THE SABAN CENTER *for* MIDDLE EAST POLICY
at THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY IN THE ARAB WORLD

A Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World & John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Panel Discussion

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

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Author, Poet, Playwright
Palestine

ADILA LAIDI-HANIEH
Cultural Critic and Editor
Palestine: We Lack for Nothing Here
Palestine

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Poet, Assistant Professor of Creative Writing
University of Michigan

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Stein Room
The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

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PROCEEDINGS

DR. SCHNEIDER: Welcome, everybody. Thank you so much for coming and joining us in what we hope will be a very interesting conversation. This event has been organized by the Arts and Culture Dialogue Initiative here at Brookings which I lead. It's located in the project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World which is led by my colleague Steve Grand—right?—to whom I'm very grateful for his support and we're all part of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy and it has been great fun to work on this project together with David Kim. Where are you David Kim? Wave—down there—who is one of the key organizers of the Kennedy Center Arabesque Festival and we're so grateful to be able to be part of that festival. The lead curator of the festival, Alicia Adams, who has also been very helpful in this panel, joined us in Doha at the U.S. Islamic World Forum in 2007 as part of the Arts and Culture Leaders Group which I convened there. I have done each year since 2006. And there she met some key people and got some ideas on the festival which she has then been working on over the last couple of years with Basma El-Husseiny to my left who was the lead consultant from the Arab world. I'd like to tell you a little bit about the Arts and Culture Dialogue Initiative—what it's trying to do—and set the stage for our discussion today. It sounds maybe to some of you like a little bit of an oxymoron. There are not so many policy think tanks that have arts and culture dialogues initiative. It exists here at Brookings because of a belief that creative expression is a very powerful force in society. It's a way people understand, reveal and shape their identities and that if you want to forge a deeper understanding

between cultures—and that's a key goal of the project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World—then you need to listen to the voices of the artists and the creators and understand their impact on society. I would say our motto might be to paraphrase the words of Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian novelist, "art humanizes, while politics tends to demonize." So amidst all the voices of politics, we look to the artists to understand society, but we also recognize—and that's going to be a key aspect of our discussion today—the important role that artists and writers and creative thinkers play in societies here and most definitely in the Arab world in pushing the envelopes, in looking critically at the society in which they live. You know, artists are the agitators and they have play—as we will hear today—a very important role in moving society. It's somewhat ironic that in the United States which has arguably—I'm not saying the best-- but arguably the most powerful pervasive culture in the world, we tend to draw a very sharp line between culture and politics and we tend to relegate arts and culture to a domain outside of politics and don't think of it so much in the political realm. As we'll hear from our panelists, that attitude exists to much lesser degrees of the same in the Arab world—both with regards to their own culture and with regards to how they perceive ours. One example of the value of creative expression in opening up societies was given to me by an Iranian film maker who once participated in one of our sessions. He said to me censors don't get analogy. And what that means is that in closed societies, you can often communicate things—actually quite daring, potentially inflammatory things—through film, through books, through music—in ways that you couldn't through more traditional political outlets.

So it's important to look to those venues to try to understand society. So that's one of the things we're going to urge—I'm going to urge today. And, interestingly enough, we understood this in the Cold War. We understood that it was the writers who were leading change within societies there, and that's why we supported writers. We even published writers like Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak who couldn't get published in their own countries. And we look to them to understand what was going on. Now, you know, this is a very different situation. I'm not advocating CIA funding. I'm not advocating a war of ideas. We're not in a war of ideas. We're simply trying to understand each other and build a relationship of trust. But, now—as was true then—the arts, literature are a very important lens to understand society. But, today—unlike in the Cold War—we aren't looking to those figures in the same way we did then. So today we have an unusual and exciting opportunity. We're going to hear from writers and cultural leaders who have lived in the Arab world and in the U.S. and who represent Libya, Egypt, Palestine and Algeria and who really have worked throughout the Arab world. And I'm especially pleased to be joined by my Brookings colleague, Tamara Cofman-Wittes, whose recent book—

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Shameless.

DR. SCHNEIDER:—*Freedom's Unsteady March*, combines an astute critique of the Bush process of democratization and its agenda and its inadequate execution of the same, with a strongly argued case for continuing firm and consistent support for increased civil and human rights in the Arab world. So together, with our esteemed panelists, we're going to explore the role that creative expression plays in

Arab societies and look specifically at creative expression as an avenue for political and societal change. And I'll warn you, as I warn my students in my classes at Georgetown, that we are asking you to be active, not passive, listeners. We'd like you to listen in the sense of not that someone's going to look at your notes at the end of this session, but that you are actually expected to ask questions. And I'm—because this is really a conversation, and I'm told by our panelists that you actually may be expected to answer questions, because they're very interested to ask you some things. So please, anyone who walks in, feel free to come sit at a microphone. So I'll turn it over to you, Tamara.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. Well, Cynthia, thanks so much for this introduction. Thanks for organizing this. Thanks to our cosponsors at the Kennedy Center, David and Alicia, for all their hard work in putting together not just today's panel—making it possible for the artists to come over and join us in this dialogue, but for all of their work over the last several years putting together the Arabesque Festival, Arts of the Arab world. I am thrilled to have this opportunity because, as Cynthia mentioned, in my book I actually say that I think what the United States needs to be doing in the Middle East with respect to political reform is focusing on freedom and the artists that we have around the table with us today are—in the conversation that we were having just this morning—were talking a lot about the way in which the arts as a sector can be a force for freedom—not necessarily about politics and policy, but about expressing the aspirations of groups in society that otherwise don't necessarily get well heard by policymakers, that arts are—that artists

are often a counter establishment voice or a counter culture voice raising the questions and raising the issues that aren't raised by policymakers and that is obviously a crucial function not only within a given society, but also if we want to build real understanding across society. So I want to thank all of you for the work that you do and for coming here today to join us in this conversation. I'm going to give you just a very brief introduction of each of our guests this morning and then I have a few questions for them. I'm sure you have some questions for them and, as Cynthia mentioned, they have questions for you as well. So I hope that we'll have a very active conversation. So starting off to my left, let me introduce one by one, Basma El-Husseiny, who is an arts manager and a cultural activist. She's been involved in supporting independent cultural projects and organizations supporting arts and culture in the Arab world for the past 15 years. She's also very active in the Women's Rights Movement in Egypt and she has organized and participated in campaigns to enhance women's participation in public life in Egypt. In 2006, Basma cofounded a new initiative, The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, which is an independent, regional, grant-making foundation and that is one of the ways in which Basma has worked to try to build indigenous institutionalized support for the work of artists in the Arab world. Let me just recognize Alicia Adams who just came in and has done so much work to put together the Arabesque Festival and to bring our artists here to Brookings today. Thank you, Alicia. Next to Basma is Suheir Hammad. Suheir is the author of "Breaking Poems" as well as "Zaatar Diva," "Born Palestinian, Born Black," and "Drops of This Story." She was an original writer and

performer in the Tony Award-winning, "Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam" on Broadway and she has read her work throughout the world. She's going to be performing on the Millennium Stage at six p.m. tomorrow at the Kennedy Center—An Evening of Breaking Poems.

MS. HAMMAD: Tell them it's for free.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: And it's for free. It's at the Millennium Stage.

