continue. I believe he received a *scholarship* but didn't continue for many reasons. Yeah.

Do you remember your brother when you look at it?

Yes, sure. For me, I am not very *spiritual* but it [the icon] is like a good wish from my brother.

So it was always hidden prior to one week ago?

It was hidden with my important belongings. I consider it one of my valuable belongings. So, when I began searching for things that I brought from Lebanon—and I didn't bring very much, mostly practical things—this may be the only one, one of two items that I brought, but I can't use. They are...

More *sentimental*?

Yes, more sentimental. I brought them for their value... They have value, not a practical one, but rather a personal value.

[4:38]

Is there a relation between this [icon] and...? You just mentioned that along with the [red cross] card, they may be the only two objects that are not...?

They are the only two objects that are not very ... I can use the card, for example, to volunteer in the Red Cross. In case something happens, I have a training and can help. I can present it. Its problem is that... [looks at the card] Oh no, there is English and French. I mean, [the text] tells you what it is. This [icon] on the other hand, *it's religious*.

Some are with, some are against. Some people believe, others don't. So and it doesn't have a practical use. It's not like...[silence]

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the icon?

Not really, no.

Where did [your brother] get it from?

Guess what? Now that you're asking me, I actually don't know. I am looking at it, and it is not like made of gold and silver, it's not expensive. It is quite ordinary. I don't like religious items to be made of gold and silver because they lose their value the more money you spend on making them.

Ok. Do you keep it closed or [open] on the mirror?

Open.

[6:21]

What is the second object you'd like to talk about?

The second object I'd like to talk about? The card, the Red Cross volunteer card. I volunteered for more than three years with the Lebanese Red Cross and we went through a lot together. Even now, I consider them my second family. I have my actual family and my close friends, who aren't many, and I have the Red Cross. And we are connected through *Facebook* and *Instagram*. I mean just today I was talking to one of them.

So, you're still communicating?

Yes. And now I am preparing, I mean, I am planning a *cadeau*. I will send them a message saying that I am coming in *décembre*. And since they make a *permanence* every night, I offered like a *compétition* between the five *équipes*, where I would cook for the team that wins during the evening. The Red Cross *expérience* was very, very important for me. I mean, to become a member of the Red Cross you shouldn't... you should keep your political and your religious views for yourself, they shouldn't affect your volunteering. I mean, when you go to help someone, you cannot decline if the person has a different religion, gender or mentality. No! A human is a human. There is a person in need, and you are going to help. During those three years we helped everyone, old, young, and from all nationalities, and that's it! I mean, you give from your heart. At one point, we used to volunteer one night during the work week and once over the weekend every five weeks. We ended up giving up to four, five nights per week and we helped and covered each other's shifts, we helped. I mean, it becomes part of life. And when an explosion happens, it felt like the explosion happened next to

my home. I mean, any injured person becomes like a family member. You must go help.

Yes, this was during that period of time in 2013 [when there was a series of bombings]...

Yes, it was. I've been through the explosion of Sassine¹ [residential neighborhood in East Beirut]. There were numerous explosions, but we couldn't reach everyone. I mean, it was an experience. You see that all the people who can help, drop by. At one point, we were around fifty people working full time during the weekend. You're talking about a big house accommodating fifty people living together, eating together. Whoever feels like sleeping sleeps, and those who don't want to sleep, have to make sure not to wake up the others. It was time where that's it. I mean, you feel as if you're living with your family. My parents would ask, "Where are you going?" I say, "Red Cross." "Where are you going?" "Red Cross." I mean, "Red Cross!" There wasn't... my life was divided between my home, the Red Cross, my friends, and work. We'd finish work... let's say, if I finish early, we would go to the Red Cross center. We'd finish some work before *permanence* shift starts, so yeah!

[9:50]

Why did you decide to volunteer in the Red Cross? Did you know of any family members or...?

