6 Lebanon's Golden/Gilded Age: 1943 — 1975

> Fabulous, yet perfectly authentic, stories are told of the transfer of gold from Mexico to India and China, of the shipment of copper from Franco's Spain to Stalin's Russia and of the sale of a huge consignment of toothbrushes from an Italian firm to a neighboring one — and all directed from and financed by some mangy-looking business house in Beirut. In 1951, when Lebanon's gold trade was at its peak, it was estimated that 30 percent of world gold traffic passed through the country.
> — Charles Issawi, "Economic Development and Political Liberalism in Lebanon" (1966)

> Lebanon's singular brand of democracy is doubly wondrous. It works and, for its continued growth and functioning, has depended heavily from birth on the international community.
> — J.C. Hurewitz, "Lebanese Democracy in its International Setting" (1963)

The brief interlude between the relatively benign civil war of 1958 and the protracted cruelties of 1975 stands out as a perplexing often anomalous epoch in Lebanon's eventful political history. It is a period marked by sustained political stability, economic prosperity, and swift societal transformations, the closest the country ever got to a "golden age" with all the outward manifestations of stupendous vitality, exuberance, and rising expectations. But these were also times of growing disparities, cleavages, neglect, portends perhaps of a more "gilded age" of misdirected and uneven growth, boisterous political culture, conspicuous consumption, and the trappings of frivolous life-styles masking creeping social tensions and other ominous symptoms of political unrest.

Perhaps because of such marked asymmetry, observers differ in their assessment of this interlude. Those who see it as a prelude to war tend, with the benefit of hindsight, to exaggerate the country's internal contradictions

and hold them accountable for much of the subsequent havoc and collective violence. A growing number of writers, in fact, speak of "self-destruction," "self-dismantling" as if Lebanon and the Lebanese are collective victims of some form of national suicide. Others, along the same vein, dismiss Lebanon as a myth, an archaic, artificial entity, created from the outset on shaky and flimsy foundations and therefore doomed to self-destruction.[1]

Others, with a more optimistic frame of mind, are more inclined to see this period as a rather fortunate interlude, a testimony to the resourcefulness and ingenuity of its people. We are often reminded by a score of such authors that when the state of greater Lebanon as a political entity was ushered into the world in 1920 it was already enfeebled by two calamitous disasters: the famine and ruinous consequences of World War I and the great depression of the 1930s. The famine alone decimated thousands in cities and much more in rural areas.

Most devastating were doubtless the physical and immediate effects of war. No sooner had Turkey entered the war (October 1914) than Jamal Pasha — the commander-in-chief of the Fourth Army and military governor of the area — promptly occupied Lebanon, abolished its autonomy, suspended the Administrative Council, and ushered in the worst reign of terror the country had ever known. Until the end of the war, Lebanon was placed under Ottoman rule. Jamal Pasha imposed military conscription, requisitioned beasts of burden, and summoned people to relinquish much of their provisions to support his troops. Even trees, often entire groves, were cut down and used as fuel for army trains. The mulberry groves in the Biqa', and a considerable portion of the country's forests, were decimated for that purpose (Al-Aswad 1925:247).

Anyone suspected of anti-Ottoman, Pro-Arab, or Pro-French sentiments lived under the constant fear of being imprisoned, banished or condemned to death on charges of high treason. An infamous military court was established and dealt arbitrarily with all such cases. Evasion of Military service, guilt by association or hearsay, membership in any of the burgeoning secret societies and clubs, or even a passing critical remark in a letter from a relative abroad were all punishable charges (Hitti 1957: 483–84).

Of all the Ottoman provinces, Lebanon suffered the worst and most damaging hardships. Foreign remittances, tourism, and revenue from summer resorts, by then major sources of national income, came to a sudden halt. A tight blockade was imposed on food, medical supplies, and clothing. Staple items and basic commodities were scarce. Prices rose and shortages became more widespread. By the fall of 1916, famine, successive swarms of locusts,

epidemics (particularly typhoid, typhus, malaria, dysentery, bubonic plague) hit an already enfeebled and demoralized population. Entire villages were deserted. Others were left in partial or total ruin, depleted of their manpower and other resources. Altogether, some 100,000 out of a population of 450,000 are estimated to have lost their lives. Many of the remaining were in a pitiful state of destitution (For further details see Hitti 1997: 483–86; Khatir 1967: 197–201; el-Maqdisi 1921: 53–59).

The backbone of Lebanon's economy, its silk industry, was to suffer its fateful woes by the entry of "synthetic silk" (rayon) into the world market. Whatever prosperity Lebanon had enjoyed by then quickly vanished, leaving more people destitute. Forced migration, which had begun in the wake of the 1860 sectarian strife, reached its peak in the early 1930s. Heart-rending accounts of the day bespeak of the immensity of collective suffering. The anguish of migration seemed welcome in comparison to the visitations of pauperism, hunger, conscription, and Ottoman repression and persecution (For further details, see Safa 1960; Khalaf 1987; Saliba 1981; Abou 1980).

In no time, however, Lebanon managed to resuscitate itself. With no resources to speak of, other than a temperate climate and scenic beauty, the country emerged as one of the most dominant commercial and cultural centers in the Arab world.

The gradual transformation of the economy from a subsistence to a market system was accompanied by marked shifts in the position of various groups within the social hierarchy. Peasants in Mount Lebanon, both Christian and Druze, acquired real estate and became land owners. In the large towns, prosperous communities of merchants and money lenders gained social prominence and political influence. In the coastal cities of Beirut and Tripoli, swift commercialization and the opening up of urban society to Western contacts and new economic opportunities provided favorable conditions for the emergence of a new urban "aristocracy."

Concomitant with these changes — possibly because of them — Lebanon witnessed an educational and intellectual awakening that began to transform the social and cultural life of the country. The extension of foreign and missionary education activity, initiated in the middle of the nineteenth century, encouraged further indigenous initiatives in the field of popular education. Benevolent, literary, scientific, and other voluntary associations participated more effectively in the intellectual and reform movements of the day. Literacy became more widespread. Presses published a variety of books, periodicals, and newspapers covering a broad range of topics and reaching an audience beyond the confines of Lebanon. It was then that Lebanon

acquired — deservedly or not — the slightly arrogant and overbearing reputation of being a "center of illumination" (*balad al-isha*).[2] It was also then that the popular and catchy saying "Happy was he who had a goat's enclosure in Lebanon" became more widespread.

To many of Lebanon's admirers such realities are further proof that if and when external sources of instability are contained (e.g. 1860–1914, 1943–58, 1958–75), the country was able to survive — as it did during these interludes — as a viable and stable parliamentary democracy. Charles Issawi, in two concurrent articles (1956 and 1964), provided persuasive documentation to support these claims. He explored the economic and social foundations of democracy in the Middle East and came to the conclusion that Lebanon was the only country in which most of the prerequisites for parliamentary democracy are met.[3] Issawi also maintained that the survival of parliamentary democracy in Lebanon, after it had been broken down in so many others, was not just an accident of history. On the contrary, it is a "triumph of ingenuity over nature."

> It is generally agreed that this remarkable development has been achieved by the enterprise of private Lebanese citizens, and has owed little to the help of either nature, or foreigners, or the government. Except for a pleasant climate and a beautiful scenery, nature has been niggardly towards Lebanon. Lebanon has not received even a small fraction of the huge oil deposits, vast alluvial plains and broad rivers with which some of its neighbors have been endowed. This trading community does not even have a good natural harbor with easy communications with the interior, such as Haifa and Alexandretta. The development of Beirut into the leading port in the Eastern Mediterranean is a triumph of ingenuity over nature (Issawi 1964: 280–81).

Kamal Salibi's (1966) assessment of the "merchant republic" during the inaugural terms of Khoury and Chamoun (1943–58), concurs with this felicitous profile. While both regimes left a rather unsavory residue of government neglect and corruption, they were also responsible for engendering the kinds of developments associated with the country's phenomenal prosperity and stability.

> It would be unfair, and also misleading, not to give the merchant republic of Khoury and Chamoun its due of credit. In 1943 Lebanon, tiny and lacking in any important natural resources, was barely devel-

> oped and its economic viability was subject to doubt. By 1958 it had been transformed into a highly prosperous country with considerable social development, well-ordered foreign relations, and a remarkable degree of stability. The unbridled capitalism which the Christian oligarchs secured was chiefly responsible for the country's phenomenal prosperity, as it was also responsible for the maintenance of Lebanese democracy. At a time when dictatorships were emerging everywhere in the Arab world and abolishing democratic practice, the Lebanese merchant republic bravely championed the ideal of constitutional life and guaranteed the freedom of enterprise which is essential to capitalism. In a part of the world where people were rapidly losing their liberties, Lebanese freedom became proverbial and provided the basis for genuine stability (Salibi 1966: 214–15).

A recent assessment of Lebanon's political economy as a "Merchant Republic" — particularly the implications of its service-oriented, open and deregulated economy on nation-building and political stability — is a bit more guarded. Carolyn Gates (1998) in a thorough and well-documented study, provides persuasive evidence to account for the success of the so-called "Lebanese Miracle" — at least in the two decades after the Second World War. Lebanon's outward-looking economy managed to institutionalize an economic order which sustained a strong currency, mobilized domestic private capital, attracted foreign investment, and promoted a growing variety of service exports. Altogether these accomplishments, doubtless a testimony to the ingenuity of its economic and political elite which had embraced the liberal economic vision of the "New Phoenicians," managed also to instill a modicum of international confidence in Lebanon.[4]

These propitious circumstances, it should be emphasized, are not, as often assumed, the outcome of serendipity or historic coincidence. It has become fashionable lately to dismiss Lebanon's success story as largely the byproduct of fortuitous and unintended windfalls rather than deliberate and willful planning or rational debate.

One economist, for example, argues unequivocally that whatever prosperity Lebanon enjoyed was the result of what he termed the "Economics of coincidence and Disaster." The Lebanese economy, Fuad Awad (1991) tells us, was largely shaped by external fortuitous events such the Arab-Israeli conflict, the closure of the Suez Canal, the nationalization of Arab economics, and the severance of Arab–U.S. diplomatic relations in 1967. While such exogenous factors account for Lebanon's momentary and lopsided prosperity, they made it vulnerable to external shocks. He goes further to assert

that the socioeconomic disparities generated by such coincidental and exogenous circumstances — "camouflage by artificial prosperity" — account for Lebanon's downfall (Awad 1991: 83). The overall assessment of a recent conference which hosted a collection of credible Lebanese experts at Oxford's Center for Lebanese Studies also reiterated the view that Lebanon's past miracle was mainly based on a spurious or misbegotten combination of luck and external factors (Fattouh 1998: 1). Another, (Waines 1976) derides the shrewd and hard-driven Lebanese entrepreneur, and the mercantile and middleman economy they created, as more the result of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" than any rational planning. To Moshe Shmesh, the very structure on which the "Lebanese Miracle" was founded was "flimsy from the outset. . . . what was surprising was how long it took to break down. . . ." (Shemesh 1986: 77).

Such partial and lopsided views are clearly inconsistent with the economic realities of the period. They can be faulted or questioned on at least two counts: first, the emergence of the "Merchant Republic" and how it came to embrace an outward-looking, noninterventionist, open and service-biased laissez-faire economy was not the result of coincidence. It came about after heated political debate and protracted controversy over the likely economic strategies Lebanon was to adopt in its post-independence and post–World War II interlude. The polemics at the time took the form of an open public debate among three overriding groups and their contentious constituencies and coteries and personal advisors and ideological spokesmen. Second, the outcome of such open debate was far from disastrous. To a considerable extent, the model they had forged, reinforced by the National Pact of 1943, which envisioned Lebanon being ruled by a partnership of Maronite and Sunni Merchants, bankers and landowners, managed to ward off a succession of debilitating challenges and survive, rather robustly, until the outbreak of civil hostilities in 1975. Economic historians have, on repeated occasions, reconfirmed such realities. To Roger Owen, the wartime regime had stimulated the economy in such a way that Lebanon had "the highest per capita income in the Arab East, the lowest rate of illiteracy, the best developed infrastructure and, for all its emphasis on banking and services, the largest share of manufacturing within national income. This too gave the country an important vested interest in maintaining and expanding its regional economic role" (Owen 1986: 28–29).

The so-called "Lebanese Miracle," even in its golden age was, of course, far from faultless. Although the economy enjoyed high growth rates, it was not, as will be seen, evenly spread. Its vibrant private sector, which siphoned off much of the wealth generated by Beirut's entrepôt and transit trade,

walked away with its lion's share. The basic economic needs of the majority of the population were not adequately met. The system was also less successful in contributing to civil liberties, nation-building or in bridging the sociocultural disparities. Indeed, symptoms of relative deprivation, because of the ostentations of the privileged few, seemed starker and more injurious. Equally unsettling and, much like the pitfalls of nineteenth century economic and diplomatic dependency, by aligning Lebanon even further to external markets and sources of political unrest, made it more vulnerable to the vagaries of global and regional transformations (for further details, see Gates 1998; Khalaf 2001).

Stark as the internal disparities were at the time, they could not alone have triggered much unrest. As in earlier such encounters, the sparks were fanned or ignited from without. Indeed, the first threatening clouds on Lebanon's horizon gathered early in Charles Helou's term in 1964. He was so eager to preserve Lebanon's "Arab face" that his first official act was to attend the Arab summit, convened in Cairo, to protest Israel's plans to divert Jordanian and Lebanese water. More ominously, he also granted permission to Ahmad Shuqayri, Nasser's appointee to head to newly established PLO, to train guerrillas in his own village retreat.

The first cracks in Lebanon's protective armor widened. The interplay between the frayed communal solidarities and unresolved regional and global rivalries became volatile. Two recent observers in fact (Winslow 1996 and El-Khazen 2000) trace back the origins of Lebanon's destruction to those fateful events and not, as often attributed, to the outbreak of fighting in the spring of 1975. From then on, the country was inexorably drawn into the region's most bitter and belligerent hostilities.

