/// June 2010 Issue 21

Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies

Middle East Bulletin

A GREEK REVIEW OF MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS

Another Perspective

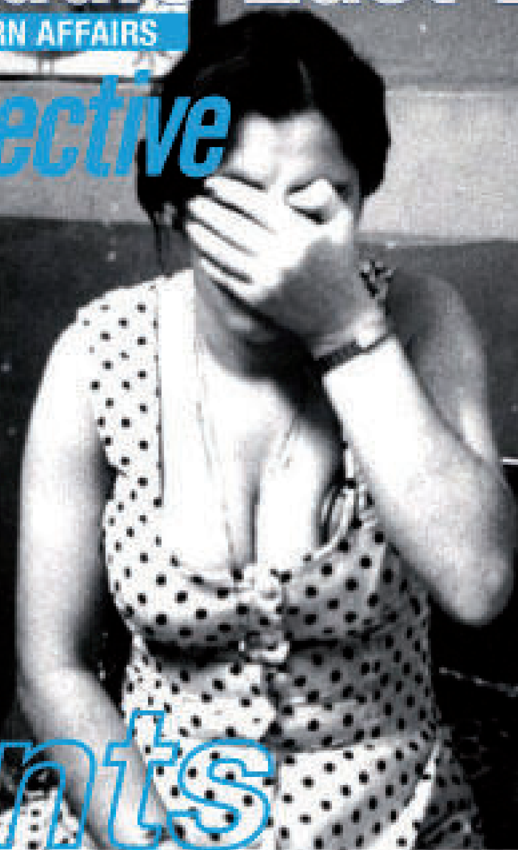


Photo: Kaveh Golestan

contents

The Zabbaleen 'Garbage Stories' in Cairo page 02
In the slums of hope and despair page 05
Homegrown and imported homosexualities page 08
Bridging the Gap between Islam and Anarchism page 11
The "female imams" of Ningxia page 14
The hijab and its multiple layers page 16
Female Genital Mutilation in the Middle East page 18
Christians in Turkey, A long and sad story page 20
The Samaritans in Palestine page 23
Islam and Facebook: Comment, Like, Share page 25
Tracing the trail of Fred Halliday page 28
Special Analysis :
The Israeli attack on Free Gaza page 31

University of Peloponnese

The zabbaleen 'Garbage Stories' in Greater Cairo's 'Garbage Cities''

Stella Athanasoulia

Cairo's zabbaleen, or garbage people (word derived from the term zibala, literally meaning 'garbage' in the Egyptian dialect) is the traditional community of informal garbage collectors who live in the outskirts of the city and have been, for many generations, the people who kept the capital clean. Recent official decisions have aggravated the zabbaleens' already difficult living conditions. Nonetheless, the zabbaleen as a social phenomenon have attracted the attention of documentarists and social entrepreneurs as well as multinational companies.

The zarraba, mainly Coptic Christians, are the descendants of poor farmers from Upper Egypt who settled in Cairo in the 50's due to the land reform under the first Free Officers' Revolutionary governments. They then merged with another group of inland immigrants, called the *wahiya*, who arrived in Cairo in late 19th century. While the wahiya became middlemen, the zarraba took their place in collecting the city's garbage through a door-to-door system agreed upon between the wahiya and the inhabitants. Progressively, the wahiya and zarraba formed a unique social fabric known as zabbaleen. The zabbaleen literally live among garbage, their villages forming Cairo's 'garbage city'. The 30,000 inhabitants of Mokattam constitute almost half of the zabbaleen population

estimated to be 70.000 in Greater Cairo – the governorates of Cairo and Giza- let alone those who make their living in the outskirts of Alexandria.

Since the 50s the zabbaleens' routine has hardly changed. Early in the morning, the male members of the community, men and teenagers, go out in the streets of Cairo with their donkey and 'karo', a wooden platform on donkey-driven carts, to collect waste and bring it back to the village. By early afternoon, it is the women's and girls' round to sort the garbage, often with bare hands.

Organic waste was traditionally fed to the pigs –as the Christian religion does not forbid the breeding of those animals- and other livestock that Christians were allowed to keep in their villages. However, in the summer of 2009 the government decided a cull for the entire pig population in Egypt, in an attempt to curtail the potential spread of swine flu. The decision caused an unprecedented crisis to the zabbaleen community, as goats and sheep cannot consume the amounts of waste that pigs did. As a result, organic waste piled up in the streets of Mokattam, aggravating the area's severe hygiene problems, and Cairo's as well.

Non-organic materials such as steel, glass and plastic bottles are sold as raw material or gathered on the zabbaleen houses' roofs to be repaired and reused. Thanks to their creativity and imagination, the zabbaleen are able to recycle up to 80-90% of the waste they collect, a figure that modern waste management and recycling methods and companies can only aspire to. The secret is that the zabbaleen do not use the large trucks which compact the rubbish. Once compacted, rubbish cannot be easily sorted and can only go to a landfill. Thus, only a 20-30% of that waste can be recycled. On the contrary, the zabbaleen sort the garbage by hand according to their own 'system'. After sorting, garbage can be reused in the village or sold to middlemen or companies. Home-made machines within the community are used to recycle paper and tin, whereas bones, glass and plastic bottles are sold to local factories. Other materials are recycled to produce rugs, quilts, pots and paper. Recently, multinational companies such as Procter and Gamble have been interested in buying back their products' empty bottles for fear of counterfeiting. Another potential market are states known for their need of raw materials, such as China, who pays US$ 600 per ton of plastic.

Until the late 80's there was no formal waste collection by the state or the municipalities. All the work was being done by the zabbaleen very cheaply, or for free. This informal system is still the most fundamental part of the city's waste management. Someone would expect from the state to embrace the zabbaleen phenomenon and work towards improving their living and health conditions instead of handing the ambitious plan of cleaning a 20 million people and around 10.000 tonnes of daily garbage city to foreign companies. In an effort to modernize the waste management system in Egypt's major cities since 2002, the state turned for help abroad, embarking on an expensive endeavor by employing private foreign companies to do the job in the Alexandria, Cairo and Giza governorates.

The reasoning was that the zabbaleen, along with the government's present waste management system, were only able to collect about 60% of all city waste (40% collected by the zabbaleen and 20% by the government). Apart from being unable to meet the growing waste collection demand following the rapidly expanding population, the existing system was also put into question for aesthetic reasons. The government has also argued that

the zabbaleen practices were 'backward' and unsanitary, bringing to light the elevated rates of diseases like hepatitis resulting from hand-sorting the garbage.

While all of these arguments were mostly true, the new, 'modernised' system still managed to collapse after its first year of operation. The first year of application of the new system resulted in street containers being stolen, municipalities failing to monitor the companies and the latter being unable to meet their contractual obligations and thus being penalised. Moreover, the inhabitants objected to the higher fees of the modern disposal system. Based on an elaborate index determined by the type of property, a certain percentage is added to the electricity bill as a garbage collection fee. With the work not being done efficiently, some times not at all, citizens often pay the zabbaleen to continue their door-to-door garbage collecting. The 2009 swine cull coincided with foreign companies employees' strike, all of that just before the holy month of Ramadan when food consumption rises along with organic waste.

However, the modernisation has had a dire impact on the zabbaleen community. The plan was expected to cost the government around US $50 million per year, whereas the zabbaleen cost around US$2 on a daily basis. However, what the European companies offered to the zabbaleen by integrating them was by far surpassed by what they gained from their own work. Nonetheless, foreign companies would never be able to recycle as much as the zabbaleen. Considered to be the world's most efficient recycling system, the zabbaleen have already become an example for other major cities such as Mumbai.

Confronted with a problematic current situation, however, the governorates and government need to work closer with zabbaleen associations and advocacy NGOs in order to bring more aspired concepts to a problem that has started to reach unprecedented scale. Based on trading systems, the garbage issue provides the poorest segments of the Egyptian society an income that no other sector does, but can become harmful for them at the same time. Since the late 70s, different networks, NGOs, social entrepreneurs and professionals have befriended the zabbaleen and have tried to bring their story to light, while advocating ways for improving their living conditions through health improvement and fighting of illiteracy. Recently, social workers and documentarists have turned an eye towards Mokattam and the fruit of their interest has also drawn some international attention. In the award-winning documentary film ''Garbage Dreams'', released in April 2010, American-Egyptian May Iskander takes a close look at the stories, lives and dreams of three teenagers who were born and currently live in Mokattam (www.garbagedreams.com). The «Zabbaleen Project» (www.zabaleen.wordpress.com) is another example of how social networks such as facebook become the point where traditional social fabrics meet modernity and push for change.

Behind concrete walls in the slums of hope and despair

Chrysoula Toufexi

Urban slums have been the latest attraction of a tourist's superficial curiosity; days, years, decades of decaying living conditions are captured in a snapshot and are exposed at the momentary light of a flash that bears witness of the world's city slums, often hidden behind concrete walls in the effort to disguise the urban divide that separates the city's rich and poor.

A photo souvenir, driven by the need to testify the witnessing of the unprivileged poor, rarely goes beyond unraveling the image, to contest the causes and consequences of a city's inequalities. The everyday life of slum dwellers displays a bleak, almost Dickensian, future for the world's urban societies.

The UN Habitat statistical results are revealing. Today, one billion people of the world's total population live in slums. In North Africa 15% of the population live in slums, while in the Middle East the incidence of slums is more prevalent in Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq. The increasing proliferation of slums according to the *UN Habitat, The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (2003) rests on a combination of causes that lie in rapid urbanization and urban poverty. More than ten million people reside in Cairo and Istanbul transforming them into the megacities of the MENA region. Moreover, the highest proportion of urban poverty is identified in Yemen reaching 49% of the urban population, followed by Egypt (29%), Syria (29%), Jordan and Morocco (12%).

