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This publication is a project by *offline:events media*

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A special thanks goes to

Daylight Magazine and *The Crimes of War Project*

and to Dina Fakoussa, Marianne Gimon, Alessandro d'Ansembourg, Jan Mun and Thomas Sommer-Houdeville for their support

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE 6 **A LETTER FROM HEAVEN** BY JASSIM MOHAMMED

In my country you don't know who your friend is; you don't know who your enemy is. You walk in the street and you don't know when you will die or for what reason.

PAGES 13 **A VIEW FROM WITHIN** 27, 34 PAINTINGS BY WALEED ARSHAD - TEXT BY DEBORAH AMOS (NPR)

One reason I won't go back, is that I have to feel myself as a human being, and I can't if I have to declare whether I am Shiite or Sunni.

PAGE 14 **BAGHDAD OFFLINE** BY ZIAD TURKEY

We are like this now: tottering voices in the void and there is no land to gather them. Baghdad is not and will not go back to how it was.

PAGE 18 **UNTIL WHEN...** BY riverbendblog.blogspot.com

We were all refugees - rich or poor. And refugees all look the same - there's a unique expression you'll find on their faces- relief, mixed with sorrow, tinged with apprehension. The faces almost all look the same.

PAGE 24 **TRAFFICKED OUT** BY SHERYL MENDEZ

When the body of her sister was dumped at the door of her Baghdad home, the life of Aishiq changed forever. It was 2003, and she was 12.

PAGE 28 **FROM EXTINCTION TO FORMATION STORY** BY ALI BADER

Easterners love Westerners more than the West, whereas Westerners prefer the East to Easterners.

PAGE 35 **WHILE WE ARE WAITING... VOICES FROM EXILE** QUOTES FROM refugeesinternational.org

They wanted to kill me, but killed my brother-in-law instead. After that, I knew I had to leave.

Displacement has been an unfailing feature of recent Iraqi history. During the last thirty to forty years, substantial numbers of Iraqi civilians fled their homes compelled by war, uprisings, and government - directed policies of ethnic cleansing and systematic forced resettlement.

The US-led invasion of April 2003 began under the projection of mass displacement. Aid agencies and human rights organizations warned, and governments throughout the Middle East feared, that the invasion risked triggering a massive exodus of Iraqis. This, however did not materialize immediately. It did, however in subsequent years and with great force. As the security and political climate destabilized in Iraq, the violence that ensued triggered a massive wave of displacement, both within the country and outside. Iraqis found themselves forced to relocate in search of security. From conversations and interviews with Iraqi refugees in Europe and throughout the Middle East and those internally displaced within Iraq, it is clear that many dream to return to their homeland. Those who express hesitation fear they no longer belong in Iraqi society or risk targeting if they return. In either case, it is equally clear that the vast majority of Iraqis living outside of their homeland does not think that it will be safe enough to return in the near future.

Today it is not that Iraqis do not want to return home, it is that many cannot due to targeting or continued instability. Exile is no easier, asylum policies are often characterized by ambivalence. The process can be one of disorientation, disqualification and disintegration leaving one with stark questions of, "Who am I?". "Who are We?". Loss of identity, control of one's environment and uncertainty of future compound the situation and must be addressed. offline:events in collaboration with independent Iraqi artists, filmmakers, and authors are documenting the lives of Iraqis navigating the space between home and exile.

A Letter From Heaven

by Jassim Mohammed

MNSG: NAVIGATING THE SPACE BETWEEN HOME AND EXILE

I see people now as strange. If this is heaven, which kind of heaven am I in? Because I ran away from heaven. I ran away from my life.

Let me ask you, in your country, when a person dies in the street, does nobody care about him? In your country, do people die because they carry a hundred dollars? In your country, is a person killed because he or she has a nice car? Or because they are managers? Doctors? Or because they are happy? Happy in their lives? In my country, you don't know who your friend is; you don't know who your enemy is. You walk in the street and you don't know when you will die or for what reason. Every morning we start our day by going to work and saying goodbye to our family. We leave the house and they are sure - the family is sure - that you may not come back. And so they say, "Be careful." Everyday they remind you to be careful. The problem is you don't know - be careful from what?

Your friend is dead. One call and your friend is dead. Is this possible in your country? Your friend is dead, your cousin is kidnapped, and they say you or your neighbour is a spy. Your friend is dead. For me this day is finished.

Do you know the first time I heard that my friend, a friend, is dead? How many times was I alone? I try to forget. The people around me say this is

normal. People here die everyday. But there is a first time, a first friend and for me this was the first person that I know who died. It takes me three days. After three days, I come back to life .. I come back to life because my area has been attacked. The area where I work and live has been attacked. I want to see, to see what happened. I go to work to see what happened to the people I know. To the people I knew. No day is like another.

They took Ahmed today. I watched, he cried, I stood and watched. I stood against my car and I watched. People come and go and I don't know what to do. Maybe they think I know him. This is dangerous, but for me he is a normal person. I don't know why they took him. I'm just looking. I want to hear something, some reason. I keep looking at his store, they come out, men with guns, he is a man and they carry him like a baby. They throw him like a plastic bag into their car. He cries to anyone who will listen, but no one listens. His eyes are locked onto me. I don't know how much time passes. Time is not important. They took Ahmed today. The day finished. The next day they find him, they find the body of Ahmed in the morgue. Ahmed was 25 years old, not married. He worked in the market to make good money, to marry. He had a dream to have a house, a family. For three days, the market is quiet. Nobody has a mind to work because we don't know who is next. That is what happened *one* time.

Freedom - we cannot change any letter from this word. Now I sleep without



fear, now I sleep like a normal person. I'm not scared, no one will come and break my door to steal from me or kill me and my family for no reason. The police won't come to catch me or my neighbour, to question or take us. So I can sleep. I close the door and I take off my clothes and I sleep naked. I smile because I feel light. It's a nice feeling. I didn't feel it before. I stand in front of a red brick immigration building in Stockholm, Sweden. I'm wearing all of the clothes that I brought to heaven. I shaved. What do I tell them? Who am I? What will happen to me when I go inside this building? Who will I be? Or what to them? I know my truth, but how many times have they heard the truth from thousands before me and have not believed them. What truth are they looking for? All I know to be true is that my life was no life. But I am not alone in this. I follow a woman from immigration to a storage closet of mattresses, blan-



kets, pillows, some clothes (second hand), shoes. She hands me a blanket and pillow and a blue plastic bag. I still have this blue plastic bag. Somewhere under a bed you'll find this bag. It's the first sign, first mark that we are refugees, that we are strangers. I don't know why no one throws it away, they keep it. It's a memory, a first memory of living outside of your country. Something changed, my life changed when I accepted this blue plastic bag. We Iraqis, we are foreigners in our own country and now we are foreigners in exile. In my room in the refugee camp there is Hussein who is a Kurd from Baghdad, who refuses to say he's Kurdish. He says, "I'm Arab." To the Swedish, he's an Arab. Hussein cannot speak Kurdish well and his accent in Arabic is not good either. If he speaks with Arabs, they think he's Kurdish and if he speaks with the Kurdish, they think he's an Arab. He lost who he was somewhere along the road to Sweden. Maybe we all have...

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

April, 28. I Was Kidnapped Today

Before the war, you never forgot this day. Parades marched, songs echoed from every corner. "Celebrate," "Be Happy," they blared, "Smile." Even if you buried your son or father on that day, smile!, for Saddam Hussein's birthday. I stop in the cue of an Iraqi checkpoint. When a car pulls up to the checkpoint two police vehicles, one on each side, box you in. Cars are waved quickly through; if you are going to go through a checkpoint at all in Baghdad; you hope it is Iraqi. Iraqi checkpoint - you will be on time, American checkpoint - you will be late. Checkpoints are part of the landscape of Baghdad, we stopped noticing them. "Hand me your IDs," the police officer said. "Why?" I ask. "It's for your safety," he said. "Give us your mobiles," we hear one of them say. "Why?" we ask.

