



Feature The legacy of Sykes-Picot. Are two men and the countries they represented to blame for our fractured societies?

First Person Take Me Out. One woman's quest to rid herself and her peers of the restrictions and barriers enforced by family and society.

Poems Breech the Wall Naked Feet

Feature Unraveling Politics and Human Relations. How violence in politics transmits to violence at home and in the community.

Reviews History, Film, Literature, People, Places

Feature Border Control. The barriers and border guards that bind.

Play Stereotypical. About Arabs, among Arabs.

Photo Essay Amber Fiber. A visual narrative of life within the borders of LAU.

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The program's mission is to prepare future Arab leaders for the complexities of the 21st century. Through high-quality academic support, leadership development activities, and civic engagement opportunities, the program fosters professionalism, ethical conduct, and tolerance in order to enable students to become globally competitive leaders and agents of change in their respective societies.

BORDERS

boundary, line, outskirts, bound, bounds, brim, brink, circumference, confine, end, extremity, fringe, hem, limit, lip, perimeter, periphery, rim, selvage, skirt, trimming, verge



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Produced by the students of the Middle East Partnership Initiative Tomorrow's Leaders scholarship program at the Lebanese American University

The Legacy of Sykes-Picot

written by **Nuran Benmusa**

In the summer of 2014, a video was published on YouTube showing members of a Jihadist militant group of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) dissolving borders between Iraq and Syria. These fighters were freely moving between the Syrian and Iraqi lands expressing anger and rage over the borders imposed between the two countries. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL declared that “[they will] hit the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot”. Though the boundaries that ISIL was challenging were not directly drawn by Sykes-Picot, the mere fact that these names are still in circulation 101 years after the ‘agreement’ causes one to question its remaining legacy.

The collective memory of the Arabs has a great place for Sykes-Picot. It was accused by many of being a colonial act that divided people by imposing new borders; furthermore, the agreement has been linked to much of the turmoil that was and still is witnessed in the Arab world. To explain the extent of liability that the agreement holds, one should first go back in time to understand it and disentangle truths from defamations and misconceptions.

In light of the First World War and in the anticipation of the fall of the sick man of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, a secret agreement was made to divide areas of influence in the Middle East mainly between Britain and France, the great imperial powers, with the approval of Russia under the last Czar. The division was made as follows: Britain would get control over modern day Jordan, Iraq, and parts of Palestine, and France would get Syria, Lebanon, and parts of Iraq and Turkey. They did this by drawing a straight line on the map between those areas. The agreement’s official name was Asia Minor, but it is better known as the Sykes-Picot.

This name stems from its architects, Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, who represented their governments and were given the authority to negotiate and reach a deal. “Why did they choose Marks Sykes and George Picot and no one else?” asks Mr. Elie Elias, who is a professor of History at the Lebanese American University (LAU). The French and British governments appointed them as they were seen as experts in the region. It was believed that both Picot and Sykes could reach an agreement that gets the best deal for each of their governments to ensure their influence.

The region before Sykes-Picot had been under the Ottoman Empire for a while. It was administratively divided with distinct demarcations but all were under the control of Istanbul. To understand the previous division of the area, Dr. Selim Deringil, a professor of History at LAU, explains that the Ottoman Empire was administratively divided into provinces called Vilayet (wallyat) and sub-provinces called Kaza (Qada). This administrative division was subject to change at any time according to economic and political needs. He gives the example of Vilayet Beirut that did not exist before 1888 and was only established for economic reasons under local bourgeoisie demands. This goes to show that there were boundaries in existence prior to Sykes-Picot but they were all part of the same empire and the divisions were dependent on the local needs and the will of Istanbul.

The context that the famous agreement was made under was during the First World War when imperial power had an eye on the areas that the Ottomans ruled. In 1916, the year Sykes-Picot was negotiated, Dr. Deringil explains that the “Turks [had] not yet lost the war. Quite the opposite, they were actually winning.” The Ottomans scored a victory in the Gallipoli battle in the beginning of that year over the allies as well as in Kut-al-Amara in Iraq, but the French and British were still determined. As



With one pen-stroke,
Sir Mark Sykes and
François Georges-Picot
created the modern states
of the region.

Dr. Deringil mentions, British and French powers were quite positive that they would win the war. The timing of the agreement came at the height of imperialism; therefore, it was a clear division of areas of influence between great powers that disregarded the demographic and social structures of the region.

Arabs had not heard of Sykes-Picot until the Bolsheviks made the agreement public. At first, it was secretive and Russia was part of it; however, once the Bolshevik Revolution took place in 1917, the document was leaked. While the agreement was being negotiated, the British were initiating another deal with Sharif Hussein, the leader of the Sharifate of Mecca, who was considered a leading figure at that time. The Sharif was promised an independent Arab state under the condition of siding against the Ottomans. When the secret agreement was made public, people who were with Hussein felt deceived by the British. Dr. Deringil describes the reaction at that time: “Everybody was shocked because basically, we have to understand that the Sykes-Picot



was made while the British were negotiating with Sharif Hussein. So they were making contradictory promises. On one hand, they were making a deal with France giving them a large part of this area. On the other hand, they were telling Sharif Hussein and Faisal, his son, [that they were] going to approve and back an independent Arab kingdom in the same geographic location.” What made that time catastrophic for many of the Arabs was that, during the same year, the British were preparing for another deal to hand over other parts of the same territory to the Zionists, granting them Palestine as a land to establish a state over.

However, did Sykes-Picot impose the borders? Frankly, it did not. Though this agreement may have contributed to establishing borders later on, the current regional demarcations were based on different agreements such as the San Remo conference in Italy in 1920, where the allies met after the end of the war and started a draft of the Middle East plan. Even though Sykes-Picot is remembered for its ‘borders’, its significance lies in the fact that it was a starting point for a new era. This initiated the era of new European influence, which was not

particularly appealing to the majority. Dr. Bassel Salloukh, associate professor of Political Science at LAU, mentions that when Americans came after the war and surveyed the people of this region, they stated that they did not want to be under the French and the British rule. They would rather be under the Americans than the British and the French. However, Syria and Lebanon were placed under the French mandate while Iraq and Palestine were under the British.

The British and the French took over and arranged the region and ruled it. There were many dissenting voices. Nationalism started rising as some groups wanted Arab nationalism; others wanted greater Syria, and some others just wanted the independence of those newly made entities. The scenario that prevailed was the independence of those small entities rather than a large Arab state or a larger Syria.

In the new territorial entities, people started getting used to their demarcations. Dr. Salloukh brings to the conversation the great anthropologist Benedict Anderson who wrote the book *Imagined Communities* in 1983. Salloukh explains how “borders are artificial but the minute you draw them, with time, these boundaries assume certain durability.” He also states “people’s political imagination becomes demarcated by these borders.” He explains that if you asked a man in Beirut in 1904 about his identity, he would have told you that he is a citizen or subject of the Ottoman Empire, but if asked the same question 40 years later, he will tell you that he is Lebanese. Therefore, a new order was introduced to the people and they adjusted to it.

