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Free online magazine from village earth  
January 2016



## THE ETHICS OF LIVING





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

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**Cover photograph of cats by Mark Ulyseas**

Hmong lady at the Hmong New Year celebrations, Laos. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas





### The Ethics of Living - is fear the key?

Mark Ulyseas



### Child Marriage in Amhara, Ethiopia: Part 1

Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

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

### Committee to Protect Journalists

### China, Egypt imprison record numbers of journalists

A CPJ special report by Elana Beiser.

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Elana Beiser is editorial director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. She previously worked as an editor for Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal in New York, London, Brussels, Singapore, and Hong Kong. [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org)



### 'We're Not in Kansas Any More'!

Natalie Wood

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



### Walking With Spirits

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](http://www.randhirkhare.in)



### Glimpses of Daily Life in the Maldives

Mark I Chaves

Mark is a freelance writer and photographer based in Bali, Indonesia. He is an active contributor for [diaforlife](http://diaforlife.com), [InBali.org](http://InBali.org), and [Balipedia](http://Balipedia.com). Follow Mark's photography portfolio on [tumblr](http://tumblr.com/markchaves) and [eyeem](http://eyeem.com/markchaves). <http://markchaves.com>



### Sledging For Joanna and Matthew

Terry McDonagh

Irish poet and dramatist, Terry McDonagh, taught creative writing at the University of Hamburg and was Drama Director at the Int. School Hamburg for 15 years. He now works freelance; has been writer in residence in Europe, Asia, Australia; published 7 poetry collections, book of letters, prose and poetry for young people translated into Indonesian and German, distributed internationally by Syracuse Uni. Press; latest poetry collection *Ripple Effect*/Arlen House; children's story, *Michel the Merman*, illustrated by Marc Barnes (NZ). He lives in Hamburg and Ireland. [www.terry-mcdonagh.com](http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com)



### This Intimate War

Dr Robyn Rowland AO

Rowland is an Irish-Australian citizen living in Australia and Ireland. She regularly visits and works in Turkey. Her poetry appears in national and international journals and in over 40 anthologies, including seven *Best Australian Poems*. Of her 9 books, two were published in 2015: *Line of Drift*, Doire Press, Galway, Ireland, her bilingual *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Five Islands Press - <http://fiveislandspress.com/catalogue/this-intimate-war> and Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey.



### Maiden Voyage

John Pinschmidt

Pinschmidt, born in Denver in 1947, is a retired high school English and drama teacher. He lives in Herbertstown, Co. Limerick, Ireland with his Irish wife in her family's ancestral stone farmhouse. Although he has written poetry for over 40 years, he only seriously pursued publication since unexpectedly taking first runner up in Limerick City's October 2009 *Cuise International Poetry Festival Slam*. It opened doors to a performance poet who writes accessibly about what moves him, capturing and celebrating current and past lives. His first collection, *Maiden Voyage*, was published by Revival Press in February, 2014. [www.limerickwriterscentre.com](http://www.limerickwriterscentre.com) [www.omahonys.ie](http://www.omahonys.ie)



### The Auschwitz Cookbook

David Almaleck Wolinsky

Wolinsky struggles and thrives in central Maryland with his wife, two very old mothers, and a rocky hillside. He also helps care for 3 non-biological grandchildren. In between he writes and listens listens to music exorbitantly, and shows up to help with peace and climate work. He adopted 'Almaleck' to honor his Jewish grandmother and Al-Andalus (Muslim-ruled Spain). His first book *The Crane is Flying* will be published by Dos Madres Press in 2016.



### Occasional Verse on Contemporary Dilemmas

David Morgan

David Morgan is a London based journalist with interests in politics, human rights, international relations, history and cultural issues. He has been working in journalism as an editor and writer for three decades after he studied literature and history at university. He has edited several titles from the Socialist History Society (SHS) of which he is the Secretary. He writes regularly for the SHS Newsletter, occasionally for the Morning Star newspaper and for a range of other online and printed publications.



### Rain overnight - travels in asia.

Joachim Matschoss

Joachim Matschoss was born in Germany and now lives in Melbourne/Australia. He is a playwright, poet and Theatre-maker. His Theatre Company, 'Backyard Theatre Ensemble (BYTE)' presents diverse pieces of theatre all across Melbourne/ Australia and internationally, both Youth Arts and for adults. Joachim has created theatre in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, India, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, HongKong, Hungary, Taiwan, Switzerland and China. Joachim's poetry is published in Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom and the USA. [www.byteensemble.com](http://www.byteensemble.com)





"I cannot teach you violence, as I do not myself believe in it. I can only teach you not to bow your heads before anyone even at the cost of your life." — Mahatma Gandhi

## THE ETHICS OF LIVING – IS FEAR THE KEY?

The compartmentalisation of societies across the world continues despite valiant efforts by those who profess the oneness of humanity. How can we expect to inculcate this oneness when the basis of ethics remains fear and its bastard child, violence?

From the moment we open our eyes to the world, the conditioning of mind and body begins in earnest. Fear is instilled in us by warped notions in society – if we don't do this or that we shall face physical, mental or divine retribution in this life or the next. And when our minds are snared the rest follows, naturally. The time has come when we actually believe and this belief is being passed on to our offspring - Our Way (the only way) of the ethics of living.

We have become guardians of our own value based ethics of living, where ethics is elastic when applied to others' ethics with a host of subjective options on offer. This is where, perhaps, the problem lies – we gauge the 'authority' of our ethics of living from our religious beliefs, rituals and traditions that have percolated down from our ancestors. Hence what would appear to be ethical to one group may be offensive to others...female genital mutilation, child marriage, dowry, severing limbs of those accused of theft and adultery, and stoning others to death...Or, using the banking system to defraud people and more.

In our haste to 'impose' our ethics of living on others we resort to violence, beginning with verbal abuse, racism, social ostracisation, sexual abuse and culminating in the use of weapons to commit murder/genocide. This violence has become synonymous with breathing, a chilling involuntary action. Without violence our purpose for existence on this planet would cease. We will become redundant. It is the nature of the beast, the violence within us, which is guiding us to self-destruction.

Is this Nature's *Plan A* for a species that rapes her every day?



