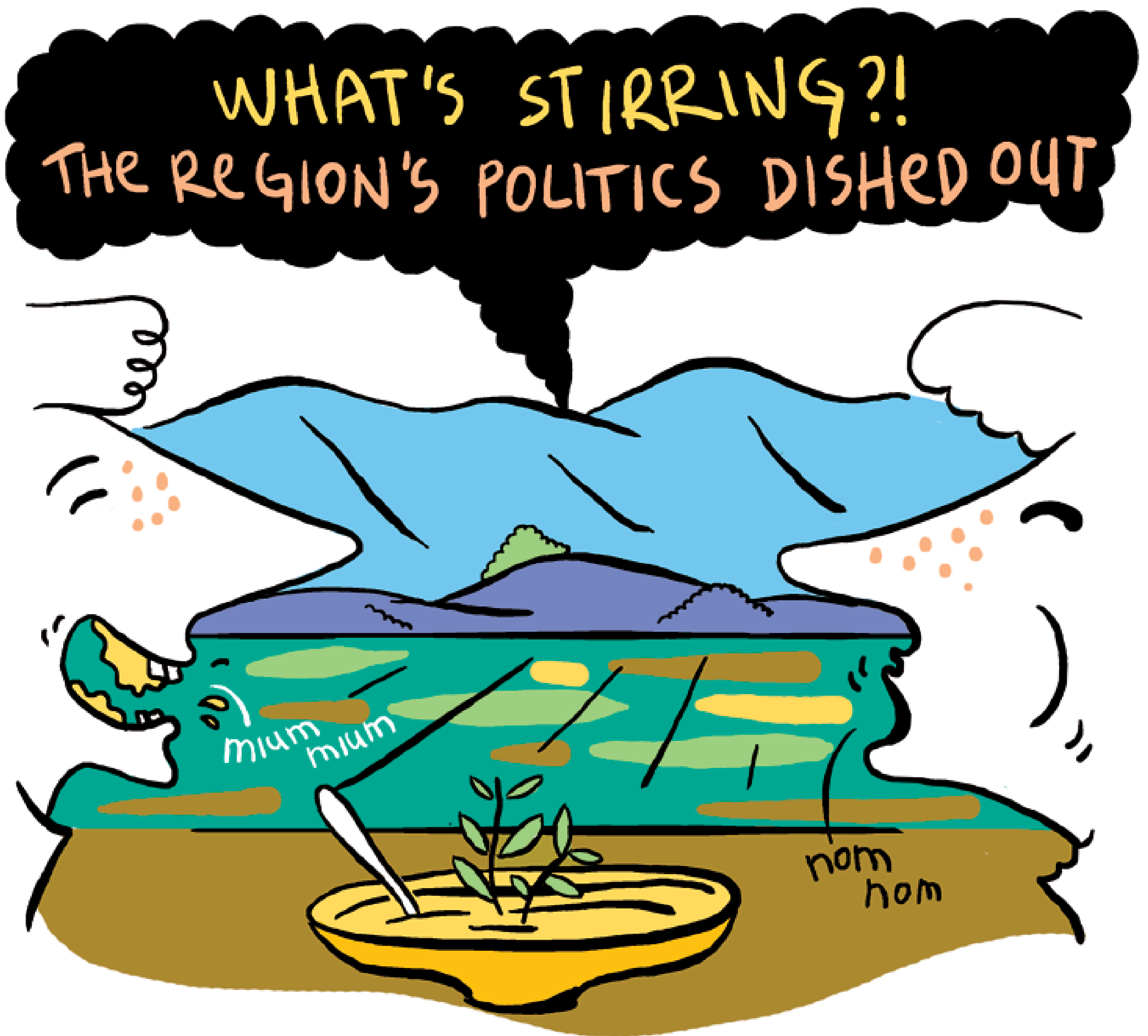
HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

perspectives

POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

Issue 13
October 2017

Middle East & North Africa



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Editorial

Food can be a potent trigger for childhood and adult memories. Everybody has a 'comfort food', something associated with good times and good company. Food is vital in a culture of generous hospitality where even if you have hardly anything to share you will go to great lengths to provide something for your guests. Whether you love savoury food or have a sweet tooth, Middle Eastern and North African cuisine will never let you down.

Countless combinations of tastes and textures shape the rich culinary landscape of the region. Bridging cultural differences and political rifts, food is a common thread for many in the Arabic speaking world. It is an essential part of a nation's identity and sophisticated recipes are almost an issue of national pride: although most mouth-watering dishes are often the result of a long history of international migration of ingredients.

Let's take the tomato. Originally from Latin America, it was introduced to the Middle East at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the British consul in Aleppo. Although viewed initially as an ingredient to be used exclusively in cooked dishes, today, the tomato is a critical and ubiquitous part of Middle Eastern cuisine, served fresh in salads, grilled with kebabs and made into sauces. The tomato's journey around the globe to the Middle East is even reflected in its local nomenclature: the early name used for the fruit in Iran was *Armani badenjan* (Armenian eggplant).

But the story goes even deeper than that. Kamal Mouzawak, founder of a chain of restaurants that have an ecological and social agenda, traces the rich history and provenance of ingredients without which today's elaborate Lebanese cuisine would not be the same. But even in Lebanon, which might be best known internationally for its culinary excellence, there is no free lunch. Noor Baalbaki takes a closer look at the dilemma Lebanese women face in a culture that thrives on its exquisite cuisine while imposing standards of thinness on women.

But there are still more political questions to be asked. Moroccan editorial cartoonist Khalid Gueddar portrays the story of Mouhcine Fikri and introduces us to the fish that nearly started a revolution.

In times when hunger has become a weapon of war and an estimated one million people in Syria are living under siege, forced through desperation to boil up herbs and grass as a soup, we cannot ignore the political dimension of food and nutrition. The agricultural activist Ansar Jasim describes how urban farming has become a form of resistance that enables people, to some extent, to win back sovereignty and dignity. Carol Khoury reviews a book by Anne Gough and Rami Zurayk on the Palestinian version of the Hunger games.

When there is abundance, consumption comes with responsibilities, especially in relation to food waste. Mamoun Ghallab, co-founder of a zero waste non-profit organisation, raises awareness of the entire chain of production and the tangible impact on energy and resources that throwing food away causes.

It has often been predicted that the next war in the region would be about water, however, there is already a low-scale conflict around Hummus. Dr. Ali Qleibo, author and expert in Palestinian culture, describes how Israel has successfully managed to internationally brand the chickpea, a typical instance of the process known as food colonisation.

As an example of the unifying qualities of cooking, the anthropologist Rachel Ann Rosenbaum shares her insights into a project that brings together women from both sides of the conflict lines in Lebanon in a form of peace building.

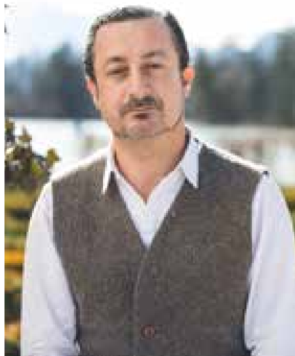
At home, the women cook. However, in restaurants, it is rare to find a female chef. Moroccan artist Zainab Fasiki has drawn a cartoon strip for this issue illustrating the way in which gender roles are firmly assigned when it comes to the Friday dish of couscous. Paul Scheicher reflects upon cafés in Tunis opening during Ramadan, a situation that disrupts the usual gender balance in these traditionally inscribed male-dominated spaces. The salt in the soup are illustrations by the Lebanese artist Joseph Kai.

And finally, over Wajdi Borgi's article on wine culture in Tunisia, please raise your cup and enjoy the issue!

Bente Scheller, Dorothea Rischewski, Bettina Marx and Heike Löschmann

A Taste of Here and Now

Kamal Mouzawak



Kamal Mouzawak is founder of Souk el Tayeb, Lebanon's first farmers' market. He is the son of farmers and producers and grew up in gardens and kitchens, tasting life, food and the fruits of the land at source. After a Major in graphic design, Kamal turned to food and travel writing, working as a macrobiotic cookery teacher and a healthy cooking, TV chef. Since its foundation in 2004, Souk el Tayeb has embraced the vision of celebrating food and traditions that unite communities and promote small-scale farmers and producers and a culture of sustainable agriculture. Today's Souk el Tayeb is an institution that includes a weekly farmers' market, regional festivals, education and awareness programmes, and its latest project 'tawlet Souk el Tayeb,' the farmers' kitchen. In addition, Kamal was a Board member of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity (2005 – 2007) and was awarded the titles of: New Hero, 2008 (MONOCLE magazine); Arab World Social Innovator, 2009 (Synergos); and, Ashoka fellow in 2011. In 2016 he received the Prince Claus Laureate.

Looking at a map of the Mediterranean, one might imagine that it resembles a large pond. It is the centre of the old world, the sea that the Romans called "*Mare Nostrum*" (our sea) and the link between the different continents; Europe on the one side, North Africa on the other, the Levant, and the Eastern Mediterranean. It is also the beginning of a new world, an inland sea that leads to great empires such as the Persian, the Indian, and the Chinese; a crossroads for people, civilizations, trade, religions, customs, and tastes.

Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) the historian of the Mediterranean, believes that with the exception of the olive tree, vines, and wheat, which were growing in the region at a very early stage, almost all the plants that we think of as Mediterranean originated miles away from the sea:

If Herodotus, the father of history, who lived in the fifth century BC, were to return to earth and join the tourists of today, he would face many surprises. I imagine him revisiting the places he knew in the eastern Mediterranean. How astonishing it all is! He cannot remember ever having seen these golden fruits hanging on dark-green bushes … orange trees, lemon trees, tangerine trees. Why, they were brought from the Far East by the Arabs! These strange, oddly-shaped spiky plants and flower stalks with their outlandish names; cactus, agaves, aloes and prickly pears - he never saw such things in his life. Why, they are from the Americas! And these tall trees with light coloured leaves, which yet have a Greek name, eucalyptus, he never saw their like. Why, they come from Australia! And the cypresses, which, like the other trees, he has never seen, are Persian. So much for the setting. But the simplest meal brings him more surprises - the tomato from Peru, the egg-plant from India, the pimento from Guyana, sweet corn from Mexico, rice the gift of the Arabs, not to mention the bean, the potato, the peach tree, a native of the mountains of China which became Iranian, and tobacco.[1]

So what do we eat today, and where does it come from? Today, the Levant's ingredients and tastes are an ideal result of globalization; we all live the same, play, eat the same but many years ago this was not the case. Migrants carried ingredients and spices with them, and had an enormous influence on international cuisine.

Food from There… and from Here: the Phoenicians

Phoenicians were the first navigator-traders between the East and the West. Their trade included grains, spices, dried and preserved foods and wine. The Phoenicians are generally renowned for their famous purple dye but they were just as famous for another product: the garum!

'Garum and other similar fish-based sauces were the ketchup of the ancient world, mass produced in factories, and sprinkled on anything savory' (see Oksman 2015). Coastal Phoenician cities had important fishing ports and an abundance of fish, so some was fermented and transformed into the fish sauce which was highly prized in the ancient world.

One of the most ornate sarcophagus in the ancient southern city of Tyre, bears an inscription indicating that it belonged to a garum producer.

The Arabs and the Spice Business

Originally, the Arab spice trade was conducted mostly by camel caravans over land routes but the Arab association with spices dates back to before the birth of Christ. Arabs dominated the spice trade and travelled back and forth to the Mediterranean region and beyond. Their dominance was so strong that Arabic was seen to be the language of traders in the Middle Ages. Arab spice merchants would create a sense of mystery by withholding the provenance of their spices and thereby guaranteeing high prices by telling fantastic tales about fighting off fierce winged creatures to reach spices growing high up on the cliffs.

In Arab cuisine, the supposed medicinal properties of certain spices compensated for the harmful properties of some foods. Spices promoted good and fought evil. There are some scholars who believe that it was the Arabs who first harvested cumin; the name derives from the Arabic *al-kamoun* or the Aramaic *kamuna*. Some literature suggests that cumin was harvested in the Levant during the earliest Biblical times, the Phoenicians carrying it westward to North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.

Potayto, Potarto, Banadoura, Bandora

Tomatoes are a central ingredient in Levantine cuisine, but they are in fact a very recent addition! There is no stew without tomato, no *tabouleh*, no salad, in fact it is hard to imagine Lebanese cuisine without tomatoes. Tomatoes significantly altered the cuisine of Lebanon and other Mediterranean countries. Today Lebanon occupies seventh place, just behind Italy, in the world's largest consumers of tomatoes per capita of the population.

Tomatoes originated from the Andes, where they grew wild, in what is now called Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador. They were first cultivated by the Aztecs and Incas as early as 700 AD. Following Christopher Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas, many 'New World' foods were transported to Europe and to the East. These included potatoes, sweet potatoes, maize, tomatoes, and chili peppers. In many instances, the New World foods had an important effect on the evolution of local cuisines.

Tomatoes arrived in Europe and the Levant around the sixteenth century, but they were considered poisonous and used as ornamental plants! They were not introduced to cuisine before the nineteenth century. Maize was brought by Columbus from the Americas to the rest of the world but, unlike tomatoes, it was quickly adopted in the Middle East, arriving in Lebanon and Syria in the 1520s. Corn helped spur population growth under the Ottomans and, as a result, many Europeans referred to maize as the Turkish grain: in India, it was known as Mecca.

The Ottomans

The Ottoman influence is very important in Lebanon – mainly because the country was part of the Ottoman Empire for four centuries. From 1516 to 1918, the Ottomans ruled Lebanon and introduced a variety of foods that have since become staples in the Lebanese diet.

Substantial migration led to the introduction of new foods, such as yoghurt, stuffed vegetables, and a variety of nuts. The Ottomans also increased the popularity of lamb. Some believe that the Turks also imported *burghol*, which plays an important role in the cuisine of the area, especially for *kibbeh*. However, some experts have argued that *kibbeh* is mentioned in ancient Assyrian and Sumerian writings with archaeological evidence indicating that the necessary utensils and products for making this

dish were available in the region long before Islam wielded its influence.

The French Joke

Orientalists always fantasise about the French influence on Lebanese cuisine, because of the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon (1923 – 1946). This influence is just that: a fantasy! During their relatively short time in Lebanon, the French did not influence the long standing and refined techniques of the Lebanese kitchen, nor the ingredients used. An example of one rather silly French-meets-Lebanese product is the Croissant bi Zaatar; a hybrid of the best French breakfast, and the best Lebanese breakfast, *manousheh*, with the thyme spice mix. Croissant bi Zaatar has become ubiquitous in the many bakeries in Beirut.

