

# Live encounters

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# TIBET

AN UNFINISHED STORY



## Authors

**Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper**

in an exclusive interview with Mark Ulyseas



Lakshmi, a temple elephant - Photograph Mark Ulyseas

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

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[markulyseas@liveencounters.net](mailto:markulyseas@liveencounters.net)

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**Language is the essence of a culture.  
It is also a repository of a people's history.  
When language dies, a culture dies.  
And the people become cultural refugees.**

## Civil wars, refugees and lost languages

The reportage from around the world continues to spew out mind numbing words and images of countries mangled by religious and civil unrest. The news gets contaminated by misinformation and disinformation. It is now getting harder to decipher this incoherent and warped reality that appears to camouflage the truth.

Perhaps the only path towards lasting peace is increased people to people contact through non-governmental avenues away from the rancidness of politics and religious fundamentalism: An exchange of knowledge of each other's cultures with the assistance of academics, writers, poets, painters, et al. Under this all inclusive umbrella the coming together of people of diverse cultures can and will stem the seemingly endless violence that appears to have engulfed many parts of the world.

Violence erupts because it feeds on ignorance, ignorance of the masses and manipulation by those that seek to create their own worlds of controlled societies. There are organisations and individuals who are fighting a vanguard battle against this murderous tide. However, these are too few to make a lasting impact.

And while guns roar and blood spills on the streets of cities, the common folk seek refuge elsewhere taking their families and meagre belongings to another land alien to their culture. In this process much is lost on the way. The first casualty is the language of their ancestors for it corrodes, dilutes and finally loses the very essence of its wisdom. This is a tragedy for language is the soul of a culture.

- "According to UNESCO, approximately 600 languages have disappeared in the last century and they continue to disappear at a rate of one language every two weeks. Up to 90 percent of the world's languages are likely to disappear before the end of this century if current trends are allowed to continue. Moreover, fewer and fewer children are learning indigenous languages in the traditional way, from their parents and elders. Even when the parental generation speaks the indigenous language, they do not often pass it on to their children. In an increasing number of cases, indigenous languages are used only by elders." [LINK](#)

- In India 780 languages are spoken and there are 86 different scripts. But 250 languages have been lost in the last 50 years. (The People's Linguistic Survey of India) [LINK](#)

- "As a result of linguistic erosion, much of the encyclopaedia of traditional indigenous knowledge that is usually passed down orally from generation to generation is in danger of being lost forever. This loss is irreplaceable and irreparable. Customary laws of indigenous communities are often set out in their languages, and if the language is lost the community may not fully understand its laws and system of governance that foster its future survival." [LINK](#)

- "The loss of indigenous languages signifies not only the loss of traditional knowledge but also the loss of cultural diversity, undermining the identity and spirituality of the community and the individual. Biological, linguistic and cultural diversity are inseparable and mutually reinforcing, so when an indigenous language is lost, so too is traditional knowledge on how to maintain the world's biological diversity and address climate change and other environmental challenges." [LINK](#)

Governments and politicians are known to use language as a weapon to dismantle a culture. For instance, the Chinese government is conducting a form of cultural genocide by not recognising/using the Tibetan language and further by enforcing Mandarin Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges in Tibet. What better way for an occupying force to subjugate the masses than by making them learn the language of the conquerors...Propaganda by brain washing then becomes so much easier.

On February 21, 2014, the world will once again celebrate International Mother Language Day. One hopes that the projections of the UN about the loss of 90% of all languages by the end of this century will not come true.

In the meanwhile let us promote people to people contact to bypass the usual barricades erected by those attempting to keep us divided and ignorant.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

01 February 2014

# CONTRIBUTORS

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## TIBET - An Unfinished Story

Interview with authors Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper

**Lezlee Brown Halper** M.Phil (cantab.), PhD (cantab.) is a Research Associate at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. She is a Tibet scholar who has extensively travelled in and written about South Asia. **Professor Stefan Halper** D.Phil (oxon.), PhD (cantab.) is Director of American Studies at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Halper is a Life Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. He first visited Tibet in 1997. He has served in the White House and the US Department of State and has written extensively on US foreign policy and US-China relations.



## Gandhi's Challenge To The Economy

Dr. Ivo Coelho

Coelho earned his PhD in philosophy from the Gregorian University, Rome. He is Reader in Gnoseology and Metaphysics at Divyadaan: Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nashik, India, and editor of Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education. Born in 1958 at Mumbai, he specialized in the hermeneutical thought of the Canadian philosopher, theologian and economist Bernard Lonergan. He is the author of Hermeneutics and Method: The 'Universal Viewpoint' in Bernard Lonergan and editor of Brahman and Person: Essays by Richard De Smet. [www.divyadaan.in](http://www.divyadaan.in)



## The Depth of Blood

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](http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com)



## The light behind my eyes has died

Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

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



## Modern Bedouin: A Tale of False, Fashionable Agitprop

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](#)



## Crossing the Bridge to the Past: Reflections on Damascus, Syria

Stephanie Saldaña

Stephanie Saldaña is a writer based in Jerusalem and the author of *The Bread of Angels* (Doubleday, 2010) a memoir of her life in Syria. She is currently at work on a second book about Jerusalem, entitled *The Country Between*.



## How Middle East regional dynamics affect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process

Yossi Alpher - Reprinted by special permission from [NOREF](#)

Yossi Alpher is a former Mossad official and former director of the Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University. Until recently he co-edited bitterlemons.net. He is currently writing a book on Israel's periphery doctrine.



## Shias in Pakistan: A view from Lahore

Dr. Paul Rollier

Paul Rollier is a Research Associate at the Department of Anthropology, University College London (UCL) with a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). His academic interest lies in contemporary Muslim South Asia and political anthropology. <http://iris.ucl.ac.uk>



## Fateful Days - Gandhi and Dilip Kumar Roy

Romit Bagchi

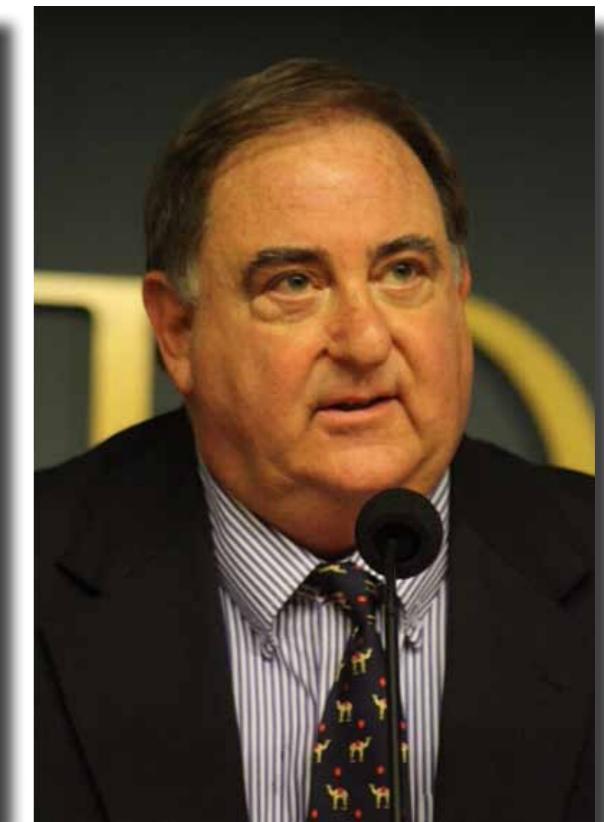
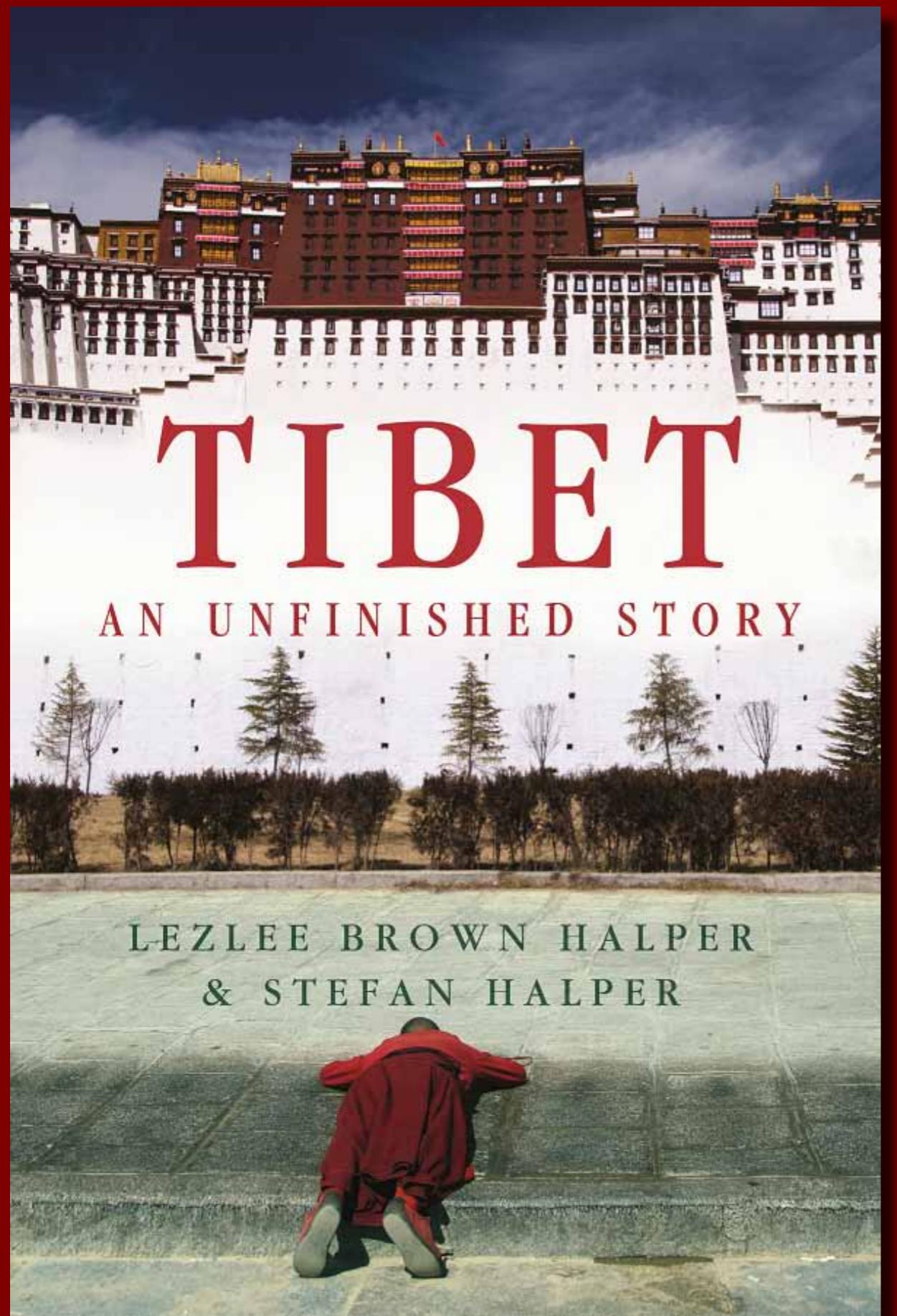
He is a senior correspondent with The Statesman posted in Siliguri. He is currently looking after the north Bengal and Sikkim bureau of The Statesman. He has published a number of articles on the ethnic unrest related to north Bengal and the political situation in Sikkim. An avid reader, Bagchi is interested in topics such as ethnic complexity, the Indian Renaissance as pioneered by Raja Rammohan Roy, Indian politics, and particularly, Indian spiritualism.



## Healing from the Other Side

Dr. Candess M Campbell

Candess M. Campbell, PhD is an internationally known Intuitive Life Coach, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Seminar leader, Hypnotherapist and Author. She specializes in assisting others to gain their own personal power and to live a life of abundance, happiness and joy. Early 2012 she will be releasing her book 12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine. [www.12weekstoselfhealing.com](http://www.12weekstoselfhealing.com)



Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper  
authors of  
**TIBET - An Unfinished Story**  
(Hurst Publishers)

in an exclusive interview with Mark Ulyseas

"Not only has Beijing attempted to pervert the natural course of Tibetan Buddhist institutions and ritual that have guided the faithful for centuries, but the Panchen Lama, a Chinese puppet, is recognized only by the Chinese Communist Party. Tibetan culture and religion is strong and as discussed in this interview, we believe the Party's attempts to deconstruct Tibetan culture will fail.

Indeed the Dalai Lama has stated that if there is no resolution of the succession question, it is logical that the reincarnation would occur outside of Tibet and beyond the control of the Chinese.

Chinese attempts to rewrite history will not work."

**Despite domestic and diplomatic constraints, the book describes how Washington mounted one of the great Cold War clandestine efforts. Hundreds of Tibetan resistance fighters were trained in the 'black arts' at bases in Saipan, Colorado and Nepal to resist the PLA occupation. Yet the Chinese grip remains. The results of China's invasion, now in its seventh decade, have been tragic for both Tibet and China. While Beijing remains determined to deconstruct Tibet's unique culture, China's brutality is condemned on the global stage. The result has been the questioning of China's civic culture and values and the retardation of China's hopes for global leadership. Tibet has become the poster child for China's human rights record.**

### Could you give us a detailed overview of the book?

Our book is the story of two Tibets. In the first instance, there is the story of Tibet's dramatic quest for independence, which proceeded amidst the treacherous politics of the Cold War. Here, a small insular and naïve government in Lhasa sought help from India, Great Britain and the United States in repelling the 1950 People's Liberation Army (PLA) invasion. Instead, Lhasa encountered a perfect storm: on one side an aggressive new China was determined to absorb the Buddhist Kingdom; on another was Nehru, who believed India's security required good relations with Beijing. Then there was Britain, whose financial straits severely limited an on-going role; and finally, the United States was constrained by its alliance with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and the China Lobby in Washington, both of whom believed Tibet was part of China, not to mention its broader preoccupation with the USSR.

