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August 2015



PATRICIA WEISS FAGEN

COLOMBIA: URBAN FUTURES IN CONFLICT ZONES



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Colombia: urban futures in conflict zones

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Fagen worked in academia before joining the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1988, where she served in Washington, DC, El Salvador and Geneva. She has worked for the World Bank, the InterAmerican Development Bank and on a fellowship grant at the U.S. Institute for Peace. 2000 to 2013 she was a senior associate at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown, and is presently a senior fellow. Her work has encompassed research, field studies, evaluations related to post-conflict reconstruction, refugees, refugee/returnee integration, migrant remittances, disaster management and urbanisation. Her recent research has taken her to Colombia, Liberia, Haiti and the Middle East.



Fracturing the Earth, Violating Rights

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#papuaitukita as a civic passion for Papua

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Two Approaches to Human Rights Review in Post-War Sri Lanka

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Being Muslim and Working For Peace

Raphael Susewind (Two years ago this month on Live Encounters Magazine)

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Famine - The Spirit of Place Programme, Swinford, County Mayo July 10th '15

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 7 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/Arlen House; children's story, Michel the Merman, illustrated by Marc Barnes (NZ). He lives in Hamburg and Ireland. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



Return of a Wandering Star

Natalie Wood

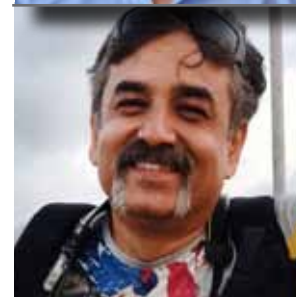
Born in Birmingham, England, U.K., Natalie Wood began working in journalism a month prior to outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. She remained in regional Jewish journalism for over 20 years, leaving full-time writing to help run a family business and then completed a range of general office work. Wood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



'Tell Me, Sister Wind'

Randhir Khare

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The Queen Archetype

Dr Candess M Campbell

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



Street Food - Turkey

Ozlem Warren, Turkish Culinary Expert

International cooking teacher and Turkish culinary expert Ozlem Warren is a native of Turkey, lived there and extensively travelled for 30 years. She has been teaching wholesome, delicious Turkish cookery in the US, Jordan, Istanbul and England. Her recipes have been published in the local media in England, Hurriyet and Sabah national daily newspapers in Turkey. Ozlem also took part at the "Turkish Chefs of the World", "Dunyanin Turk Seferi" TV program aired at TRT, National Turkish TV channel and in 37 countries. www.ozlemsturkishtable.com



All in God's Name

Mark Ulyseas

Destruction of Mother Nature and her denizens is essential in many religious ceremonies. Last November over 300,000 animals were slaughtered in a country where a devastating earthquake followed not long after the mass slaughter. The decapitation of animals was an offering to the Gods. Apparently Mother Nature thought otherwise. How many hundreds of thousands of animals will be slaughtered come November 2015?

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



PATRICIA WEISS FAGEN

COLOMBIA: URBAN FUTURES IN CONFLICT ZONES



Executive summary

The 2014-15 peace negotiations in Havana between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement are expected to end the long conflict between these two armed actors. The accords reached thus far reiterate a commitment to human rights and development in neglected rural areas, but do not prioritise the dire situation faced by regional medium-sized cities in conflict zones. Millions of victims have sought refuge in these cities and are likely to remain there. This report argues that achieving urban integration, strengthening institutions and increasing productivity in urban settings are fundamental to peace.

All cities have suffered in multiple ways from the massive influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Medium-sized cities are growing faster than the largest cities, having received the highest percentage of conflict victims in relation to their pre-existing local populations. Today they are largely unable to integrate IDPs living in their jurisdictions either administratively or economically. New infrastructure, stronger institutions and extended public services are badly needed. Taking two Colombian cities as illustrations, the report examines efforts to improve the well-being of IDPs and other victims, focusing on the urban resources and regional development that will be needed in post-conflict Colombia.



<https://pixabay.com/en/bogota-candelaria-quevedo-jet-54435/>

Introduction

The 2014-15 peace negotiations in Havana between the Colombian government and representatives of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla movement are expected to reach an agreement on ending the long conflict between these two armed actors. Although armed conflict has persisted for decades, the massive displacements that are the focus of this report were brought about by confrontations at the end of the 1990s between and among: (1) armed insurgents of the FARC and, to a lesser extent, the National Liberation Army; (2) the paramilitary forces eventually consolidated into the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), first hired to protect land-owners from the insurgents and later to directly confront the FARC; and (3) the country's armed forces. The rise of narco-trafficking and the separate but related "war" on drugs intensified forced displacement.

The peace process thus far prioritises the rights of victims and offers them compensation for the suffering they have endured during the decades of armed conflict. The negotiators at the peace table are calling for what they term a "territorial peace", one that decentralises the political and economic dominance of the Bogotá-centred political and economic structures, and empowers municipal and departmental leaders and rural communities.

The accords reached to date pledge much-needed economic infrastructure, social services and good governance to rural parts of the country that the central government has long ignored: "Integral rural reform establishes the bases for structural transformation in the countryside, creates conditions for the well-being of the rural population and thus contributes to the stable and durable peace" (author's translation). The measures under the heading "Towards a new Colombian countryside: integrated rural reform" detail the multiple deep structural and social changes needed to revive the agrarian sector and create prosperity for rural inhabitants. The accords reached thus far are dedicated to ending a history of inequalities, discrimination, and exploitation in favour of investment in rural development and reform.

The large majority of the six million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are of rural origin, and rural reforms are essential. However, there are few references in the agreements to policies intended to integrate the millions of IDPs who fled from the countryside and have now settled in nearby medium-sized urban municipalities. All important urban centres located throughout rural Colombia are today equally in need of investment, development and reform. The increasingly widely shared view among national, regional, and international actors is that combined rural development, urban planning and a regional focus should form the basis for a successful territorial peace.



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Conflict, displacement and urban growth⁽¹⁾

The elaboration of "territorial peace" in the accords is focused on broad goals of democratic development in favour of the dispossessed. The accords are intended to rectify the transformations due to conflict and economic modernisation measures that have adversely affected primarily the rural poor. The solution implicitly foresees a return to an economy based on small and medium-sized farms. Nevertheless, hopes for a revival of small-scale agriculture are countered by the realities that much of the best agricultural land is now concentrated in and owned by commercial agribusiness, while legal and illegal mining and the cultivation of illegal substances have become major sources of employment for both the urban and rural poor. Small and medium-sized farming was hardly prosperous in the past and is unlikely to be very attractive to Colombian youth in the future.

After more than a decade of displacement, millions among the victims and their families who should be the beneficiaries of peace are neither rural nor wish to be. The rural population driven from their homes and land is presently scattered, with more than half living in cities, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁽²⁾ To attend to their needs, policies addressed to the urban places of refuge where the majority of victims have made their lives are as essential, or more so, as policies focused on agricultural development.

Urban migration is a global trend that was well under way in Colombia prior to and independently of conflict-induced displacement. In the 1960s and 1970s the economics of export substitution won considerable support throughout Latin America and gave rise to manufacturing projects in several regional centres. The policy attracted farmers from the countryside who for a brief time formed a core of workers in small industrial hubs throughout the country. However, the import substitution model had been discarded by the late 1980s. Buildings in the nearly abandoned urban peripheries still stood, but without the productive infrastructure that once promised employment opportunities. Instead, former manufacturing areas served as essentially "bedroom communities" for the migrating rural poor. By the time IDPs populated these former manufacturing districts there were few if any economic opportunities for them either in the peripheral settlements⁽³⁾ or in the city cores.

Forced migration has followed similar patterns since the 1990s. Victims of violence, threats and land seizures generally go first to nearby small municipalities but, unable to find the means of survival there, move on to larger cities, from where they may move to the major urban centres. Since the early 2000s IDPs have frequently gone directly to the large cities where they have established a family and community presence. The largest cities in Colombia – Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena, Cali and Barranquilla – have received the greatest number of conflict-displaced people.



<https://pixabay.com/en/bogota-cundinamarca-colombia-54428/>

Conflict, displacement and urban growth⁽¹⁾ *contd...*

Various sources estimate the number of IDPs in metropolitan Bogotá at close to 600,000, largely concentrated in the separate municipality of Soacha, which was formerly a manufacturing hub.⁽⁴⁾ Medellín has received migrants of all kinds in recent years and grown rapidly. It is home to over 250,000 recognised victims (Pareia, 2013). These cities have been criticised for failing to provide adequate services or protect inhabitants and the environment, although Medellín has won praise for innovative financing arrangements to assist the smaller, poorer municipalities nearby that host large numbers of victims.⁽⁵⁾ Municipal authorities everywhere lament growing criminal activity and drug trafficking in areas heavily inhabited by IDPs. Nevertheless, the IDP population constitutes a very small percentage of the total population of major cities and the IDP presence is all but invisible for the majority of inhabitants.

By the early part of the next decade virtually every department in the country had either expelled or received victims, most often both. Unlike the rural poor who had begun arriving earlier, forcibly displaced persons fled to urban areas involuntarily. The newcomers neither intended to migrate to cities nor planned their departures and arrivals. The rapid, sometimes sudden, appearance of thousands of people who were poor, desperate and traumatised invariably proved disruptive to long-standing city residents and the urban environment. The authorities were unprepared and unable to accommodate the influx adequately, even with the humanitarian assistance legislated for IDPs and present throughout the country. Nevertheless, over the years and with great difficulty a formerly rural population has largely learned the disciplines and demands of urban life, accessed humanitarian assistance, found new allies to replace the broken safety nets it left behind, formed organisations and settled.

Urban conditions remain poor: substandard informal housing in marginal areas where inhabitants' land and dwellings are not, or not yet, legalised; low-quality public services; poor transportation; and few prospects for employment. The displaced in cities are living among criminal gangs, drug traffickers and deteriorating infrastructure. Cities have offered refuge from conflict and the displaced populations have poured in. But violence has followed the urban displaced, resulting in frequent intra-urban flight in numerous locations due to forced recruitment, gender based violence and pursuit by former victimisers.

While levels of services and personal security may be inadequate, however, education and health care are present in all the larger and medium-sized cities (which is not the case for the smallest municipalities and rural communities), and there are greater possibilities to earn incomes.



<https://pixabay.com/en/protest-bogota-police-riot-swat-275872/>

The displaced often cite the absence of health and educational services as major reasons for deciding against returning to rural areas. Likewise, in the towns and cities the displaced have been able to form organisations for mutual assistance and to advocate for their rights before municipal, departmental and national officials. IDP organisations are numerous throughout the country, and women in particular have been among their major leaders and beneficiaries. These organisations have not been very successful in exerting pressure for the changes their constituencies need, but their presence has been felt. The peace accords should enhance the authority of such entities.

When it comes to cities, size and overall wealth matter. Large cities are wealthier than medium-sized or poor ones. However strapped for resources they are, they have the ability to tax: land ownership is more clearly defined, enabling both property and personal taxation. The major cities receive funds from the central government and have established systems of health care, education and sanitation that can be expanded to accommodate larger numbers as populations rise, if there is the will to do so. The Colombian system is designed so that wealthier municipalities receive the largest share of federal funds as payment for use of their resources (*regalias*), and poorer municipalities less. Small, poor, rural municipalities historically have received very little – hence the priority accorded to improving conditions in such communities.

Victims and their future

Rural civilians were forcibly drawn into the conflict as their land and properties were seized and children forcibly recruited; many died and millions fled. Flight was augmented due to the fumigation of the major cash crop, coca. The AUC was formally demobilised by 2006. The FARC sits presently at the peace table in anticipation of demobilisation and a transition to a political rather than military agenda. Nevertheless, displacement caused by armed threats and violence persists, now attributed to “criminal bands” that combine former militia, drug-related gangs and others.

The underlying legal framework for addressing the rights and needs of victims has been put in place in the combined Victims and Land Restitution Law no. 1448 of June 10th 2011. The law creates mechanisms to protect and assist victims, restore land forcibly lost or stolen, and/or to compensate the rightful owners for their losses. Law 1448 provides benefits for victims and is flexible in allowing those determined to be eligible to receive benefits in locations other than their places of origin, including cities close to or far from their original rural homes. Victim and land restitution rights allow compensation for losses suffered. This flexibility is fundamental because, as important as the rights to return and restitution are to the peace process, the successful implementation of the laws presently and in the post-conflict transition period will continue to be limited by administrative shortcomings, lack of political will and criminally driven insecurity.



<https://pixabay.com/en/grandmother-peasant-colombia-455977/>

Victims and their future *contd...*

The legislation in place has not protected would-be returnees from violence and threats even when claimants are able to document the legitimacy of their claims (Amnesty International, 2014).⁶ The indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in particular have encountered violent resistance to their efforts to return. To be classified as a “victim” for the purposes of receiving benefits and assistance for returns and resettlement under the law requires recognition and registration in the RUPD (the registry of those recognised as victims of displacement) of the National System for Attention and Reparations for Victims. It is at times far from easy to meet criteria for recognition, and even more difficult to sort out and document conflicting claims to land or ascertain compensation due.

While the government and aid agencies have encouraged and materially supported IDP return under the Land Restitution Law, the new legal order has produced a relatively small number of documented successful, durable returns.⁽⁷⁾ Although greater security, more public services and improved rural infrastructure would increase both the numbers seeking return and restitution – and the likelihood that returns would be durable – these are long-term goals. Meanwhile, the more time families are settled in other places, the less likely they will be to return to their original homes (Meertens, 2004).⁽⁸⁾ Nobody expects a massive return to places of origin after the peace accords are signed or for the foreseeable future.

