Ali Noor, the Boston College Undergraduate Middle Eastern Studies Journal, aims to:

- Facilitate a nonpartisan, unbiased conversation within the Boston College community and beyond about the Middle East.
- Provide a medium for students to publish research on the Middle East and Islam.
- Promote diverse opinions and present a comprehensive view of the myriad of cultures, histories, and perspectives that comprise the Middle East.
- Be considerate of the complexity of the region while pursuing the utmost objectivity.
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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are honored to present this twelfth volume of Al Noor, a publication that has devoted itself from the beginning to “shedding light on an often misunderstood region.” Today, the journal—whose name means “light” in Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, and Farsi—continues its illuminating mission through a series of articles that train a spotlight on issues in the Middle East that are often cloaked by darkness.

First, in “The Youth’s Contribution Towards Civil Society and Democracy in MENA,” Sarmad Ishfaq explores the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and in particular the role of young people, who, during the uprisings, were responsible for increasing democratic engagement. Ishfaq argues that the current youth malaise is not due to disillusionment with democracy, but rather is a result of other social issues, which, when they are solved, may open the door to increased democratic engagement in the future.

Next, in “Poetic Propaganda,” Tyler Brice Parker lifts the curtain hiding the vibrant inner life of one of the most influential jihadist groups in the region—Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Parker shows us how AQAP uses acapella songs—an art form which has a rich history in the Arab world—as “poetic propaganda,” which it uses both to instill pride in their current fighters and to recruit new ones to their cause.

In our photo essay “Saudi Arabia’s Hidden History,” the Jane Taylor Collection from the American Center of Oriental Research’s photo archive provides a glimpse into the historical and archaeological treasures in the region of Al-‘Ula in the Arabian Desert. Long hidden from much of the outside world, incredible sites from ancient Nabatean tombs to Ottoman forts are now being opened to study thanks to Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman’s more lenient stance on tourism and archaeology.

In “Fishy Business,” Ammar Plumber takes us inside the Egyptian aquaculture sector, and explores the ways in which Egyptian fish farmers might increase their production. Plumber’s analysis of 35 years of data offers a unique look into the future of an industry that has the potential to feed millions of people in the region.

Finally, in “The Art of Speaking,” Catherine Cartier reveals the resilience of the Syrian oral storytelling tradition in the face of war and exile. Having lasted for thousands of years, that tradition is being forced to adapt in the hands of the Syrian women who are struggling to keep it alive. Cartier tells the story of those storytellers.

We would like to express our gratitude to this semester’s staff members for their hard work—and on behalf of all of us, to thank our sponsors, contributors, and readers. We are particularly indebted to Peter Marino and Susan Dunn, without whose logistical assistance Al Noor would never go to print; and to Kathleen Bailey, our constant advocate.

Beyond the work highlighted in this issue, we invite you to explore our website, bcalnoor.org, where you can view a complete archive of our past articles, interviews, and photo essays. We also hope you visit our Facebook page, which offers regular, up-to-date insight into current events relevant to the region.

Thank you for your interest in Al Noor—and, more importantly, for taking the time to delve into some of the stories, events, and ideas shaping the modern Middle East. We very much hope you enjoy this edition of the journal. As always, comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome at eic@alnoorjournal.org.

Joshua Holtz ’20
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The Youth's Contribution Towards Civil Society and Democracy in MENA

Sarmad Ishfaq

Sarmad Ishfaq is a proud Pakistani working as a research fellow for the Lahore Center for Peace Research. He completed his master’s degree in International Studies and graduated as the “Top Graduate” from the University of Wollongong in Dubai. He has several publications in peer-reviewed journals and magazines in the fields of counterterrorism/terrorism, geopolitics of GCC, and the politics of South Asia.
The youth have undoubtedly played a key role in social movements throughout the world that have reshaped human history. They have and continue to play their part in democratic activism in varying intensities around the world—from full-fledged democratic revolutions to local civic engagement that promotes democracy. History cites the youth as active proponents in success stories like the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. to the ongoing Boycotts, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) movement in Palestine and beyond. For instance, in response to the rigged elections in 2013, a massive number of Pakistani youth made their way to dharnas (sit-ins) under Imran Khan’s call to boycott the government. Furthermore, in 2017, Imran Khan and his supporters, mainly young adults, brought the offshore accounts of Nawaz Sharif and his family to public scrutiny, which eventually led the Supreme Court to oust Mr. Sharif from his position of Prime Minister.
Although the youth possess undeniable agency in social movements, they are usually stereotyped as being apolitical. Their disinterest in the political process seems to be a problem many governments around the world face or exploit. Political disinterest can be seen as a government’s failure for not indulging the youth. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs asserts that institutions must provide mechanisms for youth to participate in debates in public policy. As the youth have a right to be represented and voice their opinion, they may do so by joining civil society organizations such as NGOs, charities, and clubs; creating awareness through technology; or staging demonstrations and sit-ins. As evidence from developed countries indicates, young people who are close to their communities or engage in community-based activities are in less danger of being involved in behaviors that would put themselves and the rest of the community at risk.

Though it is often overlooked, the youth is, in fact, involved in democratic and societal change. The traditional understanding of being politically involved includes activities such as voting, but that is not the entirety of it. Vis-à-vis the findings of a workshop conducted in Canada, it was revealed that although Canadian youth are less likely to participate in traditional political processes, they are actively engaging in non-traditional political activities such as joining environmental groups and initiating and signing online petitions. It is apparent that in the modern world, young people have found different platforms via technology to promote civic and democratic practices. This trend is true even for non-democratic countries like Saudi Arabia. Aldini asserts that Saudi youth are not only involved in traditional forms of civil society but are now also using social media to interact with what is being labelled “virtual civil society.”

The MENA youth have been the driving force of recent movements in the region and have utilized their vast numbers, technology, and social media to challenge the established authority. Traditionally, it has been thought that the Arab youth are on the periphery of democratic movements, but this discourse of Arab “exceptionalism” and its citizens’ perceived somnolence must be reconsidered in the wake of the Arab Spring if not due to other movements before it.

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF MENA YOUTH

The “youth bulge” proves to be one of the primary reasons as to why the youth were a driving force in the 2009 Iranian revolution and the more recent Arab Spring. According to Lin, youth bulges often develop when countries succeed in controlling infant mortality and simultaneously maintain a high fertility rate, causing a large segment of the population to be comprised of young people. Usually, developing countries, such as South Sudan, Uganda, Pakistan, and most MENA countries, are characterized by this phenomenon. Almost one in five people living in MENA are part of the “young” segment (15-24 yrs.) of society. This high population of the youth is an integral factor as to why they came out in large masses to protest and demonstrate against their respective regimes during the Arab Spring. According to Roudi, the population of the youth (15-24 yrs.) in MENA was 88.1 million in 2010 and is estimated to grow to 92.7 million in 2040. Furthermore, the number of youth in MENA is expected to reach its peak by 2035 at 100 million people, after which a decline is expected. The greatest takeaway from these statistics is that the MENA youth bulge is not a short term reality which respective governments can simply shrug off – it is expected to last for decades and can either be a demographic dividend or a disaster, depending on how governments respond to it.

Although the lack of education is still an obstacle to progress, the growth in the education sector is a major cause for the recently politically active youth in MENA. MENA countries have spent 5% of their GDP on education during 1980-2000 which is higher than any other developing region in the world. Murphy states that not only has the Arab population experienced a demographic shift towards the youth, but it has also become increasingly more educated than ever before.

“Though it is often overlooked, the youth is, in fact, involved in democratic and societal change.”
It is assumed, especially in the West, that civic engagement in MENA countries is almost non-existent. While the democratic platform needed for a thriving civil society is not present in most MENA countries, there is still a great number of young people who are active both socially and politically. Research conducted by Mercy Corps, a civil society organization, found that compared to youth in other regions, the Arab youth are generally more engaged in various civic activities. Specifically, Mercy Corps states that the Arab youth’s average for protesting is twice as high as the world average, and while they are not as active in civic groups and elections compared to the world average, they are more politically active.

Youth unemployment was cited as a major motivator for the youth in demonstrations before and during the Arab Spring. Roudi asserts that the youth in MENA form a significant percentage of the working-age population: Yemen 42%, Jordan 37%, Syria 31%, Oman 31%, Egypt 31%, Iran 31%, Tunisia 27%, Saudi Arabia 27%, UAE 21%, and so on. A higher number of young people burdens the government as it has to either create jobs or risk high youth unemployment rates – a reality present before, during, and after the uprisings. In 2009, the MENA region had the highest youth unemployment rate and also the lowest workforce participation in the world. Hanafi highlights that the 2009 unemployment rate in Tunisia was 21.9%, 10.4%, and 6.1% for the highly educated, primary educated, and uneducated, respectively. He goes on to say that the decrease in public sector jobs, uncompensated for in the private sector, has played a huge role in the unemployment scenario in the region.

Finally, the advent of the internet and other technologies has led to the widespread espousal of modern Western values and practices. The outside world is connected to MENA, and the youth are highly active in participating in forums through their computers and mobile phones. As of November 2015, the total number of internet users in the Middle East was 123 million, with a population penetration higher than the world—52.2%. This plethora of internet users and the political restrictions in the MENA region have been main causes of much unrest in recent times.

MENA YOUTH AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The term “civil society” has numerous analogous definitions, as it is an extremely common term. It is frequently understood as the aggregate of NGO and non-profitable organizations, separate from both the government and market, which exist mainly to promote the interests of the public. Civil society mainly includes unions, charities, environmental groups, community organizations etcetera. Civil society and democracy are both interrelated and dialectic concepts as they depend on each other. A well-functioning democracy requires a strong vibrant civil society while a civil society cannot function independently and effectively without a strong democratic system.

Behr and Siitonen explain the progression of civil society and its characterization in the Arab world: in the post-colonial period, the civil societies were controlled by authoritarian governments through coercion and co-optation. Hence, they became extremely politicized and, in more recent times, have developed a religious-secular chasm which has impeded progress. The authors go on to mention that while Islamic foundations and charities form a huge portion of the civil society, other more Western-based civil society organizations including NGOs, unions, and other associational groups have also become widespread. The lack of democracy or democratic values in the MENA region, especially pre-Arab Spring, still restricts the civil society and hence constrains its independence. Halaseh remarks that
because of the restrictions placed on civil society organizations in the Arab world, they are commonly labeled as “Governmental-non-governmental organizations (GNGOs).” MENA governments use authoritarian rule to influence and control civil society organizations as they do in other spheres of social being for regime security. These rentier states have historically warranted restriction of political freedoms by not demanding taxes, especially income taxes, from their citizenry, as seen in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Al-Jribia mentions the case of Jordan where the state and civil society have historically had an unsettling relationship due to government regulations.

Boose remarks that the process of democratization relies on a number of factors, including the presence of a strong independent civil society. He corroborates this statement by comparing Tunisia and Libya—countries where the respective regimes fell after the Spring—and asserts that Tunisia, due to a strong civil society, achieved a smoother transition to democracy compared to Libya. Before the Arab Spring, the Libyan civil society consisted of only a few GNGOs but other than this was almost non-existent.

Albeit restrained, civil society was active in the MENA region even prior to the Arab Spring, as the young generation played a central role in these civil society organizations. While emphasizing the important role youth have played in Iranian politics since more than a decade, Nesvaderani comments that the civil society comprises an abundance of youth groups in movements like the “One Million Signature Campaign,” which aimed to change discriminatory laws against women and children and the “Committee for Defense for Political Prisoners,” which promotes prisoner rights. In Egypt, civil society is mostly dominated by religious organizations, although other associational groups like youth clubs also exist. Tunisian civil society was established due to the country having the best education sector in the Arab world and also due to a strong middle class that allowed for a vibrant civil society.

In light of the Arab uprisings, the MENA youth and civil society interacted with each other in distinct ways, including how the youth were involved, how they went beyond mere involvement, and how they created new civil society groups. According to Cavatorta, the Arab Spring figuratively woke up the civil society in the region. Furthermore, he suggests that new social actors like MENA’s youth rose up and launched the movements, while taking part in civil activism that went beyond traditional civil society groups. Due to restrictions placed on the civil society, the Egyptians organized under more loosely formed social movements like the Kefaya (2004) and the April 6 (2008) movements that relied heavily on both technology and social media. The authors remark that these movements started in the mid-2000s due to the failure of traditional civil society groups in protecting citizens’ rights. This further reinforces how, in some countries and situations, the youth advanced civil society demands without being under the umbrella of civil society before and after the Arab Spring.

