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issue 005 - 2009
ethics & transparency edition

POCKETBOOK *The International Green Summit*
COMMERCE *Wasta... A Necessary Evil?*
PEOPLE & SOCIETY *Lebanon: Transparent Elections?*
THE VERVE *Searching for Iraqi Refugees*
CREATIVE CONSCIOUS *Ethical Archeology*
IMPRESSIONS *Shatila, a Palestinian Refugee Camp*
THINK FORWARD *Animal Black Market*

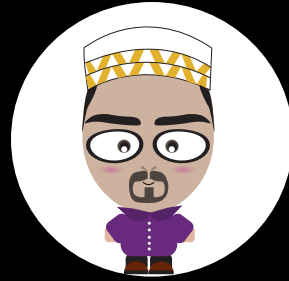


UNDER THE TABLE

what happens when no one is watching...

issn 1998-1023

a quarterly publication dedicated to social responsibility in the Arab world



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AN EXHIBITION WHEREBY
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
COME TOGETHER TO
RECREATE INNOVATIVE
DESIGN SOLUTIONS FROM
SCRAP AND WASTE
MATERIALS TO PROMOTE
ECO-FRIENDLY LIVING



REUSE 3.0

THE AVENUES

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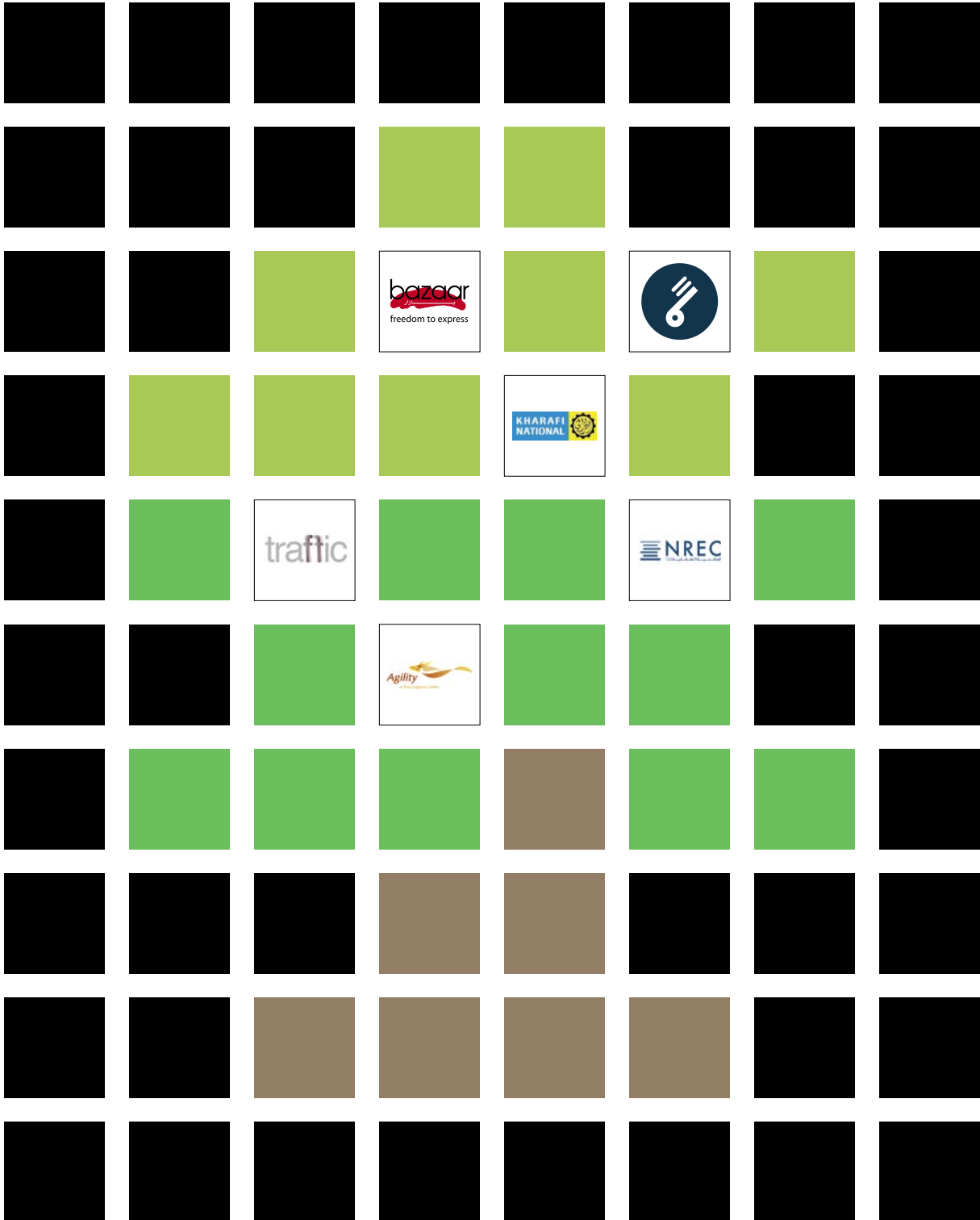
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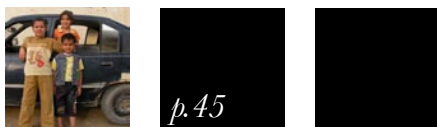
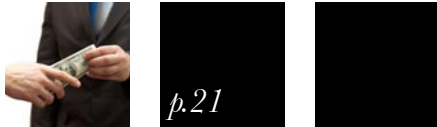
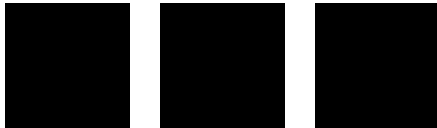
PROMOTING
RECYCLING
THROUGH
ART

TREE OF HOPE

The Tree of Hope is dedicated to organizations and individuals who support en.v as we embark on a thought-provoking journey. Log on to envearth.com and download our mediakit to learn more about how you can support en.v's initiatives.



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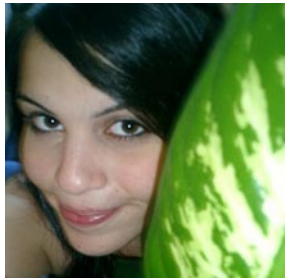
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RAWANE NASSIF

Photographer

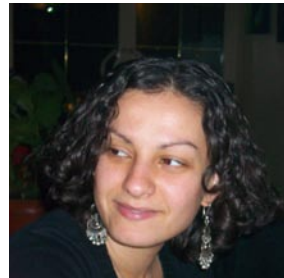
Rawane Nassif was born in Beirut in 1983 and studied filmmaking at Saint Joseph University Beirut. She directed and supervised several social documentaries that were selected for participation in international festivals. Her film, *Tabati*, about the life of three kids in the Shatila refugee camp, won the Best Student Award at Docudays Film Festival in Beirut. She later worked as a film editor for several production houses and as a film instructor at the Lebanese International University. She has also worked with several NGOs and taught languages and filmmaking in Palestinian camps. Rawane is currently finishing her masters in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton.



SALEEM HADDAD

Contributor

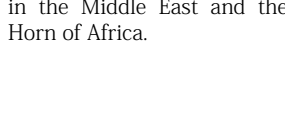
Saleem Haddad has a bachelor's degree in Economics and Development Studies from Queen's University in Canada, and a master's degree in Development Studies, with a focus on Violence and Conflict, from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He has worked in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Nepal, Canada, Lebanon, Yemen, Sri Lanka and Iraq, and is currently working as a Humanitarian Affairs Advisor with Medecins Sans Frontieres in London, helping them set up emergency medical projects in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.



YASMIN EL-RIFAE

Contributor

Yasmin El-Rifae is currently bidding her time at a slightly boring office job until she figures out how to transition into journalism without facing certain poverty. She holds a BA in Political Science with a minor in Modern History from the American University in Cairo. She has worked in media, international development and finance, while writing as a freelancer. She is interested in Middle Eastern politics, culture and gender issues. She currently lives in Cairo, for which her feelings are complicated, thinking of stories she would like to write and cities she would like to visit.





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Dear Reader,

The motives behind our reactions to situations and events in our daily lives often go unexamined and unnoticed. They become second nature to us and we forgo any real investigation into their origins or meanings.

During the most recent Lebanese General Elections, the energy in the air was palpable. As the population was getting ready to collectively decide the destiny of their nation, various governmental and non-governmental organizations were working behind the scenes to ensure the transparency of these elections.

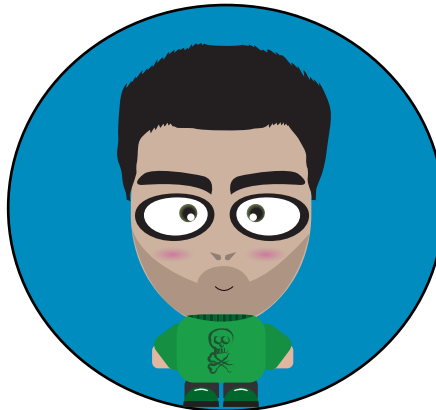
However, amid all the excitement I found skepticism and hopelessness. I met people awash with cynicism and bitterness, among whom were those refusing to vote. "What's the point?" they would respond.

Likewise, the citizens of Kuwait went to the polls this past May. Was there skepticism? You bet. Doubt? Plenty. However, in spite of this negativity, election results were a testament to the resilience of the population.

In this issue, Issue 005: Ethics & Transparency, en.v explores the ethical motives behind our actions and reactions in business, government, society and culture, as well as the role that ethics plays in our daily lives and decision-making processes. A special focus is made on the transparency of the electoral process in Beirut as well as the ethical motivations and developments behind the election of Kuwait's first female members of parliament.

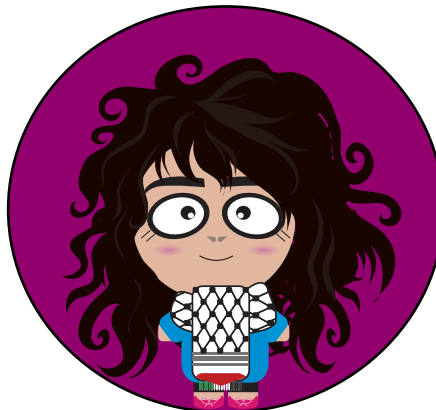
In the end, it is only through the sum of our individual desires for change that reform can take place. It is up to us to remain steadfast and hopeful.

Siham Nuseibeh



MANAGING EDITOR

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Siham Nuseibeh

Why do you vote?

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By focusing on factors that differentiate rather than bind us, we have developed the tendency to place individuals into the categories of the 'familiar,' or the 'other.' However, this year's poll results in Kuwait and Lebanon demonstrated a parallel in citizens' hope for change. Below is a collection of responses gathered in a survey that posed the question, "Why do you vote?" to nationals of each country:

To want change in Kuwait and to not go vote does not make any sense to me. The easiest way to modify a political system is by voting. I voted this year because I wanted change, and I wanted to see women in the parliament. – HT

I vote because it's an easy process. I hardly give back to society, and I'm not as active as I would like to be. Casting a ballot somewhat eases the guilt. And I do believe that every single vote can make a difference. – SM

I vote because it's the only way of enacting change. It is my right that I don't want to waste. If I don't vote then things will stay the same or [become] worse. – MT

Kuwait

As a citizen of this country, it is my duty and a privilege to vote. The voice of the people should be heard, and it is compulsory that the governing body of Kuwait be selected by the people. – AN

When I vote, I just don't do it for myself. I do it for family, local strangers and long-time residents, friends, my non-existent kids and grandkids, men, women, children, the elderly. I vote because I am responsible for all of these individuals. I believe that a vote is a minimal step toward betterment for all, now and in the future. – LG

To have someone who is capable of representing me. – MA

Lebanon

For things to change. - KH

I don't, it's an ideological principle that isn't realistic. - NM

Because it is my right to participate in the public life of my country. I feel that one vote can make a difference. - MM

It is my duty not to allow the previous thieves to win. Even if I am the only one voting against them, I will not give in by standing by and not voting. - YH

Why should I vote when all who are running are the warlords? - AR

Because I need the Sunnis to win, for the future of Lebanon. – MP



we've powered innovation ever since we powered the first flight.

Ever since our fuels and lubricants were used on the Wright brothers' historic flight in 1903, ExxonMobil has been at the forefront of scientific progress. In fact, we've been a leader in the energy industry for more than 125 years.

Today, we are the world's largest publicly traded oil and gas company, operating on six continents. Our unmatched technical capabilities and high ethical business standards have helped make ExxonMobil a global energy leader. Here in Kuwait, we're committed to a long-term, equitable relationship with the nation and its people. We support Kuwaiti nationals and institutions by supporting educational and health programs. Together, we can work toward another century of excellence.

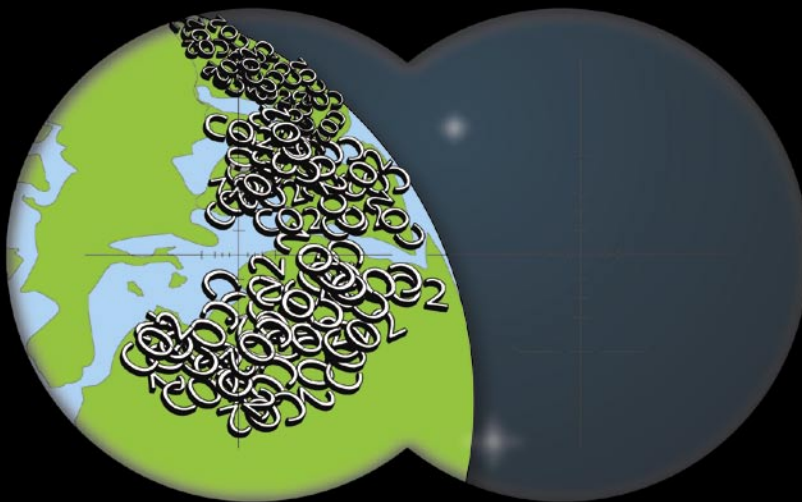
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LINGO
STATISTICS
CALENDAR
TRENDS



TOTAL CARBON
DIOXIDE EMISSIONS
IN THE REGION HAVE
INCREASED BY 81%
SINCE 1990



ETHICS

A branch of philosophy that seeks to address questions about morality.



TRANSPARENCY

When used in a social context implies openness, communication and accountability. Transparent procedures include open meetings, financial disclosure statements, freedom of information legislation, budgetary reviews, audits, etc.



CLIENTILISM

Refers to a form of social organization common in many developing regions characterized by “patron-client” relationships. In such places, relatively powerful and rich “patrons” promise to provide relatively powerless and poor “clients” with jobs, protection, infrastructure and other benefits, in exchange for votes and other forms of loyalty including labor.



DIVESTMENT

Is the reduction of some kind of asset for either financial or ethical objectives, or sale of an existing business by a firm. A divestment is the opposite of an investment.



CULTURAL BOYCOTT

Boycott of all cultural institutions and a refrain from participation in any form of cultural cooperation, collaboration or joint projects.



REFORMS

Beneficial change, or sometimes, more specifically, reversion to a pure original state.



ACTIVISM

An intentional action to bring about social change, political change, economic justice, or environmental wellbeing.



ACCOUNTABILITY

The acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions and policies including the administration, governance and implementation within the scope of the role or employment position; and encompassing the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for resulting consequences.



REGULATION

Refers to controlling human or societal behavior by rules or restrictions.



WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Refers to freedoms and entitlements of women and girls of all ages.

1



UNDER THE OTTOMANS, NEWSPAPERS WERE TOOLS OF TURKISH AUTHORITIES. AN INDEPENDENT ARAB PRESS DID NOT APPEAR UNTIL THE 19TH CENTURY.

2



3



IN EGYPT, THE CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL RENAISSANCE OF THE 1860S/70S WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE LIBERAL KHEDIVÉ ISMAIL WHO GOVERNED BETWEEN 1863 AND 1879.

4

IN SYRIA AND IRAQ, THE WRITTEN PRESS APPEARED A FEW YEARS LATER, BUT WAS VICTIM TO CENSORSHIP DRIVING JOURNALISTS TO EGYPT WHERE A FREE PRESS WAS GUARANTEED.



FROM 1908 ONWARDS, IN RESPONSE TO PRESSURE FROM THE YOUNG TURKS, RESTRICTIONS WERE LIFTED ALLOWING INDEPENDENT PRESS IN EGYPT, SYRIA & IRAQ.

5



IN 1909, THERE WERE 144 NEWSPAPERS AND REVIEWS IN EGYPT, 90 IN CAIRO AND 45 IN ALEXANDRIA.

6



FROM 1945, THE PRESS WAS A TOOL FOR INDEPENDENCE. THE NATIONALISTS, OFTEN JOURNALISTS, WERE BRUTALLY TREATED BY THE COLONIAL AUTHORITIES.

THE PALESTINIAN PRESS, APPEARED IN 1908 AND WAS STRANGLING BY THE YOUNG TURKS. IT WAS NOT ABLE TO REAPPEAR UNTIL AFTER WWI.

8



9



THE 1952 REVOLUTION IN EGYPT, FOLLOWED BY COUPS IN IRAQ & SYRIA, ENDED INDEPENDENT PRESS. 1960-1980, THE WHOLE REGION SUFFERED FROM NO PRESS FREEDOM EXCEPT LEBANON.

THE GULF WAR OPENED A NEW CHAPTER FOR MEDIA IN THE REGION. THE GULF, SEEING THE IMPACT CNN HAD, GRASPED THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SATELLITE TV.

10



THE 1990S STOOD OUT FOR DEVELOPMENT IN CIVIL SOCIETY & POLITICAL PARTIES – BOTH CALLED FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ASSOCIATION.

THE INTERNATIONAL GREEN SUMMIT



The International Green Summit is taking place at Moura Convention Center in Portugal, between November 9 and 14, 2009. During this landmark event, domain experts, policy-makers, non-governmental organizations, educators, corporations, investors and entrepreneurs from around the world will gather to discuss a wide spectrum of issues related to Renewable Energy Systems.

The primary goal of the Summit

is to provide an impetus to the implementation of green, clean and sustainable technologies, solutions and business practices. The IGS aims to facilitate global transformation towards clean sources of energy and reduced greenhouse gas emissions by advocating integration of renewable energy into the primary energy mix. The IGS also endeavors to create mass awareness about ways to conserve natural resources and safeguard the environment.



Venue for Middle East Water Solutions.

WORLD ENERGY & CHEMICALS EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE

October 6 - 8, 2009
Kuwait International Fair Ground
Kuwait
info@kif.net

WATER SOLUTIONS MIDDLE EAST

October 11 - 13, 2009
Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Center
Abu Dhabi, UAE
www.watersolutionsme.com

DUBAI SUMMIT ON ANTI-CORRUPTION ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE

October 12 - 13, 2009
American Conferences
Grand Millennium
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
www.AmericanConference.com/Anti-CorruptionDubai

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY FORUM (CGR FORUM)

November 2 - 4, 2009
Dead Sea, Jordan
www.cgrforum.com

THE INTERNATIONAL GREEN SUMMIT

November 9 - 14, 2009
Moura Convention Center
Portugal
www.igsonline2009.com



Falling Birthrates in the Middle East

Eight out of 15 countries that have seen a drop in its population growth since 1980 are in the Middle East. According to UN officials, this is a sign that education and access to family planning can play a far greater role than expected in reducing population growth, even in conservative Muslim states. Once women are given some right to choose, it is almost inevitable that they have fewer children. From 1975 to 1980, women in Iran were giving birth to nearly seven children per family; according to the latest UN population report, from 2005 to 2010 that number is expected to be less than two. Other Middle Eastern states in the top 15, in order of the steepest drop, include: Tunisia, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Kuwait, Qatar and Morocco.



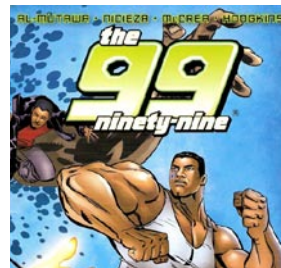
Social Networking Shows a Boost in Productivity

Workers using social networking sites, instead of doing their jobs, have long been the bane of human resources departments across every industry. However, a recent survey questioning oil and gas professionals has revealed that 40% of them believe that companies who encourage the use of social media tools, including social networking sites such as Facebook, to share knowledge and information, would see a boost in worker productivity. The survey questioned a broad spectrum of professionals across the global oil and gas industry including industry engineers, geo-scientists and business managers. It found that 70% believe collaboration and knowledge sharing are vital for driving revenue, cutting costs, and increasing health and safety.