In a second dimension, we describe another Tibet. It is the story of the Tibetan myth—the longest standing myth in the West. It provides Tibet with a form of 'soft power' that has much to do with how China is seen in the world today.

Beijing's vigorous attempts to suppress the Tibet story have, in effect, helped to sustain it. For some, the story is a morality play about the failure of force to subdue the human spirit, and for others it is an inspirational fantasy embracing the ideals of peace, wisdom and rationality, shrouded in the Himalayan fastness.

Like the Himalayan mist, the story drifts across 'The Great Wall', defying Beijing's formidable censors. It cannot be suppressed, or prized from the world's imagination, or set aside. This Tibet occupies a special place in the West. And it is the power of the myth that has anchored the Tibet story in the public mind today. We first heard of Tibet from Herodotus, whose tales of gold-digging ants seized the European imagination for centuries to come, in the fifth century. Then, there was Odoric of Pordenone, a fourteenth-century Dominican Friar whose riveting descriptions of wine, women with teeth as long as boar's tusks, and sky burials brought further mysterious and compelling images to the West.

In 1904 Sir Francis Younghusband, in service to Victorian England, opened Lhasa to the West. And though the experience began for Younghusband simply as part of the 'Great Game', he returned home to a spiritual life following an epiphany in the silent mountains outside Lhasa.

In 1933 James Hilton published the memorable book, *Lost Horizon*. He adroitly combined Tibet's most arresting images—the telepathic powers of the lamas, the promise of eternal youth, a measured,



Roosevelt and Churchill/Hurst

rational life, the mystery of the high Himalayas, and, of course, the gold-digging ants—in a brilliant depiction of the place he called Shangri-La. His book was an international bestseller; Shangri-La quickly became a part of the vernacular.

The 1930's also saw one of the more bizarre episodes in Tibet's journey through Western culture. In 1939 Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, guardian of the Nazi myth, dispatched an expedition consisting of anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers in hopes of finding the roots of the Aryan race. The book covers this in some detail.

President Franklin Roosevelt, who had read *Lost Horizon*, was enamoured with Shangri-La. On selecting his new presidential retreat in the Catoctin Mountains near Washington he said: 'This is Shangri La'. (It was later renamed Camp David after President Eisenhower's son.)

And finally, we hear about Tibet from Mao Tse-tung, whose Red Army invaded Tibet in October, 1950. The Chinese Foreign Ministry archives reveal that he warned that Tibet needed to be subdued quickly because its special place in the West might lead to American or British support for the resistance. And, of course, Mao was right.

Harry Truman, enunciating what would be called the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, was heard by oppressed peoples around the world, including the Dalai Lama. It committed the United States to support, in principle, those whose freedom was threatened from both external sources and internal subversion, but did not commit the US to assist every resistance movement in all locations at all times.

Thus, if the question is why Washington supported the Tibetan resistance, but not the Basques, Kurds or Sri Lankan Tamils, the answer is that Tibet combined geopolitical logic with America's liberal internationalist ideals. The US thought it possible to limit communist expansion while recognizing the determination of the Tibetan people to pursue their traditions and religion against all odds.

Despite domestic and diplomatic constraints, the book describes how Washington mounted one of the great Cold War clandestine efforts. Hundreds of Tibetan resistance fighters were trained in the 'black arts' at bases in Saipan, Colorado and Nepal to resist the PLA occupation. Yet the Chinese grip remains. The results of China's invasion, now in its seventh decade, have been tragic for both Tibet and China. While Beijing remains determined to deconstruct Tibet's unique culture, China's brutality is condemned on the global stage. The result has been the questioning of China's civic culture and values and the retardation of China's hopes for global leadership. Tibet has become the poster child for China's human rights record.

**Since 1947, when India obtained its independence from Great Britain, the Indian government has been acutely aware that its 2000-mile border with China presents a serious challenge to Indian security. The People's Liberation Army invaded India in 1961-2 and occupied areas of northern India for several weeks before withdrawing. China continues to occupy the Indian-claimed province of Aksai Chin and claims the northeastern Indian province of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls 'South Tibet'.**

**It appears that countries around the world support an 'autonomous Tibet'. The term 'independent' is not in vogue. Even many Tibetans speak of autonomy but never 'independence'. Is this an acceptance of China's claim to the region and, in effect, giving legitimacy to the occupation?**

The concept of 'independence' and man's aspiration to freedom will always be with us. Subjugated peoples seeking national independence are found in every corner of the globe. Tibetans have not, until recently, used the word 'independent' because the word did not exist in the Tibetan language. Tibetans historically believed they were autonomous and separate from China—hence there was no need for the word 'independent'. Non-use of the word in Tibet certainly does not denote acceptance of China's claims or imply that China's invasion and occupation are legitimate. The word is not used inside Tibet today for the obvious reason that to do so would invite a prison term. The Beijing authorities do not tolerate the use of the terms 'autonomy' or 'self-determination' because they believe acceptance of these would constitute a step towards independence.

Despite the material benefits for some Tibetans under Chinese rule, hot water and public transport are inadequate substitutes for culture and religion. This point is underscored by the fact that Chinese troops patrolling Lhasa carry both fire extinguishers and firearms in hopes of limiting further desperate protests by self-immolation; there have been 126 since 2009. China is unable to explain these extreme acts of resistance to its occupation, and is embarrassed by the accompanying global condemnation.

**India has developed permanent political inertia on the Tibet issue. Is this because it has border issues with China, and the burgeoning Indo-China trade between the countries supersedes the question of the occupation of Tibet?**

India's political posture is better described as realpolitik than inertia. Since 1947, when India obtained its independence from Great Britain, the Indian government has been acutely aware that its 2000-mile border with China presents a serious challenge to Indian security. The People's Liberation Army invaded India in 1961-2 and occupied areas of northern India for several weeks before withdrawing. China continues to occupy the Indian-claimed province of Aksai Chin and claims the northeastern Indian province of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls 'South Tibet'.

Though memories of the war, now a half-century ago, continue to resonate in Delhi and along the northern border provinces, trade between India and China resumed in 1978, reaching a value of \$51.8 billion, making China India's largest trading partner. Bilateral trade is thus a priority concern

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and outweighs India's interest in Tibetan independence. That said, India hosts the Tibetan government in exile located in Dharamsala and provides a range of social services to its supporting population of some 35,000. Moreover, the Indian people often express sympathy and support for their Tibetan Buddhist 'cousins'.

**Why is Tibet referred to as a Buddhist country when in fact it was BON that was widespread as late as the seventh century? And why does the Dalai Lama speak for all Tibetans even those who are not Buddhists? Is the Dalai Lama the de facto head of Tibet?**

BON was not, in fact, an organized religion. The word originally referred to a priest or ritual. As Buddhism took hold in Tibet, BON rituals developed and became incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism in the seventh century. Buddhism became a major presence in Tibet by the end of the eighth century. The Dalai Lama is the head of Tibetan Buddhism known as the Gelug school (or Yellow Hats). Most Tibetans today practice Buddhism and they view the Dalai Lama as their leader.

**Prior to the Chinese invasion and annexing of Tibet, what were the rights of the ordinary Tibetans? Was it ruled by 'elite' Buddhist monks or a democratically elected government?**

Prior to the Chinese invasion, the head of the Tibetan government was the Dalai Lama, who had final authority on policy and personnel decisions. Historically, when the Dalai Lama died a regent was appointed until the young leader took power. The Tibetan government was not democratically elected and most governmental positions did not require specific training. Indeed, like other pre-modern societies, many people remained in government positions until they died or retired. While many were promoted based upon their abilities, it was also common for people to be appointed to positions based upon friendships or loyalty to the leadership.

Most policy and personnel decisions were resolved by the Kalon Tripa, an official who functioned as a prime minister and reported directly to the Dalai Lama. The Kalon Tripa oversaw the Kashag—or administrative power—consisting of four officials (kalons): three were lay officials and one was a monk official. The Kashag was considered to be the administrative centre of the Tibetan government and coordinated a range of bureaucratic functions, including the Finance Office.

**The rights of ordinary Tibetans are discussed in the answer to the next question.**

**Indeed, before the Chinese invaded Tibet a majority of Tibetans were bound to the land and landowners. Tibetologist Heidi Fjeld describes Tibet's social system as a 'caste-like hierarchy'. Other prominent scholars who have researched the pre-invasion period, including Professor Robert Barnett of Colombia University, maintain that the words 'subject' or perhaps 'commoner' describe the relationship between the landowner and worker more accurately than the word 'serf'.**

**The Chinese have claimed that when they 'liberated' Tibet from the Dalai Lama and his followers they discovered that the monasteries practiced serfdom—slaves working the land for the monasteries without pay or any rights. Is this true or merely propaganda?**

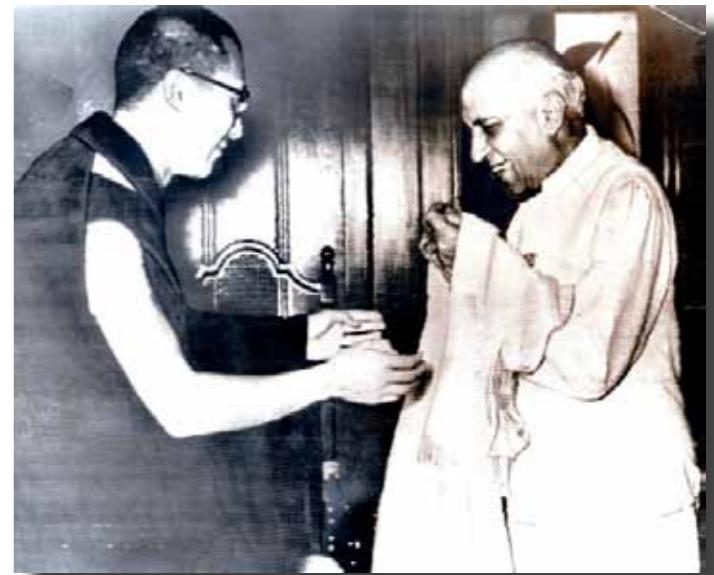
In the summer of 1950, Beijing broadcast propaganda announcements in Tibetan to Lhasa on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The theme normally centred on the promise that Tibetans would be 'liberated' and would be 'reunited with the Motherland'. Here Mao Tse-tung's government referred to 'liberating' Tibet from the British and the Americans. The notion of liberating Tibetans from 'feudalism' as a propaganda theme began about six years later. Today this theme has evolved and now emphasizes Tibetan backwardness, insularity and the importance of modernization through China's guidance.

Like the rest of the pre-modern world, including vast stretches of Asia and China itself, Tibet was a traditional society with various and complex relations between the population and the land and landowners, including the monasteries. The incoming Chinese government espoused a radical Communism that would soon institute collective farms that brought famine and death to some 40 million people in China from 1958–1962. It had a clear political, ideological interest in demonizing the monasteries and the land system extant in Tibet. History and propaganda do not mix and certainly didn't in this case. Chinese propaganda has a political purpose; it is designed to appeal to the widest possible audience in a simplified and emotional manner. Yet, facts are stubborn things and not easily fitted into Party rhetoric, then or now.

All official Chinese texts claim that the majority of Tibetans were slaves and subject to punishment by torture, death or mutilation before 1950; the term feudal serfdom is used without reservation. Let's take a moment to unpack this claim.

Indeed, before the Chinese invaded Tibet a majority of Tibetans were bound to the land and landowners. Tibetologist Heidi Fjeld describes Tibet's social system as a 'caste-like hierarchy'. Other prominent scholars who have researched the pre-invasion period, including Professor Robert Barnett of Colombia University, maintain that the words 'subject' or perhaps 'commoner' describe the relationship between the landowner and worker more accurately than the word 'serf'.

This is because these individuals were in fact able to pay off their obligations and could appeal in certain cases through the Tibetan legal system in the event of a dispute. Moreover, Tibetans were more mobile and prosperous than the word serf would connote. The Chinese Communist Party links the 'loaded' term serf to oppression, feudalism, abuse and torture—as if this house of horrors were



Dalai Lama and Nehru/Hurst

an irreducible truth. Tibetan scholars maintain that, in fact, the social relations governing Tibetans at the time were much more nuanced: Tibetans were not slaves or prisoners or savagely treated as Beijing's fevered images would have the world believe.

While the poorest in Tibet led meagre lives, the situation in Tibet is comparable to other peasant societies including India, France, Russia and China during the pre-modern period in which landowners used peasants for labour. In fact, unlike the current situation, the Tibetans made excellent use of their land and animals and there was sufficient food to feed their populations, the landowners and the monasteries.

**Qinghai-Tibet Railway has given millions of Chinese 'access' to Tibet and the 'relocation' of 7.5 million Chinese to the landlocked country has all but destroyed the delicate fabric of Tibetan society. Would you term this as cultural genocide? Please comment.**

Beijing set out to deconstruct the Tibetan culture in three ways: firstly, Beijing has flooded Lhasa and Tibet's other cities with Han Chinese with the objective of disrupting traditional life and religious rituals, and marginalizing the monasteries. Secondly, Beijing has instituted a 'charm offensive' by providing housing, public transport, and other amenities. Thirdly, the authorities have sought to 'hollow out' Tibetan traditions and rituals by turning the most revered sites into tourist stops—a kind of Disneyland—now visited by tens of thousands on Beijing-arranged tours.

We begin with the monasteries. From the 1970s through the present day the resistance to China's attempts to deconstruct Tibetan culture and society has been centred in the monasteries. Under policies introduced in 1962, the monasteries had been run by monks with only indirect involvement by government officials. That policy was abandoned during the 1966–79 Cultural Revolution, when most monasteries were closed and many destroyed. Analysts visiting China in that period and in 1976 reported on the tensions between Beijing and the Tibetan people. They noted that propaganda stressing Chinese solidarity with minority nationalities was cover for problems arising out of Han efforts to control tribal cultures. Tibet was thought little more than an occupied territory, and so-called autonomous regions little better than Chinese provinces.