The most recent polls indicate that at least 70% of the now largely urbanised internally displaced population does not intend to return to its places of origin.⁽⁹⁾ On the one hand, attempts to regain land have been met with violence in addition to legal and financial insecurity while, on the other hand, the displaced and other victims have found previously unavailable advantages in their host cities and they can contemplate a better future for their children.

The results of a 2014 survey published by the Administrative Department of National Statistics (DANE) and released by the Unit for Attention and Integrated Reparations for Victims (Victims Unit) validated the notion that IDPs were becoming settled in the various municipalities where they currently reside. The DANE survey report, entitled *Effective Enjoyment of Rights 2013-2014*, indicated growing stability and slow improvements in quality of life (DANE, 2015). The results were mixed but somewhat encouraging. In addition to greater stability among families, poverty levels showed improvement, although were still unacceptably high; more homes had been regularised and documented; and food insecurity was less a problem. The least well off were municipalities along the Pacific coast where – not coincidentally – the largest numbers of Afro-Colombian and indigenous displaced persons are concentrated.



FARC's victims are around 500,000, but the government inflates the figure for political purposes, says Fernando Vargas Quemba. <http://blogs.elcorreo.com/laotrafaz/>

While hardly painting a positive picture, the results could be seen as indicating continuing improvements in quality of life, i.e. “effective enjoyment” for IDPs in the host municipalities surveyed, and a justification for a path away from dependence on assistance.

Law 1448 created a Victims Unit charged with coordinating and evaluating public policies for the victims of armed conflict in coordination with all other government and non-government agencies. The unit has offices in every department and has taken on the functions exercised previously under the comprehensive legal framework that had defined the responsibilities of the state toward those displaced by conflict.⁽¹⁰⁾ But definitions and policies have changed with the new legislation: IDPs are now part of a wider category of victims who are entitled to receive progressive levels and kinds of assistance, e.g. immediate humanitarian assistance upon flight, emergency attention and transition assistance for which registration in the system is required.

The transition assistance subsidises basic needs – e.g. health, education, documentation and income generation assistance – and is intended to achieve stabilisation, defined in turn as “effective enjoyment of life”. The previously indefinite status of IDPs is to end. Upon achieving stabilisation or “effective enjoyment of life” the victim receives a once-off indemnity for losses⁽¹¹⁾ and thereafter is treated as other Colombian citizens. Decree 2569 of December 12th 2014 redefined benefits for IDPs under the Victims Law and laid down a path for ending the formally recognised status of displacement (CONPES, 2011; Unidad de Víctimas, 2014). This change of focus is highly controversial. The Constitutional Court has strongly defended the status of IDPs since 2004⁽¹²⁾ and rights advocates oppose the changes.

If the government is eventually to relinquish a policy of supporting IDPs as a separate category in favour of one that integrates them into the communities where they settle, it is obvious that achieving this daunting task requires local institutions and municipal and departmental authorities to collaborate with each other, as well as with communities and national institutions. With return levels low and likely to remain so, the Victims Unit continues to play an important role. Since 2012 it has revised the previous assumption that its work would consist primarily of assisting people to return to rural areas. Currently its resources and regional offices are far more often engaged either in helping people who are insecurely settled in a host city to change locations within the same city or assisting them in relocating to a different city.⁽¹³⁾ Victims may receive benefits, accompaniment and assistance when moving from one city to another, providing they can establish that they are doing so according to three basic principles: voluntary choice, security and dignity of living conditions. They are required to draw up a plan and establish that they will be relocating to a municipality that is secure and offers them the potential of effective enjoyment of life.



<http://www.imgwhoop.com/image/villavicencio/aeropuerto-la-vanguardia>

Medium-sized cities and the peace process

Outside of the major urban hubs are medium-sized cities that serve as departmental capitals and important regional trading centres. Their size and resources place them somewhere between rich and poor municipalities, and their potential importance for Colombia's future is too often undervalued. These cities are the administrative centres of every region, bridging rural and urban, national and departmental, and departmental and municipal realms. Medium-sized cities in the former conflict zones received people escaping violence throughout the late 1990s and in the first decade of the 2000s. Numbers continue to grow as violence abates, but economic displacement and poverty drive more people from the rural areas. Medium-sized cities are growing faster than the largest cities.

While they have not received the largest number of conflict victims, they have received the highest percentage in relation to their pre-existing local populations. For example, the city of Florencia, located in the highly conflictive department of Caquetá, has a present population of close to 70% IDPs. (14) Among these heavily impacted cities are Sincelejo and Villavicencio, described below. Conflict-driven migrants have built temporary shelters on private, government owned and ecologically fragile land. Their presence has brought confrontations with security forces or other armed parties, while weak municipal institutions are able to offer neither adequate protection nor viable options. Churches, non-governmental agencies and international organisations with donor funding are able to fulfil a small portion of the needs.

Today, these medium-sized urban cities are largely unable to productively integrate displaced persons living in their jurisdictions. New infrastructure and extended public services are badly needed. To a far greater extent than the large cities, they depend on the central government to fund all or part of the basic services needed, including education, sanitation, health care and sometimes housing. The challenge for post-conflict Colombia and the country's territorial peace will be to improve the financial base and employment-producing productivity in all cities and to legalise land and housing where former victims can live, thus opening the way to their durable integration. In some cases municipal authorities are themselves implicated in violence and criminality and are unreceptive of measures to improve conditions for IDPs or other poor sectors. In other instances municipal and/or department officials have been petitioning for years for expanded funding from the central government in order to cover public services.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Colombian government, the representatives of UN agencies, donor governments, financial organisations and non-governmental advocacy groups acknowledge that improving regional governance, strengthening institutions and increasing urban resources are the sine qua non for meaningful change in post-conflict Colombia.



<https://pixabay.com/en/cocoa-man-colombia-peasant-hand-452911/>

Two examples of urban realities: Villavicencio and Sincelejo

This section discusses progress in two different settings: in Villavicencio local government planning and capacity building are improving with assistance from joint UN agency projects, while in Sincelejo there is little or no planning and minimal international engagement.

Villavicencio

Villavicencio is the largest city and the capital of the department of Meta, located only 74 km from Bogotá. It was a quiet village located at the intersection of two rivers until the construction of a road in the 1950s turned the town into a hub of trade and transit and a place of refuge. The areas surrounding the city before the conflict were characterised by open savannas, cattle raising and historically poor subsistence farms. The road opened the town to new markets, but also enabled the coca economy to thrive in the sparsely populated rural region. Coca cultivation along with drug trafficking sustained the local economy and peasants from other regions migrated there. The FARC dominated the region until the 1990s, when it was partially driven out by paramilitary forces. Conflict involving the FARC, paramilitary forces and the Colombian armed forces produced thousands of victims. Two of the major massacres in the conflict, both attributed to the AUC/paramilitaries, occurred during the 1990s.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the following years thousands of civilians were caught in armed battles between factions of the AUC and the FARC. The latter retained control in parts of Meta and surrounding departments.⁽¹⁷⁾ The combined effect was to fuel a continuing flight from the countryside and its small towns to the cities, especially Villavicencio.

Coca cultivation helped to finance all sides in the continuing conflict and the combined forces of the Colombian government and the U.S. sought its elimination, primarily through fumigation. In two pilot projects during the first decade of the current century in the framework of Plan Colombia in La Macarena and Montes de Maria, Plan Colombia sought to turn these conflict regions into models of good governance and economic opportunity that were no longer dependent on coca cultivation. The effort produced the desired result in eliminating a great deal of coca and partly defeating the insurgents; nevertheless, in areas near Villavicencio the rural population was generally left impoverished by the loss of coca income and was still victimised, resulting in more people leaving (Isacson & Poe, 2009). Flight continued throughout the region. Since the 2005 census the population in Villavicencio has grown from some 360,000 to about 500,000, with this growth consisting almost entirely of conflict-related migrants.⁽¹⁸⁾ The author was repeatedly told that more people were arriving, often from a long distance away, and were expected to stay. At present the registry of the Victims Unit in Meta department lists 130,000 IDPs, the large majority located in Villavicencio.⁽¹⁹⁾



Sincelejo

Villavicencio *contd...*

People continue to arrive in Villavicencio at least in part because the city authorities are attempting to absorb the new population through long-term planning and investment in solutions. The first challenge facing Villavicencio's local officials and city planners was the rapid occupation of government land in the 1990s by desperate IDPs. The land was uninhabited, but ecologically fragile and therefore largely unsuited for settlement. Under regulations for the protection of IDPs the city could not simply expel the trespassers. To address this issue in a durable and comprehensive way required finding other options; this remains the challenge today. Moving the conflict-driven trespassers humanely means identifying other available land, building viable communities where the violence they had escaped would not reoccur, bringing in public services and, for all these purposes, mobilising a large quantity of resources. At the same time the city faces a growing shortage of water and shrinking sources of income and employment as oil prices and supplies decline and productivity is stagnant.

The second challenge, related to the first, is to legalise the settlements where people have been living, if they are otherwise viable for habitation. This requires the settlers to petition for legalisation – which is bureaucratically complicated and involves both the departmental and municipal governments – and to negotiate with owners. Legalised settlements are then eligible for public services and new infrastructure as appropriate. Community organisations in legalised settlements have standing in the municipality; those without legal status do not. The process is ongoing and progress is not only slow, but costly. The mayor has indicated willingness to spend more on improvements, but taxation in Villavicencio is a limited option. Meta department earns funds from the federal government for its oil extraction, but these funds are not expected to last as oil prices fall and extraction declines.

Assisting these efforts, the UN agencies working in Meta undertook cooperative efforts with each other and with local authorities in order to find viable solutions and funding. UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) are leading multi-agency efforts to integrate the IDP population into the urban fabric by improving institutional capacities and encouraging community organisations among IDPs. The UN alliance is a local manifestation of the Transitional Solutions Programme (TSI), a UNDP-UNHCR collaboration implemented in 17 communities, including Villavicencio, where conditions were determined to be conducive to efforts that facilitate self-reliance and development (UNHCR, 2013). Local integration is a major priority.⁽²⁰⁾

The projects are wide-reaching, including labour initiatives, credit innovations, food security and income generation. The most ambitious project is the “13th of May” settlement. It combines municipal outreach, UN service and resources, and a share of free housing that has been offered by the Presidency,


<https://www.greenleft.org.au/node/54956>

largely intended for the internally displaced. The settlement, built on land owned by the municipality, has been legalised; housing titles are being issued; community organisations participate in governance; and, for the time being at least, many residents are employed in construction. This community of resettled IDPs and others like it are on the way to becoming an integral part of Villavicencio. Continuing growth is inevitable, but Villavicencio's capacity to continue to absorb the growth is questionable for the reasons elaborated in this section. The urban planning in the city is not yet matched by similar planning outside it in the agrarian sector. Coca, once cultivated by small growers, has been replaced by large plantations of African palm owned by many of the same AUC militants who expropriated peasant land. Present cultivation levels of rice, cotton, etc. grown on small plots are stubbornly low, suggesting continuing migration from the countryside. Another worry shared by many is that demobilised former FARC insurgents will settle in large numbers in the city and not, as anticipated, in rural areas. If so, they too will need to be integrated; it is hoped they will become part of what is now a peaceful process.

Sincelejo

If there are valid causes for concern in Villavicencio, there are serious causes for pessimism over prospects that territorial peace plans will lead to successful integration in Sincelejo, the capital of Sucre department. Like Villavicencio, Sincelejo was a traditional rural town, dominated by land owners and cattle ranchers. It is somewhat smaller than Villavicencio, estimated by DANE in 2009 as having 230,000 inhabitants, up from its pre-conflict level of about 150,000. Both cities grew rapidly when they received thousands of victims in a short period of time from zones of brutally violent conflict. Like Villavicencio, Sincelejo is close to a major city – 125 km from Cartagena, but historically and culturally in a different world. A U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)- sponsored report on medium-sized cities written prior to the implementation of the Victims Law (Forero Pardo, 2011) found that IDPs faced a dire situation: while some 18,000 households had registered as internally displaced and sought benefits due to them, the municipality had attended to a mere 2%. No land had been made available for housing and the agencies charged to deal with housing had not met since 2007. The mayor had failed to comply with most of the requirements mandated by Colombian law and courts on behalf of IDPs. It could not be assumed that dramatically positive changes would follow the implementation of the Victims Law because the basic structures were not in place in the city.

Sincelejo is adjacent to Montes de Maria, a mountainous area where extreme violence emptied communities and transformed local economies. As in Villavicencio in the 1970s and 1980s, leftist insurgents, mainly FARC, claimed to defend the rights of poor peasants against the cattle ranchers and were resisted by landowner militias.



<https://pixabay.com/en/corn-chef-kitchen-colombia-food-457154/>

Sincelejo *contd...*

By the 1990s the newly organised AUC was aiming its fire primarily against the poor peasants whom the FARC were defending. Thousands died in massacres in Montes de Maria between 1999 and 2000. The survivors fled. Violence grew further until the Colombian military was sent to the area and violence abated by 2002. However, the long-present narco-traffickers who found the region ideal for their purposes joined with the still-present paramilitary forces to seize land or force peasants to sell it. The survivors of massacres and outright conflict, joined by the now-landless peasants, fled to cities, and Sincelejo was one of the major destinations.⁽²¹⁾ A UN expert estimated that 98,000 victims have fled to Sincelejo since the 1990s.⁽²²⁾

Desperate people in flight occupied vacant land, constructed informal houses and remained. The owners of the urban properties suffered losses that were not compensated. The authorities did not address the situation seriously and residents of this once-quiet city became poorer and embittered by events. Local politicians are believed to have remained closely tied to both the drug traffickers and the former paramilitary cadres. The latter are demobilised and many have settled in Sincelejo, reportedly increasing crime rates. Today, even in a country where everybody identifies corruption as a major national problem, Sincelejo is especially well known for widespread corruption at every level. The city and department of Sucre have access to funding from the central government thanks to the payments from mineral extraction. But the income from minerals reportedly remains largely in the hands of foreign owners and is not, as is now legally mandated, distributed to meet common needs.

