

The Playboy of Metn loses his Sex Appeal Amin Gemayel: The Crushing End of a Career in Politics

by Ashmole* | CDL August 6, 2007

Factoid: Amin Gemayel was President of Lebanon from 1982 to 1988. He is the son of Pierre Gemayel, founder of the Kataeb Party. Gemayel political career began officially in 1969 when he was elected, in a by-election, to succeed his deceased uncle Maurice Gemayel, as a member of the National Assembly (Lebanese Council of Deputies); he was reelected in 1972. On September 21, 1982, he was elected President of the Republic of Lebanon by the National Assembly to succeed his brother Bachir Gemayel who had been elected the previous month but had been assassinated before taking office. Gemayel's Presidency was marked by inefficiency, weakness, wars and corruption; it ended in total chaos in 1988, after which Gemayel went into exile. In 2000, he brokered an agreement with current President Emile Lahoud and the Syrian authorities controlling the country to allow him to return to Lebanon and lay low. In 2005, he tried to reclaim his dad's seat at the helm of the Kataeb Party. After a bitter fight with the rival factions of the party and through a surreptitious arrangement with Karim Pakradouni, the current president of the Party, Amin Gemayel was named "Higher President of the Kataeb Party". On August 5, 2007, the "Higher President" ran for elections in the Metn district to fill a seat vacated by his slain son Pierre (assassinated in 2006); he lost to a physician of the Free Patriotic Movement, Dr. Camille Khoury, a relative unknown in national politics.

Down Memory Lane

Those who grew up in Metn in the seventies through the mid-eighties remember - with fondness - the nickname of the elder son of Pierre Gemayel: "The Playboy of Metn." A title that young Amin, good looking and always preoccupied with his hair, earned as a philanderer who could not keep his zipper closed; a title he would carry with him into the Presidency Palace in Baabda as allegations of adultery between President Gemayel and the wife of a prominent business partner were whispered throughout the country.

The first time I met Amin Gemayel in person was in the late seventies; he was then president of the Metn Sector in the Kataeb Party. My dad had been invited to a town meeting with him and he took me along. I was then a young impressionable boy in my early teens, very excited at the prospects of a close encounter with Sheikh Amin. In fact, I sat next to my dad in the front row and at the end of Gemayel's speech, when he came to shake my dad's hand, I made sure I introduced my self and shook his hand. For me, at the time, he was a hero of the "Lebanese Resistance" (in reality Christian Resistance) against the Lebanese Muslim, the Palestinian, the Syrian, the Libyan, and most of the Arab and Islamic world who wanted collectively to uproot the Christians from Lebanon, turn it into an Islamic state and give it to the Palestinians. Abu-Ammar, Saeb Salam and Kamal/Walid Jumblat said little to appease those fears and did a lot to inflame them. Deep down, however, I always admired Bashir - Amin's younger brother and the founder and last leader of the "Lebanese Forces" - but Amin was the only available choice that evening. Growing in the Christian ghetto in the 1970s-80s, the choices of national leaders were dictated mainly by 2 radio stations: "Voice of Lebanon" and "Radio Free Lebanon" one for Pierre/Amin and one for Bashir. That was before I discovered "Voice of Arab Lebanon" and Sheikh Mouhammad Ali El-Jouzo's Fridays Sermons. Later, after Amin and Samir Geagea lost the "War of the Mountain" to Walid Jumblat and the Syrians and the so-called National Forces, I tuned to the "Voice of the Mountain" and there was Ghazi El-Aridi.

Ironically, today, Amin, Samir, Walid, Ghazi and others have reinvented themselves and joined in the same group as if nothing has happened. They have reached a power-sharing agreement that guarantees their clans a share of the pie and we the people were left without homes, without remuneration, without jobs, without hopes and without a country.

March 14, 2005: The Death of a Popular Uprising and the Birth of an Unpopular Coalition

Most of those involved in the Lebanese affairs remember vividly the popular uprising of March 14, 2005. More than 1 Million Lebanese took to the streets of the capital Beirut to protest the Syrian occupation of the country, to demand an investigation into the assassination of Rafik Hariri and as a show of mass power in face of the Hezbollah-led March 8 demonstration. At the time, the Sunni leader Saad Hariri had not been invented yet, the Christian leader Michel Aoun was still in exile and the Shiites did not show up.

