

STORYTELLING WORKSHOP PUTTING THE HUMAN DIMENSION AT THE HEART OF ABOLITIONIST ADVOCACY (STORIES / TESTIMONIALS)

WORLD CONGRESS AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY - PARIS
JUNE 30, 2026
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Workshop preparation with a questionnaire / survey

Before the workshop, an international survey collected stories that had sparked awareness among abolitionists worldwide, to show their diversity and inform future actions. In non-formal education, people who spread what they've learned within their networks after a meeting are called "multipliers." Carefully choosing who to invite can amplify a message far beyond the room — and taking the pressure off organizing only large events. Activists often forget that the story that first moved them still has the power to move others too.

What kind of stories come to mind when we discuss human rights violations? Usually, those of direct victims — but other stories matter too. That's why the questionnaire's first question asked activists about the story that first raised their own awareness of the death penalty and its abolition.

There are the

- stories from family members of victims sentenced to death (mother, sister, daughter...), which show the extent of the emotional and social impact over several generations, the life that could have been, the emotions perceived “outside oneself” (grief, mourning, anger, desire for justice) and those felt within oneself as an activist or lawyer (weight of the punishment on others, temporality of this weight beyond the execution...)
- stories seen in a film or documentary that connect fiction to reality
- stories of revenge after the death of a loved one lead people to inquire about the death penalty and, through a twist of fate, ultimately drive them to action against the death penalty
- intimate stories of correspondence with detainees, which awaken a sense of injustice
- stories read in unexpected contexts (for example, at university) that create a shock and lead to a career in activism or to profound existential reflection
- stories of personal transformation, rehabilitation, forgiveness, second chances, justice, and community acceptance—particularly involving older people and community leaders—showing that forgiveness can coexist with accountability.
- stories of commemorations where the death penalty was used as a political weapon, which prompt reflection on one's own family history
- stories from eyewitnesses (surviving victims) heard on the sidelines of official events, such as at the United Nations
- stories of proximity to a place or scene of execution, difficult to describe (Told in few words because it's difficult to find the words for what was experienced)
- song stories that offer a different perspective (Through the music and lyrics, something transforms within oneself. This is an example of indirect storytelling that brings about an effortless shift in perspective.)

Quote from the questionnaire: "When you're touched, it's forever."

Explaining why these stories were pivotal in their awareness, here are the responses they shared:

- the realization that behind a file lies a human being with dreams, relationships and a future
- the understanding that there are multiple perspectives related to the death penalty
- the feeling of shame at living in a society that still practices this, and the desire to contribute to change
- giving a face and voice to an abstract subject (humanizing individuals and the judicial system)
- understanding the emotions felt by the different families involved (of victims and convicted persons)
- the initial story became a guide and a path: a daily motivation
- the realization of being part of a global movement gave the courage to open new spaces for dialogue

Question about invisible voices or stories: Beyond the convicted person, what voices or stories do you feel are most ignored/forgotten in the abolitionist advocacy? Here are the answers summarized in categories:

1. The families of the convicted: invisible voices / Impact on children and family structure

No one seems to care about the feelings of prisoners' loved ones. Their suffering is underestimated. Mothers and children, in particular, are not heard in the discussion.

Social isolation, family breakdown, and the status of "outcasts" are common. Visits to death row are traumatic for children (sometimes conducted in "closed" locations). Yet, family support remains a vital lifeline for prisoners.

2. The victims' relatives, also misunderstood and/or not listened to

When they oppose the death penalty, their voice is ignored. Some continue to justify execution as a means of appeasement, despite evidence to the contrary and the voices of those families.

3. Frontline professionals (forgotten)

Defense lawyers perceived as complicit with criminals, suffering vicarious trauma, often left to fend for themselves.

Prison staff: suffering largely underestimated.

Social workers and local activists, whose stories receive little attention compared to those of prisoners.

4. Civil society and activists, delegitimized

Accused of serving Western or colonial interests

Very limited funding for the abolitionist struggle

Dependence of institutions on donors, which limits the stories told

5. Other groups absent from the debate

Women and Minorities: the Most Absent from the Narratives

The Clergy

Political figures

Advocacy and Diversity

An activist working in Egypt pointed out to me that the term "advocacy" is often understood in only one sense, dominated by a Eurocentric or Anglo-American perspective. This prompted me to ask for its translation into different languages in the preparation questionnaire to see if these translations differently color the work carried out in the field and to create more mutual curiosity about what our languages convey. Here is the question: "Advocacy" is difficult to translate. In the other language(s) in which you work, what word or expression do you use—and what meaning does it imply? (Language(s), word or expression used, what it expresses). Here are the answers:

