



L'ÉCHO DU CÈDRE

Jeunesse du Liban, lève toi et marche !

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.

Roumieh: Lebanon's Nightmare

Has there ever been a country that revels in paradox as much as Lebanon? The constant dichotomies that have defined Lebanon since independence are represented in even the smallest microcosms of Lebanese society – Roumieh Prison being a chief example. On April 17th, Islamist prisoners housed in Roumieh's Cellblock D rioted, briefly seizing between 14 and 20 guards before the uprising could be squelched.

In the wake of these riots, two startlingly different narratives emerged within the Lebanese media as well as among relatives of the Islamist prisoners, who took to the streets of Tripoli days later calling for the resignation of Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk, a member of the Future bloc. While prisoners and their family members have complained about regular abuse within Roumieh's walls, sources within the prison have told quite a different story to media outlets[1]. This story presents Roumieh as a building de facto controlled by a minority of hardline Islamist prisoners, who have managed to transform their area of the prison into a sort of command center for extremists located in areas such as Akkar and the Bekaa.

Until recently this "Islamist HQ" was located in Cellblock B, a wing notorious for hosting some of the Middle East's most dangerous fundamentalists. The restiveness of Cellblock B's prisoners has long served as a barometer for Lebanon's political situation – in recent years, members of Fatah al-Islam (the hardline Sunni group which flourished in Nahr al-Bared before the camp's assault by the Lebanese Army) have given Lebanese authorities almost as many problems within the prison as outside its walls. In 2012, three of the groups members escaped Roumieh altogether, joining another five who managed to escape in August of 2011[2]. It is chilling to think of the extremist contacts these men made within Roumieh before their flights from captivity; the plethora of hardline groups represented in Cellblock B provides a perfect petri dish for radical ideologies to grow and develop, and relations to form between militant groups scattered throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Yet escape is not a necessity for inmates who wish to take part in extremist operations outside of the prison. Although inmates and relatives alike have complained about a lack of access to cell phones and computers, sources within the prison have painted a picture of the ubiquity of these devices, from which militants can maintain contacts outside the camp and even direct attacks. These privileges extend past possession of contraband; some reports have gone as far to allege that Cellblock B could at one point boast water purification facilities, inmate-owned coffee shops, and machinery used to manufacture swords, knives, and daggers[3]. Fatah al-Islam members used these weapons to forcibly control the larger prison population, forcing Shi'ite and Christian inmates to pay levies to keep them safe from harm and attempting to brutally silence opposition even among other Islamists.

In January, security forces stormed Cellblock B. They were reacting to twin suicide bombings against Alawites in Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli – bombings believed to have been coordinated by extremists within the prison. The assault on Cellblock B yielded plans that called for further terrorist attacks in Lebanon. It also displaced around 900 Islamists to Cellblock D, which swelled from a max capacity of 400 to an overwhelming 1,100 prisoners. Harsh new security measures were announced, with wall-mounted cellphone jammers installed and Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk claiming that heads of guards would be "cut off" if cellphones were discovered in inmates' cells[4]. It is these security measures that have led relatives of Islamists to gather in Tripoli and demand the resignation of Machnouk, who they accuse of fostering a climate of prisoner abuse.

Machnouk's hyperboles will not solve the problem of Roumieh, nor will showing brutality towards its inmates. Overcrowded, outdated, and with conditions so appalling that they fail to meet basic UN standards, Roumieh has a long way to go before it can serve the purpose it is designed. It is a necessity that the prison be expanded or that other correctional facilities be built to house the influx of prisoners from all walks of Lebanese society. Additional steps must be taken, such as sequestering Islamists not only from the general population but also from each other, preventing the sort of contact that has undoubtedly resulted in hardship for the people of Lebanon and its neighbors.



Yet given the functional impotence of Lebanon's government, the possibility of any real reforms being enacted is slim to none. The Lebanese state is barely capable of imposing rule of law among its most law-abiding citizens; any hope of improvements among its criminal population is scant at best. Additionally, Western concepts of prisoner rehabilitation are not common among Lebanese; Roumieh is much more likely to further radicalize an inmate than begin to draw him away from fundamentalism. And so the cycle of riots and terrorism will continue, strangely spurred both by the prison's excessive leniency as well as its deplorable living conditions. Roumieh seems condemned to a future of stasis, instability, and unrest – much the same as the country in which it is housed.

Claude Khalife

[1] <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12967>

[2] <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/64443>

[3] <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12967>

[4] <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-13/283917-terror-plans-seized-in-roumieh-raid.ashx>

Much ado about Secularism

Secularism is a word that you need to tread on carefully. In the classical sense, secularism is the separation of 'Church' and 'State.' Indeed, some aspect of secularism includes the separation of religion and state; however, this does not encompass the entire concept. When we talk about secularism we need to consider one crucial aspect of it: we need to consider the extent to which secularism can free us from dogma. The latter is fundamental because often religion becomes a placeholder for some other ideology or authority that can plunge society back into political instability. Religion is a placeholder for politicians to subjugate our free will to their consent. Placeholders can have other forms: We see this in Marxism, where the dogma lies in the communal state. We see this in Capitalism, where dogma lies in imperialism and money. True freedom can be accrued from secularism when citizens have the freedom to determine the welfare of their nation without succumbing to an ideology, faction, or sect. The Palestinian scholar Edward Said captures a crux of Secularism that, in my opinion, would give genuine freedom to the people of a nation: The goal of mankind should be "not only to understand oneself but to understand oneself in relation to others and to understand others as if you would understand yourself."

I would hope that Secularism could be a means for mankind to achieve such a goal. I believe it is something that we can achieve in Lebanon in the future. I don't think I can say that it can be real at this point in time because we are so politically paralysed. It can be real in the future, but only if the mindset of Lebanese citizens is changed. More specifically, in our mindsets must accept to question the dogmas enforced on us by political leaders. Once we are able to question, we have made a step forward towards true and free secularism.

Changing the mindset of the people, in order to achieve secularism in the future, is largely a responsibility that falls on Lebanese youth. My message to Lebanese youth is to read, question, and use reason to understand what the media, and politicians at large, are telling you. I also urge Lebanese youth to realise that our government, and its underlying sects, fear us the most. They often make us believe that we must fear ISIS, Iran, the United States, the Saudis, etc... be sure that this is only a distraction. The entity that the custodians of the political system fear the most is us because once we abandon their dogmas they can no longer coerce us into their political agendas.

Nour Chehabeddine



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Youth of Lebanon, rise and move forward !

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