Friends. So, I applied before, before I... So, I was in Ein el Rimmaneh and I could have applied in Furn el Chebbak [residential neighborhood in Greater Beirut] but I applied in Gemmayzeh [division] [residential and commercial neighborhood in Beirut]. I applied in Furn el Chebbak, I applied in Gemmayzeh. Later, I applied again at Gemmayzeh [division] because I wasn't accepted the first time. I applied to the Red Cross for several reasons. The first is because in Lebanon you are either affiliated with a political party, or a certain religion, or you're [categorized] with this and that. So, when you are part of the Red Cross, it's like, for me it was like, that's it! Stop labelling and associating me with certain religious or political [parties]. And still in Lebanon, and despite all the this, they still consider that the Red Cross is related [to a religion] because it has a cross. And we faced problem because of that, I mean, but we got used to it. And the second reason was that I had friends I met at work who were also in this division. We formed a group at work together—the Red Cross group. Should anything happen: "You can call us to go and help." And on the other hand, I love to help... yeah. One of the reasons was also that my cousin had a problem. He had started working with the Internal Security Forces and he was beginning to settle down and improve his life. They gave him a gun which malfunctioned and backfired. So, when we went to the hospital, I went to the emergency room and my mother went to see the family—her

¹ October 29, 2012, Wissam al Hassan, head of the intelligence branch of the Internal Security Forces (ISF), was killed, along with civilians, by a massive car bomb in Achrafieh neighbourhood in Beirut. One hundred and twenty-eight were injured and eight others died.

side of the family—she went to see the family. So, when I arrived, the Red Cross [volunteers] were leaving the room. They were my friends; I mean, I knew them. We were together in the scouts and they applied to the Red Cross and got enlisted in the Furn el Chebbak division of the Red Cross. And they were the ones who picked him [my cousin] up, from Furn el Chebbak or Baabda. When I asked them about what happened to my cousin, I felt like they had a knot in their hearts. They said, “The doctor will inform you, everything is fine.” I felt how hard it was for them. Back then, I didn’t understand the significance of what they have just told me, “Everything is fine,” so everything was fine! However, we found out later that his condition was critical, he stayed in a *coma* for eighteen days before passing away. This is when I thought how hard it must have been for them to tell me. I know them, I am their friend and yet they were helping and giving from their hearts. So, I wanted to... Yes, just like them, why not? Why can’t I do it? Why don’t people help more? Why don’t they help others more...?

And what did your family [think]? Were they *supportive* [of your decision to join the Red Cross]? Or did they ask you to focus on your job?

Well, there is fear, there is fear. I mean, “Where are you going?”, “[to the] Red Cross.” And in the Red Cross... First, the first thing they tell you at the Red Cross is to protect yourself above all. If you protect yourself, you can save two thousand people but if you get injured in an accident, you will need time to train someone new to help people. It’s a loss for you and for others. First and foremost is self-protection, [protect] yourself as a first aid person. I mean, if an explosion happens, we have to make sure there isn’t a second explosion before [intervening]. We wait for the army, we wait for the internal security forces, we wait for everyone. If there is a fight, we should not be part of it. So, from this point of view, my parents were not concerned. And yet, despite all these precautions, when there is an explosion and you see someone leaving their house and heading towards the [Red Cross] center while everyone else is returning to their houses, you’d say: “This is a crazy person.” True! I mean there is some craziness to it. But we were people who just wanted to give. On the other hand, we weren’t living through a war. I mean, people who volunteered with the Red Cross some twenty, thirty years ago [lived] during war; they used to stay in shelters and go outside during the bombing. Yeah, we used to hear their stories. They would come to the [Red Cross] center and share their stories. For example, how they used to move through the checkpoints where [militia men] would open the car and search for weapons. So, it was really different, different! Nowadays, [people] are more tolerant of the Red Cross. But, but my parents were supportive of the *expérience* we were living through. Apart from that, apart from that, it was an *équipe* life that you get used to; you’d help each other, teach each other. New comers would learn from you. Like, there were people who learned how to clean and cook from me—I was a bit picky when it came to cleaning—they learned from me, more like we learned from each other. And later after they traveled and studied abroad, they would send *messages* from time to time saying, “*Merci* and so, I remembered you.” And I mean, it is all these stories, there will always

