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**Volume One December 2014**

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**Guest Editorial**  
**Dr Lezlee Brown Halper**





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# CONTRIBUTORS

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## Guest Editorial

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## Gandhi's Jesus

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<https://www.facebook.com/GandhisMegaSymbol>



## Regarding Rights - Centre for International Governance and Justice at the Australian National University

**Dr. Benjamin Authers & Dr. Emma Larking in an interview**

Under the auspices of Professor Hilary Charlesworth's ARC Laureate Fellowship Project. Regarding Rights provides a forum for voices from activism and academia to comment on important issues in human rights. The editors are Benjamin Authers and Emma Larking, who are both postdoctoral fellows on 'Strengthening the international human rights system'.



## Are we ready for 'disaster drones'? Legal Questions and Challenges

**Camilla R Barker FRSA**

Barker's LLM (Harvard), LLB (Lond)) main research enquiries involve international law and humanitarian assistance with a particular focus on questions relating to the extent to which international humanitarian law can and should be used to develop obligations applicable to assistance in times of natural disaster. She is supervised by Catherine Redgwell, Chichele Professor of Public International Law and Fellow at All Souls College. In the summer of 2014, Camilla was a Scholar in Residence at NYU School of Law. Contact details and published work can be found at: [LINK](#)



## The Emergence of Ethnic Consciousness

**Dr Daya Somasundaram**

Daya received the Commonwealth Scholarship in 1988 and fellowship of the Institute of International Education's Scholars Rescue Fund in 2006-07; Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal Australian, New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists. Author of *Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact of War on Sri Lankan Tamils* describes the psychological effects of war on individuals. He has co-authored *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka: An Inside Account*. [www.sagepub.in](http://www.sagepub.in)

## Celebrating 5 years 2010-2014



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## The Challenge of Islam

**Dr. Ivo Coelho**

Coelho earned his PhD in philosophy from the Gregorian University, Rome. He is Reader in Gnoseology and Metaphysics at Divyadaan: Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nashik, India; editor of *Divyadaan - Journal of Philosophy and Education*. He has been director of the Institutum Theologicum Salesianum, Ratisbonne Monastery, Jerusalem, and currently a member of the governing body of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Rome. He is the author of *Hermeneutics and Method: The 'Universal Viewpoint'* in Bernard Lonergan. [www.divyadaan.in](http://www.divyadaan.in)



## The struggle against ISIS in historical perspective

**David Morgan**

Morgan has been a journalist for thirty years and specialises in political commentary on Turkey and the Kurds. He has worked with the [Peace in Kurdistan Campaign](#) for over 15 years and taken part in several delegations to Kurdistan and Turkey. He has written widely on Turkish, Kurdish and other issues. The views expressed in the article are his own and not those of Peace in Kurdistan or any Kurdish organisations.



## High-Stakes Elections in Tunisia

**Hamza Meddeb**

Meddeb is a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence. He is currently studying the political transition in Tunisia with a specific focus on social in-justice and the emergence of transactional politics between Islamists and secularists. His publications include "L'ambivalence de la course à el khobza. Obéir et se révolter en Tunisie" (Politique Africaine, 121/2011) and "The politics of waiting: youth, Islamists and the government of inequality in Tunisia" (EUI working paper, October 2014). [www.peacebuilding.no](http://www.peacebuilding.no)



## Hamartia and The Indian Media

**Sangita P. Menon Malhan**

Malhan is a Delhi-based former journalist. She worked at the Delhi Mid Day, The Statesman, and The Times of India, before turning to creative writing. Her short stories - *Rastapherian's Tales* - were published in 2010 by the Writers Workshop. Arshia Publications brought out her Urdu poems entitled Nusrat-e-Gham (*The Triumph of Grief*) in 2012. Prior to this, she was a national gliding champion, and acquired a Private Pilot's Licence. Currently, she is a freelance editor and translator; and she teaches French.



## 2014 - Another Year of Living Foolishly?

**Mark Ulyseas**

This essay was written and published in 2008. Since then I have updated it every year. Except for a few lines here and there the basic essay has remained in its original form. It is a reminder to us that the *inhumanity of humanity* has not changed. In fact it appears to be growing in intensity. Sadly the more things change, the more they remain the same.





Photograph of Tibetan monk © Jill Gocher  
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### **Dr Lezlee Brown Halper**

Research Associate at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge  
Tibet scholar and co-author of Tibet – An Unfinished Story

Shocking acts of terrorism have flooded the airwaves this year, but that should not distract us celebrating democracy's determined progress in places from Burma to Tunisia, to Egypt and even.... Hong Kong.

Setting aside decades of military rule, Burma will hold democratic elections near year. Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi and other political rivals have joined President Thein Sein to push for more transparent and representative government throughout the country and for a cessation of sectarian and religious violence. There is widespread speculation—both within and outside of Burma, that with modest constitutional changes over the coming year, Ms. Suu Kyi, who spent 15 years under house arrest could become the next president...something that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. While democratization is a complex process, and ethnic tensions remain a challenge, the “freedom and democracy” Suu Kyi has dreamed of may soon be a reality for the Burmese people.

In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, democracy is also beginning to take hold. The region was convulsed on September 17, 2011 when Mohamed Bouazizi, a young fruit and vegetable seller, poured a can of petrol over himself and lit a match. Local protests became national protests amidst a harsh security crackdown and social media did the rest. It has taken three years for normality to return and only on October 24, 2014 were Parliamentary elections held. Particularly telling was the phone call made by the leader of the moderate Islamist Ennahda party to the opposition leader of Nidaa Tounes (Tunisian Call) to congratulate him on his Parliamentary success. Presidential elections are to follow.

Today, some six decades after the area was conquered, and after many years of efforts by Beijing to repopulate the area with ethnic Chinese, Tibet remains un-won. And China, usually so adroit at avoiding diplomatic reversals, has drawn global condemnation for its policies in Tibet, even while so little progress is made there. Tibetan resistance to the Beijing-sponsored Han culture has been paralleled over the past half century by a deep sympathy for traditional Tibet in the West. This has introduced a new and different dimension to China's Tibet problem.

There is hope that the lessons of Tunisia's seedling democracy may inform Egypt's difficult transition which has been racked by violence as the Muslim Brotherhood was replaced by the Al-Sisi secular government. But with conflict on the Gaza border and in the Sinai, and ISIL on the offensive in the region, Cairo's way forward is not uncomplicated.

Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, however, is encouraging. It has shown remarkable courage and determination and offers what seems the first step in democratizing China. The protests are an astonishing sight given China's blunt authoritarian governance which routinely quells democratic expressions in other parts of the country. In 2010 there were an estimated 180,000 protests and riots in China- about 500 a day- that figure is probably higher today - all of which have been met by police force. Hong Kong, now the center of global attention, is a different situation. Hong Kong's movement, called the Occupy Central Generation, is largely comprised of young people, committed to confronting Beijing's iron hand to force China to adhere to its commitment to allow full, fair and transparent elections for the city's Chief Executive in 2017. It is Beijing attempt to rewrite the rules that has prompted the weeks-long protests that have brought this global financial center to a stand-still.

What are Beijing's options? The continuing protests pose a serious conundrum for the government. If the protesters succeed, the precedent would challenge the regime and the Party's power in every corner of China's political space. If force is used to disband the protesters, a Tiananmen label would be applied to Mr. Xi Jinping leading to global estrangement. Regardless of what Beijing may have had in mind when the original agreement was made in 1997, it cannot now tolerate a humiliating public retreat. Likewise, as stalemate brings frustration and the Party's 'iron fist' becomes more apparent in Hong Kong, the 'cross-straits' equation is being re-examined in Taipei.

A majority of Taiwanese now believe that Beijing will neither respect its commitment to the 'one country, two systems' concept, nor will it allow Taiwan to further establish itself on the global stage. Hong Kong has put the legitimacy of China's soft power story in play. And in that sense, success for the protesters in Hong Kong could be catastrophic for Beijing domestically and internationally. A 'ripple effect' could easily stimulate support for the democracy activists and also animate separatist movements in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia. An independent-minded Hong Kong would be a beacon to democrats all over China, to say nothing of Southeast Asia. Democracy movements in Guangdong would be strengthened and Beijing is especially fearful that disputants in Xinjiang and Tibet could take heart that their appeals for autonomy might still be heard.

Like the fruit vendor in Tunisia, 133 Tibetans have self - immolated since 2009. This is an act of desperate by people without hope. In Lhasa, the People's Liberation Army occupation grinds on, and

Western infatuation with the Tibetan myth has enabled Tibetans to exercise a unique soft power - the power of moral condemnation - which Beijing can neither control nor ameliorate. It is a soft power that has raised profound questions about the values that inform Chinese society and governance. Most vexing for Beijing, it has slowed China's progress on the world stage. Speaking in Britain in 2012 The Dalai Lama said that: "China has to go along with world trends. That's democracy, liberty, individual freedom. China sooner or later has to go that way. It cannot go backward."

the world watches as the PLA patrols the streets armed with fire extinguishers ready to douse self-immolators protesting Beijing's rule.

This was not what Mao envisioned when he sent his People's Liberation Army to invade Tibet in 1950. He knew the move posed a complex political and military challenge, but he hoped a quick success would secure the tiny nation for China before the West could rise to support any Tibetan resistance.

Beijing has poured billions of dollars of development money into Tibet in an attempt to shift attention from its systematic deconstruction of Tibetan culture. Though the Dalai Lama's likeness cannot be displayed and other cultural expressions have been banned, roads and rail services have been improved. Hot water is now commonplace and housing and schools have been modernized in the larger cities where most of the Han Chinese live. Naturally, these rapid changes have introduced tensions within Tibetan society, as some seek to benefit from the 'opportunities' Beijing presents - business licenses, municipal jobs etc.-- while others in villages and settlements across Tibet struggle to limit the erosion of their heritage.

Today, some six decades after the area was conquered, and after many years of efforts by Beijing to repopulate the area with ethnic Chinese, Tibet remains un-won. And China, usually so adroit at avoiding diplomatic reversals, has drawn global condemnation for its policies in Tibet, even while so little progress is made there. Tibetan resistance to the Beijing-sponsored Han culture has been paralleled over the past half century by a deep sympathy for traditional Tibet in the West. This has introduced a new and different dimension to China's Tibet problem. Western infatuation with the Tibetan myth has enabled Tibetans to exercise a unique soft power - the power of moral condemnation - which Beijing can neither control nor ameliorate. It is a soft power that has raised profound questions about the values that inform Chinese society and governance. Most vexing for Beijing, it has slowed China's progress on the world stage.

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The flickering light in Tunis has become a beacon for the region offering direction even to Egypt in the midst of deeply troubling times. Hong Kong, now a festival of light, further illuminates the desperate trade-offs infusing authoritarian rule - how to balance public perception, authoritarian values and public security. China is moving slowly, inexorably, reluctantly - toward greater openness. We must hope this comes in time to preserve the unique Tibetan and Uighur cultures barely surviving under the PLA's hob-nailed boot.



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Peter Gonsalves

# Gandhi and the Popes

From Pius XI to Francis

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# GANDHI'S JESUS

Dr Peter Gonsalves

This article is an extract from the author's forthcoming book, **Gandhi and the Popes** (Peter Lang, 2015).

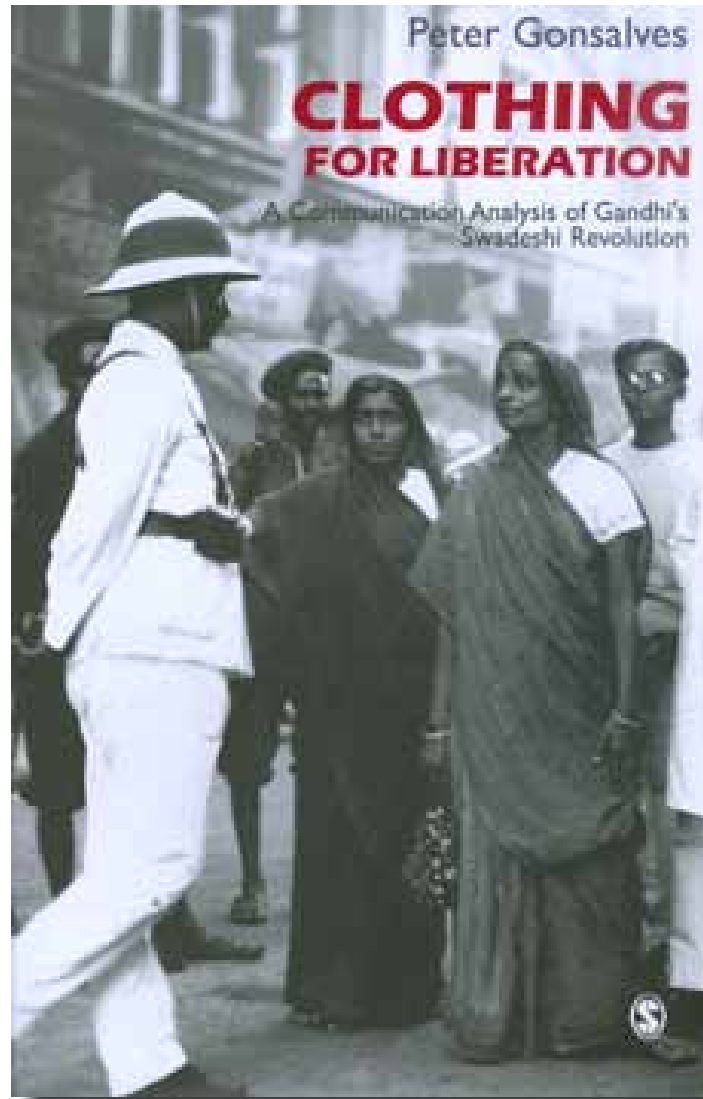
It is the last of his Gandhian trilogy, preceded by *Clothing for Liberation* (Sage 2010) and *Khadi: Gandhi's Mega Symbol of Subversion* (Sage 2012)

A study of the writings of recent popes shows that they voluntarily placed on record their esteem for Gandhi by citing his radical way of living Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the teeth of his struggle with imperialists who ostensibly professed Christianity.

When Paul VI wrote a letter to the President of India in 1969, he said, "One cannot forget Gandhi's profound admiration and esteem for the person of Jesus Christ, whose Sermon on the Mount greatly influenced his own thought and action."<sup>1</sup> In 1986, John Paul II read aloud the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount at Gandhi's tomb as if to remind the world that they were the words "with which the Mahatma was very familiar and in which he found the confirmation of the deep thoughts of his heart."<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI's reply to a question on inter-religious dialogue in 2008, drew attention to the impact of Christ's Sermon on Gandhi yet again.

Exponents of non-Christian religions have said to me: the presence of Christianity is a reference point for us that helps us, even if we do not convert. Let us think of the great figure of Mahatma Gandhi: although he remained firmly bound to his own religion, the Sermon on the Mount was a fundamental reference point for him which shaped his whole life. Thus, the leaven of [Christian] faith, even if it did not convert him to Christianity, entered his life.<sup>3</sup>

As a boy, Gandhi was unable to bear the sight of street-corner missionaries preaching against Hindus and their gods. He was repulsed by the attitude of Christian converts who took to eating beef, drinking liquor, wearing Western attire, denigrating the religion of their ancestors and despising traditional customs and their country. Only when he landed in England as a student of law did he encounter Christians of a different ilk. The first vegetarian Christian he met patiently showed him that meat-eating and liquor-drinking were not biblical regulations.



Indeed, Gandhi felt drawn to the life and teachings of Jesus. Books have been written on the subject by several authors, especially by those in the West.<sup>4</sup> One book, *The Message of Jesus Christ*, which was a compilation of his thoughts on Christianity, was assembled by his followers and even published under his supervision.<sup>5</sup> Although the popes' statements about the 'Jesus effect' on Gandhi are based on historical evidence, we still ought to examine the *nature* and *extent* of the effect, and the reaction it had on his contemporaries.

### Early Christian Impressions

As a boy, Gandhi was unable to bear the sight of street-corner missionaries preaching against Hindus and their gods. He was repulsed by the attitude of Christian converts who took to eating beef, drinking liquor, wearing Western attire, denigrating the religion of their ancestors and despising traditional customs and their country. Only when he landed in England as a student of law did he encounter Christians of a different ilk. The first vegetarian Christian he met patiently showed him that meat-eating and liquor-drinking were not biblical regulations. He advised him to read the Bible to discover more. Gandhi confessed that he "plodded through [the Old Testament] ... with much difficulty without the least interest or understanding."<sup>6</sup> The New Testament, however, produced a different impression and the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapters 5 to 7, went straight to his heart.<sup>7</sup> The figure that attracted him most was the person of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

In South Africa, one of the sources that introduced him to a deeper understanding of the Sermon was Leo Tolstoy's book that took its title from the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 17, verse 21, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.<sup>12</sup> Tolstoy explained that Christianity was founded on a non-violent ethic that was active, not passive. A passive non-violence abstained from doing harm to others. An active non-violence resisted violence through non-violent ways. This meant doing good to those who hate, walking the extra mile and loving one's adversary.

