

The power of cultural organizing in the MENA region

A dialogue and exchange for
artists and activists



American
Friends
Service
Committee



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WELCOME to Amman and part two of *The power of cultural organizing in the MENA region: A dialogue and exchange for artists and activists*.

We face a crisis of imagination and possibility. A decade after the Arab Spring brought hope for transformative change, the conflicts, economic pressures, and repressive forces that inspired these people-powered actions have endured, worsened, or been replaced by dynamics that are often no less harmful. Many people, and particularly many in the historically large youth and young adult group, see little reason to believe that a better future is possible, much less on its way. Moreover, the recent coronavirus pandemic not only disrupted lives, communities, and businesses around the world, but it also had a deep impact on the cultural ecosystem. At the same time, the crisis further revealed the importance of arts and culture for people as a major resource for resilience, connection, and mental wellness, all of which give people hope that a better future is possible.

Hope is at the heart of any effective movement for social change. It is the catalyst for action, the force that unites people across different backgrounds and philosophies, and the antidote to feelings of desperation that inevitably emerge in the face of growing authoritarianism, corruption, and economic or social malaise. Without that hope, young people become more susceptible to social malaise and disengaged from social action.

The wave of renewed and increased censorship that emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring, and heightened during COVID-19, was in part designed to curb the spread of information that was driving organizing and set limits to mobilization. It was also designed to quash the kinds of creativity and self-expression that spread powerful ideas and help people imagine a better a future, and help young people see a role for themselves in creating that future.

Though this repression has been severe, it has been unable to extinguish the spark of inspiration. The arts in fact have often played an essential and positive unifying force, especially in places and times of hardship. Many creative voices and platforms have emerged throughout the Levant and North Africa in the decade since the Arab Spring, including artists working in the region and those in diaspora in Europe and the United States whose work is inextricably tied to their Middle Eastern identities.

You are a source of inspiration and hope for us, and we are thrilled that you have joined us in Amman.

Building on our first event that took place in Casablanca, Morocco in June 2022, this second convening will focus on creating a space for artists, cultural practitioners, and activists to learn from best practices and projects that helped promote social change.

Through case studies and workshops, participants will propose concrete and practical strategies that they could implement and expand in their own communities and countries.

This event, part of our global dialogue and exchange program, is made possible in part by the generosity of *Brot für die Welt* and *Quäker Hilfe-Stiftung*, foundations based in Berlin, Germany, and individual supporters of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). We also want to give thanks to our advisory board member Moukhtar Kocache for his wise guidance and counsel throughout this process, and our special consultant, event producer, and lead researcher Jude Sajdi. We are grateful for their contributions.

— **BILAL, JASON, KHALED, RUBA, SAFWAT, SAIF, SAMANTA** (*AFSC staff*)

Overview

OUR PROGRAM

The arts and creativity have a special and important role in bringing people together, moving hearts and minds, and helping populations—especially young people—develop positive identities and methods of self-expression. Likewise, cultural organizing can play a pivotal role in crossing the colonial-imposed borders in the MENA. Participants will have the space to connect authentically and share case studies of innovative work that demonstrates the efficacy of arts and culture work connected to social justice and human rights.

The week includes case studies, artistic presentations, cultural visits, and interactive sessions. We welcome you to engage deeply with us as we know that there is enormous insight and wisdom in the space we will create together. Our program this week is a “design experiment.” Committing to participatory and inclusive facilitation, we encourage you to let us know throughout the week if there are ways in which we can improve upon our time together.

ABOUT THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Founded in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems.

AFSC IN THE MIDDLE EAST

AFSC has been present in the Middle East since 1949 and has worked on supporting refugee communities in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. It has contributed to peacebuilding efforts in the region, focusing on vulnerable communities, emergency response, and youth civic engagement. Recent humanitarian support focused on the COVID-19 emergency response, the Beirut blast response, and ongoing efforts for children and elders in Gaza. AFSC has also supported migrant and refugee minorities by developing advocacy and research, and partners closely with our colleagues in the United States on changing U.S. policy towards Palestine. Current initiatives also focus on countering fragmentation in Palestinian communities around the world.

