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the a-Rab

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editors' note

August 30, 2007: all passengers on an American Airlines flight are removed from a plane and made to wait until the following day to leave San Diego for Chicago.

Why? Because a group of six men had been speaking Arabic in their seats. Other passengers heard the criminal language and complained to flight attendees. American Airlines responded by canceling the flight.

After leaving the plane, the six men were questioned by local law enforcement officers about why they were speaking Arabic.

This is, in one way, shape, form, or another, the question that Arabs around the United States are asked daily: why are you speaking Arabic? Why are you Arab?

This question parallels the question asked of all minorities in this country: why are you speaking Spanish? Dump the hip-hop: can't you learn to speak like an educated person? Why can't you be white like everybody else?

America is becoming increasingly an English-only zone. It is becoming a place where other languages, especially those of the downtrodden and vilified, are frowned upon. "Speak our language in our country."

It's no coincidence that the possessive pronoun, that linguistic capitalist, has found its way into the political logic of this country. It's no coincidence, either, that with fear of other languages, comes fear of other people, and fear of other politics. It's no coincidence that the Martin Luther King Jr. you know is the quiet protester that President Bush salutes once a year, instead of the loud, principled, and active anti-imperialist whose speeches Time magazine eventually likened to those of Radio Hanoi.

So the question is not about language, but about politics. It is about the various ways certain communities are excluded from the political system. It is about the reason you have to start off every talk about Palestine with an apology for terrorism. It is about the reason you have to assert that you support the troops even though you oppose the war.

The question then is how do we respond. We respond like this. With narrative. This magazine will give a home to the politics, the culture, the voice, the language that the political system leaves unsheltered. We are letting a new narrative erupt out of this volcano of frustration and injustice.

In beginnings,

Yaman Salahi and Husam Zakharia

Want to support the a-Rab? We need money, writers, artists, graphic designers, as well as folks to handle advertisements and other necessary tasks. Visit www.a-rab.net for information on how to have your own material published.

If you run a business and would like to sell our publication, or if you would like us to contact a book store or community center in your area, please send us an e-mail with relevant information at distribution@a-rab.net.

you won't find us at the checkstand

the
a-Rab
...but try the nearest checkpoint

Volume 1, Issue 1
September 2007

Editors

Yaman Salahi
Husam Zakharia

Contributors

Nadia Barhoum
Tamara Buran
Liz Derias
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Nadia Abou-Karr
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About

The a-Rab magazine is an independent not-for-profit student run publication released under the creative commons license. Opinions expressed in individual submissions do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, advertisers, sponsors, or other contributors, nor are all, most, or necessarily any of these people actually Arabs. What is an Arab, anyway?

Questions, comments, suggestions?

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t-shirt at

what is the a-Rab?

Whether they're tanning some olive-oil hides on their kids for coming home with "American values" of selfishness, kicking locally-respected adages from behind a cash register at the corner store, smokin' a J with Harold and Kumar while they laugh and exchange "token foreign kid" stories, sitting in trial with their heads in their hands weeping over false accusations of bogus

bomb threats, or cheering white activists on from behind a TV screen as they take beatings from a

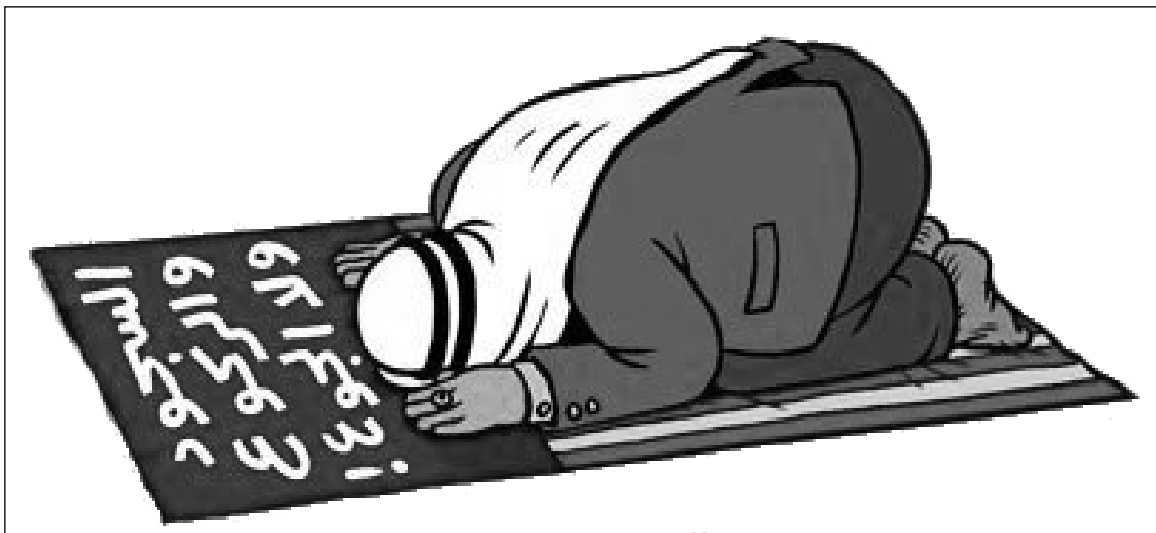
hauntingly familiar police force over Iraq war protests, this publication says:

"Respect us: We yield our own knowledge and culture and aren't ashamed to serve a cause forged in another land."

The a-Rab is everyone recklessly slapped with a criminal label September 12th 2001; the folks who were already suspected and rejected: the dark-skinned and coarse, the multilingual with heavy scorned accents, the Muslims who pray to the East, the

Arabs who sip heavily distilled grape alcohol, the Palestinians who forgot how to weep, the politically conscious, those who reject the system and won't accept its idea of good manners.

We are not talking in terms of citizenship or ethnicity. We are speaking in terms of the cultural mainstream and in terms of what passes as "American." In this



country, they tell you who you need to be, and when you try to suggest your own alternative (that is, to create your own identity), you are abused. They would like you to be the happy Arab immigrant who is subsumed by the system, makes an art out of brown-nosing to beat all of those other foreign medical graduates in the residency programs, and becomes a well-off professional by: abandoning your political beliefs--your political consciousness!, your voice, and your relevance to society. This is what it takes to be an "American" Arab

and not an a-Rab.

This castration of identity has been called by many a (European) visionary Assimilation. They heap praise on Assimilation as the way to overcome racial prejudice and discrimination, the way we can become a community with one identity that recognizes everything we hold in common. As attractive as the idea might seem,

the truth is that every identity is defined by what it is not, and every community that adopts such an identity will inevitably clash with

other identities, and will exclude them.

That means that Assimilation as we know it is the opposite of community, of inclusion, of equality. You have to follow their 12 step program to becoming an American, not yours. If you don't ditch your politics ("Gee, Mo, it makes me uncomfortable when you talk about Palestine--can't you ever just sit back, relax, and enjoy yourself? Let's go to Habibi's!") or change your supposedly savage culture, you fail. You lose the game, and then they have the

not a project of separation. this is not a project of separation. this is not a project of separation. this is not a project of separation. this not a project and be one. be many and be one. be many and be one be many and be one be many and be one be many and be one be many and be one be many

audacity to tell you that you can't expect to have any respect or access to politics unless you change course, buy a pretty suit, lose the accent, and change your name to Worthington.

If you don't follow the religion of Assimilation, you are excluded and rejected: your very right to speak is challenged.

Who hasn't been asked to love it or leave it? There is no true pluralism in this society, and the democracy practiced has more in common with an elitist and exclusive country club for Richard Cory's than it does the democracy they would like you to believe you have.

Some of us have fallen for the Assimilation myth, it is true. The Arab American

Institute for example has compiled a list of "famous Arab-Americans" to prove that it really does work, it really is possible for the White Man to love an a-Rab. But is there anybody who will say that General John Abizaid, known for his leadership in the occupation of Iraq, or Queen Noor, known for her and her husbands' "moderate" politics, are a-Rabs? If these people were to walk unguarded through the

streets of Baghdad: would they be celebrated or hunted?

We need only look at their subservient politics to understand why they are "famous Arab-Americans." It should be called imitation, not assimilation. An Arab is not necessarily an a-Rab, and the fact that a rich Queen in Jordan

is accepted in American high society is not very re-assuring for the friendly man who owns the corner store, goes by Gus, and puts up flags on the 4th to make up for the color of his skin and the subtle slips of tongue that give him away every time.

This is the a-Rab, and this is our narrative. We are here to tell our stories, ourselves, with our voices. We

are transforming a democracy of corporations that speak in jingles and brand names into a democracy of humans who speak with stories and passion. We are here to provide a radical and alternative a-Rab perspective. We won't "work within the system," until it works for us, but hell, we might use it. This is the a-Rab, and this is a project of self-determination, in every sense of the word.



"Narrative is the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision.... Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake 'classical' civilizations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision."

-- Edward Said
in Orientalism



Illustrations on this page are adapted from a cartoon by Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj.

Check out his work at www.mahjoob.com

identity is more than a passport

by *Nadia Barhoum*

How often do you think about your American passport? Or how much does that passport mean to you? It is commonplace for Americans to overlook the importance of this valuable document until put in a situation where it is used to undermine their rights and prevent them from moving freely beyond US borders. During my time abroad in Birzeit, Palestine, it became apparent to me that identity is not a simple concept. On the contrary, I realized that in our world of nation-states and occupied territories, identity is like a currency. It can take us as far as we want to go, or it can prevent us from performing even the simplest tasks.

In the occupied West Bank of Palestine, the Israeli military controls the movement of the Palestinian people both within and outside of the territory. In this environment, those who possess Palestinian documentation are denied the power to move freely within the territory of their ancestors, a restriction that stifles their daily lives and has caused an intense situation of social, political, and economic paralysis. Those living in the West Bank cannot travel without being stopped at a checkpoint or roadblock every few miles. Since my passport is blue and has the powerful seal of the US branded on its jacket, *I* travel freely in their, the Palestinians' land, while *they*, the Palestinians, are restricted from having the same mobility.

Imagine if the borders of your city, state, or country were controlled by a foreign presence, such that you could not go to work, visit a family member, or go to the hospital without being thoroughly inspected or detained. Now imagine if a traveler holding a foreign passport were to visit you under these conditions and was able to move about freely in these same areas,

can control how we lead our daily lives, and one of my experiences at a checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem highlighted this reality for me.