"I saw that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted to live a Christian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me."<sup>9</sup> The call to turn the other cheek 'delighted him beyond measure.'<sup>10</sup> He could not help comparing it with the Gita because, "[it] echoed something I had learnt in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted up to in the daily life around me."<sup>11</sup>

In South Africa, one of the sources that introduced him to a deeper understanding of the Sermon was Leo Tolstoy's book that took its title from the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter 17, verse 21, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.<sup>12</sup> Tolstoy explained that Christianity was founded on a non-violent ethic that was active, not passive. A passive non-violence abstained from doing harm to others. An active non-violence resisted violence through non-violent ways. This meant doing good to those who hate, walking the extra mile and loving one's adversary. The conclusion of the book provided the punchline: "The only meaning of man's life consists in serving the world by cooperating in the establishment of the Kingdom of God."<sup>13</sup> It challenged Gandhi's Hindu understanding of the ways to *moksha*.<sup>14</sup> He began to reinterpret the concept of the *karma marg* in the Bhagavad Gita as selfless service to the underprivileged (*seva*) and not merely as selfless-action. He considered social service the supreme way to attain moksha, in comparison to the ways of individual enlightenment (*jnana marg*) and personal devotion (*bhakti marg*).<sup>15</sup> Tolstoy's book so 'overwhelmed'<sup>16</sup> him that he translated it into his native Gujarati, made it his *vademecum*, initiated a correspondence with Tolstoy, and suggested it as compulsory reading for his followers at the Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm.

He was also brought under the "magic spell"<sup>17</sup> of John Ruskin's *Unto this Last*<sup>18</sup> – a book that drew inspiration from Christ's parable of the vineyard in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Chapter 20, verses 1 to 14. The parable refers to the 'last' as the labourers who, despite being recruited at the day's end, received the full day's wage just like the average labourer. Ruskin's essay was critical of the capitalist bourgeois economists of the 18th and 19th centuries who were unfair to the weaker sections of society and who in turn were often unable to obtain a decent living wage because they lacked opportunities or skills. It brought about "an instantaneous and practical transformation"<sup>19</sup> in Gandhi's life. He translated it in 1908 under the title, *Sarvodaya* (well-being of all). He even practised the equal wage system at his Phoenix Settlement where each inmate received the same salary without distinction of function, race or nationality. The book was an essential influence in his elaboration of an Indian theory of equality linked to social economy.<sup>20</sup>

By his own admission through emotive language,<sup>21</sup> it is evident that Christ's teaching and example did have an *effect* on Gandhi's own thinking. It was *caused directly* by his reading of the Gospels or *indirectly* through Christ-inspired literature and witnesses who lived their Christian faith.

I have not been able to see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavad Gita. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the Bhagavad Gita reduces to a scientific formula. [...] Today, supposing I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita.<sup>27</sup>

### Christ's Teachings through Hindu Eyes

However impressive Christ's influence might have been on Gandhi, it would be a misconception to think that he imbibed what he read univocally and exclusively. Much like the influence of all other scriptures, he adopted and creatively adapted what he read while adhering firmly to the Hindu religious framework.<sup>22</sup> His dedication to the *Advaita* School gave him the sense of unity and coherence that he relentlessly sought. Consider, for example, this statement on the Sermon.

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that [what] was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me.<sup>23</sup>

These euphoric expressions seemed grossly exaggerated to his Christian acquaintances. Yet, his emphasis on the symbolic rather than the historical was in line with Hindu oral tradition that was often misunderstood by the rationally inclined Western mind.<sup>24</sup> Gandhi found value even in interpreting Hindu myths despite their lack of historical accuracy.<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, the ambiguity of his hermeneutical approach to religious literature also disturbed Hindu orthodoxy when he judged their beliefs by the same yardstick.

My Rama, the Rama of our prayers is not the historical Rama, the son of Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn, the one without a second [...] who belongs equally to all.<sup>26</sup>

Or again:

I have not been able to see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavad Gita. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the Bhagavad Gita reduces to a scientific formula. [...] Today, supposing I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita.<sup>27</sup>

And more brazenly:

The Mahabharata is the story of a bloody war. But I have maintained in the teeth of orthodox Hindu opposition that it is a book written to establish the futility of war and violence.<sup>28</sup>

Another aspect of Christianity that attracted Gandhi was the Crucifix, the symbol of Jesus' non-violent submission to suffering love. He probably saw in the Cross the apotheosis of his own life: to be semi-nude and 'nailed' to an excruciating *tapasya* (austerity) for the liberation of oppressed peoples, beginning with his own.



This scrutiny of religions according to his own hermeneutical principles, and his decision to consider all religions equal while refusing to consider any one of them superior to the others, was the typically Gandhian tightrope walk. Not all his admirers could deal with this apparent ambiguity.<sup>29</sup> It exasperated those who were confused, disappointed the unconvinced, and vindicated his sworn enemies.

Another aspect of Christianity that attracted Gandhi was the Crucifix, the symbol of Jesus' non-violent submission to suffering love. He probably saw in the Cross the apotheosis of his own life: to be semi-nude and 'nailed' to an excruciating *tapasya* (austerity) for the liberation of oppressed peoples, beginning with his own. He declared: "Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal."<sup>30</sup> As with the Sermon on the Mount, so with the Cross: Gandhi assimilated and let himself be inspired through his personalized and ecumenical manner of perceiving religions. Bhikhu Parekh demonstrates this in his analysis of Gandhi's reinterpretation of *ahimsa*.

He abstracted what he took to be the central values of Hinduism and set up a critical dialogue between them and those derived from elsewhere. Thus he took over the Hindu concept of *ahimsa*, in his view one of the greatest values derived from the profound doctrine of the unity of life. He found it negative and passive and reinterpreted it in the light of the Christian concept of *caritas*. He thought the latter was too emotive and led to worldly attachments, and so redefined it in the light of the Hindu concept of *anasakti*. His double conversion, his Christianisation of a Hindu category after suitably Hinduising its Christian components, yielded the novel concept of an active and positive but detached and non-emotive love.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Gandhi's manner of being 'influenced' by Christ was no facile imitation, nor indiscriminate borrowing, nor blind acceptance. It was a complex hermeneutical process that was strongly linked to his personal and social identity and to the values he lived by. Gandhi's way of being influenced by Jesus tells us more about Gandhi and his perception of Jesus than it does about the 'Jesus' of history or Christian theology.

### Who was Jesus for Gandhi?

People generally gauge the intelligibility of whatever is strange or foreign on the basis of their habitual frames of reference. The act of co-opting anything new within one's cognitional framework is therefore a demanding process, because it involves creative risk-taking through selection (or elimination) and interpretation. The truth that Gandhi was influenced by Jesus therefore depends on a further question: what did Gandhi accept, reject or reinterpret to arrive at a perception of Jesus that was truly his own – and different from the 'Jesus' in whom Christians believe?



On being informed by a missionary that Christ's crucifixion on the cross was more than martyrdom or sacrifice and that it was a 'redemptive offering' ordained by God to cleanse this world from the consequences of sin, Gandhi replied: "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin, I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless."<sup>34</sup>

### Who was Jesus for Gandhi? *contd...*

Through numerous interviews with Christian missionaries, Gandhi patiently and forthrightly explained his position. Understandably, his answers were not always what they expected or wanted to hear. Firstly, he disagreed with the fundamental tenet of Christianity that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.

To me it ['begotten'] implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of His nearness to God; that He expressed as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and recognize Him as the Son of God.<sup>32</sup>

But this did not mean he accepted Jesus as the *only* begotten Son of God, or as *divinely begotten* in the way Christians do. He explains:

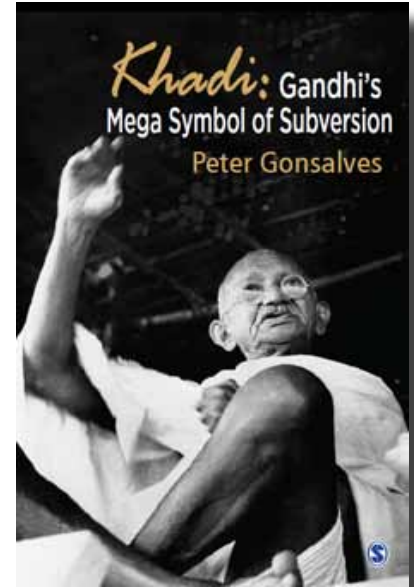
If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. *My reason was not ready to believe literally* that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. [...] I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept.<sup>33</sup>

On being informed by a missionary that Christ's crucifixion on the cross was more than martyrdom or sacrifice and that it was a 'redemptive offering' ordained by God to cleanse this world from the consequences of sin, Gandhi replied: "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin, I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless."<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the claim that Jesus was divine implied attributing *perfectibility* to Jesus. According to Gandhi this would mean denying God's superiority over man. God alone is absolutely perfect.<sup>35</sup> When He decides to intervene in the world as a human being, "He of His own accord limits Himself."<sup>36</sup> A proof of Jesus' limitation is his death on the cross. "Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh."<sup>37</sup>

Presuming that, in Gandhi's reckoning, Jesus was one of the many *avatars* of God, would he accept Jesus as one of the highest among the manifestations, one closest to divinity, or one more divine than others? Gandhi replies:

And on Jesus' power to raise the dead to life he said: "I doubt if the men he raised were really dead."<sup>41</sup> He substantiates this with a personal experience in which a child who was thought to be dead and was about to be cremated was restored to life after he gave her an enema.<sup>42</sup> Gandhi goes on to confirm his belief in the unchangeable laws of Nature, rather than in miracles.



No, for the simple reason that we have no data. Historically we have more data about Mahomed than anyone else because he was more recent in time. For Jesus there is less data and still less for Buddha, Rama and Krishna; and when we know so little about them, is it not preposterous to say that one of them was more divine than another?

In fact even if there were a great deal of data available, no judge should shoulder the burden of sifting all the evidence, if only for this reason that it requires a highly spiritual person to gauge the degree of divinity of the subjects he examines.

To say that Jesus was 99 percent divine, and Mahomed 50 per cent, and Krishna 10 per cent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to man.<sup>38</sup>

As for the miracles and prophecies of Jesus, Gandhi declared that he had no need of them to prove Jesus' greatness as a teacher: "Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry."<sup>39</sup> Regarding the miracle of feeding the multitude, he believed that "a magician can create that illusion."<sup>40</sup>

And on Jesus' power to raise the dead to life he said: "I doubt if the men he raised were really dead."<sup>41</sup> He substantiates this with a personal experience in which a child who was thought to be dead and was about to be cremated was restored to life after he gave her an enema.<sup>42</sup> Gandhi goes on to confirm his belief in the unchangeable laws of Nature, rather than in miracles.

I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, while politely respecting the Christian choice and defending the Christian's right to believe in the divinity of Jesus, he also claimed his personal right to be inspired by Jesus without adhering to any Christian denomination and without rejecting the equal dignity of all scriptures.

I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mahomed or Zoroaster. Similarly, I do not regard every word of the Bible as the inspired word of God, even as I do not regard every word of the Vedas or the Koran as inspired. The sum total of each of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The Bible is as much a book of religion with me as the Gita and the Koran.<sup>44</sup>



And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world, to all races and people – it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.<sup>45</sup>

### Who, then, was Gandhi's 'Jesus'?

To me, He was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had. To His believers, He was God's only begotten Son. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life? Is all the grandeur of His teaching and of His doctrine to be forbidden to me? I cannot believe so.

To me, it implies a spiritual birth. My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key of His nearness to God; that He expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see Him and recognize Him as the Son of God.

But I do believe that something of this spirit, that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I do not believe it I should be a sceptic [...]

[M]an has within his breast an impulse for good and a compassion that is the spark of Divinity, and which some day, I believe, will burst forth into the full flower that is the hope of all mankind.

An example of this flowering may be found in the figure and in the life of Jesus. [...] The lives of all have, in some greater or lesser degree, been changed by his presence, his actions, and the words spoken by his divine voice. [...]

And because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that He belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world, to all races and people – it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith, or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.<sup>45</sup>

Gandhi welcomed Jesus' influence and believed that "the imitation of Christ or moral identification with him"<sup>46</sup> was the universal and timeless imperative to give people hope. He rejected 'Christianity' for its dependence on imperial power, lax culture, and ostentatious claims to exclusive salvation that tarnished its original identity. He "rejected Christianity for the sake of Jesus."<sup>47</sup> Two anecdotes may help to demonstrate the impact Gandhi's own 'imitation of Christ' had on his followers. The first is Gandhi's advice to a Christian who used uncharitable language in his zeal to defend Gandhi against a "particularly vicious attack."<sup>48</sup>

I did not like your writing in the Chronicle. It is not ahimsa. [...] Why should you spoil a good case by bad adjectives? And when you have a good cause never descend to personalities. [...] 'Resist not evil with evil.' You have neutralized the evil writing [of your opponent] by a writing

Gandhi embraced Christ but rejected Christianity. He welcomed a Christianity that sought to purify itself from all that was unlike Christ. The only picture on the wall of his mud hut at Sevagram in 1940, was a black and white image of Jesus kneeling at Gethsemane with the caption: 'He is our Peace'.<sup>52</sup>

of the same kind. [...] If you have realized the fundamental truth of what I have said, you will even partially mend the evil by [...] writing a private note somewhat after this style: "Although I hold your charges and innuendoes to be wrong, I feel that I ought not to have adopted towards you the language I did. I want to follow Christ. I own that my conduct was not Christian. I have no right to judge you. I would feel somewhat relieved if I could have a line from you to say that you have accepted my apology."<sup>49</sup>

The second anecdote reveals how Gandhi's radical manner of following Jesus was so infectious that it affected the behaviour of Hindu and Muslim participants in his campaign for civil-disobedience. E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973), a Methodist missionary in India, recalls:

In one place the nationalists were forbidden by the government to carry the national flag beyond a certain point on a bridge which led into the European or Civil section of the town. The nationalists made it an issue. The magistrate, who arrested and tried most of them, remarked to me that those whom he arrested were much more Christian in their spirit than he was. They would let him know what time they were coming across the bridge with the flag and how many! Would he please be prepared for twenty-five today? Of the twelve hundred who were arrested in that flag agitation, although none of them were professed Christians, and although they could take into jail with them only a limited number of things which they had to produce before the magistrate, the vast majority took New Testaments with them to read while there. The reason they did so becomes apparent when one of them remarked, "We now know what it means for you Christians to suffer for Christ."<sup>50</sup>

If Gandhi who was against proselytism was open to the moral influence of Jesus on his life, if he believed that Christ's message had much to contribute to enriching the Indian ethos, what would his advice to Christian missionaries be? Jones, who was concerned about Gandhi's criticism of the foreignness of Indian Christianity, once put a similar question to him and received this reply:

First, I would suggest that all of you Christians, missionaries and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second, Practice your religion without adulterating it or toning it down. Third, emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central in Christianity. Fourth, Study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good that is within them, in order to have a more sympathetic approach to the people.<sup>51</sup>

Gandhi embraced Christ but rejected Christianity. He welcomed a Christianity that sought to purify itself from all that was unlike Christ. The only picture on the wall of his mud hut at Sevagram in 1940, was a black and white image of Jesus kneeling at Gethsemane with the caption: 'He is our Peace'.<sup>52</sup>



## FOOT NOTES

- 01 Paul VI, "Letter of Paul VI to His Excellency Varahigiri Venkah Giri, President of India, August 22, 1969", in Vatican.va, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/letters/1969/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_let\\_19690822\\_varahagiri-venkah-giri\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/letters/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19690822_varahagiri-venkah-giri_en.html) (08-11-2012). See also: L'OR, 3.10.1969, 1.
- 02 John Paul II, "Address on the Occasion of the Visit to the Funerary Monument of Raj Ghat Dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, Delhi, Saturday, 1st February 1986", in Vatican.va, no. 4, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1986/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19860201\\_raj-ghat\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860201_raj-ghat_en.html) (03-01-2012).
- 03 Benedict XVI, "Meeting with the Parish Priests and the Clergy of the Diocese of Rome, 7 February 2008", in Vatican.va, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080207\\_clergy-rome\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080207_clergy-rome_en.html) (08-02-2013).
- 04 Some books that focus exclusively on Gandhi and Jesus are: Robert Ellsberg (Ed.), Gandhi on Christianity New York, Orbis Books, 1991; Terrence J. Rynne, Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence New York, Orbis Books, 2008. See also a selection of early writings in chronological order that deal partially with Gandhi and Christianity: Joseph J. Doke, M. K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1919, 1967; Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being, London, The Warthmore Press Ltd., 1924; Francis Watson, The Trial of Mr Gandhi, London, Macmillan and Co., 1969; Haridas T. Muzumdar (Ed.) The Enduring Greatness of Gandhi: An American Estimate, being the Sermons of Dr. John Haynes Holmes and Dr. Donald S. Harrington, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1982; Charles Chatfield (Ed.), The Americanization of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma, New York: Garland Publishing, 1976; Margaret Chatterjee, Gandhi's Religious Thought, London: Macmillan, 1983; Ignatius Jesudasan, A Gandhian Theology of Liberation, New York, Orbis Books, 1984.
- 05 For a compilation of Gandhi's words on Christianity see: Anand Hingorani (Ed.), The Message of Jesus Christ, Ahmedabad, Navajivan, 1964. See also R. K. Prabhu, What Jesus Means To Me, Ahmedabad, Navajivan, 1959.
- 06 Autobiography, 63.
- 07 Ibid.
- 08 CWMG, vol. 48 (1931) 437-438.
- 09 CWMG, vol. 48 (1931) 438.
- 10 Autobiography, 64.
- 11 CWMG, vol. 48 (1931) 438.
- 12 The book, The Kingdom of God is Within You, was written in 1894 as Leo Tolstoy's plea for a return to a Christian ethic based on the Sermon on the Mount. This was contrary to the Russian Orthodox Church that merged with the Russian state and fully supported state policy. It was contrary also to the conflicting international relations of European powers at the end of the nineteenth century.
- 13 Leo Tolstoy, The Kingdom of God is within You, trans. Constance Garnett, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 380, quoted in Rynne, Gandhi and Jesus, 30.
- 14 "There is one thing which occurs to me, which came to me early in my studies of the Bible. It seized me immediately when I read the passage: 'Make this world the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything will be added to you.'" M. K. Gandhi, The Message of Jesus Christ, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986, 18.
- 15 "If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity." CWMG, vol. 63 (1936) 240. "I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven, nor down below, but in everyone." Young India, 4-8-1927, 247-8. See also K. L. Seshagiri Rao, Mahatma Gandhi and C. F. Andrews, Patiala, Punjabi University Press, 1969, 35.
- 16 Gandhi, Autobiography, 127.
- 17 Gandhi, Autobiography, 273.
- 18 The book, Unto This Last was written in 1860. Rather than discuss the religious meaning of the parable, Ruskin looks at its social and economic implications. He discusses issues, such as, who should receive a living wage and how that wage should be distributed equitably even to those who are underprivileged.
- 19 Gandhi, Autobiography, 275.
- 20 Anthony J. Parel, "Gandhian Freedoms and Self-Rule", Richard L. Johnson (Ed.)
- 21 In the passages quoted above Gandhi describes the 'effect' of Jesus' teaching and example on his life through emotion-laden vocabulary which I repeat here in italics: The New Testament made a 'different impression'; Christ beatitudes 'went straight to his heart' and 'endeared' Jesus to him. The turning of the cheek 'delighted him beyond measure' and 'echoed' what seemed to be 'a part of his being'. Tolstoy's book 'overwhelmed' him and Ruskin's brought him under its 'magic spell'.
- 22 See Bhikhu Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform, New Delhi, Sage, 1999, 26.
- 23 CWMG, vol. 48 (1931) 338.
- 24 To understand the semiotic foundations of the East-West encounter of religions in colonial India see the publications of Robert Yelle: Semiotics of Religion: Signs of the Sacred in History, Bloomsbury, 2013; and, Modernity and Disenchantment: Christianity and the Secularization of Colonial India, Oxford University Press, 2012.

