



HARIRI-GRAM

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The South in All Lebanon

More than 6,000 students from the schools of the liberated south of Lebanon visited Beirut on Sunday June 25, 2000. They came from Marjeyoun and Qleya, from Adaisseh and Bint Jbeil and Aitaroun, from the Jezzine – from all the villages of the south that have been rejoined to the rest of Lebanon. The 6,000 students poured into the capital at the invitation of MP Bahia Hariri whose aim was to have “the South of Lebanon in all of Lebanon.”

The idea evolved out of one of Mrs. Hariri’s trips to the newly liberated area when she realized that the children there were unfamiliar with the rest of the country. She sent invitations through the schools to children age ten or above. On the schedule were breakfast in Sidon, a tour of downtown Beirut, including a visit to the Planet Discovery Children’s Museum, and lunch at Souq al-Barghout.

“For most of us, this is our first trip to Beirut,” said sixteen-year old Fadi Waheb from the Hasbaya Public School for Boys, which sent almost 100 of its students. “We all grew up during the war and felt very separated from the rest of Lebanon,” he said. “We felt forgotten since there was no government presence, and no one came to visit.” Impressed by the reconstruction



Member of Parliament Mrs. Bahia Hariri surrounded by students during their visit to Baalbeck.

under way in the Beirut Central District, Fadi ventured to add that, “Maybe the government can fix the South too, because most of it is deserted and destroyed.”

Each student was given a flag and a cap with the words “All for the homeland” – taken from the national anthem – printed across the top. The Beirut Central District was transformed into a party zone with children singing arm in arm, dancing the dabkeh, and waving hundreds of caps and flags. At sites such as Nijmeh and Martyr’s squares, the Roman Bath, Parliament, and religious buildings guides were on hand to explain their history. Outside the Children’s Museum jugglers and

fire-eaters and a magician performed.

Speaking to the media at intervals throughout the day, Mrs. Hariri repeatedly referred to the importance of national unity and to the wonderful way in which the excursion brought together all the regions and religious groups of Lebanon to participate in a positive and uplifting activity. Mrs. Hariri said, “In my opinion, this activity falls within the framework of the return of the South to Lebanon, reaffirms the sense of national belonging, and reinforces the restoration of true citizenship. This is the duty of Lebanese society.”

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To underscore this theme, teachers, who were given copies of the national anthem, prepared the students for a show of national pride in front of Parliament. The flag waving and anthem singing seemed to have worked. Many felt they were being re-integrated into their country. "The trip is helping us to love Lebanon," said 18 year-old Zeinab Haidar from a public school in Aitaroun. "It's showing us that the country cares for the children of the South. Now we feel Lebanese."

Even teachers benefited from the trip. Teir Harfa public school teacher Nidal Ataya explained that for more than twenty years instructors taught about the country's heritage blindly from school books because they had never visited the places they were teaching about. "I feel like a bird in a cage that finally has been freed to roam. We're being introduced to Lebanon, our homeland, for the first time, and we're thankful to Mrs. Hariri for that," Ms. Ataya said.

At the end of the day, as the hundreds of buses made their way back to the south by way of the scenic sea road, the children gave voice to their happiness. "This is the first time I visited the capital, Beirut," said twelve-year old Hussein Hamouch from Adaisseh. "I have dreamt of this day for so long because I have heard so much about Beirut, and I have been seeing it on TV for years."

Similarly, thirteen-year old Ali Hussein Amine from Aitaroun offered that, "For so long I have dreamed about seeing the cities of Lebanon. I would like to have some



Mrs. Bahia Hariri with President Emile Lahoud at the Presidential Palace in Baabda.



A large group of students from the South during their tour of the Roman ruins at Baalbeck.

friends in Saida and Beirut so that I can visit them and they can visit me."