The light clicked green and the people immediately began shoving and clawing and shouting in fallen voices. I was sure that the IDF soldiers behind the plexi-glass loved to watch the internal fighting and angst among the Palestinians. After all, more fighting between Palestinians meant less work for the soldiers.

The barren, prison-like turnstile at the Qalandiyya checkpoint was meant to turn one person at a time, but the people were too impatient and exhausted to wait their turn—they shoved 2, 3, 4 people in at once hoping to end the abrupt stops in their daily life, and the teenage soldiers routinely responded with shouts in sorely broken Arabic,

“Wahed! Wahed!” to straighten out the orderly chaos of occupation.

The soldiers then ordered three young girls to return to Ramallah; heads tilted downwards in humiliation, tears searing their cheeks, they squeezed their way back through the turnstile with another day lost. Paralysis.

“Please God have mercy on you, let the girls go,” my cousin asked of a young boy pressed tightly against us.



illustration by saleh hijazi

practically without question.

It felt cruel, telling my family living in the West Bank, that I was going to visit the old city of Jerusalem, knowing that the Israeli military would not allow them to make that same trip to the holy city simply because of their Palestinian documentation. Every time I made the trip from Ramallah to Jerusalem, my aunt would tell me to wave at the Al Aqsa mosque for her. She has not been able to visit her village in West Jerusalem since 1967. In this respect, our legal identities

“My brother, I have a final exam in Jerusalem that I’m already late for. I have to get through,” the boy replied indignantly.

“May God grant you success on your exam my friend,” my cousin tried again, “but these are two ladies...”

With that, the boy threw up his arms in surrender and my dear cousin Khadouj and I were able to pass through the human knots created by exhausted bodies.

I emptied my pockets, placed my bag on the x-ray machine, walked through a metal detector, and somewhat bashfully took out my

US passport. I did not want the others in line to see my passport and know my secret. I wanted them to believe I was Palestinian like them, but it was already too late. The soldier waved me through, and at that moment I could imagine the resentment I would feel if I were still standing in line watching a foreigner pass through my land without question.

It is these instances that subtly and superficially divide Palestinians from one another. The legal hierarchy in the occupied territories is such that a US passport carries more weight and thus more political power than a Palestin-

ian identity. But my Palestinian identity is so much richer than a legal document, and my moments in Palestine revealed its many nuances. My identity is defined by my experience, by the narratives of others who have crossed into my life, by the events of past and present, by simple words filled with memory. It is an organic creation of my consciousness, regenerating with every thought and minute and constantly resisting those constructions which attempt to contain its meaning.

Nadia Barhoum is a fourth year student at UC Berkeley.

want to be a part of the a-Rab?

If this papyrus font makes you think this is hella Orientalist, the a-Rab wants you. To help it.

The a-Rab is in need of writers, artists, graphic designers, advertisers, poets, cartoonists, layout designers, advertising agents, and others willing to slave away for an important cause. The a-Rab doesn't pay, but it'll make you feel good. About yourself, it means.

Drop a line at contribute@a-rab.net for info.

the in-between of exile

by *Dina Omar*

1. Chi-Town

Below a 9 story tenement building
I chalk
seven blocks

to play
hopscotch
Throw a rock and

skip
the
box
it

landed in

With white chalk I stole from my classroom
The chalk outline
Looked like a T to me
To the Christian yard duty it's a cross
Ya' Muslim Child
Confused
The Yard duty calls me
Godless For stopping on crosses
The one white girl in my class
Calls me
Dirty, for my ashy elbows and knees

Double-Dutch, 2 square, Friday prayers
Skinny brown girl with hairy legs
Got zaatar in her teeth before recess
Other kids with PB&J laugh
And...
I ask mama
For lunchables the next day
Ask mama
'can I shave my legs'
Ask mamma
'don't call me habibety'
It's embarrassing

Sito makes
Mansaf
Ahhh Mansaf
She
Tore

bread
into

pie ces

over
the rice
Roast lamb
Roast lamb
To Wet it up
Creamy soup
Ma' kishick
Drizzle

Chopped

parsley
on top

and
Sauteed

snober

In Ameerka
Sito's Mansaf
Is replaced with macaroni and Cheese
If we had extra cash
Sito would cut hot dogs into it

2. Filasteen

Our bodies
float
in the Dead Sea
We play Toong' on it's surface
Our fathers honor
In the gossip of old women
My father
His blood soaked in the soil of Rammon
Where we bury our dead

Those who stole our land call us
Uncivilized, for our audacious refusal to die
Those we live among now call us
Animals, as mama watched her
Animal
Mama's Home demolished by Israeli Caterpillar
bulldozers
Shrapnel sticks on her skin
Mama's family lives in a chicken hut for 13
months
Mama cleans up Sido's bloody back after public
whippings
Mamma Sawahh, Baba Sawahh

Remember their thick black lashes
Drift from the wind traveling down from Carmel

Parents refuse to utter this to their children
how much they miss that misery
As Exiles we come to Ameerka as to never kneel
for mercy
As Exiles we sell liquor to young black men in
Chicago
As Exiles we search for dignity where
Dignity is dead
Because Baba cannot find a job to feed his family
Other than in a liquor store
Because mama hates to let us watch sex on TV
She does not know what to do now that he is dead

And their children carry our father's name
I—the skinny brown girl from chi-town will
carry the story of my ancestors
Of Sawahh
Exiles as we cross the Gulf of Akabah into
this strange land of tong piercing
and individual dinner plates

No Yasmeen wa' Zaytoon
We will be buried underneath the fig trees in
Ramoun
As we Palestinians will return home
Dead as they like us

Dina Omar is a fourth year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley.

being an arab: the five stages of grief

by *Husam Samir*
Khalil Zakharia

Grief has reserved at least half a year in any given person's calendar. From Mogadishu to Buenos Aires to Waco Texas humanity has gone through heartache, sorrow, anguish and depression for ever and ever.

A-Rabs are no exception (surprise!). There's a method to our madness, and it can be conveyed

niently explained by using the pop-psychology template:

The Fives Stages of Grief

Stage 1: Denial

In a compilation of renowned Palestinian folk-author Ghassan Kanafani's stories, a refugee child spends a school night in Lebanon wrenching streams of shameful tears from his face after his father confirms his deepest 7-year-old

nightmare to be true: He is Palestinian. The most immediate effect of racism includes the sudden onset of crippling shame. It rushes to your mind, visualizing the only Arabs you see on TV who—sweating from animalistic rage—hold nothing but guns in their palms and don't speak words; only crazy screaming to invoke the rage of a scary God.

"So you're an A-Rab??" your peers constantly ask you. And defensive

rejection of your identity rushes through your mind for at least a second: I'm a hairy animal? I'm the human version of desert vermin?
Fuck that.

"You're A-Rab?"

"Naw foo, I'm Egyptian..."

I'm not Egyptian, and I know this well enough by now. I'm a grown kid, and I've been reminded (in one way or another) that I was Palestinian every day since I came out of the womb. I just needed an unstudied pariah, a quick fix, an association with a proud empire. Frantically looking for alternatives to your own identity is tiring.

"That's right son, you can call me King Tut-Bust-a-Nut! Whaaaaaaat?"

Humor is a part of denial. It gives you a funny lie to hide behind; A dope evasion; a swift verbal assault that drops misconceptions once and for all, leaving my peers with smiles on their faces and a reminder that no matter I'm from, I'm making a presence.

I talked big about Palestine: the grit and stone walls were all real, but like any good myth, the truthful elements were never the focus.

Who am I kidding? I'm not Egyptian; I'm not Babylonian or Phoenician or even anything really. I have a vague occupational identity called a "hawiyah"—which I've never been able to translate exactly—and no citizenship. My passport might as well read "Never Never Land."

But I flaunted it. When I got home, I was never proud of my culture in a real way. I was ashamed.

Stage 2: Anger

How can you expect an Arab not to be angry? When I woke up on September 11th, I didn't even double-take. I figure my parents were watching the same 'ol thing: smoking buildings and people wishing they never existed. Same old shit. Every fucking morning.

Palestinians go through September 11th at least once a month. But everyone expects us to dance

"Palestinians go through September 11th at least once a month. But everyone expects us to dance with hookah pipes and entertain their children on flying carpets with Genies?"

with hookah pipes and entertain their children on flying carpets with Genies? Jafar from Aladdin is our Sambo.

No!

You cannot have the colorful and interesting parts of my culture without a heavy dose of the twisted metal scraps and lethally gaseous blazes my people breathe daily.

I'm not a clown. I'm not here to entertain your jejune conclusions about my people and their mystical traditions. I'd rather kick it with the other kids who you oppress, the other kids whose ancestors you killed and ravaged and "had your way with."

You expect me not to be angry and upset? How do you expect a person to react to being scared and intimidated into putting your flag in front of their home? Don't you ever try and teach me that brown skinned people were ever inferior. You teach me that the Arawaks ran arms open towards Columbus—their savior, but you don't tell us how wealthy European treasure-seekers set the Native American populations ablaze, how they burned and pillaged and spread disease.

How "unemployment" became imposed on them and while Wal-Mart's \$6.10-per-hour wage is non-negotiable because they don't allow people to unionize; the sub-standard pay drops to \$4.20 near Indian Reservations. (Greg Palest)

Public school didn't teach us that "manifest destiny" was a euphemism for "mass indigenous graves and tragedy."

Similarly, our schools teach us that the Zionists arrived in Palestine to a "land without a people for a people without a land."

I've had teachers sit there and antagonize me, telling me that Palestine and the Palestinians simply don't exist. Did you just tell me that I'm not people?

We're taught that the Arabs, led by Sharif Hussein helped Europe during World War 1, but not that General McMahon made his false promises while the Sikes-Picot agreement split the Arab world up between European imperialist countries. Wiping a people out is a plan for you. It's no coincidence that brown folks are dropping violently into deliberate graves.

You want us to bow our heads and pretend that flying carpets can take us far enough away to ignore the black clouds that surround our villages? You got somethin' else comin' quick.

Stage 3: Bargaining

I'm an Arab, true, but think about it for a minute corporate America... Me and you have a future.

Oh yeah, think about it. You've been selling Type 2 diabetes, black and carbonated to everyone on earth, why not make a buck off the Fertile Crescent?