According to the UN Habitat, urbanization is caused by internal - rural to urban - migration (Egypt, Syria, Jordan), high urban and rural population growth (Iraq, Egypt, Morocco) and conflict (Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza Strip). In addition, the high prices, the lack of adequate housing units and urban planning management due to rapid urban growth is leading towards the proliferation of informal settlements (Egypt, Jordan, Algeria).

According to the definition given by a UN Expert Group Meeting held in Nairobi (October, 2002) a slum is described as having one legal attribute defined as insecure tenure in the absence of legal formal documents of residence and three physical attributes such as inadequate access to basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, electricity and waste disposal), substandard building structure, and overcrowding. Moreover, the UN distinguishes slums through two very broad definitions: the so-called "slums of hope" which entail the prospect of revival and the "slums of despair", defined by their state of decay. Slum areas are either located in the center of the city - bearing evidence of a once vibrant middle-income community that moved to the suburbs leaving in their place the low income newcomers-, or are situated on the margins of the city, next to industrial zones and quarries, or they were once rural slums that were later incorporated in the city due to its urban growth.

Often perceived as areas breeding crime, gangs, drug trafficking and even terrorism, slum communities suffer from stigmatization, stereotyping and consequent marginalization. As a result poverty, unemployment and a prevalent governmental neglect are the inescapable reality of the everyday life in the slum. Most affected by living in such settlements is knowledgeably the youth which in the MENA region comprises the bulk of the population.

Stereotyping directed against a group can also be a cause for the establishment and sustainment of slums. In Yemen's capital Sanaa, slums made of tin shacks are built usually on state-owned land. As Irin News reports, Dar Salm and al-Hasabah neighborhoods in the outskirts of Sanaa provide shelter to the lowest social caste of the Yemeni population known as Al Akhdam, meaning servants. The Akhdam community is distinguished by its African characteristics and as its people are not part of the traditional tribal system they live in isolation from the rest of Yemen's society and are normally employed in minimal jobs either as street sweepers or scrap metal collectors.

In Cairo two types of informal settlements, those developed on vacant state land (such as Manshiyet Nasser) and those built on private agricultural land (such as Imbaba) provide shelter to the majority of the city's residents. Both types of slums are dense and overcrowded. Developed thirty years ago and sheltering one million residents employed in the informal economy, Manshiyet Nasser is one of the oldest and biggest squatter settlements situated in eastern Cairo, between the old Islamic cemetery and the Al-Muqqatam hill. The informal areas surrounding the hill are considered haphazard and dangerous. Despite previous warnings of their vulnerability due to a landslide in 1993, a second rockslide in September 2008 caused more than a hundred deaths, all residents of the Manshiyet Nasser neighborhood.

Imbaba is also one of the oldest and most dense informal settlements in Cairo. During the 80s the area relied on Islamic groups to deliver welfare and basic infrastructural services. In the early 90s Imbaba found itself in the middle of the government's crackdown against Islamic extremists and as it was considered to be the stronghold of the radical al-Gama'a al-Islamiya, the area was deemed a source of political unrest and was severely suppressed.

Both the 1993 rockslide in Al-Muqqatam and the acknowledgement that poor conditions in the slums can potentially form breeding grounds of terrorism led to the government's decision to launch several upgrading and relocation projects. However, relocation means loss of the solidarity network built for decades among the residents who view it as an important aspect of mutual reliance that contributes significantly to poverty alleviation. Most of them cannot afford the higher prices for food, transportation and healthcare in their new homes while they are

found in distant locations from their jobs. Faced with these problems some residents decide to return to their previous locations.

A similar narrative of slums as the breeding grounds of extremism emerged also in Morocco after the May 2003 terrorist attacks, especially in Casablanca, where a large proportion of the population is sheltered in slums due to large migration from rural areas and high unemployment rates, especially amongst the expanding youth.

The official investigation conducted after the 2003 bombings indicated that the majority of the perpetrators came from the city's old slums. The Sidi Moumen suburb, where the Douar Sekouila and the shantytowns of Thomas and Lahraouyine were located is one of the biggest, poorest and is considered one of the most notorious areas, home to most of the 2003 suicide bombers. The residents of these slums fell hostage to radical Islamist groups such as "As Sirat al-Mustaqim" which exercised control through severe punishments on noncompliant people. Nowadays, most of the slums perceived as strongholds of radical Islam have been eradicated, however the residents of Sidi Moumen are faced with increased marginalization and few prospects of employment as a result of the stereotyping inflicted upon the region as a harbor of terrorists.

Certain vulnerable groups that often occupy the slums such as immigrants, ethnic or religious minorities and internally displaced people as a result of conflict fall victims of social, economic and political exclusion in countries like Yemen, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories. Yemen is a host of many Somali and Ethiopian refugees that live in the outskirts of Aden in slums such as al-Basateen, despite the existence of the UNHCR Kharaz camps established for the refugees.

Internal displacement fueled by war is, according to the *UN Habitat State of Iraq Cities report* (2006-2007), one of the causes of the proliferation of slums in Iraq. The country is suffering from deteriorated urban infrastructure, destroyed in the first coalition invasion in 1991, that never managed revival due to imposed sanctions. As a cause of poverty, conflict, sectarian violence and internal displacement, nine million people were living in slums in Iraq in 2001. It is estimated though, that one to two million alone live in the poor urban settlements in Sadr City (holding the bulk of the Shiite population of Baghdad) which was built for the poor in the 50s by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kassem.

However, under the Saddam regime the Shiite residents were deprived of basic social services and during the 90s relied mainly on the Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al Sadr who advocated social justice for the poor. According to the freelance writer Neda M. Shukur (for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting) some of the remaining Shiites of the southern Iraqi marshlands that fled the region after it was systematically drained as a retaliation for the Shiite uprising in 1991, found shelter in Kassra and Attachis, two slum areas in the margins of Sadr City. Since 2003 the city has emerged as the stronghold and a base of recruitment for paramilitary militia of the Mahdi Army and Muqtada al-Sadr managed to yield significant support by providing security to the Shiite community during the Sunni insurgency and the sectarian conflict that followed.

In conclusion, the effort to define the phenomenon of slums in the Middle East, the causes that drive its proliferation and the consequences it yields to the everyday life of its communities is met with diversity from one region to the other. One common aspect is that wherever there is a failure of the state to meet its citizens' basic needs - affordable and safe shelter, access to basic infrastructure, education, healthcare, social inclusion or security - there is also the possibility that various groups will try to contest its legitimacy by exploiting the sentiment of abandonment of the city's unprivileged.

Homegrown and imported homosexualities

Alexia Liakounakou

'Homosexuality' (and sexuality as a whole) is a tender topic for Muslim societies inside the Middle East. Faced with growing international pressure on women's and gay rights, it seems that some societies are getting more stubborn against Western influences and therefore harsher towards those wishing for reform. However, what exactly does it mean to be 'Middle Eastern' and 'homosexual'?

The answer to the above question would have to address two problematic titles: 'Middle Eastern' and 'homosexual' - because both epithets are broad and often misleading. First of all, the 'Middle East' is a region that is seldom recognized as an entity, and its boundaries are not set in stone. Care and caution should therefore be taken when analyzing such a broad region. This account sets forth examples that could apply to many societies, but is mostly based on urban examples from Egypt and Lebanon. Secondly, the term 'homosexual' is a Latin-derived word that has been adopted to act as a translator for practices done within and outside the region. Same-sex practices are universal and private, but what is it about the word 'gay' that ticks off Middle Eastern (and, in fact, many Euro-American, Mediterranean and other Western) societies? Could it be that it creates a fear of change in social behavior, threatening traditional hierarchies and male/female gender roles, or is it a topic more largely associated with the conceal-

ment of sexuality in general in countries of the Middle East?

Brian Whitaker carried out a study which was published in his book *Unspeakable Love* in 2006, in which he aimed to address the seriousness of being a homosexual in Arab countries. Through detailed examples of prosecution, violence in the name of family honor ('honor crimes') and the often fleeing of 'deviant' (mostly male) youths from their households, he accurately portrays a sad reality which is has now caught international attention. What is important to note, however, in every study that concerns identities, is to highlight the distinction between the weight of an identity and the less weighty act. A same-sex act is not as threatening as a choice to become a 'homosexual' would be, since an act doesn't necessarily imply future reoccurrence and can possibly be stopped at will. Similar to the way women may have pre-marital sex and then cover up such 'marks' with hymen-replacement surgeries, homosexual acts are deemed 'bad', but can remain silent, as has been done for centuries in more conservatively led societies (in Europe and elsewhere). Moreover, acts may remain private, whereas a 'gay identity' is more public. Accounts of same-sex practice in the region in travelers' documents and earlier Arab manuscripts abound as much as in other parts of the world. People engaging in sexual intercourse with partners of the same sex is not, however, what threatens Middle Eastern masculinity or morality, and is usually not the cause for an honor crime to happen. It is the label of the 'gay', the change in lifestyle (i.e. adopting a homosexual lifestyle) that creates rupture, violence and stress within any given family's and its society's social structures. As Bruce Dunne cites, the issue of power and hierarchy is threatened by a homosexual identity. Male-on-male sexual acts are considered a sin (as is infidelity) in Muslim (and Christian) societies but mostly remain private and do not threaten social hierarchy. The 'Arab male' may gain power through his economic status and his age; engaging in same-sex acts with a younger man is not considered a threat to his masculinity, Dunne notes, because he is still the dominant one. Therefore, in a way, the older man who dominates a younger man, as well as women, is not only not gay, but ultra-masculine.

