

# SAFE HAVENS 2015

10–11 DECEMBER

## Dear friends

I wish to welcome you to the Safe Havens 2015 conference in Malmö. The first of three planned annual gatherings of activists, organizations, artists, cities, writers, journalists – or activists, which is one of the terms we will discuss in this meeting. In Sweden and the Nordic countries the Cities of Refuge movement has grown rapidly over the last few years through the ICORN-system in collaboration with individuals and organizations, of which several are represented at this meeting. Now this movement is growing all over Europe and at last reaching out and connecting with cities in Africa, Asia, North- and South America.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida, in a meeting which is sometimes referred to as the birth of the network of Cities of Refuge, spoke for the International Parliament of Writers on the topic of cosmopolitanism and the concept of hospitality,

“In committing ourselves thus, in asking that metropolises and modest cities commit themselves in this way, in choosing for them the name of ‘cities of refuge’, we have doubtless meant more than one thing, (...) we have been eager to propose simultaneously, beyond the old word, an original concept of hospitality, of the duty (devoir) of hospitality, and of the right (droit) to hospitality. What then would such a concept be? How might it be adapted to the pressing urgencies which summon and overwhelm us? How might it respond to unprecedented tragedies and injunctions which serve to constrain and hinder it?”  
(On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness by Jacques Derrida, 2001)

The city of Malmö is such a city of refuge and a member of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). We have since joining ICORN tried and discussed this idea of hospitality. What does hospitality really mean for the city council and its administration; can there be a starting date and an ending date to hospitality? If so, how do we secure that there is a continuation of the hospitality in the civil society and the cultural life once the time of official hospitality must end? As someone said: if you have invited a guest for dinner, you would not let the guest leave your house if you knew there were wolves in the forest. Hospitality can turn into friendship and inclusion and thus a sense of belonging, where the act of hospitality has been transcended, and instead given way for active ownership of a new context.

Yet the act of providing a long term residency; an asylum or an exile as ICORN, Scholars at Risk and others do, must be considered almost an extreme measure reserved for those who must get out from a very dangerous situation – and soon. There are also many initiatives, large and small around the world to support and to protect artists, writers, musicians, journalists and academics inside the borders of the danger zone and between countries, cities and organizations. We are very pleased to see that so many of these experienced and knowledgeable activists, artists and representatives of prominent organizations and several cities of refuge have decided to take this opportunity to meet in Malmö and discuss how we can work even better together for the global artistic freedom and against oppression and censorship.

Welcome to Malmö and the conference Safe Havens 2015

**Elisabeth Lundgren**

Director of Culture

City of Malmö Culture Department

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## About Moriska Paviljongen



In 1901, the Polish-Jewish architect Aaron Wolff Krenzisky was commissioned by the labor movement to draw an entertainment palace in Malmö's Folkets Park (People's Park). The house would be a place for fun and recreation for those who did not at the time feel welcome in the established bourgeois salons. He chose to create an oriental fairy pavilion, in vogue at the time!

In 2011 Moriska Paviljongen was relaunched by Re:Orient as a cultural crossover venue, which hosts a restaurant, several bars, events, seminars, conferences and clubs. Moriskan is today partly a non-profit cultural venue whose core values prioritise on working with minorities and cultural events.

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“Where they are burning books today,  
they will be burning people tomorrow”

As Heinrich Heine, the German poet and essayist, once wrote, “Where they are burning books today, they will be burning people tomorrow.” Indeed, there is a strong correlation between burning books and burning people. “Books are humanity in print,” Barbara W. Tuchman once noted during one of her famous lectures. Inasmuch, the sordid act of book burning – libricide, the technical term – has been a recurrent part of crimes against humanity that unfolded throughout human history.

Take one recent example. Earlier this year, in February, the thuggish warriors of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) ransacked the Mosul library in northern Iraq – burning more than 100,000 books and manuscripts including some items listed in a UNESCO rarities list. As *The Independent* (UK) reported: “ISIS militants broke into the library and constructed a huge pyre of scientific and cultural texts as university students watched in horror.”

The same month, ISIS also released a grisly video depicting the execution of Muath al-Kasasbeh – a Jordanian pilot and prisoner of war. In this meticulously choreographed video, al-Kasasbeh was seen wearing an orange jumpsuit doused in some kind of flammable liquid. He was then locked inside a cage and burned alive. The world watched in horror.

Earlier in August, we were once again horrified as ISIS beheaded the world famous scholar of antiquities, Khaled al-Asaad, in the Syrian city of Palmyra. According to a report in *The Guardian*, al-Asaad’s mutilated body was hung “on a column in a main square of the historic site because he apparently refused to reveal where valuable artefacts had been moved for safekeeping.” This was an act of scribicide.

