

From Fires and Devastation to Terrorism and Violence: Impact of Disasters on Cultural Heritage, Production and Policy

A Conversation with Rodrigo Correia do Amaral and Naomi Andrew Haruna

**Von Bränden und Verwüstungen bis zu Terrorismus und Gewalt:
Auswirkungen von Katastrophen auf Kulturerbe, -produktion und -politik.**
Ein Gespräch mit Rodrigo Correia do Amaral und Naomi Andrew Haruna

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Natural, health, political and economic disasters are unexpected events that produce high degrees of damage and the likelihood of human fatality. One authoritative source defines disasters as (1) “an unexpected event, such as a very bad accident, a flood, or a fire, that kills a lot of people or causes a lot of damage”, (2) “a very bad situation that causes problems” and (3) “a complete failure” (OXFORD LEARNERS DICTIONARIES 2022).

Recent examples include the huge flood in Artal, Germany in 2021 that not only destroyed the living conditions of many residents, but also caused damage to museums, galleries, an opera house, and archives. The art collection of the city of Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler was entirely flooded, and 30 percent of the art works were completely destroyed. The regional museum association, Museumsverband Rheinland-Pfalz, assisted with support and with the drying, cleaning and conservation of objects. Renown museums offered immediate partnerships for the restoration of specific objects. The destruction of cultural institution buildings naturally further impacts cultural production and access to arts and culture for the long-term (REDAKTIONSNETZWERK DEUTSCHLAND 2021; DEUTSCHE WELLE 2021).

Another recent example is the Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2019 and affected almost all regions of the world over a very short time period. The current climate crisis, which is an ongoing long-term challenge, is also a disaster situated on a global level. In contrast, most disasters happening worldwide can be found on local and regional levels in specific contexts. Natural disasters like floods, earthquakes,

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landslides, and desertification can be threats to both intangible and tangible cultural heritage. Likewise, political disasters such as conflicts, terrorist attacks, and wars, are disasters that too frequently affect the arts and culture sector.

In most cases disasters have an enormous impact on entire communities that are completely unforeseen. Reactions to disasters by cultural actors are seen as culture-specific solutions—part of a creative process that might elicit artistic idea creation, impacting the community threatened by the disaster. Beyond that, however, disasters imply long-term changes for cultural policy. They also require policy actions and the allocation of extra funds, often in in great amount, to overcome long-term challenges.

This editorial conversation looks at two very different disasters and their impact on cultural sectors in two very different parts of the world. The first example is the fire in the National Library in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2018, which caused a loss of 20 million exhibition pieces. The second is the influence of the Boko Haram insurgency that comes with killings, devastation, and internal displacements of people in Northeast Nigeria. The insurgency has been ongoing since 2009 and has destroyed the livelihoods of many people.

As part of this special issue on *Art Practices and Cultural Policies in Conditions of Disaster*, two experts took part in a conversation on how their respective nations, and local regions dealt with disaster. Dr. Rodrigo Correia do Amaral of the University of São Paulo (Brazil) coordinates research at the university's Women's Office, with a focus on gender inequality in the academic environment. Correia do Amaral completed his dissertation on the social profile of cultural workers in Brazil. More recently he has researched the impacts of Covid-19 on this professional group.

Case Two is discussed by Dr. Naomi Andrew Haruna, lecturer at the Department for Industrial Design at the University of Maiduguri (Nigeria) and scientific coordinator of the SDG-Graduate School “Performing Sustainability. Cultures and Development in West Africa”, a trilateral project between the University of Maiduguri, the University of Cape Coast (Ghana) and the University of Hildesheim (Germany). In Nigeria, the Graduate School is administered by the Center for the Study and Promotion of Cultural Sustainability (CSPCS).

These two very different contexts, one perspective from Brazil and one from Northeast Nigeria, provide an opportunity to compare specific challenges, strategies and solutions to disasters led by cultural and policy

actors. The conversation is structured around each expert's responses to specific questions (shown in italics in the text) with additional commentary added by the author. The interview began with each expert explaining what disaster means for their local contexts where conditions and realities might produce very different answers.