The tables change, however, when it comes to a man who adopts a gay identity, creates romantic relationships with other men and acts more effeminate in public. This is seen as a threat to traditional hierarchic roles, and is often denounced both by men and women of the family. And, being unable to resist the comparison, there are still many countries outside the Middle East (in the 'West') who also deal with homosexual individuals in similar (maybe less often and with less brutal consequences) ways.

Since no case can be seen in isolation, it is important to take a step back and see Arab sexualities and their identities in terms of their larger social, political and religious spheres. The Egyptian case of the Queen Boat, where 52 men were arrested because they practiced 'debauchery' in May 2001 is a good example of local versus international confrontation. Although the Egyptian legal system contains both civil and Islamic jurisdiction, Egyptian law does not consider homosexuality a crime; nonetheless, it remains a very important social and religious taboo. The arrest of the 52 men, however, ignited a huge debate and brought international human rights groups in verbal clashes with local organizations who willfully withdrew from the issue in fear of being delegitimized within Egypt.

The above case is a very interesting study for two reasons. First, it shows how Egypt, a country that is - by Western standards- considered to be quite 'progressive', cracked down on acts considered 'perverse', and thereby presenting itself as a Muslim-led, sexually 'moral', conservative state aiming to preserve and protect the peo-

ple from sinful acts. Secondly, it shows that Western pressure for various human rights reforms to take place may in fact create larger cleavages within local societies and, instead of helping specific minorities it may actually enhance the segregation between homosexual (generally seen as pro-Western) and straight men and women. It is a fact that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights are not a Middle-Eastern sponsored initiative and many societies in the area are trying to resist yet another Western social reform, while at the same time being unable to fully control the amount of influence coming into their societies through multiple avenues (migration, global media, travel, etc.).

Nevertheless, societies are only harsh in battling what threatens their stability, as it seems. Female 'homosexuals' are not targeted, and worries about a daughter becoming a 'lesbian' seem to be very minimal. Therefore, it is not a question about being 'normal' or 'perverse' - it is, most probably, a matter of power. Males who adopt the identity of a 'gay man' are thought to bring shame to their families and are often treated as mentally ill. Females who show 'deviant behavior' towards other women usually do not create concern (and in fact are not really perceived as deviant at all). As Whitaker notes, it is much more of a problem for a woman to engage in a relationship with a male before marriage; thus being with other women sexually may even be a relief for the family and is often regarded as a sign of late teenage/student experimentation.

As it seems, therefore, it is not the same-sex practice that bothers patriarchic societies, but the switching of identity and gender roles. This is because they bring confusion, changes in family and inheritance structures and stigma to those who are considered to be abnormal. Moreover, being a 'homosexual' is often associated with a freer sexual lifestyle and such sexual freedom could also intimidate societies which have placed sexuality behind closed (and married) doors.

Meanwhile, it appears that change and even reform is unavoidable as rights groups are gaining international ground and since technological means such as the Internet are creating avenues for more freedom and networking, globally. Just like conservatism was matched with Catholic imprints left on Middle Eastern societies during the colonial period (which is also a foreign influence that became integrated into local social threads), women's and gay rights (often matched because they aim at the empowerment of the less dominant) may have already started planting seeds within the fabric of local culture, since more and more organizations to protect non-heterosexuals are forming across the region, more urban meeting spots are created and more people in the Arab world seem to be 'coming out', either emigrating to other countries which are more tolerant, or finding ways to juggle their lives between secrecy, normalcy, guilt and perverseness. The future is not easy to predict, but since situations change, Arab states can do nothing but start accepting a changing situation, either by eliminating it altogether (which seems impossible) or by allowing for social change to take place. One cannot stop the waves, but one can learn how to surf, as the old saying goes.

Bridging the Gap between Islam and Anarchism

Marina Eleftheriadou

Far from the narrow and divisive framework of Moderate/Fundamental Islam, "Anarcha-Islam" aims to give a libertarian attribute to Islam. In this light Islam's tradition and thought are seen as containing several notions of economic and social liberty. Islamic-Anarchism offers an interesting alternative to the mainstream discourse even though it is not flawless.

The objective conditions for a revolution in the Middle East seem riper than anywhere else: authoritarian regimes, economic and social inequalities, sectarian discrimination, patriarchy, sexism, imperialism (military and economic), occupation; to name just a few. Nevertheless, when it comes to the subjective conditions, the scale is tipped in favor of religious perspectives (fundamentalist-totalitarian in the case of the most militant part), except for atheist libertarian. The main anti-systemic resistance is conducted by religious actors at the same time that the traditional resistance forces (partly national-liberation, partly left-wing) have turned rightward. Admittedly, this trend is not restricted to the Middle East. The entire world, including the West, has witnessed the twilight of modernism with its materialist and rational underpinnings. After the multi-level retreat of the Left, radical thought has been practically overpowered and theoretically tangled in the nets of post-modernism.

This evolution of the post-modernist paradigm traded cohesion with openness to non-conforming dynamics such as "God's" insistence to stay alive. His shadow (of which Nietzsche has warned against) has returned to

reclaim its share in human liberation from social (authority) and economic (capital) oppression. According to Mohammed Jean Veneuse, Islam contains all the necessary attributes to evoke total liberation, of a level similar to the one promised by the libertarian perspective par excellence: anarchism. Walking on the footprints of Tolstoy (and Christian anarchism) and taking advantage of the post-anarchist opening of the gates of variety, Veneuse presents "Anarcha-Islam" as an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist alternative.

At first glance the Muslim world and anarchism seem enormously distant. The influence of anarchist thought in the Muslim world and particularly in the Middle East has been limited although the region's periphery has come in contact with it since the late 19th century. At that time, in Egypt, Italian and Greek anarchists had a significant involvement in the radical press and had quite successfully promoted the notions of self-organization and social struggle amongst indigenous and foreign workers. Decolonization brought out Marxist and communist ideas which held a better relation with statism. Since then and to this day, with the exception of Turkey and Israel (a quasi-secular and a non-Muslim state, respectively), the proportions of the anarchist movement's presence is based on "weak" evaluations and occasionally wishful thinking. During the 1970s, the anarchist-communist group "Shagila" is believed to have operated in Iraq. In neighboring Iran during the revolution a sister group, "Scream of the People", was active (an assertion challenged by some). The road to exile in the 1980s brought several of those in contact with European and American anarchism. Some had already practically (though not theoretically) espoused anarchism while others were on the verge of reaching anarchism the hard way (through gradual disappointments from Marxist variations). Anarchist groups consisting of Iranian exiles were formed in England (the Iranian Anarchists Group) and Germany (publishing the journal *Anzne Ezad* - The Free Man). More recently, Iranian exiles got involved in the publication of the periodical Nakhdar (Neither God, Nor state, Nor bosses). At the same time, some Kurdish groups (i.e. the Kurdistan Anarchist Forum) emerged, advocating a non-hierarchical, non-statist solution to the Kurdish question. Inside the Middle East the situation is bleaker as only a limited anarchist presence is reported in Lebanon (Al Badil al Taharouri), Jordan, Iraq (Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq) and possibly in Egypt.

The Iranian Revolution had an additional impact on the apparent incompatibility of Islam (as every religion does, and particularly Islam because of its suggested all-inclusive nature) with anarchism. The work of Ali Shariati is the first complete examination of the linkage between Islamism and Marxism. Shariati's accomplishment of this task earned him Jean Paul Sartre's concession "I have no religion, but if I were to choose one, it would be Shariati's". The Iranian Revolution's charm, further accentuated by instances of self-organization (later crushed by Khomeini) such as the "shoras" (councils) and the "komitehs" (armed neighborhood committees), drew the attention of Michel Foucault as well. To the grand disappointment of many, the evolution of the Iranian Revolution into a theocracy crushed every sign of Marxism, whether related to Shariati's Islamo-Marxism or not.

Two decades later, Mohammed Jean Veneuse, Hakim Bey, Anthony Fiscella and Yunus Yakub Islam, among others, go one step further and claim than Islam can be not only anti-capitalist, but anti-authoritarian as well. They insist - in a post-modern anti-Orientalist twist - that we can't talk of a homogenous and monolithic Islam but of several Islam(s). Accordingly, in the Muslim faith's history there have been instances of an unconscious amalgam of Islam and Anarchism. Since the era of the Sunni-Shia divide, when the Kharijite movement (particularly the Najdiyya tribe) and the Mu'tazalite thought resisted the hierarchical institutionalization of Islam, there have

been communities and individuals who have experienced this bond; from communities based on Sufi traditions to the early 20th century "converts" Leda Rafenelli and Gustave Henri Jossot and the contemporary Yakub Islam (author of the "Muslim Anarchist Charter)."

Mohammed Jean Veneuse raises the stakes by claiming that even the base of Islam, its scriptures, has libertarian attributes. In his 2009 thesis (Department of Sociology, Queen's University, Canada), he suggests bringing out those attributes by reclaiming the right of *ijtihad* for every believer, boosting "gnosis (*ma`rifat*) [against] fiqh (jurisprudence)". This universal (among the believers) right to practice *ijtihad*, according to Veneuse, is actually entrenched in the Koran. At this point, Veneuse hopes to de-institutionalize religion in order to reach the anarchist threshold of total rejection of any kind of hierarchy. Since religious authority is infinitively fragmentized and not interweaved with the state, then it is "harmless" to human liberty.

