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AFAC ARAB FUND FOR
ARTS AND CULTURE
الصندوق العربي
للثقافة والفنون

Interviews

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Cultural Production: Warding Off Barrenness

All is not well with cultural production in the Arabic-speaking world. It still oscillates between the denial of its economic dependency on the one hand, and its dissolution therein on the other; between denying its status as “production”, and becoming nothing more than content development. And besides, it remains in its launching phase, while its performers, the producers, labor to finalize it. They do this by carrying on with their work, while continuously pointing out the basic conditions of possibility that their work is denied.

These deficient requirements are undoubtedly many, the most prominent of which being the lack of freedom of expression and the impossibility of full-time dedication, along with a market stagnation aggravated by the degradation of planning processes into measures for profiteering.

And yet in spite of this general state of affairs, cultural production in the Arabic-speaking world continues to expand and diversify. The works presented by AFAC in this publication constitute a kind of manifesto about the bountifulness of this production, and their makers tackle obstacles through whatever means they have at their disposal, knowing that they not only need to accomplish their work, but also to supply the underlying structure, trajectory, positioning, even the history of this accomplishment.

The words of film director Ali Essafi when speaking about his movie “The Seventh Gate” aptly convey the situation: “We do not enjoy the privilege of being artists only, but we also must be researchers and historiographers. Artists must do many things.” Artists and cultural producers in general have inherited the barrenness alluded to by the filmmaker. It weighs heavy on him and on them. Yet, they continue to produce in order to end this barrenness, or at least they try to; for it is deep-seated, consecrated by different powers as a reality that serves them well.

At times, living under this legacy of barrenness is like moving in a sweltering desert. Faced with it, cultural producers are obliged to be more than they are, to be “researchers and historiographers” certainly, but also to involve themselves in domains they did not initially consider. The reality of this legacy and its overseers push them into these domains, which although pivotal can be absent, almost nonexistent.

For example the music band “Mafar” are not granted their place among other groups of artists via the “distinction” of musical composition. Rather, their second album “Visa” is a glaring act of resistance against Israeli occupation, among other things. “Mafar” are here asserting that their work is eminently political, that their engagement goes beyond the production itself. The same goes for the project “Think Tanger” by Hicham Bouzid who, along with his companions, uses art to cast a different eye and a closer look at the Moroccan city, seeking an encounter between the citizens of Tangiers and cultural producers where both parties get busy diagnosing the problems of the city.

Following this trajectory, cultural production may be defined as social production, starting from the sharing of urban space and the desire to improve it. But cultural production can also produce an approach, as is the case with the project “Living Room” by Sandi Hilal. After working with refugees in occupied Palestine where she examined how technocracy is used in dealing with them, Hilal sought a reversal of the situation through an alternative approach to exile, which avoids the traps of victimhood and misery.

Along the same lines, “Normal Abnormal”, Abd Doumany’s photo project on the siege imposed by Bashar Al Assad on the Syrian people, documents the reality of what goes on in Syria beyond the media’s coverage of the events, where the besieged are only numbers. Here photographic production produces an alternative gaze that draws close to realities instead of canceling them.

Cultural production can also be in the service of a particular issue. The project “Impact Data Lab” dedicates its model and production training to the service of Palestinian human rights; the project “Andariya” seeks to go beyond divisions in Sudan.

Umam Documentation and Research's project "The Passionate of Darkness - Exploring Political Prison Culture and Practices in the MENA" is another example. Its entire production centers around incarceration in the region, and aims to create a space that brings together all concerned parties. Cultural production can also concern itself with one trend or direction, as is the case with Hewan Independent Theatre Group who in their forum "Theater is a Must" in Alexandria focus their production, performances and workshops on political theater in the wake of the Arab Spring. They seek to reassert the importance of this particular theater that opens the stage to spectators instead of keeping them at bay.

It would be accurate to say that one of the conditions of this cultural production leads to its transformation into a production of narratives. This is what concerns artist Khawla Ibraheem in her project "Borders", which she started after remembering her grandmother's tale about her father's heroic journey from the Golan Heights to Syria. Ibraheem seeks to produce a narrative that cancels the limits between the two places and creates a space that joins them. Not far from this context, director Nadir Bouhmouch narrates in his film, "Amussu", a static experience of "Imider", where the residents confronted the industrial company – SMI – as well as their official supporters - resisting its exploitation of their natural resources, seeking to curb their control of their minerals, soil, and water. The film is their story of struggle.

This is also true of the film "Erased, ___ Ascent of the Invisible" by director Ghassan Halwani, where he addresses the case of individuals who went missing during the Lebanese civil war. Through this work, Halwani is insisting that every one of them is a distinct person with their own story, and that no matter what changes have occurred in Beirut after the Taef Accord, they cannot

erase their memory or zealously re-absent them. This narrative trend also applies to the work of Comra Doc Film Camp, which provides aspiring Yemeni directors with the necessary tools to film the events and stories in their war-damaged country. But besides being a narrative craft, cultural production also produces research, which is sometimes ongoing. Artist Jumana Manna was conducting research about Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and interrogating her relationship to these countries when she found the subject of her film “Wild Relatives”. Ali Essafi’s film “The Seventh Gate” is like a vestige resulting from his digging into archives and memory in the face of official amnesia in Morocco.

It goes without saying that cultural production, as demonstrated by the above-mentioned works, is diverse in its directions. It is also needless to say that this diversity does not indicate affluence, but a confrontation with the legacy of barrenness, which has been transferred to these producers, who try to cope with it. And so they are artists, researchers, storytellers, archivists, activists, politicized, citizens, media people... While this in fact gives their production its many forms and facets, it threatens their work while remaining locked in warding off the barrenness. And in some cases, when the excess of production becomes mere accumulation of content, it seems like a mere avoidance of it. Also, if this process of warding off continues for too long, it threatens to turn into an attachment to the barrenness, a situation that it becomes crucial to undo. What is needed then is programming and planning, rather than concealing the barrenness with denial or overproduction. Barrenness is certainly a scourge and should not be considered a “privilege” or a “distinction”.

JUMANA MANNA

Wild Relatives

Wild Relatives seeks to capture the contradictions and ambiguities of modern seed preservation. Planting the soil with seeds, extracting coal out of mountains, escaping war in one valley, jogging in another; the camera follows radically different human engagements with the earth across two valleys, Longyearbyen in Svalbard, and the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon. An Aleppo-based agricultural research institute withdraws its backup collection of seeds from the “doomsday vault”, in the Arctic circle, and duplicates it in the Bekaa, to secure their accessibility for breeders around the world. Tracking the movement of these seeds traces a matrix of relationships entangled in the global food regime; including governments and philanthropic organizations, scientific research institutes and farmers, crops, animals and insects.

EXPLORING
RESILIENCE IN
MIGRATION
AND EXILE

PRESERVING
HERITAGE

PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING

Tell us about your film project “Wild Relatives”. How did the film come about? What inspired you?

Jumana Manna: There is more than one starting point but it mainly came about when I was thinking of Syria. As a Palestinian artist and filmmaker I was reflecting on Syria without having ever been there. Historical films or artworks have been made in solidarity with the Palestinian cause by Syrians and Lebanese, and yet there is little done by Palestinians in return, since the Syrian revolution. This has been on my mind for some years now and the project emerged as a result of previous research, specifically on a project about the herbarium at the American University of Beirut. The herbarium is one of the earliest attempts at a modern system of plant taxonomy in the region.

If we observe the fields of archeology or music or photography or language, preservation efforts have been the cause of the very same thing that they are preserving against. There is a contradiction that I have been exposed to throughout my practice. I wonder about contemporary parallels of plant organizations and their current impact on plants or human relations. This is how I came to the seed banks as a modern parallel. Seed banks are basically storages of seed varieties, both wild and cultivated that are kept frozen at minus 18 degrees Celsius, usually in research institutions, and they are used for breeding purposes.

When I began the research on seed banks, I learned about a center called ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas), which was forced to move from Aleppo to Lebanon in 2014. This was due to the revolution spreading to Aleppo which prevented ICARDA from continuing their activities there. They left behind a significant seed bank containing over 140,000 samples of diverse seeds, and it is considered the most important collection of seeds from our region and beyond, including dry areas such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Africa, and the Middle East.

Although they relocated some of the facilities to Lebanon, the seed bank remained in Aleppo. In order for the ICARDA to continue their work, they decided to create a new duplicate collection by planting back-up seeds. Every seed bank has back-up seeds stored elsewhere in the world. To create the duplicate you plant the back-up seeds, the seed turns into a plant, it is harvested, dried and frozen again, and that is how a new seed sample is created. In order to duplicate the seed bank, they decided to withdraw back-ups which they had stored in the Arctic circle, in what is called the global seed vault - a back-up facility for hundreds of gene banks around the world, funded by Norway and other international bodies that have to do with seed banking and agriculture research. The global seed vault is actually not supposed to be used and is meant for the distant future, as the final backup for humanity's food in case of any major natural or man-made disaster. This was therefore a premature usage of the vault, with Aleppo being the

first case for this need to withdraw back-up seeds in order to replant them. Evidently, it attracted a lot of media attention. As Aleppo was indeed a doomsday city in that period, this withdrawal of seeds became symbolic of both the situation in Syria as well as the kind of instability in the world at large and our region more specifically.

As a Palestinian working on a project about Syria, how did you find a connection between Syria and Palestine, and what you have been through as a Palestinian?

JM: For me the links are obvious in terms of the experience of massive violence and mass expulsion. However, the fact that I lived in Berlin and came into contact with a large number of Syrians, which was not the case before, I became more intimate with the Syrian question as a result of many exiled Syrians. It was also a way for me to undertake a project outside of Palestine. Lebanon is closer, but again a very different reality.

There are many dimensions to the backdrop of your film: a war, a man-driven catastrophe and then climate change and the storage of seeds for potential apocalypse-like events. What is your view on this?

JM: I was thinking about this question of climate change and how one can talk about it in a way that does not compromise other forms of politics in the region. How can we talk about the impact of climate change and Syria without it becoming just a tool misused by the regime to shed responsibility on why the revolution started in the first place, and to examine how the Syrian regime contributed to the intensification of catastrophic climate conditions through its use of water and agriculture in the region. This goes back to the Green Revolution - the industrialization of farming in the 1960s and 1970s, which was mainly an American-driven endeavor that was adopted across the world, and ICARDA being one result. Thus I started looking at the relationship between the history of ICARDA, an Institute that comes out of an ideology seeking to intensify agriculture through irrigation and the distribution of modern seeds and chemicals, and the current crisis in Syria.

I was thinking of the Green Revolution in relation to the Syrian revolution - the Green Revolution being an agricultural movement to encourage third world farmers to enter a global market of commodity production; in other words to move from traditional sustenance farming into commodity production of agriculture. The film started from the transaction of seeds and then

branched into much bigger questions that are related to the transformation of rural communities as a result of industrial farming, and how the dismantlement of rural communities with little alternatives is part of the reason why we are in the chaos that we are in today.





▮ **Tracking these seeds from Aleppo to Lebanon, did you find it ironic that the second resting place for this seed bank is the Beqaa Valley, in Lebanon, which is not much more stable than Syria?**

JM: What is ironic is that ICARDA was established in Lebanon in 1976 and they moved to Syria because of the civil war in Lebanon, and then moved back to same place they moved away from because of another war! So in a sense ICARDA embodies the Lebanese-Syrian relations or population transfers due to the various crises.

▮ **Can you tell us more about the research on the film when you went to the Beqaa Valley, and your findings, which probably went beyond the scope of the film?**

JM: I had to learn a lot about bio-technology; I knew nothing about plant breeding before starting this project. What I found very powerful about this story is that the seeds which were sent to Lebanon to be replanted are being replanted by Syrian refugees, many of them from the Aleppo region. There is this bizarre displacement of the seeds and the girls who are working in the fields, with the difference being that the seeds have traveled all the way to the Arctic and back while the girls just crossed to Lebanon where they reside illegally, and they are the ones who are enabling these seeds to be reproduced. My entire viewpoint on the Beqaa was focused on the displacement, the relationship to land and the movement of both plants and populations. The field research was based on sociological anthropological procedures, talking to farmers in the Beqaa, who were both Syrians and Lebanese, trying to understand their challenges and the relationship between those two communities. Thus in the film, Youssef, who is the son of Lebanese farmers from Sawiri, talks about how it is more profitable today to make refugee camps on farmland than to plant, which makes a direct allusion to this twisted economy that generates more money from putting up tents than from farming.

A considerable amount of time went into this research phase, and through this process I met Walid, the organic farmer who constituted the final chapter of the film. Walid has nothing to do with ICARDA nor the transaction of the seeds. He is creating a seed library together with a group of friends who exchange organic seeds with one another. In fact, they totally disagree with the system in which ICARDA and the global seed vault operate, because they feel like it does not empower farmers, but rather empowers regimes and institutions. These institutions participate in the centralization of seed distribution,

which puts more power in the hands of states. Walid therefore has both this anarchist and radical perspective on how seeds should be taken care of and reproduced on a biological level, without chemical intervention whether with respect to the soil, most importantly, or in the relationship with states.

Going back to my research, I was initially attracted to the geographic connection between Syria, Lebanon and the Arctic, but I needed to understand more about ICARDA which was based in Syria for 40 years. I had many questions as to what the

relationship was with the Syrian regime, because we know that there is no institute that exists in Syria that is not under some kind of either surveillance or in collaboration with the regime. Why was it established? What did it mean to have an American-funded institute in Syria in the 1970s? What kind of impact did it have on farmers and the region and the kind of seeds that were planted and distributed. A lot of literary research went into learning about the history of the Green Revolution, the industrialization of farming, agriculture research institutes, and political ecology. Unfortunately, there is very little that is written about these in Syria. I often had to reach my own conclusions, based on the kind of patchwork I gathered from speaking to researchers in universities and in reference to other cases across the world, as well as speaking to the farmers themselves and to the ICARDA team of scientists.

▮ **What was your personal relationship to this project and how it started and where it led to, namely the world's premiere and ensuing period? You presented a different film on Syria, standing out among a huge pool of films that directly pointed to the obvious in Syria which is conflict, refugees, politics, the international community...and yet you are not a Syrian director. How did that affect you as a filmmaker in this journey?**

JM: Permits were not a problem, it was just a hassle. One of the main challenges was with the farming girls, in the sense that I wanted to shoot more with them at home and to film them and their families. Given that I am not pushy, I tried in many ways to talk to them but they were very reluctant, due to their brothers or fathers. And making them feel comfortable in front of the camera of course takes time. The challenge with ICARDA was an issue of censorship that I had to dance around and to bring the question of the Syrian regime without putting any of the characters of the film in danger.

▮ **What are your upcoming projects? Where will this take you next?**

JM: I am working on sculptures at the moment that are inspired by Khabias, which is a traditional seed storage from our region. As for the next film, I have various ideas, such as the politics of nature preservation as a cultural practice in Palestine.







الزراعة أيضاً. وبسبب القانون الذي يمنع زراعة الأرز في مصر - لأنه يحتاج إلى الكثير من الماء - بدأ أهل المنطقة بزراعة أشياء أخرى لا حاجة لهم بها، وهي أيضاً تتلوث. هناك قصة بدأت العمل عليها منذ فترة عن منطقة جميلة تقع قرب البحر اسمها «الماكس»، تتعرض اليوم للضَّرر بسبب صب المصانع، والآن تريد الحكومة الاستحواذ على المنطقة بهدف بناء مطاعم ومشاريع أخرى، فبدأوا بتهجير الناس منها رغماً عنهم وخلافاً لرغباتهم، هي منطقة جميلة جداً في الإسكندرية يعيش أهلها على ضفة البحر.

📌 **لكن لا كل هذا؟ هناك تغيير يحصل في المناطق القديمة في العاصمة حيث يتم القضاء على الأشياء الجميلة لتُستبدل بأشياء لا قيمة لها. الأمر الذي يحصل في بيروت أيضاً. هناك مشاكل كثيرة!**

م.م.: أجل، هناك مشاكل كثيرة! يبقى الأمل بوجود أشخاص يسلطون الضوء على هذه المشاكل ويعملون على إيصال الصوت والصورة. يعد حصولي على مِنح «آفاق» و«ماغنوم» و«برينس كلاوس»، يسألني الأصدقاء مراراً، وبإهتمام، ما الذي سأفعله بعد الانتهاء من المشروع. لا يقتصر عملنا كفنانين أو مصوّرين على التّوصيف، بل يجب أن يتعدّى ذلك وأن يكون دور المعارض أكثر نشاطاً في مجال التوعية والتغيير. على المؤسسات أيضاً أن تتبنّى برنامجاً لهذا. إنني أرى كثيراً من المشاريع الممكن تحقيقها، لكنها لا تزال حبر على ورق بانتظار إيجاد الوسيلة لإيصالها إلى الناس.

📌 **إنني أرى في مشروعك محاولة حقيقية لتغيير الواقع...**

م.م.: أحاول، لكنني في الحقيقة لا أقوم بهذا وحدي، بل بمساعدة أشخاص عديدين قدّموا لي مساحاتهم مجاناً ودعموني مادياً وإعلانياً. عندما يتعاون الناس على أمرٍ ما، يصبح العيش أبسط. لكنني لست أدري تماماً ما التالي.

وسيط، خاصة أنه لديّ شعور بأن المصريين يجهلون قصص بعضهم. كان لقاءً مثمرًا، عُرضت فيه الصُّور الفوتوغرافيّة وراحت عائداتها لدعم الأهالي في شراء الأدوية وأجهزة التنفس وغيرها من الاحتياجات. نُشرت القضية في النيويورك تايمز، ثمّ تم التواصل معي من مهرجان «فوتوفا» المُقام في نيويورك وبروكلين من أجل إقامة تجهيز فنيّ حول الموضوع. بدأ الصحفيون يكتبون مجدداً عن الموضوع، وتهافت الناس إلى المنطقة بعد قراءة مقالات الـ"نيويورك تايمز" وما قامت آفاق بنشره أيضاً. لقد تحرّكت قضية "وادي القمر" من جديد.

تُلقي الضوء في معرضك على أزمة بيئية واجتماعية وتسعى في الوقت نفسه إلى الوصول إلى إيجابية ما تنبع من الخراب والتلوّث. هل شعرت فعلاً بتأثير إيجابي لهذه التجربة؟

م.م.: أشعر، في الفترة الأخيرة من حياتي، أن لكل واحد منّا دور معيّن. بالنسبة لي، أسعى لخلق حالة تواصل بين الناس، وإذا كان بمقدوري إيصال صوتهم من أجل قضية مهمة، فلمَ لا أقوم بذلك؟ قابلت العديد من رجال الأعمال الذين أبدوا رغبتهم بالمساعدة. أذكر شهادتين هنا على سبيل المثال: "شركتي تستطيع غرس الأشجار في المنطقة كلها، وبالتالي الحد من الغبار"، "شركتي تستطيع تقديم الأدوية لأهل المنطقة". كلّ فرد يمكنه أن يقدم خدمة مفيدة للمجتمع، وبتضافر هذه الجهود يصبح العيش أخف وطأة. فليس كل شيء مرهون بالمال فقط.

حتى الآن، تمكّن المشروع من توعية الناس. في المرحلة المقبلة، أنوي العمل على فيلم يتناول قضية "وادي القمر"، كما التحضير لمعرضٍ ثانٍ يعتمد أسلوب المحاكاة ويستعين بأشياء ملموسة مثل أجهزة التنفس والأدوية وغيرها. سيضم المعرض تصميماً صوتياً يسمح للزائرين بسماع شخص يتنفس بصعوبة عبر الجهاز، يرافقه تسجيل آخر عبارة عن موسيقى تخلق المزاج الملائم للحالة واللحظة. لن يكون هذا المعرض في صالة عرض تقليدية، بل في كراج مليء بعواميد إسمنتية غير مطلية، مما يعطي الزوار الإنطباع بالتواجد في "وادي القمر".

من الجميل شروءك في الحديث عن المحاكاة وعن كيفية إيصالك صورة عن بيئة سُكّان «وادي القمر» إلى زائري المعرض. تقول أنك تستخدم الأبيض والأسود لأنه يتيح لك رؤية وإدراك جوهر الصورة. ما الذي أضافته هذه التقنية إلى المشروع، هل هي تحاكي الإسمنت الذي قرّرت عرضه كما هو، مثلاً؟

م.م.: في هذا المشروع، الأسود والأبيض هو شيء صاف ومشاعر خام بعيدة عن أي تشتيت تسببه الألوان، أو أي طاقة تصدر عنها ويمكن أن تؤثر في المشاهد. أريد للزائر أن يشعر مباشرة بقصص الناس، دون التلهي بالألوان وتأثيراتها. أرى أن استعمال الاسود والأبيض عند التصوير يعزّز التركيز على حركة وإيماءات الناس في الصورة، وهو مناسب لهذه القصة تحديداً. أضف إلى ذلك أن لون الإسمنت والتراب رمادي، وبالتالي اعتماد الأسود والأبيض سيضع المشاهد في الحالة الملائمة، دون أي تشتيت.

كان أهالي وادي القمر متواجدين في افتتاح معرض «تراب القمر»... أخبرنا عن انطباعاتهم وعن تفاعلهم مع الحضور.

م.م.: لا أتعامل مع الناس على أنهم موضوع للدراسة، فهم أهل هذه المنطقة وجزء أساسي من هذا المشروع. يُلزمني هذا الأمر بتحديد نظرتي تجاههم، لأنني أراهم وهم يروني، فنندمج كلانا في قضية واحدة بحيث لا يشعرون باختلافٍ بيني وبينهم. ذلك يؤثر بشكل كبير على الصورة الناتجة، وعلى المشاعر المتبادلة بيننا وعلى الثقة المكتسبة. لقد قدموا لي الدعم وتعاونوا معي لجهة التقاط الصور وإقامة المعرض، خاصة أن المعرض

سيمنحهم الفرصة للتعبير عن أنفسهم. معظمهم لم يخرج من المنطقة قبلاً، فقدّم لهم المعرض مساحة للالتقاء والتواصل مع فئات مختلفة، بما في ذلك الصحفيين والمهتمين بالشأن البيئي، والتعبير عن أنفسهم بشكل مباشر. كان لذلك كله وقعاً رائعاً. كما أنّ اهتمام الناس بشراء الصور لدعمهم كان أمراً لطيفاً، إذ أنّه أمّن لهم عائداً لا بأس به، علماً أن سوق بيع الصور في مصر ضعيف. أعتقد أن كل ذلك سيدفعهم للإيمان أكثر بالمشروع ويحفزهم للعمل معي على الفيلم. خاصة أنني بتواصل دائم مع العائلات لمتابعة حالتهم الصحية.

أنتعتبر هذا المشروع طويل الأمد؟ ما هي الخطوات المستقبلية التي تخطط لها؟

م.م.: في الفترة القادمة، لن أتعامل مع القضية بصفتي فنان يقوم بمشروع ما، إذ لا أرى نفسي فناناً أصلاً، بل أرى أن هناك أشياء يمكن القيام بها، وإن بدا لي أن المشروع قابل للتطوّر فلم لا؟ في الفترة القادمة، أرغب في العمل مع العائلات التي فقدت فرداً من أفرادها، ليصبح المشروع مساحةً لتكريم ضحايا هذه الأزمة.

أريد أن أحصل من المستشفيات على عددٍ أكبر من البيانات المتعلّقة بمن ماتوا بسبب أزمة «وادي القمر» الصحيّة. أخبرني أحدهم عن وسيلة للحصول على تلك الأرقام وسأحاول في الفترة القادمة الوصول إليها. أسعى أيضاً إلى إكمال الفيلم الذي أنفذه، والذي هو بمثابة وثائقي عن حياة سُكّان «وادي القمر». أعتقد أن للصوت والصورة مصداقية أكثر من الكتابة لدى الناس، هذا سبب آخر يدفعني إلى العمل على مشروع الفيلم.

بالأسود والأبيض أيضاً؟

م.م.: لا، لقد استخدمت الأسود والأبيض لعرض المواد الأرشيفية التي تفصح عن تاريخ المنطقة. أمّا الآن، فسيبدأ الناس بإشراك أحاسيسهم مع إحدى شخصيات المنطقة التي ستقدّم لنا سرديّة عن وضعٍ ما أو عن شيءٍ يحصل. بعد فوزي بمنحة «الأمير كلاوس» للسفر، قمّت برحلةٍ إلى أمستردام لأتكلّم عن مشروعي في مهرجان «Unseen»، وقد كنتُ محظوظاً بمقابلاتي أشخاص من «World Images» و«World Press» والتكلم معهم عن المشاريع التي أقوم بها. هذا بالإضافة إلى المعارض التي أراها والفنانون الذين أقابلهم، فرأيهم مهم.

عند زيارتي الثانية للمنطقة سوف أقوم بالبحث عن شخصيّة الفيلم الرئيسيّة، كما تراودني أيضاً فكرة التّعامل مع التراب كإحدى شخصيّات الفيلم.

أي أنه أصبح لديك الآن منظوراً مختلفاً أو مقارنة مغايرة للقضيّة؟

م.م.: قدّمت في المعرض منشورات كتبتها ووّرعتها مجاناً، تحتوي على جزء من البحوث والصُّور. تفاعل الجمهور مع هذه المنشورات بطريقةٍ رائعة لم أكن أتوقّعها. وبما أن تكلفة الطباعة كانت باهظة بالنسبة لي، أفكّر بطباعة كمّيّة أكبر ليتم بيعها من خلال المؤسسات دعماً للقضية والمشروع. يمكن لهذا أن ينفع في خلق التوعية لدى الناس، لمَ لا؟.

هل واقع «وادي القمر» موجود في أماكنٍ أخرى من مصر أو المنطقة؟

م.م.: طبعاً، لجهة التلوّث البيئي الذي له علاقة بالإسمنت وبالهواء، هناك مصانع إسمنت كثيرة، مثلاً، توجد منطقة في حلوان مليئة بمصانع الإسمنت المجاورة للبيوت. لكنني قرّرت منذ البداية أن أنقذ مشروعي في منطقة «وادي القمر»، حتّى بعد علمي بأن السُكّان هم الذين اقتربوا من المصنع للعيش بجانبه وليس العكس. هناك مناطق كثيرة في مصر تلوّثت مياهها ومجاريها الصحيّة بسبب المصانع، في الدلتا مثلاً، حيث بدأ منسوب الماء بالإنخفاض وبدأ السُكّان باستخدام المياه الجوفيّة المالحة التي تؤذي التربة، فتتعدّر





أرقاماً صحيحة، إذ أنَّ المستشفيات الموجودة في المنطقة تتلقَّى الدَّعم من المصنع، وبالتالي لن تتعاون في موضوعٍ كهذا.

تمَّ الكشف عن مادة سرطانية لا تتواجد إلَّا في الإسمنت، وبالتالي فإن الربط بين سبب الوفاة وحالة التلوُّث هذه لم يعد أمراً صعباً. يتمثِّل الجزء الثاني من المشروع، والذي أُعمل عليه حالياً، في مقابلة العائلات التي فقدت أحد أفرادها بسبب المرض، مما يسمح لي بتوثيق عدد حالات الوفاة والإطلاع على نتائج التحاليل والأشعة.

لدي سؤال عن الخطوات المستقبلية... تمثَّلت الخطوة الأولى بالاستماع إلى قصص الأهالي، صحيح؟

م.م.: تماماً، كنْتُ أوثِّق حياة العائلات اليومية. يركّز جزء من البحث على إثبات أن أهالي المنطقة موجودون هناك قبل افتتاح المصنع في العام 1948، ويُقال أنهم يعيشون هناك منذ أيام الملك فاروق. خلال بحثي وجدت الكثير من الوثائق التي تؤكد هذا الأمر، منها مستندات ممهورة بختم الملك عام 1928، ومستندات أخرى تبيِّن سكان يهود في هذه المنطقة قبل إنشاء المصنع. أذكر على سبيل المثال إيصالات لسيدة يهودية تدعى "ديزا كولينا" تعود للعام 1927.

كما زوّدت "هيئة المساحة المصرية" الحكومة بخريطة عام 1944، أي قبل تأسيس المصنع بأربع سنوات، تبيِّن مسح لمنطقة "وادي القمر" والتي كانت مزوّدة، حينها، بالماء والكهرباء والمدارس. لم يكن الوضع عشوائياً إذاً؛ لقد تأسَّس المصنع في منطقة مأهولة، وبالتالي فإن الأحقية بالتواجد والحياة في هذه المكان هي للسكان.

كانت الخطوة التالية بالنسبة لي إقامة معرض دعوت إليه الأهالي المعنيين، بالإضافة للصحافة ومجموعة من رجال الأعمال والفنانين والمهتمين بأمور البيئة. الهدف الأساسي بالنسبة لي هو جمع الناس وإتاحة المجال للأهالي للتحدث عن قضيتهم دون الحاجة إلى

يرسم مشروع «تُراب القمر» لوحة لسُكّان منطقة وادي القمر، ورقصتهم مع الحياة على رماد الموت والخراب. أخبرنا أكثر عن المشروع وعن مصدر إلهامك.

محمد مهدي: تقع منطقة «وادي القمر» شمال الإسكندرية، ويسكنها ستون ألف نسمة. جميع سكان المنطقة يعانون من مرض الربو أو من الحساسية.

أنا أسكنُ على بعد عشر أمتار من المصنع، هذه هي فقط المسافة التي تفصلنا. كنت أمر بالمنطقة أثناء ذهابي إلى الكلية، لي أصدقاء يسكنون هناك لطالما حدّثوني عما يحصل في وادي القمر. دافعي الأول لزيارة المنطقة والتحدث إلى أهلها كان رؤية منشور على فايسبوك عن طفل أُصيب بالشلل ثم توفي بسبب الإسمنت. للأسف الحالة هناك سيئة جداً. إذا ترك السكان شبابيك منازلهم مفتوحة لمدة نصف ساعة، تتجمّع داخلها طبقة من الإسمنت والتراب تعادل سماكتها 3 سنتيمترات. للحوُول دون ذلك، يعمدون الى تغطية البيوت ببلاستيك مشمّع يحجب النور، ويبقون المصابيح الكهربائية مضاءة طوال الوقت. مع ذلك، فإن الأتربة التي تتسرّب إلى داخل الشَّقّق تسبّب تفاقم أمراض الرّبو والحساسية. تفيد إحدى الدراسات بأن ما يحصل يُسمّى بـ«التحجّر الرئوي»، أي أن المريض يبدأ باستخدام جزء أقل من رئتيه، فلو كنْتُ أستخدم مثلاً 50 ٪ من رئتي، مع التحجّر الرئوي سوف أستخدم 20 ٪ فقط، دون القدرة على استرجاع ما فقدته في المستقبل. العلاج الأساسي لهذا المرض هو الابتعاد عن البيئة الملوّثة. أعاني شخصياً من الربو، ولكنه غير متفاقم لأنني لا أعيش في بيئة ملوّثة مباشرة بالأتربة والإسمنت.