be beautiful memories. And even now, we send *messages* if we need each other. *It's a big community*, I mean. If I send *message* now on *Facebook* asking whether someone knows people in Montreal, I am sure there are Red Cross folks in Montreal; *it's a bigger community*. And I feel that the people who volunteer with the Red Cross have a big heart to be willing to give all this time. We used to be scheduled for one night per week from six in afternoon till six in the morning; plus, one *weekend* every five weeks because we were five *équipe[s]* on a *weekend rotation* every Saturday from five in afternoon till Monday morning. So yeah, I mean, it was a responsibility. Sometimes we had just exactly the right number of people—there was a lack of volunteers. People were not... You need people whose hearts are in volunteering, who would give to the Red Cross and stay there. Sometimes, for example, an *équipe* would [only] have six volunteers with only one ambulance heading for a big neighborhood, we were barely able to respond. This is why we always supported each other. Let's say that the *équipe* with a sole ambulance was missing one person and that the other team had two ambulances; we would accompany them and spend few hours assisting them. So yeah, we always used to help each other. I mean, yeah.

What was the *process* for someone to volunteer with the Red Cross?

They would go to any center and that's it. They submit an application.

And that's it, the application?

Yes. Later, if they get accepted... I mean, you should have time to spare and why do you want to volunteer with the Red Cross? And if you really want to be [involved] in politics or religion, then that's *ok*, go for politics and religion [elsewhere]. However, if you want to be part of the Red Cross, you should be giving from all your heart. I had a friend who rescued his brother from a car accident. When he arrived at the car [accident], a friend was next to him [his brother] and the friend's situation was more critical, so he rescued the friend first. But this is it! You come to a place where... how [difficult] but *ethically* you are obliged to prioritize: this person's condition is more critical.

Later, he accompanied his brother and spent close to six or seven hours waiting in the operations room. I mean, it is really hard.

Ok.

I wasn't accepted the first time I applied. I applied a second time and I had the support of my friends who I met. They were there [already].

Why did you bring the card with you?

In case I need it, if anything should happen. I mean, with all the problems happening in the world nowadays—let's say, a big accident or one of those people who want to hurt others or an explosion—I mean, if I can even help with just 1%, then why not? I was

trained as first aid responder in the Red Cross and later, I started driving the ambulance. Plus, I used to train [others]. And we did big emergencies, we took training for big emergencies in case something huge happens. So, since I still have the [expertise] and I can help 1%, then why shouldn't I? I mean, you can help anywhere. And maybe if I present this [card], [even if] people may not understand what it is because it's issued in Lebanon but still... still it conveys a bit.

[18:58]

Where do you put it? Do you keep it in the wallet, a drawer?

Would you believe that I don't carry it around! I mostly keep it in my Lebanese wallet because I don't want to lose it. If I keep it on me, like it is useless; Montreal is safe. I even volunteered once in an ambulance here, not the Red Cross or anything; I tried it for one day. It is very different here, much calmer. People don't have the same *stress* level; they don't have the same issues as in Lebanon. You have other problems in Lebanon. Those hit by car while crossing the street; here, everyone stops at the red [light]. You rarely encounter ugly accidents, it's all passable. The streets are accessible for seniors; they are equipped with ramps to prevent tripping. I mean, life is much easier for them. Once the weather starts to get really cold in Lebanon, elderly people fall in their apartments and break their hips. It takes a lot of time to transport and secure them [because] they're in pain. So yeah, I keep it with my stuff in my "Lebanese wallet," the one I use when visiting Lebanon.

Is there anything else you'd like to...?

