

Yesterday

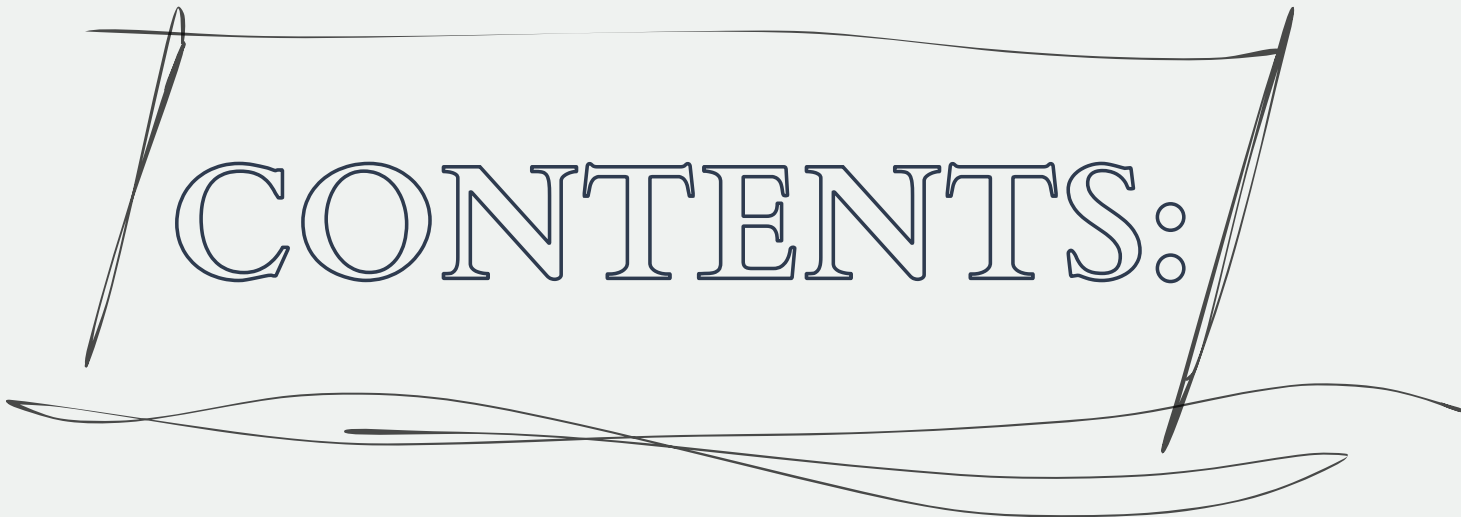
Today

Tomorrow

Finishing

Tomorrow





CONTENTS:

Pg. 3-4: Editor's Note

(5-8: The Bidi-Bidi
Settlement

9-12: Nicholas Elliott

13-20: YTT Visual
Language

→ **21-24:** Dr Henry Bell

25-28: Chaundra Finley-
Merrell

29-30: Isobel Knight

31-34: Pairi Daeza

35-36: Sarah Goodman



'Finding Tomorrow' by Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow (YTT) is a journal that desires the pursuit of a better future - a better tomorrow. In our editorial journal, we explore the important and ongoing conversation on equity, gender equality, and the urgent demand to stop gender-based violence.

Curated and developed by Ayaz Khezzadeh, we have looked towards finding a vast range of voices to platform in regards to discussing gender equity. In these often trifling times, it is easy to become jaded by what art can do for humanity. Yet, through this publication we aim to abandon the notion that art is something frivolous and lacks tangible real-life impact, and instead adopt the art as a method to explore our bounds for humanitarian good. This attitude is what the origins of YTT pertained to.

Stemming from the arts, we touch upon the fundamentals of what makes the research of YTT wholly unique. Whether it is the drawings of YTT Visual Language or the dramatic theatre techniques of Dr Henry Bell's research, this publication aims to further platform the work being done at Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow. However, we also wanted to broaden our reach by going beyond YTT and have written pieces that discuss gender and gender-equality by external contributors. 'Finding Tomorrow' is a journal that aims to be a melting-pot of all things revolving around gender and gender-equality - ranging from political pieces to more cultural and artistic pieces. From the words of New York film critic Nicholas Elliot to the liberation of Iranian women through the clothing of Pairi Daeza, 'Finding Tomorrow' aspires to discuss equality amongst all people and all industries.

Overall, we aim to promote genuine change and a broader knowledge of the complex problems surrounding gender equality through the incisive contributions from a variety of different voices from different industries.

We hope that the words of 'Finding Tomorrow' stay with you, to make a better tomorrow.

Finding Tomorrow (YTT)

THE BIDI-BIDI SETTLEMENT

The Bidi-Bidi Refugee Settlement is one of the largest refugee camps in the world, located on the Ugandan-South Sudanese border. The population is almost 300,000 and growing, of which 85% are women and children. The people living in this settlement have fled their country of origin due to the poverty, violence and atrocities of the civil war. Amongst all this is Twajiji Hope Primary School, located in Zone 1 of Bidibidi settlement, not far from Base Camp. Hundreds of schoolchildren from Twajiji Hope Primary School have been taught the YTT gender-Equality and GBV prevention program by members of the school faculty who are also YTT trained and qualified teachers. As well as being Head-Teacher at Twajiji Hope Primary School, Patrick is also one of our recent YTT graduates who has also become a YTT Ambassador for the schools and communities in Bidi-bidi settlement.

What is your name and how would you describe your role?

'My name is Maritia Patrick Borne, a more than 50 year old South-Sudanese refugee living and working in Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in the Ugandan-South Sudanese. I am a YTT Ambassador & Head Teacher at Twajiji Hope Primary School. I train young children on YTT gender-equality in my school. I have learned that YTT training on gender-equality was of great importance. As far as my role as a teacher in the classroom, it has helped a lot.'

Can you talk about a positive project you've led to empower both boys and girls and encourage equal treatment?

'Yeah, the positive projects, one is to engage girls and boys in the same school duties, for example, doing the general classroom cleaning duties equally and let them know that these types of equal duties can be extended to their homes, this makes them learn that all sisters and brothers are equal, both in the kitchen and in the field, they can do the same work. These are the kind of simple, practical life- lessons and knowledge that I pass-on to them. And they feel very happy about learning this.'

How do you make sure boys and girls feel the same in your class?

'Through the learning of YTT gender-equality, learners (school children) have become aware that their sisters and brothers are all the same, in terms of where they sit in the classroom, sharing content in the classroom and performance, they realise that they are all the same. Since the YTT gender-equality has been implemented, the boys in my class tell me : "Teacher, now I go and fetch water to help my sisters". This simple gesture tells me that the gender-equality program is affecting and helping this community.'