The direct French and British influence came to an end with the emergence of independent states after the 1940s. Those states were established out of the territorial entities that were marked by colonial borders. Dr. Salloukh mentions that “the creation of modern states in this part of the world is unlike the history of state formation in the West, where in the West [they] began with nation-states that correspond to the territorial entity. The problem here, and this is the case in Africa and throughout most of the developing world, is that the territorial entity did not correspond to tribal, ethnic, or religious identities.”

These new states inherited the borders of imperial powers and their legacy in the area. There was a reactionary rise of military power in some of those newly formed states as in Iraq, Libya, Egypt and

Syria and also the emergence of the one-man or one-group rule. The problem here became not only the borders but also rather what was inside those borders. Dr. Salloukh points out that “the post-colonial independent Arab states were built on the idea of the homogenizing territorial states, meaning the authoritarian Arab states did not subscribe to the idea of a nation made out of many voices, and this is why we see Kurds in Iraq persecuted and so on.” He adds, “There are many ways to think about how multi-tribal and multi-ethnic communities can live together.” Nevertheless, the regimes that inherited those territorial entities did not think of ways for people to live together nor offered means of good representation. Instead, many blamed Sykes-Picot.

A culture of grievance and blame was passed from generation to another and this has continued to blame Sykes-Picot, from the whole population, to the regimes, even to non-state actors like ISIL. Though the borders that ISIL attacked were not directly drawn based on the Sykes-Picot agreement, this was made as a symbol of grievance and carried the weight of all other historical decisions and demarcations.

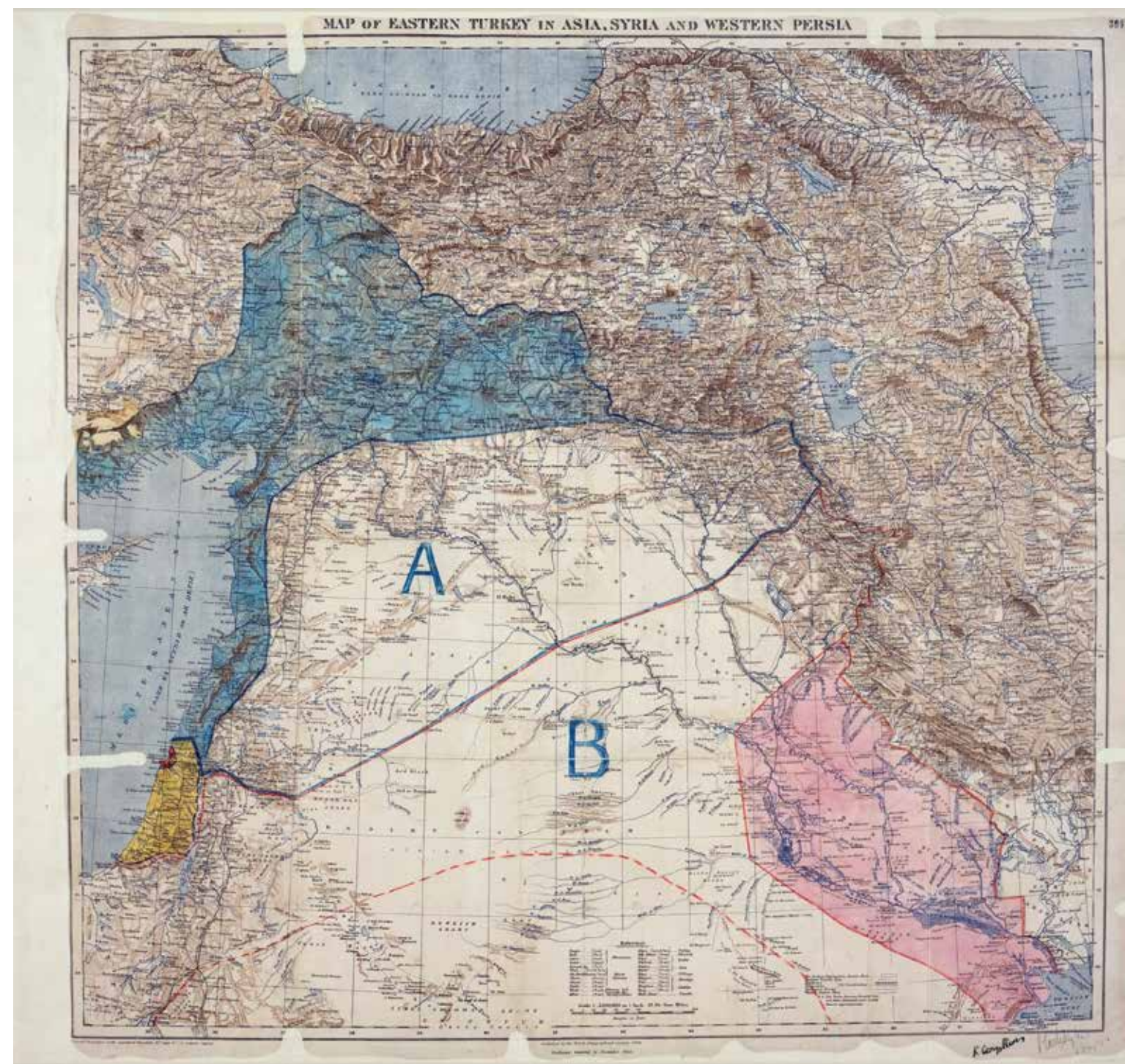
The legacy of imperialism left its touch on the history and future of the region but that does not justify blaming Sykes-Picot and withholding progress. Dr. Deringil comments on this saying that “There is a tendency in our region to blame everything on colonialism, because when you do that, you tend to gloss over your own mistakes. People make their own mistakes, their own successes in this area, and it is

not all due to Sykes-Picot. This has become a black legend in the collective imagination of the people in this region.”

Many of those regimes that were installed after independence, some of which continue to exist, were characterized by authoritarianism, repression, and corruption. In 2011, with the Arab uprising, the degree of weakness exhibited by those regimes was revealed as they collapsed once confronted by their own citizens. The Arab world generally, and the areas still affected by Sykes-Picot nowadays, are going through a crisis starting from the breakdown of some regimes to the emergence of non-state actors that defy the notion of the state and existing borders.

This is why people should start looking for solutions to the current reality instead of dwelling on blaming Sykes-Picot for all of these conflicts. Dr. Salloukh proposes that in order to bring peace to the chaos in this region, “people have to be creative, they have to think of new types of political organization at federal, confederal or decentralized structures that will allow different people to imagine the nation differently, to want to live together, but to express their identities differently within the territorial boundaries of the state.”

The original Sykes-Picot map (pictured left) was signed on the 8 May 1916.



“When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.”

Elie Wiesel,
awarded the Nobel Peace
Prize in 1986

Naked Feet

A poem by Ahmed K. Ali

I decided to join these
words together.
Slit my arms from
the joints
to my withering wrists,
dry my arms
of my blood, so
I can use it to stitch
these words together,
to make a poem
that might be broken
into two halves by
a white wall that is
not as pure as the name suggests
a wall made out of dead skin
spit,
broken teeth and
tears,
that were squeezed out
of a red-shirted kid
who is inhaling wet sand
and crusted with salt.