The polemics over Lebanon's "golden/gilded" age have not been confined to the weighty, ponderous discourse of scholars or the sensational accounts of journalists and other popular writers. Literary figures, poets, essayists, intellectuals have been equally perplexed by Lebanon's (particularly Beirut's) paradoxical character. The cruelties of the war simply gave them added graphic evidence to evoke and epitomize this alternating character of Lebanon. Instances of such contrasts or seeming paradoxes are legion:

- An accommodating and hospitable society, sustained by sentiments of charity, love, compassion, and feelings of neighborliness and extended obligations; but one also fractured by factional, almost tribal, and deep-seated hostility and distance between communities.
- A place of refuge, an asylum, a sanctuary, or a corridor for persecuted and displaced dissidents; yet also an open and free place.

- An arresting natural environment and scenic beauty, a source for romanticized often idyllic inspiration; but also a boisterous political culture.
- Pervasive religiosity and divisive sectarian and confessional loyalties coexisting with manifestations of a secular liberal and cosmopolitan life style.
- A convivial society sparked by ethos of play, gregarious, festive and fun-loving outlets; yet one also riddled with symptoms of paranoia, fear, and grief.
- A sense of opulence, extravagance, even profligacy, being vied contemptuously by a mounting underclass of less privileged and dispossessed groups.
- A fashionable resort, a "playground" with all the glitter, sleaze, and gaudy commercialization of a tourist-oriented culture, interlaced with pockets of creativity and genuine concern to preserve and enrich its threatened heritage and the high quality of its scholarly and artistic legacy.

These and related questions will be addressed in the next chapter. It is necessary that we probe first into the character and consequences of the salient socioeconomic and political transformations associated with this rather luminous and peaceful interlude. The chapter, accordingly, explores two related dimensions. First, an attempt is made to reassess some of the outstanding economic, sociocultural and political features engendered in this epoch by way of arriving at a more balanced and realistic appraisal of its overall legacy. Second, by employing the rather slack but expressive label of a "playground" we can better, in my view, elucidate those attributes which may account for Lebanon's almost Janus-like, dichotomous character; namely, features which underlie its "success story" and those which render it more vulnerable to internal and external contradictions.

Lebanon as a "Success Story"

There was nothing mythical about the stability and prosperity the country enjoyed during this blissful interlude. Nor were their manifestations as mysterious. They were visible in virtually all dimensions of society: political, socioeconomic, and cultural. There was also more to Lebanon's "success story" than the outwardly shoddy, often corrupt, and garish symptoms of a "merchant" or "tribal" republic geared and sustained by primordial and

clientelistic loyalties or the enticements of foreign capital and tourism. To Lebanon's detractors, who became legion after its downfall, the state was little more than an "estate" to be plowed, harrowed, and then reaped for the aggrandizing few entrusted to be its benevolent guardians. None of its political regimes were spared such epitaphs. In varying degrees they all suffered some of these clientelistic abuses. Yet it is too rash; if not unjust, to deny Lebanon's accomplishments or to claim that a predatory and rapacious few had successively reduced the country's potential to the edges of chaos and despair. One may easily advance, as I intend to do, a more salutary image which in my view is more consistent with the realities extracted from its history. Accordingly I will argue that since its independence in 1943, partly by its own ingenuity and partly because of the misfortunes of adjoining regimes, Lebanon was already displaying some of the enviable symptoms of political stability, economic prosperity and sociocultural mobilization. The best I can do is briefly highlight some of these features by was of substantiating their manifestations and consequences.

Economic Performance

It may be overstating the case a bit to call Lebanon's economy a "miracle." Any assessment, however, of its overall accomplishments, by all conventional indicators, reveals a few remarkable, if not "miraculous" features. At least three such attributes stand out. First, for nearly twenty-five years (from 1950 until the outbreak of hostilities in 1975), the economy experienced a sustained and often accelerating expansion. Second, there was also considerable change and viable diversification in the performance of its major economic sectors. Finally, the country witnessed a decrease in both overall income and regional disparities in living standards (for further details see, Labaki 1981; Hanf 1993; Owen 1988).

These propitious changes, it must be emphasized, predated the inflow of Arab oil capital by more than a decade. They were largely an indigenous reaction to some of the favorable economic circumstances generated by World War II. Unlike the massive privations and suffering inflicted on Lebanon during World War I, the Second World War brought nothing but gain. Wartime conditions, which had reduced international trade, transport, and communications and created new markets for domestic production, had at least temporarily "reshaped the Lebanese economy. Unemployment was virtually eliminated. Physical infrastructure was improved; and wide-ranging

regulatory policies were imposed . . . with extraordinary Allied expenditures in the region, Lebanon's foreign reserves and domestic savings grew substantially" (Gates 1998: 109).

The expenditure of Allied Forces, along with expanded employment opportunities generated appreciable revenues, particularly among the entrepreneurial and working classes.

> The tales of spectacular profiteering and the Horatio Alger stories of the time are part of the folklore of modern Lebanon. From the peasant who found a job as chauffer with the British 7th Army to the *homme d'affaires* who made a fortune selling tank barricades, nearly everybody benefited. The boom has never really ended. Twenty years after the expulsion of the Vichy regime, the inhabitant of Beirut, rich or poor, can hardly avoid the ultramodern world around him (Hudson 1968: 71).

Reserves accumulated during the war exceeded $100 million (Issawi 1966: 284) and were judiciously invested in building and extending the country's infrastructure, particularly its airport, road network and electricity. By the early 1960s, thirty-seven international airlines were already making daily flights into the airport. In no time Beirut evolved into the main financial center of the Middle East and one of the leading centers in the world.

> Fabulous, yet perfectly authentic, stories are told of the transfer of gold from Mexico to India and China, of the shipment of copper from Franco's Spain to Stalin's Russia and of the sale of a huge consignment of toothbrushes from an Italian firm to a neighboring one—and all directed from and financed by some mangy-looking business house in Beirut. In 1951, when Lebanon's gold trade was at its peak, it was estimated that 30 percent of world gold traffic passed through the country (Issawi 1966: 284).

It was also then that Lebanon began to upgrade its stature as a transit center. In early 1950s, and clearly much earlier than the impetus it was to receive from the Persian Gulf shaykhdoms, Lebanon was already acting as the main trade intermediary for the neighboring countries. Some 50,000 passengers and 400,000 tons of goods, other than petroleum, were transmitted through Lebanon in that year. Likewise, Beirut was already the headquarters of a growing number of multinational firms (Issawi 1964: 285). This is at least another indication that Lebanon's economic growth had preceded

the oil boom. Nor was it, as often assumed, merely the outgrowth of free enterprise and reckless private initiative. Even the presidency of Bishara Al-Khoury (1943–52), notorious for championing tenets of economic liberalism, did not release the state from its prerogatives and policies of investment on public utilities and services. Camille Chamoun (1952–58) likewise, despite his ardent laissez-faire leanings, did not undermine the role of the state in either enacting legislation to favor such intervention or in establishing special institutions to encourage economic development. Close to a dozen such government agencies were founded during his six-year term. Among them were the Institute of Industrial Research, Economic Planning and Development Council, the Silk Bureau, the Agricultural Industrial and Real Estate Credit Bank, the Independent Fund For Energy.

During the presidency of Fuad Chehab (1958–64), the link between economic planning and balanced regional development, social justice, and national unity assumed, of course, more pronounced dimensions. It was then, as Boutros Labaki (1993: 100) argues, that Keynesian precepts were grafted on to classical liberalism. It was also then, as will be amplified later, that Chehabism became coterminous with central planning and the growing dependence of the governing elite on a network of experts and advisors unconnected to the traditional political system.[5] Chehabism, in this regard, naturally meant a much greater portion of public spending and increase in government subsidies for industry, tourism, agriculture, applied and scientific research and education. It also involved the introduction of economic reforms in an effort to tame and control the excessive pecuniary desires and caprices of private enterprise (see Salibi 1965: 222 for examples of reforms). The establishment of councils and special government bureaus with explicit development and welfare agendas increased exponentially. Of particular importance were the National Council for Scientific Research, Higher Council for Urban Planning, Council for the Implementation of Construction Projects, Bureau of Animal Protection, and the like. More than the two previous regimes, Chehab's Presidency was marked by a much more substantive investment on public projects and, hence, a visible expansion of utilities — particularly health, water, electricity, road networks, and the modernization of ports. More important, the country's phenomenal prosperity was no longer left to chance or entrusted to the whims of individual administrators, political zua'ma, or unbridled appetites of greedy capitalists.

Coming in the wake of the unsettling disruptions of 1958, the Chehab regime may be legitimately credited with two added accomplishments: The promotion of a much-needed sense of national unity and the establishment

of public order. Both the internal and foreign policies of the regime were directed toward allaying the fractious divisions within society while making judicious concessions to ascendant Arab nationalist sentiments without compromising the country's sovereignty. Political strife in 1958 had also, as we have seen, unleashed residues of acrimonious and strident political passions, in the form of "street" and populist manifestations. Armed gangs, henchmen, and client groups of traditional zua'ma and communal leaders needed to be restrained. The regime's excessive reliance on its notorious and often repressive security forces (Deuxième Bureau), was largely an effort to restore public order.

Charles Helou's term (1964–70) was unfortunately marred by a succession of debilitating economic and political crises which deflected the energies and public concerns of the regime. The Intra Bank crisis of 1966, the Six Day war of 1967 and the disruptive confrontations with a recalcitrant and radicalized Palestinian resistance movement were all understandably unsettling in their consequences. Most critical, perhaps, they rendered the country more vulnerable to unresolved regional conflict. Helou's Presidency, because of his own personal and ideological leanings toward Chiha's brand of economic liberalism, also marked a gradual departure from planned development strategies. Nonetheless, at least the sociocultural and economic legacy Helou bequeathed to his successor was far from discreditable. Most prominent, particularly in terms of their long-term implications, were efforts to rationalize the banking sector, stimulate economic growth, industrial development, and the modernization of the Lebanese University. The state also continued the large-scale public schemes and projects begun in earlier regimes and launched a satellite station to upgrade and extend the country's international communication networks.

The presidency of Suleiman Franjieh (1970–76) was also marked by this same juxtaposition of rapid economic growth interrupted by growing symptoms of socioeconomic unrest and mounting political tension and violence. The state managed though to introduce some critical legislative reforms (such as the decree of 1943) for the regulation of industry, particularly pharmaceuticals and petroleum refineries. New ministries (e.g. Petroleum and Industry, Housing and Cooperatives) and other governmental agencies (Social Security and Health) were introduced. Among the noted public projects were efforts to modernize thermal electric power stations and secondary and higher education.

In general, observers might differ in their assessment of the magnitude of economic growth. They all concur, however, that the country managed

to sustain a rather impressive economic record. Some go even further to maintain that this thirty-year interlude was also characterized by a decline in the socioeconomic differences among and between the various strata of society (Labaki 1993: 101). Roger Owen gives an overall growth rate of about seven percent a year, over this entire period. Accounting for population increase, this would have still meant a rise of about three to four percent per capita (Owen 1988: 33). That its proverbial tertiary sector (trade, banking, services) should continue to play so vital a part in this prodigious growth is a tribute to the historic intermediary role it has served in this regard. The share of this sector in the gross domestic product increased from 62 percent in 1950 to nearly 75 percent in 1970; perhaps one of the highest rates in the world (Nasr 1978: 3).

A compelling index of this growth is the increase in banking institutions and volume of deposits. The total volume of bank deposits multiplied by 38 percent since 1950. As a result, the proportion of total to national income leaped from 20 percent in 1950 to 122 percent in 1974. This, too, is one of the highest recorded rates in the world (Nasr 1978: 4). The number of banks also increased from 10 in 1950 to 93 in 1966, with more than 20 being branches of foreign banks (Issawi 1964: 285). The brief recession the country suffered, in the wake of the Intra Bank crisis of 1966 and the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, was offset by the inflow of "petro-dollars." Dubar and Nasr (1976: 71) maintain that about two-thirds of the gulf-oil surplus passed through Lebanese hands between 1956 and 1966. Much of the construction work and real estate development Beirut and other cities were undergoing at the time was financed by such capital inflow. This massive inflow also permitted the country to pay off its large import surplus.

Naturally, this growing dependence of the Lebanese economy on foreign capital, as exponents of dependency theories would have us believe, is bound to carry with it some pitfalls.[6] It exaggerated Lebanon's global image or national identity as a transit economy or entrepôt and, thereby, made it more vulnerable to external exigencies. More important it reinforced the monopolistic privileges of a handful of well-connected entrepreneurs. By virtue of the clientelistic political network they enjoyed (such as favorable import quotas), it was estimated that not more than five such families or houses (Abu-Adal, Chiha, Faroun, Fattal, Kettaneh) had virtual monopoly over two-thirds of all foreign imports (Labaki 1971: 12). Nasr provides further evidence to prove that for the most part the same groups who dominated local production were also those who extended their controls over the import sector. Hence, cartel agreements in such vital ventures as construction ma-

terials, food products, textiles, sugar, poultry, and cement also came under the control of a few monopolies (Nasr 1978: 6).

Contrary to popular misconceptions, much of this wealth, apparent in spectacular economic growth and outward manifestations of ostentatious materialism, was not voraciously consumed or reinvested into the financial sector of Christian capitalists and oligarchs. Nor was Lebanon merely an entrepôt or a transit center. Large sums were invested to develop other sectors of the economy, particularly agriculture and industry. It was during this period that agriculture witnessed a remarkable upsurge, triggered by a shift to high-value products drawing heavy investment in labor and capital. Since the mid-1940s the magnitude of expansion in cultivable and irrigated areas was sustained at a fairly high rate of 3 percent per annum (Issawi 1964: 286). Extensive terracing of Lebanese mountainous slopes, coupled by more efficient use of fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, and improvements in processing and marketing of produce, generated appreciable increase in yield and income, particularly apples, citrus, bananas and poultry.

While in 1959 about half the country's labor force was engaged in agriculture, within just another decade the proportion had dropped to only one-fifth. What is remarkable, it was in this period that the sector experienced its greatest growth. Albert Badre puts it at an astonishing 5 percent a year (Badre 1972: 164–65). Doubtless, this is a reflection of increasing specialization in farm technology and the introduction of agro-business and other forms of agrarian capitalism. This was particularly true of crops like apples, citrus, poultry, tobacco, and sugar beets. By 1975 output in these crops together made up about two-thirds of total value (Owen 1988: 35).

