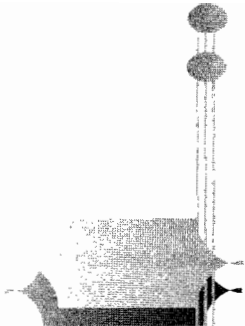


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University in Lebanon and the Question of the Cultural Diversity

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There is no better way of introducing this topic on the University and Cultural Diversity in Lebanon, than to bring back to your memories the recent attempt of Minister Edde, almost exactly a month ago, on March 12, when he submitted for approval to the Cabinet of Ministers a package of some 12 new universities, new colleges or branches of study in some already established universities, or request for permission to start doctoral programs in others. The proposal was strongly objected to by one prominent minister, and feebly defended by its supporters in the Cabinet. Outside the Cabinet, reactions were more interesting and they shed light on our topic of « Cultural Diversity ». Sheikh Mohammad Mahdi Shamsuddin,

the head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, who is the sponsor of one new Islamic University, declared that « the Shiites have no project of their own except that which unifies the Lebanese nation and the Lebanese people ». Then he added : « the Islamic University of Beirut is open to all segments in the society. It is not meant to be a substitute for the Lebanese State University ... If our intention is to improve higher Education in the country, the road to this should not be by preventing others from opening universities, but by setting high standards and criteria ». Then Sheikh Shamsuddin added « ... let us close all private universities in the country and then we shall withdraw our request to start our Islamic university. When all other universities are closed, and the only one left is the Lebanese State University, then we shall divert all our resources to supporting the State University » (An-Nahar 30/3/1996). Sheikh Shamsuddin's position is very clear — since “others” have their own universities, we should have our own as well. Either all or none. Another prominent religious figure, Patriarch Hzeem, head of the Greek Orthodox Church, came on about the same time defending his university, saying the following : « Al-Balamand is not a sectarian or a confessional institution and its presence does not add one iota to the presence of confessional institutions which dominate the scene ... » (As-Safir 27/3/1996). More recently, only a few days ago, on April 5, 1996, another group, the Greek Catholics declared breaking good news to the public that, « ... we, the Greek Catholics, though we have all the needed resources and our number is large enough, more than 240 thousand, we have decided not to open our own university » (An-Nahar 6/4/1996).

Such positions and declarations are not new in Lebanon, but never before have religious groups or leaders spoke so openly and strongly about entitlement for a fair share of the system as they speak now —, and now we are six or seven years after the Taif, and the end of open fighting. The former President of this University (Kaslik) Père Louis Al-Hajj was asked in 1991 : « Is it true that opening your University was a reaction to the opening of the Arab University in Beirut ? » Père Louis's reply was emphatic, « not at all, for we do not answer the creation of one Islamic University by creating a Christian one ... » and then he added, « but it was always the case that the other side is taken into consideration in Lebanon. This is why the creation of our University was a kind of correcting the balance » (As-Safir 15/7/1991). “Correcting the balance”, this is the key phrase in Lebanon, and this is the challenge : the balance between the religious groups. And I will not be saying anything new that is not known to anyone of you here,

that the whole history of Lebanon, its whole existence if you so wish, can be abbreviated by this phrase of « correcting the balance ».

Now we can go back to the title given to my speech this morning and think about it for a while, and get its words straightened up :

« *The University in Lebanon and Cultural Diversity* ».

Let us at once agree then, that the word “cultural” in this title, and as far as Lebanon is concerned, refers to the all religious. What we are talking about is the « University and Religious Diversity ». This way we can avoid the fruitless debate as to whether there are more than one culture in Lebanon — or whether this one culture is whole, or part, of a larger culture. Whether Lebanon is monochromatic, or multi-cultural is not the issue. What is at issue is the religious balance.

The word “Diversity” in the title also deserves some comment. The word itself is innocuous, in fact it carries with it a pleasant feeling. No one wishes for sameness in anything. Diversity is a source of pleasure, because it gives choice. What makes it contentious is that it can make a divisive, contrapuntal realities, units or religious sects on the ground in opposition to one another, and hence, requiring a balance. If the balance is tipped, then red light appears signaling danger.

In the history of religious debates, we have hit in Lebanon on an attractive word and borrowed it — a word that lifted the debate on diversity to the level of an ideology, and made us proud that we are not alone in this situation. The word is « pluralism ».

