

Live encounters

April 2013

Free online magazine from village earth



Mama, don't cut my vagina!

Female Genital Mutilation
upto 180,000,000 children/women affected



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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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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas

Publisher/Editor

Live Encounters Magazine

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Live
encounters

April 2013

**"You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body,
but you will never imprison my mind." - Mahatma Gandhi**

Dear Readers,

Where is this world heading to when Pharma corporations profit from the pain of diseased folk, women mutilate the vaginas of their own daughters and many of us are led like lambs by insidious governments? Fortunately there are still people out there to guide, educate and enlighten humanity, to save it from itself. This is best described by *Chris Hedges* in his column in this issue titled, *How to Think...*

"Artists, writers, poets, activists, journalists, philosophers, dancers, musicians, actors, directors and renegades must be tolerated if a culture is to be pulled back from disaster. Members of this intellectual and artistic class, who are usually not welcome in the stultifying halls of academia where mediocrity is triumphant, serve as prophets. They are dismissed, or labeled by the power elites as subversive, because they do not embrace collective self-worship. They force us to confront unexamined assumptions, ones that, if not challenged, lead to destruction. They expose the ruling elites as hollow and corrupt. They articulate the senselessness of a system built on the ideology of endless growth, ceaseless exploitation and constant expansion. They warn us about the poison of careerism and the futility of the search for happiness in the accumulation of wealth"

Kindly pass this magazine onto everyone you know and help in the spread of knowledge.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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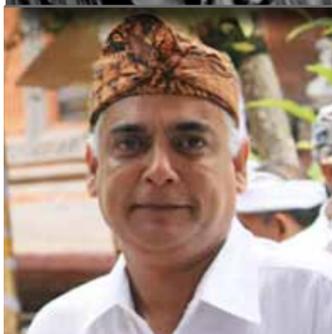
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Profiting from Pain - Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab takes on Roche in India

Kalyani Menon-Sen

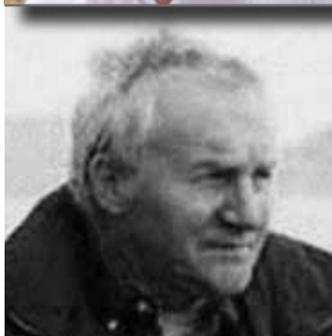
She is a feminist researcher and activist whose work explores the impacts of neoliberal economic policies on women. Menon-Sen has contributed to critiques of urbanisation policies in India and is closely involved with struggles against eviction and dispossession of the working poor in Delhi. She has written and campaigned extensively on issues of violence against women, particularly state violence and its linkage with economic policies. Email: kmenonsen@gmail.com <http://feministsindia.com/>



Mama, don't cut my vagina - female genital mutilation - when will it stop?

Mark Ulyseas

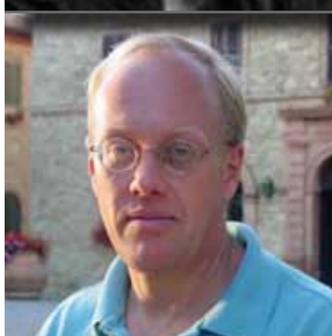
FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.



Nothing's Fair

Terry McDonagh

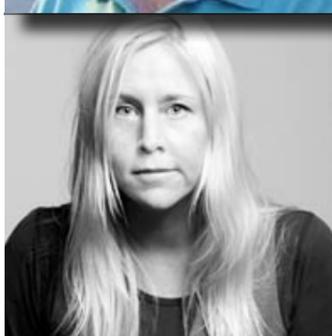
Irish poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the Int. School Hamburg for 15 years. He now works freelance; has been writer in residence in Europe, Asia, Australia; published seven poetry collections, book of letters, prose and 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



How to Think

Chris Hedges - This article was first published on Truthdig

Chris Hedges was a foreign correspondent for the New York Times and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, and his War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Nonfiction. Hedges is a senior fellow at the Nation Institute, a columnist for Truthdig, and the Anschutz Distinguished Fellow at Princeton University. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.



Catherine Jane Birch, Author of Koro in a candid interview with Live Encounters

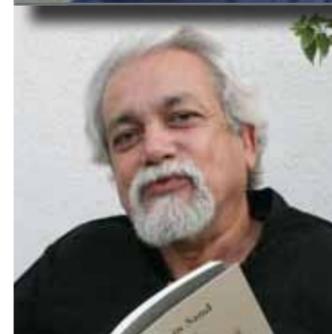
CJ Birch was born on the 13th July 1972 in Harare, Zimbabwe, to an English father and a South African mother. She was given the name Catherine Jane and became an inquisitive little girl. From an early age she was captured by the question of life and spent many hours in nature, watching the world at work. She began writing at the age of 5. She lives in Switzerland with her husband and her son. www.cjbirch.com



Faith and Religion

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. <http://divyadaan.in>



Magic in stone - Prehistoric rock carvings in Goa

Randhir Khare

Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. Executive Editor of Heritage India, the International Culture Journal, a Director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy and Visiting Professor to the Dept Of English, Pune University. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures. www.randhirkhare.in



Ancient Food Forges Arab-Jewish Friendships

Natalie Wood

Born in Birmingham, England, U.K., Natalie Wood began working in journalism a month before the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. She remained in regional Jewish journalism for more than 20 years, leaving full-time writing to help run a family business and then completed a range of general office work. Natalie Wood and her husband, Brian Fink emigrated from Manchester to Israel in March 2010 and live in Karmiel, Galilee where she continues to work from home, concentrating on creative writing. She features in *Smith Magazine's new Six Word Memoirs On Jewish Life*. Natalie Wood also contributes to *Technorati*, *Blogcritics* and *Live Encounters magazine*. Read her stories at <http://www.perfectlywritefamilytales.blogspot.com> and her general journalism at <http://www.alwayswriteagain.blogspot.com>.



Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. We stand with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice. We investigate and expose human rights violations and hold abusers accountable. <http://www.hrw.org>



Entering Trance for Self-Healing

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



Trastuzumab (marketed as Herceptin or Herclon) is a monoclonal antibody that directly attacks the HER2 protein and has a dramatic impact in terms of reducing recurrence and increasing survival for women with HER2+ breast cancer.

Profiting from Pain

Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab takes on Roche in India

an exclusive by

Kalyani Menon-Sen

Feminist researcher and women's rights activist who lives and works in Delhi, India. She coordinates the *Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab*, which is demanding compulsory licensing and ensured access to this life-saving drug through the public health system.

About 100,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year, of whom 25,000 are HER2+ type - National Cancer Registry.

Trastuzumab (marketed as Herceptin or Herclon) is a monoclonal antibody that directly attacks the HER2 protein and has a dramatic impact in terms of reducing recurrence and increasing survival for women with HER2+ breast cancer. Herceptin was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2006 as treatment for all HER2+ breast cancers.

Preeti Yadav is 53 years old and lives in Mumbai with her only son, a young man who has just started his first job with a small IT company. Suman Mehta is 45, the wife of a successful architect whose lavish home on the outskirts of Delhi has been featured several times in lifestyle magazines. Krishna Mukherji is 39, works in a women's NGO in Delhi and lives in a tiny tin-roofed room in a working-class settlement. Rukmini Shankar is 39, a dance teacher who lives with her ailing father, a retired civil servant, in Chennai.¹

Very different women, yet linked by a thread of pain. Preeti, Suman, Krishna and Rukmini are all fighting breast cancer, now the most common form of cancer among urban Indian women and the second most common cancer in rural India. One fourth of all women cancer patients in India today suffer from breast cancer.² Official statistics suggest that one out of every 22 Indian women is likely to get breast cancer during her lifetime. Mortality rates are high – according to the Association of Breast Surgeons of India, one Indian woman succumbs to breast cancer every ten minutes.

Preeti, Suman, Krishna and Rukmini all have the aggressive and fast-growing HER2+ variant of breast cancer, in which the cancer cells over-produce the growth-promoting protein HER2/neu. HER2+ cancers also have a higher chance of recurrence than other forms. According to data from the National Cancer Registry, about 100,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year, of whom 25,000 are the HER2+ type.³

Official data also show some extremely worrying trends.⁴ Breast cancer is becoming more common among women in the 30-40 age group, who are at the peak of their productive years. Younger women are showing a higher incidence of aggressive HER2+ breast cancer. Almost half of all breast cancer patients in India contact a doctor only when the disease is in a late stage. As a result, only 60% of women with breast cancer are expected to survive more than five years, as compared to the US, where the five-year survival rate for women with breast cancer is now 89%.

Trastuzumab (marketed as Herceptin or Herclon) is a monoclonal antibody that directly attacks the HER2 protein and has a dramatic impact in terms of reducing recurrence and increasing survival for women with HER2+ breast cancer. Herceptin was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in 2006 as treatment for all HER2+ breast cancers. It has far fewer immediate side effects than chemotherapy - there is usually no nausea or hair loss. Given the dramatic reduction in rates of recurrence⁵ and despite the small but real risk of heart damage and possible lung damage, Trastuzumab has been hailed as a miracle drug.

Why is Trastuzumab so expensive? Roche, the Swiss pharma giant that holds the patent for the drug, isn't telling. Neither is Genentech, the company that developed Herceptin (and was subsequently bought over by Roche). The standard explanation is that developing a new biotherapeutic product is a time-consuming, costly, and inherently risky endeavor. Hundreds of thousands of candidate compounds must be screened to identify a handful of potential drugs.

Preeti, Suman, Krishna and Rukmini have all been offered treatment with Herceptin, which sells in India for around US\$1500 a dose. The full course of 12 doses costs anything from US\$15,000 to 18,000 – out of reach for all but the wealthiest of Indians. Preeti's son for instance earns the equivalent of US\$500 a month. Krishna's salary is even lower. Rukmini's father, who retired at a fairly senior level, has a pension of around US\$1000 a month.¹

Rukmini is lucky – since she is single and lives with her father, he can claim the costs of her treatment from the government health scheme to which he, as a former civil servant, is entitled. Krishna was able to get her health insurance to cover her surgery and a single dose of Trastuzumab - her friends rallied round and raised the money to pay for the rest of her treatment. Suman and her husband are wealthy enough to pay for her treatment at a high-end private hospital. Preeti's son is still trying to find the money for his mother's treatment. His employers have refused his request for a loan. Paying for surgery and regular chemotherapy has exhausted his savings and he does not know where to turn for help.

Suman, Rukmini and Krishna are among the fortunate few Indian women who have been able to get Trastuzumab. An oncologist at the Tata Memorial Cancer Centre, India's leading cancer treatment facility, has been quoted as saying that less than 10% of the patients he sees are able to afford Trastuzumab at all, and even fewer are able to complete the recommended course of 12 injections.²

The mystery of drug pricing

Why is Trastuzumab so expensive? Roche, the Swiss pharma giant that holds the patent for the drug, isn't telling. Neither is Genentech, the company that developed Herceptin (and was subsequently bought over by Roche).

The standard explanation is that developing a new biotherapeutic product is a time-consuming, costly, and inherently risky endeavor. Hundreds of thousands of candidate compounds must be screened to identify a handful of potential drugs. Even fewer of these candidate drugs are found to be effective at treating a disease. The drug must then pass strict safety standards in several clinical trials. According to the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America's 2006 Pharmaceutical Industry Profile, developing a new drug and bringing it to the market takes up to 10 to 15 years and on average costs \$800 million.³

¹ Names changed to protect confidentiality.

² Data from National Cancer Registry.

³ American Cancer Society. Breast cancer facts and figures 2011-2012. [LINK](#)

⁴ [LINK](#)

⁵ "Breast cancer facts and figures 2011-2012", American Cancer Society. [LINK](#)

¹ All prices converted from Indian rupees (INR). A standard value of 1 USD = 50 INR has been used for calculations in order to facilitate comparisons. Actual exchange rates have fluctuated between INR 50 and INR 55 to 1 USD for the period under discussion.

² See for instance an interview with the husband of a cancer survivor who describes his experiences in accessing Trastuzumab. [LINK](#)

³ [LINK](#)

In fact, the billion dollar price tag for new drugs has been recently challenged by none other than the CEO of pharma giant Glaxo Smith Kline. Calling it one of “the great myths of the industry”, he pointed out that the cost calculation includes the cost of failed drugs. According to him, the rate of return on R&D investment has gone up by as much as 30% in recent years because fewer drugs have flopped in late-stage testing. Given these figures, it is more than likely that the costs of development of Herceptin have been recovered several times over – first by Genentech and then by Roche.

The mystery of drug pricing (*continued*)

Sounds plausible? Yes, in general terms. However, deeper digging into the specifics might tell a different story. Let’s look at the arithmetic for Herceptin.

Herceptin was approved by the FDA in 1998. The Genentech balance sheet shows that Herceptin brought in US\$ 1287 million for Genentech in 2007¹, the year that it was taken over by Roche. Since then, Herceptin has been swelling the Roche coffers – along with two other cancer drugs Avastin and Rituxan, Herceptin has accounted for 32% of Roche’s total revenue for at least five years. The money Roche has earned from Herceptin is therefore likely to be several times more than the upper figure of \$800 million quoted for the cost of development. We should also take into account the hidden public funding that goes into drug development by corporates – for instance, clinical trials and supplementary research are usually carried out in hospitals and laboratories that are supported by public grants.

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Herceptin is priced differently in different countries. In the US, a full course costs around US\$70,000. Australia successfully negotiated the price down to A\$50,000 for a full course. In South Africa, the cost is around R23,000 (US\$ 3,000) for a single dose. At US\$18,000 for a full course, Herceptin is probably cheapest in India – a fact that is well known to doctors and patients in other countries. For instance, oncologists in a leading hospital in Kenya routinely advise women with HER2+ breast cancer to go to India for treatment³. A South African woman with HER2+ breast cancer is seriously considering relocated to Mumbai to get Herceptin at a private hospital – flying in once a month as she has been doing for the last several months is proving too expensive⁴.

1 [LINK](#)
 2 GSK CEO on the “\$1 billion for R&D” myth. [LINK](#)
 3 Personal communications to the author from an oncologist in Nairobi Hospital, Kenya (February 2013)
 4 Personal communication to the author.

Roche and other pharma majors see India as an emerging market where a 10-million strong middle-class is rapidly acquiring the ability to pay for targeted ‘designer drugs’ like Herceptin. According to Roche’s head of marketing for Asia and the Middle East, Roche is aiming to win usage rates in India “at least several-fold higher” than today’s levels, while fine-tuning its strategies for other emerging markets. Another spokesman also admitted that Roche was negotiating to avoid “unilateral government action” such as compulsory licensing.

Price cuts in India: calculated moves to protect profits

The fact that Herceptin is cheaper in India than in other countries is no coincidence. In December 2011, Roche announced a “voluntary reduction” of 15% in the price of Herceptin in India, In March 2012, another price cut was announced, this time as the result of a voluntary licensing deal with an Indian generic firm, Emcure Pharma. Under this deal, Emcure is offering a repacked and renamed version of the drug (Herclone) for sale only in India at a price of around US\$1250 per dose – a reduction of around 33% from the original price of US\$1800 for Herceptin.

Far from being motivated by altruism, as Roche is claiming, these price cuts are opening gambits in a long-term strategy to protect profits. Roche’s patent on Herceptin expires in 2019. Since the drug came onto the market in 1995, well before India joined the WTO’s Agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Roche cannot file for a “blocking patent” in India. Voluntary price cuts and the Emcure deal are pre-emptive measures to deflect the possibility of compulsory licensing, an option available to the government under the WTO rules as well as under India’s patent laws. Compulsory licensing allows the production of cheaper copies of patented drugs in cases such as public health emergencies or where the original is priced out of reach of the majority of patients. India exercised this right for the first time in March 2012, forcing German giant Bayer to grant a compulsory license to an Indian company (Natco Pharma) for Nexavar (Sorafenib), a drug used in treatment of liver and kidney cancers. As a result the price of Nexavar, which cost \$5,700 for a month’s supply, came down to less than USD175 a month – a drop of nearly 95%.

Roche’s price cuts and the Emcure deal, following close on the heels of the compulsory licensing for Sorafenib, are described by industry analysts as smart moves to deter generic competition, while simultaneously placating the Indian public by offering them the drug at a somewhat lower price¹. Roche is also trying to “ring-fence” its monopoly by pushing for patents on minor variants of Trastuzumab or combinations of Trastuzumab with other drugs – as many as 15 such patent applications have been filed with four different patent offices in India.