No. I mean, it may have been... I mean, it was three years... the three years and a bit I spent with the Red Cross were some of the best times of my life. On one hand, they brought me to Montreal because of the *expérience* I had in the Red Cross, because of the teamwork. This drove me to apply for my *maîtrise* here in Montreal, it's all *related* I mean. Whether it's the work I used to do in *outdoors* or *team building* or the Red Cross [as a] *trainer*, it all adds up, I mean, it brought me here. *Ok*, I feel like working with people, helping people to help each other, not with addiction or mental conditions, maybe more like that way people could work together and get along with each other, so yeah. Each is a *support* on its own; it's an *expérience*, I mean. Because of the Red Cross, I started choosing *outdoor* objects that suit both. The items... so instead of getting a [bulky] winter jacket, you'd buy a smaller jacket that fits in the bag, or one that has *stripes* to be to be visible at night. You get used to all these details, it's a life *expérience* that you live through. During my time at the Red Cross, we used to... let's say it's seven or eight *équipes*, each alternating one night per week, so we used to... every Wednesday someone cooked, they either bring food from their house or cook [in the center]. I loved to cook, I used to cook for them in the center. So, I learned cooking more and more. We took care of the place, cleaning, tidying, fixing this door, and repairing that... It wasn't just like I volunteered—it took over my life. We used to take the ambulances to the *mécanicien*, wash them, scrub the car interiors, clean them

from the inside and sanitize them. We kept the center clean. People would come to the center; disinfecting wounds, replacing stitches ... cooking. We spent many nights together, went *camp*[ing] together. Each summer, me and a friend of mine from the Red Cross... when he'd finish his shift at six in the morning, I'd be waiting for him outside. We'd start the car and head to the beach before it gets busy, then we'd leave just before two [p.m.] when people were usually stuck in traffic on their way to the sea. So, yeah...

[23:31]

Do you remember your friends in the Red Cross when you look at it? What do you remember...?

I still see my friends from the Red Cross, I keep sending them messages to say hi. But I always remember them; they are always on my mind. I don't need to see the card I mean. I still see them, and I always remember certain incidents. Just two days ago, I spoke with my friend who I used to go to the beach with. He went to help at the [Red Cross] center. It's been a while since he stopped [volunteering], but he went to help in the *camp* that the center made. He said, "We were just talking about you." I mean, it wasn't easy, there was a period when I was volunteering with the Red Cross and I stopped seeing my friends. They started teasing me, "Where are you? And why aren't you spending time with us?" But at the end of the day, my time was packed between home, work; I finish work and go meet my friends, then back to the center. I either sleep at the center or I return home when everyone else is asleep. I wake up, go back to work and repeat [the cycle]. I would skip sleeping at the Red Cross two or three nights per week and sleep at my friends' because I'd be tired. So, yeah.... that's it, I mean, it becomes a life *system*. When I came to Montreal, it was very different for me because down there [Lebanon], I always had something to do. Here, I arrived, and I had no one, not even the Red Cross. I had nothing; life was empty. You feel like it's so much different. So, yeah... It is a completely different *culture*.

Yes.

I mean even, ... For me, I came to take this diploma and maybe return, or maybe eventually, I won't go back to Lebanon. I'll visit Lebanon to see my parents, but I would to work somewhere closer, because [Canada] is very far. Two trips [by plane], twelve hours flight and an *escale*. It's far! I have relatives here, but it's not the same as my parents, my brother and his family and my sister. So, this was the plan. That may be why I didn't bring a lot of things. I have a box, a box full of objects, souvenirs from the Red Cross; I keep it back home [Lebanon]. I'll visit in the New Year and start searching through my stuff. I will definitely discard of a thing or two, but the objects—I mean memories—those I'll keep.

[25:55]

Was there anything in Lebanon that you wanted to bring and didn't?

Yes, there was. Camping items: I had my tent and my *sac de couchage* and the camping items I mean... These objects [points to the rescue tool, CPR mask and head lamp on the table] don't take much space but a tent would take up half a [travel] bag. Also, the *sac de couchage* takes up a lot of space so I left them over there. Such objects were important because of work. At work, I used to do a lot of *camping* with the kids so you need good quality and durable objects. So no, I didn't bring them with me; they are still down there in Lebanon. I also have, not diving equipment, *snorkeling* equipment. Here, where would I go for *snorkeling*? You can't see anything if you dive down the lake. It's not like the sea; it doesn't have salt water.