First Cloned Camel is Born in Dubai

The Central Veterinary Research Laboratory produced the first cloned camel after five years of research. "This is the first cloned camel in the world," said Nisar Wani, researcher at the Camel Reproduction Center. Injaz, a female one-humped camel, was born on April 8 after more than five years of work. Injaz, whose name means achievement in Arabic, is the clone of a camel that was slaughtered for its meat in 2005 in Dubai.



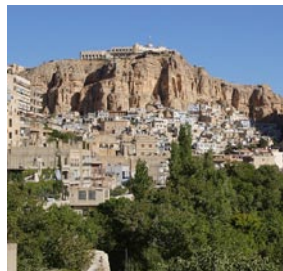
New Arab Heroes in Pop Culture

"The best thing about this game is that this is something that Arabs can relate to," said El-Zanaty, the technical director for Egypt's Good News Group, which developed the game *Bab al-Hara* based on a hit television series that airs during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The series is a Syrian production about the resistance to French occupation, and follows the lives of several families living during that era of Arab history. In Kuwait, Naif al-Mutawa had a similar vision. The Teshkeel Media Group founder drew some inspiration for his comic book, *The 99*, after treating Iraqi soldiers suffering trauma after the first Gulf War in 1990. *The 99* draws from the heyday of Muslim civilization, and each hero is named after one of the 99 qualities the Quran attributes to God, such as The Powerful and The Loving. Al-Mutawa, also the author of a prize-winning children's book, said part of the motivation for his comics was to introduce Arab youths who have grown up in a world dominated by the West to heroic characters similar to those from Arabs' glorious history.



More Women in Egypt are Attending Mosques

In Egypt, a growing number of women are attending mosques for Islamic education and Quran lessons. These lectures are given and organized by female, and not male, mosque administrators. It is a startling sight in Egypt, where mosques have long been a man's realm. While men often socialize in mosques, women have traditionally been encouraged to practice their religion at home, where they can care for their children and husband. But Abdel-Moeti Bayoumi, a theology professor at Al-Azhar University, says men must realize times are changing. "I always tell men that the days of locking up women away from society and useful work or study is backward and dangerous," he said. "It is not permitted in Islam to prevent a woman from praying in the mosque."



Aramaic Makes a Comeback

Syria is trying to revive the oldest living language in the world – Aramaic. Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad has set up an institute to revive interest in the language of Christ. Recognized by UNESCO as an endangered language, Aramaic is spoken by 7,000 people in Maaloula, Syria, which is dominated by Greek Catholics (Melikites) who pre-date the arrival of Islam and Arabic. Aramaic's long decline accelerated as the area opened up to the outside world in the 1920s when the French colonial authorities built a road from Damascus to Aleppo. In recent years, TV, the internet and youngsters leaving to work, has further reduced its speakers.



First Female Sharia Judges in the Middle East

In March 2009, nine new judges were appointed as Sharia judges in the Palestinian Territories – two of them were women. The two women, Khoulood el-Faqeeh and Asmahan Wuheidi, are widely considered to be the first female Sharia judges in the Middle East. Sharia is a complex system of laws used throughout the Muslim world with varying interpretations. Even in the secular Palestinian Territories, most issues of Muslim's personal status are decided in a Sharia court. "In Islam, it says a Sharia judge has to be a Muslim, rational adult" said el-Faqeeh. "Whenever I would discuss this with the chief judge, he would say, 'This is tradition.' I didn't buy it. I'm a legal person, and, to me, legal issues are stronger than tradition." Now, Ms. Faqeeh has begun a new chapter in her Ramallah courtroom, where defendants and plaintiffs are often taken aback when they walk in to her courtroom.



A Plea to Iraqi Scientists to Return Home

A three-day conference, hosted by the Ministry of Science and Technology, was held in Iraq to urge Iraqi scientists living abroad to return home to help their country. After being one of the most highly educated populations in the region, thousands of Iraq's brightest individuals fled from the debilitating UN economic sanctions of the 1990s and from the sectarian violence unleashed by the 2003 US-led invasion. Although violence has taken a downturn in the past two years, only around 700 university professors have returned in recent years – from about 350,000 Iraqis living abroad with university degrees. Of the 200 scientists attending the conference in Baghdad, very few had plans to come back to the country for good due to the ongoing sectarian violence.



We don't produce metal toys

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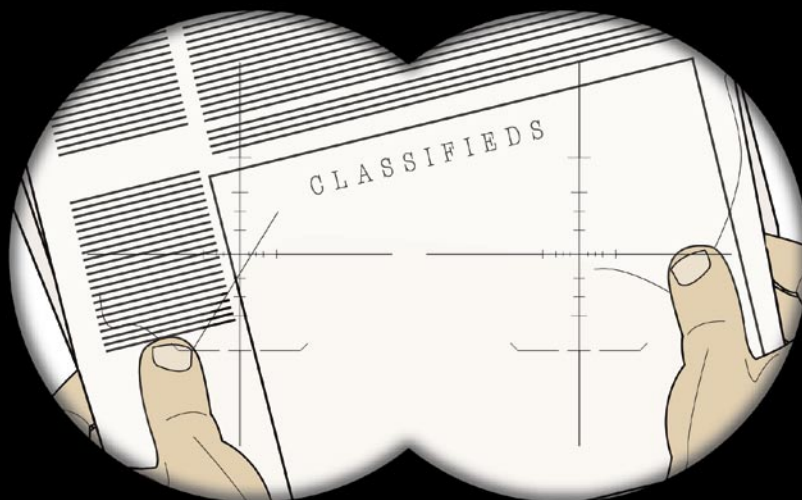
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A MINIMUM OF 5
MILLION JOBS PER
YEAR ARE NEEDED
TO ABSORB NEW
ENTRANTS INTO THE
JOB MARKET IN THE
REGION

The en.v Foundation

en.v



Building upon en.v's drive towards creating a more thought-conscious society, The en.v Initiative is proud to present The en.v Foundation – a non-profit, transparent organization committed to the betterment of the human and social condition.

The en.v Initiative was founded to instill a social consciousness in Arab citizens and Corporate Arabia alike, in order to communicate itself into the adaptation of responsible, sustainable lifestyles. Towards this end, en.v has launched a quarterly regional publication, an online portal, and an advocacy consultancy body – all dedicated to the spread and encouragement of social responsibility in the Arab world.

The Initiative's principle has always been to further the achievements of society. To achieve this, en.v has adopted a multi-lateral action plan that groups individuals, organizations and corporations, with similar goals of philanthropy, sustainability and development, with the hope of galvanizing these sectors of

society towards increasing awareness with regards to social responsibility.

Building upon this drive to create a more thought-conscious society, The en.v Initiative is proud to present The en.v Foundation – a non-profit, transparent organization committed to the betterment of the human and social condition.

Mission & Vision

A product of en.v's dedication to the advancement of social development, The en.v Foundation is an extension of this desire.

As social responsibility encompasses a wide range of sectors, the Foundation shall invest in key programs in various civil

society organizations around the region in the areas of education, environment, culture and general welfare.

Its vision is one in which grassroots organizations all over the region are empowered and equipped to combat poverty and deprivations on all levels. Through The en.v Foundation, en.v will strive to act as an enabler for civil society organizations and an advocate for social development and empowerment. *en.v*

*The en.v Foundation...
Funding Soon.*

To Boycott, or Not to Boycott?

Joseph Farag

Has boycotting ever really worked? Does it even matter if it does work? Or, is it just about personal ethics?



Rosa Parks' refusal to relinquish her seat to a white passenger resulted in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, she could scarcely have been aware of the significance her simple act of civil disobedience would have. The ensuing Montgomery Bus Boycott would mark a watershed moment in the American Civil Rights Movement, and would launch to national prominence a relatively little-known Baptist minister by the name of Martin Luther King Jr.

The boycott has long been a mainstay of both individuals and organizations seeking to voice their objections. When organized as a mass movement, as in the Montgomery case, boycotts can have serious material impact upon an organization, forcing a rethink of stances and policies, while drawing greater attention to injustice. On an individual basis, the conscious decision to avoid a product, service, vendor, or organization

can function as anything from a simple assuaging of guilt about, for instance, the exploitation of child labour, to an important act of self-empowerment. Taken in sum, even these individual acts of boycott can gain enough momentum for major corporations to start to feel the pinch.

It is perhaps for this reason that Starbucks released a statement to the press on January 16 of this year, in both English and Arabic, categorically denying that it provides financial support to the government or military of Israel. It read, in part: "It is disheartening that calls for boycotts of Starbucks stores and products, which are based on blatant untruths, have had direct impacts on local economies and residents, and have also led to violent situations involving our stores, partners (employees) and customers." The statement goes on to attempt to dispel what it dubs "myths"

surrounding the company's support of Israel and its military. Rumours to that effect had emerged over the past several years throughout the Middle East, and while several websites had been set up urging the boycott of Starbucks, it was largely through word of mouth that calls for boycott were circulated.

But while the boycotting of a company believed – rightly or wrongly – to be supporting a government's illegal policies and human rights abuses, or a bus service implementing a frankly racist policy of segregation, is straightforward enough, recent calls for an academic and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions have stirred up much controversy. At issue here is whether culture and ideas can be treated as commodities in the same way that tangible products like a cup of coffee or a bus ticket can be.

Jacqueline Rose, professor of literature



Why I Don't Boycott...
Hassan El-Houry
 Chief Executive Officer
 National Aviation Services
 Kuwait



Why I Boycott...
Noora Kassem
 Content Manager
 Bazaar Magazine
 Kuwait

By definition, a boycott is when one party chooses not to do business with another party in protest. One of the best known boycotts is the Arab oil embargo of 1973, which actually did not lead to any political or diplomatic concessions by the West, but instead the US decreased its reliance on OPEC oil and expedited exploration in Alaska, Texas and the caucuses. The boycott backfired!

A common target of Arab boycotts is Coca Cola. But do the protestors realize that Coca Cola is in fact the second largest employer of Palestinians in Occupied Palestine with over 3,000 employees? A potentially successful boycott of the company in the territories would mean that the bread-winner of over 3,000 families would be unemployed. One should

consider how many jobs are created in our region by the same multinationals we aim to isolate.

Another common target is McDonald's whose revenue from the Middle East is less than 5% of the company's total revenues and the region is not one of its target growth regions. With such a small share of total revenues, Arabs may have some leverage but extremist behavior, like a boycott, would definitely not lead to directional changes in McDonald's views or American foreign policy.

In order for us Arabs to achieve our political goals, we need to integrate competitively into the world economy, invest in education and research, and build effective public-private sector partnerships, among many others.

Those who believe that it is ineffective to boycott immoral consumerism – a consumerism that propagates war, and the double standards that preclude it – are those who have not accepted the layers of reality, and options available within our consciousness, and within the practicalities of day to day life. To believe in boycotting is not merely to believe in antagonizing a reality, or going against a tide too powerful to overcome, such as the tide of Zionism and its influence on global economics. Rather, to believe in boycotting is to believe in changing the norm of acquiescence, and to embrace the constructivism that is our power. We have the power to redefine, and to rethink, and to not only imagine another reality, but to enact it as well.

My belief in boycotting stems from an informed choice, from years of studious dedication to the topic at hand, but more importantly, from the evidence I see before me on a daily basis pointing towards a need for change. The system we live in profits off corruption, and such a system is not sustainable. Boycotting is just one vehicle dashing towards change, but it is also a vision, a belief, and a dedication to humanness which has been tainted by theories and mentalities stemming from the genealogy of Hobbesian delusion. Why should I accept, as a fixed definition, that human nature is inherently selfish? What we lack is faith in ourselves, and trust in our ability to create a better world. I boycott to belong to that dedication; the dedication to re-definition, progress, and trust.

a.



a. *Jacqueline Rose.*
 b. *A plaque commemorating Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama.*

b.



at Queen Mary, University of London, and an outspoken critic of Zionism and Israeli policies, has drawn fire over her advocacy of a cultural and academic boycott of Israeli universities. She is quick to point out that her support of such a boycott was highly reluctant, a “mark of despair” over the ongoing suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. And while she expresses wariness over facile equivalencies

between Israel and Apartheid South Africa, she believes there is a lesson to be learned from the South African case. For, despite opposition to the cultural and academic boycott of South African institutions from some quarters, Rose points out that “the boycott against the apartheid regime endured, and it is also worth remembering that – together with the dialogue which flourished with the country’s artists and writers at the

same time – it helped bring the regime to its end and lay the foundations for an inclusive democracy.”

The debate over the cultural and academic boycott of Israel rages on – drawing impassioned arguments from all sides. One thing remains clear, however: So long as injustices prevail, so too will the boycott as a means of protest and dissent. *en.v*

Wasta...

A Necessary Evil?

Adel Nuseibeh

Wasta... The mainstay of business in the Middle East seems to constantly come up in any discussion about ethics and business. Is it really that bad? Are there any benefits to wasta? Will it ever go away?



Wasta has become an intricate theme of modern Kuwaiti society, and has developed into a natural way to conduct business. Wasta can be loosely defined as “influence” or “connections”, and can be typically categorized as “a means to an end” – or, to some, simply as corruption, and in some cases even bribery. The public sectors of Kuwait are known to be commonplace for the use of wasta, and the overall consensus is that wasta has become necessary to complete any transaction with the government. The question that must be asked is: Does wasta slow business down, or does it in fact expedite the process?

Although business transactions can be expedited through the use of wasta, it can be harmful since the effectiveness of wasta can only be measured by the intentions of the beholder. Accordingly, a person’s intentions when using wasta are usually based on personal interests – to the detriment of other players in the field and for potential wider diversification in the sector. For example, when establishing a business in Kuwait, the process of attaining the proper licenses, receiving approvals from certain ministries, or even obtaining visas for foreign employees if necessary, can be rather frustrating. With the use of wasta, the establishment phase can be accelerated, and in theory, no harm is inflicted on any party involved. In contrast, some cases may resort to bribery to push requests through the

multi-layered system, and its practice can place stress on a society, produce distortions in an economy, and hinder the development of international trade. Smaller players in the industry could be forever doomed if a contract or transaction is the deciding factor for their survival, and their bid is bypassed by competitors with wasta.

Transparency International (TI), an international anti-corruption watchdog, conducted public opinion surveys in Kuwait, referred to as the *2009 Global Corruption Barometer*, and reports that around one-fifth of the respondents claimed to have paid a bribe, or knew someone in their household who did in the past year. This statistic is rather stark considering more developed nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States scored less than six percent in the same study. The overall effect of wasta varies in different situations, and as with most issues, moral relativism could be applied in stating that the detriments of wasta to society depend solely on the intention of whoever is pursuing it. However, it cannot be denied that wasta is generally seen as a rather distasteful way of conducting business.

According to Zawya, TI conducted a study that asked participants to evaluate the scale to which they believed public services were corrupt. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means not at all corrupted and 5 being extremely corrupted,



Anonymous Interview
Wasta and Business

How does Wasta affect business transactions in the region?

[It does] very much. I will give you some examples from the top of my head: Local and private banks give loans to people with wasta without even seeing a business plan. People with wasta receive new laws and regulations on business and trade permits before they are released to the public, so that they can have first advantage. People with wasta get their business transactions processed faster. People with wasta are also allowed to import goods, which would otherwise not be permitted.

Do you find wasta positive or negative?

I find it negative and demotivating for young entrepreneurs.

What is the biggest problem that can arise out of Wasta?

Corruption.

Do you think Wasta is a global issue, or special to the region?

It exists everywhere in the world. However, it is more prevalent in this part of the world.

Is Wasta still widely used? Or, has it been on the decrease?

I think it is [actually] increasing.

Kuwait rated public officials and civil servants the highest with a score of 3.4. Political parties were rated 2.3, whereas businesses and private sectors received 3.0, and the media scored a 2.4, bringing Kuwait’s overall average to 2.5. These results are based solely on the opinions of the general population; but they still provide strong indication of the corruption levels affiliated with different sectors in a country. However, the levels of intensity are directly correlated to the efforts set out by governments to curb or regulate corrupt sectors.

Wasta may eventually pan out to be a zero-sum game in which the wielder’s gain may be the loss of the under-privileged player. For this reason, anti-corruption initiatives are already being employed by governments worldwide as a unified mission to control corruption. One can only hope that governments in the region will begin to take notice of the urgency behind the need to rein in corruption and start to move in the same direction as their global counterparts.

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- Advanced Search**: Includes a search bar, a category dropdown, and a research by industry dropdown.
- Login / Register**: A section for user authentication with a form and a "Remember" checkbox.
- Newsletter**: A section for email subscriptions with an "Enter Email" field and a "Go" button.
- News**: A section for news articles, with a featured article about Mahmoud Darwish.
- Forum**: A section for forum posts, with a featured article about luxury coaches in Tunisia.
- Poll**: A section for a poll asking "Do you consider yourself an environmentalist?" with "Yes" and "No" options.
- Profiles of Change**: A section featuring a collection of portraits and text about influential Arab personalities.
- What is an Arab?**: A section featuring a portrait of a man and text about a multiple-choice exam question.
- Gamal Abdel Nasser**: A section featuring a portrait of Gamal Abdel Nasser and text about his role as an Egyptian ruler.
- Featured**: A section for featured content, including a "Remember" checkbox and a "Video (5)" link.
- Image (167)**: A link to a collection of 167 images.
- Text (93)**: A link to a collection of 93 text articles.

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the same navigation links as the top: Home | About Us | Privacy | Advertising | Contact Us | FAQ | Contribute | Login | Register | eMagazine | News | Forum |

In Brief

The en.v Initiative announces the launch of its second platform, a comprehensive online portal. The primary objective of our web-based portal is to provide a centralized medium, equipped with interactive tools, for corporations and individuals alike to document their socially responsible efforts and network with like-minded individuals on a regional and global scale.

Primary Portal Features

- Comprehensive Bilingual Facilities (Arabic & English)
- Corporate & Basic User Accounts
- Online Magazine (Cover to Cover)
- Archiving Facility
- Film, Audio, & Image Galleries
- Reports, Press Releases, Articles
- Ratings & Comments
- Related Content
- Advertising Opportunities
- Search / Advanced Search
- Downloadable Documents
- Forum
- Poll
- News *and more...*

For participation opportunities, kindly contact us at env@envearth.com to request our advertising, sponsorship and subscription rate card.



