

Live encounters

December 2012

Volume One

Free online magazine from village earth

Guest Editorial

Anat Hoffman

Civil & Human Rights Activist

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your generous offer to promote my book in your very Gandhian publication, *Live Encounters*.

You bring the world together within its colorful pages of truth, peace and understanding across borders.

Congrats to you and your team!

And God bless!

Peter Gonsalves

author of Khadi: Gandhi's Mega Symbol of Subversion
Salesian Pontifical University
Vatican, Rome, Italy

October 27, 2012

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

We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. Please help spread the free distribution of knowledge with any amount that you feel you want to give for this just cause.

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas

Publisher/Editor

Live Encounters Magazine

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Guest Editorial

Anat Hoffman Civil & Human Rights Activist

She is a major leader for social justice in Israel best known for never giving-up, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Born and raised in Jerusalem, she served in its City Council for 14 years, leading the opposition to the right wing and ultra-Orthodox administration. She is a founding member of Women of the Wall and continues to be a tireless advocate for freedom of religion and women's rights. From 2002, Hoffman is Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), the legal and advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel.



Letter to the Editor

Budi Hernawan OFM

Budi Hernawan OFM is a Franciscan friar, a former director of the Office for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Church in Jayapura and a PhD scholar at the Regulatory Institutions Network, Australian National University.

<http://regnet.anu.edu.au/people/mr-yohanes-budi-hernawan>



Terry McDonagh wellknown Irish Poet, writer and Playwright *talks about his life and works*

Poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh has published four collections of poetry; a play; a book of letters, novel and poetry for children. His work has been translated into Indonesian and German, funded by Ireland Literature Exchange. [In the Light of Bridges - Hamburg Fragments](#) is his latest book that was launched in Hamburg on 26th April, 2012. www.terry-mcdonagh.com www.podcasts.ie www.killedan-and-nowhere-else.com



Eric Hobsbawm - Another Jewish Contrarian

Natalie Wood

Born in Birmingham, England, U.K., Natalie Wood began working in journalism a month before the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and has remained in regional Jewish journalism for more than 20 years, leaving full-time writing to help run a family business. She emigrated with her husband, Brian Fink, from Manchester to Israel in March 2010 and lives in Karmiel, Galilee. Her work features in *Smith Magazine's* new *Six Word Memoirs On Jewish Life*. She also contributes to *Technorati*, *Blogcritics* and *Live Encounters*. <http://www.perfectlywritefamilytales.blogspot.com>



Are Bengalis characteristically Left-inclined? A study

Romit Bagchi

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



2012 - Another Year of Living Foolishly?

Mark Ulyseas

Ulyseas has served time in Advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a free lance journalist and photographer. All this took up nearly three decades. End 2009 he created Live Encounters for the free sharing of knowledge hoping that the 'humane' in humanity still remained albeit scattered around the globe. This has become a celebration of Life by people of village earth.

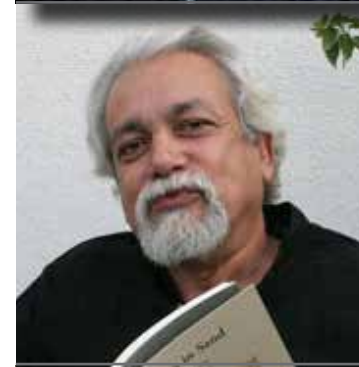
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Photo Gallery - Cuba

Joo Peter

Aka Joachim Peter is a Visual artist and writer based in Southwest Germany, presently working on documentary & travel photography in Asia right. He loves to explore and combine all arts in his work. Joo has studied Arts; painting and graphics, worked for theatre (designing stage, costume and light), did some work for television and film, went into teaching. He writes essays and a blog in his native tongue, German, for he feels his language combines philosophy and humour. www.joo-peter.photoshelter.com



Remember and Resist

Randhir Khare

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



Generating Yourself!

Candess M Campbell

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

www.12weekstoselfhealing.com



Peace Needs More Than Talk

Steven Beck

Steven Beck is a human rights activist living in Israel. Steven currently works in Jerusalem at the Israel Religious Action Center, the public and legal advocacy arm of the Progressive Movement in Israel. He is also a board member of the African Refugee Development Center, which is a non-profit organization that assists, supports, and empowers refugees and asylum seekers in Israel. He recently founded One Region One Future in order to support economic development projects in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and for African refugees in Israel.



I was taken to jail in handcuffs, pulled along the ground by my wrists, strip-searched, and left to sleep on the floor of a jail cell with nothing to keep me warm but the same tallit that started the problems in the first place. When I asked why I had to sleep on the floor, the guards simply said they were having a shortage of beds.

Anat Hoffman

Civil & Human Rights Activist

The Western Wall in Jerusalem, in the words and Yiddish accent of Issac Bashevis Singer, is “like any other Veilin Vall (wailing wall).” It is the only distinct and concrete holy place for the Jewish people. The site of the Western Wall is run by an ultra-Orthodox group of bureaucrats and rabbis who are dictating the life choices of all who enter (Jew and Gentile alike.) This group, The Western Wall Heritage Council, determines the character of the holiest site for the Jewish people. They are the ones who have taken this historical site, with deep meaning to Jews from all denominations, and turned it into an Orthodox synagogue with all the restrictions that go along with that distinction.

Pope Benedict XVI learned how extreme this group could be during his 2009 visit to Israel. The chief rabbi in charge of the holy places and the wall, Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch, said that just as the Pope would take off his shoes when entering a mosque, he should take off his crucifix when visiting the Western Wall. It took a while to explain to Rav Rabinovitch the difference between the Pope’s shoes and his crucifix. One is a clothing item, while the other is the essence of his identity. The rabbis ultimately relented and the Pope kept his crucifix on during the visit. The idea of starting a fight with 1.5 billion Catholics was a fight they were not ready to wage. Conversely, these same rabbis are more than happy to pick a fight with Jewish women who want to pray at the Western Wall because they are viewed as weak. The Western Wall Rabbis do not fear Jewish women will cause the kind of international backlash that would have resulted if the leader of the world’s Catholics was forced to remove an item that symbolizes the essence of his faith as a Christian. The rabbis fail to see that the right to wear a tallit (prayer shawl) is the same symbol for us, the Women of the Wall.

Women of all Jewish denominations have gathered every Rosh Chodesh (the new month in the Jewish calendar) for the last 23 years to pray together wearing a tallit, singing out loud and attempting to read from the Torah scroll. Our group is wonderful because it’s the only multi-denominational Jewish prayer group in existence at the Wall and maybe in the world. We became sisters as we reached across our varied Jewish practices to celebrate the new month together. Our unique community is a complex exercise in sensitivity and mutual respect. It is therefore quite shocking that our group is seen by the ruling powers of the Wall as provocative and having no respect for the feelings of others. We have suffered verbal and physical harassment by ultra-Orthodox male and female onlookers, who are threatened by our practices, which, though complying with Jewish law, seem to them to be quite unusual and challenging.

On October 16, 2012, I was arrested at the Western Wall while conducting a prayer service in honor of Hadassah’s centennial birthday. Two hundred and fifty Hadassah women came to the wall in solidarity with our group. As we were chanting the “Shema,” a major prayer in the service, a police officer approached and ordered me to leave the Wall Plaza. I was taken to the nearby police station, and night of humiliation and pain followed. I have never experienced such intense levels of intimidation. I was taken to jail in handcuffs, pulled along the ground by my wrists, strip-searched, and left to sleep on the floor of a jail cell with nothing to keep me warm but the same tallit that started the problems in the first place. When I asked why I had to sleep on the floor, the guards simply said they were having a shortage of beds.

Treatment like that is designed to make women scared of entering the Western Wall complex with a tallit, in spite of the fact that women wearing prayer shawls are common all over the world. Only in Israel does this simple act meet with such intense pressure. It is important to note that when I enter a room of Israelis with my tallit, it is usually the first time most of them have ever seen one worn by a woman.

So why do I do it? That is a logical question given the terrible coercion I was subjected to that night and the continuous abuse that has been hurled at all of us who go to the Wall on Rosh Chodesh over the last two decades. The reason is simple: if women do not stand up for their rights the patriarchal religious authorities in Israel will continue to push women further and further out of sight. Hopefully the more regular Israelis see me and other women wearing tallit, the more they will come to understand that it is not religious subversion on our part.

I respect Jews who pray differently than me, and I understand that many women do not wish to wear a tallit. The rights of millions of other Jewish women who do wish to pray at the Western Wall with a tallit in peace and safety was never meant to infringe on the rights of others. It was, and continues to be, a simple statement that there is more than one way to be a Jew and this holy site belongs to all of us.

Anat Hoffman

Jerusalem, December 2012

I hope the powers that be read Hernawan's appeal for peaceful dialogue. No nation is perfect. All nations have problems but these problems can only be resolved through nonviolent means. I leave you with this quote from Mahatma Gandhi - **"There is no path to peace. Peace is the path."** – *Mark Ulyseas, Publisher/Editor,*

Dear Editor,

I write to you to raise the issue of a decline in dialogue between the Indonesian government and Papuan people. As you may know, last February the **President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono**, explicitly expressed his willingness to hold dialogue with Papuans to solve the half-century unresolved conflicts in the easternmost provinces of Indonesian Papua. He delivered this statement during an official meeting with the representatives of the Papuan Church leaders who conveyed the request of dialogue from Papuans. During the meeting the President also ordered **Vice President Boediono** to implement this commitment to dialogue. Further, the President also appointed a special envoy for dialogue, Dr. Farid Hussain, who had been instrumental in Aceh peace process.

As we enter a new year we have still not heard any implementation of this commitment. None of the appointed officials have produced any concrete proposals for dialogue. The call for dialogue is not only coming from Papuans. World leaders such as the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and the leaders from the region, such as **Papuan New Guinean PM Peter O'Neil** and Ramos Horta from Timor-Leste, have raised the issue 'dialogue' with Jakarta. Therefore, dialogue is broadly conceived as a well-desired means to solve conflicts in Papua.

The urgency of having dialogue between Jakarta and Papua is pertinent for two major reasons. First, we recently witnessed the increase of state-sponsored violence committed against Papuan activists of the **West Papua National Committee** (KNPB). Their leader, Mako Tabuni, was gunned down by the police in public despite a lack of evidence that he was armed or even resisted arrest. Additionally, there are further reports of arbitrary arrest, harassment, and mistreatment committed by the Indonesian state security services against the members of KNPB in **Fak-Fak, Wamena** and **Jayapura**. This violent and unlawful approach will not solve the conflicts. On the contrary, it will only exacerbate and complicate them.

Second, this period is the second and final term of President Yudhoyono. He already demonstrated his capacity to solve the problems in Aceh through peaceful means as evidenced by the Helsinki Agreement. Under his leadership, communal violence in Poso and Ambon was also solved. At the regional level, Indonesia significantly contributed to the peace agreement in Mindanao, the Philippines. Similarly, Indonesia played a key role in settling the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand.



Budi Hernawan

The window of opportunity for Papuans may last only for the next twelve months before President Yudhoyono steps down. There is no guarantee that the next president will have the capacity and political will to engage Papuans when s/he enters office. So we are extremely concerned with this lack of progress of dialogue.

