L’Echo du Cèdre, est un journal par les jeunes et pour les jeunes.

Le journal est destiné aux libanais qui rêvent d’un Liban meilleur, où qu’ils soient dans le monde.

C’est un mensuel de langue française d’information économique, sociale et culturelle, fondé en novembre 2012 par deux étudiants franco-libanais nouvellement installés en France.

Il a pour objectif de rassembler les jeunes libanais de France et de la diaspora.

L’Echo du Cèdre cherche à encourager ces derniers à partager leur vision du monde et à faire découvrir à tous ceux qui l’ignorent la grandeur culturelle et intellectuelle de leur pays d’origine.

L’Echo du Cèdre is a monthly electronic newspaper in French and English, featuring analytical economic, social, cultural, and political information from Lebanon.

It was founded in November 2012, by two Lebanese students who had moved to Paris to pursue their studies.

L’Echo du Cèdre targets those students living overseas who are proud of their ancestry and who are willing to contribute time and effort in building a new and modern state.

Its main objective is to bring together the NextGen Lebanese diaspora and provide them with an interactive platform where they can share their vision and exchange their views freely.
The “Lebanisation” of Lebanon: myth or reality?

Did Lebanon give up on its Arab Spring?

In 2004, the Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir, a co-founder of the Democratic Left Movement, and a leading figure of the "Cedar Revolution", was the first to call on the Arabs to become masters of their own fate and do away with the myth of Arab exceptionalism. He put forward the notion that democracy and secularism are compatible with Arab values and Arab culture.

Few months later, on 2nd June 2005, Samir Kassir was silenced forever at the age of forty-five. At the time, the People of Lebanon had vowed to keep his spirit alive and to pursue the battle for freedom and independence.

Unfortunately, and for reasons we do not comprehend, the ball was dropped, and the momentum was lost.

Nine years have passed, and we still have nothing to show for it.

At a time where freedom of thought and freedom of expression are being challenged all over the globe, our fragile democracy is once again put to the test.

Once the only democracy in the Arab world, Lebanon seems to be sitting on the fringes while the “Arab Spring” train passes through the region.

Has the "Lebanisation" of Lebanon as advocated by Samir Kassir become a myth?

On 20th March 2011, over 20,000 people marched throughout the streets of Beirut calling for a radical change to the prevailing sectarian system based on religion and one’s affiliation to a given faith.

In Lebanon, you do not choose your religious faith or affiliation. You are born into it, like you are born Caucasian, or black-skinned, with blue eyes, or brown ones.

A few years ago, all reference to religious affiliation was removed from identity cards. Nevertheless, each citizen remains classified under his/her religious community.

For many such as the Lebanese political analyst G. Corm, “putting an end to sectarianism, that is to say, religious communities, is certainly a challenge, but it is a challenge worth accepting”.

For others, however, social harmony is based on a delicate and miraculous equation among the various religious communities in Lebanon. For them, “confessionalism” is seen as a "safeguard" against authoritarianism and against the risk of hegemony of a religious group over another.

For the advocates of secularization, the introduction of a system based on meritocracy, to replace the current system based on religious affiliation, will reinforce the Lebanese fabric and will propel the country into the twenty first Century. For this to succeed, one would need to start at the source; at school. One needs to change the mindset of an entire population, and engage in what we would call, the “secularization of the minds”.

But in today's context, would the "secularization of minds" be attainable, without disrupting the fragile equilibrium so many talk about, and as a result the cultural and spiritual plurality of the Lebanese identity?

One of the main challenges facing Lebanon is to go beyond the clichés and to overcome religious communitarianism; an artificial divide, inherited from the Ottomans and the French to serve their own interests.
Indeed, it is about time that the people of Lebanon take charge of their own fate, and reinvent themselves, if they really want to build a democratic and independent country.

