

One Heart, One Home

Context: The successive paper depicts a letter from the perspective of an expatriate to her motherland, Lebanon. The expat poses a question which she struggles to reconcile. The question being “wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?”, thus translating to ‘where do you prefer more, here or there?’.

Key Implied Terms:

Hown = Lebanon

Honik = Australia

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Age: 21

To the Land of Milk and Honey,
To the Pearl of the Mediterranean,
To the Home of the Cedars,
To the Soul of the Levant,
To the Paris of the East,
To the Heart sized 10,452km²,
To the Crossroad of Civilisation,
To the Cradle of Culture,
To the Mosaic of History,
To the Land of the Phoenicians,
To my Dearest Lebanon,

I write to you today not with answers but with a question. A question on the cusp of every lip, the echo of every voice, and hidden behind every smile, “wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?”(where do you prefer more, here or there?).

I turn this perplexing proposition outward and ask you, how do I reconcile such a question? How do I reconcile such a preference? How do I reconcile between two separate lands, two separate cities, and two separate cultural identities?

Lebanon, you gave me a candle. Flickering from years of torment, yet unextinguished and kept alight. It holds a flame ignited by Phoenicians, transmitted through generations and spread through the rise and fall of empires, battles, explosions, wars, conflicts, disasters, famines, and crises. Yet, captured within the flame, is a people who refuse to submit to darkness, bow to despair, or be repressed by desolation. Its wax is moulded by heartbreak, melted by pain, and solidified through resilience. It burns for the mother still waiting at the port, the father who longs to bring bread for his children, and the children who grew up to the sounds of gunfire, bombs, and sirens. It sputters, it cries, and it burns. While others may have let the wick drown in itself, you kept it burning for your people, knowing that the fire lives on through the ache in their hearts.

However, Australia gave me a candle yet to be ignited. It provided a lighter, fuelled by the desire to ignite dreams. It gave me the snuffer, not to suppress the flame but to guide, control, and order it. It gave me the coaster, to push beyond boundaries, limits and constraints. It gave me the wax, to form my own mould. By it, I light a path of discovery, of wander, and of voyage. So, when your children asked me “wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?”, I will ask you how do I reconcile between the country that needs me and the country I need?

Lebanon, you gave me the seeds of a cedar tree. A cedar tree, cultivated by the golden sun of the Levant, enriched by the pioneering soils of the Phoenicians, and sustained by the elusive waters of the Mediterranean. Your trunk a reminder to stand firm, strong, and steadfast. Your bark, though worn and withered by seasons of hurt, hope, and hurdles, signifies a deeper testament. A testament that strength is not in how you inflict force, but in how you assume hurt and persist in the midst of such adversity. Yet, most notable, your pine needles. The pine needles which face skyward. A reminder to stand tall with your head lifted upwards, not because a Lebanese is prideful but because a Lebanese is proud. Proud of his identity, proud of his culture, proud of his people, and proud his country.

However, Australia gave me a watering can filled with an outpour of opportunity to grow, prosper, and flourish. The opportunity to sprout my own seeds, and to bear its fruits. She gave me the opportunity to find refuge in the shade of its eucalyptus trees. Her leaves carry my hope, drive, and passion. So, when your children asked me “wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?”, I will ask you how do I reconcile between what I am and what I could become?

Lebanon, you gave me a compass with a deep-rooted identity in a world losing its direction. A map that lays a path of cultural richness, whereby every intersection is an amalgamation of the spirited and synchronised dabke, the soulful and smooth oud, and the sensual and soothing voice of Fairuz. Your journey is not easy, not quick, and not paved with comfort. In you, I face crossroads entangled in both conflict and change. Yet even though your signs are obscure, you press ahead with the hope that God is protecting you. Through using the light ignited by your faith, you hold confidence that around the bend awaits a better tomorrow.

However, Australia gave me a plethora of roads stretching from the red-rock outback to the royal blue coast. A path marked by “golden soil and wealth for toil”. Though I carry no navigator, I am never lost, but rather carving my own routes marked by the figments of my imagination. Its lanes keep me disciplined, while its highways keep me driven. So, when your children asked me “wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?”, I will ask you how do I reconcile electing between my ethnicity and my nationality?