Amaral: *In Brazil, this term is usually attributed to natural accidents of big proportions. Amid our relatively calm environment—despite the droughts and spontaneous fires that shape two of our biomes—this word assumes a euphemistic meaning of “something beyond the human capacity to predict or prevent” and is usually employed to produce commotion about an accident with collective consequences. On the other hand, this approach eventually works to elide human accountability for such events. Disasters [can include] the destruction of houses and the killing of people in precariously constructed urban areas during mudslides, and floods, in summertime. We can see examples also in the mining sector: the ruptures of two iron ore dams in Minas Gerais State, in the cities of Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019), caused deaths, the destruction of small cities, the displacement of hundreds of families, and the pollution of the Doce River. Frequently, this term is also employed for big fires in Amazon caused by illegal miners and land invaders. These are events produced by human decisions or neglect but are regularly classified as natural disasters. So, it is important to be careful in using the term.*

Haruna: *A disaster is constituted by the non-functionality of certain structures within a system, be it natural or manmade. I would term our own kind of disaster more of a manmade disaster that takes place on two domains: political and religious, because those were the two aspects really determined either the success or non-success of Boko Haram. Boko Haram is a terrorist organization that is brutally fighting for their own Islamic agenda in Northeast Nigeria since 2009. Boko Haram literally translates to ‘Western education is forbidden’. Their agenda emerged from an Islamic religious perspective and a non-belief in the concepts of formal or western education. They rather believe in the concept of education through Islam. Whilst gaining influence, the group also started rejecting and fighting against formal state structures and institutions. They believed that the Islamic structures of living were more important and truthful than the formal structures of the state. Last but not least, this disaster is marked by violent actions,*

killings, devastations, the destruction of villages and displacement as well as the devastation of cultural goods and tangible and intangible heritage.

As the responses show, definitions of the term disaster can be very broad and should be aligned to the specific context. Natural disasters, just like manmade disasters, can occur, and political and ethno-religious circumstances and conflicts can add further complexity. The influence of human capacities toward fostering or preventing specific disasters, as well as the violent or nonviolent nature of both, can be identified as two core aspects differentiating specific types of disasters. In both cases the devastation can be marked on two levels, first the permanent or partial loss of cultural artifacts and collections, second the disruption of buildings hosting cultural institutions. Furthermore, disasters can be identified on a small scale, like one collapsing museum or archive (Brazilian case), or on large scale with an entire system falling apart, which includes state institutions, the education system and food supply, as in Northeast Nigeria.

Lettau: *What does the irreplaceable loss of cultural goods in these disasters mean for the society? What are the impacts on concepts of safeguarding cultural heritage?*

Amaral: *According to the report issued by the Federal Police, the fire in the National Library in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2018 started in the air-conditioning system. With the absence of a fire detection system, and firefighting equipment, the building started being consumed by the flames at 7:30 pm, and the fire was controlled only the next morning. After one year of intense work, the National Museum's Board concluded that 46 percent of the collections were permanently lost, 19 percent of them were stored in other buildings and didn't suffer any damage, and 35 percent of the collections were being recovered (MINISTÉRIO DA JUSTIÇA E SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA 2020, MUSEU NACIONAL 2022).*

Due to the Museum being a cultural and a scientific institution, the loss of its collections immediately impacted the professors and graduate students from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and scholars from Brazil and other countries who were researching that heritage. It is reasonable to say that the permanent loss of artifacts such as mummies from Ancient Egypt acquired by Emperor Pedro II during his diplomatic incursions, Etruscan and Pompeii objects collected from

an archaeological site in Italy patronized by his wife, Empress Teresa Cristina, among many other goods accumulated since the early 19th century, represented a loss to mankind as well. From a communitarian perspective, the destruction impacted a broader audience of visitors from schools (especially those from Rio de Janeiro), and the common public who visits the Museum as a cultural practice.

In my view, the destruction expresses an increasing rupture between Brazilian society and its own past; a past in which visionary people employed their efforts to create a modern society in the tropics. Across the years, our political, cultural, and scientific elites failed to legitimate this project of a nation to larger fractions of our population. We know that the audience in museums is oscillating in many countries, but in Brazil, we have a huge gap between the public education system and our own heritage. We do better in research, but, in normal circumstances, it is not sufficient to convince the population about its importance.

