Joan Kjaer: Hello, and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. I'm Joan Kjaer, and we're coming to you from MERGE in downtown Iowa City. The topic tonight is journalism and a free press in the age of fake news. The focus of this segment is writing about war and radical social change. Joining us are two writers from the 2017 International Writing Program's fall residency. Next to me is Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, who's a fiction writer, a poet, a playwright, and a translator originally from Somalia and now living in Italy, so, nice to have you here.

Ubah Cristina: Thank you, again.

Joan Kjaer: Thank you.

Ubah Cristina: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Yes. Next to her is Hajar Bali, a playwright, a fiction writer, a poet, and from Algeria. Thank you, Hajar.

Hajar Bali: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, Ubah, if I may, I'd like to start with you, and I hope you've enjoyed your time in Iowa City this fall.

Ubah Cristina: Yes.

Joan Kjaer: Yes.

Ubah Cristina: I am. I am enjoying this [inaudible 00:00:55].

Joan Kjaer: Good. You shared some of your writing with me, some of your thoughts about writing in a country at war, and then leaving a country you grew up in, and we also talked about language, and language of violence, language that defines our times, and our times also defining the language we use, the words we choose to use, the words we don't use, and the layers of meaning that could reside in any one word. I wonder if you could take us inside your journey from war torn Somalia to Italy, and help us understand what leaving has meant to you, and particularly a phrase you explained to me “to leave in the afternoon.”

Ubah Cristina: Yeah. Yes, thank you, Joan. A few years ago I was, now I live in Brussels, but a few years ago I was living, I lived in Rome, and I worked for the group of Somali young refugees, and this school was, it was in a school of Italian languages for refugees. I was working with these young people, and since we were often discussing about the difficulty of translating words in Italian into Somali, they proposed me. I was working at the time to, with a radio program, and they ask me to just to talk every day about a word translated that was impossible to translate, and I decided to do this program with this young people.

One of the word that they wanted to talk about was the word “partire” in Italian, that means leaving, and since Somali has a nomadic culture, nomadic tradition, that there are many words to say leaving, and so one of the people who were in the workshop talked about this word that was in a Somali lullaby, that is “carrabay,” that means leaving in afternoon, but it doesn't mean only leaving in the afternoon, but because you leave in the afternoon only when something terrible happens. Because usually, nomadic people, either they leave in the morning, or they leave in the evening. At the beginning or the end of the day, so leaving in afternoon means, it has this meaning in itself, and it was very beautiful because everyone was talking about the moment he decided to leave, and yeah.

We shared these memories with each other. It's very difficult to talk about these kind of things, because on the one hand you like to ... I remember when I arrived in Italy, the first years it was very difficult for me to tell my story, because it's so complicated that I was always all so afraid that people wouldn't understand, or I didn't want also to look as a victim, because that is, this kind of idea of shame when something very violent happens to you, as if you are responsible somehow, and yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Another thing you mentioned in this piece of writing was that some who have fled the violence in Somalia, don't use the words, "Civil War," but instead use the term “burbur” meaning, "the shattering."

Ubah Cristina: Yeah, it was amazing for me, because they were always talking about it. Particular, there was one of the person was attending the workshop. His name was Isfarhan, and he had such a beautiful way to tell his stories, and he would live, he left Somalia. Often he went to South Africa, then he went back, and then he went to Kenya, and then he came back, and then he went to Yemen, as if his desire to go was always contained by ... No, this desire of going back home, so that there was this kind of idea of going back, and yeah. They didn't say [foreign language 00:05:12], which means civil war, but if you translate it literally, in Somali it means, to war against an intimate.