- 25 The ambiguity of Gandhi's hermeneutical approach to scriptural texts can be seen in his use of the word 'gospel' as detached from its historical significance, and his preference for the term 'varna' (instead of 'caste') precisely because of its historical significance. To him and his close collaborators – most of whom were not Christian – the word 'gospel' meant 'doctrine of prime importance' rather than the etymologically derived 13th century word 'godspel': god+spel or 'good+story' which refers to "the Good News of Jesus Christ the long-awaited Anointed One." Contrarily, in interpreting a Sanskrit term like varna, Gandhi was extremely respectful of its historical significance that dates back to the Vedas since it supported his argument in favour of a non-hierarchical division of society based on labour instead of the vertically stratified notion of 'caste' that was coined in the 1600s.
- 26 CWMG, vol. 30 (1926) 557.
- 27 M. K. Gandhi, Christian Missions: Their Place in India, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Press, 1941, 187. Elsewhere Gandhi goes on to tell Christian missionaries: "Hinduism as I know it entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being and I find solace in the Bhagavad Gita which I miss even in the Sermon on the mount." B. R. Nanda, Gandhi and his Critics, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1977, 5.
- 28 CWMG, vol. 70 (1939) 334.
- 29 Take the case in which Gandhi interpreted Islam according to his cherished principle of ahimsa by stating that the Koran eschewed violence altogether. A Muslim correspondent wrote to remind him that Islam does allow the use of force on certain occasions by pointing to the Prophet's participation in the battle of Badr. He plainly adds: "I dare not cite any authority because you have refused to accept any interpretation except your own." In reply, Gandhi admitted that he was aware of the prophet's use of violence, but believed that "it is possible that the teaching of a book or a man's life may be different from isolated texts in a book or incidents in a life, however many the latter may be." CWMG, vol. 70 (1939) 332-334.
- 30 CWMG, vol. 68 (1939) 278. (*italics mine*)
- 31 Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform, 26.
- 32 Prabhu - Rao (Eds.), MMG, 99.
- 33 Autobiography, 126. (*italics mine*)
- 34 Autobiography, 115. (*italics mine*)
- 35 CWMG, vol. 65 (1937) 82.
- 36 CWMG, vol. 65 (1937) 82. Hinduism believes in avatars or 'manifestations' as God's deliberate descent to earth in material forms.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 See Harijan, 6-3-1937 in M. K. Gandhi, What Jesus Means to Me, (Compiler: R. K. Prabhu), Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1959, 7.
- 39 CWMG, vol. 65 (1937) 82.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 "As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a relative's child from supposed death to life, but that was because the child was not dead, and but for my presence there she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no miracle about it." CWMG, vol. 65 (1937), 82.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 CWMG, vol. 64 (1937) 397.
- 45 CWMG, vol. 75 (1941) 69-70. This text is Gandhi reply to the claims made by Christians that because he was not a Christian and did not accept Christ, it was impossible for him to understand the full meaning of Christ's teachings.
- 46 Ignatius Jesudasan, "Gandhi's Way of the Cross", Robert Ellsberg (Ed.), Gandhi on Christianity, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, 92.
- 47 James W. Douglass, "From Gandhi to Christ: God as Suffering Love", in Robert Ellsberg, Gandhi on Christianity, New York, Orbis Books, 1991, 102. See also his refutation of the charge that he was influenced by C. F. Andrews and Christianity on the issue of untouchability: CWMG, vol. 19 (1921) 289.
- 48 CWMG, vol. 43 (1930) 159-160.
- 49 CWMG, vol. 43 (1930) 159-160. Replying to a 'particularly vicious attack on Gandhiji', the addressee Reginald Reynolds, decided to defend Gandhi by writing to The Indian Daily Mail 'in a sudden explosion of anger'. The above excerpt is Gandhi's reply to Reynolds after having read the defence.
- 50 Earl Stanley Jones, The Christ of the Indian Road, New York, Abingdon Press, 1926, 75-76.
- 51 As quoted by E. Stanley Jones, Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1950, 69-70.
- 52 Jan Peter Schouten, Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India, Amsterdam, Rodopi B.V., 2008, 137. The caption, "He is our Peace" is from Ephesians 2:14.



Photograph is a still from **The Ghosts of Jeju** a documentary by award winning film-maker **Regis Tremblay** [LINK](#)



Dr Emma Larking

Dr Benjamin Authers

### The Editors of **Regarding Rights**

an initiative of the Centre for International Governance and Justice (CIGJ), in an interview with Mark Ulyseas

Under the auspices of Professor Hilary Charlesworth's ARC Laureate Fellowship Project 'Strengthening the international human rights system: rights, regulation and ritualism', [Regarding Rights](#) provides a forum for voices from activism and academia to comment on important issues in human rights.



The changes introduced by the 'Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014' are very broad – going well beyond those provisions relating to Temporary Protection Visas on which the media has focused. Refugee advocate Pamela Curr describes the breadth of the changes as 'daunting and horrific'. If the Bill is passed it will, for example, allow Australia's border authorities to take asylum seekers who are intercepted at sea wherever the Australian government directs, regardless of whether or not the country in question has agreed to receive the asylum seekers.

### Why was Regarding Rights launched and what do you hope to achieve with it?

RR was created as part of a research project based at the Centre for International Governance and Justice at the Australian National University. In the project we're examining and attempting to respond to the gap between the widespread recognition of human rights in international treaties and the failure by states to actually respect and protect rights in practice. [LINK](#)

We've attempted to achieve a few things with the blog: to provide a forum for activists and academics to discuss important developments in the field of human rights; to explore various theoretical approaches to human rights; to publicise innovative thinking and work in the field; and to draw attention to pressing human rights issues.

RR is also a forum for keeping people associated with or interested in the work of the Centre up to date with our activities. In this way, it also helps us keep engaged with our community.

### What impact has Regarding Rights made since its launch?

It's difficult to say! We have, however, garnered a loyal following of subscribers from around the globe, and general traffic on the RR website is considerable. People are reading our articles, which we hope encourages discussion about the issues. And our articles have been picked up by other websites (including *Live Encounters!*), which is a help in disseminating them further.

We're proud of having provided rigorously argued and thought provoking commentary on a range of really important issues, including America's use of torture in the war on terror and the dire situation in West Papua and in North Korea. One less obvious, but very important, kind of impact is that RR has provided a forum for a number of early-career scholars. We've been incredibly lucky to get to know some fantastic thinkers at the Centre, and are thrilled to be able to provide a space for their work to get the hearing that it deserves!

### What is your role as editors?

We solicit material for RR and engage in what can be a fairly intensive editorial process with authors. There's also all the behind the scenes work of maintaining the schedule and dealing with the occasional technical hiccup. And, of course, we try our best to let people know about the blog, as well!



### Have you encountered controversy by publishing a provocative article/s?

We have received a few abusive emails in response to particular posts, but overwhelmingly the response from our readers has been positive.

### How has 2014 been for those seeking refuge in Australia?

2014 has not been a good year for people seeking refuge in Australia.

Boats carrying asylum seekers have been intercepted and towed back into Indonesian waters, or those on board have been forced onto lifeboats which have been towed into Indonesian waters and abandoned.

Men, women and children detained in Australian camps on Manus Island and Nauru, as well as those in detention centres within Australia itself (including on Christmas Island) are living in horrible conditions. There have been repeated protests, outbreaks of violence, and disturbing allegations of sexual abuse in the camps.

At the moment, our Parliament is considering major legislation which will make Australia's refugee regime even more punitive.

The changes introduced by the 'Migration and Maritime Powers Legislation Amendment (Resolving the Asylum Legacy Caseload) Bill 2014' are very broad – going well beyond those provisions relating to Temporary Protection Visas on which the media has focused. Refugee advocate Pamela Curr describes the breadth of the changes as 'daunting and horrific'. If the Bill is passed it will, for example, allow Australia's border authorities to take asylum seekers who are intercepted at sea wherever the Australian government directs, regardless of whether or not the country in question has agreed to receive the asylum seekers.

Readers who want to know more about this legislation should check out this interview between **Australia's Corinne Grant** and legal expert, **Daniel Webb**: [LINK](#) (Long Version 21 minutes) and [LINK](#) (Short version, 6 minutes)



In relation to practises like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) that violate basic human rights, condemnation from outside communities that hold onto these practises is often less effective than the internal dissent and advocacy of people – often women – within the community itself. For people outside these communities who wish to provide support to women and others who oppose FGM, there are a range of options, including doing whatever is necessary to ensure that all women are free to leave communities in which they may be subject to violence, and are provided with viable resettlement options.

**How would you define democracy and does it exist or is it an idea that has not been translated into reality?**

Lincoln's formulation, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' seems like a pretty good place to start! In our view, genuine democracy must protect the rights of individuals and minorities at the same time as it is responsive to the 'will of the people'. Procedural safeguards should ensure that everyone has the capacity and the opportunity to make their voices heard in deliberative processes. Historically there have been small communities, and also revolutionary movements, within which democracy along something like these lines has been achieved – but generally speaking, this model is probably still an ideal.

**People are afraid of moving away from their age old traditions. Yet it is these very traditions that defy basic human rights. Example the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. How, in your opinion, can this be stopped without treading on the basic human rights of a community to practice their tradition?**

It's true that people are often reluctant to abandon traditions that are central to their sense of identity and community, but we don't agree that traditions are static or that any, in any culture, are 'age old'. Traditions evolve along with the communities of which they are part.

An interesting phenomenon currently is that certain individuals and groups within communities whose cultures are threatened by external forces (such as globalisation) attempt to revive traditions that had actually died out or become less important. These include a number of practises that may be considered demeaning to women, or that involve violence against women. Alternatively, legal proscriptions against homosexuality in many countries often have their basis in colonial legislation, rather than the primordial traditions that are often claimed.

In relation to practises like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) that violate basic human rights, condemnation from outside communities that hold onto these practises is often less effective than the internal dissent and advocacy of people – often women – within the community itself. For people outside these communities who wish to provide support to women and others who oppose FGM, there are a range of options, including doing whatever is necessary to ensure that all women are free to leave communities in which they may be subject to violence, and are provided with viable resettlement options.



**Has the UN failed in its role in promoting and 'enforcing' human rights? Has human rights been politicalised and therefore the 'us and them' has become the order of the day?**

There have been many failures in the UN, but it's also becoming harder for countries to argue that they are immune from human rights obligations, or that human rights somehow don't apply or aren't relevant to them.

Take the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), for example, whose human rights situation was the subject of a UN Commission of Inquiry report this year ([http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-63\\_en.doc](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A-HRC-25-63_en.doc)). North Korea can still dismiss the report as a fabrication at the UN, but on the international stage it must nonetheless speak of itself as protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Clearly this is small consolation to those whose rights are routinely violated by such countries, but it does underscore that rights can no longer be simply ignored or dismissed. The UN systems, as they've evolved over the past 70 years, have been an important part of that. And of course that system is part of a much larger network of activists, NGOs, and states that work to promote human rights. All these actors are in dialogue with each other.

**There are countries that vociferously promote the concept of human rights and yet remain outside the purview of the ICC for fear of exposing its actions and those of its citizens to scrutiny and prosecution by an international court. The US refused to ratify the Rome Statute despite being a key player in the creation of the International Criminal Court and curiously used its influence to persuade other states to get on board. So how can we universally impose human rights when powerful key players remain outside the gambit?**

Pointing to the hypocrisy involved in actions such as those you describe can have an impact and provide leverage on the basis of which to pressure a country such as the US to live up to its stated commitments. Here the role and power of civil society and activists within countries such as the US should not be underestimated. We're also seeing a shifting landscape when it comes to international power and influence; the coming years may well see real change in how states relate to each other, including on issues of human rights.



Our colleague, John Braithwaite, cites Tunisia as an example of a ‘good news’ story for human rights in the wake of regime change. We’ve seen increasing recognition of marriage equality across the world. And, to make the point again, it’s harder and harder for countries to simply deny that human rights apply within their borders, while NGOs and governmental and intergovernmental actors make it harder for violating states to deny their actions—Syria being a good example. Activists all over the world continue to do amazing, inspiring work to challenge human rights violations and ensure that people everywhere can live safe and fulfilling lives.

### **The Universal Periodic Review conducted by the UN is meant to monitor human rights and civil liberties in all member countries. Why has this failed?**

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has actually been amazingly successful on one count – it has succeeded in engaging every single UN member state in the review process (even Israel, which threatened to withdraw). Purely as a symbol that’s incredibly powerful. The UPR has also had value because it’s brought some poorer states into the global human rights discussion for the first time. This goes a long way to having a truly global conversation about what human rights are, what they are trying to achieve, and how countries might go about making meaningful human rights change.

While it’s certainly true that many of the recommendations made to states, as well as the response of states to those recommendations, can be accused of being empty rhetoric or political grandstanding, this isn’t true in every case. A number of states take these recommendations seriously, and we have seen some changes as a consequence.

So in our view, the jury is still out on the role and significance of the UPR.

### **Has there been progress in the field of human rights in 2014?**

Our colleague, John Braithwaite, cites Tunisia as an example of a ‘good news’ story for human rights in the wake of regime change. We’ve seen increasing recognition of marriage equality across the world. And, to make the point again, it’s harder and harder for countries to simply deny that human rights apply within their borders, while NGOs and governmental and intergovernmental actors make it harder for violating states to deny their actions—Syria being a good example. Activists all over the world continue to do amazing, inspiring work to challenge human rights violations and ensure that people everywhere can live safe and fulfilling lives.



Demonstrators shout slogans against the government during a rally in support of asylum seekers in central Sydney Aug. 10, 2013.





# Are we ready for 'disaster drones'? Legal Questions and Challenges

Camilla R Barker FRSA

On the wall above my desk is a map of the world. I often sit back against my chair and stare at it. As a kid, I was fascinated by maps. I had a light up globe next to my bed and at night I would spin it around slowly learning the names and capitals of countries, tracing major rivers with my fingertips and wondering how long it would take to walk from place to place. Even today, there are times that I still do that with the map above my desk. But where as a kid I would look at a map and see squiggly lines, blocks of color and big patches of blue, now, as an adult, I see borders, States, and the high seas. It's the borders that captivate me the most. If you think about it, they don't just represent territorial limits. They represent struggle and sacrifice of the human population; they are scars on the earth's surface.

In my academic life, as a graduate researcher working on international law and humanitarian assistance issues, borders also represent challenge. One of the broad aims of my research is to help aid organizations and governments that are trying to get essential goods and services to individuals struggling to survive as a result of circumstances out of their control (armed conflict and natural disaster being the main culprits). Borders have a tendency to get in the way of their lifesaving work.

In most cases, affected States are receptive to international aid. But increasingly, aid organizations and coordination bodies, like the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), are having to engage in complex negotiations to get access across borders. Aid convoys could travel thousands upon thousands of miles by road only to be blocked at the border crossing closest to the disaster-struck region. Most of the time, aid is blocked because the necessary legal agreements are not in place: customs agreements, immigrant worker status evidence, declarations of quality of goods, insurance documents, etc. Aid being blocked is a huge problem. In the best cases, the delay means that the convoys take a few extra days to get to their beneficiaries. In the worst cases, millions of dollars worth of aid sits and rots in warehouses on the wrong side of the border, leaving those in need facing starvation, medical trauma, homelessness and death.

Owing to the nature of our work, humanitarians are very receptive to ideas and innovations that help in overcoming this constant challenge. At its core, our work is guided by principles that do not involve competition. We just want aid to get to those who need it; we don't fight with each other about who gets credit. When tech companies introduce to us their latest innovations that could help overcome difficult issues, we get very excited. One of the latest innovations to be introduced is the drone.

