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**Local and Global Encounters: Politics, Consumption and the  
Fueling of a Grassroots Boycott in Alexandria, Egypt**

**Taline Djerdjarian**

**A Thesis**

**in**

**The Department**

**of**

**Sociology and Anthropology**

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Local and Global Encounters: Politics, Consumption and the Fueling of a Grassroots Boycott in Alexandria, Egypt**

Taline Djerdjarian

This thesis explores the social and cultural dynamics of a grassroots boycott of American and Israeli goods and products that took shape in Egypt in the year 2000. The boycott is analyzed both as a consumer movement and a forum for populist political expression and participation. It was fueled by political discontent with United States' foreign policies in the Middle East in general, and Egypt in particular, and also constituted a reaction to the policies of the Israeli government in the occupied Palestinian territories and U.S. inaction towards such policies.

The aim of the thesis is to develop an empirical, socio-cultural, historical, and politically informed case study of current trends in the politicization of consumption in Alexandria, Egypt. The thesis presents consumers as simultaneously constrained by the forces of modernization and the globalization of market society, and as agents who consciously appropriate and rework existing systems and conditions for their own benefit.

It is commonly thought that cultural diversity is in the process of disappearing and that the homogenizing effects of globalization and westernization are inescapable. This case study shows that globalization has made significant inroads into Egyptian society creating many tensions and difficulties, yet these very difficulties have also served as the occasion for resistance to take shape, as evidenced by the Boycott.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my thesis committee and all the professors I worked with at Concordia from whom I learnt so much. Particular thanks go to Prof. Homa Hoodfar for all her guidance, invaluable advice and encouragement throughout my studies. Without her active involvement and interest in my education and research I would not be where I am today. My gratitude also goes to my supervisor, Prof. David Howes to whom I owe my involvement in the Culture and Consumption project and whose advice and support have had a tremendous impact on my work. Prof. Marie Nathalie Leblanc's contribution and suggestions both throughout my course work and in this thesis are also greatly appreciated and I would like to thank her for that.

I am deeply indebted to all the individuals and families that participated in my research in Egypt, my friends, relatives and former colleagues who enriched my understanding and made my stay in Egypt so much more enjoyable and rewarding. Their involvement and deep interest in my research made this thesis a reality. There are no words that could describe or do justice to how much I am grateful for the relationships established during fieldwork which I hope will continue for a long time to come.

My gratitude also goes to my husband Kevork Tcherkezian, my parents Arto and Nevart, and my brother Garbis who have always been there for me supporting me through every step and major decision of my life. They have provided me with the unconditional love, support, care and encouragement that in turn gave me the determination and ability to pursue my education and reach this stage of my life. I truly cherish everything that they have given me.

**Taline Djerdjarian**

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## **NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION**

In transcribing Arabic into the Latin alphabet, I have followed the traditional rules of transcribing. Arabic names are written as they generally appear in English texts.

**‘** indicates the Arabic letter *‘ain*, which is a strong, voiced, guttural consonant.

**gh** indicates the Arabic letter that is pronounced as in the guttural (not the rolled) French *r* in *gras*.

**h** indicates the Arabic letter that is pronounced as in the *h* in *Mohamed*.

**kh** indicates the Arabic letter that is pronounced as in the *ch* in the Scottish *loch*.

## **INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION:**

This research examines the various dimensions of the boycott of American and Israeli products in Egypt. In this ethnographic case study I explore the changes in consumerism in an era of growing globalized markets and the role that the current forces of globalization and westernization have to play in this process. The grassroots boycott campaign is examined as a response to American foreign policies in the Middle East in general, bilateral relations with Egypt itself, and to Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, to local interpretations and perceptions of these conditions, and as a tool for political participation and for voicing issues of popular concern.

Egypt's involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the shared experiences of Egyptians and Palestinians under Ottoman and later British occupation and their struggles for independence date back to the beginning of this century. Egypt's continuous support of the Palestinian cause grew even further after the 1952 Revolution in Egypt and has been mounting ever since. Therefore the historical aspect of this connection and feelings of shared solidarity and Arab-nationalism have long been established. Some of these historical factors are presented in the thesis in order to contextualize and provide a framework for understanding the current events in the area and Egyptians' interpretations and reactions to them.

Politics and consumerism are linked to one another in an exploration of how political decisions and American foreign policy come to have a direct impact on local consumption patterns and how Egyptian nationalism and Arab solidarity are being revised and revived in a world where it is often assumed that globalization is leading to homogenization of cultures, erosion of local identities, and lack of influence of the

general public in the developing world. Consumption is examined in terms of how local culture, identity, socio-economic and political structures influence choices of consumers and are asserted through a boycott that has materialized and evolved as a tool to meet both political and economic objectives of a public which generally has little to say in the political structure of their own state.

I situate this study within the growing body of literature in anthropology that deals with cross-cultural consumption and looks at consumers as active agents (Appadurai 1986; Howes 1996; Dant 1999; McCracken 1988; Miller 1995, 1997, 1998). The subject at hand is related to issues of culture, identity, geopolitics, and politics of consumerism in Egypt (Said 1994, 2002; Amin 2000; Dowek 2001; Hoodfar and Singerman 1986; Hoodfar 1997; Davies and Sardar 2001), to concerns over whether globalization is leading to homogenization and loss of cultural diversity and to the issue of how globalization is conceptualized by ordinary citizens and in this case Egyptians (Garcia-Canclini 2001; Ong 1999; Amin 2002; Bahaa ElDin 2000; Yassin 2000, 2002).

My research hypothesis came out of fieldwork I undertook in the summer of 2001 as part of the Culture and Consumption Research Project headed by Prof. David Howes, at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University, and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). I started with the examination of patterns of consumption and domestication of particular products such as cosmetics, Barbie dolls, debit cards, etc. It was during this time that the issue of the boycott presented itself and I became very interested in it and attempted to gather as much information and empirical data about it as possible. Upon my return to Alexandria in the summer of 2002, I concentrated on the question of the boycott exclusively.

The research upon which this thesis is based was also an opportunity to return to my homeland and apply the anthropological skills I had learned to my own culture. I was forced to see things in a different light and question phenomena and occurrences that I would have taken for granted had it been otherwise.

I do not in any way attempt to generalize my findings to the whole population as that is not feasible in anthropology. Yet what I attempt to do is to look at these particular cases from a 'native' point of view and draw some conclusions that could be true within the larger cultural context.

#### **Division of Chapters:**

Chapter I describes the location and socio-political and historical context of the ethnography. A brief description of Egypt and the city of Alexandria is followed by a more in depth account of the changes and transformations that have taken place in the country in the last century through changes in regimes, as relevant to the present economic and political situation. Perceptions of the West, modernization, nationalism, Pan-Arabism and various aspects of culture and identity are discussed as a background to the subsequent chapters.

Chapter II is a general description of the methodology of my research. The question of being a 'native' anthropologist as debated within the discipline of anthropology is discussed and related to my own feelings as an anthropologist. I also present the techniques and some of the results of collecting data, participant observation, interviews, mass media, the research sample, in addition to the analysis and presentation of my data.



An overview of theoretical concepts and literature pertaining to my research is presented in Chapter III. Concepts such as local and foreign, globalization, westernization, modernity, consumption, advertising, and the domestication of global commodities in new cultural settings are discussed within a theoretical framework of anthropological discourse. I also give a brief discussion and some examples of boycotts as grassroots social movements. Data pertaining to the local situation is also presented in order to link it to the literature relevant to each of these concepts. At the end of this chapter I take a glance at the first Arab boycott of Israel in the 1940s and compare it to current efforts.

The main body of my thesis based on empirical data about the boycott is presented in Chapter IV. I do not attempt to cover all the products being boycotted as that would be impossible. But I do concentrate on the ones that are the most visible symbols of the boycott and which were suggested and specified by informants. The reasons behind the boycott are discussed, how and in what form it is practiced, the companies and goods being boycotted and the ways in which these companies are perceived and constructed. The other dimension of the boycott taking shape in the promotion of local industry and alternative goods is examined and correlated to the reactive policies of some of the local and multinational companies and the consequent interpretation of these policies by informants. Finally, a short overview of the international dimension of the boycott as a growing social movement is discussed.

In chapter V, I present a short description of relations between Egypt, the United States, Israel and Palestine that will clarify and put into perspective some of the reasons behind the boycott. The relevance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Egyptians, the

shared colonial history and experience of Egyptians and Palestinians under British occupation, the proximity, similarities and connections between the two countries, their peoples and cultures are all contributors to the strong feelings of solidarity, unity and common interests that the two nations and peoples share.

Some examples of U.S. meddling in local affairs are also presented in order to contextualize and situate the perceptions and opinions held of the United States and Israel. Whether facts, or simple claims and allegations these conditions perpetuate strongly held opinions and views of the two countries.

I also present some headlines from the mass media in an attempt to show how they influence understandings and awareness of local and global tensions. This is an attempt to contextualize the boycott within public discourse and explore some of the messages sent through the media and how their portrayal of current events influences the decisions of ordinary consumers.

In an attempt to give a more first hand experience of some of the conversations I had with informants, I have included extracts from two conversations/informal interviews with several of my informants in Chapter VI. I believe that their words speak in very direct terms and give a good sense of local insight and sensitivity. A content analysis of the interviews concludes this chapter.

Chapter VII is the conclusion of my thesis and includes final thoughts and remarks about the current and possibly future status of the boycott in Egypt, implications for the national economy and the 'real' and 'hoped for' consequences of the boycott.

Throughout the thesis I try to incorporate selected visual images that correspond to my empirical data and arguments in an attempt to provide some contextualization to

**the reader. Another important point to mention is that all translations from Arabic or French are my own work and I take full responsibility for them.**

## **CHAPTER I:           CONTEXT OF RESEARCH**

*...despite all the changes Egypt has undergone, two basic things have remained absolutely unchanged. The first is the breathtaking natural beauty of Egypt – her deserts, shores, lakes, ancient monuments and the majestic Nile that crosses the country in all its length, bringing to it life and fertility. The second is the Egyptian people – simple, kind, good-humoured, peace-loving, hospitable, hard-working and content with very little ... These are Egypt's two most precious treasures that no one can ever take from it.*

– Ephraim Dowek (2001: 24).

### **1       Introduction and Objectives of Study**

The spread of Western commodities throughout the world has pushed issues of global homogenization and loss of cultural diversity to the forefront. However, to assume that consumers in non-western cultures are passive receivers with no agency<sup>1</sup> of their own would be misleading. The case study of the Egyptian boycott of American and Israeli goods presented here shows that external<sup>2</sup> commodities are not always received at face value, but rather that there is a process of 'creolization' or 'localization' taking place by which cultures re-contextualize and attach meanings to them which may never have been intended by the producers – and thus make sense of them in new and challenging ways (Howes 1996).

The issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seems to play a central role in current dynamics of consumption in Egypt. In fact, the political dimension of consumption is always present, but at times it becomes more clearly articulated and this case study would

---

<sup>1</sup> "By agency I mean the capacity, within the (confines of specific) structures inherited from the past and lived in the present, to act in a purposive and reflexive manner; to act in a way that at times may modify what is inherited and that which is lived" (Storey 1999:159). "Agents are mostly aware of what they are actually doing when they consume" (1999: 163) and hence, also when they refuse to consume.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the word 'external' is a reflection of how it is used by informants by the term *beta' barra*, anything 'coming from outside of Egypt', and not necessarily referring to a product from any particular country.

serve as a good case in point of how nationalism and Pan-Arabism are invoked. It also shows that consumers in Egypt have found a means by which to express their political grievances by exploiting the presence of a large array of multinationals and foreign/external products in their country. They recognize that it is due to globalization that these foreign products have flooded their markets and their homes, and they have taken an active role in appropriating and using this environment to their advantage.

Aiwa Ong states that:

Non-western cultures are not disappearing but are adjusting in very complex ways to global processes and remaking their own modernities (1999: 240). Cultural insights and our attention to everyday practice and the relations of power can illuminate how the operations of globalization are translated into cultural logics that inform behavior, identities and relationships (1999: 22).

Similarly, rather than losing their identity and being swept up by the forces of globalization and homogenization, Egyptians are trying to make the best out of the current circumstances and conditions to make them work for their advantage. In fact, within this particular case it becomes obvious how large multinationals do depend on consumers for their profits and thus, their fate is as much in the hands of the local populations as they have influence on the global economy.

I have selected a few material objects and practices of consumption to be investigated further. At the theoretical level my desire is to give consumers some credit and maintain a notion of active agency, all the while taking into consideration the dynamics of globalization and some elements of structural pressure. I do not attempt to dichotomize between oppression and resistance, or passive and active agency as the lines between them are not clearly defined and separated. I try to integrate the two and reach a middle ground as it was often expressed to me by interviewees; a balance between

tradition and modernity, between localization and westernization, between Egyptian nationalism and cultural identity and Arab nationalism and solidarity.

### **1.1 Starting Point of the Study**

The escalation of violence and military action by the Israeli forces against Palestinians in the occupied territories and what was seen as American inaction to these events in the year 2000 is considered to be the main trigger of the boycott (McGrath 2002). According to data gathered from informants and from the mass media, the boycott was initiated by individual efforts and through interpersonal networks rather than through a formal organizational structure or through direct state policy.<sup>3</sup>

The first products targeted were symbols of American hegemony and influence such as Coca Cola and McDonald's. But also Sainsbury's super markets, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Ariel laundry detergent, Pizza Hut, Proctor and Gamble, Pepsi, Johnson and Johnson, etc. The target was mainly American and Israeli products but was later expanded to include: first, all other goods and services by companies or businesses known for their support of the state of Israel irrelevant of their origin; second, companies which do business with Israeli firms located in the occupied territories; finally, companies that establish plants or operations on illegal settlements.

### **1.2 Main Questions**

The key questions that were examined in order to understand and contextualize the boycott were the following:

- a. What is the economic and political situation in the country and in the global arena as a whole and how does this affect the choices and consumption patterns of

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<sup>3</sup> The Boycott taking place in Egypt started and still is a grassroots movement not an official state boycott. This is why I only briefly touch upon state boycotts later on in the thesis. For more on this issue see Richard B. Lillich 1976.

individuals? What role do cultural factors such as selfhood, status, honor, family, education (Bach 1998), nationalism and history play in this process?

- b. How does the boycott function and how is it organized? How does it reinforce or weaken existing social relations and what is its economic and political impact?
- c. Which goods are being boycotted and why?
- d. How do Egyptians identify, define, and construct that which is local and that which is foreign? What is American and what is not? What are their own perceptions of real and imagined threats?
- e. How and why do some of these goods come to symbolize Western and/or American imperialism and globalization and hence are criticized, while others remain neutral and are appropriated and incorporated into daily life without any disruptions to the existing order? What happens at the encounter of the local and global and how does this dimension of consumption become apparent?
- f. Why is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so pertinent to the definition of Egyptian and external products that threaten internal production and consumption?
- g. Are there any symbolic meanings attached to these products and what kinds of messages, if any, do they transmit?
- h. What does it mean to be Egyptian today? What sustains this identity?
- i. How are the attempts to reconcile local needs and foreign pressures dealt with?

I try to answer these points throughout the thesis rather than answering each one separately.

## **2 Why Egypt / Why this Subject?**

I chose Egypt for several reasons: first, I realized that it is a fascinating place to do research on globalization and consumption because globalization is not new to Egypt (Amin 2002). In fact, globalization has been going on for centuries and it would be naïve to allege that it is a new phenomenon (Appadurai 1986). If we look at Egypt's long and rich history we find that throughout the centuries it has been exposed to, influenced by, and in turn influenced cultures and civilizations around the world. Thus to assume that

processes of globalization are just recently starting to have an affect on Egyptian culture and identity would be false. Nevertheless, it is the volume and speed at which recent developments are taking place that merits attention.

Second, within the local Egyptian context globalization is not always seen as a bad thing, on the contrary, it is seen as a kind of inevitable process which has to be kept up with. In public discourse, in the mass media and even in private conversations the general consensus seems to be that globalization has its advantages and disadvantages. This is why one has to be ready and well prepared culturally, intellectually, economically, politically and even technologically, to be able to make the best out of the situation and in order not to be caught by surprise (Bahaa ElDin 2000; Yassin 1999, 2000).

Thirdly, Egyptians are keen on keeping their 'traditional' beliefs, values and practices, yet they are also open to modernization and to new ideas. There is a general feeling that there could be reconciliation between their sense of being modern and being traditional. For any attempt to understand this correlation between modernity and tradition and attempts at reconciliation between the two, it is essential that we take the existing condition and examine it in light of the specific historical experience of that locality (Miller 1995a), and this is what I will attempt to do.

Fourth, consumption is an important manifestation of culture and is not just a private matter or reaction to global fashion trends.

The new significance accorded to shopping as a research topic may, in part, be explained by reference to the central role this phenomenon is accorded as a cultural phenomenon in contemporary 'postmodern' society, where it is identified as a realm of social action, interaction and experience which increasingly structure the everyday practices of urban people...an analysis of this apparently prosaic and mundane activity can yield major insights into the lives of contemporary men and women (Campbell and Falk 1997: 1-2).



Within the context of this research consumption has become a highly public, moral and political matter. In line with Mary Douglas' (1997) argument which Campbell and Falk summarize in their book *The Shopping Experience*, it would be valid to say that

The shopper is a rational, coherent person whose conduct is inspired by cultural considerations; essentially by consistent and repeated expressions of cultural hostility. What may appear to be a myriad of apparently unrelated consumer choices are in fact connected because they represent a consistent campaign in which cultural allegiances are announced and antipathies expressed (Campbell and Falk 1997: 10).

Thus, by looking at local consumption practices I was able to learn much more about the political and social experiences and worldviews of Egyptians.

Last but not least, the fact that I am Egyptian, already know the local language, and was involved in the Culture and Consumption Project, were also major factors behind my choice of fieldwork location and topic.

## **2.1 Location and Context**

Egypt is located at the north-eastern tip of Africa and is bordered by Libya to the west, the Red Sea and hence Saudi Arabia to the east, Sudan to the south and the Mediterranean Sea hence Europe to the North (Appendix A).

In any study or research it is essential to take the history of a country or of a people into consideration in order to achieve an understanding of current events. History has always played an important part in the everyday lives of Egyptians who take great pride in their ancient Pharaonic Civilization and in the influence of Christianity and Islam on their culture. As a result of hundreds of years of occupation and/or exposure to various cultures such as the Greco-Roman, Arab, Ottoman, French and British, Egypt has been exposed to, influenced by, and in turn influenced cultures around the world. Egypt

has long been a major trade center and goods from various parts of the world have been sold and bought in its markets for centuries.

All these influences have played a major role in the shaping of Egyptian society and the characteristics and identity of its people. Thus, being exposed to foreign ideas, beliefs, products and influences is not new to Egyptian society, which is often characterized by its cosmopolitanism. Mervat Tallawy says that “Egypt’s many different roots in African, Arab and Mediterranean traditions and its geographical position at the crossroads of East and West have enabled it to borrow widely and to be open to new and universal trends” (1997: 76).

My own family, which is partly Greek and partly Armenian, is an excellent example of this transnational mix of cultures common in Egyptian society. As an Egyptian, I feel proud of this heritage especially because Egypt is a country which has peacefully accepted ‘outsiders’<sup>4</sup> in its midst; such as Turks, Italians, Greeks, French, Armenians, and many others who have lived side by side and prospered in peace for hundreds of years.

## **2.2 Some Relevant Statistics**

- About 90% of Egypt’s population are Sunni Muslim, 7% Coptic Christian and 3 % other; Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant minorities such as Greeks, Italians and Armenians.
- The official language is Arabic, though English and French are spoken widely.
- Some of the main exports of the country include cotton and ready-made garments, textiles in a variety of forms, wool, petroleum, fruits and vegetables and aluminum.
- Egypt is a major tourist destination with millions of tourists visiting the country every year making tourism a major source of income.

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<sup>4</sup> Once again I use the word ‘outsider’ throughout the thesis referring to anyone who comes from outside of Egypt, anyone who is not a native to Egypt, *aganeb* or *khawagat* (external outsiders). The word ‘outsiders’ is actually closer to the Arabic translation than the word ‘foreigners’ which I try to use as little as possible.

- According to the 2000 census Egypt has a population of 65 million inhabitants (Helmy 2001: 31).<sup>5</sup>

This represents a market with huge potential for many foreign companies that have come to Egypt en masse, either producing their brand names locally, under license, granting franchise rights or importing their products from abroad to an ever-growing consumer market. Thus, the consumer cultures in various parts of Egypt as unique as they are, and always have been, have seen many rapid changes and innovations in the last few decades.

### **3 The City of Alexandria**

Alexandria is the second largest city in Egypt after the capital Cairo, with an estimated population of 3-4 million. Located on the northern coast, Alexandria has a Mediterranean atmosphere not found anywhere else in Egypt. The city was founded by Alexander the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and became the capital of Greco-Roman Egypt. For centuries it was a center of learning and its famous Ancient Library (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) and the Pharos (light house) served as symbols of this center of civilization and learning. Even though this status declined throughout the centuries,<sup>6</sup> Alexandrians are extremely proud of this Greek heritage and do not miss any opportunity to boast and talk about it (Figure 1).

In the past, the city used to have a multicultural make-up that was due to many factors; Russians fleeing the revolution, Armenians the genocide and Jews, Italians and Greeks who came in search of a better life. At the beginning of the century, Alexandria had become a cosmopolitan hub, “embracing a wide cross section of people, cultures and

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<sup>5</sup> That number has risen to about 70,000 in 2003.

<sup>6</sup> The famous battle between Mark Anthony and Cleopatra against Octavian is known to all ! Later on with the Arab conquest, Cairo became the capital of Egypt and the status of Alexandria declined.

religions” (Doherty 2001: 6). It was after the 1952 revolution and the nationalization policies of President Gamal Abdel Nasser that many foreigners left Alexandria and Egypt as a whole.



**Figure 1:** Statue of Alexander the Great, founder of Alexandria was a gift from the Greek Government and has been placed in the main city square. Photo taken by author in 2001.

Today, Alexandria is the major domestic tourist destination with millions of Egyptians from every part of the country pouring down on its beaches during the summer months (Figures 2a & 2b). In the last decade, it has also been undergoing an economic and cultural reawakening or revival with tremendous renovations and maintenance of city monuments, beautification of its streets and neighborhoods and building of duty free industrial zones and industrial areas in its suburbs.

Last but not least has been the construction of *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* (The Library of Alexandria which was opened to the public in 2002), which is to become a major center of research and learning in the region and in the world. Thus, it is once

again drawing world- wide attention and becoming a symbol of Egyptian pride and identity.



**Figure 2a:** Strolling along the famous Alexandria *corniche*, a highway that stretches from East to West of the city along the seacoast, 2002.



**Figure 2b:** View of the recently renovated buildings along the *corniche*, 2002.

## **4 Historical Background**

Egypt has long been grappling with the forces of westernization and modernization. While the country's political leaders and its population have mainly been supportive of 'modernization', the same could not be asserted about 'westernization'. This is why I will look at various attempts at modernization and westernization and the impact they have had on Egyptian society.

Edward Said states that "...all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (1994: xxv). Under such terms, it is interesting to look at how nationalism and identity took shape in Egypt, how the changes in regime played a pivotal role in the construction and understanding of images and perceptions of the 'outside' world, and how the culmination of these processes in combination with recent events, are leading to major changes in consumer behavior.

### **4.1 Identity**

Ghada Talhami refers to Bint Al-Shati', an author and one of the earliest women in Egypt to receive a university education who wrote that,

Egypt's identity was not a sudden phenomenon subject to change and reconsideration. This identity was formed from the earliest of times by geographic and universal factors. Egyptian generations were never able to change Egypt's identity by confirming some of its features while denying others in the manner in which we delineate our ideologies, political systems, and social and economic foundations (Talhami 1992: 148).

Thus, it seems that this identity which is also closely linked to the development of nationalism is a complex one which I will try to examine in some detail in the following section.

## **4.2 Egyptian and Arab Nationalism(s)**

The concern with Egypt's identity and the question of nationalism started to take form in the early 1900s as a response to British imperialism which had taken effect in 1882. Some of Egypt's revolutionary leaders and thinkers of that time forged a new "brand of modern nationalism" (Talhami 1992: 3). This idea was based on the equality of all Egyptians and on a common perception of the national interest irrespective of religion, with an emphasis on "liberal ideas, putting an end to backwardness and hastening the process of modernization and identifying openly with the Pharaonic tradition and civilization" (1992: 3). For instance, the slogans of the 1919 Revolution against the British occupiers were "Egypt for the Egyptians" along with "Religion belongs to God, but the fatherland is for all" (1992: 18).

Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood was another movement that had developed in 1928-29 as an:

Islamic nationalist organization ...that derived its special strength from the acute tensions built in Egyptian society during the modern era. In its Islamic manifestation, it was an outgrowth of ultraconservative Muslim reaction against the Western Christian penetration of Egypt from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In its nationalism, it was a product of the Egyptian nationalist movement from 1879 to 1936. The gradual westernization and modernization of Muslim society, joined with the wholly unpalatable fact of foreign domination, shaped the ideology of the movement, as did the increasingly depressed economic and social conditions of life among the Muslim masses in Egypt (Harris 1964: 14).

Even though the Muslim Brotherhood played an important role in the events of that time and even though pan Arab ideology of union and cooperation between Arab nations was growing in the area, Egypt's focus was increasingly oriented towards the promotion of Egyptian nationalism, a separate Egyptian identity, and the realization of a

modern and independent society in a secular political environment. “Achieving liberation from Britain was viewed not only in political terms but also in social, intellectual, and psychological terms” (Talhami 1992: 21).

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the feeling of being part of the Arab world was rejected. As early as 1936, and with the growing movements for independence in the area, “the need for some kind of unity with other Arab people became apparent to many Egyptians” (Rodinson 1981: 98). Arab expatriates living in Egypt played an important role in this process whereby they organized themselves to fight French and British occupation in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, etc. There was for example, “the Syrian Union Society which emerged following World War I specifically to acquaint Egyptians with Arab issues and to work for the independence of Syria and Palestine” (Talhami 1992: 9).

Arab exiles and leaders were also welcomed in Egypt, and one case relevant to our topic is that of Haj Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Palestine, who visited Egypt in 1923 and 1926 to attract support for Palestinian independence and who later settled in Egypt after World War II. Additionally,

The intensification of the Arab-Zionist struggle over Palestine, after 1937, aroused increasing Egyptian sympathy for the Palestine Arabs; and the determination of the Syrian and Lebanese Arabs to free themselves from the heavy hand of the French Mandatory Power, during and after the Second World War, likewise stimulated a warm fraternal response in Egypt. The Arab League was nurtured and given shape in Cairo in the spring of 1945. And the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 eventually made Egyptians active partners in the Arab struggle for independence (Harris 1964: 165).

In essence, Egypt had to come to terms with its own separate national identity all the while trying to reconcile it with pan-Arab nationalism.

“There is no doubt that Egypt, as the biggest and most populous Arab state, has played, and still plays, a leading role in the Arab world and has always been at the core of



the Arab being – cultural and political” (Dowek 2001: 309). “The predominant role of the Egyptian press and radio, and of Egyptian music, film, and publishing throughout the Arab world, which was aided by expanded educational opportunities and technological progress gave added significance to this development” (Rodinson 1981: 99).

In the 1950s, by increasing Arab cohesion under the leadership of President Nasser and through increased cooperation and unification in confronting common problems such as the Suez Crisis, Arab states were able to establish a common stand at both the regional and international levels. This cooperation reached its peak during the Arab oil embargo of 1973-74 and the 1973 October War against Israel. After the October War, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and other Arab oil exporting countries “curtailed their oil shipments to the U.S.” and to other countries that were opposing the Arab position or those countries “deemed friendly to Israel” (Muir 1976: 21). The tremendous increase in oil prices that followed was also a major triumph.<sup>7</sup> The impact of these events showed that when united, Arabs could have a strong influence on world politics.<sup>8</sup>

These few events indicate the complexity and importance of being able to be part of the Arab world while at the same time keeping one’s own Egyptian identity and national character.

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<sup>7</sup> “...the United States and most of its Western allies....either acquiesced in or actually encouraged the continuation of Israel’s territorial expansion at the expense of its neighboring Arab states, and of its refusal to implement the United Nations resolutions on the rights of the Arab Palestinian people. By continuing to extend its massive military, economic, and diplomatic support to Israel, the United States in particular opted for a partial position in the Middle East conflict which was clearly anti-Arab. In such circumstances, Arab oil exporting countries had not reason to continue to do political favors for the Western consuming countries. It was time to act on the basis of economic rationality only and to cutback their production to the limits justified by their economic needs (Ibrahim Shihata 1976:155).

<sup>8</sup> The following quote by Muir in 1976 referring to circumstances at that time is surprisingly relevant to my thesis and therefore worthy of note: “Although the combination of concentrated resources, unity of purpose and inflamed international relations is currently unique in the Middle East, there can be no doubt that the incentive and opportunity for adoption of boycotts will recur in the future” (1976: 21).

### **4.3 Modernization and Structural Changes**

This section is a summary of the main political and socio-economic changes the country went through in an attempt to link these changes to the current situation with regards to consumption and the local perceptions of the ‘West’. The various attempts at modernization are presented with an analysis of how the changes in regime influenced perceptions of the outside world, of Israel, of what constitutes the ‘West’, and how the availability and meanings attached to local and foreign goods and commodities changed throughout these phases.

In the West “modernity emphasized discontinuity as a means of clearing the ground for more rational forms of society – what David Harvey (1989: 16) calls “creative destruction” (qtd. in Armbrust 1996: 7). In Egypt, modernity is also “avowedly rationalist, but puts a greater emphasis on maintaining continuity with the past...and the organic association of modernity and nationalism” (Armbrust 1996: 7).

#### **4.3.1 Mohamed Ali<sup>9</sup>**

The winds of ‘modernization’ blew over Egypt for the first time with Napoleon’s campaign and Muhammad Ali’s (1805-1849) efforts to industrialize the country and build an efficient army. Mohammed Ali “created modern institutions and provided a strong material and labor base which in a matter of two decades enabled Egypt to emerge as a giant regional power” and gain considerable autonomy from the Ottoman Empire (Ibrahim 1996: 94). He was also open to foreign expertise in all fields of education, agriculture, industry and the military. He rebuilt and redesigned Egypt’s major cities, such as Alexandria using foreign/European expertise.

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<sup>9</sup> Mohamed Ali Pasha was the founder of what is called ‘Modern Egypt’.

### **4.3.2 Pre-independence / European Colonial Rule**

The second attempt at ‘westernization’ – I shift to ‘westernization’ as this was different from Mohamed Ali’s attempts at ‘modernization’ in which he aimed at development while emphasizing on the maintenance of Egypt’s own identity and benefiting from foreign expertise – came under Khedive Ismail (1863-1879), a ruler who was obsessed with Europe. Under Ismail, “...bureaucrats and technocrats were sent to Europe to receive higher education thus opening up the Egyptian economy and society to foreigners” (Amin 2000: 54). Due to Ismail’s extreme obsession with France, he did his utmost to recreate Egypt in its image.<sup>10</sup> He modernized the major cities in the image of Europe and with the opening of the Suez Canal, the dependence of European world trade on Egypt was inveterated. Thousands of foreigners were attracted to Egypt and there was an acceleration of economic and social change along with the increasing power and influence of European colonialism.

This colonial rule led to tremendous changes in all structures of society. “Egypt was to be ordered up as something object like...to be made picture like and legible, rendered available to political and economic calculation....to become readable, like a book....” (Mitchell 1988: 33). It also had to correspond to fascinating stereotypical images that had been constructed and perpetuated by the colonial powers.

Some of the major changes in schooling and the creation of a modern army were designed so as to introduce the concepts of “order and discipline” which were regarded as alien to Egyptian society. The impact of colonial policies transformed the country in a very short span of time. Timothy Mitchell explains how,

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<sup>10</sup> Ismail “boasted that the Egypt of his day had become in reality a part of Europe. In words that have since become famous, he said: “*Mon pays n’est plus en Afrique: nous faisons partie de l’Europe actuellement*” (Harris 1964: 26).

From a country which formed one of the hubs in the commerce of the Ottoman world and beyond, and which produced and exported its own food and its own textiles, Egypt was turning into a country whose economy was dominated by the production of a single commodity, raw cotton, for the global textile industry of Europe. By the end of the First World War, cotton was to account for more than 92% of the total value of Egypt's exports. The changes associated with this growth and concentration in exports, included an enormous growth in imports, principally in textile products and food, the extension throughout the country of a network of roads, telegraphs, police stations, railways, ports and permanent irrigation canals...the influx of Europeans, seeking to make fortunes, find employment, transform agricultural production or impose colonial control, the building and rebuilding of towns and cities as centers of the new European-dominated commercial life, and the migration to these urban centers of tens of thousands of increasingly impoverished rural poor (1988: 16).

Thus we can see that the roots of many of the current socio-economic and political problems are rooted deep in history and have been shaped and compounded by earlier colonial policies.

#### **4.3.3 Pre-Revolution**

It was during this period that Egypt gained a so-called artificial independence from Britain, even though British influence continued until the Revolution of July 1952. Between 1922-1952 another wave of 'westernization' came when British influence was at a peak. This is described as Egypt's 'Liberal Age' when

Large-scale industries from textile factories to motion pictures were established, and again foreign [referring to European] influence in all domains of life was widespread... the impulse to westernize became revitalized once more after the end of the Second World War, with the acceleration of Western economic growth and hastened efforts at economic development after the 1952 revolution (Amin 2000: 54).

#### **4.3.4 Gamal Abdel Nasser**

After the 1952 July revolution in which the royalist regime was overthrown, Nasser (1952-1970) was also keen on the westernization and modernization of Egypt. But due to the deterioration of relations with the United States, the establishment of the

State of Israel in 1948, followed by the United States' refusal to provide loans for the building of the Aswan High Dam, which would regulate the flow of water in the Nile – the lifeline of Egypt – Nasser immediately turned to the Soviet Union and the Arab world. The strategy shifted towards modernizing Egypt along socialist lines and working to become a leader in the Arab world.

There was thus a surge of Arab nationalism and with the policies of nationalization that Nasser undertook a large number of foreigners left the country and European influence declined. Domestic production was encouraged and the country was closed to western commodities. Yet, the defeat by Israel in the 1967 war or *naksa* (major catastrophe as it is referred to in Arabic) was a military and psychological disaster and dealt a hard blow to Nasser's policies and particularly to the idea of Arab union. The defeat caused "Egypt and the Arab world to reexamine, although not necessarily to abandon, the cultural assumptions through which their modernity was constructed" (Armbrust 1996: 6). Nasser's nationalization and socialist policies were also turning out not to be as successful as expected. His new socialist regime had to tackle Egypt's many growing socio-economic and political problems such as over-population, over-urbanization and over-expectations, and it was failing (Ibrahim 1996: ix).

With regards to foreign goods, the country was so closed to the outside world that there emerged a growing longing for anything *beta' barra* (external / from outside), which gained in value and in status. In the meantime, belief in the idea of Arab union and in the socialist system promoted by Nasser was collapsing and dislike of Israel and the United States (for its support of Israel) was gaining momentum.

#### **4.3.5 Anwar El-Sadat**

Sadat's "leadership of Egypt and the Arab world in the war of October 1973 had far reaching regional and global implications. Among these were the 'oil shock' for the West and the 'oil boom' for the Arab world" (Ibrahim 1996: x). But as Egypt's economic problems continued Sadat found no choice but to introduce *Infitah* (Open Door Policy) in 1974. These were measures intended to encourage the private sector of the economy, "reincorporate Egypt in the world capitalist system, encourage free competition and adopt modern technology" (Armbrust 1996: 37). Under Sadat (1970-1981) the aim shifted once again towards development and modernization along Western lines.

The Open Door Policy included structural adjustment and withdrawal and decrease of a variety of state subsidies. Government restrictions and controls on business were also eased and attracting foreign capital and investment from the "oil states of the Gulf and to lure Western investment and technology through joint ventures with Egyptian public and private enterprises" became a priority (Armbrust 1996: 37). Import, export and currency regulations were also markedly liberalized. American aid increased and millions of workers left to work in oil-rich Arab countries and sent back their remittances as a major source of income.

Under Nasser the Egyptians had engaged in barter trade with Eastern European countries, mainly exchanging agricultural products and other raw materials for industrial goods. Such trade did not generate any convertible currency, which Egypt needed to buy Western equipment and foodstuffs (Richards and Waterbury 1990: 242).

*Infitah* opened up the country to the West and mainly to Europe and the U.S. as opposed to the Soviet Union. Markets were flooded with foreign goods and products. "The percentage of Egyptian merchandise exports going to OECD countries rose from

28% in 1965 to 53% in 1985, while the respective percentages from the Eastern bloc fell from 38% to 7%” (Richards and Waterbury 1990: 242).

All of a sudden there was an inflow of goods that had previously been unreachable and considered of high value and prestige. Foreign products thus came to be preferred over local ones. This time the outlook for solutions and answers to the country’s socio-economic problems was towards the West.