The destruction of the National Museum has not introduced the issue of safeguarding cultural heritage, but surely suggested the importance of timing in this subject. In 2018, the Board of the Museum and the federal authorities argued that a budget of BRL 20 million (approximately € 4.1 million in that period) was already reserved by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). However, it wasn't invested in time to avoid the disaster. The Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM) is an agency created in 2009 to manage the federal museums distributed in many states and to formulate sectoral policies. In 2013, they released the first version of the Risk Management Program for Brazilian Museum Heritage. However, the National Museum is not directly covered by this agency, because it is under the responsibility of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and federal universities have total autonomy in their budgetary decisions. Only in 2020, did the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (ANDIFES) create a working group dedicated to the discussion of museology heritage management. Hence, we have organizational challenges in defining attributions, and it does not contribute to a common policy for the safeguarding of cultural goods in Brazil. Even being an event of monumental proportions, unfortunately, the destruction we're discussing here was not the last occurrence. In 2021, one storage area of Brazilian Cinematèque with 1 million documents (movies, screenplays etc.) was burned, and its damages are being assessed in this very moment.

Haruna: *The case of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria, which is ongoing since 2009, shows how systems fall apart: houses collapse, people are forced to migrate, hospitals are at their capacity limits due to huge number of injured persons. Furthermore, at one point, schools were closed, and children could not go to school, so there was no access to education. Another challenge was the access to food and an epidemical lack of food because farmers have stopped farming due to high risk of getting killed when going out on farms. The formal structures and institutions of the state also stopped functioning because at a certain point everyone was afraid of going to the office or engaging in any activities.*

The nature of the disaster emerged over time. The main forms of attacks were usually guns and suicide bombs. In the beginning attacks on other religions, Christians and other non-believers in Islam, were the major form of threat. Boko Haram attacked churches by bombings and gunfire during church services in Sunday worships. Further, formal institutions like ministries and police structures were bombed, as well as a lot of policemen killed. The attackers usually come in nondescriptive cars with guns and bombs, hiding as civilians. Apart from that they also used suicide bombers to attack, going to the most popular areas and killing people randomly. Most of the people that they used for suicide bombing were women because people trust women more and also because long hijabs hide explosives. Making people die as martyrs was the persuasion strategy behind these suicide bombings.

Then they started threatening the educational system specifically. We have two forms of education in Northeast Nigeria. The non-formal education, which is more the religious kind of education—we call it sangaya—and the formal English schooling system. The sangaya is where you find some of the mallams [Islamic scholars] and they teach about the beliefs based on the Quran. Those were the kind of schools Boko Haram believed in, so they were not attacked, instead they propagated such schools, but at a point they also started attacking other Islamic religions that they believed were preaching against them. State institutional systems that were attacked were mostly paramilitary subdivisions. Due to this, some of the other governmental institutions also suffered from these attacks, as they were situated close to the Immigration office which is a paramilitary subdivision.

It is important to mention that some of the cultural institutions, like museums, were really threatened by this particular disaster. Some of such institutions were destroyed, like certain bombings cracked their

walls due to intensity of the bombs and also many ceramic artifacts in the museum systems and archives have been destroyed. Furthermore, access to the museum buildings is nonexistent in many cases. The fact that museums are formal institutions is the reason they are still under threat—especially the ones in Northeast Nigeria and Maiduguri in particular. Another fact is the prohibition on the representation of a human form demanded by Islamic fundamentalist theologies. Due to this, many paintings, sculptures and ceramic artifacts have been destroyed by Boko Haram. A very long-standing sculpture in Maiduguri, showing a man sitting on a horse, was bombed by Boko Haram.

