

Seeing the Others



Reporting Diversity: a Media Programme to Promote Inter-Community Dialogue and Moderate Voices as a means to Prevent Religious Radicalisation in Egypt, 2008-2010



CONTENTS

Preface	3
About the Project	4
Academics' comments	5
Journalists' comments	7
Newspaper articles from the project	9
About the Media Diversity Institute	84

Preface

Seeing the Others

This booklet offers an insight into the Media Diversity Institute project titled '*Reporting Diversity: a media programme to promote inter-community dialogue and moderate voices as a means to prevent religious radicalisation*', in which Egyptian journalism professors, journalism students and journalists participated, during 2008-2010.

The project was set up to advance journalism education and journalism skills through hands-on production training for practicing journalists and through the development and implementation of specialized university curricula, related to responsible reporting on social and cultural diversity in general, and religious diversity in particular. Two workshops were organised for journalism professors from universities across Egypt, and selected participants from these workshops were then mentored in the development of Reporting Diversity curricula. In addition, two ten day production oriented training courses were organised for Egyptian journalists resulting in the production of newspaper articles.

We are extremely pleased to say that one of the oldest universities in the Arab world, Cairo University, supported the project. Currently three of their journalism professors are teaching newly developed Reporting Diversity curricula. In addition, courses are also being taught at Mansoura and Ain Shams Universities. Comments from some of the participating journalism professors can be found in this booklet.

Also included in this booklet are the articles which resulted from the training courses for journalists. All of them have been published in the papers from which the trainees came.

Our special thanks go to our local partners, the British Council Cairo and the Andalus Institute for Tolerance & Anti-Violence Studies, Cairo. Without their contribution, this project would not have been so deeply rooted, as is needed when projects deal with such sensitive issues as diversity and the media. We also want to thank to our country coordinator Ms Doaa Abdelaal, for her commitment, her professionalism and her enthusiasm so generously shared with us.

All this remarkable work would have been not possible without the UK embassy in Cairo which, by providing financial support, gave all of us the possibility to truly get to know each other, to understand each others' cultures and traditions better and to search and find common ground – in journalism as a profession as well as in democratic values, freedom of expression and freedom of information for all citizens regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, age, or income.

Milica Pesic
Executive Director, Media Diversity Institute
London, February 2010



About the Project

Reporting Diversity: a media programme to promote inter-community dialogue and moderate voices as a means to prevent religious radicalisation in Egypt

Countries: Egypt and the United Kingdom

Period: August 2008 – March 2010

Managing Organisation: the Media Diversity Institute (MDI)

Partners: the British Council Cairo and the Andalus Institute for Tolerance & Non-violence Studies Cairo

Supported by: the UK Government's Strategic Programme Fund

The programme: the purpose of the project was to advance journalism education and journalism skills through hands-on production training for practicing journalists and through development and implementation of specialized university curricula related to responsible reporting on social and cultural diversity in general, and religious diversity (cross religious and intra-religious) in particular.

Main project activities: in collaboration with local partners, the British Council Cairo and the Andalus Institute for Tolerance & Non-violence Studies Cairo, MDI organised the following activities during the project:

- *Reporting Diversity Curricula Development (RDCD) Workshops* – Two workshops were held in Cairo, with 4 academics already teaching Reporting Diversity courses, from around the world, and 26 Egyptian academics, from universities across Egypt, interested in issues related to the media and diversity. The academics discussed the principles of diversity, the role of the media, and ethical issues around coverage of diversity, globally and in Egypt. The objective of the workshops was to support Egyptian academics in the development of their own Reporting Diversity courses, through knowledge sharing and discussion with their peers from around the world.
- *Reporting Diversity Course Development Programme* – after the workshops, the Egyptian academics submitted their own concepts of Reporting Diversity courses. The five best concepts were selected for further development, ending in full course curricula, currently being taught with MDI support. Training materials, teaching techniques, reading lists, and translation of key materials were provided.
- *Team Reporting Projects in Egypt and the UK* – two production-oriented training courses for journalists, each lasting 10 days, were held in Cairo. Stories produced through the training were published in the media outlets the participants came from. The authors of four best articles were invited to the UK for a study tour aimed at enhancing their understanding of the concept of diversity in the UK.

Academics'

Comments

The experience of participating in the workshop of "Reporting Diversity Curricula Development" organized by MDI in Cairo January 2009 one of the best



experiences I ever had. I had the chance to see and practices new methods of teaching my students the skills of journalism and to open new horizons to develop the theories we teach them. I also had the chance through the mentoring programme to develop curricula in "Journalism Skills" through different discussions with Dr. Rasha Abdullah which enriched the curricula academically and practically. Those discussions led me to add new training models that help to develop the journalism skills of the students and encourage them to tackle new dynamic issues with attention to diversity in the society.

Dr. Nagwa Abdul Sallam Fahami

**Prof. Media Department, Faculty of Arts
- Ain Shams University**

I consider my experience with MDI mentoring programme where I have developed a curricula about diversity in media, a very rich experience. I have started a new beginning to seed the diversity values within my students at the faculty of Mass Communication- Cairo University. Many times these issues where opened but with no concrete and

independent focus, or sometimes it was tackled through our discussion about objectivity in general which empty it of its importance especially in the context o analyzing minorities issues. The workshop at the Mass Communication faculty- Cairo University in 2009 is considered a new light and a real start for developing curricula around diversity. Through the support of MDI either academically, morally and financially the goal became possible or today I could teach my students a curricula on (The elements of News Coverage based on Diversity) which the curricula I have developed. I look forward for more cooperation with an organization as MDI that really seeks diversity as say and as an act.

**Dr. Shereen Salama, Lecturer-
Journalism Department, Faculty of
Mass Communication - Cairo University**

MDI mentoring program has been an extraordinary experience in my career. MDI helped me to find my points of strength and weakness and my mentor Dr. Rasha Abdullah guided me to the best practice in teaching techniques.

I managed to design a course for covering diversity with focus on gender issues. It helped to raise the awareness of my students towards different issues worth coverage. The best part in my experience is that I am now able to design different courses with different focus points according to the needs of my students.

Nasry Essmat, Ain Shams University

Journalists'

Comments

I am very happy that I managed to attend this training programme as I learnt a lot either on the level of professionalism or on the level of covering the issues of marginalized and minorities in the society. I have also learnt a lot related to ethics without bias or stereotyping. The programme also motivated me on writing coverage of the problems that young girls who work in tobacco factories suffer from. I am very grateful to MDI and I hope to continue working together and I hope the programme would be longer next time.

Safaa Saleh, El-Osbou

Part of the training, I conducted an investigation which was revised by the trainers.



This helped me to discover the weak points. The training also exposed me to the ethics that control and govern the journalism work in Britain. I discovered that the British journalists enjoy a responsible freedom and this training helped me to discover more about the British media and comparing it to the Egyptian ones. I wish the time allocated for this training and the preparation of the coverage would increase. The sample applies for the examples given from different media.

**Hend Sliem
El-Wafd**

MDI training was the best training I had, and will remain one of the best I may have in my career. The main reason is the mix made between theoretical and practical training. Even the theoretical days were not pure theoretical. We had fun and learnt

many things. This training added to me both as a human and as a journalist. The group I met, the trainers, and MDI staff added to my gains from this training. This training has a future impact too. Those ten days I had in the training opened new horizons for me in my work. And from a personal view, it assured that journalism is about human beings before it is about presidents and international events.

**Mohamed El-Amier
El-Dostor**

The training programme was great and added much valuable information for me related to diversity. I wished the programme was longer to get more information.



**Ghada Abdul Khader
Al-Ahram Weekly**

The training programme opened my eyes on subjects that have never been tackled by Egyptian



journalism as the issues of some minorities that we pass every day but never attract our attention. The training also drew my attention to many mistakes we make during writing our reports. Mistakes we don't make intentionally but because of time limitations or because of shallow information. The thing that really I appreciate is the time the trainers gave to read our stories and highlight our mistakes. I see it as a taught task but it has a noble goal. It is rarely found a mentor who corrects mistakes. Personally I was happy with the experience although we needed more time for theoretical trainings and for the preparation of the stories.

Samah Abdel Atty, El-Masry El-Youm

Newspaper articles from the project



Love in Ezbet As-Safih

By Dalia Al-Aqqad

EI-Shorouk

Destiny has united them in a sacred bond. Although he is from Quena Governorate and she is from Munufia, Muhammad and Nihmidu came together in the 1970s when they were both sent for medical treatment to a Leprosy Colony.

Muhammad Abdul Qader is now 63 years old. The disease deprived him of an upbringing in his family home. As a child he was taken away by ambulance to this Leprosy Colony. Nihmidu, now 55, still remembers her tears as she bade farewell to her sisters. She was barely 13 years old at the time and had no idea why she had to leave her family. At the time neither knew what fate had in store for them in the far off colony whose very name spelled loneliness.

The medical treatments of today were not available then. The loss of limbs from the disease was more than compensated for by the love and compassion they found in their new home. They had children, boys and girls, who did not suffer from the disease. After a life of prolonged suffering caused by both disease and the reactions of other people, their happiness was completed with the arrival of Muhammad, the **latest** of their children.

The story of Muhammad and Nihmidu is not the only one that expresses the strength of family relationships in Ezbet As-Safih which lies on the outskirts of the

Leprosy Colony at Abu Zaabal in Qlayubiya Governorate. Three thousand former patients live together there side by side.

Although the disease has stopped spreading over their bodies, the physical symptoms of the disease are still evident – a visible reminder among hundreds of non-infected people in the village. These devastating symptoms are the last indicators of the disease before it passes. Once free of the disease most patients leave the Colony but they still have to live with the evidence of their past infection. They have founded a poor, marginalized community outside the gate, with no desire to be consolidated into 'normal' society because they have been made to "feel that they are still patients" when they try to mix with mainstream society.

Muhammad, a guard, explains: "In Upper Egyptian society, they are afraid of the disease. If I visited my village in Quena for example and I drank from an earthenware pot, they would then break it into pieces in front of me."

Muhammad describes how the village was founded. "The first house in Ezbet As-Safih was built with a little mud and tin sheets, " he says. "Some workers in the Atomic Energy Authority passed by us. They were amazed that this house existed. From a long distance, it looked as if a plane had landed with the owner of this house from the sky, because around him there was nothing but waste and desolation."

With the passage of time, the village grew. The only source of income for residence was the sand around them which is used in water filters. Even so their existence was not free from problem free.

Muhammad recalls: "I remember the peasants throwing stones at us and calling us names and telling us to leave. The reason why we overcame them is that unity is power and our unity enabled us to survive."

But it was not the only reason for survival according to Muhammad. Life in the village began to take another shape when the foreigners took an interest in it. Through Caritas Egypt foreigners would come to visit the secluded village bringing gifts for its inhabitants and arranging parties and camps on the beaches.

"We felt that there are people who live far away but are very sympathetic to us, while others near to us never think of visiting," says Muhammad. "We were surrounded by a closed fence and the foreigners were the first people to open its gate, striking up relationships to spread awareness about the disease, and by having normal relations with the patients giving them hope of recovery.

"Later on, the students from private schools (run by Sisters/ catholic nuns) started to visit our community. Aid followed and our mode of building houses changed from tin sheets to baked bricks. Water pumps became available. We had had to rely on one pump to provide water for the whole village. Then a health and social

centre was established. It includes a nursery and preparatory school. And finally electricity became available."

Have Muhammad and Nihmidu ever thought about leaving the village? Simultaneously they reply "No, because the weather here is fine and we are psychologically OK."

Although the village is changing for the better, "Thank God", as Muhammad and Nihmidu say from time to time. Muhammad's voice trembles when asked about his wishes for the future. Tears fill his eyes as he says: "I do not want my son to be punished because of my illness. We want society to accept us as members like everyone else. I do not want them to reject my son when he is applying for a job simply because I am sick. Now any company can refuse to hire my son because his father is sick. We want to eliminate this stigma from society.

"We do not like the expressions of scorn and fear towards us just because we once were patients and still bear the signs of the disease on our bodies. We are a part of the society, and there are diseases more dangerous than ours. In the sight of Allah, I may be better than many others."

He adds "Unfortunately, most people avoid us because of an incorrect prophetic tradition which says 'Escape from the leprous just like you escape from a lion'. That should not be legally permissible."

Mahmoud Ali Muhammad, 65, is another former patient living in Ezbet As-Safih or

Abdul Muniem Riyad Village as it is now called. He lives with his wife, his son Wael, now in secondary school, and daughter Yasmine who is at the preparatory school. Neither his wife nor children have been affected by the disease.

Mahmoud was born in Al-Badari district, Assuit Governorate but from the moment he was infected with the disease, relations with his family deteriorated. He does not like to go back to Assuit, he says: "I encounter strange looks and this makes me feel that I am still sick although I am recovered."

Although he married his cousin, their marriage has not been easy because part of the family severed relations with his wife and declared that they would never have anything to do with her.

His wife explains: "My father agreed to the marriage, but my paternal uncles said 'if you marry Mahmoud, we will never have contact with you.'"

Yet, she agreed to marry because "The disease is destined by Allah and man has no option in this respect." Adding shyly "And Mahmoud was a good person."

Mahmoud smiles and looks at his wife as if recalling a happy memory.

"Before I was infected with the disease," he says, "I was a student at one of Al-Azhar religious institutes and during the period I was receiving medical treatment, I worked for the government in the municipality of Al-Matariyyah. Later on, I was referred to a medical committee. Now, I receive LE 70 per month from the

government, although if a person worked for the government, he would occupy a prestigious position in the country."

Like Muhammad, Mahmoud insists that he has found peace of heart in Ezbet As-Safih, but says: "I have been here for 40 years. Yet, life did not become easy until we took up issues with the governorate. Still we have some demands. For example, for ten years, we have been demanding that the governor build a primary school instead of causing hardships to the kids, but with no avail. We also want to guarantee the future of our kids after we die by obtaining a contract of ownership for the house where we live. Each year, we ask the Al-Qalyubiya governor about these contracts, and his reply is 'Allah will make it easy'."

At the house of Bataa Hassan Ali, 60, a marble sign reads "Ricardo's House". It was the gift of a foreign donor, Ricardo, in gratitude for which the villagers had his name inscribed. It is more evidence of the way in which foreign citizens, particularly of Germany, Italy and Belgium have sought to alleviate the suffering of the people of Ezbet As-Safih.

Life had been very miserable for Bataa. She had been hugely affected by the disease. She has injuries to her legs and her hands were worn away by the disease. She was obliged to work in the 'dump' despite of the conditions caused by her illness. Sometimes she would crawl on her hands at work just to secure an easier life and proper education for her five children especially after her husband refused to

contribute to the household expenditure. She wept as she spoke. She has been an orphan ever since she left Quena during the early days of her infection with the disease. She has know no other residence than this house. Her daughter Shaimaa Muhammad Aly Ash-Sharqawi, a graduate of the Nursing Institute, helps her out.

"It is useless. I have been unfortunate ever since I was born," she sighs, hoping that the officials will pity her and hire her daughter in Qalyub instead of Quena.

As we left Ezbet As-Safih, we shook hands with the families we had met. We were no longer worried about being infected having seen Muhammad embrace his uninfected grandson with such love, convinced that he will not transit the disease.

It was our original intention to visit the Leprosy Colony itself but had been refused permission by the Ministry of Health. We saw that it was guarded by members of the **Camel** Corps, but without any camels, and recalled with concern the words of some of people from Ezbet: "Thank God, our condition is far better than the people living inside".

We were haunted by one final question. If the conditions former patients have to endure are better than life inside the colony, what must it be like for those still receiving medical treatment?

'Neither law nor society

Is on the side of lepers'

Unlike other diseases leprosy has few organizations caring for those who suffer

from it. CARITAS Egypt may be the only one that cares for both social and health aspects of lepers.

CARITAS works in cooperation with the Anti-Leprosy Administration of the Ministry of Health and Population to relieve the suffering of lepers inside the Leprosy Colony in Abu Zaabal, at Ezbet As-Safih and at the colony in Al-Amirryah. It has support from international organizations such as the German Organization for Assisting Lepers and the Belgian Damien Organization.

Magdy Jaras is assistant general manager of Caritas Egypt. He told Al-Shuruk newspaper that despite the great advances our contemporary Egypt has witnessed, leprosy is still a disease whose patients cannot merge into mainstream social life. For him this is less because of the nature of the disease but more because of public ignorance of the reality of leprosy and the resulting psychological impact on those who suffer from it.

Caritas Egypt began its activities in 1979 when there were 60 thousand cases of leprosy. Since then the number has dramatically decreased. According Ministry of Health statistics, Jaras says, that the number of lepers receiving medical treatment these days does not exceed 8 thousand. The Ministry provides free modern medicines that reduce the risk of deformities suffered by former old

patients in Ezbet As-Safih who had to make do with traditional treatment.

As a result, the symptoms of leprosy were very evident on their bodies. Most of them were rejected by their relatives who feared they might be infected. According to custom, leprosy is regarded as a social disgrace.

The disease has disappeared from more developed countries according to the World Health Organization, as a result of rising economic and social conditions. However, it is still widespread in the Mediterranean basin, and the WHO estimate there to be some 12 million lepers in 'third world' countries. About one in a thousand people in Egypt may be infected by the disease in Egypt, according to the WHO- World Health Organization.

Although the Ministry of Health does its best to provide medical treatment of the disease, the social aspect of leprosy is no less important than the medical one, according to Jaras. The modern tend is to try and equip patients psychologically and professionally to merge into mainstream society, as well as trying to enlighten society to accept patients once they have received medical treatment. Social rejection of patients worsens their health and delays full recovery, he explains.

Jaras emphasizes that the international organizations have greatly contributed to the establishment of clinics specialized in treating leprosy. One German organization has contributed to the establishment of 8 clinics to cure leprosy in Lower Egypt. A

Belgian organization has similarly assisted in opening 8 clinics in Upper Egypt. The French have taken an interest in Al-Khanka Hospital and set up new water stations and a bakery. And foreign schools in Egypt arrange visits to patients and try to help relieve their suffering.

However, Jaras emphasizes that such efforts must be accompanied by an interest on the part of society in accepting the patients. He would also like to see a repeal of the law, which still exists in the Egyptian constitution stipulating that lepers should be secluded in colonies.

He says, "No other country the world over secludes patients in such contemptible manner. There are no longer colonies for lepers. Once a leper receives medical treatment, he is not regarded as infectious."

"So why is a leper secluded?" he wonders. "In cooperation with the Ministry of Health, CARITAS Egypt has conducted a comprehensive study for early discovery of leprosy. As a result patients are able to recover quickly and resume their everyday life normally.

"We frequently encourage the patient to receive medical treatment outside the colony in the clinics all over Egypt to emphasize the fact that the disease is not infectious and does not cause death, unlike some others."

He claims that a large number of lepers who have recovered from leprosy and returned to society, but there are no statistics.

Asked why older patients seem to prefer seclusion, Jaras says, "It is not a question of preference. It is because old patients inside Ezbet As-Safih have lodgings, means of comfort and job opportunities. Also, some of their relatives still feel afraid of them."

For these older patients CARITAS has established a health and social centre with a nursery and a workshop to help the patients' families and provide them with opportunities to merge with wider society by organizing tours and summer camps to Balteem and Alexandria.

"Now we are trying to introduce computers, help children learn modern sciences, set up educational classes and establish industrial, technical and agricultural schools outside the Colony and Ezbet As-Safih," he explains.

Is it time to ban the term 'orphan'?

Yasmine Sliem

EI-Shorouk

"Will you let me complete my speech till its end? Or shall you leave me half way as you always do? When you feel my pain, would you forget the whole past? I do not want you to pity me for these words. It is painful to sense this feeling in the eyes of all people near me. Imagine yourself in my place and that you got up one day to find that your father and mother are not beside you. What would you do?"

These poignant words are from a contributor to the Facebook group 'An orphan is talking'. They raise questions about society's attitude towards orphans

and especially those brought up in the Social Care Houses. To what extent does society accept them?

There is a harsh look in housewife Hanaa's eyes when she says: "It would be difficult for my daughter to get married to a person brought up in an orphanage. Who would tell me how he is brought up and what about his manners?"

Muhammad, a driver, says: "The problem is that orphans are deprived of compassion and this may affect his character." He would never agree to one of his sons marrying a girl brought up in a Care House. "I do not want that for my sons. These orphans are sometimes without lineage."

Muna's opinion differs. She says: "If this young man is OK and his manners are acceptable, I will immediately marry him. Besides, it is not his sin to be an orphan, because nobody chooses his destiny."

These contradictions in social attitudes towards children brought up in orphanages are problematic. Perhaps it would help first to know how these children live, so let us enter an Egyptian orphanage in Egypt and spend a day with them.

A day in an orphan's life

I find Mustafa studying his lessons for next year even though it is days away from the end-of-year vacation. He wants to be a doctor, to alleviate the pains of others.

Mustafa is 11 years old and lives in a Cairo Care House. "I lived with my grandmother for a while, but I do not know why they brought me here."

There is a watery shine in his eyes as he tells me: "I do not know where my father and mother are."

