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Live encounters

Free online magazine from village earth
March 2016



His Beatitude Patriarch Emeritus
MICHEL SABBABH
Palestinian Patriarch of Jerusalem 1987-2008
in an exclusive interview with Mark Ulyseas



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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Civil and human rights activists, animal rights activists, poets, writers, journalists, social workers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of the magazine.

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Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah **First R.C. Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (1987 - 2008)**

Born in Nazareth, on 1933. Ordained R.C. priest on 1955. Pastoral work in parishes for two years. Then higher studies of Arabic language, in Beirut (Lebanon) Jesuit University. 1973 PHD in Arabic Philology, from the Sorbonne, Paris. Then back to Pastoral work in Christ the King parish in Amman (Jordan). President of Bethlehem University in 1980. Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1988-2008. Since 1999 until 2006, Patriarch Sabbah has been the International President of Pax Christi, a world Catholic organization promoting peace. On the 11th of December 2009 Patriarch Sabbah together with other prominent Christian Leaders launched the Kairos Palestine Document in an international conference in Bethlehem, Palestine.



Christian Peace-making in Israel-Palestine Today **Father Dr. David M. Neuhaus SJ**

Father David Neuhaus is an Israeli Jesuit and serves as Episcopal Vicar in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, responsible for Hebrew speaking and migrant Catholics in Israel. He has a PhD in Political Science from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and completed his theological studies in Paris and received his License in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. <http://catholic.co.il/index.php?lang=en>



Rabbis For Human Rights **Rabbi Arik W Ascherman**

Rabbi Arik W. Ascherman, graduated from Harvard University in 1981 and from 1981-1983 worked for *Interns For Peace*. He served as the director of Hillel at U.C. Davis from 1989-1991, as the rabbi of Temple Beth Hillel in Richmond, CA from 1991-1994, Director of Congregation Mevakshei Derekh in Jerusalem from 1994-1997 and rabbi of Kibbutz Yahel from 1997-2000. Beginning in 1995 Rabbi Ascherman served as co-director of *Rabbis For Human Rights*, serving as executive director from 1998-2010. He currently is President and Senior Rabbi. He has received numerous awards and recognitions for his human rights work, as has *Rabbis For Human Rights*.



Pakistan's Academics under siege by Government **Dr Altaf Qadir**

Qadir is Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Peshawar, where he joined as a lecturer. He is a Life Member of the Pakistan Historical Society. Qadir served as Lecturer in history for about three years in the Department of Higher Education (Colleges), Government of former North-West Frontier Province. he has published two books and numerous articles.



Is the Pacific's solidarity for Papua on the rise? **Dr Budi Hernawan**

Hernawan is Lecturer at Paramadina Graduate School of Diplomacy and Research Fellow at Abdurahman Wahid Centre at University of Indonesia in Jakarta.



Aboriginal people against the forced closure of remote communities **Yesim Yaprak Yildiz**

Yesim Yaprak Yildiz is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge, UK. In her doctoral research, she is looking into different modalities of truth-telling in peace and reconciliation processes with a focus on confessions of state officials on past atrocities against civilians. Yaprak is currently an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz, Austria. Previously she was a visiting PhD scholar at the Centre for International Governance and Justice at the ANU. She has been working on human rights violations in Turkey for over ten years.



Child Marriage in Amhara, Ethiopia: Faces of Change Part 3 (Final) **Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop**

Elizabeth is a freelance writer, poet and artist specialising in human rights advocacy, with a particular interest in the rights of women and children who has worked for many international organisations including Amnesty International and UNICEF, and has worked in a number of countries, where she has spoken with the victims of human trafficking. The subjects Elizabeth has worked and written on include inter-country adoption; legal reform; maternal and infant health; the sexualisation of children; and war propaganda. www.libertyandhumanity.com



Encounters with Badal Sircar **Anjum Katyal**

Katyal is Consultant (Publications), Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata and Co-Director, Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival. She has been; Chief Editor, Seagull Books, Calcutta (1987-2006); Editor, Seagull Theatre Quarterly (1994-2004); Web Editor, Saregama-HMV (2006-11); Editor, Art and the City (2010-13). As the editorial head of a specialist arts publisher, she was responsible for a broad range of books on art and culture (1987-2006). She is the author of Habib Tanvir: Towards an Inclusive Theatre (SAGE, 2012).



Coração Brasileiro - A Brazilian Heart **Anna Salleh**

Anna Salleh is a Brazilian jazz artist and science journalist. As a singer and guitarist she performs regularly in Australia and Malaysia, and has also performed in the UK and Brazil. Anna has degrees in science and journalism as well as a PhD in science and technology studies. She works as a journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is involved in teaching science journalism, and has contributed to a number of books. Anna has also produced a radio documentary about her journey of musical discovery in Brazil. www.annasalleh.com



Travel - First World Problems **Joachim Matschoss**

Joachim Matschoss was born in Germany and now lives in Melbourne/Australia. He is a playwright, poet and Theatre-maker. His Theatre Company, 'Backyard Theatre Ensemble (BYTE)' presents diverse pieces of theatre all across Melbourne/ Australia and internationally, both Youth Arts and for adults. Joachim has created theatre in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, India, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, HongKong, Hungary, Taiwan, Switzerland and China. Joachim's poetry is published in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. www.byteensemble.com



The Ugliness of Exceptionalism **Mark Ulyseas**

Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a free lance journalist and photographer. All this took up nearly three decades. End 2009 he created Live Encounters for the free sharing of knowledge hoping that the 'humane' in humanity still remained albeit scattered around the globe. He hasn't been disappointed. Poets, writers, journalists, students, painters, activists, doctors etc. from across continents have continued to contribute to Live Encounters. This has become a celebration of Life by people of village earth. [LINK](#)



A message from Rumi **Jill Gocher**

Bali based international photographer has spent her life exploring and enjoying Asian cultures. Her work has appeared in National Geographic, Time, International Herald Tribune, Asia Spa, Discovery, Silver Kris and many more. Her books - Asia's legendary Hotels, Periplus, Bali- Island of Light -Marshall Cavendish, Indonesia - Islands of the Imagination. Periplus, Australia - the land down under - Times Editions, Singapore, Indonesia - the last paradise - Times Editions. She has held exhibitions in Singapore, Kathmandu, and Bali. www.amazon.com/author/jillgocher

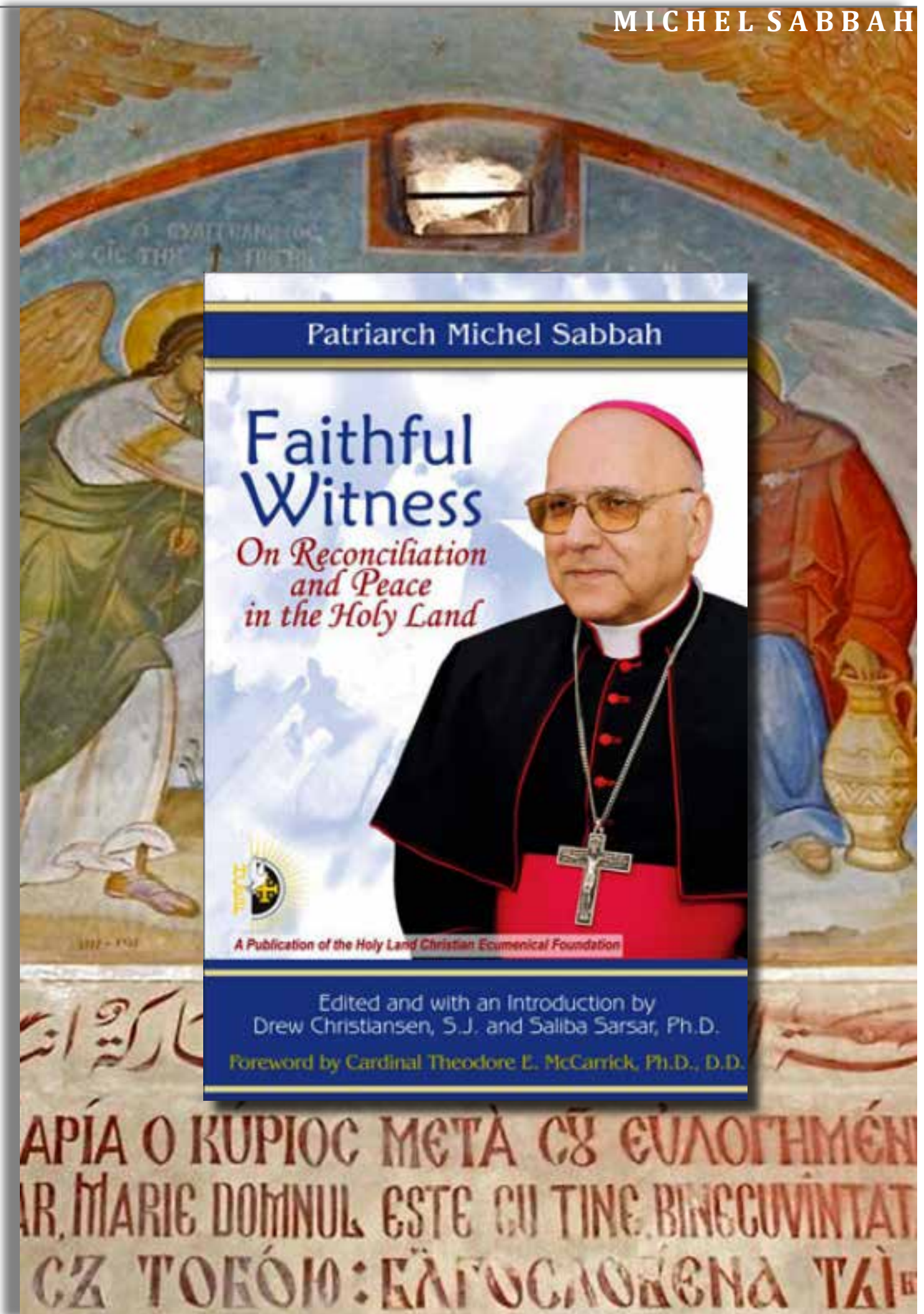
H. B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1988-2008). Born in Nazareth, on 1933. Ordained R.C. priest on 1955. Pastoral work in parishes for two years. Then higher studies of Arabic language, in Beirut (Lebanon) Jesuit University. 1973 PHD in Arabic Philology, from the Sorbonne, Paris. Then back to Pastoral work in Christ the King parish in Amman (Jordan). President of Bethlehem University in 1980. Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1987-2008. Since 1999 until 2006, Patriarch Sabbah has been the International President of Pax Christi, a world Catholic organization promoting peace. On the 11th of December 2009 Patriarch Sabbah together with other prominent Christian Leaders launched the *Kairos Palestine Document* in an international conference in Bethlehem, Palestine.

HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH EMERITUS MICHEL SABBAH

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM 1987-2008
FIRST PALESTINIAN R. C. LATIN PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM
IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MARK ULYSEAS

What does it mean to be a Palestinian Christian?

To be a Palestinian Christian is just as any human being, in any people, being Christian. Nothing special. The Palestinian people, is one people, with two religions, Christian and Moslem. The special in the life of the Palestinian people is the long *Israeli-Palestinian conflict* in which we are living since more than sixty years. The Christian Palestinian, as every Palestinian, has to face the reality of this endless conflict. He has to act for the end of the conflict, for the end of the Israeli military occupation, for justice and peace for all. A Christian Palestinian helps understand the universal meaning of Palestine, a land wanted by God to be holy, a land holy for three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. A land holy for all humankind. The *Palestinian State*, as the *Israeli State*, must respect this universal dimension and meaning of the Land. There can be and must be a political entity for Palestinians, the Palestinian state, and for Israelis, the Israeli state, but the land remains at the same time universal, first for both, for two peoples, then, being holy, it must remain open to all "pilgrims" of the earth.



When I came to Jerusalem, I found the country not only in the situation of the endless conflict, between Israelis and Palestinians, but also the Palestinians were in a situation of intense rebellion. It was the first Intifada (the Arabic word for rebellion). The people were tired of being under Israeli occupation. They wanted their independence, their freedom. I had to deal with that. Of course I was with those who ask for their freedom. But my main position was for justice and peace for all. A pastor, a man caring for all human beings, cares first for the oppressed and the poor.

Why did you become a priest?

While a child, it was the desire to pray, having seen priests who pray, and having been taught in a Christian school in which prayer has a place. Then, with more awareness, it is to know better God, and to make him known and to serve people. To serve people, means to accompany people, in their life and various preoccupations, human, and spiritual, and help them, and strengthen them. To be a priest, is to pray, to remain in presence of God, and to help people live their life, in all its variety, in the presence of God.

What was your role as the first Palestinian R. C. Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem?

The role of a Patriarch is the same, whether he is Palestinian, from the local clergy or foreigner, coming from outside the country. The people to take care of are the same, they are Christian Palestinians. The role of a Patriarch is the role of a pastor who takes care of his people, his spiritual needs, and when necessary, his material needs, or political and economic. Our patriarchate extends over Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus. The role of a Pastor is to feel the preoccupations of all these peoples. And try to respond. When I came to Jerusalem, as new Patriarch, the spiritual needs of the people were there. I paid attention to that and tried with the help of the clergy and the faithful themselves to respond: for example, we published a new series of books of catechism. We organized a "local Synod", with the participation of all catholic churches present in the country: Greek Catholics, Maronites, Armenians, Syrians and Chaldeans). A synod is an intense effort of prayer, study and reflection on the situation of the people, for a certain period of time. Our synod of the Holy Land lasted since 1993 until the year 2000. Some headlines during the Synod: faith, hope, charity, charity works and institutions, educational institutions, dialogue with religions (Islam and Judaism), ecumenical dialogue with other churches, orthodox and evangelicals, the political situation of the country, and so on...

I collaborated also with all the Churches in Jerusalem, Orthodox, and Protestants.

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Christian Zionism is doing harm to Palestinians and to Christian Palestinians, and even to Israelis themselves, because of their limited theology that does not follow the law of Christian love. If they are Christians, they have to follow the commandment, "love God, and love all God's creatures, even the enemies". They have to love Israelis and Palestinians alike. The duty of any Christian is not to support one part to become stronger to make war, it is to help both sides towards reconciliation.

What is the Kairos Palestine Document and what does it hope to achieve?

The word Kairos means "the right or the opportune moment" in which a faithful finds the grace of God. The Kairos document is a guideline for Christians to have the right Christian and human reflection on the situation. It is a vision of Christian faith, hope and love, in the conflict. It is a call to find in the events, which we are living, though difficult and oppressive, the grace of God.

The aim is to give a right faith position in this political situation. The aim is to give principles to the Christians as such and as Palestinians and as human beings: political occupation imposed by a people upon another people is a wrong thing, even a sin. It is depriving the people and individuals from freedom and dignity that God gave them. Every evil is to be resisted, and corrected. So the Occupation. But our Christian resistance will follow the path of love. We do not hate. But we ask for our freedom and independence. And our way is love. Jesus told us: you love God, and the neighbour, even the enemies. Here, we live in a situation in which we are called to apply this difficult commandment. Our aim is not to kill the enemy, our aim is to have back our freedom and dignity and independence. Through love we have to find and to invent ways of resistance that remain consistent with this logic.