The loss of cultural goods—tangible and intangible—has huge impacts on the traditions and cultural practices of the people. I would like to give another example of the local crafts of incense products and head cap making which are very popular in the region and exported into other states of the country. The production of incense has declined because the main material is tree bark that people get in the desert or in the bush. Due to the insecure situation people do not always have access to a lot of the materials right now. For the cap making it is different, the craftsmen try to sustain it but the dynamics of cap making have also changed. Internal displacement is a major result of the insurgency. That means local craftsmen migrate from rural to urban areas in order to stay in safer environments. These movements have ramifications on craftsmanship as dominance of certain ethnic groups and competition in trade affect cultural expression and production processes. The exchange has a potential for new production forms because you find a lot of people in one space from different ethnic backgrounds that have their own forms of design. Crafts people can learn from each other. The disadvantage is that some of them are more dominant than others, certain designs that are unique to a particular ethnic group then tend to fade out.

Lettau: From your observations, what is the role of cultural institutions (for example, the authorities of museums) as actors of change in this context? What strategies did they develop in this specific disaster? What are the ramifications?

Amaral: Cultural institutions play a key role in this process because they are instances of classification that legitimate what should or should not be recognized and fostered as cultural expressions. Even despite

the fact that culture and arts are fruits from individuals and groups' independent dynamics, the relation with these institutions is, at some level, unavoidable. However, back to the case of the National Museum. The management of these institutions in Brazil is an open dispute. We have 3,800 public museums and many other private institutions. On one side, there are federal, state, and city departments of culture, with investments in museums being defined in the sphere of their cultural policies. On the other side, there are 136 museums managed by federal or state universities, whose budgets derive from educational, or scientific policy, like the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. Thus, cultural institutions are not sufficient to build an effective plan of change. The prevention of disasters in museums and other tangible cultural assets in Brazil would require a broader sense of culture, in which cultural organizations act in coordination with educational and scientific institutions, among other actors, in a way to make viable a plan of valorization of our museums within larger sectors of Brazilian society.

Evaluating the role played by the authorities in the National Museum episode, we need to recognize the entrepreneurial behavior of its director, Professor Dr. Alexander Kellner. Immediately after the fire, he led the creation of a broad network dedicated to supporting the damage diagnosis, followed by the planning, the rescuing of collections, and the reconstruction of the building. He established a successful partnership with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, obtaining up to 1 million euros invested in the early stages of recovery, and obtained financial support from the British Council. In the next step, Kellner and the authorities from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) launched the project Museu Nacional Vive, mobilizing alumni, UNESCO Brazil, and public and private companies around the reconstruction. To date, this network has raised BRL 240 million (approximately 48 million Euro). On another front, this project created the campaign Recompõe to stimulate the donation of objects that could rebuild the lost collections. In this second movement, the National Museum received the commitment of 23 German museums, coordinated by the International Council of Museums Germany, and are receiving objects from private collectors and Brazilian scholars.

Haruna: *The museums [in Nigeria] are really in disrepair and a lot of art works have been lost. Not having access to cultural institutions is another big challenge. One current strategy of cultural institutions*

is partnering with schools. The idea is that pupils come and view the exhibitions, they talk with curators and get educated on cultural heritage topics but the physical access to the museum in Maiduguri, the state museum, is nonexistent as its located just beside the immigration office, which is a paramilitary subdivision with specific security regulations, so public access to this area is restricted. That shows that several conditions are affecting cultural institutions: devastations of cultural goods and building structures as well as educational principles due to the Boko Haram threat on non-Islamic teachings and ideologies. Another reaction to the situation is active efforts to start the digitalization of cultural artifacts, as successfully implemented in other countries like Cambodia. State agencies are trying to digitize the remaining cultural artifacts and create virtual museums that do not rely on physical access of a museum building. It is a process of bringing the museum to the people, especially to the younger generation. These are some of the steps taken into consideration to close the detected gap.

Some of the major challenges for cultural institutions, as shown by the two cases described here, are the loss of artifacts and cultural goods, lack of physical access to museum buildings, the absence of rapid response rescue systems and missing cultural policy instruments for safeguarding cultural heritage. It is important to mention that the loss of tangible cultural goods goes hand in hand with a loss of intangible cultural heritage, like practices, traditions, and customs, that are very relevant for the identity of the communities affected by the disaster. Some practices have nearly been obliterated; others have altered in their dynamics. In Northeast Nigeria the displacement process is another challenge as new power structures and the dominance of certain groups threaten cultural production up to the elimination of certain practices of minority groups. These aspects of identity and cultural heritage are a core dimension of the disasters discussed here.

