SAFE HAVENS

GLOBAL STREAM 2020

REPORT

Table of Contents

Introduction

Dear friends,

First of all: thank you for your dedication to sharing your thoughts, experience and expertise with all of us at the Safe Havens meetings since 2013! We truly feel that together we constitute the counter-force against the oppressors of our fundamental right to think, express, and share ideas and artistic expressions more powerfully.

It is now more than a year since Covid-19 caused the whole world to close. The pandemic has caused devastating effects on human lives and triggered everything from conspiracy theories to acts of solidarity as well as prompting already repressive governments to tighten their grip over the people and their freedom of speech.

Maybe it is also a time to reflect on how many of our artist, writer, and journalist friends permanently live under such conditions, not being able to visit old relatives, compelled to be absent when new family members arrive, unable to go for a coffee with an old friend – because so many of our friends and colleagues around the world are in permanent confinement of some sort due to imprisonment, house arrest, the denial of visas, or being forced to live in exile because of their artistic and professional practice. No vaccine in the world is going to fundamentally change the situation for persecuted writers, artists, and journalists. There will be no quick fix for oppression, censorship and persecution. This is the cause we are all dedicated to and it is for us all to make the changes we can, in solidarity, because there is no freedom without the fundamental right to free speech, and with this: artistic freedom.

Thank you all in the Safe Havens network for making the virtual 2020 Safe Havens Global meeting so successful. It was amazing to see how you all adjusted to the digital form of meeting and so generously contributed to the discussions, workshops, and round tables!

As we are getting ready to plan for the 2021 Safe Havens conference, let's look back at last year's very fruitful discussions and conclusions. In this message we have included documentation from the 2020 digital meetings. Jude Dibia and Mary Ann DeVlieg have compiled a thorough report with the main conclusions from the November workshops and the December round tables hosted by Farida Shaheed and Karima Bennoune. In addition to this, our own "house reporter" Michael Schmidt has conducted a number of interviews with some of the key participants of the Safe Havens meeting and the Freedom Talks in 2020, and we are happy to publish these conversations here.

In preparing for the 2021 Safe Havens meetings and the ongoing Freedom Talks we have decided it is time to establish a designated administration to secure the continuity of these important interactions and upcoming projects. To this end we have registered a new non-profit organisation to cater for these activities: Safe Havens International Freedom Talks (SHIFT).

The Safe Havens concept is all about sharing and collaborating and as always we invite all of you experienced and brilliant people in the network to approach us with your suggestions and to let us know how you may want to contribute to the Safe Havens conference as well as the Freedom Talks this year.

As it is still not possible to foresee the development of the pandemic situation globally, we are preparing for a digital base for this year's meeting in December as well. However, we are still hoping that it shall be possible to see you on location somewhere in the world this year – we'll keep you posted on the developments. We are so looking forward to the day we can meet and talk in real life again. Fingers crossed!

Please stay safe!
- Fredrik Elg
For the Safe Havens team

Part One:
Safe Havens Global Stream 2020 and Webinars

Safe Havens is an annually progressing, international gathering of artists; arts organisations and artists residencies; activists; human rights and free speech NGOs; legal specialists; funders and policy makers all committed to protecting and defending free artists expression and at-risk artists. Taking place annually in early December since 2013, it has been rooted in Malmö, Sweden, moving to Cape Town in 2019. It took place virtually in 2020 with a four-day, invitation-only international 'global stream', 10-13 November, for policy-users: artists and smaller on-the-ground organisations. This was followed on 3 December by a one-day public webinar for resource-givers and policy makers discussing the policy-user's report of November's 'Safe Havens Global Stream'. What would normally be the on-stage panel discussions at the conference transitioned into monthly ´Freedom Talks´ streamed and shared through social media, with artists and experts in the network discussing specific instances and approaches to freedom of artistic expression.

In 2018, both the 2018 Safe Havens participants and keynote speaker, Karima Bennoune, the current UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, highlighted two priorities for our own, emerging sector that crosses arts and human rights, which became the underlying principles for both events in 2020: to work more cooperatively and less competitively and to direct support for local, on-the-ground initiatives. As Ms. Bennoune put it in 2018:

First and foremost, if you might allow me to say in the friendliest way, that it is essential that we all work cooperatively rather than competitively. Alas, there is enough work for us all to do and if we do not have powerful coalitions and networks and allies and recognize our complementarity, we will never succeed in meeting our goals no matter how well our own organizations and initiatives may do.

It is also important to consider that sometimes small amounts of funds provided to local, regional, grassroots, frontline initiatives to help artists and cultural rights defenders on-the-ground, to help tackle root causes of human rights violations and persecution can be the most effective way to work, even if it may be less flashy than bigger external approaches which may also play a key role...

The four-day Safe Havens Global Stream 2020 comprised five primary 'hives' or discussion sessions and six further break-out hives. 164 people from all parts of the globe registered for the four days of participative discussion, presentations, and musical contributions from artists who have experienced persecution. During the streamed, open round table-sessions 3 December we registered 250 visitors through the streaming partner HowlRound, 154 live views on Facebook, and 214 views on the conference Vimeo-stream. This included viewers from a total of 18 nations from all over the world, including 17 U.S. states. It is highly recommended to visit the immensely rich four-hour discussion available on Vimeo here: https://vimeo.com/483216827

Both events were supported by the Museum of Movements (City of Malmö); Safemuse; The Norwegian Arts Council, and the Swedish Arts Council.

Framing the Discussion

To conclude this introduction and bridge the principles outlined in 2018 with this year's discussions we present difficult questions that began with the first 'hive' of the 2020 Global Stream, 'Who is at Risk/What is at Risk?'

What is complicity; what is the role of those who have power, information and privilege? What is the difference between objectively verifiable threats to life, and subjective threats to the integrity of one's own consciousness?

When we use the word ‘solidarity’, does it entail an unequal power relation, with a stronger party ‘provider’ deigning to offer support to a ‘recipient’ party deemed to be ‘in need’? In the essay quoted below, the concept of solidarity is likened to a competitive marketplace of ‘causes’, with ‘a tendency towards monopoly’, that ‘disregards the interconnectedness of problems in the world today’. Is the concept of partnership perhaps more equitable?

Partnership, in contrast to solidarity, has no centre; works in multiple directions rather than one; is based on equality rather than power; and is at odds with mutual competition, and the polarization that follows therefrom. It has the potential to be a positive undertaking for the reality of global interconnectedness and an acceptance of the shared ownership of the world. Causes and cooperation are not located in two different worlds, as the ideology of solidarity implies. It is the same world, and the same one cause, even if its faces and expressions vary…

…What was valuable in the concept of solidarity was the framework of worldwide responsibility, breaking down the segregation of human pains from one another. What could retain this value is transcending solidarity to partnership in a world that today progressively forms a single framework of responsibility, but still provides levels of freedom and capability of utmost disparity.

Yassin Al-Haj Saleh
https://www.aljumhuriya.net/en/content/critique-solidarity_

Mai Khoi and Julie Ofelia Østrem Ossum
Photo: Karoline Asskildt/Safemuse

December 3, 2020
The Safe Havens Webinar

We begin this Report with the policy makers feedback to the policy users. The Safe Havens Webinar Round Tables, organised according to the two main issues raised by Karima Bennoune in 2018, were tasked to react to the Short Report of the November Safe Havens Global Stream – either to comment directly on the recommendations or to the overall topic of their table. (See Section Two for the November report.) It's important to note that all remarks were aimed at ourselves – those engaged in this cross-sector environment, as a way to constantly improve our collective work to protect and defend freedom of artistic expression.

Key points from the discussions fell into six main categories and are collected here under these themes:

- Networking, partnerships, collaborations
- Support for and importance of regional and, local initiatives
- Holistic, intersectional approaches involving diverse sector actors
- Funding support
- Monitoring, reporting, research, documentation. Toolkits and handbooks
- Safe Havens itself as a meeting point for the diversity of players

Round Table 1

On ensuring the less visible voices, and smaller on-the-ground initiatives are made visible, supported, heard, and valorised.

Moderated by: Farida Shaheed, Executive Director, Shirkat Gah, Pakistan's largest women's resource centre and national network, the first and former UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights.

Panel:

- IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies) - Magdalena Moreno Mujica, Executive Director.
- Intro Afrika - Ayodele Ganiu, Director.
- al Mawred al Thaqafy/Culture Resource - Helena Nassif, Director.
- Prince Claus Fund - Joumana el Zein, Director.
- Swedish Arts Council - Bongi MacDermott, Division Director for Communication.
- Martin Roth Initiative -Maik Müller, Head.

Discussants:

- EU Protect Defenders, Brussels – Xavier Roura Blanco, Communication and Reporting Officer.
- York University Centre for Applied Human Rights, UK – Sanna Eriksson, Protective Fellowship Coordinator.
- University of Hildesheim, Germany, Julius Heinicke, UNESCO Chair 'Cultural Policy for the Arts in Development'.
- Freedom House – Sheryl Mendez, Senior Programme Manager Emergency Assistance.
- NCAC National Coalition Against Censorship – Svetlana Mintcheva, Director of Programmes.

Round Table 2

On the artistic freedom sector becoming more collegiate, working more effectively and collaboratively, sharing information more effectively and undertaking cooperative joint initiatives that benefit all partners and prioritise those who may be marginalised.

Moderated by: Karima Bennoune, USA/Algeria Law Professor at the University of California, Davis School of Law, the current UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights.

Panel:

- Article 19 Mexico and Central American Office- Martha Tudón, Digital Rights Programme Coordinator.
- Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Claire Annette Hubert, Deputy Director Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), PEN America – Julie Trébault, Director.
- Freemuse - Srirak Plipak, Director.
- ICORN, International Cities of Refuge Network - Helge Lund, Director.
- Culture Action Europe - Tere Badia, Secretary General.

Discussants:

- Tamizdat - Matthew Covey, Director.
- Artists Freedom Initiative - Ashley Tucker, Director of Programmes.
- Perpetuum Mobile/Artists at Risk – Marita Muukkonen, Cofounder and Codirector.
- PEN International UK – Cathy McCann, Writers at Risk Protection Manager.
- ICORN - Elisabeth Dyvik, Programme Director.

Yasmine Baramawy
Photo: Karoline Asskildt/Safemuse

Key Points

1. Networking, collaborating, partnerships, diversity of approaches, complementarity, holistic approaches

Intersectional for such as these are necessary – our lives are integrated; development will depend on these conversations. Different perspectives will add to goals of safety and inclusiveness, and help address the threats from political opposition, economic livelihood threats, gatekeeping and competition.

However, we need to keep striving to achieve four conditions:

- Collegial - an environment where responsibility and authority is shared equally by colleagues
- Collaborative - an effort in which people work together
- Cooperative - mutual assistance in working towards a common goal
- Non-competitive - not having the desire to be more central than others.

What is in common is the idea of a peer condition. This is crucial for what Yassin Al-Haj Saleh proposes as partnership: a relation that 'has no centre; works in multiple directions; and is based on equality rather than power'. Yet, it is all too easy to see one another as threats instead of potential partners, for some this is seeking competitive funding, or achieving the visibility needed to convince funders. Funder education is also needed to ensure providing what is best for those who they are supporting to achieve the desired goals.

A fluid partnership 'toolbox approach' is an effective way to envision and to implement collaborative working. It combines different actors and approaches. Every case is specific and complementary. It includes the new voices, those from the grassroots and those who can mobilise. And it also includes the funders, coordinators, temporary relocation promoters.

Good collaboration models exist between lawyers working for the arts, resettlement residencies, platforms for showing work, and the artistic and neighbourhood communities, including both grassroots organisations and large artistic institutions. On a case-by-case basis, local collaborations are put into place to serve the artists, their career paths, and grant-writing training for them and local actors also.

However, it is very important to stress here that networking, whether regional or international, is a capacity issue and most of the organisations working in this field are small. Especially but not only in the Global South, networking and collaboration mean working time and effort, in other words, money.

Levels, sectors and subsectors

The levels to consider are local, regional and international and supranational, such as the UN system. Each can play their part with full respect for one another's strengths – the local is as important as the supranational and they need to mutually support one another. Cities can also be a real force, for example they are a strong counterpart to the national government in Poland.

Partnerships between national governments and the UN system are essential, also with civil society. Partnering governments can support initiatives whose potential funding is lost into the larger UN system. Even within the UN there is always a wish to 'bring down the silos', e.g. between the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), Global Alliance of Human Rights Institutions for example. The UN Special Rapporteurs should convene expert meetings with civil society, supported by national governments. More programmatic actions and communication between UNESCO and the UN High Commission could better articulate issues.

There are other organisations that we could partner with , for example, ECRE, The European Council on Refugees and Exiles and IFEX, the International Freedom of Expression network.

There is also a big opportunity to bring the human rights and the arts sectors to work together, for example in Latin America and Africa, to share knowledge and provide support.

The arts industries need to be a part of our discussions – many relocated artists are seeking commercial, not only artistic success.

We need to collaborate with a legal ecosystem that needs to be improved; it is used to silence and to censor. The digital is increasingly important. Is there a gap in monitoring digital platforms? These intermediaries can face pressure to censor. Article 19 monitors this, but not for Cultural Rights.

There are new collaborative networks forming that bring together a number of existing initiatives and organisations, such as AMANI, the African Creative Defence Network, or Don't Delete Art, a virtual gallery of art censored by social media. There are also plans to build a Global Action Network and an LGBT Network on Artistic Freedom in collaboration with Freemuse. The long collaboration history of PEN (advocacy, campaigning, lobbying) and ICORN (relocation) is a case of two organisations complementing one another's strengths, ICORN has also used Article 19's UN accreditation to participate in meetings in Geneva.

There are four main functions for artistic freedom initiatives and ample need for more collaboration on the first three functions.

- setting or strengthening the normative standards in human right treaties (new definitions of public morals, indecency, terrorism, LGBTQI, propaganda etc)
- monitoring and documenting abuses by government and non-state actors. Capacity building needs to be done especially – but not only - in the Global South to enable professional reporting of violations and improve compliance in laws and policies;
- advocacy and campaigning where there is non-compliance and impunity - fourteen new countries in the last decade have imposed illegitimate restrictions on LGBTQI people;
- assisting victims, including temporary relocation.

2. Our common goal must be to strengthen and support regional and local actors

Where there are strong authorities that act with impunity, artists need small, local underground organisations. Then the multilateral partnerships can work on a case-by-case basis where it is needed, but the local organisations absolutely need to be involved. In addition, post-relocation, returning home is difficult where there are no strong local organisations.

Agility and strong local organisations are needed to respond to all of the new and changing crises. Some narratives have to change: in Africa we Africans need to stop being reactive and start to be proactive to change narratives about politics, religion etc as being 'Western'; we need to reorient people and prevent problems.

There are digital divides, gender divides and generational divides that we must address. Thus, it's important to create instruments that take into consideration people in places with limited languages, technical skills and internet access.

For these reasons, local or regional actors should be supported to 'go their own way' and not only do what the international agencies want them to do. Subalterns need to be identified and supported to challenge existing institutions' policies.

Funding that takes all of these elements into consideration should consider the reality on the ground, despite the pressure on funders to economize their own costs of grant programmes:

- Smaller grants can best benefit the smaller more local initiatives; they are sometimes considered non cost-effective for the funders, yet they can be crucial for the local initiatives and actors.
- One-off project funding is often detrimental as it mitigates against the sustained work that is necessary to effect change.
- It can be crucial to allow beneficiaries not to be obliged to publicize the source of their foreign funding as it may put them into danger.

3. Arts sector involvement is crucial but so is engagement and collaboration with other sectors

Some arts councils have difficulty engaging with artists-at-risk or displaced artists; they feel it is a 'human rights issue', but refugee artists want to be seen as artists, not merely refugees. We need to use opportunities to change the narrative.

Some arts gatekeepers (presenters) also are reluctant to change their aesthetic, yet innovation happens often in the smaller, often artists-led, organisations, when there is flexibility and resilience. Small, on-the-ground initiatives can help to develop the more mainstream arts organisations.

Yet, curators are an important intermediary, as they get the artwork out to the public, where the artists are and where the publics are. Their risk includes getting fired and being unable to do this important work. Peer-to-peer support in this area is essential to mental health and the will is there, but it needs to be organised.

The arts industries need to be a part of our discussions – many relocated artists are seeking commercial, not only artistic success. We have to look at how to monetize the digital space that artists are now pretty much obliged to move into.

There is a need to look at labour rights, not only freedom of artistic expression – the gig economy, the informal economy, the fragility of independents: these people do not benefit from the current Covid-related stimulus packages. There is a rise in artists' suicides – mental health issues need to be included.

We need to engage with censorship boards, some of whom are not even aware of the international conventions their countries have ratified.

Be careful with language – concepts such as re-traumatisation are being used apart from its medical definition. Phrases such as 'the violence of pure speech' lead to a slippery slope, as many kinds of artists and artistic work could be accused of traumatising others. This is a basic tenet of free speech – to be careful of using a tool that is so badly defined that it would be used in the opposite sense.

4. Funding support can also be analysed and improved to be better fit for its purpose

Cultural rights also include the right to a livelihood – to be able to survive. The UN Special Rapporteur has started to define 'at-risk' as also those who needed to leave a country or their profession due to the incapacity to survive economically.

Funding for individuals at risk are almost always short term and do not at all address the long term needs of writers and artists – many of whom are in acute situations. The most vulnerable are the non-citizens and refugee artists as they cannot be funded by grants available to citizen artists. There is a need for rapid interventions on the ground by local structures to create possibilities to earn.

This also applies to artists relocated in another country in their region, Arab countries or Turkey, for example.

'Resilience grants' are also needed. Flexibility on the part of funders is required when supporting 'cultural expression under pressure'. This necessitates continuous discussion on security and conditions with grantees.

One-off project grants have a limited benefit when longer term support is necessary to achieve a sustained effect and lasting results. This is crucial for local organisations. Funding might be, for example, given to organisations to re-grant, then grant conditionality must be for them to support the smaller organisations. There can be synergies in joining development cooperation and arts and culture programmes, but the challenge remains to find the local organisations that are strong enough to handle large grants.

Funders are challenged, often by the government regulations of those who fund them. Capacity building has to be undertaken to enable the smaller, local organisations to meet administrative and other requirements. This could be helped with long term cooperation between donors and the regional and international organisations. For the donors, it is very important that the beneficiaries work in partnership so that their grants are used more efficiently and effectively.

The definitions of human rights defenders and artists need to be broadened to include some parts of their communities, family members and those who stay behind, for example. There is a problem of labelling – some artists and others don't like to call themselves human rights defenders at risk, and the funders should be more flexible about their definitions and requirements for supporting them.

Funders, both private and public, need to hear how artists-at-risk identify themselves and what dangers they face.

5. Monitoring, reporting, research, documentation. Toolkits and Handbooks

It's easier to say that we shouldn't duplicate than it is to do it! How can we share not only information but also methodologies and good practices so that we 'can' work together, knowing we do share the same language and standards?

Monitoring and documentation are crucial areas and must be done well and professionally. All other actions depend on these being done and done well. There is a great need for capacity building in this area, in the Global South but not only. There are annual case lists (PEN International) and ongoing monitoring and reporting, but this requires professional, and paid, staff. The small organisations doing this specialised work often rely on volunteers in the regions, some of whom are themselves in very hostile and complex situations – there needs to be serious capacity building, networking amongst those who are monitoring, and above all it must be recognised and recompensed as an expert task.

Human Rights NGOs collect data and monitor abuses, but they don't share it. We need to discuss with our own organisations to see what more could be done in this regard. There is information about successful earning income post-relocation; this also needs to be shared.

There is invaluable research to be done crossing over the various at-risk subjects such as artists/lawyers/journalists. This has to be done also in a perspective of funder-education.

Universities collaborating in and with the Global South to do research are important, looking at questions of successful post-relocation, mental health and well-being of defenders (including writers and artists), civil society protection and other issues.

Tools such as the Barcelona Guidelines (on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk) are useful and should be diffused more to the arts community.
Many toolkits exist, for example, Content Removal Guidelines (Manila Guidelines and Santa Clara Guidelines) could be used for different types of content, such as artistic content. Work has already been started by Culture Action Europe on a handbook based on the available case law and on common law principles (such as the UN conventions, or in the case of the EU, The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). It will outline the existing obligations for the EU under the 2005 UNESCO Convention. As the EU is a party to the convention, the convention already had an effect on how the Court of Justice of the European Union interprets EU law in light of the convention.

6. Safe Havens and other meeting points as crucial vectors for the development of all elements of the sector(s)

We need these multi-layered, intersectional conversations to continue, including those between funders. If we don't initiate the conversations (e.g., with governments), they will never take place. We get together when there is a crisis, but the protection sector foresees the build-up of risk and we have information on cross-regional and global risk. Continuing the conversations can mitigate risk.

Artists, lawyers who defend at-risk subjects and become at-risk themselves, journalists – all of these need to be brought together and share knowledge – increased harassment affects all of them. There is a will, but the biggest challenge is to bring them all together. IFEX, EU ProtectDefenders, FrontLine Defenders, Safe Havens all try to do that.

The Safe Havens group should be enlarged to include FrontLine Defenders, FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), EIDHR (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) as well as Freedom House and some of the others NGOs mentioned in this report. Others, like EUTRP (EU Temporary Relocation Platform, under the auspices of EU Protect Defenders) already take part in Safe Havens.