Roche and other pharma majors see India as an emerging market where a 10-million strong middle-class is rapidly acquiring the ability to pay for targeted ‘designer drugs’ like Herceptin. According to Roche’s head of marketing for Asia and the Middle East, Roche is aiming to win usage rates in India “at least several-fold higher” than today’s levels, while fine-tuning its strategies for other emerging markets. Another spokesman also admitted that Roche was negotiating to avoid “unilateral government action” such as compulsory licensing².

1 The Wall Street Journal. 23 March 2012. Roche to cut prices of two cancer drugs in India. [LINK](#)
 2 The Wall Street Journal. 23 March 2012. Roche to cut prices of two cancer drugs in India.

The campaign presented compelling evidence to expose Roche's predatory pricing policy and use of unethical practices to protect its monopoly. For instance, the Emcure deal exploits market segmentation by selling the same drug under two different brand names for different prices – Herceptin (Roche) at US\$2400 per dose, and Herclon (Emcure) for US\$1500 per dose. Moreover, it is rumoured that the Roche-Emcure deal incorporates stringent conditions such as a ceiling on the volume of sales and a minimum “floor level” profit margin. Campaigners have also collected evidence of a nexus between Roche and doctors in private hospitals – patients are being pressurised to buy the drug from the hospital pharmacy at the official price of US\$1500 per dose, rather than from retailers and agents who offer the drug at prices as much as 25% lower.

Price cuts in India: calculated moves to protect profits (*continued*)

In November 2012, Indian activists launched the Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab with a letter to the Prime Minister signed by over 200 cancer survivors, health rights groups, women's groups and human rights groups from India and several other developing countries, demanding compulsory licensing for Trastuzumab. The campaign presented compelling evidence to expose Roche's predatory pricing policy and use of unethical practices to protect its monopoly. For instance, the Emcure deal exploits market segmentation by selling the same drug under two different brand names for different prices – Herceptin (Roche) at US\$2400 per dose, and Herclon (Emcure) for US\$1500 per dose. Moreover, it is rumoured that the Roche-Emcure deal incorporates stringent conditions such as a ceiling on the volume of sales and a minimum “floor level” profit margin. Campaigners have also collected evidence of a nexus between Roche and doctors in private hospitals – patients are being pressurised to buy the drug from the hospital pharmacy at the official price of US\$1500 per dose, rather than from retailers and agents who offer the drug at prices as much as 25% lower. The “discounted” price of US\$1800 at which Herceptin is procured by government entities such as the Indian Railways and the Central Government Health Scheme, is also higher than the price offered by retailers.

The arguments presented by the campaign have been validated by an Expert Committee of the Health Ministry, which has recommended immediate compulsory licensing for Trastuzumab and two other cancer drugs. The recommendation, submitted in February 2013, has been under consideration by the Department of Industrial Policy, the body that is empowered to issue a notification for compulsory licensing. Meanwhile, there are indications that Roche is using its entry to policy circles to counter the threat of compulsory licensing. Even as the Ministry of Health recommends compulsory licensing, another arm of the government, the Department of Pharmaceuticals under Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, has floated a proposal for negotiating with patent holders for bringing down the prices of patented drugs.

The Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab is strongly opposed to negotiated price reductions. Global experience shows clearly that such measures do not result in any significant expansion of access, since prices continue to remain beyond the reach of most citizens. A case in point is Brazil, which tried to use price negotiations with multi-national pharmaceutical companies to bring down the price of patented HIV drugs. As a result, the price of Efavirenz (Merck) came down to US\$760 per person per year in 2003. In contrast, when Efavirenz was brought under compulsory license in 2007, the price came down to USD170 per person per year, which is less than one fourth the negotiated price.²

[LINK](#)

² Nathan Forda, David Wilsona, Gabriela Costa Chaves, Michel Lotrowskab and Kannikar Kijtiwatchakula. 2007. Sustaining access to antiretroviral therapy in the less-developed world: lessons from Brazil and Thailand. *AIDS* 2007 21 (supplement 4) pages 521-529.

The stakes are high, and the possibility of compulsory licensing has created panic among big pharma and its patrons across the world. In the US, the Secretary of Commerce made no bones about the fact that “any dilution of the international patent regime is a cause of deep concern for the US”. The Deputy Director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, Teresa Rea, pushed for strong-arm tactics to bully Indian generic manufacturers. According to a Huffington Post investigative report on a Congressional hearing, Ms. Rea “repeatedly castigated India's government for approving generic drugs, calling the move an egregious violation of WTO regulations and admitted to “personally engaging “various agencies of the Indian government” in efforts to knock down the compulsory licence for Nexavar.

Similarly, a donor-supported process of negotiated price decreases in Central America and the Caribbean in 2002 brought prices of HIV drugs down to US\$1100-1600 per patient per year. In contrast, 10 Latin American countries independently adopted an open competition-based model involving both generic manufacturers and originator companies, resulting in prices coming down from US\$5000 to US\$400 per patient per year.¹ Apart from yielding only limited benefits, time-consuming price negotiations with pharma companies can delay action on more rational options such as compulsory licensing, thereby putting thousands of lives at risk. The Government of Thailand, which began issuing compulsory licences in 2007, noted that “Prior negotiation with the patent holders is not an effective measure and only delays the improvement in access to patented essential medicines and puts more lives in less healthy or even dangerous situations.”

What is more, negotiated price reductions will be applicable only in India – a biosimilar of Trastuzumab from Indian manufacturers on the other hand has the potential for a global impact and can expand access to this life-saving drug across the developing world. India's scientific and technical capacity in the biotechnology sector is well recognised. The announcement of a compulsory licence for Trastuzumab will encourage local pharma firms to step up their investments in ongoing research projects for biosimilar development, and will facilitate the speedy entry of biosimilars into the market. In a related development, a global group of health activists has moved the WHO for the inclusion of Trastuzumab in the WHO's Model List of Essential Medicines for early stage breast cancer and metastatic cancers. The official submission which lays down the rationale for qualifying Trastuzumab as an essential medicine has been endorsed by reviewers. If accepted, this would be a powerful lever for making Trastuzumab affordable and widely available in developing countries.

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¹ J Fitzgerald and B Gomez. 2003. An Open Competition Model for Regional Price Negotiations Yields Lowest ARV Prices in the Americas. Presentation to the 8th World STI/AIDS Congress, Punta del Este (Uruguay), December 2 – 5, 2003.

² The Burrill Report. Marie Daghlian. US protests India's compulsory licence for Nexavar. 30 March 2012. [LINK](#)

³ Huffington Post. Obama's global health policy undercuts reform at home. 7 October 2012. [LINK](#)

PROFITING FROM PAIN

Recent decisions by India's Intellectual Property Appellate Board upholding the compulsory licence for Nexavar and revoking the patent for a Hepatitis-C drug (pegylated interferon Alpha 2A) have dealt a major blow to big pharma's plans. These decisions have been applauded and welcomed by health rights groups and public interest groups around the world, for whom they are an assurance of India's political will to resist arm-twisting by pharma MNCs.

Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz has warned developing countries engaging in trade negotiations not to underestimate the influence of corporations on policy-making in the US. Pharma MNCs are closely involved in closed-door negotiations with the Obama administration to shape mechanisms such as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership that the US is pushing with members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum. "The objective [of drug companies] is to make profit" he said in a recent interview. "The way they do this is to make you pay high prices even though the basic research is paid for by the American government."¹

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As this article goes to press, the breaking news is that a generic drug manufacturer, BDR Pharma, has applied to the Mumbai patent office for a compulsory licence for Sprycel (Dasatinib), another cancer drug, on the grounds of its high pricing and consequent "non-availability" to patients who need it. The patent for Sprycel, which currently sells at US\$3,000 for a month's dose, is held by Bristol-Myers-Squibb. In its application, BDR Pharma has quoted a price of US\$160 for the generic version it seeks to produce - a price reduction of more than 95%.²

When India amended its patent laws in 2005 to make them TRIPS-compliant, the government assured Parliament that it had built in enough safeguards to protect the interests of consumers by ensuring availability of medicines at affordable prices.³ Thousands of women battling HER+ breast cancer - and some Indian generic drug manufacturers - are waiting eagerly to see the Government of India deliver on that promise.

For more information on the **Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab**, see [LINK](#) and **Don't Trade Our Lives Away** [LINK](#)

1 The Nation, Thailand. 19 March 2013. Stiglitz: Avoid mistakes of the West. [LINK](#)
2 Times of India, 19 March 2013. Mumbai company seeks cancer drug licence. [LINK](#)
3 'ENOUGH SAFEGUARDS IN PATENTS ACT TO PREVENT PRICE RISE', Press Release, Ministry of Commerce, 04 April 2005, [LINK](#)



What is the government waiting for?

This is compiled from data released by UN Organizations, NGOs and the Media.



Mama, don't cut my vagina!

Female Genital Mutilation

an overview by Mark Ulyseas



Writhing in pain, a young girl undergoes female circumcision in Mt Elgon. © <http://www.abeingo.org> [LINK](#)

Grandmothers, mothers and women from the community are the perpetrators because they, victims of FGM, assume it is a tradition that must be followed. The cycle of mutilation continues...

Procedure - Without anaesthetic.

FGM is performed with scissors, razor blades, broken glass, a piece of sharpened bamboo or tin can lids. And in modern clinics, too!

Until the 1950s, FGM was performed in England and the United States as a common "treatment" for lesbianism, masturbation, hysteria, epilepsy, and other so-called "female deviances". [LINK](#)

AFRICA

Over 3,000,000 girls (from 6 to age 9) undergo FGM every year

AUSTRALIA

Women with FGM over 120,000

UK

Over 100,000 girls/women who had undergone FGM are in England and Wales. Estimated 24,000 under age of 15 at risk of FGM include Kenyans, Somalis, Sudanese, Sierra Leoneans, Egyptians, Nigerians, Eritreans, Yemeni, Kurdish, Indonesian and Pakistani girls/women.

USA

Over 400,000 girls who have undergone or at risk of FGM

WORLDWIDE

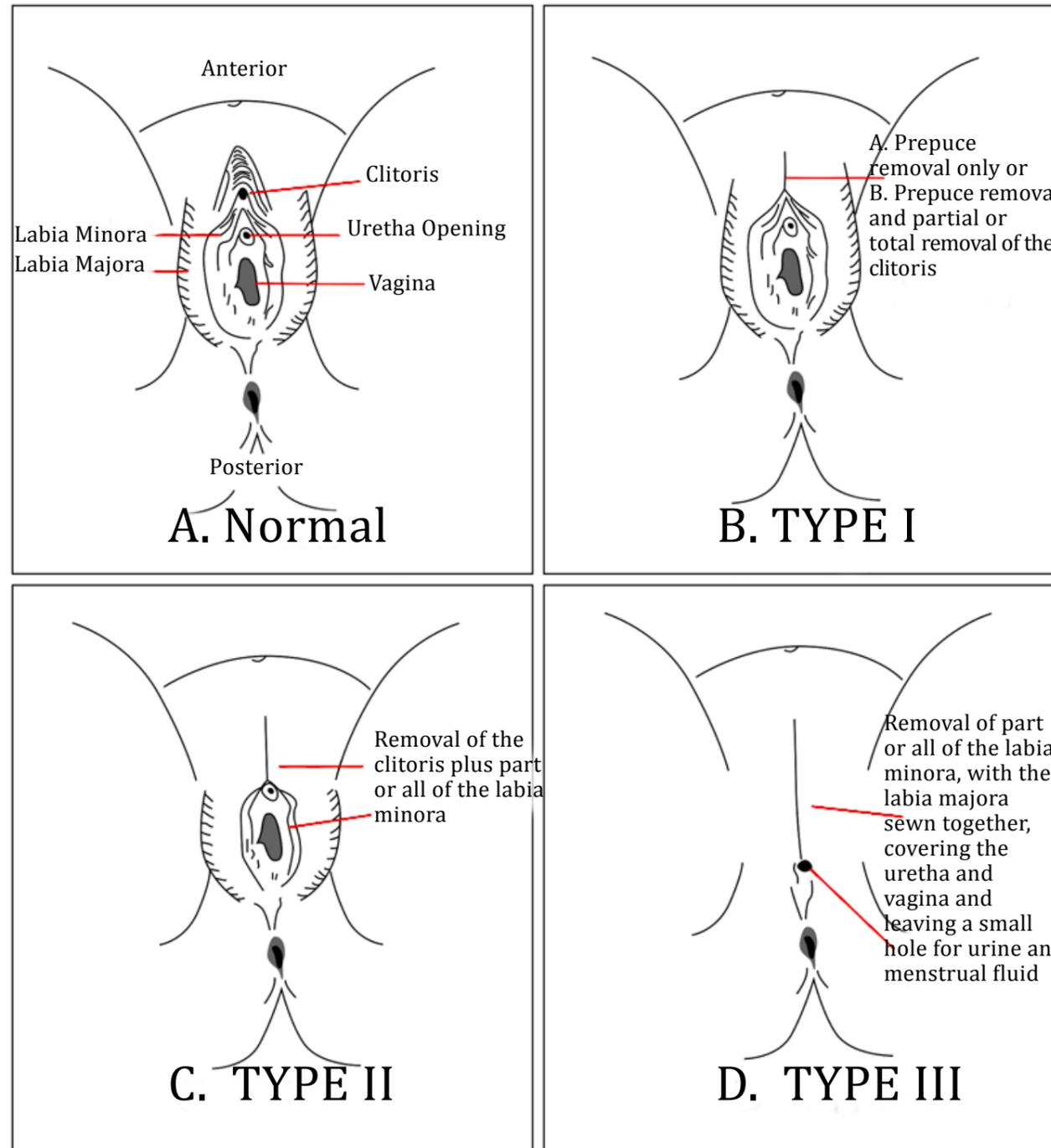
Over 180,000,000 girls/women now alive have undergone FGM/C procedure in the following countries - Africa (*Algeria, Benin, Burkin Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe*), Australia, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Immigrant communities in the West (*USA, Europe, U.K., Ireland etc.*), Jordan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palestinian territories, Qatar, Russia, some ethnic groups in South America, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkey, UAE etc.

COUNTRIES THAT HAVE ENACTED LAWS CRIMINALISING FGM

Most Western countries including USA, UK, Australia, Ireland, Canada, France, Italy, Norway, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Germany, Sweden. France is believed to be the only country that has actually prosecuted and jailed offenders. Sweden was the first Western country to outlaw FGM, followed in 1985 by the UK. In the United States it became illegal in 1997, and in the same year the WHO issued a joint statement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) against the practice. Of course laws have been changed to make them more stringent including prevention of children being taken out of their adopted country to their home country for FGM. This is also known as preventing "vacation cuts".



Another form of mutilation which has been reported is introcision, practiced specifically by the Pitta-Patta aborigines of Australia. When a girl reaches puberty, the whole tribe-both sexes-assembles. The operator, an elderly man, enlarges the vaginal orifice by tearing it downward with three fingers bound with opossum string. In other districts, the perineum is split with a stone knife. This is usually followed by compulsory sexual intercourse with a number of young men. – Dr Helen Pringle, School of Politics and International Relations, University of South Wales



What is FGM?

FGM refers to the removal of all or part of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs, for cultural or other non-medical reasons (the World Health Organization has identified several major types).

The following are the four main types of FGM.

Type I:

Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy).

Type II:

Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision).

Type III:

Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).

Type IV:

All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization.

Risks and consequences

These include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage, wound infection, abscess formation, septicaemia, tetanus, hepatitis and/or HIV, urine retention, genital ulceration and urinary tract infection.

Long-term gynecological complications include anaemia, cyst formation, urinary incontinence, sexual dysfunction, including apareunia, severe scar formation, difficulty in micturition, menstrual disorders, recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, fistulae and infertility.

Obstetric complications for subsequent pregnancy and childbirth include increased relative risks for caesarean delivery, post-partum haemorrhage, extended maternal hospital stay, infant resuscitation, and stillbirth or early neonatal death. Serious adverse psychological and sexual effects commonly afflict victims. Source: WHO

“FGM is about culture not religion” says U .N. Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin [LINK](#)



FGM being conducted in a clinic.
Asma Marwan
bulletinoftheoppressionofwomen
[LINK](#)

The Crime of Female Genital Mutilation

excerpt from Women And Revolution No. 41, Summer/Autumn 1992. [LINK](#)

“One early morning in an African village not far from Nairobi, Kenya, young girls are roused from sleep and taken to a nearby river. The waters are cold, helping to arrest the bleeding from a first menstrual cycle, making their genitalia stand out and slightly numb. Soon an elder village midwife takes the children one by one and with a rusty razor, scissors or shard of glass cuts out the clitoris, slices off the labia and applies ashes, herbs or cow dung to staunch the flow of blood. As the girl writhes in pain, other women hold her arms down, her legs apart, her mouth shut tight so that she cannot run away or alarm the other unsuspecting children waiting in their cool bath.”

