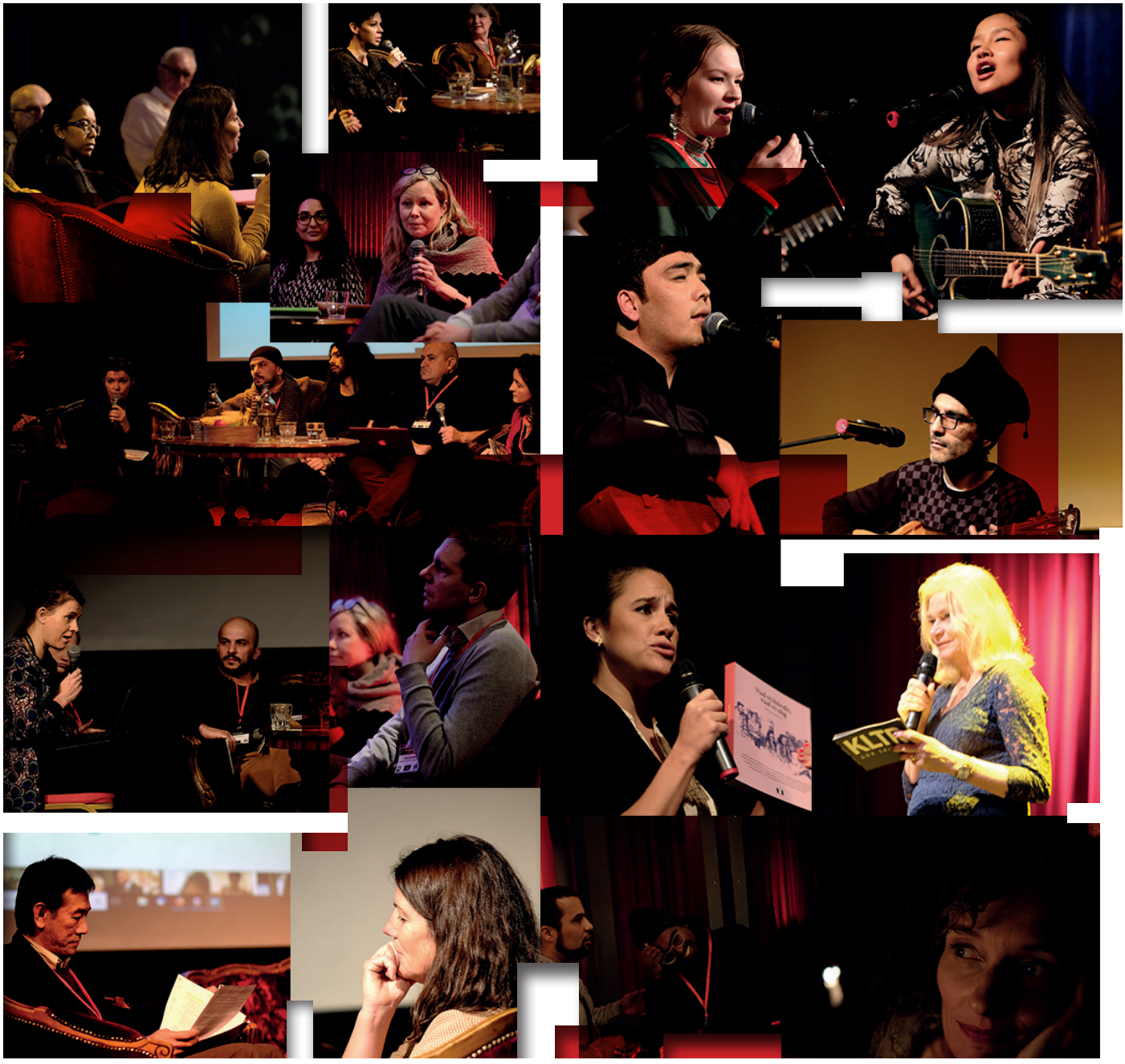
The Malmö Meeting 2017

REPORT

SAFE HAVENS



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SAFE HAVENS

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SWEDISH ARTSCOUNCIL

SafeMUSE

NORDIC-BALTIC MOBILITY PROGRAMME
Culture

REGION SKÅNE

Malmö stad

By Safe Havens rapporteur Michael Schmidt

As the trajectory of a falcon, underscored by the rhythm provided by musicians Nariman Hodjati and Masih Madani, elegant Iranian dancer-choreographer Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam spun dervish-like in a widening gyre, his svelte movements embracing the widening world of the arts, from the subatomic tracery of its paints and inks to the furthest reaches of its Diasporas.

To the awed appreciation of his audience, Sahrokh's feet stirred the dust motes on the floorboards of the onion-domed Moriska Paviljongen, site of the fourth gathering of Safe Havens: the Malmö Meetings. Initiated in 2013, Safe Havens is the premiere international gathering of activists in the field of art, as well as organisations that monitor the safety of creatives worldwide – some of which host artists in exile in extreme circumstances. Held in a contemplative, dynamic and engaged atmosphere over 6-8 December 2017, delegates and artists from across the world were delighted to hear that funding had been secured for a 2018 edition of the gathering.

Safe Havens 2017 embraced a range of themes, some more technical and internal to the collaborating organisations – but many of great interest to the broader public, ranging from how to combat hate speech and cyber-bullying, to how the Arab world's artistic and intellectual Diasporas are dealing with the somewhat deflated atmosphere in the wake of the erosion of the promise of the so-called "Arab Spring."

"One of the things that has scared me the most in the project is not to find out how brutal regimes can be in the far East or the far West, but to find out how prevalent and present censorship is in our part of the world."

The Long Reach of Censorship

Two key discussions – backed by stirring performances – demonstrated the universal, and in many cases, insidious nature of censorship against the arts. The theme was initiated by Norwegian cellist and SafeMUSE co-founder Jan Lothe Eriksen, interviewing Norwegian pop-star Pål Moddi Knutsen whose personal journey to a rather shocked awareness of the global prevalence of censorship was enlightening. Moddi's album and book project ***Unsongs: Forbidden Stories*** www.unsongs.com tells the stories behind twelve outlawed songsW from Mexico to Britain to Israel to Vietnam.

Moddi said the roots of this project that altered the direction of his career so profoundly was that over 2013-2014, based on the success of his sweet-nostalgic pop tune ***House by the Sea***, he had been touring the world launching an album in English and Norwegian. The tour took him to 25 countries from India to Argentina – with a concert planned in Tel Aviv in February 2014 that he wound up cancelling. In doing so, he became aware of a protest song that a Norwegian songstress had been force to drop from her repertoire in Israel while on tour there in 1982.
"She had been persuaded not to perform it and after that she had forgotten about it and nobody had sung it in 32 years, and that fascinated me as when you go to a festival or turn on the radio you listen to the music that festival or radio serves you; you don't think too much about the music you don't get to hear…. It was beautiful, it was powerful, it was everything that I wished pop music should be and… it made me ask myself whether there were other songs that disappear or get disappeared."