In response to entreaties from the children and owing to the success of the trip, Mrs. Hariri scheduled a second trip for July 18, with an itinerary that included a visit with the country's president at his palace in Baabda and a tour of the Roman ruins at Baalbeck. After welcoming the 8,000 children and adults to the Baabda palace, President Emile Lahoud told them that, "My heart swells when I see you here, assured that you are safely back in the national fold." Mrs. Hariri also welcomed the children to the palace,

describing the place as "the epitome of freedom, justice, equality, and unity, as well as of hope." The children, who carried flags and pictures of the president, cheered and sang the national anthem, while Lahoud shook hands with the visitors, having assured them earlier that, "You have returned to your homeland, and now you are no different from any other Lebanese citizen." Assuredly, the two trips launched by Mrs. Hariri have contributed in a major way to inspiring such a conviction in the hearts of thousands of school-children from the south of Lebanon.

Hariri Alumnus Repays Loan With A Single Payment

When Hariri alumnus Haleem Zihenni contacted the Foundation in October 2000, it was about repaying his loan and thus fulfilling a deeply felt obligation to the Hariri Foundation. Although it is not unusual for Hariri alumni to do this, what was unusual was the fact that Haleem wished to repay his total loan amount with a single check.

Haleem, who completed a B.S. in Civil Engineering under Hariri Foundation sponsorship at the University of Dayton in 1988, wrote in a letter accompanying his check that, "I cannot adequately express my gratitude to the Foundation for granting me the funds necessary to continue my education. In fact, my education helped to mold me into the successful businessman that I am today. I am grateful and happy to repay the Foundation so other Lebanese students will have the benefit and opportunities I was so fortunate to have received."

Haleem's career progressed rapidly from his initial appointment in 1988 as assistant site engineer for a small New York contracting company specializing in general construction, to the assumption of duties covering all facets of the business, and then to becoming vice president of the company in 1991. During his eight years with the firm, he facilitated the completion of over 100 million dollars worth of public improve-

ment projects throughout New York State.

In fall 1996 Haleem formed Omni Contracting Company, Inc., a general contracting business that now employs over 50 people and has work in hand worth over 40 million dollars. Haleem's company performs high quality construction work for various New York State



Haleem Zihenni at the office of his construction company, Omni Contracting Company, Inc. in Yonkers, New York.

public agencies and enjoys an excellent reputation for its ability to perform quality work within contractual time limits.

Because of the success which Haleem's business acumen and engineering skills have brought him, he was able to raise his brothers Antoine and Albert and send them to college. Antoine, an electrical engineer, and Albert, a civil engineer, both work with Haleem in his business. Haleem also helps to support his family and other relatives in Lebanon.

Rafic A. Bizri, President, the Hariri Foundation-USA, says of Haleem's loan repayment that, "Haleem has joined the ranks of those Hariri alumni who are continuing the work of the Foundation by repaying their loans and thus making funds available for current Foundation activities. Such activities include the sponsorship of Lebanese high school students in summer research and leadership programs in the United States. Haleem and his fellow alumni deserve our thanks and the thanks of the current generation of Lebanese students for the role they play in continuing the work of the Foundation."

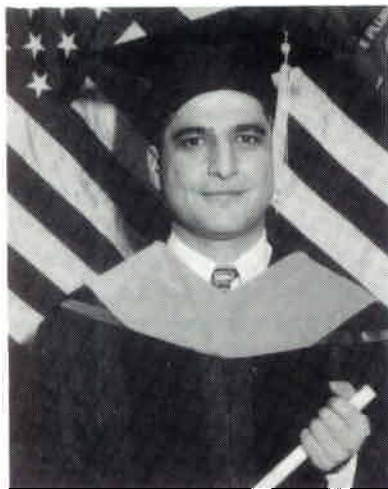
Haleem concluded his letter to the Foundation with these sentiments: "Again, I thank the Hariri Foundation for giving me the opportunity to continue my schooling. As a result of this, I will always remain indebted to the Hariri Foundation and, God willing, I will repay my gratitude by continuing the tradition of giving for the advancement of the Lebanese people. In fact, I recently set up the Haleem Zihenni Foundation for the purpose of helping those less fortunate. Last but not least, I hope this domino effect will continue for generations to come."

A Remarkable Achievement

When Khodr Shamseddine received his Ph.D. in Physics and Mathematics from Michigan State University on December 17, 1999, he became the first student at MSU to earn an interdisciplinary doctorate covering two fields and satisfying the doctoral requirements of two departments, the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Physics and Astronomy.

