

Getting Real NOW: Documenting Press Freedom & Impact - Transcript

Cassidy Dimon: Hello, everyone. Welcome to our panel. We're going to take a couple minutes here and let the room populate before we begin. Just hold tight. Thank you.

Hello all. Again thank you for joining. I see a lot of you have joined recently. We're going to take just two more minutes here and let people get into the room. And we will get started at approximately 5:03. Thank you.

Carrie Lozano: Good evening, everyone. I know some of you are still joining us tonight. But I'm so happy to kick off this conversation. I honestly can't imagine anywhere else I'd rather be right now. So thank you for joining us for this second installment of Getting Real Now. My name is Carrie Lozano. I am the director of IDA's Enterprise Documentary Fund.

I would like to acknowledge that I am in northern California on Ohlone land. And as many of you might know, we are encircled by fire and smoke throughout the west coast. And I am just reminded that in Native tradition, it's the Earth's way of renewing its soil and making it fertile to burn. And while it might be uncomfortable for us, it's the planet's way of healing itself. And so I hope we can all hold space together and honor all that the planet is doing to correct itself.

Before I introduce our speakers, I really want to thank all of the sponsors and supporters that make these conversations and getting real in the digital space possible. So pardon me while I read them. I don't want to forget anyone. The Los Angeles City Department of Cultural Affairs, LA County Department of Arts and Culture, the Hollywood Foreign Press Foundation, Participant Media, the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Wyncote Foundation.

We can't see you all, as you know. And I think so many of us are used to these digital conversations. But I do wanna say that on the bottom of your screen in Zoom, there is a little Q&A function. You can see-- see it with a little thought bubble there. And so you can at any time put your questions in the Q&A function. And we have monitor-- sorry, moderators-- who will be tracking and following all the questions. And we'll save time at the end for our esteemed guests to answer your questions and for you to engage in the conversation.

Tonight you are just in for an absolutely incredible conversation. I really cannot think of three more fierce and brilliant truth tellers than the three women you're about to hear from. The first is Ramona Diaz, who is a well-known documentary filmmaker of the most exceptional craft, and was an early grantee in our development round of the Enterprise Documentary Fund. So I'd love to bring up Ramona. And you can look at their bios right in the chat if you wanna learn more and learn more about all the incredible work that they've done.

I'll keep going. There you are, Ramona. Hi, Ramona. Welcome.

- Thanks, Carrie. Thanks for having us. I really appreciate it. This is great.

- I'm de-- delighted to see you. I next one want-- want to introduce Maria Ressa, Co-founder and CEO of Rappler, just a well-known journalist throughout the globe who is probably at this point one of the foremost experts in the world on press freedoms and authoritarianism. And so we're going to discuss all kinds of things related to not only filmmaking, but journalism and the state of journalism and truth in the world.

And really, really excited to bring onto the screen our moderator for the evening, Marina Walker Guevara, Executive Director of the Pulitzer Center. And I came to know Marina's work, actually, as she helmed the groundbreaking work of ICIJ, "The Panama Papers," "The Paradise Papers," so I honestly cannot think of a better person [CHUCKLES] to guide this conversation than Marina, who probably knows more about what's happening with Press Freedoms around the globe, actually, than most people.

So I just want to toss it all to you. I'm thrilled and excited to have you all here. And just thank you, all of you, each and every one of you, for your work. And with that, Marina, please take it away.

- Thank you so much, Carrie. Thank you for the introductions. And thank you to IDA for hosting these important conversation. I am incredibly honored and even a little nervous to be in the presence of those amazing-- two amazing and courageous leaders, Maria Ressa and Ramona Diaz. I want to have a conversation for about 45 minutes and have plenty of time to hear from the audience. So please get those questions coming. We're going to try to ask a lot of them.

So Maria and Ramona, in preparation for this conversation, I have been reflecting on the similarities of your life and professional journeys. Both of you born in the Philippines, both attended college in the US, and have spent formative years in this country. Both have led incredible careers-- creative careers. And you did not know each other. But somehow your paths-- or we know why-- your path have converged on one of the most defining stories of our

time, the erosion of democracy as we know it, with your home countries suddenly being a cautionary tale for the rest of the world and for the US.

So what I want to start asking is, how did your distinct experience as immigrants-- as traveling to countries, to continents-- shape your paths and led to you to this moment and to this particular story? You're gonna go first, Maria?

- Sure. So thank you-- thank you for such a-a great thoughtful question. Oh [INAUDIBLE]-- so knowing that there are always more than one-- there's always more than one way of looking at the world, and trying to put those ways together, that actually I think has shaped a lot of who I am and makes great foundation. You know this. A-actually I think the three of us know this, you-- it's a great foundation for journalism.

It's also extremely humbling because you don't know-- I mean you never have that certainty that you-- your solution or your question is the on-- is the right one. Who knows what the right one is? So I think that [LAUGHS] with Ramona, I mean, we've grown up in different worlds. In fact when I'm-- when I'm in the Philippines, she's in the States. When she's-- when I'm in the States, she's in-- in the-- in the Philippines.

But I think definitely being Fil is one of the reasons why we work well together because we can slip in and out of both worlds. And-- and then-- oh, what-- what is-- the-- the last one I would say is all those lessons from trying to fit in-- because you're never completely American. And you're never completely Filipino. Right?

The most-- the most empowering thing is that you're both. But, you know, they really are different groups. And Filipino-Americans don't really-- have never really pulled together as much as they're doing now, strangely enough, I think. So, you know, when you're part of both but neither, you begin to-- to form your own thinking.

And one of the-- being able to slip in and out has been one of the things we have in common.

I-I-I guess that's the lessons from that time period, that you have to bust through whatever you're-- you're thinking or whatever you're afraid of, that you have to speak because, you know, in America it's the kind of very noisy, aggressive language that a Filipino walking in was-- would-- would kind of, like, be quiet. And then in the Philippines, you're just the loudest one. So it's very bizarre.

[LAUGHTER]

- What about you, Ramona?

- You know, I-I spent my career-- I actually go back and forth. So I do live in that in-between

space, right, in that liminal space. And when I'm here, I always say I'm going back home to the Philippines, which-- which bugs my daughter to know. She goes, no, Mom, this is home, because she was born and raised here, right? But when I'm in the Philippines, I always say I'm going home to the US.

So I-I really have two homes. And-- but that-- I'm able to be an observer in both cultures, which really is-- it's a good thing to be as a documentary filmmaker. You're able to really be one foot in-- in the Philippines, one foot out, one foot here, one foot out, so you can really step back and be an insider and yet be an outsider, which always helps I think, especially in the way I do films, right? I do very immersive kinds of films where I stay forever. So I think that's one thing.

And also, you know, I was born and raised in the Philippines. But I-- so in a way, Maria and I are the same, but opposite because I was a child. I-I spent my childhood in the Philippines. But I became an adult in this country. And Maria is the opposite. She spent her childhood in the US. And she became an adult-- she was an adult in Asia, in the Philippines.

And somehow that's-- it-- it-- it's kind of different, the way we see things. But there's a lot of intersectionality, I think. So we had a lot of common ground to begin with when we started the project. There was a-- there was a recognition of sorts of a common experience.