It is a call addressed to the churches in the world in order to hear, to listen, to know what is going on in the Holy Land, in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, and to try their best to bring both parties to reconciliation.

You were one of the signatories of the Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism. Could you explain what this means and what is the purpose of this document?

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The duty of any Christian is not to support one part to become stronger to make war, it is to help both sides towards reconciliation. As Christians, two things are required from Christian Zionists, love equally Israelis and Palestinians, and help them to reconcile. The essence of the Christian message, in our conflict situation, is love and reconciliation.

"The Christian Church has been the deadly enemy of the Jewish people for centuries", said Gopstein, head of an extremist group, in one of his lectures to his followers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben-Zion_Gopstein. This extremism is harming Christians through desecrating cemeteries, burning, insult and blasphemy scripts on the walls of monasteries or churches. Its true danger will be against its own Jewish moderate society. Jews themselves will be the next victim of such extremist groups. In the meanwhile the Israeli authorities seem unable to deal with it and to stop it.

There appears to be growing violence by right wing Jews against not only Palestinian Muslims but also Christians. Why are the Christians and their places of worship being targeted? Is it because they are Palestinians? Or is there a concerted effort by right wing Jews to cleanse Israel of religious minorities?

Christians are dealt with as Palestinians by general Israeli politics. By Jewish religious extremists they are targeted as Christians. Why? It is the old enmity between Jews and Christians in the world. *"The Christian Church has been the deadly enemy of the Jewish people for centuries",* said Gopstein, head of an extremist group, in one of his lectures to his followers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben-Zion_Gopstein. This extremism is harming Christians through desecrating cemeteries, burning, insult and blasphemy scripts on the walls of monasteries or churches. Its true danger will be against its own Jewish moderate society. Jews themselves will be the next victim of such extremist groups. In the meanwhile the Israeli authorities seem unable to deal with it and to stop it.

How, in your opinion, can peace come about between the Palestinians and Israelis? And how can religious leaders on all sides help in this process?

Peace is possible if it is wanted. Now, Israeli leaders do not want it. Peace means two State solution. While, in principle, the Israelis leaders admitted the two State solution, they make every effort, through settlements to take as much as they can of Palestinian land. Recently some Israeli leaders say it clearly; there will be never a Palestinian State. The two State solution is becoming something impossible. The only solution will remain one State for all. Israel does not want this solution either. They want one State for the Jews alone. Israeli leaders are facing a dilemma: either justice, end of Palestinian occupation, end of Palestinians' oppression, or the political status quo - occupation, oppression, discrimination, and the conflict will go on for years. Religious leaders can help, if they are independent from the formal political line of the Authorities, and if they give a new education to Israelis and Palestinians, telling them both: we can live together in peace. This new education has not yet begun.

What is the BDS movement and how does it help the Palestinians?

BDS movement is not for aimed to help Palestinians. Its aim is to help Israelis, through international pressure, to enter the right path of peace. It is the only way that can help Israelis leaders move from their political status quo. They need to be pushed towards peace. True friends of Israel are not those who are afraid to help Israel take the risk of pace, they are those who help Israel take the risk.

BDS (campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions) movement is not aimed to help Palestinians. Its aim is to help Israelis, through international pressure, to enter the right path of peace. It is the only way that can help Israelis leaders move from their political status quo. They need to be pushed towards peace. True friends of Israel are not those who are afraid to help Israel take the risk of peace, they are those who help Israel take the risk.

Could you give a glimpse of your life and work?

I studied priestly studies in Beit-Jala, a small city close to Bethlehem. Ordained priest in 1955, I began my active life as vicar in the parish of Madaba, in Jordan, near Mount Nebo. Then, I studied Arabic high studies. I taught Arabic language and courses in Islam. I was director of the schools of the Latin Patriarcate in Palestine and Jordan. I was appointed to accompany the youth, and I was responsible for the youth movements. In 1970 I was parish priest in a popular parish in Amman, downtown, al-Misdar or Christ the King parish. I was appointed president of Bethlehem University in 1980. In 1987, I was nominated patriarch of Jerusalem for the Roman Catholic Latin rite.

My life is a life of a Christian and a priest to serve God and the people. I served in parishes, and engaged in pastoral works, listening to people, to their preoccupations and problems helped them with counselling and with prayer. My life was an effort to know better God and His love for people, and tried to make Him known among people, those whom I served as parish priest, and those whom I served as Patriarch. I shared in the preoccupation of the public life, the political life, as well. In this domain, I spoke for the defence of the oppressed.

What is your message to the readers and contributors of Live Encounters?

My message, for the readers and for all, is to live one's life in full, according to the word of Jesus: *'I have come so that they may have life, and life to the full'* (Jn 10: 10). Life in full is life with others and for others. One reaches his own perfection through service to others. In difficulties, and oppressions, he takes the side of the oppressed and the poor. Last, we are not alone to live our life. God is with us. We live with Him, and He gives us strength and guides us through all events of all kinds.

Father Dr. David Mark Neuhaus SJ is Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew Speaking Catholics in Israel, a part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and he is coordinator of the Pastoral Among Migrants. He completed a BA, MA and PhD (Political Science) at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He then completed pontifical degrees in theology and Scripture in Paris (Centre Sevrès) and Rome (Pontifical Biblical Institute). His publications include *Justice and the Intifada: Palestinians and Israelis speak out* (edited with Kathy Bergen and Ghassan Rubeiz), New York, Friendship Press, 1991 and (in collaboration with Alain Marchadour), *The Land that I will show you...Land, Bible and History* has been published in French (2006), English (2007), Italian (2007) and German (2011). <http://catholic.co.il/index.php?lang=en>



FATHER DR. DAVID M NEUHAUSS SJ

LATIN PATRIARCHAL VICAR
SAINT JAMES VICARIATE FOR HEBREW SPEAKING CATHOLICS IN ISRAEL
PASTORAL COORDINATION FOR MIGRANTS
JERUSALEM

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Christian Peace-making in Israel-Palestine Today

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In this brief article I will focus only on the role of local Christians in Israel/Palestine and their potential in contributing to the struggle for justice and peace. Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem from 1987 until 2008, once wrote to the Catholic faithful:

Your first duty is to be equal to the situation. However complicated or difficult it is, you should try to understand it. Take all the facts into account. Consider them objectively, calmly but courageously, and resist any temptation to fear and despair.¹

The Church in the Holy Land is reconciled to being a voice from the margins, not needing to jockey for power and influence. Christians make up about 2% of the population in Israel and in Palestine. Their role in the margins affords the freedom needed to challenge the powers that be and the dominant ideologies and call for the implementation of the values preached by the Church. At the same time, the Church can demand full rights for all in the Holy Land. The Church can promote dialogue with all, Jews and Muslims, religious and secular. Although, many of the faithful are tempted to retreat into a safe Christian “ghetto” because of the hostile world around, the Church is called to engage and refuse the temptation to become insular and dis-engaged from the challenges facing the society at large.



Christian schools, universities, institutes for the frail, the elderly and the handicapped, hospitals and other institutions that offer social and educational services are spread across the face of the Holy Land. Almost all of them are characterized by their devoted service to the societies in which they were established and by their openness to one and all, Muslim, Christian and Jew. These institutions reveal the face of a Christian presence that seeks to serve not only Christians but a society at large that is open and respectful of diversity.

The Church in Israel/Palestine today is composed of the Christians who have always been in these lands, the majority being Palestinian Arabs. Alongside these ancient communities, are newcomers who have arrived since 1948, part and parcel of Jewish, Hebrew speaking society and a large number of migrants and asylum seekers, who are overwhelmingly Christians? Whereas the Christians who are Palestinian Arabs live under occupation or in a state of discrimination like all Arabs in the Holy Land, the newcomers are part and parcel of Jewish Israeli society, even if they live on the margins.

One of the greatest challenges in a time of conflict is to develop a language that can say what the Church wants to say, facing the enormous threats that assail Christians from every side. The complexity of the Church's position obligates those who speak in the Church's name to cultivate a language that can promote the values of the Gospel and remain true to the diversity that the Church represents. This is not the challenge of using a diplomatic language that transcends issues but rather a language that can help transform reality and point to a better future. This is perhaps the Church's most important contribution to peacemaking. Words create worlds and creative, peacemaking words in a world of violence and war can open the horizons beyond which lies a better future. On July 8, 2014, as the Gaza conflict was beginning, the Justice and Peace Commission, headed by Emeritus Patriarch Michel Sabbah, stated:

Our role, as religious leaders, is to speak a prophetic language that reveals the alternatives beyond the cycle of hatred and violence. This language refuses to attribute the status of enemy to any of God's children; it is a language that opens up the possibility of seeing each one as brother or sister. Pope Francis at the invocation for peace cried out: "We have heard a summons, and we must respond. It is the summons to break the spiral of hatred and violence, and to break it by one word alone: the word "brother". But to be able to utter this word we have to lift our eyes to heaven and acknowledge one another as children of one Father." Religious leaders are invited to use language responsibly so that it becomes a tool to transform the world from a wilderness of darkness and death into a flourishing garden of life.

The words give rise to institution building, founded on Christian discourse. Christian schools, universities, institutes for the frail, the elderly and the handicapped, hospitals and other institutions that offer social and educational services are spread across the face of the Holy Land. Almost all of them are characterized by their devoted service to the societies in which they were established and by their openness to one and all, Muslim, Christian and Jew. These institutions reveal the face of a Christian presence that seeks to serve not only Christians but a society at large that is open and respectful of diversity. These institutions represent a very important Christian outreach beyond the hold of fear

The *first* challenge is simply *meeting together*. Can Christian Palestinians and Christian Israelis come together despite the walls and listen to one another? Can they listen to each others' witness of faith and accommodate the narratives that include the national identity of the one bearing witness. The Christian Palestinian is Palestinian and carries the pain, anguish and suffering of his/her people. The Christian Israeli is Israeli (or identifies with Israelis) and likewise carries the pain, anguish and suffering of his/her people.

and isolation. Particularly notable are those institutions that serve almost entirely Muslim populations, showing the face of a Church that seeks to contribute to building up a society based upon conviviality and respect. Christian institutions, particularly schools, universities and hospitals, are often places where Christians and Muslims not only rub shoulders but where relationships are established and discourse on diversity and respect is developed. It is through these institutions that the Christians can and do leave their mark on society.

The Christian presence in the Holy Land is not and will not be measured by its statistical importance but rather by the significance of its contribution to society, particularly in its service of education, health and relief work and in its language of love. Christians are animated by an awareness that in a context where borders, walls, security and suspicion dominate, they have a very particular vocation if they are to follow Jesus. *"For (Christ) is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it"* (Ephesians 2:14-16). God has planted the seed of faith in Christ deep in the soil of both Palestinian and Israeli societies and this undoubtedly has significance for the vocation of Christ's disciples who, though separated by walls of enmity because of the ongoing conflict, are united by their faith in the Christ who is peace.

The Israeli-Palestinian cuts right through the various Christian churches and communities as Christian Palestinians and Christian Israelis might indeed belong to the same churches, Orthodox, Oriental, Catholic, Protestant or Evangelical, but are radically divided because of their national identity or identification and their political and ideological convictions. Rooted Christian Palestinians are members in the same Churches and communities as Hebrew speaking Christians, who have found their place in Israeli society as well as labor migrants and asylum seekers. Simply by being Christian and never forgetting that the Church brings together those who would otherwise be enemies, Christians are called to wipe away walls and suspicion and come together as one body.

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The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/print82456.htm>

- The *second* challenge is the *challenge of solidarity*. Listening to a brother or sister Christian must stimulate a sense of solidarity with his/her pain, anguish and suffering. This introduces the tearing passion of the Cross. Solidarity opens the Christian to the pain of the other that he/she must assume alongside the pain that is his/her own in the situation of conflict.

- The *third* challenge is *self-critique*. In a time of crisis, people seek to close ranks and unite and this is true too on either side of the Israeli-Palestinian divide. However, the development of a critique of the dominant ideologies and a sensitivity to their exclusivist and discriminatory elements must develop.

- The *fourth* challenge is promoting *communion* among all disciples of Christ. The many Christian newcomers, whether they are new immigrants, migrant workers or asylum seekers, must be formed to love the Local Church, in all its diversity of language, rite, theology and spirituality. This is the Mother Church! The new comers must come to know the Local Church, her history, and her present situation.

- The *fifth* challenge is *welcoming the new comers* into the Local Church. The Local Church has an important mission in welcoming the new comers into her midst, making place for them, sharing resources with them and getting to know their precariousness and fragility.

- The *sixth* challenge is developing the *common witness* that disciples of Christ are called to give in the Holy Land today. This common witness certainly touches on the possibility of justice and peace. Brought together despite the walls of enmity because "He is our peace", disciples of Christ are called to challenge the position that peace is impossible. Christian discipleship reveals the alternatives to war and violence, conflict and contempt, engaging the other as brother and sister. Disciples of Christ constitute a bridge between the Palestinian (and Arab) and Israeli worlds, between Muslims and Jews.

- Finally the *seventh* challenge is *calling for justice and pardon*. Christians cannot assent to injustice and must be sensitive to injustice wherever it is present, especially in the societies in which they live. Disciples of Christ must also preach pardon as they have an intimate personal experience of being pardoned although they are sinners.

Although, in this article I have focused uniquely on those Christians who live in the Holy land today, communion with Christians throughout the world is an essential component to Christian identity in the Holy Land. Pilgrims, visitors and tourists flow through the Holy Land all through the year. It is important that they not only visit the Holy Places and sacred stones but also come into contact with the "living stones" that continue the witness to Christ in His own land. A clear Christian discourse on justice and peace in Israel/Palestine today is an important part in the struggle to make justice and peace abiding realities.

Christian discipleship in the Holy Land today must bridge the greatest divide among Christians in the Holy Land today: the divide provoked by the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The divide is a gaping wound on the face of the church and, like all divisions, renders her witness to Christ feeble and incoherent. In Christian unity, the church in the Holy Land can renew her prophetic spirit. Thus the Church must "*nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us*"² so that the dawn of a new beginning can shine forth.

Although, in this article I have focused uniquely on those Christians who live in the Holy land today, communion with Christians throughout the world is an essential component to Christian identity in the Holy Land. Pilgrims, visitors and tourists flow through the Holy Land all through the year. It is important that they not only visit the Holy Places and sacred stones but also come into contact with the "living stones" that continue the witness to Christ in His own land. A clear Christian discourse on justice and peace in Israel/Palestine today is an important part in the struggle to make justice and peace abiding realities.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a man who has repeatedly reached out to all his brothers and sisters in Christ, calling them to contemplate the scandal of Christian division, Pope Francis. At his meeting with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew before the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem on May 25, 2014, he declared: "*Every time we ask forgiveness of one another for our sins against other Christians and every time we find the courage to grant and receive such forgiveness, we experience the resurrection! Every time we put behind us our longstanding prejudices and find the courage to build new fraternal relationships, we confess that Christ is truly risen! Every time we reflect on the future of the church in the light of her vocation to unity, the dawn of Easter breaks forth!*" It is this dawn that disciples of Christ are called to witness to in a beloved land, torn for too long by conflict.

1. Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem (1990), 51.

2. Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (second edition, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

Rabbi Arik W. Ascherman, graduated from Harvard University in 1981 and from 1981-1983 worked for *Interns For Peace*, a community work program in which Israeli Jews and Arabs as well as Jews from around the world, worked together to bring Israeli Jews and Arabs together in positive interaction. For most of this time Rabbi Ascherman lived in the Israeli Arab village of Tamra. He studied in the Schwartz Program for community center directors at Hebrew University while a rabbinical student, and was ordained by HUC-JIR in New York in 1989. Rabbi Ascherman served as the director of Hillel at U.C. Davis from 1989-1991, as the rabbi of Temple Beth Hillel in Richmond, CA from 1991-1994, Director of Congregation Mevakshei Derekh in Jerusalem from 1994-1997 and rabbi of Kibbutz Yahel from 1997-2000. Beginning in 1995 Rabbi Ascherman served as co-director of *Rabbis For Human Rights*, serving as executive director from 1998-2010. He currently is President and Senior Rabbi. He has received numerous awards and recognitions for his human rights work, as has *Rabbis For Human Rights*.



RABBI ARIK W. ASCHERMAN

PRESIDENT AND SENIOR RABBI
RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MARK ULYSEAS

Why did you to set up an organisation that would inevitably come in direct conflict with many powerful people in Israel and would at some point be a challenge to the socio-religious-political entities in the State?

I actually did not found *Rabbis For Human Rights*. That honor goes to **Rabbi David Forman z"l**, who did so in 1988. This was the time of the first intifada. There was much more sympathy among average Israelis for Palestinians than there is today. There wasn't the same level of Palestinian violence and terror. Many average Israelis, who weren't necessarily "leftists" or "activists" or "political" simply felt that moral red lines had been crossed. Many of our current Israeli human rights organizations were founded at about the same time. Rabbi Forman wrote an open letter to Israel's chief rabbis asking, "*Why is it that the religious establishment in this country seems only concerned with Sabbath observance and kashrut (Jewish dietary laws). Where are rabbis like Abraham Joshua Heschel speaking to the burning moral issues of our society?*" Rabbi Heschel was the descendant of a long line of Hassidic rabbis, saved from the Holocaust, and spent most of his remaining years teaching and writing in the U.S. However, he didn't simply remain in the ivory tower. He was one of the first to speak out about the Jews of the former Soviet Union. Behind the scenes he was very involved in *Nostra Aetate*, the clauses in Vatican II fifty years ago that brought about rapprochement between the Jewish and Catholic communities worldwide. He was very active against the *Vietnam war*, and his picture hangs on our wall marching with Martin Luther King Jr. He is our role model of a rabbi and a scholar, who was also a social activist. Rabbi Forman's call met a need that many rabbis were feeling for a Jewish, rabbinical response to what was happening in our society.



While most of the world sees a powerful Israel and successful Jewish communities abroad, many Jews see Israel as an embattled minority in the Middle East and remember all of the Jewish communities throughout history that were successful until a disaster occurred. Ever since the marked increase of Jews returning to their homeland and the awakening Arab nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century there has been a struggle between those on both sides that believed in coexistence and those that did not.

Are Palestinians, Muslim and Christian, citizens of the State of Israel? Please explain.

There are Palestinians who are citizens of the State, and those who are not. Those Palestinians, also called Israeli Arabs, who were born inside the borders of what became the State of Israel in 1948 (Slightly expanded after War of Independence) are Israeli citizens. They are more or less equal de jure. They vote, are represented in the Knesset, serve as judges, and are involved in most aspects of Israeli society. However, as in every democracy I am aware of, there is racism, discrimination and inequality. After 1967, Israel annexed the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, although almost nobody in the world recognizes these annexations. Some of the Palestinians living in these areas have chosen to become Israeli citizens. Most have residency status. They can travel throughout Israel, enjoy certain social benefits and vote in municipal elections. (Almost no East Jerusalem Palestinians do so, because they feel that would be legitimizing the Occupation.) They can't vote in national elections. Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank are not citizens of Israel, nor are those living in the Palestinian diaspora. They have no voice in almost any of the bodies that determine their fate. There are no differences in these matters between Muslims and Christians either in Israel, or in the Occupied Territories.

For many Jews, post WW11, the formation of the State of Israel gave them a home. What has changed since then that now drives a wedge between Israelis themselves in relation to peaceful co-existence with non-Jews?

Two thousand years of oppression at the hands of non-Jews have scarred our souls, and left, perhaps, an indelible mark on our collective consciousness. While the Torah teaches us not to oppress others because we know what it is like to be oppressed (Exodus 22:20, 23:9, etc.), psychologists teach us that those who have been beaten as children are more likely to beat their children. In addition, we live in a difficult neighbourhood, where we have had to fight for our survival. All this leads to a world view in which non-Jews remain uncaring about Jews at best, and are often out to get us. All this blurs the division between being a victim and being victimizer, and sometimes we are both simultaneously. While most of the world sees a powerful Israel and successful Jewish communities abroad, many Jews see Israel as an embattled minority in the Middle East and remember all of the Jewish communities throughout history that were successful until a disaster occurred. Ever since the marked increase of Jews returning to their homeland and the awakening Arab nationalism in the beginning of the 20th century there has been a struggle between those on both sides that believed in coexistence and those that did not.

There is an irony that Israeli Arabs are better off economically and have more political rights than they would have in many Arab countries, but at best are second or third class citizens in Israel. (Also among Jews, Israel is a very stratified society.) Many Israeli Jews still do not see Arabs as truly Israelis, and most Israeli Arabs do not feel themselves to be equal citizens.

Between 1929-1936 David Ben Gurion had been in favour of a bi-nationalist state. However, those who did not believe in coexistence won out on both sides, leading to the Arab world attacking after the U.N. voted to create the State of Israel (And a Palestinian State) in 1947, and Israel declared its independence in 1948.

Immediately after the creation of the State of Israel the Jewish majority didn't know how to treat the Arab minority. Who among Israeli Arabs might have been fighting against them the day before? From the Arab point of view, 1948 was the "Naqba," the great disaster. Leaving aside the question of to what degree Arabs were told by their leaders to flee or were expelled (there are examples of both), their numbers were decimated. Many former villages became Jewish National Fund forests. Most of the elites were among those who were no longer there, causing crises in leadership, education, etc. Arabs were under military rule until 1966. This was exploited to take over lands of Arabs still living in Israel, in addition to those of "absentee owners." Retroactively, we see that the vast majority of Israeli Arabs have been loyal to the State.

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Immediately after Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza in 1967, a debate began as to whether Israel's security interests were best served through territorial depth, or peace. The *three no's* coming from the Arab world at the Khartoum conference "No peace, no recognition, no negotiations" made the debate academic. There were certainly hostile and violent elements among the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. However, Palestinians, who had lived under a series of occupiers (As mentioned above, the 1947 U.N. resolution creating the State of Israel had also mandated the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, but these areas were occupied by Jordan and Egypt until 1967.), were not particularly hostile to their new occupiers. Israelis travelled freely through the Occupied Territories, and Palestinians could travel and work in Israel. However, in addition to the desire among some secular Israelis to strengthen their hold on the entire Biblical Land of Israel, the 1967 war unleashed powerful messianic passions among religious Jews. The miraculous victory returning most of the Biblical Land of Israel to Jewish hands when so many had been sure that Israel was about to be destroyed was surely God's Hand in history.

RHR calls for the end of the Occupation, but doesn't have a position on what that will look like. It is beyond our mandate as a human rights organization to advocate for a one or a two or a ten state solution, or any particular set of borders, or what to do about the settlements. However it is clear that, while there is an almost wall to wall consensus among Israelis about the need to ensure our security, the Occupation and the settlement enterprise are wedge issues.

It would be sinful to return what God has returned to us, and we must fulfil the commandment to settle and redeem the entire Biblical Land of Israel by almost any means possible. They initiated the settlement movement.

Today, modern weaponry has greatly reduced the strategic importance of the West Bank. Any arguable security benefit could be accomplished without Israeli civilian presence in settlements. Many generals would say that settlements and the resources needed to protect them are a security liability. However, into the vacuum left by the weakening of the security argument as a reason for maintaining the Occupation, the potent mix of nationalist and religious passions unleashed in 1967 have become the driving force in maintaining the Occupation. The theft of Palestinian land and all of the additional human rights violations imposed on Palestinians for the safety and benefit of settlers, have served to create ever rising despair and hostility. Our Jewish sages abhorred violence and God tells Cain that he is expected to control his anger. However, while not justifying violence, they were realists, *"The sword comes into the world because of justice delayed and justice denied."* (Pirkei Avot) Palestinian violence in reaction to their oppression has created enmity and fear among Israelis. In addition to the State violence we have applied since the beginning of the Occupation, there are increasing numbers of Israelis employing violence either to strengthen the Occupation and/or to take revenge, and/or in the name of self defence.

While polls show that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians eventually want a compromise negotiated solution, a larger majority on both sides believe (falsely, in my opinion) that there is no partner. Increasingly Israelis and Palestinians are on a continuum between apathy and despair, believing that nothing is going to change. There is an image in the Talmud of a person who is ritually impure because he has a dead lizard in his hand. He immerses himself in the *mikva* (ritual bath) to purify himself, but can't do so because he continues to hold on to the lizard. Potential solutions are right in front of us, but even those Israelis who are not bent on dispossessing non-Jews don't see them. This could change overnight. Before former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat came to Jerusalem, Israeli opinion polls were dead set against the very things the majority of Israeli Jews overwhelming supported a week later. Because we don't believe peace is possible, we harden our positions, and convince ourselves that we don't want it.

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In the Occupied Territories RHR has returned many dunams of land to their rightful owners, prevented settlers and/or the government from taking over additional lands, and helped prevent the banishment of the Jahalin Bedouin to some far off location. We helped found the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions (originally a coalition, now an independent organization), raising awareness of the catch-22 situation in which all Israeli planning committees make it almost impossible for Palestinians to build legally, then demolish 'illegal' homes built without permits. The number of home demolitions plunged from 1998-2001, but is again several hundred per year.

However it is clear that, while there is an almost wall to wall consensus among Israelis about the need to ensure our security, the Occupation and the settlement enterprise are wedge issues. There are those who believe that Occupation is necessary for our defense, those who believe that God commands us to "redeem" the entire Biblical Land of Israel, those who believe that there is no partner for peace, those who simply wish to ignore the issue, and those of us who believe that the command of the Jewish tradition and of Jewish history is to behave more morally than we are today.

RHR is at the forefront of supporting and protecting the civil and human rights of the Palestinians. Have there been any major victories for RHR?

Believing that every human being is created in God's Image, RHR is always advocating for the human rights of both Jews and no-Jews. We run year long programs every year teaching hundreds of Israeli young people about Judaism and human rights. We have succeeded in stopping a destructive welfare to work program for Israelis that was fighting the unemployed, instead of unemployment. After five years of work by RHR and our partners, the government is reversing policies in place since the 1990's to eliminate public housing. We helped to freeze the Begin/Prawer program that would have led to the demolition of tens of Israeli Bedouin so called "unrecognized" villages in Negev, the transfer of some 40,000 Israeli citizens from their homes to problematic townships forcing them to give up their way of life, and the loss of most of their remaining lands.

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We were part of the coalition that helped return expelled men, women and children to their homes in the cave communities of the South Hebron Hills, and have helped create the international concern that has prevented until now the destruction of the village of Susya, and other targeted communities. In 2001, RHR staff and volunteers began acting as human shields to protect Palestinian farmers trying to access their olive groves. We were being shot at, beaten, cursed, etc., as Israeli security forces did nothing.

Sadly, as a rabbi, a Jew, an Israeli and a Zionist, it is true that it is religious Jews in this country that statistically are the most likely to be racist, opposed to human rights, committed to dispossessing Palestinians in the Biblical Land of Israel, and sometimes violent. That is perhaps why another important role that Rabbis For Human Rights plays is introducing into the intellectual universe of our fellow Israelis an interpretation of our tradition that is at least as authentic and textually based as the interpretation that has become so dominant in our country.

RHR is at the forefront of supporting and protecting the civil and human rights of the Palestinians. Have there been any major victories for RHR? *contd...*

As a result of a 2006 Israeli High Court victory, together with the Association For Civil Rights in Israel and five Palestinian local councils, Palestinians are accessing lands they hadn't accessed for up to 15 years, with the Israeli army protecting them.

Perhaps our most significant accomplishment has been to break down stereotypes, and to restore hope. Like Israelis, a majority of Palestinians also want a compromise negotiated agreement. Like Israelis, an even larger majority says, *"We want peace, but they don't"* Many times Palestinian parents make their children meet us because they want to be terrorists when they grow up, and their parents want them to know that not all Israelis come with guns to demolish their homes and steal their lands. Only we Israelis can break down the stereotypes that so many Palestinians have of Israelis (particularly of religious Israelis), thereby empowering Palestinian peacemakers to be heard by their own people. Only Palestinians can empower us to be heard by our fellow Israelis.

Many people across the world watched with dismay the knife attack on you by a settler. This seems surreal – Jews assaulting other Jews in the Holy land. Who are these settlers? There are unsubstantiated reports that they (settlers) are being 'supported' by ultra-religious Jews who want to ethnic cleanse the country, to make it a country only for Jews. Is this true? Or is this merely the role of politicians playing one against the other?

The suspect indicted for attacking me is only seventeen years old. I wanted to cry when I heard that. Many right wing religious parents try to keep their children away from the violent so called "hilltop youth," as many Palestinian parents try to keep their children from taking up knives. However, there are others who support these actions, and many Israeli and Palestinian young people grow up in communities cultivating hatred and violence.

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There have been many cases where our presence prevented violence. Occasionally our presence gets people more worked up. Israelis, particularly religious Jews, defending Palestinians can be more of a red flag to settlers than the Palestinians themselves. Traditionally, neither Palestinians nor settlers are willing to speak with each other. Recently there have been some exceptions. The most notable is the followers of the late settler Rabbi Menachem Froman. They are a very small, but very interesting group

Israelis an interpretation of our tradition that is at least as authentic and textually based as the interpretation that has become so dominant in our country. However, I don't think it is proper to place all the blame on this young man's family and community. (The suspect is from the settlement of Itamar. One of the murdered Fogel family was his friend.) Our political leaders are practically falling over one another to incite and to delegitimize the work of Israeli human rights organizations working in the Occupied Territories.

Israeli is split right down the middle issues such as what to do with the Occupied Territories, or how to treat the non-Jews in our midst. There are many settlers who also oppose violence. However, many of those settlers prefer to look the other way. Even many of those who support us are passive. They have given up, or simply are not sufficiently motivated to do more than talk with their friends about how terrible things are.