So, there is this kind of idea of intimacy into the word [foreign language 00:05:32], and so this is perhaps, I thought perhaps this is why they are not using this word, and instead they say burbur, that means the scattering, the things that you, you thought that you were there, stable, that they wouldn't change. Suddenly they become scattered everywhere, yeah. It is particularly important for me to talk about it today, because as you have seen from the news, yeah, I'm pretty sure there was this, yeah, this, yeah there was this bomb that killed 300 people a couple of days ago, and how to talk about it, because in Italy there is a journalist, a Somali journ- Italian Somali journalist, that she was saying, "Oh, nobody talks about Somalia."

In particular, in Italy, this is something very sensitive, because Somalia used to be, was an Italian colony, so the idea that Italians don't care anymore about Somalia, even though they have responsibility in what happened. She was very

angry, but at the same time, I think that it's very difficult to talk about these kind of things without being, talking about the victims. It is important to humanize them, but at the same time, it's also, you don't want to…. this kind of ….this pornography of the violence is always something that is very delicate, I think, and yeah, difficult to deal with.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). In the writing you do, sometimes you, you yourself are a sort of, part of, the diaspora. You no longer live in Somalia, even though your family memories are from there, but some of the writing you do involves that first generation of refugees, who have themselves left, and then other stories you write are about that next generation that doesn't even know what the land actually looks like. They have no personal experience there, but they lived that experience through their parents. Why is this such an intriguing topic for you?

Ubah Cristina: Yeah. So, in part it has to do with my own life, because when, okay when I left Somalia, it was the January 1991. I was 17, I was very young, but the civil war, for me, corresponded, was I had a child when I was very young at 17, so the civil war started when my first son was born. If I have to remember how long, yeah, that war is the age of my first son, so 26 years, and because yeah, I mean, somehow, my idea, he didn't live anything about the war. He didn't see the war. He didn't see anything, and while he was growing up, because he was interrogating himself all the time. What happened? And so I started to think about his generation, of these young people who didn't have a, I mean, a personal memory of the war, but at the same time, they inherit it.

It is not because you tell them stories about the war, but because there is something that we transmit through our body, and scattered memories somehow, like the burbur, because I realized in the books that I write, memories are not, how can I say, linear. Because you don't remember in a linear way, yes, see, it's just, you combine things and so I thought that it was very important to think about this generation, this post-memory generation, because they are the ones who have the responsibility tomorrow. Not only them, but they have the responsibility to dialogue with each other, and mean, if we don't discuss that ...

The other day I met a group of very young Somali girls, and they told me, what, but we didn't know, we were talking about Mogadishu, how it used to be the city, this cosmopolitan city, but it was not out of nostalgia that we were talking about it, but just to know how the city used to be before them. This is very important, because after the civil war, what the civil war does, is that it divides people in the diaspora so people don't talk each other. They want to discuss because there is still something going on in the country, and it's very important that this generation talk to each other, and they are able to discuss and to deal with it, and not take the part of the victims of the persecutors.

They are the ones who can, I mean, yeah, not ignore, but somehow they are not responsible of it, and yeah, so I thought that it was important because of that.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Thank you so much. I want to move now just down the line here and talk to Hajar just a little bit. So nice to have you with us. You're from Algeria, and you experienced the changes in your country some years ago when there was an Islamic uprising, Islamist uprising, and you have written a great deal about this. I wonder if you can take us back to those years when you were aware that things were changing.

Hajar Bali: Yes. Until the '80's, the Algerian state was the socialist with us, only one political party, the FNL, which was a heritage of the national independence war. At that times, the other parties, like the communist parties or others, they were all clandestine, so the monopoly of the state, on information was total. In '88 happened is what we called the October Revolution. On 5 October, thousands of young people demonstrated in the streets of several cities, denouncing the single party, demanding more freedom, and things like that.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Hajar Bali: They said to, 150 deaths officially, arbitrary arrest, especially from the communists who were suspected to being behind the movement. At that time, I was teaching in the university. We organized some strikes to free our comrades. We drafted the Black Book of October, in which we received the testimonies of tortures, et cetera. It lasted a few months, then the government was forced to opt for a democratic opening, the creation of parties. There were about 60 parties then.

