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**RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:**

HE Noura Al Kaabi

HE Najat Belkacem

Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky

Nadine Labaki

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeoWCJUQ4tM&t=7s>

**Raghida Dergham:** Good afternoon Abu Dhabi, Paris, St. Petersburg and Beirut. Welcome to Beirut Institute summit in Abu Dhabi e-Policy Circle number six. We were supposed to have our summit, actual summit, in Abu Dhabi next week on June 13 and 14. Unfortunately COVID-19 decided otherwise and however we will not abort our plans, God willing, Nchallah is that we will have the summit in Abu Dhabi on March 13 and 14 as it happens. The theme of the summit will be and has been the theme of the e-Policy Circles which were created as a run-up for the actual summit and the theme is 'Stability Redefined: Who Authors the Future?'

We are convening digitally as I said but this is only to keep the community of Beirut Institute Summit together, and to expand it as well. Normally, we focused on geopolitics but this time we have decided to focus on something really special, which is to discuss basically where we are, to contemplate how much have we been affected in the sphere of culture, identity, education. So it is a great pleasure, an absolute pleasure of mine to have wonderful friends join us and I will start by introducing HE Noura Al Kaabi, she is the UAE Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development and HE Najat Bel Kelkacem was also the first French woman to be appointed Minister of Education and Higher Education and is also the former, she was the Minister of Women's Affairs, yeah good for us. We have Professor Mikhail Piotrovsky, he is the Director of the Hermitage Museum in Petersburg, what a treat to have you with us. And you know, I'm in Beirut and I'm very partial we have the magnificent Nadine Labaki, who is not only a great director and actor, she's also a very special activist and she was the first female director to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film. So as usual welcome everyone, as usual, we will begin with giving you each four minutes to say what you wish to say and then we will engage in a free conversation which I know will be deep and profound. I will start with Noura Al Kaabi please, four minutes to you.

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** Thank you. Thank you Raghida. it's wonderful to be here, to see you again and thank you for including me with individuals that I look up to and they inspire me. I have to mention a fun fact. My first ever trip when I was appointed as a Minister of Culture in 2017 was to St. Petersburg. I visited the beautiful, extraordinary Museum The Hermitage. Of course, we were running, it was literally one day or one night and the Professor was busy but I'm always keen to know more about, you know, the story and the history of that place. And whomever didn't visit St. Petersburg, you need to add it to your bucket list, you're missing a lot. If you're in the UAE, it's just five hours away. Raghida, you know the tagline made me think and contemplate this morning and I had some thoughts with regards to the question of who authors, you know, who authors the future? You know, the first thing that may occur in our mind is, you know, the youth, it might be research, science or artificial intelligence, you know, those kinds of jargons that represents or reflects the future. Yet, I feel that the the past experience is crucial. There are many lessons in history that's, you know, even outdated research is always a future proof, the museum is a future proof, the film that Nadine, you know, directed is a future proof. Stories are an important conduit to empathy, and we live in a time where, thank you so much for adding such segment, into a policy and sometimes a rigid kind of sessions. Yet

we need it more than ever. I read a quote by Ibn Khaldoun, you know, the amazing famous philosopher it was written in 1377, "Throughout history many nations have suffered a physical defeat but that has never marked the end of the nation, but when a nation has become the victim of a psychological defeat then that marks the end of a nation." That by itself is a future-proof. Recently we all saw that there is a surge in certain books that were written decades ago, such as "The Great Influenza" in 2004 by John Barry, and you know it talks about parallels which are relevant today.

If I may add in terms of the realm of work that we do in the UAE, and let's say at the cultural sector, or the educational sector, with myself wearing the hat of working in Zayed University, I never thought that all of a sudden by a click of a button, we'll get 7,000 students to learn remotely. So far it has been successful since March with, you know, we've been trying our best to be flexible when it comes to the grades. We're also adapting new models, adapting how can we bundle education, how can the future be offline/online, how can I have a professor Mikhail give a session to our students, instead of, you know, how can we be more flexible and how can we disrupt the education process and I think this pandemic gave us the opportunity to raise such questions and to act upon them and see how it, you know, how life changes, or education changes, or culture changes. It's more about the experience. Finally, when it comes to culture I think we're all, we're all the same where we are utilizing those digital platforms to communicate and to connect although I feel it's, you know, it's not going always to be there, you know, the way that we feel it will connect us to one another at the end of the day we need to see one another, we need to feel the art, we need to smell or touch it. So I think the senses, our senses, are deprived now when it comes to such elements.