Mustafa lives with the other 48 other children in the House which is divided into a section for girls, another for children under 6 years old and the third section where Mustafa lives with the children over six years old. "I like my brothers here too much," he says.

Mustafa spends his day in the House studying and playing. "Sometimes I watch TV," he says, and asks me "Why did Obama come to Egypt?"

I explain to him and ask: "Have you listened to Obama's speech?"

"I listened to a part of it but could not understand anything," he admits.

As our conversation ends Mustafa signs a blank sheet of white paper for me and goes to talk with House Supervisor Madame Niveen, who owns the House.

Her interest in orphans began after her father died. She used to visit various orphanages, but felt she was being deceived by some of those managing the houses. With the money she inherited she decided to found her own care house.

Niveen has 3 children of her own, but considers all 48 children in the House as her children too. She tells me: "An orphan has overflowing feelings. He acclimatizes to anybody coming to visit him. It is a special ability he has."

A number of children in the House are of unknown lineage, but other still have

fathers and mothers but have suffered a family breakdown.

Niveen tells me of an incident that happened when she began running the House: "A university professor came to offer some donations to the House. After I accepted his donation, he asked to withdraw it, saying 'I came to know that some of these children have an unknown lineage and I do not want to give donations to bastards.' After this incident, I went to the House of Iftaa to ask about it."

One of the Sheikhs told her that those children have no other option than the hands which help them, and that, but for the Care Houses, the streets would be full of thieves and burglars.

In Egypt, there is a Children Law which aims to protect the rights of children. It contains a section on children in Care Houses.

Article 465 says: 'The alternative families system aims at providing social, psychological, health, and occupational care for the children who exceeded two years old ...'

Article 48 explains the meaning of Care Houses: 'Establishments of social care for children deprived from family care refer to each house for hosting children not less than six years old and not more than eighteen years old. Such children are deprived from family care because of orphanage, family dissolution or its inability to provide proper care to its children ...'

The UN Human Rights Accord did not neglect the rights of the orphan child. More than one Article asserts that a child deprived either temporarily or eternally, from his or her family environment has the right to be protected and aided by the State which should guarantee alternative care.

Currently the Ministry of Social Solidarity is studying a draft resolution about organizing the work of the 'alternative family' establishments. The most striking feature is a proposal to ban the use of the term 'orphanage' to describe the care houses that look after children who have lost their parents, one way or another.

Back at his alternative home, Mustafa leads a normal life and pay no attention to whether the Ministry of Social Solidarity will change the term 'orphanage' to "Care Houses" or not.

The most important issue for him is that others change their view of him and others graduate from the system set up to care for orphans. Their predicament is not of their choosing, but for the rests of their lives they risk being stigmatized by those who have not had to carry such a burden of loss.

Stories from Siwa
Youmna Mukhtar
El-Youm El-Sabei

Story One: The Siwan Way

During my 11 hour journey from Cairo to Siwa, I saw nothing but deserts and sands. The road has seen many armies

annihilated in the attempt to seize the oasis which remained independent of any country for many years.

At last, my eyes catch the first signs of urban life – a batch of houses built of clay. When you reach Siwa, you feel as if you are on virgin land, and the first explorer to reach uncharted territory. It is a special place. Its people have their own distinct history, culture and language.

Siwan history has many tales about how the wandering Amazigh came here. Originally, the oasis with its springs and dates was a resting place for caravans. There are stories unveil that one man got tired and was left behind him in the oasis, and that was the beginning of the development of the oasis.

The story of the old city, or Shaly as the people of Siwa call it, reveals that it was a fortified castle surrounded by a stream. The city was built by forty men, bandits who operated on the east to west caravan route.

For a long time, Siwa was a secluded area which nobody heard about. Muhammad Ali came to know about it and sent his armies to seize it. With the demarcation of borders between Egypt and Libya, Siwa fell under Egyptian control, but the government has always harboured doubts about the loyalty of the Siwan people. They are not allowed to join the Intelligence Corps or the State Security Forces. Even when performing military

service, they are kept away from highly sensitive areas. Everywhere in Siwa you will hear people say: "The government does not consider the Siwan inhabitant as a genuine citizen. It is worried about his bias to Libya."

The people of Siwa speak in Amazigh, a language also spoken in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, but their dialect differs from the modern Amazigh spoken elsewhere which has become full of French words. Amazigh is a spoken language only, because Siwan calligraphy has become obsolete. Only a few letters still exist and they are used as motifs in the Siwan embroidery although the people of Siwa do not know their meanings. Tourism, the media and school system have led to the spread of Arabic among the Siwan people, though they remain keen to speak Amazigh.

Siwa did not have a religious belief system until the Islamic conquest at the hands of Amr Ibn Al-Aas, but the Amazigh people do not care to be called 'Berbers' with all its connotations of a savage people who lack religion.

In Siwa, customs and traditions have the power of law and sometimes, they are even stronger than religion itself. If there is a dispute, both parties have recourse to the Sheikh of the tribe who issues a decisive ruling on the matter. The dispute is settled by striking an agreement between both parties in which they commit to pay a sum of money if they breach it.

"The government is very happy because it has lots of problems to preoccupy it," says

my guide Ali Abdullah: "Sometimes, the government asks the disputants to settle their disputes through the Sheikh of the tribe, and if they fail, they would have recourse to the government."

Throughout history, Siwa has been given different names such as Sintaria, Amoun, the Al-Aqsa oasis and Delta. Its heritage is replete with startling stories of magic and jinn. One of the most famous of these stories is that of the crowning Alexander the Great in the Predictions Temple, as he went to identify the killer of his father. He brought many gifts with him, so the priests crowned him king.

Ali Abdullah tells me: "The same method operates today. If you want to secure the realization of your interests, you should offer gifts to people."

Another famous Siwan story is that of Mr. Malem. The story tells of a sad man who was looking for a sacrificial animal on the night of Al-Adha Feast to please his children. He came upon a goat, and put it over his shoulder to carry it home. The goat suddenly spoke to him: "Take me to Mr. Malem," it said.

Mr. Malem was a Sudanese who had some control over jinn and could nullify spells and charms. Mr. Malem asked the man to ask for whatever he wanted. The man insisted that he needed nothing but a sacrificial animal. So Mr. Malem told him to go to the pen and choose any sheep he liked.

Then he told the man that he had been carrying on his shoulder the son of the

king of the jinn, and that jinni could have brought him whatever treasures he wanted.

Story Two: The Women of Siwa

Extreme curiosity overwhelms you when you visit Siwa. Throughout the days I spent there, I had not really seen a Siwan woman. When you catch sight of Siwan women you can not differentiate between them, because all of them are veiled with grey clothes from head to foot.

To witness this incarceration of Siwan women excites curiosity about what they look like, their dreams, and how they feel as prisoners of their clothes outside as well as inside their homes.

My guide Ali Abdullah responded to my repeated questions about the status of Siwan women by saying: "I shall prove to you that the Siwan woman is happy. I will let you meet two Siwan women, one of whom is divorced and the other is a widow."

"Is their alienation from men the source of their happiness?" I joked.

Ali Abdullah is married. He studied at Al-Azhar but he works in tourism, and he has a Bazaar shop. He suggested we have Siwan tea to learn more about Siwan customs and traditions to which tea is integral.

Ali Abdullah believes that polygamy is a right endowed to man by the Shariah rulings.

As for the woman: "Her reward is preserved by Allah who will recompense her for caring for her husband and children," he says, explaining that the husband must be like the scales; he must be fair with both his wives, and rejects competition between them for his heart. They must compete instead in loving each other.

"They must learn how to love each other. If the second wife had been a source of harm, the Islamic law would not have permitted second marriage."

Ali goes on to talk about "bondswomen". Although the time of slaves and bondswomen has gone, Abdullah interprets this verse in his own way. He says "Any non-Muslim woman who trusts a man and would like to cohabit with him – that is permissible for the man, provided she embraces Islam and never returns to her family. This does not mean that they lead an uninhibited life. He is not allowed to have an intercourse with her except after marriage."

Ali Abdullah said that he was been haunted by the idea of a second marriage for some time. As long as he fulfils all his wife's financial needs and provides her with what she needs, why not taking a second wife?

"The Siwan woman is a queen and all her needs are fulfilled," he says. He confirms that Siwan women work at home in embroidery or weaving with dried palm leaves. She cannot step outside the house without securing her husband's permission, whether to visit her family or

neighbours. If she goes out, she must veil her face and none of her body should be on display.

The curfew imposed on Siwan women preventing them from going out to buy from nearby shops or bazaars has turned houses into small shops selling household requirements, clothes and other necessities. The husband buys the remaining needs of the house, or she may send one of her children to buy the simple needs so as to avoid any contact with men.

"The Siwan woman is not a prisoner of the house," Ali Abdullah insists. "But she veils her face after marriage as a way of maintaining herself and respecting her entity." He says that girls go to school until the secondary school without veiling their faces, but once a girl is married she must conform to the customs of Siwan society.

Only three girls in Siwa have managed to complete their university education. They are the talk of Siwa. Even so, they can not go out to work.

"It is not permissible to go out wearing modern clothes and unveiling her face," explains Ali Abdullah.

Unmarried girls are far better off than married women, because they are able to go to work in palm dates factories.

Huda and Zamzam are two Siwan women with dark complexions. Behind their traditional Siwan uniform, their eyes shine with intelligence and love despite their circumstances.

They explain that the Siwan woman does not have the freedom to choose what clothes she puts on. She is obliged to put on heavy, and too many, clothes which do not suit the hot environment, but she cannot object.

"We suffer severely from hot weather, but if we refuse to put on these clothes, the other women will mock us," says Huda, who is no more than 18 years old.

The whole issue centers around the spirit of pride between families and the wearing expensive clothes, especially for weddings where the bride changes her clothes more than four times. Her friends and relatives also change their clothes, consisting of a shirt, garment, wide dress, scarf and veil.

A brother literally has the upper hand. He has the right to beat his sister if her manners do not appeal to him, but she doesn't have the right even to feel angry if he does.

"We are used to be beaten. This is our destiny." says Huda, who stresses that her brother has the right to beat her if she makes a mistake.

In this small community, gossip is rampant and rumours are fabricated about any girl if her reputation is in doubt, especially if she goes out to work.

Huda tells me: "Ever since I went out to work, people have not leaved me alone."

In Siwan society it is normal always to accuse the woman. If a man has sexual relations outside wedlock, the woman is always blamed. If such relations result in the birth of a child, the baby is to put into

an orphanage, and the woman must marry a man from outside Siwa. After such an incident, she is forbidden to leave her house or appear at weddings or funerals.

Zamzam tells me the story of a girl whom a man thought had got lost. He guided her in the right direction. But the tribe passed judgment that the man must pay a fine of 10 thousand pounds and be whipped just for talking to the girl.

"We do not want to display our charms in the streets or do sinful things." says Zamzam. "We just want enough freedom to express our opinions."

She was married to a 60 year old man when she was only 18. When she first saw her groom, she cried and said to her family: "He is very old with white hair."

They replied, "Are you going to eat him?! He can dye his hair black."

Within three days, she became the fifth wife of this man who had married four times before.

"I never thought of him as a husband. I had to have intercourse with him unwillingly," says Zamzam. Her marriage did not last more than four years as her husband died.

"I want to marry a person who loves me for myself, not for an interest in me," says Huda who is 19 years old. She dreams of being married to a man who loves her, especially as she was married off to a man who was in his mid-thirties when she was less than 16 years old. He married her to

have children, but she was divorced two years later. The experience taught her a lot. "After this miserable experience, I have to teach my girl to choose her husband by herself," she says.

Unlawful sexual relations between a man and a child were common in Siwa. It is a temporary sexual relationship and causes no disgrace to those committing it.

Mr. Umran says, "It is shameful to rape a girl as it spoils her honours. But there is no disgrace in assaulting a male." This is because a male will not give birth to children or lose his virginity. Such practices are justified by fact that sexual potency is very high in hot areas and marriage is not always available.

Such relationships are not public, and they still exist inside the Siwan society but, I am assured, at a lower rate than before.. They happen by mutual consent, and the passive party may receive money from the other as if he is a paid companion.

However, if a man peeks at a female neighbour, he may be fined up to LE 15,000 and be ostracized. He would feel embarrassed whenever he met anyone in his community.

The same applies to the crime of theft. Siwans say that whoever commits theft is as disgraced as if had fallen into a well of coal. He remains dishonoured by the theft for ever.

Mr. Umran explains: "If a stranger commits theft, he will survive if he surrenders to the police; otherwise is liable to be murdered."

The tribe punishes a young man or woman who commits adultery by fining them between LE 10,000 and 15,000 to discourage them from committing it again.

Story Three: Mabrouka the Soothsayer

"I whisper to cowries and profess future events" This is the traditional line we are used to hearing from the soothsayer or a fortune-teller. In Siwa, a soothsayer does not whisper to cowries, but to beans or 'Aywawin' as they called them.

Mabrouka is the most famous soothsayer in Siwa. She is visited by people from Matrouh who want her to tell their futures. Foreigners too believe what she says and shower her with Euros.

The Siwan people say that Mabrouka is "a companion of the Devil," but she says she treats people who are bewitched and advises them to recite the Holy Qur'an. She earns a good living from her calling.

In a very simple Siwan house, Mabrouka is sitting in front of her television, watching a program on spells. Beside her is a fearsome black cat that looks as if it embodies the Devil.

She greets me with a smile as she was prepares her tools - no more than a plate filled with beans. She asks me to whisper to 'the bean' my name and my mother's name. I do what she asks then wait while she plays with the beans.

Then she looks at me and says: "You are envied as you do well and receive no good. You will soon receive glad tidings."

She then asks the question from which she would build her later narrative, "Are you engaged?" I reply in the negative.

Then starts to relay her pre-prepared narration: "You are bewitched. A man who was a friend of yours deceived you and put a witchcraft which you passed over. Men do not see you because of such witchcraft. To nullify it, you have to recite Surah Al-Baqarah three times every Friday."

"There is another man who is fat with a mark on his face," she adds. "You should keep away from him. He loves much talk. He will try to talk to you again. He has no intention of marrying you. There is no interest between you."

She says, "There is also a dark-coloured man who wants to dismiss you from work, so be rational."

I ask if I must go to a sorcerer to remove such spells. She tells me: "A sorcerer will take much money from you and do nothing."

She gives me a bracelet made of stones,



and advises me to put it in the water I use for my bath. After taking my bath, she adds, I must sprinkle the water in the street before people finish their Friday Prayer. She tells me I would get married immediately after doing this.

'Tazjah' is the name Mabrouka uses to describe the practice of fortune-telling which she learnt from her grandmother.

She explains: "My grandmother taught me to shake the beans and invoke Allah's Blessings on the Prophet three times. Then, I will see future events. I was very brilliant, so I learnt my career very quickly. I used to hear strange voices but see nobody."

Mabrouka recalls that when she was 13 her family decided to give her in marriage to a man who was over 65 years. He used to let her play with the girls of her own age. In 25 years the marriage yielded five children.

However, she noticed that some of her clothes began to disappear and she became angry with her husband, her house and even her children. She would leave the house and go back to her father's, but her brothers would send her back to her husband's house.

He tried to cope but her condition worsened and she set fire to herself so as not to return to her husband again. She also thought of throwing herself into a well, but her brothers rescued her at the last moment.

Some time later, she was surprised to find a person knocking on her door. He confessed to having had some spells cast against her, and asked her to forgive him. He tried to nullify the spells but they were so many. He would not tell her the name of the person who had made such spells.

She told him: "Forgiveness is from Allah, not from me. Allah will give put me right."

Mabrouka felt no comfort until she was divorced from her husband. The strange thing was that her husband, now about 80 eighty years old, married another woman who was very jealous of Mabrouka. Stranger still that Mabrouka was not put off her career as a soothsayer by the severity of her suffering from charms and spells.

Story Four: The lost Siwan wedding

Gradually the customs and traditions of Siwan society are beginning to disappear. Only a few of them still exist. The Siwan wedding, which lasted for seven nights, is the most outstanding of the traditions that have completely disappeared.

On the day before the wedding party people would go to help the families of both the bride and the groom prepare the marital house. In old Siwan society there was no bedroom, people slept on a bench built of mud or on the ground, and the bride's trousseau was a wooden box in which she put her clothes.

There was a wedding procession to accompany the bride from her home to the brides' well where she drinks some water and is adorned by a midwife before going to Sheikh Sulayman's Grave to seek blessing from him after the Afternoon Prayer.

The groom also practices particular rituals as a procession accompanies him from his house to the well where he takes a bath

and is wrapped in a woolen blanket however hot the weather.

On the wedding night, the bride wears a white embroidered dress. She also wears a variety of coloured dresses and an embroidered pair of slacks under the white dress. The pair of slacks is fastened with a waistband of seven knots. The groom has to untie these knots; were he to cut them he would be disgraced.

There was also 'the handkerchief of honour showing the virginity of the bride' which the bride's paternal and maternal uncles must see. The bride's virginity was of much value to her, as her relatives put sums of money in the handkerchief.

Before sunrise a relative of the groom would come to the groom and accompany him. The bride meanwhile sat with the other women of the family. The groom returns to his bride in the evening. The celebrations for the newlyweds would last for a whole week.

Story Five: Al-Jarah Village

Al-Jarah village, or Umm Al-Saghir Village as it is known by the Siwan people, symbolizes life as it was lived in Siwa some years ago. The village owes its origins to the legend of the Forty Thieves, or Highwaymen, who lived in the ancient city of Shaly and robbed passing travelers. They were keen not to exceed forty, but as their death and birth rates did not coincide their numbers increased over time to reach 400.

My journey to move from Siwa to Al-Jarah village was long, passing through two

border checkpoints where we had to show our licenses to enter the village 250 kilometers from Siwa.

We were the guests of the tribe chief, Sheikh Mahdy Hamzah, who told us that the population of Al-Jarah



village has reached about 450 persons, with roughly equal numbers of males and females. However a lot of young men travel to Siwa or Matrouh to marry, because of the shortage of girls.

The only school in Al-Jarah village can be seen as you arrive. The nearest hospital is in Matrouh, 150 kilometers away. A mobile medical service visits the village every sixteen days. The person most interested in people's health in the village is Aishah; the midwife. She learnt her profession from her mother and grandmother.

Aishah was married before she was fourteen. She gave birth to all her children with her mother's help, and after her mother's death, she took over the job of aiding the women in childbirth. "A woman rarely dies giving birth to a child, here," she says.

With difficult births she takes the pregnant woman to Matrouh Public Hospital where she also takes courses in midwifery from the physicians.

Electricity was first introduced to the village in 1986, but only for up to four hours at night. As a result the villagers only watch TV or turn on their appliances at night. Though the village lacks cellular or land phone services, some young men carry cell phones to listen to music.

Having watched TV the women of Al-Jarah look forward to having some electrical ovens and washing machines, and they hope sometime to enjoy land or cell phones services so they can communicate with the outside world.

The law recently issued to raise the age of the eligibility for marriage to 18 years for young men and young women cannot be applied in Siwa in general and in Al-Jarah village in particular.

The recent law raising the age of the eligibility for marriage to 18 for young men and women has not been applied in Siwa in general and in Al-Jarah village in particular. Girls may be married when they reach fourteen, and the marriage is then registered when she reaches the age of eighteen.

A woman may be married and divorced without the marriage or divorce being officially registered. Tribal customs secure the woman's rights, so no man can deny his marriage to any woman.

"There are no accidents, thefts or rapes in Al-Jarah village," says Aishah's daughter Mabrouka, who emphasizes how safe she feels in this small village.

Lake Manzala needs national plan to combat over fishing, pollution and corruption

Aly Zalat

El-Masry El-Youm

'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.' An apt description of the attitude of fish abundance officials trying to cope with the many problems they face in/at Manzala Lake.

Al-Masry El-Youm accompanied a joint patrol by the Water Areas Police and the General Authority for Fish Abundance Development of the reed thickets that block the lake shore next to Balteem city. The felucca had a small engine that constantly got stuck in the reeds, making us feel as if we were trapped in a very hot tropical forest. Between these interruptions we had a discussed the problems of the lake.

Major Wael Subeih, the chief of Water Areas Police in Balteem began by exonerating his officers from the responsibility of fighting illegal fishing of fish fry. He said the practice is destructive of the lake but is centered in the mouth of Al-Burlus harbor and the sea coast where he has no authority, although he acknowledged that there have been official reports calling for a coordinated approach to the managing of the lake.

While he would mention no names he did not deny that the gangs catching young fish rely up upon protection of powerful people who provide security in the event they face legal action.

Wael said, "I know that Al-Zeiny Ebeidy is the biggest merchant of young fish, (and/but) he has (strong influence) (become a phenomenon with full powers)." The Major refused to go into more detail.

He went on: "We confiscate all illegal fishing nets in the lake. In addition, we protect the water area of the lake when informed by the General Authority for Developing Fish Abundance of transgressions by any fish farm we remove the offending (nets??)." He refused to say how many transgressions occurred during the last year.

For Engineer Salah Hussein, under secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and the head of the Middle Delta sector for fish abundancy, this was his first visit to the lake after taking up his post few days earlier. He said he needed time to appraise himself of the overall situation.