Refugee Cuisine: the Armenians and Palestinians

Of all the changes to culture and people living in Lebanon throughout the twentieth century, it is the Palestinians and the Armenians who have truly left their mark on Lebanese cuisine. The Palestinians came to Lebanon approximately seventy years ago and although they rarely kept their accents or their traditional dress they did of course keep their food! The Palestinians proudly cook for Palestine every day, through a *maftoul*, a *msakhan* or a *kafta bel thineh*.

The Armenians have had an even bigger impact on Lebanese food, indeed, there are approximately fifty Armenian restaurants to be found in Beirut alone, many based within Bourj Hammoud, also known as 'little Armenia.' The Lebanese system favours *hayabahbanum:* the preservation of the Armenian people and their identity. *Hayabahbanum* means 'Armenianess,' and is vital to the proud Armenian diaspora.

In the years following the Armenian Genocide of 1915, entire communities of Armenians settled in makeshift shelters on the outskirts of Beirut. Bourj Hammoud was born, and is widely recognised as Armenians' cultural cradle in Lebanon. There are streets in Bourj Hammoud named after Armenian cities, such as Yerevan, and rivers such as Arax.

Armenian food in the Middle East differs from that in Armenia, as it is mixed with Greek, Turkish and Arabic influences. Bourj Hammoud has the best *lahm b'ajin*, or meat pies, but done the Armenian way! And lots of *boerek* and *mante*. Armenians even have their own variations of *kibbeh*, and *kabab karaz* is somehow a form of the local *fatteh*!

The Lebanese Diaspora

Since the days of the Phoenician empire, the Lebanese have travelled the world and this diaspora is integral to the longstanding popularity of Lebanese cuisine. The diaspora is estimated to comprise 14 million people, far more than the internal population of Lebanon, which is approximately 4 million with Brazil currently having the largest number of Lebanese residents, estimated to be 6.4 million.

Throughout history, the Lebanese diaspora has used Lebanese identity to create networks to support its members and over time immigration has created Lebanese networks across the world. The Lebanese diaspora has developed a reputation for hard work and

business traditionally comprising merchants and entrepreneurs; maybe even including some descendants of Phoenician heritage! In addition, the Lebanese diaspora has sustained its Lebanese identity through food, starting restaurants and eateries all over the world, which are 'moorings', links, to the Levant homeland.

Honoring our Ancestors

Cuisines and tastes, whether they are old or new, are not just about ingredients.

Cuisine is an expression of tradition, just like architecture, or music, or dance, but cuisine is the most sincere and authentic expression and the one that travels the furthest and the best. By cuisine I mean the food of the everyday. Not necessarily court, or elite, or restaurant cuisine but food cooked by ordinary people and eaten everyday: that is the true cuisine and expression of tradition.

The 15 million Lebanese abroad could not take their houses and their beloved villages with them, but they did take their recipes. *Kibbeh* and *tabbouleh* have been adopted by countries all over the world and today *sfihha* and *kibbeh* are so much a part of Brazilian cuisine that their Lebanese origins have nearly been forgotten!

Home cuisine is a simple and authentic way to perpetuate an identity and a tradition. Nothing speaks more eloquently of the Beqaa Valley's wheat, the blazing sun, or its dairy farming, than *kishek*: sundried fermented yogurt, mixed with *burghol*. Nothing speaks of North Lebanon's steep mountains better than a *kibbeh nayeh*, made from lean goat meat and eaten raw. Nothing speaks of the hilly south better than the fire-smoked *freekeh* (smoked wheat) or the *kamounieh*, a mix of *burghol* pounded with the garden's fragrances – rose, cumin, lemon leaves, wild mint, marjoram and basil.

Through caring for and feeding their families, women preserve Lebanese identity and heritage, maintaining the roots to our long ancestry. Zaynab Kashmar, a native of Tyre, keeps her strong ties to her ancestral village. From her garden and the gardens of other women she picks fresh herbs; Zaynab is on a pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, of sorts: to discover the secret recipes, and to hunt for the ingredients. 'When I cook,' Zaynab says 'I feel as though my ancestors are here, and that I am honouring them.'

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1 Braudel 1973 [1949]

Food for Thought: Culinary Choices and Unrealistic Beauty Standards

Noor Baalbaki

Noor Baalbaki is a Programme Manager at the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's office in Beirut. Prior to that, she worked as a project coordinator at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and as a Researcher for USAID on a programme to strengthen the Lebanese Parliament through the development of a legislative resource centre. She holds a Masters degree in Middle Eastern Studies from SOAS and a Bachelors degree in Political Sciences with a minor in Arabic from AUB.

Given the lack of leisure facilities in most advanced and developing countries, entertainment that revolves around food has always been the most readily available pastime for people in the Middle East. In the case of Lebanon, food is an integral part of Lebanese culture so it is no surprise that Beirut be named the best international city for food in the year 2016 (Lieberman 2016). Each year, *Travel+Leisure* asks its readers to write about their travel experiences worldwide and to rate cities for a number of qualities, including food. This year, Beirut also topped the list. With so many international cuisines and restaurants to choose from, the temptation to eat is real, however, particularly difficult for young women who feel the pressure of having to eat less in order to maintain a certain body weight and image.

In Arab culture, chubbiness was traditionally considered one of the traits of feminine perfection, and classical Arabic poetry abounds with evidence that points in this direction (eg. Dhū al-Rummah, Qasīdah cited in van Gelder 2013, 23). However, this is no longer the case with an increasing proportion of Lebanese women viewing thinness as a marker of female beauty. Once a Western phenomenon, being very thin is now valued almost globally by young urban women and, as a consequence, there has been a significant shift in the desire for extreme thinness in the Arab region; no doubt in part due to the number of thin models dominating the fashion industry. In response to the newly emerging standards of 'the perfect body,' Lebanese women are becoming increasingly concerned about body weight and appearance. Societal values assign great importance to body weight as a measure of women's beauty and social acceptance or belonging, and this is in turn, endorsed by women's fashion magazines and advertisements that portray thin women as beautiful and attractive. The pursuit of these 'desirable' standards puts Lebanese women under great pressure to lose weight inevitably resulting in unhealthy ways of achieving this, including regularly skipping meals and the taking of, often dangerous, laxatives and diet pills. So enormous is the pressure that some Lebanese women apply for a bank loan to perform plastic surgery. This has led to a sharp increase in products that falsely claim to be effective in weight loss or control. In fact, the streets of Lebanon are swarming with advertisements related to such products; one even claims that it is a non-invasive treatment that works on those pesky love handles that nobody really loves and even that double chin you see in the mirror every morning.

Another growing trend among Lebanese women is that of ordering food from diet centers. Unfortunately, I myself have been a victim of this trend and witnessed first-hand the many shortcomings of these centres. Admittedly, some are well qualified and run by nutritionists who monitor their patients closely and help them lose weight in a sustained fashion. However, most of these enterprises are nothing short of scams designed to make money, with their owners intentionally deceiving their customers by falsely labelling food as 'healthy' or 'light.' Although such shops often claim that they follow well-proven schemes of weight control, some customers end up with a serious protein or carbohydrate deficiency. As more Lebanese women take up work and have less time to prepare their own food, they are increasingly tempted to subscribe to diet centres and thus more vulnerable to unorthodox eating habits that may lead to serious health problems.

In many instances the Lebanese, along with many other nations, follow global trends

initiated by the West and one of the most recent is one that I would like to call 'free-everything.' This largely refers to food that is gluten-free, dairy-free, yeast-free, sugar-free, gain-free, etc. The following quotations amply demonstrate that such trends not only lack any medical justification but also take advantage of the public's ignorance in order to generate profit. According to Samuel Fromartz (2015), 'consumer data [is] pretty clear: around 22 percent of adults are trying to avoid gluten, creating an estimated $8.8 billion market that grew 63 percent between 2012 and 2014, according to market research firm Mintel. As many as 20 million Americans think gluten-free diets are healthier and around 13 million are giving up gluten to lose weight.' Yet, 'the vast majority of individuals on gluten-free diets have no business being gluten-free, because, for them, there is no medical necessity,' says Alessio Fasano, M.D., Director of the Center for Celiac Research and Treatment at the MassGeneral Hospital for Children and an authority on the subject.[1] He adds, 'It's simply fashion.' American television host, Jimmy Kimmel, even made fun of this trend on his late-night talk show, asking people on the streets who were planning to go gluten-free if they actually knew what gluten was. Hardly anyone could answer this question![2]

In a study conducted by professors at the American University of Beirut (AUB) between 2000 and 2001, two thousand and thirteen students from five different Lebanese universities were surveyed. It was discovered that 12.4 % of those attempting to lose weight were using medications such as laxatives and diet pills, while 10.8% forced themselves to throw up after eating, a disorder known as Bulimia Nervosa.[3] In another study conducted by AUB professors and published in 2004, nine hundred and fifty-four students at the university between the ages of 16 and 20 were surveyed. The results were stunning, for although only 6.1% of those were overweight, 52.9% of those surveyed wanted to lose weight, and 61% of the women who were within a healthy weight range aspired to be thinner.[4]

An old Lebanese proverb has it that body movement is, literally, a blessing (al-harakah barakah). The lifestyle of previous generations was essentially predicated on perpetual movement, the total antithesis of our sedentary practices today. Herein lies the root of the problem. Like many other groups, Lebanese women are keen to follow Western practices and trends. Yet, in relation to food consumption they ignore a major aspect of Western practice, the fact that in most Western societies, individuals exercise far more than we do here in Lebanon. For example, going to college on a bicycle in the west is common practice among students and faculty alike but we tend to look down on anyone who takes up this practice. Thus, we have adopted harmful practices related to food, but ignored those tangential, more advantageous, behaviours allied to exercise. Common sense has indeed become a rare commodity.

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2 Jimmy Kimmel Asks, 'What is Gluten?' Available at http://abcnews.go.com/Health/video/jimmy-kimmel-asks-what-is-gluten-23655461 (accessed 27 July 2017).

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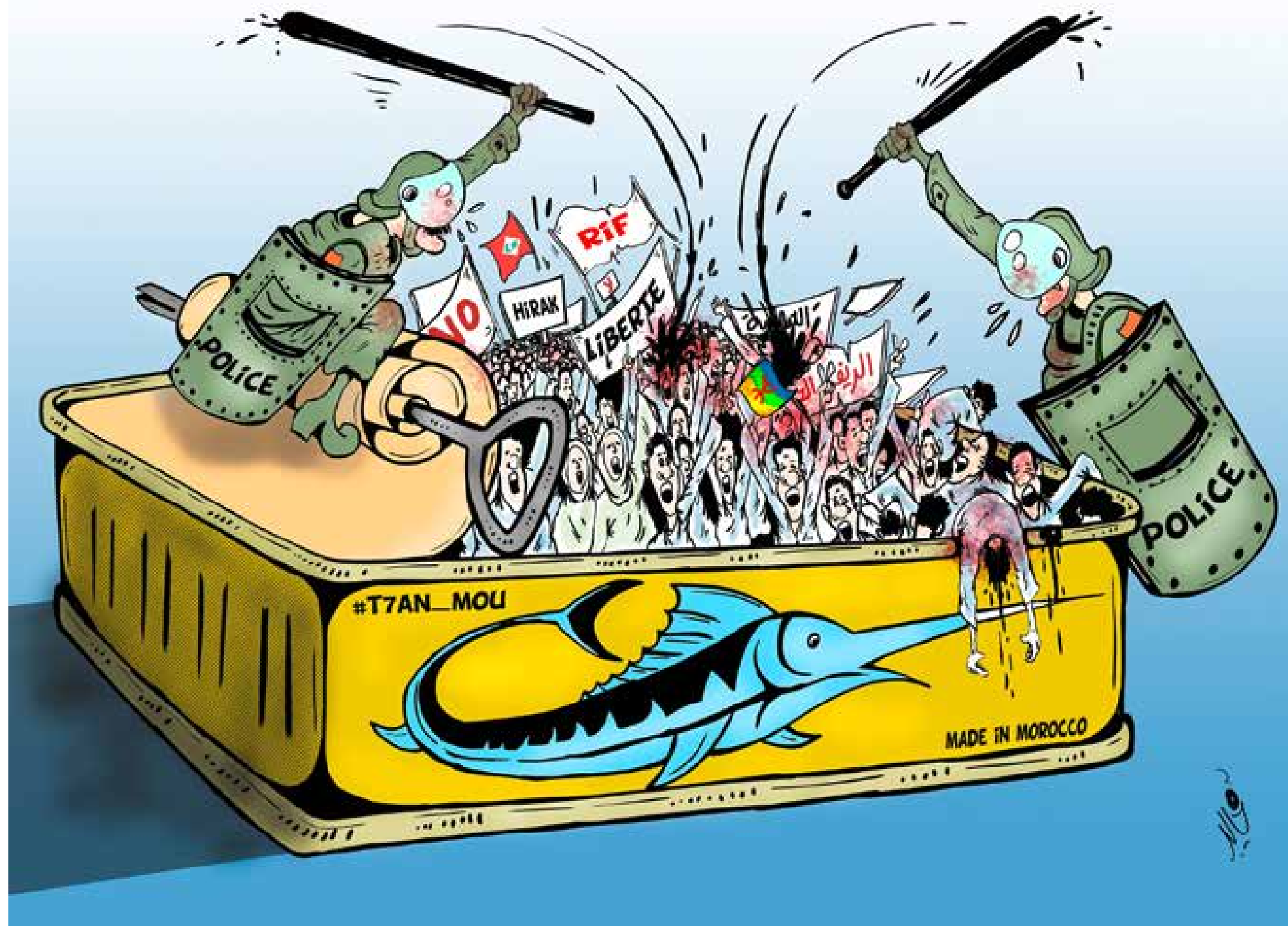
4 Khawaja, M. and Afifi-Soweid, R.A. (2004) 'Images of body weight among young men and women: evidence from Beirut, Lebanon.' Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 58: 352–353.

How a Fish Almost Started a Revolution

Khalid Gueddar



The swift escalation of violence in Morocco following the tragic death of Mouchine Fikri, a fish seller in the city of al-Hoceima, shows that there's more to food than meets the eye. For Fikri, it was an attempt to provide for his family, and for editorial cartoonist Khalid Gueddar it represents a broader public mobilisation in pursuit of civil liberties, social justice and equality, one born out of, and fuelled by, the violence meted out by public authorities.

In October 2016, in the city of al-Hoceima, police authorities confiscated a catch of swordfish fished out-of-season, and proceeded to dispose of it in a rubbish truck. In an attempt to retrieve some of the fish, Mouchine Fikri, a 31 year-old fishmonger was killed in the compactor of the truck. Police officials present at the time of the tragedy were accused of murder and, as a consequence, protests broke out across Morocco, beginning in al-Hoceima. Following police investigations, three employees from the Department of Maritime Fishing, two from the rubbish collection company and one of Fikri's colleagues were recently found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment.