Later, during his concert, Moddi explained that pivotal song further: "This was literally where the whole adventure started for me… a protest song that nobody had sung in 32 years, a protest song composed in 1982 when I was minus five years old… for various reasons the song was buried and forgotten… It's about an Israeli officer called Eli Geva who during the war in Lebanon in 1982 had refused to lead his forces into Beirut and made himself a traitor; so some people he wasn't a traitor at all but a hero…" A contemporary ***Christian Science Monitor*** report on the incident is here www.csmonitor.com/1982/0729/072944.html.

"There was something about this song that fascinated me and… it triggered something that was huge, something I did not expect: the search for songs that for some reason remained unsung. And quite contrary to what I believed, I found censored music almost everywhere. I was expecting to find some songs from South Africa, or South America, or China, or Saudi Arabia, maybe from other authoritarian regimes, and maybe from World War II and the fifties and sixties – but it appears that every place on earth, every country and every era has its forms of censorship, and all of sudden I found myself swimming in a sea of music that I never knew existed, songs in Hebrew, songs in Arabic, songs in Vietnamese and songs in Spanish… One of the songs I found was from Russia It was a song by the punk collective Pussy Riot, a song that had given them two years in prison for performing it in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow in 2012. And to begin with I didn't have much faith in Pussy Riot; I mean it sounded terrible!… Still there was something about this incredible story about these five women who put themselves at such risk and I decided to make a version of Pussy Riot's music… One of the things that has scared me the most in the project is not to find out how brutal regimes can be in the far East or the far West, but to find out how prevalent and present censorship is in

our part of the world… Kate Bush's Army Dreamers, a short and almost cute song about a boy who goes to the army for Queen and fatherland and comes back in a coffin: this was too much for the British BBC back in 1991 when they circulated a list of 67 songs that were unsuitable for airplay during the Gulf War… [and] when I released this album [in 2016] it was still too much for them… As I said, the thing that scared me most about this whole project is to find out how close censorship can be without you knowing anything about it."

Jan suggested earlier that Moddi had treated the banned lyrics gathered from around the world that he translated into English – for reasons of accessibility – "respectfully, and yet there is a vast distance from the ***Punk Prayer*** that we know of Pussy Riot to your own beautiful ***Prayer*** on the steps of the church…[a haunting version he later played at Safe Havens]." Moddi agreed that "some of the melodies have been altered quite a lot and sometimes even the whole lyric had to be rewritten to make it work in English… Some of these songs have been heavily reworked, but to keep the message… as provocative and as controversial as originally… These songs have actually made people angry and after the release we have had some not so comfortable situations that arose from the album."

The ***Unsongs*** project transformed Moddi from a pop-singer who enjoyed the instant gratification of online "likes" into somewhat of a free speech advocate. One unexpected fallout was that, touring Norway with a Russian orchestra, the orchestra members "were warned that they might face consequences on returning to Russia if they played Pussy Riot's music – even in Norway. That showed how slippery this concept is of freedom of speech. I initially thought that censorship was something that was done by states… you had a certain laws in certain states and that organisations like Amnesty International and Freemuse were working to influence the laws in different countries, but this story is also showing how freedom of speech is something that leaks." They were forced to leave ***Punk Prayer*** out of their Norwegian concert, "so that shows how Russian interests can influence Norwegian musicians in terms of what they say and what they play and what they sing…"

"When I stepped into this world of politically-charged, controversial, angry, pointy music, it amazed me how far musicians were willing to go in order to get their message out – and we are of course at this conference because of some of these musicians who have really gone lengths to sing what they believe in… These are musicians with a message: that message was so strong I couldn't resist it as a listener.

"The reception of the album has been fantastic: we've had reviews in the ***Financial Times and The Guardian*** and we've been over to the BBC and we've sold out the opera house in Oslo, so the public, the people, have received it very well – but they don't play the music, anywhere, not on the radio, and every now and again I'll be invited by some radio studio to talk about it, but they don't play the music… That is one of the things that has scared me: how difficult it is to get music with a message played on the radio." As an example, he cited being interviewed on BBC1's breakfast show after the album's launch in September 2016, a show with between 2,5-3-million viewers and being told by a producer just before going on air "not to talk about sex or violence or religion – and that's everything on the album basically!" The BCC disputed Moddi's assertion that it had censored ***Army Dreamers*** back in 1991 – but, he said, still refused to play it in 2016.

Demonstrating how close to the bone, and close to home, the invisible knife of censorship cut, during his concert, he introduced endogenous Sámi folk joiker Marka Martensson whose work – online at www.marjamortensson.no – aims at restoring her home tongue from racially-enforced obscurity in the transnational Sámi realm that traverses the boundaries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia and Ukraine.

Moddi told the audience: "One of the songs on the album is a 200-year-old Sámi song from Norway, a song that was written not many hours away from the place where I live… which has traditionally been ripe with Sámi culture… Even though my neighbours had Sámi surnames they didn't speak Sámi in their homes. It came as a slow shock to me to find out how successful Norway has been in silencing our own indigenous population to the very degree that you don't consider it censorship anymore." The song Moddi and Marja then sang was called ***The Shaman and the Thief***, a clever verbal contest between a Sámi shaman, a ***noaide***, and a Norwegian priest, over their opposing values, particularly relating to use of the land – the decolonisation debate has been a Safe Havens undercurrent – which the priest viewed as his possession by divine right, complaining that "You are in my house and you call me a thief." The noaide responded from her naturalist perspective: "You don't understand what it means to be of this land; you have to learn how to read marks on the trees; all the laws that you know, they don't apply here." The song, suppressed under Norway's shameful Norwegianisation doctrine, ends in irresolution with both priest and ***noaide*** crying at each other: "So leave and leave me be; I'll drive you away." The two later told me how old photographs of Sámi weddings which showed the couple in Western dress often bore scratch-marks where the couple's Sámi shoes had been scratched out in a deliberate eradication of their culture.

Marja told the audience: "Normally I write songs in **Åarjelsaemien gïele**, and that's a language called South Sámi, and around 500 people speak this language, and that's the language of my heart, that's my native language and that's the best way of expressing your inner thoughts. A lot of artists love to write in their mother tongue because it the best way of expressing." She spoke poignantly about "this gap that I have felt: I live in Norway and I have a Norwegian passport but I am a Sámi and I have Sámi brothers and sisters in Sweden and Finland and in Russia but I just happen to be on this side of the border, and it's something that I think in the Earth and in the world today we have these borders but we still have the same oral language, and we still have the same way of communicating and we are still brothers and sisters – so why all these borders?"

From the opposite side of the world to Norway, Jan then interviewed another pop-turned-protest singer, Mai Khoi, a delightful surprise guest at Safe Havens, who spoke of the far more obvious conditions of censorship in her still-officially-communist country. Described as the "Vietnamese Lady Gaga" because of her colour-shifting hair and techo hits like ***Saigon Boom Boom***, which raised her to the status of her country's top pop-star in 2010, she became deeply unpopular with the regime by using her new-found celebrity to try and get apathetic Vietnamese youth more directly involved in politics – most notably making world headlines by announcing her candidature for Parliament against the powerful Vietnamese Communist Party, standing as an independent on a pro-democratic ticket in 2016. Her brave lone stance earned her a visit by President Barack Obama – but also repeated raids on her studios by the security police who tried to force her into destitution by leaning on two successive landlords within six months to cancel the leases on her apartments.