However, Engineer Mahmoud Abd El-Nabiy, the general manager of production and employment in the Middle Delta branch showed on a map how the lake area had shrunk. Once it had covered 165 thousand feddans, 40 thousand feddans were reclaimed in Al-Khashiah, southeast of the lake and in Brumbal, at the western end of the lake. In consequence the lake is now only 125 thousand feddans. Moreover, not all of it is suitable for free fishing. Reeds occupy 40 thousand

feddans, threatening fish stocks as the grasses decrease the amount of oxygen in the water. The problem can only get worse as the reeds spread widely across the lake.

El-Nabiy regards the reeds as the most significant problem as fishermen have been unable to come up with a solution to their spread. He also blames the lack of resources available to the General Authority for Developing Fish Abundancy branch that supervises the lake.

Engineer Abd El-Aziz Marwan, the general manager of the lake, explains: "The authority has provided us with 6 dredging machines, most of which are out of service. We do our best to isolate reed thickets from one another so that the lake will not turn into a swamp."

Illegal harvesting of immature fish is a serious problem that cannot be denied, says Mahmoud Abd El-Nabiy.

According to him corruption has turned Al-Zeiny Ebeidy into 'the emperor of young fish'. He points out that many official reports have been drawn up about his transgressions, but he is set free by the office of the Attorney General because of his connections.

For Engineer Abd El-Nabiy, environmental pollution remains as one of the most critical problems, because Gharbiyah main drainage canal, the Kitchener drainage canal and the Tira Sea all discharge their agricultural waste into the lake. As a result the level of clay in the lake is higher as

well as the amount of heavy minerals has increased.

"The Lake is considered a natural water stock," he says. "Due to the practice of constantly discharging agricultural waste into the lake constantly, the physical features of the lake will change. In addition, drainage water helps increase the freshness (reduces the salinity??) of the lake and the spread of reeds and harmful grasses."

Meanwhile, what he describes as "social favoritism" has resulted an increase in the number of fishing licenses from three thousand to eight thousand at a time when area of the lake is reducing. This has placed an increasing environmental load on the lake, particularly given the extraction of young and migrating fish before they reach the lake. As a result, he says, some expensive kinds of fish such as bass, sailfish and eels have died out. Moreover, other types of fish are being destroyed as fishermen using in illegal meshes are catching them before they reach maturity.

In short, the lake officials believe these problems can only be dealt with through a national rescue plan, rather than the ineffective measure now being used.

Northern Lakes of Egypt – last call before drowning?

Aly Zalot

El-Masry El-Youm

"The government is studying the issue of executive resolutions with legal force to remove all transgressions on the northern

lakes of Egypt including Al-Manzalah, Al-Burlus, Eddku and Mariut after receiving the official reports issued by the Ministry of Agriculture regarding the increase of transgressions on such lakes. The reports describe such transgressions as "the most dangerous."

Al-Masry Al-Youm set out to discover more about these 'dangerous' transgressions, why they are on the increase and who is behind them.

Over a period of weeks we visited the lakes of Egypt, from Al-Manzalah to Al-Burlus, passing by Eddku and ending with Mariut. We talked with fishermen and officials and we surveyed the whole area.

Mr. Sayyed Nasr has worn out his fishing nets in forty years of catching fish from Al-Burulus lake but he is a determined man. He sails his small felucca over the calm waters of the lake and has fond memories of each bay of the lake. However, time has been unkind to this man, now more than sixty years old. Once he earned his living from catching very expensive kinds of fish such as sailfish and bass, now his nets are empty of fish apart from some miserable tilapias.

Other local fishermen have shared the same fate. The artery that connects them to sea has been cut by gangs who catch young fish and have imposed their control over Al-Burlus harbor. This strait, no more than 150 metres wide, is the link between the Mediterranean Sea and the lake, and young fish head for the lake between August and March.

There are 25 thousand fishermen for whom the Mediterranean Sea and Al-Burulus Lake represent the only source of employment. The sea is closed to them during May and June as a result of an agreement signed by the Mediterranean countries to prevent fishing during that period. But when they head for the lake they find that fishing is also prohibited to them. They are unable to enter the lake because Al-Burulus harbor is blocked by influential men who use fine meshes to catch fish fry as they too make their way to the lake.

Fisherman Ahmad Saad Shabarah, says he has switched from free fishing to join the illegal business of the emperors of young fish. Everyday he heads for the coastal village where he catches rare young fishes such as bass and sailfish, selling each for three pounds.

"What can we do?" he asks. "The catching young fish has blocked our supply. I sailed for 14 days in the lake and caught no fish. Normal fishing is no longer a profitable business."

Ahmad admits that what he now does is illegal, but says that the men of influence are the ones who should be called to account. He suggests we head for the harbor district to see what the young people of El-Hanafy are up to. As he describes it, they are the kings of the fish fry business, from which they earn more money than in the drugs trade.

Rabih Al-Shahawy, from Al-Burulus, explains how the gangs catching young

fish deprive the fishermen of their only and natural source of income. "With the increase of fish farms, searching for young fish and catching them illegally has gone on the increase. These are very expensive kinds of fish which need to be raised under special conditions. Fish farms have appeared in Damietta and Port Said, which raise bass, tarpon and cod. They then head for Al-Burulus as the natural reproduction cycle requires them to lay their eggs in the sea.

"After hatching, millions of such fish head for a life in the lake water that is rich in nutritional elements.

"The only way to enter the lake is through the harbour where the young fish pirates practice their illegal trade by setting up dams of fine mesh prevents any fish from entering he lake. They catch such young fish. Aas many as 100 young bass would fill a tea sieve and can be sold for LE 150 to a fish farmer. If the same number were to reach the lake, one fish would weigh one kilogram after 4 months and one bass is sold for 80 pounds in the market."

He adds, "Everyone can see how the fishermen are being wronged by the sake merchants who break the law by trading in fish fry."

Muhammad Al-Nahhas, a plastic artist from Al-Burulus, who's his house, overlooks the lake which was declared a natural reserve in 1982. sheds light on another aspect of the lake tragedy.

"They do not kill fish just by catching the fry. The fish farms destroy the area

dedicated to free fishing as well. In addition, the dredging machines owned by these farms dry thousands of feddans with the consent of the Water Areas Police who do nothing to combat them.

"What is more over the farms add hormones to the fish basins to prevent fish reproducing. Fish abstain from eating during the reproductive season so, for purely commercial purposes, the fish are sterilized to keep them feeding. As a result the fish grow even larger. However, the catastrophe is made worse by the fact that these fish basins discharge their drainage runoffs into the lake after the season for raising fish. These hormones sterilize the female fish living in the lake and thereby destroy the fish stock over time."

We also learned that the absence of competent supervision of the lakes, some merchants catch young tilapias before they reach their normal size and dry them on the shore to sell them to the owners of forage, fodder and chicken feed factories. In time this too could lead to the extinction of tilapias from the lake.

To get some answers, we headed for Dr. Muhammad Abd El-Ghaniy, the head of Lakes and Fishery Administration in the General Authority for Fish Abundance Development. He emphasized the Authority's confrontation of the policy of drying out lakes, and pointed out that he follows up the security campaigns in each of the northern lakes to remove all transgressions, prevent illegal fishing and reduce pollution, follows up the process of dredging the harbor.

He admits that there are lots of illegal activities on the lakes, which have results in the continuous drying up of the lake, as well as offences in the water areas and illegal ownership of such dried areas. Some borders are being fixed on each lake and the sites of offences and contracts are being marked out so as to control illegality, particularly in the areas of free fishing.

Only time will tell whether official reports on such offences will make a difference to the catching of young fish and the systematic destruction of Burj Al-Brulus reserve which continues despite the existing efforts of the competent authorities.

**She killed herself when told
"You are divorced."
Ayaat El-Habbal
Islam Online**

After a calm marriage of more than ten years that had yielded two children, a husband's sexual betrayal led to worsening rows and his first announcement that he was divorcing the wife.

When friends advised her to return to the marital house he agreed to take her back and pledged not to betray her again. Less than a month later the husband resumed his harassment of young girls and had unlawful relationships with women. At his wife's request he divorced her a second time, her family sent her back on the basis that they do not allow any family members to be divorced.

Before the end of the months of 'Iddah' (the prescribed waiting period for a woman

after divorce or widowhood), he took her back again. Again he resumed his affairs and again disputes arose; this time he divorced his wife irrevocably for the third time. He had not registered his previous declarations, and did not tell the marriage official that he had divorced her twice before, so this third divorce was legally regarded as the first.

This time he prevented the wife from leaving the marital home and seeking her family's help. He imprisoned her and treated her as if she were a servant. He beat her severely and forced her to have intercourse with him although she was no longer his wife. She could not stand the misery and took her own life.

This all happened in Abu Qarqus village, Minya Governorate. Her tragic story got the women of the village talking about their own married lives. Mr. Umar Aly, a lawyer and manager of the Preaching and Guidance Society (PGS) based in the village, says her story is not unique but one of dozens that could be told.

Such women do not know whether they are married or have illegal intercourse with men who are no longer their husbands. It is a thorny problem, and civil society groups like the PGS, CARE Society of many women who have suffered in this way.

At CARE Society headquarters in Cairo, I met a woman in similar circumstances who had taken legal action to verify that her divorce was absolute.

She told me: "My husband would say, 'Go, you are divorced,' all the time. I realized that I was leading an illegal marital life with him, so I decided to take a legal action against him. I also asked the scholars in Dar Al-Iftaa (the House of Fatwa) about the issue and they said I had to take a legal action to register the divorce."

The Court declined her lawsuit, citing Article No. 21 of Law No. 1 (2000) which stipulates registry and attestation to verify divorce for any of the two spouses in case of the denial of the other party. She was dissatisfied with this judgment because her third divorce had been uttered in front of witnesses. Her husband had previously confessed to her that it was the third divorce and promised to register it the following day, but he went back on his word refused to register it. She returned to court to get the first judgment set aside and obtains legal recognition of her divorce.

She was granted a divorce by the judge after the court ruled that the third divorce be verified, saying: "The court is satisfied with the testimony of the two witnesses brought by the appealing woman. Moreover, she has no power to register such divorce as such right belongs to the husband only."

Differences over divorce

To most people the term 'divorce' entails so many responsibilities that it should be difficult for a man to invoke it. However, Muhammad Hassan, an engineer who has been married for five years, claims that some actions by a wife may justify its use.

He told me: "Sometimes I have to utter the word of 'divorce' unwillingly after my wife provokes me."

Physician Ayman Dusuqy regretted divorcing his wife once he and his wife had parted. Now, he wants her back and the couple has been to Dar Al-Iftaa to seek a legal opinion to resolve their problem.

I met another woman who faced a different problem. She had married five months previously, but she and her husband had had a big row and he divorced her. He wanted to take her back during the days of the `Iddah, but she refused. Then he told her that he had divorced her on the wedding night before consummating the marriage, over a dispute with her family about the (dowry?) furniture list.

The woman wept as she told how scholars at Dar Al-Iftaa said she had already been divorced since her wedding night so she had spent five months with a man in an invalid marriage. To take her back into marriage, her 'husband' would have to pay a new dowry and draw up a fresh marriage contract.

She said: "He forced me to live with him and have illegal intercourse with him, though I did not know whether I was still married to him or I was no longer his wife."

Lawyer Umar Aly explains: "These matters are very different in Upper Egypt where unregistered divorce is a big problem. This phenomenon is the result of a lack of awareness, and strict traditions that consider what is shameful to be more dangerous than what is forbidden. As a

result divorces have had to be verified by court action; otherwise a woman lives as if she was a bondswoman and cannot get her rights."

Other problems arise because some people do not follow correctly the teachings of Islam, he says, offering the example of a woman who has been married for fifteen years.

"Her husband is always uttering the formula of divorce and she does not know whether he has divorced her or not. She says: 'Each time he divorces me, he goes to the Sheikh. This Sheikh tells him he has to pay a particular sum of money or observe fasting for three days as atonement for his oath so as to manage to take me back in marriage.' This happens each time and she now leads an unbearable life with this man."

Umar Aly adds: "No woman (here) has ever issued a lawsuit against her husband to register divorce or verify it. This is because women, whether half-educated, highly-educated or uneducated, refuse to issue such lawsuits because they are regarded as shameful, especially since the people of our village are strongly connected by blood and marriage."

Conflict between the law and the Islamic position

Prof. Ahmad Taha Rayyan, a professor of jurisprudence at the Faculty of Shari'ah and Law, Al-Azhar University emphasizes that Allah (PBUH) has given the right of divorce to man as a sort of guardianship

as mentioned in Allah's Saying, 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women'.

He adds, "Guardianship requires that the right of divorce be given to men who should be honest when dealing with this right. If a man divorces his wife, he uses his legal right granted to him by Allah. It is not permissible for women to transgress such a right and ask for a similar right regarding the question of divorce."

The professor goes on, "The complexities stipulated by the law, including the necessity of verifying divorce through a marriage official, are of no value as divorce is valid even it is not registered at the court or in the records of the marriage officials, and even if there are no witnesses. Registry is not an Islamic proceeding, as it is only a means to maintain rights. Accordingly, both the marriage contract and divorce are valid even if they are not officially registered."

Prof. Rayyan emphasizes that requiring the registration of divorce so as to make it valid leads a lot of couples to live in illegal marriages as the wife cannot prove she has been divorced without registering it.

The head of Islamic Studies Department at Al-Azhar University, Prof. Muhammad Abu Leila, says that divorce is not valid unless there are witnesses and such divorce is registered, like marriage, by a marriage official. He points out: "The oral divorce represents a big problem and a difficulty for Muslims, particularly for working class men who use the right irresponsibly and utter the divorce formula all the time. And Muslim scholars issue legal opinions

which differ, as some regard such divorce as valid and others regard it as invalid."

Prof. Abu Leila continues: "The opinion that oral divorce is valid leads a lot of spouses to have illegal marital lives though they live in the same house with their wives. Such opinions are the cause of the problems from which we are suffering these days. The spouses caught by the situation keep on asking Muslim scholars until they find one who gives them a legal opinion that the oral divorce is not valid."

"The Hadith reading 'Three matters regarding which seriousness is considered seriousness and joking is regarded as seriousness, including divorce...' has been quoted in ways that lack credibility. In addition, it is inconsistent with the other sayings of the Prophet (PBUH)."

The professor stresses the necessity of not regarding the oral divorce as a legal divorce. For him only a registered divorce where there is evidence of real intention should be regarded as a legal, since no-one can distinguish between a person's intention and the utterance of the divorce formula as it was done in the past when the husband would say to his wife, "You are divorced", "You are no longer lawful to me", etc.

He adds, "Such direct formulas of oral divorce were based on unregistered marriage, unlike what happens these days. Like marriage, divorce was performed through mutual consent between the two spouses. Then communities were small and people knew

one another. Now communities have expanded and it is difficult for people to know one another like before. Also, it has become difficult to trace lineages; therefore, the idea of registering arose and the practice of registering marriages has become the custom."

Another lawyer, Khadijah Muhammad, a member of the Establishment of Contemporary Woman's Issues, says: "In such cases, the judge encourages the woman to take an oath. This practice is a problem as the woman feels obliged to reveal all that she cannot say before the judge. In the draft presented by the Woman's Rights Societies' Union as a suggestion for the personal statute, we seek to cancel divorce *in absentia*, and insist that divorce is not valid unless it takes place before a judge. We want the wife to get the right to register her divorce in the court with the help of witnesses. If the husband is officially informed of the wife's claim and is summoned to negate or verify her claim, and does not come to the court within fifteen days of receiving the summons, the judge should give a ruling in favor of the wife."

Meanwhile many women must live with the insecurity of not knowing what their status is when a husband employs the divorce formula.

A day on a wheelchair
Madlein Nader
Watani

Have you ever thought if you were obliged to stay at home as you cannot go out and move around outside your house?!!! This is exactly what happens with people with

motor disabilities in our community. After I have talked to some of them, I decided to come closer to their suffering and I sat on a wheelchair for a whole day. Let me tell you what happened on a day on a wheelchair at some public transports in Cairo.

On Thursday 12/11/2009, 11:45 AM, I left home located at Said Street at el Thaher using a wheelchair. I stood in front of the 30 cm high sidewalk which I should pass to start looking for a transport. A veiled woman (wearing niqab) with her little child saw me suffering to get off the sidewalk, when she quickly said, "Do you need help to get off my little girl May God help you recover and take away your woes", she put her son aside and carried the front part of the wheelchair to descend off the sidewalk.

Then I started to move with the wheelchair in the street, which was not an easy thing. I faced difficulty moving the wheelchair on the ground as it was not paved and extremely fractured. I was afraid I would break the wheelchair especially that buying a new one is highly expensive and would cost not less than LE 700 in average. The only means of transportation I could use is the taxi. The first taxi I asked to stop just looked at the wheelchair and indifferently said, "No The taxi won't fit".

Then several taxis passed by and all refused to stop, until one taxi stopped, carried the wheelchair, put it on the taxi crossbars and fastened it tightly. On our way, I talked to him about the reasons

preventing taxis from stopping for me and the vehicles for people with disabilities. He answered, "Now it is 12:00 PM and most probably no one would stop during the rush hours. The vehicles for people with disabilities might be good for you, I heard it is sold at a reasonable price nearly LE 20,000 less than the normal ones, and the steering and control devices are used only by hand which would be better as it is difficult for you to ride a metro or a bus, this is the only solution nothing else!! I know people who have bought it."

I got off the taxi trying to ride the metro "Opera Station", I stood in front of the stairs, after a few minutes, three youngsters and an old man came to me offering help to go down the stairs. I agreed although I was a bit scared of the difficulty of carrying the wheelchair and going down the stairs. They answered, "Don't be afraid" and started to discuss together how to carry the wheelchair without asking my opinion in anything.

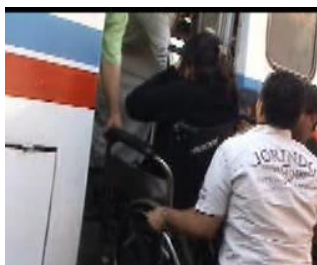
After going down the stairs, I realized it is impossible to ride the metro as I would need three to four persons to carry me on the wheelchair and therefore I decided to go up the stairs again. But then I stopped in front of the long stairs when a youngster suggested I ride the station elevator designated for those of special needs and went around seeing where it was, "The elevator is present only in few stations in the other metro line". Meanwhile a lady in her thirties offered to help me to go up the stairs but I thought I would use the elevator so I thanked her for her initiative

and told her I would use the elevator. However, I got the answer, "The elevator is down". Two cops and a man in his fifties going out of the metro station offered to help and carry me to go up the stairs. Before giving a gesture of approval, their reaction was quick enough to hold me up before agreeing and when I looked annoyed, the helping man in the fifties told me, "Don't be upset my little daughter, what shall you do? It is your destiny; don't be disappointed, you don't have other choice!!".

When I went out to the street once again, I had to cross Tahrir street to go to the other side and there was a new problem; a high barrier between the two ways where I could not alone move my wheelchair and cross it. I waited for the passers-by assistance and they had to carry the wheelchair. When I waited for any means of transportation, no bus has stopped for me and therefore I had no other choice but to use the more expensive means which is the taxi. However, some taxi drivers were looking at the wheelchair and waving their hands indicating rejection. Then a taxi stopped, I got on and then I arrived at the bus station at Abdel Moneim Riyad – Tahrir – at 1:30 PM. As soon as I arrived at a public transportation bus; # 109 going to Imbaba, I needed help to push the wheelchair ahead among the crowd. I found out that the stairs were high and the front door had an iron pillar in the middle making it difficult for the wheelchair to pass through. The alternative was to use the back door and I faced another

hardship waiting for others' initiative to help me. In fact a man in his forties standing beside the bus took the initiative and invited other people in the bus – among which was a man in a gown - to carry the wheelchair. It was difficult as the door could not take in the wheelchair together with the people carrying it. After they pushed me in, I found out that there was no place for the wheelchair in the bus so I had to get off the bus again unfortunately the same way. Yet getting off was even worse, I felt I would surely fall down as the bus stairs were high. The people carrying the wheelchair were saying, "Don't worry, nothing will happen, you won't fall down". The only solution was to close my eyes waiting for what might happen, I have to I have no other choice!!!

Afterwards I felt I was saved from an inevitable definite



accident due to carrying me on the wheelchair the way they did on the high bus stairs. I decided to go back after I lost hope in finding a good means of transportation for me on a wheelchair. There is no other alternative but to stay at home till this awful reality changes which we never know when????!!!

"Facilities for People with Disabilities in Public Transportation"

Madlein Nader

Watani

"Forced to not return to my home, but every classroom instead of returning every month, as my colleagues do, because I can not move in the transport by myself,"

"I wish there are more transportation facilities ... because they when they do not we stop living our lives"

"There are many legislations that make the life of the people with disabilities easier, but it is not implemented"

With these words, different people with disabilities expressed their suffering when using public transportation. Although there are many legislations that help people with disabilities to have the same rights to use public transportation like the others, but the physically disabled people find obstacles in the use of public transportation as the underground, the trains or the buses. The percentage of physically disabled people is about 25,6% of the disabled in Egypt, which has accounted for about 10% of the population. We talked to some people with motor disabilities around this problem, which hinder them from practicing their daily life activities normally.