Hey Mr. CEO of Philip Morris, I'm an Arab man, and like Kanye West said: "I'm not a businessman, I'm a business, man." It didn't take me long to figure out that this government doesn't want you selling your nicotine-packed, rat-poisoned, cancer-inducing tobacco sticks to the proud citizens of this healthy nation, so go on: sell a pack of Marlboros to 8-year-olds in Gaza for dirt cheap. There are no regulations there. No pesty English-speakers to call you out on your mass capitalist poison spreading scheme. Prices and packages are a compromise: Your health to us is dirt cheap, so while we sponsor elaborate "Truth" commercials in the states, we can make a killing off of making a killing off of killers. And I can help.

Hey now, the Bible came from my lands. We're not too different, you and I, so how about this... I'll be quiet about my politics, in fact, I won't even tell you about them. I'll smile at you every time I see you at work, and I'll try to never raise my voice. I'll even invite you over to my home from

time to time and try to impress you by treating my grandma's embroidery like an Ikea Original and

"You cannot have the colorful and interesting parts of my culture without a heavy dose of the twisted metal scraps and lethally gaseous blazes my people breathe daily."

keep you amused with an entertaining "hookah" session. I'll work for you and make excuses for the fact that your tax money is digging our graves while I pay more of it than you do. Just let me study business and law in your Universities so I can make your businesses seem legal. Let me buy your products and keep your economy going and tend to the liquor stores you'd rather not worry about that way you keep all brown and foreign folks in a contained space so you can keep an eye on us while we kill each other.

What a deal!

"I've had teachers sit there and antagonize me, telling me that Palestine and the Palestinians simply don't exist. Did you just tell me I'm not people?"

Stage 4: Depression

If you ask my mom about me as a kid in America, she'll be like: "Oh Husami was such a bad boy in elementary school!"

It's true, I got called into the disciplinary office a lot. At the time it seemed like the end of the world; the horror of waiting for my jobs to come home while I launched a fruitless campaign of trying to convince moms not to snitch me out. Stinging buttocks wasn't the coolest way to end an evening.

In retrospect, this is all a normal dynamic, but the principle's office itself was a different story. I spent a lot of time talking about "my country," prompted by an incident where me and my buddies made beanshooters out of a 2-liter Coca-Cola bottle and some balloons.

"Is it violent in your country?" they'd ask me "do you think about guns a lot?"

Shit, as far as I knew, yes. Yes it is a violent place. And that's what I told them. What that had to do with a couple snot-nosed kids and a bean shooter, I still can't tell you.

"Do your parents teach you that guns are okay?"

I'd be happy if they just allowed me to watch Power Rangers...

"Here, draw a picture of your country," "What do you see in this ink blot?" "It's okay, sweetie, we're here for you..."

Can't I just go back to class with a detention like everyone else?

No. I was an Arab kid. I was a FOB, Fresh Off the Boat and my parents had thick accents. My mind was

infected with violence and “kids will be kids,” didn’t cut it. Arabic kids will be terrorist kids if your elementary school teacher doesn’t save you from your own hateful race.

And guess what the nauseatingly sweet school psychiatrist told my folks when they asked what my problem was? Depression.

Ha.

Stage 5: Acceptance

I just want to let the liars and thieves know that even though I sit behind a laptop and slap a keyboard around with Microsoft Word from time to time, that’s not

a reason to not be scared of me.

You should be terrified, because these phony five stages of grief to

“‘Is it violent in your country?’ they’d ask me ‘do you think about guns a lot?’ Shit, as far as I knew, yes. Yes, it is a violent place. And that’s what I told them.”

me are just as defunct as so many of the other lies and myths I’ve been force fed since I was a kid. I’m the mildest example of my Arab age-range.

There’s youths killin’, whose art projects involve chemicals meeting explosively. I got lucky, so consider this a warning: I’ll hold this vile of ammonia and watch it diffuse slowly into your nostrils, into the cracks between your brain flaps, slowly driving you insane until you realize what you’ve done to us.

My terms of acceptance: None.

This shit is unacceptable.

Husam Samir Khalil Zakharia is a third year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley.

black-arab solidarity: what could it mean?

by *Liz Derias*

I am a daughter of two Coptic parents from Egypt. We moved to this country when I was less than a year old. My family first lived in Los Angeles, moved to Philadelphia, and finally settled in a town right outside of Philadelphia. I’ve grown up around all sorts of Egyptian people (immigrants and 1st generation residents) and Black people (descendants of enslaved Africans, Caribbeans, and African immigrants). I identify as both Coptic/Egyptian and African/Black.

Inside my home I had the Arab immigrant experience: hearing the back and forth Arabic and English in the same sentence so much so that that I only speak Arabic that way; perfecting my interpretation

skills to my parents who struggled to understand American slang; eating falafel and baklaawa and kushari and fuul; dismissing the repeated warnings from elders to not cause ‘too much trouble’; and listening to the never ending stories that started with “In my country....”

Outside of my home I had the little Black girl experience: feeling alienated by white people especially when I didn’t speak “proper” English; eating cornbread and sweet potato pie and fried chicken; getting down with the “oh-uh-uh” street politics of other little Black girls; attending annual Caribbean and Odunde festivals; dismissing the repeated warnings from elders to not cause ‘too much trouble’; and listening to the never ending stories that started with, “Back in

my day...”.

Generally for me, the similarities outweighed the differences. The differences (which on my own, I only subconsciously paid attention to) were brought to light for me by others--for instance, when Black people having found out that I was Egyptian, told me I looked like Neferetiti, or when Arabs to whom I openly identified as African/Black sighed with disapproval, giving me the “...we are not THOSE people” look.

Solidarity between these communities has meant interesting, and often vague, things to me over the course of the years. In June 2006 I attended the 1st Arab Women’s Movement Arising for Justice (AMWAJ) conference in Chicago. There I participated in a Black-

Arab solidarity workshop where another Egyptian sister, who also identified as Arab and African, said, "...that's a weird concept-am I trying to build solidarity with myself?"

Although a simple and funny question, I realize now it's a bit more complicated and serious.

I became an organizing member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Oakland chapter (MXGM) in 2004. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement is a mass based organization that works to uphold the self-determination of all African people in the Diaspora, with a particular focus on Black/New Afrikans here in the u.s. My organizing experience is primarily with MXGM, primarily with New Afrikans, and primarily rooted in lessons from the Black Liberation Movement in the u.s.

Growing up, I don't recall ever seeing or being involved with a legitimate, politically focused Arab orga-

nization engaged in community organizing or youth leadership development. Sorry ya'll, those all-day Sunday School sessions don't count. That is, till I came in contact with some radical Arabs who are part of the Arab Organizing and Resource Center (AROC) in San Francisco, CA. These Arabs are taking the lead in putting out important historical and current day analyses of the state of Arab leadership and organizing both in our home lands and in the u.s. They are serving Arabs with legal issues, are building links with various Immigrants rights forces in the Bay Area, and are helping to build a viable Arab/Arab American movement.

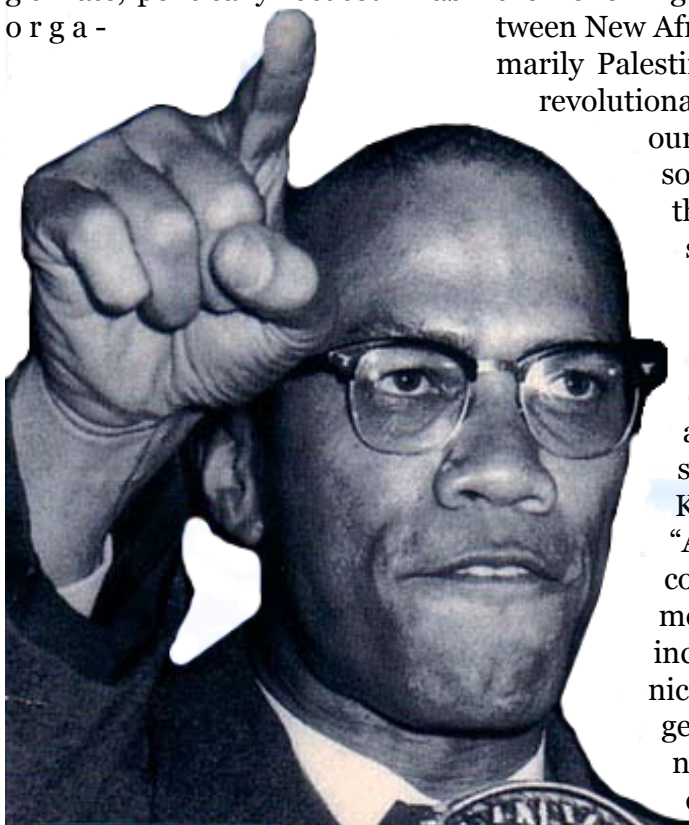
As I begin to work more intricately in the movement-building activities of both organizations, I'm beginning to think more critically about political solidarity.

Kali Akuno, also of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, wrote the following on solidarity between New Afrikan and Arab, primarily Palestinian, peoples: "For revolutionary New Afrikans our understanding of solidarity starts with the position best stated by Mozambican revolutionary Samora Machel; 'solidarity is not charity, but mutual aid in the pursuit of shared objectives' ". Kali continued, "As a people also confronting containment through mass incarceration, ethnic cleansing, and genocide we share a number of mutual enemies and objec-

tives with the Palestinian people. White supremacy and European settler colonialism and imperialism, in its US and Zionist variants, is an enemy of both our peoples. We are both fighting for the recognition of our humanity, we are both fighting for self-determination, we are both fighting for economic and human development, and we are both in pitched battles for the right to return. So, to us solidarity consists of struggling together to defeat the reactionary forces of imperialism and fulfill the demands and aspirations of our people. But, let's be clear and honest, this is not an easy task, as our enemies comprise some of the most dominant and destructive forces to ever exist in human history. We should have no illusions about the protracted nature of our struggles. Nor should we elude ourselves into believing that time is necessarily on our side given the genocidal inclinations of our enemies. We have to act and we have to act in the here and now with all we have to push back the forces of reaction."

Historically, there are several examples of solidarity between both peoples, which include written solidarity statements from the African Liberation Movement to the Palestinian resistance in 1967, and the recognition and active support of Arab nationalist forces of the struggles against Apartheid in South Africa. Kristy Feghali of the AROC wrote the following in an email to New Afrikan and Arab comrades preparing to go to the united states Social Forum.