Mai said that when she won the song of the year award on television in 2010, she thought she was at the pinnacle of success: "Many people know me, I have many respect and many invitations come and

I have many opportunities to work and earn money – but under the system." She said she knew how to navigate the restrictions of a system that forced all artists to seek state authorisation for any performance – but this dissatisfied her: "I don't agree with the way they work, the way they censor artists. We have to ask or permission before every single show or activity; it's very difficult to get permission. We don't really have freedom of expression because under the censorship system we have to censor ourselves before we create art." And Mai's art shifted from bubble-gum pop and traditional ballads to rock-blues protest songs.

"After the nomination [to Parliament], I kind of moved to another way. I have many people who support me, but also many people resist me… After the nomination, I was banned from singing in public in Vietnam because the government doesn't like my sounds and I don't give them the chance to censor my songs in any way. Instead I give concerts in a private place but the police still come to my concerts and make difficulties for the owner of venue."These discrete private concerts for a select group of only about 40 guests have been raided by armed and plain-clothes police who fine the venue host as a way of discouraging support for her.
So Mai turned to Facebook where she is followed by more than 46,000 people, both to get her message out via live screenings of her unlicensed concerts and to give herself a profile that helps protect her: https://web.facebook.com/mai.khoi.official. For instance, after staging a one-woman demonstration against President Donald Trump's visit to Vietnam there was, in her words, "a violent reaction from the authorities showing that Vietnam does not have freedom of expression." Jan noted that "What she did was filming secret police at her door… live on Facebook for the world to see." She responded that although "it is very difficult to make art in Vietnam if you put human rights content," with "the little reach that I have is Facebook, I'd do live film, live screenings and let everyone know what is going on."
At the very end of Safe Havens 2017, Egyptian rap-rai-rock guitarist Ramy Essam, known as the "Voice of the Egyptian Revolution" for his wildly popular Arab Spring protest songs in Tahrir Square, and now signed to Firebrand Records of Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello and having recorded ***The Camp*** with British singer-songwriter PJ Harvey on the refugee trauma [**www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhttLXBkJvE**], borrowed Mai's green metallic guitar for a few licks before turning it over to her. Her searing, potent, and impassioned performance had the audience on its feet.

"Today after the revolution we are asked to play a political role and our answer is to disengage. How can art fulfil this social mission without being social?"

Post-Revolutionary Blues

In mining down into the alienation of what some are calling the post-revolutionary "Islamic Winter," erudite and multi-talented Tunisian sound designer Heny "Fusam" Maatar, whose exploration of soundscapes ranges from heavy metal to ambient (the latter very evident in his project 52hertzwhale, named after the one-of-a-species whale that sings along in the north Pacific Ocean), first screened an eerily evocative film he had composed with Malek Khamiri. In black-and-white, the film started with a provocative statement: "Law 25: What is defined as 'Music' in all of its possible formats is strictly forbidden, as well as possessing, lending, broadcasting, consuming, producing, cultivating, offering, buying, selling, smuggling, delivering, distributing, fabricating, extracting or transforming any recorded sound/waveform with the intention of making this drug." The film – backed by Fusam's ad-libbed live electronic soundtrack – segued into a meditation on an experiment in which monkeys had been conditioned by being showered with cold water into beating up any of their troupe who broke the "rules" by climbing a ladder to access a bunch of bananas, then into rolling scenes of a man walking a toxic landscape with a clicking Geiger-counter, and thence into an allegory about the authorities attempting to curb a feared virus by killing a goat.

Moderated by Tunisian writer, director and academic Meryam Bousselmi, the discussion had Fusam in conversation with Stockholm-based Tunisian freelance correspondent and producer Radhouane Addala and Sudanese-born Emirates resident poet and thespian Hussam Hilali. Meryam opened so: "We make a revolution because we are seeking a change but what kind of change?… The revolution came and brings with it new questions, new problematics and new crises and it's too much and we have to deal with it?... How do you express and feel this alienation?" Fusam responded: "It involves alienation but is mostly about schizophrenia, and I was more talking about social issues and the hypercritical forces that are pulling on each other in Tunisian society, which are the progressive liberal movement and the retrograde religious movement. It's more about alienation because it's moved on from the dynamics in Tunisian society… From my position as an artist [there is] this boiling and cooking dystopia that we are going straight towards in Tunisia… There is this idea of Tunisia being this prototype of a revolution that is too beautiful to be deceived or to forget the fact that it is actually fading… it's the idea that everybody loves Tunisia and it is being marketed as this successful revolution and democratic process and turned towards more problematic and serious issues [and here] I may also mean Syria…

"The thing is that Tunisia is not fine at all… Firstly, very natural, historically everybody that goes through a revolution, there is this phase of the post-revolutionary depression, psychologically, this unanswered question, this expectation of change. And plus there is another key word which is corruption… There's this report from the European Union listing Tunisia as a tax haven… the economical situation and the political situation has been going in a very discreet way straight to freefall, while everybody was turning their back to Tunisia since they want somehow to believe everything is fine… It's really tricky, if you just Google it, it doesn't look like a country that is going fine at all. Culture… is just garbage in, garbage out: there is this anxiety, this discomfort. This dystopic visions since the terrorist attacks has inspired most the conscious artists to give a silent wake-up call."

Meryam questioned "this media brand of the Jasmine Revolution" and Radouane responded: "You had Islamists before, and now progressives, but they

are more authoritarian than the Islamists, so the European Union likes them… Are we talking about what the Tunisian people wanted or what the world wanted?... For me the Arab Spring is still something that succeeded, it's something that shook the world, it's like going from hibernation to get[ting] shaken… its better than just sleeping for decades, so for me there is hope and for that hope you need to write your own story, your own history… Journalists came to Tunisia and talk about it as if its Afghanistan before 2000, and talking about the Islamists as if they are the Taliban, but it's a totally different condition... For me, the post-revolution blues comes from the fact of who is writing this story? Who said it's this 'Facebook Revolution' or this 'Twitter Revolution'… since when? They called it the 'Jasmine Revolution' and the 'Arab Spring': it's like the ownership of the revolution got lost as soon as it happened… the young people just lost ownership of everything the moment a small thing happened, a 0,0001 change and they lost ownership… from frustration comes creativity and from creativity comes solutions."

Hussam responded: "Let me just explain how ironic this is right now because everywhere you go in the Middle East – Syria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen – everybody is looking at Tunisians as the successful example. I totally understand why you are complaining about the current political situation in Tunisia… but in other countries we couldn't even change the government, not even the regime, and this made us ask this question: do revolutions ever win? "Personally I come from a country when we've got three revolutions in a hundred years: one was the Mahdi revolution against the Ottoman Empire and of course that was a religious discourse against [the] Turkish;… later after independence there was a revolution in the sixties against General Abboud, a totally peaceful revolution and whole crowds went to the police after the death of a single student at university in Khartoum and everybody got angry, and after a couple of days the government resigned; [and] even in the eighties, we had a scenario that was totally typical to what happened in Egypt 30 years later, we had a general in power with the Islamists then the economy got worse, there were demonstrations for weeks then the military came to power and for one year we had this transitional government, then elections and the Muslim Brotherhood won the elections. This is typically what happened in Egypt but from then, from 1985, until now we lost democracy and we witnessed the so-called 'Islamic Winter' and I am just thinking we will never win. It's really horrible to face this fact."