We, on our side at the university, founded the first autonomous union of university teachers. Magazines, publishing houses, associations, radios, and even the TV, which was still national, opened debates. There were programs where finally one had a right to a free speech. One must imagine this effervescence, since it was like something we didn't even dream of before.

There was also a movement coming from Cabili, from another state, another city, which was fighting against the monopoly of Arabic language, because, asking for recognition of our native language. So, everything was open, the press, too, so some independent and partisan newspapers were born, rejecting the language of ….that was used until then. Some newspapers that wrote in Algerian, and the language, the Algerian language is a sort of creole combination of Arabic, French, Barbarian, and all this.

So, all this was tolerated. The debates took place everywhere; radio, press, cinema, university, et cetera. When, how did it change? In January '92, there was the Islamic party, who was behind all parties, who was very popular, and who won the first tour of the elections, and it was certain that it was going to win the elections at the second tour, and so between these two tours, the military took the power, and they break the democratic…

Joan Kjaer: Military coup?

Hajar Bali: ... democratic, and since there, I can say that maybe some months after that began the civil war with the Islamic movements in the mountains [inaudible 00:15:44], and against the power. This began, we can say, approximately at '93, '94.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Yeah, and you spoke with me beforehand about …the government did everything it could to convince the people that the Islamists were outsiders, were not really Algerian, that they were THEM, and we are Algerians, and the government needs to fight against them.

Hajar Bali: Yeah, we all, we all thought that. We could not imagine that people from our family, I want to say, our nation, could kill brothers. That we were having this idea of our unity against the colonialism, and these French colonies, it was still there that strong idea that we are all united. So, for people, and so the government was pushing this idea that these people are not from our country. They come from Afghanistan. They were trained there, almost, and I must say that what happened in France, I have a friend, that when that ... the cinema...

Joan Kjaer: The recent bombing?

Hajar Bali: Yeah, the recent events, I have a French friend who called me and told me, "How can you tell me how it began in Algeria with this Islamic war," and I said, "Maybe what I can tell you is that at that moment we thought that people are not from our people, and you must maybe think that these young killers are our people." It's what, I thought first. It was easy for the government to say that and to say that they are external ...

Joan Kjaer: Forces.

Hajar Bali: Forces, and almost always, like always French, and the West is trying to invade us, and things like that, to justify, on the other hand the violence of the power also against people.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and how did the press respond to all of this? Did the press basically take the same position that the government ...

Hajar Bali: The press was between two fires, and I don't know how to say this, yeah, so there was the government, the military government, with that new law, which doesn't allow you to speak about security things, and so before this law, there were many, many excesses of power from this part, and in the other hand there were the Islamic groups who were, who were very, who killed so many journalists, especially at the first years of the war.

There were some independent journalists who tried to give, to give, to give another way of saying, without following the government, and it was not accepted, even by some, we told them, democratic people, because they were not Islamists, you know?

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Hajar Bali: I can give the example of the famous agreement signed in Saint'Egidio in 1995.The main opposition parties, including the Islamic party, who was at that time stopped. They decided to meet at a colloquium in Rome, under the auspices of the Catholic Community of Saint'Egidio, opening up a prospect of reconciliation, participants affirmed by a national contract written in six pages, it stipulates the commitment to respect the democracy, the political and…. nation, the individual freedoms, including freedom of confession. All the ……, as a means of achieving and maintaining power.

For the first time the Islamic party is committed to entering the mold of a peaceful political solution, and to apply the rules of the democratic games, but the military high command categorically rejects the initiative, by refusing any dialogue with the fundamentalists, and a possible reinstatement of the dissolved party, in the politic arena. Journalists at that time, there were very, very few journalists who were following this possible idea of reconciliation.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. What is the state of Algeria's press freedom now? Do you, as a journalist in Algeria fear for what you write?

