

# VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

Culture, Conflict and Change in North Africa

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)



Contact us to receive publications in alternative formats, request a hard copy, or give feedback:  
[externalrelations@britishcouncil.org](mailto:externalrelations@britishcouncil.org)

This publication presents the key insights from a detailed research project carried out for the British Council by the Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York during 2011 and 2012. The research, led by Professor Sultan Barakat, comprised 112 interviews with individuals or groups of artists, cultural activists and civil society representatives in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, plus responses gathered in subsequent discussion groups with interested stakeholders and partners.



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*



# CONTENTS

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
Arts, culture and the demands for change	5
Graffiti, hip hop and the democratisation of culture	7
Interpreting the revolution	11
Morocco sidesteps a confrontation	12
New voices, new partnerships	13
A role for the UK's arts sector	16
Negotiating the future	19

## ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide.

We are a Royal Charter charity, established as the UK's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations.

Our 7,000 staff in more than 100 countries work with thousands of professionals and policy-makers and millions of young people every year through English, arts, education and society programmes.

We earn over 75 per cent of our annual turnover of nearly £700 million from services which customers pay for, education and development contracts we bid for, and from partnerships. A UK government grant provides the remaining 25 per cent. We match every £1 of core public funding with over £3 earned in pursuit of our charitable purpose.

# FOREWORD

We are living through a time of great change and tremendous potential. Across the Middle East and North Africa a largely young populace, inspired by past revolutionary histories in their own countries and also by the zeal of their contemporaries in other states, are taking to the streets. They want what all citizens want: societies that are fair, egalitarian, supportive, accountable and stable.

Just as oppression and inequality take many forms, so do resistance movements. Protest has not just occurred on the streets but also within the cultural sphere, aided by the digital revolution and the globalisation of culture. Writers, artists, musicians, choreographers, film-makers, designers and bloggers have been at the forefront of change, agitating both in person and in their work, determined that the future should not be like the past.

This publication and the research on which it's based offer a snapshot of a particular moment at a time of rapid transformation. It looks into the many possibilities for the future relationship between the UK and the region. There is potential for the UK to augment and strengthen the link between culture and social change and to participate in the flourishing of art in its multiple forms: as a method of non violent protest, as catalyst, as a social mirror or a space to freely explore difficult, dangerous or taboo issues, express emotions and chronicle solutions. The revolutions are giving a powerful voice to people who have so often been marginalised. It is notable just how many of the revolutionary leaders, commentators and artists are women, a clear sign that even those whose voices have historically been ignored are refusing to be silent or invisible.

The UK has the unique chance now to participate, assist and enable without dominating or dictating. We can pledge our support of all artistic voices, free expression and cultural internationalism. We can offer practical expertise and contacts with established organisations to create helpful links, not only amongst artists, but between artists and producers, commissioners, editors, curators and established figures and institutions internationally. In this way, the UK can bring the best of itself to participate in building a richer world community, supported not by diplomatic patronage but by joint creativity, the interchange of opportunities, artistic friendship and mutual cultural inspiration.

However, we must act quickly. Before the fervour of revolution has burnt itself out or been quashed, we must help to ensure that real and enduring change can be achieved. That means identifying artistic leaders, cultural spokespeople and creative innovators and sharing with them our support, resources, opportunities, institutions and structures. We must work together, ensuring that action leads to change, international collaboration leads to lasting friendship, protest leads to emancipation and art and creativity lead to freedom and equality.



**Bidisha**  
**Journalist, broadcaster and activist**

# INTRODUCTION

Many young people in the region have grown up in an atmosphere of injustice, inequality and corruption. They have ambitious ideas for a better future. We need to engage with them urgently and help them secure and build on the changes they have helped create.

A tide of change has surged through the Middle East and North Africa since 2011.

Sparked by the death of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, it has been an explosive release of pent up frustrations after decades of injustice, inequality, poverty, corruption, repression, and assaults on the dignity of the individual.

It has captured people's imaginations across the globe and compels us, as nations, as organisations and as individuals, urgently to rethink our response to the questions and demands it carries.

Rapid change is not something new to the region. Over the last generation the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has had the fastest rate of population growth of any region in the world. In 1950 the population was around 100 million. Today it is around 380 million. The consequent flow of migration from rural areas to the cities has created enormous pressures on the provision of effective services, resources and most importantly employment.

The demographic realities are startling. One third of the population of this region is under the age of 15 and 70 per cent are under the age of 30.