From the Papuan side, they have prepared their strategy for negotiation. In July last year, they already appointed five peace negotiators who will represent Papuans at the negotiating table with the Indonesian government. These negotiators are highly respected Papuan leaders who have lived in exile for many years: Rex Rumakiek (Australia), John Ondawame (Vanuatu), Leonie Tanggahma (the Netherlands), Octo Mote (USA), and Benny Wenda (UK).

Therefore, I would appeal to you, Editor, to convey the message of Papuans to the Indonesian government and the outside world. Papua has been isolated and neglected by their neighbouring countries since colonial times. So it is time for us to provide an opportunity for Papua and Indonesia to sit together in a dignified manner to discuss their shared future. Within twelve months, both sides need to start discussing a framework for negotiations to establish the whole process of negotiations. We have seen that long processes of negotiation in the region - such as those in Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, Mindanao, and New Caledonia - have largely contributed to peace not only in their immediate area but also in the region. We can no longer afford to lose more lives for the sake of political ideologies and territorial disputes. We need to build justice, peace, and reconciliation in Papua and the region without any further delay.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Budi Hernawan OFM
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Australia
December 2012

Terry McDonagh

Wellknown Irish Poet,
Writer and Playwright
speaks to Mark Ulyseas

Terry reading next to a new sculpture by Sally McKenna of the blind port, Anthony Raftery (1779-1835) in the town square, Kiltimagh, where Terry grow up.



What does it mean to be Irish?

I suppose our place of birth is the root, essence and foundation of what we later become. Ireland is my birthplace; it will always be the place where I can understand and comprehend the elusive nuances of language and symbol, and it is a place where I can feel comfortable. I live in Germany and enjoy the challenge of another culture and language, but when I talk of home, I mean Ireland. Ireland has a strong tradition of storytelling and writing and, as a poet, I feel proud, in some small way, to be part of that tradition.

Why do you write?

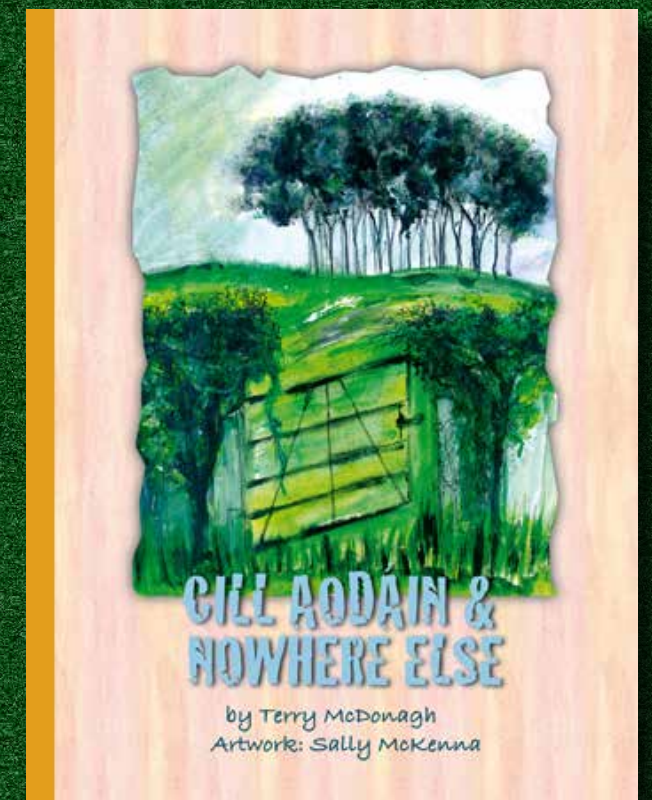
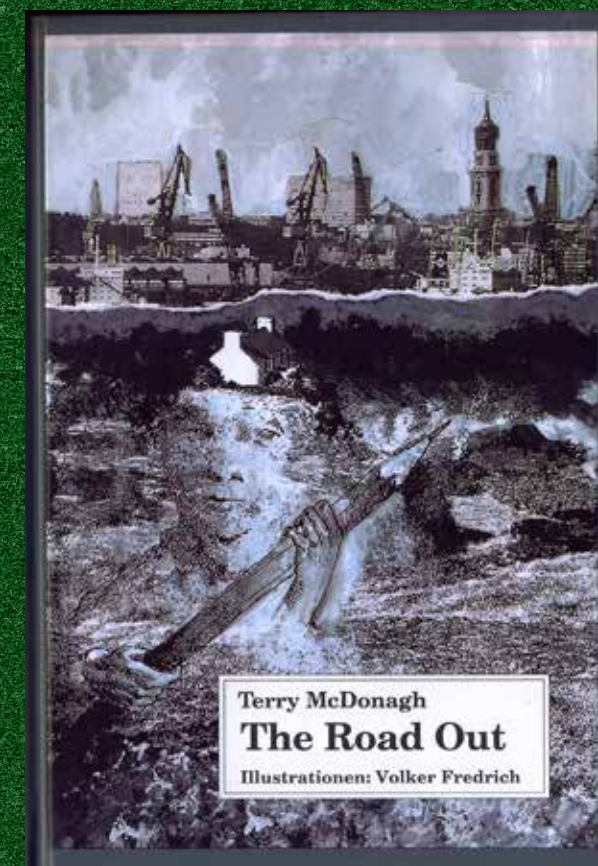
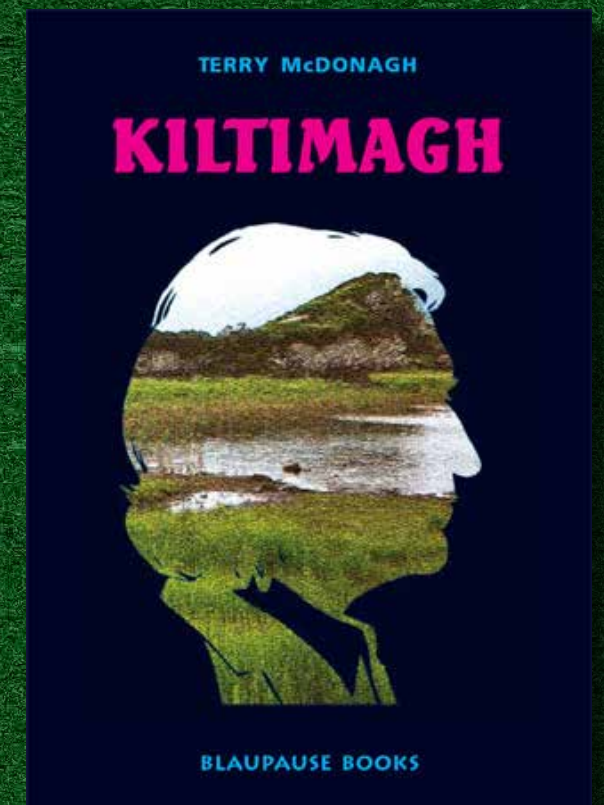
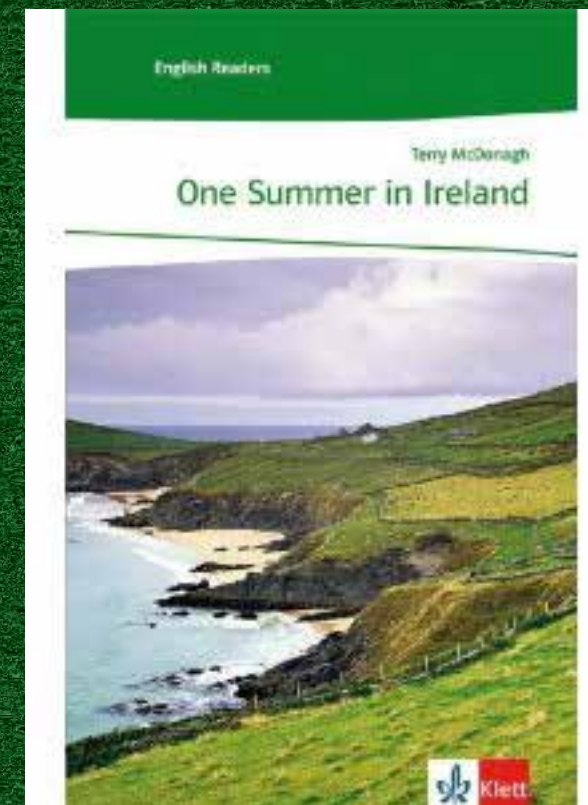
I write because it is part of what I am. As a child, I grew up with storytelling and the poetry of the blind poet of Cill Aodain, Anthony Raftery. I was born in Cill Aodain, which is nothing more than a few fields, with a small town, Kiltimagh nearby...but this is where the dream of walking the roads with a handful of fresh poems, grew out of. I wrote of my childhood in my poetry collection, Cill Aodain & Nowhere Else. Sally McKenna is the illustrator (www.killedan-and-nowhere-else.com). I think writing is like playing football: if it's in you it has to come out. As a child, I couldn't stop running after a football and, now, I spend my time chasing words.

