

Elsie Haddad

Stranded - On Life After Imprisonment

Stranded – On Life After Imprisonment is a documentary photography project that investigates the imprisonment issue in Lebanon. It does so by following inmates after their release from prison and the way they manage to recollect their lives and integrate back into a society which is often unmerciful, and an antagonizing force in their efforts to lead a normal life thereafter.

In January 2012 I met a group of men hanging out on the Beirut seashore, all were ex-convicts who had met each other in jail. Having shared the same cell for years, once released they searched and found a rock in the sea that became a sort of a sanctuary for them. Getting to know them and photograph them made me re_ect on the psychological effects of incarceration and the social humanitarian dynamic and rapports with the over world.

I wanted to take a closer look at what it means to be an ex-convict in this society and how each person deals with this challenge.

From the beginning I saw as a collaborative effort. I did not want to look at them through my camera as if they were subjects under scrutiny - they had had enough of that. I wanted them to be involved in the creative process. Each decided their terms for participation. Some used photography, some made drawings, some wrote, and some stitched, adding new dimensions to the work.

While deeply committed to the project, I tried my best to remain objective and analytical. But everything changed dramatically when my youngest brother was arrested on a drug charge and put in jail. Suddenly, this broad social issue became more personal and the project was inside my home; it had become very personal. On an impulse, I asked my brother to be part of the project and he agreed.

Camus believed in giving the oppressed a platform a mean to let their voice heard. To express themselves. We cannot think/aim for a better society a more tolerant one if we only hear the point of view of the judge cannot see the human behind its status.

I tackle this project with this same spirit by giving a prominence to people whom society judged and condemned and to expose this problematic from their point of view. I want to tell people to look deeper beneath the surface of appearances and hopefully trigger them to stand right between the judiciary system and the accused.