Footage of Mouchine Fikri's death spread quickly in the media and rapidly came to symbolize the wider system of oppression and reproduction of injustice and socio-economic inequalities. Demonstrations against the manner of his death promptly called for radical changes in the situation of the Rif and throughout Morocco. Many see this moment as the birth of the Popular Movement referred to in Arabic as '*al-Hirak al-Shaabi*' and commonly known as '*Hirak*'. A movement that since October 2016 has been protesting against the omnipresent abuse and humiliation '*hogra*' inflicted by the government apparatus on locals and the unaccountable power of the Monarchy „*makhzen*'. The protestor's demands relate to a broad set of social, economic and political grievances, calling for an end to Morocco's deeply-rooted social inequalities.

What started as a statement of solidarity for the tragic death of a fishmonger swiftly turned into a broader expression of the unrest that lies at the heart of Moroccan society. Mainly peaceful protests have been interspersed with violent clashes and many protesters have been imprisoned. Following the ousting of seven Ministers from the newly formed government, an acceleration of the 6.5 billion-dirham development project for al-Hoceima was announced. On the 29th May, the leader of the movement, Nasser Zefzafi, was arrested after he interrupted the prayer of an Imam in a mosque in al-Hoceima; he was accused of obstructing freedom of worship and disturbing the public order. Nevertheless, demonstrations continue in smaller cities as well as in the major ones. Although the presence of security forces in the Rif appears to be decreasing, there are still instances of violent repression, for example, the sit-in on the 9th July in solidarity with Hirak's detainees in Rabat.

Khalid Gueddar was born in Rabat in 1975. He studied Economics in Morocco and Plastic Arts in Paris. In 1998 he began work as a press cartoonist for Demain Magazine. In 2003, the magazine was censored as the result of a cartoon on the Royal Palace and he had to leave Morocco. In France, he was one of the founder members of the French satirical website www.bakchich.com. In 2009, he returned to Morocco as a cartoonist for Al Masae and in 2010 the newspaper Akhbar Al Yaoum was censored due to a cartoon on the marriage of a prince; he was condemned to four years in prison (suspended sentence) and a fee of $280.000. In 2016 he created the newspaper and satirical website www.baboubi.com. Then in 2010, he was awarded the International Prize for the Freedom of Expression in Spain and in 2017 he won the International Prize "Prix Vache d'Humour" in Saint-Just le Martel, France.

Agriculture and Food Sovereignty in Syria

Ansar Jasim

Ansar Jasim is 29 years old and studied political science in Marburg, London and Damascus specialising in the Middle East. Through her solidarity work she supports civil society activists in Syria enabling them to forge links with German civil society: she currently lives in Berlin.

A multi-coloured bus is picking up children from the Zaizoun refugee camp in Daraa, southern Syria. This 'bus of joy,' also called 'the olive bus,' is a service set up by a local organisation named 'olive branch.' Olives are one of the most important agricultural products in Daraa, with 6.5 million trees farmed on close to 30,000 hectares.[1] At the camp's entrance, joyful children carrying exercise books and pens are looking forward to a day spent outside its confines. Camp Zaizoun houses six hundred families, most of them refugees from Homs, the surroundings of Damascus, and villages in the province of Daraa; war zones where returning home is a distant prospect. After three or four years on the run, many of their homes have been damaged or destroyed in the fighting and their towns and villages no longer offer a source of income.

In Zaizoun many trees have been felled for firewood during the winter. The children on the olive bus are going to visit a local seedling production site with a tree nursery.[2] Rafat, who is in charge of this local initiative, explains, 'our aim is for the children to build a relationship with the land and, eventually, for them to grow plants in the camps. The children need to develop a positive relationship with nature and agriculture. Nature is the source of our food and our medications – this is what we're trying to teach them. In the nursery, we'll show them why trees are important for us.' Prior to 2011, the olive harvest had always been a collective experience with entire families working together in the fields. In part, this tradition continues today, however, displacement and the loss of lands have led to its disruption.[3] Rafat goes on to say, 'having been driven off their land, it is especially important to rebuild a relationship with the soil.' During their visit to the seedling production site, the children talk about their villages and the fields and gardens they used to have. Rafat adds, 'in war, agriculture has a special meaning. (…) Farming the land is a form of resistance, and thus it is important to get the children to relate to nature.'

Indeed, the lot of Daraa's farmers is not an easy one. Daraa is a region shaped by agriculture and, at the beginning of the uprising this was used against the people farming the land. On 25 April 2011, a week after the first protests in Daraa, the regime sent tanks across the fields destroying what had been farmed with little mechanisation and in a labour intensive way; a siege for a number of days followed.[4] These measures were specifically directed at food and the production of foodstuffs. For example, in 2012, the regime targeted bread lines in front of bakeries,[5] starved political prisoners[6] and then, in 2013, laid siege to whole communities and towns.[7] In the process, farmers were cut off from their fields (as was the case in southern Damascus), or were rounded up and eventually disappeared without a trace (as in Zabadani), leaving communities without providers. In the Old City of Homs, in Daraya, Modamiya, Madaya, Zabadani, Tell, and Al-Waer, people starved then whole villages were abandoned and people displaced to other parts of the country.

'A Revolution Has to Originate in Daraa'

It is ironic that the demonstrations that took place in Daraa on 17 March 2011 triggered a national uprising. Previously, many Syrians had quipped that a revolution would only ever succeed if it originated in this province. This was a reference to the fact that the ruling Baath Party had been particularly powerful in rural areas of Syria.

But not always: originally, the Baath Party was not a rural organisation and only became one in 1952 when it merged with Syria's first agrarian party, Akram Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party.[8] Hawrani had tried to fuse the fight for peasant's rights against feudalism with the creation of an Arab nation[9] arguing that farmers were an 'essential component' of the Arab nation and that without liberating and emancipating the peasant masses first a united Arab nation could never come about.[10] Officers from peasant families rose through the ranks of the Baath Party while, according to Nikolaos van Dam, the expert on Syria, some farming families were so poor they had to sell their daughters to wealthy urban families.[11] At least sixty percent of the rural population didn't own any land and twenty percent owned less than ten hectares.[12]

The year 1958 marked the beginning of several periods of land reform, which initially improved the situation in the countryside. Up until 1961 15,000 families became property owners through the redistribution of 148,000 hectares of land. However, the amount of expropriated land was significantly larger, in total 670,212 hectares.[13] This policy was continued after the Baath Party came to power in 1963. Still, the land reforms only saw a redistribution of around twenty five percent of the 1.37 million hectares of confiscated land to farmer families,[14] with the rest being turned into state owned farms.[15] While the normalisation policy was predominantly aimed at the 'old bourgeoisie' and considerably diminished their property,[16] as Myriam Ababsahas demonstrated in her work for the al-Jazira-region, the agricultural policies pursued by the Baath Party after 1963 were, generally, fairly pragmatic in nature and avoided overly snubbing the country's elite[17]; indeed the persistent poverty of the rural population is plain to see in the films of Syrian director Omar Amiralay.

While most countries in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) had to import food, Syria maintained a certain degree of food self sufficiency until the drought in the 2000s.[18] The subsidizing of food production went so far that up until the 2000s certain foods were being smuggled into Lebanon to be sold below market prices.[19] Agricultural projects often followed Soviet models, that is, development was pursued by means of major irrigation and recultivation projects.[20] However, these projects didn't develop as envisioned, and during the 1980s the economic liberals within the Baath Party won out and began to push policies that 'replaced ideology with economic practicability'[21] and, as a consequence, partnered with the bourgeoisie, who, not long before, had been denounced as a 'bankrupt enemy class.'[22] Still, agricultural policies continued to reflect the desire of the governing elite to impose centralised controls overseen by the Baath Party.[23]

Fearing that the West might use 'food as a weapon' in the same way that Arab countries had tried to use oil, the Syrian regime decided to introduce a new agricultural policy.[24] This policy gave precedence to strategic crops with high water demand (such as wheat and cotton) and promoted a type of crop rotation that favoured cultures dependent on high resource usage. Farmers who adapted to the agricultural scheme of the regime and began to grow strategic crops received privileged access to permits for the construction of wells, subsidised pesticides and fertiliser.[25] Cotton was produced for the local market but significantly was also destined for export to Italy, Taiwan and Turkey.[26] During the drought

of 2006, these policies brought disastrous consequences,[27] resulting in the migration of around 300,000 people from north Eastern Syria with the majority going to larger cities such as Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo.[28]

Dignity, not Hunger

After the first deaths during demonstrations in Daraa, Buthaina Shaaban, an adviser to the president, stated on 24 March 2011 that the government intended to undertake a number of socioeconomic reforms and improve living conditions through pay rises. However, this did not address the demonstrators' key demands for dignity and liberty. They responded by chanting a slogan which became very popular during the uprising, 'Ya Bouthaina ya Shabaan ash shaab as-suri mu juan' (O Buthaina, o Shaaban, the Syrian people isn't hungry), underlining the point that Syrians were not merely objects to be fed.[29]

Karam, a peasant from Idlib presently living in Lebanon, says his political goal is what he calls 'agricultural liberty' (Huriyya zira´iya). This, he says, is not about food as such but about the way food is being produced. He explains:

It is true, there's been a decrease in agriculture and some of the liberated regions are being bombarded. Still, I have a feeling of liberty. I'm at liberty to grow whatever and how many species I would like to cultivate, and it is for me to decide whether and how to sell. Syria's agriculture needs to be free, and the more freedom the farmers enjoy, the more they produce and the more ideas will flourish. The details can be sorted out by local councils or grass roots committees. What matters is that there is space for us to decide, because then we'll be able to try out the things we would like to do – and that's what I call organic agriculture. It is only an experiment but, I think, for the soil this method is the best. The soil's completely depleted because the same methods have been used over and over again. And I'd like to educate all farmers and all alternative organisations in the liberated areas of Syria. My message is that we should restore life in ways that are similar to what our grandparents knew. Back then, everything was done in a much more natural way. This is my vision for the future.

Today, Karam teaches organic agriculture to fellow Syrians. His brother Moaz has stayed behind in Idlib where, in a joint effort with other villagers, he provides agricultural aid to hundreds of people who were displaced from other regions of Syria last winter. For years there had been bombardments, but because of the current ceasefire the last few months have been uneventful. In August 2017, the villagers are working together, chopping aubergines by the kilo and putting the chunks in water in order to produce seeds. Once this is done, the tomatoes will be next. The plan is to distribute the seeds among refugees and also use some of it to grow seedlings, which they will also distribute to cultivators: this is how local humanitarian help looks. 'Before the war, if someone wanted to cultivate certain crops, they would go to a so-called "farmers' pharmacy" to pick up hybrid seeds, chemical fertiliser, etc. Today, we have come to realise that, as far as seeds, fertiliser, and pesticides are concerned, it is better to be self-reliant. Many people see it that way now.'

Agriculture Means Independence and Control

Samih grew up in an urban part of southern Damascus and used to study sociology at Damascus University. When Yarmouk, the neighbourhood he was living in, was besieged

and starved, he, together with others, began to grow their own food – tomatoes, aubergines, and courgettes, using every type of seed it was possible to purchase from peasants in nearby areas. Samih explains:

One of the most important 'weapons' used by the Syrian regime to smash the revolution is hunger knowing that most of the besieged areas within the country are rural areas. However, there is little awareness of how to control agricultural production and hardly any outside aid. As a result, many such areas have been subjugated. (…) Agriculture means independence and control – and this, in turn, means greater freedom and thus greater dignity.

Ahmad's story shows that other authoritarian forces in Syria use the very same strategy. Ahmad is from Deir az-Zor in eastern Syria. His sister, he recounts, moved to the countryside as the city no longer provided her with an income or livelihood. There she rented a small house and, in its garden, began to grow her own vegetables. The region is under ISIS control, and ISIS banned her from doing this. To Ahmad it doesn't make a difference which authoritarian power uses food as a weapon, as he sees it, 'the mentality of dictators is to make you dependent – and as a consequence they don't want you to grow your own food.'

More than Just Food Production

Majid, who teaches agriculture at Daraa's alternative university, recounts that many agricultural engineers in Syria view 'organic agriculture as a luxury.' He adds that there's just no market for people who demand a health-conscious diet. Oubaida, who studied agriculture and political science in Aleppo, remembers the acrimonious debates with older engineers during recent workshops. 'They're just plain unwilling to accept new ideas,' he says, 'and want to defend their authority by any means.'

Lina is convinced that the social function of agriculture goes far beyond the production of food and rejects the notion that the usual chemicals should be used in order to boost production. She explains: 'We were under siege in Zabadani and had no seeds as, previously, they had been distributed through centralised authorities. Finally, after a great deal of effort, we managed to procure some seeds. Then, myself and other women got together to design projects to enable the young men fighting on the frontlines to become integrated into the daily routines of agricultural work.' This shows how men began to take on a much more important civilian role than they might in combat on the frontlines. As these projects were located all over the city – on rooftops, in flower gardens, or on balconies – people said that we had managed 'to bring, above all, young people back into the heart of society.' Salih confirms this and tells how, during the siege, agriculture meant much more to him than just growing food: 'The crops pulled me back from the brink – they saved me. During the siege I'd become a nervous wreck.'

Rebuilding the Economy

When the Syrian regime began to hone in on the neighbourhood Jafar inhabited with his family, he relocated to the Golan, the Syrian Governate of Qunaitra; the place his parents had fled in 1967 as a result of the war with Israel. Now Jafar's family have moved back into the house in the Syrian part of Golan they had once abandoned. Today, about eighty percent of Syrian Qunaitra is not controlled by the regime. Even before leaving Damascus, Jafar, together with some friends, had organised medical services for the increasing numbers of refugees and together with the same group, he also became involved in humanitarian projects. After fleeing Damascus, he began to farm because, as he explains, 'we had to rebuild the economy from scratch. Most people had no money, and thus they couldn't grow plants that require irrigation, as pumping water was too costly. (…) At the same time, no one knew how the military situation would develop and, as a consequence, no one was willing to invest. Who wants to buy twenty sheep, if, at any moment, a rocket strike may kill them – or if you're forced to flee overnight?' Over time, the situation began to stabilise. Right now the area is considered to be one of the safest in Syria because the regime and its allies only shell it occasionally and refrain from using air power; they don't want to risk getting too close to their enemy, Israel. This, to Jafar, is a strategic advantage: 'Here you can build something – build a basis for a livelihood.'

So Jafar, together with other locals, created a group called ARDAQ ('your soil'). Jafar explains: 'We have a team of engineers that offers "field consultation services," meaning, they visit the farmers and help them to overcome their challenges. Whenever there's a recurring instance of e.g. a pest, we will document it, how to treat it and then publish photos on social media.' Of course, many farmers do not have web access, which is why the group is currently compiling an 'agricultural calendar,' which will document the life cycles and characteristics of the important crops in the Qunaitra region and they plan to distribute a printed version of this to all farmers in the area. Jafar says: 'It is difficult to come up with a neutral assessment of whether farming was better before 2011 than it is now. In general it was probably better, however (…) in the old days an agricultural engineer wouldn't have visited a field as they do today; the farmers and engineers work together now to develop things. All in all, the divide between peasants and the rest of society has decreased because today everybody's growing their own food. This means, we've all moved closer together.'