In the 1980's new policies were adopted that, in effect, allowed the monasteries to again be administered by the monks. In 2011, that changed once more. Despite the guarantee of religious freedom in China's constitution, the authorities forbid the display of the Dalai Lama's likeness and have wired the monasteries with video cameras and microphones. In 2012, the Beijing authorities introduced a

**The housing, communications, health, police services, commerce, licensing, and education systems are each, in effect, administered from Beijing. The education system, in particular, has been the institution of choice to socialise the next generation of Tibetans to ensure loyalty to the 'Motherland' and the Communist Party. Emphasis here has been given to primary school curricula and educational materials. At university level examinations are given in Mandarin, not Tibetan, and Mandarin is required for appointment to all municipal and judicial positions.**

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system called the 'Complete Long-term Management Mechanism for Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries' that places the monasteries directly under Communist Party officials who are permanently stationed in each. Moreover, every monk and nun has been assigned a government 'companion' for 'guidance and education.'

Beijing's hold is anchored by the PLA, which now has over 300,000 troops stationed in Tibet, including several mountain divisions and special operations regiments in Lhasa. The city is administered by some sixty departments and committees directly connected to their offices in Beijing. With the exception of carefully managed tourist sites, the city has been all but 'locked down' since the Olympic riots in 2008. Visitors report squads of PLA soldiers patrolling the streets in groups of three. Concentrations are particularly heavy around the Jokhang Temple, with military present at most intersections.

Regarding the 'charm offensive', beyond the presence of security forces in Lhasa, Beijing has employed 'soft power' in a complex process designed to improve urban areas while deconstructing Tibetan institutions. The aim is to reconstitute and modernise the cities by replacing Tibetans with Han migrants in most government offices and agencies.

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Beyond avoiding official use of the Tibetan language, a third set of initiatives is designed to extract the gravitas from Tibetan culture and traditions—in effect, to hollow out the culture. This is done by turning the temples, palaces, and monasteries—the symbols of Tibetan Buddhism—into Disney-like amusement stops accessed on tours where tickets are collected before entering.

The tours are sold in Beijing for holidaymakers to ride the 'Lhasa Express' to Tibet, complete with drop down oxygen bags. Tickets are then presented for admission to the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple,

**Beijing's 'charm offensive,' for which it should receive considerable credit, has delivered several new apartment blocks with hot running water, a great luxury in Tibet. Public transport has been improved (buses have heat) and access to consumer goods has been significantly expanded. Chinese claims of Tibetan progress are supported by statistics underscoring these achievements. The data also shows, however, that nearly all of the progress has been in urban areas populated by ethnic Han, rather than the countryside where 87 per cent of Tibetans live.**

and Barkhor Street—the circular prayer route around the temple where the faithful prostrate themselves (tourists are reminded this is 'a good place to buy souvenirs').

This hollowing out process has been accompanied by a third policy referred to above in which the PRC has poured billions of yuan into an extensive modernization program that has been people-friendly in many ways. Beijing's 'charm offensive,' for which it should receive considerable credit, has delivered several new apartment blocks with hot running water, a great luxury in Tibet. Public transport has been improved (buses have heat) and access to consumer goods has been significantly expanded. Chinese claims of Tibetan progress are supported by statistics underscoring these achievements. The data also shows, however, that nearly all of the progress has been in urban areas populated by ethnic Han, rather than the countryside where 87 per cent of Tibetans live.

These improvements and frustrations combined to form complex currents, which, on 14 March 2008, erupted in a series of demonstrations and then riots in Lhasa, Gansu, and Qinghai—the same locations as in 1987 and 1989. This time Tibetans were angered by the inflation, which brought higher food and consumer prices. They were disturbed by the 'Lhasa Express' train from Beijing and Chengdu, which was increasing the flow of Han migrants and creating heightened competition for jobs. But most of all, they were incensed by the assault on their traditions, culture, and spiritual life.

**The Panchen Lama 'appointed' by China (instead of the young boy chosen by the Dalai Lama) has reportedly reached out to all Buddhists. It is believed that this prompted the Dalai Lama to say in an interview that the next Dalai Lama (15th) would be born outside Tibet. It would appear that the spiritual edifice of Shangri-La is now 'controlled' by the Chinese. Please comment.**

Not only has Beijing attempted to pervert the natural course of Tibetan Buddhist institutions and ritual that have guided the faithful for centuries, but the Panchen Lama, a Chinese puppet, is recognized only by the Chinese Communist Party. Tibetan culture and religion is strong and as discussed in this interview, we believe the Party's attempts to deconstruct Tibetan culture will fail.

Indeed the Dalai Lama has stated that if there is no resolution of the succession question, it is logical that the reincarnation would occur outside of Tibet and beyond the control of the Chinese.

Chinese attempts to rewrite history will not work.

**One asks if China wouldn't benefit from a modified policy at this point. Firstly, the Dalai Lama has agreed that Tibet is a part of China. Secondly, most Chinese know little about Tibet. The new Chinese leadership have an opportunity to recast the Tibet issue for domestic audiences and modify the administrative structure. A suzerain relationship in which Tibet exercised greater control over its internal affairs could suit both Lhasa and Beijing. It would allow Beijing to reduce its expensive military garrison in Tibet and it would end the harsh and continuing global criticism, allowing China to actually advance its global interests. Moreover, there is a precedent for 'One China, Two Systems': Hong Kong.**

### Why do you think Tibet is an 'An Unfinished Story'?

A few months ago the National Court of Spain indicted just-retired Chinese President Hu Jintao on charges of genocide in 'the nation of Tibet'.

The New China News Agency (the Party's propaganda organ) proclaimed the Court had no jurisdiction in such matters, that the region is an 'inseparable part of China' and that its affairs are a Chinese 'domestic concern'.

In November Tibet's party chief, Chen Quanguo, announced a new crackdown on Internet and television access in Tibet in yet another attempt to control what people see and hear. Global media reacted to the indictment, Xinhua's statement and the crackdown with sharp criticism of Beijing, excoriating the Party, its claims and its tactics.

Somehow, even after decades of failed policy, in which both the Party and the Tibetans have suffered punishing setbacks, Beijing continues to insist on the same sterile policies. The Communist Party leaders remain unable to define the problem they confront in Tibet and, not surprisingly, are unable to mitigate Tibet's continued and determined resistance to their rule.

Today, as China seeks global leadership, its efforts to destroy Tibet's culture add to troubling questions about the values informing China's civil society. These doubts have delivered a unique form of 'soft power' to Tibet; the global public widely condemns China's practices. China has paid a heavy price in credibility and world opinion. Beijing has invested a great deal over a long period of time and gained little in return.

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Gyalo Thondup and Lezlee Brown Helper/Hurst

Tibet rests, after all, upon a coherent culture wrapped in a pervasive religion providing a clear identity—none of which the Communist Party can claim for itself.

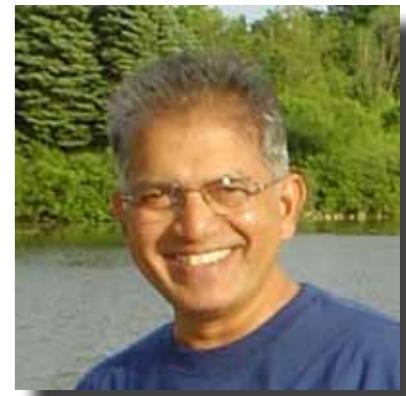
In the end, China's troubled Communist Party will succumb to history's inexorable lesson that culture trumps politics—especially imperial politics imposed through force of arms.

### Have you travelled to Tibet?

Yes, we have travelled to Tibet on several occasions between the 1990's and 2008, staying in Lhasa and surrounding areas. We have also made multiple visits to China with stays in Xian, Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Urumqi, Ulaanbaatar, Hohhot, Hong Kong and Macau, and Xingjian province.

**"The West is – understandably – deeply impressed with the spiritual energy and depth of the Dalai Lama; but we have long needed a judicious and comprehensive overview of how the current indefensible situation in Tibet arose that will take us beyond vague sympathy. This book offers just such an overview, spelling out how short-term needs of the Cold War and the tunnel-vision of pro-Taiwanese lobbyists in the USA combined with the political and moral radar of the world. It is a tragic and shameful story, told here with clarity and challenge.'**

- Lord Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge and former Archbishop of Canterbury [LINK](#)



## Gandhi's Challenge To The Economy

*Gandhi and the Future of Economics* by Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger (Dignity Press, 2013) is an extraordinary little book, a fresh and compelling interpretation of that much controversial topic, Gandhian economics. Even ardent Gandhians balk at having to defend what is commonly regarded as one of the Mahatma's idiosyncrasies. *Gandhi and the Future of Economics*, instead, gently, persistently, and, I think, solidly makes a case for Gandhian economics.

The book is not meant to be a research study. It is rather that kind of felicitous publication that breathes new life into a known theme, and, in so doing, brings out its implications for praxis. Even better is the fact that it does all this in dialogue with a set of contemporary thinkers and actors from the Indian subcontinent: Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayaprakash Narayan, Tariq Ali, Vandana Shiva, Amartya Sen, Arundhati Roy, Manmohan Singh. In the process, it sometimes turns received wisdom on its head, as when it proposes that there is not as big a gap between Bapuji and Nehru as is usually imagined.

But the crowning piece, for me, is the final chapter on Manmohan Singh: with this, the past meshes securely into the present, and our authors take a stand on the much-discussed topic of the Indian economic miracle. Given that that stand emerges out of a dialogue between someone who is considered the Father of the Nation and another who enjoys the unique privilege of being not only actually at the helm of affairs but also a renowned economist, *Gandhi and the Future of Economics* is as topical as it is surprising in the thesis it defends.

This thesis is that Gandhi criticizes the very soul of modern economics and culture. He refuses, in other words, to accept its *premises*, as for example that accumulating wealth is the general motive of production, or that material progress is a value in itself. He proposes instead that production be based on roles in society, on *dharma* or duty, on serving others by meeting specific needs, and that material progress without moral progress is no progress at all. This kind of critique is not intrasystemic: it calls the system itself into question. Such is the radicality of Gandhi's critique, and it is in this sense that his thoughts must be taken.

Gandhi's famous defence of the caste system makes sense, according to our authors, along the same lines: precisely, that is, in the light of its fundamental option for duty and service, over other economic motivations such as benevolence, or the self-interest championed by Adam Smith. Adam Smith, in keeping with the modernity of which he is a part, presumes that we are all atomic individuals. Gandhi, instead, presumes that the social order is organic, and that everyone is born with a vocation, with a role to play for the good of the community. Does this undermine the autonomy of the individual? Yet there is a prior question: whether one will have any vocation at all.

"Faced with the tragic spectacle of an adharma modern society in which babies were daily being born without having attributed to them any membership at all in a bonded community larger than a nuclear family, and with no obligation at all to serve society, Gandhi was understandably reluctant to give up the Varnashram traditions of India." Gandhi's defence of the caste system is controversial, and I, for one, could think that while 'being born to a vocation' and having a place in an organically structured society is good, one need not identify vocation with some concrete task or service. It is possible to combine a vocation to serve with the deep sense of dignity that comes from belonging to one family, which is, to my mind, the basic vision coming from Jesus. But our authors do not dispute that caste does have its limits; they merely argue that the choice to improve caste by reforming it was, for Gandhi, a more practical way of moving toward the best results than starting from scratch. Their main point is that this choice was based on a truth rather than a hypothesis. "Duty done is duty done" is a tautology: if everyone were to do their duty in a well-organized society, all needs would be met. Self-interest as the prime motivating factor is a mere hypothesis: it was not self-interest that got Adam Smith his breakfast in his infancy, for example, but probably the love of his mother.

Following Gandhi, then, Richards and Swanger advocate transformation of the basic cultural structures of the modern world rather than intrasystemic economic changes. In the final chapter on Manmohan Singh, for example, they pose three questions: (1) whether there is any feasible method for changing the basic cultural structures of the modern world; (2) whether it is desirable to change the basic structures of the modern world; and (3) whether the advice currently being given to (and sometimes imposed on) developing nations by the main international agencies is good advice. Their answer to the third is a resounding no. Their answer to the second a clear yes. They do not, for some reason, answer the first.

In their answer to the third question, the authors consider two interpretations of the same facts, the neoliberal, and the NIDL (New International Distribution of Labor). The advice being given by international agencies is neoliberal advice: that the best path to the reduction and eradication of poverty is for each nation-state to pursue its comparative advantage within a regime of international free trade; that the basic cultural structures that allow the functioning of capitalism already provide for the elimination of poverty; and that reform and structural adjustment mean, therefore, relying more on markets and less on planning. The NIDL school instead maintains that the 'economic miracle' of India is merely a temporary reward for its pre-eminence in the global 'race to the bottom.' Richards and Swanger claim that it is this second interpretation is borne out by the facts.

Manmohan Singh's program of economic reforms, initiated in 1991 when India was faced with a balance of payments crisis, was based on the neoliberal diagnosis of the problem.

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This diagnosis was that socialism in India created poverty because of its bias against employment. The cure was, therefore, to reverse that bias by, for example, reducing the protections given to labour. Manmohan's reforms have been seen as the cause of the higher levels of income, and of India's economic miracle. This, our authors maintain, is not true. It merely proves that capital moves to sites where labour is cheap. And this will not last: capital will keep moving, and the boom will bust. So the prosperity that we seem to see is merely temporary: India is merely part of the race to the bottom. Besides, there is an inherent instability in the global economic system. "The assurance given to governments around the world that a key element of the best remedy for poverty is to take decisions that will increase labour-market flexibility, on the assumption that if wage-rates fall low enough, full employment will be achieved, relies on the premise (the premise known as 'Say's Law') that full employment is the natural point of equilibrium for an economy." But this premise is merely a neoliberals assumption. Experience seems to confirm instead Keynes' theory of lower-level equilibrium.