**Raghida Dergham:** Noura Al Kaabi, you mentioned one hat, which is of course the educational one and it's incredibly important and challenging, but you're also if I'm not mistaken I mean, the Minister of Culture, you have the museums, the fabulous energy that Abu Dhabi has given through the museums and I have had the privilege and the honor to have been at the Hermitage, but can you connect on this. Is this as big of a challenge as the Sheikh Zayed University?

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** I think, I mean talking about the museums in the UAE, let's say the Ministry is more of a body, of a federal body. When I go, what I will mention, when we will talk about the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi, the Department of Culture, with the leadership of HE Mohammad Bin Mubarak. They're working in terms of, 'how can we now transform or keep the continuity of an exhibition, or the educational method of whatever that can be provided?' Therefore, you know we're all struggling here with the closure of museums and the limitations of museums. Yet now we're looking at, okay, what are we going to do if we want to capitalize on the content we have and encourage, or enrich the digital content? As you know, as you know today, we, I mean, we said education is all online, but it's all of our, kind of literature online? I don't think so. Are our art pieces with their research online? I don't think. So this is I think an opportunity that The Louvre in Abu Dhabi are working on, they have the culture for everyone as well, there's a platform, there are talks so it's a room of 200 to 2,000 people as a virtual room that is happening every now and then, and it's helping also to spread and connect each other. Yesterday there was a talk and I mentioned to a colleague now it's more of, you're seeing a chat box on the side, so we're talking about a virtual mingle, people are mingling in the chat box as if they're in an event.

**Raghida Dergham:** Very interesting. Najat Belkacem, we will hear from your education but here are your four minutes. Decide how to use it, whether it's for the purpose of speaking about education or about your personal experience in the aftermath of seclusion and the lockdown that we have all had to endure.

**HE Najat Belkacem:** Thank you and let me start by thanking you for inviting me to speak, to share with you some of my experiences. It's true that these times of COVID-19 and lockdown is unique in our history, so I think it's very interesting to take the time to think about it. And I would like to share with you a lot of things which I'm going to try to turn out positively, because now more than ever, we need to project ourselves into the future.

First of all, there is awareness, awareness of the fragility of our system, a system that doesn't recognize the value of what is really essential. Jobs that are undervalued when they are essential to us. A health system that is underfunded and unprepared for pandemics to which researchers were electing us just as they do now for climate change. And maybe in a lot of our countries a deficient industrial arsenal, we lacked of masks, of tests and so on. We are now also aware of the relevance of certain struggles that were dismissed as utopian. I think to overcoming gross inequalities, welcoming aging with dignity, thinking about our common humanity, and the work turning in on ourselves

because the problems that we face now are global and the responses must be global. So why do I say that because in this experience, this awareness led to remarkable acts of solidarity and openness to others during this lockdown. It was not only the frontline workers, an impressive number of people asked themselves what is there in my skills, in my expertise, that I can offer to the others. And the first lesson, that I see is that if in the future, we apply this reflex to the way we live our daily lives, this should greatly improve the well-being of our societies. Another thing, that I found to be really transformative potentially for societies is that although not all jobs can be done remotely, many people, many companies have learned that it's possible to work from home sometimes. And the effect of such a change in practice, if it survives to the lockdown, it is a considerable time saving, from time consuming transport and meetings, that can be easily replaced by emails. This time can benefit to the private sphere but also to the collective sphere, neighborhood, grassroot associations and so on. And finally, the last thing that I see is that, that is what have marked me during this lockdown, is that in most countries around the world choosing to stop economic activity because of the need to people's lives, means that people's lives are valued above all else. This is good news, unprecedented in history, and we must draw the necessary conclusions from it, in all our major recurring debates for example, around refugees. Is it normal to let people die in the Mediterranean Sea because it would cost us economically to assist them? No, it's not normal. So I think reclaiming the cardinal value of human life is one of the essential values that we need to rethink in a number of our policies.

**Raghida Dergham:** Amazing, we have two fantastic interventions so far and I know it's going to continue this way. I'm not going to drag things out of you but I know that you have spoken about the historical dignity Professor and I will give you the four minutes to put to the table what you wish but I have listened to you speak about identity and the memory of wars and the necessity to get over that and go somewhere else. I'm going to leave you four minutes to lay on the table what you wish us to learn from you. And then we'll go to Nadine and we'll engage together afterwards. Please go ahead, four minutes to you.

