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## Nobody Matters: On the Perils, Pleasures of Anonymity

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### Opinion

## MPs and the complexity of the nullified ones

By **Ahmed Al-Jarallah**

Editor-in-Chief, the Arab Times

**ANNOUNCEMENT** of the 2013 Parliamentary election results prompted the voters then to pin their hopes on the new legislators, especially because they were elected according to a voting system that everyone regarded as just.

However, after three years of Parliamentary life, disappointment prevailed in terms of the legislative productivity which has yet to reach the ambitious level. In fact, Kuwaitis have realized that the current members of Parliament are prisoners of the MPs in the nullified Parliaments and their complex practices. The incumbent MPs are afraid of the members of the nullified Parliaments even if the latter have been forgotten by majority of the people of Kuwait.

Despite the relatively high production in terms of legislation, the current Parliament has not dared touch the economically destructive and exploitative laws enacted by the nullified Assembly although these laws siphoned public funds at a time they are striving to accomplish a radical reform plan for the national economy. For instance, they have not reviewed the BOT Law and they have not enacted a law to end overlapping of functions between ministries as they obstruct development projects and investments, or anything similar to these laws that were enacted to serve the Parliamentary dictatorship.

They did not stop the organized destruction of social values, especially in relation to the law banning co-education which has proven to be a laughing stock. In spite of this, the law is widely used to 'tickle' the election dreams of some MPs even if it contravenes the way we were brought up.

It is very unfortunate for the members of the first Parliament elected through the one-vote system as they live under the cloaks of MPs who were deleted from the accounts of people even before they announced their boycott plans.

At that time, they made desperate attempts to be noticed by instigating chaos, as manifested in the announcement of their intention to return from the boycott because the announcement did not change anything. Majority of the people did not even pay attention to the announcement.

This fact is supposed to convince our esteemed members of the Parliament that the train has left the station. It is now on the right path and it will never go back again. Therefore, the MPs should not live under the complex practices of the previous Parliaments which caused

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### Longer term on 3 royals sought

KUWAIT CITY, June 13, (AFP): Kuwait's public prosecutor wants an appeals court to increase a sentence handed down to three royals for insulting the authorities from five years to 29, according to remarks published Monday.

Dherar Al-Asoussi said he had petitioned the court also to convict the men of using social media to insult HH the Amir.

A lower court last month sentenced the three royals, including a nephew of the Amir,

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### KIA may sell Areva stake

PARIS, June 13, (RTRS): Sovereign wealth fund Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has told French authorities it wants to sell its stake in nuclear group Areva, La Lettre de l'Expansion reported on Monday.

KIA is Areva's second-biggest shareholder with a 4.82 percent stake, according to ThomsonReuters data.

The newsletter said the Kuwaiti fund had complained that its investment in Areva, which is majority owned by the French government, was made

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### NewsWatch

**KUWAIT CITY:** On the eight day of the Holy Month of Ramadan last year, Kuwaitis were shocked to have known that a terrorist attack hit the Imam Al-Sadeq Mosque, an incident which left 27 people dead and some 227 others injured. Defying its devilish intent, the leadership and people of Kuwait stood in unity to denounce the attack with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arriving at the scene as soon as he heard of what transpired. Those behind the attack wished that Kuwait would crumble against such atrocity; however, they were sorely mistaken because the people, time and again, proved that there was always power in unity. (KUNA)

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia's influential deputy crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who leads an economic reform drive at home, left for talks in the United States on Monday, official media said. The visit comes with the longstanding US-Saudi relationship strained by greater American energy independence and last year's international nuclear agreement with Riyadh's regional rival Iran. The decades-old ties have been based on an exchange of American security for Saudi oil.

**Prince Mohammed,** 30, who is also defence minister, will hold talks with US officials on "strengthening bilateral relations and discussing regional matters of mutual interest", the Saudi Press Agency said. It gave no details on the programme of the visit or its duration. (AFP)

**ABU DHABI:** An Arab citizen was jailed for five years by the United Arab Emirates Monday for having ties to Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front, the official WAM news agency reported. It said the man, whose nationality was not given, will be deported after serving his sentence.

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### Ramadan Timings

Iftar ..... Tuesday ..... 18:48  
Imsak ..... Wednesday.. 03:03

# Amir condoles loss in Orlando

No sign of larger plot

**KUWAIT CITY, June 13, (Agencies):** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has cabled US President Barack Obama expressing condolences on the death of US citizens in a shooting rampage in Orlando, Florida.