There are different degrees of murder: the mindless slaughter of animals is not murder: invading foreign countries and killing thousands of innocent civilians is not murder, it is war: killing one's estranged spouse is murder and this usually attracts the death penalty. In many countries the death penalty exists and various methods are used to 'kill' the murderer. We have taken on the mantle of the Supreme Being: deciding who lives and who dies. The circle of death appears to begin and end with our religious beliefs that influence our notion of the ethics of living, one size fits all and if it doesn't then cut it out or cut it off.

Violence comes in many avatars. It begins in the mind of a child when it is 'brainwashed' by its parents through a process of osmosis and backed up by punishments so that it conforms to prevailing acceptable social norms. It learns at a very young age that violence solves problems and that violence is the only path towards overcoming fear; The fear that one feels of being at the mercy of the elements of humankind's 'way of life'.

### Does education breed violence?

Perhaps the French General, Napoleon Bonaparte, was right when he said, "History is a set of lies agreed upon".

We creatively write our history which is peppered with battles won and lost by our ancestors. It is written in blood by those who view such acts of slaughtering the 'enemy' as a moral victory over forces of 'evil'. The glorification of the savage within us is self-evident.

The lies of history poison our perception of our fellow humans. This is embedded in our psyche by our well-meaning parents who want nothing than the 'best for us'.

Education is a powerful tool that sculpts our minds into lean, mean fighting machines. Minds contaminated by the ideology of violence, mental and physical.

### Whose morals is it anyway?

Many years ago I had interviewed a prostitute who worked at one of the world's leading tourist destinations. She told me that prostitutes are the only truthful people in the world because they know who they are and never have any illusions about being 'above' anyone else. That they don't pretend to be anything other than providers of a service (sex) for money, money that is spent on helping their families to survive life; Unlike the 'ladies of society' who are happily married but bed hop, while spouses do likewise – both pretending to live a respectable life (whatever this means). Civilised society can accept this behaviour but not the services of prostitutes – prostitution is 'unethical'. Oscar Wilde put this in perspective, *"As for society – civilised society, at least is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are more important than morals"*. Sadly, it was this very society that destroyed him.

There are many among us, who are the redeeming factors of a species running riot. I call them the 360° people...those who can embrace one and all irrespective of their caste, colour or creed etc.; People who work towards an understanding between cultures, a common platform where we can all take the same train; People who are often imprisoned or killed for attempting to build bridges across social barriers; People who speak the language of God – truth, love, charity, forgiveness, ahimsa. Many atheists speak this language. There is no fear within them because ahimsa is present.

### Are religious rituals and murder ethical?

Religious beliefs and the attendant rituals are fiercely guarded by gendarmes of the faith. Animal sacrifice has been in vogue since time immemorial. There was a time when human sacrifice was popular, now it is viewed as murder. In some religions animal sacrifice is considered murder. But slaughter of innocent human beings in the name of one religion or another is acceptable and often condoned.

There are different degrees of murder: the mindless slaughter of animals is not murder: invading foreign countries and killing thousands of innocent civilians is not murder, it is war: killing one's estranged spouse is murder and this usually attracts the death penalty. In many countries the death penalty exists and various methods are used to 'kill' the murderer. We have taken on the mantle of the Supreme Being: deciding who lives and who dies. The circle of death appears to begin and end with our religious beliefs that influence our notion of the ethics of living, one size fits all and if it doesn't then cut it out or cut it off.

### So what is our *Plan B* ? And is there one ?

There are many among us, who are the redeeming factors of a species running riot. I call them the 360° people...those who can embrace one and all irrespective of their caste, colour or creed etc.; People who work towards an understanding between cultures, a common platform where we can all take the same train; People who are often imprisoned or killed for attempting to build bridges across social barriers; People who speak the language of God – truth, love, charity, forgiveness, ahimsa. Many atheists speak this language. There is no fear within them because ahimsa is present. These 360° folk are growing in number everyday across the world. They speak out against injustice and face the wrath of those who are possessed by fear.

Perhaps a time will come when Nature will not have to resort to *Plan A* but will acquiesce to our *Plan B*. Till then let us stand up and be counted as 360° folk not in what we wear, the food we eat or the prayers we recite or the language we speak but in the manner in which we treat our fellow beings, human and animal, and our environment with truth, love, charity, forgiveness and ahimsa.

A peaceful productive New Year to you all.

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

*The Faces of Change* series profiles advocates in the community who are changing the face of child marriage in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, by saying no to this harmful traditional practice. In this issue we introduce the Community and profile a Health Worker and village Elder. In February's issue we tell the stories of two girls aged 10 and 13 who had their marriages stopped, as well as a Government Official. In the March issue, we profile the last characters in this series: a Mother, two Priests, and a School Teacher.

Elizabeth is a freelance project manager, communications consultant and writer, specialising in International Human Rights Advocacy – particularly the rights of women and children. She has extensive knowledge of international human rights law, and a Master's Degree in Human Rights and Social Change. Elizabeth has worked for inter-governmental, international development and advocacy organisations, such as the *Africa Child Policy Forum*, the *African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)*, *Amnesty International*, the *European Union*, the *Global Movement for Children*, *Oxfam*, *Plan International*, *Transparency International* and *UNICEF*.

[www.libertyandhumanity.com/elizabeth/](http://www.libertyandhumanity.com/elizabeth/)



## Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

### Child Marriage in Amhara, Ethiopia: Faces of Change



A meeting of the Bandani Kebele Community Conversation Group which advocates against child marriage, Saguma village, Bandani Kebele, Dangla Woreda (District). Photo: © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop

#### Introduction

**“We are not just talking about change, we are stopping children from marrying.”**

A group of determined men and women from various villages in the Dangla Woreda (District) of Amhara, Ethiopia, sit under a tree among a verdant landscape of hills and pasture. Cattle, donkeys, goats, and the steep banks of a river in view. There is a food surplus in this area, the harvest having been plentiful.

The talk is lively and incessant as the group discuss their antipathy towards child marriage and their unified commitment to see the practise eliminated in the Kebele (neighbourhood) of Bandani.

Known as the Community Conversation Group (CCG), the 35 men and 35 women come from many of the 550 households in Bandani. All are considered influential community members, be that as elders, health workers, religious leaders or members of the Women's Development Group.

Atalele Abera, 35, a member of the Women's Development Group, comments: “Our group influences other women and most women want to engage in discussions on child marriage. There were 130 child marriages in this Kebele last year. School is far away and parents fear violence against their children and defilement if they send them on the long journey to school. Many cannot afford to educate their children. I have three children and limited the size of my family by using contraception, so I could ensure they would all be educated.”