"These expressions of solidarity demonstrate the deep recognition of politically aligned struggle between the New Afrikan and Arab communities throughout the



years, but do not attest to the practical working relationships necessary to strategically implement the movements we are working to achieve. In order to build solidarity in the here and now, it's going to take a lot of work and relationship building."

At the ussf, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, anti-racist (and therefore anti-Zionist) New Afrikan and Arab forces met with the intention of creating and strengthening such practical working relationships. The objectives of the discussion included:

- Analyzing the historic and current conditions in our communities;
- Providing an overview of the historical intersections and alliances between both communities;
- Discussing the state of both liberation movements;
- Understanding the legacies and manifestations of colonialism, imperialism, and Diaspora

In both communities; and

- Creating next steps towards building solidarity.

From this gathering we realized there's more work to do within and between both communities!

"The differences were brought to light for me by others--for instance, when Black people having found out that I was Egyptian, told me that I looked like Neferetiti, or when Arabs to whom I openly identified as African/Black sighed with disapproval, giving me the '...we are not THOSE people' look."

So what is it going to take? A reframing of "Black/Brown unity" politics to include the plight of Arab countries, especially pushing left and progressive forces to take clearer more anti-imperialist stances on the occupation and genocide in Palestine as one of the

most important national struggles of our times; a focus on relationship building with an eye on challenging the prejudice in each community towards one another; sustained training in organizing skills; joint political studies; an acknowledgement of differences and a focus on true solidarity which allows for each community take up the lead for their own community; and a commitment to see the liberation of both communities, and of all oppressed people.

In Unity and Struggle!

Liz Derias is the Educational Alternatives Program Coordinator for the School of Unity and Liberation in Oakland, CA.

in search of an alternative

by Tamara al-Om

Iraq is in chaos, with no end to the war in sight. Palestine, or rather what are now called the Palestinian territories, has been divided into Fatah and Hamas controlled areas. Lebanon, a year after last summer's war, is politically, economically and socially weakened. Syria, accused of supporting terrorists and purchasing Russian made anti-aircraft missiles, is under the threat of a possible attack from Israel and/or America. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia and a number of other Gulf states have signed an arms deal with the US

worth twenty billion dollars. A look at the state of affairs across the Middle East necessitates the asking of certain questions, namely how we, as Arab nations, have ended up in this situation and how on earth we are meant to get out of it.

"Write down, I am an Arab!" wrote Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in 1963, a sentiment held by many Arabs around this time. There was a sense of unity, an Arab Awakening, as millions stood up and insisted that they were Arabs before anything else. However, since then, this sentiment has

gradually faded and instead has been replaced by a much more religious identity. There is an array of key events that we could maintain influenced this shift, such as the 1967 war, the 1973 war, the Iranian revolution, the use of Afghani fighters in the toppling of the Soviet Union, the Iran/Iraq war, the Lebanese civil war, the first Intifada, the first Gulf war, the second Intifada and now of course the ongoing second Iraq war. Yet, although each of these events left us in a more precarious position, they cannot be solely blamed for weakening this sense of unity among the Arabs.

There is an inescapable correlation between the state we are in today, as a fundamentally divided Middle East, and the excessive religiosity of it and our view of our own history. Nietzsche, in *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* distinguishes between three types of history, each of which, if used excessively or in the wrong way, proves to be suppressive and destructive. However if used in unison and in balance with one another, then history proves to be productive and beneficial to the present. History must serve life; life should not simply be a tool to promote a history.

The first type of history is *monumental history*, the history of momentous events. Unfortunately, we often cling too strongly to these events, blinding ourselves from the possibilities of our own present. Instead, monumental history should be used to instill in us a faith in humanity, for “*the greatest moments in the struggle of single individuals make up a chain, in which a range of mountains of humanity are joined over thousands of years.*”

Antiquarian history signifies a love of the past, which may be considered something that preserves our traditions and cultures. However all too often this love of the past is used to define how we should live, what we should think and essentially who we should be

-- today.

“The Arabs find themselves - in spite of all the changes of the last

“Monumental history should be used to instill in us a faith in humanity, for ‘the greatest moments in the struggle of single individuals make up a chain, in which a range of mountains of humanity are joined over thousands of years.’”

fourteen centuries - moving on a stage where history is repeating itself with just one objective: the continual actualization of the past.” From too young an age, we are taught that the peak of our existence as Arabs has passed, such as the time of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire. We were once

“We should be able to critically examine the past and shatter our preconceived ideas of it in order to truly live in the present, *unhistorically*.... It is *only* when we can use the three methods of history in the right manner and proportion that we can truly live *unhistorically* and thus successfully exercise our creativity.”

great, now we merely exist in our own shadows. We are taught to rarely question, to do as we are told according to our flawed preconceptions of our own cultures and religions.

Most importantly however is a

critical history. We should be able to critically examine the past and shatter our preconceived ideas of it in order to truly live in the present, *unhistorically*. Regrettably, we have failed to critically examine our own history, and as Nietzsche stresses it is only through destruction that the conception of creation is truly possible. Consequently it is *only* when we can use the three methods of history in the right manner and proportion that we can truly live *unhistorically* and thus successfully exercise our creativity.

Nietzsche also emphasises the importance of the youth - for whom the historical sense is perhaps the least dominant - if there is to be any hope for the future. It is in light of their importance that history is so often misused against them in order to “*uproot the strongest instincts of youth, fire, defiance, forgetting of the self, to dampen down the heat of their sense of right and wrong, to hold back or repress the desire to mature slowly with the contrary desire to be finished quickly, to be useful and productive, to infect the honesty and boldness of the feelings with doubts. Indeed, history is itself capable of deceiving the young about their most beautiful privilege, about their power to cultivate in themselves with complete conviction a great idea and to allow an even greater idea to grow forth out of it.*”

Therefore it is up to us, as Arab youth to ensure and continue to

develop an even more outstanding time of creativity. We must know where we have come from, but have no irrational loyalty to the past, crippling us from being able to critically examine the errors of our past. We must not allow any of the corrupt governments, whatever their motive or incentive, to suppress our thoughts and our voices. It is through art, film, poetry and the creation of an alternative media that we can express

ourselves and get our message out there.

After all, our creative expression is all we have if we truly want to be free. *“When you are free, you have to face reality, the world in its entirety. You have to deal with the world’s problems, with everything.... On the other hand, if we are slaves, we can be content and not have to deal with anything. Just as Allah solves all our prob-*

lems, the dictator will solve all our problems.”

Tamara al-Om is a free-lance copy editor and is currently undertaking doctoral research. She blogs at <http://tamaraalom.wordpress.com/>.

re-instate debbie almontaser now!

RAWI, the Radius of Arab American Writers, is concerned by the recent “resignation” of Debbie Almontaser from New York City’s Khalil Gibran International Academy, a public school devoted to Arabic language and culture. Almontaser generated public controversy when she was asked by a reporter about a tee-shirt with the phrase ‘Intifada NYC’ worn by some people at an event sponsored by Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media. Both the event and the organization are unrelated to the Gibran Academy.

As Almontaser attempted to explain repeatedly, the shirt is not in any way an endorsement of violence; “the word basically means ‘shaking off,’” she noted. Almontaser was subjected to vicious and factually unsubstantiated attacks by neoconservative media and commentators such as Daniel Pipes, who published sensationalistic articles entitled “A Madrassa Grows in Brooklyn” and “Stop the NYC Madrassa.” (“Madrassa” merely means “school” in Arabic.) Rupert Murdoch’s New York Post dubbed Almontaser “the Intifada Principal” and ran an editorial under the title “What’s Arabic for Shut It Down?”

Amid the brouhaha, Randi Weingarten, the president of Almontaser’s union, The United Federation of Teachers, took a public stand in opposition to Almontaser. Almontaser, an Arabic-speaking Yemeni immigrant, is the founding principal of the school and is a veteran public school teacher. Because of the intense pressure, she was advised to resign as principal of the Academy; Mayor Michael Bloomberg accepted her resignation and swiftly replaced her with Danielle Salzberg, a non-Arabic-speaking American Jew; according to The Post, Salzberg is “an ardent Zionist who considered moving to Israel.”

RAWI views this intense pressure and Almontaser’s subsequent resignation as symptoms of pervasive anti-Arab racism in the United States through which nonviolent, workaday Arabic terms have been stigmatized with sinister, albeit nonsensical, connotations. We correspondingly view New York City’s move to replace Almontaser with a non-Arab Zionist as a profound insult to the Arab American community. The clear message to the Arab American community is that we cannot undertake any of our own affairs without continu-

ous public scrutiny and external bureaucratic supervision. We have also learned that in moments of crisis the fear and loathing of Arabs will supersede the commonsensical need to exercise basic civil responsibility.

As a community of writers, scholars, and artists, RAWI is concerned about the consequences of the Almontaser imbroglio to the freedom of intellectual and cultural expression. If the City of New York can be cowed into taking action against a decorated principal who had done nothing other than comment on a tee-shirt emblazoned with a cultural slogan, then groups whose purpose is to restrict public freedom will be inexcusably empowered. The effect of such groups on the Arab American community has already been substantial and has the potential to become pernicious. Almontaser was the victim of a sensationalistic and premeditated media attack. She was then the victim of cowardice by her union and employers. RAWI urges the City of New York to reinstate her forthwith as principal of the Gibran Academy, a position from which she had no legitimate reason to resign.

This press release was re-published with permission from RAWI.

who is iranian?

by Tala Khanmalek

“The Arabs destroyed our country!” my grandmother always proclaims. “They destroyed Iran; they destroyed our language and our culture.”

But, who is Iranian? What qualifies someone or a group of people as Iranian? Is there a minimum shared attribute that signifies Iranian-ness in spite of anything else? My grandmother’s statement assumes a fixed notion of Iranian national identity that is bound to the dominant language, Persian, as well as the dominant ethnicity.

However, my grandmother’s understanding of Iran as linguistically, racially, and culturally uniform is a far cry from reality. Iran, like most modern nation states, is certainly not monolithic or singular in any way.

In the formation of Iranian identity, “the Turkish, Arab, Turkoman, Baluchi, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Kurdish, Luri, Armenian, Assyrian, and other religious, linguistic, and tribal communities that lay within the administrative boundary demarcating the Iranian plateau during the transition to modernism were all termed Iranian,” says Mostafa Vaziri as quoted by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi in *Iran as Imagined Nation: The construction of National Identity*.