Hajar Bali: So, for the press, it's a bad period. Many are forced to resort to unsavory practices to round off the end of the month. Some are approached by local authorities, or by provincial potentates, in various ways. Those who continue to fulfill their mission without censorship, are not seen by their own employers, since they continue to fail to respect the tacit obligation of reserve. Not being able to avoid dangerous subjects, what we call dangerous subjects. They are obliged not to cross a red line, which only the initiates know the outlines. They must continue to feed their newspapers with revelations about provincial mafias and local institutions, but they must be careful not to disturb the traffic from which the strings are pulled in high places, like the trafficking of kief to Europe, for example, or the fraudulent export of foreign currency.

The hand of informer trade by the [foreign language 00:23:44]. The quasi monopoly of the [foreign language 00:23:48] with the foreign all companies in the Sahara. So there are some subjects were we sensible that they have no right to, so their articles are often reviewed, or even simply put in the baskets. In general, all journalists know that the information that may involve the barons of the regime, is not publishable, so today the private written press in Algeria is at the end of resource.

In addition to being let loose by those who have used it, it has lost the confidence of its readership, despite the several sanctions against journalists and calls for mobilization in their favor, Algerian society remains totally indifferent to their fate. The average reader, disillusioned, and who bought during the 90s, at least two newspaper a day, no longer reads, because also of the internet. He prefers the foreign television channels, captured by satellite, especially French and Middle Eastern. Selling has reached the lowest threshold

since the creation of the private press, and despite the disappearance of many titles, at the point where most newspapers no longer display the number of prints in their …….

Joan Kjaer: Wow.

Hajar Bali: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Wow. Well, it's a real treat for us to be able to hear personal stories, and you know, your own, your own, what you've dealt with in your own countries, and your own writing, and I thank you both for being here with us this afternoon, so just next to me is Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, and Hajar Bali has just been speaking with us about Algeria. And I hope you stay with us for the third part of this program, where we'll be joined by a freelance journalist from Belgium, and an editor from Kazakhstan. And again, this is WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. I'm Joan Kjaer, and thank you for being with us this evening.

Joan Kjaer: Hello, I'm Joan Kjaer and welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. This is part three of our program on journalism and the free press in the age of fake news. Our two special guests in this program, this part of the program, are also members of the International Writing Programs fall residency. Just next to me is Fatena AlGhorra, a poet and a journalist now living in Belgium. Thank you for being here.

Fatena AlGhorra: Thank you.

Joan Kjaer: Next to her is Yuriy Serebriansky, a fiction writer, a journalist, and an editor from Kazakhstan. Thank you Yuriy.

Yuriy Serebriansky: Hi. Thank you for having me here.

Joan Kjaer: Absolutely good to have you. As you know, it's no surprise to anyone. Our conversation this evening is about journalism, about real and fake news, about the right to freely express one's point of view, and report inconvenient truths without fear, and both Yuriy and Fatena are going to talk to us a little bit about their experiences. Some may be similar, some may be quite different. I'll start with Fatena who has had a long career in broadcasting in Gaza, and is now living in Belgium, and you can tell us a little more of your personal story.

Fatena AlGhorra: I was living as you said in Gaza, and I was known in my whole life as a Palestinian until last year. Right now, I'm honored to represent Belgium as well. I worked in Gaza as a television and radio anchor, and actually it was my dream since I was a little girl to be a journalist, but my life took me in another direction, and because it was my dream, and I believed really in this dream it just came true just like this. I studied Arabic literature, and since I graduated my work was a journalist.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: I believe actually to be a good journalist you have to read a lot to know the language, to have the skills of the language. It's not about studying journals because I think a lot of people who went to journalism university, but they are not really good journalists, but it's about how you can use your words because we are talking here about the word, and the value of the word. For me it was like directly I worked at the Palestinian television, I host programs, but actually mostly it was cultural programs both in television and in radio. After that I moved to Belgium in 2010. I started to work with Al Jazeera as a reporter, a cultural reporter with Al Jazeera, and it was another experience for me because it was really working with a company, like, a newspaper, or actually broadcast, like Al Jazeera with this big name.