The civil society in MENA has enjoyed newfound success, proliferation, and strength due to the youth’s exuberant efforts. Even war-torn Syria has seen the emergence of many new civil society groups that serve as a salvation for millions of Syrian people. Since the uprisings, Tunisia has seen a growth of “new youth-led” civil society organizations that include various NGOs. In Jordan, the “new vision of civil society” and the increasing focus on education has enabled the youth to initiate change. Since 2000, young people have formed many new civil society groups as well. Furthermore, civil society organizations in Tunisia were restricted during the old regimes but have since become overseers, educators,
"The youth have made technology their own and will continue to assert their independence through it."

and lobbyists for civil rights. These examples highlight how the youth have interacted with civil society in the region, not only becoming part of the civil society but in essence breathing new life into it. Simultaneously, the civil society provides a robust foundation for the youth and others to promote civil liberties. The contemporary youth movements in MENA have produced “single-issue NGOs” and are transforming themselves into more organized and structured groups – a prerequisite for civil society success. In post-Arab Spring Saudi Arabia, due to the youth’s increased involvement in societal change, there is now a vivid recognition of and improvement in the various roles civil society organizations provide. Even in non-MENA countries such as Pakistan, the youth are becoming new agents in the formation of civil society groups. An example of this is “The Pakistani Youth Network” created by 21-year-old Suhel Mashok in an attempt to fix the negative image of the country in the media and to simultaneously provide a platform for young citizens to voice their concerns.

The role of technology must also be highlighted with regard to the youth and civil society. The youth have channeled their energies and democratic efforts through technology and social media in contemporary times. One of the main factors for the success of the Arab Spring’s consolidation efforts was social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. According to The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) enables youth to attain employment and education and even assists in engaging the youth in civil society. Modern agents such as bloggers who challenged the traditional notions of civil society, became a “security threat” to the ruling regimes across the regions. Technology and agency are thus reshaping established civil society norms and also creating new forms such as virtual civil society. The debate regarding the usefulness of virtual civil society is ongoing in academic discourse, but it is generally found to be an effective way to pressurize and demand transparency from the state. Kittilson and Dalton conducted research in Australia and U.S. regarding virtual social interactions and whether they contribute to political involvement and citizenship norms. They concluded that although social networks cannot entirely replace face-to-face interactions, they have more or less the same benefits that traditional civil society has for political involvement and citizenship norms. It is common knowledge today that youth activists organized themselves using social networking websites during the Arab Spring. In Saudi Arabia, the number of Facebook users has more than doubled, from 2.3 to 5.5 million, in two years, with the youth constituting around 70% of said users. In Egypt, the initiation of the blogosphere dates back to 2004 during the Kefaya movement, and many important young bloggers cite these demonstrations as the commencement of their online activism. In authoritarian states like Iran and previously Tunisia, technology plays an innovative role as the youth mold Facebook into an “inclusive public square.” The youth have made technology their own and will continue to assert their independence through it.

MENA YOUTH AND DEMOCRACY

It is generally but wrongfully believed that the people in MENA do not want democracy. While not widespread, there were movements calling for democratization before the Arab Spring, as is true for Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, and Jordan where noteworthy movements clamoring for democratization took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The myriad of demonstrations that amassed under the banner of the Arab Spring were characterized by a lack of religious and ideological rhetoric; the movements were instead unified under the call for democratic and economic improvements. Movements around MENA called for democracy, elections, freedom, and the removal of corrupt governments, without anti-American sentiment either. Throughout the build-up to and during the Arab Spring, there was no ideological cause for conflict between the young protesters, allowing for greater mobilization of the youth despite different backgrounds, religions, and political beliefs represented, whether in
"The demonstrations of the Arab Spring reveal the inception of a new generation ignited by its hope for human rights, civil liberties, and democracy."

Tunis, Benghazi, Sana or Cairo. The deficiency of ideology and rhetoric should not be regarded as a societal shift from religiosity to complete secularism but rather understood as a demand for individual rights, political freedoms, civil liberties, and gender equality – all democratic principles lacking in the MENA region. The demonstrations of the Arab Spring reveal the inception of a new generation ignited by its hope for human rights, civil liberties, and democracy.

After the allegedly rigged elections in 2009, the Iranian youth, both students and nonstudents, poured out in the streets and demanded democratic change. Both Iran’s 1990s reformist movement and the 2009 Green Movement were led by the youth, demanding political and social democracy along with national development. In the Saudi Arabian case, exposure to the outside world through the internet and television increased Saudi youth’s expectations as well as demands towards social and political rights. The youth want democratic representation that has been historically denied to them by the ruling Al Saud family. Political restrictions and technological connectivity in the MENA region motivated the youth towards democratic change and protests – both online and in the streets. In Bahrain, a decentralized group of activists known as the “Coalition of February 14th Youth,” rejected any superficial attempts made by the government for reform and remained committed to real democratic change. They organized and initiated the “Day of Rage” on February 14, 2011, which developed into a nationwide movement. Unfortunately, Bahrain, with the military and police assistance of Saudi Arabia and U.A.E, forcibly crushed the democratic movement in the country. In post-Arab Spring Kuwait, the opposition group, consisting of youth movements, student, and trade unions, formed a partnership named the “Opposition Coalition,” which called for the dissolution of the Parliament and commanded the creation of a new electoral law with the main objective of a complete parliamentary system.

Similar to the youth’s participation and interaction with the civil society, they have also played an integral role in promoting democratization in the region. Civil society and democracy are interlinked concepts, so the youth actively engage with civil society in order to reach the living standards and political freedoms found in modern democracies.

Through the mass demonstrations during the Arab Spring, young men and women have shown their dedication in demanding rights and articulating their objections to their rulers. During the Spring, the Libyan youth were highly motivated and critical of the Gaddafi regime and came out in droves to protest. Various organizations, like the “Shabab Libya” (Libyan Youth Movement) for example, spread awareness of the protests and became a dispensary for news and videos for the local and global population. The Gaddafi regime’s initial response included calling the movement an American conspiracy against Libya and dismissing the young generation as “pill-popping youth” with a lack of obligation. The latter response in Libya was more brutal as was the case in many other countries across MENA.

In response to the Arab Spring protests, there were many democratic reforms offered and implemented in various MENA countries to meet the protesters half way, even though some reforms were only superficial. Kuwait held parliamentary elections; the UAE increased the size of its electoral college; and in Oman, the Sultan increased the minimum wage and unemployment benefits. Although these reforms were introduced to provide greater democratic freedoms to people, some GCC and MENA countries simultaneously replied with heavier social and political controls such as laws that would regulate the media and internet more strictly than ever before. For example, in 2011, Saudi Arabia extended draconian press laws to online media due to the Arab Spring and its consequences on Egypt and Tunisia. Furthermore, Kuwait proposed a law that would allow authorities to restrict internet access and block websites without a just cause,
all under the guise of protecting society or national security. Then in 2012, the UAE updated its own cybercrime law, which made it illegal to insult the government but was worded very vaguely.\textsuperscript{54}

An integral reason for the successful mobilization efforts during the uprisings was the pre-revolution attitude shifts of Islamist parties. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Salafi groups in recent times have become accommodative toward democracy and the nation-state, even showing their desire to partake in democratic elections. The Egyptian Nour party, a Salafi group, did exceedingly well in the legislative elections, and Saudi Salafi activists in Saudi Arabia showed support for democracy when they signed petitions demanding an elected parliament.\textsuperscript{55} Islamists that once supported the Jordanian and Moroccan monarchical rule in the past now advocate democracy, emphasizing the shift in attitude. The youth protesters in the Arab Spring augmented this pre-revolution attitude change in the Islamist parties, and although the Islamists and the civil society were not part of the Arab Spring protests initially, they did later join the youth in demonstrations. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt decided to participate in the protests after a few days on the insistence of its younger members.\textsuperscript{56} There are dual implications here, firstly that the general youth participating in the protests motivated the Islamist groups to come out and demonstrate, and secondly that the youth within the Islamist groups also played a part in pushing them to protest.

As mentioned earlier, technology’s role in aiding democratic protests and promoting democracy in general cannot be overlooked. Internet use in 2015 for the Middle East, at 52.2%, is higher than the global average of 46.4%.\textsuperscript{57} Internet, television, and cell phones have increased global connectivity and have brought democratic principles from the around the world to the MENA region. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular public spaces for political discussion and activism. In 2015, the number of Facebook users in various MENA countries were 4.1 million in Jordan, 2.6 million in Lebanon, 27 million in Egypt, 11 million in Algeria, 12 million in Saudi Arabia, 5.2 million in Tunisia, 6.3 million in the U.A.E., 1.7 million in Yemen, and 2.4 million in Libya.\textsuperscript{58} \textsuperscript{59} In 2008, the “April 6th Youth Movement” led a national general strike that attracted a 100,000 Egyptians, connected online.\textsuperscript{60} Iran had 32 million internet users in 2009, a fundamental factor in the enormity of the pro-democratic movements prior to the Arab Spring. Before the disputed elections in 2009, the internet was pivotal for Iran's civil society to successfully launch the Green Movement.\textsuperscript{61} Moreover, the “Shabab Libya” Facebook group eventually became one of the voices of the Libyan people. In Egypt, a Facebook page entitled “We Are All Khaled Said” helped initiate the revolution that overthrew Mubarak. However, technology is not the sole key here; the people behind these computers and cell phone screens, predominantly the youth, drive these changes. Thus, the youth’s agency, not technology itself, led to the Arab Spring.\textsuperscript{62}

**ARAB SUMMER: END OF THE SPRING**

In the post-Arab Spring environment, where many of the old ruling regimes are still in power, democratic attitudes have changed for the youth and the general society of the region. Although, the Arab Spring failed in many ways, immediately after its end the youth and general society remained supportive of democracy and considered the lack thereof to be a fundamental problem. However, after 2016, democracy became less prioritized by the people.

A 2014 study asserts that since the Arab Spring, overall support for democracy among the countries – Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen – has not declined.\textsuperscript{63} However, in countries like Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, people...
are doubtful if their fellow citizens are truly ready for democracy. Arabs do not, however, regard democracy as bad for security or economy as there was no significant change with respect to this between the previous and present studies. Even though the young people in Tunisia (which had a regime change after the uprisings) have concerns about democracy-related problems, they still have faith in the system.\(^6^4\) 86% of the Tunisian youth strongly agree or agree that democracy is the best system in contrast to 70% in 2011 and 2013. After 2016, however, young people have become disheartened since the Arab Spring did not achieve its desired outcomes in many countries. Despite the vast numbers and the integral role of the youth in the Arab Spring, they remain underrepresented in the political arena, especially in countries where the old regimes were ousted.\(^6^5\)

Disappointment loomed in the MENA region because the Spring led to further problems such as rise in extremism and greater youth unemployment. Post-Arab Spring, the world witnessed the rise of ISIS, the inception of civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, the extreme degree of foreign involvement, and the fall in oil prices that led MENA rentier states to cut fuel and energy subsidies. This problematic environment has led to democracy becoming a secondary priority for the youth as evidenced by the Arab Youth Surveys of 2016 and 2017.\(^6^6,6^7\) The surveys each assessed 16 Arab (MENA) countries’ youth. The 2016 survey concluded that the Arab youth sees the Arab Spring as having a negative legacy since their concerns over youth unemployment and lack of opportunity were largely unaddressed. The youth are also concerned about oil revenues and want a continuation of fuel and electric subsidies. Most importantly, however, the youth prioritize stability over democracy now. They see the rise of ISIS, threat of terrorism, unemployment, and civil unrest as the top four concerns. Lack of democracy ranked at number 9 (12%) out of a list of major concerns. The 2017 survey saw lack of democracy increasing in priority to number 7 (17%) which is still significantly lower than in the period of the Arab Spring. In 2012, 72% of Arab youth thought that the world was better off post-Arab Spring; this number has drastically declined to 36%. Therefore, in most MENA countries, due to the conflicts, terrorism, and general turmoil, security and stability have become the most pressing needs, dwarfing the democratic reform agenda in these countries.\(^6^8\)