Almost every member of the CCG was themselves married either as a child or to a child. They have also faced the decision whether or not to marry their own pre-pubescent daughters and sons. Those who did, now openly regret it, because of the resulting family poverty and the compromised life particularly their daughters now live.

The CCG has “Eyes” and “Ears” members who are tasked with reporting what they see and hear regarding child marriage, prior to a fortnightly meeting, hosted by the Community Conversation Facilitator, Girma Demlash, 30.



*Below:* Atalele Abera, 35, a member of the local Women's Development Group and of Bandani Kebele's Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage, Amhara, Ethiopia. *Right:* Hebeste Admas, 26, a Health Extension Worker at a local health post and a member of Bandani Kebele's Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage, Amhara, Ethiopia. Photos: © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop.



The CCG is part of a comprehensive programme against child marriage involving multiple stakeholders. The programme is run by the local government, the Dangla Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office (WCYAO), supported by UNICEF.

Yitayesh Akalu, Expert at the Dangla WCYAO comments: "We have undertaken several trainings with community members on how to implement the UNICEF social mobilization project against child marriage. That includes how to establish a change group known as a Community Conversation Group. We have trained 10 male and 10 female Community Conversation Facilitators so far. This is the first time we have conducted a comprehensive programme in Dangela Woreda. It is a multi-sectoral programme involving health, education, justice, the community and livelihoods, in the form of a fund to support parents to educate their girls instead of marry them."

Girma Demlash, Community Conversation Facilitator, comments: "We are very grateful to UNICEF for helping us facilitate the community conversations. Everyone who takes part is committed to ending child marriage. We have just prevented two marriages – those of a 10 year old and a 13 year old girl - from going forward as a result of the girls reporting to us that their parents were in the process of arranging their marriages. We are not just talking about change, we are stopping children from marrying."



ELIZABETH WILLMOTT-HARROP

## The Community Health Worker

**"Women come to me for family planning services without the knowledge or consent of their husband. Whereas when girls marry as children, they do not understand the consequences of sex, they are not empowered to seek advice, and so they do not come to me."**

"I go to visit new mothers seven days after giving birth to give them iron, and it is then I will refer them to hospital if they are suffering from fistula. I referred two women recently," explains Hebeste Admas, 26, a Health Extension Worker at a local health post in the Bandani Kebele.

Hebeste continues, "Child marriage results in so many other health consequences including miscarriage and stunting of the child. A girl's uterus may be damaged from intercourse and she will suffer great psychological distress. I have seen all of this."

Yitayesh Akalu, Expert at the Dangla Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office comments: "The problem of fistula is so huge we have dedicated fistula health centres. Fistula happens mostly to child and adolescent mothers as a result of intense and prolonged labour - their bodies are simply not developed enough to give birth. We have community ambulances so that fistula cases can be treated straight away. A girl will be transported by youth groups carrying her on a bed until they get to an accessible area where the ambulance will collect her."

Hebeste has been a Health Extension Worker since she was 17, and her role includes teaching community members about the health consequences of child marriage.

"In my 9 years as a Health Extension Worker I have seen a decline in child marriage as a result of community awareness, and I do believe the practice will stop. I report cases to the police. There is no confidentiality as they are breaking the law. However people hold alternative ceremonies in secret to hide that it is a child marriage – at night or at dawn. Then the girl disappears and the family say she has gone to live with an aunt."

Hebeste continues: "But local health workers like me know every pregnant woman and the Women's Development Groups and Health Development Groups who look after the wellbeing of girls and prevent them marrying, operate at the village level. So we know. The development armies report to me and I report cases to the health centre and police."





*Left: Zelalem Belay, 70, Elder, a member of Bandani Kebele's Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage, Amhara, Ethiopia. Photos: © UNICEF/ESARO 2015/Elizabeth Willmott-Harrop.*

### **The Community Health Worker *contd...***

Hebeste notes the way girls who are forced to marry are not as able to protect their own health and plan their families. She explains: "There is a real difference between older and younger women who are married. Adult women come to me for family planning services without the knowledge or consent of their husband. Whereas when girls marry as children, they do not understand the consequences of sex, they are not empowered to seek advice, and so they do not come to me."

"I have had parents bring their daughter to me ahead of marriage saying they want contraceptives for her to try and avoid the complications of childbirth. The girl told me she was really scared to be marrying an adult man. I reported them."

### **The Elder**

**"You see me here without proper clothing, wearing the clothes of a poor man, because of my family situation. Because I married my daughters when they were children."**

Zelalem Belay, 70, is a respected Community Elder and member of the Community Conversation Group against Child Marriage in the Bandani Kebele.

He stands in front of the gathered crowd and speaks with absolute humility and sincerity as he discusses his personal regrets over marrying his daughters when they were children: "At my age I have to tell the truth. Why hide when I can stand here and tell the truth for the betterment of my community," Zelalem says.

"At first I opposed the change in culture away from child marriage. I was resisting what the role of the poor girls could be. What options do poor children have? I thought. But I have since become convinced child marriage is not right. I have changed my mind. By supporting poor girls with economic incentives so they can continue their education, there is a different future for them and for their families", explains Zelalem.

"I was married at 18, to a ten year old girl, but she kept running back to her family. She wanted no physical attachment to me. So three months later I had a second marriage to a 15 year old – it was

easy to arrange quickly as my father was wealthy. My first wife, her parents sent her back to school and she married again a few years later."

Zelalem continues: "So you see, in my former life, I had good assets, with family land and property, but then we did not see education as important. But now, those who are educated, they have a higher position than those with just land. A district judge, a school principle - they educate their children so that they have a position in society, they dress well."

"You see me here without proper clothing, wearing the clothes of a poor man, because of my family situation. Because I married my daughters when they were children. If I had educated them instead, they would now be providing for the family."

Zelalem's gaze is firm, his voice unwavering as he explains the impact on one of his children: "One daughter, I married her at 15, she gave birth immediately but she is now divorced. I sent her back to school. But she did not perform well. Her life was disturbed and miserable."

"So I strongly advise against child marriage. It is a bad experience for the boy and the girl. If there is a young girl and older man, she will not be responsible for the house and he will always be out spending his money on other women."

