

FRESH PERSPECTIVES/8

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SAFEGUARDING THE DARING VOICE

Arts & Freedom of Expression



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Sidd Joag
March 2018



in partnership
with

artseverywhere
musagetes

ISBN: 978-2-930897-33-2



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Safeguarding the Daring Voice. Fresh Perspectives on Arts and Freedom of Expression

by **Sidd Joag**

Published by IETM - International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts, Brussels, in partnership with Arts Everywhere/Musagetes

March 2018

Editing and general coordination: Elena Di Federico, Nan van Houte (IETM)

Graphic layout: Elena Di Federico (IETM) on a template by JosWorld



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This publication should be mentioned as follows:

S. Joag, 'Safeguarding the Daring Voice. Fresh Perspectives on Arts and Freedom of Expression', IETM, Brussels, March 2018.

Link : <https://www.ietm.org/en/publications>

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About

SIDD JOAG

Sidd Joag is an artist, journalist, and community organizer working at the intersection of arts, culture, social justice, and human rights for 15 years. He is the Managing Editor at ArtsEverywhere and a member of Amber Art and Design.

ARTSEVERYWHERE/ MUSAGETES

ArtsEverywhere is a platform for artistic experimentation and exploration of the fault lines of modern society. It creates open spaces for dialogue about the value that the arts bring to all aspects of our communities and societies—not only from the points of view of artists, cultural workers, and arts institutions, but also globally from the perspectives of policy makers, ecologists, children, city builders, social justice leaders, farmers, educators, and activists.

Musagetes is an international organization that makes the arts more central and meaningful in people's lives, in our communities, and in our societies.

IETM

IETM is a network of over 500 performing arts organisations and individual members working in the contemporary performing arts worldwide: theatre, dance, circus, interdisciplinary live art forms, new media.

IETM advocates for the value of the arts and culture in a changing world and empowers performing arts professionals through access to international connections, knowledge and a dynamic forum for exchange.

Foreword by IETM and ArtsEverywhere/ Musagetes

Censorship comes in many forms and shapes. The 'typical' cases are those of top-down repression of artists and other dissident voices by political powers, or religious institutions with more or less explicit political authority, which deny permits, withdraw funding, or even resort to violent means to silence unwelcome voices. However, we increasingly see - or acknowledge - cases where citizens' groups united by a religious or political ideology rally against a specific artist or artwork.

It is part of the essence of art works, that what can be a work of excellence for one may be a stumble block for others. Add to this the hyper connectivity through social media, facilitating the union of a 'crowd' and the multiplication of a message, and the arena in which arts is being produced and received can turn into a battlefield. Conversely, it can also provide an opportunity to hear different voices and better understand the different positions.

In this time of blurred lines, several organisations around the world do wonderful work to combat censorship, enhance artistic freedom and support artists in danger, allowing them to continue to create even in extreme situations. We bow to their work, and hope they will be able to continue the crucial work they are doing. On our side, with this Fresh Perspectives issue, we decided to focus on 'newcomers' - professionals who are young, emerging, and/or not yet widely known, whose work at the intersection of arts and social change, whether by choice or by accident, has caused them troubles.

This publication combines the voices of courageous artists and experienced human rights defenders with short, selected testimonies from arts professionals who have replied to our online call for contributions. The precious experience and knowledge of Indian-American artist and human rights activist Siddharta Joag harmonizes those voices into a text that will hopefully be of interest for both experienced readers and professionals with limited knowledge of these topics. Your feedback and questions are welcome at ietm@ietm.org.

Beside the Author and the guest contributors, we wish to thank the artists who shared their stories with us: Ming Poon, Bill Aitchinson, Linda Wasson, Yafit Moyal, Sasha Portyannikova, Jake Oorlof, and James Oberhelm, as well as those who asked to stay anonymous for security reasons.

This issue of Fresh Perspectives features several “newcomers,”- individuals who have experienced censorship and repression and/or who have begun to create critical links across sectors. It also focuses on identity factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability, increasing their vulnerability to political pressures (if not overt censorship, they are easily victim of targeted budget cuts, dismissal for political reasons, among others) or to (more or less authentic) ‘censorship by the crowd’. Between the lines, it explores (artistic) strategies to counter all these kinds of pressure and to continue with one’s work in spite of extreme situations.

Sidd Joag,
March 2018

01. INTRODUCTION

On October 9, 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman on a bus home from school. Then 14-years old, she was already a prolific activist for female education in the Swat Valley, Pakistan and an emerging voice of global youth activism. At the age of 17, Yousafzai became the youngest Nobel Prize laureate in history. She is currently studying at Oxford, while continuing her activism globally as an advocate and spokesperson for female education. At the age of 20, she is unsure when if ever she can return home.

I remember being astounded when I first heard of Malala Yousafzai - such courage, quality of character and intelligence, at such a young age. And deeply disheartened by the grave reminder that those who wish to obstruct positive social change and silence protest will kill anyone - even a child - to do so.

Over the course of fifteen plus years working at the intersection of the arts, culture, human rights and social justice, I have had the privilege of meeting remarkable agents of change around the world. Most of these individuals/collectives/communities stumbled into (or out of) their assigned social, political and cultural roles, without the intention of becoming leaders or targets. But in so many cases, it is those artists, culture workers and communicators who have directly experienced censorship, persecution, imprisonment and/or displacement who become the most compelling and dedicated champions for their counterparts on the frontlines, at home and elsewhere.

Similarly, over the past ten years working more specifically on issues of free expression, censorship, persecution and displacement I have become quite familiar with established organizations and practices in the field. Yet, I have often found that it is those who come to these issues, indirectly, often from other sectors, who offer the freshest perspectives and strategies, as well as a flexibility and dynamism in creating solutions moving forward.

The international conversation around arts and culture, social justice and human rights is still dominated by established organizations in the field, international bodies, academia, and funders. These entities all play a role in establishing the language and criteria around risk, and determining who gets access to resources. Often times these institutional structures are more likely to support established artists, who may already have visibility, mobility and resources at their disposal to deal with risk situations. But less established artists, culture workers and communicators from marginal communities may face the same or higher levels of risk. Yet they lack the necessary recognition or access to ensure their safety and well-being after facing extreme censorship and/or being forced to flee.

Recently, we also see artists who explore and expose issues related to climate change, environmental depletion, corporate land grabbing and privatization of natural resources become quick targets of corporations/governments whose financial gains are threatened. Often times it is indigenous communities who reside on resource rich land and in proximity of water that are threatened and attacked,

and derided as being anti-development and anti-progress. Another justification for the exploitation of marginalized communities and the persecution of those who defend them.

02. FAMILIAR TERRITORIES

In 2017, I met the Bangladeshi blogger and activist Naila Zahin at a convening of the International Cities of Refuge Network in Lillehammer, Norway. Her depth of clarity in articulating the experience of being 22 years old living in political exile, was again, astounding.

Familiar Territories: A journey from Bangladesh to Iceland

Text by Naila Zahin

From what I can remember, I was around seven or eight when my voice was silenced for the first time. I was in Islamic studies class and asked my teacher, ‘Where did Allah come from?’ The teacher was extremely offended by my question. He promptly beat, scolded and humiliated me in front of the whole class. I was told to never ask that question because it is forbidden. I would go to hell if I asked questions like that. The idea of burning in the eternal hell fire, eating the disgusting food and suffering unimaginable pain frightened me to my core. So I never asked those questions ever again. I tried to be a good girl so that I can go to heaven and live happily ever after.

