ALEPPO WATER ANGUISH

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Manuel Keshishian, "Kantsasar", Aleppo, August 20, 2015
Translated by **Vahe H. Apelian**

It is dusk. I am standing on the bank of the River Queig and listen to the rumbling of the frogs.

Probably everywhere else people will be alarmed noticing the level of the water in the river next to them go down. We, the people of Aleppo, on the other hand, are alarmed seeing the level of the water in the rotting river has started rising. For us it means that we will not have running water in our houses, because the authorities have not been able to procure the necessary fuel to pump water in the reservoirs for distribution.

The reservoirs are located in areas under the control of the rebels who for one reason or another or are ordered to withhold the distribution of water to the areas in the city under the control of the Government forces. The population in these areas is half the number it was. The number would have been much less had it not been for the influx of people from surrounding areas seeking refuge in the areas under the government control.

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In the beginning of the summer there were concerted efforts to dig new wells. The ill-boding noise these well-digging machines reminded us of the vocalization of scavenging vultures and would cause much anguish to our inconsolable hearts. The well-diggers were from humanitarian and religious organizations digging with the encouragement of the Government.

I remain under the impression that the frogs live in the rotting water while I remain standing on the

bank of the river tongue-dried, under the scorching heat that refuses to dip below forty degrees Celsius (105 degrees Fahrenheit). The noise from the thousands of croaking frogs remind me of the death marches.

Do not think that I am far from the city and in a wild place. Even if there was such a place I would not be able to venture there because all around is under the control of the rebels. I am in an upscale neighborhood of Aleppo called the Villas: I gaze towards the riverbed that is a few hundred meters away. Moss and other strange wild plants have grown up there and threaten to engulf the riverbed. There I see a truck pumping water from the river. I also see large barrels bearing Red Crescent and International Red Cross signs that are filled with "filtered" water that are distributed to the people….

Aleppo is thirsty under the searing sun pretending that it is still alive, is without water. Lately we have been routinely coming across such descriptions of Aleppo. They have ceased to mean much. They do not convey the enormity of the tragedy that is being unfolded because of lack of water.

The problem is not only not having water to bathe. It is not even not having water to cook; to wash dishes; to keep the house clean and not even as much not being able to store water for cooking. The issue is not our hard-earned turned worthless money that we pay to fill up our own few thousand liter capacity tanks. The problem is the constant fights we face to have our turn to store water.

When will our turn come? Will it be tomorrow or the day after tomorrow? There is an unending bickering at home. Your wife blames you that you are not paying enough attention to store water. How about in the families that cannot afford to pay? They constitute the majority of the people. What is to say to their quarrels in front of the wells that pump water for the public? What is there to say to the quarrels in their homes as to whose turn is to breathlessly drag containers filled with water, stopping on the way many times to catch breath? Imagine facing all these after having waited for hours to have your turn come and having endured the unavoidable quarrels that you instinctively give in and let the person or the two persons behind you to fill up their containers and get lost; wherever that may be to hell or to heaven. It does not matter. All you want is for them to get lost.

Could you imagine what it means to use the same water for several times? That is to say, you save the water you use to wash your hands to use for mopping the floor: You use the same water over again to wash the dishes. The water you use to wash a cup by filling it up, you transfer it to another cup. Don't you think that these are problems?

If it happens that by a stroke of luck you did not use for few days the water the Government distributed, you will find finger-width sediment has settled on the bottom. How many hundreds of liters of water do we consume a year? Does that mean that we ingested so much dirt? That is not an issue. Intestinal diseases are not important; serious and not-so-serious poisonings are not important as well. What is important is having stored water. What will happen to us if the water we stored today is rapidly used up? May God help us. We will end up again waiting for our turn and facing the

quarrels over again. What will happen to us, if it happens that before our turn comes for storing, water flow is interrupted? Do not they distribute water only few hours a day?

The other problem is the fear of tomorrow. Fear that you may not be able to procure water. Suddenly your mind gets clogged with anxiety. What would happen if the wells dry up before the fight for the siege of Aleppo ends?

In the city of Aleppo that projects a semblance of living, water and the one time mere water now corrupts the souls. We do not realize that we are turning into human-like creatures you may call by any name; but please do not call us human beings. The hardest part is to come to terms with that reality.

For a second I had doubts submitting my article. It is a write-up that fails to present the unfolding tragedy. On the other hand I want it to see the light of the day so that every reader feels hurt reading it, as human beings should. I, on the other hand, am beginning to lose my humanity.

- "Greeting, says a stranger to me, may we live this day every year."

Puzzled I looked at him.

- "Water has started coming to Nor Kyugh (New Village), trickle by trickle but it is coming."

Water has started to come trickle by trickle but two hundred meters away from our house, two new wells are being dug ...