Borrowing, primarily, from the works of Rebecca Knuth on libricide, I define scribicide as the systematic and widespread killing or persecution of intellectuals including journalists, writers, scholars and artists. That is to say scribicide is neither isolated nor random. This persecution is very much a process in the machinery of repression imposed on a people not only by groups like ISIS but also sovereign governments and their agents of violence. Scribicide is a recurrent feature of the politics of massmurder, genocide and ethnic cleansing. And, it is also a process in the politics of repression, especially in political systems which we call the national security state.

In our work in defence of fundamental freedoms (especially for those who are engaged in developing safe havens for writers, artists and intellectuals), understanding scribicide remains a crucial task. Indeed, if we are to fight and defeat the systems of repression that routinely put artists, writers and academics across the globe under mortal danger, we must have a clear understanding of those very systems – how and why they function and who are their primary targets. For a start, this we can do by looking at a few cases concerning some of the participants at Safe Havens 2015 and events unfolding in their homelands.

Take the case of Monirah Hashemi – playwright, director and actress from Afghanistan. Hashemi arguably is one of the staunchest and most creative opponents of the system of patriarchal oppression (“prejudice, injustice, discrimination [and] inequality”) in her country. As *SVT Kultur* noted in a piece published in 2014, Afghanistan is often described as “one of the most dangerous countries for women.” What is often ignored, however, is the fact that Afghan feminists – especially, feminist writers, artists and intellectuals – pose the greatest threat against the repressive sociopolitical order in this tortured nation. An order which was so threatened by Hashemi’s theatrical productions (advocating women’s rights) that she had to flee her homeland for refuge in Sweden.

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Hashemi, of course, comes from a long line of Afghan freedom fighters like Meena Keshwar Kamal and Malalai Joya whose very existence threatened (and continues to threaten) the feudal overlords of Afghanistan. It is, thus, not surprising that feminist intellectuals and artists like Hashemi remain the primary targets of scribing in Afghanistan.

This is the case also in neighbouring Iran, where the primary targets of scribing are feminist writers and journalists like Parvin Ardalan, Shadi Sadr and Shiva Nazar Ahari, whose very existence threaten the theocratic order of the Islamic Republic. These opponents of the system of repression (including the system of gender apartheid) are targeted for persecution through the widespread and systematic use of imprisonment and torture by the security forces. In Iran, in other words, scribing is carried out by the sovereign government led by the Ayatollahs and their agents of violence.

In another part of the world, in Palestine, we have another paratheocratic order of oppression and control imposed on the people of Gaza by the Hamas-led government. Here we see that individuals like the hip-hop artist Khaled Harara are treated as "internal enemies" because they threaten the authoritarian rulers of this besieged city. Arguably artists like Harara and their songs pose a greater threat to Hamas and its legitimacy than the occupying Israeli army and its missiles. Scribing in Palestine, indeed, is targeted more towards the new generation of young artists who not only challenge the Israeli occupation but also challenge the brutal rule of Hamas. Accordingly, the Hamas government persecutes them through arbitrary detention, torture and execution.

Elsewhere, in Nigeria, like many other African nations, homophobic laws are now being promulgated as part of a new system of political repression. A system that is being opposed and challenged by writers like Jude Dibia. Here, writers and artists who advocate for fundamental freedoms are especially under threat of scribing. A threat so serious that activists like Dibia and Leo Igwe are now being forced into exile. We also of course remember the case of the Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa who, to date, remains the most well-known victim of the Nigerian scribing.

The victims of scribing, we must note, are not to be seen in a context of victimhood. These are the individuals who threaten the systems of repression through the most creative and efficient ways possible. And, that is the very reason why they are targeted and feared by groups like ISIS or Hamas and the national security states and their governments. This fear of the creative intellectual, indeed, lies at the heart of the politics of scribing.

If we are to challenge the system of repression and fear that is now being imposed on us in different parts of the globe, we must then develop a global system of protection that will not only offer refuge to the intellectual (the artist, writer, journalist or scholar) but also enable her (or, him) to carry on her struggle against oppression.

*Tasneem Khalil is the editor and publisher of Independent World Report*

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## Safe Haven Beyond Borders

The focused and compact dimension of my journalistic and feminist work and our common struggle in Iran proved that creativity and communication were the foremost tools of civic engagement that the regime fiercely feared. Our simple equality demands were as powerful as the universal dot in the end of a sentence. No comma signs, no parentheses and no slashes for any alternatives for the injustices facing Iranian women.

The global effort such as safe havens is multilayered. The preparation and facilitation before the arrival of practical matters are only the basics that should be equally matched by the willingness of the cultural institutions and organizations to co-operate with new horizons, different methods in multiple languages and voices. Hence the multi communicative abilities of all involved was challenged in order for me to engage in active partnership in a social, cultural and political context of the city of Malmö. I was able to raise the voices of our causes in Iran in the new context, of my being in Sweden.