I hope my blood is sticky
enough;
I hope by the time
I get to the end of this
poem, the last
word wouldn't
fall

off.
I hope
this poem
doesn't
get
divided.
I hope this poem will be joined like
four lips that melted into each other.
I hope this poem will
flow from between
your fingers
when you
try to cage it between
your stripped palms

I...

a boarder interrupts:

...hope
I can leave heavy rocks
in my pockets
and kiss the running river.
I hope I have words within
me to scream out
the fatal symphony
that my vocal cords are playing.
I hope,
your ears are soft enough
to listen to me:

I wish I was broken in half
instead of breaking things in half
to make room for my heaviness.
I cut,
but my fingers yearn to stitch.

You think it makes my heart smile
when I peel off lips from each other?
When I build a red fence around your
two hemispheres?
when I make you see nothing but shadows?
Black holes
ready to suck you in,
and just when you
see that new light
you're drawn into
nothingness.
Just like how
I wish to be:
nothing.

Take a sledgehammer,
take a forbidden idea,
take back your scattered minds,
take your love.

Underneath that gentle skin
inside your insides
see the glow that is
melting off your bones

listen to that
glow.
It's reminding you of something.
Something about
an embrace
tears,
intertwining guts
It's telling you to forget
the warm hug that burns your core.

Dissolve me,
fracture me.
take me,
use my shattered ribs
to save this poem.

Let it mingle
let it hold together.

I've always wanted this:
all I ever wanted was to extend my arms
and with each hand,
I could feel
two different things
and my face breaks with smiles
when I
join,
them,
together.



Border Control

Personal stories by LAU students

Compiled by Zobida Tadj



This border crossing made me feel humiliated and dehumanized. I had all the legitimate papers and I felt it was unfair to be treated that way.

RAWAND

Libyan, 20, TV/Film

While most people are overjoyed upon receiving news of getting accepted at a good university, I was busy dealing with the news at the time. Right before traveling out of Libya, the airport was bombed by not one, but two militias. We called the Lebanese American University (LAU), told them that we would try to get to another city in order to fly to Lebanon. However, even that airport shut down. Thus, we decided to drive to Tunis in order to fly from there. My friend and I rented a van and began the trip at 1 a.m. At the time, we still hadn't received the new passport even though I had applied for mine 6 months in advance. When we reached the borders, they let everyone pass except for me since I had the old passport that had 5 more months to expire. They also had a problem with my photo, which was taken a while ago. I got the feeling that a bribe would have guaranteed better acceptance. We negotiated for an hour and a half, but the answer was still 'no entry'. We finally had to give in to their demands and pay up. My troubles didn't end there as we also had a mini adventure while trying to find a black pen. Why black you may ask? Because that was the only color the second border control would use to approve my passport. We finally found the elusive black pen at around 6 a.m. It was hectic! This border crossing made me feel humiliated and dehumanized. I had all the legitimate papers and I felt it was unfair to be treated that way. I was in tears. However, if anyone ever had to go through this, they have no choice but to remain calm and keep a cool head throughout.

They left only us Syrians waiting... it made me feel as if I were less of a human being

JAD

Syrian, 23, TV/Film

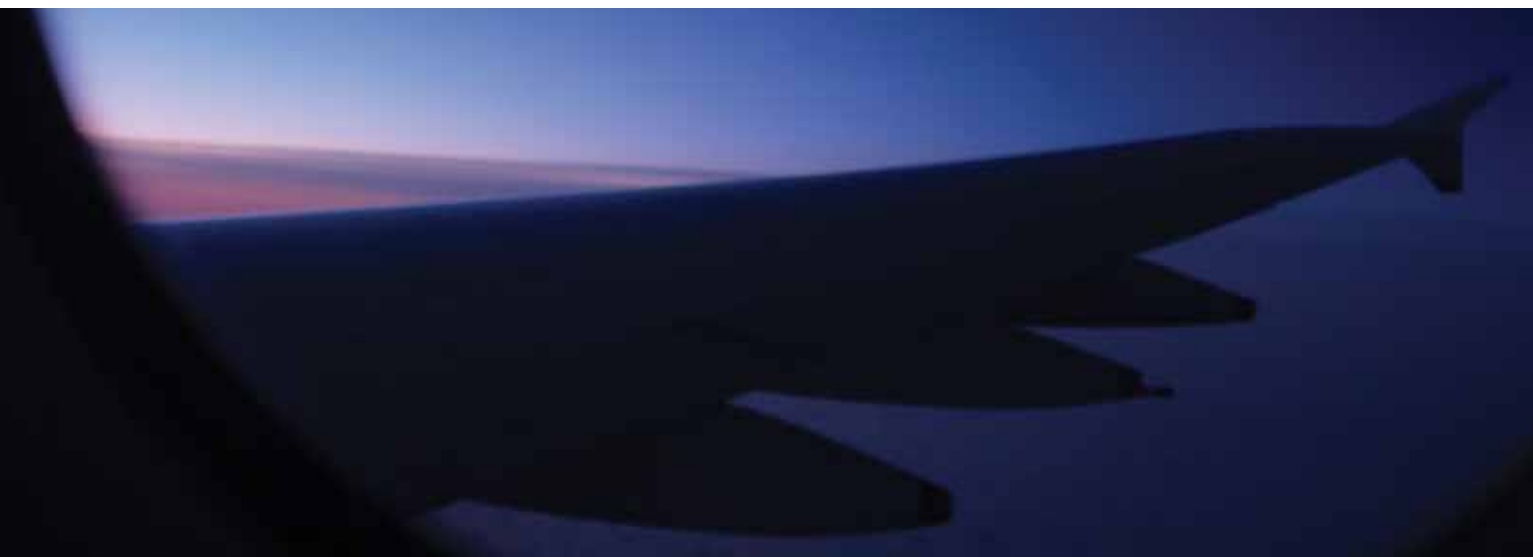
As a Syrian, I encountered border issues several times. Once, I was going to Jordan as part of a conference which included students from all over the MENA region. They let everyone check in their bags and get their boarding pass, and they only left us Syrians waiting, conducting further security checks. It made me feel as if I were less of a 'human being' than the rest. On another occasion, I was supposed to go to UC Berkeley in the U.S. for a summer exchange program. My visa application was rejected and I got to see my fellow classmates pack their bags and head to the airport while I spent my summer trying to keep busy. I feel like I no longer want any visas. I don't feel like approaching the matter or thinking about it, so I deny it constantly and try to avoid being in such a situation where I have to apply for visas. I now only try to go places that are friendlier to people like me. I advise other people not to take it personally. It's no isolated incident; it happens to all of us.

This makes me question whether a piece of paper can give value to a human being. It really frustrated me and it still is a source of anxiety and anger.