Funder education is as important as for the defenders, so that artists for example are not classified and 'siloed' only to 'their' funders. There should also be collaborative discussion for funders, such as the Human Rights Funders Network [editor: there are also networks of philanthropists in other sectors, such as arts and culture, migration, social development and so on… https://www.efc.be/thematic-networks/

The barriers to cultural mobility run from the nefarious to the banal bureaucratic. What constitutes 'at-risk' for an artist? At what stage do we as a sector intervene? Not only imprisonment but also bureaucratic measures and systems stamp down free artistic expression.

The ecosphere needs to be broadened and holistic, but we also need action, organising, coordination. How can we operationalise our vision? Regular online meetings where we discuss cases, themes, offer training – for example there are excellent training models for civil society groups to work with the UN.

What does collaboration mean in this moment? The International Labour Association has called Covid 'the worst global crisis since World War II'. We need to find ways to address travel restrictions, imprisonment of artists and activists responding to Covid-related issues. It's important to hold up the commitments of states to the cultural rights approach and to defend cultural renewal.

Our collegiality has never been so important. At the UN level, the opponents to cultural rights work strategically – for this reason, a civil society coalition that is present in significant numbers and can unify around strategic actions is necessary.

Safe Havens' strength is our diversity – including artists, organisations and institutions. Safe Havens sees itself as a neutral meeting point to facilitate cross-sector and cross-function exchange and productive, progressive learning. However, it may be time to clarify the mandate, mission, vision. The clearer we are, the better and more effective we will be.

Hamid Sakhizada
Photo: Knut Utler/Safemuse

Part Two:
The Short Report of Safe Havens Global Stream 2020

The Safe Havens Global Stream, 10 - 13 November 2020 comprised five primary 'hives' or discussion sessions and six further break-out hives. 164 people from all parts of the globe registered for the four days of participative discussion, presentations, and musical contributions from artists who have experienced persecution. The issues and recommendations below provided the content and context to which policy makers responded in the December Webinar. It was important to Safe Havens that the voices of the policy users came first.

Overall Issues and Recommendations

The Safe Havens Global Stream, 10 - 13 November 2020 comprised five primary 'hives' or discussion sessions and six further break-out hives. 164 people from all parts of the globe registered for the four days of participative discussion, presentations, and musical contributions from artists who have experienced persecution. The issues and recommendations below provided the content and context to which policy makers responded in the December Webinar. It was important to Safe Havens that the voices of the policy users came first.

3.1 Local/Global

Whereas differences between the so-called Global South and the so-called Global North were cited, there were also calls for more support to local initiatives, and more fair partnerships between the local and international.

Recommendations:

- Local and regional networks need to be encouraged and supported.
- Global North countries must live up to the commitments made in the UNESCO Convention (including Articles 14 and 16 relating to preferential treatment for artists from the Global South)
- There should be more synergies between local and international Human Rights Defenders (HRD) protection schemes, in order to ensure that the post-relocation scenario is safe. Events such as Safe Havens help create these synergies.

3.2 Temporary relocation

Based on human rights defender practice, for persecuted artists living under repressive regimes, to countries where they can be safe and able to resume and disseminate their creative practice, is a necessary and essential response especially when saving and protecting lives, but is not without problems. Post-relocation, artists often face legal and economic obstacles to the exercise of their profession, potential trauma and intersectional prejudices. The context of an at-risk story has large, and sometimes unwanted, implications on the way their work is presented and received.

An ICORN/University of York study of the wellbeing needs of people on protective relocation found that significant resourcefulness was required to access protective relocation. This showed that such people are high-functioning despite their high levels of stress and trauma. But this means they sometimes hide their need for aftercare, creating a dilemma for those who run relocation programmes.

The lack of harmonized EU legislation regarding social and legal status of artists, including those coming from the third countries, results in the most vulnerable not meeting requirements for funding and support schemes.

The situation is particularly difficult for refugee artists working for years together in ensembles, and who, in the absence of the common EU asylum policy and relocation strategy, are distributed across different countries and regions, which prevents synergies and collaborations.

Much-needed funds to support foreign artists during the Covid crisis have been mobilized primarily through civil society organizations and private donations. The cooperation on the authorities' part is necessary.

Communication and sharing of expertise and experience among all the involved actors is key for finding solutions on both local, national, and regional levels. A special effort needs to be made to enable artists to share their subjective and deeply contextualized experience, since they themselves are often the main source of insightful solutions.

Recommendations:

- Funding must be allocated to have safe and supported full time multidisciplinary staff teams (psychologists, security advisors, daily accompaniment officers, etc.) to assist with individuals' relocation.

- Temporary relocation programmes must have an intersectional perspective and ensure that languages are not a barrier.

- Care must not be a burden for relocations, and the option of a family relocation should always be on the table if needed.

- With regard to supporting foreign artists who are stuck due to Covid-19-related issues, cooperation with public and private foundations as well as the municipal authorities should provide funds to financially support foreign artists until they can return back home.

- Referring to EU countries, but applicable elsewhere, the precarious conditions of refugee and displaced artists exacerbated by the Covid-19 ongoing calls for:

a. a common EU asylum policy, and synergies in the national approaches to the relocation of artists/cultural professionals in exile;
b. the harmonization of social systems in Europe with regards to the social status of artists;
c. reconsidering the complexity of European funding schemes for artists, including the accessibility of the Creative Europe funds to the more fragile ones and those with a recent resident status;
d. Developing the specific European policy and special funds supporting the cross-border artistic mobility and collaboration, in particular with an aim to correspond to the reality of artistic work living in the cross-border regions.

It is essential to continue to insist on the centering of artists at every level of the field. It is clear from these conversations that the opinions, values, and agendas of administrators, those that inevitably inform their decisions, cannot account for the incredibly varied experiences of at-risk artists.

3.3 Offense

Free expression famously includes 'the right to offend'. Is there a corresponding 'right to be offended'? In view of so-called cancel culture debates, we need to increase our understanding of intersectional, complex perspectives. Who defines offense? Do certain groups have the privilege of naming and claiming of offence, leaving other groups without voice or platform? The intention of the artist matters: an artist can choose to stimulate the imagination, challenge old modes of thought, open minds to new possibilities, or give voice to the previously silenced. There is a line to be drawn between causing offence in this way and causing or encouraging actual harm or retraumatizing those who have suffered and may still suffer from violence, danger, dislocation, disempowerment, and other forms of systemic injustice.

Recommendations:

- Those advancing cultural rights globally should provide spaces to work together towards a statement of principles around artistic freedom that is fit for our times. Such a statement could serve as a direct challenge to current debates that privilege powerful voices, erasing or diminishing all others, while fudging the line between offence and actual violence - and might also point to an ethic of artistic practice that is sensitive to such questions, while retaining its freedom to challenge, interrogate, imagine and, if necessary, offend

- Essential to expanding and enhancing artistic freedom in a meaningful way is to build and develop networks and collaborative platforms for arts and cultural workers which are representative of the wide diversity within the sector, whether it is around gender, minorities, excluded groups, or status as grassroots, national or regional entities.

3.4 Language

...was identified as problematic. Not only the prevalence and prioritising of major languages to the detriment and exclusion of others, but also the seemingly unavoidable necessity of using human rights defender language, jargon and criteria to describe the often very different situation of an artists' persecution. It is challenging for artists to seek help or submit applications when they have to translate their experiences into unfamiliar human rights language in order to get the resources they deserve, and when they are stressed and threatened.

Recommendations:

- An artist's inability to classify themselves as a human rights defender should not prohibit the support of protection schemes for Human Rights Defenders. Defender NGOs and the arts sector should collaborate on easily understandable language and descriptions.

- Minority, and indigenous language support must be made more available and accessible.

3.5 Covid

The emergence and global spread of the Covid-19 virus has both positive and negative effects to an artistic sector experiencing widespread privations. Recognizing that the current situation is traumatic, artists and cultural workers have to find ways to tread the fine lines between isolating to stay safe, staying connected to keep work alive, staying in tune with reality but also resisting the push (often from funders) to focus only on Covid-19.

Recommendations:

- COVID-19 should not be used as an "excuse" to push for shortcuts, whether funding projects, facilitating travel for artists from the Global South, shifting attention away from long-existing and pressing concerns, or pushing for one-size-fits all digital solutions.

3.6 Digital solutions

These also have both advantages and pitfalls. Indeed, not only but also in the Safe Havens 2020 Global Stream, both presenters and participants in several places had difficulties related to internet capacity and other technical issues. Relevant factors when conceiving or implementing artistic projects (performances, residencies, exchanges...) include access to digital platforms; cost; compensation for opportunities lost due to the impossibility of completing projects physically; safety and so on. The digital environment can be supportive, for example, to create an app or platform similar to those used to track other forms of violence. It can be a tool for censorship or unwanted surveillance. It can lead to attacks and persecution, or it can be a tool for positive campaigning and artistic diffusion.

The digital sphere is useful in staying connected, overcoming travel constraints, boosting visibility for causes as a means of holding leaders accountable.

Its main limitations are cost, especially for artists with difficult access; exacerbation of existing forms of discrimination such as against artists who already weren't able to travel and the "white box phenomenon" whereby differences in background, experience, habits... are flattened out by the format of Zoom.

Recommendations:

- Leverage new technologies, for example work with YouTube to ensure they don't remove content as censorship.

- Interface with the platforms and media the artists are already using, such as one for censored art, Instagram takeovers, different regional or contextual responses.

Ensuring support for less visible voices to exercise their full agency, be heard and valorised; support for local, on-the-ground initiatives

In many countries it is impossible for artists to function, not only because of repression, but also because of the struggle for a basic livelihood. Often funding is linked to the priority countries of the funders, leaving others with less advantage.

Local and regional civil society and artists' networks are important vehicles for sharing, building solidarity, building visibility for individual cases and/or causes, and amassing momentum for advocacy initiatives (rather than always looking for top-bottom solutions from funders, governments, etc.)

There is a lack of joined up monitoring of violations against artists in Africa and many other world regions such as Asia. It is very fragmented, thus very difficult to know the magnitude of the problems that are faced by artists.

There is a need to discuss the roots of risks both in countries where the risk occurs and in the countries that 'welcome' those at risk. Incomers may face discrimination on any number or pretexts, or being refused a refugee application. Again, and again, the need to consider the intersectionality of vulnerabilities was highlighted.

Even in the EU, there are pressures, for example in Poland and Hungary. There is little talk in Greece about artistic freedom of speech. The whole artist sector is under distress (for the last ten years during the economic crisis). There is no international focus.

Recommendations:

- Support local-level coalition building efforts & broad network of artists. Replicate international coalition successes at a country and local level; build networks for strength.

- Support more national and regional monitoring of violations against artists. There is a need for Engagement with African (and other world regions') censorship boards, law enforcement and legislators on inconsistencies with UNESCO and other international human rights conversations.

- Regarding artists and human rights defenders in exile, the topic of white torture and torture in general should be discussed and experiences shared. The issue of should be raised within a potential civil society coalition in the United Nations involving also the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Connecting the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and in the Field of Cultural Rights could be promising.

- Support initiatives to counter ideologies with counter-ideologies (such as bringing in Islamic scholars to discuss those who would censor music from an Islamic perspective; or challenging ideas of 'African traditions' that are in fact colonial era laws imposed by European states).

- Continue and expand research on artist security on a continental level such as that undertaken by the Martin Roth Initiative.

- There is a need to continue the work of Safe Havens in bringing together spaces of safety on a continental level, for example for artists across Africa.

- Build a sustainable regional response for cases where local remedies are difficult – Learn from the work of ARC & African Defenders Network.

- Funding should support collaboration between organisations working on the ground in a territory or a region, not only individuals. What is needed is new formats, new modalities that build a stronger and more cohesive territorial response.

- Efforts to build a more equitable arts system need to focus simultaneously and strategically on the local and the international/policy levels (where much can be done to hold signatory countries accountable to their commitments). In this regard, continuation of initiatives such as Safe Havens in Cape Town 2019, is important for bringing together spaces of safety for artists across a continent.

Ensuring that the sector is collegiate, collaborative, cooperative and non-competitive; more cooperatively and less competitively

Sharing knowledge is crucial; organisations involved in our sector need to be committed to a work of service to those who need it, and not first and foremost a work of public relations. Structures that are developed should not favour only certain structures and networks.

There is a need to further discuss the notions of solidarity and partnership to express the relations between the artist at risk and the protection mechanisms as one community with common values.

Artistic freedom needs to be seen within the wider social, economic and political landscape, and collaboration with other organisations working to promote these rights – educators, human rights defenders, social, economic defenders, etc. where freedom of expression is a cross-cutting issue. Many of these sectors themselves experience similar repression to those faced by artists so these experiences and expertise can be shared for the benefit of all.

There is a significant overlap of experiences and methodologies that artists at risk share with other groups such as journalists at risk.

Artists can speak to and explain issues, often complex, through performance and other art forms that lawyers and human rights defenders often cannot, and thus the two sectors can work together.
Legislation including offensive content, defamation, threats to public order, cyber bullying, risks of challenging the official narrative, cross-border censorship, blasphemy, insulting and defamatory content – all of these examples in Africa are being addressed and have led to release of artists, thanks to joined-up work from various organisations.

The pandemic may reconfigure the funding landscape for the arts, taking stock of the explosion of new funds for Covid-19 related projects; the freezing of funds (especially those that covered travel); and the risk that artists may be paid even less than previously for projects that are moved to digital platforms or born digital.

Recommendations:

- Funding is an issue – responses need to be ongoing, joined up and sustained. There should be alternative funding for artists at risk to reduce overdependence on funders of HRDs. There needs to be a real dialogue with donors to provide input on how they design their programmes. The growth of the arts rights justice sector should see a growth in interest from donor organisations, rather than be a cause of resource competition among the sector's organisations.

- Useful toolkits and informative guides created by different sectors regarding at-risk professionals, need to be shared, accessible and available more easily, so that artists and others can find them. Information about support and funding needs to be more widely disseminated in the art world.

- Networking and collaboration between arts and cultural operators with other civil society sectors – education, social and economic development, human rights etc and across regions is highly important and should involve an integrated approach towards achieving change. Collaboration should be at grassroots, national and regional levels to reflect the diversity of activities across these levels.

- Collaboration should balance widely varied needs with concrete support, should extend from monitoring abuses to referring relocation cases to the appropriate protective mechanisms, and should help avoid duplication in the arts rights justice sector.

- It's important to think about the post-relocation scenarios, and create synergies between programmes (grant-making organizations, host organizations, etc.) to ensure the relocated person is in a safer and better situation than they were before participating in the programme.

- Funders should fund collaboration and collaborative initiatives between organisations working in the same territory.

- This type of event (Safe Havens, other platforms) should increase access to information, also for artists in other disciplines.

- Participants were enthusiastic regarding UN Special Rapporteur Karima Bennoune's 2018 suggestion that a coalition of cultural rights advocates be formed so as to ensure that cultural rights are represented across UN mandates.

Acknowledgements

These Reports were edited by Mary Ann DeVlieg and Jude Dibia. We are immensely grateful to all of the discussion animators and rapporteurs, as well as all November and December participants and the participating artists, without whom, of course, this sharing of knowledge would not have come into existence.

Safe Havens Global Stream and Webinar 2020, produced and supported by the Museum of Movements (MoM) and Safemuse, is also grateful to its supporters, the Norwegian Arts Council, the Swedish Arts Council and Fritt Ord.

Safe Havens Global Stream 2020 Interviews

For the world's people, 2020 turned into the year that never was, a sort of "Year Zero" when all the old certainties were shaken to their cores and the livelihoods of millions – notably freelance creatives plus arts, culture and heritage activists – collapsed almost overnight. The International Monetary Fund warned that the "Great Lockdown" is projected in even a best-case scenario to, in the intermediate term, be the most severe world recession since the Great Depression of 1929-1939, while the World Food Programme chief David Beasley told the United Nations Security Council that even before the onset of Covid-19 he had warned world leaders that "2020 would be facing the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II."

The creative sector in all its glorious diversity is among those economies and ecologies most affected by the novel Coronavirus – and governments' often opportunistic and repressive responses to the pandemic. In most jurisdictions, the performing arts became impossible to enact before live audiences; hundreds of thousands of theatres stood empty, many never to reopen; some 90% of the world's museums shut their doors; while protective residencies held their breath as countries shut their borders to travel by persecuted artists. One study of 94 cities across Europe alone saw almost two thirds reporting a halving of their creative economies' income. Although often ignored by policy-makers, the creative economy is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors: for example, in France, it is larger than the automotive industry, while in South Africa, woodcarving and traditional crafts alone eclipses fisheries as an employer, both numerically and financially.

Yet, creatives are not merely income generators, but contribute immense non-monetary value to our intellectual development and the beautification of our environments, to the upliftment of youth, women and marginalised communities, to fostering peace-building dialogue and understanding between cultures – and not least, to speaking truth to power, reasons that often get them into trouble.

Across the world, despite pandemic-related restrictions and political repression, creatives have banded together in acts of solidarity, distributing food to colleagues in need, creating new regional collaborative networks, and innovating new ways to generate income and to give voice to their works in dark times. The municipalities of Barcelona, Lisbon, Mexico City, Lima, Bogotá, and Buenos Aires have built a platform on which their residents can explore the musical, theatre, film, historical, and other resources of the collaborating cities. In recognition of the importance of the arts, new resilience-building grants have been injected into the creative sector from Los Angeles to Hong Kong.

Like many creative fora, the annual global summit of the arts rights justice sector, Safe Havens – having intended to be held on location in Bogotá, Colombia following 2019's dynamic conference in Cape Town, South Africa, out of which rose the new African continental Amani network – was compelled to go online. Yet at the six-year mark of the summit, the webinar format allowed us to reassess the positive growth of the arts rights justice sector in that period, to broaden our conversation to ensure it is truly global, to workshop specific challenges over three days and then to feed their results into a concluding set of round tables – and to reflect deeply on how to challenge the digital divide's reinforcing of neo-colonial narratives. Safe Havens is at once a global philosophical conversation about the state of the arts – and a working conference on how to improve mechanisms that protect creatives.

We present here a selection of in-depth interviews on today's interlocking global and regional socio-econo-political crises with key "activators" of the 2020 Safe Havens conference and its Freedom Talks series, starting with a harrowing poem by Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu – because our astoundingly talented palette of creatives live at the heart of Safe Havens – followed by Safe Havens founder, Fredrik Elg. The interviews are conducted by Safe Havens rapporteur Michael Schmidt, a bestselling African non-fiction author, anti-racism activist, and investigative journalist who co-runs the Hammer Arts RIghts Transfer (HART), a protective residency for creatives and human rights defenders in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The interviews are verbatim, somewhat in the style of the writers Studs Turkel or Tony Parker, with only very slight editing, so that the conversation is replicated in full.

1. I AM WRITING!

Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu is a celebrated Eritrean poet, journalist and writer. She is one of the few women to have entered what is the dangerous profession of journalism in Eritrea. After the government closed all independent media in 2001, she worked for radio Bana until the authorities raided it in February 2009, arrested all the staff and took them to prison. Until her release in January 2015, she had to endure six years under the worst conditions in the Mai Swra prison, where she was arbitrarily detained without prosecution or trial. Since then, she had been threatened with another arrest before escaping to Uganda. Mebrathu is currently a scholar of the Writers-in-Exile Program of the PEN Center in Germany: http://pen-deutschland.de/. She writes of her poem: "The original version in Tigrinya (below) is taken from my Poetry Book titled "ኣለኹ," which means "I am still alive," that was published by Emkulu Publisher, Sweden. It was translated into English (2020) by Tedros Abraham."

I am writing!

What an inquisitor, what a caller
What is he expecting from this "survivor"?

Whether from north or south
Or from east or west,
When he thinks of putting a call on the phone
I think he is ready before pressing the button?!
"What are you doing?" is all he asks
"What are you working on?" are his only words.

I am writing day and night
I am writing in reality and dream
To tie in a knot of story yesterday and today.

I shone my day's sun so that I could write
I travelled half the globe not for a morsel bite
Afraid of exploding from being muzzled
To breathe freely;
That is why I have forsaken my homeland.

Yirgalem Fisseha (2018)

እጽሕፍ ኣለኹ!