Nevertheless, the survey results do not mean that the youth has become disillusioned with democracy. Instead, they may want a more stable foundation, meaning an end to the civil wars and terrorist threats, so that democracy can become a viable future option. Faisal Al Yafai, a columnist in the National (UAE) newspaper, states:

When the results of the Survey suggest young Arabs think democracy will not work and the Arab republics should prioritize stability, I don’t read that as the youth turning their backs on democracy, or even the possibility of change. Rather, I see it as a retrenchment, as a belief that the best way to get personal autonomy and economic prosperity is to first seek stability in an ordered political system.\(^6^9\)

Unsurprisingly, Arab youth want stability in an increasingly chaotic Middle East and see the Arab uprisings as negative because of their grim aftermaths. The street protests may have subsided but this does not mean that the virtual civil society and the youth in traditional civil society are not still active in demanding personal freedoms throughout the region. Their biggest victory in recent times is reflected in the conservative country of Saudi Arabia which has recently allowed its women to drive cars after decades of women advocating for gender equity.\(^7^0\)

Furthermore, other recent surveys also suggest that democracy remains the preferred system by many countries in the MENA region. The Arab Barometer (not solely focused on youth) suggests a general optimism toward democracy. Egypt, which has been victim of much instability during and after the Arab Spring,
remains surprisingly optimistic about democracy – 51% prefer democracy over other forms of government.\(^{71}\) 84% of the Lebanese population, five years after the uprisings, agree that democracy is better than other systems.\(^{72}\) In Jordan, too, support for democracy remains formidable, as 86% of the people believe that it is the preferred system although it has its issues.\(^{73}\)

Democracy in its purest sense cannot be achieved in rapid fashion; it takes time, resources, extreme will, and, more specifically, a very stable and strong civil society. The period after the uprisings evidences that democracy is not simply a change in political representation and systems but instead a long and tedious process that necessitates a change in political culture.\(^{74}\)

Although activism for personal freedoms, accountability, and democracy in general are still present, the MENA youth have somewhat muted their outpour over democracy due to more pressing issues currently, giving some breathing space to the respective regimes. The present attitudes, however, are all subject to change if political and economic stability in the MENA region returns, which would place democracy back on a higher priority list. Stability does not necessarily mean another Arab Spring or revolution but when the conditions allow it, can mean a more active civil society and pronounced democratic reformation demand, especially if the governments of these countries remain authoritative in nature.

CONCLUSION

Due to youth unemployment, global connectivity, the internet, government restrictions, and the youth bulge, the young generation of MENA have played a pivotal part before, during, and after the Arab Spring. The youth have interacted with civil society in various ways: they were a part of traditional civil society groups prior to the Arab Spring (and still are presently); they created new youth based groups in civil society during and after the Arab Spring; they advanced civil society objectives while not being part of official civil society; and they have used technology and social media to create a virtual civil society. The youth have not only resurrected the old civil society but have also created new ones. Acting as a life-line and as innovators for the civil and general society, they have brought hope for democracy in a region often characterized by a democratic void.

The youth’s end goal in interacting with civil society was to promote democracy. The young generation is educated, motivated, and connected to the world. Not only did they heavily promote democracy and create mass awareness for human rights, gender laws, and other democratic values, on the internet and in the streets, but they also organized campaigns of unrest so popular and free of strict ideology that the majority of society backed them – religious and secularists alike. In addition, they organized the conservative minded adults and the constrained civil society who, like most, were tired and lacked motivation to carry a democratic movement on their own. The youth bulge will remain a reality for the foreseeable future and will continue to advance democratic values in their societies, despite recent issues such as ISIS and civil wars.

The youth were the champions of democracy and will continue to be in the future. While they have not yet attained all of their goals, the youth have at least shaken the established order, and in some countries toppled it; made the regimes cautious and weary for the future; and brought awareness to the general society regarding the dangers of authoritarian governments. The most important lesson from the Arab Spring is that democracy is not achieved in a day. Even though most MENA youth might see the uprisings as negative and ultimately futile, achieving a pure democracy is a slow process, and perhaps the overhauling of a political system haphazardly in one motion will lead to further problems. Instead, a step-by-step approach towards democracy using gradual reforms would be better suited in MENA due to its historic democratic void.

Endnotes:
11. Assad and Roudi-Fahimi, “Youth in the Middle East and North Africa”
23. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”
25. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”
28. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”
30. Carolina Silveira, “Youth as Political Actors After the ‘Arab Spring’: The Case of Tunisia,” in Youth, Revolt,
in Arab youth: social mobilisation in times of risk, ed.
46. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”
42. Cavatorta, “Arab Spring,” 75-81.
32. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”
30. Behr and Siitonen, “Building bridges or digging trenches? Civil society engagement after the Arab Spring”


73. Ibid


References


Poetic Propaganda

AL QAEDA’S ACAPELLA ANTHEMS IN YEMEN AND BEYOND

Tyler Brice Parker

Tyler Brice Parker is a first-year Ph.D. student in Political Science at Boston College focusing on diplomacy, governance, and security in the Middle East. He graduated from The Ohio State University with a bachelor’s degree in Arabic. He also received a master’s degree in Islamic and Near Eastern Studies from Washington University in St. Louis, during which time he interned for the American Enterprise Institute’s Critical Threats Project and taught Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic in Meknes, Morocco.
Along history of poetry saturates the social landscape of the Arabic-speaking world. From the windswept plains of the Sahara to the lush greenery of the Levant, the weaving wadis of Arabia, or even the fibrous expanse of cyberspace, the scribed and spoken word resonates mightily with Arabs. Yemen’s tradition of acapella anthems (nashid, pl. anashid) is especially rich, in spite of, or perhaps due to, the country’s many struggles. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), also referred to as Al Qaeda in Yemen, has tapped into Yemen’s vocal tradition to inculcate esprit de corps among its local fighters, their supporters, and the broader “Salafi-jihadi” movement.\(^1\) AQAP invests considerable resources into the production of anashid because they are easily disseminated, and are reinforced by a compelling culture and history. The captivating rhythms and rich language of these hymns promote both a glorious past and blossoming
future, and are an effective propaganda tool among jihadists who crave cultural legitimacy and emotional reprieve amidst their conflict with Al Qaeda's enemies.

SCHOLARSHIP ON AL QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA'S STRATEGIC MESSAGE

Academic exploration of jihadi culture, which Thomas Hegghammer defines as “products and practices that do something other than fill the basic military needs of jihadi groups,” has expanded as IP addresses multiply and war-torn nations fall deeper into conflict. Elisabeth Kendall, an Oxford University researcher who makes frequent sojourns to southeastern Yemen, asserts that poetry, unlike “direct pronouncements, rulings and position statements,” functions to “carry messages to a broader audience as it plugs naturally into a long tradition of oral transmission.” She evaluates various ways in which AQAP communicates with its audience. First, it relies on a practical argument that accentuates its amelioration of governmental corruption, economic poverty, and social marginalization. It also deploys an emotional message which can “telescope a complex political landscape into a simple apocalyptic battle between good and evil that is easy to understand and difficult to refute.” This helps the group circumvent Yemen's low literacy rate and limited technological reach.

Linguistic anthropologist Flagg Miller provides insight into the geopolitical calculus of Al Qaeda. His book The Audacious Ascetic reveals AQAP’s prioritization of Yemen in the post-Afghanistan period by showing that Osama bin Laden viewed the country as an arena to combat communists and insufficiently pious Muslims. Miller analyzes numerous lectures from Al Qaeda members, including Mustafa Hamid, who asserted that Al Qaeda should “create jihadi posts in the extensive mountain range[s] so that Yemen can be established, as a base” from which to liberate the Arabian Peninsula with “assistance from Muslims nearby.” Al Qaeda aims to insinuate itself into both the human and the geographic terrain of Yemen, using the country as a staging ground for global jihad. Miller also draws from interview accounts to reveal that AQAP’s effectiveness lies in the dignity and professionalization it provides to local youth through its training programs.

Yemeni political analyst Nadwa Al-Dawsari argues that AQAP is marginally effective in channeling social grievances into tribal support. She states that its emphasis on “humiliation, injustice, underdevelopment, corruption, and the killing of relatives and friends and destruction of property caused by counterterrorism operations” in southern Yemen only resonates with some portions of disenfranchised tribal youth. Kendall notes that Ansar al Shariah, AQAP’s local subsidiary, ingratiates itself with tribespeople by providing social services such as education, utilities upkeep, and jurisprudence. Al-Dawsari nevertheless cautions against the notion that AQAP maintains widespread support. She suggests that its “wanton violence,” threat to social order, attraction of foreign airstrikes in its zones of operation, and antagonism toward “tribal customs” all yield a contentious relationship with many tribes. This realization allows for a critical evaluation of the group’s claim of near-universal support from local Yemenis.

These scholars reveal that AQAP relies on ideological and practical messaging to sustain its legitimacy in Yemen. The organization places itself on the righteous side of a struggle between good and evil, emphasizing an ethos of strength and forbearance to emulate the tribal experience and juxtaposing itself against the corrupt Yemeni state. How effective are its poetics
inconveying these points, and in what ways does it inspire local support and international influence? Before answering these questions, the next section will explore the historical and literary elements of the Arabic poetry which AQAP utilizes.

ARABIC POETRY’S STAYING POWER
Arabic, both with its formal constancy and its many colloquial nuances, links the ethnically diverse and spatially dispersed Arab people. Arabic poetry materialized a few centuries prior to the Prophet Muhammad’s message, and it proved vital to the sociopolitics of nomadic, tribal life in Arabia. Reynold Nicholson notes its function: “[I]n the midst of outward strife and disintegration a unifying principle was at work. Poetry gave life and currency to an ideal Arabian virtue (murūwwa) which…became an invisible bond between diverse clans.”12 Poetry was an element of statecraft which facilitated relations and affirmed in-group ties. Adonis emphasizes the form of pre-Islamic poetry: “The voice in this poetry was the breath of life—‘body music.’ It was both speech and something which went beyond speech…go[ing] beyond the body towards the expanses of the soul.”13 Poetry went beyond a passive auditory experience; rather, it stirred the soul and incited emotional responses in its listeners.

The pre-Islamic poetic form remained prevalent in post-conversion societies. A. F. L. Beeston notes that this form emphasized themes like love, natural description, praise, self-glorification, lampooning of adversaries, lamentation of deceased tribesmen, and wise sayings.14 As Islam grew, combat also became a central theme. The Islamic scholar al-Ghazali stated: “The recitation of poems [is permissible] in the rajaz metre by the brave once battle is joined. The purpose of such poems is to keep up the courage of one’s self and one’s allies, and to stir eagerness for combat among them. The poems recited in this ritual are a celebration of bravery and courage. When it is done with fine articulation and a beautiful voice it has a powerful impact on the soul/mind.”15

The artful, even reverent promotion of tribal allegiance and courage against a formidable enemy inspired Muslims to take up arms in the spread and defense of Islam. Contemporary jihadis would co-opt this tradition in the service of their own battles, beginning in Afghanistan and radiating back to the Middle East and North Africa.

Osama bin Laden, who helped found Al Qaeda in Afghanistan around 1988, used poetry as a catalyst for jihad. He was a voracious consumer and prolific producer of poetry, and many people lauded him for his asceticism (zuhd). In Miller’s telling, asceticism allowed bin Laden to retrace the “path blazed by heroic sage-warriors long ago that might lend dignity to the hard and compromised lives of God’s modern strugglers.” In this way, austerity represented a simultaneous engagement with the glories of the past and ambitions of the future.16 Miller states that bin Laden’s notoriety stems from his “summons toward asceticism, conveyed most notably in poetry, [which] commends listeners to an abstemious and patient temperament.”17 Poetry functioned to smooth the reconciliation between the riches of early Islam and the struggle of modernity that Al Qaeda seeks to surmount.

Jihadis craft their poetry to frame themselves as the conduits of a restored past amidst the throes of current chaos. This poetry aims to render jihadism legitimate by drawing from a wellspring of romantic, heroic, and chivalrous precedent. Kendall states that jihadi ideologues employ the classical qasida poem form, “with its jaunty rhythms, echoing rhymes and redolent classical language,” to permeate the subconscious and conscious psyche of listeners and readers.18 They use classical terminology like swords, steeds, and knights as allusions to modern guns, cars, and combatants. In an AQAP work from 2017 titled “Oh My Weapon You are the Lamp of Darkness,” the reciter refers to his rifle as a rod, ring, sword, and knife “that does not transgress”19 — word choices which equate the modern gun to medieval arms. These rhetorical devices surfaced in Algeria, Egypt, and other nations, but they are especially potent in Yemen.

