Courage to Think
Monologues

Scholars at Risk Network
DEDICATION

Dedicated to Kees Bleichrodt (1952-2012), former director of the University Assistance Fund (UAF) in the Netherlands. Kees was a pragmatic man of principle and great vision. He was instrumental in developing the close partnership between UAF and Scholars at Risk, leading more higher education institutions in the Netherlands and beyond to take part in protecting and hosting at-risk scholars. Under his leadership, UAF brought the first monologues series to life as the *Verboden Wetenschaps Monologen* (“Forbidden Science Monologues”), and through this booklet Kees’ spirit and dedication to human rights are carried forward through the stories within and the people who read, hear and share them.
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Scholars ask questions. That can be very threatening to those whose power depends on controlling what people know. Every year, thousands of scholars worldwide are harassed, threatened, imprisoned, even tortured and killed for what they do. Scholars at Risk works to protect them. Scholars at Risk works to get scholars out of danger and back into the classroom.

The *Courage to Think Monologues* are their stories. Based on the real lives of scholars assisted by Scholars at Risk Network members and partners, these are the stories of people who have had the courage to keep thinking, questioning, writing, teaching, publishing and sharing ideas, despite grave risks. Through these monologues we celebrate them, even as they challenge all of us who enjoy a safe space to think to use that space, and to defend it.

We are grateful to SAR’s long-time partner, the University Assistance Fund (UAF) in the Netherlands, for providing the inspiration for this publication. In 2012, UAF organized a series of performances of what were called the *Forbidden Science Monologues* at higher education institutions across the Netherlands. The tremendous success of UAF’s initiative inspired us to bring the monologues to a wider audience.

We hope you will read and share these stories with your classmates, students, colleagues and friends. We hope you will organize performances and discussions of your own. We hope you are inspired, as we are inspired every day by the scholars who look to us for help. We hope you will join us, support Scholars at Risk, and help us protect more scholars and everyone’s right to think, question and share ideas, freely and safely.

Jonathan Fanton
Board Chair

Robert Quinn
Executive Director
SUGGESTED USES

The Courage to Think Monologues are adaptable to any number of uses, ranging from simple readings to extended, multi-site performances. Here are a few suggestions, but we invite you to create your own.

**Private reading and reflection** | Read one or all the monologues alone or with friends and share your reactions (est. 15 min. per monologue)

**Public reading** | Read one or more monologues in shared public space, like a campus commons or student center, to raise awareness and build dialogue (est. 20-25 min per monologue)

**Virtual performance** | Perform one or more monologues, in full or excerpts, for video recording and posting online to raise awareness and encourage online sharing and discussion (varying lengths)

**Live performance (with optional panel or facilitated discussion)** | Stage a public performance of one or more monologues, perhaps with help from a campus or local theatre company, and consider adding a panel discussion before or after, perhaps featuring an SAR scholar or network representative (combined est. 1.5 hours)

**Course session** | Add a reading or performance of one or more monologues and a guided discussion to course offerings in suitable departments, including international higher education, drama, and regional, gender and human rights studies (est. 20 min. per monologue, plus discussion – see page 32 for suggested discussion questions)

**Conference session** | Add a reading or performance of one monologue or excerpts of several to the program of a workshop or conference on relevant themes, including for example international higher education, drama or regional, gender or human rights studies (est. 20 – 60 min.)

**Local, regional or national performance tour** | Stage traveling performances of one or more monologues, at universities, colleges and other venues in your area or discuss with SAR how to coordinate events with other SAR network members elsewhere (varied durations)
SHARE YOUR STORIES

However you use the monologues, we encourage you to share your readings, events, discussions, media and video clips with your local community, your contacts elsewhere, and with Scholars at Risk at scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu.

Use any intranet, blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter, YouTube, news channels and other media to help raise awareness and generate more support for protecting scholars and everyone’s right to think, question and share ideas, freely and safely.
Scene 1

[Professor paces up and down in front of his class with his pipe. He wears a traditional African shirt and cap, as Nigerian novelist and professor Chinua Achebe might dress. We hear music from the British Afro-pop band Osibisa’s “Welcome Home” (Island Records, 1975).]

Let me introduce myself, so the class may start. Professor Kanouté, Ka-nou-té. From Congo, a country you have only heard about for the wrong reasons: ethnic struggle, exploitation, corruption. Congo was, is my country. Got that?

Philosopher, studied in London, received my doctorate in Tokyo. I am a real Plato man. I believe that, although some people behave badly, deep down you, and you, and even you, are capable of good behavior. That is why I like to talk and discuss with people, with my students. You see, an intellectual learns every day, you from me and the other way round. Let me present you a question that has been fascinating me for years, right from the moment I occupied myself with philosophy. The question everything revolves around. That is, “What is a good society?” Take your time to think. Our friend Plato said “Thinking is the talking of the soul with itself.” Got that?

A good society is a free, democratic society. “Everyone should live in harmony and there are equal opportunities for everyone.”

Of course, those are not my words, but the words of the unforgettable, fearless Nelson Mandela.

Democracy. Interestingly, the government of Congo claims to be a democracy. One of the few things in which Aristotle was right, was that the gods do like a joke! If a wolf says it is a sheep, you can test whether that is true. A wolf has teeth, a sheep has teeth, so... In Congo, the elections were ‘fair’ because the votes have been counted by computers. Yet my students have demonstrated that the one who manages the input of data may manipulate it, so...

That is why it was, is so wonderful to teach there. You are not in splendid isolation. The work is out in the streets. Remember, every society that advances, advances through intellectual ideas.

Scene 2

[Professor writes a letter to his colleague.]