ወይለይ'ዚ ሓታቲ ወይለይ'ዚ ደዋሊ
ካብዛ 'ውጻእ መዓት' እንታይ ድዩ ዝደሊ፧

ሰሜን - ደቡብ ዘሎ
ምብራቕ - ምዕራብ ዘሎ፡
እታ ከድውል ኩሓስብ እንከሎ
ቅድሚ ምጥዋቕ ማዲ'ዩ ዝዓሌ፧!
"እንታይ ትገብሪ'ለኺ፧" ኩይንዋ ሕቶኡ
"እንታይ ትሰርሒ'ለኺ፧" ጥራሕ ዘረባኡ።

እጽሕፍ ኣለኹ ኣብ ቀትሮን ጸላምን
እጽሕፍ ኣለኹ ኣብ ጋህድን ኣብ ሕልምን
ኣብ ዛንታ ክኣስረን ንትማልን ሎምን።

ከጽሕፍ ኢለ'ምበር ጸሓየይ ኣብሪቐ
ከበልዕ ኢለዶ ከንድዚ ኣርሒቐ፡
ዕብስ ኢለ ከይትኩስ ፈራሐ
ምእንቲ ከተንፍስ ኣፍልበይ ነፈሐ
ንኡ ደልየ "ንድየ ዓደ'ቦይ ራሕራሐ።

ይርጋኣለም ፍስሃ (2018)

2. FLYING UNDER THE RADAR: Small, Flexible & Collaborative Protective Mechanisms in a Time of Global Instability

Abdullah Al-Kafri is the Executive Director of Ettijahat – Independent Culture: https://www.ettijahat.org/. Ettijahat is dedicated to supporting Syrian artists and cultural practitioners and their peers across the Arab region and Europe, providing capacity-building, educational opportunities, financial and legal support to artists, cultural practitioners and academics. As an award-winning playwright and theatre director, he has collaborated with LIFT (UK), the Royal Court Theatre (UK), IEVP (Norway) and Lark (USA) and others. He works as a trainer, strategic planner, fundraiser and designer for arts initiatives. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, the Artistic Committee of Sundance Institute's MENA Theater Lab and the board of the 10th Summit on Arts and Culture. He also teaches the MA in Theatre at l'Université Saint-Joseph, Beirut, where he is also currently undertaking a PhD.

Michael: Alright, so unfortunately, I was in the parallel session with Ayodele Ganiu, so I didn't sit in on your session ["Artistic Choices in the Time of..., or Acknowledging the Hell around Us"]. Perhaps we could just start with that and recap what that debate was really about.

Abdullah: Yes, the session I was co-facilitating with Nayse [Lopez], it was to revisit or explore the modality of the safe haven in the time of being surrounded by Hell, or being in Hell literally, so to which extent we can consider that it's still efficient and effective and what kind of questions we need to bring while we are really more and more not able to move, not able to allocate or reallocate artists, activists, journalists, from their reality to another reality for two reasons: the first one is our new reality is a Hell around us; and also doe to the technicality that we are not able to any more travel, to move, to cross or pass the borders due to the pandemic. This was the first part of the conversation. The second part was also about to which extent this digital response to the situation – not only in the region, but around the world – is really able to respond or to be a kind of alternative regarding safety and security, and all the other questions coming in this regard, regarding the protections that are related to the digital narrative, related to privacy, related to the need to decolonise all the digital narrative methods. So, it was planned to be a big conversation, but it turned out to be a conversation with a small group – but it was really interesting and in-depth. For example, we discussed different modalities of responding to what's happening here in the world, and in Lebanon (solidarity from Oslo, for example, with some music festivals held here at the same time). We discussed the model of the Swedish Arts Council to support the protection of freedom of expression within a new programme and which extends these modalities as still relevant, or rather do we need to consider another modality. Because the whole assumption we are thinking about is how to provide support for individuals, regardless of whether there are a lot or a few, it's still caring about individuals while we are really in this world, or in this era that we really need to consider more support or more support, or bigger, more general support. Artists if they are at risk are really having a hard time; they are lacking the opportunity to work, to move, to express themselves. Here in the Arab region, we are once more witnessing the control of the digital conversation and narrative, and infiltration and all of these, so this is generally speaking what the conversation revolved around.

Michael: OK, tell me more about this "digital narrative". You know, the digital divide was something that came up quite clearly in the opening session, this concern that while we are very comfortable, perhaps, in our middle-class environments with good internet connectivity, etc, having these conversations, it's actually excluding a huge swathe of the artistic and creative communities around the world who battle to find bandwidth, who battle to get airtime, who battle perhaps even

with electrical supplies being inconsistent. Talk a little about the digital divide.

Abdullah: You just mentioned the challenge, or the dilemma: on the first hand, there is this assumption that this digital world is really accessible to everyone, so you just log in to be connected, however the reality says that 40% of the people around the world don't have this access. In many rural areas, when talking about connection or infrastructure, they are not well equipped, or they are not really affordable – this is the first layer. The other layer is how that in some countries – if you are talking about Syria, if you are talking about Egypt, if we are talking about Libya, Sudan, even in Lebanon – there is a question also about the protection and the privacy and safety of participants if they are using these platforms: either it's controlled from public offices and governments, or it might risk them because they don't have enough safety [knowledge] of the way to use the platform so they are really protected in a way. And the third level is making things harder, I believe: the shift from physicality to the digital comes with an assumption that this really a very temporary thing, and it wasn't well thought-out in terms of some specific genre of arts, whether they are applicable to the digital realities. So, this is the challenge. Let's remember also that all of these narratives, or this digital reality comes with really Western European knowledge and narrative: the content itself, the modality itself, the way of dealing with the software, and even the rationale itself.

So, it requires a lot of deconstructing because these digital platforms are becoming a public form or space, so we need to really make sure that while we are consuming hours and hours of content to what extent we are being critical regarding all of this – and to see to what extent we are really making engagement platforms, what kind of profiles people need or require to be able to be connected and to be engaging. If we are talking about the performing arts sector practitioners, to what extent the medium they are developing is still relevant to digital reality. And if we are talking about the safety and the protection of the artist, what is the best way to engage with an artist who lives now in Damascus or in Cairo without threatening their lives instead of protecting them. So, I'm not assuming, Michael, that we have to answer those questions at the moment, but my feeling that the assumption of the digital platform as an alternative must be considered and really discussed more and more, because now anyone who is not on the digital platform is "not relevant" anymore; this is a reality that we have to accept for the coming years, regardless of what will happen with the pandemic. My belief is that the post-pandemic reality will bring a lot from the pandemic reality itself – and we have to deal with this: the way that we gather, the way that we communicate, the way that we create art, the way that we are critical. So, all of this I think is really essential to be discussed, and this is a very fundamental question when it comes to the concept of the safe haven, or reallocating artists, or putting them in a different reality that is better than the one they are living in.

Michael: This is reminding me of a song by the English band New Model Army, saying "You weren't there"; it's a song that describes the jet-set lifestyle, the person who learns their reality from CNN and was never on the street [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlB11zdsnQY]. This came up towards the end of the conference in our concluding thoughts when Ole Reitov – he now consults to UNESCO – raised the issue around this new consultative forum that we want to establish with the Special Rapporteur at the United Nations on Cultural Rights, the importance of actually trying to integrate grassroots organisations into that high-level platform, so that shadow reports or whatever is produced at that level, a lot of it actually comes from the ground, it doesn't come from the jet-set.

Abdullah: Exactly! Absolutely!

Michael: Tell me a little more about this notion of the narrative because this is always very interesting. In my own country – I'm based in

South Africa – the concept of decolonisation has very much been foregrounded currently. I mean this is a concept that as recently as five years ago was just not on the radar; all of a sudden it is a foreground concept, a foreground conversation. How do we in the developing world grapple with the dominant narrative, how do we introduce different harmonics into that carrier-wave of the dominant narrative, or even significantly challenge the dominant narrative?

Abdullah: Well, I think, Michael, it's more and more two things: the first one that this is a cumulative process; it needs time and reflection and observation, and at least starting to talk about what kind of reality we are considering regarding the post-pandemic order and putting alternity as a key word within what we are producing, achieving and developing; this might be one of the many entry-points regarding this scenario or another. And also arriving at the truth that's everywhere that the whole era of the pandemic in one way or another is really something to observe regarding not only the vulnerability of the safety networks that we assumed existed and they really don't exist – at different levels, from one country to another country – so what kind of mechanisms of protection we consider. And I'm saying all of this because in this case it might be one of the entry-points regarding seeing that all the narratives that used to come from Europe about safety, about protection, really need to be reconsidered. And really there are shitty places like the Middle East, they are lacking everything, or Africa, or India, and we witnessed terrible situations, but at least we were also seeing very interesting and impressive coping mechanisms, that they come quicker and faster than what is happening in Europe – because simply, people are living in challenging circumstances for years, so they have to develop a coping mechanism or a resilience mechanism in one way or other. The reality is really complicated, so you need to develop ways or order to survive. I'm not saying that none of the organisations or initiatives that are presenting themselves as experts in dealing with crises [are wrong], but at least there is always this possibility of thinking or reacting maybe in a quicker way rather. So, if we are looking at the whole narrative that used to come from Europe in this regard, or even the States, and seeing really the dysfunctionality of the [developing world] system that happens so rapidly – and suddenly the only way to survive is to shut down everything, it's really something to be considered.

To link this to the whole digital world, which is also something which is coming with an assumption that is produced and is coming from the more developed, or well-equipped facilities from specific countries, it's coming with a kind of narrative terminology and we really need to look at the extent to which the rest of the world is contributing towards this narrative, regarding even the way we organise activities online, what kind of content, what kind of knowledge? This is something I believe is very important, again because this digital world is becoming a kind of alternative for public spaces in the Arab region specifically. If you are going on the ground now, it's not disallowed because of the curfew or the lockdown, but also because these public spaces are totally shrinking or stolen by the government, so the alternative is the digital one, the virtual space to advocate for freedom of expression, for LGBTQI+ community rights, or more unpatriarchal communities. So, while we are doing this, we need to really to make sure what kind of content we are producing in this regard and what is different from the whole world-wide digital narrative. So, again, I am not assuming that there is a ready-made recipe in this regard, but at least we need to bring those questions as an entry-point… Human beings have arrived at a level of ignorance and arrogance that it requires to be revived in a way.

Michael: As the sector has evolved, we've clearly seen that a cookie-cutter approach, where you just replicate a European model elsewhere, is almost bound to fail. If I may, and with respect to the ICORN project, their model is usually based around an agreement with the municipality of the host city, so it's at

municipal level; this is clever, it's designed to fly under the radar of national politics so that foreign policy concerns are not an issue. However, what they've discovered obviously is that trying to replicate this model in the developing world is difficult because the cities either lack capacity, or they are too corrupt to manage a programme like this, or there are other intervening factors that would affect the success of such a project. I mean, they do have an alternative, which is working with local arts organisations, art houses, etc. So that European model – just to use an example – has to shift, and it has to be driven by other considerations.

Abdullah: Yes, Michael. And I think that this is something really that more and more I believe that all these modalities where during the 1990s and the 2020s there is also this assumption that there is more and more stability, it's coming with an assumption that the general situation is a stable situation – and we need to reflect on where we can respond to instability as now the reality is totally unstable, so you need to think about a different model in this regard. If we are talking about 2019, 2020, we were seeing more and more challenges regarding the main question – which comes with many other questions – of Europe as a concept, also what's happening around the world, and in the Arab world with dictatorship coming back again, this is another level of complication. So, what's happening in these states over the previous year is this very extremist right-wing narrative that is terrible – but it comes with concrete things assuming that it provides benefit for the people. So, all of this together is really challenging and part of this, I believe, is how to reinvent organisation, the concept of organisation that is a very important element within the civil society movement, needs to be shifted or reconsidered. Here in the Arab region, currently we find that we keep operating within the same model of the European institution or European organisations and the more we are loyal to this model, the more we are considering governance in a way – but this must be shifted, not changed totally, we don't want to reinvent organisation, but yes we need to reinvent all of the mechanisms we responding to because really we are seeing more shifts towards failed state situations, to stateless countries, so it means that this fundamental structural body [the state] that we assume that by default existed, it's really not any more the case one way or another.

Michael: OK, what we found really interesting in preparing for Safe Havens in Cape Town last year was that there was a whole bunch of – and I have worked in this environment for a number of years, starting in 2012 – we discovered that there was a whole bunch of homegrown initiatives in Africa, of homegrown protective mechanisms and shelter city initiatives etc that we hadn't even known about. Even, us as fellow Africans, we weren't even aware of it, so it was only when we started to look for them then we discovered them. The homegrown nature of these initiatives is of course important because they are ideally adapted, if they are properly conceived, to local conditions. One of them [the Ubuntu Hub Cities initiative] is based on essentially relocating a fellow under the protection of a university so they can continue with their studies within a peer-group [https://africandefenders.org/what-we-do/hub-cities/], so there are different models that have come to the fore; some are more communal [like the Shelter Cities initiative: [https://www.ahrnfoundation.org/]. What's interesting is that Tunis is now on the map as a city of refuge under the Ubuntu Hub Cities programme; Beirut has been mentioned several times; we are of course aware of the problems within Lebanese society such as you need to get your permissions to perform plays – and of course you're a thespian – but what is the view from the Middle East – North Africa on the potential for safe city initiatives or other protective mechanisms within the MENA region?

Abdullah: Well, safe city mechanisms, just realistically, we are too far from it actually. This is honestly my belief, for many reasons, some I have already mentioned: we don't have the legislative environment, we don't have a real

possibility of creating something like this, and also the complexity of the instability that is an ongoing situation, and it wouldn't help. However, more and more we are seeing resilience: alternative on-the-ground initiatives that would like to come in one way or another to fill the gap – the role of the public institution. More and more institutions are coming with engagements with the question of protections: there is a tendency to see how we can provide protections, support – if you are talking about artists and activists – in this regard. And more and more we are seeing an inspiring way of thinking, different ways of tactics, organising, recruitment, working, so all of these impress me. My feeling is that the most important role for this type of initiative is that they stay underground, stay small, or disorganised in one way or another [as in the swarm theory of organising]. The shift towards something more organised, something more mainstream, let's say, it's not potential at the moment and we will lose something while we are doing this because suddenly, they will be in the sights [of the authorities].

Despite the need for such important initiatives, to grow up, to become bigger, I think one of the tactics for staying active is really to keep it small, to keep it informal. But at the same time, I am seeing more and more organisations from the cultural sector that are really interested in engaging with other civil society organisations or initiatives. I believe that one of the key elements that is happening – and we are doing it here in our organisation that I run – is how to consider the whole arts and culture world from the civil society resistance: the more we invest in artists, the more we invest in civil society, and this investment will be the capital for maybe not now, for the next decade. What is really important is to keep remembering that change requires time; meanwhile we have to invest, we have to encourage artists to think about their work, we have to make sure that we are really having conversations with legal advisors, with organisations; the reality now is not to work on changing cultural policies, but working on policies from the bottom to top approach where you can come in with concrete ideas of protections, of organising oneself, but really on a smaller scale, or where you can rediscover homegrown examples or models that can really be applicable in different contexts.

Michael: OK, so you are really talking about building allies in such a way that you are breaking the arts out of its ghetto and integrating it into broader society so that broader society has a stake in it, they are a part of the artistic process, but also that arts and culture becomes critically important to them, that they are key stakeholders in all of this and would therefore rally to defend it, perhaps at election time or also in other circumstances that might arise: some controversial artwork or what have you. Tell me a little bit more about networking. You are talking about using a more informal approach, you fly under the radar, you are not that obvious, perhaps.

Abdullah: It's two things I believe, Michael. The first one is that the new reality is about joining forces; it's not anymore about a solo player who is able to do all the work regardless; now more smaller organisations and this will be the new reality and one of the entry-points to keep working, to cluster around an idea that we would like to do. And this itself comes with a huge need [of] not only other resources but also of other cultures... What could potentially happen now is no longer working in silos, to work between sectors, an intersectoral approach between art and culture and media, or activism, or with legal entities, or even with education, with development. This... will be absolutely interesting and it is needed because all of us are more and more working in grey areas that are really not clear on what is the need, and it's almost multi-layered needs. So, I believe this is one of the interesting things that there is a potential for at the moment, and is really beautiful that is happening more and more organically, here in the region, in the world... And we can really look at this with admiration here in the sector of arts and culture: it is so interesting when you see all these resilience mechanisms that are coming from the arts and culture organisations to respond to the

pandemic and its effects. And part of it was also about joining forces with other institutions or initiatives from other sectors. Here in the region, in Europe, it's really impressive and inspiring in this regard and I think this model needs to be shared with other sectors because I believe it's really about values: we are always working with these values and we appreciate diversity, engagement, participation, and when we need it, concretely speaking, we found it! It wasn't all about preaching.

Michael: Give us some actual examples of this resilience and innovation from your region.

Abdullah: I am the founder and director of an organisation called Ettijahat; we joined forces with two other organisations, Action For Hope and Mophradat, and we come with an initiative called Art Lives [https://ettijahat.org/page/1065]. Art Lives is responding to artists who are hurting, affected by the pandemic by providing two mechanisms of support: livelihood support, and healthcare support. The two initiatives targeted artists in the Arab region by providing an express model of support. It's a small amount of support, it's [a total of] between USD150,000-250,000, but it's coming with total privacy: there's not only no mention of the people who have applied, but at the same time it includes the technicians, the most vulnerable communities, single moms, LGBTQ+ community, or migrants. At the same time, we are having another model of programme: it's a legal support programme that we are partnering with The Legal Agenda, which is an NGO dedicated to providing legal knowledge, support, and advocacy. With this programme we are providing direct support for the artists regarding their documents, regarding their cases if they have any problems. And the whole idea behind it is just to make people remember that artists are around; it's not anymore about petitions, it's not anymore about writing statements, and it's not anymore about knocking at the doors of legal organisations to design things; it's about how together we can generate information, data, looking at individual cases and at the same time trying to create a different environment. And I'm just sharing two concrete examples, but around us here in Lebanon there were hundreds of these cases – and in the world, not just in the region.

Michael: So, are you expecting to see a new sense of community, regionally, develop out of this crisis, has that already started to happen?

Abdullah: I believe so because also the world community – which is a key word in this regard, yes? – this pandemic or this situation encourage all of us to think about the question of engagement with the community and how to achieve this and what's the best format in this regard. I think the lesson itself learned from what's going on and how to enter 2021with some questions to be answered in one way or another. I believe all of us around the world, and in this region, and in this sector, we are not assuming that we are experts in dealing with crisis, and this crisis is really something that is beyond the capacity of all of us, but there is a lot to take with us and there is a lot to reconsider regarding our relation with ourselves, with our communities, with borders, with geography, with the narrative, with the digital, with the arts – but with freedom of expression absolutely, and the network mechanism of protection and safety.

Michael: Political power has been brought into question throughout the period of this rather unusual year because of, in many instances, the very obvious callous disregard for human life being demonstrated by ruling parties across the world. It strikes me however as interesting that there might be some conditions where perhaps new arts initiatives could arise in circumstances where new polities are trying to establish their democratic credentials: in our region, I mean the MENA region, I am thinking particularly of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in Western Sahara, I am thinking of Somaliland on the Horn of Africa, and I'm thinking of Western Kurdistan as well. As I say, these are entities that are trying to establish their legitimacy on the world stage as democratic regimes; it

would behove them to pay attention to arts rights justice; and perhaps for us to start engaging with them and saying "Well, prove your credentials, foreground your artists, celebrate your creatives and give them freedoms and protections."

Abdullah: Absolutely, absolutely! I think it will be one of the really key elements if we are really considering more democratic approaches because I think in this region, the areas you mentioned, one key thing we need is the possibility of imagining a better future, it's so needed, and I believe arts and culture could really play a vital role in this regard. Really, just to accept that what is happening is not a fate; it's so needed nowadays. You can see it in Lebanon or in all the people, the questions they have, the decisions of leaving the country after just one year like this last year. We were honestly Michael just overwhelmed with activities, and then all this excitement about the ["Arab Spring"] Revolution and unfortunately, we have to accept that it didn't work. Why didn't it work? Because we have this dictatorship-mafia regime, it's not one dictatorship model, it's many mafiosos here in this country, yes, in this region.

Michael: You've got the Syrian component, the Hezbollah component.

Abdullah: Exactly! But at the same time, we could do better as civil society organisations, we could think better and adapt and think of different tactics – but again, this requires a lot of time. It's not easy to bring it after such a year for Lebanon; it's as if it's insane on all levels. Really, I believe today we have a responsibility to work – artists, activists – in this region to keep themselves in this sector, not to quit, which will potentially happen a lot because this career all the time is coming with a lot of dialogue but also with a lot of challenges. I believe you are following up on the situation in Egypt with this initiative [the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights] and the arresting of the founder of it [Gasser Abdel-Razek, on 18 November 2020]; it's insane! The whole world is talking about this, meanwhile the regime is just keeping on the same way of arresting people, making statements about charging them as if they are betrayers. This is the reality, this is still happening every day, and while Saudi Arabia was hosting the great G20 Summit [on 21-22 November 2020], they were also keeping activists in jail and investing in the war in Yemen where people are being targeted. This is the reality in this region – and we need to keep investing in "Yes, there is a possibility for a better future – not a perfect one, but at least a better one," and arts and culture in this regard could contribute.

Michael: So perhaps a concluding comment: you are really indicating that some real vision is needed going forward, some real faith in the future, a future that has become uncertain for many societies. One of the things I train in as a journalism trainer is the role of the journalist in transitional societies – and the funny thing is that years ago that would have been developing world countries; now all of a sudden, Europe is a transitional society, the United States is a transitional society. A lot of old certainties have fallen by the wayside and new threats and challenges are arising. So, tell me about vision, what sort of vision is required to move forward in these really destabilised times?

