

Middle East **Solidarity**

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Egypt's military dictator: not welcome here



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Mahienour by Hossam el-Hamalawy

Egyptian revolutionary socialist Hossam el-Hamalawy has long used his camera as a weapon in the fight against dictatorship, inspiring activists around the world with his images of street protests and workers' strikes.

This portrait of jailed revolutionary socialist Mahienour el-Masry shows a different side to his work, focussed on the individuals who make history from below, rather than the crowd.

Hossam's portraits can be viewed on his Flickr account: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/elhamalawy/albums/72157603660566545>

Read more about the campaign for Mahienour on pages 4 and 23

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Illustration: Ashraf Omar



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About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but it is the stories of war, sectarian violence and western military intervention which grab the headlines.

Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We hope to carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences.

Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

Middle East Solidarity is a joint project of MENA Solidarity Network, Egypt Solidarity Initiative and Bahrain Watch, and is supported by funding from UCU, PCS, NUT and a number of Trades Union Councils and local trade union branches.

You can find out more about our campaigns online here:

www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
www.bahrainwatch.org

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MAHIENOUR SPEAKS FROM PRISON

Maysoon el-Masri, sister of jailed Egyptian revolutionary socialist activist **Mahienour el-Masri**, reports on the struggle to expose the horrific conditions in Damanhour Women's prison, where Mahienour is serving a 15-month sentence.

I was surprised when the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights announced the results of their tour of a number of Egyptian prisons. What really raised my anger and disgust at those who call themselves human rights defenders, is the amount of lying and fabrication in their claims.

For example, Mr. Mohamed Fayek, the president of the National Council and the lawyer Hafez Abu Seda claimed that during their visit to Damanhour Prison, Mahienour was not there. The truth is that Mahienour was there and no-one asked her to meet the members of the council.

Mahienour informed us of everything the council ignored. She wants everyone outside to know, but articles or statements written by her inside her place of detention are banned. We therefore tried to memorize everything she said.

Mahienour told us that a week before the Council's visit on August 23, there were exaggerated preparations inside the prison. They painted the buildings, hung up posters and installed new fans (after the prisoners had previously endured the violent heat wave without working fans). A volleyball net appeared, although the prisoners are banned from leaving the main cell block.

The delegation took a tour prepared by the interior ministry, entering the cell blocks whose inhabitants would not dare talk about the violations that happen inside.

Mahienour informed us about the mistreatment in the prison hospital that she calls



the morgue, where women face torture and beatings at the hands of the doctors. This abuse led to the death of a prisoner before the last Eid holiday. The prison administration is conducting an investigation about this incident.

She also told us about the humiliating body searches after returning from court hearings. Women, many of whom are old and in prison because of debts, are forced to spend a whole night in a small room containing everyone who had left the prison for a hearing.

They are searched by being stripped naked by the prison wardens and have to wait until the following day, relieving themselves in front of the wardens. If they refuse, they spend another night this way.

There is no specific time for checking on prisoners and opening and closing the cells. On normal days the cells are locked at 2.30 pm which is not enough time to prepare food because of the continual water and electricity cuts. After a lot of effort and negotiations the cells are now locked at 4 pm.

She talked to us about the days prisoners spend screaming to draw attention to a sick woman or a woman in labour. One of the prisoners gave birth inside the cell because they were one and a half hours late in opening up.

The length of time for visits depends on the mood of the administration. Sometimes it is 15 minutes and other times it is half an hour and again at other times it is 45 minutes while the statute of the prison says that the legal duration of the visit is 60 minutes.

Mahienour would have told them about the women prisoners who were waiting for the National Council for Human Rights delegation in good faith because the state promised that there will not be anyone imprisoned in Egypt for debt by the end of the year. But the delegation did not come to hear them.

Instead they conducted a token visit as a cover-up for the Interior Ministry and left claiming that Mahienour was not there. Mahienour was there. She lives between the prison's four walls but will continue to answer their lies, whatever it may cost her, just as she always has done.

This is an edited excerpt from a statement published on Maysoon el-Masri's Facebook page on 31 August, translated by the FreeMahienour campaign. Read more about the campaign in solidarity with Mahienour and other political prisoners in Egypt on page 23.

EGYPT

Irish teenager facing mass trial Helen Underhill

Irish teenager, Ibrahim Halawa, was just 17 years old when, during one of his family's annual holidays to Egypt, he was arrested during protests that took place in Cairo in August 2013.

Along with his three sisters, Somaia, Fatima and Omaima, Ibrahim was one of hundreds seized by the police after having attended demonstrations against the massacre of protesters supporting ousted president, Mohammed Morsi.

After three months, his sisters were allowed to return to Ireland but Ibrahim remains in Egypt, currently awaiting the next stage of a mass trial along with 493 others.

In March 2015, Ibrahim was moved to Wadi Natron Prison, one of the worst prisons in Egypt renowned for torture and abuse of inmates.

After more than two years in detention Ibrahim now faces trial on 4 October.

Since his arrest, Ibrahim's health has deteriorated.

As well as being denied medical treatment for a gunshot wound to his hand sustained on the day of his arrest, requests for medicine to ease breathing problems are also rejected by the authorities. Somaia told us:

"There are hardly any windows, no sunlight, and he has a chest problem.

"It wasn't diagnosed before he went into prison and he is not allowed medicine. The embassy is



Ibrahim has spent two years in jail without trial | Photo: Halawa family



refusing to get him medicine because they say it has to go through a doctor, which can't happen.

"He is only allowed Panadol, which is very rare. He is not in a good condition."

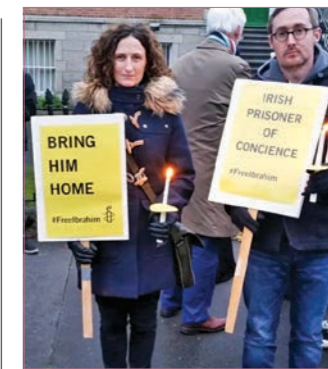
Ibrahim's case is indicative of Egypt's repressive judicial system that prevents access to legal advice or defence, and is upholding mass trials and death penalties.

Defendants like Ibrahim have little access to the lawyers, Somaia says:

"Where the trial is held is soundproof so he can't talk when there is a hearing in court.

"When the lawyer went to see him in the prison, he wasn't able to talk properly, and it only lasted for five minutes."

Despite Ibrahim's case being supported by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Reprieve, Somaia and her family feel the Irish government could be doing



much more to help to secure medical treatment, legal support and, ultimately, his release:

"They [the Irish government] are agreeing that Ibrahim will have a trial even though they don't agree with the process. Ibrahim is no longer able to defend himself because he is part of a mass trial.

"We are starting to feel that the Irish government are supporting what is happening in Egypt.

"They never come out and say they are concerned about him being tortured.

"We are questioning the whole system: is it to do with international relations with Egypt and the beef trade? Where is their human rights stance?"

Ibrahim had only just left school when he was arrested: he looked older than his 17 years, was tall, broad and "a leader" who hoped to be an engineer on aeroplanes. Somaia described her younger brother:

"Ibrahim was the last person I would ever thought would be arrested. He was never involved in politics. He would protest about Palestine but he differentiates between politics and protests to support humans.

"His cell-mate, Peter Greste called him a 'character'. He is so human, very kind and gentle. I don't understand why people would ask why was he there in the first place? I would like to remind people he was trying to be a human with humanity."

Irish opposition parties, and in particular members of Sinn Féin like Lynn Boylan MEP, have backed Ibrahim's campaign.

Somaia urged individuals to do all they can to support Ibrahim's case, noting that worldwide campaigns helped to release Ibrahim's former cellmate, Australian journalist, Peter Greste, and a Canadian arrested at the same time as Ibrahim:

"Put pressure on the government, from all over. Contact the Egyptian embassy in the UK, US, whatever. Make the case go wider so it's not just coming from Ireland.

"People can email, call, write. If you stand for justice for others, then they will take a stand for you."

Ibrahim's family are asking supporters to help their campaign by writing to the Egyptian Embassy in Ireland, mobilising support through student unions and community groups and taking part in their social media campaigns. Go to 'FreeIbrahimHalawa' on Facebook or free-ibrahim.com for the latest news from the campaign. You can also send a message of support directly to the family through the website.

BAHRAIN

Prison's revolving door

Luke G.G. Bhatia

During the last few months the Bahraini authorities seem to have been operating a revolving door policy in the country's prisons, intermittently releasing and re-arresting leaders and prominent members of the opposition.

On 16 June 2015, Sheikh Ali Salman, the leader of Bahrain's largest opposition group, al-Wefaq, was sentenced to four years in prison.

He was convicted of "inciting disobedience and hatred" on the small island state, a staunch ally of the UK and US governments.

The arrest and sentencing of Sheikh Ali Salman caused widespread outrage in Bahrain and even drew criticism from its Western allies.

He was the last remaining opposition leader not languishing in jail. Protesters took to the streets demanding his release.

Three days later, on 19 June, another opposition leader, Ebrahim Sharif, secretary general of the National Democratic Action Society or Waad, was released 9 months before completing his 5-year sentence, handed down by a military court after the uprising in 2011.

On 11 July, less than three weeks later, he was re-arrested for comments made in a speech that, according to the Bahraini government, "encouraged the overthrow of the government and incited hatred."



Ali Salman | Photo: BIRD

Sharif is often cited as an example of the non-sectarian struggle in Bahrain, being the leader of the secular political opposition group Waad.

His speech affirmed the national character of the opposition's demands, contrary to the sectarian narrative which has been pushed by the state since 2011.

On 28 June Fadhel Abbas, the Secretary-General of the Al-Wahdawi Opposition Society, was sentenced to five years in prison for "spreading false information that could harm the military operations of Bahrain and its allies, in Yemen."

Just three days later, the Bahrain government arrested senior al-Wefaq member Majeed Milad, after he made a speech demanding fair electoral districts, a democratic state and self-determination for the people of Bahrain.

Nabeel Rajab, a prominent human rights defender in Bahrain and director of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, was pardoned by the King of Bahrain and released

from prison 2 days later, on 13 July.

This followed pressure from the US and UK governments and an emergency resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 9 July.

He had been imprisoned for comments made on Twitter, and charged with "offending national institutions."

King Hamad al-Khalifa, head of the Bahrain ruling family, cited "health concerns" for his pardon.

Another prominent member of opposition group al-Wefaq and former MP, Sheikh Hasan Isa, was arrested upon returning to Bahrain from a holiday with his family on 18 July.

According to al-Wefaq, he was held for 48 hours without charge and interrogated without the presence of a lawyer.

The Ministry of Interior released a statement saying that a lawmaker had been arrested "on charges related to financing terrorism



Ebrahim Sharif



Fadhel Abbas | Photo: BIRD

among terrorist fugitives and others who are associated in terrorist acts."