All these changes culminated in the 1979 Peace Agreement with Israel, which “alienated the country [from the Arab world] and led to profound divisions in Egyptian and Arab ranks” (Ibrahim 1996: x). Egypt fell into a dilemma; it was simultaneously praised (by the West) and ostracized (by the Arab world) for this action. Once again it had to grapple with its two overlapping identities: Egyptian nationalism and Arab nationalism. It lost its position as leader of the Arab world and its new dependence on the U.S. was perceived as American imperialism (Amin 2002) and hostility towards the U.S. and Israel among ordinary citizens who had fought and died in many wars against Israel (1956, 1967, 1973) was on the rise.<sup>11</sup>

It is also important to mention that the increasing U.S. aid money given to Egypt created a situation where the government acquired a new source of income making it more independent of its own nation, relying more on the U.S. for its legitimacy rather than the will of its own people. The anxiety created after the Peace Accord with Israel and the growing American influence in Egypt became an extra source of increasing hostility.

‘Officially’ Egypt was at peace with Israel, but ‘unofficially’ in its people’s homes there was a sense of betrayal because in their minds the Egyptian government had

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<sup>11</sup> In the war of 1967 alone 15,000 Egyptian died fighting in the Sinai. See Munir Nasser 1990.

given up its principles and its position as leader of the Arab world by making peace with Israel, by giving up on the Palestinian question and by being humiliated among its Arab neighbors and being alienated from them. Hence, there was to be no normalization of relations until the recognition and the establishment of the State of Palestine and the achievement of peace with all the Arab countries.

#### **4.3.6 Hosni Mubarak**

With the arrival of President Mubarak (1981- ), the policies of Sadat did not necessarily change but they took a much faster turn. Structural adjustment policies were being implemented and economic reform and liberalization became reality. The objective became and still is today to further decrease state control, promote private sector development and attract as much foreign investment as possible. It is also true that the country has been undergoing major positive changes economically and socially. Yet, the negative consequences are also apparent.

Unemployment, overpopulation and over-urbanization continue to rise. With regards to foreign commodities, a few decades of availability have already gone by and today their use no longer carries the same prestige it previously did. The quality of local products has also improved tremendously. This has resulted in a market place where competition is based more on quality rather than the origin of the product. As well, items such as refrigerators, washing machines and television sets, which twenty years ago may not have existed or may have been considered a luxury by many, have become basic items today (Hoodfar 1997).

The positive changes also included and reflected fairly good relations within the international community, the reclamation of a leading role in the Arab world, and high



hopes for peace as a result of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian authorities. But these were put on hold with the outbreak of the Gulf War, which once again heightened hostility towards the U.S. Ten years later, with dreams of peace shattered, with increasing violence in the occupied territories, the rise of the Second *Intifadah* (Palestinian uprising) in 2000, and what is seen as consequent American 'inaction' to these events have provided yet more grounds for the escalation of the negative views towards Israel and the United States.

## **5 The Cultural Reproduction of Identity within a Local:Global Vision**

With regards to identity and a clear vision of the future, Galal Amin argues that all post 1952 Revolution governments in Egypt have failed in the creation of what he refers to as an.

Original vision of how Egypt's cultural revival would develop. In spite of all the proclamations of the revolution that it aimed at freeing Egypt from colonialism, that it was leading the struggle of the Arab nation for independence, preserving national sovereignty and regaining control of the nation's destiny, and even in spite of the real successes it achieved with regard to certain kinds of 'liberation', the leaders of the revolution could not rid themselves of the western conception of progress (2000: 45).

Amin accepts that these leaders were sincere and did achieve some success in their demand for political and economic independence. Yet, he argues that the "goal of independence remained confined to these domains alone, and did not extend to other aspects of Egyptian social and cultural life" (2000: 46).

Thus when,

Nasser raised the slogans of 'economic development' in the early years of the revolution, he could not conceive of any meaning for 'development' beyond the narrow meaning that dominated in the West, amounting to little more than raising the rates of saving and investment, achieving a higher rate of growth of per capita income, increasing school enrollment ratios and the

number of hospital beds per 1,000 people, reclaiming new land and building new factories ... (Amin 2000: 49-50).

Amin's outlook is valid, yet, this too has been changing in contemporary Egypt.

Current thinking, summed up by Ibrahim Nafe', author and Chief Editor of the major *Al Ahrām* daily newspaper, is focused towards the acceptance that,

Global changes require that we devise our policies in a different way today, since what was suitable during the Cold War days is not longer so today in a world in which U.S. power dominates and the U.S. wants to dominate the world. It is our duty, to make clear the content of the Arab vision, and how to develop and present it, and how to communicate it to other peoples around the world. We have to start working together to improve our image abroad instead of each Arab country trying to go on their own (Nafe' 2002: 32).

It has become evident to both the local and regional leaders that formulating a vision appropriate to local and global changes and challenges and acting accordingly is the most important thing they have to do in order to secure a prosperous and peaceful future for their peoples and countries.

## **6 Conclusion**

This first chapter was an introduction to the context of my research and to the reasons for my choice of research topic and setting. Relevant socio-political changes and attempts at modernization under different rulers and through different historical phases were presented and discussed in light of current events and circumstances in Egypt. This background setting was important because it sets up the ground for my later arguments and for a realization that current events cannot be understood without contextualizing them within specific time and space frameworks.

As the chapters proceed we will see how changes in political regime, shifts in balance of power, conflicting approaches and orientations towards modernization, and

challenges to the country's national and regional hegemony have been crucial in Egypt's conceptions of what the West constitutes and what the U.S. and Israel stand for.

Even though debates persist over Egypt's current position in the domestic and international arena, there seems to be a growing consensus among its population that they have the power to create a vision for their future and proclaim their identity as Egyptians and as Arabs within a framework of common interest and reconciliation between the two. This will become more obvious when we examine the actual reasons behind the boycott, which have as much to do with the internal situation in Egypt, as they do with circumstances in the rest of the Arab world. This is a vision in which ordinary citizens can play a role in manipulating and taking advantage of globalized markets and global consumer society.

The next chapter is a presentation of the methodology I followed throughout this research.

## **CHAPTER II:            METHODODOLOGY**

*The crucial moment in the research process and in the anthropological career is fieldwork, 'the intensive first hand study of small social units within the larger society'.*

**-Clifford Geertz (1963:4).**

*Fieldwork has assumed a position so central to anthropology that for many within and outside the discipline, it defines anthropology's boundaries.*

**-Kevin Dwyer (1982: 265).**

### **1       Introduction**

My research was conducted in Alexandria for a period of six weeks in the summer of 2001 and another six weeks in the summer of 2002 in connection with the Culture and Consumption Project. Contacts were established through networking and the snow balling method. Previous contacts and relationships were pursued and continued in 2002, and most of my informants and acquaintances made invaluable contributions throughout my fieldwork.

Accommodation was arranged before arriving in Alexandria where I stayed with a family, friends and relatives. In order to reciprocate their generosity, I made sure to take small souvenirs and gifts along with me to give to those who took part in my research and to some of the informants with whom close relationships were established and whose contributions have been invaluable.

### **2       Fieldwork at 'home'**

Having read the literature on the issue of conducting fieldwork at home I realize that there are both positive and negative aspects to this experience as I found out first hand while in Alexandria. The issue of being a 'native' or 'indigenous' anthropologist

and of whether one is an 'insider', 'outsider', or 'marginal native' to the group, community, or society being researched have long been and still are subject to debate within anthropological discourse.

Soraya Altorki and Camilia Elsolh explain that,

The conscious or unconscious knowledge, however partial, that researchers have of their own society is an asset ...they will be quicker to understand the implications of the social situations under study and their socialization experiences and linguistic abilities give them a head start (1988: 1).

I do not want to dwell too much upon this issue because there has been no definite answer even within the discipline.

There is no final answer on whether it's good or bad to study your own culture. Plenty of people have done it and plenty of people have written about what it's like to do it. On the plus side, you'll know the language and you'll be less likely to suffer from culture shock. On the minus side, it's harder to recognize cultural patterns that you live everyday and you're likely to take a lot of things for granted that an outsider would pick up right away (Russell 1987: 154).

Within the discipline it has generally come to be accepted that the relations between anthropologist and informants during fieldwork have to be taken into consideration. In addition, the life experiences of both parties, and variables such as: socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, language of communication, education, personality, etc, all influence the type of data gathered, the type of data one has access to and the type of relations the anthropologist is able to establish. Altorki and El Solh explain that "social scientists themselves are cultural beings whose backgrounds greatly influence the data they gather" (1988: 1). I was aware of such variables (marital status, ethnic affiliation, education, religion, age, research topic, my own experiences and beliefs, national and regional politics) and acknowledge that these did have an influence

on my fieldwork experience and on my analysis and writing, “deliberately or in spite of” myself (Dwyer 1982: xvii).

Knowledge is historically, culturally, and socially conditioned and changes as society changes socially and intellectually, and even more important, that the production of knowledge and the validity of its content are connected to the producer and therefore I cannot assume that my fieldwork was objective, rather it was a “subjective construction of reality mediated by both researcher and researched” (Dwyer 1982: xvii).

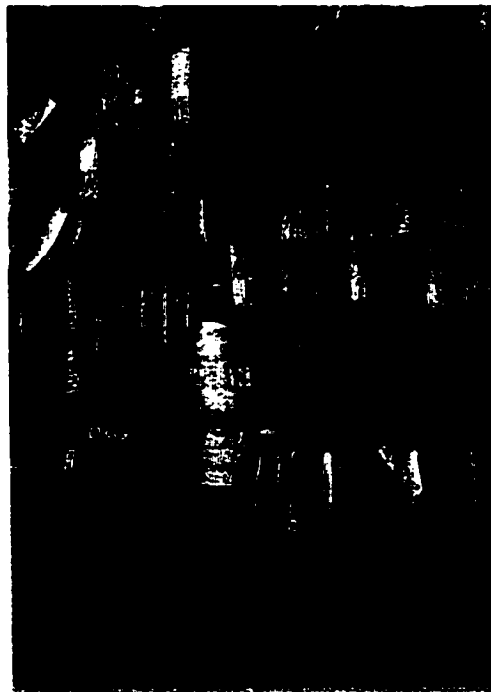
## **2.1 My Own Feelings and Expectations**

Even though I was born in Alexandria, I also consider myself to be Armenian. As such, I grew up in an Armenian family, spoke Armenian at home and went to an Armenian school. In short, I was a minority, everything about me made that apparent to those around me; my looks, my skin tone, and most evidently my name; a name that few Egyptians could pronounce properly. But then again, I never felt alienated.

It was thus through a long process of identity formation and throughout the years I lived in Egypt that I came to learn and acquire the ability to manipulate and exchange these different yet complementary and overlapping roles and identities depending on what the situation called for. It is therefore not strange that even though I am not a ‘real’ Egyptian, Egypt has always been home to me; maybe because of my embrace of such a bi- or tri-cultural identity or experience which is embedded in me and which I project to the outside world – consciously or unconsciously – that I am able to feel comfortable within different cultural contexts or settings (Dwyer 1982).

It was only after going to the field in 2001 that I realized how well my position as a ‘married woman, researcher, university student, Egyptian (Arab by association),

Armenian, Canadian,<sup>12</sup> worked to my advantage. Once again I had to strike a fine balance between these multiple identities to make this a successful and fulfilling endeavor. I also acknowledge that manipulating identity by emphasizing or underplaying it according to context was an essential aspect of my research (Barth 1969). I think this afforded me somewhat of a wider perspective of the structures under play within the context of my research. None of these identities is static, or as Edward Said calls them “watertight” but rather each one of them “influences and plays upon the other” (Said 2002: 397).



**Figure 3:** Author shopping in the *zan'at el-setat*, the old market in the old part of Alexandria, 2002.

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<sup>12</sup> I refer here to the advantage of being a Canadian as opposed to an American since Canadians are generally more respected and trusted than Americans are.

As a member of the ‘researched community’ but also as a researcher my involvement with the researched community and the relationships that were established during fieldwork were not in any way objective, on the contrary, I realize that the conditions mentioned above played a major role in the shaping of these relationships, in addition to having an impact on the type and kind of data I gathered or acquired, and the access I had to different types of data.

It is essential at this point to mention that the ultimate goal for me could not have been the attainment of ‘the total truth’, but ‘a truth’ that is intimately connected to my own life experiences and to those of the researched. These life experiences constitute an accumulation of knowledge which is socially, culturally and historically composed, and which thus varies from one person to another and from one point in history to another, even within the same community/society/cultural group.

### **3 Research and Analysis**

#### **3.1 Identifying Informants**

Alexandria is a large city and I realize that describing it as my field site is somewhat of a problematic statement since it is impossible to conduct any type of comprehensive fieldwork that would represent the whole of a population. I am also conscious that it is almost impossible to construct a sample of everyone representing everything. What I did therefore was to “construct my own field” (Amit 2000) of individuals and families as opposed to society as a whole, and whom I met through networking, identifying some key informants and the snow balling method. These individuals or families were the ones with whom I established and maintained relationships during the two periods of my fieldwork and further on.



Participants in the research were mainly middle class educated youth in their 20s and 30s and their respective families.<sup>13</sup> My own experiences as an Egyptian growing up in Alexandria are also included. I tried to focus on middle class families and avoided the extremely rich or extremely poor. The reasons behind this were first, that the middle classes do represent a large proportion of the population, second, because my aim was not to conduct a comparative study or analysis of the consumption patterns of the different classes, and finally, because I had to set limits to myself to a certain 'category' of people and not broaden the scope of my research given the time and space limitations of this MA thesis.

Both men and women of different ages were involved; some of the elderly gave a much better perspective of the past, present and future, while the young provided a new/different understanding and interpretation of the present, future and sometimes the past.

### **3.2 Participant Observation**

During fieldwork I followed an approach involving,

...Both classic and emergent anthropological fieldwork techniques. The classic approach involves field immersion, interviews, sensitivity to symbolism, attention to contextual embeddedness, and a cross-cultural perspective. Emergent approaches stress reflexivity, sensitivity to power relations, gender-race-class division, and also the contested character of any and all cultural representation (Culture and Consumption Handbook 2001: 5).

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<sup>13</sup>According to data from the 1986 populations census which includes some indicators of income distribution revealed by recent Family Budget Surveys, Galal Amin 2000 makes a suggestion that "a level of income of LE300 per month per family in 1990 as the borderline between the 'lower' and 'middle' classes, and of LE10,000 as the borderline between the 'middle' and 'higher' classes. According to this classification, about 53% (or 30 million people) of the total population of 56 million would belong to the 'lower classes', about 45% (or 25 million people) to the 'middle class', and the remaining 2-3% (1-2 million persons) would constitute the 'higher class'"(Amin 2002: 33). I realize that this is not a category of people who can be clearly defined and identified, so I took the local perspectives of who constitutes the middle classes. I chose this 'category' because it fairly represents a portion of society most influenced by the forces of globalization and the global consumer market.

Participant Observation was the main element of my research as it “is the foundation of cultural anthropology. It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives” (Russell 1987: 136). This involved an array of data collection methods such as “observation, natural conversations, various kinds of interviews (structured, semi structured, and unstructured), checklists, questionnaires, and unobtrusive methods” (1987: 137).

With regards to the way participant observation was conducted, Graham Fordham referring to his own research explains it in the following terms,

Both the formal and informal aspects of my participant observation were equally important as sources of data and in their contribution to my understanding of ... life. I made notes about many of the events which occurred as I participated in the daily life of the community. Yet there were many issues I did not write about, but which added to my stock of cultural knowledge. This was more of an unconscious learning process of coming to be aware of how things worked (Fordham 1993: 23).

Therefore, taking all these issues into consideration, I attempted to make others feel comfortable throughout the process by explaining clearly and sincerely the purpose of the research and answering questions pertaining to the research topic, since “social research, particularly anthropological fieldwork is not a very widely understood concept in Egypt...” (Hoodfar 1997: 29).

I tried to develop informal relationships by recognizing them as equals and creating egalitarian relationships and social situations, and encompassing and going beyond the researched-researcher role. Even though the topic of the research is somewhat sensitive – due to its political dimension – most individuals involved felt

comfortable expressing their feelings and practices about it, particularly in 2002 when some level of trust, friendship and continuity had been established.

As education is highly regarded in Egyptian society, my position as a university student and my emphasis on the importance of this research for my education, for my *majester* (Masters) and for my career as a whole was a major factor in the success of the process of integration and acceptance by informants. They clearly indicated to me at various points in my research that they appreciated the fact that I had chosen such a lively issue for my MA degree, but that they also highly appreciated the fact that I was so keen on learning and continuing my education and acquiring this degree even after being married. I was often advised that as an Egyptian woman this was something I had to be proud of and even if I were never to use my degree to work, having acquired it was rewarding in itself. I believe that this conviction on their part was a major contributor to the successful completion of my fieldwork.

Thus, they allowed me to immerse myself as much as possible in daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, watching television, etc., to see what was being purchased in the markets, what was consumed inside their homes, and how/what informants thought of these daily choices. In addition to examining how they related to some of the goods and how they were used in social relations or treated to reinforce identity. This immersion was crucial and provided me with patterns of a wide enough sample of individuals of different ages, genders and positions and an outlook on both private and public practices of consumption from which I could make some valid conclusions.

On many occasions, I went to the local markets, 'traditional' grocery stores and supermarkets on my own or with others to see what kinds of products were available, the prices, and the various displays and novelty items.

### **3.3 Interviews**

Several interviews and informal focus groups were conducted and were very fruitful in collecting direct information from individuals and hearing their views and opinions. Questions were formulated more as a conversational topic than a formal interview. Interviewees were revisited as often as possible especially those with whom daily contact was maintained and friendly relations were established. The purpose of the interviews was to help me put into perspective my own observations and the empirical data I was gathering through participant observation.

My aim was to see if any patterns would emerge out of the interviews with regards to the main questions of my research. This allowed me to reach conclusions and push them further into my research and into future interviews, to question their validity, to challenge their assumptions, and to see how others would react to my making these claims.

#### **3.3.1 One-on-one Personal Interviews**

This type of interview was essential as it allowed interviewees to talk about things that they might not want others to hear. A number of informal open-ended interviews were conducted (8 men & 12 women) with individuals that I had close contact and interaction with throughout my fieldwork, in order to have a certain sense of comfort. I attempted to have as diversified a source as possible, but certain individuals did emerge as potential interviewees during fieldwork.

### **3.3.2 Focus Groups**

The aim here was to get a group of people who already knew each other, such as family members, or several friends in order to have a group discussion about the boycott. Focus groups were very constructive as they allowed me to listen to some of the local discourses that were taking place among family members, colleagues or a group of friends. This allowed for an informal setting where participants felt somewhat comfortable talking and arguing about various issues, sharing their views and challenging one another's opinions. The dynamics of a group setting allowed for a lot of spontaneity and complemented the one-on-one interviews. This was also a good way to double check what different individuals had been telling me privately or what I had observed them doing in other settings.

### **3.4 Local Mass Media**

Media coverage is a crucial instrument for providing public information, image building and promotion, and thus an agent of political mobilization. As such, the role of local media in endorsing the current boycott campaign was very obvious, and it was necessary that I do a content analysis of such media along with an examination of representations of the structural forces of society, state ideology, popular perceptions and movements, student activity, industrialization, globalization, changing market conditions, etc. This gave me a better understanding of how local perceptions are constructed, of how media messages are transmitted through a variety of channels and how they are understood and conceptualized.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "mass media has been an important means for disseminating modernist ideology in Egypt" (Armbrust 1996: 6), and today, with increasing freedom of

the mass media they are not just representing government ideology but also the popular feelings of hostility towards the U.S. and Israel and are indirectly supporting the boycott. "The media are part of almost everyone's daily life...and are key to raising awareness about an issue and to mobilizing the public" (Hoodfar and Pazira 2000: 98). This is exactly how the media are currently being used to fight the battle by both sides of the boycott.

### **3.4.1 Television**

"Television, as the visual medium par excellence has become, indeed, an important instrument in the political mobilization of the Egyptian masses" (Cohen 1990: 73). Thus, whenever possible, I tried to take part in watching popular television programs, especially the ones identified or suggested by informants, such as *ra'ees eltahreer* (The Chief Editor) – which comes up in chapter VI – to understand the social context of these programs and the different messages that are transmitted either explicitly or covertly.

What I paid particular attention to were commercials to analyze the tools being used to promote different goods and services, and news programs which dealt with the topics of globalization, American foreign policy, the Middle East conflict, markets, consumerism and the boycott. I videotaped a number of these commercials and programs and have made use of them in writing my thesis. I also discussed some of these commercials and programs with informants to see how they understood and constructed the messages embedded in them.

### **3.4.2 Newspapers and Magazines**

I read and collected articles from a number of local newspapers and magazines relevant to my research. Three of the major daily newspapers: *Al Ahram* and *Al Akhbar* (pro government) and *Al Wafd* (opposition), in addition to several popular news magazines which have a very wide audience of all ages and classes were screened: *Nesf El Donia*, *Rose Al Youssef*, and *Aktobar* (mainly carrying local news, discussions about social, economic and political developments locally and internationally) were followed regularly. *Al Ahram Weekly* published in English and *Al Ahram Hebdo* in French were also very rich sources of information. Particular attention was paid to caricatures which are used to critique social and economic ills of society, mock different cultural practices and criticize the government. Ads in these newspapers were also checked and discussed with informants and appear in various contexts in this thesis.

### **3.4.3 Marketing and Advertisement**

Marketing and advertising have a significant effect on consumers and “as key developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seem to epitomize the contemporary nature of consumer society and are of clear importance in this respect...advertising gives meaning to goods and commodities...[and]...also to the people who purchase and use them” (Edwards 2000: 52 and 61). But what this also means is that as important modes of mass communication they are open to interpretation.

As a result I paid particular attention to the variety of advertisements for different products and examined the strategies used. Billboards, street signs, in-store ads, etc, were analyzed to see what kind of messages they carry and how their respective products are promoted and the strategies that are used to appeal to people and grab their attention. I

interviewed an advertising industry executive to discuss these changes and informants were often asked to share their opinions about many of these ad campaigns.

#### **3.4.4 Photographs**

Photographs were taken of city landmarks and of other relevant material such as billboards, street signs, advertisements, store windows, inside the homes of informants, inside and outside of restaurants, and a selection of these appear wherever relevant in my thesis.

#### **3.5 Writing**

I attempted to be as consistent and as faithful as possible in taking notes, and in writing down most of what I observed, was told or that caught my attention. Most of the writing was done in the form of description, in addition to some interpretation and analysis as these were unavoidable. Even though it was impossible to carry a note and pen at all times, I tried to write down all my observations as soon as I had the time and opportunity to do so. "My aim could only be carried forward by finding some way to make the experience concrete, to turn it into a text and make it accessible to people who had not participated in it" (Dwyer 1982: xviii).

Thus I took into consideration that at times my notes were reconstructions from memory, or from impressions or situations that were not planned for or which did not deem appropriate a pen and paper. This quote from Dwyer is an excellent representation of my experience:

Unfortunately, the experience is inevitably transformed in making it into a text. Events certainly lose their immediacy and are reworked in the mind of the writer as he writes them down. Less obviously, but just as certainly, much is lost in transcribing conversations into written dialogues: gestures do not appear, tone of voice is muted and mood is hidden, and Moroccan [in this case Egyptian] Arabic disappears as it is translated into English. And,



of course, the apparently simple choice of presenting 'events' and 'dialogues' as an epitome of the experience is a complex one that entails a radical recasting of experience. Consequently, it would be absurd to claim that. The events and dialogues either faithfully record the experience or fully communicate it. If a faithful record, a full communication of the experience is impossible, this is no excuse to reduce the effort to preserve in the text, and to convey to others, what one believes to be crucial in that experience (1982: xviii-xix).

#### **4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I introduced the diverse issues related to fieldwork and identity which I had to grapple with during my research and how I dealt with them. The impact and importance of my position as an Egyptian woman trying to continue her education and reach higher grounds was of utmost importance. The actual methodology of my research; identification of informants, interviewing, analysis of mass media, collection of data and of the writing process were discussed.

In chapter III, I present a general overview of some of the theoretical concepts and literature pertaining to my research and I include information about the specific field site in trying to link the local reality to the wider themes in current literature on consumer markets, globalization, westernization and advertising. I also take a closer look at some examples of boycotts and social movements to help contextualize and situate the empirical data which will be presented in chapter IV.

## **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT CONCEPTS**

*Cultural consumption is a social activity and an everyday practice...In cultural consumption we articulate both our creative freedom to make culture and our dependence on the culture industries, which provide both the means and the conditions of our wide range of social and personal purposes. What and how we consume may serve to say who we are or who we would like to be; it may be used to produce and maintain particular lifestyles; it may promise compensation in times of loss or provide a symbolic means to celebrate success and our desires; it can provide the material for our dreams; it can mark and maintain social difference and social distinction. Whatever else it is ... cultural consumption is the practice of culture.*

**-John Storey (1999: xi).**

### **1 Introduction**

This chapter is a discussion of concepts and theoretical material relevant to my research – globalization, consumption, consumer society, boycotts, and social movements – and which have been useful in analyzing my data. Throughout the presentation of these theoretical discussions and debates I also include the points of view of informants and the local debates surrounding these issues. I shed light upon social movements in general and on popular boycotts as a form of grassroots social movements in particular.

There are several points I try to assert in this chapter. First, that globalization and the spread of goods and commodities across world markets does not always lead to the global homogenization of cultures and identities (Howes 1996; Miller 1995, 1997; Dant 1999).

It is true that the globalization of consumer society introduces new products and goods to different populations of the world in such a way that it may seem to lead to global homogenization and to threatening the integrity and distinctiveness of world

cultures. But in this thesis I attempt to present a slightly different argument in that yes, globalization is leading to many changes, but these changes are in turn providing an arena for the increase in diversity. Instead of flattening civil societies around the globe the merging of globalization with particular local conditions is accentuating difference (Appadurai 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff 1990).

There is a certain “resiliency of non-Western...cultures in the face of globalization” (Howes 1996: 3). Garcia Canclini (2001) points out that globalization has given local people a certain degree of choice and power and hence a tool for resistance and opposition. Growing global inequalities provide an arena for increasing diversity and may also lead to new forms of resistance and generate new possibilities and solutions. It allows populations to form their own reactions to these foreign influences – in this case goods and commodities – and attach their own meanings to them in accordance with the specific culture they enter into, the history, and the social and economic environment of the region.

Second, that consumption goes beyond commerce and simple economics; it is a phenomenon “shaped, driven and constrained at every point by cultural considerations” (McCracken 1988: xi). These cultural factors do not take place

...outside the areas of life determined by particular economic systems and power relations; that is, culture is always in political economy, however peculiar that might sound to those of us raised on a notion that culture, economy, and politics enjoy a happy existence independent of one another...[we need] to think of culture as already in the mix of political economy...as a set of power relations ...culture, politics, and economy are interdependent (Maxwell 2001: 3-4).

Third, that in order to understand a particular consumer society within the larger context of global consumer markets we need to contextualize it and look at the particular

historic, economic, political and cultural setting, because at a deeper level, in new cultural contexts, Grant McCracken argues that consumer goods are used “to express cultural categories and principles, cultivate ideals, create and sustain lifestyles, construct notions of the self, and create (and survive) social change...Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition ...would be impossible” (1988: 1).

Globalization also “raises questions about our sense of self – our identities, and cultural belongingness” (Khalaf 2001: 62). It forces us to face the “dialectics of modernity and tradition,” but it does not mean the erosion of traditional loyalties and structures (2001: 62). This is exactly what Egyptians are trying to cope with and trying to find a middle ground for. Even though keen on modernization<sup>14</sup> they are also attempting to reconcile the old and the new in order to adapt to the demands of a new global order while maintaining, recreating and reviving their traditional beliefs, practices and local identity.

In this context Hui et al agree with McCracken’s (1988) argument that,

Changes that result from intercultural encounters will have a direct and important bearing on consumption patterns and practices. But the process does not stop there. The use of consumer goods within the new cultural context further serves to reconstruct and reformulate categories and principles that are central to the definition of both individual and group identity (Hui et al 1991: 1).

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<sup>14</sup> About the dialectics of modernity and tradition in the Arab world, Khalaf describes the notion of modernization as “...the will and capacity of a society to absorb and generate change or innovation ...” (2001: 26).

According to Goblot<sup>15</sup> “consumption not only makes it possible to distinguish oneself from others, but also provides one with an identity” (qtd. in Preteceille and Terrail 1985: 21).

Thus, we need to look at what happens when a product is produced in one place and consumed in another. This encounter between the global product and the local environment does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, it is affected by other intercultural encounters in different areas of life which have a bearing on consumption patterns and practices. According to Miller (1995) we need to be aware that the variety of consumer patterns represent an intersection of an array of different and difficult to reconcile historical processes. Therefore, just as culture has an influence on what one consumes, it similarly has an influence on what one does *NOT* consume.

Within such a framework, things become “useful in a variety of ways; they allow us to do what we need and want to do, they allow us to communicate and they enable us to express our sense of cultural togetherness as well as our individuality within that collectivity” (Dant 1999: 13-14). They also integrate us as a group, allow us to give them meanings and use them for our own benefit. I believe that this is the case with the events taking place in Egypt.

## **2 Globalization**

There are many arguments for and against globalization, yet all seem to agree that globalization is leading to extraordinary transformations in the world. From Paul du Gay’s point of view,

...Globalization is about the dissolution of old structures and boundaries of national states and communities... increasing transnationalization of

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<sup>15</sup> E. Goblot, *La Barriere et le niveau* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1961). In this quote he is referring to social class, but I think it could be applied to other areas too.

economic and cultural life, frequently imagined in terms of the creation of a global space and community in which we shall all be global citizens and neighbors. With these globalizing dynamics we come upon new experiences and encounters, with the promise of new possibilities, but also the prospect of new uncertainties and anxieties. Globalization is about growing mobility across frontiers –mobility of goods and commodities, mobility of information and communications products and services, and mobility of people (1997: 12).

This may sound particularly appealing but an examination at a deeper level shows that these are unequal changes happening at different paces and levels to different people in different parts of the world. Thus, in terms of global products for example, Du Gay argues that products such as Sony, Benetton, McDonald's and Proctor and Gamble can be found almost anywhere. But just their presence in different cultural contexts does not mean that they carry the same meaning, nor does it mean that people consume them the way they are consumed in North America. This is because "globalization does not supersede and displace everything that preceded it...[there are] continuities in social and cultural life" (du Gay 1997: 19). This is why globalization may be regarded "in terms of an accumulation of cultural phenomena where new global elements coexist alongside existing and established local or national cultural forms" (1997: 19).

The opposite point of view, summed up through the arguments of James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer in *Globalization Unmasked*, regards globalization's oppression as imperialism in disguise. They hold that globalization basically,

...Refers to the widening and deepening of the international flows of trade, capital, technology and information within a single integrated global market. Like terms such as 'the global village,' it identifies a complex of changes produced by the dynamics of capitalist development as well as the diffusion of values and cultural practices associated with this development. In this context, reference is often made to changes in the capitalist organization of production and society, extensions of a process of capital accumulation hitherto played out largely at the national level and restricted to the confines (and regulatory powers) of the state...globalization involves the

liberalization of national and global markets in the belief that free flow of trade, capital and information will produce the best outcome for growth and human welfare (2001: 11).

They point out that because of the structure of the new system it often appears to be inevitable, yet this notion is totally false. Basically, the system is set up as “an ideological mask disguising the emerging power of U.S. corporations to exploit and enrich themselves and their chief executive officers to an unprecedented degree. Globalization can be seen as a code word for the ascendancy of U.S. imperialism” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001: 62).

Within the framework of this study, what concerns us most about globalization is the “intensification in the cross-national spread of political conflicts, the transnational political relations...and the relevance of international issues in national politics” (della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 4).

With this last statement in mind let us now turn to some of the local understandings of the forces of globalization. Globalization is something that Egypt with its long history is used to dealing with. In and of itself it cannot be such a negative and evil force. Therefore, what needs to be done is to look at the changes that are coming upon globalization to understand the conflicting views towards it.

This is very much in line with du Gay pointing out that globalization has been experienced by many cultures and that maybe its impact is more shocking to the ‘first’ or ‘new’ world because it is not used to it. Nevertheless, it is a must that we consider the problems and social and cultural changes that are coming about due to the current global changes and encounters.

## **2.1 Local Perceptions of Globalization**

In discussing *el'awlama* (globalization) in general, Elsayed Yassin (1999, 2000) author and social scientist argues that there have been two opposite and contradictory reactions to it, one that rejects it totally and claims that it is a danger that must be avoided, and another which holds that globalization is what will save humanity and the world. Yet, neither one proposes any actual and practical solutions and ways of dealing with the current problems and conflicts in the world. He asserts that what is going on today under the term 'globalization' is not something that we can deny or acclaim, it is a reality that we are living and we must deal with, not only by scientific critique but also by attempting to see the picture as a whole, with all of its layers and multiplicity of colors, rather than one layer and one clear cut color. To be capable of doing this we have to be open minded and aware of the new developments of our times. If we assume that globalization is just a 'concept' that we can accept, reject or replace, this means that we do not have a clue about what is going on.

He continues to say that there are also many theories about the origins of 'globalization.' Some argue that it arose after the fall of the Soviet Union, with the end of ideological warfare, a domination of the capitalist system, free market forces, and the opening up of markets to a flood of trade, goods and services. Others say that it came in three major historical phases, first in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the beginnings of the capitalist system; second, by 1842 and the discovery of the 'new world'; and third, the contemporary globalization we are living today. Yassin disagrees with all, for him there was no particular single event that led to globalization. To the contrary, *el'awlama* is a



result of the accumulation of long historical events, which crystallized in a particular moment in time to fill a political, scientific, technological, and communications gap.

Galal Amin (2002), a noted author, journalist and social scientist states that if globalization is the movement of goods, services, labor, capital, ideas and values then it is a very old phenomena that fulfills the human curiosity and its need for exploration, and all this is fine. He sums up the material advantages of globalization in bringing people closer, in easier access to goods and services, and more understanding, communication and sharing between cultures. While it's main disadvantage which has been gaining force in the last twenty years, has been a new kind of colonialism where the United States is trying to create a new world order in which it has control over the world. Simply put, Amin describes the opponents of globalization as those who are harmed by it, and its proponents as those who benefit from it. At the top of this latter category fall the multinational corporations.

In essence therefore, Amin argues that we should not just look at globalization as something that can be judged as good or bad as a whole or in its totality. What we need to look at are the specifics and the nature of *what* is being globalized and the real objectives of it. If what we are faced with for example is '*awlamat el kahr*' 'globalization of oppression', then we oppose it, but his hope for the entire world is that a '*awlamat el insaneya*' 'globalization of humanitarianism' would prevail and this is something that no one would ever oppose.

It has thus become clear that globalization takes many shapes and forms; just as there is '*awlamat el kahr*' 'Globalization of Oppression', and '*awlamat ghaseel el mokh*' 'Globalization of Brainwashing', so too there is the '*awlamat el tafahom waltasamoh*

**'Globalization of understanding and reconciliation' and 'awlamat el 'elm 'Globalization of knowledge' (Amin 2002: 12).**

**One type of globalization that is *undesirable* is the U.S. version.**

**American style globalization is leading to a lot of problems worldwide, look at what is going on in Iraq, look at Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, even what happened in New York, these are all the outcomes of American style globalization...It is the way globalization is controlled and dictated by the U.S. that makes it unfavorable and damaging - Marwa, female, 42, married, school teacher.**

**It is after having heard many such declarations that I realized the importance of analyzing "people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts" (Ong 1999: 5).**

**There are in fact many new definitions of what is going on in the world today: 'Globalization of Oppression', 'Globalization of Militarization', and 'Globalization of American style terrorism'. These are all descriptions which Marwa and others brought up many times during our conversations. The idea is that as a result of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on America, the United States is elevating the undesirable (undesirable outside of the U.S.) aspects of globalization to a totally new level.**

**At this new level the only concern is "the oppression of those who do not share its [the U.S.'s] views, particularly Arabs and Muslims...as Egyptians most of us are both Arab and Muslim, therefore we are primary targets...what we are doing today [referring to the boycott], the way we have all come together to stand up to the U.S., through this really simple tool of the boycott, is just an attempt to turn some of the aspects of globalization to our advantage" Marwa would on many occasions insist.**

**One of the dangers of what is called 'Political Globalization' for example is the international chaos we are facing today, a world in which the United States is practicing**

what was commonly described as *baltaga*<sup>16</sup>. For instance, Yassin comments that the U.S. gives itself the right to be the protector of free choice and freedom of religion around the world. He says that the U.S. gives itself the right to look at Egypt and warn us: “if we find that Copts are being persecuted then we are going to punish you” (2000: 31)<sup>17</sup>. This is a world in which the U.S. has taken over the role of police because of its military and technological power and is imposing its will on the world (Yassin 1999; Garoudy 1999).