In both examples, state, civil society and international agencies reacted to the disaster only after it happened. Mechanisms to avoid or reduce the repercussions of disasters through long-term planning are mostly non-existent.

Strategies and solutions to the disasters are context-based and according to specific needs. In both Brazil and Northeast Nigeria, the approach has been creating partnerships between cultural and scientific institutions as well as between cultural and educational institutions (such as schools). This shows the responsibility for cultural heritage

is not seen as a specific domain for the cultural sector but as a holistic task for society. Researchers do have a responsibility, just as do schools. For example, we can identify a structural change in the curriculum of Nigerian schools to include cultural activities and education on cultural heritage. In both examples, that was not previously part of public education systems. Further strategies are the creation of a working group on heritage management, the creation of networks and partnerships on an international scale, the collection of private donations, the development of local cultural centers as new community institutions, and the digitalization of artifacts with the aim to set up virtual museums.

Museums and state institutions can be identified as actors of change in the Brazilian example as they take over a key role in the legitimization of cultural heritage of a nation. In the Northeast Nigerian example, one cannot observe a key role as the legitimization of state institutions in general is questioned and fought by Boko Haram, which puts all state institutions in a very weak position.

Lettau: *In what way do artists and cultural actors position themselves in this specific disaster? What ways do they develop to intervene for change? Can you identify new forms of contemporary cultural production and forms of artistic protest?*

Amaral: *Brazil has a vibrant arts scene, and many artists reacted immediately to the disaster. However, despite a symbolic embrace [by a group of individuals] around the burned building organized a few days after the destruction, we had no more expressive reactions or campaigns at the national level. The projects created by the National Museum's authorities were more successful in putting the topic on the public agenda, and the most common reaction from Brazilian artists is a supportive positioning to these projects.*

It is crucial to highlight that since 2018 public investment in culture degenerated. In the federal sphere, the budget of that year was BRL 2.10 billion, and, in the following years, it decreased to BRL 1,98 billion (2019), BRL 1,77 billion (2020), and BRL 1,69 billion (2021). In this scenario, many other areas were and continue to be affected, and the artistic mobilization was dispersed in many directions. In 2020, when Brazilian states adopted social isolation as a strategy to detain the contagious of Covid-19, 48 percent of cultural agents lost the totality of their revenue. In this critical context, artists and cultural producers were successful in creating a national advocacy network for the

approval of emergency aid. In July of that year, the Brazilian Federal Congress approved the Law of Cultural Emergency, also known as *Al-dir Blanc Law*, in homage to a famous Brazilian composer who died from Covid-19. This program transferred BRL 3 billion (approximately € 600 million) to state and city cultural departments, which funded artists and cultural producers (individually, or collectively) for the period of three months). Hence, the regular disinvestment in culture in the last five years aided artists and cultural agents, but the critical situation brought with the pandemic, in 2020, constrained the cultural sector to unite in these new directions.

Haruna: *One interesting fact is that new forms of cultural production emerged because of internal migration and new social realities of people. The content of cultural productions by artists focuses mostly on peace: peaceful coexistence, living in harmony, tolerance, unity. That means the topics are even more specific now because of what the society has gone through. Non-violence is strongly advocated for within the artistic scene. More bright colors are being used than dark colors. People now know that white symbolizes peace. We have had lots of influence from Western peace concepts as well. This shows that the new social environment leads to new forms of cultural production and a politicization of artists. You can see this being directly translated within artworks. About half of the arts and crafts now carry the representation of the Nigerian flag or the representation of certain ethnic groups within a particular space. Some of the artworks are being represented with the three main ethnic groups that have different colors of representation. Whenever we have programs now, the dancers always try to represent all ethnic groups, not just one, to foster inclusion. This shows that cultural production has now created conscious efforts of inclusiveness. Messages in songs, films and media changed to peace messages debating the consequences of war and disaster.*

The roles of artists and cultural actors are different in both cases. In Brazil one can identify more symbolic reactions of solidarity by artists and later a support of the official national museum response project. That means artists connected their voices more to an institutional level and the state structures. In Northeast Nigeria artists are adopting new cultural production mechanisms and develop the content of their works more specifically towards peace messages and non-violent approaches. A po-

liticization of artists taking social processes into consideration as well as creating their own agendas for peace take place.