On 24 August Ebrahim Sharif found himself in court once again, a mere two months after being released from his 4-year stay in prison.

He pleaded not guilty in court to charges of, "promoting political change through forceful means." The court case is ongoing.

During this bizarre circle of events the US government announced that it would be lifting a ban on the transfer of arms to Bahrain.

The ban on arms sales from the US had been in place since the uprising of 2011 was put down using lethal force.

The severe counter-revolutionary repression that followed resulted in the deaths of more than one hundred people, and thousands imprisoned.

The message that this sends to the Bahraini government is that it may operate with impunity and without fear of jeopardising its relationship with the UK and US.



EGYPT

Civil servants protest threat to jobs

Mostafa Bassiouny

A campaign of protests and strikes by public employees gathered momentum in August as civil servants mobilised against a new law which threatens the job security of millions across the public sector.

On 10 August up to 5,000 civil servants working the departments of General Taxation, Sales Taxation, Customs, the Ministry of Finance and Property Taxation rallied outside the Journalists' Union headquarters in central Cairo.

They were joined by bus workers from some Public Transport Authority garages who took strike action on



Thousands rallied against the attack on jobs | Photo: Mostafa Bassiouny

the same day, also in protest at the law.

After several generations when the public sector provided workers with a basic level of job security, Egypt's 6.5 million public sector workers are facing an earthquake.

In the past although working conditions were poor and their wages low, public sector jobs were at least secure.

All that is now under threat as Egypt attempts to meet conditions for international loans and investment through adopting austerity measures.

The independent unions played an important role in organising the protest.

Relations between the independent union and the regime have been complex since the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

After Al-Sisi took power and launched his "War on Terror" leaders of many independent unions backed the new regime.

Their support for Al-Sisi's call for an end to strikes created a crisis with their own rank-and-file, however.

Independent unions with a large, active membership continued to be involved in strikes and protests organised at a local level, despite their national leaders' pledge not to strike. Security forces have broken

up large numbers of workers' protests and arrested many activists.

The scale of the mobilisation on 10 August appears to have caught the security forces by surprise and they did not intervene to ban or break up the protest.

The demonstration is the largest rally organised by workers for two years.

It was also well-organised, with delegations joining the Cairo rally from Alexandria, the Canal Zone cities, Daqahiliyya province, Fayyoun and Bani Soueif.

Activists toured the provinces beforehand, organising mobilising meetings.

The presence of the PTA bus workers boosted the protests. The independent union in the PTA is also strong and well-rooted.

The scale of resistance to the civil service law, and the response of the authorities will be carefully watched by workers in other sectors. Successful protests are likely to encourage others to follow suit, despite the scale of repression over the past year.

EGYPT

Teachers' unions face attack

Mary Compton

Teachersolidarity website interviews the leader of the Independent School Teachers' Trade union (ISTT) about the challenges facing the independent trade union movement in Egypt.

"The situation is deteriorating. There is more privatisation in education and teachers' labour rights will soon be even worse than they are now.

"As a result of a new civil servants law which was enacted three months ago, labour rights have been attacked meaning that administrations will be able to hire and fire teachers at will. At the same time, there was a pay rise for all public servants except teachers – the reason was that there are too many teachers!

"Since 2013, we have not had a pay rise. What makes it worse is that about 40% of teachers are on temporary

contracts.

"After the revolution we had rights for the first time. Now there is a real attack on the independent trade union movement.

"The Sisi government chose some leaders of the movement to sit in government – for instance the chair of the independent union federation is now a minister. As a result many workers have lost trust in the leaderships.

"Teachers' unions must have the right to organise freely, they must stop threatening the ISTT.

"The state does its best to encourage internal conflicts. It has security

representatives in all schools, it was the same under Morsi – and they're in the union – this weakens the movement.

"People are more and more frustrated. They lack trust in their ability to make changes.

"Since Al-Sisi took power after the uprising in 2013, there has not even been a parliament. But people are also afraid of ISIS. I can only hope for democracy by the end of the year."

This is an edited version of an interview first published on Teachersolidarity.com on 28 August. Read more online.

IRAQ

'ISIS is born from your corruption'

Joseph Daher

Since the end of July, massive popular demonstrations have taken place in the Iraqi capital Baghdad and several cities in the south of the country, denouncing corruption in the country and the political bankruptcy of the ruling sectarian political parties.

The demonstrations also condemned the continuing power outages, deteriorating public services and increasing social inequality.

In Baghdad, protesters held up placards saying that the regime's corruption was responsible for the rise of ISIS.

They denounced the parliament, which is dominated by reactionary Shi'a parties, as "the other side of coin" to the Sunni sectarian and reactionary movement.

Conservative parties allied to the government and religious figures have



Protester's banner: "ISIS is born from your corruption" | Photo: Syriafreedomforever blog

called for participation in the massive protests, although without mobilising their members.

Yet, the demonstrators, for the most part made up of youth and with a substantial female presence, have raised slogans and demands challenging Iraq's sectarian political system as a whole.

Across the country protesters called for a secular state in opposition to a sectarian state, chanted against the division between Sunni and Shi'a populations and for women's rights and equality, while clear

condemnations of sectarian political parties could be heard everywhere.

Protesters particularly targeted former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose eight years in office were marred by allegations of corruption, authoritarianism and alienation of the Sunni population and who is still influential in the Iraqi regime.

Militia groups linked to the former Prime Minister and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) attacked protesters with knives in cities such as Baghdad and

Kerbala, while the local security forces looked on.

More than 30 protesters were wounded in Baghdad and dozens in Karbala.

A large crowd in the city of Kerbala, a highly symbolic Shi'a location, condemned Iranian intervention in the internal affairs of the country by singing "Karbala is free, Tehran out! Out!" after Shi'a sectarian militia groups and Shi'a clergymen chanted slogans glorifying the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

This massive popular movement has also been accompanied by strikes in some sectors, particularly energy and industry, opposing privatization and for better working conditions.

The Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi reacted to these protesters by voting through new laws against corruption.

Al-Abadi also suppressed important political positions (notably of three deputy prime ministers and three vice-presidents, including Nouri al-Maliki) and cancelled the privileges of ministers and deputies in an effort to halt the movement.

AKP launches crackdown on Kurds

Ozan Tekin

On 20 July more than 30 young activists died after a suicide attack when almost 300 people were gathered in Suruc, a small town on the Turkish side of the border.

They were from the youth organisation of a left-wing

party which campaigned for solidarity with Kobanê after months of attacks by ISIS.

President Erdogan and Prime Minister Davutoglu reluctantly denounced the killings. But the overall situation changed immediately.

After a few bombs dropped on ISIS targets, Turkish jets started to attack the Kandil mountain (the main PKK base) and the areas around it in Northern Iraq.

The latest developments mean an official end to the ceasefire between the

government and the PKK which has been in place since 2013.

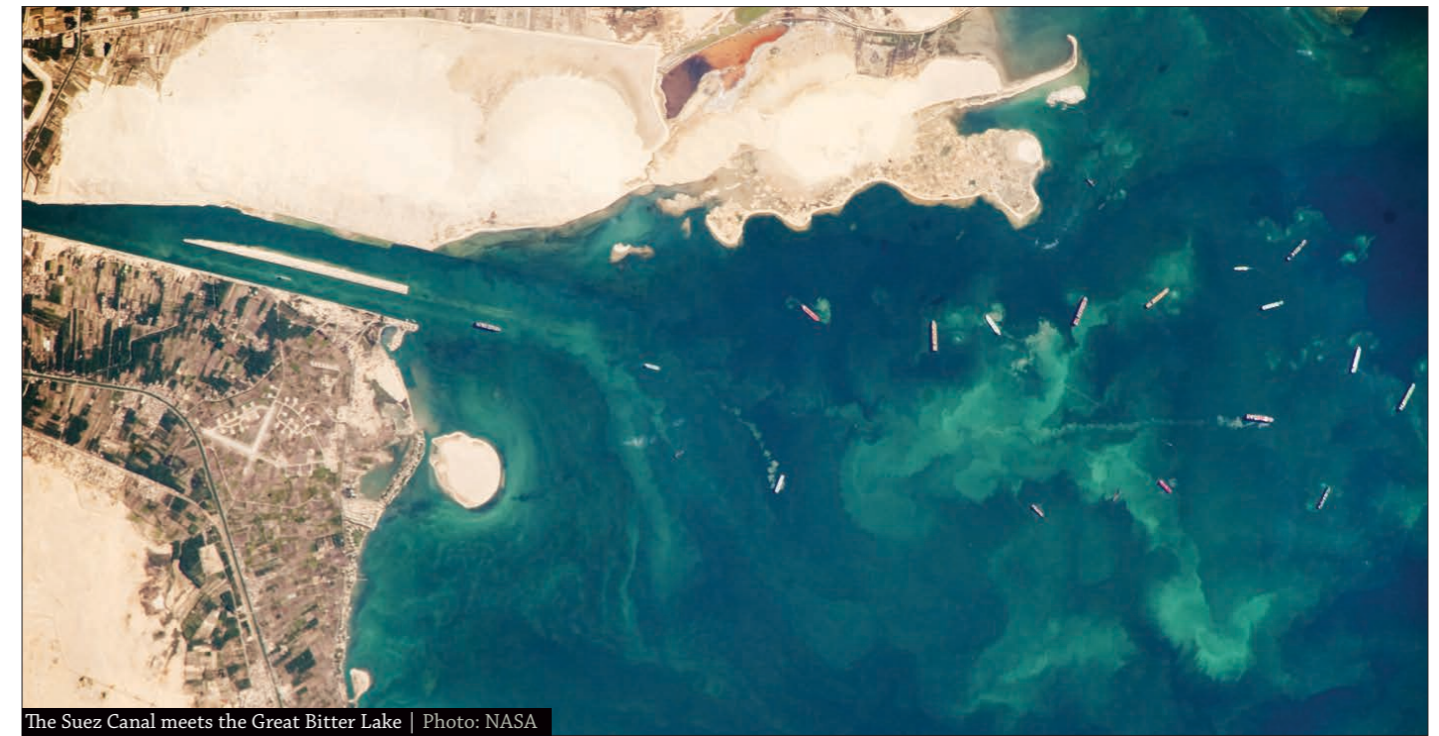
In 4 days, 1,350 people were arrested. The AKP claims these were members of "terrorist organisations". But in fact most of those arrested were Kurdish activists.

All of this is connected with the results of the general election in June – it's an attack against the growth of the HDP – the coalition of the Kurds and the radical left – which succeeded in getting 13 percent popular support.

Erdogan is trying to find a way to change the situation and avoid the mood of defeat within AKP ranks.

All the pro-government media and the AKP leaders are trying to create a sense of "national unity" against "terrorism".