In the late 1970s a number of Western feminists, together with several outspoken African women, drew attention to these barbaric acts against women and forced reluctant United Nations agencies to take up the issue.

It is clear that genital mutilations date back to ancient times. The Greek historian Herodotus noted in the fifth century BC that female circumcision was practiced by the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Hittites and Ethiopians. The Sudanese refer to infibulation as “Pharaonic circumcision”; the murky origins of the practice, however, may be inferred from the fact that in Egypt it’s called “Sudanese circumcision.”

In the 16th century when Jesuit missionaries came to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), they tried to stop ritual mutilation among converts. But the men refused to marry women who were not excised and conversions stopped. At the urgent advice of the Pope, the Church, “preferring souls to sexual organs” (as Benoîte Groult so graphically put it in her book *Ainsi Soit-Elles*), sanctioned the practice as “medically necessary.” Fran Hosken, a U.S. feminist who helped initiate international concern over female mutilation, reports that since then all Catholic missions have permitted the procedure on daughters of converts. Today medical missionaries actually perform the operation in African hospitals.

Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in Kenya in the late 1930s tried to refuse admission to the Church to any girl who had been excised. In response, Kikuyu tribalists set up independent churches and schools that survive today. After the wife of one white missionary was abducted and mutilated, the Church of Scotland called off the campaign to abolish the ritual.

Jomo Kenyatta, the darling of Pan-Africanist liberals, endorsed genital mutilation as a form of nationalist resistance to European colonial domination (and had it done to his own daughters, in a hospital). In 1938 he wrote in *Facing Mount Kenya*: “No proper Kikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised—this operation is regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* (refers to an indispensable and essential action) for the whole teaching of tribal law, religion and morality.”

Less than a century ago, Victorian moralism fueled an anti-masturbation frenzy in Europe and the U.S. Young women deemed “oversexed” were excised by their doctors. A 19th century London physician, Isaac Baker Brown, justified cutting off the clitoris as a cure for insomnia, sterility and “unhappy marriages.”

Female Genital Mutilation in Australia

Samara Valli [LINK](#)

As the United Nations announces a global ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) this week, one Australian FGM survivor opens up about her personal story.

I still remember my surprise when we pulled up in front of an ordinary looking house. I looked around me wondering where the doll shop was. Mum held my hand and we walked over to the front door. An old lady opened the door and gestured towards the sitting area. I noticed a friend from school present with her mum. We both smiled at each another. “Is she also here to buy a doll?” I asked mum who either didn’t hear me or pretended not to. Shortly, my friend was led into a room and a minute later I heard a bloodcurdling scream then my friend limped out of the room, supported by her mum. She was crying so hard that she was bent over double. I started feeling scared, why was my friend crying like that, and where was her doll?

The lady who met us earlier asked us to go into the room. Even at six years of age, I knew something was wrong, that someone had done something bad to my friend. I was led to a square table, next to a bed, and mum bent down to remove my panties.

My mum shook her head at the old lady saying she would wait outside; my auntie who had accompanied us would be present instead. As mum turned to leave, I started to cry. I tried running after her but auntie lay me on the table holding my legs apart, and pinning them down so strongly that I couldn’t move.

My next memory is of the old lady removing a razor blade from its cover right in front of my eyes and then such blinding, searing pain between my legs that I screamed, yet I don’t remember hearing my own screams so intense was the pain.

The procedure must have lasted for less than 10 seconds yet I kept on screaming. The suddenness and pain intensity of that act was so shocking; it shook me to my very core.

News Report : In West Australia, parents stand trial over performing FGM on daughter

The couple who allegedly took their one-year-old daughter to **Bali** for a female genital mutilation procedure are set to stand trial. The offence carries a maximum penalty of 10 years jail. [LINK](#)



Save girls From fgm
Mumbai, India
Sign the Petition
[LINK](#)

A letter from a Dawoodi Bohra woman in India [LINK](#)

“...I, an Indian woman who has been to University, have myself experienced the practice of FGC. I know this may surprise you, but it is true. Did you know that FGC also exists in India? Many people do not, not even many Indians!

I hail from the Dawoodi Bohra community, whose head is called the Syedna – we are a sect of the Shias, which came to India from Yemen some centuries ago. **As in many parts of the world, parents in the Bohra community suffered from “son stroke” as did my parents, who prayed hard for a son, after having four girls. They did succeed and we finally had a boy in the family.** I was the third among four sisters. We were very close and shared many secrets. But none of us, not the ones before me, nor I myself, ever shared or warned the ones closest to us about the frightening and incomprehensible experience that we would one day be forced to go through. It was not spoken about then and it is not spoken about even today.

I am 60 years old now, but will remember that fateful day for the rest of my life. I must have been around 7 years old when my mother told me we were going to my grandma’s house to spend the day with her. When we reached my grandma’s house, my cousin (my mum’s sister’s daughter), who was a year younger than me, was also there. We were happy to meet each other. Then, we were both led to a small room, which had a bed and asked to lie down. We kept asking “Why?” Suddenly, a lady dressed in black came into the room. By now, my cousin and I were terrified, not aware of what was to follow. Our dresses were pulled up and our panties pulled off, and we were asked to keep our legs apart. There were our mothers and our aunts holding our legs apart and then I felt something cold being applied to my clitoris, and then to my horror, the lady in black, actually held a scissor-like instrument and cut me there – I screamed and screamed but no one seemed to care. Then this same thing was done to my cousin, who was right next to me on the same bed. Both of us kept screaming and crying in pain. Everyone left the room and asked us to lie down with our legs apart, and told us that all would be well soon. They locked us in for almost the whole day. The burning and painful sensation between my groins is something I will never ever forget.

I felt betrayed by and angry with my mother and humiliated too. I just could not understand how my mother could have been so cruel and put me through this horrific experience.

Much later I was told that all Bohra girls must go through it, and that it is ‘good’ for you. I then understood that my mother had no choice, that for her, she was only doing what was expected of her. She was being a “good mother” because this is a practice that had been carried out in our Bohra group for centuries and was considered essential for a woman’s good reputation and marriage chances.

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Little did I know that this would affect my sexual life to such a great extent that reaching an orgasm would be a difficult thing for me! **My husband and I have made sure that our daughter does not go through the same thing. We warned his mother and mine that they dare not do anything behind our backs. We know of friends from my generation, who did not want their girls to go through FGC, but often it was the grandma or the aunts who took them away and secretly got it done!** The sad part is that my sisters and I, and my cousins too, did not really discuss our experience till many years later. We have spent years feeling shame and humiliation for a senseless act that we were subjugated to as children, incapable of defending our human right to keep all organs of our body”.

<http://www.indianmuslimobserver.com/2011/11/uproar-over-female-genital-mutilation.html>

Asma Malik, Gulf News [LINK](#)

For as little as 20 Egyptian pounds (Dh12), a girl is cut, sometimes in unsanitary settings, to thwart her sexual activity as well as reduce her likelihood of seeking extra-marital affairs. FGM is also a livelihood for many midwives and doctors who fully understand the consequences and risks behind it. **There is a wide misconception that FGM is associated with Islam. In fact, there are Christians in Northern Africa, the Middle East, and Europe who also practice FGM.** It is not religious, much less an Islamic practice, but one that has been often co-opted by FGM proponents exploiting unfounded religious passages and generational beliefs. **The late Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, has repeatedly asserted that FGM is not an Islamic practice.**

Israel: Report by R H Belmaker. MD, Beersheva Mental Health Center, Beersheva [LINK](#)

Successful Cultural Change: The Example of Female Circumcision among Israeli Bedouins and Israeli Jews from Ethiopia (Excerpt) : - In Ethiopia, FGM is universal among Christian, Muslim and Jewish groups. All women interviewed reported that FGM was universal in Ethiopia, but none intended to continue this practice with their daughters. All stated that this was a practice that would be left behind in their country of origin. On physical examination many of the women had amputation of the clitoris. **The conclusion of this study was that the severity of the operation performed had no relation to the social and cultural adherence to the operation, since the Ethiopian Jews who practiced a more severe form of the operation intended to abandon this practice while the Muslim Bedouin who had a much milder form intended to continue it. A follow-up study in 2009 of the Bedouin population of southern Israel has found that FGM had disappeared, both by self-report of women under the age of 30, and by physical examination of women under the age of 30 in an obstetrical clinic. These results suggest an optimistic approach toward cultural change involving unhealthy cultural practices and emphasize the importance of cognitive approaches to cultural change.**

“This is infibulation. It is practised by the Somalis and a tribe called the Pokots,” Pareyio said, referring to two ethnic groups in Kenya. After excision, the girl is stitched up until her wedding day. She is literally a gift; a parcel to be cut open by the man. Among the Pokots, the best man takes a goat’s horn and punches a hole between the bride’s legs, Pareyio said.”



**Stop FGM in Indonesia
Equality Now
LINK**

**The Word on Women - The Maasai woman saving vaginas, one girl at a time
By Katy Migiro [LINK](#)**

When Pareyio, who runs a refuge for girls who have run away from FGM, told me that a Maasai woman is “just like the property of the husband” she was not exaggerating.

“This is type one of female circumcision,” she said, slotting a woman’s private parts between the plastic model’s legs.

“We call it sunna. It involves the cutting of the tip part of the clitoris.”

The spread legs, though reminiscent of a porn movie, looked pretty normal to me, apart from the missing clitoris – though hardly something you would expect to be shown by a middle-aged Kenyan woman dressed in full Maasai regalia.

“This is excision. Excision is practised by our tribe,” she continued, replacing the first model with a plainer one. There were no vaginal lips, just a large slit between the legs like a doll.

“They cut the clitoris... the labia majora and the labia minora, leaving a scar.”

But it was the third one that was the real shocker.

It was just solid plastic with some white lines – like a small drawing of a television aerial – across the space where the opening should be. When you looked carefully, you could see a little hole towards the bottom to let the urine and menstrual blood through.

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[Thomson Reuters Foundation multimedia package on FGM - LINK](#)

The day I saw 248 girls suffering genital mutilation (in Indonesia) by Abigail Haworth, The Observer, Sunday 18 November 2012. (Excerpt) [LINK](#)

In the countryside, it was performed mainly by traditional midwives – women thought to have shamanic healing skills known as dukun – as it had been for centuries. The Indonesian method commonly involves cutting off part of the hood and/or tip of the clitoris with scissors, a blade or a piece of sharpened bamboo.

Last year, the situation regressed further. In early 2011, Indonesia’s parliament effectively reversed the ban on FGM by approving guidelines for trained doctors on how to perform it. The rationale was that, since the ban had failed, issuing guidelines would “safeguard the female reproductive system”, officials said. Indonesia’s largest Muslim organisation, [the Nahdlatul Ulama](#), also issued an edict telling its 30 million followers that it approved of female genital cutting, but that doctors “should not cut too much”.

The combined effect was to legitimise the practice all over again.

A week before I attended the Assalaam foundation’s khitanan massal or mass circumcision ceremony, the chairman of the [Majelis Ulama Indonesia](#), the nation’s most powerful council of Islamic leaders, issued this statement: **“Circumcision is a requirement for every Muslim woman,” said Amidhan, who like many Indonesians goes by a single name. “It not only cleans the filth from her genitals, it also contributes to a girl’s growth.”**

FGM in Indonesia is laden with superstition and confusion. A common myth is that it is largely “symbolic”, involving no genital damage. **A study published in 2010 by Yarsi University in Jakarta found this is true only rarely, in a few animist communities where the ritual involves rubbing the clitoris with turmeric or bamboo.**

While Indonesia doesn’t practise the severest forms of mutilation found in parts of Africa and the Middle East, such as infibulation (removing the clitoris and labia and sewing up the genital area) or complete clitoral excision, **the study found the Indonesian procedure “involves pain and actual cutting of the clitoris” in more than 80% of cases.**

Tradition is usually about remembering. In the case of FGM in Indonesia it seems to be a cycle of forgetting. The act of cutting is a hidden business perpetrated by mothers and midwives, nearly all of whom underwent FGM themselves as young children. The women I met had little memory of being cut, so they had few qualms about subjecting their daughters to the same fate. “It’s just what we do,” I heard over and over again.

“We visited seven hospitals chosen at random. Only one, Hermina, a specialist maternity hospital, said it did not perform sunat perempuan. The other six all gave package prices, varying from 300,000 rupiah to 550,000 rupiah (£20-£36), for infant vaccinations, ear piercing and genital cutting within two months of birth.”

The day I saw 248 girls suffering genital mutilation in Indonesia by Abigail Haworth, The Observer, Sunday 18 November 2012. (Excerpt) [LINK](#)
(Continued)

I saw my interpreter, Widiana, speaking to Suminah, the 12-year-old who was the oldest girl there, and went to join them. Suminah said she didn't want to come. **“I was shaking and crying last night. I was so scared I couldn't sleep.” It was a “very bad, sharp pain” when she was cut, she said, and she still felt sore and angry. Widiana asked what she planned to do in the evening. “We will have a special meal at home and then read the Qur'an,” said Suminah. “Then I will listen to my Britney Spears CD.”**

Back in Jakarta, an Indonesian friend, Rino, agreed to help me find out about the newborn-girl “package deals” at city hospitals. Rino phoned around Jakarta's hospitals. They told him he must see a doctor to discuss the matter. So we decided that is what we would do: since I was visibly pregnant, we'd visit the hospitals as husband and wife expecting our first baby. (“It's not necessary to bring your wife,” Rino was told repeatedly when he rang back to book the appointments.)

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Interestingly, the only doctor who argued against the procedure was a female gynaecologist from the largest Islamic government hospital, the Rumah Sakit Islam Jakarta. “You can have it done here if you wish,” the doctor said with a sigh. “But I don't recommend it. It's not mandatory in Islam. It's painful and it's a great pity for girls.”

Last month I spoke to Andy Yentriyani, a commissioner at Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women. Yentriyani told me the problem is now worse than ever. Since the government's guidelines on FGM came into effect last year, more hospitals have started offering the procedure.

“Doctors see the guidelines as a licence to make money,” she says. “Hospitals are even offering female circumcision in parts of Sumatra where there has never been a strong tradition of cutting girls.”

“They are creating new demand purely for profit?”

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“Yes. They're including it in birth packages. People don't really understand what they're signing up for.” Nor do some medical staff, she adds. The new guidelines say doctors should “make a small cut on the frontal part of the clitoris, without harming the clitoris”. But Yentriyani says that most doctors are trained only in male circumcision, so they follow the same principle of slicing off flesh.

Moreover, according to [The Jakarta Post](#), the guidelines were rushed through partly in response to the deaths of several infant girls from botched FGM procedures at hospitals.

Likewise, Yentriyani says, the recent endorsement of FGM by some Islamic leaders has vindicated those carrying out mass cutting ceremonies, such as the Assalaam foundation. **“Women are caught in a power struggle between religion and state as Indonesia finds a new identity,” the activist explains. “Clamping down on morality, enforcing chastity, returning to so-called traditions such as female circumcision – these things help religious leaders to win hearts and minds.”**

Java, radical Islam in favor of female genital mutilation by Mathias Hariyadi [LINK](#)

Circumcision is concentrated in particular in rural and remote areas of the island of Java. So far campaigns by activists who denounce the danger of infection and the violence inherent in the practice to no avail. The debate within the Muslim world, on compulsory nature (or non) of the rite. A civil battle is on, supported by more than 400 NGOs.

The Muslim intellectual **Sumanto Al Qurtuby** says the faction that supports *tetesan* is linked to the *Salafi* and *Wahhabi* community, which together with other fundamentalist groups are concentrated in Bandung and Aceh. They believe that circumcision is “morally” encouraged by Sharia, or Islamic law, and reiterated in the hadith, in anecdotes related to the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

However, the expert adds, while the practice is “suggested” it is not “mandatory” and there are no moral foundations of Islamic law that state it should be perpetrated. There are in fact six different drafts of the hadith - better known as “Kutub as-Sittah” - and only one of these “calls for” the spread of female circumcision.