The interviews did not investigate, in detail, the positions of certain societal players in context of the disaster. The instrumentalization of certain groups, like women used for violent attacks in the disaster, shows that a macro-societal dimension needs to be considered likewise.

Lettau: *How did cultural policy actors react to the disaster? How does the state and/or civil society create support mechanisms or new strategies? Which rapid response mechanisms have been implemented? What are the specific challenges in this respect?*

Amaral: *I would like to offer a positive answer to this question because we definitely need such innovations. Unfortunately, the scenario described demonstrated that arts, culture, and science were not the priorities of public managers in recent years. On the other hand, we have welcome exceptions. The Risk Management Program for Brazilian Museum Heritage elaborated by IBRAM in 2013 and updated in 2021, is an important innovation. Its methodology was developed with the support of the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE). The Program conceptualizes five steps to be followed (identification, analysis, evaluation, treatment, and monitoring), and four axes in which these steps assume particular aspects: 1. Governance and articulation; 2. Planning and preventing risks; 3. Monitoring and control of risks; 4. Answers and emergencies. Hopefully, we would see, in a close future, these premises being adopted by all museums and institutions dedicated to preserving material cultural assets.*

Haruna: *Safeguarding cultural heritage is still an almost un-addressed topic in Northeast Nigeria due to the insecure circumstances. At the moment, the federal cultural institution is trying to initiate efforts for safeguarding of cultural heritage together with the Borno state government, on a structural level, to safeguard certain endangered cultural goods, crafts and artistic expressions—as they are important lived expressions of the local culture.*

One example of a strategy is the development of local cultural centers that try to involve the youth, trying to get support from traditional rulers in engaging and supporting cultural activities in relation to

museums, fostering inter-generational exchange progresses as well as massive education, awareness creation and advocacy campaigns.

Another strategy is the link to educational policies. The state is trying to develop a monitoring scheme that supervises the curriculum that is being taught in schools. They suggest that schools add cultural activities within their curriculum to revive certain cultural practices and teach them to pupils. The government has revitalised a lot of schools in the recent years and changed their curriculums by the introduction of cultural activities.

Yet the biggest challenge is the lack of cultural policies on a conceptual level and in practical implementation. The region of Borno State does not have a cultural policy document that addresses these issues. Government agencies are currently in the phase of conceptualizing one, but the implementation is yet outstanding. Federal Government are trying to develop measures, but the state does not really take these developments seriously enough as they have more pressing issues like securing food supply and security for the people. For a future cultural policy, specific measures to address the particular aspects of safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage are yet to be developed. It is clear that they should be developed with a decided focus on the needs of artists because they are usually left out of certain policies in Nigeria, so it is good the government has a serious interest in the impact of cultural policy on artists and craftsmen.

Investigating the dimension of cultural policy, it is very clear that this domain might not offer rapid-response policy actions, in particular, because the policy field was not considered a priority in either case. In Northeast Nigeria, the government is only recently conceptualizing a cultural policy document with a specific focus on safeguarding cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the nature of the Boko Haram disaster shows that even after more than ten years, policy action is not yet implemented. As conflicts and disasters are globally on the rise, response mechanisms should be not only a task, but also a priority for cultural policy on local and international levels. This is especially important under the condition of actors that are questioning and fighting existing state structures and their institutions such as in Northeast Nigeria. In the Brazilian case, one specific example for a solution in the field of cultural policy is the Risk Management Program for Brazilian Museum Heritage, which was introduced in 2013 and updated in 2021, after the disaster. Recently, as a reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, the State acted very quickly and

adopted a new law, with a new funding structure for artists to address the 48 percent of artists who lost their income.