He will face many problems in continuing with this tactic indefinitely, however, as two thirds of Turkish society still support the negotiation process with the Kurdish movement.



The Suez Canal meets the Great Bitter Lake | Photo: NASA

The new Suez Canal: Egypt's gift to investors

Mostafa Omran challenges claims that the new Suez Canal project will be a lifeline for Egypt's economy

A new Suez Canal channel opened on 6 August to great fanfare in the Egyptian and world media.

An industrial corridor alongside the canal will create jobs and revitalise the region, supporters of the project say. Egyptians shouldn't be fooled by these illusions, argues **Mostafa Omran**. The real beneficiaries will be global firms and foreign investors, not ordinary people.

Opinions are strongly divided about the project to dig a second channel for the Suez Canal. It is not clear where the enthusiasts for the project have found their confidence in its success, given the lack of any public feasibility study by the government or detailed reports on its goals.

The doubts of the sceptics are logical, especially considering the number of government projects which so far produced no results whatsoever, including the announcement of a device to treat AIDS, HIV and Hepatitis C, a project to build a million units of housing, and a project to create a new capital city.

Sceptics can point to the poor legacy of dictatorships in general, and Egyptian dictatorships in particular, in the construction of such "historic achievements."

There is no dictator without a project of this kind adorning the

background in the murals bearing his picture.

Anyone interested in the project suffers from the difficulty in obtaining reliable information on the nature of the project and its real goals.

Adding to the uncertainty, officials have made conflicting statements, such as the military order which cut the project duration from three years to one year, and the statement by the head of the Suez Canal Authority to Al-Ahram newspaper that on completion the project would generate \$100 billion for the Egyptian economy annually.

Crucially, the government has not made it clear how the two lanes of ship traffic in the Canal will work after the completion of the new channel.

According to a television statement made by Mohab Mamish, head of the Suez Canal Authority, currently 49 ships pass through the Suez Canal on



a daily basis, whereas thanks to the opening of the new channel, this will increase to 97 ships per day.

However, according to the Suez Canal Authority website, 59 ships passed through the Canal on a daily basis in 2008, which was one of the busiest years for shipping before the global economic crisis hit.

Clearly, the increase or decrease in the number of ships reflects growth or recession in world trade.

The laws strip Egyptian workers of their most important rights and offer them up on a plate for investors.

So Mamish's expectations are based on world trade expanding to the point where the Suez Canal can capture twice the volume of traffic it absorbed in 2015.

And this is all in the context of competition between the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal and the North Sea shipping routes.

We cannot look at the project to dig the new Suez Canal, and plans to develop the Suez Canal corridor, in isolation from Sisi's role in adding to the arsenal of laws which are unfair to workers and biased towards the interests of the investors.

Apparently 40,000 workers took part in the digging of the canal.

The government set a price for the removal of each cubic metre of earth, but did not apply a minimum wage.

Nor did we hear that workers were able to organise themselves in a trade union, or what happened to the

families of those workers who died during the excavations.

What about plans to evacuate the residents of the villages in the route of the new channel?

The government has not announced any details of compensation for the loss of their homes and farms, or proposed new sources of income for after their removal.

In the context of Sisi's repressive new labour laws, talk of creating a million job opportunities through the project is more like a declaration of war on ordinary people, not about giving them work.

The laws strip Egyptian workers of their most important rights and offer them up on a plate for investors.

At the same time, the state is scrambling to sell the rights of the Egyptian people, by extending contracts with foreign firms such as Maersk in East Port Sa'id and Dubai World in Ain Sokhna Port.

From beginning to end, this project is simply an offering from Sisi to global capitalism, to show that he is its willing servant in the region and in the world, whatever the cost to the Egyptian people.

At the same time he is exploiting the project for an internal audience to burnish his image as the hero saviour who was able to complete the channel in a year.

Yes, "Sisi's Egypt" is celebrating, but in "our Egypt" we should be more concerned by the urgent need to find real solutions for our problems.

A longer version of this article in Arabic was first published on www.revsoc.me on 5 August 2015. Translated and edited by Anne Alexander.



BACKSTORY

The lavish opening ceremony, which allegedly cost its sponsors (but not the Egyptian government) some \$30 million, crowned a year of feverish activity in the Suez Canal Zone.

Between August 2014, when the project was announced, and August 2015, when Sisi paraded through the channel past watching heads of state, the Suez Canal Authority oversaw 37 km of dry digging and 35 km of expansion to existing channels.

The aim is to facilitate two-way traffic through the 163 km waterway and to accommodate larger ships.

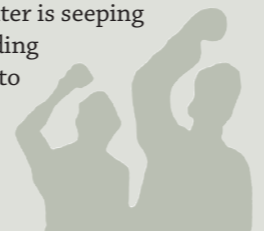
Egyptian officials claim that the new channel will boost overall Canal revenues to \$13.5 billion by 2023, requiring growth of 10 percent a year.

Despite publishing a front-page promotional advertorial on the project, The Economist was sceptical of such "a rosy projection."

The magazine noted that world seaborne shipping grew 37 percent between 2000 and 2013, and that the annual rate of growth for global merchandise trade was only 3.4 percent a year in the decade up to 2016.

Engineering experts also warn that the new Canal may have been built too close to the original channel.

Groundwater is seeping into the building site, and has to be pumped out at the cost of \$1m per day.



Surviving moral panics and state homophobia...

LGBT lives in Egypt and Lebanon

The brutal torture and murder of three gay men, executed by ISIS in Mosul in June this year has thrown a spotlight on the persecution of LGBT people in the Middle East.

In Egypt and Lebanon too, LGBT citizens are subject to harassment, imprisonment and public humiliation.

In these cases, their persecutors are not Islamists, but the military regime of Abdelfattah al-Sisi and the Lebanese police.

Alice Finden explores the complex and varied nature of the campaigns of homophobic repression in Egypt and Lebanon which have gathered pace in recent years.



Graffiti on Mohamed Mahmoud Street in Cairo

In May 2014, just ten months after the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi's government, activists estimated that the new military regime of Abdelfattah al-Sisi had arrested 77 people of non-conforming sexuality or gender on varied charges, in what human rights organisations describe as a systematic crackdown on LGBT people.

According to Human Rights Watch, the current Egyptian human rights crisis is "the most serious in the country's modern history", with rights groups recording even greater violations of rights and freedoms related to sexuality and gender than during the

Mubarak era.

The Egyptian authorities are stepping up their invasion of homes, subjecting those arrested and imprisoned to physical and mental abuse, and finally to public outing.

For Egyptian gays like Ramy Youssef, repression of LGBT people has noticeably intensified since 2013. "I think the crackdown under al-Sisi is definitely the most violent of all time," he told us.

"His government controls all the state's institutions, including the supposedly-free ones. Journalists and the media work according to the

directions of the government. Police are more violent than ever: they are using tracking techniques which they have used previously in 2003 but on a larger scale.”

Under al-Sisi’s regime, the persecution of LGBT people through the police and courts is the other face of its ideology of conservative, military-style nation building.

The creation of a ‘moral panic’ around LGBT citizens is not an unprecedented move by the Egyptian state, however. Mubarak’s thirty year rule saw consistent targeting of LGBT citizens’ rights and anyone thought to support them.

The “Queen Boat Panic” of 2001 highlighted the first instance of a systematic crackdown, through the use of repressive Public Order and Public Morals Codes to criminalise people engaged in “homosexual acts”. This case involved arrests of 52 gay men on a boat party on the Nile who were thereafter tried for “public depravity”.

The current Egyptian regime is notably more repressive and brutal in its treatment of LGBT people than ever before.

Police are using mobile phone apps such as Grindr and Growlr, and social media websites like Facebook and Twitter as a means of entrapping people they suspect to be LGBT.

An article written by well-known journalist, blogger and activist Scott Long advises LGBT Egyptians on how best to protect themselves from internet entrapment, highlighting the ways in which the police are actively tracing mobile phones and tricking people into false meetups.

Those entrapped and arrested on charges of “sexual deviance”, “debauchery”, and “insulting public morals”, often become targets of physical and mental abuse and humiliation in jail by both police and other inmates; some reporting threats of rape and intrusive “forensic anal exams” which claim to determine sexual activity.

The Egyptian counter-revolution has long focused on enforcing sexuality and gender conformity as a means to break down resistance. In 2011, blogger and activist Aliaa el-Mahdy used her naked body as a way to defy the conservative makeup of Egyptian society and to challenge ingrained concepts of sex and women.

Women protestors arrested and forced to endure ‘virginity tests’ were detained because of the challenge they posed to Egyptian nationalist norms of sexuality and gender upheld by the military government.

In her article *Talking back: Masculinity and the right time for politics*, Dina Makram Ebeid explains that the particular masculinity that accompanies the military nationalism of al-Sisi’s regime uses a stark gender division to highlight the enemies of the state.

The pro-regime media has played a key role in striking back at any visible ‘deviation’ from nationalist norms of gender and sexuality.

By framing its opponents as soft, weak or feminine, the military regime creates a public outcry against its “disreputable” enemies. In other words, Ebeid argues, “using gender as the backdrop, the state decides which lives are grieveable and how to use them.”

The pro-regime media has played a key role in striking back at any visible ‘deviation’ from nationalist norms of gender and sexuality.

On 8 December 2014 Mona al-Iraqi, investigative journalist for the programme Al-Mestekhabbi (The Hidden), instigated a security raid on a bathhouse in downtown Cairo, Ramses area. Police arrested 26 bathers while al-Iraqi filmed and released the identities of the detainees. In a rare victory, however, the defendants later succeeded in winning acquittal on all charges.

The case highlights the ever strengthening relationship between the military government and its supporting media.

The Egyptian authorities do not hesitate to cross the borders of public and private in order to humiliate and criminalise LGBT citizens. Making arrests is not the only weapon the state holds, as public shaming can often mean alienation from family, friends and work upon release from prison.

For activist Ghassan Makarem, the key battleground for the state is the enforcement of gender roles. “Gender conformity, especially in public, becomes the main marker of tolerance,

rather than sexual preference,” he told us “it is also the primary target of moral panics.”

The role of the media is also pivotal, he explained. “The raid on the Ramses bathhouse is reminiscent of similar actions in Lebanon, where the media was an instigator and an accomplice.”

People of non-conforming genders and sexualities are not the only ones to be publicly humiliated for defying the military regime.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and anyone in support of Morsi’s short spell in government have also been branded traitors to the Egyptian state.

On 1 July, nine members of the Muslim Brotherhood including two leaders were killed by security forces who raided an apartment in 6th October City.

The pro-regime media is churning out propaganda to increase the visibility of al-Sisi’s various public enemies. Regime supporters are willing to go to great lengths to stir up public outcry against critical voices. The Muslim Brotherhood and LGBT community are among the key targets.