His Highness the Amir affirmed State of Kuwait condemnation of this terrorist act; rejected by all human values and doctrines, targeting "the innocent and security of the friendly country." HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Premier Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, addressed identical cables to President Obama.



One World Trade Center is lit in the rainbow colors in New York on June 12, in reaction to the mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Fifty people died when a gunman allegedly inspired by the Islamic State group opened fire inside a gay nightclub in Florida in the worst terror attack on US soil since Sept 11, 2001. (AFP)

Earlier, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said the government strongly condemns the "terrorist attack" that took place in Orlando, adding that the escalation of such assaults requires a doubling down of efforts on the part of the international community to eliminate "this disgusting phenomenon."

Last year, 27 people were killed by an Islamic State suicide bomber in Kuwait during prayer at a mosque in the capital.

US authorities on Monday were investigating whether the gunman who killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando and declared his allegiance to Islamic State militants had received any help in carrying out the massacre.

The FBI and other agencies were looking at evidence inside and in the closed-off streets around the Pulse nightclub, where New York-born Omar Mateen perpetrated the deadliest mass shooting in US history, and the worst attack on US soil since the Sept 11, 2001.

Mateen, 29, the son of Afghan immigrants, was shot and killed by police who stormed the club with armored cars early Sunday morning after a three-hour siege.

Law enforcement officials were looking for clues as to whether anyone had worked with Mateen at the attack, said Lee Bentley, the US attorney for the middle district of Florida.

"There is an investigation of other persons. We are working as diligently as we can on that," Bentley said at a news conference. "If anyone else was involved in this crime, they will be prosecuted."

Officials stressed they believed there had been no other attackers and had no evidence of a threat to the public.

FBI Director James Comey said authorities still were trying to determine Mateen's motives but there was no indication he was part of an organized terror network, although he may have been inspired by them.

"There are strong indications of radicalization by this killer and of potential inspiration by foreign terrorist organizations," Comey told reporters in

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Clinton vows to 'stop' lone wolf attackers

## Kuwait urged to stem private IS funding

WASHINGTON, June 13, (AP): Hillary Clinton vowed Monday to make stopping "lone wolf" terrorists a top priority if elected president, saying that while the shooter in the deadly weekend attacks in Orlando may be dead, "the virus that poisoned his mind remains very much alive."

In a sober national security address in Cleveland, the presumptive Democratic nominee also called for ramping up the US air campaign targeting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. She pointedly called out US partners in the region by name, saying Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar must stop their citizens from funding terrorism.

And she vigorously called for banning assault weapons, like one of the guns the Orlando shooter used.

"I believe weapons of war have no place on our streets," she said.

Clinton's address in Cleveland was supposed to

mark the start of her general election campaign. But Sunday's shooting altered her plans and she avoided direct attacks on her Republican rival, Donald Trump, in her first lengthy remarks on the attacks.

Still, much of Clinton's comments were aimed at drawing policy and temperamental contrasts with Trump. The businessman has called for tougher action against terrorism, including temporarily banning Muslims from the US and increasing surveillance of mosques — policies that have concerned even some of his fellow Republicans.

"We have to have a ban on people coming in from Syria and different parts of the world with this philosophy that is so hateful and so horrible," Trump said Monday on ABC's "Good Morning America."

Trump was to speak on national security later Monday in New Hampshire.

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Photo by Omar Nakib  
Mai Al-Nakib, an Associate Professor of English and comparative literature at Kuwait University and author of the award-winning short story collection *The Hidden Light of Objects*, talks about the perils and pleasures of anonymity.



Amiri Diwan photo  
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with King Abdullah II of Jordan.

### Amir receives Jordan King

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday received the visiting King Abdullah II of Jordan who arrived in the country earlier Monday to extend his greetings on the Holy Month of Ramadan.

His Highness the Amir and the Jordanian Monarch, during the meeting, attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, discussed the deep-rooted historic ties between the two brotherly countries and peoples and necessity of seeking to boost their bonds. They also discussed means of cementing pan-Arab solidarity and joint Arab action.

The meeting was also attended by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanim, senior Sheikhs, Deputy Chief of the

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### Other Voices

## Muted celebration here of Muhammad Ali's life

By **Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor**  
UAE Businessman

I WAS greatly saddened by the news of Muhammad Ali's passing. I am not particularly a fan of boxing and I was never privileged to meet him personally, but I recognize greatness and sincere goodness when I see it. Ali fought all his life. Growing up in the segregated south he was victimized by poverty and racism during an era when restrooms were designated 'Whites only'.