For a long time after that, I restrained myself from asking questions for fear of being humiliated again. But that did not stop me from questioning the things around me. I think I was 13 or 14 when I first voiced that I did not believe in god. I didn’t know what atheism was, its scientific and logical discourse. I just knew that I had never seen or met the almighty being they keep shoving down my throat, so I didn’t believe in it. It was that simple. But I knew that I could not say this out loud to anyone I

didn't trust. I didn't want to be beaten again in the name of religion.

One day I accidentally stumbled upon blogging. I was surprised to find that in this virtual world you could say anything you wanted and nobody would punish you for it (as long as you don't look at the comment section.) I could write about anything- my disdain for social norms, civility, femininity and the utter lack of excitement in life. Writing in social media gave me relief from being a perfect version of myself. It was the most freedom I had ever felt. I also realized the true nature of Men. People made nice comments on my trivial throwaway posts. But when I wrote about patriarchy or religion the same people turned against me. For example, when I finally got the courage to write about my lack of faith in religion. I wasn't even a full atheist yet; I was just toying with the idea, educating myself on the subject. I tried not to make a fuss about it and added it as a small anecdote in a bigger blog post. I could not have expected what happened next.

The flood of hate and misogyny was astounding. I had never felt that kind of hatred in my life before. I made the mistake of sharing the post under my real name. It had not occurred to me that using my own name might not be a good idea, when sharing controversial ideas. I just wanted to share my opinion. But people took it as an assault on their fragile faith. Like my atheism somehow made their faith invalid. Turning me to Allah's path became their main mission in life and my defiance to their approach was a massive insult. In retaliation, they harassed, bullied and threatened me. From a young age, these people have been conditioned to defend their religion no matter what the cost. These were their methods.

The second wave of suppression came in 2013 when I joined the Shahbag movement. The war criminals of 1971 Independence War of Bangladesh were on trial by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). But their initial punishments did not match their heinous crimes. A massive protest broke out at Shahbag square - hundreds of thousands of people joined - to demand justice for the three million martyrs of the war. The war criminals were all prominent leaders and members of the Jamaat e

Islami political party who are connected to Islamic terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Taliban and ISIS. To save their leaders, the party threatened everyone involved in the protest. The domestic terrorists connected to Jamaat e Islami even published a hit list of 64 bloggers and activists. Since then more than 20 artists, writers, bloggers, and activists have been murdered by Islamist extremists. Instead of condemning the attacks, the government took the terrorist's side. Many bloggers have been arrested by the police for 'hurting religious sentiments.' To appease the extremists the government also passed the section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act, essentially a blasphemy law. Since it was passed in 2013, hundreds of citizens have been arrested under this act, some for just liking a post on Facebook. In fear for their lives bloggers and activists, including myself, fled the country. The ones who remained, live in the fear of murder and prison every moment of their lives.

Suppression of free speech has been a lifelong experience, familiar territory. They murdered my brothers, my comrades, my idols. I was heartbroken, my fighting spirit diminished day by day. But I kept writing online and protesting in the streets. I yelled when they told me to shut up, even when I just wanted to give up. Repression is what drove me to blog in the first place, persecution kept me fighting.

Western concepts of freedom of speech and expression are vastly different from ours in Bangladesh. From my perspective, these are strange 'rights'. It is not a necessity for my survival, but it is a must need for living. Most people in my country don't live, they just survive. They don't care if they don't have the freedom to fully express themselves. Life is hard enough in Bangladesh, you need to run as fast as you can just to stay afloat. Basic human rights are not seen as fundamental as food, clothing, and shelter. Most people don't even notice when their rights are being violated. When they do, they turn the other cheek, keep their head down, try to survive peacefully.

This kind of herd mentality is also why it is so easy to manipulate the majority Muslim population. Being a poor country with



Naila Zahin (© Naila Zahin)

a low education level, religion is deeply intertwined with people's day to day lives. To serve their agenda, religious groups and personalities can turn these normally calm and peaceful people into crazy mobs in no time. This is why the religious political parties have so much power among their supporters.

The current attacks on freedom of expression are a deeply political issue in Bangladesh. No amount of foreign intervention will change the mindset of the current government. The only way we can change the situation is a proper course of ethical education. But Bangladesh has a poor education system that is deeply corrupt. The more the ruling class can keep the mass population ethically uneducated, the more they can suppress our voices, and the less they have to worry about a revolution. So the system keeps the masses in check, while the corrupt government stay in power with zero accountability.

With the help of ICORN (The International Cities of Refuge Network) I moved to Reykjavik, Iceland in April, 2017. It took a while to adjust to the cold and the freedom. I have never experienced the freedom of walking on the street alone at three in the morning, or not covering myself up all the time. Initially, it seemed that Bangladesh and Iceland were two completely different worlds, but now I understand that is not the case. There are a lot of cultural and political similarities between both countries. To show this, I am working on a project where I am going to gather testimonies of sexual harassment

and assault from both countries, and draw a parallel that illustrates the absurdness of victim blaming. I am hoping my work here will start a bigger conversation about the inadequacy of sexual assault laws in Iceland. I am also deeply involved with the current situation in Bangladesh and trying my best to help anyway I can. I am determined to make both my motherland and country of residence a better place for everyone.'

'Between 2015 and 2018, ICORN received 40 applications from Bangladeshi nationals seeking refuge. While the exact reasons for persecution vary, they were predominantly (often secular) bloggers, poets and activists facing pressure from Islamic radical groups. Unfortunately, the situation in Bangladesh is not unique. In every part of the world, artists, culture workers, journalists and activists are fighting corruption, militarization, fundamentalism and state violence, most often simply by speaking the truth. In all of these situations we see the ruling class will quickly resort to censorship and persecution to stay in power and maintain social control.

Aside from censorship, governments can facilitate instability and have allowed communities to evoke violence against one another, or targeted minorities, often along the lines of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity. These, often overlapping identity factors can exacerbate situations of risk, placing the individual or community in the cross hairs of not only state persecution, but 'censorship by the crowd'.

03.

MOVING

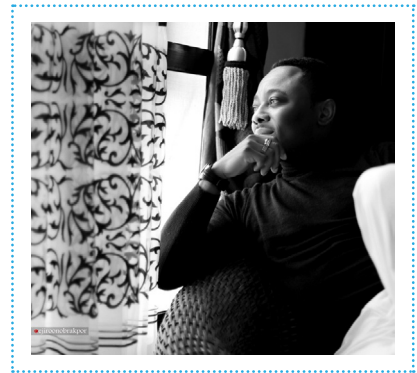
In 2015, I met the Nigerian writer, Jude Dibia, at the Malmö Safe Havens meeting in Sweden, where he had taken political asylum. Dibia was forced to leave his home, after the Nigerian government passed anti-homosexuality legislation in 2014. What had already been an unpleasant situation became tenably dangerous, with the government having legitimized existing hatred towards, and violence against queer people. For Dibia, a novelist writing about young queer characters, Nigeria was no longer an environment he could work in. But relocating to Malmö did not hinder Dibia's activist impulses. Rather, he explains he has found purpose as a settled immigrant, supporting the integration of new immigrants - many coming from similar situations and uncertainties - into Swedish society.

Moving

Text by Jude Dibia

I never thought I would leave, until I finally left. It is almost funny now when I look back and remember the times I pushed back on the idea, because a part of me knew that leaving wasn't what some people thought it was. There is this idea that many people have back home that once you leave, relocate to a foreign land, preferably Europe or North America, everything suddenly becomes right for you from the moment you land. I have travelled far too many times either for holidays, conferences or work related business to know, it isn't so for many.

