

- ♦ Groups and Movements in Palestinian Camps
- ♦ Population Trends in the MENA Region
- ♦ Tourism in Egypt



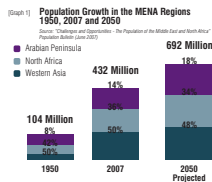
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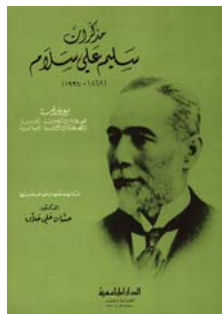
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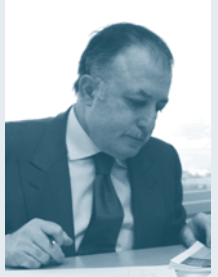
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The Tent Part 1*

It seems that both the pro-government and opposition forces have finally agreed on an issue: the seizure of public properties for a political end; firstly, the tents of “freedom, sovereignty and independence” in Martyrs’ Square, and secondly, the tents of Hizbullah and the opposition in Riad al-Solh Square.

The pro-government forces have justified setting up tents in Martyrs’ Square during the rallies against the Syrian regime (and often its people), and now the opposition is justifying the tents in Riad al-Solh, rallying against Fouad Sanioura’s government (and often the West).

One can arguably justify setting up tents and holding sit-ins and rallies as a basic right and a form of temporary civil obedience to achieve a political end; but how can one explain the annexation of public land and facilities to realize financial gains and how can this be legitimized and considered as a revered symbol?

Since tents are the issue, let us see what Lisan al-Arab defines the word “Khayma”, the Arabic word for tent. “Home or house... If it is not made with trees then it is a house...”

We, therefore, can consider that all encroachments on public land and facilities, regardless of their purpose, have become private properties. This means that Lebanon is already a large ‘privatized tent’.

The tent is barely standing, with helpless and hopeless Sheikhs. Perhaps, the “State” is just a logo to justify the real and solid tents of the ruling zu’ama. Their tents have been constructed with customs, traditions and wars, laws and decrees that were supposed to be temporary until the State is established. Events have shown that it is the State that is temporary and everything else is permanent.

This allegory extends to all Arab countries, with Muammar al-Gaddafi flaunting his tent around the world and receiving the praise of Nicolas Sarkozy and George W. Bush.

Let us take SOLIDERE as an example.

SOLIDERE extends over 2,200,000 square meters and encompasses many tents, beginning with the Serail, which has become the “Halal” of the “Sunni”, followed by more than 11 churches and mosques which are the property of confessions, excluding the “Shia’a” who have a Husseinia in Zqaq al-Blat, at the “borders” of SOLIDERE, and who have recently acquired the Parliament in Rafik al-Hariri Square (previously known as Nejme Square); now the “Shia’a” and the “Sunni” can happily coexist.

Another tent is the BIEL tent. Originally built as a temporary structure to host the Francophone Summit in 2001, BIEL has expanded to become one of the largest maritime “private properties” in Lebanon.

We should not forget four other necessary (but not sufficient) tents for the sustainability of the country of tents: The Banks Street tent, the only street that remained intact during the civil war and was protected by all the forces of hell, the tent of the Council of Development and Reconstruction, the symbol of what was called the “march of Development and Reconstruction,” in addition to the Ministries of Finance and Telecommunications.

There is also another tent which SOLIDERE introduces as follows:

“At the crossing of Weygand and Foch Streets, the Municipality of Beirut is a civic and architectural landmark dating back to 1934. The building is neo-Mamluk style, also referred to as ‘Oriental’ or ‘Arab’ style, an expression used to designate various strands of Islamic revivalism used in public buildings to express regional identity.”

Identity? Let us see

History books tell us that Foch was a Marshall of France who oversaw the creation of “Greater Lebanon” tent in 1920 and held the ceremony of Germany’s surrender to France at the Versailles Palace. Weygand, on the other hand, was the French General who surrendered to Germany in World War II.

As for the Mamluks, let us not forget that they fought against the last remnants of “Frange” (the crusaders) in the Holy Land.

Weygand Street flows into Omar Daouk Street, where it is claimed that Ivana Trump has designed a “tower”, a few steps away from Abdel-Hamid Karameh and Sa’ad Zaghoul Streets, two anti-colonialism leaders.

Having said all of this, why should we be so impatient with any additional tents, especially when we see that SOLIDERE’s profits, exempted from taxes by laws and decrees, have reached more than \$132,000,000 in 2006?

Therefore, one can acknowledge a forgotten tent for the “detainees” in Syria, located in Gebran Khalil Gebran Garden, facing the UN tent, which cost us around \$8 million a year.

“In my father’s house are many mansions” but SOLIDERE could not house the Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic ruins.

No Bronze Age, no Iron Age, no Tramway and not even a Tunbargi (horse-drawn carriage driver)... or a tent to remember the tens of thousands of people who disappeared at Lebanese militias’ checkpoints during the civil war.

It might be soul healing to us, the 12,000 investors and businessmen in SOLIDERE, when coming to this area, to remember Al-Borj Square (also known as Martyrs’ Square or Canon Square), Nejme Square and Bab Idris as they were, and to cherish the memory of more than 100,000 people who were here...

***To be continued**

Jawad N. Adra