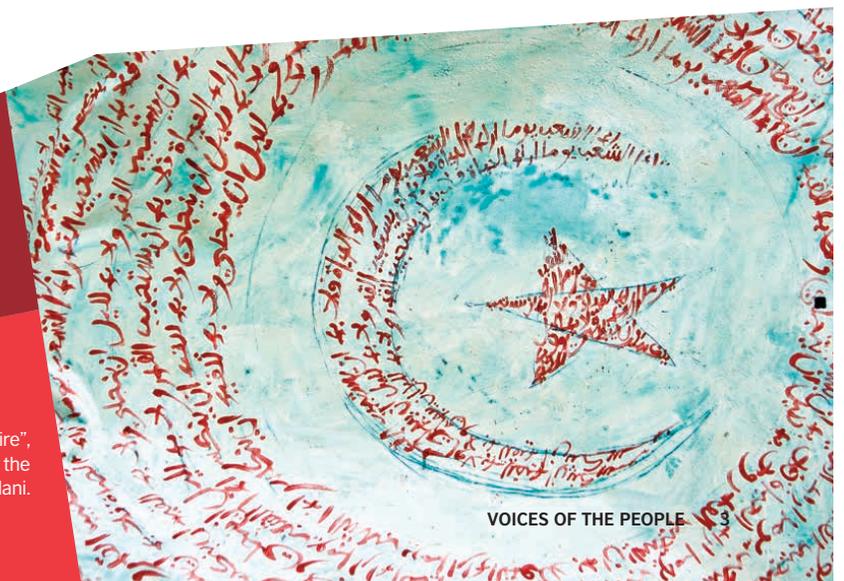
Their concerns are similar to those of the next generation all over the planet: to have a good education, to find valuable work, to be respected and listened to, to have a meaningful voice in shaping their own futures.

It has been these young people who have been at the visible crest of the loud and insistent movements for change in the region, alongside more mature institutions and individuals. It will be these young people, as they establish themselves as active citizens in their communities and nations who will be shaping social, political and cultural development in the years to come.

Given the unprecedented changes taking place, now is the time to ask how the UK can recalibrate its ties in this region. In particular, how can the UK arts and creative sector build trust and connections with this new generation of young people with ambitious ideas for a better future? What genuine, long-term and sustainable difference can we make through cultural relationships, through creative partnerships and through the exchange of knowledge and ideas? And how can we do so at a time of continuing change and, in some countries, continuing instability?

This has implications not just for the UK's ties with MENA but its relationships in other parts of the world undergoing rapid change. It also has implications for cultural organisations across Europe, in the United States and around the world.

From "Art révolutionnaire", a series on graffiti in Tunis by the photographer Wassim Ghozlani.





The voices belong to poets, activists, bloggers, artists, comedians, soap stars, photographers, writers, storytellers, philosophers, actors, satirists, musicians, film-makers, sculptors, architects, graffiti artists, designers, choreographers and playwrights, all engaged in this historic period of change-making.

# ARTS, CULTURE AND THE DEMANDS FOR CHANGE

This study examines the relationship between culture and social change in four North African countries: Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. It is a snapshot of a moment in time, between winter 2011 and autumn 2012.

Each of these countries inevitably represents different forms of civic, economic, political and cultural changes, changes that are continuing to develop at a rapid pace and scale.

Cultural activists played an integral role in the events. They helped to galvanise popular discontent and build momentum and a wide coalition of support for change in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Arts and culture acted as protest, as catalyst, as reflection, as documentation, and indeed as a means of communication across cities, countries and continents. They both reflected and drove social change.

Change has not happened simply in terms of violent confrontation and civil uprising. There has been a revolution of thought, of ideas, of behaviours, of images, shared in seconds across the region, and across the world. And it is a revolution which continues.

The loud explosion of creative expression that spread rapidly across MENA from the very outset took many forms, and placed art and culture at the heart of the ongoing protests and the vociferous demands for change. Many people may be eager to seek credit for these changes, but it would not be an overstatement to say that cultural and arts activists have played an important role both in the countries researched and through their diaspora, which reaches far into the Middle East, Europe and beyond.

There is an echo here of the short-lived Prague Spring of 1968, when human rights and a free press were encouraged, and civil society briefly flourished. The brutal response of the Soviet Union drove dissent underground and opposition to the regime became primarily cultural, rather than political: the symbolic and metaphorical power of

At La Kasbah, Tunis, the seat of government.



## Social, political and economic uncertainty in the region continues and the tide of change may quickly turn back

theatre and music kept dissent alive and drove the changes that finally arrived with the election of the playwright Václav Havel as President 20 years later.

Our investigation in North Africa was guided by two overriding questions:

- What social and artistic freedoms and possibilities are opening up for artists and cultural institutions in these four countries?

Conversely, what new possibilities of civic, social and political expression on the street and in the public sphere are they helping to create?

The voices we heard belonged to poets, activists, bloggers, artists, comedians, soap stars, photographers, writers, storytellers, philosophers, actors, satirists, musicians, film-makers, sculptors, architects, graffiti artists, designers, choreographers and playwrights, all engaged in this historic period of change-making.

They belonged to gallery directors, curators, festival organisers, administrators, television and radio

producers and educators working both within, and outside, the state-sponsored system of artistic, cultural and creative production.

The research did not try to account for everything that happened and is happening in the region. It was a snapshot of a moment in time, taken between winter 2011 and autumn 2012, and the telling of a story of what this could mean for cultural relations.

The snapshot points to an important role for independent cultural actors and institutions in the vital task of building and strengthening civil society in the region. It also points to the fragility and the volatility of these transitions.

Whilst the tide of change has slowly begun to sweep away decades of injustice, persecution and inequality, there is still a very long and difficult journey ahead. There is continuing

political, economic and social uncertainty and unrest in the region. It will take time and considerable determination for the benefits of economic liberalisation to properly spread beyond the urban elites. The reality is that the tide may quickly turn back with the potential rise of social antagonism, sectarianism and inter-community strife.