In the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in the Ugandan-South Sudanese, how do you teach kids that boys and girls can do the same things? How do you make sure your teaching stuff doesn't say things that are unfair to boys or girls?

'Wow yeah, there are many very simple ways, many simple actions, as a YTT teacher, sometimes I bring them all outside to sweep the compound and I say : "Please children, let us come together", then I, as a male head-teacher, I pick-up the broom and I sweep. Because as you know, in this community only girls sweep the compound. As I sweep, I say : "Now you see, both boys and girls can do the same work" and the boys automatically pick-up brooms and sweep, showing their brothers and sisters that there is no difference, boys can do what girls can do and girls can do what boys can do.'

How do you teach in a way that helps address and fix the problem of gender equality?

'There are many examples that we bring, for example, generally-speaking , in schools in this refugee settlement, female teachers teach the sciences and male teachers teach mathematics. Therefore, normally as a male teacher, I teach mathematics. But you see, you find that the sciences and mathematics go well-together. So, as a head-teacher, I exchange the roles, where the female teachers teach mathematics and I teach English which is part of the sciences. Then you see, the schoolchildren realise that mathematics is easily taught by female teachers, this shows the boy- child and the girl-child that they have the same brain, the same thought-process, the same reasoning. This example impresses them a lot, it makes them stronger to work together. Also sometimes, we bring them outside for practical lessons, grouping them into groups of one boy-child and one girl-child, so that they work together without segregating, with no segregation and this breaks pre-conceptions and they feel that they are one.'



How do you collaborate with families and the community to advocate for gender equality and challenge unfair practices?

'There are many ways, we have school-stakeholders, the PTA (parent-teacher association) and school-management communities. We involve all of these different actors, we involve and talk to them in meetings about the roles of their girl-child and their boy-child and that's where families and communities learn, they learn that what the schoolchildren are learning in school has to be encouraged by these stakeholders at home also. The parents then observe this gender-equality education that their children have received and they give the school feedback, explaining to us that what we are doing here in the school is helping. During parent-teacher days, we also talk to the parents about the responsibilities and roles of the boy-child and the girl-child. This is our approach.'

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to achieving gender equality in Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement schools, and how can teachers actively work towards overcoming it?

'We have barriers, these are obstacles. One of the barriers is a cultural one : the young-ones have been influenced by the parents themselves who believe that the boy-child has particular roles in the homes and communities and the girl-child has other particular roles in the homes and communities. With the YTT program in the schools and in the community interventions, they are all coming to realise that these particular roles are equal and interchangeable to both the boy-child and the girl-child. So this barrier-gap is one of cultural-thinking, it was a gap however YTT lessons and programs are now wiping out this gap. Another challenge at the moment I'm facing as I'm implementing the YTT gender-equality program with my children, is some parents are not giving time for their young-ones to come and attend these lessons, as sometimes we do these lessons after the lunch-break or at the end of the school day. Some of these parents feel, why is my girl-child wasting time, why is my boy-child wasting time, they have to come home to fetch water, to work in the land. Those are the kind of challenges, you find that the child may sit in the class here, but their mind is at home thinking that my Father is waiting for me, my Mother is waiting for me. So you find a tension in these children in the class, that's one of my challenges, otherwise the children are happy, they like it.'

'courtesy of YTT'

How do you create a safe and supportive environment for students to discuss and address issues related to gender equality in your classroom?

'Having a leadership system in place, class monitors, people responsible for health. Somebody responsible for hygiene, these are all the ways we can instil gender-equality. If we have a leader for health where we give equal chances to have this health leadership role in the classroom, that is what makes them equal, the girl can have the role of classroom headboy as headgirl and the boy can be the deputy to the classroom headgirl and this is one example of a safe and supportive environment in the classroom where the children can discuss issues of gender-equality. Another simple one, is during the process of teaching, the children put their hands-up to answer a question and the teacher picks the girl then picks the boy and so on. That way the children all feel equal and they feel that their teacher appreciates them equally. If a girl gives an answer and then a boy gives an answer, it shows that their teacher appreciates them equally and this encourages them.'



One of Patrick's sentences that he uses to describe the YTT program to his school colleagues, schoolchildren and the other schools and communities where he promotes YTT is : "If you educate a girl, you educate a nation".

Nicholas Elliott is a writer and film critic whose love of cinema translates to every project he pursues. From New York correspondent at the esteemed Cahiers du Cinema, to programmer at Locarno Film Festival, Elliott's past experience led to a fruitful discussion on gender equity and modes of change in the world of film festivals.

Film serves as a powerful ethical prism through which we negotiate the complexities of the human experience because of its storytelling and visual language. A perspective such as this serves those whose pursuit of cinema is wholly sincere - those like Nicholas Elliott. He validates this at the start of our conversation, stating that 'film is held to a very high standard, and by holding film to that standard, you're holding the world to a very high standard and vice versa...It's a relationship.' It is this treatment of film, as a sociological lens, that makes it worth abiding our attention to. Whether intentional or not, it acts as a mirror that we can use to hold up to others, as well as ourselves.

And this is clearly expressed in Nicholas Elliott's current work. Alongside Madeline Whittle, Elliott has organised a series aptly titled 'Never Look Away: Serge Daney's Radical 1970s' at Film at Lincoln Center: a ten day celebration of the French critic's works, specifically his work *La Rampe* (1983), or, *Footlights* (2023) as titled by Elliott in his translation recently published by Semiotext(e). 'I've just finished a translation of a book by Serge Daney. He's a former editor-in-chief of Cahiers du Cinéma and he's actually my hero and I'm doing a programme of films around him. So that's very connected to this idea of film as a way of seeing the world and of holding the world to an ethical standard.' Cinema has the transformative capacity to shift viewpoints, question social norms, and start important discussions about justice and morality, beyond just providing amusement. As moral architects, filmmakers create stories that shed light on the subtleties of morality - the grey areas in between. As observers, we take an active role in a group investigation of values rather than merely being spectators.

This emphasis of the ethics of cinema led us naturally towards exploring how this has translated in his previous work, more specifically Elliott's past experience as a programmer at Locarno Film Festival. It is a film festival's ability to platform certain voices in cinema - voices that are often stifled - that can make them a powerful tool for change. Yet, Elliott brings a sense of unbridling realism to the conversation. 'I've learned from my experience that film festivals are deeply, deeply problematic.' Once hailed as outlets for discovering unknown films, film festivals have unintentionally evolved into powerful gatekeepers, influencing the stories that are presented to audiences around the world. It is undeniable that they have enormous influence over which films get recognised and distributed, but regrettably, this influence has frequently been skewed towards the mainstream, excluding the voices of underrepresented groups. In theory, film festivals are essential entry points for the often unheard, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, to gain recognition and success in an industry that has previously been closed to them. Yet, this is a theory difficult to execute in practice.