Seeds

Jafar recounts the group's successes: 'In 2015, we had to purchase seeds from areas controlled by the regime. We got local Syrian wheat from the Agricultural Bank and we don't purchase hybrids – just *baladi*, that is, seedfast varieties. (…) This year, we will begin to build a seed bank and collect ten percent of the seeds we distributed earlier. We've already done that for wheat, and we are trying to focus on using Syrian varieties. Next we'll collect sesame and other foods that are staples of the Syrian kitchen.' Jafar describes the importance of this: 'Local seed has adapted to local conditions – the weather, the temperatures, the lack of rainfall.' This is why ARDAQ will not work with imported varieties, 'our local varieties go back millennia and they have survived.'

ARDAQ is a good example of how, in the absence of other organisations, local agricultural groups may mobilise existing social capital through initiatives such as seed banks.[30] In Idleb, Moaz, too, intends to create a seed bank. Both projects go to show that, faced with the collapse of Syria's economy an ethical version of this economy can be created via social networks in accordance with the principle of food sovereignty. Food security is a fundamental right, not a matter of charity. Practically, they take it even one step further: During the siege of Yarmouk where more than a hundred people have already succumbed to hunger in the area, Samih taught seminars on 'citizenship' at the local civil society centre.[31] These courses dealt with starvation and how the local community had defended its right to live by creating its own agricultural projects.

Pooling your labour and expertise in agricultural projects is one of the ways to build mutual trust and networks. Be it the Olive Bus in Moaz' village or the work of ARDAQ: decisions are made jointly, they include everyone and they value the knowledge and experience of local people as one of their central tenets. Karam, in Lebanon, expressed regret that a great deal of knowledge around sustainable agriculture had been lost in the centralisation processes of the Syrian regime. However, through joint communal projects such knowledge is now being passed on to new generations. The potential for joint action is on the rise, yet there are many challenges. There are still no farmers on many local councils and it is only in very small communities such as Idlib Province that will they be represented.

Alternative Governmental Structures

Local councils are the backbone of paragovernmental structures out of reach of the regime. Even in small towns, most of them will operate an Agricultural Office (Maktab Zira´i). Here, the General Organisation for Seed Multiplication (GOSM) bears the same name as its Syrian government counterpart because, as Abdalqader, one of the senior agricultural engineers in northern Syria, explains, 'it was initially created to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of the regime.' GOSM is part of Syria's interim government's Ministry for Agriculture and it has seven offices in those parts of the country controlled by the opposition. The main objective, explains Abdalqader, is to provide 'agricultural equipment from familiar sources.' This is co-ordinated by local councils and, he stresses, 'farmers may visit our offices at any time.' In the case of wheat it is important to conserve old Syrian varieties and, says Abdalqader, the GOSM is working with local peasants in order to propagate and distribute seeds via seed multiplication stations. Varieties of potatoes, however, are imported in part as hybrids from outside Syria, while some local varieties are being distributed as part of a 'national potato project' (Mashru´ watani l´-ikthar al-batata). Rami, another employee of GOSM says, 'there is a lot of uncertainty about the origin of agricultural products, and this is why we procure some things, especially pesticides, from familiar sources such as Syngenta and BASF,' and so he continues in the best advertising vernacular of these multinationals. Indeed, on its homepage, GOSM states, 'In continuation of our strategic plan to offer all tools and materials for agricultural production at reduced, subsidised prices within the liberated parts of Syria, GOSM wishes to inform farmers that a number of vegetable varieties, fertilisers, and pesticides produced by Syngenta, DuPont, Bayer, Sumi Agro, and BASF are now available.'[32] The financing

of GOSM is largely independent of Syria's interim government. One important donor is the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), the implementation organisation of the Ministry for Development Collaboration. They focus on high performance seeds produced by big multinationals that require the addition of chemicals and minerals to grow even though development and farming organisations repeatedly protest that these projects also include small farmers with their traditional expertise and that this expertise has to be preserved.[33]

As early as 2005, and prior to the Syrian uprising, Sygenta had established an office, which among other things was responsible for the distribution of seeds in Syria.[34] Samir, a farmer from Idlib Province, says: 'I'm in two minds about mineral fertiliser. On the one hand, the soil's totally depleted, and continuing to add mineral fertiliser to it will not help. On the other hand, we, as private individuals, are unable to get the stuff into the country as it is labelled "dual use" goods, meaning they can also be used as explosives.' For the moment, the best solution is offered by the production of organic fertilizer. The project takes care of all the communities' waste through composting: 'that way we're able to get rid of our rubbish and can regenerate our soil.' Still, he recognises the same thing won't be possible everywhere because, 'in many places people have nothing at all – not even organic rubbish.'

Whenever you use those chemicals, it will create a chemical reaction between crop and soil. Let's assume, a crop requires ten days of growth, and once you add chemicals this is cut in half, to five days. This increase in productivity, however, has its shortcomings for the soil is slowly being burnt up. Productivity will decrease as the soil can no longer support agriculture and the result would be that we'd destroyed the soil ourselves – without war, bombardment, or some kind of modern weapon.

(Ibrahim, a farmer from Syria, currently living in Lebanon)

Debates about rebuilding the country tend to neglect the fact that many Syrian farmers would prefer an approach that emphasises their autonomy and aspires to a type of agriculture, which will not create new dependencies. Such an approach would reflect the 'rules for rebuilding Syria' proposed by Steven Heydemann, which demand 'bypass Assad, go local, go small, go slow.'[35] Agriculture is a key component for achieving the goals of the uprising and the answer to the question, how do we rebuild Syria can be found in the diverse ideas of local communities and in the conversations between Syrians.

This article is dedicated to all the courageous Syrian farmers and horticulturists. While researching this article the author conducted ten formal and many informal interviews. All interviews were conducted in Arabic; all personal names where changed by the author.

Translated from the German by Bernd Herrmann.

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The Palestinian Version of Hunger Games: Two Steps Away from a Gazan Famine Catastrophe

Book Review by Carol Khoury

Zurayk, Rami & Gough, Anne. *Control Food Control People: The Struggle for Food Security in Gaza*. Institute for Palestine Studies, USA, 2013. 47 pages, with photos, maps, graphs, and appendices (total 70 pages).

While the title of the book references Henry Kissinger's remark 'who controls the food supply controls the people; who controls the energy can control whole continents; who controls money can control the world' the devastating reality in Gaza demonstrates a yet more tragic allusion to the saying 'Qu'ils mangent de la brioche [let them eat cake]'. Palestinians in Gaza are starving because, inter alia, they cannot grow their own food, so, they grow and export carnations! Why? Rami Zurayk and Anne Gough chronicle the ultimate dystopia of the real version of the hunger game(s). In answering the question 'why', they go on to answer the more important questions of 'how', 'for whose benefit', and 'by whom'.

From the outset, with no introduction yet in a very apt manner, Zurayk and Gough skilfully manage to make the reader feel, from as early as the second page, the omnipresent hunger in Gaza. The book comprehensively examines the nexus of people, land, and food security in Gaza. Referencing theoretical approaches of thinkers like Henry Kissinger, Sara Roy, Patrick Wolf, and Samir Amin, the book uses food regime theory's analysis of the power dynamics on food and farming systems to illustrate how Israeli economic policies replicate the corporate food regime in its dominance and dependency creation in Palestine, particularly in Gaza. It also incorporates the concept of the purposeful destruction of agency and food security highlighted by the theory of 'de-peasantization', framing it as a strategic tool of colonial practices. In effect, Gaza has become an extreme example of the rupture between the global corporate food regime and food security.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirms that 'since the onset of the Israeli occupation in 1967, the economy of the WBGS [West Bank and Gaza Strip] has been an "income economy" rather than a "production economy" – making the WBGS extremely vulnerable to the Israeli labour and goods market' (p. 34).

Palestinians in general are often cast as powerless victims, with the West Bank and Gaza Strip serving as theoretical containers in which activities are studied and policy prescriptions are made, but over which the Israeli occupation ultimately retains absolute control. In reality, people in Palestine make individual decisions every day, but the ability of Palestinian communities to make collective decisions about their food and farming systems is curtailed by the occupation (p. 32). Israeli occupation has used food insecurity as a weapon in its colonial project in Palestine in much the same way that, in the global food regime, the economic centre uses it against the periphery.

While Israeli regimes have framed Palestinian food insecurity as an unfortunate by-product of the conflict, the international community in its refusal to politicise aid, has contributed to the legitimatisation of this view of the conflict (p. 47). Although the tunnels are a direct response to Israeli economic and territorial strangulation, international aid agencies refuse to purchase materials they suspect have been made using elements imported through them. When funding new water infrastructure projects, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Oxfam or government agencies such as the European Commission's Humanitarian Office, will not purchase from the only remaining pipe factory in Gaza because of the suspicion that it obtains necessary materials from the tunnel trade (p. 37). As a matter of fact, international aid projects in Gaza have been largely delegitimised by their deference to Israeli food insecurity strategies. When food aid is devoid of ecological, historical, and political context, it cannot fill the vacuum created when food insecurity damages food culture.

Not only the international donor community, but also the Palestinian Authority, has encouraged the shift towards abandoning agriculture. If the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (2008) is fully implemented, Palestine will become a net food importer, subject to the whims of its major trading partners: Israeli businesses (p. 30). As long as Palestinian policymakers, and the international donor community, do not work to keep farmers on their land (rather than adopting policies that do the opposite), both are rendered complicit in Israel's war on the Palestinian agricultural sector.

Utilising an impressive and relevant lexicon, the authors proficiently embroider a contemptible canvas of all sorts of hunger: for food, for food security, for food sovereignty. The main conclusion of the book, however, is a promising one. Deploying terminology as its threads (food sovereignty, chronic food insecurity, food vulnerability, entitlement to food, metabolic rift, nutritional transition, humanitarian minimum, community agency, resistance economy, hydro-hegemony, and many more) the central motif of the book is to recast the definition of food security. Indeed, the authors propose an expanded definition informed by two complementary critical discourses: global food regime theory, and the political economy of occupation (p. 5).

If all people are entitled to food security, they must also be entitled to participate in

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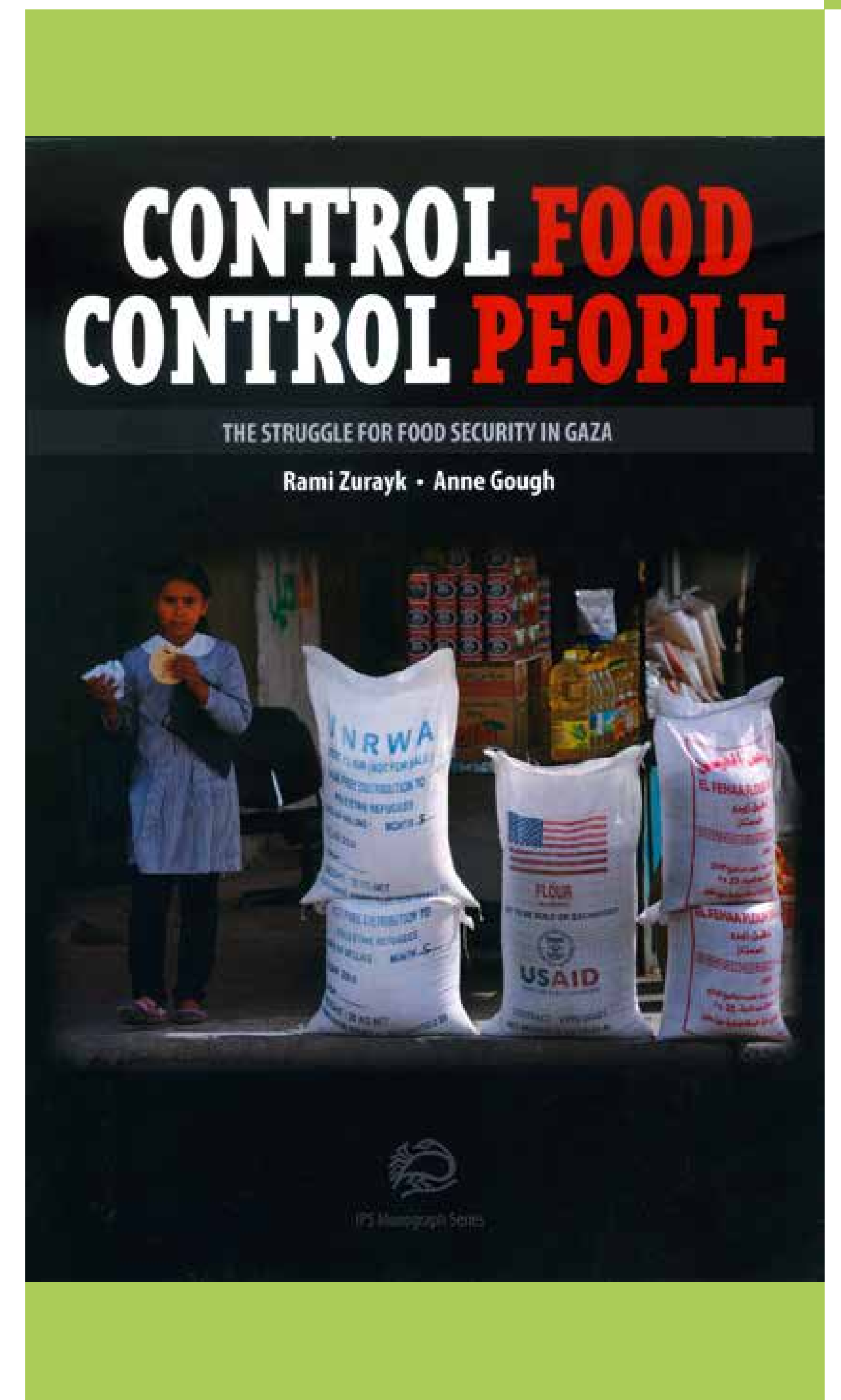

how food security is defined and measured (p. 16). In actuality, food sovereignty should be considered a prerequisite for food security. When the authors used food sovereignty as the foundation for their redefinition, they applied entitlement theory's concept that food insecurity is not caused by unemployment and low income alone. Instead, they argued, rightly, that it is a result of structural inequities in the food and farming systems that extend to social relations, employment, and trade relations. Their proposed definition focuses on particular determinants of food security that have been methodically impaired in order to serve Israeli political, economic, and territorial objectives.