The Druze clan was led into the demonstration by its leader Walid Jumblat, and the Sunni clan by Bahia Hariri and the Future Movement. The Christians took to the streets that day on their own as individuals or in small self-organizing groups, whose true leadership lied within but for some odd reason many among them believed it to be somewhere else (in exile or in prison). Of course Amin did not show up that day, he was busy arguing with Karim Pakradouni over the seat of his father Pierre Gemayel. But there was Walid Jumblat, Gebran Tueini and Bahia Hariri in addition to a handful of "second row" speakers.

The echo of the March 14 uprising, "The Cedar Revolution" as it came to be known, resounded throughout the world and sent its shockwaves into the Arab World with fears of similar uprisings sprouting here and there and demanding freedom and democracy. A decision was made – somewhere in the coulisses of a royal palace in the Arab Desert - that the popular uprising in Lebanon must be contained lest it spreads beyond the border. The establishment was rushed in to contain it and take it out the hands of the people:

Saad Hariri was invented and endowed with his father's wealth!

Amin Gemayel was resurrected and bestowed his father's seat!

Samir Geagea was released and pardoned of his sins!

Walid Jumblat was tamed and promoted to Orchestra conductor!

The "March 14 Coalition" was born... It replaced the Cedar Revolution and became "*L' Ordre du Jour*".

I still cannot figure out Michel Aoun's role; did he just refuse to play the dirty game of the establishment - once again - or does every game need a "Joker" to bypass the rules? Only history will tell.

A number of assassinations followed, most prominent among those was the assassination of Gebran Tueini, editor-in-chief of Annahar Lebanese Daily Newspaper – may his soul and the soul of Annahar and that of the Freedom of Speech in Lebanon rest all in peace.

Another assassination claimed the life of Pierre Gemayel, Amin's eldest son, a young and vibrant man who followed in the footsteps of his dad. Pierre was elected to the Maronite parliamentary seat in Metn in 2000, under Syrian occupation, and again in 2005 after Aoun's Block of Reform and Change spared a seat for him. Earlier in 2007, another assassination would claim the life of MP Walid Eido and his son.

In addition to the assassination of talented individuals many of whom held the promise of leadership, there was a surge in the number and activities of leader-wannabe(s), gifted only with a severe constipation of the mind and an profuse diarrhea of the mouth; they all became members or leaders of the "March 14 Coalition". To name a few for example, in random order of irrelevance: Michel Moawwad, Dori Chamoun, Roger Eddeh, Fares Seayd, Wael Abu Faour, Akram Shehayyeb, and many others. You see them almost daily spewing their empty rhetoric through the establishment's news outlets be it the Future TV, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC), Annahar Newspaper and other establishment media outlets. They are mostly referred to as "the second or third row" politicians. Meaning they have no opinion of their own and even if they had one, it makes no difference whether they express it or keep it to themselves. They follow the leader of their clan or bark at his door praying for a bone - in Lebanese political terms of course (in Lebanon, "in politics" you can lose an election and still claim victory).

The People versus the Establishment

This so-called "March 14 Coalition", after hijacking the popular uprising of March 14, 2005, deluded itself in its popularity and its representative capacity and gradually alienated the popular base. The main reason for the alienation was lack of trust in the neo-reformers: most of the "March 14 Coalition" today consists of warlords, war criminals, pseudo-intellectuals, feudal lords, deep pockets, corrupt businessmen and empty drums that beat without rhythm for any drummer. Even the young ones among them, like Michel Moawwad, have bypassed the requirements of modern politics and strategic leadership, and instead of seeking higher education at prominent institutions of public policy to become better public servants, they simply play the role assigned to them by their master, whoever that may be.

On the other hand, 2 main political groups emerged: One of the disintegration of the Cedar Revolution and led by Michel Aoun (Free Patriotic Movement); and the other of the disintegration of the March 8 coalition and led by Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah).

Accusations and labels aside, these two groups have one thing in common: they both represent populist and popular, anti-establishment movements who were born in the trenches of popular agony and claim to have survived the rough waters and shifting sands of Lebanese politics. They may be guided by different ideologies and philosophies (one secular and the other religious) but they have met on a set of principles that join their bases together. Today they give us a glimpse of the future if Lebanon is to survive as a democracy: they represent the nucleus of a national populist party, which joins the faithful, the intellectual, the poor and the progressive. This populist party stands in stark opposition to an establishment party - made largely of the March 14 Coalition - and consists mainly of feudal lords, heirs to wealth and family names, wealthy ignorami (plural of ignoramus), leader wannabes and social leeches who cling to the establishment hoping to exploit the system and reap the benefits.