أخبرتنا في مشروعك ان هذه المشكلة تصيب 50 في المئة من سُكّان منطقة وادي القمر، لكن هل لديك معلومات عن نسب الوفاة بسبب هذه الحالة؟

م.م.: خلال السنتين اللتين عملت خلالهما على المشروع، لم تقبل أي مستشفى إعطائي

محمد مهدي

تراب القمر

تعتبر مصر من أكثر بلدان المنطقة تلوثاً. في العام 1948 تم بناء "مصنع إسمنت الإسكندرية بورتلاند" في منطقة وادي القمر السكنية غرب الإسكندرية. ناهز عدد سكان المنطقة الذين يتأثرون بغبار المصنع حوالي 30 ألفاً أي ما يعادل 50% من مجموع سكان وادي القمر. يتطلع المشروع الى بناء مجموعة مناصرة عالمية تدعم هؤلاء السكان.

تسليط الضوء على
التحديات المهمشة

التفاعل مع
الفضاء المدني

MONIKA BORGMANN LOKMAN SLIM

UMAM

**The Passionate of Darkness -
Exploring Political Prison Culture
and Practices in the MENA Region**

The Passionate of Darkness is a regional, multilayered and interdisciplinary project that seeks to create a platform dedicated to matters related to detention, prison, torture and trauma. The platform will facilitate exchanges between artists, academics, former detainees, related organizations and human rights advocates whose actions are focused on such matters, thus bridging artistic and cultural expressions and human rights initiatives.

**SHEDDING LIGHT
ON MARGINALIZED
NARRATIVES**

**ENGAGING WITH THE
CIVIC SPACE**

**PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING**



Monika Borgmann: This research project, which we proposed to AFAC, is the result of several years of work during which a lot of efforts have been invested on different levels. We felt that we have to bring together all these elements on which we have been working for the past years, we have also been accumulating a lot of materials along with multiple partners... We also felt that the prison is a key to understand the situation in the Arab region today.

Lokman Slim: Indeed, after years of working on this topic we realized clearly the limitation of an exclusive artistic approach, the limitation of a human rights advocacy approach, and the limitation of an exclusive security sector reform approach. This feeling that there is a lacking synergy between all these approaches, represents the rationale and the philosophy of this project. We know very well that in this world it is unlikely to live without prisons. However it is becoming unbearable just to continue denouncing, and it is useless to keep playing the role of the victim. With the Arab spring, a new dynamic was initiated. For the first time, prison really took its place in the Agora, in the public space. Obviously before 2011 some countries had to address this issue; Morocco had to address it, even while Hassan II was still alive but it happened under the pressure of the international community. In Syria there was an aborted attempt, however it could not have happened without the death of Hafez El Assad. Then in 2011 it became a pressing issue and we saw clearly how the counter-spring today is relying heavily once more on the prison as a tool of suppression and oppression.

All these reasons led us conceptually to come up with a very simple idea of trying to work on setting up a space in both senses, virtual of course but which could also turn into a physical component, which deals with all these questions and tries to bring around the table all those involved, even if we know that some of the stakeholders will not be happy to be invited.

MB: We strongly believe in interdisciplinary projects. It is not the first time that we are launching such an initiative, but as Lokman was saying, we felt the past limitations of a purely human right oriented approach, or purely artistic or purely security-oriented, so in bringing all these actors together, we profoundly believed that a new dynamic can emerge from this.

📖 **A project of this scale and a project that is this interdisciplinary, could not generate the only desired outcomes as raising awareness and advocating. So do you have any foreseeable results and goals which you want to result from this?**

LS: Since it is a somewhat megalomaniac project, we would be very happy if we succeeded in engraining the legitimacy of a regional forum dealing with these issues and we know that we need to be very careful about our expectations. But let me delve more in this megalomaniac approach: why not have finally something like a report on the state of prisons in the Arab world, on the one hand aggregating what human right activists are doing, trying to sense what artists are doing, trying to have a look at what efforts are being done in terms of security sector reform... actually saying clearly that it is not a factual problem which pops off and on and then off again. It is a long-standing problem, on the one hand it has to do with our political culture, but also we cannot continue saying that it is inscribed in our genes. So there are also solutions, which are being tested; sometimes they fail, sometimes they get positive results. Keeping the debate at a certain level, I would say if we succeed setting a standard for the debate, we would be very happy and perhaps others could take on from what we did.

📖 **But working on a regional level, do you not foresee the challenges it can pose, because you will be dealing with so many different contexts, different contexts of imprisonment, different contexts of how the public perceives political detention...**

LS: Of course, it is a very relevant criticism which could be made to this approach, and we know that perhaps we will never succeed in being fair towards all the region we seek to cover. However, as we do not really believe in country-based solutions, and as we believe that the cultural dimension of the problem is an overwhelming one, we think that any shortcomings we could face in implementing the project will be offset by the idea that



looking for a country-based solution is not a solution.

📌 When you are working on a subject where the majority of the people affected are unreachable to you either because they are still in prison or because they are afraid of speaking out for security reasons, how do you approach that risk of coming off as a shallow research because you are not directly in contact with the majority of your subjects?

LS: This explains exactly why our approach from the beginning tries to widen the number of stakeholders. We are aware that we will never be able to reach out fully to everyone and therefore we believe that we should take advantage of what others are doing on a more specific micro-level.

MB: We have been building up, in the last years, a quite extensive network with other organizations and this gives us also some confidence to have a certain outreach. This network includes a web of former detainees.

LS: Commenting on the size of the network, the quantitative approach is not the most important. What UMAM did and what it strives to continue doing is exploring the possibilities of setting templates in a way. So what we are trying to do is to try to engineer a template rather than doing all the work.

📌 How would you carry on the work? Have you faced any challenges, considering that most of the subjects you are working around are prisoners, which is predominant in repressive regimes? How are you able to work on that topic under repressive regimes, what challenges do you face?

LS: There are several differences between oppressive regimes in this area. The question pertains as to how to navigate in all these different situations. Obviously if you tell me that now we will go to Cairo and start making interviews with people, it will never work out. So if you take the Egyptian example, for instance that we are reaching out to people who are already working on this, who are not necessarily Cairo-based or Egypt-based, if you are talking about Gulf states, which are another example where the issue prison is getting more and more complex as the oppression is getting more elaborated. Again we are trying to bring on board of our work, those who are working specifically on countries or on issues, sometimes we need to toy with the wording and sometimes we need to present the project as one of just historical interest.

📌 The first point you mentioned was that it is very evident that the human rights approach only or the artistic approach only, are not viable anymore. In this project where you combine all these



different disciplines, how do you think it will take a more radical form than all the previous work done?

LS: Our idea was that those actors or artistic practitioners or artistic human rights activists need to be aware of this limitation and I think that one of the aims of the project is to bring these practitioners to a kind of self-criticism or at least to a certain level of awareness so that they stop just living in their tribe in a kind of autistic mode. Will it be successful? I believe it could make sense to raise these questions and to spread them, and when we insist that we would like to always involve state actors, we believe that it is another way of introducing the questioning everywhere.

VISUAL ARTS

MOROCCO

HICHAM BOUZID

Think Tanger

“Think Tanger” is a project based on the idea that art and culture are vital for the development and the vitality of the city. This platform is launched to gather artists, thinkers, architects and designers to create creative projects and art installation to respond to the major social and cultural challenges faced by the city of Tangier.

PRESERVING
HERITAGE

CONTRIBUTING TO
SOCIAL COHESION
AND COMMUNITY
BUILDING

ENGAGING
WITH THE
CIVIC SPACE



📖 Can you tell us more about your project? Where it came from and what is the inspiration behind it?

Hicham Bouzid: Think Tanger started 3 years ago with a very simple idea. I would really like to tell the story of Think Tanger as a storyteller, because I am myself from Tangier, and I have been living here since 2009, with a 3-year break during which I was in Marrakesh, but I still did backs and forths between Marrakesh, Casablanca and Tangier since I was working on a project. Every time I was coming back to Tangier between 2014 to 2017, I was observing so many things changing in the city. I mean literally witnessing the expansion of the city; the explosion of the city even. And there started the question: what was happening in the city? When we tried to find out actually what was happening, we faced so many missing documentations about the city, not really knowing what is occurring. We were going to the urban agencies here, people were not really responsive, although it is our right as citizens to know what is happening, because public money is going there... Thus there was this interesting transformation occurring in the city and we were feeling excluded as citizens from this mutation. And this is really where Think Tanger started. We tried to put together – and when I say we, I mean myself and Amina Mourid; she is my colleague and the Project Manager – this project as a reflection and an attempt to understand what is happening in town. The basic idea was a realization that mutations are taking place, that there are big projects that the city is undertaking. Instead of going to search for this information with people who work for the city, why don't we mix? So we can have either both citizen opinions, city workers' opinions and architects' opinions. Trying to gather a whole panoply of understanding the city and its changes. And this is literally how it started.

The first year we put together a whole program trying to understand what is happening here, and the program was as follows: it consisted of an annual art residency, where we invite 8 Moroccan artists from different practices; a program of talks and conferences, and a program of trainings in cultural management. The full year ended with an exhibition where we presented the whole process of the first year, highlighting something going on in the city. The art residency was here to highlight those mutations. When we search

for Tangier on google, we constantly have these images taken by the French, about how beautiful Tangier is, but we do not get a sense of what the city is presently. The idea was to work with different artists, with different practices, to give a sense of what Tangier's mutation looks like today. This is what we did and I think we did it very well, because the 8 artists were all really great practitioners; there were sound artists, photographers, designers, graphic designers and illustrators, all gathered in one show with one theme. They all had one open question or open sentence: Tangier, a city in mutation. Each of the artists was taking his interpretation of the urban mutations. The idea was also to give a real visual identity to these mutations.

Subsequent to this art residency program, was another program of talks and conferences, which was a little bit more political, because we were trying to open a conversation with politicians, with the people who work at the city, at the wilaya...

📖 Conversations about what?

HB: For instance, the program with the politicians was about political accountability, and the idea was to bring the people we voted for, into a larger conversation to understand the city, what is happening to the city, what projects the city is undertaking, and how we as cultural organizations could be included in these reflections. It was really good, we were very passionate, because we felt that we opened a very small part of a door, to start talking with the local authorities. For instance, we engaged in a partnership with Racines in Casablanca, working on cultural advocacy alongside the urban challenges and the whole of arts and culture in the city. Specifically in this very important moment where people are migrating into Tangier, there is this rural exodus massively impacting the different communities of the city, and our idea was to talk about the role of arts and culture in all these levels of mutations, and how it could be considered since the beginning in order to participate and help people to have a better integration in the new urban spaces.

This was the program in the first year. Both the art residency and the talks/conferences programs were one-year based programs. Following the first year,



we had really experimented and started to understand what is happening in Tangier. With that said, we asked ourselves along with the team of the project: now we got into this stage; what would be the next step? How could we be really active in the communities using arts and culture as our main base, and go and experiment in the city through different practices? This is how we spent the year 2017. We did not organize any full activities in the first year, we did not launch the art residency nor any other initiative, and we are still working on a real program of partnership with different communities of the city, in order to try to be more impacting... In 2017, we first issued a call for people of various backgrounds, and created a scientific committee of Think Tanger, composed of 7 or 8 people from backgrounds such as urban geographies, artists, designers, and architects and urban planners. We have those different members with us today, who help us understand more, and constitute a reference to understand so many things about the city.

What impact did the project have on local culture in Tangier? And is it possible to translate the experiment in other cities in Morocco? What about the economic value of the project? You mentioned that you are a curator and you have different programs that are offering artists opportunities that were not available before.. So do you think your project had an economic value in the arts and culture sector in Tangier specifically?

HB: Talking about the impact in general, whether economic, political or the social impact of the project, I think we are generating it, since we would not think about Think Tanger as a very long process that has objectives 10 or 20 years from now. It is really hard to talk about the impact of Think Tanger today, because I could mention bringing on the communities, and opening the conversation to the public about specific subjects that were not specifically addressed before Think Tanger existed, or giving a platform to those different communities in order to talk about what is wrong in the city, etc. But the real impact that we are trying to provoke today is the ghetto, a project within a specific community here, the Bni (M)akada, a neighborhood that is very specific, it is very disconnected from the rest of the town, it has a specific community that lives in informal settlements, informal housings. The project is funded by AFAC. The idea is to work with the community on the project conception. We will be working with artists and designers to collect urban stories, to understand how this neighborhood was built, who is living there, what are their narratives... In an attempt to look for alternative storytelling that would explain the mutations and that would explain Tangier in an entirely different perspective. There will be four full series of workshops in psycho-geography, in radio (radio session workshops), talking with the people... Everything will be showcased within an ephemeral structure that we will be building in the neighborhood. The community is very much involved in this process. It is all in progress, which is really nice to hear that people today are starting to talk about Think Tanger, but not in the arts and culture scene. We start to communicate about Think Tanger and to deliver the message of Think Tanger, outside of the small community that surrounds us, outside of the artists and cultural organizations that we know in Tangier.

Think Tanger is starting to be more of a community project; people who have no connection with the project (they do not live in downtown, they do not have the habit to go to cultural organizations) start to talk about



the project and be part of the project, and this is really important. Here we can talk about the real impact, the economic and social impact in the sense that we are really opening the conversation with people who do not think as we, cultural practitioners, think. Moreover, all the workshops – there was a series of 9 workshops – would leave in the community a certain knowledge that could be reusable afterwards. One of the workshops is about how we can build a cultural project; sessions on how to communicate, how to fundraise, etc. The other one is about video. Thus this knowledge would be saved into the community regardless of whether we continue or not. And I think here we could also be talking about the economic impact of cultural projects in a general way, and of Think Tanger specifically, within the community and artists' involvement.

 **Have you faced any challenges, whether logistical, social or political? You mentioned you were trying to open up a dialogue with politicians in Tangier, so did you have any specific instances where your work was challenged?**

HB: Our work is really challenged every day, in so many different layers. The social layer is very difficult, it takes a very long time, if you want to work with communities, to settle a very confident relationship with the community, and this is the number one challenge. We have been doing very small workshops, doing social facilitation and games, etc.

The second challenge would be political: today we do not have any support from the local authorities, nor from our government. This is because our

practice is very new still. How can we produce the city differently and in a more inclusive way? These kinds of speeches are very well heard within the local authorities and the government. I am not saying that there is no dialogue possible; I am very positive about it, because I think that it will take a long time before getting there, but it is on-going.

The third challenge, since we are talking about city production in a cultural way, where so many different artists are involved: architects, artists, designers, urban planners, thinkers, geographers... It is really difficult sometimes to reconcile all those practices. It is not easy to bring all those different practitioners around the table, and work on one common goal.

The average age of the people who work at Think Tanger is 26, which is quite young, so this is another challenge of being 25-26 and working with people who have extensive experiences and backgrounds.

And of course the economic challenge: it is hard to find institutions that would fund a project that would run for 2 or 3 years, knowing that there would be one full year just for community involvement, and this does not involve any events such as an exhibition... When you ask for a fund you have a specific agenda that you need to respect. And now our agenda takes much longer because we are not working just in a gallery space, we are working outside with the people, and economically it is hard to follow up because at the same time we are four people working, we have to account for four salaries, for the rent of the Atelier space... We need to keep up on all of this at the same time, and it is also challenging.

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

SYRIA

ABD DOUMANY

Normal Abnormal

After seven years of brutal war in Syria, nothing remained in the shape or form which we were accustomed to. With poverty, death, shelling, killing, and destruction becoming elements of daily life for civilians, much of the 'ordinary' has become non-existent. Instead, there are surreal scenes where dead children's bodies are placed in swings while they wait for burial; plastic bags are used as window shields; guns are brought to football fields; fridges become storage spaces; and curtains are used as shrouds for the dead.

EXPLORING
RESILIENCE IN
MIGRATION
AND EXILE

PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING

📷 Capturing a deeper narrative of the Syrian conflict by revealing, through visual storytelling, the harrowing daily routine of war-time Douma residents has taken a toll on you. Tell us more about how you perceive the role of a war-time photographer in conveying stories to the world, most times at the expense of their own life and well-being.

Abd Doumany: This project has less to do with talking about myself as a photographer, and more to do with my awareness of what is happening around me in the city I grew up in. It is very hard, it is haunting—this is where all your memories, childhood, family and friends are, and where you are witnessing all of this getting torn apart. I specifically focused my coverage on field hospitals, since no one could stand being there all the time and documenting horrific scenes of injured people. Everything has its price, and the one I am paying is having to deal with sleepless nights. Sometimes, you would be having a normal, even happy day, and all it takes is a single trigger for all the memories and flashbacks to come back.

📷 You mentioned in an interview that “photographing “ordinary” things is a remedy for my wounded soul. These small “normal” images help me piece together that shattered image of a “normal” life, a life that we no longer know.” To what extent were you searching for normalcy in your project? Or has the abnormal taken precedence?

AD: This has been a long-term project. I have been documenting those unordinary or abnormal scenes, for a long time. But it is always very touching when you see things from your previous life—from your ordinary life—like children playing, people having a proper meal. People deserve to have a decent, proper life, and it always feels good to see them enjoying happy moments.

📷 So a normal life is something you aspire for, something you long for?

AD: Yes, everyone aspires to settle down—we have been through a lot. I cannot say we wasted a lot of time, but those 7 years were supposed to be the productive years of our lives, and we ended up losing everything: our possessions, our homes, everything. Those years were supposed to put us on track, so now I feel I have to work a lot towards compensating for those past 7 years.

📷 In the same interview, you mentioned that photography has “become a part” of you. To what extent does a part of you go through your lens to capture stories to the world?

AD: I taught myself how to take photos, and I gradually improved my skills in storytelling. I would say storytelling has become a part of me. Photography in and of itself is the story I am trying to tell. For me, being outside of Syria opened me up to think out of the box and use other tools. I am taking up other practices as well. I am engaging in the visual arts now, trying to visualize things that I have been through, and experimenting with other mediums too.

📷 Would you say that, when you have a story in mind, you are able to affect the course of that story? Or are you more of a spectator?

AD: Basically, most of the projects that I have worked on are based on things that I have felt and experienced. I focus on the refugee crisis and how people feel and try to portray people’s feelings. I think it is important to document these processes from the perspective of a refugee. All the projects that were made on the refugee crisis were from an outsider’s point of view, which pushed me to just say that I am a refugee, I am feeling those things, and I can tell the story the way it really happened.

📷 There is a personal side to your project. Your photography career began when your brother went missing. You photographed your mother as she awaited news from him. Is the camera a healing process, or do you consider it more of a double-edged sword?

AD: I do not think the camera is a healing process at all, but it is a critical tool that allows us to process and show what we have been through. Documenting my own mother and family was not easy at all, because I had to decide on what I wanted to show and understand why I wanted to show it in the first place. My family’s struggle is similar to that of thousands of Syrian families who lost their sons or whose sons are in prison. It is hard for people to understand why I am doing this, but this is the only way for me to show what losing a person or waiting to hear news from them for a long time could mean.

📷 How was the reception of Normal Abnormal? In your opinion, what kind of impact did your images create? Did they achieve what you had hoped for?

AD: I really liked the concept and final work, and I am satisfied with the outcome it produced. The narrative shown was not too much, as I was trying to put limits to showing what living under siege could mean. I did not want viewers to feel uncomfortable looking at my work, but I was still concerned with releasing flows of anxiety. When people are exposed to Normal Abnormal, they are not faced with just any photographic project; the work has its undeniable presence, and that is exactly what I wanted to achieve. However, I could never quantify the impact. I simply receive people’s feedback and opinions about the work, and for now, the feedback has always been good.

📷 Do you think you managed to instigate change? Or at least shift outside perspectives towards the Syrian conflict?


AD: Normal Abnormal was actually targeting outside audiences. It works perfectly with an outsider point of view. Everybody that has seen the work has admired it and was left under a state of shock. They could not realize that they are living in the same world with people having to adapt to such situations. They were confronted with very surreal scenes.




 **What are the challenges that you faced during the project? Alternatively, what are the opportunities that came your way in the course of the project?**

AD: I got the grant during a very hard time for me—I had just left Syria to Turkey, I had no legal status, and I couldn't attend the (Arab Documentary Photography Program) workshop nor issue a travel permit, so it was very challenging. But I think this is part of what I am going through, and part of the project as well, since the project bases itself on my own experience.

On the other hand, the opportunities that Normal Abnormal opened up to me include being introduced to AFAC's great team, and being paired up with a great photographer, Peter Van Agtmael, as my mentor, as well as other photographers and people who supported me throughout the process. Actually, this was the first project of its kind that I worked on, and I was really happy. The AFAC team was very supportive; I understand how hard it was for them to give the grant to me, especially since they were aware of the fact that I could never attend the workshops.

 **What are the next steps with regards to Normal Abnormal? For example, is there still a plan to conceive a platform for sharing "abnormal" personal stories"? What about the publication of a book?**

AD: I think Normal Abnormal could be extended to a book publication, because the final outcome of the project consists in 25 photos, meaning I had to let go of a lot of other photos to reach this number. I have dozens of photos that are part of this project that I would like to share as well. They recount important stories, in addition to my own experience and personal stories from the time I spent there. These could really form a book. I am still settling down in London and working towards an exhibition, so I think once I am done working my way through it, I can start thinking of the book.

 **Bearing in mind the fact that you left Syria and that, I am assuming, anything related to documentation will probably be a challenge, what are your future plans beyond Normal Abnormal?**

AD: For the time being, I am focusing on two projects, both of which are not photography-related. The first one relates to my hometown. As you know, Douma witnessed forced displacement, people had to resettle in the North of Syria. And in my time there were these weird cemeteries, which consisted in hundreds of layered graves with bodies. So when people left the city, the registry books of the layered cemetery—the books where every victim's name was written, in addition to how they died, when they died—went missing. So I started to contact documentation centers, and conducted research to recover the names. I successfully recovered 7,600 of them, and I am now handwriting the books myself again. It is a very hard and emotional process, as I know a lot of these names—some of them are friends, some are family... The victorious rewrite history in their way. Currently, the Syrian regime is erasing documents, names, videos, photos, everything. So I needed to produce these records that could not be touched. While we were under siege, we lost people very quickly and did not have the proper time to grieve them. So rewriting these books is allowing me to grieve and process all the lives that were lost. I lost a brother in the war, he was tortured to death in prison, and I never had the chance to grant him a physical grave. So there is no way we could visit him or visit the grave; we cannot even confirm his death in the first place. Thousands of refugees

have to suffer through this. As they left their cities, they could never visit the graves of the people they lost. These books would therefore function as a kind of safe space that everybody has the right to access and visit. The books will be part of an art installation based on the cemetery as well. The process of writing the books is as slow as it is supposed to be, but the art installation will be displayed in the group exhibition I mentioned earlier.

The other project I am working on is also based on the idea of forced displacement. When people left the city, they did not have much time, so they had to pack their whole lives in six hours and in back packs. What I did was contact those people who were displaced, and I asked them to document the things they brought out with them when escaping the siege. The things that you choose to save and put in your backpack differ from one person to the other. On the other hand, I started to contact people in Europe, people who led very normal lives, and I asked them to imagine if they were in the same situation, what they would bring with them. Participants from each side are documenting their experience through photography. The resulting exhibition will consist in displaying the objects and artifacts that people brought with them from the siege, and I will use the exhibition as a platform to invite more people in London to participate in that experience. It is a long-term project; at some point there will be an Instagram account where there will be photos and stories published—a multimedia project, in other words.

غ.ج.: كنتُ مدركاً للصعوبات الكبيرة عند البداية، فأخذتُ حذري وصوّرت 90% من الفيلم في غرقتي. أما الأجزاء الخارجيّة، أي مشاهد حفر الجدران، فكنتُ أنفّذها في الصباح الباكر أيام الآحاد، كي لا أتعرّض لمشاكل. هناك مشهد واحد مُصوّر في منطقة سوليدير، لم آخذ إذناً لتصويره. ما حصلتُ عليه هو إذن من الأمن العام بتصوير الفيلم. أرسلت للملخص مع أسلوب العمل الذي أنوي اتباعه وأتت الموافقة. كنت قد ذكرت أنني سأصوّر الواجهة البحرية، فاعتمدت على القرار الصادر من الأمن العام أن لي الحق في التصوير حيث أريد. واعتبرت أن الإذن يشمل الواجهة البحرية ومكبّ النورماندي. ذلك لأنني أعلم أيضاً أن لشركة سوليدير أطباعها وقوانينها الخاصة، وقد طلبوا أن أرزّدهم بنسخة عن نص الفيلم وعن سبب التصوير هناك وأن أدفع لهم بدل 500 دولار. رفضتُ أن أدفع مالاً، كما رفضتُ أن أرزّد شركة عقاريّة بسبب تصويري فيلم عن المفقودين. أنا أصوّر موقع جريمة. وعلى هذا اعتبرتُ أن إذن الأمن العام يكفي. ولكي لا أدخل في مواجهة معهم، قصدتُ موقع التصوير في 1/1/2016، أي صبيحة ليلة رأس السنة عندما كان الجميع نيام. لا شك أن لديّ قلق من أن يُستخدم هذا الشي ضدي كذريعة لمنع الفيلم. أمّا التحديات الأخرى فلها علاقة بي شخصياً. في اللحظة التي أعود لأصبح فيها ابن أحد المفقودين، يبدأ الفيلم بالتحوّل ويغيّر مساره. كذلك اللحظة التي أصير فيها فناناً، أي عندما أعمل بشكل فنّي بحث فيؤدّي ذلك إلى تغيّر السردية. كانت هذه أكبر التحديات. أعدتُ كتابة الفيلم 6 مرّات قبل أن أصل إلى الصيغة النهائية للعمل. كنتُ في كل مرّة أطوّر بعداً جديداً. طوّرت أشياء كثيرة ليست موجودة في الفيلم. في لحظةٍ شعرتُ أن كل الأخطاء - لنسمّها كذلك - التي ارتكبتها خلال تطوير الفيلم هي مهمة جداً. ومع بروز هذه الأخطاء - أي عندما يجرّ المرء لارتكاب خطأ معيّن ويلاحظ أنه ارتكبه - رحّتُ أجمّعها وأحفظها، وتعلّمت منها.

ما هي مشاريعك المستقبلية في هذا السياق، وفي ظل إقرار القانون؟ كيف ستواكب المستجدات وعمل الهيئة عبر أعمالك؟ وكيف ستكمل سيرتك في تكوين سرد وطني جديد لقضية المفقودين وذاكرة جماعية لهذه القضية؟ أخبرنا مثلاً عن مشروعك لرقمنة الأرشيف وعن جعله متّاحاً للاستخدام العام.

غ.ج.: أهم نقطة في هذا الموضوع هي الأرشيف. اليوم، وبغياب أجساد المفقودين، لدينا جسد أساسي موجود بين أيدينا وهو الأرشيف. بالنسبة لي، يشغل الأرشيف مكان كل أجساد المفقودين المخفية. هو جسدٌ بالغ الأهميّة لاحتواء مختلف أنواع السرديات والحقائق. بدأت العمل على الأرشيف منذ حوالي 3 سنوات، حيث أطلقت دعوة عامّة للمهتمين بالمشاركة وشكّلنا فريقاً يضم 17 شخصاً. في المرحلة الأولى بدأنا بالعمل على الترميم، فالوثائق تبدأ من العام 1982. طلبنا حينها من السيدة مود اسطفان، مديرة مركز المحفوظات الوطنية، أن تطلب من «أمبيك»، الخبير التقني الخاص بالمركز، أن يعلمنا تقنيّة ترميم الورق. وبالفعل، أعطانا «أمبيك» 3 ورش عمل بدون مقابل، ورمّمنا ما يقارب 9000 إلى 10000 وثيقة. بعد ذلك أتت المرحلة الثانية وهي المسح الضوئي (scanning). أكرّر أن كل ذلك أنجزَ بدون مقابل مادّي، ما عدا تمويل ضئيل حصلنا عليه لتثبيت بعض الوظائف والمهام. الآن نبدأ بمرحلة بيانات التعريف وبناء هيكلية الأرشيف الذي سيتألّف من واجهتين: الأولى موجهة للإختصاصيين، وهي منصّة جامدة بعض الشيء وإنما مُتاحة للجميع (سينمائيين، كُتّاب، أكاديميين، إلخ...). أمّا المنصّة الثانية فهي عبارة عن موقع إلكتروني يسمح لغير المتخصّصين بالتعرّف على السرديات التي يحتويها الأرشيف. مثلاً، يمكن تناول الأرشيف كمادّة للحركة النسويّة التي بدأت في العام 1982، ذلك أن معظم أهالي المفقودين نساءً. يتضمّن الأرشيف أيضاً تاريخ الحرب الأهليّة من خلال أرقام المفقودين. أرى أن كينيّة تصميم واجهة استخدام الأرشيف هو أمر في غاية الأهميّة كي لا يكون أرشيفاً ميتاً. الأرشيف يعيش عندما يتم استخدامه، لذلك أحاول قدر الإمكان أن يكون حيويّاً. هذا أهم ما يمكن فعله الآن لمتابعة القضية، لأنه سيساهم في تنشيطها وفي مساندة عمل الهيئة التي ستقوم بدورها بإغناء الأرشيف عبر تحميل وإضافة كل عمل تنجزه. الأداة الأساسية للمعركة الآن هي الأرشيف، فهو حقٌّ لكل من يعيش في لبنان بالإطلاع على المعلومات واستخدامها. لذلك أضع كل تركيزي اليوم على الأرشفة. لا أعلم بالضبط كيف سيكون عمل الهيئة الوطنية وما هي تحركاتها. أنا ملتزم مع أهالي المفقودين وأقول لهم "سأعمل معكم كالجندي".

لا أحد يغادر مقعده، هناك صمت ثقيل وقاسٍ جداً. في العرض الأول، بقيت جالساً مع الجمهور وأحسست بالثقل ذاته، هناك فرق بين عمل شيء ومشاركتك له، تحديداً في لبنان ومع أهله. عندما عرضت الفيلم في الخارج، كان أيضاً ينتهي دون تصفيق أو مغادرة الصالة. في لبنان، توجد صعوبة في إجراء نقاش (أسئلة وأجوبة) بعد انتهاء الفيلم، لأن هنا لا أحد يشعر بأن لديه ما يقوله. سعيثُ في الفيلم إلى تعزيز العلاقة المباشرة بينه وبين المشاهد باعتباره فرد، وليس جمهور أو مجموعة مشاهدين؛ أي على تطوير التجربة الفرديّة؛ فالفيلم يطلب من المشاهد رّسم أو تخيّل الصورة التي أتكلّم عنها. كل ما أضعه في الفيلم يعمل على هذا النحو، أي أنك كمشاهد، عليك أن تبذل جهداً.