It was also these crops (particularly tobacco in the south, sugar beets and potato in the Beqa'a and Akkar, citrus in the coastal plains and apples in Mount Lebanon) which were receptive to profitable capitalist ventures. It was then that Lebanon's rural and mountainous landscape was being subjected to intensive cultivation. The proverbial resourcefulness of villagers was, once again, put to edifying use. Reclaimed land was increasing at the rate of three percent a year and agricultural production doubled several times (Toubi 1980: 93). The mulberry groves of old, which had sustained Lebanon's thriving cottage silk-reeling industry in the nineteenth century, were converted to terraced orchards to accommodate the lucrative demand for apple crops. In fact, farmers were so anxious to capture the allures of the market that apple growing became almost a compulsive national enterprise, a fad as hazardous as the "tulip mania" of seventeenth-century Holland. Fortunately, the almost inelastic demand for the coveted Lebanese apple,

along with other perishable fruits, spared the country that fateful Dutch analogy. By 1974, Arab markets alone were absorbing more than 90 percent of all fruit production (Nasr 1978: 6).

Here again such profound transformations brought with them some inauspicious consequences. Two in particular have been severely unsettling. First, the growth of agro-Business brought about a significant decline in sharecropping, the traditional lifeline of Lebanese farming. Small farmers and sharecroppers, who had constituted in 1950 about 25 percent of the active agricultural population, declined to not more than 5 percent by 1970. Displaced farmers were either forced to migrate or suffer the status of being reduced to hired hands or wage laborers. Both were equally disparaging. Migrants became part of that swelling mass of disreputable and pauperized "misery belt" of Beirut's suburbs. Those compelled to become wage laborers had to suffer the indignities of competing with that cheap pool of itinerant labor, mostly Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

The magnitude and nature of the rural exodus, perhaps one of Lebanon's most grievous problems, was by far more disruptive in its consequences. Estimates and reasons underlying this persistent and accelerating outflow are varied. Initially, some of the conventional push and pull factor (exploitation, lack of employment opportunities, enticements of city life etc.) accounted for much of the exodus. After 1967, however, the growing insecurity of border villages because of incessant Israeli incursions generated waves of massive involuntary out-migration. Results of the only national manpower survey (undertaken in 1970) revealed that nearly one-fifth of Lebanon's rural population during the 1960s had migrated to towns or, more likely, to Beirut's suburban fringe. This exodus was particularly disruptive because it was largely a one-step jarring encounter rather than a two-step process observed in other instances of rural displacement. In other words villages were compelled to suffer the alienation of city without any intermediary and more accommodating interlude. Exodus from the south, as shown in table 6.1, was as high as one-third. During the early 1970s the magnitude increased sharply to envelop 65 percent of the rural population of the south and about 50 percent of the Biqa'a (see Nasr 1978: 9–10). Little wonder that by early 1970s such displaced and disgruntled groups became, as will be seen, easy fodder and accessible pools for any forms of political mobilization.

Altogether the performance of the agriculture sector, despite some of its grievous pitfalls, is not as adverse as often assumed. It is customary, for example, to site its declining share to the national product as evidence of its inherent flaws. Of course, the relative share of agriculture in the national

TABLE 6.1 Rural to Urban Migration

Province	*Total Population of rural origin*	*% of Pop. migrated to towns in province*	*% of pop. migrated to Beirut or suburbs*
Mount Lebanon	344,000	2.1%	17.4%
North Lebanon	204,435	8.6%	7.4%
South Lebanon	242,085	2.8%	29.3%
Beka'a	178,425	1.7%	16.9%
Total	**758,670**	**3.5%**	**18.1%**

Source: Salim Nasr, "The Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism" *MERIP Reports* No. 73 (December 1978): 10

economy dropped from about 20 percent in 1950 to 9 percent in 1973. So had the proportion of the agricultural labor within the national labor force. It declined from 50 to 20 percent during the same period. Yet such inevitable macro trends should not disguise some of the tangible accomplishments realized at the micro level. Indeed such accomplishments are all the more remarkable given the structural constraints farmers had to grapple with.

The ingenuity of small farmers and their predisposition to experiment with novel forms of crop rotation and judicious use of fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides were effective in maximizing yield. The peasants' relentless attachments to their own ancestral land, tracts, and homesteads reinforced their commitments and resourcefulness. Their tenacity to hold on was matched by efforts to safeguard and upgrade the cherished values inherent in this primal heritage. Hence, contrary to mistaken, often exaggerated, views, small and independent farmers were not the hapless victims of absentee landlords, decadent feudalists, or the burgeoning class of rapacious capitalists and exploitative intermediaries. By the second half of the 1960s about 90 percent of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon owned land of varying sizes. There were naturally some regional variation: 81 percent in the north, 75 in the Beqa'a, and 70 in the South. Altogether, though, some three-quarters of Lebanon's rural population owned land parcels to which they displayed varying degrees of attachments (see Nasr 1978 for these and related estimates).

In some notable instances private initiatives — both small and large — were inventive in responding to strategies of capital-intensive and techno-

logical innovations. The state, particularly during the Shihab regime (1958–64) had also launched impressive programs of rural development, schooling, and welfare programs.

The popular misconception that Lebanon's economic success story was nothing but a fortuitous accident of history engendered and enshrined by the mercantile ethics of a "Merchant Republic," is also challenged by the unusual performance of its industrial sector. As shown in table 6.2, industry witnessed the most substantive growth; twice in fact of the increase in trade. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s it expanded rapidly enough to maintain about 12 to 13 percent of its share of the national product. By the early 1970s, however, it "exploded" according to Owen (1988: 35) to raise its contribution to somewhere between 20 and 25 percent (see Kanovsky 1983/4 for a slightly more moderate estimate of this expansion).

Accounts of this vigorous growth normally converge on a set of distinctive attributes. Some single out diversification, where no one product had exercised a leading role for any extended period of time (J. P. Bertrand, et al 1979). Others note the predisposition of industrialists to innovate, as reflected in their willingness to experiment with complex and state of the art systems of production and technology. By directing their output to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding export industry, Lebanon also evolved, "far and away, as the most important Arab supplier of manufactured goods to the

TABLE 6.2 Structural Change of Economy
Selected year: 1950–73

	Percentage Shares					
	1950	*1955*	*1960*	*1965*	*1970*	*1973*
Agriculture	19.7	16.2	14.1	11.6	9.2	9.0
Industry	13.5	12.7	12.1	13.1	15.9	21.0
Construction	4.1	4.3	3.5	5.7	4.5	4.5
Transportation	4.1	5.4	3.9	8.2	8.2	8.5
Trade	28.8	28.8	32.0	30.6	31.4	33.0
Finance & Insurance	3.8	5.1	6.3	3.4	3.4	4.0
Real Estate	9.2	8.4	11.0	7.6	8.8	10.0
Government	6.9	6.0	7.8	8.0	8.7	10.0
Other Services	9.6	12.0	9.2	11.3	9.9	

Source: Roger Owen (1988: 34).

rest of the Arab World. . . . Altogether the rich oil states provided a market for exactly half of Lebanon's goods sold before the civil war" (Owen 1988: 35–36).

It was also during this period that daring individuals, with little by way of established capital or political connections other than their ingenuity and resourcefulness, launched successful contracting, engineering, consulting, aviation, and other venturesome projects which served as models and sources of inspiration for subsequent generations of equally spirited entrepreneurs. Family firms and establishments, likewise, outgrew their timidity and their nepotistic and paternalistic inclinations and evolved into some of the most enterprising and dynamic industrial organizations. In textiles, food processing, tanning, wooden and metal furniture, soap, metal works, pharmaceuticals, family enterprises like Ghandour, Jabre, Badaro, Esseily, Cortas, Kassarjian, Fattal, Doumit, Frem etc. demonstrated remarkable readiness to innovate and expand without betraying some of the traditional and rational norms and practices (Khalaf 1987: 159; Sayigh 1962: 87).

Mention must be made of the relationship between the fairly small and moderate size of industrial firms, the character of patrimonial management, and the incidence of industrial conflict. The industrial census of 1971 reveals that there were close to 11,000 small-scale firms or workshops employing less than twenty-five workers. This sector, which draws more than half of the active industrial labor force, accounts for nearly 33 percent of total production, 40 percent of the value added and 42 percent of the wage earners. On the other hand, there were only 300 establishments that employed more than 25 workers. These represent only 10 percent of the total industrial units and account for two-thirds of total production (for further details, Direction Central de la Statestique 1972).

Here again some scholars are prone to exaggerate some of the abusive or disabling features engendered by the survival of fairly small and craft-oriented industrial establishments. To Salim Nasr, for example, this "limited and crude industrialization" accounts for much of the crisis of the industrial sector; particularly its marginal standing within the Lebanese economy and its role in reproducing the hegemony of exploitative capitalism (Nasr 1978: 10–12). Yet it is these comparatively small establishments that displayed more human concern for the welfare and well-being of their workers. Such investment in benevolent human relations did much, as empirical surveys revealed, in reducing manifestations of industrial tensions and labor-management disputes. (Khalaf 1964). Except for an inevitable portion of itinerant casual labor recruited on daily or seasonal basis, the labor force on the whole enjoyed more

than just a modicum of employment security and adequate working conditions.[7] The country, particularly when compared to neighboring totalitarian regimes and overregulated state economies was also buttressed by an accommodating system of labor legislation and a fairly open labor movement.

Such circumstances were bound, as they were, to be reflected in favorable measures of sustained growth. This was particularly evident in increases in number and size of enterprises (e.g. metal, mechanical, electrical, chemical, and pharmaceutical), capital investment, labor force participation, production, and energy utilizations. Value added also witnessed appreciable expansion, particularly during the decade following the crisis of 1958 (Hudson 1968: 60–70; Iskandar 1962: 33).

Social Mobilization

It is it is in the area of social mobilization where Lebanon displayed, perhaps, its most impressive accomplishments. On virtually all the conventional indices of exposure to modernity (i.e. magnitude of urbanization, literacy and school enrollments, mass communication, food consumption, and other public health and quality of life measures), Lebanon was not only substantially better but actually had had a head start of several decades over its Arab neighbor (See Hudson 1968: 80).

By almost any comparative yardstick, Lebanon's experience with urbanization has been phenomenal and accounts, perhaps, for much of the asymmetry associated with its golden/gilded age. The country's urban population more than tripled and attained an 80 percent degree of urbanization within the short span of 30 years. This, incidentally, is disproportionately higher than rates observed elsewhere in the world. The magnitude of the increasing scale of urbanization in most other developed countries is normally gradual and moderate. Indeed, it took most Western societies approximately two centuries to reach a 70 percent level of urbanization. Lebanon's experience is striking not only because of its magnitude but also because of the sharp and sudden leaps with which it occurred. In two decades, during the 1950s and 1960s, the proportion of urban residents increased from 27.7 percent to close to 60 percent.

The same intensity of growth was sustained during the mid-1970s. Of course much of this growth was absorbed by Beirut and its already teeming suburbs. In fact, rates of growth of Beirut's urban agglomeration (at a level of 6.5 percent a year) was among the highest in the world. With the excep-

tion of the unusual circumstances associated with cities like Baghdad (9.4 percent) and Kuwait (12.2 percent), other comparable rates ranged between 1.5 and 4.0 percent in developed countries and 2.5 and 6 percent in most Asia and Latin America (see Tabbarah 1977: 5, for these and other details).

The disruptive consequences of such swift and jarring transformations are grievous and will be amplified shortly. Urbanization, nonetheless, remains Lebanon's quintessential great multiplier and social mobilizer, the vector through which much of its encounters with modernity have been realized. Deservedly or not, it was then that Beirut's image as a cosmopolitan, sophisticated, polyglot meeting place of world cultures was being embellished.

All the indicators, crude and refined, attest to this overriding reality. From the sharp increases in the flow of domestic and foreign mail, number of telephones, passenger vehicles to the more stupendous growth in the volume and diversity of media exposure (particularly TV, radio, and movie attendance), all bespeak of appreciable increases in degrees of physical and psychic mobility and high levels of consumption throughout the strata of society. On these and other related indices, Lebanon enjoyed disproportionately higher rates than those observed in adjoining Arab states. Shortly after independence, for example, Lebanon could already boast of over 8,000 passenger vehicles, or about 7 per 1,000 people, which was considerably more than what Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt had in 1960. By then Lebanon had leaped to 73,000 or close to 40 cars per 1,000, compared to an average of 4 to 6 among those neighboring Arab states (UNESCO statistical yearbook 1985; Khalaf 1992).

On other vectors of mass communication Lebanon was even more notorious, almost an oddity. Early in the 1950s, if measured by the number of movie seats per capita, Beirut was already living up to its reputation as the movie capital of the world. By then, per capita movie attendance was five per year. In another decade, it increased by fivefold, a close second to Hong Kong (UNESCO 1965). During the same period, the number of movie theaters leaped from 48 to 170, an increment of 12 new houses per year. The accessibility of such theaters, rendered more appealing by the variety of films, plush surroundings, and low prices, only served to whet the voracity of the Lebanese of all classes for this form of public entertainment. Indeed by then, before the advent of TV and home videos, anticipating, attending, and talking about movies was already the undisputed, most popular, and most absorbing national pastime.

In addition to its claim to be the movie capital of the world, Lebanon was, more importantly, also a "nation of journalists." The nation's accom-

plishments in this field are both pace-setting and of long-standing. Since the appearance of its first newspaper in 1858, the Lebanese have long displayed a distinct predilection and talent for establishing papers and periodicals sustained by an irresistible compulsion for reading them. As in other dimensions of public life, this striking penchant the Lebanese evinced for journalism was nurtured and cultivated within a network of family tradition. This intimate association between families and careers in journalism is of long standing. Families, in fact, more than ideological parties, advocacy groups, or political platforms have been the settings within which some of the most gifted journalists received their tutelage and commitments for journalistic careers. Illustrious families such as Aql, Khazin, Taqla, Tueini, Zeidan, Sarruf, Jemayyel, Tibi, Mukarzal, Awad, Taha, Nsouli, Machnouq, among others, have all produced successive generations of journalists. Fathers served as mentors and role models and, often, had direct impact in initiating scions into the venerable family tradition and in honing their skills and cultivating contacts (For further graphic autobiographical details see Tueni 1995).