Practical details

VENUE

Intercontinental Amman, Jordan
Islamic College Street
phone +962 6 464 1361

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Your health and wellness are very important to us. We also will be creating space to discuss how to stay grounded and inspired in the context of the many challenges we face. If at any point you feel sick, unwell, or need assistance, please contact Samanta Covic, Bilal Olimat, Safwat Shibly, or a member of the AFSC staff.

Per AFSC policy, all participants at our event must be vaccinated for COVID. Rules for COVID testing can change frequently, so we recommend that you please bring your vaccination card for entry into Jordan. We advise you to check the requirement two days before travel as the situation and regulations could easily change. We will provide COVID tests and ask that all participants take a test on-site for group well-being.

SOCIAL MEDIA, PHOTOGRAPH, AND MEDIA

Safety and security are extremely important to us. For this reason, we ask that you refrain from posting about the event on social media. **Please do not tag the hotel, location, or the names of participants at our event during the course of our time together.** Please only post *after* the event has ended, and only post the photographs of participants with their explicit permission. Thank you.

We will be joined by some researchers and writers who are developing case studies and stories about various activities and our discussion topics. They will not develop any content without your explicit permission. Any recordings or photographs will be used only with your permission. There is no media present.

There may be some funders or funding intermediary organizations present at our event. This is a no-solicitation space, and we ask that you please refrain from requesting philanthropic support during our time together.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

If we booked your flight or you have shared your travel information with us, we have arranged to pick you up at the airport in Amman. Please look for an “AFSC” sign when exiting into the reception area. Questions to Samanta at scovic@afsc.org.

EXPLORING AMMAN

We will plan to have some dinners outside of the hotel, and on Wednesday, February 1 we will travel by bus to visit various artistic and cultural sites in Amman.

CONTACTS AND WHATSAPP GROUP

We will create a WhatsApp group so participants can stay in touch during the program. Please make sure that Samanta has your phone number when you arrive at the hotel.

For local contacts in Amman and in the case of emergency:

- Safwat Shibly +962 7 9239 1678
- Bilal Oleimat +962 7 9512 5236
- Samanta Covic +962 7 7948 1456

For other questions related to hotel, transportation, or logistics:

Samanta Covic, scovic@afsc.org (MENA participants)
Jason P. Drucker, jdrucker@afsc.org (US/EU participants)

The Program

Sunday, January 29

WELCOME

- 15:00** **Welcome Desk and Hotel Check-In**
You are welcome to check in to the hotel any time after 15:00 in the afternoon. AFSC staff will be in the lobby to welcome and assist you.
- 20:00 – 22:00** **Welcome Reception and Dinner**
Please join us in in the Intercontinental Amman for an informal welcome reception. Remarks by Khaled Elkhouz, AFSC Regional Director for Middle East.

Monday, January 30

DAY ONE

- 8:00 – 10:00** **Breakfast**
- 10:00 – 11:00** **Welcome and Morning Circle**
AFSC colleagues will share the agenda and host an interactive session for participants to meet each other. Jude Sajdi will help introduce the overall themes and topics of the dialogue and exchange program. A brief exercise will cover the “group norms” for our time together.
- 11:00 – 12:00** **Case Study 1: Peaceful, Constructive Riot**
How can drama therapy and theatrical performance bring about change on an individual and systemic level? (Lebanon)
Speaker: Zeina Daccache
- Zeina Daccache has a theory: ‘Theatre can live in the most forgotten places and grow in the most difficult situations.’ As a play director, drama therapist, and filmmaker who has worked in Lebanon’s prisons, refugee camps and psychiatric hospitals, she is on a mission: to alter the public’s perception of marginalized populations by creating a platform to allow them to tell their own stories and lobby for policy change. The question remains, however: How can this process of clients telling their own stories bring about change? As drama therapists, we often see the therapeutic impact on an individual level, but how does it create systemic change? Through illustrations of Daccache’s own work, this keynote presentation will critically examine the relationships of power, privilege and oppression embedded in working with marginalized clients to share their personal stories, both within a therapeutic setting as well as in public spaces as part of a larger movement to affect change.
- 12:00 – 12:45** **Coffee break and networking**