In the absence of government services or protection, the Catholic church, through Pastoral Social, has come to play a major and essential role in attending to victims' needs. It channels donor funding for the community (characterised as too-often short term and of limited scope), devotes efforts to organising collective self-help, and defuses conflicts that arise among the poor, involving the IDP victims and the "historic poor" of longer standing in the town. Support for community organisations extends beyond the city to smaller towns in the area, e.g. there are over 40 organised groups in the town of San Onofre, a nearby county seat.⁽²³⁾ The Pastoral Social has helped IDP communities to organise and represent their needs to authorities, but local institutions are ill prepared to respond. Among the major demands are improvements in education – once fairly strong – and the now-broken health-care system. Equally or more urgent is to legalise land and housing in a similar way to the processes under way in Villavicencio. Prospects are not encouraging. The UN expert cited above who had worked for several years in the city concluded that planning for peace is not on the present political agenda. Officials in the National Planning Department characterised the situation in Sincelejo as "disturbing".⁽²⁴⁾



<https://pixabay.com/en/police-bogota-riot-swat-275875/>

Concluding observations and recommendations

In the preparation of this report the author has been greatly encouraged by the degree of support for her basic premise that Colombia's cities, and especially medium sized cities in the former conflict zones, need more attention. While the measures in the peace accords reiterate a commitment to rural reform, human rights and development, none of these is possible unless reform, human rights and development policies are applied to regional cities as well. Millions sought refuge in these cities and by all accounts the majority will remain there, still in need of durable integration. A goal of territorial peace should be to permit people to establish lives with both urban and agricultural elements. The cities in question have suffered in multiple ways from the massive influx of displaced persons. The development of healthy and viable cities in or near former conflict areas can potentially restore the well-being of the now-larger populations living there. The victims who are able to re-establish their lives in regional urban centres with culturally familiar environments are more likely to become active participants in regional development than are those who resettle in distant, culturally distinct megacities.

At the same time a comprehensive regional development plan would buttress rural economies by absorbing and employing present and future population growth.⁽²⁵⁾ The absence of protection and security in rural areas led to massive flight to cities. Access to these rights is also at risk in the urban spaces where they have sought refuge. Positive forms of urban development must be planned and nurtured. As has been shown, authorities in national institutions with responsibilities in support of the 2011 Victims Law are taking positive steps that recognise demographic realities and outstanding needs. But centralisation is a difficult habit to break, especially when municipal institutions remain as weak and (often) corrupt as they are. The obvious consequence is that local governments are not providing services adequately to people who need them.

These services are the joint responsibility of the national and municipal governments and need to be better coordinated than is now the case. The central government, helpfully, has made available funding for 100,000 homes for the poor, most of which are to be given to formerly displaced persons. Decisions on beneficiaries are made locally. The current financial arrangements that reward wealthy municipalities and sacrifice the poorer ones need revision. Funding made available from national, local and international sources should be equitably channeled so that victims receive benefits. Local authority can be strengthened and officials can be better trained to improve practices for attending to the needs of victims and other vulnerable sectors, and encouraging organised citizen participation. Today's "victims" encompass not only existing recognised categories, but those emerging as a consequence of criminal activities.

The project’s stated objective is to strengthen local institutions to respond to victims in all conflict-affected regions. Such a strategy, it is obvious, requires generous international funding. Preliminary explorations of donor intentions do not yield optimism, however. Previous international humanitarian and development support for Colombia may diminish on the false premise that a peace agreement alone constitutes the desired end to the peace process.

Concluding observations and recommendations *contd...*

The ongoing collaboration and cooperation between UNHCR and UNDP in TSI, observed in Villavicencio, has a significant record of achievements. It was designed as a response to the Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011 in 17 communities where efforts that facilitate self-reliance and development are judged to be viable. TSI has channeled funding for land and housing initiatives, governance and institutional strengthening, community strengthening, local economic development, and support for victims’ organisations.⁽²⁶⁾ Working in small local contexts outside the realm of humanitarian assistance is a new learning experience for the organisations involved. UNDP has lunched an inter-agency project that proposes to bring about improvements in 150 municipalities, largely the smaller ones singled out by the peace agreement as most in need, but also including several medium-sized cities.⁽²⁷⁾ The project’s stated objective is to strengthen local institutions to respond to victims in all conflict-affected regions. Such a strategy, it is obvious, requires generous international funding. Preliminary explorations of donor intentions do not yield optimism, however. Previous international humanitarian and development support for Colombia may diminish on the false premise that a peace agreement alone constitutes the desired end to the peace process.

1 Thanks to Edgar Forero Pardo of UNDP for enhancing my understanding of how urban dynamics relate to displacement.

2 UNHCR/Colombia (2014) notes that 51% of IDPs are living in the 25 principal cities in Colombia. The director of the National Planning Department (DNP) reports that 78% of IDPs in cities are in medium-sized and large cities, with 2 million in Bogotá alone (interview with Lina Garcia and Claudia Juliana Mello, DNP, February 11th 2015).

3 Refers to informal settlements constructed, largely without legal title, on the outskirts of municipal areas.

4 Interviews with Manuel Oveido, UNHCR, February 3rd 2015, and Edgar Cataño, UN Habitat, February 4th 2015.

5 Interview with Lina Garcia and Claudia Juliana Mello, DNP, February 12th 2015.

6 Amnesty International investigated land restitution and found serious problems both with regard to identifying victims who were eligible for restitution and implementing the programme. Its report (Amnesty International, 2014) covers frequent violence, multiple abuses and systemic obstacles preventing persons dispossessed of their land from recovering it.

7 UNHCR cited some 37,000 requests to register land seized in conflict with the Land Restitution Unit – which not only is a small number, but does not always mean the owner intends to return. It is likely that the people who fled from conflict but whose land was not seized constitute the largest number of returnees. But they are not registered with the Land Restitution Unit, and probably returned some time ago.

8 Surveys have shown women to be more likely than men to prefer urban life to a return to rural areas. Their family and community status is greater, as is their ability to earn incomes. Young people overwhelmingly prefer urban to rural living.

9 See El Tiempo (2014). In the 2014 DANE survey 78% reported that they considered themselves to be already returned or relocated in the place where they currently resided (Segura Álvarez, 2015).

10 Law 387 of 1997.

11 The indemnity is the equivalent of 17 to 27 salaries (interview with Victims Unit personnel, February 12th 2015).

12 In 2004 the court issued Sentencia T-025 on behalf of respect for IDPs and has intervened some 200 times since then in its defence.

13 Interview with Iris Marin and Claudia Santamaria, Victims Unit, February 11th 2015.

14 Interview with UNHCR personnel, February 3rd 2015. Cities in this medium-sized category are Bucaramanga, Buenaventura, Barranca Bermeja, Cúcuta, Florencia, Ibagué, Monteria, Neiva, Santa Marta, Sincelejo, Tumaco, Valledupar and Villavicencio.

15 Very different local responses are examined in Vidal López (2011).

16 Mapiripán and Puerto Alvíra.

17 In 1998, during the Pastrana presidency, the FARC established its area of “distención” in San Vicente de Caguan in the western part of the area. Hopes that this would enhance prospects for peace were sharply defeated.



18 Interviews with Laura Urrea, secretary of urban development, Villavicencio, and Leticia Camacho, director of the Office of International Cooperation, Meta, February 9th 2015.

19 Interview with Javier Velasquez and Susana Medina, Victims Unit, Villavicencio, February 11th 2015.

20 Excerpted from material received on Meta in relation to TSI, “Update for Colombia”, July 2014, and from discussions in Villavicencio with officials engaged in urban integration, February 11th-12th 2015.

21 Much of the information regarding Sincelejo has been drawn from interviews in the Pastoral Social of the Catholic Curia.

22 Interview with Freddy Garcia, UNDP, February 7th 2015.

23 Interviews with Norly Herrera, a resident of San Onofre, and Tatiana Palmeth of the Pastoral Social, February 6th 2015.

24 Interview with DNP officials, February 12th 2015.

25 One example of this kind of policy, although not covered here, is Florencia, located in the highly conflictive department of Caquetá. Reportedly the establishment of rural linkages between Florencia and the surrounding countryside has yielded positive results in both areas. In Antioquia USAID-supported projects for collective rural efforts could be helpful for establishing stronger rural-urban links.

26 Funding from Canada, Spain, Sweden and the U.S., as well as the Colombian government (“TSI progress update”, July 2014).

27 The proposal defines its purpose: “Construyendo Confianza en la Paz, Una propuesta de marco estratégico para posibles contribuciones de las Naciones Unidas y la comunicad internacional, a la implementation terrane del Acuerdo de Paz”.

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- List of interviews in Bogotá, Villavicencio and Sincelejo,* February 2015**
- | | |
|---|--|
| Leticia Camacho - Meta department | Pedro Pratoba - UNHCR (Villavicencio) |
| Edgar Cataño Sánchez - UN Habitat | Jose Luis Rodríguez - Defensoria del Pueblo, Sincelejo |
| David Duran - Department of National Planning | Juan Pablo Reston - Student (Sincelejo) |
| Amelia Fernández Juan - Universidad Javeriana | Fernando Rojas - Economist, World Bank |
| Edgar Forero Pardo - UNDP | Hector Orlando Solano - COFREM (Villavicencio) |
| Jenny Galvis Rey - UNDP (Villavicencio) | Yamile Salinas Abdala - INDEPAZ |
| Freddy Garcia - UNDP (Sincelejo) | Claudia Santamaria - Victims Unit |
| Lina Garcia - Department of National Planning | Christian Voelkel - International Crisis Group |
| Carlos Gómez - Office of the Mayor (Villavicencio) | Pär Westling - UNHCR (Villavicencio)** |
| Norly Herrera - Mesa de Víctimas, San Onofre | * Interviews conducted in Bogotá unless otherwise indicated. |
| Ana Maria Ibañez - Universidad de los Andes | ** Discussion group members not listed individually. |
| Stephan Jaquemmet - UNHCR | |
| Carlos Lesser Sonabria - UNDP (Villavicencio) | |
| Iris Marin Ortiz - Victims Unit | |
| Claudia Juliana Mello - Department of National Planning | |
| Susana Medina - Victims Unit (Meta) | |
| Fernando Gabriel Mesa Luna - Pastoral Social | |
| Maria Morales - Pastoral Social (Sincelejo) | |
| Pontus Ohrstedt - UNDP | |
| Manuel Oveido Herrera - UNHCR | |
| Tatiana Palmets - Pastoral Social (Sincelejo) | |

2006: Toxi chemicals found by the regulator in Rosebud Hamlet water. Petroleum distillates, bromodichloromethane phenanthrene, toluene, methy ethyl ketone, xylene, benzene, butylbenzyl phthalate, di-ethyl phthalate, bis(2-ethylhexyl) phtalate and benzothiazole. Hexavalent chromium (of Erin Brokovich fame)

light and noise pollution 24/7

air pollution by heavy machinery and evaportaing fracking fluid

water contamination with toxic chemicals used in fracking fluids

Climate change by Green House Gas emissions (Methane) through venting and flaring

an industrialised countryside

storage tanks
water transportation

gas leaks through casing cracks

well turns horizontal

natural gas flows out of well

fracking fluid pit

evaporation

natural gas is piped to the market

aquifer zone

shale

fissures, gas flows out

the fossil fuel industry frames shale gas as a 'clean energy'

shale gas slows down the transition to **renewable** energies

health impacts from nose bleeds to cancers

Shannon-Erne Waterway is at risk

In the US and Australia, fracking has negatively affected jobs and employment through its impact on **agriculture** and **tourism**

special areas of conservation are at risk

Irish **beef** and **baby formula** are at risk

devalue of **property** no home insurance

Municipal water systems are not equipped to treat fracking wastewater

earthquakes caused by fracking fluid migration at high pressure

water contamination with methane (CH₄) + radioactive materials that naturally occur in shale

"Shale gas is same as natural gas - it is a high-carbon fuell, with around 75% of its mass made of carbon. For the UK and other wealthy nations, shale gas cannot be a transition fuel to a low-carbon future. Anyone who says differently does not understand our explicit international commitments under the Copenhagen Accord, the Cancun Agreements - or, alternatively, is bad at maths."

Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research



ELIZABETH WILLMOTT-HARROP

Fracturing the Earth, Violating Rights

Holding governments to account for the negative impacts of fracking on human rights

Human rights are universal, inalienable, interdependent, indivisible, equal and non-discriminatory, applying to everyone. There are nine core international human rights treaties, which are legally binding instruments that set out specific rights and to which the vast majority of Member States of the UN are parties. Fracking can breach international human rights law in multiple ways, including violations to the rights to health, water, food, housing, freedom of information and expression, the rights of children, and the rights of indigenous peoples...



Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is a technique for extracting oil and natural gas. Despite significant risks and concerns, investment in fracking has been expanding rapidly on a global scale. However, fracking is becoming synonymous with harm. Its impacts are linked to farm animals dropping dead overnight, low birth weights in human infants, and industry cash settlements and property buyouts for people who say fracking has ruined their water, lowered housing prices, and destroyed their quality of life.