Drones have, thus far, been given a bad rap in the press. And there's little wonder. Drones, also known as UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), have played a major role in thousands of unnecessary civilian deaths in armed conflict. Of course, it is those behind the controls that should be taking the blame for this, but in reality it is the collection of metal and motors, the drone, that is, as the face of the activity, shouldering the weight of the criticism. Much less explored and publicized as a result of this are the potential humanitarian uses for drones.

Despite the increase in the promotion of drones as humanitarian tools in the past couple of years, the use of drones in humanitarianism is not as recent a practice as one might think. In fact, the use of drones as humanitarian surveillance devices goes back two decades. The United States deployed the Gnat 750 drone in Bosnia in 1994 to provide aerial surveillance for NATO convoys and numerous are the examples of drones being used to map disasters, especially for search and rescue mission purposes.

The role of the drone in the humanitarian crisis that ensued after the 2010 Haiti earthquake is considerable; without it, aid organizations would have experienced severe problems in understanding where communities were and how to access them. In addition, the use of drones has been prevalent in regional responses to crisis, such as the European Union (EU) peacekeeping missions. The EU has furnished the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) with four drones from Belgium, and it has enabled the EU mission to the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) (EUFOR) to use drones for surveillance. And their roles are not limited to surveillance and mapping; according to the drone manufacturers themselves, drones capable of transporting heavy equipment to ground troops or aid workers (already tested by the US military in Afghanistan) will soon be put into operation.

Drones offer a number of benefits. Indeed, without significant benefits, it is very unlikely that such prominent humanitarian actors would have used drones for their operations. One benefit of particular importance is that drones are able to do the work that would typically put aid workers, even very experienced ones, in severe danger. This is especially true in armed conflict. Drones can fly across most terrains quickly and efficiently, even in the presence of combatants, and they can send information such as the location of potential hazards and stranded populations back to command centers in a matter of seconds. No human mapping team could do that as safely and efficiently.

It is clear that despite the enthusiasm evidenced for the increased use of drones in humanitarian work and the resultant increase in technological development and operational policy, lawyers involved in these activities have a particular set of questions that, thus far, have gone largely unanswered. These problems exist when humanitarian missions seek to address suffering as a result of armed conflict and natural disaster, but the problems seem more acute in the former. Unless these concerns are addressed, it is going to be very difficult for lawyers to advise aid organizations about their use of drones, a difficulty that could lead to severe impacts on the efficiency and quality of aid delivery on the ground.

There exist, however, a number of problems with the use of drones. Many of these problems are of a legal nature, either posing a conflict between legal norms or falling into an area of activity that the law does not extensively (or indeed adequately) regulate. These problems are various and numerous, but the top three (in my opinion), involve State consent, national security and data privacy.

## 1. State Consent

State consent remains one of the most challenging aspects of international humanitarian work. As mentioned above, in most circumstances States are willing to allow humanitarian actors on their territories. But there are a number of circumstances where States are less willing to allow outside actors in, and in those cases the States are at liberty to withhold their consent. If humanitarians persist without the consent of the affected State, they are put at risk of direct criminalization and any State that works with these actors risks facing legal action itself for interfering in the internal affairs of another State.

It is unclear whether drones can help us in this regard. In practice, it seems much less intrusive to send a small drone into another State than it does to send a cargo truck and a team of aid workers, so perhaps the use of drones would make an affected State more willing to allow humanitarian activities on its territories. But in the event that a State still withholds that consent, legally there may be little difference between a drone and a cargo truck.

## 2. National Security

If a State is involved in an armed conflict, its national security systems will be operating at a much more intense level than they would in peacetime. This means that any foreign activity is monitored for potential security risks, irrespective of the intentions of the persons engaged in that activity. Drones are treated with suspicion for a number of obvious reasons and in the interests of national security, a State's military could take possession of the drones or shoot them down.

## 3. Data Privacy

As mentioned above, one of the major functions of drones exists in data collection and communication. There are two circumstances that pose particular threats in this area: the usual use of drones and the event that the drone falls into the wrong hands. Firstly, when used as planned, i.e. for neutral and independent humanitarian missions, drones can capture enormous data sets ranging from geographic maps to population distributions. Whether intentional or not, drones may also capture



The General Atomics Gnat 750 UAV (Photo Credit: Sandia) <http://dronecenter.bard.edu/drones-in-bosnia/>

information about military activities, including locations of key military facilities and troops. This is dangerous data to possess and may result in criminalization of drone operators and their sponsors. Of even greater concern again is if the drone falls into the wrong hands. Terrorists rarely have funds for complex data collection missions, but possession of a drone could enable such activities, which in turn puts military personnel and civilians at further risk.

## Conclusion

It is clear that despite the enthusiasm evidenced for the increased use of drones in humanitarian work and the resultant increase in technological development and operational policy, lawyers involved in these activities have a particular set of questions that, thus far, have gone largely unanswered. These problems exist when humanitarian missions seek to address suffering as a result of armed conflict and natural disaster, but the problems seem more acute in the former. Unless these concerns are addressed, it is going to be very difficult for lawyers to advise aid organizations about their use of drones, a difficulty that could lead to severe impacts on the efficiency and quality of aid delivery on the ground. That is not to say that the relevant research is not being conducted. Indeed, the academic centers focusing on drone policy and operation are producing impressive research as I write this. But at this time it seems we simply do not have enough scholarship, particularly on the legal aspects of drone use in humanitarian missions, to enable international lawyers to give effective advice to the aid organizations and assisting governments. Given the challenges the humanitarian community face every day in responding to the world's most difficult situations, it seems that this research is needed now more than ever. Without it, we are plainly not ready to use these potentially very efficient humanitarian tools.

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# Ethnic Consciousness

When a wise man, established well in virtue,  
Develops consciousness and understanding,  
Then as a bhikkhu ardent and sagacious  
He succeeds in disentangling this tangle.

Buddhaghosa, Visuddhimagga (~500)

## The Emergence of Ethnic Consciousness

The fundamental process fuelling, sustaining and driving the ongoing, seemingly intractable and, at times violent, civil conflict in Sri Lanka has been the polarized ethnic consciousness of two groups—Sinhala and Tamil. However, it has not always been this way, though some have said that this is ancient hatred and the two groups have been fighting each other throughout history. Until the recent past, relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils had been harmonious. They shared many religio-cultural practices, lived side by side as friends, colleagues, neighbours, or in the same house as family, husband and wife or as lovers. The Sinhala and Tamil identities were not so salient, exclusive or polarized: both had multiple, cross-cutting, overlapping, inclusive and hybrid identities (Silva 2002). As Eller (1999: 95–96) describes the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict:

This conflict has not been a continuous or ancient sequence but has resulted from particular and recent action, decisions, and interpretations that have selectively exacerbated certain potential differences between cultural groups while overlooking or even denying other differences or, for that matter, certain levels of similarity. In fact, there may be no place on earth where the ‘use’ of culture and history is more conspicuous, where present claims and past grievances are couched in terms of the ancient battles and kingdoms and of cultural revival and survival—where history, mythology, archaeology, are all political tools and weapons. We will also see that the cultural picture in Sri Lanka (as in Leach’s Burma) is much more complicated than a mere bi-ethnic face-off and that other groups, and groups within these groups, contoured along other cultural or political or economic lines, exist and help to move and shape the overall and dominant national conflict.

Modern political developments, socio-economic factors, increasing population pressures and a stagnant economy (Abeyratne 2004) have created the conditions for the elite to mobilize the population along ethnic lines for their own electoral and power needs. What had been a proto or nascent ethno-national consciousness (Indrapala 2007; Pieris 2010; Roberts 2004), a strand in the multi-textured quilt of myriad possibilities, has been made salient and rigidly defined with clear boundaries set against the ‘other’; a condensation, jelling (Byman 2002), crystallization of hostile and exclusive group identities.





Worldwide, nationalism, perhaps partly based on older, historic identities, is a modern psychosocial phenomenon that developed due to a confluence of global, historical, psychological, socio-economic, religious and political factors (Anderson 2006). The appeal of nationalism to a core group identity helped bring communities together, forge a cohesive consciousness, define boundaries and create nation states with 'profound emotional legitimacy and attachment' and 'generate colossal sacrifice', a willingness to kill and die for it (Anderson 2006). During the colonial period, the world witnessed the growth and development of powerful nation states in America and Europe and their subsequent imperial expansion into global empires. The fierce European (and Japanese) nationalistic rivalries resulted in the two destructive world wars of the twentieth century that affected every part of the globe (Chatterjee 2010) and set the stage for what was to follow: the breakup of the colonial empires, superpower rivalry for the spoils (the Cold War) and eventually smaller, intra-state, ethnic civil conflicts. The postcolonial struggles of the twentieth century have seen the growth of nationalism and ethnic differentiation, unparalleled in history. This vigorous affirmation of distinctions and exclusiveness has meant struggles for self-determination and autonomy. However, national and ethnic assertion cannot be constrained to follow just the boundaries wished by those who helped create them. Frantz Fanon (1967) wanted to create a positive black African identity, but what eventually emerged was a host of conflicting national and even tribal identities, a veritable Pandora's box. The dangers of too much differentiation and exclusiveness are only too clear for us to see today—the problems of ethnocentrism and chauvinism. This is the tendency where the positive elevation of group identity progresses to the extreme position of the group thinking that it is special and superior to all others, as it happened in Nazi Germany.

That group identity can arouse ultimate loyalties and sacrifice, particularly when it is felt to be under threat, is abundantly clear from numerous examples of current ethnic conflicts around the globe (in former Yugoslavia, former USSR, Ireland, Rwanda, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Burma, Thailand, India, Philippines, East Timor, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries). It is this mystical feeling of belonging to something greater than the individual self, of belonging to the larger group, a patriotic fervour, that has driven communities to extreme action; 'militant enthusiasm' as Konrad Lorenz (1963) terms it. According to Sivaram (cited in Whitaker 2007), modern ruling elites have found ethno-nationalism to be the most effective principle to organize and run modern nation states. Gilroy (2000) eloquently opposes the 'emergence and entrenchment of biopolitical power as means and technique for managing the life of populations, states and societies'. Biopolitical power is based on ethno-nationalism, a form of 'New Racism' in the modern postcolonial world, arising out of beliefs in discrete and exclusive racial and national identities with genomic undertones. The tragic consequences of creating divisive ethno-nationalistic groupings can be seen from three modern examples, among many.

The construction of India from a multitude of princely and chieftaincy regimes through diplomacy, statecraft, conspiracy, cunning, terror and subversion, for economic interest and administrative efficiency, was an achievement of the British Raj and the East India Company. In the process, there arose the need for an overarching concept of 'Hinduism', to make sense of and unify a myriad and kaleidoscope conglomeration of diverse practices and beliefs into the communal interpretation of a two-nation theory. Hinduism was contrasted with Islam and people were compelled to identify with one or the other. This divisive categorization eventually led to partition, with the creation of Pakistan and later Bangladesh, and continuing tribulations within and without (Chatterjee 2010; Frykenberg 1993; Ludden 1996; Pandey 1990; Thapar et al. 1969).

The story of Rwanda is more illustrative (Cordell and Wolff 2010; Gourevitch 1998; Volkan 1997). Belgium, and to a lesser extent Germany and the Roman Catholic Church, succeeded during their period of colonial rule in creating racial consciousness and divisions between the Hutus and Tutsis, through racial theories based on such origin myths as the story of Ham from the Bible (Gourevitch 1998) and divisive actions like issuing ethnic identity cards indicating which group people belonged to, whereas in precolonial times, their ascriptions had been tribal, clannish and proximity to power. They had shared the same territory, religion and language and a system that allowed for intermarriage and social mobility between caste and clan (Cordell and Wolff 2010). The resultant political ambitions, mutually exclusive discourses, division, animosity and suspicion erupted in Hutu-Tutsi violence for the first time in their history in 1959 and led to the genocide in 1994, which spilled over into neighbouring countries.

The strategy of ethnically dividing Iraqis into Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurd sects for governance - ethnic quotas in the Governing Council, single district electoral law and process (Chandrasekaran 2006) after the invasion led by the United States, conveniently (for Western powers), split the Islamic world in the current 'clash of civilizations' ideology (Huntington 1993). Chandrasekaran (2006) quotes Saad Jawad, professor of political science at Baghdad University, thus: 'We never saw each other as Sunnis or Shi'ites first. We were Iraqis first. But the Americans changed all that. They made a point of categorizing people as Sunni or Shi'ite or Kurd.' These impressions were confirmed by my key informant interviews of Iraqi refugees in Australia from the Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish communities.

Many of these 'ethnic' groupings are not de novo constructions by any means, but may have already existed as potential or floating possibilities among many in 'proto-nationalistic' form. It is possible to trace the strands of many modern-day ethnic identities back into history. 'Hindu' conceptions can be found in Vedic literature.





But there was a broad inclusiveness and universality of vision in the Hindu concept of spiritual insights, discernible from Rig Vedic times, that was able to encompass other religious traditions within its folds (Coomaraswamy 1977). Buddhism had an extremely tolerant tradition, welcoming Jain, Islamic and Hindu practices and beliefs. It is reported that when Christian missionaries first came to Ceylon, Buddhist monks invited them to preach in their viharas. It was only when the missionaries started to actively proselytize and rebuke Buddhist practices that antagonism started (Scott 1996, 2000). Saddam Hussein dictatorially ruled Iraq—having a Shi’ite majority—using a Sunni minority. Admittedly, the situation is much more complex.

The Kurds straddle the current geographic divisions of Iraq, Iran and Turkey, while Shi’ites in Iraq may look to Iran and the Arabic communities in Iran may look to Iraq, all of which became complicated by the Iran–Iraq war. All these loyalties and belongings antedate the American invasion. However, ethnic divisions and conflict can be aggravated or engendered by the way policies are formulated, frameworks are adopted, governance and power issues are formulated, blocks and identities are emphasized, configured and drawn out.

There are many different ways of analysing or looking at a situation. The tangle starts with trying to carve the world into neat nation states with convenient boundaries, which the imperial powers proceeded to do in a hurry, trying to understand and rule the myriad and esoteric world they had conquered.

The modern Western or European predilection for concrete, reductionist categorization (the category fallacy of Kleinman (1977), where one finds all the characteristics of a predetermined category), Orientalism (Said 1995) and receptive local conditions have selectively accentuated, reinterpreted, focused, emphasized and objectified (Cohn 1987) certain aspects while ignoring others to bring out, subtly influence, construct and mould or transform (Van der Veer 1994) modern perceptions, consciousness, ways and patterns of thinking and world views into current ethnic groupings.

These categories are then propagated as natural and a ‘history’ found for them. The Western way of thinking and seeing the world (Nisbett 2003) in concrete, reductionist categories with clear divisions has come to dominate the thoughts of not only academicians but also laypersons. John Lennon’s (2005) refrain for peace comes to mind: ‘Imagine there’s no countries, it isn’t hard to do, nothing to kill or die for.’ A more ancient verse by the poet Kaniyan Poongkuntran in Purananuru of Sangam literature sings of the universal concept of being a global citizen, ‘Yathum oore yavarum kelir’ (To us all towns are one, all men our kin, listen...); it has become part of Tamil folklore. This is not to blame the West for all that is happening, for other imaginations and configurations may have led

to different cleavages, fault lines, conflicts and violence. Nevertheless, current conceptualizations and subsequent developments are outgrowths of dominant Western frameworks. At least, if the relativity and contextuality of ethnic consciousness can be realized, it may reduce our fanaticism and enthusiasm for fighting each other!

Unfortunately for multi-ethnic Sri Lanka, which has become a case study for what can go awry, various ‘sub-nationalisms’ have tended to assert their own separate identities, resulting in ethnic confrontation. Though secular scholars (Bastian 1994; Committee for Rational Development 1984; Jeganathan and Ismail 1995; Obeyesekere 1988; Roberts 1994, 1997; Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1992) have, belatedly, tried to disentangle and deconstruct the divisive consciousness, the nationalisms have already become invested with considerable emotions and are supported by strong mythic beliefs that defy rational arguments.

Ultimately nationalisms are, in modern social science parlance, ‘constructed’ from multiple socio-economic, psycho-cultural and politico-historical contextual determinants. Anderson (2006) termed the process ‘imagined’, while Marxists criticized the ‘false consciousness’—material and class interests, they claimed, should be more progressive determinants of consciousness.

Later, under Lenin, they did recognize the importance of solving the ‘national question’ with the recognition that national consciousness arose out of the more recent development of capitalism, from feudalism as well as anti-colonial struggles (Fanon 2004). Marxists have also described the process of ‘interpellation’, where the nationalistic ideology would define and constitute the subjective experience of belonging to a particular nation or social group that changes from time to time or conjecture to conjecture (Ismail 2000). Unfortunately for Sri Lanka, most of the left parties, rather than help solve the ‘national question’, eventually capitulated to the lure of ethno-nationalism for the easy ride to power.

