

## Local

## Us vs them



SCRIBBLER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jamie Etheridge

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Writing opinions or editorials about life in Kuwait as an expatriate can be a tricky business. On the one hand, we earn our bread and butter here. Most of us have chosen to be here, boarded a flight, taken a job, built a life. We owe our livelihoods and in some cases our families and friends to Kuwait. On the other hand, Kuwait is no easy place for expatriates. Over the last several years, the government has grown more unwelcoming. We are constantly reminded of the 'burden' we place on the healthcare system, on the roads, on society itself. Rarely do locals speak up for expatriates, for the business they bring, for their contributions to the economy.

And this dichotomy arises: Us vs them. Locals vs expats. Even in the newspapers, in reporting, stories mention citizens and residents. The divide is real and substantive. Citizens have rights and privileges expats do not. We might all live under the same blue sky, drink the same filtered water and suffer the same summer heat, but we are segregated and divided.

This is, of course, an oversimplification. There are Kuwaitis married to expatriates and Kuwaiti women with children without citizenship. There are many families with citizens and residents and their lives are as intermingled and as interconnected as humanly possible. But on the whole and certainly in mediaspeak, there are citizens and there are residents.

This division makes it difficult to discuss almost everything in the press. The division sets up one side against the other. Instead of addressing the continued problems of environmental damage and littering as a community issue affecting us all, it becomes a matter of teaching residents to pick up after themselves or reminding citizens to take care of their home. When discussing school closures, the first division is public vs private, but after that, there are stories that mention 'citizens and residents', as if all our children haven't been impacted negatively by the coronavirus pandemic, the closure of schools in Kuwait since March and the online/virtual school situation.

The language we use to separate not only describes public life but seeps into our mindset, our attitudes toward one another. There are very real and fundamental differences between citizens and expatriates and these differences affect not only our interactions, but the way we experience life in Kuwait.

It also makes it harder to speak out, to speak up or to offer ideas on how to make things better. To say both what is true and also challenging. I have lived in Kuwait for much of the last 16 years and this country is my home. I love Kuwait. I love the people, the culture, the food and the way of life.

There are things I don't love about Kuwait, but as an expat, I always hesitate to say this. To say what I don't love, to offer up any criticism of the system or the way things work here, to point out the injustices - even the most blatant ones - and inequalities are certain to provoke a well-trodden out response: "Go home if you don't like it here."

It is difficult to argue with that. Except it isn't.

Because anyone who bothers to criticize usually does so from a desire to see things better. I work and contribute to Kuwait and I want to see Kuwait thrive, flourish, develop and grow. But who am I, a resident, to offer ideas?

Visions are funny things. When they are open and inclusive, they can blossom and prosper. But when they are narrowed, when they are exclusive, they also, by default, limit the potential.

## Photo of the day



View of a mosque and high-rises in Kuwait City on a clear winter day. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Why aren't women elected to parliament?



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Across five electoral districts in Kuwait, 395 candidates competed for the 50 seats in parliament last Saturday. Thirty-three of the candidates were women - the highest number of female candidates in Kuwait's history since women were granted the right to vote and run for office in 2006. Out of 567,694 eligible voters, 273,940 were male (48.3 percent) and 293,754 female (51.7 percent), according to official interior ministry statistics. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, voter turnout was impressive this year. However, not one woman candidate managed to win a seat in Abdullah Al-Salem hall.

These numbers raise the question of why not one woman was able to make it to the parliament—despite the fact that female educational achievement now surpasses that of men in many fields. Is it because we are living in a male-dominated society, where men are still viewed as more capable to manage, take the right decisions and lead? While women are thought to belong to the kitchen and are seen as housewives? Or is it because of previous experiments where women did not prove that they were capable of changing or adding anything in the parliament? Did female candidates fail to spread awareness to female voters that they are capable to speak up for their rights?

Unfortunately, throughout history, women are constantly obliged to work and toil harder in order to prove themselves and earn their place in governance, in busi-

ness, in science, in academia, in every realm of public life. Women in male-dominated environments face more challenges to make their voices heard, gain acceptance in leadership roles and be recognized for their expertise.

Regrettably, there is a belief that female candidates need to live up to a higher standard compared to their male rivals to prove themselves to be considered worthy, which is totally unfair to women and puts extra pressure on them. Why do women have to be compared to be recognized and not be simply elected based on their merits and qualifications?

However, what happened in this election proved that women did not have only men to convince about their competencies. Unfortunately, they need to convince their fellow women first in order to win. This proves that women do not trust each other. Women need to put their faith in each other to be heard. After all, who is better to talk about a woman's struggle and injustice and inequality in society better than a woman, and stand up for her? Women should rejoice other women when they see them succeed and prosper, and not the other way around. Women should empower and support each other and celebrate every woman's achievements and strength.

Historically, women have seen each other as competitors for scarce resources (male support). But nowadays women are more than capable of building their own lives, businesses and communities. It is time we started supporting and trusting each other.

I am not trying to say that women are better than men or vice versa, as each have their own role in society to maintain the balance in this world. Women tend to be empathetic, more collaborative and transformational. Women should not give up and must have more of a presence in the parliament in the future. Maybe this year was not a lucky one, but hopefully they will achieve more success in the future.