Meryam asked how Hussam, having lived for a long time in Cairo, related to the Egyptian Revolution. He responded: "In 2011, it was actually the year when I stopped feeling I belonged to Sudan as it is not anymore because that was the year when South Sudan had… independence, and I initially support the movement in South Sudan but I don't find it represents my identity anymore. I want to live in a country where everybody is represented politically and economically, but now we lost this. And in 2011 I was I Cairo, so even though I believe the revolutions never win, and I just have this pessimistic attitude, but when you see the crowds on the street… you will join the even if you know it will not lead the country to a better and brighter future."

On concrete challenges in the post-revolutionary situation, Fusam said he wanted to raise the question of censorship in the sense of any form of artistic restrictions: although, "according to the dictionary, a revolution is a radical change, linear, classical," which appeared not to have happened in Tunisia, in the sense that where culture had formerly been used as a regime tool after the revolution, there had been "an explosion of liberty of expression. I would never deny that: a verbal, cultural and literary diahorrea, it was amazing… There was a lot of money to work with cultural entrepreneurs [but this] drowned the country in dirty money.

He said there were two forms of censorship in Tunisia: "Internal censorship [which is] a mixture between Islamists and residue of the old regime; [and] censorship [that] is the regime being corrupt and money going to corrupt things. If you are really working for art, of having a different approach to them, you just have to fit in, a passive form, you have to fit in or bye-bye. You have to know people, it's corrupt at a crazy level: before you have to know somebody in government, now you have to know people in every party… In terms of the quality of discourse and work… you pass unseen. I approach religion in so many ways and I've been receiving a lot of social critique, but I am mostly facing an environmental critique not a system critique… Islamists still active the in underground of society."

Hussam noted that "One of the things that we realised later after the counter-revolution, for me I came from a Marxist background and was always aware of economic background in political conflicts, and was focusing more on clash between social classes, but later on we realised another factor that we didn't focus on is ageism. And its really one of the things that plays a major role in the political sphere where you as young people in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, the majority of the population are the youth but you are not represented in any way… The young people never went to vote, the young didn't express themselves." He said he was against using the term "activist" to describe his work "because I am fully aware of how political discourse could be dangerous when you practice art/ Of course I care about my people and my audience and I want to address their problems, but… if there is a political message or something you want to discuss in your work… I don't want to be holding this sign. We lost this political battle [so] it's really important to work in the cultural field and the artistic field."

Meryam responded, saying that "Today after the revolution we are asked to play a political role and our answer is to disengage. How can art fulfil this social mission without being social?... Do you feel this gap? Before we had this gap between making or producing art and society, and today it is fashionable to do political works." Radouane replied: "I was born in Tunisia with an afro with a brown skin, so I was born political; I didn't choose it… If we are talking at a global level, yah, to some people it doesn't matter what you choose, sometimes it's not up to you… In my opinion in a post-colonial reality where people like us are born political and artists' production or media production comes from our past, comes from what we live, comes from where we live, comes from what you know which is basically being political since we were born… So for me whether it was before the revolution or after the revolution, now we are discovering the iceberg again and again."

Meryam noted that despite all the financial support for civil society and the arts in the Arab world, Western "cultural policies are more open to labelling artists as 'refugees,' 'persecuted,' 'artists with money problems'; so we are all the time facing categories. How much are we independent and free to make what we want to make or what we are asked to make? We don't stop speaking about politics [but] a big confusion today is politicians are playing at comedy and comedians are doing political work. It is quite easy to point out the problems but how to find a new perspective to make this reorientation? Where are we, what is our role? Before the revolu-

tion, artists were considered marginalised, facing two problems of society and the work they are producing… Then after the revolution [it's] always about being engaged and all this guiltiness: that art has to be useful, art has to be meaningful and have something to do with the problems."

Fusam responded: "We turned out some narratives that had to be authentic enough and emotive enough to sell. So for Tunisian artists you have to provoke enough sympathy in order to be recognised… The universal aspects of things are getting further and further away." He cited the case of a musician friend of whom Westerners wanted to hear his story – but not his music: "He's turning into a storyteller and not an artist with an instrument, the artist that focuses on artistic side of things. We are born doing politics as a form of resistance in a post-colonial age. I think it's just a new form of censorship from the other side of the sea, this visa issue, this border issue is creating a gap, a little tube flowing with people who have some tears and a nice story to be immediatised."

Hussam commented: "One of the good things in my work is I mainly publish my writings online, so I didn't use to be in this situation having this conflict with censorship because I am mainly in this cyber-sphere. But later on a new kind of censorship arose where the magazines I write for came from different countries that are actually in conflict. I used to write for an online magazine that is actually supported by Qatar and I moved to Emirates and now there is a huge conflict between them, and now I can't publish anything in a Qatari-supported website. This is a new form of censorship not related to the content but to where did you get your money from, and this is really weird because it is not about what you are writing but about who is publishing it… I'm not famous… I use a different name online… In Sudan the case of censorship online [is that] as long as you are not significant and your work is being spread and popular, you are safe – but when you become popular you will face problems… if you publish a novel and have erotic scenes, or criticising the government."

Radhouane said: "In Europe the problem is all the creative industries were put together: working in I.T. is the same as working in music. In Tunisia it is worse because it is all reliant on the state… The cultural scene in Tunisia has a long way to go in terms of cultural policy [there is] a lot of politicisation, so it is like 'are you an Islamist or a European or an Arabist etc'… Government comes and gives more money for this political agenda or that political agenda. We can't solve things where there is a thousand controversies every day; you can only solve two… The revolution happened in Tunisia… now we are realising that relying on the state was never a good idea: rely on yourself; you are the only one in my philosophy who is capable of dealing with your fate… All those problems like culture, say let's deal with the important stuff, in a discussion when there is a lot of stuff, you can't get people to say culture is important, theatre is important, because I don't have a job."

Meryam asked about the non-state counter-culture represented by Fusam's electronic music: "How do you deal with it as a strategy of resistance and a strategy of hope?" He said although he personally saw electronic music as counter-cultural, it was not widely known in Tunisia: "When you say electronic music, it is nightlife [yet] were not talking entertainment here but culture… It's very independent: house, techno, a lot of French funds and a monopoly and the same festivals since Christ; it's really lamentable when you want to talk about electronic music and it happens in the most creepy colonial thematic. What electronic music is is a puzzle game, it's mostly some notions in software, it's like a video game with sounds, like Photoshop with sounds, it's one of the alternatives for future generations to find these creative tools."

Meryam asked Radhouane how he felt he was able to support Tunisian artists from the remove of Stockholm. He said that "the blues doesn't come if you are not ambitious… You don't get disappointed unless you aim high and that's what is happening. I decided to leave because I'm a global citizen, and because I can, and I should have the right to travel, and it's a personal choice. But for me I don't care about Tunisia, I care about Tunisians, which is I care about the people; the piece lf land is not that important in my eyes. I care about the stories of the people not the stories of the country… For me if I stay in Tunisia and I'm depressed and burned out I'm going to do bad to Tunisia because I'm depressed, I will not be doing things as well as I should." Meryam asked whether he could legitimately talk about Tunisia when he was working in Stockholm and he said: "After years of working [abroad], even now even a Facebook status gets journalists from all over the world calling and saying what's happening [in Tunisia]?: you don't have to be in Tunisia; most of the news is written from outside." He said that as a Tunisian, an African, a Muslim and an Arab, his audience was broader than only Tunisia and included all who shared in that broader identity. "For me living in Stockholm, I've learned so much about intersectionality, post-colonialism, etc. In Tunisia I was in a majority… I wanted to see the other side, the other narrative, and I will build up a certain wave of the story in the future."