Many leave and then experience the harsh reality that even in these lands, the citizens struggle to find disappearing jobs. Soon their hosts (family members or childhood friends) tire of their stay and they realize they have to leave and find a place of their own and look for anything to do while their funds dry up. Many find themselves stuck, ashamed to go back because going back would be admitting their failure. So, they take pictures in front of fancy places and post on Instagram and Facebook with the hope that people back home would



Jude Dibia (© Jude Dibia)

think that life abroad was everything that life at home had denied them—security, jobs, affordable housing, functional and reliable healthcare, running water and uninterrupted electricity and for some the glitz and glamour of a make-believe lifestyle built on images from Hollywood movies consumed since they were little kids.'

'For many years in Nigeria, I had been writing about people on the fringes because of their sexuality. I never thought that there would be a time it would be too dangerous to simply be, who you were. To write about things you felt strongly about, like being gay and the price that many pay to remain invisible.

My first novel, 'Walking with Shadows', was released in 2005. At the time, policymakers in my country were insisting 'gay' people did not exist in Nigeria. The few creative outlets like 'Nollywood' were churning out film after film portraying gay men and women as pedophiles and people possessed by dark, evil spirits. In the pulpits and religious centers, preachers and imams actively condemned and stigmatized LGBTQ+ persons.

The traditional press did not help the situation in the way it reported news concerning gay people either. Many of them adopted routine sensationalism when it came to reporting on 'homosexuals caught in the act'. Their tone judgmental and damning. Some went as far as publishing the pictures of these victims, bloodied and stripped to their underpants. They would even publish their names.

The effectiveness of these narratives cannot be overemphasized. Many people

are born into this mindset, growing up believing there is a justification for the hate they have toward gay people. For their homophobia.

This was the Nigeria of 2005, when my novel was released. In my book, I wrote a story about a gay man who was coming into his own and who defied all the negative stereotypes of homosexuality that many had long been fed.

After the January 2014 passing of the anti-same-sex marriage bill into law in my home country, it became clear that the government had waged a war against the LGBTQ+ community. And in its own unique way, given legitimacy to anyone who meant harm to that community. On the surface it tries to present itself as a moral/cultural polity that aims to protect the sanctity of traditional heteronormative marriages, but fails. One only has to read the wording of the law to know what it truly is. In it, cohabitation between same-sex sexual partners is forbidden; public show of same sex 'amorous' relationship is banned and, it imposes a prison sentence of between 10 to 14 years to anyone who registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies and organizations or supports the activities of such organizations.

Under the new law, anyone suspected of being gay could be hounded and subjected to the worst inhumanity by mobs, corrupt law enforcement officials and individuals who suddenly felt empowered to mete out their own justice.

This was not an environment I could continue to work in.

I left Nigeria in April 2014 for America. Leaving was traumatic for me; I had a life and career in Nigeria. I had to quit my job, give up my apartment, the library of books I had acquired over the years, my friends and pack what would be the beginning of a new life in two suitcases. After a year in the US, I moved to Malmö, Sweden for a writer's residency.

Malmö offered me new possibilities for my writing and activism. As the sanctuary guest writer for the city, I was introduced to a network of writers, culture workers and human rights defenders who in their own

way, defied the norm and worked tirelessly with not only displaced people but also anyone who had been denied common human dignity.

I became interested in the journeys and stories of LGBTQ+ migrants living in Sweden and went to great efforts to meet and interview them. I began developing a project centered on my conversations with LGBTQ migrants living in Sweden. I discovered a small group of unknown writers and artists within this group. They had all but given up on their art facing the harsh reality of navigating the complex immigration/asylum system in Sweden. I also discovered that a vast number of the people I spoke with recollected their journeys quite differently from those they had journeyed with. A central theme began to emerge – the connection between memory and migration.

At this point I was reacquainted with feminist-activist, Parvin Ardalan who had successfully launched a project called 'Women Making Herstory'. Parvin was also working on a new project anchored on migration and memory. We decided to combine forces.

'Migration Memory Encounters' aims to provide a platform for migrant artists who have made their way into Sweden on their own, without the support of NGOs or other organizations. Those who do not have the tools or platform to continue their artistic practice in a new society.

To date, 'Migration Memory Encounters' has organized four different public engagements and exhibitions with migrant artists, writers, performers and intellectuals. Each engagement has advanced the conversation with the Swedish and international public on what being different means in a new society, while exploring the relation to issues of censorship, human rights and artistic freedom.

As the project grows, I feel it is time to fortify my connection with the migrant LGBTQ+ community in Malmö and reignite the conversations I started with them. Perhaps because as time becomes this long overarching stretch of things constantly in motion, moving very much the same way

I was forced to move with very little on me, I've observed new movements from #BlackLivesMatter to #MeToo come to life boosted by hashtags on social media and it reminds me that not all movements will get a hashtag or trend.

There were many young brave gay men and women I spoke to when I first arrived Malmö, scarred by memories and separated by long distances from their homes. I would like to know what has happened in their lives since the last time I saw them in 2015—how many of them got their papers, how many are still waiting and how many had to begin new journeys because things didn't quite work out right.

Sitting in my apartment in Malmö, alone and writing this, I am reminded of Toni Morrison's description of a 'loneliness that roams' and thinking how apt it describes the journey of many migrants. Morrison writes: '...there is the loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive. On its own. A dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet seem to come from a far-off place.'

Particularly under repressive regimes, gender identity and sexual orientation can become a trigger for censorship and repression of artists, especially when such topics resonate in the work. A case in point in Europe is Poland, currently under the spotlight for the repressive politics against women's rights, where various art works dealing with homosexuality and/or religion have been censored. Some cases concern the censorship of Polish theatre groups. The support for a tour abroad, guaranteed by the Polish Cultural Centre in the hosting country, was canceled by the new director of the Centre only a few days before the planned travel due to what was referred to as the 'political content' of the work. The artists concerned by such cases often feel like being silenced twice: once because they cannot show their work (with the obvious loss in terms of money, work and visibility), and once because they cannot speak up, as visibility may ultimately put them in further danger. In some cases, official censorship can even be easier to bypass - and some artists have shared their creative strategies to do so.

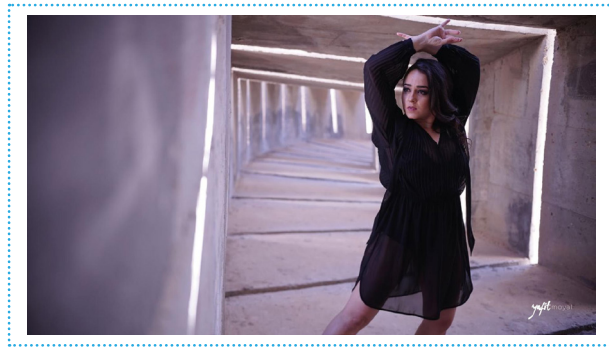
04.

STAYING. ARTISTIC
STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH
CENSORSHIP

Relocating to another country can be the only option for artists facing serious threats; however, in most cases, artists have to cope with censorship - official or not - while staying in their home country. This demands courage and creativity; some artists have offered their insights through an open call issued by IETM during the preparation of this publication.

Israeli multidisciplinary artist Yafit Moyal explains how her work 'The Spideress', which engages with the taboo surrounding women's refusal to sexual penetration in heterosexual relationships, has been refused funding from all the cultural institutions she has addressed. Moyal says that 'There is a direct link between sexuality and war in the Hebrew language', and this artwork 'resonates with the political situation in Israel as an occupying country steeped in warfare and military existence. The border between sex and war has been shattered. Modern Hebrew abounds with sexual metaphors originating in the battlefield and vice versa. The male sexual organ has the name of a weapon, a killing machine. The entire sexual lexicon is saturated with terms related to invasion, occupation and penetration. There is a direct link between political violence and gender violence in Israel'.