This journalistic urge was not, incidentally, confined to Lebanon itself. In diaspora, displaced Lebanese intellectuals were instrumental in establishing everywhere they went some of the leading papers and periodicals. In the fertile crescent, Egypt, North Africa, European capitals, Australia and the two-Americas, such ventures were crucial in maintaining links with the two worlds and as platforms for mobilizing dissent against Ottoman and foreign oppression.

Indeed, despite restrictions imposed by colonial or national governments, the Lebanese managed by the turn of the century to establish sanctioned press associations and syndicates and a fairly large number of licensed publications. By 1927, 256 newspapers and more than 140 periodicals were already registered, albeit many were short-lived. During the struggle for independence the press became much more vociferous and strident. By the early 1950s the number leaped to more than 400 political publications. Clearly, the repressive ideologies and stringent state controls prevalent in adjacent totalitarian regimes were an inducement. Publishers in the region came to Lebanon to print what they could not print in their own countries. The abuses of such a free-far-all setting became much too grievous. In 1993 the government imposed restrictions by issuing a decree forbidding the granting of any new licenses for political publications. To create a new publication, two licenses had to be purchased. Also, any periodical which went out of circulation for more than six months would have its license revoked. As a result, the number of periodicals since has been stabilized at 105 li-

censes, including 53 dailies, 48 weeklies and 4 monthlies. Readership and circulation, however, increased appreciably and continued to do so until the outbreak of hostilities in the mid seventies. For example, by the mid-sixties circulation was about 200,000 or 120 copies per 1,000 with 85 percent of the Beirutis and 77 percent of the Lebanese in general indicating that they were frequent readers (Hudson 1966: 73). These estimates, incidentally, are considerably higher that the sum total of newspaper circulation in the entire region (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1985).

By 1975 Lebanon had more than 400 valid publication licenses. For a country of about 3.5 million, this is an incredible density of newsprint; perhaps the highest in the world. The majority were politically independent, though a small number might be associated with political groups. Indeed, the press had become so independent that it evolved into an autonomous institution, a "Fourth Estate," along with the executive, legislative and judicial authorities. Rare among the Arab press, Lebanese newspapers and periodicals extended their devoted readership outside its national boundaries. Indeed, the circulation of a handful of its leading newspapers was larger outside than inside the country. Much of its appeal and success derived no doubt from its credibility for trustworthy, enlightened, and critical journalism. More important was the genuine diversity and almost unfettered freedom it enjoyed. All significant currents of Arab thought and ideological leanings had a voice or corner in the press. Even when censorship was imposed, particularly in times of acute political crises, papers demonstrated their autonomy by printing blank spaces; a signal to readers that they were censored. Incidentally, this recalcitrant but benign gesture was not permitted elsewhere in the Arab world.

The pluralism and relative freedom of the media, in themselves manifestations of a broader laissez faire political culture, had been at times readily abused. The more the press acted as a spirited gadfly in arousing public discontent and mobilizing collective grievances, the more it became a target of manipulation, often through outright sponsorship and patronage of dissident groups and regimes outside Lebanon.

Altogether the "Fourth Estate," particularly in times of political succession and electoral contests, wielded immense powers. A few of the prominent papers, particularly *An-Nahar*, have often been sought directly by leading candidates or vociferous members of the opposition to launch campaigns or articulate platforms on their behalf. On more than one occasion such efforts were instrumental in tilting the results of tightly contested campaigns (see Tueni 1995 for further documentation).

Intellectual and Cultural Awakening

Concomitant with the sweeping socioeconomic transformations, or perhaps because of them, Lebanon was also undergoing a cultural and intellectual awakening of far-reaching proportions. In fact, something akin to a "silent Revolution" was slowly taking place. This was apparent on at least three broad cultural dimensions. First, and perhaps most explicit, it was manifest in the type of questions and issues, ideological and otherwise, the burgeoning intelligentsia was beginning to probe and address publicly at the time. Second, it was visible in cultural intellectual products — both high and lowbrow — particularly those which displayed symptoms of daring and experimentation in painting, sculpture, photography, performing arts, and other popular cultural expressions. Finally, it was also visible in some of the unobtrusive but fundamental changes in everyday life. A word about each, by way of elaboration, is in order.

At the ideological level, this cultural awakening was heightened, as suggested earlier, by the critical political transformations overwhelming the region at the time. This was, after all, the period of national struggle marked by growing hostility toward Ottoman, French, British, Zionist, and other colonial and occupying forces. It was a time of upheaval and bafflement, fraught with the fearsome specters of Ottoman oppression, ravages of famine, the cruelties of two world wars, and the hopes and frustrations of the struggle for independence and self-determination. It was during this period that Arab thinkers were grappling with the nagging question regarding the nature of nationalist sentiments, political identity, and cultural heritage and how to forge autonomous political states without alienating themselves for Pan-Arabist sentiments.

The traffic in ideas and personages Beirut witnessed during the interwar period was prodigious, both in number and diversity. Autobiographical accounts recall nostalgically the incessant stream of Arab and other dignitaries who visited Beirut at that time. (See, e.g., Al Khalidi 1978; Qurtas 1983, and Al Solh 1984). The diversity of books, periodicals, daily newspapers, opinions, and world views they were exposed to was as dazzling in its variety as it was far-reaching in its impact. They were equally impressed by the new cultural activities (e.g., public lectures and debates, organized sports, concerts, youth clubs), awakened national sentiments (participation in political parties, protest movements and street demonstrations, and mass rallies), and subtle changes in mannerisms and social behavior (opportunities for the sexes to mix freely, and the appearance of new styles of conduct,

etiquette, and social conventions). Ras-Beirut, in particular, because it was able to accommodate waves of itinerant groups and immigrants, was comparatively more receptive to such diversity than other communities. To a large extent, all the intelligentsia at the time were asking essentially the same questions: Who are we? Who is to blame for our fragmentation? Who are our friends and enemies? Where do we go from here? The answers they gave, however, depending on their own particular sociopolitical milieu, were strikingly different.

At the risk of some oversimplification, one can discern three broad groups or responses. The first consisted of "isolationists," mostly romanticized zealots and chauvinists, who were eager to preserve what they regarded as Lebanon's privileged and unique cultural and historic attributes. Other than sustaining friendly contacts with France, they were opposed to any policies or involvements that would draw Lebanon into the quagmires of its neighbors or undermine their country's sovereignty and independence. Emile Edde's Nationalist Bloc is largely an outgrowth or expression of such sentiments. Second, were the "Arabists," who saw Lebanon's political destiny and well-being in a closer alignment with its Arab heritage and the nascent nationalist and ideological platforms and emancipatory movements. Finally, and between the two rather polemical extremes, once can place the Chiha-Khoury coalition and the "constitutionalists" who were advocating a reconciliatory perspective one that recognizes Lebanon's distinct plural character but is open to both its Mediterranean and Arab heritage.

For example, members of the French-educated Maronite intelligentsia living mostly in the Eastern suburbs of Beirut, who were frequent contributors to *La Revue Phénicienne*, had different perceptions of Lebanon's identity and its future than had the Sunni Muslim intelligentsia. The latter were more inclined to espouse Islamic, Pro-Ottomanl, and ultimately Pan-Arab and Arab Nationalist causes consistent with their political constituency and readership. Furthermore, what readers in the Christian suburbs found appealing in *Al-Bashir*, their counterparts in the Muslim quarters sought in *Thamarat al-Funum*, *al-Mufid*, *al-Nida'*, *al-Haqiqa*. The journals and periodicals around Ras-Beirut — earlier ones such as *Kawkab al-Subh al-Munir*, *al-Nashra al-Usbuiyya*, *al-Junayna* and eventually *al-Abhath* and *Al-Kulliyah* — were considerably more open to a diversity of viewpoints and world views, more moderate in their opinions and more receptive to secular and liberal ideas.

It was also in this period that the first generation of Western-trained local scholars started to return to Lebanon. For example, in virtually every disci-

pline or program within AUB — initially in Arabic, History, Education, and then gradually in the Social, Physical and Medical Sciences — a critical mass of resourceful and spirited scholars was emerging to assume a more prominent role in the intellectual life of the community (see Khalaf 1994). The small nucleus of local scholars (Yaqub Sarruf, Faris Nimr, Jabr Dumit, and Bulus Khawli) who had accompanied the University since its inception, was joined by another handful (Mansur Jurdak, Jurjus and Anis Maqdisi, and Philip Hitti) at the turn of the century. It was not, however, until the 1920s and 30s that the first sizeable group of local scholars returned to AUB after receiving their advanced training in the U.S. The intellectual and cultural life of the community, as well as the enhanced stature of the University, has not been the same since. Any methodical intellectual history will doubtlessly reveal the seminal and vital character of their contributions and how deeply they have influenced the subsequent course of teaching and research in the region.[8]

Much like their American mentors they too devoted the most productive years of their career to the University, and immersed themselves in the life of the community, many of them not leaving AUB until their retirement. Their presence served as a source of inspiration to successive generations of younger scholars. More distinctive perhaps, they had a broad and public conception of their role, a feature that served to deepen the sphere of their influence and enhance their public image. Partly because of their exceptional gifts and the unusual circumstances of the time, they did not confine their intellectual concerns within the narrow walls of the campus. They were sparked by a spirit of public service and a longing to participate in debating and resolving the critical problems and public issues the Arab world was then facing.

This is quite apparent in both the nature of their scholarly output and the extent of their public involvement. While the earlier generations excelled in establishing local periodicals and popularizing issues (e.g., *Al-Kulliyah*, *Al-Muqtataf*), addressing themselves primarily to Arab audiences, this "middle generation" extended and internationalized the scope of their intellectual and professional interests without ignoring the cultural needs of their local and regional constituency. They launched scientific research projects, published in professional foreign journals and produced what were to become standard reference works for years to come. A cursory review of their bibliography reveals the impressive range and diversity of their intellectual concerns.[9]

What was particularly rewarding, and surviving members of this generation continue to reflect on those years with considerable nostalgia, was the spirit

of open dialogue that pervaded and animated their lives. Intellectuals rarely remained in solitude. There were intimate circles and personal networks to provide a sense of fellowship, camaraderie, and solidarity. These circles brought together individuals with diverse backgrounds, ideological leanings, and religious denominations. The search for knowledge and devotion to free inquiry helped them to transcend their parochial differences. So did the opportunities to participate in several of the publications, cultural and scientific organizations, and voluntary associations which they helped establish. Some of these communal and parochial voluntary associations broadened and diversified the scope of their activities to incorporate more civic and national attributes. Hence, they became more effective in meeting the welfare and benevolent needs of disenfranchised groups and in alleviating the void left by an inefficient and often mistrusted government bureaucracy.

Incidentally, it was out of such small cliques that some of the most resourceful endeavors, distinguished scholars, and public figures emerged. One such striking instance is the handful of scholars drawn from a variety of disciplines — Said Hamadeh, Charles Malik, Constantine Zurayk, George Hakim, Charles Issawi, Husni Sawwaf, Halim Najjar, Anis Frayha, and Zeine Zeine — who collaborated together in editing volumes and publishing *Silsilat Al -Abhath Al-Ijtima'iyya* (Series of Social Studies) in the early 1940s. Similar such collaborative efforts, often sparked by little more than the enthusiasm of like-minded colleagues, produced other impressive landmarks in the form of journals (*Al Abhath*, *Middle East Forum*, *Middle East Economic Papers*, *Berytus*), research centers (Economic Research Institute, Middle East Area Program, Arab Chronology and Documents), international conventions (The Middle East Medical Assembly) and associations (The Alumni Association, Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa, Civic Welfare League).

It was during the interwar period that participation in such activities, along with the burgeoning facilities for competitive sports, public performances, music, art, and theatre, began to attract wider appeal. As in other more serious endeavors of research, seemingly more frivolous and playful pursuits which often underlie competitive athletics and expressive artistic events also allowed individuals and groups to transcend their parochial identities and melt into a common cosmopolitan subculture.

It was precisely this open and cosmopolitan milieu that enhanced the appeal and stature of communities like Ras-Beirut. Liberals from other communities in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world converged on it in successive waves and in increasingly large numbers. Munah al-Sulh, a prominent Sunni Muslim liberal and political analyst, singles out this same

feature in accounting for his own political socialization. He pays tribute to his teachers at the Islamic Maqasid of Beirut (e.g., Zaki Naqqash, Umar Farrukh, Ibrahim Abd al-'Al) for sharpening his awareness of Arab heritage. He also notes with pride the influence of popular journalists and political activists (e.g., Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani, Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi, Ahmad Tabbara, Ahmad Abbas) in intensifying his nationalist sentiments. But then he goes on to admit it was at AUB, at Faysal's restaurant, at the Arab Cultural Club, and in the private homes of his Protestant friends that he became cognizant of other "voices" and novel modes of conduct (al Solh 1984).

Though visibly more vibrant, Ras-Beirut did not have a monopoly over the cultural life of the city. Around the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), an equally spirited and productive circle of scholars was also asserting and consolidating its intellectual and scholastic influence. Initially, a handful of mostly Jesuit scholars (Most noted among them are fathers Louise Cheikho, Boulus Masa'ad, Istphan al-Bashaalani, Yusef al Jumayyel), the circle grew in number and stature and started to attract a secular but predominantly Francophone group of scholars and public intellectuals. Father Louise Cheikho, as founder and editor of *Al-Mashriq*, served as mentor and gadfly to successive generations of productive colleagues. The early volumes of *Al-Mashriq*, which was first a virtual monopoly of this group, attest to its prolific output and overriding interests in the socioeconomic and political history of Lebanon, manners and customs, law and jurisprudence, church and Maronite history, and related topics.

Because of the critical mass of productive scholars drawn into USJ's faculty of Law, Political, and Economic Sciences (founded in 1913), the output and research interests during its formative years were inevitably skewed in the direction of law and jurisprudence. The ground breaking research of distinguished scholars like Emile Tayan and Jean Baz on Muslim law stands out. So did the work of Bechara Tabbah on political and civil law, Choucri Cardahi on law, ethics and morality, Antoine Fattal on international law and diplomacy, Pierre Gannage, Jawad Osseyran, Negib Aboussouan, and Pierre Safa on comparative law.