The word came to us from northern Europe — from the Netherlands, the Denmark, Switzerland etc. and was popularized in the writings of Arend Lijphart, Milton Esman, Theodor Hanf and others, and here in Lebanon by Antoine Mesarra, in particular. It entered our sphere of consciousness forcefully for the first time in 1977, two years after the war, in a statement issued by the Lebanese Front after its meeting at Sayydat al-Ber in January of that year. The statement called for the adoption of « a pluralistic conception for the Lebanese society which shall take within its fold (Lebanon’s) authentic cultures and heritages (and use those) as a foundation for the new political structure of a unified Lebanon, in such a way as to augment absolute loyalty to it, and prevent clashes among the Lebanese, and permit each of its cultural groups to conduct its own affairs, especially those that have to do with freedom in cultural, educational, financial, and security matters, and matters

of cultural and spiritual relationships with the outside world, as each may individually choose » (Al-Amal, March 1, 1977). What was ominous in this statement is that the concept of « pluralism » was carried to its extreme, when it gave each of the cultural groups, i.e., religious groups, the freedom to conduct their own relationships with the outside world, “as each may individually choose”. This was, and continues to be, the raw nerve, the danger spot, which is built into the concept of pluralism, or diversity, or multiculturalism, or call it whatever you will. This is so because if one is to work out a balance in a divided country, and you try to bring in the outside world, that balance becomes very difficult to achieve, and if achieved it will be difficult to maintain. For the balance to occur, the center of attraction should point to the inside ; freedom of one group is to be tempered by considerations for the opinions or feelings of other groups inside the country, not outside. Otherwise the country breaks at the seams.

Freedom then, becomes the heart of the matter. It is the issue. The mechanism for its regulation has to be in terms of balancing the pieces without much loss to the freedom of different groups or individuals. When the outside is brought in, the balancing act is disturbed, freedom itself is compromised and the risk of conflict is increased.

Words quite often gain a character of their own. Because of associations with past experiences, they become laden with meanings and implications that are heavier than normally found in the dictionary. They become symbols, or to use a media language, “buzz” words, and are sometimes used to convey messages, not always congruent with their original meanings.

“Freedom” is such a “buzz” word. In Lebanon pluralists, multiculturalists, and supporters of diversity use this word frequently. In the field of education they never tire of referring to article 10 in the Constitution which relates to freedom. This article reads as follows : « Education shall be free provided ; it does not disturb public order or violate morals, or impinge on the dignity of any religion or sect. The rights of communities to maintain their own private schools cannot be diminished provided they conform to the general regulations issued by the State in the field of public instruction ».

This is a strong article in defence of freedom. When it is quoted by pluralist or multi-culturalists the conditional phrase in it is often overlooked — the phrase that starts with the word “provided” — tying the practice of freedom to respect of others, and also to conforming to regulations that the

State is supposed to produce. It is to be noted that this Article 10 was kept intact in the constitutional amendment of 1990 that came after the Taëf agreement. It was left - to the State to come up with the appropriate regulations.

Multi-culturalism, pluralism and diversity are also “buzz” words, charged like freedom with their own specific meanings in the Lebanese context. The recent Message of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Lebanon which was declared last December from Rome, used mild language, but despite this mild language it was received with criticism, and aroused the objection of its opponents even though in their own behavior they exhibit the same concern for their own religious sects. Paragraph 19 of the Message referred to Lebanon’s characteristics as “multi-confessional” or “multi-communal” where each community respects the “cultural identity” of other communities ; in paragraph 21 it spoke of “consociational democracy” as the means of replacing “confessional or communal identity” with “national loyalty”, and then spoke, in paragraph 38, of the role of the State in Education, and described the State as a “coordinator” منسق, and “regulator” منظم not a “sponsor” وصي or director, and then moved on to say that “freedom” is of the essence of a university whether it is a private or a public university. Those were mild words compared with those used some 18 years ago in Sayydat al Beer, but they nevertheless triggered negative reactions and were described as divisive, and that they brought back old memories of wars and conflicts. None commented, for example, on the more substantial interpretations given to the role of the State as “coordinator” or “regulator” though, in reality, there is a considerable room for different interpretations, particularly as the role of the State lies at the heart of the need of “balancing” the interests of the various groups, as we have mentioned before. Why is it so ? Why do such words, the “buzz” words, as I call them (freedom, multiculturalism, pluralism, and diversity), produce negative reactions even in the ranks of those who may not even have read the passages that come related to these words, and who, in their own behavior, are no less observant of their own shares as religious groups, than the pluralists or multiculturalists ? These opponents likewise have their own “buzz” words : unity, justice, equality and, last but not least, freedom. Why all these “buzz” words on both sides ?