MS. HAMMAD: Bring your kids.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Bring your kids. The great thing about Washington is that, you know, key words like Millennium Stage, we know that's free culture. We go. So you can go and hear from Suheir tomorrow. On my right, we have Khaled Mattawa, who is a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Michigan. He's the author of two books of poetry—"Zodiac of Echoes"—three books of poetry, okay. Then I'm behind already. You move too fast for me. He's also translated seven books of contemporary Arab poetry. And one can now understand in that context how he's been awarded the Pen Award for Literary Translation and a Guggenheim fellowship, a fellowship from Princeton, an NEA translation grant and three Pushcart Prizes. And Khaled is going to be moderating two panels in the Family Theater this weekend, discussing Arab literature and Arab-American literature. He was born in Libya, came to the U.S. in his teens and is the president of the Radius of Arab-American Writers. And then to his right is Adila Laidi-Hanieh. Adila edited a book called *Palestine: We Lack for Nothing Here*, which is a cultural review of contemporary Palestine with text and art from new artists, from

recognized artists, critics, novelists, poets from Palestine and elsewhere. From 1996 to 2005, she ran the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah and curated a memorial exhibition in 2001 called 100 Shaheed - 100 Lives. She has taught Palestinian contemporary art and Arab intellectual history at Bir Zeit University in Ramallah and she is currently working on her Ph.D. at George Mason. And Adila is going to moderating a panel at the Family Theater at the Kennedy Center tomorrow afternoon on books and reading in the Arab world. So I'm delighted to have all four of them with us today and I want to just start off with a broad question for all of you and maybe ask you each to address it briefly. Maybe we'll start with Adila and move in this direction. And the broad question is what is the role of the arts in these quick-changing Arab societies today? How do the public—especially this increasingly young public—relate to the arts? And how do artists relate to the public?

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Do I have to be the first one? Well, the role of the arts has changed. I mean, you said, you know, the key word. It has changed dramatically and there is also a problem with defining the meaning of the word art. I mean are we talking about commercial culture, pop culture, high culture, folklore. Which type of art are we talking about? So the answer I will give you is that the artist's role in the Arab world is the same that it is in all over the world—that they express the hopes, the aspirations, the critiques of the rest of the population. But they do it in a more eloquent manner, in more outstanding manner maybe. So, yeah, this is my evaluation.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks, Adila. Khaled? And maybe you can talk a bit, too, about how the public approaches the work of the artists, or engages with the work of the artists.

DR. MATTAWA: Well, I mean I think my question would be in relation to Adila's answer in terms of there is no one kind of mode of art. I mean we were just—we had a long debate actually about the Poet of the Million. The Poet of the Million is an often phenomena as far as I'm concerned.

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Say what it is.

DR. MATTAWA: It is—the Poet of the Million is sort of like the --

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: American Idol.

DR. MATTAWA:—American Idol but instead of singing, they read poetry. But it's very conservative, valued, traditional, you know, sword wielding, horse riding. It's like poetry—the imagination in that poetry still lives—well in the early Islamic conquest era. So it's a pipe dream kind of poetry. But it's very popular. It's like a—sometimes it's like Rush Limbaugh in the raw. It just sort fills people with nationalism and that kind and so on. So, but that's very popular art and I can see why there is an appeal for it because it expresses a need for solidarity, a need for sense of glory and so on and, you know, in the region, still the real glorious sort of moments are moments of martyrdom and moments of past heroic, you know, conquests. And the individual is lost in this moment. But, that's something—that's a lot of appeal for this feel good, classical kind of writing. The folk traditions, you know—I think, my sense of the folk dances and the folk traditions—I mean folk culture doesn't just—

you know, it wasn't like people just got together and dressed up in the same color outfit and said we're going to dance. That was all invented. And so folk culture, you know, when you say a folk troop, you know. There is no folk troop. You have to—they are all, they are all, they are all fit dancers. They smoke. You know, they're all—they're like ballerinas and so the folk dancers are actually a modern phenomenon. So I don't think of a folk troop as a really folk old—no. These are—folk is modern. And all the rising of folk cultures are modern. You know, Yates, the great Irish poet, when he wanted a sense of how to build Irish native culture, he looked at India and he became orientalist. He learned a lot from the European notions of orientalism in order to present the Irish's very passionate, etc. And created a stereotype about the Irish people, he picked them from orientalist notions. So, folk is invented and it's modern. It's a way of creating the modern nation. These, unfortunately, are not—I think they were helpful in building the modern Arab state, but folk culture has—there is much less interest in it. There is—there are a lot of sort of Bedouin soap operas that are very popular that put people in the mindset of an earlier—again, you know, sort of like a—the Bedouin soap opera is like the American western for us, but it just goes on for a much longer time. It's a very long western. And so there is a lot of appeal to the past because the past is a way to impose glory and success on it, because that's the sense—people sense their past in the Arab world. And that's where a lot of the popular media are. Music is very popular. There is no problem with westernizing its content in terms of, you know, technology and so on. And there is no problem. The Arab world doesn't seem to have a problem with, you

know, continuous production of bimbos—male and female bimbos coming on the screen. You write the music in Egypt. You show the bimbo on TV—video tape her in Beirut. And that's a formula that's very, very successful and it works and the most conservative family that are going like this that are covered, they are watching semi-naked women on TV all the time and somehow it just works.

SPEAKER: It's correlated.

DR. MATTAWA: It's correlated. Yes. So, it's a vicarious nudity, semi-nudity that the public music is doing. The real—what I think the substantial literature is in—contest. There are other popular arts. I mean there are lots of poetry that gets written that is in opposition to the government. There is literature that is also opposition and it's (inaudible) opening views. There was a—and so in Libya, the literary effort—the writers had been, have been—were the first to call for a constitution. And this is all very recent. They were all the first to call for a constitution. The writers are really the—really concerned about the future of the country and they've been playing a very leading role as a group. No one wants to appear as a singular oppositional figure. That doesn't work in Libya. You're not going to say I oppose this regime. No, we work together. Committees, we get together and we say let's talk about the future, let's talk about constitution. And so the writers have been very important in that. The—one poignant point I want to make which is about the censor. Censorship still strong in most Arab countries and in Egypt there is no censorship against books, but okay the books can come out, but then somebody will sue you. Then a Muslim fundamentalist lawyer will come and sue

you and that model is actually beginning to operate in Libya. The government—you can have books out, but then somebody will sue you for defamation and so that's one way of silencing post publication. They'll censor the book after you spend money publishing it. So, you know—but the censor, I think—I mean we talked about the censor doesn't get analogy. The censor is dummy, is stupid. Sometimes they're not. Sometimes you have literary, you know, people who work for the censor. The problem with the censor is they force you to write in a cryptic manner. They force you to write in a cryptic—to the point that you become marginalized. You develop your own kind of cryptic language. That—your art becomes much more nuance, etc. It happened in Poland, for example. Poland had a great many poets, but in many eastern European countries, they began to write about the Roman Era by analogy for—but what happened afterwards is it marginalized their poetry, marginalized the art. So the censor is, you know, you can—may trick the censor, but your attempt to trick the censor can, you know, it's going to produce very intricate art. But at the same time, you're going to lose immediacy. So the censors are plain detrimental. You can—yet artists have tried to trick the censor, but they haven't always succeeded. It may have marginalized them. In Libya, what's happening when censorship has been lifted a little bit, is that the art become more relevant and it has become—there's been now a chance for Libya to talk about—there actually was a prison in Libya. People were imprisoned by the government. You couldn't talk about that in the '80s or '90s, but there are books now saying oh, yeah, we were imprisoned here. People got killed in this country. There were public hangings. You know, the

other day there was a public hanging in 1980s. So, the history of a very dark period is being written for the art—through the arts and the phrase we sort of had earlier is that there is a—the literature, the novel, the short story, the memoir is becoming a kind of slow truth and reconciliation process—that's coming through the retelling. Nobody wants to admit anything, but the writer—the stories that are based are beginning—and the failures of the regime in terms of, you know, even taking care of the poor which supposedly he loves. There are some—there is a very marginalized writer. He's a very frantic, very—his name is Mohammad Losfarly—he's not a great writer by all means. But he's written about the, you know, the drug addiction and about all sorts of Mohammad (inaudible) like (inaudible). There is now a history of some alternate life in Libya that is coming through the novel. So you can't really do the research. There are no resources for the research. But somehow information about the culture is coming through the novel. Okay. Yeah. Sorry.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks, Khaled. No, that's—that's fantastic and thanks for those insights. Basma, you've been watching and engaging in the art scene in the Arab world for a long time. Khaled, can you just push that button for me.