Lebanon’s religiously based political construct has its roots in two things:

First it’s a historical construction. Identity-order political divisions in Lebanon have always had a sectarian basis. Due to a lack of consensus on what brings the Lebanese people together a confessional system was established to allow and equal allocation of power to the various communities.

The second is anthropological: its basic assumption is that the religious community exclusively forges the identity and behavior of its members. This is the perception that most Lebanese have on their national identity, due to a partial and reductive perception of their own history.

We believe that the transmission of a common history and identity in Lebanon must begin with the "deconstruction" of current perceptions.

Lebanon is not an artificial creation of French imperialism nor the refuge of Eastern Christians persecuted by Islam, let alone the country of a happy fantasy: Phoenicia.

Lebanon has been in existence for thousands of years. It has its place in the history of mankind, and is there to last.

Many lament that to date, there is no common text book that narrates Lebanon’s history.

I respectfully submit that contrary to popular belief, numerous authors have written extensively on the history of Lebanon.

Recently, I came across the masterful research conducted by Boutros Dib, former Ambassador to Lebanon in France, and Rector of the Lebanese University, and titled: History of Lebanon: From the origins to the twentieth century, and published in 2006.

This collective work brings together the contributions of ten historians and geographers reflecting on the diversity of the Lebanese complex identity. Boutros Dib has written most of it. To date, this book seems to one of the few that comprises a complete history of Lebanon written by Lebanese historians (among the ten authors, only one is a foreigner: Professor J. Richard who assumed the drafting of the chapter on crusades). The book ends with the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975.

The History of Lebanon was for Boutros Dib, unanimously recognized for his intellectual integrity and human qualities, the work of a lifetime. I would like to thank his children Maha and Yousef for sharing their father’s writings with us.

Boutros Dib’s book carries with it several lessons. It begins with a geographical overview.

For the historian, the geography of Lebanon influences its history, namely its openness to the rest of the world, and its tradition as a land of asylum.

Lebanon is a country blessed with high mountains plunging to the sea. It cultivates a tradition of openness that starts off with the Phoenician history, leading to the Frankish kingdoms and to Fakhreddin II, who entered into a political alliance with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and finally the creation in 1584 of the Maronite College in Rome.
It also cultivates a tradition of tolerance. Over the ages, it has welcomed ethnic minorities looking for a refuge. This is most evident with the presence of the most visible minorities like the Maronites and the Druze who found refuge in the mountains, the Sunnis in the coastal city of Beirut and various ports such as Tripoli and Saida, the Shites in the Beqaa valley and the southern parts of Lebanon. Even in modern times, Lebanon extended its hospitality to the Armenians who fled the massacres of 1915, the Palestinians expelled from Jordan in the wake of the Black September in 1970, and the Syrians expelled from their homes in 2013-14.

It is unfortunate that the history of Lebanon has been tainted by the events of the past forty years. Hence, the need to deconstruct the preconceptions that took roots in people’s minds and have distorted the reality about Lebanon and its message.

For this to happen, we must revive the spirit of the Cedar Revolution and work relentlessly to restore Trust among the people of Lebanon, and instill a sense of history and of belonging.

To this effect, I propose the formation of a neutral platform, a “think tank”, where ideas and concerns may be exchanged in an open, civilized and transparent manner, away from politics and communitarianism.

The Lebanisation of Lebanon is a reality, but it can only be achieved if all the people of Lebanon come together and take their fate in their own hands.

Erik. W Chiniara
Charte de la Laïcité de la République libanaise

Réinventer le modèle institutionnel libanais

Préambule

L’objectif d’une Charte de la laïcité de la République libanaise est de donner à l’Etat de Droit toute sa place et à introduire des règles qui régissent le vivre ensemble dans un espace public commun. À nous de nous les approprier et de les respecter au péril de notre vie.