Forum

Our Shared Planet Motorcycle Adventure Jun 1, 2009
 The "OUR SHARED PLANET" Motorcycle odyssey is a dream come true for three Kuwaiti motorcyclists, Muhanad Al-Sultan, Mr. Husain Ashkanani, and Mr. Ali Al-Bairami, who have been yearning to circumnavigate the globe on their own motorcycles. The trip starts in May 2009 and lasts for approximately 120 days. They will [More](#)

Cricket breaks down Israel boundaries Jun 1, 2009
 Tom Rodwell Cricket For Change- Cricket For Change was set up almost 30 years ago, in the wake of the inner-city riots in London. The charity worked with the poor, with gangs, and with the disabled. In recent years, it has taken its "street cricket" to countries around the world. [More](#)

Saudis clamp down on women's gyms Jun 1, 2009
 Many women-only sports clubs and gyms in Saudi Arabia face closure under a government clampdown on unlicensed premises, Saudi media have reported. Women's gyms have become popular in the ultra-conservative Muslim country where the sexes are heavily segregated. But only clubs linked to medical groups can get licenses and others [More](#)

Saudi's Miss Beautiful Morals Jun 1, 2009
 Saudi Arabia's only beauty pageant, the judges don't care about a perfect figure or face. What they're looking for in the quest for "Miss Beautiful Morals" is the contestant who shows the most devotion and respect for her parents. So after the pageant opens Saturday, the nearly 200 contestants will [More](#)

Detained in Egypt, But Still Tweeting May 27, 2009
 The outspoken Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas and Palestinian journalist Laila El Haddad both shared the minute details of their experience of custody, in two separate incidents, with fellow Twitter users. In about 40 tweets, Wael Abbas managed to inform his readers of his day-long experience in a Cairo city centre [More](#)





Yemen's Jews May 7, 2009
 One of the oldest Jewish communities in the Arab world is fighting for its survival. Yemen's Jews are thought to have roots dating back nearly 3,000 years to King Solomon. The community used to number 60,000 but shrank dramatically when most left to Israel, while those remaining – a mere [More](#)

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Search Results	Rating	Views	Actions
 Articles of Change The following section is tribute to some of the Arab world's most influential personalities. Thinkers, politicians, writers, singers, actors, filmmakers, businessmen, theologians, poets, artists – all have in some way, positively or not, influenced Arab culture and society. Although far from a complete list, the following profiles will attempt More	★★★★	97 Views	Add Bookmark Send To A Friend
 Conservative in Kuwait (The Pilot of The Black Mask) Tucked away for years behind a series of false store frontages, a small army of men go about their daily routine of protecting our eyes and minds from the ever increasing onslaught of foreign ideas, legs and breasts. Armed with a never-ending supply of thick black felt tip markers, the More	★★★★	24 Views	Add Bookmark Send To A Friend
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 Ethical For Charity "Shouldn't Be A Crime Against Humanity," exclaims Ibrahim al-Zuhri, Director of the Environment and Research Department at the Emirates Diving Association (EDA) in Dubai. At a time when biotuels have become a globally explosive and controversial issue, Zuhri has no compunction voicing his opinions. In fact, Zuhri has no problem More	★★★★	12 Views	Add Bookmark Send To A Friend

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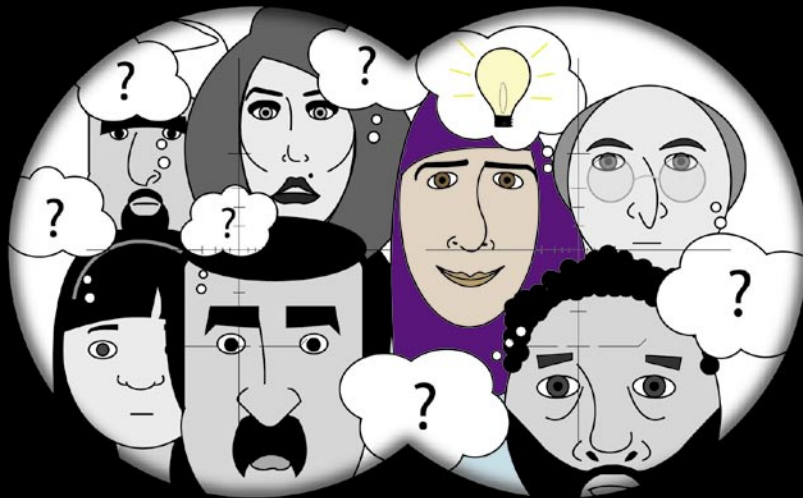
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IN THE REGION

The Missing Half

Yasmin El Rifae

Besides the moral and ethical urgency behind the need for women's rights in the Middle East, the economic benefits of granting full opportunity and legal protection to roughly half of any country's population are enormous. How is this struggle panning out in the region?



Haifa Zangana.

Qatar

Since coming to power in 1995, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani of Qatar has demonstrated that the inclusion of women in public life and government is a priority. Women ran for office in 1999, and the first woman was successfully elected in the 2003 second municipal elections. Sheikh Hamad has himself appointed the first female Minister of Education in 2003. Qatar's family laws are comprehensive and give women moderate rights, placing a minimum age limit on marriage and giving women the right to annul marriage or request divorce in certain conditions. Rates of school attendance and literacy of boys and girls are close. Qatari society remains

In thinking of the issue of women's rights in the Middle East, one has to deal with at least two conflicting impulses: On the one hand, it has become intellectually impossible to conceptualize or argue for the rights of Arab women using the same approaches as those used in the West. The fields of social and cultural studies have long ago come to appreciate the importance of context in writing about people in a society, and in that light, the religious, cultural and political circumstances, which so powerfully shape Middle Eastern societies, demand their own language and approaches. On the other hand, however, it is difficult – and unwise – to ignore the absence of the most basic human rights from the lives of so many women in the region.

Women's rights can broadly be defined as "the effort to secure equal rights for women and to remove gender discrimination from laws, institutions, and behavioral patterns." In international practice, this means the state's protection of the rights of women as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as legally binding agreements such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Since Arab states vary in terms of ratification of these conventions and are therefore on unequal levels of legal obligation, this article will focus on the more general questions of concern to women's rights: Are women given equal opportunities, for example in terms of education and employment? Are women treated equally by the law?

Saudi Arabia - The Theocracy

Arguably one of the most demonized by the international media as far as women's rights are concerned, Saudi Arabia is home to large numbers of educated working women.

In Saudi Arabia, while women study and work in most fields, their mobility is severely restricted. Famously, women are not permitted to drive, nor are they allowed to travel without an authorized male companion. Segregation is strictly enforced.

The legal status of women is strictly regulated by the state's interpretation of Sharia law. Their rights to inheritance and divorce are tightly confined, with little hope of re-interpretation or advances in the near future, such as those seen in some countries whose legal systems are mixed.

Nonetheless, Saudi women have seen some advances such as holding their own identification papers (prior to this they had to be placed on the papers of a male relative). In addition, Saudi women have made advances in the business sector and held prominent positions in professional fields. Further increases in their roles in public life will only strengthen the women's rights cause in that country.

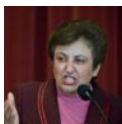
Iraq - Women Bearing the Brunt

The status of women's rights in Iraq has been nothing short of deplorable since the American invasion of 2003 and the subsequent occupation ever

since. This has been confirmed not only by the writings of Iraqi women, but also from studies conducted by Oxfam and Amnesty International. Whereas Iraqi women were amongst the most educated and well-employed in the region, the elimination of security, the dismantling of the state apparatus, and the ensuing sectarian violence have all severely damaged Iraqi women's rights.

The Iraqi Provisional Constitution of 1970 granted women equal rights under the law, and guaranteed their rights to attend school, work, run for political office, and own property. While women bore the brunt of the international sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s, their situation has dramatically worsened since the American invasion. The current employment rate of women in Iraq is at 11%. Girls' illiteracy rates are rising as parents are fearful of sending them to school. Incidents of rape and sexual violence have increased as law enforcement has vanished.

In a speech delivered at the American University in Cairo last February, Haifa Zangana, a prominent Iraqi activist, elaborated on the plight of Iraqi women. She spoke of the resignation of the Iraqi Minister of Women's Affairs, Nawal Al Samarra, who stepped down due to a severe lack of funding and general support from the Iraqi government. Samarra is quoted as saying: "I was convinced that I could improve conditions for women, but I ran into a wall... the occupation, terrorism, the economy collapsing... all that produced an army of widows, an increase in the



A Look at Three Other MENA Countries...

traditionally conservative, opposing large public roles being taken on by women, and promoting segregation of schools and most workplaces. Sheikh Hamad has made it a point to mitigate his advocacy of women's rights with traditional religious beliefs. There are no active women's groups in Qatar.

Bahrain

While the Bahraini constitution grants equality between men and women '... without breaching the provisions of Islamic canon law,' it does not outlaw discrimination against women. Since all family law cases are heard in either Sharia courts, often headed by conservative judges, women are often at a disadvantage compared to men.

Bahraini women married to foreign men cannot pass on citizenship to their spouses or children. Furthermore, there is no law specifically concerned with gender-based violence, leaving victims of domestic abuse and sexual harassment no legal recourse. While women comprised over half of the students enrolled at the Arabian Gulf University and the University of Bahrain in 2007, the two largest in the country, they accounted for a mere 19% of the country's labor force in that same year. Additionally, there are certain subjects women are prohibited from studying in high school, specifically those that would lead to a university degree in engineering, a profession from which women are excluded. On the other

hand, women are over-represented in the fields of education and healthcare. In terms of political equality, Bahrain is similar to other relatively liberal Gulf states in that it has seen female ministers since the turn of the century, appointing the first female minister of health in an Arab country in 2004.

Iran

Iranian women played an active role in overthrowing the Shah during the 1979 Revolution. Many of them felt betrayed by the hard-line stance the regime adopted - one which forced them to fully veil their bodies, reduced the marriageable age to nine, excluded them from the political process and, temporarily, kept them out of universities. Some progress has been made, largely thanks to the

tenacity of Iranian women's rights activists. The most prominent individual example is that of Shereen Ebadi, who had been made Iran's first female judge before women were barred from that position. Ebadi focused her attention to human rights activism, and wrote and campaigned to improve the legal position of Iranian women and children. She also practiced the law in defense of several dissident and liberal Iranians. Her efforts on behalf of women in particular won her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. Many other less known figures and organizations have worked for decades, in a context of civil and political repression, to improve women's rights in Iran. Today, almost 70% of Iran's university students are women, however, women's unemployment rates are double that of men.

number of divorcees, unmarried women, women beggars. Society is falling apart and me; I was a minister in a ministry without means, without power, without offices outside Baghdad." She has since rescinded her resignation after pledges of support from international agencies.

Zangana went on to discuss the misrepresentation of the situation of Iraqi women in international media, particularly right-wing networks such as Fox News. Describing how many TV stations and newspapers were running stories praising the increased visibility of Iraqi women on the streets as compared to a year ago, Zangana explains the darker side of this phenomenon. Men are basically forced to stay home due to kidnappings, murder, and sectarian and political assassination. This essentially pushed the responsibility of going out for food, water, and other resources onto women. Ever since, women have fallen prey to increasing levels of violent crime as they are forced to risk their lives in order for their families to survive.

Egypt - Women in the most populous Arab nation

The Egyptian women's rights movement has a long history - from Hoda Shaarawi taking off her veil in an act of protest in a crowded train station, to current Islamic feminists who are pushing for a re-interpretation of religious teachings pertaining to women, to Suzanne Mubarak leading other Middle Eastern First Ladies in advocating to improve the status of women in the region.

Most recently, Egyptian women have seen some positive legal advances. The kholo' law, which made it possible for women to file for divorce on the basis of incompatibility, was passed in 2000. Prior to this, women had to prove mistreatment by their husbands, whereas men could divorce women verbally. The Egyptian Parliament also passed laws criminalizing and completely banning Female Genital Mutilation in the summer of 2008.

However, the status of Egyptian women, particularly outside its crowded urban centers, remains dire. Forty-five percent of Egyptian girls and women over the age of 15 are illiterate. Women lack proper access to sexual and reproductive health awareness and care. They suffer from restrictive traditional attitudes which often confine them to the home, and are largely unaware of their legal rights.

In the country's urban centers, sexual harassment is omnipresent. Surveys have proven that women - regardless of how they dress, whether or not they are veiled, or what time of day it is - face verbal and physical sexual harassment on the street and on public transportation on a daily basis. Reporting incidents of harassment or assault to the police often leads to victim blaming, and so most women do not bother.

There appears to be some progress even in this most endemic of problems, however. Last October, and for the first time ever, an Egyptian court sentenced a man to three years in jail for physically and verbally assaulting a woman on

the street. Parliament is being urged to discuss explicitly criminalizing sexual harassment. Moreover, the amount of negative international attention which Egypt has received as a result of this problem has arguably led to a more diligent and helpful approach by the authorities. Only time will tell if this is a positive, permanent step towards change or a frantic attempt at damage control.

Men's Rights

The issue of women's rights in this region is made more complicated by the overall lack of human rights in general. The Middle East is dealing with a series of ongoing and recurring international conflicts, refugee crises, authoritarian regimes, police torture, and the absence of the rule of law. The truth is that women are not the only ones here who still have to fight for their basic rights (such as freedom from torture) as well as their political, religious and civil rights.

It was not until the world wars had ended and civil rights had been achieved for blacks in the United States that women were able to make advances in terms of economic, social, and political rights. Women's rights are made exponentially more difficult to achieve in contexts of war and political oppression. Until the Middle East region achieves more stability, security and desirable political systems, it is difficult to imagine women's rights thriving in the area.

We should all be thankful, however, that this does not prevent some people from trying anyway. [en.v](#)

NGO Ethics: A Given or Vain Hope?

Nesma Farahat

a.



Although the earliest non-governmental organizations (NGOs) date back to the 19th century, NGOs have only recently stepped in to fill the role of the state and deliver services to communities that governments are unable or unwilling, to provide. What sort of ethical and accountable codes exist for NGOs? Where does all the aid money actually go?

The phrase ‘non-governmental organization’ came into popular use with the establishment of the United Nations Organization in 1945, as organizations which are neither governments nor member states. Since their official inception, NGOs have grown exponentially in size, prevalence, capacity, and influence. NGOs now emphasize humanitarian issues, development aid, sustainable development, human rights, environmentalism and a number of other sectors. They are staffed by both volunteers and full-time, paid employees, and receive their funding from a plethora of donors. This funding, being one-off contributions or multi-year, renewable grants, is a source of heated discussion, as questions of how the money is raised, where it goes, and who is accountable for it, are constantly raised.

Dr. Michael Williams, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Palestinian Authority and the Quartet, warns that while NGOs are often trusted more than most official institutions, stakeholders,

including both the public and private sphere, must continue to demand accountability and transparency in all operations. Williams states: “Trust does not, however, only apply between an NGO and its supporters. It is also a crucial element in all its other relations; with its partners in the South, with governments, with the media...” While NGOs are responsible for not only implementing development projects but also reporting on the status of their funding, it remains a donor responsibility to perform a monitoring system of checks and balances to ensure that funding is being channeled correctly as per organizations’ mandates and terms of agreement.

In June 2006, the heads of 11 international NGOs (INGOs) working in human rights and environmental and social development, publicly endorsed the first global accountability charter for the non-profit sector. In adhering to good governance tenants of transparency and accountability, the INGO Accountability Charter looks to demonstrate NGO policies of disseminating and sharing knowledge about global issues, and works to establish networks and coalitions

to address these issues. Through the Accountability Charter, leading INGOs seek to express the importance and legitimacy of their operations in light of the increasingly influential role they play in the international arena.

While the Accountability Charter is one step towards effective monitoring and management of NGO funding, the Charter only applies to its current signatories. As such, no similar initiative has been established in the region, nor is in the pipeline. Getting the entirety of organizations in the Middle East and North Africa region to sign the Charter is unrealistic and futile. With new organizations being established daily, it is nearly impossible to estimate the number of NGOs operational in the Middle East at any given moment, nor the sheer amount of funds being channeled into them. As the coordination of organizations within individual countries is a daunting task, a regional coordination effort will no doubt be an endeavor that will take significant planning and management. What can be hoped for, however, is that the parties that are signatories to the Charter, including many who fund development programs in the region, will look to the Charter’s

b.



a. Palace of the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.

b. The United Nations outdoor fountain.

Key Principles of the International Non-Governmental Organizations Accountability Charter

- Respect for universal principles (freedom of speech, assembly, and association)
- Financial and political independence
- Responsible advocacy
- Genuine partnership with communities and NGOs
- Non-discrimination (in all activities, both internal and external)
- Transparency
- Good governance
- Ethical fundraising
- Professional management

As a foundation, describe the difference between where your funding comes from and where non-governmental organizations (NGO) receive their funds.

As part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR), the EFG-Hermes Holding Company established the EFG-Hermes Foundation in early 2007. Since its inception, the Holding Company has funded the Foundation with 39 million Egyptian pounds, and in turn, the Foundation has approved 17 different development projects implemented through various NGOs. NGOs on the other hand, are funded by the private sector, other NGOs, international organizations, private donations, individuals and large donor organizations.

Hanaa Helmy
Chief Executive Officer
EFG-Hermes Foundation
Cairo, Egypt



By what criteria do you determine which NGOs to fund? What, financially, do NGOs have to prove to you to be rewarding of your funding?

We work with both large and small NGOs, and select partners based on their successful track records. We also prefer to work with NGOs lead by social entrepreneurs. As yet, we have not approved a proposal without adding or changing to it in order to ensure that it is in alignment with our goals of sustainable development rather than simple charity. Also, NGOs must show the willingness to learn, demonstrate market skills, and accept us as partners rather than a donor who merely writes checks and receives progress reports.

Describe your monitoring and auditing process.

We conduct site visits, review project reports, and distribute budgets accordingly. Our projects are only funded once they demonstrate a certain level of achievement.

Describe a situation you encountered where you felt an NGO you were in contact with was being unethical or unaccountable.

In situations like that, we step up our monitoring and conduct more site visits until we reach our goals and fulfill our commitments. In situations where NGOs fail to meet our expectations, we cease their funding entirely.

What measures can be done to strengthen and ensure NGO accountability?

Entities that choose to fund NGOs must enter into partnerships, rather than top-down donors. They also must lead by example and work as one team towards achieving a common goal. The issue is not merely that of NGO accountability, but the accountability of all parties. Once there is a partner-wide system of checks and balances, all pieces will fall into place.

key principles and ethically monitor the funneling of their donations.

Other initiatives seek to provide the same services but through less formal, and more country-specific, activities. Spirit of America is a nonprofit organization funded solely through private sector contributions, which seeks to respond to requests from American military and civilian personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa for items that will help local communities. In 2004, Spirit of America underwent their biggest fundraising effort since its inception in support of a request by the 1st Marine Division to provide equipment for Iraqi-owned and -operated television stations.

After requesting US\$86,001 for the Al Anbar TV project, Spirit of America was able to raise in excess of \$1 million. The organization gave private donors the options of letting Spirit of America use their donation for any other activities, to support any media need in Iraq or Afghanistan, restrict the donation to support only the original Al Anbar TV stations, or refund the unused portion of their donation. By giving donors the opportunity to choose where their

original donations were allocated, the organization exhibited ethics and accountability, and efficiently retained responsibility over donated funds.

Perhaps the largest monitoring body of humanitarian funding to the region is NGO Monitor, an organization founded to promote accountability, and advance a vigorous discussion on the reports and activities of humanitarian NGOs in the framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict. NGO Monitor recognizes that because of the “do good” nature of humanitarian organizations, as well as the fact that NGOs are not democratically elected, they often enjoy immunity from detailed scrutiny or criticism and are not held to the same standards of accountability for the resources within their control.

With the Arab-Israeli conflict possibly the longest and most-heated debate in the Middle East’s recent history, the excessive amount of funds allocated to the innocent victims of violence often go unchecked and unaccounted for. Bodies responsible for the allocation of these funds often find themselves in the position to misrepresent situations on the ground by selectively removing entire contexts

and channeling ideologies, as well as donations, to off-sector groups. This not only fuels tensions in the region, but also leaves those most vulnerable without the assistance originally intended for them.

Regulatory bodies, such as NGO Monitor, seek to challenge organizations to accurately present the information in their hands and funnel humanitarian assistance ethically and accountably. Until a region-wide regulatory body is created, however, organizations will continue to disperse resources as they see fit, while donors, perhaps blindly, believe that these funds are being accounted for and managed ethically and transparently. *en.v*

Health & Ethics

Dr. Kazem Behbehani

en.v



Dr. Kazem Behbehani

A leading figure on the world health scene and former World Health Organization Envoy, Dr. Kazem Behbehani explains to en.v how health and human rights are inextricably linked...

When talking about ethics and transparency in the health sector, what sorts of concerns do health professionals have regarding this issue?

Neglected tropical diseases affect one billion people in the world, often the most vulnerable populations living in poor rural areas in low-income countries. They can result in lifelong disabilities and even death. They constitute a source of social stigma, discrimination and poverty. Affected populations often do not have access to treatment and preventive measures, and research and development has been insufficient. This is both a public health, and human rights issue. A human rights-based approach to neglected tropical diseases, aims to raise understanding and knowledge among health planners, human rights groups, development partners and civil society organizations.

How stringent is the ethical code for doctors in the region?

In many countries the ethical code is not at all stringent. This is partly cultural and partly lack of perceived need or pressure. For instance, in some countries nobody goes to the doctor or hospital, no matter what the age, without several members of the family. The health problems of

the individual are discussed and shared amongst the family. Medical reports, and other information, are given out to family members, even over the telephone.

You have stressed that health and access to health is a human right. What is the actual perception held in the region regarding health?