Food security exists when all people with full agency and freedom from fear of not having enough to eat have, at all times, physical and economic access to healthy farming systems and means of land reform. All people should be/ are entitled to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food made possible through the support of agrarian livelihoods. All people are able to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy food culture. All people should be able to meet these determinants through mechanisms of democratic deliberation. (p. 18)

The recast definition of food security that the authors are lobbying for is based on the components they found to be missing from the conventional definition, namely: access to resource entitlements, agrarian livelihoods, community agency, and a local food culture. This approach links people to the food they consume, accounts for the political framework in which food security actions are deployed, and transforms the notion of food as a commodity to food as an entitlement (p.18).

While conventional food security definitions have always avoided any reference to the spatial political control of food systems; food sovereignty, on the other hand, recognises class and power dynamics not as issues of charity or development, but as necessary targets of democratic change in any attempt to challenge the prevailing corporate food regime.

No less important than the recast definition, the book also contains two recommendations: the urgency of redefining food security and linking the Gaza Strip to food movements around the globe (p.43); and the importance of revalorising Gaza's vulnerable food-producing economy, not only to ensure food security, but also as a strategy of resistance (p. 41).

The situation in Gaza confirmed the authors' thesis that food insecurity is not a side effect of the occupation, but rather a strategic goal pursued by all Israeli governments, a strategy that not only prolongs public health and environmental disasters, but also ensures that no long-term development or autonomy is possible in Gaza (p. 43). While it is possible that the end of the siege could marginally improve selected food security indicators, it is unlikely to improve the state of Gaza's agricultural system or levels of chronic food insecurity. Gaza would not only remain occupied, but also still be surrounded by countries, donors, and agencies more concerned with maintaining their own presence in Palestine than with ending the occupation (p. 47).

While the whole world watched, and is still watching, Gaza slipped from being a food exporter (as late as 1967), to having eighty-eight percent of its population receiving food aid (in 2011). The situation on the ground is set to worsen, in tandem with the pace of failing international integrity. If 'humanitarian minimum' is now trusted to be the accepted bottom, the world might be only two steps away from a new disaster.

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Food and Effort Gone to Waste

Mamoun Ghallab

I remember the last time I threw away some food. It was the remains of my fruity-muesli breakfast I had one morning. It contained oats, seeds and some dried strawberries. I had had more than enough and some leftovers ended up in my rubbish bin. It left me wondering about these food items' journey, from the day they were produced to the day they ended up as waste.

Those little strawberry pieces left in my muesli bowl had begun their journey about a year ago in California, where their hybrid 'mother plant' was produced. This Californian 'mother plant' had been exported thousands of kilometers across the Atlantic Ocean to a Spanish nursery. There, it was cultivated and divided into thousands of plants ready to be exported again and planted in strawberry farms in countries like Morocco, Turkey, and Egypt, where the magic happens.

And that's when the magic finally happened! In a long white plastic tunnel, my beautiful little red strawberries later ripened, thanks to the interventions of dozens of farm workers and agro-engineers. Quickly picked and frozen in a nearby industrial facility, the strawberries were then sent to China by boat in refrigerated containers. China is a country where energy is cheap and using an energy-intensive industrial process, tons of frozen red berries were quickly transformed into freeze-dried little fruits.

Setting sail once again my strawberries travelled towards the USA or Europe to be mixed with muesli and packaged under the name of a famous international brand. Then, thanks to the retailers, this fruity-muesli pack was brought to a shop close to my house. That's when I bought it, enjoyed it and threw away part of it before rushing to work.

That day I thought I had only thrown away a few grams of food, wherein fact I had wasted the end result of an extended international value chain employing human, natural and energetic resources, eco-systemic services and industrial activities. I realized that in the modern food system each bite of a snack, each spoon from a muesli bowl, or even each ingredient in the most traditional tagine is much more than just simply 'food.'

At a global level, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that about one third of the food produced for human consumption ends-up either lost or wasted (that's 1.7 billion tons of food per year).[1] In effect, this means that an area of agricultural land bigger than the whole of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)[2] region is dedicated every year to producing food that will never be eaten (that's 1.4 billion hectares of land).[3]

Food loss and waste happen all along the food value chain, taking into account not only food wasted by the final consumers, but also all the food potentially lost upstream from field to market.[4]

Food Loss and Waste in the Mena Region

Although the FAO points to the fact that we lack precise data about MENA countries, all its reports suggest that the region also wastes about one third of its available food, 250kg per capita each year.

On closer investigation of the food value chain in the MENA region, the FAO believes that most of the food loss and waste occurs in the upstream stages of the value chain during harvesting, handling, transportation, processing and distribution.[5] In part, this may be due to a lack of resources among small farmers unable to implement efficient harvesting techniques,

Mamoun Ghallab is passionate about environmental issues. Three years ago, he adopted the 'zero waste' lifestyle and strives to promote good practices to reduce human impact on the environment. He co-founded the Moroccan non-profit 'Zero Zbel' (www.facebook.com/ZeroZbel/) that aims to foster a positive environmental attitude among Moroccan youth: 'Zero Zbel' played an active role during the COP22. Supported by Heinrich Böll Stiftung, they organised the Eco-Festival CLIMATE OPEN ZONE, giving a voice to young people involved in protecting the environment. Mamoun has established his own sustainable, development consulting firm in Morocco (www.makesense.ma), and has animated a TV programme called 'Made In Africa' highlighting inspirational sustainability initiatives around the African continent.

but also to bad transport and storage facilities and exposure to hot climatic conditions. As a result, food wastage before products even reaches the consumers.

At the consumption stage, urban households' behaviour also plays an important role since they waste 32% to 34% of the food they consume.[6] Wasting food is almost a 'normal' by-product of our lifestyle, but in a region where more than 50% of food is imported and where agriculture constantly struggles against water scarcity and other impacts of climate change, to waste food makes no sense.

What Food Waste Represents in Our Region

Food loss and waste is a phenomenon that has social, environmental and economic effects. We can't provide a comprehensive list of each of these as that would require a complete life-cycle analysis but here are some interesting statistics. What we have tried to do here is to translate these figures into more tangible and easy-to-understand facts. This approach might not be an exact science but it may help to visualise the problem at hand.

A Waste of Human Energy and Labour

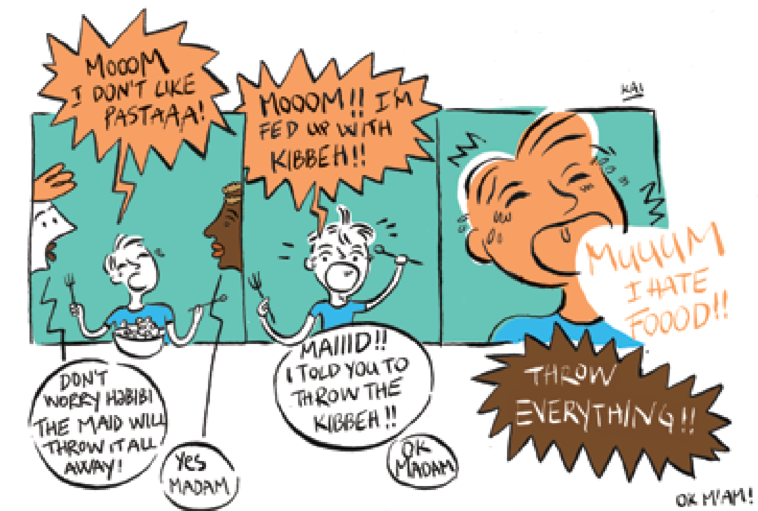
45% of fruits and vegetables are lost or wasted (the highest of all food categories).	>	In a week, a farm worker producing fruit and vegetables dedicates 3-days' work to producing waste.
In Morocco, households spend 34.5% of the family budget on food, of which one third is wasted.[7]	>	Each month, 3 days' salary is dedicated to food waste. In other words, more than 10% of a household's budget is invested in food waste.

A Waste of Natural Resources and Unnecessary Environmental Consequences

42km3 of water is used every year to produce the food that is wasted annually.	>	Annually, water losses in MENA equate to the average volume of water carried by the Nile river over a 5-month period.
360 million hectares of land are used to produce the food that is wasted annually.	>	An area of land as big as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq is dedicated to producing food waste.
Over its entire life cycle, lost and wasted food in MENA, produces 200 million tons CO2 eq.	>	Food waste's climate footprint is equivalent to Algeria and Lebanon's cumulative annual carbon footprint.[8]

A Problem of Food Security

Households waste about one third of their food at home.	>	A family of 6 people could feed 2 more people with the food they waste.
Up to 20% of MENA's cereals are wasted.	>	The region depends on importations: 36 million tons of wheat are imported each year, whereas 16 million tons are wasted.
In the MENA population, 33 million people are undernourished.	>	A population as big as Morocco's is food insecure.



A Need for More Rational Practices

Returning to the roots of the problem, one can easily understand that food loss and waste is tightly linked to two elements: the complexity of our modern food system, and our patterns of consumption.

As most national and regional policies on food waste reduction in MENA mainly focus on the early stages of the value chain, I would like to pay some attention to consumption. Being an urban citizen, just like the majority of MENA's population, I grew up disconnected from food production. In cities, food comes from the market, not from the land; and the only limiting factor in accessing food is money, not crop seasonality, climate conditions or the availability of water and healthy soils.

Modern food systems blur people's perception of the most basic elements determining our existence: we don't really know how food is produced and where it comes from. We don't know how much food is discarded before fruit, vegetables and fish arrive in the market, and it seems normal that everything we buy generates inorganic waste (food packaging, plastic bags, etc.). As a consequence, wasting food at home has become the norm, as well as expecting to have only perfect-shaped vegetables, or eating dairy products without even knowing that the milk they contain was produced in New-Zealand.

It is my contention that although most food waste occurs on the way from the field to the market, the most powerful way to tackle food waste and get quick, positive results is to focus first on changing consumer behaviour.

First and foremost, I believe policy makers and civil society organizations should use media campaigns to promote simple positive habits. One example, I feel is important, is to promote simple traditional food conservation techniques that are being forgotten. These campaigns should also foster changes in mindset, especially in regards to the over-consumption of food during traditional holydays and ceremonies, therefore encouraging people to buy only what they need and finishing what's on their plate.

Reconnecting urban population, particularly young people, with food production is also a priority. This can be done through the introduction of small-scale food gardens in schools, and by fostering the development of urban agriculture, thereby beginning to relocate food production and reducing the supply chain length for fruit and vegetables.

If implemented with the necessary political will for change, I think these simple measures could possibly produce a bottom-up reaction. Having more responsible consumers could very quickly create a positive systemic change beyond food waste reduction, namely, reducing the pressure on natural resources, fostering local food value chains, re-evaluating traditional products and small farmers' work and cutting down on unnecessary food importations.

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2 FAO regional nomenclature refers to MENA region as 'Near East and Northern Arica (NENA)'.
3 FAO, 2013, *Food wastage footprint: Impacts on natural resources.*
4 'Food loss and food waste refer to the decrease of food in subsequent stages of the food supply chain intended for human consumption. Food is lost or wasted throughout the supply chain, from initial production to final household consumption.' FAO, see: http://www.fao.org/food-loss-and-food-waste/en/
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Mashing it up: the Hubbub over Hummos or the Israeli Appropriation of Palestinian Heritage

Dr. Ali Qleibo

Dr. Ali Qleibo is an artist, author, and anthropologist. Born in Jerusalem and educated in the United States, his writing and artworks have taken him all over the world. Dr. Qleibo has lectured at Al-Quds University, teaching ancient classical civilisation. He was former Director of the Cultural Studies Programme at Al-Quds University Fellowship at Shalom Hartman Institute; Director of Department of Fine Arts at Al-Quds University; Visiting Professor at Tokyo University for Foreign Studies; and, former Assistant Professor at Birzeit University. At the Jerusalem Research Centre, he developed the Muslim tourism itinerary in Jerusalem encompassing tangible and intangible heritage. He is a specialist in Palestinian social history and has authored various books such as Surviving the Wall, Before the Mountains Disappear.

'The slogan "A land without a people for a people without a land" is at the heart of the *hummos* polemic', is how my friend, Rabbi Douglas Krantz, explained the appropriation of *hummos* as indigenous Israeli sabra food. 'When I first came here, over 30 years ago, *hummos* and *falafel* were ubiquitous and I assumed it was Israeli food. In the States it was advertised as Israeli *sabra* food', in reference to the sweet and prickly cactus fruit, *sabra*, which has come to mean any Jew born on Israeli territory, ironically it is also a commonplace Palestinian backyard fruit used for fencing.

Krantz, a reform rabbi, was making sense of the absence of Palestinian tangible and intangible heritage in the Israeli narrative. 'Years later when I came to the Palestinian side I discovered otherwise. It took time for me to realise that this was just another aspect of the Israeli hegemony in Palestine and its denial of Palestinian heritage, history, culture, cuisine and people.'

The mere idea of one land for two people is anathema to Zionist ideology. Following the *Nakba* of 1948 the land, emptied of its inhabitants, was soon occupied by new residents. From 1948 to 1953, almost all new Jewish settlements were established on refugees' property. The Palestinian cataclysmic catastrophe in 1948 marked the settlers' colonial conquest of land and the displacement of its owners, a dual act of erasure and appropriation. Citing 'reasons of State', Israel's first premier Minister David Ben Gurion appointed the 'Negev Names Committee' to remove Arabic names from the map. By 1951, the Jewish National Fund's 'Naming Committee' had assigned 200 new names. But it did not stop with the destruction of the Palestinian landscape and the recreation of a new geography. The Zionist appropriation of Palestine as the national homeland for the Jews and the exclusion of the indigenous Palestinian Arabs encompassed innumerable cultural elements including cuisine. In this context, the 'hummos wars' is not about petty claims and counterclaims; Israel's obsession with *hummos* is about more than usurping Palestinian tangible and intangible heritage. Rather, it is symptomatic of the Israeli denial of the Palestinians as people with legitimate rights and a historical connection deeply rooted in Palestine.

Hummos is the Arabic word for 'chickpea' and its history spans the vast regions of the Mediterranean from India to the Arab countries dating back to ancient Babylonian civilization, but finding a single place and time of origin has evaded historians. Today, *hummos* is central to Turkish, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian and Egyptian cuisines, just to name a few. Part of the reason for the mystery is semantic. *Hummos* only means 'chickpeas' in Arabic. What Westerners think of as *hummos* is actually called '*hummos bi tehinah*'. Its name suggests the two necessary ingredients of the dish: pureed chickpeas and sesame-seed paste, *tehinah*. Both culinary elements are major constitutive elements of 'Levantine' cuisine; a region that includes Syria proper, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

Hummos recipes have been recorded in thirteenth century cookbooks. Shihab el-Deen Ahmad el-Hanafi, an Egyptian author, described *hummos* in his book 'Description of Common Food and the Flower of Elegant Dishes'.