How fracking impacts human rights

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Fracking can breach international human rights law in multiple ways, including violations to the rights to health, water, food, housing, freedom of information and expression, the rights of children, and the rights of indigenous peoples:

The Right to Health: Commonly reported symptoms in people and farm animals living near fracking operations include skin rash or irritation, nausea and/or vomiting, abdominal pain, dizziness, eye irritation and throat irritation. Air pollution and water pollution risks from fracking include heavy exposure to carcinogens. A Cornell University study associated shale gas wells with reduced average birth weight among infants born to mothers living within a 2.5 km radius from a shale gas well.

The Right to Water: Fracking fluids injected underground include chemicals that are known or possible human carcinogens, and which can migrate into underground water supplies. Leaks and spills of drilling fluids also provide a route for contamination. Wastewater disposal wells have leaked into groundwater causing pollution and wastewater injection wells are linked to earthquakes. Fracking is a water intensive activity that poses a risk to many already over-utilised water resources.

The Right to Food: A Colorado State scientist called the state's oil and gas boom "a death sentence for soil". Dramatic negative effects on vegetation have been caused by the drilling and fracking of natural gas. There are cases of livestock deaths from drinking contaminated water, feathers falling off birds and chickens, skin irritation in dogs, and rashes after people swam in a local dam. Food-producing animals exposed to chemical contaminants may not be tested before slaughter and farms testing positive for air and/or water contamination still produce untested dairy and meat products.

The Right to Housing: Influxes of temporary workers push up rents and reduce available properties. Property damage and devaluation result from contaminated land and water wells, damage caused by earthquakes, and wastewater disposal and pollution. Forced displacement is caused by property damage or through coercion from private companies. Community impacts include interference with quality-of-life (e.g., noise, odours), overburdened transportation and health infrastructure, and disproportionate increases in social problems, particularly in small isolated rural communities.

The Right of Access to Information: The identity of chemicals injected underground can be hidden from the public, and lawsuits are often resolved through confidential legal settlements. This makes it difficult for individuals to assess their own circumstances and risk of harm, and for campaigners to objectively assess the industry and its impact. This denial of information itself leads to the violation of other rights: for example, the consuming of contaminated food products and doctors being unable to correctly diagnose illnesses.

The Right to Public Participation: Like access to information, public participation through public debate and dialogue is a right used to defend other rights that might be impacted by fracking. There have been cases of alleged violations of this right related to fracking such as violations of the right to protest.

The Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Given the close ties and interdependence between the earth and the culture of many indigenous peoples, fracking and its negative consequences can breach cultural rights. In December 2014, the Mithaka indigenous people of Australia lobbied the UN over fracking on their land saying "Our right to our culture is inseparable from the condition of our traditional lands. Unfortunately, by promoting petroleum exploitation on our traditional lands without adequately consulting us, the Queensland Government is failing to respect and protect our right to our culture".

Addressing violations

The existing international human rights system provides strong norms and mechanisms to spur States toward improved policies and practices vis-a-vis corporate action within their jurisdiction. Civil society and the communities and individuals affected by fracking have rights, and there are established and accessible mechanisms people can engage to report human rights violations caused by fracking and to advocate for improved policies and intervention in particular cases. These include platforms for engagement with Special Rapporteurs (there are currently 41 thematic and 14 country rapporteurs), the Universal Periodic Review process (which reviews the human rights records of every UN Member State), and mechanisms offered by specific treaties at both the international and regional levels.

In another freedom of information case, this time concerning fracking, a Pennsylvania kidney specialist, Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez, has taken a case to the US Court of Appeals, challenging the state's fracking law, which prohibits the disclosure of the chemicals and fluids used in fracking unless doctors sign a confidentiality agreement. Dr. Rodriguez says the law prohibits him from sharing what he believes to be crucial treatment information with his patients. Other examples of relevant national litigation and administrative proceedings, some involving fracking or more generally resource extraction, include...

Addressing violations *contd...*

In September 2006, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a landmark ruling, becoming the first international tribunal to recognise a basic right of access to government information as an element of the right to freedom of expression. The case concerned a major logging undertaking, known as the Condor River project.

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- In April 2014, a Texas jury awarded \$3 million to a family affected by fracking who alleged that hazardous gases, chemicals and industrial waste made them so ill they could not work or live in their home. The award included \$275,000 for loss of market value to the family property, and \$2 million for past physical pain and suffering.
- In October 2014 the Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC) amended its existing oil and gas disposal well regulations so that if seismicity increases in the area of a well, the RRC now has explicit regulatory provisions "allowing it to impose injection pressure and rate limits, a temporary injection ban or even outright cancellation of a disposal well permit".
- A 2014 ruling by Canada's high court recognised the aboriginal title of the Tsilhqot'in First Nation to a specific tract of land. This set a legal precedent affecting resource rights and making it harder for governments to justify economic development on aboriginal land. Oil industry website OilPrice.com said of the ruling: "Business for oil companies operating in Canada just got more complicated because of a Supreme Court ruling that significantly expands the ability of a native tribe's ability to potentially veto proposed land use plans. ... The court stated that the Tsilhqot'in had the right to determine "the uses to which the land is put and to enjoy its economic fruits." That power could prove to be a major obstacle for industrial companies seeking to build major infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, power plants, and pipelines.

However, not only are rights often not respected by corporations, those seeking to lobby for their rights may be persecuted by private companies. A 2010 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders notes that: "A number of human rights violations against human rights defenders are committed by private corporations, a category that should be understood as consisting of companies, whether national or transnational, not owned or operated by Governments. Private corporations have allegedly been impeding the activities of defenders working, inter alia, on labour rights, the exploitation of natural resources, the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities."

- In 2013, a Dutch court ruled against the oil company Shell for a case of oil pollution in the Niger Delta, seen as "a test for holding multinationals responsible for offences at foreign subsidiaries". In January 2015, Shell announced a settlement of £55 million for individuals and the Bodo community in Nigeria affected by oil spills.

Legal reform

Meanwhile there are calls for legal reform. The United Nations World Water Development Report 2014, which focuses on water and energy, recommends that:

"Legal and regulatory frameworks should be created to channel reforms and establish rules and sanctions for infractions by users, including businesses. Calls for closer regulation and greater transparency, monitoring and local community engagement are part of the public and political reaction to the potential impact on water from the development of unconventional sources of oil and gas; for example, fracking in Argentina, Mexico, the USA and in Europe."

Corporations as well as States have responsibilities in preventing and addressing human rights violations. *The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework* 2011 reminds corporations that:

"Business enterprises should respect human rights. This means that they should avoid infringing on the human rights of others and should address adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved."

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"A number of human rights violations against human rights defenders are committed by private corporations, a category that should be understood as consisting of companies, whether national or transnational, not owned or operated by Governments. Private corporations have allegedly been impeding the activities of defenders working, inter alia, on labour rights, the exploitation of natural resources, the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities."

Human rights violations resulting from fracking impact our entire world: from its animals and ecosystems, to communities and individuals. Of greatest concern is that while the risks and negative impacts of fracking are being documented every day, we are perhaps still in the industry's infancy: In Texas, producing horizontal wells in Barnett shale alone rose from fewer than 400 in 2004 to more than 10,000 during 2010.

Legal reform *contd...*

The focus of the UN system is on the role of the State to ensure that its national legislation and public policies effectively prevent and redress abuses. But given the human rights impacts of corporate interests and activities around the world, a legally binding international treaty on business and human rights is needed, and can make an important contribution to the efforts for greater accountability of private actors.

A 2015 Guardian interview with lawyer Martyn Day, who heads a team of over 20 lawyers representing claimants in cases against corporate and government bodies, noted that:

"So, if a government abroad or a multinational company is acting up in some way - perhaps dumping waste or mistreating workers - what can be done about it? Do they get a free pass? Day nods. "Yes, I think that's absolutely true. It is a totally depressing landscape. I feel good that we've got a system here that works, but it is very unusual and we do not fall over other lawyers from other jurisdictions when we are out and about around the world".... It's an issue that should be seriously worrying the international community."

A proposed International Law that could enhance accountability for human rights violations caused by fracking is the International Law of Ecocide. Ecocide law would put in place a pre-emptory duty of care at the very top end and hold to account individuals in positions of "superior responsibility". Laws prohibiting Ecocide currently exist in the national legislation of ten countries, and it was first proposed as an international crime in the 1970s. However, despite it being drafted into the Rome Statute (which codifies the existing Crimes against Peace: Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Crimes of Aggression), a law of Ecocide was removed at the eleventh hour. Many nations objected to its removal in 1996. In 2010 a fully proposed draft Ecocide law was submitted to the United Nations by Barrister Polly Higgins.

Acting now

Human rights violations resulting from fracking impact our entire world: from its animals and ecosystems, to communities and individuals. Of greatest concern is that while the risks and negative impacts of fracking are being documented every day, we are perhaps still in the industry's infancy: In Texas, producing horizontal wells in Barnett shale alone rose from fewer than 400 in 2004 to more than 10,000 during 2010. The question then becomes how those negative impacts will also increase in the future, and how they will be addressed.

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The Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, Marc Pallemmaerts, noted in August 2013:

"Health and environmental risks of hazardous substances used extensively are generally discovered in hindsight, when the substances have already become widespread in the environment in large quantities and are having adverse effects on the enjoyment of human rights or on the state of ecosystems."

There is no time to lose. By exercising their rights now through official channels, people can be agents of change in the protection of both the planet and its people – from the quality of soil to the quality of life.



To find out more, please read *A Guide To Rights-Based Advocacy: International Human Rights Law and Fracking* which Elizabeth co-wrote and edited for Mercy International Association: Global Action [LINK](#)



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at the Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM) Jakarta

#papaikutita as a civic passion for Papua

Prompted by the killings of four high school children in the highlands of Paniai in Papua, Indonesia, a group of activists, academics (including the author) and concerned citizens initiated a civic movement called #papaikutita. Relied on the effectiveness of social media in drawing the Indonesian public attention, this movement aims at breaking the silence and the ignorance of the Indonesian national public of the continuing state-sponsored violence of Papua. This is the passion that inspires this movement.

What did happen in Paniai? Perhaps many of us might not be aware of that despite the growing Indonesia's democracy, state killings continue in Papua. The killing occurred on the eve of the visit of Indonesian President Joko Widodo to Papua after Christmas 2014. Pius Youw, Yulian Yeimo, Apinus Oktopia Gobay and Simon Degei were shot dead by the Indonesian state apparatus without any reasons while they were preparing Christmas in their village. These children were innocent. Various national and international human rights groups have raised their voices to the Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM), the Indonesian Witness Protection Agency (LPSK) and President of Indonesia calling for immediate actions. Specifically the Paniai Customary Council (Dewan Adat Paniai) demanded the establishment of the Inquiry Commission by Komnas HAM equipped with sub-poena power to investigate the case as authorised by Law No. 26/2000 on Human Rights Court.

This demand was informed by the facts that many cases of human rights violations committed by the Indonesian state apparatus have never brought to justice. Partially adapted from the 1998 Rome Statue, Law No. 26/2000 is the only legal provision within Indonesian legal system that authorises Komnas HAM to undertake pro-justitia investigation in order to find sufficient evidence to prosecute perpetrators through a special court, namely the Indonesian Human Rights Court. Since its enactment, only one case has ever been brought to court, namely the 2000 Abepura case. This was the case of torture and extra-judicial killing in Jayapura committed by the Indonesian police.



This is the context of the movement of #papuaitukita. It is part of large, vibrant and resilient Indo-nesian civic movement who promotes civic values, human rights, pluralism, and humanity. The movement has toppled down the authoritarian regime of Soeharto's New Order. It opposed the rise of fundamentalism in Indonesia. It managed to secure a fair presidential election during the last presidential election.

It responds to Rohingya refugees but also combats violence against minor, such as the case of Engeline in Bali. In other words #papuaitukita is not unique as a civic movement. Rather it is an organic element of the expansion of civic passions of the Indonesian community who does not tolerate any trends, actions, policies that do not respect humanitarian principles, human rights standards, and the rule of law.

Komnas HAM recommended two police commanders who were in charge of the raid against civilians to be held responsible under the principle of command responsibility. Following the logic of ordinary criminal prosecution, the judges, however, ruled that the police commanders were not directly involved in the crimes and thus were found not guilty. They were released free and later were promoted. This was a shocking decision for victims given the amounting evidence presented by prosecutors and testimonies from the victims and witnesses. Learning from this experience the Paniai Customary Council is committed to prevent that such thing will happen again to the Paniai case.

Public awareness is the uncharted area in the Indonesian psyche. With some 250 million population and spread across 14,000 islands, Indonesia is a massive geographical and political landscape to cover. Layers of memory of violence in the last decades remain buried in victims' mind from the history of the martial law in Aceh to then East Timor to Papua, from the massacre of half-million of the so-called communist suspects in 1965-1966 across Indonesia, from ethnic violence in Kalimantan to religious-based violence in Maluku to acts of terrorism in Java, Bali, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara. This mosaic of violence still begs for explanation and recognition from the public and the state narrative.

Despite continuous pressure of the civil society, it took months before Komnas HAM made a decision to establish the Inquiry Commission or the Ad Hoc Team. Even then, Papua activists questioned (*Tabloid Jubi*, 1/7/2015) the commitment of Komnas HAM as this state-funded institution acknowledged that they has no funds to conduct pro-justitia investigation into the case. In comparison to the previous Komnas HAM pro-justitia investigation into some cases in Papua such as Abepura, Wasior and Wamena, the current Komnas HAM team seems indecisive and hesitant in taking any steps closer to investigation. As a result, once again early July 2015, #papuaitukita mobilised public support to put pressure on Komnas HAM to be true on its words. They collected coins and brought them to Komnas HAM office as a symbol of donation to support the work of Komnas HAM.

