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Free online magazine from village earth

REARMING HINDUISM



Professor Vamsee Juluri



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Cover Photograph: Relief from Mahanavami Dibba, Vijayanagar Kingdom, Hampi by Mark Ulyseas

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Live
encounters

OCTOBER 2014



Rearming Hinduism

Professor Vamsee Juluri

Juluri is a Professor of Media Studies at the University of San Francisco where he teaches classes on globalization, Indian Cinema and Mahatma Gandhi among other subjects. His latest book, *Bollywood Nation: India through its Cinema* (Penguin India), tells the story of modern India through its popular movies and makes a case for recognizing the essential contribution of cinema to India's survival as a democracy. His earlier books include *Becoming a Global Audience: Longing and Belonging in Indian Music Television*, and *The Mythologist: A Novel*.



The Mirage of ISIS

David Morgan

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



The un-Islamic State

Mouin Rabbani

Mouin Rabbani is a co-editor of *Jadaliyya* and a contributing editor of *Middle East Report*. He has written and commented widely on Middle East affairs. Reprinted by special permission of [NOREF](#)



Torture, the War on Terror, and The New York Times

Cynthia Banham

Banham is a PhD candidate in her final year at the ANU in the Regulatory Institutions Network's Centre for International Governance and Justice. Her thesis examines the responses of liberal democracies to the torture of their own citizens after September 11. She is a former foreign affairs and defence correspondent for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Cynthia has a Masters of International Affairs from the ANU. She is also a lawyer, and worked as a solicitor in Sydney in the 1990s. [Regarding Rights](#)



The Life and Death of a Lone Wolf

Natalie Wood

Born in Birmingham, England, U.K., Natalie Wood began working in journalism a month prior to outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. She remained in regional Jewish journalism for over 20 years, leaving full-time writing to help run a family business and then completed a range of general office work. Wood and her husband, Brian Fink emigrated from Manchester to Israel in March 2010 and live in Karmiel, Galilee where she continues to work, concentrating on creative writing. She features in *Smith Magazine's* new *Six Word Memoirs On Jewish Life* and contributes to *Technorati*, *Blogcritics* and *Live Encounters* magazine. Her stories - [Website](#) and journalism - [Website](#)



Glore Woman for Sally McKenna

Terry McDonagh

Irish poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the Int. School Hamburg for 15 years. He now works freelance; has been writer in residence in Europe, Asia, Australia; published seven poetry collections, book of letters, prose and poetry for young people translated into Indonesian and German, distributed internationally by Syracuse Uni. Press; latest poetry collection *Ripple Effect* due for publication in May/June 2013, Arlen House; next children's story, *Michel the Merman*, illustrated by Marc Barnes (NZ) to be published in September 2013. He lives in Hamburg and Ireland. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



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Foxcroft is an Australian conservationist and Director of the non-profit organisation *Cee4life* (Conservation and Environmental Education4 Life) She has served in the Australian Army as a SGT Medic, holds double degree in wildlife conservation biology and environmental management, and has been investigated the wildlife trade and witnessed the brutal treatment of some of the world's most iconic animals. www.cee4life.org



Sexuality in the time of Sobriety

Aryaa Naik

Aryaa is currently the Head, Creatives at Gyaan Adab Centre. Her educational qualifications include Bachelors in Philosophy from Ferguson College, Pune, Post Graduate diploma in Social Communications Media from Sophia College, Mumbai and Masters in Gender, Culture and Development Studies from the University of Pune. Her experience includes script writing and feature writing for publications such as Times of India, Femina, Life 365 and Maharashtra Herald. www.gyaanadab.org



Online Dating - Hmmm...

Dr. Candess M Campbell

Candess M. Campbell, PhD is the #1 Best-selling author of *12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine*. She is a Blogger, Intuitive Success Coach and International Psychic Medium. She has practiced as a mental health and chemical dependency counselor for over 30 years. www.12weekstoselfhealing.com



Photo Gallery - Faces

Mark Ulyseas

These are some of the enchanting people I have met while travelling dusty roads in search of life away from the tourist ghettos. Bali, Indonesia.



Professor Vamsee Juluri

Novelist, author and professor of media studies at the University of San Francisco.

Rearming Hinduism

Rearming Hinduism is my attempt to offer some new ideas about what it means to be Hindu, and also more broadly, what it means to be civilized, in terms of our relationship as human beings to the living world. It is in part a critique of the academic and media stereotypes and distortions that have plagued the narration of Hindu and Indian history, and in part a plea to go beyond the normal terms of definition for civilizational history altogether; to go beyond "swords and stones" and find a way of narrating history that does not objectify nature, animals or life. In the following extract which I am happy to share with readers of Live Encounters, I talk about the "Greatest Love," or how the "animal myths" of Hinduism may be appreciated as a resource for restoring common sense again in our mechanistic, cruel and unnatural modern world.

www.rearminghinduism.com

"We are living right now in a moment of vast civilizational hunger. It is not fundamentalism, nor fascism. It is an exceptional historical moment in which an entire generation of young, modern Hindus in India and the diaspora is growing up and asking only one pressing question: who are we, really?"

REARMING HINDUISM

NATURE, HINDUPHOBIA, AND THE RETURN OF INDIAN INTELLIGENCE

VAMSEE JULURI



Modern Hindus must recognize that our “animal” gods are our most essential link to the living, natural world that modern anthropocentrism has cut our minds and hearts away from. The popular legends of Vishnu as the Dasavatar are one way in which we still remember our relationship to the divine as nature.



The ten avatars of Vishnu, (Clockwise, from top left) Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Krishna, Kalki, Buddha, Parashurama, Rama and Narasimha, (in centre) Krishna. Painting currently in Victoria and Albert Museum. [LINK](#)

The Greatest Love

Dasavatar

“Cheema-lo, Brahma-lo ...” It is not only in the form of relatives and friends that Hinduism exhorts us to see the divine but also in the form of non-human life. From the tiny ant, to the vast cosmos, as Tyagaraja sang, we still find the same One thing. Without recognizing this key aspect of Hindu sensibility, its deep recognition of the sanctity of non-human life, we are left only with a shadow interpretation of Hinduism. Hinduphobic belief often denigrates the reverence we accord animals in Hindu thought as superstition and “animal worship,” and at best, treats animals as metaphors for social groups.

Modern Hindus must recognize that our “animal” gods are our most essential link to the living, natural world that modern anthropocentrism has cut our minds and hearts away from. The popular legends of Vishnu as the Dasavatar are one way in which we still remember our relationship to the divine as nature.

In this chapter, I offer some ideas about how restoring our attention towards non-human divinities can help us better understand what Hinduism meant to our ancestors, but also help us critique and overcome the violent speciesism that underlies the environmental holocaust that has been unfolding across the world the past few centuries.

The question is simply this: would you call a fish a god if, somehow, in the improbable but not impossible array of causes and things, somehow, it helped you?

Or would you only see the lowly fish?

Matysa

One day, when the world was about to end...

A fish saved the day.

“Why have You come in this lowly form?” The good sage asks Lord Vishnu.

Grace does not need to be preordained from atop hierarchies in Hinduism. We imagine our Gods coming down, from the sky, from the ocean of milk, or from the exalted mountain adorned by the crescent moon, but where they come, how they come, what they come into, does not matter.

In theory, in practice, all is His avatar. The salt in the water is also the salt in the body of all that lives. But sometimes, what is embodied is something more. Whether there was really a talking fish that grew to epic proportions in just a few days is not the question. Whether there was really a turtle that lifted a mountain is not the question. Whether there was really a Rama or a Krishna or a Hanuman is not the question. Whether there were some local heroes who got elevated by the circulation of bardic tales into a mythology of divinities is also not the question, it is in fact, a distraction.

The question is simply this: would you call a fish a god if, somehow, in the improbable but not impossible array of causes and things, somehow, it helped you?

Or would you only see the lowly fish?



[LINK](#)

It is God. It is devotee. It is inevitable, though its seeming impossibility is about all we think about. As Yudhisthira tells the Yaksha of the Lake, what is inevitable is not death, as we often think, but happiness.

It is the greatest love.

It can swell a tiny fish to the size of a continent-hauling whale.

It can make a God swallow all the world's poison in one gulp to keep life safe for us.

It can call a God out of a pillar, in a flash of fire and clap of thunder, a god who is half-lion, half-human, fully smarter than any conundrum or condition raised against him.

It can also wage war, and it can suffer, for love.

It is God. It is devotee.

It is inevitable, though its seeming impossibility is about all we think about.

As Yudhisthira tells the Yaksha of the Lake, what is inevitable is not death, as we often think, but happiness.

We live of course, in the age of the greatest industrial scale output of happiness ever made, or at least so we are told. From the time we are born, advertising, consumer culture, consumerism-based parenting, everything tells us this world is here to buy happiness from. We grow up thinking that the greatest thing in the world is to get what is being tantalizingly promised to us through our senses; to get whatever we think will give us ever greater physical gratification and pleasure. The shop is therefore the metaphor of choice for all we desire today. And for those of us fortunate enough to afford entry, we have no end to what form we can buy happiness in; toys, clothes, candy, ornaments, cars, gadgets, pictures, drugs, status, power, prestige, whatever it is. We live our lives working, wishing, scheming, if necessary, for this.

But we wonder sometimes if we really are happy. We wonder if we are doing what we are really here for. We wonder if our love is real.

We wonder still if the greatest love is possible, in today's world.

We don't have answers for that. We might find some answers at best only for what is wrong with today's world using the limited language our discourse gives us today. We recognize at best problems like corruption in the government, and stress in our work and lives. But we seek, still, the language with which we can name what we want to find more than anything else in this world. For something like the greatest love to be understood, we will need eyes to see what ails this present world far beyond corruption and stress. We will need eyes to unveil a greater illusion than what our ancestors might have needed to look beyond.

Is the greatest love right here, right here now, all around us, in the world that is living all around us, in every ant, fly, bird, and beast we see, and is it only our limitations as human and socialized beings that deter us from grasping it?

Is the greatest love only a myth of the past? Or was there such a thing for real? Was it love that brought the Great Lord Mahavishnu Himself down to earth?

Or, even within the terms of reason, one might ask: was it love that elevated ordinary men and women into saints? What was that love? Was it selflessness? Was it its unconditional existence, free of expectation?

Is there a name for it? Or a technique for it? How do we get it? Now? Is there a shop... perhaps? We might ask the question now, for this is a book, after all, about God.

Is God real?

Or is it all just how we look at it?

If so, how do we learn to look at truth again?

In practical terms, what is it that we need to recognize in order to better understand the question of God, or at least, the possibility of love in this world? Are the secrets hidden in our ancient languages and in the ruins and relics from our past? Or is it all right here, in plain sight, in our lives, in our customs and values, mixed up, but still holding the promise of showing us a way forward?

Is the greatest love right here, right here now, all around us, in the world that is living all around us, in every ant, fly, bird, and beast we see, and is it only our limitations as human and socialized beings that deter us from grasping it?

Perhaps it is.



[LINK](#)

How the modern anthropocentric mind sees nature is not the only way of seeing it. There is a greater insight in nature's theater, in the theater of life, so to speak, that our modern discourses about nature, life and animals, can only teach us so much about. It is nature, ultimately, that we will have to turn to once again, to know what it is to love, and be loved.



[LINK](#)

The world we live in today, the modern industrial, or post-industrial world, is based on a very specific culture's assertion of the dominance of the human species over all else. It has brought us great benefits and pleasures, no doubt.

But each day in the life of planet homo not so sapiens today carries the karma, so to speak, of the massive destruction of millions of living beings around the planet. Recognizing this should not make us defensive.

The answer is not to say either drop out and be a hermit, or continue to ignore this. The answer is to merely learn to see it for what it is. What we have to acknowledge first, is just one simple thing.