Founded in 1946, Locarno Film Festival is in the top tier of large film festivals held in Europe. 'Of the top European festivals, Locarno was the one that seemed to be where you could take the most risks, that had a real experimental section.' Held in Locarno, Switzerland every year, the festival vows itself to be a place where the best of national and international filmmaking is celebrated.

'I came into [Locarno Film Festival] because it hired Lili Hinstin as its artistic director, a friend of mine who also happens to be a woman I tremendously admire.' French artistic director Lili Hinstin took over the artistic director position of Locarno Film Festival after Carlo Chatrian's departure in 2018, with a hope to engage a younger audience to the festival. 'In my view, Lili exercises programming as an art and an instrument for change and betterment in the world, to put it in very broad terms.'

Elliott never explicitly states why Hinstin left her position as artistic director for Locarno, but alludes to challenges she faced as a woman in a position of power in what proved to be what proved to be a conservative organization. Instead, he continues upon the broader conversation of film festivals as a whole: 'Festivals are very concerned with optics, and many have stepped up in terms of some level of gender parity, at least in terms of the programmers. But some European festivals are pushing back, and most notoriously, Cannes [film festival], which is the trendsetter for everything. I have to say that I understand why one can't commit to 50-50 programming in festivals. For the simple reason that in most countries, if not all, it's still much more difficult for a woman to get a film made than a man. So if you want to try to represent, "the best of contemporary creation in cinema," you probably are not really going to be able to hit gender equity until production hits gender equity, or if anything, until production overcompensates.' It is these grassroots levels of creation that need to be addressed. Thus it begs the question, why are we not seeing this level representation on the ground level of production?

'While [film festivals] may be attending to optics very nicely, the terrible problem with festivals as gatekeepers is an intersectional problem.' This intersectional approach inspires to break down not a single barrier but the complex network of structural injustices that disproportionately impact marginalised people. And in this case, answers the question why we are not seeing female-led productions to begin with: because they are not given the finance to facilitate them.

NICHOLAS ELLIOTT

'It has to do not with how many women are on the programming committee, how many queer people are on the programming committee, how many people of colour are on the programming committee, which, incidentally, European festivals are not looking good in that respect at all' Elaborating further, Elliott claims 'it also has to do with class, because programmers for festivals are so ridiculously underpaid for the amount of work that they're supposed to put in that really only people who have the kind of background that I do, which is to say a relatively comfortable middle class background, can afford to take these jobs (not to mention questions of access to the kind of film culture necessary to qualify).' This stark discrepancy in earnings creates a long-lasting, stifling shadow in the arts, impeding the true spirit of artistic expression. The unequal distribution of wealth makes the already difficult path for aspiring artists even more difficult, frequently silencing their voices due to financial privilege rather than skill. Real artistic variety is undermined as galleries and performance places turn into playgrounds for the rich. This is true for anyone pursuing a career in the arts, let alone those who are in the minority and who are overall unrepresented in the mainstream.

Admittedly, it is certainly a difficult undertaking to navigate the complexities of the film sector, particularly in light of the necessity to promote intersectionality and gatekeeper at film festivals. It requires an enormous amount of work to overcome the ingrained prejudices in the system because it is biased against the underrepresented by design. In addition to talent, one has to question those in charge of these festivals; those who hold the key for the unheard to be heard. Interestingly, Elliott references Thierry Frémaux, the head of the Cannes film festival, several times throughout our conversation. Critiquing Frémaux's amount of power, Elliott openly discusses the complexities and ethical bounds of managing such a large-set system like Cannes.

'I understand that [Frémaux] is working every year with a tremendously delicate algorithm, having to figure out, "I need my big stars on the red carpet to get the worldwide attention", "I need to get the sponsors", "I need enough films from the global south and to at least gesture at an attempt at gender equity" and "I need a couple films that are going to make the critics happy and that are going to get a Palme d'Or" etc.' It is the age-old moral dilemma of an the imbalance in who has access to power and who has the right to it. It is an unrelenting endeavour, with an elaborate network of institutionalised obstacles standing in the way of anyone seeking to change the narrative. It becomes a point where it no longer feels like it is about film itself.

Because of this, it is easy to become cynical when faced with a system full of impediments and prejudices. However, retaining a steadfast optimism becomes a potent catalyst to bring about change in the arts. As opposed to allowing pessimism to win, we ought to consider how we may make this landscape better. So simply, I ask Elliott how we remain uncynical.

'I would say smaller is better. I have the sense that there are very small local festivals, and even not that small, where the financial stakes are less important. And therefore the corporations and the sponsors don't get their hands on it. And you're still able to have an experience where people are coming together to see and talk about film. And I think that that's really healthy [...] I think that for actual film culture, this is where hope and dynamism lie.'

Elliott ends by stating, 'We should also simply decentralise power. By making sure that nobody can be the artistic director of the most important film festival in the world for 15 years, like Thierry Frémaux...it is just wrong that one person has that much power over an entire industry, that has such an impact on public debate and our imaginations.'

