

AGENDA

LEBANON

MUSEUMS

A Night at the National Museum
 Mathaf, Beirut
 Dec. 14, 6p.m. - 9p.m.
 +961 1 612298
 Organized by the Director General of Antiquities, the Foundation of National Patrimony and the National Museum Committee, this evening launches three exhibitions that will last through February: "Ancient Kitchens," showing utensils used for cooking and in kitchens from antiquity; "Pottery from the Bronze Age to the Islamic Period"; and "24 Creators of the Museum," where 24 local artists have created works to be sold in the museum shop.

EXHIBITIONS

Andree Hochar Fattal
 Alice Mogabgab Gallery, Beirut
 Until Dec. 24
 +961 3 210424
 Hochar is a sculptor who works between Paris and Beirut and has exhibited in both cities. A student of the Neuilly-sur-Seine school of sculpture in Paris, she is worth checking out.

MUSIC

Chamber Music
 Pierre Abou Khater Amphitheater, Beirut
 Dec. 14, 8 p.m.
 +961 1 489530
 A program of Bach, Rost, Rossini, Bellini, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich performed by Nina Filipova on harp, Ondin Brezeanu on violin, Roman Storjenco on viola and Olga Bolun on piano. All of the musicians are from the Lebanese National Conservatory Of Music.

LECTURES

"New Media and the Transformation of Everyday Life in the Arab World"
 Nicely Hall, American University of Beirut
 Dec. 13, 12 p.m.
 +961 1 374374
 Continuing the Brown Bag series of lectures, Daniel Weber analyses new media in the Arab World.

EGYPT

EXHIBITIONS

"Qubba Bridge Metro Station"
 Egyptian Center for International Cultural Cooperation, Zamalek, Cairo
 Until Dec. 16
 +20 2 736 5419
 35 art students from Cairo University's School of Fine Arts show works depicting derelict urban scenes from the quarter of Kobri al-Qubba, once a burgeoning middle class area of Cairo next to Qubba Palace, where Egyptian monarchs lived in the 1920s until King Farouk was deposed in 1952.

THEATER

"Kideb fi Kideb"
 Al-Sawy Cultural Center, Zamalek, Cairo
 Dec. 13, 8.30 pm
 +20 2 736 6178
 The Al-Maraya troupe perform "Kideb fi Kideb (It is All Lies)," written and directed by Saleh Said.

French-Algerian author hits big time with novel about life in Paris projects

Nineteen-year old Faiza Guene's "Kiffe kiffe demain" sells 70,000 copies worldwide

Olivia Snaije
 Special To The Daily Star

PARIS: When Faiza Guene turned 19 last June she could never have imagined what would soon be in store for her. The daughter of Algerian immigrants, Guene, a writer and aspiring filmmaker, grew up in Les Courtillieres, one of Paris' large public housing projects in the northeastern suburbs. Her novel, "Kiffe kiffe demain (More of the Same Tomorrow)," recounts the life of a heroine named Doria. (The title loses a lot in the English translation - "Kif kif demain" would be the correct spelling but Guene changed it to reflect the verb "kiffer," slang for liking something, so the title would have an upbeat connotation.) The book was published in August 2004. It was an instant hit.

Since then, Guene has been good-naturedly traipsing from interviews with *The New York Times* or *Elle* magazine, to television and radio studios. "I used to tell my mother I'd be a writer some day but it was a dream - this was totally unexpected," she says, talking to *The Daily Star* in a cafe in the Bastille area of Paris.

Her publisher, Hachette Littératures, has sold the rights for "Kiffe kiffe demain" to European, British, North American and Japanese publishers. The book is on the Associated Press' international bestseller list and so far 70,000 copies of the novel have been sold.

Guene, alternately earnest and giggly and wearing an olive-green knit beanie and dangling earrings, has written stories practically from the day she could read and write. At 13 she became involved in a publicly financed neighborhood cultural center, which offers theater, film and writing workshops. One of the founders of the center read the first 40 pages of the "Kiffe kiffe demain" manuscript and showed it to his sister who works at Hachette. Guene still marvels over the fact that very little of her manuscript was changed.

By 14 she had written several scripts and finished her first short film, "La Zonzoniere", (zonzon is slang for prison) about an adolescent girl whose zealously traditional father and

brother keep her imprisoned in the family apartment.