How the modern anthropocentric mind sees nature is not the only way of seeing it. There is a greater insight in nature's theater, in the theater of life, so to speak, that our modern discourses about nature, life and animals, can only teach us so much about.

It is nature, ultimately, that we will have to turn to once again, to know what it is to love, and be loved.

It is only in nature, that perhaps we will know what it is to be not just Hindu, or human, but in the sanathana dharma itself.

A Hindu still sees a monkey and says Hanuman! A Hindu still sees an elephant and says Ganesha! A Hindu still sees an eagle and thinks of Garuda. A Hindu still sees a snake and thinks of Subramanya and Shiva. A Hindu sees God, still, in the vast world that the modern way of life has learned to ignore, suppress, and devour. A Hindu still sees God. A Hinduphobe only sees a primitive animal worshipper in the Hindu.

The *Dasavatar* is one way of offering a sense of narrative on the fundamental core of our philosophy: that all life is divine, God is in everyone and everything that lives.

Evolution is science's way of telling that story, in the language and in the power trips of science.

Unlike in places where both science and religion face off as power trips, in India there has been no conflict between the two.

A Hindu still sees a monkey and says Hanuman! A Hindu still sees an elephant and says Ganesha! A Hindu still sees an eagle and thinks of Garuda. A Hindu still sees a snake and thinks of Subramanya and Shiva. A Hindu sees God, still, in the vast world that the modern way of life has learned to ignore, suppress, and devour.

A Hindu still sees God. A Hinduphobe only sees a primitive animal worshipper in the Hindu.

Actually, it's something much worse than even Hinduphobia that denies life its own integrity. It may not be the Greatest Hate, but it is certainly the Greatest Delusion that plagues the human world in our time.

How many more PETA celebrities must try before we recognize too many have died?

Yes, and how many slurs will we face before they know, this is what we have said all along?



[LINK](#)

David Morgan explains why the US-led campaign against ISIS ultimately lacks integrity and its aims lack credibility. Kurds are on the frontline against ISIS but not all Kurds are equally favoured by the West.



The Mirage of ISIS

The Threat from Islamic State, the US and the Reshaping of the Middle East

Undeniably the Islamic State or ISIS presents a great danger, especially to non-Sunni minorities and women in the Middle East, and the group has demonstrated that it is capable of committing the most heinous and ruthless crimes that sicken all normal feeling people. Nevertheless, the rhetoric raising the alarm of its "imminent threat" to the world issued from the mouths of Western politicians seems much exaggerated and overblown. Interestingly, when addressing the UN General Assembly, US President Obama claimed that Russian aggression in Europe posed an even greater threat to world peace than ISIS. He cannot have it both ways; either ISIS is an existential and unique threat sufficiently menacing to warrant waging war or it isn't.

On the CIA revised estimates active ISIS militias number approximately 30,000 on the ground and are spread over two large countries, Syria and Iraq. While 30,000 is a significant figure it is not really such a formidable military capability and should be no match for a well trained and equipped army of a fully functioning state. But of course ISIS is not just an armed terrorist gang or a band of mercenaries using religion as a cover for plunder and theft.

The group's appeal to young disaffected Muslims is extremely strong in the Islamic world and in the West. Recruits appear to be totally committed to the cause as "true believers". ISIS has occupied vast stretches of territory, grabbed huge resources in the process and acquired advanced weaponry - or it has been permitted to do so. Furthermore, it has considerable funds at its disposal and a sophisticated technology to put its message across on social media, Facebook, Youtube and the like. It creates propaganda videos and even publishes an annual report to document its latest achievements like a modern business corporation.

But there is still more to ISIS than meets the eye and the current campaign to defeat it has far more aims than simply to eradicate an immediate threat from a terrorist organisation. Behind the mirage of ISIS lurk far darker forces.

President Obama has hailed the support of the Arab states for the airstrikes and declared that the US was "proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with these nations". Not one of them, of course, can claim to be a democracy. However, members of the Gulf royal families who took to their jets to join in the bombing on a fellow Arab country seemed to have enjoyed the ride.

The main intention of this article is not to explore the wilder suspicions that the Central Intelligence Agency is behind the formation and success of ISIS, as has been argued by some, but to examine the implications and aims of the strategy for combating the organisation. As I write US bombs are once again raining down on Iraq and President Obama has finally been able to start bombing Syria, although not quite the targets that he originally intended a year ago. A third Gulf war is now starting with no conclusion in sight.

A war to save Obama's face

Obama was about to go down in history as one of the most ineffectual occupants of the White House in the modern era. He urgently needed something big to rescue his reputation and earn his place in history. When ISIS came along it was a gift of perfect timing and they are the ideal enemy because hardly anyone but the most hardened jihadist can sympathise with their cause and brutal methods. US strategists seem to adopt a very simplified view of how to defeat ISIS and how to build effective alliances in the region. The White House has put together an exclusively Sunni alliance in order to attack a Sunni terror group in a country with a Sunni majority population, namely Syria, which is headed by a Shia minority leadership of Assad whom they seek to delegitimise in favour of a Sunni rebel group, the Free Syrian Army. This comes as no surprise as historically Western strategy has been to foster sectarianism in the region for its own advantage and the present coalition is but the latest example.

President Obama has hailed the support of the Arab states for the airstrikes and declared that the US was "proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with these nations". Not one of them, of course, can claim to be a democracy. However, members of the Gulf royal families who took to their jets to join in the bombing on a fellow Arab country seemed to have enjoyed the ride.

Cultivated Sectarianism

The "sectarianisation" of the Middle East has long been adopted by the US as a strategy to play one group off against another. Favoured academics have been offered rapid promotion for arguing the right line and distorting the reality of what the real culture of Mideast countries is like. Sunni, Shia, Kurd and Assyrian have lived in relative harmony for decades, nay for centuries, until the modern era of imperialism that is. This is not always grasped from reading Western commentaries on the region.

Ironically, one of the few democracies in the region is none too keen on taking part in the US-led operations. So far Turkey has held back from any direct involvement in the campaign. Incirlik Air Base located on Turkish soil is a NATO installation where a large number of US aircraft are stationed. However, with the exception of flights of unarmed US surveillance drones, Ankara has not permitted the US military to carry out airstrikes against ISIS from its territory.

If the ISIS crisis has achieved anything, it is this: it has exposed the cynical alliances and ruthless pursuit of vested interests of both the regional and international powers.

As Patrick Cockburn, the distinguished commentator of The Independent newspaper, ironically but accurately observed, "The so-called "coalition of the willing" is, in practice, very unwilling to fight ISIS, while those hitherto excluded, such as Iran, the Syrian government, Hezbollah and the PKK, are the ones actually fighting."

Turkey and ISIS

Ironically, one of the few democracies in the region is none too keen on taking part in the US-led operations. So far Turkey has held back from any direct involvement in the campaign. Incirlik Air Base located on Turkish soil is a NATO installation where a large number of US aircraft are stationed. However, with the exception of flights of unarmed US surveillance drones, Ankara has not permitted the US military to carry out airstrikes against ISIS from its territory.

The argument used by Turkish leaders until recently has been their concern to protect the lives of its hostages that have been held by ISIS. But they have now been released without harm; not even a hair on their head! It now appears that a deal was struck between Turkish intelligence and ISIS to obtain the release in an exchange of prisoners. Hurriyet newspaper reported that 50 ISIS members were released by Syrian rebel group Liwa al-Tawhid, a group which apparently has links to the Muslim Brotherhood, on the same day as the Turkish hostages were freed. Turkey's President Erdogan was quoted as telling reporters, "You might have had an exchange but it takes some effort to prepare for such a thing." Great pressure has no doubt been put on Turkey by its NATO allies and on 24 September Erdogan, the master of studied ambiguity, announced that, "Turkey will provide the necessary support for the anti-ISIS operation. The support could be military or political."

Knocking out ISIS is not the only aim

For the US president the high moral ground is the most valuable piece of real estate as he assumes his country's customary mantle of moral arbiter of the world's ills. In justifying the bombing, Obama made it quite clear that the aims of the campaign were far more than simply combating ISIS. He referred directly to the Syrian opposition as the "the best counterweight to ISIS and to Assad." Linking the toppling of Assad with defeating ISIS has long been argued as a necessary US foreign policy objective.

© David Morgan

Using the protracted conflict in Ukraine as a pretext, the Western powers have imposed ever more severe economic and financial sanctions on Russia in the last few months. The aim is not just to deter Moscow from supporting the rebels of East Ukraine or to punish it for absorbing the Crimea, but to contain Russia on the world stage. Under Vladimir Putin Russia has successfully reasserted its position as a major global power and adopted an independent foreign policy at variance with that of Washington, which is in marked contrast to the Yeltsin years when Russia's feebleness became something of an international laughing stock.

Knocking out ISIS is not the only aim *contd...*

Writing in *Politicos Magazine*, 2 September 2014, Dennis Ross, former special assistant to President Obama, called on the US to "provide significant lethal assistance and logistical support to those fighting not just ISIL but Assad as well" and in a "timely fashion". Meanwhile, Oubai Shahbandar, a Syrian-American, who is a senior adviser to the Syrian Opposition Coalition in Washington, claimed that the root cause for terrorism in Syria was precisely Assad. Following the bombs, the next step will be to extend the training and equipping of the Free Syrian Army – the so-called 'moderate rebels'. This robust partnership with the FSA will be essential to defeat ISIS and Assad, Shahbandar told the *New York Times*, 23 September. It can be mentioned that these moderate rebels are to be trained in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Political Bombing

The US bombing campaign has deliberately targeted and destroyed Syrian oil refineries which were under the temporary control of ISIS. This destruction of a prime asset and income stream for the country will prevent Syria from getting back on its feet for many years and will reduce it to a dependency status on Western reconstruction aid, technology and expertise post-Assad. Let's just consider that this might have been an intention. What the US could have done was to flush ISIS forces out without destroying such valuable infrastructure as it has been obliged to do in Iraq. The destruction of Syrian oil assets is flagrantly politically motivated pursuit of US hegemony cynically justified in terms of necessity in a war against "evil".

Outflanking Russia

Using the protracted conflict in Ukraine as a pretext, the Western powers have imposed ever more severe economic and financial sanctions on Russia in the last few months. The aim is not just to deter Moscow from supporting the rebels of East Ukraine or to punish it for absorbing the Crimea, but to contain Russia on the world stage. Under Vladimir Putin Russia has successfully reasserted its position as a major global power and adopted an independent foreign policy at variance with that of Washington, which is in marked contrast to the Yeltsin years when Russia's feebleness became something of an international laughing stock. An obvious motive for the attempts to overthrow Assad, an ally of Russia in the Middle East, is to undermine Russia's strategic position in the region, leaving the field open for the US to exercise dominant regional power.

Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds are not formal military or political allies. However, the Kurdistan Regional Governorate led by Barzani's KDP and Turkey led by Erdogan's AKP have formed an extremely close relationship. Once regarded as a threat by Ankara, the governorate ruled from Erbil is now Turkey's largest business partner in Iraq and one of its most lucrative in the region. The scale of their mutual financial and commercial interests cannot fail to have an influence on their political calculations and strategic thinking. This is exposed in both their positions vis-à-vis ISIS, Rojava and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

This explains the scathing attitude of Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, towards the US-led coalition against ISIS. Lavrov told Channel 5 in St. Petersburg: "Now that has been appointed United States' arch-enemy, I'd like to recall that [ISIS militants] are the very same people that evolved and got powerful sponsorship and material support from abroad at the time of the regime change efforts in Libya and later on when the same process was attempted in Syria."

Lavrov recalled that the Americans and Europeans had in the past justified their support for Islamic fundamentalists as part of providing support to forces opposing unpopular regimes: "When we called their attention to the fact that there were a large number of terrorists and extremists fighting these regimes, the Americans and Europeans essentially told us that all such things would pass once they overthrew the regimes, and that they would deal with this later on," Lavrov said. "But all this turned out to be wrong."