The day before, a neighbour had come to consult Zelalem over marrying his 11 year old daughter. Zelalem explains: "I told him the law and that the marriage may not work out. That he will have lost property in agreeing to a marriage that does not last – divorce when people marry as children is common. I told him his daughter will probably run away. If she runs away to the city she could end up as a sex worker, trying to support herself. Many end up in cities working in local bars. They have nothing to fall back on."

"My life experience tells me that if you marry with an equal age and love each other – when it is a choice – and you share household responsibilities equally, then the marriage will prosper. They can run a business together, the husband can source raw materials and the wife can use them to make local beer to sell. It is a better life."

"I dream to get back to be like a child, and to live such a life."



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A CPJ SPECIAL REPORT BY  
**ELANA BEISER**, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR  
OF THE COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS

## CHINA, EGYPT IMPRISON RECORD NUMBERS OF JOURNALISTS

Egypt is second only to China as the world's worst jailer of journalists in 2015. Worldwide, the number of journalists behind bars for their work declined moderately during the year, but a handful of countries continue to use systematic imprisonment to silence criticism.

A record number of journalists are behind bars in China, and the number of journalists jailed in Turkey and Egypt also rose dramatically in 2015, the Committee to Protect Journalists has found. Overall, the number of journalists imprisoned around the world declined modestly from record levels recorded in the past three years.

CPJ identified **199 journalists in prison** because of their work in 2015, compared with 221 the **previous year**. Iran, Vietnam, and Ethiopia were among those countries holding fewer journalists prisoner, but in all three countries a climate of fear for the media persists, with many of those released continuing to face legal charges or harsh restrictions, including forced exile.

Perhaps nowhere has the climate for the press deteriorated more rapidly than in **Egypt**, now the second worst jailer of journalists worldwide. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi continues to use the pretext of national security to clamp down on dissent. Cairo is holding 23 journalists in jail, compared with 12 a year ago. As recently as 2012, no journalists were in jail for their work in Egypt. Those behind bars include **Ismail Alexandrani**, a freelancer who focuses on the troubled Sinai Peninsula and who was recently arrested on arrival in Egypt from Germany. (Read detailed accounts of each prisoner [here](#).)



A quarter of those jailed globally are in [China](#), the world's worst offender for the second year in a row; the 49 journalists in prison there are a record for that country. The lengths to which China is willing to go to silence its critics is demonstrated by at least three people *not* on CPJ's imprisoned list: the brothers of Shohret Hoshur. The Washington D.C.-based Uighur journalist for U.S. government-funded Radio Free Asia (RFA) reports critically on China's treatment of his ethnic minority. According to [Hoshur](#) and [RFA](#), China, unable to arrest him, has thrown three of his brothers who still live in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region—Tudaxun, Shawket, and Rexim—into jail on anti-state charges in retaliation for Hoshur's work.

Conditions for the media have also taken a turn for the worse in [Turkey](#), which doubled the number of journalists in jail over the year to 14. The country released dozens of journalists in 2014 after being the world's worst jailer for [two consecutive years](#), but in 2015—amid two general elections, further entanglement in the Syrian civil war, and the end of a fragile ceasefire with fighters of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—fresh arrests make it the fifth worst jailer globally. Most recently, Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, senior staff members of independent daily *Cumhuriyet*, were [arrested](#) on charges of espionage and aiding an alleged terrorist group after publishing reports that alleged Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) had transferred weapons to Syria under cover of humanitarian aid.

A quarter of those jailed globally are in [China](#), the world's worst offender for the second year in a row; the 49 journalists in prison there are a record for that country. As President Xi Jinping continues his crackdown on corruption and as the country's [economic growth slows](#) and its markets become [more volatile](#), reporting on financial issues has taken on new sensitivity. [Wang Xiaolu](#), a reporter for the Beijing-based business magazine *Caijing*, was arrested on August 25 on suspicion of “colluding with others and fabricating and spreading false information about securities and futures trading” after he reported that a regulator was examining ways for securities companies to withdraw funds from the stock market. He later appeared on state television saying that he regretted writing the story and pleading for leniency, even as it was unclear whether he had been formally charged with a crime. As CPJ has documented, [televised confessions](#) are a tactic repeatedly deployed by Chinese authorities for dealing with journalists who cover sensitive stories.

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Anti-state charges remain the favored tool for jailing journalists in [Iran](#), where the number of journalists in jail fell in 2015 to 19 from 30 a year earlier, but where the [revolving-door policy](#) of allowing some prisoners out on furlough while others are arrested continues. On November 2, authorities rounded up at least four journalists, including the prominent columnist Issa Saharkhiz, on anti-state accusations. *The Washington Post's* [Jason Rezaian](#), who has been held longer than any U.S. correspondent by any foreign government since CPJ began tracking imprisonments in 1990, is accused of espionage, among other charges. State media has reported that he has been convicted and sentenced, but has not said on which charges or provided any other detail.

The number of prisoners also shrank in [Vietnam](#), but in some cases release from jail comes at a high cost. [Ta Phong Tan](#) was freed after serving three years of a 10-year term and was immediately flown to the U.S. In October 2014 Tan's colleague, Nguyen Van Hai, with whom she co-founded the *Free Journalists Club* in 2007 and who was also imprisoned for his work, was also [forced into exile](#). The country remains among the [most censored](#) in the world.

Another of the 10 most censored countries is [Ethiopia](#), which released six bloggers from the [Zone 9](#) collective in 2015, but they [report](#) that they face travel restrictions. Meanwhile, Ethiopia's prisoners still include prominent online columnist Eskinder Nega, who is [serving](#) an 18-year term on terrorism charges, and Temesghen Desalegn, an opinion writer who has been [denied health care](#) in prison, according to people who have visited.

While anti-state accusations are the most commonly used charge for putting journalists in jail, applied in 55 percent of cases, CPJ found the highest proportion of charges in five years, 25 percent, are retaliatory—arbitrary, trumped-up accusations such as drugs or weapons possession, embezzlement, or assault. Two such cases are [Khadija Ismayilova](#), sentenced to seven and a half years in Azerbaijan for illegal business, tax evasion, abuse of power, and embezzlement, in retaliation for her investigations of alleged corruption; and [Azimjon Askarov](#), sentenced to life in prison by Kyrgyzstan for the murder of a policeman in retaliation for his exposure of wrongdoing by police and prosecutors.