Activist Scott Long revealed recently that a malicious fake Twitter account was set up in his name, putting him at risk of arrest and abuse as it claimed that he was calling on LGBT people to support the Muslim Brotherhood.

The attacks by al-Sisi’s government on those who do not fit its idea of Egyptian military nationalism are taking place in the context of divisions within opposition camps and the left in general over how to respond to the counter-revolution.

The crackdown has also prompted the withdrawal of LGBT activist groups and individuals of non-conforming genders and sexualities into the private sphere. Protests take place online or in the form of “activism from the closet”.

According to Makarem, following the short-lived optimism of the 2011 revolution, most organisations and groups took a step back, some completely disengaging.

“I believe one reason is the role of Islamists in the revolutions and the reaction of the “secular” and middle class segments inside the ‘movements for change’... Fear of Islamists taking power drove many LGBT and feminist NGOs back into the state’s camp; some were actively engaged in demobilisation and counter-mobilisation.”

This is not to claim that life under Morsi’s rule was perfect.

Some Islamist activists fuelled sectarian hatred, for example, encouraging attacks on Coptic Christians during the battle over the adoption of a new constitution. LGBT people were still subject to harassment and persecution. However Youssef sees this as a “lighter crackdown”, compared to repression under al-Sisi. “Everyone knew that Morsi was leading a government with a religious-orientation, so they did not have anything to prove. On the contrary, the Brotherhood tried to work on different topics because they knew that people already acknowledged their views on sexuality.”

Despite this, the military managed to exploit fears of a restrictive Islamist Egypt to rally support for al-Sisi who was hailed as a hero, allowing him to launch a series of moral panics far more vicious than anything under his predecessor’s rule.

Around the same time as the 2001 Egyptian Queen Boat Panic, the Lebanese state was inspired to introduce a regressive penal code reform, with article 534 stating that “sexual intercourse contrary to nature” is punishable by up to a year in prison.

While LGBT people’s experience of police brutality in Lebanon is not on the same level as Egypt (digital entrapment methods are more commonly used by police for extortion, for example), constant raids and arrests have become more visible over the last few years.

Lebanese activist Anthony Rizk told us: “police harassment has gained more media attention, and gotten more visibility and air time on the news... Every few months there’s a story about a gay guy or a gay couple or gay group that were arbitrarily arrested and taken in for anal tests and so on, and either released or found guilty and taken into prison.”

The humiliation and harassment encountered by those arrested is also becoming a class issue as a result of the assault on public space as part of the neoliberal reconstruction of Beirut.

The increasing privatisation of public space around the city has facilitated round-the-clock patrols of what are sometimes referred to as gay cruising areas.

According to Rizk, “people who can afford to have sex in private are

fine. They wouldn’t go to these places [public gay cruising areas] because they are independent enough or financially secure enough to have their own apartment... But the people who don’t, they are the people who are affected by the loss of public space. So it is a class issue. The way sexual oppression is happening in Lebanon is happening by all means on a class basis.”

Those arrested on account of their gender or sexuality who don’t have such connections are those making the Lebanese headlines.

In the past few years cases such as the 27 men arrested in a hammam in August 2014, 36 men arrested in the raid on a gay cinema in 2012, and Syrian refugees arrested for gay sex work in Beirut have all been working class without exception.

Lebanon has some of the best-known LGBT activist groups in the Middle East, such as Helem which has campaigned for over ten years not only for LGBT liberation but also for better conditions and pay for workers, as well to end sectarian discrimination and prejudice against migrants.

Activists from Helem have played important roles in a wide range of campaigns, however recently in Lebanon, LGBT organisations have increasingly turned towards models of service provision and western influenced and funded NGOisation.

Splits and disagreements within LGBT organisations on the topic of political engagement have effectively distanced them from other leftist groups, breaking bonds of solidarity.

Some of the first disagreements within Helem were on the topic of what kind of presence LGBT groups should have with regards to mainstream politics and the fightback against Lebanese sectarianism in 2011.

Rizk told us: “In 2011 lots of independent groups and leftists groups started to organising massive marches and a joint campaign called Isqat al-nizam al-ta’ify [down with the sectarian regime]. [In Helem] Some were very interested in it and pretty much straight away involved themselves in it officially as part of the organisation or on their own.

“Others were a lot more sceptical of it.... This is a sort of binary or debate that has been going on for years with Helem. It has always been between people who want to be engaged with

the politics of Beirut, outside of just LGBT issues, and people who wanted LGBT issues to be the ceiling of the organisation.”

Other leftist movements involved in the 2011 marches challenged Helem’s visibility as an organisation focused on gender and sexuality. This increased the difficulty posed in organising campaigns and protests.

Such disagreement within and outside of the organisation on top of the need felt to remodel itself in order to gain western funding led to Helem and many other LGBT organisations transforming into service providers and rejecting political activism.

The revolutions of 2011 and shifts and uprisings since then have shed light on new ways of thinking about gender and sexuality in the Middle East.

Organisations like OpAntiSH (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment), which was formed to defend women from sexual assault during street protests, the revolutionary media collective Mosireen, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, and bloggers like Scott Long continue to highlight the atrocities committed by al-Sisi’s military regime.

The attempts by the Egyptian state to whip up a moral panic around the campaigns of homophobic repression and arrests have not all been successful.

“Unlike what happened in 2001 when Queen Boat incident took place, people do not really care to turn their aggression towards homosexuals into violent action”, notes Youssef.

“The government may have wanted to use the crackdowns on gays as a distraction from the failure of government policies”, he argues, “but people perceive thinking about homosexuals as a luxury that they cannot afford.”

While links and bonds of solidarity created through activism in the private sphere are the safest option for many in Egypt and Lebanon today, the rise of mass movements in the future may create spaces for LGBT activists to once again win wider audiences to their cause.

Despite some difficult debates at the time, Rizk is positive about the gains which LGBT activists made within the mass movement against sectarianism in 2011, arguing that the mobilisation helped win solidarity in unexpected places.



Cornell's campus in Qatar | Photo: Joey Coleman

Global University Inc.

Despite the recession, the international business of Higher Education still seems to be booming.

Luke G.G. Bhatia and **Anne Alexander** ask if UK universities are putting lucrative research and teaching contracts before human rights and academic freedoms as they partner with repressive regimes and companies across the Middle East.

For several years now, the “internationalisation” of Higher Education in Europe and North America has occupied the minds of many senior managers in both prestigious, and not-so-prestigious universities.

This can take the form of attracting high-fee-paying foreign students, opening new campuses in glamorous locations, and courting foreign private and government investment for research and teaching.

Positioning the university brand in a global marketplace has grown in

importance as cuts to public funding bite and the privatisation of higher education gathers pace.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has put academic links with Israel in the spotlight, however the scale of collaboration between international universities and other repressive regimes in the Middle East is much less well-known.

Across the region, higher education institutions from a growing number of countries have set up international branch campuses and initiated transnational education collaborations, while often turning a blind eye to rights violations committed by host states.

The states with the highest number of institutions in the Middle East are the United States and the United Kingdom.

Prestigious universities such as New York University (NYU) in the US, and University College London (UCL) have opened in Abu Dhabi and Qatar respectively.

These institutions often have campuses paid for by the host countries and in NYU's case received \$50 million upfront from the Abu Dhabi government before signing up to the project.

The problems with such

collaborations often begin long before the new institution opens its doors to students and staff.

Last year the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), sent a letter to 8 universities outlining the workers' rights violations occurring in many of the host countries in the Middle East.

The universities included UCL, Georgetown University, Cornell University, HEC Paris, Carnegie Mellon University, Northwestern University, Virginia Commonwealth University and Texas A&M.

The ITUC brought to their attention the issues faced by the migrant workers in the region, such as lower than expected wages, confiscation of passports, human trafficking for forced labour and inhumane living conditions.

In the case of NYU Abu Dhabi, one of the leading activists in the student and staff-led campaign exposing the university's complicity with the abuse of workers in UAE, has himself been barred from travel to Abu Dhabi.

Professor Andrew Ross was stopped from boarding a plane to the UAE in March this year, where he planned to spend a week researching the conditions of migrant workers on NYU's Saadiyat Island campus.

NYU's spokesman John Beckman

claimed in response that “our faculty and students have experienced zero infringements on their academic freedom” during the five years NYU has been operating in Abu Dhabi.

He evidently hadn't tried to use Skype from the Abu Dhabi campus: NYU's student newspaper reported in February that students and staff there found the UAE's internet censorship regularly preventing them from using the service.

Matt Duffy taught media law at a national university in the UAE for two years before work permits for him and his wife were suddenly cancelled in 2012. He believes promises by the UAE authorities to respect academic freedoms are meaningless:

“No professor at NYU Abu Dhabi can be sure that what he teaches on the campus would not lead to a sudden and irreversible expulsion. The pledge of “academic freedom” from NYU is essentially worthless because powerful figures can make arbitrary employment decisions with absolutely no recourse.”

While expatriate academics face travel bans and cancelled work visas, the consequences for UAE academics who speak out are far worse.

Nasser bin Ghaith was teaching economics at the UAE-Sorbonne University when he was arrested in 2011. Held for seven months in appalling conditions, bin Ghaith was eventually convicted of “publicly insulting” the Crown Prince because he advocated democratic reforms.

His employer has close ties to Paris-Sorbonne, which receives 15 percent of student fees from enrolments in the UAE. In August 2015 bin Ghaith disappeared after being arrested again, leaving his family fearful that he was being tortured in order to force a false confession.

Despite these high-profile cases, UK universities are continuing to form partnerships with the UAE regime.

In 2014 Salford University announced plans to develop “academic and professional development courses, new educational and industrial partnerships, collaborative research projects in close consultation with UAE industry and government.”

Not content with courting one repressive Gulf monarchy, Salford has also taken steps to cement a relationship with Bahrain, awarding Sheikh Ahmed bin Ateyatalla Al



The University of Salford's vice-chancellor cuts cake with the UAE's Minister of Culture
Photo: University of Salford @ Flickr

Khalifa, Minister for Follow-Up in the Bahrain Royal Court, an “Alumni Achievement Award” in April 2015.

Of course, it is entirely possible that Sheikh Ahmed would still have achieved the same level of success in his career without the advantage of membership of Bahrain's ruling family.

As Salford University's gushing tribute to him notes, he displayed “talent and hard work” during his days as a student.

As well as international branch campuses, teaching partnerships with institutions in the Middle East have also become more commonplace, and at times can become legitimating factors for autocratic regimes.

Take the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Since 2004 the institution has had a partnership with the Medical University of Bahrain.

After the uprising in Bahrain in 2011, some of the medics trained by the RCSI – Bahrain partnership were arrested and tortured for their role in treating protesters injured by government forces.