Poetry’s prominence in the social and political landscape of Yemen predates Afghan or Arab struggles. Steven

"Jihadis craft their poetry to frame themselves as conduits of a restored past amidst the throes of current chaos."
The term anashid is akin to poetry in terms of its literary qualities. Inshad is a verbal noun derived from the three-letter consonant cluster n-sh-d which makes up the noun nashid (pl. anashid). The term means recitation, recital, or declamation. Inshad is the vocal performance of poetry in which a reciter (munshid) deliberately varies his intonation and volume to offer an especially emotional resonance. Adonis marshals the scholarship of the great Islamic philosopher and thinker al Farabi to explain the difference between poetry and inshad, or music: "[A]n essential difference separates them: poetry is an arrangement of words according to their meanings, ordered in a rhythmic structure and taking the rules of grammar into account, while music attempts to adapt rhythmic speech to its measures, and transmits it as sounds in harmonious relationships both quantitatively and qualitatively, according to its own methods of composition." Inshad’s adaption of rhythmic speech allows for a more liberal and free-flowing interpretation of written or spoken texts. The variation in pitch and speed enthralls listeners in ways that poetry often cannot, leading to a communal experience that inculcates enjoyment and solidarity amidst its listeners. Although inshad is traditionally acapella, secondary tunes and synthesized background voices magnify its captivating qualities.

During the 1980s, two events in the Islamic world spurred the mobilization of inshad as a tool for jihadis. The first was the so-called “Islamic awakening” (al Sahwa al Islamiyya), wherein primarily Islamists and regimes affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood vied for “cultural domination” through mediums of discourse. The second was the transit of Arab foreign fighters to Afghanistan, where they produced and exchanged music praising their exploits in battle. One Afghani fighter revealed: "Although it was a holy war, we still listened to music. We were not narrow-minded. Music was our entertainment." The adoption of anashid in jihadi circles related more to flexible Salafi and Muslim-Brotherhood thought than to Wahhabism—the Hanbali Sunnism in Saudi Arabia—since the musical form is not prominent in Saudi Arabia. Afghanistan was an arena for the jihadization of anashid, which migrated to the Arab world in the minds and rucksacks of returning jihadis, where they were grafted onto traditional forms of poetry.

Jihadis quickly realized the usefulness of anashid in shaping the hearts and minds of prospective recruits and local populations in ways that transcended tedious discourse. Nelly Lahoud points out that "Anashid do not strictly belong to the doctrinal realm of jihadism, but rather to a set of practices or technologies that curate the listener’s emotions: the melodic rhythms of anashid seem intended to give rise to cathartic releases that complement and even substitute for dry ideological dogma." They entice recruits, motivate fighters during periods of training and combat, and calm suicide bombers before their missions. Anwar al Awlaki, the Yemeni-American cleric killed in a 2011 US drone strike, deemed anashid “especially inspiring to the youth, who are the foundation of jihad in every age and time. [Anashid] are an important element in creating a ‘Jihadi culture.’” Their simultaneously rousing and soothing qualities keep combatants primed for battle, while also, in a broader sense, inculcate Muslims around the world with a zeal for jihad.

"One Afghani fighter revealed, 'Although it was a holy war, we still listened to music. We were not narrow-minded. Music was our entertainment. "

Caton explains that in northern Yemen “a tribesman does not compose poetry purely for the sake of art,” but rather as a sociopolitical act that can “stir or, better yet, captivate an audience” to mold allegiances and shape opinions. Miller arrives at a similar conclusion that poetry is “an important conduit for popular political opinion,” though he expands its scope: “Exchanged among itinerant herders, craftsmen, merchants, soldiers, and town-based administrators, poetry provided the cultural flesh for an inimitable ideal” indicative of early Islam’s “influential Muslim thinkers.” This ideal included everlasting values such as honor, dignity, and forbearance. These values found their way onto audio cassettes where the stylistic and performative richness of written poetry was replicated en masse, leading to a resurgence of inshad.
The Internet facilitates the dissemination of jihadi inshad. By uploading their anashid onto YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms, groups like AQAP expand the reach of their poetic propaganda. Gilbert Ramsay calls jihadi forums “collective projects… which generate powerful affective attachments among members—not just to the duty of jihad, but to the forum itself, and the practices and sense of presence in jihadi space which it sustains.” Anashid exist primarily in three mediums: audio clips that can be easily downloaded onto a phone, transcribed deliveries, and videos that bring the historical allusions and fighting scenes of the voiced text to life. Jihadi Abdur Rahman affirms: “Be it a video of a raging battle, a mujahid shooting mortars, the setting off of an I.E.D. or simply sitting amongst other mujahideen, 9 times out of 10 you’ll find these videos being accompanied by jihadi [anashid].” The visuals that accompany anashid, whether a photoshopped image of a fighter presenting his rifle or a compilation of video clips, add an emotive dimension that is as important as the content itself.

Jihadi anashid revolve around four primary themes, as identified by Behnam Said. First are those related to battle, which “are committed to fighting and used to encourage and mobilize the warriors and their supporters.” These anashid are generally high-tempo and provide numerous references to both medieval and contemporary weapons. There are also those commemorating the deaths of martyrs (shuhada) by highlighting their resolve in the face of death. Third, anashid of mourning (ritha’) lament the arduous circumstance of individuals or societies. Finally, those related to praise (madih) emphasize the “generosity, bravery, or honor” of a specific jihadi or the community supporting him or her. I will analyze the following four anashid based on their adherence to these themes of battle, martyrdom, mourning, or praise.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE ANASHID FROM AL QAEDA IN YEMEN
AQAP produces dozens of anashid each year, primarily, though not exclusively, through its al Basha’ir Foundation for Audio Production. This section will explore four anashid from 2017: “Do Not Descend from the Mountain of Archers,” “Farewell Dialogue,” “Groans from Burma,” and “Happy Eid.” For each, I will describe how their content relates to either a local or international audience and analyze how different verses highlight the pragmatic thoughts and emotional feelings of the jihadi experience.

The nashid “Do Not Descend from the Mountain of Archers” is a seven-verse hymn released in June 2017 that emphasizes the importance of warriors’ perseverance during battle. It uses a tight rhyme scheme ending with the “t” consonant and a rapid rhythm which seizes the listener’s attention. The echoing chant linking each verse lingers in the ear, leading to ease in memorization. The munshid Abu Bakr al Hadrami uses formal Arabic case endings to emulate the dual hemistich form of classical qasida. This work is truly an anthem, meant to inspire reverence for AQAP fighters as they fight off the enemy.

Two verses of “Do Not Descend from the Mountain of Archers” emphasize the pragmatism of combat. The first verse begins:

Either we perish together, or succeed in compelling the
Promotes a pragmatic approach. Unfortunately, I obtained the highest dwelling."

The reciter is speaking to fighters who, while not on the frontlines, play an important role in AQAP’s insurgency. He adopts a first-person perspective in a conflict marked by “blood” and “harshness,” and calls upon his allies to support his group by watching their flank. The words emphasize solidarity; without buy-in from each faction, the enemy will kill them all. The refrain employs the standard trope of AQAP inshad: equating modern combat with classical warfare. The “mountain of archers” hearkens to a medieval battle scene where noble Muslim warriors may draw their bows to strike Crusaders. Though the “archers” likely reference artillery squads, the use of classical language conjures an eternal warrior mystique that produces temporal continuity for the jihadi project.

Practical qualities are also found in the nashid’s sixth verse, which begins: “Victory lies in a generation that has prepared for difficult matters.” The most valiant fighters possess a yearning for hardship, for it is the bridge to brighter days. The verse then highlights the qualities of “consciousness, youthful zeal, taqwa and virtues… truthfulness, high-mindedness, chivalry and generosity.” The text encourages traits highly prized in both the Arabic literary tradition and in Yemeni tribal dogma. In addition to the gentlemanly qualities of intelligence and placing the needs of the community ahead of oneself, the use of taqwa—consciousness and fear of God—imparts the need for Islamic piety. Coupled with the fifth verse’s imploration to gather around the Qur’an and Hadith, we see that this nashid calls for a well-rounded fighter, strong in body, mind, and spirit.36

While the previous nashid promotes a pragmatic fighting corps, “Farewell Dialogue” presents a jihadi who proudly declares his anticipation of martyrdom during a dialogue with his concerned mother. This 2017 al Basha’ir Foundation hymn, delivered as part of the “Ambassadors of Glory” album, is recited by Abu Bakr al Hadrami and composed by Abu Hajar al Hadrami, according to Nasheed Translations. Unfortunately, I was not able to secure an audio rendition of the work; thus, my analysis relies only on an Arabic-English transliteration. Nevertheless, this nashid offers political and emotional references that proclaim a multi-faceted impetus for jihad.

“Farewell Dialogue” blends past and present by juxtaposing historically disparate political forces. It introduces the Yemeni state as one “whose nature has been prominent with treachery… [who] killed the best of our men.” It then links the Yemeni state to past attackers of the Muslim polity: “The Mongols have returned, the most evil Genghis of America leading them / And the Crusaders came.” The nashid equates the contemporary government of Yemen, which is supported by the United States, with the 13th-century Mongols and Crusaders who besieged the Middle East from the East and West respectively. AQAP relies on the myth of an impenetrable barrier between the jihads of yesteryear and its own modern campaign to carve a base in Yemen to justify its insurgency.

The draw of this nashid lies in its rebuttal toward complacency in fulfilling obligations. Toward the middle, the narrator’s mother begs her son to leave jihad to marry his fiancée. He retorts by declaring: “My wedding is my diving into enemy ranks without fear or alert / And my bride is a Russian, in her heart the death has settled.” The narrator dismisses the mother’s plea, affirming that he does not want the fanfare of a wedding and human bride. His “Russian” bride is an AK-47 rifle, and the wedding banquet is his charge into battle. In the final verse the mother warns that the son “will undoubtedly be killed” and that he should “reconsider” jihad. He retorts boldly that death is: “[T]he survival of my creed, [and] my death is the victory … for I am a martyr [and] in the paradises I obtained the highest dwelling.” The narrator offers a layered meaning to survival: while he will die a martyr, his obligation to martyrdom will remain everlasting. Farewell Dialogue seeks to ameliorate jihadis’ concern over death by comparing it to a bridge to the tranquility of the afterlife.

Al Qaeda in Yemen also produces inshad related to internationally afflicted Muslims to present themselves as vanguards of the global Salafi-jihadi movement. One such composition is “Groans from Burma,” a mournful nashid which interrogates global Muslims’ indifference to the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Burma.
"‘Groans of Burma’ implores global Muslims to shake their indifference and come to the defense of the Rohingyaas."

This is not an al Basha’ir Foundation production, which produced a similar nashid titled “Burma” in Fall 2017. However, it is likely that “Groans of Burma” is linked to AQAP since Abu Hajar al Hadrami is its munshid. A video with images of Rohingyas crammed into boats, clamoring for water, and sifting through the rubble of destroyed homes accompanies the audio. There are at least three male voices delivering the text in a harmonious blend of bass and tenor voices to accentuate the nashid’s primary message of solidarity.

The narration details the transgressions of a monolithic “Buddhist” who targets the Rohingyas with indiscretion. Al Qaeda uses this dichotomization to position itself on the side of the oppressed Muslim group. It states that the Buddhist has “broiled my children with fire, Burned my mosque arrogantly and causelessly[ly] and tore [apart] my pure Qur’an.” The first-person perspective personifies the Rohingyas as one person who feels tangible and corporeal pain. The bodily description of pain continues: “And our sister in religion, what a pity? / The criminal soiled her honor, / and shackled her with chains / without mercy and compassion.” Here, the hymn uses gender-based violence to spur anger over Buddhists’ violence. By presenting a Muslim woman relegated to bondage, the entire Muslim polity is humiliated.

