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## TV series strives to topple sectarian, ethnic animosity

*Show stresses political divisions do not reflect reality*

By Josie Ensor

Daily Star staff

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

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learn from the making of the show?

"I used to have a complex with Shiites," says Sally, who comes from a Druze family, thinking back just a few months, "[but] the program made me feel we are all people and we need to communicate with one another and talk to others because they are human beings just like us.

"People of different parties like Hizbullah and those with [Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid ]Jumblatt will directly fight without looking at logic so this is a problem," she says. "We can tell them we are all the same despite our

BEIRUT: It was a fascinating social experiment as much as it was light afternoon television viewing. The acclaimed 13-part series "Kilna Bil Hayy," ("All of us in the neighborhood") that began in May, which, according to the program's website, featured six children from Armenian, Christian, Druze, Palestinian, Shiite and Sunni backgrounds who lived in the same apartment building, aimed at breaking down sectarian divides as part of a unique televised anthropological study.

With the last episode aired on Lebanon's LBC channel last weekend and the children having had a chance to reflect, what did they

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religions since we all worship God and that is all that matters.”

Sally’s family were involved in a row in the very first episode shown earlier this year when the mother accused her Palestinian neighbor who cleans her house of stealing her gold necklace. As it turned out Sally had borrowed the necklace from her mother without asking permission, and the incident was swiftly resolved when Sally explained what had happened, diffusing the situation and helping rebuild the two women’s relationship.

“We need to talk to adults and make them understand,” Sally says, reflecting on the tumultuous times she had during filming, “this is all we can do.”

The creators of the series, Search for Common Ground, an international conflict transformation NGO, wanted to make the program to show that Lebanese people have far more productive and nuanced relationships with each other than people realize. “Far too long the squabbles of petty politicians and pundits have been perceived as emblematic of the sectarian divisions within Lebanese society,” the organization says.

But they stress that this dialogue, or lack thereof, does not represent the real interaction within Lebanon.

Nader Noueiri, another one of the young actors, whose real name and accent were used in the show to authentically represent her community, believes the program achieved what the creators set out to do.

She says she experienced a true mix of children from other religious backgrounds for the first time, giving her a chance to really listen.

“[My participation in the show] changed me and changed my political attitudes.”

Nader says that before it was difficult to even consider living side-by-side peacefully with people from different religions- “It was hard because of our parents’ and political leaders’ hatred: the inability of our parents to forget the memory of the war, and not being able to open a new page.”

When asked in an interview after the show what she would put on a wish list now to give to political leaders, Nader said: “I just wish to put all political leaders on one airplane and take them away. I wish they would leave Lebanon and search for another country to destroy. I wish they leave us and the future youth to build Lebanon, we do not want war any more.”

Critics of the program agree the initiative has proved to be very promising for future peace in the country. Cathie Glover, program officer of Lebanese group for human development Safadi Foundation, says: “These children who have grown up post-Taif recognize the tragedy of war and each of them made statements about their desires for peace in the country. If that isn’t the definition of hope, I don’t know what is.”

However, Glover recognizes a common response among the show’s children was to blame political leaders for the conflict. “While I find this recognition amazing and hopeful,” Glover says, “I can’t help but wonder if this view will prevent the children from future participation in the democratic process.

“Children should be taught to understand that a true democratic system needs their participation and ignoring a country’s political system because it has failed will not make the problem go away.”