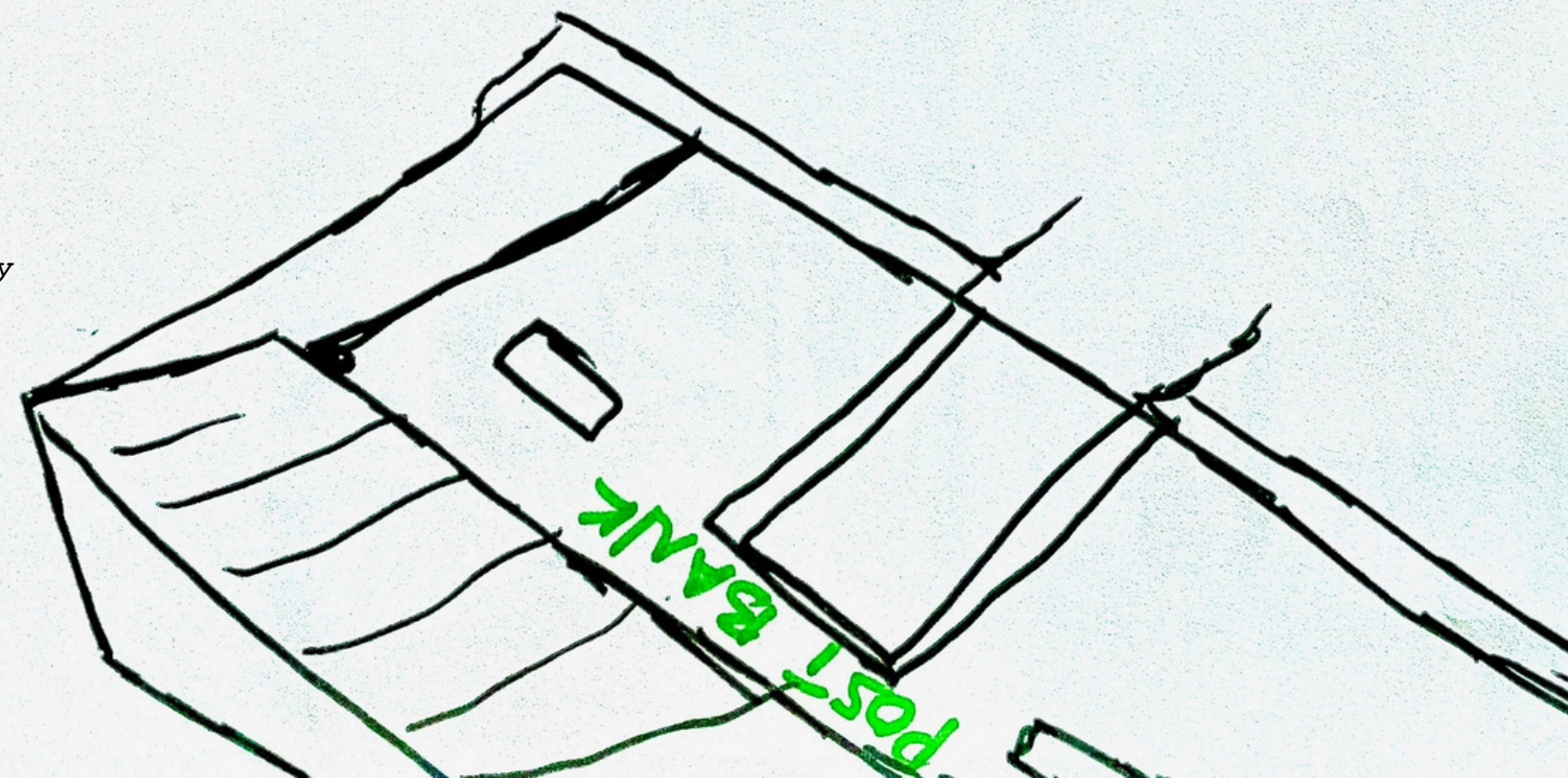
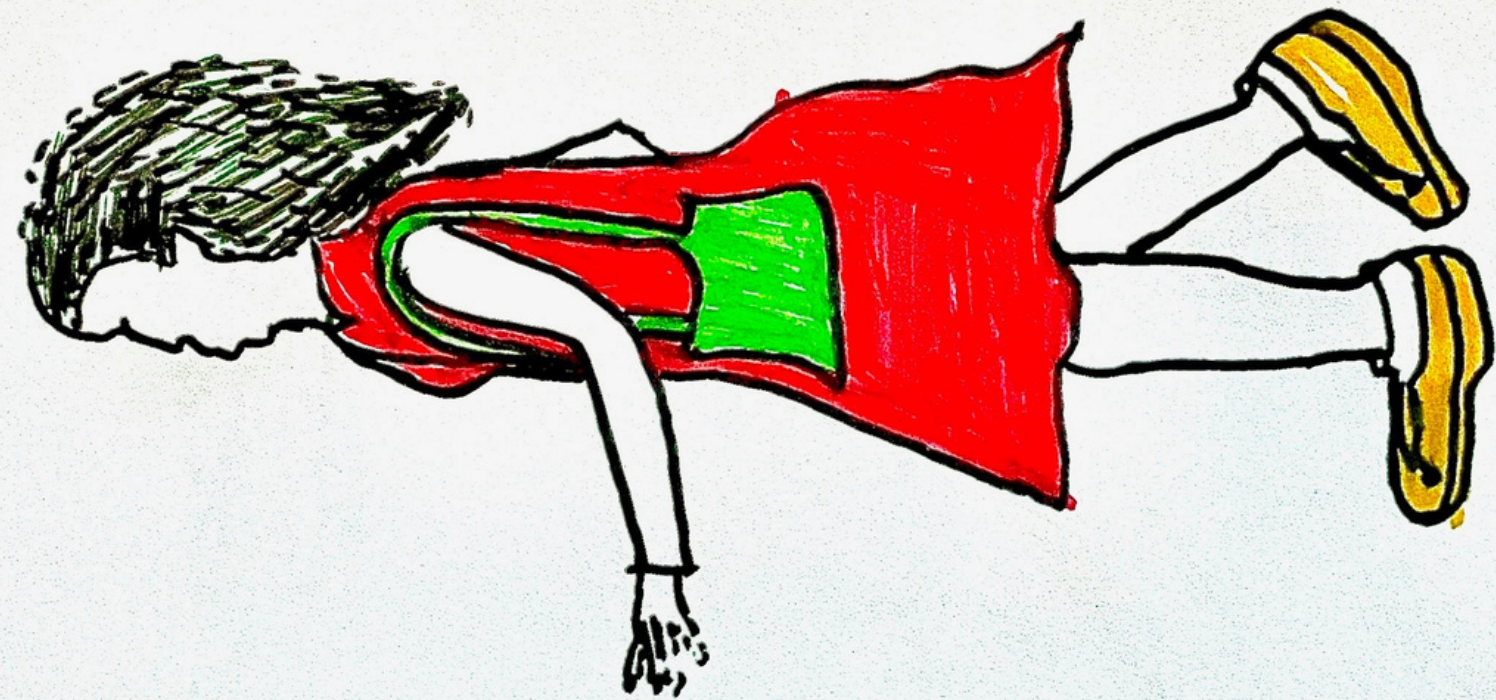
Maybe smaller is better. It is easy to become overwhelmed and inevitably jaded by systems that feel larger than yourself. By working locally, distributing power appropriately and consciously representing your community at large, these systems of oppression that often feel concrete and impenetrable, not only become manageable but begin to wholly reflect the community you exist in. To have equity in the arts is to be uncompromising in all areas - from the grass-root levels of studios and production companies where a film is green-lit, to those being portrayed on the big-screen. With the potential of penetrating the wider cultural zeitgeist, it is important to be critical of what films are chosen to be screened in these environments - or more specifically, to be critical of those who are choosing what is screened. This is because representation extends beyond the lens.

YTT VISUAL LANGUAGE

Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow's main framework revolves around two components: YTT Visual Language and YTT Methodology. YTT Visual Language is a process which involves asking participants to draw their 'yesterday', 'today' and 'tomorrow'. Through drawing their past and present, participants are thus able to envision their future beyond mere words - breaking the barriers of language and instead bridging them to make something universal. These visual narratives lend well foundationally for the second half of YTT's approach: methodology. YTT Methodology involves a psychological and cognitive approach to the social implications of these drawings. Emphasising upon Allport's intergroup contact theory (1954), YTT's methodological approach aims to not only better understand psychology holistically, but also aims to address the mental health needs of participants.