I claim this is so because the game is essentially that of power among the various factions, and that power, not freedom, or justice, or unity, or equal-

ity is at stake. In this sense education and universities become battle-grounds where the various factions meet, each trying to get a bigger share for itself of whatever there is to be gotten.

The new President of Saint Joseph University, Père Salim Abou, has a much loftier vision than this. In his recent speech on March 19 celebrating St Joseph's Day this year, he declared that, « the University, any university, is not at the service of the political discourse ; it is rather at the service of Man ». These are lofty words ; they sound like beautiful music which is always good to hear, but they are far removed from motives and forces that compelled Minister Eddé, only one week before Père Abou uttered his words, to submit to the Cabinet of Ministers a request asking to license some dozen new universities and new colleges and degrees. It is to be left to history, or to Minister Edde, to explain reasons behind his attempt. But if my claim is correct, that the game is essentially that of power, then our attention should shift from lofty words and noble pronouncements to focus instead on that human invention called the State, and try to find out how well it is discharging its duties in regulating power, and balancing the shares of the various segments of the population.

But the State is a reflection of the people **كما تكونون يولى عليكم** if the people are divided, then the State or more precisely the government is also divided. Furthermore, it cannot regulate too much, or interfere too much, even if it is so inclined without cutting down on the amount of freedom that the people have. Something has to be lost in return for that which is to be gained.

Seventeen years of war have been a painful experience for all the Lebanese. Those years are as much a reality for Lebanon life as multi-culturalism or the division of the population into religious communities or sects. If freedom is a supreme value and is, as some claim, the *raison d'être* of Lebanon, then we better make sure that Lebanon would remain one country, where there would be Lebanese to exercise and enjoy the labors and fruits of freedom. Indeed freedom, diversity, multi-culturalism, pluralism are all noble words, but if they are to be enjoyed they have to be rooted in a common soil that we call Lebanon. It will be foolish to ask a hungry man to go on a diet, and even more so to expect him to enjoy it. He will be able to enjoy it only after he has had the experience of abundance, security, good health and a bit of extra weight. In weak countries, especially those exposed to outside interferences, multiculturalism would more likely degenerate into

conflict and chaos ; it will be something to enjoy after and not before unity and prosperity are attained. The role of the central government as a regulator and coordinator, and also as a guide and a disciplinarian and norm setter, is indispensable.

So far, I have used the language of the political scientist, which I am not, instead of the language of the educator and historian, which I am. Hence I will spend the rest of my time reviewing before you, very briefly, the procession of universities in Lebanon over time, focusing attention on the dynamic forces behind this and on the emergence of major institutions, particularly the State University, in the more recent times.

The private universities in Lebanon have all been a product of religious efforts except for the very few. Hence they are an expression of the multiculturalism, or pluralism, or diversity we have been talking about. The oldest of these are, as is well known, the American University of Beirut established in 1866, and the St Joseph University (French/Jesuit) established in 1875. They represented two different modes of operations, in their philosophies, approaches, languages used, students they attracted in terms of religion and nationality, and even in terms of programs and fields of specialization. What is of special significance is that these two institutions, disparate in many ways, had a monopoly on higher education in the country for nearly 80-85 years. The leadership positions, the elite in the professions, and in the world of learning and culture had all been a product of one of the two universities or the other with a few exceptions, and this elite would speak and/or identify with the French or English language creating duality at the upper levels of the cultural edifice.

The Lebanese State University was started officially in 1951, (some say it did not begin in earnest until 1959). In 1961 the Arab University of Beirut was started as a branch of Alexandria University in Egypt. 1961 also was the year of the establishment of this University, the University of Holy Spirit at Kaslik. It also saw the re-opening of the Higher Law Institute of Al-Hikmat. The sixties and the seventies all the way until the outbreak of hostilities in 1975, were years of development and growth in all institutions, particularly in the Lebanese State University. There were other institutions which had opened before, such as the Lebanese Academy, opened in 1944 (the only institution which owes its life to the efforts of one individual and without outside support), the Beirut University College in 1948 — started in 1924 as a girls' college, loosely affiliated with the American University, the Near East

School of Theology in 1932, the Ecole Supérieure des Lettres, and the Centre d'Études Mathématiques et Physiques, opened in 1944, 1945, later closed in the early seventies, and the Hagazian Armenian College in 1955.