12:45 – 13:45 Panel Discussion: Resourcing Social Engagement and Sustaining Independence

Introduction: Jason P. Drucker

Panelists: Moukhtar Kocache, Cathy Khattar, Sarra Maali, Hatem Salama

This panel brings the perspectives and insights of organizations and individuals who are immersed in the practice of resourcing artistic practice and cultural communities in the region. What trends and patterns do they see in terms of social and political engagement in the arts sector? How would they describe from their vantage point the needs of cultural practitioners who are focused on change through work that is more participatory, justice oriented, and seeks to impact cultural norms and values? What models of resourcing such endeavors are worth highlighting? What examples or case studies can they share of innovative engaged arts communities that are able to be creative in resourcing their practice while remaining independent, vital, and doing so with artistic integrity? How are considerations of socially engaged cultural practice being addressed by their own institutions? What infrastructure can we collectively imagine will be needed to encourage work that is at the nexus of arts and culture, social justice, and human rights.

14:00 – 15:00 Lunch at the Intercontinental

15:30 – 16:30 Case Study 2: El-Funoun Dance Troupe (Palestine)

Speaker: Nidal Kebi

El-Funoun Palestinian Popular Dance Troupe is an independent, non-profit artistic organization that is virtually entirely volunteer-based. Since its inception, El-Funoun has been crowned as the lead Palestinian dance company in Palestine, as well as among Palestinians in exile. It holds an impressive track record of over one thousand performances locally and internationally. Over the years, El-Funoun has aimed at expressing the spirit of Arab-Palestinian folklore and contemporary culture through unique combinations of traditional and stylized dance and music. Furthermore, El Funoun works on deconstructing some of the issues within society; internally on ideas, norms, and traditions that they feel are not aligned with the time they are living in, and externally, the occupation that is hindering any form of Palestinian development, whether cultural, political, economic, or social.

16:30 – 16:45 Restroom / Movement Break

16:45 – 17:15 Presentation: Mariam Naoum (Egypt)

Mariam Naoum is an Egyptian screenwriter considered a leading social/ feminist screenwriter. Her work addresses the challenges of those who are marginalized both socially and economically with a special focus on women's issues. Her passion for dramatic screen writing is because she considers it a mirror of society with the ability to express a powerful mixture of emotions in each moment.

17:15 – 18:00 Coffee break and networking

20:00 – 22:00 Dinner

Tuesday, January 31

DAY TWO

8:00 – 10:00 **Breakfast**

10:00 – 10:30 **Meet the Host: American Friends Service Committee**

Speaker: Saif Atari and Khaled Elkhouz

Since 1949, AFSC has had a continual presence in Palestine and the Middle East. Today, our signature program is designed to counter the fragmentation of Palestinian communities in the region and globally. We will share our ideas about why focusing on the social and cultural fabric of Palestinian life with youth is essential for our identities to survive and flourish.

10:30 – 10:45 **Framing the Day**

Jude Sajdi, along with AFSC staff, helps introduce the overall themes for today's conversations.