Note: While incidents of FGM/C are reducing in number in many African countries, in Indonesia it is infact increasing. The reasons for this regression is evident in the many Press reports emanating from Indonesia. [NEWS REPORT THE JAKARTA POST - LINK](#)

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION



Pic © <http://www.guardian.co.uk/> [LINK](#)

List of some organisations doing outstanding work in fighting FGM across the world. Thousands of NGOs are fighting to save young girls and women from the horrible mutilation of their vaginas.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, well known author and activist, AHA Foundation - [LINK](#)

Waris Dirie, is a nomadic child from Somalia and a mother of two beautiful sons. She is a human rights activist, a supermodel, and a best-selling author who has received numerous prestigious awards for her work and her commitment in the fight against female genital mutilation. - [LINK](#)

END FGM European Campaign run by Amnesty International Ireland and supported by NGOs - [LINK](#)

UN Human Rights - [LINK](#)

World Health Organisation - [LINK](#)

UNICEF - [LINK](#)

Global Alliance Against Female Genital Mutilation - [LINK](#)

Equality Now - [LINK](#)

USAID - Female Circumcision in Indonesia - [LINK](#)

Daughters of Eve - [LINK](#)

UNFPA EGYPT - [LINK](#)

Fowarduk.org - [LINK](#)

Awava - Australia - [LINK](#)

28toomany.org - [LINK](#)

Ipu.org - [LINK](#)

Wilpfinternational.org - [LINK](#)

Fgmnetwork.org - [LINK](#)

"Mama tied a blindfold over my eyes. The next thing I felt my flesh was being cut away. I heard the blade sawing back and forth through my skin. The pain between my legs was so intense I wished I would die."



Waris Dirie, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador and spokesperson on FGM

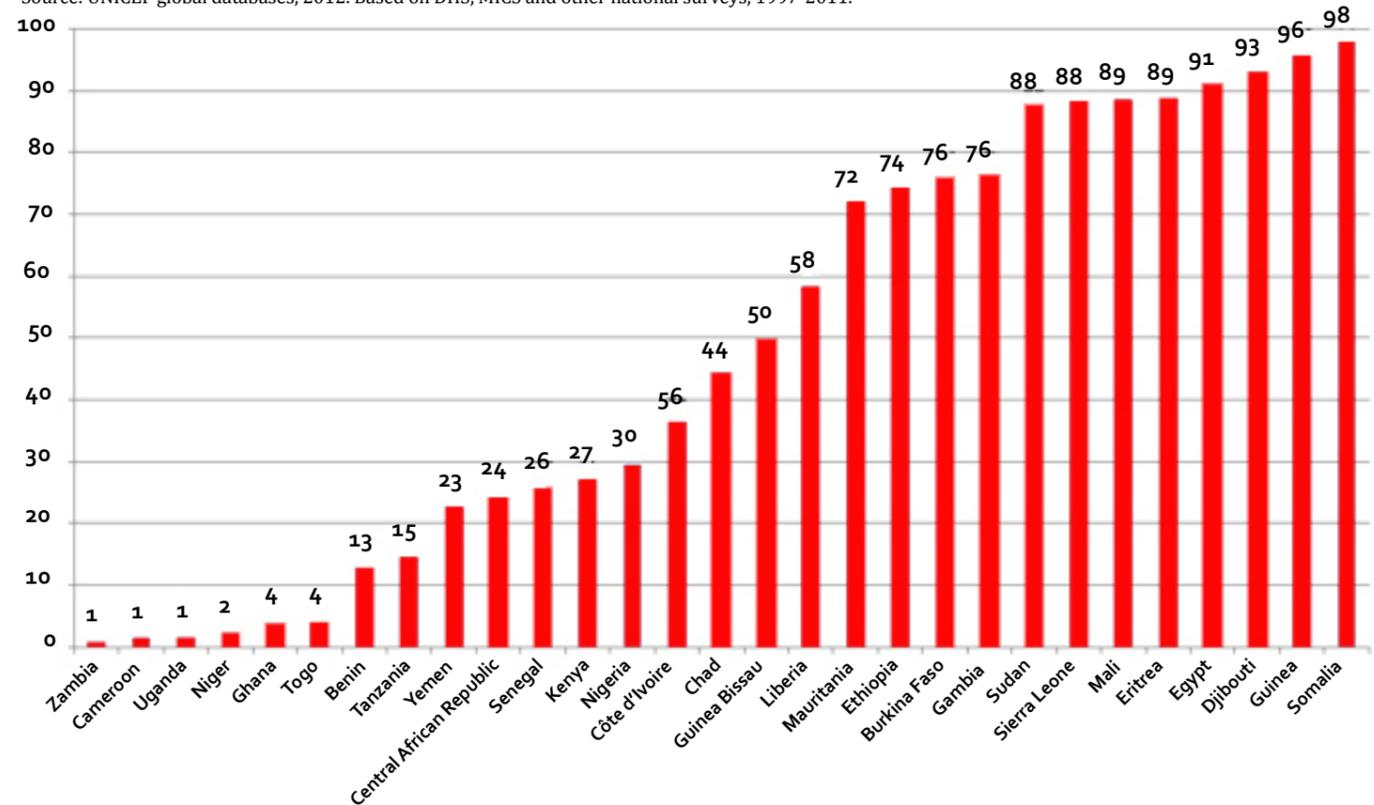
<http://www.desertflowerfoundation.org>

FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.

- World Health Organisation [LINK](#)

Prevalence of FGM/C among women aged 15-49 varies widely, from 98% in Somalia to 1% in Uganda, Zambia and Cameroon. The graph below depicts percentage of women between 15-49 years old who have been cut in Africa.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2012. Based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys, 1997-2011.

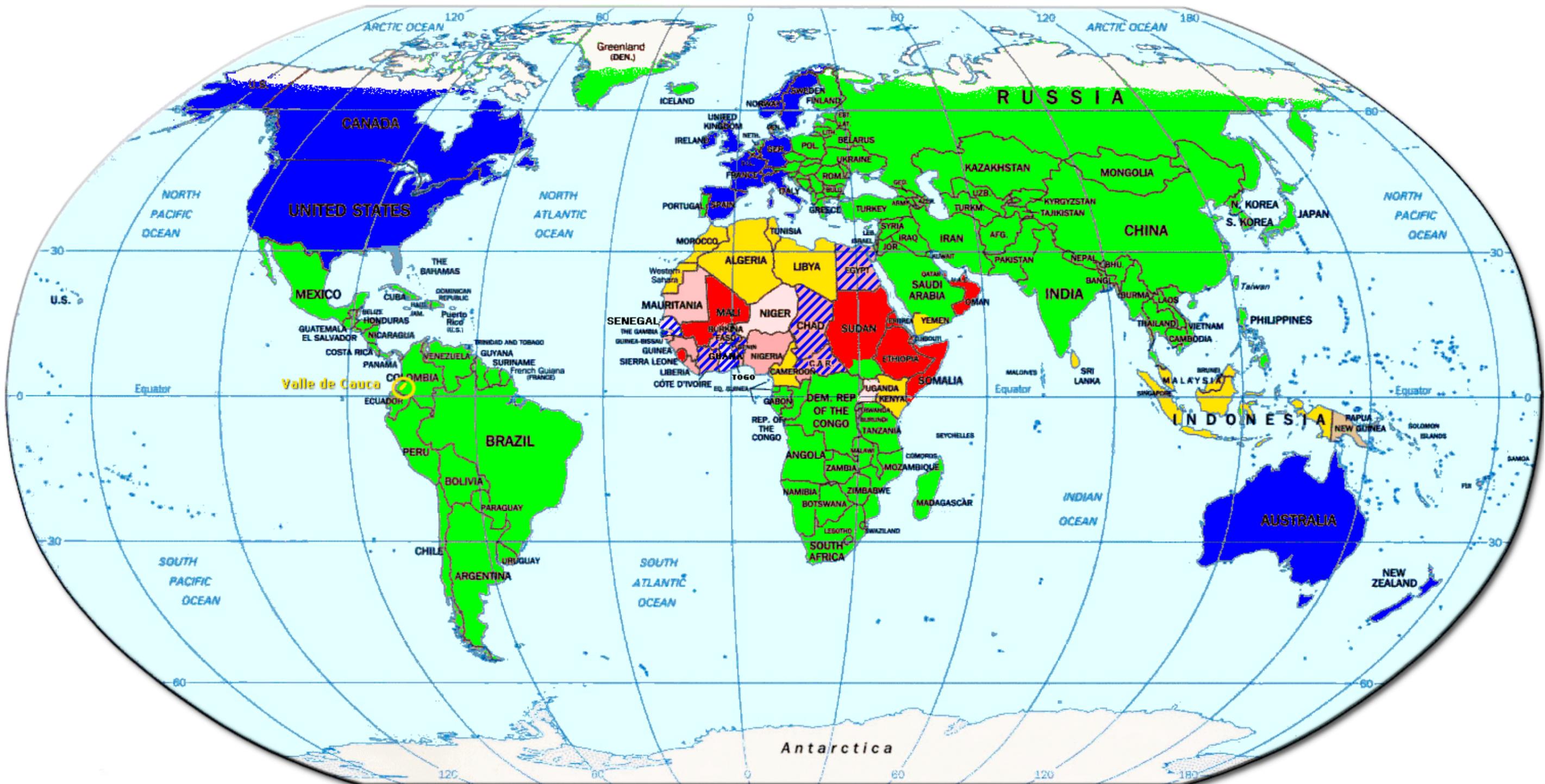


Unfortunately only guesstimates are made about the extent of FGM in western countries. France for instance has a reported 75,000 girls/women affected by FGM, Ireland 3,000, USA approx. 400,000 affected or at risk...the list is endless. The problem is that many immigrants do not report such issues to the authorities for fear of the law/deportation/ ostracisation from their close knit society. This filthy, seedy under belly of 'the immigrant tradition' has now entered western society. Parents are known to fly their children to their country of origin for **a vacation cut** - FGM. Laws are in place to prosecute those that indulge in such practices. However, who will inform the authorities?

The status of Kurdish women is heart breaking. In Iraq and Iran more than 80% of the Kurdish women have been subjected to FGM. In Sri Lanka and Indonesia even though FMG/C is widespread there is no available data.

So the graph above on African countries is only one part of the big picture.

Incidence and Distribution of Female Genital Cutting Worldwide



- 25-50%
- 50- 75%
- More than 75%

In FGM outlawed countries more than 4,000,000 girls/women are affected/at risk. And the menace is growing with the rising levels of immigrants and the increasing radicalisation of Islam, even though FGM is a cultural practice and not a religious obligation. **Worldwide : Upto 180,000,000 have undergone FGM/C. Approximately 10,000,000 girls/women are at risk.** In many countries the exact figures cannot be recorded as cultural/social/religious conditioning makes it near impossible for women and children to speak out about the mutilation of their vaginas.

Source : www.circumstitions.com



How to Think

by Chris Hedges

(This article was first published on [Truthdig](#))

Cultures that endure carve out a protected space for those who question and challenge national myths.

Artists, writers, poets, activists, journalists, philosophers, dancers, musicians, actors, directors and renegades must be tolerated if a culture is to be pulled back from disaster. Members of this intellectual and artistic class, who are usually not welcome in the stultifying halls of academia where mediocrity is triumphant, serve as prophets. They are dismissed, or labeled by the power elites as subversive, because they do not embrace collective self-worship. They force us to confront unexamined assumptions, ones that, if not challenged, lead to destruction. They expose the ruling elites as hollow and corrupt. They articulate the senselessness of a system built on the ideology of endless growth, ceaseless exploitation and constant expansion. They warn us about the poison of careerism and the futility of the search for happiness in the accumulation of wealth. They make us face ourselves, from the bitter reality of slavery and Jim Crow to the genocidal slaughter of Native Americans to the repression of working-class movements to the atrocities carried out in imperial wars to the assault on the ecosystem. They make us unsure of our virtue. They challenge the easy clichés we use to describe the nation - the land of the free, the greatest country on earth, the beacon of liberty - to expose our darkness, crimes and ignorance. They offer the possibility of a life of meaning and the capacity for transformation.

Human societies see what they want to see. They create national myths of identity out of a composite of historical events and fantasy. They ignore unpleasant facts that intrude on self-glorification. They trust naively in the notion of linear progress and in assured national dominance. This is what nationalism is about—lies. And if a culture loses its ability for thought and expression, if it effectively silences dissident voices, if it retreats into what Sigmund Freud called “screen memories,” those reassuring mixtures of fact and fiction, it dies. It surrenders its internal mechanism for puncturing self-delusion. It makes war on beauty and truth. It abolishes the sacred. It turns education into vocational training. It leaves us blind. And this is what has occurred. We are lost at sea in a great tempest. We do not know where we are. We do not know where we are going. And we do not know what is about to happen to us.

The psychoanalyst [John Steiner](#) calls this phenomenon “turning a blind eye.” He notes that often we have access to adequate knowledge but because it is unpleasant and disconcerting we choose unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to ignore it. He uses the Oedipus story to make his point. He argued that Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon and the “blind” Tiresias grasped the truth, that Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother as prophesized, but they colluded to ignore it. We too, Steiner wrote, turn a blind eye to the dangers that confront us, despite the plethora of evidence that if we do not radically reconfigure our relationships to each other and the natural world, catastrophe is assured. Steiner describes a psychological truth that is deeply frightening.

I saw this collective capacity for self-delusion among the urban elites in Sarajevo and later Pristina during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. These educated elites steadfastly refused to believe that war was possible although acts of violence by competing armed bands had already begun to tear at the social fabric. At night you could hear gunfire. But they were the last to “know.” And we are equally self-deluded. **The physical evidence of national decay—the crumbling infrastructures, the abandoned factories and other workplaces, the rows of gutted warehouses, the closure of libraries, schools, fire stations and post offices—that we physically see, is, in fact, unseen. The rapid and terrifying deterioration of the ecosystem, evidenced in soaring temperatures, droughts, floods, crop destruction, freak storms, melting ice caps and rising sea levels, are met blankly with Steiner’s “blind eye.”**

Oedipus, at the end of Sophocles’ play, cuts out his eyes and with his daughter Antigone as a guide wanders the countryside. Once king, he becomes a stranger in a strange country. He dies, in Antigone’s words, “in a foreign land, but one he yearned for.”

The story of Lear, like the story of Oedipus, is about the attainment of this inner vision. It is about morality and intellect that are blinded by empiricism and sight. It is about understanding that the human imagination is, as William Blake saw, our manifestation of Eternity. **“Love without imagination is eternal death.”**

William Shakespeare in “King Lear” plays on the same theme of sight and sightlessness. Those with eyes in “King Lear” are unable to see. Gloucester, whose eyes are gouged out, finds in his blindness a revealed truth. “I have no way, and therefore want no eyes,” Gloucester says after he is blinded. “I stumbled when I saw.” When Lear banishes his only loyal daughter, Cordelia, whom he accuses of not loving him enough, he shouts: “Out of my sight!” To which Kent replies:

*See better, Lear, and let me still remain
The true blank of thine eye.*

The Shakespearean scholar [Harold Goddard](#) wrote: “The imagination is not a faculty for the creation of illusion; it is the faculty by which alone man apprehends reality. The ‘illusion’ turns out to be truth.” “Let faith oust fact,” Starbuck says in “Moby-Dick.”

“It is only our absurd ‘scientific’ prejudice that reality must be physical and rational that blinds us to the truth,” Goddard warned. There are, as Shakespeare wrote, “things invisible to mortal sight.” But these things are not vocational or factual or empirical. They are not found in national myths of glory and power. They are not attained by force. They do not come through cognition or logical reasoning. They are intangible.

And here is the dilemma we face as a civilization. We march collectively toward self-annihilation. Corporate capitalism, if left unchecked, will kill us. Yet we refuse, because we cannot think and no longer listen to those who do think, to see what is about to happen to us. We have created entertaining mechanisms to obscure and silence the harsh truths, from climate change to the collapse of globalization to our enslavement to corporate power, that will mean our self-destruction. If we can do nothing else we must, even as individuals, nurture the private dialogue and the solitude that make thought possible. It is better to be an outcast, a stranger in one's own country, than an outcast from one's self. It is better to see what is about to befall us and to resist than to retreat into the fantasies embraced by a nation of the blind.

They are the realities of beauty, grief, love, the search for meaning, the struggle to face our own mortality and the ability to face truth. And cultures that disregard these forces of imagination commit suicide. They cannot see.

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"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea," Shakespeare wrote, **"Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"** **Human imagination, the capacity to have vision, to build a life of meaning rather than utilitarianism, is as delicate as a flower.**

And if it is crushed, if a Shakespeare or a Sophocles is no longer deemed useful in the empirical world of business, careerism and corporate power, **if universities think a Milton Friedman or a Friedrich Hayek is more important to their students than a Virginia Woolf or an Anton Chekhov, then we become barbarians.** We assure our own extinction. Students who are denied the wisdom of the great oracles of human civilization—visionaries who urge us not to worship ourselves, not to kneel before the base human emotion of greed—cannot be educated. They cannot think.