Students at RCSI – Bahrain were asked to swear an oath of allegiance to the ruling family in Bahrain and sign a document stating that they would not take part in protests.

On returning to Ireland after a fact-finding mission to Bahrain in 2011, Professor Eoin O'Brien urged the RCSI to speak out against the imprisonment of RCSI-Bahrain students and other Bahraini medical staff.

The RCSI's President and Vice-President refused to accept his

advice, he later told the BBC, instead telling him to tone down criticism of the Bahraini regime as it was damaging the RCSI's reputation.

More than four years after the uprising, and with some medics still in prison, the RCSI – Bahrain admissions are open for the September 2015 semester.

Universities are also entering into training contracts with authoritarian states from the region.

Staff and students at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) were dismayed to find out in 2014 that the university had signed a training contract with the Qatari Police Force, for the country's new Police College.

Activists from the lecturers' union UCU at MMU noted the hypocrisy of the university promoting LGBT equality whilst at the same time signing a contract with the police force of a country where male homosexuality is illegal, and punishments include flogging, imprisonment, deportation and death.

Pura Ariza is branch secretary of the UCU union at MMU. “Our UCU branch was appalled with MMU's decision to collaborate with and accept funding from the Police Force of Qatar,” she told Middle East Solidarity. “Members insisted that they had the right not to team up with the enforcers of human rights abuses.”

Pura and her colleagues were also worried by the change in the university's role: from public provider of teaching and scholarship to private contractor for a repressive regime.

Only a few years before signing the training contract with the Qatari Police Force, MMU's department offering teaching in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies had closed down.

“Students used to come from all sorts of backgrounds, including local services and the police,” notes Pura.

“Now, through government PREVENT policies to tackle “extremism”, we are told to spy on local muslim students, whose hopes of an education are tarred with suspicion before they have even arrived.”

Connections between Egyptian and British universities have also mushroomed in recent years.

British universities have concentrated on accrediting degrees at Egyptian private universities, while a new £20 million research fund provided



by the two governments is likely to spur research collaborations and partnerships in future.

Loughborough University, Queen Mary University London and London South Bank University validate degrees for the British University in Egypt (BUE), while the degrees at October University for Modern Sciences and Arts (MSA) are validated by Bedfordshire and Greenwich Universities.

Three members of MSA staff, including the dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy, were reportedly arrested in the crackdown following the military coup of July 2013.

Severe repression affects the whole of the Egyptian higher education system, according to a new report by Egyptian human rights organisation, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE).

Last academic year, security forces snatched students from their accommodation in dawn raids and repeatedly stormed campuses in attempt to stop protests by students opposed to the current military regime.

Three students were killed on or near campus and 761 arrested. During the last academic year 89 students faced trial in front of military courts, on the grounds that university campuses constitute a “military area,” under the jurisdiction of the army.

Meanwhile pressure on university staff increased as university leaders used disciplinary sanctions and threats to enforce conformity to the government’s line.

The government frequently intervened directly in the appointment of senior academics and managers, and in university disciplinary processes, according to AFTE’s research.

In Egypt’s public universities, senior academic and management roles have long been the almost exclusive preserve of candidates vetted and approved by the regime.

Before the revolution of 2011 State Security officials enjoyed unrestricted access to the campus, intervening in everything from policing student protests to the content of classroom teaching and academic appointments.

For a brief period this control was disrupted as students and university staff fought to ‘cleanse’ their campuses of the former ruling party.

Now the old system is back in an even more vicious form.



The British University in Egypt
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

The heads of most public universities, far from defending their students and staff from attacks by the police, have played a key role in enforcing the crackdown.

The UK and Egyptian governments are keen to promote research collaboration between the two countries.

In 2014 Greg Clark, Minister for Universities and Science and his Egyptian counterpart Dr Sherif Hammad signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the Newton-Mosharafa fund, which provides £20 million in funding to enable “the British and Egyptian scientific research and innovation sectors to find joint solutions to the challenges facing Egypt in economic development and social welfare.”

Dr Yasser Sakr, president of Helwan University told the British Council website that this “landmark agreement” would accelerate “collaboration and co-operation between the UK and Egypt in terms of higher education, student change, faculty change - all aspects of higher education.”

Dr Sakr certainly seems to have embraced the efforts by the military regime to “change” students at his own university by facilitating the clampdown on political protest.

Student societies affiliated with political parties have been banned or dissolved at many major universities.

He made repeated statements to the Egyptian media at the beginning of the last academic year warning students that “rioting” would be punished, and that students’ parents would be held financially accountable for any damage caused.

Sakr professes to support students’ right to express themselves - so long as they don’t share their political opinions. “We have no political parties on campus,” he told the Egyptian media last autumn, “and any student who breaks the norms and traditions of the university will be held

accountable by the law.”

His colleague Dr Hussein Eissa, president of Ain Shams University and another member of the delegation which visited the UK for the signing of the Newton-Mosharafa Fund memorandum was just as forthright.

He announced that no political slogans would be tolerated on campus and counselled university staff to leave their political views behind at the university gates.

Repression at both Ain Shams and Helwan Universities took an even more sinister twist recently with the forced disappearance of several students.

Final year engineering student Islam Atito was kidnapped on campus shortly after finishing an exam at Ain Shams University on 19 May. He was shot dead by the security forces who claimed he was a “terrorist.” Distressed relatives revealed at his funeral that Islam’s body bore injuries likely to be the result of torture.

In August and September student rights website freedomseekers.org reported on several other cases where Ain Shams and Helwan students had disappeared.

Opportunities to access funding for teaching and research from regimes or businesses in the Middle East may seem attractive in the context of funding cuts and pressure on resources.

Initiatives in transnational education are also often presented as chances to broaden students’ horizons and spread “research excellence.”

However, in the context of cuts to core funding for public higher education, such opportunities often carry a price-tag of a different kind.

For Pura Ariza, the issues raised by MMU’s decision to work for the Qatari Police are part of a much wider problem, which demands a broader political response:

“Marketisation leads to collaboration with notorious regimes, which are guilty of human rights abuses, and conformity to the government’s islamophobic agenda; it undermines critical independence scholarship, ethics and the teacher-student relationships - and this is why we resist.”

Take action: academics and research students who are concerned about their university’s links to Middle East regimes can contact the UCU union for advice.

Drones: lethal robots kill thousands

Alice Finden and Anne Alexander

The assassination of two British men, Reyaad Khan and Ruhul Amin, by RAF drones in Syria has highlighted the growing use of flying military robots by states such as the UK, US and Israel.

The two men were killed by a drone strike near the Syrian city of Raqqa, and Defence Secretary Michael Fallon claimed that other British members of ISIS could be imminent targets for future attacks, raising fears that the government is now operating a “Kill List” similar to the US policy of ordering secret drone attacks on wanted individuals.

Nearly 5,000 people have been killed by US killer drones under the CIA’s covert programme, which focuses on Yemen and Pakistan.

Legal charity Reprieve has led the way in the campaign to expose the horrific effects of the drone attacks on individuals, families and communities.

According to Reprieve’s research drone strikes are not the “clean” operations praised by their defenders: for every “target” hit, on average 28 other people are murdered and many more injured.

These include local people in areas under drone surveillance, like grandmother Manama Bibi whose body was ripped to shreds by a missile fired from a US drone in October 2012.



Drone operators based in Iraq, 2005 | Photo: United States Air Force

As her grandchildren rushed to her aid, the drone fired another missile, leaving them with serious injuries. Manama’s son Shahzad is still waiting for justice, nearly three years later.

“Nobody has ever told me why my mother was targeted that day. Some media outlets reported that the attack was on a car, but there is no road alongside my mother’s house.

“Others reported that the attack was on a house. But the missiles hit a nearby field, not a house.

For every “target” hit, on average 28 other people are murdered and many more injured.

“All of them reported that three, four, five militants were killed. But only one person was killed that day – Mamana Bibi, a grandmother and midwife who was preparing to celebrate the Islamic holiday of Eid. Not a militant, but my mother.”

The US also operates drones in both surveillance and assassination missions over Yemen.

Case studies by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism report that there have been between 64 and 88 confirmed deaths resulting from US drone strikes so far in 2015 alone, with nearly 100 civilians killed between 2002 and 2015.

Drones play a key role in Israel’s occupation of Palestine. In summer 2014, the Israeli attack on Gaza killed 2,200 people. According to Corporate Watch, 37 percent of those killed died in drone attacks.

Since Israel’s partial withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the occupation has instead been slowly taking to the sky in the form of unmanned aircraft, replacing the presence of soldiers on the ground.

In this way, the Israeli military can continue its surveillance and assassinations whilst not officially at war.

The secrecy which surrounds drone operations makes it difficult to collect data on casualties: companies suspected of supplying Israel with drones often refuse to disclose information on the matter and the Israeli military itself has yet to officially admit its use of drones.

Yet Palestinian organisations such as Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights have amassed detailed evidence of the devastation caused by these killer robots.

According to Al Mezan’s fieldwork, in 2004 only 0.3 percent of Palestinian deaths in Gaza were caused by drones, compared to 78.8 percent in 2012.

As a spokesperson for Al Mezan told Corporate Watch: “The people who manufacture the drones facilitate more attacks by the Israelis because they are cheaper and the drones are in the sky all the time. They don’t even have to plan the attack properly beforehand.”

The two major suppliers to the Israeli military are Elbit Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries.

Elbit Systems makes 85 percent of the Israeli military’s drones, describing its products as the “backbone of Israel’s UAS fleet”.

Turn to page 18 to read more on how campaigners in the UK are facing trial for exposing the deadly role played by Elbit’s UK factories in Israeli drone attacks on Gaza.



BDS march for fair play

MENA Solidarity

Around 1,500 Palestine campaigners marched through Cardiff on 6 September. They called on Welsh fans to boycott the Wales-Israel Euro 2016 qualifying match and demanded Israel is kicked out of international sport.

Football fans from across the country travelled to Cardiff to show their solidarity with Palestinian footballers and fans who live under Israeli occupation.

Drone protesters face court

MENA Solidarity

Activists whose demonstrations shut down UK factories owned by Israeli company Elbit Systems will face court on 27 November.

Nineteen people were arrested on 6 July at Elbit's Staffordshire factory as part of a day of protests outside the company's UK and Australian factories.

The UAV Engines plant makes components for military drones used by the Israeli army in attacks on Gaza.

Alistair Wingate took part in the protest on 6 July.

He urged solidarity with the Elbit defendants, saying, "You can't find a more direct link between Britain and Israeli war crimes than the UAV plant. That's why the protests are so important."

Activists took action to shut down production at Elbit's Staffordshire plant in August 2014 in protest at the killing of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza.