The number of prisoners rose in Bangladesh, Gambia, India, and Saudi Arabia in addition to China, Egypt, and Turkey.

Globally, 109 of the prisoners worked online, and 83 worked in print.

#### Other trends and details that emerged in CPJ's research include:

While 28 countries worldwide had journalists in jail, 10 of those were imprisoning a single journalist. The 2015 survey reinforces CPJ's finding that only a handful of countries engage in systematic imprisonment of journalists.

For the second time since CPJ began compiling annual prison surveys in 1990, not a single journalist in the Americas was in jail for work-related reasons on December 1. This also occurred in **2011**. Factors include a change in Cuba's policy of regularly jailing journalists, the effectiveness of the Inter-American human rights system, and campaigns against criminal defamation by CPJ and other groups, although plenty of challenges remain for journalists in the Americas hemisphere.

With 17 behind bars, Eritrea remained the worst jailer of journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, and the world's worst abuser of due process. No Eritrean detainee on CPJ's census has ever been publicly charged with a crime or brought before a court for trial. Six journalists who worked for the government-controlled station Radio Bana were released early in 2015, the reason for which was not clear.

The percentage of journalist prisoners who are freelancers was 28 percent. The percentage has steadily declined since 2011.

Globally, 109 of the prisoners worked online, and 83 worked in print.

The number of prisoners rose in Bangladesh, Gambia, India, and Saudi Arabia in addition to China, Egypt, and Turkey.

Countries that appeared on the 2015 prison census after having no imprisoned journalists in the 2014 survey were Turkmenistan and the United Arab Emirates.

CPJ is aware of at least two cases of journalists in prison that families have asked not to publicize, in hopes that quiet negotiation will win their freedom.

The prison census accounts only for journalists in government custody and does not include those who have disappeared or are held captive by non-state groups. (These cases, such as U.S. freelancer Austin Tice, are classified as "**missing**" or "**abducted**.") For example, CPJ estimates that at least 40 journalists are missing in the Middle East and North Africa, many of whom are believed held by militant groups including Islamic State.

CPJ defines journalists as people who cover the news or comment on public affairs in media, including print, photographs, radio, television, and online. In its annual prison census, CPJ includes only those journalists who it has confirmed have been imprisoned in relation to their work.

CPJ believes that journalists should not be imprisoned for doing their jobs. The organization has sent letters expressing its serious concerns to each country that has imprisoned a journalist. In the past year, CPJ advocacy led to the early release of at least 31 imprisoned journalists worldwide.

CPJ's list is a snapshot of those incarcerated at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2015. It does not include the many journalists imprisoned and released throughout the year; accounts of those cases can be found at [www.cpj.org](http://www.cpj.org). Journalists remain on CPJ's list until the organization determines with reasonable certainty that they have been released or have died in custody.





## NATALIE WOOD

### ‘WE’RE NOT IN KANSAS ANY MORE’!

This essay was supposed to examine why so many western immigrants to Israel return to their birth countries or move on elsewhere.

But a startling report by the [Institute for Jewish Policy Research](#) (JPR) explains how the number of Israelis migrating to Britain is vastly bigger than that of U.K. Jews emigrating to Israel. This seems barely credible although the JPR has used official British census figures to prove it.

But let me begin as intended and first ask why people emigrate to Israel.

Is it for a genuine love of the country and the Zionist ideal?

Is it to escape antisemitism?

Is it for a lark – a bit of adventure?

Or can it be – no, surely not! – to flee domestic and other personal responsibilities in their countries of origin?

I pondered this mishmash for the umpteenth time recently, first on reading the views of [Ze’ev Portner](#), a British émigré who has returned to the UK after five years in Israel and then again on seeing the feature about the JPR report.

Portner, who qualified as a lawyer in Israel, claimed that the real story of western emigration to Israel was not about how many people go to live there, “but how many actually remain in Israel”.

It is alleged that up to 70 per cent of North American immigrants to Israel return to their birth countries and Portner believes the figure for British immigrants is similar. “The reason for such poor retention rates is simple. Western olim (immigrants) are simply unable to get a decent job or even earn enough to make a living”, he maintained.

I suggest that this is only partly true and that the entire picture is far more complex: To start, many newcomers, forgetting they are not tourists on an extended vacation, expect far too much, far too soon.



The holiday jollity wears thin and they often find they have over-spent. Then they seem unable to cope with what is, after all, a terrific culture shock and refuse to consider that integration is not only a matter of learning Hebrew and acquiring housing but is about understanding a different mindset from that of people ‘back home’.

We all quip, “I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas any more”. But joking about our dislocation is not the same as dealing with it - understanding that it takes many years’ patient persistence before we can live in Israel as we did in the U.K. or North America.

I am aware that I write as someone who has not entered the Israeli workforce and so I appear blasé when discussing these matters in abstract.

But living on a modest income and a tight budget, I am all too conscious that finding employment in Israel is very difficult; that wages are low; employers often treat their staff with disdain and that the cost of living is about twenty per cent higher than that in Europe.

And yes. Job seekers should be aware of a selection ‘pecking order’: Priority is given to native-born Israelis with a good IDF service record and yes, some prospective employers forever delight in insulting or deceiving new immigrants whom they seem to view as a diversion from their daily routine.

© Natalie Wood



The modern State of Israel is only 67 years old and its citizens also live on a semi-permanent war-footing. Indeed, there have been two full-scale wars since 2010 when I emigrated – along with innumerable terrorist attacks like those during the current (unofficial) ‘knife intifada’. One day I felt frightened enough to lock myself inside our apartment and twice we have cancelled plans to travel out-of-town because of anti-Jewish riots.

So we have a small country with a growing and hugely diverse population burdened by often excessive summer temperatures that can make daily life unbearably uncomfortable. Citizens cross all ethnic, religious and cultural divides; most young Jews fulfil compulsory military or national service and everyone in the workforce buys or rents expensive housing, food and goods on relatively low incomes. People often remark that they live on a continual bank overdraft.

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Finally, if we were to consider how being constantly bullied may form someone’s character, let us imagine how this feeling may have shaped the personality of many Israelis. If it has made them brusque to the point of rudeness, it has also made them ultra competitive; most determinedly driven. This is a difficult personality of the sort that may send soft souls scuttling back from where they came.