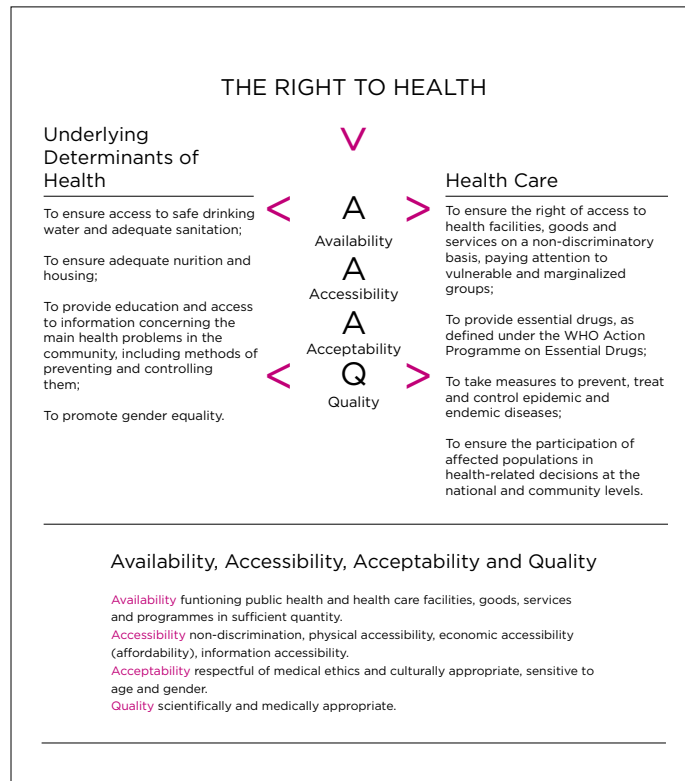
Human rights are a set of entitlements, which apply to all human beings. A human rights-based approach is guided by human rights standards and principles. It requires that health interventions support the capacity of duty bearers (primarily government authorities) to meet their obligations and of affected communities to claim their rights. The right to the highest attainable standard of health ('the right to health') is recognized in several human rights treaties and national constitutions. Moreover, the right to health is closely related to and contingent on several other human rights. Development efforts often need to be cross-sectoral and include economic, social and political interventions. Moreover, in a number of countries there is no perception of maintaining health, only fighting disease and treating patients.

The issue of human rights extends to a broad spectrum of liberties including education, health, shelter, the pursuit of happiness... Having said this, would not a broad national strategy to tackle the issue and components of human rights be necessary to change perceptions region-wide? Or, are these separate issues?

No, they are not separate issues, but very closely interdependent hence the need for an integrated cross-sectoral approach with the citizen at the center. A broad national strategy is key to changing perceptions and providing the health care and public health preventive measures that all members of society equally deserve and have a right to.

Many people may not see health as a priority when discussing development issues. Do you see this as a problem?

Development issues are discussed and projects are implemented without taking account of the health issues – [this has] been a major concern to all nations. Where health impact assessment studies have been well conducted, the



development process has proceeded in a more cost-effective and beneficial manner than when the health aspects have been ignored.

Have people's views towards health issues and its connection to a nation's development changed?

It is very difficult to generalize on the issue of health and the nation's development. People's perception and demand for development have not always considered the health aspects. As more and more technology is introduced into the daily life of the individual, many more health considerations must be addressed. Development works both ways. In some situations, as a result of development, some diseases have been reduced or even disappeared; on the other hand new diseases have occurred.

What are the most pressing health issues in the region?

The most pressing health considerations in the region are the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiac disease and cancers, and the underlying obesity and lack of exercise that is

sweeping through the middle-aged and younger generations. Diseases that can be prevented by a change in lifestyle are pressing, and actions to develop a knowledge-based society are essential.

Have we taken the necessary steps to fix these issues?

We have not yet taken the necessary steps to address these issues. There is a reluctance to embark upon many of these actions because the power of technology is not well understood, nor demonstrated, and the short-term financial implications are seen as a barrier instead of long-term benefits.

How can Arab states take a more proactive role in providing better healthcare and health solutions to all members of the community?

There are some very basic major steps that can be taken by all nations. These are to develop and strengthen health systems and their management with the citizen as the center and as the client; and to serve the needs of the client and not the needs of the health providers. This is a fundamental change in thinking that must be vigorously pursued.

The right to health extends not only to timely and appropriate health care, but also to the underlying determinants of health (access to education, clean water and housing). The right to health calls for immediate and targeted steps to be taken to progressively ensure that health services, goods and facilities are available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality.

What advice would you give a young adult looking to work in this sector?

Working in the health sector is not easy and not financially rewarding, but can be very challenging and satisfying given the right training and experience. There will be dramatic new tools to work with, including drugs, vaccines, diagnostic techniques, technology and new strategies. There is no doubt that life will be prolonged and, along with that, will come even more challenges. *en.v*

Socially Responsible Companies

en.v

Although arguably under par when it comes to global corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, the region has been working hard at catching up with the CSR big leaguers. In particular, three companies in the region have been working hard at building up their CSR credentials. Here's a small look into their various world-class initiatives.



Blom Bank

Blom Bank, which won the Best Bank in the Middle East 2009 award and the Best Bank in Lebanon for that same year, has participated in and initiated various projects for the community in a range of sectors. They are the exclusive Platinum sponsors of the BLOM Beirut Marathon for the past four years aimed at making a difference in people's lives through sports. Blom Bank is also one of the major contributors to the Green Lebanon Book, the revenues of which are dedicated to increasing forestry and green areas in Lebanon. The bank also donates several scholarships to various schools and universities for underprivileged students. The other two areas to which Blom donates and contributes to widely are in the health and cultural sectors. Among the NGOs they support are the Red Cross, The Children's Cancer Center in Lebanon, Islamic Orphans House (Makassed), and various art and musical festivals in Lebanon.



Batelco

The Batelco (Bahrain Telecom Company) Group is the leading communications provider in the Kingdom of Bahrain serving both the corporate and consumer markets. Batelco is proving to be a leading national figure in the field of social responsibility through its various initiatives in education and health. In cooperation with Bahrain's five governorates, Batelco launched the Batelco Live project that aims to build 30 computer labs and provide free Internet in 20 villages across the country. Additionally, Batelco is one of the major sponsors of the Crown Prince Scholarship Fund project that is seeking to reform the educational system in Bahrain by connecting classrooms to a central system. In the health field, Batelco has dedicated BD3 million for the construction of a new health center in the town of Hidd, which lacks its own medical center.



EFG-Hermes

Foundation

The EFG-Hermes Foundation is dedicated to helping people and institutions alleviate obstacles in financial, educational and health issues that face society in Egypt. Through its support of programs and initiatives that aim to "increase opportunities for the most in need," EFG-Hermes has helped change people's lives. The foundation has completed the first phase of its Project Ro'ya initiative, which aims to decrease poverty levels in the Ezbet Yacoub - Beni Sweif governorate in Egypt. This EGP 25 million two-year project is targeted towards constructing safe and environmentally friendly homes, and a community service center run by the villagers. The center will include a bakery, clinic, a dairy production facility, a computer training facility for youths, and a center for children with special needs.

Senior Art Director

*Minimum of 5 years experience.
Proven track record in successfully managing and
training a creative team.
Excellent multi-tasking abilities.
Excellent communication and networking skills.
Excellent organizational skills.
Highly proficient with Adobe
design programs & animation programs.
Knowledgeable in all aspects of printing and
production. Adaptable to a young, fast-paced
creative environment.
English and Arabic mandatory.
Client relationship management.*

Careers at El Boutique Creative Group

Sales Executive

*Minimum of 3 years experience.
Proven track record in successfully closing
sales to high profile corporate accounts.
Dynamic networking abilities.
Excellent presentation skills.
Excellent multi-tasking abilities.
Excellent verbal and written communication
skills.
Excellent organizational and administrative
skills.
English and Arabic mandatory.*

***Send all CVs and
Supporting Documents to:***

***info@elboutique.com
Fax: +965 2252 4615***

Honesty: The Means to Acting Ethically

Dalal Al Sane



A Kuwaiti classroom.

How is our personal ethical code formed? How do we decide as individuals what constitutes ethical behavior? In short, what does it mean to be ethical?

While the election of four female members to parliament marked a new page in Kuwait's history on the 17th of May 2009, the following day brought an unfortunate truth regarding the matter to my attention. My aunt and I were expressing our awe over the evolutionary change in the population's political mentality, only to be disappointed by a remark made by her 11 year-old daughter who was listening attentively with a confused look on her face.

According to my cousin, one of her

teachers had informed her class that the election of a female member to parliament is *haram* [a sin]. When the class questioned the teacher as to why this is the case, she responded by saying that the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) had spoken against it in one of his hadiths, or teachings. As soon as the child concluded what she had to say, I couldn't help but feel disheartened – not by the truthful or false nature of the teacher's argument, rather by the manner in which our children are being taught to take certain lucidly validated

views for granted. Rather than being taught how to critically think by drawing on a variety of knowledge sources, our children are being taught to take certain views for granted. Questioning the teacher's approach in this particular situation consequentially lead me to wonder, in an all-encompassing sense, what it means to be ethical.

As per definition, an ethical act is that which is undertaken in adherence to a code of right conduct. What is limiting, yet simultaneously liberating about this

To me, being ethical in my professional and personal life means knowing that I'd be comfortable being on the receiving end of decisions I've made. – NF

To follow a certain category of social codes whose purpose are to allow us to live together. – KH

Limiting my freedom when it comes to overtaking other's. – AB

Act in accordance to what satisfies my conscious. – SB

To treat others in the manner in which I would like to be treated. – GS

Being ethical means to act within morals or the principles of morality, which ultimately govern what is right and wrong in conduct. – RS

The following is the collection of responses to the question "What does it mean to be ethical?" upon which this article was based:

To me it means taking into consideration the repercussions of your actions on others, and avoiding the negative effects. What makes being ethical challenging is that it's a process of judgment that varies between individuals. – DK

To abide by your moral standards even if it were to your detriment. – KG

One is ethical when one lives their life in adherence to a set standard of 'right' and 'wrong'. Ethics is the love-child of narrative and tradition which, inevitably, fuels the 'clash of civilizations', where one community ethically perceives an action as a moral duty while another community ethically views it as a moral evil that must be fought. – WJ

To do the right thing, even if it goes against my own interest. – AF

I think ethics are derived from two sources: 1- A broad, universal human conception of what is right and wrong based upon instinct and empathy. 2- A more precise code of moral conduct provided by culture and/or religion that differs from people to people. – TR

In a nutshell, to be ethical is to do the right thing. It pertains to an individual's morals and beliefs, and making the right decision in accordance with social norms. – AN

generic definition is that it does not dictate what constitutes right conduct. Rather, it just describes what it means to act ethically.

In an attempt to understand the criteria underlying an ethical act, a random group of people were asked to give an opinion about what it means to be ethical. Although a variety of responses were received, overall, most views seemed to suggest that the code of right conduct entails being honest with one's self and others. However, in order

for one to be able to be honest with one's self, even before being honest with others, one must be given the opportunity to formulate convictions based upon personal experiences. When one is deprived of such an opportunity, the meaning of right conduct becomes dictated by external forces rather than an honest process of contemplation and self discovery.

If acting ethically entails being honest with one's self and others, then an 11 year-old girl should be equipped with

the knowledge necessary to be able to formulate her personal and honest convictions over time. It is these honest convictions that will go towards forming a distinct and true personal identity, which in recognizing its ability to be honest with itself, can hopefully bring itself to be honest with others. *en.v*

The Fantastic 4

en.v

The next generation of leaders in Kuwait is emerging with a slightly different outlook on things - a particularly female one...



On May 17, 2009, history was made in Kuwait. After half a century of male domination in the parliament, four women won seats in Kuwait's National Assembly in the country's second election in a year after the parliament was dissolved following a confrontation between its members and the government. Although over half of the eligible 384,790 Kuwaiti voters are women, no women won seats in the previous two elections after having gained the right to vote in 2005.

Apparently, third time *is* the charm.

Four women did not only make it into parliament, they made it big. Former minister and first female to hold a cabinet position, Dr. Massuma al-Mubarak, placed first by a large margin among the 10 positions in her district. Liberal candidates Dr. Aseel Al-Awadhi and Dr. Rola Dashti came in second and seventh, respectively, in their district - unseating previously popular Islamist members. Independent candidate Dr. Salwa Al-Jassar also made the race in her district at seventh place, taking the number of women in Kuwait's parliament to four. In Dashti's own words, "I think it is history for women in politics all over the world."

A Kuwaiti newspaper reported that the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, congratulated the women in a cable and expressed that he was "delighted at the great results achieved by Kuwaiti women and their deserved success in the elections."

The four female Members of Parliament were educated in the United States and all hold doctorate degrees. However, as Dashti stressed in an interview with a local newspaper: "Yes, all of us are educated, but we also have a woman who won who is married to a non-Kuwaiti, one who is divorced, one who is not yet married, one whose mother is Lebanese. We represent different social strata."

Massuma Al-Mubarak: The US-educated political analyst and professor at Kuwait University made history by becoming Kuwait's first woman minister in 2005, the year women were first given the right to vote and run for office. Mubarak spent a year as planning minister before being appointed as transport minister in 2006, and health minister a year later. She stepped down in 2007, however, bowing to pressure over her handling of a hospital fire.

"This is the will of change of the Kuwaiti people. We hope the results will lead to political stability and help achieve the desired cooperation between Parliament and government."

Rola Dashti: The US-educated economist is a leading women's rights activist and advocate of democratic and economic reforms. Dashti was the first woman elected to chair the Kuwaiti Economic Society. She was listed among the 20 most prominent Arab women by the Financial Times last year, and she is also a member of Kuwait's Supreme Planning Council.

"For the last three years we've ran and to move and do this historical [achievement] without a party, without a quota, I think it is history in Kuwait."

Aseel Al-Awadhi: Born in 1969, Awadhi is a professor of philosophy at Kuwait University and earned her PhD in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin. Expectations pre-election were that Awadhi would win, but no one predicted such a great placing as second.

"It's a victory for Kuwaiti women and a victory for Kuwaiti democracy. This is a major leap forward."

Salwa Al-Jassar: A professor of education at Kuwait University, US-educated Jassar is also a leading women's rights activist and chair of the non-governmental Women's Empowerment Center. She is reportedly drafting a new law that would grant civil, economic and social security for women attempting to found their own businesses from home and for those looking for part-time work.

Al Jassar has asked Kuwaiti women not to look at education simply as a means to earning a degree, but that it should pave the way for her to play an important role in the economy, as well as the one she plays at home. en.v

If you could ask one question of any leader in the Arab world...

I can't think of anyone, and if I did all I would ask is: Why are you so corrupt and short-sighted!? - SK

I would go for one of the old-guard, throne-hugging mobsters like Hosni Mubarak or Qaddafi and ask them how long will they stick around and how they've been able to maintain power for so long? - WJ

I'd pick Sultan Qaboos. What challenges does he envisage might come up in Oman after he leaves? - DK

Umm, I think I would pick Nawal Al Saadawy – the leading Egyptian feminist, and ask her what her thoughts on the increased level of sexual harassment in Egypt were and what she thinks can be done to help curb it. - NF

Mohammad Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, what is the truth behind Dubai? - RM

MOST importantly, from any leader in the Arab world – I would like to discuss the human rights issues; I would like to discuss torture, violation of privacy, and detention without charge...
- RS

Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed, What is your 5 year plan for Kuwait, and where are you taking us? - HT

Hosni Mubarak, what are you doing? - WG

Hasan Nasrallah, I tried very hard to think of someone else (political, economic, social, etc.), I only came up with his name... No one else has anything of worth to say. - KK

I'd like to know what Hosni Mubarak has to say. I'd also like to hear from Nasrallah. I want to ask them both – what is your definition of ethics and do you feel you govern with those ethics? - RK

Gaddafi, what is the definition of a Jamahiriya? - MA

Hasan Nasrallah, I would ask him about every factor that had and is motivating him to keep on pushing, whether it is religious, nationalistic or personal. - LG

Transparency

in the Lebanese General Elections: A Glass Half Full

Deen Sharp

With a new campaign finance reform and innovative electoral transparency slowly being introduced, the new Lebanese electoral laws may in fact surprise us all...

Vote buying dominated much of the discourse on the Lebanese elections. According to local and international news reports, votes were being bought left right and center by Lebanese political parties. A correspondent for The New York Times reported that voters were demanding as much as US\$800 for their vote in expectation that parties would pay out large sums of money in return. Additionally, political parties bought Lebanese citizens residing abroad plane tickets to ensure they come back to Lebanon to vote.

Despite the fact that these stories of vote buying are very difficult to verify, the topic was a central focus in this election, both locally and internationally. As the media continued to ‘talk’ about the various aspects of vote buying, the innovative improvements that were made to ensure transparency of the Lebanese electoral system are being lost.

The Lebanese Interior Minister Ziad Baroud, who was previously head of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), spearheaded much of the electoral reform. Baroud pushed hard for a full range of electoral reforms and wanted to set up a completely independent body to run the elections. Not all the reforms however, were passed and there were some glaring omissions, which prompted Baroud to conclude



a. People gather for a speech by Michel Aoun, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, on May 28, 2009.

b. A campaign poster in Lebanon's third largest city, Zahle.

c. Two voters on Election Day showing off their ink-dipped thumbs, a mark that they have voted.



that Lebanon was left with, “a glass half full”.

“Significant steps forward have been made with the new electoral law introducing long awaited reforms on campaign finance and media regulations as well as the establishment of the SCEC [the Supervisory Commission for Electoral Campaigns],” asserted Gaëlle Kibranian, from the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA). The new electoral law meant that for the first time in Lebanon, and the region, there was a monitoring and ‘controlling’ of campaign finance. This included such provisions as fixed limits on campaign spending set at \$100,000 for each electoral district, with a flexible ceiling of \$3 for every registered voter for each district. This also obligated candidates to draw up a statement of transactions throughout the campaigning period. (It must be noted however, that Lebanon’s highly secretive banking privacy laws mean that it was very hard for the SCEC to fully regulate campaign finance.)

However, this significant improvement in the law was passed without any real recognition or awareness amongst the general public. Kibranian argues that it nonetheless made a difference indirectly: “The main political parties/blocs in Lebanon [were] using the promotion of

transparency as part of their electoral program and this has not happened previously, especially when it [came] to campaign finance.”

The LTA, in their preliminary post-election report, announced the vast sums of money that were being spent on buying votes. The report stated that votes were being bought for as much as \$800 in the district of Zahle, and in the district of Zgharta votes were being bought for as much as \$3,000. “The main way we [were] able to chase vote buying is when a family [was] not paid,” Kibranian claimed.

Nabil Al Fala was one of those who claimed that he was not paid what he was promised after Election Day. On a Lebanese TV program *Al-Fasad* (Corruption), shown on TV network *Al-Jadid*, Fala accused Ibrahim Kanaan – Member of Parliament from the Free Patriotic Movement – of not paying him and 400 other people what he promised for their votes. When the program host Ghada Eid phoned Kanaan to get his reaction to Nabil Fala’s accusations, a 10-minute verbal onslaught between Kanaan and Eid occurred for the entire nation to see.

“You’ve blown this matter out of proportion and someone has paid you,” shouted Kanaan at Eid. This argument



The Lebanese Elections
Election Results



On June 7, 2009, Lebanon went to the polls. Many of the results were already known beforehand, such as the assured victories for the Future Movement led by Saad Hariri in the Sunni dominant areas, and for Hezbollah and Amal in the Shi'a dominant areas. In the Christian community, unlike their Muslim counterparts, political support is not homogenous. Support is split within the Christian community between the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), led by Michel Aoun in alliance with Hezbollah known as the March 8 coalition, and the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb who are aligned with the Future Movement in what is known as the March 14 Coalition.

Much of the international coverage focused on the possibility of the March 8 coalition, particularly Hezbollah, winning the election and the possible ensuing international implications. However, the predictions by most political analysts turned out to be wrong, and just before midnight on Election Day the results trickled in that March 14 had maintained their governmental majority. The FPM had been unable to gain the necessary amount of Christian support in the vital electoral districts to allow March 8, the opposition coalition, to gain a governmental majority. The March 14 coalition won by 71 seats to 58 and thus it was the supporters of March 14 who celebrated hard into the night at the end of the much-anticipated Lebanese Parliamentary elections.

caught national attention and zoomed even more focus in on campaign financing and vote buying.

One method that facilitates the ease of vote buying is the issues of the pre-printed ballot paper. Richard Chambers, the party head of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), explained that the lack of a standard ballot paper seriously undermined the right for secrecy of the vote. "While this custom is justified by politicians as enabling last minute negotiation of lists, in practice it means that the ballots can easily be traced back to the voters who cast them," Chambers said.

Serious gaps in the electoral law, with regard to transparency, do remain; and while vote buying was a result of this gap, one of the most serious lapses in the current system that was not addressed was the absence of the Constitutional Council. The Council is the only body able to resolve electoral disputes and settle challenges to election results. Political deadlock meant that the five judges needed to form the Council were not appointed. Consequently, all the hard work put in by organizations, like the LTA, to ensure the elections were transparent, remained largely theoretical so long as the Council remained dysfunctional. As Chambers stated, the deadlock over the Constitutional Council meant "the

enforcement of important political and civil rights [were] left up in the air."