**There is thus a need for us all not to stand back and wait for clarity to emerge, but to act now. We need to engage rather than observe.**



# GRAFFITI, HIP HOP AND THE DEMOCRATISATION OF CULTURE

State art was safely removed from social issues such as bread shortages and corruption. Hip-hop music and street art emerged as key mediums of protest in the months before the revolutions.

Before the revolutions, art or culture sponsored or authorised by the state was really about the wishes of the leaders of the countries, a means of pandering to the elites and reinforcing the cult of personality (particularly in Libya). It provided an empty version of principled engagement with the world that was safely removed from sensitive social issues such as bread shortages, government corruption, marginalisation and widespread poverty.

Such state-sponsored art played little or no part in the revolutions, with the artists concerned fearful that involvement could affect their standing, future funding and livelihoods. What emerged instead was a democratisation of culture,

typified by the use in Tunisia of hip-hop music as a key medium of discontent, with rappers consistently jailed in the final months leading up to the revolution, and by the emergence and proliferation across the region of street art.

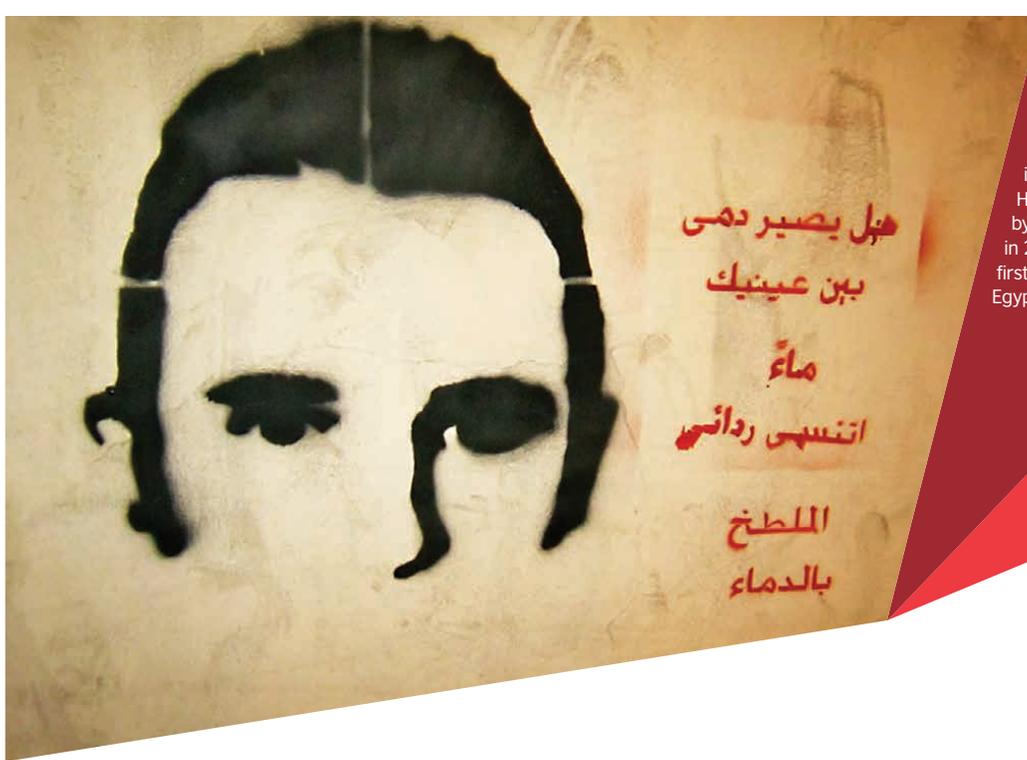
This is happening at present in Syria which has always had a strong tradition of highly metaphorical cartoons in its heavily censored press, and where a new generation of illustrators has been posting their responses to Syria's turmoil on the Facebook page *Comic4Syria*. Here, the uprising took on a new intensity when a group of young people were arrested and tortured for spray-painting a slogan. It was the same slogan – 'Alsha'ab yurid isqat al-nizam' ('The people want the overthrow of the regime') – which fuelled the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

Graffiti across North Africa both encouraged public participation in art (free from the bounds of state control) and functioned as political commentary.

After decades of being subjected to Libyan state propaganda and the personality cult of Colonel Qadhafi, Libyans revelled in recasting his image in derisive terms through murals, portraits and graffiti messages that signalled a release from years of simmering anger and frustration.

Graffiti artists who had begun creating small works in local safe neighbourhoods, where the likelihood of persecution was minimal, gradually moved onto larger, more elaborate works in more open, public and confrontational spaces. These spaces were communal and interactive as other artists and citizens contributed to the work over time, or altered them to ensure they remained relevant to the unfolding events. Participatory theatre in Egypt and street theatre in Tunisia developed similar followings.





This image of Khaled Said became widespread in the streets of Cairo. His murder in Alexandria by security forces in 2010 ignited the first sparks of the Egyptian revolution.