But the Koran and the Sunnah are also ridden with qualities in favor of the anarchist project. On the question of anti-capitalism, Veneuse highlights the concept of Property (there is no private property but Allah's), Communal and Individual Caretakers (human beings are only the keepers of the Property either as communities or individuals), *Mudarabah/Musharakah* (a communally established anti-monopolistic and anti-oligopolistic external financial structure), *Riba* (forbiddance of interest), *Zakat* (obligatory charity), *Ramadan, Sadaqat Al-Fitr* (charity) and Islamic banking. He also points to Islam's anti-authoritarian aspects: on the one hand are the anti-authoritarian practices at the micro-level (organizational/interpersonal) such as *Shura* (mutual consultation), *Ijma* (consensus) and *Mashala* (public interest). On the other hand, at the macro-level of institutionalized religion and the state, he challenges the mainstream interpretation of the concept Khilafah (Islamic state as opposed to egalitarian representation) and rationalizes the authority of God. The expected anarchist malaise is dispelled by branding the "submission to Allah's authority" as voluntary and non-compulsory. However, at the same time that Veneuse provides freedom from religion and God's authority, he is adamant in asserting the freedom of religion. He doesn't only demand this on the basis of freedom of choice but he also lambasts the Euro-centric dogmatic short-sightedness (anarchist or not) on the matter of religion; and in a rather peculiar guilt-evoking fashion.

Consequently, the concept of "Islamic Anarchism" can possibly resonate with anarchist ideals; but not more than any other (Religion-) Anarchism concepts that have been compounded. All major religions, if examined under a certain prism, can point to some sort of radical tradition. However, Islamic Anarchism or any another type of religious anarchism, although quite right in reproaching atheist libertarianism of "reinventing the -claimed dead- God in the form of essence", fails to reconcile the fact that a reference to the metaphysical simply involves more intermediaries than a reference to human reason might have. Bakunin is right in asserting that a "divine revelation... [implies] revealers"; the same applies to the interpretation of the divine (*ijtihad*). Islam under a certain "refinement" may coexist with anarchism; however, it can possibly go the other way. For every "libertarian" verse in Koran, there is another which, if "conveniently" read, can "justify" anti-libertarianism. Simply, religion is scattered with possibilities of domination; it can easily, in the words of Emma Goldman, turn into "the dominion of human mind".

CHINA'S "NU AHONG": The "female imams" of Ningxia

Anna Apostolidou

In the Ningxia region of China, women from the Hui Muslim minority set up and run their own mosques, thus functioning similarly to an imam. The phenomenon of these "female imams" constitutes an irregularity in the Islamic world and raises questions whether it could become an example to be followed by other Muslim societies as well.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a rather unique phenomenon for the Islamic world was brought to light: the existence of "female imams" and women's mosques in the remote Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in China. Women leading prayers have occasionally been reported elsewhere, with the most prominent example being Amina Wadud's delivery of the Friday *khutbah* in Cape Town in 1994; however, in the case of the Chinese Hui female imams, it is noteworthy that their role is institutionalised and generally accepted by both state and society, to the point that it now constitutes one of the basic characteristics of the so-called "Islam with Chinese characteristics".

China's Muslim population, according to the BBC, ranges from 20 to 100 million, and is categorised into 10 ethnic minority groups. Among them the Hui, numbered approximately 9 million, comprise the largest Muslim ethnic group. Officially, they are the descendants of Middle Eastern merchants who travelled to China during 618-906 AD and their converts; however, apart from the religion they are indistinguishable from the majority Han Chinese, and they speak the official language, Mandarin. In contrast to other Muslim populations in China, such as the Uyghurs in China's western frontier Xinjiang, the Hui, residing mostly in Ningxia and its surrounding regions of Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan, had been isolated from the Islamic world, allowing thus the development of alternative Islamic institutions, such as the *qinzhen nusi* (women's mosques) and the "nu ahong," literally "the female teachers" (from the Persian *akhund* for the learned one, the teacher).

In 2008, the Ningxia Autonomous Region had more than 80 "nu ahong" in a total of 6,000 imams. Most of them live and work in women's mosques which are affiliated to a regular male mosque or an Islamic school; nevertheless a few "nu ahong" have established independent "qinzhen nusi," completely separated from men's mosques and not overseen by male religious leaders. They are licensed as "ahong" from the local state-sponsored Islamic Association just like their male counterparts, and they receive a monthly salary, though inferior to men's. Their duties include teaching the Arabic language and the Qur'an, preaching, offering counselling and ritual guidance at marriages and funerals, and resolving social disputes. However, despite the eagerness of the West to call them "female imams", the "nu ahong" are not imams, at least not fully-fledged ones: Their audience consists only of women and children (including boys), and they do not lead the *salat*, the five daily prayers, nor do they conduct the Friday *khutbah*. But even if they are considered to be female scholars rather than imams, the fact that the Islam of the Hui allows women to officially play a leading role in teaching the

Islamic doctrines constitutes a novelty in contrast with other Muslim societies.

The primary reason for this novelty can be found in the limited interactions of the Hui with the Islamic world, given the geographic position of Ningxia which is found almost at the centre of China. When Islam first entered this particular region, it stepped on the Confucian background of the Chinese. The Confucian terms and principles, such as the value of secular virtue, were used to interpret Islam and render it more familiar to the local population. In the following centuries, the geographic isolation of the Hui impeded the spread of stricter Islamic schools, such as the Salafi and the Wahhabi. In fact, it wasn't until the end of the Cultural Revolution and the Opening of China to the West, that the Hui realised their links to the Middle Eastern Muslim countries and re-embraced the formalities of their religion; until then, the Hui consumed alcohol, the women rarely wore head scarves, and the only thing that differentiated them from their Han neighbours was the abstinence from pork.

A second argument, maintained mostly by Chinese scholars and media, for the phenomenon of the "nu ahong" in the Hui societies is the embedment of the communist ideology which advocates gender equality. This is partly true: the institutions of the women's mosques and the "nu ahong" date centuries back, from the late Ming dynasty (17th century), when the first Muslim schools exclusively for young females were established. These schools had transformed into mosques for women under the guidance of other women by the late Qing dynasty (19th century), long before the founding of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party's contribution to the development of the "nu ahong", nonetheless, is that after the Cultural Revolution and the persecution of any religious activity, be it Muslim, Christian or Buddhist, it gave official status to the "nu ahong" by granting them certificates from the local Islamic Associations. It is also responsible for advertising this "Islam with Chinese characteristics", maybe so as to shift the focus from the Muslim populations in Xinjiang.

The rising question is whether "Islam with Chinese characteristics" and the position of women within it can promote the revision of women's role in the Muslim world in general. Muslim women in moderate Islamic countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, or in Western countries, might advocate through blogs and sites (such as "altmuslimah") the adoption of "female imams" in their respective societies, but it would be an exaggeration to argue that Ningxia can export an alternative Islamic movement in ways Egypt or Saudi Arabia did. The Hui do not have the capacities nor the willingness to create a School of thought and propagate it in the Middle East. On the contrary, as their interactions with the Middle East started to increase, either through student exchanges or donations from the Saudi Arabia-based Islamic Development Bank, the Hui began to adopt the "Islamic" attire and to abide by the Ramadan fasting and other Islamic practices. Nonetheless, the "nu ahong" continued and will probably continue their work; after all, they survived dynasties, political regime changes and a Cultural Revolution.

The hijab and *its multiple layers*

Styliani Saliari

The hijab is mostly seen as an Islamic symbol that opposes the 'West' as the holder of universal values such as freedom and liberty. No other icon embodies with such force the Islamic 'other' that challenges 'Western' modernity, which is constructed as a unidirectional notion of evolutionary progress. Moreover, the hijab is usually associated with women's subservience and is therefore seen as an offence to the idea of 'gender emancipation'. However, the hijab cannot be merely seen as an indicator of passive submission, backwardness and piety as it has turned into a social phenomenon which has adopted multiple meanings through time.

By walking through Cairo one immediately notices that the majority of women are veiled. Nonetheless, even if most women wear the hijab the spectrum of fashion and expression is notably broad. There are young women and girls in jeans, fashionable tops and jewelry with two-layered veils which match perfectly with their outfit. Then, one sees college girls wearing the black gown which hides their shape, but they wear make-up and special accessories. Less common is the niqab.

It is remarkable that while the hijab is meant to cover something, it also creates an entire new dynamic. It gives each woman a unique personal style as they present themselves differently. Obviously, there appears to be a strong element of religious identity reflected in the way women wear the hijab. Hence, the presence of the veil expresses that a woman is a Muslim, but the way she chooses to wear it might tell a lot more. Precisely, the hijab itself has turned into a symbol of different religious and social meanings. This is something which will be discussed below. Regarding Egypt, it can be said that the hijab became a visible part of Egyptian society in the 1970s due to the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 and the stalemate against Israel in 1973. Pan-Arabism's demise paved the way for Islamist ideologies which gained ground in an increasingly disillusioned society. As a result, more and more women decided to veil themselves; however, these women were not only poor lower-class women but professional and well educated ones who put on the veil voluntarily. At the

same time, another change has occurred: Egyptian women do not wear the 'austere black cover' which is worn by their mothers and grandmothers and which is associated with backwardness while fighting against notions which present the hijab as a symbol of passive submission.

For them the veil stands for an active interest in Islamic scripture. The new generation of veiled women emphasizes that they know the 'true' Islam and by doing so they distinguish themselves from traditional uneducated women who are sustaining traditions and traditional religion as part of their domestic lives. Radwa Abul-Azm, a 25 year-old veiled woman, says: 'For a big part of society, particularly in rural and low-class areas, wearing the hijab is merely a cultural practice. Some of the veiled women in those areas don't even know how to pray.'

