

Why Brazil under President Michel Temer Risks Becoming ‘Lebanized’

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Btaaboura is a tiny village in the mountains of northern Lebanon. It is connected to the main motorway by a narrow winding road. It could be just anywhere in the Christian part of this country: white stone houses, olive groves, wine grapes, bare hills.

Like elsewhere, the wealth is hardly backed by hard work. It is mainly sustained by remittances flowing from abroad. There are grotesquely luxurious cars everywhere – Audis, BMWs. And there is Western Union office on the main street. All doors are closed; nothing moves.

But this village is actually ‘unique’; different from all others in the area. At the entrance, there is a new park that shows the Brazilian and Lebanese flag fluttering side-by-side.

And across the street, a blue and white sign announces in Portuguese and Arabic: *RUA MICHEL TAMER PRESIDENTE DO BRAZIL*.

In front of the word *PRESIDENTE*, there is a patch of blue spray paint. Later, I am told that just a few months ago it read, *VICE-PRESIDENTE*, but when Michel Temer ousted the legitimate President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, the Mayor of Btaaboura personally covered what he considered to be ‘outdated’ – the word *VICE* (Temer took office on August 31, 2016 after Rousseff’s impeachment and removal).

We inquired at a small grocery store, and soon we found the ancestral home of Michel Temer, “*Presidente do Brazil*”. Nizar Tamer (the local spelling), his cousin, was sitting in the garden, waving at us, inviting us in.

Come, sit down and rest. Have some figs and grapes: all local produce. You want to talk about Michel? But of course; why not?

Soon, the seating area begins to fill with other relatives and friends. Fruits are served. Everybody is smiling, joking, happy.

My head is heavy. I hardly slept the night before, shooting endless Tweets, denouncing the coup, ending my long chain of messages with words of unconditional support for Dilma, and with one Tweet depicting a battered Brazilian flag, accompanied by the text: “*Here is lesson one in essential Portuguese: FORA TEMER! = TEMER, GET OUT!*”

“*If only they knew,*” I am thinking. And involuntarily, a bitter smile appears on my face.

"Yes, we are cousins," Nizar, a civil engineer, grins. "His father left for Brazil, my father stayed in Lebanon..."

I am shown another house, right next door, where Michel Temer's father was born. The house is around 200 years old, and it is totally dilapidated. But there are rumors now that it could soon be converted into a museum in honor of the 'Presidente'.

"People in Lebanon are very proud of Michel," explain his relatives. "When he came here last time, it was in 2011 or 2012, it was a huge event: some 100 security people, Brazilian embassy employees... Michel told us that he would raise economy in both Brazil and here."

When Temer 'became President', the village organized a huge party, with fireworks, belly dancing, traditional music...

And what about the coup, the corruption? Do people here realize how he came to power?

Here, nobody cares about politics. He is now perhaps facing some problems, but these are his problems. We support him no matter what, because we are Lebanese, and because his roots are in Lebanon. We eat figs and grapes. Then coffee is served.

Several women, miserable-looking Syrian refugees, are walking down the street, humble, scared, looking down at the road.

It is just two days before Dilma Rousseff addresses the Senate.

[#ForaTemer](#) em São Paulo. Bem "inexpressiva" e "mini mini mini", não é, golpistas? pic.twitter.com/g5gRrKbGJ8

— Jean Wyllys (@jeanwyllys_real) [4 September 2016](#)

I could stay much longer, listening to slow-flowing stories about the man who is now helping the West to demolish socialist South America. But suddenly I feel nauseated; I want to vomit. Obviously, I had reached the limit, and we have to leave.

Will Brazil get 'Lebanized'?

Lebanon is a total mess – a collapsed country with nothing social or socialist whatsoever. Money, 'business', flashing wealth is all that matters here.

While Maserati and Porsche sports cars navigate around the potholes of Beirut, misery and filth are swallowing suburban areas. Garbage collection periodically collapses, the country is burning diesel to generate electricity (blackouts and water shortages are endemic). Less than 40 percent of children attend public (state) schools. Medical care is mostly abandoned to the market. There is virtually no public transportation, no city planning, hardly any parks or green areas.

Those who have money throw it around, proudly and vulgarly. There are obnoxiously rich marinas, while the restaurants in the capital are at least twice more expensive than in Paris.

And there is plenty of cash here: from filthy mining and other investments that are plundering West Africa, from drugs being grown in the Bekaa Valley, from those billions of

dollars in remittances, and of course from banking (money laundering). Lebanon produces very little. It consumes excessively.

Its reputation in the Middle East is terrible, mainly thanks to the racism and arrogance of many of its citizens.

Paradoxically, the only social force that stands above all religious and sectarian divides, is Hezbollah. But Hezbollah is closely linked to Syria and Iran's government, and it fights ISIS in the mountains and across the border, as well as the several Israeli invasions and incursions into Lebanon. Predictably, the West put it on the terrorist list.

I keep imagining Brazil being governed by Mr. Temer and those like him. And I am frightened! What would happen to the majority of the people? Would they again become fully irrelevant and forgotten, like here in Lebanon?

Would the country function only in order to serve big business, the elites? Would the success of the entire nation be judged by the size of marinas and by the size of luxury cars in the parking lots of grossly overpriced restaurants and clubs?

Instead of being an example to the world, would Brazil get brutally Lebanized? The West would definitely like that, as it worked so hard to make it happen in the first place.

But in the name of Brazilian people, the rot, this deadly destruction has to be stopped.

Before leaving Btaaboura village, I stop my car for a few moments. And suddenly I see it: the beautiful and dear Brazilian flag is not waving in the wind. It is torn, dirty and looks like a rag. And there in front of the entrance to the park garbage lies strewn everywhere.

Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. His latest books are: "Exposing Lies Of The Empire" and "Fighting Against Western Imperialism". Discussion with N. Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return is his critically acclaimed political novel. Andre is making films for teleSUR and Press TV. Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and the Middle East.

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