Dear Murakami... Murakami, this is Kanouté. I can see the smile on your face once you have opened the envelope. Yes, your old eyes see it right. This letter contains twice as many stamps as the last one. That is the price of a government that does not believe in economic forecasts!
I should have written to you sooner, Murakami, but you are a dangerous man. First there is this friendly invitation for a working visit:

[imitates the voice of Murakami] “Only two weeks, Professor Kanouté! Two weeks only. Come to Hiroshima!”

Then you spoil me by offering brilliant students, good discussions, and sushi! During the last night you show me that you are not a professor in philosophy... [laughs] you are a karaoke professor.

[singing] “Take me down to the paradise city; Where the grass is green and the girls are pretty; Take me home.”

Now I am back in Congo and you ask whether I want to work with you. Fixed contract, house, a super research budget. Murakami, now I understand why everyone out here drives a Toyota instead of a Ford. Marketing!

Your invitation is tempting. Seriously. I have not been received with open arms here. Anonymous phone calls, threats. My wife was completely upset when they stood in our parlor with their guns out. I had to wrestle them outside. Cowards. Can you imagine, boys just old enough to follow class have been given guns to shoot, while you and I are so careful to let youngsters find their way in the world with words. It is not their fault, we should blame their chiefs. Bad. I went to the police in order to file a complaint against the soldiers. It wasn’t possible; the commander looked at me sheepishly. As if he thinks his silence will let the regime blow over. An authoritarian regime thrives on fear. Murakami. If I leave, if I am silent, they will have it their way. No way, no fucking way.

And I know we will win. Sooner or later. Last week I have watched the release of Nelson Mandela with my students. [laughs] You sometimes think I am too sentimental for a philosopher, but this was really one of the most beautiful moments in my life. The lecture-room was packed. You know that intellectuals from the Congo can talk 25 hours in one day. We were all quiet as a mouse. Sometimes Aristotle does understand something: “Disaster brings people together, when the evil that hurts them is the same.”

But what I don’t understand about Mandela, after everything that has been done to him by white people, he just cooperates with them, he laughs with them. I don’t understand this. I will not work with the soldiers once it has finally entered their helmeted brains what is real democracy.

Scene 3

[Professor is reading behind his desk. An armed man enters his office. The whole scene is played as if the armed man, unseen and unheard, is participating.]

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1. “Paradise City” by American hard rock band Guns N’ Roses (Geffen Records, 1987). Actors are invited to adapt the music to the time and audience.
Yes, this is my office. I am professor Kanouté. Pick up my book. I repeat, young man, pick up that book. Arrested? [Laughs.] Me?! You are not a policeman, you cannot arrest me... Should I listen? I have endangered national security? By doing what, what have I done wrong? I didn’t manipulate the outcome of the elections. I didn’t lock up any opposition leaders. Young man, I fight with books, with words. The only thing I am guilty of, and I admit that I am 100% guilty, is offering an opportunity to young people to think, to think for themselves what is right and what is wrong. And this young man, is wrong.

Should I listen to you, because you point a gun at me. You’ve got a gun. Come on shoot, shoot, kill me, pull that trigger. Your gun is worthless. Your boss is terrified that I get murdered. He knows the whole city will rise up against him. Get out, now. Out of my office. You can still go back. If professors from Japan and America ask questions about what has happened to professor Kanouté, your chief will point at you. Don’t think he will catch the bullets for you! Remember, Plato always said, and I will pass this on to you as a soldier, “The only persons that have seen the end of wars are the dead!”

[Professor reacts as if he has been physically struck.]

Help! Help I am being molested! Help! Can somebody help me?! Coward, you have waited until everyone has gone. So cowardly. Low. You have ruined my pipe. My pipe. What do you mean take off my clothes? You can’t do that! I know my rights. I am a professor! I could have been your father. [He takes his shirt off.] My trousers as well? Look at me, don’t turn away your eyes, I am talking to you. You think I am your enemy. Do you think so? I am not your enemy, you have become your own enemy. Today, you arrest me. Tomorrow someone will arrest you and then what rights do you have? Think about it. It is incredible that this happens. You are sending Congo to damnation, and yourself too! Plato said it, “he who commits injustice is ever made more wretched than he who suffers it.”

Please. Please, I am begging you! Don’t humiliate me. I am begging you, don’t let my students see me like this. [He bursts into tears.]

Ok, I will listen to you, I will listen. My dear pipe. My dear pipe. You have broken my pipe.

Scene 4

[Professor in prison cell writes a letter to his colleague. He has a bandage on his shoulder. Traces of blood are visible.]

Dear Murakami... Murakami, this is number 8.12.82. I do really hope that you will receive this letter. You haven’t heard anything from me. I have been imprisoned for 37, or 38 days. All these days I have been wearing the same clothes, I am not allowed to take a shower. I am in a cell with two other people, roofless, the food is bad. They keep us awake at night. Other prisoners disappear. But, I am not going to bother you with the details. You’ve got to help me. They accuse me of having ordered weapons in Japan. That I, number 8.12.82, am the mastermind behind 5,000 soldiers that
want to overthrow the regime from the jungle.  
[Laughs.] The gods do love a joke!

They really do anything to make me confess.  
But I wrote nothing. I will sign nothing.  
Nothing! I tell them the truth, Murakami. I tell  
them step by step what I have done in Japan.

[Imitates Achebe] “My dear brother Kanouté,  
Governments, universities, religions, are  
terrified of storytellers. Your weapon is  
philosophy. My weapon is literature.”

He gave me a compliment that I will carry  
with me for the rest of my life.

[Imitates Achebe] “You cannot plant greatness  
as you plant yams or maize. Whoever planted  
an iroko tree—the greatest tree in the forest?  
You may collect all the iroko seeds in the  
world, open the soil and put them there. It will  
be in vain. The great tree chooses where to  
grow and we find it there, so it is with the  
greatness in men.”