DR. MATTAWA: I'm sorry.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. So can you tell me a little bit how you see this relationship with the public evolving? What's the role of the artist in opening up public discussion of issues like Khaled was describing?

MS. EL-HUSSEINY: I cannot talk about the cultural scene in general in the region. I can only talk about one part of it, which is mostly the noncommercial,

nonprofit, nongovernmental sector which is now we call and is branded as the independent sector in the region. I think the most visible change came in the early '90s, after the (inaudible) Civil War ended and then there was the Oslo process and then of course the whole restructuring of some of the major countries like Egypt—the economic restructuring and the process of economic reform allowed opportunities for cultural groups to work outside the state control. Because before then, of course—let me just—a footnote that the region is very diverse. So, for example, Tunis and Lebanon are very different from Syria and Egypt and Morocco is another case. So anything I say I think you should take into consideration this diversity. But, before the 90s, until the late 80s, the major cultural centers in the region had the system where most of the cultural production and distribution was done by the states and carried the regimes political agenda. It was kind of propaganda art—more or less. Although not all of it was like that. Some of it was even of high quality. But because of the changes in the region—the political change and the economic changes, the states were first not able to sustain this level of spending on culture and less willing to kind of carry this burden economically and then there was also the globalization, the opening, the internet—the opening to society of the internet—and the ability for individuals and for groups to express themselves outside this structure. So this is how groups started to form and to produce work and express themselves in different ways. This sector has certain attributes. This sector now exists in Morocco, in Tunis, in Lebanon, in Egypt—even in Syria actually. Although, in Syria there is no legal framework whatsoever for these

people to work and operate and produce work. Still these groups exist and they have names and everything, but they just—they don't exist legally. No bank accounts. No offices. But they exist in terms of producing work and reaching out to audiences. So this sector is still small—most of it, the groups are small. They're usually the sizes between like between five and 20 people working together producing theater or an independent sort of, almost nonprofit publishing house or a music group or a research center. It's also very flexible in terms of its plans. Most of the people who work in this way do not have annual plans. They don't have continuous funding of any sort. Some of them have very small physical facilities. It's focused on production mostly, so producing work, producing theater, film, music, publishing books—it's very in a way globalized in the positive sense. It's very open to exchange to working with people from different cultures. Even dealing with sensitive issues that were previously kind of seen as taboo subjects and the issues about minorities, for example—women, sexuality, homosexuality, etc. Also, this sector is quite diverse. It does not have like a political affiliation. And Adila knows I mean we are friends. We work together. But we have very—sometimes very different political stands in situations. We are not all 100 percent anti-American or 100 percent pro-American or 100 percent pro-whatever Islam or anti-Islam. It's quite diverse, yet it's quite well networked. When there is a small festival in Syria that's happening, for example, next month, the first time an independent documentary film festival in Damascus. And it's an initiative by a small group of young film makers and everybody knows about it. People are paying to go there and be there and meet other film makers and people

know each other. And they talk about the films they are going to produce. It's called OxBox by the way. Look it up on the internet. This sector has some really serious challenges. I think the most important challenge is in the legal environment, the legislative environment in the region. There is no legal framework basically. Either we operate as commercial entities and therefore we are taxable, we are not allowed to accept donations or funding from international donors, or we are registered in foreign countries like we are registered in Belgium and we have some kind of a very kind of clandestine, strange way to operate in the region. And I won't bore you with the details of this. And the other challenge is, of course, the economic sustainability of the sector. Mostly it depends on international donors. It's starting now to find local or indigenous or Arab donors in the region and this is why we started the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture because we wanted to create a structure that attracts private donors.

SPEAKER: Did you start that? I did not know.

MS. EL-HUSSEINY: Well, me. Not just me. I mean a group of people. I mean many people. I am the one who did not put any money in it.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: So you started it. Good to know.

MS. EL-HUSSEINY: The other challenge which is a positive thing but also might become a problem is the growth of the sector. It's very attractive for young artists to form groups and to work and to find audiences, yet the growth is really tremendous. Every day in Cairo there is a new music group—a new—even a new publishing houses—new publishing house. Alexandria, which did not—used to have

any publishing houses, now have four independent publishing houses working almost noncommercially. So it's really a phenomenon what's happening. Having said all that, I think this sector has great potential for making an—for having an impact—public impact, a civic role. It's if—only if it becomes institutionalized—if these groups and organizations—or at least some of them—either merge or organize themselves in a way that they become like more or less public institutions and not one man shows, one woman shows here and there. They have proper governance and also some sort of financial stability that's strong inside the society, then I think they will become—they will have a direct impact on the political life of the country. Because although the—I always argue that the relation—the direct relationship between artistic expression and politics is questionable. I mean people take it for granted that the arts have the civic role. At least here in America, I always hear about this. I think this relationship is not as simple or as direct as it sounds. It's very complicated and very long term. It's—you can make a play and criticize the regime and run it for three months. But will it change anything in the country? I don't think this is the way to really play a civic role. I think it's about empowering people to be who they are and to speak out. This is the most important thing. Not criticizing the regime or not making political statements. Not talking politically, but behaving politically is what's important I think. Now, of course, the most significant thing that's happening in this sector that these small, very poorly funded, sort of ad hoc organized structures are now playing a representational role. And it was very brave of the Kennedy Center to contract us—a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization to

work with them on the Arabesque Festival where usually, originally in the way the things used to be, this role was only played by governmental agencies in the various countries. I'm off track. Sorry.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Basma, thank you. Maybe I can ask Suheir to pick up one of the themes that Basma was mentioning which is empowerment. And you were speaking earlier about how new technology and sort of the prevalence of hip-hop culture is empowering young people to create their own art without these institutions.

MS. HAMMAD: Yeah.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: How do you see this evolving?

MS. HAMMAD: Well, I want to thank all of you for making time this morning to come in and care about Arabs and arts and artists. I happen to be a little bit of all of those things and it's very heartening to be in D.C. with you guys. So I just want to thank—and ladies—and others. I just want to thank you for that. Gaza—the vast majority of people in Gaza are under the age of 18. The vast majority. So Gaza was a stage for the world most recently and the occupation and the history of Palestine—I'm going to go there, let's just go there—is a dominant narrative, right? It's a national myth like we have our national myths. A dominant narrative for any artist, anywhere in the world, it either inspires a retort or silence. And so we've gone through several different phases of how our retorts have been expressed—physically, intellectually, through resolutions, through the world stage, through the commercial sector—and then we've also experienced as artists, the

silencing, the shame, the not having the language to speak about something unspeakable. So I just came back from the Middle East where I was in Jordan and I didn't only meet Jordanians or Palestinians, but every person I met had a new timeline—"before Gaza" and "after Gaza." I don't know what this means for policymaking. I don't know how one gives money to a population that has had three billion U.S. dollars worth of bombs dropped on them. I don't know how much money is enough for that. So I don't know. But I do know that there is a narrative that's coming out of these bodies and of these broken homes and of this broken land which matters to us as Americans walking into our new day. One of the things that I've realized in talking to Arab artists is that they're not looking for the American export. They don't really believe in our cowboys and Indians. We don't believe in it anymore. So this idea of like how is the Arab artist or the Arab artistic sector any different than our artistic sector, which is always the marginalized, the poor, the sexualized—in our country the racialized—as it is in the Arab world as well. One of the conversations we were having—so, okay. We have this idea of the dominant narrative. In the hip-hop culture, that means it's a battle rap. It means I'm not going to take you out and I'm not even going to deny your existence, but I'm only going to tell you my position, my history. Within the culture, that's a battle rap. That's a battle. It's the way that you don't kill each other in the street. It's the way that you actually have to better yourself. That's this idea of competition that we were talking about, like how—you know—is competition in the arts in the Arab world? I don't really know if what I want to export is American competition to the rest of the world, but