Like AUB, the USJ also felt the need, early in its academic development, to establish its own professional journals. Soon after *Al-Mashriq* was published in 1898, the *Mélanges* followed suit in 1906. *Travaux et Jours*, which also enjoyed fairly wide circulation, came into being in 1961. Each of the independent faculties produced their own annual or bi-annual volumes or special series. Of note are the *Anuales* (1945), the *Proche Orient* (1967)—both juristic and economic—*Etudes de Droit Libanais* (1964).

Scanning through the USJ's *Livre D'or* (1995), commemorating the eightieth anniversary of the faculty of law is almost akin to consulting a "Whose Who" in Lebanon. Clearly, a disproportionate number of the country's political and public elite had received their tutelage under this select group of mentors. No less than 30 percent, by the way, of all parliamentarians were USJ graduates. Receiving a law degree, and until the early 1960s of the USJ was the sole institution offering such education, was almost a prerequisite for launching one's political career. Hence it is no surprise that 40 percent of all parliamentarians since independence were graduates of law schools and a significantly larger proportion, if one were to consider those who received their education in Europe at French-Oriented secondary schools, were French-educated (Khalaf 1980: 249).

The rivalry between the two sister institutions, a relic of the bitter hostility between French Jesuits and New England Protestants, had given this competition a rather creative and vibrant edge. If AUB took the initiative to establish a journal, host a conference, or sponsor a series of events, the USJ reciprocated by doing likewise. The converse was also true. The beneficiary, of course, was the effervescence of culture and other intellectual and artistic byproducts. This was most visible in the effusive mood of cosmopolitanism and savoir-faire in the burgeoning metropolitan life in Beirut and beyond. When the USJ launched, in 1940, their annual conference (convened during the last week of April) as "Les Seminaires Semaines Sociales de Beyrouth," their counterparts in AUB responded by establishing their interdisciplinary "Series of Social Studies." Of the two, the former was much more of a public and coveted event; clearly a precursor of other such ventures which became more fashionable in subsequent decades. Each year the conference addressed a particular issue such as public morality, schooling and national education, agriculture and national resources, the Lebanese family, the Lebanese economy, or social progress. These annual events always managed to engage some of the country's most notable scholars and gifted public speakers: Michel Chiha, Fouad Boustany, Bichara Tabbah, Fouad Ammoun, Hector Klat, Edmond Rabbath, Charles Ammoun, Joseph Donato, Antoine Khalifé, Albert Badre, Fouad Saade, Soubhi Mahmassani, René Habachi, Jean and Francois Bebbané, George Asmar, Jawad Boulos, George Hakim, Paul Klat, Elie and Pierre Gannagé.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, and much like AUB, the ranks of the faculty at USJ began to be infused with fresh blood. It was also then that the various divisions and faculties of the Lebanese National University were being established. The marked upsurge in research output and publications

during the sixties is a reflection of such swelling numbers. It is also a testimony to the resourcefulness and elevated scholarly standards this new generation of scholars had set for itself.[10]

Another equally radiant landmark in the intellectual life of Lebanon during its vibrant post-independence epoch was the founding of the Lebanese Cenacle in 1946. It was a critical threshold that signaled the emergence of indigenous initiative for self-determination and national discourse. The times were auspicious. With the evacuation of all foreign troops, Lebanon's independence became a reality. The specters of World War II had disappeared. In quick succession, the country won international and regional recognition by being ushered into the Arab League and the United Nations.

The founders of the Cenacle intended it as an open forum for the articulation of the various ideological views and visions underlying Lebanon's national character as a pluralistic society. It was hoped that the open discourse would invite concerted efforts to forge the outlines of a coherent national identity with a modicum of consensus on its political, sociocultural, and aesthetic philosophy. As alluded to earlier, three different viewpoints were contesting for dominance. The first affirmed that the country was much too small to form a viable independent state. Hence it should be absorbed in the larger Arab World. The second, even more negative, asserted that in its present composite form the country was too fragmented and cumbersome to manage politically. Hence the most viable prospect was to reduce its size still further by ridding itself of some of its unwanted elements. Only by so doing could its survival be assured, albeit as a diminished and isolationist entity. The Cenacle opted for a third and more realistic perspective, one more consistent with Lebanon's pluralistic structure and prospects for harmonious coexistence among its differentiated parts. Cofounders of the Cenacle shared the optimistic view that through open dialogue it is possible to approach consensus on the common constituent elements defining Lebanon.

Those defining elements they held converge on the following set of beliefs: Lebanon, as a Mediterranean country, is heir to a long succession of Mediterranean cultures — Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Hittite, Ancient Egyptian, and Arab. In addition to language, it shares with its neighboring Arab states a common culture and common political destiny. Lebanon's Arabness is more than just an accident of history. Eminent Lebanese scholars literary figures of the caliber of Faris Shidyaq, Nassif and Ibrahim Yazigi, Butrus and Salim Bustani, and Adib Ishaq have contributed significantly to its nationalist ethos and Arab cultural and literary revival. But Leb-

anon has also an international character. By virtue of its strategic position and multiculturalism, it has been, since the 22nd century B.C. open and receptive to world cultures. It is both Arab and international, a gateway between East and West but, above all, it has its own personality and unique national identity.

The articulated credo of the Cenacle was not, naturally, uncritically endorsed. All its underlying premises and visions invited heated public debate. The periodic lectures of the Cenacle became eagerly awaited public events. They attracted some of the country's most eminent intellectuals and polemical figures. More telling, at a time when political discourse in adjacent Arab regimes had already degenerated into the belligerent and militant rhetoric of radical change and bloody confrontations, Lebanon opted for the pacifist give and take of open dialogue.

The Cenacle lectures always drew some of the eminent persons of the day. There were no holds barred on the topics to be discussed. Discretion of speakers was the only form of censorship. Politicians like Kamal Jumblat, Habib Abi Shahla, Saeb Salam, Hamid Franjieh, Micheal Khoury, Ghassan Tueni — representing a wide spectrum of views — spoke freely and critically. Likewise historians such as Fuad Bustani, Charles Corm, Jawad Boulos; even Arnold Toynbee aired their distinctive visions of Lebanon. The same was true of ideologists like Pierre Jumayyel, Alfred Naccash, Takieddine Solh, Edmond Naim, and Jamil Jabre.

Coming in the wake of a recently won independence, the concerns of the Cenacle converged understandably on three vital issues: Lebanon's foreign relations, its philosophical groundings, and some of the unsettling socioeconomic problems the country was grappling with at the time. Philip Taqla, Emile Bustani, Muhieddin Nsouli, Fuad Ammoun, Ibrahim Ahdab, and Manuel Yunis addressed foreign relations and diplomatic issues. Lebanon's philosophic and metaphysical perspectives were left to Charles Malik, Michel Chiha, René Habachi, Kamal Hajj, and Jean-Marie Domenach. Finally, specialists and policymakers in the fields of education, administrative reform, and economic and fiscal problems were invited to address their issues. So were problems of youth, women, the Lebanese family, and the creative and performing arts. The Cenacle was also venturesome enough to launch its own series of publications to stimulate the circulation of prominent Lebanese writers like Khalil Sarkis, Al-Akhtal as-Saghir, Said Takieddine, and Amin Rihani.

What the Cenacle had inaugurated in the mid 1940s was enhanced and enriched by other, often overwhelming, intellectual and cultural transfor-

mations Beirut was beginning to display at the time. These, inevitably, were associated with the intensive urbanization and commercialization the city was also undergoing. It must be recalled that the first evidence of an increasing scale of urbanization as measured by the intensity of construction activity did not really begin in Beirut until the early1950s. Until then, the city continued to assume its horizontal, even skyline with the traditional suburban villas overwhelming the urban scene. The intensity and pace of urbanization was not evenly spread throughout the city. Ras-Beirut, both spatially and culturally, was considerably more open than the other communities, enabling it to accommodate the growing demand for urban space. Since no confessional or ethnic group had complete dominance over the area, Ras-Beirut became particularly receptive to successive waves of marginal Anglo-Saxon groups, who could not have had an easy entry into other communities.

The sweeping sociocultural, political, and commercial transformations the area witnessed during the 1950s and 1960s reinforced and complemented, at least initially, the cosmopolitan and pluralistic character of Ras-Beirut. Beginning in 1948, waves of Palestinian migrants started taking up residence in the area. Political events in both Syria and Egypt, particularly after the Suez crisis of 1956, generated another influx. Armenian refugees, particularly professionals and semi-professional groups who had settled elsewhere in Lebanon (after the massacres of 1914), also started to converge on Ras-Beirut.

Despite their divergent backgrounds and the varying circumstances underlying their uprootedness, all these groups had much in common: they were drawn predominantly from highly literate, urban and middle-class families with Anglo-Saxon traditions and a predisposition for socioeconomic mobility. Though they were all displaced groups, they retained little of the attributes of refugee and marginal communities. They evinced, from the very beginning, a noticeable readiness to be assimilated into the nascent urban fabric of Beirut. They were also instrumental in accelerating the pace of change by adding to and enriching the cultural and economic vitality of the area. The upper- and middle-class Palestinians, many of whom managed eventually to acquire Lebanese citizenship, brought with them professional skills; a comparatively high proportion of them were professors and university graduates. A mere listing of a few of the names of those who joined the University during the 1950s indicates how vital this generation of Palestinians has been in upgrading the quality of professional and intellectual life of the area.[11]

Not only AUB, but other colleges, schools, and cultural centers were going through a period of growth and expansion. The inflow of capital from

the Gulf and the concomitant speculation in real estate provided other employment opportunities. In addition to providing a handy reservoir of professional talent, Palestinians (and this is also true of Egyptians and Syrians who left the UAR after episodes of nationalization of private enterprise) ventured into profitable and enterprising sectors of the economy. This was particularly visible in banking, insurance, business services, and retail. The Intra Bank, Arabia Insurance Co., and other consulting and contracting firms (such as Dar Al-Handasa and ACE) come to mind. Armenians were equally resourceful. They, too, contributed their own ethnic and occupational skills, particularly in professional and semi-professional vocations such as pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, photography, and electronics.

By the late 1950s areas adjoining Ras-Beirut in particular were already displaying all the characteristic features of increasing commercialization and rapid growth. Urbanization was so swift, in fact, that in less than two decades their spatial character was almost totally transformed. Mounting pressure for urban space, the invasion of commercial establishments, and the sharp rise in land values and speculation in real estate resulted in large-scale construction and corporate financing. The attractive red-tiled villas, which once graced the suburban landscape, soon gave way to a more intensive form of land utilization. Towering structures in reinforced concrete with glittering glass facades and prefabricated aluminum frames began to overwhelm the urban scene.

The sense of neighborhood and the homogeneous residential quarters which housed regular and stable families were also threatened by a more impersonal form of residence, such as single men's apartments, furnished flats, and rooming houses to accommodate a growing itinerant population. It was not uncommon, for example, to have the basement of a building utilized as a stereo-club, bar or night-club, or possibly a garage or warehouse; the ground floor as a movie house, side-walk café, restaurant, or display parlor; the first few floors as bank and financial premises, executive and administrative branch offices of foreign companies, marketing research outfits, insurance companies, transportation and airline agencies, single or collective doctor's clinics, or offices of other professionals — side by side with shops, Swedish massage institutes, haute couture, and boutiques; and the upper floor utilized for residential units, penthouse apartments, and roof gardens (Khalaf and Kongstad 1973).

Gradually, Ras-Beirut started to lose its cohesive and wholesome character as a residential neighborhood and became, instead, a tempting ground for sightseers, shoppers, tourists, and other transient groups, who sought ref-

uge in its anonymity and permissive outlets for casual and titillating forms of entertainment.

Despite these inevitable transformations, the area remained, until the early 1970s, the most dominant and arresting urban center in the Arab World. It retained its mixed composition and displayed, because of rampant consumerism, an even greater propensity to experiment with novel forms of cultural expression. The commercialization of popular culture as profitable ventures, reinforced by a permissive political climate and free and uncensored media, encouraged further eclecticism and sensationalism. The highbrow exclusive periodicals of the early 1960s (e.g. *Hiwar, Mawaqif, Sh'ir, al-Adab, al-Adib, al-Fikr*) were supplemented by a plethora of new tabloids and glossy magazines. Even daily newspapers broadened their coverage to reach the growing pseudo-intellectual interests of its readership. Many, for example, started publishing literary and cultural supplements. In ground breaking, often courageous and venturesome essays, writers were challenged to break loose of conventional and inherited modes of classical expression and to invent a new vernacular — a narrative prose better equipped to confront the broader human and universal issues.

Art, theatre, music, and dance displayed a variety of genres ranging from serious surrealistic expression to mediocre manifestations of poor taste and low aesthetic standards. Traditional folklore and arts and crafts were not spared. They too, were victimized by the ethos of cash and excessive commercialization. Publishing houses, with an eye to quick returns, were also eager to publish almost anything. Book exhibits became celebrated events and book stores continued to sell, despite the inevitable debasement of literary standards, perhaps the richest possible variety of books and periodicals found anywhere in the Arab World.

Universities like AUB and St. Joseph were no longer exclusive cultural sanctuaries. Other centers and outlets emerged to satisfy this aroused appetite for popular culture, ideas, and ideological discourse. Politically motivated cultural and information centers, sponsored by adjacent Arab regimes and ideological groups, established their own programs and publications or subsidized particular newspapers (e.g., *Dirasat 'Arabiyya, Journal of Palestine Studies, Dirasat Filastiniyya, Shu'un Filastiniyya, al-Hawadith* etc.). So did many of the foreign embassies and their affiliated cultural missions: The Kennedy Center, British council, Goethe Institute, University Christian Center, Italian, Spanish and Russian cultural centers, Arab Cultural Club, Islamic Cultural Center, The Orient-Institute, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemprain (CERMOC) etc. — all contrib-

uted to the diversity of "voices" and "scripts." More important, one was at liberty to listen and incorporate what was heard.