Abdullah: I think the only slightly good thing that is happening nowadays is that we finally arrived at the conversation regarding the vaccine for the Coronavirus, which is something big because at least that is helping us to consider that next year, hopefully, in a specific stage, we will be able to continue moving, gathering, talking. I believe this is a big step for life, for the human race. At the same time, let's remember that it will be the 10th anniversary of all the uprisings in the Arab region, and despite that we have to accept that we did not achieve the Revolution, but we achieved a lot regarding the concept and possibility of change, the idea that people more and more believe or consider that what is happening is not a fate, and there is a slight – or a big – possibility for change is already something big and we need to invest in it. I think we – I am including all activists, artivists,

journalists, civil society members – all the battles for less patriarchal [systems, and for systems] more respecting of minority rights, [for] more inclusive conversations including personal choices is something big in the Arab region.

The general or the political Revolution did not achieve, but the personal Revolutions are taking place, that the engagement with the economic, the engagement with the social, the engagement with gender topics are really taking place more and more, and this is where I can absolutely salute the digital reality because it became a kind of alternative public space. All of this it requires vision and the vision will be something in this regard: we need to consider that what are the lessons that we will take with us from this decade, we are entering another decade where uncertainty is the key word, but uncertainty is a good way really to shake all the structures, the beliefs, the fundamental ideas we have because I think the Earth is trying to tell us that it is tired of us and there is a new need to consider things in a different way, and with less arrogance. So, I believe that again, maybe, this region is full of challenges, but also full of inspiration and resilience, like any other area in the world, like Africa, like India, like Mexico, the whole of Latin America. And this is hopefully a time to reflect on how to achieve something in the coming years.

3. INNOVATION & RESISTANCE: Opposing the Narratives of Cultural Conservatism in South-East Asia

Kathy Rowland grew up in Malaysia, but now lives in Singapore. She has worked in the arts as an editor, producer, and manager for 25 years, starting out running the Australian High Commission in Malaysia's cultural programme, then did an MA at National University of Singapore, writing her thesis on arts policy in Malaysia. She started the pioneering arts media platform Kakiseni (https://kakiseni.com/) in 2000 and ran it for eight years, then started ArtsEquator (https://artsequator.com/), a progressive digital media platform which covers arts and culture in Southeast Asia. She is the lead researcher in a website that archives arts censorship in Malaysia: https://myartmemoryproject.com/censorship/. Kathy hosted the second of Safe Havens 2020's Freedom Talks series, under the title of "Arts and Culture in Southeast Asia: Proxy Wars".

Michael: So, you were looking at "Arts and Culture in South-East Asia: Proxy Wars." Tell me a little bit about first of all, ArtsEquator as well, and how that talk came together and particularly how the concept was framed: what is this concept of "proxy wars"?

Kathy: So ArtsEquator is four years old, I set it up with a partner that I'd worked with for 20 years. We used to run another website in Malaysia, so I'm originally Malaysian, all my family's Malaysian, but I now live in Singapore. And we started out as a website that does a lot of reviewing and covers the arts in South-East Asia, it has a regional focus and we do a lot of reviews because as you know, traditional media is dying, there's no way to monetise it and the first thing that goes is coverage of the arts, whether it's reviews, or in-depth articles, it's just missing or it's gone – and everything then becomes about lifestyle, it becomes commodified and arts and culture is only valuable if someone can make some money out of it. And in South-East Asia and a lot of countries as you will know where there's a repressive state/government, sometimes the media is very tightly controlled, but it's in the arts where, artists get to say things, people will use the elements of the arts to be critical of the government without being overtly critical. A lot of the resistance that happens in repressive societies, sometimes happens in the arts, so our interest was really in covering the arts. I just want to make clear that in Malaysia, what we did was more activist-driven and we were much, much more critical of the government in Malaysia. In Singapore the situation is very different; it's an extremely affluent society and it's very, very well-managed; government prides itself on being

corruption-free – but it's also got some repressive laws, for example, the death penalty, laws on drugs; the media is not as free as in some other parts of the world, in press rankings, Singapore doesn't do very well. So we are limited perhaps in the kind of coverage and articles that I was able to do in Malaysia; in Singapore we have to tread a little more carefully, which is not great, but we try. Our rule is that we go where the artist goes, so if the artist is going to talk about something that is critical of the government, then we go where the art goes, right?

The talk came about, I was invited by the Museum of Movements, and the reason that I came up with this concept of "proxy wars" was I had written quite a bit about art and censorship for the past 15 to 20 years, a lot of the research and work that I've done has been about arts censorship and one of the things that became very clear in South-East Asia – as in the rest of the world – is that often when there is a controversy or there is an act of censorship against some kind of cultural or arts element, it's never only about that painting, it's never only about that play, or that TV show. It's about the values that one part of society wants to enforce on another part of society, so it's a proxy war for nationhood, it's a proxy war for religion, right? So in Malaysia it's happened several times where you have a Muslim artist, let's say, who creates a work and then there'll be another sector of the Muslim community who will rise up and say "This is anti-Islam," so it's a proxy war about who has power to define what is Islam, or who has power to define what is gender, who has power to define what is marriage. So that was why we came up with this concept. I had written an article, there was a photo-exhibition that had come up a year ago in a very liberal arts festival up north in Malaysia and what happened was that two photographs – the exhibition had been on tour for a couple of years – but there was a photograph of a transgender woman, and a gay rights activist, and suddenly both of those photographs were removed. So that is how the concept for the talk came about, and one of the things that I wanted to do was to showcase regional speakers, so we had a speaker from the Philippines, Katrina Stuart Santiago, she's a critic but she's also an activist, we had Sivarasa [Rasia], who is one of the founders of one the oldest Malaysian human rights organisations, SUARAM, which was formed in the late '80s in response to the Malaysian government detaining people without – there's something called the Internal Security Act I don't know if you have it in South Africa, it's a legacy of British [colonial rule]?

Michael: We had it, yes, definitely in the apartheid era, it was a very obnoxious and intrusive piece of legislation.

Kathy: So, we still have it, we have a version of it in Malaysia; it's been slightly changed and a bit more liberalised, but it's still there. And he's a trained lawyer, so when we had the Reformation Movement in the late 1990s, Sivarasa moved from being a civil society activist, he went into being in opposition politics and he's now an opposition member of parliament, so he came with the kind of legal background. T. Sasitharan is in his sixties, he's the grand old man of Singapore theatre, he's kind of been lionized by the state in that he's received the Cultural Medallion Award, but he always was and remains a very vocal critic of the way in which in Singapore, the arts are very much supported by the government in terms of grants, there is millions and millions of dollars that goes into infrastructure, but then he argues that that can also be a form of control, as there is this dependency on the state for funding, which can in turn determine what works are made and presented .

Michael: This is paying the piper to call the tune.

Kathy: Yes, so that is one of the tools used to control or censor the arts. Ann Lee has just finished her Ph.D.; she's Malaysian but has spent a long time in Indonesia and her Ph.D. looked at a very popular Indonesian TV show, it's almost like a kind of Saturday Night Live sketch where it's a satire on a TV new

programme and they have all these characters that play ministers, and it's really hard-hitting. So, she talked about that and also she looked at memes, the way that memes critical of the ex-Malaysian Prime Minister [Najib Razak] … he is accused of scamming the country out of billions of dollars [his party, in power for 61 years since independence was toppled in 2018, and in July 2020, he was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment]. Ann looked at the way that one artist, Fahmi Redza, created some memes to criticise the then-Prime Minister, but then it became replicated by everyone, so it's almost this Spartacus moment because the government tried to stop him, but then thousands and thousands of people copied and recreated the meme that he'd created so there was no way to catch anyone because everyone was posting it. So that was how the talk came about.

Michael: OK, it's useful I think to take a regional perspective and not to get stuck in a national paradigm – I find that distinct problem in South Africa, and in many other countries, is that the narrative tends to be very nationally-bound, and then by default or design, winds up being nationalistic.

Kathy: Yes, and one of the things that came out if that talk was the fact that actually we have so much to learn from each other, and also, there is a need for countries to speak up in support of artists across borders, so that Indonesian artists should be speaking out in support of Singapore artists, and so on.

Michael: So, this proxy wars concept, essentially you are saying that there are cultural wars being fought which are tied into battles for dominance in different spheres of life – and that art becomes kind of the whipping-boy if you will, a signifier of a broader conflict.

Kathy: Exactly. And often it's a safe environment: what I mean by that is that when you attack artists and when you attack the arts sector, the impact for example on the economy, the impact on social relations, is slightly more contained because the arts are anyway quite a small sector of broader society.

Michael: So, it's seen as a weak target.

Kathy: Yes, it's weak but there's a lot of high value because it also enjoys a high profile: if you attack an artwork then the chances are that the newspapers will cover it often – and it's not just the local newspapers, the international media will be very happy to run an article that fits in, because there is also kind of an East-West narrative that "Oh, it's another Asian country that's suppressing artists," so then we make the international news. And at the same time, in the local context, those groups that are attacking the artists gain a lot of traction and they can emerge potentially as heroes because, "Look, we are protecting the sanctity of heterosexual marriage," for example, or "We are protecting family values" when they attack an artwork that is supportive of, let's say, LGBTIQ rights.

Michael: We've heard a lot at Safe Havens about the infiltration into the human rights field of cultural activists who come from a very narrow cultural perspective, in fact are trying to insert a kind of cultural dominance and are claiming a human rights narrative while in fact pushing a bigoted or very closed and exclusionary rather than a diverse or diversity agenda. Could you maybe talk a little about that?

Kathy: I have seen that happen… I am trying to think of concrete examples…

Michael: You are saying that people who attack these artists come out looking the heroes, as cultural defenders in fact, as defenders of cultural rights whereas in fact they are suppressing cultural rights.

Kathy: Yes, and I agree that you will find these groups that really when you take everything away, what they are trying to do is they are trying to suppress speech. They have learned the language of the Left, so they will use the same framing of their cultural rights are being threatened, their cultural rights are being

infringed by someone else. So there is a replication and a kind of borrowing of the language, and not just the language but the techniques of the Left in trying to push a very narrow, conservative agenda. One example in Malaysia is that what we've seen over the past 15 years is the rise of what I call the "citizen-sensor." So, it used to be in the 'Sixties or 'Seventies, 'Eighties even, that when a work was censored, the censoring authority used to be from the government, so it might be either City Hall or the Home Minister. What began to emerge in the 1990s was that plays, for example, would be given the licenses by the authorities whether it's City Hall or the police or whoever, the show would open, and then what you would have is that you would have an audience member who would watch it and then be offended and would then marshal some kind of public outcry against the show. So that was one form that began to emerge. Another was that people, groups would not even see the show; they would just, based on publicity material, take offense to one element of the show and then they would form into these kinds of unnamed, anonymous "majorities." They would claim the power of the majority and say, "We are speaking on behalf of everyone else."

Michael: It's sort of a virtual lynch-mob.

Kathy: Yes, and it's very hard because it's quite clear for us as artists that when you are being suppressed by the government or the state or the Censor's Board or whatever, you have the moral high ground because you are the small artists making work and there's the big state, the big guys are trying to stamp you out, right? So, your narrative is very clear [but] when you're an artist and what you're face with is a citizen group, your argument changes, right, because suddenly you may kind of appear to be the elitist that doesn't really care about how people feel; it's the audience or the public who're upset with you; it's not power that's upset with you.

Michael: Right, so it's a much more diffused and slippery enemy because also the rules of engagement are not defined by law, they're also not defined by conventions of debate, academic or other conventions, so you tend to get this evolution of a kind of kangaroo court mentality in which there are no real rules of play, and people can get their careers and reputations and lives badly damaged by this sort of campaigning.

Kathy: We'd had in Singapore a couple of cases where there have been these Facebook groups that name themselves after things like 'family values', I can't say for sure because we don't know who they are, we don't know if it's two people or 500 people because that's the whole thing, it's anonymous.

Michael: And that's part of the problem, yeah.

Kathy: But it speaks with the authority of the masses, I mean that's the language it uses, it appropriates the language of the majority. And one of the things that's recurrent here is that there's a strong Christian rightish evangelical movement that has been very vocal against, the LGBTIQ movement. So there was a very big case – this was quite funny – a couple of years ago there was a hullabaloo over a children's book called And Tango Makes Three [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uOXUCiDE-s], and it's a children's picture book about an actual set of male penguins in a zoo somewhere that paired together and adopted a little baby penguin and started looking after it, so they form a family unit. This was a charming book, but the National Library received a complaint, and they removed the book and I believe destroyed the book. This became public knowledge and there was a huge, huge outcry about it but in that case, it was interesting because it was done at the behest of a member of the public saying "This work offends me."

Michael: And a single member of the public. So, the balance between what is the actual national interest in terms of the interests of the National Library in ensuring that is the repository of the knowledge produced in society, which is a mass mandate, and the one single person, on the basis of their claimed

offense, can actually have a book destroyed, have a work destroyed and taken out of the public repository. That is the real danger here.

Kathy: Yes, and I can't tell you the number of times that there have been shows, there've been artists, there've been exhibitions that faced controversy because of one single unnamed complaint.

Michael: There's a complete lack of balance in how we as artists are able to respond to this, but also in how the authorities respond as well. They seem to be, the saying is, "Acting like a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking-chairs," they jump at the slightest provocation without knowing whether there is any worth to the actual complaint.

Kathy: Yes, and to me it's also about how disempowered artists are in general. Even though there is so much money that is pumped into the arts here, I think really that in a lot of our societies, the artists and arts are undervalued, or we're seen as troublemakers, or we're seen as something that is dispensable, and that our words and our opinions don't carry that much weight; it's an imbalance of power.

Michael: Well, there's a bit of sleight-of-hand being practiced here by many authoritarian regimes, and that is that on the one hand they are completely dismissive of the arts, treating them as borderline prostitutes and underworld, demi-monde characters – and yet on the other hand the arts is one of the first sectors that gets attacked by these authorities who claim that these arts are completely unimportant. Which actually says that there is a recognition of the power of the arts that they don't actually admit to in public.

Kathy: Yeah, I think there's definitely fear, because in a way, artists speak truth to power, right? And I was talking about why we set up ArtsEquator as well, it is because in societies where you can't say a lot directly, it's in the arts where you can use different kinds of tools, metaphor, and satire to speak to the public and also to speak to those in power. In Singapore, it's kind of interesting because there's both this sense of wanting to harness the arts to build up Singapore's international reputation – and there's a lot of money that's gone into it and ArtsEquator has benefited as well from grants from the government – but at the same time, there is a fear that the arts cannot be controlled, right, so there are attempts to control it.

Michael: Tell me a little bit about this East-West narrative you mentioned earlier. The rise of Trump and the rise of China, it's lead to this... attempt to recreate a bipolar world in which two big ideas are supposedly contesting each other, whereas there seems to be a drive to deliberately misunderstand the other, to not accurately represent the other. You mentioned your colonial-era laws, and that is another aspect of this: in the developing world, a lot of the laws that we are saddled with are in fact colonial-era laws and they are claimed by the new liberation parties or the new post-independence parties as their own, quite bold-facedly appropriating colonial laws and perpetuating a colonial mindset. So, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that East-West dynamic.

Kathy: Just to clarify, I was talking about something a little different. When we had our internal meeting with the panellist to prepare for Save Havens, one of the things we wanted to do is we wanted to avoid falling into that kind of common narrative that sometimes occurs in the freedom of expression community internationally, that in the East there is a lot of suppression of free speech, and there's no freedom of expression, and there's no individuality. We wanted to talk about was how artists in this part of the world are very inventive and find ways to either challenge the laws directly, or find ways to subvert it, or be empowered in the ways in which we've addressed these attacks on the arts.

Michael: Are you saying that the Western donor and human rights realm tends to take a rather monolithic view of circumstances within Asia more broadly, or South-East Asia?

Kathy: Yeah, I've had that experience just in conversations when I've met with donors and funders internationally. I've worked in cultural policy and cross-cultural management for the past 20 years; it's changed a lot, I think a lot of the human rights activists and the grant-givers – I'm talking about the Western ones – are much more informed, they understand the nuance, but yes you will still find that there is this lack of understanding. It happens also because South-East Asia is so small compared to East Asia, South Asia, and we're kind of an unknown; people are more familiar with what's happening in China for example, so the diversity of the populations in Southeast Asia, in terms of class, in terms of access, in terms of how empowered they are versus how not empowered they are, I think those voices sometimes get lost, and so there is this sense of "Poor South-East Asian artists," [whereas] that's not just our story. Our story is also one of being empowered and being challenging – of course we need the support internationally. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying, coming from South Africa?

Michael: Well, we do tend to feel that we're at the edge of the world at times. The ameliorating factors are that number one we have one of the strongest economies in Africa, and secondly what you could call the Mandela Effect, because of the struggle against apartheid which created probably one of the largest civil society movement globally to oppose apartheid. But still we feel that we're on the edges and also that our narratives even though they are supposedly well-known because of the anti-apartheid struggle. When I receive foreign university students here, you realise that the nuances have been completely missing in their education, there's entire ethnic blocs here of whose existence they are completely unaware, they are completely unaware of those social dynamics. I was reading a book recently called Forgotten Wars on the Second World War in South-East Asia.

Kathy: Tim Harper and Christopher Bayly; it's one of my favourite books! It's one of my favourite books, Forgotten Armies and the second book, Forgotten Wars.

Michael: I haven't read the sequel, but it just opened up a whole field of knowledge to me about, again the dominant narrative… I have my own theory as a historian that in fact the Second World War starts and ends essentially in China and Asia, so it's essentially precipitated by the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 because this draws in the US in support of the Guomindang, so Pearl Harbour is in response to that – which of course Americans will very seldom admit to – and then I believe the whole grand cycle closes out with the independence of Indonesia and the coming to power of the Communists in China in '49. But when you start to reframe things like that you start to give due agency to [smaller countries]. I'm just saying what books like this do – and of course our definition of creatives as Safe Havens of course includes writers and academics and journalists – these give agency back to these countries in South-East Asia and show how pivotal the struggle in that region was for the Great Powers.

Kathy: Well one of the big unknowns on which we proposed to do a piece with an American website was to talk about the effects of the Cold War on the arts in South-East Asia because of course America was a huge funder of the arts during the Cold War in South-East Asia and had a huge influence… They used arts and culture in some ways to fight the Cold War because of the domino theory, there was a lot of fear that the rest of South-East Asia would fall to the Communists after Vietnam.

Michael: And you also had the support for very repressive but supposedly free regimes such as that of Park [Chung-hee] in South Korea [over 1963-1979], those countries right on the frontlines, and I count Chile under [Augusto] Pinochet and South Africa under P.W. Botha in the same sort of set, where the West supported these really obnoxious regimes and claimed that they were in fact free by comparison to Communism.

Kathy: Well, as you know, Indonesia is still

dealing with the fallout of Western support for Sukarno [1949-1967], the ramifications of which are still felt. Before I forget, when we are talking about East and West the other thing that we must be very conscious about is to not fall into this narrative of Islam and majority-Muslim countries being repressive because again that was something we did not want. Although of course we are all in Singapore, in Malaysia, in Indonesia, dealing with a resurgent politically fundamentalist Islam and it has a *huge* impact on the way that we practice art, but we also didn't want that to be the take-away for everyone, because in Singapore for example, and even in Malaysia, the evangelical Christian movement is big, and it's powerful, and it can also be repressive.

Michael: And obviously we've seen in Myanmar and in Sri Lanka – yeah, I've also worked there recently – we've seen Buddhism weaponised in ways that are supposedly counter-intuitive to its actual religious precepts. So, I think that needs to be put into the same basket of this drift towards a more authoritarian… antagonism between religions, rather than saying that there's merely a threat from extremist Muslims; extremists of all sorts are problematic to the arts… What is your feeling about protective mechanisms for the arts South-East Asia, do they exist, are they starting to spring up, are they evolving, are they networking, what's the current state of play?

Kathy: I think that artists are now a little bit savvier about knowing their rights and forming stronger bonds with civil society groups, so you will find that in Malaysia, and even more broadly speaking, in Indonesia, Thailand, although the governments there can be quite repressive and controlling, what you have there is a very activated arts community that has strong legal defence or civil society movements, in those three countries. In Singapore it's slightly different: In my experience when I've read and witnessed artists being attacked by civil society groups or with the state coming down on arts groups, I've not myself seen a corresponding civil society [or] legal groups that have come to the defence of the artists, so that needs to be strengthened in Singapore. But definitely yes in the three countries that I have mentioned, and in the Philippines as well, it's emerging.

Michael: So, the possibility of, let's say, an actual city of refuge being established in South-East Asia, is that possible? A safe residency for artists within the region who are being threatened?

Kathy: Yes, it could happen [but] I don't know at this point whether the kind of attacks that have been on the artists would warrant them actually; it doesn't feel as if their lives are in danger, a lot of the time now there's legal harassment or threats of lawsuits.

Michael: We have of course seen the murders of bloggers in Bangladesh; people like Mai Khoi from Vietnam have had to essentially to into protective residency in New York; so, it's differentiated by circumstance.

Kathy: Things may change because in Thailand there are all these really big demonstrations against the military and royalty, right, I know that there are artists and arts groups that are at the forefront of that. And it may be that if the military in Thailand comes down very aggressively that might arise, and of course what's happening in Hong Kong [anti-government protests which started in June 2019], maybe in the Philippines because [President Rodrigo] Duterte is a law unto himself… so I can imagine if he turns his attention on the arts more specifically, it might be more dangerous.