Khodr's unique achievement represents the culmination of an outstanding academic career. In July 1988 he received a Bachelor of Science with High Distinction from the American University of Beirut where he majored in physics. Two months later he began a Master of Science program in physics at MSU under Hariri Foundation sponsorship. Shortly after completing his M.S. in March 1990 with a 4.0 cumulative average, Khodr took and passed the Ph.D. candidacy examination of the Department of Physics and Astronomy. After several years of additional coursework in mathematics and physics, Khodr successfully petitioned the Department of Mathematics in 1996 to approve his dual major after first obtaining approval from the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Khodr continued to maintain his perfect 4.0 average throughout his doctoral studies.

In explaining his motivation for taking on the additional coursework, research, and qualifying examinations required by the dual major, Khodr points first to his love for "the rigor, clarity, and beauty of mathematics" as well as to his love for a good challenge. In addition, he explains that "Research has become



Khodr Shamseddine, recipient of a dual doctorate from Michigan State University in December 1999.

so specialized in the last two decades that it is more likely to make breakthroughs in research at the 'borders' between various fields than it is in one specialized area. Consequently, interdisciplinary majors are becoming strongly encouraged in most universities. I also feel that my dual Ph.D. degree will always work to my advantage when I apply for jobs. Sure enough, without even applying formally for the job, I was offered a joint appointment in both the mathematics and physics departments at MSU as soon as I finished my Ph.D."

In the acknowledgements of his dissertation, *New Elements of Analysis on the Levi-Civita Field*, Khodr expresses his deep appreciation for the guidance, support, and inspiration which his advisor Professor Martin Berz provided him over his years of study and research at MSU. In addition to the sponsorship which Khodr received from the Hariri Foundation, Professor Berz provided him with major financial support in the form of a research assistantship, especially in the last

three and one-half years of his doctoral program.

Noting the groundbreaking nature of Khodr's achievement in earning a dual doctorate, Professor Berz credits him for his initiative and for doing the extensive legwork necessary for putting together a dissertation committee comprising professors from two departments. Professor Berz also credits Khodr for his excellent academic performance and for his strengths as a lecturer in his present teaching appointment.

Khodr also expresses a deep appreciation for many years of financial and moral support from the Hariri Foundation. "Without the Foundation," writes Khodr in a recent letter, "my parents would not have been able to send me to AUB, and I would not have had the opportunity to come to the USA."

Khodr continues, "I always thought it was a very noble thing that H.E. Rafik Hariri started his program in 1984 to educate young Lebanese men and women abroad so they can go back later and reconstruct Lebanon. Besides making a positive change in the lives of its thousands of scholars, the Hariri Foundation has built many strong 'positive agents' for Lebanese society, many of whom have already returned to Lebanon and started their service to society."

Mindful of this link between education and service to society, Khodr looks forward to the day when he will return to teach and to share his knowledge with the students of Lebanon. When that day arrives, Khodr's service to Lebanon

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Alumni Notes

Hariri Foundation alumni are invited to contribute news about their current activities and accomplishments for publication in the Hariri-Gram Alumni Notes. Please see the back page of this issue for contact information.

Youssef Hashash: Ph.D. Civil and Environmental Engineering, M.I.T., 1992. Youssef was one of 59 young researchers who received Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers in a ceremony in Washington, DC on October 24, 2000. The award is “the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on young professionals at the outset of their independent research careers. ... These awards, established by President Clinton in February 1996, embody the high priority the Administration places on producing scientists and engineers ready to contribute to all sectors of the economy. ... ‘These extraordinarily gifted young scientists and engineers represent the best in our country,’ President Clinton said. ‘Through their talent, ability, and dedication, they will quicken the pace of discovery and put science and technology to work advancing the human condition as never before.’” (White House press release of October 23, 2000) In writing the Foundation about his award, Youssef expressed his gratitude to the Hariri Foundation and to Mr. Hariri for supporting his efforts and education over the years. Youssef is currently an assistant professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Mona Hallak: M.A. Architecture, Syracuse University, 1994. Architect and preservationist, Mona was featured in a *Christian Science Monitor* article (August 8, 2000) titled “Two Women Break Stereotypes in Lebanon.” The article describes her efforts to save a circa-1924 building slated for demolition in Center City Beirut. Mona would like to see the building, which was badly damaged during the civil war, restored and turned into a “museum of memory” to teach future generations of children to hate war. “There were days when we slept and thought we’d