I use two stories – one from the ‘Keep Olim in Israel Movement’ and a second, more personal in illustration:

An individual living in a strictly Orthodox West Bank settlement has alleged that their child was bullied at school and that the authorities suspended the other students involved. In revenge, says the complainant, the mother of the bullies is attempting to have their family thrown out of the settlement.

No wonder a returnee to Manchester once remarked to my husband:

“Huh, Israelis? You can’t live with them!”

-----

Then there are Israeli Jews who do not like their countrymen – or indeed, their country. It may be because they feel trapped; rather like being forced to live with one’s parents long into adulthood. I am not giving them unwonted publicity by naming them here. But they do remind me somehow of those western Jews who leave their birth countries and try living in Israel – but for all the wrong reasons. I don’t know about you. But I see a certain ugly symmetry here.

But what of the Israelis who live abroad? What pulls them, for example, to northern Europe whose lands are cold, wet and teeming with [anti-Jewish hatred](#)?

A good many are superbly educated and have top academic and business appointments. They will almost certainly be earning far more than they would anywhere similar in Israel.

Some Israeli émigrés to the U.K., says the JPR, are not Jewish and so would not feel too concerned about antisemitism.

Not everyone is born a high-minded patriot, so some people may decide to settle in Europe in the hope that their children would not have to serve in the IDF.

However, says the JPR, even those secular Jewish Israelis may send their children to Anglo-Jewish day schools. This, I’m forced to guess is because they don’t want to deny their offspring part of their Jewish heritage.

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This article was published in the inaugural issue of Live Encounters Magazine January 2010.



## RANDHIR KHARE

Founding Contributor of Live Encounters

### WALKING WITH SPIRITS



An Irula sacred space. Photograph Randhir Khare

The traditional communities living in the Nilgiri Mountains of Tamil Nadu in South India hold the natural environment in which they live in great reverence. The Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Moolukurumbas, Paniyas and other indigenous communities, in their own way, relate intimately to the land on which they live. If you have had the opportunity of travelling in that region, you will probably appreciate the reason why such relationships could have evolved. Nature in those mountains displays a stunning variety and resplendence. There is, even today after all the pillaging of its naturalness, an all-encompassing robustness and mystical power that stimulates the senses when you wander the more undisturbed reaches of the region. You will not be overcome by feelings of aloneness or isolation but instead by the presence of natural forces that defy the senses.

In lonely glades, under ancient trees, on desolate mountain slopes, besides gurgling streams flowing between flowering rhododendrons and wherever the hidden forces seem most pronounced, you will come across sacred stones of all shapes and sizes, singularly and in groups, known as cairn, barrow, kist-vaen and cromlech and locally called Phin, Hok-kallu (navel stone), Pongui (gold pit), Sela Kallu and Gattige Kallu (throne or seat stones) Bira Kallu (or hero stones), Pandavaru Mane, Savumane, Azaram and Moriari Mane. These stones have been placed by people from the early pre-historic times down to possible a few hundred years ago. In places it's also evident that people from indigenous communities today still add such stones to the landscape. The past and present fusing into a composite sacred whole which pervades the very air you breathe.

The Todas, a pastoral community living on the high grasslands of the blue mountains believe that the entire region represents their sacred land. Haenn was the first Toda. He came from Heaven with his wife Thoovi Thirke. At that time no one lived here on earth. So they came down to earth right there and they started a family – and produced three sons and two daughters. Haen ruled for three hundred years and went on to rule Amunore, the land of the dead with one of his sons. Porshaey, one of the daughters, was responsible for the creation of all the other munds (settlements); she divided the clans, buffaloes, human beings, shastras...everything. She was the maker of these things. The conical temple, called Moonbow Porshey, made from grass and reeds and wood in Muthanad Mund marks the place of their creation.



So specific is every sacred space that even the path that a spirit takes to Amunore is physically evident. I journeyed with a group of Todas, following the Spirit Path to the land of the dead. We began the trek from Mulli Mund and headed off towards the hills. The climb became steep and the path almost covered over by brambly thickets. And the deeper we went, the cooler it became. Forests gave way to grasslands and grasslands to mossy glades where strangely beautiful butterflies flashed and wild flowers exuded gentle fragrances. Everywhere around us there was the music of the wind and streams.

Not far from there is a stone circle which marks the place where Porshaey created the Toda buffalo which occupies a significant place in Toda life, both religiously as well as non-religiously. There is a separate cattle kraal near a temple for the sacred buffaloes and the officiating priest does the milking and churning, distributing the milk to the people of the mund. The butter, some say, is made available to outsiders too. Non-religiously, the animal has across time, proved to be a boon as an ideal dairy animal. Rites, rituals and ceremonies related to the animal dominate the life of the community.

In fact, when a Toda dies a buffalo is sacrificed so that the spirit of the animal may accompany the person on the long journey to Amunore and live there, providing milk and butter.

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We reached Mettine Karsh (Steps of Stone), which was an enormous forehead of granite jutting out of a grassy hill...said to be the place where the spirits of women climb with an oarskh, or grinding stick, in one hand. And up above Mettine Karsh was Koche Arre (Bangle Rock) where the spirits crawl, dragging their bangles along the rock surface.

Later, where the path climbed up along the side of a hill face, we encountered Ovvunni Karsh...the place where the spirit throws three stones and calls out "Ovvunnikku Karsh Vodhu" (beware the stones are coming) - symbolic of the penetration of darkness by light.

I don't know what seized me at that moment, I picked up three stones and intoning the words threw them off the side of the hill into the thicket below. And then we walked on, entering the thickets once again till we surfaced much later out on to a grassy knoll jutting out desolately...overlooking an expanse of undulating hills far below.



An Kurumba sacred space. Photograph Randhir Khare



Resting back among the grass and stones of Maebaem an uneasiness swept through me and prevented me from relaxing. I looked up at the grey sky overhead, almost expecting the blue curtains to part and visions of another time and another space reveal themselves. But of course they didn't, and some time later I found myself stalking the thicket ridden path again, moving on – tracing the spirit journey to the Land of the Dead.



The chest touching stone. Photograph Randhir Khare

“This place is called Maenbaem. If a baby dies before the Pishaarothithu ceremony or even before it is born,” said Polkaer, one of the Todas. “The body is buried and not cremated, and the spirit comes here. Here, right here, it sits and waits for the spirit of its mother. But even if the mother passes this way, she cannot take the baby with her. It is lost. Lost forever, here on this grassy place.”