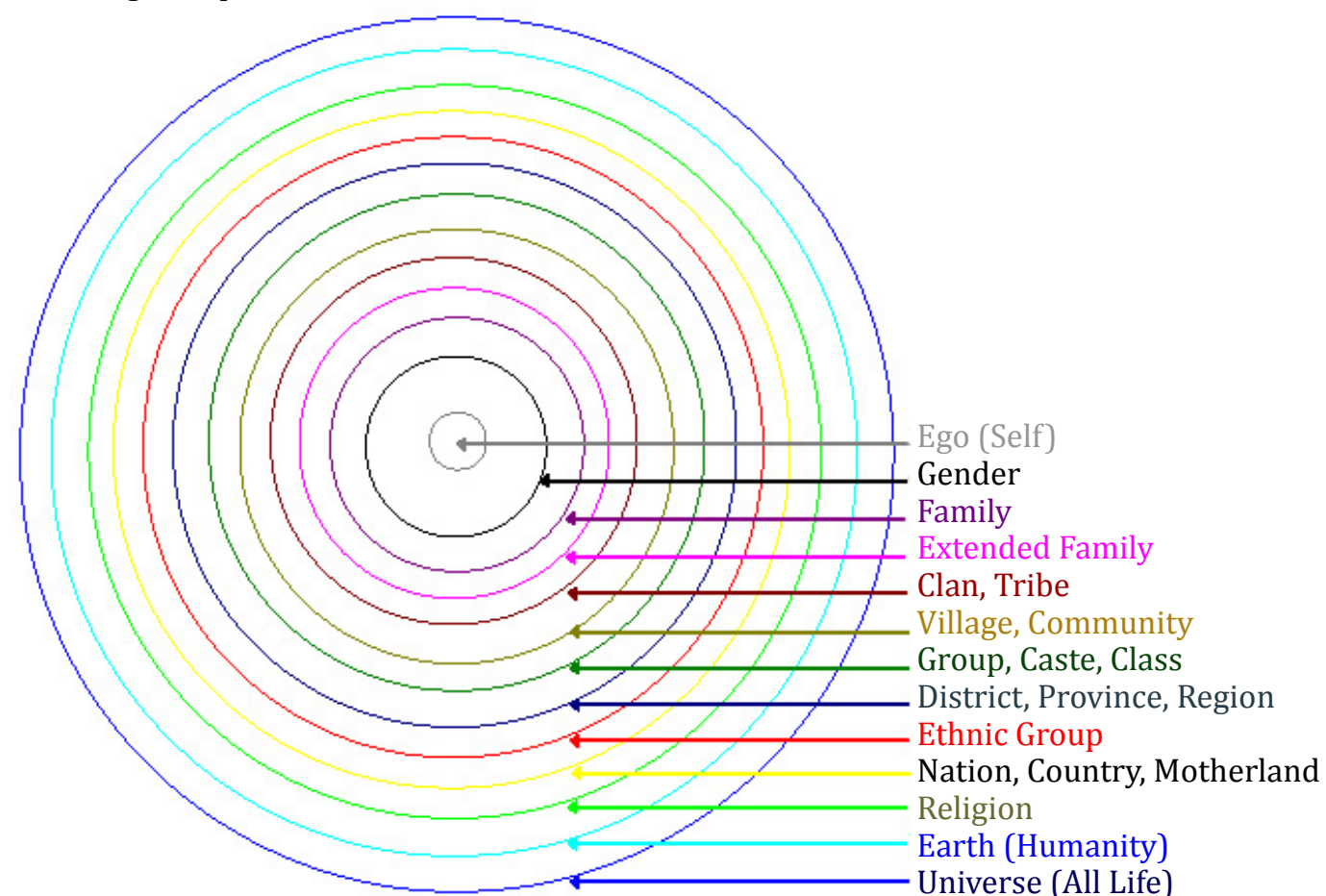
Then there is the Buddhist and Hindu metaphysical concept of construction, *vikalpa*, or the illusory *maya*, like outer clothing or *kosha* one puts on, the cloth spun as a product of the socializing process from childhood, but becomes strongly identified with. It would take a Buddha to transcend these constricting boundaries (see Figure 1A.1), to liberate oneself by developing better understanding and deeper insight by clearing the misperceptions and compelling hold of ethnic identification, to disentangle the tangle. This is not to say that ethnic consciousness is not real. Ethno-national consciousness gives rise to cultural diversity, which is the beautiful flowering of the differentiation of humanity. It is when ethnic consciousness becomes exclusive, without respect and tolerance for the ‘other’, chauvinistic, blinding ethnocentrism that the trouble starts.





There have been a few genuine Sri Lankans from different communities who have managed to break away from communalism but their voice for peace and reconciliation is easily drowned by the vociferous clamouring of ethnic entrepreneurs (DeVotta 2004). Current socio-economic realities (Abeyratne 2004; Bastian 1994; Gunasinghe 1984) and powerful myths, legends and passions (Kapferer 1988) shape how the different ethnic groups perceive themselves, interpret what is happening around them and determine herd behaviour with tragic consequences.

Figure 1A.1:  
Increasing Group Identification



Source: Modified from Allport (1958)

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Group and ethnic identities are linked to self-esteem, dignity and sense of belonging, defended or sacrificed with life itself, developing a self-fulfilling, transgenerational, reproductive capacity to pass on to future generations through the socialization process. Unfortunately they harden and become rigidified into polarized, exclusive categories impervious to change after bitter conflict, violence and war (Kaufman 2001; Thiranagama 2011; Volkan 1997). These identifications and belongings become fixed social reality, overdetermining how ethnic groups perceive themselves and how others perceive them. These are collective psychosocial phenomena affecting whole communities that provide the fuel for the ongoing ethnic turmoil capitalized upon by aspiring leaders and ethnic and conflict entrepreneurs.

### Ethnic Group Dynamics

Ethno-national consciousness is the way an ethnic or national group perceives and experiences itself, the outer world and other groups. Central to ethnic consciousness is the group or collective identity based on a way of life—culture, language, religion and home territory among other characteristics (which could yet include clan, tribe or caste in some societies)—usually in opposition to other groups. Group identity is given sustenance by strong mythical beliefs about its origin, life, history, 'chosen traumas' (Volkan 1997), and the future. Ethnic identity becomes invested with considerable emotions, a sense of loyalty and belonging felt at the core of the being. Susan Greenfield (2000) explains that emotions, though often subterranean, subconscious and apparently irrational, are the most basic building blocks of consciousness.

A picture of concentrically increasing and expanding identities and loyalties is given in Figure 1A.1. Similar concentric circles of loyalties (Allport 1954), applicable to the Sri Lankan situation have been described by Arasaratnam (1979, 1998) and Somasundaram (1998). Smith (1998) describes the 'onion character' of ethnicity, its capacity for forging 'concentric circles' of identity and loyalty, the wider circle encompassing the narrower. Multiple identities can be coextensive, if not symbiotic, as in multicultural societies where there can be harmony, and does not necessarily lead to destructive, violent conflict. Family and group identity and feelings may be more salient in collectivistic societies like many Afro-Asian communities where membership and loyalty to the community are much stronger than in individualistic ones like in the United States and Australia (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Hofstede et al. 2008; Nisbett 2003).

Within the concentric circles of identities, the narrow inner circle is individualistic self-interest. In the Western world view of the social contract described by Rousseau, egoistic individuals come together to form groups or society out of self-interest, agreeing to conditions of mutual benefit.

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But unlike the coalescence of individualistic identities, group identity is determined by how the group or community defines itself, who belong and who do not, socially accepted practices, rituals, beliefs, interactions and relationships, collective memories, the past and the present, history, myths, narratives, stories, songs and dances that are passed on to future generations by a socialization process starting from birth.

This results in self-effacement, interdependence, cooperative behaviour, relationships and networks, group norms, common goals and motivations where people can act for altruistic reasons, for the common good, sacrificing self-interest (Chun et al. 2006; Heppner et al. 2006). Ethnic consciousness arises from this background, as does the sociocultural context to mould the way the community sees the world. Collective consciousness and unconsciousness of ethnic groups, collective memories, cultural world views and group identity are manifested in their psycho-cultural narratives (Ross 2007). Collective stories, dramas, songs, art and other creative productions, images, metaphors, rituals and symbols reveal the inner world, chosen memories, deep fears, perceived threats and grievances that determine day-to-day behaviour, choices, motivation and, more pertinent to our purpose here, drive the ethnic conflict. The collective narratives are thus good reflectors, entry points that give insight and access to understanding the inner workings of the group mind.

Group identity is a basic need that determines a community's well-being; its cohesiveness, relationships and networking; its social capital. When it is lost or weakened, the group undergoes loss of dignity, esteem, status, confidence and pride; feelings of inferiority, disempowerment and lack of direction and control over their fate rise to the fore. There may develop various forms of social dysfunction like anomie, suicidality, crime, domestic and child abuse, alcohol and drug problems, a motivation, helplessness, dependence (on outside help), mistrust, paranoia and a host of other social ills.

These kinds of adverse social consequences can be seen in indigenous communities that have been destroyed by colonization, as in the Americas (Erikson and Vecsey 1980), Australia (Atkinson 2002; Krieg 2009) and by assimilation among the Veddas in Sri Lanka (Thangarajah 1995). Signs of collective trauma and loss of social capital can be seen today among communities that have faced the brunt of long civil wars, as in Africa (Abramowitz 2005), Cambodia (Somasundaram et al. 1999), among the Tamils (Somasundaram 2007a), which will be described in the sections to come (see Table 3B.1), and other minorities experiencing repression. A strong sense of group cohesiveness, confidence, identity and collective efficacy is positive, leading to resilience and is protective against stress from adverse events. But when group identification becomes extreme, transforming into ethno-centrism and chauvinism, it can lead to difficulties, first for other groups that are in its path and

then the group itself, when emotions can turn inwards becoming exclusive, puritan and paranoid. Buddhaghosa's (~500) insightful description about entanglements of the 'I' consciousness (and unconsciousness) can be logically extended to exclusive 'we' consciousness (and unconsciousness).

The individual and collective unconscious negatives tend to be projected, as defence mechanisms, attributed onto the 'other(s)', which according to Jung (1931) 'leads to collective delusions, "incidents", war and revolutions, in a word, to destructive mass psychoses'. Jung blames politicians and journalists who 'unwittingly unleash (these) mental epidemics'. Short of mass understanding and awakening, politicians, journalists and educators hold the power to reverse the process. Eastern traditions, Frieir's (1972) pedagogy of 'conscientisation' and psychotherapy (Watts 1973), claim that vidya (right knowledge), vipassana (insight) and clear perception can be liberating from these entanglements, complexes, bondage.

Although rationally, ethnicity can be understood on the basis of a common way of life, language, religion or territory, membership of an ethnic group usually bases itself in an overpowering and ineffable belief of sharing the same primordial essence (Smith 1998; Isaacs 1989), a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986), having the same origin and descent, an extended kinship<sup>1</sup> network (Horowitz 2000).

There is often a deep-seated faith of sharing the same pure blood (Allport 1954; Volkan 1997) or belonging to the same native soil (bhumiputras or sons of the soil). During ethnic identity formation and conflict, appeals to blood and soil become common in the images, symbols, mass media, political rhetoric and rituals as seen in the north and south of Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> An important feature of social identity formation is that once committed to a particular group, often a small sub-group, the members of that group become 'tribal and clannish', intolerant and cruel in their exclusion of other groups, while pledging total and blind obedience and loyalty to their own group. Groups have a need to externalize, project their fears, feelings of threats, frustrations and aggressions on to an outer group, the 'other', an enemy to hate (Kaufman 2001; Volkan 1988).

This process of in-group formation and exclusion of any out-group was brought out by a series of revealing experiments. When subjects are assigned to a group, any group, even arbitrarily (for example at a weekend camp), they immediately, automatically, almost reflexively, think of that group as 'us', as an in-group for them, as better, attributing positive qualities and showing in-group preferences. To them any alternative is an out-group, 'them', the 'other', attributing negative qualities and showing discrimination against them and depriving them of resources even when it is clearly detrimental to their own interests (Brown 1965, 1986; Tajfel 1978).



A very important component of ethnic consciousness is perception of 'us' and 'them', the 'other', against whom or in reference to whom the group becomes more clearly defined. As Kapferer (1988) argues, the Tamils have become the demonic, evil 'other' in the Sinhala psyche. Perception of the 'other' includes attitudes and stereotypes concerning the 'other'. Stereotypical labels usually have an associated emotional tone, often negative. Thus, the terms Demala for the Tamil and Cinkalavar for the Sinhalese, though strictly neutral and used in formal writing, can be used in a derogatory way or as means of exclusion by the other group. Labels paradoxically also influence the person labelled, compelling him to fit the mould.

These result in zero-sum games, with competitive and incompatible goals, where both sides lose, the overriding emotional concern being that the other side loses more (Jesse and Williams 2011). Being social animals, humans seem to have the intrinsic tendency and need to form groups that had survival value when competing for food or security.

Erik Erikson (1968) describes this need for psychosocial identity, both personal and collective, to be of a 'special kind' and to project all the negative qualities on to others which 'in conjunction with their territoriality, gave men a reason to slaughter one another in majorem gloriam' (see also Erikson [1963]). Reggie Siriwardena (1984) describes the 'mystical belief in blood' in the racist vocabulary to denote racial purity, saying, 'If you really believe that your blood is inherently superior to that of another race, you will have less compunction about shedding the latter.' Allport (1954) points out:

Both family and racial pride focus on blood. Race is a fashionable focus for the propaganda of alarmists and demagogues. It is the favourite bogey used by those who have something to gain, or who themselves are suffering from some nameless dread. Racists seem to be people who out of their own anxieties, have manufactured the demon of race. Others, like Hitler, have found racism useful in distracting people from their own troubles, and providing them with an easy scapegoat.

A very important component of ethnic consciousness is perception of 'us' and 'them', the 'other', against whom or in reference to whom the group becomes more clearly defined. As Kapferer (1988) argues, the Tamils have become the demonic, evil 'other' in the Sinhala psyche. Perception of the 'other' includes attitudes and stereotypes concerning the 'other'. Stereotypical labels usually have an associated emotional tone, often negative. Thus, the terms Demala for the Tamil and Cinkalavar for the Sinhalese, though strictly neutral and used in formal writing, can be used in a derogatory way or as means of exclusion by the other group. Labels paradoxically also influence the person labelled, compelling him to fit the mould. The label can become an inner command (Sartre 1963; Solomon 1974), forcing the individual to behave in a way expected by others. Thus, stereotypes can become both self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling by influencing our behaviour towards those we stereotype as well as drawing out the stereotyped behaviour.

1 Tamil co-ethnics were addressed as brothers and sisters by the LTTE.

2 Tamil militant youth used to cut their fingers with a blade and put pottus (mark of different colours applied in the centre of the forehead or between the eyebrows of religious or cultural significance) on themselves and each other as symbols of their loyalty and commitment at political rallies, which had a profound, electrifying effect on the audience. These stories were then passed on in awe by word of mouth. The phrase raththathin raththam (blood of our blood) was a common metaphor in political rhetoric and nationalistic songs, as was sontha mann (this is our common soil).





# The Challenge of Islam



...both Muslim and non-Muslim, from Europe, North America and elsewhere are swelling the ranks of the ISIS. Ed Husain, one time jihadist and now member of the Tony Blair Foundation and of the American Council on Foreign Relations, explains that these are mostly either migrants, new converts or small delinquents, and always youth who are not fully integrated, do not have a strong social network, carry seeds of hatred within themselves, and lacking a good knowledge of their own religion. To this we might need to add that the dream of a grand Caliphate has never quite died down among many Muslims, fuelled no doubt by readings and memories of perceived historical injustices such as the Crusades...

## Christian - Muslim Brotherhood

The encounter between Christianity and Islam has never been an easy one, but there have been periods of calm and periods of unrest. Right now we are certainly living through a period of intense and ominous unrest, with the rise of the so-called Islamic State and the passionate emotions it arouses.

On the one hand, there are those who are attracted and fascinated by the ISIS. I have personally heard of young Muslim people educated in Catholic schools, in Mumbai and elsewhere, who have escaped to join the ISIS. These are part of a much larger number of youth, both Muslim and non-Muslim, from Europe, North America and elsewhere, who are swelling the ranks of the ISIS.

Ed Husain, one time jihadist and now member of the Tony Blair Foundation and of the American Council on Foreign Relations, explains that these are mostly either migrants, new converts or small delinquents, and always youth who are not fully integrated, do not have a strong social network, carry seeds of hatred within themselves, and lacking a good knowledge of their own religion. To this we might need to add that the dream of a grand Caliphate has never quite died down among many Muslims, fuelled no doubt by readings and memories of perceived historical injustices such as the Crusades. I remember very distinctly a fine and educated Muslim girl I met in Paris some twenty years ago, who told me very calmly that Muslims would one day take revenge on the Christian West for all the many centuries of suffering.

On the other hand, there are the many who are revulsed and disgusted by the beheadings and crucifixions of innocent people, and repelled by the news of young Muslims in European countries taking it upon themselves to harass Christians and Jews living in their midst. "One thing which bewilders me is that Islamists who live in Europe, instead of being grateful for the freedom they have there, they abuse it, and they criticize and threaten Europe and its inhabitants; so, what I do not understand is why they insist on remaining in Europe? ... I despair..."



Ed Husain himself notes that ideology and extremism cannot be fought with bombings and military interventions. What is needed is a war of ideas, involving Muslims themselves. “We should not forget that the great majority of Muslims is not extremist. We need to launch an ideological challenge, one that is capable of conquering minds and hearts. Above all, we need to offer an alternative, a better version of Europe....”

What to think and what to say in the face of all this? Some Christians are tempted to regard the whole thing and even Islam itself as diabolic. Others distinguish between Muslims and Islamists. The more sane and sage speak of the task of educating young people, Muslims included, to more fraternal and irenic attitudes. “Maybe it is time Christians became proactive and use their intellectual skills etc. to fight this evil menace,” my friend writes. Ed Husain himself notes that ideology and extremism cannot be fought with bombings and military interventions. What is needed is a war of ideas, involving Muslims themselves. “We should not forget that the great majority of Muslims is not extremist. We need to launch an ideological challenge, one that is capable of conquering minds and hearts. Above all, we need to offer an alternative, a better version of Europe....” More easily and more often, however, Christians easily tend to forget everyone else and pray only for their Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering on account of their faith; but this is, in my opinion, a merely tribal mentality and a far cry from a truly Christian attitude.