Therefore, despite the significant improvements that have been made to the electoral law, and in particular campaign finance, serious gaps remain. Furthermore, as the preliminary post-election report by the EU stated, the capacity of the SCEC even with assistance from the LTA was not enough to cope with the task at hand. The report went on to add that: "Financial resources played an excessively large role in the electoral campaign. In addition to reports of direct vote-buying, it was evident that the provision of health, education and other welfare services by permanent foundations and networks affiliated to different political groups played a significant role in achieving electoral support." All this contributed to making the Lebanese elections the most expensive, per capita, in the world.

The LTA, a chapter of Transparency International, itself was instrumental in trying to improve the transparency of the elections and launched, for the first time in the Arab world, a Campaign Finance Monitoring project. "This project has two levels," Kibranian, the Project Director for the Campaign Finance Monitoring project, explained. "One is at the [headquarters] in Beirut where there are analysts, project coordinators,

researchers and monitors, and the other [was] on the field where 79 field staff [were stationed] around the country."

The field staff fed information back to headquarters on the events happening in their locality – estimating the total cost of meetings, receptions and lectures that candidates for the elections held. All of this information was compiled and published, and a mid-campaign report was issued for key observers to the election. (A final public report is to be issued in September for public viewing.)

Despite the lack of a functional Constitutional Council and the problems that surrounded the Lebanese elections, there were significant improvements made to increase the transparency of the elections. The introduction of monitoring and 'controlling' of campaign finance into the election law set important precedents that will hopefully lead to further reforms. Until then, the Lebanese political system has a long way to go before effective transparency is apparent in the electoral system.

In the meantime, those concerned with electoral reform are left to hope that the glass that is half full can one day be filled up the rest of the way. *en.v*

FASHION
FOOD
SHOPPING
SPORTS
TRAVEL



42 MILLION PEOPLE
SUFFER FROM
HUNGER ACROSS
THE MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH AFRICA
REGION

Lost in Fashion

Exploitation

Nur Kaoukji

The story of one designer's travels through the fashionable tailors and markets of India, and the rude awakening awaiting her back home...



The traditional technique of Peeta.

India, I can personally say, is the most colorful, exotic and daring country in the fashion world. Indian artisans pride themselves on being part of an ancestry responsible for an entire library of handicrafts. These existing handicrafts were either created in India, or fashioned from a technique introduced historically by one of the many artisans of various backgrounds who passed through.

As the revival of lost handicrafts is one of my main interests, I was a little wary at the beginning of my trip to India of just how far the workers would go.

My first endeavor in India was to incorporate the traditional technique of Peeta into the first collection of my new brand, noon. Peeta is a technique in which silver wire is wrapped around a cord that is then hand-stitched in a particular pattern on a piece of stretched material, and finally, gently hammered down. This laborious technique is most commonly found on the borders of skirts or saris, and is usually produced in the form of three straight lines. The simplicity of the lines is due to the fact that the wires are almost impossible to manipulate and curve into different shapes.

Adamant that this technique could be applied to my circular Siwa-inspired pattern (a pattern coming from the region of the same name in western Egypt in the Libyan Desert); I approached the artisans with all the necessary designs. I was answered with a smile, a laugh and a headshake: "No way it is possible ji." In less than basic Hindi, I pleaded. It took no longer than five minutes to entice them

into testing out this foreign pattern.

The job was not an easy one, but the artisans worked hard on it. Arriving to the workshops early in the morning, I was usually greeted by a grinning embroiderer who had somehow managed to come close to figuring out exactly how to perfect the technique. The process of sampling took about two weeks without a single complaint from any of them. By the end of production, just in time for my departure to Kuwait, the two embroiderers responsible for the work had proudly mastered an entirely foreign technique of embroidery on their own.

Upon my return to Kuwait, I was confident with the experience that I had gained working with craftsmen in India. With this confidence, I approached a local Indian tailor to produce an unimaginative oblong shaped handbag using a pattern that I had ready - a job that requires nothing more than a standard sewing machine and basic sewing skills.

The answer I received was a quick and sharp "NO!"

I couldn't believe it. The tailor refused, he would have nothing to do with it and no pleading, nor attempts at Hindi, or any explaining could persuade him otherwise.

I didn't understand. I knew it wasn't a question of not having the time, as he agreed to replicate and alter a few other garments.

"I don't know how. I never make bags. No one orders bags, why waste time."

My reaction was just as quick; I immediately labeled him as a languid, uncourageous worker who probably didn't really like his job and fell comfortably into the category labeled 'Lazy Tailors of Kuwait'. I packed up my things, huffed and left.

On the way home, I kept thinking about the artisans in India, how passionate they are about their trade, and how curious and excited they get to test out new things. Why couldn't I see any of those characteristics in this tailor who I knew came from the same background?

Was his unwillingness to experiment due to his disconnection from India, to his placement in a stuffy room in a foreign country, filled with fellow countrymen who work systematically all day to produce just in order to get by? Or, was his lack of interest a reaction to one too many clients unamused by an experiment or mistake made often due to an idea lost somewhere in translation?

People often say that Indian artisans are better off working outside India because, although their lives are tough, their pay is always higher. Is this really the case? Is losing the dignity of your craft and enthusiasm for your work really worth an extra KWD 40? More importantly, as a population aware of the origin and current way of life of these workers, is it really ethical for us to observe, accept and treat them as low as we allow ourselves to pay them? *en.v*

Unethical Eating: The Truth Behind Gourmet Food

Hussam El Tayeb



Fugu, or puffer fish.

How would you feel about paying US\$1,000 for a six-course meal for two? Now imagine that the figure is actually over \$130,000 and it isn't a six-course meal, but a mushroom...

Burger King is not exactly the first option that comes to mind when you think of gourmet dining, but their new limited edition offering of 'The Burger', six months worth of Research & Development, will leave you drooling as you peruse the exotic ingredients: "Wagyu beef, white truffles, Pata Negra ham slices, Cristal onion straws, Modena balsamic vinegar, lambs lettuce, pink Himalayan rock salt, organic white wine and shallot infused mayonnaise in an Iranian saffron and white truffle dusted bun." This fantastic explosion of taste and culinary delight can all be yours for the modest sum of US\$200... Roughly what someone in Bangladesh earns in a year.

Why the fuss? Well for a start, the main ingredient is Wagyu beef. Wagyu literally means Japanese cattle and is renowned worldwide for its marbling characteristics, which refers to the amount of intramuscular fats which give the cuts of beef a marble like pattern.

This is serious business that involves

selective breeding, a diet that includes sake or beer, and an exercise regimen that comes with a daily massage. This painstaking attention obviously comes at a premium, and 200 grams worth of this delicacy will easily set you back more than \$100.

Yet, when it comes to fine dining, that is just the tip of the iceberg. If you have a more adventurous spirit and care to play Russian roulette a la restaurant, then you may want to give 'Fugu' a chance. Yet another delicacy from Japan, Fugu is an exquisite serving of the infamous puffer fish. Prized for its clean and sweet taste:

"The meat is texturally both crunchy and chewy – a sensational property the Japanese describe as shiko shiko." Chefs must train for over 30 years to become accredited in the art of preparing Fugu such that, "only a minute trace of the poison remains – enough to cause a shibireru, or numbing sensation of the lips and cheeks."

If you prefer a more vegetarian and

The world's most expensive foods



1. **Saffron** (450 grams of dry saffron requires 50,000–75,000 flowers to make, meaning an entire football field of these flowers.). US\$ 1,100 – \$11,000 per kilogram

2. **Almas Caviar** (Literally diamond in Arabic or Persian, and comes from a fish over 100 years old, that has been virtually unchanged for 120 million years). \$5,000 per kilogram

3. **French La Bonnotte Potatoes** (Almost extinct, only 100 tons of this top quality potato are cultivated and collected only on the island Noirmoutier annually). EURO 500 per kilogram

4. **Sundae at Serendipity, NY** (Originally introduced in 2004; and comes with 5 scoops of Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream, Madagascar vanilla, 23K edible gold leaf and Amedei Porceleana – one of the most expensive chocolates in the world). \$1,000

5. **Tieguanyin Chinese Green Tea** (World's most expensive tea). \$3,000 per kilogram, \$15 per cup

non-lethal option, then you may opt for truffles. Fabled by the Greeks and Romans for their aphrodisiac properties, which were allegedly so intense that the delicacy was deemed demonic, truffles are the fruits of the underground hypogean fungi and are notoriously rare – so rare in fact that in 2006, "a Hong Kong bidder paid EURO 95,000 for a 1.2 k.g. white truffle!" Obviously the point is to garnish a dish with these exotic mushrooms, which come in white and black varieties, rather than to eat them whole – an exercise that would surely bankrupt you in the process.

Where does the line between fine taste and unhealthy excess blur? Is it wrong to indulge ourselves so excessively when "at least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day"? Or, is this simply a matter of individual choice and taste. Perhaps it is a little bit of both, but a little bit of consideration always goes a long way, particularly when you are wolfing down in an hour what a Somali household makes in a year... *en.v*

The Life of an 'IT' Bag

Nur Kaoukji

Have you ever wondered what goes into making that designer handbag you carry around, as you strut down the street? Have you wondered lately whether that same bag you see someone else carrying is authentic or fake? Can anyone really tell the difference nowadays?



The tension is high. It is up to Alessandro Di Alberto to create the next 'IT' bag for the upcoming season for his high-end Italian fashion brand. His hours are long and the work is tedious. His team of seven sits behind a desk, swarmed by swatches of leather, lining material and hardware, so that they can create a masterpiece that will take the luxury world by storm.

Hours are spent brainstorming, researching, designing and sampling. When a design is finalized, it is then made out of basic materials in order to develop a 3D model. After this tiresome and lengthy process, which entails butchering the sample until a perfect prototype is made, the design team's work is finally complete. It is generally only a fortnight before they have to start all over again to create something new and even more exciting.

However, the life of this ultra luxurious bag has only begun; it has been given birth to and is now trimmed and polished by a production and marketing team. Created at minimum cost by a mass production factory, it is the responsibility of the production team to create thousands of these bags to distribute to retailers around the world. As the bag is then sold at approximately 12 times its cost price, it is up to the marketing team to advertise and target consumers who are

willing to invest in it.

Most of the marketing of this 'IT' bag lays in its pricing; at such a high price it can be labeled as nothing less than a luxurious item. It is a fashion fact that the higher the price, the easier to psychologically manipulate a consumer into believing that the item is worth it.

This season, Di Alberto has succeeded. His 'IT' bag is a hit – the fashion world loves it, the media indulge in it, and every trendsetting woman believes that it is an imperative part of her wardrobe – at least for this season.

Unfortunately for Rawan, a 24 year-old secretary living in Beirut, this highly coveted dream bag is far out of reach. The price of one Di Alberto bag is the equivalent to three months salary. Although Rawan appreciates the beauty and work behind this piece, nothing could ever justify its price. So she continues to flip through the fashion magazines, which she collects every season, and admires the bag from afar. Imagining herself too to be one of those glossy looking girls, always impeccably dressed, strutting a class-defining bag under their shoulders.

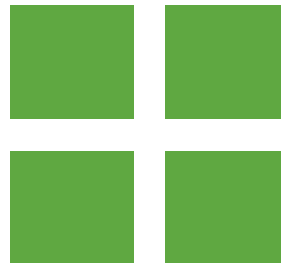
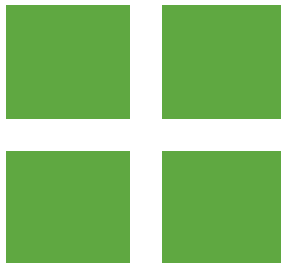
However, Rawan has nothing to fear because due to the success and high demand of Di Alberto's exceptionally

designed bag, factories all over Asia will be illegally reproducing the same prototype by the thousands. Many will be of substantially less quality, some almost identical, and all definitely sold at less than half the price.

Rawan will not have to do without the 'IT' bag this season, she will not feel less deserving or of a lower standing than the other girls. Thanks to mass production and exploitation, this girl will be permitted to feel better and enjoy the luxury of possibly being mistaken for someone of a higher economic status.

It is apparent that every character in this cycle is a victim of mass consumerism. Be it a head designer and his team who spend hours exuding every bit of creativity they may have to offer, only to have their designs pirated. The luxury consumer who still believes in the notion of luxury being defined by rarity, quality and handcraft, a concept which is almost extinct due to the money-minded tactics of major luxury corporations. Or, the average consumer who, influenced primarily by the media, feels an urgent need to be identified as belonging to a higher class based on something as superficial as a handbag.

Although this story is a fictional one, it is a very common and real setting in the fashion world of today. *en.v*



Zaki's Falling Star

"AWOL!" boomed British soccer fans at Wigan Athletic, an English Premier League team, when striker Amr Zaki, on loan to the team from Egyptian El Zamalek, decided to extend his stay in Egypt after reportedly incurring a hamstring injury while on international duty playing for Egypt. A little hard to ignore as this is Zaki's fourth absence and who has already been fined two weeks wages by Wigan manager Steve Bruce. Fellow Egyptian teammate Ahmed Mido mediated on Zaki's behalf and had this to say: "Zaki came and apologized to the team, and the lads absolutely forgive him [...] What people don't know is that he is a great lad and a very good man - he just doesn't know how the system here works."



Iraqi Football: Privilege, not Right

Out with the old, and in with the new was the sentiment at the Iraqi Football Association (IFA) when they disbanded the national soccer team after its dismal performance at the 19th Gulf Cup that saw Iraq tie with Kuwait 1-1, securing its sole point for the championship. This came amidst growing sentiment that the squad had too many 'carefree' footballers who took their team membership as a right rather than a privilege. IFA member, Abdulkhaliq Masoud, said: "We faced a sudden dilemma whether to keep the footballers who [had] made the team [and are] Asian Cup champions, but [have] lowered [team] morale lately." The new team members Masoud mentioned were recruited locally from the Erbil, Sulaymanya and Duhok clubs.



Ultimate Frisbee: Ultimate Peace?

What does Ultimate Frisbee have to do with world peace? Everything apparently. According to Ultimate Peace (UP), a non-profit sports initiative that aims at developing cross cultural understanding between integrated Israeli and Palestinian youth teams. The teams are coached by Moses Rifkin and Miranda Roth, both American citizens and elite players of the sport, who traveled to the small farming community of Far'un in the northeastern West Bank, barely five clicks from the Israeli border, to teach local youth the sport. Rifkin noted that at the coaching clinic held in Tel Aviv, "The Palestinian youth were quiet and participated reluctantly, which I attributed to feeling far out of their element." Yet in Far'un, "The students seemed anything but - everyone was laughing, [and] throwing themselves into this new experience."



A Nigerian Striker in Sudan

"It's been very difficult I must tell you, very, very difficult," commented 19 year-old Nigerian striker Stephen Worgu, regarding adjusting to life in Sudan. Worgu was bought by Al Merrikh for US\$2.6 million in October 2008 after a fantastic African Champions League performance that saw him secure 13 goals for Nigerian team Enyimba. Worgu has a four year contract with Al Merrikh, and says that language is a huge barrier - so much so that he cannot even understand the praise of fans! As uneasy as he is with this transition, this will not be a long term concern for Al Merrikh, as plans are in the works to sell him to a European club.



The Endless Search for the Iraqi Refugee

Saleem Haddad



Iraqi refugee children watch as they wait for their turn to come for face painting during children activities by Save the Children in Amman, Jordan June 20, 2008.

As millions of Iraqis scrambled to leave the violence and chaos of the US invasion of their country and subsequent civil unrest, it seems that the country bearing most of the brunt of this influx of refugees is Jordan. Although a safe refuge to begin with, Jordan's resources are wearing thin and locals are beginning to feel the heat...

The war in Iraq is not limited to Iraq. Internally, the US invasion catapulted the country into an intense and bloody civil war involving coalition forces, the new Iraqi government, Shi'a militias, Sunni tribes and al-Qaeda. Externally, the result of this violence and chaos manifested itself most strongly in the massive movement of over two million Iraqis to neighboring countries, a phenomenon that has profoundly affected dynamics throughout the Middle East. Whether their dreams are to create a new life in the West, or to wait out the worst until Iraq achieves some level of livability, these refugees generally land first on Jordan's doorstep.

Jordan provided a safe refuge, albeit an increasingly difficult one, as the country kept its borders open to refugees long after other regional destinations closed theirs. This refuge, however, is close to exhausted because of resource strains, security concerns, and the fact that the violence in Iraq – despite its ebbs and flows – has yet to calm down. By now, somewhere between 8 and 12 percent of the population of Jordan are Iraqis,

and the humanitarian crisis this created has brought about tough questions of ethics and transparency in refugee management and service provision that many in the government and the NGO world did not see coming.

The irony is that it is traditional ethics that drives the flow of refugees: On the one hand is the tradition of Arab brotherhood, which constitutes a political and moral imperative to provide refuge; on the other, is a determination on the part of the government not to integrate the Iraqis or acknowledge their permanency.

How Many: Refugee Numbers and Transparency

It is almost impossible to estimate how many Iraqis are now living in Jordan, because the vast majority of them are undocumented. The massive flight of Iraqis was largely invisible to the media and policymakers until very recently. The Iraqi population settled in cities, living among the citizens of their host

Testimonials Iraqi Refugee Children in Jordan



Boy, aged 12: "I remember they came with their tanks and I was with a group of people. A helicopter came at 2:00 a.m. and I lost my uncle. That helicopter killed my uncle. I don't want to say too much more. I want to go back to Iraq and live peacefully."

Girl, aged 14: "When the war started every day and every hour we were afraid. My mother slept with all of her clothes on as if we were going out. Females had to be ready in case the Americans entered our house at night."

Girl, age 15: "A year and a half ago we were living in Baghdad. It was not a bad life. One day we were sitting in the house – myself, my mother, and two little brothers. My father was visiting one of his friends and we were waiting for him to come back. He didn't. Somebody dropped a letter at our house. It was from a gang. The letter only said one thing – 'this is your day'. My uncle went out to try and find my father. He didn't find him. My uncle told us to go to Jordan. We ran away. My uncle in Iraq keeps trying to find my father. I heard lately that my uncle was working for the American forces as a translator, but last week he was kidnapped. Now we are on our own. My mother doesn't know whether to have a funeral for my father."

Boy, aged 12: "We came here by bus on a road. They stopped us at the border. There were too many people on the bus. I had bad dreams when I slept on the bus. They gave us a very hard time at the border. A government soldier woke someone up who was sleeping outside and they took him."

Boy, age 17: "I came to Jordan in 2006. In Iraq, I remember I used to go out with my family and friends visiting. I miss that... I only have an uncle I visit here. It's always in my memory, going to my grandfather's house in Iraq. I miss that very much because he died."

Boy, aged 14: On alienation in Jordan: "I come back from school and I do my homework, but I don't have friends. I stay at home and sleep and watch TV. Sometimes I play on the carpet."

Girl, aged 12: "The people treat each other in a different way. At school and in the street, people tell me I am a stranger here."

Boy, aged 16: "The main problem is that people talk badly about us. The kids become gangs and they are against us... Sometimes Jordanians ask us, 'Why are you here? This is not your country'. They put pressure on us and don't accept us."

Group skit by girls: Children are in a classroom and are asked by a Jordanian teacher to recite the alphabet. When one Iraqi student does so with an Iraqi accent, she is reprimanded and told to do it again. "Be Jordanian," the teacher says.

countries. TV and media images train us to recognize refugees: tent cities, plastic sheeting, a flurry of humanitarian aid agencies and UN tanks in the area, food and water distribution, and emergency field clinics and reception centers. With Iraqis in Jordan, there is no such footage – there never was an exodus, merely a strong and consistent flow of arrivals into the crevices and corners of Amman, Jordan's capital city.

But many Iraqis are intentionally staying off the radar for fear of deportation, and in Amman – a city of refugees – how does one stand out? How would one know that the man you meet in a coffee shop in the quiet neighborhood of Shmesani is a recent refugee from the civil war in Iraq? How does one measure the number of a population when these people look just like the host population, live amongst the host population, and in many cases have resorted to tweaking their accents to sound more like the host population?

But it isn't only refugees themselves who have a stake in misrepresenting

numbers. The Jordanian government has understandably tried to inflate the numbers, which serves two functions: securing and channeling more foreign aid into the ailing economy, and to justify restricting incoming flows of refugees into the country. In the interest of greater clarity, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry and Department of Statistics contracted a Norwegian-based organization, FAFO, to undertake a household study of the population last year. Their final estimate was around 500,000 Iraqis living in Jordan. However, some say that the number has fallen due to acceptance for resettlement in other countries. Further, many on the ground say the numbers are inflated due to pressure from the government.