Michael: Winding [up] our circle a little bit and talking about the rise of global populism – which we've again dealt with quite substantively in previous Safe Havens – now we've had the fall of Donald Trump which is a huge relief to many people, but [Jair] Bolsonaro in Brazil and [Narendra] Modi in India are potentially far more dangerous personalities because they lack the checks and balances that are imposed on the likes of Trump; they pretty much are laws unto themselves; you mentioned the Philippines as

well. Could you talk about the status of populism within South-East Asia and maybe a little more broadly within Asia, is it becoming problematic?

Kathy: Um, yes, the clearest examples of that have been in Malaysia because Malaysia has been going through several changes of government over the past few years and one of the ways these changes have happened is that politicians have really... created emotional appeals to people's insecurities, emotional appeals to people's fears, and [have] then [been] feeding on that, and that has created this rise of populist leaders that use methods of incitement against smaller groups to win power and to stay in power. I am finding it a little difficult to find parallels because in Thailand you have this push back against the military and the King and that feels like quite a hopeful moment, but definitely in Malaysia, it's kind of quite clear.

Michael: And perhaps to close off, I noticed the donation appeal on your website, the impact of this pandemic on the arts. Of course, most theatres have closed and some of them are not going to reopen because of this crisis. Has the arts community kind of pulled together to protect itself, has it come up with sustainability initiatives in this period.

Kathy: Yeah, a lot of it goes according to how wealthy the governments are. In Singapore we have so far been quite lucky because the government has stepped in with a lot of subsidies and special grants to support the artists, so the arts community here has been badly hit, but relative to what's happening in the rest of South-East Asia, we can't complain. But the impact here will be that we are losing a lot of talent, actors who have spent years and are highly qualified in the arts are leaving the arts sector to move into other industries because their income has gone down to zero, so we're losing that next generation of artists and arts managers. In Malaysia and Thailand and other parts of South-East Asia, I know personally of people who are working as delivery men and who are delivering groceries, delivering food; I know a senior artist in Malaysia who was talking to me about applying for grocery vouchers. So it's not just a question of the impact on the arts, but a question of the impact on individual artists and how they are going to find their next meal – it's devastating.

4. "TRYING TO SURVIVE LIKE PLANTS"

The rise of the murderous neo-Fascist regime of ex-military officer Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018 has had a chilling effect on the arts, culture – and broader society – of the country in a manner that should arguably be of greater concern to human rights activists than the twilight days of the exiting Donald Trump administration in the United States. Leo Moreira, who was unfortunately not able to participate in the Spanish-language sub-hive of Safe Havens 2020 on "Temporary Relocation in Latin America" nevertheless emailed us some provocative thoughts on the situation, which will then be explored in detail by Brazilian journalist Nayse Lopez:

I could give you a perspective from inside of Brazil in this tragic moment of our history. I am really sorry for my internet connection, but maybe that speaks more about our situation than myself. It's a symptom of how precarious and difficult being an artist during the collapse of our democracy.

I had prepared myself to talk about that crossroad where we, Brazilian artists, are right now. And I say crossroad using a term from Brazilian mythology – this place where the past (our history being stolen), the present (our attempts to survive) and the future (also stolen from us) meet. From one side, we want to escape from here and look for other ways of surviving, since the black, queer, and arts people (I'm included in the last two) are the frontline of the attacks in this "war." From the other one, there's the wish to stay and be part of the revolution that is needed (I know how naïve this sounds).

I was not ready to give any answers, but those

are some questions I'd liked to have raised during our meeting: how Europe can assume their responsibility in this historical process we are living now? How can we think of forms of supporting Brazilian artists (that are being attacked, censored, neglected and are starving right now) without re-enacting the colonial process? How could that support be directed to artists in their local places and how not to box them in "exoticism"?

Before, I've used the war metaphor, but I don't like that [anymore]. I prefer the "vegetal" metaphor. Now, I can tell you, we are trying to survive this incompetent, homophobic, violent government like plants. That is: we are not able to move, but we are growing, occupying, looking for gaps and spreading our seeds wherever there's any square of fertile soil. That's why being part of the conversation (despite my shyness) seemed very important to me. That kind of meeting and the process of "thinking together" is the only fertile soil available nearby. Again, I am really sorry and frustrated for not being able to be in the conversation.
But I hope this is an open door for a future collaboration.

5. BLACK GENOCIDE & "THE BUBBLE": The Arts in Neo-Fascist Brazil

Nayse Lopez is a journalist and curator based in Rio de Janeiro. Since 2001 she has been curator of Festival Panorama http://panoramafestival.com/o-festival/?lang=en and since 2005 she has also served as its artistic director. She created and directed the project www.idanca.net, the educational project Entrando na Dança https://www.facebook.com/entrandonadanca/ and the arts residency programme coLABoratorio. She is a guest curator and speaker at several festivals and theaters in Brazil and abroad.

Michael: Can you tell me a little bit about the intersection between journalism and creating; is that an unusual intersection to sit at?

Nayse: Not really; I think a lot of curators came from criticism and journalism; I think my case is very unusual in the sense that I never left journalism because my work here as a curator is very independent; I never had a job as a curator, all the festivals or events I did, I created myself so I could never let go of my career as a journalist because I needed to have a day-job. So basically, in that sense, you don't see in the performing arts world, for instance, outside countries with very difficult finances for culture like Brazil, South America, Africa, and even in the US. But if you go to Europe for instance, or Asia, if you go to people who are curators, that's their job so they basically can write articles, they can write for various publications, but they don't have a day-job as a journalist, so in that sense, yes, because I always had to keep my job as a journalist. But I think it was good, looking retrospectively, sometimes it was very hard because I've always had this feeling that I've been dividing myself in two very complex work fields, and also because it took a big toll on my personal life because I had to work a full-time job and a full-time job in one life – I was never part-time journalist and I was never a part-time curator – so when I became a mother seven years ago, it was even harder to juggle so I had to slow down both jobs a bit... but that's how it is.

And for me the thing that is interesting about the intersection and what we were discussing at Safe Havens is that I think the work of a curator as I believe it should be done, it's very similar to the work of a journalist, especially an editor like I am, I have been for 30 years now, because I think our job basically is to find stories and find people that are telling stories and relating to the world, and working in some way directly or metaphorically ore very abstractly on the world and putting the stories together. I think that the narrative of the festival, the dramaturgy of the festival works in a very similar way of how we do a TV show, a documentary for instance. So, in my experience, it was very informative; both worlds have been very informative of each other. And that has to do with a lot of the things we said before [in Safe Havens] because it's very easy for the arts curator,

especially one dealing with very experimental, very radical work like I have been, to isolate ourselves in our bubble of avant-garde artists, and galleries, and museums, and theatres, and black boxes – and I could never do that because I was connected to the world because I was a full-time journalist all the time, and I was either reporting on the news itself, which I did for a long time. In the last 20 years I did more feature TV, I was doing thematic shows about culture mostly; I was doing a feminist debate show, a weekly show for eight years, so I could never disconnect from reality because I had to decide what they are going to talk about so in this sense it was very good for me to have these two careers in parallel. I still think it's very hard and I would love, now that I'm older, to have a proper job as a curator that I could only do for a while, but I can't do that here in Brazil, that's impossible, but eventually if I decide to go to Europe, I can. But it's always hard to leave in the sense that my mother is very old and she lives here... It's hard, but for me it's interesting to see how the window into reality that journalism has provided to me has helped me as a curator, not being in castles, insular curatorship, and I know many curators who are.

Michael: It appears that journalism helps ground your artistry, your curatorial work in a broader social context. Does either profession take the lead in how you interpret the world as an individual, and a creative, and a journalist? Or is it a constant dialogue?

Nayse: It's a hard answer because I don't think I can point out when I'm reading the world in such a way because I'm a journalist – and I was a reporter for many years, and an editor for so many years; I'm going to have a 32-year career this year, so it's three decades of work – so I would be lying to you if I said "I got this thing from this perspective and I decided to write about this thing because of my work as a curator," or the other way around, "I chose these works or I chose to work with this artist because of my work as a journalist." I think they are just two parts of the way I had grown to read the world, because of course I started very early. I make the joke that I'm old but my first job as a reporter, I was 18. So, the thing is that I kind of became an adult concerning myself with these questions, about how the world was functioning, especially in cultural terms because I always worked with cultural journalism. So, I think how one addresses the world is really the result of three decades of doing both, three decades of journalism and two decades of curating. And I think here it is also related to privilege, Michael, because as white people in countries where white people are the privileged ones, we know so well how different it would be if we were black. So in my case, although we never had apartheid as an official policy like you had to deal with in South Africa, we have a real-life apartheid that is so clear, that is so violent. We are dealing in the last week with the last scandal of my country which is because the security guards of Carrefour, the French supermarket chain, they killed a black man [João Alberto Silveira Freitas] inside the supermarket, they beat him to death in five minutes until he choked and died. And that was the night before the Black Consciousness Day, which is November 20, so it was a huge scandal... it was an outrage of black celebrities, of human rights activists, and a lot of people. But you go to the comments of white people – because you see their photos in Facebook pages, in the news outlets – and you see how far we are from any sense of humanity towards black people here because the comments are "He was not killed because he was black; he was killed because he was creating confusion, or because he was involved in fighting with some of the employees." But of course, if it were me or you that was shouting at the employees...

Michael: It wouldn't have happened.

Nayse: We will be at [the] maximum, arrested, probably not even. So, the idea that we live in this country that being black and being white is so different, in my case because I was born in an upper middle-class family, my father is Spanish, my mother is Brazilian, and I was raised in schools where all the time I had this awareness. Also, my point of view is very informed from privilege because it's

impossible to really step into the shoes of someone who had a very different life. I have friends who are curators and who are black and who came from very poor realities that of course look at the world completely differently from me also, so I think it's a very important exercise all the time. I think the journalistic work has helped me broaden my view of the world and not stay stuck in my little "I'm a curator, and I'm sophisticated" kind of world that we can so easily go into because I do spend a lot of time speaking to very highly educated and clever people and it's very easy to protect yourself from the world that doesn't understand what you're doing. So as an artist or even as a curator or a producer, you can easily protect yourself and just be within your world, and I think most festivals like ours have this risk – and my festival is a little different. For a long time, I would... go to shows that we got a lot of international money to pay for, and you would go to the theatre and there were 200 people, and you know all 200 people who are in the theatre. And that means that you are totally in "the bubble" and you cannot reach out to the reality around you.

Michael: It's funny that you use that term because I've always used it. I'm also a journalist by trade, also 32 years in the trade which is interesting, and I've always spoken about this combine between the arts, media, and politics as being "the bubble" which is often very disconnected from the grassroots.

Nayse: Totally. And in our case, it's more because we live in countries where, by definition, the elite is in the bubble because it's really set apart either physically, politically, or militarily from the rest of the world.

Michael: South Africa and Brazil are the two most unequal societies on the planet, and still, as you indicated, ethnically or racially differentiated.

Nayse: Yes! So, in the 13 years that the Workers' Party was in the government [2003-2016], it became a bit better, so we had like 40-million people that came out of poverty, but of course we went way back with the last two governments, and this government is a Fascist, Nazi kind of government: they hate black people... But this situation we've just had with this black guy being beaten to death, the president's reaction was to say, "There is no racist in this country, and the people who are doing manifestations about it and riots about it are garbage." So, there is no thread of empathy, there is nothing.

Michael: Could you maybe compare this moment in Brazil's current trajectory to the George Floyd moment in the United States earlier in the year; are there similarities?

Nayse: I think that the George Floyd movement, the Black Lives Matter movement became so strong internationally, and to a degree for Brazilian young black people who are connected to the internet, who can understand what happened, who are educated, that was really like a steppingstone, so the level of the discourse about that was more spread on the internet. We don't have huge riots going on: some black people went to manifest in front of Carrefour branches all over the country, but it was not very violent; they set one in São Paulo on fire, but really a small fire. But of course, the Brazilian TV, the media treats the George Floyd protests in the US as a manifestation of a civil rights movement and protest – and called the Brazilian equivalent "vandalism," because of course the Brazilian TV serves the elite. It's very clear the difference in the discourse which is the same as the discourse we had in 2013 when really, we had huge riots on the streets against the government and against the World Cup being brought here when people were dying of hunger and we had this huge, billion-dollar event that was only bringing in money to a few rich people, and also those protests were called vandalism, all the time. And it helped this Fascist government because it helped create this atmosphere that Brazil was out of control and we needed a strong military kind of government to take it on. There's a similarity in the sense that there is a turning-point; I don't think the black community here in Brazil is so silent anymore,

but we have a – I am not an expert in the black civil rights movement in the US or here – but I've been reading some people who are very knowledgeable about this and most intelligent people who write about it and study this black history in Brazil say two things that are very interesting. One is that the importance of the black church for the black movement in America is very clear since the 'Sixties, but now in Black Lives Matter was very fundamental: if you look at the places where the riots were bigger where they were better organised, they have a lot of connection with the black church, with the Baptist Church, with the Presbyterian Church. The black communities are very well rooted in the religion and it's a religion that deals with civil rights, there's a tradition, since Reverend Martin Luther King and all that.

In Brazil, we have a huge, huge, huge evangelical [movement], what we call the New Pentecostal churches, they control the country basically, the control the country politically, they have the biggest number of congressmen submitted to them, they control a lot of cities – my city, we have elections this Sunday and the actual mayor of Rio de Janeiro [Marcello Crivella] is a bishop of the worst of those churches [the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God], he's trying [for] re-election, there's a chance he will win [just before the end of his term, he was arrested on 22 December on bribery charges]. But to say that here the churches are the equivalent of the churches in the US that deal with the black community, here they are very white, very conservative, very racist, very homophobic. We have a strong religious force here that is against the riots, basically. Black people don't see themselves in this community, and if they join these churches, they are not received with this atmosphere of "Let's fight together for our rights," but the contrary; it's a very conservative environment. The other thing is that although the black communities in the US who respond for most of the poor and most of the unschooled population, together with the immigrants, mostly the Latino community, here the difference is more radical because the public school system is very bad in Brazil. So basically, if you look at the data on black lives in Brazil, it's really, really astonishing: in the US they have one George Floyd and all the world goes [on about it]; here, we are kind of numb because we've become accustomed to being killed by the police force; the entire police forces in Brazil, kill about 60 black men a day!

Michael: Joh! Wow!

Nayse: The last numbers we have from 2018, they were released earlier this year, show that we had over 66,000 killings in Brazil in one year.

Michael: These are police killings?

Nayse: These are killings in general, but most of these killings are made by police forces. Our police forces, the Brazilian police forces, if you combine the numbers of different states, is the [largest] killing institution in the world; there's nothing that kills more than Brazilian police if you take the numbers and compare to any other police force – and of all these killings, 78% are black males. Amnesty International calls it a black genocide, so we live in the conditions of a black genocide every day. And that's one of the reasons, I mean, one very good writer who is now in exile because he was menaced a lot by the people who follow this president, he lives in Portugal now... and he wrote a very strong text about the killing, about the Carrefour thing. People were like, "Why are not all the Carrefours on fire? Why aren't black people destroying all Carrefours like they did in the US?" And he just wrote a very nice post on his Facebook that here in Brazil, people don't make it back from going grocery shopping; would they come back from a protest? That's the basic difference: there's a feeling in the US that you might get arrested at a protest, you might get beaten in a protest, but there's a general feeling that you'll survive the protest; here if you are black, you are not sure you are going to survive going to the supermarket. So how can you ask people to mobilise themselves and go to protest? In that sense we are still very much a slave country, and we are dealing

with this heritage of racism and slavery very slowly.

Michael: We'll get on to decolonisation and those sorts of things later, and the whole Bolsonaro state of politics in Brazil, but I am just curious about the position of LGBTIQ people at this time because I am seeing a lot of attacks on that community and of course entities that protect and support them.

Nayse: Brazil is a huge country, and we are the biggest in a lot of things [including] bad statistics, so what happens now is that we are the country that kills more transgender people in the world, the most killings of transgender people in the world happen here. On the other hand, the artist that is most listened to and viewed on YouTube and Spotify in Brazil is a transgender artist, so it's a very complex country to understand. But the LGBTIQ people came a very long way because 20 years ago, they couldn't do anything, they couldn't use their names, absolutely no laws protected them, they could never dream of having a public servant job or going to the military or anything – and we have all of that nowadays, it's possible for them to go to the military, it's possible that they become a school teacher, it's possible that they are a Congress person – we now have some of them, not a lot, we just had city council and mayors' elections last two Sundays... and we elected for the first time 25 transgender people around the country, which of course is nothing if you think that we have over 6,000 city councillors around the country in different cities, but we never had one some years ago, we now have 25. The most voted city councillor in this election two weeks ago was a black transgender woman from São Paulo, from the biggest city; I have no idea how that happened, but it happened. So, they are going through a lot of good steps but it's still very far away from daily life because they still suffer a lot of prejudice. In my festival, when we started producing work by transgender people, I think we were one of the first festivals to co-produce work done by drag queens, by transgender artists, it was very hard. Some companies that were sponsoring us, although we were always very open and they knew what kind of programming we had at the festival, one of the companies said to me, because they had the right to have tickets to shows as sponsors, "Can you please let me know which shows have gay and trans people in because I can't take my director to those shows." This kind of thing is really hard because you see how entrenched in life it really is, and artists who became transgender in the last years, they still face a lot of problems with institutions. It's getting better but it's really slow.

Michael: I don't believe we have a single transgender public representative in the country.

Nayse: But the situation in South Africa goes a bit further and comes a bit back.

Michael: The first time I was in Brazil was in Porto Alegre in 2003 for the World Social Forum and it was there that I learned about the Brazilian police forces and I think a lot of people don't understand the Brazilian police, how they have, I think they call them the Polícia Militar, almost sort of a militarised police force?

Nayse: Yah, we have many types of police.

Michael: Yes, many layers, but they are heavily armoured, they have heavy weapons, tanks. This is the kind of thing that maybe Americans, Europeans would not understand; it's the kind of phenomenon that you would only see in the likes of Russia.

Nayse: It's very colonial, it's a very colonial form because countries that were not colonies, they have what we call daily-life police, they have police that is there if you kill your wife, if somebody robs your shop, if somebody steals your car, so they are dealing basically with investigating crime, that's what the police is for in countries that were not slave-owners. In our countries, the police never had this kind of job; the job of the police in our countries was to protect property, basically, so protect either black people from escaping

because they are property and they are valuable, or protect property being stolen by the people who had no money. So basically, the primary function of the Police in Brazil is military in nature. All over the country, a lot of activists disappear [because] it's like the police have become another army. We have the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, like all countries, they don't deal with safety issues, they deal with protecting the borders, training for an imaginary war with the United States, whatever. And then we have the city police, which is the civil police that every country has, and, in its most basic form, functions as investigators and law-enforcement officers who come to your house if, for instance, you kill your wife – which in Brazil happens a lot, people kill their wives – and they pretend to investigate that; they never do. But then we have the Military Police [which] comes from the security guards of the landowners, that's the origins of the Military Police, so it's a very colonial thing. And it became the main force for security, so basically, they stop cars on the street, they invade communities to look for drug dealers, they do a very in-your-face kind of police work and they basically don't do any investigation, nothing, they're just a force to control and to keep order. It's so clearly about protecting elitists from poor people, protecting property.

It's a huge abyss between what people look for in a police force and what we really have, and that violence – because it's a very violent police force – is in the root of most of the problems we have here in society. And for the artists for instance, they can be very dangerous because they can stop you doing a performance like they did in the last two years – it was unthinkable several years ago, during the dictatorship. I mean during the dictatorship of course it was very common, but after the dictatorship we had 30 years of democracy were basically it was very strange if a policeman would stop you on the street unless you were naked, because it's against the law to be naked, but if you were doing a protest, a political performance or something, you would not be arrested. And some artists just were arrested since Bolsonaro was [put] in place because it kind of entitled these Fascist police to act against the law, knowing there would be a lot of public support for that. So, I think there is an increase in repression and an increase in violence that is enabled by the fact that half the country voted for this project for the country that is clearly defending the dictatorship and defending the military. We have more military men, generals and admirals and these kinds of people, in the government of Brazil right now than we did when we were a military dictatorship, so it's really, really awful.

Michael: This is interesting because you went through this period in which it was post-dictatorship, but they didn't really dismantle key elements that could help re-establish a militarised power.

Nayse: No, and we had another thing that sets Brazil apart from all the other military dictatorships in South America: we had the general amnesty. Because what happened in other parts of South America, the dictatorship was very violent, like Chile, like Argentina, they were taken from power by the Revolution, or at least by an organisation of social forces that forced them out of power; in our country, at some point, we had this general amnesty because at some point the elites of Brazil said "This is unsustainable; we can't go on torturing and killing people like this because it's becoming bad for business, the US is changing, Europe is not turning their eye away from this anymore, so we have to do something." So, it was agreed by right-wing politicians and very rich people who talked to the military and said "You step out, the Right-wing politicians come in and we call it a democracy. We have [a] general amnesty for all crimes committed during the dictatorship – and let's move on." My country has never done any trial about torture – sorry, we had one trial about torture – different from Argentina which had years of trials to put the military in jail for the torture crimes, here we had none, nobody was ever arrested for all the crimes they committed during the dictatorship. Basically, what we had was this under-the-carpet history where we start this fake democracy which still

has the same people in power, because if you look at the Congress we have now, 2020, many of those Congressmen were the Congressmen when the dictatorship was there, or at least are relatives, so there is very little change in the political elite of Brazil, the rich families, the oligarchies, it's all the same.

