

An Nahar - Samir Atallah (translation from arabic)

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BUT WHAT HOMELAND?

Michel Chiha painted a picture of Lebanon similar to the image that Antoine de Saint-Exupéry drew for *The Little Prince*, one of the most famous French works: optimistic, smiling and brimming with vitality. But neither the author of *The Little Prince* nor the partisan of a Greater Lebanon were aware of having drawn their image on the sand.

The sand is frail. The sand is deceiving. The slightest breeze carries it, projects it; most often to the other end. The language of Michel Chiha was like that of Saint-Exupéry: it was full of precision and abounded with elegance. Feelings purified by the mind and mind controlled by consciousness.

Michel Chiha was, first and foremost, in search of a homeland for himself. As the member of a worried minority, he was perfectly aware of the instability that prevailed in the East. He imagined a country devoid of worry, safe from nightmares. He dreamed of a piece of land that would live by its beauty, a small piece of land that would offer its inhabitants the sea as far as the eye could see, as in the time of the purple. And as the land was small and coveted, Chiha wanted to replace the smallness of the land with the grandeur of the dream. He imagined the Lebanese as a category of honest people who would guard against foreign temptation because of the need they would have for each other and their will to protect their country against the flatteries of the devil, that always come uttered with the words of angels.

It is for this reason that political Lebanon seemed to him both attractive and possible. On paper, the state he envisioned seemed convincing and the regime exemplary. A sectarian and cultural harmony, coupled with an exhilarating freedom in politics, the media and the arts. In this refined language that Chiha used in his writings, followed by his disciples and thinkers after him, the Lebanese was endowed with the traits and apparent kindness of *The Little Prince*. There was equality of all before the law, neither dominant nor dominated, neither ignorant nor pretentious. Chiha's Lebanon was a dialogue between the state and the people, or between the people themselves, like Takieddine el-Solh, Philippe Takla, Bechara el-Khoury, Hamid Frangie and other people strongly attached to the nobility of political involvement and the art of expressing oneself.

Chiha, his generation, as well as his followers after him, have been inspired by great thinkers around the world to polish the image of Lebanon and make it as satisfying as possible, so as to block the way to the fractious, the indiscreet and the insensitive.

We regret to announce that the era Michel Chiha is now over. It is no longer appropriate today. Time does not end once. And the good, as tenuous as it is, continues tirelessly to struggle. But it is high time for us to understand that this ingenious formula no longer exists now that psychological rudeness and gross rhetoric have been endowed with the immunity of literature and the protection of thinkers. But the writer Dalal el-Bizri refuses to give in to this innovation in verbal violence. She considers the election of Miss Lebanon as an "oasis torn from its environment". But what environment are we talking about?

"Lebanon has now lost all its resources and, more than that, it could undeniably be called the homeland of ugliness. Its springs have withered, its wells are dried up, trash pours into its rivers, its electricity is in the hands of mafias, its roads are devoid of roadways and sidewalks, the stench of fuel oil, as well as old and new garbage stinks the air. Tussles and chatter for nothing, filthy seashore full of bacteria and cow carcasses, privatized shores, whose access is forbidden to people of middle income. Its beaches and waters have been seized by powerful developers, each of them protected by one of the ruling parties. Mountains are devoured by other equally powerful developers. The greenery disappears little by little, gradually giving way to fragile and gloomy concrete. Pollution takes hold of sight, hearing, smell ... Lebanon? The ugliness has penetrated into its mind. Lies, greed, quarrels and corruption gnaw it to the marrow; blackmail, mistrust, competition and this rudeness in words and behavior that is gaining ground...All at an infinitely monotonous pace... All in order to destroy the soul of Lebanon by ugliness. This is a weapon of massive destruction of the most monstrous type to say the least. "

Between the image so sought after by Chiha -- that of the enlightened and enlightening right -- and the picture that a lady from the vanquished left shows us, we notice the extent of the destruction that followed this experience. I do not know what system we have to look for. Maybe we are not worthy of it. No constitution could tame our abuses. No reconciliation could tame us. No agreement could put an end to this state of alert. The State of Greater Lebanon cannot survive in the face of closed hearts, small numbers, small disparities. We must take into account this reality and keep quiet. This country has lost all ties with itself. The years that have elapsed have caused the Republic to lose its connection with the homeland. Nothing could be of use anymore in this end of time.

We cannot blame a single man, or even a government or a specific mandate. The responsibility lies with this deviant general behavior that we have considered

normal. The responsibility lies with this society that has agreed to set up a university between two grocery stores after the country had been the lighthouse of higher education in the East. The responsibility lies with this society which has accepted that its "patriotic movement" takes over its business world, after Lebanon had been the trading center of the East. A society that today consents to the disappearance of the press after Lebanon had been the media pioneer in the entire region.

We regret to announce the passing of the era of Michel Chiha who was one of the greatest intellectuals and sensible men in the East. Thanks to his thorough knowledge of the living conditions of the people and the perspectives of nations, he wanted to offer us a peaceful homeland. A homeland that we have insulted, massacred without blinking, without even deigning to look back. We do not even notice the changes anymore. We are apathetic to failure and alienation. We have become accustomed to the lack of ethics. We have accepted the idea that portfolios are more important than men...A government that nobody expects except the people in power. No poor, no industrialist, no investor, no unemployed. A homeland of people who fear for their future and of people undermined in their daily lives... A time when fluency and some humorous traits are enough to lull the people to sleep. In the era of Michel Chiha, word and homeland were inextricably linked. This era is now over.

Rafic Hariri has made every effort to become a key partner in Lebanese and Arab politics. His perseverance, his dynamism, his money as well as his Arab and international relations led him to hit the last wall. He pushed the position of Prime Minister as far as the situation permitted.

Saad Hariri was as far from politics as his father was impregnated with it. Fate, and not envy, drove him to carry out a will he knew nothing about. Rafic Hariri was on his way to Baabda when he heard on the radio that there were plans to throw a spoke in his wheels. He turned back and returned to Koraytem to announce his resignation.

Saad Hariri is a prisoner of the will. He sees the obstacles but claims that they do not exist. Everyone took part in the decision-making process. Everyone imposed his conditions. He thought he was forming his government before realizing that every minister is the size of the country and every wallet the size of the nation.

In a last interview, Rafic Hariri told me: "I do not want a dynasty. I am about to retire. I have done everything I can in politics. I gave. Bahaa is in Geneva and does not want to come home. Saad is in Arabia, he manages the family affairs. For him, politics is only a puzzle and a waste of time. "

Throughout the last government formation process, I wholeheartedly thought of Saad Hariri and his kindness. When I inquired about his plans he kept telling me, "I miss the family and the children. I do not see them". I wonder what Abu Houssam would have done in this kindergarten if it were not for this testament that binds him. One pays a heavy tribute for one's filiations.