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Could Nowheristan become Everywheristan?

By *Deena Douara*

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Michel Elefteriades (aka Emperor Michel I) is Lebanese of Greek descent, and speaks six languages

CAIRO: Michel Elefteriades is a busy man. "I am a clown, a philosopher, a warrior and an artist." This, besides being the self-proclaimed emperor of a "supernation," he hopes will take over the world. Literally..

"Nowheristan" is his imagined utopian empire, complete with constitution, embassies, a political structure and citizens with passports. The idea is to create a place free of violence, history, and borders. "The idea of nationality is stupid now. It was good when all [members of a nation] were the same with regards to culture, beliefs, etc."

Michel Elefteriades (aka Emperor Michel I) is Lebanese of Greek descent, and speaks six languages.

Instead, citizens would all share common ancestors: Phoenicians, Pharaohs, Celts, Native Indians, and Greeks. "The root of all problems is identity." Their history would be "the sum of all histories of the world."

Similarly, the political system, if it can be called such, would take the best elements from all systems, including capitalism, socialism, and communism.

The only thing missing then is a geographical location. This is not a concern for Elefteriades though, who believes that within 10 years governments will start falling

to Nowheristan.

"If just two percent of every nation is a citizen of Nowheristan, I will have the largest nation in the world."

Citizens and believers would act as lobby groups within their countries trying to enact the decisions agreed on by Nowheristan on issues like euthanasia, cloning, global warming, and wealth partitioning, among other hot topics.

At the same time, the empire can strategically plan and organize shows of civil disobedience, such as refusing to pay taxes or abstaining from work, which Elefteriades believes could topple governments. Violence, however, would never be used. Indeed, no weapons are allowed in Nowheristan, except by small [police](#)/military outfits ensuring some measure of security.

Though he admits some elements of the project are symbolic, or "to create media buzz," Elefteriades is serious about

the project, comparing himself to Karl Marx, who in 25 years spread communism. "It is not as crazy a project as Marx's... The majority of people will go for the Nowheristan concept. I'm sure of it."

Already Elefteriades claims more than 9,000 people have expressed interest in joining, from Norway to Saudi Arabia, Egypt to Japan, and many from Turkey. Among his roughly 200 "intellectual" cooperators on the project, Elefteriades says he has some high-level representatives, but who would be "afraid of showing their interest in this point."

Elefteriades abhors modern politics and politicians. He believes the US, neoconservatives, and their allies are mainly to blame for "creating monsters," mass frustration, and false dichotomous choices: capitalism vs. communism, freedom vs. the axis of evil, and in 10 years perhaps, America vs. China.

Instead, the decision-makers in Nowheristan would be the *crème de la crème* of society, citizens over the age of 60, who have proved successful in their diverse fields. Intelligence and morality are the key factors for inclusion. Still, no clerics would be included, unless they excelled in another field, and no quotas would be set.

Elefteriades and his team would select the 600 (unpaid) members of one Senate, and they would in turn select the 600 members of the other Senate. Elefteriades emphasizes that there would be no voting, elections, or "media-ization" of Senators. "Political position is a reward for how much you can lie."

Each group of Senators would reside in fully-equipped villages at diametrically opposing points on the earth, and re-locating every four years, to avoid "centralism." He admits he has not approached anyone yet about being a Senator, "because at this point they would tell me to f--- off."

While Elefteriades was once a communist, he no longer believes a cook's vote should equal a scientist's or expert's. Now he believes more in eclecticism, or "brainocracy." "I believe people are equal in rights but not in obligations."

Responding to a comparison between his utopia and dictatorships, Elefteriades says "[The Senate] can throw me in jail if they want ...full power is with the senators," who make all the decisions relevant to the empire.

The idea of Nowheristan came about at a crossroads. "I had to start something like this or I would have started fighting again," like an "atheist bin Laden."

Perhaps this is one reason Elefteriades admires Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah, even though he is a-religious. "He's smart, he's not lying to his people, he believes in what he's doing and he's not gratuitous." He does not blame Hezbollah for the war that ravaged his country most recently. "If you place an implant in the body [Israel] and it rejects that implant, the body will die."

Though much has been made of the presence of the UN secretary-general representative and the Lebanese Minister of Culture at a performance at the National Orchestra of Nowheristan upon its launch, Elefteriades admits they were there under a deliberate misunderstanding, thinking the event was merely a philanthropic event of multiculturalism. They learned the true significance of the ceremony when Elefteriades illuminated them with a "delirious expose" of the project. "I manipulated them, but so what? We have been manipulated for a long time."

In order to be taken seriously, Elefteriades, dressed in an eclectic costume of baggy black pants, silver bracelets, and cane, has spent years making lots of money. "Money had no meaning for me until I was 25. Then I realized that to be taken seriously, you have to prove to people that you can make money. Money measures the importance of someone."

He has opened clubs, music halls, and a restaurant, as well as produced fusion music for notable musicians such as Jose Galvez and Toni Hanna.

His roots were always activist though. Elefteriades recalls how since elementary school he was always in trouble with his peers. "If someone mistreated a girl or someone weaker on the playground, I could not interfere." This continued until he was 15, when he became a war activist. He claims he was arrested and tortured by Christian militias for having communist ideas, which he adopted on his own after reading Marx's *Das Kapital*.

After joining his hero Michel Aoun's army at 17, he was given the choice by Syrian forces, he says, to surrender or flee. He chose to become a political exile in France.

After similarly causing disturbances in France, and being "more left than communism," Elefteriades fled to Cuba, the only existing communist nation he believed would be a haven for someone like him.

In his one year in Cuba, he even began to criticize Fidel Castro and decided to leave once again. By then, Syria was out of Lebanon and Elefteriades could return to his Lebanese homeland, where he says he escaped two assassination

attempts after organizing resistance movements.

Eventually he reached a point where he thought it was all futile. "I can't get anywhere with this," he felt.

His time in Cuba though inspired his idea for cultural fusion, a path he has been on ever since, combining songs, beats, and instruments of Arabs, Balkans, Cuban, Lebanese, Palestinian, the Swiss and gypsies. "I thought culture can make the world a better place."

In his Cuban Beirut club, Amour y Libertad, replete with Cuban waiters, barmen, and cigar-rollers, the theme is anti-Americanism and walls are decorated with quotes from Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, while flyers on the injustice of the American embargo are distributed.

When he's not creating an empire, running his businesses, penning a novel, composing music, or stirring trouble, Elefteriades judges contestants for the pan-Arab talent show "X-Factor." He is currently in Cairo to view talents whom he will judge on the show for his second year.

While contestants compete from across all Arab countries, Elefteriades says the Maghreb region and Middle East countries produce more talent than the Gulf states due to a long tradition of children singing and dancing at home, and because of a longer tradition of music historically.

Recruits are garnered, for both show and empire, through Elefteriades' "secret weapons," media and Internet. "No [country] will escape."

For more information visit www.nowheristan.com



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