In other words, contemporary veiling is different from the traditional women's use of the hijab. The latter group represents 'backwardness' and 'ignorance' and is veiled because previous generations had done so as well. The former reappropriates religion and occupies a visible space in modern domains of Egyptian society while conveying a political statement. Particularly, these women claim that they have become part of modernity itself as they have distanced themselves from traditional popular interpretations and practices of Islam and have politicized religion. They have pledged themselves to the religious knowledge of Islam by considering the sources and are not seen as part of the periphery anymore. Women wearing the hijab are part of the public scene, they have become an urban phenomenon and attend universities where modernity flourishes. Thus, this group of women challenges the long-lasting belief that education and modernization goes hand in hand with secularization and the decrease in religion by attempting to create an alternative modernity.

Nevertheless, there is also a paradox; on the one hand there is a large group of women who wear the hijab due to religious and political reasons and in doing so they wish to manifest a break linked to the practice and understanding of 'traditional' Islam. On the other hand, many young women see the hijab as something fashionable and mix 'eastern' with 'western' traditions.

Mona Abaza, a sociology professor at the American University of Cairo, believes that the hijab has transformed itself from a symbol of piety into a cultural mechanism, a political statement, and finally, a fashion trend: 'Like any other religious symbol, the hijab has taken multiple meanings through time,' she says. The way the hijab is worn in Egypt varies from the Spanish liberal style - the so-called 'Spanish wrap', a technique where the hijab is wrapped behind the neck - to the most conservative niqab. Moreover, veiled women are not restricted to wearing the galabyya anymore as the 'hijab' style has turned into a thriving business with (online) shops and fashion magazines presenting the latest fashion trends while symbolizing the consumerist version of the hijab. Women can buy everything there from hijab accessories to underwear, from bonnet caps to free halal body care. The motifs are as diverse as possible and women can find colored and bleached designs. Moreover, they can get advice on various issues such as how to 'add a little volume to their hijab styles' so as to avoid a 'flat hijab' or 'what not to wear a la hijab'. In this way, women can be modest and appealing at the same time.

Inextricably linked to the phenomenon of the chic and consumerist version of the hijab is 'petro Islam'. This refers to the large number of Egyptian middle-class families who travel to the Gulf countries and come back home with a different way of perceiving Islam. Particularly, they claim that being an Islamist and supporter of consumerist values at the same time does not contradict each other - something which is commonly practiced in the Gulf countries.

It seems as if the hijab has also turned into a social phenomenon which does not mainly represent religiosity or a political statement and that a mix of demand and supply and 'doctrinal flexibility' have led to the emergence of a new fashion: the Islamic veil. Nonetheless, it is important to differentiate between women who wear the hijab due to religious reasons and women who see it as something cultural or fashionable. But above all, it is crucial to realize that it is merely patronizing to assume that every single veiled woman is oppressed. Thus, if it is desirable to understand the meaning of the hijab, which is considered as the 'epitomy' of the Islamic 'other', it is necessary to disassociate ourselves from pigeonhole models and means of organizing the world in binary oppositions such as 'modern' versus 'backward' or 'oppressed' versus 'liberated'.

Female Genital Mutilation in the Middle East: A religious or cultural practice?

Elisavet Paraskeva-Gkizi

Every year 3 million girls worldwide, the majority under 15 years of age, undergo the procedure of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This operation is a centuries-old tradition, deeply rooted in parts of Africa and some countries in Asia and the Middle East, where obscurity still covers sexual habits like the FGM, as they remain a taboo.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) FGM comprises "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non medical reasons". There are valid arguments that this social custom begun around 3,000 BC but the origins of FGM are hard to trace. This indicates the strong attachment between FGM and cultural traditions, as this custom has also "managed to survive fifty years of criminalization" (The UN Commission on Human Rights had condemned FGM in 1952) and informative campaigns, performed from both non-governmental and governmental organizations.

Although Africa is usually seen as the birthplace of the tradition, it seems that it varies from region to region in its use and meaning. It is more widespread in Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan, but statistics for such a private practice are very difficult to check for accuracy. It is generally accepted, when it comes to Middle Eastern countries, that it is a cultural and not a religious practice, as Thomas von der Osten-Sacken and Thomas Uwer note.

In general, there are four recognized types of FGM, the first of which is the clitoridectomy, accounting for 85% of all mutilation operations. The name of the first type of FGM, the "Sunna procedure" (meaning "following the Prophet's tradition"), is often used as evidence of its connection with Islam. The second type is the excision of the clitoris, but may include the Labia Minora or other, larger incisions. The third type is the removal of part or all of the external genitalia (Labia Majora) and the forth type is the pricking, piercing or incision of the clitoris and of the labia.

However, although FGM is considered a custom practiced by some Islamic societies, it can be found in non-Muslim communities too. FGM concerns a very small number of women in Israel, and a large number in Egypt. According to a 2005 UNICEF Report, 97% of the female population in Egypt (Muslim and Coptic Christian) is subjected to genital mutilation. FGM is not mentioned in the Quran but it is, however, found in Saudi Arabia among few immigrant women and some Bedouin tribes and in Oman, in limited numbers throughout the country.

According to the latest findings, FGM in the 'Middle East proper' (i.e. excluding North Africa) is widely practiced mainly in the Kurdish regions of Iraq where the average rage of genital cutting is 72.7% and reaches 100% in some areas. Yemen is another place where FGM is found, as a high proportion of women, 50% in some regions, are being subjected to the operation. FGM might be, however, a relatively recent phenomenon in Yemen; possibly a result of the contacts of local tribes with communities in the Horn of Africa.

Genital Mutilation is a rite of great importance for these

communities who practice it, as its most widespread purpose is to prepare young women for their oncoming transition from childhood to womanhood. FGM has become an important part of cultural identity for girls and women, giving them a sense of pride. Mutilated women in these societies are thought to have more chances of getting married than someone who is uncircumcised. In addition, negative perceptions in rural areas regarding genital anatomy and function are common. It is considered that FGM restrains women's sexual desires, while female organs need to be excised to preserve a woman's morality.

Lack of knowledge is another aspect of this phenomenon, as it is also sometimes believed that women are not able to have children if they have not been genitally mutilated. Consequently, refusal to be genitally mutilated could be reason enough for a man to refuse marrying a bride. Therefore, FGM is closely linked to the level of education of girls, their families and their communities as a whole. A recent research in Iraqi Kurdistan led by the German NGO WADI showed that educated people are easier to be convinced not to practice FGM.

The Kurdish Regional Government is said to have been cooperating with advocacy groups since 2008 to discourage women from performing this operation. The Iraqi Kurdish Government has found some allies in an (well publicized internationally) initiative to abolish FGM, in local media and women's organizations. The Sulaymaniyah-based "Rewan", a non-governmental women's organization, has been fighting against this practice since the region established its autonomy from Baghdad in 1991. Public discussions on the topic of FGM among peoples of the Kurdish society, unthinkable a few years ago, are now possible because of these organizations' hard work. There is a strong belief among Kurdish Parliamentarians that a bill banning FGM will be brought to the Parliament this year.

A ministerial decree banning FGM in Yemen has been in place since 2001 but results have not been positive. Ironically, the only change since 2001 is that women are subjected to genital mutilation at home and not in hospitals. According to Wafa Ahmad Ali, a leader of the Yemen Women's Union (YWU), the attitude of Yemeni societies hasn't changed towards women's 'inferior' position in society, although progress has been made on promoting public debate about FGM.

The Yemeni government has been attempting to introduce new policies such as encouraging debates to inform the public in order to achieve a total ban of FGM in the country; YWU, NGOs and religious communities participate in this project. Religious leaders all over the country, after governmental exhortation, are trying to persuade Yemeni people to stop practicing FGM, as they preach that Islam is incompatible with this concept.

These views are shared by a host of influential Muslim figures. In 2006 Muslim scholars from around the world gathered in a conference in Cairo to determine FGM's relationship to Islam. The head of the al Azhar mosque, Sunni Islam's top authority Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, declared that circumcision was not an obligation for a woman from a religious point of view. Other Muslim scholars participating in the conference accepted Tantawi's declarations and promised to oppose the continuation of FGM.

Nevertheless, there is still the impression that FGM is a way of manifesting gender inequality which predominates in Muslim societies, appropriable from the religious authorities of Islam. Certainly FGM has had ties with Islam but is mostly a cultural practice deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures. The lack of knowledge renders difficult any effort of abandonment of FGM in these societies but the fact that, lately, there has been worldwide mobilization about the issue is something positive. As part of this mobilization some Arab governments (in Egypt, Yemen and Iraqi Kurdistan) with the cooperation of NGOs are trying, through seminars and media campaigns, to inform the population of the damaging effects of FGM on health and thus raise awareness; in some cases they have been quite successful, as it seems to have happened in Iraqi Kurdistan. Sadly, the practice is a phenomenon that seems to be growing in some areas, in spite of 'modernization', as Osten-Sacken and Uwer cite, and this could be due to the resistance of local societies against the forces of the 'West' to impose rules about what is right and what is wrong.

Christians in Turkey, A long and sad story

Menelaos Agaloglou

The purpose of this article is to examine the historical and current position of the Christian minority in Turkey and try to identify how the Turkish state treats Christians in its constituency. The article will focus its attention on the old Christian populations' of Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians, as well as to the current Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

Christianity in Anatolia (current-day Turkey) has deep roots since it is the birth place of numerous Christian saints: Paul, Timothy, Nicholas and Polycarp. The Byzantine Empire was the first political entity to formalize Christianity and adopt it as its religion while spreading it in and beyond the empire's domains. Furthermore Christian communities (such as Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians) have been living in the area long before the Seljuk Turks arrived. For example the Assyrian people have lived in southeastern Turkey since the 20th century BC, making them the oldest ethnic group in Turkey. Similarly, the Greeks have being settling in Asia Minor and the Black sea since the 8th century BC. With the conquest of the area by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, the Christian minority became subjugated to the Muslim Ottomans. Christians were perceived as second-class citizens. Christian families were obliged to pay a special tax as well as to donate their sons to fight for the Ottoman Empire; these soldiers were known as Janissaries. Moreover testimony against Muslims by Christians was not acceptable in the courts, they were forbidden to carry weapons or ride atop horses and their houses were not allowed to overlook those of Muslims. It is worth noting however that most historians agree that the Ottoman Empire was more tolerant to different religions, than the Byzantine Empire or

medieval European kingdoms were. The Ottoman Empire often served as a refuge for the persecuted Jews of Europe, and different ethno-religious groups were allowed to open and run their own schools, a benefit that the Byzantine Empire never granted to its minorities.