Mervat Ibrahim, a student at the Faculty of Arts, Helwan University - with motor impairment disability, and uses a wheelchair says: "The most tiring thing of taking public transportation is the stairs especially in the under ground. For

example, when I want to ride in the direction of El-Marg I have to take the subway heading to Helwan although it is in the other direction of where I want to go because I can't use the stairs to cross to the other side. This is the case in the first line of the underground as it doesn't have elevators. As for the second line very few stations have elevators. I have to get off in the stations with elevators only and then take a taxi to head to the place I am going to.

Mahmoud Abdel-Karim - student at the Faculty of Commerce - has polio and uses crutches says: "Bus drivers do not stop and look at me as if I will hinder them. And if the bus stops I find it very crowded and I can not find a place to sit although there are seats reserved for people with disabilities but nobody abide...!!! As for taxi drivers they increase the fare because they know I had no other alternative but to stay at home.

Bassma, a young girl from Menia in Upper Egypt who has polio and uses a crutch - says: "Although there is the decree number 772-29 dated 1 / 11 / 2005 which gave people with disability, a reduction of the railway fares by 75% in, but I find it hard to ride the train by myself, especially that the train platforms are very high and if anyone try to support me I end with a horrible pain in my back. Also the usage of the crutch is very exhausting as I get older. I wish there could be any facilities regarding transportation because I end by living an abnormal life."

May Aziz a young girl with motor impairment who uses crutches - said: "because I'm from Monofia I am forced not return to my home, but every semester instead of returning every month, as all of my colleagues because I can not move in the transportation by myself. I have to wait for my mother to help me going home.

P - t - a young man who is visually impaired: "There are many existing laws and regulations that facilitate the usage of public transportation for people with disabilities but they are not implemented. For example, there is the decision of the Governor of Cairo that some categories of people with disabilities could use the public buses free of charge. But now, public buses are replaced by Private buses which do not apply even the policy of reduced fares. As for the underground, there is a protocol of cooperation between the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Railway Authority no. 60 - 02 / 123 / 1 / 4444 on January 30, 9 / 2006 to reduce the proportion of the fare of the underground by 75% for people with disability. I have tried for several months the hotline for the underground because it does not apply in all stations, but the response of the employee was: "Actually there is law but no implementation....". I was amazed when he told me that "We pity the people visually impaired and we don't ask them to pay anything....".

Dr. Ashraf Marei, the president of "People for People with Disabilities" in Heliopolis - uses a wheelchair - in speaking on this subject, he says: "...the decisions relating

to transport facilities for people with disability, in fact, are impossible to implement ..!". Therefore, we are studying this problem in an attempt to develop practical solutions. And from my point the stairs should be replaced by elevators in all subway stations and the stations with existing elevators, these elevators should be working not "broken" as we have mostly seen for many years.

The second issue is related to the public transport buses, the new buses that the Ministry of Transport put in operation every year should be properly equipped for the usage of the people with disabilities. The

bus should not be with stairs but with a slide which helps the person to get in and out of the bus easily and there must be a spacious place inside the bus for the usage

According to the Central Agency For Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the year 2006 census, the number of the blind in all over Egypt governorates is 44,152 people, where 27,192 is male and 16,960 is female. The number of Disable 951152 people, where is 610432 male and 340720 is female.

of the person. Also the private buses should apply the same policy as the private ones in reducing the price of the tickets for the disabled persons.

Several NGOs are working on defending the rights of people with disabilities is studying the above problems including "Shomou Association" for Human Rights which monitor the violations of the rights' of people with disabilities. These organizations also try to submit suggestions on how to preserve the rights

of people with disabilities either by introducing free of charge services or real deduction in the fares.

Law versus reality: How companies profit by exploiting the blind people
 Ghada Abdel-Kader
 Al- Ahram Weekly

"Most of our society treats me as if I am inferior to them. They think a blind individual can do nothing. I am human being like them. I can reach the highest level of education", said Mahmoud Mustafa (not the real name), University graduated Faculty of Arts History Department at Ain Shams University.

In Egypt, we don't have accurate statistics for the number of blind people. Egyptian enumeration is not constant. "A family in the countryside still has this misconception that having disable child is kind of disgrace and shame. In the other families, they didn't even state that they have disable children.

They called him idiot or stupid" said Sherifa Massoud, Human Resources specialist in Development Association for Empowering the Special Needs DAESN Association.

According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the 2006 census, the number of the blind in Egypt is 44000 people.

General Manager of Disabilities Administration in Ministry of Manpower and Immigration Gamal Eldin-Hussein said "Recently, we are working on making detailed data base. We are going to

classify them according to, their numbers and type of disabilities”.

The law of the employing disabled people obliges all the employer of governmental institutions, public and private sectors whose number of workers equals to or exceed fifty employees to employ 5% of the total number of workers from the disabled recommended by Department of Manpower in the governorates and its offices. Any one violates this law paid a fine one hundred pound for each missing number and imprisoned for a term not exceeding one month or either one of these penalties.

Media Advisor in the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration Ibrahim Ali told *Al-Ahram Weekly* “The ministry pays great attention to the case of employment of the blind as important part in the structure of Egyptian society. We have 300 employment offices in all the governorates. It receives the job seekers from disabilities. It registered their data then; this data is classified according to their residence, type of disability and field of specialization. As result of this data, we nominate them to the available jobs. Sometimes, they need to improve and develop their skills to acquire a job. So, we train them in the training centers of the ministry”.

Mohamed explained “Manpower offices do regular inspecting for the establishments to see how far it committed to the law. There is no new draft resolution to increase the rate of 5%. We found the recent legislation is very good. What

concerned us in the coming period is effective applying of the law”.

Massoud says the law largely ignored. “Many of the private institutions doesn’t committed by 5%. The government’s performance is not effective in follow up the applying of the law to know who break or stick to the law”.

Mustafa is 27 years old. He has been graduated 4 years ago. He couldn’t find a job. He said “The rate of 5% isn’t applied. There are no certain jobs that imposed upon us. This option doesn’t really exist. I have presented my application three times before for different companies but no one answered. I applied for a job in motor car company but they didn’t accept me until I bring a recommendation letter”.

Mohamed El-Sayed (not the real name) is 31 years old. He is University graduated Faculty of Arts History Department at Ain Shams University. He hasn’t been working for two years. El-Sayed “I have applied five times for a job. Each time they refused to accept me. The excuses are that you disable person and ineffective to society”.

El-Sayed explained “We have appointment in the state but it is suspended. The companies took our documents and hired us on papers fulfilling the rate of 5% of the law in front of taxes. This part is deducted from the taxes. The employer told us you are a blind person. We don’t have appropriate job for you. You needn’t to come every day. We stayed at home and each month we took our salary as if it is aid. Our wages is very low. The salary for the medium qualified is L.E 85 per month

and highly qualified is between L.E 94 to L.E120 per month”.

On how he spends his spare time, Mustafa said “I don’t have spare time. I took several courses in computer. I like reading scientific and historical books and watching television. I also, spent time on the internet chatting with my friends”.

Ahmed Abdel-Hamid is 25 years old. He graduated from Faculty of Arts Information Department two years ago. Hamid wishes to be computer programmer and complete his studies in America. “I want to study abroad and develop myself in computer programming. I am great lover of Geography. I want to do a programmer that makes blind person active with the geography. He can go to any place he wants without the help of anybody”, added Hamid

Ahmed Fakri is 25, university graduated form Faculty of Arts History Department. Fakri said “I took several courses in computer skills. I’d like to work as computer programmer. I volunteered in Resala Charity Organization. I was teaching computer’s drives. I love reading very much. I have read all books of Tafseer and English translation of the holy Qur’an and also some books in hadith and politics”.

“There is no specialized library for the visually-impaired in Egypt except Bibliotheca Alexandria. It has some Arabic books and simplified books in certain fields like Arabic, history, explanatory of Qur’an, children stories and the stories of the prophets”, Hamid added “My family

doesn’t make me feel that I am blind. Since I was young my mother was studying with me. She learnt the Braille to study with me. My brothers didn’t believe that I am visually impaired. My father was great support for me. He saved any thing I want”.

The Development Association for Empowering the Special Needs (DAESN) is NGO began working in the year 2008. Its mission is to develop the full potential of visually impaired and blind children to lead independent lives and to integrate children in the educational system.

Trainer in DAESN Alaa Farid explained “Braille terminal is very easy and smart tool. It is system providing information without voice. Blind person uses his hand to read the screen. Using a voice is sometimes boring you may have a headache. This software is a special one. It’s made in Arabic language. There are many other programs for blind people but they all in English language”.

Massoud “when train them to work in jobs like call centers, secretary, operators, consumer services and telesales”.

“DAESN has partnership with Wanaya International Foundation for Integration and Awareness (NGO) in cooperation with International Labour Organization and some businessmen in to help us in finding jobs and working opportunities. Also, we went to the Manpower and Immigration We has a meeting with Undersecretary for Employment department for Disability Affairs Iman El-Nahas. We have discussions and we are agreed on sending

our program to the ministry. The ministry will go to direct the job seeker to us to train them. It is going to help us in employing them in the public sector”, added Massoud.

Executive Director of DAESN Association Lilli Atallah said “We totally refused the rate of 5% that it isn’t activated. As if it is charity or an aid. So, the association is looking for real job opportunities for the blind people”.

Executive
 Director of
 Wanaya
 International
 Foundation for
 Integration and
 Awareness
 Hossam Eldin

Wanaya is NGO taking action in order to make people understand, accept and live with persons with disabilities aim is not only to raise awareness, but also to provide educational, legislative and developmental programs that integrate children and adults with disabilities in the Egyptian society.

Mustafa added “This subject is divided into two parts. The first part, in the big multinational companies they employed and gave them a total opportunity like other employees. The second part, employing them without having real chance to work, it could be happened in small companies, public and governmental sector. Wanaya is working with big companies. We gave training courses how to deal with them for the whole company and its employees. We gave training courses for blind people too.

“Measurements are divided into two parts. First, Manpower office intervenes if the employee complained to the manpower office that the employer refused to hire him or hurt him. Second, if the company applied the 5% and employed him the

employee doesn’t really go to his work. In this case, the company sticks to the law”, said Ali.

One of DAESN projects is ‘*capacitating the blind and find job placement*’. Association will provide blind youth with training courses in computer and communication skills. All the training courses are free of charge. The training courses have started on June 2009. During two years, it is going to train 160 blind people. Also, the association will do job placement and follow up them in the places they are working in it.

The whole project is financed by Sawiris Foundation for Social Development. The Orascom Telecom Holding Company donates with Braille terminal and the software Bysonic. Braille terminal costs €4000 and the software is \$50.

Tobacco Girls: A lost life between a lethal smoke and a merciless hunger
Safaa Saleh
EI-Osbou

Every morning, with the first drops of moisture on the flower leaves in the arboreta which proliferate in Al-Munifia Governorate, thousand of village girls wake up not to collect flowers or carry them to the perfume factories, but to carry tobacco and mix it with tar in the tobacco factories all over the Governorate. The young girls extremely suffer for fifteen pounds which spare them the humiliation of beggary at the end of the day.

Each and every day, these girls whose age ranges between 9 and 22 years are

exposed to health dangers because they are subject to dust, acids and the gases emitting during the manufacturing and packaging operations. In addition, the girls are exposed to humiliation which results from the tyranny and violence of the chiefs of the factory halls. Besides, the girls can not find a person to call for their rights and protect them from psychological or physical pain.

Last Wednesday on the 11th of November 2009, I got up at 5 o'clock AM. I left the house at 5.45 o'clock AM. At that time, the sun did not wake up yet, although tens of girls and children woke up in my village. They were standing at the village bus stop of Munshaat Sultan, 11 kilometers far from the capital Shebeen Al-Koum. They were waiting for the buses which will take them to the factories in the capital Shebeen Al-Koum and Sadat City. A group was heading to garment factories while another was going to tobacco factories. I was standing in a corner watching and waiting for the tobacco girls of until it was 6.30 o'clock AM. When the first group was about to leave, I went to them and asked them about the bus of the tobacco factory. One of them replied that it did not arrive yet. Another one behind me pointed that it was the bus coming over there. I headed for it and asked the driver "Shall this bus head for the tobacco factory?"

Yes, are you a new hire?

Yes, for the first time

You are welcome, if you have sisters or friends, tell them and bring them. We need

many girls one time or twice the number of this bus passengers

I got into the old minibus while my heart was throbbing as I was afraid from the unknown world on the one hand and I was afraid that my mission will fail and my identity is unveiled on the other.

The driver has his young daughter who has not yet completed her sixth year. Whenever I intend to sit on one of the seats, she would tell me that this seat shall be occupied by one of the girls, and if she came and found me, she would dismiss me from it. I asked her where I would sit down. She pointed to the seat behind the driver and she stipulated that I would sit on the side seat because the one next to the window is allocated for Dalia who will get angry if she found me. I said to her "It will not matter. If she gets angry, I will sit on the side seat".

I waited for several minutes until girls came in groups one after another. Each girl carries a small plastic bag which contains the work uniform and food for lunch. Each one has their own place which they know full well. Dalia came and she gave a concise, sharp comment on my existence "This place is mine."

Her gloomy face, like all their faces, does not give good promises. All of them were silent, gloomy and angry. Their anger is manifested when a girl irritates another, and if this happens, a volcano of anger tainted by calling names erupts.

I obeyed Dalia's command while I was afraid from all of them who recklessly

looked at me and then they turned their faces from me.

After the minibus left on its way to the factory, Najiyah or "Dalouah" as they call her asked me "Are you new, honey?"

I nodded: Yes

She replied: I advise you to cut it short and find another job instead of the misery we suffer. Or, Dalia, take her with you to heaters.

She looked at Dalia and laughed. The others asserted her speech and demanded Dalia to take her to the heaters and Dalia agreed by saying "Why not? Let her come."

I asked her about the nature of these heaters and she replied "There you will know."

Najiyah has a series of severe cough and said: May Allah destroy yesterday smoke paste. When they bring it, I am about to die when I weigh it or even touch it.

She said to the girl next to her: Last night, I fainted in the bathroom and my mother used to cry thinking that I am about to die.

I asked her: *Are you ill?*

- Yes, my chest ails me because of the distress we suffer during work.

- Make a medical checkup

- I made many medical checkups but with no avail. As long as we are in this factory, we shall never recover.

- Why does yesterday tobacco paste particularly cause such pain?

- Because it contains more aqua fortis than Al-Qass tobacco.

These are the two types of tobacco produced by this factory in addition to snuff.

Najiyah works in the factory in order to buy the furniture and home appliances required for her marriage. She is engaged and is about to consummate marriage once she completed the furniture. The same thing applies to Sabah who complained that after she bought all furniture and home appliances required, she could not find a place in her husband's house because she will marry in a room in her husband's family house. She will pile the fridge, oven, cooker, washing machines and all appliances she bought in this room. Even though, she insists on working in order to fulfill her mission because people will see her stuffs carried on trucks to the husband's house. She and her family will pride in the many things she is buying day after another and which she pays their price from her breaths choked with the smoke of the factory.

The driver arrived at the factory which lies on the eastern outskirts of Shebeen Al-Koum. The minibus crossed the gate and none of the security personnel suspects me or even checks my identity.

I walked with the rest of girls until we entered into a four-storey building. They told me that their work hall is in the fourth floor. Once I passed through the door of the building, I had severe cough although work has not started yet.

While I was getting on the stairs, I could not touch the rails which were covered by a sticky black material from the tobacco. The same thing applied to all stairs and walls. On these materials, Dr. Amal Saad Ad-Din, Professor of Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine in the National Center of Scientific Researches, said "The most dangerous threat to these laborers in these factories is the high humidity which causes the accumulation of fungi on walls and floors. Among these fungi is the Spearaglaze which secretes poisonous materials which cause cancerous tumors in the liver if inhaled and they also affecting the immunity."

We reached the hall which I was looking forward to see when I was on my way. I found it long and wide and it accommodates thirty nine tables or more. On each table, there are scales for weighing tobacco. Later on, I came to know that a skillful girl in weighing tobacco uses her hands in weighing rather than the scales. Around each table, there were about ten girls and a small number of boys who did not exceed ten boys in each hall along with hundreds of girls.

One of the girls in the hall pointed to a twenty-year old girl and said that she is Hend, the hall supervisor. She told me that I should tell Hend that I am new. I told her and notified her that I want to work. She agreed and ordered me to sit down until work starts.

I sat down watching girls while arriving at the hall. They were more than 200 girls

and no less than 15 of them did not exceed ten years old.

Work was initiated and Hend called me after she exchanged glances with another employee. They talked for several minutes and she told me that she would send me to another new hall where there are decent girls, because the situation here will not appeal to me. There, it is calmer than here and work here is difficult. Besides, the chief of the hall is violent and she frequently used to beat girls and call them names. In the bottom of my heart, I was very happy because I came across a "bad" hall where there will be many events throughout the day and I want to know what is going on here.

I answered her that I want her to leave me here today because I feel comfortable with her, and that if I did not like things here, I will go to another hall after lunch. She agreed with resentment. She allowed me to sit on the last table with less violent girls than those in the forefront of the hall. Yet, she kept on looking at me sadly and reminding me with the other hall which I deserve because she thought that I should not be exposed to troubles.

I sat next to the girls to learn how to close packs and sort them in the box. The girls used to work very quickly. The young girls were around us just like working bees. They used to continuously wipe the floor to remove the falling mixture honey. Some of them would carry the raw mixture honey while others would wipe tables. Thus, they did not stop even for a while.

Ayah, 11 years old, was working on collecting garbage from the hall and sorting it out. She would sort out Sullivan paper, carton paper and tobacco falling on the floor of the hall. Ayah said that she came here after her father ordered her to leave the fifth primary class and he sent her to work in this factory.

As for Amirah, 15 years old, or "Zawawi" as the girls call her, she is cruelly beaten by the older girls throughout the whole day. She collects and sorts out garbage, and goes up and down although she has a disability after she lost her right eye. She said "I was not like that. I used to see very well until a person was riding a bicycle and carrying a glass plate hit me and the glass plate spoilt my eye. Later on, I left school and came to work here."

There was also Sayyedah. 22 years old, who was paralyzed. The chief of the hall did not bear her slow movement in turning or packaging. They assigned her to sweep the hall back and forth all day. Besides, she would get down to fetch boxes from the other building whenever they need them. Sayyedah said: "I lost my mother a long time ago, and my father also died recently. I have none to care for me. My sister married and I became alone. Where could I support myself? I must work and bear anything in order to live."

Iman, 14 years old, said "I left school after I became broke. I found all girls putting on good clothes while mine are torn out and old. I came here to work and get some good clothes to be like them."

After about fifteen minutes, a senior employee in charge of the laborers came and kept on looking around the hall until his eyes gazed at me. He asked: Are you new?

I answered: Yes

He looked at Hend and said: *She does not look like the girls here. Why did you keep her with them?*

She answered: *I told her that I would take you to the second hall but she insisted to stay here.*

He turned to me and said: *Come here, I shall take you to a good place. You will not find your ways here. You are not like them to expose yourself to troubles.*

I was obliged to surrender to his command so that none would ever suspect me. At that time, the girl next to me, Najwa, shouted: *Take me with her uncle Usama. I am polite and belong to a good family like her. Why do you prefer her?*

Usama smiled but he did not turn towards her.

We went to the other building and got into the hall. I found only four tables for tobacco while the rest of the hall was used in producing carton paper for the tobacco packs in the factory. Men cut this carton and piled it out. Actually, this hall was much calmer than the other. Later on, I came to know that the cruelest halls for girls were Bushra and Nasrah's halls where I was first.

I stood around a table with four other girls and three of them were new like me.

Dunya, the old weighing girl, used to weight the tobacco, put it to Asmaa on the foil to roll it, while I an Azza would package it in the carton packs which Hasanat closes and sorts out in the boxes.

Although the hall was not one of the main work halls which are crowded with workers, it has five or six young girls whose age ranges from 9 to 12 years old among about 30 girls in the hall. I used to exchange smiles with them from time to time. It seems that they were not used to such smiles. After a while, a girl brought me a chair so that I will not feel fatigue. Later, she resumed here work. Around me, Afaf, eleven years old, was roaming here and there to wipe the falling tobacco on the floor or the table. She neither smiles nor cries, but she silently works. I used to sadly look at her, just like I did with another girl in the hall who did not exceed ten years old, and even though she was pulling an iron carriage full of piles of carton paper.

In my new hall, "Mr. Ali's Hall" as each hall is called after their supervisor, I sat to package the tobacco. It was a large size pack which weighs 192.5 grams. Each table closes around 10 boxes per hour. Girls used to work for approximately 9 hours (in an outright breach of the Egyptian Labor Law which stipulates that the working hours are 7 interpolated by a break of half an hour). This means that each 5 girls used to pack 90 boxes per day and in each box, there 60 packs and the price of each pack is LE 3.5 with a total of LE 18900. My share of packaging

is LE 3780 and I only get LE 15 out of them!!!!