I know there's something about that braggadocio, macho, street credibility that absolutely gives people empowerment. And this is what I experienced in 1980s Brooklyn was that there was a void of the American experience me and my classmates were going through. So this is the same reality. But now what you have in the Arab world, is you have YouTube. Right? I've never—I don't have a YouTube account. I never uploaded a thing. I don't even know how to use a camera. My fans put up my YouTubes with their cell phones. They come in. Free shows. They sit in the back. They don't have a production team. They certainly don't have—what's the word—license agreements or permission, but here it is, you know, here you are. You're sitting an American artist and you're thinking the way we're taught as artists, you brand yourself. You have a product. You think about what your cost is. You think about what your value is. You're in the commercial world. I make a living by being a writer. It's very frugal and interesting, but you know you have to like figure out the rules of it. The young Arab world has no rules. Their parent's rules no longer apply to them. Their parents are unhappy with the rules given to them. Nobody believes the rules are their own. Let's start there. So this idea of what would the Arab artists role be today is to watch out for the kids. Because the kids are already—we were talking about—I was in Europe and I was listening to the hottest underground MCs in Europe, right? They arrive in French, in Arabic, in Wolof, Dutch. They get their beats from guys in southern Lebanon who are Hezbollah guys, who have no jobs, who sit around on their computer making the nicest beats you have ever heard in your life. I would never be able to hear these songs to begin with in the states.

None of our artists could work with these artists or definitely not exchange any money with them. But the idea that in Europe, they were given their musical expression. They were just allowed to be like any other guy who didn't have a job at 20 in any other situation and was able to create and express himself artistically. I think about that a lot. Like I think about the lyrics that Europe is listening to that is coming out of the immigrant experience and the actual beats that they're nodding their head to are made in Lebanon. I mean it's something to make you think about these things, especially when we know the people who are buying hip-hop albums are white suburban youth. Right? So these connections I'm interested in. I'm also interested in seeing—in hearing like things that you're seeing, the connections that are coming to you in your research and in what you're interested in doing. So maybe move on.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks, Suheir. And I do want to open this up, but I also want to come back to Adila since I really took her by surprise I think at the beginning. And I just want to give you a chance to respond to any of what you've heard from the other three artists, or particularly since you ran a cultural center in Palestine and since Palestinian civil society often talks about more of the folk side of culture as a way of preserving identity under difficult circumstances, do you have any thoughts on some of the ideas that Suheir was putting out just now?

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: No. I mean I agree completely with Suheir, but the question of the role of the arts in Palestine and now I just, you know, hooked up to the word that you said folklore. Folklore was big in the '80s, '70s. It was part of a

whole culture of smooth and self-reliance and Palestinian identity equals the village and this is where it's spring from. And the—after Oslo, this has change completely. It's not the case anymore. Palestinian culture has become much like our culture and world culture—more focused on the city, more focused on the self, depoliticized in a collective overt way, but very politicized in a very individualistic manner where basically the self mediates the collective. And, yeah, it has become globalized. These are some of the trends and I can talk about some others because there are so many. I mean I've just done a book about that. But basically this is one important thing. I just want to add two things is that one about Gaza and one about reception, because of course it's important to talk about artists and how they are changing, but reception is very important. If, for example—and here I'm only talking about Palestine—in the '80s and the '70s, the public—the place of culture in society was larger because society was not Islamized like it is now. It was more secular and because you did not have this pop culture that Khaled alluded to, you know, the barrage of music and bimbos that comes, you know, from the satellite commercial Arab TVs and which people listen to a lot. So the place of culture with a capital C has changed radically. Anyway, and I can talk about more issues in detail later, but what I want to say about Gaza, which is very important, is that Gaza is the only city we have in Palestine, because all of the cities—the real cities—disappeared in 1948. They became Israeli cities and the Palestinian population was taken out. And all of the cities we have now are basically towns or villages that grew and, you know, the fabric of a city and the culture of a city is different than that of a small town or a

village even if has become the defacto capital and you know what I'm talking about. So therefore when I was running the Sakakini, you know, I was—I made a special effort to reach out to Gaza and I—and there was incredible vitality, you know, because there is this impression that Gaza is conservative. Gaza is poor. Gaza is turned toward Egypt. It's different. It was more militarized. But still there was incredible vitality and in my book there are a lot of people from Gaza who have contributed. During the last invasion or—I was in touch with some of the artists that I had worked with, many of them that I had supported, and I was surprised that many of them still were trying and concerned with their work. Of course, all of them had these horrible stories of what happened to their family members, how they were supposed to—how they left their homes and, of course, then there would be these long phases of silence where you don't know if they are dead or they don't have electricity and internet. And then they write you I thought thank God, you know. And so I was surprised that—because, you know, I was in disarray. Everybody was in disarray. What are we doing? What can we do? And I was surprised that even they who are in the eye of the storm, they are still holding onto their role as artists, which is you know their humanity, which shows that even under duress you do not subsume your artistic role to other emergencies.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. I want to open up this conversation now and so let me—I know that you all have questions that you want to ask of the folks who are around the table, but I want to give them a chance to speak first. So questions or comments for any of our presenters. Steve?

DR. GRAND: I'll use an artistic expression. The narrative I've been hearing is, I think, largely a narrative that's focused on the Levant in North Africa, which is of state control—early state control of the arts, a period of nationalization where the arts were instrumental in some ways by the state. Greater—in subsequent years, greater independence, more artists operating independently in part because technology enables the artists to operate more independently now, a greater proliferation of channels to get ones product out through satellite TV, the internet and so on, an art that has empowered those effected by poverty and by conflict and by injustice. That's the narrative I've been hearing. But there's another narrative, which is the Gulf narrative which is a state funded, in many cases, cultural renaissance focused maybe much more on the high arts—on classical arts—which is state directed, which is replete with resources and I wonder how those two narratives interact. I wonder how much the money that's being devoted to the arts in the Gulf is going to support artists in the rest of the region. I wonder how those who don't—who aren't of the Gulf are sort of reacting to the state sponsored projects of the Gulf and how artists feel about that. How much of that is good? What's happening? How much is the state sort of co-opting?

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks, Steve. Basma, do you want to start off?

MS. EL-HUSSEINY: You know I think you're absolutely right to draw the—to talk about the difference between the two different—very different environments. I think what's happening—the Gulf nowadays cannot be evaluated now and its impact on the region is still to be seen. Maybe after—at least in my

opinion—10 years, since some of these projects actually are going to take that long. My concern about what's happening the Gulf now is I'm not sure of—if this is happening now because of economic reasons and some political reasons as well and about the present moment. A more—maybe more delicate way to express this is it because the rulers of the Gulf states want to have political impact now so they are starting these projects, or is because they want to have cultural influence after 10 years or 20 years? So I'm not sure about this. I have a question about this. Now, of course, it is really wonderful that they are building all these opera houses and huge museums and borrowing all these brands from all over the world—the Louvre, the Guggenheim, universities, etc. Nothing wrong with that. I think it's really great and this is—the history of humanity is about borrowing from cultures. So it's not—nothing to be ashamed of. The pity that—there is this demographic issue that there is nothing we can do about. Out of the 300 million Arabs, only I think over 30 million live in the Gulf. Just slightly over 30 million. And this includes a lot of the people who are not from the Gulf states but have been living there for over 10 years, but with an intention to go back to their home countries. So I don't know if all this tending, all this investment in cultural projects in the Gulf will have the cultural impact on the region that we want or hope for or anticipate or expect. It's just a question. Now on the other hand, the problem is the other 260 million Arabs living in poorer, much less glamorous countries like Egypt or Sudan or Mauritania, unfortunately have a lot more cultural impact on the region and the world in the Gulf states. Whatever happens in a country like Egypt, culturally, has positive and