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We stopped a while at Kojji Kochith Koer - the stream where the spirits from Amunore come to meet the new arrivals, Tharsfole Karsh - where the spirits soften their finger nails in a stream and file them down on a rock, and Oarskh Konsse where cereal is pounded and prepared for the journey onwards. The land closed in on either side of us, thickets peering down curiously as we trekked along the grassy ravines. There was no wind, only a terrible stillness that pervaded everything... It was almost with a feeling of relief that we broke journey and travelled back to urbanity for a brief respite.... only to return again, as the seasons changed, to continue the trek to the land of the dead.

And one afternoon we reached...after all the rambling and roving and tracking and sweating and staggering, after stopping in reverence at Nijjemutti Karsh (the Chest Touching Stone which cleanses the spirit of all family attachments), Ponniuppu Karsh (the disease cleansing stone) we reached a mountain top among the clouds, looking out into the beyond and the abyss of Amunore.

I stood stood there with my feet planted among sunburnt clumps of grass, surrounded by wind-worn slabs of stone and remnants of tree-limbs carved by the elements into fantastic forms, skeletons of life that had gone before. Behind me the undulating land rolled away to a horizon wrapped in a haze. Ochre, brown and shades of deep green merged into one another until they melted into a shimmering blue. Arching from my left to my right, before me, magnificent ranges of highlands spread themselves out, rocky shoulders resting craggily against one another, row upon row of seated hills, patch-worked with dense green foliage of ancient sholas, unfolded until they fell into the arms of advancing clouds, grey, white, gauze-like. The wind that bore the clouds onwards towards us buffeted my body as I stood there gazing into the nothingness beyond.

© Randhir Khare



“There’s a stream down there, hidden among the trees. That’s where Poodhiavre is. The dead person’s spirit washes itself at the stream, cleaning away all traces of the ashes of the funeral. When that is done, the spirit moves on until it reaches that forest there. That’s the last stop before Amunore. It’s called Pooverikaene, the Bubbling Stream. There’s a rope strung across the stream. The spirit has to cross, walking along this rope. If it has not lived a just life, it will fall into the stream and a sacred buffalo will offer its horn to rescue the drowning person. But if the spirit fails to climb out, it will have to wait one year.”

Polkaer walked up beside me, and pointed out towards a distant range almost lost among clouds. “There beyond that last range is Amunore. The Toda Land of the Dead,” he said quietly. “And down there, there, can you see that band of sholas down below in the valley?” He asked.

“Yes,” I replied.

“There’s a stream down there, hidden among the trees. That’s where Poodhiavre is. The dead person’s spirit washes itself at the stream, cleaning away all traces of the ashes of the funeral. When that is done, the spirit moves on until it reaches that forest there. That’s the last stop before Amunore. It’s called Pooverikaene, the Bubbling Stream. There’s a rope strung across the stream. The spirit has to cross, walking along this rope. If it has not lived a just life, it will fall into the stream and a sacred buffalo will offer its horn to rescue the drowning person. But if the spirit fails to climb out, it will have to wait one year. There are only three chances. If it fails all three, the corridors to Amunore close forever for that person. But if the spirit succeeds, it is truly liberated from all the rites and practices and shastras of Toda life on earth and it travels on to Amunore. The Land of the Dead.” When he finished speaking, the advancing clouds swarmed around us and the land vanished.

I stood there among the clouds, overwhelmingly aware of the earth on which my feet rested, of the land I had traversed the many hours and days and weeks and months before that, of the rivers and streams I had forded, of the sacred stones I had seen and touched, of the trees whose fruit I had plucked and eaten...whose flowers I had admired.... whose shade I had slept in...whose trunks I had leaned against for solace. It was indeed sacred earth.

Behind us, down on his haunches, Thaethli Kuttan worked away with the back of his sickle, chipping away a large flat stone into the required shape, preparing it for its journey back to be installed near his temple in Mulli Mund. He was unconsciously linking the extremities of life and death. Building a mystical bridge of foreverness.

The trek back was surreal. Low clouds followed us all the way along the valley and narrower ravines. And when we reached the uplands, a blanket of clouds shrouded the land. The experience was over. We had returned from the Beyond.

I stood there among the clouds, overwhelmingly aware of the earth on which my feet rested, of the land I had traversed the many hours and days and weeks and months before that, of the rivers and streams I had forded, of the sacred stones I had seen and touched, of the trees whose fruit I had plucked and eaten...whose flowers I had admired.... whose shade I had slept in...whose trunks I had leaned against for solace. It was indeed sacred earth.



Journey’s end. Photograph Randhir Khare





## THE OTHER SIDE OF POSH: GLIMPSES OF DAILY LIFE IN THE MALDIVES

Photographs by Mark I Chaves

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Typical photographs of the Maldives depict fantasy islands and lavish lifestyles of exclusive resorts. This photograph collection offers scenes of Maldivian life 'behind' the luxury resorts. In late 2014, I lived on an 'inhabited island' called Maafushi in the Kaafu Atoll. I politely turned down a dreamy bungalow built on top of a private reef so I could experience the local life. This allowed me to photograph a parallel reality that is mostly invisible to tourists. The government permitted visitors onto Maafushi recently in 2011. I witnessed the transformation from a sleepy fishing village to a leading international destination. My hope is to share rare glimpses into Maldivian life before rising sea levels prompt voluntary and forced evacuations. Perhaps these images offer a different perspective or deeper appreciation for paradise.



Waiting for the sun – early commute





Maafushi Island landscape



Sketchy jetty to the Dhoni (traditional boat)



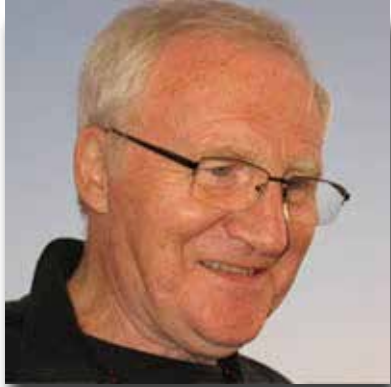


Maldivian Dhoni sailor and Thor



Sandy streets of Maafushi – football practice





Even if we don't have snow in Hamburg at the moment, *Sledging* is a poem that brings back happy memories of my son, Matthew, tumbling about in snowdrifts with Joanna, my wife, an anxious onlooker. The poem is included in my recently published collection for young people, *Echolocation*. [LINK](#) Terry is a Founding contributor of [Live Encounters](#)

## Sledging

*For Joanna and Matthew*

The wooden sledge stood  
in the corner of our shed  
like a small person on tiptoes  
most of the year – its  
metal blades curved like  
comet arms in a mythical sky.