[Singing] “I won’t let you down... I will not give  
you up... Gotta have some faith in the sound...  
It’s the one good thing that I’ve got...”

By the way Murakami, Achebe’s singing is  
worse than yours! But I haven’t told him that  
so bluntly. I assume you will pardon me.  
I know Aristotle says all brilliant people are  
melancholics, but even so it was a bit sad, two  
West-African boys, their houses destroyed by  
dictators, in an American karaoke bar, singing  
“Freedom” by George Michael.

Murakami, my friend, I have been on the road  
for six years, 7 months and three days. That is  
how long I have been roaming the free world.  
Over 55,000 hours. An intellectual learns  
every day. You get to know mankind even  
better. I used to be positive, just like Plato,  
that man is good. Then just after I had fled,

Scene 5  

[Professor at his desk writes a letter to his  
colleague.]

Dear Murakami... Murakami, this is Kanouté.  
Finally I am no longer 8.12.82. I am back again.  
Murakami you can see from the envelope,  
I now live in a country where one stamp is  
enough to send a letter around the world!

Too bad we missed each other at Harvard.  
I have met the writer Chinua Achebe. That  
was a wonderful day. It was so special to see  
how both of us, from different angles, he as a  
writer, me as a philosopher, think the same  
about freedom.

I thought man was evil, evil, evil. I perfectly understood Leviathan by Hobbes. People are so evil that they cling to power by any means. But in prison I learned the power of being silent, through meditation I learned to think about inner growth. So slowly I started to understand why Mandela has forgiven white people and works together with them. If you want peace with your enemy, you should not destroy him, but collaborate with him. That is how you learn to understand one another. From Plato, through Hobbes, I went to Socrates. People are capable of both good and evil. Remember Murakami, good and evil.

I had packed my suitcases to go back after the last elections. But they ‘won’ again. Incredible. But it is a transitory phase. I have started naming myself Kanouté Odyssey. My head is no longer constantly there, I try to gain more in-depth knowledge in national culture and politics. Next time we will meet I will sing you a song by Nick & Simon.3

[Laughs.] You have never heard something like that.

And yes, one day I will go back. Believe me some day, I will. Some day the dictator will die. Won’t he? And I will go back and teach again at my home university, in my home country, and maybe, maybe my students will sing with me...

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3. Nick & Simon is a Dutch singing duo. Actors are invited to adapt the reference to the time and audience.
DIANA

[A woman in her late 30s sits cross-legged on her sofa. She is surrounded by books. There is Colombian music playing softly as she looks away from her reading.]

My name is Diana. I am a child. I am the child of my parents. My parents have created me, but my father is my hero. My mother dealt with women, and problems, and problems with women, and women with problems. My father was my hero. He fought for grand ideals! He fought for us! For our country, to make it better. He also had problems with women, but that is different. He was a man. Yes, that was before...

Colombia is my country. Mi país! My country. I love my country. My country has many faces, many specialties, beautiful ones, but horrific ones as well. I am happy with the way I was raised. Both my parents were activists with clear ideals which they passed on to me: If you see injustice, you help. If people need you, you help. You do what you think is right and you accept the consequences. That is it in a nutshell.

I had never thought that the consequences would happen to me. These horrific consequences were for the people I helped. Not for me. That is what I thought. Yes, that was before....

I am a female anthropologist and I also studied history. If you study history, you find out that there is not much good in mankind. Studying history teaches you that. Yeah.

People don’t know Colombia. They think cocaine. They think guerrilla organizations like the FARC. Maybe they remember Ingrid Betancourt.4 But that’s all. Nobody knows that great things have been done and created. That we have produced artists and writers:

“Muchos años después, frente al pelotón de fusilamiento, el coronel Aureliano Buendía había de recordar aquella tarde remota en que su padre lo llevó a conocer el hielo.”5

“Many years later, standing before the firing squad, colonel Aureliano Buendía had to think about that long departed afternoon, when his father took him to discover ice.”

Gabriel García Marquez. And painters, like Fernando Botero. We can also take pride in singer-songwriter Shakira. But in the media only the corruption and the drug cartels count.

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4. The FARC or Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) are a Colombian Marxist–Leninist guerrilla organization involved in the Colombian armed conflict since 1964. Ingrid Betancourt is a Colombian politician and activist who was kidnapped and held by the FARC from February 2002 until her rescue by Colombian security forces in July 2008.
5. The opening line of the novel One Hundred Years of Solitude by Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez.
Both my parents were politically active. My mother fought for women’s rights. There is much violence against women. My father was an activist. He held political speeches, organized debates. Yes, that was before.

[Pause.]

Many people disappeared and there were many kidnappings. If they were kidnapped they still had a chance to come back. But if people disappeared you knew it would take a long time, a long time before you heard something. Kidnapping was better, then they contacted you for the money. Disappearing was bad. I helped a lot of people whose brother or sister had disappeared. I had never thought something like that would happen to me. My father was friendly with the head of the opposition and senators. He was a respected man. Yes, that was before.

[Pause.]

My father was a vain man. Light skin and raven black hair, always with pomade in it. “Gitano!,” my mother always said. Just like a gypsy. And every time he left the house he wore a silk tie. He was a simple man but he thought it was important to wear a tie every time he held a talk or debated. A purple silk tie. It gave him something “militant” he said, and he liked that. He thought that people needed something to look at.

My mother was darker, more like an Indian. She always pulled his tie before he left the house, when he didn’t expect it. That made him always lose his balance for a moment. “That was to throw him off,” she said. That is good, a bit of chaos when you don’t expect it. “Be prepared for anything,” she said. I didn’t think it was a proper thing to do. Yes, that was before...

[Pause.]