He channelled his frustrations in the ring gaining a place on the US Olympic team and a subsequent Gold Medal before soaring to the heights of his profession entrancing the world with abundant self-confidence, poems and dances. "In the ring I can stay until I'm old and grey, because I know how to hit and dance away," he said. He had the gift of being able to lift spirits and make us laugh with him.

Muhammad Ali was a champ in more ways than one. The man born as Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr, would boast of being the greatest — and he actually was. A fierce opponent in the ring, he was a proponent of non-violence outside it. He used his celebrity status to champion the civil rights movement for which he emerged as one of its icons. He stood up against the government refusing to fight in Vietnam risking imprisonment and the end of his boxing career. "I got no quarrel with them Vietcong," he reasoned. His principles always came first no matter what sacrifices he was forced to make to stick to them.

He did more than embrace Islam, he lived his life

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## MPs row over Municipality Law

By **Abubakar A. Ibrahim** and **Ahmed Al-Naqeeb**  
Arab Times Staff

KUWAIT CITY, June 13: The Parliament approved the proposal to amend Kuwait Municipality Law No. 5/2005 in its second deliberation on Monday, including the suggestion of the government on adding new areas through a decree rather than a law.

In the explanatory note of the bill, it is stated that the law was amended in view of changes in the Municipality's nature of work and services, as well as the growing population. This will support the Municipality in addressing issues and facing challenges to ensure smooth flow of work.

It also clarified that some functions of the Municipal Council and the Executive Body of the Municipality overlap with that of other institutions due to the issuance of laws governing the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition and the Environment Public Authority (EPA); hence, the need for the amendment bill.

According to the Public Utilities Committee's report, the amended version of the law includes four chapters with 53 articles whereas the existing law consists of 42 articles. The amended law states that the Municipality is an independent public authority

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▼ **US\$/KD 0.30135/45**  
▲ **Euro/KD 0.3401**  
▼ **Yen/KD 0.0028**  
▼ **British £/KD 0.4281**  
▼ **KSE -10.06 pts** at closing June 13  
See Page 35  
▼ **DOW -72.63 pts** at 21:05 June 13  
See Page 36  
▼ **Nasdaq -29.01 pts** at 21:05 June 13  
▼ **FTSE -70.79 pts** at closing June 13  
▼ **Nikkei -582.18 pts** at closing June 13  
▲ **Gold \$1,280.80** per oz (London)  
▼ **NYMEX crude 48.71** per barrel  
▼ **Brent crude \$50.15** per barrel  
▼ **3-month \$ LIBOR rate 0.65560%**



Mai Al-Nakib

Photo by Omar Nakib

Nobody Matters:

# On the Perils and Pleasures of Anonymity

By Mai Al-Nakib

We've all heard the following nugget of contemporary wisdom: "If it's not online, it never happened." *I post, therefore I am* would be the twenty-first century equivalent of Descartes's proposition. This platitude on digital ubiquity is neither surprising nor, to most, bothersome. It's part of everyday routine. Some post daily, others by the minute. Some express sincere political concerns by sharing relevant articles or videos. Others "curate" an impeccable image of themselves for all to see. That last element is key. We want everyone to see everything. With each new breach of our privacy settings by one social media network or another, our outrage diminishes. Privacy doesn't seem to matter anymore. In fact, privacy defeats the whole purpose. In our brave new world, privacy means you don't exist.

There is no doubt that an online presence can have excellent outcomes. Making the once invisible visible or claiming voice for the previously voiceless is an ethical process that has transformed perspectives and changed social, political, and cultural life at a speed impossible before the Internet. Personalizing suffering and expressing it directly to others halfway across the globe via Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram can make that suffering urgent in a way newspaper articles or television reports seem unable to match. From the Palestinian BDS movement to the Black Lives Matter movement, online visibility provides a high degree of flexibility and mobility. Raw images and personal details about unreported injustice travel via social network conduits, and this information can potentially move to action those far-removed from the fray.

An online presence allows us to share and, especially, to access important discoveries, research, and work from all over the world that we might not be privy to otherwise. We learn about physicians and scientists doing remarkable things that could improve or save lives. We discover obscure international artists, writers, musicians, or comedians, whose work might resonate with us more than that of celebrated cultural figures who garner mainstream media attention. If such individuals did not post, we would not know about them. At the very least, access to interesting research and culture can broaden our often narrow horizons. The early dream of the Internet was of free and open access to information. Although that initial dream has been compromised by government regulations, security concerns, censorship, and commerce, some residue of it remains intact for now, and our online presence multiplies our capacity to retrieve and contribute to it.