Richards and Swanger conclude that neoliberal advice is not good advice, "for the assertion that full employment will obtain when there is no 'bias against employment' is neither theoretically valid nor borne out by the vast empirical evidence from all corners of the earth."

The second question is whether it is desirable to change the basic structures of the modern world. The neoliberals do not see the need for such change. The NIDL people do see the need but doubt that it is possible. Our authors, instead, answer with a resounding yes: change is not only desirable but also necessary. The goal of the current government of India – combining prosperity with justice – can be achieved only by questioning first premises. One way to do that is to reconsider Gandhi. First premises need to be questioned because the economic dilemmas faced by India are created by cultural structures. The dilemma of 1991 was imposed by the cultural structures of the modern world, the structures that Gandhi condemned. Democratic compulsions (as opposed to pleasing international capital), guaranteeing enough food (at the risk of running up deficits because of subsidies), the possibility of simply not paying debts: none of these things were decisive. Decisive, instead, were the systemic imperatives of the cultural structures of the modern world. These structures imply that costs of production must be kept down. They imply that debts must be paid, but here a moral command becomes a physical command – borrow or suffer! They imply that profits must be made, overriding other social goals.

Here is where we find an adumbration of an answer to the unanswered first questions. From the above, it follows that a method for cultural change must be one that modifies the dominant systemic imperatives. Gandhi, for example, would hold that production costs must not be lowered at the expense of workers, and that consumers must learn to pay higher prices for goods made under fair labour conditions.

**For a Lonergan person like me, Gandhi as interpreted by Richards and Swanger has surprising echoes in the work of Bernard Lonergan – as, besides, Richards himself observes in his Introduction. Both, for one, were deeply dharmic persons, who believed not only that economics without ethics was impossible, but also that the moral sublates economics. Neither, on the other hand, was a professional economist, with the expected result, therefore, that the economic theories of both have been roundly neglected and relegated to the sidelines. So perhaps the dialogue between Gandhi and Lonergan might not be as strange as it first sounds.**

A good way ahead is consciousness-raising, educating people so that they understand that the systemic imperatives are commands imposed by institutions that have been culturally constructed. Gandhi understood this: he understood that the West's cultural institutions were imposed upon India, that another world was possible, and that such a world had once existed in India and could exist again. This is a path of self-reliance. Workers would own their own tools. Service to neighbour rather than buying and selling would have been the goal of work.

For more substantial matter on the question of method, we would have to turn to the authors themselves. Howard Richards tells me that he and Joanna Swanger have done workshops on methods for changing basic cultural structures at the University of Toronto, and also in the Diocese of Los Angeles. More recently, he has been working with Gavin Andersson in South Africa on a methodology called 'unbounded organization.' On a philosophical level, the second volume (chapters 25-30) of his Letters from Quebec (San Francisco / London: International Scholars Press, 1995) is called Methodologies for Transforming the Structures of the Modern World. There was also a course at Earlham College called Methods of Peacemaking which was really about changing the basic cultural structures of the modern world.

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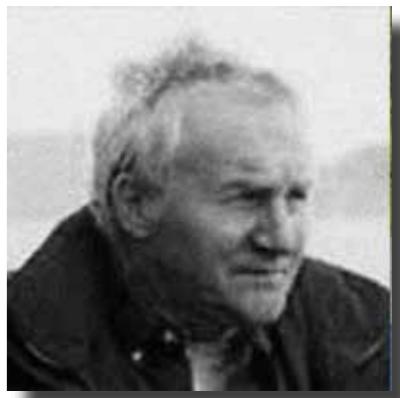
*Nor is it impossible that further developments in science should make small units self-sufficient on an ultramodern standard of living to eliminate commerce and industry, to transform agriculture into a super-chemistry, to clear away finance and even money, to make economic solidarity a memory, and power over nature the only difference between high civilization and primitive gardening.*

Richards himself, perhaps, might some day bring together the ideas of Gandhi and Lonergan. In the meantime, the present piece can be counted as one little effort towards consciousness-raising.



This poem, *The Depth of Blood*, was written a few years ago in the response to conversations I had with refugees who had come to Ireland seeking refuge from the horrors of war and poverty. It was as if they felt they had to apologise for being human beings and in need of help.

Naturally, not all people responded in this way, but some did and 'some' is too many.



## The Depth of Blood

The host does not dance with refugees  
nor does he feel their solitude.  
They must promise to be good;  
not to unpack; never to forget their homeland  
and the shame of deserting their untidy fields.

You cannot stay!

Men, full of hard submission, stand  
motionless on the pier.  
Women, with dissolving eyes and no name  
must hide away till nightfall, when  
they drape pot-bellied men with a glow like fireflies.

They keep their minds on whistling bridges  
and talking stones they knew, before  
the depth of blood drove them away.

This is a time for weaning away from  
lovely things. To be taken to a strange place  
with little chance of return to  
a promise made by a school gate  
when the wind blew gently up the valley.



**All the cases mentioned in this poem are based on true stories. In every country of the world, there are thousands of children subject to domestic and international human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Their childhoods have gone. Some never had one at all.**



## The light behind my eyes has died

Risk factors collide  
I live in the Philippines  
My parents are poor  
Technology is cheap and makes crime pay

A local family has made their home a cybersex den  
I get taken there, day in day out  
At times to suit wealthy overseas customers  
They pay \$56 a minute to see me abused online

I am seven years old  
My mother tells me to remove my clothes  
A man on the screen tells me to spread my legs  
I am scared  
My life has become a little slice of hell

Sometimes my parents get paid twice  
By a man who comes to abuse me in person  
And by the webcam viewers  
He touches me, forces me to touch him  
I'm live online, but dead inside

*My childhood has gone, I am a carcass  
I am a child with hollowed out eyes*

Risk factors collide  
I live in Bangladesh  
I was born in a brothel  
My mother was sold there for \$300  
She was forced to work free for years

One after another they come  
Some with videos on their phone showing sexual torture  
Asking "find me a girl who will do this"  
  
I am forced to take steroids  
To fatten me up  
Make me more attractive to my rapists  
I am unlikely ever to live outside this brothel  
  
And even if I do  
The effects of the abuse and the steroids will stay with me  
Some have died  
Some have kidney disease, skin rashes, high blood pressure, PTSD

*My childhood has gone, I am a carcass  
I am a child with hollowed out eyes*

Risk factors collide  
I live in the UK  
My step father hated me  
My mother, an alcoholic, handed me over to state care  
There I became prey to a child prostitution ring

I sit on a bench outside the men's toilets  
In a large city centre park  
I laugh with my mates as we wait for punters  
We are used to this life now

It buys us cigarettes and DVDs  
The authorities can't do anything  
I go through the motions most of the time  
I'm a young lad with bravado



"A child with no childhood" by Elizabeth's daughter Poppy, age 6

But sometimes it gets tough  
And I bleed from men too violent for my young flesh

*My childhood has gone, I am a carcass  
I am a child with hollowed out eyes*

Risk factors collide  
I live in Mexico  
My family sent me to work as a domestic in the USA  
Hoping for a better life for me  
They paid a middle man

But the middle man was a sex trafficker  
As soon as I am away from my parents  
He rapes me  
It is part of the drill  
For child sex slaves to be broken by their captors

When I arrive in the US  
Another man visits  
Not for sex  
But to remove my top front teeth  
So I don't hurt the customers  
When they force themselves into my too-small mouth

*My childhood has gone, I am a carcass  
I am a child with hollowed out eyes*

Risk factors collide  
I live in Ghana  
I am a young girl  
Bonded to a priest of a local shrine  
I will be his domestic and sexual slave for life  
Trokosi is the name of this traditional practise



"Give him hope" Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

I am appeasing the gods for an offense  
Committed by a member of my family  
But what offense could be worse than  
The lifelong rape of an incarcerated child

*My childhood has gone, I am a carcass  
I am a child with hollowed out eyes*

Risk factors collide  
I am a baby boy from Russia  
Trafficking for inter-country adoption is rife  
Very few of us are orphans, as it is claimed

I am sold to a couple in Australia  
Before I can talk, I have appeared in hard core pornography  
My adoptive parents run a paedophile ring

All I know is sexual abuse  
I was factory-farmed into adult depravity  
And a world of confusion and despair

The light behind my eyes has died  
If my childhood has already passed  
Am I an adult at 18 months old?



Bedouin sheik with a female visitor to his encampment near Arad in February 2011

I've spent too much time recently worrying about artistic integrity. Perhaps I should instead save some of my energy for the unfounded and escalating row about Israel's Bedouin, whose plight is being used quite shamelessly as yet another weapon with which to bludgeon Israel. If ever there has been a tale of false, fashionable agitprop it must be the way their cause has been embraced by the extreme left and its cohorts.

Even Anshel Pfeffer of the perennially anti-Israel Government [Haaretz](#) newspaper has noted that like the protests supporting illegal African migrants, the Bedouin are supported by nearly identical coalitions: the political parties normally associated with the 'peace camp', Israeli liberal and radical left-wing NGOs, financed to a large extent by funds from foreign foundations and European governments and a uniformly sympathetic international media".

Here I offer a different, eye-witness version of the story, starting with a visit to a tourist-driven Bedouin encampment near Arad in southern Israel that we saw on a trip to the Dead Sea and Masada during our first year here.

On the day, we were greeted by a picture book sheik in full regalia, offered traditional delicacies while sitting in a circle on floor cushions in his tent and told a little of Bedouin life. This was great fun but gave us nothing of the reality.

More truth emerged some months later on a trip to Kfar Hivaled, near the northern Arab town of Shfar'am, when our guide explained that Bedouin society is not monolithic and that the residents of a nearby modern apartment block to which she pointed were upper-class Bedouin who disdained the life-style of their nomadic, desert-dwelling cousins! Further, by a remarkable coincidence, a bare quarter-mile from where we live in Rabin, Karmiel dwells another group of Bedouin whose corrugated, rusty shanties offend many other local residents. As some of our near neighbours also include Arabs who live in ordinary modern property, we don't understand why the Bedouin choose to live as they do, especially as they were offered a resettlement deal during the 1990s.

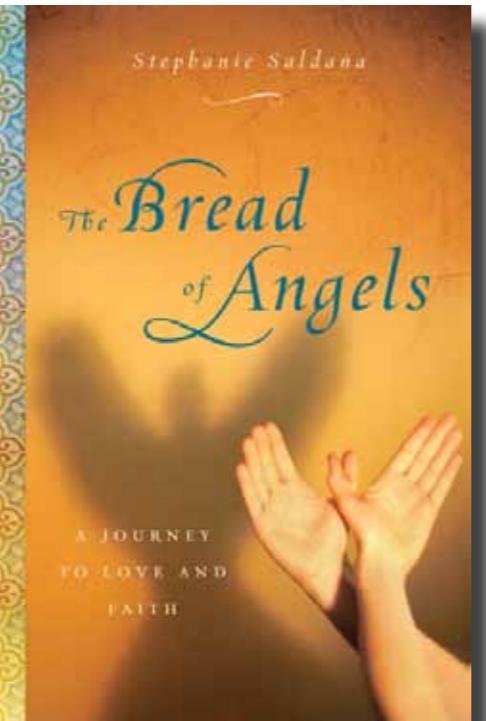


Some are sheep and goat farmers and we see them tending their flocks on nearby waste ground and in the surrounding Hilazon Valley. The shepherds don't wear traditional dress but modern clothes, often with hi-visibility tops and baseball caps. One family has a ramshackle smallholding where we've noticed their odd conglomeration of horses and battered vehicles and hear a cockerel cackling at intervals whenever we walk nearby.

Late last year, [The Electronic Intifada](#) published a typically disingenuous feature in which the author interviewed a family who described themselves as 'invisible citizens' of Karmiel. But they are in no way ill-treated or undermined and their homes are an all-too obvious reminder of their presence. I can see no reason for their not accepting the resettlement conditions that are outlined in the E.I. report. As of December 2012, only two of 28 families had accepted the resettlement scheme and 13 months later, the nearby fresh land allotted to them still appears to be unused.

So I feel forced to agree with the [Israel Ministry for Foreign Affairs](#) that insists the Bedouin cause has been manipulated and abused by extremists, "many of whom are not Bedouin, (and who) chose to divert the open debate about a purely social and humanitarian cause into a confrontation, falsely linked to the Palestinian issue. Behind the recent violent protests lie alien interests rather than a sincere concern for the Bedouin rights to a higher quality of life".

The now infamous Prawer-Begin Plan for Negev Bedouin resettlement was shelved in December 2013. I don't believe their problems will be solved any faster than those of their Galilee counterparts. But let's see.



## Crossing the Bridge to the Past: Reflections on Damascus, Syria

by

**Stephanie Saldaña**

Author of [The Bread of Angels](#)

L.P. Hartley famously wrote that “the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.” When I set out to write this piece, a friend of mine mentioned that I was sitting down to do the unenviable task of writing myself into the story of my own past. And while I agree that the past is a foreign country that all of us are in some way exiled from, in this case it is even more true, for the past I wish to write about is a world that I used to live in that no longer exists. I am writing about Syria: a country that I loved and that changed my life forever, and which is now in its third year of a devastating civil war. Never has the past felt so much like a country where things were different, and that now has disappeared.

