

## **“Singular Futures: Some Thoughts on 9/11”**

**By Mai Al-Nakib**

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On the one-year anniversary of the appalling attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, my thoughts turn mainly to the singularity of life ruthlessly snuffed out that day. It's what I always think about when I contemplate the violence people are capable of unleashing against other people. Let's imagine for a moment the life of someone who might have died on one of the planes: a young woman with loving parents, sisters she was looking forward to seeing at Thanksgiving, a boyfriend she had argued with that morning but who she really loved, memories of a childhood only she could remember, traces of sights, sounds, smells, and feelings uniquely her own, a history not quite like anyone else's. This is a woman who, when she woke up that morning, believed she had a future. What did this woman think and feel as the plane followed its doomed trajectory? As it crashed into the building, did she have a second to think about her parent's pain, her sisters' grief? Was she furious with those who had decided to extinguish her life forever? Or was she just afraid?

The events of September 11 have been discussed in terms of a struggle between West and East, freedom and fundamentalism, democracy and dictatorship. I think of September 11 as a tragedy of shattered potentials, an annihilation of what might have been, an attack on the future. As a Kuwaiti, I have gone through something similar. Unlike many of my fellow citizens, I have not forgotten the devastating effects of the Iraqi invasion, effects that we continue to experience daily. Kuwait is not what it once was. The future that Kuwait might have had without the invasion will never come to pass. What it has become is nothing like what it might have been. The invasion destroyed that particular future for Kuwait--a future that I think would have been brighter than the one we are faced with presently. Communities that once thrived no longer exist. Demographics have altered inexplicably. The liberty we once coveted is being taken over with astonishingly little resistance, alas, often even with our approval. August 2, 1990 wasted potentials that can never be retrieved. This August 2, the twelfth anniversary of the attack against Kuwait, I mourned for the singularity of the future Saddam Hussein and others like him have taken away.

The thing about singularities and futures is that they belong to everyone. Everyone's singular life, everyone's future, everyone's potential should matter and should be of value to everyone else. That woman on the plane, for example, should matter to a Kuwaiti who she will never know. A Palestinian life should be of value to an Israeli because it is unique, with a potential that cannot be replicated by anyone. And vice versa. Fundamentalisms of all kinds refuse to recognize or acknowledge the irretrievable value of singularity. Fundamentalists have one image of the world--their image--and will tolerate no other. The attacks on the United States last September were the outcome of this one-dimensional and stupid logic (one-dimensionality is always stupid). People living in this part of the world, whether they recognize it or not, are also victims of this rigid and stupid fundamentalism. September 11 should stand as a warning against intolerance, against rigidity, against fundamentalism. It should remind us that all lives are special, all futures have value, all people have the right to live with hope and peace. September 11 should remind

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us that the woman who died on the plane that morning had a life that will never be again, a future that no longer exists, a singularity obliterated forever.