This time a two star officer answers us, "Give him your mobiles!", he orders. The two star officer instructs his men, "Get them out and drive the car," meaning our car. "What's happened?" we ask, "Why our car?" "This car is stolen. We'll talk in the police station where we can check on it," he said. During all of this confusion, two police pickup trucks drive up behind our car. The pace around us is frantic and sudden, a long cue has formed behind us, but all are waved on. I am pushed from behind my neck into one of the pickup trucks. We drive off passing an Iraqi army checkpoint and are quickly waved on. After a while, our convoy stops near Sadr City and the police start to undress, yelling to one another "Hurry, Hurry." They close our eyes with black cloth and move us to two cars parked nearby - one a Caprice, another Opel. I was put in the trunk of the Caprice. We are taken to a house. Are you Sunni or Shi'a? A kick in the head, then blows to my body to the sound of voices repeating, "We will take you to Abu Deraa." They laugh and take us back outside. Thrown once more into the trunk of the car, I lose track of time. I repeat a prayer from the Holy Koran and think to myself today I will die. I am sure I will die. I did not say goodbye to my family. Finally, the car stops and now I find myself in another house. "We will ask you questions; if you lie, we will kill you." A Kalashnikov is pressed onto my head, "You are Sunni," the man at the other end of the Kalashnikov says to me. "No, I am Shi'a." A stream of questions flood the air. "You are a spy," he said. A spy to whom? I ask myself. A phone call is made. "Sayed (mister) Abu Deraa we need you to make interviews with this Sunni shit we hold; they are spies for America." After the call, they take us to the Opel, and throw two of us together into its trunk. The trunk of an Opel is impossibly small, small for one, but now we are two, pain shoots through my leg as I try to not move, I am afraid I may crush my friend who is beneath me. We pass the time driven from house to house. All sense of time is gone, days pass. Finally, we are brought in front of a man sitting with the Holy Koran at a low-lying table. "Tell me the truth and I will release you," he continues, "We now know of each person in your family so if you lie we will kill you and all of your family." They close my eyes once more and push me into the back seat of a car. "We will release you, but your telephone, your id, your address all the information is with us. If we know you work with the Americans, we will kill you and your family." They drive on stopping only to throw us out of the car.

April 28. I was kidnapped today.

In Iraq you can't save yourself, you can't save your children, so you send them away. You simply cannot save your child. In my own family, my cousin's 12 year-old daughter slept alongside her parents on the roof on one unbearably hot summer night to escape the heat of Baghdad. There was no electricity, no air downstairs, so the family slept on the roof. In the summer, you sleep on the roof or in the garden. This is what we do. On this night, a bullet came from the sky and found a place to settle deep inside her skull. The little girl made a sound, they say like a cat, and the family woke. They woke to check on her and this sound. Blood stained her face. She made no more sounds. Her family carried her down the stairs to the car and drove to the nearest hospital. At first, they thought the blood was coming from her nose. They didn't know at first that there is a bullet in her head. At the hospital, her head was shaved and they found a hole in her head. She died within two hours. One day before, she told her mother, "If I die, give the people Pepsi and bananas." During the three days of mourning, food was prepared and her mother served Pepsi and bananas. It is a tradition in Iraq to make lunch and dinner for the people during the mourning ceremony. Why did she die? We don't know. A bullet came from the sky...

Do you know loss? Loss that takes everything, every sense is assaulted, everyone is a victim? Do we ask to be victims? No, we ask for our lives. It's no simple matter to leave your country, to leave your life, your family and friends. We are Iraqis, we are proud of being Iraqi, we don't leave our families behind, we don't make our families stay alone without us. But if we stay, our families are more in danger; they are more in danger if we stay than if we run away. This is how we keep them safe.

In your country, are the police kidnappers and the kidnappers police? In your country, when you see a man in a police uniform, driving a police car, and there's a checkpoint, a police checkpoint, and you stop, you stop for the police, does it ever occur to you that you'll be kidnapped? That the police aren't the police? That the police in your country are the kidnappers, aren't who you think they are, will never be who you think they are, never to you, never again? You'll never trust a uniform, never



trust your neighbour, never trust your country that it will keep you safe, you know that it can't keep you safe. Knowing this, living this, where do you go from there? Where do you begin again, can you begin again, can you trust again or will it be in the back of your mind? For how long? When will we have back our country? Our lives? Our families?

At some point, we all run, you too would run. Maybe you would run before the troubles, or after they've broken your body or you learn to live. Your body or you learn to live in fear and you wait. You wait inside your home behind locked doors and drawn curtains and dim candlelight, you wait in the heat, a murderous heat. You listen to each sound outside your door, each whisper can throw you into panic. We spend a lot of time learning our sounds, we memorize sounds. The sound that the front door or a car door makes, how one drags their feet or searches for their keys. We know the sounds of our own footsteps, how each one approaches the home. The women of the house know these footsteps. You are never late to come home. If you are late the women watch the door for some sign they recognize, endless days they wait by the door. Then they cry, they cry because they know you won't be coming home. Our women know these things; they keep these images.

But do you understand now, do you begin to see that there is no safe side, no one is who they say they are? Once we were normal. Remember, once we were normal. I too was normal. I'm not sure anymore.

I'm from Baghdad, I was. I believe in the Holy Koran, which says, "If you don't feel or you don't find your life in this ground go to search for your life on another ground." When your country doesn't want you anymore, why should you want her? In my country, I saw death too many times to face her again. I faced my own death as I lay bound hand and foot in the trunk of a car. I was scared, I tell you, I'm still scared. So I ran.

Eat. Sleep. Wait. This is my life, my new life. I watch others watch TV. I watch others watch me. The television is in the middle of the apartment. It's always on. We stopped talking with one another; the sounds of the television fill the space between us. It speaks for us. We watch the news of Iraq as if we are in a theatre, an audience sitting quietly with no attachment to what they see before them.

Life in a camp, a refugee camp, is boring. There is money but not enough to do more than feed you. We receive money every month. In another country, the money would go farther. In another country, one could go farther. But here in Sweden I live in a country which for Europeans is expensive; imagine what it is like for a refugee! I cannot take a bus to the next town less than 30 kilometres away; it is too expensive to travel. I cannot buy bread in the local supermarket; it is too expensive. So we bake our bread and we smoke cigarettes from an Arabic shop nearby where a pack is less than half the money charged in a Swedish store. I am not complaining. I have no right to complain. I only wonder what life I will find here in a country that is too expensive for Europeans and impossibly expensive for me and others like me. You see, the last four months I have not moved from within a one kilometre circle and I have walked this same circle daily to change the air I breathe. But the Swedish do not speak to us; they have

seen enough of us pass through their small town. The others have been here longer than I. The others' eyes are out of focus; they stopped going to Swedish classes long ago. They never go outside except once a month to a local disco where they stand on the edge of the dance floor and look at the blonde haired Swedish girls who they know will never speak with them. You learn this quickly here that if you have black hair, the locals do not talk with you. It is that simple. Everything's simple really, black and white. We are black, they are white, our hair is black, theirs is white. Imagine I've come from a prison and now I've found that I didn't escape the prison; I've only moved into another cell in the prison without my knowing it at first. Each day my mind narrows, each day I watch the others around me and see their blank faces. They lost their expression months ago; they have been here too long, too long without a family, without something familiar to hold to. It's become too expensive to call home; we lose a lot of money on the telephone. We lose *a lot* on the telephone. Boredom deadens you; it has deadened those around me. I am sure one day it will deaden me. Everything is strange to me here, everything. Every street, the language, the people, how they look and act, how they react to me. I see people now as strange.