The online citizen journalist emerged as a potent social actor. The use of mobile phones for photography and video enabled artists, activists and ordinary people to be seen as part of the revolutionary masses, and shifted the medium from a risky activity to an awareness-raising and documenting one. The line between documentation, democratisation, and in some cases propaganda, and art increasingly became blurred where artists, curators and communities developed deeper communication and participation in a more civil realm.

The influence of political activism and citizen journalism are clearly evident in the experimental forms of documentary cinema and theatre that sprang up in Cairo. Tahrir Cinema, an artist-organised initiative, screened documentary footage from protests and clashes on a screen set up in Cairo's famed square; while Tahrir Monologues, continually updated, presented first-hand accounts of the first 18 days of the revolution.

In Tunis, after the fall of Ben Ali, an exhibition of images and clips of the Tunisian revolution caught by individuals on their mobile phones reflected the view of the average Tunisian and succeeded in simultaneously chronicling and expressing the revolutionary nuances.

Through social media, the images and sounds of the uprisings were shared in seconds across the world. The international media promoted the banners, placards, signs and slogans of protesters. Composed not just in Arabic but in English, French and many other languages, the urgency was to promote the message of the uprisings both within and beyond the borders of the Arabic-speaking world.

Significantly, in Egypt a fusion of old and new protest strategies emerged as hand-painted signs and graffiti were used to produce messages; and the technology, in the form of social media networks and mobile phones, provided a means of promotion and mobilisation. At the same

time, graffiti stencils were uploaded online for artists and activists to use and themes for placards were translated and shared across countries. The result was once more an exchange between the virtual and the physical as each nurtured expression through the other.

The revolutionary spirit in the region was for freedom of expression and inclusion for the many, not the few, in shaping their societies.

For arts activists, the impulse to engage with, and show solidarity with, the disadvantaged and the marginalised in society, including women, was crucial. They felt that through this process of engagement they could increase understanding and dialogue across classes, generations and cultures, and that they as artists might begin to speak a more inclusive language.

As events unfolded, people's need to share stories and images with each other became both urgent and possible.

Cairo hip-hop group  
Arabian Knightz.

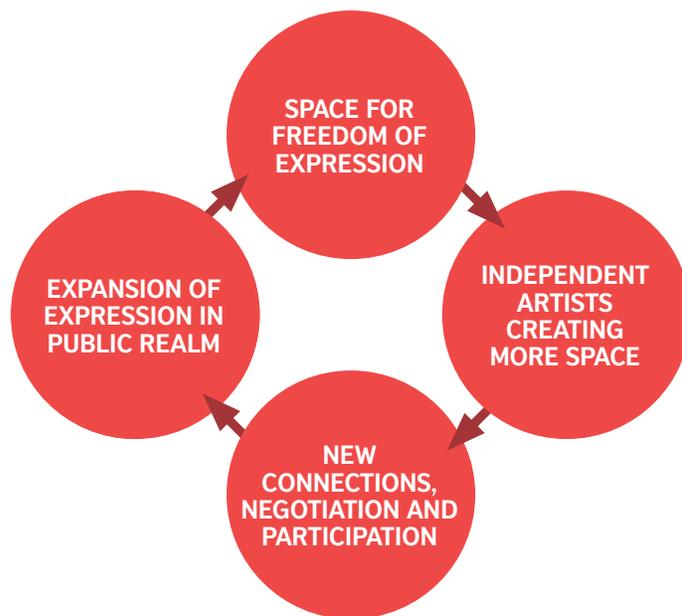


At the height of the protests, many of the existing cultural institutions, particularly those supported by the state and by the elite, found themselves frozen and unable to act for fear of taking sides. It was the independent art scene in compact with social activists and newly-awakened citizens who readily got involved with the ongoing calls for change.

What they were so insistently calling for is not in many ways unique to their context or countries. They were, and are, asking for respect, dignity, equality, social justice, and new associations between people and power.

These spaces and channels included more voices and greater communication than previously imaginable, which in turn made the possibility for more connections to be made laterally between people, which in turn opened up more civil space for yet more vibrant freedom of expression.

This bold imagining of new forms of association, of community building, of power dynamics and of social equity is of as much relevance in the global north as it is in the south. They are issues which have echoes in the social movements in the squares of Europe, in the parks of America, from Chile to Hong Kong, from Nigeria to New Zealand, and across the world.



Much of the work created by artists and social activists during the uprisings forced open new experimental spaces and channels for freedom of expression.

## **MOHAMED BOUAZIZI (29 MARCH 1984 – 4 JANUARY 2011)**

Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi was a Tunisian street vendor in the small rural town of Sidi Bouzid who set himself alight on 17 December 2010, in protest at the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation that he reported was inflicted on him by a municipal official.

His act was a catalyst for demonstrations and riots throughout Tunisia in protest at the endemic and long-standing corruption, repression and inequality in the country. The public's anger and violence intensified following Bouazizi's death, their protests becoming more widespread and eventually reaching the capital and the heart of government. Ten days after Mohamed Bouazizi's death, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his family fled the country after 23 years in power.