Performances tackling sexuality and nudity are one of the main targets of authoritative regimes, as Ming Poon explains, referring to his experience in Singapore, where his 'Undressing Room', a work touching on themes of desire, shame, power and intimacy, was 'denied classification' by the state authorities, which effectively acted as a kind of indirect censorship. This meant that the work could not be shown in front of an audience. The artist's response was to show it in private, in front of a selected audience (by invitation only), which ultimately resulted in a somehow



Yafit Moyal, 'The Spideress' (courtesy of the artist)

ironic situation, with the performance - unchanged - taking place in the same venue, on the same dates and times, and in front of the same audience members as initially foreseen, but without them having to pay for the tickets. The performance was supported by crowd-funding. Poon notes that this particular case raises the question as to what is the actual purpose of classification, when in practice, a non-classified work can still be performed as a 'private' event. This says a lot about the state's ambivalent relationship with artists.

Jake Oorloff, based in Sri Lanka, has a creative and courageous way to deal with official censorship in his country, where a specific national body, the Public Performance Board (PPB), is in charge of delivering a 'Censor license' to theatre productions. When creating his first theatre performance in 2007, in a tense political climate, where intimidation of journalists and violent attacks on media institutions were the norm, Oorloff agreed with the producer to present the performance inside a church. 'The choice was both artistic and strategic. The PPB at the time had never received an application for a performance to be presented in a church and therefore didn't know if they were overstepping their mandate. Perhaps it was in fact the first time that a secular play was being presented in a space of religious worship in Sri Lanka and therefore presented a conundrum about which state institution, if any, had jurisdiction over a performance presented inside a church. They eventually informed us that the performance could go ahead without a censorship license'. Overt censorship of the arts is still a reality

in the country, and Oorloff soon realized that 'spoken language and text could be censored but performance art that did not have text or spoken words could not'. So his work started to include moments of performance art not only in theatre settings but also as solo performances and photo-performance works, replacing words with evocative moments and acts that allowed him to express (at least in part) what he wanted to say.

When producing a work entitled 'My Other History' - a performance that dealt with the armed conflict and memorialization, Oorloff faced a specific 'delay tactic' used by the PPB - the 'Censor license' was issued so late that the show could not open as planned. In this specific case, some lines of the text referring to aerial bombing of the Jaffna peninsula in the north of the country by the State were censored. 'After much deliberation we decided to go ahead with the performance but announce to the audience that the show had been censored and what they were seeing was in fact altered by the state. We felt this would cause people to question the very idea of the censor mechanism that is in place even today in Sri Lanka'.

Censorship does not target only artistic work dealing with sexuality and desire; environmental changes are another topic that raises increasing curiosity by artists/activists, sometimes leading to pressures by authorities protecting commercial interests more than their citizens' interests. A case in point is the experience of US documentary photographer and filmmaker Linda Wasson, who tried to document - via photography - the situation of the Houston

Ship Channel in La Porte, Texas, once known as Buffalo Bayou ('bayou' is a southern term for creek or river) - which was 'literally dredged, re-shaped and re-formed to allow for supertankers, enormous ships designed to do absolutely nothing other than to carry vast quantities of oil across the ocean. They come into ports where refineries are based to unload their oil. Buffalo Bayou emptied into the bay which goes towards the Gulf of Mexico, which made it very accessible for trade; Houston grew up around this port, as many other cities have done. As the fossil fuel industry grew in significance for Texas, the refineries also grew up in this area and hence, the bayou was expanded into what is now the Houston Ship Channel'. Due to its commercial interests, the shape of the waterway has been changed dramatically from its original form, with devastating impacts on the environment. Wasson wanted to document the situation of the channel, but she was forced to delete photos off her camera by a police officer and had her name entered into the Department of Homeland Security's database. 'I played down the incident and did not protest, as obviously I did not want to go to jail and was also about to attend my father's funeral, so it was not the time for getting arrested. However, it concerns me a great deal that what I photographed should have been in any way whatsoever "prohibited" as the structures, in my opinion, are part of the environmental aspects of where my focus lies today in my work, i.e., how humans are changing the planet - the Houston Ship Channel is a man-made waterway that literally disrupts water flow and contributes to flooding'. Overall, Wasson reports having been 'marginalized, ostracized and generally disenfranchised much of the past 30 years for my continued support of marginalized communities' through her documentary photography and filmmaking work, a disenfranchisement worsened by her background: a working class woman of mixed ethnicity, she reports having a great deal of difficulty obtaining recognition and acknowledgement.



A scene from 'My Other History', by Ming Poon (© Devaka Senevirathna, courtesy of Floating Space Theatre Company)

05. RELOCATION OF ARTISTS AT RISK

With respect to relocation of artists in danger, there continues to exist a binary logic of safety and danger being associated with the Global North and South respectively. The tendency to relocate artists from the Global South to Western Europe or North America has overlooked the potential of and need for interregional support networks for persecuted individuals and communities. In response, some international networks/ organizations like ICORN are actively pursuing collaborations to expand safe haven options in the Global South, including Michael Schmidt's work in South Africa (see below), the Arts Rights Justice Academy regional laboratories in Salvador, Brazil and Beirut, Lebanon.

African Safe Havens Initiatives

Text by Michael Schmidt

From 2015-2017, the city of Malmö, Sweden was host to the Malmö Safe Havens meetings, a series of annual convenings bringing together an incredible group of artists, writers, educators, journalists, human rights workers, and administrators working with organizations and projects supporting safe relocation for forcibly displaced artists. Veteran journalist

Michael Schmidt covered all three years of the conference as a special rapporteur. Schmidt, an investigative reporter and war correspondent, is no stranger to grave risk. His introduction to the International Cities of Refuge Network (of which Malmö is a member city), was impetus to begin laying the foundation for safe haven or shelter cities in his native South Africa. Through a learning and solidarity partnership with Malmö Safe Havens convener Fredrik Elg, Schmidt has made significant progress towards viable relocation options within the African continent.

With repeated failures by UN peace-keeping missions to protect refugees, Africa has probably done better by its animals than by its people - so I was intrigued when introduced in 2012 to the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), which provides refuge for persecuted writers, artists and activists. ICORN wanted to expand its network of cities into the developing world. The desire to do so was partly to prevent ICORN becoming another 'West saves the Rest' initiative, as well as to reduce the culture shock experienced by displaced people. For example, when Kenyan poet Philo Ikenya was relocated to Norway by ICORN, her teenage son had to learn Norwegian to complete his schooling; he could have studied in English were they relocated to South Africa.

Back in 2012, ICORN's sole city outside Western Europe was Mexico City. Since then it has expanded to include - apart from new cities in North America - Oaxaca

in Mexico and Belo Horizonte in Brazil, with more being negotiated elsewhere. In Southern Africa, we are targeting the cities of Windhoek in Namibia, plus Cape Town, Johannesburg and the university town of Stellenbosch in South Africa, to bring them on board as ICORN cities. The project was founded under the aegis of the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism of which I was then Executive Director. After moving to freelance work in 2015, I relocated project oversight to the Professional Journalists' Association, and PEN's South African chapter has since partnered with us.

Progress has been steady but slow, as working with universities and municipalities can be bureaucratic. However, the project held launches in Johannesburg in May and in Cape Town in July 2014 to introduce academics and city officials to the Cities of Refuge concept; films relevant to the exiled creative experience were screened – Beate Arnestad's *Silenced Voices* on Sri Lankan journalists and Marion Stalens' *Silence or Exile* on ICORN guest writers. Because most exiled creatives – whether choreographers, film directors, poets, journalists or painters – want to continue doing what got them into trouble in their home countries, the project requires the assistance of third parties to give them that platform. So we have engaged the Universities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Stellenbosch to explore possibilities – and have also established relations with the Holocaust and Genocide Centres in Johannesburg and Cape Town because of our mutual interest in interrogating issues of migration and prejudice.