In "Kiffe kiffe demain," Doria's neighbor Samra has the same fate. Guene says an acquaintance of hers lived a similar situation and was the inspiration for both her film and the book.

It is clear from her writing and her open manner that Guene grew up with a healthy dose of freedom compared with most girls in the Parisian projects who are of North African origins.

"I'm incredibly lucky. My parents are very open-minded. They are religious, but for them, your relationship with god is a personal one," she recounts. "My mother always trusted her children and I could come and go as I pleased. She knew I'd respect the rules."

Mrs. Guene was the eldest of ten children and according to her daughter is a born teacher. "My friends were always get-

By 14 she had written several scripts and finished her first short film

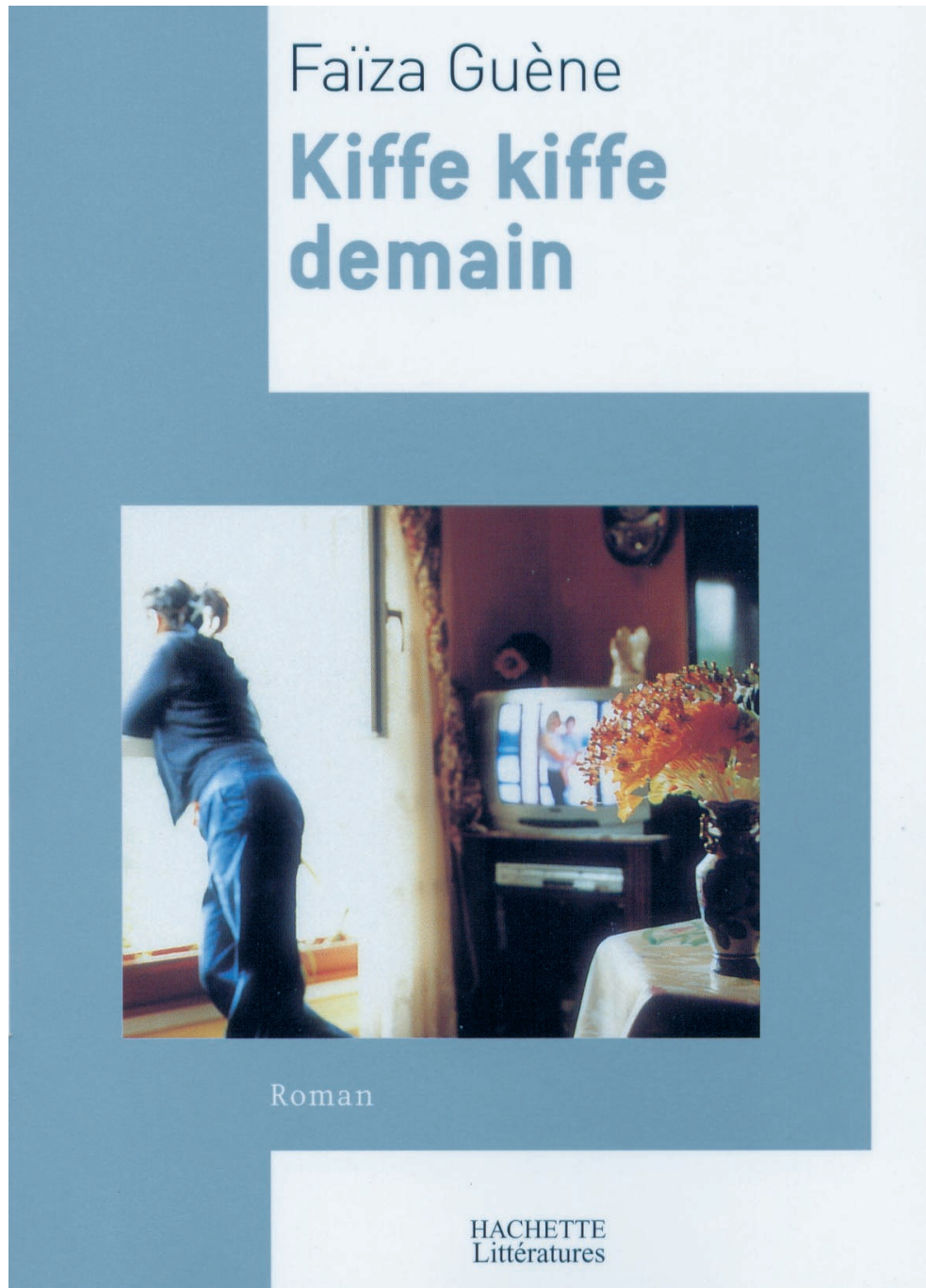
ting smacked by their parents. My mother never hit us. She talked and explained everything to the point that sometimes I'd say, 'Okay c'mon just hit me and get it over with!'"