“Groans of Burma” implores global Muslims to shake their indifference and come to the defense of the Rohingyas. The first-person narration states: “But you continue your life in prosperity and happiness / You didn’t even saddle a horse for me / Don’t my sorrows sadden you?” The ambiguous “you” refers to the Muslims around the world that do not face the persecution playing out in southwestern Burma. The hymn also takes the opportunity to conflate the past and present. The call to “saddle a horse” is not literal in a geographic sense; it is a figurative plea for a genuine request: travel around the world that do not face the persecution of the Rohingyas as one person who feels tangible and corporeal pain. The bodily description of pain continues: “And our sister in religion, what a pity? / The criminal soiled her honor, / and shackled her with chains / without mercy and compassion.” Here, the hymn uses gender-based violence to spur anger over Buddhists’ violence. By presenting a Muslim woman relegated to bondage, the entire Muslim polity is humiliated.

Al Qaeda in Yemen’s enduring preoccupation is insinuation into the tribal fabric of southern Yemen. A praise nashid entitled “Happy Eid,” disseminated by al Basha’ir Foundation and delivered by Abu Bakr al Hadrami, reminds the citizenry that jihad’s victory is impending. Like other anthems, it uses a high-pitched and dancing voice that ebbs and flows in the ear of the listener. The deeper background voice adds resonance to the words, making them rest in the psyche. The sound’s matter-of-fact presentation offers a sort of clairvoyance that would likely swirl around a crowded Eid gathering and linger in the heart and mind of the recipient.

“Happy Eid” presents a hopeful circumstance of impending victory which aims to connect with each segment of society. In the first verse, the hymn wishes “[a] happy Eid, my ummah, that urges you to the evident victory,” proclaiming that Al Qaeda’s fighters “have been blessed with your love and sacrifice, oh Muslims.” The reciter argues that the community’s support is pivotal to forthcoming success. Verse three speaks especially to the youth, offering “candies and melodies of joy” and a “poem chanted with love” that inspires emotional familiarity, joy, and trust. Finally, the fourth verse mentions the “elders, who gather at every Eid,” to signify their importance as the bedrock of Muslim society. This three-part reference strives for emotional solidarity during a time that is both arduous and joyous.

The hymn also highlights the pragmatic sacrifices of jihadi fighters that lead to communal rewards. Importantly, the narrator affirms: “We do not tell this as a favor, nor to blame the sad one” to ensure that the words are not seen as arrogant. The three-line fifth verse and
the first line of the sixth verse proclaim:

We run to arms in advance, so that you may wear the new dress.
And we spill our pure blood, for you the scent of musk and oud.
And we spread our dead bodies, so that you proceed towards eternity.
We keep the clang of swords at wars away from your ears.42

Each fighters’ sacrifice translates into better material and spiritual circumstances for those not on the frontlines of battle. While the warriors bleed and struggle in confronting the enemy—again, with medieval implements like “swords”—society is rewarded with blessings. Through this proclamation of valiant selflessness, AQAP aims to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness.

THE UTILITY OF POETICS
Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula does not simply focus on the tactics of battle. It also taps into the linguistic character of Yemeni society to undergird its armed exploits with emotional justifications. The poetic form of inshad serves as a valuable propaganda tool in AQAP’s quest for martyrs and supporters. These four anashid identify how they merge historic and contemporary jihad into a single quest for retribution and righteousness against Islam’s enemies. In the future, inshad has the potential to resonate with both would-be and battle-hardened jihadis. As Abdur Rahman proclaims, “I believe personally that this anasheed movement is still in its infancy stage and hasn’t reached its maturity. The day in which we see both Muslim[s] and non-Muslims reciting the rhythmic poetry written by a Munshid … is the day we can say that we’ve reach[ed] the pinnacle of our potential.”43

Jihadi inshad form a soundscape with immense introspective insight. As long as their production persists, inshad will continue to elucidate the myriad ambitions of AQAP as it strives to corner the market of both global and local jihad.◆

Endnotes
1. The author of this article defines Salafi-jihadis as militant actors who draw on the tenets of religiously-sanctioned jihad warfare to implement, through force, a global caliphate which adheres to puritanical renditions of early Islam’s politics and society. See Shiraz Maher, Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
5. Ibid., 101.
8. Ibid., 361-2.
17. Ibid., 366.


22. Ibid., 422.


29. Ibid., 62.


31. Ibid.


34. Ibid., 873.


36. Ibid.


38. Ibid.


40. Ibid.


42. Ibid.

Saudi Arabia's Hidden Past
A Photo Essay

The Jane Taylor collection at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR) and the Al Noor Staff

ACOR works to further "research and publication across disciplines with a special emphasis on archaeology in the region" through support for scholarship, excavation, and restoration. The photo archive can be accessed online at https://acor.digitalrelab.com/index.php. All photos by Jane Taylor, courtesy of the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman. The ACOR Library Photo Archive Project is made possible through an American Overseas Research Centers grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Title VI). All text has been written by the Al Noor Staff.
For this issue’s photo essay, the staff of Al Noor would like to offer you a snapshot of some of Saudi Arabia’s rarely-viewed archaeological wonders. Politics, religion, and the difficulty of obtaining visas have long separated the outside world from ruins as dramatic as Petra but untouched by tourists. Saudi Arabia contains a wealth of untapped cultural and historical riches: British archaeologist Jamie Quartermaine estimates that the desert hides between 6,000 and 10,000 unexcavated sites. These sites include Mada’in Saleh in the region of Al-‘Ula, which contains Nabatean tombs from the first century CE. Traveler and scholar Ibn Battuta visited Mada’in Saleh in the 14th century and English poet and writer Charles Doughty became the first known European to see the tombs in 1876. In the modern period, the sites have been closed except to archaeologists, but Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman’s "Vision 2030" initiative includes plans to
develop Mada’in Saleh as a cultural destination through the Royal Commission for Al-‘Ula. Given the difficulty of accessing Al-‘Ula and other archaeological sites in Saudi Arabia, we would like to present a photo essay of images that illustrate the region’s journey through history, beginning with ancient sites from the 6th century BCE and ending with Ottoman forts.

Left: Two men contemplate the Haddaj well, which was constructed during the 6th century BCE, making it one of the oldest wells in the Arabian peninsula.

All photos have been selected from the Jane Taylor collection at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR). ACOR works to further “research and publication across disciplines with a special emphasis on archaeology in the region” through support for scholarship, excavation, and restoration. The photo archive can be accessed online at https://acor.digitalrelab.com/index.php.
Above: A view of the Lion Tombs of Dedan, which are cut into the sheer face of a mountain and date from the 5th century BCE.

Left: A close-up of one of the lions, carved in relief, which adorn the tombs at Dedan.
Above: This tomb at Dedan sports an ornate lintel in the Greco-Roman style, which contains a carved theatrical mask in the pediment.

Left: A view of the old town in Al-‘Ula, which served as the capital of the ancient Dedanite people and later was conquered by the Nabateans.
Right: The minaret of a disused mosque in Al-‘Ula’s old town. Minarets are typically the site of the Muslim call to prayer.

Below: A mosque and other ruins in the ancient city of Dumat al-Jandal, which literally translates to “Dumah of the Stone.” This territory belonged to Dumah, one of the twelve sons of Ishmael, who was Abraham’s first child in both the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions.
Left: The Diwan, or central governing body and meeting area, of Mada’iin Saleh. The Nabatean empire was formed around the 4th century BCE and conquered by the Romans in 106 CE.

Below: Qasr al Bint, or “The Palace of the Daughter,” towering at 16 meters, is the largest tomb façade at Mada’iin Saleh. In the city once known as Hegra, the Nabatean people carved tombs that remain today as some of the last and best preserved remnants of the past kingdom.
Two portals, adorned with intricate surface details, stand at tomb group C at the south side of Mada'in Saleh. The Nabataean tombs sit at a crossroads of trade and their exterior designs are adorned with a unique variety of languages, scripts, and artistic styles from 1 BCE to 74 CE during which the city of Hegra thrived.
Qasr al-Farid, or “The Lonely Castle” stands by itself as a majestic example of Nabataean architecture in Mada’in Saleh. By chiseling rock from top down, the Nabataean people created this tomb but never finished it, as is shown by the deterioration of detail nearing the base of the structure.
Al-‘Ula oasis in Wadi Al-Qura or “valley of villages” sits 380 km north of Medina. Once an important weigh station and mercantile center, Al-‘Ula is now known for its rock drawings and inscriptions which offer invaluable insight into some of Saudi Arabia’s ancient civilizations.
Left: The ancient capital city of the Tabuk region in northwestern Saudi Arabia housed the Tabuk Castle during the time of Ottoman Sultan Suleiman Al-Qanoni. The purpose of this fortress was to both protect the Tabuk water station and wells, and serve as one of the welcome stations on the Levant-Medina Haj road for pilgrims.

Below: An Ottoman fort and reservoir in Al-‘Ula, near the site of Mada’in Saleh.
Qal'at al-Marid, a castle built in the third century CE in Dumat al-Jandal. The oasis' position at the intersection of caravan trails connecting Mesopotamia, the Arabian Gulf, and Arabian desert made it an important commercial center along trade routes.
Fishy Business
ASSESSING EGYPT'S GROWING AQUACULTURE SECTOR

Ammar Plumber

Ammar Plumber is an undergraduate and a Benjamin Franklin Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania. An economics major, he is spending his third year as a visiting student at the University of Oxford’s Pembroke College, where he has taken an academic interest in Ancient Greek philosophy. He is also passionate about the issue of global food insecurity and its concomitant environmental challenges.
Based on hieroglyphic evidence, scholars say that fish farming in Egypt dates back over 4,000 years. Despite its ancient history, Egyptian aquaculture was only recently scaled up to industrial levels. The past three decades have seen such a rapid expansion of Egyptian freshwater aquaculture that Egypt ranked eighth globally in total annual harvest weight of farmed fish in 2016. However, technological advancement in the industry has remained slow, even during this period of growth. Egyptian fish farmers still chiefly use brackish water earthen ponds, which are confined to saline waste lands. In particular, most fish farming takes place in the Nile Delta region, where land is becoming scarce as it is repurposed for agriculture. Innovative strategies and technologies are needed to expand usable environments and to increase Egypt’s productive potential. Egypt still lacks the technical knowledge needed to
undertake large-scale mariculture—sea-based aquaculture—and accordingly produces mostly freshwater fish like tilapia, carp, and mullets. Globally, countries have utilized many different systems, ranging from offshore cages to flooded rice fields. While many of these possibilities have been explored in Egypt, brackish water earthen ponds remain the predominant mode of production. And unlike other countries, Egyptian law additionally requires that fish farming only take place on land and water that is unsuitable for other purposes. Given these constraints, improvements in productive potential are impossible unless Egypt learns how to farm in new ecosystems, such as the open ocean, deserts, and rice fields. In addition to its impact on the Egyptian population as a source of food, the future of the Egyptian fish-farming industry has far-reaching implications for the viability of aquaculture in other developing nations, especially those with similar ecosystems. Given the threats to marine life posed by ocean acidification, pollution, and overfishing, aquaculture has become an increasingly important source of food throughout the developing world. Its success and efficiency has the potential to ameliorate systemic crises of food insecurity and water scarcity.

In this paper, I hope to both quantitatively and qualitatively examine the historical development of Egyptian aquaculture over the past thirty-five years, and to determine what factors improve or inhibit Egypt’s productive potential. To do this, I will graphically analyze time series production data retrieved from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s database FishStatJ and tie observed trends to specific managerial, political, or technological changes in the industry. First, I will show that aquaculture is the dominant mode of fish production in Egypt and has far surpassed the output of wild caught fish. Then, I will provide a categorical breakdown of Egypt’s aquaculture species and explain why certain fish are farmed more than others. Finally, I will use data visualizations to survey the international aquaculture landscape,
which may help to characterize and explain Egypt’s development relative to other nations. Overall, I argue that Egypt’s insufficient production in new inland and offshore environments has limited its fish farming industry’s growth potential.

AQUACULTURE TERMINOLOGY
Before proceeding, it is necessary to define the technical terms that will be referenced throughout this paper. Aquaculture is generally divided into three categories based on the level of nutritional input: extensive, semi-intensive, and intensive. Extensive systems do not contain added nutritional inputs; fish subsist on food that is naturally present in the farming environment. Semi-intensive aquaculture systems use dietary supplementation, but natural food still comprises much of fish nutrition. Finally, intensive aquaculture involves adding nutritionally complete food to the ecosystem, often in the form of pellets. Extrusion, on the other hand, is a newer technology that allows more intense heat and pressure to be applied to the nutrients such that digestibility and feed cohesion are improved. Another common practice is mono-sex fish production: by feeding hormones to fish fry, it is possible to reverse the sex of females and produce an all-male population. This homogenization ensures that fish do not reproduce during pond cultivation and that they achieve greater mass than females can attain. Finally, integrated fish farming uses products of one farming environment as inputs for another to minimize waste. Integrated systems are generally less environmentally costly and economically wasteful than non-integrated systems.