مع نهاية الفيلم أتوقع من المشاهد أن يكون قد أنجز عملية فكرية غير بسيطة، إنما طويلة وصعبة. الجميع عبّر بعد الفيلم عن تعب، أتعبهم الفيلم. في مشهد منطقة الـ«نورماندي»، أكثرية المشاهدين قالوا لي أنني محوت الصورة لكي يعمرّونها هم بمخيلتهم: "عندما رأينا النفايات رحنا نبحث بنظرنا عن جُثث، وتملّكنا الخوف من أن نرى جثّة بالفعل". كنتُ مدركاً لإمكانية إقحام المشاهد في هذه الحالة العسيرة. أردتُ في الفيلم أن أطرح أسئلة وأحاول الإجابة عليها «في الوقت الحاضر» مع المشاهد. لذا، هي تجربة مشتركة. كما أنني لم أضف أي موسيقى إلى آخر مشهد من الفيلم، حتّى أنني محوت الإشارات الصوتيّة، هو مشهدٌ صامت تماماً، صوته موجود في قلب المشاهد، ولكل مشاهدٍ صوته الخاص. إلى هذا الحد أردت توريط المشاهد معي. لذلك كان الحوار بعد عرض الفيلم صعباً. كثيرون قالوا أن الفيلم «لوّثهم»، ليس التلوّث بمعناه السلبي، بل بمعنى قبل وبعد؛ أي أنهم لم يعودوا قادرين على التجوّل في المدينة كالسابق، وكأنهم دخلوا على الفيلم من مدينة والآن خرجوا من الفيلم إلى مدينة أخرى، عاجزين عن العودة إلى المدينة التي كانوا فيها من قبل.

هل سيكون هناك إطلاق رسمي للفيلم؟

غ.ج.: نعم، الإطلاق الرسمي هو أيضاً بداية حوار مع السلطة. عندما أطلق الفيلم رسمياً، سوف تشاهده الرّقابة وتقرّر السماح بعرضه أو منعه. وهذا هو أيضاً بداية لحوار معهم، وإدراك ما إذا سيكون تعاطيهم مع الفيلم سلبياً أم إيجابياً. قبل كل عرض أنادي من يملك مؤسسة أو وصي على مؤسسة أو جامعة أو أي أحد يستطيع تنظيم عرض، بأنني مستعد، من دون مقابل، أن آتي بالفيلم وأعرضه. أوّدُ عرض الفيلم بقدر ما أمكن. قد يصدر الفيلم بشكل رسمي في مهرجان أيام بيروت السينمائية في شهر آذار، ولكن من الآن حتى ذلك الموعد، سأقدم عروضاً ما استطعت، عرض واحد كل أسبوعين لو أمكن ذلك، وإذا خسر الفيلم مشاهدين عندما يصدر رسمياً، سيكون الناس قد شاهدوه. أريد أن أقدم 20 أو 30 عرضاً قبل الافتتاح، في حال تم منع الفيلم.

لقد حاز الفيلم على عدة جوائز في مهرجانات عالمية، منها لوكارنو، تورونتو ومونبليه. ما هي التأثيرات وردود الفعل التي تأمل أن يسببها الفيلم عند إطلاقه في لبنان خاصة وفي أعقاب إصدار القرار؟

غ.ج.: كان صعباً أن يجول الفيلم خارج لبنان حذف أن عرضه هنا أولاً؛ أدركت ذلك أثناء إنهائي الفيلم. هذه واحدة من امتيازات السينما. إما أن أعرض الفيلم في لبنان وأخسره في الخارج، ويكون قد شاهده حوالي 300 أو 400 مُشاهد، أو أن أعرضه في الخارج أولاً. عند عرض الفيلم خارج لبنان، كنتُ قلقاً من أن يفقد بُعدَه كمحاولة لفتح نقاش، أي أن يُعرّف الفيلم كعمل حائز على جوائز عالميّة، يقلقني هذا الأمر، أن نتعامل معه كفيلم سينما أكثر من كونه بداية حوار. من المؤاتي عرض الفيلم الآن بعد صدور القانون، لأن ذلك سينقلنا إلى المرحلة العملية. اليوم، نريد أن نبدأ العمل. إذا كانت الدولة تلتزم بالقانون الذي أصدرته، فإننا إذن ننتقل إلى مرحلة العمل. الفيلم شامل، ولا يتعلّق فقط بأهالي المفقودين بل بنا كלבنايين نعيش في بلد توجد فيه مقابر جماعية. فاللحظة مؤاتية لعرض الفيلم، خاصةً بوجود هذا الاهتمام الحالي بموضوع المفقودين.

ما هي التحديات والصعوبات التي واجهتها خلال مراحل التطوير والتصوير والانتاج؟



أصبحت قريبة المنال؟ أم أن المعركة بدأت للتو؟

غ.ح.: بالنسبة لي كان القانون مفاجئاً جداً من ناحية قيام مجلس النواب بالتصويت. كان هناك خوف حتى آخر لحظة من كَيْفِيَّة إجراء هذه العمليَّة. كان نزار صاغية ووداد حلواني هما حجر الأساس في وضع هذا القانون. حضر كلٌّ من صاغية وحلواني الجلسة الأولى التي انعقدت في 24 أيلول، لكن النواب لم يصلوا يومها إلى البند ولم يكتمل نصابهم، فلم تُعقد الجلسة. يمكن قراءة هذا كتميع للتصويت.

تم تحديد الجلسة الثانية وحضرها ووداد ونزار. نحن نذكر ووداد ونزار لأنهما من أكثر المتّمعّنين في الموضوع، بالإضافة إلى البقية طبعاً. ولكن حتى هما كان لديهما شكوك حول كيفية حصول هذا التصويت. اليوم، لا أحد يستطيع تفسير كل الجوانب حول كيف تمكّن مجلس النواب من التصويت على هذا القانون. ولكن في الوقت نفسه، لم يشعر أحد منا أن هناك حاجة إلى محاولة فهم سبب التصويت، لا نريد تفسير ذلك، نريد أن نعتبر أنه أُجبر على فعل التصويت. وهذا انتصار لكل سنوات العمل. أُلزِمَ مجلس النواب، لم يعد يستطيع الهروب من مسؤوليته، وتم إجباره على التصويت. نعتبر أنه علينا أن نفهم هذا القدر فقط من هذه العملية. ولكن إذا أعدنا النظر في ممارسات السلطة (السلطة وليس الدولة)، وإلى كيفية تعاملها مع هذا الموضوع، لا بد أن نشكّ في آلية عملها. ففي العام 2000، عندما قررت الحكومة أن تقوم بتحقيقات لمعرفة مصير أهالي المفقودين، شكلت لجنة من كافة الأطراف العسكرية في لبنان، وأجروا بحثاً لمدة 6 أشهر. نحن نتكلم عن آلاف المفقودين، في فترة لا تتعدّى الستة أشهر قامت هذه اللجنة الأمنية ببحثها وأصدرت بياناً عبارة عن ورقتين A4 فقط، خلاصتهما أن كل المفقودين قد ماتوا وهم موجودون في مقابر جماعية في لبنان، ولا نستطيع فتح هذه المقابر وندعو الأهالي أن يعلنوا وفاتهم بشكل رسمي. والشيء ذاته في العام 1996، عندما صدر أول قرار وزاري ينصّ على أن من لديه مفقود منذ أكثر من ٤ سنوات، يستطيع أن يُوفّيه.

بالعودة إلى العام 2014، أي عام صدور تقرير لجنة التحقيق، بعد مطالبات دامت 14 سنة من قبل أهالي المفقودين الذين طالبوا رؤية ملف التحقيقات كي يفهموا شيئاً، "أنتم بأنفسكم استخلصتم النتائج وقتلتم الجميع!". على الأقل دعونا نعرف! 14 سنة ولم تقبل اللجنة تسليم التحقيقات، إلى أن لجأ أهالي المفقودين إلى مجلس شوري الدولة الذي

حكم لصالحهم وأجبر الحكومة على تسليم صندوق التحقيقات.

رفضت الدولة تسليم ملف التحقيقات بحجة أنه يهدد السلم الأهلي. وبعد شهر تقريباً، أخذوا قراراً آخر من مجلس الشوري أن هذا التسليم لا يهدد السلم الأهلي ومن حق أهالي المفقودين أن يأخذوا الملفات. أيضاً لم تقبل الدولة بتسليم الملفات، إلى أن قام الأهالي بحملة أعلنوا فيها أنهم لن يتركوا الشارع لفترة شهر قبل تسليم ملف التحقيقات. في النهار التالي قرر تمام سلام أن يسلمهم الملف. فتحوا الصندوق وجدوه فارغاً وجدوا فيه عملهم هم كأهالي المفقودين، أي هم من قاموا بكل اللوائح وكل الأبحاث. وجدوا بعض الرسائل بين أفراد التحقيق وبعض الأطراف الحزبية، ورسالة دبلوماسية بعثها مسؤول في الدولة مفادها أننا نعمل على قضية المفقودين ونسألکم هل لديکم أي شيء تفيدونا به؟ شيء بمنتهى التفاهة!

بالعودة إلى موضوع تطبيق القانون اليوم، بعد التصويت، مؤكد هناك معركة، لأننا نجهل الكيفية، فأساس العمل هو تشكيل لجنة وطنية. كيف ستتشكل هيئة وطنية اليوم؟ هل سنقوم بتعيين فرداً تابعاً للحزب الاشتراكي وآخر لحركة أمل، وهل سنعيّن القضاة ضمن الأطر الحزبية ذاتها ونعتني بانتقاء الأطباء الشرعيين؟ لأننا لا نريد طبيباً شريعياً مستقلاً، بل طبيباً كذاك الذي يظهر في الأفلام، الذي سيقول أن هذه العظام هي لحيوانات. لذا فإن تشكيل الهيئة الوطنية أمرٌ خطير. يصوّتون على القانون ثم يقولون "ها نحن نعمل على الموضوع، نحن من صوّت للقانون". هنالك معركة جديدة لا محالة! لقد أُجبروا على التصويت على القانون، وهذا بمثابة انتصار كبير جداً، ولكن الآن هناك معركة ربّما أقوى وأخطر. فالآن كل الأشياء يمكن أن تُسرق.

📌 **مع إعلان إقرار القانون هذا، أُعيدت قضية المفقودين إلى الواجهة في الإعلام اللبناني. كيف ستخطط لإطلاق الفيلم وعرضه في لبنان في هذا السياق؟ هل تتطلع إلى عروض غير رسمية وتوزيع بديل في الجامعات والمكتبات؟**

غ.ح.: لا زالت استراتيجيتي لإطلاق الفيلم هي نفسها. فلقد قدمت عرضين في لبنان غير مُعلّنين وكانا مؤثرين جداً، ويشبهان بعضهما: ينتهي العرض، لا أحد يصقّق ولا يتكلّم،



عدد من ورش العمل مع «الصليب الأحمر» حول تقنيات تنقيب المقابر الجماعية، واتضح في الورشة الأخيرة أننا لا نستطيع الشروع بالتطبيق الفعلي لهذه التقنيات إلا بقرار سياسي صادر عن الدولة اللبنانية. في اللحظة التي بدأت بالبحث فيها عن الملصق، تيقنت أن ما أقوم به يشبه العمل الحقيقي الذي يجب أن يحصل. من المهم أن نتشارك السرديات التقنية لنبش المقابر القابعة تحت حياتنا اليومية. قد أذهب إلى المصرف وأطلب قرض سكني يخولني شراء منزل جميل في بيروت، دون أن أعلم أن أسفل المبنى الذي سأعيش فيه توجد مقبرة جماعية. أما جميع الملصقات المرصوفة تحت ذاك الملصق، فهي أيضاً تمثل الحياة التي عشناها لمدة 6 سنوات - سواءً كانت صور مرشحين أو صور للحج والعمرة أو لمهرجانات ثقافية أو حفلات أو دعايات الشامبو - هناك شيء يشبه الواقع كثيراً في عملية نيش الجدران. هناك طبقة ثالثة أو بعدد ثالث أوددُ إضافته إلى قصة الجدار له علاقة بتغير مدينة بيروت. فالملصق وضع في العام 2007 وأنا بحث عنه في العام 2013، بعد أن كانت بيروت قد شهدت تغييرات كثيرة. إختفت جدران وأقيمت مكانها مباني. لقد بحثت عن الجدار الذي رأيته في العام 2007 لمدة نصف يوم تقريباً دون أن أجده. فإذن، إنطوت عملية البحث عن الجدار على رمزية ما، ولكن أيضاً على واقعية تغير مدينة بيروت. مثلاً، لم أبحث في منطقة مار مخايل لأنها كانت منطقة صناعية آنذاك. كان ملفتاً كم كانت عملية البحث مرتبطة بالتغير السريع الذي شهدته المدينة.

📌 **لقد أعلنت في مهرجان تورونتو أن الفيلم بدأ كبحث عن رواية جديدة محتملة يمكن نسجها حول موضوع المفقودين. قلت أيضاً أن الفيلم يحاكي الجيل الجديد، الذي ورث هذه القضية. حاولت إنداً تحويل هذا الإرث من حالته الطبيعية ودفعه نحو حالة التراث الوطني. هل تعتقد أنك نجحت في محاولتك؟ وما الذي تريد قوله للجيل الجديد؟**

غ.ج.: أنا متأكد من أنني لم أقل أن الجيل الجديد قد ورث، لأن عملية التوريث تتم بشكل غير مُعَيَّب. لا نريد أن ندرك فجأة أننا ورثنا، فهي عملية فكرية يجب أن تتم بشكل واعٍ. اليوم لم يرث الجيل الجديد، وعندما أتحدث عن الجيل الجديد أفصل بين الجيل الصغير التابع لأهالي المفقودين، والجيل الصغير بشكل عام. عندما يرث أولاد أهالي المفقودين أهلهم، يشعرون تلقائياً بضرورة وجود سردية جديدة للموضوع، تهيب لعملية التوريث. لا أريد التحدث عن التوريث بصفتي مسؤول عنه، أي أنني أرث مثلهم. الفرق هو أنني لا أريد أن أرث لوحدي لأن أبي مفقود. وبالنسبة لي يجب أن نقوم بهذه العملية بشكل واعٍ وبقرار. نحن نقرر إذا ما كنا سنرث أو لا، أو كيف سنرث. أي أننا إذ أردنا أن نرث، كيف سنقبل بهذه الأشياء. الجزء الأكبر ممّا لا يدرك وجود مقابر جماعية أينما ذهبنا. لدينا الحق في أن نقرر إذا ما كنا نريد أن نعيش هكذا أم لا. اليوم عندما تُطرح قضية وجود مقابر جماعية في إطار شديد التخصصية، فإما نتكلّم عن أجهزة الدولة أو عن أهالي المفقودين أو بين الفاعلين في المجتمع المدني، أو أحياناً ضمن المنصات الفنية. ولكن في المجال العام، نحن لا نتحدث عن هذا الموضوع، فالتناس لا علم لها به. من هنا تأتي الحاجة لبلورة سردية أشمل.

يحاول الفيلم فتح باب للنقاش. لا أستطيع الجزم ما إذا نجحت بذلك أم لا. خلال عملي على الفيلم، كان جل هدفي أن أفتح باباً للنقاش. وطبعاً النقاش ليس معي، ليس طرح سؤالاً وأنا أقوم بالإجابة عنه، كلا، هو نقاش بيننا، ماذا يجب أن نفعل؟ طبعاً هذا طموحي الذي يمكن أن يتحقّق من خلال كيفية تنسيقي لعروض الفيلم. هل أنا قادر على عرض الفيلم في شتى المناطق والقرى، وليس فقط في بيروت؟ وهل الجمهور مستعد للنقاش؟ هنا أستطيع القول، نعم! استطعت أن أخلق هذا النقاش وأن عملي ناجح.

📌 **أقرّت السلطات اللبنانية في 12 تشرين الثاني 2018، قانون المفقودين والمخفيين قسرياً، وهو قانون يتضمن 38 بنداً، يُتيح كشف حقائق الإخفاء والخطف ومحاسبة المسؤولين عنهما. القانون عبارة عن خطوة نحو تحقيق النضال الذي تشخّصه والدتك وداد حلواني، رئيسة لجنة أهالي المفقودين والمخطوفين في لبنان، بالإضافة إلى عمل المحامي غسان مخيبر الدؤوب، ونضال المرحومين غازي عاد وأوديت سالم. ما رأيك بهذا الخبر؟ هل تعتقد أن الحقيقة**

غ.ج.: لقد كان خطيراً بالنسبة لي أن يظهر الحيز الشخصي لأنه كان سينهي الفيلم. كان ليخرج الجمهور من الفيلم بمشاعر خاصة اتجاهي كشخصٍ خُطِفَ والده، لذا أحرص على عدم إيقاظ هذا النوع المباشر من المشاعر. ما يهمني هو مشاعر أكثر تعقيداً تأتي نتيجة تحليل فكري خاص بكل مُشاهد، أي التحليل الفكري القادر على إنتاج حوار حول الفيلم، لا أن أُملي على الجمهور مشاعر معيّنة. لذلك جرّدتُ الفيلم أيضاً من البُعد الموسيقي (كان مشهد الانيميشن الأخير مُرفّق بشريط صوتي استبعدته لأن فيه استثارة مباشرة للعواطف). قرّرت أن أجعل الجمهور يسمع الصوت الذي يريده ويشعر به، بدلاً من أقترح صوتاً درامياً يوحي بنهاية الفيلم. لهذه الأسباب قمت بإلغاء الصوت.

📌 **تستخدم وسائل سمعية وبصرية متعددة في الفيلم - التصوير، التسجيل الصوتي (voice over)، الكتابات المعروضة على الشاشة، وتقنية التحريك. ولكننا نشعر في الفيلم أن كل هذه الوسائل تنضم إلى لغة بصرية واحدة. كيف واجهت هذا التحدي؟ خاصةً أن خطتك الأساسية كانت إنتاج فيلمين مختلفين.**

غ.ج.: بدأت الإشكالية مع مجموعة كتابات كنت قد وضعتها، هي أشبه بأفكار تمهيدية أو اقتراحات فكرية لها هرمية بحسب تطورها وأهميتها، كفكرة المقابر الجماعية مثلاً. كنت عازماً في البداية على إصدار منشور يضم هذه الكتابات، وعندما قرّرت صناعة فيلم، لم يكن لديّ صورة، أي لغة بصرية أنطلق منها. فكّرت بأنني لا أريد إنتاج صورة، لأن الصُور التي أنتجت عن الموضوع كثيرة وكثيفة، وشعرت بأن هناك صورة واحدة لم تظهر بعد، وعليّ أن أجدها. فكان أن استخدمت الصُور الموجودة عن الموضوع لأخلق منها صورةً جديدة. أظن أن ما يربط عناصر الفيلم ببعضها البعض هو استخدامي لصور ليست لي. أبحث عن الصور الملصقة على الجدران وأعرضها كبصريات نعرفها. وبما أنها ليست لي، دفعتني تلك الصُور إلى عدم خلق مادة بصرية جديدة، بل إلى الإنطلاق من البصريات الموجودة. تماماً كصُور العنف التي أصبحنا نتعرّض لها يومياً سواء على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أو الإنترنت أو التلفزيون. لهذا أيضاً لم أرد إنتاج صورة عنيفة، فلجأت إلى محو الصورة، تلك التي تظهر في بداية الفيلم. إذن، ليست الصورة هي التي تجمع الوسائط المختلفة ببعضها البعض بقدر ما هي سياسة الصورة المُقترحة. يقترح الفيلم موضوعين، الأول هو قضية المفقودين، والثاني هو طرح سياسي لإشكالية الصورة وكيف نقترحها وما هي مخاطرها.

📌 **هناك مشهد في الفيلم، نراه مراراً ويكمن مع المشاهد بعد انتهاء الفيلم، هو مشهد يديك تعملان بشكل دؤوب ودقيق على تقشير وإزالة ملصقات عن جدار في إحدى شوارع بيروت. يتم إزالة الملصقات واحدة تلو الأخرى، وكأنها طبقات من الذكريات والأحداث التي تغذي ذاكرة المدينة. حتى تظهر فسيفساء من الوجوه الباهتة، وجوه المخطوفين. تدوّن بقلم بعض الأسماء والتواريخ، وكأنك تعيد لهم فرديتهم في المنظور العام. على الرغم من مرور الزمن والحياة، تغيرت المدينة ولكنها لم تُنس. لا تزال ذاكرة المفقودين موجودة خلف طبقات الزمن، وجوههم وأسمائهم على الجدار تنتظر العدالة. هذا المشهد يذكرنا بجملة قتلها خلال مقالة في مهرجان تورونتو: "لم أعمل كمخرج على المشروع - كنت أعمل على الأرشفة". ما تعليقك على ذلك؟**

غ.ج.: أظن أن الفعل الذي قمّت به على الجدران يحمل معانٍ كثيرة، منها مباشر وآخر مُخبّئاً. كما قلت، الطبقة الأولى هي عندما قرّرتُ البحث عن الملصق الذي ظهر في العام 2007 والذي طرح إشكالية كبيرة لي لمدة 6 أعوام، أي إلى لحظة البدء بالبحث عنه في العام 2013. أما الطبقة الثانية، التي لا تتعلّق بالإخراج مباشرة، فتتمثّل بمشاركتي في

📌 **لقد ترعرعت وعشت مع قضية المفقودين لأكثر من 36 عاماً. كيف استطعت أن تُبعد الجانب الشخصي من تعقيدات الأبعاد الفنية، السياسية، التاريخية، السينمائية والناشطة، ومزجها في سرد واحد جديد؟**

غ.ح.: في الوقت السابق لقيامي بهذا الفيلم، كنت قد فصلت كلياً عملي المهني عن عملي على ملف المفقودين، وقلت لنفسي بأنني لن أقوم بأي مشروع فني أو فيلم عن قضية المفقودين أبداً! إلى أن أحسست بأنني قد حُشِرْتُ في زاوية. حُشِرْتُ نتيجة للأسباب التي سبق وذكرتها؛ أولاً عندما رأيت ذلك الملصق في الشارع في العام 2007، وثانياً في حرب تموز العام 2006 عندما اضطررنا إلى نقل الأرشيف الموجود في منزلنا الواقع عند أطراف منطقة الشياح في بيروت. كانت تلك هي المرة الأولى التي أرى فيها الأرشيف في حالة خطر. قبل ذلك كان موجوداً بشكل يومي، نعمل عليه بشكل عادي... والدتي تقوّمه وتأخذ منه بضع مقالات. كانت المرة الأولى التي يتضح لي أن هذا الأرشيف ليس كقطع الأثاث التي قد نسمح بأن تحترق أو تفسد. حينها، أحسست أيضاً بحالة أخرى أجبرتني على العمل بشكل مختلف. طبعاً، لم أبدأ بالعمل لوحدي، بل أصبحنا مجموعة تعمل على تنظيم الأرشيف ليصبح مُتاحاً للجميع. في البداية لم تكن نيتي صناعة فيلماً، بل كنت أكتب وأفكر بنشر ما أكتبه، وفي مرحلة ما كنت قررت أن أحوّل كل هذه المواد إلى شريط بصري. كان خياراً استراتيجياً، لأن للمشاهدة أسهل من القراءة. كان واضحاً بالنسبة لي أن البعد الشخصي غير موجود في هذا العمل،

كنت حريصاً في كل لحظة من تطوير العمل أن أمحو كل بُعد شخصي. أيضاً عندما أشعر بوجود خطاب نضالي أستبعده، لأن القضية لم تعد نضالاً اليوم. أو عندما يأخذ الفيلم طابعاً فنياً، أُعيد صياغته لكي لا يدخل في النطاق الفني فقط. هكذا، إستغرق المشروع 6 سنوات لإنجازه، كلّما ظهرت سرديّة ما، وتحديدأ شخصية، أقوم بكسرها. تظهر علاقتي الشخصية فقط في نهاية الفيلم عندما تظهر صورة لإخراج القيد العائلي خاصتي.



📌 **لا أدري كم سيلحظ المشاهدون أن إخراج القيد يعود لك، وتحديدأ غير العرب، فأنت قرّرت ألا تترجم محتواه إلى الإنجليزية.**

غ.ح.: هذا بالظبط ما حصل، غير العرب لم يدركوا ذلك، أمّا العرب فممنهم من لاحظ ومنهم لا. في هذ المشهد، اضطر لقتل الأشخاص كي أوصل فكرتي. وبما أنني لا أستطيع أن أقتل أياً كان، لجأت إلى إخراج القيد العائلي خاصتي.

📌 **ولأجل ذلك قررت استبعاد فكرة ربط القضية بوضعك الشخصي، ولكن أردت أن توصل فكرة شخص لا يصارع الموت فعلياً.**

📌 **يرتكز فيلمك الأول «طرس - رحلة الصعود إلى المري» على الآلاف الذين اختطفوا خلال الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية، ووجودهم الغيابي في حياة أحبائهم. يسائل الفيلم طبيعة الذكرى الجماعية. مع مرور الوقت، يفقد كل مخطوف فرديته في العقل الجماعي، ليصبح ضحية لا وجه لها لتلك الظروف التاريخية. ولكن تبقى سجلاتهم مفتوحة، فهُمْ على قيد الحياة بشكل رمزي، المواطنون المفقودون الذين لن يُسَخَطُوا كراحلين أبداً. الآلاف من الخالدين الذين يُثقلون السجلات اللبنانية. أخبرنا المزيد عن المشروع وأهدافه.**

غسان حلواني: ما دفعني إلى القيام بهذا المشروع هو بشكل أساسي الإشكاليات العديدة التي لاحظتها فيما يتعلق بموضوع المخطوفين في لبنان، وبالخطابات الموجودة حول هذا الموضوع. من جهة، وبعد 35 عاماً، كان لدي خوف من أن يتحوّل خطاب أهالي المفقودين القائم على المطالبة بحقوقهم إلى سبب لعزلهم عن بقية المجتمع، إذ لا يمكن لخطابهم أن يكون مُغايراً لما هو عليه، فهو نفس خطاب أهالي المفقودين في تشيلي أو الأرجنتين أو البوسنة. كان لدي خوف من أن يساهم هذا الخطاب في عزل أهالي المفقودين عن بقية المجتمع، الذي أصبح في حالة تطبيع مع وجودهم ومع مطالبهم كأنهم جزء طبيعي من هذا المجتمع، جزء لا يستلزم عملاً أو حلاً. هذا من ناحية، أما من ناحية أخرى، فقد ظهر خطاب مواجه لخطاب أهالي المفقودين، وهو خطاب السلطة - أسمىه خطاب «السلطة» وليس «الدولة» - المستمر منذ سنوات الحرب وبعد توقّفها، والذي يعمل على إبطال خطابهم. كان واضحاً أن وجود هذين الخطابين مقابل بعضهما سيؤدي إلى معادلة سلبية دائماً. وفي الوقت ذاته، بدأت تبرز خطابات أخرى لها علاقة بالمنظمات التي تتناول الموضوع، والتي تمثّل بالنسبة لي إشكالية ابتداءً من صورة الملصق التي ظهر في بيروت في العام 2007، والذي يدعو إلى حضور معرض عن المفقودين. بمعنى أن هذا الملصق، بإشكاليته، كان يوضح قليلاً بأننا نتعامل مع مشكلة المفقودين في لبنان مثل ما يمكن أن يُتَعامل معها في أي بلد آخر، فلا خصوصية للوضع اللبناني. والملصق - كما حاولت أن أوضح في الفيلم - على الرغم من كونه عامل بصري، هو أيضاً بداية لخطاب له علاقة بجعل قضية المفقودين حالة عامة تغيب فيها فردية الأشخاص وتحوّلهم إلى رموز لقضية قائمة. بالنسبة لي، يفيد خطاب من هذا النوع بأن المجتمع قد قام بواجبه؛ أي أنه أنتج ذاك النوع من البصريات الذي أطلق عليه إسم «الأيقونات» التي تحمل بُعداً روحياً أكثر منه مادّي للإشكالية التي نواجهها.

عندما نرى هذا النوع من الصور نحزن، ولكننا سرعان ما نطمئن أنهم لا زالوا موجودين ولا زلنا نتحدث عنهم. ولكن ليس هناك داع أن نقوم بأكثر من ذلك. كان هذا هو الخوف الذي شعرت به. كان هناك خوف آخر له علاقة بما سيحصل لأهالي المفقودين في حال لم تُحل القضية، أو ما الذي سيأتي بعد ذلك. أرى أن بعد أهالي المفقودين لدينا عدة احتمالات، الأول يتابع القضية أبناء أهالي المفقودين، أي الجيل الثاني، وهنا تكمن إشكالية أخرى، أي توريث القضية كأمر بيولوجي؛ "هؤلاء كانوا أهلکم، علیکم متابعة القضية"، علماً أنها قضية وطنية تعني الآلاف. إشكالي أن يتبنّى أبناء المفقودين القضية، هم الذين لطالما مارسوا حياتهم بمعزلٍ عنها.

في وقتٍ لاحق، شاهدت أجزاء من أعمال فنية ظهرت، أو كنت قد شاهدتها خلال السنوات التي مرت لفنانين ليس لديهم مفقودين. لاحظت أن الخطاب الكامن في أعمالهم الفنية هو نفسه خطاب أهالي المفقودين، دهشت كثيراً لهذه الفكرة، إذ على خطاب الفنانين أن يكون مغايراً. على الفن أن يطرح سرديّة أخرى. شعرت بضرورة طرح سرديّة جديدة لا تحوي صوت أهالي المفقودين، وتسعى إلى جمع أو إيجاد عناصر مشتركة بين كل المواطنين في لبنان في ما يخص طبيعة استخدامهم لمدينة بيروت أو استخدامهم للبلد. أي أنه عندما أقول: "عند المرور من الحمرا إلى مار مخايل" - أحدّد هاتين المنطقتين لأنهما من أكثر المناطق حيوية اليوم - تمر بمقبرتين أو ثلاث مقابر جماعية هي ليست فقط لأولاد أهالي المفقودين، بل للجميع. الفيلم هو أيضاً عبارة عن عملية بحث عن هذه العناصر التي تطل كل المواطنين. لا يسعى فيلمي إلى بناء خطاب، بل يقوم بتحديد بعض التّقاط. كيف يمكن أن نبني خطاباً جديداً للقضية بشملنا كلنا ولا يعزل أهالي المفقودين بخطابهم. بشكل عام، هذه هي الأسباب التي دفعتني إلى تنفيذ هذا المشروع.

فيلم وثائقي

لبنان

غسان حلواني

طرس، رحلة الصعود إلى المرئي

في بيروت، المدينة التي تعيش في حلقة مفرغة من الدمار وإعادة الإعمار، وتسعى جاهدة في نفس الوقت لدفن ماضيها الأليم والقاتم، يعاود الأشخاص المفقودون خلال الحرب الأهلية اللبنانية الظهور مؤكدين وجودهم الدائم. يخرجهم أحد العابرين الذين بعد أن يكتشف آثارهم، يحفر أعمق نافضاً اللثام عما بات يمثل المفاهيم الجديدة لمدينة أعيد بناؤها.

تسليط الضوء على
التحديات المهمشة

خلق مساحات للتعافي

الحدث على
التفكير النقدي

VISUAL ARTS

PALESTINE

SANDI HILAL

The Living Room

When hospitality is exclusive to the state and the public domain, then stateless people have no room for being reciprocal in the generous act of hospitality. The “Living Room” project aims to recognize the private space as an important social and political terrain for communities in exile, and to give visibility to the culture of exile beyond victimhood and misery.