So revulsion? Despair? Education? Prayer?

I am convinced that, for one who believes in God, revulsion is understandable but despair is not. However desperate the situation, if I truly believe in God I am called to ask myself: what is God saying to me, to us, through all this?

I would think that God is reminding Christians of the great virtue of hope. Despair is not a Christian option.

I think God is telling Christians not to cast the first stone, and to remember that they have also been guilty of using his name to justify violence and hatred.

I believe also that God is reminding Christians to go slow and not to generalize. Not all Muslims are bad, just as not all Christians are good. I find it inspiring that Ed Husain came across Islamic scholars in the Middle East who opened his eyes to the difference between traditional Islam and the ideological version that advocates hatred and violence.

I believe, above all, that God is inviting Christians to go beyond a merely tribal way of responding, and to extend and expand their hearts to embrace not only Christians but everyone, and not only the good but also the evil. “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Mt 5:44-45). The bishops of the Middle East were deeply prophetic in their recent pastoral letter when they stated that it was not a very Christian attitude to be concerned only about the persecution of Christians.

Where will the current situation lead? We do not know. What we know is that, like Christ, we are called to live by what we believe. And it is encouraging that our Muslim brothers have reminded us, in *A Common Word between Us and You*, that we are united not only in belief in the omnipotence and mercy of God, but also in the love of God and of neighbour. Which is why I have chosen to speak of Christian-Muslim brotherhood...

“We fully understand the fears and sufferings of our brothers and sisters in Christ, when by violence they lose members of their families and are driven out of their homes. They have the right to count on our solidarity and prayers. In certain circumstances their only consolation and hope is to be found in Jesus’ words: ‘Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 5:10). However, the repetition of the word ‘persecution’ in some circles (usually referring only to what Christians suffer at the hands of criminals claiming to be Muslims) plays into the hands of extremists, at home and abroad, whose aim is to sow prejudice and hatred, setting peoples and religions against one another.” [LINK](#)

So faith, hope and charity: against this there is no law, but also no appeal. It is simply not possible for a Christian to give in to hatred, despair, gloom and generalization. And perhaps what is happening will help us find new meaning in what we have always heard: that it is the cross that is at once the moment of glory.

I begin to understand this when I look at James Foley going bravely to his death. Foley’s death illuminates the nameless thousands who have lost their lives in similar situations in the Middle East, and is in turn, for me, illuminated by the life and death of Christian de Chergé and his fellow monks in Thiberine, Algeria. De Chergé’s vocation as a monk in Algeria was inspired by the death of his friend Muhammad: Muhammad, a Muslim policeman and father of 10, gave his own life in defence of de Chergé, and that gift of his life permeated every Eucharist that the monk celebrated. Islam, de Chergé came to believe, cannot be confined to the idea that people have of it, not even to what Muslims themselves might say about it, or to what we see of it in its historical manifestations. The death of de Chergé and his fellow monks is another light upon the deep and profound connection between cross and glory. We have to dare to say and to believe that glory and victory lies, paradoxically, in death and in defeat faced with faith, love and hope, in the refusal to despair and to demonize.

Where will the current situation lead? We do not know. What we know is that, like Christ, we are called to live by what we believe. And it is encouraging that our Muslim brothers have reminded us, in *A Common Word between Us and You*, that we are united not only in belief in the omnipotence and mercy of God, but also in the love of God and of neighbour. Which is why I have chosen to speak of Christian-Muslim brotherhood, hoping that this will be seen as an icon of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all human beings, and that more and more of us will be able to join Pope Francis and exclaim with conviction: never again religion in the service of hatred and violence.

**Even if we are not able to turn the tide of history, every little victory counts, every little victory over the temptation to hate, generalize and despair.**





London's Kurds rally for Kobane, Parliament Square, Westminster, 11 October, 2014./David Morgan



# The struggle against ISIS in historical perspective

**The continuing resistance of the Kurds in Kobane against the ISIS menace is inspiring popular solidarity actions across the world. David Morgan reports.**

Two months or so ago, the name of Kobane was virtually unknown outside Syria and the Kurdish region. Now, as a result of the heroic resistance of Kobane against ISIS, the name is inspiring people around the world. Actions in support of Kobane's struggle have been held in the unlikelyst of places many far removed from the Middle East. By any estimate, Kobane has put up a remarkably formidable resistance against ISIS which has sought to conquer the city for months. It has refused to yield.

Kurds are asking why ISIS is expending so much effort to take Kobane. Why has ISIS concentrated on taking this once obscure city? It is said to occupy a strategically vital border location integral for control of Syria, but there are many other important locations in Syria and Iraq where ISIS seeks to hold sway.

Clearly ISIS is able to fight on various fronts simultaneously. At the end of October it began to pose a threat in Lebanon and it has been reported that ISIS even has a presence in Finland. But in launching its determined onslaught on Kobane, ISIS was not acting alone; at least it has not only been acting in its own interests. The fall of Kobane would greatly please Ankara which has been concerned about the success of Syrian Kurds in establishing a functioning democratic structure in the area known as Rojava, of which Kobane is a part. The defeat of Kobane would be the start of an effort to eradicate the entire Rojava "model". This model has the potential to offer an alternative system for the peoples of the Mideast showing that they can establish a form of democracy completely unknown in the region. There are certainly tremendous vested interests principally among local rulers who would be more

than content to see Kobane fall, and by extension would like to undermine the whole of Rojava. There are tangible reasons why they should fear what has been unfolding in Rojava because its grassroots, participatory democratic model poses a direct challenge to the remote, autocratic rule of the few who tyrannise over the many and callously dismiss the people's interests as a matter of policy.

The uprisings that were quickly branded as the "Arab Spring" illustrated that the region is like a tinderbox - on that occasion a small spark had set off a great transnational movement for change the like of which the region had never before seen at least in recent history. Long established regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt were toppled in quick succession; sectarian divisions seemed temporarily forgotten as the power of the people appeared unstoppable. But eventually the people became exhausted and somewhere along the line this magnificent momentum for change was diverted, halted and arguably reversed. Out of the maelstrom emerged the dark forces of ISIS which has even outdone Al-Qaeda in its genocidal intent and anti-human brutality.

It is the fear that the Rojava experience might catch on among the masses around the region that motivates the backers of ISIS. Rojava is not exclusively the concern of the Kurds and, in fact, its success truly touches on the fate of all humanity and the future trajectory that the world might take. If Rojava falls to a combination of ISIS, sectarian manipulation and imperialist forces, it will mark a grave setback for humanity's ongoing struggle for progress, democracy, social rights for women and justice for poorer people. But, by contrast, if Rojava manages to repel the onslaught this will inspire people all over the world by sending out a message that change that is beneficial for the poor and oppressed can be won. It is not too much of an exaggeration to draw a parallel with what was at stake at a crucial historic turning point in the last century.





When the Bolsheviks took power in Moscow in 1917 Winston Churchill was prompted to declare that the new revolutionary government in Russia should be "strangled at birth". He uttered this class-biased prejudice not because he cared for Russia or its workers. He saw the toppling of the old Czarist order as a dangerous precedent and the rise of Communism as a virus with the potential to spread rapidly to engulf the British ruling class too.

The struggle against ISIS that has crystallised around Kobane is another historic moment where two different competing world views are coming into deadly conflict: the secular, modernising humanitarianism that is represented by Kobane - a modern Stalingrad - and the forces of atavistic darkness and utterly merciless brutality represented by ISIS.

At the end of the First World War empires collapsed like that of the Ottomans and the region was reshaped by the outside interests of the West. New states emerged and grave injustices persisted. Autocracy and tyranny were resisted frequently by popular movements where the masses were mobilised. The people were inspired by the hope of a better world and securing improved standards of life. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm observes in his book *Age of Extremes*, the revolutions, anti-colonial struggles which marked the major mobilisations of the masses were all achieved by secular ideas throughout the 20th century. There was to be no instance of popular mobilisation by what Hobsbawm calls "traditional religious ideologies" until the 1970s. This is an enormous change that has taken place in the last few decades of the last century and into this century. ISIS represents the eclipse of secular movements in the Mideast and its international appeal is a cruel caricature of the old workers' internationalisms that inspired the masses in previous decades. The big question is whether the hopes that these old internationalisms represented can ever be recaptured? This is by no means certain, but what is certain is that ISIS represents a deadly threat equivalent to a poison or virus and some antidote needs to be found. By contrast, the Kurds embattled in Kobane, are the modern representatives of the great secular ideologies of the past, whose light is not quite diminished and it is through their struggle that illumination stands out amid all the countervailing darkness.

### The KRG, KDP, PKK and Turkey

It was reported on 28 October that the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq and Abdullah Ocalan's PKK were on the verge of reaching a strategic pact. This would signify an enormous development and remarkable step forward in achieving a semblance of Kurdish unity, as the KDP headed by Barzani, had seemed keen to develop close relations with Turkey in recent years. Indeed, the Kurdistan Regional Government in Northern Iraq which is headed by Barzani has developed close relations with

its Turkish neighbour in the vital areas of commerce, trade, and infrastructure development. Huge contracts have been awarded by the KRG to Turkish firms to build new mega projects in the province. As the Financial Times reported, there are now more than 2,200 Turkish companies registered to operate in Erbil, according to the local chamber of commerce.

Furthermore, the bulk of Turkey's \$12 billion trade with Iraq is conducted with the KRG. Politically, Barzani had sided with Prime Minister, now President, Erdogan against the PKK. In 2013, Barzani even went so far as to visit Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan and a stronghold of the pro-Kurdish HDP, to praise Erdogan's reforms and call on the PKK to stop fighting. KRG officials have lavished praise on the successes of their relations with Turkey describing it as a "long-term strategic partnership and commitment". The FT said, "Iraqi Kurdistan became one of Ankara's most trusted allies" in a special report, 22 September 2014. This relationship reflects their recognition of mutually beneficial links. For the KRG "Turkey is a ticket to future independence, if not political then economic", the FT observed. Given Turkey's hostile attitude towards its own Kurdish citizens, this is profoundly ironic indeed. The KRG's strategic relations with Turkey have been even more strengthened through the oil trade now that oil from Iraqi Kurdistan is pumped through a new pipeline. Reflecting the truism that politics and economic interests are usually intertwined, a key aim of Turkey has been to make sure that the PKK and the KRG are prised apart and it has achieved success through these ever closer and deeper commercial links. It is hard to see that these will be easily set aside by either the KRG or Turkey despite differences over Kobane, for example. Surely a change in policy on the part of the KRG can only be brought about by pressure from the Kurdish public within the KRG itself and a sufficiently strong outcry from Kurds outside and their supporters.

### Peace Process

It is perfectly possible for two people to embark on a lengthy conversation and later on to never agree exactly what was said. As far as Turkey is concerned the peace process is all about disarming the PKK once and forever. The struggle over Kobane has seen the exact opposite occurring. It has reinvigorated the image of Kurdish guerrilla fighters and given them an immediate and just cause that has to be fought. There is simply no option but to confront ISIS by force of arms. This is an enemy to whom it will never be possible to talk peace. They can only be defeated in battle. Nothing else seems at all feasible. How this will impact on the development of the peace process in Turkey between the jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan and the government in Ankara is yet to be determined. Whether the Kurdish and Turkish participants will ever be able to see eye-to-eye on the actual meaning of the peace process is another matter. A transformation in the attitude of the major Western powers towards the PKK would definitely have an enormous impact on how the peace process develops.





### Peace Process *contd...*

There are many discussions now at different levels with some emerging in the media to suggest that the US is contemplating a change in approach to the Kurds in Turkey and Syria. One recent report on CNN was headlined “Syria's Kurds - new found allies?” The Washington Post has also speculated whether it was not now time for the US to rethink its attitude to the PKK. How times change...

However, it needs to be said that what the US opposes is not the Kurds as such but what they stand for – surely so long as the PKK has a broadly socialist perspective it will be strenuously opposed in Washington. That is not to say that situations do not change: the ANC and Nelson Mandela were once seen as the most violent terrorists by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. But the political landscape changed so much that Mandela achieved a secular sainthood and every Western politician wanted to shake hands and rub shoulders with him in the apparent hope that some of his saintliness would rub off on them.

### Conditions of the People

The plight of the people, their living conditions, safety, life expectations, still less their career options and fulfilment of their potential as human beings, is all hardly of great concern for those who seek to impose their wills on remote regions of the world. While the inventiveness of ISIS in carrying out atrocities has appalled the public worldwide and forced their leaders to echo the popular outrage, the sufferings caused by the misconceived intervention in Syria in terms of the millions of refugees seems to have been cruelly accepted as a "price worth paying" for achieving the strategic objective of removing Assad from power and by so doing rolling back Russian and Iranian influence in the Middle East. Robert Fisk, writing in *The Independent*, 26 October, reported on the terrible plight of child refugees in Lebanon.

It is estimated that there are 200,000 Syrian children in Lebanon now, many living in conditions of squalor in camps. They are forced to work for less than a dollar a day picking potatoes and other crops on farms where they are treated little better than child slaves. The Western politicians who are so keen to drum on about human rights and removing tyrants from power callously ignore the plight of the refugees in Syria and Iraq who are in truth the casualties of their policies. Equally ignored, are the Yezidi refugees whose plight was used as the trigger to allow Obama to win support for his airstrikes. The US strategy towards Kobane remains somewhat opaque and contradictory - they at last have started to bomb ISIS positions around the city, but it took them an inordinately long time to do so.

It is possible that Washington did not want to risk accusations of complicity in a massacre if they stood by while ISIS overran Kobane and carried out yet another mass bloodletting before the gaze of the world's media. Public outrage would have been considerable and the shame would have further stained the US's deeply tarnished reputation. Obama had been in large part selected and elected to restore America's damaged reputation following the adventurism of George W Bush and his neo-con cohorts, the much derided Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Rice and Chaney. Few expected that Obama would preside over the same kind of humanitarian interventionism as his Republican predecessors in Iraq and Libya.

The freedoms that the Americans seek to espouse and propagate around the world are for ideological gain and frankly do not translate into material advantages for the people whom they seek to “liberate”.

A few years ago the erection of a statue to the Cold War former American President Ronald Reagan outside the US Embassy in London by Condoleezza Rice and William Hague, then the UK Foreign Secretary, was used as a cynical attempt to endorse the "regime change" interventionist foreign policy. The public were told that it was now a common sense of modern times because of the successes that Reagan had in defeating Communism in Eastern Europe. But Reagan's view of freedom was partial, partisan, and ultimately meaningless.

He pursued a brutal policy in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East: toppling the socialist regime in Grenade through a direct invasion; sponsoring death squads to undermine the progressive Sandinista government in Nicaragua; bolstering apartheid in South Africa; and offering support to Israeli massacres in Lebanon, are just some of the horrors of Reagan's anti-Communist foreign policy crusade to impose neoliberalism across the globe. Neo-con ideologues were later to attribute the eventual collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe to Reagan's resolution in standing up for free market capitalism.

In the early eighties it became a commonplace to observe wryly that the only trade unions who received a sympathetic hearing from Reagan and Thatcher were in Poland, that Achilles' heel of Soviet Communism. The weaknesses were all too evident in the Communist system: when miners had to strike in order to obtain supplies of soap, there was clearly something not quite right with the system. As it turned out the Eastern bloc proved easy pickings for a West that scented ultimate triumph. The aspirations of humanity for a better world were no longer embodied in "actually existing socialism" when the administrations could not fulfil basic requirements. But these basic human aspirations persist, looking for a new means of liberation.



...since the Cold War Era was in full swing, all the most repugnant regimes around the world from Pinochet's Chile to Suharto's Indonesia and Rios Montt's Guatemala had been openly and covertly backed by the US. For example, Reagan insisted that Rios Montt, a military dictator responsible for a scorched earth warfare that saw thousands killed, was a "man of great personal integrity". Brutal terror gangs like the Contras in Nicaragua and UNITA in Angola received great support from the US in the alleged campaign to contain Communism, which was really more about keeping countries part of the "free world" where markets are free and open – but where people were profoundly unfree. In pursuit of global dominance, Islamists were sponsored around the Middle East to act as a counter force to obstruct the rising popularity of Communism. Thus the seeds of ISIS were planted. (Opp. pic : Ceylan Ozalp, 19 year old Kurdish fighter. [www.beforeitsnews.com](http://www.beforeitsnews.com))

### Conditions of the People *contd...*

These two freedom-loving leaders of the West sought to persuade the public to light a candle for Polish Solidarity and the clamour to "let Poland be Poland" was sanctified by the Vatican whose newly ensconced resident, Pope John Paul II, was himself conveniently of Polish origin. Human rights were never more degraded than during this period and in the blood-stained hands of Reagan were obviously seen as little more than a political move in a global game of chess. Aside from oddities such as North Korea, historically since the Cold War Era was in full swing, all the most repugnant regimes around the world from Pinochet's Chile to Suharto's Indonesia and Rios Montt's Guatemala had been openly and covertly backed by the US. For example, Reagan insisted that Rios Montt, a military dictator responsible for a scorched earth warfare that saw thousands killed, was a "man of great personal integrity".