As scholars pursued their research and teaching in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, so did the growing ranks of freelance writers, editorialists, columnists, and opinion makers. Caustic political humor became a popular pastime. Ziyad Rahbani's gifted sketches and musical comedies, portraying the deepening pathologies of Lebanon's pluralism and the futility of sectarian violence, were reminiscent of Omar al-Zi'inni's biting poetic ditties of the 1930s and 1940s.

Such popular and other pseudo-intellectual voices became more audible and appealing. Some, in fact, were beginning to overwhelm those of the more serious and dispassionate scholars. The restless and baffled among the young read the musings of Unsi al-Hajj and Adonis with the same intensity that earlier generations had approached Constantine Zurayk's essays on Arab Nationalism or René Habachi's discourses on existential philosophy. It was intellectually fashionable to be engagé. There was an air of chic about it. The avant-garde, of all shades, flaunted their causes célèbres with considerable abandon and self-indulgence. They, too, had their own networks and social circles. Sidewalk cafés, snack bars and restaurants, much like the formal headquarters of other explicit groups, became identified with particular kinds of intellectual and ideological clients and subcultures.

The role of coffee houses and sidewalk cafés as venues for spirited public debate and lively discussions must not be overlooked or trivialized. In a culture predisposed for the jocular; for frivolous, festive, and ceremonial encounters, coffee houses in Beirut replaced or transformed such "idle" and "debased" spheres into productive and creative leisure. Traditionally, coffee houses, as elsewhere in the Arab World, were mostly sites for carefree, gregarious and light-hearted gatherings; at best they offered release from the petulant cares and drab routines of daily life. Gradually, they evolved into meeting grounds, rendezvous, and places of assignation for spirited and animated debate. Some, like "Faysal," "Diplomat," "Horseshoe," "Chez Paul," "Express," and "Ajami," became almost subterranean meeting places for left-wing and recalcitrant intellectuals and journalists. To dissidents out of favor in adjacent Arab regimes and other displaced groups, these places offered expedient outlets to mobilize their dissent. The fairly open media and permissive political culture were, naturally, very conducive in this regard.

The 1950s and 1960s also witnessed an upsurge in photography, art, music, folklore, and theatre. As in other cultural products in interludes of free-expression and excessive experimentation, there was a great deal of mindless,

often compulsive, borrowing. There was also, however, efforts to preserve and embellish local traditions and vernacular. Beirut, incidentally, was far from a wilderness or cultural tabula rasa awaiting the infusion of foreign incursions. If and when the cultural scene was ignited by foreign artists, it would be met by a pool of gifted local talent and an equally receptive audience and sponsors. The ebullience of photography and painting, much like the flowering of popular music, theatre, folklore and modern dance, owes much to such inventive symbiosis.

Clearly this cultural exuberance of the 1950s, 60s and 70s did not just suddenly mushroom out of thin air. Photography, for example, had made its appearance in Lebanon almost a century earlier. Credit is often attributed to the Bonfis family (Felix, his wife Lydie and son Adrien) who had set up their studio in the center of Beirut's business district in 1877. From then on, we are told, this gifted and indefatigable family transformed Beirut into the undisputed image-making capital of the Middle East. As John Carswell put it "there was no corner of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, no topographical, religious, ethnic, social or incidental aspect of everyday life that was not grist to the Bonfils will" (Carswell 1989: 17). It was also then that commercial photography started to gain an edge over religious painting and iconography, which for a long time had been the most venerated genre of traditional painting and artistic expression. In quick succession local artists, particularly studios like Sarrafian, Sabunji, El-Ferkh, Nowfal, Dakouni, Aoun, Ferneini, Tabet, Srour, Mourani, Rabbat, Tarazi, became very prominent. They also managed, judging by the popularity of family and personal portraits among the notable and nascent urban bourgeoisie, to establish thriving business ventures (for further details see Fani 1995).

As in journalism, family and kinship networks were judiciously exploited in harnessing vocational skills and exporting such enterprises to other parts of the Middle East. For example, there were at least five Sabunjis: the Reverend Louis and his brother George and their offspring Daoud and Philip. Mention is also made of Chibli who had accompanied Cornelius Van Dyck in 1864 on his sightseeing expeditions. They all tended their trade and jealously guarded its vocational secrets in Beirut and Jerusalem. In Jerusalem they competed with rival establishments associated with the American colony who at the time were preoccupied with their own series of photographs of the Holly Land.

Displaced Armenian refugees were crucial in enhancing the professional and artistic stature of photography. They too, as an uprooted and marginalized ethnic community, displayed all the protective attributes of family

and communal consciousness. Successive generations received their tutelage and cultivated their professional skills in close association with other more accomplished family mentors. Some, like the Sarrafians in Beirut and the Orfilians in Tripoli, had a virtual monopoly over their profession. (Carswell 1989; Yamin 1999). The Orfilians alone produced five reputable photographers in three succeeding generations: Noubar, perhaps one of the earliest emigrants to Tripoli who took residence there in 1830, and his son Baghdasar and three of his grand children (Yabrum, Lyon, and Noubar).

Like other photographers they supplemented their trade by also painting; often they retouched portraits to comply with the idiosyncratic tastes of fastidious clients. The close link between the two art forms has been recognized by art historians. The history of both has been, likewise, intimately associated in Lebanon — at least in the formative years of development. Clearly, the commercial success of photography was not oblivious to the generation of early Lebanese painters. A photographic perspective began to impinge on their art. This is clearly seen in the output of some of the founding fathers of Lebanese classical painting, particularly Daoud Corm and Khalil Saleeby.

The relatively early preponderance of painting in Lebanon and its popular appeal is doubtlessly a byproduct of the three primary prerequisites noted earlier, namely: a potential pool of talent, a receptive public, and private patronage. All three, to varying degrees, were evident in Lebanon long before formal instruction and schooling in art became available. It was after all not until 1937 that the Lebanese Académie de Beaux-Arts was established. For about two decades, this was the only venue for art instruction. Given its Francophile leanings, much of the output of the pioneering generations of local artists remained within the fold of such French cultural traditions.

The other direct impetus that spurred a public enthusiasm for art would not appear until the mid 1950s, when the American University of Beirut established its Department of Fine Arts. Two innovative and spirited young American artists — Maryette Charlton and George Buehr — were recruited to spearhead the program. Schooled at the renowned Art Institute of Chicago, they brought with them many of its pedagogical precepts, some of which were rooted in the legacy of Bauhaus. Among other things, this meant that instructors had to be active, practicing, and exhibiting artists. More important, although art-making was perceived as a pervasive mundane activity, accessible virtually to everyone, it should be taught in a formalistic and not a stylistic manner. The art seminar introduced by spirited teachers, first hesitantly received, soon caught on. Largely because of their open, dem-

ocratic character, they drew a large audience outside the university community. The public program of lectures, hands-on demonstrations and instructions engendered an enabling sentiment that almost anyone, if given an opportunity, could well discover untapped inner sources of creativity longing to be unleashed.

As in other dimensions of cultural and intellectual life, Lebanon was the beneficiary of this lively French-American rivalry to gain a measure of hegemony over the country's cosmopolitan cultural setting. As the French embassy stepped up its cultural exchange program by inviting renowned French avant-garde expressionists, the John Kennedy Center retaliated by launching a series of itinerant exhibits of high-profile American artists. One, in particular was John Ferren a leading abstract expressionist who took up residence in Beirut in 1964 and who had a captivating impact on a string of young Lebanese artists. His studio at Manara became a refuge for lively debate and free experimentation. Many trace their self-discovery and artistic sensibilities to such sessions.

This momentum for art was abetted by the establishment of art galleries and studios. During the 1950s and 60s such outlets, in fact, became successful business ventures which doubtless played a part in the commercialization of art and, hence, in debasing and bastardizing its standards. The quality of the exhibitions in the burgeoning art galleries did not always meet the desired critical standards of high art. In most, in fact, the line between decorative interior design and serious art was blurred, if not inexorably betrayed or overlooked. There were a few notable exceptions, however, which made efforts to safeguard the threatened standards of high art. *Gallery One*, founded by the poet Yusif al-Khal and his gifted Lebanese-American wife, Helen, was very influential in this regard. So was *Contact*, established by Waddah Fares, an Iraqi dissident artist who was instrumental in opening up exhibitions to artists elsewhere in the Arab World.

Another encouraging feature was the emergence of art criticism. Special literary supplements of leading newspapers started to devote portions of their weekly editions to art and art criticism. *L'Orient* itself hosted a series of avant-garde exhibitions in its premises in downtown Beirut. The annual Lebanese "Salon," most likely modeled after its European counterparts, sponsored public exhibitions. Its rather inclusive character meant, naturally, that the quality of large portions of the output was of dubious artistic credibility. The Sursock Museum, a privately endowed foundation, was more selective and discriminating in its exhibitions. In the late 60s and early 70s it hosted a series of thematic exhibitions (e.g. on iconography and Islamic art) accom-

panied by scholarly essays by reputable art historians of the caliber of Endré Grabar, Basil Grey, and Jules Leroy (Carswell 1989: 19).

Another compelling indigenous initiative was the founding of Dar Al Fan by a group of largely decentered public intellectuals under the leadership of Janine Rubeiz. Judiciously run by Rubeiz, it evolved as a vibrant site for intellectual camaraderie and free-spirited discussion. It drew together intellectuals, artists eager to reinvent the liberalizing encounters some of them enjoyed in comparable settings in Europe and the U.S.

One serendipitous but auspicious byproduct of this upsurge in art was the unprecedented participation of women, both as artists and enterprising patrons. They did so, judging by empirical evidence, in comparatively large numbers. Until the mid 70s Lebanon had the largest number of women artists in the Arab world (around 40 compared to 10 or less in each of the adjacent countries). More significant, the proportion of professionally active women (1/4) and those accorded a prominent status (1/3) among the leading artists of the country is perhaps unmatched elsewhere in the world (see Khal 1989: 15 for these and other features).

It is not too difficult to trace answers to such striking realities in both the sociocultural milieu of Lebanon at the time and the biographies of the artists themselves coming into their own during that spirited period. If Lebanon ever enjoyed a "Belle Epoque" it was then. These, as we have seen, were times of opportunity, exuberance, experimentation in life styles, and exposure to the novelties of art galleries, exhibits, and the commercialization of cultural products. But these were also times of conflict and uncertainty, marked by discordant societal transformations and asymmetry in gender expectations and, hence, ambivalence and tensions in personal options.

The vivid profiles of prominent resident artists — their background, the circumstances associated with their careers, the role that art came to play in their lives, and their perception of its impact on their status as women — attest to the underlying tensions engendered by the "polarized forces of freedom and restriction" they experienced (Khal 1987: 21). This poignant interplay between their biographies and the repressive sociocultural realities they were entrapped in should be instructive to researchers interested in documenting the marginalization and empowerment of women in the Arab World. In short, how do "excluded" or "secluded" groups seek strategies for enhancing their individuality, self-esteem and zones of autonomy without threatening their protected status in society?

Willfully, or otherwise, art came to play this enabling role in their lives. Some had no illusions about it. While it offered an effective medium for

self-expression, it did little by way of transforming the lives of other women. One can easily extract common threads and themes — both manifest and latent — which inform this process. The following stand out: First, they were all drawn from a diverse background of ethnic, national, religious, or cultural pluralism. They also experienced and sustained such diversity through their own education, marriage, and other cross-cultural contacts. None of them, in fact, grew up or remained as "pure" or indigenous Lebanese. Second, their initiation into the arts was largely a byproduct of their adolescent socialization as a "safe" and decorative pastime. Much like music, dancing, drawing, or embroidery, it was an acceptable outlet at the time for girls of privileged and Francophile families. Either abroad or in the burgeoning art academies in Lebanon, they were exposed to the stimulation of an inspiring tutor or milieu that encouraged and channeled their creative energies. Third, and with rare exceptions, they all experienced successive emotionally unsettling encounters — diaspora, exile, divorce and tensions endemic to their gender roles — which transformed their dabbling with the arts into a consummate form of self-expression. To many (e.g. Caland, Saikali, Khal, Kazemi, Seraphim) their art acquired an explicit sensual quality, and they spoke about it, often unabashedly, as a means to "explore the sensual possibilities of the human body," "erotic and feminine sexuality" or color as a form of "quiet seduction" (Khal 1989: 30–31). Finally, it is at that point that their art became an enabling force in their life; a source of potency, identity, self-worth and inner strength to cope with the vicissitudes of public life and a palliative, fickle as it is, for the emotional void and existential angst they were beset with. "It is one of the new permissible windows in her '*herem*'. Through it, she can discreetly express all that she feels and thinks. She paints now as in the past she embroidered poems to her beloved on a soft, silk handkerchief, with care and fine taste for "*Zakhrafah*" (decoration) as well as for depth of emotion. Most of them now still paint poems, but for a few it is their path for liberation" (Khal 1989: 31).

The music scene was also becoming more vibrant. If measured by the professional quality of local performers or the presence of autonomous and endowed national orchestras, Lebanon was clearly below par early in the 1960s. On other less visible indicators, however, public awareness, interest in music instruction, and public performance were growing perceptibly. Here again, as in other cultural and artistic expressions, conventional forms of music appreciation were being supplemented by more professional and discriminating opportunities. Traditional coffee houses, once sites for idle, gregarious, and convivial leisure were, as we have seen, transformed into

places for spirited public debate. Likewise, art seminars converted and enriched the folk art of *Zakhrafah*, decorative design and embroidery, into a professional outlet and creative venue for self-validation, autonomy and personal worth.

The upsurge in music was also undergoing this enabling dialectical change. Writing in the mid 1960s Diana Taky Deen (1969: 217), an accomplished concert pianist herself, noted:

> The Lebanese music-lover has once and for all adopted the concert hall as both replacement of and a complement to his gramophone. Fifteen years ago, a musical connoisseur was considered as well-informed as his pile of records at home was high and heavy. Today a season ticket is his pride. The music-lover had become more active, recognizing the irreplaceable authentic value of a live performance.