Amin asserts that due to these circumstances and the changing balance of power in the world, we have suddenly realized that imposing some local control and enforcing some internal regulations is not such a bad thing after all. After years of total openness towards the U.S. and the West and total embrace and fascination with all things ‘external’, there is suddenly an emerging realization that some protectionism is needed. That promoting the local and criticizing some of the forces of globalization could work to our advantage, that opening up to the rest of the world and accepting everything foreign is not always so beneficial, and that even though some things are open to globalization, adoption and creolization, there are others that are better to be rejected and forbidden (2002: 11).

Mahmoud, a 33-year-old male economist had this to say:

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<sup>16</sup> *baltaga* is a term used to describe the actions of lawless individuals or groups who go around committing acts of violence and/or vandalism, terrorism, and extortion of money from innocent people.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, in an email message which I received from an informant in January 2003, he informed me that for the first time ever the Egyptian government had declared January 7<sup>th</sup>, the Coptic Christmas to be a National Holiday. He explained that recently U.S. propaganda in Egypt has been doing all it can to flare up tensions between the Coptic and Muslim populations by making “false allegations and accusations” of religious persecution. As a result, in an attempt to ease tensions and to put an end to these U.S. tactics, the Egyptian government introduced this change. To date, Copts and other Christians had the right to take a paid day off from work or school on January 7<sup>th</sup> as their Christmas holiday without being penalized for it. But the change makes this an official national holiday for everyone. According to this 33-year-old Coptic male informant the Americans “have increased their meddling in local religious affairs and are using it as a tool to distract Egyptians from events in Israel and Palestine and the upcoming war on Iraq.”

We are not against the West, nor globalization, nor modernization, these are inevitable, and our society has been facing them throughout our history, and yet we have not turned out so bad. So today too, we know that these changes are coming whether we like it or not. The fact remains that we do want to modernize, we do want to develop and stay up-to-date with global changes instead of stagnating. GATT, free trade, etc, we have signed them and we have to abide by them, all these things are coming and it is for us to keep up with the changes. If we are prepared for them, then we can at least have some say on how they influence us. If we are educated, know who we are, have and maintain our own vision and identity, try to be a step ahead, then we should be able to turn globalization to our benefit. I think what we find hard to accept is when the United States wants to manipulate everything to its advantage. When its American style globalization, then there is no way we are going to put up with it. I mean we are very much keen on maintaining our traditional beliefs, values and practices, yet we are also open to modernization and to new ideas. But we don't want to be forced to accept anything that is alien to us or which is not in line with our traditions. Yes, there are tensions between the old and the new, but we have had to face these tensions. If we know who we are, and if we are sure of ourselves, then these current tides of globalization and Americanization will not blow us away. I mean there are a lot of benefits like technological developments, free internet, mobile telephones, that we have incorporated into our daily life so as to reinforce existing social relations. So we have to look at the pros and cons and take what suits us and reject what does not.

This is what Yassin concludes when he says that globalization poses both opportunities and dangers, the essential question for us becomes whether or not we are going to figure out a vision to challenge and confront the dangers and a strategy to revive our heritage and culture, to increase productivity, to work towards improved democracy, and make use of the opportunities. What is needed is for us to think globally and act locally.

### **3 Consumption and Consumers**

In looking at the study of consumption, Miller (1995a) who is concerned with the relationships of consumers and commodities, describes the current approaches as a convergence of various movements; first, the treatment of goods as signs that carry meaning (Douglas, Isherwood, Baudrillard); second, the focus on the continuous

creation of meaning as goods move between contexts, as opposed to a clear cut dichotomy between the local and the global (Appadurai); third, the importance of consumption to political economy (Miller, Rutz, Orlove).

Cultural theorists have “traditionally...depicted the masses as being manipulated – and even brainwashed – by consumer culture” (Classen and Howes 1996: 178). It was assumed that the impact of these changes and manipulations was most evident in the Third World where different cultures and different peoples were being controlled and transformed into a homogeneous consumer society by being forced to buy Western goods like jeans and televisions which did not fit into their cultures. Yet, this view fails to understand these cultures from within. Developing countries are always presented as victims of globalization and free trade, but they do not see themselves that way. They have rather “... used us and taken advantage of all what we have to offer them... they love the consumption but they have put a political meaning into it...” (Homa Hoodfar, personal conversation 2001).

“...Consumer activism and consumer rebellion are often variants on a theme of consumer power, which contrasts sharply with the notion of consumers as victims (the consumer as powerless)” (Edwards 2000: 11). What is important for us as a dimension of consumption therefore is the “notion of consumerism<sup>18</sup> which focuses on the more organized practice of consumers, often relating most directly to various forms of collective consumer resistance...” (2000: 2-3). In the Egyptian context, when consumers purchase a product or refuse to purchase it they are spontaneously attaching meanings to “a variety of commodities to create a discriminatory process of incorporation and

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<sup>18</sup> For more on Consumerism, see David A. Aaker and George S. Day, eds. 1989.

rejection [articulated in] an expression of identity where they try to retain the traditional yet adopt whatever is to their benefit” (Hui et al 1991: 3)

Thus this becomes not just “a personal relationship between consumer and seller, and between owner and possession. It is also part of group economic, political and social relations, between consumers and entrepreneurs, between workers and capitalists, between citizen and the state and between nations...” (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 119). In fact one of the critical aspects of mass consumption is that it is “... not merely affected by prior structures but also gives potential for new unprecedented forms of cultural diversity and heterogeneity, which eliminate the presupposition of global homogeneity even as a future prospect” (1999: 119).

Daniel Miller’s thesis regarding the relationship between cultural consumption and the making of culture provides an excellent means to understand the ‘agency’ of cultural consumption, without losing sight of the question of ‘structure’. Consumers are active, creative agents who manipulate and adapt material objects in accordance with their own values and interests, thereby implying that while some of the symbolic constructs and uses of objects conveyed by advertisers are accepted without criticism, others are in fact rejected, subverted or recontextualized. Egyptians are in fact doing their best to engage in these issues, to have a say in what is going on, and to make the best out of a global system which more often than not does not take them or their interests into serious consideration.

We may conclude therefore that even though Western goods are spreading this does not mean that they are received and used in the same way across the globe. On the contrary, these goods are often transformed, new meanings are attached to them, and new

uses are generated according to the local culture and local needs. “The term ‘creolization’ was proposed to refer to this ‘indigenization’ of consumer goods” (Classen and Howes 1996: 179). This indicates the importance and power of cultural identity in the recontextualization of goods through processes of localization, appropriation, domestication, hybridization or creolization. Designating local values to these commodities is a reiteration of their cultural identity.

One of many instances of such indigenization, or localized patterns of consumption of globalized commodities came up in a conversation about clothing and fashion trends, Donia, a 38-year-old housewife had this to say,

Of course fashion trends are important, nevertheless, we do not copy everything we see on television, on satellite, or in movies and magazines. There are things that are acceptable in our culture, which suit our tastes, so we take those and modify them a little to better suit us. But there are other things which simply do not compliment our traditions and practices so those kinds of things are disregarded. For example, sometimes I would see a nice dress on television and if I think it is suitable I will have it tailored, but we see many things on actors and actresses that are too open or bare it all and unacceptable for us, so we disregard them. I once saw a foreign actress wearing a pair of pants that was open on the sides up to her thighs, it looked very sexy and I liked it. So I went to the tailor and had one made, but of course the opening on the sides was only up to my knee, which would make it acceptable in our culture.

Thus we could conclude that different cultures respond differently to consumption opportunities. Home Hoodfar (1997) explains how,

...Cultural traits conducive to a market economy should be viewed as additional resources for societies pursuing such development. Low income Egyptians have eagerly welcomed many of the products of modern technology and adapted their lifestyle to incorporate their consumption. In many instances, they have used both material and nonmaterial resources to finance their new pattern of consumption, which is also their major source of saving in the form of durable household goods. This new consumption pattern had increased prosperity and stimulated the local and national economies. The Egyptian low-income consumption pattern has not evolved in a vacuum. It is strongly influenced by Egyptians’ desires to be part of

their rapidly modernizing: culture and modes of life and to secure their long-term material well-being ...The eagerness to acquire modern household appliances is not to be interpreted as total acceptance of the consumer habits that these goods may advocate (190). For instance, it was common for women to place their electric washing tumblers on the balcony or even in the alleyway, and converse with their neighbors while washing clothes. And, although by 1988 almost all of the households had a television set, women preferred to watch their favorite programs together and discuss them (208). Similarly, despite the fact that most households owned a gas stove, it was used only occasionally, because gas stoves, unlike kerosene burners, are not portable. Much of the cooking was done on small portable kerosene or gas burners, allowing the women to change the location of their cooking. They might cook on the balcony, or in the common corridor, while chatting with friends, for example, or in the room while watching television or entertaining guests....Although women welcomed the new appliances as an improvement, they rejected practices that would curtail social interaction. (209).

In fact, "historically Egyptian modernity has embraced western technology, scientific methods and consumption products on the one side, and 'Egyptian authenticity', that is continuity with the past, on the other" (Al-Ali 2000: 31). Thus in addition to taking into consideration matters of style and taste we need to take into consideration the "historical or economic underpinnings of consumer practices or their more overtly political implications [which] tends to inform a wider analysis of consumer society" (Edwards 2000: 31).

According to Mohamed Ragab, Chairman of Ragab Group in Alexandria and Chairman of the Alexandria Business Association, an NGO where I had previously worked between 1996-1998, Egypt "... went from an open market to a socialist market, back to an open market again and then finally into a market economy in less than 50 years" (El Bakry 2000: 47). These changes should not be taken lightly since their impact on the structures of society have been tremendous.



So “despite their relegation to residual categories by economists, cultural factors feature prominently both in the expansion of the economy and in the development of the national market....the cultural values and practices of a society can facilitate or discourage increased consumption or the adoption of new lifestyles” (Hoodfar 1997: 189).

In the last two decades or so there has been a tremendous increase in the number of ‘western’ products and services available in Egypt. From restaurant chains to clothing to movies to computers one can find almost anything from any part of the world in the local marketplace. In fact, most informants particularly those in their 40s or 50s provided a good picture of the changes that had happened in the marketplace. Whereas in the 1960s, or 1970s no products from abroad could be found in Egypt, today it is a completely different picture. Goods and products ranging from China, Taiwan and Japan, to Europe, North America and even Latin America can be found everywhere. This was seen by many as a positive change because it provided them with choices and a wide range of products of different qualities and prices that they could choose from.

Egyptian economists have long complained of the tendency toward lavish consumption associated with the open door policies of the 1970s. They have pointed to a sudden wave of consumerism symbolized by the rapid increase in the importation of motor cars, color TV and video sets, washing machines, air conditioners, American refrigerators, and Japanese fans. The objection is that this type of consumption is ‘unnecessary’, ‘wasteful’, and ‘costly’, in so far as it takes place at the expense of saving and investment, and creates too heavy a burden on the balance of payments (Amin 2000: 18).

Considered from this perspective there has been a lot of criticism of both marketing practices and consumption patterns of Egyptians. In an interview for *Nesf El*

*Donia Magazine*, Mr. Ihab Elwy, Head of the Central Authority of Statistics, says that the consumption patterns of Egyptians are,

...a reflection of the social behavior that is spread among the youth, and some of the elders too, to want to show-off, to blindly imitate, and a keen interest in owning everything that is new, regardless of whether it is useful or not, and there are no considerations to spend wisely, and at the end we complain from increasing burdens and expenditure, while we are the ones who create them....we also consume cosmetics worth L.E. 97 million per year and sun-glasses worth L.E. 23 million per year...67% of households own a refrigerator, washing machine and oven (Helmy 2001: 29).

This is all evident in the increased number of Western style shopping malls, supermarkets, and cinema complexes in Alexandria. In addition to a huge growth in the local advertising industry that aims to promote consumption. Yet, one cannot disregard the fact that these new trends are not eliminating or replacing already existing and functioning structures. Street vendors for example have not disappeared, they are everywhere, and Egyptians do not call them “traditional” or “old-fashioned” markets as Westerners refer to them because they are not the exception, but rather the rule in Egypt. It is true that they are in sharp contrast to the new shopping malls and shopping centers, but I doubt that these will lead to the disappearance of the “traditional” market places.

Every morning, in the Alexandria train station one can see peasant women getting off the trains from the villages with huge baskets of homemade cheese, which they carry on their heads to sell in the local markets. In these markets, and on the streets one can see men and women selling vegetables and fruits on their horse or donkey drawn carts, but one also sees pickup trucks on the roads selling watermelons, melons, tomatoes, mangoes, etc, side by side with the carts. This shows that the old and the new can be combined together and come to be acceptable as part of the local reality of the specific culture.

#### **4 A look at the Current Environment**

This fascination with all 'external things' has been gradually fading due to several factors. First, has been the slow but steady emergence and growth of locally manufactured products of equal and sometimes better quality at more affordable prices. This is because more and more new businesses – factories and companies – are producing goods that used to be exclusively imported, such as clothing, foodstuffs and household appliances. Second, is because of an active government campaign of promoting local industries, production, export, and consumption of local goods. According to several informants this has been a successful campaign and along with the improved quality of the local products there is no longer a reason to buy the more expensive foreign products.

##### **4.1 Perceptions of Western Goods: Praise and Criticism**

There is and always has been an incredible openness towards all that is new and modern. The simplest examples are in the fields of electronic appliances, music, films and cars. Such things are all imported into the country and are widely purchased and used by individuals and companies alike. In the fields of information technology in particular, there is an increasing sense of urgency that the world is moving forward very quickly in this field and that these new developments have to be kept up with. So there is a strong interest in following up all that is new and in acquiring the latest technological advances particularly of products used by individuals in their daily life. Chinese goods have 'invaded' the country, Japanese and German cars are the most popular and European clothing still enjoys a good reputation. But along with this openness, the increasing politicization of consumption has also been taking place as a form of local resistance and re-action.

## 5 Social Movements

In this section I would like to examine social movements as a form of collective action for change. A social movement is defined as “a formally organized group that acts consciously and with some continuity to promote or resist change through collective action...[it] is an organized group having a coherent internal structure, leadership, a written statement of purpose, membership and logistical base” (Goldberg 1991: 21). According to this definition the boycott in Egypt currently lacks some of the characteristics of social movements. But even though it is not yet a full fledged social movement it is on the path of becoming one as it is becoming increasingly organized.

What I attempt to do here therefore is to examine the boycott as a form of collective action and mobilization. According to Goldberg, in order to make sense of the form of social movements, “we must look to the grassroots to understand the mobilization of common people for change (Goldberg 1991: 2)...[and] the constructed theories to account for the appearance of protest” (1991: xi).

In researching social movement activity, this definition of ‘collective action’ provides an excellent framework for our understanding of the dynamics of the current boycott. In *Social Movements in a Globalizing World*, Bert Klandermans et al, provide this description:

Collective action frames are action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns...Collective action frames are supposed to consist of three components: (1) injustice, (2) identity, and (3) agency. *Injustice* frames refer to the evaluation of a situation as unfair or unjust. This evaluation is not merely cognitive but emotional. The *identity* or *adversarial* component contains an element of *collective identity*: a ‘we’, and a *definition of an opponent*: a ‘they’. ‘We’ are the people who conceive of themselves as sharing the same unjust situation. ‘We’ can relate to a very specific group, such as the members of an organization, or to a more general group such as

women or farmers. 'They' are the authorities, elites who are held responsible for the adverse situation. Therefore, the second component is also referred to as adversarial frame. ...In other words: who or what causes the adverse situation, who or what is to be blamed for it? Thus adversarial framing has a cognitive component which refers to the attribution of responsibility, and an affective component, which refers to the direction anger takes....*Agency* is the third component of collective action frames. It refers to the belief that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action. Injustice and identity are supposed to be necessary but insufficient conditions for movement participation. Merely sharing grievances is not enough for people to engage in collective action, neither is a common causal attribution" (Klandermans et al 1999: 135-136).

This means that the three components must be present for a social movement to arise. Taking this as a frame of reference we can easily identify the three components of injustice, identity and agency in the case at hand.

**Injustice:** in the current conditions in the occupied territories and U.S. inaction towards them. Morally and ethically these conditions are unacceptable.

**Identity:** 'we' or 'us' as a shared collective Arab identity, 'we' who can relate to the suffering of Palestinians, 'we' who are also confronted with U.S. and Israeli threats and instability, etc. Then there is 'they' the 'others' who are to be blamed for the situation. The cognitive dimension is what attributes responsibility to the American and Israeli governments. While the affective component directs the anger towards whatever is available, i.e. the representations and symbols of U.S power and hegemony in the world.

**Agency:** as in the belief that through the collective action of 'ethical purchase behavior', i.e. the boycott, it is possible to alter the current conditions.

In this case a condition that is seen as unjust and wrong becomes personalized and any perceived threats start to touch 'us' in a very direct way. When we combine these feelings to those of sympathy with the victims, i.e. the Palestinians in this case, the

problem becomes exacerbated. It is under such conditions therefore that social movements may arise. The right time is also critical, and in this particular case the outbreak of the second Palestinian *Intifadah* in 2000 was the catalyst for tremendous public support, increased anger towards Israeli policies and last but not least the birth, fueling and intensification of the boycott activities in Egypt.

## **6 Outlook on Boycotts**

So let us examine 'boycotts' as a form of social movement, a consumerist collective action/behavior/decision that consumers make in the market. In *Morality and the Market*, Craig Smith defines boycotts "as the organized exercising of consumer sovereignty by abstaining from purchase of an offering [product] in order to exert influence on a matter of concern to the customer and over the institutions making the offering" (Smith 1990: 140). Monroe Friedman, in *Consumer Boycotts*, defines the boycott as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (Friedman 1999: 4).

In market economies such as in the West and increasingly around the world, Egypt included, "decisions are decentralized and made by 'the people'." The concern is with the issues over which the buyer may have influence and the amount of available competition that would provide some degree of consumer sovereignty. "This could mean the public not buying a certain product...and deliberate restrictions of choice in purchase behavior...which could be practiced by people of all ages, classes and nationalities" (Smith 1990: 2).

Here “consumer sovereignty is key...this is the rationale for [free market economy] capitalism, the political economic system in the West (Smith 1990: 3). The importance of this topic relates to the relationships between business and society and specifically the social control of business ...” (1990: 14).

Corresponding to the three components of social movements, Smith continues to describe boycotts.

As a non-violent consumer action are a social and political technique...[where] direct action may be symbolic, designed to gain public attention (but possibly losing public sympathy) and demonstrate strength of feeling or breadth of support. In so doing, the group has the sense of being active and morale is raised and maintained. Alternatively, or additionally, direct action may be designed to achieve concrete results in itself (1990: 135-136).

Boycotts are thus a very flexible tool that can be used in a wide variety of contexts to achieve various goals. They “have been launched by a wide variety of sponsoring organizations; consumer groups, labor unions, organizations interested in ethnic and labor unions, religious groups, women’s rights groups, and environmental groups.” gay rights groups, anti war groups and others (Friedman 1999: 10).

### **6.1 Other Boycott Examples**

So let us look at a few other boycott efforts in order to understand the general context and reasons for the appearance of such movements. Two of the most famous boycott campaigns have been that against the Nestlé Corporation and the California grapes boycott. Others against South African apartheid and France’s nuclear testing have also been highly successful.

Nestlé,<sup>19</sup> the Swiss based multinational and biggest food company in the world faced a consumer boycott between 1973 and 1984. The company and the infant food industry as a whole were accused of aggressive marketing of baby formula in such a way that was discouraging breast feeding, minimizing the dangers associated with improper use of formulas, and promoting such feeding as the ‘modern way’ that should be adopted by all mothers.

Such use of baby formula was resulting in decreasing numbers of mothers breastfeeding their babies, particularly in poor countries where the consequences were disastrous. Mothers were often mixing the formula with contaminated water and illiterate mothers were unable to read the instructions for proper use or were diluting the product to make it last longer because of its high cost. The result was infant malnutrition, diarrhea, and even death (Higgins 1983; Barovick 1982; Dobbing 1988; Veraldi 1988).

In this instance even though the whole baby formula industry was at fault, “perhaps Nestlé became the main target of the boycott because it was the largest establishment and served well as a symbol of the whole industry” (Dobbing 1988: vi).

The campaign spread from Europe to the U.S. and as a result, in 1977, the Infant Formula Action Coalition launched a consumer boycott of Nestlé products sold in the U.S. Congressional hearings in Washington were followed by a series of international meetings under the auspices of WHO and UNICEF, which led to the adoption by the World Health Assembly in 1981 of an unprecedented international Code of conduct “for international marketing of infant formula; it was the first time that activist groups on a global scale had managed to team up successfully against major corporations” (Barovick 1982).

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<sup>19</sup> For more details and information on the Nestlé Boycott, see John Dobbing 1988.



Another successful campaign was that led by Cesar Chavez, leader of the farm workers of California and the American Southwest. Chavez organized boycotts of celery, grapes and grapefruit, and other produce of the powerful agribusiness industry in order to improve the conditions for migrant workers in California and to gain the right to unionize. "The Boycott was organized on a large scale, with boycott committees effective in the major North American markets and operating in most American cities" (Smith 1990: 251). The campaign was indeed a success and spread even to Canada, where Ministers of Parliament voted in December 1973 to keep California grapes and lettuce out of parliamentary restaurants (Bank 1974).

A much recent boycott campaign was organized in 1995 by the International Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade against France's nuclear testing in the South Pacific. An alert (Appendix B) was therefore issued calling for the world-wide consumer boycott of French exports such as "wine, cheese, cosmetics, and bottled water."

"The boycott sent a shock wave through French business and export groups who had remained silent over the nuclear testing" (Hoodfar and Pazira 2000: 31). They in turn put pressure on their government to stop the testing. Their efforts worked and the

French government, conceding the political and economic consequences of the nuclear testing, was forced to cease its nuclear tests before their completion...[this sent] a clear message to other governments that citizens of the global village can indeed exert considerable influence using the appropriate strategies (Hoodfar and Pazira 2000: 34).

Another interesting campaign was that against the South African government and its apartheid policies. This campaign was unique in that anti apartheid groups world-wide took part in it "demanding a boycott of South African products and other symbols

of the South African government” (della Porta and Kriesi 1999:12). In the 1970s, even the General Assembly of the United Nations

adopted resolutions condemning the South African policy of apartheid, urging, *inter alia*, all States...to terminate all military, economic, technical and other cooperation with South Africa [and]...to end tariff and other preferences to South African exports and facilities for investment in South Africa (Muir 1976: 25).

Thus we can see in this example that firms and multinationals doing business in South Africa were “as a consequence of doing business there, seen to be implicated in apartheid” (Smith 1990: 235). This is very much in line with what is going on in Egypt, where multinationals are being boycotted because through their operations in Israel they are seen as being implicated in the continuing occupation of Palestinian territories and of the system that is allowing for these conditions to persist. In these cases, using or even abusing “brands as an agent for social change” is the main objective (Chandiramani 2002).

## **7 Boycotts under International Law**

As we have seen from the examples above there seems to be no dispute over the legitimacy of such consumer boycotts or social movements which could be organized by any group, for any purpose, at any level of society. The controversy over legitimacy only arises when the boycott is led and promoted by a state government.<sup>20</sup>

Such state led boycotts or embargoes are common. The U.S. embargo of Cuba, Libya and Iraq are just a few examples of many such instances that show that boycotts are often used as an “instrument for the advancement of foreign policy objectives.” At this level they are “undoubtedly...an instrument of coercion lying somewhere between war and diplomacy in the scale of force” (Muir 1976: 26).

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<sup>20</sup> For more in depth analysis of this issue see Richard B. Lillich 1976.

Whether such boycotts are in violation of international law is not clear. It is well established that the “regulation of foreign trade is normally a right within the sovereign prerogatives of an independent country...Individual nations have historically regulated imports and imposed tariffs, inspections, quantitative and qualitative restrictions, and numerous other conditions and barriers to international trade. The question then is whether such regulation becomes illicit when directed against a particular country or countries for purposes of diplomatic pressure” (Muir 1976: 26), i.e. for political purposes.

According to the UN General Assembly’s 1965 resolution on non-intervention and the Assembly’s 1970 Declaration on Principles,

...Armed intervention and all other forms of interferences or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic, and cultural elements are condemned ...No state may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another State in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights and to secure from it advantages of any kind (Bowett 1976: 8).

The difficulty in such a declaration is how to measure or define economic coercion and who has the right to do so. Instead of providing a clear-cut definition this resolution leaves a lot of room for debate and for contestations, claims, and even retaliatory action by one or all parties involved.

Even though I had stated earlier that the concern in this study is restricted to actions by individuals or organizations, not countries via their governments, I nevertheless decided to include this section in order to clarify yet another reason why the Egyptian government is not interfering or adopting this campaign as state policy. It is concern over possible retaliatory action on the part of the United States that it fears the most.

## **8 The First Arab Boycott of Israel (1940s-unclear)**

It is ironic that as an Egyptian growing up in that country I had never heard or learned of this earlier Boycott nor was it ever talked about or discussed. I remember how surprising it was for me when I went to Taba, Sinai, for the first time as a teenager and encountered Israeli products being sold on little tables right at the border between the two countries. At that time, it was taken for granted that Israeli products would be available at that specific place or location because it was *the border*, yet no one even seemed to question why Israeli products did not exist in other parts of Egypt. It was a question that had never even crossed our imagination.

It is not surprising therefore that I only learned of this first Arab Boycott of Israel when researching for this thesis. In 1945, as a moment of pan-Arab nationalism, and in unison against a common external enemy the first official boycott of Israel by Arab states was adopted to boycott goods produced by Zionist firms in Palestine and companies having branches there.

After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the establishment of the Central Boycott Office in Damascus, Syria<sup>21</sup> in 1954, the Council of the Arab League issued its first formal Boycott declaration. "Resolution 16, stated that Israeli products and manufactured goods shall be considered undesirable in the Arab Countries and called upon all Arab institutions, organizations, merchants, community agents and individuals...to refuse to deal in, distribute, or consume Zionist products or manufactured goods" (Chill 1976: 1). The boycott was later expanded to include third country firms; foreign companies doing business in Israel (Smith 1990).

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<sup>21</sup> For an in depth discussion of the operation of the Arab Boycott and U.S. and Israeli reaction, see Kennan Lee Teslik 1982.

Even though this boycott drew a lot of attention at the time and was highly criticized for its 'assumed' implications, and for its main goal of 'destroying' the state of Israel, it is clear to me that it was a failure. Let me present some of the reasons for this conclusion.

First, even though some multinational corporations did comply with the Boycott, others "defied it, repented from dealing with Israel to get off the blacklist, partially repented to the Arab governments but not severed business ties with Israel, or have evaded the boycott by setting up dummy corporations" (Kaikati 1978).

Second, both the U.S. government<sup>22</sup> and Israel fought it wholeheartedly. Even though the Boycott did keep many companies from cooperating with Israel at first, very soon, opposition in Europe and the United States grew and lobbying campaigns and counter boycotts by Jewish organizations led to the reversal of decisions by many companies that had originally abided by the boycott (Smith 1990). These were followed by "Congressional hearings on the boycott in early 1975...followed by the introduction of assorted anti-boycott bills" and the passing of a law against U.S. firms complying with the boycott (Teslik 1982: 69). In fact the U.S.,

...administration has taken actions to make it clear that it does not support boycotts of friendly countries. 1. In January 1976, the Justice Department instituted the first civil action against a major U.S. firm for violations of anti trust laws arising out of boycott restrictions by Arab countries. 2. In November 1975, the President instructed the Commerce Department to require U.S. firms to indicate whether or not they supply information on their dealings with Israel to Arab countries. 3. The Federal Reserve board has issued circulars to member banks warning against discriminatory practices and reiterating the Board's opposition to adherence to the Arab Boycott (Simon 1976: 24).

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<sup>22</sup> Chill describes the actions taken by the U.S. government, such as a bill in Congress, June 30, 1965, declaring that "The anti-boycott amendment required the administration to announce to businesses, by October 1965, that it was the policy of the U.S. to oppose practices or boycotts imposed by foreign nations against countries that are friendly to the U.S." (1976: 49).

Thirdly, there were many problems and difficulties in the functioning and implementation of the boycott rules. On many occasions, if there was a particularly strong need for a specific product or service, Arab governments simply ignored the Boycott provisions or the black lists. This was not hard to do since the blacklists were secretly kept in the Boycott offices and were not made public (Smith 1990). Meaning that there was no public accountability.

Fourth, along with the failure of many of the boycott activities in economic terms, there were also disastrous political consequences. For example,

Boycott attempts to blacklist individuals (actors, celebrities, officers of financial institutions and so on) invariably have led to massive newspaper coverage and public scandal. Although several airlines need Middle Eastern airports for refueling and repair, most refuse to accede to Boycott demands. Similarly, efforts to influence other large, international corporations have failed due to the economic ability of these firms to outlast the Arab countries and to coordinate their reactions to Boycott demands with those of the public. Finally, the Arab attempt to force compliance upon foreign governments through contracts and trade agreements, although successful through the 1950s, has met increasing resistances as the public increases its knowledge and awareness of the Boycott's activities. Thus, the Arabs, by overextending the scope of the Boycott, thereby increasing its notoriety, have decreased the Boycott's effectiveness (Teslik 1982: 12).

A fifth difficulty was perhaps in the nature of its organization. Ordinary citizens were not directly involved in the process, there was lack of information, secrecy in operations and no grassroots involvement at all. Thus, perhaps it was impossible to carry on and continue implementing it since it was a mandate proclaimed and to be enforced by Arab governments, which already had so many internal problems and issues to deal with that there was no time or energy left to channel towards the boycott. Finally, and with the eventual peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979, the campaign seemed to just fade away.

My conclusion therefore, that it was a failure is because even though “as an international sanction it [may have been] effective...yet, [it] cannot be credited as successful...” because it did not achieve its main goals (Teslik 1982: 164).

Even “the exact monetary effect of the Boycott on Israel’s economy is uncertain” (Chill 1976: 23). The fact remains that since 1950, Israel has had a 10% economic growth annually, a figure which is one of the largest in the world, it would be easy to conclude that even though the boycott may have made this process hard on Israel, nevertheless, “measured against the goal of creating an unbearable burden for the Israeli economy, the Arab boycott has obviously failed” (Teslik 1982: 21).

Thus we could say that the boycott “has been most effective in potential forgone, particularly in denying Israel the role of trading centre for the Middle East, which Palestine’s pivotal location would have ideally suited” (Smith 1990: 155).

These were just a few of the differences between the first boycott and the current boycott that was born out of and developed by individuals at the grassroots levels which is what makes it more valid and legitimate in the eyes of its practitioners.

## **9 Conclusion**

This chapter covered some of the theoretical background and literature pertaining to my thesis. Some of the concepts and issues presented were globalization, consumption and consumer behavior. A brief look at perceptions and changes in outlook and understanding of Western goods was presented. I also examined some of the local literature and scholarly work dealing with these topics and how they are viewed and understood at the local level.

In order to understand the different dynamics of boycotts it was also important to examine them as a grassroots social movement and the reasons behind the birth of such actions. Some examples of other boycotts were presented and finally the first Arab Boycott of Israel was discussed in order to clarify some of the disparity between it and the current boycott efforts.

From what has been presented in this chapter therefore, we may conclude that along with globalization there has been a growing interdependence on a global scale that characterizes the human condition. As a result, we must pay

Attention to the political context in which social movements mobilize and focus on the impact of the national, regional and local political contexts on mobilization and its outcomes across countries [and] the impact of the increasing interactions between national and international political contexts on social movements...[in order to understand them in such a] globalized world (della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 3).

The consumer society that we are faced with is one that “incorporates political and economic significance along with social and cultural ones...” (Edwards 2000: 30). There is apparent conviction on the part of boycott participants of the importance of social and political participation to make the world a better place. Boycotts have been used for a variety of objectives and they will continue to serve as a tool for social change no matter who the participants might be.

Within the local context of the boycott in Alexandria, it only goes to show that there are in fact other forces that contest Western forces of homogenization. We may argue that “...subjects, in given historical conditions, are shaped by structures of power - colonial rule, cultural authorities, market institutions political agencies, translocal entities – and...they respond to these structures in culturally specific ways” (Ong 1999: 22). This is the view I attempt to provide, an “ethnographically grounded and nuanced perspective



to the universalism and homogeneity claimed by Western theory...instead of embracing the totalizing view of globalization as economic rationality bereft of human agency..." (1999: 23).

The next chapter will do just that. Chapter IV is a presentation of my empirical data based wholly on the actual research conducted in Egypt.

## **CHAPTER IV: THE BOYCOTT IN ALEXANDRIA**

***The way out of all this is simple: 'our message to the United States and the whole world is that if you want to stop the turmoil in our region, stop Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon from carrying out his crimes in Palestine. He is provoking everybody. It is his acts that lead to emotional reactions like those of the young men and women who are killed trying to cross the border'.***

**-Farid Zahran of the Egyptian Committee in Solidarity with the Palestinian *Intifadah* quoted in *Al Ahram Weekly* 13-19 June, 2002.**

### **1 Introduction**

I was spending time with Omneya, a 24-year-old university student as we were watching the latest news on television. She suddenly said: "look, just look at what Bush is doing, calling Sharon 'a man of peace' eh! What a sham...no wonder why resentment of the U.S. is growing" (Figures 4 and 5). In this chapter I present the relevance of this boycott campaign and its evolution within a local context and from a local perspective. Its different manifestations are presented and a number of the targeted products are discussed in depth.

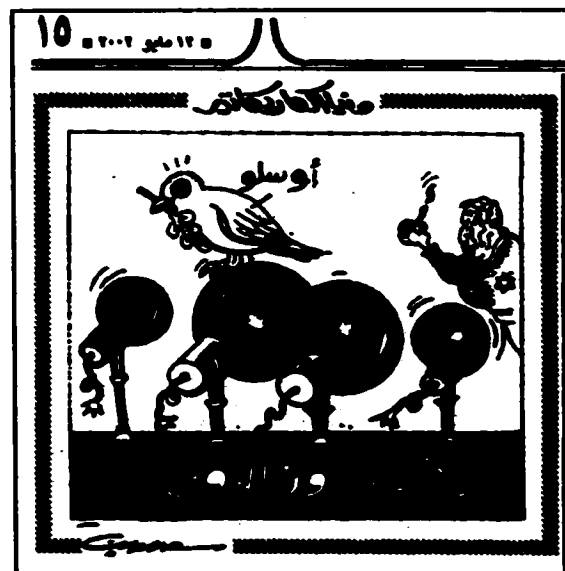
The three components of collective action; injustice, identity and agency are contextualized. I also include more precise description of empirical data, and use anecdotes, quotes and parts of interviews and daily life to show the articulation and the logic of discourses and practices regarding the boycott.

We need to keep in mind that different consumer patterns should be understood as the intersection of many different and difficult to reconcile historical processes (Miller 1995), and it is these historical and current conditions that are influencing the boycott.

As my research went on, it was becoming obvious that the scope of the boycott was much greater than what I had originally anticipated.



**Figure 4:** Caricature depicting Ariel Sharon as a devil crying and saying “I don’t care I want Gaza.” The U.S. replies: “darling, just wait a little bit and soon I will get you Gaza and everything else that you want.” (Source: *Al Wafd*, by Amr Okasha, 13 May, 2002: 1).



**Figure 5:** “The International Sharon Conference.” In this caricature we see bombs ready to be ignited. As a dove referred to as ‘Oslo’ tries to jump from one to the other to save itself, Ariel Sharon holding a match is about to ignite them all up. (Source: *Al Ahram*, by Saad El Din, 12 May, 2002: 15).

It was clear that political sentiments and grievances were having an influence on what people chose to buy and bring into their homes. I had always known that politics played a major role in the everyday lives of Egyptians, but this new phenomenon of combining politics and consumption through identifying key Israeli and American products and boycotting them had amplified in the past couple of years. With this in mind I attempt to explore how the attitudes regarding consumption, the U.S., Israel and Palestine may be translated into practices at the level of everyday life.

The cases of Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonald's, Lays, and Sainsbury's are just a few examples which will indicate that the 'local' has immense power over the fate of foreign goods and on whether or not they gain a place in the homes of Egyptians. It will also show that multinational corporations cannot always dictate or control the consumption patterns of local people. Thus the opening up of the Egyptian market to foreign goods and increasing globalization of trade has brought about an avenue of democracy that Egyptians have been longing for.

### **1.1 Who / How**

No one can accurately tell how the boycott started,<sup>23</sup> but it is generally accepted that it was started and spread by ordinary people, family members, students, circles of friends and informal groups. Ironically, the same technologies produced by the West, and imported into Egypt; Internet and mobile phones are being used to send email and SMS messages (short message services) to promote and diffuse the idea of the boycott, in addition to many web sites providing information on the campaign.