negative impacts on the region and the world much more than anything that happens in Kuwait or Qatar or Bahrain. So this is how I think it's really advisable to see things in perspective. It's not about how much money or how big is the project. It's about what is it going to impact now and in 20 years from now.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Yeah. Actually I have been studying this phenomenon so—first, there are two phenomena. Actually, no—the states in the Gulf were heavily funding actually culture. But it is their own local vernacular culture. So we're talking about restoring forts, organizing vernacular culture, vernacular poetry contests, promoting one style of music over the other—okay?—for example, promoting the Bedouin music over the more cosmopolitan maritime type of music. It's all like every other country with a more, let's say, longer cultural heritage. They've done the same thing except that now in the '90s and after 2000, it has gone into overdrive. I mean you have—and this is part of culture, I mean, I'm going to say it. You have camel beauty contests, camel races. This is part of the Bedouin culture which is promoted—a very big art popular cultural form in the United Emirates is—it's called Yolla which is a form of—I don't know. It's like juggling with your weapons. And this attracts local, young men because until the '90s, all these countries were net consumers and absorbers of Arab high culture. Pop culture, which—and the narrative is completely different there. The narrative in Arab high culture is secular, looking for modernity and this is not the narrative there. So you had this massive investment in local culture. I mean it's—it has even been called

national industry. However, what you have now is this massive investment in this high end, western basically brand names. And it is obvious—I mean when you look which is the authority—the part of the government which is running this, then you know what is the end use. I mean in Dubai—in Abu Dhabi, which is the richest emirate, this is headed by the tourism authority, not by the culture authority. And you have, for example, the emirate which always had a very long standing cultural interest, Sharjah, is now being completely overshadowed, you know, by the other initiatives. But, it is very clear to me, and I think to many people, that the audience intended for all these high ticket and high end investment is not the local audience. Not the local, national audience and not the regional audience. It's—you know it's a new concept of attracting tourism and so on. And the question what impact is going to—this is going to have, because I travel often to the Gulf. I'm going there in two weeks time and you feel when you talk with the locals, that there is this unease. That this is happening too fast—too fast and who is this for and when you go to these cultural forums you don't find local people. You know, you find all the people who have been flown in like me—foreigners, you know? And basically the spending is disproportionate with the size of the population. So, I don't know if that should be considered as culture or as tourism and I will just end with one important point. The analogy that I'm making in my mind to understand this phenomenon is that you had, for example, in Egypt at the end of the 19th century, or in Iran in the 1970s, an investment in culture, an investment in some sort of western culture. Okay, because these states were expanding. They wanted a place on the international stage and one

way to assert it is through culture and western culture. Okay? But there you could understand that these two countries have a—are standing on the shoulders of very long—I mean, I'm sorry, mixing my metaphors—a very long well-known cultural traditions and so acquiring, you know, building an opera house where Verdi composes, you know, Aida especially for you or having, you know, the Tehran Contemporary Art Museum kind of makes sense, you know, because you're just showing that you are—this is just one facet of your long cultural heritage, which is the western facet. But this is not the case in the Gulf and in Iran and in Egypt, you had at least masses of people who could—in theory, in theory—consume this and this is not the case in the Gulf. So, you know, as Basma said, the judgment has to be suspended on this.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Liz, and if you wouldn't mind, just introduce yourself before you ask your question.

MS. McKUNE: My name is Elizabeth McKune and I had 33 glorious years in the Foreign Service. I was U.S. Ambassador to the state of Qatar and now I'm Executive Director of the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Center. Sultan Qaboos is the leader of the Sultan of Oman and I was struck—one of the things that Basma—you said about not making generalities. I think it's very important not to make generalities about the Gulf. I'm very leery about calling myself an expert, but I do have some experience and my experience at least with the Omanis is that they are very proud of their heritage. Each year they spend millions on a festival—it's called the Muscat Festival—where they bring in dancers. Traditional dances are celebrated.

Most of the people who go are Omanis, but they have foreigners as well—Australians, Brits, Europeans. So to say that that tradition is lost or that it's all being forsaken for opera houses is not correct. Another point I'd like to make is that—I don't want to be crude about this, but I was told by an Arab—the bidet story. That is, if somebody has—he was talking two wealthy Arabs and one guy got a very lavish bidet from Europe and the other guy got another one larger. And it went on and on and on until the bidet—finally they had a bidet that filled up the whole room of the bathroom. The point is that in addition to tourism, I also think it's doing—bettering their Arab brothers. You know, one guy put the opera house in maybe Qatar or something like that. Then the UAE will have an opera house. Now, as a matter of fact, Oman is building—is going to complete an opera house. With respect to filling those opera houses with Arabs, I do believe that in this case the Kennedy Center President Michael Kaiser, Alicia and David have seen that need to—for arts management and much to his vision and credit—Michael Kaiser is going to be—has already done some training sessions on how to manage opera houses and how to get local people involved in western art. By the way, they didn't pay me for that. Finally, one (inaudible) that I really think the Kennedy Center has done that's really great and that is the exchange. In the case of Oman's participation in the Kennedy Center, we actually have an exchange going where Omani dancers are working with American dancers and there's a blend of the traditional and the old—and there still are tickets available. Thanks.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks, Liz. Adila?

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Actually, I am glad that you brought up the Oman example, because Oman is an example of a country that has been investing in culture for many years in a way—according to the new UAE model, but much more low-key and you have actually a population there. So they have done a lot of the investment in folklore and a lot in the building the museums and restoring—restoring the forts and, you know, all that and it's on—I mean it's still on. But they also have something which you didn't mention—that they contracted (inaudible) to run the Omani Philharmonic Orchestra, which was staffed completely by Omani's wearing traditional dress, which—so there you have the two models that I am importing western culture, but it's for my own population. What's—and high end western culture. But there you see the contrast with the—with what's happening in the UAE and even in Qatar. You are importing high end western culture, but it's not for your population, because your population isn't enough anyway in terms of quantity. So yeah, I mean, Oman was always a leader in the region in terms of investing in its own culture and in culture per se. Yeah. But Oman has always been different from the Gulf in many respects, right?

DR. MATTAWA:—tell us about in the Gulf there's been an attempt to demonstrate that the people from the region are modern. And so you promote—if you will find some writers from Qatar or Bahrain who are writing free verse poetry, the government immediately goes and prints 5,000 copies of this small book of poetry in Beirut. And they try—they give it for free. It is just take the poetry --

SPEAKER: At the book fair.

DR. MATTAWA:—just to show that we have modern poets (inaudible). And then, you know, you talk to the modern poet and you see the style of poetry is very fascinating (inaudible). You can't go to his house. You can't meet his wife. You can't meet his kids. I mean (inaudible) very interesting conceptual poetry, but the life there is—there's no modernity in this life. So there is a kind of pretense of modernity and I'm not going to say in which countries, but it's—you know—so there is a way to say oh we have modern art and so on and that's a way to just sort of—so there's kind of march of progress that we've kept up with Arab modernity that had come to Egypt and to Levant. But, there is a big disconnect. I mean, you know, Arab poet modernizing, revolutionizing the poetry. But, your house, your—you know—your wife looks like Zorro. I mean that's just crazy. I mean, that's just, you know—who are we kidding? And that's not the—you know, that's not expecting, but that's kind of a real—to me that's a contradiction right there alive. You know, you're not modernizing anything. You're just playing with modernity and playing with the notion of freedom and open mindedness and so on. And so to me—and I know this is not happening everywhere and I've been being champions of true expression in the Gulf, but anything, I think, that the governments have touched or like their approach to translating their own literature is in a way sort of like that. That, well, okay, we're translate our poetry—our great poet. We'll put his book at the airport, at the hotels just to show that well we have poets and their—you know, it's contemporary poetry as art. And, it's—you know—it's like taking a book and then digging a hole and throwing it in the ground and burying the book. That doesn't

work because there's no dialogue. The modernity in the art has a huge disconnect with the domestic lives of people and that to me is a very difficult situation and so I there appears to be modernity in the Gulf. But they can afford to remain as conservative and as closed as they can. But they need to show the world that they are contemporary and have high standard of art. And they can do both. They can promote high art and they can still keep their women and children very enclosed.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. I can see we're provoking a fierce debate around the table and there are a lot people who want to respond to that. We, unfortunately, only have about 12 minutes left, so what I'm going to do if it's okay is just take some comments from around the table and then I'll come back to all of you for closing comments. So why don't we start right here and again, please introduce yourself?