EXPLORING
RESILIENCE IN
MIGRATION
AND EXILE

CREATING
SPACES FOR
HEALING

BUILDING SKILLS
AND CAPACITIES

CONTRIBUTING TO
SOCIAL COHESION
AND COMMUNITY
BUILDING

 You have established Madhafas (Living Rooms) in 5 locations in Sweden as part of the Living Room project. Tell us more about these spaces, their connection to the private versus public, and to hospitality in a host country.

Sandi Hilal: Not all 5 spaces are in Sweden; there is one in the Fawwar refugee camp and one in Eindhoven. It is the story of Yasmeen and Ibrahim. The whole project began in Boden, which is 8 kilometers away from the Arctic, in the very North of Sweden, where the weather is hard and there is a lot of darkness. The Public Art Agency commissioned a project in Boden, which is full of refugees from many places; from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq... Historically, Boden was established as a city to protect the Northern part of Sweden from a potential war to come from Russia, and therefore it was built almost as a military space, with a profusion of military infrastructure. It was completely closed until the end of the 1980s. Foreigners were not allowed to enter the city. However, with the collapse of the Berlin wall and knowing that the war is not arriving, and lately the crisis in the Middle East, Boden opened itself largely because it was an ideal place for Sweden to host refugees. The military city was transformed very quickly into a host city for refugees.

When I arrived there, it all seemed so familiar after working for a long time in Palestine refugee camps on political subjectivity and the right of return. I saw something very similar. A lot of people were living in tiny houses composed of one room sometimes, having gone through a certain state of depression in the sense that “this is not the dream that we had when we set sail in the boats to arrive here”. I was interested in the possibility of doing this project, and perhaps I was looking for this political agency that I encountered in refugee camps all the time. Just when I was about to give up, thinking there is nothing that can be done there, suddenly someone looks at me and says “you should meet Yasmeen and Ibrahim, because they are planning to stay in Boden”. I was searching for refugees who were planning to stay. So I met with Yasmeen and Ibrahim, along with representatives of the Public Art Agency, and when we entered the house, I experienced this amazing moment of being hosted. We are highly critical towards what is happening in the Arab world, and yet when it comes to hospitality we have a certain pride. I saw this pride with Yasmeen and Ibrahim of hosting the Swedish government, instead of them being hosted by them. This was the moment when I realized that if there is any place where I can still be seeing this agency that I was looking for, the subjectivity that I was seeking, it was happening in that living room.

As an architect, I was interested in the living room, and yet it can be any space, in between the private and the public, that manages to bring back to people who are not connected to the place, a feeling of belonging. In places like Europe, public space is highly codified, and you never know how to belong to the public; the only way is by forgetting who you are and trying as much as you can to become a permanent guest in a country like Sweden, and potentially a permanent Swede. There is no way that you become a permanent Swede, so the best thing you can do, is to perform as a perfect guest. The whole project centers on the fact that it is possible to live for eternity as guests, unless you find a way to demand that you exist in a place with certain political subjectivity. This happened when my partner, Alessandro Petti, who is an architect and researcher, and I were establishing our artistic practice in Palestine and thinking of moving to Sweden. Sweden was very important for us because we felt if we stay another year in Palestine we will be completely repeating ourselves. We wanted to challenge ourselves. We were asked several times to work on projects but we never accepted to engage with what was called the refugee crisis in Europe, because to engage, we wanted to be there. We could not engage in something while we are in Palestine. So we moved to Sweden.

I was not there for a project with Yasmeen and Ibrahim but for myself to

understand what does it mean for me to live there today. This act of hosting that I saw in the house of Yasmeen and Ibrahim in the living room, touched me profoundly, because it made me think what kind of life I can still have. It is a transformative project in many ways, but it also has this dimension of being a highly personal project. Seeing Yasmeen and Ibrahim hosting with such pride, made me understand that when Alessandro and I decided to go back to Palestine after 7 years living in Italy, and opening up our practice and the Living Room, we needed to have our own public space; a space to which we can belong. Since we were not able to belong to the public space, we decided to create our own. It was very clear for me how, sometimes, you withdraw in the private the moment you have no means to belong to the public. There are invisible living rooms all over the world. But they are Palestinian invisible living rooms, Lebanese invisible living rooms, etc. and they never open up themselves to belong to the place where they are living. What was special with Yasmeen’s and Ibrahim’s living room is that they opened it up to Swedes. Ibrahim and Yasmeen understood that they were sort of hosts and refugees - abstract refugees. And so the project was about what I call the right of being a host.

 Tell us about the Living Room activation, and its role in dealing with alienation while reinforcing the right to host.

SH: The right to host for me is almost like exercising a political right of belonging, while you do not know how to belong. Alienation comes very strongly out of the feeling of not belonging, and hosting is one of various ways that you can continue existing. The living room is a closed space yet it is open; it has doors, and a threshold. When you open the door, and guests cross the threshold, you open up your space to others. And this is what the project is about.

Another living room was set up in the Yellow House, which is a place where many asylum seekers arrive, yet they do not have any room to make into a living room in their houses. So we were given this Living Room, which became more public than the living room of Yasmeen and Ibrahim, and has been mainly activated by Yasmeen. Yasmeen opened up this Living Room or Madhafa – a place where there is a person that claims to be the host. With this Madhafa in Boden, refugees were able to host locals from the city of Boden, instead of being hosted all the time by locals and institutions.

In a nutshell, the whole concept revolves around how to create a space for people to become hosts, rather than accepting themselves as guests. Because when you arrive in Europe you accept the fact that you are a guest. You accept it and do not question it. The project states that you cannot be a full citizen without being a guest and a host at the same time. The moment that people become refugees, or even foreigners, they are required to behave as guests. Forever.

The activation of this project is the activation of the host in us, the one that was oppressed, when arriving to other places. I think that there is, in many of us, this hidden host, and we do not realize what we are hiding. With this project, the host comes out; it brings it back despite all external repressive factors. When someone from the Middle East, says “we lack social life”; I interpret it very much as “I miss the host in me”; “I miss to be at the center of my life”. The problem is that if you would do it only among Arabs, or only among Iranians, or only among Afghanis, you would be treating yourself as if you are an alienated member of society. I say that the moment you trust your host, to host also others, and not only the ones who know you, this is where you begin to break isolation and alienation.

After the establishment of the public Madhafa in the Yellow House, I established a Living Room in Stockholm. This is when the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - AFAC came in. I did not want this money to come from the Public Art Agency nor from the Swedish government. I was reflecting

on my role and in a sense being the public figure, the ambassador who will speak about us as hosts. Therefore, it was very important that the project money does not come from my host but rather from AFAC. I opened up my art studio to set up my Living Room, and it was designed in a circle with a carpet and concept pillows. The pillows are key because of the messages on them, alluding to emotions associated with hosting.

I was very troubled upon leaving Palestine. For me it was a question of “what I would be bringing in my luggage”. When you have to leave a house suddenly, you will most probably take your gold, your keys... I asked myself what would be the luggage that I would prepare to move from Palestine to other places? I decided each time I moved to any place, I would have a suitcase of covers of pillows, and there would be all the time more pillows to move with me. This is the richness that I brought with me from Palestine. This is what I can contribute with. For instance, we had this exhibition in Abu Dhabi, and I decided to bring my pillows. When I arrived there, I was given an apartment on New York University Abu Dhabi campus, so I decided to activate the Living Room in the campus. I opened up the apartment, where normally professors and staff would stay, for teachers and students. After 10 days with my open Madhafa, I was walking in the campus saying hello to half of the university!

I take my pillows everywhere. Each time I go to any destination even if it is for a short time, and I open up my Madhafa.


 **Madhafas are also a space of learning. What is their role in arts? And how do they feed into the “Campus in Camps” concept?**

SH: Madhafas are a transformation of what Campus in Camps stands for – and actually not by chance. I am currently discussing with some institutions in Sweden, to establish Campus in Camps in the Yellow House, because we see that the Madhafa, without knowledge production, is superficial. There are new concepts that need to be re-thought, re-discussed, such as hospitality, integration, alienation... The Madhafa is what the camp was for us in a way. The camp is not private, nor is it public. It is this place where the whole notion of private does not exist, because people do not own their spaces, and there is no municipality to regulate the camp. So basically it is this Masha3, this space in the middle of the private and the public. The Living Room is for us that space in between the public and the private, that permits the ones who do not feel they belong, to belong. Similarly, whenever you have a public space in a camp, you seek to turn it partially into a private space in order for you to belong. Whenever you have a private space, you push it to open itself to the public in order for it to influence the rest of the environment where you are living.

Thus the Madhafa exists between the public and the private. Whenever I find myself in the public, I try to close it to become private; and whenever I find myself in the private, I try to open it up so it will influence the public. While

designing my Living Room, I was asked by the Museum of ArkDes – which is the Museum of Architecture and Design in Stockholm – to install a Living Room there. I decided to build walls with doors, as a way to say “I am building my private space, therefore I need walls”. It is very similar to when people in Fawwar refugee camp say “in order for us to be able to organize the Plaza, we need walls”. For people to access it, I needed a threshold. Without the threshold of the door, I was unable to create this condition of hospitality and of being the host. I therefore built a room with three entrances. If you look at the Madhafa in the Arab world, there is a door towards the public and a door towards the inside of the house, as a way to say that they are in between the public and the private. For me, the importance of different doors is the importance of different kinds of thresholds.

I love the name “Living Room” in English because it holds the idea of living. It has this concept of continuity, of continuous understanding of what living is all about. It is very important to break this idea of formal knowledge production. We should influence schools and universities to understand knowledge in a completely different manner. If you ask me why we brought the campus which is in the university into the camp, it is exactly because we wanted to influence the university and make sure that knowledge is not only produced somewhere else but that life in the camp is so rich and should have a full university in it. It is a new way of looking at things.

 **What was, in your view, the impact of the Living Room project and its Madhafas on the refugee community in Sweden? Do you believe the project has managed to change a reality? Did it achieve its aims to give visibility to the culture of exile beyond victimhood and misery?**

SH: Of course we know that a small project cannot change a reality. But for the city of Boden, it changed a lot. One great impact is that the Swedish government, which holds a yearly meeting where they bring together all people who work in arts institutions – normally in Stockholm – decided to meet in Boden because the Living Room was there. They brought 150 mentors of very active art institutions in Sweden and asked me if I can organize a performance for them. The performance was a lecture that I gave for half an hour, inviting them to revise the way they look at the host and hospitality. After my conference, they were spread in groups across several Madhafas to have dinner. Yasmeen and Ibrahim found 13 host families in Boden, among them 4 Swedish families in addition to 9 non-Swedish families – Somali, Iraqi, Kuwaiti, etc.

We shared pictures among each other of these dinners. Some people were sitting on the floor. Some said they never had such an encounter before. Yasmeen was approached by another big institution in Sweden, to collaborate on an initiative for Ramadan. This gave the project a lot of visibility, coming from the Swedish government. To have the Madhafa at the National Museum of Architecture and Design, in an exhibition about public space, gives voice to many. I myself am slowly beginning to understand the domino effect in this project. One interesting incident happened in the Van Abbe Museum in the Netherlands. I thought the Madhafa cannot work just in any place, especially if I’m not there to activate it. But for some reason I just meet the right people everywhere. When I arrived at the entrance of the Museum, I asked them to call the Director in order not to pay the ticket, and there I met Shafik. Shafik is the guard of the Van Abbe Museum. He is Afghani, living in Eindhoven since a while. He was asking me about the project I am doing, so I told him about the Madhafa, and he said “I want to be the host”. In this moment, I realized that the architectural space of the Living Room needs to be at the entrance of the Museum, where Shafik is normally conducting his work. It was really amazing, because when I brought the pillows, his reaction was, “I want to bring the carpet from my house, because if I do not have this element from my house, I will not feel home”. Given that my pillows had Arabic words sewn on them, Shafik explained that as an Afghani, he cannot





sit on anything that has Arabic writing because the Coran is in Arabic, and they consider Arabic to be a holy language. So he said “I have no problem with other people around me sitting on the pillows, but I want to have the pillows under my elbow.” Since then, Shafik is touring in the exhibition and is hosting people in the Living Room; serving green and black tea, nuts and dried fruits which are reminiscent of home. So it was a fully Afghani hosting Living Room. We also involved a young woman from Gaza who had arrived to Eindhoven and had no social life. Every Saturday afternoon she activates the Living Room in the Van Abbe Museum. Shafik also convinced another friend of his, an Afghani artist to have the Living Room in her workspace.

When Ayat, host of the Square of Al Fawwar Refugee Camp found out about the project in Sweden with Ibrahim and Yasmeen, she said “Wow, Sandi, imagine the women in Fawwar opening up their Madhafa!” She wanted her Madhafa to be public and run by women, which she did. When I got invited to do an exhibition in Kalandia International by the Ramallah Municipality, I insisted on not being the host and instead suggested Ayat. This is where art interacts with the grassroots, and the other way around. The moment that Ayat went to activate her Madhafa in Ramallah, the city of culture and knowledge production, this gave her a lot of credibility within her own camp.

What are your future plans with respect to The Living Room?

SH: I have this big dream, to have Campus in Camps in Boden, in the Yellow House, for the next coming years to offer a graduate specialization and discuss notions of integration, participation, host/guest... There are a lot of stories to be told on the one hand by refugees, and in a completely different manner, by the migration officers. I would like to create this learning environment to develop this collective dictionary. Sweden is amazing for that, because this collective dictionary would end up in the hands of migration

officers and people who deal daily with refugees.

What is happening in this project is a little bit overwhelming. It is a full time job and is expanding beyond my own capacities. I am not just creating living rooms, I am also creating very strong relations with many people and this takes time. I need to reflect on the project and perhaps to write the story of all what is happening around it. It can be powerful to narrate, as it will have a completely different way of reaching people, encouraging the hidden host in many of us to come out. I am currently doing one or two lectures a week but I feel it is never enough. I want to make this project more accessible to as many people as possible.

Did you ever feel challenged during the course of the project? Did you ever face obstacles?

SH: This project touches on a very pressing issue, and it is going much faster than what I can ever handle. It is overwhelming to see many people positively react to this initiative, and yet it feels as if I do not have enough tools and references to understand what it is exactly that I have to do, and where I am heading with it. How many Living Rooms can I still open? And should I open more? Campus in Camps is my main mission, and the challenge is how to combine that with continuing to open up Living Rooms.

There is also a risk that some people begin to feel that maybe refugees are taking over. Such a reaction is a positive one because it stirs a discussion. If projects of integration need to be done by Swedes, then what is our role? Once we shift power, then the ones we shift the power to are questioning what does that mean for them. After a year and a half, Yasmeen is very ready to take over the Living Room in Boden. I can dedicate my time to Campus in Camps.

Mobilize. Empower. Impact.

The Arab Creativity and Entrepreneurship Fund is a platform launched by AFAC in 2014 for philanthropists to support the independent arts and culture scene in the Arab region and diaspora. Every year, AFAC publishes a report for ACEF, highlighting a number of grantees and their projects in order to demonstrate the impact of philanthropy on the arts and culture sectors. For the 2017 report, we choose to highlight projects that have challenged various social, political and economic contexts throughout the Arab region and placed arts and culture in the center of the battle for social change. From tightening public spaces, inequality and forced displacement, this year's report will conduct in-depth interviews with 15 artists from the Arab region whose works served as beacons of hope in their environments.

Artists and cultural institutions from the Arab region operate in an increasingly challenging environment and often with little and/or conditional support. When AFAC was established in 2007, it was precisely to respond to the need for an independent support system, to fill a void that existed in the region. There were individual artists striving within an often quite challenging context to create their work. There were some institutions, mostly in the capital cities, nurturing—encouraging, exhibiting, supporting—this process of creation. But there was no stable and independent funding infrastructure either to support individual artists or arts organizations, and thus no ecosystem that might allow them a fighting chance at longevity or sustainability. AFAC strives to nurture a robust ecosystem for the arts and culture sector in the Arab region by engaging with a diverse network of givers. This includes going beyond the non-profit channels of funding and exploring innovative partnerships with for-profit organizations, for-benefit enterprises, and individual philanthropists. It is the diversity of sustained funding and being less captive to agendas that allows authentic creativity to flourish.

Support is vital to maintaining the cultural scene, but in order to do so, the support system must serve the cultural scene and not the other way around. A critical pillar for local sustainability is individual philanthropy. Individual philanthropists have always been the backbone of arts patronage, using their resources to uplift artists, and, in so doing, uplifting and advancing their communities and societies. Among its many roles, AFAC seeks to facilitate that process, to become the connective tissue between generous donors and deserving artists, allowing the impulse to give and the impulse to create to converge together and become a powerful force for regional change.

Why invest in arts and culture?

Creative expression has the power to inspire new visions for our region, provoke important questions, and re-invent Arab societies that are open, self-sustained and have the power to produce their narratives.

This bone-deep belief in art's social impact is paramount to the type of work AFAC does, and it necessarily asks us to flip the question and consider, too, how social upheaval impacts artists themselves and their work. That aforementioned relationship between art and society has philosophical, moral, and aesthetic ramifications at once, and these become ever more urgent in times of crisis.

The Arab region has had its share of crisis, and crisis is therefore an essential component of how, what, and why some Arab artists are creating work. Ongoing wars, as well as their far-reaching consequences, have forced artists into confrontation with questions of how exactly to respond to such circumstances. This applies not only to artists who have directly experienced the consequences of crisis and upheaval, but to those who have borne or wish to bear witness as well.

At the same time, art cannot simply reproduce the humanitarian model of relief-response to crisis, because then it remains mired in the shifting quicksand of current affairs. Artists should in fact not be expected to respond to crisis in the same way, or even to produce something immediately recognizable as "a response." There must be room for different ways of reacting, without the presupposition that art is being made with the express purpose of acting as a counterpoint to official national narratives. To see it as such means that it can only be read against, or in conjunction with, political history, which in turn denies it the possibility to be understood on its

own terms, as an expression of complex moral, emotional, personal, and technical ambition, and denies artists, too, the agency of being creative actors rather than just political subjects.

AFAC is about conveying broad geographies of the mind and imagination from the Arab region. We proliferate diverse narratives about urgent topics through words and images. We instigate critical thinking to create more open societies. We stimulate local economies by cultivating audiences and engaging professionals. We spur on new technologies to make arts and culture more accessible.

In thirteen years, we invested in 1,472 talents and independent voices from the Arab region and in diaspora. We count on many to accompany AFAC in expanding the creative space for many more emerging artists and established practitioners through performing arts, visual arts, documentary photography, documentary film, cinema, music, creative and critical writings, arts and culture entrepreneurship, research on the arts, and training and regional events.

It is with an accumulation of freely expressed ideas and emotions orbiting our lives, that we are able to narrate, dream, create, inspire and reconfigure what seem to be fragmented stories and societies and to make sense of complex realities, including physical and emotional displacement.

Fifteen bold stories are at your fingertips. We are called on to sense the urgency of issues and how they are tackled through different mediums - documentary photography, film, music, performing and visual arts, writing, research and regional collaborations. They are narratives that have challenged the social and political contexts in various ways and have helped to change the narratives imposed by these contexts.

How do arts and culture affect society?

**PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING**
الحثُّ على التفكير
النقدي

**STIMULATING
ARTISTIC
VOCATIONS**
تحفيز المهن الفنّية

**PRESERVING
HERITAGE**
الحفاظ على التراث

**BUILDING SKILLS
AND CAPACITIES**
بناء المهارات والقدرات

**ENGAGING WITH
THE CIVIC SPACE**
التفاعل مع
الفضاء المدني

**PROBING
IDENTITIES**
مسألة الهويّات

Umam / The Passionate of Darkness
Comra / Comra Doc Film Camp
Abd Doumany / Normal Abnormal
Jumana Manna / Wild Relatives
رحلة الصعود إلى المزي
غسان حلواني / طرس

Visualizing Impact / Impact Data Lab
Andariya / Sudanese & South Sudanese Musical Youth Digital & Branding Training & Regional Outreach
Comra / Comra Doc Film Camp

Andariya / Sudanese & South Sudanese Musical Youth Digital & Branding Training & Regional Outreach

Sandi Hilal / Living Room
Visualizing Impact / Impact Data Lab
Comra / Comra Doc Film Camp

Hicham Bouzid / Think Tanger
مَقَر / ألبوم تأشيرة

Umam / The Passionate of Darkness
محمد مهدي / تراب القهر
Nadir Bouhmouch / Amusu

Jumana Manna / Wild Relatives
Hicham Bouzid / Think Tanger
Ali Essafi / Crossing the Seventh Gate

كيف تؤثر الفنون والثقافة على المجتمع؟





📖 على النطاق العملي، كيف تواجهون التحديات اللوجستية المتعلقة بالإجتماع والتدريب؟ حيث بعضكم يسكن في بيت لحم والبعض الآخر في رام الله. وهل من تحديات أخرى خاصة بيوميات فرقة موسيقية فلسطينية مكوّنة من شباب؟

نحن نخطّط لاجتماع منذ ثلاثة أسابيع وحتى الآن لم نلتق. هذه المشاكل موجودة من بداية تأسيسنا للفرقة؛ مكان للتمرين، الأدوات اللازمة، المواصلات... كل هذا قد لا يكون متوفراً دائماً. أحد أعضاء الفرقة يعيش في الخليل، فنحن موزعون بين رام الله وبيت لحم والخليل. كنّا أصدقاء في جامعة بيت لحم قبل أن نؤسس الفرقة، وتجري التمارين هناك، حيث يعيش أغلبنا. المشكلة التي نواجهها دائماً هي المكان المناسب للتمرين، فاحتياجاتها كثيرة من ناحية العدة الموسيقية، فطموحنا لا يقتصر على المهرجانات أو النوادي الموسيقية، بل نحلم بتقديم موسيقانا على مسرح كبير الحجم يخوّلنا تقديم مسرحيات موسيقية غنائية. ليس الأمر سهلاً لكننا سنكون السباقين. التّحدي جميل والدّعم الذي تلقّيناه من «الصندوق العربي للثقافة والفنون» (آفاق) هو ما جعلنا نبدأ، فقد كنّا قد استسلمنا بسبب الموضوع المادي، إلى أن أتى دعم «آفاق» في الوقت المناسب. كان الألبوم جاهزاً منذ سنة تقريباً، وها قد توقّر التمويل لتسجيله. وهنا نشكر «آفاق» جزيل الشكر لأنها حقّقت خُلم خمسة أو ستة شبّان يحاولون أن يصلوا إلى هدف فنيّ من خلال موسيقى حقيقية، لا من خلال موسيقى تجارية.

لها تأثير على الجمهور من ناحية الإستماع إلى الكلمات والتعاطي معها. علماً أننا سوف نطرح الألبوم بشكل مستقل ولكن بعد إطلاق المسلسل. سوف نطرح المسلسل على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي بمساعدة المؤثرين الرئيسيين الموجودين في فلسطين، كما على تطبيقَي «سناپشات» و«إنستغرام». ولدينا أيضاً اتصالات مع أناس من الشرق الأوسط، سنطلب منهم مشاركة روابط المسلسل على أوسع نطاقٍ ممكن. بالنسبة إلى الحلقات، ستكون هناك فترات متباعدة بين حلقة وحلقة لشد الجمهور الذي يستمع، فيلاحق ويتابع ليرى ما يحصل في الحلقة التالية، فالحلقات تشكّل معاً قصة كاملة متكاملة. سيكون هناك رُعاة للمشروع أيضاً، لكننا سنركّز أكثر على المشاهدات والمشاركات، كما نسعى إلى إنجاز ثلاث أو خمس حفلات إبتكارية وجديدة لإطلاق للألبوم، إذ سندعو عدداً من الراقصين والفنانين البصريين لأداء المسلسل أما الجمهور بينما نعزف نحن الموسيقى كفرقة حيّة، بمرافقة كورس. إذن، سيوف نعمل على إيصال الألبوم بصريّاً أكثر منه سمعيّاً. هذا بالإضافة إلى بطل المسلسل الذي سيكون أيضاً موجوداً في الإفتتاحات الحيّة للألبوم. يُضاف فعل التصوير إلى التمثيل إلى العزف، ممّا يسمح للمشاهد بعيش تجربة سمعيّة/بصريّة متكاملة تعلق في ذاكرة المشاهد وفي لوعيه. لا يهَمُّنا فقط أن يُسمَعَ ألبوم «تأشيرة»، بل نسعى إلى أن يكون حافزاً للتّغيير. والتّغيير هو أن نتحرّك وأن نقاوم الظّلم والفساد.

ما هي مشاريعكم المستقبلية، وهل ستشكّل استقراراً للأهداف التي تجهدون لها في ألبوم «تأشيرة» وأهداف فرقة «مفر» الأساسية؟

يوجد دائماً كلام عن مشاريع مستقبلية وعن استمرارية وعن أهداف للفرقة، ولكننا حالياً في مرحلة الإنتاج. لقد أنجزنا التّسجيل الصوتي الألبوم، ونحن الآن في صدد إنتاج المادة البصريّة. لذا، نودّ أن نضع كل طاقتنا في المشروع الذي نعمل عليه حالياً لنعطي أفضل ما لدينا. بالنسبة المشاريع المستقبلية، علينا أن نتطوّر أولاً قبل التفكير في جديد، وأن يكون لدينا هدف أسمى في كل مرّة. مع ذلك، نعم، هناك أفكار تدور حول مشروع مستقبلي.

تحتُنّا أغنية «ثورة عالتخت» على الحلم والعمل وتغيير القانون الذي لن يعمل لمصلحتنا اليوم ولا غداً إن لم تغيّره. بينما تتكلّم «عالتابور» عن فشل الناس واستعبادهم من قبل الحكّام العرب، فيما نحن خاضعين وعاجزين عن إحداث تغيير داخل الدائرة التي نعيش فيها. «مكتوب عليك» هي أغنية أخرى تتحدّث عن الفراغ الذي يسكن بين الناس والحكومات العربية عموماً، فمن يتكلم سوف يُعتقل. هناك حالات كثيرة تُسجّل هنا وفي مصر، حُكِمَ فيها على شباب رفعوا صوته في الشارع أو في الإعلام. أمّا أغنية «طربوش» فتتكلّم عن الحُكم الذي يستأثر به من يرتدي الطربوش ويتحكّم بالشعب، وعن ضرورة الإطاحة بالطاغية أيّاً كان وأينما كان. تتناول «لوين بدنا نهرب»، آخر أغنية في الألبوم، اليأس القابع وعدم إمكانية الفرار نحو الحرّية... "بالنهاية العالم ورا سور والسما بيضاء بدار العين بتدور". وأخيراً أغنية الألبوم ما قبل الأخيرة، «تأشيرة»، التي تتكلّم عن الصعوبة التي نواجهها نحن الفلسطينيون في الوصول إلى لبنان، ذلك بسبب ختم دولة الاحتلال الاسرائيلي على جوازاتنا. في نفس الوقت، كم من اللبنانيين يحاولون الوصول إلى الأماكن المقدّسة في فلسطين أو يأتوا للحج أو حتى لزيارة المناطق الأثريّة ولا يستطيعون لذلك سبباً، ذلك لأن بالنسبة للبنان هي دولة العدو. الأمر نفسه يُطبّق على سائر الدّول العربيّة الأخرى. نحن كشباب، إذا ما قارنّا أنفسنا بأوروبا، سنكتشف أن نسبة 90% ممّا لا يصلون إلى أي مكان في الخارج، بينما في أوروبا الحدود هي خط، مجرّد خط مرسوم على الأرض.

فيليب: أود أن أضيف أمراً هنا، هو أن الأبعاد السياسية في الألبوم لها أيضاً أبعاد إجتماعية، بحيث يمكن لغير المهتمّين بالبعد السياسي أن يربطوا أعمالنا بأمور إجتماعية. فتغيير القانون ليس بالضرورة أن يكون تلميحاً سياسياً، فهو يُعنى أيضاً بأيّ عادة أو تقليد في المجتمع يرفض الناس التخلّي عنه. قد يكون الطربوش مثلاً رمزاً لربّ العمل، أيّ رمزاً للسلطة في حياتنا. إذن، أغانيها تحمل أيضاً أبعاداً إجتماعية كثيرة.

جريس: هذا يعيدنا أيضاً إلى ما قلته سابقاً عن أن كلمات الأغاني ومواضيعها التي تخاطب كل فرد حسب حياته ومشاكله، ولا تقتصر أو تعمّم حالة واحدة على الجميع. يخاطبنا الألبوم شخصياً كأفراد، أنا، أنت، هو، هي.

لماذا اخترتم إسم «تأشيرة»؟ هل ألبومكم الثاني هو جسر بين أجيال الشباب في البلدان العربية؟ أم هو جسر بين الموسيقى التراثية العربية والموسيقى الغربية، أو بين الشرق والغرب عموماً؟

لها هدف اجتماعي. نحن نعاني من مشاكل عند طلبنا تأشيرة سفر، كالمستندات والوثائق وغير ذلك. كل هذه هي أمور تنظّمها الحكومات وتؤدي إلى انعدام حرية الأفراد وتقييدها. لا نحصل على تأشيرة للسفر التي هي عبارة عن ورقة لعبور حدود ليست موجودة إجتماعياً أو ثقافياً، إنما وضعناها نحن أو الحكومات أو أصحاب الطّرايش، مما يفرض نوعاً من الحدود الاجتماعية والثقافية والفكرية ويمنع الاندماج بين المجتمعات، حتّى نصبح في النهاية غرباء عن بعضنا البعض. أتكلّم عن الرّحيل، حسناً، لكنني بحاجة إلى تأشيرة سفر لكي أذهب إلى لبنان أو إلى الأقصى أو إلى الحج، هذه أبسط الأمثال. معظم الشباب العربي يعاني من هذه المشكلة من الناحية الإيديولوجية والثقافية والفكرية والإجتماعية. لكن من الناحية الموسيقية، يأخذ الموضوع منحىً آخر. حاولنا في هذا المشروع دمج الأساليب لنخلق جسراً موسيقياً وثقافياً، أي تأشيرة عبور فنيّة. فقد سعينا إلى دمج أساليب الغناء الشرقيّة مع الغربيّة، نتيجة إدراكنا لتزايد الشرائح المجتمعيّة التي تستمع إلى اللغة العربيّة في أغانيّ بديلة أو مستقلّة. لذا حاولنا أن نقدّم هذا المشروع كطرح مُستحدّث؛ كأن يكون أسلوب الغناء شرقي والعزف غربي مع القليل من الألحان الشرقيّة. نتطلّع إلى إرضاء العديد من الفئات الدّوقيّة مع التركيز على هويّتنا العربية، فنحن نعيش في بلد عربي وفي الشرق الأوسط، وعلينا التركيز على هويّتنا العربيّة.

ما هي خطتكم لترويج ألبوم «تأشيرة» ولتحقيق أقصى قدر من التأثير في فلسطين والمنطقة؟

أستطيع أن أجب إنطلاقاً من المنحى التسويقي: نحن نخطّط حالياً لإطلاق الألبوم مع المسلسل. لن نطلق الألبوم قبل إنجاز المسلسل لأنه مرتبطٌ بالمادّة البصريّة التي سيكون

سيتضمّن الألبوم أغاني تحاكي الشتات وتهجير العرب من بلادهم، بما في ذلك فلسطين، لبنان وسوريا. الألبوم يخاطب الشباب لدفعهم نحو التغيير وكسر الحواجز/ الجدران/ الفساد الحكومي، والاحتلال، سواء كان ثقافياً أو عقلياً أو أيديولوجياً أو جسدياً. أخبرونا المزيد عن المشروع، وعن شكل الألبوم الفريد من حيث الإنتاج.