Article 1: La République libanaise est un État démocratique et laïque

a- Un système institutionnel et juridique laïque consiste en:

- La stricte séparation de la sphère religieuse (privée) et de la sphère politique et civile (publique)
- La séparation de la religion des questions de statut personnel
- L’interdiction de l'intrusion des instances religieuses dans le domaine des affaires publiques

b- La laïcité n’est pas une entrave à la liberté, mais plutôt la condition de sa réalisation. Elle ne serait dirigée ni contre les individus ni contre leur conscience. Bien au contraire, elle cherche à garantir l’égalité de traitement entre et envers tous les citoyens, sans discrimination aucune. Refusant toutes les intolerances et toutes les exclusions, elle serait le fondement du Respect mutuel et de la Fraternité.

Article 2: La République libanaise respecte toutes les croyances mais ne se reconnaît en aucune d’entre elles.

Article 3: Chacun est libre de croire ou de ne pas croire et d’exprimer ses opinions dans le respect de celles d’autrui et dans les limites de l’ordre public.

Article 4: L’État est neutre à l’égard des convictions religieuses et spirituelles.

Article 5: La République laïque organise la séparation des religions et de l’État.

Article 6: La laïcité offre aux citoyens les conditions nécessaires pour exercer leur libre arbitre et faire l’apprentissage de la citoyenneté. Elle les protège de tout prosélytisme et de toute pression.

Article 7: Les fonctionnaires de l’espace public ont un devoir de réserve. Ils ne doivent pas manifester leurs convictions religieuses lors de l’exercice de leur fonction.

Article 8: Nul ne peut se prévaloir de son appartenance religieuse pour refuser de se plier aux règles applicables dans la République.

Article 9: Le port de signes ou tenues dans l’espace public par lesquels les citoyens manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est contraire au principe de laïcité.

Article 10: La laïcité doit être comprise comme un instrument qui permet de transformer la liberté de conscience en liberté publique et qui garantit l’égalité de tous les citoyens devant la Loi.

Texte proposé par l’équipe éditoriale de l’Echo du Cèdre
The Relics of the Past: A Tribute

“And ever has it been known that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.” - Gibran Khalil Gibran

The loss of a loved one is often a testament to one’s courage, patience and strength. It is a moment where all the intricacies of your life pale into the background... all your deadlines become a blur of numbers, all your priorities turn into obsolete tasks. On March 6th, 2015, I lost someone very dear to me. However, I did not lose her in vain, because I know she lives on after death in her legacy, in those of us that loved her.

Raheel Jabbour was a woman of many historiographies. Ironically, I never knew this about her until I saw her at her end: to me, I got to know her from the very beginning. I got to know her as a person who was more than just my grandmother, but a courageous and loving human being. Upon hearing of her sickness, I rushed to Lebanon to be with her. Though she could not speak, I felt that our bond became stronger than ever. When our relatives and friends would come to visit her, they would reminisce about their experiences with her and I began to see her through a different light. I began to see her from the perspectives of these people: as the courageous friend, as the loving aunt, as the caregiver of so many. I had collected a set of historiographies about this woman and I got to know her through the light of these stories. In my recollections, she is the woman that I went to the beach with every summer, she is the woman that I would play cards with on her couch, and she is the woman that told me entertaining stories about her mischievous siblings. I was her younger companion, her only granddaughter, and I will always cherish my historiography of Raheel.

I often feel embittered by the fact that I got to know so much of my grandmother in her final days. Unfortunately, this is the price we pay for being the Diaspora youth of Lebanon. The circumstances of our life have caused us to live far away from our grandparents. These circumstances have caused us to clutch on to our memories with them as one of the only means of knowing who they were, or who they continue to be for those of them that are alive. Grandparents are genuinely artifacts of the past, they are a crux of our identities and they leave behind a legacy for us to carry forward as our generation replaces theirs.