Meryam turned to Hussam, and asked the same question of him as an expat living in Dubai. He responded: "This is totally liked to the question of identity, when it comes to being a writer for me who is Arabophone and who speaks and writes in Arabic, it doesn't matter who is the reader, whether Sudanese or Egyptian or Iraqi; whoever speaks Arabic and reads what I'm writing is the ideal audience… But when it comes to what I am doing – I work for a media production house as a scriptwriter for TV and luckily enough work for a country that produces only cultural and scientific programmes, so I am still in my natural atmosphere. [The channel is] a tool how to address 500-million people who watch Arab TV, but to write about Sudan or Egypt? I just feel I am Middle Eastern. I have this problem that I was born in Saudi Arabia then moved to Cairo then spent 12 years there then. I am Sudanese by citizenship but my identity does not stick to one state… I lost my monoculture… I don't even know who am I; I am just happy to be a human being who is reacting and working with everybody."

"Also we see many cases of internet platforms or social media platforms trying to do censorship"

Freedom of Expression in a Digital Age

Middle East and North Africa human rights specialist and Safe Havens 2017 mistress of ceremonies Hanna Cinthio of the City of Malmö's Cultural Department introduced a critical session on digital freedom of expression, saying that "digitalisation for me is at once… a tool for democratisation [that] it makes accessible, new platforms and new tools for expression and for reaching new audiences, and at the same time it makes us sometimes drown in this abundance of expression and of competition and of information… Sometimes it is as if it brings us closer together, and at others as if it tears us apart." Panel chair Sarah Whyatt, a veteran freedom of expression and human rights campaigner, introduced former Amnesty International human rights coordinator and now Freemuse executive director Srirak Plipat and asked him what patterns he had seen develop in terms of digital freedom.

Srirak responded that there did appear to have been an overall negative trend: "In theory certainly all the digital platforms can help communicate pieces of art, spread opinions and expressions to a mass of groups of people… on the opposite side, when you have a central control of internet platforms and the ability to censor it, it can also be very efficient… countries such as China can really use its platforms to clean up all of the expressions that the government does not want… In human history there was only one time when there was an attempt to put together an international law to curb behaviours of business and that was in the 1970s: the actual law was drafted already, it was sitting on several desks at the UN for ten years; the law has never been passed and in the end the law just disappeared and what you have instead is the UN Declaration on Business and Human Rights; it's not legally binding, it is principles that governments or companies can implement or not."

He noted that: "We have very few players when it comes to internet platforms, whether it is Google or Facebook or Twitter, that are quite limited. We have also seen some of the initiatives that are trying to strengthen the international framework, one of them that is probably worth mentioning is the ranking of digital rights of the corporate accountability index… organisations trying to monitor and do the ranking of these companies and which one has provides what level of accountability and transparency. Also we see many cases of internet platforms or social media platforms trying to do censorship... Freemuse documents over 1,000 cases a year by governments and companies…
"Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights applies to companies also… normally international laws are for governments, but… they have to hold companies to account [and yet] firstly, there is a lack of transparency and accountability on the company side – when we say companies this is mainly social media platforms – especially when it comes to content removal… Artists are suffering during this removal of content without explanation at times, and the closing of artists' accounts. Secondly there is a lack of procedural process in terms of safeguards, when content is removed from these platforms artists and individual persons find it very difficult to challenge those… There's also failures on the companies' social media platforms to respect freedom of expression standards [under international law]… When Facebook removes a portrait of nudity, it's the responsibility of Facebook to show how it relates to national security, how removing that picture is related to public health, or public order, or protecting human rights of other people… there are legally-binding requirements but this is not done."
Regarding the circumvention of international laws by governments and companies, he said that "in some countries very often special media providers

close accounts of journalists and other people and use as the excuse that the governments want to crack down… especially in authoritarian regimes it becomes so unclear whether it comes from government or companies.. Looking at the state and government's responsibilities, Freemuse did a universal review on Pakistan and when YouTube posted a material the government didn't want, YouTube was closed down… [This occurred] on and off depending on what is put up there… The biggest challenge out of all of this is the internet control by repressive regimes, and here we are talking about China, Iran, Turkey and many of the more right-wing governments." He noted that China was using keyword tracking so that the authorities were able to quickly trace and arrest dissidents.

Coming to some solutions, Srirak suggested: "We can use more international norms when we advocate with companies… there is a huge room for artists to use all possible mechanisms in this; particularly the European Union has a huge role to play. When it comes to companies there is a variety of moves we can do: campaigns for more transparency on removing of content, and the implication is we need to engage with people outside this room much more; there is a huge amount of pressure that needs to be generated to hold these companies to account. Many organisations fighting for digital rights important to join hands and work in solidarity."

Whyatt next introduced Svetlana Mintcheva, director of programs at the National Coalition Against Censorship, an alliance of US free speech organisations. Svetlana said: "What I want to talk about is a kind of recent development and it promises to change the whole field of freedom of speech: this feeling that there is too much freedom of speech and an attempt to close things down. [that the internet has] turned into a sewer canal." She called on Safe Havens participants "as we are reacting to the threats, the harassment, the racism, the sexism, that everything that is happening online, to remember what the internet promised and not to toss this promise out with our desire to be safe."
She recalled the promising early-1990s "techno-libertarianism… of the internet as a space free of technological control… [a space] of collaboration, helpfulness, and community, a period when incredible opportunities opened for artists. You could be anybody, any gender… spaces like Second Life that were created by artists [which were] trans-spatial, where you could talk about philosophy talk about ideas. Threads were primitive but they were connecting people. There were also trolls and there were flame-wars but these were moderated spaces, not entirely anonymous and a moderator could tell you 'stop this, shut up'… but that's changed."

The rise of anonymous, unmoderated lists around 2004-2005 precipitated the change "and then it kind of exploded a few years ago: threats of violence, racist slurs, you have neo-Nazis, defamation, harassment, doxing – the revealing of personal information – revenge porn, email bombs… all the way ranging to Pizzagate in the US which brought to a physical attack on a space, fake news, petitions to close down exhibitions, pull books from circulation, to ban speakers from campus, to boycott publishers – a lot of these have been successful in closing down speech. Some of them are very technical, say hacker attacks on someone who has published something unpopular to virulent ad hominem attacks, to calls on art institutions to cancel programming."

Svetlana cited the investigative journalist Julia Angwin: "The internet seemed to hold out the promise of fostering democracy and of shifting the balance of power from the powerful to the masses.

