



# The Lebanese University and the Issue of Social Integration An Analytical Survey Study\*

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## Abstract

*This study aims to identify the views of the Lebanese University students about national issues, and vary when expressed by students from single or multiple- unit faculties on the one hand, and by students in the first or final year on the other hand during the academic year 2008–2009. A questionnaire was used to measure students' religious, social, and political behaviors that motivate them to take these views. The sample consisted of 518 students representing 32.7% of the total student population in five faculties, three of which are unified and two are divided. The study showed the following results: 1) Diminishing role played by unified faculties in enhancing communication and national integration among students. 2) There was a quantitative and qualitative development among first-year students in supporting the idea of unifying faculties in one location compared to their senior classmates. 3) Christian students felt more strongly about preferring marriage partners of the same general religion while Muslim students were more likely to emphasize the sect within the religion as a basis for choice. 4) Students were wary of expressing their views freely on campus. 5) Social communication, though not high, was happening among students who belong to the same religion.*

## I. Introduction

The feature that distinguishes the academic institution from other social ones is that it constitutes a platform for higher education and critical intellectual production. It is also a space that allows convergence and interaction between individuals from different religious and geo-political backgrounds, through the discussion of different issues related to society. If we suppose that social and national integration in Lebanon is one of the main objectives that the national university seeks to achieve and deepen in a unified national framework (University Guidebook, 1998), this implies that the university does not operate in a social or cultural void. Instead, as Parsons (1955) has explained, the university is rather part of the general socio-cultural structure that is concerned with intellectual aspects of society. Thus, the social function of a university is of great significance and it must be thoroughly analyzed in order to reveal the impact of interaction among students and the level of convergence among them. Pressing questions are to be raised about the repercussions of this interaction imposed on students who have to be in the same

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\* Translated from Arabic

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location for four, or even more, successive academic years, amidst diverse values and opinions in academic settings (Murad, 1973). It is as important to know whether such an interaction has created room for convergence over certain communal, religious and national issues or, on the contrary, pushed students toward revitalizing the state of competition, conflict, and partisan affiliations. Did it enhance loyalty to the pre-academic historical and social backgrounds that they acquired through their socialization by parents, school, and religious institutions who spoon-fed them some values within a limited cultural context where the sectarian affiliation prevails over the patriotic belonging, and where the individual must connect to life through his sectarian affiliation and his connections with the religious and secular leaders of his community? However, from a theoretical viewpoint, the university takes the individual to a wider space, and plays the role of a mediator between inherited primary affiliations and newly acquired orientations. It also offers an opportunity to truly interact with different social values, to rethink them and approach them from an objective perspective. Thereby, the main hypothesis of this study revolves around the role of the Lebanese University in the national integration process, through the influences of space and time on interaction among converging student groups, and on the extent to which they reject or tolerate each other. It also reveals the role of unified faculties in enhancing social and national integration among students.

The mere fact that the issues of integration, unity, and political sectarianism in Lebanon are frequently raised indicates that society lacks consensus and cohesion when it comes to these concepts. For this reason, the National Accord Document of 1989 underlined the need for "revisiting and developing curricula in order to consolidate national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness, as well as unifying history and civic education textbooks" (article 5). Furthermore, it is given that these curricula, just like the Lebanese people, seek to achieve a full national unity and to create a well-knit national society in which citizens enjoy security and peace of mind (Center for Educational Research and Development, 1977, p. 1 - 13).

The subject of this study is divided into two essential issues:

**First:** There is a problem among university students who have diverse views about concepts that are linked to national unity, as this remains an obstacle to national integration.

**Second:** The role of the Lebanese University as a wide space that allows students to come together, thus facilitating the national integration process and highlighting its role in the process of reform and building the future of the unified nation.

But, has the university been able to achieve positive interaction and national integration among students through the unity of space? Or has it been a victim of cultural and political polarization, which in turn leads to ruptures and intensifies competitiveness and conflicts among student groups that live side by side? Is the acquired education at the pre-university level immune to change? Has the university been incapable of breaking through this culture, despite its efforts to gather and mingle students together? Has it also failed to build the culture of recognizing the other and his natural right to a different of opinion? In addition, has it failed to give the priority to unified syndical interests of students as well as free competition, as opposed to primary allegiances and fanatical and sectarian affiliations? Or has the current situation of students become a microcosm of the larger Lebanese divisions?

In this context, this study highlights the nature of the social function undertaken by the university. In addition, the impact of the space and time frames and their effectiveness in terms of orienting the behavior and tendencies of students in different aspects of their social life, is also addressed.