- Let's talk a little bit about how you started the project. I read somewhere that you were at some point thinking about starting your career in fiction. And here you are in the middle of the-- the-- one of the most defining nonfiction--

- No, it's fiction. It's fiction.

- [LAUGHS] --nonfictional stories in the world. So tell us about, Ramona, h-how you-- how you get it-- how you got yourself into this.

- Well I did start in fiction, actually. You know, after college I started-- I worked in Los Angeles in television in-- in fiction, in serious television. And then I went back when the Marcoses were booted out of the country after the People Power Revolution in '86. I went back to the country-- to the Philippines-- to see what was going on there. All right?

And that was, I think, when my love for documentary took root because there were a lot of stories that were being-- imagine that after 30 years of not being able to talk, suddenly everyone's, like, talking. It was a-- I mean, it was, of course, really noisy. There was so many daily papers and so much-- it was loud, right? But there were so many stories that were being told on the streets.

But I didn't have the craft. I didn't know how to-- I didn't quite know how to do it. So I left. I left again. I did the grad school for documentary filmmaking. That's how I got into documentaries.

And ever since then, what I do, really, I think what-- what I do is I try to decode what happens in the Philippines for a Western audience. That is what I do, basically, because all my films are either about Filipinos or Filipino-Americans.

And what was-- oh yeah, so that's how I got into documentaries. And I like-- and the way I do docs is-- it's this very kind of crazy way because it's-- it's unfolding stories in front of the land. So you never really know where it's going. But I've always loved the process. So when people ask me, what do I love about filmmaking? More than-- of course the storytelling. But you can tell stories in any format, right?

But I love film and documentary because of the process. I love, like, being on the precipice and not knowing, oh my god, is this going to work or not? It's a crazy way to make a film. It's really zen. You really have to trust your gut and instinct.

And I think I have-- I've done enough films to really trust my instinct to know a good story-- to know a good character because at the end of the day, if-- even if they have a great story to tell but they don't hold the frame, you know, they don't hold the light-- it's casting, right, then it's a five-minute YouTube clip, right, because they don't tell stories well. So they-- they also have to-- so my instincts tell me, this is a good story. Maria is the right person to tell it. And oh my god, could she hold the frame, right? Can she-- she can hold the-- the story.

So it is instinct. It's a crazy-- but I love it. I love the process of verite, observational filmmaking that, you know, you never leave until you have to leave-- [LAUGHS] until the story ends [INAUDIBLE].

- Maria, how was it-- how was it for you? How was the experience of being asked to-- here you-- you are in the middle of this story that is unfolding. You are a key character in that story. And you get this request to be followed, to have a-a television crew be part of that-- of maybe the most difficult days and months or years of your life.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- She'll make that distinction. By the way, that is our conflict.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

This is a basic conflict we're evolving as we go. It's like that Rainer Maria Rilke quote about how you love the question and then you just live your way into the answer, right? Ramona said that she interprets for a Western audience. That's been-- but I'm a journalist. And that's what I did with 20-- in the years I was with CNN, right? It's the-- I think we were-- I think journalists-- who-- who said that? The Washington Post guy said that it's the first page of history.

So where our conflict is, is-- is the same thing that's facing American news organizations. At a

time when it's morally important to take a position, will the fly on the wall-- will the observer-- what will that observer do, right? This was a debate yesterday with Woodward's book. You know, should he have announced that-- that quote from Trump much earlier in February when he said it? Ramona and I--

I almost said no to Ramona. No I never-- I didn't say no. I-- when she first came to my office, we started with-- I-I actually took the meeting because I was like, oh yeah, I remember this filmmaker-- "Imelda," 2004-- and I remember her because she said no to an interview with CNN. You know?

[LAUGHTER]

And-- and-- and at that point I was like, but I-- but it was because of this core conflict, which is she does cinéma vérité. But journalists have, like, you know, you-- you shoot, you make a quick decision, and you do the story. And "Imelda" was a flashpoint, I think, between us. And maybe we've come closer together. But the-- you know, I-I felt that when a woman steals \$10 billion from a-- the coffers of a country, we know who that woman is.

And I thought that we need to say that. Isn't that crazy? It's the same place that I'm at today. That's the conflict today for journalism, right? Do you call a lie a lie? Do you-- or do you couch it, right? So-- so that's how we started. And the reason I said yes was-- when-- when I actually asked her, I watched her, you know-- I watched her kind of wriggle a little bit. Then she finally said, OK. And then she jumped in. And she was honest, right?

So honesty, that's the first, because the values are incredibly important. And then the second was the conditions. I wanted somebody outside of Rappler. I would have loved if Rappler had the resources to do it. But if it's somebody inside the organization, you don't know whether you're getting the right thing because you're caught in the moment. So she's professional. She's done this before. You know, it's almost tailor made for my need at that time.

And then the third is the Filipino-- Filipino-American experience. I don't much-- you know, in the last four years, so many people have told our story for our own survival. We've had to do that because the only defense we have against, you know, state is to shine the light. And so-- so yeah-- so Ramona can tell you what that was like because sometimes we just get deluge. And you just sit there, and you try to, like, center yourself. [LAUGHS] So who's winning, Ramona? I think I'm winning because Ramona's taking positions [LAUGHS].

- No, no, no. And so what I have to say-- so this is my thing. And we've had this ongoing conversation for two years now. But this is the thing. You know, film as film-- because of its form-- resists objectivity. It will never be objective. So even if it is very verite or observational,

the very fact that we're editing it and choosing how you watch or how you observe, Maria, is already not objective, right? The-- I mean, it is a mediated experience. The only way you'll get a very objective experience is if you're there present.

But I am mediating your experience of Maria's experience because I'm the director. So that can never be objective. It can-- it-- it will always be through my point of view, in a way. And-- and I-I-I wrote about this, actually, in-- in Talkhouse, that-- that the film-- the end product, right, 1,000 cuts is really a result of our relationship because there has to be trust. She had-- she had to totally trust us because she allowed us-- at the end of the day, she allowed us in places we had no business being, like in lawyer strategy meetings, in at times when-- I mean, seriously. But she trusted that we're going to be there. And-- and my deal with her is I would never put her in more trouble. You know, that's not the point.

So-- yeah, so-- so-- the film is the trust. That's a-- that-- that is the result. It-- it is a relationship. It is the-- the trust that we-- that she-- that we form. That-- I trust that she was not gonna back out of the film, right? I also had to trust that because that would have been deadly.

- I have to say, Ramona, I was also quite impressed with the access that you got to other characters, and including some character-- characters close to the president's circle, like the former pop star turned political appointee, Mocha Uson. I don't know if I'm pronouncing her name correctly. But tell me how that kind of access worked and those-- how those relationships worked in this cases.

- Oh yeah. So It's Mocha Uson, like the flavor mocha [LAUGHS].

- OK.

- You know, I've done a lot of films that played in the Philippines. So they knew my work. Mocha Uson knew my work. So did General Bato dela Rosa, who's a very close ally of President Duterte. He's actually the first implementer of the drug war. And I think to me, I have to be very honest-- transparent. So they knew I was covering Maria. They knew I was-- I was, you know, then gonna cover them [INAUDIBLE].