بصراحة، يمكن أن نتخيّل العالم اليوم كمسلسل أو فيلم نعيشه بالفعل. دون أن ندرك، نتعرّض لضغوطات تمنعنا من التمثيل كما نريد. أنت فكرة المسلسل عندما أدركنا أن كلمات الألبوم هي أشبه بقصّة شاب واحد يمثّل كل الشباب. شعرت أنه من الممكن كتابة سيناريو متكامل عن قصته وأن تتحوّل إلى مسلسل تلفزيوني. يتوزّع المسلسل على 10 حلقات، كل حلقة عبارة عن أغنية. يظهر في الحلقات العشر ممثّل/شخصيّة واحدة يعمل على إيصال القصة بطريقة مصوّرة. سبّب آخر هو أن الناس أحياناً لا تفهم بعض المصطلحات التي نستخدمها في أغانيها، هنا سوف تعمل الصورة على شّرح وإيضاح المعنى الكامن في أعمالنا الموسيقيّة.



هل هناك بلدان معيّنة تظهر من خلال الحلقات؟ وعلى أي نوع من الرسائل تسلطون الضوء؟

الألبوم يعبّر عن كل الشّباب العربي. نحن لا نركّز على الوضع الفلسطيني فقط، لأن فلسطين وحدها لا تعبّر عن كل ما يجري. وفي النهاية، فإن العالم العربي كله يعبّر عن الوضع في فلسطين. لذا نحن لا نتخيّر للهوية الفلسطينية لأننا فلسطينيين، بل على العكس، أنا أشبه اللبناني والسوري والأردني والمصري والعراقي والجزائري... العالم العربي كلّهُ يعاني من نفس المشاكل. لذا، إختارنا أن نكون متنوّعين. نحن لا نأتي على ذكر فلسطين في أيّ من الأغاني، كما أننا لا نتخيّر في الفيديوهاث إلى أي دولة مقابل دولة أخرى؛ هدفنا هو العالم العربي كلّهُ.

ما هي أبرز المفاهيم التي تتطرّقون إليها؟

جريس: البطالة أحدها، ثم الديمقراطية. تحت أغنية «مسار» على الإنتفاض والتحرّك، ففي نهاية المطاف، نحن من يحرك المجتمع، نحن الشباب. وطبعاً، لا تقتصر فئة الشباب على الذين تراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و30 سنة، بل تتجاوز هذه الفئة العمريّة. تتناول أغنية «البلد» موضوع الديمقراطية وصعوبة التعبير والإفصاح. أمّا أغنية «عالراديو»، فتتناول الأخبار اليومية والأفكار السلبيّة يلي تبثّها الراديوهات والإعلام بشكل عام. هناك الكثير من الأفكار التي تحدّنا وتحبطنا وتزجّنا في سجنٍ مقفل يمنعنا من تبادل الرسائل بوضوح.



📖 **فرقة «مفر» هي فرقة فلسطينية أطلقت في بيت لحم لإعادة إنشاء الموسيقى البديلة في فلسطين وبناء مشهد جديد للموسيقى المستقلة عموماً. يدل اسم الفرقة على مقطع من قصيدة لحمود درويش يقول فيه "حاصر حصارك لا مفر"، وهو يدعو الفلسطينيين إلى المقاومة والصراع بكل طاقتهم. إختارت فرقة «مفر» أن تقوم ذلك من خلال الموسيقى: أنتم تواجهون تحديات الحياة الاجتماعية والسياسية، وتسائلونها بكل صراحة في أغانيكم. كما تطرحون أغاني تحاكي مشكلات الشباب والمجتمع. أخبرونا المزيد عن «مفر»، وعن رؤيتها وأهدافها الرئيسية.**

جريس: مبدئياً، عندما نتكلم عن فرقة «مفر» فنحن نتكلم عن أي واحد من أعضاء الفرقة، نحن الخمسة نشكل مجتمعاً صغيراً يمثل المجتمع الأكبر. نحن شريحة صغيرة ضمن شريحة أكبر هي شريحة الشباب. أنا لا أغني ما عاشه والدي، لأنه عاش حقبة مختلفة، لكنني أغني ما يغنيه راجي وما يغنيه فيليب. كأعضاء فرقة، تتمحور رؤيتنا حول الإفصاح والتكلم في زمن يهاب فيه المجتمع التكلم. موجودون لتكلم ولنواجه المشاكل بموسيقانا وكلامنا. نحن نعتنق الواقعية ونعمل وفقها بهدف دفع الناس لمواجهة الواقع وليس التهرب منه أو العيش في تخيلات توهمنا أن الحياة مليئة بالأمل وأن كل شيء على ما يرام. على الناس أن تواجه الواقع لكي تتغلب عليه وتغيره.

📖 **يؤمن أعضاء الفرقة بقدرتهم على خلق تغيير في كيفية تفكير وتصرف الشباب العربي تجاه بعض المفاهيم. كيف تخلقون هذا التأثير؟**

الفكرة من كل موضوع هذا الألبوم هي أن نحدث تغييراً في المجتمعات وخصوصاً في الشباب المُسَيَّر في ظلّ الاحتلال وفي ظلّ الحكومات والعاجز عن تحقيق ما يريد. في هذا الألبوم، نخاطب الشباب من خلال كلمات الأغاني التي وضعناها، كلٌّ منهم يسمع هذه الكلمات ويفهمها كما يشاء. لكلّ مشاكله وأحلامه العاجز عن تحقيقها. هناك كبثٌ للحريّات. هكذا، تتمحور كلمات الأغاني حول كل فردٍ بمشاكله اليومية، كالعاجز عن السفر أو التنقل أو الإنتاج أو غير ذلك بسبب الضغوطات. تقوم الكلمات بمخاطبة المستمع كفرد، أي بصيغة «أنت/أنتي»، الذي يمثل بشخصه فئاتٍ عديدة، فيصبح الألبوم وكأنه مُصمَّم له/لها. وبالتالي يخلق المستمع/ة علاقته/ها الشخصية بالألبوم تبعاً لمشاعره/ها، ولكي توقظ كلمات الأغاني في نفس المستمعين ما يجعلهم ينتفضون ويفكّرون في المشاكل ويتحرّرون من الواقع الذي يعيشونه ويستعيدون الحريّة التي يستحقوها.

📖 **تتوقعون أن يخلق ألبوم «تأشيرة» ثورة ضد الظلم. الدعوة للنضال واضحة في أغنية «في البلد»: "غير هل جو المجنون - ما تلعب دور الحزين - ما تغمض هل عيون". كيف تخططون لتحقيق هذه الثورة؟**

فيليب: ربما تكون كلمة «ثورة» كبيرة قليلاً، لنبدأ بالتغيير. نحن فرقة تأسست في العام 2014، لكن انطلاقتنا الرسمية كانت في العام 2016، حين أطلقنا رسالتنا وألبومنا الأول، واستطعنا اكتساب عتنة محدّدة من الجمهور. بغضّ النظر عمّا إن كانت صغيرة أو كبيرة، فقد تمكّنا من إيصال فكرتنا للناس، ونودّ توسيع هذه الفكرة في الألبوم الثاني. برأيي، التراكم من أهم العوامل التي تخلق تياراً معيّناً. إن أردت يمكنك أن تسمّيه ثورة أو تغيير.

أنتم في صدد العمل على ألبومكم الثاني «تأشيرة»، وهو عبارة عن مسلسل موسيقي تلفزيوني (مجموعة فيديو كليبات)، وهو شكلٌ إنتاجي يُطلق للمرة الأولى في المنطقة.

الموسيقى

فلسطين

فيليب جراد

مَفَر

ألبوم تأشيرة

هدف المشروع هو إنتاج «تأشيرة»، وهو الألبوم الموسيقي الثاني لفرقة «مَفَر». سيعيد الألبوم إحياء موسيقى تراثية من العالم العربي في سياقٍ موسيقيٍّ جديد يواكب الذوق الموسيقي لجيل الشباب اليوم.

التفاعل مع
الفضاء المدني

التأكيد على
التنوع والتعاطف
وحرية التعبير

DATA VISUALIZATION TRAINING CAMP

LEBANON

JOUMANA AL JABRI AHMAD BARCLAY IMAN INNAB

VISUALIZING IMAPCT

Impact Data Lab

Impact Data Lab (IDL) is a training, prototyping, and production program that convenes multidisciplinary teams to collaborate on Palestinian human rights.

The project follows three stages:

1. **Mentorship (remote):** One month, 4 teams
2. **Workshop (Amman):** 20-30 participants supported by top data visualization mentors/trainers
3. **Ongoing partnership:** Post-workshop advancement of strong ideas and prototypes through VP's cyclical production program.

STIMULATING
ARTISTIC
VOCATIONS

BUILDING SKILLS
AND CAPACITIES

PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING

📌 **Visualizing Impact (VI) creates community-empowering visual tools by a team of researchers, storytellers, designers, and technologists working in partnership with civil society organizations and other change makers to promote social justice. In this context, Impact Data Lab relates to Visualizing Palestine (VP), Visualizing Impact’s largest project. Visualizing Palestine’s mission is to support the realization of justice for Palestinians by providing tools that present a factual, rights-based narrative of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Can you tell us more about Visualizing Palestine and its work so far?**

Joumana Al Jabri: Let me start with the relationship between Visualizing Impact and Visualizing Palestine. Visualizing Palestine actually preceded the brand Visualizing Impact. The latter grew out of a desire for whatever work we were producing and processes we were developing for Visualizing Palestine to become accessible to people working on other issues and other causes. We felt that Visualizing Impact, as a brand umbrella, allowed for more expansion in other areas. Visualizing Palestine can thus be perceived as the prototype for anything else that happens under Visualizing Impact, and sometimes, some projects that come under the umbrella of Visualizing Impact inform the necessary technical skills and knowledge required for Visualizing Palestine-related projects; there is a lot of exchange happening between both.

Today, in social justice spheres, certain things have become so fixed, they ended up almost isolating and detaching social justice itself from everyday premises of being a human being. So, it almost ends up becoming a field that either one belongs to or does not. There are just too many labels that come with it. And after being marginalized by economic powers, it became hip, through terms such as ‘social entrepreneurship’. What we are trying to do with Visualizing Palestine is attempt to render important knowledge accessible to already existing communities by fortifying communication. But what we want to also do is make that knowledge sought after and exciting to communities that do not usually engage with it. For example, the material we provide becomes a sort of upgraded communication for advocacy groups and academic spheres, and goes further in its reach than through in-depth researchers and policy makers. But we also are very concerned with reaching a community that would approach our material from a different angle, such as designers. The fact that we produce visuals within the information design community allows us to become a case study for the information design field regardless of our inquiry, which in turn invites people who may not necessarily seek knowledge about Palestine to engage with us nonetheless due to the quality of the tool itself.

The easiest way for me to describe our mode of operation is through a comparison between modern Western medicine and holistic Eastern medicine. The way we have worked operationally in the conception of our product, and through our thinking and value system, is by trying to espouse the model of preventative, holistic Eastern medicine, which looks at many things interacting together as one ecosystem, in order to create a healthy environment and a socially just world. What we are recognized by is visualizing data. But that is very different from saying we are experts at infographic production, just like one would say, “I am a doctor that specializes in kidneys”, but often enough there is a need to understand and be in touch with a wider set of skill sets, value systems, and communities, to actually be able to produce influence on the long-term.

Our team operates from at least 6 different countries at a time. It was not

necessarily intended, but throughout the years, and while very challenging on a day-to-day basis, it has proven to operate almost like a pulse into different environments. It allows us not to be isolated within a bubble containing certain mindsets that end up blinding us. For example, I am living in the UAE, and I am connected to Saudi Arabia, but also Jordan. Other team members are in Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt, another one is in Toronto, Canada, and one is in Boston, USA. Since what we work on is affected by specific power dynamics—financial world operations, banking systems, bottlenecks, different legal statuses—we have become closer to multiple pulses that allow us to be aware of different societal perceptions, or ways through which actions are being undertaken by different communities, or at the very least different political and economic environments through which people live. The fact that we are spread in different areas has thus proven effective, though definitely challenging.

While our primary focus has been on visualizing data about injustices, we have also been looking at it strategically and saying, “OK, when you keep on sharing with the community what is wrong, how do you also actually contribute to hope-instilling ways in which to move forward?” Thus, recently, we started releasing visualized data about the impact of the visual infographics we have produced. It is similar to assessing the footprint of our visuals. We now have on our website a whole section called “Impact”, and in it, we have installed a tracking system where, if someone downloads our material—as all of our material is downloadable—they are asked to provide us with information pertaining to how they are going to be using it, in what context or city, etc. We were thus able to find out that the majority of our users either operate within an academic context—professors, university students, groups such as the SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine) who have 80 chapters across the US, New Zealand, and Canada—and advocacy groups of different types. Our tracking system has shown that our material has been used in over 424 cities and 65 countries around the world since 2015. We are also working on a search platform related to our impact as well as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS)’s impact. We are focusing on what has actually succeeded; this has become as important to us as relaying data related to injustices. It prompts the community to think that action does lead somewhere, even if it takes time. For us to share that change does occur over time is important, because it allows people not to give up hope and understand that changes may be generational.

One thing that we have recently introduced to our team is reflecting on social justice in relation to us meaning on an interpersonal and organizational level. It is very easy for individuals to become employed in groups and teams, as well as under organizations that are working for social justice externally, but we are starting to introduce practices internally. It is our way of asking ourselves, “Is fairness part of our value system and practice? What about our way of working and mode of operation? And what does that actually mean, for a team and for a growing community?” So, there is a lot of inner reflection happening, and internal work to improve.

📌 **Impact Data Lab is a prototyping event focused on Palestinian human rights.**

The event brought four multidisciplinary teams to Amman to participate in a hands-on program focused on producing innovative data visualizations for social justice. The program included structured collaboration sessions, training opportunities, and presentations. The workshop took place in Amman from March 11-14, 2018. Tell us more about the Impact Data Lab event within the broader framework of Visualizing Palestine.



focus thematically on one thing and really try to digitize everything on the maps.

The digitization would occur during mapathons?

Yes, and since the platform is online, participants can do it from anywhere. These mapathons provide an educational framework for mapping and tool usage that derives from OpenStreetMap, a collaborative project to create a free editable map of the world. The participants can then use OpenStreetMap if they want, or the current map. We are also recruiting knowledgeable people who have time on their hands and are interested in digitizing these maps and stay involved. It is a Wikipedia-style type of crowdsourcing.

II: For the 5 themes, we put together and brought in experts from each field who could participate in a way that would bring value to the project through different skillsets. We had an expert in GIS mapping, a great storyteller, an experienced researcher who works with gender data, etc. It was incredible bringing all these people with different skill sets around the themes, it brought a lot of creative energy; I never imagined that we would be able to accomplish all that we did in the span of 3 days, it was truly amazing.

The work around gender was enormous. I think more funding should go into collecting data on gender. For now, the United Nations and other international organizations are fixated on women's health; they focus on birth rate, or women's physical health, or equality in the sense of access to education. Very few of these studies actually take into consideration women's relationship to wider socio-political contexts. What does it mean when a woman is born under the occupation? What does it mean when a woman gets married, or decides to bring children, under the occupation? We have managed to gather really strong data, but even that data, as we were working with it, had its flaws, in the sense that there were gaps in terms of really trying to get to the psyche of women. Taking into consideration that Palestine, and the West Bank in particular, has a massive rural potential, how does that affect the status of women, especially in regards to income loss and the absence of males in their households? We just wanted to find a way to highlight all of this in the data. How do we tell these stories in a way that is more interesting? That is why we wanted it to be interactive, and we thought it would be nice to capture the experiences of these women through a typology. A way to bring you into their world was to create these characters, and then use them comparatively across different categories of women as told by the data. So it was very enriching. But developing that would require a separate funding structure and more time.

Education was trickier, since we were working on its related data well in advance of the workshop. One will not find specific information to East Jerusalem that is comparable, and this is important to stress, to West Jerusalem, or the West Bank. Finding information that is comparable and can be measured across these different areas was very difficult to do. Generally, drawing comparisons is problematic when the data is not comparable to begin with. It is quite telling of the segregation being endured by Palestinians. When humanitarian organizations go in, they look at crisis relief as a band aid to all, but they do not look at the effect of apartheid on East Jerusalem, and how it affects children there, for example. The team who worked on the education theme all hailed from the Palestinian civil society. As data analysts, we do not necessarily extrapolate—we do not come out and make statements about the data; the data makes statements for itself. But, as human rights activists and civil society members, the participants wanted to produce statements on the top of the data. Through the data, they wanted to say that there is a very determined and intentional interruption of Palestinian education in East Jerusalem. Our role was to try and find the data to support their observations. We therefore taught them a lot about how to formulate statements based on data. This was a very tricky negotiation. They learned a lot, and we also learned a lot about how passionate they are about the topic. Since people respond to numbers much better than statements, the participants were desperately trying to assemble all the data they could.

Ahmad Barclay: From the start, we saw Visualizing Palestine as a project that was about using visual media and storytelling to convey the message of Palestine. But we also saw it as a way to develop emerging tools, such as infographics, as an example of building networks, and to educate communities on how to use these tools in order to communicate their message based on different types of advocacy work. It is therefore about starting to build a kind of ecosystem around data visualization, infographics, visual storytelling etc. Impact Data Lab is something that naturally comes out of that. It was the first time we brought a big group of people to work on different projects all in one space.

Five themes—gender, education, topographic maps, collective action and digital rights in the West Bank and East Jerusalem—guided the Impact Data Lab's content focus. Can you tell us more about how the participants treated the themes, and how these themes were visualized and disseminated?

In terms of the themes, each was treated differently. The theme that really allowed for the infographic type of output associated with Visualizing Palestine was the education pod. Participants were looking at education in Eastern Jerusalem specifically, and they issued an infographic output we are looking into disseminating at the moment. One of our partners is very keen on using it for face-to-face advocacy purposes, and that is something we hope will happen soon. We also launched a platform, Palestine Open Maps, which was the result of our work on topographic maps, and it turned out to be the direct 'descendant' of the Impact Data Lab.

With regards to the topographic maps theme, how will the dissemination be done?

It is now online. We organized a soft launch on May 15, i.e. Nakba Day, and were able to gather thousands of views. We are also currently working on a major upgrade that will make everything flow much more smoothly, and which will also allow us to promote the platform again. We are hoping to develop the platform in a way that allows for the digitization of the information contained in these maps—property boundaries, roads, and places. The digitization would allow for clickable historic maps through which you can find current locations. The idea is also to organize mapathons, where we bring people together for a short period of time in order to introduce them to the process of digitization, and then to allow them to systematically work on it for a day or two. We will

Regarding collective action, we had assembled this enormous database, and we were looking into information that captured events that happened in the past and which were related to collective action around human rights in Palestine. The questions we asked ourselves were the following: How do we track instances of collective action? How do we make people aware of it, and how do we get them to involve themselves? Consequently, we came up with a sort of add-on, a Google Chrome plug-in, that alerts users of actions taking place across the world. Our hope is that this will feed into an app, something that is more dynamic, and which would allow users to join a movement they feel they want to involve themselves with in a way that is easy and intuitive.

What were the challenges you faced during the workshop?

II: It is a universal challenge: how do you filter a lot of data into a crystal clear, simple message that has the biggest impact? This is what a lot of us were learning and re-learning, sharing, and challenging throughout the sessions.

The lack of data, and more specifically comparable data, was another big challenge; but also having to deal with a very low nuance in the gender-related data. There was a lack of clarity in the methodology sometimes, and a lot of the reports we got our hands on would not allow us to extrapolate wider statements around certain underlying issues. If, for example, that the women cannot reach a well because soldiers are occupying the land, humanitarian organizations will say, “OK, we will just install a well on the women’s land.” But nobody would dig deeper and say, “How is this really affecting the life of women who don’t also have access to their trees, from which they extract produce and sell it to the market to generate income?” So, all of this data is swimming out there, but somehow it has not been collected in a way that is comparable and allows you to truly understand it. As a team, we ended up confronting more questions instead of producing answers.

Were there learnings that would allow you to face these challenges in future workshops?

II: I think the United Nations and other organizations that commission this type of research should stop designing these studies without truly working with local people on the ground. I know they are trying to do this through universities, but I think they need to branch out more before pulling out this kind of data. The data they deal with has the power to move big budgets towards different things; it also has the power to trigger governmental action, and shift policy. This is where the power of these numbers is; it allows for real change within these communities. Instead of fixating on humanitarian relief, it allows policy makers to address underlying issues, where you can show that instead of putting money in building walls or fences, we could actually invest in infrastructure that is more useful to rebuild an economy. These numbers can also allow activists to pressure their governments not to give money here, but to divert it there instead. This is where I think we need to play a bigger role as an organization, and I believe that this is what data ought to have the power to do—shift mindsets at a higher level, not strictly at a humanitarian relief one. So this is where I think we should learn most. We should start from the source.

Impact Data Lab was inspired by the need to gather as a community and brainstorm new ideas, forge new partnerships, and exchange knowledge. What were the highlights of the workshop? Any new ideas that stood out? What was the impact of these ideas

and outcomes after the event?


AB: For me, the highlight was coming together and meeting people within the Visualizing Palestine and Visualizing Impact teams. There were people I had not met in real life, and I think that is true for everyone on the team. It was an excellent opportunity to connect together as a team. There were various opportunities through which people presented their work, and that was how we would get to know each other. We also had a lot of people coming from outside, and the response was generally very positive. We were also able to combine teamwork and networking. It was a great opportunity to be in the same space and on the same page as people who were doing development work, and to really think in a more open way about creating bridges between design and development. That really showed in the outputs of most of the pods actually. You understand the possibilities of each of the components, whether it is design, development, content, etc. I think a good example of that was what the participants did in the Collective Action pod, with the Google Chrome plug-in.

The maps definitely would not have happened without Impact Data Lab. It was an offshoot of a different project I had been working on with Visualizing Impact, which has to do with creating an exhibition on 3D topographies based on these same historic maps. The intention was to create something we could generate a revenue stream from; there was an advocacy purpose to it as well by allowing people to talk about Palestine. It is a political statement, without necessarily being a provocative object in that sense, just a beautiful one. We had access to these maps, and we were intending to use them with another purpose. But then we thought of coming up with a brief on the spot. So, it was really only because of the Impact Data Lab that we had this whole other project coming out of our initial one.

Joumana mentioned in an interview that “visuals are important because of their speed, their adaptiveness to social media, and the fact that the mind captures more from visuals than from texts”. Yet an infographic is like an iceberg; you see one-tenths of it while there is so much below that of work being done, whether by researchers, writers or others. Tell us more about the process of developing an infographic at Visualizing Impact, giving it context, and giving it life (engaging power)?

AB: What we try to do is to understand the bigger factors at play, and the type of context involved, in what we come across in the news and the data we collect and visualize. The picture in Palestine seems to be changing all the time, but it is actually quite slow and static compared to other parts of the Arab world right now. To get carried away with the things that are happening now can distract attention from the kind of processes that have been ongoing, such as settler-colonialism or the implementation of apartheid policies. If you focus too much on the daily acts of violence shown by the mainstream media, you end up failing to understand the bigger forces at play. So in all the work we do, regardless of whether it is very current or based on a long-term set of data, we try to make it relevant to the bigger picture. Ever since the beginning, when we would work on Visualizing Palestine, we would try to define a process through which to implement each project by tying it to a broader framework. We always start by identifying what topic we are trying to look at, and then we would go into researching and understanding. Following that, we would create briefs and open up the transfer from the researcher to the designer. For a long time, we thought you could define the story of a visual through text, and in some cases you can, but in other cases there is a visual component that allows you to shape the data in a certain way and tell a story. I think you lose something if you

just think through text. So that really varies from project to project, and there would always be a tension. Two other important things we also think of when beginning a project have to do with the audience we are trying to reach and the message we are trying to communicate. If either of those two components is missing, you are much less likely to create a successful and impactful visual story. And that is something we learned through time; really pinning down those two elements is probably more important than anything else. And obviously you have to have a data set that tells the same story that you are trying to tell. So you need all of those components. Then, the next stage is obviously about visualization, so it is about finding the right medium for the audience you chose to target, and that has really changed a lot; during the 7 years that we have been working, transformations related to how people browse the Internet, for example, have been huge. This is something that we are trying to keep up with; we are pre-figuring how people are trying to engage with content. We always ask ourselves: What kind of stories are people going to appreciate? What are the big words that are going to capture their attention? If there is a visual concept we can use—like a hook that really gets people into the story and allows them to capture the idea instantly, then we are all set. But then we have to do with more complex things, like trying to put numbers in context. For instance, we use anchors that appear intuitive to people, like comparing the number of displaced Palestinians with the number of inhabitants in a big city, or comparing between the number of Palestinians and the number of Israelis that were killed during an attack, which allows highlighting the disparity.

 **How do you make sure these visualized statistics, once issued by Visualizing Palestine, have a lasting impact on reality and are able to change it as well as change lives?**


AB: While it is a very difficult point in time in terms of making change, I definitely think we are contributing to the way that activists and advocates are able to communicate on Palestine. So, we are considering them more and more to be our primary audience in a way. We are providing tools that people who want to advocate for Palestine can use. If, for example, you visit the Israeli Apartheid Week website, where they bring together the listing of events taking place, and they provide basic resources for people who are putting on these events around the world, the first thing that is listed in their resources page is Visualizing Palestine. Among advocates, we are probably the number one source in terms of the kind of visual information we produce, and definitely in terms of infographic information. So in terms of lasting impact, this tool is about re-engaging with people who want to use our material and who are using our material. Someone who has a very avid interest could use it as a very strong base to expand their basic understanding, to introduce concepts and how they kind of fit together in relation to Palestine. It is augmenting knowledge and it is providing it hopefully in a fairly rounded manner than just taking a set of infographics in whichever order they appear.

 **What about augmented reality? Is that something you are looking into for future tools?**

AB: Not really. The closest we will get to that is, for example, with the map platform, which makes it possible for people who have actually visited Palestine, to locate places directly on their phone using GPS so we can, in turn, locate them on the map. If users are trying to get to a particular historic site but it is probably not on the official maps, they now have a tool that they can use and locate themselves with very precisely.

They are also able to correct things; if there is something on the map/platform that is wrong, we give them the ease and ability to flag that and say it is incorrect. We are always aware of the latest technological developments, and when we see opportunities that really fit in with the kind of communication

goals and the kind of audiences we are trying to engage with, that is where a new project comes out.

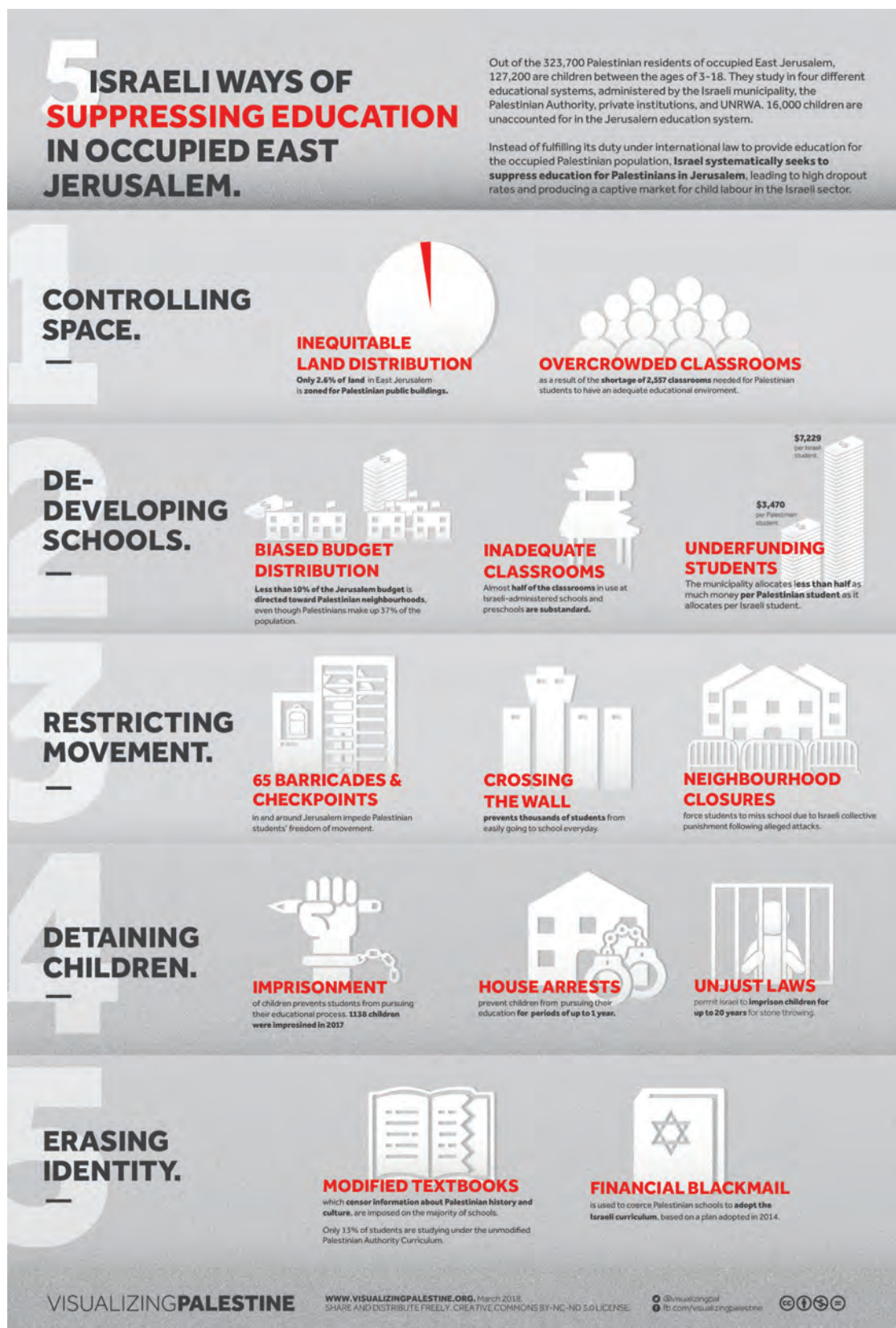
 **What are your future plans in terms of data visualization and dissemination that are concerned with Palestine? We heard that you are planning to move into other media, such as animation, dynamic infographics, or even crowd-designed graphics.**

II: In terms of partnerships, we get approached a lot by different people who want to work with us on different projects. The only things that tie us are time and resources. We define the scope of a project based on what we can put together, or based on the kind of impact it can have. We learned that we need to be more impact-savvy. The work can be great, but if you do not get it out there, distribute it, disseminate it, then you do not have as much impact as desired.