In 2004, when I was twenty-seven years old, I finished my Masters at Harvard Divinity School and set out to spend a year in Damascus, Syria, on a Fulbright fellowship to write about the Prophet Jesus in Islam. As a scholar of Christianity and Islam I knew that Damascus was one of the richest cities in the world in which to study Muslim-Christian dialogue, a place where Muslims and Christians had lived side by side since the earliest days of Islam, and where Arabic speaking Christians were still a thriving minority, forming one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. The Syrian landscape was a living testimony to a Christian past, studded with the ruins of monasteries from the Byzantine Empire. The Umayyad Mosque, which sat like a jewel in the heart of the old city of Damascus, with a towering minaret known by locals as the “Jesus minaret”, was once the cathedral of St. John the Baptist, and remained a site of Christian pilgrimage. Tradition held that in the earliest years of Islam, Muslims and Christians had shared the space, each praying in their own respective section.



I found a room in a sprawling, enormous house just off Straight Street, the famous street where St. Paul fell from his horse after being blinded by a vision of Jesus. My neighbor, a 73-year old Armenian who called himself The Baron, quickly adopted me, insisting that I drink tea with him at least three times a day and commenting on everything from my clothes to my desire to study Islam. There was no way that I could know that he would not only be my neighbor but that he would become my home...



The old city of Damascus. Photograph courtesy Stephanie Saldana

I had traveled to Syria several times in the past, and I had always wanted to return there for research. Yet while I justified my journey in scholarly terms, in ways I was only beginning to understand I was really running away: from a broken heart, from a family history of depression and madness, and from a life in which I had found myself, despite my years in Divinity School, somehow exiled from God. The following twelve months, which I write about in my memoir *The Bread of Angels* (Doubleday, 2010), would see me wrestle with God, with myself, and with everything I imagined my life would become, at times losing nearly everything.

When I arrived in Damascus that summer, I had nothing more than the two black, wheeled suitcases I brought with me from Boston, and a map of the city to help me find my way. I set out to search for a house in the only way that I could think of: by knocking door to door in the ancient Christian neighborhood of Bab Touma, where locals sometimes rented rooms out to students. It was the height of the U.S. led-war in Iraq, and perhaps not the smartest moment for an American girl to go knocking house to house in Damascus, Syria. Yet eventually I found a room in a sprawling, enormous house just off Straight Street, the famous street where St. Paul fell from his horse after being blinded by a vision of Jesus. My neighbor, a 73-year old Armenian who called himself The Baron, quickly adopted me, insisting that I drink tea with him at least three times a day and commenting on everything from my clothes to my desire to study Islam. There was no way that I could know that he would not only be my neighbor but that he would

It was not just any desert, but the ancient monastery of Deir Mar Musa, a stunning 6th century monastery hanging from a cliff face and accessible only by a flight of 350 stairs. I was there to meet Paolo Dall'Oglio, the Italian abbot of the monastery, who had invited me to do the month long Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, a month of silence and meditation. During that month, I would be asked to confront all of the demons of my past, and to meditate on the gospel of Matthew. Finally, I would need to make a decision about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I had no idea of what that choice would be. All I knew was that something had to change.

become my *home*: that he would teach me about war and about survival, and that, most of all, he would teach me to speak the Syrian dialect of Arabic.

The Baron had lived through the Lebanese Civil War, and in his past life - before he lost his entire fortune - he had been a shoe salesman. Though he was now very poor, in the afternoons he entertained me with tales of his old life, stories of wooing women and selling shoes, playing football and traveling to Milan and Tehran. After I finished listening to his stories, I wandered into the narrow streets of the famous Old City, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, and found myself in a world more diverse than I thought possible, where Armenians, Kurds, Sunnis, Shiites, Iraqis, Circassians, Palestinians, and even a few Jews lived, and where it didn't seem surprising that my Christians neighbors still spoke Syriac, a dialect of the Aramaic language Jesus once spoke. In the early evenings I would enter the Umayyed mosque and watch pigeons circle the Jesus minaret. As the sun set, the courtyard was magically transformed into a river of light, so that the children playing in it seemed to be illuminated.

Those moments of light illuminated the darkness, and yet the darkness remained. I was an American in Damascus during the height of the U.S. led invasion in Iraq, and the tension was palpable. I could not enter a taxi without the driver grilling me about American foreign policy, which I stumbled to discuss in my failing Arabic. In my language classes at Damascus University, America was a common topic. Secret Police were everywhere. In fact there was nothing secret about them, and they came to my house off Straight Street and openly questioned me. In the meantime, the streets of the Old City flooded with refugees fleeing the war in neighboring Iraq. With tensions rising between the American government and Syria, many of my neighbors feared that they, too, would be invaded. I, too, was scared.

In November of 2004, George Bush was re-elected as president of the United States, and it quickly became clear that the war was only going to get worse. That week, I packed my bags, and headed to the desert to change my life.

It was not just any desert, but the ancient monastery of Deir Mar Musa, a stunning 6th century monastery hanging from a cliff face and accessible only by a flight of 350 stairs. I was there to meet Paolo Dall'Oglio, the Italian abbot of the monastery, who had invited me to do the month long Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, a month of silence and meditation. During that month, I would be asked to confront all of the demons of my past, and to meditate on the gospel of Matthew. Finally, I would need to make a decision about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I had no idea of what that choice would be. All I knew was that something had to change.

**Though Paolo was a devout Christian, he believed that Islam was part of his own spirituality, that Islam was not an accident, but part of God's plan for the world. He did not think that mere co-existence between Muslims and Christians was enough, but he believed in dependence: that the Muslims and Christians of Syria needed one another to be whole. He even named his desert monastic community *Al-Khalil*, the special name that Abraham, the "friend of God" and father of Muslims, Christians and Jews, is given in the Quran... In the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises, I meditated on the stories of the gospels until I could picture the characters in front of me, could ask them questions and wait for them response.**

When I reached the top of the stairs, Fr. Paolo was waiting. I had never met anyone like him, with his voice booming across the courtyard. He was imposing: six foot four, with an unruly beard and enormous hands, a burly Roman who looked more like he belonged on a rugby pitch than in a monastery. Completely fluent in Arabic and yet constantly gesturing with his hands like an Italian, he had first come to the monastery in 1982, when it was still in ruins, and decided to rebuild it into a monastery dedicated to dialogue with Islam. Every year, alongside Christian pilgrims, thousands of Muslims climbed the stairs to visit with the local community, where they would eat and even pray. Though Paolo was a devout Christian, he believed that Islam was part of his own spirituality, that Islam was not an accident, but part of God's plan for the world. He did not think that mere co-existence between Muslims and Christians was enough, but he believed in *dependence*: that the Muslims and Christians of Syria needed one another to be whole. He even named his desert monastic community *Al-Khalil*, the special name that Abraham, the "friend of God" and father of Muslims, Christians and Jews, is given in the Quran.

For an entire month, in the silence of the mountains and the desert, I prayed. In the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises, I meditated on the stories of the gospels until I could picture the characters in front of me, could ask them questions and wait for them response. I remembered what a priest had once told me, that you know that you are really immersed in the Exercises when the characters start telling you things you don't want to hear! And they did. And yet the spirituality of my childhood, that I had been exiled from so long, came back and lived beside me, day after day in the desert where monks had come to pray for 1500 years.

In the evenings I came and sat across from Fr. Paolo, and we spoke of my past, of my fears, and of my hopes. He spoke to me of fear as a gift, something to be confronted, as something that always comes to us on the way to faith. This is why, in both the Old and New Testaments, angels always appear and whisper: "Do not be afraid." For fear comes when blessings come. I listened to him, and in a way that has happened in monasteries around the world since the beginning of Christianity, Fr. Paolo became a spiritual father to me, listening to me, until day after day I slowly climbed my way back to God. By the end of a month in the desert, not only had I reconnected with my faith, but I had decided to become a nun.

Yet as the saying goes: *man makes plans, and God laughs*. In the months following the Spiritual Exercises, I returned to Damascus, became ill, and lost faith again. This time I was nursed back by the unlikeliest of people; a famous female Sheikh by the name of Huda al-Habash, a teacher renowned for her deep knowledge of the Quran. In Damascus, at a young age, she had founded the city's very oldest Quranic school for girls, where hundreds of girls came to memorize and study the Quran.

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Though she knew that I am a Christian, she invited me into her home to study the Quran with her, and together we explored the Quranic verses on the Virgin Mary. With her I read about a Mary who is young and alone, and who is one day asked to carry a burden that seems almost to heavy to bear: to give birth to Jesus. She wanders into the desert in labor, at one moment so despondent that she wishes that she could die. And then she has the child.

Day after day I studied and recited the verses of Mary from the Quran, amazed by her story. Here was resurrection in the story of a young girl: life coming in the midst of despair. Those weeks, I recited the Quran with my female Sheikh, and slowly became well again. I drank endless glasses of tea with the Baron, my Armenian neighbor. I befriended my neighbors, in particular an Iraqi refugee named Hassan, a poet who taught me that poetry exists everywhere, even in the midst of war. I fell in love with the Syrian dialect of Arabic. And I discovered that the resurrection I had been searching for in a monastery in the desert was all around me, in the dirty, mad, tense, and beautiful streets of Damascus. I was made new, in the place I least expected it to happen.

That was ten years ago. When I set out to write a memoir, *The Bread of Angels*, I thought that I was simply capturing in writing a year that changed my life forever. For Syria did change my life: I found a home, I found God, I found two spiritual teachers. I fell in love with a country. Before the end of my time there, I would meet the man I would marry.



*The monastery of Deir Mar Musa in the snow. Photograph courtesy Stephanie Saldana*

I last spoke to him on Skype in July of 2013. He was calling me to say goodbye, for he was going again into Syria, this time on a dangerous mission...Two weeks later, he entered Syria to negotiate for the release of kidnapped prisoners, and was kidnapped himself by ISIS, an Islamist militant group associated with Al-Qaeda. No one has heard from him since. When I think of him now I think of hope, of a tiny seed—the size of a mustard seed—planted in the desert.



*Children at the Umayyad mosque at sunset. Photograph courtesy Stephanie Saldana*

Yet *The Bread of Angels* will now be remembered for something I never intended: for capturing a world just before it disappeared. For as we know now, that incredible diversity I experienced in Damascus, that world where Sunnis and Shiites and Alawites and Kurds and Christians lived side by side, was a thing of magic when it worked. But the moment in which it did not, that very diversity became a tinderbox for civil war.

Though I left Syria in 2005, I never left completely. Fr. Paolo remained my spiritual father for the next ten years. When I married instead of becoming a nun, he flew to Europe to say the wedding mass. When I had children, he traveled to Europe to meet them. A nun from the monastery is my son's godmother. Fr. Paolo and I remained as close as two people can be who are not family, our destinies tied to one another forever during a month of silence and prayer in the desert.

Yet I could never have known a decade ago what would happen to him and the country he had grown to love during the more than 30 years he made it his home. As the Syrian Civil War began to take shape, and as civilian casualties began to mount, Fr. Paolo increasingly became critical of the Syrian government. Eventually, he was forced into exile. Yet rather than stay away, he began to sneak in and out of the country illegally, visiting those in the north most affected by the war, and even negotiating the release of kidnapped citizens. I last spoke to him on Skype in July of 2013. He was calling me to say goodbye, for he was going again into Syria, this time on a dangerous mission. When we spoke, we talked about hope in

Somewhere beneath this madness is a country that welcomed a stranger, a girl alone, from an enemy country, and embraced her and gave her a home. Surely this place still exists, of only in the hearts of those who once made it so—surely there is resurrection, even in the midst of these horrors—there must be. Until then, I am glad to share the lessons and stories of friends, my neighbors, and my beloved teachers—one Christian, one Muslim. May we at least meet in these pages, and say: we are so very blessed, so lucky to know you - if only for a moment. Inshallah, we will meet again.

the midst of despair, hope “the size of a mustard seed”, the smallest of the seeds, able to give birth to the largest trees. It was a hope that could grow and give root even in the midst of war.

Two weeks later, he entered Syria to negotiate for the release of kidnapped prisoners, and was kidnapped himself by ISIS, an Islamist militant group associated with Al-Qaeda. No one has heard from him since. When I think of him now I think of hope, of a tiny seed—the size of a mustard seed—planted in the desert.

My female sheikh, Huda al Habash, also went into exile shortly after the war began. I watched videos of young girls I knew from her mosque, many of them teenagers, marching as gunfire sprays in the background. I do not know when I shall see her again. Nor do I know where my old neighbor, the Baron is: though I have watched news of bombs going off near my old house, where St. Paul was thrown from his horse. Just as I have watched news of nearly every neighborhood I walked in being bombed. Even the Iraqi refugees I know have returned to Baghdad, where it is safer than the Damascus where they once sought refuge.

The monastery of Deir Mar Musa is largely empty, the monks and nuns in great danger isolated in the desert. In a nearby church, hundreds of families, most of them Muslim, have sought shelter, all of them fleeing violence and seeking food and warmth during the cruel winter. The villages I knew around the monastery have been the sites of some of the fiercest fighting of recent months, in a war that has now taken an estimated 130,000 lives. Barely a week goes by when I don't learn of a place I once knew that has now been destroyed: a city street, a market, a church or mosque. Recently I saw a picture of a bridge collapsed into the water, and it took me a moment to remember that I had stood on that bridge, that very bridge, collapsed into water.

If I am glad that I wrote *The Bread of Angels* it is to remind myself, and perhaps others, that a different Syria once existed--- no, that it exists still, somewhere under the rubble of war. Somewhere beneath this madness is a country that welcomed a stranger, a girl alone, from an enemy country, and embraced her and gave her a home. Surely this place still exists, of only in the hearts of those who once made it so—surely there is resurrection, even in the midst of these horrors—there must be. I will never give up hope that the shattered bridge will be recovered from the waters, and rebuilt, and we will cross it.

Until then, I am glad to share the lessons and stories of friends, my neighbors, and my beloved teachers—one Christian, one Muslim. May we at least meet in these pages, and say: we are so very blessed, so lucky to know you - if only for a moment. Inshallah, we will meet again.

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.