It was challenging for me, but actually I think I get a lot of experiences from working there.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: It was all the time, even for as a writer I think it's part of your job also being a journalist in a way because you are investigating while you are reading, and you interview people who's inside you, people who you wrote about, or you wrote them actually. In a way, I think it's one way, but two ways of saying the same point.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What are some of the special challenges you would say in the transition that you made from the Palestinian broadcasting work you did into this international network? Al Jazeera?

Fatena AlGhorra: Well, because it wasn't the same because in Palestine I cannot compare actually. Of course, in Palestine, especially in Gaza City, it was with a very limited production. Actually you cannot compare it like Al Jazeera. Also, I was working as a television anchor, and radio anchor, so we are talking about a different side of media. It's not like writing an article, or reportage, or making an interview, or news, just writing. Here you own yourself, and you own your language, and you can edit everything not once, ten times until you come with the best version of your work. But especially most of the time I was live, either on television, or radio. Especially radio. It was my best moments actually behind the mic of the radio because you are there connecting the people, the audience only with your voice, and the emotions that you can convince the people through your voice.

There's no television ...

Joan Kjaer: Camera.

Fatena AlGhorra: Camera, and the place, and the décor, and dresses, so there's a lot of things that can drag the audience. But actually radio it's only your voice with the people, and you have really to get to them to convince them, to keep listening to you. I know exactly what you are doing here.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Fatena AlGhorra: Want you to challenge really to be a radio anchor. But television of course I loved my work. Actually, the third, if we are talking about order radio, television, newspapers for you.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Well I spent 30-some years of my life also as just a voice on the radio.

Fatena AlGhorra: Wow.

Joan Kjaer: It's such a strange and wonderful thing when you actually get to see some of the faces of people who know you from that voice alone. Talk a little bit about the voice you put into the newspaper work that you're doing now.

Fatena AlGhorra: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joan Kjaer: How did your voice come through in the writing you're doing now?

Fatena AlGhorra: Well, you mean the journalist right?

Joan Kjaer: Yeah, I mean your sensibilities.

Fatena AlGhorra: Well, actually I think I'm somebody who cannot write about anything. Actually, unless if it's an order, and it's rarely. Normally I suggest the topic that I want to write about it to Al Jazeera, and they approve or not approve.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: It's about the decision to approve it for them, but actually the topics that I want to write about it, it's my story.

Joan Kjaer: Interesting, yeah.

Fatena AlGhorra: Yeah. That's why it was a comfort for me to work it like this because I'm somebody who's really faithful to her beliefs. I just write what I want to write, and maybe that why I was in the cultural field not political because in ... I cannot be a politician. I cannot write in politics because I will ruin it from the first. I would be kicked out from the beginning.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: I cannot just be a writer in politics, but culture it's my field. I own the words here, I own everything, not to mention the big community and relationships between all the writers from Palestine, outside Palestine, in Belgium, and other countries right now. I have friends from almost all over the world, and of course thanks to IWP now I have also other friends added to my list from 35 countries ...

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Fatena AlGhorra: ... And cultures. Actually, it's more than this because some of us we have multi-nationalities. Like Ubah, she's a Somalian, and she's Italian who, by accident, lives in the same country that I live. We are far away from each other, 30 minutes, and we met here. We didn't know each other before, so that's wonderful!

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Well, so this is a good transition into Yuriy because Yuriy is ... Actually, there are two things that we're going to talk about tonight. Your editor's position, and also a Polish diaspora publication are you responsible for, or contribute to. Tell us about your life, where you're living now, how you concentrate your work.