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** Thank you very much, it's a great pleasure to be here, to be here with you. And it's important that now we are, it's a right time for culture, the world is absolutely unstable, and the big part of this instability is in the minds. And where it is in the minds so here the culture comes. Culture is a medicine, it's a medicine which can cure some of our problems, all these hysterics, panics and so on. And well, we being online in Hermitage, we have got, usually we get 5 million visitors a year, we had 34 million visitors in two months for our website. And people have been writing that they're coming to Hermitage online every day because it helps them to leave from all these isolations inside. So, we can work as a medicine and we show that we are medicine. Another thing now is also that the world is now divided, very much divided, and there's a temptation to stay divided. People want to be alone, countries want to be alone, nations want to be alone, don't touch me, it's better to be isolated. It's a temptation, and for me, culture is a bridge and I'm always saying even before this we have a lot of bridges, economic, political, sometimes they're falling down, sometimes they're exploded their own bridges. We are the bridge which could be exploded, the last one which could be exploded. We have to keep connection with the people when all other things will be, let's say, partly destroyed. So in this thing, in this field, one of the most important things is the identity. We spoke about the flexibility. We must be flexible also in the idea of identity, now in the global world everyone else must have several identities. Citizens of the Russian Federation or one of the Russian nationalities, American or American, Italian-American, Arab-American and so on we know it. Also, identity of nation and religion, Christian, Russian, Muslim Russian, and so on, and so on. So, we have to develop this and the country or the place who they vehicle to explain people that it is beautiful it's beautiful to have different a lot of identities. It is beautiful to have people different from each other. Well difference can be the base of wars and it could be the base for peace and enjoying our joy of being together and being different. One of the most important things in our life is the wars of memory. What we have now in the United States, it's a war of memory. They just remembered the civil war. The Civil War is going on, and we have very clear distinctions which are connected with the Civil War. We had a lot of civil wars and different wars in our history we can remember them and go on fighting, we can try to cover them somehow, to explain them, to study them and to make them history. It's very important for the work of the museum to make all our wars and all our differences a beautiful picture, or history. That's what we are trying to do and it's exactly the thing museums are doing. They bring cultures together and they show that there is no real difference, no real contradiction, it's a pleasure it's a beauty.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much. Now, Nadine Labaki, four minutes to you and I know that you've been inspired already by a lot of what was said but I know that you're coming also with what you want us to hear from you to begin with in your four minutes.

**Nadine Labaki:** First of all, thank you for having me, it's a true honor to be among all of you. To tell you the truth, frankly, personally I have more questions than answers. For me, you know, I feel that this crisis and this pandemic has revealed or unraveled lots of, lots of failures in our systems, the health system especially for us here in Lebanon with the crisis and the revolution. I think that the health system that has been created [inaudible]. So, my big question is, really, what is the responsibility of art, of culture, of education in this new world that we are we are bound to build and to create? Because you know as revolutions and unrest unfold, greed, corruption, excessive consumerism, climate crisis, the unequal distribution of wealth, discrimination, human trafficking, displacement, wars, child labor, poverty, hunger and the list really goes on. The question is, have we learned anything and are we in such a hurry to go back to our old lies ignoring what we have become? Are we, are we exploring alternative systems or we starting to think differently? Are we trying to build a new world? Because frankly for me, this is really the death of a certain kind of world, and the birth of a new world. A new world, of course, where there's equal chances for people in life, there's equal chances in education, there's equality, there's social justice, societal change, good leadership, when there is social social justice and social equality. Are we and really instead of having sort of rivalry between nations, how can arts really inform that and turn it into a collaborative bond between nations? And how does art, and culture, and education really inform policymaking? These are really my questions.

**Raghida Dergham:** I actually have a question, for you Nadine Labaki and it's coming from Former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Kingdom Alistair Burt, he's our friend... "How can your films keep up with what's happening in Lebanon today and where will you see hope as in your previous ones?"

**Nadine Labaki:** Can you can you please I'm sorry can you repeat the question because you were disconnected at some point.