So an online presence enables us to post and learn about significant global movements against injustice, cutting-edge medical and scientific discoveries, unfamiliar art and culture—all certainly worthwhile. However, as we well know, for most of us, online activity circles less around the above

and more around ourselves. We post our accomplishments online, from the magnificent to the mundane. We post our triumphs and our tragedies. In the name of connecting with others, we post about our children, our pets, our hates, our fears. We post our vacations, our gym visits, our food preferences, our weight loss. We post clever jokes and silly videos, riddles and IQ tests. Some of us post with integrity, others less so. And, needless to say, we post selfies. Selfie after selfie, and then more selfies still. We post as though our very existence depends on it. *I post, therefore I am*. If I post, it means that, even if I have not contributed to knowledge, the fight against injustice, the advancement of medicine or science, art or culture, I am still important. If I post, even a mere selfie, it means that I am not anonymous in this world. If you can see me online—or if I believe you see me, even if you aren't actually looking—it means that, at least in my own mind, I am somebody. If I am somebody, then I matter, my life matters.

This belief is both disturbing and dangerous. It is a sorry state of affairs to hinge one's sense of worth upon so tenuous and fickle a hook as social media. The compulsion to endlessly post about the minutiae of daily life in order to feel alive siphons energy away from other, potentially more gratifying endeavors. A "post or perish" mentality is dangerous because it can push people, especially young people, to extremes to meet whatever arbitrary standards are being imposed by their online peer group. Furthermore it buttresses the self-absorbed, opportunistic worldview motoring our exploitive economic, social, and political structures. In exceptional cases, when ceaseless posting makes individuals rich or elevates their social standing, the menace is compounded. These become the most visible and rewarded models for young people to emulate. When young people grow up, they don't want to be nurses or social workers or teachers; when they grow up, they want to be Kardashians. In Kuwait, wannabee Kardashians on Instagram make upwards of 20,000 Kuwaiti dinars per month to pose with a purse or to eat a hamburger. Online somebodies are amply rewarded for their efforts with the attention of millions and bucketfuls of cash.

The question I would like to pose here is: does an existence in the physical world not posted about online matter? What if nothing post-worthy is accomplished in a life? What if no great discoveries are made, no award-winning art or culture produced, no photogenic meals cooked or consumed? Does that unaccomplished life matter? When Bowie and Prince died, we posted our sorrow. When thousands of anonymous human beings the world over die, we do not mourn for them. We post relentlessly in order to align ourselves with the Bowies and Princes over and against the anonymous majority we neither know about nor post about. In

other words, we post to save ourselves from the perceived horror of an anonymous death. And yet, about a week after Bowie's death and Prince's, we had all moved on to the next postable thing. Bowie and Prince are as dead as the anonymous dead, and no posts, no matter their quantity or quality, can revive them. Their music remains, of course, and it is this that will prolong their presence on earth. But what about those of us without the talent of a Bowie or a Prince, without any actual work to sustain our memory in the public domain, those of us who post and post in order to compensate for this perceived lack? Do the rest of us, the nobodies, matter?

A "nobody" is normally understood as a nonentity, a loser, a nothing. To be a nobody is the very status our online existence is hell-bent on overcoming. We all want to be somebody, and in the process of striving so desperately to become somebody online, if not in life, we often disregard the nobodies. However, to claim—contrary to the prevalent ideology of global culture—that a "nobody" matters as much as any aspiring "somebody," cracks open the possibility that no lives matter more than others. Not white lives more than black lives; not Israeli lives more than Palestinian lives; not French lives more than Lebanese lives; not Kardashian lives more than all other lives combined. Despite all contemporary cultural, political, and social cues that affirm the opposite, I'd like to propose that nobody matters. Nobody is as important as you; that is to say, you are no more important than anybody else. This realization need not trigger panic or despair. To be nobody can involve an alluring range of overlooked pleasures.

Imagine a life lived with less competitiveness. Life online is life compared to others, both less and more capable than ourselves. Whether you are a stay-at-home parent or an aspiring pop star, if you are online, you are competing with every other posting parent or self-proclaimed pop star, and it's exhausting. So exhausting that after a few hours comparing yourself to others online, you are often left too drained to do the actual work that needs to be done to be a solid parent or successful pop star. It doesn't matter that you know for certain the image presented by others is constructed, its perfection exaggerated or invented. While it's true that some are propelled by a sense of competitiveness, for the majority, online competitiveness is toxic and rarely generates productivity. In contrast, to be a nobody is to work without promise of reward or accolade and to want to continue anyway. This is one of the prime pleasures of anonymity: knowing that you are doing the work you do because you can't do otherwise, because your life does not make sense to you without it. It's not a competition with anyone, except, maybe, yourself.