## II. Methodology

- 1. Layout:** this study is divided into two parts.  
**The first part** is a theoretical frame for reviewing relevant literature, methodology and questions, as well as determining the social function of the university as a tool for change in order to achieve national and social integration of different social components.  
**The second** is an applied frame that includes an analysis of the opinions of a sample of students in the academic year 20082009- in order to answer the questions raised by this study and to test its hypotheses.
- 2. The population of this study:** This is represented by unified<sup>2</sup> faculties in the Hadath campus (Medicine and Pharmacy) and outside the Hadath campus (Agriculture), and by non-unified faculties represented by the two branches of the Faculty of Law: The first branch (located inside the Hadath campus) and the second branch (located outside the Hadath campus), as shown in Table 1.  
This choice aims primarily at identifying the impact of integrating faculties in one building, and the influence of such a process on the interaction and tolerance among students.
- 3. The sample of the study:** This study is based on a random scattered sample comprising 518 male and female students from four faculties of the Lebanese University, in the first and the last<sup>3</sup> year. The study covered 32.7% of the total number of faculty students, and the degree of resemblance with the original society reached a level of complete conformity in some practical faculties (in the faculty of Pharmacy for instance), and a resemblance of more than 5 to 20 in the faculty of Law.

**Table 1: The composition of the student sample by gender**

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Faculty	Non-unified	Number	130	198	328
		%	39.6	60.4	100
	Unified	Number	67	123	190
		%	35.3	64.7	100
Total		Number	197	321	518
		%	38	62	100

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, "unified" is used to refer to single unit faculties, while "divided" or non-unified is used to refer to multiple unit faculties.

<sup>3</sup> The terms "First year" and "Last year" have been adopted due to the differing numbers of years to graduate in the different faculties covered by the study.

**Table 2: The composition of the student sample by religion**

			Religion			Total
			No answer	Muslim	Christian	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	21	154	153	328
		%	6.4	47	46.6	100
	Unified faculty	Number	7	102	81	190
		%	3.7	53.7	42.6	100
Total		Number	28	256	234	518
		%	5.4	49.4	45.2	100

Based on the data of the tables 1 and 2, the sample was distributed as follows:

- Males: 38%; Females: 62%.
- Muslims: 49.4%; Christians: 45.2%.

#### 4. Data collection

A questionnaire was designed and directly filled in by students during classes. The questions contained in the questionnaire were either close-ended with two choices, or open-ended to allow students to add their personal opinions and viewpoints. Some questions were inspired from previous questionnaires<sup>4</sup>.

#### 5. Data analysis and interpretation methods

Excel and SPSS programs were used in analyzing data, through simple and complex frequency tables and goodness-of-fit test (chi square) to identify significant statistical differences between variables.

The content of this survey was decided in the light of events that occur in different faculties and based on previous studies, especially those undertaken by Theodor Hanf (1973), Joseph Jabra (1972), Adnan El Amine (1977) and Adnan Al Amine and Mohammad Faour (1998). These studies came to certain common conclusions about the impact of sectarian and religious affiliation on the role that universities and schools play. It was observed that universities became an identical copy of the divisions in the religious and sectarian society in general. Whereas the study undertaken by Barakat (1977) about the political orientations of university students showed that family and religious affiliations are complementary. Therefore, the more one drifts away from one's family the further one is away from religion, and the more one is integrated into one's family the more one is attached to one's religion and communal affiliation.

This study was undertaken after a long time from the previous ones, and after a time period that was marked by denominational and sectarian incidents that affected even members of the same community. This may entail a state of consciousness and change in mentalities, which may

<sup>4</sup> Some questions from previous surveys were added (ElAmine & Faour, 1998, pp. 419 - 435)

deepen the successive generations' conviction that national affiliation prevails over all other considerations and does not contradict any other affiliations.

### III. The results of the field study

These are presented in this part through three dimensions:

1. The religious dimension and its impact on national integration.
2. The social dimension and its impact on cooperation and integration among students.
3. The political dimension and its repercussions on national integration and interaction among students.

#### 1. The religious dimension and its impact on national integration

Numerous theories and publications have tackled the concept of religion whether as a phenomenon imposed by the collective conscience which dominates individuals and leads to political and social stability (Durkheim, 1967), or as an important factor which affects social changes and is related to the daily behavior of individuals (Weber, 1967). In addition, religion has also been seen as a unifying drive which creates a spirit of social solidarity among individuals through cultural values and beliefs preached by any religion (Ibn Khaldoun). Therefore, religion can reflect the social conflicts that arise in a society, whether as an excuse to justify the hegemony of governors, thus "religion is the opiate of the masses", or as a tool used by social forces to express political opposition and rebellion, and in this case, "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature" (Marx et al., 1968). However, no matter how much these orientations differ or converge, they all point to the fact that religion is inspired from a complicated social, economic, political and historical reality, and that the evolution of religion is closely linked to the evolution of this reality. Amidst such contradictions, one may wonder if religious diversity is a healthy phenomenon or a social disease that ought to be eradicated in order to achieve stability. In fact, monotheist religions emerged in peace, without any conflicts or hostilities. None of them had the ambition of annihilating the others, and all the prophets were sent to this world to make justice prevail (Said, 1998). In reality, the difference between religions is not about the concept of good and evil, but rather about viewpoints and ways of worship. Even if the three religions do not converge when it comes to essential creeds (Arnaldez, 1986), some of their elements and basic beliefs are interconnected and similar (Gedner, 2005). One has the freedom of choosing his own religion and practicing religious rites secretly or openly. But this freedom reaches its limits when it threatens social security and stability.