MS. ALLMAN: Sorry. My name is Avis Asiye Allman. I'm an American Muslim artist. I haven't done work in the Arab world—the regions that you're talking about—but my experience has been Turkey, okay? And there is a relationship between very much—between Turkey and the Arab world. Istanbul, in particular, I think runs on a different model that may be a combination of this separation that we've been talking about. Istanbul has the cultural department, okay, which is governmental—supports a lot—really supports the local, you know, artists. Okay? Now some creative people would argue it's only within a certain perspective, you know, Islamic artists. But within that realm, lifestyle wise, they are modern people, okay? I mean their thinking is modern, okay? They also very much support regionally

Central Asia Republic Artists, okay? There's a lot of—you know—it's like a regional hub and more and more Istanbul is --

DR. COFMAN WITTES: I'm sorry. Can I ask you to be brief so we can get in more voices?

SPEAKER: Yeah. Okay.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: And really ask a question.

SPEAKER: Yeah. I mean, I guess what I'm saying is that as you look at models, okay, like your question, Steve. You know, maybe Turkey and some of its—what's going on there can be—can provide interaction. That's my comment.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. Thank you. Ma'am.

MS. WILDE: Hello. My name is Claire Wilde and I spent a semester at Georgetown School of Foreign Service in Doha, Qatar. And there are just a few remarks I would like to make and first of all, I do think there's a distinction between being a Libyan living in the United States and being a Qatari living in Doha. I don't know if you've seen Freege, which is—which in some ways—this was very, very well watched in Doha, in Dubai, elsewhere. I mean it's about Dubai and four women who wear Hijab—yes.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. WILDE: Right. And it's something where people would see—like students of mine, female students in Doha. Georgetown does not allow Hijab. Education City generally does not have Hijab, but the women—the mothers of many of my students were (inaudible). But they were glad—were not able to read, so you

have this double layer of education. So on the one hand, many of the young Qatari—and I can only speak from Doha—but many of the Quataris will have been educated in American and British schools. The children are perfectly bilingual in Haleji, Qatari, Arabic and English. And—but the families from which they come will-- for example, the grandfather still goes to his kind of farm tents in the desert, does not take advantage of all the, you know, air conditioning, modern air conditioning that is there. But there's also a political element I believe that is being served, because Doha—yes. You have American Air Force Base in Qatar. You had an Israeli trade mission. You have a Palestinian Ambassador. Georgetown School of Foreign Service was not aware so much of the Palestinian Ambassador, but the Israeli trade mission man was always at the university. So you—with the arts—with the artistic funding and expression, you found—at least I found many of my students using their ability to very strongly support a Palestinian situation even though they are from the—they are not from there. So I think there's so many layers that are going on in these discussion, that it's difficult to make generalizations when you talk of—because there's a reality with Israel, with the United States that exists. But it's complex.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Thank you and it's worth remembering that as we started out saying these are societies that are undergoing rapid change and we can't necessarily—even within a given country—make generalizations about how different members of a given society are addressing or interacting with that change. Dalia?

MS. MOGAHED: Hello. It's very nice to be here. My name is Dalia Mogahed. I direct the Center for Muslim Studies at Gallup, so my job is to understand populations from survey research and in home interviews and statistical analysis. And so my question for all of you is do you see yourselves as leaders in terms of being thought leaders that are taking these populations forward in a certain direction? Or do you see yourselves as people who are sort of at the back of the caravan picking up the people who fall and who are wounded and giving them a voice? I'm not sure which it is, because—and I think it's important to know because, you know, Shirin Ebadi—I just recently heard her—or read a quote by her and she said that there was this difference. That a political leader was in the front making a path for the people. A human rights advocate was in the back picking up the wounded and holding their hand. And what I'd like to know is where do you see yourself and what role do you play because I—some of your comments sounded like contempt for the ordinary people and their backward thinking and some of your comments sounded like sympathy. And my concern is if cultural artists are going to be the bridge, are you—what are you bridging from? Is it a bridge to a broad base or is it a bridge to a group of elite intellectuals that all agree with each other?

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Get one more comment from the—I know you all want to respond. Let me just get one more comment from our invited guests and then I'll come back to each of you for closing comments. We're going to—if you don't mind, we're going to go a few minutes over because we started a little late and there's a lot going on here. So if any of you have to leave at 12, go ahead and leave.

We won't be offended. But we'll go until about ten after in our discussion if that's okay. Sir, why don't we --

MR. BENNETT: Good morning or good afternoon as the case may be. My name is William Bennett and the affiliation that's relevant here is that I'm the Chairman of the Law and Religion Section of the National Bar Association. The National Bar Association is the largest association of lawyers, judges, law professors and law students of African ancestry in the United States and in the past we've counted among our members the present president of the United States. But as the Chair of the Law and Religious Section, I do have a question and it is for everybody. You don't have to respond now, but maybe at some point. It would be interesting to hear how religion is treated among the artists—whether poets or play writes or musicians. And in particular—in particular, how artists from the various Islamic countries treat variety in religion—theological variety of religion? So I'd be curious to hear how people will respond to that.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. I think that dovetails in some ways very well with the issue Dalia raised which is who do you see yourselves representing? Who is it you're trying to address? Suheir, why don't we start with you? And we'll move back down in this direction.

MS. HAMMAD: You might end with me. I just keep thinking how many more opera houses does the world need? Not the Arab world, but in New York do I want an opera house—another opera house? It's wonderful. I was in a play on Broadway. I grew up in New York City. That's my dad. We never entered a

Broadway theater before I was on stage. I'm from New York City. My public school did not buy me the tickets to go to a Broadway show. There was not a patron of the arts who picked up the slack for the Department of Education. I'm a local. I'm an artist there—building, working, creating theater. I had to be in the show. I had to be the monkey in the show to get into the circus, right? So there's a question of I really appreciated, Dalia, really what you were saying about the concept of art being elitist or within the academic and intellectual realm. And I guess really it goes back to what you were saying. I've done both. After Hurricane Katrina, I absolutely did get up on the stage and read a poem because I knew people needed the poem. And a year later, I picked up trash from the ninth wards at Congo Square. Same group of people. One year I picked up trash for them, because that was the position this artist had to play and the other year I got up on the mic because no one could do it better than me at that time. The next year, I felt like the New Orleanian poets should be the ones on stage and I was honored and humbled to pick up their trash after them. So I think Basma is right. I don't think—I think, first of all, you can lead by being in the back. That's my favorite leader actually—the one I follow. And you can be in the front taking people nowhere. So it goes back to your really individual, unique ideas and feelings about art that has moved you. And art that has made you a better citizen. And when we think especially of the Gulf—of the Gulf. I don't know that much about the Gulf. I have performed in the Gulf. I've had people show up seven hours drive just to see me at a bookstore that nobody knew about—like I didn't know about that bookstore. But the Gulf doesn't necessarily make art for the people who

live there. They make art for its citizenship and that's another conversation. Who are the citizens of the Gulf? Who then becomes a citizen of the state of Israel? Who—what does it mean to be a citizen in the West Bank? So as much as I would love to keep art in my little head in my smoke room in the back of the studio, I know that it is about engagement and actually the—how you play your position in the cultural field is really an independent and ultimately political decision that you make. I don't know. What do you feel about it, Dalia? Because you said contempt. That's a very serious word. I mean you obviously felt something.