The war years (1975-1989) saw the establishment of two important universities : Notre Dame at Lwaiza, in 1987 by the Maronite order, with English as the language of instruction and an American style educational orientation, the first of its kind in the Christian heartland, and the Balamand University by the Greek Orthodox in 1988, absorbing into it the older Lebanese Academy. There were lesser establishments which were licensed during this period, like the Imam Awzai university in 1987, the Islamic Law College and the Higher Institute for Islamic Studies, and the National Institute for Nursing all started in 1986. But the more important development during the war years was a phenomenon known as segmentation or spreading out in different parts of the country. Most dramatic, and with very serious implications in this regard, is what happened to the Lebanese State University. When this process began in 1977, it was opposed in the beginning by what was known at that time as the nationalise or unionist block and supported by the pluralists, but soon afterwards even the nationalists and unionists wanted a piece of the university each in his own region. The number of branches in the Lebanese University stands now at 48 ; they are practically different branches of the same College, not different branches of the same University. Segmentation, or more appropriately, regionalization was more successfully applied by St Joseph University when it opened three regional centers (as branches not of Colleges, but of the University as a whole : one in Tripoli, another in Zahlé, and a third in Sidon). The American University had a brief experience of this kind when a branch was opened in the Christian side of Beirut in 1977 and closed at the end of the war in 1990 ; the Beirut University College opened a large extension campus in Byblos and a small one in Sidon. The process of segmentation blanketed the country with institutions of higher learning of all sorts, but particularly in the case of the Lebanese State University it went beyond control with little regard to qualifications, criteria or regional needs. A new Ministry of Culture and Higher Education was started after the war, in 1993, with the hope of bringing order to the scene. There were meetings and activities aimed at setting criteria and standards for ordering the opening of new universities or licensing new programs. These were not approved yet ; instead there was the surprise request of Minister Eddé made at the Cabinet meeting to which I referred

earlier, which alarmed many regarding its timing and the intentions behind it. Perhaps something good will come out of this in the benefit of higher education.

At this point, I wish to share with you some statistics on enrollment of students in institutions of higher learning, before the war, in 1972-1973, and during the war and after, at ten year intervals. The statistics are divided by male and female, and also by nationality, and are tabulated starting with the oldest university and going downward.

UNIVERSITY ENROLLEMENT IN LEBANON BY NATIONALITY
TABLE I

Institution	Date of est.	1972 - 1973			1982 - 1983			1992 - 1993		
		LEB	Non Leb	T	LEB	Non Leb	T	LEB	Non Leb	T
American University	1866	2302	1978	4281	3875	1080	4955	4471	700	5171
percent		53.8	46.2	8.4	78.2	21.8	6.8	86.5	13.5	5.8
French University	1881	3257	382	3639	4975	196	5171	5234	222	5456
percent		89.5	10.5	7.2	96.2	3.8	7.1	95.9	4.1	6.2
Beirut Univesity College	1924	501	484	985	1473	372	1845	2958	383	3441
percent		50.9	49.1	1.9	79.8	20.2	2.5	86	14	3.9
Lebanese Academy	1944	209	46	255	524	21	545	907	32	939
percent		82	18	0.5	96.1	3.9	0.7	96.6	3.4	1.1
Lebanese State University	1951	12340	1662	14002	25786	1361	27147	37248	2678	39926
percent		88.1	11.9	27.6	95	5	37.2	93.3	6.7	45.0
Beirut Arab University	1961	2708	22424	25132	2851	26141	28992	6813	21114	27927
percent		10.8	89.2	49.5	9.8	90.2	39.7	24.4	75.6	31.5
Holy Spirit University	1961	333	39	372	2738	83	2821	2189	52	2241
percent		89.5	10.5	0.7	97.1	2.9	3.9	97.7	2.3	2.5
Hikmat Law Institute	1961	233	2	235	212	4	216	547	2	549
percent		99.1	0.9	0.5	98.1	1.9	0.3	99.6	0.4	0.6
Imam Awzai University	1976	N/A	N/A	N/AA	99	36	135	425	552	977
percent		N/A	N/A	N/A	73.3	26.7	0.2	43.5	56.5	1.1
Louaize University	1987	N/A	N/A	N/A	317	27	344	1381	78	1459
percent		N/A	N/A	N/A	92.2	7.8	0.5	94.7	5.3	1.6
Other		1295	607	1902	722	159	881	293	210	603
percent		68.1	31.9	3.7	82	18	1.2	65.2	34.8	0.7
TOTAL		23179	27624	50803	43572	29480	73052	62566	26123	88689
percent		4536	54.4	100	59.6	40.4	100	70.5	29.5	100
Rate of increase over 10 years (%)		N/A	N/A	N/A	88	6.7	43.8	43.6	-11.4	21.4