The success of the Tunisian protests inspired protests in several other Arab countries, plus several non-Arab countries. The protestors included several men who emulated Bouazizi's act of self-immolation, in an attempt to bring an end to their own autocratic governments. They and Bouazizi were hailed by some Arab commentators as 'heroic martyrs of a new Middle Eastern revolution'.

One year on, Tunisian writer and academic Larbi Sadiki wrote in Al-Jazeera that Bouazizi's self-immolation 'would change the course of Arab political history ... it will be years before 17 December 2010 and the subsequent chain of events his act set off in Tunisia – and later on across the Arab world – are profoundly grasped by historians and social scientists.

The man and the act spawned a hugely unprecedented movement, forever altering the Arab political landscape, delivering the much-vaunted "breakthrough" in the fight against autocracy.'

# INTERPRETING THE REVOLUTION

Artistic and cultural activism is seeping into the mainstream of young people's experience. Cultural development has a critical role to play in finding long-term solutions for the people of the region.

What lies ahead in the continuing process of nation building in the region are the tasks of creating an effective civil society. These include giving voice to the disenfranchised, creating opportunities for young people, documenting and commenting on change, imagining new forms of governance and accountability, embedding moral leadership, and forging new relationships between the younger and older generations and between ordinary people and national institutions.

Cultural development is a critical and central part of the multiple, complex and long-term solutions for the people of the region. In the post-uprising environment, there has been a flowering of new culture rooted in civil society, which is widely acknowledged as a key aspect of nation-building and the underpinning of new democracies.

Since the events of 2011 there has been an almost constant stream of art journals, conferences, films and art exhibitions focused on representing and interpreting what has happened. Commercial and independent galleries in Cairo and elsewhere have been offering up a steady stream of shows – some as early as a month after the uprisings – devoted to the revolution. The works in these exhibitions carry titles such as *Freedom*, *Drink Freedom*, *Shadow of Freedom*, *People Demand*, *Man Crying* and for the most part offer up a literal or heavy-handed interpretation of recent events.

While some of these activities presented new-found freedoms and were ideologically driven, it should be noted that others were found to be driven by newly-emerging commercial interests, taking advantage of the needs of growing local and global audiences eager for images and songs of the revolution. These increasingly commodified aspects of the revolution have proved marketable internationally, to the discomfort of some activists and commentators.

Artists have become emboldened and have begun to put pressure on their new governments for institutional reform and greater freedom to tackle day-to-day realities. Many of those running state cultural institutions are the same as before the uprisings, perhaps inevitably, but artistic and cultural activism, whether by street artists or by more established cultural players, is now seeping into the mainstream of cultural practice – not least for the young people who are the majority of the population.

Non-state associations have begun to proliferate, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, in order to provide support and professional training and opportunities in the region and internationally. There is a general feeling that reform of the ministries of culture is necessary and desired but that this is likely to be a long process, which is why civil associations are considered vital in the meantime.

This ongoing change has profoundly shifted the landscape in the region and has implications far beyond. There is now a renewed sense of people's confidence and pride in the region, strongly connected to a renewed sense of their own multiple and co-existent identities and possibilities in the contemporary world.

Over the past year a growing number of artists have been making work that responds to a rapidly changing sequence of events using new or non-traditional media. The work of the Egyptian graffiti artist Alaa Awad, for example, can appear on a wall within the space of a few hours; a video of the work can be posted instantly on YouTube; and the blogger *SuzeeintheCity* can report on it being painted over by the present authorities and then repainted by artist-activists: 'The authorities have given the artists a new spark to light a fire with, a new drive to use art for their movement against the establishment, the regime, the police and censorship of free speech.'

In Libya, art is being used to raise civic awareness through the dissemination of comics and cartoons in non-urban areas, communicating in new ways and making the messages more immediate and more easily accessible.

# MOROCCO SIDESTEPS A CONFRONTATION

The government has accepted quite challenging art, but even here changes in the cultural scene are influencing wider political and social change.

By supporting and encouraging small local identities, the Moroccan state has prevented the sort of popular unified uprisings found elsewhere in the MENA region. This has had, for some, the effect of satisfying the need for a sense of belonging and the expression of this belonging, at the same time as disabling these same groups from bonding together with a shared sense of grievance or political expression.

This has allowed the government of Morocco to accept even quite challenging art in some genres, such as cinema (the local film industry does tackle controversial social topics, even if it does avoid directly political issues); and they have co-opted hip-hop and rap music which are no longer as subversive as they have been elsewhere. But even in Morocco,

changes in the cultural sphere are responding to and influencing wider political and social change. Much has been accessed through music and image, as in the work of the rapper *L7aked* and satirical cartoonist Khalid Gueddar. Unlike painting and sculpture this work does not have to rely on the patronage of galleries or museums to be shown. Similarly, while most established playwrights self-censor their work in order to access state funding, much of the new theatre produced in the wake of the uprisings is influenced by the documentary impulse of citizen journalism and is presented in non-traditional spaces.

Across the region, many artists have become social activists and feel that until some social justices are met, they cannot continue their practice as before.