- In Arabic, "advocacy" doesn't have a perfect equivalent. I most often use « المناصرة » (al-munāsarāh). This word expresses the idea of standing alongside people whose rights are threatened, amplifying their voices, influencing decision-makers, and working towards legal and political change. It implies solidarity and sustained action rather than speaking on behalf of others. But المناصرة best captures the human rights meaning of the term advocacy ».
- Advocacy in German is "Interessenvertretung". An advocat is someone who represents the interests of others or of a cause.
- We talk about 'championing' folk, 'supporting' and 'platforming'.
- In French: plaidoyer; Spanish: incidencia política; Italian: "advocacy"/difesa. Advocacy is about implementing strategic activities to raise awareness, promote an idea and, eventually, influence decisions.

- Advocacy (can be translated into: supporting, activism, promotion) which in Luganda can be translated as: Okubunyisa amawulire (spreading the word), okuwolereza (defending / pleading) or okuwagira (supporting).
- In Italian "difesa, sostegno, patrocinio o sensibilizzazione". A strategic effort to promote and defend the rights, needs, or interests of an individual, a group, or a cause. Its purpose is to influence public opinion and policymakers in order to bring about social, legislative, or economic change.
- Swahili: "Utetezi wa haki" (advocacy for rights) and "kusemea wasio na sauti" (speaking for those without a voice). These phrases convey promoting and defending human rights, amplifying marginalized voices, influencing laws and policies, and standing alongside affected communities to advance justice, dignity, and social change.
- ADVOCACY is translated as Kumenyera/Kuyankhulira which can easily be translated back to English as speaking/ fighting for the other.
- Attivista
- sensibilizzazione, it express creating a contact between a situation, a fact and the sensibility of someone. Once this contact is there it is easier for the person to understand the importance of the issue at stake.
- In Somali, the word most commonly used for "advocacy" is "u doodid" or "u ololayn". U doodid literally means "speaking on behalf of" or "defending a cause." It conveys representing the interests, rights, and concerns of individuals or communities whose voices may not be heard. U ololayn means "campaigning for" or "mobilizing support for a cause." It implies raising awareness, influencing public opinion, and encouraging decision-makers to take action. Together, these terms convey the idea of promoting justice, defending human rights, amplifying marginalized voices, and working for positive social and policy change through peaceful and constructive engagement.
- Advocacy involves amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and bringing their concerns, experiences, and demands to decision-makers, institutions, and forums where they would otherwise have little or no representation. L'advocacy. Engaging key stakeholders and amplifying the voices of the players in this space (CSOs)
- The term "plaidoyer" in French comes from a legal term.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Around one hundred people participated in the workshop, spread across 8 round tables of 10-12 chairs. This arrangement, as well as the room, open on both sides and regularly welcoming new arrivals, required to continually adapt the proceedings to this very interesting dynamic of space occupation (groups seated around tables may not move around as much as a group seated in a circle) and fluctuating (number of participants).

Preparing the room

Fabrics from different countries were laid out on each table: in many languages, storytelling and weaving share the same origin (text and textile). Speech, too, is woven. Similarly, words and numbers intersect (storytelling/counting: Some tales have a counted form, a rhythmic way of telling.). Various musical instruments were also placed there, to evoke the musical and non-verbal nature of language, and to encourage spontaneous associations with other symbols.

Brief biographical details about my approach

As an intercultural and language facilitator, I have worked in intercultural dialogue, non-formal education, and the field of lifelong learning for over 20 years, using a holistic, interactive, inclusive, and artistic approach. This sensitivity has led me to moderate and organize international conferences to help people overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, create an environment for calm communication that facilitates discussion on sensitive topics, and develop innovative formats tailored to each event (objective, intention, audience, subject, space, etc.).