This is in line with what the statistics proved. Statistics indicate that the rate of consuming mixture honey has largely increased. As per a report submitted to the Health Committee in the Egyptian Parliament on December 2008, Cairo Café guests alone consume about 40 million tons of mixture honey per annum.

Next to me around the table, there was Azza, 21 years old. She is illiterate and she also works in order to buy her marriage requirements. Her father dies after he suffered from cystoscirrhus for 7 years but he did not know that it was cancer because he did not follow up with a physician because of his poverty as she told me. When he came to know that it was cancer, he was about to die. Azza had to complete her marriage requirements in order to consummate the marriage with her fiancée, because her brothers have "bad health and they could not find a job" as she said.

As for Hasanat, she is a student in the second technical secondary certificate. Although her father is still alive, she says "All of us are born to humble people. Where could we get money? I could not stay without work or money until I finish the technical diploma. Something bad would happen to me."

I got involved in the work. While I was rolling tobacco, a voice from behind called me "you, sweetie?" I did not pay attention. She called again and her voice was accompanied by an attempt to take away

the chair I used to sit on. I turned to her saying "Is it me?"

She replied *"Is there any other sweetie sitting on a chair except for you? Give me the chair. It is mine."*

I gave her the chair. I know it is not hers, but I preferred to avoid clashes.

I completed work while standing. When it was about twelve thirty PM, I was about to break down. The pain which started in my chest when I began work increased to the extent that I felt as if somebody is catching a knife and tearing out my lungs. I had severe dizziness and headache. Azza noticed my pain. She told them saying "It seems that she is very tired. I pity her." Asmaa replied "Never mind, all of us ha such conditions in the first week, but later on, you will get accustomed to smell and fatigue." At this point, I was about to explode and demand to leave this factory irrevocably. Yet, I remembered that I could not leave except with the buses at five thirty. If I tried to leave, I may arouse their doubts, search my belonging and find my camera. At that time, I will not be safe and I do not know what they will do. None ever managed to enter this place. Even many researchers from the Research Center could not make their scientific theses about this world. This is what happened with Dr. Amal Saad Ad-Din who said "I wanted to make a research on the health of the workers in the mixture honey factories. I went to some of these factories, but the officials in charge there did not allow me to make the research or even get into the factory."

On the health of the workers in the halls, Dr. Saad Ad-Din said "The girls in the halls are exposed to gases and harmful chemical materials which are absorbed by the skin and when they penetrate the body, they cause severe harms."

On the precautions which the factory should have taken into consideration, Dr. Saad Ad-Din said "There must be masks to absorb gases and masks for dusts. Girls should put on gloves and coveralls over their clothes and such should be daily washed in the factory laundry. The girls should take a shower before they leave the factory in order to get rid of the effects of honey mixture and eliminate acids from their bodies instead of taking them back home."

She added "There are certain ages which must avoid this type of work such as the newly married girls who are vulnerable to pregnancy because such acids cause embryos deformation. As for children, it is even worse. They are in a stage where they form their cells. They should never be subjected to such acids or chemicals. During such stage, the cells are very sensitive and the structure of their cells may change which leads to cancerous tumors or hereditary tumors which afflict the coming generations."

Dr. Amal Saad Ad-Din stressed that factory owners should protect the worker in a manner that conforms with the nature of the place. Workers must put on boots, masks, coveralls and gloves. In addition, there must be a large number of suction pumps."

On my table, we ran out of boxes. They sent me with a girl from the next table to get down and bring some boxes. I also seized the opportunity to change the hall atmosphere.

At the hall door, I found Naema waiting for me. I found a lad working in the hall saying to me "Sweetie, I would like to have sex with you."

I looked at him in anger and left him. A girl advised me "Call him names or beat him and he will never irritate you. Here, they do not know his glance."

I and Naema get down to get the boxes from another building in the factory. On our way, we passed by the heaters, and here I realized their identity. They are the "holocaust". In this place, vapors and hot gasses are lifted from the black containers where the tobacco is mixed with the black honey and other components after mincing it in mincers.

Naema told me that she previously worked in these heaters units yesterday. She said "May Allah provide the girls who work in these heaters unit with His Help. I worked there for only one day. When I asked Mr. Usama to relieve me from such over tiring work and to replace me with another girl, he pitied me and sent me to work above with the polite girls. When I worked in Hanan's hall, she overburdened me with work, I collected garbage, swept the floors, and went up and down. This is the way things work here. The girls insult and shout at the slow working girl. The boss is always holding a stick by which she beats

the girls who do not work and who talk in a loud voice. This is really some kind of humiliation, really a humiliation".

Dr. Saad Ad-Din added "During the heaters phase, overheat could cause thermal exhaustion for women. The symptoms of such exhaustion are lack of concentration, feeling of general strain, and thermal shocks which resemble sun strokes. Thermal strokes cause frequent faints and may lead to death in some cases. In addition, the gasses emitting during the manufacturing process of the honey mixture in the heaters irritate the respiratory system and the mucous membrane of the whole body. They also cause eye and nose irritation and may lead to fires because of overheat."

Naema then sighs in pain and says "I'm not an illiterate girl, I have obtained the secondary school grade from Al-Azhar but my father was poor and could not make me join the university. My mother told me that I or one of my brothers should leave school. But they were young in the primary and preparatory stage. I contemplated the matter and said to myself how I shall join the university and they become totally ignorant. So I chose not to complete my study. If you were in my place, what would you do? Shall you oppress your brothers or make self-sacrifice?" When Naema saw my eyes pitying her, she said "Never mind, my conditions are better than that of many other girls. Here the girls really are afflicted with calamities. Some of them do not even find hard bread to eat but they keep silent".

Then we passed by the mincing machines that emit big quantities of dust and sprays. The tobacco dried brown plants are minced and then taken to the heaters units. About the diseases of this stage, Dr. Saad Ad-Din said "During the mincing stage, dusts affect the respiratory system especially that mincing some dry plants leads to producing some fungi which cause chest allergy, cystigerous chest, and chronic chest diseases."

Then we reached the boxes hall, took the boxes and got out.

I returned again to my table and sat with my new colleagues to complete my talk with them. Naema brought a chair for me so that I would not be tired again. I sat down but only a few minutes elapsed when I heard the same voice behind me saying "Oh you, nice girl? I replied in an annoyed manner "What do you want". She said this chair belongs to the girl in charge of weighing. Leave it."

That time, I replied forcefully "No, this chair is mine, Naema brought it for me". Then she began to call bad names at me but I paid her no attention at all.

And one of the employees came to apologize for the non-availability of chairs. He promised to make them available next day. Then he whispered to us "If you know beautiful girls like you, please recommend them to us as we are really in need of many girls". Hasanat then commented on his remark "All men are obscene". I wondered why she said that. The man talked very gently. She said "Did not you

hear him describe us as beautiful? Azza then interrupted her saying "Would you have been pleased had he said we were ugly? We resumed our work till we heard a noisy crash on the floor. We saw a girl fainting on the adjacent table. She kept on fainting for more than 7 minutes though the girls supervisor attempted to help her recover her consciousness. When I asked about what is wrong with her, I knew that she often faints without knowing the reasons.

It was about 2 P.M and we had not finished our allocated portion yet. All table finished their work. Naema then came to help us in order to go out for lunch. We finished the quantity then we went to the toilet to wash our hands from the tobacco remainders. As I approached the toilet at the back of the hall, the same boy caught me by the hand asking me "oh you nice girl, does that girl insult you? I took off my hand rebuking him "Are you stupid or crazy?" I ran away and as we descended the stairs, we were stopped on the way by another guy. He pointed at Naema while talking to another girl "I want to be the boy friend of this girl". The girl said "She is engaged to another guy" but he replied impudently "Let her desert him and be my girl friend".

Naema and I descended running away. Naema said: See, he is short and dirty, and he thinks vainly of himself. He wants me to leave my fiancé who is better than him. My fiancé is tall, stout and far smarter even than me.

She asked me "Do you have a meal? I replied "No, I will buy one. Is there any canteen in the nearby? She replied "No, there is only this wall there. Can you stretch your hand out of this wall?"

I looked and saw two holes in the same size of two bricks in the factory wall. In front of these holes, a group of girls and young men stood stretching their hands with few pounds to the female seller who was sitting behind the hole giving them beans and Falafel sandwiches and tamarind juice packages. Seeing how these sandwiches look like, I give up the idea of buying any. Naema stretched her hand with 25 piasters and gave it to Asmaa who was by the wall to get for her a tamarind package. I was introduced to Asmaa when she brought the tamarind package. She was a 14 year old girl. Asmaa said "I have been working her since four years. At that time, I was 10 years old. I left school when I was in the third primary year and came her to work. Before, I worked in cleaning and removing garbage but today I became responsible for weighing. When I asked her why she did not complete her education, she replied "What is the use of education? One of my neighbors completed her college then married and had children yet she has not found a job until now. Her conditions are very bad. I'm not educated yet I earn money. My weekly wage is 90 pounds and I can buy whatever I like".

We went to the place where the girls perform their prayers and change their clothes. Some of them had locked boxes

so that their clothes would not be stolen. One of them was robbed of her blouse yesterday. She did not find it.

There I met Heba (15 years old) who left school when she was at the second preparatory year. When I asked her why she did such hard work, she replied "I work to earn money. What do you think I work for? I am obliged to cope with chief Hanan who causes me many troubles. First I used to cry too much and I always prayed to Allah to make me get rid of her. Some times, she haunted me in dreams." Samar (11 years old) is a student in the sixth primary stage. She says "I work in Bushra's hall. I leave my school for some days and come to work her to get money and clothes".

All these stories made me forget about the hall. It was then 3:10 P.M. when we hurried up the stairs. Every one who met us said "Where have you been? they are searching for you and they thought you left the factory".

Then Naema asked "What do you mean by searching for us? Do you think they will punish us?"

He replied "Allah forbids, I do not know".

We entered into the hall, and bore all the insults and harsh words they said to us. We finished our work. When it was 5 P.M, we left. Naema accompanied me to change her clothes at the boxes with one of her friends. There, I found the girls in the heaters unit wringing their work clothes and spreading them on the wall till

morning to dry and wear them the next day.

We went out to get some fresh air while waiting for the buses to come. These buses come to take the girls to their villages. In every bus, there is a driver and a contractor. The contractor is the person who recruits girls from remote villages to work in the factory. He accompanies them to and from the factory every day.

We sat on a tree trunk. After wearing her dirty clothes, Afaf came, she sat beside me and we exchanged smiles which she feared to do when she was in the hall. She sat smiling silently beside me. When I asked about her name, she said "My name is Afaf Muhammad (11 years old) in the sixth grade. I leave school for some days to work in the factory like today and on Fridays. I work for 25 pounds a day. My older sister comes with me to prevent others from beating me".

On our way to the gate, I saw the girl who fainted inside the factory. I asked her "What is wrong with you?" She said "I do not really know, I have a pain in my side, and I faint a lot but I recover quickly and resume working".

Outside the gate, there was a lady selling packages of potato chips. The girls went out one by one under the supervision of two female supervisions. One of them held a big wooden stick and the other one held a broken broom handle. When I was about to leave to buy something to eat, they told me to wait till the one who has left returns. A girl told me that they thoroughly inspect the girls who go out. I was afraid they

might discover my camera which the newspaper entrusted me. So I waited till my village minibus arrived. I got in the bus with the village girls. For the girls, they felt as if they came out from the dusk to a lightened world full of freedom and liberty. Najjiyah was sitting next to Shaaban, the driver, to talk and sometimes laugh. She would sometimes turn and participate with the girls in mocking Bushra, the chief of the hall. Iman refuses to sit on the seat and she would sit beside the door to stretch her legs in the air while singing.

With regard to safety in the tobacco factory, the professional health and safety secretary in the Public Union of Egypt Laborer Syndicates, Ali Amer, says "there is a problem regarding safety and professional health in Egyptian factories due to the shortage of health inspectors in the Ministry of Manpower. It is supposed that there is a regular inspection of tobacco factories to verify the availability of big ventilators and masks for female workers. But the crisis of the non-employment of health and safety doctors and engineers made the factories owners abstain from abiding by the conditions of professional safety and health. They do not want to pay more money and the government does adopt the approach of appointing more staff in the State's administrative body. Any one working in the professional health and retires is not replaced by another one. So within three or four years, there will be no professional health inspectors. For example, in Beheira province now, there are 1000 factories and

only four inspectors. So how will things work in these factories?"

Amer adds "The living hard conditions and the lower standard of life oblige people to send their children to work. How can a man whose salary is two hundred pounds sustain a family? So we have to provide enough protection for these laborers. The factories owners have to abide by law No. 12 year 2003 i.e. the Unified Labor Law. This will not be in effect unless more professional health and safety inspectors are employed. When the factories owners find a committee that makes a report on their factory every week not every year, they will be obliged to abide".

With regard to the risks the female laborers may be exposed to in the tobacco factory, Amr says "The most dangerous risks threatening the laborers in the tobacco factory are lung diseases, chest diseases, renal failure and the most dangerous of them is phthisis".

Around one hundred years ago, a labor movement which emerged among the factory workers turned the whole society upside down. The term "Factory girl" became equivalent to independence and strife for change.

In 1914 AD, the tobacco female workers in Beirut went into a general strike. Owing to such strike, they got 15 months of paid wages per year and the religious vacation days became paid leaves. They achieved several benefits on the realm of amending the work prerequisites and increasing health care. When shall the tobacco girls in Egypt obtain their rights?

"Al Masaleeb" The Grandsons of Al Zeer Salem in Qena Samah Abdul Aati EI- Masry EI-Youm

At the edge of the canal bank that penetrates Toukh village in Qena province, Ragab Mahmud, 25 years old, stands there fixing the strings of his rebeck and preparing to play music. Behind him, two of his relatives stood, one of them holding a rebeck and the other holding a big tambourine. The sad melody of the rebeck reached the ears of the villagers who gathered around the little band. Sighs get louder, tears flow and noisy shouts of approval were heard applauding Ragab "May Allah provide you with more talent".

Usually, Ragab does not receive such approval and interest unless he sings.



It is no wonder that all leave him not because

he finishes his singing which attracts all around him, but the real fact is that those people who approved his singing a few minutes ago are the same people who always hate to sit with him or talk to him. They even look up down to him in an arrogant way. For them, he is no more than one of the gypsies in the neighborhood. They think that sitting with those gypsies to talk to them with no reason is a source of great shame.

Despite the fact that Toukh residents use the term "Al Halab" to describe the gypsies

residing in their village, the Halab themselves do not approve this naming and hate it. They insist on calling themselves "Al-Masaleeb". That word goes back to their grandfather and it means that their grandfather could not fight, when he came to Egypt, he has no money and was unable to buy lands to cultivate.

"We do not like to cultivate lands because our grandfather did not do that", uttering these words, Abdul Nasser Jumaa, 46 years old, justified why Al-Masaleeb were not professionals in cultivating lands.

Inside the narrow yard at the middle of Al Masaleeb houses in Toukh village, Abdul Nasser sat among his family members. He says that their numbers are no more than fifty persons. They stay in

They hate to work in agriculture. They marry their own relatives and they never reveal the secrets of their mean jobs to others but only at the death bed

houses at the south edges of the village only few kilometers from a place that contains old Egyptian monuments that goes back to Nikada first and second civilizations. There, the clay houses with low roofs are gathered at the shape of a horseshoe looking over the village canal from their two edges. Though the high pressure posts are planted among the eight houses, they do not have a power supply. Their inhabitants are obliged to light them with a primitive type of lamps made of empty medicine bottles half filled with gasoline and a little piece of clothes

soaked in. This kind of lamps are known there as "the rocket lamp".

Abdul Nasser who works in fishing by a hook says that the ancestry of Al Masaleeb goes back to Al Zeer Salem who was an Arab famous warrior and poet who resided in Arabia before the Islamic era. He launched a fierce war that lasted 40 years that was known in the old history as "Al Basoos war". Abdul Nasser says that there is a difference between his people (Al Masaleeb) and the Halab people whom he claims do not belong to them in any way. According to his expression, they came from Aleppo valley in Syria and their grandfather worked as a blacksmith in Egypt. But again, he describes himself and his family to belong to "the roaming Arabs". This same classification which Abdul Nasser said was written in the old identity cards before the computer identity cards came into existence. Now the job described in these old cards are to be changed to "Laborers". Therefore, says Abdul Nasser, all the roaming Arabs in any place in Egypt are "our paternal cousins".

Yet the kinship ties which Abdul Nasser acknowledge is not a reasonable justification as thought by Jahlan Mahmud to open the door to make Al Masaleeb get marry with others. Because of that opinion, Jahlan refuses to marry any of his daughters to any of those roaming Arabs saying "We would better marry from our own people". This view is affected by the tribal nature of the people's life in the Upper Egypt. As he says, there are Arabs,

Hawara, farmers and nobles and these are the names of tribes and families that refuse to marry from others. They only marry to and from their cousins and nieces from the same single tribe.

Jahlan also refuses to reveal the secrets of his job to any of his children as long as he lives. He says that he inherited this job from his father. This job is specialized in extracting dried bones that cattle in his village may swallow and stuck in their throats. Jahlan says that he uses some incantations and words while extracting these bones from the cattle throats in consideration of an amount of money given to him by the animal's owner.

Explaining his point of view, Jahlan says "When I get old and I feel I'm reaching the end of my life, I will reveal the secret oath of my job to my elder son as I fear if I give it to him now, he may compete with me". He then explains that oath saying "This oath is like the oath sworn when dealing with a scorpion". He went further in his explanation "It is the same case as when some one is bitten by a female scorpion and the magician spells this incantation on that bitten person". The magician memorizes some words and repeats them as Jahlan says, and bequeaths them to his children. As per his expression, if they keep to it, their job shall continue otherwise "Farewell".

As a little small smile covered Jahlan's mouth, two silver teeth appeared fixed at his upper teeth line. He says that he fixed them after his marriage "As you may say, I was still young and newly married and

wanted to show off". Samira, the maternal aunt of Jahlan who lives in the same area, has the same silver teeth but in her bottom teeth line. She also says she fixed them after her marriage in Qus city which is next to them.

Samira is professional in making tattoos. She says she first learnt it by trying it on herself. "I got the fine dust from the rocket lamp and mixed them with some milk. Then I soaked the needle in this mixture and pierced my skin with it for three times till my wound dried and got the green color". Before she learnt that, she saw her grandmother do the same job to strangers. Samira says "I was then young and I saw my grandmother make tattoos for the people and I learnt that from her". Samira says that making tattoos is not only for adornment but also is used as some kind of cure. I use it to heal any one who stumbles on his legs or hands. This is an instant cure. Samira earns her living from that work. She says that she does not ask people for a fixed fee but leaves the matter for their estimation as if it is merely a gift in return for her favor.

Radia, the mother of Samira, who lives in Luxor and visits Samira every now and then, is professional in horoscope using the dried dates stones known there as "Al Fasa". Radia says that she was not taught this job by any one, she found herself mastering it upon her suffering from labor when she was about to give birth under the trunk of a tree. After, she gave birth, she slept at her place and dreamt that some one brought some dates for her and

taught her how to master the art of horoscope. When she wakes up, she found herself a master in that regard.

Besides the art of horoscope, Radia was also clever at expelling evil spirits. She recites some spells and incantations on those who were afflicted with no apparent reasons such as those afflicted with envy or evil eye and similar beliefs of the upper Egyptians. Usually, any one who thinks his animal is envied resorts to her to expel the evil spirit from his animal or any one who thinks his son had an evil eye.

Radia, a 90 year old woman, remembers how Al Masaleeb lived in the past in "Sabait" which means cages made from the reed before they settled in the houses they built for themselves at the edge of the village. She says that Al Masaleeb who live in Toukh are a small group of the tribe that is dispersed in the villages and towns of Qena. She believes that their dispersion came as Allah answered the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, or as she expresses "Allah responded to the Prophet's prayers against them". She explains that saying that Al Masaleeb lived in Arabia before coming to Egypt and they disobeyed the Prophet in some thing she did not mention. So he supplicated to Allah to make them disperse in all countries and thus they became despised minorities. Radia thinks that if Al Masaleeb gather, that would cause disasters to their neighbors and shower the Masaleeb with many afflictions at the same time.

The job of singing and playing music mastered by some of Al Masaleeb has to be contemplated not because it caused many of them to be famous but because it is the only way to get out of the village and work in tourist areas such as Luxor and Hurgada and may be in Cairo or even Europe and America. This is not a difficult dream to realize especially when we know that the famous rebeck player Mitkal Al-Kenawy belongs to Luxor Masaleeb. Toukh Masaleeb boast when they mention him and repeat his songs in their wedding days if they played the rebeck. May be for that reason Ragab Mahmud, 25 years old, was fascinated by the rebeck after learning it from his relatives.

Ragab masters playing the rebeck and sings folklore upper Egyptian songs. The villagers ask for his assistance in their weddings. Some times, he may set for a tourist city to gain some material benefits but eventually he returns to his village to sit on the edge of the canal bank that penetrates the village and plays on his rebeck to hear the approval of his neighbors saying "May Allah provide you with more talent".