The relationships that were built through the Impact Data Lab were amazing. I think people who have known each other via Skype or email finally coming together in one space has really galvanized a movement, even within the team and our collaborators. It feels very good to know that if you need their support on something, they will jump in and help you with it. I think it is an incredible network to have. Learning skills from one another is very powerful, because then you are able to reach out at the right person for the right job, or for the right information, which I think is brilliant. Regarding projects to sell, I know that we have big plans for the collective action pod, as well as for Palestine Open Maps, which we are working hard to continue to develop. The gender pod might not be a priority until we find a proper partnership to build from. But I think our next focus is going to be the education pod, which we are planning to explore through different angles. One of them is to show what is happening in North American and European universities in terms of building a movement for justice and equality in Palestine, and also to show how educators are utilizing tools to build solidarity. In our newsletter, we have a section called Impact, and in a recent one we sent out, we featured a symposium led by Dr. Manal Hamze, who is a gender expert, where she used six data visuals from Visualizing Palestine. We are doing interviews with educators who have used our material to show the kind of impact from having spaces that we do not necessarily have access to. So, we are going to build this video series, and in the first part of next year, we will be working on a campaign around education.

On a separate note, we have serious plans for a storefront that can help maintain the project. The Wearable data is one of our innovation lines, and innovation is one of the three of core functions of our operation. The wearable data is an old idea that we have been working on for some time—the first prototype was created in January 2017. At the moment, the prototype is a scarf, and there are several variations, several editions of it. We are continuously refining the product, and we are building excitement and creativity around the idea of wearable data through this scarf, so that when we do launch the product, there would already be an impact around it. There is a lot of demand, so we need to be ready to make sure that our product is first of all good. We are asking ourselves all types of questions: can you wash and dry the scarf? Is the thread going to rod? When you put on a scarf, what do you do with it? Do you wrap it on your neck? Do you let it fall? how does that affect the design and where the data goes? How can people tell the story? Can anybody relate to this? It is not a fashion item, it really is just wearable data. We are seriously committed to this idea. The fact that it looks great and beautiful is a bonus. It is a portable storytelling device.

One can see how the world is changing in terms of information. People don't read, they get put off by large amounts of reading, especially because they are on their mobiles. We realize that it has become vital to tell stories that require history and background, but in a way that unfolds and is engaged with in a short amount of time. So we thought about how to build our



infographics in ways that are animated, basically through short one or two-minute video clips using the same visual assets and material, as well as updated information. We have a sample now that we are almost done with finalizing. If we end up liking the output, we will roll it out on others, and re-release our past work in a different form, so that it can be shared on Instagram and other platforms.

The other major priority for us that we have learned is impact, and how to think about it in a different way. If we produce this great work and nobody knows about it, or very few people learn about it, then what kind of impact are we having? It is as if we do not exist. We have a strong brand, and incredible credibility, and we are really in a great position reputation-wise, so it is time for us to be more clever about where we place our work, and how we get our work to reach more people. Social media is definitely one, but we also need to develop relationships with people who need the work but don't know it exists, and involve them early on in the process. So, for example, if you take a piece or campaign on education, how do we involve educators at an early stage so that when we release the material, it is in their hands? And how do we document this impact? We started doing it with Dr. Manal Hamze, we are learning a lot from this relationship because she is extremely active; she is now taking 6 of our pieces with her to different spaces to activate

groups and academics and challenge them to think in a slightly different way. This has been very powerful for us. I think our buzzword for the years to come is going to be Impact. How do we achieve a bigger impact and build a stronger dissemination for our work?

JAJ: We have also been looking into digital security, not just in the sense of how to protect ourselves as a team and the organization, but also in terms of the data, our members and subscribers, etc. We have lists of different types of people in our possession, and we need to make sure that this is not something that can be hacked into, stolen, or tampered with. We already had one consultant come in who was keen on helping us pro bono which was lovely; they checked the security of our website, the security of our CRM provider, the payment system that we have etc. So, we have done that first step, but now we are also working very closely with one of our funders, who is connecting us to some experts who can help us develop a security strategy so that we are able to maintain and continue to update our digital security around the organization. We need to be prepared for digital attacks and other risks, especially as the collective action pod and movement grows. So yes, it is on the top of our list for this year as well.

DOCUMENTARY FILM

MOROCCO

NADIR BOUHMOUCH

Amussu

When their wells began to dry, a village decides to shut down a water pipeline to a rapacious silver mine.

There, they construct what has become one of the world's longest environmental protest camps. Through the villagers' artistic performances and agricultural harvests — this film documents a creative social movement on the front lines of the struggle against environmental injustice.

SHEDDING LIGHT
ON MARGINALIZED
NARRATIVES

CONTRIBUTING TO
SOCIAL COHESION
AND COMMUNITY
BUILDING

ENGAGING
WITH THE
CIVIC SPACE



Amussu (in English, “Movement”) is your fourth in a string of films dealing with social activism and identity among the people of Morocco. The film focuses on Imider villagers who decide to fight back creatively against the mining company whose ecological impact is destroying their community. Tell us more about what inspired you to create Amussu, and the different phases of production that led to the film’s completion and release.

Nadir Bouhmouch: Amussu is first and foremost the struggle itself. It is about how a community was able to fight back against a powerful mining corporation in Morocco, with very little resources, and how it also established a liberated zone on a mountain that they call Mount Alebban, which is essentially free from state power. In this liberated zone, they were able to take on a lot of the responsibilities of the state into their own hands, because the state does not allocate them the opportunity or space to engage in theater, show films, and organize art workshops... On Mount Alebban, they were able to enact many of these things that were taken away from them for so long.

As for the different phases of the project, the first thing that I did was propose to make a film collectively—I had already been going to Mount Alebban for a couple of years before I decided to start filming, mainly as an activist myself, as I mainly work on environmental and land rights. We first got the approval of AGRAU. AGRAU is a kind of general assembly; it is an indigenous form of democracy that existed in North Africa for thousands of years. It is an institution that works by consensus and involves the entire community: men, women, and even children participate in AGRAU and they all have a say in the process. Once that was done, we began a training process for the community. Essentially, my belief was that there is a specific relationship Moroccans—even North Africans in general—have with the

camera. The camera is this alien, foreign object that can feel a little bit invasive in communities in the Atlas, or in marginalized areas of the country. Making the camera accessible, demystifying it, rendering it something that is not so alien, but that belongs to you, was an important part of the process. And so, during these workshops, and in order to demystify all the cinema equipment, everyone was allowed to put their hands on it and use it, and received training on how it works. Of course, this also becomes essential for the autonomy of the community later on. But it also makes for a better filming process, because it ceased to be an alien process and became a familiar one.

Film screenings were part of this process, so we could look at what other examples of documentaries there were. Then, the community formed into several groups—so we had the AGRAU focusing on the writing, and we had the local film community of Imider, and we will have the AGRAU for the editing. Anyone could participate in the AGRAU from the community to film and write, there is a large circle where everyone gives ideas on what should be filmed, how it should be filmed, what the narrative could look like. What I took and tried to formulate through Amassu was the outcome of the AGRAU’s participation in the filming and writing. Everything I shot was first suggested by them. And of course, in the filming process itself, anyone could interject at any time and suggest something. So sometimes, uncle Tounis would come to me and say, “You should film me this way; this is what I do in my life, usually at this time of day I come from the oasis and I feed the livestock”, and he would establish the mise en scène for me. It was a collaboration where people could interject and intervene in how the film was being shot. I was essentially just a tool for them to express themselves, and what they would want the world to know about their lives. The rough assembly, however, was an informal process; since I was living with them, I would take out my computer and we would look at the rushes, discuss them, and then think of what we could do and focus on the next day. It is a collective process; it is not just me imposing my vision on the community. The editing phase with the AGRAU was also a back and forth process where everyone would share ideas, and the final cut itself had to be approved.

📖 You mentioned the following in an interview: “I was a protester before becoming a filmmaker. So I was inside the protest. And my role as a filmmaker was secondary to that and the film itself was an act of protest because it was done illegally.” Amassu is therefore your own act of protest, revealing to the world the Imider community, so their voice could be amplified. What are your plans to secure an impact to their struggle?

NB: The world premiere was held in Imider in the protest camp, and we invited people from all over the country. It was an open call to anyone who wanted to come all the way to Imider. In terms of securing an impact to this project, there is this notion in anarchist philosophy of ‘dual power’. On the one hand, you are fighting directly against oppressive forces, and at the same time you are constructing an alternative in the process. The very process of making this film collective is a construction of an alternative, which is that cinema should not always be engaged with and produced to make money. Above all, cinema is supposed to be useful for society.

But more concretely, the first thing we did was organizing regional screenings in North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania). I do not see myself being limited to just Morocco. We want to work on mobile caravans; we also want to work with student unions in public universities specifically, because they are quite marginalized in Morocco. We will also organize screenings at workers unions, especially among agricultural workers. We are also planning to screen Amassu in ciné-clubs, especially in Algeria, as there are a lot of village-based ciné-clubs in Kabylie where Tamazight is also spoken. We want to also focus on the regions that suffer from similar issues and try to build a network through these screenings and between these different communities. So it is not just about Imider, but also Redayef in Tunisia which is suffering from phosphate for example, or in Southern Algeria where communities suffer from oil extraction.

And then there are the international film festivals. And these are very important because they give credibility, not only to our film, but also to our collective methods. To prove that this is a method that works, that can be replicated in other places. And hopefully this will empower other people throughout the region but also maybe also the world to take up collective modes of film production. The film also allows building a grassroots network

outside of Morocco.

📖 In Amassu, you recount the story of Imider through its people’s own artistic modes of expression, especially Timnadine and Izli poetry, as well as oral storytelling. You incorporate the cultural heritage of the Moroccan southeast to convey a message of resistance while preserving a marginalized popular narrative. You seek to allow more room for these communities to express themselves directly while, at the same time, preserving the oral and visual heritage of the Ait Atta tribe through cinema. Can you tell us more about this?

NB: Izlan (Izli is singular, Izlan is plural) is under attack, because of its history. There is an active process of folklorization of Amazigh culture; it is not art, they say, it is folklore. I think this division of art versus folklore is very dangerous, because it makes it seem like these very ancient artistic modes are something that are inferior to, say, modern and contemporary Arab or European culture. This is a form of racism in artistic discourse that we find in Morocco today. It is also not convenient for the State, in the sense that this type of poetry was often recounted by a figure called an amdiz. The amdiz is this rebel historian poet, who is either associated with a certain village or tribe, or ambulant, going from village to village to tell stories. For example, under colonialism, the amdiz served as the radio of Morocco’s marginalized areas. He would come and bring news of resistance and rebellion against colonial powers. He could go up to a qaid or a figure and challenge them to their face without repercussion. An important aspect about this poetry is that it is very simple; it is familiar and is very easily learned by others and replicated over time. So you find people today still reciting poetry that was written hundreds of years ago, and which has only slightly been modified over time. The Amdiz is like a historian, by documenting certain historical events through poetry. A lot of these Amazigh cultures were not cultures of writing; they were oral cultures. It is an important archive for us today that needs to be given more time and energy. This is why I think that, as filmmakers, we should focus on these dying stories that tell our own history. We are often taught that the Amazigh are primitive and failed to build lasting structures, while



Arabs are civilized, urban, and built huge palaces, etc. But I think we need to challenge this—people who did not build palaces were also not slaves, so were they really inferior by choosing to live outside of state power? These are the theoretical and historical reasons that pushed me to work with this heritage particularly.

▮ **Amussu is a documentary that allows its performative and observational aspects to coexist. Could you elaborate on this?**

NB: By observational, I mean the erasure of the filming process itself. I often criticize activist films for being too grainy, too gritty; I think it takes the focus away from the struggle itself that they are supposed to be filming. So I thought maybe this could be a militant film, but an observational one, where we erase ourselves as filmmakers, and focus on what happens in front of the camera. However it is also a film about constructing a narrative around the accumulation of mundane acts—these very simple gestures in daily life. History is not only made through extraordinary events, such as wars or revolutions, but also through this multiplication and accumulation of many little acts that people carry out in their daily lives.

In terms of the documentary's performative aspect, it means essentially that the community performs poetry throughout the film, and the idea is to split the authoritative voice of a classic narrative, and to give more room for multiple people to partake in collective narration. It is not entirely unique—it is unique in some ways—but it is also inspired by other films that deploy this type of method. Glauber Rocha for example, and the Brazilian Cinema Novo, use this kind of folk songs in their films. Or even here in Morocco, Ahmed Bouanani also speaks about this—which is very funny, because a lot of Moroccan filmmakers are currently talking about Bouanani, and it is becoming sort of a trend. However you have to pay attention to what Bouanani is saying; he states that we should look at our oral culture; we have a treasure that is being lost, and we have to preserve and retrieve what is being lost. So I am actually applying what Bouanani is talking about, in many ways.

▮ **One of your goals was facilitating the village's future audio-visual autonomy and encouraging local production, creative expression and cultures of cinephilia. You mentioned hoping the impact of this documentary would last long after you having finished production. Could you tell us more about the Imider Film Festival for Environmental Justice?**

NB: The Imider Film Festival for Environmental Justice is organized by the AGRAU as well as the movement itself, and we help with the curation of the films. The idea is to make cinema accessible to people. I believe that if you are not watching films, you cannot produce films. If you have not seen something before, you will have difficulties knowing what to do. And I think one of the first steps is to make film accessible to a community and a region that do not have cinemas nor cultural infrastructure. This accessibility allows for audio-visual autonomy. It is also important to show what it means to be together in one place by watching a film... You know everybody now has access to smartphones and the Internet, and this is good, but I think there is sense of community we get from watching films—and that is also very important.

▮ **One of the most essential objectives of this project is to give a voice to**

illiterate women who have developed a consciousness of their condition as victims of environmental and social injustice. This consciousness is beautifully expressed in their poems and oral stories, and it is through both that Amussu aims to touch people throughout the world. How did you plan on achieving this objective?

NB: First of all, we recorded a lot more than we needed for the film, in order to make sure we have this archive for future generations to listen to or look at. And so, just by doing this, we are giving value to women who do not necessarily know how to read or write, but have a lot to say about society, economics, politics, culture, etc. I think that we often venerate what people write—we venerate text—but we have forgotten that oral culture and storytelling are very essential parts of human culture. We also transcribed all these poems, and turned them into text. Sometimes, when you turn these poems into text, they can be read like an article. Some people have to see it in text to appreciate it. Transcribing these poems gives them value and archiving power.

▮ **Through your films, writings, and photojournalism, you are ensuring that young Moroccans are able to tell their own stories. What is the message that you would like to pass on to your generation and fellow Moroccan youths?**

NB: My message would be to not to wait for anyone to give you the permission to tell a story. I think you can tell a story without necessarily having a lot of money or having a permit to shoot... I think it is just a question of finding the right people to work with and finding the right stories to tell. I may make it sound easier than it is, but I believe that a collective mode of production will essentially take out a lot of the resources one may need in order to finance the production of a film. If it was not for the community in Imider, this film would have cost a lot more money. Even in terms of the crew, we had very few professional members, as most were people from Imider whom we had trained to do this. This also ensures that people continue making films afterwards.

We should stop mimicking European or Hollywood-style cinematic modes of production. These are made in a context of a different culture. Maybe we should give value to our own culture, and try to find a filmic language that is based on our stories, poetry, and artistic modes of expression.

▮ **What are your future plans, with respect to Amussu and beyond?**

NB: With respect to Amussu, first I am planning to write about my experience and our process, because I think it is important to narrate how this film was made collectively, and what our methods were. I already started writing articles, and I think eventually a book would be useful. I want to make these writings accessible, and allow people to replicate this model. It does not have to be an exact replica. Different contexts will need different modifications to it. This, I believe, should be the first step.

The second one will be to continue recording and filming oral stories and poetry in marginalized areas to make sure they are not forgotten. In terms of projects, there are so many that I want to make, I would not even know where to begin. But for now, I would like to write more about this experience and continue documenting it.



من الجهة السورية والجولان المحتل. كيف تشعرين بأن هذا العمل يمكن أن يؤثر على ذلك، وعلى هذه الأحكام الموجودة؟

خ.ا.: أعتقد أن كل فنان أو كل شخص يريد أن يصعد إلى منصة أمام جمهور يجب أن يكون مدركاً لما يحدث حوله، ليس فقط سياسياً، بل سياسياً واجتماعياً ومحلياً وعالمياً. هذه هي مهمة الفنان الصعبة، أن يبقى طول الوقت مدركاً ومتابعاً وصاحب رأي تجاه الأشياء، لأن في النهاية أنت تريد أن تخاطب الناس. ولتخاطبهم عليك أن تخاطب المشترك معهم، وهو ماذا يحصل للمجموعة، أما ما يحصل في قلب بيتي فليس له أي شرعية لأن يكون على منصة إن لم يكن يخاطب جميع الناس. السبب الوحيد لأن أضع وجبة غداء على المنصة بيني وبين صاحبي، أن هذه الوجبة تطرح أسئلة تخص كل شخص في هذا البيت، في هذا العالم، وتلامسه في عدة قضايا لا فقط ما بيني وبين صاحبي من ماضي. الانقسام حول هذه القضايا، هو عدم وعي وعدم إدراك وعدم معرفة لعمق القضية ولما حصل تاريخياً. المسرحية تتعلق بالجولان، لكنني أعتقد أن هذا يؤخذ إلى كل مكان. إنه بحث تاريخي عن تداعيات الظروف التي أدت إلى أن يكون هناك اليوم سكان في الجولان يعيشون ضمن نظام دولة إسرائيلية، لكنهم ليسوا إسرائيليين. هذا تسلسل تاريخي، تداعيات تاريخية حصلت في قلب هذه المنطقة. بعد أن تجري بحثاً تاريخياً ستفهمين أنه لا شرعية للاتهام بالخيانة، وأن هذه الاتهامات باطلة وساقطة، لأن الظروف والتداعيات أوسع من الإنسان،



ليس في المسرحية توجه مباشر إلى ذلك، سوى أن هذا الشريط لا يزال موجوداً وأننا لا نزال منقطعين. الجولان لا يزال منقطعاً عما يحصل في سوريا. وهذا الشريط يكبر وهذا الشرخ يكبر بين الجولان وسوريا. للأسف الشديد أنا اليوم أقولها، التعاطف الموجود في الجولان تجاه القضية السورية هو تعاطف غرباء؛ نحن نتعاطف مع القضية السورية كأننا سياح في ألمانيا، أي كما يتعاطف الأجانب مع القضية. ليس هناك إحساس بأننا جزء من هذا الوطن، هذا الشريط الذي وُضع في عام 67، هذا الاحتلال الذي بدأ في عام 67 نجح خلال 51 سنة في شرخنا بشكل تام وكامل.

ثمة اثنان تزوّجا ويريدان أن يقوموا بلمّ شمل. هذا ما كان موجوداً، فاضطرّا لمدة ٤ سنوات لمحاربة بيروقراطية غير موجودة، ليتكرا القالب الذي من خلاله يمكنها أن تأتي لتسكن مع زوجها. لكن منذ تلك اللحظة التي عبرت فيها إلى الجولان لتعيش حياتها ويصبح لديها عائلة أدركت كم هي نادمة. ليس لأنها لا تُحب هذا الإنسان/الزوج، بل لأن كل عائلتها، أمها، أباه، إخوتها، رفاق مدرستها، كل شيء تربّت عليه هو في الجانب الآخر من سوريا، في دمشق. وحلم العودة حلم رومانسي، وليس فقط عبورٌ للشريط. هذه هي قصة الصبية وهذه قصة المسرحية بالأساس، التي كتبها أنا وخليفة ناطور ككاتب شريك.

✍ يتناول مشروعك فترة زمنية امتدت إلى الآن. ولكن مع كل ما يحصل الآن في سوريا، كيف يمكنك أن تُسقطي مشروعك هذا على الوضع الراهن؟

خ.١: هذا واحد من الأسئلة التي واجهناها كثيراً خلال المراجعات وأيضاً وُجّهت إلينا بعد العمل؛ هل نريد أن نتطرق إلى ما يحصل في سوريا اليوم أم لا. أعتقد أنه لا توجد أي وسيلة لنهرب مما يحصل في سوريا اليوم. حتى حين لا نقوم بأعمال عن سوريا، كان هذا جزءاً من حصارنا اليومي. هذه أخبارنا وهذه حياتنا، ولا يمكننا أن نهرب منها. رغم هذا،

✍ آخر سؤال لك، العمل الفني لا يجب دائماً أن يكون عدوانياً بالطريقة التي يطرح بها المواضيع. لكن في نفس الوقت أنتِ كفنانة تُدركين جيداً السياق الذي يسير فيه هذا العمل، هل تشعرين بأن هذا العمل يتحدى السردية المفروضة على الفلسطيني الذي يحمل هوية إسرائيلية، والفلسطيني الذي لا يحمل هوية إسرائيلية؟ فهناك دائماً في هذه العملية تخوين. هي كلمة ثقيلة نوعاً ما. لكن هناك فلسطينيون في داخل فلسطين، وهناك الجولان، الجولان



ثم إلى العروس التي حملها على ظهره طول طريق العودة، رغم مهاجمة الجنود والذئاب لهما. همّة الوحيد أن تصل العروس سالمة لعريسها. كان لهذه القصة ولصورة الشيخ الحامل للعروس أثرهما العميق عليّ.

اليوم لم يعد باستطاعتنا عبور الحدود السورية رغم أنّها بلادنا التي من المفروض الوصول إليها سيراً على الأقدام. من هنا بدأ البحث عن ماهية هذا الشريط الفاصل، ثم تطوّر البحث ليتناول قضايا نساء من الجولان متزوجات من رجال من بقية الأراضي السورية، أو العكس. إذ أن العديد من النساء قررن، بعد الإحتلال خلال سنوات الثمانينات والتسعينات، تقديم طلب لم شمل والزواج من أقارب لهنّ، وبالتالي العبور للعيش في الجانب الآخر. هكذا تعرفنا على قصة أول عروس سورية عبرت بعد الإحتلال.

كيف تعرّفتم إليها؟ كيف كانت عملية البحث عنها؟

خ.ا.: بدأت ببحث شخصي، فزُحْتُ ألتقي بالناس الذين يروون عن فترة ما قبل الاحتلال وكذلك عن فترة الحرب، سواء الـ67 أو الـ73، وما حصل من الـ73 إلى اليوم، ويشمل المحطة الكبيرة في حياة الجولان، التي هي إضراب عام 82 لرفض الجنسية الإسرائيلية التي فُرضت على أهالي الجولان. ومن خلال لقاءاتي تعرّفت إلى تلك العروس، وكذلك بدأت أبحث عن نساء جنّ من بقية الأراضي السورية لأستمع إلى قصص الجانب الآخر. هكذا تعرّفت إلى أول صبية عبّرت إلى الجولان. روت لي قصّتها، وقرارها بالمجيء إلى الجولان والزواج. كان في القصة شيء يلامس القلب لأنها في النهاية قصة حبّ وليست قصة سياسية، قصة تحكي عن بنت عمرها 13 سنة تعرّفت إلى ابن عمّها وقرّرت أن تغيّر حياتها وتعود إلى الجولان، نشأت تلك الفتاة طيلة الوقت مع فكرة وحلم العودة. وبالفعل حاربّت لأنها حين قرّرت أن تتزوج ابن عمها وتأتي لتسكن في الجولان لم تكن هناك إمكانية لذلك؛ لا إسرائيل ولا الجانب السوري كان لديهما هذا الطرح. ثمة من يريد العودة إلى الجولان،

كيف بدأت العمل في المجال المسرحي؟

خ.ا.: بدأت العمل في المسرح منذ عمر 12 سنة. أنا من سكان قرية اسمها مجدل شمس، تقع في الجولان المحتل، وهي واحدة من 5 قرى بقيت بعد حرب الـ67، بعدما كانت تقريباً 153 قرية قائمة، ما عدا المزارع والمدن في الجولان. حين بدأت العمل في المسرح في الجولان كطالبة، لم يكن هناك مسرح، بل كنّا مجموعة شباب أقمنا مسرحاً صغيراً في قلب البلدة بإشراف أحد سكانها واسمه معتز أبو صالح. أنشأنا فرقة مسرح هواة للأطفال ومن هناك بدأنا بالعمل. فجأة اكتشفت أن المسرح منبر، وأنه المكان الذي يمكن أن تحكي فيه أشياء كثيرة بطرق فنية بشكل مباشر وغير مباشر وساخر ولادع وحزين؛ هو قناة بين البلد والناس. في تلك اللحظة أدركت أنني سأكمل العمل في المسرح طوال حياتي. تخرجت من جامعة حيفا في فلسطين المحتلة، وعملت كممثلة لمدة سنتين في مسرح الميدان. ولكن سرعان ما بدأت أكتشف أنني لربما أريد القيام بأشياء أكثر من التمثيل، فانسحبت من مسرح الميدان وبدأت أعمل بصورة مستقلة كممثلة مستقلة، مساعدة إنتاج، مديرة إنتاج ومساعدة مخرج. هكذا، شيئاً فشيئاً، بدأت أعمل من خارج المنصة، لا من قلبها.

هناك متعة كبيرة في العمل خارج المنصة، لما يعطيه من قدرة على التحكم. فالمخرج أو الكاتب أو المنتج هو صاحب القرار في ما يطرح على المنصة، وهو من يحدد التوجه النهائي للعمل. لذا قرّرت أن أخوض التجربة وأن أحاول إخراج عملي الخاص الذي سأكتبه. بدأت الفكرة من بلدي، من حيث أتيث، فالبلد الذي وُلدت ونشأت فيه، بالنسبة إليّ، هو محط الأسئلة الأول، المنبع الأساسي لكيفية رؤيتي للحياة.

كانت جدتي تحكي لنا قصة عن أبيها الذي ذهب ليأتي بعروس من الشام في الفترة ما بين نهاية الإنتداب الفرنسي وتسلم الحكم الذاتي. قطع الجد الجبل ووصل إلى جبل العرب

المسرح

سوريا

خولة ابراهيم

حدود

يرتكز المشروع على بحث وتوثيق قصص من التاريخ الشفهي المروي لمنطقة الجولان المحتل خلال القرن الاخير. يتطرق العمل إلى الاسئلة الصعبة التي تطرح نفسها على خلفية ما يجري حالياً في سوريا، عن معنى الإنتماء، خاصة لمكان لا يعرف عنه الجيل الثالث من أهل الجولان، والتي تنتمي إليه المخرجة، سوى القصص البطولية المروية.

استكشاف الصمود في
الهجرة والمنفى

خلق مساحات للتعافي

REGIONAL EVENTS

SUDAN

OMNIA SHAWKAT

ANDARIYA

Sudanese & South Sudanese Musical Youth Digital & Branding Training & Regional Outreach

The project will aim to alleviate the digital awareness of Sudanese & South Sudanese musicians to extend their outreach locally and internationally. After the training program, the project will organize a mini-tour in Egypt and Nairobi to expose Sudanese and South Sudanese musicians to high-caliber music scenes and promote their music in neighboring countries where bilingual music is widely produced.

STIMULATING
ARTISTIC
VOCATIONS

AFFIRMING
DIVERSITY, EMPATHY
AND FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION

PROBING
IDENTITIES

What can you tell us about your project, Sudanese and South Sudanese Musical Youth Digital & Branding Training & Regional Outreach?

Omnia Shawkat: We first noticed that negative stereotypes have been affecting our psyche's generation in different ways. We would stand in disbelief while hearing from previous generations that things were better 'back then', and that there was a lot of dynamism and progress, while our generation faces unemployment, massive corruption, wars, and displacement. On the other hand, when you have such consistently negative stereotypes circulating for decades, investments stop pouring in, tourism halts, and the country's movement stalls, be it related to intellectual production or business. This creates an isolated barrier between one's country and other countries, and generates ignorance, indifference, and an overwhelming negativity.

We wanted to challenge negative narratives regarding Sudan. We also realized that there was another underlying problem, namely that South Sudan was facing the exact same problems as Sudan. Our generation is unique in that we have experienced living in a unified Sudan. The next generation will be composed of South Sudanese youths unaware of what it is like to have a Sudan that was once a unified country. We wanted to create cultural bridges between the Sudanese and South Sudanese, because we share the same language, eat the same food and grew up in similar circumstances. We want to shed light on and highlight both populations' similarities, and celebrate our differences on the pathway to being good neighbors and invested partners.

We thought to use contemporary tools to create a digital platform and tell stories—multicultural, multimedia stories—about Sudan and South Sudan in view of challenging negative narratives but also to provide constructive critiques of what is going on, mostly by shedding light on positive initiatives, especially when undertaken by youths who are getting very little visibility, due to a lack of interest from both the local and international media.

So at the end of 2016, we started a new musical series. We were creating content about music and musicians, looking for emerging contemporary musicians as well as different musical genres and instruments to feature. In the process, it dawned on us that we had an extremely limited digital footprint in music, despite the medium's universality. We then thought that a great entry point into securing a strong digital presence and connecting with audiences all over the world was to benefit from the growing movement of festivals in East Africa, Germany, Latin America, and North Africa that are receptive to 'world music'. It was a great opportunity for us to share all the digital storytelling knowledge we had built and accumulated in Andariya. We applied for funding from AFAC, and after receiving the grant, we thought we needed to go beyond the initial idea of a training program - that was when the idea of the mini tour emerged. The mini tour is not just a performance tour; it includes insights on how to gain knowledge, promote yourself, and create a set with different kinds of musicians, as well as how to connect with audiences and present yourself as someone who is worth their time, money, and fandom.

We proceeded with building this process since receiving the grant. However, we ended up sending the applications call at an unfortunate time when a lot of protests have been raging in Sudan in reaction to massive economic problems, which has been going on for two months now. In parallel, in South Sudan, high level

revitalization talks—which aimed at reengaging the stakeholders in the original peace talks—were also occurring.

Consequently, we were not able to create a lot of buzz because we knew it was an inappropriate time to do so, but we pushed it through all our channels, as well as our partners', and ended up receiving 44 applications of really talented musicians, which is what we had been aiming for to begin with. We did not want beginners, but rather musicians with an established track record of at least a couple of years. Once the call closed, we started the interview and shortlisting process, and undertook auditions in Khartoum. We finally selected 18 musicians which were then filtered down to 15 - all of whom are very committed, and provide the kind of diversity that we were originally looking for. We had instrumentalists, rappers, MCs, pop singers singing in English, Arabic, Juba Arabic, and other tribal languages. It was the kind of mix that we thought would work well for a full production of Sudanese and South Sudanese contemporary music, laced with cultural richness, heritage, and multi-disciplinarity. Once the selection was finalized, we began with the sessions: the first was a social media training, the second an opportunities training, etc. We also added a mentorship component so that, at the end of each training, we would bring in mentors, who were themselves established artists. This turned out to be highly beneficial, as trainees could ask all kinds of questions, which would then get transcribed and shared with everyone. A module was then created around the question "how do you really make it?" from a digital perspective, but also from the practical perspective of different artists. We held three more trainings and when we went on tour in Egypt and Uganda held two full day workshops for local artists to pass on our training material and learnings. #AndariyaRoadshow participants had a chance to also share their perspective and train other artists during these workshops.

Wouldn't established artists already be aware of available social media tactics to promote themselves?