To think, we must, as Epicurus understood, "live in hiding." We must build walls to keep out the cant and noise of the crowd. **We must retreat into a print-based culture where ideas are not deformed into sound bites and thought-terminating clichés. Thinking is, as Hannah Arendt wrote, "a soundless dialogue between me and myself."** But thinking, she wrote, always presupposes the human condition of plurality. It has no utilitarian function. It is not an end or an aim outside of itself. It is different from logical reasoning, which is focused on a finite and identifiable goal. Logical reason, acts of cognition, serve the efficiency of a system, including corporate power, which is usually morally neutral at best, and often evil. The inability to think, Arendt wrote, "is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody—scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded."

Our corporate culture has effectively severed us from human imagination. Our electronic devices intrude deeper and deeper into spaces that were once reserved for solitude, reflection and privacy. Our airwaves are filled with the tawdry and the absurd. Our systems of education and communication scorn the disciplines that allow us to see. We celebrate prosaic vocational skills and the ridiculous requirements of standardized tests. We have tossed those who think, including many teachers of the humanities, into a wilderness where they cannot find employment, remuneration or a voice. We follow the blind over the cliff. We make war on ourselves.

The vital importance of thought, Arendt wrote, is apparent only **"in times of transition when men no longer rely on the stability of the world and their role in it, and when the question concerning the general conditions of human life, which as such are properly coeval with the appearance of man on earth, gain an uncommon poignancy."** We never need our thinkers and artists more than in times of crisis, as Arendt reminds us, for they provide the subversive narratives that allow us to chart a new course, one that can assure our survival.

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, quoting the Bible, asks of Father Zossima in "The Brothers Karamazov." To which Zossima answers: **"Above, all do not lie to yourself."**

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My thanks to Janet Buehl, Assistant to the Publisher of [truthdig](#) - Zuade Kaufman, for facilitating the special permission required to reprint this article. - Mark Ulyseas



I have written lots of poetry for children. I suppose the inspiration for it comes from my work in schools, which I enjoy very much. I have often read, *Nothing's Fair* for adults as well as for children, and I always think that when adults get a laugh out of a children's poem, there must be something in it for everybody.

Nothing's Fair

What's all this about fairness?
Nothing's fair when you're a kid.
Parents can fight all they want to
and it's okay – they can even divorce.

When kids have fights,
it's big stuff: no pocket money,
lines, TV withdrawal threats!

Just last week, I tried
to fly my new UFO
from our upstairs window
and just because it landed
on Mrs Murphy's cat, I'm
out of favour –
in the doghouse!

Oh, I can go to school
alright – even to
my daft piano lessons,
but I can't repair my UFO.
I'm a threat to the neighbourhood.

When Dad crashed the car,
Mum put her arms around him.
He was in shock, poor man.
I'm in a permanent state of shock
and I get my freedom chopped.

Dad's driving again.
Mum's more loving than ever
to him
– to me, she's horrible,
just because my invention
killed Murphy's black cat.

Nothing's fair when you're a kid.
I'll create chaos when I'm older.
I'll get my own back. I will!

KORO

C.J. Birch



'Koro' demonstrates the calamity of life as a migrant worker, a Zimbabwean 'innocent' side-tracked in Johannesburg. Characterisation is good, particularly the relationship between Wittington and his mother, and later Beauty, the traditional healer. This book demonstrates the transience of life in Africa, that life in Africa is cheap. The coming-of-age of Wittington Mudeka coincides with the corruption of his soul by the subversive undercurrents at large in Johannesburg.

Catherine Jane Birch

Author of Koro in a candid interview with Mark Ulyseas

Why do you write?

I write because I have a message to share. I spend a lot of time contemplating life and I have spent a lot of time living life. My living translates into my self-expression. I write because I cannot not write. Periods in my life when I have been stifled have been traumatic for me, as if my air has been cut off. That may sound melodramatic, but it isn't. I breathe through my words. My words come alive in my mind and I interpret their pictures, recraft the essence of their message and convert them into plain English, which is easily understood by even those whose mother-tongue is something else.

My writing is visual. I show, rather than tell. My intention is to build in the minds of my readers a framework upon which they will pin their own opinions and with which they will develop their own understanding of the subjects handled. I write to convey to others the plight of this world in which we live. I feel I have a deep connection with nature, my nature, and I am passionate about crusading to make this planet the best it has ever been. I think it's time. I write because I want to make a change. I do not merely want to make a difference, I want to make this world change the way it views love, I want this world to understand just how powerful love's reach. I want to make calm out of chaos, light out of dark. I want people to understand the responsibility of contributing to the collective unconscious, too. We all have access to this entity and it is our collective responsibility to keep it pristine. I think there are too many haters contributing to our collective head-effort, too many mindless tourists who visit the sacred grounds of the psyche and leave litter, graffiti. I write to investigate different worlds, each avenue I find is new, as yet *untried*, exciting. I write to illustrate my understanding that there really is no time like the present.

The present is where we find our 'once upon a time' and it is where we lay the cornerstones of our futures. Writing is my life. My fingers speak for me. I write because I am not a public speaker. I will not stand atop a soapbox. We do not need another voice making a noise on this planet, we needed to find a new way of sending a message. That is my written word. I have spent years cultivating a style that is both direct and accessible. I write inclusively, I am a storyteller and I ensure my work is coherent as a social comment.

I do not avoid taboo subjects in my work, I feel that transparency is the best chance we have as a world to right our wrongs and transcend them. I write to escape reality. I can spend six or seven hours working, my mind trained on the picture in my mind of what I want to describe. When you can voice your visions you will find that you connect with a part of yourself you had silenced. Writing jogs an ancient wisdom in me. I communicate effectively in the written word. My thoughts have impact as possibilities, solutions. I am learning to be a skilled solution-finder. Writing makes my mind grow and stretch. It challenges my perceptions of this world. My words will speak for me, for us, long after we are gone. To me, that means something. I rest easy knowing I am of service. My intention is to mend the world. I start with a simple word: care.

How many books have you published?

I have published one book, KORO. I worked on this book for 3 years and then left it for months. I worked through this story in the company of four independent writers, we shared the experience and for their contribution I will always be grateful. Their insights presented me with many gifts and I learned a lot from their understanding of my work. When I returned to the manuscript, I edited it at length and then submitted it to ten agents. In every case the feedback I received was that the work was of a high standard but the subject matter was 'not for them'. I was initially asked for exclusivity on my manuscript - one agent was taken with the tale - but she completed reading the work and asserted that she had found the work 'harrowing' and as such could not offer me a contract. I do not see this story as harrowing. I see it as real. It tells an uncomfortable truth. Fiction tells truths more effectively, sometimes, than reality does. The tale is in parts fairly graphic and I describe life the way it is.

Could you share with the readers your thoughts on your books and what you hope to achieve with them?

My books are where I have placed the essence of my life understanding. I write contemporary fiction. I employ various genres in my self-expression. I am passionate about the gothic and have an interest in metaphysics, magic, art, mysticism, alchemy and the senses. I believe there are more than six senses. I have three works open at the moment and spend each day creating, whether it be a small amount - or to a large degree. I am intrigued by social dynamics and find the human condition to be the most fascinating experience. Through my work I intend to reach the psyches of millions of people. Each person that relates to my work will take something from it. It will teach you something.

I want to entertain readers with my perception. I want to inform people. I want to be heard. I want to encourage people to look beyond the horizons created by our conditioning and I intend to do that by deconstructing traditions that threaten to swallow our everyday. I will hold a mirror up to this world. I will ask it to identify itself and I will insist that it takes accountability for itself. I am not politically correct and I don't shy away from painting an uncomfortable picture. We must understand

that our lives are a construct. This is a great gift. Do not waste it. We must structure our lives, build our realities using love, and trust. There is no other way. We have too much invested in others' say-so. There is too much anger and too much fear in this world. I want to change this. I want us to draw a line in the sand. I want us to make peace with our past and move forwards into a future glowing with possibility.

I address the issue of baby rape ([LINK](#)) because I feel that on a universal scale this is one atrocity too many. **I cannot accept that innocent children will be destroyed because of a trade in folklore. Raping a virgin does not cure AIDS. This is one message I am sending with this work, using the metaphor of KORO - which is a curse sent to emasculate a man. I am also sending the message that raping a woman as 'spoils' is an intolerable practice. It happens, often. I address the issue of suburban crime in South Africa. Its brutality exists and I am determined to raise the profile of the insanely stressful situations in which many ordinary South Africans find themselves living. My work illustrates that life in Africa is cheap. It is transient, too.**

There is a violence in South Africa that side-steps all reasonable explanation. The cruelty visited on citizens by other citizens is barbaric, unhealthy. The rape statistics are through the roof. It is unfortunate that the demographic would illustrate that the black on black crime is as horrific as the black on white crime.

The point is that the stress generated by criminal circumstance in such a beautiful country is out of order. The government needs to address this. It needs to address the damage done to the psyche of the black man by an age of oppression and it needs to address the anger rife in society, because until this anger is sourced and eradicated the society the children will inherit is going to suffer.

With my book I intend to make a noise. I have advised the Department of Basic Education in South Africa to read this book because it is a damning indictment on the state of affairs in contemporary Johannesburg. I do not believe South Africa will transcend her problems unless she faces up to them. Stigma and taboo mean that we don't get to hear a lot about unacceptable happenings. I am breaking with taboo. I am launching myself back into the mainstream energy of Africa - I believe that the energy invested in me as a child growing up in Africa needs to be put back into the system. I have a debt to pay. I pay it humbly, with hope that my stance is the stance a great many people would take. *I give back what I have been given, and I do this in the shape of a work that documents the coming-of-age of a black nineteen year old Zimbabwean boy in one of the most violent cities in the world today.* My perception has been challenged by the writing of this work, though I have to add that the stretch it has given me has launched me into the sequel, FARMER. I am on Chapter 15 and am finding that I am satisfied with the platform I have created for my expression with the first work. It is a strong foundation. **I do not intend to be controversial, I am not in that game. I intend to continue to highlight contentious subjects and I will do so until somebody takes notice. Someone eventually will.**

My first book - A life-long suicide note - is a story about transcendence of the soul. It explores the duality of existence and it is a beautiful work, despite its seemingly ominous title. I am considering publishing this work, it has been 13 years in the making. I believe we converge with ourselves on our paths to perfection. I understand that until you transcend your existential reality you will be stuck on the hamster wheel of life. Transcending ourselves means changing. Progressing. Do not turn out to be what you were predicted to be. Turn out to be something different. Something better. There is always time for that.

The **Mindscape of Magenta Alighieri** is another of my works, currently open. It is a gothic visitation to a citadel inside an antique snow globe, where Pan, Cupid, The Bloodrunners, The Mystic Guru and The Warriors reside. *It is a dark tale, erotic fiction.* The writing of Mervyn Peake - The Gormenghast Trilogy - inspired me to write this story and employ this genre. It is an in-depth analysis of love, in all its manifestations, deployments. Love does not mystify me. I find it worth studying. I find the heart's intelligence worth mapping and I do feel that if we acted more from the heart and defaulted less to the brain, this world would be a saner, more compassionate place.

Where does your inspiration come from? Real Life or Reel Life (cinema)?

My inspiration comes from watching other people be. From watching human nature evolve. I don't translate life stories, I watch people act and decide and hesitate and despair and I am inspired through empathy to self-observation. Self-observation is an art worth learning. It inspires me to write in a way that makes me understood. I do not want there to be any misunderstandings with my work. I make a clear statement, albeit at times ambiguous. It depends on what you want to see in my work as to the message you will take from it. I am communicating from my heart. I believe that unless we try at life we are bound to the confinement of the cages we make for ourselves.

We cage our imaginations, we curb our truths. Truth is clarity. Clarity is where you want to be when you write and the thought of finding clarity is what inspires me to push my parameters to the far-reaching places that give me space. It is important to understand that we decide the size of our lives. We design our own limitations. If we put too many restrictions on ourselves we will be crushed by defeat. Humans are meant to achieve goals.

We are made for measured risk. Not gambling, but measured risk. Too much restriction inhibits risk. Know that risk is the currency of the braveheart and know that brave is always better than not. I am inspired by real life trauma. I think the impact trauma has on a way of life is misunderstood and undervalued. Trauma taps into a dark part of you - a part perhaps previously unknown - and it exposes you to a rawness in yourself that leaves you gasping. I find emotional outbursts inspiring and I find cathedral spires, inspiring. Gargoyles. I love crypts and I want to explore them in the dark. I believe in the force of Nature, the Taoist 'Way' and a refusal to be subsumed by life's trials. Life plays hard with everybody, there are no exceptions. Experience inspires in me reverence. I respect how people feel about things. I like to know why. I find the concept of evolution inspiring.

I like the idea that we are all on this planet in a race that does not discriminate. We are all here to survive - to win our own race - and I think the sooner we realise that this drive in us is stronger than any other we will be better equipped to accept one another as 'real' people and respect that what every other person on this planet believes is relevant. I am inspired when I inspire people. I appreciate contributing to the lives of others and I find value in being useful. I am inspired by the integrity I feel to my work. My fundamental purpose is to demonstrate that feeling of integrity through my written word.

Are you a full time writer or do you juggle your life with other things?

At the moment I am a full-time writer and mother; wife. I create all day. I have my mornings and afternoons to myself. My evenings and weekends I dedicate to my family. I have periods of intense creativity when I will create artworks as well as written works. I am working on a gecko mandala for world peace, called 'Diaspora'. I juggle my everyday between English and German. I am fluent in just the one language, though I have a love for the other. German is such a sensible language. It says exactly what it means. I have a son of three and a half, Finn. He keeps me grounded and his learning of life inspires me every day. I struggle to make myself accessible when I am working and this challenge is compounded by the fact that I am an indulgent mother. I find it hard to say no. I create my reality using tools I have developed during the living of my life and I manage my family and my work independently. It is as if the two will not be combined.

Could you share with the readers an insight into your life and work?

I am inquisitive about life. I do not accept that any man can dictate the conditions of another's existence. I am passionate about human rights abuses and have particular issue with the act of genocide. It confounds all sense of morality and in that I find conflict. Where I find conflict, I find resolution. I don't believe that we are created equal. I believe that our genetic coding is either successful, or it isn't. If it isn't, we are shown this or we are given an ultimatum and our days are numbered.

I am of the firm opinion that there is a universal energy to which we all contribute - and from which we all draw source - and I believe that this energy does not end. When we die, we begin again. I do not think that earth is hell, I think that earth has the potential to be the utopia that a lot of like-minded people seek. I suspect that our karma has a lot to do with our present tense.

I think until we realise that our thinking in the now has a great deal to do with the how of our futures, we will be trapped by the consequence of living. In this world we cannot live without consequence. That is important to understand. Everything we do has consequences. I am constantly learning about consequences and I find satisfaction in this learning because it is consistent. I believe we need to lose the thinking that we are what we have been taught. We are what we have learned. There is the difference.

I revere Nature. I am struck daily by her magnitude, her grace, her relentless striving for equilibrium. For that is what nature does, that is what karma does. They search for equilibrium. They say turn Nature on herself and she will transform herself. Do you know how powerful she must be to take herself on and shake herself up? I believe Nature will recover her self-esteem, but she needs help. I do not think that we respect Nature enough. I do not think we give enough thanks for her majesty. I think we take her for granted and this complacency is counterproductive. I support Greenpeace because I believe in their motivation. We need to appreciate the cycle of life, understand that we awake each day to a brand new beginning. We open our eyes and we start afresh. How can it be said that human beings are 'punished' by their existence? That is an outrageous lie.

We are not placed on earth to suffer. We are placed on earth to ensure that life, living, does not suffer. And it is suffering. Life is suffering. The only way to rectify this is to be sure we take the lessons that we are given and utilise freely the wisdom we extract from their happening. If you will make the same mistake each time, you will be taught until you learn. We are the keepers of our fates and our efforts to do our best with each day we are given are not overlooked. If you can improve who you are - at all - you are making progress and your life has purpose. It is essential to recognise a purpose for your life. You were created with extraordinary capacity. Human beings are miraculous. You need to find the work that pushes you to be your best because what is the point of being a mediocre you? Your best is the work you were born to do. A job that owns you does not mean anything except money. To listen only to the siren song of fiscal gain is to betray the very essence of everything that you are. Keep it in perspective. Money affords us choices. It affords us privilege - and I am not talking about the shallow privilege of owning Prada trinkets, I am talking about the basic privilege of having clean water in the tap in your kitchen. We are kept happy as humans with choices. Trust this. When you restrict another's choices, you deny them their freedom, their right to self-actualise.