SHIFTING FROM CATCH FISHERIES TO AQUACULTURE
To demonstrate the increasing importance of aquaculture as a source of fish, Figure 1 plots aquaculture as shares of total national fish production from 1981 to 2016.
Of the twelve largest aquaculture producers, Egypt had the highest proportion of aquaculture relative to total fishery product in 2016. Moreover, over the sample period, its share rose the most of any country displayed on the graph. In 1981, approximately 16% of fishery production was sourced from fish farms. Now, the proportion nears 80%—about a five-fold increase. But, it would be erroneous to infer that catch fishery production has decreased. In fact, wild-fish production has nearly tripled since 1981, as shown in Figure 2.

Rather, the Egyptian fish farming industry has so drastically outpaced growth in catch fisheries that wild-caught fish are now a minor fraction of total fish production. Plainly stated, Egypt has become heavily reliant on aquaculture as a food source.

**SPECIES BREAKDOWN**

Figure 3 is a packed bubble chart of Egyptian aquaculture output by species. As a comparative benchmark, Nile tilapia in 2016 accounted for 940,309 tonnes of production. Nile tilapia is far and away the most farmed fish species in Egypt, the second largest tilapia producer in the world. Until 2005, tilapia constituted a much smaller percentage of total production. The ensuing growth of Oreochromis nilotica can be attributed in part to the development of tilapia-specific sex homogenization technology. An all-male population produces a greater yield than a mixed sex one, a quality that appeals to profit-seeking fish farmers. Mullets and carp are the next two most farmed fish species. Often, carp and tilapia are raised together in polyculture environments because of their complementary diets: the carp consume what the tilapia do not. Tilapia, carp, and mullets are all raised in earthen pond environments, while European seabass, meagre, and gilthead seabream are mariculture. The infancy of sea-based fish farming in Egypt explains why these saltwater species are such a small portion of total production.

**AGGREGATE PRODUCTION**

Now, I examine the basic question of how much aquaculture each country has produced in tonnes during each year starting in 1980 (Figure 4). To avoid distortion and more clearly illustrate Egypt’s growth trajectory, it is necessary to exclude the two biggest producers, China and Indonesia, from the graph. From this visualization, a few trends are apparent. First, Egyptian aquaculture began growing around 1984, and in 1997 industry growth accelerated considerably. Second, Egypt recently surpassed Japan and approximately matches Norway and Chile in total production. Third, based on the trend line, Egypt’s growth appears to be one of the least volatile among the countries shown. More specifically, Egypt has enjoyed reliable growth in production whereas Japan’s and the Philippines’ outputs increased and then declined. This discrepancy in growth demands further explanation. Unlike Japan and the Philippines, Egypt is somewhat cushioned from the productive dominance of Chinese aquaculture because most Chinese fishery exports are destined for its neighbors and the United States. Moreover, Egypt has the largest Middle Eastern aquaculture sector, and thus faces no competition from surrounding countries. In possessing unthreatened regional market power, Egypt controls its own destiny. The longstanding success of the domestic industry depends primarily on Egypt’s own policies and management practices and less on the market decisions of other countries.

**PER CAPITA PRODUCTION**

Despite the importance of these conclusions, total production provides an incomplete account of Egyptian aquaculture’s ability to feed Egyptians, as population growth may outpace growth in output. For this reason, I also examine per capita aquaculture production, shown in Figure 5. Nearly quadrupling the second biggest per capita producer in 2016, Norway has consistently surpassed all other countries in this regard, which reflects the nation’s specialization in aquaculture. Despite having lower per capita production than most countries shown in the graph, Egypt has steadily increased its per capita output throughout the period shown. As in the aggregate production plot, Egypt overtook Japan in the past decade in per capita production. Furthermore, Egypt’s per capita output growth path is strikingly like Bangladesh’s. A remarkable number of similarities that influence both countries’ aquaculture industries help explain this association. Both are developing coastal nations that only farm fish inland. Like Egypt, Bangladesh’s two predominant farmed fish species are common carp and a genetically improved species of Nile tilapia, which was brought in by the Bangladesh Fisheries
with a historic bilateral relationship, and each is opportune, as both are developing economies. In 2010, Egypt's General Authority for Resources Development (GAFRD) signed an agreement with Myanmar in 1992, and Vietnam in 1994. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Egyptian aquaculture witnessed a period of significant technological reform starting in 1997. Many farmers undertook intensive aquaculture operations in place of pre-existing semi-intensive systems and semi-intensive systems in place of extensive ones. Land and water use restrictions drove this intensification, as fish farmers could not make use of new terrain. Moreover, because of Egypt's steep population growth over the past few decades, demand for fish and other food sources has consistently risen. Faced with limited options, businesses wishing to increase output must boost the yield of land already being used. As reflected in the data, Egyptian fish farmers in the past few decades have begun to use new management technologies such as extruded feed and sex homogenization to accommodate more fish and improve efficiency.

While modernization is certainly good for the long-term health of the sector, production is ultimately capped by the amount of land available. Though fertile soils are unavailable for fish farming, there are other viable environments and farming strategies which would comply with regulations besides the highly prevalent earthen pond environments. Mariculture is the most obvious possibility, as seawater is neither needed for vegetative cultivation nor for most other industrial purposes. To this end, Egypt has taken steps to increase its mariculture knowledge base with the aim of augmenting its sea-based productive capacity. In 2010, Egypt's General Authority for Resources Development (GAFRD) signed an agreement with Vietnam to share aquaculture expertise, strategies, and technology. This cooperative relationship is opportune, as both are developing economies with a historic bilateral relationship, and each has a comparative advantage in a different type of aquaculture: Egypt in freshwater and Vietnam in seawater. While little information is available regarding the fruits of the original agreement, as recently as 2017, both countries signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) expressing a commitment to invest in joint fish farming ventures. Besides its international engagement, the Egyptian government has also initiated its own new mariculture projects in recent years in Port Said, northern Kafr El-Sheikh governorate, and around the Suez Canal. The species being farmed include flat head grey mullet, gilthead sea bream, and European sea bass. While these ventures are still in their infancy, Egyptian mariculture, if successfully undertaken, promises immense gains in farmed fish output.

Two other systems compliant with land- and water-use regulations are desert and rice-fields aquaculture. The former involves using underground water in desert environments to raise fish in tanks and then reusing effluent water from fish farming operations to irrigate crops. This process serves to conserve freshwater, which could appeal to the relevant licensing agencies. Moreover, desert environments have few agricultural uses, so this form of aquaculture takes advantage of idle land. A second possibility entails stocking fish in submerged rice fields, a strategy long used in Vietnam, China, and Bangladesh. This method facilitates a symbiotic relationship between the two organisms that bolsters the yield of both; rice attracts pests and disease-carrying insects that fish can feed on. Another advantage is the efficiency with which rice-field aquaculture uses water. The two products are cultivated together using half of the amount of water needed to raise them separately. While many Egyptian farmers employ these two systems, more can be done. Less than 1% of Egyptian aquaculture production is farmed in the desert, and less than 5% is sourced from rice-fields, despite the fact that Egypt is the fourteenth largest paddy rice producer in the world. Ultimately, integrated aquaculture offers the benefits of increased production without colossal environmental costs.

**EXPORTS**

In addition to studying production, it is also useful to inspect Egypt's fish farming export levels. Figure 7 plots a time series of fishery product export quantities measured in tonnes. As extreme outliers relative to the other countries, China, Norway, and Vietnam are...
omitted; excluding them makes the other countries’
export trends more discernible.
From Figure 7, it is apparent that Egypt exports the
least among the twelve largest aquaculture producers;
its trend line remains relatively stagnant for the entire
period shown. By showing only Egypt’s aquaculture
export levels, Figure 8 makes clear that Egypt’s exports
have indeed steadily increased since 2000, though
more modestly than exports in the eleven other
countries.46

But a categorized breakdown of fishery exports
reveals that most are from capture fisheries rather
than aquaculture farms.47 Despite the abundance of
aquaculture production in Egypt, the EU and United
States reject Egyptian freshwater farmed fish, since
Egyptian production methods do not meet their
rigorous food safety requirements.48 Safety concerns
are related to drug residues and environmental
contamination. An obvious possibility would be
for Egyptian government to take regulatory action.
Whether this type of solution would be advisable is
beyond the scope of the argument advanced here.
Regardless, other export growth avenues exist. There
is substantial evidence that the development of Egypt’s
mariculture sector would serve this end. As of 2013,
the only Egyptian aquaculture producers permitted
to export to the EU were marine fish farmers.49 Perhaps
this is only a contingent feature of the fish farming
market: if freshwater fish farmers were more attentive
to matters of cleanliness, their products would also
be approved. However, according to two researchers
from the World Health Organization, freshwater
ecosystems, by their very nature, are more susceptible
to chemical and biological contamination than is
open-sea farming.50 This difficulty is compounded
in Egypt, where freshwater farmers are statutorily
barred from using high-quality water, as it is more
urgently needed for other purposes. For these
reasons, mariculture appears to be the most expedient
opportunity to increase exports.

CONCLUSION
While much research is available about the state of
Egyptian aquaculture in isolation, there is much more
to be understood about how Egypt fares relative to
other nations. To this end, relevant studies may offer
profound insights regarding how Egypt can leverage
its comparative advantage in aquaculture to bolster its
position in the global economy. Analysis of production
and export data revealed several noteworthy trends.
First, Egypt seems to be economically insulated
from the competition posed by Chinese aquaculture.
Egyptian aquaculture is, therefore, secure in its
short-term industrial autonomy. Second, Egyptian
and Bangladeshi per capita production data and a
litany of other factors suggest parallel developmental
trajectories. Successes or failures in one country may
offer insights about what may or may not work for the
other. Evaluating Bangladeshi case studies may be a
promising direction for future Egyptian aquaculture
research. Finally, growth opportunities in mariculture
and integrated land-based fish farming are possible
avenues to boost exports and per capita production.
While I do not offer specific policy recommendations
here, the effectiveness of various policy measures in
promoting mariculture and integrated aquaculture
ought to be studied further. Should these growth
opportunities be realized, fish farming holds great
promise as a staple Egyptian food product.

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ADDITIONAL SOURCES
The Art of Speaking

Oral Storytelling Among Syrians in Jordan

Catherine Cartier

Catherine Cartier is a student at Davidson College, majoring in Arab Studies and History. Her research interests include oral storytelling, translation, and the role of arts in reconciliation. During her time at Davidson, Cartier has conducted independent research in Jordan and Lebanon, and is now studying Persian in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. She would like to thank the Rohaytn Center for Global Affairs at Middlebury College, for their generous support in carrying out this project.
Oral storytelling is a continued living tradition in Syria, practiced in cafes and gatherings of family and friends. Stories, like the people who narrate and listen to them, change because of migration. Since 2011, close to 600,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan. Forced migration to Jordan has transformed story themes and how Syrian storytellers narrate them. Along with folklore, oral storytellers draw upon lived experiences, and recording oral stories brings the oral history of the storyteller into the historical record. Benmayor and Skotnes theorize that oral history reveals aspects of the migrating experience which might otherwise be ignored, and challenge “mono-causal, linear and economistic theories” of migration, creating new ways to understand migration.
For Syrian communities displaced to Jordan, oral storytelling communicates societal values, connects Syrians to a distinctly different past, and opens an alternative space for the storyteller to confront lived experiences. Limited civil society efforts have been made to celebrate this tradition. Instead, the storytellers themselves, who are predominantly Syrian women, negotiate its future. Oral stories reflect the rich history of storytelling in Syrian society, which extends to the pre-Islamic era. “Our society is a storyteller,” commented one interlocutor, emphasizing the centrality of stories to human experience.4 In a time when politics and media consistently deny the humanity of Syrians, stories highlight the creativity, humor, and resilience of storytellers and Syrian society.