Source : Center of Educational Research and Development, Lebanese Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. (Statistical bulletins for relevant years).

UNIVERSITY ENROLLEMENT IN LEBANON BY SEX

TABLE II

Institution	Date of est.	1972 - 1973			1982 - 1983			1992 - 1993		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
American University	1866	N/A	N/A	4581	2922	2033	4955	2913	2258	5171
percent		N/A	N/A	8.4	59	41	6.8	56.3	43.7	5.8
French University	1881	N/A	N/A	3639	2485	2686	5171	2233	3223	5456
percent		N/A	N/A	7.2	48.1	51.9	7.1	40.9	54.1	6.2
Beirut University College	1924	99	886	985	880	965	1845	1821	1620	3441
percent		10.1	89.9	1.9	47.7	52.3	2.5	52.9	47.1	3.9
Lebanese Academy	1944	152	103	255	237	308	545	386	553	939
percent		59.6	40.4	0.5	43.5	56.5	0.7	41.1	58.9	1.1
Lebanese State University	1951	10366	3636	14002	14312	12835	27147	19889	20037	39926
percent		74	26	27.6	52.7	47.3	37.2	49.8	50.2	45
Beirut Arab University	1961	20702	4430	25132	22352	6640	28992	18910	9017	27927
percent		82.4	17.6	49.5	77.7	22.9	39.7	67.7	33.3	31.5
Holy Spirit University	1961	285	87	372	1577	1244	2821	1123	1118	2241
percent		76.6	23.4	0.7	55.9	44.1	3.9	50.1	49.9	2.5
Hikmat Law Institute	1961	209	26	235	97	119	216	285	264	549
percent		88.9	11.1	0.5	44.9	55.1	0.3	51.9	48.1	0.6
Imam Awzai University	1976	N/A	N/A	N/A	117	18	135	739	238	977
percent		N/A	N/A	N/A	86.7	13.3	0.2	75.6	24.4	1.1
Louaize University	1987	N/A	N/A	N/A	237	107	344	892	567	1459
percent		N/A	N/A	N/A	68.9	31.1	0.5	61.1	38.9	1.6
Other		N/A	N/A	1902	N/A	N/A	881	N/A	N/A	603
percent		N/A	N/A	3.7	N/A	N/A	1.2	N/A	N/A	0.7
TOTAL		32817	9916	50803	45827	27225	73052	49628	39061	88689
percent		N/A	N/A	100	62.7	32.3	100	56	44	100
Rate of increase over 10 years (%)		N/A	N/A	N/A	39.6	174.6	43.8	8.3	43.5	21.4

Source : Center for Educational Research and Development, Lebanese Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. (Statistical bulletins for relevant years)

If one is to conclude something from these tables. and from the brief review of the background I gave, it is that expansion in numbers has gone further than anyone expected, particularly in the case of the Lebanese State University. Now is the time for consolidation and for better quality.

The question is : how is this to be done ? There are two answers to this question : (1) either by market forces, i.e., laissez faire — the survival of the fittest — let the market decide, or (2) by regulation (not coercion) someone, somebody, or some agency has to do this.

My feeling is that it is too early to leave the matter of consolidation and quality control in Lebanon totally to the market forces, particularly in as much as the Lebanese State University is concerned. For one thing, the market is too chaotic and ridden with loopholes, and subject to manipulation and monopolies from inside and outside. The solution before us is regulation by special councils or boards formed by the State and some private universities with stature. Such boards should be able to contribute significantly to consolidation and quality control. The idea is not new. In fact it is built into the present system of the existing Council of Higher Education. Let us give it support.