To modify a quote, *"We have nothing to despair of, other than despair itself."* We must remember that the *midrash* (Rabbinic commentary on the Torah) teaches us that God didn't part the waters of the sea until the Israelites plunged into the sea. We are taught *"You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from doing your part."*

Could you give us a few instances where RHR has played a pivotal role in defusing a volatile situation and helping bring about an amicable settlement on some issues between Palestinians and settlers? Are there any 'joint-committees' of Palestinian-Settler kind? Do Jewish (besides RHR), Christian and Muslim leaders play peace makers?

RHR has from time to time dialogued with settlers, and has in a few instances brought about more moderate opinions. Ironically, as was mentioned above, we are better positioned to moderate Palestinian opinions by breaking down stereotypes. We might be willing to be in a mediating role, if asked by both sides. I can recall instances where we played a mediating role and defused situations between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, but I can't recall having played that role between Palestinians and settlers. There have been many cases where our presence prevented violence. Occasionally our presence gets people more worked up. Israelis, particularly religious Jews, defending Palestinians can be more of a red flag to settlers than the Palestinians themselves. Traditionally, neither Palestinians nor settlers are willing to speak with each other. Recently there have been some exceptions. The most notable is the followers of the late settler Rabbi Menachem Froman. They are a very small, but very interesting group.

RHR continues to advocate for Israeli Negev Bedouin rights, including advocacy for the ninety times demolished village of El-Araqib. We currently have a letter writin campaign to prevent the Jewish community of Hiran from being built on the rubble of Bedouin Umm Al Hiran, and the Yatir forest from overrunning the village of Atir: www.dontdemolish.com.

How are the Jews in the Diaspora assisting RHR? Have you observed any difference between the attitude of Jews in Israel and that of those in the diaspora towards the abuse of Palestinians' civil and human rights?

Jews in the diaspora support us by joining advocacy campaigns, hosting us, coming to volunteer with us, and through financial support. In much of the English speaking world there is more of an understanding of the connection between Judaism and universal human rights and social justice, as well as the role of the rabbi as a social activist. Beyond that, Jewish communities both in Israel and abroad are too varied to generalize.

What are the various projects that you are involved in at the moment?

RHR has an education department teaching year long courses in "Pre army academies," that are gap year programs between high school and the army. We run two human rights yeshivas in which university students spend a year studying with RHR and doing a field placement with RHR or another human rights organization. Along with the Jewish Learning Works in San Francisco, we are developing an English language version of our main teaching tool with Israelis, a Talmudic style commentary on Israel's Declaration of Independence.

RHR runs a social rights center in Hadera (mid-size town in the middle of the country) helping Israelis living in poverty to know their rights and obtain their benefits. We helped create and work with grass roots public housing groups in Beit Shean and Jerusalem, as well as the national Public Housing Forum working on policy change.

RHR has several additional socioeconomic justice campaigns for Israelis, such as our efforts to prevent Israelis living in poverty from having their electricity cut off.

RHR's new Interreligious Department seeks to amplify voices from different faith traditions advocating for human rights. We do a bit of advocacy work on behalf of African asylum seekers.

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RHR continues to engage in field work accompanying Palestinian farmers to their lands, legal work to prevent or reverse land takeovers, and work with Israeli security forces to ensure that they uphold their court ordered responsibilities. We advocate on behalf of the Jahalin Bedouin, and help with summer camps and afternoon programs, as well as trying to save the mud and tires school we helped build.

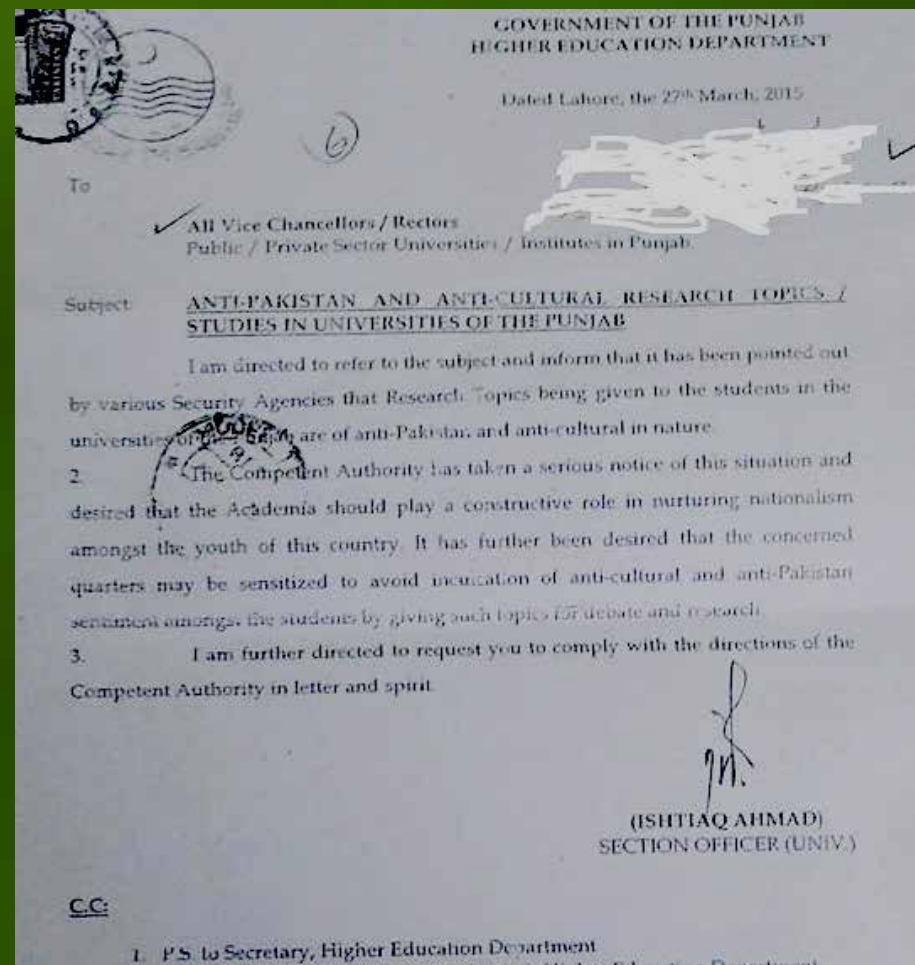
RHR recently had a very disappointing result in an Israeli High Court case to end administrative home demolitions by returning planning authority in Area C to Palestinian hands. We now need to devise a next strategy.

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RHR has support groups in Great Britain, Canada and several U.S. cities, work with many groups abroad to advocate and educate.

RHR representatives travel around the world to speak to Jewish and other communities.

PAKISTAN'S ACADEMICS UNDER SIEGE BY THEIR GOVERNMENT



Some weeks ago I received an email from Dr Altaf Qadir with an attachment – a photograph of a document – a directive from **Ishitaq Ahmed**, Section officer, Government of Punjab (Pakistan), Higher Education Department to Vice Chancellors/Rectors, Public/Private Sector Universities in Punjab on the subject of “**Anti-Pakistan and anti-cultural research topics/studies in universities of the Punjab**”.

When I asked Dr Altaf Qadir how this affected him, he replied - “*I am in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and it is notified for the Universities in Punjab. A similar type of directive was circulated by Higher Education Commission Islamabad addressed to VCs of all universities. In Peshawar we rarely bother due to the vibrant academia at our university but still at times such directives have an effect on genuine research. Furthermore, we are already under armed attack in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but in Punjab and Islamabad these directives must have some effect.*”

Further to this he kindly granted Live Encounters Magazine the following interview.



Dr Altaf Qadir
Assistant Professor

Department of History, University of Peshawar Pakistan
in an exclusive interview with Mark Ulyseas

“Such government directives are dangerous in regards to their longterm effects. The school curriculum is already manipulated. The majority of university students lack critical minds. Universities would certainly become mouth-piece of the government. No debate would be generated and it would become a very closed, frustrated and suffocated society. The entire education system would be a propaganda tool.

Last January, I presented a paper in a conference at Karachi on issues related to curriculum. During his comments, the chair of session turned towards me and stated, ‘*continue the work but you would never become a vice chancellor.*’

Such directives would be followed by more people and in the end there would be no education except skills like in communist societies. Even today, in most places, we find both types of extremists.” - Dr Qadir

The Textbook Boards have been producing textbooks for Grade 1 to 12. All such books were sent for approval to the Curriculum Review Committee, Federal Ministry of Education, Islamabad, until the 18th Constitutional amendment in 2010. Each successive government *fiddles* with the contents of the textbooks, under some internal force or for some external 'benefit'. It is pertinent to note that there are different types of public and private institutions which follow the books published by *others* and do not use government approved textbooks. However, subjectivity, hate, intolerance, and irrelevant material not fit for growth of critical minds is found in all such books with little difference. State authorities as well as various lobbies have a share in the production of such books. The books written for Cambridge Series i.e. O level & A level are better, compared to the rest.

Since the creation of Pakistan has the State been involved in regulating universities and the syllabus with the intention of 'controlling' how subjects are taught? And which central authority decides the syllabus/research etc. from primary school to university?

Decolonization in the 20th century gave birth to many nation-states in Asia and Africa. These newly formed nation-states needed a strong ideological base to 'integrate' different entities in their geographical boundaries. In some States one can see attempts by the ruling elite to impose cultural homogeneity, or by the majority to create a unified nation-state by force through civil wars, genocides, ethnic cleansing or religious persecutions. Almost every State tried to provide a strong ideological base. In this regard attempts were made to formulate a curriculum to fulfil the need of the nation-state. The main focus for this purpose remained on 'history content' which was not only incorporated in the subject of history but also in social sciences, literature and even science books. These nation-states formed commissions and appointed experts to write the required history.

Since the creation of Pakistan, a number of steps were taken to write the 'national history'. The first National Education Conference was held in 1947 to formulate guidelines for education policy and curriculum. Similarly, in 1951 a conference for Educational Development was held to adopt the first *National Plan of Educational Development* (1951-57).

Report of the Commission on National Education 1959 changed the outlook of education especially in two aspects:

Firstly, it affected the welfare concept of education and mandated the creation of Text Book Boards with the duty to reflect the government policies in the text books. Many such bodies were formed that resulted in producing major policy documents. Some examples are; *Report of the Commission on Student Problems and Welfare* 1966; *The New Education Policy* 1970; *The Education Policy* 1972; *National Educational Policy and Implementation Programme* 1979; *National Education Policy* 1992; *National Education Policy* 1998-2010 and *Education Sector Reforms* 2002.

There are number of other policy recommendations in the last one and half decades which limited/limits education to literacy only. The policies of the State has encouraged the private sector to invest in education. And though this increased the number of institutions it has also led to education becoming a kind of business on one hand, and class based on the other.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment has brought the universities under the purview of provincial government but only Punjab and Sindh have formed their provincial HECs. Though HEC has provided policy guidelines for regulating higher education but it did not try or has been unable to devise uniform curriculum due to the involvement of senior academia of the whole country. However, the appointment of Vice Chancellors is the government prerogative. In the last decade or so, junior, less experienced and incompetent persons were appointed VCs due to their affiliation with ruling parties. The ruling party is rewarded with the employment of their 'people' in universities in different capacities which discourages genuine researchers and scholars.

The Textbook Board was created to guarantee the reflection of government policies in textbooks. The first in the series of notifications stipulated that:

- 'The moral and spiritual values of Islam combined with the freedom, integrity, and strength of Pakistan should be the ideology which inspires our educational system'.
- 'We must strive to create a sense of unity and of nationhood among the people of Pakistan'.
- Imparting the 'skills and training necessary in a complex modern society'.

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Secondly, in the case of universities, University Grants Commission and now Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad deals with Universities across the country. The 18th Constitutional Amendment has brought the universities under the purview of provincial government but only Punjab and Sindh have formed their provincial HECs. Though HEC has provided policy guidelines for regulating higher education but it did not try or has been unable to devise uniform curriculum due to the involvement of senior academia of the whole country. However, the appointment of Vice Chancellors is the government prerogative. In the last decade or so, junior, less experienced and incompetent persons were appointed VCs due to their affiliation with ruling parties. The ruling party is rewarded with the employment of their 'people' in universities in different capacities which discourages genuine researchers and scholars. The situation is not much different in universities run by corporate bodies, military or private sector. The mechanism of approval of research topics involves two/three different bodies and the final body/authority which approves research topics is headed by a VC. Some genuine topics are deferred due to incompetency/lack of knowledge/prejudice of the members of the approval body.

Ayesha Siddiq's **Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy** book launch ceremony a few years back was not permitted at Islamabad Club despite reservation of the venue for the said purpose due to State pressure. When she contacted other hotels she was refused. The hotel managements informed her that their halls were for wedding functions only. This also led to curiosity among the readers and many people sought copies from different venues when it was not available in their city. The normal launch could not have generated the debate, which was created by government pressure on hotels in the capital.

There are instances in different universities across the country where PhD degrees are awarded to people who might have never earned a Master degree by merit. Shockingly, one person remained director of a prestigious institute for more than a decade and later was appointed VC for almost four years. Apparently he had plagiarised his entire thesis from a single book. The government did not remove him from his post when it was proved that his thesis had been plagiarised. How can one expect genuine research in the presence of such 'professors and academics' in the institutes of higher learning?

What are anti-Pakistan and anti- cultural research topics/studies? And what does the State fear from such activities? And how does one define 'anti'?

This strange phenomena exists in the State Managers who are suspicious about the loyalty of fellow citizens. They may be called self-proclaimed 'physical and ideological defenders' of the State. None of the research is either Anti or Pro if it is objective research. Declaring a research anti-Pakistan or anti-cultural means barring a debate which could otherwise clear many myths associated with all such issues. This tendency exists in Muslim Societies since the establishment of Abbasside rule in Baghdad, which is evident from the classical literature that deals with State and government functions, produced in that period. It also exists in Western Societies to some extent like debating Holocaust is either banned or discouraged. The response to such topics is actually emotional, otherwise a logical response can easily settle the issue. It reminds one of two instances:

01. **Stanley Wolpert's Jinnah of Pakistan** which was banned by the government due to a reference to Jinnah eating ham. The government considered it the *shaking of the ideological foundation of Pakistan*, which was 'created on the basis of Islam'. The ban created a lot of curiosity among academia and general public. I believe that due to this ban it was read by many more people as compared to what would have occurred in a normal situation.

02. **Ayesha Siddiq's Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy** book launch ceremony a few years back was not permitted at Islamabad Club despite reservation of the venue for the said purpose due to State pressure. When she contacted other hotels she was refused. The hotel managements informed her that their halls were for wedding functions only. This also led to curiosity among the readers and many people sought copies from different venues when it was not available in their city. The normal launch could not have generated the debate, which was created by government pressure on hotels in the capital.