Guene, who lives with her parents and two siblings, apparently handles her newfound celebrity with aplomb, and doesn't take herself too seriously.

"For a TV show you get your make-up done and everything is all glittery and shiny. Then you go home and the elevator is broken and the hallway smells of urine!"

From the outset, Hachette had Guene fielding journalists on her own.

"I was never nervous about giving interviews. In the beginning I'd say the first thing that came to mind. Nobody told me what to say and what not to say so I've been learning along the way," she says. "At the same time I'm glad I've always been sincere. When I do big stuff like TV shows, someone from my publishing company is with me. Sometimes I feel out of place on talk shows, but I've always tried to make my point."



Published in August 2004, "Kiffe kiffe demain" was an instant hit.

Part of Guene's point is that being from the often-grim suburbs doesn't have to have negative connotations. She has long felt that what has been written about neighborhoods like hers only involves clichés such as violence, drugs or unemployment.

While these subjects are part of the backdrop in "Kiffe kiffe demain," the novel is primarily about Doria's coming of age and her Moroccan mother's slow path to empowerment once her husband has left her for a younger wife who can produce the son that she wasn't able to.

Guene's character Doria is only autobiographical in her sense of humor and a vicious eye for detail. Whether Guene is describing the procession of social workers that come to Doria's apartment or people in the metro, no one is spared her merciless scrutiny. Another theme Guene is interested in is the isolation felt by the inhabitants of the housing projects. Paris may be nearby but the psychological distance is tremendous.

"It's easier for me to get to Paris than to the center of the area where I live. But people are afraid to cross the barrier - it seems so far away. I first

started coming to Paris when I was 14 and realized it was right there, and also not that big of a deal!"

Even before crossing the "barrier," a journalist who met Guene in 1999 wrote about her while reporting on the first workshops run by the Courtillieres cultural center: "Without having moved from Pantin [a northeastern suburb of Paris] Faiza already slips back and forth between the troubled urban zone and the other world."

Indeed, Guene remembers doing what she has Doria do:

She is wary of being categorized as a writer from an urban ghetto

She opens an atlas and traces an imaginary itinerary around the world. Doria also rides the metro from one end of the line to the other just for a change of scene.

The young author is wary of being easily categorized as a writer from an urban ghetto.

"A lot of journalists I've met have already decided what

they're going to say about the suburbs and they just want to meet you to prove their point," she says.

She was also put out by a recent call from the French Interior Ministry. They offered her a job to work on "positive discrimination," the controversial French version of what in the United States is called affirmative action, often seen as an invention that enhances differences and encourages divisions. "I stopped them right away," she scoffs. Guene feels very strongly about being French as well as Algerian. "How can discrimination be positive, anyway?"

For the time being she is studying sociology at the University of St. Denis in Paris, but she is mainly interested in telling stories, whether through film or writing. Her backbone, however, remains her family where little has changed since she has gained fame.

"If I told my parents I walked on the moon they would say, 'That's great sweetie. Now wash your hands before lunch.'"

"Kiffe kiffe demain" by Faiza Guene is published by Hachette Littératures

STAR SCENE



Ali Ajami, Armena Tchokasizban, Mahmoud Tarabey, James Watt, Abdel Malak Succarie, Fadi al-Khalil and Ano Abdel Ahad



Najj and Zeina al-Khalil



Mirna Talhouk, Jihad Kassatly and Cyntia Alper



Lydia al-Khouri and Fouad Khalil

Lebanese graduates celebrate 10 years of educational camaraderie

BEIRUT: Under the patronage of British Ambassador to Lebanon James Watt, the Lebanese Graduates of British Universities organization (LGBU) held its annual Christmas dinner at the Pavillion Restaurant in the Movenpick Hotel on Friday. The LGBU, which has been connecting and coordinating British-educated Lebanese at home and abroad, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