I would be the next. They had warned me. In writing. By letter. I have always been attacked in silence. That is how they want to kill you. By fear. They murder a few and they put the remainder on a death list and publicize the names. These people will not speak afterwards, nor publish, and thus in the end you kill them all. They are silenced, and so are their families. Fear destroys you. I’ve had a lot of toothbrushes in Colombia. Slept over at many different places. Yes, that was after...

[Pause.]

My name is Diana. Diana is the hunting goddess. But now the hunt was on for me. Hunted game, that is what I became after we had found my father. Afterwards I became the spokesperson of the family and they came after me. That was after...

[Pause.]

Now I live in America, but I don’t speak the language well. I learn in English but the language doesn’t come out of my mouth well. I don’t know why. Studying and writing both go well. But the language doesn’t come out of my mouth. It is as if I can’t go home anymore if I speak the language well, I think. I am afraid that if I speak English well, it means that I am starting to forget Colombia. Time and time again I am reminded that I cannot
explain well what I mean and that is comforting for me. I am not an American and I never want to become one. *Soy Colombiana.*

The food over here is terrible. That is what I miss the most, good Colombian food. You cannot be an activist on hamburgers!

I was raised without frivolous things and in America there is much frivolity. It may seem odd, but I find joy in that. I didn’t know it, wasn’t raised with it, perhaps that is why. I go to shops, walk by shop-windows, see what is on sale. I feel safe in the anonymity of the cheerful mass of people shopping, eating and consuming. When I am at home again, the cat just stares at me. I am alone.

There was a time I couldn’t stand my cat. I was convinced that he followed me. I couldn’t sleep. I had to bring him to the animal shelter. Yes, that was then...

This new cat has different eyes. I can look into them. They are not following me. They are not confronting me. Noise bothers me. I can’t stand bangs and when I hear people shout or see parades I get fearful. Yet I have never had a gun fired at me. Nor have I ever been attacked by yelling people. None of that. But I just can’t handle it. Yes, that was after...

*[Pause.]*

I wanted to go to America. The land of the free, the home of the brave! I had family living there, it seemed logical. I do not consider myself as very exceptional; there are a lot of people in a similar situation. I am not a celebrity or a nuclear scientist or such. Yet, I was helped by this program; this network of universities that help people like me. Because of them I started living again. Yes, that was after...

*[There is a long pause as the woman prepares herself to continue.]*

My father came back in a rubbish bag. They dropped him on our doorstep in a plastic rubbish bag. Chopped to pieces. One of the greatest minds in Colombia, chopped to pieces in a rubbish bag. They had stuffed his beautiful purple silk tie into his mouth to show us he would never speak again. Because of them.

I can’t explain what that does to you. To see your father, whom you’ve watched from your early childhood on, studying and working in his room, to see all that knowledge and love, ending up chopped to pieces in a rubbish bag. In a rubbish bag on the doorstep of the house that he worked so hard for, in order to buy it.

When I go back they call me, they threaten me. Same with my mom. That is how they want to make me stop with the investigation into the death of my father. The Aguilas Negras, the right-wing terror group, but also people from the State. Every time I cross the border into Colombia, I will be checked by government officials that are corrupt and thus they know I am back again. I go back annually; I find it very difficult in America. At home I want to carry on my political activities. I am scared, but I want to go back. But when I am there, I don’t do a thing.
[Pause.]

There are various reasons why I was so active when I was younger. I think it was because of the love for my father. And what I witnessed... I saw so many people in a bad situation, so much abuse. It is not fair. So when we found the remains of my father I thought, I have to do something, it is part of who I am, of my identity, to do something, I have to do something otherwise I will die.

But after the threats I thought, I’ll take a break. I got really fat. Really fat. Stress. I didn’t eat, but I got fatter. My body wanted to protect me.

Yes, that was after we had handed over the rubbish bag and in return we received the official identification papers. That indeed it was my father’s body. That it was him. That he was dead. That it was now on a piece of paper that he was dead. And that we had to bury him now.

[Pause.]

I am alone, I live by myself with my cat. I am glad that I can get up without fear that something may happen to me. I listen to music quite often, for instance Mozart, a beautiful flute concerto that my father loved, but also Colombian music. It depends on my mood. I don’t have any children. There aren’t many men that can handle the pressure of a woman that is being threatened. I don’t deny that there was a possibility to have children, but that is over now. He couldn’t cope with it. He was not an activist and didn’t want to become one. I couldn’t share my fight with him. That is one of the consequences of my choice. You can’t ask anyone to make such a sacrifice. To live in fear and uncertainty. At least, I haven’t met someone that has the courage. I do this for my father, to make sure he will not be forgotten, I am his child, so I have to take care of that.

The Colombians that I meet here are always cheerful, they dance and they eat. At first I thought how can you be so superficial when you know what is happening in your country? Now I do the same and it is my rescue. I laugh and I sing and I dance and I eat and I buy clothes. I laugh about things that are not funny and about myself. I don’t want to go back to that... that image of the rubbish bag. That’s nobody’s business. It remains closed for others.

I have decided to carry on with studying and writing about abuses in Colombia, otherwise I can’t go on. I have to do something for others, it keeps me alive. My mother hopes that I will return and that is also my most profound wish. That is why I chose this program that allows me to go back when things get better. Going back is very important to me.

My brother stayed. He doesn’t want to have anything to do with the battle. They didn’t threaten him. They chose me and that means that I have to take up the arms that I have and fight. I’ve got no family. Every time I let a man come close, I am afraid I might lose him, that one day he will end up in a rubbish bag on my doorstep, just like the first man in my life. I do try, but it doesn’t work. It doesn’t last.
Right now I am feeling better. My study goes well, I have come to terms with the loss of my father, I have learned a lot from it. I love life more, but I also attach value to pride. Honor. A human being should not be treated the way he was treated. It gives me strength to fight. I can’t tolerate people treating others badly. That was before... and after.