Michael: There's a very interesting comparison with South Africa as well, because people talk about the huge change in South Africa – but the change is far less dramatic in reality than it appears from the outside. Again, the oligarchy is entirely untouched, it just has a few extra members, a few black members, a few members of colour are now in the oligarchy. The police that we demilitarised at the expense of many millions of Rands – we demilitarised the police – have been remilitarised. Forced evictions, massacres of workers, these types of things have returned to the agenda, and the economy is still in the hands of the same old suspects from back in the day. We also had this weird situation where only one senior officer has been jailed, one for crimes committed under apartheid, not one single person has ever been charged for the crime of apartheid. Our Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that be some 300 prosecutions flow from that process; only one of them actually went forward, and in fact didn't go to trial, didn't go to court, it was in fact plea-bargained behind closed doors and the whole process was shut down – and it was shut down by the African National Congress government in cahoots with the old generals [Michael Schmidt's book Death Flight: Apartheid's Secret Doctrine of Disappearance tells this story for the first time]. And this has now become quite a hot topic at the moment. Tell me a little about the immediate conditions here. Leo Moreira gave us some quite potent things, talking about this crossroads in terms of Brazilian crossroads, where the past (our history being stolen), the present (our attempts to survive), and the future (also stolen from us) … He prefers a vegetative, a vegetal metaphor, saying rather we are growing like plants, looking for gaps, occupying, spreading our seeds in any square of possible fertile soil. Is that what it feels like for you in Brazil as well?

Nayse: I think it's a very good metaphor for the artist's practice now because most of the artists now are completely off the grid of any public support because we always had difficulty in public support for the arts but at least some schemes were there, some projects were there, some laws were there. Most of these projects are now gone, either because the government that took power doesn't believe in them and just decided not to operate them, or because some [state] governments decided just to extinguish them because they don't believe in the public support for the arts. When Fascist discourse wins an election one of the first things that suffers is the arts because one of the axes of Fascism as you know is to decide only one form of proper art should be supported by the state, also very little because the state should not be paying artists to exist, they should be paying schools, and food, and health: that's the main frame of Fascism. So when you take critical thinking and you take art out of the equation of public financing, what you do is you leave it to the market to decide, and in our country, truth to be told, even the Left-wing governments left it to the market to decide on the public sponsoring of art because most of our art sponsoring in the country, museums, festivals like mine, big institutions of art, libraries, cinematheques, all big events of the arts were and still are, when they are, financed using tax law, meaning that a huge company can use 6% of its profit income annually for culture.

Meaning it's public money because it's tax money, but it's decided by private marketing directors, so that is also a very perverse system, it's always been a very perverse system because of course when I go with my festival to ask for money, they would give me some money and if I go back and say "You know what, I decided to present [dancer-choreographer-actor Mikhail] Baryshnikov, Baryshnikov's going to dance from his retirement and he's going to do a big show for 4,000 people," I can get two million more if I put Baryshnikov on the programme because

of course it's about marketing and it's a company and if a company's sponsoring an arts project that will give them a gazillion views on the internet, it's much more important to them than to present an LGBT creator coming from the outskirts of the north-east of the country. So basically, the system for the arts has always been very perverse, but it was in place and some people could develop projects on that system. Now we don't have even that because most of the companies either don't have profits because of the economic crisis we are facing, or some [state] governments stopped their tax-reducing laws, claiming that they have a big deficit, and they cannot afford to have these laws anymore. It's a double problem.

Michael: There's one thing that really intrigues me, because I've worked in Brazil, I've worked in India. It kind of distressed me – and we're all delighted to see the fall of Donald Trump – but it distressed me that Donald Trump's position as this supposed poster-boy for Right-wing populism, that his position completely occluded the danger posed by people like Modi in India or Bolsonaro in Brazil where people forgot it seemed that Trump is a beholden man, there's lots of checks and balances in the US system, that do not exist in Brazil and do not exist in India, and these are to my mind far more dangerous men.

Nayse: Of course. They are far more dangerous because on the one hand our political system is presidential and based on money for campaigns and support from the elites to be a president, and on the other hand, they are far more dangerous because they are sitting on top of countries where – I don't know the figures in India – but in my case, a country where only 30% of the population can read, officially in Brazil we have 13% illiterate people, but that's a lie because if you go and work with people who know about it, they can prove to you that 70 or even 75% of people in Brazil cannot read an article in a newspaper, cannot read a paragraph from a political campaign. They can write their names and if you show them a paper with words they can read, but they don't understand what is written there, so this what we call functional illiteracy in Brazil means a huge amount, a hundred-and-something-million people that are basically only informed by WhatsApp and the internet. They don't even go to portals – that's another discussion – because the way that mobile phones came to our countries provided space for this to happen because they made agreements with these big apps like Facebook, and Twitter, and WhatsApp, and Instagram, where these apps don't take the bandwidth that people pay for; but if they go on the internet, if they go to a proper newspaper for instance, and read the news and click on a video from CNN it will take their bandwidth, the gigabytes that they paid for, so they don't; they only go to the bubble of the social media – and in India, WhatsApp. So we had before the election of Bolsonaro, we had research here that showed that 65% of people said that their only source of news is WhatsApp.

Michael: Wow!

Nayse: So, then you can imagine the size of the hole that we are [in], when a billion people in India and two hundred million people in Brazil inform themselves by WhatsApp. In the US you have a lot of social media influence in the elections as you know but you still have at least journalists in people's lives; we have basically very few here in our lives. So I think it's in that sense most dangerous. And of course, it's important to remember that Trump didn't fall because falling would be for him to lose by a landslide; half of the population of the US voted for this guy, it's not a fall. And here's it's going to be the same: in two years we have elections here and Bolsonaro will be a super-strong contender, even if we manage to make a Left coalition to fight him, there is still a very, very good chance that he can win because I'm sure that half of my country believes in what he defends, believes that women should be at home, believes that black people should know their place, believes that LGBT people cannot be teachers and "make your children gay" and all this nonsense. And I believe with Modi in

India it's exactly the same, so I'm not an optimist, Michael, I'm very, very pessimistic about the next years to be really honest…

We're not going to do the festival this year, because there's no money, there's no logic, the rise of cases of Covid deaths – October was like May, the same numbers, it's really, really strong – so basically, we're going to do an online project where we read books online, I invited a lot of people to go online and just start reading, because this is something I did in my festival, we called it The Embodiment of Text. We did it in public spaces a lot – there's a lot of meanings to that in Brazilian culture, public space readings – and it's a project that is called Do You Have a Minute to Hear the Word? Because it's how the evangelists approach people, like "Do you have a minute for Jesus?" And we use that name to change the Word that is in that case only The Bible, only one book, to give it back to all books. We just go on a square and we read for 12 hours, eight hours, any book that we want. We can't do that now, physically, so we're going to do it online. But then I decided to do it in a way that we can mark the enormity of the Covid tragedy in Brazil so we're going to read it online live, one second for each Covid death that we have in Brazil when we start reading. That means because we have already 170,000 [deaths] today that it would already be 47 hours and 20 minutes of reading. We're going to probably have to do 50 hours straight, so I've started talking to people and artists and friends and partners around the country and around the world, because we need a lot of people. So, we're probably going to need 300 people to read to complete the whole.

6. THE THREAT MATRIX: Creatives' Safety, Security – and Critical Agency

Daniel Gorman is director of English PEN, one of the world's oldest human rights organisations (http://englishpen.org), championing the freedom to write and the freedom to read around the world. English PEN is the founding centre of PEN International (https://pen-international.org/), a worldwide writers' association with 145 centres in more than 100 countries. Prior to English PEN, Daniel was Executive Director of Shubbak (https://www.shubbak.co.uk/), Europe's largest festival of contemporary Arab culture. Daniel is also a co-founder of Highlight Arts, who have organised UK-based international arts festivals, events and projects since 2007. Daniel has written for the Guardian, Irish Times, N+1 and many others. Daniel is a National Arts Strategies 'CEO Community and Culture' 2015 fellow and a British Council Cultural Leadership International fellow. At Safe Havens 2020, Daniel's sub-hive discussed the project done on attempting to end capital punishment in Pakistan by Sarah Belal of the Justice Project Pakistan, No Time to Sleep: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBDD53m8Xng&feature=youtu.be

Michael: It's been very interesting chatting to Fredrik [Elg] about how this ecosystem – which it really is, because it's a living thing and continually growing – how it evolved and what has come to the fore and what is becoming part of the picture, who's come into the conversation. And it's become multi-layered. I think there are two components that are key to this and one is an overarching philosophical debate about the state of play in the word today for the creatives, a broad-spectrum concept of creatives, everything from academics and journalists – I'm a journalist myself by origin; we try not to encourage ourselves to be too creative – right across to film-makers and bloggers and hip-hop artists etc. So that kind of philosophical debate, but then an underlying structural debate, a workshopping, a continual working in best practice, how do we improve things, how do we make sure people don't fall through the cracks, how do we not come in with colonial perspectives, how do we make sure everybody is part of the conversation, and everybody is welcome, and everybody is on an equal footing. So, yeah, it's been really interesting to see how that evolves.

Daniel: Yeah, I think I came across clearly in

the sessions – and I attended most of the sessions in Safe Havens this year, I think there was one I had missed – but the sessions I was in, the openness to dialogue, the openness to criticism, the openness to talking ideas out, with a common purpose of attempting to protect artists in times of risk, was very refreshing. There were some voices who had maybe been there a couple of times who were more familiar with the set-up, but it didn't feel like they were dominant voices, it felt like there was a space, and I think that's really important as you say, to try and open up the space of equality of expression within the Safe Havens framework too, where people who are new to this field and people who have been doing it for a long time have equal space to talk and discuss and question – because I think we need to continue to be questioning what we're doing, and why we're doing it, and how we're doing it.

Michael: Yeah, it's great to have the wisdom, but not to just go blindly forward with that momentum.

Daniel: I think that's right. It's also great not to fall into a rut and I think something like Safe Havens allows us not to fall into a rut of just doing the same thing over and over and over again. I suppose what was maybe slightly challenging was the digital side of it, the fact that it was all online, and you missed those behind-the-scenes conversations. But at the same time I think that was probably outweighed by the fact that people from all over the world could attend and that there was in some ways much more accessibility to Safe Havens. And those behind-the-scenes conversations were happening to some extent within the chat and sending individual messages to people who were there. So it still served its purpose and definitely from my perspective, brought us more connections to individuals and organisations who we haven't necessarily worked with before but whose work we have known of.

Michael: The ecosystem has evolved quite rapidly, I guess. It basically originated in the International Parliament of Writers which was set up to contest the fatwa against Salman Rushdie but also the death threats in the same period against various writers and journalists in Algeria during the very difficult period of the civil war in Algeria. Then that evolved into ICORN and subsequently blossomed out from there. I mean we've now got an academic component in the form of the Arts Rights Justice Academy at the University of Hildesheim in Germany, there are networks of human rights lawyers who have come into the mix and who provide a very vital component of pro bono support in times of crisis. We've obviously tried to foreground artists themselves, put them at the centre of the thing, but then there's this layer of artivists as some people term them, artists who have become activists and who are pursuing particular campaigns around various issues in their jurisdictions or scopes of interest. So it's really interesting to see who steps into the room the next time around. PEN has always been tangentially involved because of PEN International's role within ICORN in terms of vetting applicants to the ICORN Guest Cities network, but it is good to see PEN in the room in a more representative form, not that you stand for all of PEN.

Daniel: I don't stand for all PEN centres, but as you say that infrastructure, and knitting together of different elements of it is really key and I feel that PEN has a role to play in that and it's really great to be part of those conversations. And obviously as you mentioned, PEN International does work with ICORN, but also a number of PEN centres host residencies for writers in times of risk, in various different ways, and English PEN has had a programme of respite residencies for the last few years. And so that's very helpful, but I also think it's critical that we have the space to meet with our peers, talk through our questions, our concerns, our thoughts around what it means to host a residency for someone who is undergoing threats or violence or risks, and how do we not duplicate the work that others are doing, how do we make more of a holistic infrastructure where each of us is contributing towards the same shared aim rather than each of us working somehow in

competition with each other or somehow potentially leading to duplication of efforts – which isn't helpful to anybody. And also at the same time, just knowing what's out there because we do get approached for our residency by people who would not be eligible for it, so just having an understanding of the other opportunities that exist is incredibly helpful to us, and Safe Havens is I suppose a by-product can provide that.

Michael: Ja, I found that the fluid network form on the one hand, but also developing this peripheral vision where you're looking at cross-cutting issues, you're looking at LGBTIQ issues, you're looking at… country scenarios that are severely problematic to the creative arts, but also individual circumstances because of particular local quirks or what have you, cultural contestations etc. And to be able to say, "Well, something's popped up on my radar; it's not my thing but it's your thing," and to pass it along and to try and board over the cracks so that nobody falls through the floor.

Daniel: I think that's totally right, thinking through where something's appropriate for us and where it's appropriate for someone else to lead on – with the main aim, the main focus being safety and security of artists. So having the space to come together once a year is incredibly helpful for that.

Michael: Tell me about – because I sat in on the alternate session – your session with Sarah [Belal] on the Pakistani project looked very interesting. I've done some work on Pakistan, but I haven't been there yet, I've worked in India and elsewhere in the region, but Pakistan is an exceptionally complex society, also because it's one of only two countries in the world that really has – the other one being Ethiopia – this really strange structure of ethnic federalism that in some way is a driver of conflict. It's designed to be a control mechanism, but it has inherent explosive elements built into its fibre, I guess. Tell me a little about Pakistan and the discussion you had.

Daniel: Well, the discussion that we had didn't drill down into local contexts as much; it was more looking at the work of the organisations and the individuals that we were speaking to, and in Pakistan we were very lucky to have with us Sarah Belal from JPP, Justice Project Pakistan [https://www.jpp.org.pk/]. They campaign on behalf of those most at risk within the judicial system in Pakistan - they are primarily prisoners on death row. And what I find very interesting about them and I've been lucky enough, not through English PEN but a previous organisation, Highlight Arts [http://highlightarts.org/], the one I mentioned earlier on, did a number of collaborations with JPP over the years because as an organisation, JPP, is a legal NGO but they believe very strongly in the power of arts and Sarah I think Sarah said "Looking at ways to work with the arts to change the course of public opinion, and seeing them almost on the same level as their work in the courts themselves." So they have developed a huge number of very interesting collaborations with arts partners in Pakistan and internationally to try and draw attention to miscarriages of justice and the fact that the death penalty is ongoing in Pakistan. And I found that really fascinating just to think through why is it that hey as a legal NGO, they were looking specifically to work with the arts, and they have been hugely effective in Pakistan because as you said, Pakistan is divided up in various different ways – but the arts is a way of transcending many of these barriers and getting a wider audience that can really look at what is shared rather than what is potentially divisive.

Michael: I see that one of the collaborators on that project is Dawn newspaper which is interesting because newspapers themselves are under so much threat, not just from state and sub-state actors but just because of the economics of the digital area and social media, as you're aware. But that's interesting because to me, I feel there's kind of been a retreat away from the concept of progressive, campaigning newspapers, you know newspapers that will nail their colours to the mast for a progressive cause. There's been a retreat into this rather bland version of

"objective journalism," so called, or a reactionary partisanship. Can you perhaps talk a little about that? I don't know if you can talk about it in the Pakistani situation.

Daniel: I can't really talk about it in the Pakistani situation other than that collaboration went very well and working with Dawn saw a huge number of people engage with the No Time to Sleep project and caused a national conversation around the death penalty. So, it was very successful, and I think one thing, although it's slightly removed from your question, is the discussion around entry-points into popular culture and thinking through that and trying to draw attention, not necessarily to individual cases but looking at the more global question of the risks that artists face. And I think that is a really interesting example of it. There's an organisation in the UK called Counterpoints Arts [https://counterpointsarts.org.uk/] who've also been doing some interesting work on that front. Now in terms of newspapers and journalism [sigh], I don't know if I can be so broad about that: I think there's many, many excellent journalists who are doing excellent work and who are keeping, for example the government in the UK, under scrutiny in terms of its positions. But I think that what is really challenging is the economic infrastructure for journalism and trying to balance those two elements out because we need journalism, we need serious and independent journalism that can hold a nation, and a society, and a government up to scrutiny, and hold power to account. And as the financial bottom falls out of that equation, it becomes very difficult to maintain – and that is a real freedom of expression concern. I mean one thing we look at very strongly is platforms and social inequality as freedom of expression questions, and as, say for example, within journalism, if the financial side of the model's not there, fewer and fewer voices will be platformed, there'll be less and less ability to take risks on the journalists that you work with and bring in new talent. And that's all concerning as I think we look forward.

Michael: And yet we've seen the very strong rise around the world, whether it's in Belarus or elsewhere, of investigative journalism and where it has sprung up, often driven by networks of journalists themselves, in collaboration maybe with philanthropists, but often with readers, coming up with novel business models that say "Well, this is a reader-and-journalist-owned newspaper, it's a collaboration between society and its interlocutors." That's really interesting to me as a business model, but it's also very interesting in terms of how narrative is framed. Because, for instance, there's a small local newspaper in East London, Daily Dispatch, in South Africa, that completely turned the whole news diary process on its head: it started a series of public engagements in local townships where basically it was an open mic session and people passed the microphone around and started to express their concerns about what their local issues were. So that in fact literally the broader populace was starting to set the news agenda and make it more aligned to what people were actually concerned with, and actually interested in – and not taking their lead from "smart thinking" in the newsroom. And I find that really interesting in terms of how narrative is shifting as well.

Daniel: Yeah, I think that's true. I think the other thing along with business models and, given that we work with artists in times of risk, journalists in times of risk, if people are working on a much more independent basis it means that there is much less infrastructure and supportive infrastructure to provide any security in times of risk, and people are going into more and more extreme situations. So, trying to think through security questions around that is important to do.

Michael: Tell me a little bit about the residencies that English PEN runs. You indicated that from the way you framed them that these are really meant as a hiatus, a breather, a time-out session to enable somebody who has been through a really traumatic time to recuperate their strength.

Daniel: I think that's a good description of it. There are residencies that we organise that we

term Respite Residencies and so they really are a time for somebody to potentially take some time out from their work. What we do notice is that journalists, artists, writers struggle with taking time out [laughs], but just being out of their local context can be a huge help. The residencies are generally around three months in length; they're on a one-to-one basis, they're individually tailored to the needs and wants of the individual who's coming to us. They're not open to application; we have limited capacity and therefore new residents are found through our existing network.

Michael: Referrals from your peers?

Daniel: Exactly. And we try and tailor them as I said to the needs and wants of the individuals. So that can include, say, trying to support them to meet other journalists, or other writers, but also trying to include some pastoral care and support, and just to encourage them to take the time out to recover from whatever they've been going through, and trying to think through that very carefully. We aim to put as little pressure as we can on the residents coming in. I come from an arts background, not as a creator but as an organizer: my previous job was as executive director of this festival, Shubbak, and within that we also hosted residencies, but they were always creative residencies, you know, with a fixed output in mind, a fixed outcome. And so it took a little bit of a mental shift for me to get into the swing of the Respite Residency, but I really feel that this model is very effective and really works and is much needed. It's similar in some ways to ICORN, I suppose, but on a smaller scale.

Michael: You say these are individually tailored. You get very different responses from people who come into residency: some people feeling compelled to continue to do the work that got themselves into trouble in the first place; some people – and I'm finding this a lot with Eritreans in particular – wanting to drop out of sight entirely, completely go to ground out of fear of reprisals.

Daniel: Yup, it completely depends on the individual. So, we have many conversations with them. The first aim is to get them somewhere where they feel safe and secure, so depending on what they would prefer in terms of their accommodation, it could be with a family, it could be with an individual, whatever is best and most suited to them. And then I suppose some decompression from the situation they have been in and we try and analyse risks with them, whilst very much supporting them in their own decisions about what level of risk they are comfortable taking.

Michael: ICORN has quite a – and Elisabeth Dyvik explained this at one of the previous Safe Havens probably about two or three years back; I lie, in fact I think it was an ICORN meeting – quite a complex threat matrix, a multidimensional threat matrix of how they assess somebody's risk. You know somebody in one country may be more at risk because they are high profile – or they may be less at risk; their exposure as a famous or infamous person may protect them from people moving against them, or it may in fact increase their exposure to risk. So that's just one variable of the thing.

Daniel: Sure, I'd be fascinated to see that matrix actually. But at the same time, we deal with that almost on a daily basis, so there are many cases that we work on that are not in the public domain, and there are a lot of others that we work on that are in the public domain... Thinking about risk is a key element of that, but then also thinking about impact and efficacy of what we do because we want it to be effective and efficient, and just thinking through how we do that best. Sometimes it will be public, sometimes it won't be.

Michael: And how does your process work, how do you assess risk? I am assuming partly through input from your guests, partly through some sort of vetting organisations in their country of origin, or organisations who proposed them to you.