Another pleasure of anonymity is slowness. The Internet moves fast, as does the attention span attached to it. Time is

money, the capitalist cliché goes. I prefer Einstein's formulation: time is relative. Fame or celebrity—being somebody—comes and goes, so money must be squeezed out of it as quickly as possible. Anonymity—being nobody—is eternal, and there is nothing there to exploit. In anonymous space, anything can happen in the slowness of time (apart from the usual tricks that generate profit). Slowness provides the space to take unfamiliar ideas into serious consideration and to experiment with new ways of existing in the world. In the slow stream of anonymity, it becomes possible to experience life differently than we do in the fast lane of becoming known, important, appreciated, rewarded. Different does not always mean better, but it could, and a slow pace allows us to find out.

Another pleasure of living anonymously entails living small. The majority of the earth's population lives small not by choice, but as a result of the exploitive conditions that structure their lives, conditions that are by no means pleasurable. Their exploited lives make possible the lives of those of us in a position to live large or to aspire to live even larger than we already do. Personal online posts often convey an image of the good life, where bigger is always better and the suffering of those upon whom such expansion depends is erased. Travel adventures, grand food and drink, home decor, cars, extravagant parties, and stuff, loads and loads of stuff—all of these flood our visual terrain, encouraging us to strive for more. It's not always the case that everyone will be pushed in a consumerist direction by what they see; some might feel disgusted enough to downsize and declutter. As long as such moves are not accompanied by endless self-congratulatory posts, it might indicate a shift toward anonymity.

How much do we actually need to live a good life? In Kuwait, living smaller would allow us to live without exploiting non-Kuwaiti residents, domestic labor especially. Living smaller would allow us to live without the xenophobic fear that those who might want to become Kuwaiti citizens (stateless bidoun, long-time residents, refugees) are going to steal away a piece of our precious material pie. It would allow us to recognize that there is more than enough pie to go around if only we consumed less gluttonously than we do. Living with less would mean less reliance on government benefits and salaries, so that public funds could be spent on essentials such as education, healthcare, and sidewalks. Living small might diminish our arrogant sense of entitlement and generate more sense of social responsibility and ethical care.

An added pleasure of living small is the knowledge that you are leaving behind a smaller carbon footprint. For Kuwaitis, living in smaller houses over our favored McMansions would reduce our consumption of electricity and water. This would mean that instead of shifting the burden of

our over-consumption unfairly onto the shoulders of non-Kuwaiti residents—as a recently passed law does—we would address the issue head-on and take personal responsibility for our waste. Living with fewer cars in Kuwait would mean less consumption of petrol, less traffic, and less pollution. Given the distressing state of the environment, which Kuwait's production of oil contributes more than its fair share to, a move toward smaller can only be better.

To live anonymously offline—to be a nobody—allows us to keep secrets. Much of contemporary life, from televisual pop psychology to state security initiatives, reinforces the notion that secrets are bad. It's bad for our physical and psychological health to harbor secrets. It's bad for the state not to know our secrets. Online, everything is laid bare for friends, nation-states, and businesses to see and to exploit. Apparently we're fine with that since we continue to do it. We have come to accept that the way forward is a world without secrets and without privacy. As mentioned, few are disturbed by breaches of online privacy; the generation born into this state of exposure seems particularly unconcerned. In Kuwait, recent news that the government will be collecting and storing the DNA of its citizens, residents, and visitors has generated far less outrage, criticism, or dissent than we might have expected. Online openness has, I believe, prepared the conditions for precisely this lack of response to invasive state control. We don't seem to care about secrets and less still about privacy, even when it comes to jurisdiction over our own genes. Transparency in the name of exposing political and economic corruption has been the upside of less secrecy. However, I would suggest that some secrets—and the privacy required to maintain them—might be worth keeping. In private, secrets can unfold in creative ways contemporary life tends to foreclose. Secrets are singular kernels of surprise and difference that can have far-reaching and transformative effects (though there is no guarantee that they will). Secrets can cultivate curiosity and induce imaginative leaps without which the adventure of life falters or remains stuck in repetitive mode.

To claim that nobody matters is not nihilistic; it is, on the contrary, affirmative. It is a reminder that being nobody—being anonymous—in all its non-competitive, slow, small, secret splendor, might be more valuable than we think. In the homogenizing, consumerist, and exploitive terrain of online activity, it is worth considering that nobody matters as much as you.

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Mai Al-Nakib (maialnakib.com) is an associate professor of English and comparative literature at Kuwait University and author of the award-winning short story collection *The Hidden Light of Objects*.