But now... after... I smile more. I live. I want to live.

I love life.

I love life.
[A man in his early 50s is standing in a modern lab looking into a microscope. His glasses hang from around his neck. There are books, lab and computer equipment beside him.]

Welcome. Welcome to my lab. In that space behind we do our tests. You see that equipment over there? That is cutting edge.

Do you see these computers? They’ve got software for simulations that make thousands of tests superfluous. The programmers have copied the world so incredibly and modeled the interaction between laws of nature so beautifully, that you do not need the real world to know whether something works!

Do you smell it? [Silence.] Do you smell it? [Silence.]


This is my laboratory. This is my universe. This is my paradise.

Sometimes I come home late at night after a day of performing miracles in the lab, and when I am done in and content lying in my bed next to my wife, she says, “You don’t have passion.” Then I look at her teasingly and say, “I do have passion.” But for the wrong things.


A world in which you leave your passions at home because they distract you from your work. A world in which you leave your passions at home because they cloud your look. A world in which you leave your passions at home because they disturb your experiments.

Outside is where people are living. Inside is where scientists work. Outside the warm passions rule. Here inside the cool intellect reigns. Outside live the people who blow themselves up out of sheer love of God. Here inside work the people who leave their God in the hall at the entrance. In the lab there is no place for God. In science, God is taking a toilet break.

You are also from the outside. And therefore you are a danger. A danger to the lab. A danger to the universe. Because you bring the outside world inside. You take ideas from the outside, inside.

Nonsense. Here I am not a Sunni, here I am not an Iraqi, here I am no refugee. Here I am a scientist. If a Sunni drops a stone, it falls down just as hard as when a Shiite drops a stone. Even Saddam Hussein couldn’t forbid a stone to drop.

You are from the outside but I will not have my order disrupted. I demand that you leave all your prejudices outside. You can leave your pity in the hall. Next to God.

Many of my countrymen have difficulties with this country. They feel turned away. They can’t settle in. They withdraw in an echo of the past. Not me. I’ve got science. Science knows no borders. From the first moment on, my colleagues knew I was one of them, we wanted and thought the same thing. We speak the language of science. Sometimes they didn’t get me, but they always understood me.

My wife is not a scientist. She has to live outside the lab. She always had to live outside the lab. Her heart pumped wildly when she smelled the burning smell after a bomb explosion. Time and time again she was afraid that they had caught me.

[Pause.]

Do you know which words I like best in Latin? Ceteris paribus. “All other things equal.” These two words are the essence of the lab, ceteris paribus. All other things equal. Experiments fail as soon as chaos creeps in.

The problem is not that too little is happening, but too much takes place. It gets dirty, a mess. You can no longer distinguish what is relevant and what not. It gets out of hand and you lose control. Terrible. In one study you want to test one thing while all other things are equal. Ceteris paribus. All other things equal.


No bombs. No war. No refuge. Ceteris paribus.

Francis Bacon was the spiritual father of the lab. Therefore he is my hero. Bacon wanted to acquire knowledge by conducting experiments, based on evidence, observation, and practical methods. He was a fierce opponent of those that believed something was true a priori. He loathed people that built belief systems in which one claimed truth logically follows from another claimed truth. They are palaces on quicksand. “Prove it!” he said.

In Iraq they don’t know Francis Bacon, they don’t think like him. No one over there will have his beliefs changed, even if a thousand experiments would prove that his belief is not right. And it is not just Iraqis. What about George Bush! I’m not saying he is a bad person, only that he is a lousy scientist. He thinks you can bomb a country into democracy.

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6. Actors are invited to replace “this country” with the name of the country where the performance takes place.
Francis Bacon said, “scientia est potentia”—knowledge is power.” If you know the laws of nature you can manage nature. Everything you think is so wonderful would not have existed without Francis Bacon. Your cars. Your iPhones. Your phosphorus bombs. Francis Bacon was the first. Later on Auguste Comte also phrased it beautifully: “Savoir pour prévoir et prévoir pour pouvoir.” - “know in order to predict, predict in order to act.”

That is why I hate unpredictability. Because of it, you can’t know, you can’t act. Unpredictability is a murder in broad daylight, ceteris paribus, killing the future.

[Pause.]

Amal Maamlaji was an IT professor in Bagdad. He drove into an ambush. After, they counted one hundred and sixty bullet holes in his car. Thamer Kamel Mohammed was a professor at the human rights section of the department of higher education. He was murdered on his way to work on February 22. The murderers used rifles with silencers.

Firas Yawoz Abdul Qadir Awchi, the assistant dean at the law faculty was murdered on his way to work on December 21. He had two children.

And it also works the other way round: every murder increases the unpredictability, ceteris paribus.

The nasty thing about chaos is that you have to adapt. When I was still living in Iraq, chaos was everywhere. It wasn’t safe for a scientist. If I went to work I wore shabby clothes. Every day I took a different route. The people at the lab thought I was crazy, but they didn’t understand: I adapted to chaos. I had to.

In science it is often stated that ceteris paribus is a condition. Only after that the real work, the proper research, can start. But ceteris paribus is a hell of a job.

My area of study is environmental science. Everything that is destroyed by men, in the air, in water, on the earth, we try to recover. We clean, we build up. If cars pump CO2 into the atmosphere, we wake up. If factories pollute water, we rise. If corrupt regimes unleash biochemical weapons on the land, then...well...then we do our best.

It is a noble task. I am proud of it. But it is a hell of a job, trying to clean up for humanity. Trying to keep things in balance, to get to ceteris paribus, all things being equal.