After the occupation at the Shenstone branch of the factory, activist Eva Jasiewicz said "Britain needs to impose an arms embargo on Israel. It's not enough to look in horror at the television. Action speaks louder than words."

London Palestine Action Group wrote in a statement announcing the protest: "The factory that we are occupying produces engines for drones



Football fans led protests against Israel's football apartheid | Photo: Mirfat Suleiman

Israel regularly prevents Palestinian footballers from playing in international and local matches, and jailed Mahmoud Sarsak, a member of the Palestinian national team for three years without charge or trial.

Sarsak, who was tortured in prison, believes he was deliberately targeted for arrest as a well-known football player. Meanwhile teams based in Israel's illegal settlements play in the Israeli league and can travel abroad without difficulty.

and is owned by Elbit Systems, Israel's largest military company and the world's largest drones producer.

"Drone engines manufactured at this factory were exported to Israel in 2010, 2011 and 2012, and Elbit Systems' drones are being used in Israel's ongoing massacre.

"Any claims that components manufactured at this factory are not being used in Israel's current attack on Gaza are not credible."

Action taken by protesters cost the company significant revenue.

David Cliff, general manager for UAV Engines reported in a police statement that: "The value of lost production for the two days we were forced to close amounted to £186,000."

The value of lost production for the two days Elbit were forced to close amounted to £186,000

Nine Palestinian solidarity protesters were originally charged back in 2014 and were due to stand trial in February of this year.

Charges were dropped, however, after Elbit Systems refused to provide evidence detailing its arms deals with Israel.

To mark the first anniversary of the attack on Gaza, activists returned to the factories to demand the UK stop arming Israel.

London Palestine Action activist Elly Hassan said: "People have come here from all over the country to show their solidarity with the Palestinian

struggle for freedom, justice and equality and to demand that the UK government imposes a two-way military embargo on Israel."

Demonstrations took place at three UK branches of Elbit systems, in Broadstairs, Shenstone (UAV Engines) and Tamworth.

A factory in Melbourne, Australia was also shut down on the same day.

Protesters managed to stop the assembly lines of the factories through road blockades and scaling the roofs.

They tied white ribbons bearing the names of Palestinians killed in the 2014 attack to fences and painted messages on the building.

Activists defied a court injunction banning demonstrations from within 250m of the building to make their protest.

For Alistair Wingate, the attempt to halt the campaign through the courts gives added urgency to the call for solidarity.

"The campaign for the Elbit 19 is also about defending our right to protest. We can't let the Israeli state and Elbit get away with using the courts in this country to try and stop us from exposing their crimes.

"The previous campaign in solidarity with arrested protesters was successful, so we know Elbit can be beaten."

Read more on page 17 about the devastation caused by drone attacks in Palestine, Yemen and Pakistan



Between two walls: Syrian refugees speak out

Tabloid editors and Tory politicians spent the summer whipping up a storm of racism against refugees waiting in Calais, hoping to cross to the UK.

Emmanuel Haddad and **Luke G.G. Bhatia** report on the courage and desperation behind the headlines, following the stories of **Nabil** and **Mohammed** as they make the perilous journey from Syria to Europe.



Refugees in Babussalam camp on the Syrian-Turkish border | Photo: İHH İnsani Yardım

generally hear only about the supporters of the regime, described as cynical or bloodthirsty, about its moderate opponents, usually powerless, or about the jihadi fighters, depicted as horrible, medieval barbarians.

And once they reach the gates of Europe, the Syrians fleeing the war find themselves all lumped together as migrants, most often illegal ones.

At the age of 33, like so many others, Nabil fled Syria to escape from arbitrary arrest, from the torture that would follow, from a sudden bombardment or a stray bullet.

His name is on a list of 96,000 Syrians hunted by Syrian intelligence, the existence of which was revealed by a leak in March 2013.

His greatest enemy is the indifference of the European Union to the asylum-seekers who are trying to reach its shores.

For in order to benefit from the rights granted to refugees according to the Geneva Convention and many European laws, it is still necessary to submit a request for asylum.

Put off indefinitely by the European embassies in Lebanon, threatened by the random violence directed at

Nabil, like 3.34 million Syrians, is – in the eyes of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) – a refugee. Like the others, he has been forced into exile for fear of persecution.

Behind this terrible motive which all share, each one has their own reasons, more personal and subtle, that international law does not always take into account. And which Europeans are only rarely able to understand.

When it comes to Syria, they



Syrian cities have been ravaged by war | Photo: Christiaan Triebert

Syrians, Nabil sees no way out but to put his fate in the uncertain hands of a smuggler.

“It’s as if I am between two walls. On one side, the war stops me from going back to Syria. On the other, the bureaucracy of the European states forbids me to travel freely. I have only two ways to escape: by the sea or the skies.”

In July 2014, only 123,600 Syrians had submitted an asylum request in Europe: 0.5% of the total number of Syrians who have fled their country.

European leaders are regularly reproached by the UN and human rights organisations for their lack of eagerness to welcome refugees.

Mare Nostrum, a naval operation put in place on 15 October 2013, came to an end on 1 November 2014, after saving more than 150,000 lives in the international waters off the Italian coast.

The same day, the European border agency Frontex launched Operation Triton. From now on, only Italian national waters will be patrolled, and the operation’s budget is a third of what it was.

The means put in place by Italy for sea rescue had been considered a “suction current” drawing migrants to try to gain the shores of Europe, whatever it took.

The UN’s Special Rapporteur on the migrants’ rights, François Crépeau, declared at the time:

“The governments that don’t support sea rescue operations have put themselves on the same level as

the smugglers. It amounts to saying: let them die, it’s a good method of deterrence.”

26 September 2014, 1.45 p.m. I get a message from Nabil: “I’ve bought a plane ticket to Turkey, 8 October. I’ll go to Istanbul and from there I’ll try to get to Greece. Lebanon isn’t safe for Syrians any more.” So he’s going to “try something crazy.”

“I am between two walls. I can only escape by the sea or the skies”

Monday, 3 November. His eyes fixed on the gulls which filch the fish from under the cooks’ noses and fly away laughing, Nabil eats a fish sandwich beside the Bosphorus, underneath Galata Bridge.

He doesn’t yet know that at the mouth of the Bosphorus straits, off the fishing village of Rumelifeneri, 22 lifeless bodies of Afghans and Syrians were fished out of the water today, at dawn, by the Turkish Coastguard.

“They were going to Romania via the Black Sea; they had paid 6,500 euros each to their smuggler,” the Turkish journalist Aysa Mola explains to me the next day, between two live TV reports broadcast from the beach at the port of Rumelifeneri.

On air, she mentions that in addition to the 22 bodies which were recovered, and the seven people rescued alive, eleven are still missing. There is little hope of finding them alive.

The same day, the International

Migration Organisation denounced “the ruthless criminal gangs which seek to profit from the misery of men, women and children who are fleeing conflict and oppression.”

In 2014, at least 3,419 people were drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe: it has become the “most deadly” migration route in the world, according to the UNHCR.

Stella Nanou, head of Public Information for the UNHCR in Athens, believes that solutions can be found in the European legislative apparatus, to stop this slaughter from continuing.

“Why doesn’t the EU increase the availability of legal alternatives for these refugees, before they have to use clandestine routes to get to Europe, and die at sea?...”

Nabil is still in Istanbul, between two walls. He has submitted a visa request at the Portuguese embassy, with the promise of support from the director of the scholarships department at Porto University, where Helen is studying. Since then, he’s been waiting.

The month before his request, the Portuguese Interior Minister, Miguel Macedo, resigned over the corruption scandal of the “golden visas”, residence permits granted by European countries which are in crisis to non-European citizens, in exchange for an investment of 500,000 euros or more in real estate, or a million euros or more in financial property (250,000 euros in Greece, 300,000 in Cyprus).

In time, the residence permits these rich investors have bought may allow them to be granted citizenship.

The visa, that Holy Grail refused to asylum-seekers who are fleeing to survive, has thus become – like frontier surveillance – a lucrative market. Those who arrive in Europe empty-handed are not seen as profitable clients.

By Emmanuel Haddad.

This is a shortened version of an article which appeared in French in *Ijsberg* Magazine in January 2015. Thanks to Peter Hill for the translation. Nabil eventually arrived in Germany and recently received his asylum papers.

Mohammed lives in Manchester. When I ask him why he left Syria he simply says, “because of the situation.” His journey to Manchester has taken him over a year. He left Syria on 7 June 2014.

He was a teacher working in a school outside of Aleppo. He did not fight as part of the resistance saying: “I didn’t fight in the war. I was a teacher, but I lost everything. I lost my job, I lost my school, my students.”

After 3 years of war he explains, “I was wanted because I refused to go and do military service, they fired me from my work.” After losing his job Mohammed continued to teach without pay at the school for one year before deciding to leave Syria.

I ask him why he left and he replies: “A lot of conflict, wars, there is real war in Syria – destruction – everything has been destroyed. It is an unbelievable situation. They destroy every city out of their control. The result of the revolution against ‘that’ government.” The school that he worked at is now closed.

When asked about the situation in Syria now he says: “Because of the violence, the war, everything has deteriorated. Most people do not have enough money to leave. I left all my family there. I can speak to them from time to time. Maybe they can leave. The situation is very bad and it is impossible for me to go back now.”

I ask him about his journey to the UK. He tells me that he lived in the countryside near Aleppo, near Khaliloco. The area is a revolutionary stronghold that is bombarded by Assad’s government’s bombs on a daily basis.

He crossed the border with Turkey in the north of Syria and spent fourteen days waiting to travel to Libya, explaining that: “Libya is the best place to reach Europe, but the journey is hard and you can die crossing the sea.” Mohammed borrowed money off his friends so that he was able to purchase a plane ticket from Turkey to Libya.

Once in Libya, with all of his money having been spent on the plane ticket there, he had to work in order to save the £700 that it costs to travel across the Mediterranean to Italy.

He spent three and a half months in Libya working in a marble stone factory, saving his wages until he could afford to make the crossing.



Babussalam camp | Photo: IHH İnsani Yardım

Arriving in Sicily Mohammed spent four days in a camp. He says he “was lucky as they didn’t take my fingerprints, so I was able to run away.”

Travelling first to Rome and then Milan by bus and train, using money saved up from his time working in the marble factory in Libya, he finally crossed the border into France at Ventimiglia and arrived in Nice.

He explains that this point was chosen to cross into France as you are less likely to get caught by the police and sent back to Milan. The journey was expensive, and he was unable to afford it again, so had to manage to cross into France on his first attempt.

“I was wanted because I refused to go and do military service.”

Once in France Mohammed started to make his way north, first to Paris, and then to Calais, at one point travelling 250km “underneath a truck among the wheels.”