Shown in this journal are particularly interesting examples of YTT Visual Language that stood out to us, found within the YTT archives. The first batch of examples show the participants' vision of their present day ('Today'). The second includes examples of their envisioned future ('Tomorrow'). The last set of examples stand separate from the previous two, asking participants to draw a hypothetical reality of what their lives would look like as the opposite gender. In doing this, we are able to emphasise the empathic approach YTT chooses to adopt throughout their work.

***NOTE:** *These examples of YTT Visual Language between 'Today', 'Tomorrow' & 'The Opposite Gender' do not correlate with one another, and are instead are standalone examples that visually stood out to us within our archives.*



'Today' by a 19 year old Congolese refugee woman living in Rwamwanja refugee settlement on the Congolese border.

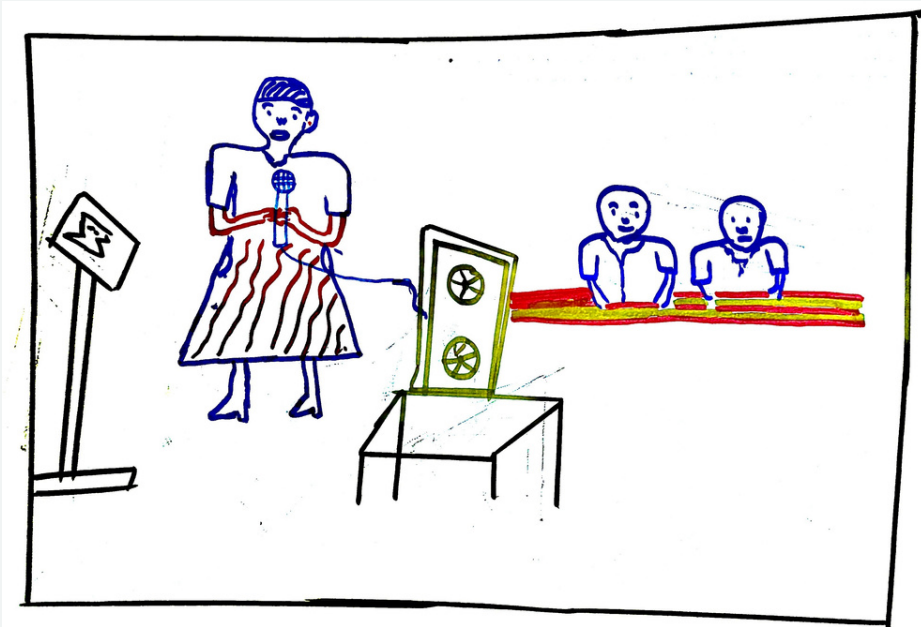


'Today' by a 15 year old Congolese refugee boy living in Rwamwanja refugee settlement on the Congolese border.



'Today' by a 21 year old Congolese refugee woman living in Rwamwanja refugee settlement on the Congolese border.

'Tomorrow' by a 24 year old South-Sudanese refugee woman living in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement on the South-Sudanese border.



'Tomorrow' by a 18 year old South-Sudanese refugee woman living in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement on the South-Sudanese border.

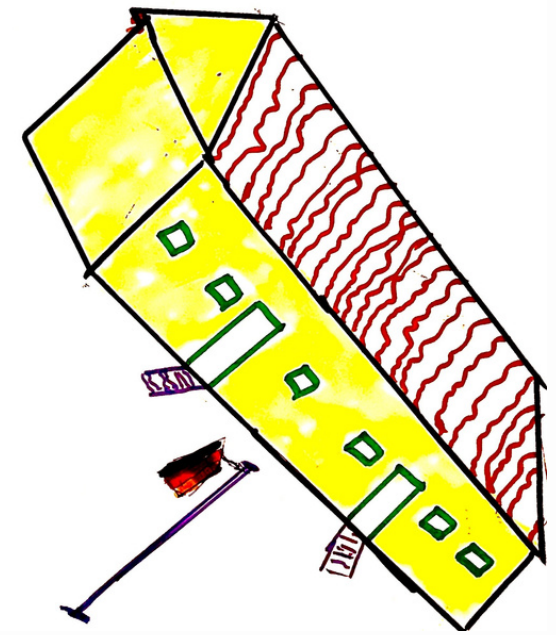


'Tomorrow' by a 17 year old South-Sudanese refugee boy living in Bidi Bidi refugee settlement on the South-Sudanese border.

A 15 year old South-Sudanese refugee girl depicting life in the refugee camp, if she were a 15 year old boy.



A 34 year old Congolese refugee man depicting life in the refugee camp, if he were a 34 year old woman



A 20 year old Congolese refugee man depicting life in the refugee camp, if he were a 20 year old woman.

DR HENRY BELL

Dr Henry Bell is an academic and practitioner who specialises in 'Theatre Making, Theatre-in-the-Round, Early Modern Drama and Digital Pedagogy, Applied Theatre, Actor Training, Farce and Theatre Comedy, Theatre and Phenomenology and Cross Media Collaboration.' Aligning with YTT's approach of 'visual language', Bell's focus on Augusto Boal's Image Theatre explores the effects of physical performance. In doing this, scripted pre-thought is negated and the unconscious truth of the performer is expressed to their audience. Therefore, it demonstrates parallels with YTT Visual Language, both searching for a form of expression beyond words.

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED



*"civility of revolutionary
socialism in the
21st century"*

Can you elaborate on the unique performance methodology you've developed as the Performance Director of Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow (YTT), particularly the use of Augusto Boal's Image Theatre technique and its application to engage the public with drawings created by refugees?

'I teach and research actor training, which as a discipline requires the people taking part to put themselves in the shoes of somebody else, to imagine their dreams, their desires, their motivations. And even if that person that you're acting and you're you're being is somebody who has views, beliefs, life experience or whatever, that is different to yourself.

Way back in 2016, Bryan McCormack got in touch with me about this yesterday, today, Tomorrow project and really explained the drawing methodology, which I found absolutely fascinating. From an actor training perspective, I thought there's a wonderful crossover here between the person looking at the drawing who was looking at that drawing and they are imagining what the person who drew it is like, what their dreams, their desires, the situation that they're in is. And really, that's at the centre of empathy.

At the time I was teaching Augusto Boal's methodologies, his theatre of the oppressed, which is a variety of different techniques and one of them is image theatre which is more about working with participants to imagine things themselves which are important to them and using embodiment to be able to create those away from written words. And I thought of the visual language yesterday, today, tomorrow, and I thought this would be an excellent bridge to build.

I've also maintained the discursive element of image theatre, particularly with a technique that looks at the Tomorrow section but I've adapted it so it is using this technique to work with the drawings of other people rather than the thoughts of yourself.'