In *Women Making History*, I have since 2012 been involved in re-writing "100 years of immigrant women's lives and work in Malmö", Sweden by re-interpreting the image of the city. Astonishing 50.000, one sixth, of Malmö's citizen are women born abroad. Their life and work is a tremendously important part of the city's history, but much of the women's experiences are invisible and lacking in the official history. Global activism is thus no more limited to multilayered perception but also the necessity of being multi-dimensional i.e. to expand and develop ones activism beyond national borders.

Historically activism is explained within the areas of participation, causes, tactics and tools. In *Women Making History* the inclusion, participation and contribution of the immigrant women are the core pillars of the work. The mobilization was formed by and communicated through various methods with both transparency and horizontal co-ownership. The significance of inclusion within social, economic and institutional structures is a key factor of plausible combating tactics against ostracism, isolation and extremism. Activism is my tool of choice, whether traditional or modern, locally or globally.

Today's unrecognizable mishmash of color pigments in the global political scenery where the red has transformed into blue, the green has feared backed into a yellow corner and the *Anemone hepatica* has shown its hidden brown color should be a reminder of the vital role of the multi-voiced activism, artists and activists, fighting against militarism and displacement. No matter if it involves legitimate states or criminal thugs, as in Daesh.

In this complex world we need to show our discontent and anger. We need to raise our voices. How can we sit tight behind the secure lines of our safe haven when barbed wires are being set up, mentally and around our borders?

*Parvin Ardalan is journalist, activist and project manager of Women Making History, City of Malmö*

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## Freedom of Speech in Comics Today – Seven International Voices

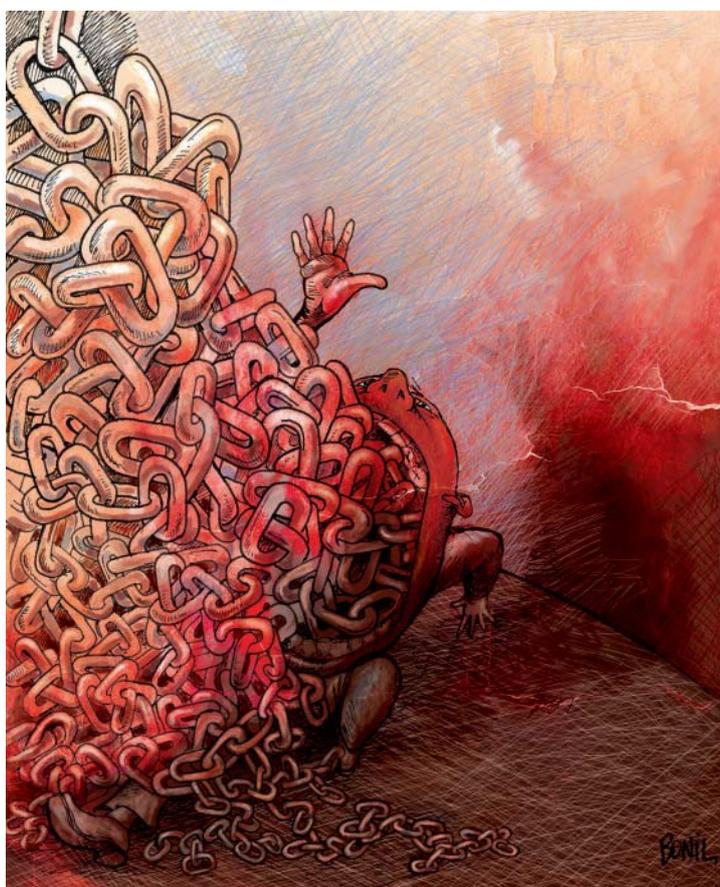
To express oneself freely is not possible in many places around the world, even closer than we think. Comics artists, together with journalists, authors and many others, are being persecuted for practicing their professions and expressing their opinions. They are being threatened, oppressed and even imprisoned as a result. We can now take part of the artists' work and hear their stories.

The exhibition presents seven artists from different countries: Bonil (Ecuador), Karrie Fransman (Great Britain), Fadi Abou Hassan (Palestine), Nina Hemmingsson (Sweden), Arifur Rahman (Bangladesh), Rayma Suprani (Venezuela) and Zunar (Malaysia). They all have different stories, but together they illustrate restrictions on freedom of speech – and freedom of drawing.

The issue of freedom of speech and censorship in comics has a long history and is part of Seriefrämjandet's background. The association was founded in 1968 with the mission to counteract the current negative view on the art form. During the decade before, there was a fierce debate that led to comics being censored, both from the outside and from within, which has had repercussions to this day. The question is still relevant today, perhaps more than ever before.

The exhibition Freedom of Speech in Comics Today is produced by Seriefrämjandet with support from Region Skåne and Längmanska kulturfonden.

*By Jamil Mani, Director of the  
Swedish Comics Association*



*Illustration: Xavier Bonilla,  
Bonil (Ecuador)*