NURAN

Libyan, 20, Political Science

Every single time I try to travel, I get into a border issue. It has never gone smoothly for me since 2011. My experience was a turning point on how I viewed the value of a passport. I was traveling from Tripoli to Lebanon and wanted to go through Jordan as I usually do. I had plans to see some of my family in Amman before getting to Lebanon. However, two days before my flight, I stumbled upon a Facebook post that said that now we, Libyans, need a visa to enter Jordan. I called the embassy and they asked me to come and apply for a visa. They then said that it would take two weeks to be ready, although my booked flight was in just two days. I had to give up on my plans in that single moment. I realized at this point that I needed to have not just a plan A but also a plan B and C. I no longer feel safe or take any process for granted. This also makes me question whether a piece of paper can give value to a human being. It really frustrated me and it still is a source of anxiety and anger. I do advise others to always consider different plans before deciding to go anywhere since it is now difficult to predict what might happen.



It was so difficult to leave Gaza that I missed my 1st semester at university! I was rejected at the Israeli border 4 times, and the Jordanian border 3 times, and at the Egyptian border once.

HIBA

Palestinian, 19, Freshman

Trying to travel from Gaza in the fall of 2016 was not my first attempt to leave for educational reasons. I have traveled previously in 2013, to the U.S., through the YES scholarship program, and may I say that it was not a very pleasant trip. There were problems with both sides of the border, with Hamas and the Israelis. They both gave my group a hard time before they gave us the permission to leave and enter the West Bank. I had to wait nearly 3 months before I got the permission letter to leave from Eriz crossing, and at the same time, I was waiting to get my 'No-objection' paper in order to enter Jordan. The process took 3 months until I had all the necessary papers. However, this time, it was so difficult to leave Gaza that I missed my 1st semester at university! I was rejected at the Israeli border 4 times, and the Jordanian border 3 times, and at the Egyptian border once. I think this must be some sort of record! I was upset, mad, and hopeless. I was also terrified because I got my visa issued twice, and I was afraid that the second one would expire before I had the chance to leave Gaza. The advice I'd give people in similar situations is to stay patient and not give up, because I was on the verge of giving up when my name was finally added to the list of travelers in October. I thought that I would never leave, but since I'm here now, anything can happen.

HALA

Yemen, 20, Business

This incident and other similar ones made me hate where I came from at some point. Now, I feel like it is a constant struggle for me to make peace with my origins.

Being a Yemeni passport holder exposes me to so many difficulties and situations where I am rejected. My freedom of movement is not only limited outside my country, but also within it. Back in August, when I went back to Yemen, I found myself stuck in the country because the airport in my city Sanaa closed down. It happens a lot so each time I go back, there is a risk of getting trapped. I had to travel all the way to Aden in order to take a flight from there. Additionally, the 7-hour trip took 12 hours to complete due to the increased number of checkpoints. They were basically looking at our last names in order to see if we belong to the South of Yemen or not. They could also tell a lot from your place of birth in your birth certificate, which you had to carry with you everywhere. My ID was issued in Sanaa since I had lived there for the past fifteen years of my life. However, what saved me is that I had my family card that indicated I was born in Aden. If I didn't happen to have that card I would have been denied access to the city. It would have been much more difficult and laborious to get back to Lebanon. This incident and other similar ones made me hate where I came from at some point. Now, I feel like it is a constant struggle for me to make peace with my origins. The advice I would give to anyone going through the same situation is to stay patient as this is how the situation is now but that doesn't mean it will stay like this forever.

Amber fiber

A diary of photos and lyrics by Sarah Al Nemr



“Don’t blow your mind with why”

– Radiohead, Bloom

On how we’re fixated on understanding the universe, humanity and our own existence. It’s also powerful to understand our limitations and enjoy our simple moments.

Breach the Wall

a poem by Larissa Kassis

A NEW ADVENTURE OF FEAR,
 WHERE YOU WILL HAVE THE COURAGE TO PUT IN THE KEY,
 AND OPEN UP TO THIS PRECIOUSNESS YOU HAVE IN HERE.
 HERE WHERE FALLING IS NEVER A WORD TO FEAR,
 BUT A FRIEND TO HEAL,
 AND A MEMORY TO KEEP
 HERE WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO FALL INTO THIS EXTRAORDINARY FEAR OF BEING.
 A NEW ADVENTURE OF FEAR,
 WHEN YOU SCREAM
 WITH A VOICE NO ONE CAN HEAR
 BUT A SELF THAT IS TRYING TO REACH
 THE NONLIVING DREAM.
 HERE WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO FALL INTO THIS UNTOUCHABLE FEAR OF TRYING.
 A NEW ADVENTURE OF FEAR,
 WHEN YOU ADMIT
 WITH A BREATH FULL OF HEAT,
 THAT YOU ARE CAPABLE TO RELEASE
 THE PAIN OF CHOOSING NOT TO DISAPPEAR
 FROM A WORLD THAT HAS CHOSEN YOU TO SPEAK
 THE WORDS THAT AREN'T MEANT TO BLEED
 BENEATH A HEART THAT STILL CAN BEAT.
 HERE WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO FALL INTO THIS WISE FEAR OF RISING.
 A NEW ADVENTURE TO BELIEVE.
 THROUGH THE WALL YOU CAN BREACH,
 BY THE OCEAN YOU CAN STEER,
 AND WITHIN YOURSELF YOU CAN BUILD
 A WILL THAT IS READY TO LEAD.

**“He made it to the ocean, had a smoke in
 a tree, the wind rose up, set him down on
 his knee.”**

– Pearl Jam, Given to Fly

On the need to escape a little from our made-up barriers every now
 and then.



**“So you run and you run to catch up with
 the sun but it’s sinking, racing around to
 come up behind you again.”**

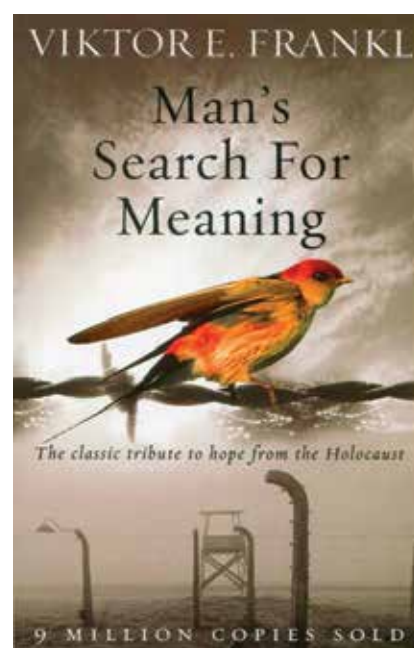
– Pink Floyd, Dark Side of the Moon

On having to keep up with ridiculous tasks in life in order to live
 ‘comfortably’.

Man's Search for Meaning

by Victor Frankl

Book Review Muna Saeed



Free in prison. How? What about all the walls and borders? Is it just a dream or wishful thinking? How can anyone find a purpose to their existence in such circumstances? Victor Frankl in his 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, explains how the pursuit of meaning had helped him overcome all the physical borders, degrading treatments, and psychological discomfort of being locked up in a Nazi concentration camp.