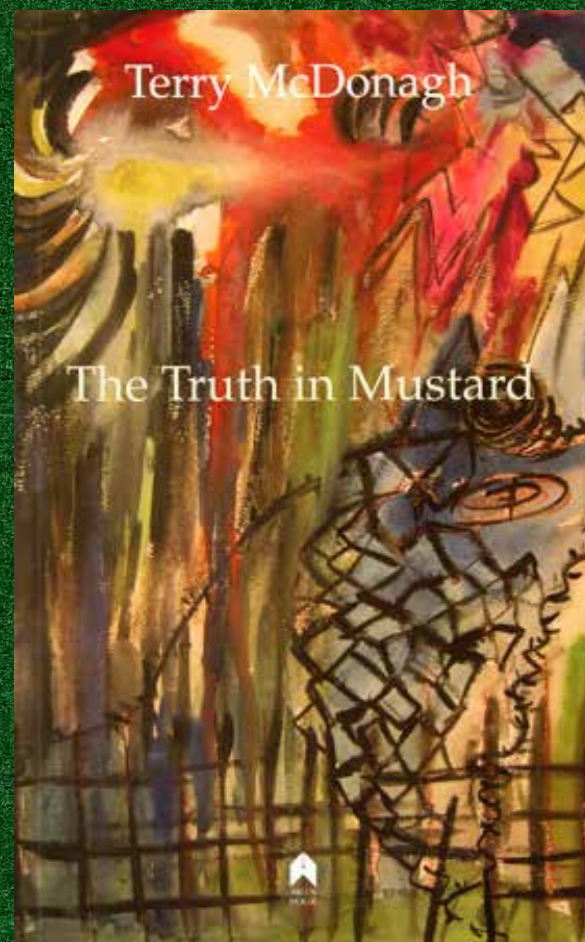
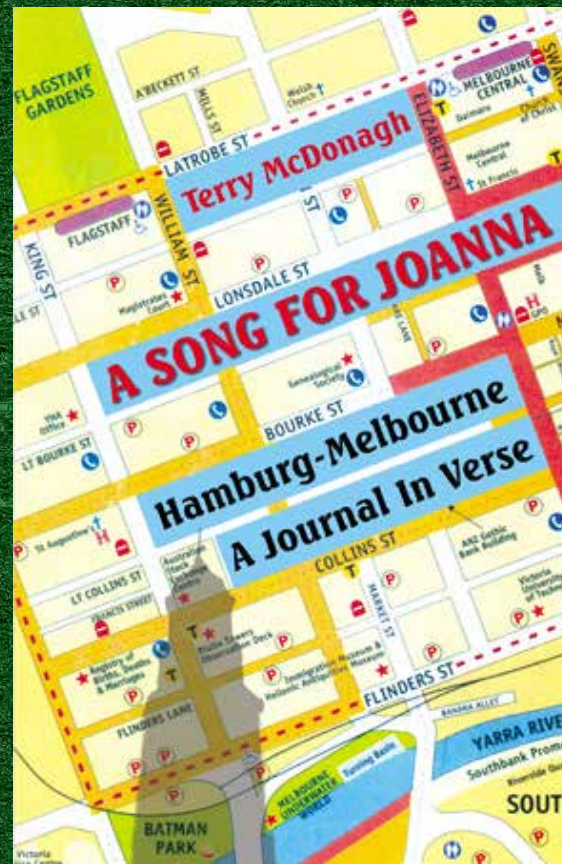
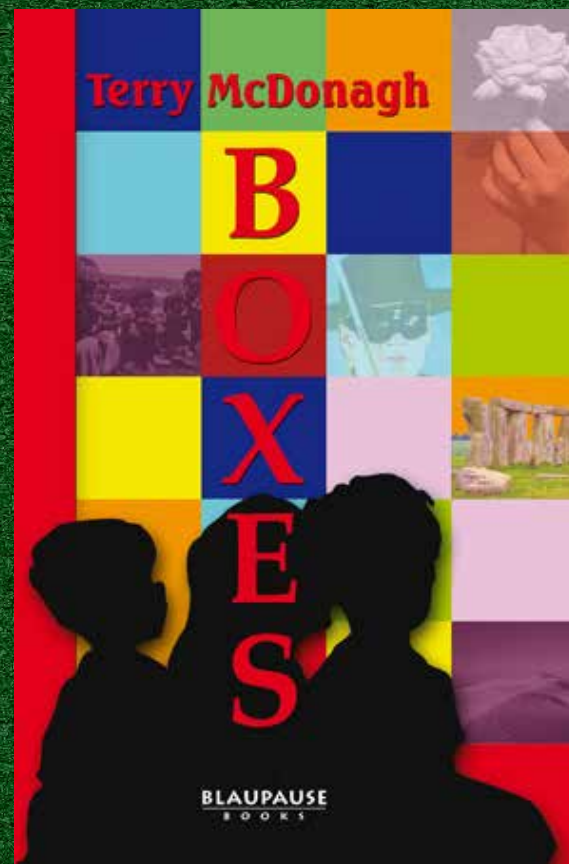
Where does your inspiration come from? It is said that writing is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Do you agree with this view? Further, does one have to live the life to be a poet or writer?

I think I answered that, to a great extent, in question two. Writing is hard work. It is inspired...I don't like the word, inspired...by one's experience, but especially by childhood experiences. You dig deep into long-forgotten memories when you write...these memories can be unpleasant and pleasant but they drive you on to dig deeper and to go further into yourself and your past. Inspiration is a word we use for want of a better word.

Writing involves lots of working, reworking, looking at blank walls and out of windows. We all do things because we have to...'need' is the driving force. Where this 'need' comes from is different for person to person, but if you can't satisfy that need or drive, you become very unhappy, I feel.

To answer the question on inspiration and perspiration: I don't think we can put a percentage on the process, but one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration must be about right. To live the life of the poet, it important to wear the hat...in other words do what you have to do and be true to your instincts. A coat never made a poet.





Writing involves lots of working, reworking, looking at blank walls and out of windows.

Could you give us a glimpse of your life and work?

I was born and grew up, the son of a farmer and teacher, on a small farm in the west of Ireland. I attended (walked to) a nearby, rural primary school in the nineteen fifties, and cycled nine miles, hail, rain and snow, to and from secondary school in Swinford, Co. Mayo. I hated school because of daily doses of corporal punishment and did not do well, but I enjoyed football, which was a saving grace. I studied to be a Columban Catholic priest for a number of years, left the seminary and then decided to become a secondary teacher, for want of something better to do.

I left Ireland in 1980 and went to Germany where I have lived, more or less, until the present day. I worked at language schools, the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the International School, Hamburg for sixteen years. I loved this work with my students but decided to leave this very noble profession about ten years ago to pursue and intensify my writing career.

I had always written and published but I felt the time had come to go in a different direction. I have not regretted my decision, even if the financial reward for my work is not always what I'd wish it to be. I get to travel quite a bit to festivals and schools where I facilitate creative writing programmes, or do readings from my work. I have written a number of books of poetry, some prose, essays etc, but my main work is trying to communicate the love of words I grew up with. I have two beautiful sons and a very charming wife. There are so many details of life that I have not touched on, here, but they will have to wait for another day.

Who, whom or what has been the greatest influence on your work and why?

This is something I have often thought about because the question is often asked. For certain, there is something in our genetic costume that drives us in a certain direction...it's a bit like nurture and nature...which comes first: the hen or the egg. Perhaps we all have certain talents and if we nurture them, we have the opportunity to take them as far as we can, or, perhaps as far as they are capable of going.

As I have, already, said in answering a previous question, I grew up in Cill Aodain, Co Mayo with the poetry and tales of the blind, wandering bard, Anthony Raftery (1778-1835). He was probably the last traveling bard in the Irish literary tradition. Rambling is in my blood as well, I hope. My great-grandfather, Thady Conlon translated some of Raftery's poetry into English (Raftery's language was Irish/Gaelic) and my Uncle Tim McDonagh, passed this love of words on to me as we wandered up and down and round about the little fields and hills of Cill Aodain. I had a most perfect hate of school, but my uncle (himself a schoolmaster) helped to keep my love of learning alive. Later, I got to know other writers like my good friend, Philip Casey, who really encouraged me. In some ways I stumbled from poem to poem because I had to.



A writer must write for writing's sake, and like good water: if a piece of writing is to find its way, it will.

What are you working on now?

I have just completed a new collection of poetry, *Ripple Effect*. It is to be published by Arlen House early next spring. Alan Hayes of Arlen House is a wonderful editor, so we will have some interesting discussions before the book comes out. I am really looking forward to it. I have also just completed a children's story, *Michel the Merman*, set in Hamburg, in which a young boy becomes half boy and half fish...Marc Barnes, a wonderful artist from New Zealand is illustrating it, so I have lots to look forward to. In addition, I have almost completed a new collection of children's poetry, which is to be called *Echolocation*. I am testing these poems as I wander from school to school and festival to festival...to date, I am pleased with the response. Children don't lie or pretend!!! I have always more to write about than I am able to keep up with.

How would you describe the Irish Literary world today? And who are the young emerging poets and writers?

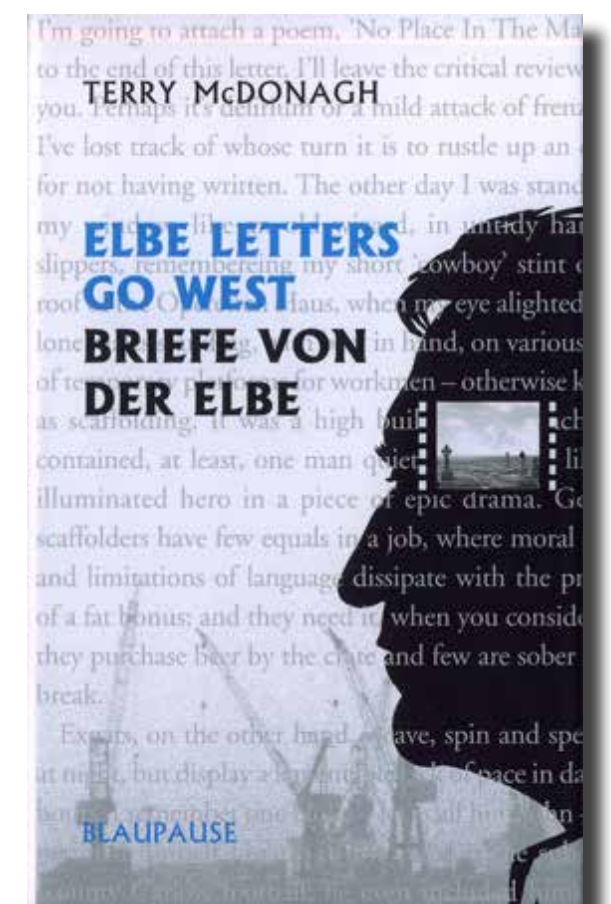
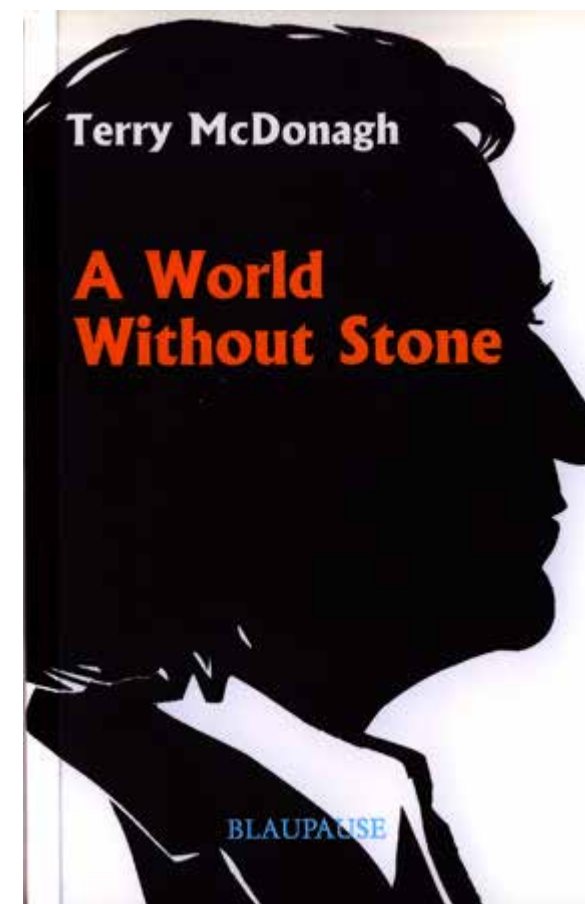
The Irish Literary World is healthy if the number of writers is anything to go by. I have just read at two big festivals: Clifden Arts Festival in County Galway and Cuisle International Poetry Festival, Limerick and the standard of writing and support of and for the writers, was second to none. Poetry Ireland run a very vibrant schools programme (Writers in Schools) and Children's Books Ireland do something similar. Ireland can boast of huge poets like Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Paul Durcan and countless others, to many to mention. There are the playwrights Brian Friel, Marina Carr or Tom Murphy; novelists of the stature of Sebastian Barry, Maeve Binchey, Dermot Bolger, John Boyne, John Connolly. Philip Casey's www.irishwriters-online.com has a wonderful overview of Irish writers with a list of about six-hundred authors. I could go on and on, but a look at Philip Casey's website will relieve me of the burden of having to struggle on with facts that he has gathered over the years and, kindly, provides us with. Funding is always a problem, especially as Ireland is going through a difficult economic downturn, but the future is not bleak and won't be as long as the writing tradition – stretching back to Raftery and beyond – and our storytelling tradition, continues.