MS. MOGAHED: Well, I mean I think that we run a danger of having elite intellectual academics talking to each other that, on both sides, aren't really representing a wide base and do look at the wide base with some contempt. And I don't mean this as just Arab intellectuals, but intellectuals in general. And so, there is a danger to a bridge—you know, a bridge to nowhere. Just both sides not really being rooted in their wider populations and not necessarily representing them and that we don't take it forward as much as we could had we engaged a wider, more diverse group of artists who are both in the back of the caravan and in the front.

MS. EL-HUSSEINY: Okay. Two responses quickly and then a closing remark maybe. I think on what Dalia said I was also kind of struck by the use of the word contempt and this is—it's—it's easy. Maybe easy is not the right word. But, it's—it's a natural tendency when you hear people who are English speaking, westernized from the Arab world talking about political regimes or the Gulf or the masses. It's something natural to accuse them of being elite, detached from reality,

not in contact with the populations or the masses or—and that these people know nothing about reality. They don't connect with the wide population and they don't understand it. Therefore, they don't express it—express it. This is fine. Yes, there are people like that. There are people like that, but I think it is legitimate for people who have criticism of reality—whether it's political or social or cultural. It is legitimate for them to take some distance from what's happening and to really think, contemplate, reflect express themselves in a way that might not be acceptable to the masses, might not be easily accessible to everybody, and this is how societies change. It's because these people make—take this distance, think in this way, and produce something different. And then it becomes actually almost like it's somebody elses job to mediate between what they produce and the wider population. This is what usually happens in processes of social change. The problem is in many societies, the go between—the go between function is missing, so there are people—beautiful intellectuals, beautiful artists—who produce this fantastic art or ideas for change, a different world, a different future, but nobody to take this to the wider population. People like me exist for this reason. This is my job. And I assure you I have no contempt for anybody. I have only contempt for the people who are closed minded and don't want to appreciate achievements—whether it's intellectual, artistic or scientific—people who are dismissive of the other. This is the only contempt I have. Now on your point about religion, I think it's very, very important. I was really puzzled by the reference to a global Muslim community in the new text—in the text of the dialogue on—the dialogue initiative. What is the global Muslim community? Does it include me? Does

it include my friend, Alfred Gameel who is a beautiful Egyptian musician who gets invited to Pakistan to perform as an Islamic musician? He's a Coptic Orthodox, of course. Or to my husband, (inaudible), who's a Palestinian musician, who is Greek Orthodox again? Or to many Iraqi musicians—(inaudible)—who are (inaudible) I think they're Catholics? I don't know. I mean I think the assumption that the Arab world is Muslim is a very dangerous one and that the cultural scene is Islamic is, I think, a very simplistic one. So diversity I think is really, really important—to recognize it, to—not to forget it for one second. Now, my closing remark is I—this is—this is a very unusual opportunity—I was saying to Cynthia earlier—to be invited here to tell Americans and American diplomats, American politicians, policymakers what we feel, what we think. It does not happen. It just did not happen. I was never invited to something like this before and I've been working in this field for over 30 years. So it's really important and it's also important—not just this gathering, but it's important anything like this that happens nowadays, because this is a unique opportunity. We are in a very, very positive moment of history with the Obama Administration—Obama as president. This is an opportunity. Let's not miss it. Let's not lose it. It really—it might be our only opportunity for a long time and we can easily lose it if we, first of all, play only on the short term. If we only deal with the Arab world as a homogeneous identity, Islamic—whatever—and not recognize its diversities, we can easily lose it if we do not listen to the other side. If we have only one agenda, we have to see the two agendas all the time and try and find connecting lines.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you, Basma.

DR. MATTAWA: Yeah. The issue of the masses. The problem with what is happening in terms of some of the popular arts and some of the popular arts that appeal to traditional ideals. They allow for a kind of bemoaning where we are defeated. We are beaten. Colonialism, America, (inaudible)—and the only solution is to go back to God and to go back to Islam and all of that. And we sing this big song and people feel very good and there's a kind of detoxing process. It's a traditional—conventional art is a kind of dialysis, when really what is needed in a lot of sense is a new kidney. We need a transplant. We need to die and be born again in sort of a sense. Not this kind of art that uplifts you. It gives you a kind of cultural sugar high. You feel very happy about your nation and—but then that doesn't allow you to confront. There is no—there is no self questioning. So, in many ways folk art is being used to—was being used to coalescing the nation around beautiful idyllic scenes of oh, we were beautiful peasants. We were—you know—what a peace loving and here we are. So we have a sort of a collective ideal notion. What's happening with a lot of the Arab—brining back of the traditional art, as I was saying, is this notion of telling the Muslims that we are a proud nation and our only resource is to be exactly as we are and to become pure Muslims than others and so on. Well, you know, I don't think that's the truth. I mean that's not the truth. I mean I don't think that's the way to go about it and the problem with that logic is that it doesn't leave room for people to think differently and if you think of, you know, what's happening there, the masses are part of the oppressive of different opinion. If you have any

contempt for the masses, it's because you can rile up a few masses and they come and bring—burn books. So say, okay, the masses are very nice this way. They come and burn books and we are going to allow that. So, the masses are being used. The masses—I mean I don't have any contempt for them. I actually—I'm really, as (inaudible) would say, I want to protect the martyrs from being abused and the way the mass population is being used it is being used by the institution and by religious figures to silence opposition. It is being used as a force to not allow for diversity. And so the weapons are part of a use against diversity. The artistic communities in Libya, in Egypt, in Lebanon are the most religiously tolerant groups. The most mixed groups are among the artists. That's always been the case. Musicians—you've had—from the (inaudible) age, you had Christian musicians, Arab, Muslim singers—there's always—the artistic community of artists and writers. In Lebanon, it got divided to some extent. But in other places, if you really wanted to mix—a mixed group, that's it. You know, you have—you go among a group of writers. You don't really sometimes know who's the Jew and who's the Muslim and who's the Christian. It doesn't—it's not as much an issue as it is (inaudible). So there is an atmosphere of tolerance that happens in the cultural circles that doesn't happen in culture that is actually becoming much more coalesced. I mean—so in a sense, and without supporting the people who are thinking in contrary means, it's so-called, you know, elite and so forth. We wouldn't have a lot of the great arts. I mean, you know, who was Jackson Pollack? Who was Leonardo Da Vinci? Who was Dante in Shakespeare? Galileo—you can call him an elitist. So there are people who are doing (inaudible)—

you can brand them as elitist and just sort of send them to hell, which is if you allow a lot of governments will end up going. But I think the issue is that how much are we willing to tolerate difference and diversity and the more regimes have appealed to the mass culture, to the ideas that are already established and locked into people's head, the more heads had been—had to hold. In Algeria, you know, popular—people from the streets said you are going to be killed if you don't stop writing. People from—not the government. Islamists from the street. And so, you know, it's—you know, it's frightening when, when the people who are with—different ideas are not allowed to speak. In terms of where you are on the spectrum, I think you need to go back and forth. You are the guy with the bullhorn in the protest. You go to the back. You make sure you include more people. You go to the front. You so the direction. You are as fluid as can be and if you assume you are in the leadership, believe me very few people will follow. You will be going on your own. You have to go to the back to do it. But, you can't go to the back by telling people that no, there's no difference. You are fine. You are beautiful as you are when you know there is an issue. The honesty and candor and self-criticism are a big part of the process. And if, you know, and I think that that's what artists are doing. They are the ones brining up the issues and it serves a lot of governments and strong religious institutions to not bring up these issues of contention and contradiction.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you, Khaled. Adila. Last word.

