

# The Monthly

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History of Lebanese Parliamentary Elections  
Part 1: Elections in Batroun and Koura

The Monthly meets Ghassan Sayah

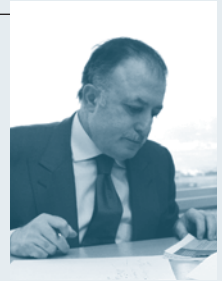
When they talk...about Resolution 1701

## Stamped at birth voting at 18 or 80, does it matter?



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# Citizen Zero & the Casino



Festivities and sorrows are usually manifested side by side in Lebanon. Everyone is celebrating because Lebanon, as they say, is “well sheltered from the worldwide financial crisis”. Both, the parliamentarian majority and the opposition “agree” that the banking sector and economic management (or non management) have “protected” the country from the splinters of this global crisis. And although this might seem to be a normal assessment from the standpoint of the majority, it is somehow difficult to actually understand the opposition’s point of view, bearing in mind its negative evaluation of the successive governments’ economic policies. Is the “good” economic administrator nowadays different from the “bad” one that has been managing the economy for a long time? Did the opposition unjustly assess the performance of previous governments, or is it simply exercising some sort of “sweet-talk” as an introduction to a relocation in its position? A position where political opponents “join forces” to supervise the grand theft of the state, as was done during the civil war and after until now.

However, the Opposition and the Loyalists disagree now on a different matter concerning issues from behind the seas... The new president of the United States of America Barack Obama is the title of this difference. One can understand (again to a certain extent) the parliamentarian majority’s “grief” regarding the loss of the presumed successor of their “ally” George Bush, but what is incomprehensible is the opposition’s celebration of the results of the American elections, given its alliance with parties and regimes that do not acknowledge democracy in the first place. One can also further understand how the majority quickly washed their hands from Bush and his team since this is consistent with their behavior as it has been with their predecessors since the creation of Lebanon.

The scene is similar to our reaction towards the World Cup. Some of us side by Germany and others by Brazil not to mention France, in the absence of two major factors: the first is that none of us is “sportif”, and the second is that we don’t even have a winning soccer team or even a well established one. One wonders what is our frame of reference?

Is Brazil’s coach going to train our team? Are we going to buy players from Brazil and make use of their talent in the Lebanese league? Will we be learning anything from them that could be of any benefit in coming world competitions? Is any of the players a descendant of one of our “Lebanese ancestors”? **Of course not.**

We look for a reason to be jubilant, celebrate or irritate others even at our own expense.

Did the leaders in Lebanon and the Arab world suddenly, after Obama’s victory, become aware to the fact that their leadership will not last forever? **Of course not.**

Did the “looser” in Lebanon or the Arab world admit its loss before its competitor and address him as “my president”, as McCain said to Obama? **Of course not.**

Did the “victor” in Lebanon or the Arab world bow before his competitor saying: “you have sacrificed more than me for the country”, as Obama said to McCain? **Of course not.**

Did the “victor” from the “Ocean to the Gulf” form a government with a vision of getting a “team of rivals” to work together for the sake of the nation? **Of course not**

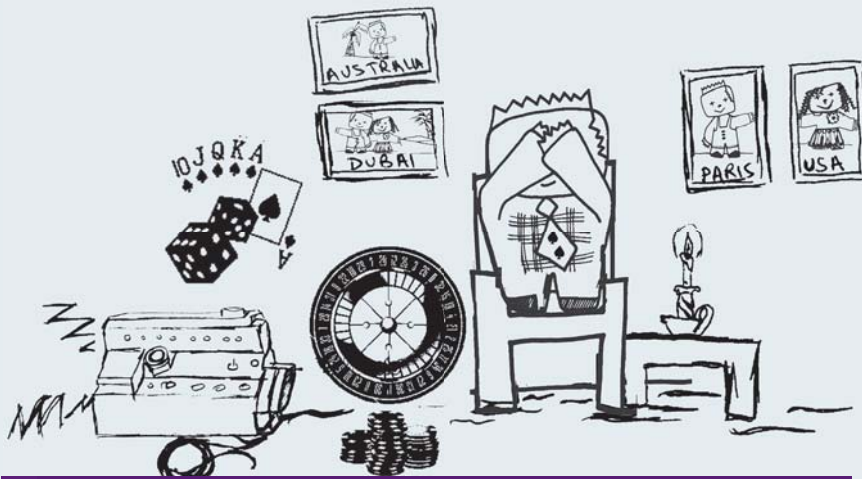
Did Citizen Zero really understand all that and thus threatened to hold his leader accountable and make it clear that he, the suppressed citizen and descendant of another suppressed citizen (just like Obama) is now a fully mature human being and that he aims at taking his role in running his society? **Of course not**