Accusing the West of double standards, Lavrov asserted that the Western powers had incited Islamic extremists against Middle East regimes they don't like. He said the West should stop dividing terrorists into good and bad and stated that Moscow has no intention of joining the anti-ISIS coalition that the US had cobbled together.

Turkey and the KRG

Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds are not formal military or political allies. However, the Kurdistan Regional Governorate led by Barzani's KDP and Turkey led by Erdogan's AKP have formed an extremely close relationship. Once regarded as a threat by Ankara, the governorate ruled from Erbil is now Turkey's largest business partner in Iraq and one of its most lucrative in the region. The scale of their mutual financial and commercial interests cannot fail to have an influence on their political calculations and strategic thinking. This is exposed in both their positions vis-à-vis ISIS, Rojava and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Pan-Kurdish friendship with neighbouring Kurds in Turkey and Syria rarely amounts publicly to much more than deepening cultural contacts and occasional expressions of emotional solidarity. The KRG has demonstrated a clear reluctance to extend material support to the beleaguered Kurds in Syria in their fight against ISIS and there is no sign that the peshmergas will be mobilised to offer military assistance to the PYD as it does battle with the jihadists.

Why such urgency to come to the aid of Iraq now, when the country has been suffering more than a decade of ruthless terrorist attacks? The country has been assailed by suicide bombers and assassins aimed at predominantly soft civilian targets such as schools, hospitals, market places and even funerals. Carnage had become a daily occurrence, but little was done to assist Iraq to combat the largely Sunni terrorist groups, which had been in receipt of support from outside the country and apparently have been very well funded.

Turkey and the KRG *contd...*

Similarly the peshmerga were accused of withdrawing their forces to leave the Yezidi community vulnerable to an ISIS attack during the refugee crisis around Sinjar. The romanticisation of the peshmerga in the Western media creates an impression of courageous fighters defending their people against aggressive forces overwhelmingly ranged against them. This image does not always truly reflect the reality. The operations of the peshmerga today conform to advancing the interests of the KRG and as a consequence, they will be hardly likely to come to the aid of other Kurdish communities that exist beyond the territory of the KRG. Furthermore, now that the KRG is an important strategic ally of the United States in the region its leaders should not be expected to carry out any operations that defy US interests or at least don't meet with Washington's sanction of approval. Were they openly to extend military support to the PKK, which is still resolutely viewed as a dangerous terrorist organisation by the US, then the Obama Administration would surely have something to say about it and this most certainly would not be very favourable.

Terrorism in Iraq is Nothing New

Why such urgency to come to the aid of Iraq now, when the country has been suffering more than a decade of ruthless terrorist attacks? The country has been assailed by suicide bombers and assassins aimed at predominantly soft civilian targets such as schools, hospitals, market places and even funerals. Carnage had become a daily occurrence, but little was done to assist Iraq to combat the largely Sunni terrorist groups, which had been in receipt of support from outside the country and apparently have been very well funded. Iraq has been seriously weakened by these terrorist atrocities and impeded from playing its role as a great power in the region. Economically, its mighty oil sector has also been unable to recover sufficiently to realise its full potential in the world oil market.

Fate of the Yezidis

The continuing plight of the Yezidi community in Northern Iraq which became the initial trigger for the launching of the bombing of ISIS positions in Iraq should not be forgotten as US ambitions widen and the media's attention is turned towards Syria. More than 3,000 women and children were captured by ISIS during its assault on the Yezidis and they are still being held in appalling circumstances.

It remains difficult to assess whether US airstrikes are going to relieve the siege of the Kurdish city of Kobane. Bombing was reported to have taken place around the city but at the time of writing the operation had not been confirmed by the US or any other source. The BBC's Mark Lowen, on the Syria-Turkey border, stated that Kurds in Kobane had reported a significant increase in shelling by IS militants on the morning of the 24 September. But a Kurdish military commander told Reuters news agency that ISIS had strengthened its forces after US airstrikes, sending extra fighters and tanks to the outskirts of Kobane.

One young Yezidi woman, who managed to escape during the airstrikes on ISIS, told the BBC how women were being tortured and forced to act as sex slaves by members of the group. "They will sell girls to whoever wants to buy them - girls aged nine and over," she said. "Some men bought two or three, even four or five at once. It's shameful." Such human tragedies must not be allowed to slide from public scrutiny and concern.

Kobane: the Kurdish Stalingrad

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A defiant statement from the KCK (Union of Kurdish Communities) in Turkey was issued on 23 September and stated: "The reality in Kobane is not as reported by the pro-AKP media and some Arab press that support ISIS. Our people in Kobane are putting up stiff resistance. In the same way as Stalingrad played a role against fascism during the Second World War, the Kobane resistance has a key role in determining the outcome of this conflict. Neither the ISIS gang, nor the Turkish state and the forces behind it, will succeed in their aims."

Turkey's role is no longer an ambiguous one - it appears at least by its actions, if not by its words, that Ankara is facilitating ISIS; at least it is quite prepared to look on while the Syrian Kurds are "degraded", the leadership of whom Turkey sees as pro-PKK if not outright PKK. Turkey's enemy number one remains, not ISIS, but the Kurds who support their gaoled leader Abdullah Ocalan.

The Kurdish Alternative

The model of devolved democracy proposed by Ocalan which goes under various descriptions, amounts to sharing power at grassroots level in an inclusive way respecting the cultures and traditions of each community. It is a direct challenge to the autocratic centralised state model prevailing in much of the Mideast - but also directly challenges the ethnic and sectarian model.

The secular, non-sectarian, democratic position adopted by the Kurds and their allies in Rojava is not an initiative that any major regional or global power wants to see succeed inside Syria or indeed anywhere in the region for that matter. It is a democratic revolution more fundamentally challenging than the Arab spring ever was and this was in the end stifled. The Kurds are determined that Rojava does not end in defeat.

The Kurdish Alternative *contd...*

The Kurds who follow the PKK are not seeking to establish an exclusive enclave where only Kurds can breathe the air of freedom; they are seeking to create a society where they will be respected as equals and, in turn, they will respect the other communities who share common land and whose histories are intertwined.

It is instructive to compare the muted response of the White House and the European Union to the relentless attacks by ISIS on the Kurds in Kobane to their furious and panicked reactions only a few weeks ago when the KRG seemed at risk and the Yezidi Kurds came under attack.

Ocalan has long proposed this devolved democracy as an alternative to dictatorship and centralised power; while there have been few serious public commentaries, still less any debate, on these ideas, you can be sure that governments and their policy advisers, have been examining Ocalan's proposals closely; uppermost in their minds is no doubt the extent to which his Kurdish followers are taking his ideas seriously and if they are determined to implement them. In this regard, the "Rojava experiment" -which has existed now for a couple of years – is an important development. It is the most serious attempt to implement Ocalan's "Democratic Autonomy" project. It has survived so far because of the crisis in Syria. The Assad government has been too busy fighting the various Sunni rebel factions in the bloody civil war to want to take on the Kurds; and until now the rebels have been unable to take on the Syrian Kurds, who, after all, are a part of the democratic opposition. However, they have never been favoured by any members of the coalition that backs the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups. The Kurds are ferociously hated by ISIS and other jihadi groups who are seeking to destroy them.

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The non-sectarian politics itself are a challenge to the powers that prefer to maintain order by fomenting and exacerbating sectarian divisions. ISIS has much in common with existing state leaders; its sectarianism is simply an extreme version of common everyday politics in much of the Mideast.

More important than all this, Rojava challenges the fundamental principles of neoliberal capitalism which in the era of globalisation has become increasingly controlled by corporate interests whose attitude to democracy is that it is an inconvenient obstacle to their unhindered pursuit of plunder and untrammelled exploitation of the earth's resources. Kurdistan is a corner of the world that simply cannot be exempt from this capitalist globalisation. Its land is located on too many vital resources for that to be any other way.

ISIS still has powerful and wealthy backers - unlike the Kurds of Rojava who can't even claim the full unswerving support of Kurds in Iraq.

In the wake of the Yezidi crisis, the BBC online news ran an article by two Kurdish affairs analysts which asked, "Could support for the 'other' Kurds stall Islamic State?" The question was raised on 25 August; unfortunately, the 'other' Kurds, by which the BBC writers meant the Kurds in Syria and the PKK, have not been supported by anyone and the tragedy now unfolding in Northern Syria is the result.

Commentators and military strategists have speculated how effective Obama's determination to bomb ISIS would be and whether there was a need for "boots on the ground". People should now wonder why ISIS positions were not bombed to prevent their attacks on Syrian Kurds and to avert another humanitarian catastrophe. No-one need be in any doubt that the US military can act very quickly when it is authorised to do so. The fact they seem to be holding back while civilians in Kobane are slaughtered and forced to flee in their thousands speaks volumes about the strategic aims of the US – quite simply, they are seeking political advantage for their interests and those of their allies. Turkey, the Arab states and the US will not be especially worried if Rojava is defeated and the "Rojava experiment" collapses. It is slightly embarrassing to them that they have relied on ISIS to do their dirty work in achieving the eradication of these "awkward" Kurds, but this is something they must have judged they can live with. They do not want the Rojava experiment to succeed; it challenges not only ISIS and the Assad regime, it even challenges the Western-backed Syrian rebels by offering an alternative participatory democratic model to their sectarianism and self-serving power plays. Rojava has thus posed a fundamental problem for other Syrian rebels, who wouldn't be unhappy to see it removed.

More important than all this, Rojava challenges the fundamental principles of neoliberal capitalism which in the era of globalisation has become increasingly controlled by corporate interests whose attitude to democracy is that it is an inconvenient obstacle to their unhindered pursuit of plunder and untrammelled exploitation of the earth's resources. Kurdistan is a corner of the world that simply cannot be exempt from this capitalist globalisation. Its land is located on too many vital resources for that to be any other way. Clearly the KRG is now truly "one of us"; such an opinion could not be expressed with regards to the PKK. For a long time Turkey and its allies have branded the PKK as sworn enemies; denounced first of all as a "Marxist-Leninist" organisation, it became officially a "terrorist group" in 2000 and has been proscribed in the UK, EU and US since that time.

It will be extremely surprising if the anti-ISIS alliance led by the US comes to the assistance of Rojava with sufficient material force to make a real difference. They are more likely to sit it out to see if Rojava succumbs to the pressures ranged against it. This it must not do, although Ankara is certainly anticipating such an eventuality. Turkey's intention is to establish a "buffer zone" in the Kurdish region for its own protection. This cannot be achieved while the Rojava self-administration remains in existence and the Kurds have accused Turkey of collaborating with ISIS in order to depopulate the region.

The Kurdish Alternative *contd...*

Turkey has always taken an intransigent position towards the Kurds and recent rumours that Germany was considering delisting the PKK must have been read with utter dread in Ankara. While everyone in the West from Obama down have expressed support in unison for Barzani and the KRG, their attitude towards the PKK has been equally consistent – but of overt and unrelenting hostility.

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The sheriff is back in the saddle

The ISIS threat offers a convenient tool for the US to reassert its hegemony and reshape the Middle East to suit its interests. The campaign against ISIS enables it to regain the respect among local client states grown disenchanted with the performance of the US under George W Bush and the neo-cons. After two terms Obama's foreign policy has been a huge disappointment in the Middle East; he has utterly failed to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict and has watched on helplessly as countries such as Libya have virtually collapsed in the wake of the Arab Spring. He badly needs a success story in the region to re-establish both his own credibility and that of his country.

