



Palestine Hosting Society

Food has always been a representation of class, time, and power. It creates a unique atmosphere conducive to encounter. Sharing food sets the table with aspects of hospitality, distribution, exchange, familiarity, and pleasure. A shared meal can become a space for reflection on socio-political realities, attitudes, fashions of the time, and even the suppressed elements of history.

Inspired by her desire to start a conversation with a group of like-minded people about their passion for food and its role and expression in Palestinian heritage and today's reality, Mirna Bamieh – a Palestinian artist whose

practice so far has revolved mainly around video installations – contacted Yazid Anani, the head of the Public Program at A.M. Qattan Foundation, who immediately expressed his full support. In August 2017, an open call for “Palestine Hosting Society: A Collective in the Making” was announced through the A.M. Qattan Foundation, and five researchers were selected to be part of the first project, entitled Family Dinners. Each researcher identified one family in Palestine and engaged with it over a period of three months, looking closely at the family's history, their food culture, cooking space, materials used, and visual culture. The researchers also looked at where these families bought their ingredients, how they stored food, and the economy of the daily menu. They noted which dishes were part of daily meals and which were special favorites, and they registered the seasonal alterations that are made and how the family cooks for special occasions. The researchers then chose several dishes and spent time with “their” family learning how to prepare them. Finally, they put together a menu and hosted a dinner with selective or public participation.

The dinners were held over a period of two months. They started with a Christmas dinner entitled *On the Table of Ursula*, by May Odeh, followed by *On the Table of Rummaneh Kitchen* by Fatin Farhat, and *Palestine on a Restaurant's Table* by Momen Tayeh. Gaza was present in its full glory with *On the Table of the Abu Heiba Family* by Shaima Hamad, and the series concluded with *From My Mother's Pantry* by Suzanne Matar.

After the heartwarming interactions and friendships discovered across each table, the

project significance became clear. In July 2018, Suzanne Matar and Mirna Bamieh decided to dedicate most of their time to the collective so that it could stand its ground in the arenas that evoke contemporary art practices, cuisine, and food research.

Mirna Bamieh is a visual artist whose practice until recently focused mostly on video installations. During a three-month art residency in Tokyo in 2016, she realized the need to liberate her artwork from its dependence on technology. Given that, next to art, food is her passion, she chose to pursue it more seriously. After returning from Tokyo, she enrolled in culinary school and began to develop works that use the mediums of storytelling and food in projects that include Potato Talks and Palestine Hosting Society. Through Palestine Hosting Society she aspires to create an innovative and fresh way for people to experience themselves and their surroundings, and to increase their waning knowledge about food.

Suzanne Matar has, until recently, worked as chef de partie at Habasta Restaurant in Jaffa. Past experience includes cooking professionally in several kitchens in Dublin: as an intern at Brioche – a French fine dining restaurant, and as a commis chef at Gather and Gather. Her desire to research how identity is shaped by food and what role it plays in constructing societies led Suzanne to leave her job in 2018 to pursue her passion and dream of recovering traditional and almost-forgotten food practices and techniques and to get a firsthand look at crops and ingredients in food from Palestine and beyond.

Through Palestine Hosting Society, Mirna and Suzanne engage in research based on eating, reading, conversations, and identifying culinary interventions that unpack broader social concerns and limitations vis-à-vis contemporary political dilemmas that construct our present-day Palestinian communities. Through the collective and its projects, they aim to create a platform for food enthusiasts to

construct and reconstruct their relations with place, history, society, and politics over food.

To be continued...

You can watch a documentary film about Family Dinners at www.palestinehostingsociety.com and follow Palestine Hosting Society on Instagram and Facebook, for a closer look at its research and future projects.

Mirna Bamieh is an artist, a cook, and a traveler from Jerusalem. She obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology from Birzeit University, a master's degree in fine arts at Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design, and was part of Ashkal Alwan Home Works study program in Beirut. Her works have been exhibited in several renowned local and international shows. For more information, visit www.mirnabamieh.com.