10:45 – 11:00 **Art Showcase**

11:00 – 12:00 **Case Study 3: Music for Social Change (Lebanon)**

Speaker: Janine Chehade

Right To Play (RTP) is a global organization, using the transformative power of play to educate, protect, and empower children and youth facing adversity. In 2006, the work of RTP expanded to reach children and youth residing in Lebanon and has also expanded to support displaced Syrians. Though the majority of RTP's community support in its early years in Lebanon was inside Palestinian camps and gatherings, the organization has expanded since to reach all areas and diverse community topologies. One of the prime examples of RTP's approach is the Music for Social Change (M4SC) project; coming to fruition in early 2018, the project, in its multitude of community-centered facets, uses music as a vehicle to facilitate attainment of technical knowledge, life-skills, and change in communities sparked and realized by communities themselves. The M4SC intervention has given youth opportunities to express themselves, advocate and make their voices heard, and equally as important, employ newly discovered empowerment into a wider spectrum of community needs through community-led initiatives.

12:00 – 12:45 **Coffee break and networking**

12:45 – 13:15 **Presentation: Mohamad Khayata (Syria)**

Addressing the issues of Syrians living in Lebanon, artist Mohamad Khayata examines their relationship with the political and societal environment, focusing on their jobs as workers and farmers, which are the professions they are allowed to practice, while addressing the social life of women. As the result of years of displacement, Khayata's work deals with concepts of migration, memory, and identity. Evolving from photography to encompass mixed media, painting, sculpture, and music, he often combines more than one medium with photographic work to produce a multi-layered exploration of identity and nation. Many of his pieces include the ongoing metaphorical – and literal – theme of the patchwork quilt which reflects his desire to stitch Syria back together.

13:15 – 13:30 **Restroom / Movement Break**

13:30 – 14:00 Presentation: Nesrine Deli (Tunisia)

Nesrine Deli is a communications and training practitioner in the cultural field. She founded the Fromad Cultural Center in the capital of Tunisia and conducts work focusing on peer education with children and youth highlighting positive messaging in line with human rights and encouraging inclusiveness and diversity. To do so, she uses creative tools such as storytelling and music. Nesrine believes in the power of street culture, as this is where youth are mostly engaged and draw inspiration from.

14:00 – 15:00 Lunch at the Intercontinental

15:00 – 16:30 Case Study 4: Hamasat Project (Egypt)

Speaker: Hala Badry

Hamasat Project was implemented in Al-Nasreya village, a village lying some 30 kilometers outside the city of Aswan in Egypt and home to many migrants from Nubia and neighboring villages. The Tamasi Performing Arts Collective collaborated with the Jesuits Brothers Association on the Hamasat Project which aimed to provide spaces for self-expression for women and children of the community through arts training on theatre, storytelling, and music and to build the capacity of up to 15 local trainers to ensure the sustainability of work beyond the project. The initiative spanned a full year, and involved rigorous training with renowned artists from Cairo, mentorship and travelling to Cairo to attend theater and music performances, which resulted in a comprehensive and immersive experience for the women involved.

16:30 – 16:45 Restroom / Movement Break

16:45– 17:15 Presentation: Ahmad Srour (Jordan)

Ahmad Srour is a Jordanian actor currently considered one of the most prominent and upcoming actors in the industry. His experiences include hosting the first political satirical show in Jordan and starting the first ever Jordanian street theater in 2011. Srour has acted in various shows and various Jordanian and Arab series. Many of his shows and drama series received awards on the local and national level. Srour also has a popular radio show (Matab Itha3i) on Radio Hala. Srour is known for his passion for teaching drama and theater especially for children and has done many successful projects in this regard.

17:15 – 17:30 Coffee break and networking

17:30 – 19:00 Open Space

In Open Space, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel sessions around a specific theme. Individuals will propose sessions they'd like to lead, or sessions they'd like to see someone else step up and lead. Quickly, almost if by magic, a schedule will emerge, composed of sessions around topics people feel passionate about pursuing. **Please bring your topic to Ruba Ja'fra or Jason Drucker on day 1 or 2 of our event so we can create a running list of possible topics.**