With the sheriff back in the saddle, the regional powers are reduced to mere supplicants requesting support because they cannot sort their own territory out for themselves. This is the perfect example of the master and client relationship; there can only be one driving seat, only one captain of the ship, only one pair of hands on the console. The campaign ensures that America is back after it was discredited by Bush's lack of finesse. There is a great irony to the fact that the US, which habitually defines itself as the "world's greatest democracy", has assembled a coalition of monarchies and autocrats - the very same states that suppressed the Arab spring. Certainly they have not joined the campaign as a commitment to defending and extending democracy. Rushing to assist Rojava is hardly an objective either: the snuffing out of the challenge of Rojava is part of their plan.

Kurds from Turkey who comprise a large percentage of the Kurdish population resident in the UK are largely sympathetic to the PKK which remains a proscribed terrorist group in Britain and the European Union. The Kurds find any association of their party with the murderous and barbaric ISIS by the British legislators unbelievable and deeply offensive especially as the PKK has proved to be one of the most effective forces fighting ISIS. It is a gross injustice when the party that has shown most courage and success in its battles with ISIS is put on the same level and held to be a dangerous terror group.

The Gulf States have also played a highly questionable role in Iraq since the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein by undermining any attempt at creating a functioning democracy in the country. This coalition therefore is not particularly trusted by the people of Iraq or by the Kurds.

UK Protests

While Kurds have reportedly been flocking in droves to cross the Turkish border to join the fight for Rojava in Syria, Kurds in the UK have been galvanised into activity. They have demonstrated a new self-confidence as they organise their community in protests, rallies and imaginative actions to show their support for Rojava, their opposition to ISIS and to articulate their demands for the British government to act honestly and consistently in its dealings with the Kurdish people. It is the gross injustice which is at the heart of Western responses towards the different Kurds groups that really angers them.

In an echo of the tactics adopted by the Suffragettes early in the last century, a group of Kurdish women chained themselves to the railing of Westminster on the afternoon 23 September only to be roughly mauled by hostile police officers. Within the grounds of the palace of Westminster, two aggressive police officers arrested one Kurdish woman apparently just because she was the most articulate among the group. Their protest had been noisy but entirely peaceful. This woman was forced to the ground, kicked hard, her arms wrenched and twisted back, she was hit in the face and sat upon by one officer while his colleague tried to handcuff her with what looked like plastic thread. The awful incident was filmed by an onlooker's mobile and makes for deeply distressing viewing. Had it taken place in Moscow or Beijing there would surely have been a media outcry. This cruel incident seemed symbolic of the way that Kurds continue to be abused by Western governments at home and abroad.

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It is a gross injustice when the party that has shown most courage and success in its battles with ISIS is put on the same level and held to be a dangerous terror group.

Kurds rightly point out that it is the PKK and the PYD in Syria that have been most effective in fighting ISIS and the case of Kobane is a clear example where the Kurds are doing battle with the jihadi group. The conflict around Kobane has been going on for several months. They have pushed back ISIS on different occasions in the past. It was also the Kurdish guerrilla units who came to rescue the Yezidis when they were facing massacre from ISIS. Their role in the entire Syrian conflict has also been an honourable one.

UK Protests *contd...*

The truth is that the PKK's roots are entirely different from those of ISIS; it is a secular organisation in its outlook and democratic in organisational structure. It has strenuously made an effort over many years to promote gender equality and can count women as many of its most dedicated cadres at all levels. Women occupy leadership positions and are famous for their role as guerrilla activists in the military wing of the party. The PKK represents a genuine upsurge of Kurdish self-confidence within modern Turkey and indeed everywhere where Kurdish populations reside, especially in Europe where waves of Kurdish refugees have built significant communities in many of the larger urban areas.

Meanwhile, the PKK's methods and mode of operation are also quite unlike ISIS. Despite Turkish orchestrated propaganda and a generally very hostile coverage in the Western media, obscene atrocities against civilians cannot be attributed to PKK cadre; there is simply no evidence of any actions committed by the party that in any shape or form resemble what ISIS has been doing. Unlike ISIS, the PKK does not rule the people by instilling fear in the community like medieval barons or a modern mafia. They earn the loyalties of the people by offering hope and by articulating popular grievances. The party espouses an ideology that speaks of justice, equality, duty, fairness, community and feminism. It might be argued that the party assembled an eclectic mix of progressive ideas to construct its modern ideology but there appears to be deep sincerity in its beliefs and it shows openness to learning from the ideas of others. Unlike ISIS it is not an insular organisation alienated from the wider world.

Kurds rightly point out that it is the PKK and the PYD in Syria that have been most effective in fighting ISIS and the case of Kobane is a clear example where the Kurds are doing battle with the jihadi group. The conflict around Kobane has been going on for several months. They have pushed back ISIS on different occasions in the past. It was also the Kurdish guerrilla units who came to rescue the Yezidis when they were facing massacre from ISIS. Their role in the entire Syrian conflict has also been an honourable one.

The establishment of Rojava in Northern Syria as an autonomous democratically run enclave has offered hope to Kurds everywhere that they can achieve recognition and be permitted to run their own affairs. It has been held up as a non-sectarian, secular and democratic model for other parts of the region to emulate.

The celebrated American writer Lillian Hellman defined as “scoundrel times” her experience of the McCarthy era when all progressive independent thought was suspect and when dissenting opinion was mercilessly persecuted. Because of the harsh and inconsistent treatment of the Kurds by Western powers, they could be forgiven for believing that we still live in these scoundrel times. It is high time therefore to give them reason to believe otherwise.

The West's approach to the PKK appears not to have shifted one iota from one of hostility and total denigration. Significant is a statement from the US Embassy in Ankara that appears to imply that its citizens in Turkey's east and southeast regions are vulnerable to attacks from the Kurds. “Following the commencement of military action against ISIL targets in Syria, US citizens are reminded that there have been violent attacks in Turkey in the past. The possibility of terrorist attacks against US citizens and interests, from both transnational and indigenous groups, remains high,” the embassy stated on 24 September.

There must a firm obligation on citizens to urge their elected politicians to act with more integrity and to remove bad laws from the statute books. The proscription of the PKK under the Anti-Terrorism Act is one such bad law. Concerned citizens recognising the profound injustice of this case must make their Parliament see the error of its ways.

The return of scoundrel times?

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So let's no longer hear of “good Kurds” and “bad Kurds”. The Kurds who support the PKK are not to be equated with ISIS; rather they should be seen as some of its fiercest opponents. The West needs to wake up to that fact. Only then will we have properly seen off the new scoundrel times. And only then will the mirage of ISIS really begin to be lifted. Unfortunately it is likely to take a very long time as we move towards uncertain times for all with this third Gulf War and it is probably going to get far worse before it starts to get better. Thanks to some misguided political leaders.

[Link to video - Kurdish women chained themselves in front of British Parliament to protest ISIS terror in Kurdistan. British police attacked Kurdish women and detained them.](#)

The Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) is a resource centre integrating knowledge and experience to strengthen peacebuilding policy and practice. Established in 2008, it collaborates and promotes collaboration with a wide network of researchers, policymakers and practitioners in Norway and abroad.



Executive summary

The Islamic State (IS) movement needs to be understood as a political project whose primary objective is to establish a viable entity in areas it can control rather than engage in permanent insurgency against more powerful adversaries. The conditions for its emergence were created by the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the dissolution of the Iraqi state and its replacement with a sectarian political system and conflict, and the collapse of state authority in regions of Syria. The available evidence indicates that the IS is at best uninterested in achieving the conventional forms of legitimacy and integration pursued by other Islamist movements; engagement is therefore unlikely to prove a viable option.

There are no quick or simple solutions to the challenges posed by the IS. Those being considered, particularly Western military intervention, are almost guaranteed to make a catastrophic situation worse, while a strategy that relies on disaffected Sunni tribes and sectarian Shia militias is unlikely to succeed. A comprehensive approach is needed involving a re-evaluation of policy towards the Syrian crisis, engagement with regional parties on a much broader spectrum of relevant issues, and a focus on establishing legitimate institutions that are able to address deep-seated grievances and resolve the conflicts that allow movements like IS to thrive.



Mouin Rabbani

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Introduction

Since the Islamic State (IS) movement seized control of Iraq's second city of Mosul in early June 2014 it has achieved unprecedented levels of success in Iraq and Syria, seized territory in Lebanon, and expanded to the border regions of most surrounding states. As a result the international community, which had virtually forgotten about Iraq and was growing increasingly uninterested in Syria, put these conflicts back at the top of its agenda virtually overnight. The U.S. is once again engaged in hostilities in Iraq and considering direct, less covert means of involvement in Syria, as are a number of its partners. Regional governments, which had previously seen the IS as either a distant threat or useful proxy, seem to be overcoming their differences to confront what is perceived to be a common and growing challenge.

Much has been written about the IS's genesis, ideology, objectives and practices. Most of these characterise it as a puritanical movement that represents either an extremist incarnation of Islamic orthodoxy or a radical distortion of it. The more pertinent observation that the IS represents a thoroughly modern project and that explanations for its existence are primarily to be found in the political landscape in which it operates rather than Islamic theology is less frequently made.

Unsurprisingly, Iraqi politics gradually came to be dominated by fundamentally incompatible identity-based political forces rather than national ones competing on the basis of different political programmes.

Origins and development of the IS movement

The IS's roots are located in the 2003 U.S. occupation of Iraq and the Syrian crisis a decade later. The U.S. administration in Iraq systematically dismantled the Iraqi state and its institutions and replaced them with a sectarian political system and conflict that reproduced itself throughout government institutions. Unsurprisingly, Iraqi politics gradually came to be dominated by fundamentally incompatible identity-based political forces rather than national ones competing on the basis of different political programmes. While the supremacy of Islamist parties among the disenfranchised Sunni community was not a foregone conclusion, the increasingly religious milieu of the Arab world in recent decades, the increasingly Islamist character of opposition politics in the region (both of which are to some extent a legacy of the cold war), and the prominence of Islamist militias in the struggle against both the occupation and the new regime in Baghdad contributed to these parties' ascendancy.

Similar dynamics were at work in the ranks of the armed Syrian opposition in the period 2011-13, where – as in Iraq – those with the most effective military forces also obtained the greater share of foreign funding, weapons and skilled cadres. Locally, endemic socioeconomic decay, particularly rampant youth unemployment and its debilitating impact on individual lives; a deep-seated sense of perpetual injustice; and the opportunity to redress these realities while simultaneously affirming a sense of self-worth and improved opportunities – all with a bit of adventure thrown in – ensured a steady supply of recruits.

What made Iraq and Syria, rather than more conservative societies like Jordan and Saudi Arabia or polarised polities like Lebanon and Palestine conducive to the emergence of such movements was the withdrawal and in some regions collapse of the state.

A similar process can be observed today in Libya and, to a lesser extent, Yemen. Indeed, the breakdown of central authority and the absence of national institutions with sufficient legitimacy to address grievances and mediate political conflict have not only empowered subnational phenomena like sectarianism and tribalism as social defence mechanisms, but provided militias adopting such agendas with the space to develop and opportunity to expand.

Nevertheless, this does not explain why the IS in particular succeeded where others failed – or, rather, was able to seize the initiative and dominate or eliminate so many of its competitors.

While the IS's proclamation of a caliphate in late June 2014 was motivated by a host of factors, not least among them a determination to settle accounts with al-Qaeda, subordinate other participants in the Iraqi Sunni rebellion and Syrian armed opposition to its will, and, of course, capitalise on its spectacular successes of the previous months, its willingness to take a step eschewed by similar movements reflects the reality that statehood is germane to the IS project.

Here ideology and the particular variant of Islam promulgated by the IS are largely negligible factors. Rather, this phenomenon can primarily be attributed to the movement's thoroughly contemporary rather than atavistic modus operandi.

Firstly (and unlike so many of its competitors, whose raison d'être is confrontation with the state, or what might be called a conventional guerrilla insurgency), from the outset the IS – as its name suggests – has pursued a strategy of establishing and consolidating a political entity in regions where the former state no longer functions or can be expelled. It is in this respect a fundamentally political rather than religious project – even though the IS insists the two are inseparable.