How can you learn to master yourself if you are not permitted to try and fail? If you do not fail, you cannot grow. Mistakes are brave. I have to concede to this. Mistakes are not always easy to make - because of our tendency to over think our actions - but for development they're essential and if you intend to go far it is wise to admit to mistakes and accept that you will make them frequently on your path to perfection. In this life, or in your next, you will be faced with a similar set of problems to those you currently face. You will encounter the joys you have encountered and you will still meet your future past as a stranger. That your future past will be a surprise, should not surprise you. The point is to take your future - your destiny - by the horns, and bend it to your will. It is possible. I am a determined optimist - I choose hope - and I value true context. Context has a lot to say about our behaviour.

I am not selfish with my ideas. I take what is given to me and I modify it, let it go. I believe that you must put in something in order to get something out. There is nothing for nothing in this world. I am certain that the more we share, the faster we will evolve as sentient human beings. I think when we set about evolving ourselves we will change the fact that this world is a contemporary nightmare for a lot of people. I think if you have one iota of conscience you should want to work towards

a more equal global equality. We are not all able to manage life equally. Some of us are better equipped to take risks, some of us are more adept at playing it safe. It is in understanding what you are - and what you are not - that you can make the most of your scheduled time on this planet. Modify your dreams to fit your capabilities and you will achieve them.

I believe in diving down the rabbit hole. How can a person not take an opportunity when it presents itself? Use any excuse to meet yourself in the eyes of another. You will learn a lot more from that exchange than from listening to your inner Narcissus. Living well is living right. Living right is seeing yourself alive in many frames, facing up to your reflections. We are mirrors, each of us. We mirror our environment and we mirror each other. We project. Learning to interpret your projections is an important business. Understand that the response you receive from a person is the response you asked for. Never forget that reality. If you will project your negativity upon another, understand that the karmic kick will be yours.

Karma is fair that way. I understand how our present actions influence the outcome of our past. Act rather than don't. This world is no time any longer for hesitation. Know that we can change our future by modifying our present tense. All you have to do to fix the future is to change the way you handled your present the last time you were given a life. Until you handle your present differently - and the objective here is to improve - your future past will keep coming at you out of nowhere and tripping you up. For change to take effect, you must first change. Do not despair when this is under your control. If you want to control your future past, you need first to manage your present with some skill. To do that, you must make yourself present and open your heart to the full experience. Make the unfolding of your day a meditation and be mindful. Just be mindful.

What message do you have for aspiring writers?

Write with your heart. You will feel your words. If you listen to your heart you can be sure the message you are sharing is one of love. Love is where it's at, every time. Hatred is destructive, it's pointless. Prejudice is pointless. **We are none of us without shadows, scars, but we need not subscribe to living our lives in the dark. We possess the light of living, within. We have had that particular spark of life since conception. We need to embrace our shadows and take the best from our worst, because at worst is when our best comes to us. Realise your full potential. Why spend your days trying to prove you are better than someone else? Who someone else is, is not your business. Your business is who you are. That is what matters. Do not write to win approval. Write because you have something to say. Do not pretend you have something to say. If you are not authentic, your work will not resonate. Write in your voice. Write to be understood and to do that, take the time to understand yourself. Identify why you write what you do. That will tell you a lot about yourself.**

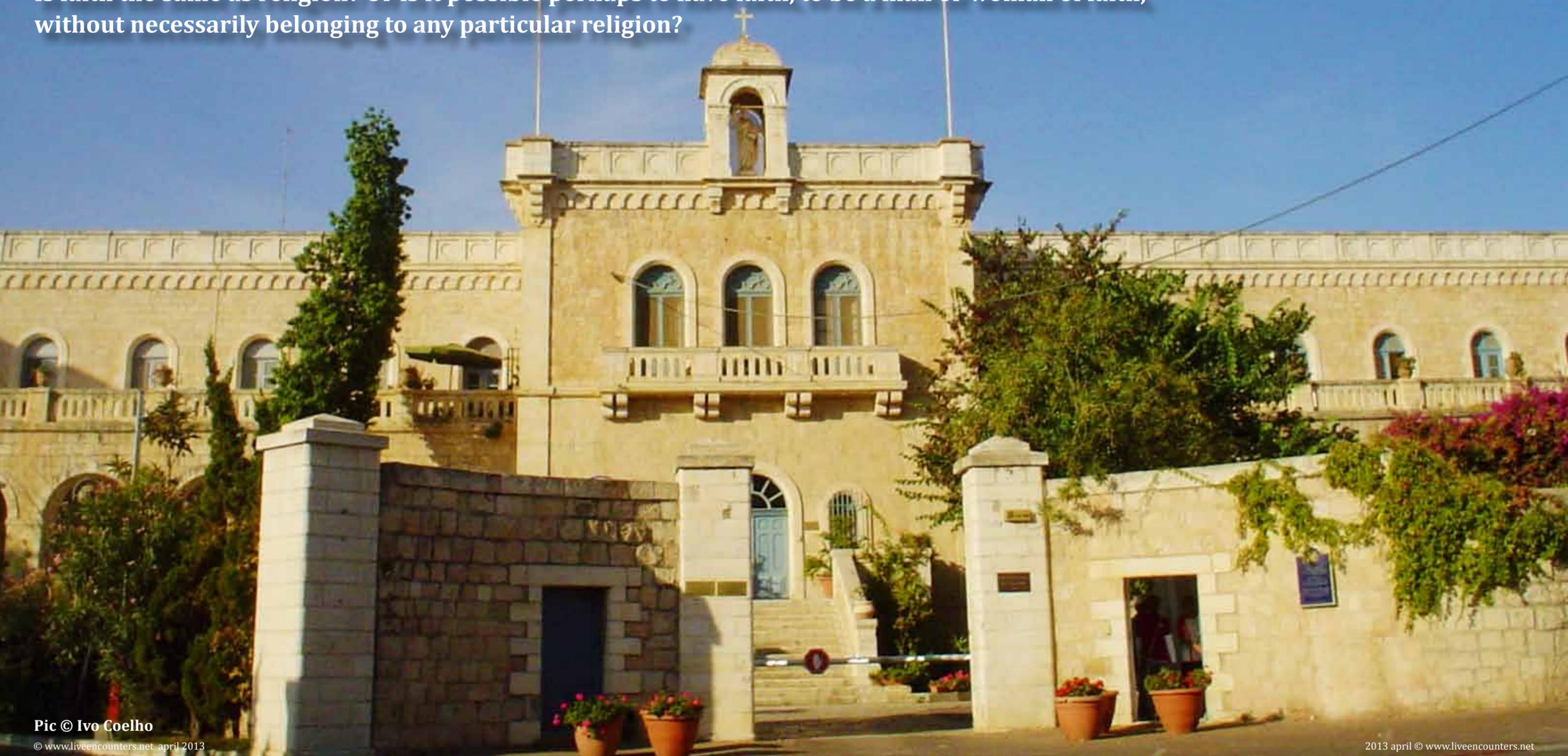


Faith and Religion

by **Ivo Coelho**, SDB

Rector, Ratisbonne Monastery, Jerusalem, Israel

Is faith the same as religion? Or is it possible perhaps to have faith, to be a man or woman of faith, without necessarily belonging to any particular religion?



Faith was an intellectual virtue, and the act of faith was a divinely assisted assent of intellect to a set of divinely revealed truths. The Reformation tended to give greater emphasis to faith in its aspect of trust and confidence in God. In contemporary Catholic theology, however, there are at least two thinkers I know of who distinguish faith and beliefs: Raimundo Panikkar and Bernard Lonergan

Is faith the same as religion? Or is it possible perhaps to have faith, to be a man or woman of faith, without necessarily belonging to any particular religion?

Traditionally, at least in Catholic theology, faith and religion tended to be identified: to have faith meant to be a good Catholic. Faith was an intellectual virtue, and the act of faith was a divinely assisted assent of intellect to a set of divinely revealed truths. The Reformation tended to give greater emphasis to faith in its aspect of trust and confidence in God. In contemporary Catholic theology, however, there are at least two thinkers I know of who distinguish faith and beliefs: Raimundo Panikkar and Bernard Lonergan. Just now I do not have access to the books of Panikkar, so let me give a brief outline of the way Lonergan distinguishes faith and beliefs.

Faith, for Lonergan, is the knowledge born of religious love.

The knowledge born of love may be approached by distinguishing between factual knowledge and 'heart' knowledge. Factual knowledge is what we attain by experiencing, understanding and judging. Heart knowledge belongs to what Lonergan calls the fourth or existential level of human consciousness, and might be described as the discernment and judgments of value of a person in love. This kind of knowledge goes beyond the judging that yields knowledge of facts to an apprehension of values.

When the love that moves the apprehension of values is religious love – which at least in the Christian tradition might be described as God's love flooding the heart (*see Romans 5:5*) – we have an apprehension of transcendent value. This, for Lonergan, is faith: the knowledge born of religious love, where the knowledge in question is not of facts but of values.

Faith may therefore be described as the eye of love. When a person is in love in an unrestricted way, that love is a religious love, and it transforms the person, and her ways of apprehending values.

Now the fact is that love also transforms a person's ways of apprehending facts. We might put this slightly differently. Among the many values, faith also discerns the value of believing the word of religion, or the judgments of facts and value proposed by religion. In other words, it is through faith – the eye of love – that the beliefs of a religion are accepted. Love – religious love – becomes the moving factor in our acceptance of the beliefs and all the other things that constitute a religion.

But what, we might ask, is religious love? In Christian terms, as we have said, it might be described as the gift of God's love flooding our hearts. In experiential categories – or '*phenomenologically*' – it is a state of being in love in an unrestricted way. If being human might be described in terms of a thrust towards self-transcendence – from dreaming to the waking state of experiencing, from mere experiencing to trying to understand and actually understanding, from understanding to asking whether such understanding is correct, weighing the evidence and making judgments, and from judgments of fact to asking what I am to do, exploring alternatives and weighing them, making

We also know that knowledge usually precedes love: we have to at least see someone in order to fall in love. There is an expression for this in Latin: *Nihil amatum nisi cognitum*. Still, falling in love, even when it is in some way preceded by knowledge, is a new beginning, a transformation and reorganization of one's previous world. "Love changes everything," as Andrew Lloyd Webber's song goes.

decisions and carrying them out – being in love can be seen as fulfilment, and being in love in an unrestricted manner as complete fulfilment, of this thrust. We might speak therefore of a cognitional self-transcendence, a moral self-transcendence, and a religious self-transcendence: cognitional self-transcendence when we attain the correct understanding that is truth; moral self-transcendence when we discern true values, and affective / religious self-transcendence when we consistently opt for and live by these values, so that we become ourselves incarnations of value.

Most of us know from experience that falling in love and being in love is something amazing. It is an irruption of an other into our lives. We also know that knowledge usually precedes love: we have to at least see someone in order to fall in love. There is an expression for this in Latin: *Nihil amatum nisi cognitum*. Still, falling in love, even when it is in some way preceded by knowledge, is a new beginning, a transformation and reorganization of one's previous world. "Love changes everything," as Andrew Lloyd Webber's song goes. But the major exception to the rule is God's love flooding our hearts: God can love us and we can respond to this love even before we know who it is that has loved us and who it is we are responding to. This is what is meant when we talk of God's love as a gift, or, in terms of a more traditional theology, grace.

When God's love floods our hearts, we are in the dynamic state of being in love in an unrestricted manner. We experience deep joy and peace, which comes from the fact that our thrust towards moral self-transcendence has found a fulfilment: now we act morally with the ease and comfort of one who is in love. Our love also leads to a new or fresh appreciation of the values of prayer, worship, repentance and belief. But if we would know what is going on within us, and if we are to integrate what has happened with the rest of our lives, we have to inquire, investigate, seek counsel and direction.

Now if religious love is God's gift, and faith is the eye of this kind of love, the very beginning of faith is a gift. For me the meaning of grace came through a lovely story that has never ceased to touch me. It is told by Vincent Donovan who for many years was a missionary to the Masai people in East Africa. Donovan reports:

I was sitting talking with a Masai elder about the agony of belief and unbelief. He used two languages to respond to me – his own and Kiswahili. He pointed out that the word my Masai catechist, Paul, and I had used to convey faith was not a very satisfactory word in their language. It meant literally "to agree to." I, myself, knew the word had that shortcoming. He said "to believe" like that was similar to a white hunter shooting an animal with his gun from a great distance. Only his eyes and his fingers took part in the act. We should find another word. He said for a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose and eyes and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the speed to catch it. All the power of his body is involved in the terrible death leap and single blow to the neck with the front paw, the blow that actually kills. And as the animal goes down the lion envelops it in his arms (Africans refer to the front legs of an animal as its arms), pulls it to himself and makes it part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.

What then of our initial question? We asked whether faith was the same as religion, and in the light of what we have been saying, we have to say no. Faith is one element within religion: it is the inner word of God's love enabling discernment and acceptance of the outer word of religious expression. It is the eye of love that discerns and accepts or rejects the values found in the religious expression of some or all religious traditions.

I looked at the elder in silence and amazement. Faith understood like that would explain why, when my own was gone, I ached in every fiber of my being. But my wise old teacher was not finished yet.

"We did not search you out, Padri," he said to me. "We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him, even leave our land and our people to find him. But we have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God." (Vincent Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered)

Our spontaneous tendency is to think that we are the lion. But in the end, the lion is God. Faith, I learned, is not something I do for myself. It is a gift.

I have been distinguishing, with Lonergan, the gift of God's love, faith as the eye of that love, and beliefs which are among the values that faith discerns and accepts. But what then of religion? Here again we must clarify, because the word has many meanings. The gift of God's love, the state of being in love in an unrestricted manner, the experienced fulfilment of our moral and religious striving, is religious experience, the 'inner word.' In contrast to this there is the outer word of religious expression, which we might conveniently sum up in the four Cs: creeds, codes, cults and community. Religion, for me, would be not just the outer word but the sum total of inner and outer words. If faith and beliefs can be distinguished as I have been trying to do, then religion does not identify with beliefs. It is faith and beliefs together, and much more.

What then of our initial question? We asked whether faith was the same as religion, and in the light of what we have been saying, we have to say no. Faith is one element within religion: it is the inner word of God's love enabling discernment and acceptance of the outer word of religious expression. It is the eye of love that discerns and accepts or rejects the values found in the religious expression of some or all religious traditions. So perhaps the initial question needs to be reframed. Instead of asking whether it is possible to have faith without necessarily belonging to any particular religion, I would ask about the value and worth of religious beliefs, and, more extensively, of the whole gamut of religious expression that I have been calling the outer word.

So what then of the worth of religious expression? Isn't it the religious experience that is the real thing, so that expression is something marginal, secondary, dispensable? Isn't the mind a deceiver, so that we had best remain at the level of pure awareness, without thinking, without concepts? Isn't nirvana beyond all categories, so that it is best not to speak about it? Are we not called to go beyond names and forms to the ineffable experience, the supreme experience of the nirguna Brahman, the Brahman without qualities, rather than remaining in the realm of the saguna Brahman? Should we not let go of the boat once we have crossed to the other shore? Should we not kick away the ladder when we have climbed to the top? Should we not shut up when we reach that which cannot be spoken about?

Can we not let go of the boat, kick away the ladder? And here perhaps is an area of fundamental differences between religious traditions. It seems to me that some traditions – usually referred to as the 'mystical religions' (Hinduism, Buddhism) – are more willing to relativize religious expression than others – the 'prophetic religions' (Judaism, Christianity, Islam).

I have struggled long and hard with such questions, but I believe now that that expression is not something merely marginal to religion – not even to the religious traditions that would in the end relativize them. Religious expression is, in fact, an important part of being human. When two persons are in love but have not yet expressed their love to each other, they have not really reached the fullness of love. *"Their very silence means that their love has not reached the point of self-surrender and self-donation."* (Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 112-13).

But once they have expressed their love to each other, there begins a new phase. What holds for human love, holds in its own way also for the love of God and human beings. Like human love, religious love also has to come to expression. *"Ordinarily the experience of the mystery of love and awe is not objectified. It remains within subjectivity as a vector, an undertow, a fateful call to a dreaded holiness. Perhaps after years of sustained prayerfulness and self-denial, immersion in the world mediated by meaning will become less total and experience of the mystery become clear and distinct enough to awaken attention, wonder, inquiry."* (Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 113).