In recent years, a depressing realisation has taken hold: the internet is fragile and easily exploited by hackers, trolls, creepy corporations and oppressive governments." This had, Svetlana stated, created a problem for free speech activists: "Speech is weaponised to suppress other speech. And that has brought a kind of crisis for free speech activists." And the conventional response of issuing more speech to counter hate speech was insufficient as haters, trolls and repressive regimes simply deluged the internet with their own counter-narratives whether "fake news" or other forms of propaganda: "You flood the internet with the information you want out there, as a repressive government... it is more effective to drown out dissident speech."

She affirmed that the platform of speech had become crucial to how debates evolved: "We can all speak but who gets the attention? That is why drowning speech is so efficient. Groups in the West borrowed that from oppressive governments… [It's no longer] about the oppressor and the oppressed; it's about this morass of speech and you don't know who to believe… Audiences have a very high degree of heterogeneity, they are not the traditional audience who might come to your museum… the conventional audiences who would react to an object in your museum; a virtual audience is different."
She said there had been many online campaigns to censor exhibitions, citing an exhibition on Chinese art at the Guggenheim museum in which a petition against the exhibition drew not only more than 800,000 signatures but also threats of violence against the artists and hosts; the museum withdrew the exhibition. As another example of how "cheap speech online" was able to easily and anonymously destroy artists' careers, she cited the case of an artist who tweeted about the racist content in Gone With the Wind – but was then herself accused of racism and blacklisted from conferences.

"All these online actions that lead to closing of exhibitions, blacklisting of artists: you don't want the closure but you do want the conversation. What is to be one with all of this horrible speech coming online? There are many suggestions to have more state regulations and more monitoring by private companies. The thing with the online environment is you have very few owners of platforms… there are currently 2-billion users on Facebook [and] Zuckerberg projects 5-billion users… eerie numbers. There are very few companies, and very few platforms on which all of us communicate. Facebook has horrible terms of service – they remove real news.

"They are also operated by bots: when we ask for transparency we see a long algorithm… increasingly in this field where bots regulate what we can see… What are they going to take down? Is it hate speech as you understand it or it going to be hate speech as President Trump understands it?... Research revealed Twitter has perhaps 48-million non-human users and these are bots… so we are entering this environment… This is unprecedented and what this means for free speech is a complex question and what we do about it is very interesting."

Regarding calls for greater internet regulation, Svetlana opined: "There are kind of moral panics that call for solutions that are very repressive; so we don't want fake news so we want some authority to tell me what's true and what is not true… Who is going to decide for me who is fake and what is not?… As a consumer it's important to work on media literacy, it's important to have more of an informed audience… we have to train our critical capabilities."

"You don't understand what it means to be of this land; you have to learn how to read marks on the trees; all the laws that you know, they don't apply here."

Combating Online Hate Speech and Abuse

A subsequent session on tackling online abuse was chaired by Julia Farrington, a freelance member of International Arts Rights Advisors. Julia kicked off by saying that only a month before, "I came across the Camden Principles, a document that was drafted by Article 19 with a big consortium of free speech organisations in 2009 and predates the Rabat document that came afterwards and that looked more deeply at hate speech... It helped me square the two rights that seem to be in opposition to one another and those are freedom of speech and equality… This series of principles I think brings them together in a really harmonious, really positive, really constructive way. The preamble is actual quite beautifully written; it takes into account deep-seated discriminations, negative stereotyping. It acknowledges that some speech is so iniquitous to equality that we have to condemn it: hate speech, intentional incitement to racial hatred – there is no place for that in freedom of expression; many people acknowledged that, I mean it's outlawed… I would love to think that they inform the metanarrative of everything we are doing that there is that mutual respect…

"I just wanted to very briefly say why I have become interested in the issue of online harassment and what we as a community can do to push back. And it really was just meeting a young woman in London in June this year. She's young Yemeni-American artist who' been living in Los Angeles, and she put some work up online. She relies heavily on the internet for her livelihood for connecting with her art... I'm only beginning to understand what they do, how the economy for online artists [works]… She's got 29,000 followers on Instagram. Anyway, she got very, very nastily attacked online for her work and then the attacks sort of became into her real world so she began to be stalked and no longer felt safe in her home in Los Angeles so moved to London… She felt very vulnerable, she didn't know what civil society was, didn't know what NGOs were, didn't know of possible pro bono legal work, didn't want to talk to her friends about it… very isolated very depressed; it stopped her working. So I was interested in what support was out there… Also I had a hunch that other areas were further ahead as they often are than the arts, such as journalists..."

For a statistical grounding on the scale of the problem, Julia turned to Gunnar Myrberg, a senior analyst at the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, whose agency had conducted surveys of Swedish authors, journalists and artists facing threats, intimidation and physical violence. The results were shocking and echoed Moddi's earlier assertions about how close to home censorship of the arts could be, even in supposedly progressive societies such as those in Scandinavia.

"A few year ago," Gunnar said, "we were discussing some reports we had read about threats to journalists and politicians and we wondered what the scope of exposure was for threats and violence in the cultural sphere... We did a survey regarding the level of exposure to threats, violence and harassment among artists and authors… The results were anonymised so we never knew which artist said what… It was quite a large survey [of members of Sweden's main artists', writers' and journalists' organsiations] and asked [about] no less than 23 different kinds of threats, violence and intimidation…

"I will just give some of the main findings: more than one third [37%] of the artists in these organisations had been exposed to threats, violence or harassment related to their work; 17% had been exposed to some form of threat, violence or harassment in the past 12 months – and this is quite a lot we think; 14% of those who had experienced threats, violence or harassment had abandoned commissions or themes due to fear of exposure and

clearly not everyone who is an artist in Sweden receives threats… In total a relatively small group, but relatively big in terms of actual numbers who seems to be threatened almost on a daily basis…

"The most common form of incidents are threats via social media – public and known authors and artists and those who are active on social media run higher risks of receiving threats." Authors who worked as journalists, he said, also faced greater risks. Echoing the earlier panel's stress on the importance of platform, he said: "It seems to be very much not what you are writing about but where you do it. Artists with a foreign background had higher exposure. Who is the perpetrator and what is the motive? The impression we got is the perpetrators are often unknown, but motives are relatively strongly known by authors and artists." The results differentiated authors from artists in that authors were targeted for their opinions, "especially if authors are writing about feminism, immigration, LGBT issues" and so forth, whereas artists were more directly attacked for their art-works. The majority of the threats were perceived as being right-wing extremist or racist in terms of their motives, whereas threats from left-wing extremists were not that common. About three times as many women artists were threatened as men.

"So what should be done?" he asked. "Platforms should take more responsibility for content. [There should be] forums for organised support among colleagues, and [processes] clarifying the responsibilities of [art and writing] commissioning bodies." He said that although the government had been quite active and the minister of culture took the issue seriously, in July 2017 having initiated "a government action plan initiated to prevent threats against journalists, politicians and artists" because of their importance to a democratic society, the police were struggling to get to grips with the problem, partly because perpetrators used anonymity or fake online identities to commit their crimes. Gunnar suggested that web-guides for people who have been exposed to threats and harassment were of assistance.