The government usually does not tolerate any view which does not fit in their 'national narrative'. In November 2015, Professor Sayid Wiqar Ali Shah was removed from the Directorship of the National Commission on Historical and Cultural Research when he, in a keynote speech, referred to the need for revisiting regional histories with focus on G. M. Syed, Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai and Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

State Managers fear debate because their iniquitous actions in personal or institutional capacity may come to light and this could result in lose of their 'elite position'. This factor of controlling society by State Managers happens because it endangers their interests, that is why they quickly apply the label of anti-State and/or anti-culture in order to prevent free thinking and freedom of speech.

It is beyond my personal understanding whether research should be declared anti-something or who should define and what does it mean. Academia should be vibrant. Curtailing debate would certainly increase frustration and frustration would result in more violence and this violence would one day sweep away the existing State system.

As an academic and author have you or anyone you know been affected in any manner by State interference in matters related to education?

There are many instances when researchers are barred from conducting studies on some specific issues. Personally, I could not carry out research on a couple of topics though I wanted to and few of my acquaintances have received threats from different quarters, when they planned to work on some topics. However, I can make no comment whether the threats were from State institutions, lobbies or private individuals.

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In the past has issues related to the history of Pakistan been manipulated to depict the State in a favourable light even though facts maybe to the contrary? And has this reflected in the education system from primary school to university?

There are many such instances of manipulation of history and a lot of academics, researchers and civil society members have written about such issues. One can find many such documents by surfing websites.

Such government directives are dangerous in regards to their long-term effects. The school curriculum is already manipulated. The majority of university students lack critical minds. Universities would certainly become mouth-pieces of the government. No debate would be generated and it would become a very closed, frustrated and suffocated society. The entire education system would be a propaganda tool. Last January, I presented a paper in a conference at Karachi on issues related to curriculum. During his comments, the chair of session turned towards me and stated, *'continue the work but you would never become a vice chancellor'*.

Pakistan has consistently produced outstanding academics and it now has a vibrant and enlightened intelligentsia. Would you agree with this statement? And further, could you state your reasons why the aforementioned government directive is a dangerous precedent?

Without doubt there are many outstanding academics and yes we have an enlightened intelligentsia. Unfortunately, the past 42 years of State sponsored militancy has marginalized this moderate section of society.

The academics that are trained in a *certain tradition* in the last four decades are unable to encourage debate. The few senior academicians and some among the second and third generation are busy conducting objective research but are facing multiple problems.

Such government directives are dangerous in regards to their long-term effects. The school curriculum is already manipulated. The majority of university students lack critical minds. Universities would certainly become mouth-pieces of the government. No debate would be generated and it would become a very closed, frustrated and suffocated society. The entire education system would be a propaganda tool.

Last January, I presented a paper in a conference at Karachi on issues related to curriculum. During his comments, the chair of session turned towards me and stated, *'continue the work but you would never become a vice chancellor'*.

Such directives would be followed by more people and in the end there would be no education except skills like in communist societies. Even today, in most places, we find both types of extremists.

This tendency is visible in the administration of the universities too. I am observing an alarming increase in employees registering petitions against VCs and Registrars in higher courts, which shows that administration is not listening to the grievances of the employees.

This dangerous tendency of barring opposing views would further increase extremism and use of violence in our society.

The government directives to the head of institutions for arranging their security, install surveillance cameras and barbed wire have made the government a laughing stock. This only profits those who invest in conflict economy. The government is collecting taxes but fails to provide the basic needs of a citizen. Good education, health and livelihood opportunities have been and continue to be the least preferred area of the State in the last few decades. Now citizens are asked to protect themselves. This raises a question mark over the existence of the State itself.

The present wave of attacks on educational institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is alarming. Could the government directives to all heads of Education Institutions resolve the issue of security? What could be the possible solution for eliminating terrorism in the long run?

The government directives to the head of institutions for arranging their security, install surveillance cameras and barbed wire have made the government a laughing stock. This only profits those who invest in conflict economy. The government is collecting taxes but fails to provide the basic needs of a citizen. Good education, health and livelihood opportunities have been and continue to be the least preferred area of the State in the last few decades. Now citizens are asked to protect themselves. This raises a question mark over the existence of the State itself.

This mess of terrorism is the result of a long process, initiated by State and non-State actors in mid-70s. Many political figures, military officials, civil bureaucracy and religious heads have played their role in official or unofficial capacities. The issue cannot be resolved with military operations and cosmetic measures. I understand, and many more are of this opinion, that militancy would be curtailed if -

- State eliminates double standards from its foreign and national policies
- Put on trial everyone, alive or dead - politician, bureaucrat, religious figure or military official who had/has any involvement in sponsoring militancy and extremism in public or private capacity. Only then people would trust the State and its institutions; and this would resolve the issue once for all.



Dr Budi Hernawan

Lecturer at Paramadina Graduate School of Diplomacy and Research Fellow at Abdurahman Wahid Centre at University of Indonesia in Jakarta.

Is the Pacific's solidarity for Papua on the rise?

Recently during a public forum on the issue of Papua organised by the Indonesian government think-tank (LIPI) in January 2016, we were drawn to the attention of the Pacific countries towards Papua. While the representatives from the Indonesian government and intelligence treated the issue as marginal, a Golkar parliamentarian, Tantowi Yahya, took the Pacific issue very seriously. He argued that the Papuan movement managed to mobilise support from the Pacific diplomatic fora, particularly the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF), by exposing human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian security forces.

Yahya also outlined the power struggle between the Pacific countries where Fiji and Papua New Guinea play a double standard towards Indonesia. On the one hand, they continue to secure their own national interests but maintaining their alliance with Indonesia but on the other hand, they give a leeway for the Papuan representatives, the ULMWP, to operate freely in the region. Therefore, Yahya urged the government to act more decisively in combating the growing support for Papua in the Pacific. Yahya is not wrong.

In comparison to the active Pacific diplomacy on the issue of decolonisation of New Caledonia or French Polynesia, we heard very little of the engagement of the Pacific diplomacy with Papua for many years. It was only Vanuatu which consistently supported the Papuan political aspiration for self-determination and brought Papuan freedom fighters together. For instance, in July 1977 Vanuatu facilitated the reconciliation process between two leaders of Papuan freedom fighters: Jacob Prai and Seth Rumkorem under the so-called "Villa Declaration". In 2008, Vanuatu played an instrumental role in supporting the establishment of the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL), an umbrella for the Papuan armed groups.

In the last three years, the role of Vanuatu in unifying Papuan political factions remains central. During the 19th MSG Summit in Port Vila, Vanuatu was the only member state, which fully supported the Papuans' bid for the MSG membership. Despite Papua's failure to secure the bid of the MSG membership, Vanuatu remained committed to unify Papuans. As a result in December 2014, it made a breakthrough when the three major Papuans signed an agreement in Salarana, Vanuatu, to establish a new umbrella organisation, namely the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP).

The three major organisations, including WPNCL, Federal Republic of West Papua (NFRPB), and the National Parliament of Papuan People, were committed to the Saralana Agreement to work together under Secretary General Octo Mote.

The persistence of Vanuatu permeates the Melanesian countries which then explicitly expressed their support to Papua's self-determination. In the 19th MSG communiqué we will find phrases like 'the inalienable rights of the people of West Papua towards self-determination' and 'human rights violations and other forms of atrocities relating to the West Papuan people'. These wordings were unprecedented given the long silence of the MSG over the case of Papua. During the 20th MSG summit the support for Papua was translated into the approval of the MSG leaders to grant observer status to ULMWP. The decision not only has given Papuans a formal status within the MSG, which was unthinkable before, but more importantly, has created a space for dialogue between Papuans and the Indonesian government. The latter constituted another breakthrough that the Pacific diplomacy achieved.

The Pacific diplomacy did not stop there. Through the PIF, the Pacific countries decided to send a fact-finding mission to Jakarta and Papua whereas the Chair of MSG extended its invitation to the government of Indonesia and ULWP to be a mediator of their dialogue early this year. The Indonesia's response, however, is rather predictable. Just as France strongly opposed any international hand intervening French Polynesia, so too does Indonesia resist any international gesture towards Papua since it has been perceived as undermining Indonesia's sovereignty. Instead, the Indonesian government continues its program to mobilise Indonesian Melanesian as an antithesis to ULMWP. The Indonesian government argues that there are five provinces in Indonesia that anthropologically belong to the Melanesian. So Papuans are not the only ones.

Perhaps Yahya is right in identifying the rise of the Pacific diplomacy on Papua. But he might miss the fact that the concerns of the Pacific countries over the issues of self-determination and decolonisation were already cemented by the establishment of the South Pacific Forum in 1971. Since then the Pacific countries have actively promoted self-determination and decolonisation as their core values. Although they maintain their diplomatic silence when it comes to the US territories, they have actively engaged with New Caledonia, Bougainville, and French Polynesia, long before Papua.

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Yesim Yaprak Yildiz is currently a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge, UK. In her doctoral research, she is looking into different modalities of truth-telling in peace and reconciliation processes with a focus on confessions of state officials on past atrocities against civilians. Yaprak is currently an Associate Researcher at the Centre for South-east European Studies at the University of Graz, Austria. Previously she was a visiting PhD scholar at the Centre for International Governance and Justice at the ANU. She has been working on human rights violations in Turkey for over ten years. *Article reprinted by permission of [Regarding Rights](#).*



Yesim Yaprak Yildiz, University of Cambridge

FROM SPACES OF DOMINATION TO SPACES OF RESISTANCE: ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AGAINST THE FORCED CLOSURE OF REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The **Aboriginal Tent Embassy** in Canberra sent a delegation to the Australian Parliament to deliver a message to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. The day was 27th November 2015; a global day of action against the threatened closure of Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and other regions due to funding cuts by the federal government. There were **protests in Australia and around the world**.

I was among the group that marched to Parliament House in Canberra, accompanying a small delegation carrying sacred objects including a message stick to be delivered to Mr Turnbull's office.

Our faces painted in ochre, we waited by the sacred fire lit on the lawn in front of the new Parliament House as the delegation proceeded into the building to deliver the message. Although the Prime Minister's Office had been informed of the visit in advance and our arrival was communicated to them by security, not a single representative from the PM's Office came out to receive the message and to hear what the delegation had to say. The spear that the Gomerey warrior broke and tossed to the ground became **a powerful symbol** not only of a broken dialogue but also of the continued denial by the Australian government of Aboriginal people's very existence.

Judging by the standards of countries where an action in front of Parliament challenging a government policy would face a heavy-handed police response, the Australian Government's response might be described as non-violent. But this would be untrue. What we encountered that day was a form of violence that Aboriginal people experience in their everyday lives as disregard and denial of their subjectivity and political agency. It is a dehumanising violence, aiming to keep the colonised "at a respectful distance", behind the dividing line between the space of the Sovereign "built to last, all stone and steel" and the space of the oppressed, which is defined by exclusion.[1]



The policy of forcibly removing and concentrating Aboriginal people in larger settlements and towns dates from the 1930s. Goodall argues that following the failure of ‘dispersal’ policies at the end of the 1880s and early 1900s, a new policy was formulated to remove Aboriginal people from town camps and smaller reserves and stations to centrally located and tightly controlled stations. The argument was no different than today’s – that is, efficiency in using limited funds.

Colonial oppression

Colonial oppression of Aboriginal communities was organised not only socially and economically but also spatially through segregation in reserves and missions or forced displacement and relocation in larger settlements and towns. As Lefebvre and Foucault argue, right and power over space, and control over a population and its movement, emerged as a defining aspect of state sovereignty.[2] By way of inclusion and exclusion, the state defines its power in terms of its territory and determines how people use and access that territory. Displacement and resettlement of certain populations are, in this sense, powerful tools by which a state reorganises and homogenises its territory. As Havemann argues, Australia’s existence as a sovereign state is built on denying the place based culture of Aboriginal people and their physical estate – ‘*terra aboriginalis*’.[3] Through the application of the *terra nullius* principle, Aboriginal people were rendered placeless[4]. From the 1850s onwards, the British and then the Australian governments have been spatially organising the Aboriginal population both through excluding them in remote areas and including them in urban areas through assimilation. Forced closure of homelands and removal of Aboriginal communities continue to be part of this spatial control and assimilation policy, attempting to destroy Aboriginal people’s belonging to the land and their political and economic agency.

Continuing oppression

Last year, the federal government announced that \$534 million would be cut from Indigenous programs over the five years to 2020. Its Municipal and Essential Services program had been terminated on 30 June 2014, with responsibility for the delivery of municipal and essential services to remote Aboriginal communities delegated to state governments. Following the governments of Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania, the Western Australia government had **agreed to assume responsibility from the 1st of July 2015**. As part of these transition agreements, the federal government committed \$90 million to the Western Australia government: enough to support remote communities until 2017. Even so, the **Western Australian** Premier said he expected a significant number of remote communities to close.

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Despite the long history of Aboriginal people’s strong resistance to forced removals and closure of their homelands, and despite the social, economic and health problems associated with removals, the Australian government has continued to implement similar spatial policies, rehearsing the same old arguments. **Amnesty International has documented** how, from 2006 onwards, Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory were effectively forced to abandon their homelands and move into larger towns due to the withdrawal of financial support for new housing, and very limited support for housing maintenance or the delivery of services.

But the authorities were aware of Aboriginal people’s strong connection to and identification with their land and kin: their spatial policies were designed to destroy these links.[6]

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Regarding the current funding cuts, Western Australia’s Premier Colin Barnett stated that ‘a hub and orbit approach’ will be followed which will ‘lead to building up the larger communities while closing down the smallest and most under-resourced’. This is a re-visitation of policies that have a long history. As the Kimberley Land Council said in its submission to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

History shows us that these policies have resulted in the gradual disintegration of cultural standards and governance; it has resulted in fringe communities in urban areas, in alcoholism and youth suicides, and in disempowerment... And now the Australian government is allowing it to happen again.

The news of the latest community closures has caused worry in other Aboriginal communities. As a Pintupi elder, Lindsay Corby, who lives in Kintore **told the Guardian** in May,

[People] can’t move from Kiwirrkurra or another community because there’s a lot of graveyards there and they can’t leave the graveyard behind. It’s a homeland... They want to live there and go hunting, and keep sacred sites.

Dispossession from ancestral lands and destruction of cultural practices, forced relocations to missions, reserves or stations, removal of children, and closure of communities have all been features of the Australian government’s policy of spatial control and surveillance of Aboriginal people. Uprooting communities from their lands and leaving them ‘out of place’, is a way of denying the colonised political and economic agency. Control over space is not, however, absolute. Against essentialist approaches, I would like to emphasize that space is not only a sphere of domination but also a sphere of resistance and struggle.

Continuing oppression *contd...*

What Linsay Corby defines as a homeland is, however, only a ‘lifestyle choice’ for former Australian PM Tony Abbott. In support of Mr Barnett’s statements, **Mr Abbott said**:

What we can’t do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have...

If people choose to live miles away from where there’s a school, if people choose not to access the school of the air, if people choose to live where there’s no jobs, obviously it’s very, very difficult to close the gap.