Yuriy Serebriansky: I think I belong to a generation from Soviet Union who carries this Soviet cultural code. But before I begin let me start with the ... Get back to this recent sad news from Massachusetts about Richard Wilbur. A great American poet who died 14th of October, and he was also a translator of Russian poets. Brodsky, Joseph Brodsky, and Anna Akhmatova.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: These poets just defined my attitude to the concept of freedom, and influence it from my understanding of Soviet Regime. I'm working as an editor of a Polish diaspora magazine, which in Polish had the title…….. I think I want to give some background about the Polish diaspora in Kazakhstan before I will share my experience. During the IWP panel discussion concerning the question of identity, and rethinking of how some of my colleagues were speaking about post-colonial syndrome, and in Kazakhstan's case it is not only a post-colonial issue related now mostly to Soviet period, but also an identity problem of nations deported to Kazakhstan, by Stalin's and Soviet officials' decision before the Second World War, and during the Second World War.

I'm talking about Germans, I'm talking about Koreans, Kurdish, Chechen, Turk, Armenians, many others. Polish from the Ukraine were the first nation moved to Kazakhstan in 1936. Today we can say that more than 200,000 Polish displaced widely from the territory of Ukraine, and also arrived in Kazakhstan independently after exile from Siberian camps and other territories. These people had no right to leave their special settlements without permission of authorities until 1956 when these absurd accusations of non-reliability of the nation were removed from the Polish population of the Soviet Union. In spite of this, several times I had to interview elder women who came from Ukraine as girls, and I was really surprised that they did not retain feelings of hatred of the Soviet Regime, and the people who are guilty for this tragedy.

Today, the ethnic Polish population of Kazakhstan is about 35,000 people. The Polish diaspora is represented in the assembly of the people of Kazakhstan in the national political body of the country, and our magazine published in two languages in Russian and in Polish. Russian language in Kazakhstan is the language of inter-ethnical for ... We use it for okay ... In common language, but we also have Kazakh state language. Here during my stay in Iowa I'm working on a book, which I want to be in two parts. The first part consists of non-fiction stories of Polish families who immigrated to Kazakhstan from the territory of Ukraine. I collected these stories since 2012 when our Polish diaspora magazine was founded, and we began to publish these stories in every issue.

Another part of this book is the fiction story of a Polish girl deported in 1936, and faced with these incredible difficulties in her life, but I'm not trying to make these stories just dramas. From the very beginning I thought about it, so I used my journalistic experience for writing always.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Yuriy Serebriansky: This is my way I think for the work.

Joan Kjaer: You said you were so surprised to hear that some of the people who had been deported, forcibly moved from Ukraine, they don't carry hatred for that.

Yuriy Serebriansky: Just like that.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Why? Why are they not resentful of this?

Yuriy Serebriansky: Some of them treated this Stalin regime like some kind of fate.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: I've been interviewing together with a professor from a Chechen diaspora, and he said this very strange thing, very controversial, that if he couldn't come to Kazakhstan, he couldn't finish any university.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Your magazine, the one we've been talking about that is published both in Polish and in Russian, or in Kazakh.

Yuriy Serebriansky: In Polish and in Russian.

Joan Kjaer: And in Russian, yeah. Do people in Poland read it? Or only people who are of Polish descent in Kazakhstan?

Yuriy Serebriansky: Of course we mostly focus it on local content.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: But the Polish ... Some Polish families are related to Kazakhstan, connected to Kazakhstan, also are subscribers to our magazine.

Joan Kjaer: Sure.

Yuriy Serebriansky: I'm always very proud to see our magazine cover in some village in Kazakhstan.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Yuriy Serebriansky: Like a last year issue, I think is ... I treat it like a big responsibility.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. For both of you, when have you faced difficulties from authorities or from your editors about publishing something that you believed to be true, that you know to be true, but that you were not allowed to publish? I'm sure this happens even in the cultural field.