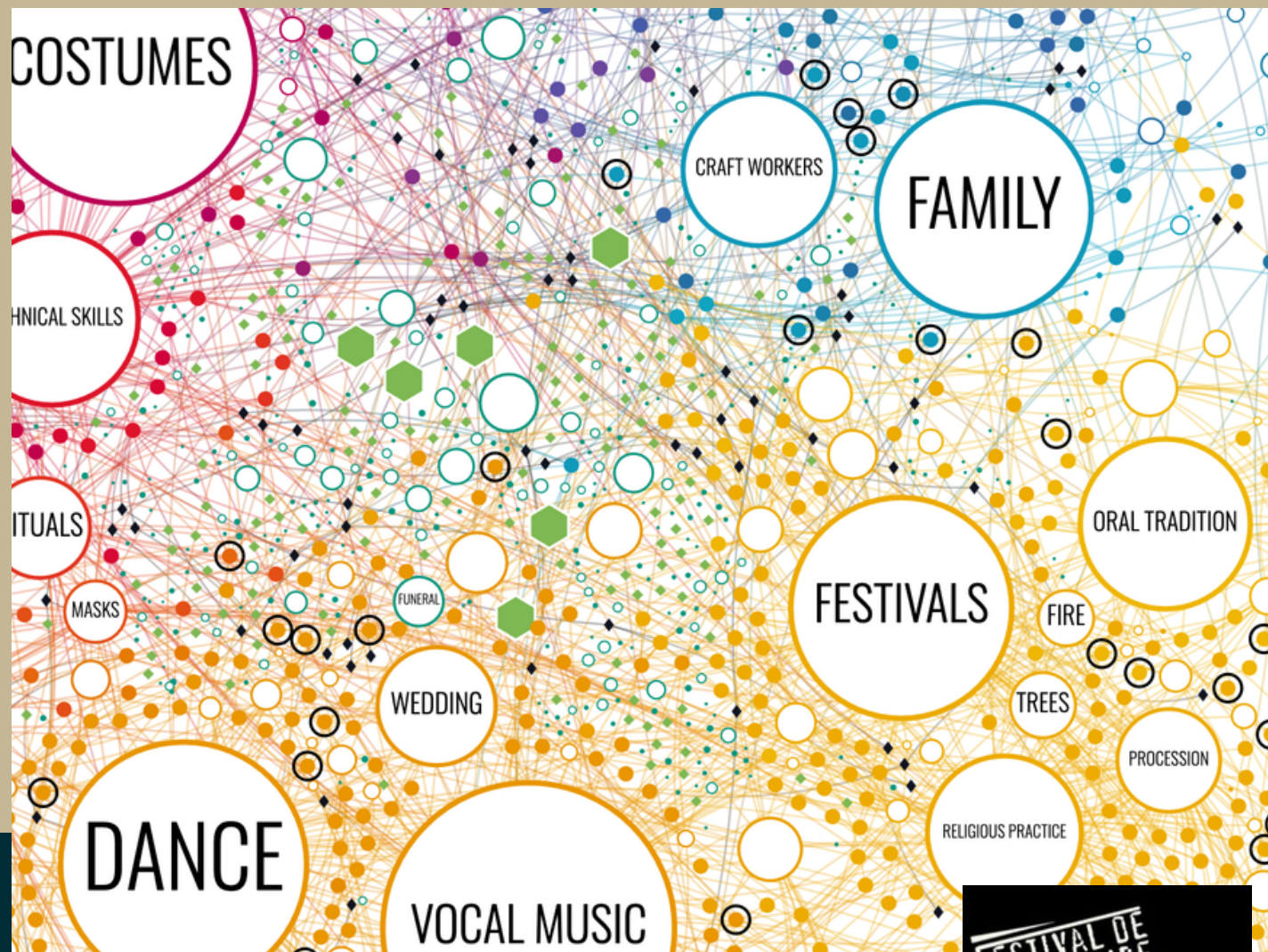
The work of a storyteller came later, inspired by my mother and street art festivals in France. This indirect, ancient and oral approach has always seemed to me a powerful tool for addressing certain subjects and reaching people in a different way – beyond borders (including historical ones) – who do not attend training courses or conferences. Oral traditions like storytelling belong to our intangible cultural heritage. This heritage is a fascinating source of knowledge and inspiration.

TO LEARN MORE OR DISCOVER THIS
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE:

- DIVE INTO INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE! →
UNESCO INTERACTIVE AND
INFORMATIVE MAP

Discover multiple ways to navigate through a dynamic and interactive space of vibrant intangible cultural heritage practices and expressions. See how together they represent a rich cultural diversity.

Using web-semantics and graphic visualization, 'Dive into Intangible Cultural Heritage' proposes a broader conceptual and visual navigation through close to 800 elements inscribed on UNESCO's Lists of the 2003 Convention. It explores the various elements across domains, themes, geography and ecosystems and makes it possible to visualize deep inter-connections among them.



- VISUAL & SOUND ARCHIVES OF THE HOUSE
OF WORLD CULTURES – FRENCH CENTRE
FOR INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



WORKSHOP SESSIONS

- Short introduction and presentation of my work and my intentions for the workshop
- Icebreaker: take the time to arrive, stand up, go and greet the people present.