HOROSCOPE

- Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19)**
You will be meet pushy individuals if you get involved in certain organizations. Pleasure trips will promote new and exciting romantic encounters.
- Gemini (May 21 - June 21)**
Be prepared to have relatives or close friends introduce you to new and exciting individuals. You may not be able to help, but your support will be favorable.
- Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22)**
The morning focuses on job, health and appearance. If you join intellectual or cultural groups, you should meet individuals who stimulate you.
- Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22)**
Keep your wits about you and be sure you can trust those you confide in. You may need help with your financial situation. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance.
- Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)**
Your enthusiasm will inspire everybody around you. Business partnerships should be quite lucrative. Make sure you get legal matters checked out thoroughly.
- Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)**
Opportunities will unfold, but you must be willing to pay the price. An urge to do your own thing will be strong today. Coworkers may not be on your side.
- Taurus (April 20 - May 20)**
Your changing philosophies may lead you into new circles and open doors that will give you a unique outlook on life. Today emphasizes investment concerns.
- Cancer (June 22 - July 22)**
You may have difficulty trying to explain yourself or get your mate to understand your position. Unforeseen circumstances will disrupt your daily routine.
- Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)**
Rewards for past good deeds will be yours. Don't hesitate to voice your opinions at a group meeting, but keep your thoughts to yourself at home.
- Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21)**
Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable if you take them with that special person in your life. Your reputation will be affected. Be sure to take care of the needs of youngsters.
- Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)**
Money problems will be difficult to deal with if you have a partner. A good money-making day, yet it may be hard to get others to understand your next move.
- Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)**
You will gain knowledge through your adventure. Raise your self esteem and your confidence if you want to get back into the mainstream again.

"Hamburg Cell" actor wary at first Arab screening

Acclaimed film reconstructs plot behind Sept. 11 attacks

Andrew Hammond
 Reuters

DUBAI: When "The Hamburg Cell" was first screened in the Arab world this week, Egyptian-born actor Kamel feared audience reaction could descend into violence.

The acclaimed film, which reconstructs the Al-Qaeda plot behind the Sept. 11 attacks, drew a strong response in Dubai on Thursday, but Kamel survived unscathed to tell the tale of what it was like to play Egyptian hijacker Mohammed Atta.

"I was really nervous tonight. I thought maybe somebody could throw something. When I was coming up the stairs, I thought this could be the moment," said the 35-year-old after the screening at the Dubai International Film Festival.

"I'm quite overwhelmed because this is my first time to see the film and it's the first time it's shown in an Arab country," said the actor, who declines to use his surname.

"There is absolute evil in what they did and I did it knowing there's no way to take it any other way. But the film is asking you to know that this is where

they came from." Kamel and Lebanese actor Karim Saleh, who plays the Lebanese hijacker Ziad Jarrah, give powerful performances that focus on the psychology of the 19 attackers, 15 of whom were Saudis.

The script of Irishman Ronan Bennett suggests that Atta turned to fanaticism in part because of a cold, strict father.

The more sociable Jarrah is brainwashed by radicals. But a number of Arabs in the

The film takes the easy route and shows negative stereotypes of Muslims

audience in Dubai said the film, mainly financed by Britain's Channel 4, neglected the political backdrop of widespread enmity towards American foreign policy.

Anti-U.S. sentiment has been strong among Arabs and Muslims because of perceived U.S. bias towards Israel in its conflict with Palestinians.

"You are excellent actors, but everybody knows the political motivations," one man

said to shouts of approval.

"The film takes the easy route and shows negative stereotypes of Muslims as extreme, fervent, terrorists. There's not one positive image here," another said. Saleh responded, to applause: "But that's what they were."

In Europe some critics have said the carefully researched film is too sympathetic to the 19 men, and relatives of the victims have said it should not have been made so soon after the attacks, which killed nearly 3,000 people.

Kamel said the movie, set to air on the U.S. HBO network in January, had been careful to avoid political sloganeering.

"If someone were to make a film about Muslim suffering every day, it would be imperfect. If you just tell stories, people will want to know every story. So here we start with one, and maybe tomorrow there will be another one," said the New York-based actor.

"I know that as a people, when we go out in public our vocabulary tends to become a bit numb. You can sense how people emotionally want you to stop your ranting."



Kamel, left, and Karim Saleh, who play the roles of Mohammad Atta and Ziad Jarrah, respectively.