Lebanon, you offered me to board a boat of fragmented wood. Wood composed of splinters, fissures, and imperfections. Your anchor shackled you to a seabed of sorrow, which kept you from drifting. Your deck continues to creak with the sounds of broken hearts, unanswered prayers, unheard voices, cries of pain, and the footsteps of those who fled. Your waters were never peaceful, serene, or composed. Your tides pulled many in conflicting directions. Your cabin holds the visions of the young who hope in a better tomorrow and the anguish of the old who mourn what was yesterday. Yet, despite your broken vessel, your unconventional navigations, and your ragged sails, you press forward. Through this vessel, lessons surface upon every breaking wave. Lessons of resilience amidst adversity, hope in the face of despair, strength when weakness knocks, and most importantly faith when all seems

impossible, unbearable or insufferable. Whilst your sails weren't equipped for tangible routings, they carried treasures not limited by the senses of vision, scent, touch, or sound.

However, Australia gave me a life jacket and allowed me to set sail on waters beyond the horizon. She carried many onto her shore, those from afar and those from near. Her sails, filled with prosperity, promises, and pleasures. So, when your children asked me "wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?", I will ask you how do I reconcile between a land that gave me peace and a land that gave me purpose?

Lebanon, you offered me a book carved by Phoenicians, upon sand and stone in proto-Canaanite script. A book filled with stories of a profound history, a proud identity, and an immersive culture. A narrative with such depth, that it stretches deeper than the roots of our cedar trees. Every page, etched with the wisdom of our ancestors. The ink, as dark as our troubling experiences. Each chapter, comprising a dynamic tale of war and peace, of songs and screams, of strength and vulnerability. A prologue dated back older than time itself, and an ending never to be inscribed. Your spine, stronger than steel and your margins, not quite as straight and neat. Though your story is flooded by an inundation of plot twists, we await the climax, knowing that you will rise, like a phoenix; you will recover, like Beirut; and you will recapture your soul, like the Mediterranean waves embrace Beirut's shore.

However, Australia gave me a book, filled with blank pages. She liberally handed me a pen, inviting me to write my own story. There was no prologue to define me, or epilogue to confine me. There was no afterword to restrict me, or conclusion to limit me. Just unmarked sheets where I could be both the subject and the author. She gave me the opportunity to elect the size, the font, and the spacing, without apprehension. As I compose this plot, she allows me to write outside the lines and think beyond the mind. So, when your children asked me "wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?", I will ask you how do I reconcile between a past to pride myself upon and a future with the hope to thrive upon?

Lebanon, you offered me a backpack stitched with fabrics of history. A backpack composed of a Phoenician thread, an Ottoman needle and a French knot. One strap padded with memories encapsulating triumph, and the other strap, experiences embracing tragedy. The zipper jams because she refuses to let go of her people's pain, she refuses to let go of her people's ache, she refuses to let go of her people's torment and she refuses to let go of her people's suffering. Equally so, the zipper jams because she refuses to let go of her people's hope, she refuses to let go of her people's courage, she refuses to let go of her people's faith, and she refuses to let go of her people's love.

However, Australia gave me a backpack, with zippers wide open, inviting me to pack my belongings. With each strap I carry hope, dreams, opportunity, and chance. So, when your children asked me "wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?", I will ask you how do I reconcile between a land that spoke and a land that listened?

As I come to conclude my writing to you, maybe, just maybe, the answer is not in electing between the two but appreciating that both countries are interwoven like tapestry into the fabric of my identity. Whilst my identity is contingent on two divergent worlds, my roots remained grounded on Tannourine soil, an overarching testament to the esteem I have for you. My heart is for you, my heart sinks for you, my heart stops beating for you, my heart skips beats for you, yet my heart also keeps beating for you.

Yet, with that said, I've come to appreciate your imperfections, not as flaws, but as marks of resilience. I've learned that the wisest minds are often those who have been challenged, the clearest vision belongs to eyes that have seen it all, the strongest hands are those that have carried the weight of the world and the keenest ears are tuned by the vibrations of cries.

I come to appreciate that my country and people are one of my most prized possessions. So, even though I call Australia home, my heart remains approximately 14,200 kilometres away, proving that the saying 'home is where the heart is' may not be true. So, when you ask me "wayn bet fadli aktar, hown ow honik?", I will ask you how I reconcile between my home and my heart.

Yours Sincerely,
Celine Marie Harb