Entering the 20th century, the situation changed dramatically. The combination of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Young Turk's extreme National agenda created a chaotic situation that led to genocidal campaigns against Christians living in the empire, and Christians were portrayed as alien subjects that cooperate with the enemies of the Ottomans. The strongest accusations were made against the alliances between the Armenians and the Russians and the Greeks with the Greek state. In the period 1914-1923 the Ottoman government instigated a violent campaign against its Christian citizens. The Genocide of the Armenians led to more than 1 million dead people, whereas the genocidal campaigns against the Greeks led from 200,000 to 1 million dead people and the Assyrian Genocide perpetrated against the Syriacs led to 250,000 deaths. After the creation of the Turkish secular state in 1923, the pogroms against Christians and the population exchange (1923) between Greece and Turkey (where 1, 5 million Greeks were deported from Asia Minor) the Christian population today numbers just 0.13% of the 72 million in current-day Turkey. Of the remaining Christians, 70% are Armenians, 16% Syrian Orthodox, 4% Greek Orthodox, 4% Jehovah's Witness, 3% Protestants and 3% are adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church (and form the largest Christian community in Iraq). These facts are worrying, especially if we take into consideration that in the beginning of the 20th century one third of the population was Christian.

According to the "Country Study of Turkey" (Library of the US Congress), there are currently fewer than 10,000 Greeks living in Turkey. They live mostly in Istanbul and the islands of Imbros, Tenedos and the Princes Islands. According to Human Rights Watch, the Greek minority is too small to sustain itself demographically, due to emigration, much higher death rates than birth rates and continuing discrimination. Greek populations may also be found in Pontos which have converted to Islam in order to escape the exchange. They are very cautious in identifying themselves as Greeks due to the hostility of the Turkish state. Although they are one of the three officially recognized minorities in Turkey (Greeks, Armenians and Jews) they continue to encounter problems in relation to education and property rights. For instance, there are serious restrictions on the training of clergy since the closure of the Halki Seminary in 1971, a theological institution that was founded at 1884 and has since provided the clergy for the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the spiritual center for Orthodox Greeks since the Byzantine Empire.

The most populous Christian group in Turkey is the Armenians. The present population is estimated between 40,000 and 70,000, mostly living in Istanbul and its environs. The community is an official minority and enjoys its own religious, educational, socio-cultural institutions and its distinct media. The Armenians are the most active Christian group in Turkish politics, despite the fact that no Turkish Armenian has been elected in the Turkish Grand National Assembly since 1960. A political active Armenian was Hrant Dink who, as a journalist, advocated for the reconciliation of Turkey with Armenia. He was murdered in broad daylight in front of his newspaper office. Dink was well known for supporting the rights of the Armenians and had inspired thousands of Armenians worldwide. Even more worrying for the Turkish state should be the reaction of the police which treated the assassin as a national hero. It is worth noting that thousands of Turks protested against the murder shouting the slogan 'We are all Armenians'. Now, since Armenians are working in low-paid, mostly domestic, jobs and hold an ambiguous position within Turkish society, the discussion for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide still remains a fragile issue; nonetheless, the matter is discussed in parliaments around the globe.

Furthermore, around 20,000 Assyrian Syriacs live in Turkey, most of them in Istanbul. The rest live in Tur Abdin, Adiyaman, Diyarbakir, Kharput, and Ankara. They belong to different religious backgrounds (the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East). The treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and the new Nationalistic State of Turkey buried all hopes for a homeland for the Assyrians and started imposing a single, Turkish identity on its minorities. In the 70s and especially in the 80s there was a massive emigration of the Assyrians from the area of Mardin Tur Adbin near the Syrian frontier due to fear of the conflict of PKK with the Turkish army in the area, but also to countries of Western Europe. In 2000, with stability returning to the area, many people returned to their homeland. Assyrians demand that the Turkish state recognizes their rights, especially in relation to education and their use of their own language, which is taught in foreign universities in the West, but not in Turkey. Assyrians feel Turkey to be their home and are very keen to state that Turks are the warmest people on earth, but on the other hand see that their rights will be guaranteed and fully respected only if/when Turkey joins the EU.

Since 2005 attacks against Christian missionaries and priests in Turkey have attracted international attention. Father Andrea Santoro, a Catholic priest, was killed in Trabzon in 2006 by a 17-year old male. In 2007, the Malatya massacre followed. Three employees of the Malatya Bible Publishing House were tortured and killed while they were taped. Two of the victims were converts from Islam; it has recently been the case that it is welcomed for Christians to convert to Islam, but the opposite is very dangerous. The attacks were blamed on the 'deep state' of Turkey (mainly ultranationalist members of the army) who wanted to portray the Islamic government of not protecting the minorities. On the other hand, the message was once more sent that the Christian minority is not welcome in Turkey. Attacks against Christians are by no means concentrated only in Turkey. Open Doors UK estimated in 2.000 that 100 million Christians face persecution in the Muslim world and India, with numbers to have an extremely rising tendency, as religious violence has risen as a whole, globally.

Turkey portrays itself as a global strategic player that promotes peace. Its recent criticism of Israel and its role in the Iranian issue can only be described as positive signs. On the other hand, Turkey has a problem when it comes to examining its own history. Since the country wants to become part of the European Union, more and more members of the European Parliament demand the recognition of the Armenian genocide as a prerequisite in order for the country to enter the EU. The International Association of Genocide Scholars, the world's leading genocide scholars' organization, passed a resolution for the genocides perpetrated by the Ottomans against the Christian minorities and claims "whereas the denial of genocide is widely recognized as the final stage of genocide, enshrining impunity for the perpetrators of genocide, and demonstrably paving the way for future genocides...is the conviction of the association that the Ottoman campaign against Christian minorities between 1914-1923 constituted a genocide against Armenians, Assyrians and Pontiac and Anatolian Greeks".

To conclude, Christians in Turkey, as well as in the whole of the Middle East, are a minority and they should be protected by the state. Christians are currently being portrayed as foreigners, collaborators with other states or simply as unwanted Westerners. However, it is an irony that the same states that are unwilling to protect their own minorities make statements about the racism that Muslims face in Europe and the USA. Racism will end only when we accept that people are different, have the right to be different and believe in different values.

The Samaritans in Palestine: Stuck in the Middle East

Zakia Aqra

In the region of historic Palestine, amidst the rift between the Christian and Muslim Arabs and the Jews, lives a group of people known as the Samaritans; and yes, they still exist. Incorporating features from both sides but keeping a safe distance from both by not identifying with either side, they have managed to survive all the hostilities from the 5th century BC to the 21st century AD.

Josef Cohen, a Samaritan, was ambushed on his way home by a group of Palestinian militants who mistook him for a settler near the Israeli settlement Bracha. A little later, he was shot by Israeli soldiers at a roadblock who mistook him for a 'terrorist'.

The Samaritans are an ethno-religious group present in the territories of historic Palestine for centuries. Samaritanism is an Abrahamic religion that accepts the five books of Moses, while rejecting the Hebrew Bible and other Holy books that followed. According to their holy scripts they are descendants of the ancient southern Kingdom of Israel. They split from the Jews (Northern kingdom of Israel) in the 6th century BC when the Assyrians conquered the Kingdom and remained in the area of Palestine. They are closely related to Jews but are non-Jewish Israelites.

While in the BC period they numbered thousands (in some records even up to 2 million) their population was almost extinct in 1917, numbering no more than 150. The resulting inter-marriages brought about genetic defects in their offspring. Now, with a population of a little more than 700, they still suffer by 7% in genetic defects and lack of women. Their heritage is patrilineal, therefore their community includes Christian, Muslim and Jewish women from Israel and Palestine and even mail-ordered brides from abroad. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has split the Samaritan community in two: half of them live in Kiryat Luza, which is close to their holy mountain Gerizim (south of Nablus in the West Bank) and near to the Israeli settlement of Barcha; the rest live in Holon in Israel. Before the First Intifada the Samaritans lived in Nablus but fled because of the situation. As they say: "we weren't hurt, but we were scared." This small community has managed to co-exist with both Israelis and Palestinians, as their primary preoccupation has been conserving their heritage.

The Samaritans in Palestine are active within Palestinian society; they attend schools and universities and have businesses such as stores (trading merchandise originating from Israel). They are also represented in the Palestinian parliament. In 1996, the Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat granted a seat to the Samaritans in the Palestinian Legislative

Council. On the other hand the Samaritans in Israel serve in the army and are considered 'Jews' according to the Law of Return. Both communities in Kiryat Luza and Holon have permits that allow them to enter both Israel and Palestine through the "Samaritan Blocker", a checkpoint to enter the city of Nablus which is exclusively for Samaritans and is open even when the rest of the region is under Israeli curfew.

The fact that there has been no discrimination from either side, at least officially, gives them the sensation of being a bridge between the two communities. Their priests have repeatedly emphasised maintaining a 'neutral position' in the conflict. Mount Gerizim International Peace Centre and the Samaritan Medal of Peace and Humanity Achievements function as meeting points with a positive aura between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Recipients of the medal have been Munib Masri, King Abdullah of Jordan, Israeli President Shimon Peres, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Palestinian Minister of Development Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh.