What is your message to aspiring poets and writers?

A writer must write for writing's sake, and like good water: if a piece of writing is to find its way, it will. You have to network; it's part of the game, but the real work of writing is what it's all about. Some people, today, because of social media, are good at selling and have sold the poem or the idea before it's finished, but only writing of quality will stand the test of time. Line up the rejection slips, because they will outweigh the success stories, and, above all, don't stop writing.

If you had a chance to relive your life would you still be a poet and writer?

I have always written or tried to and I love listening to stories. Poetry is rooted in the story of what it means to be human. – Check out that storytelling genius, Niall de Burca – When I was a drama teacher, I absolutely loved my work. The contact with the students was really rewarding, but a little voice kept nagging at me to become a full-time writer. I have written all my life and cannot do otherwise. To answer your question: I would not change a thing. I consider myself to be a very lucky person: this is the message I try to share with young people when working in schools. My life is blessed.



Professor Eric Hobsbawm was the leading Marxist historian of his generation. He was also a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who made England his home. Here Natalie Wood suggests that he was eternally contrary, never quite cut his Jewish roots and became something of an old-fashioned 'rebbe' to his academic acolytes, to the extent of offering them traditional hospitality at home.



This picture of Hobsbaum's childhood family shows him with his mother, sister Nancy and cousin Peter (centre) outside an alpine TB sanatorium in Austria in 1930.

Eric Hobsbawm

Another Jewish Contrarian

by Natalie Wood

"Hampstead wasn't good enough for you was it? You had to go poncing off to Barnsley. You and your coal-mining friends." - Monty Python's Flying Circus, BBC TV

Naughty, I know. But the death in October of Eric Hobsbawm, the much revered Marxist historian, reminded me of the scabrous Monty Python joke.

As a Communist intellectual par excellence, he was an archetypal denizen of that elegant, leafy London suburb, measuring others, not by the cut of their coat but by the breadth of their brain. "Not a first-class mind, what?", he'd say of some lesser being. Nor did it stop him owning a second home. Indeed, one obituarist wrote:

"His wartime experience, he claimed, 'converted' him to the British working class: 'they were not very clever, but they were good people'. His house in Hampstead remained a meeting place for Left-wing intellectuals from around the world. He also had a holiday home in Wales."

I interpret this remark as from the mind of a secularised Talmudist – someone who judged others by the extent of their knowledge of Torah – but who had somehow become ambushed by modern life!



I guess that to understand Hobsbawm's monstrous, if most amiable ego, we must also reflect on the massive hunk of iron-faced chutzpa it took for any Jewish refugee from Nazism to brave the snobbery and social antisemitism they met in the England of the 1930s and beyond. This, surely, is what helped to shape him and his friends like Ralph Miliband, father of politicians, Ed and David into classic 'non-Jewish' Jews and give them places in the smartest groves of academia.

This was self-preservation on a grand scale so I suggest first that it was remarkable how Hobsbawm abided by his mother's advice **"whatever you do, never deny you are Jewish"** and second that his pioneering ideas about 'people's history' or 'history from below' were in direct descent from the biblical prophets and thus imbued with classic Jewish thought.

Further, it appears that these principles filtered through to less well-known colleagues like **Dr. William J ('Bill') Fishman** who wrote **East End Jewish Radicals** and **Bill Williams** who went on to examine Manchester-Jewish history, not only through the lens of communal worthies and the institutions they founded, but also through those of their more 'ordinary' contemporaries.

So what I find hardest to swallow is not merely Hobsbawm's quite religious devotion to Communism but his insistence that he had "no emotional attachment" either to Judaism or Israel which he described in his memoir as **"the small, militarist, culturally disappointing and politically aggressive nation-state which asks for my solidarity on racial grounds."**

All this runs contrary to his many deep friendships with fellow Jews – self-evidently he felt secure in Jewish company – and the warm Jewish-style hospitality he and his wife offered to scores of people in their home.

Further, in recent years his daughter, Julia has said she has felt drawn towards some Jewish social practices like prioritising her family and encouraging them to gather for a Sabbath meal. Sweetly, she also performed that most Jewish of roles by playing matchmaker in the romance of **former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his wife, Sarah**. Now, I suggest, Julia is like too many other people I know who resent their parents for not giving them a better Jewish education.

One of Hobsbawm's close colleagues and friends is Professor Donald Sassoon, who like him was born in Egypt. He has tried to explain Hobsbawm's anti-Zionist philosophy and why he became a founding signatory of the U.K.-based Independent Jewish Voices group, which claims that the Jewish establishment silences those who criticise Israel's policies towards the Palestinians:

"He was certainly an anti-Zionist ... He used that word, but for him it meant he did not share the idea of Jewish nationalism that there should be an ethnically defined state in Palestine.



For him being Jewish meant cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism. He hated any kind of nationalism, including Jewish nationalism. He was a Communist because he always thought that Communism was an international movement."

Later in an interview with The Guardian, Hobsbawm explained:

"I have never been in favour of destroying or humiliating Israel. I am a Jew, but being a Jew does not imply being a supporter either of Zionism and even less of the particular policies now being pursued by the government of Israel, which are disastrous and evil. They are policies logically leading to the ethnic cleansing of the occupied territories ... I am very strongly of the opinion that Jews must say it is possible to be a Jew and not to support Israel."

But I can confirm that his views did not prevent him from visiting Israel. When I wrote to him in 2009 about a family matter, he said that he and my mother's cousin, fellow historian Professor Avrom Saltman had **"last met many years ago in Tel Aviv where he was teaching at Bar Ilan University but since then I have had no contact at all with him."**

He also recalled Avrom from Birkbeck College, University of London as a **"very agreeable man with whom I remember getting on well while we were colleagues ..."**

I had written to Professor Hobsbawm, then aged 92, about my mother's brother, my uncle Sidney Saltman (a.k.a. 'Steve Maxwell') whom he could not recall. I must put this down to age as in a genealogical paper about the Saltman family he published in 1998, Avrom had written:

"When I was teaching at Birkbeck College, I would occasionally hear about Sidney from my distinguished colleague Eric Hobsbawm, who was acquainted with him. Hobsbawm is a Marxist – I believe a Party member until the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 – and met Sidney in those circles. He described Sidney, then teaching at Brunel College, as a promising political economist."

As my cousin's knowledge of Hobsbawm's Communist Party affiliation was hazy it is unsurprising that Hobsbawm's own memory lapsed when we corresponded eleven years later. Professor Hobsbawm is survived by his wife, Marlene, three children,, seven grandchildren and a great-grandchild. It will be interesting to see if anyone in the next generation returns to the mainstream Jewish fold.

Are Bengalis characteristically Left-inclined? A study by Romit Bagchi



*A hundred ways to live were tried in vain:
A sameness that assumed a thousand forms
Strove to escape from its long monotone
And made new things that soon were like the old.*

- Savitri, **Sri Aurobindo**

The typical Bengali mind has remained free down the ages from the grip of cut and dried convention stereotyped as traditions. This freedom from the conventional clichés, nurtured as an open space in the subjective domain, accounts for the race's ceaseless experimentations with the myriad forces moulding life- a certain measure of unshackled intellectual restlessness that moves the race to tread the least travelled road, signifying non-conformism that sometimes proves suicidal.

The race is known as a fine instance of a hybrid race. Numerous races-Aryan, Dravidian, Mongoloid, Semitic, and Negroid-came herewith their peculiarities, both physical and temperamental, got mixed in blood and contributed to the complexity of the race. Many Anthropologists are of the view that such an enormous measure of blood-mixing has happened to a very few among the races that inhabit what is known as the Indian sub-continent.

There is another factor cited to explain its extra-ordinary intellectual suppleness or mobility. It is related to its peculiar geography. Bengal is a land of rivers, particularly, Bhagirathi (Hoogly), Padma and also Brahmaputra. These along with their innumerable tributaries, changing courses frequently, kept eroding lands and building new ones depositing silts along the banks. Things on the geographical plane were thus in a flux and the race grew up in line with the ceaseless and inexorable breaking and renewing.

The Aryan civilization seems to have left little influence on the Bengali culture except on the surface of its superstructure. This might be partly because of the superciliousness that made the custodians of the former to steer clear of Bengal perched on the eastern fringe of the Aryan-dominated region. Bengalis reciprocated it by refusing to emulate the Aryan civilizational tenets for long. Several of the non-Aryan religions like Buddhism and Jainism aside from the numerous cults like **Tantra, Bajrajan, Mantrajan, and Sahajjan** emerged in this part of the world.

Prabhat Patnaik, the renowned Leftist intellectual and former professor, Centre for Economic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, wrote in an article (The Telegraph, Calcutta edition, 8 October, 2012)-"As a child in Odisha, I looked up to Bengal like most other Odias. It was a terribly mixed attitude: we resented any hint of the superciliousness among the Bengali elite towards the Odias, but at the same time, we took a vicarious pride in Bengal's achievements when compared to other parts of the country...When I came to college and studied economics in Delhi, most of my teachers, both in BA and MA, were from Bengal. They were brilliant: among my BA teachers were Naresh Chandra Ray and Sukhamoy Ganguly; and my MA teachers included such outstanding names as Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty and Tapan Raychaudhury. Every single one of them, in varying degrees, was left, and inspired students with progressive thinking. In fact the general belief in my student days was that of the main centers of economics in the country, Bombay and Calcutta, one produced economists of the Right-of-Centre, while the other produced economists of the Left-of-Centre."

Now the question is- when and how Leftism or Communism swept Bengali intelligentsia. This was at a time when the mainstream freedom movement was in a state of decline after Gandhi withdrew the Civil Disobedience Movement. Militant nationalism was also on the run with the revolutionaries either being killed in police firing or being sent to the gallows. The vital question for the freedom fighters was- what is next. The real political history of the anti-colonial struggle in Bengal began with the *Swadeshi* movement that was launched in 1905 in wake of the British government's decision to partition the province on Hindu-Muslim lines. It was a kind of revivalism that tended to hark back to the utopian Golden Age that is supposed to exist sometime in the Hindu past of India. It took *Vedas* and *Upanishads* as its bedrock, but imparted a queer touch of its own. India was imagined as the Mother and the movement extolled the anti-colonial struggle as paying obeisance to the Mother that was suffering being under chains of dependence.

