

Lebanon's Chronic Crises without Remedies (1943 – 2008)

Foreign Companies in Lebanon: June – December 2008





The Monthly meets former Minister of Finance  
Georges Corm

# Lebanon's NGOs Mushrooms or Civil Society ?

1,878 NGOs (in 5 years)

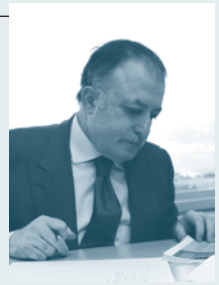


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# The city and the clouds: “Us” and “Them”\*

*\* This article was previously published in The Monthly issue 25 of July 2004. It is republished in the wake of the departure of Bush and his administration and the rising expectations which Obama has ensued.*



In Part 3, 'The Pendulum or Anomic State' (Issue No. 23, May 2004), we attempted to answer the question of what is wrong with "us". In this article, we try to answer the question of what is wrong with "them". The answer lies basically in the state of mind that came up with the famous question (in the aftermath of September 11): why do "they" hate "us", and the ready-made, self-gratifying answers were: because they are afraid of "our" values, because "we" are better than "them"... In short, because we are a "city on the hill".

The inquisitive mind, typical of western Cartesian logic, would have asked what went wrong? Of all the nationalities on earth, for instance, why the Saudis? An oil rich country and an ally! Who are the "Afghan Arabs" and who trained them? Who is Saddam Hussein and how was he raised to power? Who are the Palestinians and how was their plight brought about? Why do "those" who loved "us" for more than half a century hate us now? In short, one is compelled to pose the soul-searching question: what did "we" do or not do. What we get instead is the rhetoric that is normally and widely believed to be typical of "us, the east"; that is, denial and self-gratifying fantasies.

It is this state of mind that has given impetus to three prevailing conditions as far as "we" are concerned. The first is consumerism, mainly the high consumption of oil and the urge to acquire it at low prices, the second is defense spending and the third is the unequivocal support for Israel.

For the United States to spend more than \$300 billion on defense and to serve as the main arms supplier and merchant for oppressive regimes, while claiming to be the moral leader of the world is in itself an anomaly. For Saudi Arabia, a country that has never been directly engaged in a war since its foundation, to spend \$30 billion annually on defense under the auspices of the west, is a burden that she can no longer bear, both financially and politically. Nor can she continue to supply cheap oil at a high moral, human and political cost for both "us" and "them".

It was Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel and an ardent Zionist, who stated in his book Trial and Error, that "I am certain that the world will judge the Jewish state by what it will do with the Arabs, just as the Jewish people at large will be judged by what we do or fail to do in this state..." And it was President Bush, his Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and other advisors, who condoned Israel's recent actions, as if telling the Palestinians that their only destiny in life is to ensure Israel's security.

In short, no reform can take place in the Arab world without a process of reform in the 'west' itself. The U.S. cannot refuse to sign the Kyoto and International Court of Justice agreements, and preach morality. The "west" and the "east" are destined to take a soul searching journey to perhaps discover how similar they are, and it is the "west" that should and is able to take the lead, otherwise the clouds will continue to darken and the city on the hill may never shine.

— Jawad N. Adra