Nonetheless, the main problem in Lebanon lies in the "sectarianisation" of religious disparities in political competition, and also in the controversial exploitation of religion in political competition. The National Accord Document underlines the importance of "harmony between religion and the State" (paragraph B), which presupposes a healthy relation between religion and politics, in such a way that religion does not impose itself by force, but is rather the fruit of faith and commitment, and politics does not resort to violence under the cloak of religion. Instead, politics should be based on religious diversity and religion must not be exploited in political competition. However, this hypothetical harmony often turns into a threat for the entire national entity.

In this context, numerous questions are raised concerning the relation between religion and political divisions and the ensuing repercussions on national integration among students in the Lebanese University. Do religious diversity and the subsequent denominational and sectarian diversity affect divergence among students? How does this reflect on cohesion as well as

social and national integration among students? Did religious diversity create social barriers and weaken the integration process among university students? In this regard, it is extremely important to highlight the differences between religion, which is the creed and the theological beliefs of a certain community (Barakat, 1986), and sectarianism which is a social structure with specific numbers, institutions, slogans and traditions (Nassar, 1970), and which expands and grows stronger at the expense of the central state.

Thus, our hypothesis sustains that a politicized religious diversity, or in other words, the political exploitation of religion and sect, produces a divergence among students, and that the university with all its components, as a space for gathering and acquiring knowledge, will constitute a factor that contributes to eliminating such a divergence and transforming it into positive interaction and concordance among students. Therefore, unified faculties will be more efficient than non-unified faculties in the process of national integration, for it allows a positive interaction among students from various regions and political backgrounds. Moreover, students who have been in university for four years or more (i.e. who are in their final academic year) will be more in harmony and tolerant than students who have only been interacting for a few months (first year students), and who are still affected by their familial and sectarian integration into their primary communities.

In a bid to test this hypothesis, we sought to identify the orientations of students through a number of criteria and variables linked to the reflection of their religious affiliation in their attitudes and their behavior towards others, whether at the level of marriage, friendships or collaboration with people from other religions.

#### a. Religious commitment

**Table 3: Student religious practices by academic year**

			The practice of religious rites					Total
			Sometimes	Some of them	All of them, regularly	Not at all	No answer	
Academic Year	First	Number	72	127	109	18	1	327
		%	22	38.8	33.3	5.5	0.3	100
	Final	Number	21	94	71	3	2	191
		%	11	49.2	37.2	1.6	1	100
Total		Number	93	221	180	21	3	518
		%	18	42.7	34.7	4.1	0.6	100

X<sup>2</sup> is significant (0.02)

The commitment to religious obligations or the absence of such a commitment is not a parameter of faith or atheism, nor is it a parameter of one's citizenship. This is because every pious person is definitely a citizen, but not every citizen is a pious person or a believer in the traditional sense, based on the practice of rituals. In this regard, the opinions of students who are newcomers to university will be compared to those of their classmates who have spent more than four years in the same university. This is in order to unveil the changes and the knowledge acquisition that

occurred during this period of time, which could transform religion into an important factor that enriches social relations, or at least exclude it from impacting relationships with others (Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's).

Table 4 shows that the percentage of individuals who regularly fulfill their religious obligations reached 33% in the first year and 37% in the final year. This fact points out that final year students are more committed to religious practice compared to their classmates, with a slight difference of only 4%. If we add the percentage of individuals who practice their rituals irregularly (some of them + sometimes), then the percentage of practitioners reaches 60% of the total.

If we add together the percentages of individuals who practice, regularly and irregularly, their religious rituals, then the sum of the two exceeds 95%; whereas the percentage of those who do not practice at all decreases to 4%. These results are similar to previous ones (ElAmine and Faour, 1998), for they show that 94% of university students have one thing in common: faith in God. Only as little as 6% are atheists. Whereas if we add the three variables in the case of the first and the final year, it turns out that first year students are less committed to their religious obligations, even if by only 3%. In fact, this percentage reached almost 94% compared to 97%, which contradicts the study undertaken by Barakat 1977, which showed that university students drift further away from religion and the further they are from family.