Throughout life, all of us would have to face injustice, inequity, corruption, cruelty, suppression, exploitation, bias, prejudice, discrimination, intolerance... you name it. For some, it is about being born a woman and remaining locked up in a house, not allowed to explore the world. For others, it is being trapped in one region because they don't have the "right" passport to cross the border and discover what's out there. It may be hard, extremely hard, for us to be left with nothing and have all our human rights taken away, but despite it all, Frankl refuses to accept this restriction. He explains that one would never be left with nothing and that we would always have the freedom to choose how to react no matter the situation. This is one piece of freedom that can never be taken away.

Victor Frankl, a psychologist in Vienna, Austria walks us through his experience of being arrested in a Nazi concentration camp in 1942. He describes in detail the brutal treatment that he and some of his prison companions had been subjected to. They were deprived of all comforts and even simple daily needs like food, safety and sleep. Many were executed; especially those who were weak, sick, or simply desperate. Frankl tried to understand "the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature." Those who kept imagining a positive life outside prison were able to defeat the circumstances by the strength of their inner fate, while others who gave up easily ended up dying first or suffering the most. Frankl also endured torture, the injustice of being beaten and broken, and the pain of seeing those around him "treated like nonentities." In the midst of the horror, he found what carried some through to the end: meaning.

Frankl quotes Nietzsche throughout the book, but seems to favor one statement in particular: "He who has a 'why' to live for can bear almost any 'how'."

In his book, Frankl tries to deliver the message that people must overcome any external hardships that take control and attempt to paralyze an individual. "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." The fact that we as human beings always expect life to put us in certain situations and pretend that it's out of our hands to respond to any of these unpleasant situations is a misconception. We shouldn't expect from life; we should rather let life expect from us.

Man's Search for Meaning is a book I highly recommend, if only for the inspiration it has brought to readers around the world.

**"Society, have mercy
on me."**

– Eddie Vedder, Society

On being outed for being different.



**"All that you need is
in your soul."**

Best advice my mum gave me.



**"Oh, my God, I've
gotta, gotta, gotta,
gotta move on. Where
do you move, when
what you're moving
from is yourself?"**

– Modest Mouse,
Never ending Math Equation

On struggling with my self- love
throughout the years.



Take Me Out

by Marwa Ben Khalifa

“Isn’t that skirt too short? What would your uncle say if he saw you wearing it? We are not in Europe. This is Tunisia.”

When we first hear the word ‘borders’, we usually conceive the term as the geographic boundaries between countries. My borders exceed the physical limitations I may face while traveling; they are, in fact, far more subjective and limiting. The origins and purpose of my borders are difficult to understand. Since the day I opened my eyes to the world, I was never truly free. It wasn’t even my parents who decided for me, but rather society and its impositions.

When I ask why or how, the answer is: “don’t ask, this is how things are”. These rules were established centuries ago by people who are no longer here, but if any of us tries to be themselves and not follow the crowd they would be deemed guilty and seen as a threat to society’s values and principles. The borders I’m talking about imprison, hunt, and suffocate an individual until they become a copy of everyone else, until they make the choices society wants them to and become a mold shaped by these restrictions.

Not long ago, a Tunisian young man named Marwen was harshly beaten and tortured by his own father when he discovered his homosexuality. When did parents become so heartless and get to the point of torturing their child because of their sexual identity, over which they have no control? The sad part is that Marwen’s story isn’t even an extreme. It isn’t an atypical example. Some families could cause even more harm while attempting to impose these borders. Sadly, one story comes to mind – that of my high school friend, who was also gay. He felt so alone in a world that pressured him and showed no support. His loneliness led him to his last resort. He ended up committing suicide.

Unfortunately, in our society, choice and freedom are seen as a crime and a threat to principles that survived long enough to determine our paths and choices and to make some of us abandon our dreams and ambitions so as to live up to society’s standards. Some parents would rather crush their children’s dreams and set a path they choose for them just to satisfy the borders they were, themselves, victims to. Such parents, who’ve probably been through the same chaos, might think they are protecting their children by making them join the “in crowd,” without realizing that they are worsening their psychological state. Such actions can easily lead to the development of a deep feeling of hatred and envy within us that will push many people to harm themselves and the people around them.

Many choose to leave their homes to find a different place where they can be fully accepted and respected for who they truly are. However, these borders aren’t only placed within the private family, but also publicly, socially, and especially by our media. A recent article written by MTV concerning the dating Lebanese TV show “Take Me Out” is also a concrete example of how society judges and labels people based on the way they choose to live. Practically speaking, the show did not harm anyone in any way, but people usually tend to categorize and critique every aspect of other people’s lives even though it does not concern them in any way. It is as if these walls continue to follow people, no matter how far they choose to run.

I strongly believe that since we’re part of society and cannot live isolated one from the other, morals and principles are inescapable no matter how much we try to avoid and run away from them. However, it’s our prerogative to mold these walls and adapt them to our beliefs and identities. In this way, even if these boundaries and limitations still exist, we can always manage to at least act upon them and make more room for our freedom.



“You desired my attention but denied my affection.”

- Mumford and Sons,
White Blank Page

Almost half all the romantic relationships I’ve seen.



“They’re still here, he’s all gone.”

- Bruce Springsteen, Born in the U.S.A.

On how the government sanctions whoever speaks up as they walk out with clean hands, and no one can call them out, or they’ll die as well.

“Why do I give valuable time To people I’d much rather kick in the eye.”

- The Smiths,
Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now

On always having to fake interactions with fake people, which makes me just like them in turn.



ازرقاق

قصة بقلم صفية الطيف

سمير شابٌ طويلٌ ذو بشرة خضراء، له عيان سوداوان وبشرة ناعمة، لا تنمو عليه أي زهور أو بذور، ويتكاثر بأسلوب بشري. هو في الحقيقة إنسان بكل ما تعنيه الكلمة، أي حيوان مع عقل وواعي بمحيطه. سмир على خلاف غيره قادر على البناء الضوئي (عملية كانت سابقاً حكراً على النباتات).

هو إنسان، ليس هجيناً بين إنسان ونبات، بل هو إنسان بالكامل رغم مظهره الخارجي الذي يوحي بأنه شجرة لولـة الشعر الأزرق والعيان السوداوان، وفشله في امتلاك سيقان بُنيّة.

صبغة الميلانين في جسد سмир لم تعكس بشرة بيضاء، سمراء، أو سوداء، بل عكست اللون الأخضر. قدرته على البناء الضوئي محدودة، أي إنه قادر فحسب على تزويد ذاته بالطاقة. لعلّ هذا تطوّر في حد ذاته، فسمير على سبيل المثال لن يعاني يوماً من المجاعة، إلا أن سмир يحب الأكل وأكلته المفضلة هي «البرغر». لعله من المضحك أن ترى شخصاً شبيهاً بالنبات، الكائن السفلي في هرم الأكل يتغذى على كائن أعلى منه، إلا أن سмир يُعد إنساناً بالأساس، وبالتالي لا زال يتصدر الهرم الغذائي.