In his cook book, Shihab el Deen described *hummos el Sham*, the *hummos* of Greater Syria as being sold in a vessel by street vendors. The addition of *tehinah* to *hummos* was an eighteenth century innovation. *Tehinah*-based sauces are common in Middle Eastern cuisine and when blended with mashed chickpeas to

create the well-known breakfast dish '*hummos bi tehinah*', this delicacy adds a festive quality to Friday breakfasts at home and features prominently in the daily menu during the holy month of Ramadan. *Hummos* as chickpeas is a ubiquitous staple in the Palestinian cuisine. Qidreh, the traditional festive meal of Hebron, Gaza and Jerusalem, brings chickpeas and cumin spice together to create this delicious mutton and rice speciality.

Chickpeas are commonplace to such an extent that they have become synonymous with the concept of the minimum basic staple. The folk perception of the nil Palestinian culture mobilizes the mundane chickpeas metaphorically. Describing an outgoing individual who recounts that all he/ she sees or hears without reserve, the saying runs 'He cannot leave quiet a single chickpea in his stomach' (*Ma turkud humseh fi batnoh*). Another popular saying describing the total loss and waste of effort in an unsuccessful transaction is: 'He left the *mawlid* (the feast) without eating a single chickpea.' *(tile' min el mawlid bala hummos.*) Mundane, small in size and commonplace chickpeas have become synonymous with insignificance.

Chickpeas are closely associated with the rich tapestry of Palestinian heritage. As early as middle March sour green almonds and *hamleh*, fresh green sweet chickpeas, are among the first harbingers of warmer weather, marking the end of winter. Whiling away the afternoon in village courtyards, eating lightly toasted fresh chickpeas warm out of the oven, is a common spring ritual.

Cross-cultural exchange and cultural appropriation underlie different attitudes to other cultures. Pizzas, hamburgers, schnitzel, crepes and waffles have become popular fast food among Palestinians and indeed most cultures. No one would deny the Italian, American, Austrian, French or Belgian origin of these dishes. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of colonial cultural appropriation, ethnic transfer and denial. The appropriation of Palestinian *hummos* by the Israelis and its promotion as indigenous Israeli *sabra* food within the context of occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestine suppresses Palestinian social cultural identity and its deep roots in historical Palestine. In the decades following the establishment of the State of Israel on the ruins of Palestine, various elements of the indigenous culture have been targeted for appropriation: *falafel, knafeh* (traditional Palestinian sweet), *sahlab* (Palestinian drink) and, of course, *hummos*. Israel has claimed them all as its own: falafel is the 'national snack', while *hummos*, according to Israeli food writer Janna Gur, is 'a religion'.-

Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and for the first two decades its people did not eat local Palestinian food; they came from all over the world and did not have a traditional food in common. As Vered, an Israeli chef says, 'They stuck to their old habits.' He goes on to explain. 'It's also a political issue. If I eat Palestinian food, in a way, I acknowledge that they exist, that there are other people here who have food of their own.' By the late 1950s, the Israeli army started serving *hummos* in mess halls. Since the basic ingredients, chickpeas and *tehinah*, do not break the Jewish laws of *kashrut* the Palestinian dish fits into any meal without breaking any dietary rules. Soon the ordinary Israeli came to know *hummos* as an everyday food and with time, *hummos bi tehinah* became common food for Israelis and was adopted as *sabra* fast food. As the local fare became more familiar to the Israeli immigrants from Europe, *hummos* became hip, something young people enjoyed eating. 'Hummus became appropriated as the food of the new *sabra*', explains Dafna Hirsch, an Israeli sociologist. 'In Israel, hummus is considered a masculine dish,' says Hirsch. 'It's a kind of masculine ritual to go with a group of men to the *hummusiya* (fast food restaurant) and eat hummus, wiping with these large circular gestures.'

The Israelis have conquered the land, forcibly evicted the Palestinians and appropriated Arab heritage. Recognition and denial underlie the patronising attitude in which Palestinian Arabs have been eradicated from the landscape and the appropriation of *hummos* is just one more way of excluding Palestinians from the narrative of Palestine; it is another frontier in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A conflict that is symptomatic of the Palestinian struggle for recognition as legitimate heirs to Palestine's tangible and intangible heritage. Hummus and *Hummos bi tehinah* debunk the Zionist myth of 'a people with no land to a land with no people'; a myth in which the Palestinian presence is necessarily ignored.

Make Food, Not War: The Role of Food and Intimacy in Spaces of Conflict and Tension in Lebanon – the Case of Souk el Tayeb

Rachel Ann Rosenbaum

'What is it about food?' I ask Jihane. She replies, as though it was obvious, 'Food unites everybody, don't you like to eat?' This attitude pervades everything Souk el Tayeb[1] does. From their weekly farmers' market selling locally sourced and grown products, to their Capacity Building Programmes, to their restaurant Tawlet, Souk El Tayeb actively fosters a culture of positivity, promoting the idea that food can heal the wounds of political and personal conflict. Jihane continues, 'Our slogan is "make food, not war."'

In 2004, Kamal Mouzawak founded Souk El Tayeb, one of the first farmers' markets in Beirut, bringing together farmers from different regions of Lebanon and gathering people from different religions, sects, and political backgrounds in a mutual appreciation of food and agricultural traditions. As Quality Assurance Director, Jihane Chahla, explains, 'you see all these different producers from different backgrounds standing beside each other and no one is discussing [anything] except food. How you make your jam, how you grow your tomatoes, etc. And the main aim of Souk el Tayeb is to highlight the culinary traditions of Lebanon, to empower it, and to empower those small scale farmers, producers, cooks, and housewives.'[2]

In Lebanon, food has often served the role of peacemaker. As an integral part of Lebanese culture, culinary traditions revolve around the sharing of food with friends, family, and strangers alike. Food undeniably played an important role in the post civil war reconstruction effort. As neighbourhoods and regions became more and more segregated around the system of sectarianism, public space that had a focus on food became some of the most integral in bringing people together from opposite ends of the conflict.[3]

So what is it about food? What makes food a particularly important mediator in spaces of anxiety and even violence? This paper argues that the materiality of food (from production to consumption) acts as a cultural mediator with the potential to instigate social change and forge new social relationships across difference. Souk el Tayeb's Capacity Building Programmes with women from diverse political, national, or religious communities illustrates this potentiality, shedding light on the important entanglement of food, history, memory, and the intimacy of conflict.

Drawing on Brian Massumi's (2002) characterisation of the term mediation, if food is a cultural mediator, then perhaps we can see culinary practices as part of a process of social change constituted in small acts of resistance. Massumi says, 'mediation, although inseparable from power, restored a kind of movement to the everyday. If the everyday was no longer a place of rupture or revolt, as it had been…it might still be a site of modest acts of "resistance" or "subversion" keeping alive the possibility of systematic change.'[4] In the context of Lebanon, food may act as a mediator that brings together unlikely groups in unlikely ways. While the forging of solidarity between Lebanese and Syrian women, for example through the cooking of Kebbet Beit or Kebbet Banadoura, may not rupture the entrenched discrimination against refugees in the country, it could act as a modest but significant resistance against the status quo, keeping alive the possibility for progress and a life made just a little more delicious.

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Capacity Building Programmes – the Construction of Liminal Food Spaces

Souk el Tayeb's Capacity Building Programmes were started with the aim of strengthening the quality of products in the weekly farmers' market. However, its original goal to provide educational opportunities for farmers and producers grew into something much larger. Partnering with local NGOs and organisations, Souk el Tayeb developed hands on training and business skills for diverse groups throughout Lebanon, providing an avenue for job creation and increased economic stability for families. Initially, they worked with a group of twenty Palestinian refugee women from the Ain al-Hilweh and Nahr al-Bared camps. The programme organisers started by asking these women what they usually ate at home. Their answers included: pasta, burgers, or maybe a Lebanese dish, but rarely did anyone mention Palestinian dishes. Jihane reported, 'So, we said, okay, we'll come back tomorrow, but meanwhile you have homework to do. Go and ask your grandmoms, your ancestors, what are your typical dishes, the typical dishes of Palestine? The second day, we drew the Palestinian map, not with its regions but instead with the typical dish per region. So instead of Haifa, we put maftool. Instead of Gaza we put the musakahn, the typical dishes.'[5]

After mapping these quintessential Palestinian dishes, the women learned how to professionalise their cooking, from the technical aspects of cooking to sales skills and self-confidence workshops. The outcome of this particular programme was a catering line called '100% Falastine', enabling each woman to run a business from home complete with marketing, logos, a menu, and pricing. This programme has been particularly important for refugees, who are barred from obtaining work permits and largely unable to work legally in Lebanese formal economy. For many of the women, this was their first and only employment opportunity as it permitted them to work around these oppressive labour laws as well as challenged cultural understandings of women in the workplace.

This programme has gone through a number of iterations since '100% Falastine', with increasingly different aims. While each of these programmes have been designed to bring new working opportunities (often the first) and economic empowerment to people (particularly women) throughout Lebanon, '100% Falastine' was designed to cultivate a pride in, and a celebration of, Palestinian cultural and culinary traditions. The other Capacity Building Programmes are deeply tied to heritage and history, but with an explicit focus on groups of women who have experienced particular religious or political tensions with one another. The aim of these programmes is to provide a therapeutic outlet and a space of positivity and reconciliation.

The spaces that Souk el Tayeb provides through their Capacity Building Programmes constitute what, borrowing from Victor Turner (1974), we can call a 'liminal food space'. Turner argues that ritual processes construct liminality, meaning a space of being in-between. This liminality is enacted through three important phases integral in developing what Turner calls, 'communitas'. The first phase is separation or segregation in which the subjects are removed, or remove themselves, from their usual social reality. This phase is about entering a ritual designed to elevate status or achieve a social goal. This step moves one into the liminal phase. This phase is a space of in-between where one moves away from the structure of daily life and enters a zone of conceptual chaos. It opens up opportunities for different symbols and behaviour, creates cognitive dissonance, renders taboos irrelevant and enables a flattening of categorical markers. In a liminal space, markers of individuality are less pronounced a great sense of camaraderie develops among the participants. This sense of camaraderie is what Turner calls 'communitas'. Communitas is an unstructured community where hierarchies are diminished and in which people forge relationships based on solidarity and unity. Turner remarks that, 'we are presented, in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time", and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties.'[6] Since both 'communitas' and social structure are temporary states, the last phase of the ritual process is the point of re-aggregation to the social structure. This phase can have many characteristics but if the ritual works within the aims of the group, individuals will emerge with a new status or different allowed behaviours. This is this phase in which social change occurs. Is the normative social order reaffirmed or has the structure changed in some way?

Through participation in the various culinary arenas of Souk el Tayeb, we can begin to see how food can act as an agent to usher in a space of liminality that transforms the relationships of the participants into one of 'communitas'. Turning to two examples from Souk el Tayeb's programming, I will analyse how this process of creating a liminal food space brings groups with histories of conflict together, reconstituting the social realities of the participants and reordering how they may experience the anxious remainders of these histories.

Atayeb Trablos – Reconciling the Remains

One of Souk el Tayeb's programmes was called 'Atayeb Trablos', which translates roughly from Arabic into 'the best of Tripoli'. This programme was run in collaboration with Ruwwad el Tanmia, a development organisation in Tripoli, and brought together twenty war widows who were involved in armed conflict between the Jabal Mohsen and Bab el Tabbaneh neighbourhoods. Since the Lebanese Civil War, there have been repeated instances of conflict between the Sunni Muslim area of Bab el Tabbaneh and the Alawite Muslim area of Jabal Mohsen, with intermittent outbreaks of violence almost every year since 2008. Fighting between these two neighbourhoods of Tripoli in the North of Lebanon has continued since the civil war ended in the 1990s but has intensified as a result of the ongoing Syrian Civil War. This particular conflict is especially tense as they are divided not only along sectarian lines in the

context of an existing sectarian system, but are also divided by their stances towards the Syrian government. The Alawites are supportive of the Syrian Regime and the pro-government forces in the Syrian Civil War, while the Sunnis are hostile to the Syrian Regime, especially as a result of memories and experiences sustained during the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon until 2005. These neighbouring communities have a complex and entangled history of violence and marginalisation that remains unresolved. Anthropologist Rebecca Bryant's (2014) work in understanding the ambiguity of ongoing conflict proves useful in thinking through the relationship between these two neighbourhoods. She says:

…it is precisely the […] ambiguity of belonging(s) that may open an important window onto the ways that persons give historical meaning to their everyday worlds. This meaning making becomes an especially fraught endeavor in ongoing conflicts where histories are anxious and incomplete and much is at stake in their resolution. In such a context, an 'unfinished' history is one that is liminal, caught in the unresolved (historical) conflict. Where conflicts have still to be resolved, one can neither 'move on to the future' nor 'put the past behind.' In this sense, history itself may be seen as having an untranscended temporality.[7]

Bryant draws our attention to the liminal character of histories that may prove stuck in time and in people's everyday consciousness. So, how can this 'untranscended temporality' of conflict possibly be perforated and unsettled? How can there begin to be reconciliation between these two neighbourhoods even as the conflict itself remains unreconciled? Souk el Tayeb's programme is unique in that it takes the liminality and intimacy of this history of conflict, being enacted in the everyday, and further suspends it in an alternative liminal, intimate space: that of the kitchen.

The programme provided three months of cookery training to ten Sunni women and ten Alawite women in Ruwwad's community centre. Even the site of the community centre is significant for it is situated on the street that divides the two neighbourhoods with an entrance on each side of the building; suspended on the borderline.[8] Jihane spoke passionately about the effects of this programme. She told me: 'How they were sitting in the first session, they were sitting on both sides of the table like a reality, the Sunnis from here and the Alawites from here and looking at each other like, "I want to kill you, your husband killed my husband." You know? In this meaning.'[9] She goes on to describe how these resistances to working in the same space and cooking food together slowly dissipated over the course of the programme.

To conceive of how this liminal food space, the kitchen, could be so successful at dissipating the remainders of conflict, let us imagine twenty women cooking a meal together. Think of the intimacy of the space of the kitchen, the women crowded into a small space, each with a task that will contribute to the whole meal. One woman is boiling chickpeas, another sautéing okra for the *bamyeh*; a team is preparing the filling for *kebbeh* with another assembling the *kebbeh* balls for frying. In this moment, these women are interacting in a way that was unimaginable outside the confines of this street, straddling the borderline. Here, food acts as that cultural mediator, an agent compelling these women to work together, to interact, to know one another in a different way - an act that subverts the normalised social structure. 'So what happened at the end of these three months?' I ask Jihane. She replies, 'So at the end of the session they are friends, they are working now together in a center in Tripoli, they are making plans together, they have a WhatsApp group together. It's happier living.'[10] In this instance, the effects of this liminal food space have persisted outside the context of the programme, even in this small way reconfiguring the possibilities of interaction and reconciliation between these two communities.