“Official figures based on the FAFO study are 400,000 Iraqis,” says Yasmeen Saco, a development consultant based in Amman. “But if you read the document carefully, the number FAFO found was actually only 106,000. The government decided the number FAFO found was too low and they were going to use a different methodology for accounting for refugees – namely, mobile phone registration as a measure of how many have entered – a methodology that is bound to give inflated numbers.”

Transparency and the Search for the Marginalized Iraqi

The lack of transparency in accounting for the refugee population does not stop with the government, but is often carried along by cash-starved NGOs fighting for donor funds. A large amount of aid enters Jordan specifically designated for Iraqi refugees – most of which comes from the US State Department’s ‘Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration’, which acts as a main donor to NGOs working for Iraqi refugees. The Middle East has traditionally been a complex area from which to launch humanitarian and development initiatives, particularly when channeling funding through host countries. In most cases, donors have opted for funding international organizations based in the country rather than channeling the money through the government.



Amman, home to one of the largest populations of Iraqi refugees in the region.

Much of the aid flowing into Jordan since the war in Iraq is earmarked specifically for Iraqi refugees. NGOs thus scramble to cater their programs to Iraqi beneficiaries in order to attract these earmarked funds.

“In order to garner more finances for their projects, many NGOs now decide their *raison d’être* is to provide emergency relief for refugees, and so inflate the number of Iraqis in their proposals,” says Saco. “The problem is that these organizations then have to be accountable to these inflated numbers, so it becomes an endless search for these ‘marginalized Iraqi refugees’.”

The irony is that this heavy focus on ‘Iraqi refugees’ itself marginalizes other communities – particularly lower-income Palestinians and Jordanians living in Amman’s poorer neighborhoods. Non-Iraqis can eventually ‘fill out’ empty spots created by overinflated refugee figures, but the NGO projects, food aids, school funds, health care and community improvement efforts are designed specifically for Iraqis, which alienates other vulnerable groups.

Tensions are already rising in underprivileged neighborhoods in Amman, especially in what are in effect Palestinian refugee camps such as Wehdat, as resentment grows towards Iraqis who are perceived to be favored by the international community. Resources are limited and opportunities are scarce, and each drop of assistance is duly noted and measured.

Ethics and Numbers: Where to Draw the Line?

The relationship between ethics and transparency is hardly ever

straightforward, and the case of inflating refugee numbers by governments and NGOs in Amman is a similar case in point. Ultimately, it becomes a precarious balance of finding the magic number of refugees – too low and you’re off the donor radar, too high and outside governments can begin to have a stake in interfering in Jordanian affairs. But, is this justified?

“It really depends on whose perspective you take,” Saco says. “I look at it from two main perspectives: On the one hand, you have problems with the host community and refugee dynamics and the impact of this on their relationship. So far, there have been no robust studies carried out, but the general sentiment is that these relations and the focus on Iraqis can marginalize vulnerable Jordanians and Palestinians. Even though they sometimes get access to these projects supporting the refugees, the way it is currently constructed is that these projects are mainly for refugees and the others are merely ‘fillers’.”

The other perspective, according to Saco, is the pragmatic one: The government of Jordan is overburdened and straining to stretch its country’s limited resources to all. Inflating the numbers could potentially allow more money to trickle into structuring a more integrated project that would support not just refugee needs, but also the needs of the other low-income, marginalized members of Jordanian society.

“Then again,” Saco says, “Many international NGOs have created projects that mainly focus on Iraqi refugees. I just wonder if they plan to stay and continue providing these much needed projects once the refugee crisis ends.” *en.v*



SIX SENSES HIDEAWAY

ZIGHY BAY

Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay is secluded on Oman's northern Musandam Peninsula. It is designed with 82 pool villas, including the Retreats, the Reserve, and a private marina. The dramatic setting has mountains on one side and a beach on the other.

Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay truly reflects the brand's positioning of Redefining Experiences. It offers a choice of dining alternatives – from international cuisine to regional specialties.

The Six Senses Spa focuses on holistic wellness and rejuvenation. It offers a full menu of treatments delivered by skilled international therapists.

Six Senses Hideaway Zighy Bay actively supports the Omanisation Programme by helping to replace expatriates with trained Omani personnel.

At present there are almost 30% Omanis hosts working at the resort.

The resort has also employed an Omanisation manager with the hope that in the near future the number of local hosts will increase considerably.

**Zighy Bay, Musandam Peninsula
Sultanate of Oman**

T: +968 26735 555

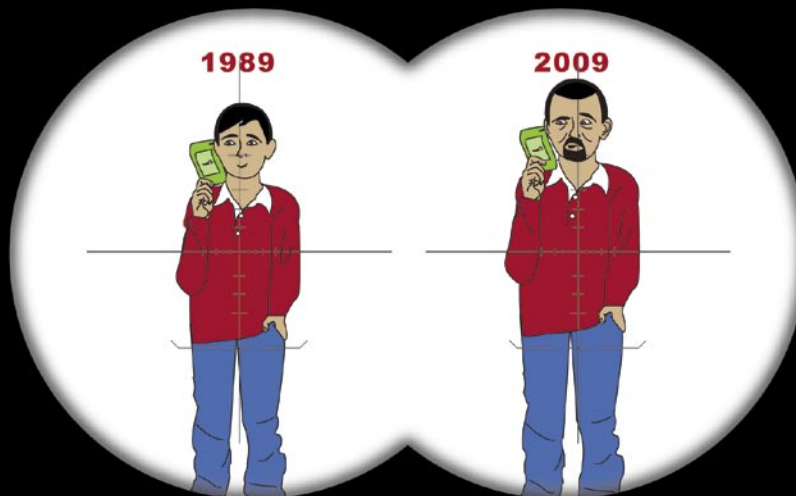
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IN THE REGION HAS
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WORLDWIDE EXCEPT
FOR SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA

Arabic or Turkish? It's All Just Soap to Arabs

Dwan Kaoukji



The cast of
Noor.

An increase in the number of unusual divorce cases in the Middle East has left people wondering about the source of the problem. Some suspect it may be related to a recent wave of Turkish television soap operas increasingly aired on Arabic satellite channels. But, can television soaps change people's lives so drastically?



Al Ijtayah (The Invasion)

The first ever Arab TV series to win an Emmy award, *Al Ijtayah* is a Jordanian-produced drama series about a love affair that survives the Israeli massacre of Palestinians from Jenin in 2002. The series first aired on LBC over Ramadan in 2007, and tells the story of an unlikely relationship between Mustafa, a Palestinian freedom fighter persecuted by the Israeli authorities, and an Israeli woman that is able to flourish amidst the violent Israeli raids. A number of Arabic TV channels refused to air the series for fear of it portraying an affectionate relationship with the Israelis, and representing the TV channel as being partial to what happened in Jenin.



TV Recommendations

Bab al Hara (The Neighborhood's Gate)

Watched by millions since 2006 and for over three seasons in a row, *Bab al Hara* is one of the most popular television soaps in the Middle East. The series follows the everyday lives of people in a small town in Damascus in the 1930s and 40s under French mandate. Set in the old part of the city, the stories reflect the romance and drama of the period. It has been criticized for portraying Arab families as being extremely patriarchal, with men berating women and exaggerating their control over them. Series four aired on Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC) during Ramadan of this year.

Rasa'il al-Hubb wal-Harb (Letters of Love and War)

Gold winner of the best Arabic Drama Promo at the Promaxarabia 2009, *Rasa'il* centers around two characters; a young exploitative Syrian intelligence officer, and a wrongfully accused political prisoner. The show is set in the early 80s and follows the escape of the prisoner to Beirut who becomes a journalist and supporter of the resistance against Israel. The Syrian authorities asked the director to change the script, and after some negotiation agreed to air the show. Similarly, Qatar's state-owned TV station had some reservations about the show, but they were mostly around scenes of Israeli military torture techniques towards its prisoners, and as a result removed the scenes from the show.

Turkish soaps dubbed in Arabic appear to be a big hit among Arab viewers in the Middle East, many of whom feel they can identify closely with the characters portrayed on the shows. However, this has had an unusual effect on people's behavior and relationships. Earlier this year, a Saudi Arabian newspaper, *Al-Yawm*, reported a man who divorced his wife and threw her out of their home after she complained he was not as romantic as Muhannad, a lead character in the Turkish soap opera *Noor*. A similar case was reported not long after of a man who divorced his wife after she hung a framed picture of Muhannad on their bedroom wall.

Turkish soaps tell the same stories Arabic soaps do, but show them in a different context. The Turkish soap *Noor*, for example, is one of about a dozen series that is particularly popular among viewers. It relates the story of an unhappily married woman who tries to gain her husband's love by playing the role of a dutiful wife. Muhannad, her husband, has lost his true love to a tragic accident, and because of cultural constraints is forced to remain in a marriage with

Noor. The series traces their hardships together, and Noor's attempts to win her husband's heart, which she eventually achieves, and her own self worth.

The hardships dramatized in *Noor* are not unlike those in many Arabic soaps. The only difference is that Turkish soaps take place in a secular society that is predominantly Muslim. The characters in *Noor* observe fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and show arranged marriages, but also portray the social liberties not openly represented in Muslim societies, like drinking alcohol in public, or having a child out of wedlock. As a result, a show like *Noor* is particularly interesting to Arab viewers who share similar hardships but feel constrained by their traditions to express them.

While most Arab viewers may feel a direct connection with characters in Turkish soap operas, some do not. Arabs governments and religious clerics particularly have denounced satellite channels for broadcasting these soaps and have declared them un-Islamic. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Sheikh, the grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia condemned

the shows saying that they "destroy people's ethics and are against our values", warning people not to watch these shows. Despite that however, the last episode of *Noor* attracted more than 85 million viewers across the Middle East, a record for Arabic TV.

Would these shows be just as exciting if they were taking place in Arab society? Possibly. However, the distance between Arab and Turkish culture is a comfortable one and makes for better stories. Arabs are more curious about Turkish culture and society today than ever before. Since the introduction of the television series *Noor*, for example, Turkey has experienced a surge in the number of Arab tourists, mostly from the Gulf, with an estimated 100,000 visitors this year alone.

Just as Mexican soap operas were once a big hit with Arabic TV channels during the 1980s; it is possible that Turkish soaps will also begin to lose their popularity among Arab viewers. Syrian soaps, for example, are particularly popular during Ramadan, and may ultimately overshadow the romantic effect Turkish soaps have had on Arab viewers. *en.v*

4 Books



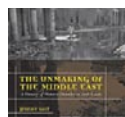
Khalil Gibran: A Biography
By Alexandre Najjar

“If there is a man who can read *The Prophet* without a singing in the heart as of music born within, that man is indeed dead to life and truth” - *The Chicago Post*. A new biography by Alexandre Najjar retraces the life of prolific writer and literary genius Khalil Gibran, from humble beginnings in Lebanon to his studies in Paris and journey to the United States. The highlight of Gibran’s career was of course his international bestseller *The Prophet*, which remains one of the most influential books of our time. It was even famously quoted by President John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” Najjar explores Gibran’s letters, publisher’s archives, unpublished notes and documents, to reveal the breadth of his influence and overarching message of peace throughout his works.



The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict
By Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes

In *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*, Nobel Prize winner Stiglitz and Harvard professor Bilmes shed light on the true cost and expense of the Iraqi war – a figure that has, thus far, been hidden from American taxpayers. From the cost of replacing military equipment, to the cost of caring for injured veterans for eternity; the authors investigate where all the money is going and where it could have alternatively been invested. According to the publisher, not only are the facts simple and straightforward, so too is the language used to write this work that “will forever change the way we think about the war.”



The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands
By Jeremy Salt

“Why do they hate us?” So begins the book, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* by Jeremy Salt. It was written for those who want to know the real and true historical background of Western intervention in the Middle East. From Algeria and Egypt, to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the ongoing war in Iraq, Salt puts together the watershed events that have come to shape the region as we know it today. Always careful to mention and highlight the human cost of the West’s policies, the author makes known to his readers various US and British archives that reveal the fateful decisions made behind closed doors. Simply put by its publishers, “This is a book that will change the way we see the Middle East.”



Whatever Happened to the Islamists?: Salafis, Heavy Metal Muslims, and the Lure of Consumerist Islam
Edited by Amel Boubekeur and Olivier Roy

Although seemingly a modern phenomena, Islamism and political Islam can be traced back more than a century. The processes of modernization and globalization have irreversibly altered the originally utopian beliefs of Islamism. Through careful and detailed research, this collection traces the movements of current and former Islamists to show the reader what has become of political Islam. Although militants continue to use Islam as a fundamental ideology, the methods and channels through which it is expressed have changed. The book even makes note of the Islamic rap concerts that have overtaken traditional street protests. According to the publisher, “This anthology highlights Islam’s remarkable adaptation to modern influences and the ongoing revitalization of its utopian message.”

Musical Inclinations

en.v

Music, perhaps unbeknownst to some, plays a vital role in the region's culture and identity. It is one of the most important mediums through which national pride, personal tragedies and collective glory has and still is expressed. Here's a look at two regional musical initiatives continuing this tradition...

a.



a. Egyptian Musicians.

b.



b. Syrian Rappers.

The Egyptian Center for Culture and Art

Founded in 2002, the Egyptian Center for Culture and Art (ECCA) was established to record and preserve traditional music in Egypt. Housed in a residence near the Giza pyramids and in an old printing house in downtown Cairo, the ECCA is concerned that traditional Egyptian music is increasingly being reduced to either "exotic tourist curiosity" or "backward and irrelevant". The organization hopes to inspire a renaissance of Egyptian culture and music in order to return it to the influential role it played on regional arts and culture. Moreover, the ECCA is attempting to nurture a new perception of Egyptian music as a "resource for creativity" and hopes to share this "rich resource" with the global community.

In its own words, the ECCA's objectives are the following:

1. *To participate in safeguarding Egyptian cultural memory by researching the intangible cultural heritage of Egypt and by encouraging*

the re-establishment of popular traditions and social festivals;

2. *To contribute to dialogue among people from different cultures through an intense process of artistic production;*

3. *To present to a wide audience Egyptian oral and traditional arts as they are now rarely practiced; and,*

4. *To encourage the diversity, specificity and vibrancy of Egypt's cultural scene as a strategy to counter cultural uniformity, consumerism and an increasing intolerance for the marginal.*

Hip-Hop, Syrian Style

A growing number of Syrian youngsters are taking to hip-hop and rap as artistic outlets to express themselves on a range of social, political and other day-to-day issues facing Syrian youth. On the streets and in the parks and colleges of Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and Lattakia, local groups such as Street Art, Rap Refugees, Wrong Way, Underground Pound and Sons of Rage are gaining a wide following among teenagers and college students. Hani al-Sawah, 20, of

Street Art performs in the city of Homs and belts out politically-charged lyrics like: "Brothers in Gaza, my microphone is your cannon. You kneel down only to God, and no one can force you to surrender." At first imitating famous western artists, Sawah and other rappers have begun to create their own original style singing in Arabic, but with western rap beats. Although these groups of youngsters have no financial means to record proper tracks or albums and very few record companies support their music, they have found a growing fan base through resources like Facebook and other social networking sites – one song was reportedly downloaded 50,000 times only a few hours after being posted. These young artists have made distinct names for themselves such as Khalid Gailani, 21, who is one of the best known of these rappers and prefers to perform in the keffiyeh – the black and white headscarf that has become the symbol of the Palestinian cause. As Sawah puts it, "Through Arabic rap, we found a great style to express ourselves. Simply, it is a matter of letting off steam." *en.v*



Ethical Archeology

Dwan Kaoukji

a. A view of an archeological site in Byblos, Lebanon, showing Roman and Persian ruins.

b. Four Syrian workmen at the Tel Kazel archeological dig, Syria 2005.



Another day, another discovery...
Another morning on the dig at
Syria's Tel Kazel excavation
site...

It's 5:00 a.m. on a hot August day in Syria. The sun rises slowly over Tel Kazels' excavation site, covering the shovels and trowels with a bright orange glow – a typical morning on the dig. The archeologists are followed by local workmen as they make their way to their respective pits, moving carefully along the sandy tunnels that surround the partially submerged temple of this early Bronze Age site.

When compared to other archeological digs in Syria, Tel Kazel is considered relatively small. Located in the southwest of Syria, about 10 kilometers north of the Lebanese border, the site is believed to be the location of an ancient kingdom that was ruled by the Amorite dynasty, beginning around 1200 BCE. The excavation has been an ongoing project since the early 1990s, and is led

by Leila Badre, director of the American University of Beirut (AUB) Archeological Museum, and her team of international archeologists from academic institutions outside the Middle East.

I had been digging there for around two weeks and was slowly getting the hang of things. My responsibilities were a four by four square meter pit, about 10 meters deep, and two Syrian workmen named Abu Omar and Abu Khalid, whose roles were to assist me during the dig. Though farmers by profession, both workmen had been digging alongside archeologists every summer since they were teenagers and watched the site change drastically over time. We had been working closely together since I started, and got along well. I was particularly impressed by their knowledge of the area and local environment.

"Hey, be very careful over here. Make sure you use the small trowel for this section. I can see pottery shards under the sand over there," I said firmly to Abu Omar, while he shoveled deep into the pit. To which he responded shyly, "No Miss Dwan. Those are just a bunch of rocks... easily mistaken for shards."

Surely enough, he was right. They were stones, and I looked like a complete fool. There was no doubt about it – my two workmen knew more about digging than I did. All of my experience at university in the United States could not match theirs. They could tell if they had reached an area on the site that had been inhabited by people merely by looking at the way the color of the sand changed. They were able to determine if a piece of ceramic was a pot, a jug, or a saucer just by feeling its texture in their hands.

Rami Yasin
French Institute of Archeology
for the Near East (IFAPO)



Rami Yasin graduated from Lebanese University in 1996 in Interior Design. Since 1994, he has been working on archeological digs and field survey at Tel Kazel in addition to digs in Tyre, Sidon, Kamed el Loz, Tell Fekhrayah, and Crryhus. He works at the French Institute of Archeology for the Near East (IFAPO) on archeological books layout.

1) The Middle East is a region rich with history, and its archeological sites plentiful. What period is most commonly excavated in this area?

It varies by region. In the eastern Mediterranean, particularly Lebanon and Syria, it's mostly sites with Phoenician and Roman history. But in Egypt for example, it would be ancient Egyptian, and so on.

2) Do the artifacts found on these digs become the property of local museums in the Middle East or are they sent to museums in the archeologists respective countries?

In the past, any artifacts found would be taken by the archaeologists to their

respective countries. This has changed however overtime. Presently, artifacts that are found are sent to the local museums, sometimes warehouses where they are stored, and go through conservation.

3) Do you feel that Arabs are interested in the history of the region and the archeological excavation of it?

I would say very few Arabs are, unfortunately. Those who are, would be intellectuals or academics. Others are under the impression that there is something of a more universal value like gold to be found on these digs, and are much more excited about that, less so about the history.

4) You've been on many excavations; roughly speaking, what proportions of the archeological digs are led by Arab academics?

Very few, I'm ashamed to say, if none at all. Most of them come from abroad and bring archeologists with them. This is probably because Arab countries have laws that prevent local and independent archeologists from

digging. In Lebanon for example, a country that is known for numerous archeological digs, as well as a university with an archeology department, government laws allow only the DGA (Director General of Antiquities) to be fully responsible for excavation and no other academies. So, the opportunities for leading an excavation on a smaller scale and without the bureaucracy are practically impossible. The problem is not in the laws, but in that it is hard to find funding that supports archeological research. In a Lebanese university with an archeology department that may have an excavation, there is contribution from the DGA - if funding is available. Tel Kazel, for example, is supported by the American University of Beirut (AUB), as it is an excavation of the AUB museum.

5) Most western archeologists receive the funding they need from charitable foundations, and government funds. Where do Arab archeologists get their funding?

Some Arab governments have funding for digs. In Lebanon, the DGA is the only one allowed to manage the budget from the government to excavate. Any other 'up and coming' archeologist would not be allowed. And as a result, their only ambition is to become DGA! What happens sometimes in Beirut, for example, is that the owner of the land has to pay for the excavation of the DGA (or any other academy that the DGA accept) before he starts building, which makes him a donor. This may create other priorities or careless responsibilities.