**b. Choosing a spouse from another religion as an indicator of convergence among students**

**Table 4: The opinions of students about their preferences when choosing a spouse by academic year**

			How do you prefer to choose your spouse?					Total
			I do not ask	No answer	From my religion	From my confession	From my region	
Academic year	First	Number	95	4	144	82	2	327
		%	29.1	1.2	44	25.1	0.6	100
	Final	Number	41	2	90	58	0	191
		%	21.5	1	47.1	30.4	0.0	100
Total		Number	136	6	234	140	2	518
		%	26.3	1.2	45.2	27	0.4	100

X2 not significant

This table shows disparities between first and final year students when it comes to their preferences when choosing a spouse. It seems that first year students are more flexible, even if by a slight difference, in the adoption of religion as an essential determinant of their choice. When observing the percentage of those who do not ask about the religion of their spouse it can be seen to reach 29% compared to 21% in the final year. Moreover, the percentage of students who prefer to marry someone from their own religion reaches 44% in the first year compared to 47% in the final year. These results are in line with the information contained in Table 3, regarding the decreasing percentage of first year students who practice their religious rituals in comparison



with final year students. This contradicts the hypothesis that we suggested as to which final year university students are more open and more flexible in tolerating others, and first year students are still influenced by their primary communities, being family and sect. Such a fact raises many questions concerning the negative role of the university in the integration process. Furthermore, this tendency gains importance as we notice that the high percentage of students who consider religion as the main determinant when choosing a spouse increases in unified faculties, especially in the faculty of pharmacy where it reached 59% and in agronomy 49%.

**Table 5: Preferences when choosing a spouse by religion**

			The preferences of choosing a spouse					Total
			I do not ask	No answer	From my religion	From my sect	From my region	
Religion	No answer	Number	15	1	9	3	0	28
		%	53.6	3.6	32.1	10.7	0	100
	Muslim	Number	68	2	66	119	1	256
		%	26.6	0.8	25.8	46.5	0.4	100
	Christian	Number	53	3	159	18	1	234
		%	22.6	1.3	67.9	7.7	0.4	100
Total		Number	136	6	234	140	2	518
		%	26.3	1.2	45.2	27	0.4	100

X2 is significant (0.000)

The data contained in Table 5 shows some convergence in the opinions of Christian and Muslim students who do not ask about the religion of the other person when choosing a spouse. However, when it comes to those who prefer a spouse from the same religion, their opinions diverge: the percentage of Christian students reaches 68% compared to 26% among Muslim students. This fact is reversed when it comes to selecting sect as a criterion for choosing the spouse: the percentage of Muslim students reaches 47% whereas that of Christian students is around 8%.

**Table 6: Preferences when choosing a spouse by gender**

			The preferences of choosing a spouse					Total
			I do not ask	No answer	From my religion	From my sect	From my region	
Gender	Male	Number	77	5	71	42	2	197
		%	39.1	2.5	36	21.3	1	100
	Female	Number	59	1	163	98	0	321
		%	18.4	0.3	50.8	30.5	0	100
Total		Number	136	6	234	140	2	518
		%	26.3	1.2	45.2	27	0.4	100

X2 is significant (0.000)

The table above reveals that females are much stricter in the choosing process. Whereas the percentage of males who do not ask about the religion of their spouse reaches 39%, the percentage of females who feel the same way does not exceed 18%. The same applies to the adoption of religion as a determinant in the choosing process: This percentage exceeds 50% among females compared to 36% among males. Such disparities appear as well regarding sects, for the percentage of females reaches 30% compared to 21% in the case of males. These figures show that when it comes to choosing a spouse, males have a wider margin of freedom compared to females who are more committed to observing their social legacy. Thus, the knowledge acquired in university as well as the interaction among students failed to change the hierarchy of values among females.

**c. Befriending people from other religions as an indicator of national integration**

**Table 7: Friendships among students from different religions by type of faculty**

			Befriending people from other religions			Total
			To a certain extent	No	Yes	
Faculty	Unified faculty	Number	43	8	277	328
		%	13.1	2.4	84.5	100
	Non-unified faculty	Number	14	1	175	190
		%	7.4	0.5	92.1	100
Total		Number	57	9	452	518

X2 is significant (0.05)

**Table 8: Friendships among students from different religions by academic year**

			Befriending people from other religions			Total
			To a certain extent	No	Yes	
Academic year	First	Number	34	7	286	327
		%	10.4	2.1	87.5	100
	Final	Number	23	2	166	191
		%	12	1	86.9	100
Total		Number	57	9	452	518
		%	11	1.7	87.3	100

X2 not significant

Tables 7 and 8 show that the percentage of students willing to befriend people from other religions is very high. This is at the level of unified faculties (92%) or non-unified faculties (84%), with the highest percentage at the level of pharmacy (96%). This applies to the academic years

as well; the first year percentage reaches 88% and the final year percentage almost 87%. This means that making friendships with people from other religions is viewed as a social matter while choosing a spouse from other religions is viewed as a religious matter.

**d. Sectarian affiliation and its impact on national affiliation**

Divisions deepen among students when the student elites that form within the university enlist in denominational and sectarian conflicts. This in turn leads to a deeper regression into a narrow world dominated by the color and the smell of sectarianism, where each religious community seeks to marginalize and eliminate the other communities.