Fatena AlGhorra: Yeah, of course. It happened to me more than one time actually, and actually it happened more when I was working for Al Jazeera because they have their own

policies. Sometimes you just write something, or actually you write about a writer from a country that they don't want to write about, or to mention this country. Sometimes even in cultural topics you write about something really complicated between Kurdistan, and Arab, and Shia, and Sunni, but related to culture. Yeah, sometimes I face that more than one time, and in a way you have to manipulate that, and that leads me to the fake news that you were telling about because maybe as somebody who lived until last year as a Palestinian, for me it was the first news that I know I learned that it was a fake news. One of the oldest fake news in the world that Palestine was an empty land. That's why it was given to people without a land, and of course it was fake, and there was movies built on these fakes actually to convince the people that this land was an empty land.

Even with the war that's going on in Gaza most of the time like people living in Gaza for 17 years right now. Gaza is a complete prison, and there is a lot of photos and news coming out, but most of the people they know that it's just fake because it doesn't represent, it doesn't captivate the real life in Gaza because most of the people from outside, although with this world they think that the people inside they are living in a desert in a way. They don't know that most of the people they have iPhone 6, or iPhone 7, or maybe right now 8, or Galaxy, or whatever. I don't know if it's a commercial. We are living ... A lot of people they have ... We have malls in Gaza, we have the sea, we have very chic hotels in Gaza that maybe more expensive than here, but a lot of people they only see this part of the world, which exists.

Half of Gaza is destroyed completely. Even with rebuilding, and this is also because either fake news or you choose that ... The people who is really in the high level of making news they want only to focus in this part to make it like it's the only face of ... Like racism, for instance, we have ... Most of the people because of the media they think that if you see an Arab or a Muslim, directly they will think about he's dangerous or she's dangerous. Actually the Muslim there are more than 1 billion Muslims around the world, and these people who's doing that is just like a bunch of hundreds. You're talking about a very small minority of Muslims, or Arabs. But when you compare it to the other people who's living just normal lives, who's listening to Justin Bieber, or Michael Jackson, it's their idol until now, and following all the new media, and the new movies, so this has come from the fake news. The fake vision that you want the people to think.

I'm sure that what we are living right now is the most bubble, the most fake bubble that we are living right now because if you look to the social media right now, anybody can fake any news. Like what happened when this guy he was killed. They found him killed in his house. The one who I don't remember the name, but actually he has like 10 fake news website, and he said that he was responsible. Actually, one of the people who was responsible on Trump won the election, and actually because he was faking the news, and people were sharing this news without even going to the source to know if it's right or wrong. Nowadays, you can see on Facebook, on Twitter thousands and thousands of

photos, and news, and you just share it directly. It hit something inside you, you feel relative to this news, and you just share it like this without going to the source.

After all, which kind of world we are living in, and are we responsible on that or not? This is a lot of questions, and we need to find answer for it.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I suspect this is the same for you. I mean people in Kazakhstan have the same kinds of social media, and of course you're very close to Russia there. Do you see fake news coming into your environment?

Yuriy Serebriansky: Yeah of course. Well, Christopher mentioned in the first block there were revolutionaries who comes to get first radio, TV, and telegraph. I don't think Esquire office will be the first place that they will come. Some of my work is devoted to support a cultural process in Kazakhstan, and somehow Esquire today also is a media discussion platform for social and sometimes political topics.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: But is it possible now in Kazakhstan if I think about this constitution guarantees of freedom for us, freedom of speech and the press in our country. But referring for example to Freedom House national report from 2015 the Press Advocacy Group….. documented 38 criminal cases against journalists and media outlets in 2014, including 15 defamation cases.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: There were also 106 civil suits of which 97 were for defamation, and new amendments to the legislation on media caused heated discussion in the journalist community once again recently. A number of representatives of the media argue that these amendments will end any anti-corruption investigations in Kazakhstan just like this. Another problem of course is related to the fact that Kazakhstan almost completely lives today in the Russian information field. The popularity of Russian content are much higher than the local ones of several reasons such as independence of media in Kazakhstan, most of the media is supported by government, and language priorities also for some social group, etc.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: I'm talking not only about high quality or low quality content, but also about the propaganda, which comes from Russia with this content, but it's not only a side effect for us, we are a target audience of this propaganda as well.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: But in my case in Esquire, Esquire for me is a possibility to give voice for different points of view. For example, in the last issue we published Ukrainian author Vladimir Litvinenko, fragments of a new novel, and he moved Donetsk to Kiev recently. Somehow I'm trying to use literature to be in touch with these social topics because I still believe in literature ...