So far, the most progress has been made in Cape Town where, initially, the fact that the city is run by the opposition Democratic Alliance assured that its decisions in this regard would not be aligned to national politics and foreign policy concerns (this is why ICORN works at city and not national level). We conducted an ICORN tour of Cape Town in May 2015, bringing guest writers Parvin Ardalan, an Iranian journalist, and Ramy Essam, an Egyptian musician, to meet officials, academics, and activists, and were tentatively offered a defunct museum in a converted suburban house as a possible ICORN residence. A bilateral agreement

signed in 2016 between the mayors of Cape Town and Malmö in Sweden, a City of Refuge, will now be used to drive that project to signature and activation – hopefully in 2018.

Stellenbosch has proven slower. The original mayor who we met with in 2015 has been replaced, but the local university's journalism department is interested in the project. Johannesburg was revived in 2017 by a range of discussions on possible venues that incorporate theatres, dance studios, computer rooms, exhibition spaces, and residential apartments. There, our project coincides with a similar initiative by the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders' Network (PAHRDN) which aims at establishing Safe Hubs for persecuted human rights defenders in: Johannesburg, because of its cosmopolitanism; Kampala, Uganda, because of it successfully absorbed Somali and Burundian refugees; Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, because of a new law explicitly providing for such safe haven, and; Tunis in Tunisia, because of its new democratic dispensation; the initiative was launched in October 2017 with ICORN participation.

In June 2016, we relocated a Zimbabwean human rights defender in exile in South Africa to Windhoek, Namibia, who was seriously at risk of assassination by state agents. Two of his colleagues had already been murdered and one narrowly survived a poisoning. Relocation funds were provided by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). It was an operation fraught with danger that almost failed twice and resulted in the defender eventually returning to South Africa. But it taught us valuable lessons about such relocations which we shared at a conference with PAHRDN in August 2016. We have since, in 2017, successfully relocated a persecuted poet and blogger from Lesotho to South Africa, and are involved in monitoring the status of several other at-risk creatives. Our hope is that 2018 will finally see the project mature with Cape Town and perhaps Johannesburg signing on as ICORN cities.

One aspect of relocation that is of crucial importance and remains underdeveloped are ways to adequately deal with the trauma of socio-cultural displacement.

While an artist may be physically safe in a new city/country, often times they are left to their own devices in unfamiliar terrain, with limited language ability and few if any cultural connections. Further, without a relatable community to integrate into, individuals face many obstacles to their creative practice and professional development.

06.

RE-CREATING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Syrian visual artist Khaled Barakeh, an outspoken critic of the Assad regime, has been living in Germany since 2010. Having established a studio and practice in Berlin, he has extended his creative efforts to organizing the international community of displaced Syrian artists. The Syria Culture Index is an online platform to support Syrian artists at home and abroad. It creates space for dialogue, collaboration, professional development and employment opportunities. Barakeh, is one example of how artists at risk become strong advocates for their peers once they are resettled.

Syria Culture Index

Text by Khaled Barakeh

In 2005, I graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus in 2005 and was involved in Syria's contemporary art scene, but it wasn't until I traveled to Europe for the first time, that I noticed how undeveloped and restrained it actually was. Diverse factors played a role in the process of creating Syrian art infrastructure, but sadly, it has remained stagnant. Commercial galleries are locally focused without many international perspectives, and official institutions, which offer limited opportunities as well, are often corrupt.

That trip made me realize how disconnected from the contemporary art flow we, as Syrian artists, were and how much more there was to be seen and done in our cultural scene. That was when I decided to continue my studies abroad. Soon after returning to Syria, I was offered

an opportunity to take part in 'The Image of Middle East Festival' in Copenhagen. This experience led me to continue my studies in Denmark.

In 2010, I completed my MFA at Funen Art Academy in Odense, followed by Meisterschüler at the Städelschule Art Academy in Frankfurt, Germany. After graduating in 2013, my student visa expired, as did my Syrian passport. I knew I couldn't go back to my country due to my openly expressed political stands against the regime. I had no other legal option than to apply for asylum.

Previously I hadn't considered myself a refugee in the usual sense of the word – since my emigration to Europe in 2008 wasn't forced and I had lived in Germany for many years – but I realized that in fact, I had suddenly become one. Unable to return home or to apply for any legal status other than a refugee, I found myself in a confusing state of being in-between. Given the volume of media coverage of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, 'refugee' was not a neutral word anymore - it became a pejorative term, often used to stigmatize certain groups of people. I began thinking how we could work past these exclusionary labels and bring the human element back into the equation.

At that time, I decided to move to Berlin. The city became a meeting ground for a community of Syrian cultural producers who shared common hopes and experiences, unlike Frankfurt where I was living at the time. Berlin felt almost like a mini-Damascus - not only could I find familiar faces in a city of strangers, but new artistic initiatives, cultural events and exhibitions focused on the Syrian artistic community were happening all around. There was a creative network growing and newcomers were welcome.

Throughout my time in Germany, and especially since 2015, I've been continuously asked to suggest or chose Syrian artists for various exhibitions - and even with the best intentions, after certain time you inevitably get stuck within the same circles, the same familiar group. I always suggested artists whose work I believed in, but I felt the need to somehow map the community further. This way we

could provide opportunities to unknown producers, not only based in Berlin or Germany, but those still living in Syria and in the diaspora elsewhere. Feeling that granting all of them more democratic access to opportunities would not only improve their situation but perhaps even kickstart a bigger artistic movement, we decided to establish an online platform dedicated to that goal.

Syria Cultural Index (SCI), created as a response to mass displacement, is an alternative map connecting the Syrian artistic community around the globe, showcasing their work to the world. Alongside team of professionals, I managed to slowly turn this idea to reality - after receiving a startup grant, we are now in process of finally establishing an online platform. Covering all artistic fields, we aim to create an on-line space for all Syrian cultural practitioners (individuals and institutions as well), both inside and outside their country of origin. As SCI expands, we are aware that Syrian cultural producers not only need equal access to opportunities and visibility in the art market, but multi-level support in their professional practice. Through my experience of teaching artists with a forced migration background at Universität der Künste (UdK) in Berlin, I've realized that majority of them lack theoretical knowledge or ability to present themselves and their creative work in an effective way. SCI aims to ensure that artists are personally benefitting from being a part of the platform - through educational opportunities, a diverse range of support services and in belonging to a bigger movement that allows them to be seen and discovered.

Syria Cultural Index is an easily accessible online platform which functions both as a individual gallery space for its users as well as a social network for creative professionals. The core focus of SCI are Syrian cultural producers – it's a space dedicated to not only mapping works of both established and emerging artists, but creating new chances for them to develop it further. As a communications & networking instrument, SCI finds and connects Syrian artists to share their knowledge and professional skills and to find fitting collaborative partners for new



Khaled Barakeh (© Khaled Barakeh)

projects. Furthermore, SCI's reach will be extended by a mobile app offering its users additional services.

SCI will also be a place for cultural institutions and artistic networks to connect and share resources and information. Their input will be extended by a regularly updated overview of other essential information provided by the SCI network itself, to inform the users about topics like legal information, academic opportunities, job and funding offers, artist residencies, as well as upcoming events and activities. It's not only an event-database and cultural archive, but also a business incubator - the index serves to create opportunities for encounters with artists, institutions and supporters from all fields on the ground to make the community and their surroundings profit from the project. As Syrian Cultural Index network serves as a research tool, it analyses the collected data and maps Syria's cultural scene as a whole around the globe, which allows the Syrian artists as well as other institutions and individuals who are interested in the Syrian matters to filter the database based on the information needed - and therefore to design future programs according to the real needs and possibilities of the Syrian cultural community.

