“The Making of the Chicken Nugget Generation”

Parween Ebrahim
Bahrain Teachers College, Bahrain
pebrahim2012@gmail.com

The gas station and the military base are two images that have pervaded depictions of U.S. and Gulf Arab relations. Both images have been perpetuated by the mass media as much as academic scholarship. Little attention has been given to the cultural superstructure shaped by the U.S. economic and military presence in the Arab Gulf. Or if it has, it has primarily focused on the shopping mall and consumer habits. This paper links the cultural superstructure of the U.S. hegemonic arrangement in the Arab Gulf as it directly relates to the local populations. How has it shaped their everyday lives? What cultural formations and identities has it produced? The paper takes as a case study a specific social grouping in Bahrain (which has its parallels in neighboring Gulf countries) and that proclaims itself as the “chicken nugget generation.” Chicken nuggets refers to a youth culture that has emerged with its own identity, preferences, interests, style of dress and linguistic affiliations. As one avid blogger puts it, though “chicken nuggets” had signified numerous things and groups, it ultimately became attached to “those who go to Private Schools and who watched American/English TV series and spoke with an American or English accent and didn’t know a word of Arabic. Some, of course, spoke Arabic, but their English was way stronger.” Based on fieldwork and interviews, this paper investigates the cultural space that chicken nuggets inhabit, which is alternately perceived as lacking and excessive. The paper provides an account of the rise and history of chicken nuggets and serves as a reflection on the hegemonic dynamics that shape the social affiliations and class distinctions of youth cultures in the Arab Gulf.