Daniel: All of the above. Firstly, through the individuals themselves – that's for our Residency, so we will have access to the individuals themselves – but if it's campaigns where someone is imprisoned then obviously, we can't necessarily speak to them but we'll speak to their families or speak to their lawyers. We will work very closely with PEN International; we're very lucky to be part of the PEN International network which is over 140 centres around the world who can give strong input in terms of specific contexts. And then in terms of what their specific field of work is or other organisations they've worked with, as you say, we'll speak to other peer organisations. I'm big on collaboration and partnership and I think Safe Havens is a great example of that; I really appreciate having the space to work together and share ideas and share resources.

Michael: Yeah, clearly breaking down the silos is a key theme of this conference, but previously as well because of the necessity, especially with the shrinking resource base, to make sure that we're not competing for funding, that we're actually fitting together more as a process rather than stepping over each other's toes or talking past each other or what have you. What was your overall impression of the outputs of the thing? Because we always try to ensure that these aren't just talk-shops, that these are working meetings, we're trying to establish, to move forward on what we built the year before, so we're not just treading water and having a nice time together.

Daniel: Yeah, it's difficult for me to comment holistically on that until we've gotten a little away from it and we see the next session which is next week… On a very individual level, and on an organisational level, it's been very useful for me as I said to have conversations with individuals and organisations who – maybe some of them we have crossed paths before, and some we haven't – but already we have some movement at least just in terms of knowledge-sharing between our organisations and that's very, very positive.

Michael: One of the things that we are attempting to do – and obviously this was initiated within the Nordic region because of the number of protective mechanisms available so it was easier to bring everybody together under one roof – but as the sector grew, we felt a distinct need to, "We've got to take it out of Europe, we've got to be on the ground," so we were in Cape Town, South Africa, last year, and out of that arose the Amani network which is now a continental gathering of pre-existing protective mechanisms and networks within the African continent, so that is kind of a continental sub-set of Safe Havens. In the coming year – it's still up in the air – we're hoping to go to Colombia and perhaps establish something similar, but of course along lines that are devised by whoever is in the conversation, whoever is in the room, so maybe Latin American and perhaps North American organisations working together along trajectories that they themselves decide. So, yeah, trying not to go over the same ground again, and trying to make this a truly global conversation.

Daniel: What do you think the aim is of the conversation, what would you hope as an outcome from this Safe Havens?

Michael: From this Safe Havens, to on the one hand reassess six years of labours and see what they've produced, realistically, to take stock of that overarching philosophical narrative about where the arts stand in terms of their risk experiences but also opportunities globally, to see how collaborations have evolved and what future avenues exist for better co-ordination, better collaboration, and more innovations in terms of funding and of shaping funding to the needs that exist in reality in the sector, not necessarily letting the funders drive the objectives, but have the artists themselves drive the objectives. That would be my kind of framework for the thing.

Daniel: Hmm. That sounds great and I think we got some of that in there. I think it could have been nice to have more artists on the stage and I know that is an aim of Safe Havens too, but… it could have been pushed even

further, but it was also limited by the fact that it was all happening digitally.

Michael: We did have this conversation earlier today, myself and Fredrik [Elg], that we're always trying to ensure that artists are not merely performers, that they are in the conversation as well; there's obviously always a lot of a juggling act to seeing how do our primary themes evolve as we start putting a conference together, but it is something that we've definitely highlighted for the year going forward, wherever we wind up.

Daniel: I wonder – and I'm not sure if this has already happened – but I wonder if a session that is lead purely by artists who have had some sort of Respite Residency or ICORN residency...

Michael: Well, several of the people in the mix, like [Nigerian author] Jude Dibia, like [Iranian journalist and writer] Parvin Ardalan are of course artists in their own right, but people who are maybe still in-country who haven't been relocated, who are facing tough conditions and who have decided to stick it out, because ideally we want people to remain in their society of origin or at least in the places that they want to live in and not be forced into exile. And that is as important a conversation as is aftercare.

Daniel: Yup. I think that one of the things that really stuck with me after the three days was a comment from Jude Dibia which was around that feeling when you first arrive somewhere else and that still, particularly around the visa situation, you don't know what's going to happen because you are potentially going to, not of your own volition, but have to go back into a situation of risk after a certain number of months or a certain number of years, and therefore although you are out of the primary arena of risk, there is still continued risk to you and to any loved ones in the place you have left. And thinking through that in a really deep way is something that I personally need to reflect on further: is there any way that we can further try and provide that sense of safety and security – but not a false sense of safety and security – on a deeper level. And so I really appreciate that there were a number of artists who were involved or who have made use of residencies in the past, respite spaces, and I found all the contributions very valuable, but I found their contributions particularly valuable. I still think there's a lot of learning for us as the organisations to do and being able to have that frank conversation because a lot of the time there is always this potential for an imbalance between the hosting organisation and the person who is being hosted.

Michael: Thinking of aftercare, which is of big concern to me because I have started my own relocation mechanism which will hopefully be up and running in the new year in terms of we should be receiving our first Fellow if we receive the funding – is the question of aftercare, and it does keep me up at night because in planning for Cape Town there were two people whom we wanted to bring into the room, and the one guy who had gone through a European safety programme, safe residency programme was unable to come because he'd gone to ground as an illegal immigrant in Spain because his visa period had run out. And there was clearly quite a bit of bitterness – he's an Algerian guy – there's quite a bit of bitterness towards our sector because of this feeling of abandonment after the residency was over. On a related, but different topic, another woman, a poet from Kenya, that we'd also wanted to bring into Cape Town basically didn't want to come because she felt that there'd been insufficient protections of her intellectual property rights as a guest artist during her residency, that people were basically stealing her works and that she was unable to make an income. So, I think that these are very serious criticisms that we need to take to heart and to integrate into how residencies such as my own work – and how the whole ecosystem thinks about how we really, really shy away from using these people as kind of poster-kids for our own projects or whatever, and really give them agency and put them at the centre of what we're doing. And keep them somehow within the family, even after they've left a residency.

Daniel: Sure. I think that came across clearly from one of the other artists – I can't remember her name – who was in the Safe Havens conference around marketing and framing of the artists who were taking part in these residencies, and the fact that artists need to be able to determine and define for themselves how they want to be presented. And her primary aim was to be presented as an artist first and foremost.

Michael: This was Yasmine [Baramawy], the oud player from Egypt.

Daniel: Yes, that's right.

Michael: Yes, this is a repeated refrain right across ICORN and Safe Havens: "Do not treat me as a refugee, do not treat me even as an artist-at-risk, or even as a Syrian, or even maybe as a woman; treat me as the artist that I am, and look at my works." [Lawyer turned thespian] Meriam Bousselmi, one of our previous contributors, from Tunisia, she spoke at length in one of my previous interviews, about this problem that, you know you've got an hour to speak on some TV programme and they only want to talk about the political situation in your home country and they never give you the opportunity to talk about your art, which is what you want to talk about. Of course, you come from there, and now you're here, and you want to talk about your art. And we've got to be very careful as you say, in terms of the framing. It needs to be led by them; this supposedly their network and it really needs to be that in all relevant aspects.

Daniel: Agreed.

Michael: Tell me a little bit about your engagement with the arts festival, the Shubbak arts festival. That sounds very interesting. There's an ongoing dialogue around how Europe continually kind of cuts-and-pastes its cultural paradigms on the Arab world and the Arab world seems to continually try to readjust that framework, kind of a fight-back against that. I'm sure you've encountered quite a bit of that debate.

Daniel: Yes, that's a pretty long-standing one, and as you were saying, people tend to get asked the same questions over and over again. One thing we did within Shubbak was a project around Europe and ideas around European identity which was a Creative Europe-supported project commissioning new work by Arab artists living and working across Europe in various different places. And there was actually a residency component attached to that, but it was also to open up the fact that there are many people of Arab origin living across Europe and they tend to be asked questions around their country of origin, or the country that their families were from. So, say somebody was originally born in Syria and has now lived in Belgium, will tend to be asked about the situation in Syria rather than about the situation that they are actually living with in daily life in Belgium or Europe, or questions around Brexit or things like that.

Michael: Reinforcing the dislocation: "You're not actually here," or "You're only going to be here for a short time."

Daniel: We were very focused on trying to put that point across – but through the creative process of commissioning new work.

Michael: So breaking down that gastarbeiter [guest worker] kind of mentality.

Daniel: Yeah, and also because there's so much movement between Middle East – North Africa and Europe and the UK anyway on an ongoing basis, and a lot of the festival tried to reflect that and we would have a significant number of artists who were living and working in the Middle East – North Africa, but also a significant number of artists of Arab origin living and working in the UK and Europe. And opening up again, a pretty different thing [to Safe Havens], but still with the aim of opening up that space for discussion and overlap and interaction between the artists themselves almost as much as between, say, audience and artist.

Michael: Perhaps just as a closing out question, a more global perspective. You

obviously speak for English PEN and not for the rest of the network, but you tap into that network so obviously you do have a global perspective through your peers. Is there hope, with the eclipsing of Donald Trump, or have we put too much focus on the likes of Trump and are we ignoring more long-term threats, the ingraining of right-wing populism in societies that maybe are much more volatile, but are not as much under the microscope as the United States is?

Daniel: So, I think there's both significant hope and significant challenges. And the significant hope is that people are having these conversations around freedom of expression, around holding power to account, and many artists are deeply involved in this at the international level as we know. And hence sadly, one of the significant challenges is that there is a need for something like Safe Havens to exist to provide a space for artists who have been targeted by those in power, both state and non-state actors. I think additionally we face challenges around disinformation, and targeted disinformation, and that can have an impact on many of those whom we work with when disinformation is generated and shared around them. Online harassment is also a significant challenge for many of those whom we work with, and many times online harassment builds into offline harassment.

Michael: It's a very unequal battle because these are essentially kangaroo courts, not abiding by any rules of diplomacy or debate or politeness.

Daniel: Yeah, and you can clearly see that people who are targeted via online harassment tend to be women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people who experience racism, and religious minorities, and that correlates with offline violence too. So, there are significant challenges but there also is significant hope in that people are continuing to hold power to account, doing that through art, doing that through journalism. And I think I suppose that one slight silver lining we all find ourselves in with this awful pandemic is that we are able to talk to each other on a more global level or at least, even if we were able to before, we are now doing it, and so therefore there is opportunity for a more joined-up response, a more rapid response when required, and all more global thinking. Because a lot of the questions we are facing are not UK-only questions, or Sweden-only questions, or South Africa, these are really global questions that we need to think through together. So, I think the hope is that we are opening up these spaces to be able to think through them on a global level.

7. "LET ME GO FOREVER TO FIND MY OWN TRUTH": Breaching the "Iran Curtain"

Confess is originally an Iranian heavy metal band known for having faced charges in Iran for their music, in which they expressed anti-religious and anti-government views. Confess in Iran played together for 10 years, and released two albums, an EP, and several singles. Singer-guitarist Nikan "Siyanor" Khosravi and DJ-bassist Arash "Chemical" Ilkhani were arrested in November 2015 and held in solitary confinement. At that time, they potentially faced execution after being charged with blasphemy for "writing Satanic music and speaking to foreign radio stations." In July 2019, the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Tehran sentenced Nikan and Arash to 14-and-a-half years in prison for the crime of playing metal. Nikan was also sentenced to 74 lashes. Fortunately, he managed to escape the country and landed in Safe Haven Harstad, and a while later, it also became possible for Arash to move to Norway. They have teamed up with Norwegian musicians, are developing their distinct and powerful metal music, and are planning a tour in the spring of 2021.

Michael: What was your first, initial experience of metal, I mean how did you come across it in Iran – I mean not that it's impossible?

Siyanor: I remember I was like 9 years old, 10 years old and I already I knew what metal is by knowing bands like Metallica, Guns 'n Roses, and bands like that but I wasn't into them; I was more into listening to like rap music at

the time. But a year after I think I was around 11 or 12 years old, in senior high school I got a CD from one of my friends at school and he was like "Go check this out, I mean this is good!" It was like a CD that he burned, and it was multiple music videos that he captured via satellite TV from like MTV and stuff like that. So I just put it in my computer after school when I got home, and bands like Slipknot and Korn and all of those bands that emerged in the beginning of the 2000s, those were the bands that really got me into this. I was like "Wow! What is this?" Full of energy, angry, and it was like at the time I wasn't really good in English; it was almost impossible to understand what this guy is yelling in the microphone, so it pushed me more to go and find the lyrics and work with your English skills to understand what these guys are talking about, because as I told you I came from rap music, so I wanted to know what this guy is telling me.

Michael: So, you are saying that in rap obviously, it's the lyric that is the most important thing, it's the spoken word, the poetics that is the most important thing, so that's what drove your interest.

Siyanor: Yeah, the lyrics were very important for me – but at the same time the music that heavy metal had to offer for me was really rich, powerful, and energetic and I'm 12 years old and I've never seen anything like this, but it's more exciting because this guy is playing guitar and the other is playing drums but in rap music you don't see anything like that; it's just one guy, as you stand on stage, it doesn't look like teamwork. So I was like "Yeah man, I've got to discover this." So, I could say that bands like Slipknot, Slayer, Korn, System of a Down, these types of bands just got me into this and then I just started to translate the lyrics, then I just asked my parents to give me an electric guitar. At first, I asked for a drum – but they were like "No, it's going to be loud," and typical drummer stuff.

Michael: This is why drummers grow up to be recluses, right?

"Siyanor"
Photo: Camilla Therese

"Siyanor"
Photo: Camilla Therese

Siyanor: [Laughs] Yeah, it's total discrimination! So, they agreed with buying me an electric guitar after learning a little bit of acoustic guitar – because they wanted to test me out, like "Do you really want to do this or is this just a summer thing?" So, I was like "Yeah, I really want to do it." So I got me my first guitar then everything started since then.

Michael: Did you start with normal classical?

Siyanor: Oh yeah, for the first couple of months because actually the thing is my sister got an acoustic guitar before me, she liked to play acoustic guitar. So, my mom bought her an acoustic guitar – and she put it away after a couple of weeks.

Michael: What is your sister's name?

Siyanor: Nazgol.

Michael: Nazgol. So, she started playing acoustic, but your mother couldn't handle it?

Siyanor: No, no, no, my mother was like "Here's a guitar, just go and learn it," but after a couple of weeks she was not really practicing, or stuff like that. So a year after her I asked her for a guitar so she was like "Nah, you're not going to do it – like her." And I was like "No, I really want to do this stuff. Just give me an electric guitar." And she was like "OK, if you want to prove it to me just go for two months, go and learn the acoustic guitar. If your teacher calls me and tells me that you are persisting and you really have a love for this, I will get you an electric guitar." I mean it was supposed to be two, three months but it happened way earlier because if my guitar teacher was telling me to learn from page 10 t0 15, I really added on to page 20 or page 22, you know, so I was really thirsty. I remember that from what he told me back in the day, was he had a student who had been taking his class for two years, but you are better than them because I was constantly, my world was like just go to school to make everyone happy to be able to go to these classes – and to make myself happy. So that was the whole plan, and I am really happy that I did it because that's what makes me, and it still makes me feel happy, playing songs.

Michael: So, I am interested in this intersection between the original rap and the metal, between what is quite an operatic form in some senses, metal right, it can be quite operatic, and certainly it owes a lot to the German heavies of the 19th Century, and rap which is very spoken-word poetry. Tell me about how that intersects – if it does?

Siyanor: To me, definitely, the closest genre to heavy metal can be rap music, hip-hop culture basically. I mean there are so many differences of course, I mean the way they look, to the way they act, but the thing is that both of these genres emerged through the most confusing era of humanity in modern society. I mean there are people, [in the] both hip-hop world and the rock/metal world at the time that for example, at the time Black Sabbath came to the scene it was right after the Second World War, so from watching interviews, they were saying "When we were kids we were playing in the wreckage of the buildings after World War Two," and then they were talking about being confused, " I don't know why, I don't know what I'm going to do, what is this world with so many old people deciding about the world." I mean [the] Vietnam War happens right after that; I mean it's an era that humanity was in transition – still is – but it was in the very horrifying transition from one era to another era. But at the same time, hip-hop as far as I know came through the culture of demonstrating, of black people against police brutality, or any kind of racial discrimination. So both music [styles] have something to say – and both are protesting. So, this is the main foundation of the similarities of these two. And at the same time, if you want to be more focused on the music, rap music also has that kind of pounding, kind of wide groove that heavy metal has. So maybe this is the only thing that you can compare these two music [forms] with, I mean there is this kind of rhythm base.

Michael: You find sort of Ice T somewhere in the middle there.

Siyanor: Yeah, definitely, yeah. That's why so many people love bands like Pantera because Pantera comes from a world that's very groovy, it's a flow kind of music, very rhythm-based music. And if you want to be more focused on lyrics – I mean if you want to talk about rap music, I am talking about political rap, like socio-political rap music, not about the Top 40 on the radio.

Michael: Because originally, rap was very political and then it became very corporate or at least very wannabe Hollywood Boulevard.

Siyanor: Yeah, like get into the box and make it beautiful so we can sell it to the world.

Michael: It's only about the money and the cars and the girls.

Siyanor: Yeah, so that's what ruined the whole thing. And sadly, it also happened to heavy metal because these major labels, they want to sell you, they don't care who you are and they don't care how you feel about your thing, I mean these A&R guys from companies constantly talking with the artists [saying] "It's better to look this way, to do this, maybe try that thing," so make you more mainstream. But you cannot imagine say that Rage Against the Machine would be like that, so that's why they quit the whole thing, they stopped the whole thing.

Michael: Well maybe that's even a better example of the bridge between metal and rap is Rage Against the Machine, Tom Morello's crew – and they are very explicitly political, and they've now signed as you're probably aware have signed Ramy Essam to Tom Morello's label. I mean this is a very explicitly political project; it almost has the feel of a sort of 1930s really beautifully strident Left-wing thing, "We're going to stand up and fight, and we stand for the poor, we stand for the underclasses, and we stand for the oppressed, and we stand against the elites," and it's very explicit in a way that a lot of other stuff isn't.

Siyanor: Yeah, that is a great example, I mean Rage Against the Machine is what rap and heavy metal should be. But every once in a while, you'll hear from bands – I'm talking specifically around metal – that they are putting out albums that they are getting back more into their roots because we are living in a time that there's so much stuff that you can talk to as an artist. And it's hard for me to grasp the whole idea of turning a blind eye to these facts and talk about some stuff that doesn't matter, you know. I mean, use my imagination? I don't need to use my imagination; I can just look at the screen on my TV and just write about what I'm seeing, you know? And that's what art is about: art is the production of society, it's the mirror that you see yourself [in]; I mean, if I'm bad, if I'm considered criminal in my country as an artist, with the way that I'm making art, well you made me a criminal, you know what I mean? It is what you made me; I was born in that territory, into that education system, I was a citizen of that country, so I'm a reporter, I'm a journalist, I just said what I saw, I just did my thing. So, if you didn't like it, you'd better go and fix it because this is reality. If so, many people can't do it, good for them – I can.

Michael: So, the intersection between politics and art, always controversial, but at the fundament it is humanity; it's love, we've got to look after each other. It was kind of funny at Safe Havens after you guys had played that I think it was Sverre [Pedersen] from Freemuse who raised the question that there is a collaboration called Headbanging Against Authoritarian Regimes. But before that Mary Ann DeVlieg said that metal-heads are actually peaceable people; it's kind of unfortunate that people actually have to say that in the first place. But one of the things that Sverre said in response to that, was, I think he mentioned a bunch of Algerian head-bangers who said, "Well we're heavy metal because our world is heavy metal," "Our own environment is as toxic as heavy metals," in other words. So therefore, this energy and apparent aggression is expressing a deep-felt frustration with an unjust system, an inequitable system.

Siyanor: Yeah, totally, I mean you choose the

type of music based on your personality and based on what you can relate to, you know? I mean when I was listening to Slayer, there's a song called Skeletons of Society from their album Seasons in the Abyss in 1991, so I remember back in the day I was 14, 15, 16 years old around that age, I was listening to the song maybe 15 years after its release. I was born two years after the release date, I was born in '93, so I'm listening to this song and this is so us, I mean he is talking about my life, this guy's song is what I'm seeing now, I mean who is this dude? He's from USA and talking about this when he was 27 years old, like what I'm now, and talking about the same shit that I'm dealing with, I mean "The end that came so fast," I was like "Fuck man, I'm living this!" So, the first thing that this tells you is that you are not alone, I mean that someone went through the same thing that you are going through. But you can understand, you can pick what you want out of this; mine was not to think that this is going to be like this forever; the point was that, OK, he went through all of this and now I'm someone who's admiring him, decades after, and he's going to live through his music, no matter who he is. So why shouldn't I be that guy for someone else? Let's pick up a guitar, learn how to play it, write a song, record it, put it out there as hard as you can, stand by your choice, stand by what you said – and be that guy for someone else, because... there's nothing better than someone coming to you and saying, "Your music saved me."

Michael: And that's happened to me: I mean, there's a local rock band here. I broke my spine in five places and went through all sorts of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression because of all kinds of wars I'd been in and this kind of thing. And there's a local rock band, an all-girl rock band that literally – they're called Cortina Whiplash – and they basically, literally saved my life, and I keep telling them that, and they get kind of embarrassed about it, but yeah, it's true because it's that resonance. I mean, it's a cliché that music is a universal language, but this whole thing that it's speaking to you in your situation, if you're a 13-year-old Bengali girl, or whatever it is, that it resonates, you know?

