

Building Community with Creativity and Love
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MENA Theater Makers Unite!



October's fourth annual convening of the Middle Eastern and North African Theater Makers Alliance (MENATMA) in San Francisco marked a powerful milestone for our theater community.

Co-produced by [Golden Thread Productions](#) and [Art2Action](#), this year's gathering demonstrated our movement's growing confidence and resolve. Panel topics included coalition building, intersectional identities, global theater, and art and solidarity work.

During the pre-conference, Silk Road Rising's Jamil Khoury organized the first-ever MENATMA Producers' Circle that brought together MENA/SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) producers and artistic directors dedicated to building a national network.

Moreover, the convening reaffirmed our commitment to embracing the rich mosaic of MENA/SWANA cultures. It was an opportunity to honor all that unites us and to harness our collective wisdom against the backdrop of these harrowing times, particularly in Palestine/Israel and Nagorno-Karabakh.

This historic conference further defines our work as we expand the canon of American stories.

This year's convening was co-sponsored by:

- [Diaspora Arts Connection](#)
 - [New Arab American Theater Works](#)
 - [Noor Theatre](#)
 - [Silk Road Rising](#)
 - [Theatre Communications Group THRIVE! Program](#)
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When Tradition and "Modernity" Collide



Cheryl Hamada as Siu Yong in Silk Road Rising's 2007 Midwest Premiere of David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*, directed by Stuart Carden.

In 2007, Silk Road Rising produced the Midwest Premiere of David Henry Hwang's *Golden Child*, directed by Stuart Carden. Set in China in the early 1900s, the Obie Award-winning *Golden Child* told the story of Eng Tieng-Bin, a wealthy Chinese merchant who returns from abroad filled with Western ideas and Christian beliefs, and hopes of

liberating China from its superstitious past. *Golden Child* posed the age-old question— can ancient traditions and new ideas co-exist or are they destined to collide?



Vic Chao (Eng Tieng-Bin), Cheryl Hamada (Siu-Yong), Kimberlee Soo (Luan), and Tiffany Villarin (Eling)



Vic Chao (Eng Tieng Bin) and Tiffany Villarin (Eling)

The Thank You Corner

The world needs community now more than ever, and with your support, we're building a vibrant network of MENA/SWANA theater artists across the country.

thank you
thank you
thank you



THE POLY CULTURALIST
A PUBLICATION OF POLY CULTURAL INSTITUTE

Our latest offering of *The Polyculturalist* features Roaa Ali, a Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management at the University of Manchester (UK) and a member of the Polycultural Institute's Advisory Council.

Polyculturalism Across the Pond with Roaa Ali

This interview was conducted on June 15, 2023, by Silk Road Rising's Dr. Tasneem Mandviwala.

Tasneem: You work as a cultural sociologist examining Arab and Arab American cultural production in richly intersectional ways, drawing upon race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and artmaking. Can you please share a bit about how you understand



polyculturalism and intersectionality as working in tandem to advance social justice?

Roaa: Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of the social markers and social categorizations, such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, and so forth that we have as social beings. Intersectionality helps us understand how these categories and identity markers intersect and interact with one another to shape a person's experiences of oppression and privilege.

I think of polyculturalism as a framework that goes beyond multiculturalism and that interrogates both the successes and failures of multiculturalism, and tries to address the failures, particularly when it comes to policy and to understanding what living in a society with multiple cultures means. It goes beyond the notion of just coding diversity; it also recognizes the dynamics and fluid nature of culture.



Tasneem: Though you research Arab American storytelling, you've been working in the United Kingdom for several years. What similarities and differences have you observed about the cultural representation of Arabs in the US vs. the UK?

Roaa: British Arab cultural production is different than American cultural production in many ways. This manifests due to the different system of racial and ethnic identifications.

Arabs in the United States have historically been identified as white for naturalization purposes. Early Arab immigrants had to fight for a white identification because citizenship was only given to whites at the time, and because they were mostly Christian Arab immigrants, the configuration was easier.

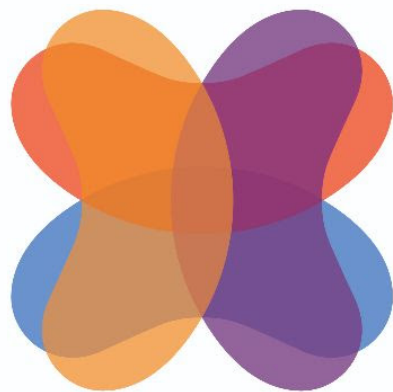
Whereas, in Britain, Arabs are considered non-white; they have only very recently been included as a category on the census; but historically they fall under the “Other” category.



Roaa's breathtaking photo of Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales, UK.

Tasneem: In your opinion, how can human creativity be a catalyst and oasis for connectivity?

Roaa: Creativity challenges the ordinary; it challenges what we accept as the norm. Even if the norm is causing us substantial harm, we accept it because it's the norm. Creativity considers something and challenges it:, 'Why can't you be something else?' And I think therein lies a kind solution or vision. It creates a space for freedom. It creates space for imagination. Creativity is what led to our human civilization and innovations. I think it's our only way to move forward from our current silos. Creativity is not a license to harm, but a responsibility to do better.



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**Support a Vision of the World that is
Open, Willing, and Creative.**

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