## How Middle East regional dynamics affect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process

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Pic - Nile River Delta, Sinai Peninsula by NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center with cc license from Flickr"

### Executive Summary

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is currently influenced by regional dynamics – specifically the Iran nuclear controversy and the Arab revolutions – in ways that militate both against and in favour of a successful outcome. The chaos in Syria and Egyptian Sinai is an example of a revolutionary development that works at least theoretically in both ways: persuading Israel to avoid new undertakings until the Arab smoke clears, but also presenting a strategic environment free of major military threats to the country that is conducive to taking risks for peace. Similarly, Israel's dissatisfaction with the U.S.-led Geneva nuclear deal with Iran militates against its taking security risks with the Palestinians, while it also drives Israel and Saudi Arabia closer together, thereby enhancing Riyadh's capacity to offer Israel incentives to reach a two-state solution.

Other regional developments, for example the U.S. military withdrawal from the region, Jordan's preoccupation with Syria, and the Egyptian army's coup against the Muslim Brotherhood, are more unequivocal in their influence over the peace process. While none of these developments may prove crucial to Israeli-Palestinian peace, their overall effect should not be discounted.

Israeli-Palestinian relations – whether they take the form of intifada, peace process or merely the "status quo" – have never developed in a vacuum. Not only have interested third parties such as the U.S., European Union and Norway been involved, but so have immediate neighbours like Egypt and Jordan. The Arab League has also been involved, usually with Saudi urging, in initiatives like the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the earlier 1982 Fahd plan.

Yet the current Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are exceptional in their heavy exposure to two major regional dynamics: international manoeuvring over Iran's nuclear project and the Arab revolutions. This expert analysis explores the ramifications of these dynamics for the peace process.

**On the one hand, Israel's possible readiness to offer territorial and security concessions to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) could now be constrained by concerns that the "traditional" assumption of U.S. military involvement in peacekeeping tasks can no longer be taken for granted. Conceivably, a U.S. military that is on its way out of the Middle East will not be available to police West Bank demilitarisation; alternatively, Washington's conditions for deploying its military will no longer be acceptable to Israel.**

### **U.S. policy toward Iran and Syria**

In the current Israeli perception the U.S., led by a risk-averse president, is retreating from its presumed commitments in the Middle East. Following on withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan that leave behind chaos and violence, the U.S. recently backed off from attacking Syria, thereby "rewarding" Bashar al-Assad for chemical attacks on his own citizenry and enabling him to stabilise his rule. Most recently, Washington made a deal with Tehran that allegedly leaves Israel exposed and moves a nuclear Iran toward rapprochement with the international community.

Israel is not alone in this perception. A number of Arab countries in the Gulf region, led by Saudi Arabia, share Jerusalem's concerns over the Iranian danger, Asad's staying power, and the credibility of existing and future U.S. commitments to support their security needs in the region. These developments have two immediate ramifications for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. On the one hand, Israel's possible readiness to offer territorial and security concessions to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) could now be constrained by concerns that the "traditional" assumption of U.S. military involvement in peacekeeping tasks can no longer be taken for granted. Conceivably, a U.S. military that is on its way out of the Middle East will not be available to police West Bank demilitarisation; alternatively, Washington's conditions for deploying its military will no longer be acceptable to Israel. Conceivably too, offers of U.S. security guarantees for Israel within the framework of a peace agreement with the Palestinians will now prove to be non-credible in Israeli eyes.

On the other hand, the seeming convergence of views regarding Iran and Syria among Israel, Saudi Arabia, other Gulf Arab states, Jordan (see below) and possibly Egypt – with all the Arab states recognising that Israel currently presents the only likely military deterrent to Iran – could provide an incentive for Israel to register progress in peace negotiations. The Saudis, after all, appear to condition overt security co-operation with Israel against Iran on a successful peace process or at least progress toward this end, citing the Arab Peace Initiative as a possible framework.

Moreover if – as now appears quite possible – the Asad regime triumphs in the Syrian civil war or at least secures the southern and western parts of the country, several years hence in the post-war period Israel can expect to face an enhanced Syrian-Iranian-Hizbullah alliance on its northern border. This suggests yet another reason for Israel, backed by Iran's Arab enemies, not to postpone peacemaking with the Palestinians. Interestingly, then - Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin made a similar observation about Iran some 20 years ago in explaining the rationale for the Oslo process.

In contrast, the Netanyahu government's calculations regarding the scope of territorial and security concessions to the Palestinians appear to be negatively influenced by the U.S.-led P5+1 agreement

**This, then, is arguably a time for Israel to "keep its powder dry" and wait for developments to unfold in the region before acting. Why, for example, negotiate the emergence of a new Arab state – Palestine – at a time when existing Arab states are crumbling and part of Palestine (Gaza) presents a growing Salafist threat? This is one of the contentions of the Israeli right in opposing the creation of a Palestinian state.**

with Iran. About a year ago an Israeli columnist coined the phrase "Bushehr for Yitzhar": Netanyahu would feel freer to risk dismantling isolated West Bank settlements like Yitzhar and enter into a U.S.-sponsored deal with the Palestinians if the Iranian centrifuges at Bushehr were dismantled as part of a deal to close the Iranian nuclear project.

Now what appears to be emerging is a "neither Bushehr nor Yitzhar" paradigm: because the deal with Iran appears to Netanyahu to leave Tehran's nuclear programme intact, he will be less forthcoming on concessions to the Palestinians. Because U.S. secretary of state John Kerry is in charge of both negotiations, the perception of sharp U.S.-Israel disagreement has become unavoidable, thereby exacerbating yet further Israel's approach to talks with the PLO. (Never mind that Bushehr constitutes a presumed existential nuclear threat, while Yitzhar has only negative security significance for Israel and represents the demographic disaster that Netanyahu and the settlement movement are driving Israel toward. Under current circumstances, the prime minister's only complaint about announcements of new settlement-building plans is the timing, not the substance.)

### **The Salafist role in the Arab revolutionary wave**

Like the interplay between U.S. Middle East policy and the Israeli and Saudi response, the emergence of a strong Salafist element amid the chaos of the Egyptian and Syrian revolutions appears to affect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process both positively and negatively. On the one hand, precisely because neighbouring Arab armies are preoccupied with extremist threats to their governments, and in the Syrian case because the national army has suffered serious losses in men and materiel, the Israel Defence Forces currently face no major strategic military threat along any border. Even the massive rocket threat from Hizbullah in southern Lebanon has been sidelined by that organisation's deep involvement in the Syrian fighting. Is this not, then, the optimal time for Israel to take security risks for peace?

On the other hand, Israeli security planners can cite the neighbouring anarchy and Salafist threats as preoccupations that ostensibly preclude any serious peace initiatives on Israel's part. In the Egyptian case the Salafists are situated directly on Israel's Negev border with Egyptian Sinai and have also infiltrated the neighbouring Gaza Strip.

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**There are several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, dating from 1948, in the Damascus area, mostly in the Yarmouk camp, which has witnessed prolonged fighting in recent months. When these Palestinians try to flee from Syria, Jordan rejects them and Lebanon mounts obstacles to their entry. Both countries fear that a new influx of Palestinians would prove a disruptive demographic factor.**

### The rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood

Mention of Egypt and the Gaza Strip invokes the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in the course of Egypt's revolution as a development that affects the peace process. In particular, it affects the Palestinian approach. During the year of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt between mid-2012 and mid-2013 Hamas drew strength and prestige from the Cairo regime. Hamas, which is in effect the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, enjoyed a relatively open Gaza-Sinai border and open access to its supporters in Egypt. It was even implicated in violent attacks on Egyptian security forces.

While the Morsi presidency did have some problems with Hamas's behaviour and a year ago sponsored negotiations that led to a relatively successful Israel-Hamas ceasefire, Hamas's overall prestige among Palestinians grew thanks to Egyptian Islamist backing. This in turn constrained the freedom of manoeuvre of PLO leader Mahmoud Abbas with regard to a possible renewed negotiating process with Israel: Abbas feared the impact on the Palestinian public of Hamas criticism of his peace policies. Thus it was no coincidence that U.S. secretary of state Kerry was able to renew the process only after the Egyptian army took power in July 2013. Egypt's military rulers removed the Brotherhood from power and began energetically closing the Gaza-Sinai border smuggling tunnels and cracking down on Salafists in both Sinai and (through pressure on Hamas) Gaza. With Hamas weakened, Abbas can negotiate in an atmosphere relatively free of domestic Islamist pressure. Moreover, under current conditions, any Israeli military response to attacks from Gaza is likely to be dealt with tolerantly by the ruling Egyptian military authorities, who in any case now favour the PLO over Hamas.

### A new wave of Palestinian refugees

There are several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, dating from 1948, in the Damascus area, mostly in the Yarmouk camp, which has witnessed prolonged fighting in recent months. When these Palestinians try to flee from Syria, Jordan rejects them and Lebanon mounts obstacles to their entry. Both countries fear that a new influx of Palestinians would prove a disruptive demographic factor. The United Nations Relief Works Agency, which deals exclusively with Palestinian refugees, at one point this year tried to persuade both the Gazan and West Bank-based Palestinian leaderships to accept Palestinians fleeing Syria. The initiative failed when it ran up against Palestinian fears lest refugee absorption be seen by Israel and possibly the international community as an exercise of the "right of return" and the creation of a new permanent status of "returned" refugees on Palestinian soil, thereby compromising Palestinian negotiating positions regarding refugees. It is important to keep in mind that current final status negotiations regarding the refugee/right of return issue are taking place at the same time that a new Palestinian refugee drama is unfolding.

**Jordan also has a strategic relationship with Israel. And because of the fighting in Syria, it is this relationship that appears to have been awarded priority over the Palestinian issue in recent months. In the course of 2013 King Abdullah II met quietly at least twice with Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu to discuss not Palestine, but the threat of violent revolutionary overflow from Syria into Jordan.**

### Jordan's preoccupation with Syria

Jordan, with its large Palestinian population and shared borders with both Israel and the West Bank, is undoubtedly the Arab country most sensitive to the possible consequences of a failed peace process and/or new unrest in the West Bank. It is also, by dint of its peace treaty with Israel, a participant in any solution or new arrangements concerning Jerusalem. Accordingly, for years the Hashemite kingdom has both pressured Israel to engage in serious two-state solution negotiations and offered its good offices to facilitate talks.

But Jordan also has a strategic relationship with Israel. And because of the fighting in Syria, it is this relationship that appears to have been awarded priority over the Palestinian issue in recent months. In the course of 2013 King Abdullah II met quietly at least twice with Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu to discuss not Palestine, but the threat of violent revolutionary overflow from Syria into Jordan. That the meetings were leaked in Jordan (rather than in Israel, where such leaks are chronic) points to Abdullah's need to signal his public where his current strategic priorities lie. Jordan is reeling under a huge refugee influx from Syria. And because it reportedly facilitates the infiltration into Syria of rebel manpower and arms in consultation with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, it fears being dragged into the fighting. The leaks regarding meetings with Netanyahu even produced unconfirmed reports of Israeli-Jordanian military consultations and co-ordinated Israeli drone reconnaissance flights along the Jordan-Syria border.

The upshot of these developments is evidently a reduction in Jordan's involvement in Israeli-Palestinian contacts and in pressure by the monarchy on Israel to reach a two-state agreement.

### Conclusion

We have noted the ramifications of both the Iran nuclear issue and the Arab revolutions that affect the Israeli-Palestinian sphere. Some of these ramifications, such as Israeli concern over an international deal with Iran and Jordan's preoccupation with Syria, appear to militate against or at least not encourage progress toward an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Others, such as military rule in Egypt, appear to have the opposite effect on prospects for an agreement.

Ultimately, the fortunes of such an agreement will be influenced far more by internal politics, the quality of leadership on both sides, and possible U.S. pressure on Israel and Arab pressure on the PLO. But the effect of regional dynamics should not be discounted. Indeed, in some instances the more positive among these developments, such as in Egypt and the Gulf, could conceivably be directed toward helping Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.



## Shias in Pakistan: a view from Lahore

**Dr. Paul Rollier**

Research Associate, Department of Anthropology  
University College London

Received scholarship on Twelver Shias largely stems from research on Iranian society, and to a lesser extent from the Iraqi and Lebanese contexts. Pakistan's Shias, who constitute 12 to 20 per cent of the country's population, represent the second largest Shi'i community in the world. However Shias in Sunni-majority societies are often regarded as living on the margins of a Shi'i crescent subordinate to Iran, best described through the prism of sectarian conflict and their status as minority communities. This view is further accentuated with the regime change in Iraq in 2003 and the 'Arab spring' shifting towards a strategic and confessional showdown between regional powers, which have led to renewed debates over a transnational Shi'i revival centered on the Middle-East. This tendency to overlook the South Asian context has made it difficult to appreciate the multifarious experiences of Shiism across national borders and to recognize the distinct religious and political trajectories of Pakistani Shias.

The vast majority of Pakistani Shias belong to the Twelver (Isna Ashari, Jafari) branch of Shiism. Well represented in liberal professions and in the arts, and comprising a few influential families with political clout, this heterogeneous community is nevertheless increasingly marginalized and persecuted (e.g. Parachinar, Quetta). To account for this situation a large body of scholarship focuses on the way Pakistan became the scene of a 'transplanted' war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the context of the anti-Soviet jihad in neighbouring Afghanistan.



The country's Shii clergy, traditionally educated in Lucknow, gave way to a younger generation of politicized clerics educated in Iran and Iraq who denounced what they saw as the community's narrow focus on rituals of public mourning (*azadari*). The revolution revitalized a Shii reformist trend manifest in Pakistan since the mid-1960s and which drew on the Muslim reformist movements that gained prominence in nineteenth century South Asia. Pakistani Shias needed to be educated and Shiism purified of 'innovations' accumulated through centuries of coexistence with Hindus.