**Raghida Dergham:** "How can your films keep up with what's happening in Lebanon today and where will you see hope as in your previous ones?" Because normally, whatever you've done in the past you saw hope somewhere where will you see hope? That's a question to you Nadine Labaki from Alistair Burt.

**Nadine Labaki:** Well to tell you the truth, for the time being, it's a little bit too early for me to decide, I think and or to be inspired, actually I'm in the most difficult maybe phase of my life, where I'm completely uninspired, maybe because I'm trying to maybe observe what's happening, let everything sink in. I don't have enough distance to tell you the truth, with what's happening, we're all trying you know to do whatever we can, trying as much as I can to use my tool as a filmmaker, to inform some kind of change. I don't know if we would ever be able in such turmoil to change the situation, but at least we are trying to use this tool responsibly and I think this is something that I am understanding more and more as a mission. How do we use communication and this tool which is art more responsibly to inform change? What we're trying to do lately, I mean we've come up with a campaign that encourages people to grow vegetables and food on their back balconies and their rooftops or whatever surface where they can plant things, to encourage or promote the idea of self-sustainability the idea of self-sufficiency. Of course, this is not going to solve the economical crisis we are going through and the political crisis we are going through, but maybe by, you know, empowering people a little bit in introducing their own food or in giving them this this sense of going back to the relationship, to this intimate relationship with nature, going back to the wisdom of nature, maybe trying to learn from nature or from the wisdom of nature. So we do what we can to really cope with the situation and use this medium responsibly.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank You Nadine. Noura Al Kaabi, you have heard really quite profound and really heart to heart conversation so far I think. Do you think stability has got to be looked at, and the stability I don't mean it only, you know, countries' stability, but stability of the mind, stability of works, of being who we are these days, the aftermath of the shock that our bodies and our minds have gone through? You've heard both, well all actually, all of the other speakers, do you want to reflect on what was said and from the angle of stability? I mean do we have to think of alternative systems, when we are looking at all the matters that you all put to the table, be it education, be it child labor, be it refugees... Do we need new prism? New paradigm? Please Noura Al Kaabi.

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** Well I mean, I think you know hearing from Professor Mikhail, Najat and Nadine, we're all kind questioning, I mean we all have those questions, [inaudible] [...] again back to our

normal kind of way of let's say educating it, but I don't think we learned anything, if we go back to the excessive spending and certain I don't know superficial and not necessary stuff that we are hungry to buy or hungry to pursue, or the pace of just flying and running around and trying to meet people back-to-back and maybe harming the environment. I mean we started asking ourselves questions that are pinned with value. What are our values? We need to go back to the values of environmental values, what our values, in terms of coexistence, in terms of respect, in terms of not judging anyone because of their background or faith or race, I mean those feel it's important to educate our kids on values before religion, if religion is an important subject in school. If I'm teaching kids, I mean it's all in the textbook, Raghida. What will define a nation and the future of a nation the textbook, how are they preparing their next generation or the future of that nation who is interconnected. Currently we are interconnected, you said it, from Lebanon, to Russia, to Paris, we're all connected here. So we need to be connected with the values because they are universal values.

**Raghida Dergham:** But I mean, let me go to you Mikhail Piotrovsky. This sounds to me and probably to others who are listening that this is nice, wonderful, good intention by all of you, but the world is ugly. What's happening right now, after what has taken place, wars go on, conflicts continue in fact there are more conflicts within us. Anticipation and the waiting have been very costly, so how, you have spoken about in the past, you have spoken about what you called 'the Dialogue of Cultures' and I was wondering if this is possible only through the world of culture, through people like you, all of you. Or is it possible in other means, by other means, amongst other people, particularly the politicians. What do you do? Are you our Saviors? Because the politicians are at it, the war lords are fighting...

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** We are not that saviors, but the culture and museums are saviors because there is a mechanism, we can't go to change everything, but there are certain mechanisms which help to make people peaceful and make peace between the cultures. Now which I see it was yesterday, once again big discussion about Istanbul and Aya Sofia, to close the museum and to make it back a mosque, it was a church before.

**Raghida Dergham:** That's right.

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** So, when it was a church, it became a mosque, and then Ataturk made it a museum. So, as a museum, it can be, you can have Christians praying there, Muslims praying there and this museum which brings cultures together. And so, if you become back a church, "once again let's put a cross in Saint Sofia", this again a base for different, not differences, fighting morally but in the real way. So, it's a one mechanism. Another mechanism, they took sometimes we have to enforce understanding of difference of cultures. It's a more complicated story, we all know well, Daesh destroying Palmyra and destroying Timbuktu. We all know that it's not for the first time, before Christians have been destroying the sculptures of Greek and Roman sculptures, we had Protestants destroying pictures of Virgin Mary, we had Bolsheviks in Russia destroying churches...