But my-- my-- my pitch to them is that, I'm gonna let you tell your story because there must be something behind your-- the performance, right, behind the headlines-- behind who is Bato, beyond being the implementer of the drug war. I wanted to know if you really believed in the drug war. Or was it all performative? Right? I wanted to know why Mocha was a true believer of Duterte. What was it that really, truly made her very loyal to him?

So that's always the intention. That's my intention. Whether I get there or not-- sometimes I do. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's purely performative. But I think because they knew my

work, they-- they knew that I spoke to a larger audience beyond-- beyond the Philippines, they said, yes. And-- and-- and it was the same, like with-- with Maria. Of course over the span of however long we shot-- a year and a half-- the center of gravity changes of the film. And when the center of gravity became Maria, I spent more time with Maria.

But I was spending as much time with them, so-- which was very immersive. And they all set to trust me. And I had to trust them as well. It was the same kind of relationship. And I was very open with-- transparent with Maria. She knew I was covering Mocha and Bato as well.

- Maria, was there anything that you didn't expect, that surprised you, that you didn't anticipate going into this process?

- I mean, I didn't expect I'd ever be arrested. I didn't expect [INAUDIBLE] different, you know, criminal. I have eight arrest warrants. Good god. I-I didn't expect where we are almost 35 years after People Power. That's-- that's one. And the shock really happened four years ago. So I-I think this is also globally-- I think the dominoes that-- that are spelling the doom of democracy started falling in the Ukraine in 2014, but in my world-- in-- in the Philippines in 2016. That was the first domino. That was the year all the elections started falling, right? I mean, Trump was elected in 2019-- sorry, in 2016 in November.

So the-- the upside down communications world-- but in terms-- sorry, that's the big-- I-I spend so much time--

- [INAUDIBLE]

- That's about the information ecosystem and how there is no other point in time that we've lived through in my lifetime in the-- as a journalist-- by next year it'll be 35 years, you know, that-- where-- where the dictum of why we-- I became a journalist is so clear. Information is power. And that is what is, like, shepherding us in this behavior modification system we call social media.

In terms of the process with Ramona, yeah, I think the fact that we became friends, [LAUGHS] that's-- that's one, because when somebody is there all the time-- so our world is so crazy.

Like-- I mean, everyone says right now because of the pandemic. But starting in 2016, when all the attacks were coming bottom up, and then in 2017 when President Duterte in his state of the nation, they came top down-- the same attacks-- let's just take that narrative journalist equals criminal. Right?

And in 2016 I laughed about it. But when you say it a million times and you lace it with anger and hate, it becomes a fact. And so for 2017, it came top down. 2018 the government filed 11 cases and investigate-- and began more investigations. 2019, the arrests-- eight arrest

warrants-- and then all the cases began. And I spent 90% of my time in courtrooms.

Ramona has been in-- in the courtrooms. She knows the judges. Like, if I wanna say, you know that judge, she was wearing this bright red lipstick, she'd know-- she'd know exactly the day and the time. And then the other part, instant transcription [LAUGHS]. I was always like, Ramona what did that-- what did that person say? And-- and I was making crucial decisions during this time period.

And so having somebody who was-- she hasn't-- she kept a very light footprint. But she was a thinking person watching it. And so every now and then, I'd actually go, what do you think?

What's the right thing to do? Because there were so many of those instances. By 2020 when I got convicted, she wasn't here. So you missed that, Ramona [LAUGHS].

But-- but journalist equals criminal. You know, what's reality and what's-- what's-- what's created, they're actually both one and the same. And it shows you the power of social media combined with the power of the state to turn the world to recreate-- to reshape the world. Sorry, that's a long-winded answer to your question of what was surprising. I think there are so many things that we were afraid of, you know, like getting shot. You know, how do you deal with that? There's that moment.

And then another one later, I think, when-- when we were trying to figure out how do you protect-- how do we protect Rappler? What about security? All of these questions, Ramona and-- and-- and her team were there. And in some instances, sometimes they were extra protection as well, if that makes sense. You know, and-- and I'm sure Ramona can tell you what it was like for her team.

But my team-- Nietzsche's quote, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, is really real. And if you catch whatever it is head on-- take it head on-- own it and shape it, and become part of-- it becomes part of who you are. Oh, I still didn't really answer your question. Did anything surprise me? Did anything surprise me, Ramona?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- I don't-- I don't think you-- you know, when I ask for access, I don't really ask for-- it's gradual. I know it's gradual because I know I have to earn that access. I have to earn the trust. So I never fully tell them exactly how long we're going to stand. I'm just gonna say, we're-- we'll hang out forever. But, you know, if I leave the forever out, then they realize, oh my god, this is forever. So there were times when she'd look up, and she's like, you're still here? I'm like, yes, Maria, we'll be here until whatever happens happens.

So I think that's what caught you by surprise because you're used to breaking news, right? You're used to news groups coming in and then leaving. But we were always the first ones in and the last ones out. And then what we do is-- especially when you got arrested twice-- we would just zoom out, right? We would watch them filming her. But we were still a step back. And they'd all disperse and leave to do their reports. And we're still there filming. And I think-- I think that-- I don't know-- maybe that surprised you. And then you got used to it. And then you knew we weren't leaving. And I go, whatever. You know, I'm busy [LAUGHS] so--

- Well, that didn't surprise me. I expected you to do that.

[LAUGHTER]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No-no-no. But it was-- but that was part of what was also good because at-- at a certain point-- so at the beginning the film crew was a bridge between two worlds that were really being torn apart as it was happening. At that point we had already been denied access to the palace. We actually have a case in the Supreme Court where our young reporters filed a case because we got banned from the palace. It's like being banned from the White House. And then that ban continued throughout anywhere President Duterte is, Rappler is not allowed.

So Ramona was a little bit of a bridge. You know, it's like-- because I do want to know. And I do want-- and up until very recently, when-- when I became their target, I actually kept a very open mind. And in fact, I would argue that the Duterte administration's actions against me helped me make very difficult decisions that I probably would not have made in the evolution of journalism, that I probably would not have made if I hadn't been the target because you don't know what it's like until you're actually attacked. And while you're outside--

- [INAUDIBLE]

--you can kind of-- you know, you can kind of think-- think-- you can kind of say, oh, well, it's this. But it's not. When you're under attack, that's it [LAUGHS].

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--an example of one of those difficult decisions that maybe you wouldn't have made, had you not been in this situation.

- I wouldn't speak as frankly as I do now. We all know, you know, journalists handcuff ourselves because we want to be fair. I think that's a big, big difference-- it's the same with business, right? When you're running a news crew, you-- your-- you know that your goal is not to make money but to make enough money to pay your people, that you are-- your main goal is to

protect the public sphere. So that makes a journalist business person different from a normal business person, i.e. The greed of tech. Sorry.

[LAUGHTER]

Slide.

[LAUGHTER]

- Yeah, I-I think-- I think her arrest-- like you always say, Maria, your arrest unshackled you. And then you-- you could speak out more because she actually was now the source, right? She was now the victim of-- her rights were trampled on. So she didn't have to go out anywhere else to find the source. And you could actually see that because she would speak out more against Duterte, making her then the opposition when she wasn't the opposition. She was-- she was a journalist whose rights were trampled on and was now speaking out for-- for-- because her rights were violated.

But because there was no viable opposition, she became the opposition voice, which is really interesting.