Your collaboration with Dr. Sunita Toor on the Justice For Her project brings the YTT Performance Methodology into the realm of police training and prevention of Gender Based Violence in India. How do these collaborations intersect, and what challenges and successes have you encountered in adapting your methodology to such a critical and sensitive context?

'I have to say that I initially, when I found out about the project which is working with in her research, is world leading in terms of working with the police, working with the justice system, which often with these sorts of projects is not the people that we get access to. So I was initially quite nervous about working. I wasn't sure how open the police would be to creative methodology. I wasn't sure about how open they'd be to embodiment and performance techniques which are very basic.

Obviously working with people in India, it's very different culture to the culture that I work with here in Scotland. But Sunita's expertise is really unmatched, I think in the UK, and the project that she runs is absolutely fantastic.

So when I was in the room with the police officers, I was absolutely blown away by their creativity. I was blown away by their desire to change things, to work on the system, to work on the systems there about addressing gender based violence, not just reaching for the obvious questions, to tackle the difficult questions, but also to be able to look at the small prints, to look at the small things that they need to change. That's the great thing about Image Theatre and the Wyatt Performance methodology is that part of it is about embodying and understanding the experiences of other people.

But the end of the YTT methodology is always about the future, about tomorrow, and about change.

A lot of what I do is about drawing the participants to think about the specific things that they can do to enact change. So for it to begin with visualising what the changed future looks like. But then we go backwards and I say, what can you do tomorrow? What small thing can you do? What can you change about the systems that work in your Police Department, who can make this happen?

For them to not tell me, but show me with an image. It was really interesting seeing a group of really committed Indian police officers come up with quite tangible, achievable things to make a difference to the gender based violence situation.

You know, I was really impressed with the work that they did. And I think it sort of says something about activism, creative activism, change, focused work that sometimes you've actually got to work with the people who you're criticising in some ways, or the people that you're trying to challenge.'

Your work extends to the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, where you're collaborating to create Peace Building methodologies through the YTT Performance Method. How do you envision this method contributing to Object Based Learning and fostering understanding among diverse communities?

'When I was in Sarajevo, working with the War Childhood Museum running workshops with their education department, you had teenagers from Serbia, teenagers from Bosnia Herzegovina, teenagers from Croatia and teenagers from Montenegro all working together. It sounds really simple, but the performance methodology is about making pictures together with your bodies, about embodying things together and not using words.

It was the way of getting people from different groups to work together on something who haven't worked on something before, with, you know, an easily achievable thing, such as making a living picture with your body.

Then, we got to the end of the workshop, which is more discursive, and people started to talk about some of the things that they've made. Because they'd spend 90 minutes working together on something, looking at stories from the past, objects from the past of other people, as well as their own experiences from the past.'

They had that creativity of working together, that kind of use of embodied play that you find through image theatre and the YTT performance methodology. It led to some really fruitful and interesting and specific conversations, and every single person that did that workshop came away and they had to write three things down.

Three pledges of things that they could do tomorrow, literally now, tomorrow to build a more peaceful society that they lived in. What was really interesting was that it wasn't just something they wrote down on a piece of paper. It was something that you saw people that didn't know each other beforehand talking about as they left the building. And this idea that there is this living, constant thing.

That's what I really like about yesterday, today, tomorrow, not just the, you know, the things that other people on the project work on, is this really unique approach that is the past, the present and the future. I think sort of ending with the future in this work means that it keeps going. It's not just this thing that stops once you finish the workshop.'

DR
HENRY
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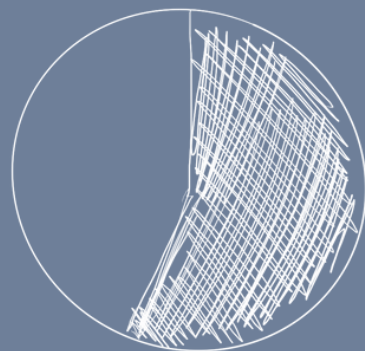
Can you share the initial motivations that led you to transition from research on coping strategies in children and military families to working with refugees, and how did this evolution shape your approach to mental health support?

'Each experience made me more aware of oppression within the systems (i.e. healthcare, education, labour market) I work in, and how those systems impact the clients I work with, my colleagues, and the students I work with. Anyone that's worked within the challenges of non-profit culture, often operating out of survival, lack, and scarcity—has probably learned to be resourceful and creative in developing mental health program support. So—I've been drawn to more non-traditional grassroots decentralised approaches-- that allowed me to connect with clients and be creative. I first came into working in a similar program model—the Assertive Community Treatment model-- in our efforts to connect with military families in the community. I adapted a similar model in working with refugees and asylum seekers. Programming looks like infusing preventative mental health programming within a bulk of wrap around services. It looks like going into communities, into homes, schools, and working with cultural brokers to connect with new arrivals, listening to their story and empowering them within the community with tools to move forward in accomplishing their goals—individually and collectively. In my experience, most mental health programming efforts are centralised and there is a disconnect coming from NGO leadership in being able to deliver effective MHP support into the community.'

'A thread throughout this evolutionary experience for me is getting to work with clinical practicum students in the field of social work and psychology. Students bring innovation, creativity, and passion. They also bring capacity to underfunded programs. For me personally, I learn so much from students and there is nothing better than getting to witness the magic of empowering a student with tools to carve out spaces that promote human connection and healing within highly oppressive systems. Training the next generation of mental health providers, exposing them to the diversity within our own backyard and showing them, it can be done - lights my fire!'

Chaundra Finley-Merrell

Courtesy
of
YTT

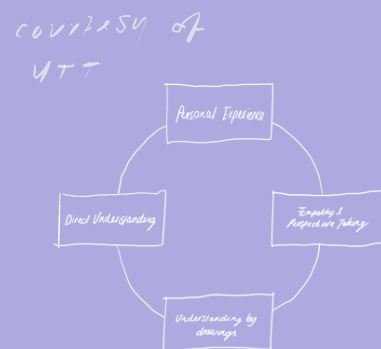


Chaundra Finley-Merrell is a licensed clinical social worker involved in work surrounding working with children and military families. Involved as a research assistant role, her answers are focused on **initial motivations** transitioning from working with children and military families to working with refugees related to the evolution of shaping my approach to mental health support.

In your collaboration with YTT, how do you tailor your approach to meet the diverse needs of clients coming from various backgrounds and experiences, especially considering the emotional distress commonly experienced by newly resettled refugees?

