

Interview with Ali Farzat

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1. Fact: Ad-Domari was shut down by the Syrian government in July 2003.

Questions:

A. What are your current plans? (ignored)

B. Will you reopen Ad-Domari?

(Ali Farzat) "I shall reopen Ad-Domari only under the shadow of real democracy practice in my country. This is currently unavailable as a foundation for reopening my newspaper."

C. Is your brother starting a new publication? (ignored)

D. Or are you starting a new publication? (ignored)

E. Are you continuing to publish your caricatures in foreign and domestic newspapers?

(AF) "Yes of course I am because my drawings are not anchored to a certain place and time, although they spring from local concerns and pains. But they are part of a comprehensive human art that touches the feelings of people all over the world. The works of the artist Mr. Charlie Chaplin are a clear example of what I mean."

F. Please give examples of recent publications that have featured your work?

(AF) "It is difficult indeed to enumerate the newspapers and magazines and publications that published my works or talked about it. I can add to your question that worldwide satellite stations also discussed and showed my works number about 48 stations; on top of all these are CNN, BBC, Washington Post, New York Times, Le Mond, La Stampa (Italian). For more information, just type Ali Farzat or Ali Ferzat on the web and just click enter."

2. Fact: In Iraq, recent elections gave Shiite religious parties the largest number of votes, but not a majority.

Questions:

A. Will the voting in Iraq encourage other Arab nations to engage in competitive elections?

(AF) "This is what will happen for sure. Time never turns to look behind"

B. Will the voting strengthen the cause of people like Anwar al-Bunni who are advocating civil society?

(AF) "Of course. We have a popular saying that says: 'One hand does not clap.' Anwar Al-Bunni and people like him would be delighted to find another hand represented in democracy to clap with their hands."

C. Will the voting in Iraq be enough to establish the Iraqi government as legitimate, or will it still be viewed as a puppet regime of the United States?

(AF) "One who gets out from darkness to the light suddenly might not see anything in the beginning. His eyes should need enough time to uncover and clarify the matters. It is the same with those who get out from under the oppression of dictatorship, to the ease and comfort of democracy. We had got a lot of deceiving and lying from the stupid regimes that suggest doubt to anything democratic linking it with the theory of plotting.

3. Fact: For many years you advocated the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and, in March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq and deposed Saddam.

Questions:

A. Were you in favor of a US invasion in March 2003?

(AF) "I really wished that it would had been a public Iraqi invasion of that fascistic regime and I still have a large hope for a public Arab invasion of their suppressive regimes."

B. Did you see another way to depose Saddam, aside from a foreign invasion?

(AF) "Saddam Hussein did not leave any room for anyone to think of any other way."

C. Since the US invasion, over 100,000 Iraqis have died. If the US had resolved the problems in Palestine, instead of invading Iraq, some people say that Saddam would have been overthrown by his own people, a foreign invasion would have been avoided, and many Iraqi lives would have been spared. Do you agree?

(AF) "By the time I am replying to your question now, the number could exceeded what you mentioned because of the explosions that Quaeda and vanquished troops of Saddam are inserting in Iraq."

"As for the rest of your question, it could be possible if the American Administration becomes a robot while you have a remote control device in hand to guide the robot the way you like."

D. How and when can the US remove its troops from Iraq?

(AF) "I do not have enough information about this matter, not more than President Bush has."

4. Fact: Your caricatures satirize all elements of society, including the common people who you depict as not always being intelligent and thoughtful. Nevertheless, you seem most often to satirize the wealthy and powerful.

Questions:

A. What would you identify as the major thrust of your work?

(AF) "The real motive is the talent I have together with my love of quarrelling against injustice and corruption."

B. What is your favorite target for satire?

(AF) "This whole world with its contradictions."

5. Fact: Lebanese politician and businessman Rafic Hariri was killed in a recent car bomb in Beirut. The US is using this tragedy as a pretext to sanction Syria.

Questions:

A. Does it seem logical that the Syrian government or rogue elements within the Syrian security services could be the cause of this assassination?