Political instability incurs overwhelming costs upon our nation: death, unemployment, poverty, and inequality. All these aspects of political instability can be quantified in numbers. However, your lifetime spent apart from your family is something you cannot quantify. It is the sad realisation that we have to live far away to benefit from infrastructures that our home country cannot provide. At the end of the day, this is the most painful cost. I think this pain is something that a lot of youth outside of Lebanon can relate to.

I have no creative solution at this point in time that could remedy such circumstances. However, when we think of Lebanon, we should remember that politics can affect our lives more critically and fundamentally than we want to believe. Living away from Lebanon can often deceive us into thinking that we have escaped from the political instability it harbors, but we haven't escaped anything. The loved ones that we left behind remain there, and so a part of us will always be inextricably tied to this small country that sits on the Mediterranean Sea.

Nour Chehabeddine

For My Grandparents Izat, Amira, Saeed, and Raheel
In Loving Memory,
Raheel Jabbour
7 October, 1935 - 6 March, 2015
The Importance of Neutrality in Lebanese Foreign Relations

Any careful reading of Lebanese history makes it clear that the country has often served as a battleground for foreign states and conflicting interests; a common Lebanese response to decades of foreign meddling is that countries like Israel and Syria and groups like the PLO were simply jealous of Lebanon’s natural and cultural beauty.

Yet all joking aside, Lebanon’s long tradition of governmental instability and weak rule of law has fostered a hospitable environment in which its larger, more powerful neighbors can advance their strategic interests. This was the case in the 1980s during the Israeli-PLO conflict and it is still the case today, although the main players are now Saudi Arabia and Iran. As these nations battle for regional supremacy amidst a Middle East rapidly devolving into extreme sectarianism, whatever exists of the Lebanese government must make sure that it walks a thin line down the middle.

Of course, this is quite difficult to manage when the two most important factions within Lebanese politics are accused of being puppets for Iran and Saudi Arabia. A common complaint among Lebanon’s citizens is that there are no parties that represent the country as a whole – there are factions for Shi’ites, Sunnis, Christians, and Druze, but none for Lebanon. While groups like Hezbollah, the Future Movement, or the Lebanese Forces will never be able to rid themselves of their inherent sectarian nature, they now possess the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the integrity of an independent Lebanese state whose political and security situation will not be compromised whenever a dispute arises between regional neighbors. By working together, these parties have the ability to make it clear that Lebanon will not be dragged into choosing sides in this battle.

This will not happen, and it is the fault of the Lebanese people. Since the end of the Civil War, Lebanon’s citizens have categorically failed in fostering a spirit of reconciliation within the country. Yes, the nation has suffered immensely due to those aforementioned foreign interests over which the average Lebanese had no control. However, this does not excuse the Lebanese from clinging to their religion as the primary base for self-identification. Neither does it excuse them from harboring deep mistrust of different sects, as well as generally keeping to their “own kind” when choosing where to settle or who to marry.

Of course, the basis for this separation goes back decades, even centuries. Maronites in Lebanon still feel a very real sense of pain and anger stemming from the abuses their ancestors suffered under Ottoman rule. Shi’ites – traditionally the poorest and least well educated of Lebanon’s major sects – were only able to gain political and economic clout due to the maneuvers of Shi’ite parties like Amal and Hezbollah. In the face of such a long history of division and sectarian isolation, it is no wonder that most Lebanese continue to embrace societal divisions, even if this is not a conscious intent on their part.

Yet no matter how hard it may be to move past these ancient divides, it is necessary in order to preserve some sense of national unity and peace. Syria and Iraq are currently being ripped apart by Saudi and Iranian meddling. This is because the leaders of these two nations do not care what happens to the average citizen as long as their respective influences grow. Lebanon cannot go down this road. For the vast majority of its citizens, Lebanon is the gem of the Middle East. In order for that gem to gleam brilliantly, the Lebanese must learn to embrace their similarities and not their differences. Sadly, it appears that this lesson will not be learned for a long time to come.

Claude Khalife
Youth of Lebanon, rise and move forward!

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