Mr Abbott’s comments reiterate the official stance. Back in 2005, the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone referred to Aboriginal homelands as ‘cultural museums that are too small to warrant government support’. Such statements cannot be interpreted merely as a lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people’s connection to their land. Rather, they represent an entrenched policy of discrimination and assimilation. As the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz said**, this ‘smacks of racism’.

Resistance

Dispossession from ancestral lands and destruction of cultural practices, forced relocations to missions, reserves or stations, removal of children, and closure of communities have all been features of the Australian government’s policy of spatial control and surveillance of Aboriginal people. Uprooting communities from their lands and leaving them ‘out of place’, is a way of denying the colonised political and economic agency. Control over space is not, however, absolute. Against essentialist approaches, I would like to emphasize that space is not only a sphere of domination but also a sphere of resistance and struggle.[7]

States’ attempts to appropriate and configure particular lands are challenged by opposing forces that seek to re-appropriate them and to create alternative counter spaces. One of the most powerful examples of this is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which was erected in front of Parliament in 1972 to represent a displaced nation. As Howell and Schaap argue, the very existence of the Embassy demonstrates that Aboriginal people are denied their space and self-determination and treated as ‘aliens in their own land’.

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It is also, however, ‘a public platform [on] which they control...the terms [of their interaction] with representatives of the settler society’.[8] The erection of the tent embassy has been a radical re-appropriation of sovereign space. It has been an active counter-space bringing Aboriginal people from different Nations together, as well as supporters from all around the country. Similarly, remote homelands facing closure today are not just spaces of continued colonial violence, but also spaces of resistance and struggle against assimilation and dispossession.

NOTES

[1] See Sartre’s Preface and Fanon’s ‘On Violence’ in Fanon, F. (2004), *Wretched of the Earth*. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox with commentary by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K Bhabha, New York: Grove Press.
[2] Lefebvre, (1991), *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing; Foucault, M. (1980), *Power/Knowledge*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
[3] Havemann, P. (2005), ‘Denial, Modernity and Exclusion: Indigenous Placelessness in Australia’, *Macquarie Law Journal*, 5: 57-80, p.63.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Goodall, H. (2008), *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales 1770-1972*. Sydney University Press, pp. 231-232.
[6] Ibid. pp.239.
[7] See Lefebvre, 1991 and Foucault, 1980.
[8] Howell, E. and Schaap, A. (2014), ‘The Aboriginal Tent Embassy and Australian Citizenship’. In *The Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*, Neyers P, Isin E (eds), London: Routledge.

The **Faces of Change** series profiles advocates in the community who are changing the face of child marriage in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, by saying no to this harmful traditional practice.

In this issue we profile the last characters in the 3- part series: a Mother, two Priests, and a School Teacher. Read the January 2016 issue for an introduction to the Community and profiles of a Health Worker and village Elder, and the February issue for the stories of two girls aged 10 and 13 who had their marriages stopped, as well as a Government Official. [Part -1 Link](#) [Part -2 Link](#)

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Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

Child Marriage in Amhara, Ethiopia: Faces of Change - Part 3



The Mother

"At first the community blamed me for my decision, but now they see me as a clever woman. I am a role model! Other women ask me about the challenges of educating girls rather than marrying them."

Hebeste Kesete, 40, a vibrant charismatic woman, is one of 70 community influencers who make up the Community Conversation Group. The Group is supported by UNICEF and meets twice a month to advocate for the end of child marriage, and to act upon reports of planned marriages in the Bandani Kebele (neighbourhood) of the Dangla Woreda (district) in Amhara, Ethiopia.

Hebeste peppers her talk of the tragedy of child marriage with guffaws of rich laughter, as she finds humour in the retelling of her painful childhood, blighted not just by one, but by three forced marriages at the ages of 9, 11 and 15.

Left: Hebeste Kesete, 40, suffered greatly from being zending in divorce. As a result she refused to marry her daughters and instead has educated them all. She is a member of Bandani Kebele's Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage, Amhara, Ethiopia. Photo: © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

"Of course I was forced to have sex with him," she says laughing heartily as she motions with her hands, speaking of her nine year old self. At that young age and newly married, she was constantly sent back to her husband's home by her own parents, despite running back to them at every opportunity.

This pattern would repeat itself with her second and third marriages, all of which ended in divorce. However the third marriage lasted long enough for Hebeste to have her five children. "I suffered a lot. In my first marriage, every evening I had to wash my husband's legs, and those of my parents in law," she explains – a common practise for girl wives in the community, indicative of their submissive position within the household.

Hebeste has four daughters and one son. The oldest daughter aged 20 is a teacher, Hebeste's 18 year old daughter is at college and the other children, aged 7, 9 and 12, are all at school.

"My family told me I must marry my daughters as young girls. But I told them how much I went through and that child marriage has to be stopped. Their father also wanted to arrange marriages for the girls, which is what lead to our divorce. He wanted the assets that would have accrued from their being married off."

Hebeste's striking and determined eyes sparkle throughout the conversation as she continues: "I was determined to send all my children to school and to protect my daughters from going through the same experiences. As for my daughters' view – they are thanking me!"

"At first the community blamed me for my decision, but now they see me as a clever woman. I am a role model! I get asked for advice when I go to church on a Sunday. Other women ask me about the challenges of educating girls rather than marrying them, especially as I care for my children alone. I explain that I make a living by cooking for the local community.

"The worst thing I see are the pregnancies of these girls – they get pregnant again even while trying to manage caring for their first child. Their wellbeing and personal hygiene suffer."

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Yazew Tagela and Degu Eneyew are both Priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and members of the UNICEF supported Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage in the Bandani Kebele.

Both are vehemently against child marriage, but come from different perspectives...

The Priests

"If I had known before what I know now, I could have helped save so many girls. I married both my daughters at age 12 and 16, and I really regret it", Yazew Tagela

"You marry a girl before 18 and it is like killing the very life of the girl", Degu Eneyew

Yazew Tagela and Degu Eneyew are both Priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and members of the UNICEF supported Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage in the Bandani Kebele.

Both are vehemently against child marriage, but come from different perspectives:

Yazew Tagela, 41, has directly experienced financial loss as a result of marrying his daughters as children.

Right: Priest Degu Eneyew, 50, has seen first-hand how girls thrive when they are educated. He is a member of Bandani Kebele's Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage, Amhara, Ethiopia. Photograph © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop



"At the age of 38 in 2003 I went back to school. It was then that I saw the impact education has on the girl – how well she can do in life. But the community sees education negatively as they associate it with a girl's exposure to risk. We are teaching the community that if a girl is educated she will support the family. Every Sunday I include in my regular preaching to say "no to child marriage" and send girls to school instead.

Yazew Tagela comments: "If I had known before what I know now, I could have helped save so many girls. I married both my daughters at age 12 and 16, and I really regret it. I spent 20,000 ETB (around \$1,000) on the marriages of my two girls. I could have bought urban land with that, which would now be worth up to 200,000 ETB (\$10,000). The girls lead a rural life like me, and do not enjoy life like their peers who were educated.

"Three years later, neither are yet pregnant, but I really worry about that. With the poor living conditions they have, if they give birth life will get more complicated. If I had not married them, they could have contributed a lot to their country through their being educated.

"My own wife was 15 when we married – I was 25. She showed such childish behaviour but I supported her and she became pregnant straight away. As a priest I am responsible for these marriages as I have to marry a virgin girl, so there is so much pressure on the girls being of younger ages. But I am no longer prepared to bless a marriage if a girl is below the age of 18. The government has committed to stop child marriage by 2025, but I know we can stop it way before then. This Kebele is a role model for what can be achieved, a learning site. Everyone here shares ideas and supports each other against child marriage."

Degu Eneyew, 50, has seen first-hand how girls thrive when they are educated. He comments: "At the age of 38 in 2003 I went back to school. It was then that I saw the impact education has on the girl – how well she can do in life. But the community sees education negatively as they associate it with a girl's exposure to risk. We are teaching the community that if a girl is educated she will support the family. Every Sunday I include in my regular preaching to say "no to child marriage" and send girls to school instead. Look at the difference between two families – one which is fast to marry its girls too young, one which does not. You can see life's consequences from child marriage – giving birth early, scarce resources, limited land. You marry a girl before 18 and it is like killing the very life of the girl. Where families are strong enough to send their girls to school the girls have jobs. Her life will be completely different. In the past, a priest would bless the marriage of a child. But today, if the girl is under 18 the priest will not be told. The family will conduct a customary marriage instead with any elder, but witnesses to such marriages are criminally liable. Hereafter if a marriage involves parties who are under 18 I will denounce it and report it to the police. If the couple are 18 or above I will bless the marriage. I want everyone to condemn the practise as an evil act."

Students come to Selamawit and the Girl's Advisory Committee to report what is happening to girls at the school. "At that point we intervene by discussing the situation with the child, parents and leadership system for the village. We discuss issues freely with the girls. We build a relationship with the family – most are farmers so we go to their home - so that we can discuss issues of child marriage. We have long discussions in which we try to get them to understand the implications of child marriage and that it is illegal. If they resist we go to the police," says Selamawit.

The School Teacher

"Last year we intervened to prevent 6 cases of child marriage involving female pupils aged 12-16 and boys aged 16-18."

"In this community the parents do not value education and we need to push for them to send both boys and girls to school. Schooling is also interrupted in May when children are pulled out of school to help with agricultural work," explains Adamu Yenew, Principle of Wondafay Primary School in Wondafay Kabele (neighbourhood), Dangla Woreda (district), Amhara, Ethiopia.

The Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office (WCYAO) in the Woreda is supported by UNICEF to run a comprehensive programme against child marriage involving multiple stakeholders at the community level.

The school has 500 pupils and has successfully intervened to cancel six out of eight reported cases of child marriages among its pupils in the past year.

Adamu explains: "There are marriage seasons when the harvest is more bountiful, so nothing happens in October and November but marriages peak after the harvest in January and February and then again after April. During these peak times last year we intervened to prevent 6 cases involving female pupils aged 12-16 and boys aged 16-18. All are still in school. In two cases the parents resisted so we wrote to the police and gave the parents a copy of the letter."

Occasionally girls and boys who marry will continue with their schooling, but they inevitably drop out.

Adamu continues: "Child marriage is common and happens without the child's consent. I was just discussing this issue with a girl aged 13 who I have heard is due to marry. But she is too ashamed to say what is happening."

Teacher Selamawit Yigezau, 24, is chair of the school's Girl's Advisory Committee. The committee discusses all issues affecting a girl's education including child marriage.



"As a child I was lucky", explains Selamawit "I was due to marry at 7 years old, but my Uncle, who is educated and a government official, decided I had to continue my education. I was supposed to live with my husband who was 12 and his parents, but my Uncle insisted I live in a separate house. It was only two years later when I was aged 9 that I had to go to my husband – he was then 14 – but it did not last long. I was only there a month and my Uncle removed me and took me to his house. I did not know what was going on.

"Child marriage really hurts a girl's life. Getting pregnant so young and having the responsibility of running a house. It is too hard for a girl child to administer a home and it leads to quarrels with her husband, and violence against her. The girl has such a high workload she cannot possible manage and the Mother in Law joins in and criticizes the girl.

"If my Uncle had not intervened I would now have children and be vulnerable. But I am now productive and leading my life without needing anything."

Students come to Selamawit and the Girl's Advisory Committee to report what is happening to girls at the school. "At that point we intervene by discussing the situation with the child, parents and leadership system for the village. We discuss issues freely with the girls. We build a relationship with the family – most are farmers so we go to their home - so that we can discuss issues of child marriage. We have long discussions in which we try to get them to understand the implications of child marriage and that it is illegal. If they resist we go to the police," says Selamawit.

Tigist, a 14 year old girl who is a member of the Girl's Advisory Committee, says: "Child marriage harms our life. One of the marriages that we successfully had cancelled was that of my friend. We are so happy for her."

Above: Teacher Selamawit Yigezau, 24, chair of the Girl's Advisory Committee, pictured discussing child marriage with four girls aged 12-15 at Wondafay Primary School in Wondafay Kabele (neighbourhood), Dangla Woreda (district), Amhara, Ethiopia. The school has intervened to prevent 6 child marriages last year. Photograph © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

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ENCOUNTERS WITH BADAL SIRCAR

ANJUM KATYAL

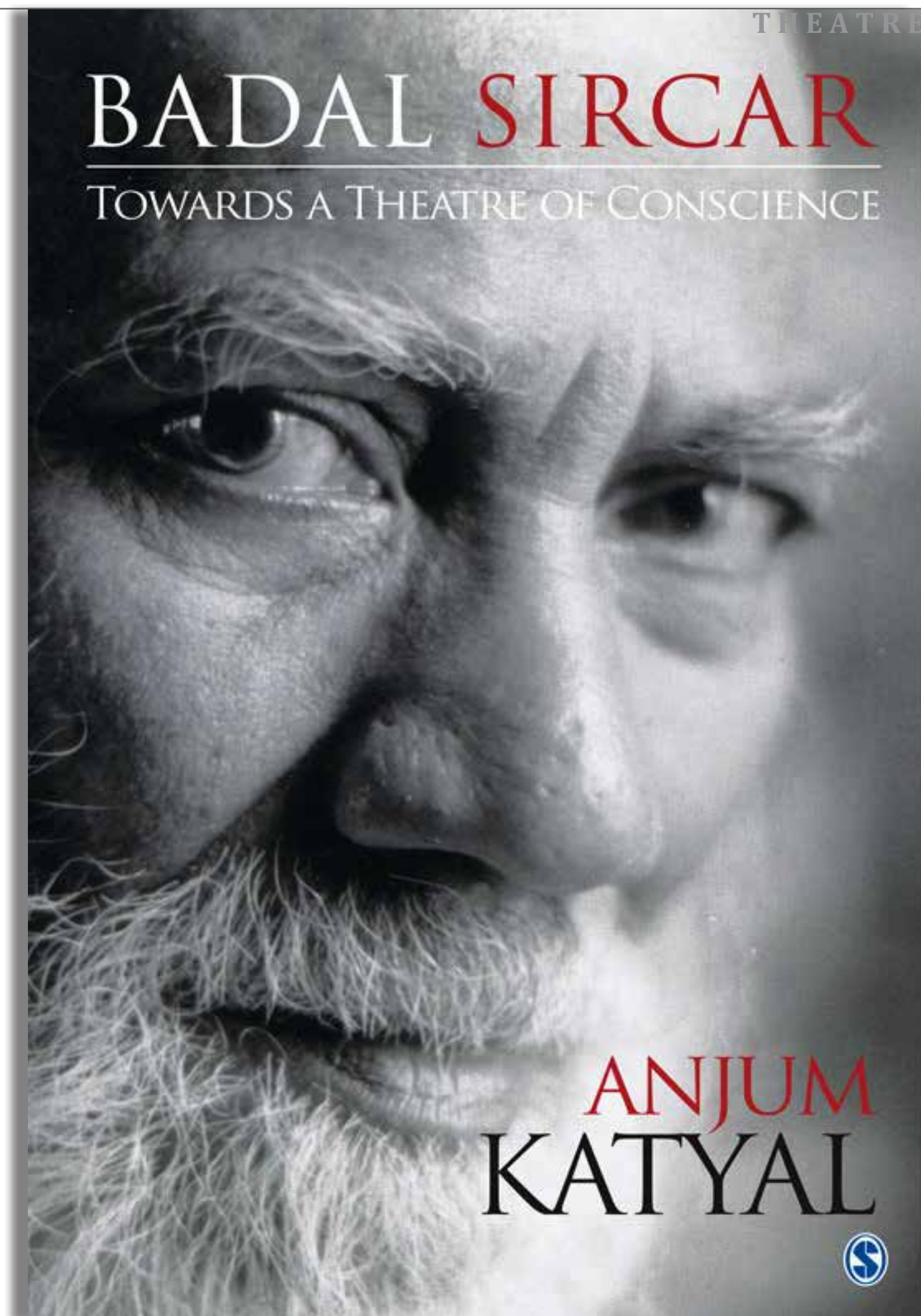
AUTHOR OF

BADAL SIRCAR: TOWARDS A THEATRE OF CONSCIENCE

PUBLISHED BY SAGE

My first encounter with Badal Sircar – widely known as Badal-da in theatre circles – was through his theatre. This was in the early 80s, after my return to the city of Calcutta from college in the US. I had, of course, heard of his innovative and powerful Third Theatre, which was an alternative to the proscenium, with the actor central to all communication: if you were interested in cutting-edge arts and culture in India of the time, you had to have heard of Badal-da. So I went to see one of his regular weekly performances.