Syrian culture is constantly under threat: the artistic output is overshadowed by dispersion across nations and regions as well as often harsh economic, social or psychological situations. It is extremely important to realize the difficulties and challenges Syrian producers are facing everyday, both inside and outside of their country. Those still in Syria, besides the obvious harsh conditions of living in a war zone with its ongoing destruction of the tangible heritage and people, have little to no chances of producing freely and growing their artistic career – which is a result of an underdeveloped cultural infrastructure of the country. Nevertheless, Syrian cultural producers living abroad, despite new opportunities of free, uncensored creation, face new challenges too. As they move and integrate into new societies and communities, so does their art – often blurring the lines of their artistic identity, melting into their new surroundings, caught between what’s perceived as Syrian and what’s not. These traumatic times will surely have a lasting impact on the global dynamic of cultural outpouring and there is an urgent need to compensate for the current loss of the Syrian geopolitical identity by replacing it with a collective cultural identity.

Because of the complex narrative of this situation, it’s crucial to provide Syrian producers with means allowing their uniqueness to remain present. Syria Cultural Index addresses those issues and needs. Working against geographical, religious and political divisions that are strongly present in the cultural scene in Syria, SCI wants to reflect a wide cultural diversity on all levels. It serves to reconnect the social fabric by bringing together artists who were forcefully displaced with those who remain in the country, as well as it counteracts the defragmentation of the identity as a nation and represents and preserves the cultural heritage and its shape beyond national borders.

The SCI project is expected to have an essential impact on the integration process, so urgently needed in many countries around the globe. Experiencing Syria through its rich culture will help to shift from common stereotypes, fears or ignorance caused by war and immigration

problems, to open-mindedness and understanding towards Syrian people. Providing the opportunity to discover Syria through the perspective of art, it will provoke a necessary questioning of the image of Syria created by the mainstream media. We see Syrian Cultural index as a support system for the process of intercultural communication - enhancing integration and cultural diversity through real interaction with Syrian people. While Syria is a starting point for the Index, in the future we plan to expand the platform, first covering conflict zones in MENA region and then, hopefully, moving beyond.

Syrian Culture Index operates with the belief that a collective spirit and the active exchange of varying viewpoints, develops innovative thinking. We aim to devise solutions to some specific challenges posed by the extraordinary times we live in. We support artists and cultural producers to be actively involved and responsible for shaping the culture of this and generations to come. Within Syria Cultural Index we are looking forward to building diverse partnerships, expanding our horizons and bringing new collaborations to life.

Barakeh’s work creating the Syria Culture Index is one example of the ways in which resources from the art world and philanthropy can be accessed and leveraged to support displaced, marginalized and under-recognized artists at risk. And particularly effective when artists are operating from first hand experience.

Increasingly, and in large part because of the persecution of high profile individuals, arts administrators, curators, educators and other art world actors are working in different capacities, and more deliberately, with artists who are censored, persecuted and/or displaced.

07.

CONNECTING ARTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS FROM OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Lalita Salander, a curator and doctoral student, was exposed to initiatives defending free expression and fighting censorship through her research on artist residency programs internationally. Coming from an art world background and considering her own personal relationship with the criminal justice system, Salander has been exploring ways in which her research, and in particular the process of archiving, can connect the arts and human rights worlds and strengthening the global movement around artist safety.

Towards an Agenda of Repurposing the Largess of the Art World

Text by Lalita Salander

2008: ‘It is not about justice, it is the law’, said the judge in a New York City courtroom, absent of color aside for the surreal reflection of dark winter skies, and fake-wood against Formica.



Screenshot New York Post Family Portrait Courthouse, Lower Manhattan

1981-1987: Thin grey New York light delicately spreading its magic. Trees canopying the open space between East 80th and East 79th Streets. A child runs downstairs to that month’s opening at her parent’s art gallery that doubled as their family home. I used to think that art was

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

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the beauty of colors ground from precious stones.



Detail of *The Milkmaid*, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1660



Google earth screenshot 22 East 80th

I own up to the privileged position in which I grew up; access to making art, looking at art and possessing art were givens. New York City in the 1980s, the birthplace and the age of banks investing in the art market. Art was easy and still is, for those players within the multi-billion dollar art system who have agency including consecrated artists, dealers, curators, museum professionals, and collectors amongst others. Artists that refer to themselves as social practitioners even fall into this schema of power and money subsumed into the museum circuit and collectors' fetishes.



Esteemed Clients of First Republic Bank

2010, 8 AM: The grey of Mid-State Correctional Facility is a different kind of depressing than the insidious greys of Rikers Island. In a welcome center, two prison guards sit behind a desk. A mother who boarded a bus in Jamaica, Queens at

midnight with her three-month-old stands at the front of the line - the achievement of a night's journey behind her. Then, the look on her face and countless faces like hers, when the guard turns the mother away falsely claiming her clothing is inappropriate. Under the bitter grey Utica sky, she waits a few meters from her partner, waiting in his cell to meet their baby, who he has never seen. For eight hours, the young mother comforts her baby, until the return bus takes her back to Queens. That bitter grey now gripping their warm hearts.

August 2017: We sit across a table in Germany. I tell her of the sound of iron bars slamming behind me as I left my father in the visitation room. She tells me of her experiences of solitary confinement in an Iranian prison because of her poetry. Our teary eyes meet as she describes the pain of not seeing her mother again in her home country. Over the course of the past decade I developed a personal relationship with the word justice based on my family's experience. And in a sense, particularly as it relates to the arts.



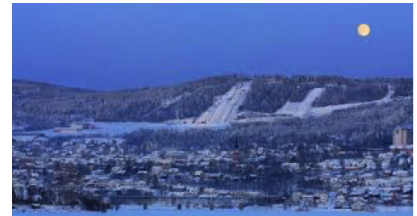
Family portrait, Mid-State Correctional Facility. As white visitors we did not have trouble getting in to see our father.

March 2017: When I applied to the first Arts Rights Justice Academy, I shared this story and the work I do now; as a curator pursuing a doctorate focusing on artist residency programs. While curating Residency Unlimited's Dialogues platform I was introduced to ArtistSafety.net (formerly freeDimensional), a human rights network active between 2006-2016 that advocated on behalf of over 200 artists and

cultural workers from close to 35 countries. Artists, whose safety was threatened due to their practice, many working under the radar of mainstream media coverage of persecution and violations of freedom of expression.

Throughout 2017, I participated in ArtistSafety.net's S.H.O.P. Talk, a learning cohort at the intersections of arts and human rights. The goal was to clarify strategies for safe relocation and best practices for hosting artists at risk. I joined as a representative of the artist-residency field. Others joined including representatives from ICORN (International Cities of Refugee Network), Protect Defenders, Freemuse and The University of Hildesheim who announced The Arts Rights Justice Academy within this context.

August 2017: She tells me of the isolation of living in northern Europe - the weather, lack of community, the expectations and the needs not met. A poet turned pawn in the European Union (EU) cultural policy agenda to purport 'inclusion'. A band-aid for a failing system? She landed in Norway though one such mechanism which creates residencies called 'safe havens' for artists in distress.