(AF) "It seems from your question when you say that there are rogue elements within the security services, as if you say that there are good elements. Do you think so? However, we must wait to see the result of investigations."

B. If Syria withdrew its 14,000 troops from Lebanon today, would this make Lebanon more free and more stable?

(AF) "Yes, Certainly."

C. Does the Hariri killing presage a resumption of the Lebanese civil war?

(AF) "I do not think so."

6. Fact: You are the pre-eminent Arab political cartoonist.

Questions:

A. What is the basis for the appeal of your drawings?

(AF) "A smile mixed with bitterness. Relying on mental analysis with no comments and the pleasure of discovering the meaning after seeing my drawings."

B. Why don't you mention individual names or have captions to your drawings?

(AF) "Individuals are impermanent. A comment would push the picture in the frame of local understanding of the language. Hence, my pictures aim their criticism at the practices without any written language, this makes them a humane art talking in all languages."

7. Fact: Your friend, the Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali, was assassinated in London in 1987.

A. What are the risks of working as a political cartoonist in the Arab world?

(AF) "Just as the risks of someone bursting into a secret meeting of the Mafia gangs depending on prayers that he offered to God in his life."

B. Why was al-Ali killed?

(AF) "He used to talk to me sometimes and confessed some of his concerns that squad 17 that take their orders from Arafat personally are chasing him. One week before he was killed, he received a warning from Arafat through the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish that if he does not stop criticizing Arafat and his mistress Rashida Mehran through his cartoons his life would be in danger. This was ascertained to me by Khaled the son of Naji Al-Ali."

C. And why have you survived?

(AF) "I survived because of the reasons I mentioned to you, i.e., due to my prayers and good deeds."

D. What are some of the resistance and difficult times you have endured as a political cartoonist? (ignored)

8. Fact: You are one of the few Arabs to publically call for the overthrow of Saddam and to support the US invasion of Iraq. Very few Arabs are willing to step out from the herd, especially when that means siding with the US.

(AF) "Yes I was one of the few Arabs, but those who supported the overthrow of Saddam later on became much more, especially after the disclosure of the horrible practices of the regime with obvious evidences that hurts the eye and harms the human feelings.

"Freedom is freedom whether supported by America or any other country. We must not take sides with slavery or accept it just because a certain country or certain side is supporting it. The real artist takes sides with justice away from any other consideration including the opinion of the mob. Justice is the truth and the Arab multitudes in the Arab native lands were carried away from the truth under forged mottos some of which is "No for freedom as long as America is proclaiming it."

Questions:

A. Why is the Arab world so politically correct?

(AF) "This is a normal matter while some Arab peoples are submissive to suppressive regimes and dictatorships that impose the sole opinion and the sole thinking to benefit the ruling regime without discussion or debate. At the same time the authorities are enjoying what they rob from the homeland and the native. They build up barns of false mottos for citizens to live in as brain-washed reiterating what they are requested just as parrots."

B. After the Iraq invasion, is the US now "radioactive?"

C. In other words, civil society advocates in the Arab world--are they now in a difficult position because of the US mistakes in Iraq?

(Reply for B + C)

(AF) "The civil societies in Europe and America and some Asian civilized countries were, still are, and will always be a respective example.

"We should not confuse our understanding of the civil society with the political decisions that countries take as per their dictated benefits in light of their relations with other countries.

"Those who say other than that would in most cases be employees of Arab secret services that breath hard to keep their benefits and the benefits of the suppressive mafia regimes represented by immoral and inhuman deeds."

9. Fact: You are the head of the Arab Cartoonists' Society and the "godfather" of Arab cartoonists. (ignored all this part)

Questions:

A. When did the art of political caricature take hold among Arab artists? Is it a recent development, since World War II?

B. Who are some of the finest of the younger generation of Arab political cartoonists?

C. What are some of the major Arab newspapers and magazines the feature political cartoons?

D. What are some of the difficulties of the art of political cartooning that you share with your colleagues in the US and other countries outside the Arab world?

E. What are some of the satisfactions of being a political cartoonist?