Table 9 shows that the percentage of students who prioritize their sectarian affiliation over their national affiliation exceeds 28% of the total sample, whereas those who give priority to their national affiliation account for more than 46%. This includes all faculties. These results are in line with other studies undertaken in the late 1990's (ElAmine & Faour, 1998). However a slight difference has been registered between unified faculties (medicine, agronomy and pharmacy) and non-unified ones, where the percentage of students who give priority to sectarian affiliation reaches 26% in unified faculties compared to a 30% in non-unified faculties.

**Table 9: National and sectarian affiliation of students by faculty**

			The relation with community				Total
			Is stronger than my belonging to Lebanon	Comes in second place	Does not concern me	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	99	137	89	3	328
		%	30.2	41.8	27.1	0.9	100
	Unified Faculty	Number	50	104	31	5	190
		%	26.3	54.7	16.3	2.6	100
Total		Number	149	241	120	8	518
		%	28.8	46.5	23.2	1.5	100

X2 is significant (0.05)

As for the academic years (Table 10), statistics show that the percentage of first year students is high (30%), against 26% for final year students. Even though the difference is negligible, it remains a significant indicator of the interaction among students in various faculties, despite the diversity of their affiliations. The low percentage of final year students who give priority to sectarian affiliation at the expense of national affiliation in comparison with first year students, shows that our hypothesis is accurate; national allegiance is enhanced the longer students coexist and the more they know about the importance of national allegiance.

**Table 10: National and sectarian affiliation of students by academic year**

			The relation with community				Total
			Is stronger than my belonging to Lebanon	Comes in second place	Does not concern me	No answer	
Academic year	First	Number	98	143	82	4	327
		%	30	43.7	25.1	1.2	100
	Final	Number	51	98	38	4	191
		%	26.7	51.3	19.9	2.1	100
Total		Number	149	241	120	8	518
		%	28.8	46.5	23.2	1.5	100

X2 is not significant

## 2. The social dimension

Relations and cooperation between people are some of the essential pillars of citizenship. These relations grow and are transmitted from one generation to the next through cultural characteristics, in order to guarantee a long-lasting situation and to achieve their common goals. In fact, a nation cannot be reduced to land, it is rather a network of relations among citizens, which entails solidarity against common threats, and gives individuals a social value regardless of their religious or communal affiliations. The concept of social communication is perceived as a characteristic that distinguishes people who are committed to participation, collaboration and interaction with others. Thus, social communication is the direct means for reviving the spirit of solidarity between social classes and it serves as a basis for building new concepts such as cooperation, interaction and synergy in order to achieve integration and social cohesion (Durkheim, 1960).

Within this understanding, cooperation is confined to groups with common goals, such as university students for example, who are the subject of our study. In this context, what is the role played by the university in creating such communication and synergy among students? Does the heritage from their primary community work as a catalyst for forming groups on a religious or sectarian basis impermeable to university in terms of penetration and integration within a unifying national frame? In this regard, we shall seek to examine the degree of cooperation among students from the angle of religious diversity on the one hand, and from the perspective of their communication and gathering in a unified university campus for several years on the other.

### a. Religious diversity: An impediment or an incentive to social communication?

Tables 11 and 12 show high percentages of students who do not face any difficulties in communicating with others: 61% in non-unified faculties compared to 69% in unified faculties. However, the percentage of students who find it relatively difficult to communicate with classmates from a different religion exceeds one third of the total number of surveyed people: 34% in non-unified faculties and 29% in unified faculties. This slight disparity highlights the positive

role played by unified universities in the process of communication and convergence between adepts of different religions. This distribution of percentages applies, with slight differences, to students according to academic years (Table 12). Results are almost similar, whether in the case of the absence of communication difficulties (almost 64% in both academic years) or in that of limited difficulties (23%). The percentage of recognition of extreme communication difficulties with people from other religions, whether at the level of faculties or academic years, is very small and does not exceed 4%.

**Table 11: Communication difficulties between students and people from other religions by type of faculty**

			Communication difficulties among students from different religions				Total
			Extreme	To a certain extent	None	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	14	112	201	1	328
		%	4.3	34.1	61.3	0.3	100
	Unified faculty	Number	2	56	131	1	190
		%	1.1	29.5	68.9	0.5	100
Total		Number	16	168	332	2	518
		%	3.1	32.4	64.1	0.4	100.00

X2 is not significant

**Table 12: Communication difficulties between students and people from other religions by academic year**

			Communication difficulties among students from different religions				Total
			Extreme	To a certain extent	None	No answer	
Academic year	First	Number	10	106	210	1	327
		%	3.1	32.4	64.2	0.3	100
	Final	Number	6	62	122	1	191
		%	3.1	32.5	63.9	0.5	100
Total		Number	16	168	332	2	528
		%	3.1	32.4	64.1	0.4	100

X2 is not significant



**b. Unified faculties and their role in social communication**

The data in tables 13 and 14 shows that more than half of the surveyed students support the role played by unified campuses in bringing students together and promoting interaction. It turned out that students in unified faculties are more enthusiastic about the idea of unification than their colleagues in non-unified universities (61% against 52% respectively) (Table 13). However, these results seem to be reversed at the level of academic years. While more than 63% of first year students give a great importance to the role of unified campuses in convergence among students, the figure decreases to 42% in the case of final year students (Table 14). We believe that the divergence in student opinions is due to their experience through the events that they have witnessed, having spent several years in university.

