

## PALESTINE PLACEMENT REPORT- THOULATY FINAL REPORT

We did the placement in Palestine between 15 to 22 May 2023. The organiser of this placement was the Assirk Assaghir team and they managed to give the cirqu'en choc team a very rich experience, covered with palestinian culture and context, and fulfilled with the desire to meet different cultural organisations working there.

DAY 1 : arrival in Nablus through Tel Aviv

DAY 2: Quick visit of Nablus with a view on the city with Yasmeen explaining her daily life and reality in which she dealt with due to the occupation context (insecurity, Israeli snipers surrounding the city, checkpoints). Then visit to the Assirk Assaghir social circus school in Nablus, first meeting with the students (a collective juggling exchange where words were not necessary to create links with the young people training there, using circus as a tool for social bonding). And the discovery of delicious Palestinian cuisine. The evening we had some traditional "Barrad" citronnade in a park with some of the young circus artists of the school. They shared with us some of their personal struggle under occupation. Like humiliations crossing checkpoints and borders, family detained in jail and loss of any hope for a better future in Palestine.



DAY 3 : Visit of Jenin's refugee camp at the freedom theatre where we met Ahmed Tobasi freedom theatre director and performer & Ranin Odeh youth program director and director at the freedom theatre. We discovered with pleasure and interest their feminist theatre festival they were organising in September broadcasting women actresses. We witnessed many street paintings on the walls picturing occupation and the suffering resulting from it. We learned more about the history of the Jenin refugee camp. Palestinian living there have been stuck in this camp since more than 70 years, hoping one day to go back to their villages taken by the israeli settlers. The camp is a poorer area compared to the other cities in the west bank that are already economically struggling. Then we also visited in the camp the music school [www.alkamandjati.org](http://www.alkamandjati.org) founded by Ramzi Abuwerdan, famous palestinian music composer who was also sadly famous as a child for being the kid throwing stones on a journalist picture taken during the first intifada.

Finally, we shared a barbecue at the circus school with the youth team from Assirk Assaghir school. We took the opportunity to view some of the students' work on video and talk about our last creation Gnoko Bok to raise awareness of Estelle's experience as a black woman in Switzerland and give them a first insight of political intimate topics staged through contemporary circus.



DAY 4: Yasmeeen suggested we go to a women's Hammam and visit the old town of Nablus, where we discovered the photos of the many martyrs and freedom fighters displayed on the walls of the city. We also had the chance to eat & taste the famous nablus knafeh. On our return, we attended the auditions for the placement in Lebanon with propositions staged by Wajdi, Raghad and Asseel. All three had chosen themes based on the reality of their experience and context: domestic violence/divorce and problems within families and the effects on children, women's rights in Palestine and an Israeli army raid in the old city of Nablus just as the children were leaving school.

In addition to the circus presentation they explained to us their research and staging process with their performers.





DAY 5: Visit of the Palestinian Circus School where we met Ahmad Abu Taleb, the artist and production coordinator. We then went to visit the museum of Yasser Arafat in Ramallah and learned more about the history of Palestine and the Palestinian cause defended by Arafat. On our return to Nablus, we told the project participants who were the two students selected for the workshop in Lebanon. After a long reflection, the choice was difficult because all of them were brilliant but based on Mohammed's insights as he knows them better we finally decided to choose Raghad and Wajdi. Noor and Tala were chosen to come as performers but in September Tala could unfortunately not join the last placement because of some serious security threats that she faced on the Israeli checkpoint / borders and decided that it might be safer for her not to travel.



DAY 6: Yasmeeen took us to a trek outside of Nablus where we followed a group of people led by two guides. We discovered the Palestinian landscape and had time to reflect on our trip and bond with Yasmeeen in a more relaxed context.



DAY 7 : For the last day, as Mohammed was not allowed to come with us in Jerusalem, as Jerusalemites are forbidden to Palestinian men under 40 without a permit, we went with Yasmien only. We then crossed the checkpoints with Yasmien to join one of her friends, visit the city and El-Hakawati - The Palestinian National Theatre of Palestine. In the evening, Yasmien returned to Nablus. For our part, we joined Amer Khalil, director of the El-Hakawati theatre (also a thoulathy participant) and a Swiss-Lebanese friend who was making a documentary about the theatre. We then spent the night in Jerusalem before heading to Tel Aviv the next day to catch our flight.

DAY 8 : departure from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv

It was the first time ever we had to answer questions leaving a country. We also had to clear and erase all traces of our stay in occupied territories.

These phases were essential to the project in order to understand the context in which the students from the Assirk Assaghir social circus school are evolving, and to guide them as best as possible during the workshop in Lebanon in September 2023.



## LEARNINGS

During the Swiss placement we already had an insight with the experience of the Palestinians and their daily lives, how the evolution of the war and conflicts have affected their lives and the situation of artists in Palestine. But to have the opportunity to go there and see ourselves has deepened the comprehension of it on another level.

We witnessed how contrasted and multilayered the suffering caused by the occupation reflects itself in the Palestinian society and daily life. Life and death, daily life and insecurity coexist permanently. And in addition to it, to be under occupation deprived from freedom, there are other cages. Based on gender, desires, work, sexual orientation, hobbies etc... people have to navigate with cultural sensitivity and other forms of discrimination.

Due to context and lack of resources we learned how the Palestinian artists and cultural workers developed strong abilities in public relations & fundraising because they depend on it. Sustainability is also what they always seek and keep in mind and they master the art of innovation.

The relationship between the various structures linked to the performing arts (theatre, circus, dance) is based on exchange and mutual aid more than competition.





## EVALUATION

The activities conducted in Palestine led us to better understand the daily life of our thoughtful collaborators and artists met in Palestine. With a better view on the life under occupation we could prepare more efficiently the workshop for the last placement.

Like, for example, getting to know the team of students who were going to take part in the workshop. It was then easier for us to form the teams according to the sensitivities, circus specialities and personalities of each one.

Also due to the context and their focus on sustainability we could also aim the workshop in this direction. We would plant seeds and “teach how to fish instead of giving the fish” so they would carry on themselves with the inspiration

We also discovered the excellent artistic work of the circus school. The students already had skills and experience in contemporary circus, which made it possible to adapt the workshop.

On a personal level, experiencing such a trip in a country under occupation and war was a strong reminder and inspiration for us about the importance of resistance through art. We seek to carry on like they do with our art and organisation.

Also, we were affected by the fact part of our thoughtful team could not join us on this placement because from Lebanon. This was a direct effect on how wars and borders affect people's life and at the same time we managed somehow to keep doing circus without borders because we all met in Lebanon or the last placement and it was a success, relief and joy.

Tania & Estelle