Based on a series of semi-structured interviews with Syrian women living in Jordan and organizers of storytelling projects, as well as observation of oral storytelling sessions, this essay explores how Syrian storytelling traditions have changed because of Syrians’ forced displacement to Jordan. Participants’ names have been changed to ensure privacy unless otherwise indicated with an asterisk. Oral stories belong to popular literature; there is no singular author or owner. Zulaika Abu Risha, editor of Timeless Tales: Folk Tales Told by Syrian Refugees, comments, “I cannot say that these stories are Syrian stories—they are present in every region, with small or large differences depending on the narrator and the environment.”5 Furthermore, the borders between Syria and its neighbors are relatively recent, a reality reflected in the backgrounds of storytellers. Aisha Khalil al-Khalil,* one of the only storytellers from Syria active in Jordan, has family origins in Palestine and fled from the Yarmouk Refugee Camp outside of Damascus. For these reasons, this research focuses on oral stories narrated by Syrian refugee storytellers.

**THE STORYTELLER IN SYRIA’S HISTORY**

Understanding the history of storytelling within Syria is essential to grasping how this tradition has evolved in Jordan. Before Islam, the storyteller, known as the hakawati, served as a news correspondent. With the advent of Islam, a new generation of hakawati spread the story of the Prophet Muhammad. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the storyteller appeared as an entertainer, and under Ottoman rule, the epics told by storytellers became available in print.6 Representations of the hakawati in popular culture are almost exclusively of a man wearing baggy black pants with a red fez atop his head. Traditionally, the hakawati memorizes stories and reads from books of epics. Each night, he recites a section of the epic, inviting listeners to return the following night. Al Nofra, a coffee shop in Damascus, has hosted a storyteller at evening gatherings for the past 300 years.7

Although storytelling continues at Al Nofra, even this institution has struggled to find talented storytellers. The Syrian government, both prior to the uprising and to this day, does not offer support to storytellers, contributing to the diminishment of this once popular art form.8 The scene of coffee shops and professional storytellers is only one aspect of oral storytelling traditions within Syria. While men dominate the scene of professional storytelling in Syria, women are the primary storytellers between family and friends. “All of our parties and gatherings consist of stories,” comments Hiba, a retired schoolteacher from Damascus who lives in Amman.9 Stories are transmitted through family gatherings, and many women who tell stories to their families do not consider themselves to be storytellers in the same sense as a hakawati in a coffee shop. Hiba sees herself as a storyteller within her own family, while Aisha, who tells stories to children in her community, is unsure if she is a storyteller.10 While there are no professional Syrian storytellers in Amman, the tradition of storytelling is alive within Syrian communities. The study of Syrian oral storytelling in Jordan requires broadening the definition of storyteller beyond professional performers to include female storytellers who share narratives in social gatherings.
STORIES AND FORCED MIGRATION

In the context of forced migration, stories and storytelling traditions have moved across borders. In The World, the Text and the Critic, Edward Said introduces Traveling Theory and argues that “theories and ideas travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another.”

When they emerge in new and different contexts, they have similarities to their original forms, but are mobile and in some way transformed and affected by this movement. Said’s work concerns literary theory, but the principles of Traveling Theory can be applied to stories and storytelling. The Syrian war has displaced the tradition of Syrian storytelling to Jordan, a new context and environment. With these dramatic changes in family structure and environment, Syrian storytelling and oral stories themselves have changed in significant ways.

Because of the trauma of war and escape, many Syrian women have forgotten the stories they once memorized, leading to the loss of many Syrian stories. Umm Ahmed, a Syrian living in Amman since 2014, declares, “Those who survived, forgot,” reflecting her lived experience. As a child, she loved hearing stories from her grandmother, who would visit her family for extended periods of time. She remembers, “Her stories were very wonderful. We would all ask her to tell more.” But when she came to Jordan, she forgot all the stories except for short and simple ones, attributing this memory loss to her traumatic experiences. Umm Ahmed’s experience with forgetting stories was echoed by other interlocutors, one of whom commented, “I swear, I memorized my mother’s stories. But in our context, I forgot them.” The relationship between Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and memory is well documented. Patients with PTSD often speak of memory loss with subjects unrelated to their trauma. For some families, their displacement to Jordan has led to an outright loss of the oral storytelling tradition.

For individuals who continue to practice oral storytelling in Jordan, the context is distinctly different. Jordan does not have cafes known for storytelling, like Al Nofra in Damascus. A storyteller from Palmyra commented on the absence of public places, such as cafes and parks, potential venues to transmit stories. However, because the tradition of oral storytelling is grounded in family gatherings, the separation of families presents an even greater fundamental change in Syrian storytelling traditions.

“The Future of Syria,” a recent project by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), highlighted the gravity of family separation. Of 202 children interviewed, forty-three of them stated that one or more of their immediate family members were either dead, detained, or missing. Over 30% of Syrian households in Jordan are headed by women alone. The reality of family separation was reflected in interviews with Syrian women, many of whom recalled late nights spent with their extended families in Syria and lamented the impossibility of such events today. “The general sentiment or ambience amongst the family is different now, and there is a lack of psychological relaxation,” says...
Economic challenges in Jordan also make these family gatherings more rare. Syrian refugees, the majority of whom cannot work legally, work long hours in the informal sector, leaving little time for families to relax. Increasing numbers of Syrian women in Jordan have been forced to take on work outside the home to support their families. Umm Ahmed contrasted her life in Syria, where her responsibilities were based in the home, with her reality in Jordan, where she is forced to seek out employment elsewhere. However, many other interlocutors worked outside the home before coming to Jordan.

Children’s relationship to oral storytelling has been particularly affected by these changes in family structure and childhood experiences. While middle-aged storytellers have strong pre-war memories, youth today grew up during the war. Syrian women who had children prior to coming to Jordan emphasized how their own children never experienced childhood. Rania explained, “The past generation didn’t have childhood. They didn’t have happiness. Their childhood was only escaping.” Because of the war, the youngest generation largely missed the chance to participate in and develop a love for the tradition of oral storytelling. Umm Ahmed’s children spent most of their childhood sheltered underground and did not experience storytelling through family gatherings.

**IMPORTANCE OF ORAL STORYTELLING IN SYRIAN COMMUNITIES**

In the face of the loss of family structures and of their country, Syrian refugees are offered a powerful tool to communicate values through oral storytelling. Hiba used stories as a teaching tool with her children and within the classroom: “I determine the goal of the story and then I choose the words to serve the story.” Umm Ahmed commented on the potential for stories to teach patience, a virtue that she says Syrians need as they wait for the war to end. Stories supply lessons about bravery, goals, and wisdom, but they are also humorous and imaginative, and can carve out a space for Syrian children to reconnect with their lost childhood. Shalabieh al-Hakawatieh notes, “Storytelling can create a space for imagination…we went to Syrian refugee camps several times, and we provided a space for childhood simply by creating a story.” Oral storytelling traditions offer manifold values to a young generation of Syrians in Jordan.

Storytelling is an important way to link the younger generation to the past, but television and phones often intervene as other forms of entertainment. Anand Vivek Taneja suggests, “If we cannot remember the ways in which the past was different from the present, we cannot imagine any other present than the one we live in, or any other futures than the grim, inexorable one we seem to be heading towards.” The way Syrians remember their past informs their vision of the future. Hiba said, “I hope that stories will reflect more hope and humanity, to link the child to the present because this situation will not last. The story must strengthen them and present them the reality that there is good and evil in life, and we must insist on the good.” In a recent report, many interlocutors suggested that intangible cultural heritage, including storytelling, can help Syrian children fill this gap in their knowledge of their homeland and “maintain a sense of what it means to come from Syria while in exile.” However, the youth’s entertainment predominantly
comes from television dramas and the internet. One commentator notes, “the older generation no longer tells, and the younger ones no longer listen.”

Some children lack an older family member with knowledge of stories, and there is often little interest from the younger generation. Imane, a mother from Homs, suggested that television shows have taken on the role of teaching children morals and values. Television shows and oral storytelling are not entirely disparate from each other; many interlocutors described series featuring folk tales. Similar to the epics told by the hakawati, Syrian television dramas known as musalsalat are released as nightly episodes during the month of Ramadan, and watching them is a communal and familial activity, like listening to stories. Despite the popularity of other forms of entertainment, most interlocutors in Jordan spoke of how much they themselves, as well as their children, enjoyed listening to stories, and family separation and displacement were said to be more significant challenges to oral storytelling.

The tradition of oral storytelling in the Middle East is enjoyed by adults as much as children. For the older generation, oral storytelling offers a space to process the events of the war. Several interlocutors observed that discussing folk tales helped them to recall their past and take their mind off al-ahadath, a term which some use to refer to the Syrian war. Other interlocutors commented that the act of telling stories puts their minds at peace or inspires them. Storytelling opens a space to discuss the events of the war from an indirect, often third-person perspective. In one storytelling session, Aisha told an emotional story about a woman who lost her husband and raised her children on her own, only to end up far away from them. Only when she finished narrating did she comment, “That was the story of my life, my story, me.”

Through storytelling, Aisha connects with a younger generation of children—her own grandchildren are in Syria. Aisha, and other interlocutors, also enjoy storytelling as a form of entertainment and a source of laughter.

CHANGING STORIES IN A CHANGED WORLD

Aisha’s infusion of her personal experience into oral storytelling reflects how stories themselves are changing because of forced displacement. Hiba states, “The crisis has created new stories, about war, arms, and killing.” The stories told by Syrian women incorporate a long history of folklore but are also constantly evolving. Stories respond to the marginalization and isolation of Syrian refugees in their host country. Hiba suggests, “If we have a connection with our society, we speak our stories. But sometimes we don’t tell stories, or we change them because the society is against our story.”

Hiba has hope, though, that the stories will someday represent a more peaceful reality: “We hope that God will help us return to our country, to hope and security, and the good stories.” This hope is expressed by many interlocutors, who anticipate that when their own circumstances change, stories will as well.

Oral stories, because of their flexibility, are profoundly affected by the environment around them. Zulaika Abu Risha, editor of Timeless Tales: Folktales Told by Syrian Refugees, states that the story is spoken for the audience and changes according to the goal of the storyteller and their circumstances. She argues that oral stories are for any person to reshape as they see fit. She says, “the idea of ownership is not present in the sense that I (the storyteller or editor) cannot change the story.” Multiple interlocutors observed that “stories are a result of the environment” and emphasized that almost every aspect of their environment and lives differed in Jordan. Syrian oral storytellers in Jordan have begun to integrate aspects of their new environment and experiences into their stories, even as they anticipate returning to Syria.

PRESERVING AND CELEBRATING ORAL STORYTELLING

Few civil society efforts attempt to highlight storytelling traditions. Although not specifically focused on Syrian storytelling, the Hakaya Festival...
takes place annually in Amman and aims to “reclaim the centrality of stories in the healthy growth of individuals and societies.” The festival brings together artists from across the region and the world for a week of storytelling, performances, and workshops. In the past, Syrian storytellers and artists have been amongst the performers in these events, whose organizers have made efforts to bring storytelling to Syrian communities by organizing performances in refugee camps and neighborhoods with significant Syrian populations.

Another initiative, the al-Hakawati Project, aims to preserve oral storytelling, and produced the anthology Timeless Tales: Folktales told by Syrian Refugees, the most significant publication thus far to gather oral stories in the context of forced displacement. The bilingual anthology contains stories collected from displaced Syrian storytellers in Lebanon and within Syria. Through a related project, a storyteller from Palmyra, living in Jordan, began performing in schools and community centers. The storyteller asks members of the audience to complete his stories or share their own, and in doing so demonstrates the similarities between Syrian and Jordanian culture. After his performance at a nursery school in Mafraq, a northern city where many Syrians live, the headmistress asked the mothers of Syrian pupils to share songs and nursery rhymes, to be taught alongside Jordanian songs, aiming to help children to transition to their new school and foster communication between Jordanian and Syrian students and teachers. Along with Aisha, the storyteller from Palmyra is one of very few Syrians who tell stories in public places in Jordan, in part because of the limited number of initiatives like the al-Hakawati Project.