You miss the sea?

Yes, the salt water and the taste of sea fish which is different from the river *saumon*. Especially since my father, my grandfather used to live by the sea; they'd go fishing. Sunday family lunch was sacred in our family. He [my grandfather] used to take care of preparations; he'd slice the potatoes to make *frites*, prep the fish and everything. My mother helped a little. He would wake me up in the morning, early in the morning. He used to prepare lemon or carrot juice depending on the season. He would wake me up, I'd be still tired from a night out. He would wake me up, I drink the cup of juice and go back to sleep.

[27:44]

Do you have something else to say about the card?

Hmmmm... No, not much... I mean, I mean just as the icon was a *support* from my brother, the card was a *support* from the Red Cross family; not everyone of course but I have lots of people who if I call and speak with are a huge *support* for me, they would help. I mean there are people from the Red Cross here in Montreal and Quebec who can help; it is a big family... yeah.

Ok.

Yes, true! Oh, yeah. Recently, [folks] at the [Red Cross] center were talking about elective recruitment of former volunteers who left; see if they can give a certain amount of hours per month, something around ten hours per month. We usually volunteered a *minimum* of forty-eight to fifty hours per week, so if you can volunteer for fifteen or sixteen hours... I can use this card to go back to the center. I mean, if people changed, I can show them the card, and they would be able to check their records and confirm that I was a volunteer at this center. I'd be able to volunteer again in Lebanon. I may do it if I finished my [university] *project* and visited Lebanon for few months. I mean, I can help them. We would do *training* and everything.

Are some of your friends still [volunteering], those who were with you at the Red Cross or...?

One of my friends is still there, but not every week. He is still involved as [a Red Cross] alumnus. The other friend is in the process of joining back as an alumnus. There are still many of them, and those who came one to two years after me, have now become responsible, *in charge* I mean.

[30.06]

Ok.

These three [objects] have a more practical value. This is a small *mask CPR* [opens the mask]. Few people have first-aid training, few people have *CPR training*. If you happen to be somewhere and someone had a symptom or something, you may not be able to save his life, but you could stabilize their condition in a fraction of a second. This [mask] is nothing, it's a plastic bag protecting the person who is helping, giving mouth-to-mouth [CPR], it protects against bacteria. It is a small object, but it is very important in case something happens—this *CPR mask*. At one point, we brought a *CPR mask* for every one of us at the Red Cross. Because of my line of work and [volunteering] with the Red Cross, I have two of them. I keep one of them on me and the second in my bag; one in my 'Lebanese' bag and the second stays in my 'Canadian' bag.

Does the second one have a pen and a whistle [attached to] as well?

The pen should still work [tries the pen]. You can use the whistle and the pen in case of emergency, if you have to. Let's say that something happened, and you have many injured people, you could use the pen to write on their hands or somewhere, on a paper, for example, which you clip onto them. This person has a critical condition and they need... I mean, the first thing [you do] when an emergency happens—let's say a bus crashed—the first thing you do is ask people, "If you can hear my voice and you can move, come in my direction." Those who make it, you help them get out and you head back to check on the remaining cases. You could have different types [of injuries], someone has a broken hand and is passed out for example, or you could have more critical cases, for example if someone stopped breathing. So, there are priorities; you take care of the people who can be saved. And then there are cases where it's too late and you can't save them [the people] I mean. These are some emergency scenarios where you can write on a piece of paper that someone checked on this person and they need this and that, if you couldn't [help]. Because if you were the first respondent at the scene, let's say it's the same bus crash, you have to act fast to help or you need to make an *assessment*. The whistle, yeah... I mean, if you are unable to scream or something, people can hear you and come your way, or you can whistle to seek help. I keep another *CPR Mask* in my bag. I can use my fingers to whistle, and I always carry a pen. The best type is the *feutre* pen; it's big and you use it to write on someone's skin. I

used to have a similar [necklace keychain] in the Red Cross that I kept around my neck... so, yeah.

And did they give these to everyone in the Red Cross or did you...?

