

i. Meanings

The political contradictions on the Lebanese and regional Middle Eastern scenes appear complicated. They aren't as intractable as they seem. With some determination and method, policies and events can be comprehended, and they are largely understood by those who live them. The Lebanese Cedar Revolution is no different. In the web of historical and cultural legacies – institutional straitjackets; sociological structures; professional and class interests; economic yearnings, individual idiosyncrasies and collective logics; serendipitous events, including mass rallies, sudden outbreaks of violence, and assassinations –, various factors can be tracked down and identified. The more difficult task is to distil the Cedar Revolution's *meaning*.

Two central meanings unfolded in the Cedar Revolution: non-violence, and the search for political and judicial accountability. Of the two, non-violence is the more important. Underlying its novelty is what Paul Kahn expressed in a recent essay, building on the construction of Europe: 'The longing to join the EU among the countries of Eastern Europe is not just about economics, but also about depoliticalization, i.e., about an emerging perception of sacrificial politics as a form of pathology. Indeed, the entire effort of the international human rights movement is rooted in this vision of well-being. No one, in this view, should die or suffer for politics.'¹ Violence should have no place in the

¹ Paul W. Kahn, 'Sacred violence', paper contributed to SELA (Seminar in Latin America on Constitutional and Political Theory), Yale law school, 2003, 13.

16 natural bid of humans for political power, and Lebanon added in 2005 a significant contribution to a trend which found its most remarkable success in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a colossal achievement which is yet to be appreciated as the one major non-violent breakthrough in the history of humankind.

The Lebanese addition to non-violence is distinct. Non-violence as the defining trait of the Lebanese Revolution is the more momentous because the prevailing reality of the contemporary Middle East systematically undermines the fundamental right to personal *security* from harm, a right which was expressed by the French revolutionaries in the first *Declaration of human rights*.² In modern history, massive violence, which is the flip coin of security, is the one dominant characteristic that sets the larger Middle East apart from the rest of the planet. Surely other regions have known violence, often on a horrendous scale. But nowhere like the Middle East has violence for the sake of politics gone on so relentlessly in the last two centuries. The Cedar Revolution, for the first time in modern Middle Eastern history, fought with non-violence for the right for the people to be secure, – that is to be free of violence –, in Lebanon and the region. And it did so in response to an immensely violent act: the killing of Rafiq Hariri and twenty-two other innocent people on 14 February 2005.

The Cedar Revolution rose in direct response to the 'killing of Mr Lebanon'.³ By choosing non-violence as the privileged and exclusive way of conducting politics, it marked the promise of a watershed. The Lebanese route is all the more remarkable since Middle Eastern and world history have collapsed into one violent continuum stretching to New York since September 11, 2001, after having marked for decades the fate of Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq. On February 14, 2005 the good people of Lebanon said 'enough', there is another way to conduct politics:

2 Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, 26 August 1789, Art.2: 'Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont la liberté, la propriété, la *sûreté* et la résistance à l'oppression.' Emphasis on security added.

3 Remarkable first book-length account by Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr Lebanon*, London 2006.

17 it is non-violent, and it can succeed.

The second meaning of the Cedar Revolution, accountability, flows from a positive application of non-violence on the larger scene of history. On its own, non-violence can be construed as non-action, a passive form of making history. Antecedents from Christ to Mahatma Gandhi show that passive resistance can have tremendous effects. But even compared to these bearers of world revolutions, the Lebanese revolutionaries had something of their own to add. A new meaning was ushered in on the streets of Beirut when the Cedar Revolution created a positive, tangible application to non-violence: judicial accountability.

The search for accountability was also political. There is little new in the search for political accountability, since all revolutions are accountability in action against the standing order and those responsible for it, and I will argue that one of the weaknesses of our Revolution was its failure to hold politically accountable a number of leaders who remained openly supportive of the Ancien Régime. This was the case, at the top of the political ladder, of the president and, in a more nuanced way, of the speaker. Two years after the Revolution, they were still entrenched in extended mandates. That failure was costly, but it did not prevent the novelty of the Cedar Revolution developing its open embrace of *judicial* accountability in response to the assassins' relentless hand.

The Cedar Revolution sought an end to impunity in the Middle East, and elevated the region to the new horizon developed by human rights organizations the world over and taken up by states in the symbol of the International Criminal Court. The Cedar Revolution had this particularity: it consciously sought its meaning in judicial accountability, rather than in violent revenge, and unfolded in the demand for an international investigation, then for a UN tribunal for Lebanon. No revolution in modern history has so consciously expressed itself in the persistent search for an independent and effective judicial process. No revolution had adopted as the measure of its success, as its fundamental meaning, truth in justice.

This dual meaning, non-violence and judicial accountability, is at risk. To salvage it, we need to put the Cedar Revolution to the larger test of history's special moments. I believe our Revolution meant something distinct in

18 the long span of human history, Lebanese and otherwise. To protect the revolution's memory, its importance, its sacrifices, its *uniqueness*, and its place in human history, it is essential to elevate and substantiate the meaning to the level deserved by the Lebanese who made it happen. The present essay is a battle for the place of our Revolution in history, now and in 2221. It believes in knowledge and its accumulation. For that, the historiography of the French Revolution over two hundred years is one powerful guide for understanding 'what happened'⁴ in Lebanon in 2005. Hence 2221.

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, Paris 1980, chapter 8: '1874 - Trois nouvelles ou «qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?»'