Civil society associations, syndicates and unions have flourished. So too have informal collectives comprising anti-institutional movements rooted in diverse art and cultural forms, often seeking out new, more open and less controlled outlets for their work. The parameters for producing and sharing work that were created by the state regimes and their formalised elites, are now beginning to shift and be more inclusive, and increasingly negotiated through lateral connections rather than vertical permissions.

## NEW VOICES, NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Long-term investment in civil society structures and new models of education and training are needed to enable change to take root.

Artists and cultural makers have begun to organise themselves through civil society associations. The subject and content of their work is being changed by, and in turn is changing, the context. As this process unfurls, new conversations are happening and fresh compacts and ways of organising are forming, between people all over the region and across the world, often enabled by digitisation and social media.

The changes have spawned an unprecedented set of powerful new alliances, partnerships, collaborations, networks and campaigns within, across and beyond the region that are set to endure.

However, for true change to occur, artists in the region recognise the need for longer-term investment in civil society that is conducive to free expression, artistic creativity, openness and building countries and communities where these values are given the opportunity to take root.

Many expressed the need for the new art networks and emerging institutions to develop professionally through further education and training, and with links within and beyond the region to open up channels for cross-cultural exchange.

While the current systems do offer an environment within which like-minded individuals can gain some visibility, it also demands that students largely follow in their professors' traditions or risk losing the limited academic recognition and opportunities that exist. The current privatised alternatives are expensive and new local options, not just replicating European or Western models, need to be nurtured.





Mohammed Taman:  
'Angels of Hell 2011'.  
170cm x 120cm  
Mixed Media on Canvas.

The demand by activists for more equal access to culture entails:

- a strengthening of lateral peer-to-peer ties outside government structures
- an increase in access to learning, resources, networks, innovation and ideas
- building a system of representation that can create policy and practice on the rights and responsibilities of independent artists.

Beyond education and training, cultural activists and independent cultural organisations have called for a coalition of art and culture organisations to be allowed to have a voice in the political process. Artists and intellectuals are actively involved and many are currently engaged in political rather than artistic activity.

Almost all independent art organisations and spaces across the region have revisited their programming to respond to the new context. This is not a mere

technical change in timing, but a substantial change either to express a stance or to contribute to the continuing momentum of change. European cultural centres are similarly revisiting their programmes in response to the changes. This vital understanding of mutuality and responsiveness has been welcomed by art activists.

Artists and creators are challenging the institutions of culture and society, both formal and informal.

Some of the core attributes of international cultural relationships – the development of sustainable cultural and creative livelihoods, for example, through skills development, entrepreneurship and leadership - are vital in the aftermath of radical change. These help to build new compacts and models of working between cultural makers and civil society infrastructure.

Collaboration and networking between artists, collectives and organisations is essential to create new patterns of commerce, exchange and opportunity

that are widely accessible. New associations have emerged from the changes in the region. These now need nurturing with training in innovation, governance, public participation and fundraising in order to strengthen their capacity for growth and long-term sustainability.

The changes we have seen in the region have created clear opportunities for leadership in artistic and civil innovation on the issue of inclusion for marginalised groups – and particularly for women. Training, mentoring, workshops, festivals, film screenings, all provide platforms for marginalised voices and can promote and enhance an awareness of women's rights and the rights and dignity of vulnerable minorities.

These activities can also maintain the pressure for progress on this issue, and for a positive and lasting change resulting from the bravery and activism of men and women in the region.

# A ROLE FOR THE UK'S ARTS SECTOR

Within the region, respect for and trust in the UK's cultural and creative institutions and individuals is high. There is an opportunity now to work with young, driven and principled new partners.

The UK is perceived as having one of the most vibrant arts and cultural scenes in the world, and it is important that UK-based practitioners come to the region to witness what is happening and amplify these renewed voices more loudly back in the UK, and vice versa. This experience of developments in the region is already happening to some extent through the media, but the media can never capture the human story as profoundly as can the arts, or the individuals, collectives and communities behind them.

The changes have renewed people's sense of confidence and perception of their own identity and their potential in the region. There is an appetite to build on this new sense of energy and the opportunity to build trust through cultural exchange. This will enable the sharing of practical experience and learning about the creation of free and open artistic communities and wider societies. International cultural institutions, particularly those whose work is grounded in people-to-people dialogue, have an opportunity and a responsibility to make this happen.

The UK, with its world-renowned cultural and creative institutions, now has an historic opportunity to take a leading role in the understanding of, and action in, zones of conflict and post-conflict not only in MENA but around the world. The research demonstrates the continuing impact of cultural action in sustaining a new sense of national identity, but also in building a civil society in which the many, not just the few, can play a full part as active citizens.

The question now is how to support culture that can actively be a part of real, lasting and meaningful positive social change and not retrench into self-censorship or fear. In order to do so, we need some new or reinforced understandings.

Most importantly, we need to take action now to properly accompany MENA on its journey of transition.

The context is complex and constantly shifting and it is tempting therefore to wait for clarity to emerge. That clarity will only emerge, however, if those with the knowledge, access, experience, values, credibility and networks urgently take and sustain supportive action.