(edited by Sheryl A. Mendez)

jassim mohammed

Former fixer, translator and photographer for the international press now targeted by militias in Iraq. In 2007, he was kidnapped and an attempt was made on his life. On numerous occasions he was also accused by militias of being a spy for working with the foreign press. The Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org) investigated his case in 2007 and confirms that he is a journalist-at-risk. Jassim Mohammed currently is seeking asylum in Sweden. His case has been followed by CPJ, The Rory Peck Trust, The Crimes of War Project and the numerous international journalists who he worked alongside of in Iraq. At least 127 journalists and 50 media workers have been killed in Iraq since the U.S. led invasion in March 2003, making it the deadliest conflict for the press in CPJ's 26-year history. Nearly 90 percent of media deaths have been Iraqis.



Waleed Arshad says he's never going back to Baghdad. "Art was a lie during Saddam's time." A graduate of Baghdad's Institute of Fine Arts, his first endeavor as an artist in post-Saddam Iraq was painting Arabic-language signs that read, "Halt, do not come closer than 100 meters. Deadly force will be used." He hated the job. "After I started working inside an American army base, I suggested I could paint portraits."

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

Baghdad Offline

by Ziad Turkey

I probably made the right decision to rescue my family from the infernal sectarianism and hate that prevail in our society. I heard that the house where my family and I used to live was burned by the militias a few months after leaving the country. I heard many stories from my neighborhood; frightening stories.

...

My friend Emad,
Let me remind you of our rendezvous under the eucalyptus tree at Abu-Nowas Street at five in the afternoon. Don't forget that I already asked the fisherman to prepare the fish and to buy some ice to cool the bottles of beer. Don't let the beer get warm and don't let the cats eat the fish. I'm waiting for you.

- Ziad

Emad didn't show up. None of the friends showed up, and neither did I. The ice melted over the bottles of beer and its water got hot, and the fish found its way into the guts of the cats.

I can't stand the procedure of the residency application in Sweden anymore. I miss my sons and wife; I'm almost throttled. The situation in Baghdad is very bad and my wife is not going to work anymore because the roads are too dangerous, so they stopped paying her. Ziad, my children are growing up while I'm away from them. Tell me, what shall I do?

- Basim Hajar

My friend, prepare yourself to be indulged into the second spiritual experience. I will send you the script of the film and you'll like it, and don't worry because the shooting won't be in Baghdad. We'll be able to shoot Baghdad's scenes out of it. I don't want to risk the lives of the crew. By the way, I sent you a picture of a sculpture I made. You can find it in the attachment.

- Oday Rasheed

Oday,
I read the script and I like it a lot, and I saw your sculpture and I thought it's a reflection of a disturbed desire to run away to the arms of the mother. Do you agree with me?

- Ziad

Congratulations Ziad! Our series "Hometown Baghdad" won 3 Webby Awards.
- Fady (over the phone)

What a great feeling that our series wins international awards! Congratulations

to you Fady and to all the friends who participated in it, and congratulate the colleagues at Chat the Planet.

- Ziad

My friend Nezar,
I don't think that we can do the successful experience of holding the short film festival again in Iraq, because I think the coming days will be horrible and there is no chance for any cultural or cinematic activity in the midst of this bloody noise. I'm leaving the country soon and I'm preparing for this.

- Ziad

Yes, if the quality of the festival is not better than the first one then there is no reason for risking anything. I dislike not being able to take things seriously. So we won't find you again in the Baghdad neighborhood of Bataween ?

- Nezar

Hello, Ziad? Basim Hamed, the sculptor, died in a car accident. Tell the friends.

- Barie (over the phone)

Basim returned to Baghdad from Syria five days ago. He was in a hurry to return to Baghdad as he was in a hurry to his final departure.

I will leave Sweden and go back to Baghdad. I heard it's gotten better and I can't stand missing my daughter and wife any longer. They made the procedures to return. I will call you soon from Baghdad.

- Samer

The situation is better now.

- Samer - (from Baghdad)

The situation is dangerous and disgusting. I will try to come to Syria.

- Samer - (a week later)





We are like this now: tottering voices in the void and there is no land to gather them. Baghdad is not and will not go back to how it was. The problem is not with Baghdad, not with an irresponsible invasion, not with insolent militias; the problem is with generations that lost the way. There is no road that can take me anywhere. All the roads that I know in Baghdad are now lost to others. Children are lost, women are widows, the old are licking bitterness, weakness, exhaustion, and longing for the days of the past when they were stronger. Some friends now walk the backstreets in the heart of our homeland. Others walk between their rooms and immigration offices in the countries of asylum. Only the evil strangers own the main streets in Iraq. I now know it very well. I am proud that I have learned to talk about it and about its people well. I was mostly accurate in explaining its historical happenings, so I like Damascus and I feel it is amiable towards me, but by the end of the day I do not have any source of support under its sky. It also consolidates the idea of being the polite guest: do not talk about politics, be polite, have the kindness of these beautiful people, respect all including the people who make you listen to insults, and try as much as you can not to eat in cheap restaurants. So bear the hunger until the streets of Damascus farewell you as you go home to count another night in your rented house.

I wanted to do my best to get a refuge through the United Nations, so I went with a friend of mine to a big cage in the UNHCR's yard in the suburbs of Damascus. We were surprised that they locked the gate of the cage, which contained around six hundred men all under the direct sun. All of us were Iraqis and most of us were Yazidis. I squatted like the rest waiting for administrative orders to deal with the big group of people locked in this BRC cage. To distract myself from the feeling of detention I started talking to other Iraqis with big mustaches. "What is bothering you in your areas in the north?", I asked and they said, "We are threatened of extinction by the Kurdish militias. We even think that the Al-Qaida people would be more merciful than the Peshmerga."

Me, my friend and those poor people waited for about three hours under the spring sun. I noticed the presence of a few cameras from TV channels and the

guards were trying their best to keep them away from the cage because that would reflect badly on the image of the UN.

I remembered the following: the genocides, the military prison in the army, and the war prison cages; a feeling of humiliation that most Iraqis experienced. Here I am again helpless and imprisoned like the rest of my weak brothers and sisters. And what made bad things worse is my claustrophobia. I cannot stand imprisonment or elevators because as long as I do not get to hold the handle of the door I feel furious. Finally, I received a far date for an appointment, and so I started counting the days and the months to get the chance to find a sky that can give me some peace and to relieve me of the weight I am carrying. Because however hard I try, I will never succeed to help my four children if we stay in Damascus, my children whom my wife delivered in very hard times and where we used to count how many pieces of bread we had left till the end of the week.

I waited for six months until I got the registration appointment. Then forty days later an employee called me to tell me that in case I do not object to applying for citizenship in the United States, I have to go with my family to be interviewed by another employee who would direct my file to the States. When I was younger, I used to have the innocent dream of studying cinema in the US. So I have to accept to go to this appointment to "win" a life in the States, a nice thought. But then this thought somehow died inside me. Some people do not know the difference between the arrogant American soldier in Iraq and the free American citizen who likes to help. I do know the difference and I think I would accept to live in the US to achieve two things: to secure the studies of my children, and to get a passport that enables me to enter any country. This would be better than my Iraqi passport that I barely use even inside Iraq. However, the problem are the letters, the names of the Iraqi passport; the problem is and will always be my suspicious original nationality.

We finished the boring three-hour refugee interview with redundant questions and answers. Someone told me before that by repeating the answers they are more likely to believe that we are honest about the information. Do I have to repeat what I am saying to seem honest? Was that what Umm-Kulthum, the famous Egyptian singer, used to do all the time?

Now I am sick of the repeated singing, of the waiting for a feminine voice with a Syrian dialect - which I like - asking me on the phone if I am Ziad and if my family's names are xyz. "Yes!" I say and then she tells me that I have an appointment the following day at seven in the morning and that I should bring all my documents. By the way, I am still waiting for the last part of the repeated verse.