The creation of national identity requires, and Iranian identity in particular required, the erasure of linguistic, racial, and cultural differences. The mainstream definition of “Iranian” presupposes sameness, and lumps together the

particularities of ethnic groups within Iran to produce a static and homogeneous identity.

In *Language Reform in Turkey and Iran*, John R. Perry follows the development and activities of the Persian Academy, founded in 1935. In particular, he looks at state-sponsored language reform in Turkey and Iran that was “characterized chiefly by attempts to ‘purify’ Turkish and Persian of their centuries-old accretion of Arabic loanwords.”

Language reform constituted a cleansing of Persian and the reinstatement of an exclusive national identity. The purging of Arabic loanwords established “us” as Iranian and “them” as Arab, producing a strict binary. The dubbing of Persian the standard language of Iran coincided with a rise in nationalism, which simultaneously vilified Arabic language and culture and propagated Persian ethnocentrism.

The Iran-Iraq war necessitated the promotion of such nationalist spirit to categorize the common enemy—the Other or “the Arab.” The irony lies in the fact that we have a lot in common with the Other that we have imagined.

Not to mention, folks in the south of Iran speak Arabic and borrow largely from Arab culture.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Franz Fanon states, “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.” Thus, a language presupposed a civilization, and to speak a language is also to embody its implied culture or world. To my grandmother I therefore propose a reinvention of language that foments an evolution of what we consider and don’t consider Iranian culture.

Let us explore a redefinition of Iranian-ness that includes difference and purges ideas of racial intolerance; let us examine a redefinition that unites us with our neighbors against U.S. imperialism in the Middle East. And let this be a guiding principle for nation states around the world.

Tala Khanmalek is a third-year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley.

Image from http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/opinion/2005/07/images/070302iran_map.gif



muslim, the race

by Brett Newell-Woods

At the Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance a video installation asks an audience of impressionable youth: "Most of the recent acts of terrorism have been committed by Islamic extremists, which raises the issue of racial profiling... Should racial profiling be allowed?" Teachers nod their assent and students walk away with the debate raging in their minds. The issue of racism is addressed and discussed.

This question, and the many like it utilized in middle education, is clearly intended to elicit a resounding 'no!' at the most, or at the least a debate which would move the argument in that direction. It is typical of the post September 11th discourse on assimilation, of the limits we as Americans should set for our fellow country-men and women. But plunging a little further into the statement's semantic depth we hit our head on a sharp stone. Muslims are not a race.

In fact, the notion of race, which has its provenance in the advances in biological sciences made during the European Enlightenment, has been discredited in many of those very European countries. Yet here, in the United States, we still refer to 'race' as if it existed. It

is still the division and definition of peoples according to an imagined conflation of culture and ethnicity into an unassailable mass, impermeable as it is monolithic. Traditionally, these divisions and definitions have revolved around ethnicity: any characteristic which is not inflected by the color of one's



illustration by nadia abou-karr

skin (or even the tint and shade of that color) is considered perverse. All are expected to play their biologically assigned roles.

In our country today there is little room for multidimensional identity. The legacy of Enlightenment racial discourse, with its monolithic pronouncements on

ethno-cultural groups, is a legacy of absolutes. When the question of assimilation is raised there can be only two responses: you either are or you aren't. You are either American or with the terrorists. Supposed diversity runs on caricature alone.

I remember 9-11. I remember the terror I felt that my godfather, an Arab, a Muslim, a Palestinian, the man whom I call father, would be swept away in a technowar combine of righteousness. I myself am neither Arab nor Muslim, but my godfather was and is a permanent fixture in my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life. Before that day I had no sense of 'Arabness' or 'whiteness.' At age fifteen, the full psychological impact of America's racialism had not hit me. In the days, weeks, months, years after that event I felt an odd relief at still being able to kiss my godfather's cheek, at being able to bus tables in his restaurant with the reassurance that his grumpy voice would still

bark with paternal cadence. He is everything a poor boy could ask for in a father.

That odd relief I felt, that attempt at convincing myself of continued normality, was finally unraveled with my introduction to the post 9-11 curriculum of tolerance, encapsulated by the quote above. It goes without saying that Mus-

lims are not a race, even in the antiquated sense of the term. Islam, like Christianity or most any religion, is cast over a plethora of languages, cultures and ethnicities. It cannot be whittled down and defined as one monolithic block of hijabs and beards. Every fundamentalist, whether Muslim or Christian, desires to uphold this very fiction of permanent division between monolithic powers: fundamentalist Muslims wish all of the faithful to fall under the yoke of a rigorist interpretation of 'Ummah,' on whose definition they hold a monopoly, and fundamentalist Christians who, like their Muslim counter-parts, make up only a tiny fraction of the world's Christian population, tout themselves as the only true believers.

However, I do not wish to speak expressly about fundamentalists. The racializing of Muslim citizens is just as prevalent in the secular main stream as it is on mega-church pulpits; in fact the dovish sweet-talk of the former is more

worrisome than the blistered shouting of the latter.

In much of the American mainstream, Left and Right, there is plenty of support for such insidious teaching. School-children the

"In our country today, there is little room for multidimensional identity. The legacy of Enlightenment racial discourse, with its monolithic pronouncements on ethno-cultural groups, is a legacy of absolutes. When the question of assimilation is raised, there can only be two responses: you either are or you aren't."

country over are presented with the yes or no question of racial profiling without there being any reference to the fallacy of this sort of terminology. The next generation is inculcated with a concept of race even more peculiar than ours: a race-cum-religion.

The European Enlightenment was presented with a pertinent conun-

drum: what to do about the Jews? Certainly they, with their religion which was decidedly un-Christian, un-European and Oriental, should be required to either assimilate completely or face alienation. It was simply impossible for one to be Jewish and European.

In hind-sight we see the catastrophic error in judgment with 20/20 vision, and history is constantly being reborn.

The era of nation-states has ended. With countries as diverse as they are now we cannot afford that concept. The diversity of cultures must not rely on caricature, and the differences

of people must not be the measure of their worth; that statement may seem axiomatic, even trite, but it still begs to be followed. We are witness to the consequences of the past; and we are responsible for the consequences of the future.

Brett Newell-Woods is a writer in Alameda, California.

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on parades and protests

by Yaman Salahi

There was a time in American history when protests were not tolerated by those in power. We need only look back at the civil rights era to find the authorities violently repressing protestors calling for social equality and an end to the war in Vietnam, in the same way that similarly organic protests continue to be put down in other parts of the world today. At that time, protests were a genuine and effective way to oppose government policy because they were at once outside of the prevailing political system, and at the same time opposed to it.

This is no longer the case in America. The “protest” is more commonplace than ever, but it is rarely effective. If we have learned anything from ANSWER’s record in the last several years, it is that The Biggest And Loudest Protest In History is not the answer. The traditional protest has lots its effect and as such does not pose a threat whatsoever to the prevailing

institutions we seek to replace.

The root of the problem is that our concept of the protest has shifted from one of confrontation to one of self-gratification. We kindly acquiesce to police officers who ask us to move our “protests” outside of the flow of traffic, as if we as protestors were ac-

necting with them, as if we were merely having communication problems.

But that is not what the protest is for. “We want to be heard” is a justifiable sentiment, but not if it is confused as the purpose of the protest. The protest of “we want to be heard” is nothing more than an expression of an opinion, a visual and physical manifesta-

tion of the newspaper editorial. It is as easy to ignore that kind of protest as it is to throw out the papers.

If we consider the circumstances surrounding this particular sort of “protest,” it should not be so difficult to understand the weakness that has allowed government policy, from Iraq to Afghanistan, to continue unimpeded despite large and frequent “protests” throughout the country and despite polls clearly indicating that at least two-thirds of the American public favor an immediate change in policy.

In many cases, these “protests”

the protest in politics

What kind of protests do our politicians believe in? Democratic Congressman Mark Udall’s office was occupied by a Colorado activist named Carolyn Bruinski, who was later arrested and sentenced to one month in prison.

Udall explained that the reason Bruinski was arrested was that her actions “had the effect of interfering with the daily duties of [his] staff.”

Strangely, Udall emphasized that despite supporting Bruinski’s arrest, he still believed that people had a right to “protest.”

How long will it take before protests are understood in our political parlance to be actions of interference rather than mere newspapers with legs?

tors on a stage, in a show that can be moved from venue to venue. In describing our protests, we say that we only want to be heard, we simply want those in charge to pay attention to us. We assume that those higher than us actually want to hear us, and that it is just a matter of con-

occur only with permits from city officials. Sometimes money has been exchanged so that the city can cordon off several blocks for the demonstrators' use. One might think, with all the collaboration that these protests require with the authorities, that we are actually preparing for the Rose Parade. But, no, these are "protests" in which we submit to the rules of the authorities, in effect allowing the very system that we presume to oppose to orchestrate them.

Protests may have the potential to force change--but parades certainly do not. How absurd it is for protestors seeking to overturn a political system to work with the approval and cooperation of that same slow, corrupt, and incapable system! And yet, this impossibility eludes us because we have forgotten the purpose of the protest in the first place, and did not notice that it stopped serving this purpose as soon as it became the parade. Even worse, in parading, we think we are protesting, while those who should be responding continue to ignore us: yet we manage to walk away with a sense of accomplishment and self-importance, when we have done nothing but reassure our own image of ourselves.

While one effect of the protest is to serve as a display of numbers, to signify a presence to the powers that be and to inspire others to become a part of that presence, it is certainly not its purpose. That task can be served by editorials. If we lived in a genuinely democratic system, we would need to look no further: but recent events should lead us to question just how effective our democracy is in carrying

out the will of the people in the first place.

The defining purpose of the protest is to halt the system, however temporarily. Presuming that the law is unjust, it breaks the law for justice, forbidding the system from operating uninterrupted. This is civil disobedience, the act of breaking minor rules about law and order in order to demand that we be recognized and acknowledged and our grievances addressed: in other words, to bring the system that controls us under our control. When we protest we say: you cannot roll us up and

"We have forgotten the purpose of the protest in the first place, and did not notice that it stopped serving this purpose as soon as it became the parade."

throw us out like the opinion section.