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Okay. It's going to be more than a word. I want to say two things to address the elite/masses issue and then very briefly answer. First of

all, I just want to say I think like I think you have alluded to, that it's okay to be elitist and it's a great thing to be elitist because there are many things that you cannot do with the masses, that you cannot do in a community center. It's like saying a person who is working in a lab doing very expensive, high end research on very exotic disease is elitist, and the only person who counts is the nurse practitioner who's working Appalachia. I mean we cannot make this reduction. You need all of that. And actually to answer just briefly one issue. Myself, I was in—when I started working in this field—I was, I considered myself as a leader because I wanted to work in culture, popular culture, so on and so forth. And now I'm not. Now I'm working in academia and I'm very happy being in my small circle of talking to other academics. I just love it. Anyway, so this issue of the masses is—okay. It is—it is a valid issue, but it has also been a weapon used by Stalinist regimes, by Mao, you know, to beat up artists and to censor them, you know. And you had the state sanctions Stalinist art and Maoist art, you know, which is art of the masses. So, this is a very, very, very old debate. However, what I want to give some information to the audience is that the question of the common man and the people and the peasant has been an edifice—I think everyone knows what an edifice means—of Arab culture from the period of modernity '20s to now. I mean the—many artists collectives individual arts, they have had an obsession with creating a language that the common person can understand, of fashioning, you know, like for example, in North Africa, in Morocco and in Algeria—creating—and in Palestine—creating the new art forms that are built on very popular art forms so that people can understand

them. You have modernization of folklore and, of course, let's not forget that cinema—Egyptian cinema, Algerian cinema, Moroccan cinema, Iraqi cinema. There's a fantastic movie called The River about this man whose wife is dying and who lives in a bamboo hut or something in the Tigress and he goes to Baghdad to get medicine. It's just a fantastic movie. Anyway, so a lot of them—these films, which are elite films made by bourgeois film makers and, you know—have taken as their content the concerns of the common man—to address the issues of the common man. So this is a very false dichotomy to bandy about. The end—the last point I want to mention on this particular issue is that if you go to the Arab world in Arab countries, you will see that a lot—many, I don't want to say everybody—many of the organizations—the governmental and especially the NGOs—go out of their way or bend over backwards, you know, whatever, to open up their doors to have outreach programs in refugee camps in popular areas of having—I mean I organized summer camps, free summer camps, open days. You name it. This is just happening all over the place because people are aware that they have something great in their hands. They have culture and they want to share it with people. They don't want to—you know. So, this—the outreach work and the concern for the common man is very much out there. Last point to address this issue of religion. Of course, you have like everywhere you have religion in the arts—I would say especially in popular, traditional arts. However, you had at the high period of Arab modernity, individual arts and in poetry, a conscious decision by artists to incorporate religious art forms in their art work. So it's all about the Syafii experience, the language from the Bible, the

language from the Quran and the very famous singer actually was hounded and was he—what happened to??

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Yes.

SPEAKER: He was prosecuted.

MS. LAIDI-HANIEH: Prosecuted. Right. Because he had used poems by (inaudible) which used Qur'anic phraseology. So the use of the forums is there and before I get to the however, I want to mention a very important point about this issue of the people. There's a very important Egyptian scholar whose name is (inaudible), who wrote a book about Egyptian culture. And what she—basically the argument was that now the problem that you have in Egypt is not that the state is a censor, is that society is a censor. And she cited examples of the university where she teaches where books were banned—not because the state wanted it, but because parents wanted it. Okay? This is the American University in Cairo. However, despite, you know, these religious forums and so on, what you have basically is that because the society is—is that working in culture has always been a field preferred by people who are secular, of a secular bent and the artwork is mostly secular. And this has been the case in the past when kind of everybody was secular. And now even more. I mean I see—and just to give a very small example of the two countries that I am most familiar with, Algeria and Palestine—where you see a lot of young people coming to work, working in culture and you see that it's not really that they want to

make music or write poetry. But it's a way of self—of expressing their secular identity. This is how they do it. So, that's my answer.

DR. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. I am so grateful to all of you around the table for this incredibly rich conversation. I have a feeling we could go on all afternoon and so all I can say is that I hope that this opportunity, which Basma says is so unusual and unique, will only become the first of many conversations that we will have across—across this table, across these sectors. And I want to turn it over to Cynthia for a couple of closing remarks. But I want to ask you first to join me in thanking Adila, Khaled, Basma and Suheir for their engagement today.

DR. SCHNEIDER: Thank you all so much. It's been a great discussion. I just want to conclude by brining back a little bit to the work we're doing here at Brookings and—first of all, apologies to you, Basma. The offending term is in the White Paper that I wrote that's on the Brookings website with a colleague who Basma introduced me to, Christina Nelson who lives in Egypt. And she would say I told you that was a bad idea if she were here. And I just will apologize for the terms. The terms are so hard. You know, I could spend a paragraph talking about the world that extends from here to there and has these religions and da, da, da. So the terms are hard, but I am reminded by another one of our Iranian participants who said to me once I am a Muslim. I am a film maker. I am not a Muslim film maker. So I always—I am not a Christian professor, so I get it. It's a very dumb—it's a very dumb thing to say and I apologize. But one thing that I think Brookings can do—I'm constantly being reminded we are not a film studio. We are not (inaudible)—

you're not creating musicals here. But one thing—despite my efforts—but one thing that—or one of the main things that Brookings can do is Brookings can be a convener. We can do things like this and I hope we'll be able to do more. Just an example of how that can work in the cultural field—you know, I've had the opportunity to meet—lots of people convene in these meetings, so that I was able, for example, to introduce someone who is very active in developing film in the Gulf, who has a lot of resources, to people in Jordan who have been working from the grass roots up developing film there, who have a lot of great strategies and not so many resources. And, you know, for whatever reason the two—they hadn't met before. And so now they've met, and now I hope they're going to work together and, you know, that's to everyone's benefit. I just want to also say that we have a kind of global attitude here. I am a strong believer in the power of popular culture. Earlier on, Khaled and I were having a very interesting discussion about that at the end of which I said that's why I left the university. But, you know, you need—and I still teach diplomacy and culture at Georgetown, but obviously you need both. But in my experience in working with people in the commercial area in the U.S.—working in film in particular and we've spun out a project from Brookings called MOFT—Muslims on Film and Television—where we have a resource center in Los Angeles working directly with the creators of content writers, show runners, producers—to give them information so that they can have characters and themes where the Muslims are not always the scary, angry terrorists, but actually normal people as they are in society which you can find out by looking at Gallup's latest survey of

American Muslims. But we're trying to encourage, but make it possible in their own terms to have more accurate images. I have found, you know, these people are very willing to do this. And so I think it's—it's important, of course, to have the artists pushing the edge, doing the art that's hard, that's difficult, that's not going to attract a large public. It's also important to work with people who are going to attract a large public and so, you know, when you have film producers who produce films that reach millions and millions of people all over the world who want to be engaged in this, who want to play a positive role and reach the broad public, I think that's important too. So we're trying to do all things and be all things to all people and are so grateful to our Kennedy Center collaborators. I want to just thank again Alicia and David.

MS. ADAMS: There's so many people around this table that have been involved in Arabesque and its development that I just want to say thank you to all of you. Basma's comment about being courageous for us to work with her—it didn't occur to me that that was being courageous, but that I was looking for a counterpart in the—in the Middle East, in the Arab region that I could work with to find the artist to bring to the Kennedy Center. I hope this is a one small step in terms of changing the conversation about the—about the region and putting on stage artists that are the best from all of the 22—all of the 22 countries. It has been an enormous challenge and task for us to mount this festival and I am so relieved that the response has been so great that I think that it will make a difference, that it will have some impact. So I just want to thank you.

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