To offset Iran's attempt to export its revolutionary ideology, Saudi Arabia became directly involved in the promotion of Sunni Islam in Pakistan, financing religious institutions and facilitating the emergence of radical religious movements. Simultaneously, General Zia-ul Haq oversaw a Deobandi-orientated program to make Pakistan's public sphere more 'Islamic', emphasizing the country's proximity with the Sunni Middle-East rather than with so-called 'Hindu India'. These processes have profoundly altered the nature of Shii-Sunni relations and led to more exclusive sect-identities.

But the impetus of the Iranian revolution also instilled a sense of self-confidence among Pakistani Shias. The country's Shii clergy, traditionally educated in Lucknow, gave way to a younger generation of politicized clerics educated in Iran and Iraq who denounced what they saw as the community's narrow focus on rituals of public mourning (*azadari*). The revolution revitalized a Shii reformist trend manifest in Pakistan since the mid-1960s and which drew on the Muslim reformist movements that gained prominence in nineteenth century South Asia. Bare-chested men flagellating themselves in public, devotees prostrating themselves before religious icons and saints were deviations from proper piety. Pakistani Shias needed to be educated and Shiism purified of 'innovations' accumulated through centuries of coexistence with Hindus. More than the expression of traditional faith, religion was to become the vector for social transformations and progress. Emboldened by their Iranian mentors, Shias became more active politically and demonstrated against Zia ul-Haq's polices and in defense of their religious rights, such as being exempted from explicitly Sunni laws and curriculum.

The drive to reform rituals however was not so successful. In fact, Shii political activism in the 1980s often focused on the preservation of traditional rites, such as taking out mourning processions during Muharram. Iran's attempt to imposed its standardized version of Shiism, together with the formation of Sunni sectarian groups to counter Iranian influence progressively led Pakistani Shias to adopt a more nuanced attitude towards their coreligionists in the Middle-East and to reaffirm their attachment to local forms of Shii piety. In short, although Pakistan's religious establishment did become more clericalist and centralized following the revolution, we should be careful not to overstate its role as a catalyst for the transfer of Iranian ideas among lay Shias.

### Shii religious life in Lahore

Twelvers Shias in Lahore are thought to constitute 15 to 20% of the population. The historical center of ritual activity is located in the Old City. Following partition and the arrival of migrants from the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, Lahore witnessed the emergence of four enclaves with a Shii majority. Most Shias however live in mixed neighborhoods. According to Lahori tradition, the

My introduction to Lahore's Shii community coincided with these Muharram celebrations and its countless processions to the sound of elegies and self-flagellation (*matam*). My Shii acquaintances, who mostly belong to the lower-class, would define themselves as fervent *azadars* (mourners), rather than Shias. During the year that I spent in their company, rarely if ever did they mention Khomeini's concept of political authority or the emulation of high-ranking jurists. For them being Shia is about giving preference to the family of the Prophet (*ahl-e-bait*) over their enemies.

advent of Shiism in the city dates back to the aftermath of the epic battle of Karbala in 680, which saw the death of Imam Hussein and his companions. Some of his female relatives are believed to have escaped on camelback to Lahore, where they narrated the tragedy and were later buried. A large number of Shii families in the city, as elsewhere in Pakistan, claim to be descendants of the Prophet who migrated from Central Asia, Iran and the Arabic peninsula to flee Sunni persecution. Although the vast majority are in fact descendants of Sunni Muslims and Hindus converted to Shiism during the Safavid period, the prestige conferred by noble origins often eclipses the concern for historical accuracy. The Qizalbash, an influential family who enjoyed colonial patronage since the nineteenth century, played a major role in promoting *azadari* rituals and remains to this day the patron of Lahore's largest procession, which is held annually on the day of *ashura*.

My introduction to Lahore's Shii community coincided with these Muharram celebrations and its countless processions to the sound of elegies and self-flagellation (*matam*). My Shii acquaintances, who mostly belong to the lower-class, would define themselves as fervent *azadars* (mourners), rather than Shias. During the year that I spent in their company, rarely if ever did they mention Khomeini's concept of political authority or the emulation of high-ranking jurists. For them being Shia is about giving preference to the family of the Prophet (*ahl-e-bait*) over their enemies. It is about demonstrating one's love for Hussein and his relatives, and grieving the loss of these outstanding role models. Taking out annual processions through the streets, singing elegies, attending mourning assemblies and beating one's chest in unison is understood as a form of protest and a mnemonic device.

As I am repeatedly told, these public rituals serve the purpose of reminding other Muslims that Islam would no longer exist, had it not been for Hussein's heroic sacrifice. These events are also recognized as condensing issues of local power and patronage, economic rivalry and the display of social prestige. Participants explicitly acknowledge that processions are as much about religious piety as they are about asserting their presence over public space in spite of suicide-bombs and other deadly attacks. And indeed, with over 20 000 policemen deployed for security, entire neighbourhoods cordoned off, helicopters hovering in the sky and mobile networks temporarily suspended, Muharram celebrations are undoubtedly the largest public event in town. By risking their lives in making their grief manifest, mourners see themselves as performing something akin to Hussein's own sacrifice at Karbala. But these rituals are not simply about defending a theological stance, asserting one's communal presence or competing for social prestige. Although less explicitly acknowledged, one also attends processions for direct returns. Blood and tears shed for the Imams are spiritually and materially rewarding, allowing one to seek the martyrs' intercession and to gain proximity with God. Participants perform propitiatory vows before the ritual icons transported in processions, be it for fertility, good health or prosperity.

I recently came across a number of accounts of Sunnis ‘converting’ to Shiism, some of them narrated by converts themselves. Almost all of them involve persons in custody charged with murder and who previously identified as orthodox Sunnis (Deobandi or Ahl-e-hadith). Typically, the culprit is enticed by a co-detainee to petition the Imam, his plea is fulfilled, and upon his release he flagellates himself in public, takes the lead of a procession or simply distributes food to its participants. In other words, Shii rituals are thought to operate almost independently from one’s faith, allowing a degree of fluidity in the way people identify along sectarian lines.

### Shii religious life in Lahore Contd...

If fulfilled, a vow may be ‘returned’ at a later date, usually by distributing thanksgiving in the form of food among processionists, or by offering money to the patron of the procession. The procession itself is sometimes propitiatory: the second largest in Lahore for instance is said to have originated in the early 1920s as a remedy for a particularly severe epidemic.

In important ways, it is the imputed efficacy of these vows that accounts for the popularity of processions, as well as for the participation of Sunni Muslims and Christians, although their presence is dwindling nowadays. Non-Shias petitioning Hussein and his relatives are in fact said to have their wishes fulfilled more easily.

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Aside from extolling the virtues of the Imams, these stories are also meant to suggest that one does not need to subscribe to Shii doctrine to experience the effectiveness of these vows or to participate in processions. In other words, Shii rituals are thought to operate almost independently from one’s faith, allowing a degree of fluidity in the way people identify along sectarian lines. However this open-endedness may well be fast eroding as Deobandi militant groups intensify their attacks on such rituals.

This intercessory component of popular Shii piety directly connects with the dominant Barelwi (or Sufi) forms of religiosity found in Pakistan. The point of convergence is particularly evident in the domain of charismatic relations of religious authority. The popularity of spiritual masters among my Shii informants is quite striking and manifests itself in diverse ways. While some vow allegiance to a particular master or to a living saint (*murshid*), the majority simply consults a spiritual guide (*pir*) on an ad-hoc basis for issues ranging from bad fortune to matrimonial disputes to spirit possession. The noticeable differences between Shii and Barelwi masters are that the former resort to the *ahl-e-bait* as intercessory agents and are frequently associated with Shii places of worship (*imambargahs*).

Until his death in 2011, Bawa Sada Hussein Bukhari was perhaps Lahore’s most eminent and controversial Shii spiritual master. Divergent accounts of his life seem to coincide on a few points:

**Another issue centers on the practice of *tabarra*, the ritual cursing of the Imams’ archenemies, some of whom are held in high esteem by Sunni Muslims. While this practice is rarely performed, especially in the presence of non-Shias, Bawa Sada’s followers are accused of performing it inconsiderately, thereby creating discord. Some Shias contend that this attitude gives ammunition to the anti-Shii extremist groups operating in the country. Hence Bawa Sada is sometimes thought to have been an ‘agent’ of the CIA or India’s secret services, since sectarian strife is often understood to be the work of external enemies as part of their strategy to undermine Islam.**

born in a Punjabi village prior to partition, and an ascetic since his childhood, Bawa Sada sought religious education in Iraq, where he also served at the shrine of Imam Ali. He was then instructed in a dream to return to his homeland to spread the truth. Back in Punjab, he ardently defended Shii rituals, going to villages on horseback with his followers to perform *matam* in Sunni strongholds and actively proselytising among the rural poor. He is also remembered for having given a distinctly Shii colour to one of Pakistan’s largest Sufi festival (Sehwan Sharif) and for establishing a large *imambargah* in the northern outskirts of Lahore. His son inherited the mantle and runs the *imambargah* which attracts Lahoris as well as thousands of rural devotees during Muharam.

The case of Bawa Sada is particularly interesting insofar as his followers are representatives, albeit in a radical form, of the dominant Shii sensibility in the region. At the same time they also draw severe criticism from Sunni Muslims as well as from the urban middle- and upper-class sections of the Shii community.

This dominant Shii sensibility is commonly known, among Shias, as *malang*, or *matami malang*. In its narrow sense, the term *malang* in Punjab designates a religious mendicant. In its Shii sense, it can be used more loosely to convey the idea that one is more concerned with divine love and the esoteric realm than with adherence to orthopraxis and the sharia. The reformist stance on the other hand is known as *namazi* (‘someone who performs his daily prayers’) or, from an explicitly *malang* perspective, as *shia wahabbi* and *maulvism*.

The condemnations emanating from *namazi* Shias bear the mark of reformist thought and centre on the near-divine powers allegedly attributed to Imam Ali and the *ahl-e-bait* by the *malangs*, as well as the latter’s mode of worship. In particular, the *namazis* reprove of the apparent precedence given to the public performance of *matam* over daily prayers (*namaz*), and the excessive acts of deference towards spiritual masters and ritual icons. For them, the likes of Bawa Sada indulge in innovations, associationism and anthropomorphism, all of which threaten the fundamental imperative of *tauhid*, divine oneness.

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**Sunni preachers may deliver sermons through loudspeakers to eulogize Hussein's archenemies when a Shii procession approaches, as was apparently the case with the Rawalpindi incident last Muharram. Sectarian clashes are not triggered by abstract disputes over the notion of the Caliphate and the Imamate, but through acts deemed disrespectful towards the material forms that make these theological differences manifest.**

### Patters of violence and political representation

The rise in sectarian violence in Pakistan over the last decade has led to numerous studies on the relationship between the Taliban, militant sectarian outfits and the state and its implications in terms of national security. This focus however sometimes obscures the everyday dynamics of inter-sect relations. Notwithstanding sporadic target killings and a suicide-attack on a procession in 2010, sectarian confrontations in Lahore are rare. They did occur on a large scale however during Muharram in 1963 and 1986, and each time followed a similar sequence, which is also discernable in instances of sectarian clashes throughout the province.

The first point of contention during Muharram processions concerns material symbols of sectarian affiliation. Tied to eclectic poles and buildings, specific billboards are seen conspicuously hanging above the streets along procession routes. Shias consider these boards insulting as they bear the names of what Sunnis regard as the 'righteous four friends' (the first four caliphs of Islam), to whom Shias oppose the twelve Imams and the 'five pure ones' (*the ahl-e-bait*). Together with the canopy of electrical cables that hangs across the streets, these boards sometimes impede the smooth transport of the ritual icons carried in Shii processions. Some consider that having the procession passing below them amounts to an acquiescence to the genealogy inscribed thereon. Historically, the physical constraints impacting upon the transport of sacred icons have been at the centre of communal violence across South Asia, and a sectarian confrontation involving religious billboards was recorded as early as the seventeenth century in Lahore.

More problematic however is the question of precedence between the call to prayer (*azan*) and the performance of *matam*. Shias believe that Hussein's sacrifice at Karbala is cardinal to Islam, and that expressing one's commitment to his cause is paramount. For *malang* Shias, self-flagellation is precisely testimony to this commitment. At the same time, Muslims of all persuasions in Pakistan regard the *azan* as sacrosanct, sometimes more than the prayer itself: music is generally turned down, and all reprehensible activities momentarily suspended. Problems emerge when a Shii procession passes next to a (Sunni) mosque emitting the *azan*. Although police authorities are very careful in regulating the exact itinerary and timing of processions, the performance of *matam* and the Sunni *azan* sometimes coincide in the same locale. Confrontation generally ensues from a refusal on the part of processionists to suspend their self-flagellation and let the *azan* resound. Likewise Sunni preachers may deliver sermons through loudspeakers to eulogize Hussein's archenemies when a Shii procession approaches, as was apparently the case with the Rawalpindi incident last Muharram. Sectarian clashes are not triggered by abstract disputes over the notion of the Caliphate and the Imamate, but through acts deemed disrespectful towards the material forms that make these theological differences manifest. The affective

**The strategy adopted by most of my Shii interlocutors consists in supporting known Shii politicians, irrespective of their party affiliation, in the hope of gaining a degree of access to public resources and protection. According to them, the MWM is a useful Shii platform for the organizations of protests rather than a viable political party. Composed predominantly of iranianized clerics, the MWM is also suspected by many Shias of receiving direct support from Iran.**

attachment to these tangible and audible forms, as well as their temporal and spatial situatedness are not all there is to sectarian confrontations, but they nevertheless constitute a critical dimension of these phenomena. Recognizing this allows us to gain a better understanding of the way in which identities based on sect can be mobilized but also made inconsequential and less discernible in other contexts. However while billboards, the *azan* and *matam* were traditionally the catalyst for communal confrontations involving familiar rivals, target killings and explosions have added an element of unpredictability and a heightened sense of danger to these public rituals.