If we wish to make our efforts effective, then we must engage in this type of non-violent civil disobedience. No doubt, this will put us at odds with the authorities: but are we not already at odds with them? Do we not already find ourselves increasingly in a position of weakness and subjugation to them, even a position wherein we feel threatened if we do not actively cooperate with them on trivial matters? What do we do when we comply with rules and orders regarding when, where, and how we are allowed to protest, besides dull the only blade we wield?

If we want to see decisive and democratic action regarding the brutal wars that our government is conducting abroad and at home, then we must act, and we must act outside of the framework that has been set up by the very same people who give the orders for bombs to be dropped in Baghdad, Kabul, Beirut, and Gaza.

In doing so we must recognize that while we are acting specifically in opposition to these reckless and corrupt military adventures, we are also acting more generally to reassert our right and duty to control the government and its behavior. Much remains to be fixed in a system that allows unrepresentative presidents to wage war, undemocratically subverting the citizens and their authority. Today the government is not of the people, but independent of them. The struggle to fix these structural flaws is inseparable from the anti-war elements of our protests.

To achieve these things we must give up the parade and revive the protest. I wrote that there was a time that protests were not tolerated in America. That is still the case. We may parade around freely, but we still cannot protest. In doing what needs to be done we may end up in handcuffs. But at least we will not end up in uniforms fighting exploitative and unjust wars, or supporting the softer side of empire from the comfort of our cubicles and living rooms.

Yaman Salahi is a third-year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley. He blogs at www.yamansalahi.com/.

woman: the cradle of civilization

by *Dina Omar*

Before the 1991 Persian Gulf War women in Iraq were given comparatively more legal, political, and social rights than other women in the Middle East and North Africa. Parallel to the rise of Ba`athism in 1968 was the increase of woman's agency in Iraq. For example, article 19 of the 1970 Provisional Constitution declares that no person should be denied equal representation before the law on the basis of "sex, blood, language, social origin, or religion."

According to Iraq's historical archives, archives that have been destroyed by U.S. bombing during the first few months of the war, "In January 1971, Iraq also ratified the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These international agreements provide equal protection under international law to all. Labor laws were also established that are similar to the sexual harassment laws in the United States to protect women in the work place.

Eager to generate economic development, Saddam Hussein and the Baathist party in 1971 authorized mandatory laws to educate people in rural areas. According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) the literacy rates between 1969 and 1989 grew over 45%. Women were specifically targeted; the laws aimed at women mandated that citizens from both sexes attend primary school and government assistance was provided to attend secondary

school. Some oral sources claim that if fathers did not allow their daughters to attend school they would be imprisoned.

The Ba`athist party adopted even more unconventional laws; in 1979 they attempted to pass legislation to eradicate all illiteracy. The Government established "literacy centers". The literacy centers were run by the GFIW (General Federation of Iraqi Women) almost all the teachers in the literacy centers were women. In the 1987 the literacy rate of women grew to almost 76% according to UNESCO. This statistic includes Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish women alike. In 1980 women were granted the right to vote and to hold public office. Unfortunately, the enjoyment of these new found rights for women were limited.

In 1972 Iraq made a provocative move to nationalize its oil. In 1980 the Iran-Iraq war started and during the eighth year of the war on March 16 and 17, 1988, Iraq dropped poison gas on the Kurdish city of Halabja. According to Human Rights Watch, between 4,000 and 5,000 Kurdish rebels and Iranians tragically died. The straw that broke the camel's back was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

These events prelude UN resolution 661 which established economic sanctions on Iraq. An estimated 500,000 Iraqi children under the age of five have died as a result of those sanctions. Due to lack of infrastructure, water, and most importantly milk, women started to miscarry one-third of all pregnancies. Effects of the sanc-

tions on women are still being felt today. Over 90% of Iraqi women suffer from iron deficiency anemia; also osteoporosis and other calcium deficient related illnesses have grown over 50% since 1990.

After the first Persian Gulf War in 1991 the progress made regarding women's rights was reversed. This reversal is mostly due to Saddam Hussein's lack of political capital.

To stay in power he decided to revert to the tribal and traditional ways to appeal to the religious aristocracy and pull more support from those he previously isolated in the early 1970's. He embraced Islam as a political tool, thereby amplifying gender gap. He conveniently neglected that the Qur'an provides women with explicit rights to inheritance, independent property, divorce and the right to testify in a court of law. Another factor was that families no longer had the financial capability to send their children to school and the government no longer had the financial capability to subsidize education. Therefore, school enrollment decreased and female illiteracy increased.

When faced with limited resources and safety troubles, many families chose to keep their girl children at home. According to UNESCO in the year 2002, Iraq had the lowest regional adult literacy levels; literate women were less than 25%. At the same time that women produce 75 to 90 percent of food crops in the world, they are responsible for the running of households. According to the United Nations, in no country in the world do men come anywhere close to women

in the amount of time spent in housework.

Furthermore, despite the efforts of 'feminist' movements, women in the wealthiest, Western countries still suffer disproportionately, leading to what sociologists refer to as the "feminization of poverty," where two out of every three poor adults are women. The informal slogan of the Decade of Women became "Women do two-thirds of the world's work, receive 10 percent of the world's income and own 1 percent of the means of production." This is no more evident than in Iraq.

Women have witnessed the ugliness of war from both the battlefield and the sidelines – being widowed, displaced, detained, raped, separated from loved ones and becoming victims of violence and injury. The Red Cross has published a study entitled "Women facing War", designed to increase awareness of the plight of women in conflict and of the protection to

which they are entitled.

Upon the fall of Baghdad, President Bush claimed that the United States has played a vital role in liberating the women in Iraq. However upon further analysis and research we may just realize that what Iraqi women truly need is liberation from us.

Hanny Megally, executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, says that, "Women and girls today in Baghdad are scared, and many are not going to schools or jobs or looking for work. If Iraqi women are to participate in post-war society, their physical security needs to be an urgent priority."

Women in Iraq today live in fear, they are isolated in their homes; sexual violence and abduction were not considered a problem until the first Gulf War. Victims, witnesses, and law enforcement authorities have documented some of these crimes. According

to the Human Rights Watch these crimes often go undocumented and unreported due to the lack of stability and trust in local officials. There is no police; officials are not trusted to maintain the security. If women report to tribal leaders they face the risk of honor killings and social stigma.

It would be nice to give the women in Iraq some of our over the counter freedom or organically grown liberty. However, what Iraqi women need is not our intervention but running water, electricity, and security. What good are words like democracy and liberty if you can't put food on the table?

Life originated in Iraq like life originates from women. Currently, life is awfully hard for the women who live in the "cradle of civilization."

Dina Omar is a fourth year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley.

resist, don't enlist!

by Nadia Abou-Karr

"Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on Brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs and denied simple human rights? No I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over. This is the day when such evils must come to an end. I have been warned that to take such a stand would cost me millions of dollars. But I have said

it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is here. I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality. If I thought the war was going to bring freedom and equality to 22 million of my people they wouldn't have to draft me, I'd join tomorrow," Muhammad Ali once said.

I'm disturbed by the gratuitous military recruiting targeted to Arab Americans. Arab American-centric media outlets print solicitations promising big dollars for Arabic speakers. I am bombarded

with these misleading, exploitative ads on TV, in the movie theater, and now in my Arab American media? Our Arab street festivals are swarming with the same military recruiters who already have unbridled access to students in the high schools, passing out free pens and t-shirts to young people in hopes that they'll enlist. Unlike the recruiters I encountered when I was a high school student (who were all white), these recruiters are clearly Arabs, with Arab names and sometimes Arab accents.

Am I the only one who thinks it's abusive and unfair for Arabs to advocate service in the American

military to other Arabs? Are our lives worth so little that we should sacrifice them in service of a government that has institutionalized discrimination against us, in order to perpetuate the same type of war and imperialism that brought many of our ancestors here?

More importantly, are there so few rich Arab Americans setting up endowments and scholarship funds for low income Arab American youth that our youth feel they have no other choice but to enlist if they want to have any chance at the trifecta (doctor, lawyer, engineer) of Arab American success?

With all the pressure put on young Arab Americans, regardless of economic status, to achieve high educational goals, enlisting in the military might seem incredibly appealing to those of us with few other financing options. Why not increase the options? Contrary to the stereotype, we are not all rich sheikhs with oil wells back home; many of us have grown up on free school lunches and government cheese. We are all Arab Americans, still part of the same com-

munity, and we can all contribute in different ways. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva wrote in *Racism Without Racists*:

We all must participate in the new movement and contribute in whatever way we can. Some will provide expertise, others money, others time, and others will craft and participate in the actions re-

I ain't going no 10,000 miles to help murder and kill other poor people. If I want to die, I'll die right here, right now, fightin' you, if I want to die. You my enemy, not no Chinese, no Vietcong, no Japanese. You my opposer when I want freedom. You my opposer when I want justice. You my opposer when I want equality. Want me to go somewhere and fight for you? You won't even stand up for me right here in America, for my rights and my religious beliefs. You won't even stand up for my right here at home.

-Muhammad Ali

quired to advance the new politics of change. We all need to regain the energy we seem to have lost, drop the pessimism that has filled our souls, and get over the individualism and materialism that has eaten so many of us from within. Our participation in this movement is a must. We cannot remain as spectators of the racial game being played before our own

eyes in America.

Multiple generations of Arab Americans have attempted to squeak past unnoticed, changing our names and passing for non-Arab, serving in the military and pledging allegiance to American nationalism and striving to move up in the racial hierarchy at the expense of our relationships with

other people of color. These are different times and different generations, and they require different solutions. We must do all we can to increase our options for survival beyond total assimilation and acceptance of American patriotic values that demand our subordination. We are

all different, with different values and lifestyles, but one thing I am certain of is that aiding the US government tear our homelands apart will not make any of us free.

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Food for thought: Remember those 6 Arabs kicked off of that American Airlines flight in the Editors' note?

They were linguistic specialists working for the government.

reclaim the feda'ye!

by Saleh Hijazi

All around the world, whenever there is engagement with issues of oppression and domination, wherever there is a fight for freedom and peace, Palestinians are there. In every pocket of resistance now and shrouding every action against neoliberalism, war, and racism is a Kufiyah. The Kufiyah is the only representation of Palestinians in the human struggle: a mere symbol associated with the fight for freedom. We are not there in progressive discourse, real engagement, or action against oppression; we are only there as an artifact of revolution.