Two major party coalitions: "a progressive populist party versus a conservative elitist party."

The Elections of August 5, 2007

These elections reflected 2 states of mind on the Lebanese scene today:

In Beirut, although the Hariri candidate won by a margin typical of the totalitarian regimes in the Arab World (>82%; Assad of Syria won by ~ 93%), the participation rate in the Beirut by-election was less than 18%; indicating that Hariri and the "March 14 Coalition" scored less than 15% of the vote. This miserable turn-out in a time of high political tension reflects a depressed mood of the Sunni voter in Beirut who found himself at a loss of serious choices for MPs: either go with Itani (Hariri's candidate) or stay at home. A majority preferred to stay at home.

In Metn, the battle was far more interesting. The two evolving superpowers in Lebanese politics (Conservative Elitist versus Progressive Populist) came clashing face to face at the polling booths: the establishment and the March 14 Coalition represented by Amin Gemayel on one hand, and the progressive populist movement represented by the Free Patriotic Movement and his allies (Michel Murr, Tachnag, and Hezbollah) on the other. This election was poised to be the best in the modern history of Lebanon, were it not for instances of abuse of the media by the establishment's candidate. Gemayel and allies filled the news media outlets (written, spoken and seen) uncontrollably with speeches, rumors, misinformation and innuendos by their supporters, old and new (*I had to stop watching LBC and reading Annahar and L'Orient Le Jour for a while to preserve my sanity; I never considered the Future media outlets to be serious so I had no problem with those*); they snatched Bkerki's support (willingly or reluctantly) on the basis of tradition and respect for the dead; they capitalized on the sympathy of the Metn voter with their family for the assassination of Pierre. Many of their practices broke the electoral law but the establishment turned a blind eye. They rallied every political hopeful whom Aoun did not choose on his ticket in 2005 and brought them to Metn in the fiercest anti-Aoun campaign I have seen since the attack by Geagea Forces on the Lebanese Army in 1990. They literally used every trick in the book of election history in Lebanon.

...They lost! The "March 14 Coalition" lost! Amin Gemayel lost!

For the first time in his political career, Amin Gemayel could not inherit a political seat left vacant by a deceased member of the family (he had inherited in the past his uncle Maurice, his brother Bashir, his father Pierre and was hoping to inherit his son Pierre).

Amin Gemayel was defeated!

Instead of graciously accepting defeat, bowing to the will of the majority and congratulating the winner, Amin was furious; he lost his cool and he looked for a scapegoat to blame for his unpopularity in a district where people, like me, grew up on the legends and heroism of Pierre Gemayel (senior), his family and his party. Amin's campaign with all the support of the "March 14 Coalition" unraveled and Amin revealed his true self in a moment of truth.

When all inhibitions are off and real emotions surface, a man's true identity is revealed.

After his loss, Amin Gemayel revealed his true identity. He showed himself to be a hypocrite bigot. He launched a prejudiced ethnic attack on a small minority group of Armenian Christians who voted for Camille Houry, Aoun's candidate.

But Amin was not alone in his prejudice and racially and ethnically charged attacks; his ally Gabriel Murr launched a similar attack against the Armenian Christian voters. When I heard Gabriel Murr and Amin Gemayel on TV attacking the Armenian Christian minority, I was reminded of Hitler and the Nazis blaming the Jews for the lot in Germany in 1930s. But why go so far and compare these dwarfs to Hitler? Their close ally, Walid Jumblat (self-proclaimed leader of the democratic coalition), had made a declaration of civil war in 2005 following early results of the Baabda-Aley district elections and before the Shiite/Hezbollah vote from the Southern Suburb of Beirut carried him to victory. Then, Jumblat considered the vote by the Christians of Baabda-Aley against him and his possible loss of 7 parliamentary seats as a prelude to a civil war. He made the threat openly on LBC. Walid Jumblat, Amin Gemayel, and Gabriel Murr are but the icing on the bigoted core of the "March 14 Coalition". They hate everything and everyone that does not serve their personal and family interests.

For the first time in his life, Amin Gemayel stood naked in front of the voters, after the by-election results, and he looked ugly; the Playboy of the Metn has lost his sex appeal.

* **Ashmole**: traveler, antiquary, politician, officer of arms, student of astrology, alchemy and para-psychology; collector of curiosities and artifacts.