Anna Livion Ingvarsson, the secretary-general of Swedish PEN, responded that regarding threats to free speech, "suddenly we have to focus on the situation in Sweden and not just on writers from elsewhere in the world. It's both a direct threat towards writers, authors, journalists, their readers, and artists, but at the same time you can hear voices calling for stricter laws… PEN is an excellent organisation to approach this. We have also the responsibility as part of our charter: you have to resist." PEN had held public talks with the Stockholm Culture House, and focused on schools and discussions with the police and the police union, involving other organisations such as Reporters Without Borders and publishers in an ongoing discussion on how to tackle the problem. "It is complicated because you have to reach out everywhere and in every city – and you have to prioritise." An educational day with teachers and experts on hate speech was imminent, she said. "We are interesting to discuss prevention… [to] find ways to prevent hate on the internet. Writers born abroad are more threatened: we want to think more about this. We have to open up for all the new writers coming from Syria and elsewhere…" She mentioned the Swedish initiative #JagÄrHär (#IAmHere), a closed Facebook community with 75,000 members that continually debated how to improve online ethics and polite behaviour.

International human rights lawyer Andra Matei then discussed some legal avenues that could be used to protect creatives from hate speech: "While there is no universal definition of hate speech, it is clearly discriminatory whether based on gender, age, sexual orientation etc. These are all protected by international human rights law. If you have… anti-discrimination laws in your countries, make sure that people, artists etc are aware of these laws and use them. Most countries have specific laws that tackle harassment or bullying, even cyber-bullying laws. Make sure you know about them and that you use them." She noted that even conventional penal codes include offences and crimes including blackmail, defamation, and the public disclosure of private acts (called doxing), "which you can use to bring to court a case – either civil or criminal. I have a preference for civil as they are victim-centred whereas under criminal law, when you do not have the perpetrator which is [often] the case in internet hate [it is harder]." Under these laws, a victim of online intimidation could seek pecuniary or non-pecuniary damages from the website hosts.

"At the international level," Andrea said, "there is Article 20 of the [UN] Convention on Civil and Political Rights on incitement to hatred… and the European Union Convention on Human Rights on combatting racism, intolerance and discrimination – all incompatible with human rights. You need to trust more the judiciary. Even though the law can sometimes limit art, it can also protect it. The biggest challenge we have in law is to distinguish between what is lawful speech and what is unlawful speech.

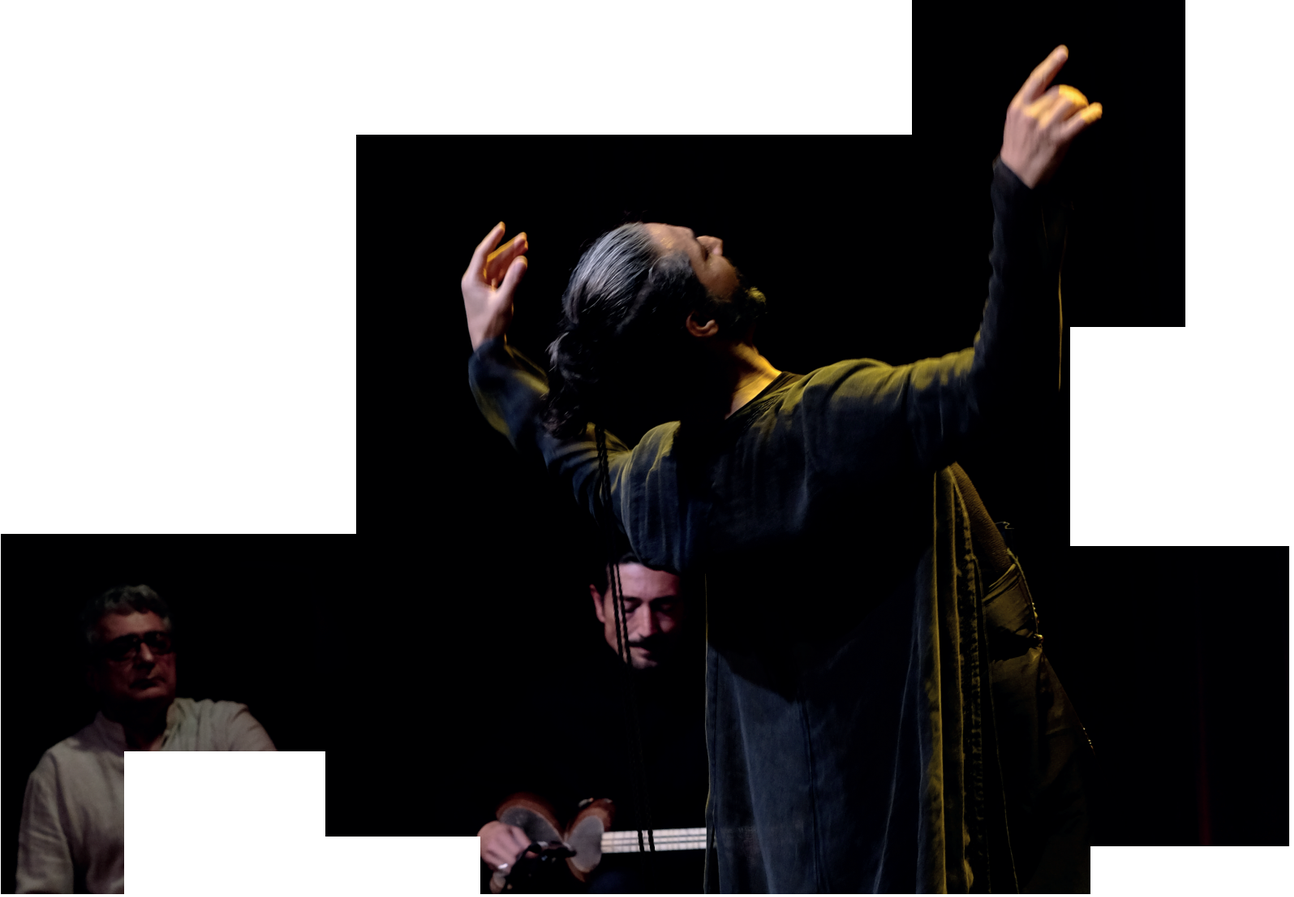
She warned that the term "hate speech" was "wide and somewhat emotive and implies that all hate speech is illegal – but some forms of hate speech is legal." Illegal hate speech included defamation as well as incitement to violence or genocide, while lawful hate speech often included "statements that are inflammatory or highly offensive or mocking but that do not reach the threshold of violence or the severity to have a crime. We look at the intent of the speaker, we look at the target group, we look at the likelihood of harm, and at the political and social context; it is very dependent on the particular circumstances in each case." She cited the case of a Turkish activist travelling in Switzerland who said the Armenian Genocide was a fabrication; he was convicted in Switzerland but the EU Human Rights Court overturned that conviction in his favour; this demonstrated the continually-evolving legal debate over the tensions between hate speech and free speech.

There were, Andrea said, criteria under law in order for governments to be allowed to restrict free speech: the interference with the right to freedom of speech should pursue a legitimate aim that included upholding national security, public order, and public health, or protecting the rights of others; such interference had to be proportionate to the nature of the speech being curbed. Sara suggested that arts schools should include sessions on artists' legal rights and recourses and Andrea responded that lawyers, too, "need to be educated on defending artists. We want to create a network of pro bono lawyers; many lawyers are defending journalists, but for some reason artists are set aside."
Lillian Fellman of the Arts Rights Justice Network, a group of about 30 members including cultural organisations and arts organisations and individuals that monitors the arts rights freedom situation in Europe, then entered the conversation: "We have so far collected in about 24 cases in seven countries which we have not a special focus on hate speech, but in practically all cases hate speech plays a role, sometimes to defame..." She cited several of their cases to how online instruments themselves could protect creatives from hate speech violations.

