



In this production, directed in Jordan by Husam 'Abed, young people from Sudan, Jordan, Palestine and Syria came together and created an original play, Up to the Light

Who We Can Be & What We Can Create

By Seenaryo, specialists in theatre and play-based learning with marginalised communities



WORLD
Refugee
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He remembers the sign across the entrance of the camp he was living in: 'Baq'a'a Refugee Camp. An Emergency Camp'. It made him think of hospital rooms and that "it had a feeling of being temporary". Read on to learn more about Husam 'Abed, his work and different experiences of being a refugee in Jordan.

Jordan: Home to many

Interwoven in the fabric of Jordan's history are multiple periods of refugees arriving from neighbouring countries in search of safety. Most recently, of course, are the almost 700,000 Syrian refugees currently living in Jordan, forced to leave their homes because of the war in Syria. At the height of the crisis, the number of Syrians in Jordan was estimated at around one million, making Jordan the country with the second-highest number of Syrian refugees per capita, globally (Lebanon being the first). And as a result of civil war, unrest or lack of services in their home countries, there are also more than 6,000 Sudanese and more than 13,000 Yemeni

“I am Jordanian. I am Palestinian. I am Czech. I am all of the places I have been to and I am all of the people I have met”

refugees in Jordan, according to official UNHCR figures. Jordan is no stranger to providing this kind of welcome. During the first Gulf War, it is estimated that almost one million people came from Iraq and Kuwait and sought refuge in the Kingdom.

Meet Husam 'Abed

The word 'refugee' has further nuance when we consider the situation of Palestinians living in Jordan. The majority of Palestinians have Jordanian citizenship, but approximately two million Palestinians in Jordan are registered as refugees, some of whom live in the ten official Palestinian refugee camps. We asked theatre-maker and artist Husam 'Abed, who grew up in the Baqa'a Palestinian Camp in Jordan, and is now living in the Czech Republic, whether he was aware of the 'refugee' label as a child.

The feeling of being temporary continued to shape his identity throughout his life – "I don't identify with one identity. I am Jordanian. I am Palestinian. I am Czech. I am all of the places I have been to and I am all the people I have met; they all shaped my identity... I don't feel connected to one place; I feel fragmented."

Theatre, play and identity

When Seenaryo first started running theatre projects in Lebanon back in 2015, it was in response to the need for young people to have a platform themselves, create art and have their voices heard. This group of people happened to be refugees. It is often refugees who are the most marginalised in society and have the least opportunity to access tools that allow them to explore, express and challenge the identities that they have



Husam 'Abed pictured here at the Akcent Festival in the Czech Republic (2015)

“I'm proud of what I'm doing even if others reject me”



Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese youth perform in I See My Ghost (Lebanon, 2020)

A Dip into the Life of

been given. For Seenaryo, theatre is one very powerful way to equip people with the tools they need to tell stories that matter to them and, through imagination and play, to explore the complexities and nuances of the human experience. One young participant who took part in a Seenaryo Studio project in Lebanon explains, "I'm discovering myself more and building my personality. I'm proud of what I'm doing even if others reject me."

'Abed has been producing and performing theatre for the last 20 years and is now pursuing a PhD. His current solo performance project, *The War Maker*, supported by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture-Beirut, tells the story of his friend who lived in the Yarmouk Camp in Syria and explores how our identities and documents can decide our path and "constantly put us on a crossroads" forcing us to choose between "love and family", or "relationships and dreams". He explains that his motivation for working with refugees or with any group of people comes from a desire to "show solidarity, to find ways that [people] can communicate with audiences by adding new narratives and bringing in something different."

The ingredient of imagination

For Seenaryo, making theatre with marginalised groups is inspired by the belief that everyone has the right to reach their full potential and to have their voices heard.



From *The War Maker*, a current project Husam 'Abed is working on



Young actresses and actors in Jordan perform in *Turned Into Stars*, a play that explores racism and fragmented identities

We have adopted a participatory process, which means creating the script through collaboration and consensus. Workshops involve a constant back and forth between the facilitator or director and the ideas, stories and experiences that the participants bring to the table. This allows space for individuals (refugees and others) of different nationalities, including Jordanians, Lebanese, Sudanese and Ethiopians to explore various roles and ways of being, without the labels they've been given having to define them or the theatre they create.

'Abed articulates the uncertainty and excitement created when working this way, the fact that "nothing is given in advance, it's about trying new things and exploring unknown areas." All ideas are welcome, empowering and inspiring the participants. He elaborates further, "I love the chaos that is part of the process before the plan slowly starts to take shape." In this environment of acceptance, with an added ingredient of imagination, the possibilities for who we can be and what we can create are endless.

For information on what Seenaryo is doing to celebrate World Refugee Week (14 - 20 June), check out www.seenaryo.org or follow on social media @seenaryo

Jordan Stats

753,282 refugees are registered in Jordan, from a total of 57 different nationalities, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of February 2021



From *The War Maker*, a current project Husam 'Abed is working on

Did you know?

Refugees are people forced to leave their own countries to other countries where they might find safety and protection. The word 'refugee' represents millions of different individuals, all over the world, with different histories, life experiences, and stories to tell



From *The War Maker*, a current project Husam 'Abed is working on