What disturbed me, however, was that I was told by the head archeologist of the dig that our workmen were not to be trusted, as theft was a common occurrence at digs. I had to keep a close eye on Abu Omar and Abu Khalid to make sure they did not put objects that they discovered into their pockets. Any sign of stealing would lead to them being banished from the site and no longer being allowed to work there anymore, a punishment neither of them could afford to experience.

The situation was ironic. Archeologists from abroad could travel to places like Syria, taking artifacts back with them for museums in their own countries, while Syrians who live around these artifacts were barred from these same sites with the worry that they might steal things. Shouldn't Abu Omar and Abu Khalid

be entitled to take the same artifacts as foreign archeologists do? Don't they have a right to the pieces considering they are from that area, and have some historical connection to it?

Many would argue that archeologists and historians should be the only people with the right to access such artifacts because their motives are positive and will benefit everyone. They are taking these objects to better understand history, restore it in the best way possible, and make it accessible to all. Individuals, on the other hand, often have far more selfish reasons for taking an artifact from its environment and are even less likely to make it available for everyone to see. As a result, there are international laws that protect archeological sites from potential looters through guards and other surveillance materials.

Abu Omar and Abu Khalid explained they would never dream of stealing from Tel Kazel. To them, the consequences of theft were far greater than the risks associated with it.

"And besides... who would be willing to buy a few pieces of broken pottery? Only the foreigners... What are Arabs going to do with this stuff?" Abu Omar joked as he brushed the dust off a piece of pottery shard.

He had a point. Arabs seem far less interested in artifacts from their past. International archeologists, however, are willing to travel a long distance and invest a great deal in restoring and learning about our history. *en.v*

Chinese Keffiyehs?

What Next?

Dwan Kaoukji

From the black and white checkered headscarf, the Keffiyeh, to traditional Syrian blown glassware, it seems as though most of the region's craftsmen are being pushed to the sidelines to make way for cheaper, mass produced versions from abroad. Is there any room left for them?



A man wearing a keffiyeh.

Who would have thought the keffiyeh would become a fashion piece for people across the globe? To most Arabs, the black and white checkered keffiyeh represents a symbol of Arab heritage, worn by our ancestors to protect their faces from the harsh sun and dusty sandstorms. To some, the keffiyeh also symbolizes solidarity with the Palestinian cause, worn by resistance fighters during the Intifada. Buying one typically required a trip to the local souk, where one would find products made by artisans from the region. This is no longer the case however. Almost all the keffiyehs sold in the Kuwaiti souk, for example, are made in China or India.

Keffiyehs can be found on the shelves of almost any shop in metropolitan cities around the world. They come in all colors of the spectrum and can be seen draped around the necks of international

celebrities like Kanye West and Sienna Miller. Fashion houses from Singapore to Seattle will sell them at exorbitant prices. At the same time, street vendors on the sidewalks of New York City will sell them for just under US\$10. The variation in cost comes from the quality, rather than the location in which they are produced.

What was typically considered local attire in the Middle East, is now an international symbol manufactured at a large scale in countries outside the Arab world to satisfy a global market. China, in particular, has taken advantage of this demand by mass producing keffiyehs at reduced costs to compete with Arab factories, thereby benefitting from its international popularity.

The problem is that local artisans in the Middle East cannot match the competition

presented by Chinese manufacturers, and are often forced to stick to their own local markets that are slowly dying out. In 1960, Yasser Mohammed Hirbawi was one of the first people in the Middle East to set up a keffiyeh factory in Hebron, Palestine, and today is struggling to keep it open. Keffiyehs produced in China are being imported into Palestine and Israel at affordable prices and sold to local shop vendors who are consequently less likely to buy the locally produced ones. Hirbawi also faces the even greater challenge to his trade imposed by the restrictions of the Israeli government that prevent him from selling to other Arab markets easily.

In addition to keffiyehs, a number of other small industries in the Middle East have been affected by the competition from China. Lebanese and Syrian glassmakers, for example, used to supply



a. Arab man wearing a keffiyeh.
 b. Keffiyehs on display at a trendy store in Montreal, Canada.
 c. Colorful keffiyehs.



The Glass Blowers of Damascus

Just as the evening begins to cool down and the buzz of the city subsides, the glassblowers make their way to their workshop for their late night shift that finishes the following morning. Blowing glass is a very specialized skill and can only be carried out at night to beat the soaring heat during the day.

The process involves blowing air into a molten globule of glass that has been created in a hot furnace. These furnaces run all day and night to maintain high temperatures at 2400°F, (1315°C), and are too expensive to reignite.

Some of the first methods for glassblowing are believed to have originated with the Phoenicians around 50 BCE. Today, these same methods are used widely in the Middle East by artisans in the trade, and the techniques are passed down from generation to generation.

Unsurprisingly however, the number of glassblowers in the region is rapidly declining, as the demand for blown glassware decreases. Currently, the biggest demand for blown glass comes from high-end furniture shops in Europe, but less so from the Middle East.

homes with jars, tableware and lamps in the 1950s and 60s. Today, most of the glassware comes from Asian countries at competitive prices, and in greater quantity as they are produced by machines and not handmade. As a result, many glass blowers in the Arab world have had to shut down. The remaining artisans have long moved away from local markets, instead targeting tourists with souvenirs of the region.

Today, it is rare to find something produced in the Middle East being sold in the international market. While some consumers might be aware of the origins of the merchandise they buy, very few are concerned with where it was made. Shoppers at a mall in London, for example, may know that the keffiyeh is originally an Arab head scarf, but are less likely to know if it was made in the Middle East or in China. More importantly, they are

unaware of the effect their purchases have on local artisans in the Middle East.

Unless otherwise indicated, it can be difficult to determine whether something is made locally or mass produced elsewhere. As a result, making a conscious decision about a purchase can be challenging. But how does a locally produced keffiyeh, for example, compare to one produced in China? Usually, the quality of the workmanship differs between the two. Keffiyehs made in Palestine, for example, tend to adhere to the traditional designs, while those made elsewhere will adapt to mainstream tastes.

People who actively seek out designs made by artisans tend to feel a moral obligation towards them with the intention of supporting their work and

livelihood. They are aware that local artisans depend on their trade and suffer from the competition of mass production. However, they represent a small number of consumers that are unlikely able to fully sustain the work produced by local craftsmen.

Will people's attitudes to the way they shop change in the next few years? As the global recession continues, consumers will be less likely to spend as much as they used to, and as a result, will hopefully be more concerned with the quality of the product rather than the quantity. This may ultimately bring about more awareness for the way things are produced and where they come from. Until then, however, artisans will continue to hang on a thin thread, producing in short quantities and hoping for change. *en.v*

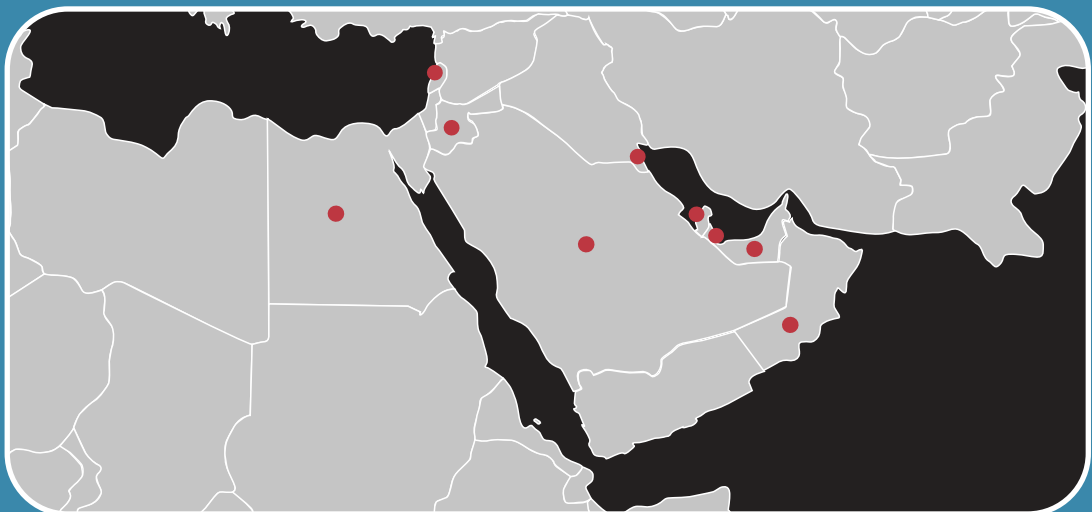
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*Living in Shatila:
A Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon*
Rawane Nassif

Think of a camp; and you will probably conjure up images of tents, barbecues and kids playing. Think of a refugee camp; you will probably imagine refugees starving in tents and Red Cross humanitarian workers with food aid running around. Now, imagine Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. These are a different story completely. Palestinian refugee camps are long-term camps that grew from temporary fixes into small settlements on the outskirts of towns and cities scattered all over Lebanon. To date, there are 12 official camps and two destroyed ones that are home to more than 210,000 Palestinian refugees.

Like any settlement, the camps include

communities, families, organizations, places of worship, markets, networks and essentially, residents that have their own daily rhythms and lives. The residents are mostly Palestinian, but throughout the years many non-Palestinians have moved in, notably Lebanese and Syrians searching for affordable housing. Despite their grim economic and political realities, they live their lives like you and I would, searching for basic necessities and small pleasures.

Enter the Shatila camp in Beirut. You can see poverty, unemployment and desperation, but you can also see people getting water, going to the market, throwing garbage, raising animals, kids

playing and art on the walls. You might then begin to realize that the camp is actually alive, away from the political slogans and Palestinian hopes and aspirations for the right of return. The camp is real and is here to stay.

The Shatila Refugee Camp was founded in 1948 by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It is most known for the 1982 Sabra and Shatila Massacre, in which hundreds were murdered in a two day killing spree. Shatila is currently home to more than 12,000 refugees who live on one square kilometer. en.v















Pg. 57: Mannequins fill the marketplace of the camp, as though silently observing passersby.

Pg. 58: Goats are raised on garbage sites and are then sold for their meat, or can serve as pets like dogs and cats.

Pg. 59: With such overpopulation at the camp, playground spaces for kids have been turned into parking lots and garbage dumps. What used to be an amusement park, is now a rusty old steel carcass painted in the colors of the homeland. The only places that kids can escape to nowadays are small internet and video game shops that offer them a window into the virtual world.

Pg. 60: The market extends to the outskirts of the camp and has everything from old shoes to new toys and pirated DVDs. Everything is being sold, bought or repaired. In the clothes section, the plastic models look over the camp and mix harmoniously with the inhabitants to form a perfect example of the contradictory realities of which refugee life consists.

Pg. 61: The water pipes have not been changed since the 1970s. Some of the drinking water has been mixed with sewage. As a result, water shops and water sellers have flourished throughout the camp. However, they are unregulated and their water quality uncertain. Some places have filters, while others use a hose that disposes of wastewater into simple black containers.

Pg. 62: While walking in the streets with a camera, many kids will come to you and say: "Take my picture, take my picture!" The funny thing is that many of them don't even want to see their pictures once taken, but rather just wanted to enjoy the moment. Their faces and laughter get to you, and you oftentimes find yourself wandering through the tiny streets hoping to bump into another happy bunch.

Pg. 63: Like in any culture or civilization, the walls of the city record the lives of its inhabitants. Flags, posters, pictures of martyrs, broken dreams, old symbols, new symbols, youth initiatives and sometimes just plain dirt tell the stories of the camp.

Pg. 64: Originally hosting hundreds of refugees, Shatila is now home to more than 12,000 registered Palestinian refugees. The entire area of the camp consists of approximately one square kilometer and has an exceptionally high population density.



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Organic Farming: Is it All it's Cracked up to be?

Sarah Schmidhofer



Everything you've always wanted to know but been afraid to ask... about organic farming.

The European Union has introduced a new logo for organic food

What exactly does it mean to be organic?

The word “organic” is showing up everywhere – in the news, at the produce stand and even on shampoo bottles. The media works hard for organic labels to evoke images of pure, luscious fruits, happy cows getting massages, ozone holes repairing themselves and food so healthy that fast food shrivels in its presence. Is this really fair? Well, no, but... sort of. Let me explain.

Though the organic label makes no direct claims about the nutritional value of a product, the label does ensure that certain production practices were adhered to, and these practices actually do care for the environment and incidentally result in high quality.

Organic practices are designed to be environmentally-sound, synthetic-free and ecologically-sustainable. Instead of focusing on what humans need to add to a system to get products (often depleting resources or contaminating surroundings in the process), organic methods focus on ecosystem management, relying on the idea that properly managed systems will sustain themselves and produce superior products in the best way – those closest to systems in nature.

Though specifics vary, in general,

animals must have healthy living conditions. Everything they eat, drink or breathe must be organic, and genetic modification is not permitted. Medication is minimized and natural treatments are first-line defenses. Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are prohibited for plants. The consumer can generally assume that products bearing an “organic” label were produced in an ecologically-conscious way, though he or she might want to check out the websites of the certifying bodies if concerned about specifics.

Why do I care about organic food? Is it better for the environment? Can organic products repair the ozone holes?

Not exactly, but because organic processes “think ahead”, they avoid many of the environmental pitfalls of conventional farming. Instead of exhausting farm resources, farmers work to create self-sustaining systems, using much less energy, emitting far fewer greenhouse gases, and preventing groundwater pollution.

Certain practices allow organic plants to store increasing amounts of carbon in the soil, which help lessen the greenhouse effect and global warming. Eliminating synthetic fertilizers (huge-energy sinks in production) goes a long

way towards this end, and additionally reduces groundwater contamination.

Possible long-term effects of soil degradation, erosion, etc., are taken into account before the problem arises, so farms are sustainable in the long run. Organic farms use crop-rotation, symbiotic relationships, cover-crops and organic fertilizers to preserve soil quality and create stable ecological systems. Far fewer natural resources are degraded as these systems are increasingly self-sustaining.

The suspect use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is avoided, protecting biodiversity in crop gene pools and fostering healthier plant systems that are naturally more resistant to stresses. The effect of GMOs on health is not determined, but is under scrutiny. It is important to remember though, that genetic engineering is increasingly used in the world, and thus it is impossible to guarantee that a product is fully outside of the grasp of genetic engineering. “Organic” just means GMOs were not used directly in production.

What does it mean to have an organic label?

A true organic label will carry the name of a certification body and a set of standards. The label means that someone



Procedure to become certified

(the certification body) checked out the product and vouches for compliance with that set of organic standards. In general, to have the organic label means that a product has gone from the farm to the market according to a set of ecologically-sound specifications.

There are two sets of voluntary international standards that are bare-minimum, off of which other standards are based: The Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization Codex Alimentarius Commission and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement's (IFOAM) International Basic Standards for Organic Production and Processing. Both include management practices, handling, storing, packing, processing and transporting procedures, and lists of permitted substances. Both are reviewed and updated regularly.

Governments use these guidelines for legally binding national mandatory standards. These are often more specific and adapted to the needs of individual countries. Private certification bodies can set their own standards, and though not legally enforceable, they are often more restrictive due to consumer demand. It is good to look for the "IFOAM Accredited" logo in these cases to be sure standards are up to international requirements, and to remember that mere membership in IFOAM does not indicate accreditation.

It is important to realize that in many developing countries, there are agricultural practices that meet organic requirements but are not certified (certification is a costly, time-consuming process). This produce is non-certified organic but is not regulated by any governing body or set of standards. This is often the food you find at local farmers markets. Participatory Guarantee Systems are another alternative to costly third party certification. According to IFOAM: "Participatory Guarantee Systems are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange. The very life-blood of these programs lies in the fact that they are created by the

1. Contact a local certification body. The local Ministry of Environment is usually a good place to start. It is best to make sure that the body is IFOAM accredited to ensure that at minimum the standards are up to international values. The OneCert International Organic Standards is another good resource to find information about many certification bodies in one place.

2. Fill out an application detailing cropping history, livestock management

procedures and a plan for organic conversion.

3. Pay an application fee.

4. An inspector pays a visit to the farm and awards certification (or not).

5. Keep detailed records and annually submit information about crop/livestock inputs and sales.

6. Licenses are renewed each year upon inspection and payment of a fee.

very farmers and consumers that they serve."

Is "natural" the same as "organic"? No. "Natural" has no legally recognized meaning (what doesn't come from nature, when you think about it?), whereas "organic" indicates a carefully monitored process. Furthermore, it can be misleading and counterproductive to label organic products as "chemical free". True, synthetic chemicals were not used in the production directly, but they are omnipresent in the environment and trace amounts can be found even in organic foods. The point is that organic products have greatly reduced levels of synthetics.

What is MENA doing in terms of Organic Products?

Well, it is not that easy to determine. Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia and the UAE are all members of IFOAM, but regional information on certifying bodies is tough to find.

Certain MENA countries are making an effort, however, to be transparent in their use of the term "organic". The Abu Dhabi Organic Farm was the first farm to be certified organic in 2007 by European standards and IFOAM. Though production has thus far been slow, as it is a small farm, it was designed to encourage and educate other farms about organic practices in the region.

Similarly, Lebanon is nearing the fourth year of a large organic project. Farmers receive support from USAID

(United States Agency for International Development) to learn sustainable practices and earn certification.

In Egypt, interest in organic farming is boosted by problems caused by high rates of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Due to increased costs of organic products, most organic agriculture in this area is destined for export, though Egypt has the healthiest local demand for the products. As local demand increases, so does support for the industry and a corresponding lowering of prices. Organic certification in Egypt is provided by two local IFOAM accredited organizations: Egyptian Center for Organic Agriculture (ECO) and Center of Organic Agriculture in Egypt (COAE).

There are also a number of internationally approved organic certification schemes in Saudi Arabia (BCS, ECOA, ECOCERT and CERES).

Please remember that though they are better for our environment, if there is no local demand for organic products, the energy requirements and polluting effects of exporting the products abroad offsets some of the environmental points racked up by growing organically in the first place. By creating more local demand through education and purchasing power, the cost of organics will be driven down and resources to continue growing organically will increase. We know that the production process (from ground to label) is self-sustaining, but I now encourage you to become a part of this cycle, helping make the cycle from store to table sustainable as well. *en.v*

The Mantra... That Failed to Save Dubai

Leen Al Zaben

Don't kiss, or... kiss Dubai goodbye!



Construction sites litter the horizon of Dubai.

It seems that no other place in the region has had as quick a rise and fall as Dubai... As the global recession continues, Dubai scrambles to pick up the pieces and catch those still falling from its cracking ceiling...

Dubai's omnipresent theme song that chimed for a decade in concert with robust economic growth pumped nothing but hot air into the bubble that surrounded the oasis of the Emirates. The mantra, 'do-buy, do-buy, do-buy', recruited a wealth of young, talented professionals to the cast of 'Dubai's Boom' - each one playing a supporting role, but sadly not all of them received mention in the closing credits.

With frenzied overpaid executives and bleach blonde tourists strutting along the marble floors of some of the world's largest malls, Dubai has everything from sequined tops and passes to a life-size artificial snow globe, to non-existent apartments on manufactured islands for sale. But alas, the subscription to 'Dubai's Boom' has ended. Its theme song now tolls in melancholy despair - 'don't buy', point blank.

Who was affected?

Expatriates, who make up the larger

portion of Dubai's population, were hit the hardest when the bubble protecting Dubai burst this year. In addition, many individuals who had few qualms about investing a hefty down payment into real estate that did not materialize now realize that they may never see a return. Robert North from The New York Times recently reported that "more than 3,000 cars sit abandoned in the parking lot at the Dubai Airport, left by fleeing, debt-ridden foreigners (who could in fact be imprisoned if they failed to pay their bills). Some are said to have maxed-out credit cards inside and notes of apology taped to the windshield." The actual number of people who have been laid off still remains a mystery, and the government refuses to cooperate by withholding all information related to the crisis.

Where is the transparency?

A draft media law, which is set to be passed sometime in 2009, has made

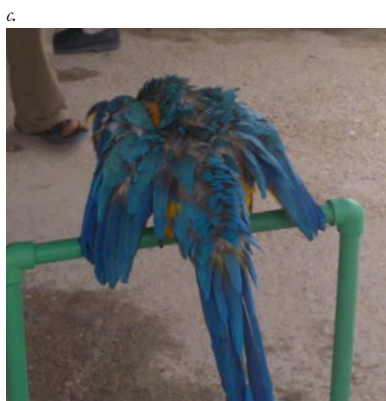
it very clear that the government will continue to put a muzzle on anyone who attempts to report on the financial crisis that has toppled the towers of Dubai. On April 13, 2009, Human Rights Watch reported that, "The law will muzzle the press, preventing honest reporting about the country's continuing financial crisis or about its rulers."