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#papuaitukita, however, is not only active in the area of legal and human rights. The movement actively engages the Indonesian national public through performing arts. In June 2015, we organised a cultural event involving young musicians, Papuan Church leaders, and activists in order to speak about Papua to the national public with a universal language: arts. Located at Taman Ismail Marzuki, the heart of Jakarta arts centre, #papuaitukita built the bridge between the national public and Papua. The arts perhaps is an effective language as the movement has to confront stigmatisation of the state over those who support the Papuan struggle for recognition and identity. They can be easily labeled supporters of separatists or secessionists and thus can be classified as inciting treasons.

Anyhow, this is just the beginning of the movement. Although it is hopeful, it is also fragile and requires supports from all of us to grow this civic passion for Papua.

All images are courtesy of #papuaitukita



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JACINTA MULDER

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TWO APPROACHES TO HUMAN RIGHTS REVIEW IN POST-WAR SRI LANKA



Top left: U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay listens to an ethnic Tamil war survivor during her visit to Mullivaikkal, Sri Lanka. Source: The Hindu, 9 Sept 2013.

Some have lauded the Human Rights Council's [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) mechanism for its state-based model, ensuring equality of treatment between all 193 UN member states. Others have criticised the bureaucratic nature of the process and the superficiality of the documents produced. In the course of a single review, states commonly receive upwards of 200 recommendations for human rights reform. Rather than reflecting a concerted effort towards developing a state's human rights culture, these short, cursory comments often seem ill considered. As I discuss below, Sri Lanka's experience at the UPR provides a good example — demonstrating how UPR recommendations often fail to consider the realities associated both with rights violations and with what is required to achieve rights implementation in a particular country. Reports produced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), on the other hand, can play a more useful role. Former High Commissioner Navi Pillay's report on [promoting post-war reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka](#), released in early 2014, is rigorous but concise, has a confined focus, uses concrete examples, and is the result of consultation with members of Sri Lankan government, civil society, and victims. [i] The report provides a more realistic account of rights violations as they were experienced, and therefore provides a more effective base for suggesting avenues of rights-focused reform.

Sri Lanka in the UPR

In the course of [Sri Lanka's second UPR](#), the country received 204 recommendations. One recommendation, from Austria, called on Sri Lanka to 'adopt a National Policy on the protection of human rights defenders and journalists in order to prevent harassment and intimidation'. [ii] To anyone who had been following press reports, NGO statements or human rights treaty body reports on the situation in Sri Lanka during the immediate post-war years, this recommendation seemed almost delusional. Firstly, because of the hostile attitude of the Sri Lankan government to UN accountability mechanisms and NGO probing. [iii] In 2013, during Navi Pillay's visit to Sri Lanka for the purposes of drafting her report, she spoke at a press conference about -

the harassment and intimidation of...human rights defenders...and many ordinary citizens who met with me, or planned to meet with me. I have received reports that people in villages and settlements in the Mullaitivu area were visited by police or military officers both before and after I arrived there in Trincomalee, several people I met were subsequently questioned about the content of our conversation. [iv]

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Sri Lanka in the UPR *contd...*

Secondly, reports suggested that much of the persecution occurring against journalists and human rights defenders in Sri Lanka was state-sponsored. Human rights defenders had been subject to threats and derogatory remarks,[v] and police had blocked buses carrying people intending to demonstrate against the disappearance of their family members.[vi] Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth referred to the 'reign of censorship' and 'threats and violence' imposed by the Rajapaksa government.[vii] If the Sri Lankan government was involved in the suppression of dissent at the time of its UPR, it is most unlikely that it would act positively in response to a recommendation to adopt 'a national policy on the protection of human rights defenders and journalists'. In this context, the Austrian recommendation was particularly out of touch. It exemplified, however, a lot of the language used in UPR documentation, which is lofty, polite, aspirational, and expressed without any engaged sense of human rights violations as they occur 'on the ground'.

Document Production in Modern Bureaucracies

Julie Billaud, who interned with the OHCHR as part of an ethnographic study of the UPR, has commented on the gap that exists between UPR documents - which purport to reflect a human rights situation as it 'objectively' exists - and 'real human voices'. In the course of her internship, Billaud had the task of drafting one of the two background documents that the OHCHR produces for the UPR.[viii] To Billaud, the process of creating these documents is typical of work conducted in modern bureaucracies, where 'content fades away behind the aesthetics of logic and language, producing acceptable modes of impartiality'[ix] Part of what makes Billaud's account so enlightening is the insight it gives into the complicated processes that go on behind the production of documents that purport to communicate an objective reality. In a similar sense, the many imperatives operating behind UPR recommendations are hidden from public view. We cannot know the private conversations that go on between state representatives, or how much the language is controlled by the strictures of global diplomacy. In framing their recommendations, states may be driven by local concerns and preoccupied with the desire to 'make a statement', irrespective of the likelihood of eventual implementation. Acceptance of recommendations can be driven by states' desire for aid, by domestic political imperatives, and by the desire to appear to the international community as a responsible rights citizen. Meanwhile, the entire process is constrained by the strict time limits imposed on the UPR, and the limited number of pages that can be produced. States are expected to suggest significant changes to other states' laws and policies within very confined parameters - and not only this, they are expected to do it 193 times. It's no wonder that many recommendations do not seem meaningful or engaged.

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The Utility of OHCHR Reports

In this respect, the processes involved in the UPR can be contrasted with the processes involved in the production of reports by the OHCHR. Former High Commissioner Pillay's visit to Sri Lanka in 2013 involved intensive consultation with all levels of government (including President Rajapaksa), as well as the families of victims, those living in internally displaced person camps, and other commentators.[x] The report itself summarised the existing situation before discussing discrete areas of human rights concern, and evaluating the accountability measures that had been pursued by the Sri Lankan government. The report provided detailed accounts of people whose lives had been adversely affected by government actions, or who were the victims of crimes for which they had received no redress.[xi] It provides a very real sense of the atrocities committed, as experienced by their victims. With its firm grounding in consultation, and clear, nuanced presentation of the facts, the recommendations contained in the report are based on a much firmer foothold than those produced by the UPR.

Reports of the OHCHR can be viewed as an important bridge: though they have a substantive grounding in a particular country context and situation, they still speak the language of the UN and are the subject of scrutiny by the Human Rights Council. In future reform to UN human rights mechanisms, including the UPR, working groups should look to OHCHR reports for guidance - to the merits of providing examples, to close scrutiny, and to trying to understand the political and cultural context of a particular country.

[i] 24 February 2014, 'Promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka', [A/HRC/25/23](#). This report, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 22/1 of 9 April 2013 ([A/HRC/22/1](#)), preceded the [OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka](#).

[ii] Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Sri Lanka*, 22nd sess, Agenda Item 6, UN Doc A/HRC/22/16 (18 December 2012) 26 (Recommendation 128.86).

[iii] See *Sri Lanka: Rajapaksa Legacy of Abuse: Assaults on Activists, Resistance to International Investigation in 2014* (29 January 2015) Human Rights Watch <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/29/sri-lanka-rajapaksa-legacy-abuse>>.

[iv] Navi Pillay, 'Opening Remarks by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' (Press Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 31 August 2013). [No need for web address as I have inserted a link here]

[v] Human Rights Council, *Promoting Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 25th sess, Agenda Item 2, UN Doc A/HRC/25/23 (24 February 2014) [21] ('*Promoting Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka*').

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] [Letter from Kenneth Roth to Maithripala Sirisena](#), 26 February 2015.

[viii] Julie Billaud, 'Keepers of the Truth: Producing "Transparent" Documents for the Universal Periodic Review' in Hilary Charlesworth and Emma Larking (eds), *Human Rights and the Universal Periodic Review: Rituals and Ritualism* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) 63, 66.

[ix] Ibid 82.

[x] Pillay, above note iv.

[xi] *Promoting Reconciliation and Accountability in Sri Lanka*, above, note i, [47]–[64].

Two years ago this month on Live Encounters Magazine.

RAPHAEL SUSEWIND

author of

Being Muslim and Working for Peace

Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Gujarat

Published by Sage Publications

speaks to Mark Ulyseas

What does it mean to be Muslim and working for peace? And what is this peace? And how is it defined?

What came out most clearly from my research in Gujarat is that there is no single way in which religion and politics relate to each other if one takes individual lives seriously. Muslims work for peace in a variety of ways. Some will draw strength from a strong sense of community and be inspired by religious sources, perhaps even consider peace activism their moral duty. Such "faith-based actors" are perhaps the most well known kind of Muslim activist. Other Muslims, however, do not care much for religious sources or community. As "secular technocrats", they are not necessarily opposed to these dimensions of life, but experience themselves as "religiously unmusical", as Max Weber famously coined it. In a world where many believe that Muslims are religious by default it is important not to forget that this is not true for everybody, perhaps not even for most. Still another kind of Muslim peace activists are the "emancipating women" whom I encountered in Gujarat: victims of the pogrom, who regain their agency through activism in a challenging struggle with the ambivalence of religion. "Doubting professionals", finally, discovered the complexity and ambiguity of religion in conflict after 2002, and began to question their own previous certainties about development as well as about their own identities.

Like there are many ways in which Muslims work for peace, there are also many ideas of what exactly it is that they are fighting for. This begins with the term "peace" itself; alongside the English word, activists in Gujarat spoke of shanti, sukun, aman or nyay: peace can be personal healing and reconciliation, basic absence of violence, or a comprehensive pursuit of social justice. Peace activists not only argue about peace, but also about the best way of reaching it. Some for instance work in conflict, systematically including people from different groups in programs that otherwise don't specifically address the riots (for example in micro-credit schemes where both Muslims and non-Muslims participate). Other activists argue this would not be enough, that one should work directly on conflict (for instance in religious education, or inter-communal celebration of religious festivals). Unfortunately, the various kinds of activists do not always recognize each other, a tension particularly pronounced between expressly Islamic charitable organizations and traditional NGOs."

Most Muslim victims of the Gujarat riots had nothing to do with the Godhra incident, either – even if one were to see revenge as an acceptable medium of justice, it is hard to see why such “revenge” had to target innocent people. But contemporary Muslims are neither allowed to be individual people, nor to be people for whom being Muslim isn’t all that important. They are not allowed to be innocent, either. While such “groupism” isn’t confined to India – we find it in Germany, too – the ignorance towards individuals even among some of the peace activists I spoke with is very widespread still. I frankly find it very problematic.

In your opinion, are Indian Muslims generally considered ‘aliens’ by the dominant Hindu culture and therefore ‘viewed’ with some degree of suspicion? And has this acted as fuel to ignite areas of disagreement across India, Gujarat being a case in point?

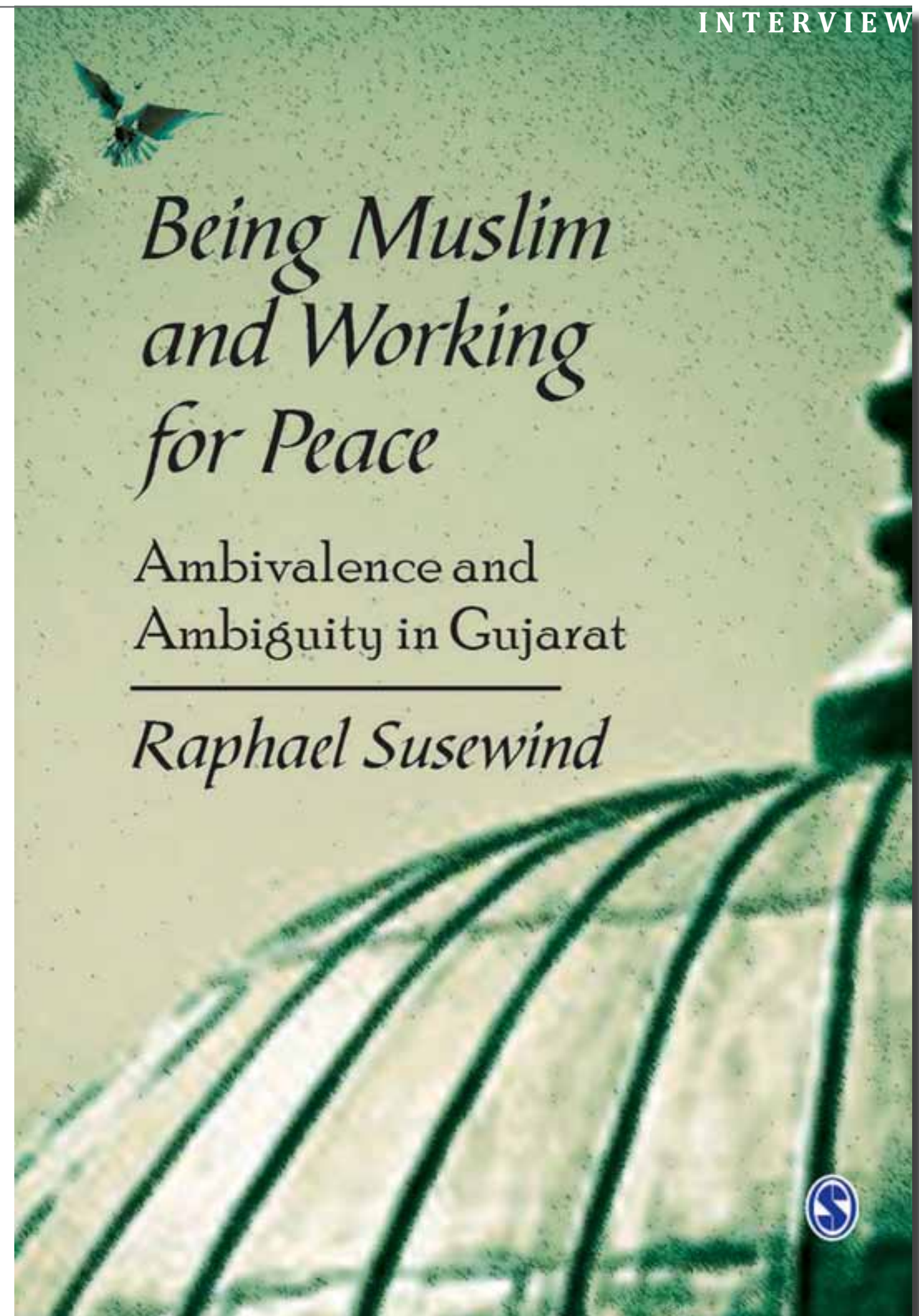
I have done research in India since more than five years now, and came across many Hindu friends who do not consider Muslim Indians ‘alien’ or suspicious. One should not let Hindutva define Hindu culture, as one should not reduce Islam to a narrow set of moral commandments or a specific theological position.