At the time, performances by Satabdi, Badal-da's theatre repertory, were held in a large, rather rundown hall on the first floor of a building opposite the bustling New Market. Sindhi Association Hall. I climbed a bleak staircase and emerged onto a narrow verandah; attached was a large room. Unadorned, stark. Benches for the audience members. I took my place. I cannot remember which production I first saw but I remember being impressed. By the simplicity and fluidity of the action. This theatre was unlike anything I had previously encountered. Actors' bodies turned into machines, bridges, furniture, forests. The message was strong and the sincerity palpable. It was up close and direct. Badal-da himself played a role, one amongst the ensemble actors. Grey bearded and balding, it was only his advanced age that signalled any distinction between him and his group members. Once the production ended, a piece of cloth was laid on the ground to collect the coins and rupees the audience could donate if they wished to. Badal-da briefly addressed the audience, announcing the weekly schedule and inviting us back if we liked the experience.



The Badal-da I encountered was always reserved, dignified, and focused on the task at hand. He didn't chat or waste time on niceties. He had a wry, drily ironic tone at times, often self-deprecatory. Over several visits, he allowed a slight relaxation of tone to creep in. Towards the end of his life, when I paid what turned out to be a final visit, to interview him in connection with an article, I found him much more open to discussing a wide range of subjects related to his oeuvre.

That was the first time I encountered him. Subsequently I watched Satabdi perform in the open air at Curzon Park, on the street, and in other public spaces. At the time they were in form, physically and in terms of conviction: fresh, lithe, effective.

It struck me, watching the group dynamics as they performed and interacted with the audience, that there was no 'cult' being created around him as an individual, no attempt by him or the others to project him as the leader or well-known figure he already was. Here, he was just part of Satabdi, participating in ensemble acting interchangeably with the other much younger men and women. The whole production was treated as a collective exercise. Clearly, Badal-da wanted it this way. My interest was well and truly caught.

By this time, Badal-da was already a controversial figure in the world of theatre as someone who had turned his back on his considerable achievements as a playwright and director of popular plays. Instead, he had committed himself and his group to a total rejection of the economy on which proscenium theatre was premised. He had proved through his practice of Third Theatre that it was possible to do meaningful, powerful and artistically evolved theatre on little or no money. This, and his own uncompromising stance, turned him into a bit of an outcast to the theatre fraternity. He was carving his own path, a cult figure to some, but also a loner. He attracted only those who believed in theatre as social commitment.

My second encounter with Badal-da was both more literary and more personal. I went to his home, at 1A Peary Row in north Calcutta. A narrow house in a narrow lane, a darkish room on the ground floor which doubled as rehearsal space, a few assorted and shabby pieces of furniture, scuffed wooden cupboards which he unlocked to produce slim volumes published by his group, for sale at modest prices.

The reason I was there was a professional one. Seagull Books, the publishing house where I was Editor, began bringing out his plays in translation. His essays on Third Theatre, the language of theatre, actor training, were to be translated and published as collections. Seagull Theatre Quarterly, which I edited, covered him in some detail. Given these multiple publication plans, I began to meet him at intervals to discuss the various projects. The Badal-da I encountered was always reserved, dignified, and focused on the task at hand. He didn't chat or waste time on niceties. He had a wry, drily ironic tone at times, often self-deprecatory. Over several visits, he allowed a slight relaxation of tone to creep in. Towards the end of his life, when I paid what turned out to be a final visit, to interview him in connection with an article, I found him much more open to discussing a wide range of subjects related to his oeuvre. I quote from that section of my book:

These multiple kinds of encounters helped me build a relationship with Badal Sircar more layered and complex than my direct interaction with him allowed. A relationship premised on respect for the man, whom I found admirably consistent in his values. A relationship based on the recognition that his contribution to the history of Indian theatre was significant and longlasting, and deserved to be studied, recorded and conveyed to future generations.

"To the end he remained curious, interested, open to learning. I remember meeting him in 2009. By then his movements were restricted, and he was almost completely confined to his room in his house in north Kolkata. We spoke of several things, but what came through clearly was his deep passion for and commitment to the theatre path he had chosen to walk for the past forty odd years." (Intro, p.xvii).

Because his self-respect was more important to him than publicity, this led him to disengage from the increasingly media-hungry, money-driven theatre scenario with which he was surrounded. I recall one telling incident which demonstrates this pride and self-respect. I was paying him a visit after a long break. In between he had had an accident, suffered serious injury, was home bound and unable to engage in his usual theatre and workshop activity. I carried with me a cheque from Seagull Books. As his publishers, this was entirely acceptable, but he balked at accepting it. He questioned me closely – why this money now? He did not need charity. Was this money due to him professionally? If so, for what exactly? He would not accept it unless he was sure that it was legitimately his due. Finally, only after he was assured that this was an advance against books in progress, would he allow me to hand it to him. I got a glimpse of the proud man who would not budge an inch from his principles.

This brings me to the third encounter with Badal Sircar. This happened some years after his death, when I began reading his memoirs while researching my book. A different Badal-da emerged from those pages: someone who enjoyed spending time chatting with friends; someone passionate and vulnerable, but always with a sense of ironic distance which stopped him from being pedantic; someone with a marked sense of humour; someone self-questioning and self-critical, continuously pushing his own boundaries. And then I began interviewing people who knew him well, who had worked with him closely. They spoke of him as an open-minded person who never put himself above them, who had no false pride: someone who became a student again at the age of 60, and attended MA classes alongside people younger than his own troupe members.

These multiple kinds of encounters helped me build a relationship with Badal Sircar more layered and complex than my direct interaction with him allowed. A relationship premised on respect for the man, whom I found admirably consistent in his values. A relationship based on the recognition that his contribution to the history of Indian theatre was significant and longlasting, and deserved to be studied, recorded and conveyed to future generations. A relationship of deep regard and appreciation for this remarkable artist who with little concern for self-promotion dedicated himself to bringing a meaningful theatre to the people.

Coração Brasileiro

A Brazilian Heart

ANNA SALLEH

A science journalist
who sings and plays
Brazilian jazz
speaks to Mark Ulyseas
on her life and works

When I was about 10 I saw the film *Black Orpheus* - the story of Orpheus and Eurydice set in Rio de Janeiro at Carnival time. I was captivated by the film's stunning views of the city from the hillside favelas, and by the irresistible rhythms and haunting melodies of its soundtrack. It really sowed the seeds for my love of Brazilian music today.

I've always sung - my mother - and her mother - were singers, and all through my childhood my parents played music in the house - classical, folk, world, jazz and everything in between. I remember being particularly mesmerised by my dad's Ella Fitzgerald records. I had violin lessons when I was four but the first instrument to really stick was a guitar my father gave me when I was 12. I played and sang folk and pop standards on guitar all through high school. In my 20s I busked, and performed at folk clubs and festivals, and later joined a five-part acappella group run by Gary Smith, who became my life partner. The group sang a lot of jazz and gospel and had loads of fun touring places like the Edinburgh Festival.

But all through these years, the music of *Black Orpheus* kept echoing in my mind. By 2010 I had left the vocal group and returned to my roots: guitar and voice. I taught myself to play jazz chords on guitar, got some tips on pronouncing Brazilian Portuguese, and started regularly performing bossa nova (e.g. see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfibwW-bQos>). I then became so obsessed with Brazilian music, I packed up my guitar and flew to Rio. I took lessons in percussion and guitar, played with the locals, and got tips from elders in the music scene. When I came back from Brazil I was thoroughly inspired. With Gary's help I put together a show called 'Gorgeous Songs from Brazil & Beyond' that has been evolving ever since. The show blended honey-smooth bossa nova hits like *The Girl from Ipanema* with less well-known Brazilian material, and non-Brazilian tunes, ranging from ballads and cheeky swing tunes, to original arrangements of old favourites.

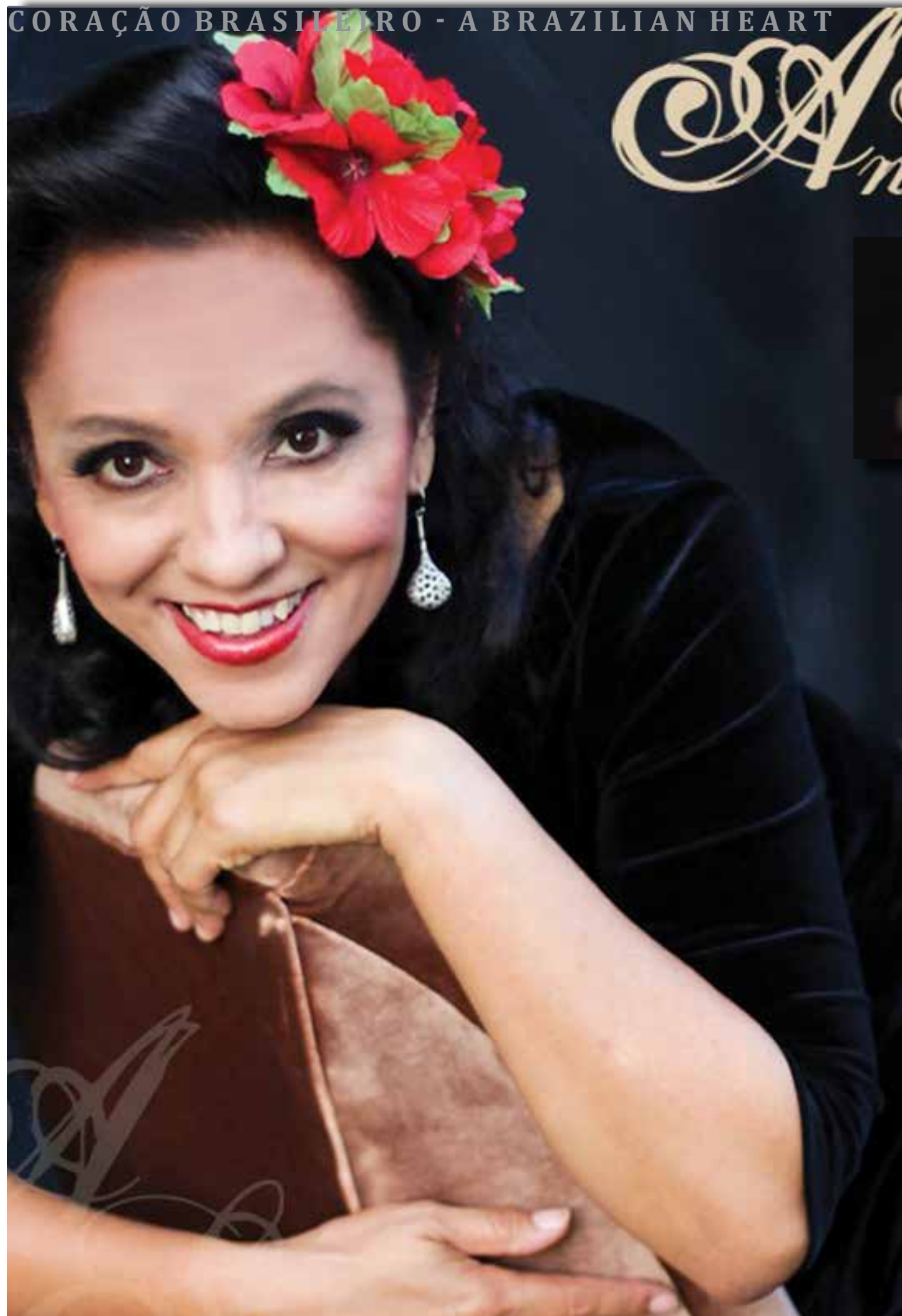
My music? The way I see it, what I do best is interpret and channel. I hear a performance of a song and it communicates a feeling to me - it might be joy, sorrow, irreverence or beauty - and that becomes part of me. When I perform that song I try to share that original feeling. The amazing thing is that it doesn't seem to matter if I sing in a language the audience doesn't understand. They *get it* anyway! My shows involve me sharing some of those gorgeous musical gems that I have collected and shined over the years - from Brazil and beyond. I'm a sucker for good melodies and there's no shortage of those in the music from Rio, which is what I'm drawn to most. From the gentle-as-a-feather rise and fall of a Jobim bossa nova tune to the crazy endless melody of a choro by Jacob do Bandolim - I am possessed by them all! Many of the melodies (and lyrics) are quite melancholy and I love the way they juxtapose against the stirring samba/bossa rhythms.

Going to Brazil was the best thing I've ever done in my life. Perhaps that's why some people say I have a 'Coração Brasileiro' (Brazilian Heart)? When I came back I made an ABC radio documentary about my experiences there, which had given me a much deeper appreciation of Brazilian music than I had before. My Rio host Luiz Carlos de Oliveira e Silva really encouraged me to look beyond bossa nova to other styles - like samba and choro. Samba is the traditional music of Carnival, while choro dates back to the 19th Century, evolving from such things as the polka from Europe combined with African rhythms. There is a thriving club scene in Rio where you can spend hours enjoying the revival of these traditions.



Musically, the most important thing I learnt in Brazil was a solid samba groove. The thing that helped me most with this was a young percussionist called Mateus, who used a method called 'O Passo' (meaning 'the step') to teach the rhythm. O Passo involves doing a kind of dance that helps you embody a rhythm. As someone who loves Latin dancing and learns best by ear, this made it all possible. After the rhythm was in my body, I was then able to transfer it to guitar. Performing with Rio locals and the feedback I got from bossa nova legends like Roberto Menescal and Maurício Einhorn also gave me the confidence to keep on channeling this beautiful music.