As the Samaritan leaders candidly admit, being on good terms with both Israelis and Palestinians and reserving a neutral stance is the best way to promote Samaritan issues and especially preserve their identity and traditions. Benyamin Tsedaka offers the best example of this effort to preserve the Samaritan heritage while presenting its culture to the world: he is the editor of the Samaritan News bi-weekly magazine (A.B.) which is issued in four languages (Modern Hebrew, Ancient Hebrew, English and Arabic). He is also involved in organizing international conferences on Samaritanism; seven have been held since 1988 (the last one in Papa, Hungary in 2008, and the forthcoming one in Halle, Germany in 2012). He has also conducted the Israelite Samaritan Choir which is said to sing the 'most ancient music'.

For the Samaritan community, a bystander in the everlasting conflicts of the region, the promotion of the Samaritan identity and the maintenance of its heritage while staying aside from the conflict are essential for its survival. Dating back to the 5th century BC, when the Judeans of the Northern kingdom (Jews) returned from their exile in Babylon, the Samaritan-Israelites were accused of betrayal; in the era of Jesus (in the New Testament) they are portrayed as "The Good Samaritans" and in the post-war era as 'Jews of Palestine'. In a region where centuries of conflict have granted them the apt skills for survival, in the 21st century one may easily depict them as the 'resilient Samaritans'.

Islam and Facebook: Comment, Like, Share

Christina Prifti

Social networks are made of groups of individuals tied by specific types of interdependency such as common interests, exchange of knowledge and more importantly, the same system of beliefs. In older forms of social networks (clans, tribes, religious groups, nations), this last component is crucial. For the "family" of Facebook this is clearly not the case. It would be more accurate to say, then, that Facebook endorses a variety of social networks. And like the old times, theses social networks either coexist or are in conflict with each other. However, conflict may also come from within a social network when some individuals adhere to principles different from the founding ones.

Despite the fact that it is a product of the Western world, and more particularly of the US, and even though one of its co-founders, Marc Zuckerberg, is Jewish, this does not seem to be a problem for the large number of Muslims who use Facebook all around the world. On the contrary, Facebook is becoming more and more attractive not only to the Islamic youth, as expected, but also to Islamic organizations.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, comes third in the list of countries using Facebook, after the US and UK. On the other side, the war-torn countries of Iraq and Afghanistan are at places 94 and 133. This comes not as a surprise, as only around 0.10 and 0.00 per 100 people are Internet users. At the same time in Pakistan, 1.00 per 100 people are internet users, reaching the thirty-sixth place of the global rank. What is more, in Iraq and Afghanistan female users take up the 26% and 14% of total users, while in Pakistan female users reach the percentage of 32%.

In the conservative but oil-rich Saudi Arabia, access to the Internet is not much of an issue as people have better access to IT technology: internet users are estimated to be 6.50 per 100 people while the number of personal computers in use is 13.7 per 100 people. As a result, out of 28 million people, 2.3 million are subscribed in Facebook. Women take up 33% of the total users, while usually faceless or under nicknames and comic images instead of photographs. In any case, in a country where wahabbism, one of the most conservative sects of Islam is being practiced, Facebook clearly constitutes a way to socialize and meet others. In this sense Facebook in Saudi Arabia does constitute a social network, where young people especially between the ages 18-34, use the website for social relations and possible flirting.

However, in the cases of Iran, Syria and Pakistan, Facebook goes beyond the social spectrum further into the political and religious ones. And not without consequences: Syria and Iran are not even in the formal list of Facebook users. The Syrian government has banned the use of Facebook with the premise that the website promoted attack on authorities while the government also feared Israeli infiltration of Syrian social networks. In Iran, during the 2009 election, Facebook was banned due to fears that opposition movements were being organized online. Furthermore, it was only recently that, according to Reuters, Pakistan's Telecommunication Authority directed Internet service providers to block access to Facebook indefinitely because of an online competition to draw the Prophet Mohammad.

One of the biggest Islamic organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, has an official page in Facebook. The page received the go-ahead from the Brotherhood's second in-command Muhammad Habib and is founded by Khairat Al Shater, deputy Chairman of the MB and currently in prison. The scope of the page, according to the organization itself, is to spread the Islamic message and push for the return of an Islamic caliphate. The discussion on the page is anchored on these pillars: the salvation of Islam and issues of the Islamic nation, the spread of stories of the Prophet and the organization of all Islamic parties to support these initiatives. Other Islamic pages (such as Al-Quar'an & Sunnah Pelitaku with 266,592 fans) mostly focus on the importance of Islamic ethics (e.g. charity and praying), the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the teaching of Qur'anic studies. However, in the case of MB, the discussion often expands to topics such as criticism for Egypt's internal and foreign policy, the Israeli politics in Palestine and human rights violations. What is more, the organization clearly states that it welcomes constructive criticism as well as items to be posted under "other views", in an effort to cure misconceptions about the movement in western countries.

Nevertheless, criticism may often come from within the Islamic realm and it is mostly found on two levels: within the MB in Egypt and in other countries, and in the Islamic world in general. More specifically, other Muslim Brotherhood leaders such as Hamdi Hasan have strongly criticized this initiative on the basis that it could lead to an internal division of the movement promoted by the new generation. The Nigerian Islamic court has banned the debate on the implementation of Sharia law on social utilities such as Facebook. And in a more philosophical debate, the 'moral' battle between Islamists and secularists for the role of Islam in modern societies has been also transferred to the virtual space. High ranked clerics, Muslim priests and the more conservative Islamic community advocate that Facebook promotes un-Islamic practices as it often leads to gossip, flirting and homosexual relations, 'corrupting' the Islamic youth. Unless it is used to spread the words of the Quran, some argue, Facebook should be forbidden. In many cases, more conservative Muslims believe that just by logging in to such websites constitutes a violation of religious teachings. Another level of debate could be added at this point; it refers to the way that Islam should be promoted, according to the various Islamic schools of thought: does the scope purify the means? If it is to spread the words of the Quran, should it be allowed for Muslims to log in? On a dif-

ferent level, for example, while political Islam and Islamic extremism both advocate that Islam should dominate in the cultural, religious and political system and, thus, pursue the creation of an Islamic state, they differ in the means of how this can be achieved. Political Islam uses more social means such as education while Islamic extremism often adheres to violent practices.

However, the advantages of modern technology have been long ago appreciated by extremist organizations. The use of internet, in order to build and sustain connections with Islamic networks globally, has been a rather useful tool. In the same spirit Facebook pages, affiliated to extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda, have been created allegedly to raise funds and recruit young people. According to various newspapers, Al Qaeda members have appeared in Facebook spreading terror messages. Even though it is difficult to imagine the 60-year old Al-Zawahiri creating a Facebook account and uploading his picture with a semi-automatic rifle, it is easy to understand why militant groups would be eager, in a less obvious way, to penetrate online social networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Whether the use of Facebook is in agreement with Islamic principles is of little importance. What is noteworthy is that this virtual space constitutes one more space to raise questions about Islam's role in modern times and its ability to evolve and reform. In any case, according to Facebook's most frequent quotes, one can in the site's pages Comment: express an opinion about almost everything, Like: publicly criticize and doubt principles and practices, and Share: information can be accessible to everyone. This is a worth-mentioning breakthrough for closed and firm systems of values such as the Islamic one, in which the tajdid (the renaissance of Islam) can only come from within. And by within I refer to the new generation of young Muslims, who are able to criticize and reconsider other social networks as well as their own.

Tracing the trail of Fred Halliday

Ilias Tasopoulos

His distinctive writing style along with his creative thought exercised a decisive influence over the study of international relations, and the Middle East in particular. Upcoming books and articles to be released after his passing away might cause everyone to rethink the lasting impact of Fred Halliday as time might reveal new aspects of his work's continuing legacy.

Despite being a trailblazer of international relations' research, Halliday wasn't interested in formulating grand theoretical schemes. In any case, a career as a professor at the London School of Economics was not the highlight of Halliday's life, although his scholarly achievements were plenty. His work brought the Middle East closer to Europe by raising the whole world's awareness of events happening in the Middle East. His intriguing and provocative comments deepened the understanding of the factors shaping global attitudes about international relations. Halliday's enlightening lectures on what was described as his passion, the politics and society in the Islamic world and the Middle East, were bound to catch public attention.

His frequent travels all over the Middle East were an opportunity to exchange views and engage in political discussions with locals. Before settling down in Europe, Halliday participated in the struggle against the Sultanic regime of Oman in the 1970s, wrote about the bleak prospects of the regime of the Shah just before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and visited war-torn countries like Yemen and Afghanistan. His real life experience was probably crucial in triggering his commitment to universalize human rights' norms.

neglected in any way. The willingness of Middle Eastern and Western states to use violence before employing all other options went against his beliefs.

He used to castigate great powers for their "hegemonic abstentionism", arguing that this was only a justification of their indifference to what was happening in Middle Eastern societies. By exposing the underlying assumptions of the solidarity expressed by western societies to the plight of third world countries, he contended that solidarity only matters if it is combined with knowledge about the actual conditions of the people concerned. Fred Halliday set the interests of the Middle Eastern people, who he knew only too well, as a priority to his thinking. He attempted to convince the West that Middle Eastern societies were not simple units, and viewing them as small dots in a world map would not be beneficial for anyone. At the same time, he refused to hold the West wholly responsible for all the problems in the Middle East, opting instead to focus on the influence of the regional actors and suggest that local people should not absolve themselves of blame.