The first involved the 54th National Festival of Polish Song: the festival was fully booked thanks to the

planned performance of legendary singer Maryla Rodowicz, but Maryla wanted to invited a very politically-active singer known as Kayah to perform, and because the festival funding came directly from the ruling right-populist party, the festival director flatly refused. In response, Maryla used social media widely, stating she was stepping down from the festival in solidarity with Kayah. With Maryla gone, one singer after another pulled out, and the host city cancelled the festival contract as their headlining star would be absent.

Lillian's second example was of the Polish Theatre Festival: although the whole programme had been sent in to the ministry of culture for pre-censorship, 15 days before the festival, EUR50,000 in sponsorship was withdrawn by the government pulled out, because the very outspoken director Oliver Frick was scheduled to participate. The festival organisers started an international crowd-funding campaign and made up the financial shortfall.
In the third case a Belgian human rights activist was fired because she had engaged in an exhibition in New York in which a Belgian woman in a burqa spoke about how the country's anti-burqa law violated her privacy. Universities in Belgium collected signatures in the activist's favour and many public debates were held over the case. Although she did not get her job back, Lillian said she had told the Arts Rights Justice Network that it had been "very important to raise the question of minority rights and artistic freedom of expression for minorities." Lillian cautioned, however, that because artists tended to work alone, "There is a lack of solidarity built into our sector… In general, [arts and commissioning' institutions are withdrawing and are not very supportive of artists' work even when they have them in their house."



"I wanted to bring the prevention aspect… how we can move from a strategy of individual protections, to a regional one, through legislation, though building networks of artists."

Alternatives to Artists' & Activists' Relocation

Because relocation of creatives should only be the last resort, a key debate on alternatives to relocation was chaired by journalist and human rights consultant Ole Reitov who first introduced human rights lawyer Laurence Cuny. She told the Safe Haven delegates: "I wanted to bring the prevention aspect… how we can move from a strategy of individual protections, to a regional one, through legislation, though building networks of artists. We have civil society organisations and PEN and Freemuse that have done amazing work..., [we have] human rights defenders who are not engaged enough yet. There has just been a launch by the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network of a safety city in the region. I was in Algeria working with human rights activists and a European Union delegation: they could not give me one case – but we know that PEN and Freemuse have been working in Algeria and we know the situation is not great for artists in Algeria."

Still, she suggested that some EU delegations and embassies had guidelines that could be of use to defenders of persecuted creatives. She gave as an example that "Swiss embassies can provide temporary protection at the embassies in particularly acute cases, they can help the return or entry into the country of the human rights defender or artist, to escort them at the airport, they can convey information through diplomatic channels and they can observe trials; this is part of their mandate but we have to ask them to do this."

Laurence said that regarding EU and UN delegations, their special rapporteurs often arrived in troubled countries like Hungary without any prior grounds for addressing the government on arts rights violations. Defenders needed to brief such rapporteurs well before a visit as repressive governments tended to respond if it was an international organisation such as the UN or EU that made recommendations – rather than the arts community itself. As an example, she said that Freemuse and PEN had submitted on artistic freedom in Lebanon to the UN and that resulted in an official recommendation to improve the situation. Such pressure was perhaps not possible in authoritarian states, but could prove effective in "middle countries," she argued.

SafeMUSE's Jan Lothe Eriksen said he'd "like to give a flower to the Swedish ambassador to Vietnam" for publicly standing by Mai Khoi after her anti-Trump protest – and suggested that more embassies could be prevailed upon to do similarly to dissuade repressive authorities from intervening against artists, though he admitted not all embassies were as proactive. SafeMUSE had, he said, been working on protecting hip-hop artists in Guatemala who had been murdered on the streets by gangsters by raising their profile and networking them with other hip-hoppers – a project he hoped to extend across Central America.

Jan spoke about an initiative of Palestinian rapper Khaled Harara, a previous guest artist of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN): "He knows the situation in the refugee camps there; we are now looking at the possibility of developing mobile studios that could function as a studio/workspace, a place for having workshops, maybe fold down a wall and you have a venue. We also hope this could be used as a radio studio for broadcasting for the area around and link studios together, and to have these in conflict areas in refugee camps. We are working with an architect in Norway..." Jan said that if refugee-camp artists were not isolated and given such creative platforms, perhaps their desperate need to relocate would be reduced. SafeMUSE was also working with a record lable for emergent mu-

sicians – who often published online merely for the exposure and for no profit at all – to publish their music in the newly-revived retro formats of vinyl and cassette, and was hoping to launch the inaugural tracks in 2018.
Helge Lunde, the executive director of ICORN, which now groups 70 cities as places of refuge for persecuted creatives, said that the network's ultimate aim was "to disband," to become unnecessary. While he recognised that "to relocate to another city is in very many cases the very last option… we get over 100 applications a year [but] not very many of them are in their country when they applied: they have already fled… that is one of the complications." He showed figures that over 2015-2016, most ICORN guest writers came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iran. Recalling one of the themes of the Post-Revolutionary Blues session, Helge noted that the goal of most artists was to continue working on issues related to their home country – albeit from exile – but a further complication was that "If you are able to work effectively in your home country, you are getting less popular with Al Qaeda, your government, and so on."

Diana Ramarohetra, project director of Artwatch Africa within the Arterial Network, then took the mic, saying that one solution they had found to protecting threatened artists in-country was to temporarily relocate them to a safe house that was unconnected to the artist or to the arts scene. They had recently done just that with an artist in Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of Congo with an artist sought by the police who "wanted to stay under the radar. We used our contacts to find a place where he could hide for a while. The safe house is not linked to the artist or the arts sector at all. In other countries, legislation is very important for us – there are more laws in Sub-Saharan Africa against freedom of expression than for it – but that is a very long process. We need to have more media talking about artists and what is the value of art."

Diana warned that although one embassy in Rwanda had offered shelter to a threatened gay artist, in many countries, getting embassies involved could create further problems, particularly in Africa where allegations of foreign "interference" in national sovereignty were often raised. But Africa also offered some unique solutions: "In Nigeria we had some cases where we asked the king to act… the perpetrator is not necessarily the state but a sub-state actor, it's the public, it's society, so we used the traditional power to sit and be the moderator between the artist [and the public] so we don't need relocation. Artists need to be more organised themselves, need solidarity. When you feel isolated, that's when you want to go out."

Arts rights defenders had often relied on prominent creatives such as author Wole Soyinka to step in on occasion in order to improve the visibility and solidarity of threatened artists; this needed to be developed further. Diana cited the case of Mai Khoi, who she argued, knew that if something happened, many people would stand by her. She stressed that governments needed to understand that freedom of expression was not a "loan" only available to artists for a time, nor was it a "charity" that the president could withhold or grant at will – rather "it is a right!"

[ENDS]

The Malmö Meeting 2017

REPORT

SAFE HAVENS