Atayeb Zaman – Healing New Wounds, Discovering Old Scars

This potential for addressing the remains of conflict through food was also explored in programmes with Syrian refugee women and Lebanese women. Souk el Tayeb wanted to find a way to address the immediate needs of the Syrian crisis through what they do best: intentionally cultivating positivity. Jihane explained, 'We repeated the same [programme] then with Syrian refugees when the Syrian crisis started… we said, okay, all the aspects are very negative about this crisis, so we said let's think positive, let's think positively, how we can help instead of nagging.'[11] The refugee crisis in Lebanon has had a myriad of effects on the everyday lives of people living in Lebanon, but especially prominent is the anti-Syrian discourse of xenophobia present in all levels of society. While there are many Lebanese working tirelessly as advocates for Syrians in Lebanon, others harbour more negative feelings. Some point to Syrian occupation for their rationale, while others lump their grievances under the common justification for xenophobia: 'they are stealing our jobs.' Still more invoke a type of déjà vu, repeating the same scapegoating rhetoric that has surrounded Palestinians in Lebanon for decades.

When Souk el Tayeb decided to create this programme, entitled Atayeb Zaman, designed to bring groups of Lebanese and Syrian women together in the kitchen, they were very intentional about the kind of space it was going to be. The menu for the completed programme states, 'These women find in cooking an opportunity to celebrate their heritage, history and culinary knowledge as well as a therapeutic outlet to focus on the positive aspects of their lives.'[12] This emphasises a temporal shift from the ambiguity and anxiety of belonging towards a reconceptualisation of a shared culinary knowledge, and even a shared history. This programme placed Syrian and Lebanese dishes in the same framework, advocating an appreciation of one's own history and livelihood as well as that of 'the other.'

Jihane told me that the majority of these women did not know each other before their first day in the kitchen. She said:

For example for one of the groups where we had Lebanese and Syrians, the Lebanese they start saying that 'Ana, I don't want to work with the Syrians in the same kitchen,' at the beginning. Then after the 5th session they became friends, and now, the project ended one year ago and they are still friends. They make plans together and go on outings together. This is really the main target of these sessions. Not just to teach them how to cook, sometimes they teach us how to cook, but the most relieving thing is when you hear them saying: 'We don't come to those sessions to cook but to forget our pain and to make friends.'[13]

This programme, through its intentional emphasis on positivity, food over politics, and shared heritage and traditions, has enabled these women to create 'communitas:' solidarity forged in the kitchen. Friendship may even become a radical act here, cracking open possibilities for resettlement and coexistence.

Conclusion

Food plays many roles in our everyday lives, and like anything else is enmeshed in power discrepancies, conflict, and anxiety. In Lebanon, food has served as both a mediator and instigator of conflict for centuries. However, in the case of Souk el Tayeb, we can begin to bring some understanding to that original question, 'what is it about food?' What is it about this medium that is charged with so much social potency and meaning? In the most intimate spaces of conflict, the materiality of food itself, in all its sensorial deliciousness, has the power to break down what divides us most vehemently. Through their method of defiant positivity, Jihane and the rest of the Souk el Tayeb team cultivate an atmosphere where food actively mediates between sides and where, at least for an hour a day, people can forget about their most pressing anxieties, about what divides them, and can enjoy that delicious, liminal food space. As Jihane says, 'When you go to the souk you see all the groups, all the nationalities. But no one asks, where are you from, what's your nationality? I only care about you and your food.' All that matters is you and your food.

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1 Arabic for 'the good market' or also as in 'goodhearted.'
2 Transcribed from the author's field interview with Jihane Chahla on 28th June 2017.
3 A system of governance and social organization that uses religious sect as the means of categorisation.
4 Massumi, B. (2002) *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Duke University Press.
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A Couscous Friday

Zainab Fasiki

Gender inequalities are omnipresent in today's Moroccan society structure according to Zainab Fasiki. She demonstrates the ongoing disparities in gender roles by following the trajectory of one of the country's most famous dishes: couscous.

If there is one thing that represents Moroccan society at its best, that is Friday's couscous. Feasting with the perfectly-dressed slowly-cooked grains, accompanied by all sorts of fresh vegetables, and, why not, raisins and caramelized onions on top is the perfect way to end a tough week. Because yes, life is not always easy in Morocco… you have to spend endless afternoons chilling at the café with your friends, while some lucky duck can spend all the day working at the couscous factory and doing house chores. But luckily it's Friday; luckily, it is couscous day.

The story of couscous can reveal us one of the greatest secrets of Moroccan society: perfect balance. The absolute harmony in the division of everyday's tasks grants men and women a fully equal status and is the secret of Morocco's fair, just and peaceful society. Its success is due to its self-evident simplicity: things are this way, have always been this way, and will always be this way. This natural division of roles avoids unnecessary questioning about gender balance, discrimination and reproduction of inequalities. It is as simple as it gets: Moroccan society is perfect like it is, no need for change.

Like the best things in life, preparing a perfect couscous is a collective effort. Women rise early to go to the market and buy the grains and all the necessary ingredients, while men rest and prepare for the long day ahead. It is imperative that duties are equally shared in Moroccan households: while women meticulously prepare the famous meal in the kitchen, men alternate between long-lasting disquisitions at the local café, and moments of profound spiritual reflection at the mosque before returning home. After enjoying the meal, men are so overwhelmed by the exquisite outcome of the shared effort that they need to take a long nap right afterwards; can you guess who is going to do the dishes?

Zainab Fasiki was born in Fez, Morocco, in July 1994. She recently graduated as an Industrial Mechanics Engineer and is a self-taught cartoonist and digital installation artist. After she moved to Casablanca in September 2014, Zainab created alliances between different cultural organizations in order to develop her passion for art and technology. When she joined the magazine collective Skefkef, she was able to create comic book panels with a group of artists while working on a number of artistic residencies in Casablanca; she also ran workshops designed to introduce pupils and high-school students to DIY culture and electronic installation with the organization Morocco Makers. Currently, Zainab works as a freelance digital artist and is preparing a new comic book Omor, tackling gender equality in the Arab World, which is to be published internationally.

Coffee Time During the Long Days of Tunis' Ramadan

Paul Scheicher

Paul Scheicher is based in London and has been working in human rights and humanitarian organisations in Austria and Palestine. After finishing his degrees in Political Science and Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Vienna and Sciences Po Lyon, he worked for the Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Tunis, where he was researching Tunisia's post-revolutionary society and political transition. At the moment, Paul is pursuing the graduate programme "Violence, Conflict and Development" at SOAS, University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies).

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, a holy month observed by Muslims worldwide as a time for fasting, praying and reflecting. Practising Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and engaging in sexual activity from dawn time and until sunset prayers. It is also instructed that Muslims practice compassion and self-restraint and refrain from engaging in hateful speech or instigating conflict.

In Tunis, Ramadan is a special time of year, reserved mostly for family and friends. People gather daily to share dinner and then many of them flock to the old Medina where they listen to music and dance until it is time to fast again.

For fasting and non-fasting Tunisians alike, this time of year is also a test of the people's capacity for patience and tolerance for the issue of eating and drinking in public constantly provokes a political and social debate.

During the day, the pace of life is slow; tired and lacking in energy, people leave their offices early in the afternoon and shops are often open for a couple of hours a day. No one drinks or smokes on the streets and restaurants remain closed. Ordinarily busy streets are deserted, especially just before sunset, with a few young men here and there, passing their time in the doorways of old houses or in the shadows of an occasional tree. From time to time their families order them to rush out into the evening heat to grab the last available piece of bread for the *iftar* supper.

A number of cafés however, are silently protesting against the daily winding down of the city. Café owners must apply for permission to keep their doors open during the day for hungry and thirsty customers and, in order to receive this dispensation, they are obliged to cover the windows and doors of their 'hideaways'. As a result, old newspapers, reflective foil or heavy curtains make it impossible for passers-by to see what is happening inside the cafés: the covering bestowing an odd sense that there are clandestine practices afoot. The sporadic glimpse of an arm or a foot is the only hint of an apparent parallel universe and the ordinary café suddenly appears semi-legal and shady, calling to mind images from gangster movies. However, the people inside are simply in search of their daily dose of caffeine and nicotine in a fight against boredom.

'En quoi ça te dérange - si tu jeûnes & moi je mange?'
- Why be upset, if you abstain and I banquet?

Every year during Ramadan the issue of eating and drinking in public during the day provokes a huge political debate in Tunisia. The police regularly shut down cafés that do not adhere to the special regulation that requires them to cover windows and doors during the month of Ramadan. Indeed on 1 June 2017, the sixth day of this year's Ramadan, four men in the northern city of Bizerte were sentenced to one month in prison after being caught by the police smoking and drinking in a public park.

However, Tunisia would not be Tunisia, if there were not a number of people who took to the streets to protest. There is no law, which prohibits eating or drinking in public during Ramadan so activists came together in front of the justice ministry in Tunis for a spontaneous picnic to express their solidarity with the four men.

In effect, the men had been convicted under Article 226 of the penal code, which was introduced by the occupying French power in 1914. This article enables prosecutions to be brought against those involved in 'violations of moral standards and public decency' and was originally used to convict those engaged in such 'crimes' as kissing or showing physical affection in public. Indeed, Judge M. Boularès who presided over the trail in Bizerte, argued that their act 'was provocative and posed an attack against morals.'

Rahma Essid, who took part in the picnic, said that, 'Article 226 bluntly conflicts with Article 6 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of belief and conscience.' Article 49 of the Constitution further elaborates on the protection of individual rights and states clearly and that all judicial bodies should permanently secure the protection of rights and liberties of any violation. Defending the non-fasters, Rahma Essid co-organised a demonstration on 11 June 2017 under the slogan *mouch_bessif*, which in Tunisian Arabic means, 'I'm not obliged' or 'I'm not under pressure'.

Reports of the demonstration by Tunisia's mainstream media suggested that the protestors were solely demonstrating for the right to eat, drink and smoke on the street during Ramadan. There was a harsh backlash against the activists, especially on social media, where they were called disrespectful and some even received violent threats. The Mouch Bessif activists, though, point out that they were actually calling on the State to respect individual rights and liberties and to follow the new Tunisian constitution. 'Our biggest fear,' Rahma Essid says, 'was the very broad interpretation of the law, under which the four men were persecuted. - This is extremely dangerous, the law has been very contentious before, but they have never applied it in such a case. Following an interpretation like this, they could also persecute me for leaving the house in a mini skirt if they wanted.'

Demonstrators with signs saying (bottom left to right) 'Read and understand Article 6 of the Constitution', 'Individual freedom is a right and not a wish' and 'No to religious police - you will not impose it on us'.

Rahma Essid during the demonstration with a sign saying 'The article of shame is unconstitutional' relating to Article 226 of the Tunisian penal code.

The legislation that cafés must follow during the month of Ramadan is similarly confusing and out-dated, even though it is not so old. In 1981, then Prime Minister Mohammad Mzali ordered the daytime closure of all restaurants and cafés during the month of Ramadan. However, it only took two days for President Habib Bourguiba, famous for emphasising his belief in secularism by showing up publicly drinking water during Ramadan, to revoke the edict. Later it was re-introduced by Bourguiba's successor Zine el-Abedine Ben Ali, although it was rarely enforced. Today authorities all over Tunisia refer to this regulation when ordering the closure of cafés.

In order to keep the cafés open another edict, dating back to 1977, comes into play. The then mayor of Tunis announced that the selling and buying of alcohol should be prohibited during Ramadan. The edict also stated that cafés and restaurants would need special authorisation to keep their doors open, although this originally referred to places especially created for tourists, and, finally, the same edict dictated that those venues that are open should not be visible to fasters.

Ironically, the Mouch Bessif group were unable to find these orders in any official legal code. Similarly, those café owners who were asked had never seen the original mandate and each year they have to request permission from their individual municipalities to open their doors, not knowing if it will be granted. This is why activists from the Mouch Bessif started a petition lobbying parliament to investigate this practice and to remove the edicts.

Wahid Ferchichi, professor of law at Tunis' renowned Faculty of Judicial, Political and Social Sciences and President of the individual liberties NGO Adli (Association Tunisienne de Défense des Libertés Individuelles) says that, 'it is a real problem that there is still no constitutional court in Tunisia, which would be obliged to scrap those edicts and laws, such as Article 226, which are hundred per cent unconstitutional.' He goes on and says that, 'the parliament and political parties, however, are unwilling to intervene due to the fragile government of national unity.'

The government of national unity is dominated by the two biggest parties in the country, the moderate-Islamist *Ennahda* party and the secular-conservative party *Nidaa Tounes*. In order to secure the fragile peace and to prevent further schism within the population the parties recoil from debate and, in particular, those that concern society and religion. For example, the dispute about whether eating and drinking should be permitted on the streets in the daytime during Ramadan, is an absolute taboo.

The question, however, is if the much-awaited constitutional court will live up to expectations and solve Tunisia's legal inaccuracies. After all, the Tunisian Constitution of 2014 embodies the on-going ideological dispute and fragile compromise between the Islamist and secularist camps. For the activist, Rahma Essid, Article 6 guarantees her 'the right to be different and a state which does not interfere in personal affairs.' Yet, the same Article 6 also names the State as the guardian of religion, whereas the First Article of the Constitution unambiguously defines Islam as the religion of the State. Wahid Ferchichi concludes, that 'in the end, we will have to wait for the composition of the constitutional court.'

Six years after the Revolution and three years since the Constitution came into effect, Tunisia's fight about its own identity is ongoing. Is Tunisia a homogenous Muslim country with a collective society or should the State make space for more individualism, and do these questions necessarily have to be mutually exclusive? This is a fight where food fuels the political debate and becomes emblematic of the complex situation in Tunisia.

Although one amusing side effect of this very particular time during Ramadan is that suddenly male customers in men-only cafés are joined by women.

Is Bacchus Alive?

Wajdi Borgi

Wajdi Borgi, is 26 years old, and was born to a Djerban family in Tunis where he grew up and went on to study Psychology. Wajdi works as a guide leading visitors through the maze of the Medina of Tunis. He also writes for the Journal de la Medina and works in various projects on citizenship and education. He is one of the founders of 'Doolesha,' an interdisciplinary team experimenting with urban explorations. Based on the idea of 'strolling' they create formats to share their vision of the Medina with inhabitants and visitors from all over the world. He also performs as a comedian.

Is Bacchus, the Roman god of wine, alive among us through his elixir, between the leaves of his sacred plants or in the vines, planted for his delight?

This story of wine begins on the shores of North Africa, many centuries ago. In Tunisia, the art of growing vines and winemaking dates back to earliest antiquity, and viticulture to the ninth century BC, during the Carthaginian era. Carthage was both the breadbasket and the wine cellar of Rome. Today Tunisia's vineyards extend over a surface area of 17,500 hectares and are principally located in the northeast of the country. Annual production amounts to 400,000 hectolitres, of which 220,000 are sold on the domestic market, mainly to cater for the five million tourists Tunisia welcomes each year.