Secondly – and closely related to the first – the IS strategy has focused on obtaining the resources and means required to function as a state. For it, control of territory; the provision of governance,

Territorial expansion is not prioritised and pursued for its own sake as with many of its competitors, but rather pursued only when there is a reasonable prospect that such territory can be integrated, defended and governed. While the IS's proclamation of a caliphate in late June 2014 was motivated by a host of factors, not least among them a determination to settle accounts with al-Qaeda, subordinate other participants in the Iraqi Sunni rebellion and Syrian armed opposition to its will, and, of course, capitalise on its spectacular successes of the previous months, its willingness to take a step eschewed by similar movements reflects the reality that statehood is germane to the IS project.

The IS movement: strategy and objectives

Much has been written about the background to the IS's recent sudden expansion and the interplay in this respect between the Syrian and Iraqi arenas, and there has been an equal amount of speculation about where it might seek to expand next. Its current response to the latter question – i.e. Arbil, the capital of the Kurdish region of Iraq – seems in light of the consequences somewhat out of character.

Unless, that is, speculation is correct that it deliberately sought to provoke Western intervention in order to profit from direct conflict in the knowledge that the U.S. and its allies lack the will to repeat the invasion of Iraq and the means to defeat it in Syria. To the question "Baghdad or Damascus?" the response is almost certainly "neither". The former is too heavily defended, the latter too distant, and both are the seats of central authority.

Perhaps the greatest irony of the IS phenomenon is that its vision of an Islamic state that correctly applies the pristine and unadulterated practices its leaders ascribe to the religion's inaugural practitioners would almost certainly be disavowed by the latter as a monumental parody.

The IS movement: strategy and objectives *contd...*

A no less interesting question is whether the recent vast expansion of IS territory, and therefore of assets at potential risk, might motivate the movement to deal more pragmatically with the world around it and perhaps even attempt to come to informal or other understandings with adversaries to enable it to consolidate its position and govern more effectively.

In this respect some have looked to Lebanon's Hizbullah and more recently the Palestinian organisation Hamas as examples of radical, armed Islamist movements that have either achieved or seek conventional forms of legitimacy after attaining significant political power and the responsibilities of governance.

An initial informal non-aggression pact between the IS and Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), which allowed the latter to seize Kirkuk and expand its territory by some 40% while the IS consolidated its hold on Iraq's Arab Sunni heartland, seemed to suggest this could be a possibility.

Yet the IS is fundamentally different in character and agenda from these other movements, and to extrapolate IS policies on the basis of the trajectory of other militant Islamists would be akin to inferring Khmer Rouge conduct from the record of the Bolsheviks after they established the Soviet Union. The tacit alliance with Iraq's Kurds was thus exceptionally short-lived and no more stable than the IS's periods of coexistence with other elements of the Syrian armed opposition.

To return to the Soviet analogy, the brief dalliance with the KRG might be compared to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, although the IS's strategic calculations in this instance more closely reflect those ascribed to Hitler, with the KRG fulfilling the role of Stalin.

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Indeed, from what is known about the statecraft of the Prophet Muhammad and the first caliphs, they would in all likelihood have rather quickly run afoul of the IS's caliphate. No less importantly, the fulfilment of the IS's programme requires the systematic dismantling (and in too many cases the physical demolition) of 14 centuries of Islamic civilisation and tradition.

Although the movement derives its theological roots from 18th-century Wahhabi doctrines that serve as the state ideology of Saudi Arabia and have for several decades been energetically disseminated throughout the Muslim world, the IS rejects the Saudi state as a distortion of Wahhabi tenets.

Few of the ideas promulgated by the IS are without theological foundation, nor are its practices entirely without precedent. Nevertheless, it can hardly claim to be rooted in well-established Muslim tradition or jurisprudence and should therefore be primarily understood as a thoroughly modern interpretation and application of a faith whose imagined past is a projection backwards of contemporary agendas rather than a revival of early Islamic rule.

The IS's reclamation of Islam's essence is thus on a par with the Khmer Rouge's insistence that it represented the pure soul of communism.

Similar to the Khmer Rouge, and returning once again to the comparison with other Islamist movements, IS branding is in significant part based on a categorical rejection of either compromise or concession to an imperfect world, or a gradualist approach to achieving its objectives. The pragmatism and interaction with existing states and institutions exhibited by other Islamist movements is therefore something the IS has condemned not only when in opposition, but more importantly after achieving power.

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As attested by the rapidity and ferocity with which the IS has eliminated the presence of minorities in areas under its rule, suppressed erstwhile Sunni allies in Iraq and Syria, and criminalised tradition and local custom, initial post-combat statements reassuring populations under its control that their rights would be respected pursuant to traditional Islamic practice have proven to be nothing more than a tactic to encourage a false sense of security and thus prevent the premature emergence of significant resistance to its designs.

Conclusion: future prospects

Under the circumstances the assumption that history is on the verge of repeating itself and that the IS will be removed much as its Iraqi precursor led by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was defeated by foreign-sponsored local forces seems to be far-fetched. The IS movement is no longer a clandestine insurgent group that can be evicted by stronger militias and prevented from resurrection by internal security forces, but – not unlike the KRG – an increasingly conventional military force that can only be dislodged by taking physical control of its fiefdom.

One might also note that complacency towards the propagation of takfiri thought – the Islamic counterpart of George W. Bush’s belief that one is “either with us or with the terrorists” – is particularly hazardous, given the heterogeneous societies of the Levant and Iraq.

Conclusion: future prospects *contd...*

The coalition that occupied Iraq in 2003 appears to have little appetite for a rematch, and should its position change it is inconceivable that a renewed foreign occupation of Iraq will not make an already catastrophic situation more so.

Additionally, the IS appears to have rather methodically put to sleep most of the leaders of the previous Awakening movement and potential kingpins of a new one. This notwithstanding, mechanisms to empower a cowed population to assert itself without exposing its members to mass slaughter need to be examined.

On a related note, the risk that any operation to suppress the IS will degenerate into a sectarian campaign to blunt Sunni aspirations has already been realised and needs to be addressed. In the current highly polarised environment, subcontracting Iraqi national security functions to sectarian Shia militias is a particularly dangerous approach that is liable to have a lasting disastrous impact.

Secondly, as many analysts have pointed out, there is a fundamental contradiction in Western policy towards Iraq and Syria. Seeking to strengthen the government opposed to the IS in Iraq while acting to weaken its counterpart in Syria may serve any variety of policy objectives, but defeating the IS is not one of them. Similarly, given the near-apocalyptic perceptions of the IS that have gripped Western capitals in recent months, the approach of continued demurral and deflection concerning the extent to which the policies of regional allies have empowered and assisted IS needs to be revised.

One might also note that complacency towards the propagation of takfiri thought – the Islamic counterpart of George W. Bush’s belief that one is “either with us or with the terrorists” – is particularly hazardous, given the heterogeneous societies of the Levant and Iraq.

In the short term there are no easy responses to the challenges posed by the IS. Military containment may succeed, but to do so it needs to be led by local and regional forces rather than those who have already brought Iraq to the brink of dissolution. Even limited U.S. military intervention is likely to bolster the IS at least as much as it weakens it.

Secondly, policy towards the Syrian crisis requires a comprehensive review. One need not endorse the Assad regime’s brutal policies or assist with their implementation in order to recognise that the

...neighbouring states need to be dealt with as participants in a potential solution rather than part of an existing problem. This applies equally to Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who, along with others, should be encouraged – and if necessary pressured – to revise policies that enable and empower the IS by design or default.

regime is a reality in the Middle East that will continue to exist at least until a political transition commences in Syria. Those who freely treat with Omar Bashir, Nouri al-Maliki, Binyamin Netanyahu and Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi lack persuasive grounds for rejecting engagement with Bashar al-Assad on matters of common concern.

Thirdly, neighbouring states need to be dealt with as participants in a potential solution rather than part of an existing problem. This applies equally to Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who, along with others, should be encouraged – and if necessary pressured – to revise policies that enable and empower the IS by design or default.

Finally – and crucially – political transition must be actively pursued, not only in Syria, where it has been reduced to a slogan for regime change, if not regime suicide, but equally in Iraq. Only the emergence of institutions enjoying sufficient popular – and not necessarily electoral – legitimacy can address deep-seated grievances and peacefully resolve the conflicts that allow movements such as the IS to thrive, and thereby reassert governance and authority on a national scale that ultimately forms the only durable solution to this challenge.



Torture, the War on Terror, and The New York Times

Cynthia Banham, Centre for International Governance and Justice

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Last month, *The New York Times* decided it was time to ‘recalibrate’ its language to describe aspects of the US’s treatment of detainees in the war on terror. The executive editor, Dean Banquet, [released a statement](#) announcing that, at the urging of the newspaper’s reporters, from now on it would use the word ‘torture’ to describe some of the more brutal interrogation methods the CIA used against detainees under the Bush Administration. Previously the newspaper had used euphemisms favoured by the Bush Administration to describe these practices, such as ‘harsh or brutal interrogation methods’.

The NYT’s justification for why it has taken so long to reach this point is less than convincing. Its statement, moreover, raises questions about possible repercussions flowing from the newspaper’s reluctance before now to use the universally recognised language of torture – contained in international human rights instruments including the *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* – in its reporting and commentary about the Bush Administration’s detainee interrogation practices. In particular, it is important to consider the influence the NYT’s actions may have had on public debate and on calls for official accountability for what occurred under the cover of the war on terror.

The *NYT* begins its statement by explaining how, when revelations first emerged about the CIA’s torture practices, ‘the situation was murky’; details about what the CIA was doing during interrogations of terrorist suspects were ‘vague’; and the US Justice Department insisted that the techniques ‘did not rise to the legal definition of “torture”’. The statement continues: ‘*The Times* described what we knew of the program but avoided a label that was still in dispute, instead using terms like harsh or brutal interrogation methods.’

This much is true: the Bush Administration was highly secretive about its CIA detainee program. It only admitted in 2006, for example, to holding ‘ghost detainees’ extra-legally in secret CIA ‘black sites’ in countries such as Poland, Afghanistan and Thailand. And the Justice Department did, in a series of legal memoranda in 2002, purport to give a new contorted definition to the word ‘torture’. Its efforts to redefine torture were necessary given that torture was prohibited under US domestic and international law (as it continues to be). According to the Justice Department’s arguments, to be torture, conduct had to ‘be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death’.[1]

The Justice Department also argued that a series of methods –waterboarding, slamming detainees into walls, extreme sleep deprivation, facial holding and slapping, grasping, confining detainees in boxes for long periods, locking detainees in boxes with insects, wall standing ‘to induce muscle fatigue’ and stress positions – would not, even when used in combination, meet its new definition of torture.[2] This tells us much about the US government’s policies regarding torture. None of it explains, however, why it took the NYT, the US’s esteemed newspaper of record, so long to call the CIA’s interrogations methods what they were: torture.

Continuing the explanation for its change of position, the NYT notes that far more is now understood about the CIA’s methods, including that it ‘inflicted the suffocation technique called waterboarding 183 times on a single detainee and that other techniques, such as locking a prisoner in a claustrophobic box, prolonged sleep deprivation and shackling people’s bodies into painful positions, were routinely employed in an effort to break their wills to resist interrogation’.

Except that much of this has been known for a long time. The fact that the CIA waterboarded Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the terrorist suspect accused of planning the 11 September 2001 attacks, 183 times was [reported by the NYT in 2009](#). Karen Greenberg and Joshua Dratel published their book, *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib*, containing many of the Bush Administration’s memos that originally authorised the practices, in 2005.[3] Jane Mayer [reported in The New Yorker in 2006](#) that the US Navy general counsel, Alberto Mora, had warned Bush Administration officials that the behaviour they were sanctioning for use against prisoners at Guantánamo Bay could reach ‘the level of torture’. Phillipe Sands published *Torture Team: Rumsfeld’s Memo and the Betrayal of American Values*, where he traced responsibility for the torture carried out against detainees in the war on terror to the top of the Administration, in 2008.[4] Then President-elect Barack Obama said in 2009 he was ‘gonna make sure that we don’t torture’ – an acknowledgement of sorts that what had gone before, under the previous Administration, was torture.