**Table 13: Student opinions of the role played by unified university campuses in the convergence among them by faculty**

			Convergence among students				Total
			yes	To a certain extent	No	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	171	123	30	4	328
		%	52.1	37.5	9.1	1.2	100
	Unified faculty	Number	117	61	9	3	190
		%	61.6	32.1	4.7	1.6	100
Total		Number	288	184	39	7	518
		%	55.6	35.5	7.5	1.4	100

X2 is not significant

**c. Cooperation between students: National or religious background?**

Data in tables 15 and 16 shows conformity at the macro level. That is, 32% of the sample members are willing to cooperate with their colleagues with no reserve, while 28% cooperate with some reserve and 37% refuse to cooperate with others. If we consider that partial cooperation between students reveals a state of wariness or hesitation among them, then such cooperation cannot be classified as serious and effective. This in turn means that the university finds itself in a state of regression and fails to create national unifying frameworks to bring students together. As a matter of fact, two thirds of the surveyed students show no willingness to cooperate in a serious and complete manner. At the level of faculties and academic years, the percentage of cooperation or non-cooperation is the same, where the ratio of each variable reached one third or slightly more.



**Table 14: Student opinions of the role played by unified university campuses in the convergence among them by academic year**

			Convergence among students				Total
			yes	To a certain extent	No	No answer	
Academic year	First	Number	208	101	12	6	327
		%	63.6	30.9	3.7	1.80%	100
	Final	Number	80	83	27	1	191
		%	41.9	43.5	14.1	0.50%	100
Total		Number	288	184	39	7	518
		%	55.6	35.5	7.5	1.40%	100

X2 is significant (0.05)

**Table 15: The degree of cooperation between students by faculty**

			Cooperation among students				Total
			Yes	Sometimes	No	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	106	97	119	6	328
		%	32.3	29.6	36.3	1.8	100
	Unified faculty	Number	62	50	74	4	190
		%	32.6	26.3	38.9	2.1	100
Total		Number	168	147	193	10	518
		%	32.4	28.4	37.3	1.9	100

X2 is not significant

The data contained in the table 17 concerning the entities that students cooperate with show that the Lebanese University plays a meager role in national integration and its deepening among students. This may be due to two main reasons: **The first** one is related to the low percentage of students who cooperate with each other (only 12% of the total sample). **The second** reason is the exclusivity of cooperation among students who belong to the same religion or the same region (10% and 2% respectively, distributed as follows: 59% Muslims and 41% Christians). It is also noteworthy that 91% of unified faculty students do not seem to cooperate with their colleagues, especially in Medicine and Pharmacy, the two faculties which are supposed to achieve the highest level of cooperation due to the nature of these specializations.

**Table 16: The degree of cooperation among students by academic year**

			Cooperation among students				Total
			Yes	Sometimes	No	No answer	
Academic Year	First	Number	109	87	123	8	327
		%	33.3	26.6	37.6	2.4	100
	Final	Number	59	60	70	2	191
		%	30.9	31.4	36.6	1	100
Total		Number	168	147	193	10	518
		%	32.4	28.4	37.3	1.9	100

X2 is not significant

**Table 17: Religion of those who students cooperate with, by faculty**

			Religion of those who students cooperate with				Total
			From one religion	From one region	Irrelevant	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified	Number	47	7	258	16	328
		%	14.3	2.1	78.7	4.9	100
	Unified	Number	7	5	173	5	190
		%	3.7	2.6	91.1	2.6	100
Total		Number	54	12	431	21	518
		%	10.4	2.3	83.2	4.1	100

X2 is significant (0.001)

### 3. The political dimension

Paul Valery describes politics sarcastically as “the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs which properly concern them”<sup>5</sup>. If the current state of the system of governance in Lebanon does not encourage participation, how is it possible to incite people to participate in systems which do not really need their participation? (Messara-a,1995 ) Does this mean the exclusion of youth from participation? What future awaits university students in public interest?