- Getting straight to the point of "testimonies/stories": on each table, stories from the questionnaire (printed in English and French) served as examples for everyone to tell their own, either in a large group or in small groups depending on the language.

→ Liberation of speech and listening: what helps, what hinders?

→ The instruments on the tables were mentioned, along with the musical aspect of listening, followed by a short exercise to "open the ears (and hearts)". Method: whispering a poem, a text, or a childhood lullaby into a paper cone in a neighbor's ear (because lullabies and poems "speak" to other parts of our hearts or minds and connect us in different ways, they touch something in us.). This is done before sharing the story, to "open up" those present. This aspect can take other forms. This was just one example of how to proceed.

- Further exploration with the concept of semantic injustice and its relationship to testimonies: how does this phenomenon prevent us from hearing, believing or taking a story seriously?
- Ethics: the concept of "Do no harm... but do something" was addressed with keywords

→ *A description of these two concepts is provided later in this document.*

- Collective intelligence and participation: At each table, participants shared their ideas, inspirations, and experiences for creating environments that care for both those who share their stories and those who listen, or for exploring new spaces for sharing; by getting curious about existing local cultural practices, oral traditions, or rituals.
- In conclusion, two tales recounting how a character faces danger and finds an unexpected way out - through unwavering willpower and life's pleasure (the taste of honey) - were shared to provide inner support to the activists in their work. *I use storytelling as a subject matter support, an indicator of solutions, a tool for resilience, and an aid in overcoming trauma, particularly vicarious trauma.*

HERE ARE THE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THOSE PRESENT AT THE WORKSHOP REGARDING THEIR IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING SPACES FOR MEETING AND EXCHANGING IDEAS AROUND STORIES:

- **Conditions under which this sharing takes place / Comfort (before / after the story)**

Offer a glass of water

Build trust

Take your time

Provide a private space

Preserve a degree of privacy, even in a public testimony — this makes it easier to speak

- **Expanding one's relational and social circle = expanding one's circle of compassion**

Door-to-door

Expanding the network: family, neighbors, and the wider community

Professional networking opportunities

Association meetings, political rallies, demonstrations, festivals

Press conferences

Public speaking competitions

- **Everyday places conducive to informal sharing**

Hair salons / Barber shops, cafes, tattoo parlors, waiting rooms, bookstores

- **Artistic and creative forms**

Art installations (Visual Art Thinking: Using images to feel/think)

Music, Theatre, Forum theatre, Stand-up comedy

Documentaries, Comics, Books

Art therapy,

Paintings, Drawings



HERE ARE THE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THOSE PRESENT AT THE WORKSHOP REGARDING THEIR IDEAS OR SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING SPACES FOR MEETING AND EXCHANGING IDEAS AROUND STORIES:

- **Community and Traditional Practices**

Village council (around the fire, under the tree)

Stories passed on to religious leaders

Use of traditional communicators, religious and customary leaders, storytellers, musicians

- **Being together differently (beyond face-to-face interaction)**

Being in a circle, in a round

Cooking together and sharing a meal

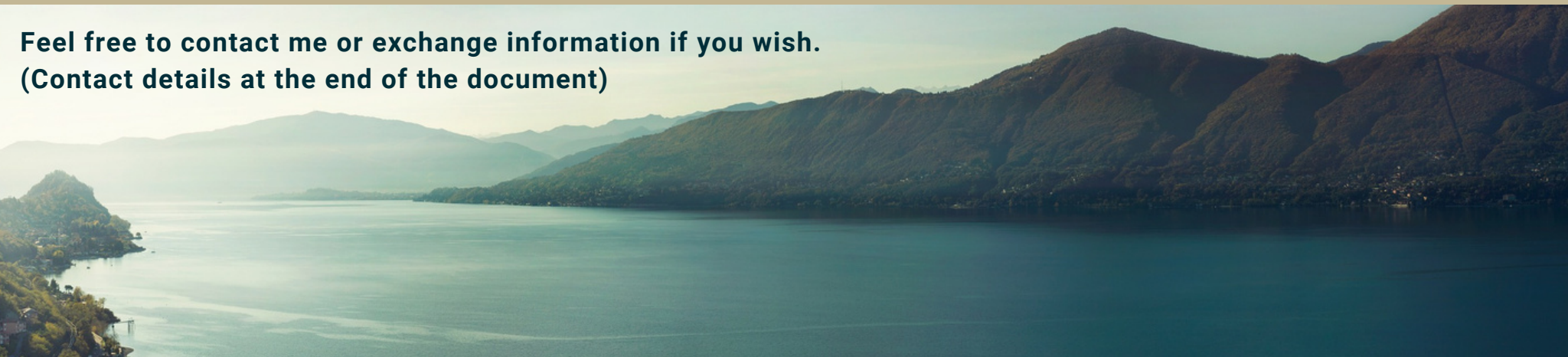
Reflecting on different ways of meeting: simply being present in a common space is already powerful, not just direct interactions

- **Train and equip information relays**

Train journalists to tell these stories

QUESTIONS OR NEED FOR CLARIFICATION OR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR YOUR/THEIR IDEAS?