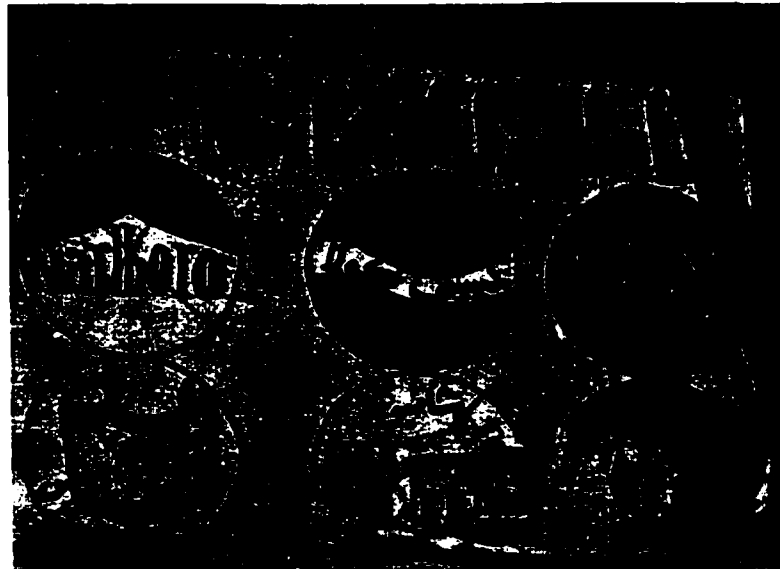
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<sup>23</sup> "Public participation does not necessarily mean creating or joining a political party; there are many other forms of both individual and collective participation" (Hoodfar and Pazira 2000: 30). They go on to say that "political participation does not need to be initiated formally or at official levels by high ranking individuals, or justified with cumbersome words" (2000: 37).

The flood of email and Web sites sets this effort apart from previous ones...which were often organized by governments. The current efforts arise from women's groups, citizen committees, trade unions and other grass-roots organizations –sources some executives fear will inflict longer-lasting damage to US franchises and brand names (Mac Farquhar 2002).

The boycott is publicized, not just by word of mouth, but also fliers, Internet websites, mosque sermons, and the mass media. In fact flyers with a list of boycotted products and their local alternatives are handed out throughout the city (Appendix C).

In one neighborhood I noticed signs/drawings on the walls depicting Coca Cola and Pepsi bottles, and bags of Ariel laundry detergent, which had been crossed out with an "x" and captions reading: "Boycott Ariel, to save a Muslim," or "Boycott Pepsi, to save a Muslim," or "Boycott American and Israeli products" (Figure 6).



**Figure 6:** Sign on an Alexandria street calling for the “boycott of the products of the enemy: Lux soap, Pepsi, Marlboro cigarettes, Tide Laundry detergent, Pantene shampoo, and Raid insect repellent.” Photo taken by author in 2002.

For example, the word 'Pepsi' is believed to stand for "Pay Every Penny to Save Israel," while the Ariel logo is believed to be a modified Star of David. Even though produced locally under license, the name Ariel itself is considered to be an Israeli name, as in Ariel Sharon and therefore it is believed to have Israeli interests behind it.

According to Ashraf Bayoumi, Professor in the Faculty of Science at the University of Alexandria, and president of the Boycott Committee the main reason for the boycott is that the militarization of globalization by the U.S. is unacceptable. He goes on to explain the functioning of the boycott in the following terms,

The Popular Boycott Committee includes 300 members, some of whom are intellectuals. For us it is basically about sending a political message. We are now studying the best way to apply the boycott. We have chosen 5 very well commercialized brands, one cigarette brand, one detergent, one sports shoe, a soft drink, and a well known fast food chain. We will start with this list and we will enlarge as we go, since applying a total boycott of all American products is a delicate mission at the present moment. The boycott is a symbolic weapon ... even though it is hard to hit these huge multinationals, yet we are getting letters from them to explain and justify their situation. The other objective is political, the boycott sends a strong political message saying that the Arab people can do something together in unison and that they reject American policies. Yes, this will hurt American interests in Egypt, but it will not lead to unemployment, rather to the increase in domestic production and consumption and increased opportunities, so for example, we should not give one specific local alternative over its foreign one, instead we should say for example, 'local drinks' instead of 'Coca Cola' (*ra'ees el tahreer* television program- 27 May, 2002).

It is hoped that when these multinationals start to lose economically, then they will put pressure on their respective governments and particularly the U.S. government to change its current policies towards the Middle East and what is perceived as its pro-Israeli stance, as reasoned by Mahmoud Abdel Fadeel, Professor of Economics at Cairo University (2002: 30).

## **1.2 Why**

The reasons for the boycott (which is also gaining momentum in other Arab and some European countries) are clear. The resentment on the part of a large number of Egyptians of the actions of the Israeli government towards the Palestinian population in Israel and the occupied territories, a sense of increasing helplessness towards what is considered 'American double standards and unjust policies' towards Israel, other Arab countries, and throughout the world, and a widespread belief that it is because of unconditional U.S. aid, support and backing that Israel is able to continue the occupation of Palestinian lands and territories.

U.S. support for Israel emerges in several ways: financial, military and diplomatic. Israel ...receives 25 percent of the entire U.S. foreign aid budget. Since 1976 Israel has been the highest recipient of U.S. foreign aid in the world. The Congressional aid comes to about \$1.8 billion a year in military aid and \$1.2 billion in economic aid, plus another \$1 billion or so in miscellaneous grants, mostly in military supplies, from various U.S. agencies. Tax-exempt contributions destined to Israel bring up the total to over \$5 billion annually (Phyllis Bannis 2002: 20).

This, as well as the idea that Americans are hostile towards Arabs and Muslims, the many wars that have been fought between Egypt and Israel, the continuous tensions in relations even after the peace accords of 1979, and the fact that Arab governments are unable to confront the U.S. and Israel and have shamefully failed in gaining the rights of Palestinians are also contributing factors. The United States' constant interference in local Egyptian affairs and its constant attempts at imposing its own views on the current government is also a major contributor.

Additionally, the boycott is seen as a simple tool for political participation that can be easily implemented to send a political message, as well as an action which many

believe could have long term economic consequences along with the short term political ones.

The main aim of this boycott as explained to me by the majority of participants in my research is to show Israel and the United States that ordinary people can take matters into their own hands and can play an active role in political and economic issues to express their opposition to the events in the occupied territories and to the way the United States is trying to control the world in general and Egypt and Arabs in particular. "It is something that we are learning about and we are improving every day, it is perceived by the ordinary citizen as a way of participation, as simple as that" explained Omneya.

In fact the extent of the boycott has increased so much that it has become a common topic in daily public discourse and mass media. There are daily articles in the major newspapers (both government and opposition), in popular magazines and on television discussing the matter, its validity and consequences. One of such consequences is that a system of classification/categorization of Israel and the United States as villains/victimizers, and Palestinians/Arabs as victims, and what they stand for is constructed and perpetuated. This became a focal point not just for the rise of the boycott but for its continuation also.

### **1.3 What / The Target**

The boycott targets all products that are made in Israel, it also prohibits "all direct trade with Israel, trade with companies which have a branch, agency, factory or plant in Israel, and firms and countries that do business with Israel indirectly, or have some Israeli links" ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2002](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2002)). Under this category of companies fall such multinationals and American companies as MacDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Lux



Soap, Ariel and Tide detergents, IBM computers, Pepsi, Coca Cola, Motorola mobile phones, Marlboro cigarettes, Westinghouse appliances, Nike, Always, and the list goes on.

The intention is not to boycott all companies that have brought their products to the Israeli market, but to restrict the ban to those that are actively collaborating with Israel; meaning those companies that are contributing to the growth and strengthening of Israel's infrastructure and economy, or those that are establishing their businesses on occupied lands and providing jobs to settlers in illegal settlements.

#### **1.4 Official Government Response**

The Egyptian government does not officially endorse nor condemn the Boycott; it has not taken any steps to promote it nor to put an end to it. The critical factor here is that if the government opposes and criticizes the boycott it will have to face popular anger and opposition. On the other hand, if it goes out to publicly support the boycott that would mean having to face the consequences – such as sanctions, end of aid, even military retaliation – from the U.S. Thus the boycott remains a public initiation. The government is not interfering in the matter since it cannot force consumers into anything. It has left the public to decide for itself what to buy and what to reject in a free market society.

## **1.5 Role Played By Professional Syndicates<sup>24</sup> and Other Civil Society Organizations:**

By the time I returned to Egypt in 2002, a large number of the influential syndicates and professional trade unions had been supporting the boycott and adopting a variety of anti-normalization measures. *el nekabat el mehaneya* (professional syndicates) are considered:

A salient force of Egypt's civil society. There are 24 professional associations with a total membership of about 3 million, that is 20% of Egypt's labor force. Distinct from workers' unions in that their membership are university graduates with white collar occupations; the syndicates are Egypt's embodiment of its intelligentsia (Ibrahim 1996: 166).

In fact "all of Egypt's professional syndicates, including the Doctors Syndicate, Writers Union, Journalists Syndicate and Lawyers Union, support a ban on Israel" ([www.middleeasttimes.com](http://www.middleeasttimes.com)).

Each syndicate or union is taking strong action to halt relations with Israel. For example, the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce called on all traders to boycott Israeli products, without specifying any measures that would be taken against those who would not abide. It also forbade import of all products and raw materials from Israel. According to Abdel Moneim Seoudi, Chairman of the Chambers of Commerce, "all what is Israeli must be boycotted" (Mahmoud 2002: 28).

As to Mohamed Farid Khamis, Head of the Industry Committee at the People's Assembly,

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<sup>24</sup> These "professional associations are probably the most active civil organizations in the Arab world at present. Partly because they provide union like benefits to their membership, partly because of the higher level of education and political consciousness of their members, and partly because of their relatively independent financial resources Arab professional associations or syndicates...have spearheaded the movement of civil society in their respective countries...and are organized on the par-Arab level as federations" (Ibrahim 1996: 255-256).

the United States is Israel's main partner and it should be treated as such...the local Egyptian economy must be strengthened so that dependence on the U.S. is decreased. It is not possible for Egyptians to be importing tons of wheat and corn worth billions from the U.S. while at the same time calling for a boycott of its products. It is therefore crucial that simultaneously, local production of such strategically needed goods is increased (Mahmoud 2002: 29).

Along the same lines, the Chamber of Maritime Agents in Alexandria decided to boycott all Israeli ships if attacks against Palestinians did not come to an end. Likewise, the Pharmacists' Syndicate, which is one of the most powerful in the country, representing all Egyptian pharmacists banned import of all Israeli pharmaceuticals and approved measures to penalize those who continue to do so. Even though the amount of such imports is minimal, Mohamed Abdel Maksoud, secretary general of the syndicate claims that most Israeli medicines go unnoticed because the packaging is disguised. "If you scratch out the fake label, you'll recognize the original Israeli mark on the boxes...labels are changed because a majority of the public will not buy a product clearly marked 'made in Israel'" ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8)).

Thus the fact that these powerful syndicates have taken the initiative and are playing a pivotal role in the boycott campaign is a good indication that the boycott is popular among many strata of society and is gaining a recognizable framework and structure.

### **1.6 Lifting the Ban**

According to the President of the Popular Boycott Committee (discussed in the May 27, 2002, *ra'ees eltahreer* program) the list of blacklisted companies will actually be revised from time to time so as to add new companies or remove the ones which

publicly declare and act upon their support of the Palestinians in exactly the same way they support Israel.

He provided the example of one multinational company whose local agent asked to meet the members of the Boycott Committee to demand the removal of his company's name from the boycott list. The Committee requested that he make a public statement that his company is against the establishment of Israeli settlements and that it supports the cause of the Palestinian people. When the agent refused, saying that such a statement would be against company policy, the Committee in turn refused to remove the name.

He also explained that there are instances where the companies respond positively and the Committee takes immediate action to remove their name and make a public statement of their own declaring their support of that particular company and encouraging consumers to support it as well.

## **2 Products Under Fire**

When it comes to brand<sup>25</sup> names informants explained that they are quite aware of what is Egyptian, what is imported, and what is foreign but produced locally under license. This extreme awareness on the side of consumers has become increasingly critical and at times detrimental to the fate of some goods and services.

According to Gareth Williams, in Western culture,

Undeniably we use brands as one way to define and express our identities, but the success of capitalist economies that support and underlie brands means that they are global forces...Some international brands maintain a consistent message all over the world; others adapt to fit into locally specific

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<sup>25</sup>“A brand is a combination of names, slogans, logos, product design, packaging, advertising and marketing that together give particular products or services a physical, recognizable form...Brands must engender trust and loyalty if they are ultimately to be purchased. A brand, therefore, is a business strategy to encourage us to consume one product over its competitors, and it is a sign loaded with meaning that we choose to consume because we feel we relate to it. Successful brands are those that achieve a high degree of recognition by consumers. However, it is not enough for a brand to be familiar if we do not internalize its values” (Williams 2000: 7).

cultures. As a symptom of culture defined by consumption, brands have been identified with American values, and most global brands are American in origin. But brands from other parts of the world do not simply assimilate American culture. Increasingly non-Western brands are developing as expressions of non-Western cultural identity...to succeed, brands must trigger an emotional response in the mind of the consumer by appearing to fit the environment where they are encountered. Brands and their meanings are formed as much by consumers as they are in the boardrooms of marketing executives, on the computer monitors of product designers, or in the television studios of advertisers (2000: 10).

If we accept this view, then we can understand why the big American brand names have become the primary target.

Tim Dant asserts that,

For America's largest brand-name consumer goods corporations like Coca-Cola, Marlboro, KFC, Nike, Hershey, Levis, Pepsi, Wrigley or McDonald's, selling American products means selling America; its popular culture, its putative prosperity, its ubiquitous imagery and software, and thus its very soul. Merchandising is as much about symbols as about goods and sells not life's necessities but life's styles which is the modern pathway that takes us from the body to the soul. Hence, It is often assumed that Western goods carry along with them meanings and cultural symbols that have a tremendous influence on the receiving cultures (1999: 60).

But when the whole purpose of the campaign is the rejection of all of the above, then it is exactly for this reason that the main targets of the boycott have been the biggest American brand names which are spread all across the globe – Egypt and Israel included. So now let me present some of the products that are pertinent to my study. I admit that including all the boycotted products in this thesis would have been difficult because of space and time limitation. I have therefore chosen some of the products which were most often invoked and/or suggested to me by informants.

I have intentionally chosen a wide range of products – Marlboro cigarettes made in Egypt, Eli Lilly pharmaceuticals made in the U.S., Nokia phones made in Finland, Coca Cola and Pepsi made in Egypt, Lays and McDonald's also made in Egypt, and

Sainsbury's a British super market chain – in order to show the scope and the actual complexity of the campaign.

## **2.1 Cigarettes: MARLBORO**

Even though Marlboro cigarettes are actually produced in Egypt, yet, many smokers have turned to boycotting them as a tool that provides an emotional outlet for anger against the United States. In 2000, 9 billion American cigarettes were produced and consumed locally. This number dropped to 6 billion in 2001 and if the boycott continues it may drop further, particularly because of the availability of local alternatives (Abdel Fadeel 2002).

Saleh, a 39-year-old male office employee explained that since he and his family started taking part in the boycott he had stopped smoking Marlboros. He had switched to the local Cleopatra cigarettes, which he would often take out of his shirt pocket to show me as proof. "I know you might think that this is trivial, but it means a lot to me, I also know that quitting smoking all together would probably be the best option for me, but for now, I think just having switched is the best option under the current circumstances, it might be like a drop in an ocean, but who knows, maybe it will go further."

## **2.2 Pharmaceuticals: ELI LILLY**

When the Pharmacists' Syndicate banned all trade with Israel, it also decided that anyone who continues to trade with Israel would be punished (Apiku 2002). In addition, it took action and called on its members to boycott Eli Lilly and Co. a U.S. based drug maker to protest against what it considers,

A bias towards Israelis to the detriment of Palestinians. The Syndicate accused the company of granting medical aid to Holocaust survivors in Israel while ignoring the suffering of Palestinians fighting against Israeli occupation. 'They have helped the victims of the Germans and refuse to

help the victims of Israel', syndicate secretary-general Mahmoud Abdel-Maqsoud reasoned.' He explained that ...the syndicate would scrap the boycott if Lilly gave the Palestinians \$500,000 worth of medical aid ([www.aharm.org/weekly/2001](http://www.aharm.org/weekly/2001)).

When the company came back with an offer of \$50,000 the Syndicate found this unacceptable because the amount did not match what was given to Israel. The final decision of the Syndicate was to continue with the ban ([www.aharm.org/weekly/2001](http://www.aharm.org/weekly/2001)).

In this instance, in trying to explain their aid to Israel, company representatives insisted that their assistance went to helping innocent victims; old people. Even though the syndicate accepts that the company can and should help who-ever it chooses to, nevertheless, if it wanted the ban lifted then it would have to be fair in its dealings and give the same amount of assistance to innocent Palestinian victims as well ([www.aharm.org/weekly/2001](http://www.aharm.org/weekly/2001); [www.arabia.com](http://www.arabia.com)).

In an article dealing with the issue in *Al Ahram Weekly*, most pharmacists interviewed indicated that they would take part in the boycott of Eli Lilly, and that there are local or other alternatives and therefore patients would not be affected in any way ([www.ahram.org/weekly/2001](http://www.ahram.org/weekly/2001)).

### **2.3 Mobile phones: NOKIA**

Even though mobile telephones are being bought and used at an incredible rate and although Nokia has been one of the most popular brands in Egypt, I was surprised to see that it was on one of the boycott lists I came across in a newspaper. As I investigated further I started to understand why.

It turns out that the mobile phone manufacturer is building "the technology for a mobile network in Israel. Mustafa Bakri, Chief Editor of *al-esbou'* newspaper – one of

few which officially supports the boycott – indicated that any company which actively collaborates with Israel will be targeted and Nokia is certainly doing so” ([www.helsinki-hs.net/news](http://www.helsinki-hs.net/news)).

#### **2.4 Soft drinks: COCA COLA et al.**

Coca-Cola, Pepsi and other soft drinks such as 7Up or Sprite have been widely consumed in Egypt for decades. Yet recently there has been some resistance and criticism of these products and calls to boycott them (Figure 7). Joy and Wallendorf ask a critical question: “can we even begin to explain the meaning of Coke and Pepsi from a cross-cultural perspective?” (1991: 33). Yes, we can and this is an attempt to do so.

Here are some relevant descriptions of Coca Cola that I came across during research:

- 1) Coca-Cola is one of those transnational goods that has come to acquire the status of a meta-symbol that allows it to be filled with almost anything those who wish to either embody or critique a form of symbolic domination might ascribe to it. It may stand for commodities or capitalism, but equally Imperialism to Americanization (Miller 1998a: 170).

(At the local level American imperialism is totally rejected).

- 2) The most recognized brand in the world is also the most democratic. Coca-Cola makes one basic product, with variations, that appeals to people across age, class, gender, race and income. The Coca Cola bottle is one of the most recognized symbols in the world... The bottle shape, introduced in 1915, is a registered trademark of Coca-Cola, acknowledging the significance of the packaging design to the success of the brand. The Coca-Cola script logo may be older, but the bottle shape is just as significant as a vehicle for the brand’s values: it has become a logo itself... (Williams 2000: 14).

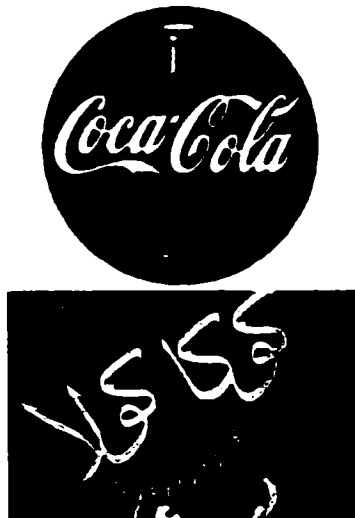
(I mention this because as a result of this branding and recognizable logo, the Coca Cola bottle and the actual script of the words in both English and Arabic have come to symbolize the boycott (Figure 8). The script is reconceptualized and given a totally new meaning. In fact I was told by informants that the words Coca Cola in the actual logo



would read “no to Mohamed, no to Mecca” if read backwards and upside down. It’s ironic that no one was able to show this to me, but the belief existed I found that contesting it always led to a dead end!).



**Figure 7:** Notice a Coca Cola boycott sign right in the center of the photo taken in an Alexandria neighborhood. The Coca Cola bottle is crossed out and the caption reads “Boycott ...to save a Muslim.” Photo taken by author in 2001.



**Figure 8:** Coca Cola logo in English and Arabic

- 3) ...Coca Cola has become a veritable symbol of all things American...(Frank 1997: 170).

(And all things American are seen as “discriminatory and ruthless” –Jehan, 36, female, banking executive).

- 4) Coke remains the global soft-drink leader with more than two-thirds of its 1992 revenues coming from abroad (compared with only 20% of Pepsi’s). Coke has had global ambitions for a long time. But nowadays an ambitious company cannot simply capture global consumer...markets by aping their ideologies and accommodating their tastes: it must also be prepared to create global markets by careful planning and control (Barber 1995: 68-69).

(It is this control and the fact that Coca Cola does make money abroad that is being targeted).

This shows us how powerful the brand really is and how successfully it has spread and been incorporated into peoples’ lives, not just in big metropolitan urban centers but to the remotest corners of the world. Yet, it is also for this reason and for the company’s alleged support of Israel that it has become a target (Appendix D).

So let us examine some of the accusations against Coke.

- 1) In 1997 the Government of Israel’s Economic Mission honored Coca-Cola at the Israel Trade Award Dinner for its continued support of Israel for the last 30 years and for refusing to abide by the Arab League boycott [referring to the old boycott of the 1950s] of Israel...the Coca-Cola World Headquarters hosted and was the main sponsor of the American-Israel Chamber of Commerce Awards Gala. Recently it has been announced that Coca-Cola, in return for millions in incentives and tax breaks from the Israeli government, is to build a new plant on stolen Palestinian land at Kiryat Gat... Intel is already facing possible legal problems for building its chip plant on the same stolen land. The Kiryat Gat industrial park is built on the lands of the village of Iraq Al Manshiya whose residents were ethnically cleansed in 1949 in contravention of International law ([www.bigcampaign.org](http://www.bigcampaign.org); [www.boycottisrealigoods.co.uk](http://www.boycottisrealigoods.co.uk)).
- 2) On Tuesday February 19th 2002, Coca-Cola helped through a partnership with the University of Minnesota, fund a pro-Israel propaganda lecture given by Linda Gradstein. The event was cosponsored by Zionist

organizations like Friends of Israel, and National Hillel ([www.bigcampaign.org](http://www.bigcampaign.org)).

In the statements made above, whether they are of informants or posted on websites promoting the boycott, there is without doubt a lot of finger pointing and allegations and accusations which may or may not be verifiable or true. But the reason why I include them here is that they are occurrences which are highly publicized locally and end up being the focus of many conversations about the boycott. These statements about Coca Cola or McDonald's (in the previous section) were often brought up by informants to prove that these companies are in fact supporting the State of Israel. When I asked them about the validity of such statements, some would respond by "yes these are true." While others would say "even if this is not the complete truth, there must be some validity to it, there must be some connection on whose basis these news come out." I will further discuss these perceptions of companies and goods related to the United States and Israel in the next two chapters.

## **2.5 Fast/Junk Food: MCDONALD'S**

Since 1995 McDonald's<sup>26</sup> outlets have sprung up in various cities of Egypt but mainly Cairo and Alexandria. Even though McDonald's did achieve some success in Egypt, it never gained the same popularity it enjoys in North America, primarily because of high prices but also because a local version of fast food, the national dish, which is cheap, tasty, and healthy, already exists in the form of *foul and falafel* (two dishes made of beans and mixed greens).

Thus, in May 2001, McDonald's launched a new product called '*McFalafel*' being referred to in the ads as the "Original Egyptian falafel." *McFalafel* is a big falafel

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<sup>26</sup> For more on McDonald's international position, franchises and world-wide status see John Ghazvinian and Karen Lowry Miller 2002.

sandwich, which sells for L.E.1.50 (US\$0,40cents)<sup>27</sup>. Large signs and posters were displayed in front of McDonald's restaurants, there were inserts in the major daily newspapers (Appendix E), in addition to a television commercial portraying a man and woman in 'traditional' peasant dress eating the *falafel* sandwich and loving it. It was a commercial which almost everyone I spoke to found to be a "stupid, desperate, and final attempt by McDonald's to attract customers."

So if McDonald's tries to copy the local fast food of another country would it still be valid to call this cultural imperialism coming from the West? Or is there an unexpected reversal of positions? A question I asked myself, was why would I ever go to McDonald's to have a *falafel* sandwich, when I could go to one of many local restaurants such as *Mohamed Ahmed* or *Gad* and have about four or five sandwiches and a cup of tea for that price?

Several times during my stay I went to *Mohamed Ahmed* (Figure 9) but failed to get into the restaurant because of huge lineups. I noticed that all day long and especially at night, the street where *Mohamed Ahmed* is located is crowded with cars and customers standing in the middle of the street or on the sidewalks eating their sandwiches. There are young people and old, children and families leaning against cars or even sitting at tables on the pavements or blocking the sidewalks just to eat at that restaurant. I did nevertheless manage to eat at *Gad* a few times because I intentionally went very early in the morning.

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<sup>27</sup> These are the 2001 exchange rates.

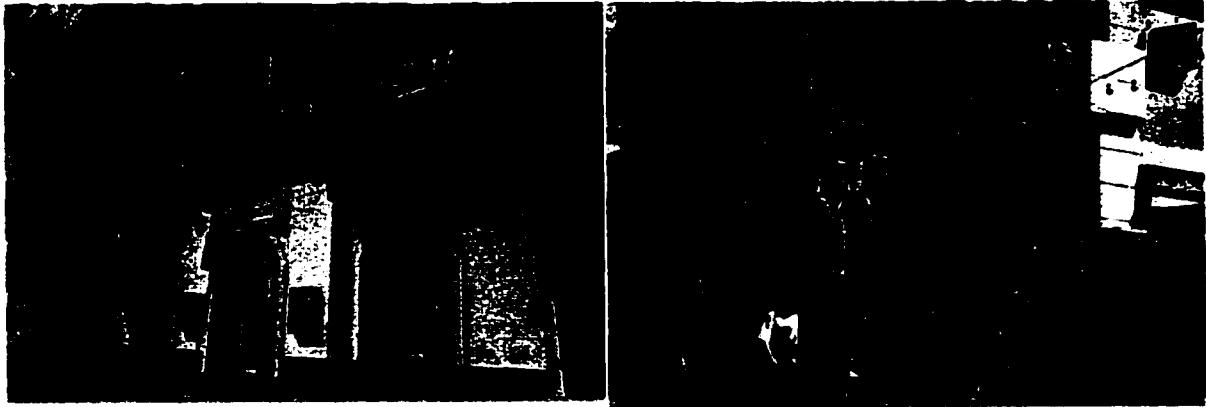


**Figure 9:** Outside of *Mohamed Ahmed* Restaurant (to the right of the photo – entrance where the white car is located) in downtown Alexandria early in the morning. It was impossible to take a picture in the evening when the place is most crowded because of the many cars on the street and the huge crowds which make movement very difficult. Photo taken by author in 2001.

Even though I did not go to McDonald's or KFC, I did nonetheless pass in front of these restaurants almost on a daily basis as they are located in the heart of downtown Alexandria. Looking inside, there were only a few occupied tables and it was not long before I realized that this was not just about the price or the type of food being served, that the boycott was obviously having an impact since these two fast food chains were at the top of the list<sup>28</sup> of products to be boycotted (Figures 10a and 10b). Nationally, sales of McDonald's have dropped by 25% and the "local McDonald's is finding few takers for its McFalafel burgers..." ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2002](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2002)).

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<sup>28</sup> There are currently several versions of lists circulating around with the names of companies and products that are to be boycotted along with the local alternatives to their products. There is a growing debate that these lists have not been verified by any official or trustworthy body to verify their accuracy. This is a task that the 'Popular Boycott Committee' recently took upon its shoulders to produce a detailed and carefully researched list.



**Figures 10a & 10b:** Outside of McDonald's outlet in downtown Alexandria. Left: photo taken in the morning, in the summer of 2001, notice that there is no 'government police guard'. Right: photo taken in the afternoon, in the summer of 2002, a guard (in white) is sitting to the side of the entrance. Guards can be seen in front of most McDonald's outlets for fear of vandalism.

Even though McDonald's is the largest and best-known global food service retailer with more than 30,000 restaurants in 121 countries, it has been hit hard in Egypt because of its 'support' of Israel. Here are some of the claims made against McDonald's:

- 1) Chairman and CEO Jack M. Greenberg is an honorary director of the American-Israel Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc., of Metropolitan Chicago.
- 2) According to the Chicago Jewish Community Online McDonalds Corporation is a major corporate partner of the Jewish United Fund and Jewish Federation.... Through its Israel Commission, the Jewish United Fund works to maintain American military, economic and diplomatic support for Israel; monitors and, when necessary, responds to media coverage of Israel... McDonalds entered the Israeli market in 1993 and now has 80 restaurants across Israel...and benefits the Israeli economy (<http://www.mcdonalds.com/countries/israel/>).

Due to these factors and because McDonald's is a symbol of all what America stands for, it is no wonder that Egyptian consumers have so favourably joined in its boycott.

## **2.6 Snacks: LAYS POTATO CHIPS<sup>29</sup>**

Lays potato chips was one of the first targets I came across in 2001. Again, an American brand produced locally that was not viewed favorably. There was one little store where I usually bought juices or simple household products such as soap and shampoo and one day I decided to buy several different kinds of potato chips and other snacks to try and see what the craze for them was all about. I asked the old lady in the store if she had any Lays chips and she immediately replied with a “no.” But since Lays is sold almost everywhere I was surprised at her answer and when I asked her why, she simply said that she had heard rumors that the owners of Lays were ‘Jewish’<sup>30</sup>, in addition she explained that it “causes bad things to your health.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, she had sent back the stand and stopped selling it completely. As a substitute, she sells *Chipsy*, which is a local brand of potato chips.

## **2.7 Super markets: SAINSBURY’S**

Another case which shows how much power actually rests within the hands of the local population is that of Sainsbury’s; a British supermarket chain which opened several outlets in Egypt but was then hit by ‘rumors’<sup>32</sup> that again some of its owners were ‘Jewish’. This was right at the beginning of the Second Palestinian *Intifadah* and Ariel Sharon’s visit to the *Al Aqsa* mosque; a time when tempers were flying high.

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<sup>29</sup> Lays is produced under license in Egypt.

<sup>30</sup> The word ‘Jewish,’ in Arabic ‘*yahoudi*’ is generally used to refer to Israelis, and that is why I am using it in the same way my informants were using the term, confirming that by their use of the word ‘*yahoudi*’ they were not referring to religion in any way and that they had nothing against Jewish people, rather that it is the politics of the state of Israel which they disapproved of.

<sup>31</sup> Some Egyptians avoid using the word *saratan* (cancer) instead they just refer to it in some other more discreet way. I think this is what the lady was referring to because I heard similar references made by others.

<sup>32</sup> These so called ‘rumors’ were in fact being debated in newspapers and magazines and in public discourse, which contributed to their dissemination with such a detrimental outcome to the company which continually denied the charges.

The Sainsbury chain of stores became a target and their sales dropped considerably even though their prices were very low compared to most other places and even though they epitomized the 'Western experience or practice of shopping.' It was the first instance of a boycott of such a visible target taking effect with almost immediate consequences. Eventually, this led to Sainsbury's closing most of its stores and considering pulling out of the market completely, which it had already done when I returned in 2002. "The company was simply the most obvious victim of the interplay between Middle Eastern politics and Egypt's social and economic climates" (El Sherif 2001: 25).

### **3 Problems and Weaknesses**

Along with all these successful cases, it was common to hear arguments and discussions about the many obstacles that need to be traversed, many weaknesses that need to be remedied and problems that need to be solved. According to Elsayed Yassin, the first deficiency is that so far the campaign has not been very well organized and relies on individual initiative, rumors, hearsay, false allegations and even unreliable sources.

"Ethical purchase behavior is dependent on informed choice, on the consumer being aware of the ethical issue and it therefore acting as a potential influence on the purchase decision." There has to be a "source that is organized and directed towards providing such information, the pressure group" (Smith 1990: 97).

Thus, there is an urgent need for a body like the Boycott Committee or some other committee to conduct studies and research in order to choose the products whose boycott will be the most effective (Mohamed 2002; Yassin 2002). Here the complexity of the



question of how knowledge about an issue is made available becomes evident (Kitsuse and Spector 1977). This is without doubt a major gap that the Committee is trying to fill.

Second, even though local alternatives are available, it is still crucial that local companies and businesses acknowledge the sacrifices made by consumers and play an active role by stepping up to the challenge and improving even further the quality of their products and offering them at reasonable prices which would make them available to all (*ra'ees al tahreer*- 27 May, 2002).

Third, there is of course the question of how to reach consumers in a more effective manner and to spread the campaign as quickly, as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

Fourth, is how to convince those who so far have not yet participated of the benefits of the campaign. Yet, in the meantime, how to make the public understand that the boycott will not hurt the U.S. economy as such, but that what it will do is affect the companies working in Egypt which eventually might play some role by pressuring their respective governments (*ra'ees al tahreer*- 27 May, 2002).

In terms of numbers, the United States' exports to the Arab world were worth \$20 billion in 2002, just 2.5% of its total exports. Exports to Egypt were worth about \$3.7 billion according to 2001 statistics. This means that Egypt does not represent such a huge market for the U.S. In addition, about 55% of these imports are bought by the government and therefore cannot be boycotted, which means that only about 45% of imports are replaceable ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8)).

As for Israel, again, it must be made clear that trade between the two countries – even before the boycott started – had been minimal. Official trade statistics are not clear,

but most of Egypt's exports are in the form of oil and therefore cutting oil exports is regarded as a strategic step.

But Israel's exports to Egypt are not easy to pinpoint and this brings us to the fifth problem of how to identify products under increased global economic interdependence and the internationalization of production whereby bits and pieces of goods are manufactured in different places and put together somewhere else. Often the actual source of many products is impossible to identify. There might be a single element or piece which is made in Israel, but the whole is made and assembled in another country and this makes detection of the Israeli element unfeasible. The fact also remains that many Israeli products do not enter the country directly and are not properly labeled. It is the increasing globalization of production that poses difficulties here ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8)).

Sixth, a major argument of the opponents of the boycott is that some local Egyptian companies are being falsely accused and targeted by competitors who might want to drive them out of the marketplace. Some companies do want to promote certain kinds of services or exploit certain demands and desires of the population. Much in line with this, is the cost of the boycott for the local economy. These multinational companies employ thousands of Egyptians, and are mostly owned and operated by locals which means that there are local employers and employees who will be hurt in the process. The Committee suggests that a plan be devised in order to face these difficulties.

Last but not least, is the most critical question of how to actually force these companies to take some positive action and lobby their governments to change their

policies towards Israel and the Palestinians  
([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8)).

I do not attempt to provide answers to any of these questions because they are open-ended ones being discussed by ordinary citizens and boycott organizers on a daily basis and are under urgent questioning by the promoters of the campaign. Thus it remains to be seen what will be done with regards to these questions and what the ultimate outcome of the boycott will be. For now let us look at some of the immediate results.

#### **4 Overall Consequences**

There is a lot of debate about the actual consequences or results of the boycott, 'is it working'? Or 'is it not working'? These seemed to be common questions on everyone's mind. More urgently though is the question 'are we going to hurt ourselves more than we hurt anyone else with this campaign?' These were issues on which there seemed to be no consensus.

Within the context of local industry, some informants would argue that in the short run we are only hurting our own economy because these businesses which will shut down will translate into lost jobs, lost revenues and a slowing economy. Others would argue that no, to the contrary, with these 'foreign' companies gone, local ones will step up and provide jobs and new opportunities would be created. Yet others would argue that even though we might lose on the short run, we have to be far sighted and consider the long-term outcome and consequences, as these will surely be to our advantage. With a stronger economy there will not be as much dependence on the U.S. for aid and

assistance as there is now. This will translate to a stronger position when it comes to negotiations or lobbying.

In terms of sales “American fast food franchises have suffered the brunt of the boycott, with sales in Egypt reportedly down by as much as 35% since the start of the *Intifadah*” (McGrath 2002). In interviews conducted with managers of ten fast food stores in Egypt, *Ahram Hebdo* reports that their complaints were similar.

...‘The last few weeks have been really hard for us, attendance has decreased by almost half of what we are used to’ complained one Hardee’s employee, an American fast food store. Another visit to one of the city’s McDonald’s does nothing to negate the above statements. So, the specials are on the increase; for example, two Big Macs for the price of one. One of the strongest of these is the sign at the entrance of Chilis in Maadi [a Cairo suburb, similar signs were posted at Chilis in Alexandria] declaring that 10% of profits will be donated to the Palestinian people. Radio Shack does not hesitate to display the Egyptian and Palestinian flags at its window. Briefly, whatever is politically correct will sell. Supporting the Palestinian people through boycotting the products of its colonizer and their allied is a good cause... ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/arab/ahram/2000/11/8)).

We might question the statement made here that “whatever is politically correct will sell.” But the behaviour and consumption patterns I saw and experienced during fieldwork do support this argument. Further on in this chapter I do present a few of these “politically correct” products that are selling very well and a few “politically incorrect” ones that are not doing as well as expected.