"Impulses move Bengal's actions, emotions sway Bengal's thinking. Bengalis do not work for the sake of work. Nor do they think for the sake of thinking. Pursuing something steadfastly with a definite goal kept in view and taking pains to succeed in the mission does not suit the typical Bengali temperament. They are prone more to artistry than to utilitarian obsession. The fount of his action is a peculiar sense of delight that cannot be explained in terms of taut practicality. Bengalis craved for freedom not because they would be better fed and better clad after the country becomes free but because the country would turn more beautiful after being free," said Nolini Kanta Gupta, one of the leading figures in the *Swadeshi* movement who later turned to spiritualism under the influence of Sri Aurobindo, in an article, *Banglar Pran*. (The passage was translated from Bengali by the author)

Bengalis are more prone to the path of devotion than to the path of knowledge in sharp contrast to the Aryan convention. Approaching the divine through the warmth of devotion of heart has remained dearer to the race than reaching out to it through churning of knowledge in the mind. When viewed from the typically Bengali vision, it seems the border lines between the world of the gods and that of the humans are blurred. Gods tend to descend down to the mundane level of the humans while the humans, on the other hand, tend to ascend to the heights of the gods. Divine cannot be relished in full unless it is invested with a human touch. *Durga* is imagined as a daughter and *Shiva* as son-in-law and *Durga Puja* is a celebration of the daughter's annual arrival to her parental house.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa revived the Bhakti cult in Bengal during the period of religious-cultural Renaissance. His *sadhana* was unique in the sense that he ushered in a new era in the spiritual life of India in his embracing the timeless gems of the Hindu body of spiritual thinking as enshrined in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Gita* and synthesizing them with the timeless Bengali endeavor to transmute what is abstract into the concrete. The concept of Mother got a new, pulsating, intimate shape in the *sadhana* of this saint whose physical framework was frail but whose strength of devotion was enough to shake the world to its foundation.



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Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the Bengali novelist and a contemporary of Ramakrishna, gave the Mother concept a cultural shape, invoking the Universal Mother as the Mother India through his evocative coinage **'Vande Mataram'** (I bow to thee, Mother). Rabindranath Tagore enriched the idea further in his songs and poems. Aurobindo Ghosh brought it into the political realm and transformed patriotism into a gospel of Mother-worship.

But here a mention must be made of Raja Rammohan Roy, acknowledged as the 'First Modern Man of India' for having pioneered the Indian Renaissance. Much before Ramakrishna arrived on the scene Rammohan strove to prune the essence of Hinduism as based on the lofty musings of the Upanishads by ridding it of the outgrowth of the paraphernalia of religiosity. He discarded idol-worship of popular Hinduism and strove to found his concept on formless monotheism to make it presentable in an age seemingly swept over by the rush of new ideas fresh from the Occident.

Rammohan's view exercised a powerful influence on the Bengali intelligentsia. The religion that came to be founded years after the reformer died at Bristol in England grew stronger with a majority of the elite getting converted. Yet, the influence of the sect began dwindling soon, divorced as it was from the powerful impulse of Bengal.

He was non-conformist par excellence, a relentless crusader against the antediluvian customs and practices. But he chose to swim against the tide of Bengali impulse in respect to the essence of religion Bengal loves to nurture. Bengal believes in softening the hard crust of deified religious rigidity into the milk of an intimate, compassionate and humanly warm divinity. His reformatory zeal transcended time, but the sect that came to be founded in his name ebbed away fast with time.

The Mother concept having powerfully come into the currency with the ascendancy of the Swadeshi movement, the Extremist School in opposition to the one led by the Moderates emerged in the Indian National Congress. The Bengali intelligentsia remained ill at ease with the Moderate policy of mendicancy vis-à-vis the British imperialism from the beginning. Radicalism gained momentum and threw challenge to the domination of the nationalist politics by the school being led by the so called conformists.

What Aurobindo Ghosh wrote in Indu Prakash in 1893 years before he plunged into politics struck a chord in the radical Bengali intelligentsia. *"I say of the Congress that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not the spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts are not the right sort of men to be the leaders, in brief, we are at present led, if not by the blind, at any rate, by the one-eyed."*

Extremism gave way to militancy, as Bengali non-conformism hardened posture vis-à-vis British imperialism.



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Dwelling on the radical propensity of a section of the Bengalis, historian/ writer, B. R. Nanda wrote: *"Even before the partition of Bengal, the mood of the young radicals, sick with hope long deferred, had turned into one of frustration and bitterness. They became convinced that political reforms in India would not be conceded by Britain, but would have to be extorted from it. They considered the Moderate policy of studied moderation for converting the ruling race as a hopeless venture. The Extremists were more militant in their speeches and writings, but they had not been able to translate their programmes into action. Loss of faith in the efficacy of Congress methods was one of the main reasons for the formation of revolutionary groups which were inspired by the example of the Irish nationalists and the Russian nihilists. Secret societies grew up especially in Bengal which planned assassination of unpopular British officials and their Indian collaborators."* (The Making Of A Nation)

Mahatma Gandhi came on the public scene of India like a thunderbolt, to quote Nehru, 'shaking us all, and like a flash of lightning which illumined our minds and warmed our hearts' and kept reigning supreme over the nation's political horizon. But non-violence-the creed with which Gandhi was identified-failed to touch much of a chord in the Bengali psyche. Given the tantric traditions that flourished in Bengal in the mediaeval age, Bengalis remained wedded to the worship of strength. Terrorists, particularly the martyrs among them, stood much higher in popular estimation than Gandhi and his band of non-violent adherents that included Nehru and Patel. In Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali non-conformism vis-à-vis the Gandhian supremacy found its manifestation in full.

Communism swept into Bengal at the critical juncture when the momentum of the Gandhian movement was flagging and the terrorist movement was proving to be a futile adventure. The Communist International was formed in 1919 two years after the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union. The first (overseas) Communist Party of India was formed at Tashkent on 17 October 1920. M. N. Roy, an anti-British revolutionary working under a radical Bengali group, who was baptized into Communism while in exile in the United States, played a leading role in the formation. In December 1925, the indigenous Communist Party of India came into being at Kanpur. In Bengal, the process started the same year through the formation of the Workers' and Peasants' Party of Bengal. By 1931 organizational structure of the Bengal Provincial Communist Party of India was set up. It was formalized in 1934.

However, the consolidation process of the Communist movement in India, in general, and in Bengal, in particular, got a fillip after the militant nationalists joined the CPI after being released from the jails from 1937 onwards. According to some political commentators, the British government helped the militant nationalists getting indoctrinated into Communism. They are supposed to have flooded the jails with Communist literature to disinfect the hardcore militant nationalists of the germs of revolutionary nationalism the core of which was focused on overthrowing the British government by any means.



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They perhaps thought Communism being an international doctrine would weaken the nationalistic resolve of the hardened nationalists. Besides, they might have thought that Communism being based on class struggle would dilute the spirit of all-out nationalist consolidation behind the urge for Independence by driving wedges between the classes of the haves and the have-nots.

The startling freshness of the doctrine, its humanistic appeal and a ticklish promise, beckoning to a far-off utopia of archetypal equality, mesmerized the ideologically befuddled radical revolutionaries and a section of the intelligentsia in Bengal which was prone to radicalism.

“Bengalis are capable of thinking. But his thinking is like flash of lightning—a momentary, yet intense illumination. It is bereft of the static base conducive to pure empirical reasoning. It is difficult for the Bengalis to derive pleasure from pure ratiocination while stifling the urges of the heart. Empirical thinking requires some kind of the severity of rigorous patience and perseverance. But the Bengalis’ nervous system—flexible and unstable at the same time—cannot stand it long.” (From Banglar Pran by Nolini Kanto Gupta, translated by the author)

It seems that Bengali intelligentsia was not interested then to unemotionally weigh the practical efficacy of the doctrine they accepted as a gospel. However, it was clear from the beginning to a discerning intellect that the three principal pillars on which it is based, working class dictatorship, state ownership of the means of production and economic equality of all irrespective of individual nature and inherent qualities, stood in irreconcilable opposition to the fundamental foundation of life.

Communism as a champion for the cause of the subaltern against the exploitative system of governance is perfectly in tune with the humanistic urge for a just society, but to focus on restructuring the society tumbling the perennial dharma or essence of the societal structure upside down is something that smacks of audacity and Nature is most unlikely to stand such an audacious challenge for long. This the radical section among the Bengali intelligentsia took long to realize. Or, maybe, they, or at least a section of them, stuck to the dogma to make them appear ‘progressive’ despite having realized the utopian fallacy embedded in the doctrine. A few among them, of course, returned to the base, the abiding fulcrum of Bengali originality that is non-conformism in a much wider sense, a constructive comprehensiveness in a typically Bengali sense that spurred the real stalwarts like Rammohan, Tagore, Vivekananda and Aurobindo to action. I personally know many Communists who, having mentally discarded Marxism, opted for the profounder fount of Bengali vision.

Prabhat Patnaik wrote: *“Later in life when I became an academic economist, presenting a paper at a seminar in Calcutta became the ultimate test for me, since the audience would be filled with people who were well-versed not only in economics and mathematics but also in Marxism. And, more generally, the plethora of little magazines in Bengali carrying poems and articles from the Left, the passion for films and theatre, the enormous sensitivity to world currents one came across*



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in young men and women from ordinary lower middle class Bengali families were testimony to an intellectual-cultural life whose vigour was unmatched anywhere else in India, except that other little spot of leftism, Kerala. This vigour is what sustained the Left, and was the object of both wonder and envy in Odias of my generation. I may be wrong, but one does not find that vigour in Bengal any more. True, that vigour has gone down everywhere, including Kerala, but the decline in Bengal is far greater than in Kerala. The fact that the critics of neo-liberal economics among Bengali economists are generally close to or above the age of seventy, is for me indicative of this shift. One does not feel the intense, passionate radicalism in the air any more when one visits Calcutta.”

In the view of eminent Left-of-Centre economist, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of China to a State ‘where painstaking research becomes necessary to establish whether it is capitalist or socialist’ have mainly contributed to the decline of the Bengalis’ passion for radicalism.

“Some would put the blame for the decline of the radical ferment in Bengal on the long period of Left rule itself, though the exact argument is not clear... True, very long years of one kind of government may produce an ennui that can be quite stifling for intellectual-cultural ferment. But I believe that there have been other, more potent, factors behind the de-radicalization process,” Patnaik wrote.

According to him, the ascendancy of the neo-liberalism and its attendant benefits for the middle class Bengalis has stifled the characteristic radical passion of Bengal. *“To say this is not to malign the middle class in any way. Just as the relative quietude of the workers in the advanced capitalist countries over a long historical period is explicable by their becoming economically better off (until of late under globalization), likewise the recent quietude of the Bengali middle class owes much to its economic betterment,”* he wrote.

The Left Front government under Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was not fully averse to the concepts of neo-liberal economy despite dissenting murmurs heard from the orthodox circles both at the state and at national levels of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). A poster-boy of industrialization intent on seeking assistance from alien capitalists (a cardinal sin for classical Communism) to economically rejuvenate his state, Bhattacharjee was determined to change the rural-based economy into an economy based on industrialization. *“I am a Communist and I am proud of it. But we have to change, we have to reform,”* he said in an interview with The Indian Express published on 7 June 2006.