**Feel free to contact me or exchange information if you wish.
(Contact details at the end of the document)**



INTERVIEWS

Following the workshop at the Paris World Congress, I interviewed participants about their intentions, expectations, and what they gained from it:

- A lawyer: the wooden frog-shaped instrument on her table reminds her of hope and healing—its song heralded rain and the fresh sand used to treat certain ailments. It inspired her to share this with others and talk about her story. Exchanges at her table inspired her to create collaborations between dancers from her country and other countries on the issue of abolition.
- One participant suffering from intergenerational trauma reflected on how to take care of herself as an activist and at the same time create sensitive spaces for dialogue; a dancer herself, the approach through the body, art or music allows her to help manage stress while exploring ways of meeting "the Other" and the topic differently.
- A human rights rapporteur was inspired to work more closely with local leaders on the issue of abolition.
- A documentary filmmaker was looking for inspiration to tell stories differently, and found ideas and support from other people present.
- Exchange of expertise (search for methods & search for content): activists already using art as an advocacy tool, and artists seeking to connect their art to more conscious advocacy work.
- A female pastor - mentioning the "theology of hope" - sought to help survivors connect with their emotions as victims of the justice and prison system, often omitted when testimonies focus on overcoming difficulties and oneself.
- A journalist was looking for new ways to get in touch with religious groups and create spaces for dialogue with them.
- LGBTQIA+ activists from different countries have found inspiration there for an indirect approach to sensitive topics.
- A former death row inmate was inspired to explore more deeply his own vulnerability and how he could share his story with his audience.
- A person (a lawyer), realizing that she was traumatized by what she had experienced, was encouraged to use creative writing to tell her story and her deep questions about these subjects.

HAVING TESTIMONIES AND STORIES... BUT WHAT TO DO WITH THEM?

Some questions to ask yourself:

- What is my intention?
- What effects do I hope to create?
- How can I reach those who will hear it?
- What form can this testimony take?
- How do I prepare for listening?
- How do I create an atmosphere conducive to this encounter?
- How do I ensure everyone is taken care of? (including the organizers)

If it's an oral story

- Is it told by the person concerned, or by a close witness (with, if necessary, aspects modified to protect someone)?
- Should it remain anonymous for safety reasons?
- Is it live or recorded? With or without an audience?
- Is it filmed, narrated, sung, or staged (object theater, shadow puppetry, dance)?
- If it's the person themselves: how can their needs be addressed, how can their needs be helped to find the appropriate words and form?
- How can a safe environment be prepared for an audience? How can the audience be prepared?

If it's written

- Single text or collective work, collection, article, letter?
- Who is speaking, or who has the power to speak?
- In what language, that of the audience?
- If translation is needed, should the interpreter be prepared—to respect the content and counterbalance power dynamics (linguistic, social/cultural, political, etc.)?

THE SETTING/PLACE/VENUE INFLUENCES THE STORY AND THE WAY TO LISTEN TO IT

A venue transforms the way we can share a story: it can intimidate or support, expand or stifle it.

Closed, open, small, large, a passageway, or outdoors, each venue is like a distinct entity (or being), capable of amplifying a message, and one that must be fully understood.

- Is it linked to a theme?
- Does it reassure or impress?
- Is it intimate or spectacular? Confined to a specific function?
- Does it carry a symbol, or can it become the bearer of a new symbol/memory?
- Is the audience focused, or can they come and go as they please?
- How do these choices influence the testimony, positively or negatively—and how can we leverage them?

Using concrete stories in advocacy adds different levels of understanding to the facts and collective emotions these issues evoke, placing the human element at the heart of the matter. Consciously using spaces to reinforce the intended message and connect it to the desired approach allows for the creation of innovative formats.

But giving voice to others means, beyond formats, venues, and objectives, also taking into account the social, discriminatory, or emotional factors that can hinder the reception or understanding of the story. A holistic approach, attentive to each person present, allows us to anticipate these effects and support the sharing process with the right tools or attitude (connecting with oneself and others, resilience, stress management, inspiring, spreading hope...).