never wake up, and moments when you didn’t know if you’d ever see your mother again,” remembers Mona. “Now people just want to go out dancing and forget. I think we have to keep something so beautiful that the war made so ugly.”

Kamal Harb: B.S. Public Health, California State University at San Jose, 1989; M.A. Public Health, San Jose State, 1991. Kamal was featured in an article appearing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on July 7, 2000. The article discussed the challenges which universities face when “encouraging male students to get routine checkups as well as early treatment for problems that do arise.” Kamal is a health educator at the men’s clinic at San Francisco State University. The clinic, which is only two years old, conducts an extensive medical checkup for students who request it and relies on preventive medicine to help patients achieve their health goals such as quitting smoking, managing stress, and protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. Kamal also co-authored an article for the San Francisco State health journal about the establishment of the clinic and its beneficial effects on the health of male students.

Waleed Howrani: Musical Composition, University of Michigan, 1986. In a solo piano concert at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC on November 2, 2000, Waleed played an original composition which he had written for and premiered at the June 1999 inauguration of a new piano for the Assembly Hall of AUB.. The performance was a benefit concert for the American University of Beirut. Waleed’s composition weaves together variations on the melody of AUB’s Alma Mater. The inauguration of the new piano co-incided with the dedication of AUB’s new College Hall.

A Remarkable Achievement

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will also be an expression of thanks to the two people who most influenced his life: “My parents have always been my greatest two teachers,” writes Khodr. “They taught me and my brothers early on that education is the longest lasting wealth we can acquire in life. They

were right. I feel rich even when I have no money in my bank account. They have always been an inspiration for me through their hard work, dedication, self-denial, patience, and faith in life. I thank them everyday for what they have taught me and what they have inspired in me, and I dedicate all of my achievements to them.”

With a sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards family, friends, advisors, sponsors, and nation, Khodr looks forward to using his hard-won and much valued education to express his appreciation for their support and “to become a positive force in society, contributing to knowledge, peace, and the well-being of the whole.”

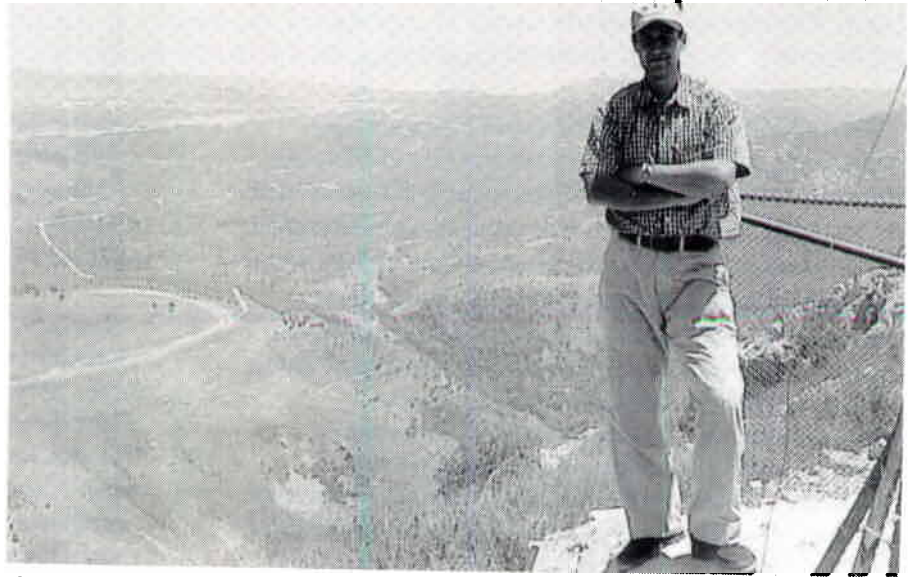
Reflections from Lebanon: This Little Something