The final part of the NYT explanation for changing its language around the CIA’s interrogation practices is based on President Obama’s indication that he will not prosecute officials over any torture inflicted on detainees. Because of this decision not to prosecute, at least in the view of NYT editors, the debate around the legality of torture methods used by the CIA during the Bush Administration is academic.

Why the *NYT* chose to tip-toe for so long around the ugly truths of what the US did to detainees in the war on terror, why for so long it kept in step with the policies of an Administration five and a half years out of office, is intriguing. In the beginning, it is possible to see that government intimidation of the media, combined with a misdirected sense of patriotism that sometimes occurs in war reporting, may have played a role. The tendency of the news media to self-censor during war-time is well-documented. To do it for so long, however, is more difficult to understand.

According to the *NYT*:

today, the debate is focused less on whether the methods violated a statute or treaty provision, and more on whether they worked – that is, whether they generated useful information that the government could not otherwise have obtained from prisoners. In that context, the disputed legal meaning of the word ‘torture’ is secondary to the common meaning: the intentional infliction of pain to make someone talk.

And so the *NYT* will from now on use the word ‘torture’ to describe incidents where it knows ‘for sure that interrogators inflicted pain on a prisoner in an effort to get information’.

In other words, the *NYT* refrained before now from describing as torture particular methods that would commonly be regarded as such under international law, because the Bush Administration argued they should be called something else. (In fact, in July, the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *Al Nashiri v Poland and Husayn (Abu Zubaydah) v Poland*, which involved the extraordinary rendition by the CIA of two terrorist suspects to Poland, unequivocally [described the treatment of these men as torture](#) in breach of Article 3 of the *European Convention on Human Rights* which prohibits torture).[5] How remarkably accommodating of the *NYT*.

So why did it take so long for The *NYT* to call torture what so many others – lawyers, journalists, members of the US government, presidents-elect – had done long before, and why does it matter? Possibly, the *NYT*’s failure to use the word torture when describing CIA methods had become an embarrassment to itself. Everyone else was calling it torture. The US Senate is, any time now, going to release its long-awaited report into the CIA’s interrogation program which will give the most comprehensive account to date of the Bush Administration’s detainee torture regime. President Obama, last month, used the plainest language possible in describing the methods used by the US after 11 September, saying ‘[we tortured some folks](#)’. For the *NYT* to continue writing about ‘harsh interrogation techniques’ would look very silly indeed.

Why the *NYT* chose to tip-toe for so long around the ugly truths of what the US did to detainees in the war on terror, why for so long it kept in step with the policies of an Administration five and a half years out of office, is intriguing. In the beginning, it is possible to see that government intimidation of the media, combined with a misdirected sense of patriotism that sometimes occurs in war reporting, may have played a role. The tendency of the news media to self-censor during war-time is well-documented.[6] To do it for so long, however, is more difficult to understand.

Media play a critical role in promoting human rights by increasing public awareness of what rights are, what constitutes them and when they are transgressed, especially by governments. The media have done many things to expose official wrong doing in the war on terror when it comes to the rights of detainees. Following the government line for so long in failing to call torture – when carried out by the US – torture, is not one of them.

Was the *NYT* afraid of being branded anti-American, of putting past or future governments or agencies off-side? Was it reluctant to admit it had erred in the past? Or is this whole episode a demonstration of how it can sometimes be too confronting for the Western media to acknowledge that their own liberal democracies engage in behaviour as barbaric as torture?

The more important point, from a human rights perspective, is the effect that the *NYT* policies may have had on public awareness of, and on encouraging government accountability over, violations of international law and principles during the post-11 September decade. The refusal to use the language associated with international laws and domestic criminal statutes of what constitutes torture serves at least two purposes. It helps to numb the reading public to the full reality and truth of what was done in their names after 11 September. This then allows the perpetrators of those violations – and the architects of the policies that enabled them to occur – to go unchallenged.

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[1] Jay S. Bybee, Assistant Attorney General, ‘Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzalez Counsel to the President’, 1 August 2002, in Karen J Greenberg and Joshua L Dratel (eds), *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) 172.

[2] Jay S. Bybee, Assistant Attorney General, ‘Memorandum for John Rizzo, Acting General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency’, 1 August 2002 in David Cole, *The Torture Memos: Rationalizing the Unthinkable* (The New Press 2009) 106.

[3] Karen J. Greenberg, and Joshua L Dratel (eds), *The Torture Papers: the Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[4] Philippe Sands, *Torture Team: Rumsfeld’s Memo and the Betrayal of American Values* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[5] Case of *Al Nashiri v Poland* (European Court of Human Rights, Former Fourth Section, Application No. 28761/11, 24 July 2014) and Case of *Husayn (Abu Zubaydah) v Poland* (European Court of Human Rights, Former Fourth Section, Application No. 7511/13, 24 July 2014).

[6] See, for example Susan L Carruthers, *The Media at War* (Palgrave Ma



The Life and Death of a Lone Wolf

The Jewish world is very small. In Israel where there have been seven full-scale wars and innumerable 'armed conflicts' since the state was established in 1948, everyone knows at least one family bereaved by war; one person who has died slowly from their wounds – often after many years of great suffering – or someone who somehow lives a full life despite having sustained appalling injuries. The Jewish world is tiny. The first time many Jews saw [Steven Joel Sotloff's](#) name, they knew instinctively that despite his appearance, the foreign correspondent kidnapped by ISIS was Jewish.

Then came the U.S. freelancer's dreadful end. Yeah, said my husband's first cousin. She had once dated his dad, Arthur. That's right, echoed The Jewish Journal's [Danielle Berrin](#). They had grown up together in Miami where they attended the Temple Beth Am day school and much later, corresponded on Facebook when they discovered they had both become journalists.

Sure, announced all the other news outlets once the self-imposed embargo was lifted, Sotloff had dual American-Israeli nationality and his grandparents had been Holocaust survivors. Then one of my own friends confirmed she had met him while he was studying as a lone immigrant at the Interdisciplinary Centre (IDC) in Herzliya during the early 2000s. So how a man in such a position managed to hide his background and his faith, yet pray regularly and even fast on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – simply beggars belief.

If the story is not make-believe, perhaps Sotloff would have said his faith supported him; that heaven was on his side. But his luck ran out. He was hoodwinked at a fake checkpoint, then captured and 'sold' to ISIS by Syrian rebels. Then, as the world now knows, following a year of incarceration, he was slaughtered most vilely, just like his non-Jewish colleague, [James Foley](#) and another infamously executed Jewish correspondent, [Daniel Pearl](#).

But the three men had yet more in common. It was not simply that they were well-educated westerners in the Judeo-Christian tradition, imbued with a peculiar gift for gathering and interpreting news. Foreign correspondents and investigative reporters share many traits. They are resourceful but restless. They dislike being desk-bound and loathe routine. Their search for the truth of a story is also their way of escaping the drudgery of ordinary life.

I offer Sotloff's family and all Jewish readers my best wishes for the Jewish New Year of 5775.



But where many correspondents who are posted abroad prefer to work in packs based at central hotels, people like Sotloff are lone wolves. I don't believe he could have been the 'gentle soul' described by his mother, Shirley. But neither, I suggest, was he an adrenalin-crazed 'war junkie'. He simply loved doing what he did and like adventurers in the classic mould, he felt compelled to follow a story simply because it 'was there'.

It appears there was always one more lead to chase and it was the last one that caused his end. I don't agree that the Obama Administration was responsible for Sotloff's plight and his family must surely realise that he went about his self-imposed work acutely aware of all the possible consequences. I'm not entirely clear why some hostages, including Sotloff, agree to read statements written by their captors when they know their death is inevitable.

[Sotloff was video recorded next to a masked figure](#), addressing President Obama thus: "You've spent billions of US taxpayers' dollars and we have lost thousands of our troops in our previous fighting against the Islamic State, so where is the people's interest in reigniting this war?" He must have known the words would be dismissed as empty rhetoric.

While I salute the life of one modern hero, I want us all to remember another, less celebrated hostage who was murdered in 2004 after being kidnapped by Islamist militants in Iraq. Italian security officer, [Fabrizio Quattrocchi](#), who had begun working life as a baker, was forced to dig his own grave and then kneel beside it wearing a hood while his captors prepared to film his killing. But he defied them, attempted to pull off the hood and as he yelled, "I'll show you how an Italian dies!" he was shot in the back of his neck. It has been pointed out that if other hostages were to react like this, it would prevent terrorists from publicising beheadings and their campaign would begin to falter.

Where I believe people like Sotloff fail is that they commit the cardinal sin in journalism by becoming the story rather than simply its narrator. While it's natural for the grieving families to lash out at convenient targets, they should be made aware of how other people's lives are endangered in any attempt to rescue their loved ones.



Sally McKenna came from the USA to live in County Mayo in Ireland about ten years ago and since then she, and her work as an artist, has had a huge impact on the life in the area around Kiltimagh. She has transformed an old disused mill into a wonderful artist's studio and called it *Glore Mill Arts Centre*. www.sallymckenna.com

She illustrated my book, *Cill Aodain & Nowhere Else* and has done the covers for other books of mine. This poem was written in appreciation of the contribution her public art and work in general has made to the area. *Live Encounters* has also published an [interview](#) with her.

Glore Woman for Sally McKenna

Woman without origin, here,
you carve and quilt
by the Glore river
like a joyful feature glowing
in the spirit of water and wood.

Woman without root, here,
look back upriver
to the source of wild currents
raging into tributaries of dust
like questions that cannot be answered.

Child of canvas and stone, here,
come out
into to the hills you have created,
into your colours chanting,
into the exile you left by a lake in Illinois.



Melani was a majestic Sumatran tiger, born in captivity. From birth she was under-weight, poorly fed and neglected. Then one day the Surabaya Zoo keepers began feeding her and the other tigers meat contaminated with formaldehyde. Though the others died agonising deaths she survived against all odds. Then she was shifted to Taman Safari. Here she clung to life for some time. But the poison had reached her organs and froze them. She passed away, a pathetic emaciated shadow of her former majestic demeanour. Sybelle was by her side to tell her we are all sorry for what humanity had done to her. The cruelty. The humiliation. Her message was her courage, bravery, endurance, patience and her great love that engulfed all those she met - Editor

Melani

Remembering a beautiful gentle soul

Sybelle Foxcroft, Director of Conservation & Environmental Education 4 Life (CEE4Life)

Melani was a 16 year old Sumatran Tiger that was born at Surabaya Zoo, Indonesia. Her life would become one that was a terrible example of how a precious tiger was born to be caged for entertainment and treated with severe neglect, simply because the humans deemed to care for her had no idea how to care for a tiger.

Melani's mother, Deli, was a captive born tiger and her father, Ujang, was a wild caught tiger. After interviewing witness's of the relationship between both of these tigers, it became clear that Melani's mother was heavily traumatised by the very wild Ujang, an example of mismanagement for the purpose of tiger breeding. However Deli did fall pregnant, and gave birth to only one very tiny cub, Melani, on the 7th May 1998, but disowned Melani resulting in the staff of Surabaya Zoo having to hand raise her.

It is unknown why Melani was so very small at birth, some suggest that it was because of the poor diet of her mother Deli and others suggest that Deli did not carry Melani to full term and the cub was pre mature. Having no experience as to how to raise a tiger cub, the staff at Surabaya Zoo fed Melani on human milk formula, which lacks many vitamins and nutrients that a carnivore requires. This feeding regime resulted in the already tiny Melani to not develop to full potential anatomically, physically and lowered her immune system.