Today the Palestinian flag is waived by a Zapatista, Palestinian freedom is a slogan sung in the Basque, and the Palestinian revolution is an outfit worn by protestors and activists all around the world. But none of this or anything else is happening at home in Palestine. At home, trapped within a wall and inside a prison, both of which we allowed to be built on the remainder of our land, we raise green flags against yellow ones.

At home and in the Diaspora we transformed ourselves from freedom singers to international mendicants. We dropped the gun and the olive branch and outstretched our arms, begging for U.S dollars. We turned Palestine from resistance nation to Mukhabarat (TM) country. We abandoned the Feda'ye for bureaucracy.

The Palestinian, the Feda'ye, the movement towards freedom, justice, and peace is stopping, not to

reflect, not to reenergize, but to give up.

But why? Why are we leaving our home? Why are we going through a new exile? And why are we being the ones this time to dispossess ourselves from Falasteen al Huriyeh?

Before I discuss these questions let me shed some light on the



illustration by saleh hijazi

Palestinian concepts I use and which are essential to the article: Feda'ye, Intifada, Falasteen al Huriyeh, and Kufiyah. For Palestinians these concepts/words are part of the movement's discourse that describes what Palestine is and what it means to be Palestinian. But due to the existential disparity, resulting from historic or geographic differences, among those who identify as Palestinian, the concepts vary and are very di-

verse in meaning. These concepts cannot be defined, set, or essentialized. But when you are born you are in some way told that you are Palestinian or in your being you are associated with some place called Palestine, and in turn, you enter a certain discursive world made up of these words and many others.

This world contains stories, narratives, dreams, realities, images, and descriptions all of which give you the Palestinian identity and in most cases, depending on your environment, a sense of direction in life that is relevant to "Palestine." Al Nakbah (1948) for example is one such word that is constitutive of the Palestinian discursive world in which Palestinian identity is built and discourse for movement is created. Al Nakbah is an actual historic experience just like the Kufiyah is a traditional scarf, but with the creation and progress of the social movement, these words become categories which are filled

with meaning depending on the situation.

The discourse which I discuss here is that of The Feda'ye as the Palestinian revolutionary, who fights for Falasteen Al Huriyeh or the Palestine of Freedom, through Intifada or grassroots revolution with Kufiyah as the all encompassing material symbol. Depending on the historic situation, the categories of this discourse are

set in meaning and therefore create the ideology which reflects the historic situation. These categories and the discourse they constitute were, until Oslo, created and given meaning by the Palestinian grassroots. The first Intifada was a living example of that.

During the first Intifada, the discourse led to spontaneous and authentic action that reached almost egalitarian levels when children and youth assumed positions of leadership in the movement. Sadly, the growing bureaucratic leadership at the time collapsed this movement, and the categories were gradually dissolved, thus leading us to the situation I am discussing today: a situation where Palestinian people are alienated from their identity as Palestinian, their movement towards a free, peaceful, and just Palestine, and their own autonomous processes of organizing resistance and engaging with politics.

This is what I am calling the new Palestinian exile. A post modern exile if you like which the Palestinians are forcing upon themselves. So why is this happening?

The occupation is always our answer to the “why” question. This is fair and right but it is not nearly enough. The Palestinian movement is essentially an anti-colonial movement and as long as there is a Zionist entity occupying Palestine it will always remain so. Our existential situation was and still is determined by the context of Western imperialism. The Palestinian relationship to that context was one of active rejection and resistance. That was before

Oslo. Today, and even after a second Intifada, our relationship to the colonial context became institutional and bureaucratic, even on the level of military resistance.

The daily oppression that people in the West Bank and Gaza strip endure on a daily basis, the never-ending suffocation of the Palestinian refugees in their camps, the racism that the diaspora population faces in Arab nations and elsewhere around the world, are all matters that are dealt with institutionally or bureaucratically; negotiations, humanitarian institutions, governments, and legal

“We are not dead yet and can still say, all together, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, 1948 Palestinians, refugees, and the diaspora:
Enough!”

organizations have become the medium through which Palestinians relate to or engage with the colonial context. This strips the Palestinian people from the political and cultural essence of their identity and promotes instead a humanitarian one.

Today, Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are citizens, and in worst cases Jihaddees. The Palestinian in Lebanon is a refugee and not Handala. Falasteen al Huriyeh is a temporary American-Israeli granted state. Intifada is an old story. The Kufiyah, on the other hand, is a symbol we left for other people who have dreams and still believe in ours because

today Palestinians wear suits.

But we are not dead yet and can still say, all together, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, 1948 Palestinians, refugees, and the diaspora:

Enough!

We have said it before to imperialism and acted upon that. Today we say it to ourselves and again with the many voices in this world that say enough to neoliberalism, capitalism, colonialism, heterosexism, and racism. In Palestine and wherever there are Palestinians there needs to be a revolution against the Palestinian self and then an Intifada on the world.

Palestinian youth are the key here. Support any initiative by the Palestinian youth that goes beyond any factionalism or NGO paternalism. We all can reclaim the Palestin-

ian discourse, give it new creative meaning, and put it in motion; each person or group has the ability to pursue this in their own ways. Let us, Palestinians and others, make Feda'ye, Intifada, Falasteen al Huriyeh, and Kufiyah a process rather than a word, and let us take ownership of this movement and return it to the grassroots.

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balaat baby

by Tamara Buran

I am sitting on the balaat, toes curled and tucked away. The cold stone is pressing on my legs, stinging my colorless skin. My cramped back is to the wall and I can hear every word of every guest. There is a perfectly good carpet lying a foot away and despite the chill from the ground, I am too tired to inch towards it. I feel as though I have a fever. I touch my forehead in vain, knowing full well that is not the problem. My palm stays on my head. I move it to my stomach.

I do not feel well.

Footsteps.

There is someone walking towards my room. I would know the sound of her shuffle anywhere. I can see her shadow from underneath the door. I get up quickly, peeling my sticky, pale skin off the shiny, stone floor

and open the door quietly.

Ghanti laughs at me.

“Madam,” she smiles, “are you dressed?”

I shake my head no. I am shaking my head too severely to look natural. Ghanti’s black, beetle eyes narrow and she studies my face. She is taking in every pore, every sweat droplet, and every misplaced hair. Only she, she does not mind. She never minds. She likes my pores, my sweat droplets and my misplaced hairs.

“You are not dressed, Madam.”

She pushes her way past me and into my room. She is shifting the weight of her head from side to side, rocking her neck back and forth while gazing at my unmade bed and closed windows.

I sit on my unmade bed to show her that I do not care about my mess.

She makes her way toward me and softly presses my neck, her long fingers covering half my chest.

“Psssss,” she hisses mockingly, “too boney.” She glides past me and opens my window. I have not seen the sun adequately in days. I am in the desert, only to find myself hiding from any contact with heat. My room is hot enough. I do not need the outdoors anymore.

The light does not pour in the way I thought it would. It is not like the movies and it doesn't come in slow motion. It just appears. Ghanti turns, her profile revealing her little belly and her full, relaxed cheeks. Her belly is the product of multiple helpings of rice and fruit cakes, her cheeks her only link to Sri Lanka, where they are touched upon with care.

She is wearing my favorite apron. It is checkered with green and white. There are speckles of today's lunch on her blouse. Her hands go to her hips and she turns to me.

“Madam, please get dressed.”

Ghanti does not say this to be rude. She says this to save me from my father's parents. She knows the temper of my grandmother. She knows the passiveness of my grandfather. She knows that I will be ignored for weeks if I do not pick my sticky self off the bed and change into something acceptable.

I cannot say no to anyone. I have always been weak when it came to matters of speaking to those in my family. My grandmother will occasionally sneer about this in my direction, but I know that she is secretly grateful that her granddaughter is a coward. She will sigh to my father about my anemic will and blame my mother for passing this trait to me. My father will begin to defend me. He will fumble his words and laugh awkwardly. He will realize mid-sentence that it was he who passed down the gene of silence. He will remember why my mother lives in the States. Just as he does with me, he will remember that he has never spoken up for her. This is when he will stammer that I am just “shy” and “bashful.”

I am not shy.

I am not bashful.

I am loud. I am a huge person on the inside.

In the moments when I walk outside of the huge stone gates to the awaiting taxi, I transform. I laugh rowdily, swear in front of men and smoke cigarettes with the janitors at my school. I have tried to bring this side of myself back home to my grandmother's house. This girl, this girl that spits and mashes her lips to men's mouths? She disappears as soon as she enters the gates of the house. If they knew what this girl was capable of her grandmother would have me sent away. I would go back to the States. My grandmother would relish in telling the neighbors about my double life. She would blame my mother, of course. My grandfather would just stare at his book, not reading a word. I have tried on many occasions to bring my secret self to dinner or on our visits to different auntie's houses, but no.

No.

She departs quickly and into what I believe is the darkest part of me: the cowardly hole behind my stomach. That's where she lives, waiting to jump out, waiting to laugh without covering her mouth. Sometimes, when I feel brave, I let her reveal herself when I speak to Ghanti. Ghanti has seen this part of me. She has been with me since I was a year old. I wonder if she knew what this part of me was capable of.

I think she has seen her.

I hope she has seen her.

Ghanti steps towards me, “Madam?”

I look up, my face still riddled with sweat droplets.

I blink.

“Please, Madam. Dress.”

As soon as the words leave her wrinkled, brown mouth, the sound of the guests get louder. Someone has opened the door to the bedrooms. They are walking towards my room. I stand quickly. I know these footsteps well.

I dread these footsteps.

My grandmother opens my door. She does not poke her head in. She does not knock. I would even believe that she did not have to use the door handle. These doors are wise enough to know that they should open on demand.

She does not look at me. She looks past me. She stares at my bare legs and my rounding stomach.

Her eyebrow arches.

“You have gained weight.”

I slump my shoulders and shrug.

“I don’t feel well,” I stammer.

Ghanti is hidden near the closet. She addresses my grandmother, “Madam, I am picking her dress now. We will be ready in ten minutes.”

My grandmother smiles, her teeth a slight shade of yellow from smoking too many cigarettes with my grandfather when they were young.

“Good,” she coos. My grandmother stares at my body again. “Wear something modest,” she breathes.