By Wissam Yafi

“Do you think our prominent role is over?” I asked him. “No,” he answered, “it’s just beginning.” His answer took me completely by surprise. I had asked many other people this question, and most had had much gloomier scenarios, citing the internet, globalization, and Arab advances as having rung the death knell for the Lebanese comparative advantage. Did he know what he was talking about, or was he seeing things in a totally different light? “You see, yaa Wissam, we Lebanese continue to have what others don’t. It’s this little something.” He moved his fingers in the air as if trying to catch some particles of this-little-something in order to demonstrate to me what he meant. “This little something,” he continued, “cannot be replaced or replicated by computers, the internet, or others in our region.”

I was in the company of a prominent Lebanese. His words often carried weight. However, on this occasion I found myself carrying his words around for days trying to decipher their full meaning. What could this little something be? What was its source? What did it mean in practical terms? Why did he see it and not others? If it does indeed exist, would it be enough to spell success for Lebanon? Questions, questions, and more questions – this merits another reflection.

So, how best to describe this little something? A good place to start would be the Dog River which rises in Mount Lebanon, works its way through the mountains, and ends its run in the Mediterranean. On the day of our trip to the Dog River,



Wissam Yafi at Beaufort Castle in the newly liberated South Lebanon.

immediately after emerging from a small tunnel some 20 kilometers north of Beirut, we stopped our car on the shoulder of the highway. With our back to the sea as we looked towards the mountains, we could see the river lying off to the left. On the right rose a steep slope. It could have been just any other Mediterranean slope. Only it wasn’t, for protruding from the bottom of the slope were huge square marble tablets, each one 15 meters distant from the next. As we started reading the tablets while we walked parallel to the slope, we saw that they were ancient mementos left by every invading army that had gone through this region, from the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, and Romans, all the way up to the British and the French. It seemed that all had felt the need to leave a trace of their presence. Could this dizzying history have forced within us an invincible capacity to adapt? Could this be part of our little something?

The morning after, I woke to the sound of the muezzin intoning a beautiful tune that was new to my

ears. That same day, we were going to meet with the president of a university in the Koura Mountains. Koura is in the North of Lebanon some five kilometers south of Tripoli and is famous for its olive oil. Actually, a person told me that the only thing better than the olive oil of Koura was the women of Koura – an interesting comparison in and of itself!

It took us about ninety minutes to travel to the Koura from Beirut, but once there, the view and freshness of the atmosphere made it worth the trip. Upon entering the office of the president, we were greeted by our smiling host. He was taller than I had envisioned him and stood very erect, emitting an air of authority without being over-imposing. Indeed, he came across as being very amicable, and his smile and lighthearted laugh reminded me of former schoolmates. I had read many of his writings and found them to be very engaging and patriotic. Looking around his office, however, I was surprised by the many icons adorning the walls. “Oh, oh!” I thought; here is another

one of those moderate Lebanese intellectuals who with age had regressed into a confessional state of mind.

What followed, however, changed this impression, for he was a man who was quite comfortable with his Christianity and did not try to hide it. Moreover, he felt neither threat from nor animus towards Islam. If anything, he seemed quite knowledgeable, understanding, and appreciative of some of its legacies. To him Lebanon simply could not exist without either religious pillar, and Lebanon's future depended on a concordance between the voice of the muezzin and the tolling of church bells. That afternoon, having returned to my apartment, I heard the prayers of that muezzin again. This time, though, they were followed by church bells. I smiled. Could religious diversity also be a part of our little something?

The next morning, I met Abu Hussein, a cab driver in his mid-fifties from the Bekaa. Abu Hussein has seven children, three of whom are triplets. He teaches in the mornings and in the afternoons drives a cab to make ends meet. "Three of my kids are finishing their university degrees. One is doing medicine, one business, and I have a girl in agriculture," he said proudly. I told him that I admired his persistence. He answered, "Whatever work I would have to do, my utmost priority and pride is seeing my kids through university. I refuse to beg like some people, and to me any kind of work is honorable." Here was a man with one thing on his mind: working hard to give his children an education. He simply refused to sit home doing nothing. Could Abu Hussein's belief and determination

be another part of this little something?