- And a-- and a very fine line to walk and a difficult one. We don't want to be put in that position. But there are situations like this one where, like, there's just no other choice. Ramona, talk to me a little bit about the-- to us about the-- the dangers of this story. Like, you know, this is about the most dangerous thing you can do in the Philippines, to report-- to cover the war on drugs. So how do you protect your crew? How do you navigate those sanctions?

- So President Duterte knew I was making this film. We were very visible because we had to ask his people-- his presidential command-- access to the pit-- to filming very close up in the rallies. Otherwise we would have been in the media box. And there was no way we could get that close. So I think because we were visible really protected us. He knew we were around. And he knew we-- we were also filming Bato. Were also feeling Mocha. So I think that was comfort and security in that.

But I also knew that we were covering a journalist who was donning a bullet proof vest, right, while we were not. And we were in the car with her. So at some point, you have to talk to your crew, right, to see-- because everyone-- it's a very personal decision. Everyone's tolerance for risk is different. So when I realized that she was at the crosshairs, meaning we were also in the crosshairs, no matter how visible we were, I had a conversation with the crew and said, you know, you can leave right now. I wouldn't take it against you. We don't live here. We're more protected. But you guys live here. You have to face the consequences beyond filming.

Oh my god, Maria, not one of them left. Every one of them stayed because they felt it was the right project-- the right story to tell. And then when we were finishing the film, I offered them to be anonymous. I said, we could, you know, [INAUDIBLE]. And they go, no-no-no, we wanna named. We-- we're very proud of our association. So it's really touching.

But for as long as I could protect them-- we all lived together. I mean, we had a few we were in, like, four-- three apartments all close by. So for as long as I could do something about their safety while we were filming, I thought that was the best thing to do, even if there were local hires. We provided housing. So it became sort of this camp. And that's why I loved the process because it was such a-- which is weird. It wasn't-- it was very tense. It was very stressful. But then because we're all together-- all in it together-- it was kind-- it's a very-- there was a very community feeling about it.

- And-- and a big purpose, of course-- a sense of purpose-- a shared purpose.

- Yeah, a shared purpose. Exactly.

- Going back to the-- to the big picture and to President Duterte, four years into his presidency, what-- what-- what-- it does surprise me. He's-- I-I should say he's vulgarity and violence-laced presidency, that his level of popularity continues to rise even amid a pandemic. So my question, Maria, is can this solely be explained by the entrenched networks of disinformation in the Philippines?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- So I-I don't think that his popularity continues to rise. I do think that statistical surveys at the evolution of a democracy to a dictatorship, they don't catch it because you can see this. Look at Venezuela. Look at all of the other countries who have gone through this and what the statistical surveys have shown, right? They actually tend to be on the side of the budding dictator because when you have an environment of violence and fear, do you really expect people to stand up, to be the nail that gets hammered down?

And statistical surveys in the Philippines mean that these-- that the people who are doing the survey go into your home. So this is face-to-face. So they know your address. They know where you live, right? So it'd be really-- so there's that. But then the other part of-- yes, I think president Duterte-- like President Trump-- captures the anger. And Ramona gets this in the film. You know, what-- what President Duterte promises is revenge. It is class war. It is tearing apart the fissures of society. And when you foment that, you do get almost cult-like behavior because you fuel anger.

So this plays very well into the networks of disinformation on social media. I think the biggest change is social media, that we now get the news from Facebook. Facebook is the world's largest distributor of news. And built into the design of Facebook-- unlike the days when newsgroups, journalists were the gatekeepers, where we literally tried our best to-- to take ourselves out, right-- to-- to-- where we were held accountable for the facts-- the social media platforms, Facebook, in the Philippines, the penetration rate-- 100% of Filipinos on the internet are on Facebook. So that is our internet.

In the US you're talking about roughly 70%. Imagine what your world would be if it was like ours, 100% of Americans on the internet are on Facebook. That means by virality spreads faster. So what-- what is it exactly? Built into the design is exactly the top-down approach of these digital authoritarians. It is us against them. That is in the design of the platforms that now distribute our news. And so what that means is that filter bubbles, tearing apart society is exactly what happens when it comes at the velocity that it does.

So I now-- you know, I now call these social media platforms behavior modification systems because the data that we put in-- there's a film that also just came out on Netflix this week-- "The Social Dilemma," Tristan Harris, the former ethicist of Google actually takes you through and tells you how the design of the platform takes all the data you put in, uses machine learning to find your most vulnerable moment, pushes it into artificial intelligence, and with micro targeting, sells your most vulnerable moment to a message to a country or a company. This is an advertising in the old sense. This is Pavlov's dogs. Right? That's what we are here. Sorry. So-- so you can, you know-- and-- there's also the other thing that you asked, which is, you know, what-- the other thing of having the film crew there is that the evolution of ideas happens with someone else watching. The crew gets it, right? So every time in the last year and a half where I learned something or, you know-- or I'm speaking, and Ram-- Ramona will always come up afterwards and say, this is new. This is new. This is new. It's like having a real time stenographer.

[LAUGHTER]

- Fact checker.

- And a fact checker. It's like, you could've said this better.

[LAUGHTER]

But-- but, you know, I want to actually-- the questions you asked, Ramona, triggered other things that I think are important for filmmakers. I think the first one is I did my best to drag Ramona into the film.

- She still does.

- In what sense? Tell us.

- Like, as a-- as-- because she-- there should be someone asking the questions. But there's nobody-- she's there asking the questions from all those interviews, right? And others, a journalist, would be part of it. And she would always try to take herself out, which is why the most she ever said to Rappler is after the film had already been-- been released, right? She just was very quiet most of the time. But anyway, so I did my best to drag her in, you know, when we're doing-- when we-- she-- she resisted. But I think she will at some point.

I think-- and then the second thing is fundraising. That was also interesting for me because, you know, I-- I created-- I mean, we raised money for Rappler. And-- and then, you know, watching Ramona with her fundraising also was very interesting to me because we're-- it's different and yet similar. And then, you know, as you can see from the list of the folks in "A Thousand Cuts," who supported it, values driven. Like they-- the same funders all around the world actually back films as-- and journalism.

It's like-- it's like the-- the-- the truth tellers are-- are collapsing. You know, and in that sense, that's really interesting to me as well because the evolution of all of this at a time when the economy-- the global economy has plunged, in some ways I would-- I think, actually, filmmakers have more than journalists right now-- have access to more funds than journalists. And maybe you guys can tell me if I'm wrong [LAUGHS].

- Yeah. Sort of, you are.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't know. I mean, that's always tough. Fundraising is always a hurdle, right. One of the-- the most difficult things to do is raise money for a film that-- and you really don't know what's the-- the-- how that story is going to turn out because sometimes you try to make it up. But obviously they know that you don't know. So it's a leap of faith on everyone's part. So that's why it's-- it's difficult to raise money for it. And I think--

But the difference between, I think, journalism and filmmakers-- in terms of content, right-- I mean, she would always start-- so what she wanted to do, she would ask my cinematographer to turn the camera on me. And I would say, no, don't ever do that even if she forces you to.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I'm like, no, don't do it. And they knew not to do it. So I think what I do in my films, is-- is I look for moments, right? And I-I look for behavior. That's what I do. As opposed to journalism, they

prefer story, blocks, like, all right, beginning, middle, and end. I look for moments. I look for behavioral. I-I look for moments that speak of what the person's really about without really telling you what the person is about. But it's just-- it's just an insight into the character.