With things in the dark, people will never really know where the fate of Dubai lies. And as the world treads deeper into the trenches of the economic crisis, people in Dubai remain in the shadows, not knowing their fate.

It is a shame that Dubai did not get to construct its own "Broadway" or "West End" to host the charade that was once, for many an expatriate, a dream come true. *en.v*

Animal Black Market

Rania Dalloul



a. Birds huddled together in their cage.

b. A man holding a bird, moments before he sets it free.

c. A parrot tethered to a pole for passers by to gawk at.

d. Ducks squeezed into a cage, without leaving room for them to move around freely.

Welcome to Kuwait's animal black market, or locally known as the Friday Market..

Friday afternoon, the dry desert heat beat against my skin like a pestering insect. Wandering in between cages, fenced underneath aluminum ceilings, I found myself surrounded by salesmen and animals, both equally eager for my attention...

A parked Jeep clad with neon posters boasted "All kind of dogs for sale" – surely enough, it housed cardboard boxes full of several breeds and ages. A suspicious man folded his arms and watched me as I examined the puppies in their filthy state; their noses were as dry as the concrete they lay on, their bellies inflamed from famine, while held

up by their bony stature. As I gradually dripped fresh water on their wiry fur coats and dehydrated tongues, their keeper told me, "It's not good for them, water; only twice a day." They were kept out at least eight hours of the day, and fed scraps of rice and tomato sauce, a diet from which no such animal could substantially benefit.

As I beckoned him to move the full grown dogs under the shade, I took notice of the several breeds surrounding me. A husky with thin and coarse fur was shedding and painfully enduring the ounces of heat absorbing his energy at a feverish rate. His delirium was apparent

as he is far from indigenous to such desert conditions, nor accustomed to a mere two pardons for water a day.

A gathering of seated men had fixed their collective gaze at my water-bearing presence. One man reassured me that the puppies were healthy, as he shoved three black Labradors back into a small cardboard box, out of which the puppies had attempted to escape. The most expensive breed of all were the KWD 200 Pomeranian pure-bred puppies – so densely packed into a briefcase of a wired cage, that I only noticed half of them. The other half were trampled on and struggled to expose themselves,

Ayeshah Al-Humaidhi
Animal Friends League, Kuwait
Animal Treatment in Kuwait



Is Kuwait being faced with a rapidly escalating population of homeless animals?

Yes. Pet ownership is becoming more popular for the purposes of companionship, guarding, trend adherence, fighting, and breeding/sale. Setting up winter campsites has become extremely popular among the middle class, and more and more dogs are used as “guard dogs,” only to be abandoned at the end of the season. This creates a massive influx of breeding dogs just prior to the start of the summer, during which the majority of these animals die of heatstroke and dehydration. As far as stray cats, the rate of abandonment doesn’t seem to be increasing, and the population can only increase if the amount of garbage on the streets increases. It’s a complex issue, but the short answer is yes.

How much concern does the matter seem to garner within the social interests of people living in Kuwait?

Difficult question. Kuwait is very diverse. While some population segments are supportive, others are not. Most segments appear to be totally unconcerned, and it seems most of those who are concerned perceive themselves to be alone and therefore act alone to improve the situation, believing both the general population and the government to be heartless on this issue. Where support is offered from members of society, it is frequently only offered to one specific species of animal and denied to others for reasons of personal or religious preference.

How impenetrable is the animal black market, which continues to successfully carry out the illegal importation of animals?

Not impenetrable at all. The reason the trade in illegal animals and their products is so large is that most people are unconcerned or uneducated and authorities give animals the lowest priority in their very busy agendas. Proper enforcement at borders and an animal law enforcement task force would place a major dent in the animal trade in such a small country. Also, adherence to CITES regulations and the promotion of complementary animal protection laws would make an enormous difference. The illegal animal trade is currently conducted in public without fear of reprisal. A couple of years of attention, and we believe this market would shrink dramatically.

What particular actions or attitudes from the public need to be reevaluated in order to direct them towards a productive and collective effort against the violation of animal rights?

That would be a very big answer. Our primary goal in the education sector is to promote kindness to animals and an understanding of animal sentience. We also attempt to teach people about the importance of taking care of the environment. These are all very basic lessons that should be taught in preschool, but our education system lacks any curriculum about kindness toward animals despite numerous references in the Holy Quran related to compassionate treatment of animals. Also,

the long distance transport of nearly 1 million sheep and goats for immediate slaughter and consumption causes great suffering and does not meet Halal guidelines for food. The slaughter of animals in Kuwait has also been shown to violate religious standards and international standards by having improper infrastructure for mass slaughter, by killing animals in front of each other, beating the animals prior to slaughter, and severing tendons to immobilize the animals prior to slaughter. As a society, we have to consider where our food comes from and if there is any real reason why an animal needs to suffer before it can be eaten. This is such a simple concept, but Kuwait imports more live animals per year than any other nation on earth and we continually violate Halal standards for the treatment of animals.

Regarding the common response to animal rights initiatives as, Governments need to tend to their people first, then their animals; how does your organization respond to such a statement? What laws exist in Kuwait that most protect animals from mistreatment, abuse, labor, sales, etc. if any?

My personal response to that is that Kuwait isn’t doing anything about either issue, so I don’t think that comment is quite as relevant in Kuwait as it might be elsewhere. However, when the laws of a government are based upon the predominant religion of its people, in this case Islam, then, as Islam commands, all aspects of the religion must be given equal precedence. Of the Abrahamic religions, Islam is the most clear regarding the treatment of animals, and animals are the only part of the religion that is consumed by the body. That, in my opinion, makes animals a very important part of our religion and our government. There is a law in Kuwait that prohibits extremely cruel treatment of animals, but to the best of our knowledge it has only been used once, in a case of skinning camels alive prior to slaughter. In our experience, the police are unaware of the law and will refuse to act on behalf of an animal.

The majority of people do seem to share the belief that animals should

not be considered until all human issues are resolved. That, however, is not the case in any country. Nowhere will you find a country that has all of its human issues resolved and therefore is working to improve conditions for animals. The ideal model is the implementation of an Animal Control Office (ACO) program within national law enforcement. ACO’s are responsible for adherence to animal protection laws, and other law enforcement agencies are therefore able to concentrate on helping the people. There is no rational argument that says any nation has to develop in any particular order. On the contrary, if Kuwait wants to become a nation of international reputation, progress needs to be made in all areas, including the enforcement of laws that prevent people from committing unquestioned acts of cruelty toward animals.

How effective is the presence of your organization in Kuwait, and how unique? What are some obstacles which hinder the expansion, publicity, success and freedom of such an organization in this region?

K’S PATH and Animal Friends are utterly unique in Kuwait. We operate the only open-door shelter in Kuwait, and, as far as we know, we are the only organization working on all aspects of companion animal welfare, stray animal management, the illegal wildlife trade, farm animal issues, education, marine conservation, and more. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, we are one of the few groups in Kuwait that works proactively in operations (rescue, education, sheltering, etc) and retroactively in fundraising and publicity; meaning we are in the trenches, actively working to improve our areas of commitment. Our biggest hindrances are inadequate laws protecting animals and a lack of enforcement, the difficulty of raising funds for animal related causes privately, in the corporate sector, and in the government, the general lack of concern for animals from the public and within Kuwaiti religious institutions, and finally the willingness of the government to utilize dangerous and cruel forms of animal control (gunshot and strychnine poisoning).

perhaps at the hopeful notion of being saved.

It was a prison of animals, and I felt like a spectator at a torture museum as I watched their panting desperation escalate. No water bowls, no leashes, just streams of their waste trickling along the concrete, and ropes held down by heavy bricks. Siamese, Persian and Himalayan cats held their heads back to a rhythmic panting of dehydrated exhaustion. The few water bowls in sight were filled with brown liquid, their cages infested with their own filth.

Confused and disoriented, I approached

a man with a friendly face sitting by a single cage of a beautiful rainbow of a parrot, elaborately painted and quite large in size, “Where do all these animals come from, these birds, these cats, these monkeys?”

He shrugged and looked around him, “South America” he claimed, “Farms...” he paused, “Wasta.”


His yellow grin was harmless, he was only told what to do, but he knew how it was done before it reached him and was handed to him by dirty trade.


As I walked away from this black market,


I saw a man fling several birds into the sky. “Salam” we greeted one another, as I asked him what he was doing with the cages of birds he had just purchased.


“They belong to the sky, not to us,” his old eyes smiled with touching wisdom. I then asked the salesman for as many birds as I had change, and he handed them to me curled in his palms. I released them one by one into flight. One of the birds turned around and flew back into its cage, and the bird keeper shrugged and locked it back inside.




He asked if I wanted a refund, but I just walked away. *en.v*

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SynchroniCITY en.v

In most Arab countries there tends to be a concentration of mosques in large residential areas. And as per Islamic law, prayer ("Aadaan") is recited five times a day from these mosques. All mosque's clocks and audio systems are not synchronized to a centralized broadcast system so it is typical of prayers to be broadcast from several different mosques in a dense urban area all at varying times (with delays occurring within a matter of seconds or even minutes sometimes). Furthermore, the "Imam" or person leading the prayers in each mosque exhibits a unique audible range with their recitations (as is only natural given that we are human), whereby some recitations are pleasant to the ear and others are piercing.

Given your understanding of acoustics, what are your thoughts regarding an economical and sustainable solution to the above-mentioned problem? What technologies exist today (or are under R&D for the near future) that can counter "noise pollution" in a dense urban environment (keeping in mind delicate cultural and religious traditions)? And can you cite examples, if any, of implemented solutions or technologies in cities today that have successfully countered a similar problem(s)?

DragonEars


- 1) Even if you synchronize the prayers/audio/loudspeakers, the sound will propagate out at the speed of sound. The farther you are from each mosque the longer it will take for the sound to get to you. Each home will hear each mosque at different times even if the broadcasts are all synchronized. Further complicated by the speed of sound varying with temperature, humidity and barometric pressure.
- 2) Limiting the projection of sound to a specified distance in open space is impossible. You can only reduce the volume to reduce the distance heard (short of ANR, Active Noise Reduction is not practical for large open spaces). Further complicated by temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, surrounding structures, vegetation and water.
- 3) Imam Idol. :-)


Anonymous








It sounds like the amplified broadcast of prayers at loud volume may be something of a problem in itself. Amplifiers take something away from acoustic sound, and prayer may be especially affected. I believe, an holy utterance of sound is best unadulterated by amplification as prayer does not rattle the perception but resonates from within to summon devoutness. I wouldn't place much faith in technology to create the correct environment for prayer. Internal vs external noise will always be at odds and unless the place of prayer is quiet enough for natural sound to emanate, the breath (spirit) of the prayer will remain obscured. Water fountains may mitigate some types of nuisance noise - and act to absorb distracting energies.

Todd Krieger

They'd have to do some sort of cellular phone line type coordination. Satellite transmission has too much delay... (Although they might be able calculate the "delay" to achieve synchronicity.) I don't know if "land lines" are cleanly transmitted like in the U.S., but if they are, they'd be ideal for urban transmission.

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Tomservo

You have several issues. I have been to Egypt and am somewhat familiar with the sounds. I stood outside for some time several evenings just absorbing the sound from all directions. It is difficult or impossible to let electronics decide which sounds are pleasant and which are not. I think if timing would solve part of it, at least that is easier to do. As you suggest a central timer or control would be the way to do it. What technologies exist today (or are under R&D for the near future) that can counter "noise pollution" in a dense urban environment (keeping in mind delicate cultural and religious traditions)? I think the Muslim inhabitants don't really regard this as "noise pollution". The purpose is that the call for prayer can clearly be heard by everyone.

Travisty

I fear there is no easy solution to your 'issue', not because of the technological issues (a first step might be easy: get five muezzins from five neighboring 'friendly' mosques to gather together each time, but take turns reciting the adaan for the five mosques), but because of the human issues. The discordance does not bother everyone. And for those it does bother, it does not bother them every day. And where there is 'competition', it has been going on in most residential communities for decades if not centuries. This is not an easy issue. After all, who is going to want to ask an Imam to quiet his muezzin because he does not recite as well as the neighbor's? Does that not question his judgment of what is pious? Of what is appropriate for his congregation? If the Imam thinks his muezzin should be replaced by a younger man (who has not lost touch with his 'gadwal' tone and timbre), he can always ask the older man to teach a new generation of muezzin and everyone will understand. If it were important that all the muezzin in a given community were synchronized, would it not have already been accomplished? This is going to be a prickly subject and I fear there is no way to avoid offending sensibilities.

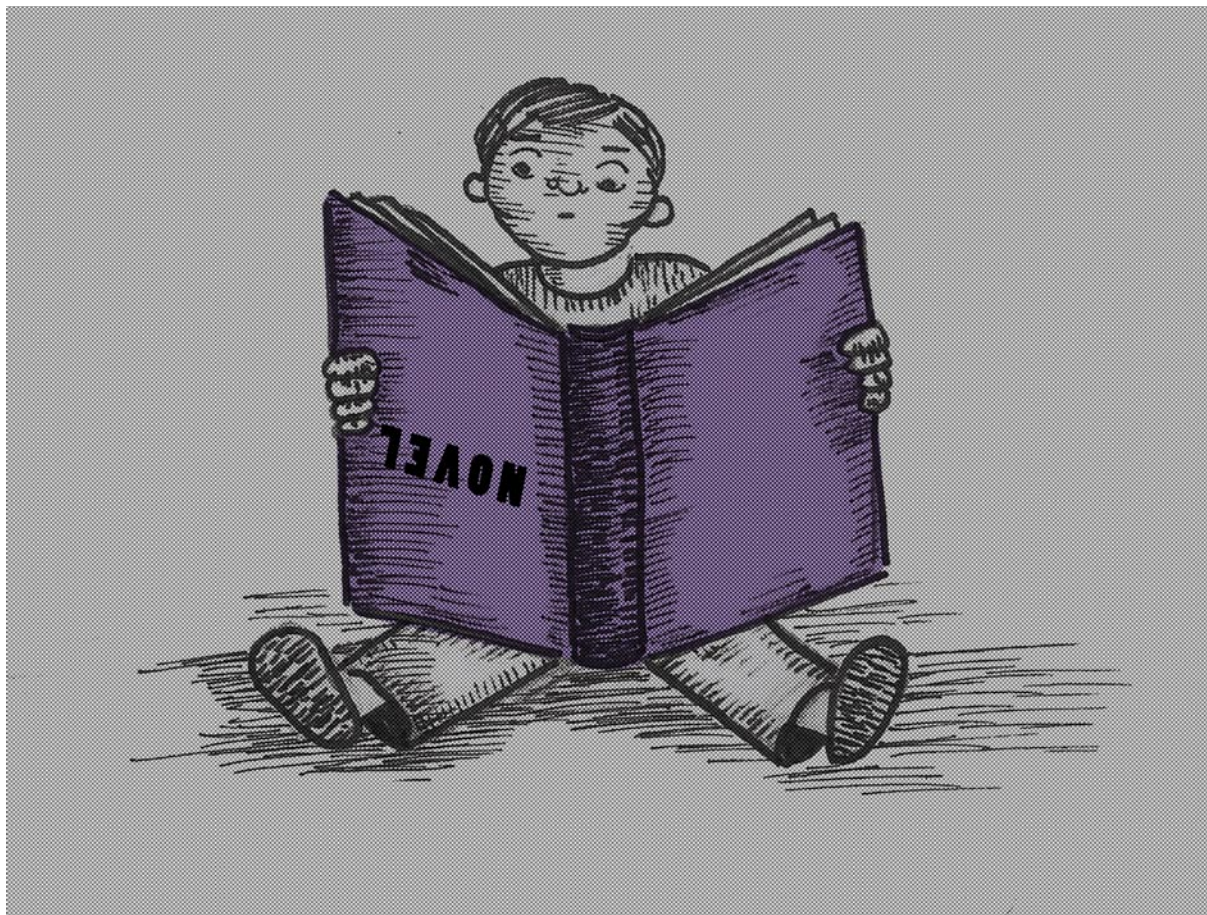
Variac

A volunteer organization develops and assembles a reasonably priced speaker and amplifier system that is designed to be distributed around the perimeter of the Mosques. Larger mosques have more of the same speakers if they need more coverage. Then: The Imam makes a high quality recording at the organization and it is put on a CD that can be played through the system, which would include a low cost CD player. Or possibly: They could also customize an inexpensive computer that would play back recorded messages, when triggered by a central location. The Imam of each mosque would come to the organization and record his prayers. These would be loaded onto the computer right there, and various people from the mosque could be instructed on the (not-complicated) way to make sure it is operating. A simple program could be written to use different recordings on different days if that is a requirement. The organization would have to provide an on-site repair service to ensure that all is operating properly.

Note from en.v

The above are real excerpts taken from several international online audio forums in response to our post on how to synchronize the Adaan in Kuwait's Mosques. Our posts caused much heated debate and discussion, which in some cases resulted in en.v's discussion threads being deleted by these forums' administrators.

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Kharafi National hosts business forum on practical green measures for challenging economic times



(From left) Capt. Ali Abbas Haider, Director Environment Public Authority, Dr. Abdul Rahman Al Awadi, Executive Secretary of Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment, Mr. Najib Saab, Secretary General of AFED and Mr. Samer Younis, Vice- Chairman and Managing Director of Kharafi National

Workshop organized by AFED in partnership with UNEP and KHARAFI NATIONAL

A green economy initiative can help rescue the Arab region's economy from the global downturn, a workshop held in Kuwait on May 27, 2009 was told. Entitled 'Corporate Environmental Responsibility: Challenges and Opportunities', the event was organized by the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED), in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and hosted by Kharafi National.

The one-day intensive workshop, which brought together executives from 25 leading private corporations, Environment Public Authority and public sector bodies, addressed the business rationale for corporate environmental sustainability efforts and presented frameworks for incorporating environmental responsibility goals into business strategies.

"More and more companies are considering environmental initiatives. This strongly suggests that market forces are increasingly powerful drivers of corporate environmental improvement," said Najib Saab, Secretary General of AFED. "This workshop,



(From left) Mr. Bashar Zeitoun, Director of AFED's CER Program, Mr. Hanif Qureshi, Corporate Director, QA&C of Kharafi National, Mr. Salam Abdel-Khader, Six Sigma Manager of Kharafi National and Dr. Ibrahim Alghusain, General Manager, Utilities Development Company

part of our Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) program, assists business managers steer their complex organizations through transition to environmentally responsible enterprises, and learn how to remain profitable while acting in an environmentally sustainable way." Saab thanked UNEP for its support, and commended AFED's corporate member, Kharafi National, "for playing a major part in making this workshop possible." He invited other companies to join AFED's CER program and "become leaders in incorporating environmental issues into their goals for the future."

Habib Habr, UNEP's Regional Director and Representative for West Asia, said in a statement: "Arab countries, like the rest of the world, are experiencing the effects of economic recession, which call for efficient and immediate action. Today's economic slowdown presents us with a rare opportunity to re-direct our energies and resources toward making a transition to more sustainable patterns of development." Habr called for "turning high unemployment, food and water security risks, and climate change into green opportunities". Explaining that the Green Economy Initiative "would be anchored in investments in environmental assets, clean and efficient production, renewable energy and regenerative urbanization," Habr noted that the

workshops are carried out in cooperation with UNEP's Economics and Trade Branch in Geneva.

Mr. Samer Younis, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of Kharafi National, highlighted the need for businesses to find efficiencies across their operations. "All businesses can become leaner and greener. Some changes, like investing in cleaner technology, involve a short-term cost. But we have also streamlined many of our processes and seen immediate cost savings. We are very happy to be cooperating with AFED and UNEP and hope that by sharing our experiences we can inspire other companies to follow our example. Of course, there is always room for improvement. So this forum gives us the chance to learn from other organizations as we continue our journey towards greater sustainability."

The ten-hour workshop was led by Bashar Zeitoun, Director of AFED's Corporate Responsibility Program. It included presentations, discussions, case studies and group exercises, and concluded by forming a steering committee representing participating bodies.

The event is one of a series of eight workshops AFED is holding in Beirut, Amman, Manama, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, with two in Dhahran (Saudi Arabia). All workshops, supported by UNEP, will culminate in the formation of national steering groups entrusted with coordinating activities in the framework of an Arab Green Economy Initiative, undertaken by AFED in association with UNEP and other regional partners.



Attendees of the Workshop



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