'Tailoring clinical work involves connecting with whoever you are working with, building trust and a safe space. I design and partner with programs that allow my team to engage with clients over a long period of time compared to traditional western mental health clinics that are not free, and typically only offer a limited number of sessions. For this collaboration with YTT, clinicians spent months getting to know clients, calling to check on them, providing information on skill building opportunities -- focused on client goals within practical matters such as employment, education, transportation, and language proficiency. Those are priorities for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. There is a high level of stigma associated with mental health within many cultures, so partnering with a cultural broker to help guide content and interactions that build on existing mental health literacy and coping strategies is a method I found to be useful in meeting the diverse needs of clients coming from various backgrounds and experiences.'

What are some common misconceptions or challenges you've observed in the broader community regarding the mental health of refugees, and how do you work to overcome or address these issues in your role?



'I live in Texas. There is a lot of political disdain towards refugees and asylum seekers, so attempting to create anything supportive-mental-health-related feels like trying to maintain a popsicle stand in the desert. One of my mantras I've come into and still hold tightly to on days it feels like I've hit a wall, Creativity- There is a Solution, and I just sit with that even though I don't have the answers yet. This has been foundational in shaping my approach to mental health support. I'm working to build something that doesn't exist on the level it could--accessible high quality mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers as they transition into starting a new life in the U.S.'

'Another misconception is that refugees are mentally ill or need to be fixed in some way. I've found refugees and asylum seekers to be some of the most intelligent, resilient, inspiring humans on the planet and it's an honour to share a sacred space with them to hear their stories, to be a witness to their experiences and learn from them.'

In your experience, how has the YTT mental health program positively impacted the lives of refugees, and are there any specific success stories or outcomes that stand out to you?

'Results from our first clinical pilot in the U.S. consistently showed distress relief and an increase in self-efficacy-- specifically related to being able to handle challenges and achieve goals across different situations. Participants reported feeling relief for being able to express what was visually inside of them. After collecting all the data and images, it opened an even wider range of potential clinical phenomena to explore further--i.e. altruism, use of colour saturation In relation to somatic expression, and connecting cross-culturally through art.'

In some of the group work, one of the participants drew a picture of a rock. She came to the U.S. alone, forced to leave her partner and children back in home country. Through the YTT intervention, I observed her coming into seeing herself in a new light and perhaps recognizing her strengths for the first time, starting a new life in a new country-- amid mounting grief. As she talked about being a "rock" and described her new keenly self-aware feat, she took off her hijab and let her hair down. It felt like I was watching a physical manifestation of this newfound perspective now helping her to focus on her goals so that she could make it easier for the rest of her family when they arrived.'

Looking ahead, what do you envision as the future of mental health support for refugees, and are there any innovative approaches or strategies you believe will be particularly important in addressing the evolving needs of this population?

'The future of mental health support for refugees looks like...accessible high quality mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers as they transition into starting a new life in the U.S.'

'Program innovation includes screening and prevention efforts, robust mental health programming integrations into wrap-around NGO service provisions, and decentralised community-led program buildouts.'

'Combating oppressive systems and work culture within NGOs by advocating for sustainable work load solutions that promote vitality.. thriving, not just surviving-- trickles down to the quality-of-care clients receive.'

‘Kyrgyzstan’s femicide epidemic: from domestic violence to bride kidnapping’

In the mountains of Central Asia lies Kyrgyzstan, an ex-Soviet Republic home to snow-capped peaks, crystal blue lakes, and other-worldly canyons. Tradition is celebrated, with ornamental weaved carpets and national dishes like pilaf paying homage to the former nomadic way of life. Yet, the tradition of ‘bride kidnapping’, and the culture of misogyny found in much of the country, is threatening the women and girls of Kyrgyzstan, causing an epidemic of femicide.

The tradition of bride kidnapping - or ala kachuu in Kyrgyz, which translates to ‘take and run’ - originated in the steppes of Central Asia before the 12th century. The process can range from a consensual elopement to a violent kidnapping, which may involve abuse or rape. Women are abducted into cars by the man and his friends/relatives, and forced to wear a white wedding scarf, called a jooluk, which signifies acceptance of the marriage. Most women accept due to manipulation, abuse, or not wanting to break tradition. Moverover, some do not know their future husband prior to the kidnapping.

Reporters at Kloop Media - an independent news outlet based in Kyrgyzstan - investigated the femicide epidemic and found that 762 women had been murdered in the country in the last decade. Due to the nature of the crimes, many deaths and abuse cases go unreported. They found that the Covid-19 lockdown increased domestic abuse by 65%, and that disputes about housework or cooking are prevalent triggers for an outburst.

One case, detailed in the Guardian, involved a woman’s ex-husband cutting off her ears and nose, whilst on a probationary sentence for rape, abuse, and threats. Other cases include a man who fatally stabbed his wife after she didn’t prepare dinner, and a husband pouring gasoline on his wife, who died of severe burns.

The practice of bride kidnapping was suppressed during the Soviet Union, and was made illegal in 1994 under Kyrgyz criminal law, yet persists to this day. 1 in 3 marriages in rural Kyrgyzstan begin this way, surveys suggest. It is one of many traditions that were banned during Soviet rule, meaning bride kidnapping can be seen as an assertion of national culture; a celebration of post-USSR independence. Some see it as unpatriotic to refuse the marriage, and this only adds to the stigma surrounding defiance.

Abuse within marriages is rarely prosecuted in Kyrgyzstan; 8512 cases of domestic abuse were reported from January to August 2023, and only 2% of these went to trial. Women face a legal system that does not prioritise their safety, in a society rife with misogynistic attitudes.

Yet, abuse being underreported is not unique to Kyrgyzstan. Due to stigma attached to victims, or fears for their own safety, many women around the world choose not to report what is happening, and even if they do, prosecutions are rare. As crimes such as abuse, rape, or even abduction happen within the domestic realm, there are rarely witnesses or evidence, making court cases complex.

The situation for women in Kyrgyzstan may seem bleak. Cases of domestic abuse and bride kidnappings are rarely taken seriously by police or society at large, leading to severe injuries or even death. The reporters at Kloop Media said ‘it is important to cultivate social empathy and mindfulness regarding women’s rights, raise awareness among law enforcement agencies and educate women and girls about their rights’. Attitudes and practices so deeply entrenched in a culture are hard to change, but work is being done to end the epidemic.

by

ISOBEL KNIGHT



'courtesy of Pairi Daeza'

Pairi Daeza is a Persian clothing brand based in Italy, focused on sustainability and ethics of what design can be. The two sisters, Yasaman and Nastaran Rezaee, create clothing that carry through the rich history of Iranian culture, whilst simultaneously championing the contemporary causes that Iran seeks for - especially as of recently with the 'Woman Life Freedom' movement.

PAIRI DAEZA

How does Iranian culture influence your designs, especially concerning traditional gender roles?