لعلك تشعر بالشفقة على سмир الآن، لا حاجة لذلك أوّكد لك! فسمير هو الأكثر حظاً بين أقرانه، حليلة على سبيل المثال وُلدت زرقاء، لسوء حظ حليلة فإن ازرقاقها باهت، هي تبدو كأحدى تلك الكدمات التي يستيقظ الشخص يوماً ليكتشف وجودها، وهي كذلك تماماً. كانت على وشك الغرق في أحد الأيام، ولكن حارس الإنقاذ الذكي تمكّن من اكتشاف مكانها عبر فقاعات ثاني أكسيد الكربون، لحسن حظها ربما أنها لا زالت تتنفس الأكسجين. طعام حليلة المفضل هو «البرغر» أيضاً.

Bluish

A short story by Safa AlTef

وهكذا تعرفت على سмир، كانا يقفان في الصف، ينتظران دورهما، سмир طلب استبدال الأماكن مع حليلة، فمكانه كان مشمساً، الشمس تجعله يشبع بسرعة ما يجعل البرغر أقل إغراءً، ونكهة الطعام دائماً ما تكون أفضل عندما تكون جائعاً. ذلك الطلب بتغيير أماكن الوقوف أدخل حليلة في حالة من حالات الصدمة، وهي التي طالما ظنّت أن سмир محظوظ، فهو طويل وهي القصيرة، هو الذي دائماً يلاحظ وجوده وهي الخفيّة، لأول مرة تشعر بالقوة وبالتفوق أمامه. كل أصدقاء حليلة هم من الباهتين، جعل هذا حياتها أسهل، سهّل عليها المقارنة مع من هم مثلها وبالتالي نسيان، ولو للحظات، شعورها بالأسف على ذاتها.

سمير كان يكره الناس، يكره أمثاله، يكره أولئك الزرق الضعفاء الذين يلومون العالم على كل شيء، يكره البيض والشعاع الضوئي الذي يأتي منهم، والسود وسخونة أجسادهم. يكره كيف أن الحياة صارت ألواناً، كل كائن يتصرف وفقاً للونه، إن كنت أبيض فعليك عكس الضوء والحرارة، وإن كنت أزرق فأنت باهت وبارد، أما هو فأخضر، هو الأبقى بين الأجناس، يعيش لسنوات طويلة دون الحاجة لشيء سوى الماء والأكسجين. يستطيع التنقل بسهولة ولوقت طويل، ببساطة يمكن للأخضر فعل كل شيء. ليس كل شيء في الحقيقة، فهم غير قادرين على الانتحار. شعر سмир دائماً بالغيرة من الزرق الذين يموتون بسهولة، «هناك متعة في الموت» يهمس سмир لنفسه.

ردّة فعل حليلة كانت بتجاهله، إلا أن تعبير وجهها لم يخفي اشمئزازها من الكائن الذي ما ليث أن شعرت بالشفقة عليه، ثم بالفخر بنفسها بسبب شعورها بالشفقة. «هذه هي الحقيقة!» يَكمل سмир كلامه وكأنه يجب وجه حليلة المُتعجب

«الموت ممتع لأنه يضع حداً، يضع نهاية. وجود نهاية يجعل كل إحساس، طعم، ملمس نشعر به ذو قيمة أكبر لأنه قد يكون لآخر مرة.»

أدركت حليلة لأول مرة ما يعنيه الناس عندما يقولون إن الخضر هم الأكثر حكمة، لعل هذا ما يعطيك إياه العمر. «الحياة تكرر نفسها» يستمر سмир متجاهلاً حليلة، هو فقط يريد أن يسمع نفسه يقول ذلك، هذه أول مرة يقول فيها ذلك لنفسه.

تُلقب شجرة الموز بفاتلة أبيها، لأنها بعد نضج الثمار لابد أن تُقْلَع الشجرة الأم حتى تسمح بنمو الشجيرات الصغيرة حولها، والتي في الأصل متفرعة منها. كانت حياة الخضر كذلك، حرصت الطبيعة على الحد من تكاثر نوع بشري ضد الآخر، وبالتالي سيطرة نوع على الآخر. يبدو أن الطبيعة وجدت أخيراً طريقة للتعامل مع أكبر أعدائها (البشر)، بل عبر اتباع مقولة بشرية في الحقيقة، «اجعل صديقك قريباً، وعدوّك أقرب». في ترحاله الدائم كان سмир يفكر في شجرة الموز، يشعر أنه ينتمي لها أكثر من انتمائه لأي بشري آخر، ولطالما آمن سмир أن للشجر وعي ولم يفهم يوماً سبب وجود النباتيين الذين يرفضون إمكانية وجود وعي للنبات بينما يؤكّدون وجود وعي للحيوان، «وجود عيين وقدمين وحركة لا تعني وعياً!».

على أي حال، دعت حليلة سмир للجلوس معها لتناول البرغر، كان كلاهما يأكلان برغر دجاج، لعلك تفكر بأنه قاسم مشترك، فيشكل عام هكذا يبدأ التعارف بين الناس وتتطور العلاقات، القواسم المشتركة تجعلك أقل وحدة، إلا أن الدجاج وللأسف خيار سмир الوحيد هذه الأيام للأسباب لا يُسمح بذكرها. أما حليلة التي تتعاطف كثيراً مع البقر، الغنم، والخنزير، فتجد أن برغر الدجاج هي الطريقة الأمثل للحفاظ على التوازن البيئي. على أي حال، انتهز سмир الفرصة أخيراً لطلب معروف من أول إنسان أزرق تحدث معه يوماً (صدّق أو لا تصدق، حليلة هي أول إنسان تجرأ على التحدث معه والاختلاف معه)، حليلة لم تكن مميزة، الواقع هو أن سмир لم يختلط يوماً معهم. طلب سмир بصوت منخفض وضعيف «هل يمكنك مساعدتي؟» يمكن القول إن حليلة أحسّت بمشاعر لم تعرفها من قبل، كانت قوية، لم تعد باهتة، أصبحت واثقة، وأجابت بثقة وصوت واضح «بالتأكيد.»

«أريد أن أنتحر!» قال سмир. «يمكنني اختيار وريثي عند موتي، سأجعلك خضراء.»

الصدمة لم تستمر طويلاً، فسرعان ما أدركت سميرة أن هذا سيعني حياة جديدة، وحياة أفضل. «بالتأكيد، كيف نفعل ذلك؟»

قرر سмир أن يأكل برغر آخر، هذه المرة قرر طلب برغر بلحم البقر، أكلها ببطء، فهذه آخر مرة سيأكل فيها برغر. أثناء مضغه البطيء، شرح سмир أن الطريقة الوحيدة لقتل إنسان أخضر هي عبر الغرق، «فخلّدي الإنسان الأخضر لا تشيخ بسرعة، كما أن المجاعة ليست خياراً، ولكن لأننا لا زلنا بشراً، فالخلّايا تنفجر تحت الماء، مما يمكّننا من التحلل.»

«وكيف أصبح خضراء؟» تسأل حليلة بينما يعلو وجهها تردد لأول مرة منذ لقائهما سмир.

