

<http://divergences.be/spip.php?article2015>



Larry Portis

Chou Sar? What Happened in Lebanon?

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2010 - N° 23. Décembre 2010 - English -

Date de mise en ligne : Thursday 2 December 2010

Copyright © Divergences Revue libertaire en ligne - All rights reserved

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L227xH340/De_Gaulle_Eid_7022-a415d.jpg

His name is De Gaulle, and he knows well what happened on December 9, 1980. He was ten years old on that sunny afternoon in the northern

Lebanese village of Edbel, 20 miles north of Tripoli—Lebanon's second largest city—when almost his whole family was killed before his eyes.

De Gaulle, named after the famous French general and president in honor of the then independent foreign policy of the French government concerning the Middle East, knows well what happened because he knew the killers he saw and heard. They were from the same village.

In fact, there is no mystery at all. The operation was simple and efficient. Simultaneously, at 2 p.m., all the houses belonging to the Eid family were surrounded and the fathers were called out. De Gaulle's father was cut down by a burst of machine gun fire when he opened the door and emerged, thinking to speak with his neighbors and spare any violence to himself and his family. The attackers then entered the house and slaughtered the numerous members of the extended family. De Gaulle and one brother and one sister survived because they played dead for more than four hours as they lay covered with their relatives' blood.

Only De Gaulle was not wounded. His sister, Rosie, received a bullet in the face and his brother, Jean, was nicked in the ear. His mother, aunts, and other siblings did not have such luck. It took the assailants only one hour to liquidate 13 heads of the large Eid family, along with most of their families.

The only real questions about the affair were why the massacre was carried out and why there has never been any investigation of it. De Gaulle lived with these questions—ignored by officialdom and even by the remaining members of his own family—throughout the rest of his youth and young adulthood.

But the questions are important precisely because they are ignored. Or should we say that they are ignored because they reach into the very entrails of Lebanese society and, perhaps even more importantly, involve geopolitical interests of more powerful states? More particularly, the political division of Lebanon into confessional factions is something that serves the interests of powerbrokers in the United States, Europe, Israel and even some Arab or Muslim countries, more than it does the Lebanese population.

An essential question in this regard is why the very idea of a civil war is often denied in Lebanon. Why was it so important in 1993, to pass a law providing amnesty to all who committed crimes during the long period of war and conflict? Why have these crimes been brushed under the table? Moreover, why has there been so little elucidation of the fate of more than 150,000 people who “disappeared” without a trace during this period (in addition to those known to have been killed)? Why has there been so little serious debate about the nature of a bloodbath that is perhaps not as complex as people like to say? Why is there an international inquiry into the 2005 assassination of prime minister Rafic Hariri when tens of thousands of assassinations and murders have been carefully ignored?

In the case of De Gaulle's family, there is no confusion about who perpetrated the carnage. There is, however, more to say about the complicity of others who have an interest to not allow any investigation of such affairs.

De Gaulle left Lebanon nine years after the massacre to study cinema in France. He then worked as first assistant to the French director Jean-Daniel Pollet and then to the great Egyptian director Youssef Chahine, all the while directing and producing short films and documentaries. All this was preparation for making the film I saw a few days ago at the Mediterranean Film Festival in Montpellier, France.

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH267/Degaulleid-e0775.jpg>

In this documentary of the quest to learn more about his loss, he begins by filming his departure from France to pursue his personal investigation of his family's massacre. Upon arrival in Beirut, he visits an uncle who is initially reluctant to talk about the tragedy. He speaks with his sister, who has dedicated herself to work with orphans, but who begs De Gaulle not to return to the village. She fears he will be assassinated by the murderers, those who "live and raise their children without fear" as if nothing had happened. He speaks with a cousin who wrote a university thesis on the affair, but who now has no desire to think about the subject. Her therapy was successful. De Gaulle speaks with a nephew who was in school with the son of one of the assassins, a boy who affirmed his pride in the action carried out by his elders.

Most disturbing, De Gaulle interviews a rich and powerful uncle in Beirut who was not in the village, and seems to be hiding his own complicity in the affair. The man has difficulty making eye contact and says: "You should look on the positive side of it". But De Gaulle doesn't see any positive side.

Finally, De Gaulle goes to the family house in Edbel, accompanied by a small film crew. They enter the yard and venture into the dwelling pockmarked by bullets, and now dilapidated by pillage and almost thirty years of abandonment. De Gaulle breaks down in tears when they pass into the bathroom, where he, his brother, and his sister had lay in fear, covered with blood.

They then decide to enter the village proper, uncertain as to what they will find.

The camera turns as they progress up a winding path between houses before entering the small central square of the village. The soundman picks up commentary from some villagers: "Look, they are filming. They must be from the television."

De Gaulle tells the crew to keep walking. In the distance, De Gaulle sees a man limping across the square. "I think," he says, "I recognize this man. Make sure you keep the camera turning and the sound on."

They approach the man, who stops, and seems puzzled.

"Do you recognize me?" De Gaulle asks.

The man stares mutely.

"I recognize you," De Gaulle says.

"Do you?" the man utters.

"Yes. It is easy to recognize the man who killed your mother.

" There is no response. The man continues to stare, wringing his hands involuntarily. The camera continues to turn. Villagers began to move in the background. The camera crew is nervous, and De Gaulle signals them to begin moving backward, slowly.

They made it down to the vehicles below the village without incident.

The next installment of the story is not in the film: it is now in the news in Lebanon. First, De Gaulle's film was banned, or at least not given authorization for projection. Quickly it became a cause célèbre, arousing discussion in talk shows and in the press.

In an initial discussion with De Gaulle Eid in Montpellier several days ago, he told me that the pressure has been on the present prime minister, Saad Hariri (son of the assassinated Rafic Hariri). Lebanese authorities must show that the country is now stable. International investors need to be reassured. The following day De Gaulle ran up to me, insisting that I read a message received on his hand computer. It was from the office of the prime minister, informing him that authorization will come to show the film in festivals in Lebanon, although no permission for screening in commercial theatres is yet forthcoming. De Gaulle is confident that it will come, that a barrier is coming down.

http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L340xH284/De_Gaulle_Eid_7027-0acfb.jpg

Still, De Gaulle is no uncritical optimist. Lebanon, he says, will never be stable as long as foreign interests and internal elites use the issue of religion to divide the population. It cannot have peace while the United States and Israel have designs on the region and while Syria and Iran are tempted to counter by maintaining a presence through other means. "Alas," he observed in debate after a showing of his film, "Lebanon will continue to suffer as long as there is petroleum to be exploited and controlled in the region."

Oh, and why was De Gaulle's family killed? It wasn't a religious or ethnic antagonism that was the trigger, although it was sometimes the case in other, similar massacres. It was a feud between families, the result of misunderstandings and maybe jealousy. De Gaulle's Beirut uncle was a member of the Phalange—the Christian fascists—when a member of the other family was killed. The family of this aggrieved victim was predominately linked to national socialists close to the Syrian Ba'ath Party. No local complicity could be alleged but, in any case, the on-going civil war was a good pretext to liquidate bothersome "others". At least this is De Gaulle's hypothesis.

Post-scriptum :

De Gaulle Eid's film, "Chou sar?" (*What Happened?*) will be shown in Washington D.C. in December and in festivals such as Sundance. He can be reached at degaulleeid at yahoo.fr

Larry Portis can be reached at larry.portis at orange.fr

This article was published in *Counterpunch* November 5 - 7, 2010

<http://www.counterpunch.org>