OS: No matter how established the artists are, their social media presence was not optimized. Even when some artists have a large number of fans on their social media channels, their output tends to be sporadic - their content is rarely consistent, their visuals are not homogeneous... We asked artists in the application form to include all their social media pages and past audiovisual works, in order to scan both and go deeper upon shortlisting. During the training, we started talking about strategy, tools, pipelining, scheduling, tone of voice, and we found out that all this was new to the trainees. Consequently, we provided them with social media training and advice on what platforms to use for those who are offline, and how to go about refining what has already been shared and uploaded for those who are already online.





Have applicants expressed their interest in connecting between Sudanese and South Sudanese musicians?

OS: Yes, many were already talking about different aspects of the whole secession, and raising awareness around inclusivity, and respect for one another. Some of them are quite connected to this issue, and we have been actively encouraging them to work together on new music because we want to produce a set that is inclusive of their music while being representative of Sudan and South Sudan as well as contemporary Sudanese music, using different genres and their different capabilities as lyricists, artists, and musicians. Many applicants have expressed the desire to create an Andariya roadshow album, which would consist of a collaboration between all of them. They are interested in working on music that focuses on cultural healing, acceptance of the other, postwar nation building, etc. This added a dimension to the project, which we really liked, and we believe that this will be something that applicants will carry on in their careers for a long time. We have one aspect of the project which is the album, and another is looking for opportunities to take part in, such as festivals, trainings, or courses. We have handed applicants a list of different opportunities, and have added them to a number of mailing lists that are music-related. We worked with them during a workshop on how to apply for funding opportunities, create a profile, upload high quality videos of yourself performing. We also asked applicants to write their profiles, so we can edit and translate them, and through this, we are building templates so that they can easily apply for different opportunities.

You are focusing on increasing the digital footprint of these artists and initiatives, but how do you plan on having that translate from the digital world into the real world?

OS: One of our criteria was for them to be rather advanced in their career tracks, so most of them—except maybe just one—have performed in live sessions or concerts, either with a band or solo, in festivals. Because they already have offline exposure, what we wanted to do is refine their online presence, so that they can use it as a tool to promote themselves further. We sought to open their horizons towards the outside world, which feeds into our mission as Andariya of striving to have internal conversations with people in Sudan and South Sudan, and reflect that to the world to see what is happening locally through our eyes. Our goal was to take their social media presence from zero to a hundred. We were aiming for a world-class end-result, and wanted it to be something that speaks to audiences beyond their bubbles, as some of them have built niche audiences, such as university students or the rap industry. In other words, we wanted them to be more universal and to have the corresponding tone and output online so they can communicate with an audience inside Sudan with an even better tone and an even better output, and to the audiences outside Sudan with content that matches outside environments. We wanted them to leverage the knowledge and the trainings and to exercise that during the tour, which represents their practical test. When you go on tour, you need to maximize the use of social media to all kinds of levels and also engage other media. We brought people from TV and radio to train them in the second phase, because when you go and you have a live interview you do not really have the chance to make mistakes on air, so this is an important part of the training. It falls under offline, yet it is part of media, and we expected to be doing interviews when we go on tour, so we wanted to arm them with this training before we embark.

Why did you choose Egypt and Uganda for the tours? Does that have something to do with the fact that Sudanese

artists have restricted freedom of movement?

OS: We chose Egypt and Uganda as they have a very high population of Sudanese and South Sudanese due to histories of displacement—which is similar to Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. They are just close by. So we have a significant community in those countries, and the other way we thought about it is that in Egypt and Uganda there is a vibrant music scene driven by competitiveness. Moreover, there is a refined audience and potential partners for us to work with.

Aside from trying to build this digital community that is aware of the cultural similarities between Sudan and South Sudan and wanting to spread that across the region, how do you think your work affects the larger context? And do you think that should be a priority for you or do you think you should focus on culture, music and the arts?

OS: Culture, music and the arts are an industry as such, and if we do not look at it that way then we will never take it seriously. We need to look at it as an industry that benefits society at large, which is what culture does, but it also documents where society is at, and reflects the different aspects of society. So it is essential to have culture as a profitable industry and growing industry, a thriving industry, an industry with so many dimensions. It is part of why we exist as Andariya; we want to show that we can survive in this industry even though it is not really regarded as a serious industry in Sudan, but we want to be a success story so that different people can also contribute to this success story. We want to reach a point where culture becomes a very respected industry, where you know you do not have to become a doctor to make it in Sudan; you can be a painter or a musician or you can be a cultural curator or a gallery owner, etc.

We would love to start connecting the different dots; and in the three years of our operation, we have been connecting with so many different cultural actors and creating a community that feeds off of each other, that is mutually beneficial and symbiotic. One of our goals is to make culture something that is respected in Sudan and in South Sudan, and by doing that we have to showcase what culture has to offer which is all the different content that we are creating. We want to formalize the industry and we hope to do that by being the spokesperson of the industry for now, and maybe we can take on more roles. Our AFAC-supported project is actually our first offline project with this scale, and when we can succeed in running such a project, we will widen the horizons for more impact-generating endeavors.

DOCUMENTARY FILM

MOROCCO

ALI ESSAFI

Crossing the Seventh Gate

Crossing the Seventh Gate draws an intimate poetic portrait of Ahmed Bouanani, the vanguard Moroccan filmmaker, poet and writer, who passed away in 2011. A great artist, who was systematically sidelined, marginalized and prohibited from pursuing his vocation.

PRESERVING
HERITAGE

SHEDDING LIGHT
ON MARGINALIZED
NARRATIVES

📖 Your film-portrait “Crossing the Seventh Gate” takes on a firm position with regards to the state policy of amnesia (politique étatique de l’oubli) in Morocco, personified by Ahmed Bouanani, and allows him to finally exist in the collective memory. What drove you to give a voice to the one who was pursued by censoring, and marginalized and oppressed all his life?

Ali Essafi: This project is part of a larger research project that I have launched in the years 1960s-1970s in Morocco, because upon my return from France to Morocco, I was surprised to see that the entire memory of this generation was erased. I was undertaking workshops with young artists, and was discovering that there was in fact no link between these young artists and those of the generation of their parents. Thus while analyzing things a bit further, I understood that in Morocco there is this long-standing policy, to erase memory from the generation before. This alienates people somehow. I therefore attempted to exhume, partly for me as well, as an artist, even if I am close to the 1970s generation, I myself discovered that a lot of things from this era, especially at the level of creation, were not known nor accessible to me. Thus this work was primarily for me, in the framework of my personal research process, and then I enlarged it a little bit to refresh the memory and straighten things up.

📖 Everyone discouraged you to meet Ahmed Bouanani. You practically found nothing on the internet. The obstacles were multiplying on your path. However, this did not stop you from completing your project, which in fact represents an archival masterpiece. Tell us more about this process and about your determination despite all the hurdles that blocked your way.

AE: I believe that what discouraged me to pursue my mission, was not necessarily something machiavellic, but rather I think ignorance from these people, among them many artists, of the importance of connecting and linking between the artists of several generations. Moreover, what helped me, I think, is the chance that Bouanani was still alive. I think that if he had been deceased, it would have been extremely difficult. But the fact that he was still alive, encouraged me to pursue my research until I met him, and starting from there, things became much simpler, because he started to mentor me; he gave me a lot of valuable information that triggered me to go dig up and search. Thus the process became much easier under his supervision.

There prevails in Morocco, contrary to many nations, including among the elite, real ignorance about the importance of memory. This ignorance touches all social layers, especially the elite, and this is something extremely surprising for me, which somewhat shocked me.

📖 You believe this problem of state policy of amnesia is a problem that goes beyond Morocco; an African problem. Can you tell us more?

AE: I confirm that this is an African problem, however it is not merely a state problem. State in itself, everywhere else, not only in Africa, possesses the memory. They often have access, they have the archives, but they do not render them public nor accessible. On the other hand, the intellectual elite, the artists, and others, ignore the interest, or capital importance, of memory, of archives, etc. In any case they do nothing, and this holds true for the entire African continent. There is no real consciousness today among the elite, that it is a capital issue, that we really need to fight to bring back memory and the archives.

📖 “For them, the archives should not exist. There should have been no memory. They were afraid of memory”. Were you not scared to counter this reality?

AE: On the contrary, it is really a jubilation, for someone who comes from a country like mine. Every time I show Moroccans the elements that are linked to the memory with numbers, everyone jubilates, because we really missed this entirely, as if limbs from our own body were missing, and suddenly appeared, which gives us energy, power... We see further, we have a better view of what is happening. The work I am currently undergoing, on the years 1970s in Morocco, is also a work of archives. When I showed the rough cut to the people working at the Moroccan television, or to filmmakers, even if they are close to this period, they were delighted to find and discover things that they had never seen from this period, and they start to see clearly where we stand today. We make the link with what we have today, and this is the real role of memory. It allows us to situate ourselves; have we regressed? How is our society functioning?

📖 We have the impression, in your documentary, that you defy the forbidden, and unveil it. What are the echoes of “Crossing the Seventh Gate” after its launch?

AE: In fact, there has been no real launch of the film up to present in







Morocco. There were only a few projections, which gave way to a highly positive feedback overall, and great reviews. People really understand. Even during the projections, where the public was quite diversified, there was an interest. Despite the unconventional language of the film, which is not necessarily easy to watch, people were interested and felt like watching it again. A lot of people asked me to watch the film again and again, because there are so many details to it, and they could not digest it all at once. Beyond this, there was a polemic, too, on the rights of some artistic works, that Bouanani had slightly revealed.

Problems of copyright?


AE: Yes, because at that time, Bouanani, who was sometimes forbidden to direct, was not using his name, and thus others took credit for his work. Thus this polemic arose, which in itself was also interesting, because it was the first time we question the history of Moroccan cinema. And thus, I was counting on the film's screening at the national festival of cinema, to continue monitoring the reactions, however unfortunately, for peculiar reasons, the film was screened in a very secondary program, which prevented access to the festival's public and feedback. In conclusion, there was no real launch for this film yet in Morocco, but this has been the case for all my films. The process is long before the film starts to circulate.

 **"There is no better future plan for a filmmaker than to participate with his modest means to the radical and systematic transformation of his society, for the construction of a non-traumatizing word." This role of the cineaste, described by Ahmed Bouanani in your documentary, do you think you have adopted it as well?**

AE: Completely. When I found this quote, I marked it in bold, in big. And in fact this is where we meet, him and I. In other words, to avoid this trauma, this traumatizing reality, we need to participate with small means, even if this sometimes appears futile... I was always surprised that, despite the fact that Bouanani was marginalized, censored and so on, he continued until his last days, to produce, to create. When I asked him, how does he manage to have all this energy, he used to tell me that in fact, he had understood for a while now, that what he is doing is not for the Moroccans of today, but that there will be other generations that will need all this, and will find value in his work. And I believe he is right; all this work, due to the ignorance that I mentioned earlier, is for the Moroccans who will come in future generations, who will be more conscious and who will ask for it. We already see this happening, in fact. Today's youths follow my research work, my work of archives, and ask for it. Many stay in touch with me to have access to this or that. There is real demand, contrarily to previous generations.

 **The unbreakable spirit of Ahmed Bouanani transpires in your film. You succeeded in transmitting the message that despite all the challenges that he faces, a man who is engaged in his path cannot be broken. Can you tell us more?**

AE: It was not difficult to bring this out, because he himself embodies this. I believe that, even if he was not engaged in a party or a movement, he was engaged in creation and in weaving links between himself, his person and his society, between his present and his history, between his intellectual formation and popular culture. For me this is the true engagement of an artist. It is not important to make films that scream big titles. Bouanani, for me, was the first truly engaged artist that I had met in Morocco. This is how I could describe him.

 **"One day... It is sure, even dreams will be forbidden". This apocalyptic statement is highlighted in your documentary. "Happy is the one whose memory rests in peace". We hear this statement twice in "Crossing the Seventh Gate". Can you tell us more?**

AE: This story of dream, when I see the work that I am doing on the 1970s, we see there were dreams, when compared to today. What transpires from this statement, Bouanani's mirage, is what we are living today. Today's youths cannot even dream of a future. Thus little by little, in breaking all these dreams of this generation, which is the first generation of independent Morocco, a generation that was bearing a dream for the country, at that time, today we have a generation of youths who are cut from their memory, and who do not make the link between their culture, their history, and what is happening today. We thus lose enormously. This work that he attempted to undertake, which I am trying, with my modest means, to continue, gives this engaged artist that I was mentioning earlier, this peace of mind for having played a small role, for having somewhat participated, and thus, he can rest in peace afterwards. It is funny because, when I completed Bouanani's film, I had this feeling that I could now die. In other words, I had saved the work, and it was a great relief.





▮ **“One does not have the privilege of being an artist exclusively. We need to be historians, researchers...” How did you live these different roles during the process of your documentary?**

AE: This does not only apply to the work on this film; I think it concerns the entire project of an artist. In other words, one cannot, as French or even as Turk, or Iranian, be just an artist. We, in Africa, have this problem of memory, which is at the base of many other problems, thus we cannot create like artists do in many normally constituted countries. In our homeland, an artist cannot just lock himself up in his studio and do his work; he needs to undertake a panoply of things, because we are in dire need of history, of references, of links, of libraries, of museums... This also affects critique, which gets lost. We unfortunately do not have the luxury to say “I can start now, I can continue what has been done, what I have studied, what I have digested...” No, we have to do everything at once, if we really want to build something. This is what actually happened in the 1980s, in the whole of Africa; it almost occurred with economic choices, it was the time of the IMF, of the World Bank, which dictated to governments what must be done. So starting from the 1980s all the dreams of the 1970s of artists, intellectuals and others were broken, and in the 1980s, each took refuge in his or her corner. Everyone continued to create, but the links were lost. Consequently, we did not really build anything, since each was in his/her own corner. This is the resume overall.

▮ **You were one of the first to fight for documentary in Morocco. In this framework, “Crossing the Seventh Gate” certainly created a benchmark in Morocco. What are your projects in the**

near future?

AE: I believe that documentary is starting to hold a place in Morocco today, or at least people talk about it. As for this battle for memory and archives, I really feel like getting rid of it these days, as it has been years and years...

▮ **You plan to win this battle?**

I don't know... One cannot always win at once. It is for the long-term. However the real and certain victory, is the safeguarding of things. For now, I still have this project, which was in fact inspired by Bouanani himself, by one of his works, entitled *Memoire 14*, the first and last auteur film about archives in Morocco. My project will be the second. I had already produced it as short film, and now I am working on a longer version. I therefore want to get it over with this story of archives and memory.

There are also things that I write about; I am writing about the history of Moroccan non-fiction film, which will appear in text. Who knows, maybe one day someone will make a film about it.

Again, I want to get it over soon with this story of archives and memory, and maybe instead, what would interest me afterwards, is to continue this work in the form of contemporary arts, i.e. installations... I believe there is much to be done, which can bring a breath of fresh air to the archives. I have already started this work, and exhibited an installation at the Dakkar Biennale, as well as in Rotterdam. Thus I feel like continuing to propose projects with archives in the field of contemporary arts, but in cinema I feel like moving to something else.

DOCUMENTARY FILM TRAINING CAMP

YEMEN

SARA ISHAQ

COMRA

Comra Doc Film Camp 2018

In war-torn Yemen where film studies are non-existent, foreign media access is blocked and political media outlets control the world's view of Yemen, now is the most pressing time for independent Yemeni filmmakers to have a voice. The Comra Doc Film camp aims to provide these filmmakers with the tools and support necessary to tell their stories to the world.

STIMULATING
ARTISTIC
VOCATIONS

BUILDING SKILLS
AND CAPACITIES

PROVOKING
CRITICAL THINKING

 You decided to give a voice to young Yemeni filmmakers with your project Comra Doc Film Camp, amidst war-torn Yemen where film studies are non-existent, foreign media access is blocked and political media outlets control the world's view of Yemen. Tell us more about the project, its challenges and its achievements.

Sara Ishaq: The project goes back several years, well before the war broke out in 2015. I had always wanted to run film training programs in Yemen. With the war, however, it was very frustrating to see that there were no films coming out of Yemen, particularly films that were made by Yemenis living amidst the war, despite all the suffering and struggles people were, and still are, going through. At the time, I was still part of a media collective called #SupportYemen which was more active back then, and decided with my partners there to organize a short two-week documentary film workshop, called ‘Comra Doc Camp’. We did it on a whim and the British Council supported the project. We enrolled 12 people on the course out of 30 applicants. This was when the dream of doing film training became a reality. Although it only lasted 2 weeks, it was quite intensive. The first week was more theoretical, we watched and discussed films and talked about the various styles and types of documentary films. The second week was mainly technical, leading up to the participants making their own films, which included ideation, research, filming, editing and the final screening. The 12 participants were divided into groups of 3, and each group produced one joint film.

Following this workshop, we received a very positive response from the international community who saw the films that we produced, but the response from aspiring Yemeni filmmakers on the ground was even more encouraging. Almost all the filmmakers who trained with us in 2015 went on to work in the field and still do so today with their own production companies. The ‘employment prospects’ that came from training with us also inspired many others to approach us.

In 2017, my partner Yousra Ishaq, myself and two others at the time, co-founded Comra Films as a film foundation to focus on film training programs similar to the one we ran in 2015, but with more structure, a stronger focus on quality (of both trainings and film outcomes) and more sustainable support from partners and funds. We also felt it was important to provide those who complete our training to work in the field, therefore many of them continue to work with us in film production today.

In 2017, I applied for the AFAC Training fund, and we were fortunate enough to get it. I returned to Yemen in 2018 and launched the Comra Doc Camp 2018 with AFAC’s support, which ran in three phases, two of which I was present on the ground for. The first phase took place in the summer that focused on pre-production, film viewings and discussions and online masterclasses given by a number of acclaimed Arab filmmakers; the second phase took place in late summer whereby the filmmakers produced their films in different parts of Yemen, and the third phase took place in the fall and focused on post-production. I decided this time to change the structure, as I felt that what the participants needed more time to do their research to properly develop their stories, and get to know the subjects better before filming.

Prior to the Comra Doc Camp 2018, we did an open call online, and received over 200 applications. This time, however, we decided to select 12 participants from across Yemen who had some basic experience, but more importantly, interesting personal qualities and ‘out of the box’ ideas. Owning equipment, was not a prerequisite as the focus of the training program was visual storytelling rather than technical cinematography skills. This was a decision I made based on the results of the 2015 training whereby our trainees were more obsessed with producing ‘stunning’ images than

well told, well-structured stories. When asked what they wanted to actually ‘say’ with their films, they struggled to answer this question. So this was something that had to change. In our 2018 program, most filming exercises only required a mobile-phone camera, and the transformation in storytelling abilities was immense.

By 2018, the war had also dragged on for a long time and the participants were clearly worn out, hopeless and feeling the strain of the war on their lives. Many of the participants were struggling with personal loss, depression, broken dreams, and various other tragic circumstances that affected their emotional disposition during the Doc Camp. This, for me, was extremely important to address before we embarked on any technical film training. Everybody had a unique story, but they were too blocked and censored to speak about what they had endured in the last few years. Inevitably, the Comra Doc Camp 2018 became more than just film training. It transformed into a 6-month art therapy program where artistic expression, talking therapy, friendship and a community were paramount. During the first month of training, we wrote daily ‘stream of consciousness’ morning pages, to allow each participant to ‘offload’ their emotions, vent any negativity and address their issues on paper, privately. We did yoga, we drew pictures of our ‘life critics’ and tore them up, we reenacted scenes of bullying and pain from our past(s) where we confronted our bullies with honesty and compassion. Most of our morning sessions were dedicated to such activities and had nothing to do with filmmaking. By the time we started watching films and discussing ideas, everyone seemed to be in a much better headspace to think critically and creatively. It was a great learning experience for both participants and teachers alike.

As for the challenges, the first challenge was keeping morale high, especially when I was not in Yemen with them. In a time of war when everyone is already engulfed by a sense of hopelessness, it took a lot of energy to re-spark their passions. The dipping morale affected the group in its entirety so it was a constant juggling act to keep everyone afloat at the same time. I understood this state-of-mind, after all my entire family lives in Yemen in the same circumstances and I experienced the same feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, but we were able to work on tackling these feelings together, but being honest and addressing them head-on.

The second challenge was independence: I wanted all the trainees to be able to handle their own films and execute their own ideas themselves without the constant support of a mentor. This was the main reason I decided to leave them to their own devices during production (with only weekly one-to-one online sessions to follow up on their progress).

The third challenge was time-management: at times, their work stalled as they struggled to find their way. Most of the participants had to earn a living for their entire family since paid work in Yemen is scarce at the moment. This meant that many of them had difficulty committing to their program and getting all their work done on time. But in the end they emerged with the stories, characters and footage they had set out to get in the first place. Ultimately, the experience of being left to their own devices to manage their own schedules and find their own solutions to the various problems that arose (including securing filming permits) was good for them, because they learned the hard way, as we all do as filmmakers, particularly in the Arab world.

When I returned to Yemen in November (2018), everything picked up again. The participants attended our sessions daily, from early morning until late into the night for two continuous weeks. We worked collectively on editing their projects within this time-frame. This time-pressure did push them to focus all of their energy into making the best films that they could.

Although the logistics of the program were difficult, and I could not possibly be there for 6 consecutive months, I fully believe that the time I spent away from them and consulting them remotely played a very big role in giving them the personal confidence and self-reliance they needed to continue


working in the field under such challenging circumstances. Throughout the course, it became clear to them that they had to work with international quality standards in mind. In order to receive funding, film selections for international film festivals or future distribution opportunities for their films, they had to also compete internationally as well as work according to international standards, schedules and deadlines. Being Yemeni and living in a warzone might earn you some degree of recognition, but ultimately a strong film is a strong film, and that is something we want our participants and trainees to be recognised for.

In contrast to the 2015 workshop, this time each filmmaker produced their own film AND worked on someone else's film. So in total, 12 films ranging from 3-10 minutes were produced by the end of the Doc Camp.

What can you tell us about the stories that were told to the world through Comra Doc Film Camp so far?

SI: One trainee made a film about age-old folklore surrounding the two pillars in the Grand Mosque in Sana'a, while two others made touching (yet very different) films about musicians struggling to find an income through music in Yemen. Art and culture tended to be the most common themes, although a couple also dabbled with human rights issues or political satire.

Most of them shied away from talking about the war directly. None of them wanted to tell their personal stories. I tried to encourage them to focus inwards, on their own lives, families, environments, but it is a lot to ask given Yemen's conservative society and the censorship that exists all around. In the end, they all chose the stories they felt most comfortable with and I think this was the most important thing they could have done. Sooner or later, stories will become bolder and more daring, but it is too much to ask young filmmakers to challenge a lifetime of barriers and prohibitions and potentially put themselves at risk of social exclusion or imprisonment for expressing themselves. The most important thing we could offer as a foundation and training program was the safe space to be able to express themselves, and whatever films emerged from this environment was already a success.

 You mentioned in an interview, "in war or peace, filmmaking plays an important role for Yemen's youth. It is an empowering tool and it enriches dialogue and public opinion. Generally, the making of art in times of war is therapeutic. Here, it is the case for both those making films as well as the audience. Movies help us express ourselves and to enrich the views of others and challenge preconceived ideas and stereotypes." Tell us more.

SI: That quote summarizes most of what I have said in a way. At a time when all media outlets in Yemen are censored and international media outlets have a set agenda, creating a massive divide in people's view of Yemen. All the while, the most essential piece of the story is lost in between, the stories of the people living amidst this war. These are the stories that matter, and that will keep people aware of their common struggles and that, despite all the war and destruction happening in their country, if they can find a way to remember what binds them, they will find a path to reconciliation when the war is over. The media often has a horribly powerful way of blinding us about what is right in front of us, but films - honest, independent, personal stories - have an equally powerful way of opening our eyes and touching our hearts and reminding us that we are all part of the same universal journey, the same struggle.

I wanted the films to focus of the training program to veer away from the labels and division this war and media outlets have created among Yemenis. The participants themselves came from warring sides, and it was important to be able to create a space for dialogue during the program and also through their respective films. It's the 'not talking' that is the problem. Through Comra Films training programs, we want to encourage our participants to talk about the lives of the people around us and what we want to say about our own experiences. To tell universal stories, to relate to one another, and not see things in black and white.

There is so much to be said about the resilience of Yemeni people as a whole. The fact that Yemenis have not had electricity for several years now, fuel crisis after fuel crisis, no jobs or income, water is scarce - this is the case in the larger cities, let alone elsewhere in the country. How are they functioning? How are they still surviving? They innovate and improvise, and band together in collectives and communities. They use solar panels and bicycles. They use pottery wrapped in wet clothes to keep food and water cold in place of refrigerators. They economize. They do not buy excess food that will go off. They limit how much energy they use per day. Life in 2019, for Yemenis, is a century behind what it was in 2010. And yet they have totally adapted, and through it, they create art and are a massive source of inspiration and admiration. Their common struggle, common resilience and common reality is what binds them, and these are the stories that need to be told.

Did you feel you achieved positive change? Can you already foresee the impact of these 12 films on the reality in the Yemen and the perspective of the world?

SI: Yes, 5 of the films, which focus more on human rights, have been screened at the Karama Human Rights Film Festival in Amman, Jordan, while others premiered on two separate occasions in London through Sarha collective and "Moving Lines" organization, as well as at the Edinburgh College of Art and universities in cities across the world. A traveling outreach art festival called "Stories Never Told" in the USA screened 6 or 7 of the films. There is a long list of events where the films have been screened so far, and the resounding response to them is that they have shown the outside world a very different reality to the way Yemenis exist in Yemen today, compared to what news outlets portray. We also ran a few closed screenings in Sanaa, where over 100 people attended. Reactions and discussions were fruitful and positive. The screenings themselves received standing ovations.

Certainly, the more we can make films like the ones our trainees made, and the wider we can distribute them, the more we can narrow the gap between the realities of the lives of Yemenis in Yemen today, and the way the world perceives them.



أخرى للدولة. فمعظم الممثلين الذين هم راسميون أو الدارسون أو حضروا فيها لأنها فرصة بالنسبة إليهم. فبالنسبة إليّ أرى أيضاً أن هذا الأثر له علاقة بمجتمع المسرحيين. فأنت لست موجوداً فقط عند جمهور عادي من الشباب، بل أيضاً مجتمع المسرحيين يرون إن كان لديك قيمة مختلفة تقدّمها في الورش المسرحية التي تقيمها.

✍ إن عدت للوراء، ورأيت النسخ الخمس، هل تشعر بأن ثمة تغيير حدث بفضل الملتقى؟

٤٠٤.: أجل، شعرت بذلك في النسخة الأخيرة بعد التراكم. بدأ الناس يعرفون أن هناك أشكالاً مسرحية قادرة على البقاء. مؤكداً هناك تغيير لأننا طرحنا عروضاً في الإسكندرية لم يكن أحد آخر لي طرحها أو يأتي بها، طبعاً هناك تغيير؛ رأى الناس أشياء في نسخة 2014. فقد أتينا بعرض ألماني كبير له علاقة بالرأسمالية ودورة رأس المال. في 2014 كان لدينا مشاكل في العروض وعرضناه في مكتبة الإسكندرية، وقد رأيت جمهوراً كبيراً، 300 شخص. كنا نتمنى أن يزيدوا عن ذلك العدد. ومع ذلك هناك تغيير لأننا وثّقنا أيضاً. ما نريد أن نفعله بعد فترة قصيرة هو أن نطرح كل ما وثّقناه على الإنترنت، أي الفيديو واللقاءات مع الفنانين. وهذا يحتاج إلى مشروع كامل وإلى الاستمرارية.

✍ أي أن يصبح عندكم منصّة مثلاً؟

٤٠٤.: تماماً، نريد أن نخلق منصّة وبالفعل كتبنا اقتراحاً له علاقة بفكرة المنصة، قد يكون اسمه مختلفاً عن "لازم مسرح". لكن أيضاً يُفترض به أن يستفيد من "لازم مسرح" ومن خبراتنا ومن العروض التي قدّمت في الإسكندرية وفي المدينة. وأن يكون قادراً على أن يتطوّر، وأن يشترك في فكرة المسرح السياسي على الإنترنت ونجري مقابلات مع الناس الذين لن نقدر على أن ندعوهم إلى مصر. فكرة الملتقى أن يكون هناك منصّة عند أناس كثيرين، فيجمع الناس حول المادة ويستطيع الناس أن يشاركوا فيها ويطوّروها. أي أننا لا ندّعي أن لدينا تعريف لماهية المسرح السياسي، لكننا نريد أن نحاول أن نعرف مع الناس ماهيته في ظل ظروف معيشتنا الحالية تلك.

مونودراما، أي ممثل واحد. هذا مختلف في سياق مصر والإسكندرية. قد لا يكون مختلفاً في أوروبا. له جمهور معيّن. قد لا يكون مختلفاً في لبنان، وكذلك في تونس. لكن في سياق المسرح، في هذا الوقت أيضاً، ومع الظواهر المسرحية التي هي مسرح مصر والعروض التجارية المستفيدة من التلفاز والتي تُبثّ بكثافة، صار هناك شكل معيّن للمسرح، أنه مجموعة من المشاهد الساخرة التي تعتمد على شتيمة أو مواقف. هذا هو شكل المسرح. فحين تعرض شكلاً مختلفاً حيث يواجه الجمهور ممثلاً واحداً، ويقولون أن المسرح عبارة عن عدة أشخاص يستهزئون ببعضهم البعض، فهذا بالنسبة إليهم شيء مختلف. هذا أولاً.

ثانياً هناك إسقاط فكرة المسرح السيكلوجي الذي هو المسرح الدرامي. وهو المسرحيات العادية مثل مسرحية هاملت. الأساس ليس أن تكون هناك حكاية تُروى أمامك بالشكل الذي اعتدّت عليه بالحاجز. وكأن هناك حاجز الحائط الرابع، فكرة أن يكون ثمة حاجز ما بينك وبين الممثلين. هذه تمثيلية، فأنت منعزل عنها. فستراها وتتأثر. فمعظم العروض كانت مباشرة، فيها كلام مع الجمهور. وهذا ليس جديداً جداً، لكنه في النهاية هو في السياق الذي نحن فيه... وحين يكون مكثفاً سيترك أثراً مختلفاً. طبعاً كان هناك عرضا رقص، رقص معاصر يعمل على الرقص البلدي. وهذا أيضاً أمر جديد مختلف وتجربة فريدة. أنتجت في القاهرة في 2013 وأتينا بها لأننا رأينا أنها مناسبة للمهرجان. وعرض فؤاد ببرقص الذي هو عرض رقص معاصر مختلف، جمهوره ليس جمهور الرقص المعاصر الذي هو عرض رقص يدون خسارة، يقوم على التفاعل ويطلب من الجمهور أن يصعد إلى المسرح. وفيه بساطة ومباشرة في الطرح، هذا أيضاً مختلف. وهناك أيضاً عرض "فيمينست مانيفستو" ابطي هو أيضاً طريقة كتابة مختلفة لأن عند الفنانات السويسريات والألمانيات طريقة معينة في الكتابة. ورأيت ذلك خلال خبرتي في المسرحين الألماني والسويسري، إذ حضرت أكثر من مهرجان هناك. المسرح الألماني متقبل للجمهور الألماني المثقف الذي يبحث عن محتوى نقدي للمجتمع. لكن هذه الطريقة، طريقة الإلقاء والتمثيل ليست معروفة في مصر كثيراً، وهذا كان اختباراً لها وأن يبقى المحتوى مباشراً له علاقة بالنسوية، وينقد المجتمع الذكوري، بطريقة غير إيديولوجية بقدر ما هي طريقة مباشرة قد تهاجم الرجال. وفيها تعابير كأنها تعابير شخصية: "أنا أكرهك" أو "لا أريد كذا" أو "لن أسمع كلامك". هذه الطريقة مفهومة في ألمانيا أو في أوروبا. لكن حين توجّه للجمهور في مصر، فمن المهم أن يراها الناس هكذا.