This is not to deny that many people, in India as much as elsewhere, strive hard to clearly classify people and to collapse various contextual ways of being in the world (being Muslim or Hindu, being religious or not, being Indian or German, being nationalistic or cosmopolitan, to name just a few) into narrow sets of acceptable “cultures”. Such intolerance of ambiguity is, however, more a characteristic of modernity than one of religious tradition. Modern people, or more specifically those aspiring to a specific kind of modernity (often those in India’s “rising middle classes”), often find it hard to tolerate differences, particularly if these differences are muddled and ambiguous.

In the case of Muslim Indians being reduced to ‘aliens’ in their own country, however, another, wider tendency is very troublesome – a tendency which the sociologist Rogers Brubaker called “groupism”. Often, Muslim Indians are not only reduced to being Muslims, but also conflated with each other and collectively made responsible for acts that might have nothing to do with them in the first place. Nobody living today is responsible for the partition of the subcontinent, nor for the historic role of Moghul emperors (who often ruled in collusion with Hindu kings, but this is another debate).

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While such “groupism” isn’t confined to India – we find it in Germany, too – the ignorance towards individuals even among some of the peace activists I spoke with is very widespread still. I frankly find it very problematic.



I also believe that it is important to widen the debate beyond a focus on the state, or a focus on Narendra Modi as an individual who might become the next Indian Prime Minister. I do not want to release the state from its responsibility, but think it equally important to unpack the complicity of large sections of Gujarati society which sustains the state's culture of impunity – and enabled the pogrom in the first place.

What do you hope to achieve by writing this book?

I want to shed light on the diversity of Muslim civil society and Muslims in civil society, and through this example to better understand the role of religion in contemporary India. On an academic level, I also wish to contribute to an ongoing debate on the “ambivalence of the sacred”. With this, conflict researchers sum up their insight that religion and religions are not per se violent or per se peaceful – they bear the potential for both. Religion has produced terrorists and peace makers. I think this is an important step beyond perspectives that declare religion either irrelevant (which it is not) or inherently violent (which it is neither). But most scholars still attribute this ambivalence neatly to specific people: terrorists versus peace makers, this-worldly versus other-worldly religion, spiritualism versus political involvement, etc. My research demonstrates that such neat categories overlook how the ambivalence of the sacred is experienced on an individual level. One need not contrast terrorists with peace makers to discover ambivalence; ambivalence is felt by either kind of activist.

Furthermore, I argue that scholars should more carefully distinguish between ambivalence and ambiguity. Ambivalence is a relation of either-or: religion is experienced as either good or bad. Ambiguity in contrast is a relation of neither-nor: religion is experienced as both good and bad, or more precisely: as neither clearly good nor clearly bad. My book explores the implication of this distinction for the personal lives and political projects of Muslim peace activists in Gujarat. I argue that the transformation of ambivalence into ambiguity, in fact the recovery of an ambiguity which has long been celebrated in Islam (and perhaps in India at large), but is increasingly under threat, might be a central requirement of our time.

What is the difference between the Gujarat riots and those in other parts of the country, if any?

The key difference for me was not the involvement of the state, as many argue – but more specifically the fact that the state never made even a shallow attempt to acknowledge this involvement, acknowledge wrongdoing on the part of politicians, police, and the judicial system. While I do believe that the non-apologetic involvement of the state sets the Gujarat riots apart, however, I also believe that it is important to widen the debate beyond a focus on the state, or a focus on Narendra Modi as an individual who might become the next Indian Prime Minister. I do not want to release the state from its responsibility, but think it equally important to unpack the complicity of large sections of Gujarati society which sustains the state's culture of impunity – and enabled the pogrom in the first place. It is too easy to blame it all on politics, or the politicians, avoiding to ask more uncomfortable questions: what is the relationship between aspirations to a specific kind of neoliberal development and hatred for ‘alien’ Muslims?

For the “secular technocrats” I encountered, for instance, secularism as an ideology isn't very important. They live by what I call a “secularized secularism”, a secularism devoid of quasi-religious zeal, a relaxed everyday practice. This need not be the only way in which one can live a secular life, but it shows that secularism has made deep inroads into Indian society despite heated ideological debate, and can even be found in such unexpected circles as among Muslim peace activists.

Communalism is a byword in India and in a way defines the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Why does this conflict arise? Does it have its roots in history from the time of the first Muslim invasions? Or, is it a potent mix of religious fundamentalism, political septicaemia, matters to do with land or commerce?

I think decades of research have clearly demonstrated that communalism is a fairly modern phenomenon. This is not to deny earlier conflicts between different sections of society – but the idea that Muslims and Hindus constitute two mutually exclusive groups, that each Indian (and not just the rulers or religious elite) have to belong to one of these groups, and that they are naturally opposed is a fairly new thought.

Such emphasis on the modern character of communalism should, however, not be confused with instrumental explanations. While politics, land, etc all play a role in explaining communal riots (as foremost the research of Paul Brass has shown), it is wrong to release religion of the hook too easily: as I argued earlier, and more comprehensively in my book, religion is an ambivalent force – and it is an independent factor, which cannot be fully reduced to an instrumental front for political ends. But importantly it is modern religion that struggles to come to grips with ambivalence, including with its own ambivalence.

Does true secularism exist in India or is it a catch phrase for votes?

Can't it be both? I think with such “catch phrases”, it is always instructive to look at lived realities, which by default are more diverse, complex, and ambiguous than ideology suggests. Clearly, secularism as an ideology is a potent rhetoric tool in the political arena, both for those promoting it and for those opposing it (or propagating different versions thereof).

But my research in Gujarat – particularly the experience of those activists whom I called “secular technocrats” – is instructive to see how secularism is experienced in everyday lives. Unfortunately, scholars only now start to examine lived secularism with the same earnesty that they examine lived religion.

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While my book unpacked four various ways of “being Muslim and working for peace” – those which I encountered in Gujarat – one should not forget that most terrorists, too, claim to work for peace. Once you start to think about it: people who claim they do not want to live in peace are very rare indeed. But once one begins to look into the specifics, into what people actually mean when they say “peace”, into how peace comes to life, reality becomes more complex, more ambivalent, and more ambiguous.

Violence does erupt between Shia and Sunni in India. How can a Muslim peace maker work effectively without identifying oneself as either Shia or Sunni? Or for that matter violence between two different castes – how does a Muslim working for peace operate?

I can only reiterate what I said earlier: there are many ways. In 2011-12, I lived in Lucknow for my next project – a city well-known for sectarian tension. In fact, my own neighbourhood witnessed a particularly violent episode when family members of the local (Sunni) corporator opened fire on a (Shia) religious assembly in January this year. Some people argue that it is important to emphasize one’s Muslim identity over one’s being Shia or Sunni in order to mediate in such situations.

Other activist claim the opposite, and argue that it is precisely their sectarian identity which makes them oppose sectarianism; many Shia in Lucknow for instance use the emphasis that their tradition places on solidarity with all human suffering to work for better Shia-Sunni relations. And others still argue that one should not stress religion too much in the first place, let alone sectarian identity – and highlight, for instance, that both the corporator mentioned earlier and his victim have been locked into a business rivalry for years. On what ground are we treating this incident as an instance of sectarian rather than, say, economic conflict? Again, it is perhaps both – only that we unlearned how to accept that, sometimes, neither one explanation nor the other are sufficient in themselves.

This complexity of social life also automatically means that there are multiple ways in which one should deal with conflict – and I think my work both in Gujarat and in Lucknow demonstrates this complexity fairly well.

Did you have any encounter with people in Gujarat which reflects the truth – that people wherever they maybe want to live in peace?

Obviously – but the question is what people mean by that word, and how they want to achieve it. While my book unpacked four various ways of “being Muslim and working for peace” – those which I encountered in Gujarat – one should not forget that most terrorists, too, claim to work for peace. Once you start to think about it: people who claim they do not want to live in peace are very rare indeed. But once one begins to look into the specifics, into what people actually mean when they say “peace”, into how peace comes to life, reality becomes more complex, more ambivalent, and more ambiguous.

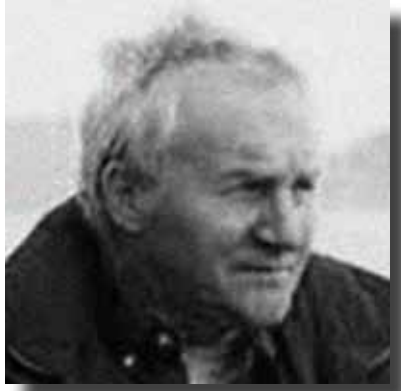
I am a practicing, liberal, islamophile Catholic Christian, a happily married husband, a young aspiring scholar in the multidisciplinary social sciences, someone privileged to be born in the richer part of our world. I try to not reconcile the ambivalences between and within these conflicting identities while navigating my life – but to embrace their ambiguity.

Could you give us a glimpse of your own life and works? What are you working on now?

I was born and raised in Germany, and later studied in Germany, India and the UK. I am a practicing, liberal, islamophile Catholic Christian, a happily married husband, a young aspiring scholar in the multidisciplinary social sciences, someone privileged to be born in the richer part of our world. I try to not reconcile the ambivalences between and within these conflicting identities while navigating my life – but to embrace their ambiguity. I also try to ensure that this appreciation of ambiguity does not prevent me from taking a stance when it matters: to highlight injustice, to broaden freedom, to encourage deeper enquiry.

As an academic, I am intrigued by the resilience of the individual in groupist contexts, and by India in particular, where East and West met for centuries, and where both the problems as well as chances of living with diversity are very apparent. After my book on Gujarat, I am now more broadly interested in what it means to be Muslim and belong as Muslim in contemporary North India; as mentioned earlier, I currently explore this theme with a case study of Lucknow. I am especially curious to see in which various ways different Muslims with their respective personal biographies navigate, combine and ignore normative discourses on Muslimness. This project also included quite a bit of mapping, which has been fun – generally much of my academic work is multi-disciplinary and employs whatever method appears best suited for the task at hand. A few months ago, for instance, I became the first anthropologist who was granted access to the Oxford Supercomputing Centre – for an analysis of Muslim politics in the last elections in Uttar Pradesh...

More on this and on my different academic projects – as well as a more detailed introduction to the book and an interactive way to explore the typology of “being Muslim and working for peace” in contemporary Gujarat – can be found on my [Website](#) and . If you are interested to engage with my work, or just read what I am up to, you can also follow me on [Twitter](#) – and if you do find time to read my book, I am curious to hear what you have to say..



In Swinford, County Mayo July 10th 2015.

I was asked to write a poem on the occasion of the unveiling of the memorial to the victims of the Great Famine in Ireland 1845, '46 and '47 . It was a time when several millions died or emigrated while those who could have helped went about their business of exporting grain that could have saved countless lives.
This poem, FAMINE is my response.

FAMINE

The Spirit of Place Programme – Swinford, July 10th '15

The dead are never far from us
and, now, in famine, our children
lie strewn on doorsteps
or along roadsides and we
are so far gone, there is
no chance we will recover
– even if we did, a
black stalk lies in waiting
like a preying cat on a windowsill.

Wit cannot drive suffering away.
Those potatoes that dug up
so clean and vibrant in a day,
diseased and fouled the fields
in a stream of pus before dawn

and

some landlords cried out,
*we'll give those peasants
nothing – for nothing
is what they've earned –
let them die. We'll put them
out on the roads
to compete with the grain trade
in a race for great ships.*

My family claw side by side
with snails and grubs
for the right to die with
grass and mud between our teeth.

We did attack the drills like
flocks of crows, hoping
to get to the food before
it festered, but the rot beat us
to the bite – the famine god
had sickened every stalk
from the birthplace of
our farthest ancestor
to the common grave
of our youngest child.

That death – untalkative and cold,
grabbed what it could.
What remained stayed as it was
or it was cast aside or overboard.

The lanes we lived up
were left behind to fall
into disuse and silence

forgotten

except on occasions
when communities walk
the sad walk – to try
to greet the past face to face.

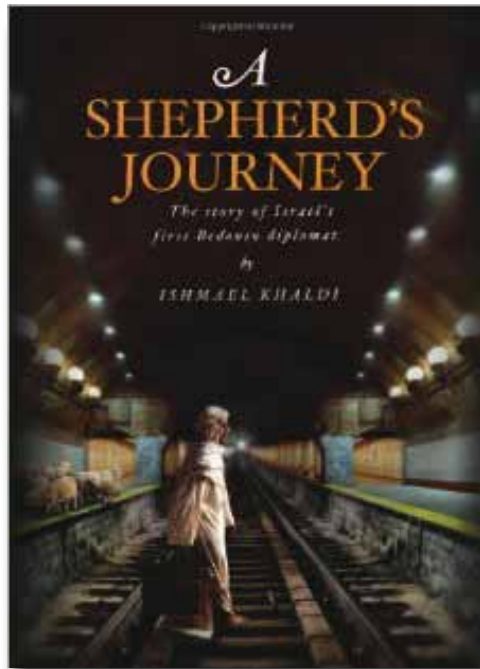


“National Famine Monument with Croagh Patrick in the background” by Night of the Big Wind - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 nl via Wikimedia Commons (link embedded in photograph)



NATALIE WOOD

RETURN OF A WANDERING STAR



Read the opening chapters of *A Shepherd's Journey**, the brief, entertaining memoir of Israel's first Bedouin diplomat and you'll learn swiftly how his grandmother Nof, also spoke Yiddish.