My wife thinks she can achieve ceteris paribus by sleeping pills, but that is not the right way. She is no scientist. She wants to shut down everything. But then you can no longer do experiments.

In Iraq there was no more ceteris paribus. Too much changed. Our equipment broke down, people disappeared and you never knew whether the world was still the same when you stepped out of the lab.

[Pause.]

One day I drove home in the car. I didn’t see it coming. Suddenly time stood still. As if everything was in slow motion. The bang. My
car flew through the air. I made a somersault, with my car. I didn’t feel my legs. I was light-headed. And then I knew. “Now I am dead.”

But I wasn’t dead.

My wife says I was lucky. But I am a scientist. I don’t believe in luck. I believe in cause and effect. Although I don’t know the cause. And I couldn’t have thought of the consequences. An I.E.D., “improvised explosive device.” That much I do know. But why it wasn’t lethal? God knows why. No not God. Francis Bacon might know!

Francis Bacon said that knowledge is power, but in Iraq the power hates knowledge. I cannot tell who is behind the murder of all these scientists. They came from all over the place. Some were killed by the Americans. Some by Shiite militias. Some even by pupils who have not been given a pass. Angry pupils - a type that exist everywhere. But they do not own weapons everywhere else. And everywhere else they do not live in a lawless country.

At first I did not want to give up. I love science. Then my brother’s child was kidnapped. My wife was scared. On the internet I found this program; a network of universities that help scholars like me. That is how I came to this country. At first I did not want to go. I was afraid I would no longer be a scientist, but merely a refugee.

But you know a funny thing. Here I ended up in a laboratory that is better than the best laboratory in my dreams. This is my universe. This is my paradise.

I just wished I would manage to keep outside what is outside. Sometimes I am afraid I won’t succeed. Sometimes I am afraid that I myself am no longer ceteris paribus. Then I have the idea that first I have to bring order to the chaos before I can escape from it.

[Pause.]

That is why I count them. The scientists who die in Iraq. To bring order to it.

Firas is number 467. He was murdered on his way to work on December 21. He had two children. Number 467. I am not one of them. But sometimes I am afraid that I abandoned the others by fleeing. You can take the scientist out of the war, but can you take the war out of the scientist?

Sometimes I am afraid that I have abandoned my wife by bringing her here, away from family and culture. I’ve got the lab. But what does she have? Except for her sleeping pills?

[Pause.]

By the way, do you know how Francis Bacon died? Doing science! Traveling by coach in a blizzard, he was inspired with the idea of preserving meat by freezing it in snow. A true scientist, he got out of the coach on the spot to conduct experiments. He caught pneumonia. That is how he died.

[Pause.]

Sometimes I think I am no scientist because I did not die. I escaped. But then I am only a human with impulses. Sometimes I am afraid
I am just an experiment myself. Then I am weak. As weak as someone who grabs sleeping pills. But then I look at this lab. Then I look at this universe. Then I look at this paradise and I know.

Here everything is predictable. Here I can block out the world forever. Here ceteris and paribus are king and emperor.

[Long pause.]

Epilogue

You may think I am a chilly, cold scientist. But actually I believe in fairy tales. I believe in the fairy tale of Ceteris and Paribus. They are lost. In a strange lab. In a strange country. But one night an odd thing happens. A terrifying thing. A miracle. A thunderbolt of a magnitude that has never been observed by anyone before crashed through the sky. Ceteris and Paribus looked up. They were afraid at first, but couldn’t resist the spectacle. Brilliant thunderbolts followed every second, one after the other, lighting the night. Over two thousand in all. Two thousand and thirteen, actually. Then it stopped.

Only then did Ceteris and Paribus realize they had changed. Their eyes could no longer see borders between countries. They could no longer see differences between people. They could no longer see people’s color and religion. Suddenly Ceteris and Paribus were no longer lost in a strange country. Every country had a lab, and every lab was for every scientist. And so Ceteris and Paribus could come knocking at any lab. And thus Ceteris and Paribus lived long and happily ever after.

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7. Actors are invited to replace “two thousand and thirteen” with the year of performance.
ZHAFHAR

[A woman sits at a table. She has her earplugs in and an iPod on the table, playing with the switch of a table-lamp. On off, on off, on off. On the table lies a volume of poetry by the Persian poet Rumi as well as a pile of newspapers, torn out pages and scissors. She switches on the light, takes the poetry book and starts reading aloud.]

I've come again
like a new year
to crash the gate
of this old prison

I've come again
to break the teeth and claws
of this man-eating
monster we call life

I've come again
to puncture the glory of the cosmos
who mercilessly
destroys humans

I am the falcon
hunting down the birds
of black omen
before their flights

I gave my word
at the outset to
give my life
with no qualms 8

[She puts aside the poetry volume and picks up the scissors. She clips parts of a torn out page and begins to read a series of newspaper clippings aloud.]

“Yesterday the Iranian Justice announced the hanging of two dissidents. Yesterday one of them was already hung in Tehran.”

“The Iranian police confirmed a casualty yesterday during protests in the capital Tehran. ‘One person was victimized by jihadists during yesterday’s unlawful unrest,’ states a police spokesperson. Yesterday evening, the opposition identified the victim and denied that it was responsible, blaming the police for cracking down on peaceful protestors and using bullets and tear gas against them.”

“Iranian politicians demand the death penalty for opposition leaders Moussavi and Kharroubi, accusing them of causing turmoil among the population.”

A list of explosions that killed Iranian scientists and damaged nuclear installations over the last two years. This one says “Today, Iranian media announced that a motorcyclist stuck a bomb to a car by means of a magnet before speeding off. The explosion killed the driver, a 32-year-old nuclear scientist.”

[Calmly and quietly she makes a ball out of the news clippings and puts them on the table.]