Did someone and specifically in Lebanon and Syria stand out to say let us look to what happened and learn from it? **Of course not**

It is jubilation, degradation, irritation, grief and no lessons learned. Just like at the Casino, when we play, lose, envy, celebrate with the winner feel sorry or mock the looser; the most important thing is to keep on playing.

Why should I care about the intense debates going on in the American Congress, concerning a plan to “give away” \$700 billion as a support for the US financial institutions, as long as I am “unaffected” by it, and as long as I pay relatively more than 3 times more what the American citizen pays, (\$700 billion = 5.3% of US GDP compared to 18% of Lebanon’s GDP in service of the debt). All this in the absence of congressional, national or otherwise debate in the country, and in a time when Citizen Zero celebrates the brilliance of his economic administrators.

Let us imagine that Lebanon is all about a Casino. Its guests are theoretically temporary but practically permanent. It “hosts” rich and poor people, winners and losers. Today’s rich is yesterday’s poor, and today’s winner is tomorrow’s loser. You see worn cars on the streets and new cars at its doors. The “losers” or perhaps the “winners” or non-players can go to Dubai or to Australia and continue to support the game.



In this casino, there is a church, a mosque, a temple and a brothel to satisfy the fancies of everyone. There, you can find preachers, monks and sheikhs, as well as atheists. It is a place for sensual pleasures, calculations and pure madness and ultimate nothingness.

Chips with numbers and colors, and a cashier with dollars for the sake of creating a “trustful” environment. The chips disappear before you reach the cashier who, being bankrupt, wishes and plans that you never reach him. Anyhow, what you make today, you will lose tomorrow.

 Citizen Zero in Celebration Mood

You can dream of winning or weep for losing. You can preach or curse. You can eat a sandwich or devour a whole feast. You can listen to classical music or watch a circus.

Every other while, you are overwhelmed for hearing a bell or a ring at a table, or you walk away from what you imagine to be an unlucky place or person. For here, you are in a world of dreams and fantasy... And bit by bit, you discover that you are growing old, and that the number of visitors diminishes, and that your life isn't what you hoped it would be.

How does all this talk about the genius of our economic brains concern me, when before the candle light or with the ambiance of a noisy electricity generator, I'm celebrating or grieving alone with my wife because all my sons and daughters became the strangers of other countries and are celebrating in turn the brilliance of the “casino mentality” governing Lebanon.

How does the victory or loss of Obama and McCain concern me, when I vote or run for elections according to a ridiculous and destructive electoral law? How does the victory or loss of Obama concern me, when I have never voted in my life, and when never has my opinion been taken into consideration in any of the Arab countries lying between the “Ocean and the Gulf”?

Citizen Zero decided to light a candle and stay awake all alone, dreaming that one day he might be able to listen to the voice of Fairuz singing at Al Manar TV<sup>(1)</sup> before watching Cleric Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah presenting his khutba in the Imam Sadik Complex<sup>(2)</sup>. He felt a desire to dream that one day he might be able to listen to Patriarch Sfeir asking about the fate of those who have been kidnapped on militia check points never to be seen again, and specifically condemning the crimes of Israel. He felt an urge to dream of seeing an opposition block in the Syrian Parliament, an electoral process in the Arab peninsula and a sewage treatment plant in Lebanon. “20% of the Lebanese population has emigrated in the past 20 years and we say we are smarter than the Europeans and the Americans?” He heard himself saying.

“Blow out the candle and go to sleep”, the voice told him. “Dreams and facts are forbidden. Listen closely to the noise of the generators or to the roulette tables, play Russian Roulette if you wish. Some people are winning today, and you might be winning tomorrow... Hang a picture of Obama or Bush, alongside the flag of Brazil or Germany. You have the freedom of choice...”

Citizen Zero blew out the candle, but did not go to sleep.

(1) Al-Manar TV does not air females singing

(2) Fadlallah was not present at the inauguration of the Imam Sadik Complex

*Jawad N. Adra*