All this was based on idea: "it's my heritage, I changed, now I hate my old heritage." So, there is an issue, is the world heritage yours or is it the heritage of all mankind? Have you arrived to destroy something which belongs to you from your family, something if it is beautiful and good for others, or you don't have this right? It's not an issue for today I think that we, the world has to interfere because of Timbuktu, because of Palmyra, because of Bamiyan, but it's a question to be discussed. I think it's one of these new ethics which we have to develop and to have a, you know, well one or a joint point of the view.

**Raghida Dergham:** In one sentence, who is responsible for making that happen in the first place? Is it government or is it arts, is it the people?

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** I think it's people through the arts. I think art can educate people, art can educate governors. Not always but we try to do this. You know, I think yesterday was, I was discussing one of [inaudible], Nicolas the First, [inaudible] and some of good things of the towers because of this education run by the poet. Poet's words must try to educate people and rulers through journalism, through newspapers, through television and through the internet. Internet which really is a tool for both sides, it could be true for anything.

**Raghida Dergham:** Najat, I want to go back to you in your capacity, you served as Minister of Education and I want to ask a specific question about education. What education is needed to guarantee the progress of a country? You know what is it, what sort of education is needed in order to safeguard the continuity of countries beyond governments. I mean sometimes, and Nadine might

relate to that very strongly because we in Lebanon we are having a very difficult time with our government but we insist on our country. So I want to give you the floor first Najat and then I want Nadine to come in on this, if you wouldn't mind. Go ahead, Najat.

**HE Najat Belkacem:** I just would like to say that for me, obviously there are two things that can help us change the world and face the difficult challenges that we have to face, climate change, social inequalities, gender inequalities and so on... These two things are Education and Culture, because it is the two things that really can change the mentalities and the way we see the world and the things. So Noura said it, but yes education we need to teach more empathy to our children, more openness to the world, more ability to cooperate but we also need to help them to find their place in the workplace and because we know that unemployed people are a risk for society so we know today that the workplace will be shaped by the current revolution of automation, artificial intelligence, and so on. We know that about 30% of tasks of jobs will be automated within the next 10 years so I am ready to prepare our children to develop the good skills to be able to find their place. That means that we have to teach them technical knowledge, strong skills, but for example coding but also soft skills non-technical skills such as the ability to work in a team. That's the first thing for me that is very important and the second thing, is that we have to understand that our current model where by people graduate from school or university and then advance in their careers without ever returning to the classroom. This model is no longer really bad changes in the workplace require that the development of skilled human capital is an iterative process. In other words, governments need to invest in lifelong learning because tomorrow's workers will need to acquire new skills at different points in their career. So I think there is this three thing to do to see very quickly now in all our countries, how do we prepare our children with more empathy, and openness, and soft skills, and technical skills? How do we help them find their place in the workplace and how do we really have lifelong training?

**Raghida Dergham:** Now, Najat. This I'm sure has left Nadine thinking very strongly and sadly probably about the state of education here in Lebanon but Nadine, go ahead, it's probably painful to think that kids here may not be able to go back to school. Go ahead, reflect on this for me please.

**Nadine Labaki:** It's very painful to know that kids here in Lebanon unfortunately don't have the same, the same equal right to education, they don't have the same access to education, unfortunately depending on your background, depending on where you come from, depending on so many different parameters you don't have the same, you don't have the same education. My dream is to you know live in a country where everybody can have the same, exactly the same, right to education where because unfortunately, of course, there are public schools in Lebanon, but we have to look at the fact that actually it's not really, it's not really free education, you have to pay for transportation, you have to pay for, you know, the books and notepad, notebooks and everything and your classroom, and so many, many, many children don't end up going to school, and many parents don't end up sending their kids to school because it's costs money. So unfortunately, I dream, of course, of a day where you know school is free for everyone and everybody has the same standards in education because this is not the case and it's not only the case in Lebanon, it's the case in many other countries in the world. We have to get to a point where everybody has the same right to the same education, and then of course, we have to, the way that the curriculum is right now, it's not really catering to our needs. It's not really catering to our children's needs. We have to have to have a completely you know alternative way of thinking we have to introduce more art, we have to introduce more music, more theatre maybe, we have to introduce empowerment, we have to change so many things in our systems. And I don't think it is, the way it's going right now it's not catering to our children's needs anymore.