I ask Mohammed to explain to me what life was like in Calais. He responds, “I didn’t expect this life in Calais – it was miserable.” He first slept on the steps of a church in a makeshift tent that had a roof but no sides. Mohammed then states that, “they talk about human rights and the United Nations, but the French government doesn’t deserve to be thought of like this. Some of the police beat us, some were very bad, but you know, it depends on person to person.” He was shocked that they were left sleeping in the streets.

During his time in Calais Mohammed was attacked twice by racist gangs, but speaks warmly of the residents, saying, “there were a lot of good people who offered food, clothes, blankets.

I am planning when I get my travel documents, to go back and thank them all because I know most of them.”

On the final leg of his journey to the UK, he explains, “it is very difficult to cross to England. You either pay for a smuggler to help you or you have to depend on yourself if you don’t have money.

“If you don’t have money and depend on yourself it is just depends on luck. Crossing depends on luck. I did everything, more than you can imagine to cross. 250km under a truck. Every day I tried but I didn’t succeed. I got caught and detained. Some guys come, they know nothing, and after one day they cross.”

Mohammed spent four months and three days in Calais eventually managing to sneak into the port, and hiding again underneath a lorry amongst the wheels. He says, “when the truck moved and went inside the ship it was like, you know there are special sounds that the truck makes when it moves, it was like creepy music, so we were very happy when it stopped and we were on the ship.”

After arriving in the UK the truck was stopped after approximately 20 miles and the police took Mohammed away to a detention centre.

After staying in hostels he eventually found himself living in a house in Sheffield, and upon being granted asylum by the UK government he travelled and settled in Manchester.

At the time I spoke to Mohammed about what could be done to help end the misery for people in Calais, solidarity and protests were not yet having an impact.

He said that refugees were worried that their calls for help were not being heard. “We had some demonstrations in Calais about the conditions but nobody cared, nobody answered us. They have to be able to depend on themselves to be able to cross.”

Now that demonstrations in solidarity with refugees are mobilising tens of thousands, hopefully the voices of those still trying to find their way to shelter will no longer be ignored.

Interview by Luke G.G. Bhatia.

Read more on p25 about solidarity delegations to Calais organised by UK and French activists. Go to the Stand Up to Racism website to find out how you can get involved.



Campaign launch at Downing Street | Photo: CAAT



RMT union members show support | Photo: Anne Alexander

John McDonnell
Photo: Anne Alexander

Campaign against al-Sisi visit launched Egypt Solidarity

Activists from Egypt Solidarity, Campaign Against Arms Trade and Platform unfurled a giant banner at Downing Street to mark the launch of the campaign against the visit of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to the UK.

The call for protests against the visit is also backed by the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, Union Solidarity International, MENA Solidarity, leading figures from the National Union of Students including Piers Telemacque and Malia Bouattia, UCU union president Liz Lawrence and former NUT union president Mary Compton.

They are among many activists who have signed an open letter to David Cameron condemning British complicity in al-Sisi's attacks on human rights, including the regime's enforcement of the siege on Gaza.

Sarah Waldron from Campaign Against Arms Trade said:

"The UK should be condemning the appalling human rights abuses

that have taken place under al-Sisi's rule; instead this visit will bolster his brutal regime. We're calling on the UK government to withdraw the invitation and stop supporting the regime with weapons sales."

Andy Reid from PCS union and Egypt Solidarity added:

"It is disgraceful that David Cameron is prepared to welcome al-Sisi to the UK. This is a man who is directly responsible for the death of over 1000 people at Raba'a Square.

"Anyone who protests is a target for repression, from Muslim Brotherhood activists to the revolutionary left. Workers protests are being routinely crushed and the army justifies shooting dead strikers in the name of 'fighting terrorism'."

Mika Minio-Paluello from Platform said: "The UK government is supporting the Egyptian regime hand in iron fist.

"Egyptian activists are being jailed and tortured in the thousands, but Cameron wants to throw out the red carpet for al-Sisi to boost profits for oil corporations like BP. We stand with those demanding democracy and an end to military rule."

Add your name to the open letter.
Sign online at the Union Solidarity International website.

Corbyn, McDonnell and trade union leaders slam invitation Egypt Solidarity

Opposition MPs are calling on David Cameron to withdraw the official invitation to Al-Sisi. Green Party MP Caroline Lucas tabled Early Day Motion 279 condemning the visit with the backing of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, Mark Durkan of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Scottish National Party's Martyn Day and Jonathan Edwards of Plaid Cymru.

Over 30 MPs had signed the EDM by the time of the parliamentary summer recess in late July.

The motion also calls for the revocation of death sentences handed out by Egyptian courts to opponents of the military regime, including former president Mohamed Morsi, who was overthrown by al-Sisi in a coup two years ago, and demands an end to British sales of arms and security equipment to Egypt.

John McDonnell MP, one of the sponsors of the motion and a member of the MENA Solidarity Steering Group said:

"This is a visit of someone with a record of oppression of human rights and of trade union rights. We shouldn't allow him to come to our country and desecrate our soil"

Meanwhile, trade union leaders Mark Serwotka and Dave Ward confirmed their backing for the campaign.

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the civil servants union PCS, and Dave Ward, general secretary of the Communication Workers' Union CWU added their names to the statement against the visit.

They join leading figures from Unite, the biggest union in the UK and Ireland: Mark Lyon, chair of Unite's International Committee and Unite's national president Tony Woodhouse have also pledged their support.

Go to egyptsolidarityinitiative.org/sisinotwelcome to find out more



Protesters took to the streets to show solidarity with political prisoners in Egypt on 21 June. Solidarity actions took place in Australia (left) South Korea (top left) Canada (top right) and London (right), as well as many other countries.

Mahienour jailed again Egypt Solidarity

On 31 May, award winning human rights lawyer Mahienour al-Masry, along with journalist Yusuf Shabaan and seven other activists, was sentenced to one year and three months in prison. This follows her release from jail in September 2014 after a two-year sentence in another case for breaching Egypt's controversial anti-protest law was reduced to six months.

The activists were accused of storming Raml police station in Alexandria during a protest in 2013 in solidarity with lawyers who were attacked by the police after attending to represent arrested clients.

The return of Mahienour and her colleagues to jail spurred on activists around the world to mobilise protests in solidarity with Egyptian political prisoners on 20 and 21 June.

The date marks a year since a peaceful protest march to the presidential palace in Cairo was attacked by the police and

over twenty people arrested, including human rights activist Yara Sallam and student Sanaa Seif.

Egypt solidarity activists staged a demonstration on 20 June at Cleopatra's Needle in London before joining a major protest organised by the People's Assembly Against Austerity. Egypt Solidarity Initiative joined the anti austerity march to raise awareness of Cameron's backing for the Egyptian dictatorship.

In Ottawa on 20 June, activists from The Third Path – Canadian Egyptians for Freedom and Social Justice organised a protest outside the Egyptian Embassy, highlighting the cases of political prisoners and forced disappearances in Egypt. New York also saw a protest in Union Square in solidarity with Egyptian political prisoners, organised by MENA Solidarity – US.

In Paris, the Committee in Solidarity with the Egyptian People's Struggle organised an information stall at the start of a protest in solidarity with the Greek people on 20 June, highlighting the cases of political prisoners in Egypt.

Protest activities took place in Australia, Montreal and Dublin, activists from the former collecting

Global action for prisoners



signatures from trade union leaders and academics on the statement against executions in Egypt.

Other events in solidarity with political prisoners in Egypt included a protest organised by activists in Geneva outside the Egyptian embassy.

In Bologna on 15 June activists from the XM 24 squat organised an event to talk about repression under Egyptian military rule.

On 19 June, 18 organisations including the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), National Union of Mediaworkers and Workers' Solidarity, organized a protest near Egyptian embassy in Seoul. Jong Kim, one of the organisers of the protest, said:

"We condemned the hypocrisy of the leaders of other countries such as the US, UK and Korea.

"For example, the Korean president recently wrote a letter to Al-Sisi saying that she wanted friendship and trust with him. But we do not consider Al-Sisi as our friend but rather a butcher, an enemy of the Egyptian revolution."

Go to www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org to join the campaign for political prisoners in Egypt.



Asylum win for Isa al-Aali

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy

A UK court approved Bahraini Isa al-Aali's asylum appeal in a verdict welcomed by the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD).

Judge Clark of the Immigration and Asylum First-tier Tribunal ruled on 28 July that there is "reasonable chance that the appellant [Al-Aali] would risk persecution on return to Bahrain for his political beliefs" and that he therefore qualifies as a refugee.

Isa al-Aali, 21, arrived in Britain on 14 February 2014, when he fled Bahrain via Dubai to London on a visit visa. Al-Aali had been a participant in protests in Bahrain.

In February 2013 police arrested him, beat him and held a knife against his groin, threatening to cut him if he did not confess to attacking policemen.

Al-Aali was imprisoned two more times in relation to his assembly and



Isa al-Aali and supporters | Photo: BIRD

association in 2013. On his release on bail in January 2014, he decided to flee the country.

In May 2014, the Home Office ordered Al-Aali's deportation, which was later stopped by a court injunction.

At the time, Al-Aali told the Independent that "The decision by the UK to deport me to Bahrain could put me at risk of my life as I will get tortured."

The Home Office's denial of Isa al-Aali's asylum coincided with controversies over the UK welcoming Bahraini Prince Nasser bin Hamad, who

faces allegations of torture.

In October 2014, Prince Nasser's immunity from prosecution of torture in the UK was quashed, though he continues to visit the country.

Following the court's verdict, Isa al-Aali said: "This decision is a slap in the face of the Bahraini government. I will be an ambassador to my country and people, and continue the struggle for human rights and democracy."

A longer version of this article is available online at birdbh.org

Teachers' leader denied medical care

MENA Solidarity

The health of jailed teachers' union leader Mahdi Abu Dheeb is failing, Bahrain and international human rights groups warned recently.

Injuries sustained under torture during his interrogation in 2011 mean that he is unable to walk without support because of severe neck and back pain.

The Bahraini authorities have also denied him access to medicine for hypertension and diabetes since March, according to Amnesty International, and refused to let him wear supportive shoes needed for his back pain.

Prison guards have refused to accept the medication brought to him by his family.

Amnesty is calling for immediate



Funeral procession in Bahrain, 2011
Photo: Al-Jazeera English

medical treatment for Abu Dheeb and an investigation into allegations of torture that he endured throughout his interrogation.

Fellow member of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, Jalila Salman, was also arrested on the same charges as Abu Dheeb in 2011, but was released after 6 months of imprisonment.

Salman was quoted on twitter by BirdBahrain saying: "Everyone tortured Mahdi Abu Dheeb, the CID, prison, military court, even the nurse."

Meanwhile, fellow political prisoner, Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace completed his 160th day of hunger strike on 28 August.