I am not enthusiastic about going on with the repetition anymore, and no to an impossible return.

ziad turkey

Ziad Turkey began his career during the Iran-Iraq war when he was sent to the frontlines as a soldier and photographer. In 2003, Ziad served as director of photography on "Underexposure," the first uncensored feature film shot in postwar Baghdad. It won Best Film at the Silver Screen Awards at the Singapore International Film Festival. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Cinematic Arts from the Fine Arts Academy in Baghdad and continues to exhibit his photography throughout the Middle East. He is currently working on various projects in film and theater and lives in Damascus, Syria.

Until When...

from riverbendblog.blogspot.com

Two months ago, the suitcases were packed. My lone, large suitcase sat in my bedroom for nearly six weeks, so full of clothes and personal items, that it took me, E., and our six-year-old neighbor to zip it closed. Packing that suitcase was one of the more difficult things I've had to do. It was Mission Impossible: Your mission, R., should you choose to accept it is to go through the items you've accumulated over nearly three decades and decide which ones you cannot do without. The difficulty of your mission, R., is that you must contain these items in a space totaling 1 m by 0.7 m by 0.4 m. This, of course, includes the clothes you will be wearing for the next months, as well as any personal memorabilia- photos, diaries, stuffed animals, CDs and the like.

I packed and unpacked it four times. Each time I unpacked it, I swore I'd



eliminate some of the items that were not absolutely necessary. Each time I packed it again, I would add more 'stuff' than the time before. E. finally came in a month and a half later and insisted we zip up the bag so I wouldn't be tempted to update its contents constantly. The decision that we would each take one suitcase was made by my father. He took one look at the box of assorted memories we were beginning to prepare and it was final: Four large identical suitcases were purchased- one for each member of the family and a fifth smaller one was dug out of a closet for the documentation we'd collectively need- graduation certificates, personal identification papers, etc.

We waited..., waited..., and waited. It was decided we would leave mid to late June- examinations would be over and as we were planning to leave with my aunt and her two children- that was the time considered most convenient for all involved. The day we finally appointed as THE DAY, we

woke up to an explosion not 2 km away and a curfew. The trip was postponed a week. The night before we were scheduled to travel, the driver who owned the GMC that would take us to the border excused himself from the trip- his brother had been killed in a shooting. Once again, it was postponed.

There was one point, during the final days of June, where I simply sat on my packed suitcase and cried. By early July, I was convinced we would never leave. I was sure the Iraqi border was as far away, for me, as the borders of Alaska. It had taken us well over two months to decide to leave by car instead of by plane. It had taken us yet another month to settle on Syria as opposed to Jordan. How long would it take us to reschedule leaving?

It happened almost overnight. My aunt called with the exciting news that one of her neighbors was going to leave for Syria in 48 hours because their son was being threatened and they wanted another family on the road with them in another car- like gazelles in the jungle, it's safer to travel in groups. It was a flurry of activity for two days. We checked to make sure everything we could possibly need was prepared and packed. We arranged for a distant cousin of my moms who was to stay in our house with his family to come the night before we left (we can't leave the house empty because someone might take it).

It was a tearful farewell as we left the house. One of my other aunts and an uncle came to say goodbye the morning of the trip. It was a solemn morning and I'd been preparing myself for the last two days not to cry. You won't cry, I kept saying, because you're coming back. You won't cry because it's just a little trip like the ones you used to take to Mosul or Basra before the war. In spite of my assurances to myself of a safe and happy return, I spent several hours before leaving with a huge lump lodged firmly in my throat. My eyes burned and my nose ran in spite of me. I told myself it was an allergy.

We didn't sleep the night before we had to leave because there seemed to be so many little things to do... It helped that there was no electricity at all- the area generator wasn't working and 'national electricity' was hopeless. There just wasn't time to sleep.

The last few hours in the house were a blur. It was time to go and I went from room to room saying goodbye to everything. I said goodbye to my desk- the one I'd used all through high school and college. I said goodbye to the curtains and the bed and the couch. I said goodbye to the armchair E. which I broke when we were younger. I said goodbye to the big table over which we'd gathered for meals and to do homework. I said goodbye to the ghosts of the framed pictures that once hung on the walls, because the pictures have long since been taken down and stored away- but I knew just what hung where. I said goodbye to the silly board games we inevitably fought over- the Arabic Monopoly with the missing cards and money that no one had the heart to throw away. I knew then as I know now that these were all just items- people are so much more important. Still, a house is like a museum in that it tells a certain history. You look at a cup or stuffed toy and a chapter of memories opens up before your very eyes. It suddenly hit me that I wanted to leave so much less than I thought I did.

6 am finally came.

The GMC waited outside while we gathered the necessities- a thermos of hot tea, biscuits, juice, olives, which my dad insisted we take with us in the car, etc.

My aunt and uncle watched us sorrowfully. There's no other word to describe it. It was the same look I got in my eyes when I watched other relatives and friends prepare to leave. It was a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, tinged with anger. Why did the good people have to go?

I cried as we left- in spite of promises not to. The aunt cried... the uncle cried. My parents tried to be stoic but there were tears in their voices as they said their goodbyes. The worst part is saying goodbye and wondering if you're ever going to see these people again. My uncle tightened the shawl I'd thrown over my hair and advised me firmly to 'keep it on until you get to the border'. The aunt rushed out behind us as the car pulled out of the garage and dumped a bowl of water on the ground, which is a tradition- its to wish the travelers a safe return... eventually.

The trip was long and uneventful, other than two checkpoints being run by masked men. They asked to see identification, took a cursory glance at the passports, and asked where we were going. The same was done for the car behind us. Those checkpoints are terrifying but I've learned that the best technique is to avoid eye contact, answer questions politely, and pray under your breath. My mother and I had been careful not to wear any apparent jewelry, just in case, and we were both in long skirts and headscarves.

Syria is the only country, other than Jordan, that was allowing people in without a visa. The Jordanians are being horrible with refugees. Families risk being turned back at the Jordanian border, or denied entry at Amman Airport. It's too high a risk for most families. We waited for hours, in spite of the fact that the driver we were with had 'connections', which meant he'd been to Syria and back so many times, he knew all the right people to bribe for a safe passage through the borders. I sat nervously at the border. The tears had stopped about an hour after we'd left Baghdad. Just seeing the dirty streets, the ruins of buildings and houses, the smoke-filled horizon all helped me realize how fortunate I was to have a chance for something safer. By the time we were out of Baghdad, my heart was no longer aching as it had been while we were still leaving it. The cars around us on the border were making me nervous. I hated being in the middle of so many possibly explosive vehicles. A part of me wanted to study the faces of the people around me, mostly



families, and the other part of me, the one that's been trained to stay out of trouble the last four years, told me to keep my eyes to myself- it was almost over. It was finally our turn. I sat stiffly in the car and waited as money passed hands; our passports were looked over and finally stamped. We were ushered along and the driver smiled with satisfaction, "It's been an easy trip, Alhamdullillah," he said cheerfully.

As we crossed the border and saw the last of the Iraqi flags, the tears began again. The car was silent except for the prattling of the driver who was telling us stories of escapades he had while crossing the border. I sneaked a look at my mother sitting beside me and her tears were flowing as well. There was simply nothing to say as we left Iraq. I wanted to sob, but I didn't want to seem like a baby. I didn't want the driver to think I was ungrateful for the chance to leave what had become a hellish place over the last four and a half years.

The Syrian border was almost equally packed, but the environment was more relaxed. People were getting out of their cars and stretching. Some of them recognized each other and waved or shared woeful stories or comments through the windows of the cars. Most importantly, we were all equal. Sunnis and Shi'a, Arabs and Kurds... we were all equal in front of the Syrian border personnel. We were all refugees- rich or poor. And refugees all look the same- there's a unique expression you'll find on their faces- relief, mixed with sorrow, tinged with apprehension. The faces almost all look the same.