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.elwatan.com/Le-11-decembre-1960-a-ete-un>



It is true that student movements in Europe have led significant changes at the national level in the 1960's. Nonetheless, student movements in Lebanon did not emerge motivated by global national motives aimed at introducing universal changes that serve the general national interest. They rather operated according to narrow sectarian or ideological priorities (they participated in the Lebanese Civil War 1975). Instead of taking the general national interest into account, they sought to reduce the nation to their own interests. This was in such a way that the Lebanese people forgot that this country is theirs, with their jobs and careers being the only link that tied them to this country (Massara, 1995-b). Thus, the distance between youth and politics grew gradually larger, as a result of the failure in creating unifying national frameworks for the entire Lebanese people.

**a. The Lebanese political system: An impediment or an incentive to participation?**

There were 55% of the students who expressed their willingness to participate in political life because they believe that there are no impediments that keep them from occupying political positions in the future. On the other hand, a high percentage of 42% stated that they are unwilling to participate in politics for different reasons. At the level of faculties, 57% of unified faculty students believe that there are no obstacles that prevent them from occupying political positions, compared to 54% in non-unified faculties (table 18). These percentages show that students' opinions of occupying political positions are relatively equally divided, only varying between acceptance and refusal. This phenomenon is interesting and strange at the same time, especially as human beings are by nature thirsty for power. However this decrease in the percentages reveals the gap between politics, politicians and people's interests, as well as the monopoly of power by religious and familial leaders. This tendency is further supported by the accusations and the criticism addressed at politicians by students due to the unsatisfactory performance they perceive. Politicians are also accused of corruption and held responsible for the inheritance of power and the poor performance of current political parties. Furthermore, 11% of queried students expressed their fear of assassination and murder.

**Table 18: Students' attitudes towards the obstacles to occupying political positions in the future, by faculty**

			Obstacles to occupying political positions			Total
			No	Yes	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	178	143	7	328
		%	54.3	43.6	2.1	100
	Unified faculty	Number	108	77	5	190
		%	56.8	40.5	2.6	100
Total		Number	286	220	12	518
		%	55.2	42.5	2.3	100

X2 is not significant

Students who have expressed their willingness to participate in elections and in the electoral campaign can be added together because they are considered as students who give a particular importance to the electoral process. Thus, they account for 51% of the total sample, while students who have not specified their attitude towards participation as well as those who will boycott the elections account for 48%. We noticed a certain balance between the percentages of students who are enthusiastic towards elections, those who would boycott them and those who

are indifferent towards them. As for disparities, they were clear at the level of academic years. In fact, the percentage of those who are willing to take part in elections and in electoral campaigns reached 44% among first year students compared to almost 63% of final year students. We believe that this disparity is due to the participation of final year students in political life, especially that they are now one step from graduation, thus they might have the ambition of occupying certain political positions.

Moreover, those who have not taken a clear stand on elections account for 41% in the first year compared to 24% in the final year. This fact is of particular significance in terms of final year students' understanding of the necessity of participation in parliamentary elections.

There are two key issues in this survey. The **first** one is the low percentage of students who were willing to participate in electoral campaigns, which did not exceed 13% of the total sample. The **second** issue is the high percentage of students who did not express any interest in elections and who did not specify their attitude towards them, which accounted for almost 35%.

As for the opinions and the orientations of students concerning external threats to Lebanon, they were distributed horizontally across different dimensions and included more than 30 possibilities. However, the dominant preoccupation of students was about external threats, more precisely Israel which was mentioned in more than 223 answers out of a total of 518. This was stated as the only threat or as a combination of threats which also included the United States of America, Syria and moderate Arab states. Syria was recurrently mentioned as a source of threats less frequently than Israel. Syria's name occurred almost 80 times, whether alone or with Iran and Israel. Moreover, international ambitions were mentioned as frequently as 83 times<sup>6</sup>. As for the rest of the answers, they varied from preoccupations due to the economic situation along with the increasing migration, to internal divisions, fear of war, fragmentation, and Hezbollah's weapons. This disparity in attitudes towards common national issues is somewhat gloomy, for it constantly exacerbates fragmentation and divisions, which makes national integration an extremely difficult and complicated process.

**Table 19: Students' attitude towards participation in parliamentary elections, by academic year**

			Attitude towards elections					Total
			Will vote	Will participate in electoral campaign	Will boycott elections	Do not know	No answer	
Academic year	First	Number	92	53	47	134	1	327
		%	28.1	16.2	14.4	41	0.3	100
	Final	Number	102	18	24	46	1	191
		%	53.4	9.4	12.6	24.1	0.5	100
Total		Number	194	71	71	180	2	518
		%	37.5	13.7	13.7	34.7	0.4	100

X2 is significant (0.000)

<sup>6</sup> These rates and frequencies were taken from the main database of the field study.

### b. Attitudes towards national identity

A small percentage, not exceeding 5% of the total sample, believes the Lebanese have achieved their national identity independently. However, 47% of students believe that the Lebanese have failed to achieve their national identity, and 42% doubt this achievement or consider it as incomplete. This means that 89% of students doubt or do not recognize that the Lebanese have achieved their independent national identity. This belief might be based on the incapacity of the Lebanese people to solve their problems themselves without any foreign intervention (Table 20).