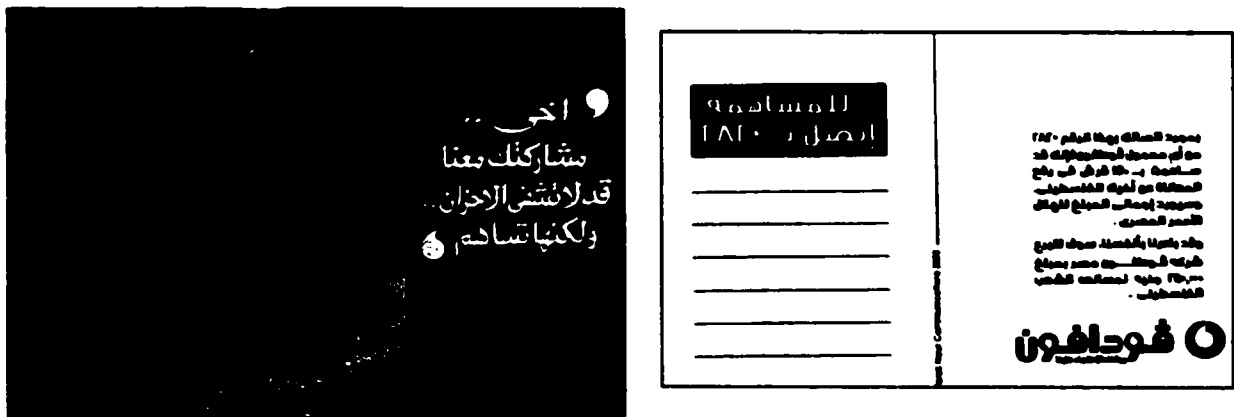
## **5 Reactions of Local Companies**

With the boycott campaign gaining in strength and fears of ending up like Sainsbury’s a new trend has started where Egyptian companies are taking out ads in newspapers, magazines and T.V. to confirm that they are 100% Egyptian and that they have absolutely no connections to Israel or the U.S. This seems to be stemming from a

growing fear among these companies that they might be mistakenly boycotted. It is as if there is a contest for public support.

Thus for instance “Seniorita Group for Food Production” has taken out ads in all major magazines declaring that it is 100% Egyptian with a list of all its products and an announcement that 1 piaster (100 piasters = 1 Egyptian pound) of each package of its Lion’s potato chips goes to the children of Palestine (Appendix F).

A policy of donating part of its profits to Palestine is also regularly advertised by Vodafone Egypt, the country’s second largest mobile telephone service provider (Figures 11a & 11b). *Menatel*, the company that runs the main public telephone system and owned by *Orascom*, one of the largest investors in the country and owner of *Mobinil*, the largest mobile telephone service provider in the country, also has a campaign donating money to Palestine (Appendix G).



**Figures 11a & 11b:** Left: Front side of the post card. Caption reads “brother...your contribution may not heal sorrows, but it will help.” Right: Back of the Vodafone postcard. Caption reads: “to contribute call #2820 from any *Vodafone* mobile telephone and you will automatically contribute 1,50L.E. to lift the suffering of your Palestinian brothers. The total amount will be given to the Red Crescent Society. We have already taken the initiative whereby, Vodafone Egypt will donate 250,000L.E. to support the Palestinian people.”

In a surprising twist, Avon, an American brand which has spread like wild fire in Egypt has a similar strategy. According to Lola, a 25-year-old university student and Avon lady,

Some of Avon's products are actually made in Egypt, in their new factory in the 10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan City, but others are mostly made in Europe. I think the best thing about Avon is that it is of very good quality and the prices are rather suitable; they are not as expensive as the big brand names like Christian Dior or Lancome, nor are they as cheap as some of the local products. Avon is a brand that is well respected among my clients and I think it is because of its huge success in Egypt that Avon started this campaign because it is afraid of losing its clientele and also its Avon ladies.

It is Lola who gave me the summer 2002 catalogue in which Avon was publicizing its "Avonian Palestinian Campaign." This is a campaign where a certain percentage of each order will be donated to Palestine (Figure 12).



**Figure 12:** Cover of the Avon summer 2002 catalogue declaring its "Avonian Palestinian Campaign" and a Palestinian flag appears at the top left.

These are just a few examples of the many companies that have not actually been boycotted, but are taking precautionary steps. Another noticeable result of the boycott campaign was the increased amount of advertisement by the actual boycotted companies.

What is taking place could be described as an attempt “to associate goods and services with particular cultural meanings and to address these values to prospective buyers...[and creating] an identification between producers and consumers through their expertise in certain signifying practices” (du Gay 1997: 5). The strange part was that increased advertisement was backfiring because it was taken as a sign of weakness and a sign that the boycott is in fact working.

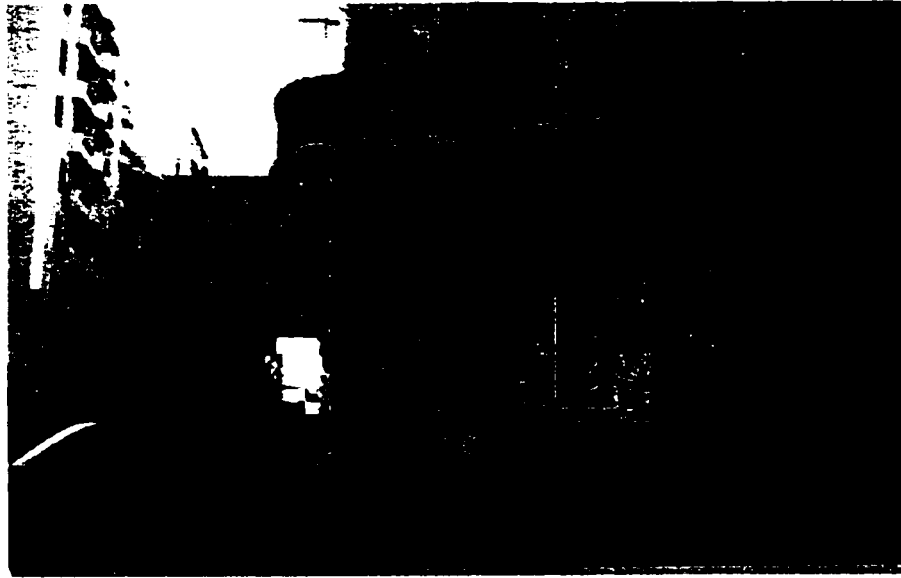
This shows that even though advertisement,

Define[s] products or services in terms of their image, style or association and most importantly, it promotes a knowledge of the product or service en masse, particularly through television, in a way that no other sales medium can parallel. What happens after that in terms of its intention, impact of importance remains entirely open to interpretation... (Edwards 2000: 59).

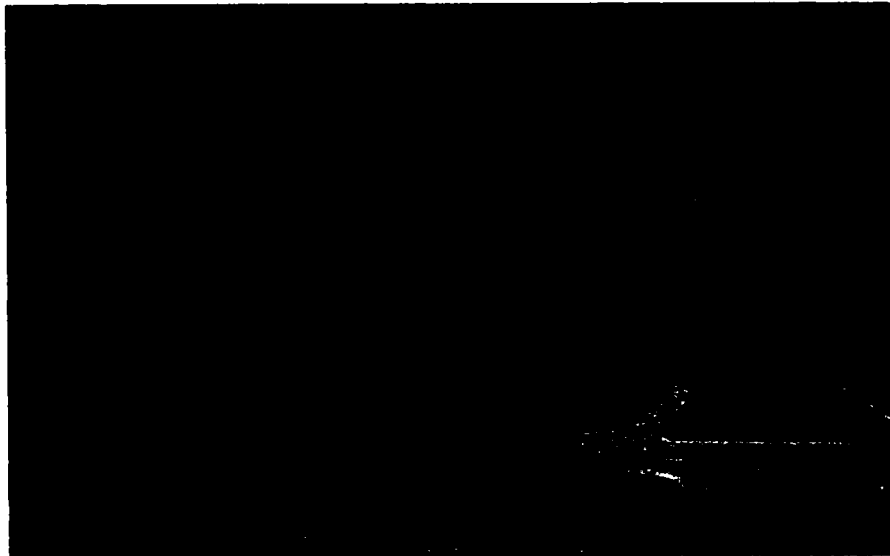
For example, soft drink advertisements are everywhere (Appendices H and I), at almost every street corner a little store with big Coca Cola (Figure 13) or Pepsi signs (Figure 14) could be seen. The outside walls of many of these stores are painted in the Coca Cola or Pepsi colors and logos<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to see that along with this phenomenon, there are also many other stores and shops whose facades are filled with pro-Palestinian posters and slogans and lists of products to boycott.



**Figure 13:** The outside of a corner store in Alexandria, painted with the Coca Cola logo and colors is a common sight all over the city. Photo taken by author in 2001.



**Figure 14:** The outside of a corner store in Alexandria painted with the Pepsi colors and logo. Photo taken by author in 2002.

In Egypt, which is a country with a very hot climate, anything ‘cool and cold’ goes. On any hot summer day the consumption of cold drinks is crucial and that is why Egyptians use the word *haga sa’a* (something cold) to refer to soft drinks. In an attempt



to play on words and take advantage of this habit Coca Cola urges consumers to “*uul Coca Cola, mat’olsh haga sa’`a*” meaning “say Coca Cola, don’t say “something cold” in its advertisements. Several famous singers are also recruited to promote Coca Cola and Pepsi.

As for Ariel laundry detergent, according to the Egyptian Boycott Committee the Ariel logo is allegedly a modified Star of David (Figure 15). The brand name ‘Ariel’ itself as associated with the name ‘Ariel Sharon’ is automatically considered Israeli. The company has been so badly hit that it has a new and very lengthy commercial on television about its factories and how it contributes to the Egyptian economy and how much employment it provides.



**Figure 15:** An Ariel laundry detergent flyer. The logo appears on the box to the right of the photo, 2002.

It has also gone as far as creating its own short television program *el sett dee omee* (this woman is my mother), in which they choose ordinary citizens to talk about their mothers for a few minutes on the program. The idea is to show the sacrifices these

ideal mothers have made and how well they have raised their children – and of course these mother use Ariel to do their laundry. During the program they also feature the lucky winners of gold coins from the Ariel prizes campaign and to some of these mothers as well. According to Lobna, a 23-year-old female marketing student,

Ariel has reduced its prices significantly, they have even changed their packaging from paper carton to plastic bags. But not matter what they do the damage has already been done. In the perception of any product there are controllable effects (product, price, promotion, packaging, availability, etc) and uncontrollable effects (politics, economics, environmental issues, culture, etc) sort of external variables. Companies, like Ariel are trying to make changes in the controllable items, such as reducing prices, changing packaging, or saying that money from profits will go to charity, but the damage is done and it will be almost impossible to change this, especially in the case of Ariel.

In such an environment advertisers and marketers are trying to capture and evoke a desire, mainly through enticements and prizes such as cash, refrigerators, walkmans, watches, stereo players, soccer balls, cars, and of course free tickets to the concerts of some of the spokespersons.

Consumers are encouraged to collect a certain number of caps, or find pictures of prizes or of the singers in the caps to win prizes and free concert tickets. When I inquired about how these spokespersons are regarded Omneya, (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) explained in the following words, “yes, they are advertising these products, but you see them less and less nowadays, it is on the decline, besides, good for them that they are appearing in these ads, making tons of money, and yet we are still not going to buy the products, so they might as well make some money out of it!”

## **6 Promoting Local Industry, Exports and Local Consumption**

The Egyptian government has undertaken an active campaign of promoting local industry, production, exports and consumption. For instance a new Ministry of Foreign

Trade has been created, headed by Dr. Youssef Boutros Ghali, former Minister of Economy. The main work of the Ministry is to facilitate exports. A new law *kanoun hawafez eltasdeer* (the export incentives law) which will ease regulations and provide incentives to exporters is under study and will soon be introduced in order to remove and decrease any obstacles to exporting.

The aim is to also develop a solid infrastructure that would facilitate these changes in order to increase exports by at least 20% (some consumer products by up to 300%) and to encourage exports by small and medium size enterprises which would eventually provide employment opportunities (Saad and Talaat 2002: 16).

Additionally, there have been television commercials encouraging consumers to "Buy Egyptian." Even though I did not see any of these myself, informants told me about them and said that the ads had ran for a few months at the end of 2001.

Actually, this is one of the main arguments of the promoters of the boycott, saying that to fill the gap that will result from the boycott Egyptian consumers should look to local alternatives and imports from Arab countries, and from countries with which Egypt enjoys friendly relations. In fact "in some cases, consumer boycotts involve not only the avoidance of certain products but also the welcoming of others, in the embracing of a more appropriate subculture or alternative society" (Smith 1990: 136). Thus let us take a quick glance at some of the alternative products available in the Egyptian market to which consumers are turning.

### **6.1 *Fayrouz***

The first of these products, which no one can overlook is *Fayrouz*; a soft drink with a different twist to it which is growing in popularity. Produced by Al-Ahram

Beverages Company (ABC), it is a natural, non-alcoholic malt beverage with apple, pineapple, berry and recently introduced mango flavors, that uses a very effective strategy describing *Fayrouz* as the “natural development/progress of soft drinks” (Appendix J). The idea here is that *Fayrouz* is “natural,” i.e. more healthy than other soft drinks, and that it is the next step in the evolution of soft drinks, i.e. more advanced, modern, or more fashionable than the usual or regular soft drinks.

The same company also produces *Birell* (Appendix K), a tasty malt beverage similar to non-alcoholic beer, which is promoted as a sugarless and healthy drink that could be consumed by both young and old. According to company executives, *Birell*, is one of their most successful products and is a huge potential for growing exports to the Arab world and even to Africa and Asia (El-Bakry 2001: 39).

Along these lines, many of the families I was in contact with were turning back to ‘traditional’<sup>34</sup> drinks, and local stores selling fresh juices such as mango, orange, lemon, and sugar cane were ‘in’ once again. Juices in small packages are also very popular, especially among children. Two domestic companies, *Enjoy* and *Juhayna* are producing very high quality juices at affordable prices. Guava, mango, apple, and orange juices are among the most popular of these drinks. Children take these to school with them to have with their lunch, and in family outings many parents prefer to buy a small juice for their children instead of the more common Coke, Pepsi, Sprite, or 7Up.

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<sup>34</sup> My use of the word ‘traditional’ is somewhat problematic here. Many of the things that we in the West might refer to as traditional (describing other cultures) are not regarded as such by the local people themselves. These represent the norm rather than the exception for them. In this case for example, sugar cane, *sahleb* and *karkadeh* (hibiscus) juice would be some of these drinks which have always been consumed by Egyptians and are now in fashion.

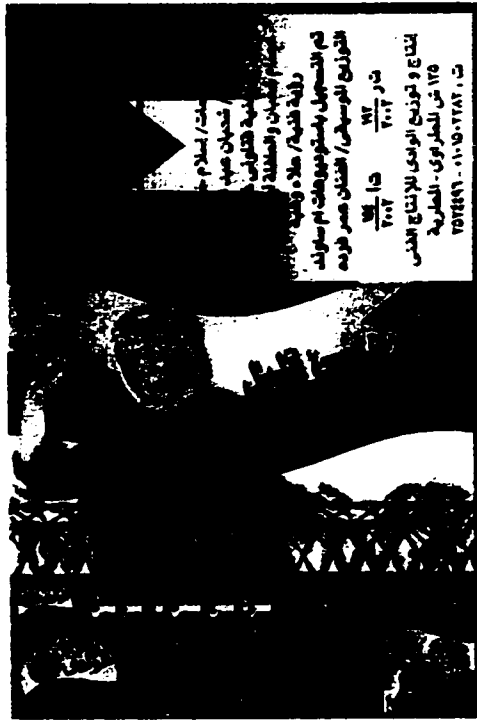
## 6.2 Sha'aban Abdel Rehim

The phenomenon of *Sha'abolla* – his nickname – is truly a remarkable one. *Sha'abolla* is a singer who emerged out of nowhere and gained huge popularity because of the lyrics of his songs which are clearly anti-American and anti-Israeli (Figure 16). His songs are played most everywhere in town, and listeners seem to enjoy him even though the music and rhythms are highly repetitive.

Even though *Sha'abolla* has a very *sha'bi* voice and many define his music as very 'bad' indeed, yet it is his lyrics filled with hostility that attract consumers. Simon Frith (1996) talking about music asserts that, "identities are formed by the kind of music to which we listen" (1996: 122). He contends that.

...[postmodern] identity comes from the outside not the inside; it is something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover (1996: 122)...social groups [do not] agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity....Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them (1996: 111) ...Music....symbolizes and offers the immediate experience of collective identity (1996: 121).

This seems to be true when it comes to *Sha'abolla* because his words symbolize and represent the thoughts and feelings of a large number of Egyptians.



**Figure 16:** Cover of one of Sha'aban Abdel Rehim's music tapes on which he appears wearing a Palestinian *koufeya*, the Palestinian flag and barbed wire in the background, and him throwing a stone; a symbol of the *Intifadah*.

### 6.3 Arafat snacks

Last but not least, right before I left the field in 2002, I came across a new product named “*Abu `Amaar*” after Yasser Arafat (Appendix L and M), a corn chips snack. The small bags carry a picture of Yasser Arafat with the Palestinian flag and the caption reading, “Hand in Hand, we are building our future. The more you buy, the more you build.” The product is mainly targeted towards children and sells for 25 piasters (about U.S. 5 cents), and for every 25 packages sold, the price of 1 package will go to the Palestinian children. The maker of the product is an Egyptian company that has been in the snack food business for some time and already has a reputable name.

It is such occurrences that are increasing and I have no doubt that many more such products have or will appear on the market very soon, as consumers are ready to buy

them, either for the quality of the product itself, or to just support the Palestinian people, or out of great curiosity to find out what they are.

## **7 Internationalization of The Boycott**

The Boycott of American and Israeli products and the promotion of alternative goods is becoming widespread in other parts of the world as well. According to Monroe Friedman boycotts may

Differ with regard to their intended geographic scope...national boycotts appear to be the most common, followed by local boycotts; occurring far less frequently are international, state, and regional boycotts...as social and environmental issues become increasingly international in character, the volunteer groups that address them have looked more and more to globalizing their activities (1999: 8).

And it is this globalization of activities which is taking place at the moment in two directions.

First, boycotts are taking place in many other Arab countries, even those which have long been staunch supporters of U.S. foreign policy. Second, boycotts are starting to pop up in Europe and other parts of the world, either by Arabs and Muslims living in those areas or by groups and organizations that would also like to see a change in U.S. foreign policy (Appendices N and O).

According to an article in the *Economist*, not only are fast food chains being targeted, but new products are also being introduced with great success. Iran for example, which produces 'Zam Zam Cola' is hardly able to keep up with demands from the Gulf states, and it is launching the soft drink in Europe as well ([www.metimes.com/2K2/issue2002-34](http://www.metimes.com/2K2/issue2002-34)). According to company executives,

PepsiCo. blames the boycott for flattening its non American drink sales. Coca cola says the consumer strike has hit business in Bahrain, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia and lopped up to 10% off its sales in the region. Fast-food

outlets in Saudi Arabia such as KFC and Burger King report a 50% drop in sales since September 2000. Losses have led McDonald's to close two of its six restaurants in Jordan; its outlets as well as the rival Burger King's have been attacked in Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Cairo and Qatar. Supermarkets in Bahrain and Egypt are pulling American brands from their shelves and refusing to stock Nike shoes (Brand Wars in the Middle East 2002: 65).

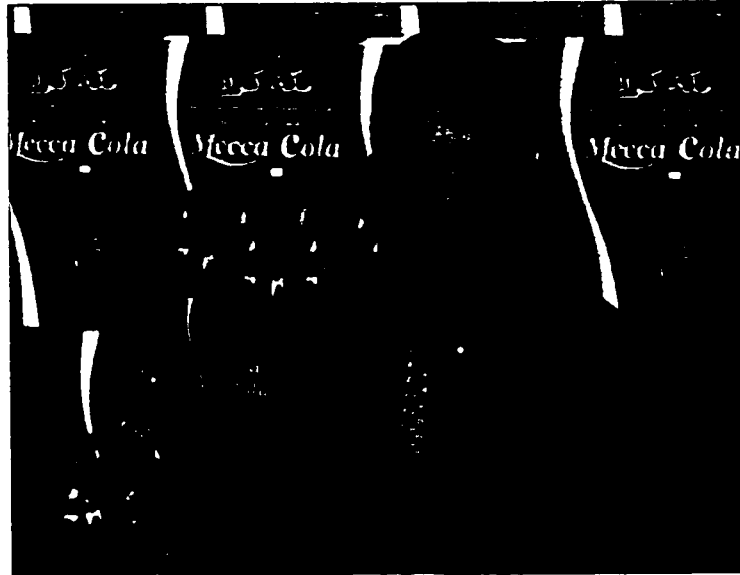
It seems that at the present moment the main concern for these companies is the long-term damage being done to their brand names. It is also feared that a long-term boycott will slow down the spread of franchises. Already there are indications that overall sales at most American fast-food outlets are down by 30-40% in the Arab world.

Another such new product gaining full support in both Europe and the Middle East is *'Mecca Cola'* (Figure 17). A cola type soft drink, Mecca Cola is being produced in France by Tawfiq Mathlouthi, who runs a radio station for France's Muslim minority who indicated that,

Mecca Cola is not just a drink it is an act of protest against Bush and Rumsfeld and their policies...I got faxes from China and Australia and we have got many deals in North Africa...people are thirsty for a way to stand up to U.S. hypocrisy...it is a rejection of American politics, imperialism and hegemony and a protest against the Zionist crime financed and supported by America (Mecca Cola Political Weapon against U.S. 2003: A1).

In addition, 10% of the profits will be donated to Palestinian charities. Mathlouthi explained that "you can't fight violence with violence, so we're pressuring America in the economic way" (Kovach 2002: 9). Online advertisements for the product use "real-life footage of the Palestinian uprising" and it seems to be a successful strategy. The demand for the drink is also tremendous and the company is struggling to keep up with demand (Tagliabue 2002: A4). Their logo of 'Don't drink foolishly, drink with commitment!' has led to orders from Saudi Arabia, and all throughout the Middle East, Pakistan, China, Russia and even the U.S (Kovach 2002: 9).





**Figure 17:** Producer of Mecca Cola with bottles of the product appearing in the background, 2002. (Source, personal email).

## **8 Conclusion**

This chapter was a presentation and analysis of the empirical data that forms the basis of my thesis. I included specific data descriptions of the boycott, its birth and functioning, its reasoning and the role played by different actors and bodies in society. I also presented and analyzed a variety of products being boycotted, how companies are fighting the boycott and how the media are being used and manipulated by both sides of the campaign. The problems and weaknesses and envisioned improvements were also examined and some of the locally made alternatives were highlighted. At the end of the chapter, the international dimension of the boycott was briefly covered and showed the extent to which this movement is moving beyond national borders.

This international dimension of the boycott is very much in line with what della Porta and Kriesi suggest when they argue that "...in the contemporary world, social action in a given time and place is increasingly conditioned by social action in very

distant places” (1999: 3). According to Giddens (1990: 64) “globalization implies the creation and intensification of world wide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa” (qtd. in della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 3). “This process of growing interdependence on a global scale has been going on for a long time” but in the last few decades “a number of related economic, cultural and political developments have contributed to an intensification of both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole” (Robertson 1992: 8, qtd, in della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 3), which could be behind the internationalized or globalized feature of the boycott.

Based on what we have seen in this chapter, I may conclude that specific cultures respond in culturally specific ways to such things as “colonial rule, cultural authorities, market institutions, political agencies, and translocal entities” (Ong 1999: 23) and thus we need to pay close attention to emergent forms of power that “variously ally with and contest Western forces” (1999: 22) and selective consumersim or boycott of particular products could be one such response.

Anthropologists have argued that,

The dispersal of Coke, McDonald’s restaurants, American TV soap operas to villages in West Africa or to Cairo, Beijing and Sydney is not bringing about a global cultural uniformity; rather these products have had the effect of greatly increasing cultural diversity because of the ways in which they are interpreted and the ways they acquire new meanings in local reception...(Ong 1999: 10).

This is very true when it comes to Egypt, because like many other cultures around the world, these ‘other’ cultures are not passively absorbing all the new trends, symbols and meanings that these goods carry and promote nor are they automatically incorporating them into their own. On the contrary, they too are agents who themselves decide which

of these goods are acceptable, which are not, and how they are integrated, or creolized with the local culture for the benefit of one's own community. "...Recent approaches in the study of consumer culture...stress the agency of consumers to select and adapt products according to their own desires, knowledge and interests" (Classen and Howes 1996: 178).

According to Homa Hoodfar this grass roots boycott campaign is a perfect example of the extent to which "multinational companies producing these goods are dependent on the local people for their success or failure" (personal conversation, 2001). It also shows that "transnational corporations cannot simply ignore local sensibilities and customs..." (Classen and Howes 1996: 183). The political context has fueled the boycott, and in the meantime, the fact that there are local alternatives has facilitated the process. These are practices and everyday choices that consumers make, which show that globalization is a two way process which could also give power to the 'powerless'. This has brought about a new form of democracy and political participation that few political scientists have considered, particularly those working on globalization.

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1978) assert that consumption is more than an economic process and involves more than the purchase of goods in the market place, they add that "consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape" (qtd. in Dant 1991: 23). In this case, we see how consumption of certain goods and the rejection of others is at once influenced by cultural factors but is also reproducing culture and reshaping it in new ways.

This means that even though "Western consumer goods are indeed spreading across the globe, there is none the less a significant amount of variation in the ways in

which these goods are received by different peoples” (Classen and Howes 1996: 181). As we have seen with goods such as McDonald’s hamburgers, Lays potato chips or Coke, these imported goods have changing dimensions, take on new meanings, and are transformed according to the “values” and “local realities” (Howes 1996: 5) of Egyptians.

What I found remarkable among all of my informants is the openness they felt toward all that is ‘foreign’ while at the same time selectively and consciously making critical choices about what to buy and what not to buy.

It could thus be described as the overlapping of local (Egyptian) and regional (Arab) nationalism which does not blindly reject ‘western’ products, but one that is well thought out and being promoted and endorsed by poor and rich, educated and non educated, young and old all the same. And even though there is the realization that this boycott will not have any quick and short term effect on either the U.S. economy or that of Israel, still there is a sense of accomplishment that is present, and a sense that if it is well organized, well conducted and lasts long enough, its consequences will be felt by all.

In the next chapter I look at the relations between the U.S., Egypt and Israel, Egypt’s involvement in the Palestinian issue, and some of the perceptions held of these countries and of this conflict. An analysis of particular events and occurrences involving the United States and U.S. policies which have been a factor in the initiation and expansion of the current campaign are also discussed.

**CHAPTER V: CONSTRUCTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. AND ISRAEL**

*Even though Egypt was the first country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, yet most Egyptians whether Muslim or Copt sympathize with the Palestinians, and what Israel is doing to contain the Intifadah has made them extremely angry towards Israel. ...There is no longer anyone who believes that the US is fair/just nor that it is trying to be honest in mediating between the Arabs and Israel.*

**-(Al Akhbar, April 23, 2002: 7).**

**1 Introduction**

Why the equation between the U.S. and Israel? I am sure this is a question that would come to anyone's mind looking at the current situation from the 'outside.' Yet, the answer was very simple and very clear in the minds of my informants and this is what I will try to explain in this chapter. I examine the discourses about consumption, how they are related to the American and Israeli role in world geo-politics as conceived by Egyptians I interviewed, and how some of the perceptions of the U.S. and Israel are constructed and perpetuated. I do nevertheless conclude with an analysis of these perspectives.

I will also throw a glance at the question "why do they hate us?" which the Americans – and even President George W. Bush himself – have been asking themselves since the September 11 attacks. In perspective, it is this kind of thinking that is at the essence of this boycott. It is also a question that is debated not only in the U.S. but also in Egypt and hence I will present some of the local perspectives with regards to this question.

Egypt has long been involved in the Palestinian question, due to its leading role or position in the Arab world and also its support of Palestinian Arab rights (Talhami 1992; Ismael 1986; Lavie 1990). In fact, even with Egypt's leading Peace Agreement with Israel in 1979, "...loyalty to the Palestinian cause conspired to ensure implacable Egyptian hostility to the Jewish state" (Cohen 1990: 1).

Egypt is ready to go to great lengths to help the Palestinian cause and it spares no efforts to create conditions conducive to the most favourable solution from their viewpoint; however, it adamantly refuses to be manoeuvred back into military confrontation with Israel (Dowek 2001: 317).

As we saw in chapter I, Egypt's involvement in the Palestine issue dates back to the early 1920s and 1930s. "Egyptians have always been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. For 50 years they have sought to liberate Palestinian territory from Israeli occupation, spilling blood on the battlefield in 1948, 1967, and 1973" (McGrath 2002).

So a solidarity movement, such as the boycott campaign is just an extension and a new manifestation of these long held beliefs and sentiments in Egypt. The only distinct aspect of this movement is that,

Unlike religious extremism, which draws primarily from the socially and economically disenfranchised, this movement draws from the entire population, some 67 million Palestinian sympathisers...the *Intifadah* has spawned dozens of pro-Palestinian organizations, attracting members from across the political, religious and social spectrum... (McGrath 2002: 2).

"All Egyptians sympathize with the Palestinian people and many believe the government is not doing enough to support them" says sociologist Azza Korayem (McGrath 2002: 2) and this is why they have created such a new opportunity for social and political action.

## **2 Social Construction of Categories/Classifications**

There is today an incredible amount of hostility and mistrust of the State of Israel and the United States, a view that is shared by the majority of Egyptians. Consequently, “ordinary Egyptians’ reactions echo the conflicting feelings they have about the United States. Fingers are immediately pointed at the U.S. administration when the Arab-Israeli peace process is stuck over differences between the Middle East rivals. Washington is usually accused of prejudice to the Israelis at the expense of Arab rights.” (Mahmoud 2002: 22).

There is no disagreement that an apparent condition, i.e. the occupation, does exist. Yet, I do not try to solve nor provide the ultimate answer or judgement on this issue. What I try to point out is that the boycott symbolizes the feelings and convictions of informants and the actions that they believe may remedy the situation regardless of their objectivity or subjectivity.

What I am presenting is the perspective of members of society, “their values, judgements, their activities, grievances and claims with respect to this condition” (Kitsuse and Spector 1977: 76). Here (and in chapter VI) as in most anthropological endeavours, I try to understand the whole situation as members of society see and define it themselves, how they construct the world and the meanings they create (Loseke 1999).

What I want to talk about is how this condition is conceived in Egyptian society which is quite different from perceptions in the West in general and the U.S. in particular. Thus as an example, we might say that the occupation is seen as necessary in the U.S. while it seen as the exact opposite in Egypt. Even the meanings of what constitutes a victim or victimizer, oppressed or oppressor are turned upside down. This may indicate

that how we make sense of the world around us is a result of our culture and lived experiences. This shows that "...the same conditions can be given different meanings and these different meanings encourage us to have different reactions..." (Loseke 1999: 14).

Thus, we may argue that what is taking place is nothing but "claims making." But even this is still considered as a "conventional form to express complaints and demands" (Kitsuse and Spector 1977: 81). Such activities are an "integral part of social and political life. They are everyday activities in all societies and occur at all levels of social organization." (1977: 81)

...A claim is a demand that one party makes upon another...Claimants construct notions about the causes of the conditions they find onerous, assign blame, and locate officials responsible for rectifying the conditions. Alternatively, claimants may decide that no one is in charge of doing something about the condition, and that may become the substance of their complaints. Consequently, they may seek out those they think are in charge of creating and assigning such responsibility. Third, they may ask who benefits from the condition in question and look for vested interest groups that actively perpetuate and profit from it or support it for personal pleasure or convenience (Kitsuse and Spector 1977: 83).

When ordinary citizens see and hear daily news of Israeli brutality in the occupied territories and U.S. support – or at least inaction – towards these policies the infuriation is simply boosted (see the three letters to the editor in Appendices P and Q which reflect images and ideas very common in all strata of society).

It is also a fact worth mentioning that all of the local news media, in addition to satellite channels from other Arab states are uniform in their portrayal of events in the occupied territories and of their interpretation of U.S. and Israeli policies. These visual images and news footage shown on television almost exclusively correspond and



perpetuate locally held beliefs and opinions and are used “to persuade audiences to think and feel in particular ways” (Loseke 1999: 27).

The mass media therefore have a critical role to play in the formulation and dissemination of these ideas and opinions. So, let us look at a few headlines from major daily newspapers which help keep the issue alive, before the public and simultaneously capture and perpetuate public perceptions (some of these were clipped and given to me by informants):

The continuation of the boycott of American products is in reality a strong and clear popular message to the masters of the White House telling them that *the people of the Arab world do not accept their endorsement of the Israeli ‘edwan [aggression] against the Palestinians*. Why don’t we bring our efforts together to concentrate on boycotting American cigarettes, this would protect the Arab cigarette manufacturers...plus, the Americans can’t really condemn us for it, since they are against smoking in their own country, yet they export it to us.

(Shoheeb, Abder Kader in *Almussawar*, 3 May, 2002: 11)

When asking the question ‘why do they hate us?’ after the events of September 11, how can president George W. Bush immediately point the finger at us, at Arabs and Muslims as a whole, and conclude that we are at fault, and that the reason behind this terrible act is that we envy and hate the prosperity and democracy of America?<sup>35</sup> Even though President Bush declared that the war on terrorism is not a crusade against Islam and Muslims, yet, we see that it is the Islamic organizations and institutions that have been turned into the enemy. Further, with all the violations by Ariel Sharon against the Palestinians, *Bush continues to declare him as a man of peace*. It seems that in the new American strategy, the only good Muslim is a dead Muslim.

(Ragab, Hassan in *Al Akhbar*, 23 April, 2002: 9)

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<sup>35</sup> “...worse than the triviality and bad taste of these cultural and commercial barrages (McDonald’s, Coca Cola, CNN, MTV) is the arrogant presumption that our ‘way of life’ is the best on earth and ought to be welcome everywhere; or that our power and supposed advancement entitle us to dictate policies and strategies to the rest of the world. This is the face of imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (See Petchersky 2001 - presentation).

The Dream of the U.S. and the dreams of the rest of the people around the world: The U.S. says that what Israel does is self defense, even if it is killing innocent children and women. Yes, we have respect for the U.S., for its history and the role its constitution and laws have played but we also expect it to act towards Israeli aggression the same way it does towards other aggressors around the world, and to *stop judging Arabs and Muslims one way and Israel and Jews in another.*

(Salem, Magdy in *'akeedati*, 14 May, 2002: 3)

All kinds of laws to serve Jews and Israel: Has the American Congress become a branch of the Israeli Knesset?<sup>36</sup>

(El Badry, Hanan in *Rose Al Youssef*, 2-8 June, 2001:10)

US injustice ...is the reason behind the blow-out of the situation in Palestine.

(*'akeedati*, 23 April 2002:20)

Israeli sweeps into Palestinian towns, launched in late March after a wave of Palestinians suicide bombings, have prompted public outrage and widespread protests in Egypt. The number of attempts by young Egyptians, including women, to sneak into Gaza has surged since then. And in an incident last Sunday, an Egyptian policeman was wounded in the thigh by a stray bullet fired during a gunfight between Israeli troops and Palestinians across the border, police said. On April 16, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a 21 year old Egyptian man, Milad Mohammed Hemeida, who tried to cross into Gaza Strip carrying explosives. Israeli troops control the Gaza side of the border with Egypt under the 1994 Palestinian autonomy accords. One part of Rafah is in Egypt, while the other is in the Gaza Strip where some of the fiercest clashes occur between Israeli forces and Palestinian militants.

(Gunman arrested, policeman hurt, *Middle East Times*, 1-7 June, 2002: 5).

*...The American media have adopted a biased position in the Arab-Israeli conflict.* Israeli deaths and injuries are widely reported while the brutal aggression directed at Palestinians is virtually ignored. Palestinian resistance is reported as terrorism, not a struggle against occupation, a word barely mentioned. The history of the conflict might as well not exist. So much for subjectivity.

(Abdel-Rahman, Awatef, in *Al Ahram Weekly*, 13-19 June, 2002: 15).

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<sup>36</sup> The writer is presenting this question, because Israel and its security are on the daily agenda and make up a large part of discussions in the U.S. Senate and Congress (El Badry 2001).

These are just a few of the countless articles and headlines that fill the pages of newspapers, magazines and news on television and radio. It seems that no matter what happens in Israel fingers are immediately pointed towards the U.S. According to Ahmed, a 36-year-old tourism company executive,

We believe that if there is to be any real solution to the Middle East Conflict, the U.S. must play the leading role and must stop taking sides. The only reason that the conditions for the Palestinians are deteriorating is because the U.S. has given Israel total freedom to act in any way it pleases even if violating international law and UN resolutions. As if this were not enough they also give billions of dollars in aid and military equipment to Israel.