My doctorate in science and technology studies (STS), which is the social studies of science, was a result of certain frustrations I felt as a working journalist - these were to do with the way I saw science being used as a tool by those in power. I wanted to understand how journalists could encourage a more democratic use of science. Not long into my science degree I started working at the student radio station, interviewing people about science-related issues. I have my mother largely to thank for this side of my life. I studied philosophy and politics in my early years at university and have always been interested in the challenges brought by new technologies - from genetically-modified food to nanotechnology. Technology brings both exciting opportunities and scary possibilities and I think it's important for us to debate and discuss the issues technology raises for society. To do this in a way that is meaningful, however, requires we get rid of one of the biggest misconceptions about technology - that it is autonomous, that it just develops and progresses by *itself* and all individuals can do is to adapt to it. Technology is created by *humans*, and embodies *values*. I think technology is often oversold as a solution to problems that may be more effectively solved by *social* innovation. And I think journalists can play a role in helping to facilitate debate about all this.



www.facebook.com/AnnaSallehMusician

What drives me to be multifaceted? Just the fact that I have many 'itches to scratch'. One of my friends calls me a "renaissance woman" but the thing is I think most people have different aspects to their selves that need to be expressed. I think it's a shame that people feel forced into working most of their life in one profession. My wish for society is that we can all have our basic needs met while fully expressing ourselves as creative beings. Perhaps this will happen - In fact I've heard there's a trend towards "portfolio careers".

Currently, my research and writing work is mainly at [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](http://www.abc.net.au) where I work three days a week. My work as a journalist has shifted over time with the ebb and flow of editors and resources. Lately I have focused on communicating the fascinating research being carried out by all manner of dedicated and passionate scientists. In the past I have spent more time looking at the social issues involving science and I hope to have an opportunity to do more of that in the future, as the organisation restructures within the new media ecology. Another thing I have done recently is contribute to the development of a science journalism course for Pacific Islanders. And - on another track - I am helping to compile an online retrospective of my father's contribution to Malaysian literature and cultural life.

On the music side, I play regularly at [Foundry616](http://www.foundry616.com.au) jazz club in Sydney and have just released a new album with a five-piece band. I am also developing a solo show and other new projects, including a duo with a former guitar teacher/maestro, with whom it's always been a joy to collaborate with. There is so much new repertoire I'd like to explore in many different forms - from the intimacy of a solo and duo performance to the excitement of the full band on the big stage. The buzz of an ever-evolving life as a musician and performer really makes me feel like I'm in the flow of this beautiful river called life.

My message for readers? Make room for your passions, even if it means taking a vow of relative poverty. And of course... have no regrets - je ne regrette rien!

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Travel - First World Problems

It was early morning and still dark outside but Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport was already alive. I was waiting to board my flight to Jakarta with Garuda Indonesia who had been voted best economy airline in the world. Who votes for these awards?

People pulled their belongings in their little portable coffins, some with squeaking wheels. Many people listened to music through oversized headphones. Some seemed to have conversations despite being half asleep. I found a seat. Two little children were running around, no doubt excited to get on a plane, maybe for the first time. A man urged their parents to keep them quiet. He couldn't read his paper in peace.

A woman near me seemed very nervous. Getting up, sitting down, looking left, looking right. Somehow her behavior tickled my imagination and a story crept up on me. I opened my notebook and began to write.

A woman in a worn out tracksuit has not been on a plane in years. She was not afraid to fly. She simply had no reason to board a plane. She was happy to walk everywhere, enjoyed her neighborhood more than traveling to faraway lands. Now I can see her dialing a number on her 'old school' - phone to say goodbye to everyone she knows and she tells them that she hoped to get a window seat. She didn't know that she could have chosen her seat. The online check in procedure was just downright confusing to her and it didn't help that English was her second language or that she did not have a computer. She arrived well ahead of her departure time and after passing through security she realized that she had still more than two hours to kill before boarding would commence.

She bought herself a cup of coffee and drank it quickly and soon after took something from her handbag. She unfolded a faded paper serviette and revealed a cream cheese sandwich that someone had thoughtfully packed for her. She ate it quickly. I was certain that she also had some fruit buried somewhere in her oversized handbag, a banana or a pear which she wanted to save for later.





Photographs by Mark Ulyseas

When she had finished eating she bought a magazine and passed the rest of the wait nervously leafing through it. Besides her bag, she had a suitcase small enough to be permitted as carry-on luggage but she didn't like the overhead bins of this particular type of plane, and so, when it was time to board, she handed it over to an attendant and asked it to be stored in the plane's hold. Inside the plane, she found her seat and was mildly upset that it was a middle seat and just when she fastened her seatbelt the same attendant who had taken her suitcase appeared at the front of the plane to say that, due to storms in the city of their destination, the flight departure would have to be delayed. He couldn't say for how long, but for now passengers had to return to the waiting area. She stepped off the plane and the attendant handed the little suitcase back to her. She was very worried about missing her connecting flight and approached another attendant at the gate's desk, a young man, who she could not help noticing, had missed a few places while shaving that morning. He was the one who told her that the same storm delaying their take off would be delaying all other departures as well, which the woman took to mean she needn't be too concerned.

Several times over the next three hours, while sleepily reading her magazine she thought about eating her banana or the pear but decided against it. Who knows when next she would get food? At some point a new departure time was announced only to be postponed at the last minute. Finally passengers were "invited" (the word provoked tired laughter) to get on the plane and, after another half-hour wait in the runway queue, the plane lifted smoothly into the air. She arrived safely and before she was allowed to leave the arrival hall she had to put banana and pear into a bin because fresh fruit was not allowed to be taken anywhere. She now regretted that she did not eat them earlier.

I closed my notebook and noticed that the children were now chasing each other a little further away and the man had moved to read his paper elsewhere. I bought myself a coffee and eventually my boarding call came and it was time to get comfortable in the world's best economy seats. Time flew by and in an instant I landed safely in Jakarta. Heavy security awaited me; maybe because Indonesia was holding elections tomorrow. I paid for my temporary visa and headed towards further check-points. I passed them flying colors and headed to the baggage claim area and took a strategically smart position near the rattling carousel. The children were still playing, now in a different country and the man was still complaining. I suddenly realized that I had lost my wallet with everything inside, passport, credit card, cash and most of all photos of my loved ones. It must have happened sometime after passing immigration and the interrogating stares of the customs-officers.

Utter panic kicked in!



I sprinted back and immediately was surrounded by soldiers. I smiled somewhat with the frozen look of someone who had no clue what to do. The soldiers put their heads together and made the decision to accompany me and after an eternity of retracing my steps I saw my wallet still sitting on a counter, untouched. I jumped for joy, thanked the little army that had accompanied me and made my way back to the arrivals hall, stepped outside into the humid Jakarta air and found a taxi from the Bluebird group which is the only trusted company in Indonesia and two hours of Jakarta traffic later I was in my hotel. I looked out the window and twenty meters from the end of the pool that was surrounded by tropical gardens I could make out makeshift huts, slum-like areas.

If you pay attention to the moment, then the moment will pay attention to you.

*

Later that day someone said near me at a table in a restaurant.

'My new Ben Sherman shirt, imported from India by way of Indonesia, and indeed of a rather flimsy cloth, does not even have the benefit of a top pocket, a sorry omission.'

The problems of the first world.

"Live quietly in the moment and see the beauty of all before you. The future will take care of itself..."

- Paramahansa Yogananda, Autobiography of a Yogi



The Ugliness of Exceptionalism

On the hour, every hour, one bears witness to mind numbing hate that often translates into violence; Bombings, stabbings, torture and more. Everyone involved in this violence holds either - knife, gun, bomb or some other weapon with hate in their hearts while chanting the mantra of *exceptionalism*. The words and actions by *these* people are merely a means to an end – an end that results in false victory by one over another for the purpose of possession or profit, real or imagined. The real intentions of the victors are spiced by a colonial mentality that simmers in the cauldron of perpetual hate for the other...the pathological need to *sanitise* one's life of all those that do not belong in the perceived world of the *exceptionals*. Sacred symbols are abused. Words and phrases are appropriated...trade-marked...so no one else has access to them, and if they do they are immediately branded racist. Example: *Black Lives Matter*, *Jewish Lives Matter* and to hell with the rest of the world.

The word *nigger* can be used by a black against another, including a non-black person. Yet if a non-black person uses this word it immediately becomes racist. This is prevalent in the USA and other western countries.

Semite is a term for a Jew, Arab or any other member of an ancient tribe of the ME. Antisemitism was a phrase coined in Germany in the 19th century for attacks against Jews. This term was popularized in Germany in 1879 as a scientific-sounding term for *Judenhass*, which means Jew-hatred. Now anyone who is a non-Jew and is even mildly critical of a Jew's actions (not related to his/her religion) are immediately branded antisemitic (but Jews can criticise themselves and others, this is acceptable). Even criticism of the State of Israel is considered antisemitic. But abuse against Arabs in Israel and elsewhere is alright. Kill them. Bomb their countries, seize their lands and sell them weapons to slaughter one another and more. Call them savages. These actions are not antisemitic.

It matters little to the colonial mind-set that the sacred swastika of over 1.6 billion Hindus, Jains and Buddhists is deliberately confused with the Nazi swastika. [LINK](#) This disrespect is apparent in most parts of the western world – particularly in Europe, the home of the colonials.

Curiously the republication of *Mein Kampf*, the autobiography of Adolf Hitler, in Germany, is an instant sell out. Meanwhile in Japan the government is removing the sacred swastika symbol on their maps which denote the location of a Buddhist temple because it may offend *some* people.

A few months ago an aspiring contributor to Live Encounters informed me that he was withdrawing his poems because *"I firmly believe that inciting hatred against Israel is morally inexcusable"*. Apparently he had read the following article. [LINK](#) The burning of a Christian church, desecration of graves, burning to death of a Palestinian child by right wing Jews is okay with this gentleman but not the criticism of the State of Israel's omissions and commissions. It is, for him, antisemitic. He doesn't live in Israel. Unfortunately he is not alone in this thinking in and outside of Israel. Instead of addressing the problems the only defence is to deliberately obfuscate all relevant issues by terming critics - antisemitic - thereby attempting to malign all and sundry. It matters little if truth becomes the bastard child of a bloody reality that no one wants to own or be responsible for...

The frightening aspect of this development is that ordinary God fearing people are being contaminated by this cancerous *exceptionalism*. Ordinary people who simply want to live in peace and not seize someone else's land, invade another country or senselessly slaughter innocent civilians, are being forced to choose between love and hate, are being coerced into submitting to the nature of the beast (some would call this the mark of *Cain*, while others would term it *Karma*). A fine example is the latest controversy surrounding the book on forbidden love between a Jew and an Arab titled *Borderlife* by noted Israeli author *Dorit Rabinyan*, which has upset many self-righteous folk in Israel. [LINK](#)

A terrorist attack in Paris elicits tremendous outpouring in the western media. Yet daily mass murder, kidnapping and rape of hundreds of women and children in Africa; persecution of Kurds by Turkey (ironically the Kurdish women fighters are winning the battle against ISIS while certain elements in Turkey, a NATO power, are supporting ISIS); enslavement/rape of Christians, Muslims and Yazidis by ISIS pale in comparison to the killing of Europeans in a western capital. The colonial mind-set is apparent in the reaction of the western media.

Exceptionalism smells like a rotten egg.

Some years ago I interviewed celebrated Norwegian anthropologist and author, Professor Unni Wikan of Oslo University and asked her about the clash of cultures (with reference to Bali and the marauding tourists). She said *"Cultures are ever changing, just like people; indeed, it is people who make up cultures, we are the agents, culture in itself can do nothing, it is just a word, a concept. It is important to keep this in mind: People have in their power to create and make "culture" happen, for good or bad. Therefore too, culture clash is not a term I use: it indicates that there is something there with the power to act by itself. Think of people instead, and you have a better instrument for building peace."* [LINK](#)

Professor Unni Wikan's comment is best illustrated in this incident: A few months ago a new contributor to Live Encounters withdrew his poems stating *"I firmly believe that inciting hatred against Israel is morally inexcusable"*, (this after having read the following article - *Antisemitism in Israel - Racism Against Arabs and Arab Jews and its effects* [LINK](#)). The burning of a church, desecration of graves, burning to death of a Palestinian child by right wing Jews, illegal seizure of Palestinian land is acceptable but not criticism of the State of Israel's omissions and commissions. It is, for him, antisemitic. He doesn't live in Israel. Unfortunately he is not alone in this thinking - in and outside of Israel. Instead of addressing the problems the only defence is to deliberately obfuscate all issues by terming critics - antisemitic, thereby maligning all and silencing even genuine supporters of Israel. It matters little if truth becomes the bastard child of a bloody reality that no one wants to own or be responsible for...it is always someone else's fault.

The ongoing tragedy is that many among us are being drawn into a septic situation that breeds hatred, breeds violence against one another. Illiteracy, poverty and *exceptionalism* fuel the ongoing genocide.

Banning words, phrases or symbols doesn't make the problem go away. It only exacerbates the situation to a point where hate for another *not of our kind* becomes a self induced genetic disorder.

Batting only for oneself is not cricket.

Many years ago I received an email from a black person in the USA berating me for stating the truth that Affirmative Action was hamstringing the black people, that Affirmative Action was alienating the black people from other folk because of the 'exclusiveness' attached to it. I have been proven right. Certain people within a democratic state cannot be treated preferentially based purely on historical injustices, for this action creates more injustice. In a democracy all citizens must be treated equally. Unfortunately democracy is a good idea, nothing more. [LINK](#)

The question that begs to be asked - Why is it that peoples of the [First Nations](#) whose land it was in the first place never seem to get any support from those shouting '*Black Lives Matter*'?

Perhaps *All Lives Matter* should be the slogan.

If we want peace we must first help those who are dispossessed - like the Jew *Steve Maman* from San Francisco, who is helping free Christian and Yazidi slaves from ISIS. [LINK](#) Or, the various charities working in Palestine and Israel, including [Rabbis For Human Rights](#), [Association For Civil Rights in Israel](#) and [Christian Aid](#).

The ongoing tragedy is that many among us are being drawn into a septic situation that breeds hatred, breeds violence against one another. Illiteracy, poverty, political brinkmanship and *exceptionalism* fuel the ongoing genocide.

Banning words, phrases or symbols doesn't make the problem go away. It only exacerbates the situation to a point where hate for another *not of our kind* becomes a self-induced genetic disorder.

Nelson Mandela, despite years of incarceration, returned to public life to lead South Africa onto the path of reconciliation. He was a man who broke out of the world of violence and hate, to become a leader that guided a nation hemorrhaging from hate to acknowledge, accept and to move on from its violent past through the process of *inclusiveness*. Perhaps the following words of Mandela will resonate with those that seek both justice and peace in a world fragmented by *exceptionalism*:

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

JILL GOCHER



“You were born with wings, why prefer to crawl through life?” - Rumi

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