«الإنسان الأزرق يبهت أكثر تحت الماء، عند انفجار خلايا جسدي وأثناء التحلل، ستكون هناك بقعة خضراء، إن وقفت في منتصفها ستنمو عليك الخلّايا باحثة عن أي مضيف». يُكمل سмир «لابد أن نذهب في النهار، فلابد أن تتمكّني من تجديد الخلّايا، ولفعل ذلك نحتاجين إلى الشمس».

ذهبا سريعاً إلى البحر، تخيلت حليلة حياتها الجديدة بدءاً من اليوم، توقعت الكثير، السفر إلى كل أنحاء العالم، القوة، الاحترام، الانتماء، انعدام الخوف، كل هذا ضد خوفها الدائم من البحر الذي لم يصمد إلا ثانية أمام ما كان يوماً حلماً غير قابل للتحقيق، ليصبح اليوم مجرد توقع على وشك الحدوث.

جرت العملية بسلاسة، تُوفي سмир ووُلدت حليلة خضراء، ولكن...

عائلة حليلة كانت قلقة، اختفت ابنتهم لأيام، أصدقاؤها الزرق قلقوا أيضاً، آخر ما سَمِع عنها هو تناولها البرغر مع رجل أخضر طويل.

نسي سмир أن يذكر لحليلة شيئاً، أو ربما تناسى. عملية التحول لا تستغرق دقائق أو ساعات، بل تستغرق ٢٥ شهراً. يبقى فيها الإنسان الأخضر عاجزاً عن الحراك، كالشجرة تماماً. يُقال بأن هذا هو مصدر الحكمة. في البداية حاربت حليلة بكل قوتها، ثم غضبت للغاية من نفسها، من ضعفها، ثم غضبت من سмир، وبطيئاً انتقلت إلى التفكير بأنها قد ماتت، وهكذا هي أبديتها، ثم بدأت تلعب بذكرياتها، تفكر في كل قول وفعل قامت به، فيما يمكن أن يحدث بعد الموت، تخيلت أن تكون أبديتها مع لا شيء سوى ذكرياتها، أخيراً تقبلت وضعها واستسلمت للشمس والماء. لأول مرة تسبح دون خوف، الماء ناعم، الماء حر ويعطيك الحرية كذلك. ما إن ظهرت من الماء حتى أدركت غياب سмир لارتكابه الانتحار. لو كان سмир هناك، كان سينظر بعينه السوداوين الكبيرتين بابتسامة خبيثة.

“I will build a great wall — and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me — and I’ll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words.”

President Donald Trump

“Even if they build the wall, I will climb the wall. I will bring a ladder the size of the wall, even from sticks or whatever, but I’ll make it, and I’ll jump over there.”

Recently deported Mexican migrant whose children remain in the United States José de Jesús Ramírez

Unraveling Politics and Human Relations

written by Noor AlShaikh

A close relative of mine reported that she and her colleagues were investigated after the Bahraini 2011 uprising because their work peers, who support the government, disclosed their conversations and opposing views to the ministry of interior. She continues to say that they are now pretending as if nothing had happened at work because otherwise they might get into trouble again. This is not an isolated incident. Social tension in the workplace has taken many forms, including happily dancing and clapping when others were arrested. This not only affected colleagues but also friends who lost their camaraderie due to political disagreements.

Following the uprising in Bahrain, the fear of the unknown led civilians to set up personal checkpoints and protect themselves. Some people were harmed based on identity. Fear makes these reactions understandable. At the same time, however, it ignites social tension. What is even worse is that, in mixed cities, pro-government groups marked Shiite houses with an 'X' symbol to facilitate the work of security forces as they identified which people needed to be arrested.

What makes people set these boundaries to their cities and restrict others from entering or even existing?

Even though some romanticize the old days where Bahrainis lived in harmony regardless of their religious affiliation, history proves that this social conflict is an old one, regardless of the existence of political conflicts.

But what do we mean by conflict? According to Dr. Makram Ouais, a political science and conflict resolution professor, this is a state that a person experiences when they face disagreement and differences. He goes on to explain that when conflicts deteriorate, this can cause problems such as broken communication channels, stereotyping, discriminating and acts of violence.

A conflict can escalate due to different factors such as the existence of multiple religious groups, high social exclusion, and unfair laws.

“Social conflicts lead to polarization, group dynamics, prejudiced speech, and sectarianism.”

Dr. Markam Ouais

300,000
stateless Kurds
living in Syria
in 2011

150,000
stateless
“bedoons”
living in Kuwait

450,000
stateless
Palestinians in
Lebanon

Dr. Ouais claims the existence of a “continuum”, a thin line between political and social conflicts. A political decision, such as withholding citizenship from the “Bedoon” – a stateless ‘people’ who reside in Kuwait - creates not only political conflict between those involved and the government but also social separation between them and other citizens who often look down at them and even refuse to get married to them.

“Social conflicts lead to polarization, group dynamics, prejudiced speech, and sectarianism,” Dr. Ouais claims. As people polarize, more are encouraged to adopt extreme opinions, become xenophobic, become fearful of the other, and when this accelerates it can lead to more aggressive means of communication or even to actual use of violence. Dr. Ouais states that all these phenomena should be confronted immediately, because it is very difficult to “de-program” people after they have participated in such conflicts.

For example, people in Yemen were on relatively good terms till the war ignited. However, the north and south had historical political and social conflict, and the war reinforced this issue while creating a deeper sectarian wound. Social boundaries due to political conflicts are also evident in Syria. The city of Aleppo was divided into an eastern and western section, and this segregation harmed many. The fear is that if these political restrictions were to end, the social fabric of the people involved will remain damaged.

Why are there lasting effects to these struggles? While discussing the current conflicts in Bahrain, Dr. Huda AlMahmoud, a social activist and researcher, says that social and political conflicts affect people’s families and emotional relations. Families begin to introduce public political conflicts into the privacy

of their own homes. Dr. Ouais, though, thinks that a family can shield itself from the direct impact of the conflict, but since it interacts with society members, those people pass on their fear, hatred, and panic to their family members, who begin to mimic similar emotions, even if they were not personally involved or felt any direct pain. According to Dr. AlMahmoud, there can be cases of divorce due to political conflicts. They can affect the relationships of friends and also create tensions between brothers and sisters.

But is this problem an impossible one to solve? It could be argued that just as social influences may cause political conflicts, these same ‘powers’ can also resolve them. Social campaigns that aim to encourage tolerance among people from different sides and parties in times of conflict are crucial to “keep some hope alive” as Dr. Ouais believes, even if they might not be able to tackle the regional or international level of the conflict, he continues. Similarly, Dr. AlMahmoud believes that social campaigns are the escape many people hold on to so that they can bring their societies together again.

The prevalence of subgroups that are, for instance, a product of intermarriage between two conflicting groups, or who are not conventionally polarized, can help make the situation better. When the subgroups start having more power, they can present themselves as mediators in the conflict and can advocate power sharing.