It is worthy to note that even though the U.S. is now increasingly mistrusted, it is still believed to be the only viable government that can force Israel into making peace.<sup>37</sup> In Ahmed's words,

No other country, not even the European Union can force Israel to do anything it does not want to do, nor can it punish Israel in any way. *Only the U.S. has the force, leverage and capability to push things forward, or threaten Israel with retaliation, and this can only happen if and when the U.S. changes its pro-Israeli policies.* Even if action is taken through the UN, we all know that the U.S. must be the first to agree because if not, it will simply veto any action that it deems inapt for Israel. Look at all the resolutions that Israel is violating, no one at the UN can do anything about it. *Only if and when it pleases the U.S. will something be done about this.* The Arab governments of course can't do anything because it is impossible to face the U.S. a world superpower, so at the end of the day we turn back to the U.S. the only superpower in the world that can force Israel out of the occupied territories and to end the cycle of violence. Maybe this boycott will be a political wake-up call to the U.S. to start moving in the right direction.

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<sup>37</sup> "The combination of the U.S.-Israeli 'special relationship' and the vast superiority of Israel's power in the region further consolidates the U.S. centrality. As long as Israel remains the strongest military force in the region, with the fifth most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world and one of the most powerful conventional militaries anywhere, other countries in the region and around the world will tend to limit their diplomatic imagination to what they think Israel will accept. That means acquiescence to continued U.S. control" (see Phillis Bannis 2002: 18).

These statements reveal the true beliefs of many informants, but they also reflect much that has been written about the special relations between the U.S. and Israel which are at the core of current complaints and frustration. According to Tareq Ismael (1986), in *International Relations of the Contemporary Middle East*,

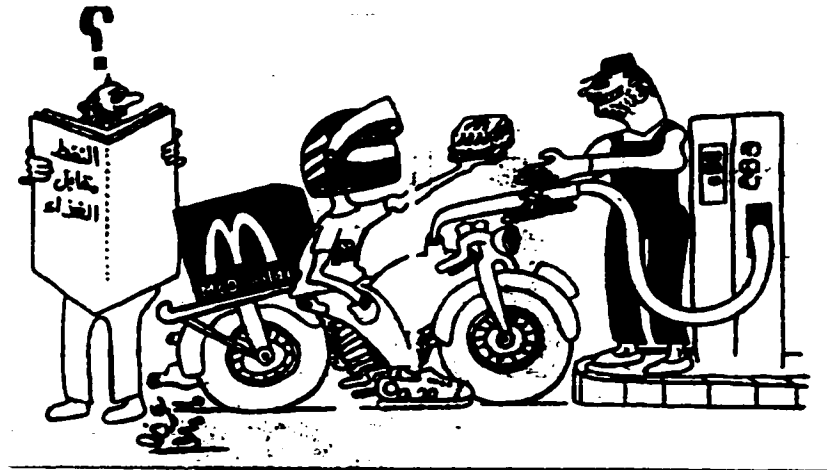
The way the U.S. deals with Israeli policy is in some respects counterproductive to American interests. Much of the Arab world's alienation from the U.S. stems directly from its predictably negative response to American favoritism for Israel. There is a particularly low tolerance for the seeming inability of Washington to exercise any political leverage on Israel, even when it violates principles that the United States has specifically formulated and upheld. Most Arabs find it incomprehensible that extensive aid to Israel continues unabated, despite such violations. Some explain it as evidence of a tacit U.S.-Israeli alliance that has little regard for Arab interests. Without trying to assess either Israeli actions or U.S. policy in reaction to them, it is possible to recognize that in categorizing Israel as a "special" interest, the U.S. has helped to polarize the Arab world and to incite radicalism (139)... the perception of many people in the area that the U.S. engages in a pronounced favoritism for Israel is in itself perhaps the major source of their anti-American sentiments. The special relationship with Israel may have been a reassuring element in the American defense system in the Middle East, but it was also detrimental to the various U.S. peace initiatives. In accommodating Israeli policy, the U.S. has often undermined its own credibility among the Arabs and its ability to draw them into the negotiating process (162). There has seldom been a clear recognition in Washington that when the U.S. fails to maintain a balanced policy, it relinquishes its role as an effective mediator. Every time the special relationship with Israel is allowed to exclude other considerations, the quest for peace is obstructed. Another counterproductive aspect of U.S. Middle East policy has been its inconsistency. On many occasions, the U.S. has taken positions that have been equitable and even-handed, including numerous criticisms of Israeli as well as Arab behavior. But most attempts to keep Israel in line with American policy have not been consistently pursued. Even those presidents who seemed determined to maintain a balance in their approach to the Middle East, such as Ford and Carter, occasionally reversed their positions, creating uncertainty as to their real intentions and commitments. The establishment of a constructive and effective U.S. Middle East policy depends on clarity of purpose and on a consistent adherence to announced principles in all fields. This requires not only a non partisan role in mediating the Arab-Israeli dispute, but also an unequivocal position on upholding the

territorial sovereignty and independence of all states in the area, and a genuine commitment to the right of peoples to self-determination (163).

But in addition to what is going on in Israel the U.S. is also blamed for the suffering of Arabs and Muslims in other places like Iraq and Libya (Sardar and Davies 2002; Salama 2002). Ahmed stated that,

The United States allows Israel to occupy Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights in defiance of international law, in the meantime it decides to go to war against Iraq and bomb and punish the Iraqi people who have done nothing wrong (Figure 18). These are the same Iraqis that the U.S. encouraged to revolt against Saddam Hussein and promised to support after the Gulf War. No one really knows why at the last minute the U.S. backed down and basically handed these people over to Saddam to be killed. Let's be realistic, what I am saying is all over the news, it's not just something we are making up. We are not saying that Saddam is the good guy, on the contrary we want him gone more than anyone, but this is not the way to do it. When the opportunity was there after the Gulf War nothing was done, *why?* I would really want to know *why?* Look at what the U.S. is doing to Libya with the embargo and in many other countries too. After all this, President Bush starts to ask 'why do they hate America?'. Now Bush accuses Iraq of having weapons of mass destruction, but it forgets that in reality they are the only ones in history who have actually used nuclear bombs on Japan and killed innocent women, children and civilians. In addition, they continue to support military regimes and dictatorships across the world, whether in Latin America or much closer in Saudi Arabia. Even the Taliban of Afghanistan were supported by the U.S. when they were killing the Russians, but now they are the enemy. In essence, if you look at Saudi Arabia, it is run today just like Afghanistan was yesterday, so why isn't the U.S. bombing Saudi Arabia? This is just the tip of U.S. hypocrisy.

It seems that U.S. credibility is being lost and this in turn is a catalyst for the current feelings held towards the superpower. "As people in the Middle East lose faith in the integrity of the U.S., they tend to set in motion trends and movements [in this case the boycott] that actively seek to obstruct the achievement of American aims" (Ismael 1986: 138).

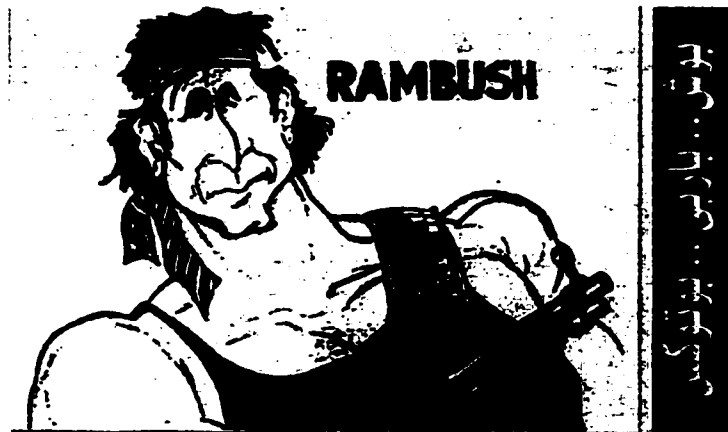


**Figure 18:** A caricature making fun of the UN “Oil for Food” program of Iraq. The person to the left is reading an article in the newspaper about the program and is probably wondering/questioning if McDonald’s hamburgers in exchange for oil is how it will be implemented. (Source: *Sabah El Kheir* June 19, 2001: 22).

Even the terrorist attacks of September the 11<sup>th</sup> on the U.S. have “led to great changes in the American mentality...we are now faced with a wild lion that wants to prove to its own people and to the world that America is the world superpower and whoever confronts her or does not blindly agree to go along with what it says and does will be crushed” (Gorgissian 2002: 10-11). This article by Gorgissian was accompanied by two depictions or caricatures of U.S. President George W. Bush. In Figure 18a, Bush is depicted as a cowboy giving the world a spin and deciding who to attack, while in Figure 19b, Bush is depicted as Rambo (Silver Stalone’s character in several famous Hollywood movies of the 1980s) and referred to as ‘RAMBUSH’, carrying a gun and ammunition and ready to fight and attack.



**Figure 19a:** Caricature of U.S. President George W. Bush. (Source: *Sabah El Kheir*, 7 May, 2002: 11).



**Figure 19b:** Caricature of U.S. President George W. Bush as “RAMBUSH”. (Source: *Sabah El Kheir*, 7 May, 2002: 10).

### **3 U.S. Interference in Local Affairs**

In addition to these policies towards the Middle East and other parts of the world in general, there is also a sense of frustration with U.S. policies inside Egypt itself. I must admit that I was completely unaware of this dimension of the boycott until it was brought to my attention by various interviewees. Once this happened I started to pay closer attention to such occurrences in the media, and kept asking and probing about

them. In newspapers I read daily articles discussing U.S. policies towards Egypt and I noticed that these events or news items were in public discourse on a daily basis. Below are a few examples of policies of “arrogance and extreme pride which make the Americans think they can run the whole world as they wish” as Munir, a 50-year-old father and engineer put it, that cause Egyptians to feel this way against the U.S. government. This aspect of the boycott is indeed a very important and fundamental one.

### **3.1 Textile exports**

Textiles and ready made garments are one of Egypt’s main exports. Thus when the U.S. government offered to lift all taxes and tariffs on Egyptians textile and ready-made garment exports to the U.S. *only if* the Egyptian government agreed to purchase raw materials and accessories going into the manufacturing of these ready-made garments from Israel a fury erupted (Ebeid 2002: 1). Some of the crucial conditions for lifting the tariffs were the following:

- 1) 35% of items are to be manufactured in “special areas/zones” in Israel and Jordan.
- 2) Israeli raw materials must be used.
- 3) The U.S. will monitor the implementation of these rules through American, Israeli and Jordanian inspectors.
- 4) The manufacturing company must have an Israeli partner.

The significance of this kind of offer becomes apparent when we take into consideration that textiles and ready made garment exports to the U.S. reached \$518 million (L.E. 2 billion) in 2000. Ready made garments include “quota-restricted items like T-shirts, cotton blouses, pants and other products like cotton and woolen yarns, as well as handmade carpets account for 78% of Egypt’s total exports” (Business Today, June 2001: 11). Thus we can see why such demands by the U.S. would cause frustration



and anxiety, an impression that the U.S. is forcing Israel upon its neighbors, and that the final goal is to ensure more business and profits for Israel.

### **3.2 *Fesikh***

Another news item which was a bit amusing and filled the daily newspapers and public conversations was about Egyptian exports of *fesikh* to the U.S. *Fesikh* is a dried up and salted fish consumed by Egyptians during the local *Sham el Nessim* holiday celebrations on Easter Monday. Apparently some of the people who consumed the fish in the U.S. – most probably Egyptian Americans – got poisoned and fell sick after eating it. An investigation was conducted in the U.S. to determine the origins of the product and if there was any pre-meditation involved.

Thus the joke in Egypt was that as a response to this 'act of terrorism against U.S. freedom' the only logical and natural reaction by the U.S. would be to start bombing Egypt, particularly targeting the *fesikh* producing factories (Figure 20).

### **3.3 *Mufti***

Another instance of U.S. interference in Egypt's internal affairs happened when the U.S. ambassador in Cairo, asked to meet the newly elected *Mufti* (highest religious authority) Dr. Ahmed Eltayeb. According to local news the *Mufti* has nothing to do with politics, yet he agreed to meet the ambassador just like he would any other personality. But to his astonishment, just before the arrival of the Ambassador one of his aides handed the *Mufti* a paper saying that this is the press release that will be given out to media after their meeting and that no journalists should be allowed into the meeting.

When this incident became public it only reinforced views of the U.S. as acting in the same manner of pride and snobbery that it always has in trying to run Egypt and its leaders as it pleases and trying to interfere and meddle in what does not concern her.



**Figure 20:** A caricature regarding the *fesikh* controversy was on the cover of the daily *Al Wafd* newspaper. The caption reads “Horror in New York due to the poisoning of individuals after eating *fesikh* coming from Egypt.” Declaration: “*fesikh* producers deny having any connection to *Al Qaeda*, declare their support of President Bush, bless his efforts in fighting terrorism and denounce the actions of a spiteful minority who sent the *fesikh* to America.” On their behalf, signed, *do'do'* the *fesikh* maker. (Source: *Al Wafd* 20 May, 2002: 1).

### 3.4 *El Dorra*

Another controversy was created when once again the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt met with Mahmoud Abu Elleil, Governor of Guiza (west of the Nile Bank, west of Cairo) to demand a reversal in the decision of naming a street in Guiza after Mohamed El Dorra, a Palestinian child who was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers while in the hands of his

father in Palestine whose footage is constantly repeated by the media. It seems that the ambassador tried to talk the Governor out of it by offering U.S. aid to renovate some of the city facilities.

This incident caused public uproar and eventually the street was named as planned. It was the decision of the Local People's Assembly of Guiza to go ahead with it to express the solidarity of the Egyptian people with their Palestinian counterparts.

It is these actions that show that the U.S. is blindly supporting Israel and they don't realize that such actions will simply lead to more hatred and anger. Neither the Egyptian government nor its people will ever allow the U.S. Ambassador to interfere in its internal affairs no matter what the sacrifices (Elhalwani 2002: 6).

Munir indicated that "what we are sacrificing now in terms of U.S. aid, consumption or good relations with the U.S. is nothing compared to what the Palestinians are going through and the humiliation they have to put up with on a daily basis...so this is the least we can do for them."

### **3.5 Sinai Multinational Observation Forces**

Taking this issue seriously might be considered somewhat immature and ahead of its time. But the reason I mention it here is simply to show the urgency and seriousness with which such news are received at the local level. After the 1979 Camp David Agreement, and since 1982 the U.S. has contributed personnel to the Multinational Observation Forces stationed in the Sinai to ensure that Israel and Egypt abide by the peace agreement. The concern arose when U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced to President Hosni Mubarak and to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon proposed plans to withdraw U.S. forces from Sinai.

The reason given was that forces were no longer necessary in that area. This simple statement was seen as a major threat to Egyptian security. The fear stems from the fact that according to the Peace Agreement, Egypt is not allowed to have a force of more than 22,000 in Sinai. Thus the announcement by the U.S. is interpreted as a green light to Israel to threaten Egypt – as it does with Lebanon – and even attack Sinai with its superior military power. The fact that during this same time Israeli forces bombarded and destroyed the memorial of unknown Egyptian soldiers in Gaza was taken as a first sign of what could come in the future ([www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2001/24/4](http://www.ahram.org.eg/hebdo/2001/24/4)).

### **3.6 Cotton Dumping**

When President George W. Bush signed the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, he granted massive subsidies to American farmers and contradicted “American commitments to reduce protectionist measures under the aegis of the WTO,” (El Amrani 2002: 3) and instead almost doubled these subsidies.

The impact of this bill on Egyptian cotton growers in particular and on government measures of reducing subsidies was highly negative. First, the subsidies meant that an extra 300,000 tons of American cotton would flood the markets and reduce prices. Even though this would not hurt American farmers who are protected through subsidies (almost 50%), yet, the cost to Egyptian farmers would be very high because under structural reform programs such subsidies have been reduced to a minimum of 10%.

Second, according to one expert in the field: “One of the most dangerous parts of the new farm bill is that it sends a protectionist message. It’s a dismal signal to the rest of the world.” Thirdly, and unfortunately, there is not much Egypt could do about this.

According to Habib Ayeb, a professor of geography at Paris VIII university and a specialist on Egypt and geopolitics,

If the Egyptian government did the same thing to protect its potato or cotton production, Egypt would run the risk of being excluded from world trade...It would run the risk of being reprimanded by the World Bank, or of being punished by the U.S., perhaps through the suppression of American aid. Egypt today does not have the right to impose barriers to protect its agricultural production. It's exactly the same thing across Latin America and Asia...There's a sense of betrayal (El Amrani 2002: 3).

Thus we have seen through this array of examples how U.S. policies towards Egypt are in fact also contributing to the growth in the negative image of the country and are catalysts to many of the statements I presented at the beginning of this chapter by some of my informants and of the statements I present in the following chapter.

#### **4 Conclusion**

What I have tried to achieve in this fieldwork and present in this thesis is an understanding of their way of viewing and interpreting the world. Thus this chapter was a summary of some of the views and perceptions held of the United States and Israel and the reasons and causes for the emergence of these views. Some examples of U.S. interference in local affairs and how these are interpreted and understood were also presented.

This discussion of both historical and contemporary events makes it clear that the reasons behind this boycott and behind these new consumption patterns are very complex and intertwined in a variety of economic, political and social events and experiences.

We have seen in this chapter some of the analysis of U.S. Israeli relations.

Since 1967, Israel played an important role as a Cold War ally and sometimes surrogate of the U.S. Today, Israel stands as one of perhaps the two or three closest U.S. allies, and for most nations around the world

**maintaining good relations with Washington requires at least amicable ties to Israel (Bannis 2002: 19).**

**This plus other instances of U.S. interference in local affairs shows the complexity and tensions in U.S.-Egyptian relations, the extent of mistrust, and the impact that significant or insignificant events have on the perceptions of the U.S. and its position as a threatening global superpower.**

**We also saw in this chapter that despite the United States' constant trumpeting of "free trade rhetoric, it remains a persistent defendant of protectionist policies for its farmers. Meanwhile small producers throughout Asia, Africa and the Caribbean...are squeezed out by U.S. imports and relegated to the informal economy or sweatshop labor for multinationals" (Petchersky 2001- presentation).**

**It is also evident through some of the media representations and quotes of informants that "Palestine today stands at the symbolic center of Arab consciousness" (Bannis 2002: 17). Sympathy with the Palestinians is at its peak and feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction with American inaction are at an all time high. Egypt's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whether diplomatically or through wars has been a direct and first hand involvement and experience for all Egyptians, irrelevant of social class, background, education or religion. As a consequence, seeing a peaceful and just end to this conflict is what everyone hopes for.**

**In the next chapter extracts from various interviews with informants are presented in order to give the reader an idea and a feel of some of the local discourses about this topic.**

## **CHAPTER VI: INTERVIEWS**

*Egypt isn't just another foreign country; it is special. Everyone has some acquaintance with it, whether through photographs of Abu Simbel, busts of Nefertiti, school courses in ancient history, or images of Anwar Sadat on television. Historical characters – Cleopatra, Ramses, Tutankhamen, among many – have been drafted for service in mass culture, and they continue to exist and function as symbols of passion, conquest, and wealth complicated by an exotic remoteness that remains attractive in the late twentieth century. Yet curiously, because these figures have such a clearly outlined yet eccentric status, in their isolated distance from anything truly familiar, they also remind us how small and selective is our knowledge of Egypt, which, after all, is a real place with real people possessing a real history. Nevertheless, Western representations of Egypt have a history too, one that doesn't always coincide with Egyptian representations of Egypt.*

**-Edward W. Said (2002: 153).**

### **1 Introduction: Why These Interviews**

Even though I have included many quotes from informants throughout the thesis, there are several individuals with whom I spent a considerable amount of time talking and discussing these issues and it would seem only fair to present their opinions and views as I am sure they are highly complimentary to what I have so far presented. They sum up in such fired up and honest words the general atmosphere and feelings that I encountered throughout my stay in Egypt. In other words, I have chosen these particular individuals because of their influence on my work and their strong belief in what they had to share with me and hoped that I would in turn share with others. These represent only a small portion of informants' accounts about the boycott.

I realize also that informants have to be given credit for their own feelings, emotions, views and personal preferences and characteristics. It is essential to keep in mind that they too are subjective, that they too can come to conclusions, and that they too

have the ability to think analytically, to interpret their reality and provide us with the relevant information accordingly (Cohen 1994).

These individuals made it clear to me that they would like their real names to appear in my thesis, nevertheless, due to ethical concerns I have decided not to do so. It is also important to note that like the quotes throughout this text, I have translated these interviews from Arabic to English and I have tried to be as faithful as possible to the original meanings expressed and conveyed to me. I have selectively chosen what to include in this section as it would be impossible to include all the conversation I had with informants – even though I would have loved to do so.

My aim is to give voice to a few of my informants who represent what I heard and learned from so many others. I convey to the reader through these conversations the way in which the different concepts and events presented throughout the thesis come together and make sense in the interviewees' own minds. Even though at first glance there might seem to be no direct link between let's say, Israeli policies in the West Bank and an ordinary Egyptian buying hair shampoo, if we look deeper we can see that yes, there is a link. This type of link might be a subjective one, created and constructed by informants due to conditions existing in the real world, and experiences which are part of their lived reality. What they see around them are troublesome conditions and problems that do matter to them greatly. This is what I have attempted to show throughout the thesis and I hope that the interviews that follow will shed some light upon the link between these diverse issues.

The two interviews I present here are quite different in that the first one is in the form of direct quotation/extracts of the main points that came out of one interview and



many informal conversations with AY. AY is a 30 year old female friend, from a middle class family in Alexandria. She is highly educated with a university degree, has lived both in Europe and the United States for many years, married to an *agnabi* (outsider/external person, i.e. not Egyptian) and works in one of the largest UN organizations in Egypt. In fact, being so well versed in a variety of subjects, all I had to do was ask one question and AY would talk for hours clarifying and trying to make me understand the local point of view of issues.

The times I spent with AY were very pleasant. She is the kind of person who wants to help everyone around her and who is extremely passionate about her beliefs. On a more amusing note, the first time I asked her about the boycott, her reaction was quite surprising and was an indication of the extent of her involvement in the campaign. She told me “is that what your thesis is about? I can write that up for you if you want!” And I think she meant what she said, if I had given her the opportunity she would have taken great joy in writing about this topic. This is yet another reason why I find it essential to include my many conversations with her in this work.

The second will take a different form as it was based on focus group discussions with three male informants with whom I conducted two focus group discussions in 2001 and two in 2002. GH, MR, and ML are all male, their ages vary between 35-45, and are all married with children. GH and MR have college diplomas while ML has a university degree. They all work in the same organization holding different positions. What makes me feel comfortable in presenting their views is that all three have a friendly relationship with one another, and two of them are also related through marriage ties. They are thus quite frank and comfortable talking about many different things in one another’s

presence. It was amusing to see how they would comment and question each other and try to clarify issues for me and for each other's benefit.

I intentionally place a sample of my questions at the beginning in order to give a general description of the kinds of questions I was asking and so as not to interrupt the flow of ideas and thoughts presented.

Since these were informal interviews and took the form of a discussion as opposed to structured question and answer formats my questions included but were not limited to the following:

**\*Can you please tell me what you think of this whole issue of *el mokat'a* (boycott)?**

**\*In your own view what are the reasons behind it? I mean why are people, all of a sudden not buying these American products which have always been highly valued?**

**\* How is the boycott being organized?**

**\*Are you boycotting too? Are members of your family and friends doing it? What made you join the boycott?**

**\*Do you really think it will work? Don't you think that we are just hurting ourselves by doing this, putting people out of work, closing restaurants and maybe even whole companies if this goes on?**

**\*Would you agree with me if I said that some local Egyptian companies are just taking advantage of the situation and trying to sell anything and everything under the banner of supporting the Palestinians?**

**\*Do you see any problems with the Boycott?**

**\*What do you think of all the new advertisements and marketing campaigns?**

**\*What in your view is the link between these companies whose products are boycotted and the American government? I mean do you really think that this whole boycott will lead to any changes? Is it for psychological satisfaction, and if so, then is it really worth it?**

Since the issue of the boycott was very really a hot topic, all I had to do was bring it up and almost anyone, anywhere would have something to say about it. Thus, the

questions above were more than enough to get AY, GH, MR, and ML going about the issue.

## **2 Interview with AY – extracts from conversations in the year 2002.**

The boycott basically started with the second Palestinian *Intifadah*. It spread through word of mouth, through emails, relatives, friends, workplace, etc. Since the government cannot organize it officially people end up finding about it in bits and pieces.

I think we are going to continue on with this as long as we can. Even if it does not hurt the U.S. economy immediately, even if it were only for one's own moral and psychological satisfaction at the moment, I think that if we continue eventually it would be successful, *it has too*. They [referring to the US] are getting the message, and in the meantime we are showing them that we support the Palestinian cause and that we are not going to stand still and watch passively.

This is a means that is available to us where we consume and buy what we want. No one can force us to do otherwise, if we don't want to buy something no one can force us to. I mean let's be realistic, we know we cannot go to war against Israel, since that means going to war against the U.S., the world's only superpower, it would be like suicide, but this is a means available to ordinary citizens, young children, students, parents, old peoples, all alike. It is by making simple everyday choices that we can do this, it is not so difficult. Besides there are many alternatives to all these products either made locally or from Europe or Asia or any other part of the world. So it's not like we are saying no to everything coming from the outside, to the contrary we are looking for replacements of these products.

You asked me about the reasons, so let me make one thing clear to you Taline, and I think this is one point which you must emphasize. The point is that this is not just about Palestine, it is much more than that. The U.S. policies are provoking, look for example at what they did at the International Conference on Racism in South Africa. They are blindly supporting Israel. The U.S. is helping Israel in every way; money, arms, everything, even the weapons that they are using against the Palestinians.<sup>38</sup>

Our government can't do anything about it, no government can. Now more than ever, especially after the events of September 11, the U.S. is allegedly fighting terrorism, but I think it ought to look at its own actions first. I think this is quite a threatening situation, what the U.S. and Israel are doing is terrorism of another kind.

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<sup>38</sup> For more on U.S. aid to Israel see Phyllis Bannis 2002.

So look at us, as citizens of this country, as Egyptian, don't you think this kind of environment upsets us? As if this were not enough, we are also faced with the realization that as individuals there is nothing we can do. We can't go fight along with the Palestinians, we can't even demonstrate peacefully and freely right here on our streets. When demonstrations are organized, and they are always peaceful by the way, there are a million police out there doing everything they can to end the whole thing (Figure 21).



**Figure 21:** Newspaper clipping about three demonstrations that took place in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria and El Arish demanding the trial of Ariel Sharon as a 'war criminal'. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 16 May, 2002: 8).

Did you read in the papers about all those young people who try to cross the border into Gaza to fight there, they are arrested, put in jail and returned to Egypt, but there was one who was even shot and killed by the Israeli police.<sup>39</sup> Is this the kind of environment we want to live in? So imagine the amount of frustration.

So you see this is as much about Palestine as about everything that is going on politically and economically around us. There is provocation and discrimination in all areas, look at how the U.S. deals with Israel in terms of arms aid and how it deals with the rest of the world.

<sup>39</sup> An increasing number of teenagers and young men and women in their 20s are attempting to cross the border from Rafah, Egypt, into Gaza hoping to join the resistance. According to security officials this has become a somewhat normal daily occurrence. A 21 year old who tried to cross the border in April 2002 was shot dead by Israeli security. (For more see Khaled Dawoud 2002).

Let me give you an example, did you know that the U.S. ambassador to Egypt met with the Governor of Guiza threatening him in order to stop the naming of a street after Mohammed El Dorra. He claimed that such a thing would “hurt our [American] feelings and the feelings of Israelis.” So what? The Governor went ahead and named the street anyway!<sup>40</sup> This is what the U.S. policies are about, they don’t want to leave us or anyone else alone, they interfere and meddle in everyone’s internal affairs.

Look at what they are doing through the IMF, WB, etc. They are forcing us not to grow wheat and other essential grains so that we remain dependent on U.S. aid in these areas. In the meantime, everybody is talking about Israel and their cooperation with the governments of Sudan and Ethiopia to build dams in those countries which would eventually mean less water flowing into the Nile and less water for Egypt. Can you believe this?<sup>41</sup>

Another example is what happened with the new *Mufti*, the U.S. Ambassador asked to meet him, and even though the man has nothing to do with politics he accepted to meet the Ambassador. Imagine the extent of U.S. arrogance that right before the meeting, a representative of the Ambassador sent a memo to the *Mufti*, which was *the* press release to be given to the press, demanding that no journalists attend the meeting. The *Mufti* did not make a big scene out of it, but simply refused to meet him. What right does an Ambassador have to act like this with the religious leader of this country, of *Al Azhar*, which is the religious center of the Islamic world.

You know well that for us, for all Arabs, honor and dignity are extremely important, especially for the men.<sup>42</sup> This, by the way, has nothing to do with Islam or religion, it has to do with our Egyptian and Arab identities and cultures, it is something that we all feel and share. So imagine the ordinary man on the street and try to put yourself in his shoes and experience the feelings of provocation and humiliation that they undergo when they see such things happening. Egyptians are not aggressive by nature, you know that and we are known for it. You might hear loud voices on a street and shouting and cursing, but it rarely flares into a physical fight because it is not in our nature. Yet, when we hear about all these things happening right

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<sup>40</sup> I later learned that the street named after Mohamed El Dorra was the street where the Israeli Embassy is located and that is why the Israeli and U.S. Embassies were opposing the change in names.

<sup>41</sup> I tried to look into this matter to find further information about it but failed. Sudan was not mentioned anywhere, but the daily *Al Wafd* newspaper ran an extensive investigation of U.S. studies/research done in Ethiopia and plans to help that country build a number of dams to generate electricity and for agricultural purposes. This would obviously mean less water flowing into the Nile River and into Egypt. For more See Abaas Eltarabeelee 2002.

<sup>42</sup> For more on “...the role of values in the definition and analysis of ...what violates normative standards” see Kitsuse and Spector 1977: 31.

here in our own country, in Palestine and other parts of the world. it makes us crazy.

Why do you think Castro [referring to Fidel Castro of Cuba] enjoys such great popularity here, it's because he is a man of honor, who stands up to the U.S.

Have you noticed that demonstrations – even though illegal – are on the increase, especially by university students. Donations for Palestine have also increased tremendously; actors and famous personalities are organizing concerts and charity events and collecting money (Appendix R). Many businesses are now also donating part of their profits. But it is all organized on an individual basis, nothing is done by the government. The Red Crescent and the syndicates are playing an important role and have taken the lead in boycotting Israel and the U.S. So you see all kinds of initiatives are being taken. The Union of Chambers of Commerce has prohibited any trade with Israel. But these things will take time to take effect because is not a well organized and direct campaign headed by some big and powerful organization or government body.

The consumer boycott is on the rise. Some of the products boycotted are Pizza Hut, Heinz, the Americana fast food chains, Proctor and Gamble, etc. People are just shifting towards alternative local goods. Yet, there is still no total awareness, but this is changing slowly. The important thing is that ordinary citizens be informed and as soon as that happens they will not hesitate to join the boycott.

Look at where I work for example, it is a big organization with hundreds of employees from different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Everyone seems to be talking about the boycott and discussing it. We exchange news and ideas, and inform one another to raise awareness. You know Taline, one of the things I respect about you and about what you are doing is that you are trying to understand this *mokat'a* from a secular and local point of view. I know you are not Muslim, but I also know that apart from our religious differences, we are the same, and we share a common culture, a common history, traditions and beliefs. We are both *Egyptian*. And it is important to let others know about what is going on in Egypt; it is not a matter of religion, not a matter of Muslims being against the West. Even though I am aware that this is how we are portrayed abroad. It is true that many Muslim leaders are playing an active role in the boycott, and that Islam and religion are often evoked to promote the boycott, yet, I know for sure and I see it every day at work, that most of my Christian colleagues are as enthusiastic about this as I am.

A while ago I saw a woman in a supermarket asking the cashier about the non-American products and the person told her that the American products

have all been placed apart at one corner of the store, since so many people had been asking the same question. For example, the sales of Ariel laundry detergent have gone down tremendously. I am sure these companies are hurting, I mean just look at the amount of advertising there is on TV, newspapers, magazines and just everywhere on the streets and billboards. They are doing everything they can to get consumers to buy their products. Look at the amount of prizes that they are offering; it's a real big thing (Appendices S and T).

Oh, do you like *Sha'abolla*? Why do you think people are buying his tapes and listening to him, even though his music is really horrible? It's simply because he is saying out loud what so many of us feel.

As for local products, well why not, what's wrong with promoting our local economy and industry, the whole world is doing it, why is it so bad when we do it. Plus, it is more economical for consumers to buy local products; they are cheaper and gone are the days when local alternatives could not be found.

You know Taline, at the end of the day we want to be left alone to live our life the way we choose to live it. We want everyone to live in peace, but it has to be a just peace for all, for Arabs as well as Jews, we want the Israeli government to change its policies and we want the United States to stop supporting it and to start taking some action to change the situation in the Middle East as it does in so many other parts of the world. What we don't like is the way the American government wants to rule the world according to its own criteria and not according to international norms and regulations (Appendix U).

### **3 Focus Groups with GH, MR, and ML – extracts from conversations in the years 2001 and 2002.**

**GH:** This is a grass roots popular movement, not an official government policy. The official government policy cannot discriminate against any product and I don't think our government can get involved in this at the official level.<sup>43</sup> It would be too risky. You know how the U.S. is, they would probably start bombing us for terrorism if the government did so much as to support this campaign [this was said with quite a lot of sarcasm].

You know I am boycotting American products and all other products that come from companies that support Israel. And it is not such a difficult thing to do. I go online to many of the boycott sites to find out about the products.

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<sup>43</sup> I think what he means is that the government cannot officially and publicly boycott American products for political reasons. Technically, it might have the right to do it, but realistically, it cannot. As discussed previously, the Egyptian government does not want to jeopardize its relations with the United States. There is real fear of losing U.S. aid money and ending up on the U.S.' blacklist.

We do have alternatives and that of course is helping. Did you know that it is students who are the ones most involved in this, it is young children in the schools who are boycotting and they are telling and teaching their parents about it, they are the ones influencing what the family does.

Did you also know that boycotts are going on in other Arab countries like Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, even Saudi Arabia, and many parts of Europe and other countries as well. So we are not the only ones, others are doing it too, and this gives validity to our campaign, to our claims and demands.

The boycott is not just delivering a message to the Americans. I am also sure that it is having an impact, I am certain about it. Maybe at this moment the companies are not actually losing money, but their profits are sure on the decrease. The amount of ads we see everywhere is an indication. Even in cafeterias, on the beach and public places, you will notice that the table covers, the parasols, the cups, are all marked with the logos of these big companies, like Coca Cola and Pepsi. Sometimes these ads are effective, but I think nowadays they might even be having a negative effect. I am sure you saw the Coca Cola commercials on TV during the World Cup, with Mahmoud Elkhateeb<sup>44</sup> as spokesperson. I mean we all love him, but when we see him in that ad, on the one hand we think its good that they have probably paid him millions to do this, but on the other hand it only goes to show how powerful these companies really are, and contributes even further to the negative image we have of them.

Besides, did you see that campaign Coca Cola has undertaken of sponsoring sports events, football [soccer] games between the Egyptian National team and the team representing Palestine, how much more hypocritical can you get (Figure 22).

**ML:** On that note, commercials, oh, they want to constantly be in your face, wherever you turn, there is no escape, they are everywhere. This is the policy of the big multinationals, its disgusting, visual pollution, yes, that's what it is, that just popped into my head, but yes, if you think of it, that's exactly how I can describe it.

This whole boycott, I don't know, sometimes I feel it is right, but at other times I feel it is a waste. This whole question is under constant debate, on TV, newspapers, magazines, etc. It is a hot topic and no one seems to agree on what should be done and how to actually go about doing it to make it effective. No one is sure. No one seems to know anything. Some say it is working, others say it is not. I think we will never be able to do anything to those big companies, even if we do, it will never be to the extent that they pressure their governments to change policies, which is supposedly the real

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<sup>44</sup> Elkhateeb is the greatest and most popular football (soccer) player in Egypt's history.



purpose of the boycott. Plus, the difficulty in this whole issue is to actually identify the products. How can you tell that a product, let's say, coming from Bulgaria or Romania or wherever else is not owned by an Israeli company, or that certain parts were not made in Israel. I think that at the end we are going to hurt more than them, yes, it is a psychological satisfaction, but at the end we are going to hurt more.

There are also many problems with the boycott, mainly the identification of products. There are a lot of joint ventures for example, so do you consider these Egyptian or foreign establishments? Similarly, we need foreign direct investment for the development of our economy but what we are doing will push foreign investors away. In addition, there are many companies that are wrongly/falsely accused which means that there are 100% Egyptian businesses which are also hurting. Take for example "Americana." It think it is a Kuwaiti establishment, and its local businesses are all owned by Egyptians. I even think it has roots right here in Alexandria. They have tons of investments, factories, and restaurants and of course some of these are joint ventures or investments with American companies but does that mean we should boycott them? Recently Americana started running a television commercial in which they declare "Americana, 100% Egyptian." But how do they expect people to believe them? I mean just look at their name!

**GH:** I don't agree with you ML. Taline, have you have noticed how everybody is talking about the boycott, its become a primary preoccupation of many people and I think that is something positive. As long as it is debated and out in the public, it will be easier to maintain it and it will not just fade away. We have to keep trying, we have nothing to lose and eventually the results will start to become obvious. I sure do hope so.