EMOTIONS AND TESTIMONIES

Event schedules often leave too little time for people to arrive, connect with others, and relax before the delicate moment of sharing a story—risking re-traumatizing the person sharing their story or creating vicarious trauma for others.

Reflecting with the person involved on how to experience this moment, what they wish to share, and how, while also preparing the audience, helps to better counterbalance this difficulty.

There is also a societal tendency to reduce a person's identity to a single story—that of their conviction: Who is this person beyond this experience, and how can we connect with them?

Can abolitionist work help transform this image?

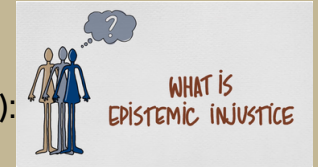
Can an abolitionist event also be a place for encounters through collective activities—cooking, singing, playing games, doing sports together—to destigmatize the individual and their loved ones and create a space of trust where the diversity of some meets the diversity of others? Event showing multiple ways of being?

Indirect formats can have just as much impact as direct formats.

The creative or artistic process can serve both as a method for telling a story and as a means of expressing difficult emotions or channeling the stress associated with the work. It also helps the audience to listen to and receive the story with empathy, activating their own resilience in the face of challenging narratives.

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE... WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE?

VISUAL EXPLANATIONS HERE
(FROM THE EDINBURGH SCHOOL OF LAW):



1. Testimonial Injustice

Negative stereotypes linked to a person's social group cast doubt on their testimony. For example, class prejudice in some societies makes poor people appear less reliable and distorts the perception of their story.

2. Hermeneutical injustice (or injustice of interpretation)

A gap in common language prevents us from accounting for a lived experience, which then remains difficult to think or express, due to a lack of access to the places where the tools of language are made (schools, media, research).

3. Contributory Injustice

Even when words exist to describe the experience of dominated groups, they are not taken seriously by dominant groups: the person is reduced to the position of witnessing, and not considered as a producer of knowledge.

4. Epistemic appropriation and transmission

Knowledge produced by marginalized groups circulates in the social space, but those who disseminate it get a disproportionate benefit — forgetting its origin.

5. Injustice of transmission

The inability to pass on to one's children the history and knowledge that are one's own and, conversely, the impossibility of inheriting from those who came before us.

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE... WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE?

In an [interview](#), philosopher Kristie Dotson, author of "*A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression*," proposes four registers for recounting the same topic—political, detailed personal example, theoretical development, and metaphysical reflection—so that different forms of listening and attention can be respected.

She advocates for a philosophy of everyday life, an art of asking questions collectively: neither reason alone, nor emotions alone, are sufficient to combat senselessness; words are needed to discern this phenomenon, and tools are required to navigate these conversations.

Source: *Epistemic frailty, Kristie Dotson* (The Royal Institute of Philosophy)

This practice of asking questions, akin to many oral traditions, could shed light on questions such as the difference between justice and vengeance, what the right to life or forgiveness mean—and/or serve as a safe space to help those affected by the death penalty (convicts, families, and judicial personnel) find the words before sharing, with their consent, what they have learned.

→ **This could also inspire an innovative format where the same subject is not only presented through multiple perspectives (different voices and experiences) but the same story is told in four different ways, in the same space, using various languages or creative approaches so that the message “gets across better”.**

ETHICS, RISKS, AND TESTIMONY

What is your main concern when using (personal) narratives in your advocacy work? (Question asked in the preparatory survey) Summary of responses:

1. Security and threats

Risks for people in exile (e.g., Iran, Vietnam), who must remain vigilant.

Fears of targeted attacks or repression by state institutions./ Increased danger depending on the country.

2. Retraumatization and emotional well-being

Repeating one's story (in the media, the courts, through advocacy) can reopen old wounds.

The need for a trauma-informed approach: dignity, consent, privacy.

Risk of secondary trauma, even among well-intentioned individuals.

3. Instrumentalization and ethics of narrative

Risk of using someone's story for purposes other than their own : a form of story "stealing"

Telling someone else's story can make it seem less authentic and less convincing.

4. Financial Exploitation

Stories used for profit by third parties

Expectations of compensation from witnesses

5. Online Hostility and Harassment

Active and aggressive pro-death penalty groups on social media

Abusive comments targeting testimonials

6. Personal reluctance

Some people simply do not want their story told.

7. Lack of strategy

The absence of a clear advocacy objective weakens impact and exposes the organization to other risks.

