

## Neighborhood Tales: Kuwait Under Lockdown

The Neighborhood Tales: Kuwait Under Lockdown project sprouted out of a painful realization that even as history was sure to remember the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and its impacts on every aspect of our human life, there are some stories, some voices, some experiences that might never be recorded for posterity. In Kuwait, where history still struggles to break out of the official and mainstream narrative, there would be many who, if not completely unheard, would find their experiences subject to but an ephemeral burst of public interest in the newspapers and social media. They might be heard. But not listened to.

This project is an effort to prevent that loss. It's a community-based effort to document what we've lived through. So that we may all remember. But more importantly, so that we can act to bring change. What did we get right? What do we need to fix? Pessimism and conventional thinking come easy in crisis. And it's these two instincts we hope this project remedies against. We are guided by the belief that, no matter how challenging the times, there is always hope--waiting for us to wield it. Hiding, in unexpected places.

**HELEN-** An Ethiopian sales associate shares her struggles and daily experiences of lockdown in Mahboula.

[In this clip, Helen reflects on how badly the neighborhoods of Mahboula were hit during the lockdown, leaving many begging for food on the streets...]

Batul: And what was-- what was Mahboula like? So did you, did you stay in your, like, did you stay in your apartment itself or did you go around Mahboula when you, if you, if it was possible? What did you notice about Mahboula?

Helen: Only in one block was I was rounding. I see, you know, I see you know some young (incomp). He was, you know, begging me to give him *ruba* dinar<sup>1</sup>. And I say-- you, you believe me?. He's very young. And I asked him, give me your phone. I can support you. Give me. Your hungry. I can give you what I have. He is from India. I find him I'm Sorry to say that. I said, 'What's wrong with you? You don't have a sponsor?' 'No money, no money.' He doesn't speak English or Arabic. He was begging for the *ruba* Dinar to eat. I find like this, you know, I don't want [incomp]. Maybe, you know, the government, he trying his best by the way, the police that everyone was working to give food, but they cannot, they cannot handle each every door. You know? I don't know. They cannot, maybe their management was the wrong, how to manage. Maybe they bring full of car food, I see in video, if really they can manage, nobody can beg to have a bread. You get me? But the manag--managing it was wrong. I feel like that. Sorry about it. I find people when I walk, when we walk, begging you to give them *ruba* dinar, 200 fils, '*Ruba, ruba, ruba,*' he say. *Yaani*, 250, he know. Then I try. I give what I have in my hand only[ph]. I say, 'Give me your phone. Later. I can support you. Maybe you got hungry. If I cook, I can give it to you. You are rounding here. Block 2'. He was in Block 2. I walking, 'I give it to you. Don't worry. Give me.' he was not understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> A quarter Kuwaiti Dinar, equal to 250 fils, and the smallest paper currency note.

Maybe he didn't give me the phone, you know, I cry, when I come up home[ph], I say, 'Oh my God, please stop this and enough, you know enough, we understand it was a mistake. We do mistake. We don't know how to save our money maybe. Or we were choosing. This, this work good. This work bad. But you know, we was choosy. So stop, please, Lord'. I pray. And I pray because if this is continue like this, really, it will be hard. It will be hard for all people. You know? Like Ethiopians,, Indians, Bangladesh. Not for the local people. Of course, local people, even small or big, they have salary. And this is own country also. It's not the same for all of us. Right? So if COVID-19 continue like this. Blocked blocked. It was hard. I was thinking it will be more and more worse, but thanks God. Now we back to life, you know, slow like fifty percent.. Yes, I see bad things like this, begging. You have hand, you have leg, but you don't know, you don't have work. You know, we don't have family here. Maybe these guys, they kick him out from the--His dress was very dirty. His shoes very dirty because maybe he's sleeping outside maybe. We don't know. He don't wan--allowed me to know why, 'What's wrong with you?' I was pushing him to tell me 'What's wrong with you?' He don't want. Just say, 'Give me money' only. And I say, 'Don't drunk'. I say, 'If you want to buy drunk for this, I don't want to give you'. He say, 'No food, food' with his [moves hand to mouth as though eating] I say, okay, I give it. You know, like these things, it was a lot of people was begging for fifty fils and Ruba dinar, here in Mahboula, block 2, block 3 and block 1. Every block. Some people losing jobs as they, nobody understand that because they are not speaking English or Arabic properly, you know. He should have to find his nationality to talk. but his nationality, maybe the same situation, they cannot support him, you know [voice heavy with tears]. That's why he push himself to us, even human beings, *bas* he don't know me. He just, just see dark color and he thinks he's find his family maybe, you know, and he called me and he begged me. You know, I cried. I say, why? Why Like this? You know? What is our mistake? Of course, everybody not perfect. God only perfect. But still, you know, God, please forgive us and enough, we don't want to see any like COVID-19 sickness, please. Lord, Jesus really I'm praying every day. We don't want to see again. Let-- Let's enough this. For world, for all world. Not only Kuwait or Ethiopian or Indian, for all the world, enough *yaani*, forgive us. This is I can say. That much, I feel sorry. That much I am stressed about it.

Batul: Yeah. It is very hard. I can only imagine. It's very difficult. [Both speaking] Go ahead. If you're going to add something, go ahead.

Helen: It is -It is hard. You know, it is hard for who, you know like people, same like me. No, not for the, I can say the same language here now. Some other nationality also here like us, but at least they know how to speak Arabic. Like Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Maghribis, every-- every-- Tunisians. At least they can explain what they are, need. You know, but like me and like other nationality, they don't know how to speak English or Arabic. This was more worse for them this time. The period was very, very hard for us. Not for others. I cannot say it's they don't feel, and they don't stress. Of course they are. But at least they can say for who responsibility, they can explain. But like these people, they don't know how to speak. They don't know how to explain. Of course it was very worse for these people. COVID-19 in Kuwait. Really. More people, like I say, I see young man, he begging for a *ruba* dinar. What do you feel? If that's my brother? What I feel? If that's my son. Imagine. Of course it was very hard. You know, when I remember him, I like [ph] cry.

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