Melani by Sybelle Foxcroft

Melani's temperament from the beginning was so very gentle. She was a tiger that was walked around openly in Surabaya Zoo in public. There is not one instance in which she lashed out or showed anything but a gentle loving tiger. This was most unusual as even the gentlest of tigers can have a very feisty side to them. Melani's demeanour could very well have resulted in her poor birth conditions and the following feeding regime making her a weaker or more fragile tiger, along with being hand raised.

Still the very uncharacteristic gentleness of Melani the tiger, had numerous specialists at a loss as to why this carnivore was so joyful and gentle.

The zoo management underwent changes in approximately 2008 which caused rifts between old and new staff. Because of the very outdated rules and regulations of Surabaya Zoo, staff could sign onto work and then leave the premises and do outside work, or some would sign on and then proceed to set up markets inside the zoo to sell their own products. The animals were simply not cared for and soon they began to die in horrific ways, such as a giraffe with 20 kg of plastic bags in its stomach. As the management further declined, so did the finances. Management gave themselves huge pay rises, while the animals suffered with low grade and incorrect food. The situation became worse and in an effort to save more money the decision was made to buy cheap grade meat for the tigers. This meat was laced with the poisonous chemical formaldehyde and was fed to four tigers. One of these tigers was Melani. Three of the tigers died, but for some unknown reason Melani struggled to live.

The poison had taken a terrible toll on Melani's body effectively destroying or freezing her organs. The staff at Surabaya Zoo had no real idea how to care for Melani and treated her with extra vitamin and digestive supplements.

By May 2013, and after a succession of horrifying animal deaths, *Cee4life* and other organisations began to campaign to have Melani removed from Surabaya Zoo in order to receive the correct care that she so desperately needed. A petition of over 100 000 signatures plus a letter was personally given to the Mayor of Surabaya by myself, where the response was polite but showed no understanding of animal welfare. So the next level was to contact the Minister of Forests in Indonesia, who is an animal loving man. Within 24 hours of the Minister of Forests receiving that letter, Melani was ordered out of Surabaya Zoo and to be transported to the highly ethical facility of Taman Safari. On arrival at Taman Safari, Melani was unable to stand, she was in critical condition.



Melani and Sybelle Foxcroft

Melani underwent intensive care 24/7 for the next few months, until she could stand, and then walk a little. These small steps were moments to behold as the joy that exploded in Melani on simply being able to walk was such a celebration for this dear tiger. As the months went by, she then learnt to walk faster, and then to jump, and then finally at the 12 month mark, she learnt how to run again. The sheer happiness that Melani displayed with each progressive step was something that I will never forget. It was joy unleashed.

Unlike many other tigers, Melani was friendly to everyone, but for those that she loved, she showed it. She was so very devoted to the few people that she loved, that she would never leave their side and would constantly talk and lay her head in your hands. I was honoured to be one of those people.

This glorious critically endangered Sumatran Tiger was unique and one of a kind. I doubt very much that I personally will ever met another tiger like her. She was a precious gift with a message to bring to the world.

Her message was her courage, bravery, endurance, patience and her great love that engulfed all those she met, and all those the read about her journey. This wonderful carnivore allowed human beings into the deepest parts of her tiger heart and beamed her light upon us all, to teach us to be kind to animals as they have a nervous system which enables them to feel pain, and therefore have emotions.

In August 2014, Melani's devastated body could simply not go on any longer. Her mind was still extremely active but the poison had taken its toll.

My last words to her were "I love you Melani" she looked at me, lowered her pretty eyes to smile, and chuffed.

In honour of Melani, *Cee4life* bought her a star to shine down upon us all, to bring hope if ever people feel hopeless. We have also developed "Melani's Legacy" which is a fund that will solely be for the protection and aid to all creatures, whether they are wild or captive.

Lastly, I am writing the book "Melani" on the indepth story of her life and as a witness to the emotional lives of these beautiful creatures. Kindness is a tiger named "Melani".

It was seventy three years ago, in 1941 that Ismat Chughtai's controversial short story '*Lihaaf*' (The Quilt) which depicted a lesbian relationship between a childless woman and her servant was published.



Sexuality in the time of Sobriety

Aryaa Naik, Head, Creatives, Gyaan Adab Centre



"It's about time we shed these prudish pre-conditioned layers and talk and deal with sexual explicitness in our books and films with a certain degree of refinement and maturity," Sreemoyee Piu Kundu, author of the novel *Sita's Curse* was quoted in a recent article in *Hindustan Times* which proclaimed that sex had finally come out of closet in India, and writers were celebrating this newly-found freedom to write on the tabooed subject of female sexuality. This article gave voice to women writers who could now openly explore the theme of female sexuality and steer away from the stereotypical projection of women as meek and submissive in bed, because the society has finally accepted women as subjects of desire and not just objects of desire. This is the year 2014.

It was seventy three years ago, in 1941 that Ismat Chughtai's controversial short story '*Lihaaf*' (The Quilt) which depicted a lesbian relationship between a childless woman and her servant was published. Quite scandalous for a time when women lived a veiled life. Bold, daring, progressive, scandalous, even obscene are some of the adjectives popularly used to describe Chughtai's work. Though '*Lihaaf*' landed her in the midst of a raging social controversy and an obscenity trial Chughtai continued her 'bold' writing in a rebellious tone and a feminist voice.

A heady satire on the institution of marriage, as well as on the social mores of 1940s '*Gharwali*' (The Homemaker) is another story by Chughtai which is has managed to turn heads. In India, marriage remains an essential step of any individual's life, especially a woman. Very few women remain single and those who do, are looked at with suspicious raised eyebrows. Seemanthini Niranjana in her book *Gender and Space* says "Marriage is a critical turning point for a girl, allowing her to translate into reality latent reproductive capacities and thereby realize her claim to womanhood in the eyes of the community." '*Gharwali*' questions the notion of marriage being the prerequisite to womanhood.

Author Tahira Naqvi, well-known for her translations of a sizable body of Ismat Chughtai's work into English, in a lecture she gave on Ismat Chughtai at the 'Sadaa: Voices of Women' arts festival in Seattle (2004) explained, that at the time 'Lihaaf' was published, the editor of the magazine that published it assumed that the writer was a man writing under the pseudonym of Ismat Chughtai. Nobody could believe, first of all, that a woman would venture to send a story out and second, that the story would be the story that it was. When it was discovered that the writer was a woman, the story created the most amazing furore.

'Gharwali' is a story about Lajjo, an orphan who comes of age to realize that her biggest asset is her body. She solicits her body for money, sometimes for cash, sometimes on credit and other times on charity. Lajjo likes sex and makes no qualms about it. She works as a maid servant, serving food in the dining room and serving her master in the bedroom. She is a woman of ill repute but is at the same time incredibly desirable to the men.

Lajjo goes to work in strait-laced bachelor Mirza's house and charms him with her coquetry. He yearns for her but fears treading inappropriate ground. Mirza's dilemma is solved when one night Lajjo grabs him and seduces him thoroughly. His fondness for her breeds insecurity and he soon proposes marriage. Lajjo begs him to change his mind but Mirza stays firm. Once they get married the inevitable happens, Mirza loses his interest in her and Lajjo, who breeds a healthy appetite for sex finds a replacement. When Mirza finds out, all hell breaks loose. He beats her black and blue and turns her out. Divorced, Lajjo is out on the streets again. In the end they both realize that they need each other and the arrangement they had was best when left untouched by marriage. Lajjo's is well aware that marriage is a tool to control female sexual desire in a patriarchal world. She is relieved when this burden is removed.

Though her character in the story is submissive she has tongue which is razor sharp. She is bold, frank, outspoken and in touch with her sexuality. She understands her physical needs as basic human needs without getting caught up in the complicated notions of modesty and morality. "She had a very large hearted concept of the man-woman relationship. For her, love was the most beautiful experience in life. After attaining a certain age, she was initiated into it and since then her interest had only grown."

Before Ismat Chughtai tackled the subject, female sexuality had been previously dealt with in Indian literature. Sarat Chandra Chottapadhyay's novel 'Shesh Prashna' (The Last Question) first published in 1931 reinforces the author's enduring relevance on a female's sexuality, questioning all patriarchal values. However, female sexuality had never been dealt with by a woman. Author Tahira Naqvi, well-known for her translations of a sizable body of Ismat Chughtai's work into English, in a lecture she gave on Ismat Chughtai at the 'Sadaa: Voices of Women' arts festival in Seattle (2004) explained, that at the time 'Lihaaf' was published, the editor of the magazine that published it assumed that the writer was a man writing under the pseudonym of Ismat Chughtai. Nobody could believe, first of all, that a woman would venture to send a story out and second, that the story would be the story that it was. When it was discovered that the writer was a woman, the story created the most amazing furore.

To this, the woman, the legend, Ismat Chughtai would have said, as she has said before, *"In my stories, I've put down everything with objectivity. Now, if some people find them obscene, let them go to hell. It's my belief that experiences can never be obscene, if they are based on authentic realities of life"*

Chughtai's 'Gharwali' has been brought to life on many stages by Naseeruddin Shah in his acclaimed play 'Ismat Apa ke Naam'. He plays both parts, of Mirza and Lajjo. With a pout here and a flutter of eyelids there, Naseerudin brings Lajjo's character to life. The story humorous, enjoyable and daring has also been narrated by the versatile story teller Chettan Shetty at Gyaan Adab Centre, Pune, and where it was then read out in Urdu by well-known Urdu poet and singer Mumtaz Peerbhoy.

Even now, seventy three years after the story was first published, the Urdu reading of 'Gharwali' managed to draw a few "tsk tsks", raised a few eyebrows and offend some moralistic sensibilities. To this, the woman, the legend, Ismat Chughtai would have said, as she has said before, *"In my stories, I've put down everything with objectivity. Now, if some people find them obscene, let them go to hell. It's my belief that experiences can never be obscene, if they are based on authentic realities of life"*

Whether India is going through a sexual revolution and women writers now have the freedom to explore women's sexuality, without shying away from writing about closed bedroom romps and intimate love-making scenes is still a contested subject. But what cannot be contested is that Chughtai's bold stride of discussing female sexuality in her work, enabled people to see that it is possible for women to explore and to write "bold" stories and paved the way for a succeeding generation of women writers.



Online Dating - hmmm...

One of the most fun articles in this Relationship series I have written this year is this one on Online Dating. Talking to women and men about their dating experiences and especially online dating has been interesting at least. This article will address online dating for those 40 years and older. We would be delighted to have you comment on your experiences, whatever age.

Being privy to some online profiles has been amusing! My first reaction when reading men's profiles was I should teach them how to write a profile. As I delved into this whole process, the issues of finding a partner through dating sites go much deeper than the profile. Men and women both had feedback and here are suggestions about online dating.

The Profile

WOMEN'S VIEW

1. Issue – The profile has one line of information.

Example - "man Looking for trust respect and loyalty, the main ingredients for a good relationship."
(Copied exactly)

Fix 1 – Take some time to tell about yourself. Sharing your lifestyle is important. If you are looking for a long term relationship, the woman will want to know if you are compatible by reading who you are and what you do every day.

- Enjoy gardening and cooking what I grow.
- Love to travel to nearby towns and go antiquing.
- Spend my weekends boating, skiing, cycling, on my motorcycle.
- Family is important to me. I have 2 children I see weekly.

Fix 2 – If you don't have good writing skills, have a friend edit your copy. Whether it is a woman who has barely finished high school or a woman with a doctorate, when she reads this one line, she will click NEXT!

If you are unemployed or retired and can spend hours on the Internet “fishing” for dates, think before you contact women who clearly have a full, vibrant, active life.