**Raghida Dergham:** Nadine, just to follow up, what is education that is needed in order to guarantee the progress of the country? In this case your country, my country, Lebanon. What sort of education is needed in order to guarantee the progress, rather than the downfall, which is probably, we are about to sink in? In a sentence or two please...

**Nadine Labaki:** It's an education where art is much more present. It's an education where we give much more importance to building a personality, to building a human being, more than you know building his academic level. It's more an education where, of course, there's more values you can, I mean, there's a complete way of looking at education that needs to be considered now that needs to be rethought. You know, it's more about, I don't know exactly the right answers right now but definitely art should be more and more introduced. You know art is as a brain synchronizer. Art can actually

ignite empathy. And we are wired for empathy, human beings are wired for empathy. We just have to find ways to just develop it more and to introduce it more, to make it more accessible to children, to listen more to our children's talents. Maybe to cater more to our children's needs and talents. I mean it's a completely alternative way of looking at education. I think that it needs to be, it needs to be rethought. I don't have you know, I haven't thought of the whole, the whole, you know, all the answers to that. But I think art is one of the very, very important things that needs to be more introduced in our curriculums.

**Raghida Dergham:** I want to go back with Noura Al Kaabi to what Mikhail said earlier about identity. I want to talk about the issue of identity and versus, again I heard clearly what you said Mikhail, but what do you do with nationalism? We have an epidemic of nationalism basically, you know, a pandemic almost, really, I don't want to do to overstate it. But we have a problem in this world these days, the identity or identifying on the level of nationalism, has created many problems. Maybe if you look at what's happening in the United States, we can see that there is deep division and that is again because of identity. Is there, Noura Al Kaabi, something that we can do about it in order to make it more positive than negative? Can you reflect on this issue? Because I mean I like that our conversation is focused on education and the arts but we live in this real world I'm trying, I keep trying to drag you back to it unfortunately, to the ugliness of it, but it is a fact we are living in a very difficult time, because, and one of the contributors to that is the issue of identity. Noura Al Kaabi, do you want to reflect on that?

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** Yeah sure. I mean going back to Nadine's point with regards to arts and empathy, I totally agree. I think I believe empathy is the engine of change and the moment empathy is the base of what we do in schools and our government, and in whatever we're doing in this universe, I think empathy is the key for us to understand one another and that takes us to the point of nationalism and racism and what we're seeing across, not just in the U.S., I mean let's not kid ourselves, racism is everywhere, everywhere. And surprisingly, and unfortunately with what happened in the U.S., I saw that there are many great stories coming out from this part of the world. How can we ourselves learn from others? How can we not start smearing or saying, "oh wow, that works for the land of whatever it is?" I mean let's all go back to where we are right now, we're all confined into our homes because we're all equal, when it comes to confronting a scare which is the crisis of COVID-19, so there is no difference if I am whatever ways I am, if I come from a wealthy background or a poor background, we have this kind of a feeling that is a base that is connecting us. And when it comes to the equality point, what also Nadine mentioned when it comes to education, the epidemic is amplifying how systems work in each country, when it comes to access of education, arts and culture. Now when we go to your point of nationalism and how can we work on fixing our own problems, we always need to start with ourselves and we always need to ask ourselves questions, how can I get children, how I can get, you know, a population, that is enjoying coexistence, that is respecting one another? It all falls back in terms of what are the values that are stemming from the leadership.