In no time this hidden surge for musical performances found expression in the formation of semi-professional chamber groups who would most often perform for themselves or for a limited circle of personal admirers and devotees. Concert halls and auditoriums at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut College for Women (BCW), and L'Ecole Superieure des Lettres stepped up their public performances. AUB, incidentally, had a head start in this regard since piano recitals and musical performances were introduced to the public early in the 1920s. In fact, the introduction of formal instruction in music at AUB predated art instruction by over three decades. Taking advantage of the large number of gifted Russian refugees who had found their way to Beirut after World War I, AUB recruited Professor Arkadie Kouguell, at one time director of a conservatory in the Crimea, to establish the Institute of Music in 1929. Since his arrival in the early 1920s, Kouguell had been giving private lessons and organizing concerts at the University.

Music at the time, as elsewhere in the Arab world, was not as yet a scientifically or professionally cultivated art. Musical performers and those associated with the performing arts and other traditional elements of popular culture, were not highly regarded and did not rank high in social status. Exposure to European classical music was also minimal. Hence, the establishment of an institute for formal instruction in music was bound to be met with some reservation. Concerts and recitals were first subsidized. Otherwise, the public would have had no inducement to attend (Penrose 1941: 255). Gradually, however, the concerts began to draw an enthusiastic audience beyond the confines of Ras-Beirut. President Bayard Dodge noted the following in his annual report of 1928–29:

> Gradually the music became so popular that Professor Kouguell was able to arrange for fortnightly concerts given by a symphony orchestra of thirty-five pieces, to audiences of five or six hundred people. Many high French officials and their wives encouraged the music and the students became enthusiastic. . . . In the symphony orchestra there are Russians, Armenians, French, Americans and members of other nationalities. Professor Kouguell has also organized a student orchestra (AUB Annual Report 1928–9: 21).

By 1928, the University was so encouraged by the public response that it sought government permission to launch a private conservatory of music under the leadership of Kouguell. The institute was a radical departure in more than one sense. What made it so remarkable was that it was the unlikely outcome of collaboration with the French. The diplomas were recognized by L'Ecole Normale des Music of Paris and, more surprising, the language of instruction was in French. At the turn of the twentieth century, it must be recalled, the scions of the founding fathers of Presbyterian missionaries were still harboring disparaging views about Jesuit cultural incursions into the Levant and propagating strategies for shielding native groups from such benighted manifestations of the so-called forces of "anti-Christ." The collaboration with the French, though short-lived, was very beneficent. By 1940, there were eighty-three registered students in the Institute, exclusive of large numbers taking courses as electives. Typically, students were drawn from the culturally mixed student body AUB enjoyed at the time who must have played a part in imparting this music appreciation to other parts of the Arab World.

Unfortunately, the Institute was suspended in 1947 when Kouguell chose to emigrate to America. By then, however, the Lebanese Conservatory of Music, established in 1924 as an autonomous body financed by the Ministry of Education, started to expand its resources to accommodate this growing demand for formal instruction in music. By the mid 1960s it had 500 students and 70 instructors and offered a curriculum of about 25 subjects (Taky Deen 1969: 218). The "Occidental" and "Oriental" conventional clusters gave way to a more integrated program. As in other dimensions of cultural life, the renaissance of music in the 1960s was reinforced largely through private initiative and the patronage of voluntary associations. *Les Jeunesse Musicales du Liban*, established in 1954, was one such organization that enjoyed the support of several foreign cultural missions in the country. The first generation of accomplished Lebanese concert pianists, vocalists, and other instrumentalists was largely an outcome of such ventures.

More perhaps than other modes of cultural expression, it was during the 1960s that theatre may be considered to have truly come of age. Of course theatrical performances appeared much earlier. In fact the first stage production, a play by Maroun Naccache, was performed in public in 1846. In subsequent decades works of noted literary figures like Nassif Yaziji, Farah Antoun, George Abyad, Najib Rihani, along with those of Egyptian playwrites (especially Yusuf Wahbé and Ahmad Shawki) were also staged. Translations or adaptations of foreign plays were also in vogue. It was not, however, until 1960 that theatre, as a movement and an art formcame into its own. All earlier productions were mostly adaptations of prominent authors like Mikhail Naimeh, Said Akl, Said Takkiyddine, Yusef Ghassoub and Toufiq Awwad which did not lend themselves easily to staging or acting.

According to Paul Shawool (1989), the turning point was Issam Mahfouz's *Zinzalakht* (The Neem Tree) in 1968. It marks the first attempt to create a theatrical language and a script receptive to the needs of stage and actors. What facilitated this transformation was that the text was in colloquial language and, hence, served as an inducement for popular actors to create portrayals that were close to the realities of everyday life. This innovative element in Issam Mahfouz's work, sparked off the creative and artistic talents of a growing circle of playwrights, poets, actors and producers like Onsi al Hajj, Raymond Jbara, Jalal Khoury, Shakib Khoury, Munir Abu Dibs, Nidal Ashqar, Antoine Courbage, and Antoine Multaqa. Individually and collectively this spirited group managed to produce a succession of plays, often polemical and controversial but always experimental and avant garde in form and substance. They also made recognizable efforts to organize workshops, study groups, institutes, and centers for instruction and founded associations to promote their careers and professional interests as performing artists (For further details see Said 1998: 21–47). When they were not putting on their own plays, they staged translations or adaptations of well-known plays and playwrights. They made deliberate efforts to break away from the stylistic syntax of classical prose and traditional theatre. By doing so they also gave vent to a new genre of satirical plays, particularly political humor, drawing-room and stand up comedy.

The entertaining sketches and performances of comedians like Nabih Aboul-Husen, Hasan Ala'Iddine "Shou-Shou" and Ziad al-Rahbani found particular appeal among an enthusiastic audience cutting across communal and class boundaries. So were the vaudevillian skits of "Abou Melhem" and "Abou Salim" aired nightly on national radio and television. They became almost unrivalled in their popularity and mass appeal. Albeit more lowbrow,

the comic characterization of folkloric episodes in village and urban settings had an evocative and transcending impact. It also elevated this provincial art form into a noteworthy cultural export to neighboring states.

Much like the impetus resident foreign artists had in stimulating creative interest in music, photography, painting, and sculpture, here as well many of the budding generation of local playwrights and actors attribute their enthusiasm for the theatre to their encounters with foreign mentors. At the American University of Beirut, Professor Christopher Scaife a gifted actor and director, was a source of inspiration to a succession of theatre enthusiasts around the university community. Likewise, at the Centre Université d'Etudes Dramatique, George Shehadi, Jaques Metra and Anne-Marie Deshayes were instrumental in launching the careers of a sizeable number of actors. Alphonse Philipe as a stage-set designer was invaluable for the studios involved in experimental theatre.

The cultural rivalry between the Francophone and Anglo-Saxons was also intense here and did much to enrich the volume and diversity of performances. Around AUB alone more than a handful of organized group — Berytus Theatre Ensemble, British Council, New Theatre Group, the Phoenix Players, American Repertory Theatre (ART)- were active in staging play readings, classical and contemporary plays, musicals, operettas, variety shows to packed audiences in West Hall, Irwin Hall, Gulbenkian, Alumni Club or Beirut Theatre. Around USJ and L'Ecole Superieure Des Lettres an equal number of studios and workshops were also active. Most prominent were the Forums of Contemporary and Experimental Theatre organized by Antoine Multaqa, Munir Abu Dibs, Antoine Courbage, and Raymond Jbara. Armenians had also enough talent to organize their own ethnocentered theatre. The circle of Armenian Intellectuals, under the resourceful leadership of Wahran Papazian and Berge Vazalian staged some memorable productions.

The outcome of all this flurry of activities was a very vibrant theatre program; both high in quality and rich in diversity. Between 1964–75 Khalida Said (1998) lists an inventory of more than 100 commercial productions (nearly a dozen performances every season) in four languages and, hence, accessible to a wide range of theatergoers in various quarters of Beirut. The Baalback National Festival was also at its pinnacle at the time and thus offered local and foreign audiences another rich array of world-class performances.

An exposition of the performing arts in Lebanon is incomplete unless one recognizes the role of folkdance during the 1960s and how it became

embedded into the national ethos and collective memory of society. The emergence and growth of folkdance as a popular art form was in part the enigmatic byproduct of the incursion of Russian artistic elements into this traditional Lebanese folk art. This fortuitous encounter dates back to 1956 when Igor Moisseev visited Lebanon with his popular Bolshoi Dance Company.

The two countries have, through the centuries, sustained distinct and separate cultural identities. Yet one can discern a common feature rooted in the symbiotic interplay between their traditional manifestations of country life and the popular arts, particularly folkdance. In both countries, this edifying interplay transcends the prosaic character of dance routines compelling as they may be. They are also emblematic of deeper and more complex sociocultural realities. The vibrant expressions of voices and melodies; the rhythmic cadence of syncopated movements, in which every muscle of their bodies bespoke of the dramas of everyday life and sacred rituals embedded in their collective memory. In Lebanon, as in Russia, folkdance, perhaps more than other collective artistic expressions, evokes and memorializes, indeed it celebrates, the wide gamut of human emotion — the bitter and the sweet, the joyful and the sorrowful; the lighthearted, festive dances for courtships and weddings, along with the more somber and cheerless chants, often posturing as dance, for burials, wakes, rituals of revenge and the calls to war. In a word, the joys of victory and the anguish of defeat.

At the time Moisseev visited Lebanon, Lebanese folklore was barely coming of age. Pioneering groups and dedicated artists, largely self-taught but inspired by the wealth and diversity of village life, were trying to forge a new vision of Lebanese folklore. Efforts were made to retain the authenticity of its folk heritage while grafting it to the imperatives of modernity. Foremost among the pioneers were the talented duo — Marwan and Wadia Jarrar — who founded a dance company for tutoring gifted young students. Their efforts were hailed at the time as a revivalist movement. In retrospect, they must also be credited for transforming folkdance into an edifying and enabling national pastime.

Lebanese audiences, from all walks of life, were enthralled, often spellbound, by the exuberant success of Moisseev's performances. They left an indelible and vibrant impression. It was, however, the timely patronage Mrs. Zalfa Chamoun bestowed on the burgeoning arts, the Baalbeck Festival in particular, which reinforced this enriching encounter with the Russian master and his renowned troupe. Her moral authority, as wife of the President of the Republic, lent her efforts added impetus and credibility.

The National Committee of UNESCO, at whose invitation Moisseev was in Lebanon, were soon exploring with their guests, and with the Soviet Cultural Mission, means by which Moisseev could assist in the development of Lebanese popular dance into a full-fledged art. The intention, of course, was to move the folklore, as was the case in Russia, from the village square to the limelights of national theatres.

Igor Moisseev agreed to engage in an exploratory tour of Lebanon (accompanied by the Jarrars) to study and observe the various *dabkeh* performances in their diverse natural settings: in the Beqa', North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon and the South. By the end of his study tour, the Russian master presented a comprehensive and probing report going beyond the description and analysis of salient dance techniques. He also explored some of the sociohistorical dimensions of folklore, the rigorous training and methodical discipline it necessitates, its cultural messages, and the national role it could serve as an expressive, cathartic, and healing art form. The report spared little: choreography, scenery, costumes, thematic inspiration and, finally, how to preserve the reawakened national spirit of folklore while striving to imbue it with universal dimensions.

In light of the Moisseev report, which was at the time subjected to careful scrutiny and debate, it was agreed, with the support of the Ministry of National Education, to send the Jarrars on an extended mission to Moscow. They were commissioned to work there and receive the necessary knowledge and training. Upon their return they were entrusted with the establishment of a much needed and desired national ballet company.

Only a year later, in the Baalbeck Festival of 1957, these cherished hopes were realized. The *Lebanese Nights* embellished its program and captivated the hearts of the throngs — both natives and foreign alike — who were privileged to watch it. From then on, the Folklore performances became the most eagerly awaited event. In a quick succession of varying styles, often venturesome and dazzling, it metamorphosed into an evolving genre of its own; a source of inspiration to multitudes in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world.

More important perhaps, the instant success of *Lebanese Nights* fired up the imagination of that talented coterie of impassioned artists and composers of the like of Rahbani brothers, Zacky Nassif, Tawfic el Bacha and gifted vocalists: Feirouz, Wadih Safi, Sabah, Romio Lahoud, Nasri Chamseddine, among others. All became national icons of sorts. Together, they helped in transforming folkdance into operettas, drama, and evocative theatrical performances of high quality.

The resurgence of folklore had a transforming impact on national culture and ordinary life, at all levels of society. Baalbeck had lost its monopoly long before the war interlude interrupted the International Festival. Even during the war, folklore traveled with the Lebanese wherever they fled or emigrated. Yet, wherever it went, it did not just nurture the longing for nostalgia but also their commitment to return to a sacred homeland, Baalbeck in particular.

Lebanon as a Playground

All metaphors, as analogies or popular figures of speech, involve some inevitable distortions of reality. They rarely tell the whole truth. Nevertheless, to label Lebanon as a "playground" is still, in my judgment, more germane and informative than some of the other hackneyed labels it has been tagged with over the years: both the redeeming ones which make it seem like a privileged and wondrous creation, a "Switzerland" or "Paris" of the Middle East, or the more pejorative, almost epitaph-like, slurs it has been maligned with lately; namely that it is no more than a congenitally flawed, artificial entity bent on putative self-destruction. A deranged oddity of this sort, the obituaries bemoan, is beyond understanding and beyond cure. Like a diseased organism, the most one can do is to "quarantine" or contain it lest it contaminate others.

As a metaphor, a "playground" conjures up images of an open, gregarious accommodating space, germane for felicitous inventiveness and experimentation but also vulnerable to all the vicissitudes of excessive passions, heedless narcissism, complacency, and indulgent egoism. In this sense it is a more neutral metaphor. It neither adulates nor abnegates. It allows us, instead, to allude to and illuminate certain inescapable realities, which cannot be wished away, whitewashed, or mystified. It is also a more inclusive metaphor, thus enabling one to incorporate its everyday discursive and reflexive manifestations, which pervade virtually all dimensions of society.