**Table 20: Students' opinions of achieving national identity by the Lebanese people by faculty**

			Achieving national identity by the Lebanese				Total
			Yes	To a certain extent	No	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	20	151	137	20	328
		%	6.1	46	41.8	6.1	100
	Unified faculty	Number	6	68	109	7	190
		%	3.2	35.8	57.4	3.7	100
Total		Number	26	219	246	27	518
		%	5	42.3	47.5	5.2	100

X2 is significant (0.006)

As for the opinions of students by academic year, they are relatively similar to the opinions of students in faculties: 42% of first year students and 56% of final year students believe that the Lebanese were unable to achieve their national identity<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, consensus and conformity were clear in the attitudes of students by faculty and by academic year, regarding the achievement of national identity by the Lebanese: no more than 5% for both cases. This fact raises many questions, most importantly about national allegiance and faith in political leaders who run the parties.

### c. Freedom of expression on university campus

It appears that the percentage of students who express freely their opinions is weak for it does not exceed 34% of the total. Those who cannot express their opinions totally or relatively well, account for almost 63% of the total sample. The distribution of these percentages was unequal between faculties. The percentage of students who express their opinions freely reached 38% in non-unified faculties while it reached approximately 28% in unified faculties. Similarly, the percentage of students who cannot express their opinions totally, or relatively well, reached 68% in unified faculties compared to 59% in non-unified faculties (table 21).

<sup>7</sup> These percentages were taken from the main database of the field study.

**Table 21: Distribution of students' opinions on freedom of expression on campus by faculty**

			Freedom of expression				Total
			Yes	To a certain extent	No	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	124	112	84	8	328
		%	37.8	34.1	25.6	2.4	100
	Unified faculty	Number	54	83	47	6	190
		%	28.4	43.7	24.7	3.2	100
Total		Number	178	195	131	14	518
		%	34.4	37.6	25.3	2.7	100

According to our estimates, students fear expressing their opinions freely due to several factors:

1. The university campus is located in a denominationally homogenous geographic region.
2. The area is dominated by political movements and parties that share the same orientation.
3. Some students belong to rival political movements, or come from regions that are different from the university location in terms of religion or confession.
4. Students do not trust each other.

Thus, the unity of place encompassed by the university, as a space that brings students together, plays a negative role that includes contradictions and some repulsion among students.

**Table 22: Student opinion of Lebanon's Arab identity by faculty**

			Lebanon has an Arab identity				Total
			Yes	To a certain extent	No	No answer	
Faculty	Non-unified faculty	Number	197	72	32	27	328
		%	60.1	22	9.8	8.2	100%
	Unified faculty	Number	117	38	21	14	190
		%	61.6	20	11.1	7.4	100%
Total		Number	314	110	53	41	518
		%	60.6	21.2	10.2	7.9	100%

X2 is not significant

#### **d. Belonging to Arabism**

The issue of identity and national affiliation in Lebanon was a controversial topic and subject to different interpretations. In 1989 the National Agreement put officially an end to this controversy,

considering that “Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity” (Preamble to the Constitution, clause b). What happened actually to this issue later, taking into consideration the conflicts that Lebanon witnessed in the last years? The data in Table 22 show that most of the students (60%) agree that Lebanon is Arab in identity and belonging. As for students who disagree, they only account for 10%, and those who have some reservations in their position account for 21% of the total students.

#### IV. Conclusion

The study revealed that the Lebanese University, as a geographic and human space, cannot achieve and enhance national integration among students on its own. As a matter of fact, external factors such as family, social environment, media, and others affect the consciousness of students; define their social behavior and their positions from each other more than the university does. The daily political discourse which resorts to denominational and sectarian incitement in various forms of media inevitably influences the behavior of individuals and students, outside and inside the university. No matter what the capacities of the university are, it does not have the mechanisms that enable it to cope with external factors. These mechanisms are kept and then used by financial, religious and media institutions to achieve their goals, thus becoming the tools to terrorize and exclude others. Therefore, the slogan of unifying academic faculties in a bid to achieve social and national integration is meaningless, as long as reform and the changing of mentalities start with the early upbringing of individuals and their primary civic, social and national education. In fact, university students carry the heritage of primary communities, and the university could not produce serious changes, especially in correcting stereotypes about others. It requires support from external mechanisms in order to allow achievement of the required national integration. This study showed that the integration of students in their religion and their sect is greater than their national integration, and that social communication and cooperation are achieved, if ever, among students who belong to the same religion. Moreover, the repulsion of students who refrain from participating in political life explains the regression of politics and the state of frustration and isolation among students, especially when it comes to their conviction that the Lebanese people have yet to achieve their full national identity.

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