The first minutes after passing the border were overwhelming. Overwhelming relief and overwhelming sadness... How is it that only a stretch of several kilometers and maybe twenty minutes, so firmly segregates life from death? How is it that a border no one can see or touch stands between car bombs, militias, death squads and... peace, safety? It's difficult to believe- even now. I sit here and write this and wonder why I can't hear the explosions.

I wonder at how the windows don't rattle as the planes pass overhead. I'm trying to rid myself of the expectation that armed people in black will break through the door and into our lives. I'm trying to let my eyes grow accustomed to streets free of roadblocks, hummers, and pictures of Muqtada and the rest...

How is it that all of this lies a short car ride away?

Continual violence across much of Iraq's central and southern regions is forcing thousands of people to leave their homes every month. As a result, the international community is facing a humanitarian crisis bigger than the one aid agencies planned for during the run-up to the 2003 war. By April 2007, there were believed to be well over 4 million displaced Iraqis around the world, including some 1.9 million who were still inside Iraq, over 2 million in Middle Eastern countries, and around 200,000 further afield. A significant proportion of these were displaced prior to 2003, but many others have fled since then. By 2006, Iraqis were once again the leading nationality seeking asylum in industrialized countries. However, some 95% of displaced Iraqis are still located in the Middle East.

Iraqi refugees elsewhere in the world [2006-2007]					
Germany	52.900	United States	6.000	United States	6.000
UK	23.300	Switzerland	5.000	Switzerland	5.000
Netherlands	21.800	Canada	4.000	Canada	4.000
Sweden	21.100	Finland	1.600	Finland	1.600
Australia	11.100	Italy	1.300	Italy	1.300
Denmark	10.700	France	1.300	France	1.300
Norway	8.500	Hungary	1.200	Hungary	1.200



Iraqi asylum applications [2006]	
Sweden	8.950
Netherlands	2.765
Germany	2.065
Greece	1.415
United Kingdom	1.305
Switzerland	815
Belgium	695
USA	535
Denmark	505
Austria	380
Finland	225
Ireland	215
Slovakia	205
Canada	190
Australia	185
Cyprus	130
France	115

Displaced Iraqis in the Region *	
Syria	1.200.000
Jordan	750.000
Egypt	100.000
Iran	54.000
Lebanon	40.000
Turkey	10.000
Gulf States	200.000

* Estimates include recognized refugees, asylum seekers and those who may be in need of protection. Data subject to revision. Visit www.unhcr.org for updates.

Trafficked Out

by Sheryl A. Mendez

Under-age and trafficked out of Iraq, girls as young as 11 and 12 are sold as dancers in nightclubs and casinos, as virgin brides, and as prostitutes to the illegal sex markets in the Gulf, Yemen, Jordan and Syria. Organized criminal networks operating in the sex trade further jeopardize the precarious financial state of Iraqis at home and living abroad.

When the body of her sister was dumped at the door of her Baghdad home, the life of Aishiq changed forever. It was 2003 and she was 12. Prior to the war in Iraq, she lived with her mother, sister, and brother. The family lived in a simple two-room traditional Arabic style home in the Eastern part of Baghdad. Her father died two years prior from natural causes. The loss of the head of household dealt an emotional and financial blow to the family. With the future now uncertain and their home falling into disrepair, the remaining members of this small Shiite family moved from their Baghdad home to a \$200 a month rental apartment in the holy city of Karbala. Aishiq's brother first found work as a day laborer in Karbala and the family relied on the charity of Shiite and Sunni neighbors for any essentials not covered by the boy's income. "After the death of my father we were very poor and even my brother's money was not enough. We spent a lot of time without good food. My sister suffered from bad headaches and my mother begged neighbors to feed us." Financial struggles and stress complicated the mother's health leading to her death of heart failure while praying in the Imam Hussein Ibn Ali's mosque in Karbala. The three siblings without parents managed to survive on the sole income of the son. With the aftermath of the war in Iraq, Aishiq's brother found new work. It is one of the most dangerous civilian jobs in one of the world's most dangerous countries: translating Arabic for the U.S. military in Iraq. Late one night, Aishiq found the body of her brother, shot in the chest, slumped against the door of their family home, murdered by non-Iraqi Wahabeen (followers of a radical and rigid branch of Sunni Islam). "There was a noise at the door, I opened it and found my brother shot in his chest. His eyes were open; I closed them."

Her sister would shortly suffer a similar fate. First beaten, raped, then murdered, the body was dumped at the family door this time by five local men. She was 15 years old. "They kidnapped her in front of our house. My sister told me she was going to study. She was at the front door and five guys came and took my sister...". Her voice starts to break. She knew the men who killed her sister, "These guys take pills."

Scared for her life, Aishiq fled her family home to an uncle living in the same city. Yet, her uncle's wife refused to take the girl into their home. Without a family, a home to return to and her own life endangered, Aishiq joined a multitude of Shiite pilgrims congregating outside of the

Imam Hussein Ibn Ali mosque in Karbala. It was the first night of Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, a time of mourning and religious observation for Shiite Muslims. Exhausted and with few options before her, she lay down on the pavement alongside the mosque and fell asleep. She would not remain asleep for long. A woman shook her awake, "Aren't you the daughter of Umm Saddam? Aren't you Aishiq?". The girl nodded yes. Kissing both her cheeks, she told her, "Come home with me." There were two young Iraqi girls in the woman's home and both girls were orphaned in the aftermath of the war. They told Aishiq that they were living in a Baghdad orphanage when this same woman and a man posed as prospective parents looking for children to adopt. Aishiq explains, "If someone goes there (to the orphanage) and says my wife cannot have children they will give them a child. But they don't know how the children will be treated." She is visibly saddened when remembering the two young girls who she describes as thin and one with green, the other with hazel eyes. They were 11 and 12 years old at the time. The threesome would soon be trafficked out of Iraq. Aishiq was sent to work as a dancer in a Dubai nightclub and the two girls would be married off to men in the United Arab Emirates. In the months that followed, Aishiq traveled three times between Dubai and Syria. The woman's family was living on the outskirts of Damascus in the Sayyeda Zeinab neighborhood. During Aishiq's stays in Syria, she worked as a dancer in nightclubs and casinos as she did in Dubai, "There were a lot of girls but I was the youngest. The others were older: 16, 17, 18, 20..."

This work did not last long, however, as these places are regularly checked by the Syrian police for girls working under the age of 18. The woman who first trafficked her out of Iraq and would today be the go between for prostituting Aishiq decided to sell her most valuable commodity: the girl's virginity. An elderly Saudi man living in Damascus entered into a temporary contract marriage with the young girl. Contract marriages, also commonly called pleasure marriages, are permitted in Shiite society but there are conditions, as Aishiq explains, "The girl must be an adult, must have the agreement of the mother and the father, and cannot be a virgin but must be a widow. There are certain circumstances under which these pleasure marriages are allowed, such as war and similar situations". The woman sold her off to the Saudi. The man paid 200,000 Syrian pounds (4,000 USD), the going price for a virgin. "When I married I had no period. I was 12. I was a virgin." The Saudi gave her gold bracelets and earrings. She says he took good care of her and she became fond of him. Yet, it was not long after the woman had received the money for selling Aishiq that she started to think how to get the girl back under her own roof. One day, while shopping in a local market in Damascus, two of the woman's sons kidnapped Aishiq. "They put their hands over my mouth and forced me into a car," she says.