Another Form of Violence

Yousra Al-Sharkawy
Al-Ahram

"Oh, what a miserable woman! She died without being married". Hanan Abdul Muniem (36 years old) said in reiteration of the words of a person attending the funeral of one of her female relatives who reached an old age but died without getting married. Hanan, the dark-complexion, veiled Aswan girl who has

very particulate features and whose calm voice never raises even when she gets nervous, abruptly leaned forward and said "Is not this some kind of violence? When a woman lives and dies while people remember nothing about her except that she did not marry as if it had been a point of weakness which deserves pity or it is a great sin which could not be ignored even when she is buried." Hanan sat upright again in her chair.

Hanan, the former employee in a foreign development agency, narrated the story of her relative in reply to a question on whether it is time for the mass media and women's rights organizations to deal with the socially typical and stereotype image of the girl who is late in marriage. Is such issue less important than other women's rights issues such as transgressions on divorced women and violence against women? These organizations rarely discuss the stereotype image of the girl who is late in marriage or the social pressures she may suffer.

Even after issuing the last report by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics on October 2009 which estimated the numbers of Egyptian youths who reached the age of 35 years without getting married at 9 millions, most analyses and opinion essays hold a unanimous agreement that this issue is characterized as a "social catastrophe" and a "crisis". They reiterated the number "9 millions" to indicate that the reason for such crisis is attributed to the youths' economic challenges and the stubborn

demands of some families with regards to the exaggerated marriage requirements. Yet, taking into consideration the increased number of girls who are late in marriage should be counted as a necessity to start changing the stereotype image in this respect.

Dr. Maha Al-Kurdi, the head of the Public Communication Researches in the Social and Criminal Research Centre, is of the opinion that the oft-frequently negative stereotype image of the girl who is late in marriage has tremendously changed and that the society displayed more understanding and respects towards the girls who chose to marry at the early or mid-thirties, especially that the average age of marriage in Egypt has been delayed to the late twenties and the early thirties. Yet Hanan, drawing on her practical experiences, agrees with Dr. Maha that the average marriage age has changed, but the stereotype image of the girl who is late in marriage is still negative as it has been several years ago.

As per Hanan's words, the first proof that this negative image is still prevalent is its description as a "catastrophe" and a "crisis" although it is no more than a potential social transformation. Clarifying her point of view, Hanan added "It seems as if there are no youths who are late in marriage in the world countries. Do these countries consider such as a crisis or a part of the society which has its own circumstances which delayed their marriage? Or is it related to the youths' personal choice?" She continued on

saying "Even if we agree on the concept of catastrophe or crisis, why should it remain as a girls' crisis while the young men do not have any crisis?" She referred to the nine millions stated in the report of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics and that amongst them 3 million and 731 thousand are young women and the remaining are young men. Almost always, attention is paid to girls taking into consideration the traditional concept that late marriage for men is acceptable, but for young girls, it is a crisis.

"Usually, this crisis is the girl's responsibility", added Hanan who emphasized that there is a continuous tendency to portray the girl whose marriage is delayed in a negative or humiliating manner. She may be figured out as a girl with bad relations she is afraid to divulge by marriage, "an irresponsible girl who has many requests" or "an ugly girl who could not attract young men towards her." Hanan said these words and confirmed that it is the same stereotype image inherited from generations and that there is no manifest difference between city and village inhabitants with regards to this image.

Hanan emphasizes that these ready interpretations for delaying a girl's marriage do not include the fact that a girl may postpone her marriage because of her desire to complete her study, finish a professional project or even to find a suitable husband. These judgments – according to Hanan – accompany the woman as long as she does not get

married even if she realized many achievements on the professional and social scales. She expressed it as the girl "remains incomplete" and "socially blemished as if the judgment on the extent of success of any woman depends on her relation with man even in our current time."

Radwa Hassan, a teacher, (29 years old) added another dimension to the stereotype image. Apart from the sense of responsibility and social blemish, she thinks that the woman remains "incomplete" in the light of the society even if she proved herself on the professional and social scales. From the society's point of view, the woman's role is "human production and to give birth to children, while man is entrusted with innovations and inventions." If this is the stereotype image on the societal level, how would the family deal with the girl who is late in getting married? Does the family support her and understand the situation? Or does it agree with the society with regards to its pressures on the girl? It is noteworthy that situations vary based on many circumstances. In Hanan's case, for example, her family understands the matter and appreciates her desire to find a suitable husband intellectually and not materially as Hanan asserted.

As for Injy Muhammad, a program author, (32 years old) her family "neither supports nor presses her, it only played the role of some one who does not care." Injy asserts that the negative attitude of her family with regards to the fact that she did not get married till now has something to do with

their general objection to her life style. "It is easy for you", she said it while pointing to the head veil I put on. She added "I am not veiled and I smoke. I put on the clothes I like and I indulge in continuous debates and discussions." She said that these characteristics make her far from the traditional, socially acceptable and ideal bride. She mocks at the regular phrases published in the newspapers to search for a bride who is "veiled, with a moderate body build, white, calm, and honors marriage life."

Injy said that her style may be fearful to some people or portray her as a "wild girl" as she put it. Yet, like all girls, she wants to marry and she is ready to bargain or give up some of her conditions for the success of the "marriage company" as she expressed it. She ignored some defects in a previous husband who courted her and she agreed to his request to hide some of her characteristics in front of his family such as smoking, but the project did not succeed in the end.

Generally speaking, Injy thinks that there is a relation between the continuance of this stereotype image and the biological nature of girls. Reaching a certain age, women's fertility begins to weaken and their chance to give birth retreats. She stressed that her age now does not include her with "spinsters" but in the past, it would have placed her in this category. But she feels she "must move now so as to manage to give birth but with the suitable match", as she expressed it.

Away from the family and street environments, it seems that the stereotype image chases the girl even in her business headquarters. Dr. Inas Abou Yusuf, head of media monitoring department in the National Women Council, stresses the fact that unmarried girls are usually assigned with as much work as possible because they do not bear any responsibility except for "work". This emphasized the notion that the unmarried girl has not started her true life yet. Supporting the view point of Dr. Inas, Niveen Aziz – a public relation officer - (30 years old) narrated a story that happened to her with her boss. Before she gets married, she applied for a vacation. He boss replied "What are you going to do during it?" Once she gets married, this same boss, even without a request on her part, took the initiative of offering her to alleviate the work burden. As for Amirah Muhammad, – a university teacher – (33 years old) she talks about the disappointment which haunts her whenever she realizes any scientific or professional achievement because of the comments of others like "You are free ... no house and no kids" as if "all I achieved is nonsense" as Amirah said.

Regardless of the continuity of this image, Shadha agrees with Dr. Inas that the major problem lies in the fact that no organized effort is exerted to change this image. Dr. Inas confesses that this category of girls is marginalized and that none of the researches or reports related to the stereotype image of women dealt with it. Even if such issue is handled, it is

done in a subordinate manner within other issues related to women. Such researches or reports may just refer to the estimates of the girls who are late in marriage. Dr. Inas blamed the mass media and TV drama for their responsibility towards giving a caricature and almost always negative image of the girl who is late in marriage and that they portray her as a category disassociated from the society. She asserted that these same media apparatus are positively biased with the married woman under the pretext that she is the sole model of the socially recognizable woman.

Another proof that this image does not receive the required attention is the reports issued by the Social and Criminal Research Center. These reports do not refer to the necessity of treating this image although the Center is about to prepare a study on the conditions of the youths who are late in marriage in both sexes. The condition of the popular or non governmental communities is not better such as the New Women Community and Young Women Forum which the officials assured that this issue was not previously included in their agenda. No reports monitoring women whose marriage was delayed were mentioned in media or in the drama.

According to Wesam Kamal (27 years old), the administrative affairs official in the Young Women Forum, owing to discrimination cases and prejudice against women, some women contributed to shedding light on this issue. But in this

case, its sensitivity and the conservative attitude of many girls in this regard restricted the chances of exposing and facing them, or showing them in a clear manner. Moreover, they are really convinced with the way the society looks at them and that they made mistakes that delayed their marriage.

Even Yomna Mukhtar (28 years old), the moderator of the group "Spinsters for the sake of change" on the Facebook which aims at changing the image of girls whose marriage was delayed on the social and individual levels, unveils the fact that the group members are eager to talk about their psychological pains because of this stereotyping and they theoretically refuse it. Yomna created this group after she witnessed the suffering of many of her friends and acquaintances because of salon-based marriage and the societal point of view towards their delayed marriages. Yomna says "But when I ask them to hold a meeting to discuss their problems in a clearer way, most of them refuse".

Yomna commented that abstention to discuss this issue is not only restricted to girls, but it also extends to their families. She quoted one of her friends' relative who described the group and its topic as a sort of "low morals". A sociology scientist objected to this group and accused Yomna with inculcating the concept of female spinsterhood. She advised Yomna to ignore such concept until it is no longer in use and such stereotype image changes. Yomna commented on this scientist's

words "as if spinsterhood is not an established fact."

Yomna explains her personal attitude that she and the other group members do not want to remain "spinsters" as she put it. They realize that marriage is "predestined" and that man has nothing to do with such destiny. If a girl's marriage is delayed, she has to enjoy her other achievements. Such convictions almost always shall not appeal to the people who are of the opinion that a woman's death without getting married is a matter which generates pity and that such woman is directly responsible for her married or unmarried life. In an estimate which is likely to disappoint Yomna and her group members who would like to stop the social punishment of the girl whose marriage is delayed, Dr. Inas Abou Yusuf said "It will take time to change this stereotype image of the girl whose marriage is delayed ... it may take years."

Refugees' Children: Kids with no country no shelter and no identity
Mohamed El-Amier
EI-Dostor

"I have issued him a certificate but not a future", this is in brief the story of the Sudanese refugee Hatem's Father (Abou Hatem) as he issued a birth certificate for his son when he came to Egypt having him as a baby with his mother. The man - presenting his name as such - fled his country and came to Egypt looking for a future to his son joining thousands of refugees in Egypt who all share several problems and issues that are doubled if the refugee was not registered.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) the registered refugees in Egypt are estimated to be 45,000, the vast majority of which are Sudanese, followed by Somalis and finally Ethiopians. However, due to not being enumerated there is a great disparity from the actual number of refugees which ranges from 500,000 – 2.5 million. And according to the Egypt State Information System (SIS), the cases registered at UNHCR only represent 10% of the number of refugees in Egypt.

Heba Qasem, the executive Director of "Refugee Center for Human Rights" which provides legal assistance for refugees said, "Procedures for receiving refugees in Egypt differs from those in other countries; signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol governing refugees reception. The Egyptian law does not comprise an article organizing refugees' presence; however, Article 53 of the Egyptian Constitution gives the right to political asylum.

That is why the refugees children born in Egypt were

not governmental ly recognized before 2001 either due to the fact that

A female legal expert: Refugees' Children Birth certificates are just a proof for their identity and for being alive

their parents do not have governmentally acknowledged papers or because they are late in registering due to not knowing its necessity, or the UNHCR does not approve their asylum.

Since then and after starting to give special attention in Egypt on the academic as well as the NGOs level, Heba says that her center started to provide

A mother refugee: Egypt is beautiful but in fact we are not living there, we are on the fringe

awareness to refugees to register their children highlighting that "Issuing a birth certificate is a proof of his/her existence; the identity which no person can be deprived of even if he/she was a refugee."

Hatem's Father (Abou Hatem) says, "I was keen to register my son and give him an Egyptian name to make it easier for him to cope with his

Head of the Sudanese Fawr Region Children NGO: Not educating children creates raw materials for extremism and deviation

Egyptian companions." Yet, what the Sudanese father did, has not guaranteed to Hatem the same rights and interests as his Egyptian companions.

The Egyptian government which has signed the 2 international conventions governing the refugees rights declared its reservation towards 5 items of the convention guaranteeing for refugees; "the right to having the Egyptian

Article 53 of the Egyptian Constitution, "The right to political asylum shall be guaranteed by the State for every foreigner persecuted for defending the peoples' interests, human rights, peace or justice. The extradition of political refugees is prohibited."

Nationality, the right to work, the right to free education, social solidarity and the right to get nutritional meals"; i.e. refugee resettlement.

According to the memorandum of understanding between the Egyptian government and UNHCR in Feb 1954, the government has pledged to provide necessary facilitation to UNHCR to work and provide residence to UNHCR affiliated refugees according to current procedures. Therefore, UNHCR and neither the government nor the Judiciary Authority - as in most countries of the world - is entitled to accept refugees in Egypt.

This means that Hatem and other born kids who found themselves outside their home countries and whose parents are aware of having to and succeed in registering them, eventually do not have the same benefits as their Egyptian counterparts. They do not have the right to enroll in Egyptian schools and here comes the role of NGOs supporting the immigrant communities' children, the Human Rights Organizations or several churches dealing with UNHCR office.

Heba indicates that education offered to refugees' children is not real education because eventually it does not provide an education certificate, however, there is a possibility for getting an equivalence accreditation for Primary Education, but mostly parents cannot proceed till the very end. As for the capable refugees, they can enroll their children in private schools on condition that they first get their birth certificates.

On his way from the 10th district to Sacre Coeur Church opening doors to several refugees, a man in his forties speaks about his six year old child saying, "Hatem feels so happy when he goes to the educational classes in our region and studies with our home country resident or refugee children. Although I know that his studying will not qualify him to enter a university or be educationally upgraded or promoted, I believe this is better than ignorance."

Ibrahim Isahaq, the Sudanese journalist who has sought asylum in Egypt since 2007, agrees with Hatem's Father (Abou Hatem) about the necessity of providing education to refugees' children saying "not educating children creates raw materials for extremism and deviation which in fact happened with some children who have reached teenage and found nothing to utilize their energy in except violence."

He also says, "non registered refugees' children are located in the middle of Retardation Triangle; they are mostly poor, deprived of education and besieged by illness due to unavailability of chronic diseases treatments as a result of

"No access to full education for refugees children pushes them to utilize their emery at teenage in a way that makes us suffer later on from their quarrels and spats", Heba Qasem

Hatem's Father (Abou Hatem): Registering my son dos not mean I guaranteed his future with just a paper

unavailability of formal papers which makes them revert to NGOs, some of which provide assistance for nothing and the rest seek a hidden agenda."

Therefore, Hatem's Father (Abou Hatem) believes it is necessary to educate his child saying, "If I managed to get a resettlement permit for my family in a third county, my son will need such education even if little, at least I have infused the desire for education."

What about those children whos e



parents forget or fail to register them? Heba answers, "There are different reasons for non registry of refugees' children, either due to the fact that the parents are married with an urfi contract (customary contract) affiliated to their tribe and consequently it is a non binding contract in the Egyptian Government. As I previously mentioned, the Egyptian law does not comprise articles organizing the presence of refugees and therefore we referred to using the contract documentation article through signatures validation at the Egyptian Courts."

Although Ishaq's daughter, coming from Darfour Northern Region has formal registered papers, her father - through his

chairmanship for Charitable Fawr Region NGO which supports the Children of his Sudanese Fawr Tribe – has encountered similar cases highlighting "Some are not aware of the necessity of registration and others get bored of the long procedures."

Heba adds, "at the beginning of issuing documents for refugees and their children, we faced many difficulties as the employees are not aware of the legal situation. Yet we started to talk to specialists to clarify the situation and have found great understanding, leading to recruiting a new employee to provide awareness on refugees and their problems to resume cooperation to issue their papers. Thus, the center has succeeded in issuing several drop out birth certificates for the refugees children.

The second non registry case for refugee children, takes place when one parent or both flee from homeland without issuing a birth certificate, which surely happens for children born in

In 1951 Convention, a refugee is any person who, "...owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

unsettled and unstable regions such as Darfour or Somalia that have suffered a lot from absence of a state central government. This category has no other choice but to "determine their children's age" and according to her, "the government is not to blame as the law of each country sets the rules for registering its citizens".

The third case is for the female rapped refugees' children. After the refugee flees to save her life as well as someone else's, she finds out that the rapper will not only torture her with his deed but also will ravish the kid's identity. Heba clarifies, "As for the girl who fled her homeland after being raped, her rapper's identity cannot be identified. Consequently the employees will face a situation of having a child with an unknown father and therefore will not register the child; there is no way to register him/her.

The rapped mother who seeks resettlement in a third country will find herself facing the danger of separation from her child so long as she cannot register him. This sometimes pushes the mother to get married to a man and agree with him to register her child under his name, thus the non registered child can be issued a birth certificate.

According to the parents, registering the refugees' children does not distinguish them from their companions who sought asylum as they face the same discrimination, which made the mother we met outside the Sacre Coeur Church carrying her three year old daughter in her

hands, hesitate to speak to us and make sure to blot out her identity before speaking "Even if you were the media, how do I guarantee that you are different from those I see every day and bother my country people."

The mother continued, "I always consider the daily abuse I face and the hassles I go through because of my colour, and it scares me to think of my child living among a community that rejects her since being a kid. I hope we can go to another country that provides her normal rights; Egypt is beautiful but in fact we are not living there, we are on the fringe."

**A refugee from Darfur relates his attempt of escape to Israel
 Hend Sliem
 El-Wafd**

In the light of the problems they face in Egypt, many refugees may be obliged to escape to Israel. Unfortunately, they may face murder or arrest by the Egyptian border guards to start a new stage of suffering consisting of various aspects; for example, children may become victims without committing any sins.

The police killed his pregnant wife ... The judiciary authority releases a sentence of imprisonment for one year against him... Their child is the victim...

Siddiq Sahur Abakr Ismail, who is forty years old, is a member of Al-Fawr tribe. He is a refugee from Darfur and lives in Ain-Shams district. He was careful to meet me provided that I publish my interview with him without omitting any word. His words were tainted with feelings of pain and anger, particularly

when he talked about his wife whom, as he claimed, the Egyptian police had killed before her child without any reason though she had a seven month pregnancy!!

Siddiq said, "I worked in the fields of teaching and farming in Darfur, but I was obliged to escape to Egypt in December, 2003. Four months later, I got the status of a refugee. Seven months later, my wife joined me. During that period I worked in many careers; for example, selling some goods such as watches on pavements, but the municipality officials would frequently chase me and confiscate my goods. The real problem arose when the UN High Commission for Refugees decided to freeze the Sudanese refugees' status in August, 2004 after the southern Sudanese signed Nefasha agreement with the Sudanese government that the Sudanese refugees might be prevented from entering the commission bureau, a matter that led us to carry out a sit-in before the commission bureau located in Al-Muhandeseen district from September, 2005 until the famous 'massacre' carried out by the Egyptian police on the 30th of December, 2005."

The Egyptian Ministry of Interior declared the death of 20 Sudanese refugees during the attempt to drive them away from Al-Muhandeseen district, whereas other independent sources and eye witnesses estimated the number of victims as ranging from 50 to 150 deaths.

Siddiq added, "After ending our sit-in, I asked the Commission to allow me to return to Darfur to face the tragedy with

my dispersed family, but they refused my request and put me to the option to return either to southern Sudan or to Khartoum. Of course, my fate would be obscure in both situations as I knew nothing about what might wait me in the Sudan as I might be arrested or sentenced to death."

Siddiq continued, "I found no way out except to escape to Israel. So, I concluded an agreement with a broker who frequently visited Ain Shams district to help me escape along with my wife and child to Israel in return for 500 US dollars. We actually drove in a car along with some other refugees accompanied by the broker and another man who claimed to be a police officer until we reached Sinai where we were taken to a civil van belonging to the smugglers. We were divided into some groups to stay for two days in huts belonging to the Bedouins there. Then, the smugglers asked us to leave all our belongings including our clothes under the claim that such action would enable us to escape the security systems camping on the Israeli borders. Rather, they asked us to wait until the time suitable for escape. Women and children fell asleep on the ground out of extreme tiredness. At dawn, we were surprised to find an Egyptian police patrol approaching us and bringing our location into view with their batteries. They then showered us with shots without previous warnings. They did not stop shooting us until they had finished their ammunitions. But for running out of ammunitions, they would have killed us all. My wife, Hajjah Abbas Haroun died of a

shot in head. She died while she was asleep and had a seven-month pregnancy. I have never seen her dead body or known where or how she was buried. Moreover, the police checked us including our women and took hold of our property. Then, we, as well as our children, were frequently transported between the court and the office of the attorney general. Finally, Ismailia court released a judgment of imprisonment for one year and an LE 2000 fine against me with the charge of infiltration though we had not reached the borders area!"

Siddiq added, "My child, Samar who was 20 months old at that time spent 15 days with me in prison, but she was in a women cell with strange women, a matter that scared her and she fell sick. She was about to die, but some Darfur refugees took her and looked after her during the period I spent in prison. She suffered from a bad mood as she would undergo fits of weeping and crying, particularly during the night."

Siddiq said, "My child is 4 years old now and she always asks about her mother who was killed by the police before her eyes. I say to her, "They killed her!"

Siddiq then showed me a copy of his wife's death certificate issued by Salah El-Din Board of Health belonging to North Sinai Governorate which reads that she died at Rafah hospital because of a shot in head. He showed me another document issued by Al-Qanater prison that proves that he spent a whole year in prison with the charge of infiltration.