Bengal’s economy remained rural economy for a greater part of its ancient history. Despite the existence of the port-town of Tamralipti (Tamluk) and commercial town like Pundrabardhan (in north Bengal), life remained dependent on agriculture and small crafts till the end of 3rd century AD. Bengal remained somehow segregated from the mainland India and what was happening there in domains of commerce and the like remained out of bounds for Bengal.



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Things began changing by the beginning of 4th century AD. Commerce gained momentum and became the principal means of wealth production and accumulation, thus robbing agriculture of its primacy. This trend continued for the whole of 4th century and a greater part of 5th century. For these two centuries Bengal got integrated to the mainland principally by means of commercial enterprise and expansion. These two centuries marked the Golden Age for India and this is because of super-abundance of gold coins here that resulted from its vigorous commercial interaction with the Roman Empire. Interaction of India with the Roman Empire started in the beginning of 1st century AD. With the transit of gold from Rome to India gaining momentum, a Roman historian lamented in 2nd century that the transit of gold from Rome to India would finally bleed Rome white. Commerce flourished through around 20 ports spread across India and these included Gangabandar and Tamryalipti of Bengal.

Bengal, at least a part of it, being under the Gupta Empire, the people here were benefited by the commercial enterprise. According to historian, Nihar Ranjan Roy, even the villagers in north and south Bengal used gold coins for deeds of land transfer. *"This indicated percolation of wealth down to the level of the agriculturists-an unmistakable sign of all-round economic prosperity,"* he said.

The momentum was arrested after the Roman Empire crumbled in 475 AD. Things kept reverting back to the predominance of agriculture in Bengal. Commerce remained alive, though much weakened, during the Pala Dynasty; but with the ascendancy of the Sen Dynasty, Bengal turned again into a typical village society. *"Absence of silver or even any metal coin, let alone gold coin, during this age confirmed Bengal's reversion to agriculture-based village economy,"* Roy wrote.

It would be interesting again to note that Raja Rammohan Roy asked the Europeans to get settled down in India and invest their newly acquired capital here in setting up industries. He championed unfettered trade, considering this inevitable in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in England. He took the side of the 'industrial capital' that the newly ascendant bourgeois class in post-Industrial Revolution England represented against the 'merchant capital' that the East India Company was identified with. The latter remained focused on increasing revenue through merchant trade and it was against setting up new industries in India with European capital. The orthodox group led by Radhakanto Deb opposed Rammohun's move. Taking the side of the East India Company, Deb and others of his ilk were for continuance of the trade monopoly of the Company.

The conflict of the two schools in respect to globalization of capital is an interesting study in view of the fierce debate continuing now over neo-liberal economy and globalization in Bengal, India and elsewhere.

Patnaik concluded the article, saying: *"The situation, however, is likely to change soon, with a new wave of radicalization on the horizon, both there (Bengal) and here."*

This might happen if the Bengali middle class is adversely affected by neo-liberal economy and globalization. But this is not certain. What is, however, certain is that the dream of a just society based on the communistic postulates and striving for its realization on the Indian soil is a thing of the past. Bengali intelligentsia got disillusioned many years back. Of course, the collapse of Communism in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and capitalistic transformation of China precipitated things. But the long Left rule in the state led principally to the sense of disillusionment. It was clear that a revolutionary restructuring of the society is a chimera and even if a revolution happens by any chance things would not change at their roots.

Leftism is just a passing phase as far as the evolution of the collective psyche of the race is concerned. They have acquired the experience of what Communism is like. Now it seems, time has come to leave it behind.

They seem to have realized what Sri Aurobindo wrote in his epic, Savitri-
*"A hundred ways to live were tried in vain:
 A sameness that assumed a thousand forms
 Strove to escape from its long monotone
 And made new things that soon were like the old"*

The Leftists might come to power again, given the suicidal Leftism being followed by the new chief minister, Mamata Banerjee. But if this happens it would not prove to be the harbinger of revival of radicalism that Patnaik seems to be pining for. It would just correct the self-destructive adventurism being carried on by the new regime. For the so-called Leftists are now champions of the Right of Centre path while the present regime, mad in its populist/leftist zeal, seems bent on pushing the state down the slippery slope of economic decline.

Bengal evolved on its own lines separate from the Indian mainstream in response to the Aryan superciliousness hurled on it in the ancient time. That sense of separateness provided Bengal with the 'open space' in its intellectual domain. That 'open space' begot myriad experimentations with the world forces. India was enriched by Bengal's treading the least trodden roads. But that non-conformism gave way in due course to unproductive, stale radicalism. Striving for comprehensive, constructive, synthesizing newness got bogged in ideological selfishness - a tendency to sacrifice larger interests on the altar of a typical idee fixe. Bengal indeed has been suffering much too long for its Left-of-Centre romanticism economically.

Now, Bengal must integrate with India and the world more vigorously for mutual interests. But it must keep erect its moorings - constructive, synthesizing, comprehensive radicalism. God's book is far from finished with an infinite number of pages yet remaining unfolded, as Vivekananda, the quintessential Bengali radical, said.

I first penned this essay in 2008. Since then I have tried to update it hoping that the inhumanity of humanity would slowly disappear as the years roll on. Sadly the more things change, the more they remain the same.

~~2011~~ 2012

Yet Another Year of Living Foolishly?

This year is grinding to a close and then hope will begin for the New Year.

So what will it be?

More wars? Genocide?

Child abuse?

Women beating?

Extinction of another species?

New insidious revelations that expose the all pervasive criminality of international politics and sections of the Media?

There is so much to choose from. It's like a supermarket out there with all kinds of manmade disasters available on the shelves, one has simply to reach out and grab one.

~~2011~~ 2012 is ending on a note of negotiated delusions with the climate change conference in Doha. What happened to the good old days when we used a blanket instead of a heater? All this talk of saving the world is pointless.

Everything is done half-heartedly. Let's make a resolution for the New Year to decimate the planet. Destroy all our natural resources, pollute the rivers and farm the seas to extinction. At least we would be doing one thing properly.

And once again, as we have done in the past, this Christmas and New Year we shall all sit down to sumptuous meals, drink whatever fancies our taste buds, shop till we drop and pamper our overweight children and pets. It's the season of happiness, love and family especially for the homeless, injured and maimed children of wars, missing women in Afghanistan and elsewhere, asylum seekers, political detainees and the fringe folk of the planet. They will surely be very happy and content with what they see, hear, feel and touch this festive season.

On one hand we talk of peace, love and no war. On the other hand we bomb, rape, pillage, annex and subdue nations with money, military power and retarded religiosity.

For instance, let's take a quick look at Afghanistan. The British couldn't control the tribes in the 19th century, the Russians failed miserably and the American soldiers with their assorted comrades in arms, poor souls, are dying by the dozen along with faceless unarmed civilians. I suppose life is cheaper by the dozen. Hasn't anyone got a clue about what the Afghans want?

And what about certain parts of the Middle East? Do you think they will run out of people considering the number of killings that are taking place? Education there is history – like the death of a six year old killed by a stray bullet. It stems from the barrel of a gun. The pen is for signing death certificates.

Statistics are essential in war zones. They can always be rearranged to suit one's perceived objectives. The little numbers represent people; mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, relatives and friends. A neat way to manage these numbers is to write in pencil so that an eraser can be used judiciously.

And while the death toll in war ravaged countries rise, a hysterical caucus threatens Iran not to go ahead with its nuclear program, while watching China systematically and violently dismantle Tibetan culture.

Africa, the Dark Continent, what can one say about its peoples and their ancient civilizations that have slowly been corrupted by large corporations and foreign governments meddling in the affairs of the states: Buying and selling governments on mammoth proportions? Oh for the days of Idi Amin. Remember Entebbe and the blood baths? Everything is so quiet now, no excitement and drama except for bloody popular uprisings, theft of natural resources and other inconsequential happenings.

What about the sub-continent, India? Do they still abort female foetuses? Burn women who don't bring enough dowry? Continue to kill tigers for their body parts to be used in aphrodisiacs? And do millions still exist on the threshold of life and death? And is the arrogant Indian Middle Class growing to newer levels self indulgence?

Forgive me, I missed that little country to the west of India; Pakistan. Poor chaps they've had such a tiresome year with the constant ebb and flow of political violence and religious fundamentalism peppered with suicide bombers that probably the common folk want to migrate to India... can't really blame them. All they desire is to live in peace to pray, work and procreate.

Now let's see who is left on the black board? Hmmm...Chavez seems to be holding forth.

And what about the indigenous people of the Amazon who are fighting a losing battle with the powers that be to stop the plunder of their home, the rainforest, the green lung of mother earth? South America appears to be lost in translation. We never seem to get a lot of news from there except for soccer, drug lords and the Mayan Calendar that ends in 2012.

Let's leave all this violence for some whale steaks. The Japanese are so considerate to the world at large. For a country that prides itself on rejecting nuclear weapons it has a rather odd way of showing its respect for the environment. I am referring to the mass killing of whales for scientific purposes. Actually you must admire their concern. Ever considered the fact that they maybe ridding the oceans of monsters that take up so much space and are a serious health hazard to humanity? I think Japan's neighbor China has the right approach. It has dispensed with the cumbersome concept of Human Rights and its implementation. In its place totalitarianism with a small dose of plutocracy has been suitably installed.

There are many countries that lecture China on its Human Rights. Wonder who has a perfect track record? The world's last Superpower? A superpower that continues to interfere in the affairs of other nations ... at times actually sending troops and bombing unarmed civilians along with perceived enemies of the State? I suppose the term 'collateral damage' is more palatable than the word... murder.

Civil liberties are essential for the survival of a nation and so is the health of its people. In some areas of society where commonsense has been the victim, Nature has found a way of retaliating by inventing diseases like AIDS and Swine Flu, infecting millions and helping to keep the population in check.

And once again, as we have done in the past, this Christmas and New Year we shall all sit down to sumptuous meals, drink whatever fancies our taste buds, shop till we drop and pamper our overweight children and pets. It's the season of happiness, love and family especially for the homeless, injured and maimed children of wars, missing women in Afghanistan and elsewhere, asylum seekers, political detainees and the fringe folk of the planet. They will surely be very happy and content with what they see, hear, feel and touch this festive season.

From genocide to environmental disasters it has been a roller coaster ride through many countries and peoples and cultures and religions. This journey will end only when we truly comprehend the reason as to why we have been put on this planet by a power far greater than we can ever imagine.

Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year to all.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

On January 14, 2013 citizens of Cuba will be permitted to travel abroad. However, there will be restrictions on highly qualified professionals. President Raúl Modesto Castro Ruz hopes to improve living conditions in the country by promoting free travel. Presently, Cuban exiles send hard currency home to their relatives and it is this money that greatly contributes to the national economy. Today a teacher is paid a salary of Euro 200 (in Peso) for a year's work whereas a *jinetera* (prostitute) earns the same amount on a weekend.

But the State gives free medical care and free education to all its citizens.

The popular religion of Cuba is Santeria, a blend of African religion with some aspects of Christianity. The Spanish, French and Portuguese introduced African slaves to Christianity and, partly as a compromise to ensure cultural survival, the slaves depicted the various African deities with facsimiles of Roman Catholic saints (*a phenomenon known as syncretism*). The gods and goddesses of Santeria are of West African origin, specifically of the *Yoruba* culture of southwestern Nigeria. [LINK](#)

Visit Cuba now before the old world fades into sterile modernity.