Whatever political system you have, I think any political system has to have a manifesto that respects those values. I mean going back to my story, I studied in a private school, my mother got me out of the private school to a government school. She said "your Arabic has to be better than your English", and of course the Arabic language is also a totally different kind of also subject, if we're going to talk about education. So I continued my elementary school studies in a public school and the best part was all of my classmates were from either Egypt, or Syria, or Lebanon. I had few classmates from the UAE because we were in a neighborhood that has more of different nationalities than the other neighborhoods. And I was in that school because my mother was then the principal, of course it wasn't a good experience, you being the daughter of the principal, yet, in high school my dialect, wasn't Emirati, so I was kind of bullied in high school because they thought, they thought that, they were they're asking me why am I speaking, why am I choosing certain words. Yet, they are my friends, I mean it was a kind of a friendly bully, it wasn't it didn't, you know, it's not something that is long-lasting. Yet, I feel going back to work, we work with different nationalities, I had bosses from different nationalities, Raghida, this is the norm in my country. This is the norm in the UAE. I mean last year we announced the Abrahamic family house. So now as an Emirati I know there will be a synagogue, a church and a mosque the same block. There will be, there will be encouragement of let's do more and there will be resistance, you know not everyone is the same. Yet, how can you always push for a better change because you know at the end what would prevail is the unity and humanity, that is above everything. And going back it's the school, it's the system. it's the leadership, it's the policies in a country. It's how are we also treating one another, I mean currently, sorry the last thing that I want to point out, is that we're looking at the statistics of the volunteers here in the UAE and I was surprised to see more than 130 nationalities, different nationalities, are volunteers in the

UAE. I mean that by itself makes us feel lucky that we have such individuals living with us and considering UAE as home.

**Raghida Dergham:** Absolutely, now I have a very interesting question to all of you and what's interesting is that I'm going to ask this question first to the Professor. So the question is from Liane Ghussaine, and she is from Palestine and she is saying the following, she's saying "How can we make Arabic sexy again? How can we make Arabic sexy again?" Is it through re-education? I want you all to answer that in one minute, one minute each please because I have another important question. I am going to start with Professor Piotrovsky because, for those who don't know, he is the very renowned and master of Arabic. He's an Orientalist and he speaks beautiful Arabic. Alright Mikhail Piotrovsky, can Arabic be sexy again?

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** I think Arabic is sexy, and do you know, Oriental faculty, I have a lot of people who are studying Arabic because it's a sexy and fantastic language and it's a fantastic subject. And it's very important that everybody knows this and understand this and people do feel once the same thing. Different is beautiful. We must say black is beautiful, black is beautiful but different is beautiful. We have to cultivate our differences, and this is the point of, the main point of all, humanistic studies, study the differences which are beautiful, so Arabic, was, is and will be sexy. It's a great culture, great language...

**Raghida Dergham:** I agree with you, I like it because I write it and I speak it and I have lived in the States for over 40 years and it remains in my blood and it's a beautiful language and it is sexy. What do you think Najat Belkacem, is Arabic sexy or do you need to make it sexy again? How?

**HE Najat Belkacem:** I don't think you need to make it sexy again. What I think is that the best way to make people discover it is music. Please create music with Arabic language.

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes, I agree. Yeah beautiful. Nadine Labaki, you also work with Arabic language, give us your take.

**Nadine Labaki:** I think it's by changing our archaic way of teaching it, that's the biggest problem. The way that we are teaching this language is truly archaic. And you know teaching is a mission, teaching is a gift, and if more and more teachers start dealing with this as a mission, I think it can change a lot the way children perceive this language and the way children will start to fall in love with this language. It's really about how we are teaching; it's really about how our teachers are teaching this language.

**Raghida Dergham:** Noura Al Kaabi, is Arabic, does Arabic need to be sexed up or not?

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** There has to be a huge facelift in the way we teach Arabic. I was having a discussion with the professor of Arabic language at Zayed University and she was questioning, why do we teach kids and first grade the word "استيقظ" and you know, it's a very difficult word you can use قام or more of a delicate word. So, this goes back to the way we teach Arabic, let me just highlight one point, we need to also take steps of how can we disrupt that way. How can we, so therefore in the Ministry of Culture, we have been working on a survey that looks into feedback from students, from individuals who are even you know graduates about the way Arabic is taught, the way it's used in the media, the way we want we see Arabic that is as a preferred language, they like the language but we all agree that the teaching tool or the way of teaching Arabic needs to be adapted in a new model. Going back to also to the point of songs, I think having content creators like Nadine, having content creators, who are, who understand kids' content. Kids content is not the easiest content, it's the most difficult content, it requires science, psychology understanding the colors, the music, so it's it's a total kind of a different science built into it to start education, educating our kids when it comes to this language that should be a simple, beautiful language rather than heavy. Well, will they will end up watching YouTube and Sesame Street and Pippa Pig instead of our content.