I can feel the hidden part of me swelling. How I wish I could rip open my chest, crack my ribs and let her out. She would charge out of me- sweeping up every evil word these walls have absorbed. She would slam my grandmother’s head to my swelling stomach and laugh. She wouldn’t be ashamed to touch her fingers to her lips for a man; she would not shy away from showing her boney neck or her legs to complete strangers. No, she would thrive on these moments of pleasure and looseness.

After all, she had once before.

I watch my grandmother walk out of the room, leaving the door open. I can hear her heels clicking the tile, sounding so opposite from the usual sound of my bare feet.

Ghanti is looking at me again. Her eyes are on my legs, too. They move to my round stomach and my boney neck. She walks inside my closet and begins to touch the rows of dresses and linens. Her hands reach and she pulls out a blue dress.

“I have three children,” she says. She pulls the dress onto me. “My son is named Amithnal.” I turn to face Ghanti. She has never spoken of her children in Sri Lanka to me.

She continues, “he studies at a good school now. He makes a very good grade in University.” I was surprised. Ghanti’s face showed no signs of her age. Her smooth skin was beautiful, a dark brown, with wrinkly lips and straight, white teeth.

“I don’t feel well,” I whisper.

“I know,” she says, as she smoothes the stray hairs away from my eyes. “I know.”

The dress does not zip up. I have grown sideways in the past four months. My grandmother was right. I had gained weight.

Ghanti smiled and pulled the dress off of me. She reached for another. “I have two daughters,” she smiled. “One is twelve years old. Her name is Kalathma.”

I take a sharp breath. This dress is tight.

“What is she like?” I ask, trying to ignore my dizzy head.

“Kalathma? Kalathma loves her paints. She loves to draw.”

“Is that why you send back crayons and paper?”

Ghanti grins, showing me her shiny teeth. “Yes,” she says. “Shemail me very nice pictures.”

The dress is off of me now. Ghanti touches my perspiring forehead. I am taller than Ghanti. I have my mother’s height and her hair. Ghanti was loyal to my mother when she lived here. They would stuff grape leaves outside together in the shade for hours and take turns getting up to change the radio station. I look at Ghanti’s hands and wonder if they smelled of grape leaves and rice.

Her palms touch my cheeks and her eyes are glassy.

I worry about what she will say now. I quickly ask about her third child.

Ghanti touches my boney neck again and laughs. "Nayanadini."

"Nayanadini," I repeat, the syllables tripping over my tongue.

"Yes, Nayanadini."

"Tell me about her." I look away. I can feel my eyes becoming glassy, too.

"She has beautiful black hair. Long. Green eyes. She does not look like my other children."

I look at Ghanti again. Her face is worried and soft. "Whom does she look like, Ghanti?"

"It does not matter who she looks like. She is mine." She chooses a final dress. It is looser than my usual attire. It slides on, wrapping around my shoulders and my chest. Ghanti picks up the sash and stands in front of me. She ties it around my waist, stopping at my naval.

Her fingertips touch my hard, slightly round stomach and she looks at me. I don't need to say a word, but I do.

"I don't feel well," I choke. My face is hot with shame and I stare at the cold floor, blinking back non-existent tears.

There should be tears. There should be many tears. I have not cried once since I found out. I stopped smoking cigarettes, though. I don't know why. It seemed polite and courteous at the time.

I can feel my hidden spirit rising.

I look at the balaat. My heart drops to my stomach and I feel a mixture of dishonor and something like pleasure. I cannot escape the cold ground, no matter how hard I try. Ever since my wicked acts four months ago, I have walked on identical tiles all over the city. Every house is fashioned with the same, shiny ground. I walk into my auntie's house and I am faced with the tile I shamed myself on. I walk to the kitchen for water and my toes touch the same surface. It is the same ground I sit on daily, sticky and pale.

I have tried to ignore the balaat for the past four

months, for that is where she came out of me, wild and heated for the first time. I almost laugh at what she did. What I did, how reckless and joyful I was that night. The coward in me is humiliated. The courage in me feels no shame or guilt- only excitement for what is to come.

The balaat will not let me forget.

I take another sharp breath. My legs are weak and shaky and I cannot stand. My face is so damp, my breathing shallow. I am shaking and I can feel my eyes fluttering behind my head. Ghanti gently touches me and I recoil, my skin hurts. Ghanti lowers me to the ground. Her face is alarmed and she pulls a pillow under my head.

Her hand reaches under my dress and her eyes widen. Her pupils are now bigger than my grandmother's finest dinner plates. She does not show me her hand. She does not want to scare me.

The balaat is where this started; it is where it should end.

I can feel my chest ripping open and my ribs bending back.

Oh, God.

She is out.

Tamara Buran is a fourth year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley.

shahid

by Brett Newell-Woods

(Upon seeing the frozen face of a martyr on a cell-phone screen...)

A line twisting down the street;
 Youth lost in the dust, running with heat
 Carrying a blissful sleeper
 On their shoulders.
 Wrapped up, the Shahid here
Greets his night.
They scratch up their hearts
 And toss lead to the wind,
 Bite their nails and drop to their shins
Covering old sins
 With the sheets of the sleeper,
That Shahid traveling deeper.
 And a few see them pixilated—
 —Slated with a new war—
 To be annihilated and cast off
Like sacks of new world produce
 And the triggers who aren't used
 Wander in desperation for refuge.
It's no trick that the Arabic word for exile
 Also means refuse.

confessions of a madrasa grad

by Yaman Salahi

Few people I associate with know that my earlier schooling took place in a madrasa. I still find myself, from time to time, recognizing that some of my beliefs and habits today have their roots in my time at that madrasa. I see similar residue on the many people I know that also came out of such institutions. There's some truth to the belief that the madrasas have dangerous and long-lasting effects on those who attend them.

The madrasa I attended happened to be located in southern California. I can't say it was much different from schools that other kids attended, at least not on the surface. These hallmarks of normality, though, belied the insidious nature of that place. What we were taught, right here in America, was even more startling. It should not be too much to ask of schools in America that they teach children the truth and that they do it in light of the visionary and revolutionary political spirit for which this country is renowned in all corners of the world.

Instead, I was taught lie after lie and deception after deception. I was trained to look at the world through a particular framework that was so thorough that it did not become clear to me how bankrupt and dangerous it was until it finally came time for me to break away from it. I still feel the violent effects of that rupture, as it has left me alienated from those I grew up

with. In that culture, they do not take kindly to so-called traitors. But in a situation like that, my conscience left me no choice but to leave, to get away, and to stand up for what I believed in.

As painful as it is to recall those times, I realize now that it is incumbent upon me and every other madrasa grad to speak out and to speak up. The fate of democracy, of this country, indeed of the entire world, rests upon our gathering the courage to confront those who have damaged us in the ma-

"I was taught, for example, that a man named Christopher Columbus discovered this country in 1492, after sailing the ocean blue. He thought it was India so the people who were already living here were called Indians, a mistake still transmitted through the generations."

drasas. Generations have gone through them, and our own children might be next. Yes, even in America. For the children, then, I proceed.

As unbelievable as it may sound, I was taught, for example, that a man named Christopher Columbus discovered this country in 1492, after sailing the ocean blue. He thought it was India so the people who were already living here were called Indians, a mistake that is still transmitted through the generations. We know now that this land is not India, and we know now that the people

Columbus discovered were not Indians: but we still call them "Indians," and we still say "discover." That any textbook in this country continues to use these words in describing anything other than Columbus' error is something I view with great horror: *innocent children in madrasas all around this country continue to learn this mis-information as fact.*

Come to think of it, I never read anything at the madrasa that an Indian (who wasn't actually Indian) had said. The only three that were given voices in my upbringing were the ones that taught the white man how to grow food, the ones that starred in Disney films and said "I do" to white men, and the ones who surrendered, telling the white man: "I will fight no more, forever." The feisty ones who resisted the intruders to their lands, we called savages, sharing stories about how they would intentionally scalp civilian children, while the American heroes only did that while pursuing military objectives in self-defence, like during the Trail of Tears.

It was not so difficult then to think of them as lesser people, as simpletons who were a scourge on civilization, on the great steps forward that America was destined to represent in the History of Man. In the Indians, who weren't actually Indian, we admired obeisance and pacifism. Those Indians who fought, the ones we could not overpower, had traits resembling the ones we admired in ourselves:

bravery, courage, selflessness. That might explain the limited and dehumanizing exposure I had to the Indians (who weren't actually Indian) when I studied at that public madrasa.

Speaking with others who have gone through similar ordeals, I know that it was not just my madrasa that taught me these things, but that there was something inherent in the madrasa which lent itself towards such an education. Americans, for the most part, call these places "schools." They might call them elementary schools, middle schools, or high schools. But do not be fooled. These convenient euphemisms barely capture their true essence as madrasas: institutions of socialization and acculturation, centers of indoctrination that teach our children how to ignore their consciences and how to rationalize mass murder, economic exploitation, and social injustice.

Is there anything about our lives today that cannot be explained in some way by reflecting upon what

is taught at the madrasas in this country? I think that madrasas might be a big reason why Thomas Jefferson the slave-owner is heralded as a father of liberty. Is there anything particular about madrasas in America that differentiates them--functionally, I mean--from madrasas in, say, Islamabad? I am convinced that the madrasa in both places--in all places--is a source of much malformation in the logic that informs the way we and our children look at and understand the world.

It is only when we realize this that the dream of an education as we know it becomes a nightmare. Of what use can such an education be if the curricula are shaped by an exclusivist organization like the state? Is it even an education at all anymore? In the public madrasa, children are assimilated into the political culture of the elite (the same culture that the elite prefers, since it also dictates it) by learning common myths about American history, along with learning admiration for those colonizers and slave-owners we now consid-

er heros.

In allowing the state to shape the curriculum of these madrasas, we also allow it to shape us, our own selves, culturally and politically. This is the prevailing truth around the world, especially in places where political culture is explicitly bound to (by?) a political narrative promoted by the state. Before we can have a free education, we must ourselves be free. But before this can happen, we must have an education free of similar interference..

We are passive beings in the madrasa by design. Once we have collapsed this structure and asserted ourselves as active beings in the educational system, as well as succeeded in developing a system to facilitate that will to action in younger children, then we have retaken our schools, as well as our selves.

Yaman Salahi is a third-year undergraduate student at UC Berkeley. He blogs at www.yamansalahi.com/.

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this is not
the end.