After the kidnapping, a doctor was brought to repair the girl's virginity by reattaching her hymen. "I was crying, it hurt too much," she says. Aishiq goes on to explain that men want virgins. Following her kidnapping, she was once again whisked away to Dubai alongside of the woman and the girl was put to work as a dancer once again in a casino. At work she met a young

Emirati man and she says they fell in love. The woman arranged for a contract marriage between the Emirati and the girl. Aishiq lived with this man for 3 or 4 months. Again, it was not long before the woman who contracted this second marriage realized that losing the girl means losing income. The woman threatened the young man that if he did not return the girl she would call his family in the Emirates. The shame and dishonor would be too great to bear, so he agreed to return Aishiq. The young girl was sent back to Syria and forced this time into prostitution. In Syria, she lives with the woman who first trafficked her out of Iraq, the woman's two daughters, both prostitutes, one of the woman's sons and his wife. The woman, now Aishiq's pimp, has two other sons who live in a separate apartment nearby; one of the boys is the girl's minder and accompanies her when she is sent to a client. She sees the second son every three days when he comes to force sex upon her. She says, "One time I refused and he struck me; blood came out of my nose and mouth."

Aishiq's body is a roadmap of torture. A knife cut across her chin paired with a deep slice across the base of her thumb - punishment by her minder. Her arms and hands are riddled with scabbed punctures to her skin, some old, some new.

"When this family punishes me, they bring nails, heat them, tie me and stick the nails on my hands and arms", she says. We ask her when they punish her. "When I ask for money, the money I've earned. They become angry and punish me. They won't give me money." Aishiq sleeps in a small space between the bathroom and the kitchen on a thin mattress. "They provide me with a little food and a place to sleep. The woman sends my money to Iraq to build a house in Karbala." She then pulls down her t-shirt and bares her scarred chest, mutilated by cooking oil thrown at her after she asked to buy a cream to sooth her itching skin. Aishiq explains, "They were cooking fish and threw the oil on my chest." In the past, when her injuries were too severe to treat at home, she was taken to the hospital. In the hospital they would threaten her, "If you say something, we will kill you!"



In the summer of 2005, two unfamiliar men with long beards pulled alongside him in a car as he left an American army base. "Are you dealing with the unbelievers?" They spoke with a Saudi accent and warned him he would be killed if he ever came near the base again. He took his wife and children to Syria on May 2005. Within a few weeks, his parents were forced out of their home. "One reason I won't go back. I have to feel myself as a human being, and I can't if I have to declare whether I am Shiite or Sunni."

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

From Extinction To Formation Story

by Ali Bader

Where do I begin? Every time I face the West, I find myself facing my own self. Upon my first encounter with Western literature as a teenager, I created a heroine who lived in a corner of my soul, a heroine who was a collage of all the heroines I had met upon the pages of books, with unique characteristics from all the female protagonists from the Western novels I read. I don't know when I made her, nor where, nor why, but she contained all the coincidental mistakes, games and fears of an adolescent who dreamt of a far-away, unattainable world. I do not know why my mind has not glazed over the details, and on winter nights in Berlin a month ago, the thought would cross my shivering mind that I was going to meet her, perhaps in a dark bar, or a nearby restaurant, or even at a café, and in the dim lights I would feel the fantasy transformed into a cold, cruel loneliness, and feel that a childish entertainment that had popped up in my imagination while I read had transformed my life into something of a sorry mess, exiling my great hopes into nothingness, not because I will never find that woman, but because I haven't found the place where I wanted her to be.

This woman is more responsible for my upbringing than the environment I grew up in. She is the one who's always watching me and critiquing my behavior, and I see her at all times standing in front of me picking out my clothes, helping to brush my hair and making me into someone different. This difference, perhaps this difference alone, has led me to feel this oppressive misery, and to escape from many of the questions that confront me about my own identity.

This is not because my behavior, life or thoughts developed in an environment totally different from the one I found myself in, and belong to the long-lasting hours of reading and dreams rather than the reality that I existed in, but it is that I found myself after a while participating in creating a history that existed despite my wishes, having to belong to a society where I was already a stranger and in exile. I had dreamt of a place that would change and become one of the most civilized and developed metropolises of the world, stable and unchanging, and I find myself here in this place that is constantly agitated, and I must carry a weapon, be a soldier and fight, I must be part of a society that I was always escaping from, escaping into books, hours of reading and dreaming of a woman who was simultaneously there and not there.

Baghdad collapsed a long time ago, ceasing to be a global center, but its wounded narcissism caused this country to create perceptions of itself that far transcended reality. This desolate place, which used to be a center of a world that stretched all the way to the Great Wall of China, has succeeded in attracting the world's attention once again. The fact that it has found itself in a position that does not match with its historical role has created an adolescent who breaks plates just to gain others' sympathy, and made him stray on the streets committing destructive acts. This is perhaps one way to

MNSG: NAVIGATING THE SPACE BETWEEN HOME AND EXILE

see this unceasing movement, this constantly moving soul that rushes through Iraqis at a dizzying speed: it is a kind of feeling of being in the wrong place, a feeling of the collapse of an old empire and the sorrow resulting from great poverty and destruction. I was looking out from the river onto this city that is rotting in its darkness, and gardens and buildings fading from dirt and rust and filth, thinking to myself again and again how unfair it was for me to be in this place, and to live in this corner of the world, in this patch that breathes destruction and is being destroyed by its sadness and feelings of marginalization, insisting on remaining buried under the ashes. I wondered about this fate that never changes, about this fate that makes me be like this in this place, feeling just a little angry and rather worried when I read - shuddering - about incredibly beautiful and wealthy capitals, or about Baghdad when it was the unmatched metropolis of the world, beaming its rays of science and literature across the world, unstoppable.

A real mental confusion has occurred in Iraq as a result of the revolutions, fallbacks, break-ups, and splits. It is like the desperation of a murderer who no longer has any hope of receiving a logical trial, since politics is the only yardstick; a yardstick of greed, cruelty and hatred that has imposed degenerate values upon a society that no longer distinguishes between the ethics of politicians or gangs. It has imposed breakdowns and unending abuse as well as confrontations ruled by nothing except the deification of chaos, irrationality and perversity. It has imposed an incredible reverence for the forces of instinct and mysterious blood. Saddam Hussein was a mysterious creature led by the spirit of revenge and violence and brilliant cunning, and his insanity could only be ma-



terialized through the picture of the eternal enemy, first the communists, then the Iranians and after that, the Westerners. Iraq as an existing nation and entity was only defined through its enemies, which is how he changed it into a vessel that moved without caring where it was going, a blind force that rolled about aimlessly before collapsing into the abyss of certain destruction, a force of insane speed. The west was pushing it into battle after battle, from invasion to invasion, in order to create the empire of malice and opportunistic masses who would go on to eat up the nation, the nation, the future and the past, leading to this massive distortion of reason, this madness, and unlimited violence and ceaseless, unstoppable motion.

Life became, not recently, but a long time ago, rather Dostoyevskian in its harshness, reminding me of an event that has remained in my mind from a while back whenever I see the scenes of terror, damage and destruction in Baghdad: Saddam Hussein mentioned three times that he had read Dostoyevsky as a young man, claiming that he had read him while spending time in prison in the 1960s. I did not know then whether or not Saddam Hussein had loved Dostoyevsky's characters and spaces. The only time I saw him was when I was awarded the badge of courage following the Basra battles against the Iranians. Fate alone allowed me to see him up there, his tanned face infused with a specific shade of yellow. I was not a hero, and was more interested in the enormous bookshelf behind him than in the person himself. The shelf was stacked with numerous magazines, and my eyes kept returning to an expensive red leather-bound volume until I made out with some difficulty the name Dostoyevsky on the spine. The name was a key, and after the ceremony, I went to the Semiramis Bar on Sa'adoun street with a friend of mine for a beer and a chat, and there I wondered whether Saddam Hussein was so passionate about Dostoyevsky's characters that he wanted to create fates for the Iraqi people similar to those of the great Russian author, this brutality mixed with a special tinge of cruelty, and an attraction to everything violent and crazy which gave the Iraqis the same excessive emotional range as Dostoyevsky's characters. An unbounded propensity for extreme hatred, and love that leads them to dumb submission. Upon following it, one finds a resemblance between the narrative of Saddam and his victims and Dostoyevsky's plots; he leaves them to their own choices, submitting them to humiliation and insults in utter sadism and cruelty, sparing them only to be able to chase them down again later, or else exterminating them ruthlessly only to cry passionately over them afterwards. Even as Saddam stood at the gallows a few months back, I recalled the scene that Dostoyevsky had written of his fake execution.