ETHICS, RISKS, AND TESTIMONY

Some additional points for ethical reflection, to be adapted to the respective contexts:

- Ensure you have permission to tell someone's story, and agree on how you wish to do so.
- If this is impossible, anonymize or use a pseudonym to avoid putting anyone at risk.
- Avoid "tokenism" (superficial diversity): symbolic efforts at inclusion that exploit a person without regard for their well-being, in order to avoid accusations of discrimination.
- Pay attention to the language used and the accuracy of translations: prepare interpreters for the power dynamics at play (linguistic, social, political, historical) and vicarious trauma.

For further guidance, the "Do no harm... but do something" approach and the Yogyakarta Principles offer useful frameworks for prevention and reflection.

“Do no harm... but do something”

A concept inspired by Mary B. Anderson's 1999 book, *“Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War”*. It calls for vigilance without paralyzing action: cooperation must be based on global reflection and the local expertise of activists, who know their environment better than anyone.

In 2022 in Berlin, the Hirschfeld-Eddy Foundation, together with grassroots activists and German development aid organizations, organized events on this topic applied to LGBTI projects, offering advice that can inform approaches related to the abolition of the death penalty:

- **Gather local knowledge:** leverage experience in social strategies, and designate individuals responsible for risk monitoring in each community.
- **Context of criminalization:** public funds conditional on registered association status can deprive of support groups that have no chance of registering in a country that persecutes them; greater trust in unregistered groups is needed.

ETHICS, RISKS, AND TESTIMONY

- **Visibility is also a risk:** useful for advancing rights in some countries, it can be dangerous in others (photos, names, simple lists of participants). For example, the ARTIVISM Queer Film Festival in Tunisia avoids any dissemination of faces or names and shares meeting places in secure groups.
- **Postcolonial – equal relationship (?):** *“The decision to separate racism and homophobia in narratives surrounding colonialism is not only dishonest, but also leads to division.”* – Activist from Trinidad and Tobago. Many homophobic and transphobic laws in Africa and Asia are a legacy of colonial and missionary history.

→ The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia, Babacar M'Baye

- **Flexibility strengthens resilience.** *“Every change in security conditions requires maximum flexibility from both sides.”* – Activist from South Africa. Essential security expenditures (cameras, secured doors, personnel) are sometimes overlooked by donors; some organizations should also have the right not to display their partners' logos if doing so puts them at risk.
- **Ensuring sustainability:** core funding – supporting an organization's structure rather than just its projects brings it greater stability.
- **Poverty is a constant threat – intersectional thinking :** people ostracized and criminally prosecuted for their lifestyle may no longer be able to meet their basic needs; aid conditional on their advocacy work must take this humanitarian risk into account.

During a parallel session on LGBTQIA+ rights at the World Congress, the indissociation of these rights from human rights was recalled – a framework supported by the **Yogyakarta Principles**.

Yogyakarta Principles

In 2006 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, a group of international experts developed a universal guide to human rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity, affirming binding international legal standards. Available in six official UN languages: <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

The Yogyakarta Principles + 10

adopted on November 10, 2017, complement them with 111 “additional obligations of States” (torture, asylum, privacy, health, protection of human rights defenders).

To learn more:

- [From Yogyakarta with Love / APCOM: Video illustrating the Yogyakarta principles](#)



- Kim Vance-Ilgaworld, [The Yogyakarta principles – five things every activist should know](#)

EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE APPROACHES USING ORALITY

TALI TUKANG GANTUNG AT FIVE ARTS CENTRE – MALAYSIA

A play created in Malaysia by Effa Qamariani. A film about the play - [Impressions & Link](#) - is currently in production. Performed by Deena Dakshini, a poet and activist whose work translates complex legal content and human rights issues into language accessible to all audiences.

Objectives: to diversify advocacy campaigns, reach new audiences, make complex issues more accessible, boost the motivation of activists weary of the stress of this work, and increase media attention.

This approach “opened a door that is usually closed”: that of the criminal justice system, courtrooms, cells, prison corridors, women’s bodies, the inner lives and minds of detainees, lawyers, and judges. The play questions the usual “legal narrative”: **Who has the right to complexity? Who is reduced to a legal file?** It also shifts the focus of the death penalty from an isolated case to a phenomenon targeting foreign minorities in Malaysia, highlighting the paradox of a multicultural society where outward hospitality does not guarantee equal rights for all.

Non-verbal elements serving the story and the audience: sound and lighting choices create an emotional framework, offering moments of respite and moments of comic lightness to help the audience.