Brutal terror gangs like the Contras in Nicaragua and UNITA in Angola received great support from the US in the alleged campaign to contain Communism, which was really more about keeping countries part of the "free world" where markets are free and open – but where people were profoundly unfree. In pursuit of global dominance, Islamists were sponsored around the Middle East to act as a counter force to obstruct the rising popularity of Communism. Thus the seeds of ISIS were planted.

### Idealism Perverted

The youths filled with idealistic thoughts joining ISIS today are the equivalent to the young of previous ages who were attracted to Communism. The volunteers for Spain during that country's Civil War against Franco fascism in the 1930s - later seen as a prologue to the Second World War - often travelled covertly supported by a cross-border network of sympathisers who acted as stopping points on the journey. A vast underground network of supporters was centred on the European Communist Parties; today the party's strategic position is replaced by that of the Mosques. ISIS is idealism perverted. A propaganda video released by ISIS from inside Kobane was fronted by a British hostage who referred to ISIS fighters as "mujahideen". Significantly, this brings to mind how the mujahideen were forged in the US-backed war against Communism in Afghanistan. This shows that the contemporary crisis over ISIS is firmly rooted in the recent history of US Cold War strategy designed to counter the Soviet Union. But today, the struggle for Kobane goes on - after so many weeks it is remarkable that such a small number of people, besieged and under resourced, have been able to resist an assault from a deadly and determined enemy, whose forces are fanatically inspired and allegedly intoxicated with drugs.







## Bankrolling ISIS

Financing terror has become a controversial issue as the atrocities have mounted and the horrific acts viewed by millions on their TV screens have seemingly become ever more appalling by the day. Some of the West's key strategic allies and important business partners in the Mideast, namely the wealthy Gulf States, have been accused of bank-rolling ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

This is not only a deep cause of embarrassment for Western governments like the US and UK but an indication of the high-level support, materially and ideologically, covert and overt, that ISIS and other Sunni terror groups have been attracting. With such powerful supporters it is obvious that ISIS cannot be defeated by airstrikes alone or even in the field of battle. It will need to be tackled root and branch by cutting off its financial lifeline which provides its crucial material support. This can be achieved by concerted and coordinated action involving a grand alliance equivalent to what was established in the 1940s to destroy the Nazi war machine. It will mean that rivals will need to come together and temporarily set aside their differences in recognition of the essential need to unite against a villainous opponent that threatens everyone equally. However, the world is far from reaching such a common accord at least at present. It seems the magnitude of what we are up against is not accepted by everyone.

## The Arrival of the Cavalry?

They don't have white horses, but a group of peshmerga fighters from the KRG were allowed to enter Kobane to reinforce the beleaguered resistance and were greeted like all-conquering heroes. This breakthrough received the fulsome support of the US. "We welcome the deployment of peshmerga fighters and weapons from the Kurdistan Region to Kobane, which began this evening," Brett McGurk, deputy envoy tasked by Obama with building a coalition against ISIS, wrote on Twitter, 29 October, according to France24 news agency. Once the euphoria expressed by the Kurdish people, natural in the circumstances, settles down, some hard questions will need to be addressed, such as why it has taken so long for relief to be allowed to assist Kobane? Why is it that members of the Free Syrian Army and the peshmerga are being allowed to enter while the Kurdish guerrillas more closely affiliated with the Syrian Kurds are not being permitted to help? What is the real objective of allowing Iraqi Kurds and so-called "moderate Syrian rebels" to bolster the resistance in Kobane? Is this not actually designed to weaken the political influence exercised by the Syrian Kurdish organisations? Could this not ultimately be aimed at undermining Rojava from within? Is not this latter point precisely what the Turkish Prime Minister meant in the comments he made in a BBC interview.

"The only way to help Kobane, since other countries don't want to use ground troops, is sending some peace-oriented or moderate troops to Kobane. What are they? Peshmerga ... and Free Syrian Army (Syrian opposition forces)," Turkish PM Ahmet Davutoglu said.

Is Turkey acting entirely alone? It has been a key NATO member for decades and was at the centre of the US Cold War against the Soviet Union and its crusade against Communist expansion; it is worthy of note that it was the presence of US missiles in Turkey that was the initial spark that led to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 which took the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation. In terms of its wider Syria policy, Turkey persists in seeing the PKK and the PYD as identical and that they along with Syria's Assad, are its two main enemies rather than ISIS. It therefore continues to insist on the adoption of a long-term strategic plan for Syria which involves the removal of President Bashar al-Assad from power and the marginalisation of the PYD. The Turks have been claiming that either Assad's forces or Kurdish militants will fill the void if ISIS is simply neutralised. Following the logic of this position, ISIS cannot simply be eliminated, according to Turkey. It is in this context that the arrival of the peshmerga and the FSA into Kobane should be situated. Of course, it is to be hoped that Turkey will not get its own way in this manoeuvring and in fact there is no reason why it should succeed if sufficient international pressure is exerted.

## The True Motor of Change is the People

The Kurdish fighters in Kobane have started to inspire the world, especially their amazingly courageous women guerrillas who inspire even jaded journalists, but fill ISIS jihadists with utter dread. The genuine solidarity and motor of change lies with the people at the grassroots. Solidarity activity has been extensive and it has been accelerating steadily around the world. The Kurds in Kobane clearly know that they don't stand alone. When they insist that they are fighting on behalf of all humanity, this is no mere rhetorical gesture: it is absolutely true and their words are resonating across the globe. . .

## A Crescendo of Solidarity

People have mobilised against Turkey's ambivalent role in surprising places. For example, it was reported that in Morocco a rally took place in Rabat outside the Turkish Embassy where people called for support for Kobane. There have been delegations to Rojava of political activists from many countries such as the UK, Italy, Germany and Austria among others. Rallies in support have taken place in India and America. Leading political parties in the UK such as the Greens and Plaid Cymru have passed motions in support of Kobane and the Kurds.





### **A Crescendo of Solidarity** *contd...*

A strong message was issued by the British Fire Brigades Union (FBU) on 21 October which expressed support for “the right of Kurdish people across the Middle East to self-determination, including their right to defend themselves against attack from ISIS”.

The FBU went on to “oppose the horrific brutality of ISIS and its sectarian and murderous behaviour towards peoples of the region” and specifically condemned “the Turkish government’s comments equating Kurdish fighters -including the defenders of Kobane- with ISIS”.

The union stated that it could have no confidence in a US, UK and French bombing campaign against ISIS, based on the bitter experience of similar interventions over the last decade. Finally the FBU called on the TUC to raise the issue as a matter of urgency with the British government and appealed for “international trade union solidarity and support for the defenders of Kobane”.

An international appeal supported by Noam Chomsky, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, along with hundreds of politicians, academics, writers, public figures and prominent activists worldwide, was issued on 14 October calling for a global rally in support of the people of Kobane which was to be held on 1st November. The aim was to hold as many rallies, protests and symbolic actions as possible all over the world in an attempt to send a clear message to political leaders that Kobane must achieve a victory over ISIS and that much more must be done to assist them. It expressed the belief that strong popular pressure has the potential to shame hesitant politicians into taking action even if it is against their wishes. If sufficient number of people speak out then it must be possible to initiate change for the common interest of all.

If a historical analogy may be employed, the people’s coalition against ISIS might be seen as the modern equivalent of the great anti-fascist alliance of the 1940s which brought together the Western capitalist powers and the Soviet Union in order to defeat the menace of Nazi Germany. The likes of Winston Churchill, a onetime belligerent imperialist, was transformed into a hero to many for having the foresight to realise that it was essential to form a pact with a former bitter foe, Stalin’s USSR, to achieve victory over a far more dangerous force which threatened the extinction of civilisation. ISIS today threatens to extinguish all civilised values and stands for mass slaughter and brutal oppression the like of which has not been contemplated since the Nazi death camps were uncovered to the horror of all decent human beings all those decades ago.

The statement calling for action on 1st November states the following:

“ISIS launched a major multi-front military campaign against the Kurdish region of Kobane in northern Syria. This is the third ISIS onslaught on Kobane since March 2014. As ISIS was unsuccessful on the two previous occasions, they are attacking with larger forces and want to take Kobane.

It continued, “In January this year, the Kurds in Western Kurdistan (Rojava) established local administrations in the form of three cantons. One of the three cantons formed is Kobane. The Turkish border is to the north of Kobane and all the other sides are surrounded by ISIS-controlled territories. ISIS has approached the Kobane borders, using US-made heavy weapons. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are threatened by the most brutal genocide in modern history. The people of Kobane are trying to resist using basic weapons against the most brutal attacks of ISIS terrorists, with only the assistance of People’s Protection Unit in Western-Kurdistan, the YPG and YPJ, but without any international help. Therefore a Global Rally against ISIS – for Kobane - for Humanity is vital.

“The so-called international coalition to fight ISIS has not helped Kurdish resistance effectively despite witnessing the ongoing genocide committed against Kobane. They have not fulfilled their real international legal obligations. Some of the countries in the coalition, especially Turkey, are among financial and military supporters of ISIS terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

“If the world wants democracy in the Middle East, it should support the Kurdish resistance in Kobane. Democratic autonomy in Rojava promises a free future for all peoples in Syria. In this regard, the “Rojava Model” - the secular, non-sectarian, democratic position in Rojava - is the model which practices unity in diversity.”

**The appeal concluded with a ringing declaration urging “people all over the world to show their solidarity with Kobane. Go to the streets and demonstrate. Support the Resistance against ISIS – for Kobane – for Humanity!”**

**Turkey is standing on the wrong side of history. It must cease obstructing the historic struggle in Kobane. All our futures are at stake. Fortunately, many more people now realise this, as was shown by the huge and inspiring rallies around the world on the international day of action for Kobane on 1st November.**

<http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/>



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## The streets, the ballot box and consensus: high-stakes elections in Tunisia

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### Executive summary

The October 2014 parliamentary elections will be crucial for Tunisia. The political polarisation that began in the streets between the Islamists of Ennahda and the parties rooted in the old regime could be confirmed in the polling booth. The fierceness of any ensuing conflicts is likely to be commensurate with the issues: access to state resources, the consolidation of electoral bases and the strengthening of political footholds across the country with a view to the next elections. Negotiations on forming a stable coalition government will be decisive as the vote result itself. Only a consensus on forming a government of national unity will allow for the rehabilitation of the political process and the consolidation of the transition to democracy.

On October 26th 2014 just over 5 million Tunisian voters will elect their 217 representatives in a vote that will be crucial in more ways than one in the transition to democracy. Firstly, there is the risk of massive voter abstention, which would reflect Tunisians' disenchantment with the political process and political parties' failure to mobilise electors who are discouraged by the slow pace of changes and the crisis into which the country has slid. Secondly, Tunisians will be voting in a political context of polarisation between the Islamist movement Ennahda and an opposition grouping led by the Nidaa Tunis (Call of Tunisia) movement that is part of the secular movement that comprises figures and networks linked to the old regime and certain business sectors. The risks of destabilising the democratic transition process are so great that how the winners of this vote handle their victory will be as critical as the electoral verdict itself. In a broader sense, these elections are part of a political process that is playing out as much in the streets and at the ballot box as at the negotiating table.



The pragmatism of the Tunisian Islamists certainly lies in targeting this vote as a step towards consolidating their integration into the political system. The Ennahda party agreed to relinquish power because it was unable to continue to lead a country that had become ungovernable owing to its slide into an economic and security crisis, the crumbling of popular support, the weakening of support from foreign partners and funders and, above all, the shifting of the conflict with the opposition from the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to the streets.

### **Elections, abstention and rehabilitating the political process**

Far from falling within a pre-set political time frame, the organising of the elections constitutes the final phase of the roadmap negotiated between the political parties, one of the high points of which was the adoption of the country's new constitution in January 2014. Rather than the product of a shared vision of the country's future, the consensus reached results more from a balance of power that found in the polls a way to settle an acute political crisis triggered by the July 2013 assassination of Member of Parliament Mohamed Brahmi. Faced with wide-scale protests that lasted for two years, the Ennahda party had to turn the reins of government over to a team of technocrats in exchange for the holding of elections before the end of 2014.

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For its part, the secular opposition led by Nidaa Tunis, which for months had limited itself to denouncing "Ennahda's nascent dictatorship" and calling for the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly born of the October 2011 elections, was unable to impose itself through street-level activism. Without being the product of a convergence of political viewpoints, the organisation of this vote thus constitutes a pragmatic solution reached by parties seeking to avoid a zero-sum political game – an outcome likely to spare Tunisia an Egyptian-type scenario.

Furthermore, the October 26th vote constitutes a test of public participation and an opportunity to rehabilitate the political process. The forming of a crisis-exit government was accompanied by the glorifying of technocrats presented as competent, apolitical and able to meet Tunisians' demands for reforms.

These figures were portrayed as being the only ones able to respond to the various social and economic challenges, stand above partisan divisions and interests, and create a vision adapted to the challenges posed by the transition and to the people's aspirations. In reality, the spreading of this discourse rested largely on marginalising the popular demands made by the social movement that

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was behind the fall of the dictatorship, as well as by restricting public debate to a binary vision between "Islamism" and "modernity", leading progressively to disaffection with the political process among a portion of the general public.

The resulting exasperation contributed to an anti-political (Schedler, 1997), hostile, negative view being disseminated in the political arena among the media, civil society and even the political class – a view supporting the arguments of those who have an overwhelming nostalgia for the Ben Ali dictatorship and defenders of an authoritarian restoration. Thus, the extent of voter participation will be a key indicator with respect to the rehabilitation of the political process and the public playing a central role in the transition to democracy.

### **The polls and the electoral weight of the parties rooted in old regime**

Because the NCA did not adopt the political exclusion bill, the upcoming elections will see the participation of personalities and networks rooted in the old hegemonic party, the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), which ruled during the Ben Ali dictatorship. Thus, knowing the electoral weight of these parties is one of the key issues of the impending vote. In the absence of transitional justice – deferred until the post-election period – Ennahda and its allies are counting on voters to sanction them and whatever vague intentions they may have to return to business via the polls.

For their part, the Neo-Destour parties are seeking to draw support from those disappointed with the two Ennahda governments' poor performance and those dissatisfied because of the socioeconomic crisis and, more generally, to benefit from the sense of concern caused by the security situation and the weakening of the state. With the backing of much of the business sector, these parties are stressing their knowledge of how the state runs, their administrative and political experience, and their ability to get things going again. While able to unite the street opposition to the Ennahda-led governments, these parties rooted in the old regime are nonetheless disorganised heading into the elections.

The RCD's dissolution in 2011 following a judicial ruling resulted in the scattering of its partisan and patronage networks that had been firmly embedded in the state administration and created a rivalry among them worsened by their leaders' personal ambitions. The issue in the upcoming vote is not simply acquiring electoral legitimacy to govern for the next five years. The winner will have access to resources to reward its militants and consolidate its electoral bases and its political foothold throughout the country.



Although the Ennahda movement says it is in favour of a government of national unity, its detractors do not seem to share this view, arguing that it is incompatible with their social projects. Certainly, the party that wins at the polls will have a decided advantage with regard to forming a coalition government, but the danger of polarisation between Ennahda and Nidaa Tunis in the face of the marginalisation of the small parties will present them with a difficult choice between joining forces, at the risk of alienating part of their respective electorates, and opposing one another and thereby jeopardising the chances of forming a stable majority.

### **The polls and the electoral weight of the parties rooted in old regime *contd...***

The experience of the Ennahda governments following the October 2011 elections has been double-edged: it has shown the importance of state control during this transition period but, at the same time, has demonstrated the limits of exercising power. Much of the electorate is more interested in greater redistribution, better access to public sector jobs and more economic opportunities than in purely ideological considerations. Certainly, the Islamist movement has benefitted from its passage to power to reward its supporters, but in doing so has cut itself off from a portion of electors who voted for it in 2011 and have not benefitted from state largesse. <sup>1 1</sup>

The make-up of Ennahda's electoral lists, which include businessmen and candidates with profiles more in keeping with the modernist segments of the population, reveals a party as much concerned with polishing its image, pursuing its moderate line and continuing its shift towards a conservative model as with profiting from its candidates' prominence to aim beyond its traditional electorate.

### **The future of the transition process: between conflict and consensus**

The negotiations phase that will form a post-election government coalition is essential to the success of the democratic transition. The partisan groups continue to proclaim their commitment to the principle of consensus without, however, identifying the specific means to implement it after the vote and at the risk of limiting it to a simple profession of faith. While ensuring representation in the National Assembly of a large number of parties and movements, the voting method will not help to obtain a government majority but, instead, promotes the fragmentation and dispersal of votes.

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...an Ennahda victory – in which it leads a government coalition that replicates the experience of the governments between 2011 and 2013 – might trigger virulent opposition from the secularist parties and mistrust among neighbouring regimes, notably Algeria, which would look unfavourably on Islamists winning power in Tunisia for the next five years, given the risk of a spillover effect. On the other hand, a victory by Nidaa Tunis, which in taking power would exclude its Islamist rival, would raise the threat of a return to authoritarian rule through the emergence of a dominant party.

The future of the democratic transition will definitely depend on the level of consensus that can be reached on the key questions of governing jointly and the scope of the coalition that will support and implement this consensus. Voting arithmetic can legitimately produce a majority – even a simple 51% majority – but is not enough to satisfy the imperatives of the key step now being taken in Tunisia.

Certainly, identity and societal issues have been dealt with in the constitution, preventing ideological hegemony from being exercised by any one party. However, the upcoming political agenda – the presidential and municipal elections, and the Decentralisation Act – together with economic and security issues (the battle against unemployment, the budget deficit, the national debt, inflation, the fight against terrorism) will require a broad consensus that encompasses the political parties, employer organisations and, of course, unions. Division and confrontation are to be expected because the losers, unless they are included through consensus and cooperative effort, will seek to move the conflict into the streets in order to change the post-vote balance of power.