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yuriy Serebriansky: ... As a possibility to have news as ... Christopher also mentioned is the first block ...

Joan Kjaer: Yes.

Yuriy Serebriansky: ... In the 19th century.

Joan Kjaer: Right. We've talked a little bit about social media, and these devices are all over the place, and we've talked a lot about ... A lot of the negative things that can happen, and the fake news that can be transmitted, and all of us can fall prey to that. But in the early days in the Arab Spring it was through instant messaging, and social media that people came out from their homes in great, great danger, so it's a very tricky, and ...

Fatena AlGhorra: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: ... Dense web you have to find your way through.

Fatena AlGhorra: Yeah.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Fatena AlGhorra: It's very tricky like you said, and sometimes even with your experience with journalism you can fall down the net that was set there because it's a lot in the news, and sometimes they are clever. The people who's making these fake news are clever. But you are right. During the Arab Spring or the fake Arab Spring because it's the fake Arab Spring right now for us, and the beginning only through social media we could be there, and especially in Tahrir Square in Cairo ...

Joan Kjaer: Yes.

Fatena AlGhorra: ... Which was the biggest revolution ever, and it was full of love, and challenge, and hope. All of us were full of hope because we were following 24/7 just following the revolution. I get to know most of the beautiful writers through Facebook. Before Facebook, I never imagined to know them or to read about them especially when I was in Gaza because it's very limited to receive books ...

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: ... Or newspapers like literature in newspapers, but only through Facebook or Twitter you can read from a lot of writers from all over the world. Even the translation poems also. Of course, it has two sides like television when it was in the cables in the beginning.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Fatena AlGhorra: It was like really a lot of people they were scared ... Internet from the beginning before Facebook also. It depends how and from where, from which perspective you going to deal with this. It's about you as a human being, and sometimes I feel like some people they don't ... We should put some limit for them to access Facebook or social media because it would ruin them. They are not like ... It's a very big mess there, and you have to be really clever, and armed in a way with the culture, and knowledge to survive there.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you through your publications, have you found ways to encourage your readers to always sort of think twice about what they're seeing, what they're hearing? Do you do that in subtle ways through the articles you publish?

Yuriy Serebriansky: Well, I'm trying to do my best to work with fact checking.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah.

Yuriy Serebriansky: In these cases I'm very careful. It's ... In our case, in Kazakhstan's case last year is related to Ukraine of course.

Joan Kjaer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.

Yuriy Serebriansky: I use my ... Even personal connections with Ukrainian authors to be fast in this fact checking.

Joan Kjaer: Yes.

Yuriy Serebriansky: This is also my obligation and responsibility.

Joan Kjaer: Yeah. Wow. Well, it's so interesting to talk to both of you this afternoon, and I'm very grateful you would be here with us. We have had Fatena AlGhorra, and we have had Yuriy Serebriansky with us, both of whom are here this fall as part of the International Writing Program, and I thank all of you who joined us this afternoon for WorldCanvass. If you would like to see any of our upcoming programs listed, or catch any of our past programs, you can go to international.uiowa.edu. These programs are also available on iTunes, and the Public Radio Exchange. I want to say thank you to everyone for coming. Thank you especially to our guests.

Fatena AlGhorra: Thank you for having us.

Yuriy Serebriansky: Thank you for having us.

Joan Kjaer: It's been a great pleasure.