Like-- like in the film, it's the scenes with the two sisters. That's why they-- they're memorable because anymore than that, and it cancels itself out, right? So that-- it has to be calibrated.

There has to be just a few moments of that, so you really remember it because any more, then they-- there's too much to remember. And no one will remember anything. And you know, it's always-- in the editing process, you always put so much that you don't remember anything. And then you start pulling things out. And things pop out.

- And some of us wanted to see a little bit more of that Maria behind the scenes-- Maria, the woman, the private citizen, and in that sense, I wanted to ask you, Maria, we see other journalists-- other Rappler journalists in the field-- show-- allowing themselves to show us some of their anguish and-- and even talking about the fear they feel. And you are always with that amazing calm that characterizes you, and even a cheerful mood in-- in really difficult situations. So do you allow yourself for the other kind of moments and vulnerability? And what is the source of your strength?

- Thinking ahead, embracing the worst, I think that's-- so, you know, Duterte-- the Duterte administration attacked me at the time when I already knew who I was. I knew why I was doing what I was doing. I was handling-- you know, for many-- for almost a decade, for the [INAUDIBLE] I was handling security in Southeast Asia. I was a-- I handled security for our team, right? So it's like-- it's-- it's a little bit of prac-- practice at realizing I've-- I will-- I'm the first to say no story is worth dying for. But I know my first-- my first responsibility is my team. So I really think ahead. Like right now I'm trying to think through what the next-- what-- what it'll be like four years, five years from now. So yes, I've had those moments. And Ramona's been in some of those. But what I-- what I do is, you know, there-- you get sucker punched when you realize it. And one of those is in-- in the film-- April in New York City at the launch of [INAUDIBLE], when Jason Rezaian from the Washington Post-- who had been jailed in Iran for 548 days-- and I remember that because I-- his book, "Prisoner," actually was what-- so I read. That's the other part. When I can't quite imagine it, then I try-- I read what other people have gone through.

So that moment was when I realized, oh Christ, I can go to jail. And I spent maybe a month when I was grappling with it because I knew I needed to already-- I needed to get it out of the way because if I'm scared, I can't work. And I can't-- I can't do my job if I'm scared. So whatever

it is you're most afraid of, you have to, like, take it and own it, embrace it, and rob it of its sting. I said this to the graduating class of 2020 at Princeton. It's personal. It is professional. It's also actually great for dealing with security issues. So that's-- that's one. I always think through worst case scenarios and prepare for them and then drill them.

The second I think is there are now worst case scenarios that are-- that-- that I can think of, that, you know, I really don't like. And I have no control. So that's also OK. There's lots of things we don't control. I could step out and get COVID. I mean, you know, there's lots of things that could happen. So just-- if I just embrace this uncertainty, then I get stronger as well.

And I think the last part is remember I have a team to lead. And my team is incredible. And you saw some of that. Actually better that we'll see, look, I always get-- and up until today I still get emotional. They're the only-- my team is the group that makes me emotional because they're so committed, which is what we need.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- I think the-- the young reporters at Rappler are incredible. I've seen them and watched them. And they're young. But I think that's also Maria's legacy, the reporters, really. It's-- because they will go on beyond Rappler. They're young. And they're strong. And they're smart. And they're brave. So beyond Rap-- Rappler they'll-- they'll do their work. And that is a real legacy, training those, we need face up-- step-- step up to the moment, right? But keep your values. And be very clear on the mission-- the mission of journalism. They're very clear. And it's so impressive and inspiring, really.

I-I can't say any more. But those young reporters are-- that's why it makes-- I can understand why it makes Maria emotional because they are truly inspiring. But I don't know where you get them, right? [LAUGHS] You get them fresh out of college or something. But they are incredible.

- They're the smartest-- so it's like the way we set up Rappler, right? We-- we were-- we knew what we didn't know. So the founders-- the four women are-- we're in our mid to late 50s. And-- and when we set it up, this was, like-- this would be eight years ago or something like that. We-- we knew we weren't digital natives. So why pretend? And-- and we knew that the world was getting turned upside down. And I wanted to capture that.

So we hired the smartest 20-somethings we could find then. They are now in their-- Pia Ranada, who you saw, Patricia Evangelista, who you saw in the film-- you know, Patricia is the eldest of the group that we hired. And she's young. Crazy. And I think that's-- the other part-- it's funny, yesterday I just did a zoom with 18 new hires for Rappler. That's the other part. We actually, despite all the attacks, did well because our community came in around us, which is

what I hope the film will do. It will build community. And-- and we need to build communities of people who believe in democracy, of people who have tolerance for nuance, of people who will say no to hate speech.

So anyway-- so that's-- that's it-- just yesterday I-I was-- I've never met these people who are now walking into Rappler. And one of the questions I always ask is, why are you joining? You know, we could get shut down tomorrow. And to hear their lessons or the reasons why they're doing that, actually, you know, makes me very, very-- like, we're building the next generation. And I think that's the part we have to-- your film-- the films you were going to do at this point in time, it's a battle of narratives and social media. And social media, while it distributes this stuff, robs everything of context. I-I would argue that it atomizes what we create and robs it of meaning.

So you-- we're growing up now in a world where-- where meaning has got to be personal because the chaos of-- of the algorithms provides different context beyond your control. So this film, what Ramona did actually was surprising to Filipinos because I don't think anyone had ever seen everything in one-- in the same way that we lived through it.

- Ramona, tell us what happened on June 12th because you did something very bold for this film and for this story and maybe we can say for-- for democracy in Philippines in-- on June 12th.

- So June 12th was a Friday. And a lot of things were happening in the Philippines-- a lot of things-- pandemic-- there was strictest lockdown. So when we say lockdown, we mean lockdown because Duterte's response to call it is a very-- it's a police response. It's not-- it's not a public health response. So when we say lockdown, you go out, and you get arrested, right? You-- you-- you can't break curfew. There's curfew. So it's a very strict lockdown. There was an [INAUDIBLE].

- More than 100,000 have been arrested. Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt, Ramona.

- There was an anti-terror bill that defined terrorism broadly. So you can really be arrested for anything-- for speaking out against the government. No one really knew, right, what-- what terrorism-- what-- what was included-- how terrorism was defined. So everyone's suspense about this anti-terrorism bill. The biggest network in the Philippines was shut down in the middle of a pandemic. The biggest network-- so it's like shutting down CNN here or Fox or maybe-- I mean, suddenly they were-- they went dark because their franchise was not renewed.

So it was a-- a-- a few things. And then Maria's verdict was coming down that Monday. Her very-- her first-- the first verdict out of eight cases. This was a very first verdict. And so the-- that

was a Friday, June 12th. The Monday before that, I was-- I think Maria and I were talking. And I said, you know, I think-- let's just release the Philippines-- let's just release the film in the Philippines for, like, 24 hours. What do you think? She goes, can you do that? I said, yeah, I think I can do that. I don't know if I can do it. I don't know, you know, because there are so many stakeholders in the film.

So after we spoke, I reached out to my producer, Julie Goldman. And I said, Julie, I wanna release the film in the Philippines for 24 hours. She goes, why? I said, because all these things are happening. I think this is the time. We should do it. There's something happening there. We should do it. She goes, OK. And then so we called Concordia, who's a s-stakeholder.