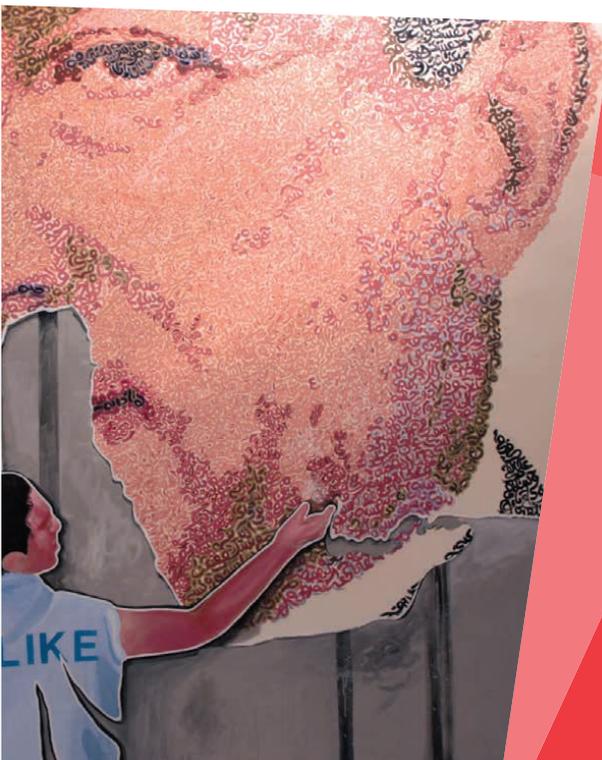
Zakaria Ramhani:  
'Bye Bye Hosni' 2011  
200x240cm  
acrylic on canvas.



Whilst trust in Western government establishments may be low in the region, people's respect for independent artists and cultural makers is high. The uprisings in the region have renewed people's sense of confidence and there is an opportunity to capture this moment of confidence to build on mutual trust through the telling of a new story of change for the region. The UK arts and creative sector has a critical role to play in enabling people in the region to create, amplify and share a fresh image of themselves for and in the world.

The development of arts and culture in the Arab world in the aftermath of dramatic change in the region offers the opportunity to work with a range of new counterparts who are young, driven and principled. They have worked alongside more established artists, courageously and imaginatively to stimulate dialogue with people within their countries, between countries, and globally. This work deserves objective documentation and action to share it openly and widely across the region and beyond.

There is an opportunity now to initiate an international collaboration and conversation between the region and the rest of the world on arts and culture during, and in the aftermath of, periods of conflict and upheaval.



## EGYPT

On 25 January 2011, a popular uprising began against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak.

It was mainly a campaign of non-violent civil resistance, which featured a series of demonstrations, marches, acts of civil disobedience, and labour strikes. One of the key demands of protesters was for an end to the state of emergency (which had existed since Mubarak had taken power in 1981) alongside other issues such as human rights and employment.

Despite being predominantly peaceful in nature, the revolution was not without violent clashes between security forces and protesters, with at least 846 people killed and 6,000 injured.

On 11 February 2011, President Mubarak resigned and left Cairo. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, led by Field Marshal Tantawi, assumed executive control of the state.

Protests continued, however, and in July 2011 hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in Suez, Alexandria, and Tahrir Square in Cairo to demand immediate government reforms, and the swifter prosecution of former officials from the ousted regime. Further demonstrations in November 2011 led to fierce clashes in which an estimated 40 protesters died, and there were renewed outbreaks of fighting in April 2012 in the run-up to the presidential elections. In June, Hosni Mubarak was found guilty of complicity in the murders of protesters and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Following elections on 24 June, Mohamed Morsi was sworn in as President. He is the first civilian to hold the office, and the first chosen in a contested election with direct universal suffrage. In November 2012 President Morsi enacted a decree granting himself sweeping new constitutional powers, sparking a new wave of public protest.

## LIBYA

Beginning in February 2011, following popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya experienced a full-scale revolt against Muammar Qadhafi, who had ruled Libya since 1969.

It is believed that 500–700 people were killed by security forces in that month alone, before the rebels took up arms. By March large parts of the country were outside of Qadhafi's control, particularly in the east. A National Transitional Council (NTC), based in Benghazi, met on 5 March for the first time. The Council declared itself the sole representative of Libya and that it would act as the face of the rebellion against Qadhafi's rule, though making clear that it was not an interim government.

On 22 August, Tripoli fell, and on 20 October Qadhafi was killed after being captured during the battle for the town of Sirte. On 23 October, the NTC announced that Libya had been freed and declared liberation.

A transitional government was appointed in November 2011 and an Elections Law was issued in February 2012. Elections were held on 7 July 2012 and a month later power was transferred to an elected congress which will draft a permanent constitution for Libya, to be put to a referendum.

# NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE

Ultra-conservatives are growing in influence and there will be both pressure and the temptation to fall back into self-censorship, but the UK arts community can help shore up fragile changes and build a sustainable cultural ecosystem.

The UK arts and cultural sector has a clear opportunity to play a supportive role. Its work can help to span the gap between the established and the emergent, the institutional and innovative, to support the negotiation of emerging ideas and to offer ongoing opportunities for people to play their full part as active citizens.