The killing of over eighty Shii Hazaras in an explosion in Quetta in February 2013, followed soon after by the target assassination of a Shia doctor and his son in Lahore led to important demonstrations in the city. The Majlis-e-Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM), a recently formed Shii political organisation, arranged a large protest outside the Governor's House. Men and women, mostly Shias, sat on different sections of the road facing a stage where political leaders, clerics and a few representatives of civil society organisations addressed the angry crowd. 'Labeik ya Hussein!' — Here at your service Hussein — was the resounding slogan.

Whereas civil society representatives stressed the existence of fraternal bonds between sects and the need for these denominations to be subsumed under a common Pakistani identity, Shii clerics and leaders emphasized the 'sacrifices' that Shias had made for their country since its inception. Surprisingly for an outsider, they strongly denounced the killing of Shias yet never named the groups orchestrating these acts of violence — the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and its avatars for instance. When I asked some participants why this was case, I was told that everybody knew who 'they' referred to. The United States, on the other hand, were openly vilified. As a matter of fact the MWM was at the forefront of the nation-wide protests against the controversial American film on Islam in 2012. Anti-Americanism seems to be the mainstay of its political rhetoric, which may seem quite at odds with the challenges facing Pakistan Shias nowadays. The votes of Pakistani Shias, who traditionally supported the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on account of the Bhutto family's Shii leanings, are now dispersed between the three main national parties (PPP, PLM-N, PTI). As for the MWM, it fared rather poorly in the last general elections. The strategy adopted by most of my Shii interlocutors consists in supporting known Shii politicians, irrespective of their party affiliation, in the hope of gaining a degree of access to public resources and protection. According to them, the MWM is a useful Shii platform for the organizations of protests rather than a viable political party. Composed predominantly of iranianized clerics, the MWM is also suspected by many Shias of receiving direct support from Iran. Again, the rift between so-called *malangs* and *namazi* Shias translates in a certain disconnect whereby Shias of a *malang* sensibility feel underrepresented in Shii religio-political organizations.

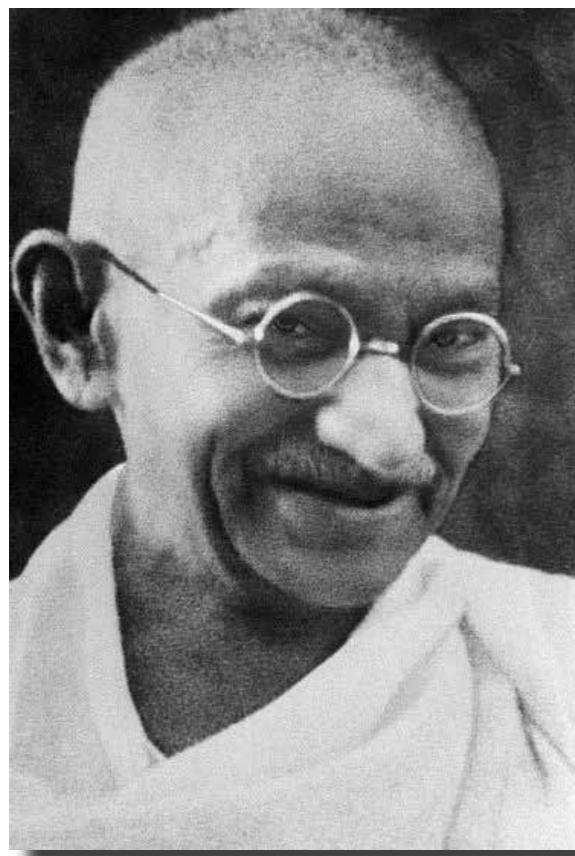
**The prevalence of a traditionalist sensibility raises important questions concerning the role of the ulama and the presumed influence of transnational clerical networks in shaping the theological and political orientations of Shias in Pakistan. The vitality of local heterodox practices must be understood as the complex outcome of the crosscutting political and ideological trends at play in the country over the last three decades.**

## Conclusion

In this brief overview of Lahore's Shi'i community I have sought to highlight some of dominant trends that characterize popular Shi'i piety in the region. In doing so I argue that Shiism in Pakistan should not be discussed solely in terms of 'sectarianism' and that attention must be paid to the changing attitudes among Pakistani Shias with respect to reformist movements. The prevalence of a traditionalist sensibility raises important questions concerning the role of the ulama and the presumed influence of transnational clerical networks in shaping the theological and political orientations of Shias in Pakistan. The vitality of local heterodox practices must be understood as the complex outcome of the crosscutting political and ideological trends at play in the country over the last three decades. At the same time the escalating levels of violence and the preponderance of the reformist stance among the Shi'i elite may lead to transformations that are difficult to predict. While processionists seem determined to carry on displaying their unflinching commitment to public rituals, a cross-section of the urban middle- and upper-classes of all sects now argues that confining *azadari* rituals to private spaces would perhaps be the best way to prevent further violence.

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## Mahatma Gandhi and Dilip Kumar Roy **Fateful Days**

Photograph: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait\\_Gandhi.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_Gandhi.jpg)

With *Hindutva* being again on the ascendant curve, occupying India's prime politico-ideological space, it would not be out of place to recall the predicament of Mahatma Gandhi and the animosity dogging his prayer meetings in Delhi in the immediate aftermath of Independence. People, by and large, were seething with anger with the Congress and, particularly, with Gandhi, for they felt that they had supinely acquiesced, if not treacherously engineered, the partitioned freedom that had left a gory trail of massacres and sufferings for millions of people.

Jawaharlal Nehru admitted to Krishna Menon, his friend, "The partition business has excited Hindus tremendously and their wrath has turned against the Congress which is supposed to be guilty of agreeing to this partition." Many opined that but for the numbing shock thrown upon the nation's conscience by Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, the forces representing *Hindutva* would have gained momentum at the expense of the Congress.

Dilip Kumar Roy, son of the legendary Bengali poet, composer and playwright, Dwijendralal Roy, drew a graphic pen-picture of what was happening at the Mahatma's prayer meetings in Delhi in those fateful days in his book, '*Among The Great*' Aside from being a reputed writer, Roy was a gifted singer about whom Gandhi wrote, "...though I am no connoisseur of music I may make bold to claim that very few persons in India—or rather in the world—have a voice like his, so rich, sweet and intense." Besides, he was a dearly loved disciple of Sri Aurobindo and a very intimate friend of Subhas Chandra Bose.

Roy met the Mahatma several times, beginning from Poona where the latter was convalescing then at a government hospital following appendicitis surgery in February 1924. And the final one happened in the last week of October 1947 in Delhi—just three months before the Mahatma fell to the assassin's bullets. Roy attended the prayer meetings for three consecutive days from 29 October. He sang songs, overwhelming the Mahatma and all others present. Yet, he felt an ominous strain of foreboding, hanging palpably in the air. People, at least a section of them, present at the prayer meetings, were in no mood to countenance Gandhi 'inflicting' Quran verses on them.



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilipkumar\\_Roy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilipkumar_Roy)  
Personal collection of Prithwindra Mukherjee  
Courtesy: Milan Sen

"Next evening I arrived at the Birla House a good quarter of an hour before time. The audience was even more impressive than on the evening of my first visit, but the atmosphere was disquieting. I was told that someone had registered an objection to Quran verses being inflicted on a predominantly Hindu audience and so it was on the cards that Gandhiji might not be holding the prayer at all. They pointed out to me the trouble-maker: it was a Sikh stalwart with white beard and sombre face. As I fixed him with my gaze he looked up and our eyes met. Instantly he hoisted himself out of his seat and almost ran up to me in a breathless state.

'Sir!' he roared angrily. 'You are a sadhu and so must adjudicate. I appeal to you on bended knees to be fair. Tell me, is it right to foist on us, the Hindus, verses from the scriptures of those who have massacred us ruthlessly, desecrated our homes... Won't it be a slur on our honour and our manhood to have to listen after all this to this abomination...'

I restrained him in the middle of his fiery speech. 'But be quiet, my kind sir,' I demurred.

'But why shouldn't I?' he flashed back. 'I came here to hear Mahatmaji, not Quran verses.'

'But you knew he insists on reading the Quran verses. So the better course for you would have been to stay away since you feel as you do...' Then placing hand on his shoulder, I added: 'You will at least hear me sing the name of God, won't you?'

'I'd love to, provided you do not bring in the Muslim God.'

I couldn't help but laugh and answered: 'But there is only one God, you know.'

'I do,' he returned, 'but...'

'Calm yourself, my friend,' I replied helplessly; then I asked him to take his seat, adding that I was going to sing of Krishna.



**Gandhi's view of India's composite nationalism was invincible. It remained unshaken to the very end despite momentous challenges thrown to it from time to time in course of the sub-continent's tumultuous communal history. "I have not lost hope that I shall live to see real unity established between not only Hindus and Muslims but all the communities that make India a nation...All those who were born in this country and claim her as their motherland, whether they be Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, Jains or Sikhs, are equally her children and are, therefore, brothers, united together with a bond stronger than that of blood," he stated.**

His face brightened. 'Splendid' he cried. 'And I'll listen the whole night..."'

But Roy was singularly unconvinced of the efficacy of the Gandhian shibboleths. "It was worse than useless to attempt what was exceedingly difficult –the reconciling of irreconcilables- by a means which almost guaranteed failure...Anyone who could feel the pulse of the country knew-which the newspapers tried desperately to hide-that the Hindus have been growing restive all over India.

Also I wondered how Mahatmaji could have lost sight of this simple fact that where love was intense it turned into hatred almost overnight when frustrated or thwarted. It was evident that those who had come to hear him loved him, but that was precisely why they all felt so bitter against him for having let them down for no reason they could discover," he wrote.

Yet, at the same time, Roy could not help being moved by the Mahatma, ploughing his lonely furrows in the wasteland of communally frenzied India. "When I left him, my eyes were moist with tears. I was moved by him as never before. And though I tried hard, I could not shake off the suggestion that I would never see him again."

Gandhi's view of India's composite nationalism was invincible. It remained unshaken to the very end despite momentous challenges thrown to it from time to time in course of the sub-continent's tumultuous communal history. "I have not lost hope that I shall live to see real unity established between not only Hindus and Muslims but all the communities that make India a nation...All those who were born in this country and claim her as their motherland, whether they be Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, Jains or Sikhs, are equally her children and are, therefore, brothers, united together with a bond stronger than that of blood," he stated.

But the problem is that he could do nothing when communalism of both varieties-Hindu and Muslim, running counter to the Gandhian axioms, came to the fore, save for mouthing lofty, yet ineffectual platitudes and for banking helplessly, pathetically on the good sense of the belligerent communities- bent on slitting each other's throats in the name of their respective religions.

Roy was deeply worried about the Mahatma too. "The reason was this. Some years ago, somebody in our Ashram (at Pondicherry) had seen a prophetic vision...The vision was not concocted after the event; it had been published in the 1920s in a well-known (Bengali) book entitled 'Unapanchasi' whose author, a celebrated writer and a quondam disciple of Sri Aurobindo, is noted as a man of keen intellect and great integrity of character...The vision he had recorded was that directly after the liberation of India from the foreign yoke a very eminent man 'in white homespun' would be shot

dead in a public meeting. As I heard his (Gandhi's) address (at the prayer meetings) I could not dismiss the vision," Roy wrote.

Gandhi, aware as he was of his helplessness, looked melancholy personified those ominous days. "...I had a feeling that with all his brave attempts to hide it, he was weary to the bones...world-weary and...longing for sleep," Roy recounted.

When the news of the assassination came just three months after the final meeting Roy was giving a lecture-demonstration on Indian and Western melodies at Calcutta University. "The meeting was dissolved and a boy went hysterical. Gloom descended on us all. On my way back home I was struck by a coincidence: the song I had composed and was going to sing was a mystic dialogue between Mother and Child:

I will now sleep in thy love's deep  
And toy no more with things that pall.  
I have at last heard thy far call."



## Healing from the Other Side

Standing in front of the room I looked out at over a hundred people in the community as I prepared for my first a large public Psychic Medium workshop. It was interesting to watch the openness of the participants. I have given intuitive readings as a part of my private practice and international business for many years. It was surprising though to see this crowd in the conservative city of Spokane, Washington. It was even more surprising to know we had booked a room that would not hold everyone and there was a waiting list.

Having worked as a mental health and chemical dependency counselor for over 30 years, I was a little apprehensive coming out as a psychic. Yet, here I was. My eyes viewed the audience from right to left and I began to get a sense of who I would read. One woman's energy pulled me in and when I looked at her face I heard a yes from my guides. I asked her, "is there someone you want me to talk to that crossed over?" As soon as I said that she appeared shocked and said "my son."

I went inward and connected with her son and I got a sense that something was off. There was a miscommunication I heard from him. I saw him as a bright light and full of love. I looked at her and asked how he died. She said it was suicide. I immediately knew that was wrong. I could feel the experience he had when he died in my body. I began to shake and my lungs felt like I couldn't breathe. I sensed that his lungs collapsed. Immediately I heard the words that he had a seizure and his lungs collapsed.

I went back and I looked at him on the other side again and he was this bright light and not at all like someone who had been depressed or committed suicide. As I communicated with him, he shared that he had planned to incarnate for a period of time on this planet, but had not planned to stay. He shared with me that he had completed his special purpose and that and his life had been incredible.

This young man was in his late 20's and he was ready to exit. When I told her this, the woman looked at me and she just started crying and she shook her head yes! She knew deep in her heart that she found the truth.

At that moment I had clear insight! I understood that what happened for this woman in a few minutes could've taken years of therapy. It was incredible for this woman to understand the truth about her son and shift her confusion to understanding he didn't kill himself. Now she could heal her grief. Although I've been hesitant to totally come out as a psychic medium, I understand now this gift, when shared, can help people in a powerful way I never understood before.

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