I am not a victim. I can work in a café. I left. I am not a victim. I can always go back. I can always work in a café. My friends are there. I have left them behind. My friends do understand. Most of them, not all. They get arrested. They get brought in. They get interrogated. And I am here.

I cannot work there. I am not allowed to work there. I am being threatened there. Therefore I am here. But ... can I leave them behind like that? If I could work...


[Holding up another newsclip.] “In Iran demonstrations have broken out in order to restore democracy and popular sovereignty. Demonstrators were attacked by the police, resulting in two deaths while hundreds of demonstrators were arrested. In recent weeks prisoners, politicians, dissidents and family members of Camp Ashraf were executed.”

I am an activist. I have never been in prison, but I have been interrogated. Innumerable times I have been interrogated: ‘Why do you work for NGO’s?’ ‘Why do you work with refugees?’ ‘Why do you work with women?’ ‘Why do you work with children?’ It takes hours... They say, ‘International organizations are dangerous.’ ‘They use you.’ ‘They abuse you.’ ‘They have the worst intentions with you.’ ‘They are no good for the country.’ ‘Be smart, take the easy life.’

I am an activist. I am a scientist. I take responsibility. I see poverty. I see the great gap between classes. I see the rich conservatives. I see the poor pariahs. I see discrimination, exclusion, inequality. It is in our legislation, in our social amenities, education, religion, administration of justice. It is in our system.

It is in our system! Women have rights! Children have rights! The UNDP[^9] is not a criminal organization!

I am an activist. I am one of the fortunate. We stand up for ourselves. We protest.

We want change and a nice life. We want to enjoy life, pleasure in life. Public pleasure. A day in the park, all people with curly hair. The next day, everyone with a water gun! Another day, all people singing in the park. Ordinary fun. A-political pleasure. But that is not allowed in our country. In our country, public pleasure is a protest.

[^9]: United Nations Development Programme

[She grabs a new piece of the newspaper and reads] “American journalists met today with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the Iranian embassy to the UN in New York. ‘Homosexuality is one of the most ugly conducts within societies and is against religions and at the expense of humanity,’ Ahmadinejad says.”
I have felt threatened. I have been afraid. I have felt pursued all day. Looked at others suspiciously. Without a reason.

I have sat in the dark. Out of fear of being seen. My heart has skipped as many beats as there are cars in Tehran. But I don’t know what I am afraid of. Is it real? Is it being afraid of being afraid? Always the certainty of doubt.

They know all about you. Not just you. About your family. About your friends. I will be tailed all the time. Going back means not being able to do anything. Nothing with women’s rights, nothing with children’s rights, nothing with politics. What remains is hope. The hope that something will change. Then I will be able to go back, and do something. Not just work in a café.

Here. Here I am no threat to the government. It is beautiful here. It is almost like a fairy tale. It is carnival. Happy people. Nice people. A feast. I wish I could find the peace and quiet in myself to enjoy this all. It is so distant from reality, my reality. It is not my world. My head is somewhere else. I don’t see what I can contribute here. What can I do? I plead for a less conservative attitude of the academic world. For more reflection on reality, revolutions and real-world developments. A less detached position. Fewer scientists behind closed doors, and more cooperation between activists and academics. But they are not open to it, neither side. Yet everything has an effect on everything: The West on the Middle East. The Middle East on the West.

The West should always be alert to what is happening over there. Over there, they think the whole world is against them. They think they should unite against the evil West. Against the Christian dogs. That they should arm themselves, enrich uranium. They are not stopped by sanctions from the EU or the US. Sanctions alone are not sufficient...

[ Picks up the paper and reads] “[Sanctions are] a hostile act. A psychological war, that has no effect. This has been going on for about thirty years,’ says a spokesperson of the department of Foreign Affairs.”

My research on Iran keeps me going. My project keeps me in touch with home.

But life is no project. Life cannot be planned. Life unfolds. Perseverance, faith and trust? I have stopped making plans. I persevere in being systematic. I am not religious. Too many wars have arisen from religion. For sure there is something like a higher power. I put my trust in that.

[She lowers herself to the floor and sings along with music from her iPod.] “…But Angie, Angie, you can’t say we never tried…”

I am alone. Alone in my head. “Why are boys allowed to do more than girls?” No one can hear me, no one can see me. “Why do girls always have to be obedient and calm?”

10. Tori Amos’s rendition of ‘Angie’, 1992. Actors are invited to adapt the music to the time and audience.
I am nine. The teacher rattles on about us becoming good women when we grow up. And mothers. About head scarves, about taking care of the household, and our men and sons. “Why is Aunt Maddah only nice to my brothers?” Papa says that I shouldn’t bother with that. That I should do what I want. That I am too smart to just cook for a husband.

It used to be different. Haleh, the maid’s daughter, is already someone’s wife. That’s crazy! It used to be different. Massoudh’s father hasn’t come home for a week.

It used to be different. Wasn’t it? Wasn’t it Papa? Wasn’t it Papa...

I am alone. In this other country I am alone. Home. Home is my family. My friends. Food, music. At home I would do it again. Everything, and more.

It all went too quickly! I have made a rash decision. I should have considered it all once more. I should have taken more time to think it over. It all went so fast, too fast. Now I am here. My father sleeps again at night. He says: “My daughter is safe, safe in another country.”

You taught me to be myself. To let no one bully me. To stand up for my rights. As a girl, as a woman. And to always be there for others. That is what I do, Papa.

That is what I have always done. That is what I want to do. As good, and as bad, as it goes. But sometimes it only seems to go bad. I am so far away. I am so alone. How can I do well, Papa? How can I do well?