**ML:** Have you noticed that if walking down the street and you want to drink something, most people will just drink anything that they find, and that is why in the *sha'bi* places for example, you see a tremendous increase of places selling fresh juices. In the past such places were diminishing. Now, there is high demand for them, people are choosing not to buy the soft drinks so there is a demand for the traditional juice stores and they are definitely on the increase. I am sure you noticed the change since last year.

Of course those who are boycotting are really into it, but those who don't know anything about the general dimensions of this whole issue continue to consume like always. I think it is mostly the poor people doing this, and they never had the money to afford these products anyway.

## كوكا كولا مصر وبها رجل «القلب»



أعلنت شركة كوكا كولا مصر في لقاء لبارزة للظهور بين المنتخب الفلسطيني ومنتخب نجوم العرب تروعا بجنه مصري مقابل كل تذكرة تم بيعها في مهرجان فلسطين في القلب بحد الذي ١٠٠.٠٠٠ الف جنيه، وأنشأت للهندس نجاح كمشاهير - مدير عام كوكا كولا مصر أنه من أهداف أسلوب عمل الشركة المساهمة في الأهداف الرياضية والاجتماعية للبيئة المحلية لذلك جاءت هذه الفكرة لتتلاقح مع الهدف الفيل للمهرجان.

وكانت كوكا كولا مصر قد قامت خلال عطلة لتكريم المنتخب الفلسطيني حفرة للقلب من كوار الفلسطينيين الرياضية والصحية وكان الحفل فرصة جديدة لاظهار مدى تضامن الشعب المصري بمختلف طوائفه مع الأشقاء الفلسطينيين، وأصبحت المصدر لتمد الطيفي رئيس الاتحاد الفلسطيني عن سعادت بوجوده في هذا الحفل والمسئولة المصرية للفخية الفلسطينية، وتوجه بالشكر إلى السيدة الفاضلة سوزان مبارك لدعم الذي تقدمه للشعب الفلسطيني من خلال الهلال الأحمر المصري.

ومن المعلوم أن شركة كوكا كولا فلسطين هي الرامي الرئيسي للمنتخب واتحاد الكرة الفلسطينية وأنشأت رامي خوري الرئيس التنفيذي لكوكا كولا فلسطين أن الشركة تدعم الكرة الفلسطينية منذ تأسس الاتحاد وتهدف هذه الشركة إلى رفع اسم فلسطين في المحافل والبطولات الدولية.

وسوف يتم تسليم التبرع إلى الدكتور على الدين هلال وزير الشباب تسليمه إلى الهلال الأحمر.

**Figure 22:** Coca Cola sponsored Football Tournament where 1L.E. from the price of each ticket sold at the “Palestine in our hearts festival/tournament” would be donated by Coca Cola to the Palestinians through the Red Crescent Society. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 12 May, 2002: 23).

**GH:** Ok, hold it, I don't agree with what ML is saying. Anyone in Egypt can afford a Coca Cola or 7Up these days and you know that. So I don't agree that it is just the poor doing this.

**MR:** I agree with you GH, these are not high end expensive products. They are things that anyone can afford whether rich or poor. You know Taline, things like Birell and Fayrouz are now becoming very popular. Personally I love Birell, it is a natural and healthy drink and is good for your body as it cleans up your whole system and it has no sugar. Even the pre-packed juices like Juhayna, are very popular with kids and at schools. I used to take my kids to places like McDonald's from time to time but I have stopped that. Oh, and what's with that Mcfalafel commercial, did you see it? What a disaster. It came out last year when you were here, but they have stopped airing it, I think it was a major disaster. I mean what do these companies think we are,

stupid? How can they ever think that I or anyone else like me would go to McDonald's for *falafel*.

**MR:** By the way, did you hear about the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Trade, Kenneth Gastir, saying that the United States will do all it can to fail any attempt by any European or Arab country that tries to boycott Israel. He says they will impose sanctions. That is what they do, impose sanctions on anyone and anything whenever they feel like it !

**GH:** By the way, did you ever watch *Hamdy Andeel's* [the host] program, *ra'ees el-tahreer (The Chief Editor)*? Wow, that is one provocative thing.<sup>45</sup>

**ML:** Do you know that a while ago, I think it was just before you came [in 2002] that he had a very controversial issue on his program and the government stopped his program for a while because he had gone too far!! Anyway, he has been talking about the boycott in every episode lately.

**MR:** I watch his show all the time, it is excellent. And did you notice he has the Palestinian *koufeya* on a chair next to him on the show.

**GL:** He was talking about how other countries<sup>46</sup> and even the Americans boycott or embargo every country whose actions they do not like, so why is it that when we do it, the whole world turns upside down, they call us racist, and the agents of multinational companies here turn the world upside down and start to spend millions on commercials. I liked the way he was giving

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<sup>45</sup> I indicated that I had been following the show which is aired every Monday night on Channel 11 of the national television. It is in fact a very interesting and unique program on Egyptian television. The host, *Hamdy Andeel* is a highly respected journalist and public figure and his program has gained wide acceptance because of the controversial issues it discusses. Usually, the program starts with a summary or round up of the latest news and headlines from all kinds of local and international newspapers with *Andeel* providing commentary about the events. Then the topic of the day is presented and one or more guests are involved in a round table discussion. Government officials, businessmen, political and religious leaders, actors, etc, are invited as guests depending on the topic. My informants were referring to two of the latest shows aired in May and June of 2002. In both these shows there was an incredible amount of criticism of U.S. and Israeli policies. In one episode, the round table discussion dealt with the boycott, in which the participants were, first, a member of the Egyptian Committee in Support of the Palestinian *Intifadah*; second, the General Coordinator of the Popular Movement of Resistance of Zionism; third, a noted author and researcher; fourth, the Deputy Chair of the Touristic Establishments. I had in fact watched and video taped those two episodes which were very useful in my understanding of the dimensions of the Boycott and which I have used in various chapters of the thesis.

<sup>46</sup> As an example, "Israelis are said to be boycotting Air France after a pilot flying from Paris to Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, referred to the destination as 'Israel-Palestine'. Many Israelis aboard the flight took offence at the comment, thus causing boycotts to be organized throughout Israel. The state run telephone company, Bezeq Israel Telecom, has announced that its 8500 employees will boycott the airline if the pilot is not dismissed, reported Reuters" (Israelis Boycott Air France after Pilot's remark 2002).

examples from other places, he was talking about how the French are upset about the U.S. cultural invasion, specially when it comes to food.

**MR:** I think they were discussing some very relevant issues, like how to improve the campaign, make it more effective and long lasting and how it is critical that the final goals be clearly specified so that people are not misled.

I could probably go on for many more pages of such conversations but I think the extracts presented here are enough to give the reader a sense of some of the local discourses surrounding this topic. I therefore end at this point and turn to a content analysis and a conclusion of this chapter.

#### **4 Content Analysis and Conclusion**

I realize the difficulty for the reader in understanding the logic or the thinking that would produce or lead to these statements and convictions. The everyday reality and life experiences of these and other informants is very different from ours in the 'West'. Having shared some of these experiences with them, I have tried to do as much justice to convey to the reader how and why these sentiments are developed and why they are so staunchly engrained in local beliefs, systems of understanding and making sense of the world.

There seems to be much stress put on values and morality and the importance and necessity of taking "a moral stand [when] something is wrong and needs to be fixed" (Loseke 1999: 7). There is a sense that what is going on in the occupied territories is against the values and morality of Arabs and of human principles in general; it is injustice. The occupation and perceived U.S. threats are often interpreted as intimidating and threatening to human dignity, honor and values. This is evident in AY's statements when she talks about the humiliation she and others feel when they see what is going on

in the occupied territories and cannot do anything about it. Even what the U.S. is doing in Egypt, and still not much that one can do about it. The importance of values is clear in what Kriesi and Spector (1977) say:

Values are the explanations people give in support of their claims, complaints or demands. Claims are commonly buttressed by espousals of moral positions, assertions of value judgments, and expressions of indignation or outrage. Claims-makers do not simply say, 'we want you to change this'. They say, 'It's not right that this should be happening! This is wrong! This is unjust, unfair, and violates our rights! This condition is disgusting and should not be allowed! People who engage in such practices should be institutionalized! Why? Because [in the original text, it starts with because it is 'un-American' which is ironic in this case but still valid], its against religions; its debasing, degrading, humiliating, unwholesome, exploitative, dangerous, and irresponsible' (92)...Claims express demands within a moral universe. Values are those statements that express the grounds or the basis of the complaint. They are used to justify a demand, to explain not simply what is wrong, but why it is wrong...In social problems, values are invoked to justify claims or demands, or express dissatisfaction, indignation, or outrage (93).

We could say that the statements presented here are just claims and nothing more. Nevertheless, they are important because they are the basis of this whole boycott campaign and therefore they are not 'false' constructions of the world. Yes, there might be a distinction between 'objective reality' and 'constructed subjective representations' but these definitions are social products and are not constructed in a vacuum. This is their own way of viewing and judging the world and the conditions around them as part of their everyday reality whose objectivity or subjectivity is not only obsolete for them but almost impossible for me to measure.

At another level, my own attempts at understanding their world views were also critical in their understanding of me. I realized while going over these interviews that a sense of trust had been established without me even realizing it at the time. Words like "you already know....that so and so...." or "Taline, you understand.....such and such"

or “Taline, you are Egyptian like us, so you realize.....” were an indication that they did not look at me as a ‘foreign’ researcher. They were in a way implying or taking for granted that I would know and share these beliefs and opinions with them as a member of society.

At several instances I remember interviewees telling me outright that they can talk to me about politics because I am one of them and that they have no reason to worry about anything. Yet, in addition to all of this I also believe that my being Canadian was very well accepted too. I doubt I would have had the same kind of cooperation had I been studying at an American University or had I been an American citizen. This is simply an extension of recent attempts at disassociating with anything American.

Wadee`a, 38, who works in a large American multinational company indicated that a few years ago her job was a sign of prestige and something that she would be proud of and boast about. Today, she is “ashamed of telling people where she works,” because she does not want to be associated in any way with the United States (Appendix V). She would often say that “it is not just me, I have friends who work in other American establishments which used to be dream jobs for anyone, but who now feel that they don’t want to be affiliated to anything American anymore because it is looked upon with disgrace and negative attitudes.”

Similarly, ML had pointed out that a company such as ‘Americana’, which owns many restaurant chains and other businesses in Egypt has been running television commercials with the logo: “*Americana, masreya meya fel meya*” (Americana, 100% Egyptian). But how the company could even imagine that consumers will buy this was

not comprehensible to anyone. Whereas before a brand name like 'Americana' would have attracted customers, today it is pushing them away.

There was for instance much frustration with the multinational companies which had increased their ads and prizes in recent months. Over and over we see in the statements above that this phenomenon is having two unexpected outcomes. First, it is taken as an indication that the boycott is working and that therefore it should be continued. Second, it is a sign of the power that these companies have and that they will not give up easily. In both cases the end result is scorn and contempt.

The unilateral fascination and endorsement of the Hamdy Andeel program was also not surprising to me. No matter where I might be on Monday nights, the families, friends and informants I was with made sure that they would not miss the program. There was anticipation of 'what they will hear this time', and much discussion afterwards of what had been presented. I think the host's main objective throughout the shows I watched was to "prove that U.S. foreign policy is hypocritical," and his message did go through.

At almost every show, no matter what the later subject of discussion would be, Andeel would start the show with accusations and condemnation of Israel and would bring up headlines from newspapers, both local and international, about the latest events in that country and U.S. response to them. The idea was to always present the news not as 'direct accusations', but as 'current events' left to the viewer to judge.

A respected social scientist and long time journalist, Andeel was not afraid of accusing or pointing fingers at anyone, even the local government, which was a contributing factor to the success of his show. But more importantly, this was *THE*

**MAIN** reason why no one from 'outside' was able to condemn or criticize the show. If this were a show that simply showed the faults of the U.S. or of Israel I am sure the Americans would have interfered and asked the government to stop it, like they did with another political and historical *tamseleya* (soap opera) '*Fares bela gawad*' (Knight without a horse) which included some references to Zionism and which the American government formally disapproved of and demanded that it be ended. This was another case of much controversy in Egypt.

Returning to my point about Andeel, the reason why the program seems to be immune *is in fact* because it criticizes the Egyptian government and the behavior, policies or conduct of individuals, of companies, of journalists, and of almost anyone that deserves criticism. Even the government does not like what is going on at times, yet it wants to prove that it is open to criticism and that there is free speech and freedom of the press. Under such a scenario no one would dare to ask the government to put an end to this program, especially not the U.S. which often criticizes Egypt and other countries for their lack of freedom and democracy.

This is in sum the type of environment in which the boycott is intensifying and the kinds of feelings that are pushing people to take part in the boycott. According to Lola, "some people are boycotting just to belong in their cultural surrounding, here in Egypt everyone listens to everyone else, we like to *conform* and *stand out*, but *stand out together, not alone.*"

These interviews also bring up the problems and weaknesses of the boycott and the debates over its validity. No one seems to have a definite answer to what will happen in the years to come, and there seem to be some disagreement over its effectiveness. Yet,



all of the interviewees above did participate in the boycott. ML, had indicated that in his own view the boycott will not solve anything, but that he was taking part in it just “to make a point,” and to feel that he is part of the community and to show that he shares the common concerns and opinions held of the United States, of Israel, and to show his “disgust with the violence taking place in the occupied territories.”

We can see from this why the boycott appeals to so many. Some are convinced that it will work and will eventually push these powerful companies to pressure and lobby their governments to take some action. Others believe that it is just a political message to the U.S. to show discontent with American foreign policy and double standards. While still others who do not believe the boycott will achieve anything are also participating to show their solidarity and be part of their community. In all, there is the unanimous conviction that if not for anything else, the momentary psychological satisfaction is enough of a reward for most Egyptians.

## **CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION**

*Egypt's astonishing historical continuity of thousands of years of recorded existence has regularly attracted European travelers, visionaries, artists, and conquerors, from Herodotus, Caesar, and Alexander the Great to Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Flaubert. Then came the Americans – Cecil B. De Mille, David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger. Its strategic closeness to Europe and the East has made Egypt a highly prized and much sought after imperial possession: the roll call of civilizations that constructed foreign policy around Egypt is virtually unparalleled in world history, although the Atlantic West and the Arab world together have played the dominant part in this continuing drama. As a result then, we can speak of intelligibly and correctly of a battle not only for Egypt, but also for the right to depict Egypt. On the one hand, there is the Egypt whose symbolic, cultural and political identity while Africa, is nevertheless essentially Western, in which the country's ancient grandeur and modern significance come together in ways that are British, French, German, Italian, or American. On the other, there is the Egypt whose Islamic and Arab roles are in frequent conflict with its Western representations, which have often stressed the country's remote (therefore more attractive) past at the expense of its actual present. In the contemporary phase of this conflict, Egyptian themselves have been divided in ways that are both surprising and interesting, since in the age of mass international communications they too have become participants in the contest over Egypt's identity. Yet everyone who has ever been to Egypt, or, without actually going there, has thought about it somewhat is immediately struck by its coherence, its unmistakable identity, its powerful unified presence. All sorts of reasons have been put forward for Egypt's millennial integrity, but they can all be characterized as aspects of the battle to represent Egypt, which somehow remains itself, aloof and yet inviting, distant and still accessible.*

**-Edward W. Said (2002: 154).**

### **1 Analysis of Arguments, Closing Points**

As a result of my fieldwork it seems that consumer goods have significance that goes far beyond their commercial or utility value and that they also symbolically communicate cultural meanings that the community has assigned to them (Douglas and Isherwood 1978; Appadurai 1986; McCracken 1988). This means that goods have to be

contextualized because there is no guarantee that consumers are going to use the products in the way they were initially intended by the manufacturers (Howes 1996), and this is evident from the examples presented in this thesis.

In line with this argument “groups are able to attach meanings to a variety of commodities to create a discriminatory process of incorporation and rejection...[which] articulates an expression of identity where they try to retain the traditional yet adopt whatever is to their benefit” (Hui et al 1991: 3). The influx of western goods and services and all the meanings, prestige and trendiness they carry with them certainly do influence what is consumed and how. Yet as Aiwa Ong suggests there is a need to “analyze people’s everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts” (1999: 5). In addition, we need to look at human agency and pay attention to its local articulations.

Such processes of ‘creolization’ or ‘indigenization’ are in fact taking place in many parts of the world (Howes 1996). In these Egyptian cases, it seems that local tastes, sentiments, traditions and ideologies combined with a sense of identity and nationalism are playing a major role in the consumption patterns and choices that are made. The cases that have been presented indicate how “rather than let consumer goods colonize them, local peoples instead ‘colonize’ consumer goods, imposing their own systems of values and practices on them and maintaining their cultural integrity” (Classen and Howes 1996: 191).

Here, goods and consumption have become thoroughly political. They have been assigned the blame for their silence and indirect connection to the prosperity of a system that is seen as unjust and illegal – the occupation and U.S. foreign policy. These goods

along with their logos and famous brand names have been turned into something shameful and undesirable.

We know that consumption is a cultural phenomenon "...shaped driven and constrained at every point by cultural considerations" (McCracken 1988: xi). In any society, socio-economic, historical and political considerations make up part of this culture, which in Egypt plays a critical role in the everyday life of consumers. If

Culture is everything that is learned, then virtually all aspects of the consumption process must be affected by culture. What we learn to buy, the ads and other promotion to which we respond, the signals sent by various aspects of packaging and presentation...the way we use the products, what we believe the use of the product does for us, or says about us – all of this, and more, is affected by culture (Costa 1994: 5).

Consumption patterns in Egypt are constantly changing over time and space, they are developing and taking new shapes and forms in order to adapt to the local and global realities and to symbolize the ways in which Egyptians express and sustain their identity and their priorities. This is also "...an indicator not only of approval of the rapidly changing culture and society but also of a desire to be part of it" (Hoodfar 1997: 273).

Such consumption, as indicated by Tim Edwards, in all of its forms:

...Is increasingly important and expanding in its capacity to dominate our individual lives and indeed the entire development and direction of contemporary society, nationally and internationally. Few areas of every life are now not affected or linked to the processes of practices of consumption – from image making and advertising or the simple organization of activities and leisure time, to the formulations of world wide economic policies – as societies, rich and poor alike are caught in processes of buying and selling (2000: 5).

Today, increasingly, events taking place in distant parts of the world may have immediate repercussions for people in other parts of the world. This means that events taking place in Israel and in the occupied territories, are crucial even if they do not hurt

Egyptians in any direct material terms. As Giddens (1994: 22) “observes, globalization is not only ‘out there’ but also ‘in here’: it transforms everyday life.... At the same time, solidarity movements mobilize pro-actively on ‘distant’ themes, that is, on themes that are not immediately related to their national context” (qtd. in della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 4). “Globalization influences the national context in so far as it makes events occurring miles, or thousands of miles away relevant for a local mobilization” (della Porta and Kriesi 1999: 6). This is why we need to examine current events as they are located in time and space but also in specific personal, historical and cultural contexts which give them new significance.

Therefore, despite the fact that an “orientation towards consumption” maybe spreading consumer cultures maintain their uniqueness. The combination and interaction of local conditions and global forces contribute to the emergence of specific patterns and meanings which are appropriate to each locality (Belk et al 1994).

What Tim Dant defines as “human interaction with objects...sometimes because through them we can interact with other humans and sometimes because they reflect back something of who we think we are” holds true under these circumstances (1999: 38). Here, one of the main functions of consumption becomes its capacity to make and maintain social relationships, community solidarity and feeling of belonging and taking part in a noble cause that would not only help the Palestinians, but would also boost the national economy and help in gaining some self-respect and dignity. As Craig Smith suggests in *Morality and the Market*, “consumer boycotts may be successful without being effective, because publicity or punishment may have been intended... as a

symbolic act, the boycott becomes a moral act, to punish and to publicize (Smith 1990: 258).

Within such a context I examined the boycott in Alexandria as a grassroots consumerist movement that Egyptians are participating in for several reasons and with several objectives in mind. These could be summed up as:

1. A tool for political participation as there are not that many channels available to ordinary citizens to convey their grievances within the current political system
2. As an immediate psychological and personal satisfaction of participants who feel that they too can take matters into their own hands and contribute in some way, and also show the world that this boycott is their choice and a tool that no one can take away from them.
3. As a short term political tool to send a message to the government of the United States that their policies in the Middle East, particularly towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and also their policies across that region in places such as Iraq or Libya, and even policies of interference in the local affairs of Egypt itself are not acceptable .
4. As a long-term economic tool that would hurt these multinational companies and maybe force them to pressure and lobby their own governments to change their policies and also pressuring these companies themselves to stop them from establishing or expanding their operations into Israel and particularly on illegal settlements in the occupied territories.
5. For the long term economic development of local industries and services to fill in any gaps that might be left by such companies as McDonald's, Proctor and Gamble, Lays, Pepsi, Tide, etc....To increase employment and provide job opportunities to those that might be put out of work, boost the local economy and the consumption of alternative and new local goods.

## **2 Summary of Chapters**

Chapter I was a general description of the location and socio-political and historical context of the ethnography. An overview of the setting, of Egypt and the city of Alexandria was followed by a more in depth account of the changes and transformations that took place in the country in the last century through changes in regimes as relevant to the present economic and political situation. Perceptions of the

West, modernization and various aspects of culture and Egyptian and Arab identity were discussed as a background to the following chapters.

Chapter II was a presentation of my methodology which is essential in any anthropological work. The question of being a 'native' anthropologist and the different debates surrounding the issue were mentioned. I related these concerns to my own feelings and multiple identities and how I used these to make the best out of the situation I was in. I also presented the techniques and some of the results of collecting data, participant observation, interviews, mass media, the research sample, in addition to the analysis and presentation of my data.

It was necessary at this point to discuss some of the literature relevant to my thesis before going into the empirical data as such. Thus, chapter III was a collection of the theoretical material which helped me in the analysis of my data. Concepts such as local and foreign, globalization, westernization, modernity, consumption, advertising, and the domestication of global commodities in new cultural settings were discussed within a theoretical framework of anthropological discourse. I also related these issues and the debates surrounding them to local discourses and to local understandings and interpretations. At the end of this chapter social movements and boycotts as collective action were presented and included several examples of other boycotts. A brief introduction to the first Arab boycott of Israel was made and compared to the current campaign.

The empirical data which resulted from my fieldwork in Egypt forms the core of chapter IV. Here, I tried to concentrate on some of the products that were most relevant in the boycott. I presented the reasons behind the boycott, how, and in what way it is

practiced and who is taking part in it. Opinions about the companies and their reactions to the boycott also made up a large part of this chapter. We saw some of the new products introduced to the market and some of the products which are taking advantage of the current circumstances and offering donations to Palestine to win the hearts of consumers.

The promotion of local industry and local consumption are also major factors and go hand in hand with boycott efforts. Finally, and in today's globalized world, the international dimension of the boycott of American and Israeli goods in other Arab countries and even in Europe was presented as dissatisfaction with U.S. foreign policy is spreading worldwide.

In order to contextualize some of the conclusions and events I included in chapter IV, I followed it with some description of relations between the U.S., Israel, Egypt and the Palestinian conflict. Egypt's involvement in this crisis, both at the government and individual levels was made obvious. Some of the national and international reasons for mistrusting the U.S. were discussed, in addition to the belief that as the world's only superpower, only *IT* can end the violence and force Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

Even though events throughout history are important factors in the formation of the negative perceptions and opinions of the United States and Israel, I also included some of the current events and headlines from the mass media in an attempt to show how they too influence and create awareness of local and global tensions. Contextualization of the boycott within public discourse and by informants concludes this chapter.



To give a more first hand experience of some of the conversations I had during fieldwork, I devoted chapter VI to extracts from conversations/informal interviews with several of my main interviewees and close connections that show some of the discussions, concerns and opinions held by ordinary Egyptian citizens. These were individuals who were very much involved in my research and showed considerable interest in it. Their insights and suggestions were central to my fieldwork.

### **3 Final thoughts and remarks**

A year has almost passed since my fieldwork in Egypt in the summer of 2002, yet, friends and contacts still keep me up to date and inform me that the boycott is nonetheless very much in affect. More recently, with the threats of war in Iraq, the continuous violence in the occupied territories, and inaction on the parts of Arab governments – Egypt included – political discontent is also on the rise and has led to many more demonstrations and public outcries and denunciations of U.S. foreign policies in the region.

In a recent article in the local Gazette newspaper, Stewart Bell writes about “demonstrations against a war in Iraq [which] attracted more than 100,000 Egyptians, and the press [that] depicts Americans as cowboy colonialists” (2003: E4). Additionally, he writes that Egypt’s “official position is that the real problem in the Middle East is not Iraq, but Israel, and that resolving the status of Palestinians will bring peace to the region and quell anti-Americanism” (2003: E4).

Such circumstances are igniting more protest and attracting individuals from various strata of society to take up the cause. As we have seen throughout the thesis, historical and current events are gaining a significance in relation to consumerism and the

outcomes of this relation are demonstrated by the current boycott efforts both in Egypt and in other parts of the Arab world.

This boycott has presented itself as a form of political participation that is often denied to individuals in Egyptian society. It has thus emerged as a grassroots movement making rational consumer choices for both political and economic purposes. The final outcome or end result is yet to be seen. The immediate consequences have been discussed in this thesis and have shown both the positive and negative aspects of the boycott. But it will be some time before the long-term results can be determined.

I hope to return to Egypt in the near future in order to observe recent developments and to explore some of the effects of the boycott on the local economy, and on the boycotted companies as well. But more importantly, I would like to revisit all the individuals and families that were involved in my research to share the outcomes of my fieldwork with them and to explore any changes in their attitudes and actions in recent months. Political events both within Egypt and in the region also need to be followed in order to achieve a better understanding of what is yet to come in terms of grassroots political action.

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**APPENDIX B – Boycott French products poster  
(Source: Hoodfar and Pazira 2000: 32)**

**If you disagree with France's decision to  
explode nuclear bombs in the South Pacific,  
Please join the international boycott  
of French  
products!**


**Nuclear testing is:**

- ⚡ a threat to public health
- ⚡ a danger to the environment
- ⚡ a huge waste of money
- ⚡ a means of developing new, more dangerous nuclear bombs.

**O**n June 13, France announced its decision to resume nuclear explosions in the South Pacific. Jacques Chirac, the new president of France, made this announcement only a few weeks after the indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In the NPT, France agreed to "exercise utmost restraint" in testing nuclear weapons. France's decision betrays the commitments made by nuclear weapons powers to implement the NPT. It also undermines worldwide hopes for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

France's resumption of nuclear testing is especially insensitive because 1995 is the fiftieth anniversary of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. France says it will explode eight nuclear bombs at the Mururoa Atoll (French Polynesia) in the South Pacific between September 1995 and May 1996. Each test will release energy amounting to about 150 kilotons – eight times the power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Their decision may encourage other nuclear weapons states to resume their own nuclear weapons tests.

The International Peace Bureau, with member organizations in 46 countries, has called for an international boycott of French products. Besides nuclear explosions, some of the more common French exports are wine, cheese, cosmetics and bottled water. Please boycott these and other French products. Canadians should also avoid French airlines and holidays in France.



Graphic: Montreal Peace Council News Report

*The International Peace Bureau, with member organizations in 46 countries, has called for an international boycott of French products.*

**CANADA'S ROLE IN THE NUCLEAR MADNESS**

From the beginning, Canadian uranium and nuclear know-how was used for nuclear weapons. The atomic bombs dropped on Japan used uranium from Canada and the Congo, which was refined at Port Hope, Ontario. From 1942 until 1946, Canadian uranium was sold explicitly for weapons. Canada's uranium research on plutonium enriched uranium, France and India to develop nuclear weapons.

Canada remains the world's largest exporter of uranium – the key ingredient for nuclear weapons. Our biggest customers are countries with nuclear arsenals, like the U.S. and France.

Canadian uranium goes to France – 9,715 tons of it between 1974 and 1991. Over time, 90% of it is discarded as having no civilian value. However, this "displaced uranium" is used as the raw material for the production of plutonium – the primary explosive in French nuclear bombs.

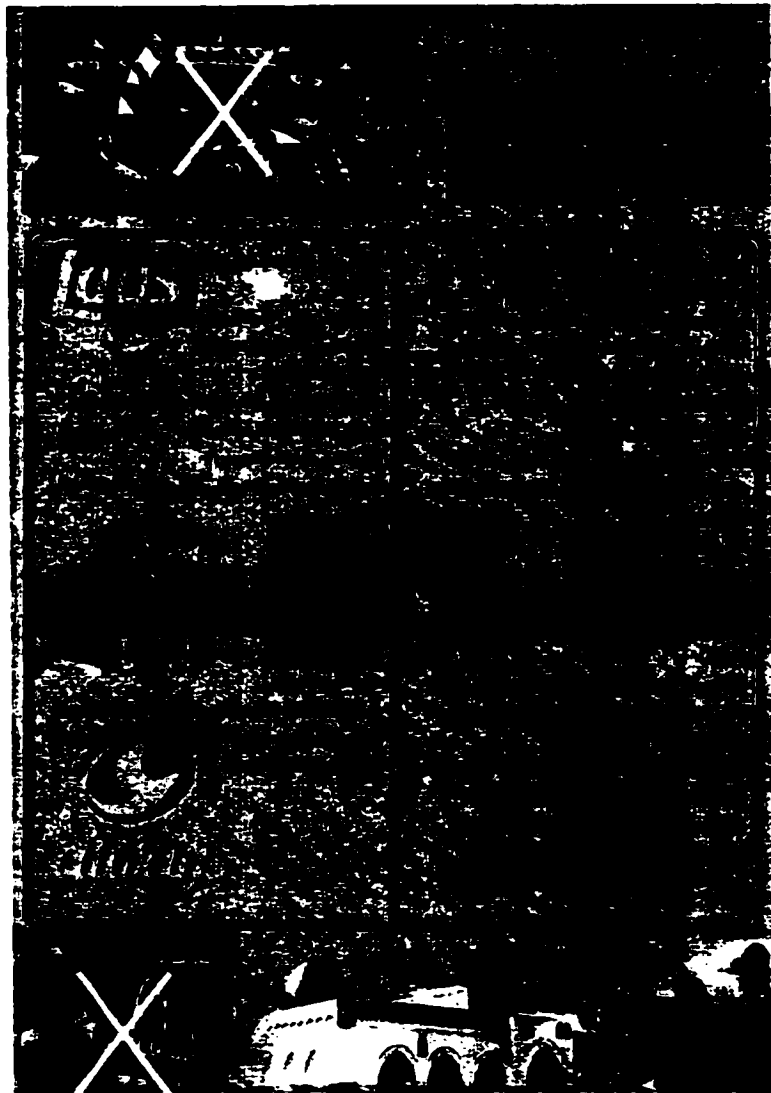
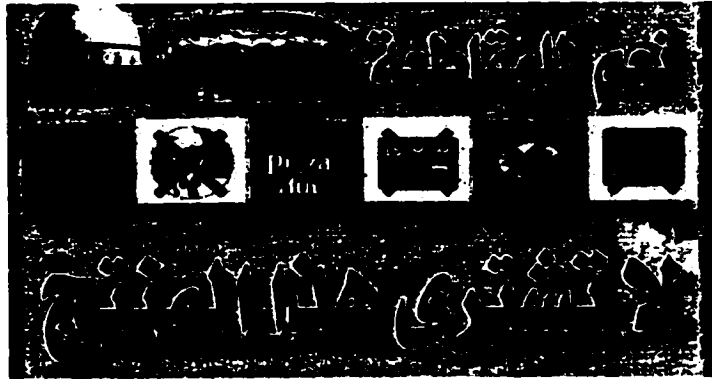
Canada has contributed 200 million tons of uranium mine tailings, containing several of the most radioactive substances known to science. Aboriginal communities are increasingly making connections between nearby uranium mining and local health problems.

Source: Global Warming, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

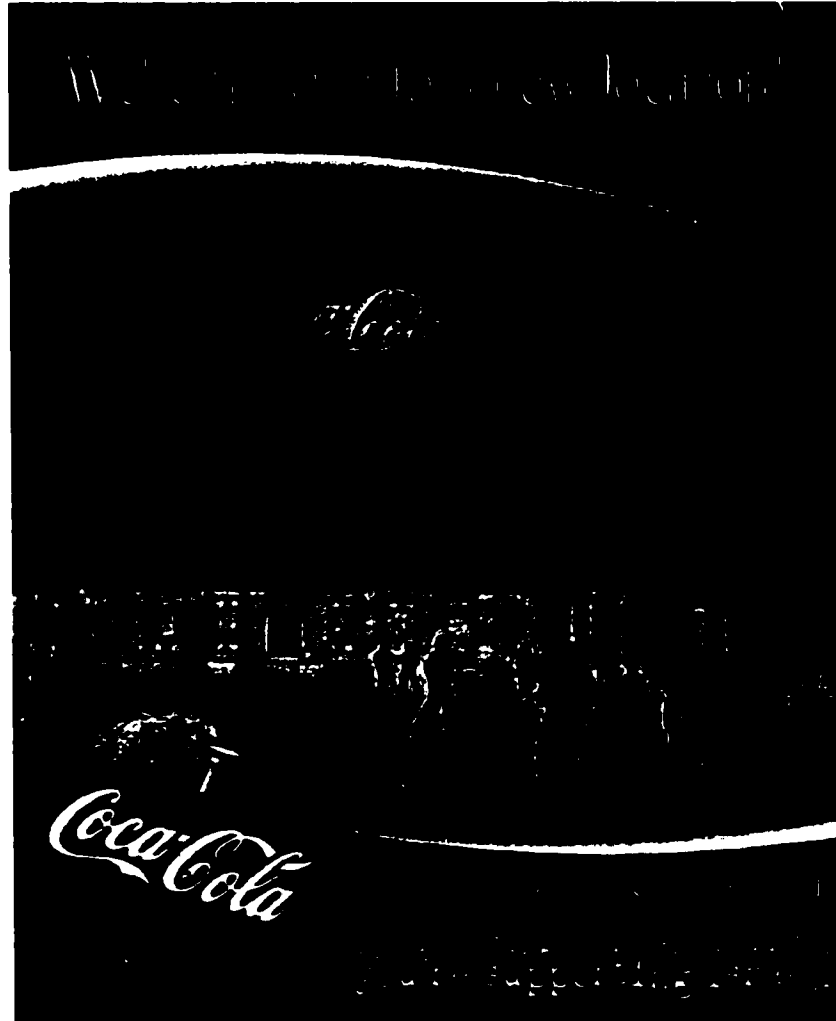
**Coalition to Oppose the Arms Trade (COAT), 489 Main St., Ottawa ON K1S 3H7**  
Tel.: (613) 231-3076, Fax: (613) 231-3614, E-mail: [co207@domest.ca](mailto:co207@domest.ca)



**APPENDIX C – One of many boycott lists/flyers handed out on the streets of Alexandria, 2002.**



**APPENDIX D – A poster circulated widely through the Internet calling for the boycott of Coca Cola (Source, personal email).**



**Haven't we had enough humiliation? Israel is killing Palestinian children and the US economy is supplying the bullets. Is there anything you can do to stop this? Yes! There are 1 billion Muslims and 5 billion humans around the world. If we all unite together and boycott the attached American product, we will send a strong message to the U.S. that is supporting the killing of innocence. We have nothing against the American people. We just want Israel to stop the killing. This is only the beginning! More products to come. Please make an impact. Boycott this product and spread the word. Together, we can make a difference.**

كتابة إمانة إسرائيل تقتل الأطفال وأمريكا تدعمهم بالمال والسلاح. هل يمكنك فعل شيء لتغير ذلك؟ والله نعم! قاطع المنتج المعان عنه هنا ونشر هذه الرسالة إلى أكبر قدر من الناس فنحن مليار مسلم. قلو جميعاً قاطعنا المنتجات الأمريكية لسمعت لنا. فأمريكا تعلم معنى وفعالية المقاطعة الاقتصادية. واعلم أنه سيكون هناك المزيد من المنتجات... هذه البداية. كن عنصراً في نصرة نبتك وقدمك وإخوانك.

APPENDIX E – McDonald's McFalafel flyer, 2001.