Siyanor: Yeah, I mean... actually before we started this conversation now, like one hour ago, I was talking to one of my friends and she heard another Iranian band from years before... So, I just sent the music from a band from when I was learning guitar and it was a thing and their music was fantastic, and they were way older than me. And she really liked the music, she's listened to it a couple of minutes ago and she was like "You guys have something in your genes: this music fits you guys really well". When you are living by a totalitarian government and they are trying to affect you and impact your life as much as they can. And it gets tighter and tighter, you need a real outlet to keep you going, and this type of music is the best thing. So for example, when you want to write it for yourself, I mean, come on, you don't need to imaging anything, as I told you; you just need to put the pen on the paper and it comes, just so much to say...

Michael: It writes itself; I mean real life.

Siyanor: Yeah, it writes itself. You can just pick [up] the guitar and it just comes out of you and people can resonate to that. And so many places I saw during the years with the success that we could have over our music over the years, we saw that they are comparing us more and more to Sepultura. And Sepultura, I mean, they're from Brazil, right? And at the time that they came up, they were also living under a dictatorship, so they saw stuff, and I read somewhere that Max [Cavalera] from Sepultura, he was talking about his music and he said something like "Maybe because we were from the Third World, we saw things outside of the box, we saw things that maybe someone in the US they cannot see it. We lived stuff that maybe they just make movies [about], we lived it, we knew how it feels like to live in a place where really there is no justice."

Michael: Yes, if you look at albums like Chaos A.D., and you can hear that this is grounded in a political reality, you know?

Siyanor: Yeah, and the frustration in the sound, that dirty, raw, uncut, unapologetic kind of sound; you don't need to be polished; this is what it is, you either like it or you're going to hate it, there's no other way around it. We don't want to be millionaires, this is what I tell my guys, I mean if I wanted to be a millionaire, I'd put the same work ethic behind something else. I don't want to be a millionaire, just get it, I just want to be the guy that I wanted to be when I was 10 years old, that's as bigger and as further as I can go, that's the whole mission.

Michael: Well, very few people achieve their childhood ambitions, so if you made it…

Siyanor: Definitely, yeah, because it's never going to end.

Michael: Well, if you managed to achieve that then you are doing exceptionally well on your own terms. I actually interviewed Andreas [Kisser] from Sepultura back in 2003 – and I'm not a music journalist, so you'll have to excuse that I'm a little rusty around this field. But it was just prior to a South African tour, he came out here and they performed here, I went to the show, met them afterwards, and they signed my battle-jacket and all that kind of thing. It was really cool, but what was really interesting to me was maybe how different the guys were in terms of, just as people, they were all by that stage, they were all married guys, the one collected toy cars, and they were just normal people and obviously not as scary as some people might think, but really, really great guys – and there's a lot of commonality between South Africa and Brazil. But it was just great to interview them and again, share a commonality between societies that come from very repressive backgrounds, come from dictatorial backgrounds. I mean, your society is still stuck in that though. How do you feel about that going forward? Do you think that music like yours can contribute towards an opening up of Iranian society?

Siyanor: One can only hope for it; I mean, if my music and what I have to say can reach – I mean I know we have fans over there, we have fans that are fellow Iranian people – but if we can help to make a change… of course what you're making changes something somewhere, even if it's only one person, who knows, maybe that one person can do something big in the next years. This is a fact that no matter who you are and no matter what you do, if it's something that if you put it out there and, it's art or it's science, it can change lives. But how big can it get? I don't know I just hope that, and not just hope that my music can start a Revolution or something, not because of that, because of the fact that it would help people to find the truth. Because I don't know what the truth is, I'm still looking for it, so what I'm screaming about is just "Let me go! Don't hold me back; let me go forever to find my own truth." I don't want to tell people what is true; I don't believe in religion, I despise it and someone else believes in it, good for them if it's not going to harm anyone else, if it's not going to dictate what they think, you can pray in your own living room or your bedroom or whatever, I don't care. We can still be coexistent: that's your truth, I respect that, this is my truth, you must respect that. But with this kind of mind-set, I can listen to even a religious song and if I find out that I get something from it – I know that sounds weird, but the fact that someone is brave enough to present himself and his thought out there.

We are kind of preachers, right? Because we are preaching something, we are preaching our own beliefs, this is my church and I'm preaching it. But I'm not going to come and knock at your door, I'm just going to put my stuff on the platforms that are available, and I just promote it. But the thing is that since this is art, you can always find something to enjoy, because as you said, music is an international language. But the fact that someone can be brave enough to talk about what they believe, and fight for, I mean freedom is not something that you can find someone who is like "No, I'm against it!" I'm talking about freedom; nobody can be like "I hate what you are saying." You can disagree with what I am saying, have different opinions, but there are red lines, and the red lines are [about] being free, think free and speak free and to have that

kind of freedom when you want to talk about what you believe. But this fact that you can see someone is doing this is encouraging. It's like, because I'm following Safemuse, Freemuse, Facebook pages and every day you can see that there is this person – girls or boys, old or young – they are fighting for what they believe with what they can – and this is so encouraging. Maybe I do not really know who this person is or what is this hunger strike for, or whatever, but to see someone who is so brave who is fighting for his rights and for what he believes [is inspiring].

Michael: So somebody may be, let's say, a religious singer but it's not necessarily about the god that they are praying to; it's about the ethic, are they talking about compassion, are they talking about care, are they talking about...

Siyanor: Love, loving each other and stuff like that – you cannot deny that.

Michael: Yeah, of course you've got your beliefs, but it doesn't matter if it's attached to some god [or not].

Siyanor: Yeah, this is what I mean. For example, there is this guy who was a drug addict for years and then he started this stand after he quit the drugs and he became religious, became Christian, and then he started a band and when I listen to his music, I mean, he is constantly talking with god and about religion in a way that goes with the music – and his music is good – but the message that he is telling me is not specifically what I can understand because what he is talking about is something that I do not even believe that it exists. It's not about, "I know that it exists and I'm going to despise it," no... At the same time, the fact that he could find a truth somewhere to lift himself up – that is uplifting to me. So, this is basically what I mean.

Michael: There's this collection of songs by Nick Cave who you may know, the Australian singer, and it's foreworded by this long essay which is about the exploration of the love song as a search for god [Nick Cave, The Secret Life of the Love Song: https://www.anothermag.com/design-living/12391/from-the-archive-the-love-song-a-lecture-by-nick-cave-tilda-swinton]. And that's kind of interesting to me because, I mean, I'm an atheist personally, but nevertheless that sort of spiritual instinct is alive in many people and a lot of it is very positive, so to express it through the concept of a love song, I just found that to be very smart and a very refreshing way of looking at things. Your own experience has been, well it would have been very dire if you'd stayed behind in Iran, I mean 74 lashes and all of this. I don't necessarily want to rehash that, but you've as you say, you've got fans, you've got family back there, there's a growing diaspora, it's conflicted amongst itself. How do you navigate your own people?

Siyanor: I am trying to stay out there as much as I can, with following the news and stuff. I mean I left Iran in 2017, September 2017, a little more than three years ago that I left there, but I can feel that the censorship and everything is worse and worse. This is what you can expect because the pressure form outside is even more on the government, so they reflect the same pressure on their people, this is what happened in the whole history, I mean with governments and political systems.

Michael: It happened in apartheid; it was the same thing, you know?

Siyanor: They tried to send a message inside, that "Don't get it twisted – we are still in power." Second of all to send a message outside that "We have hostages here, so just don't go crazy with all of this pressure." So how do I, it's a little bit complicated; I'm just trying to stay as much as I can, stay tuned with everything that is going on, and do what I can do. For example, last year around the same time, there was these huge protests in Iran over, the trigger was the gas price, overnight they tripled the petroleum prices, gas and everything, so people just went out on the streets and protested this. And after a few days you could hear the news that the gas

stations are being burned down to the ground, people are fucking angry. [The regime] sent guards into the streets, first beating people, then started shooting people, they killed so many people, from what the UN said, around 1,500 people that were killed in the streets in one month in Iran. And what they do? They "condemned" this situation. OK, what's next?

Michael: But this is of course the lever of history, of course you know: the population. I mean the original, the actual, the real Revolution in 1978 before the Khomeinist Counter-Revolution was installed in '79 was precipitated of course by forced removals, and this then grew into wider and wider popular protests until the Shah just found it untenable to return home.

Siyanor: Yes, but the biggest difference, as an Iranian, we all know that the biggest difference between this regime and the other one was that the Shah didn't want to kill people, he was "OK, cool."

Michael: He tortured a lot though [via his Savak secret police].

Siyanor: He just left the country, he was like "OK, you don't want me anymore, and I don't want to kill anyone," [though] he [did] kill people in the protests, I mean a couple of people died, I don't know the exact number, but it is unbelievable what they [the current regime] is doing: they're firing real bullets at people, they shut down the whole internet for 10 days in Iran, and it was the first time that they did that, they called it "Iran Curtain," so you don't need to see this. Because people were filming all of this, and people were being encouraged to go on the street and fight for their rights. But all of a sudden, they just shut down the whole internet and then nobody knew, I couldn't call my family because we talk with internet, WhatsApp, Skype, things like that, and then I didn't know what was going on. And everyone was afraid at this point that one day they can shut down the internet; and it wasn't surprising because they are great friends with China and Russia and they have a great cyber-army, hackers and all that. So, yeah, what we [Confess] could do was that, OK, we have a new album coming out, there is a song that is about police brutality, so let's just put this out. And at the same time, I was checking all the big media channels, the corporations – and nobody was talking about it because at the same time they were talking about [the protests in] Hong Kong. Why? Because they want… to separate Hong Kong from China but believe it or not, they don't want to see a regime-change in Iran, I don't know why but the West doesn't want that. It's a balance for the US to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia, it's a balance for Israel to be like "Oh, they're going to bomb me one of these days," so we'll arm you.

Michael: So basically, what this boils down to is regional warlordism in which the imperialist powers are manufacturing a market, essentially, and maintaining a fiction of this [conflict].

Siyanor: It's a business, war is a business, they want this, and to be honest, someone like me talking like this with a journalist, it's crazy because nobody wants to be… it can put a career on the line, saying stuff like this. Everyone will be like, "Why are you saying this?" …Norway… is being known as a peaceful country but at the same time, in every war, they send weapons, and Sweden…

Michael: Yeah, Sweden's one of the world's largest arms manufacturers, but they're a "neutral" country [laughs]. It's a very clever position.

Siyanor: Yeah, but "We need to eat and stay one of the best countries in the world." And I can get it; that's what politics is all about. If they won't make weapons, their unemployment's going to go higher, their whole social benefits are going to be faded away and all this. But it doesn't mean that I should not say this, no? That's why I'm saying, if something happens in Lebanon, holy shit, everyone's going to talk about it, if a protest comes up, emerges in Hong Kong, in some of the countries, if it happens in Venezuela then

they will reflect it. But if it happens in countries like US allies, they're not going to talk about it, no, no, no, no, no, this is not good. If it's going to happen in Cuba, they're going to send journalists over there to film this. But if it's maybe another country... if it happens in Saudi Arabia, "Uh-oh, we won't talk about it, because we want these people to be there, because this is what makes the balance: we sell weapons, we get wealthy, we keep the war in there." These crazy religious [groups] like ISIS and these groups, you are like "What the fuck? Are these humans?" I mean where did these people come from? How did they find the weapons? And at the same time, you hear that from the war in Iraq there are tons of weapons that are missing, and decades after you see ISIS comes up with lots of weapons.

Michael: We know a lot of those guys were ex-Syrian Army in any case, or ex-Iraqi Army.

Siyanor: Yeah. And besides that, Clinton, I mean... it was around the time of the election and they were finding his email that he's talking about being in touch with ISIS and all of that. Because these people are well-trained, beside of being in – and don't forget that – all of these ex-generals that were in the Iraqi Army, they were in Al-Qaeda; they said that they'd died but they just keep coming and keep coming. So, for me – right now we are far away from what you asked me and I'm sorry – but what they are doing to the Middle East right now to me is the same plan that they did maybe you can say around 200 years ago. It started 200, 300 years ago with Africa, and the whole plan was to evacuate the place [of people] and dig deep: make wars, stuff like that, send the people out of their homes, for example of the 12 million population in Syria, 8 million are out of the country. So, what happens there? They will go and find their oil, they will bring it out, no-one is there to ask any questions, there's no civil movement, there's nothing. You destroy everything.

Michael: This reminds me of that Rage Against the Machine track [Darkness] about "We'll kill them off, take their land, and go there for vacation," right?

Siyanor: Yeah, same stuff, you know it's still relevant and then we talk about immigration: if you are against immigration, stop the war. These people get back. There is no place better than your own country to live in. And you sell weapons, make war, you drop bombs on people's heads, they get out of there, and you bring an entire anti-immigration government on and you are condemning these people. What do you want? Do you want is to die? Then you will have a good, good life.

Michael: So, your tattoo there? Was that your prison number or what?

Siyanor: Ah yes, yeah! Smart guy. I usually say this is "I won the lottery!"

8. THE OPPONENTS OF ARTISTIC FREEDOM STRATEGISE TOGETHER; We Need to Counter Them & Offer Alternative Voices

Karima Bennoune was appointed as the second UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights in October 2015. Having grown up in Algeria and the USA, she is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Hall Research Scholar at the University of California-Davis School of Law where she teaches courses on human rights and international law. Her research and writing have been published in leading journals and periodicals. She has received numerous awards, including the Dayton Literary Peace Prize (2014) for her book, Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here: Untold Stories from the Fight Against Muslim Fundamentalism based on interviews from 30 countries, of people of Muslim heritage challenging extremism. The TED talk based on the book has been viewed by over 1.3 million people. Karima has worked in the field of human rights for more than 20 years, including with governments and non-governmental organizations, and has carried out field missions, trial observation, election observation and research in many regions of the world. The text that follows is from her introduction to a session she chaired on the

final day of Safe Havens 2020 Global Stream on 3 December on "Ensuring the Artistic Freedom Sector Becomes More Collegiate" by working more effectively and collaboratively, sharing information effectively, and undertaking co-operative joint initiatives that benefit all partners and prioritise those who may be marginalised.

Karima Bennoune: In these times, simply to keeping the work going, to practice and to defend cultural and artistic rights and artistic freedom is difficult, so really, I want to begin by congratulating you. And I can say from my perspective as UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, the challenges at the current moment are rather considerable, due to the pandemic: I'm unable to carry out country missions; there are a significant number of urgent cases coming in, it seems more and more, but limited resources to respond to them; funds that were supposed to be allocated to the mandate often remain inaccessible within the UN system. And so in the face of all of this, partnerships… have been utterly essential. And I really want to thank all the government and civil society partners including many who are here today who have either supported the mandate or collaborated on cases and issues, without whom the work would have been utterly impossible. And let me say that when I look back on these last five years, where we have had successes, we have had them because we have worked together in a concerted way, so I am thrilled at the choice of topic in this forum. Let me say a few words – and I know you have been talking about this already all day – about the contemporary context of our important methodological discussion on collaboration.

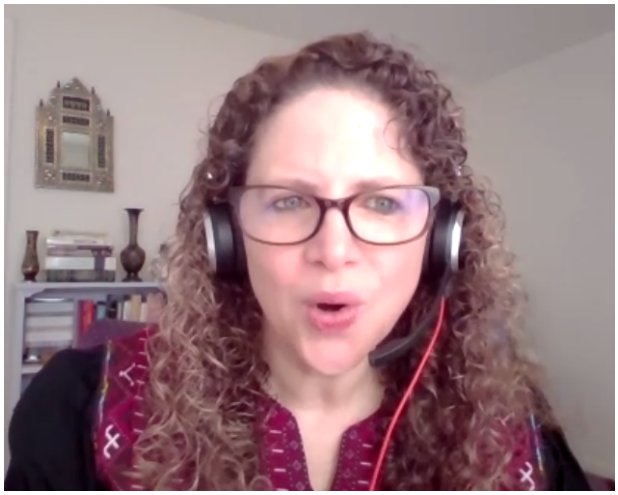
As many of you know I am currently working on my next report for the UN Human Rights Council which will be about Covid-19 and cultural rights, though we must not forget other important ongoing issues as the Safe Havens [Short] Report [on the hive and sub-hive workshops] notes, this is truly an unavoidable topic because Covid-19 represents, as the International Labour Organisation has said, nothing less than the worst global crisis since the Second World War and we have to have – to be able to continue this work – a 21st Century holistic human rights approach which mainstreams cultural rights and can better guide our global responses to the pandemic. So that's why I chose this topic for the next report and I am as many of you know going to look both at the negative messages in terms of how grave the impacts have been on culture and cultural rights and artists – but also the positive side as it were, the importance of arts and culture in an effective response, my slogan on this being "Culture is the heart of our response to Covid-19."

And I was very impressed by the words of David Sassoli, the President of the European Parliament on November 19 at an event when he said that "Art has cathartic power that can accompany post-pandemic society on the road to resilience; art is not an accessory." But of course, words such as those, or my words, are easy to say: they must be backed up by deeds and policy and funding – and that's what I'm going to try to push for with the report, with your support. The enjoyment of every single right covered by the Cultural Rights mandate, and certainly all of those we work on together, has been gravely affected by the pandemic and some of the responses to it. And so I think when we contemplate collaboration, and co-operation, we have to think about what those mean and how essential they are in this particular moment. It has become, as so many of you know so well, even more difficult to organise efforts to assist at-risk artists including through relocation due to pandemic-related measures such as travel restrictions. And I can tell you, my concerns now about imprisoned cultural rights defenders and artists are heightened with every such imprisonment possibly becoming a de facto death sentence due to the increased risk of contracting Covid-19 in prison. And one of the key messages that I want to carry forward in the report is that a cultural rights approach to all of these issues remains absolutely necessary, focusing on the cultural rights commitments under international law of states to actually guarantee artistic freedom

and the rights of everyone to take part in cultural life – which are not things that can be set aside in the pandemic; they remain essential in the pandemic. And I think really defending a sort of cultural renewal in this moment is an essential component of any efforts to "Build Back Better," that's the slogan we keep hearing.

So then I come back to the question for us today: how can we more effectively do the work in this challenging environment so as to carry forward these messages and the other messages you've been discussing today? I think our collegiality, our co-operation, our collaboration has never been so important – and I hope we will use our time here today to think how we might strengthen it, institutionalise that in this current context and to reflect on the recommendations that are made in the Short Report of Safe Havens 2020 Global Stream – the report which has been made available to all of us. As that Report notes, in 2018, I called for one example of this co-operation which was the creation of a Civil Society Coalition for Cultural Rights at the UN, modelled after similar coalitions that exist around, for example freedom of religion or belief. This is a structure that could more systematically aid me and future Special Rapporteurs [in Cultural Rights] in pushing for implementation of cultural rights including artistic freedoms in these trying times; it could work to develop implementation toolkits and materials, it could lobby states in support of the work, it could push to hold states accountable to the UN system for violations, and help train artists and activists in working in the UN system, and through the human rights system in particular.

And I recognise – and I want to say this immediately – that not everyone may want to or have capacity to work at UN spaces, and I realise there are many other spheres which are shared and in which co-operative work is essential, but I would remind us that much harm can be done to cultural rights and artists at the UN if we are not there in numbers, working together to defend these rights and co-ordinate the bastion. And let's be clear: the opponents of artistic freedom work together very strategically in the UN; we need to be there to counter them and to offer alternative voices and to help bring the local voices, that are so included and represented in the work that you are all doing, to the international stage. So to conclude, let me say that I think very much today in this space, as we contemplate all of this about the artists we've lost to Covid-19 in all regions of the world, such as Cameroonian Afro-jazz legend Manu Dibango, or the Mexican film actress Cecilia Romo, to name a few, and I think it's really essential that the international community and all of us work together to honour their memories by memorialising their work, by supporting those who continue the artistic work, and by promoting and nourishing cultural life for everyone. And I hope, and I say this to myself, we will all be spurred on by their legacy, even when we may sometimes be tired and frustrated, to continue our work together with enhanced strategic thinking, heightened collaboration, and strengthened networks.



Karima Bennoune

Safe Havens Freedom Talks

1) “The Balaha Case,” with Freemuse on the death after almost 800 days in custody of Shady Habash who had produced the music video for rock-star-in-exile Ramy Essam’s song Balaha (https://vimeo.com/425430077)

2) “Arts and Culture in Southeast Asia: Proxy Wars” with Arts Equator on the limits on freedom of expression in the arts in Southeast Asia (https://vimeo.com/464175197)

3) “Disease Control,” on how Covid-19 is affecting press freedom globally, as researched and presented by Index on Censorship (https://vimeo.com/473001129)

4) “Never Again,” with Uyghur PEN on the Uyghur Genocide in East Turkestan by the Chinese government (https://vimeo.com/480310651)

5) "Break Dancing in Gang-Dominated Guatemala” with Safemuse on breakdance battling across the Atlantic (https://vimeo.com/500643744)

6) "Indigenous People's Rights and Freedom of Artistic Expression" with Safemuse on the struggle of Indigenous artists and cultural workers (https://howlround.com/happenings/indigenous-peoples-rights-and-freedom-artistic-expression)

Lavon Volski
Photo: Krzysztof Karpiński

Confess
Photo: Camilla T Norvoll

[ENDS]