"It was her generation that made the first connections with the Jewish pioneers ... who arrived primarily from Eastern Europe during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s to build the country.

"In fact," adds Ishmael Khaldi, "those were the years that defined and designed our status as a Bedouin ethnic minority in the newly-born Jewish state, Israel".

He then goes on to describe the close ties that Bedouin like Nof formed with their new Jewish neighbours. This was due, not only to their traditional hospitality, but also because the community had been mistreated by both Ottoman and British rulers and bore the scars of centuries of disputes with their landed Arab counterparts, the fellahin.

"Taking all this together, the creation of a bond between Bedouin and Jews was natural and mutually beneficial," says Khaldi, who is about to step down as Counsellor for Civil Society Affairs at the Israel Embassy in London where he's been fighting anti-Israel activity like Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions for some years. Here surely is a well-formed symbiosis, where both parties have aided each other, not merely for the reasons that Khaldi outlines, but because Bedouin are desert 'wanderers' just as Jews have wandered the globe since their dispersion after the Roman invasion of ancient Israel in 70 CE.

Indeed, good inter-community relations have so benefited Bedouin that they borrowed the idea of moving out of tents and into barrakiya – metal-roofed wooden huts – from residents in the local kibbutzim – who simply recreated the housing in which they had lived in Europe. Khaldi's book is an engaging, sometimes hilarious, often moving account of a young man who has somehow straddled two universes: that of the slow, unchanging landscape of his Galilean forefathers and the frenzied, frightening world of 21st century North America and northern Europe.



As I read the closing pages of Khaldi's book, I saw a startling news story claiming how Shin Bet, Israel's security service, had arrested a six-strong [Negev-based ISIS Bedouin cell](#) that allegedly included four school teachers. What, one may ask, causes such a huge difference in attitude between the Bedouin of Israel's north and south? First, the Galilean Bedouin population is less than half of that in the Negev. Second, while northern Bedouin have now enjoyed many years of interacting with their Jewish neighbours, those in the south did not meet Jewish settlers until after the State of Israel was established.

"Because of that", writes Khaldi, "there is a less intimate connection between Jews and Bedouin in the south" and we must infer this gives a greater cause for animosity. Certainly as someone who lives barely five minutes' walk from a Bedouin settlement, I can confirm that I have received only pleasant smiles and no personal animus from that community. Khaldi recently gave a wildly successful address based on his book to members of Karmiel's Anglo community. On the night, he invited us to visit his home village of Khawalid. He has since revealed that he intends returning there to live after his tour of duty in London concludes.

We all wish him well in both his marriage plans and his aim to develop his home village with a modern access road.



Drawing by Randhir Khare from his new series Earth Lines which is part of his 7th solo exhibition opening later this year.

From INTO THE BLUE BEYOND, a soon-to-be-published volume of poems which celebrate the Himalayas. These poems are also being performed by the poet as part of a series of live concerts with his newly formed poetry-music band MYSTIC.



'TELL ME, SISTER WIND'

Tell me sister wind
Where does this road end?

All day I have walked
With friends,
Strangers,
Lovers,
My shadow,
In the company of ravens and magpies,
Lifting swifts,
Water voices,
The past like a swarm of bees
Hiving my heart;

Tell me sister wind
Where does this road end?

All night I have walked
With wolves,
Dreams,
Moon shadow,
In the company of my many selves,
Broken promises,
Snow song;

Tell me sister wind
Where does this road end?

Over the edge of the last mountain
Floating through ice knife air,
Crashing on snow rocks,
Scattering,
Each particle sinking to rest

Somewhere below,
Finally liberated -
From the long journey,
The hoping,
The loving,
The waiting,
The dreaming,
The remembering?

Does the road
Wander into towns,
Villages, cities, fields,
Over journeying rivers,
In and out of dark tunnels
Shot through mountain sides;
Bleeding visions of endless roads
And wolves and broken promises
And beehived hearts
And caravans of longing,
Until one day -
I am walking again
In the company of strangers,
Lovers,
Ravens, magpies,
And my many selves?

Am I dreaming the road I walk on sister wind,
Fragrant with seasons,
Lover of freedom,
Unable to move?

Tell me sister wind
Where does this road end?



CAREERS IN PUBLISHING

VIVEK MEHRA, MANAGING DIRECTOR AND CEO OF [SAGE INDIA](#)

Publishing is NOT printing. This is perhaps the reason many aspirants shy away from considering mainstream publishing. It's true that publishing began with printers and printing presses, however, this changed when printing and publishing became specialised. Today, hardly any publisher owns a printing press. There was a period in the late 1990s and early 2000s when publishing was going through a phase of reinventing itself. Prior to this period, two distinct and opposing forces ruled publishing. These were:

1. Economies of scale provided by the offset press and
2. Saleability of content limited by distribution channels

So in theory the more copies a publisher produced the lower the per-unit cost was. But distribution was expensive, time consuming, risky and complex. While many believe the Offset press revolutionised publishing, it also created a problem for small print runs; these started becoming more expensive. The Internet began changing the landscape. Information flowed more easily and the arrival of online ecommerce companies changed distribution forever. In the early 1990s, the content on the web doubled every 2 years. It took 2 years for the web to cross 100 websites. But by 1999, the web had grown to 10 million websites. [LINK](#)

Look around you, do you know the web page you visit, the article you read, the ad that you love so much and even the product information you seek are all a form of publishing? There isn't an area of life that publishing doesn't touch and yet very few think about joining this industry.

Here are some facts that you may not have thought of. India's publishing industry estimates indicate about 15,000+ publishing houses across the country and across languages. Even a conservative estimate of around 30 employees per house, we have a staggering 450,000 people employed within publishing. The publishing services industry (providing outsourcing services to publishers) is perhaps 3 times as large. Consider this, almost all the content put out by the top 10 global publishers flows through India. The two combined (publishing and publishing services) provide a robust and growing opportunity.

Conventional Publishing is where it all begins before technology steps in to enhance end user experience. There has never been a better time to explore publishing as a prime career option.

It's true that when one thinks of a 'publisher' one tends to use it as a synonym for 'book publisher'. And that is where people confuse themselves. Publishing is about disseminating knowledge (content) and NOT just about putting out a book. There are many types of publishers but there are some common opportunities across all types of publishers.

Editor

At last count SAGE had about 16 definitions for this term. The term editor defines three types of primary functions. These are

1. Filtering content – an acquisition editor for books would 'edit' content that is not in line with the company's vision. An academic acquisition editor will 'edit' any proposal for publishing fiction. Similarly a journal editor would 'edit' content that is inappropriate for the journal's aim and scope.
2. Fixing language – a language editor would 'edit' or remove inappropriate grammar, inappropriate words and make the content readable.
3. Manage publishing schedules – this type of editor ensures content is published at an agreed or at an appropriate time. So a production editor would ensure the journal was brought out on time. Another example would be bringing out books when they are most relevant. Text-books for example need to be available before the session begins. This sort of publishing is very time sensitive.

As is evident there are different types and titles for each one of the 3 distinct functions I have described. Depending on the publishing vision, editors and their titles change.



Commissioning/Acquisition Editor

This editor is the one responsible for acquiring content for a publishing house. At one time these were perhaps the most powerful individuals in a publishing house and their craft was hidden under many layers. Here is what a generic content creating cycle looks like:



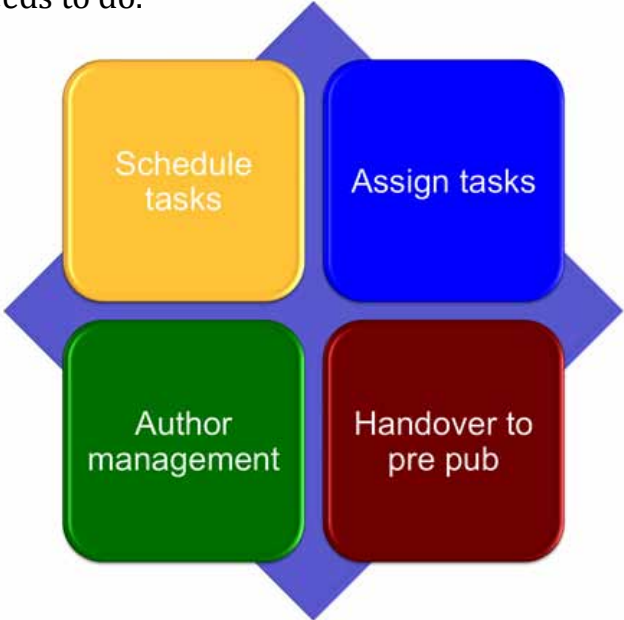
There are just two basic traits one needs to be able to excel at this:

- 1. The first is a clear understanding of the publishing vision and or publishing priorities. Each publishing house has a clear focus area of publishing. It is the responsibility of the Commissioning/Acquisition Editor to ensure that every type of content clearly aligns with the focus area.
- 2. The second is commercial sense. A good editor knows where the content will sell, how much it will sell for and how much of it will sell. Yes it takes some time to develop this but in today’s world, the learning (as can all learning) can be fast tracked.

This is a front facing job where the person is expected to travel and meet with potential authors. It needs someone who is an extrovert, knowledgeable in a given subject area, articulate in the language one wants to commission in and the ability to be a sales person. No, he is not supposed to sell the content to the end consumer, he needs to sell the publishing house to the content creator AND to sell the content to internal stakeholders within the publishing house.

Production Editor

This is the editor that takes over from where the commissioning editor acquires content. In smaller publishing houses the role of a Commissioning Editor is merged with that of a Production Editor. This type of editor coordinates the cleaning, structuring and finalizing content. He (she) is aware of the language styling and content structuring that works for the publishing house. Here is a graphic representation of what he needs to do.



There are two clear needs of excelling at this job and a third that is great to have.

- 1. A very good command of the language. Good production editors are fluent in the language they are working in. They need to have the ability to spot errors especially in areas such as titles, section headers etc. They need to communicate efficiently between the content creator and other types of content processors (such as language editors).
- 2. The second is the ability to multitask and manage schedules. “Time is money” is their mantra and every task they work on must be completed within an agreed timeframe. And there are always multiple projects running concurrently.
- 3. A third skill that works but isn’t an absolute essential is diplomacy. Production editors typically handle lots of sensitive authors.



Copyeditor

If you have a love for the language and the ability to spot errors, it is this sort of editor that is valued very highly. They have to have outstanding language skills especially written ones. The rest of the skills can be learnt. Here is what the Copyeditor's role looks like.

Away from the editors are a host of jobs that are equally challenging.

Sales

With publishing changing the forms of delivering content, sales has now opened up possibilities like never before. Gone are the days when sales people had to haul backbreaking loads of books. Digital catalogues and computer data are today's tools needed to sell content. A bright person with a charming smile and a can do attitude will help make a great career in sales. Here is what the sales universe looks like.

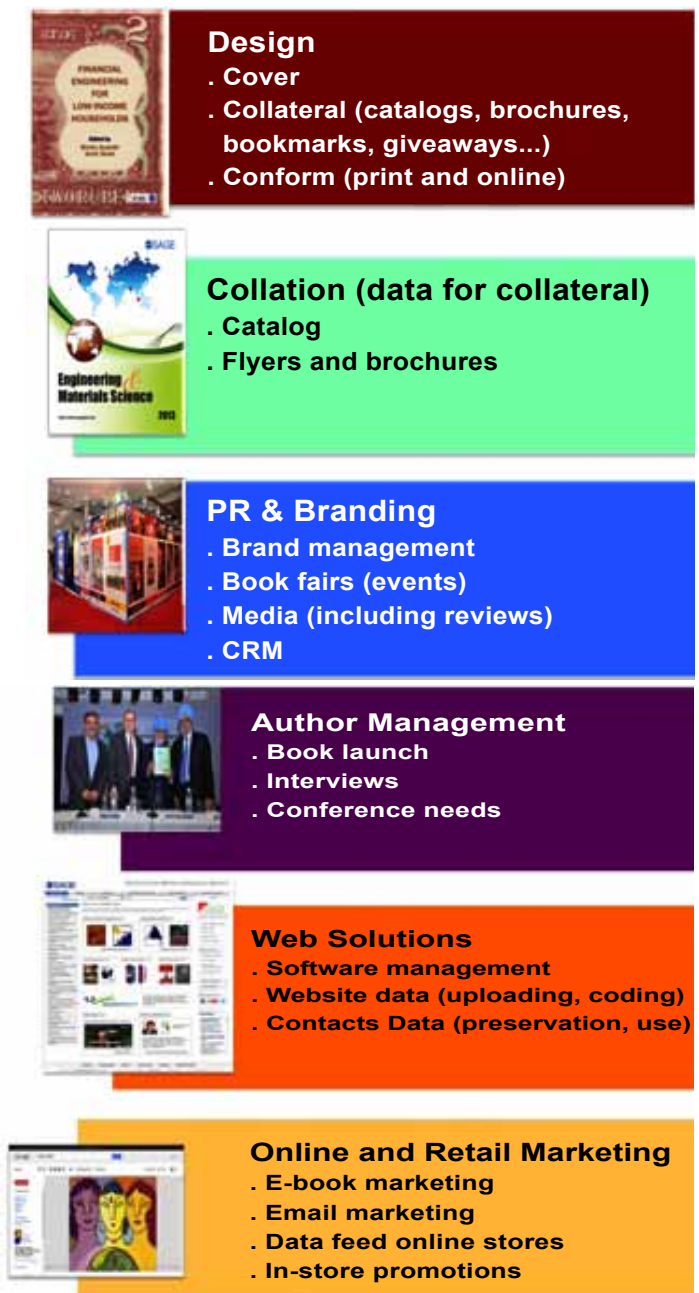


Marketing

Many people confuse sales with marketing and that is where the similarities end. Marketing is about highlighting the virtues of a product or series of products and placing these before the correct (target) audience. The Internet, online selling, web pages, social media, etc. require loads of targeted data. This is where design, branding and timing come together to produce marketing materials that drive sales. Here is what a typical marketing department should look like:

While publishing is synonymous with publishers there is another universe that very few people are conscious about. This is the universe of service providers. While China became the manufacturing capital of the world, India quietly created a dominating position in knowledge processing. Today almost all types of global (English) content (static text, images, moving images, animation, web, etc.) flows through India. This industry hires more than 3 times the number of people all of publishing hires.

