

# The Global Affairs Desk in North Beach

By Matt McFetridge

## “Obamamania” at the Queen of Sheba market!

I like to pop into the Queen of Sheba market on Larkin and Sutter to see one of the loveliest human beings alive, Ms. Galia Ali. She doesn't mind feeding homeless teens, selling cigarettes to the transsexual prostitutes who wobble in on their stilettos, and she doesn't get flustered with the inquisitive San Francisco foodies who buy her Halal meats. I also like going there because when I want a fix of the Islamic world, her market smells like markets I've been to in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The smell of pilaf rice, lamb, and chicken cooking (no pork, that would be “haram,” or forbidden, and no booze either) ... the tubs of olives, tahini and hummus ... the tapestry of colors and smells that comprise the tobacco for shisha or hookah pipes ... al-Jazeera blasting in Arabic ... wait a minute, Galia hasn't watched al-Jazeera in six months ... she's hooked on the presidential election and a certain senator from Illinois!

San Francisco is a political town, and in an election year, politicians tried to sway the Queen of Sheba owner to put their candidates' signs in her windows. The Ron Paul folks were

first. Then came the Clintonistas. Galia stopped watching al-Jazeera, and tuned into CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC to keep on top of the election. Galia Ali is a political junkie.

“I listen to TV day and night. All day here, then when I get home, and then when I wake up in the morning.”

She emigrated here from Yemen 34 years ago, but considers Campaign 2008 the most important election in her time here. Unlike the al-Qaida killers with their twisted version of Islam, devout Muslim Galia is all about peace and the part of the Koran where Allah expresses his love for all humans. She left Yemen because of a vicious civil war (which was actually a proxy battle between the United States and the USSR) that left thousands of her countrymen dead. She does not like war because she has seen it firsthand, so McCain is out, and guess who is in?

“I like him, he's fresh, young and different. It's time for changing the president. We need a new president.”

Senator Barack Obama's message of change has taken hold at Sutter and Larkin. What happened when



The Queen of Sheba has Obamamania!

the Obama volunteers came in with their signs? Besides adios to Hillary and Ron Paul signage, she told them, “I need five signs for all my windows.” She is glued to the TV when the networks tape an Obama speech live. She closed early to go home and watch the debates. Galia smiles at the mention of the Illinois Senator's name saying, “Inshallah [God-willing, he wins], Barack Obama.” When I asked her why she loved him so much, she replied, “So many reasons, I have to think about that.” When queried if she thought an African-American could be elected president of the United States, she replied, “If the people come together to see that this man has the strength and the courage to provide a good future, he will win.” But, Galia doesn't live in a dream world; her Tenderloin shop gives her a front row seat of America's racial chasm, and the financial divide between the haves and have-nots. When I pressed her on Obama's electability, she said, “No.” Galia watches the news, and sees with Hillary Clinton's big wins in battleground states with those white working-class Democrats, that maybe mainstream America isn't ready for a person of color to lead us. But, reality doesn't dampen her enthusiasm. Obama was about to speak live on

CNN, and Galia ran to the television. She'll go back to al-Jazeera after the election.

### Our man in Beijing

It's not a great time to be a Westerner reporting from Beijing. In last month's column on the Olympic torch, I mentioned how both the imperial Bush Administration and the paramount leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Hu Jintao demonize the news media when they perceive “negative reporting.” I ran my May column by a correspondent based in the Chinese capital, and got this ever-so-politically-incorrect response, “Yes [the media are all evil mother [expletive]] is true when covering stuff these people [President Hu and the eight angry men who run China] don't like to hear, from the Olympics to human rights to Tibet to pollution to product recalls. As long as you are reporting on the Shanghai share market, and the never ending economic miracle, we're all friends.”

In China, a Western reporter stands out like a sore thumb, and the tone of negativity comes from not only the government, but also brainwashed nationalist Chinese citizens. Reporting in China has gotten nasty and possibly dangerous. “On CNN, BBC, etc., – yes, the morons who live here are free to criticize us [the Western media], protest, abuse, and threaten to kill us – I've had thousands of death threats – or so they tell me in the office. Until they start making them in English, I'm not taking them seriously... but practically no one in

this country is free to watch CNN, BBC, SKY, al-Jazeera, etc.”

### The Hez flex their muscles in Lebanon

Imagine if you have to get to work in the morning and this is the situation outside your front door (described by a Beirut correspondent via e-mail).

“Armed militiamen trading fire in the streets. RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] fire included. Burning barricades. Airport sealed off. No flights.”

In May, the Shiite Hezbollah militia showed off their urban warfare skills and routed Sunni gunmen in the streets of West Beirut, while the Lebanese Army just watched the mayhem, doing nothing. The problem is that West Beirut was ground zero for the 15-year Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) where Muslims fought Christians across the death zone known as the Green Line, and then Muslims sometimes fought each other for control of West Beirut. My March 2007 *Northside San Francisco* Lebanon cover story predicted the future of Lebanon will be written in blood. The Hez are still armed by Iran and Syria and never disarmed like they were supposed to after Lebanon's 15-year internal carnage. During that same civil war, the Lebanese Army fragmented into either Christian or Muslim factions and fought each other, so it's a good thing the army stayed on the sidelines.

I'm not a fan of pessimism, but Lebanon's situation is slowly creeping toward Civil War Round Deux.

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### LETTERS, CONT'D FROM PG. 3

Dear Jasmine:

I don't mind at all about that bit of Glen of Imaal terrier in you. If we weren't fixed, I bet we'd make beautiful lab-pit bull-Rotweiler-German shepherd-bull mastiff-Glen of Imaal terrier puppies together. Since we are, how about a stroll at Crissy Field sometime?

Max



Dear Editor:

I just wanted to take the time to let you know that I think you have the best food and wine section in the City. GraceAnn Walden was the only reason I opened the *Chronicle* food sec-

tion for years, so I was thrilled to find her in *Northside*, especially now that she has brought back her “Chef's Night Out” column (I loved that more than the “Scoop” in the *Chron*). I love reading about chefs, so “10 Questions” is another favorite. “Tablehopper” is a fun read, and I enjoy the Kitchenless Cook's recipes, too. The reviews are dead-on – I almost always agree with them. I was especially happy to see last month's piece on Da Flora. I like the fact you don't just review the trendiest new places, but also remind us of old favorites. I think Fred McMillin is a class act (and a fun read), and I've gone to quite a few wine events in Jeannine Sano's unpronounceable column. (I still remember her funny piece on choosing between

a bottle of Screaming Eagle and her car.) Bravo to all of you, and keep it up. Your writing puts the *Chronicle* to shame!

Alice Parker



Dear Editor:

Kudos to the *Northside* staff for a damn fine magazine. It's one of the best things about the first of the month. Anyone who thinks the Internet is going to replace print should see me on a lazy Saturday on my deck reading *Northside* over an espresso and a muffin. (Though I am glad to see that your Web site is up to date!)

James Barnett