His understanding of the region was enhanced by his command of more than eleven languages, combined with an ability to switch comfortably from one language to another. This enabled Halliday to fit his ideas in every linguistic context and, eventually, capture the essence of whatever he was trying to explore. He believed that language is key to understanding a culture and a peoples, and he not only captured the essence of what he was trying to explore, but actually

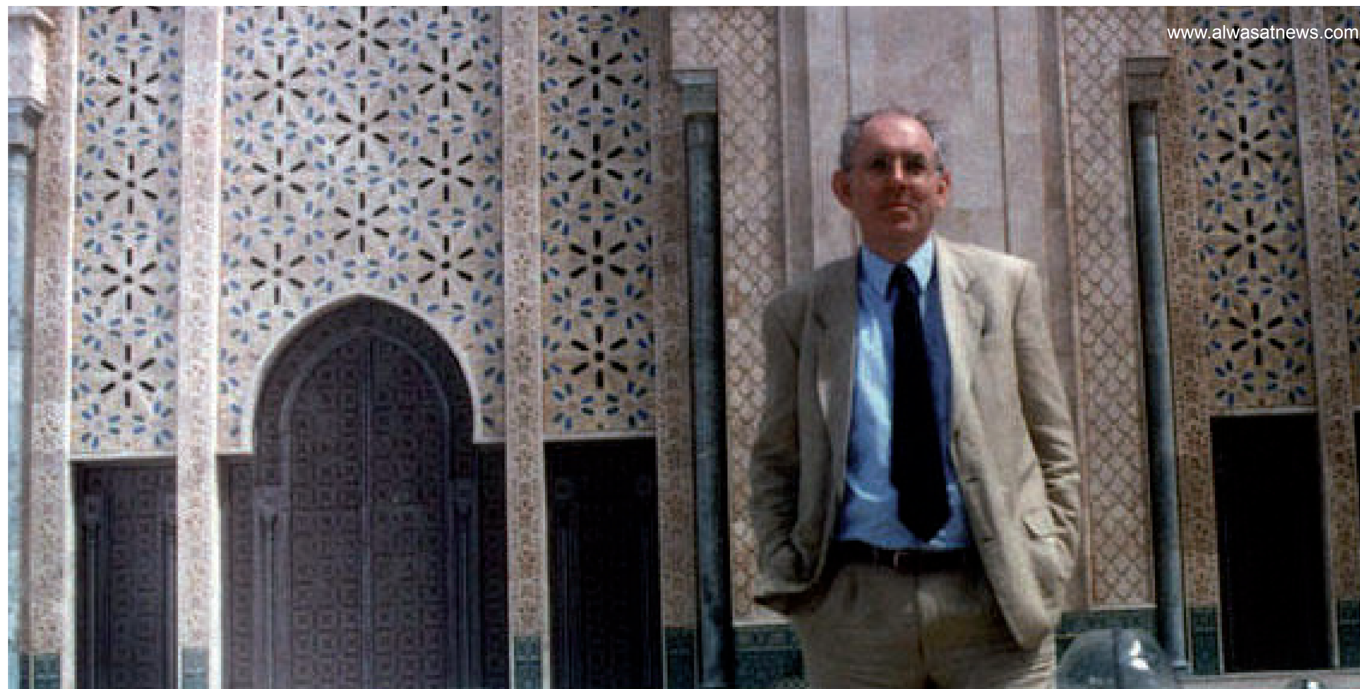
Halliday wrote a series of books, both as a journalist and an academic scholar, about subjects rarely covered. He would always state his arguments skillfully, however controversial these might have been. The devastating critique of the complicated leftist discourse was a prime example of how Halliday chose to express his opinion. His body of work could be seen as a struggle to discover a balance between the hard realities of interstate political relations and internationally recognised fundamental human rights.

Halliday's uncompromising stance against the violation of basic human rights gave credence to his innovative ideas about Western approaches towards the region. In this regard he suggested that the West should engage forces capable of influencing political outcomes in the Middle East, even if this meant negotiating with regimes in power or movements inimical to the Western presence in the region. The only precondition that he insisted on was that basic human rights were not to be

evoked communication with the people he came into contact. Referring to local jokes and incidents affecting the daily lives of the inhabitants was a common feature of his writing. But the most distinguishing characteristic of his writing was his use of language in interpreting political concepts and actions. Halliday argued eloquently against using words with meanings not clearly defined in his arduous attempts of challenging comforting stereotypes, widespread in the literature of international relations.

The multitude of skills acquired after years of hard work meant that Halliday was one of the few scholars able to make a comprehensive approach to the study of international relations. Halliday examined everything in a historical perspective, presenting it in a vivid, illustrative, direct and compelling manner, as though he was in a dialogue with everyone reading his books and articles.

Many field experts, coming from diverse academic backgrounds that range from gender studies to political science hailed his holistic approach. Halliday offered alternative explanations to a host of issues in the Middle East, while, in some cases, long predated upcoming events in his writings. But even when his predictions failed, Halliday's remarks presented the probable unconventional choices that could have been made. Halliday was a political intellectual, who, according to his colleagues "when he spoke to you, you had to listen and when he wrote, you had to read him."



The Israeli attack on Free Gaza: Some strategic notes

Sotiris Roussos

It is too early for an attempt to analyse possible strategic repercussions of the bloody Israeli raid against the Free Gaza flotilla. Despite its ugliness as an outright breach of international law and as a violation of any notion of ethics in relations among nations, it is not yet certain whether this tragic incident is just another episode in the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict or a crossroads in the relations between Israel and the world. Most probably, the truth will be with the former but we have to bear in mind some facts and conditions.

First, this is the first time Israel is violently confronting civil society groups and activists away from the Palestinian territories. Most of them came from western countries and most importantly from Turkey. Foreign pro-Palestinian and pro-peace groups have been active mainly in the West Bank, but they are very small in number, scattered, and under tight Israeli control. The flotilla example presents a new challenge for Israeli strategists, who have failed to articulate an efficient response. They resorted to cruel use of disproportionate force, leading to a blow on Israel's international image and attracting rather than discouraging further activist mobilisation. Such mobilisation will sustain the Palestinian issue and particularly the blockade of Gaza in the media's top stories.

Second, perhaps for the first time in its history, Israel is clearly lacking a strategy of alliances. The State of Israel had initially formulated a strategy of non-Arab alliances that is with Turkey, Iran of the Shah and Ethiopia. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and instability in the Horn of Africa, in the same period, deprived Israeli strategy of its Iranian and Ethiopian flanks. However, the Camp David Peace Agreements with Egypt in 1978 and, most importantly, the peace treaty with Jordan and the strategic alliance with Turkey in the 1990s substituted quite suc-

cessfully for the loss of Iran. Today, Israel is alienating itself from Turkey and Netanyahu's policy places its "cold peace" partner, Egypt, under serious strain regarding co-operation in Gaza's blockade. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that this is a very delicate transition/succession period for the Egyptian leadership. It is not a coincidence that Egypt opened the Rafah crossing immediately after the flotilla bloody attack.

Third, this absence of meaningful regional alliances makes Israel a heavy strategic burden for the USA. The administration will rather not follow policies similar to those of George Bush I and James Baker, in 1992. It will not press Israel to a more sensible position. The stakes are very high in vital domestic issues and President Obama would not spare any potential supporters among the powerful American-Jewish lobby. This situation poses insurmountable impediments to any serious American initiative for a breakthrough in the peace process and it is reducing US policy to mere crisis management.

Fourth, there is a clear shift in the regional balance of power and strategic partnerships in the Middle East. Iran and Turkey are now aspiring to become regional hegemons at the expense of the Arab order and the declining presence of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, Turkey is aspiring to become a major energy hub, cultivating close relations with Iran, Russia and the Caucasus states. The Gulf states, on the other hand, are looking all the more towards the East and their new big customers: the oil-hungry economies of South and East Asia. Some analysts have started to think that Israel's resort to a particularly challenging "visit, board, search and seizure" (VBSS) operation, despite other options available (to disable a ship by fouling its propellers), aimed to target not the Free Gaza flotilla but the ascending role of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Let us not forget the heated international debate over the demarcation of Turkish and Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zones in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Concluding, Israel is losing its strategic options, one by one. It relied exclusively on USA's might and their ability to intervene in the region forcefully but at the same time the Americans are already deep in the imbroglio of both Iraq and Afghanistan. Their capability to intervene militarily will soon be limited, although a show down on Iran should not be ruled out. The global balance of power might also change at the expense of US hegemony. Resort to disproportionate force would not rid Israel of the Palestinian presence. The blockade of Gaza has not brought

Hamas down. The Palestinian political leadership, on the other hand, (both Fatah and Hamas) are still jeopardizing their people's future by insisting on feuds and turf wars. External mingling in Palestinian affairs in the form of either Israeli-American support for Fayyad's government or Iranian-Syrian tutelage for Hamas may be tactically convenient, but is strategically detrimental for both groups. With the construction of Israeli settlements unabated and the Palestinian population on the rise, the prospects of a two-state solution are dwindling. The situation might, in two or three decades, resemble more that of South African Apartheid, and the solutions will be more painful for all parties in the region.

The Bulletin posts a multitude of positions in the context of free academic debate. These do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Middle East Bulletin or of the CEMMIS.

Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies

Department of Political Science and International Relations

Consulting Editor
Sotiris Roussos

Senior Editors
Marina Eleftheriadou
Ilias Tasopoulos

Coordinator
Alexia Liakounakou

Contributors
Menelaos Agaloglou
Anna Apostolidou
Zakia Aqra
Stella Athanasoulia
Marina Eleftheriadou
Alexia Liakounakou
Elisavet Paraskeva- Gkizi
Christina Prifti
Styliani Saliari
Ilias Tasopoulos
Chrysoula Toufexi

Senior Research Associate
Evangelos Tembos

English Language Editing
Alexia Liakounakou

Designing
azúcar K