Tunisian viticulture can be traced back to the centuries when, through trial and error or simple experimentation, humans discovered spiritual and alcoholic beverages; which in antiquity were spread between cultures around the 'middle sea.' Travellers along the southern shores of the Mediterranean basin, the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Carthaginians, introduced wine making with its tradition of technically rigorous practices and understanding. The famed Tunisian agronomist Mago, who lived in Phoenician Carthage, initiated the study and observation of agriculture, devising a set of rules and identifying factors affecting production. His works are still the bible of viticultural agronomy.

Tunisia, the wine cellar of antiquity, was an Eden of agricultural production for luxurious, quasi-sacred produce consumed during the great rituals in Rome; Carthaginian wine was drunk in honour of emperors, temples and soldiers. Life in Carthaginian Tunisia revolved around producing and exporting; clay potters made wine jars, wine presses were installed in large vineyards, and festivals crowned the harvest during the pressing of grapes and the nights when people would dance with Bacchus, celebrating the art of wine and conviviality.

During the Roman era, Tunisia was the breadbasket of the emperors, and wine production became more sophisticated. Tunisia's favourable climate and generous sunshine led it to exert a monopoly over production. Roman Tunisia introduced a set of criteria for the labelling of wine and wines made by African Romans were drunk at the Vatican during meetings of its conclave and to celebrate mass.

The Roman conquest of North Africa and the wealth of its soldiers led to the planting of vineyards that were larger and more varied than those from antiquity. The sheer density of vineyards enabled this 'elixir of life' and intoxication to flow freely throughout the ancient world as the techniques of wine production improved from generation to generation, and from one culture to another.

Then the Byzantines reached Africa, bringing with them their ancient Greek traditions of decorating mosaics, frescoes and statuettes with vine leaves, baskets, bunches of grapes and satyrs. This decorative language drew on the depictions of ancient aesthetic iconography of gods carrying bunches of grapes, nymphs hiding behind vine leaves, and muses mixing their wine with the waters of wisdom. In this era, wine was a social and cultural practice where drinking vacillated between inebriation and the sanctity of wisdom. Poets wrote odes to it, theatre plays alluded to it, philosophers discussed it, and time passed.

The Arabs illuminated the world with the torch of a new religion, and reached the shores of North Africa, Ifriqiyya, in the seventh century with its sea of vineyards that shone green like an emerald, richly verdant, but drained by wars.

Islam began to influence daily life; vineyards were no longer the good investments they had once been, and the production of wine was no longer an accepted practice on either religious or sociocultural grounds.

The vineyards' star began to fade as they became increasingly rare. Some practices did survive, such as wine and wine liquor production on the island of Kerkena, and in a few other corners across Ifriqiyya. Wine was an important character in Arabic poetry. *Khamr* was the ally of artists, poets, lovers of the Caliphs, and of princes at their soirées. In poetry, Bacchus, a well-known figure at the time, assumed the guise of an Arab warrior from the Orient and sung of his knightly escapades, warrior's courage and amorous nights. Through his special relationship with the fruits of the vine, Bacchus became synonymous with the wine that ran in the rivers of paradise, conjuring a riverscape through which it flowed. This poetry developed and shared a taste for a culture of wine that was both anchored in the lands of the tizurin ("vines" in the Berber language) and also found in a miraculous grapevine which covered the heavens of Berber mythology, a sky of gracious and fragile leaves that traced shadows of songs and stories. The poet-soldier disembarked in these places, and sang of the blood and gold-coloured waters. These poets, as they swapped shores, demonstrated a new taste for poetry that told of the noble and courageous, the knight and poet in all their manifestations. In literature from the Abbasid era, they would charm through their harmonious and melodic descriptions of wine, it was a source of fantasies, intoxication of the senses, and pleasure, a space where man could forget his troubles and embrace words.

Wine then took on a great significance in sung poetry, of which traces can be found in the music of al-Andalus: "I deprived myself of sleep, o mistress of departures…I revealed our story to my cup …I spoke only to my wine cup…my living is without nourishment… Poets made declarations of love with their words, pairing sensual nights with wine-fuelled ones. Wine continued to spin its cultural web between Roman palaces and Arab gardens, lands where man lived piously by day, but by night his experience was a spiritual one in which wine lit up sombre, lugubrious evenings. Whilst wine production declined because of the new traditions and moral codes, it could still be found in palaces and large cities, among ethnic minorities, and in the hinterland during festivities, and marriage ceremonies. The lyrics of songs also continued to talk of intoxication through love and wine not only in classical Arabic, but also in the local dialects.

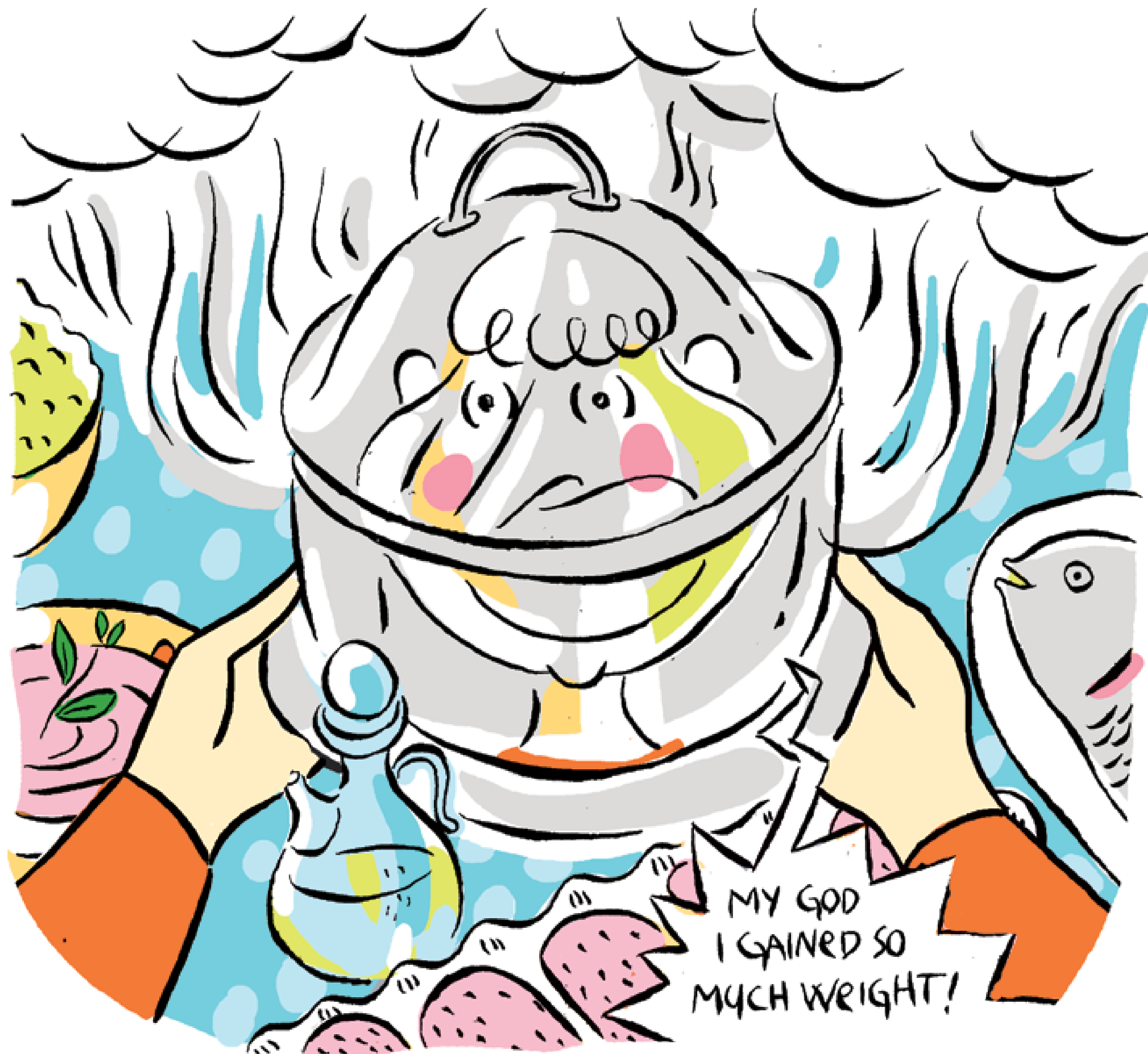
The spirit of Bacchus fought against the new moral code and persisted, like a tree whose roots sing of the past and whose branches, with Eros' red ink, write the future. During this period, however, wine production made no technical advancements and continued only in a limited way among a few foreign Christian families from Malta and southern Italy, and among the Jewish population. These ethnic groups protected Tunisian wine heritage until the arrival of the White Fathers at the end of the nineteenth century, who along with the Italians who arrived after the treaty agreed with the Bey of Tunis in September 1868, developed and revitalised the Cap Bon region's vineyards and viniculture. The first vineyard of the modern era in Tunisia was planted at the seat of the Archbishop in Tunis in 1879. Wine began to rival in popularity a fig eau-de-vie, known as Boukha, which was a popular traditional liquor in Tunisia's Jewish community. Wine would not find its place in the codes of local gastronomy, whether popular or refined, but as always it remained linked to nights of pleasure and mysticism.

In 1881 with the establishment of the French protectorate, winegrowers sprung up in great number. Different varieties of wine were produced, and Tunisia once again re-established its wine chart, from red to white wines, via rosé, from the dry to fruity via the sweet. Tunisian wines drew their flavour from the country's rich soil and harsh sunlight. In the mid-1960s, when the Italian Tunisians left independent Tunisia, wine production underwent another dark period when the presses and vineyards were abandoned. The troubled economic period that infected the country steered wine from an 'elixir of life' to a neglected industry until 1999, when the Tunisian Wine Office opened up production to the private sector and offered the opportunity to French, German and Italian specialists and investors to draw up new strategies, benefiting from their rich expertise to revive Bacchus once again.

Wine is the reflection of a civilisation, an art of living and a culture. To appreciate it, one must know its origins: where it comes from, the variety of grape, how it was vinified and by whom. But to discover its soul, one must dive into the history and customs of the country where it was produced. Better still, one should visit the vineyards to take in the landscapes, smell the scent of the earth, and meet those who work to produce it. One must also take an interest in the local gastronomy and the matching of wines to certain dishes. In this way, Tunisian wine would no longer be simply the beverage of couscous restaurants. It would become an independent part of Mediterranean culture that could accompany all types of cuisine. For you readers, it would become one of the world's must-have wines, one to lay down in your cellar.

And on those occasions when you feel like escaping, just as those moments when one lingers in front of an artwork, you might just sip it among friends, family, or even for an important occasion. Is drinking wine today still a toast to the gods or simply a means to escape reality?

Translated from the French by
Sarah Morris



Editor: Josephine Borradaile
Layout: Rachad Chamoun
Illustrations and Cover Design: Joseph Kai
Photos: p. 37-38 by Paul Scheicher

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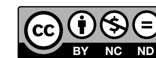

Published by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2017

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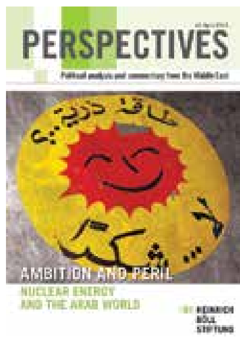
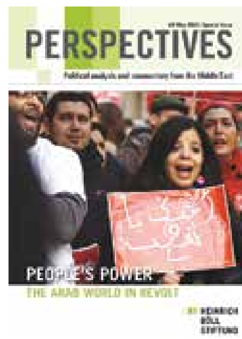
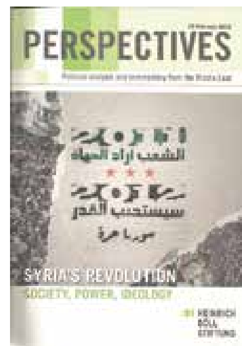
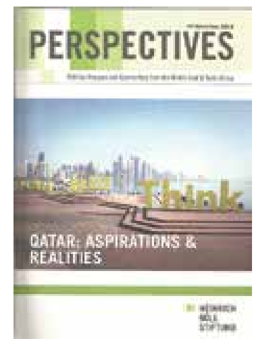
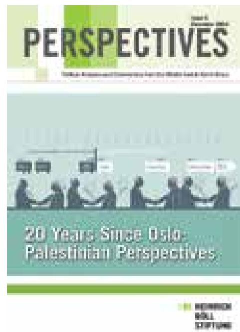
This edition is published jointly by the offices of Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Beirut, Rabat, Ramallah and Tunis.

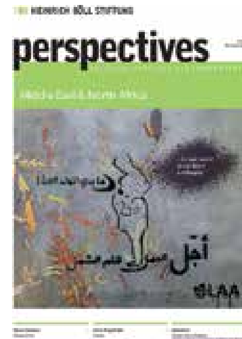


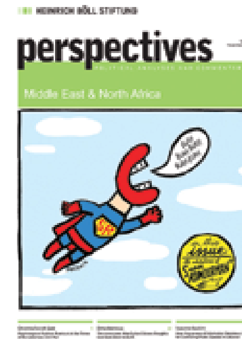


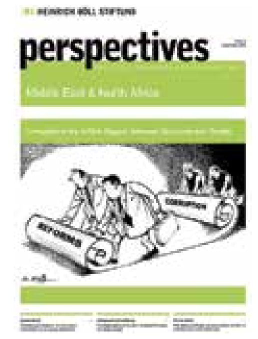


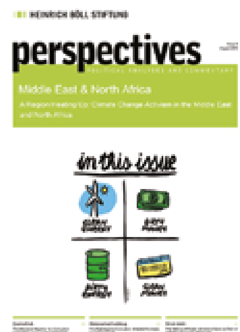


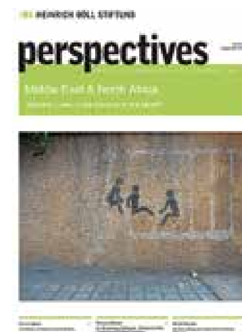


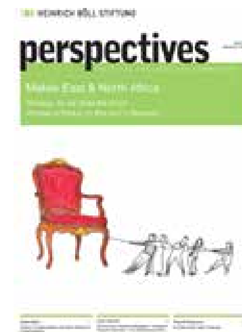


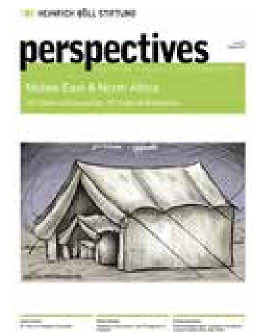












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