To have a full vision about the fact, I talked to Noura Hamed who is a refugee from Darfur and who looked after Samar after Noura's husband had brought her from prison.

Noura said, "When my husband brought Samar from the prison, she was so sick that I could not accompany her out of home for a period of 3 months as she was afflicted with diarrhea and sever skin allergy. She felt frightened whenever she sat alone. Whenever she woke up and found herself alone, she would cry and weep, so I was careful to make her sleep with me in the same bed." She added, "Whenever the child saw a woman, she called her as her mum. She has called me as her mum up to now."

The Egyptian police statement read that a Sudanese woman called Hajjah Abbas Haroun was killed and other three Sudanese women and an Ivorian woman were injured while aborting an attempt of collective infiltration through the international borders to Israel. The statement indicated that the woman's dead body was transported to Rafah hospital.

The International Relief Organization showed in its site on the Internet that the police knew the location of the refugees when a child from among the refugees cried, a matter that led the police to shoot them. It also showed that the child, Samar Siddiq, the daughter of Hajjah Abbas Haroun spent some days in detention with her father in Al-Arish city. The Organization added that the police have not made any investigations on the fact.

Darfur Refugees .. Sufferings are going on
 Lack of security and shortage of health care are the most outstanding problems...
 The law stipulates that refugees receive the same treatment received by the Egyptians
 Wrong medical treatment
 Hend Sliem
 El-Wafd

Imagine that you live in a fragile hut amidst sounds of bombs and gunfire and processes of ethnic cleansing and genocide and you are liable to have your body burnt and injected with chemicals or tormented to death while you know nothing about your family whose members have fled from collective massacres and you can do nothing but to run away leaving your family, documents and all you possess just to remain alive. This is a summary of the tragedy which millions of persons live in Sudanese Darfur region and which obliged thousands to escape to Egypt, but sufferings have not come to an end as Darfur refugees face two main problems which are lack of security and shortage of health care. I was really surprised to find them ready and sometimes keen to talk to me though they might face some problems. Perhaps this reflects their awareness that their problems will not be solved by themselves as there must be some sort of risk.

All Darfur refugees whom I met are of the same opinion that they lack health care and sometimes receive wrong medical treatment that may cause permanent physical defects and health problems, a matter emphasized by some medical documents.

Caritas Society, registered in the Social Solidarity Ministry and belonging to the International Caritas Organization, takes over the question of caring for refugees healthily and socially through a partnership between Caritas and the UN High Commission for Refugees. The Cairo office of the High Commission declared that Caritas is regarded as one of the executive partners of the commission. It gets financing from the Commission's budget that has reached 6934337 dollars this year in return for carrying out the program with which it is commissioned, but I reviewed some medical documents that establish the fact that there is a clear shortage of such care.

I met a refugee from Darfur who was afflicted with a permanent defect in her hand and leg after Caritas sent her to Heliopolis hospital to undergo a surgery there. Though the husband of that woman did not allow her to talk to journalists lest the procedures of settling them in the USA should be suspended, I managed to review the documents explaining her health condition, which exist in the Egyptian Committee for Refugees' Rights. These documents emphasize that this woman has undergone a surgery during which some bones of her pelvis were removed and then fastened on the wrist and forearm areas without getting a previous agreement from the patient or her husband, a matter that is regarded as a direct breach of the Egyptian law. Additionally, the surgery failed and

resulted in a permanent defect in the woman's hand and leg, a matter that led the Egyptian Committee for Refugees' Rights to raise a lawsuit against those responsible for the harms that afflicted her, but the woman disclaimed her lawsuit after the Commission had agreed to settle her and her family in the USA.

I also reviewed a medical report from Nasser Institute Hospital belonging to the Egyptian government that emphasizes that the Sudanese refugee Hajjah Haroun needs blood transfusion regularly, a matter that Caritas Society completely neglected and consequently the woman was aborted twice.

It seems that the refugees get a common impression that all surgeries carried out through coordination with Caritas Society end in failure.

Mr. N. S., a man who is in his fifties and leaning on a walking stick, says that he has suffered from hemiplegia since 2006 and that the medical treatment he receives in Caritas clinic is restricted to some medicines repeatedly prescribed by doctors in vain. He adds that doctors finally told him that his case requires a surgery but he fears the whole matter as he is sure that it will definitely fail and he alone will suffer from its bad outcomes.

CARITAS

I gave a visit to CARITAS to inspect the matter. Of course I was careful to hide my identity as a journalist. The refugees had been gathering in a small area in the Society located in Garden City district

since 7 p.m. and their waiting continued for long hours to meet the doctor.

I talked to a refugee from Darfur who was a university student, but he fled from Darfur before finishing his study. He told me that he underwent torment in the Sudanese prisons. He then uncovered his leg to show me the marks of burning inflicted on his body that I personally got scared. He also told me that he had been injected with unknown injections in prison, a matter that still arouses his worries, particularly these injections led to the erosion of the backbone of his previous prison mate, who discovered later that such injections were chemicals. He told me that he reported the whole matter to the doctor working in Caritas clinic, but the doctor referred him to a psychiatrist, justifying such action by saying that psychiatric medicine was more important than!!

I then talked to a Darfur refugee who is in his forties and leaning on a walking stick. He told me that he was injured while he was in Darfur. He added that Caritas clinic had given him a walking stick and some medicines, but he did not recover, a matter that led him to give a second visit to the clinic that referred him to an orthopedist. I made an offer of assistance to accompany him to Al-Hilal Orthopedics Hospital. When the doctor examined his X-rays, he told us that he could not diagnose the case well and that he needed more X-rays and examinations to diagnose the case. This made me wonder if the doctor working in

Caritas clinic had given the medicine to the patient without diagnosing his case!

Noura Ahmad Hamed, who is a refugee from Darfur and a housewife, says that Caritas lacks medical requirements. She adds that the doctor has got nothing but a stethoscope, so he asks patients about what they may suffer from and prescribes medicine for them even without telling them about the nature of their illnesses.

First medical center

I actually gave a visit to Caritas clinic that was extremely simple. There I saw nothing except for some simple tools such as a stethoscope and a blood pressure gauge (sphygmomanometer).

There I met the medical consultant of CARITAS Society, Dr. Magdy Francis who was extremely friendly and helpful to me. Dr. Magdy said, "Caritas clinic is a primary medical center equipped with primary diagnostic tools, so we can not perform any surgery or treat teeth here. We just examine the patients and prescribe medicine for them or send them to specialists or hospitals contracting with the society if the case is bad. It is worth mentioning that Caritas pays 75% of the price of medicine if it is not over 50 LE. However, some pressing cases get medicine whose price may be over 50 LE, or instead we prescribe another cheaper medicine for such cases. Also, Caritas pays all the costs of medical treatment for those suffering from chronic diseases. It also undertakes all the costs of treating the patients suffering from kidney failure."

Abd El-Hafez Hasan Shaayah, a social specialist in AMERA (Africa and Middle-East Refugee Association), can best explain the whole matter as he says, "Caritas has a limited financial roof that is related to the budget it gets from the High Commission, so it tries to manage medicine economically. This means that the doctor depends on the principle of experiment as he prescribes a medicine for the patient without making any analyses or examinations to be sure of the diagnosis. If the patient does not recover, the society refers him to a specialized doctor. Also, the doctor may prescribe some medicines with unknown names as a sort of saving money, a matter that makes the patient doubtful about the effectiveness of such medicines. Moreover, Caritas clinic does not consult more than a doctor concerning any surgery to be sure that the patient needs such surgery and be sure of its side effects, a matter that often causes some problems." He adds, "When we have some of these problems, Caritas has nothing to do except for offering apologies. However, the Society began to devote more attention to the whole matter than in the past!!"

The Sudanese are treated like the Egyptians

The agreements signed between Egypt and the Sudan stipulate that the Sudanese get the same rights of the Egyptians concerning medical treatment and education.

I tried to conduct a practical experiment through accompanying the Sudanese refugee, Sadeq Muhammad to Al-Hilal Hospital located in Ramses district. I introduced him as a refugee from Sudanese Darfur region who works with me in an accounting office. First, the examination tickets clerk asked for a double price as a foreigner, so I told him he is a refugee and his financial abilities are limited. The clerk asked me to inquire about the matter in the public relations office where I was told that he was a foreigner and consequently he had to pay a double price. After long discussions, the public relations officer was impressed by his conditions and asked me to go to one of the hospital officials who sympathized with the case and phoned those responsible for bookkeeping who finally told him that the Sudanese are treated like the Egyptian citizens, which means that these agreements are actually carried out, but the employees working in the hospitals are still in need of having knowledge about these agreements on a large scale so as not to deprive a lot of the Sudanese patients of medical treatment because of high costs, particularly that the number of refugees and those seeking political refuge registered in the UN High Commission for Refugees in Egypt has reached 22373 persons..

Street Terrorism

Darfur refugees whom I met emphasized that there are some Sudanese armed gangs who attack them to take hold of their property.

Muhammad Abd El-Rahman Adam, a refugee from Darfur, says, "Darfur refugees living in Ain-Shams district suffer from Sudanese gangs. Most of these gangs are from southern Sudan and are supported by the Sudanese government. They attack the houses of those refugees and take hold of their property. They are armed and carry big knives. They might cut hands and legs or cause permanent physical defects. When we reported such to the police, they said, 'You all are Sudanese and have to solve your problems by yourselves.'"

I then went to a café in Ain-Shams district. It is said that the members of these gangs sit there. Actually, I saw some persons with African features, but I did not notice any arms with them. Moreover, I did not notice any marks of identification that can distinguish them from other African refugees living in Egypt.

Also, I managed to get a video that is said to have filmed the Sudanese gangs while attacking the Darfur refugees. In a shot of this video, there are some persons with African features attacking other persons who resemble them. Though this shot does not represent a hard evidence, it should not be neglected.

General Farouk Lasheen, the chief of Cairo Investigation General Administration, comments on these claims with statements mixed with some nervousness as saying, "There has not been any attack and we have not received any official reports about such attacks."

Simultaneously, Ahmad Badawy the board chairman of the Egyptian Committee for Refugees admitted that there are some Sudanese gangs in Al-Maadi and Ain-Shams districts, who call themselves "Lost Boy" and "Out of Law" and launch attacks against refugees with African origins, but the problem is that such accidents haven't been officially established yet.

Mahmoud Faraj, the manager of the team of communication with the society in AMERA, says that one of the functions of the organization is to help the refugees report to the police in case they are attacked, but the problem lies in the fact that the refugees can not identify the persons who attack them, a matter that interrupts the course of having an investigation about such accidents by the police.

The refugees' rights

There remains a question; what is the legal responsibility of Egypt towards these refugees?

Prof. Nabil Helmy, a professor of international law and the former dean of the Faculty of Law, Zagazig University says that we should differentiate between two types of refugees; the refugees who seek refuge with the UN High Commission for Refugees. The Commission is responsible for settling these refugees in another country and not to leave them in Egypt. As for the commitments of the Egyptian government in such case, they are not commitments towards the refugees, but towards the commission, which means that its responsibility towards

a refugee is the same responsibility towards any other foreigner; for example, the government undertakes the responsibility of treating them in some urgent cases unless the Commission pays the costs of treating them. He adds that the other type of refugees refers to those who seek refuge in a particular country; in case such country accepts their request of refuge, they get all the rights given to the citizens of such country. He explains that the Sudanese refugees have a different status, as they get the same treatment of the Egyptians concerning medical treatment or education according to agreements signed between the two countries. With regard to those having refuge requests, they get the same privileges of the refugees as long as the Commission or the country agrees to examine their documents.

It is worth mentioning that Cairo office of the Commission says that its main role is confined to coordinating with other governments to make sure that the refugee gets protection in the hosting country and that he will not be driven away or sent back to his homeland. The Commission has executive partners that offer limited medical, financial and social support through finance offered by the Commission.

The period I spent with the Darfur refugees may not exceed 14 hours over 3 days, but it was enough to know a lot about the matters I was ignorant of regarding this issue. Many people may think that Egypt has several problems and

that it is not ready to undertake any responsibilities for the refugees, but we have to admit that those people were obliged to flee from murder, torment and genocide.

The African refugees on the eastern Egyptian borders ... escape from wars and poverty to the "deadly bullets"
Wael Mamdouh
EI-Dostour

The police bullets that do not care for any one whether he is a "Bedouin" or an "African" and the government disregard of the development of Sinai generated the systematic activity of people trafficking across the Egyptian eastern borders to the Israeli side. This is a daily continuous activity supported by the dollars paid by Africans which are the only source of income for the Bedouins of the border areas and its tax is the intruders' blood shed everyday near the wired line separating Egypt from Israel.

Tens of Africans of different nationalities fall every day in an unprecedented manner. This is no more than a "cool" number in the police data and the news which unveils their killing by the Egyptian police bullets at the Egyptian - Israeli borders during their attempt to infiltrate the

Poverty and unemployment make the sons of the border tribes facilitate the penetration of the Africans to Israel ... and the "random" police bullets do differentiate between a "Bedouin" or an "African" as they kill both on the border line

borders. The trafficking of Africans became the new source of income for the Bedouin inhabitants at Sinai border line. This came in the aftermaths of the well marketed white slavery trade represented in trafficking Russian women from the former Soviet Union to Israel across Egypt. These women were used to work in Israeli prostitution networks. This activity took place in the nineties of the last century till Taba bombings in 2004. These operations stopped to pave the way to the Africans trafficking operations. The difference this time is that the police bullets were never directed to the prostitution Mafia at borders, but they are currently directed to killing tens of people from Black Africa in which poverty and civil wars are abundant.

In spite of the fact that there is no difference between the trafficking of "White Slavery" and that of the "Africans" except in the color of the skin and the motive behind this trafficking, the middleman is the same and the roads and passages of trafficking are the same in the two cases. The major difference is that events escalated suddenly in the recent years that witnessed the events of firing bullets randomly at several infiltrators in a semi-daily routine. This escalation took place after the Bedouin inhabitants at the border line began to depend on the trafficking of Africans as a source of income and after new groups of tribes took part in this "game". Therefore, the traffickers now vary from some ordinary young men who are experts in the roads and passages of

deserts and borders, professional traffickers living in the middle of Sinai to a great number of professionals specialized in trafficking drugs and weapons who are more ferocious, knowledgeable of the districts and most of them were sentenced in absentia with imprisonment for years more than their expected ages by doubles.

Some people attributed the reasons for the increased shootings of the African infiltrators in the last months to the exaggerated security measures and the policemen's rush to randomly shoot bullets at the borders without warnings. Yet, it should not be disregarded that the expansion of the trafficking operations in great numbers and the appearance of new categories of Bedouin tribes at the borders caused the increase of such shootings at African infiltrators on the borders.

Khalil Jabr, one of the inhabitants of Sheikh Zuwaid border city and the independent researcher on tribal affairs, said "All of Sinai economy is now built on trafficking to and from Palestine". Jabr stressed that the attitude of Sinai inhabitants with regards to trafficking people is a natural reaction to the governmental carelessness and the exaggerated security measures against Sinai and its inhabitants especially in the border line area. He added that "it is not reasonable that the government makes a security siege around the inhabitants of Sinai, ignores to provide them with the level of services they need and does not provide them with job opportunities, and it

expects them to starve without making any protest."

Before trafficking Africans, Sinai border village inhabitants also suffered because of the repeated random shootings that reached their peak in 2007 when the police soldiers fired at two persons of the Sawarka tribe. This tribe influence extends between Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid border cities. The two tribe men were killed near one of the ambushes that were spread at the roads leading to their village close to the border line. This event caused Al-Sawarka rage and they made a sit-in near the barbed wires separating the Egyptian borders from Israel near "Karam Abou Salem" passage. They were centered in 20 kilometers along the south of the passage directly at the borders. The Sawarka condemned the police random shootings of the tribe men.

Following the interference of some tribal nobles, the Sawarka ended their sit-in on condition that the security bodies promise not to repeat such events, release the tribe men who committed no crimes and to set a trial for the officers and soldiers responsible for killing the two Bedouin young men. After the Sawarka ended their set-in, some of these requirements were fulfilled. But the police again shot two of the "Tarabeen" tribe which is located in the middle of Sinai near one of the police ambushes in the middle of Sinai. The Tarabeen went to the border line as the Sawarka did. They made a two day set-in but it was more violent. The police retaliated by killing some more 3 persons

of the tribe and buried their corpses in a dump near the borders next to "Al-Azarek" police station. The Tarabeen discovered that and their rage erupted. They besieged the police station and detained 25 policemen but the officer who shot the three young men fled away immediately after this event

After a series of intermediations and negotiations and before events escalate more violently, the Tarabeen ended their set-in stipulating the same conditions; not to arrest people randomly, not to expand the arrest campaigns on innocent tribe men, not to shoot Bedouins randomly and to set a trial for the officers and soldiers responsible for killing the Tarabeen men. Yet, these promises were not fulfilled in any of these two events. None of those who shot the Sawarka or Tarabeen men were set in a trial till now despite the power of the two tribes and their influence in Sinai eastern border area. This really unveils the bad conditions of African immigrants who are killed daily at the borders and whose blood is shed in vain without punishing those responsible for that. The tribes neither protect them nor ask for revenge and the police do not punish their killers.

The African infiltrators across the borders with Israel belong to several African countries the most prominent of which are the Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia. The conditions of these infiltrators vary, but their fates are similar. The infiltration trip ends in one of two options; the most optimistic one is to

peacefully end in passing to the other side where there are dreams of affluence and noble life while the other option starts with the random police bullets on the borders and ends with the African infiltrator in Arish or Rafah Hospitals either injured or murdered.

It is surprising that a remarkable percentage of those African infiltrators are refugees in Egypt. They came into Egypt through various means and they escaped from the dangers threatening their lives in their home countries, especially the refugees from Darfur in southern Sudan, the Eritrean youths who deserted military conscription and the Somalians escaping from the civil war. Most of these refugees fall under the umbrella of the United Nations High Commission of Refugees in Egypt. They are either actual refugees who carry the "green" refuge card or they are on the waiting list and carry the "yellow" card which indicates that the Commission is still researching whether the refuge conditions apply on them so as to include them with more than 43 thousand people who are either refugees or refuge applicants.

Most surprisingly is that a large percentage of those infiltrators have green cards which means that they fall actually under the umbrella of the Commission. This also indicates that they should enjoy a series of privileges which their counterparts who are not under the umbrella of the Commission or those who are on the waiting list will not have. Yet, such refugees do not find a job opportunity

which secures a source of income which enables them to lead a decent life on a new land. Even the financial aids provided by the Commission are very minor and they could not enable the refugees to continuously pay the rent of a simple house in a poor Cairo district. In addition, it is impossible to find job opportunities for those refugees in a country where the number of unemployed people ranges between 4 and 5 millions as per the statistics of the Information and Decision Support Center of the Egyptian Cabinet.

The deteriorating economic conditions of the Sinai people – especially the Bedouins of the border line – are similar to the conditions of the refugees and illegal African immigrants. Such conditions led to creating a seemingly balanced alliance which depends on mutual interests. In the light of such alliance, the Bedouins utilize the Africans and consider them as nothing more than a bunch of dollars. The Bedouin trafficking in Africans through the borders only takes into consideration the agreed-upon amount. He never cares for the safety of the infiltrator and he leaves him at the nearest inlet which may allow him to cross the borders to the other side. The Bedouin returns home and leaves the infiltrator whose fate relies on his ability to pass through the borders before the border guards see him. If the infiltrator managed to cross the Egyptian borders before the guards see him, he will save his life. Otherwise, death shall be his fate.

It was not easy to contact the traffickers of the Africans and gain their trust to know

the details of the death journey. Yet, the mediation of some of the tribe men in the border area extending from Rafah to Sheikh Zuwaid cities and the blood relation which ties them with some traffickers enabled us to make an interrupted contact with some of them. Hence, we moved to the border area of the villages Shabanah and Al-Mahdiyyah where the African infiltrators are received in one of the Bedouin houses scattered throughout the border line or in the straw-made "huts" which are one of the most prominent signs in the area. The African infiltrators arrive at these huts after a long journey through abrupt, bumpy and unpaved desert routes coming from the western bank of the Suez Canal whether they originally came from Cairo or the deserts of the Red Sea Governorate after they infiltrated through the borders at Halayeb and Shalateen. At the end and after a long journey, the Africans stay at these temporary hideouts until it is possible to take them to the border inlet through which they will infiltrate.

"The black goats" is the common name of the African infiltrators usually used by the traffickers. This is more of a description than a nomenclature. The traffickers are of the opinion that the Africans are nearer to frightened young goats whether while they wait for their fate in the pre-infiltration hideouts or while they are in the rear box of the four-wheeled vehicles used for transporting them through the desert bumpy routes to the safest place near the border point from which they infiltrate.

The traffickers unconsciously talk about some "black goats" they have for "sale" and they mean the infiltrators who wait for an opportunity to escape through the area extending for 70 kilometers between Al-Contilla and Wadi Al-Amr. This area has bumpy and mountainous features which facilitate infiltration through its border wire. The prices of trafficking Africans vary according to their nationalities. Trafficking a Sudanese from Sinai to Israel costs between USD 1000 and 1500, and the Eritrean USD 2000, while it increases in case of the Nigerian as it reaches USD 2500 or 3000. The rate of infiltration ranges between 1000 to 1500 infiltrators per month. Within the past months, it reached 10.000 infiltrators per month.