No, this... we, we got this. We got it as a *group* in the Red Cross. We were an inside *group* and we did, like, a fundraising campaign and we got them for everyone. Each center used to provide a toolbox for each rescuer to keep in their cars or with them, but those are perceived as somewhat expensive. So together, we used to gather one another and organize like a [fundraising] campaign and buy them for our center. Each center, or group of centers, used to have a group or a *comité* to research how they could improve. I mean, in Lebanon, the [Red] Cross was different from the [Lebanese] Civil Defense, they don't have much funding from [the government]. They relied on donations from abroad. So, the centers used to improve autonomously. They'd change the *design* of their *ambulance* car; they'd buy new *equipment* if they could. If they weren't able, they would receive new *equipments* as donations. This was the responsibility of the center. Here [Montreal] it is different. Here, it's more of a job. I mean, they organize a *grève* if they are not getting paid, the government increases their salary. Over there [Lebanon], if the Red Cross stops, it is the people who will be impacted; the government will not offer [help]. It was mostly donations from abroad. And now, for example, with the war in Syria, they received more donations and more safety equipment. I went to Tripoli [city north of Lebanon] for example, and there were [armed] clashes in Tripoli. We'd [wear] the helmets and gear and stay away [from the shooting], I mean. When we arrived at Tripoli's entrance, we could hear the shooting and we waited with the lights turned off so that they couldn't aim at us. I was driving in front and had three [people] sitting behind me and I said, "Stay low," in case a stray bullet hit them. I mean, you keep remembering these stories; they keep popping up in your head. And later, when a second ambulance arrives, lights turned off as well, after driving from the road above so that no one sees them, we used to quickly exchange the wounded and head back again. So, yeah. The Red Cross has a lot of respect from the [Lebanese] army, we used to work together, we used to do *training* together, we helped each other and did a lot of *trainings* together.

[36:45]

Ok.

I don't know, I have, I have a vivid *memory* of the day of the Sassine explosion [in east Beirut]. It was a Friday afternoon and the explosion happened at the same time as students were finishing their school day. We had a *camp* that Saturday and Sunday and were going on Friday to prepare beforehand. My friend and I were supposed to meet at the center. I was at Karantina [neighbourhood in north-east of Beirut] and he was at the beginning of ... at Saifi Village [upscale neighbourhood in south-east of Beirut] and the [Red Cross] center was in the middle of Gemmayzeh [neighbourhood

in east Beirut]. So I was telling him, "I'll be there in half an hour, fifteen minutes and we meet up there." I hung up, and heard the explosion go off in Sassine.

Yes.

I had just finished the call, and I called him again. He said, "I am running towards the center." I said, "I am taking the car." I was at my friend's apartment, I left the door open, rushed and got to Gemmayzeh. I couldn't find a place to park [the car]. The *valet parking* of the restaurant facing us said, "Leave [the car] and go up [to the center]." I remember that I was driving the ambulance, but I don't remember how I drove. I remember that I drove around ten people up there [Sassine]. I made the trip twice. I was taking more people to help and I can't remember how I drove, but I did; I mean, ... I drove past cars. For me it is an *expérience* that I'll never regret. It taught me a lot. The scouts taught me to take care of myself and everything. The Red Cross taught me to take care of others, to live together and more ... it's a *higher level*. So, yeah.

Ok. Is there anything else?

Well, the rest are objects, practical objects. I mean, I use the *headlamp* a lot here. It's not cheap, you can use it up to one meter below water level, it doesn't malfunction, and it has a very good light—multiple *levels*. I used it when I was working in *camping*, so I brought it over. I wouldn't leave it in Lebanon. I brought it because it's useful. It very helpful when biking so it's more practical. This *Victorinox* [Swiss Army knife] ... People would see a knife but actually *it's a rescue tool*. It is made for car accidents. I used to keep it in my car, because it is specially made for car accidents. It has a piece to break auto glass, and another to cut the seatbelt efficiently so that it doesn't hurt the person—it only cuts the *ceinture* very fast. It has a saw if you need to cut something. And yeah, it's more practical. Not all people think this way. Maybe it's my Red Cross training or the *expériences* I lived through and accidents I witnessed; this may be the reason why I keep it even if I might never use it. For example, I used to have a first aid kit in my car in Lebanon. It had a rope, a knife scissors and gauzes, lightweight stuff. Here, in case something happens, they [ambulance] arrive in five minutes. In Lebanon because of the lack of [ambulance] cars, it might take around ten or fifteen minutes to arrive so there is a difference, yeah. I kept it [Victorinox], one of my nicest objects.