Following the vote, a fierce confrontation between the opposition and the majority, whoever the protagonists are, will imperil the transition to democracy and plunge the country into uncertainty. In fact, an Ennahda victory – in which it leads a government coalition that replicates the experience of the governments between 2011 and 2013 – might trigger virulent opposition from the secularist parties and mistrust among neighbouring regimes, notably Algeria, which would look unfavourably on Islamists winning power in Tunisia for the next five years, given the risk of a spillover effect. On the other hand, a victory by Nidaa Tunis, which in taking power would exclude its Islamist rival, would raise the threat of a return to authoritarian rule through the emergence of a dominant party.

In short, this would constitute an electoral coup d'état that would evoke a remake of the Egyptian scenario at the polling booth. Therefore, reaching a consensus on forming a government of national unity is absolutely essential not only for government stability, but also – and above all – in order to consolidate the democratic transition process.

<sup>1</sup> In the October 23rd 2011 election the Ennahda party won 37.04% of the vote and 89 seats, followed by the Congrès pour la République (the party of the country's president, Moncef Marzouki), with 8.71% of the vote and 29 seats.





Author of *The TOI Story: How a Newspaper Changed the Rules of the Game*. Harper Collins 2013 [LINK](#)

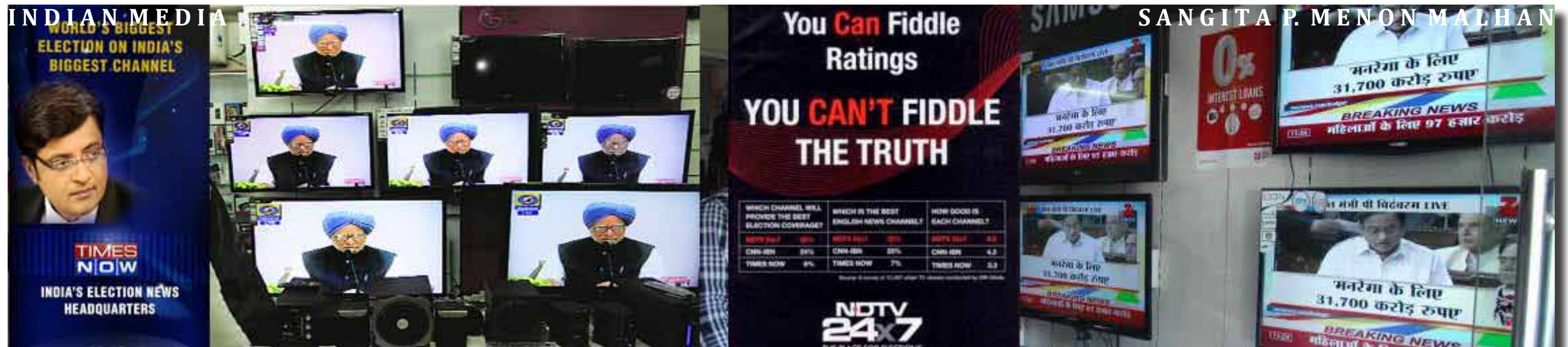
## Hamartia and The Indian Media

India's elections in April-May 2014 saw the media play a larger role than ever before. The scale of the exercise - nearly 400 news channels and every large and small newspaper and magazine worth its salt, fussing and gushing over politicians - and the stunning span - almost non-stop reportage from September 2013 - beats everything else in terms of election coverage.

Elections in India have always been a mega event of noise and colour playing out on dusty roads and vibrant streets; somehow retaining order and method beneath the visible chaos and the charming madness. It would, however, be fair to say that this time around, a parallel spectacle of overwhelming proportions played out in India's newsrooms as well.

Sadly, though, this election also brought the limitations of the media. More appropriately, it was the *Hamartia* of the media - the errors of judgement and the tragic flaws of the protagonist as described in Aristotle's *Poetics* - which emerged during this saturated election coverage. There was also *hubris* on show, of course.





It was, therefore, with some trepidation and with a little excitement that I realized that the role of the Indian media in the recent general elections had all the attributes of a classical Greek tragedy. An entire generation of newsmakers (and the now-well known `news traders') has had the collective distinction of having being played by the environment and by their common goal – survival, with or without meaning to do so. Have they been helpless? Yes, and No.

By the end of the jamboree, it was clear that unless the media reinvents itself significantly from here, its high point would actually mark the start of its rapid decline. Underlying trends, notably social media and the democratisation of opinion, suggest that Election 2014 might have been the peak – the point from where begins the journey downhill.

The media has been criticised for not being objective in its election coverage. There is data to show, for example, that Mr Narendra Modi (now Prime Minister of India) got a disproportionate share of airtime. In many cases, hagiography and melodrama passed off as news feature. Even leading media houses failed to ask tough questions of Mr Modi, often grateful for being allowed to interview him at all in the first place.

Public theatre ruled the day and racy visuals sought to hold the attention of a disgruntled – and cynical - electorate. Beginning mid-December 2013, and particularly in March and April 2014, the din only got louder. Is this to say that the media entirely lost the plot, or did they go on to the stage with their eyes open!

A pre-determined narrative, the pressure to compete and to fill airtime with sensational, juicy distractions, offering easily consumable content – all these redefined news coverage and made it entertaining and light in every sense of the word. It often neutralized the distinctive voice and made clones out of a seemingly dissimilar Press. Most organizations copied one another, and said the same things, with no conscious desire to provoke dissent or opposition in thought and definitely not in word.

Most media channels did not do much, if anything, to scrutinise the claims by political parties through objective on-ground reportage. Channels happily aired footage of public rallies from the political parties conducting them. Shooting public rallies became nothing short of an art form, with camera angles used to exaggerate participation and play up the response to politician speeches. The channels got into the act in prime time panel discussions in the evening. These mostly centred around inane issues, trying to deconstruct speeches and bytes of the day and locating meaning where none existed. All this, done by the same faces, day after day.

Many among the second and third rung politicians learnt to make the most of it. Hurl provocative statements during the day, and end up basking in prime time fame for that one evening.

This perverse drill meant that viewers were deprived of scrutiny, objectivity and analysis of key issues. Election coverage became a non-stop soap opera, severely eroding the role and credibility of mainstream national media. Although the election speeches were replete with mentions of development, jobs, battling corruption, communalism, and so on, the media rarely chose to go beyond the rhetoric.

The central question, however, is why did media coverage of the elections turn out this way? One part of the explanation is in terms of ideology and partisanship. Indeed, the 2014 elections has been termed as a highly “polarised” election. Especially on issues of communalism and minority rights, there seemed to be a divide, real or perceived. The polity was seen to be sharply on either side of the divide.

Some of that ideological fervour may have seeped into the media. There were clear instances of partisanship in media coverage. It did appear at some stage that you were either “pro Modi or anti Modi”. The media played along. It took sides, often in brazen ways.

Bias and prejudice are by themselves serious issues for the media. Integrity and objectivity are central to the media's role. But on delving deeper, one finds that underlying this behaviour were more serious factors relating to the long term health of the media.

The fact is that media is a loss making business in India. Barring a few leading houses, most media companies are bleeding. This includes several media outfits that have a long track record of competence and credibility. In a wildly fragmented and intensely competitive market, there just is not adequate advertising money to keep everyone going. Especially in an economy that has slowed.

In this situation, media is increasingly having to rely on big business for survival. Under the impact of debt, some of the leading houses have had to obtain a bail-out, as it were, from financiers and business houses.

It turned out that many of these channel owners, like much of big business in India, were pro-Modi during these elections. They viewed the outgoing Congress government as indecisive and ridden with corruption, notably in the last two years of its regime. It is just that big business did not keep this bias to itself. It leveraged the media under its control to further this cause.





There were instances of leading journalists being cautioned against tweeting against Mr Modi. Editors were under pressure to toe a line. Some that did not were asked to leave. There was a clamour among journalists and media observers to make public the ownership and cross holdings of media houses. Lack of transparency, they argued, was making election coverage murky.

To be sure, some of these journalists used rhetoric and hurled shallow and careless comments in their famed panel discussions to discredit candidates. They did not have well-reasoned, measured and factual content to speak with conviction. All in all, none of the sides of the mainstream English media covered itself with glory.

Unfortunately, the print medium followed suit. They seemed overwhelmed by the image-led mega spectacle being created by the television media. Their coverage remained devoid of issues and balance for the most part. They first contributed to building the Modi wave, and then surrendered to it. None of this is a comment on the capabilities or otherwise of any candidate. This is not an argument that Modi won on the back of an unprecedented media support, or that it was even decisive in his landslide victory. Rather, this is a narrative only about how the media succumbed, big time. The most notable part though is that despite the scale, size and homogeneity of the media coverage, mainstream media was in fact rendered irrelevant by competing factors because Modi's campaign was itself unprecedented in ambition, planning and execution. It appears that no other election campaign, barring Obama's presidential campaign in 2012, comes anywhere close.

According to the Business Standard newspaper, between September 2013 and May 2014, Modi travelled 300,000 kilometres across 25 states, addressing 437 public meetings. He also participated in 5500 video conferences, public events and 3D holographic rallies. Combined with this was a relentless campaign of advertising, perfectly orchestrated with a great sense of timing. This raised questions – muted towards the end – about the source of funding such a mega campaign. But the fact is that mainstream, traditional news media was in that sense completely swamped by the alternative channels of communication. They were bypassed.

It also left one wondering whether the media is relevant beyond a point, in a play of such grand magnitude. Do newspapers and television channels set precedents and influence trends any more? To be charitable to the traditional media, some of its failings can be attributed to the fact that it was struggling to remain relevant in the face of the barrage of social media, advertising and on ground effort that marked Modi's campaign. They no longer enjoyed the status of being the primary channel of communication between politicians and their voters. They were left with little space within which to set the agenda of the elections.

Add to this Modi's charisma and his exceptional communication abilities. These were tailor-made to win in the image led spectacle, especially against rivals who were particularly mediocre in this aspect. So if the media reasons that its Modi obsession was driven by viewer ratings and nothing else, we may have to grant it to them to a certain extent. *“Do not blame Caesar; blame the people of Rome who have so enthusiastically acclaimed and adored him.”* (A quote attributed to Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero).

Those who lament the role of the media in the 2014 elections must accept the factors underlying it – bleeding bottomline constraining resources for quality programming, new sets of owners with limited experience in running the media, the power of the social media and on ground efforts challenging the monopoly of newspapers and television as mediators between politicians and voters. Unfortunately for the media, this does not end with the elections. The 2014 elections only brought these underlying trends to the forefront. Social media, with its innovative models of customised communication and advertising, is striking at the heart of traditional media business models.

Unlike the West, social media may be constrained by relatively low penetration of the internet and smartphones. A generation brought up on morning newspapers and family viewing of television may take a while to switch to online and digital. But this is only a matter of time. The writing is on the wall.

This is leading traditional media to bend over backwards to humour advertisers. Newspapers creating multiple front pages to humour advertisers, evident in recent weeks, is one such “innovation”. Puritans scoff at it. But we have to realise that the traditional media is battling for long term survival. At the same time, the carpet bombing coverage of Mr Modi's mass mobilisation initiatives and overseas visits, suggests that the shindig-as-news mode of television is not going anywhere. If anything, it has intensified.

The 2014 elections have thus been defining for the Indian media. It showcased their size and stamina, but also made stark their limitations. Let's just hope that there is some retribution at the end of this all. Time will surely tell!

**Says Mephistopheles to Faust in Goethe's eponymous masterpiece, “I'll be your servant here, and I'll not stop or rest, at your decree. When we're together on the other side, you'll do the same for me.” ..... ?**

(The eroteme... is mine.)



This essay was written and published in 2008. Since then I have updated it every year. Except for a few lines here and there the basic essay has remained in its original form. It is a reminder to us that the *inhumanity of humanity* has not changed. In fact it appears to be growing in intensity. Sadly the more things change, the more they remain the same.



## 2014 : Another Year of Living Foolishly ?

This year is grinding to a close and then hope will begin for the New Year. So what will it be?

More wars for religious or commercial purposes? Cultural genocide? Child abuse? Mutilation and other abuses of women? Human slavery? Beheadings? Decimation of another species?

New insidious revelations that expose the all-pervasive criminality of governments, international politics and sections of the Media?

There is so much to choose from. It's like a supermarket out there with all kinds of manmade disasters available on the shelves, one has simply to reach out and grab one. 2014 is ending on a note of negotiated delusions with the Climate Change Conference in New York. What happened to the good old days when we used a blanket instead of a heater? All this talk of saving the world is pointless. Everything is done half-heartedly. Let's make a resolution for the New Year to decimate the planet. Destroy all our natural resources, pollute the rivers and farm the seas to extinction. At least we would be doing one thing properly.

On one hand we talk of peace, love and no war. On the other hand we bomb, rape, pillage, annex and subdue nations with money, military power and retarded religiosity.

For instance, let's take a quick look at Afghanistan. The British couldn't control the tribes in the 19th century, the Russians failed miserably and the American soldiers with their assorted comrades in arms, poor souls, are dying by the dozen along with faceless unarmed civilians. I suppose life is cheaper by the dozen. Hasn't anyone got a clue as to what the Afghans want?





What about certain parts of the Middle East and in particular Syria and Iraq? Do you think they will run out of people considering the number of killings that are taking place? Education there is history – like the death of a six year old killed by a stray bullet. It stems from the barrel of a gun. The pen is for signing death certificates. And as ‘heads begin to roll’, aficionados of one religion pursue a scorched earth policy including hounding, raping and pillaging innocent civilians and their properties; people whose only crime is eking out a living on their ancestral lands and following their faith.

Statistics are essential in war zones. They can always be rearranged to suit one’s perceived objectives. The little numbers represent people; mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, relatives and friends. A neat way to manage these numbers is to write in pencil so that an eraser can be used judiciously. And as the death toll in war ravaged countries rises, a hysterical caucus threatens Russia and a host of other countries for deviating from the ‘acceptable norms of international behaviour’ like illegally invading countries on trumped up charges and bombing innocent folk back to the stone age...while deliberately turning a blind eye to China, a country that continues to violently dismantle the vibrant ancient Tibetan culture, brainwashing and incarcerating the Tibetans. Incidentally these very countries vie for commercial space in the seas off China.

Africa, the Dark Continent, what can one say about its peoples and their ancient civilizations that have slowly been corrupted by large corporations and foreign governments meddling in the affairs of the states: Buying and selling governments on mammoth proportions? Oh for the days of Idi Amin. Remember Entebbe and the blood baths? Everything is so quiet now, no excitement and drama except for bloody popular uprisings, theft of natural resources and other inconsequential happenings like the sudden spread of highly infectious diseases and mass kidnapping of school children for forced marriage and conversion.

What about the sub-continent, India? Do they still abort female foetuses? Burn women who don’t bring enough dowry? Continue to decimate wildlife? Persevere in the destruction of the environment? And do millions still exist on the threshold of life and death? And is the arrogant Indian Middle Class growing to newer levels self-indulgence? And are the subsistence farmers still committing suicide due to failure of crops, seeds often supplied by a multinational?

Forgive me, I missed that little country to the west of India; Pakistan. Poor chaps they’ve had such a tiresome year with the constant ebb and flow of political violence and religious fundamentalism peppered with suicide bombers that probably the common folk want to migrate to India... can’t really blame them. All they desire is to live in peace to pray, work and procreate.

Now let’s see who is left on the black board? Hmmm...the indigenous people of the Amazon are still fighting a losing battle with the powers that be to stop the plunder of their home, the rain forest, the

green lung of mother earth. South America appears to be lost in translation. We never seem to get a lot of news from there except for soccer, drug lords and plunder of the marine world.

Let’s leave all this violence for some whale steaks. The Japanese are so considerate to the world at large. For a country that prides itself on rejecting nuclear weapons it has a rather odd way of showing its respect for the environment. I am referring to the mass killing of whales for scientific purposes and slaughter of dolphins on an industrial scale.

Actually you must admire their concern. Ever considered the fact that they maybe ridding the oceans of monsters that take up so much space and are a serious health hazard to humanity? I think Japan’s neighbour China has the right approach. It has dispensed with the cumbersome concept of human rights and its implementation. In its place totalitarianism with a small dose of plutocracy has been suitably installed.

There are many countries that lecture China on its human rights. Wonder who has a perfect track record? The world’s last Superpower? A superpower that continues to interfere in the affairs of other nations ... at times actually sending troops and bombing unarmed civilians along with perceived enemies of the State? I suppose the term ‘collateral damage’ is more palatable than the word... murder.

Civil liberties are essential for the survival of a nation and so is the health of its people. In some areas of society where common sense has been the victim, Nature has found a way of retaliating by inventing diseases like Ebola, AIDS and Swine Flu, infecting millions and helping to keep the population in check. Of course, with a little assistance from humankind.

**And once again, as we have done in the past, this Christmas and New Year we shall all sit down to sumptuous meals, drink whatever fancies our taste buds, shop till we drop and pamper our overweight children and pets. It’s the season of happiness, love and family especially for the homeless, injured and maimed children of wars, missing women in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, asylum seekers, political detainees and the fringe folk of the planet. They will surely be very happy and content with what they see, hear, feel and touch this festive season.**

From genocide to environmental disasters it has been a roller coaster ride through many countries and peoples and cultures and religions. This journey will end only when we truly comprehend the reason as to why we have been put on this planet by a power far greater than we can ever imagine.

Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year to you...

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om



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