[INAUDIBLE] Frontline, obviously, because they all hold North American rights, and-- and the next day we're all on a Zoom call. And I pitched this idea to them. And I sort of gave them the context of what was happening in the country. And I said, 24 hours for free, and at the very end of that, we have a talk back with me, Maria, and a moderator. And then they said, OK, for free? I said, yeah, I don't think we should-- you know, it is unseemly to monetize it.

And everyone said, yes. I mean, there were just-- you know, there were questions-- piracy issues and all that-- but after a while, they said, yes, it's the right thing to do. It was amazing. And-- and 24 hours later, we were up on the YouTube channel of Frontline because that was the easiest way to do it, to put it up on Frontline's YouTube channel. And Frontline was telling me, OK, without any preparation, without any advertising really, you'll-- you'll probably get an audience of, like, 20,000, which is already a high end because usually our average is 40 with a lot more preparation, a lot more time to really push it out. But since, you know, we've only had, like, really 24 hours, 20,000.

You know what we got? OK, so it started Friday evening. Friday, June 12th, turned out to be-- not turned out to be-- but I had forgotten-- it's Independence Day in the Philippines.

- They keep finding her [LAUGHS].

- Yeah, I'm like, oh my god, yes, Independence Day. That wasn't part of the plan. I just thought Friday to Saturday was a good idea. There were a lot of people marching. And the police dispersed them, right, a-a-a-a lot of the-- marching for independence and protests. They were dispersed by the police. They went home. The minute they got home, we were live on YouTube channel.

And we just pushed it out on social media and Viber chats. And we got full views of 233,000 in 24 hours. And it was pretty incredible. And all weekend long, I was getting messages from strangers saying how sad they were. You know, I expected anger. Anger I expected, but not the

sadness, right? Compounded of course, by the fact of pandemic. Everyone was [INAUDIBLE]. But the sadness that they had taken their eye off the ball of how fragile democracy is and how it all can be lost if you are not vigilant, and you're not paying attention.

Because remember it's just been, like, 35 years since the Marcos dictatorship. And it took a whole generation to build institutions of democracy and really hard work. And it can be taken just like that. So there was a sadness that they-- they failed in their-- in their vigilance and-- and just keeping guard and speaking. And I wasn't ready for that-- for the sadness. It really-- it was a really tough weekend that weekend, just the sense of deep ennui, you know?

Anger-- yeah, anger, I suspected. And then also I wasn't doing anything that was hidden. I mean, this was a story that they should have known because it happened out in the open. But I think putting it together in a film like that-- where you connect the dots, when you hear a fresh Duterte being vulgar, right, because sometimes you get used to it, and that's the biggest danger when you start getting used to the vulgarity. But they heard it afresh in this context. And they were horrified, as they should be.

And yeah, so that's what-- yeah, and then there was a talk back. And then of course, Monday came, and Maria was found guilty. But there was so much more attention on her, on that verdict. - I want to-- we are getting a lot of cred-- Thank you so much for sharing that. And thank you for your leadership for making that happen.

- Now I want to thank the stakeholders because they were really amazing. I mean, they-- they stepped up and said, yes, we should do it. They-- they recognized that it was important.

- Maria, I wanna get a couple more questions in before we move to the questions from the audience. And the prospects-- prospects right now are grim. You know, Duterte is in power. Your case is moving through courts. And there's real possibilities of-- of jail time. We hope, of course, it doesn't happen. We are in the middle of a pandemic. I understand you can't leave the country. There is a sort of a travel ban for you right now. So quoting a journalist from the New York Times who reviewed "A Thousand Cuts," he said, how many cuts are left? And what is the way out?

- So I think two things. You know, definitely the runway is shorter. And it got shorter really fast. The pandemic helped that because while this is happening this year, you-- you saw the shutdown of the largest broadcaster in the Philippines. That happened May 5. And then our captured legislature-- a small subgroup in our house of representatives-- took away their franchise and instead has awarded it to-- well anyway, let me not go there.

So-- so the first is that there's significant loss of freedom. There's an anti-terror law that was

passed. Our institutions are collapse-- have collapsed. I mean, well, I can't say that publicly because I have subject to some rules, right? So let me-- let me qualify that. But I think that-- so the runway is shorter. But the key thing to fighting is something like this-- the lesson I have learned-- and this is hard fought-- is that when somebody dangles a Damocles sword over your head to try to prevent you from doing your job, you have to keep doing your job. You have to ignore it.

Look, I-- I guess I could go to jail. But if I do what I'm doing and I do it well, then that will impact whether I-- what the runway is going to look like. So what I do matters. I actually would say that for every journalist in the Philippines. What we do matters. And every Filipino would translate that to Americans when you have-- when you're two months before elections-- everything you do matters right now. This is a critical moment. You know, when else do we have a pandemic? It happens every 100 years, this strange confluence.

It's the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, the end of fascism, the dropping of Hiroshima, the atom bomb, and I think this is one of those moments, again, we have to-- as a-- as humanity, we need to come together globally to prevent people from doing the worst of what humanity can do to itself. Sorry, I-I didn't mean to pull that out. So-- so the way I deal with it is I plan ahead. I think the worst case scenario, and I try to do what I can to prevent it.

It's not a lot. But, you know, what do I do? I'm a journalist. Marina, [LAUGHS] I'm a journalist. So I keep-- I-- my job right now in Rappler is to hold up the sky so that the team can do their work. And they're doing their work. And, you know, we're-- we rolled out a tech platform in the middle of the pandemic. You know, and this is-- we believe that, you know, there's three stools right now for democracy. This-- these are the Venn diagram of Rappler from the very beginning, investigative journalism, technology, and community.

So we need to strengthen all of that. And if I do that, then my chances of going to jail are less. It-- the worst thing is to still be paralyzed because that's exactly what the government wants.

- Well what do you say to a journalist in a country like Honduras or-- or Hong Kong or Russia that does have the kind of attention, perhaps, that now your case has?

- It's a really [INAUDIBLE].

- How-- how do-- how do they hold the line?

- Real world communities, right? I think we're all trying to do that now. I didn't realize how-- the kind of work that needs to happen to defend press freedom globally because I came-- I-I'm-- I'm big corporate media. That's where I came from, you know? And-- and so, yes, part of the reason there was attention to our story is because so many people who run news groups were former

colleagues of mine. There's that.

There is also the fact that I-- I was-- I reported for CNN for two decades. I-- I was in Southeast Asia. Today is 9/11. You know, the-- the investigations into terrorist networks in Southeast Asia, this was our-- my story for CNN for two decades. So-- so I-- sorry, not two decades, for-- it is now-- what is it? The ninth year post 9/11. Anyway so I-I think that what we have to do-- what I'm-- I've started to do is to make sure that those stories-- that the people whose names you may not know-- that the journalists in Cebu who are getting jailed-- that we amplify that. We-- we have to build networks, networks of networks to defeat the network.

And so here's what I would say if you are under threat. And we are seeing this in so many countries around the world. You have to contact the groups that are there to help pull us all together. And-- and there are three who-- who actually created something called a Hold the Line coalition for us. It's CPJ, the Committee to Protect Journalists-- ICFJ, the International Center for Journalists-- and RSF, Reporters Without Borders. They're there. And they actually do try to put the spotlight on every single journalist.