I stood there, unable to explain this extremism of rancor, malice and hatred, sometimes unable to explain this terrible cruelty without finding it in the past, or in the Islamic heritage of state-formation. But this extremism is also present in the Western nation-state model, and modern Iraqi culture was very much influenced by Western culture. It is true that there was a tangible slide into a life characteristic of the Islamic state with the rise in

ethnocentrism, sectarianism and tribalism which stunted social-class formation and led to the creation of power legacies and a regime, which used the military as a crutch and distributed rank and privilege to its entourage. But the Western model was always present for intellectuals, politicians, the educated elite, artisans and the Baghdad middle classes; thus you find that politicians attempted to emulate western models of forced integration, such as the Bismarck model, and intellectuals tried to imitate Western cultural models in all their phases. The Bismarck model's failure to produce a nation was doubly painful for Iraqi intellectuals; on one side, there were constant accusations of betrayal by their nation and on the other there was a particularly strong attraction to Western culture dictated by the historical position of the West and its culture. You are aware that the first conception of an intellectual was developed in Baghdad during the Abbasid reign, a model that the West only developed in the modern period. However, Islam in its imperial context proved incapable of melding the philosopher-intellectual, poet, author, historian and critic with the man of the cloth, as happened during the Christian era in the West. Thus, the intellectual was doubly confronted, caught between the preacher on one end and the sultan on the other.

Allow me to tell you about Bab Touma, the neighborhood in Damascus I currently live in: Bab Touma is the Christian area of old Damascus, characterized by the ancient architecture of its buildings, its smells and its way of life. It is my favorite place in this area, and this is not due to the fact that my home looks like an ancient Roman convent, or to the fact that the place is Christian in an Eastern way. No, it is - maybe - because the neighborhood is crowded with Europeans, Europeans enchanted by the East. You can see them wandering around with their backpacks, wearing simple clothes, walking the streets day and night. This is a neighborhood of narrow, winding streets that intertwine; there are no straight roads. All the roads fold in upon each other in strange ways. These Europeans walk around these narrow winding streets as if they are looking for something that they cannot find. They roam these labyrinthine streets constantly, and when they get tired they sit in one of the small bars that dot the place, bars that have no equal, since they are a bizarre mix of rowdy Eastern bars and dark European ones. To me, the thing that makes this neighborhood magical are those people who rent out small rooms in houses with large inner courtyards and fountains: Christian Syrians, refugee Iraqi artists, and Europeans who have come here to search for parts of themselves that they still have not discovered.

We Iraqi artists here in Damascus seek out Westerners naturally, and this is crucial - Easterners love Westerners more than the West, whereas Westerners prefer the East to Easterners. I said this to a French friend of mine, who had asked me frankly why Arabs flocked to Pigale, Paris' red-light district. As I drummed my fingers upon the table, I told her that Westerners like the East as a place, as desert, water, architecture, and ruins, wanting to forcibly remove the people who inhabit it. Westerners come to these places - I am not saying "our" places - and do not even glance at the people there. They stare impassively at

the places where people live and at the people themselves with blank faces that become animated as they look at stones and ruins. They look to the left at an old building, and turn their heads right to look at another one, and erase those who inhabit them from their vision. Or they take folkloric pictures of these people - but these pictures are cold, sterile and ancient. On the other hand, Easterners are fascinated by Westerners, and because they cannot get to them personally, they take the easy route and interact with the West through Western women, which is why they crowd Pigale! I am sure that those who come from Europe to Bab Touma are not after our oil, or seeking to occupy our land - the our here is important, since we are talking about us and them. I do not believe that people in general believe that they really own things on earth. The our and theirs is important as long as Europeans speak of culture and say our culture, and speak of modernity and say our modernity. Even if we only witnessed Western modernity at the end of the 19th century as the Ottoman Empire weakened, you should know that the struggle over modernity was bitter; brilliant intellectuals paid heavy tolls for it. An enthusiastic elite fought for what they saw as dignity and life, and were dragged into a bloody fight with the religious establishment and the political authorities. Some went to the gallows for this, feeling that a true enlightenment was coming from the West. But they were shocked by the second-rate treatment they received at the hands of Westerners, and the humiliation they were forced to bear. Did you know that the bloodiest revolt against colonialism in Iraq was not over petrol, but over dignity? The 1920 revolt in Iraq against the English, the largest in the colonies, took place because a British officer had slapped an Iraqi man held in high esteem by his family.

I have never felt that I own something on this earth. What makes me oppose the West is not the petrol that we do not own, and not the land that we don't own either, but disappointment. The Iraqi intellectual is like the intellectual in your countries, feeling that culture has a role to play. Western culture, from Gramsci to Sartre, is planted in the heart of every Iraqi intellectual, and intellectuals here use the same discourse as intellectuals there: semiotics, sign, image, simulacrum. Western culture is a treasure trove of ideas that intellectuals here plumb ceaselessly. Our intellectuals have entered a new era with the West. Do not think that the majority of them are still looking for something in Western culture: they know full well that the anthologies of the past have collapsed and are gone for good, and that the return to religion, or the Islamic awakening as you in Western newspapers call it, was caused by the West itself, which has really brought us up against a wall.

The Islamic movements in Iraq were supported, and sometimes even created, by the West to fight communism, and this has led to us being massacred with their swords these days. We paid a really hefty price because the West does not want any genuine intellectuals in Iraq, and did not respect those who hungered for the spirit of independence, freedom and justice, since these values and principles did not coincide with interests of large corporations. We were being shoved towards the West, which - as we imagined - was the source of reason

and enlightenment, and these great humanistic values naturally stoked our enthusiasm. But the Western support for Islamist movements, reactionary regimes and foul dictatorships gave our consciousnesses multiple personality disorder. Was the continent of reason - which is what we called Europe at the time - truly reasonable? We shouted as loudly as we could: Faust! Faust!

We were famished for the Faustian values, wanting to free our societies of the Holy and we wanted to liberate our societies with Justice and Law.

But, on the other end, we came up against the Western wall, which was supporting all those movements that glorified the blood instinct, which murdered us with Western weapons. Our societies are experiencing something akin to the terrifying explosion of the forgotten vows of history, and those of us who had lived a sort of cultural hybridity in Baghdad due to the intermingling cultures and meanings, now have all developed multiple identities. And what a disappointment it was when we found the continent of reason treating us despotically with extreme bigotry, showing only one face to us: either Saddam Hussein and stories of him blotting out an entire nation or the news of Islamists, who have become the true representatives of Iraq's people, with their immensely rich and diverse culture. We - this latest generation of Iraqi intellectuals - realized after it was too late that the West does not want real intellectuals from this country, but what it really wants are servants and shoeshine boys.

The war here is a war of values and when you see religion is invading Iraq do not believe that Iraqis believe in absolute Truth. This is more a search for objective parameters to balance their lives, since some of the magic of the world they used to inhabit has gone. Iraqi intellectuals were sturdier due to their sturdy relationships with their culture, but their relationship to Western culture distanced the magic of their culture and their surroundings. And this is why you can see, despite his high culture, that the Iraqi intellectual has begun to suffer from a spiritual void. He lives in two separate minds, his present mind deprived of modernity and his other mind that is issued from the modern world - and, I wonder, how can this void be filled? Gilles Keppel's statement that all Islamists want to get revenge for their gods does not apply to them at all, but I believe that some of them - at least some of the intellectuals I know - do not want to stand midway. In the beginning, there was a strong trend towards modernity, or a certain idiosyncratic type of modernity, and when they hit the Western wall, some decided to return to religion in its most primal form, which is impossible, since the world has totally changed. I am certain that they will soon come around.