Our best wishes to Cuba for the New Year 2013.

Viva La Cuba!



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Capital Havana

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Street Scene Havana



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Street scene, Havana Pic © Joo Peter





Cinema Hall, Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Lovers on Malecón, Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Street scene, Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Prado in Havana Pic © Joo Peter
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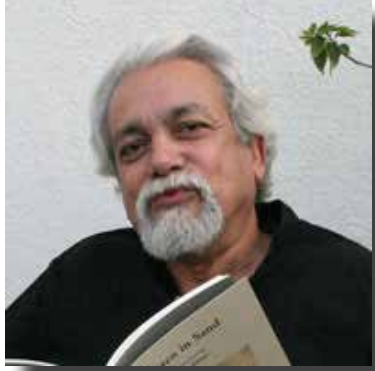
Street Vendor, Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Santeria Cult altar in a private home in Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Students of the Flamenco dance at the historic theatre of Cienfuegos, Havana Pic © Joo Peter



Remember and Resist

Randhir Khare

May 1974. Seventy-seven-year-old Iwakichi Kobayashi visited the NHK television studios in Hiroshima carrying with him a picture he had drawn titled 'At about 4 p.m., August 6, 1945, near Yorozyo Bridge'. It showed, in simple strokes, the havoc caused by the bomb. "Even now I cannot erase the scene from my memory. Before my death I wanted to draw it and leave it for others," he said.

This single drawing inspired the television station to launch a programme, 'Let Us Leave For Posterity Pictures of the Atomic Bomb Drawn by Citizens'.

The response to the request for pictures was met by a deluge of entries. Half came by mail and the other half brought by hand...mostly by old people who could hardly walk. The pictures were drawn with pencils, crayons, water colours, magic pens, coloured pens and India ink. Almost any kind of paper was used – drawing paper, backs of calendars, advertisement bills, paper used for sliding doors, the backs of scribbled paper used by children.

Nearly three decades later, memory was still fresh and strong. It defied the very force of forgetfulness and triumphed.

Mikio Inoue, one of the contributors, remembered, "It was when I crossed Miyuki Bridge that I saw Professor Takenaka, standing at the foot of the bridge. He was almost naked, wearing nothing but shorts and he had a ball of rice in his right hand...the northern area was covered by red fire burning against the sky.

"His naked figure, standing there before the flames with that ball of rice, looked to me as a symbol of the modest hopes of human beings."

This is merely an example of some of the powerful memories that had arrived at the television station, frozen forever on paper. Later, they were collected into a book and published. I found a battered copy of the book at a sale in Delhi's Darya Ganj in the 80's.





Milan Kundera has put it eloquently in *The Book Of Laughter And Forgetting*. ‘The struggle of man against power,’ he says, ‘is the struggle of memory against forgetting.’

The city at that time, I remember, was picking up its shattered pieces and trying to put them together as sensibly as possible after the riots. I was a new arrival. In fact, I had landed in the city the day Mrs Gandhi was assassinated and the riots had exploded. That day, we were driving along one of the main arterial roads of the Capital when we arrived at a major traffic intersection. A red light – so we stopped. Then it happened. We were ambushed by a mob of at least two hundred people that poured out from the pavements and turned itself into one giant howling mass. The driver sank his head on the steering wheel and began to shiver. Our car was not the target. Instead, it was the auto rickshaw next to us, driven by an old sardar. He sat stoically in his seat waiting for the end. And it came suddenly and brutally. All that we heard was a pitiful scream as the frenzied mob surrounded him. His bloodstained turban shot into the air above their heads...floating down like a festive streamer. Two days later, the dhobi’s son flew into the house to announce that he had stoned a ‘killer Sikh’. Then he proceeded to give me a graphic description of how he had mangled the man’s bicycle out of shape after that. His friends narrated other exploits.

A few years on, I found myself in Punjab, on assignment, to develop an anti terrorism awareness campaign for the State Government. This meant that I would have to travel throughout terrorist torn areas to expose myself to what people were really experiencing. I remember that day in the city of Amritsar. Fear hung in the air over people’s heads...in the marketplaces, the main streets and homes. Traffic policemen were sandbagged up to their necks, arms waving absurdly over their heads to conduct traffic. Anyway, there I was in a tense and frightened city that afternoon, sitting in the dilapidated studio of a local photographer. The man specialised in photographing victims of terrorist violence. It was lucrative, he told me. One just had to remain calm, no other investment. As a result of his ingenuity, the hole-in-the-wall studio was doing far better than the fancier and better equipped ones in the city. Even fear could not make him close down his studio. In fact, he claimed that terrorists were also his clients. ‘Aarey, they come here and get themselves photographed. I can tell that they are terrorists. All of us know.’

As for me, I knew instantly that I was in the presence of an unwitting witness. A Memory Man of sorts.

While I was there at his studio, a young ‘activist’ wearing the trade mark white khadi sari and carrying the trade mark jhola walked in, hauling in behind her a photographer on an invisible leash. The fellow was a veritable walking advertisement for Nikon...the brand name on a wristband, on a jungle green commando beret, on his shoulder bag, on his camera strap and on the camera case (which hid the camera).

‘We are from Delhi,’ said the Khadi one with an air of ‘power’ in her voice. ‘We produce innumerable pamphlets and papers which we circulate in thousands.’

Memory Man had got used to such preambles. He was interested in talking business. ‘So you want photographs of corpses. Well, I have a range. People of all ages...babies, children, young people, men, women, lots of photographs of only heads. You see most papers here have only space for faces so I tend to take more photographs of faces.’

‘Oh,’ said the khadi one, sounding disappointed.

‘But I also have others,’ he continued. ‘You name the place and the killing and the date, ‘I’ll give you what I have. But you must be as specific as possible. For example the Lalru killings and such like.’

‘Okay,’ she muttered, ‘there’s a bomb blast one. I saw it in one of the papers. It has one burnt leg in it...next to that a bunny rabbit.’

‘A bunny rabbit?’ he asked, scratching his head. ‘Oh yes, yes. A tame rabbit of a household during the blast. Yes I have it.’

‘Excellent. How much for a cabinet size?’ she asked.

‘Fifty rupees.’

‘That’s far too much. A little less please. See, we’ll be taking a regular supply of photographs of victims from you. Surely you can give us a concession. Please.’

‘I’m sorry. This is my business. What will happen when the killing stops?’

The khadi one looked at the Nikon man. The Nikon man looked at his Nikon safely tucked away, for consolation. Then he nodded. The deal was transacted. They left.

‘What does that man do with his camera?’ Memory Man asked.

‘It’s probably new and he doesn’t want to damage it,’ I replied.

‘Maybe there’s no camera inside the case,’ the man grinned. ‘I have known of such things to happen.’

Later, I presented the anti terrorism awareness campaign concept to the cream of Rajiv Gandhi’s kitchen cabinet, using a blind man’s stick (that’s all that the department could muster) to

To never forget, to keep the wounds open, to bear witness so that others never forget, keep their wounds open...resist the whitewashers...this, I am beginning to feel, is a desperate need.

point out specific displays arranged on a wall. I cringed when a department officer first turned up with the stick.

‘Sorry I can’t use that stick. It’s a blind man’s stick, can’t you see,’ I said to the harassed man.

‘Well what to do Sir, this is all I could find. But don’t worry, there’s no bell on it so no one will know.’

Bell or no bell, I used the stick for a while then gave up on it.

After the presentation, one of the kitchen cabinet chefs said to me with an air of confidentiality, ‘that was good, effective. But then I can see that Goebels needs Hitler as much as Hitler needs Goebels.’

‘I don’t understand,’ I replied.

‘It’s a two way deal,’ he said, with a wink.

I felt as if I was walking around inside Kafka’s head, lost in a Bhool Bhoolaiya.

Lest I confuse you any further, dear reader, I’ll shut out these memories for a while. Just for a while, because all these memories are important to me. They keep my wounds open, keep me hurting, remind me that I’m alive, that I’m human. This charges me as a writer to go on resisting. If I allow these wounds to heal, I’d be giving in to forgetfulness, constantly wiping my slate clean and instead see history as merely a bundle of facts that exist –and it wouldn’t make a difference to me if those who wanted to meddled with those facts as and when required. I’d be one more of the mesmerised numbers who have become victims of those in power. A mere pawn in the deadly game of profit and loss. I’d be telling myself that the Gujarat pogrom has never happened, that caste wars and communal violence don’t exist, that the environment is not being pillaged, that indigenous, traditional and marginal people are not being displaced, that minority faiths, religious practices and places of worship are not at risk of being destroyed, forcibly adopted or brutally mutated, that everywhere I look I can see unity in diversity, that the raga of equality and free enterprise is playing full blast, that India is truly shining. I’d be preoccupied with myself and the security and progress of my own world. In other words, I’d be a progressive Lotus Eater. An abetting victim of political, social, cultural and religious whitewashers. Milan Kundera has put it eloquently in The Book Of Laughter And Forgetting. ‘The struggle of man against power,’ he says, ‘is the struggle of memory against forgetting.’

“I speak for no one but myself because I think I know myself a little better than others know me.”

Jonathan Schell persists in a similar vein by saying, ‘...of all the crimes against the future, extinction is the greatest. It is the murder of the future. And because this murder cancels all those who might recollect it even as it destroys its immediate victims, the obligation to ‘never forget’ is displaced back onto us, the living. It is we – the ones who will either commit this crime or prevent it – who must bear witness, must remember...’

To never forget, to keep the wounds open, to bear witness so that others never forget, keep their wounds open...resist the whitewashers...this, I am beginning to feel, is a desperate need. By saying this, I am also aware that I’d have a pack of purists who’ll pounce on me and take me apart, and ask me what right have I to demand that a writer play this role or that role or write like this or write like that...who do I think I am? God?

No, fortunately not.

I speak for no one but myself because I think I know myself a little better than others know me.

Most of the writing I am exposed to today does not reflect life as it really is. Its merely a presentation of cherries picked off a salad heap which contains chunks of fruits in varying stages of decomposition. I am not looking for opinions, I am virtually drowned in them. Nor am I looking for smart-ass jugglery of words which amount to verbal masturbation. Instead, I’m looking for stories, real stories. Stories of witnesses. Stories that come from all over the sub-continent. Stories that tell me about how people really struggle, how they live, their hopes, their loves, their innate genius, their songs, their folk lore, their amazing capacity to survive. Stories that tell me about how those in power have time and again perpetrated bigotry, communal hatred, suppression of all kinds and have been party to the annihilation of human lives. Stories that prevent my wounds from healing. Stories that keep memory alive...and help me to resist power.

The poet Horst Bienek, in Time and Memory, says,

***‘All that moves
can be changed
but not what is frozen
in our memory
this is meant to endure.’***



IRON AND SEED

(message to all those who seek revenge and have not learnt to forgive)

I stand here talking of peace,
 Beneath my feet the grass has withered
 And on the faces of men
 The ash-mark of a burnt out third eye.
 How to speak of peace when the heart rejects itself
 And the anthems of mourners
 Dissolve the syllables of logic?