Lettau: *How did international actors react to the disaster? What ways of support have been created and how are they assessed by local actors? If we talk about the concept of solidarity, can there be any international solidarity structures? If so, in what specific ways? Taking into consideration the specific local needs, what solutions would be appropriate?*

Amaral: *I was a visiting Ph.D. student at the UNESCO Chair of Cultural Policy for the Arts in Development, at the University of Hildesheim, when the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro was destroyed by fire. On September 2, I was attending an international short course titled Arts Rights Justice (ARJ) Academy promoted by the Chair with participants from many countries. Before analyzing the reaction of international institutions, I would like to focus on that group. Actually, I didn't know about the disaster because that morning I didn't read the news. I remember that my colleagues began to offer me their condolences. The first one was Laura Kauer, an activist from Argentina living in New York, followed by many others. I was immediately knocked out after reading about the details. At that moment, I realized how international activists, artists, and cultural managers cared about a disaster like that. I was encouraged by them to propose a collective response and was equally supported in preparing it as an artistic performance because we had some internal resistance in assuming that as an official statement. On September 7, this document was presented in the ARJ Forum, at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Berlin. It was declaimed in 18 languages (Arabic, Bengali, Dari, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Ndebele, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Yoruba), and its printed version was signed by 60 participants. The artist Takwa Abubarnousa gave a live calligraphy performance of the word تذكارة (Memoria) to the sound of Chico Buarque's song "Construção" (Construction); images of the National Museum of Brazil in flames were projected on Takwa's work during the reading that followed her performance. My supervisor at that time, Professor Dr. Wolfgang Schneider, kindly invited me to write an article in the magazine of the Department of Cultural Policy about the tragedy, which I did. When I returned to Brazil, I sent the manifesto to the National Museum's Board and the Rector of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), explaining the context*

of that reaction. Unfortunately, they never responded. As I mentioned before, the international institutions promptly reacted to this tragedy, offering institutional and financial support. However, the strong and immediate empathy I've found in my personal experience appears to be the best "technology" or "structure" to deal with this sort of event. In other words, the embodiment in each person of the belief that culture is a human right remains the most important goal for a long-term strategy to prevent future disasters like that.

Haruna: *For some years now, Maiduguri is a hot spot for humanitarian aid being implemented by plenty of international non-governmental organisations. Nevertheless, most of them are more into humanitarian aid and only additionally supporting artists and craftsmen as a byproduct. Indeed, it is not the center of their focus but because it is a means of livelihood it is being supported as a byproduct through entrepreneurial capacity building.*

The question of solidarity structures is also very relevant here. Western countries have specific knowledge and established forms of addressing issues related to cultural sectors. Maybe they could initiate these approaches in Northeast Nigeria. For now, we know the museum is interested in new approaches. International partnerships might bring it to the forefront. It is important to use the already existing local structures to make these structures stronger. Definitely we cannot replicate everything because we come from different cultures. But there are certain methods that are always the same across the board. A specific approach could be to go beyond the solely humanitarian aspects, as a broader approach that takes into consideration that humanitarian aid is only one aspect of a human life and will, in the best case, come to an end. Cultural practices and expressions are part of our constantly changing identity creation and thus add a valuable component to living conditions as well as human coping with disasters.

As the words of the interviewed experts reveal, international actors responded to both disasters in different manners. In the Brazilian case, international 'solidarity' included personal condolences and a public artistic performance as well as international institutional partnerships and support mechanisms on a public level. In the example of Northeast Nigeria, the clear focus of international support lies in humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, Haruna emphasizes a potential for solidarity structures through knowledge transfer in the cultural sector taking the local cont-

ext and needs into consideration. Cultural institutions are interested in new approaches and particular methods that can foster more access to museums, involve younger generations, or digitalize collections. Such approaches would also imply training and exchange of professionals and could be a sustainable international support structure.

In conclusion, definitions and perspectives on disasters need to be re-examined with a specific focus on regional and local contexts. Disasters are no single events even though they often appear like that. New disasters are constantly emerging in very different natures and scopes. A look into historical developments shows a continuous prevalence of disasters on a global scale. For this reason, there is an existing need for sustainable, valid and flexible disaster strategies for cultural sectors (including tangible and intangible cultural heritage) by both local and international actors. This is even more important, taking into consideration that a growing number of conflicts, as outcomes of disasters are emerging.

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