Inspirations from Oral History

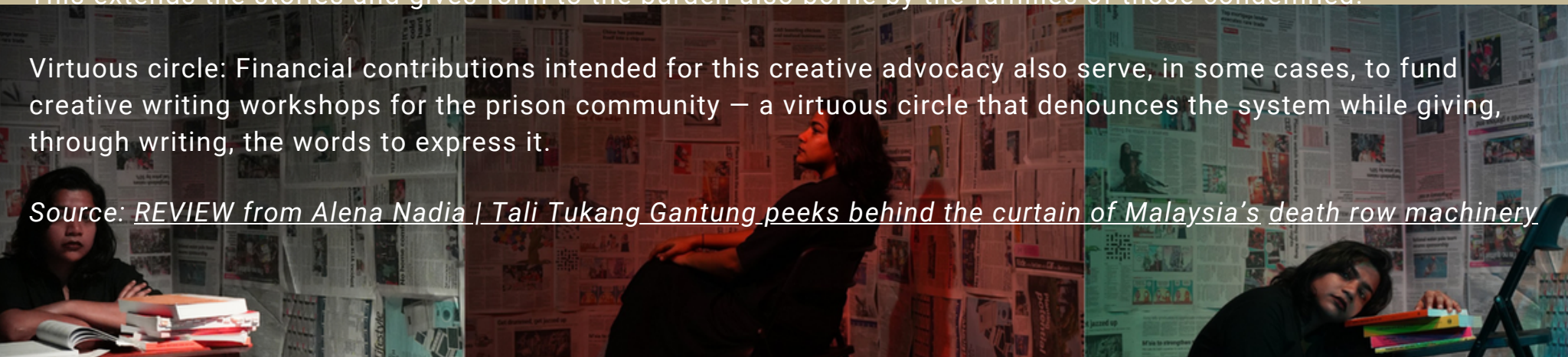
Araro Ariraro: Tamil folk songs from colonial Malaysia, which kept alive voices that history attempted to erase.

Oppari: Traditional Tamil funeral lament, a way of speaking out against injustice and expressing grief that ordinary language cannot contain.

This extends the stories and gives form to the burden also borne by the families of those condemned.

Virtuous circle: Financial contributions intended for this creative advocacy also serve, in some cases, to fund creative writing workshops for the prison community – a virtuous circle that denounces the system while giving, through writing, the words to express it.

Source: [REVIEW from Alena Nadia | Tali Tukang Gantung peeks behind the curtain of Malaysia’s death row machinery](#)



#ABOLITIONNOWTOUR PROJECT & WAYANG KULIT

During the facilitation of the [#AbolitionNow Tour / Youth Stands Against the Death Penalty project](#) in six countries, (for the World Congress Against the Death Penalty in Berlin) an approach using Wayang Kulit shadow puppetry was chosen for young activists in Indonesia. This approach utilized a local oral tradition to tell stories while protecting the activists. This popular and well-known form of oral storytelling can reach all audiences and is easily replicable. Starting with existing shapes, participants created their own silhouettes, drawing inspiration from other collective references (superheroes, mythologies, real-life figures, etc.) and shared various stories of marginalized voices.



In this project, other young people used music in unusual ways to express opposing feelings related to being abolitionist or retentionist. Without words or formality, these [TikTok videos](#) are powerful in their simplicity and can go viral.

During the World Congress in Paris, a participant told me about the collective of women artists [Wayang Women](#), in Malaysia, where this practice is similarly used to challenge certain prejudices and address social issues: [Reimagining Wayang Kulit](#)



REIMAGINING JUSTICE, ONE STORY AT A TIME.

With Sabrina Mahtani, Lawyer, Activist & Host

Around the world, nearly one million women are behind bars – and that number is rising. Often this is not for serious crimes, but because they are poor, because they've survived violence, or because the system failed them long before a conviction.

On the Women Beyond Walls Podcast, we speak with women who have lived through incarceration, as well as those reimagining what justice could look like.

Women Beyond Walls is an award-recognised podcast, a finalist at the International Women's Podcast Awards (2022) and in the 'Crime and Justice, Individual Episode' category of the Webby Awards (2026) – widely considered the Oscars of the internet and one of the most competitive honours in digital media.



& AVAILABLE IN SEPTEMBER 2026: FIRST OPEN-SOURCE GLOBAL MAP OF CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS SUPPORTING WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN ARRESTED, ARE ON TRIAL, INCARCERATED, OR RELEASED, AS WELL AS THEIR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES → [HERE](#)

QUESTIONS, INFORMATIONS & CONTACT

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