We must have an expert in the area routes to lead us through the extensive desert lands without causing any troubles to the trafficking gangs which interests intersect and which impose their dominance over the whole area. A person belonging to one of the famous tribes in the area must accompany us to secure our march and help us avoid any harm by traffickers if they discovered our identity. He would do so under the pretext that we are his guests and to avoid falling under the sovereignty of the martial law which governs everybody here. As a matter of fact, our journey started near Shabanah village in foot and we walked for more than two hours during which we covered a distance of more than ten kilometers. As soon as we reached the eastern outskirts of the village, our relation was completely cut off

with the Egyptian mobile phone companies. We were surprised with the Israeli network Orang on our cell phones. Thus, the domain of the Egyptian networks came to an end. This was confirmed when the international code 002 preceded each Egyptian number I tried to call.

Then, we knew that the traffickers of the Africans use the Israeli Orang lines that are difficult to be traced by the Egyptian side or satellite-based Thuraya cellular phones according to their ability to organize the communications between each other after making amendments to their phone so as to operate "without lighting LCDs". This is because most of their infiltration operations are made at night and the lighting LCD may be seen at many kilometers distance. My companion told me that the traffickers began to disable the cellular phone LCDs after a policeman shot dead one of the traffickers in the head after locating his place through the light of his cellular phone LCD.

They also use signs and descriptions of their own to locate the infiltration area without being discovered by strangers such as "coils" to indicate the border barber wire (the description came from the shape of the wires that are coiled around themselves) and the sign "010" which means that crossing will be near one of the control points neighboring a well known telecommunications tower on the boundary line as well as many other phrases no one can understand or interpret but themselves.

We continued moving towards the border wire and walked through totally unpaved roads and out of any security control. We arrived at one of the active trafficking areas and a number of 4x4 cars, accidentally, appeared on our way without traffic plates and their backs are covered with thick linen fixed by ropes. My companion said that these cars belong to traffickers who escaped from imprisonment in absentia sentences and they are living in these rugged desert roads and at the same times are involved in many activities related mostly to trafficking.

In our way towards the borders, we encountered many cars loaded with fuel and goods heading to Rafah which is not much far from the area under the protection of small 4x4 cars to arrive at their destination in the Palestinian Gaza Strip through the tunnels. My companion disclosed to me the secret behind the detection of many African infiltrators and their vulnerability to police shots. He confirmed that at the beginning the infiltration operations were limited and the traffickers were securing the infiltrators until they reach the other side of the borders and then get back to their places. But with the expansion of the infiltration operations and the increase in the infiltrators' numbers, the traffickers were forced to get the African infiltrators to the nearest inlet in the borders and ask them to cross quickly and get back to their places and they may be detected and shot by the Egyptian policemen.

In our way, we approached some bungalows made for the reception and gathering of African infiltrators before trafficking them and no one knows that there are infiltrators inside for there are many people in the bordering zone who reject the idea of trafficking Africans this way. Therefore, some tribe men keep silent with regards to those who are working in trafficking Africans as a profession and a source of living to secure their lives. Those persons resort to smuggle a small group of infiltrators or refugees every month to the other side to secure appropriate source of living. But at the same time, they endanger the lives of the infiltrators as they only get the infiltrators to the borders and they either cross to the other side or shot by the police, if the police reached their first.

We reached a bordering zone near Karem Abu Salem crossing point and my companion pointed to the border inlet through which Africans infiltrate. This is the nearest and most dangerous inlet. More professional traffickers who know the area well use other inlets located to the south in the most rugged and least secured area that are graduated in terms of weakness till the Contilla area in central Sinai. We get back through the same way which is not marked by any signs or features except those known by our guide who move as if the place is full of road signs. After an hour or more, while we were walking we met a 4x4 car and it seems that the driver knows the guide and

drove us to the nearest inhabited area to our starting point at Shabanah village.

I was able to make short interviews with many Sudanese nationals who are living in Sinai and we were surprised to know that some of them are refugees registered in the UN Commission. One of them named "M" talked about the killed persons, the Sudanese nationals in particular, on the borders and confirmed that the government notifies the Embassy with any killed person if identified, but the Embassy does not care in most cases. Instead, the Sudanese nationals living in the area take responsibility, driven by humanitarian feeling, bury their dead bodies after the government abandoned them. "M" added that he himself buried some murdered persons in Al-Arish and Sheikh Zuwaid cemeteries. One Sudanese refugee, who buried some murdered persons, added that in most cases their injuries are serious and are concentrated in the upper parts of the body and this indicates that the shooter's target is to kill the infiltrator not to obstacle him. He asked why the shooter did not shoot him in the leg or otherwise arrest him?! And he confirmed that this is an inhumane conduct,

Sudanese nationals who are living in Sheikh Zuwaid told about their colleague Yusuf Mohamed who lived with them in the city as a refugee for more than 15 years before being frustrated because of the absence of stable living resources. This is because most of the Sudanese nationals are working in unstable handicrafts such as construction and

painting on an irregular basis. They affirmed that Yusuf tried to infiltrate across the borders at the end of the last year but he was killed and buried beside his colleagues who were unidentified in Sheikh Zuwaid cemetery.

The shooting was not denied only by the Sudanese nationals but also by the inhabitants of Sheikh Zuwaid who accidentally watched the injured persons and all of them confirmed that all these persons were shot in deadly parts of the body. Mohamed Al-Meneiy, a human rights activist and a member of the Democratic Front in Sinai, added that the policemen shoot the infiltrator without a prior warning indicating that they have instructions to set fire at suspects who approach the borders. Al-Meneiy surprised us with his statement that the soldier who kills an infiltrator is rewarded by his seniors and is given a leave from service.

Al-Meneiy said "None of the shooters were presented to trial although many of them kill the infiltrators intentionally instead of arresting them". "These incidents indicate that there are clear and explicit instructions to the policemen in the border points to randomly shoot the infiltrator without trying to arrest and present them to a fair trial according to the Egyptian laws and not to kill them in this inhumane way", he added.

A young physician in Al-Arish public hospital, who described the injuries of the African infiltrators as "deadly", confirmed the above statement and added that the injuries type and number of bullets in the

infiltrators' bodies confirm that they were randomly shot and sensitive parts of their bodies were targeted. The young physician, who belongs to a well-known tribe in Northern Sinai, blew up a surprise that the injured persons are heavily guarded and chained with steel chains in their beds while receiving their treatment. "If the person is injured in the hand, he is chained from the leg to the lower pillar of the bed and if the injury is in the leg, he is chained from the hand to the upper pillar of the bed", he added.

Another physician in Al-Arish Public Hospital, in which there were 4 dead bodies of unidentified African infiltrators in the last two months, affirmed that the heavy guard continues until the injured persons are completely recovered before they are removed by the Northern Sinai Security Directorate and here, the hospital has no relation with them.

It was supposed to meet a group of infiltrators near Al-Mahdiyyah village which is located between Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid after a mediator paved the way for the meeting with them while they are at their traffickers' hideout without photographing or recording. But without knowing the place of the meeting where they are gathered, I had to go alone on the way leading to the village. But my companion in my journey in Sinai rejected the idea and warned me against their reaction if they suspected my identity or if they have fears that I may betray them and tell the security, and he asked me to

go with me as a warrantor as he is one of the tribe men and to ensure my safety.

But the traffickers totally refused the idea despite the attempts made by the mediator who paved the way to contact them at first. The matter was ended with refusal and the traffickers allowed me to talk to two infiltrators by phone. I talked with an infiltrator named Abd El Malek who is a Sudanese national and the Eritrean Samuel according to their statement. I asked the first person about the reason that made him endanger his life and may lead to his death and he answered me that he faced death at the hands of the Sudanese army in the south but he survived and then he moved to Egypt with a number of his colleagues and that the absence of living resources in Egypt means death for him as well. He said "If I succeeded to cross the borders, I will have an honorable life, but if I failed, this will be God's unavoidable will". However, Samuel was so cautious and talked with me nervously and confirmed that he has no confidence in journalists and that his life or death is not a concern to me but my only concern is to have news precedence. He affirmed that he is not willing to talk with me before he left the phone to the mediator who told me that the call is ended and he closed the line.

After my journey has ended and shortly after my arrival at Cairo, the mediator who prepared for the meeting told me that the group which I was supposed to meet and talked to two of its members has infiltrated

in the evening of the same day. And the traffickers agreed at the beginning to meet me but they had only few hours to cross the borders shortly before the start of the football match between Egypt and Algeria which dominated everybody's concern. He affirmed that the police opened fire on the infiltrators and shot Samuel, the Eritrean, dead, the person who refused to talk to me and the police injured two other persons while 4 persons succeeded in crossing the borders to the Israeli side.

Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists and Plymouth Brethren are Unwelcome Sects
Emad Khalil
Watani

He answered me in extreme anxiety saying: "where did you obtain my phone number?" This was the answer I received from one of Jehovah's Witnesses followers after I succeeded in getting his phone number and expressed my wish to meet him to understand the problems he is facing because of his belief. After he insisted not to declare his name or workplace due to security reasons, I agreed to his request after I convinced him that my purpose is not to criticize him but I just want to explain the facts. He preferred not to be known and said: "I don't know the reason for this hatred expressed by the Christian sects towards Jehovah's Witnesses. This is our free belief and we don't seek to induce others as claimed by the leaders of the other sects. My relatives and friends know that I'm a Jehovah's Witnesses follower but the lies and half facts make people loathe us and link us

with international Zionism especially in an Arab society that is very hateful to any Zionist feature". The physician denied the claims that they don't pay taxes saying: "I have a special registered clinic and I pay taxes on a regular basis and fulfill the duties and responsibilities towards the state of Egypt as I am Egyptian up to the pith. But as for our rejection of blood transfer, it is a doctrine in our belief and I attended a world conference in Italy supporting the idea that using blood alternatives is much better than blood transfer. I hope that people leave us live in peace as we do no harm any one and all we do is to follow a belief that we think it is the right one. "We believe in God Almighty, Jehovah, who arranges for everything and the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The complex-designed miracles of the universe are in themselves a logical evidence on the existence of an intelligent and very omnipotent creator. Similarly, as the deeds of people reflect their character, the deeds of Jehovah reflect His qualities. The Holy Bible tells us that: "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" Romans 1:20.

On the other side, reaching the Adventists sect was much easier. At first, I asked for an appointment to meet one of the Adventist Copt officials and there was a quick answer and I met the priest Anwar

Iskandar, the secretary of the Adventist Copts in Egypt who said: "the word "Adventist" generally refers to someone who believes in the Second Advent of Jesus (popularly known as the Second coming) and this is not a novelty but it is rather a correction of the Christian belief that exists in the Holy Bible (the New Testament and the Old Testament) and we are officially recognized in Egypt not as one of the sects but as a movement for correction and revival of the Right. It is like an oil field that is discovered; and this does not mean that the oil is newly invented, rather it existed a long time ago and is recently discovered. We share the basic Christian doctrines such as the sacrosanct trinity (the father, the son and the holy spirit), the revelation of the Holy Bible and the Redemption doctrine by the redeemer Jesus Christ. However, the differences are man-made and many claims about the Adventists are half facts and are completed with other artificial halves such as the claims that we sanctify Saturday and tend more to Judaism than Christianity but the truth is that we are very devoted Christians, have faith in the Holy Bible (the New Testament and the Old Testament) published by the Bible Society of Egypt, we call our place of worship a "Church" not a "Synagogue" and our religion in the ID cards is "Christian". We sanctify Saturday not as a Jewish trend but instead as a commitment of a divine doctrine of the Ten Commandments of God revealed and delivered to Moses (to whom God spoke). So, why do we neglect this commandment and stick to the other

nine ones? In the New Testament, the Christ called himself the Lord of Saturday as he said: "For the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day", Matthew 12:8.

I said to him that Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the See of St. Mark considers that the Adventists who believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ and his stay in Jerusalem are not Christians for many of their beliefs stem from Judaism. He added that they are not also Jews but they only believe in the Jewish doctrines. The Pope affirmed that Egyptian children of non-orthodox mothers must not be deprived from Baptism and Eucharist rituals in the Egyptian churches indicating that those children in this case are not responsible for the fathers' sin of marrying from outside the sect and the Middle East Council of Churches rejects the dialogue proposal of the Adventists in 1989 as the council considered them as non-Christians.

Anwar Iskandar answered me concerning the rejection of the dialogue saying: "every church or council is free to accept the others and such rejection of dialogue is not a disgrace for us but it is instead a source of pride. And this shows that we are ready to communicate with others and they are free to consider us as non-Christians because even these decisions issued by the council are not a decisive judgment on our credibility and the Holy Bible is our source of the right and the wrong. Concerning cooperation, there are always opened minds that accept us and

other narrow minds that reject us and refuse to marry from our girls. I consider that this is a right decision because marriage is based on mutual thinking. We have 20 churches all over the governorates of Egypt and they are Egyptian national churches and we do not practice terror, violence or intimidation to attract anyone of the other sects as we rely on the freedom of choice by way of convincing. I personally have an experience in this respect as I was raised in the Evangelical church and during my youth, I believed in this doctrine and the sanctification of Sabbath. Although my family was open minded but they and my friends rejected my new belief. But due to my concern with the satisfaction of God, I resisted this rejection and that helped me to endure any resistance of rejection from others".

As regards the Plymouth Brethren, it is a protestant sect with a limited number in Egypt. I discovered by chance that one of my friends, a journalist, named Emad Habib is a follower of this sect who said that "the Plymouth Brethren entered Egypt in 1885 and they do not believe in the priesthood. They have no problems in terms of marriage because they often marry from inside the sect and reject the orthodox marriage and reject marrying from other sects. They prohibit TV watching, ask women to cover their heads when entering the church and prohibit make-up for women as they believe it is illicit. They are about 10,000 people and they have 20

servants in the churches all over Egypt and their gatherings are mostly concentrated in upper Egypt especially Asyut and Minya in which he was born. Marriage is consummated inside their churches by the servants through prayer, preaching and documentation like any traditional marriage".

On his side, priest Refaat Fikry, member of the Evangelical Synod and shepherd of the Evangelical Church at Ard Shereif in Shubra, said:" the Adventists is a sect recognized by the state but for us as Christians, we do not recognize them like Jehovah's Witnesses because their thoughts tend towards the Jewish doctrine to the extent that Jehovah is the name of God in the Old Testament. Therefore, they are rejected by all Christian sects. Any way, they have the right to survive, exist, and believe but have no right to be considered as Christians as they adopt false and destructive thoughts such as the prohibition of blood donation and that Christ is archangel Michael. If the church welcomes dialogue, it will be with ecclesiastically recognized sects and consequential requirements in terms of rejecting marriage from all sects shall be taken into consideration."

Priest Morkos Aziz of the Virgin Mary Church of the Orthodox Copts in New Jersey in the USA said: "The aid provided by the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses to the poor should be refused because such aid is the way to hell and they demolish morals and virtue by spreading the doctrine of nudity, atheism

and exotic doctrines such as marrying one's mother, sister or other unmarriageable relatives. The aims sought by the international Zionism through its different organizations are:

1. The establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine and taking Jerusalem as a capital from which they reign the world
2. The elimination of religions by the propagation of rebellion and insurgence among the believers and religious leaders
3. To drive away the role of governments by:

a-Exciting and feeding the spirit of revolution and rebellion among the working class against the government

b-Provoking internal tumult through the incitement of sectarian, racial or ideological tendencies

These Zionist organizations follow secret and serpentine methods in terms of finance and bringing money from the USA. Using the same methods, the Zionist organizations hold their secret meeting away from sight and observation and use the same methods adopted by secret bodies such as the formation of cells, irregular venues for holding the meetings, and sneaking into houses and societies. These organizations have special bulletins and regular reports circulated to the members and they have their secret codes in communication and correspondence.

In this respect, a magazine affiliated to one of these organizations "Watch Tower" indicated to that issue saying: "with such parable and simile, the report passed the

watch circles and no one could notice the real intended meaning". So, We ask them; if they are really honest people who work in the public, strive to spread an honest and upright message and if they advocate sound doctrine and honest principles, why do they feel afraid? And why do they have recourse to fraud and eluding from watching? They feel sinful and they are afraid from the consequences of their actions and, therefore, work in the darkness. These societies include:

Jehovah's Witnesses, the doctrine established by Charles Russell late in the past century in parallel with the birth of the Zionist movement. "Jehovah" is the Hebrew name for "God". This movement is a Zionist extremist group that distributes its venomous publications, exotic instructions, heterodoxies, deadly heresies and destructive principles. Therefore, we warn the sons of our beloved nation from these wolves who are in sheep' clothing. My aim is to find out the reality of this group and other groups in order to be aware of their intentions and so as not to be deceived by their sweet talk or think well of brilliant names that hide the worst intentions behind.

Jehovah's Witnesses society made the demolition of beliefs and religions at the top of the tools they use to realize their ends and complete their message and, therefore, they criticized them all and described them as being apostasy, aberration and they are eventually apt to evanescence and disappearance. Their book titled "God is truthful" in page 27

expresses this fact "step by step, the eye of people, men and women who have righteous hearts will see the effects religions have introduced in the world such as chaos and disturbance". They do not abstain from explaining this object. Christianity did not come to incite seditions and rebellion but instead it taught us how to be good citizens. It taught us not to resist dominant rulers because this is ranked by God. So, we have to submit to any man-made arrangement for the sake of God. It taught us "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme" 1st Peter 2:13. It, therefore, commands us to cooperate with them and that the spirit of love and fraternity dominates. We pray for them so that God shall bestow them with wisdom and uprightness. (1st Timothy 2:1, 2 and 4)

This was the opinion of the Coptic Orthodox church, and the Catholic Church agreed with that opinion as represented by Rafik Grish the official spokesman of the church who affirmed the above point of view. We tried to explore the secularist Copts' point of view who object to some systems in the Orthodox church. We received a reply from Kamal Zakher the coordinator of the secularist trend in the Orthodox church who said: "the Adventist Brethren are Egyptians of full citizenship and they have the right to embrace any belief they choose and we, in turn, have the right to refute any beliefs they call for which are in contradiction with the three sects of the church in terms of the nature

of Jesus Christ, the second coming and the day of judgment and these matters are dealt by many Coptic writers and his holiness Pope Shenouda III.

For Jehovah's Witnesses, they interpret Christianity based on a Jewish background and thus, they interpret the Old Testament prophecies literally in a manner that contradicts with the spirit of the New Testament. They also share intellectually with the heresies of the Ecumenical councils which were refuted by reason and divine evidence.

As regards the social dimension, we cannot necessarily accept marriage with them for the future consequences on the family and because my belief is very clear concerning the nature of Jesus Christ and this stance cannot be renounced as this means the abandonment of the established beliefs. I think that the intellectual consistency is the basis of building a stable family.

About the Media Diversity Institute

What do we do?

The Media Diversity Institute (MDI) works internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity. It aims to prevent the media from intentionally or unintentionally spreading prejudice, intolerance and hatred which can lead to social tensions, disputes and violent conflict. MDI encourages instead, fair, accurate, inclusive and sensitive media coverage in order to promote understanding between different groups and cultures.

The rationale

Although the media often aggravate divisions in society, exclude moderate and minority voices, and foment conflict, they also possess an enormous capacity to contribute to the solution of these very problems.

People experience diversity in many ways: race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, income, and so on. Diversity can inspire social and economic progress, vibrant communities, and a richness of life. All too often, however, diversity engenders inequality, discrimination, suspicion, repression, and violent conflict. Journalists and media organisations hold a unique power to shape our experience of diversity. Through their actions, they can help promote understanding, or they can exacerbate divisions among different groups and cultures.

How do we do it?

MDI applies a comprehensive and holistic approach of engagement, education and training of all the actors in society who can influence media coverage of diversity. These include: media decision makers (owners, editors, & managers); journalists; journalism academics & students; civil society organisations (CSOs) concerned with diversity issues; and governmental & intergovernmental organisations. MDI employs the following means in order to achieve its goals:

- **Media decision-makers conferences** bring editors, managers and media owners together to explore the importance of good diversity coverage for the societies that they serve.
- **Journalism workshops** provide theoretical and practical training for journalists on covering diversity, minority and human rights issues.
- **Strengthening community media organisations** through providing education and training in all basic aspects of running a media organisation.
- Introducing **Reporting Diversity courses** into journalism schools and faculties.
- Providing **media relations and advocacy training** for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on how to use the media to overcome negative and inaccurate portrayals of their communities.
- A wide range of **manuals and resource materials** are produced and published by MDI.
- Conducting **research and media monitoring** studies to identify problem areas and recommendations for action.
- Running the **Global Media Diversity Network (GMDN)**, made up of like minded organisations.
- Provision of a **web portal** which includes news and resources, plus networking, blogging and debating facilities, for those involved in the media & diversity field.

Where do we work?

MDI has worked in Western, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, the former Soviet States, West Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South East Asia.

More information

www.media-diversity.org