20:00 – 22:00 Dinner

Wednesday, February 1

DAY THREE

8:00 – 9:00	Breakfast
9:30	Meet at Lobby Please meet promptly in The Intercontinental lobby so we can depart on time for our day's cultural excursion.
9:45 – 10:00	Travel to Manara Arts & Culture Established in 2019, Manara Arts & Culture is a café and multi-functional space in the heart of the Jabal Lweibdeh neighbourhood onlooking the cityscapes of Amman. They advocate artistic and cultural endeavours through hosting art exhibitions, music and dance performances as well as various stimulating workshops and discussions.
10:15 – 10:30	Framing the Day Jude Sajdi, along with AFSC staff, helps introduce the overall themes for our conversations.
10:30 – 10:45	Art Showcase
10:45 – 12:15	Case Study 5: Co-Authorship Approach in Theater and Drama in Education (Jordan and Palestine) Speakers: Samar Dudin and Wasim Kurdi Samar Dudin, theater artist and drama educator, will speak about the co-creation and co-authorship dimension in her approach in youth and child theater. She will address how theatre and drama evolved her approach in campaigns that address child safety at Ruwwad where she leads the programs. She will also share her collaboration with poet educator and drama in education specialist Wasim Kurdi and neuroscientist, Dr. Samah Karaki, to integrate a new dimension of co-authorship in building the safety campaign's community leadership focusing on youth. Wasim will present the power of drama and the arts as learning mediums, and he will shed light on the ways through which such mediums transform norms, attitudes, knowledge, and ways of seeing the world through several projects he led with teachers and children. His area of practice is drama in education, creative writing and project-based learning. He established the drama in education school with Qattan Foundation and led the educational research program.
12:15 – 13:00	Coffee break and networking
13:00 – 13:30	Reflective Session We will take time to share thoughts about our time together as our convening comes to a close.
14:00 – 15:00	Lunch

16:00 – 17:30 Cultural Visit: Al Balad Theater

Al Balad Theatre is a multi-purpose artistic and community space. It was established in 2005 in an old cinema, built in the 1940's. The space aims to promote young artists from Jordan and the region by presenting their works, providing rehearsal space, and contributing to strengthening Jordan cultural scene. Al Balad Theatre organizes theatre, dance, and music performances, as well as film and video screenings, hosts workshops in the performing arts, and promotes independent artistic and cultural production and exchange. Since 2013 until the present, it organizes the Street Art Project "Baladk."

20:00 - 22:00 Closing Dinner

Thursday, February 2

DEPARTURE

8:00 – 10:00 Breakfast and Closing

Breakfast is open for those who have not already departed on flights home or to a next destination. For those that have not yet departed, we invite you to continue your networking and socializing. Please let us know how we can assist you in your travel plans.



Participants

EGYPT

Amany Abouzeid Ali
Hala Badry
Mariam Naoum
Hatem Salama
Kholoud Yaseen

JORDAN

Laila Ajjawi
Raed Asfour
Samar Dudin
Emad Hajjaj
Mohammad Hammad
Khaled Mansour
Tatiana Mouarbes
Mustafa Adnan Al Sakran
Ahmad Srour
Mohamad Zakaria

LEBANON

Janine Chehade
Zeina Daccache
Reem Dalloul
Moukhtar Kocache
Cathy Khattar
Mariam Metwally

MAURITANIA

Lalla Kaber El Ghalawi

MOROCCO

Aadel Essaadani
Rajaa Essaghyry
Rajae Hammadi

PALESTINE

Anas Abu Oun
Wasim Y.M. Alkurdi
Farah Chamma
Fatin Farhat
Nidal Keabi

SUDAN

Talal Afifi
Hajer Musa

SYRIA

Mohamad Khayata

TUNISIA

Nesrine Deli
Sarrah El Maali
Ahmed Guerfal
Hamdi Jouini

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Robert Bound (United Kingdom)

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Jason P. Drucker (United States)
Bilal Olimat (Jordan)
Saif Atari (Jordan)
Samanta Covic (Jordan)
Safwat Shibly (Jordan)
Ruba Ja'afra (Palestine)
Ahmad Yasin (Palestine)