No matter the strategy, conflict resolution techniques should be adopted to resolve the political and social conflicts; however, this is a long-term solution. Even if their immediate impact might be very minimal, these strategies still promise a better future.

Border in Film

A synopsis

Compiled by
Sarah Al Nemr

We often attach our own meaning to the word 'borders', but what happens to these preconceptions while viewing Arab and international movies? This list of movies gives us further insight to what borders mean and how they affect people's lives in different ways. Here you'll find quite a bit of personal and national struggles. Which one would you identify with?

BABEL (2006)

by Alejandro G. Iñárritu

This Mexican production tells four intertwined stories that are taking place in The U.S., Mexico, Japan, and Morocco. The movie transcends its presumed purpose of linking stories that are separated by geographical borders. It also showcases that we're all connected in a way. Psychological borders such as rejection, cultural ignorance, national and personal tragedies - even self-inflicted adversities - are all universal, and knowing that can only bring us together as individuals on this land.

BORDER (1997)

by J. P. Dutta

This Indian war drama explores the relationships between soldiers during one of the battles of the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971. It touches upon how instincts and moral duties could clash and whether people should get drafted and defend their land. It also calls for never harming a human being, regardless of which side you're supporting. In between the gruesome segments of the movie, soldiers bond and reminisce, showing an often-overlooked side of what happens in battles and wars.



THE DUPES (1973)

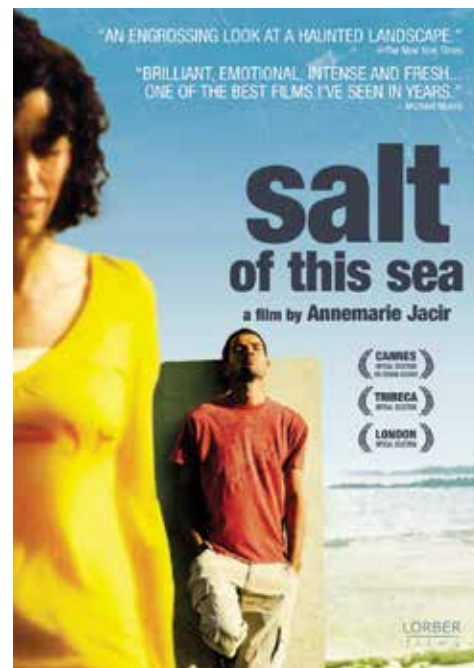
by Tawfiq Saleh

This Syrian-Egyptian production portrays the lives of three Palestinian refugees after the 1948 Palestinian exodus by following their journey from Palestine to Iraq in the hopes of reaching Kuwait to pursue job opportunities that will lead them to achieve stability, hope and freedom. The simple story is rather a study of motivations and the will to escape and take risks.

SALT OF THIS SEA (2008)

by Annemarie Jacir

This Palestinian film is about an American-born Palestinian woman who heads to Israel and Palestine on a quest to reclaim her family's home and money that were taken during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. From this list of movies, this is probably the one that highlights actual physical barriers and their constraints. We see the queues, terrible treatment, roadblocks, and barricades to ensure the country remains two separate entities with two completely different cultures.



THE BORDERS (1982)

by Duraïd Lahham

This Syrian 'comedy' gives the audience a wakeup call. It discusses the ridiculousness of 'Arab Unity'. The story takes place in a fictional universe where the main character is attempting to cross a border. Along the way, he loses all his identification documents and ends up camping by the border as neither his 'home' country nor his visiting country are willing to take him in. The characters whose lives are depicted in the movie are a reflection of the division between Arabs, and the cynical reality we live in. Although the film was produced in 1982, it's still relevant and applicable to how we carry on with our lives as Arabs today.

THE NIGHT OF COUNTING THE YEARS (1969)

by Shadi Abdel Salam

This Egyptian director's feature film is based on the true story of an Egyptian clan that had been robbing ancient Egyptian artifacts and selling them in the black market. After a fight within the clan, one of its members goes to the police and attempts to find the stolen items. The film casts its story in terms of the search for an authentic, lost Egyptian national identity. Additionally, the conflict between the city and countryside suggests questions that are not resolved in the film, making it an ambiguous, unsettling reflection on the price of identity as a whole.



5,525 miles

The length of the longest continuous international border, between the US and Canada.

8,848 meters

The height, above sea level, at which the border between Nepal and China peaks, at the precise summit of Mount Everest.

21 August 2011

The date on which the photograph overleaf was taken, from NASA's International Space Station, highlighting the brightly lit border between India and Pakistan. The orange lights and fencing were installed by the Indian government to thwart smuggling and arms trafficking.

Facts & quotes throughout compiled by Dima Helou

Stereotypical

A play by Majdoulin Al Mwaka

Act I - Scene 1

Stereotype (noun): a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Café Mahmoud is bustling with noises of people talking and coffee mugs being stirred and sipped. Six individuals of different nationalities - from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia - are seated near each other when they notice their different dialects and decide to converse among one another.

Lebanese: *(Casually)* What brings you folks to our beautiful Lebanon?

Saudi: *(Arrogantly)* Lebanon is known for its beautiful sights, so I thought I would come and do some sightseeing.

Egyptian: *(Teasingly)* Do you mean sights as in their beautiful women?



Bright lights, big border

NASA posted a striking photo taken on August 21, 2011 from the International Space Station showing the clearly visible lit up border between India and Pakistan.



Syrian: *(Sarcastically)* Or you just decided to throw your overflowing money here and be treated as a king.

Saudi: *(Condescendingly)* You're just jealous because I'm better off than all of you are. Your women are all over the Khaleeji men. Just imagine if I marry a Syrian woman, I'd have her following me around catering to my every whim.

Lebanese: I know right! Those Syrian women are only good for being housewives and having a bunch of kids.

Egyptian: I just pray to God that I become as rich as a Khaleeji, driving around in my Rolls Royce.

Moroccan: I pray that you achieve that as soon as you get your mind cleared from its marijuana haze.

Tunisian: *(In a state of laughter)* Why pray to God for him when in Morocco you can practice witchcraft in order to get what you want?

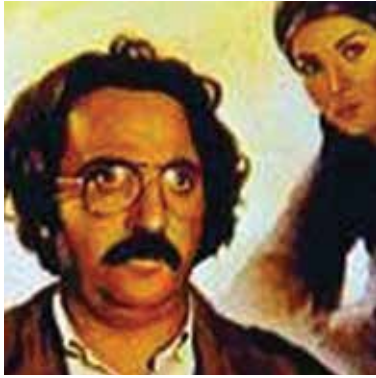
Saudi: *(Incredulous)* Do you even know God? You've abandoned all your traditions and customs. You're barely considered an Arab anymore.

Lebanese: Hey we're not all Arabs here; I, for example, am proud of my Phoenician ancestry.

Syrian: *(Bemused)* It's called freedom of expression and opinion - concepts I doubt you've heard of.

Moroccan: Oh how rich coming from a Saudi who in reality probably thinks women shouldn't be even allowed to drive.

Tolerance (noun): a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry.



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