But the fact that there are so many, it's exactly what Ramona said, right? If we inundate-- like the drug war, like the tens of thousands-- according to human rights activists-- who have been killed-- that's at least 27,000-- the UN says 8,800-- if you just pump numbers, they don't matter. It's the people who are doing this. So go back-- going back to telling the story, if you are in trouble as a journalist doing your job-- Lina Atal-- Atallah in Egypt, right-- if you're arrested, tell the story because there will be extreme pressure on you to stay quiet. They'll try to dangle this thing of, you know, negotiate with us behind the scenes. Don't do it because you'll give up too much.

- Thank you, Maria. We're going to move to some of the questions from the audience. And the first question is for Ramona from Connie Botinelli. And what she says is, what the storyline did you started with before you realized the threat that became "A Thousand Cuts"?

- Actually it was the drug war, right, because I was-- I lived in the US. And I was finishing my previous film, "Motherland," when the-- Duterte became president. And shortly after he became president, a few hours after he became president, the drug war started. And the bodies started piling up. And the photographs out of the Philippines were just horrific. I couldn't-- I couldn't avert my gaze. I really couldn't. And I knew there was a story there.

And also I grew up-- like I said, I grew up under Martial Law. I was-- I'm a Martial Law baby. And I felt like there was something that was dragging us back to this dark past. And I'm like, what is going on? So that was my first instinct, was to make a-- a film about an idea about the drug war.

But when I got to Manila late 2017, a lot of people were already had that idea of making this film about the drug war. So I had to look around.

I-I knew I wanted to make a film about the Philippines under Duterte. Whatever it was, there was a film there. I looked around, and there was Maria. [LAUGHS] Maria, who was not only talking about the drug war, she was also talking about disinformation. So she was connecting impunity, the drug war, authoritarianism, and disinformation, and algorithms, and Facebook when no one else was talking about it.

She started talking about it-- her first article's in 2016, right? Now everyone's talking about it. But then it was like-- I'm like, oh my god, that's a story because it also pulls it out, right? It becomes even more a global story. It's very, of course, specifically the Philippines. But the themes are bigger. The themes are more global. So, um, and that's why I think it resonates globally, this film, because it is happening. This kind of disinformation is happening everywhere. And this-- the rise of authoritarianism especially, in this country, right, it really resonates with people here.

So that-- that was the evolution. And then of course when Maria got arrested and arrested again, and then we were already given access, that's the story. You can't-- you're-- you're in it.

- Thank you. We had a question from Laura Robbicheck. And she thanks both of you for [INAUDIBLE] and asks, I feel honored to be watching you. I would like to know how much danger you are currently in, Maria.

- Hard to quantify, you know, because the exponential attacks on social media bottom up. And then the governments-- the weaponization of the law. I will say based on what Ramona said, is, you know, what's happening in the US happened to us two years ago maybe. You know, like, what-- and-- and it's shocking to me to see even disciplined forces-- I would have said police forces in the states are more disciplined than-- than in-- in our country, right? But I shouldn't say that because I know I'll get attacked as well.

But look at what's happening. Shocking. Not a surprise to us. Our managing editor actually wrote a piece that, you know, for-- if you want to understand what's going to happen to you, look at what's already happened to us. I said this in December of 2016. And I was talking about journalists-- because the exponential attacks were there-- what are the dangers? I mean, I-I-I always think in terms of three. So, you know, of course we're prepared for worst case scenarios for Rappler. We're not going to buckle. We will keep going, regardless of what happens.

And the second is for-- for me, well, yeah, it's there, also prepared [LAUGHS]. What do you do? You prepare mentally. Everything happens in your mind first. And then I think the third part-- and don't forget this part-- and this is also the role of filmmakers-- you build these communities of

action. Rappler's elevator pitch when we built it was-- in 2011 and 2012-- it's one sentence-- you have to have one sentence-- we build communities of action because I was tired of throwing stories into a black hole for a Western-- largely Western audience. And I wanted to have stories that will impact my world in a way that will change it for the better.

It sounds stupidly idealistic. But you know, that's actually it. I'm still idealistic. [LAUGHS] And I'm pretty old. So-- so anyway, the dangers are infinite. You can't actually-- and I can't let it stop me. So what's that serenity prayer-- great serenity prayer? You know, the things I can control, I control. I can be a control freak. But the things I can't control, I'm very good at letting go as well.

- Thank you. We have several questions here. Maria, how much international attention helps journalists who are in jail or at least are-- are at risk of getting jailed and [INAUDIBLE] governments? Well, how much, you know, attention works against them?

- This is always a balancing act. And you can actually look at two different ways of having handled this. I think the reason why Rappler is still alive is not just because of Rappler. It's because of the stories that newsgroups all around the world have done. I mean, if you really look at it, Sheila Coronel [INAUDIBLE] wrote about how it-- it-- our journalists in the Philippines, while we try, in general if your-- if your business owners are worried about their business, that is the pressure point that is attacked. And your stories-- it's not self-censorship as much as tip toes on the line.

So that-- Sheila wrote about that in the Atlantic. So I think the-- the struggle to continue giving facts, to continue providing context, to do hard core investigative reporting-- follow the money. We know. Marina, you know this, right? And those same networks are-- we're working to do that precisely. So with the international attention, we may have already been shut down if that hadn't been there. Amal Clooney and-- and Doughty Street-- Keelin Gallagher, QC-- she's a QC-- you know, Covington is doing pro bono work for us. Like I told you, I'm old. [LAUGHS] You know, so you know, it's a-- it's the generosity of strangers. But when you're a journalist, the only weapon you have to fight back is to shine the light. So [INAUDIBLE].

- Tell them, Maria, when you've got person of the year, you were not sure whether that was a good or bad thing, right? I mean--

- You should ask Ramona the questions about me.

- Oh, no-no-no-no. Yeah, you tell them because that was a turning point for you, whether being named TIME Person of the Year was a good thing or a bad thing in terms of Duterte coming at you harder.

- Yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

You're right. That's actually--

- Talk about that, Maria. Talk about that.

[LAUGHTER]

That was key-- that was key, right?

- So, you know, I found out about being TIME person and being one of the four covers on Twitter. And I didn't-- I-I thought it was of-- I thought it was false. So I actually sent it our social media team to fact check. And then I-- and then I got the call from CNN, who still has my number. And I was like-- I stuttered. And the first thing was, oh my god, I really be attacked now. That-- that was when I was still trying to figure out the balance between-- between pulling back and pushing forward.

That's a tough balance, right? Because-- because the-- so the thing that goes with fear is choose your battles. I don't like that because sometimes that's a code. I-I actually like hold the line because every battle is important when it's a principal battle, right? So anyway in that one, it turned out to be the shield that helped-- helped me both find my voice and-- and helped us survive. So huge, Marina.

And in that sense also, I-I realized for other journalists who may not have the same networks, we do our best to do that now. You know, and-- and I think that's-- that's the network of networks that we need to do-- we need to create, especially when journalists are under attack globally.