[She tears the paper to pieces and throws them on the floor]

My father used to talk about politics all the time. Not any longer now. Now he thinks it is dangerous. Now he thinks it is better if my nieces know nothing. That will keep them safe. But there are things Ahmadinejad cannot stop. Recently, my nine-year-old niece in Iran said to my father, “I think we should know more about politics and the like. Because suppose you would all get arrested then we would know why and what we should do.” I tell her on the phone about taking responsibility and the risks that are involved. “Are you a refugee?” she asked me the other day. “Here they say you are a refugee.”

I am not a refugee. I choose to be here. I can leave if I want to. I take responsibility.

I can contribute here. I follow what happens over there. I am with them. With my friends and my family. I write about them. I talk about them. About the women. About the children. I hope I can finally return. And be meaningful to my country.

Perhaps a higher power is needed for that.

[She picks up the poetry and reads]

I am the falcon
hunting down the birds
of black omen
before their flights

I gave my word at the outset
to give my life
with no qualms.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MURAKAMI
Kanouté, quoting Mandela, says a good society is a free, democratic society with “equal opportunities for everyone.” Do you agree? What is the role of higher education in such a society? Who should have access to higher education, and for what purposes?

Kanouté tells the young soldier that he fights “with books, with words” by teaching young people to think for themselves. Why is that threatening, and to whom?

Kanouté tells the young soldier that if anything happened to him, professors from other countries would ask questions and this would put pressure on the soldier and his senior officers. How much do you think international pressure can help to protect scholars? It didn’t keep Kanouté out of prison. But he wasn’t killed, and after Murakami and others intervened, he was released. What responsibility, if any, do people in safe places have to protect at-risk individuals?

Kanouté is tempted by Murakami’s offer of a comfortable life abroad, but chooses to stay at home in Congo, despite all its challenges. Even after suffering in prison and being forced into exile, he still dreams of returning home. Why? What would it take to make you give up on your country? What would you risk to remain or to go back home?

DIANA
Diana’s parents taught her that if “you see injustice, you help. If people need you, you help. You do what you think is right and you accept the consequences.” Do you agree? Have you ever had to accept negative consequences for doing what you thought was right? Would you do it again?

Diana talks about being “attacked in silence” with threatening letters designed to silence her. She explains how attacking a few prominent individuals creates waves of fear through activists, to their colleagues, families and even future boyfriends. How can these waves of fear be confronted? How does Diana deal with her fears and keep going? What can be done to help people like her?

Diana says she has a responsibility to keep fighting, despite the threats against her, because she is as an activist and because of what happened to her father. But she says she can’t ask anyone to make the same choice “to live in fear and uncertainty.” Do you agree? How can one person have a responsibility to speak up, but not others?
FARIS
Environmental science uses physical and biological sciences to study the relationship between living things and their environment. What kind of research in this area could you imagine being controversial, or even triggering threats against researchers? Was the professor here threatened because of his research content, or for some other reason? By whom was he threatened? Does he even know?

The professor cites Francis Bacon saying “knowledge is power”. Is this true? He also says that in Iraq “power hates knowledge.” Why would power hate knowledge? Can you think of examples from other countries? What kinds of knowledge? What kinds of power?

According to the professor over 467 professors were assassinated during the conflict in Iraq, with many others like him forced into exile. What happens to society when its educators and researchers are lost? What does it mean for the future?

ZAHAR
Zahar wrestles with guilt about fleeing persecution at home, while her friends and family remain behind. Should she stay abroad and keep working, or return, even if it means giving up her ideas and her career? What would you do? What are the most important factors to consider?

Zahar describes herself as a “threat” to the government at home because of her ideas, but says that she is not a threat to the government where she is now. How can that be? Aren’t ideas about their content? Can the same idea be more or less “threatening” in different contexts? What were the ideas that Zahar was sharing, how were they threatening and to whom?

Zahar’s father helped her to be educated and to think for herself. After Zahar was persecuted, her father was glad she fled and found safety abroad but he stopped teaching her younger nieces, trying to protect them. Zahar’s niece said that society needs young people to be taught about sensitive issues, even it if puts them at risk, so that they are prepared for the future. Who is right? Can we protect young people by shielding them from knowledge? What are the consequences if we do? For them? For society?
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ABOUT SCHolars AT RISK

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of higher education institutions, associations and individuals acting together to protect threatened scholars, promote academic freedom, and defend everyone’s right to think, question and share ideas freely and safely.

Scholars at Risk members save lives by providing sanctuary to professors, lecturers, researchers and other intellectuals who suffer threats in their home country. Through temporary academic positions, SAR members help scholars to escape dangerous conditions and to continue their important work. In return, scholars contribute to their host campuses through teaching, research, lectures and other activities. Many scholars return to their home countries after their visit. When safe return is not possible, SAR works with scholars to identify opportunities to continue their work abroad. The benefits are clear: scholars are free to live and work without fear. SAR members gain talented academics and inspiring, courageous educators. The world benefits from solidarity among higher education institutions, greater awareness of current threats to academic freedom, and deeper appreciation of the vital role of higher education and scholarship in free societies.

Scholars at Risk also educates the public about attacks on scholars and higher education communities through the SAR website, email bulletins, publications and events. The SAR Speaker Series brings threatened scholars to member campuses to engage directly with students, faculty, alumni and the community. SAR also advocates on behalf of imprisoned scholars and undertakes research aimed at promoting understanding and respect for academic freedom and related values.

Higher education institutions, associations and other like-minded organizations in any country are encouraged to contact Scholars at Risk to inquire about joining the network.

Scholars at Risk depends on the generous financial support of friends inside and outside higher education communities to sustain our work. Gifts of any size are gratefully appreciated, including gifts in honor or memory of others, matching gifts and legacies.

Learn more, get involved, or make a gift at www.scholarsatrisk.org.