Even at this point, there may not be clear answers. But here the importance of the word becomes clear. Existing religious expression is a help towards expression of my own experience. For I am not the first to have undergone such experience. Through the accumulated wisdom of the religious tradition, and with the help of religious specialists (priests, gurus, spiritual masters, preachers) I can be helped to identify what is going on within myself. Through the word of fellowship I can gather together with others to celebrate the gift. And when I have identified and named the gift, I can begin to respond to God's love in a new and more deliberate way. Like a man and woman who express their love to each other, now there begins a new phase.

So the outer word has its importance. But we could still ask, as we have already: do we have to cling to it? Can we not let go of the boat, kick away the ladder? And here perhaps is an area of fundamental differences between religious traditions. It seems to me that some traditions – usually referred to as the 'mystical religions' (Hinduism, Buddhism) – are more willing to relativize religious expression than others – the 'prophetic religions' (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). I would think that these are differences in attitude towards the outer word: the mystical religions, or at least significant trends within these religions, tend to regard the outer word as human objectification or formulation of the inner word of religious experience, whereas the prophetic religions tend to regard the outer word as somehow God's word, divine objectification of the inner word.

Obviously, it is easier to relativize merely human objectifications than what one regards as divine objectifications. Thus the Advaitin can easily leave behind the saguna Brahman in favour of the nirguna Brahman, but the orthodox Jew or Christian or Muslim will shudder at the thought of leaving behind the Word of God. And Christians take the further step in believing that God has given expression to his love not only *"in many and various ways"* through the prophets but also in a particular historical person. If a man and a woman are not fully in love until they express that love to each other, then Christianity believes that God has taken the risk – for risk it is – of expressing his love to us in Jesus.

I believe that the gift of God's love has been given to all, because I believe in a God who loves everyone, at all times and in all places. I believe in the power of that love to move, to heal, to build, to overcome, not immediately, not always in ways that we can see, not without the temptation to despair at the evil that religious persons and traditions have been capable of, but still surely, steadily, "as certain as the dawn." (Hosea 6:3)

Where does all this leave us? We have distinguished between faith and beliefs, between inner and outer word, religious experience and expression, and we have been asking about the value and worth of the second member of each of these distinctions. We have proposed that there are constitutively different attitudes within religious traditions towards beliefs, outer word, religious expression. And here is where I must desist.

I am aware that even the very language I have used is derived ultimately from a particular religious tradition, which happens to be naturally my own. I know that not all religious traditions would care to speak of religious experience in personalist terms like I have been doing. I tend to think, however, that there is still much space for dialogue. What I have been calling the gift of God's love, or the dynamic state of being in love in an unrestricted manner, could well be phenomenologically equivalent to universal compassion (*karuna*) in a non-theistic tradition such as Buddhism, or even perhaps to the so-called dissolution of the self in certain reaches of Advaita. And perhaps the matter is not all that desperate, for authenticity has a way of recognizing itself wherever it is found. I believe firmly that we are united at the deepest core of our beings, not only because of our common humanity but also because this common humanity has been graced, gifted, loved by a love that knows no bounds and no barriers.

I believe that the gift of God's love has been given to all, because I believe in a God who loves everyone, at all times and in all places. I believe in the power of that love to move, to heal, to build, to overcome, not immediately, not always in ways that we can see, not without the temptation to despair at the evil that religious persons and traditions have been capable of, but still surely, steadily, "as certain as the dawn" (Hosea 6:3). I believe that this love is moving always, somehow, in ways that I know, in ways that I merely suspect, in ways that I do not even imagine, to bring all humanity together.

I believe that this coming together will not be without an experience of dying, of that death to self that seems to be celebrated somehow in all religious traditions. I believe that faith, hope, love, these endure, but that the greatest of these is love, so that in the end, we will be and even now are united in love. But that love is what enables us to have the eye of faith and the firmness of hope. It is what enables us to believe that the world is not so evil as to be desperate. It is what gives us the possibility of continuing to hope even when there seems to be no room for hope.

So faith and religion. One can be a man or woman of faith even if one does not belong, or does not feel one can belong, to any particular religious tradition – and the criterion of all genuine religious experience and faith is authenticity, the authenticity that St Paul expresses in terms of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, self-control (*Galatians 5:22*). But one can very well be also a man or woman of faith while belonging to this or that religious tradition, and there again the criterion is the same: not so much what one believes, not only what one professes to believe, but above all the way one lives. For I believe very much that in the end we shall be judged on love, as Jesus tells us in the Gospel according to Matthew (25:31-46).

The problem perhaps is that when we speak of authenticity we think easily of moral authenticity and religious authenticity, of goodness and holiness. We tend to forget – or perhaps our postmodern age will not allow us to remember – that there is authenticity also in the sphere of the intellectual, and here is where, I think, most of our major issues, the issues that divide us, rest. Here, and perhaps also, if not more so, on the plane of the emotional.

What then of Jesus himself, I can hear my co-religionists asking me. That is another and very large question. All I can say here is what I have said already: authenticity has a way of recognizing itself wherever it is found. The problem perhaps is that when we speak of authenticity we think easily of moral authenticity and religious authenticity, of goodness and holiness. We tend to forget – or perhaps our postmodern age will not allow us to remember – that there is authenticity also in the sphere of the intellectual, and here is where, I think, most of our major issues, the issues that divide us, rest. Here, and perhaps also, if not more so, on the plane of the emotional.





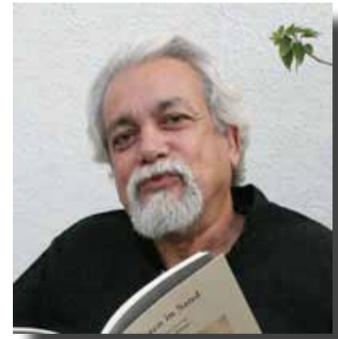
Magic in Stone Prehistoric Rock Carvings In Goa

Experiencing the amazing mystic rock carvings which are believed to have been created in Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times.

If you ever find yourself in Goa and have a day or two to spare, it would be well worth the experience to travel south to the district of Quepem. Make your way via Tilmol town, down the main road jostled by a stream of trucks from the mines, scattering red dust, to Zambaulim. From there press further south to Rivona and Colombo till you begin to notice the landscape becoming a little more wooded and rugged. Just when you think that you may be lost, you'll notice a sign-board of the Archaeological Survey Of India on your right, informing you that you have to turn off the road and head cross country if you want to visit the ancient rock carvings along the banks of the Kushavati river. It is more a dirt track than a road, weaving as it does between dense shrubbery, across undulating terrain. Finally, as you turn a corner you'll come across an immense pit that has been scooped out of the red earth, a large water-body gleaming from its centre, like the watery mouth of some prehistoric beast. Least you get carried away with wild imaginings, you should perhaps get the right picture – it's the remnants of an iron mine. The wounded land, waiting to be healed.

Turning away once more, you'll arrive, through clumps of shrubbery, beside the quiet Kushavati, flowing along with a soft gurgle. Before you are tempted to cross the precarious bamboo and coconut trunk bridge across the river and vanish into the cool green spice plantation on the other side, stop, take a deep breath and relax – then walk down the stony slope to your right out on to the enormous embankment of laterite rock that stretches along the waterway into the trees.

This is the site of Stone Age rock carvings. The place – Kevan-Dhadole, Usgalimal of Pirla village in Sanguem Taluka. Here before you lie more than a hundred figures of creatures, carved deep into the hard flesh of rock, frozen forever in the great drama of the living and the spirit world, some in motion, others still and yet others fighting, mating, dying, giving birth... a part of the great tradition of rock art that was created thousands of years ago in the dim reaches of the past when hunting and gathering communities sought to express themselves by creating forms on rock faces.



'Rock Art', if one can venture to use such a term, first made its appearance about fifty thousand years ago (according to existing theories). There are in India as many as twenty-two clusters of painted rock shelters. Among them are those in Sheopurkalan, Pachmarhi, Badami, Kota, Raichur, Tekkalkota and Kerala. Generally speaking, the rocks are granite in the south and sandstone in central India, though there may be a few exceptions. The unusual creations in Usgalimal differ from these as they are on hard laterite rock with intense iron content. Apart from this – they are carved and not painted.

Throughout the monsoons, the waters of the Kushavati rise and cover the shelf of laterite and then when the waters recede, the direct heat of the sun evaporates the dampness. This constant dampening and heating has contributed to reinforcing the hardness of the rock. Nature here has played the 'Preserver', ensuring that the powerful art of the prehistoric past survives. So, when you look all around you at the surface of rock you will not notice any crumbling fragments. A smooth hardness is evident everywhere. And into this hardness, the ancient stone carvers have cut out deep grooves, creating dramatic forms. Many believe that working with such hard rock would have meant that early creators used tools that were not only hard but also sharp and pointed too. One theory is that since ferruginous stones are a plenty in the surrounding area, they were used to make tools.

To explore these powerful creations, you will have to walk among them. So begin by moving along the edge of the rock shelf till you reach the water's edge. The first few creatures will reveal themselves, a bull and a peacock-like creature among them. Then once you've reached the water-side, turn back and cross again, following a deeper path...walk up and down in this way until you have finally reached the far side of the rock shelf. Creature after creature reveal themselves... there are those like the zebu bull, deer, Gaur, boar-like beasts and a plethora of mystic and fertility symbols.

The concentration of animal forms and fertility symbols in this expanse of rock suggest that these were certainly not mere representations by hunters of their prey either before or after a hunt but instead a complex and powerful visual medium of communication with the power of the Divine. There are a number of symbols here which suggest this. The Triskelion, for example – a sun symbol with seven concentric circles or the numerous other carefully placed and suggestive geometric forms which lend themselves to worldwide mystic and astronomical connections with other prehistoric cultures. What perhaps draws all of these forms, both animal and abstract, into a whole, is the presence of a carving of the Mother Goddess. This outstretched and vibrant figure places the whole expanse of animal and geometric creations into a context. And this context finds connections within the bigger story of the region.



For example at Kajur, not far from Usgalimal, there is a large single slab of granite (locally called 'Dudhanfatar') on which is carved a zebu bull, antelope, deer and ibexes and the form of a vulva in the centre. At one side a symbol in the form of a cross is visible. Then here is the image of a Mother Goddess on the northern lateral side of the rock. What makes this site even more dramatic is the fact that in front of the nearby Paikdeo temple there is a stone circle which is four-layered. Not far from both sites is a place called Curdi where the image of a Mother Goddess was discovered. Here she holds a newborn baby between her breasts.

Two rock shelters have been discovered in the same area. The first one, in the village of Ulhan in Rivona's Kevan area, is about six hundred feet off the ground. Not far from the Usgalimal site. It can apparently house about thirty people and gets a water supply from a perennial stream which flows not far from there. The second rock shelter is also not far away but is of course far bigger than this one. It is in Chandole, Kasmai in Sulkarn.

And this is not all. There are other shelters too. And signs of early habitations.

According to P.P.Shirodkar (formerly a driving force in Archaeological Survey of India's Goa operations), who has done some path-breaking work in the region, the rock carvings of Usgalimal and its environs were created by Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic humans who, he says, were familiar with 'tool making techniques' and perhaps used sharp pointed tools which were made from jade, flint and quartz.

So now, a picture is gradually surfacing of early hunting and gathering communities that lived in this entire region. The land around must surely have been densely wooded and alive with a wide variety of animals which must have represented not just a source for food and other related necessities (like implements and clothes) but also provided powerful symbolic reinforcement – becoming reflections of the many faces of the Divine. Communication with them, through art, therefore brought hunters, shamans and others closer to unseen forces that provided for, protected and empowered them.

This perhaps reinforces the symbolic manner in which creatures and mystic symbols have been expressed. For example, the so-called x-rayed animal. Why was it presented in that manner? What were artists saying? Were they saying that every creature has a visible life and a hidden life? Or that all living beings are temporal and made up of skin and bone and meat? Though conjecture abounds, one cannot escape the fact that these are not random musings of prehistoric artists but expressions stemming from the deeply felt experiences of early human beings who were discovering for themselves, presumably without the support of prior knowledge and experience. There, in an untamed region, all nature existed as a force that needed to be experienced before it was comprehended.



Three elements are of course missing in these visual displays – birds (with the exception of a solitary peacock-like creature), stellar forms like the sun and moon and other orbs and floral designs. No suitable explanations for their absence have been offered so far.

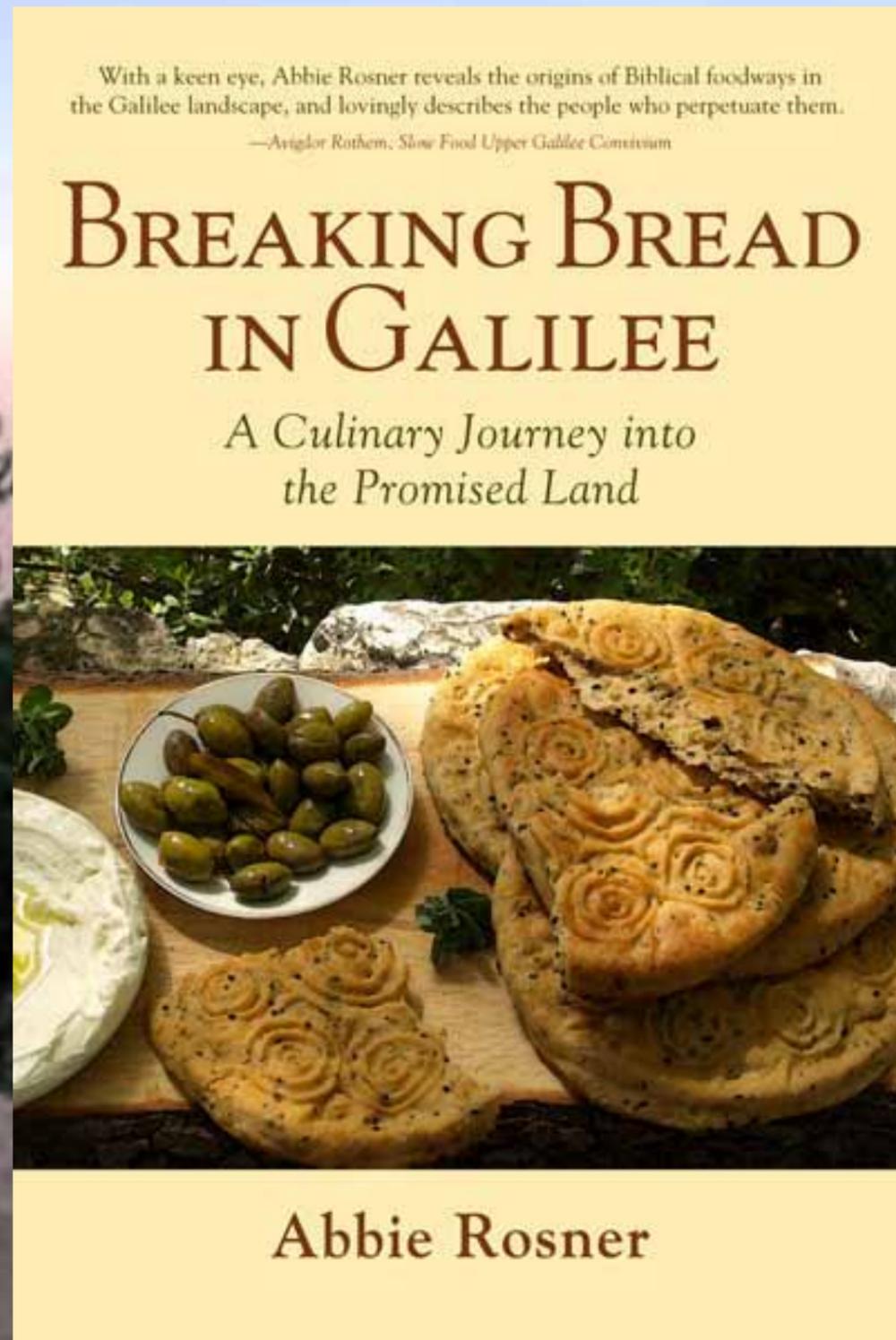
The jigsaw puzzle is incomplete as there are numerous pieces missing. However, that will not rob the experience of its sense of mystery. Encountering the distant past in places like this, gives one the invigorating feeling that we can extend ourselves and establish a dynamic connection between the seen and the unseen world. Furthermore it reinforces in us the realization that we belong to the larger family of humankind that exists beyond the narrow domestic walls of province and creed.