- And that's something really important that-- and for our audience to know that the-- the times when investigative journalists or journalists general were [INAUDIBLE], I think we're leaving them behind. I'm an optimist. My entire career was built on building networks. And these networks actually do exist now and this network of networks. And collaboration has become a key aspect of-- a-- a component of how we go about doing our work. And it has made our stories more relevant and-- and-- and better, frankly. So that's a-a-a little bit of optimism there. I have a quick question for Ramona and then one for both of you to close. So for Ramona, your advice for first time filmmakers, [INAUDIBLE] asks, especially when all you have is an interesting character and know a platform where your film can land.

- Oh my goodness. F-first time filmmakers, you have to have collaborators, right? You have to find those allies that can get you to where you need to be beyond the character. You have a character-- great character. You have your story. You know what your story-- what story you're going to tell. First of all, you have to know what story you're going to tell. Even if you don't know

it all, you know the themes. You know what your voice is, right? Because right now, I-I always say it's the best time to be a filmmaker because the tools of filmmaker-- filmmaking are so accessible.

But at the end of the day, voice matters. What do you want to say really? So be very clear on what you want to say through your character. What are the themes? Be very, very, very clear. And then go find allies. And tell them. With the same passion that you have for the characters, you have to find those allies. You have to, you know, attend-- you know, unfortunately, they're virtual-- but when we're back post-pandemic, all right, be present in the-- in-- in convenings because I think that's how you form your network.

- And then we have a question from-- let me see the name-- from Luke. He wants to know, what is the topic for the next documentary film that should be made about the Philippines?

- Basketball.

[LAUGHTER]

That's easy. Yeah. Yeah. So I might be making a sports film [LAUGHS] next. I have never done a sports film. So maybe basketball. We'll see. But there's also-- there's still-- you know, Maria's story's not over yet. So [LAUGHS] we'll see about that. [LAUGHS] There might be a part two somewhere in there.

- What-- you know, great leaders always talk about keeping their eyes on the big picture and in the peak that they are climbing. Or you said, Maria, in, like, three, four years from now. What-- what is the peak that you are seeing-- that peak that you are climbing and that you are leading your team to climb with you and that makes all that you're going through really worthwhile? And the same for Ramona, what is the peak that you are climbing with this film? And what do you expect that the impact of this film be in this story?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

- Me first? Me first or Ramona first?

- You first, Maria.

- You can go then.

- OK, so for me, I think it's democracy. It's whether or not we are going to-- whether democracy stays or whether we're going to go into a decade of fascism. And that sounds really dramatic. But I think the next few months of this year will determine that. And a lot will depend on what tech will do.

So Silicon Valley-- so isn't it interesting-- and I think this is part of the reason the world is global. One of the things that the-- our information ecosystem is global now-- and it's-- and it's focused

on behavior. It is about our humanity, not as much as the differences in culture because they're there. But we are Pavlov's dogs. I've said this, right? So-- so that-- the first is if nothing much is done-- and I feel like Cassandra because I've been saying this for four years. If-- if no change happens in Silicon Valley-- in the social media platforms-- we will usher a decade of fascism, at least, right, because th-- that's-- those are the cycles of history.

And then the second thing-- so these are all the hats that I wear. And I think this is part of the reason I'm privileged to see this because I run a business, I am a journalist, I build technology, and so, you know, on-- on the tech front, our information ecosystem is poison. It-- it's actually a hate factory. So we need to stop that. And right now it's Silicon Valley's enlightened self-interest that needs to do that.

The second is the future of journalism. The very same platforms that are attacking us that we used to distribute our stories-- facts-- are the same platforms that are eating up the revenues.

The advertising model is dead. So finding a sustainable business model-- the Duterte administration helped us find that last year. You know, our-- we're using a dead tech in data B2B model that has grown 12,000%. So that's part of what happens. You get stronger.

And then I think the third is civil society, right? And this is where filmmakers will have huge impact. What do-- what will mass levels-- mass society-- what will large numbers of people-- I-I like thinking about it as emergent behavior, right, be-- because the information ecosystem we're in now helps determine how we will behave. So where's civil society now? What-- what do we want? Because if-- if facts are debatable, and you're being manipulated, do we really have agency? Do we really have free will?

These three big questions will be decided, I think, that-- whether we're on the road to recovery or ruin-- will happen in the next six months or so. Certainly a lot will depend on the US elections because look, Facebook will do things for the US elections that it's not doing for the global south, where its-- its policies have helped genocide in Myanmar, violence in India, Pakistan, violence in the Philippines, the attacks against me are on that-- so those-- those three things. And that will determine what kind of political system-- what kind of society we live in.

- Thank you. And Ramona?

- So-- so the-- wait, the question was what is-- sorry. What is the question?

- What peak are you climbing with this-- with this film?

- Oh that's right, with this film. To-- to me with this film is just to keep the conversation alive, right, because I think what this film does-- well and that's largely because of Maria-- is she really unpacks what this information is, right? Because it's a word that's bandied about. But in the film

you see it unpacked and what the effects of it on real lives. Right? There's a real effect on the ground of disinformation and what the weaponization of social media does. And it's very clear. So I think just to keep the conversation going and then use the film as a launching pad to talk about all the other things, like authoritarianism-- which is also in the film-- and disinformation-- how those two intersect, So I think that's-- as-- you know, as a filmmaker with this film, at this moment, that is our job to make-- to push it out even more and to let people beyond the choir, right? We have to start-- we have to talk to people beyond the choir and to have them actually watch it.

My-- my goal is-- you know, a lot of-- a big population of the Filipino-American-- the Filipino American population in this country are Trumpers. They're-- we're the largest Asian-American group of people who voted for Trump. My goal is to get to them, right? I want them to see this film. I want them to see and explain and have a real conversation beyond just the-- the headlines and the click bait and have that nuanced conversation. I think that's what film has a capacity to do.

- Thank you so much, Maria Ressa. Thank you so much, Ramona Diaz. Thank you for letting us in your collaboration and your relationship for sharing your knowledge and your thoughts with us. And we're going to invite Carrie to join us again and to help us close this event.

- You're mute.

- It's bound to happen [LAUGHS]. Thank you so much to all of you. I know that I leave this conversation just kind of the armor back on, just ready to fight for what's right, to fight for truth, to fight for our democratic ideals. And I'm so in awe and appreciative of all of you for guiding the way. And there's-- just to the audience, I hope you're following the chat where there are lots of information about press freedoms, about the film, "A Thousand Cuts," and ways that you can support Rappler, which I think is really critically important right now. So thank you all.

I just want to also thank our colleagues at the controls, Cassidy Dimon, Niki Bhardwaj, LeAnn Scrimmager-- thanks to Andrea Lest for ASL interpretation, Tina Dylan for live captioning-- please join us for the final conversation of our Getting Real Now sessions on Wednesday, September 16th at 1:00 PM Pacific time, 4:00 PM Eastern time. We're going to talk about-- just jump-- this is perfect, Maria. I hope you can attend and listen in at the intersection of storytelling and community and a conversation between Louis Massiah and Yvonne Michelle Shirley.

And I think Maria actually really teed that up, about what community can do and how crucial it is for us to build it right now, so that we can avoid this terrifying thought of a decade of fascism. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Getting Real '20 is-- registration is open and free. And

we're going to be announcing more soon. Have a great evening. Godspeed.

- Thank you.

- Thank you. Thanks so much.