Norway

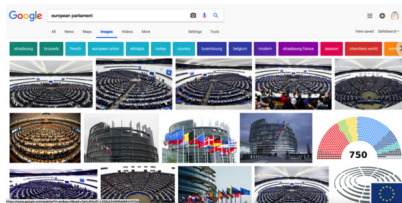


Tehran

January 2018:

I am guilty, of the global north fetish of the global south. I found the possibilities of intersecting human rights and artist residencies sexy, fantasizing an ideal system already in place. On the flipside, I've understood anew some things worth considering:

- The lack of understanding on the part of the governmental and institutional systems of what artistic practice is and how to nurture this practice.
- The lingo of 'safe-havens' is utilized but where is the long-term structural support of the artist beyond moving them across borders?
- Can the art world stand in solidarity with artists who fight injustice and live in precarity everyday? How?
- Institutional actors are for the most part from the global north while the artists are from the global south, perpetuating the neoliberal system of social, economic, political and cultural inclusions and exclusions.
- Can these mechanisms give space for the artists to carve their futures rather than the subject/object of EU projects?
- When on the ground work moves from grassroots initiatives such as ArtistSafety.net to institutionalized mechanisms, such as the European Union and University systems, there is a gap of understanding vis a vis those in positions of power and those on the ground.



Screenshot google image search European parliament

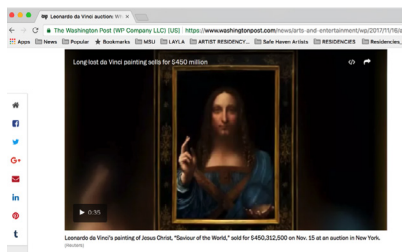
Precarity of artistic freedom exists in different forms of subjugation across the globe. From brutal silencing through assassination, violent assault, and imprisonment to less violent but insidious

crimes against expression. Like in the United States, where: 'This history of artistic suppression continues in the public schools and has contributed to the elimination of the arts as a core component of the educational experience of low-income students.'¹



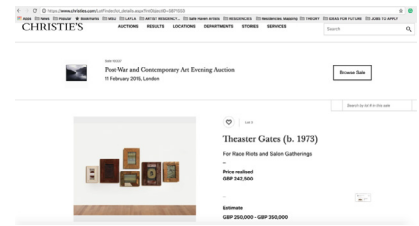
Public School, South Bronx

The most recent data tells us that the total sales of the global art market (from 2016) range between \$45 billion US Dollars - \$56.6 billion depending on which report referenced. If the art-world is about promoting art it must also promote freedom of artistic expression for as Daisetz T. Suzuki states, 'Art lives where absolute freedom is, because where it is not, there can be no creativity. Freedom and creativity ... are synonymous'².



Screenshot, Washington Post reporting on the record breaking auction sale of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi, 1500 - \$450.3 million.

To those who hold positions of power in the art world and human rights field, I pose a final question: what are the connections between defending human rights as they relate specifically to freedom and justice and the art world's narrative of social practice?



Theaster Gates is one of the definitive social practice artists of the 21st century. This is a screenshot of a 2015 auction sale-price of his work - GBP 242,500.

Like Salander, it is oftentimes an indirect connection that brings people outside of the human rights and social justice sectors into contact with issues related to free expression and censorship. It is perhaps this initial lack of familiarity that adds to the energy and excitement that at times seems lacking in professionalized circles that reside within institutional structures. Often the most reliable forms of psychosocial support are 'non-professional' - concerned individuals who are willing and able to engage directly with others in processing trauma, beginning with basic emotional support.

¹ Lori D Ungemah and Ariana Gonzalez Stokas, 'Making Space for the Possible: Artists-In-Residence in Community College', *The Journal of The National Art Education Association* 71 (1), 2018
² Daisetz T. Suzuki, 'Zen and Japanese Culture', Pantheon Books, New York, 1958

08.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE RELOCATION OF ARTISTS AT RISK

Consider being: threatened, attacked, imprisoned, tortured, and kicked out of your home – this is the experience of many individuals working on the frontlines of social change. The sense of isolation that ensues can lead to depression, anxiety and other manifestations of psychosocial trauma, which often go undetected. Individuals seeking help can downplay the physical and psychological trauma they have endured, in an effort to not come across as needy or damaged. At the same time, most relocation programs do not have the capacity to fully recognize and adequately address trauma.

Nicolle Bennett, a non-profit arts administrator and educator, with a background in health and policy, offers her recent insights into the psychosocial aspects of forced displacement and relocation. Bennett reminds us that ‘to effectively serve displaced persons, the whole person must be considered’.

Bodies/Voices/Lives in Displacement

Text by Nicolle Bennett

When facing censorship, systemic oppression, or more violent forms of persecution, an artist may fear that an admission of psychological or medical trauma will limit their options for support and/or shift focus away from their work. Many of these individuals will need to be relocated, temporarily or permanently, but often indefinitely. The need for swift action in the face of imminent harm means the potential trauma of this upheaval can go unchecked by the artists and those who seek to assist them. There is a need for timely, coordinated responses that prioritize the technical aspects of relocation, while acknowledging that hosting sites or other sources of support often feel unprepared to address these additional challenges due to a lack of available information and resources.

The need to think and plan more strategically in support of those taking great risks to fight injustice and express freely drove the creation of S.H.O.P. Talk 2017: an experimental learning process. It sought to inspire the sharing and refining of an evolving set of Safe Haven Operating Procedures, for use by individuals, organizations and communities that host or want to host artists, culture workers, human rights defenders and others at risk.

It was repeatedly revealed that persons-at-risk need support from local spaces and communities in order not just have a roof under which to survive, but to flourish in a new environment – support that is life-enhancing, socially and culturally inclusive. In short, hosting is more than bringing someone to a place.

Safety, not to be separated from health, in this sense, is more than the absence of danger (disease). It is the result of the complex interplay of systemic, community and individual factors that allow a person to feel they have control over their bodies, voices, and lives. The World Health Organization’s [Declaration of Alma-Ata](#) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being - as a connection to community and culture, as much as to the receipt of acute services and care.

When the threat of imminent harm due to the very act of personal expression necessitates a move to an unknown place, complex and holistic support mechanisms are needed to address logistical, as well as psychological, social, and creative needs. Freedom from brutality and persecution, access to housing and acute care, a means of income, social connection, and an overall sense of autonomy are fundamental to personhood and well-being (however broadly defined). This is inclusive of those artists/activists who are fighting for those rights on behalf of others, as they shed light on injustice and open spaces for contemplation and possibility.

It is essential, then, for those who provide support to be able to effectively identify and engage partner organizations who are able to provide mental/health/social resources and services, and to clearly understand the potential psychosocial effects of

displacement – in order to anticipate them, discuss them, and engage with appropriate support networks when needed. Effective hosting and support is not demonstrated by providing all things for all people; rather by understanding the potential range of needs, and using the hosting space as a focal point to provide and/or access those resources when necessary. What are the potential psychological effects of persecution on an individual? What are the behavioral, emotional, and even physical effects of displacement from one’s physical belongings/spaces and/or social/community circles? While these questions are being researched and answered in different capacities and a global body of knowledge being formed, because each individual’s perception and interpretation of trauma is unique, they need to be continually revisited.

Knowledge of (and access to information on) this potential range of effects is key to ensuring a broad range of resources is identified and available, when needed.

A survey conducted by the University of York’s Centre for Applied Human Rights found that 86% of persons at risk identified being nearly equally concerned about their overall personal well-being as with their physical security. While one could generally ask ‘what is well-being?’ more important is to consider the displaced person’s own definition/s of and approaches to well-being and care, which can vary across culture, region, profession and/or individual. For example, care of self equates to meditative or other personal stress-relieving practices for some, while for others, any notion of personal well-being is intimately tied to community (and any variation in-between). Of note is also the hesitation that displaced persons may feel in expressing emotional or even physical trauma, due to cultural/gender norms, a sense of duty, or a fear that availability of financial/housing services and/or the reception of their work will be negatively impacted.

To effectively serve displaced persons, the whole person must be considered. Shedding light on these important issues in open forums, and encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing across sectors that are involved (or could be involved) in providing support is an essential first step, as is

continued research in this area. The hope is to build capacity for current and potential support providers and for the artist, to not only survive, but thrive.

