

LERC Releases Anthology of Zajal on Lebanese Migration (1900 – 2000)

Thursday 9th December 2010, LERC, NDU

Reported by Elie Azar, LERC

The Notre Dame University, Louaizé, held a book launching session for an anthology compiled by Mr. Joseph Abi Daher on *Anthology of Zajal on Lebanese Migration (1900 – 2000)* that was issued by the Lebanese Emigration Research Center. The collection of poems highlights the most poignant and meaningful verses that have as a theme Lebanon and the Lebanese Diaspora.

The *Zajal*, is a popular Lebanese form of spontaneous vernacular-based poetry that is recited in song, and is composed of three components: *Matla* (beginning), *dawr* (round), *qufl* (closure). The term *Zajal* means move with the voice, sing.

The *Zajal* was widely practiced by the Lebanese pioneered emigrants and continues to be appreciated by the new waves of Lebanese that settle in the various countries of the world.

It is an important source pertaining to the history of the Lebanese emigration and provides a new linguistic and cultural source, an impulse that embodies the spirit of Lebanese migration, and the retention of its values and customs.



From right to left: Mr. S. Matar, Mr. J. Abi Daher, Mr. E. Chedrawi, Fr. W. Moussa, Guest, Dr. G. Ghanem, H.E. Mr. N. Abi Nasr, H.E. Mr. M. Edde, General M. Nahas

The *Zajal* brings to life, in language, the history of Lebanese migration, from two important perspectives: the view of the immigrant experiencing emigration and

distance from the motherland, and the view of those left in Lebanon, experiencing a life devoid of their loved ones with separation and longing. These two opposite perspectives constitute an essential part played by memories and all the conflicting emotions of nostalgia. With this in mind, LERC and NDU contracted Mr. Joseph Abi Daher, journalist, poet, writer, critic, sculptor, and painter, best known for his expertise in the Lebanese *Zajal*, to prepare the *Anthology of Zajal on Lebanese Migration (1900 – 2000)*.

Mr. Abi Daher documented the 416 pages with an overview of the life and biography of poets commenting that “the *Zajal* on Lebanese emigration skips the emigrant status and remains a witness over the generations.”

The Anthology was signed on Thursday the 9th of December 2010 at Notre Dame University in Zouk Mosbeh. In attendance was H.E. Mr. Michel Edde, President of the World Maronite Foundation; Mr. Eid Chedrawi, World President of the World Lebanese Cultural Union (WLCU); Dr. Ghaleb Ghanem, Head of the Higher Judicial Council; H.E. Deputy Neemtallah Abi Nasr; F. Walid Moussa, President of Notre Dame University – Louaize; Dr. Ameen Rihani, VP for Academic Affairs; Dr. Assaad Eid, VP for Sponsored Research and Development; Mr. Suheil Matar, VP for Cultural Affairs and Public Relations; Mr. Georges Mghames, Director of Press at NDU, in addition to many friends, interested public, and the professors, researchers and staff of LERC and Notre Dame University – Louaizé.



Mr. J. Abi Daher signs a copy of the Anthology (Dec 2010).

The speakers at the book launch were in order Mr. Suheil Matar, H.E. Mr. Michel Edde, Mr. Eid Chedrawi, Dr. Ghaleb Ghanem, and Mr. Joseph Abi Daher.

Mr. Suheil Matar welcomed the dignitaries present and paid tribute to LERC and Mr. Abi Daher. He went on to review the book's main three topics: Lebanese migration and its causes, the evolution of the *Zajal* of Lebanese migration, and the anthology itself.

Second on the podium was H.E. Mr. Michel Edde, who stressed the importance of the *Zajal* of Lebanese migration, and its association with Lebanon's mountains, its entity and the collective identity of its people. He did so in terms of two perspectives: the struggle of the emigrants in regaining their identity and maintaining their relationships and networks with the homeland and the Lebanese residents likewise becoming more aware of their identity.

Mr. Eid Chedrawi then thanked the efforts of those behind the publishing of the book, and pointed out the need to deal with common concerns between both Lebanese emigrants and residents at home so as to promote confidence and understanding. He called for the recognition of the rights of the Lebanese in the diaspora most notably the granting of citizenship and the right to out-of-country voting.



The audience mesmerized by the eloquence of Dr. G. Ghanem (Dec 2010)

On the podium, the eloquence of Dr. Ghaleb Ghanem, the heir of one of *Zajal* greatest poets "Alaandalib" Abdullah Ghanem, held all mesmerized. He praised the work of

Mr. Abi Daher for it constituted a national value. Poetry, he said, "in its remote object is a spirit that flows on the plains of papers, a jealousy protecting an entity, and a guard for the treasures of parents and grand-parents. The *Zajal*, has remained Lebanese in all its colors and features, in language and in identity."

The author Mr. Abi Daher, in a brief speech, referred to the reality and circumstances that surrounded the start of Lebanese migration and the expansion of the *Zajal* of the Lebanese emigrants. He thanked NDU and LERC for the confidence they had shown towards him especially by LERC's Director Ms. Guita Hourani, who displayed a clear vision about the anthology itself and is credited with the idea.



Mr. J. Abi Daher speaks at the podium (Dec 2010).



Mr. J. Abi Daher talking to guests (Dec 2010).

Ms. Hourani also recommended Mr. Abi Daher for carrying out the project. She realized his knowledge in researching and documenting Lebanese heritage as a whole and specifically the *Zajal*. Commenting on the occasion, Ms. Hourani said, "The history of Lebanese emigration can be researched in various human productions such as text, music, sculptures, photography, newspapers, films or documentaries, or cultural material which we collect at the Center in order to guide researchers and intellectuals and the Lebanese in general, whether emigrants or citizens, to realize the richness in diversity of sources and the need to study these mediums capture the fullness of this human experience."

This work can provide academics, researchers and lovers of *Zajal* and culture, a selection of the very best verses published in books or newspapers, by 127 poets, some who experienced migration themselves and others who experienced it by staying in the motherland.



Mr. Georges Mghames, Director of Press at NDU (middle) stands with Dr. G. Ghanam (second left), NDU's Press Attaché Mrs. T. Rouhana-Bou Hadir (first right) and other guests (Dec 2010).



LERC's Mr. E. Nabhan (left) and Mrs. L. Haddad stand with Mr. J. Abi Daher (Dec 2010).