(This is an excerpt from a work previously published by www.niqash.org)

ali bader

Born in Baghdad in 1964. He has a degree in Western Philosophy and French Literature. He has published three novels. His first, *Papa Sartre* was awarded the State Prize for Literature in Baghdad and the Prize of Abulkassim al-Shabbi for the Novel in Tunis. His third, *Shata al-Ailah* won the Prize of Literary Creativity. In 2001, he left Iraq, and now lives in Amman, Jordan.



Arshad and his family were resettled in the United States in August 2008. He now navigates the beginning of a new life, in a country whose language he is learning and whose assistance for the newly arrived immigrants can be as short as two months. He exhausted his savings while living in exile in Syria. After his arrival he was taken off the resettlement assistance offered by RST (Resettlement Services of Texas) and is still in search of work and a way to support his family.

While We Are Waiting

"It is impossible to go back to Iraq because I would be killed, but I can barely survive here in Syria."

A single middle-aged woman in Damascus says that her only hope is resettlement. She is willing to go anywhere, although she, like most Iraqis, has many questions about what life is like in some of the resettlement countries. She came to Syria after her parents were kidnapped and killed in Iraq. She says that she would be killed if she returned; in any case, her house was burned down so she would have nowhere to go. While she is grateful to get a small stipend for her volunteer work with a humanitarian agency, she struggles each day because all of her money goes to rent. *"I live alone...I have no family. I just want to be resettled somewhere."*

"We were threatened, our son was kidnapped, we lost everything...All this because we are Christians."

A woman alone with her four children in Damascus tells us that her only hope is to be able to get to Norway, where her husband fled last year. The family had to leave Baghdad after they were threatened for being Christian and working for the UN. Their son was kidnapped by militias, and paying the \$25,000 ransom left the family completely destitute. According to this woman, return to Iraq is impossible. *"Before the war, we had a large villa, and lived very well. Now, I pray to be able to pay the rent for one one-room apartment in Syria"*.

"They wanted to kill me and killed my brother-in-law instead. After that, I knew I had to leave."

According to this young man, his barbershop was bombed and his wife's brother killed by the Mahdi's army. He now lives with his wife and two children in Damascus and tells us there is no way he will ever return to Iraq. *"Once a glass is broken, there is no way to fix it."*

"There are laws preventing foreigners from working. I just hope that the government [of Lebanon] will make an exception for Iraqis."

A young Iraqi man in Lebanon recently lost his job because he was working illegally and his employer was worried that the police would come arrest him. He said that he would like to get sponsored so that he would work legally. He wondered out loud, *"There are Lebanese who need to work, so why would anyone hire me?"*

"I have served my sentence in prison but I will stay in here because I can't go back to Iraq."

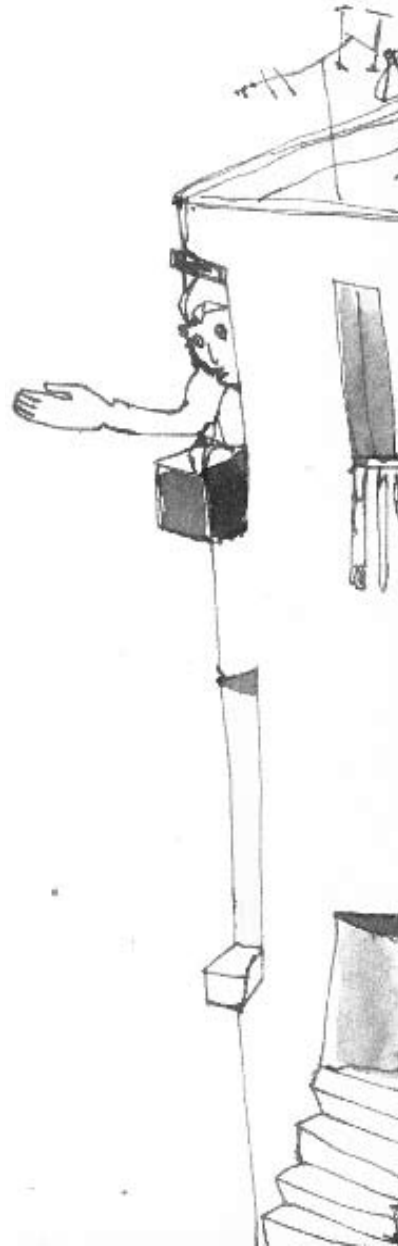
After serving a three-year sentence for a crime he says he did not commit. In 2004 somebody came to his shop with an envelope for someone else. He explained that he did not know that there were fake papers in the envelope until the police arrested him. He has decided to remain in a Lebanese prison rather be deported back to Iraq. *"I am stuck. My business, my house: it's all gone. I would like to be resettled but I don't know how to read and write. I am taking classes in prison, but even if I learn how to read and write, nobody wants to resettle a criminal."*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,
Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,
Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,
Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,
Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,
Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,
Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore,
The General Assembly,
Proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.



Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.
Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.



Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG MIDDLE EAST Since its inception in the year 2004, the foundation has been supporting Iraqi civil society activists who strive to initiate a self-determined process of democratization based on the principles of equal citizenship rights regardless of ethnic or confessional affiliation, full participation of women and a civic culture on the grassroots level. Contributing to the build-up of an active civil society, responsible and reliable media, and the rehabilitation of the population from experiences of physical and psychological violence are crucial objectives. To attain these goals, a series of seminars have been taking place in Beirut and Berlin to build capacities among a core group of Iraqi activists, and for them to liaise with organizations and like-minded individuals in the region. Additionally, the website of the office provides a continuously updated dossier on the Iraqi refugee crisis with a selection of texts in English and Arabic (www.boell-meo.org). The report *No Place Home - Iraqi Refugees between Precarious Safety and Precipitous Return*, written by office staff Layla Al-Zubaidi and Heiko Wimmen, attempts to give an overview of the origin and magnitude of the crisis, probes the likelihood of substantial numbers of refugees returning in the near future, and assesses the responsibility of international actors towards the refugees. It is available online under http://www.boell-meo.org/download_en/iraqi_refugees1804.pdf.

OFFLINE:EVENTS is a non-profit media organization based in Italy, founded in the Summer of 2007 collectively by a group of individuals from the Middle East, Europe and North America. The aim of offline:events is to give visibility to our counterparts living in parts of the world isolated because of the socio-political situation they reside in. offline:events acts as a catalyst for the development of dialogue and imaginative ideas by supporting independent filmmakers, journalists, authors and artists who pursue innovation in form and/or content in the performing and visual arts, journalism, and in emerging fields. offline:events is committed to working in partnership with individuals and emerging organizations that generate provocative ideas and reframe the debate by facilitating a platform for promoting public engagement between cultures whose freedom of expression is endangered or denied.

According to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention

A refugee is a person who:

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

Internally displaced persons are:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_cref.htm - United Nations, 1999, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)



MNSG: Navigating the Space Between Home and Exile, is a recipient of the Every Human Has Rights (EHHR) media awards, 2008. We would like to thank Internews Europe, Internews Network, Every Human Has Rights, The Global Forum for Media Development and The Elders for their support and nomination.

The Elders: *Nelson Mandela, Graça Machel, Desmond Tutu, Kofi Annan, Ela Bhatt, Lakhdar Brahimi, Gro Brundtland, Fernando H Cardoso, Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson, Muhammad Yunus, Aung San Suu Kyi.* www.theelders.org