A "playground," incidentally, is more than just a heuristic and analytical tool. It also has cathartic and redemptive features. By eliciting those latent and hidden longings for play, conviviality, adventure, a "playground" may well serve as an expressive and transcending outlet. It brings out all the "Homo ludens" virtues of fair play, the exuberance of individual and competitive sports and differential rewards for harnessed and accomplished feats of excellence.[12] In this respect a "playground" becomes an ideal site for

cultivating the virtues of civility and commitment to the courtesies of the rules of the game. The very survival after all of a playground, particularly since it is associated with spaces where children can indulge in play, is predicated on the premise of monitoring and controlling the hazards of reckless and foolhardy impulse. When uncontained, a "playground" could easily slip into a free-for-all, raucous, rough and tumble public ground. It is then that lines demarcating civil and the uncivil, couth and uncouth behavior, foul and fair play are blurred. Indeed, fair becomes foul and foul fair.

The curative and healing aspects of a playground are naturally more pertinent in times of collective unrest and postwar stress and uncertainties. A boisterous political culture suffused with factional and contentious rivalries can find more than just momentary release in such outlets. Some of the enabling features of a playground — i.e., those of fair play, teamwork, equal recognition, and the sheer exuberance of doing one's thing without encroaching on the rights and spaces of "others" — can all aid in the restoration of civility. At least they need not be dismissed and trivialized. Inordinate effort and resources, as will be argued later, have been squandered on strategies of political and administrative reform and the broader issues of regional conflict and infrastructural reconstruction. Important as these are, they overlook some of the more human and sociocultural issues of coping with pervasive fear and damaged national identities. It is also these areas which are amenable to individual intervention. Ordinary, and otherwise passive and lethargic, citizens are given opportunities to participate and become actively and meaningfully engaged in processes of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Within this context, at least five features of a playground stand out, particularly those which have some bearing on Lebanon's seemingly lopsided character. Expressed differently, in all those features we find many of the enabling and disabling sources of the "playground"; i.e., those which account for Lebanon's "success story" and those which render it more vulnerable to internal and external contradictions.

1. *By virtue of its location, composition, and its historical role as a place of refuge for dissidents or a gateway for itinerant groups, Lebanon has always been a fairly open and free space*. Exit from and entry into society has been relatively easy. Indeed, some argue that Lebanon became much too open, too hospitable and, hence, too vulnerable to the vicissitudes of internal and regional disturbances. It availed itself to abuse by the very forces that sought it as a haven from repression or homelessness. A free press, uncensored media, absence of exchange controls, a "free zone" in Beirut's port, secret

bank account, liberal migration laws, receptivity to novelties and fads, progressive and permissive life styles all reinforce the discordant dualism inherent in its character as a free and open society. Hence its generative and positive attributes were often undermined by subversive elements and deplorable consequences. Lebanon became all too often no more than an expedient conduit, a transit point, for the trafficking and recycling of displaced groups, goods, capital, and ideas.

Naturally, such trafficking was not always of a desirable and lawful character. Inevitably, Lebanon became notorious for smuggling, arms-running, trading in drugs, black-marketing of illicit contraband products, and other nefarious activities. Perhaps more damaging was the abandon with which dissident groups exploited this freedom to launch vilifying press campaigns and plots against repressive regimes in the region. This only served to arouse the suspicion and retributive strategies of the targeted states or groups against Lebanon. On both counts Lebanon became unjustly victimized.

2. *As in a playground, the Lebanese displayed a proclivity for playfulness sparked by a mood of carefree and uncommitted activity*. They had a special fondness for humorous encounters. Here, as well, this pervasive playful mood was double-edged. While a source of unflagging resourcefulness, sustained by a sense of experimentation and adventure, when unrestrained it would quickly degenerate into restless expenditure of energy, mischievous activity, and anarchy. Much too often a heedless element of play and unplanned activity permeated every fabric of society. The laissez-faire ethos, in such a free-for-all milieu, was clearly a relief to an inept government and a welcome to those adept at exploiting it. Even the corrupt civil servant "became increasingly appreciated by the national and international business communities, since bribes now served to circumvent red tape and to effect short-cuts; which made conduct of business, in many ways, more 'efficient' in Lebanon than in even the most advanced countries" (Tabbarah 1977: 22).

There are other more grievous manifestations of this predisposition for unrestrained play. It is evident in the wasteful discrepancy between audacious and playful planning on the one hand and executive ineffectiveness on the other. This has plagued government bureaucracy for so long and has been a blatant source of administrative inefficiency and misuse of resources. Some of the schemes for development are often so adventurous in their visions that they remain unrealized blueprints; victims of reckless planning or short-sighted expediency. Examples of such disjunctions are legion.

The Litani River Authority of 1954, was supposed to irrigate 32,000 hec-

tares in the South-Western regions of the Biqa'a valley. By 1975, twenty years after the establishment of the project and despite hundreds of millions of pounds already expended, the coveted waters of the Litani were still draining to the Mediterranean (Nasr 1978: 8). The Green Plan of 1964, successive urban planning schemes, and comprehensive master plans, rent and zoning laws, as well as educational and civil service reforms, to mention a few, are all grievous byproducts of this dissonance between exuberant planning and flawed implementation.

This is also apparent, as we have seen, in the political process, particularly electoral campaigns and contests for public office which were suffused with playful and festive elements. The whole style of daily politics is sustained by a large residue of political maneuverings as sources of animated exchanges bordering on public entertainment. Indeed, as one of the smallest nation states in the world, Lebanon has always been ravaged by an inordinate number of people who expend their energies and derive their sense of esteem from "playing" politics. This is, in itself, another reflection of the problematic and ungovernable character of the Lebanese polity. To many of these political actors, prominent and not-so-prominent figures who meddle in the political affairs of their society, the art of politics is often reduced to a self-indulgent game, a morbid form of public amusement and exhibitionism. So alluring is the game that successive generations of politicians have found it extremely difficult to redirect their energies into less flattering but more resourceful and creative pastimes. There is something akin to a compulsive addiction to playing politics. Like any other addictive or habit-forming activity, actors, it seems, suffer all the symptoms of withdrawal once they are compelled to abstain. Witness how difficult it is for political actors in Lebanon to retire from politics.

Even the character of fighting was not entirely free from manifestations of play. Combatants, during the early stages of the 1975 war, when bearing arms and combat still assumed redemptive and purgative features, went about their militant roles with considerable aplomb and savoir-faire. Indeed, any identification with the garb, demeanor, or life styles of fighters and militia groups became almost chic — a fashionable machismo. Belligerency, in fact, became so stylized that groups literally disfigured themselves to simulate such playful and alluring identities. As fighting escalated in magnitude into massive bombardment, random shelling, car bombs, ground troop movement, and aerial attacks, it acquired all the artifacts of a colorful and dazzling spectacle, a "danse macabre," and was often viewed as such by the entrapped nonbelligerent population.[13]

3. A *playground is, above all, a place that thrives on gamesmanship*. In an open, free, and competitive milieu, one sustained by the maximization of private initiative and free enterprise, there is a correspondingly high premium placed on individual success and socioeconomic mobility. Ruthless competition may propel the Lebanese to new heights, stretch their abilities to new thresholds. Yet it also generates a form of "social Darwinism" and heedless individualism impervious to any controls or ethical restraints. Symptoms of anomie become rampant. Everything and anything becomes accessible or feasible, by fair means if possible or foul means if necessary. It is here that benign play degenerates into malevolent and foul play.

At the height of Lebanon's golden/gilded ages (the second half of the 1960s), there were already a growing chorus of dissenting voices decrying the abuses and the desecration of the country's potential. To René Habachi, there was nothing new about the crisis. There have always been two Lebanons:

> The present crisis is a quarter of a century old. It is as old as independence, that is one generation. It is a chronic, latent, disease which has suddenly burst out from under the embers of people's souls. The old style Lebanese, those who wore Ottoman boots, took over a country which had entered the modern age, but they ruled it with the mentality of the Sultan. The level of development of the country, its openness to civilization and its geographic, economic and human resources fitted it to live within the democracy of science and knowledge. Instead they ruled it like someone exploiting a farm he had inherited from his father, with the right to bequeath it in turn to his son. In Lebanon, today, there are two Lebanons. . . . (quoted by Awwad 1996:137).

Gamesmanship after all involves, literally, the internalization of the necessary social skills — those of tact, deftness, acumen, quick-wittedness — for handling and rearranging situations to one's own advantage. It conjures up images of Byzantine maneuvering, manipulation, deals and quid-pro-quos. Everything, including the most cherished values and resources, becomes negotiable. Lebanese entrepreneurship, particularly in its reckless form of speculation and risk taking, seems guided more by Adam Smith's "invisible hand" than by rational long-term planning.

These too are not unmixed blessings. While they may account for much of the resourcefulness and enterprise associated with Lebanon's "success story," they also sanction the use of ploys and other ethically and intellectually dubious means to achieve desired ends. Clientelistic politics, the sur-

vival of subversive patronage, graft, nepotism, and corruption are all byproducts of such pervasive practices. Those who stand to benefit from the spoils and excesses of this form of deranged "social Darwinism" will naturally resist any system that undermines their jealously guarded privileges. Spokesmen of the radical left, heralding revolutionary change as the one panacea to rescue society from its own inbred foibles and moral weaknesses, admitted that even an organized revolt has little hope for undoing the deep-seated structure of vested privileges. Writing again in the late 1960s Gibran Majdalani has this to say:

> The realisation of the aims of a real revolution conflicts with vested interests and with apparatuses which were set up to protect those interests. It is unreasonable to those who are profiting from the present state of affairs voluntarily to give up those things which give them their power and their material and political potentialities. Those who are 'eating the cheese' (as they say) in any system will oppose any attempt at radical change because change implies the liquidation of their privileges and positions of influence and the threatening of their interests. The form of opposition to which the leaders and protectors of any system will resort determines, in the last resort, the method of revolution (quoted by Awwad 1976: 138).

4. *The most edifying and enabling feature of a playground is, doubtlessly, its convivial and gregarious character.* In part because of the survival of a large residue of primordial and intimate social networks, the Lebanese have long displayed a proclivity for festive, light-hearted, and fun-loving encounters. If one were to single out a national pastime, the preoccupation of society with feasting, spontaneous social gatherings, and companionship is clearly the most appealing and visible. Time and budget analysis reveals that an inordinate amount of time and resources are devoted to ceremonial activities, social visitation, and frequent contacts with close circles of family and friends. Such contacts are invaluable sources of social and psychological support, particularly in times of public distress. As the public world becomes more savage, menacing, and insecure, people are more inclined to seek and find refuge and identity in the reassuring comforts of family and community. So intense and encompassing are these attachments that the average Lebanese recognizes hardly any obligations and loyalties beyond them. Here lie many of the roots of deficient civility and the erosion of the broader loyalties to public welfare and national consciousness.

Once again, what enables at one level, disables at another. At the local

and communal level conviviality is a source of group solidarity and an avenue for vital sociopsychological and economic supports. At the national and public level, however, such solidarity could easily degenerate into parochial and oppressive encounters. Compassion for and almost obsessive preoccupation with and concern for micro interests coexist with (indeed are a by-product of) uninterest in or indifference toward others. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the character and functioning of voluntary associations. The concern for public welfare continues to be inspired and mobilized on sectarian, communal, or factional grounds. Hence national and broader societal problems such as child and family welfare, mental health, orphanages, the aged, delinquency, poverty, protection of the environment and habitat, and concern for the threatened architectural, archaeological, and cultural heritage are all articulated as parochial and segmented problems. Indeed, the character of voluntary associations, their membership, financial resources, and organizational leadership continue to reflect sub-national loyalties. Even interest in competitive sports, normally the most benign and affectively neutral and transcending of human encounters, have lately become bitter and acrimonious sectarian rivalries.

5. *Finally, Lebanon is recognized and treated as a "playground" by the multitudes who perceive it and seek it as a popular resort.* The country's captivating topography, scenic beauty, temperate climate, historic sites, colorful folklore, reinforced by an aggressive infrastructure of commercial, financial, medical, and cultural facilities, have made it a year-around tourist attraction, a popular amusement center and summer resort.

As a national industry, tourism and related services have always served to invigorate the Lebanese economy. By the early 1950s tourism was already the most important invisible export; earning more than half of the value of all exported merchandise (see Gates 1998: 117–80). Revenues from tourism grew four times in the period 1968–74, to provide 10 percent of the gross domestic product (Owen 1988: 37). By the outbreak of hostilities in 1975 it was contributing significantly (at least $40 million annually) to GNP and thus offsetting the unfavorable trade balance. It opened up society further and enhanced the receptivity of isolated communities to diverse cultural contacts.

There was, however, a darker side to tourism and Lebanon's image as a resort center. It exacerbated further the lopsidedness of the Lebanese economy by rechanneling vital resources into the largely unproductive sectors of the economy. The country was increasingly becoming a nation of services,

middlemen, agents, idle *rentiers* and hotel keepers. Popular resorts, invariably, became tempting spots for venial and not-so-venial attractions. Lebanon was hardly a paragon of virtue in this regard. It had its full share of houses of ill-repute, casinos, gambling parlors, nightclubs, discos, bars, escort bureaus, and other abodes of wickedness.

More damaging perhaps was its blemishing impact on the country's national character. As a "merchant republic" Lebanon became a country obsessed with and too eager to please and serve others, with all the cruel ironies that such ingratiation and servility often do to society's self-esteem. Artisans, villagers, and farmers abandoned some of their venerated crafts, vocations, and sources of traditional status to capitalize on the transient rewards of tourist-affiliated activities. Many became idle much of the year awaiting the alluring promises of a quick and sizeable windfall generated by the influx of vacationers during the brief summer months. Others wallowed in aimless indolence.

Sparked by the ethics of a mercantile culture, it is easy to see how tourism could deepen further the inauspicious consequences of rampant commercialism and the vulgarization of some of the cherished values and institutions. As a result the society embodied at times the most lurid features of a bazaar and an amusement park where the impulse for fun and profit remains unabashed. Practically everything and anything becomes for sale or is converted into a sleazy tourist attraction. Every entity and human capacity is conceived as a resource for the acquisition of profit or as a commodity to be exchanged for the highest bidder. This is most visible in the ruthless plunder of Lebanon's scenic natural habitat and dehumanization of much of its living space. Hardly anything is spared: shore lines, green belts, public parks and private backyards, suburban villas, historic sites and monuments are all giving way to more intensive forms of exploitation to enhance their fashionable attributes.