So when you think about careers in publishing don't just think about books or magazines or journals, think about content, its structuring, cleaning and dissemination. While publishers do this directly, service providers do this indirectly. The result is a great rewarding and fulfilling career in Publishing.





THE QUEEN ARCHETYPE

The creativity of your subconscious mind not only shows up in dreams, but also shows up as archetypes in your life. Archetypes are overlying patterns that show up in all cultures that are seeded in the psyche. Some examples of archetypes are mother, judge, teacher and healer. When you begin to look at these patterns in your life, you can unleash your creative energy.

"The shadow aspects of our archetypes are fed by our paradoxical relationship to power. We are as intimidated by being empowered as we are by being disempowered." - Caroline Myss

Whenever I explore an archetype, it is fun to write about one where I have personal experience. In this case, I am writing about my friend's archetype.

Several years ago at a Conference with Brendon Burchard in Santa Clara, I met an incredible woman, Katie Cavanaugh. We spent the whole workshop learning together and getting to know each other. It was a collaborative relationship made in heaven. We decided to be business mentors for each other and have Skyped every week since.

In addition to focusing on business, we became fast friends. In 2012, she hosted and facilitated the Healer's Gathering Workshop at the Harmony House in Sisters, Oregon. I was delighted to be invited to be a keynote speaker. I decided to facilitate a DNA Activation with this group of 100 participants. She invited me to come and stay with her in the guest room (which is now called Candess's room!)

As the pre-event unfolded, her house began to fill up with other guests and eventually I was moved to a blow up bed in her office. I found myself reacting, feeling hurt and angry. It just happened that my friend Cheyenne from Colorado was visiting her friend near Sisters and I was able to meet with her and talk. Cheyenne and I have known each other for many years and she is like a sister to me. She helped me realize that my control issue here was a safety issue and these kinds of reactions generally manifest for me in my own home and wherever I sleep.

Before the event I felt I needed to meet with Katie and clear what happened for me. I invited Katie to have lunch with Cheyenne, her friend and I so we could talk. The three of us were seated at a patio table as Katie walked in. She was majestic in her presence, carrying herself with confidence and grace. She sported a large smile and introduced herself and the whole ambience changed. Cheyenne said as soon as she saw her – she is a Queen. I immediately got it. My friend Katie Cavanaugh had the Queen archetype! We talked about my reaction to being downgraded from my own room to a blow up bed and just being able to share this with Katie created the safety I needed.

More importantly, knowing that Katie had the Queen Archetype shifted my relationship with her and I was able to understand and honor how amazing she is and how delighted I am to work with this powerful, intrepid woman!

You may have Queens in your life as well.

Characteristics of the Queen Archetype

- Makes sure everything is exactly as it should be
- Takes charge
- Dominates her court and give orders
- Is benevolent and takes care of her subjects
- Is dignified, striking and awesome
- Has a clear sense of responsibility
- Plans and gets things done
- Imparts to her subjects what she believes in important
- Empowers her subjects to connect to the community and return to her

Shadow side of the Queen

- Demanding
- Aggressive
- Vengeful
- Heads will role if they don't follow the rules

Having realized the nature of the Queen Archetype, I understood even more clearly the value of my friendship and collaborative relationship with Katie Cavanaugh. My main archetype is that of a Spiritual Teacher, but my energy is soft and responsive. When I watched her facilitate the Healer's Gathering I was awed as many of us are in the presence of her majestic command.

Caroline Myss, a medical intuitive and the author of Sacred Contracts, a book on archetypes, has been my mentor through her workshops and books for nearly 20 years. She also has the Queen Archetype. In fact, I think many of the powerful women I have sought out as teachers share this quality.

By understanding and working with the Queen Archetype you will learn to identify these characteristics in yourself or in others. If you have the Queen archetype, be aware of how you affect others in your life. Your intensity may be misunderstood. Use your powerful persona to influence and guide others. Surround yourself with friends who support your vision and are willing participants in your Queen-dom!

If you have friends, family or co-workers who have the Queen Archetype, take a look at how you can benefit from their ruling and how you can support yourself and the Queen by this awareness. Share with them what you have learned and find your place in the royal family.

Awareness of the Archetypes can help you heal yourself and access your natural path to move toward your Divine Soul purpose.

Katie Cavanaugh is an Intrepid Success Coach and Mentor. You can find more about her at <http://katiecavanaugh.com>.

Candess M. Campbell, PhD a #1 Best-selling Author, Intuitive Mentor and Coach, Speaker, and International Psychic Medium Healer. <http://energymedicinedna.com>

Recipe © www.ozlemturkishtable.com



MIDYE DOLMA: HOMEMADE STUFFED MUSSELS WITH AROMATIC RICE BY TURKISH CULINARY EXPERT **OZLEM WARREN**

Midye Dolma, stuffed mussels with aromatic rice, herbs and spices, is a delicious street food we love as a nation in Turkey. They are well worth the effort to make at home; these scrumptious stuffed mussels, midye dolma would make an impressive starter or if you really like them like my 11 year old son, it may be your main course!

Serves: 25 - 30 stuffed mussels

Ingredients

- 25 - 30 large black mussels, cleaned and bearded
- 2 medium to large onions, finely chopped
- 30 gr / 1 oz. currants
- 30 gr / 1 oz. pine nuts
- 110 gr/ 3 ¾ oz. / ½ cup short grain rice
- 1 tomato, very finely chopped or grated
- Handful (about ⅓ cup) finely chopped flat leaf parsley
- Handful (about ⅓ cup) finely chopped fresh dill
- 15 ml / 1 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 - 2 tsp ground black pepper
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes or chili flakes
- 5 ml/ 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 60 ml / 4 tbsp. olive oil
- 240 ml/ 8 fl. oz. / 1 cup hot water
- Salt to taste
- Lemon wedges to serve



Local vendors at the Turgut Reis beach, Bodrum; And at Beyoglu, Istanbul. Pic © www.ozlemturkishtable.com

Instructions

01. Place the currants in a bowl, cover with warm water and soak for 15 minutes. Then drain and set aside.

02. Place the rice into a sieve and rinse well under cold running water. Drain the rice and set aside.

03. Make the stuffing first (you can also make the stuffing a day ahead of time). Heat the oil in a medium sized pan and stir in the onions. Sauté over medium to high heat for 5 minutes.

04. Stir in the pine nuts to the onions, sauté over medium heat for 3 minutes, stirring often. Add the rice, currants, chopped tomato, spices and season with salt to your taste. Pour in the hot water (about 240 ml/ 8 fl oz. / 1 cup) and combine all well. Bring to the boil then cover to simmer over low heat for 15 minutes, until all the liquid has been absorbed. Rice will be “al dente” and still have a bite to it. Remove from the heat and leave to cool.

05. Once cool, stir in the chopped dill and parsley to the aromatic rice and combine well. Check the seasoning and add more salt or ground black pepper if you’d like. Set aside to cool. You can cook this delicious aromatic rice a day ahead of time and keep in the fridge, covered. This really helps the flavors to blend in and phase your cooking time wise.

06. Now, open the mussels. If you’ve bought the mussels in a vacuum bag, open the bag over a bowl to catch any liquid inside. Place the mussels in a large bowl and rinse under cold water. Scrub the shells clean and scrape off any dirt. Using a blunt knife, carefully force the point of the knife into the gap at the pointy end of each mussel (if opening the shells become challenging, soaking them in warm water helps to open the shell, as it relaxes the mussels). Slice through the meat so the shell opens with half the meat attached to each half shell – once you cut through the thick, round connecting muscle at the bottom of the mussel, it will be easy to open.

07. Pour the juice from the mussel to a bowl. Snip off the beards and using your finger, remove any grit at the base. Spread the half shells to tear the muscle of the mussel, but leave the two halves connected. Put about 2 tsp. of stuffing into the middle of each mussel (try not to overfill) and push the half shells together again.



Put about 2 tsp. of stuffing into the middle of each mussel (try not to overfill) and push the half shells together again. Pic © www.ozlemturkishtable.com

08. Place the mussels on a wide heavy pan, with the tips pointing outwards towards the edge of the pan, with the shells slightly overlapping (to prevent them opening). Build a tight spiral of shells in the center of the pan. There should be one layer of mussels, so if you have mussels left over, use another pan to keep on the layering. Place a wide plate over the mussels to prevent them from opening too wide while they cook.

09. Strain the mussel juice through a sieve lined with a double layer of muslin (cheese cloth) three times to remove any grit. Mix the mussel juice with water, make it up about 250 ml/ 9 oz. / generous 1 cup water (have another 1 cup of water ready if you are using two pans). Pour this mixture to the pan; the water level should only reach to the half of the shell. Cover the pan and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes.

10. Remove the mussels from the heat and leave to cool at room temperature. Then cover and keep them in the fridge for 30 minutes – 1 hour to cool further and for the flavors to settle. Serve stuffed mussels with aromatic rice, midye dolma on a big platter with lemon wedges by the side. They are best enjoyed eating with your hands, using the top shell to scoop the mixture out of the bottom shell, with a generous squeeze of lemon over the mussel with aromatic rice.

Notes

1. Opening the shell of the live mussels may seem a little challenging at first; soaking them in warm water helps to open the shell, as it relaxes the mussels. Make sure to discard any broken or open shells. Tap any half open shells; do not use any that do not close immediately.

2. The herby, aromatic rice itself is really delicious and you can make it ahead of time. I made mine a day ahead of time and kept in the fridge, covered; it really helped for the flavors to settle.

3. Plenty of onions in the aromatic rice really go well; they pack a lot of flavor combined with currants, pine nuts, herbs and spices. I like to add a little red pepper flakes to bring a delicious but not overpowering heat to the mussels.

4. Try not to over stuff the mussels with the aromatic rice, as the rice will need a little space to cook further.

ALL IN GOD'S NAME

The fashion for religious trinkets appears to be growing: Whether they are plastered on the forehead, worn on the wrist, around the neck, around the waist or as a tattoo where the sun doesn't shine. It is all in a God's name, literally.

Salvation, karma, snipping the anatomy of a baby as a ritual, water and fire purification, floral tributes containing sweets in plastic wrapping, orange robes, black robes, white robes all jostle for a place in the firmament.

Who is holier than thou? Guess?

And as for The Holy Books: Dare not drop them on the ground, burn them or show any disrespect. Of course these books contain words that are claimed to be of/from God/s and dictated to Man. Man being the stenographer who has morphed into the self-appointed interpreter of the Word. Millions of trees are cut down to make paper for the Books.

The Holy Books are not free. Someone has to pay for them. The Gods' words have a price.

Destruction of Mother Nature and her denizens is essential in many religious ceremonies. Last November over 300,000 animals were slaughtered in a country where a devastating earthquake followed not long after the mass slaughter. The decapitation of animals was an offering to the Gods. Apparently Mother Nature thought otherwise.

All in God's name they say. Sing, recite, eat the right food, follow the rituals even if it means destroying life on earth, and honour your Gods not Gods of others.

Hundreds of thousands of animals are slaughtered in Nepal every year during the Gadhimai festival.

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Each God is appropriated by a section of the people. Some own one God, others more than one God. To follow one, you have to give up the other. It is all very confusing, like riding a Ferris wheel with a bad case of vertigo.

And while the offerings and costume parades continue, the sixth mass extinction is upon us. Some claim that Truth will be lost in this wave of extinction. I think they are wrong. We lost Truth a long time ago. What we have now is a sentence from the Holy Books. A sentence of death. Nothing more.

Here are a few words from George Denis Patrick Carlin, Grammy-winning American stand-up comedian, actor, author, and philosopher:

"We're so self-important. So arrogant. Everybody's going to save something now. Save the trees, save the bees, save the whales, save the snails. And the supreme arrogance? Save the planet! Are these people kidding? Save the planet? We don't even know how to take care of ourselves; we haven't learned how to care for one another. We're gonna save the fuckin' planet? . . . And, by the way, there's nothing wrong with the planet in the first place. The planet is fine. The people are fucked! Compared with the people, the planet is doin' great. It's been here over four billion years . . . The planet isn't goin' anywhere, folks. We are! We're goin' away. Pack your shit, we're goin' away. And we won't leave much of a trace. Thank God for that. Nothing left. Maybe a little Styrofoam. The planet will be here, and we'll be gone. Another failed mutation; another closed-and biological mistake."

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Live Encounters is celebrating 5 years 2010-2014

Live encounters

Free online magazine from village earth
August 2015