And so, while you are there in the presence of those energy driven creations, you are led into worlds beyond worlds ...only to be brought back to your own present reality by the gurgle of the Kushavati as it wends its way through time and space, carrying secrets that it can never share with you...leaving you incomplete but alive...because prehistoric art transcends time and space and touches the subterranean waters of memory in each one of us.

You leave with the feeling that this is surely a place that should be visited by more people and perhaps should be 'protected' and 'developed', that the access tracks should be made more approachable and that infrastructural facilities and a proper information centre should be set up. But unfortunately, most of these wishes of yours will never be granted because the environs are officially 'forest land' and under the control of the Forest Department which will not permit any altering of the natural landscape. Nevertheless, the important point here is that the Archaeological Survey still continues to maintain the Usgalimal site along with the others, with a lot of care, sensitivity and enthusiasm.

But Nature and Art aren't concerned with Bureaucracy. They exist with it and in spite of it. These rock carvings have survived thousands of years as a result of the harmony between the two. And they will persist for your children and grandchildren to enjoy and be mystified about...because they belong to the great tradition of pre-historic art in India which has survived despite changing times and the inclemency of a drastically altered environment.





R to L : Abbie with her guide, Balkees, a Palestinian cook © peacepeace.org [LINK](#)

Ancient Food Forges Arab-Jewish Friendships

Thanks to an Israeli TV chef based in London and an American immigrant in the Galilee an ancient food has become a modern fad - and a great way of forging Arab-Jewish friendships.

The work of Yotam Ottolenghi and his Palestinian business partner, Sami Tamimi is well documented. But less well-known in Europe and the U.K. is that of freelance writer, Abbie Rosner, who has spent many years studying local wild plants with the help of her Bedouin neighbours. What's more, alongside her love of foods like freekeh (roasted green wheat), hilayon (wild asparagus) and zaatar (the name of both an edible wild plant and a popular spice), she continues her struggle to learn Arabic and has developed a deep affection for her Arab friends.

Reading Rosner's book, *Breaking Bread In Galilee*, it is clear that many resentments between Arabs and Jews are as much cultural as political. But a commitment to investing in a shared history – some of it biblical - can help to overcome them just as personal friendships will continue to achieve much when political pacts fall apart.

But descriptions of 'foodways' (local eating habits and culinary practices) aside, the real charm of her book lies in her developing friendship with Balkees, a Muslim woman from Nazareth, whom she first meets at the archaeological museum on Kibbutz Ein Dor. The pair is separated by age and culture but joined fast by a mutual love of the land and the food it produces. This empathy encroaches on other matters and any reader would share the shame felt by Rosner and her husband, Ron when they first visit Balkees and her family during the fast of Ramadan:



"Her family's land holdings were much larger when she was a child ... and the compensation they received in no way offset the suffering over their loss. The painful memory filled the room and settled in the pit of my stomach. Out of a conversation that started over bread, four almost strangers sitting in a Nazareth living room were delicately treading on an aching scar of the conflict between Israeli Arabs and Jews. None of us could fix it, or make it go away. But it was the simple act of speaking and listening with open hearts that guided us through."

So somehow the two families scramble over this hurdle and eventually the Rosners are invited to help make freekeh on land owned by Balkees's friends. The grain is harvested and roasted for threshing by hand, using the same methods and wooden handled sickles used in biblical days.

The one difference now is that the green wheat is ignited with a cigarette lighter or by a blow torch powered by butane gas! Only when it is sufficiently charred and dried is it threshed by a tractor-operated machine. So it's small wonder that very few local farmers continue to produce it. The grains are then stored in the shade to retain their green colour before being sent to a local mill to be ground. A coarse texture is used for general cooking and a fine variety is used in freekeh soup.

Initially I was astonished to discover that people in the U.K. are prepared to pay almost £8.00 a kilo for commercially prepared and packaged freekeh (e.g. Melbury and Appleton). But I must suppose that the long, laborious partly hand-made manufacturing process may justify the price. Does anyone agree?

** Abbie Rosner has self-published her book as the first publication of the Hilayon Press.*

Tabouleh has long since been a favourite Middle Eastern dish in the west, so I'm closing the first half of this piece with a version made with freekeh rather than bulgur or couscous.

Freekeh Tabouleh

Ingredients:

1 cup freekeh
 2 1/2 cups water
 1/4 cup quality olive oil
 1 tbsp. lemon juice
 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped fine
 2 tbsp. fresh mint, chopped fine
 1/4 cup basil, chopped chopped fine
 3 green onions, chopped small
 about 16 cherry tomatoes, chopped or 3 Roma tomatoes, diced
 Sea or kosher salt and black pepper, to taste



Preparation:

Prepare freekeh according to package instructions, draining well. Allow freekeh to cool slightly, then toss with olive oil and lemon juice.

Combine freekeh with chopped parsley, mint, basil and green onions until well mixed. Add tomatoes and season generously (don't skimp!) with salt and pepper.

(Credit: About.com Vegetarian Food).

A Plague On All Their Houses

A less savoury aspect of Israeli cuisine has emerged along with the recent plague of locusts which invaded the country from Egypt with perfect timing for the Passover holiday. **Although they are insects, four varieties of the creature are deemed kosher in Jewish law and halal for strict Muslims. So the attitude in many quarters has been 'if you can't beat 'em - devour 'em!'**



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As a vegetarian with a delicate constitution, I am personally affronted that Israeli TV has taken an unwholesome delight in reproducing hugely magnified images of them on screen. But despite my rising nausea and to the consternation even of the Orthodox rabbis who reluctantly designate them as kosher, locusts continue to be a popular treat among the Yemenite community. But I will not tempt you with Moshe Basson's recipe for locust pasta, and will conclude instead with a description of how they are prepared. Are you ready?

"First throw your live locusts into boiling vegetable stock. They will squeal like lobsters as the air shoots out of their shells. When they have turned pink, remove from the stock with a slotted spoon.

"Take off the heads like you might do with a prawn. Remove the black thread from along its spine, its wings and the smaller legs. You can leave on the two long hind legs".

I trust that I have not lost Live Encounters magazine too many readers and wish everyone who's celebrating, either a kosher and happy Passover or a happy Easter



“This Old Man Can Feed Us, You Will Marry Him”

Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

Worldwide, some 14 million girls are married before their 18th birthday every year. A 2012 report by UNICEF shows that around one in three women aged 20-24 years were married before they reached 18 years of age, and around 11 percent entered into marriage before 15 years of age. Child marriage occurs in practically every region of the world but occurs at higher rates in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan Human Rights Watch Report

(Juba) – The government of **South Sudan** should increase efforts to protect girls from child marriage, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today, on the eve of International Women’s Day. The country’s widespread child marriage exacerbates South Sudan’s pronounced **gender** gaps in school enrollment, contributes to soaring maternal mortality rates, and violates the right of girls to be free from violence, and to marry only when they are able and willing to give their free consent.

According to government statistics, close to half (48 percent) of South Sudanese girls between 15 and 19 are married, with some marrying as young as age 12.

The 95-page report, *“This Old Man Can Feed Us, You Will Marry Him:’ Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan,”* documents the consequences of child marriage, the near total lack of protection for victims who try to resist marriage or leave abusive marriages, and the many obstacles they face in accessing mechanisms of redress. It is based on interviews with 87 girls and women in Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria, and Jonglei states, as well as with government officials, traditional leaders, health care workers, legal and women’s rights experts, teachers, prison officials, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations, and donor organizations.

For more information, visit HRW website: <http://www.hrw.org>

The Human Rights Watch report tells the story of a 17-year-old girl studying in Lakes State whose father tried to force her to marry an old man who had offered a dowry of 200 cows to her family. The girl refused and said, “I don’t know this man. I have never spoken to him, and he is not my age.” The girl was taken to a nearby forest, tied to a tree and beaten until she died.

“Girls who have the courage to refuse early marriages are in dire need of protection, support, and education,” said **Liesl Gerntholtz**, women’s rights director at Human Rights Watch. “The South Sudan government must make sure that there is a coordinated government response to cases of child marriage and more training for police and prosecutors on the right of girls to protection.”

Girls told Human Rights Watch of being pressured to marry by family members anxious to receive dowry payments, or because they were suspected of pre-marital sex. One girl, Ageer M. told Human Rights Watch, “I refused him but they beat me badly and took me by force to him. The man forced me to have sex with him so I had to stay there.” Few girls in South Sudan know they have the right to seek help, while girls who try to resist early and forced marriages suffer brutal consequences at the hands of their families – including verbal abuse and physical assault, and sometimes even murder.

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The report recommends that the government clearly set 18 as the minimum age for marriage; ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRC), and other human rights treaties; and pass comprehensive family legislation on marriage, separation, and divorce. Child marriage disrupts or ends a girl’s education, increases her risk of violence and abuse, and jeopardizes her health. Failure to combat child marriage is also likely to have serious implications for the future development of South Sudan, Human Rights Watch said. It constrains the education, health, security, and economic progress of women and girls, their families, and their communities.

“Child marriage frequently interrupts girls’ education – or deprives them of it altogether,” Gerntholtz said.

Girls and women interviewed said that dreams of continuing school to become accountants, teachers, or doctors were cut short when they married. Those who dropped out of school found it difficult to continue after marriage or becoming pregnant.

Government statistics for 2011 show that only 39 percent of primary school students and 30 percent of secondary students are female. Child marriage also puts girls at greater risk of death or ill-health because of early pregnancy and childbirth. Reproductive health studies show that young women face greater risks in pregnancy and child birth than older women, including life-threatening obstructed labour due to their smaller pelvises and immature bodies – problems accentuated by South Sudan’s limited prenatal and postnatal healthcare services.



A young woman recovers after giving birth to twins in Bor Hospital. She was married at the age of 12 and had her first child at the age of 15, enduring a protracted five-day labor. She is now 20 and these are her 4th and 5th children. - Bor, Jonglei State, February. Pic © Human Rights Watch



“The global problem of child marriage strips women and girls of their livelihoods and creates a high risk of violence,” Gertholtz said. “South Sudan’s government must make good on its pledges of gender equality by putting human rights of women and girls at the heart of its development agenda.”

Human Rights Watch called on the South Sudanese government, with the support of its development partners, to:

Develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan to prevent and address the consequences of child marriage;

Develop and implement guidelines on how national and state level government ministries and agencies should handle child marriage cases;

Conduct training for relevant government and law enforcement officials about the legal rights of girls under the Child Act, particularly their right to be protected from child marriage;

Carry out a nationwide awareness-raising campaign to inform the public about the harms caused by child marriage;

Work toward comprehensive reform of South Sudan’s laws on marriage, separation, divorce, and related matters; and

Take programmatic and policy measures to ensure that girls and women who seek help to fight forced marriages can receive it.

Worldwide, some 14 million girls are married before their 18th birthday every year. A 2012 report by UNICEF shows that around one in three women aged 20-24 years were married before they reached 18 years of age, and around 11 percent entered into marriage before 15 years of age. Child marriage occurs in practically every region of the world but occurs at higher rates in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Pic - Mary eloped with her husband when she was 14. Her husband beat her severely and stabbed her for talking to another boy. As a result, she lost the use of her right hand. When her husband took her to the police station and accused her of adultery, the police caned her as punishment. Her husband was never charged for assaulting her. Mary now lives with her uncle. Juba, Central Equatoria State, February 2013. Pic © Human Rights Watch



Entering Trance for Self-Healing

This month's focus for self-healing is Hypnotherapy! You can use hypnotherapy and self-hypnosis as tools in many areas of your life. Whether you use it to manage pain, quit smoking, lose weight, ace a job interview or a school test: it is great to assist you in gaining control over your life. Many people also use hypnotherapy or guided imagery to develop their spiritual life.

It's not uncommon to have mixed feelings about hypnotherapy. Some people are afraid of being hypnotized, thinking it's a sign of weakness and are sure they cannot be hypnotized. Others associate hypnosis with something entertaining they have seen on television, on the Internet, or at a stage show. They think people are controlled and made to do stupid things such as cluck like a chicken. The reality is when under hypnosis you would not do anything you weren't willing to do. If you felt like you were being compromised, you would just come back into full awareness. What is true is that you go in and out of trances on a daily basis.

Trance happens often when you are stopped at a red light or stop sign. Your focus drifts and you don't notice that the light has changed. The person in the car behind you honks the horn and you are startled back into the present. You had just fallen into a light trance. You may also have this experience while washing the dishes, taking a shower, or reading a good book. You may realize that you lost track of time, which is a sign of having gone into a trance. When you are in trance you are able to access not only the information from your conscious mind, but your subconscious as well.

There are a several ways to enter trance. One is progressive relaxation, either active or passive. Active progressive relaxation involves tensing the muscles and then relaxing them while practicing breathing. Passive progressive relaxation involves focusing on a part of the body and relaxing through the use of imagery and releasing tension via the breath.

To increase your success with self-hypnosis, you may want to practice deepening your trance. This occurs naturally when you put yourself into and out of trance repeatedly. Each time you put yourself in trance again, the trance deepens. We are often naturally in trance when we first awaken and right before sleep. These are great times to give yourself suggestions, or to visualize the behavior you would like to accomplish.

Eye fixation is another way to enter trance. You focus on a certain spot, preferably a little above eye level, while giving yourself suggestions to move into trance. You may say, "I feel relaxed and am moving deeper into relaxation." Allow your eyes to glaze over and slowly close.

You can also use imagery. Imagine a place you have already been or a place you would like to go. You see yourself walking down a path or a stairway. Imagine yourself walking slowly downward; notice your breath slowing. With each step downward, give yourself suggestions concerning things that you would like to accomplish, or see yourself experiencing what you would like to experience.

The more you use hypnotherapy, the more helpful it becomes. One day I experienced some anxiety and decided to close my eyes and imagined a ruler that went from 0 to 10. I started with my anxiety at 10, the highest number, and saw the ruler moving down to 0, or no anxiety. As I took a deep breath, my anxiety decreased and I felt more relaxed.

Music is one of my favorite tools for entering trance. Give yourself suggestions before you start the music concerning how you will respond when the music begins. You can also tie the suggestions into the rhythm of the music--for example, when the music is quieter, you may give process suggestions, such as My body relaxes with each note. As the music becomes louder, you may give the end result suggestion, such as I move easily and have the energy to complete my tasks each day, or post-hypnotic suggestion, such as When I get up in the morning I will be motivated to _____.

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When you are asleep, you have dreams every 90 minutes or so. Some you remember, while others are immediately forgotten. You have the same dream-like rhythms, called ultradian rhythms, while you are awake. During the daytime, it's important to take a break every 90 minutes or so to rest. Ignoring natural rhythms, pushing through, and keeping going can upset the delicate rhythms of the mind-body regulation. This hyperactivity results in stress-related disorders such as psychosomatic pain, overeating, mood disorders, depression, and other disorders. Honor the natural rhythm of your body. When you find yourself naturally daydreaming or spacing out without seeing, know that unconscious processes are being resolved. This is a vital part of self-healing.



There are a few ways to know you have entered trance. One is that you will have the experience you were hoping for, such as relaxation, lower stress levels, and pain reduction. The second is that you will experience a sense of warmth, cooling, or numbness during the process. The third is that you will experience what seems to be a distortion of time. Often it seems as if very little time has passed, when the time that has actually passed is much greater than you had realized. A 45-minute session often feels like five or ten minutes.

Self-Healing Tools

Developing a Mantra

A mantra is a short phrase that has an easy rhythm that is used to increase results. It can be used for better suggestion when applied to what you are working on. For example, a mantra in the early morning might be "I am alive, awake, refreshed, protected from stress." My favorite walking mantra is "I am strong, healthy, and fit." An evening mantra might be "Thank you for my blessings, and heal me in my sleep."

Use a journal to write out mantras or self-hypnosis suggestions you want to use when you first awake and before you go to sleep. These are powerful trance times that benefit you the most.

You can find sample scripts in the appendix of my book *12 Weeks to Self-Healing: Transforming Pain through Energy Medicine*. Decide what you would like to accomplish in your script. Your goal may be to decrease stress, reduce pain, increase exercise, eat a healthy diet, or any number of other life improvements.

Write out your suggestions: *I crave healthy foods such as green, fresh spinach salad and juicy organic oranges. When I am at work, I breathe and relax and allow myself to be peaceful. When I awake, I get out of bed and begin stretching gently.*

You will find a free Smoking Cessation program here [LINK](#). There are also audio sessions for *Entering Trance and Relaxation*.

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