Beyond their potential contribution to society, there is also a need for these projects because of the manifold challenges to oral storytelling traditions. However, community organizations face a difficult landscape in their attempts to carry out such work. In the spring of 2018, the Al Balad Theater, organizer of the Hakaya Project and partner in the al-Hakawati project, received an eviction notice from the owner of its building in downtown Amman, who plans to use the building as a commercial space. In a statement released after the eviction, the theater noted: The eviction of Al Balad theatre from the building is not simply about a lease that ended, but rather a symptom of the battle waged against independent community initiatives...these initiatives find themselves confronted by commercial logic and market values without any protection, despite the official rhetoric vowing to support initiatives committed to provide spaces for youth to be creative and proactive.

The small number of organizations interested in Syrian storytelling and storytelling in general, coupled with a lack of support for organizations like the Al Balad theater, leave Syrian storytellers largely on their own to negotiate the future of oral storytelling.

CONCLUSION

The future of Syrian refugees living in Jordan, and the stories they tell, is largely unknown. One interlocutor reflected, “We don’t know the future or our own futures.” Another woman commented, “there is only fear for the future of storytelling if peace does not return.” No one knows when peace will return, and when it does, whether or not millions of Syrian refugees will be able to return to Syria. Hiba notes that the future of storytelling depends on the younger generation and warns, “sometimes the present eliminates the past.” Many Syrian interlocutors seemed confident that oral storytelling traditions would continue as they have for thousands of years, noting that oral storytelling is a flexible practice and one that has persisted for thousands of years through radical changes. Fadi Fayyad Skeiker, one of the few scholars to examine Syrian storytelling traditions from an academic perspective, refers to Abu Shadi, a former storyteller in Damascus, as “the last storyteller in Damascus.” Through his scholarship, Skeiker hopes “to shed light on and draw attention to his work and his
A newspaper article refers to Abu Shadi as “The Hakawati of Damascus.” This title excludes Syrian women within Syria, in Jordan, and around the world who continue to narrate stories to their family and friends. With limited attention from journalists, scholars, and civil society, these women are the primary practitioners of oral storytelling. Studying oral storytelling among Syrian communities in Jordan reveals that storytelling is not a dying art but rather a changing one. Through their courage to speak, even in the most challenging of circumstances, Syrian women sustain oral storytelling as a vibrant, dynamic, and very much living tradition.

While stories reflect the displacement of Syrian communities to Jordan, they also integrate a long history of folklore shared across the region and the world. Many stories feature Joha, a famous character appearing in many stories who seems silly but surprises the listener with his clever tricks. The woodcutter, another repeated character, works constantly but struggles to survive. An oppressive king appears frequently, threatening to cut off the heads of his subjects. Women also mentioned the stories of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and the Boy Who Cried Wolf, tales that are told and read across the world. Inspiration for specific details often comes from local nature or agricultural products and mirrors the environment of the storyteller, but the vast overlap between oral stories across the world reminds the listener of common human experiences. Listening to oral stories told by Syrian refugees not only provides insight into this moment in their lives and in history but also serves as a powerful reminder of our shared humanity.

THE KING’S EARS
Originally told by Aisha Khalil al-Khalil from Yarmouk Refugee Camp, now living in Zarqa

Long ago in a faraway place, a King ruled over his land. None of his subjects knew that he had huge ears—his ears were his deepest secret, which he desperately wanted to hide from his people.

Every time a barber came to the castle to trim the King’s hair, he would say, “O Great King, why are your ears so huge?” The King would command the Barber to finish cutting his hair. But when the Barber finished, the King would take him away and cut off his head, so that he could not share the King’s deepest secret.

Hardly a single Barber remained in the entire Kingdom. Over ten Barbers had cut the King’s hair, and each one of them exclaimed “Oh my! O Great King, why are your ears so huge?” Each barber met the same fate: the King cut off their heads. When the people heard that the King beheaded all the barbers, they said in shock, “Scarcely one Barber remains and still the King cuts off their heads!” They wondered why—because none of them had seen the King’s ears or knew of the secret he hid.

The final lone Barber came to the castle. While he was trimming the King’s hair, the King asked, “What do you see on my head?” The Barber was focused on the King’s hair and did not respond. He didn’t remark to him, “Why are your ears so huge?” The King asked again, “what do you see on my head?” The Barber replied this time and told him, “I didn’t see anything on your head.” The King asked, “But didn’t you see my entire head?”
The Barber replied that he had. The King persisted and asked, “what about my ears?” The Barber told him, “O Great King, your ears are huge so that you can hear the concerns of the people.” The King decided not to behead this Barber and told him that the haircut was finished. The Barber said once more, “O Great King, your ears are huge so that you can hear the concerns of the people. You listen to anyone who comes to express their concerns and speak about their oppression from any person or thing.”

The King felt happy because of the Barber. He thought, “I want to honor this Barber.” He decided to thank him by arranging his marriage to one of the maids in my court, who knew of his huge ears. The King swore, “I won’t let him tell this secret to anyone.” He instructed the woman to watch her new husband, to ensure that he would not tell the secret to anyone. The King gave the Barber his new wife, and told him, “This woman is your reward, because you supported me and you are an excellent Barber.” He told him to return to his house with his wife.

The woman from the court and the Barber married, and the Barber enjoyed his marriage very much. But he couldn’t tell the secret to anyone: the King had sent the maid to watch the Barber. If he told the secret to anyone, she would report it immediately to the King. The Barber’s belly started to grow because the secret was hidden in his stomach and his heart. His stomach grew and grew and grew. As much as he wanted to, he couldn’t let the secret escape. If he told the secret, the King would cut off his head. Every two or three days, the King sent for the maid and asked her, “Did you hear him say something?” She shook her head. He asked again, “No one has ever seen or heard or discovered the secret?” She confirmed to him, “No, never.” He told her “very well. Keep your ears open and see if he tells the secret to anyone---even to you!” But she told him, “He’s never even told me.” The King sent her back to the Barber’s house.

She returned to her home, where the Barber sat inside. This secret that he desperately tried to hide grew huge in his stomach. He decided he didn’t have any choice except to find an abandoned well. He said, “I will find myself an abandoned well and put my head inside, and shout, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey.”

He went out and searched and searched for four or five days until he found an abandoned well. There was no water in the well or anything else, and nobody else within earshot. He put his head in the well and shouted, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey. The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey.” His stomach started to shrink, and he kept screaming until it returned to its normal size. The secret was in the well, and the Barber kept shouting until he was sure that none of the secret was left. Feeling relieved, he returned to his house.

By chance, rain started to fall. The stream flowed and filled the well, and water started running from it. The water ran into the stream, which watered the grass and trees and all the plants. When the grass and trees blew in the wind, they too shouted, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey.” They swayed back and forth, all the while shouting. A symphony of their voices filled the air. Each gust of wind spread their shouts further, but not a single person who heard the voices knew their origin. The King ordered his men, “Go and bring me the Barber!” When they found the Barber, he swore to the King, “O Great King, I did not tell your secret.” The King did not believe him and demanded, “To whom did you tell my secret?” “I didn’t tell anyone,” promised the Barber.

The King said, “Listen. I hear everyone shouting.” He knew that the trees and the grass and the bushes were shouting, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey.” But the Barber told him once more, “I swear to God, I did not tell anyone.” The King asserted, “Tell me the truth, or else I will cut off your
head.”

The Barber promised, “I swear to God I will tell you, O Great King,” and began his story. “I really didn’t tell anyone. But the more I tried to hide the secret, the more my stomach grew, and the secret was in my stomach and heart. My stomach grew as if I was pregnant. To whom did I want to tell the secret? There was nobody because I feared for my life, I feared the news would reach you.” The King prompted the Barber to continue. “I went to look in the forests, in the gardens, and I found an abandoned well, without any water. I put my head deep into the well and started shouting. I shouted until I emptied my heart and stomach, until not one bit of the secret remained, and then I returned to my house.”

The King nodded and told the Barber, “Very well. We are going to search for the well.” He took the Barber with him on his horses. They found the well and in fact, the grass still shouted, “The ears of the King are the ears of a donkey!” The Barber had told the truth.

Surrounded by the shouting grasses and trees, the King wondered, “What should we do with the water and grass and the trees that are shouting ‘the ears of the King are the ears of a donkey?’”

The Barber asked the King, “O Great King, how did I sin? I didn’t tell the secret to anyone, I just spoke into the well. It rained and the water flowed. The trees drank, the grass drank, and they started to shout. This was not my sin.”

“The truly, it was not your fault. This was in the hands of God,” agreed the King. The Barber hesitated, “But what is the solution?” The King gazed out over the grass, the trees, and the bushes, and returned his eyes to the Barber, who awaited his fate. He decided, “You will go and walk between the people, and tell them the story—all of it. Tell them that their King has huge ears so that he can hear the concerns of the people, to listen to the oppressed and the hungry, to listen to the problems of any person.”

The Barber happily went out of the forest and walked between the people, telling them, “I swear to God, I went to cut the King’s hair and I found that his ears are huge, so that he can hear incredibly well, unlike ordinary people. He hears our voices, and any person who visits him, the King will welcome him. Any person who has doubts can express them to the King and ask for his needs to be met.”

The King finally felt at ease, and the whole world felt overjoyed to hear that his ears were huge so that he could listen to the problems of the people. The King appointed the Barber as a Minister. He told the newly appointed Minister, “You really didn’t tell anyone. You protected my secrets. Therefore, I have chosen you as a Minister.”

From that moment onward, the Barber led any work that the King initiated. In the whole country, there wasn’t a single Barber except for this one, and he was now a Minister. The people wanted to cut and style their hair, but there were no Barbers in the Kingdom.

The people did not know how to handle political matters in an honorable and polite way. They laughed at the King’s huge ears and the Barber’s appointment as a Minister. The King cut off their heads directly. From the Barber turned Minister, the people learned to be understanding and level headed. And so the King and the Barber lived in happiness, and the people did as well.

**WHEN FISH FLY**
*Originally told by Sahar Mohammad Muqdad* from Derra, now living in Amman

A young, clever woman and the devil had a fight and they disagreed on who was stronger, the woman or the devil. The devil said, “I am stronger than you.” “No, I’m stronger than you,” insisted the woman,
and the devil replied, “Tomorrow we will see who is stronger.” She told him, “I can make a man divorce his wife and return to her the next day. Can you do that?” He admitted, “No.” She nodded triumphantly and told him, “Tomorrow you will see what I’m planning to do.”

The next day, she visited a silk trader near her home. She went disguised as an elderly woman. She said, “My son, give me a piece of green silk.” He accepted and as he was cutting the silk, she interrupted and said, “My son, I want this silk to be very well cut. Pay attention to your work.” He turned to her and replied, “Why are you so concerned?” She explained, “My son is in love with a girl, and he wants to take this piece of silk and give it to her.” After he finished his work, she took the silk and left the shop.

Instead of going home, she went to the silk trader’s house, where his wife was. She knocked on the door and said, “My dear, it’s the time for prayer and I need a place to pray. Can I pray in your home?” The silk trader’s wife let her in and showed her to the bedroom. But the old woman did not pray. She intentionally put the silk under the pillow, went out of the room, and left their house and went back to her own.

That night, the silk trader came home. He put his hand under the below and felt something. He pulled out the silk and asked his wife, “Where is this from?” She swore to him that she did not know. She explained, “A very old woman came and brought it.” “That’s impossible,” he exclaimed in shock. “You’re in love with the son of the old woman and she brought you the silk as a present! I threw her out of our house and divorced her, and now I’m going to return to her.” She exclaimed, “Oh no! You must remarry her.” The trader brought the old woman the cut of silk from his house. His wife and her family were very upset, and the divorce was nearly irreversible, but they settled the dispute and remarried.

The young woman took off her disguise and told the devil, “See! I made a man divorce his wife and return to her the next day. Can you do that?” He shook his head and acknowledged that he could not and that her plotting impressed him. The clever woman returned to her home and the devil descended to his. He sighed and admitted, “Women teach the devil lessons.”

Endnotes
4. Hiba (retired school teacher), discussion with author, April 2018.
5. Zulaika Abu Risha (editor of Timeless Tales),
discussion with author, April 2018.
8. Ibid.
10. Aisha Khalil al-Khalil (storyteller), discussion with author, April 2018.
12. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
22. Hiba, discussion with author, April 2018.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Zulaika Abu Risha (editor of Timeless Tales), in discussion with the author, April 2018.
35. Ibid.
40. Hiba, discussion with author, April 2018.
41. Ibid.
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