**APPENDIX F – A full page ad taken by “Seniorita Group for Food Production” announcing that it is a 100% Egyptian company. The names of the owners appear at the bottom, a list of its various products is included, in addition to announcing that a piaster of every bag of Lion’s chips sold will be donated to Palestinian children.**

**(Source: Rose Al Youssef, May 18-24, 2002).**

**MAY**

**يونيس**

**منتجات ليويس فودز**

**شركة ليويس فودز**  
بطاطس شيبس ليويس

**قرش من كل كيس ليويس**  
**لأطفال فلسطين**

**شركة ماي مصر**  
شيكولاتة جوليتا  
بسكويت ماري سنهوريتا  
لبان كوتوجيم  
لبان كناري - جلاس بيلا  
مصاصة هوب هوب  
نوجما سنهورى  
طوفى سنهوريتا  
جلاس رى فروش

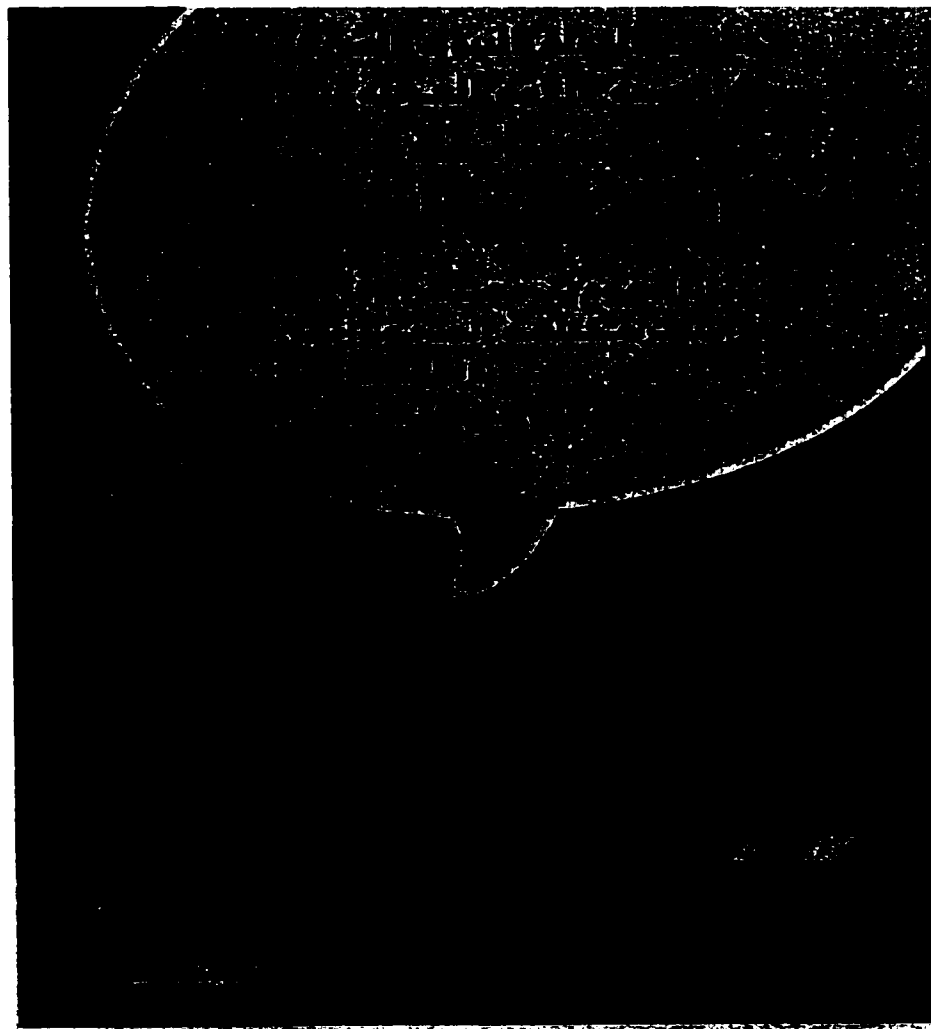
**شركة سنهوريتا**  
سناكس هائلو  
- هريدى -  
- كمبورة -  
- نهنجا - شيكا -  
أملاوى  
- زملكاوى  
الدرأويش

**هبة فويل نسوق**  
عضو مجلس الإدارة

**الماج حلمى أحمد نسوق**  
نائب رئيس مجلس الإدارة

**الماج فويل أحمد نسوق**  
رئيس مجلس الإدارة

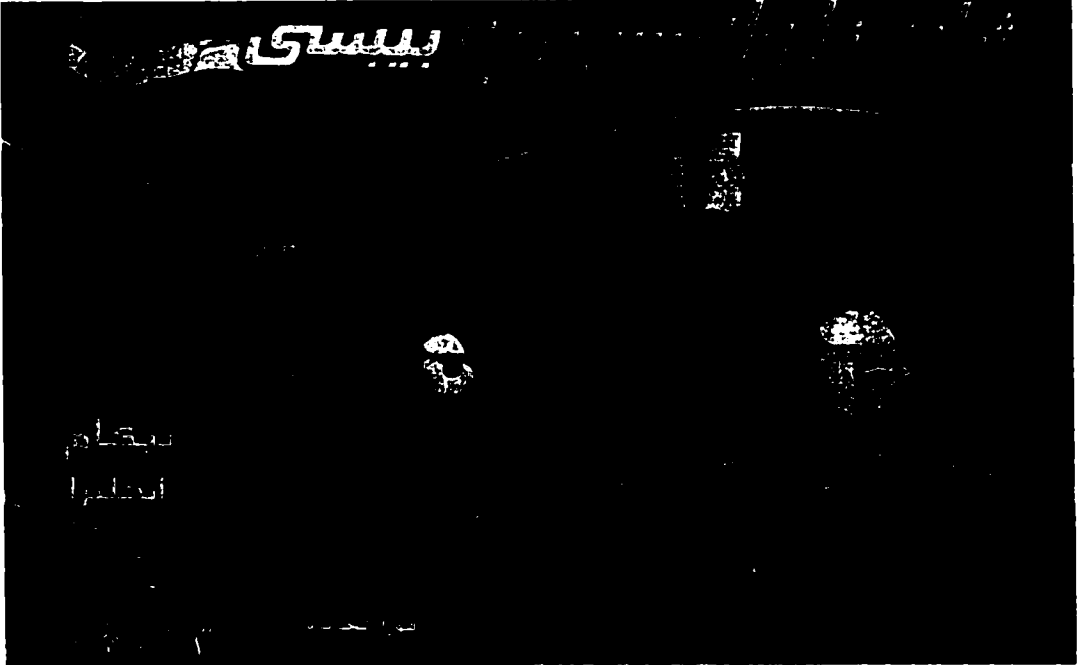
**APPENDIX G – Menatel ad campaign in support of Palestine. (Source: *Al Ahrām* – 23 May, 2002: 23).**



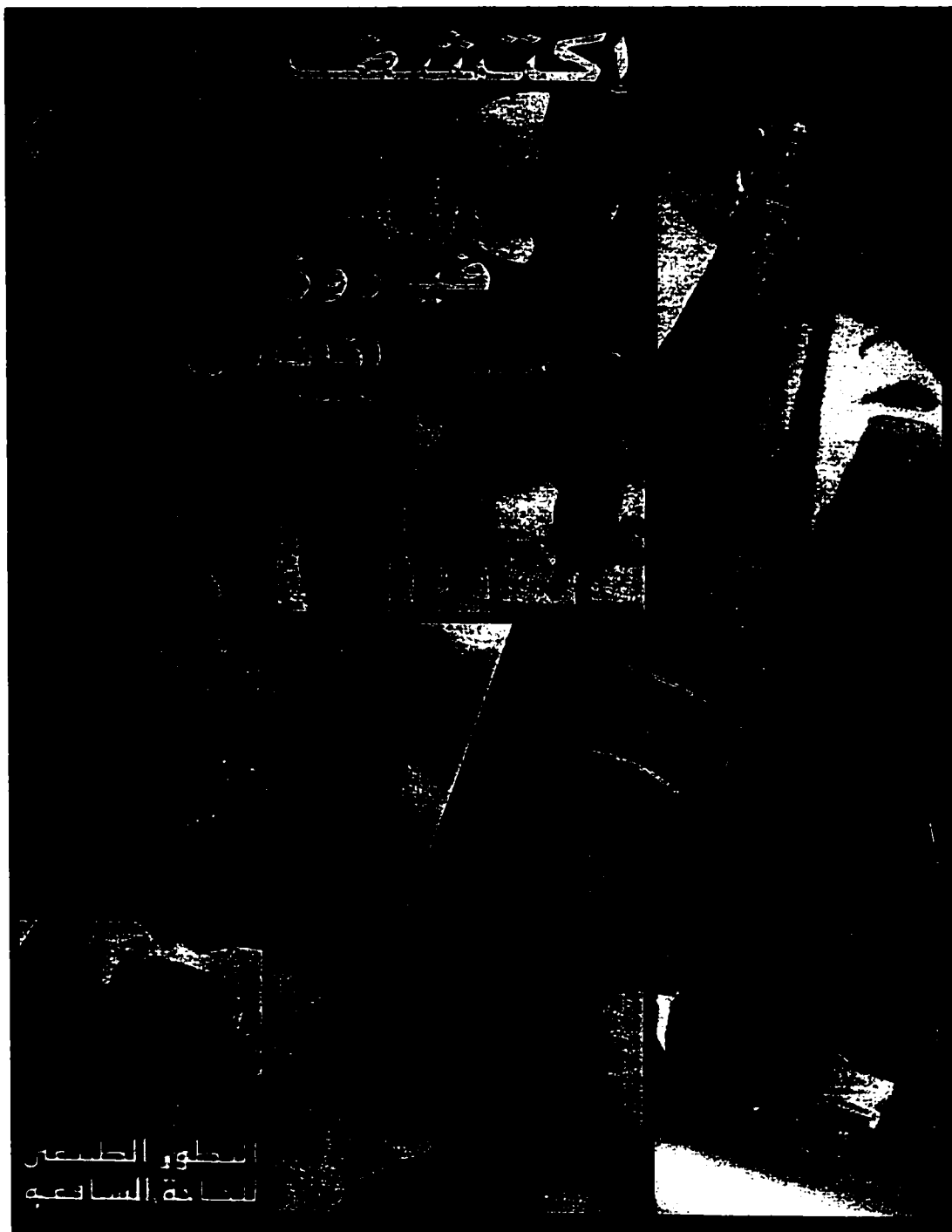
**APPENDIX H- Coca Cola ad offering prizes to consumers during World Cup Games in 2002. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 31 May, 2002: 28).**



**APPENDIX I – Pepsi Ad also offering prizes to consumers during World Cup Games. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 31 May 2002: 21).**



**APPENDIX J- "Discover Fayrouz pineapple."  
(Source: *Rose Al Youssef*, July 28-August 3, 2001).**





**APPENDIX K – Birell natural drink / non alcoholic malt beverage.**  
(Source: *Rose Al Youssef*, 28 September – 4 October, 2002).

الشعير يحتوى على فيتامينات طبيعية مفيدة للجسم  
شعير أكثر = نشاط أكثر



**APPENDIX L – Cover photo of Cairo Times newspaper containing article about the new Arafat corn snacks (6-12 June, 2002:8).**



## Munching toward victory

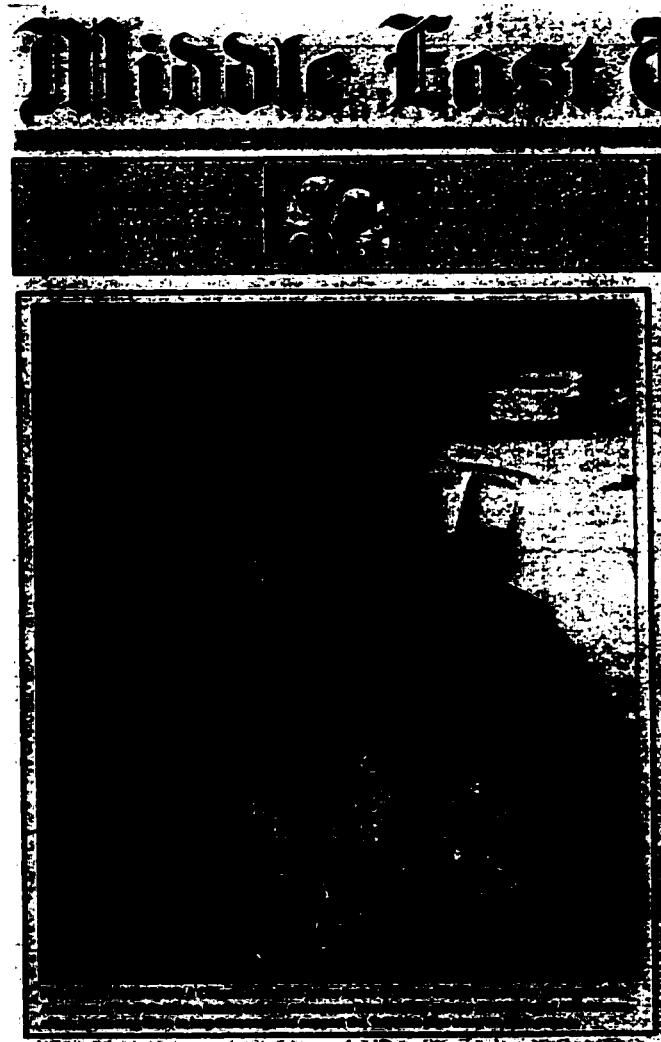
**EGYPTIAN KIDS HAVE found it easy to give up on the new Arafat corn snacks. The new Arafat corn snacks, which are sold in plastic bags, are being rejected by kids in the streets. Parents are angry, and some are taking a Palestinian flag, a symbol of the new character. The package says 'Arafat' and 'Al Arafat' (love of the Palestinian) with the upside-down picture. 'Hard to hand, not holding out. When the more you buy, the more you eat.'**

Mohamed Khamis, owner of the Al Arafat corn producing firm, is the most bitter. He says the company official Mohamed Fakhri says the snacks are going very good, but could be rejected in the Cairo Times exactly what happened in the new...

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**APPENDIX M – Middle East Times article on Arafat corn snacks (June 1-7, 2002: 1).**



**APPENDIX N – Other Boycott Organizations around the world  
([www.boycottisraeligoods.org](http://www.boycottisraeligoods.org))**

**Belgium: COPID, Centrum voor Ontwikkeling, Documentatie en Informatie Palestijnen**

**Belgium: Actieplatform Palestina**

**Denmark: Dansk-Palæstinensisk Venskabsforening**

**France: France - Palestine Solidarity Association**

**France: Association des Palestiniens en France**

**Iceland: Iceland Palestine Association**

**Ireland: Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign**

**Israel: Gush Shalom**

**Israel: Matzpun**

**Italy: Campagna per il boicottaggio d'Israele**

**Netherlands: Nederlands Palestina Komitee**

**Norway: Boycott Israel**

**Spain: Comite de Solidaridad Con la Causa Arabe**

**Sweden: Palestinagrupperna i Sverige [PGS]**

**Switzerland: Gesellschaft Schweiz-Palestina**

**UK: Innovative Minds**

**USA: Boycott Israeli Goods**

**USA: SUSTAIN Stop US Tax-Funded Aid to Israel Now**

**APPENDIX O – From Boycott Israel campaign in Norway  
www.boykotisrael.no**

**Do not buy products that carry the code # 729**

**Please forward this message to all folks you know. If you believe Israel is committing crimes against Palestinians, an occupier of Palestinian land, defying international laws, and defying United Nation resolutions, I seek your support and urge to pass the following piece of information to your family, friends, colleagues and relatives, and urge them to boycott Israeli products. Israeli product carry the unique code starting with # 729 Most of the products have a bar code to identify them. Each bar code contains a lot of information such as the factory and also the country where it is produced.**

**Some examples that has nothing to do with Israel:**

**383 EAN Slovenija**

**471 EAN Taiwan**

**A bar code starting with "729" indicates that this product is produced in Israel 729 Israeli Bar Code Association - EAN Israel. This is a modest, simple and effective way to support Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation and ethnic crimes against Muslims, Christians and human beings.**

**Sometimes brands are misleading, a bar code never lies if it carries that 729 !!!**

**There must be a way to work with this on a larger scale!  
Please forward this message to all!**

**APPENDIX P – Letter to the Editor published in the French language newspaper Ahrām Hebdo (Source: www.ahrām.org/hebdo).**

**Boycott . Un de nos lecteurs nous encourage à boycotter les produits israéliens pour soutenir le peuple palestinien.**

**Aux citoyens d'agir**

La situation dans les territoires occupés est des plus scandaleuses. Pour protéger et étendre leurs colonies, qui n'occupent que 2 % des territoires palestiniens, les soldats israéliens occupent près de 50 % du reste et y rendent la vie impossible aux Palestiniens. Plusieurs sondages récents ont montré que les Israéliens eux-mêmes souhaitent en majorité rendre les territoires occupés aux Palestiniens. Malheureusement, en Israël, la politique et l'économie sont totalement contrôlées par une minorité puissante qui ne rêve que d'étendre encore leur territoire.

A part quelques critiques de-ci de-là, les gouvernements européens ne font rien de concret contre la politique israélienne. Quant aux Américains, Israël reste toujours leur partenaire économique et militaire privilégié.

Devant l'inaction de nos gouvernants, c'est aux citoyens d'agir !!

Des centaines de magasins en Israël boycottent les produits français et européens, sous prétexte que la France et l'Europe osent critiquer leur politique de répression.

De plus, les produits provenant d'Israël, viennent souvent des colonies israéliennes en territoire palestinien. En évitant d'acheter les produits israéliens, et ceux de compagnies investissant en Israël, vous aidez les Palestiniens bien plus sûrement qu'en allant manifester ou en signant des pétitions. Les responsables israéliens seront bien obligés d'infléchir leur politique, s'ils veulent préserver leur économie. Que faire ? Eviter d'acheter tout produit provenant d'Israël (avant d'acheter vérifiez la provenance, en particulier : légumes, fruits, fleurs, textiles, logiciels informatiques). Eviter d'acheter tout produit de compagnies investissant en Israël. Faire savoir par courrier ou e-mail à ces compagnies que vous vous passerez de leurs produits, et les raisons de ce boycott.

La campagne mondiale de boycott des produits israéliens est en cours. Vous trouverez plus d'infos sur ces sites web :

<http://www.geocities.com/campaign002/index1.html?1020386410992>

<http://WWW.matzpun.com/>

<http://WWW.gush-shalom.org/english/index.html>

<http://WWW.palestinecampaign.org/>

<http://WWW.boikottisrael.no>

<http://WWW.inminds.co.uk/boycott-israel.html>

<http://WWW.commondreams.org/>

<http://al-awda.org/>

Jacques – Alexandrie.

**APPENDIX Q – Two letters to the editor published in the French language newspaper Ahram Hebdo (Source: [www.ahram.org.egy/hebdo](http://www.ahram.org.egy/hebdo))**

**Le monde arabe et le boycott**

Le monde arabe et l'Égypte viennent de lancer une campagne de boycottage, il y a quelques semaines, contre les produits américains et israéliens. Au Caire, une commission de sensibilisation a été installée dans différents quartiers. Certaines personnes ont eu la chance de suivre de près différentes manifestations et sur les produits à boycotter. Sur ce, suite à votre article publié dans le numéro 401 d'*Al-Ahram Hebdo* intitulé « *Discussion sur le boycott* », vous avez bien montré et appuyé le boycottage des produits en faisant connaître aux consommateurs le code-barres (729) des produits israéliens. Voulez-vous, Monsieur le rédacteur, faire publier le code-barres des produits d'origine américaine afin d'éviter de les toucher dans les supermarchés ?

Nizar Abdoussalam,  
Le Caire.

**Boycott . Un de nos lecteurs se prononce en faveur d'un boycottage des produits américains en réponse à l'alignement des Etats-Unis sur Israël.**

**Une arme qu'il faut utiliser**

Je m'adresse ici à ceux qui sont contre le boycottage des produits américains. Je veux leur rappeler que l'argent payé pour ces produits aide l'Amérique et Israël à fabriquer des armes pour tuer des Palestiniens. Et il suffit de poser la question : « *Aimez-vous être la cause de la peine d'une mère qui perd son fils dans les combats ?* ».

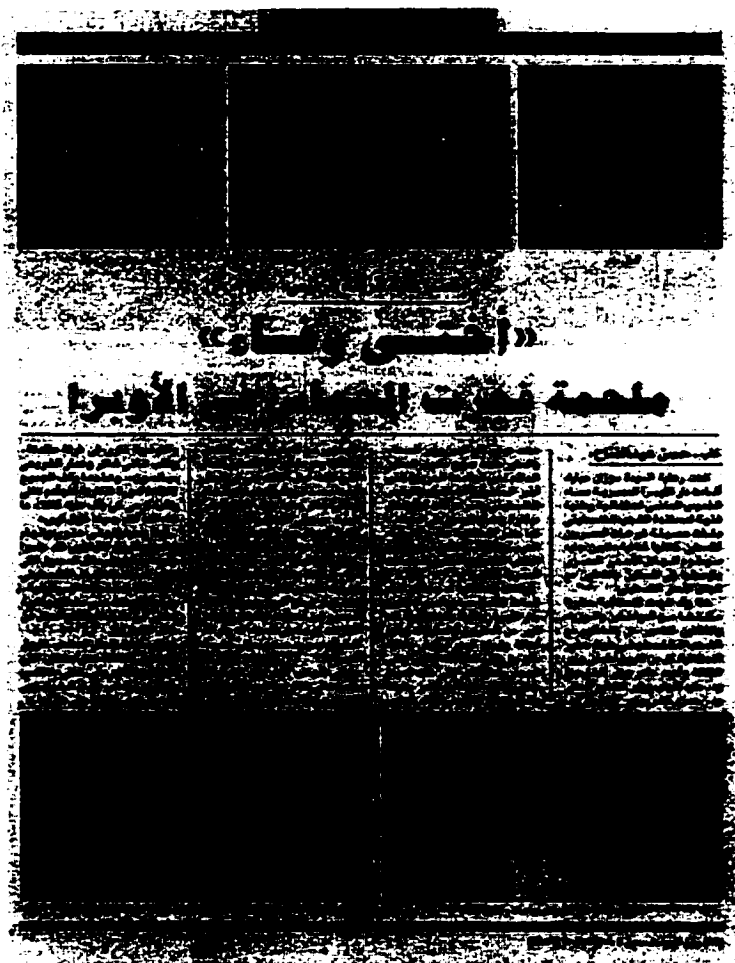
Nous devons défendre la cause palestinienne, il faut essayer de penser comment on peut aider le peuple palestinien. Si on y pense, on réalisera qu'il faut boycotter ces produits. Car chaque livre égyptienne payée pour un de ces produits se transforme en une balle qui s'enfonce dans le corps d'un enfant palestinien. Alors, le boycottage de ces produits est le moins qu'on puisse faire pour le peuple palestinien. C'est un devoir national.

Cela dit, je comprends que ceux qui s'opposent au boycott avancent des raisons comme le fait que ce serait nuisible à certains Égyptiens qui peuvent perdre leur travail. Mais je veux leur dire que cela peut être une bonne occasion pour encourager l'industrie égyptienne, alors, on va avoir une augmentation de la production locale et plus de chances de trouver du travail.

Même si nous souffrons, il faut supporter. Il faut penser aux autres comme nous pensons à nous-mêmes. Il faut qu'on fasse des sacrifices.

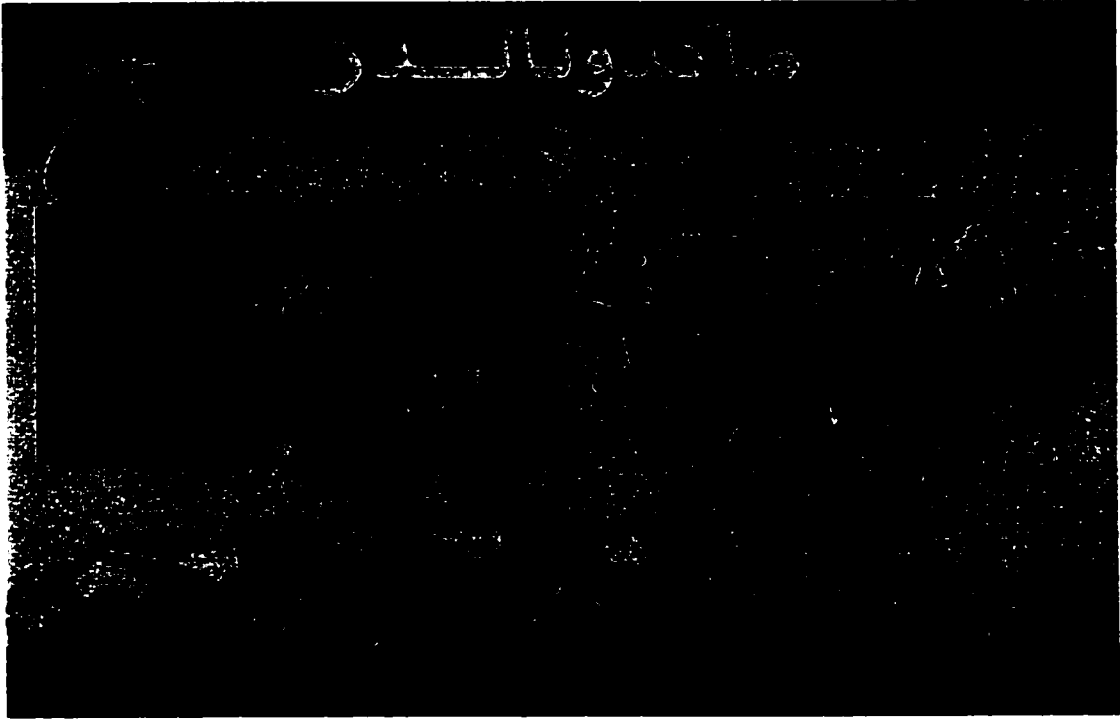
Asmaa Adel  
Le Caire

**APPENDIX R – A Charity Event under the auspices of First Lady, Suzanne Mubarak was organized at The Cairo Opera House. A large number of actors, singers and poets, etc. took part in the event. The 8 million Egyptian pounds that were raised will be sent to the Palestinian people under the supervision and cooperation of the Egyptian and Palestinian Red Crescent Societies. (Source: *Rose Al Youssef*, 4-10 May, 2002: 82.)**

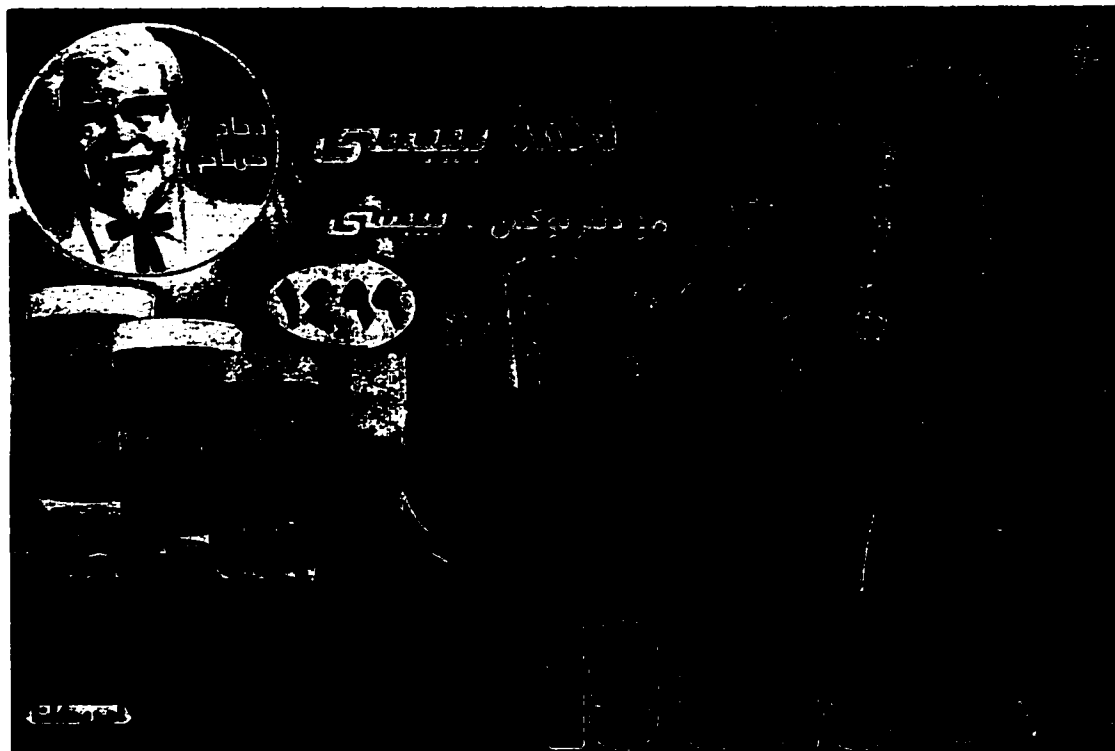




**APPENDIX S – Mcdonald's ad offering prizes of up to 250,000L.E.  
(Source: *Al Ahram*, 1 October, 2002: 35)**



**APPENDIX T – KFC ad featuring Shakira and prizes. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 1 October, 2002: 32).**



**APPENDIX U – With regards to mistrust of U.S. intentions and accusations that it is trying to control the world, this comic book type depiction is a good example that portrays in very simple terms an example of such representations. Here we see a U.S. conspiracy during the World Cup Soccer Games of 2002. (Source: *Al Ahram*, 31 May, 2002 : 7).**

Who will get the Cup ?

1) Jacques Chirac of France and Kofi Annan of the UN.

Chirac says: Excuse me Mr. Annan, but I have to go to catch our game against Senegal, it is a very important game for us if we want to keep the Cup this year.

2) Kofi Annan of the UN and U.S. Secretary of State Collin Powell. Chirac has left. Annan whispers to Powell: Quick, you must find a way to win the Cup, imagine that guy Chirac wants to keep it for the second time around.

3) Bush hurries to meet with German Chancellor Gerhard Shroeder and then Russian President Vladimir Putin. Bush says something to Shroeder.

4) When Putin meets Shroeder he informs him of the secret reason behind Bush's visit to Russia.

5) Shroeder replies with laughter: "Oh, what is this! He requested from you too that Germany give up and let the U.S. win if they played against each other!?" [the assumption is that Bush asked Putin for the same thing].

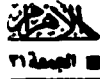
6) Finally, when the U.S. finds out what happened between Shroeder and Putin, Attorney General John Ashcroft holds a press conference.

Ashcroft: "Due to the fact that there are threats against our players in the World Cup Games, we have decided to incarcerate/detain all the fans and players from all the other competing teams, the bombardment of all the stadiums, and the confiscation of the CUP."

(Appendix U)

ذآ آلاف السنن.. منذ أن بدأت النسااء

العطرية لامطباء الأزواج



أفء

العالم

الكأس بين

استللك باسفر هنان هلمان الحق القزح على مباراتنا مع السنغال لانها مسهمة لنا انصتلفا بالكاس

يضحك

إلصكبوا شولوكو طرقة تاخذوا بيها الكاس لفسن اللى اسمه شيرك عايز يحتفل بيه للعرة العنينة

وهب شيرك ومسا. بارل



4

ولما القنى بون بشرهو لبلع الرئيس الروسى للسنغال الكلى سر زارة بوش لوسكو



نظرا لوجود تهديدات ضد لاعبيننا فى السنغال لبلد قرنا اعتقال الجمهورى والاسرى المسرى الخالصة وأصلف لللاعب وعصارة الكاس

2

وسارح بوش إلى السنغال لاللى شورهو ومعه الرئيس الروسى بونتن

وسارح بوش إلى السنغال لاللى شورهو ومعه الرئيس الروسى بونتن



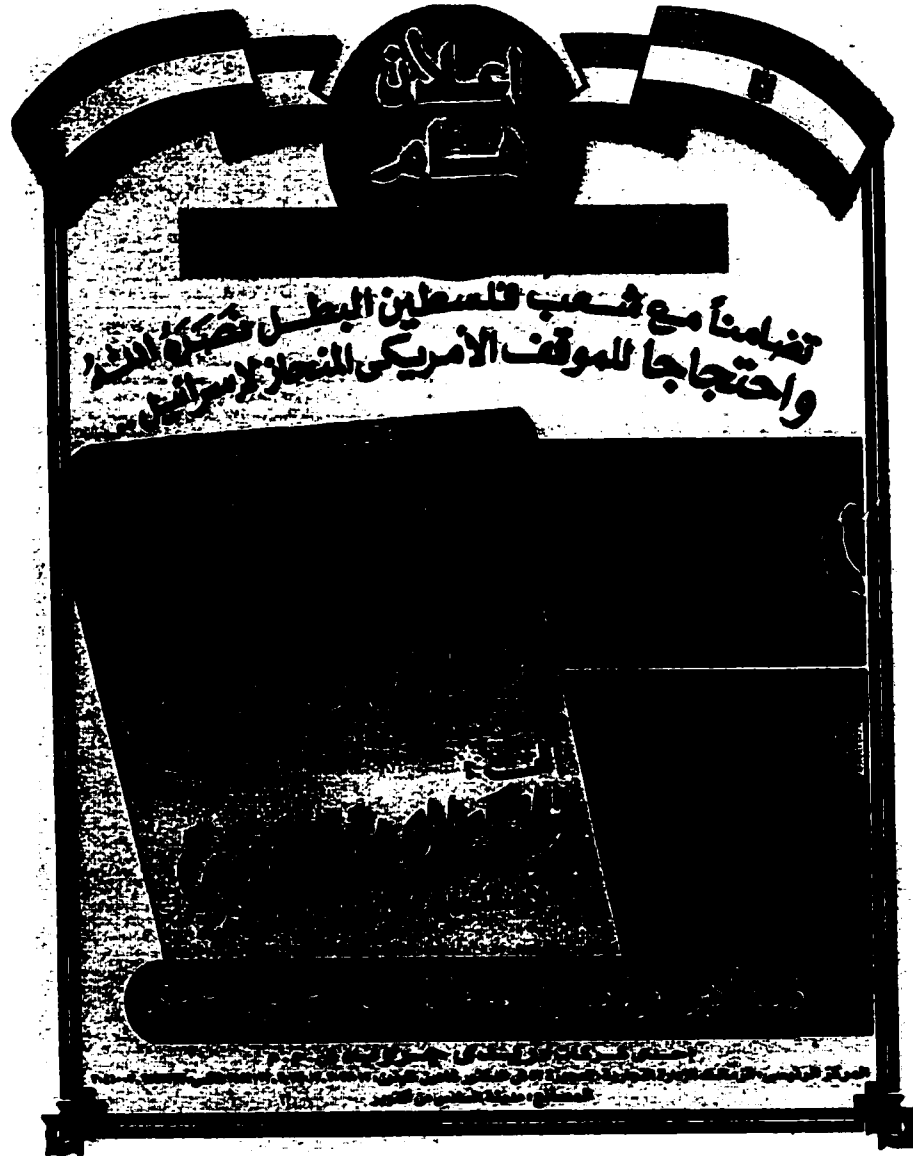
وعندما ظمت أمريكا بما دار بين شورهو وبونتن عطفه وزير العدل جون الكروفت



إيه ده هو طلب منه لكت كمان إن روسيا تمشيها ماتسوها لأمريكا إذا لفتت مصافها

**APPENDIX V- "Important Announcement to the Arab Nations**

**In solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people and in condemnation to the pro-Israeli American position Reedy Group Companies, Engineer Sayed Elreedy has decided to change the name: The Egyptian American Company for Commercial and Industrial Investments to: The Egyptian Arab Company for Commercial and Industrial Investments." (Source: *Rose Al Youssef*, 4-10 May, 2002 : 47.)**



## **GLOSSARY**

*agnabi* outside, anyone who is not Egyptian

*‘awlamat el kahr* globalization of oppression

*‘awlamat el ensaneya* globalization of humanitarianism

*‘awlamat el kahr* globalization of oppression

*‘awlamat ghaseel el mokh* globalization of brainwashing

*‘awlamat el tafahom waltasamoh* globalization of understanding and reconciliation

*‘awlamat el ‘elm* globalization of knowledge

*baladi* relating to traditional urban practices

*baltaga* is a term used to describe the actions of lawless individuals or groups who go around committing acts of violence and/or vandalism, terrorism, and extortion of money from innocent people.

*cornihce* road along the coast in Alexandria

*el‘awlama* globalization

*elmokata‘a* The Boycott

*falafel* a popular dish made with beans

*fatwa* religious pronouncements, edict.

*Fayrouz* new line of soft drinks

*Fesikh* a salted and dried fish consumed by Egyptians during the *Sham El Nessim* holidays.

*fuul* a popular dish made with beans

*gawhar* essence

*halal* legitimate and permitted according to Islamic laws

*hamdullellah* “thanks to God” a frequently used expression indicating gratitude or resignation

***haram*** all that religiously forbidden

***haweya*** identity

***Infitah*** Egypt's liberal economic policy introduced in 1974

***Inshallah*** with God's help, or 'God willing'

***Intifadah*** Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation

***karkadeh*** a sweet infusion of dark red hibiscus petals, which is usually consumed cold but can also be drunk hot

***khawaga*** a term used to refer to all non-Egyptians

***khetab*** discourse

***koufeya*** Black and white scarf which has become a symbol of Palestinian resistance

***majester*** Masters degree

***Mufti*** Religious leader / head of the *Al Azhar* which is the center of Islamic learning

***Naksa*** major disaster or catastrophe, a term used to refer to the defeat in the 1967 war

***nekabat mehaneya*** syndicates

***sahlab*** a thick and creamy drink from arrowroot and sprinkled with cinnamon and chopped nuts.

***sha'b*** the people, the nation

***sha'bi*** grassroots or popular

***Sham El Nessim*** Traditions Easter Monday celebrations

***thakafa*** culture

***tareeq elthaleth*** the third way/wave