[41:06]

And it appears well taken care of like...?

The objects you want to last longer, you have to take care of and clean them, all of them. I mean, even the *headlamp*, I clean it every now and then or it will collect dirt from *biking* here.

Is there anything else?

No. Those four objects go together. I couldn't bring my *camping* items because they take up a lot of space. I thought I'd buy them from here, because it's cheaper, or there is more variety. But the places you go *camping* are far and you need people to go with. I didn't meet a lot of people here that feel the same way as me about these things. So, I mean... all these objects fall in the same category.

[42:10]

[What would you choose] if you wanted to pick one object to bring with you?

Just one? It is a difficult question. Can I choose two?

[head nod, yes]

These two [points to the icon and Red Cross card].

Okay why?

If you're asking me now, after three years and three months in Canada, why did I choose these? Well, on one hand, the icon was given to me by my brother, because my brother was the most, he was the most *support* I had for me during these three years and I keep telling him that every day. And the Red Cross [card] on the other hand, because it gave me... how can I say it ... it gave me the *skills* and the *expérience* to be able to take care of myself and take care of others and to be a responsible person in my society. I am not alone. So for me, these: on one hand, it's my brother and family, and [on the other] it's the Red Cross. All the *expériences* I grew up with. I mean, they are two very important families to me.

If you want to choose just one?

I will go with the... I can't choose between two families. I may lean towards the family I grew up with every day of my life. But the Red Cross was also my family, when I was in need over there... I have a friend who used to volunteer for the Friday night shift. I was helping him when half way through his shift, they called to tell him that his father had a stroke. So, I went with him and we took his father to the hospital and stayed there. I told him "I will cover for you at the center until next day." So, I replaced him at the center. And I had my weekend shift after him, Saturday and Sunday. By Monday, I was burnt out. I drove the ambulance and my eyes were almost shutting. So how I am with my brother, my sister, my parents—there are people at the centre who I am the same way with. And these, it goes without saying and without much thought, that these are stories that last a lifetime. I haven't spoken with him for a couple of months I mean, I called him today. His father died not long ago, and I was sad because I knew his father and I know his mother; I wasn't there for the funeral. So these two things are in my heart [the icon and Red Cross card]. I can't choose between them. This, [points to card]

I spent three years of my life there, but it feels like twenty. This [icon] is my family. I may have not been this close to my brother before my arrival to Canada, but after all that I went through he was [my support]. I mean, I would reach out to him and share what was happening with me and he would say: "Yes, I went through the same thing too." And I began to understand—understand why he gave it to me, because it helped him here. And I have nothing to hide. The Red Cross, I could talk about exits, *sorties* and emergencies, as much as you want, I mean, I couldn't finish. When I look back at my life since I was eighteen until now, how it changed direction, the decisions I made, you'd be amazed how I arrived here. I wanted to do *physiotherapy*, I became a sports teacher instead. After studying to be a sports teacher, I didn't work in a school or a *gym*, I worked in *outdoor education*. I volunteered with the Red Cross for the *outdoor* [education] and the two of them went hand in hand until I applied to come to Montreal. I came to Montreal, and I made that decision when I felt like I was in a place where I was sure that my parents were living comfortably. My sister finished university and started working, my brother has a child and is settled and comfortable in his life. Now, I can be in a position where I am able to advance and change. So, I came to Montreal. The first year was very hard, but I mean... between my family and the Red Cross family, between these two families and my friends, I had support.

Ok.

[47.09]

Translation to English: Emma Haraké

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