'Our designs are all inspired by ancient Iranian arts and craftsmanship, where there is also a strong trace of Iranian culture. Iranian culture is very much influenced by Persian Pagan traditions that date back to millennia ago, when women were seen as the incarnation of the sun and were bringing illumination to the world. Same goes in our literature, where the sun is called Lady sun. In addition, in Persian language all the pronouns are genderless and there is no distinction among genders. Unfortunately, however, in the last decades our society hasn't lived up to our ancient culture and values, but the Woman Life Freedom movement showed that huge change is coming.'

Have you found ways to challenge or redefine traditional gender norms through your fashion creations?

'We see gender as a choice, and our designs are very genderfluid; sometimes the silhouettes are more feminine and sometimes very masculine in the same collection. Because we design for a clientele that has the same mentality: no gender should be limited to certain types of silhouettes, fabrics or colours and no person should be forced to carry an identity—a gender that they don't relate with.'

Have you collaborated with any organisations or activists working towards gender equality in Iran?

'Yes, in 2023, we created a scarf collection in collaboration with twelve Iranian artists from all over the world (Ardeshir Tabrizi, Arghavan Khosravi, Hana Shahnava, Hanieh Ghashghaei, Mahboubeh Absalan, Maryam Keyhani, Maryam Sefati, Mona Danesh, Rahilzz, Sara Emami, Tala Madani and Yasaman Rezaee), who share our values in terms of gender equality and who wanted to contribute to amplifying the voices of Iranian women, LGBTQ+ and men fighting for their freedom in Iran. All profit from sales of the scarves went to Abdorrahman Boroumand Center (www.iranrights.org), to support the movement in Iran. We also made a short film (Iran-e man directed by Naghmeh Pour and produced by Newland.tv) that won many prizes worldwide. However, our main work contributes more to gender equality improvement in Iran, as for every collection we collaborate with Iranian craftswomen to find them a source of revenue in a country where more than half of the population lives under the poverty line.'

How do you see the intersection between fashion and activism in promoting gender equality?

'Fashion has a similar liberating power, in the sense that you are encouraged to distinguish yourself, take risks and stand out - to not fit into the repetitive norms imposed by society. Fashion also has a strong expressive power; people can communicate many things about themselves through the clothes they wear. In the case of Iran, our country, the way you dress up can even communicate your political views and this is activism, just as the women of Iran, despite all the deadly risks, have stopped to carry the mandatory hijab to reclaim their freedom of choice.'

In what ways does your work make you distinctly Iranian - How is being Persian tied to the work you do?

'Everything about our work is tied to Iran. Our passion for fashion was born from the desire of freedom of expression, in a country where the regime wants to control every aspect of your life and suffocate any voice that is different to its own. Our mission is to reclaim a suppressed identity with which we were born and to do that we strive to rejuvenate Iranian multi-ethnic arts and crafts through collaborating with marginalised craftswomen and craftsmen to find them a voice in the industry and at the same time present a different face of Iran to the world—a poetic culture with such beautiful aesthetics.'

How has the reception of your work changed? Do you feel a sense of pressure to be an activist in your work?

'We have received a lot of love and support from the end clients, but haven't had the same reception from the intermediaries or more particularly the fashion buyers for multi-brand stores. They are very risk-averse and conservative when it comes to activism or politics and they are wary of inserting in their shop the brands that have activist identities. But this is inescapable for us, our creations are inspired by Iran and by a generation that dares to raise its voice against oppression; while the regime in Iran is so gender apartheid and against our values that we inevitably become political and this has even made us lose the privilege of visiting our country or else we will be arrested upon arrival. In fact now we have to manage our relationships with the Iranian artisans remotely and through other people.'

How do you envision an idyllic future for the Iranian people? What change would you like to see?

'Iran can recall a point in its ancient history, when the world's first human rights were written, when all races with different ideologies lived together in equality and peace. An idyllic Iran would have a growing economy that can sustain the hopes and dreams of the young generation, and let them be happy on the streets in the open air instead of being suffocated on the ground. Iran would be a place where women can live their freedom and equal rights, letting their beautiful hair flow in the wind.'



'courtesy of Parizi Daezai'

Sarah Goodman is a writer and researcher based in New York. Through her experiences, she discusses her ever changing relationship to her industry through the eyes of being a woman.

by Ayaz Khezzadeh

Realising gender parity in media organisations and bylines involves creating an inclusive atmosphere where a range of perspectives are valued and acknowledged. The necessity of gender equity in journalism is discussed in this editorial, along with the actions that must be taken to guarantee a more representative and balanced field.

'When I was in graduate school, a guest speaker said that it's not the office of a journalist to *be* the expert but to be able to find them. In this, I think sourcing is key - both when reporting on the front end and editing—and fact checking—on the backend. To avoid personal biases and blindspots, a diversity of viewpoints is key. People are experts about their own experiences and I think honouring that is crucial in terms of combating stereotypes and presenting one-dimensional stories.' Interestingly, it is identifying these patterns early on, in the classroom as a student, that is formative to undoing these cycles of sexism within the industry.

Over the course of her work, Goodman's viewpoint on issues pertaining to gender has changed. Goodman's growing insight invites contemplation: what stories or experiences have influenced her perspectives on equity and gender? 'I think my understanding of gender-related issues has shifted as my understanding of power has evolved. I got one of my first gigs as a journalist around the same time the Harvey Weinstein scandal broke, which remains a significant reference for me. It strikes me as illustrative of how to hold powerful people accountable, but also how to sensitively go about reporting individual cases that involve gender-based violence.'

The manner in which the media industry approaches concerns regarding sexual harassment, misconduct, and gender equality has changed significantly in the post-MeToo era. Newsrooms are now more attentive to creating inclusive and secure work environments for all staff members, and they are more cognizant of power dynamics and the significance of consent.

'Since then, I would say that many of the examples that I've seen firsthand have to do with the pay gap, both in my own career and those of my friends. In my case, a male colleague was paid \$4 more an hour doing the same job, and he and I had similar qualifications and graduated from the same MA program. The modifiers "promising" and "young" I often see used more to describe female colleagues than male ones.' The media ought to give authentic portrayal of marginalised genders and ethnicities the greatest emphasis in order to avoid tokenism. This means going out of one's way to find distinct points of view and making sure they are given platforms that signify something instead of just being token gestures. The media has the power to promote an inclusive dialogue that values genuine and respectful hearing of all viewpoints, leading to greater equity and representation in public discourse.

'The best way to combat tokenism is to try to create a more inclusive media landscape overall, and I think one of the most important shifts in the industry is going to involve hiring more diverse people for positions of authority within media organisations. It is, of course, important to hire more POC and genderqueer folks at all levels, but I think it is crucial to have a wider representation of backgrounds and lived experiences in the rooms where editorial lines are being decided.'

SARAH GOODMAN

By AYAZ KHEZZADEH

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