Alternative/Positive Futures: Integrating art into human rights defence and research

Text by Sanna Eriksson

In January 2018, University of York Center for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) celebrated its ten-year anniversary with an event and exhibition, Art, Activism & Research. While CAHR has operated within a human rights framework, in recent years they have begun to integrate artists (who are human rights defenders) and the arts into their program. This in recognition that creating stronger links between human rights defenders and other sectors allows for a displaced individual's needs to be addressed in a more holistic manner. Sanna Eriksson, the center coordinator of CAHR, reflects on 10 years of hosting human rights defenders, active research and new modes of constructive community building and engagement through the arts.

On the ground, human rights practice has been at the core of the work of the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) since it was established in 2007. From the very beginning this has involved inviting front line human rights defenders (HRDs) for fellowships to participate in CAHR's research and teaching activities. Despite being practice-oriented, CAHR's work was more within the traditional range of human rights education and research until January 2013, when Juliana Mensah arrived at CAHR as a Leverhulme Trust funded artist in residence. In many ways Juliana's arrival was a turning point for CAHR that culminated with our 10th anniversary celebrations in January 2018 where the focus was the Art + Activism exhibition and a two-day workshop on Art, Activism and Research. Seeing the importance and utility of art in human rights defence and research has certainly moved to the core of the work we do, alongside other, more 'traditional' practice.

Art has seeped into all three main categories of our work over the past five years: support of HRDs, teaching students, and conducting research. From 2013 until 2016 Juliana Mensah worked

with our visiting HRDs in creative writing workshops. She not only introduced creative writing to them, but also tried out methods such as playback theatre for HRDs to deal with their experiences through the arts, directed public performances with HRDs performing texts they had written, and edited a collection of mainly non-fiction writing ('Defending Writes', 2013).

Many HRDs unused to artistic expression were wary at first, but once having tried out a few workshops embraced this new way of talking about their work, even standing up on stage at York Theatre Royal performing poetry they had written. Juliana Mensah also organised three-day residential stays at a monastery in the north east of England - musicians were invited to lead workshops where HRDs could further explore creative ways of expression. In the end many HRDs have taken the creative methods home with them, continuing either with writing practice in their own time, or utilising methods from CAHR workshops and trainings within their own organisations. In 2018, we are exploring collaboration with the Afro-Latin percussion and brass duet Ladies of Midnight Blue, who are leading music and visual arts workshops for the HRDs and putting together a performance with them for York International Women's Festival.

The next step was to introduce the arts into postgraduate teaching: a popular postgraduate module called Culture and Protest was created. In this module students were not only acquainted with the different ways the arts can be used in activism, but also had to carry out projects where art was part of the activism. Over the years, students were involved in a variety of projects, including curating the York Human Rights City Network's annual Human Rights Film Festival, creating their own human rights films featuring HRDs, and organising a theatrical human rights walk in the city.

As the most recent development, the arts have made their way into how CAHR academics conceptualise and realise their research. Dr Alice Nah's research, 'Navigating Risk, Managing Security, and Receiving Support', has invited multiple artists in different media to interpret interview transcripts where HRDs from



Sanna Eriksson (© Sanna Eriksson)

five different countries discuss their experience of risk and security in the context of human rights defence. The arts have been utilised in an innovative way to share research results with audiences who would not read a research paper. Professor Paul Gready's project, Development Alternatives, exploring exactly that in Uganda and Bangladesh, has invited local artists to imagine alternative futures through workshops already in the data collection phase. And finally, Martin Jones's 'Law of Asylum in the Middle East and Asia' will utilise digital storytelling as a device for advocacy and online discussion.

The Art + Activism exhibition brought together all these different strands of work, and also some of the artists who had participated in Dr Nah's and Professor Gready's projects. The exhibition and the Art, Activism and Research workshop, which it coincided with and formed an active part of, thus became fora where academics, artists and human rights defenders alike were able to discuss the intersections between art, academia and human rights, and where these would go next.

With civic space shrinking for academics, artists and human rights defenders alike across the globe, it is becoming perhaps more urgent than ever to look at ways how to create spaces for interaction

and discussion between these different actors. Art, activism and academia are all imperative in maintaining democratic societies, and therefore defending free expression could not be more acute in this climate of rising nationalism and populism. It is crucial to support initiatives that bring academics, activists and artists together, to learn from one another and also to forge new working relationships with each other. CAHR's work so far can function as one example of how to do this, how to engage artists with the work of academics and activists in order to reach out to the general public and generate conversations on alternative, positive futures.

09.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE FUTURE OF FREE EXPRESSION & SAFE RELOCATION OF ARTISTS DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

In December 2016, ArtistSafety.net facilitated a conversation at the second Malmö Safe Havens meeting in Sweden titled the Communicative Ecology of Artist Rights. The focus was on how different forms of theoretical and experiential knowledge, and best - on-the-ground - practices being developed at the intersectional fields of arts and culture, social justice and human rights might be shared more effectively with greater efficacy. The centerpiece of the workshop was a framing of this line of inquiry (across organizations and sectors) - being developed in partnership with ArtsEverywhere.ca - on free expression, censorship, oppressive state apparatus, as well as religious, corporate and other private interests that result in the endangerment of artists, culture workers and communicators. Of particular focus was the relationship between the violent persecution and forced migration of artists and safe relocation considerations and strategies.

In part as a result of the conversation that began in Malmö, beginning in February 2017. ArtistSafety.net initiated a six-month online learning cohort - SHOP (Safe Haven Operating Procedures) Talk. The approach, form and objectives were open and experimental by design. Within the parameters of a curated exchange between artists, human rights defenders, funders, administrators and community organizers across the world, we were able to move forward beyond concept - what a "communicative ecology" might look like and how it might foster and support parallel projects and initiatives that cross sectors.

We like to think of what we do at ArtistSafety.net as creative trouble shooting around the mobilization and delivery of services and resources to artists and activists at risk. In the course of six months, and beyond, we have seen many new productive relationships grow from this process. At the same we identified a few shortcomings and obstacles that we will continue to address:

- Oftentimes actors in the field are working in close intentional proximity but are unaware or disconnected from one another's efforts.
- At times, even when organizations in the arts and human rights worlds are made aware of their connectivity, it seems that insular thinking makes it difficult to find ways to collaborate and maximize their impact.
- Competition for funding is subtle but divisive. Transparency is one important device of knowledge sharing that is compromised as a result.
- It is hard to find connectivity between institutional and organizational initiatives, with more grassroots and social movement styled efforts, due to some clear fundamental differences in approach and perception of principles.
- Participation was limited due to time zone and availability of participants. (e.g. we had light participation from outside of North America and Europe)
- Participation was limited due to language accessibility. This compromises a balanced

representation based on region/country.

10.

RESOURCES

Several articles on [ArtsEverywhere](#) deal with freedom of expression and censorship.

HowlRound's series of articles on freedom of expression, curated by artist and activist Jessica Litwak, highlights the work that is being done around artist rights and safety in the theatre world. The hope is to ignite dialogue, spark further exploration, and encourage more people to get involved.

- Mary Ann deVlieg, '[Artistic Freedom: a Moveable Feast](#)'
- J. Litwak, '[Taking Action: An Artist Becomes an Advocate](#)'
- Julie Trébault, Laura Kauer García, '[A Global Network That Protects and Defends Artists at Risk](#)'
- Matthew Covey, '[Why Artists Should Pay Attention to US Visas, Policy, and Cultural Exchange](#)'
- Hjalmar Jorge Joffre-Eichhorn, '[In Search of Lost Hope: Theatre Against All Odds in Afghanistan](#)'

FRESH PERSPECTIVES

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