Like Abu Dheeb, Al-Singace was arrested for his role in peaceful protests in 2011.

He was sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court on 22 June 2011, as a member of the "Bahrain 13", a group of prominent human rights and political activists.

Dr Al-Singace is a blogger and academic and former head of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Bahrain.

Campaigns for his release and an appeal signed by 41 NGOs have highlighted his physical deterioration; entering prison as a disabled man, a lack of access to medical aid has only worsened his condition.

In March 2015 he began a hunger strike in protest at torture and collective punishment in Bahrain's prisons, surviving by drinking water, fizzy drinks and taking IV injections.

Find out more about the campaign for the release of Bahraini political prisoners at birdbh.org



'Refugees Welcome' demonstration in London, 12 September | Photo: WeeklyBull @ Flickr

Activists deliver Calais solidarity

Alice Finden

Refugees trapped in the humanitarian crisis in Calais are targets of ongoing racism and scaremongering. Many have fled counter revolution and war in Syria and Libya. Philip Hammond MP recently described people in Calais as a "swarm", threatening the "standards of living and social infrastructure" of Europe. Such remarks have only spurred on anti-racist activist organising in protest.

On 20 August Theresa May and Bernard Cazeneuve (French Minister of the Interior) were met in Calais by demonstrations over rigid border controls.

A mixture of local Calaisiens and people living in refugee camps came together to voice outrage at the way the British and French governments are handling the situation.

Political group Calais Migrant Solidarity documented this story and many others like it.

Since 2009 they have focused on documenting police harassment of migrants and giving a voice to people living on the border.

Stand Up To Racism launched a statement on 10 August protesting the racism of Hammond and Cameron, in

solidarity with people in Calais.

It is also following the example of activists from Strike! magazine who took advantage of the Daily Mail's offer of a £1 ticket to Calais in December 2014.

They took provisions down to the border and started spreading the word about how others could do the same.

Provisions are being collected from workplaces, communities and union branches and then driven down to refugee camps on the border.

Stand Up To Racism is organising a delegation to Calais on 17 October.

Response to the activism from people in the UK has been impressive. On fundraising, Diane Fotheringham of the group Glasgow Solidarity with Calais said "The initial target was £500, and with two days to go before the appeal finishes almost £4,000 has been donated."

Other groups around the UK and France such as No Borders UK, SOAS detainees support, and L'Auberge des Migrants are taking action in the form of fundraisers and providing direct aid in Calais.

As Fotheringham states: "It is clear that the mainstream media is not the voice of many ordinary people."

Read the stories of Syrian refugees Nabil and Mohammed on p19-21. Go to the Stand Up to Racism website for more details on the statement and solidarity delegations.

New book: Bahrain's Uprising

Bahrain Watch

Nearly five years since the 2011 revolutions swept the Middle East, the Gulf island of Bahrain has almost been forgotten from the narrative of events which dramatically changed the region.

Co-edited by two Bahrain Watch members, Marc Owen Jones and Ala'a Shehabi, *Bahrain's Uprising* examines the ongoing protests and the state's repression, revealing a sophisticated society shaped by its political struggle against a reactionary ruling elite that sees the island as the bounty of conquest.

This regime survived largely through foreign political and economic patronage, notably from Britain, America, and Saudi Arabia – a patronage so deep, that the island was the first target of the regional counter-revolutionary mobilisation that continues today.

We asked editor Marc Owen Jones, a PhD candidate at Durham University, why they had decided to put the book together: "We wanted to do a book that collated a lot of the disparate writings of *Bahrain's Uprising* in a volume that would stand as a narrative of the time for a wide readership. It was also the intention to have contributions from those whose lives have been touched in some way or another, by the Uprising, from academics and activists to writers, poets and political prisoners.

"The purpose of this was to bring the issue of Bahrain, which is often marginalised in international media, to as broad a public as possible, shedding light on both contemporary and historical injustices. Although much is missing, we hope *Bahrain's Uprising* will be the first of a number of empirically rich volumes that explore the Uprising from a perspective of social justice advocacy. While some may feel Bahrain is a small country, undeserving of much attention, the internationalisation of repression and dissent starkly highlights the relevance of the tiny island to global publics."

Bahrain's Uprising: Resistance and Repression in the Gulf is published by Zed Books.

Academics & students under fire



Nasser bin Ghaith (UAE)

University lecturer Nasser bin Ghaith is being held by UAE authorities in an unknown location. He was detained on 19 August 2015 following his criticism of the mass killings of demonstrators in Raba'a Square by Egyptian security forces in 2013.



Mahmoud Hussein (Egypt)

Nineteen year old Mahmoud Hussein was arrested on 25 January 2014 for wearing a t-shirt with the slogan "Nation without torture". He has spent more than 500 days in pre-trial detention, this period was extended by another 45 days on 24 August.



Jihad Sadeq al-Hebaishi (Bahrain)

Jihad Sadeq al-Hebaishi was 16 years old when he was arrested in July 2012. He told the court he was tortured into giving a false confession by security officers. Despite this he was sentenced to 10 years in prison under the anti-terrorism law.



Esraa el-Taweel (Egypt)

Student and photojournalist Esraa el-Taweel disappeared in June 2015. After two weeks she was reported to have been jailed in al-Qanater women's prison on charges of spreading false news. Her case is one in a wave of disappearances in Egypt.



Heba Kishta (Egypt)

A student at Mansoura University's Faculty of Commerce, Heba is being tried in a military court under anti-protest laws. She was arrested on 30 October 2014 after security forces stormed the campus, attacking and beating students and staff.



Wafae Charaf (Morocco)

Law student Wafae Charaf was coordinating a workers' protest in April 2014. Upon leaving the protest she was attacked by two men who beat and threatened her. She was then sentenced to two years in prison for falsely reporting torture.



Emad Shahin (Egypt)

Emad Shahin, Professor of Public Policy at the American University in Cairo, was sentenced to death in absentia on 16 May 2015 on charges referred to as espionage. Shahin fled Egypt in January 2014 and has remained in the US since.



Ahmed al-Saroo (Bahrain)

Ahmed al-Saroo was arrested at the age of 15 during a raid on his home. Security forces harassed and abused him during his detention and was refused access to a lawyer throughout interrogation. He was sentenced to 3 years in prison in 2013.



Jihad Salim (Palestine)

Student representative Jihad Salim was arrested in April for his connection with a Hamas-affiliated group. He was beaten and threatened by security forces. His arrest is one in a number targeting university students for their political opinions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make a protest

Write a letter to the relevant embassy in London, calling for the release of all those unjustly detained.

Make it specific: it is important that the regimes know that individual prisoners have not been forgotten.

Look out for information online about dates for trials and appeal hearings to time your action.

Make it public

Don't just let the ambassador know you're angry, tell the world.

Write to the media, spread the word on social media, or ask your student union or trade union to circulate your letter.

Embassy officials read and respond to letters in the national press. They care about their image abroad

Do it together

Collective action is stronger than a lone voice.

Why not organise a joint letter and collect signatures from workmates or other students?

Put a resolution to your union branch or student union to send an official protest.

Organise or join a protest to highlight specific cases of repression. Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com/campaignguide for model motions, embassy addresses and more.



Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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Contact us online if you have an idea for a story, want to contribute a translation or to share a photograph or illustration you have created. Go to www.menasolidaritynetwork.com/MEScontributors



MENA Solidarity

menasolidaritynetwork.com

MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NUT unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.

BAHRAIN WATCH

bahrainwatch.org

Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.



Egypt Solidarity

egyptsolidarityinitiative.org
Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.

LEBANON'S ROT STARTS AT THE TOP



Protesting on 29 August | Photo: Joelle Hatem

Festering piles of rubbish in the streets of Beirut this summer touched off mass anti-government protests on a scale not seen for several years. Lebanese activist **Haytham Cero** analyses the political and social tensions which turned waste collection into a major political crisis.

Over the summer the Lebanese capital Beirut was the scene of a growing protest movement triggered by a crisis over rubbish collection. A major landfill site closed down in July and the corrupt political and business clique that runs the country failed to find a replacement. As a result tons of rubbish were left for weeks on the streets of Beirut and other cities throughout the country.

This issue is the latest scandal of a regime in perpetual crisis. Privatisation, neoliberal policies and gentrification over the years have marginalised the majority of the Lebanese population.

The regime constantly uses religious sectarian rhetoric as the cornerstone of a divide-and-rule strategy, threatening to plunge the country into a repeat of the 1975-1990 civil war.

The state is divided among sectarian parties and their militias who in turn are supposed to control and contain “their” people, so the organised looting of the country’s resources by the regime’s crony capitalists can continue undisturbed.

This is the backdrop for the emergence of the “You Stink” movement, which organised a 10,000 strong protest in central Beirut on 22 August.

Although its organisers and initial participants were

mainly middle class, mobilised through social media, it was able to draw on the resentment felt by large layers of Lebanese society towards corrupt politicians.

On 22 August, protesters’ attempt to remove the barbed wire set up by the police and army was met with fierce repression by state security forces.

Riot police fired live bullets into the air and attacked protesters with tear gas and water cannons, injuring dozens in a savage assault.

The “You Stink” movement organisers – along with large sections of the mainstream media – condemned state violence against protesters, and called for another demonstration the next day.

However, when youth from the impoverished Beirut suburbs spontaneously joined the protests the “You Stink” campaign organisers and mainstream media labelled them “infiltrators” under the pretence that they came from neighbourhoods notoriously controlled by sectarian parties Amal and Hezbollah.

A well known TV reporter said they “didn’t look like educated activists to me”. The organisers went so far as to call off the protest and ask security forces to “clear the square of infiltrators.”

A further protest on 29 August mobilised tens of thousands, but the same tensions were still visible.

The seemingly festive atmosphere was disturbed by a few thousands chanting revolutionary slogans against the regime, and putting social demands at the forefront of the march.

The organisers and the mainstream parties which had jumped on the protest bandwagon appealed to Lebanese nationalism, but revolutionary activists raised chants inspired by the Arab revolutions of 2011.

A few weeks later, further protests appeared to have won a victory, as the government conceded activists’ demands to let local councils remove the rubbish as well as opening new landfill sites.

Initially confined to rubbish collection and environmental issues, mass mobilisation around the “You Stink” movement has created an important space to express political demands, and uncovered the discontent felt by large layers of the population.

The organisers’ efforts to limit the social scope of the movement and their hostility towards the young people from poor and working-class neighbourhoods who tried to participate was a serious mistake.

The fact that people from Beirut’s poorest neighbourhoods joined the protests from 23 August onwards shows the potential for breaking the ruling sectarian parties’ grip on political life.

It raises the possibility of mobilising people along class lines to fight for social demands, rather than through religious sectarianism.