In the evening I happened to go out with a group of friends to a nightclub by the name of Vida y Libertad (Life and Liberty). Located in Kaslik, the place is decorated with a Che Guevara revolutionary motif. For a couple of hours I was transported to Cuba with live Celia Cruz and Tito Puente music. Anyone who has not experienced nightlife in Cuba would do well to go to this place, for it's as close as you can get to the experience without being under Fidel's wings. One member of our group happened to be a professor at AUB with a Ph.D. from the States. She spoke five languages and jumped from one to the other as nimbly as she did between mambo and salsa. "Now, what the heck is your story?" I asked her curiously. Turns out she doesn't have a family from South America but was simply intrigued by Latino spirit and passion – from halfway around the world! She has already been on missions to most of South America and is currently working on starting a foundation that would bring Latin American children of Lebanese heritage to Lebanon. Does her passionate and adventurous spirit symbolize our little something?

Surely, the above sample of Lebanese people and traits does not do them justice. If anything, it under-represents the unique mosaic of traits and experiences that is Lebanon and the Lebanese, but I hope that it serves to show that the Lebanese must have a little something that other nationalities lack. What else could account for our incessant adaptability, hard work, ambition, education, taste, desire for excellence, and *joi de vivre*? How else could we explain that while the rest of the world talks

about globalization, we have been globalizing for the last three thousand years? They talk about adopting the new technology, well, what can I say but sorry for this interruption, but I just got a call on my tiny cell phone from my cousin in Miami calling me via Net2Phone! They talk about Lebanon missing the boat, yet I could have sworn that yesterday I saw a cruise ship anchored in the port of Beirut. And so they continue to talk and to talk, whilst we learn, implement, and adapt.

Without this little something we Lebanese are but a social security number, a chador, or a turco. There are those who trace the source of our little something to geography, weather, genetic heritage, culture, or history, and there are others who trace the source to differences within the Lebanese. I think the second group should be shunned, and the first group is wasting its time, for the answer is really staring us right in the face. The enigmatic source is none other than Lebanon itself, that organic, dynamic, living whole which cannot be separated into its individual strands without risking the evaporation of the little something into the air never to be retrieved. It is the one and only Lebanon in the universe, with everything and everyone good and not so good that it contains and represents.

For those Lebanese who still doubt who they are and who they would prefer to be, I would ask, "Hasn't the war given you a taste of what you thought would be better, and wasn't it bitter?" We Lebanese, who are renowned for our salesmanship, should never again sell our country short. In the years to come we should expect to be put to the test.

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The offers will increasingly be many and will come in different shapes and forms. The better off Lebanon grows, the more offers to be expected. They will come from the naïve, the ill-intentioned, the envious, and the interested. Whatever the offered price, it will be cheap, for what we have is indeed priceless.

Until we understand – and make our children understand – that in our recent past we and our little something were at the point of extinction, we risk having our tragic history repeat itself. However, with time, persistence, wisdom, and patience, we can learn and then teach our children how to value Lebanon above everything else in the hope that this perpetuates this little something – dare I say identity?

During summer 2000 Wissam Yafi conducted research in Lebanon under Hariri Foundation sponsorship as part of a Master of Public Administration in International Development program at the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. He is currently completing a report titled "The Lebanese State: Formation & Development in a Comparative Perspective."

Hariri Foundation

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CAREERS & CALLINGS

For the latest information on job openings in Lebanon and the Middle East, go to our web site at <http://www.haririfoundationusa.org>, click on the heading **Job Services**, and then click on the word **link** in the last line of the section.

HARIRI FOUNDATION DOCUMENTARY

A twenty-seven minute VHS videotape documentary on the history and activities of the Hariri Foundation is available upon request from the Foundation. Please contact Joe Murnan via e-mail at HFJMurnan@aol.com to request a free copy.

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