2. Issue – Photos that don’t show the face or are not current.

Fix – Present yourself online with a true representation of yourself. When you meet the woman in person, you want her to be happy to see you.

Issue – Ugh! Photos with your shirt off (unless you are on a beach and it is appropriate!)

Fix – Hey guys. If the woman posted photos where she was scantily clad, that may be a turn on for you. The women I’ve talked to with regard to men say, no way!

Issue – Photos of your motorcycles. Seriously?

Fix – Women want to see you in your environment. Have a nice bike, boat, car, or home? Share a photo of yourself with your toy. Six photos of your motorcycle will limit you to a very small percentage of responses.

3. Issue – Contacting women who are clearly not a good match for you!

Fix - If you are unemployed or retired and can spend hours on the Internet “fishing” for dates, think before you contact women who clearly have a full, vibrant, active life. Think about whether or not your lifestyle is a match with hers or not. Will you be happy with a woman who doesn’t have time to respond to your emails or will only be available on some weekend?

MEN’S VIEW

1. Issue – Having a vague profile.

“I like long walks in the sun.” Just about everyone likes long walks in the sun. Quote from my male source “What they’re basically saying is I have no personality.”

Fix – Have a profile that has something interesting to say. For instance if you are really active in kayaking, running and doing triathlons, say so. That would make it easier for someone who’s not as active to know that the two of you would not be a good match. Figure out what it is about you that makes you special and then communicate about that. Share your passions and interests. What are your talents?

Have a good headshot and at least one photo that shows your body ideally in profile. When you meet this man, you want to show up looking like your photos.

2. Issue – Not knowing what you want or not articulating what you want in a relationship.

Fix – Be clear about what you want in a relationship. Do this in positive terms not negative terms. “I want to meet someone who likes to run daily.” Not, “I don’t want someone who sits around all the time.” In your profile, give the man some indication of what you want so he can decide if what he has to offer fits with you or not. For instance let them know if you want a homebody, someone intelligent, fit, healthy, and goal-oriented.

3. Issue - Photos that are not easy to see or no photo.

Fix – Have a good headshot and at least one photo that shows your body ideally in profile. When you meet this man, you want to show up looking like your photos.

MAKING CONTACT

Having worked your profile so it accurately represents you, now is the time to make contact or respond to contacts. To be successful at making good contacts, it is important that you are communicative. Read their profile and send an email that allows for dialogue. For instance, “I see that you like music. Who are your favorite musicians? What was the last concert you attended? What three concerts would you like to attend in the next year?” This starts a nice back and forth discussion.

Read their profile before you contact them. Many people have shared that they clearly say “no hunters” on their profile and then they get a contact from someone who loves to “fish and hunt.” Screen out what you don’t like. Maybe you want someone who has a big family or you don’t want someone who smokes. Be clear on what you want and see what their profile says. If you are not sure, then ask. The experience you create in the beginning of your online dating will color the whole experience.

Take the time to make your experience successful.

Not everyone on dating sites is honest. Don’t develop too much of a relationship through emails. It’s best to get on the phone with the person or better yet, to get on Skype or Google Hangout. I have a thing about voices. The wrong voice is an automatic turn off for me, so I make sure I hear someone’s voice right away.

When they met, he spent the first 10 minutes talking about why and how his life was such a mess. She said she was overwhelmed and didn't know how to respond.

FIRST CALL OR MEETING

When you get to the first phone, Skype or Google Hangout call or your first meeting, this sets the stage for a possible next step. Some of the feedback I have gotten about this step is that the person spends the whole conversation talking about their self. They don't inquire about the other person. One person shared that early in her online dating experience, she met with a man at a coffee shop prior to any phone conversation. When they met, he spent the first 10 minutes talking about why and how his life was such a mess. She said she was overwhelmed and didn't know how to respond. She tried to listen and be positive, but he continued on for 10 more minutes about all the negativity. She got out of the situation as politely and quickly as she could. Unless your goal is to find someone to act as a counselor or mother, show your best side first. You may have a family or work issue that is difficult at the time, but you don't have to lead with that.

This is true for whenever you meet someone. In fact, I was walking Domingo, my Cairn terrier this morning and a neighbor came up to talk. Luckily I had headphones on and I motioned to her I was on the phone. The first and only time she and I had talked, I felt like she had held me hostage. She spend 30 minutes telling me her life story even when I said, I have to go. I didn't want to hurt her feelings and be a bad neighbor, but I had a client in a few minutes and she wouldn't listen. I won't get into that situation again.

One man I met with shared this recommendation. He said in the first meeting, do not go on at length about your ex. This happened several times with women he met online. I even saw in a man's profile, "Not interested in stories about your ex." If you have issues about your former spouses or partners, get therapy and get over it. Don't bring the past into the future. Share the positives in your life. Share what you enjoy doing and be honest. If you say I enjoy traveling and you have not been out of the city for three years that is not a good representation of who you are. What you want to do and what you do are not the same. One male source said, "Listen and be engaged in the conversation." Come with something to talk about and be willing to listen. We talked about the "ping-pong" style of communication and how unsatisfying it is when one person shares and the other picks out a phrase and then takes the conversation back. For instance if he says "I have a boat that I keep at Priest Lake and I like to go there in the summer time," you don't respond with "oh, I went boating with my husband all the time. We had a boat at lake Coeur d'Alene." It would be better to ask him more about his boat, his experience at the lake and whether or not he fishes. I understand when you read this that it seems to be common sense, but the reality is, for many it is not. Somehow relationships scramble the brain and play havoc with good manners.

Sadly, too often I have heard that long distance relationships started through email and then phone calls and went on for weeks or months before a meeting was scheduled. Then when it was time to meet in person, they "had a crisis" and requested money from you or they said they couldn't get the time off work. In the end, the person never really intended to meet you and often they were manipulating for money or phone sex.

ONLINE DATING RED FLAGS SHARED BY MEN AND WOMEN:

- 1. Neediness** – If you have a big hole in your life, fill it with some healthy, fun activities. A relationship will not fix your life and will only cause pain for both of you.
- 2. Control** – If anger or being a control freak ended your last relationship, get help before you get into the next one. Remember, wherever you go, there you are.
- 3. Chemical Dependency** – If your drinking or drugs have created problems in the area of family, your social life, work, health or legally, take care of this first. (AA and NA are the best treatment for most people!) <http://www.aa.org> <http://www.na.org>
- 4. Codependency** – If your pattern has been attracting partners that you end up rescuing and then resenting, Stop NOW! Read Codependent No More, give yourself at least 6 months to heal and then look for a healthy relationship. (Link to Codependent No More [LINK](#))
- 5. Emotional Health** – If you are emotionally unavailable and can only feel through sex and touch or if you are an emotional mess and attach rather than connect, find a therapist and heal this first. Although in the beginning of a relationship, this intensity may be fun, the fall will be hard.
- 6. Unavailable** – This is surprising to me, but many of the men on dating sites are married. Be sure to exchange information and meet right away. Another way someone may be unavailable is they have children that take up much of their time. They also may not be free to be with you due to a complicated living situation, such as caring for an elderly parent. These are all important to check out early on.
- 7. Long Distance** – Sadly, too often I have heard that long distance relationships started through email and then phone calls and went on for weeks or months before a meeting was scheduled. Then when it was time to meet in person, they "had a crisis" and requested money from you or they said they couldn't get the time off work. In the end, the person never really intended to meet you and often they were manipulating for money or phone sex.

If you are curious about this manipulation, it is called Catfish and there is a film you can watch. [LINK](#) Lastly, I suggest you begin the online dating process with using your intuition. You will get a sense of the person from the beginning through the photos or what they are writing. Take time to focus on your gut, listen to yourself and most of all, and be gentle with yourself.

FACES

These are some of the enchanting people I have met while travelling dusty roads in search of life away from the tourist ghettos.

Bali, Indonesia.



Mark Ulyseas



Waiting for the cockfight to begin.



Village children
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Novice Hindu Priestess



Subsistence rice farmer
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Peanut Farmer



Balinese lady with a cup of Kopi Bali
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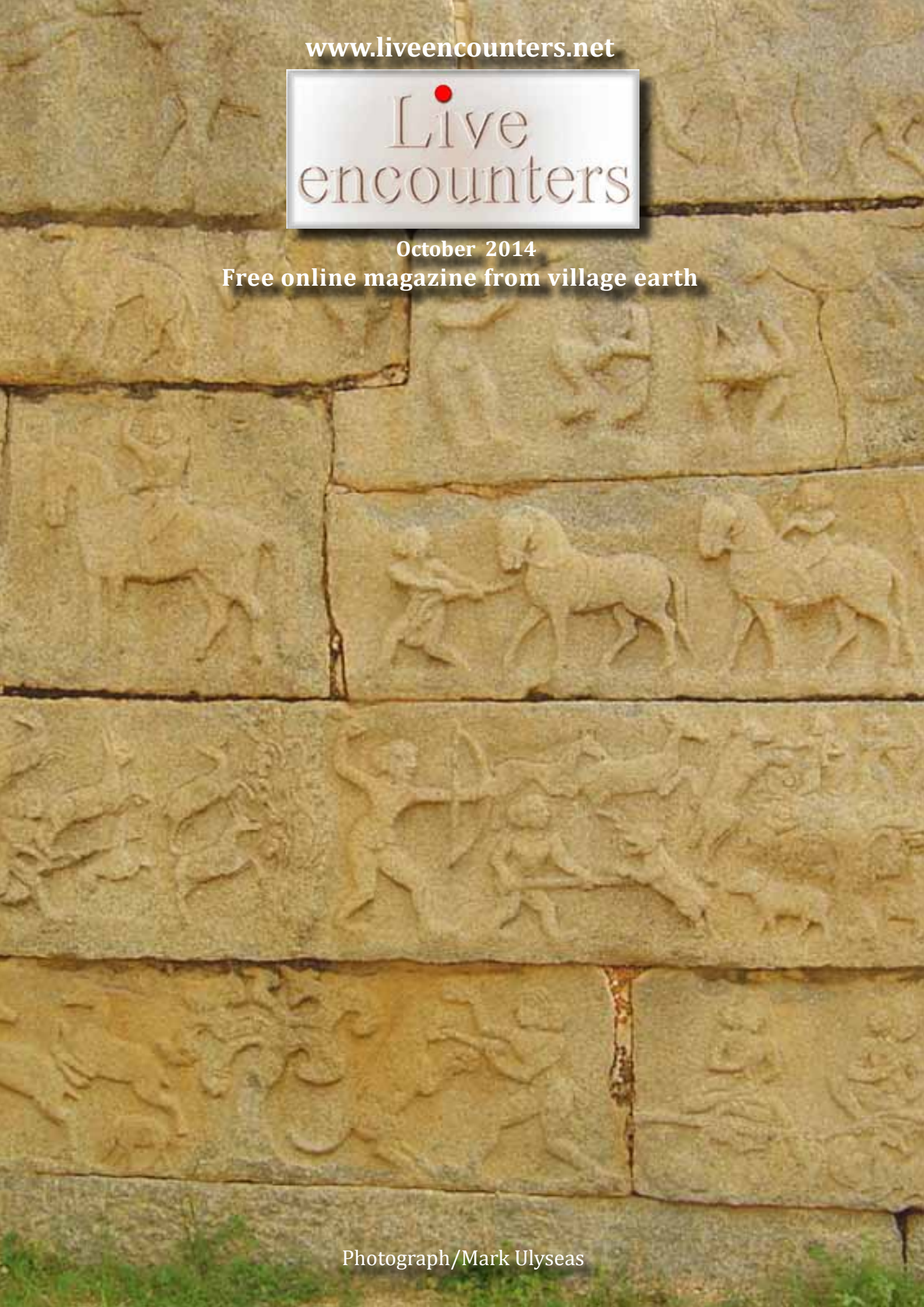
Balinese lady outside a temple with offerings for visitors

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