Here now on the edge of an age smelling of blood
 Only ruins behind me,
 Who will point the way to the promise of tomorrow?
 Tomorrow with its dead women and children,

Its maimed youth,
 Its horror of perpetual silence,
 Perpetual waste, perpetual hate;

Our ancestors once said,
 We pass like shadows but the earth remains...
 So dig a pit to lay your weapons in, brother,
 That they may learn the way of seeds,
 And one day when this age has passed –
 Each bullet will crack its case and grow into
 A life of green that whistles in the wind.



Generate Yourself!



The last few weeks I found myself in a crisis situation where I helped someone who needed immediate support. Haven written earlier about Boundaries you know that I am generally clear on responding in a healthy way where boundaries are concerned. In this case, I jumped in with both feet; defended, protected and supported the person who for a time could not defend herself. After awhile though, I realized that she was not generating herself. She became dependent upon me and I could see how she created the situation in which she became entangled.

So how did I recognize my help was no longer helpful? The first sign was I was beginning to feel really stressed. I found myself easily overwhelmed and making careless mistakes like putting my slippers on the wrong feet. This is also the time where we might find ourselves putting pots and pans in the refrigerator, or food that needs refrigeration in the cupboards! Next, I realized I had been running adrenaline like mad! I was in the fight or flight mode. I wanted to help, so I was revved up to fight the battle. I put my resources to the test! I wrote letters, called people, visited the appropriate powers that be, all to make the case for this person, and eventually hired an attorney. I opened up my home, my emotional resources, and my financial resources and loaned my new black Fiat 500 Sport car in assistance to help her!

Then I began to notice how I was doing all the work. I had to ask for simple things like, “Do you mind picking up after yourself, would you not snap at me, and began to feel like I was doing it all.” This is one of the signs of Codependence. In trying to be helpful, to do well, did I cross the line? I began feeling exhausted, frustrated, overwhelmed and wanted to distance myself from her, hiding out in my bedroom or my office. I had crossed the line! My giving stopped being from the excess of what I had to give, but started to be from my reserves. My tank was empty and I was exhausted. I had not known my limit and I began to feel depleted and resentful! What happened for me was I began behaving Codependent. I saw this and as quickly as I could, I pulled back some of my help so that she would have to generate her own behaviors, to generate herself. Although my behavior was temporary, when you get in a pattern of this helpfulness over and over and get stuck, you become Codependent. Here is a small list of **Codependent Symptoms from Melody Beattie’s book Codependent No More**. You may find that you or someone you know has many of these signs.

Codependents:

Have difficulty identifying feelings.

Minimizing how they feel.

Have difficulty making decisions.

Behave aggressively or passive aggressively.

Judge themselves unmercifully.

Have an inability to receive.

Are unable to ask for what they want.

Seek approval.

Judge others harshly.

Use indirect communication.

Are attracted to addicts as a way to not have authentic relationship.

Pull people toward them, and then push them away.

Need validation and fear rejection.

Are extremely sensitive to other’s feelings.

Are loyal and stay in abusive relationships.

Value the opinion of others over their own.

Put aside their own interests and hobbies in order to do what others want.

Confuse sex and attention for love.

Are fearful that the other person will leave them.

Are fearful to express an opinion that differs from others’.

Make decisions without thinking about the consequences.

See others as incapable of taking care of themselves.

Become resentful when others don’t let them help.

Become resentful when they help too much.

Blame others for their lives.

Use rage or manipulation to control others.

Are obsessive and compulsive in their thinking.

Pretend to agree rather than stating their opinion.

Now that we’ve looked at What Codependency is; what do you do about it?

If you are just showing some signs of codependency, stop and take some time to feel what you are feeling. If there is a crisis and a need for you to intervene, be aware of when you have hit your limit. It may be that you feel exhausted, overwhelmed, or just sense you cannot give any more of your time, energy, money, or other resources. You may begin to feel resentful or angry with the person you are helping. It is better early on to assist the person to find their own resources and not be the only one who helps them. You can inventory your behavior and see how you feel. Make moves to step away and as hard as it may be, allow the person to struggle and even fail in order for them to lift themselves up and regenerate themselves. Sometimes when we give too much we create a dependency on ourselves. As much as it feels good to give; giving too much can be crippling to you and the other person.

If you find you are beyond just crossing the boundaries and are truly codependent, I highly suggest the book Codependent No More. This may not be enough help for you and there are treatment programs that treat Codependency or you can contact a local mental health counselor. If you are in crisis or have been stuck for awhile, be sure to create new friends, access public resources, let others help who can empower and not enable you, and generate yourself!



We are different peoples but we are one region with one future, and we have to build this region together.

Peace Needs More Than Talk - Steven Beck

It has become clear to me that we are not going to negotiate ourselves completely out of this conflict. Of course the government of Israel and representatives of the Palestinians need to keep trying to find acceptable accommodation, but a process of evolution needs to take place—and fast. Arabs and Israelis need to start seeing each other part of the same region with a shared future.

This conflict is more than just religion and politics. It is an example of how poverty, and the feeling that there is no way to ever come out of those conditions, can lead to extremism. Many people on all sides of the divide recognize that, without economic opportunities for all the peoples in the region, the marginalized on both sides will continue to fall prey to extreme voices urging violence.

King Abdullah of Jordan was frequently quoted saying that Israel, Jordan, and Palestine should become something analogous to Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxemburg) for the good of their own economic futures. These are small countries with limited resources, but significant skills and advantages if they would work together. Ideas like this are often dismissed as pipe dreams on the level of Israeli president Shimon Peres' "New Middle East" with highways from Tel Aviv to Damascus. No matter how far afield it might seem, we need to keep working for it.



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I live in a part of the world famous for many things. Israel is known as a country that excels in sciences, arts, and high-tech innovations. That being said, unless you have been living on the moon without a television for the last sixty years, you are aware that this is also a region of conflict. Even as I stare out my window upon Tel Aviv's idyllic Mediterranean tranquility, I am reminded that I only need to travel a few hours in almost any direction to find many living without hope.

I am not an Israeli. I am a fourth-generation American, and I have no blood relations in this country. As a Jew who grew up in a committed, non-Orthodox Jewish family, the State of Israel has always been a central part of my identity. It might seem strange that I have a bond to a country where neither I, nor my family, was born, but for many Jews living all over the world this is very normal.

As part of my Jewish education in the United State I learned more about than Israel than Judaism itself. We learned about Jewish leaders Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also David Ben Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan, and Golda Meir. Above all, we learned that Israel needs our support because she has enemies that wish to do her harm.

I was taught about the Arab armies that invaded Israel after the UN partition and of every conflict that occurred during the subsequent decades. While the stories were noticeably one-sided, there was no denying that our Israeli brethren were living in a difficult part of the world, and that their lives were much harder than ours. It was clear that Israel needed our support.

That support generally came in two forms. We could make aliya (move to Israel) or, if we chose to stay in the country of our birth, we should do all we could to defend Israel from the world's false perceptions of her. In being part of the army of amateur Israeli PR soldiers, a lot of us felt in a small way that we were doing our part to build and defend the Jewish state. The election of Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 changed everything. The beginning of the Oslo Process was more than just the start of a path towards mutual recognition and peace; it changed the way the world saw Israel. The Arab boycott ended and foreign companies flooded into Israel. A generation of Israelis thought that the cycle of war leading to seven to ten years of calm, only to lead to another war, would finally come to an end. This hope did not reach every corner of Israel.

On November 5, 1995, a young religious university student named Yigal Amir pulled out a gun at a peace rally in Tel Aviv and changed the future of the State of Israel. I was in Tel Aviv that night and I can remember every detail from the moment my roommate came running into the apartment (he was at the rally) saying something had happened, to the announcement on the TV that Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Israel, was dead. I stepped out of my apartment to see hundreds of Israelis in groups huddled around car radios in total shock. Our world was going to change.



Pics ©Sari Ganulin

The process didn't die overnight, but as of this writing the government of Benyamin Netanyahu, who was opposition leader when Rabin was Prime Minister in the 90s, has threatened to annul the Oslo Accords if the Palestinian Authority pushes ahead with its bid for an upgrade in their UN status. In reality, this is an unnecessary step on the part of the Israeli government because the process has already unraveled and few people hope to be able to stitch it together again.

There are millions of Palestinians and Israelis who believe that they will never have the freedom that all people deserve or the security that all people need. It is hard to believe that only fifteen years ago we all thought this might end and everyone's lives would be "normal". Hopes rise and fall, but people generally prepare themselves for more of the same.

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In all of the comparisons made between Israel and the old Apartheid regime in South Africa, people seem to forget the most important part of the analogy: why it ended. There were many reasons why the old South African regime fell and a representative democracy that represented all the peoples of South Africa could be born. There was international pressure, like the boycott and divestment campaigns, and there was pressure from governments that had relations with South Africa.

In spite of this, the white minority was able to maintain its rule for decades. The change that finally ended that system happened from within.

My own home in Tel Aviv might feel a lifetime away from the conflict, but the reality is history and provenance have linked the fates of Arabs and Israelis, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to each other forever. We are different peoples but we are one region with one future, and we have to build this region together.

There came a moment in their history when a majority of the Afrikaners started to believe that minority rule was immoral, and that they had to share power. This was historic and difficult for Afrikaners who had lived as a privileged class in South Africa for generations, but even this was only part of the equation.

In addition to the change in mentality from many of the white South Africans, there was also a change in the way of thinking among many black South African groups and individuals. There was no longer the desire to push all the whites into the ocean, or have them sent back to Europe. They came to accept that for most of the Afrikaners there was no Europe for them to go back to, and the future of all the rainbow nation's races were linked forever. They would rise and fall together, so there was no choice but coexistence.

This analogy might give the impression that I am calling for a "one state solution" or a bi-national state. That is not the case, and I am committed to the State of Israel maintaining its unique and imperfect Jewish character. I prefer to think of myself as one who sees the lasting solution for this conflict as a "one region solution". Every group has the state and flag that represents its own national aspirations, but our futures are linked together just like the peoples of South Africa.

Almost 25 years since I first stepped foot on Israeli soil I am still here hoping that the country I love lives up to the ideals for which it was founded. I still believe that, as a Jew, it is my job to support Israel in becoming a free and fair democracy for Jews all over the world. We are still the same people that rebuilt our lives after the Holocaust and came back to a hostile land and made the desert bloom. Israel is strong and prosperous, and that should give us the confidence to imagine a future where peace is not simply defined as the absence of war.

Bethlehem is visible from the rooftops of many homes in Jerusalem, and that will never change. Without borders, Amman would be a ninety-minute drive from Jerusalem, and that distance is permanent. My own home in Tel Aviv might feel a lifetime away from the conflict, but the reality is history and provenance have linked the fates of Arabs and Israelis, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, to each other forever. We are different peoples but we are one region with one future, and we have to build this region together.





Live encounters

December 2012

Volume One

Free online magazine from village earth

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Free online magazine from village earth