

vi. Names

Independence *intifada*, Gucci Revolution, Cedar Revolution. If we want to be serious about Lebanon's Revolution, we better have a name for it that lasts till 2221. In English 'Cedar Revolution' has stuck, and I always favoured its Arabic equivalent, *thawrat al-arz*, over other appellations. Ten days after the demonstrations started, the Bristol people, named after the hotel where the motley group of politicians opposed to Syria's rule used to assemble, sought to baptize a movement which they were seeing growing. They settled on 'revolt for independence', in Arabic *intifadat al-istiqlal*. 'Independence 2005', the corresponding English title that saw its way on stickers and pins, was meant as a revolt against Syrian domination. After fifteen years, a long time in Lebanon's short history of independence (1943), breaking the shackles in that form was natural, and independence became the rallying idea for Lebanon regaining its sovereignty. I never liked the appellation *intifada* much. It was obviously associated with its Palestinian namesake, which had simply not succeeded. We all supported the first Palestinian *intifada* in its early days in December 1987, because of the unique sense that something different was afoot, namely a non-violent revolution in Palestine. Throwing stones is not an altogether peaceful exercise, but the result, - no death, though some injuries -, remarkable in the Middle East. And then, slowly and inexorably, the Palestinian *intifada* turned violent, as much against Israelis as against Palestinian so-called 'collaborators', who were ringed with tires and set ablaze. By then, towards the end of 1988, the Palestinian *intifada* had exhausted its historical calling.

The second *intifada* was started by Ariel Sharon on 28 September 2000 and deftly taken over by Yaser Arafat to perpetuate his rule over a Palestinian body politic which had grown exhausted by his nepotism. The second *intifada* was ugly from the very beginning. On 28 September 2000, it should be recalled, Sharon moved onto the esplanade of the Haram Mosque in the heart of Arab Jerusalem, triggering the protests that would bring him and Israeli extremism to power within months. The Haram scene, exactly as he expected, turned into a massacre perpetrated by Israeli security forces who shot at the protesters, killing six people. A few days and more Palestinian deaths later, the world was shocked by the death of young boy Durra cowering in fear behind his father, which was recorded live on camera. Calls to bring the boy's killers to justice went nowhere, as was any move to punish those Israeli policemen who shot into the crowd a week earlier. The second *intifada* quickly turned into the burial of the peace process, bringing symbols of hatred and death to power in both societies, Ariel Sharon in Israel and the Hamas leaders in Palestine.

In fact the Palestinians owed the word *intifada* to Lebanon. In the internecine wars of Lebanon in the mid-1980s, politicians ran out of appellations for the turns and twists of the successive outbursts of violence. In one instance, which was pitting 'Lebanese forces' leader Samir Geagea to 'Lebanese forces' leader Elie Hobeika, -- or was it rising military strongman Michel Aoun? --, Geagea's *éminence grise* Karim Pakradouni sought a new term for his boss's latest 'corrective movement, *haraka tashihyya*.' Corrective movement is an appellation dear to Arab putschists of the Hafez Asad-Saddam Hussein type turning violent on their own companions to take over power. That appellation was evidently not in favour in Lebanon. Then the word *intifada* fused, which Pakradouni said was provided by my father in casual conversation. I am not sure how it arrived to Palestine in December 1987, but the word quickly caught on in the narrow Levant of a globalised Middle East.

Knowing that pedigree, and the disturbing image which associates the word with chicken literally 'shaking off' when they get slaughtered, I resisted the word *intifada* for our Revolution. Our Revolution was different, because it was premised on non-violence, a pact the Lebanese

people contracted amongst themselves as they were carrying it out.

Looking into antecedents, I realized that Hanna Batatu, the great historian of 20th century Iraq, mentions *intifada* for one of the larger street revolts against the Monarchy in Baghdad in 1952.³² Maybe the disastrous fate of Iraq was an additional reason why I dislike calling our Revolution *intifada*. 'Cedar Revolution' was coined by Paula Dobriansky, then US 'Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs', in a press conference on 28 February 2005. In the report available, the expression is recorded in bracket and in the singular form, 'Cedar Revolution'. Despite its foreign origin, an American one to boot, it stood out against the word *intifada* because of the violent and inconclusive Palestinian precedents. One reason was also selfish: my grandfather being known as the poet of the Cedar, *sha'er al-arz*, I naturally identify with the name. Less selfishly, the battle is also symbolic, and probably also atavistically sectarian. The Cedar is the symbol of old Mount Lebanon joining Druze and Christian territory, as opposed to the Sunni coast, or Hizbullah's strongholds in the suburbs, the Biqa' valley, or the South, where there are no cedars. And the Cedar was uniquely Lebanese, a beautiful and majestic symbol sitting on our flag since 1943, rather than the ugly and non-descript colours that form the flag of most Arab countries.

There is more to names and slogans than meets the eye: throughout the demonstrations, we were plagued with a tripartite empty slogan that came from the Aoun movement. It said *hurriyya, siyada, istiqlal*, liberty, sovereignty, independence. Sovereignty and independence are redundant enough, with liberty adding a further sense of repetition. What was missing in our Revolution was democracy, and the recognition of its most remarkable trait, non-violence. The redundant slogan stuck, symbolically failing to inscribe non-violence and democracy alongside independence. Fortunately, another slogan developed. 'Truth and Justice' covered Beirut streets, and all novelty was not lost.

³² Hanna Batatu, *The Old social classes and the revolutionary movements of Iraq: A study of Iraq's old landed and commercial classes and of its communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers*, Princeton 1978, chapter on 'the Intifadah of November', 666-70.

And so it was that between independence and *intifada* we constrained our Revolution, whilst missing its more important characteristics: the people's demand for democracy, and their pursuit of security through non-violence. Words have a logic. One should never underestimate their power. *Liberté* and *égalité* are enduring concepts from the French Revolution, *fraternité* never quite made it.