One of the most commonly circulated half-truths is the idea that artists in the Arab world are experiencing unprecedented freedoms. Such a view omits the difficult and complex realities facing artists across the region. While many have become emboldened by the revolution, others remain wary of the increasingly violent nature of recent events. At the same time, the overwhelming victory of Islamic parties in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere promises also to change the cultural landscape.

It remains unclear whether the dramatic rise of the ultraconservative Salafi movement across the region might result in new restrictions being placed on artistic expression.

Now more than ever, there is an opportunity for the UK to engage with the arts and creative sector within North Africa and to help with the building of sustainable cultural eco-systems. The development of a lasting and deep engagement with the sector will deliver clear and mutual benefit, at a time when arts and culture is increasingly at the heart of the wider process of social and political change.



Tahrir Square: after the court's verdict on Hosni Mubarak

## MOROCCO

Morocco's political system is evolving from a strongly centralised monarchy to a parliamentary system.

King Mohammed VI retains much of the executive power, but the parliament and most of the government are democratically elected.

On 9 March 2011, in response to events elsewhere in North Africa and to protests by Moroccan pro-democracy activists, the King announced an ambitious programme of constitutional reform, placing a new emphasis on individual freedoms. Promised reforms include recognition of the plurality of Moroccan identity, strengthening the independence of the judicial system and reinforcing the separation of powers, and giving constitutional protection to national bodies to promote good governance and human rights. This speech marked a new era for

Morocco's internal politics. A commission was appointed to work on a draft reform which was presented to the Monarch in June 2011 and endorsed by public referendum of 1 July with an approval rating of 98 per cent.

Parliamentary elections for the lower house of parliament (the House of Representatives) were held on 25 November 2011. The elections were deemed free and fair by international observers, although turnout was only 45 per cent. No party achieved an overall majority, but the Islamist Party of Justice and Development won 107 seats and its leader, Abdelilah Benkirane, was appointed Head of Government in accordance with Morocco's new constitution. The new government, a coalition of four parties, was formed on 3 January 2012.

## TUNISIA

Tunisia gained its independence from French rule in 1956. Habib Bourguiba, who led the independence movement, became the first President. He was replaced in November 1987 by the then Prime Minister, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, who remained in power until 14 January 2011 when he fled the country after widespread uprisings following the death of Mohamed Bouazizi.

These protests, reflecting the depth of public anger over poverty, unemployment, political repression and government corruption, constituted the most dramatic wave of social and political unrest in Tunisia in three decades and resulted in scores of deaths and injuries, most of which were the result of action by police and security forces against demonstrators.

Following Ben Ali's departure, a state of emergency was declared and a caretaker coalition government was

created, including members of Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party. Daily street protests in Tunis and elsewhere continued, demanding that the new government have no RCD members and that the RCD itself be disbanded. By early March 2011 both these demands had been met.

In October 2011 the country's first democratic elections were held to appoint a Constituent Assembly tasked to draft a new constitution and appoint a government. On 13 December the Assembly elected former dissident and human rights activist Moncef Marzouki as President, and a new coalition government led by the moderate Islamist Ennahda party was formally appointed on 24 December 2011.

Marzouki will serve for a year until the constitution is rewritten and new elections are held.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### About the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit, University of York

The PRDU is an international centre of excellence for the study of post-conflict societies and their recovery. Since its establishment in 1992, it has evolved into a world leader and its staff have significantly influenced post-conflict reconstruction policies through linking theory and practice.

### The research team

Professor Sultan Barakat, Director, PRDU, University of York  
Dr Chad Elias, Lecturer in History of Art, University of York  
Dr Luisa Gandolfo, Altajir Lecturer in Post-War Recovery, University of York  
Craig Robertson, Doctoral Candidate, University of Exeter

### Others who contributed to the research and/or this publication include:

Shaima Al-Banna, Mariam Aydoun, Peter Beaumont, Gabrielle Becker, Imed Belkhdja, Nigel Bellingham, Ibtissame Berrado, Jim Buttery, Cathy Costain, David Cotterrell, Eunice Crook, Robin Davies, Walid Elbahi, Farah Fawzi, Cherry Gough, Paul Heritage, Laila Hourani, Jude Kelly, Moukhtar Kocache, Colin McLennan, Magda Meliti, Nadine Mueseler, Intissar Rajabany, Jonathan Robinson, Martin Rose, Amina Sayadi, Awatef Shawish, Steve Stenning, Mark Stephens, Ruth Ur, Elizabeth White

### PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Front cover © Wassim Ghozlani  
Page 3 © Wassim Ghozlani  
Page 4 © Adib Samoud  
Page 5 © Adib Samoud  
Page 6/7 © Wassim Ghozlani  
Page 8 © Gigi Ibrahim  
Page 9 © Omar Chatriwala  
Page 13 © Wassim Ghozlani  
Page 14 © Artspace, Dubai  
Page 16/17 © Artspace, Dubai  
Page 19 © Gigi Ibrahim  
Inside back cover © Adib Samoud

### **Voices of the People is published by the British Council**

Text: Paul Howson, Peter Jenkinson, Shelagh Wright  
Editors: Paul Howson, Mona Lotten  
Series Editor: John Dubber