**Raghida Dergham:** So now I have to ask, I'm going to ask a question to all four of you, and I'm going to go in the reverse order of how I started and you have less than a minute each, please not more, less than a minute each. And my question is: What's your next next? What's your state of mind now? Is it a sigh or is it a scream? I start with you Nadine Labaki.

**Nadine Labaki:** It's a huge scream, it's a scream that I hope will resonate very loudly. Yeah, I mean the state is really anger, the state is anger with what's happening in the world, and what's happening in Lebanon more specifically, with what the government is doing, with what the government is actually not doing, with the corruption, with the laziness... I mean unfortunately the state of mind now, is anger.

**Raghida Dergham:** Mikhail Piotrovsky, is it a sigh or scream?

**Prof. Mikhail Piotrovsky:** I think it's a scream but it's a scream of orders for everybody: let's do this let's do that, let's do that! Now that we know a lot of things which we should do, in Russia, in museums, in the world. So, let's scream, let's do this! Thank you.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you Najat Belkacem, what's your next next? Is it a sigh or scream?

**HE Najat Belkacem:** Well I try to be hopeful, you know, because, you know, you told us let us not be naïve and you're right but I really think that this experience that we just had of the lockdown and the COVID-19 crisis, is so important because it changed a lot of views of a lot of people. For the first time in their life they were, you know, they had the same constraints that so many people in the world such as refugees who cannot go where they want to go. So when you are locked down you are constrained. When you are facing the COVID-19 or pandemic, you are angry and you fear for your family and all these experiences, you can do them even if you are rich or you are poor and for me it changes a lot of minds and even if there is this risk of populism, that you said, a lot of people understood during this crisis that the virus doesn't know any border. So I think there are ways to transform this experience in a very positive thing: to fight inequalities.

**Raghida Dergham:** Finish your sentence to fight, I interrupted you, go ahead.

**HE Najat Belkacem:** To fight especially social inequality.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much Najat Belkacem, Noura AL Kaabi, again your next next and how are you feeling sigh or scream?

**HE Noura Al Kaabi:** I think none. I'm still in a processing mode. I think this is how I feel, this is the way we carry out our work every day, our day, it's continued to process and I think it's you know we, you know, we do have such moments of feeling you know powerless and we're all powerless. Yet, with small steps but big ones I believe we can all have an impact. And then at the end, what did we learn but what did we make sure that we are working towards, how are we implementing the change that we want to see?

**Raghida Dergham:** What a treat this has been, to be the all four of you but before I let you go, let me announce who would we have next week. It's not going to be as beautiful, as pretty, because this has been a beautiful conversation and it made me think of tomorrow in a bit more hopeful way, and I agree with what practically everything you all said, especially about the issue of music, I think this is one language that unites us in the final analysis and also arts and I guess when people like Nadine Labaki make movies, they combine both. So let me announce who's going to be next week, it's going to be hardcore geopolitics, my guests, next Wednesday at the same time, is His Excellency Elliott Abrams is the United States Special Representative for Venezuela, I have Brian Hook United States Special Representative for Iran, so as you know there's a lot of Iran-Venezuela conversation going on right now and from Lebanon, I have the former Minister of Economy, and trade and he was also former Minister of Industry and Vice Governor of the BDL and that is Nasser Saidi, and I have Noura Muller who is the Executive Director of Körber-Stiftung and quite a magnificently smart woman, she'll handle all these men very well. Now I want to thank you for this treat. This has really been very special for me to have you all... Noura Al Kaabi, you honor me always by being at Beirut Institute in your own capital. Thank you for embracing Beirut, thank you for embracing Beirut Institute Noura Al Kaabi, you have really brought us together to, in a different direction, that I hope I could continue for always because we can think together, and we can be global. We're not only regional, we're not only local, but we are global. Thank you so much Noura Al Kaabi, thank you so much Najat Belkacem, join us next March, God willing and Nadine Labaki, we have had the pleasure of honoring you and the privilege of honoring you at Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi last year but and you were also in one of the panels in the first summit so come again, please we'll meet you in March in Abu Dhabi. Professor Piotrovsky, I have been a great admirer of yours. I've seen you speak at the Valdai Club

and I've been pursuing you and saying you must come to the Summit now I got you, digitally. Thank you very. I wait for you in Abu Dhabi. Thank you all very much. Thank you for joining us have a wonderful afternoon and until we meet again. Goodbye. Thank you thank you, thank you.