✍ من المؤكد أن الملتقى استطاع أن يثير النقاش ويطرح الأسئلة. ما كانت ردود الفعل هذا العام؟ وما كان تأثير الملتقى وفعالياته على المجتمع؟

٤٠٤.: كانت ردود الفعل إيجابية لأن كل الأيام كانت ملأى طيلة 9 أيام. صحيح أن عروضنا كانت مجّانية، لكن أيضاً ليس كل الوقت في الاسكندرية متاحاً لأن تستطيعي — وإن كانت العروض مجانية — أن تملئي المكان تماماً. فقد كنا نعرض في مسرح يتسع لـ 300 شخص تقريباً. كانت كل الأيام تزدحم بالندوات وبالحلقات النقاشية. وكان فيها حضور، نتمنى أن يكون أكثر، لكن كان هناك اهتمام معقول.

الإسكندرية مدينة كبيرة جداً فيها ملايين البشر، لكن الفعاليات الثقافية فيها ليست مؤسسة أو ممنهجة بشكل جيد لأنه ليس لدينا أماكن ثقافية مستقلة كثيرة. وحتى الأماكن الرسمية ليست مفعّلة، فكل الاهتمام ينصبّ على العاصمة، القاهرة. لذا لا نستطيع أن نقدّر عدد الجمهور الذي يمكن أن نصل إليه، نحن وكل صنّاع الفنون المستقلة، إلا الموسيقى لأنها تختلف. فالفرق الكبيرة تعرف كم عندها وتعرض في أماكن معينة. فمعظم الفعاليات الموسيقية ستجد أن لها جمهوراً كبيراً جداً. لكن في المسرح طوال الوقت لا نعرف أن بنينا شيئاً علمياً له علاقة بمدى وصولنا إلى جمهور. هذا ما رأيت أنه أثر مهم، أن المحتوى رغم أنه ليس محتوى ترفيهياً وصل إلى كل الناس. وكان هناك شباب مهتمّون بمشاهدته. الورش أيضاً كان الإقبال عليها كبيراً جداً، وهذا أثر آخر.

حتى أن هناك أناس يدرسون للمسرح ولم يحضروا العروض، لكنهم حضروا مثلاً في الورش، سمعوا أو عرفوا من زملائهم أنّ هناك ورشاً فجاءوا. في إحدى الورش كنت أترجم للمدرب وأساعد فيها وخصوصاً في التمثيل فحضر كثيرون. كانت ورشة من 4 أيام. في اليوم الثاني جاء أناس وطلبوا أن يكونوا حاضرين فسألت المدرب إن كان ذلك ممكناً فوافق. وهم يدرسون المسرح أو يعملون في المسرح. لم يحضروا للمهرجان لأنه كانت هناك فعالية



في الجمهور. الناس كانوا يختارون ما يريدون أن يحضروه. هذا كان مهماً بالنسبة لي، أن الناس حين يأتون بحضور هذا العرض يكونون مهتمين بالفكرة، وهذا معناه أن هناك فكرة وصلت. تلمسين هذا من تنوع الجمهور كل يوم.

السياسة والحب، الحرب والفن... عرضت بعض العروض هذا العام هذه التناقضات. ما هي الرسالة التي حاولتم بثها في هذا السياق؟

٤.٤ : السياسة والحب هو موضوع موسيقي لفنانة هولندية. كانت الفكرة من هذا العرض منشوراً نسوياً. والـ"فيمينست مانيفستو"، كما قلت لك، هو أن يتعامل الجمهور في الإسكندرية وصناع المسرح في الإسكندرية وفي مصر مع هذه الأفكار وتُنقل إليهم خبرة كيف تجري مناقشة هذه الأفكار. أي أن هذا هو التركيز الذي نحاول أن نبنيه من أجل هذا الأثر الذي نريد تركه. نحن لا نريد أن نوجه رسالة معينة، بل نريد أن نترك أثراً له علاقة بالحرية عموماً، أن يأتي الناس ليشاهدوا أموراً قد تكون بعيدة عنهم لكنهم سيفهمون أن لها وجود... أن هناك أفكاراً أخرى في العالم.

هذا أمر، والأمر الآخر أن يكون للأثر علاقة بالفنانين الذين يعملون في الإسكندرية وأن يبدأوا بتناول ذلك من دون أن نجبرهم على شيء. لذا كانت لدينا أيضاً ورش عمل مختلفة، على الدراماتورج مثلاً. لكنها مفتوحة وليس فيها منهجية قوية عليكم العمل بها لكي تحققوا شيئاً. تميل الورش إلى كيف يمكنهم المساهمة أو تناول الفكرة. هي مداخل لاختيار الموضوع فقط. ما نريد أن نفعله أكثر هو أثر. وضعنا عدة تجارب متجاورة بجانب بعضهم البعض. فعرض السياسة والحب — الذي هو عرض موسيقي لفنانة هولندية وحدها على المسرح وهي تؤلف أغاني وتعمل على أفكار نسوية من خلال هذين الإطارين، السياسة والحب — يشترك في بعض الأمور مع حركة «أنا أيضاً» (me too) تنتقدها وتتفاعل معها أحياناً. وكل ذلك بشكل أغاني أيضاً وهذا شكل مختلف. وفكرة الحب وموقعها بالنسبة إليها كفنانة تعمل بالمسرح وأيضاً ترى نفسها نسوية. ما كنّا نريد أن نفعله هو أثر له علاقة بحرية تناول الموضوعات. وألاً يكون هناك حكم فني أو حكم قيمي أخلاقي. أي طوال الوقت يكون هناك انفتاح على مناقشة الأفكار فقط، عند الفنانين والجمهور.

قلت قبل قليل إنه طغت على الملتقى أشكال العرض غير التقليدية. ما تعليقك على ذلك؟

٤.٤: صحيح. فكرة غير التقليدي ترتبط أيضاً بالسياق. فمثلاً عروض كثيرة كان فيها

صحيح أنها منتجات تميل للفنية لكنها تُثير نقاشاً أكثر مع المجتمع، وفيها أمور ضد طبيعة المجتمع الذكورية نوعاً ما. كذلك كنّا نراهن على أن هناك جمهوراً صغير السن سيهتم بأن يكون موجوداً حتى لو كان شكل هذا المسرح غريباً عليه. أي جمهور حين يذهب إلى مكان ما فإنه يتوقع أمراً مسلياً أكثر. ويتوقع أمراً يتناقض مع قضاياه بشكل أو بآخر، فكان هنا الرهان. حاولنا أن نعمل على هذا بشكل واسع غير مؤدلج، بحيث لا تكون هناك رؤية واحدة لهذه السرديات النسائية، ويكون هناك أكثر من رأي أو أكثر من مكان. واستطعنا أن نقوم بذلك في العدد تحديداً، فجميع العروض التي أقيمت كان المخرجون القائمون عليها نساءً ما عدا عرض واحد. إلا أن ذلك العرض الوحيد أدرج مؤخراً جداً لأن المخرج أيضاً... عرض محمد فؤاد، الذي كان بلا خسائر، هو أيضاً أدرج مؤخراً، لأننا لم نستطع أن نجلب عرضاً آخر، فاختارناه. كان هناك عرض لبناني فرنسي من المفترض أن يشارك لكن وقعت مشاكل في الفيزا فلم نستطع إدراجه ضمن العروض. فاختارنا عرضاً آخر، لكن اختيارنا له كان تأكيداً للمنهجية العامة للملتقى، التي هي دعم أي شكل متحرر، أو يحاول أن يتحرر من القوالب الجامدة. فهو عرض على الرقص المعاصر، لكنه أيضاً ينتقد منظومة الرقص المعاصر أو الفن المعاصر بشكل أو بآخر. وهو عرض مهم جداً وكنّا ثاني مكان يُعرضه في مصر. وهو إنتاج مهرجان "دي كاف". وبعدها عُرض في الإسكندرية، ثم سافر إلى أكثر من مكان. وكانت فرصة مهمة وصدفة طيبة أن نعرضه.

هل رأينا تطوراً في جوهر الملتقى هذا العام مع هذه السرديات النسائية؟ هل تعملون على تطوير الملتقى؟

٤.٤: ليس هناك تطوّر في فكرته الجوهرية. الفكرة الجوهرية موجودة، لكن حدث نضج للشكل وللمضمون. أي أصبح كل شيء في مكانه بشكل جيد.. الأفكار واضحة جداً، فأول مادة صنعناها كانت فكرة الجمهور. كانت في 2015 في ثالث ملتقى، لأول مرة جرّينا موضوع المادة. فكان السؤال، هل اختلف الجمهور بعد الربيع العربي أم لا؟ حاولنا أن نقدّم عروضاً وأجرينا نقاشات لكنها لم تكن واضحة كثيراً لجمهورنا. لم تكن مادتنا واضحة. التلقون الذين حضروا لم يفهموا المادة. لكن بعض المتخصصين فهموا ماذا نريد. لم تكن العروض جذابة للكثيرين لكن مع سرديات نسائية كانت المادة واضحة وكانت هناك رؤى متعددة. ليس كل الجمهور الذي حضر أحبّ كل العروض. نعم، هناك كثيرون حضروا العروض جميعها، لكن هناك أناس اختلفوا مع عروض معينة وأناس اختلفوا مع توجهات معينة وأناس أحبّوا توجهات معينة. وفي بعض الأيام كان هناك جمهور معيّن. وفي أيام كان هناك جمهور أكثر من أناس مؤدلجين وسياسيين، لأنه أقيم عرض يُسمى "روزا لوبز فيمينست مانيفستو". وكان تعاوناً سويسرياً مصرية وأنا أشرفت على هذا التعاون نتيجة معرفتي لفنانين سويسريين وفنانات سويسريات وفنانات مصريات. يُعد هذا تطوراً داخل الملتقى، أي إن العرض نفسه تطوّر داخل الملتقى. إذاً نعم، هناك تطوّر كبير، وهناك تنوع

المسرح السياسي منذ نشأته مع "ريخت" و"بيتر فايس" وجميع الحركات تلك التي نشأت في أول القرن العشرين، وواقعه الآن في أوروبا وألمانيا. لذا تكوّنت لديّ فناعة بأن المسرح السياسي بحاجة إلى أن يتم تعريفه في منطقتنا العربية، بغضّ النظر عما يحدث سياسياً، وكل الرقابة التي تُفرض. لأننا بعد فترة توقعنا جميعاً أن يحقق الحراك الجماهيري انتصارات، لكن في النهاية ستحدث انكسارات وانحراف في مسارات عدة. وأكثر ما يُمكن أن يرصد، بل أن يشتبك مع التفاعل، هو المسرح. أجل، قد ترصد السينما التفاعل، لكن المسرح طوال الوقت هو ما يبقى مشتبكاً ويمنح دروساً واضحة عن التجربة وقت حدوثها، أو مدى الحرية وقتذاك. فمثلاً عرض "لا وقت للفن": لا أعتقد أنه يمكن عرضه الآن بنفس الشكل الذي عُرض فيه عام 2012.



ركزت الدورة الخامسة من الملتقى على الاستمرار في تسليط الضوء على أعمال مخرجات مسرح من مصر ومن المنطقة العربية ومن أوروبا. تحت عنوان "ممارسات المسرح والسرديات النسائية"، استضاف الملتقى إنتاجات مسرحية، عروضاً موسيقية، محاضرات ونقاشات جرت من خلال رؤى مجموعة مذهلة من الفنانات. ما كان سبب تسليط الضوء على العنصر النسائي هذا العام؟ وما الذي أردتم تحقيقه من خلال هذا البرنامج؟

٢٠١٤: عندما حدث الاحتكاك، وبعد عملنا في عامي 2014 و2015، وخاصة عام 2014 الذي كان فيه عروض كثيرة، منها 4 عروض من أوروبا وبرنامج ندوات للكتابة المسرحية، في تلك السنة بدأت أفكر في المادة (وكانت تلك ثاني سنة لي أقيم بها الملتقى 2012 و2014)، ومنذ 2015 بدأنا نضع المادة للمهرجان كل سنة، حتى يبقى. لأنني رأيت أنه كان شكلاً من أشكال الإدارة الفنية في المهرجانات الأوروبية (فالمهرجانات الأوروبية هي الأكثر ثباتاً من حيث يمكنني أخذ الخبرة منها). وبدأت أعمل على موضوع المادة وكيفية تطويرها، وكيف يمكننا أن نخلق مادة خاصة، لديها علاقة بنا وأيضاً تكون متقاطعة مع ما يحدث في الخارج لكي نستفيد. ولكي يكون هناك تواصل، لأن الأحداث المستمرة ذات العلاقة بالربيع العربي أو التغيرات السياسية لا تزل مرتبطة ارتباطاً عضوياً مع أوروبا. إذاً كل ما يحدث الآن له علاقة مثلاً بالأزمة السورية وباليمن، ولا يخلو أي حدث من البعد الإقليمي.

الفكرة أننا بدأنا بالمادة، ومادة آخر سنة، وهي سرديات نسائية في آذار 2018. كنت أفكر طيلة الوقت أنه بعد رصد الناس الذين عملنا معهم أو من كان لديهم طرحةً مختلفاً. الواقع أننا هنا في الإسكندرية، ثاني مدينة في مصر والمشهد المسرحي فيها — المستقل تحديداً، لا المشهد الرسمي — وجدنا أن هناك نقصاً في المشهد الرسمي وليس هناك تشجيع للعاملين في المسرح. لا توجد سيدات مخرجات وكاتبات، فالمرأة ممثلة فقط أو جزء من مشروع. لا يوجد تشجيع لمن يطرحون رؤيتهم. كنت أعمل على تلك الفكرة من قبل، من 2016، وكنت أحاول تنفيذها لكن ظروفًا معينة حالت دون ذلك. فعملت أكثر بشكل مكثف بحيث أصبحت أجمع العروض التي أحتاج إلى العمل عليها، وأصوغ المادة خاصتي وأسأل الناس عما إذا كان الأمر مناسباً أن يُنفذ في الإسكندرية في هذا الوقت. وحدث ذلك وكان مناسباً جداً وكان هناك إقبال كبير عليه رغم صعوبة تلقيه لأن المنتجات ليست منتجات فنية ترفيهية.

يهتم ملتقى "لازم مسرح" العالمي في الإسكندرية بتقديم إنتاجات مسرحية اجتماعية-سياسية مُعاصرة من منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا وأوروبا، نشأت في أعقاب الربيع العربي. ذلك بالإضافة إلى تنظيم ورش عمل مسرحية ومحادثات ونقاشات حول السياسات الثقافية والمشهد المسرحي المعاصر الحالي في أوروبا والمنطقة العربية. وقد نُظّم الملتقى في أواخر شهر آذار وبداية نيسان 2018. أخبرنا عن الملتقى وأهميته في ظل أحداث يناير / كانون الثاني والربيع العربي.

٢٠١٤: كان الملتقى فكرةً مني، كمبادرة بعد 2011، أي بعد أن شاهدت عرضاً مسرحياً لفنانة مصرية اسمها ليلي سليمان، وهي مخرجة مسرحية. كان اسمه "لا وقت للفن"، وهو مسرح وثائقي عمّن سُجنوا بعد الثورة في أحداث مختلفة. أي قصص لأشخاص سُجنوا بعد الثورة لأسباب مختلفة، إمّا سياسية، وإمّا مع التغيرات. فهناك قصة لشخص كان في اعتصام. والقصة الثانية لشخص انضم إلى الجيش إبان الثورة، فكان منعزلاً عن فكرة العزلة نفسها، عما يحدث في المجتمع. والقصة الثالثة لشخص اتهم، فألقي القبض عليه قبل الثورة وخرج وقت الثورة حين فُتحت السجون. وكان يدّعي أنه مظلوم وأنه قد قُبض عليه في سياق قضية ملققة. يتقاطع خروجه مع الثورة.

وهكذا كان هذا العرض ملهماً لي في فكرة سؤال: هل لدينا مسرح سياسي في المنطقة العربية أم لا؟ لأنني كمخرج مسرحي، لم أكن أصنّف عروضي قبل الثورة عروضاً سياسية، رغم كونها سياسية بالفعل. لم أكن أراه مدعاة للفخر الكبير أن يُصنّف العرض على أنه سياسي، فذلك التصنيف يجعله أقل فنية لأنه سيكون موجّهاً أو شيئاً من هذا القبيل. كان هذا تفكيرتي وقتئذ.

ثم بعد ذلك الحين، إبان الثورة أو الربيع العربي، أو جميع أحداث ما بعد 2011 في تونس ومصر تحديداً، بدأت أفكر فعلاً في موقع المسرح المعاصر وأتساءل إن كان لدينا تياراً أم لا... أو ما هو دورنا في البدء وفي اللاحق... وبعدئذ بدأت أفكر في ذلك، بينما كنت أنتج عروضي المسرحية خاصتي، وعندما شاهدت هذا العرض، بدأت أفكر بأكثر من فكرة واحدة. وكان هناك أيضاً عروض أخرى مثل مشروع كورال وأمور أخرى مشتبكة تماماً مع الوضع السياسي. جعلني هذا أن أفكر بأن علينا أن نفعل شيئاً له علاقة بما يدعى المسرح السياسي. فبدأت أقرأ وأعمل على الموضوع وأبحث فيه. وقمت بأول دورة في بداية 2012 وكان التمويل ذاتياً. كانت العروض مصرية فقط وكان معظمها من القاهرة، فقامت بجمع العروض المتواجدة في القاهرة وقتذاك (بالإضافة إلى فرقة موسيقية إسكندرانية، لأن المهرجان يُقام في الإسكندرية تحت اسم "شوارعنا") ونظّمنا ملتقى صغيراً.

واجهنا صعوبات جمّة بسبب كثرة التظاهرات طوال الوقت حينها، ولم يكن هناك أيّ مركز ثقافي ذي برنامج مستقرّ إلى حدّ ما. كانت جميع الأحداث في البلاد مرتبطة بردود الفعل السياسية، التي كانت بدورها مرتبطة أيضاً بميدان التحرير والأفعال السياسية المباشرة اليومية. وهنا كنت أرى أن في ذلك مشكلة كبيرة، فمن وجهة نظري في لحظة ما، سنكون بحاجة إلى أن نحلّل ونقدّم طرحةً أكثر هدوءاً لما يحدث، لأن كل التغيير والأحداث السياسية كلها جديدة. كما أنها قائمة على فكرة الفعل ورد الفعل؛ ففي لحظة ما، سيحدث انكسار أو انتظار أو أمر كهذا. لذا كنت أرى وجوب توثيق هذا، وكان المسرح أفضل سبل توثيقه. وبناءً عليه جمعتُ العروض وكان من ضمن الملتقى العرض الذي ألهمني بشدة، وهو "لا وقت للفن". وعروض أخرى عرضناها في الإسكندرية فقط، ومن هنا جاءت فكرة الملتقى وارتباطه بالربيع العربي.

بعد ذلك مع تطوّر الشخصي وانفتاحي أكثر على مفهوم المسرح السياسي، من خلال حضوري في 2014 مهرجاناً مسرحياً في ألمانيا اسمه "ملتقى المسرح"، حيث شاركت في ورشة كبيرة، لم تكن مجرد ورشة فقط بل أيضاً منحةً وأناساً مسرحيين. اجتمع فيها حوالي 37 مسرحي من العالم لا يزالون في منتصف حياتهم المهنية. في تلك اللحظة تعرّفت إلى مفهوم المسرح السياسي في ألمانيا وفي أوروبا بشكل أكثر منهجية، وتاريخه، بالإضافة إلى دراستي للمسرح وتجاري، لكن الأهم طبعاً هو الاحتكاك. وأن نرى إلى أين وصل

المسرح

مصر

عادل عبد الوهاب

حوار للمسرح المستقل والفنون الأدائية

ملتقى لازم مسرح - النسخة الخامسة

يهتم ملتقى «لازم مسرح» العالمي في الإسكندرية، بشكل أساسي، بتقديم إنتاجات مسرحية إجتماعية-سياسية مُعاصرة من منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا وأوروبا، نشأت في أعقاب الربيع العربي. ذلك بالإضافة إلى تنظيم ورش العمل مسرحية ومحادثات ونقاشات حول السياسات الثقافية والمشهد المسرحي المعاصر الحالي في أوروبا والمنطقة العربية.

الدّفاع عن المساواة
الجندريّة

تسليط الضوء على
السّرديات المهمّشة

خلق مساحات للتعافي

على "مخيم قمره للأفلام الوثائقية" الذي يزود المخرجين اليمنيين بالأدوات اللازمة لكي يصوروا الحوادث وحكاياتها في بلادهم المدمرة بفعل الحرب. وبالإضافة إلى كونه صنعة سردية، فالإنتاج الثقافي هو إنتاج بحثي، وأحياناً، يكون إنتاج متواصل. فهي الفنانه جمانة مناع، وعلى متن بحثها، الذي كانت تستفهم فيه عن سوريا، ولبنان، وفلسطين، وموقعها حيال هذه البلدان، وقعت على موضوع فيلمها "حب برّي". كما أن فيلم علي الصافي، "الباب السابع"، بمثابة أثر التنقيب في الأرشيف والذاكرة في مواجهة النسيان الرسمي في المغرب.

نافل القول أن الإنتاج الثقافي، ومثلما تبينه الأعمال المذكورة، ينطوي على تنوع في مساراته. ونافل القول أيضاً أن هذا التنوع لا ينم عن ترف، بل عن ارتطام بإرث القحل، الذي انتقل إلى المنتجين، والذي يحاولون تدبر أمره. فهم الفنانون، الباحثون، الرواة، المؤرشفون، الناشطون، المسيهسون، المواطنون، الإعلاميون إلخ. وهذا، فعلياً، ما يوفر لإنتاجهم مقالب ونواحي كثيرة، لكنه، وفي الوقت نفسه، يهدده بالبقاء في وضع درء القحل، الذي، وفي بعض الأحيان، يبدو الإفراط في الإنتاج، وعندما يتحول إلى مجرد تكويم للمحتوى، مجرد تلافي له. على أن الدرء، وحين يطول وقته، قد ينقلب إلى تعلق، وعندها، يصير التفلت من ذلك الوضع ضروري، وهذا، ما لا يستلزم ستر القحل بالانكار، ولا بالإكثار، إنما يتطلب البرمجة والتخطيط، فالقحل بلاء، بالتأكيد، ولكن، ما يجب أن يكون "امتياز" أيضاً.

يهدف إلى تخطي الانقسام في السودان. وهذا ما يشير إليه مشروع "هواة الظلام - السجن في ثقافته وممارسته" من إنجاز "أمم للتوثيق والأبحاث"، بحيث يتمحور كل إنتاجه حول المسألة السجنية تلك، راميةً إلى إنشاء فضاء يجمع كل المهتمين بها. وقد لا تكون هذه المسألة سوى وجهة، فـ"حوار للمسرح المستقل والفنون الأدائية"، وبملتقى "لازم مسرح" في الإسكندرية، يعلق إنتاجه، من عروض وورش عمل، حول المسرح السياسي في أعقاب الربيع العربي، ساعياً إلى إعادة التأكيد على أهمية هذا المسرح، لا سيما لأنه يؤدي إلى فتح الخشبة أمام المشاهدين ولا يبقها بعيدة عنهم.

وعند الإشارة إلى حال من أحوال الإنتاج الثقافي إياه، فقد يصح القول أنها تغيره إلى إنتاج سردي. هذا ما تنشغل به الفنانة خولة إبراهيم في مشروعها "حدود"، الذي انطلق على إثر تذكرها لرواية جدتها عن أبيها المتنقل، وفي طلعة بطولية، من الجولان إلى سوريا. فتسعى إبراهيم إلى إنتاج سرد يزيل الحد بين المنطقتين، ويشكل فضاء يربطهما ببعضهما البعض. وليس بعيداً عن هذا السياق، يسرد المخرج نادر بوحموش في فيلمه "أموسو" تجربة ساكنة "إمضر"، حيث عمد السكان إلى مواجهة شركة \$\$\$ الصناعية، مقاومين استغلالها لثرواتهم الطبيعية، وساعين إلى كف يد القيمين عليها، ومعهم داعميها الرسميين، عن معادنتهم ورمالهم ومائهم، ليشكل الفيلم حكايتهم النضالية.

وهذا، أيضاً، ما ينسحب على فيلم "طرس-رحلة الصعود إلى المرئي" للمخرج غسان حلواني، الذي يعالج فيه قضية المفقودين خلال الحرب الأهلية في لبنان، والذي يحاول من خلاله التشديد على أن كل واحد منهم يقوم بحكايته، ولا يمكن للتغيرات التي تطرأ على المجال المدني، أي على بيروت بعد اتفاق الطائف، أن تمحو ذكراه، أو تفرط في تخييبه مرة أخرى. مثلما ينسحب الإنتاج السردي

المجموعات الفنية، بل أن ألبومها الثاني "تأشيرة" هو مقلب من مقالب المقاومة لسلطة الاحتلال الإسرائيلي وغيرها. من هنا، تؤكد فرقة "مفر" على أن سياق عملها هو سياق سياسي بامتياز، بحيث أن خوضها له بمثابة خوض لنشاط يتعدى الإنتاج بذاته. الأمر نفسه ينسحب على مشروع "فكر في طنجة" لهشام بوزيد، الذي، وبصحبة رفاقه، يجعلون من الفن سبيل الوقوف على شؤون المدينة المغربية، والسعي إلى النظر فيها عن كثب، وهذا، ليس بعيون تقنية خالصة، بل بعيون مختلفة. فيتطلع هذا المشروع إلى تحقيق لقاء بين مواطني طنجة والمنتجين الثقافيين لكي ينشغل الطرفان في تحديد مشكلات المدينة.

بذلك، الإنتاج الثقافي، في هذا المطاف، هو، وإذا صح التعبير، إنتاج إجتماعي، تنعقد صلاته بالانطلاق من تقاسم الفضاء المدني، ومن الرغبة في تحسينه. على أن الإنتاج الثقافي قد يكون إنتاجاً لمقاربة، كما هي الحال في مشروع "غرفة المعيشة" لساندي هلال، بحيث أنها، وبعد انشغالها بالعمل مع اللاجئين في فلسطين المحتلة معاً، الطريقة التقنوقراطية في التعامل معهم، سعت إلى قلب هذه الطريقة بالارتكاز على مقاربة أخرى لموضوع المنفى، لا تحمل على الوقوع في فخ الضحية والبؤس. في الجهة عينها، وعندما يخرج عبد دوماني مشروعه الفوتوغرافي "الاعتیادي غير المعتاد"، الذي يتناول فيه الحصار المضروب من قبل نظام بشار الأسد على السوريين، يجد فيه توثيقاً لحقيقة ما يحدث في سوريا، وهذا بالبعيد عن تغطيته الإعلامية التي تجعل من المحاصرين مجرد أرقام. فالإنتاج الفوتوغرافي هنا هو إنتاج لنظرة أخرى تقرب من الحقائق ولا تلغيها.

وقد يكون الإنتاج الثقافي مصنوعاً ليكون في خدمة مسألة محددة، كما هي الحال في مشروع "مختبر المعلومات" الذي يضع كل تدريباته على النمذجة والإنتاج في خدمة حقوق الإنسان الفلسطينية، أو في مشروع "أندريا" الذي

ولا شك أن هذه اللوازم كثيرة، من الخلل في ظروف الإنتاج، وعلى رأسها، ظرف الحرية، التي تتعلق بالتعبير بالتوازي مع ارتباطها بالتفرغ، إلى استقرار السوق على الركود، الذي يفاقمه تقهقر عمليات التخطيط إلى إجراءات للتنفيذ. لكن، وعلى الرغم من حالته العامة تلك، إلا أن الإنتاج الثقافي في عالم اللغة العربية لا يتوقف عن الإثّساع، وعن التنوع. فالأعمال التي تعرضها "آفاق" في هذا الكتاب بمثابة بيان حول رحابة ذلك الإنتاج، الذي، وأي كانت عقباته، يحاول فاعلوه تخطيها بالمتاح. علماً، أن أعمال هؤلاء لا تستلزم منهم إنجازها فحسب، ولكن، تحقيق بنى هذا الإنجاز، سياقاته، مواقفه، وتاريخه حتى.

لعل العبارة التي تشير إلى وضع المنتجين هذا قد أتت على لسان المخرج علي الصافي في إطار حديثه عن فيلمه "الباب السابع"، فقد قال: "لا نتمتع بامتياز أن نكون فنانيين فقط، بل يتوجب علينا أن نكون باحثين ومؤرخين. يتوجب على الفنانين القيام بالكثير من الأشياء". على هذا النحو، الفنانون، أو المنتجون الثقافيون على العموم، هم ورثة القحل، الذي يشير الصافي إليه، والذي يثقله وإياهم، ومع ذلك، يواصلون الإنتاج لأجل الإنتهاء منه، أو محاولة هذا تحديداً، بحيث أنه قحل راسخ، لا سيما أن سلطات كثيرة تكرّسه كواقع موافق لها.

حيال هذا القحل الذي ورثوه والذي، وفي الكثير من الأوقات، يبدو العيش في ظله شبيهاً بالعيش في صحراء قائظة، يلتزم المنتجون الثقافيون بأن يكونوا أكثر مما هم عليه، بأن يكونوا "باحثين ومؤرخين" بالطبع، لكن، وأيضاً، أن ينطلقوا من نطاقات، لا يقصدونها بدايةً، إلا أن مواجهة الإرث إياه، واقعه وسلطاته، يدفعهم إليها، لا سيما حين تكون نطاقات فعّالة ولكنها غائبة أو شبه معدومة حتى.

فرقة "مفر" لا تحظى بـ "امتياز" التأليف الموسيقي الذي يعرفها كمجموعة من



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الإنتاج الثقافي بوصفه درءاً للقفل

لا يمكن القول أن الإنتاج الثقافي في عالم اللغة العربية بخير. فعدا عن كونه لا يزال يتأرجح بين نكران إقتصاديته من جهة، والزوال فيها من جهة أخرى، بين نفيه أنه "إنتاج" من ناحية، وتحوله إلى مجرد إنشاء لمحتوى من ناحية أخرى، لا يزال مجاله هو مجال في مرحلة الإقلاع، التي يجهد الكثير من فاعليه، أي المنتجون، في إتمامها. وهذا، وعلى الأقل، من خلال الإستمرار في عملهم الذي لا يتوقفون عن الإشارة إلى اللوازم التي يفتقر إليها.