When the snow came, we  
dragged it along the  
white, packed road  
by the railway tracks  
to the long slope in the park.

I see Matthew hurtling down  
on flattened snow –  
a picture of perfection  
with only a wire fence  
between him and a frozen pond.

Joanna covered her eyes while  
he tumbled into the white powder  
rolling over and over –  
a puppy in a Christmas storybook.







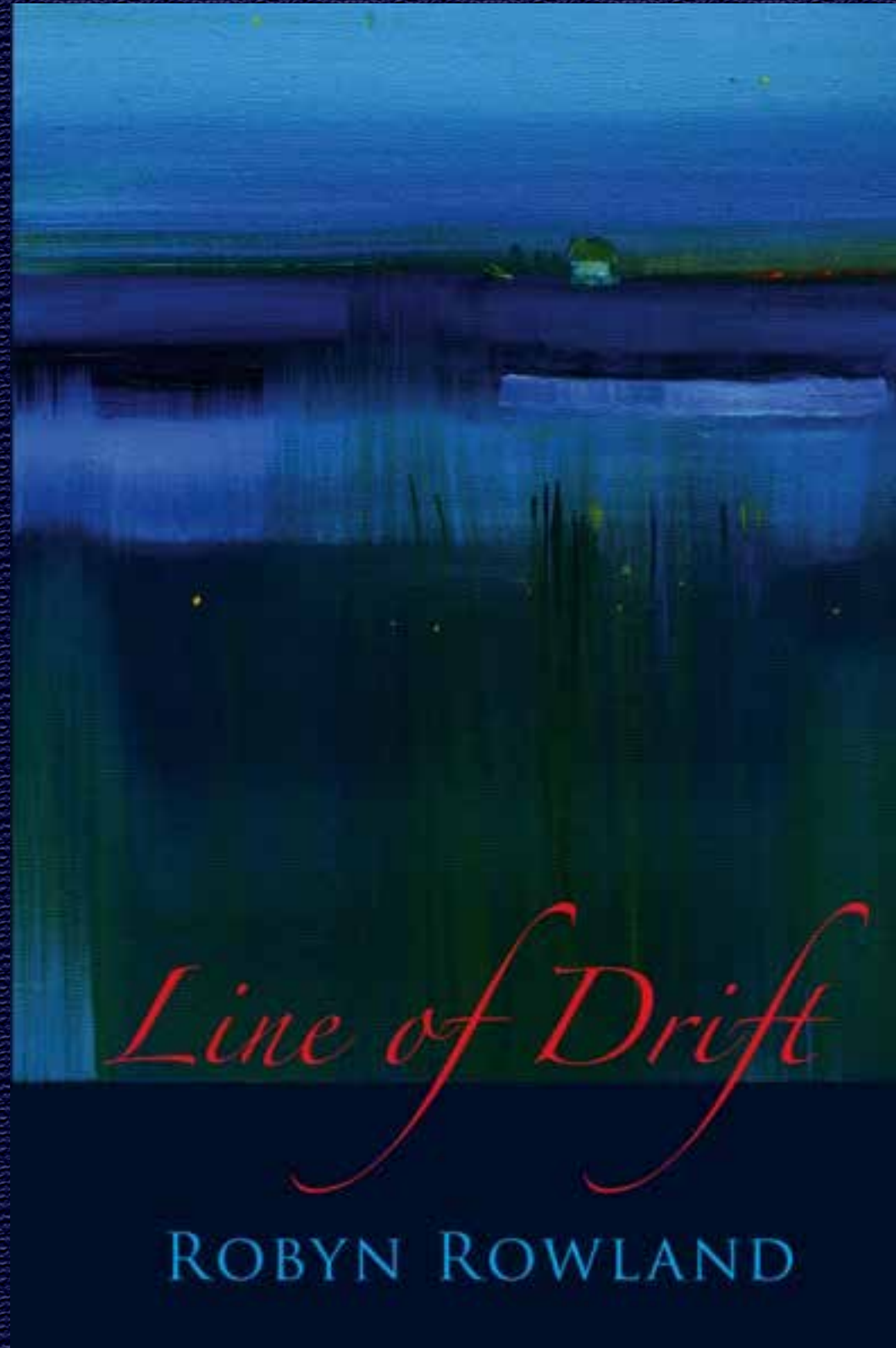
Dr Robyn Rowland AO is an Irish-Australian citizen living in Australia and Ireland. Her poetry appears in national and international journals and in over 40 anthologies, including seven *Best Australian Poems*. Of her 9 books, two were published in 2015: *Line of Drift*, Doire Press, Galway, Ireland, and her bilingual *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*, Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, Five Islands Press - <http://fiveislandspress.com/catalogue/this-intimate-war> and Bilge Kultur Sanat, Turkey.

## Hyacinth Loving

*Errislannan*

*and what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on this earth.*  
– Raymond Carver

God or flesh, Persian poets wooed their 'beloved' as if there were no greater gift than to be both namer and the named. Absent, your brown furred body lives in my skin's memory, laughter recalled is my *uisce beatha*, water of life, your care, the charge of a sun. Every morning, alone here but for the thought of you, excitement tingles in fingertips that tuck in the stray flips of earth tipped from indigo pots at my door, as hyacinths, rising from their dark birth-shrouds, go ruffling for light. Brown onion caps, almost discarded, balance in comedic joy, a small wonder as they protrude into the ice-blue chill above ground. Heads loaded with bubbles of scented flower, they make the sky ache for their pink and blue sweetness. In the cleft of their companions' leaves thrust toward sunshine, clear rainwater is caught, meniscus bulging as if curved crystal. First night back, a pregnant crescent moon slung low, carried before her the shadow-shape of herself to come. Connemara's sky was star-crowded and cold – deep airborne cold – and pure beyond diamond. Spring is an act of trust – the sky will warm, buds rise and open, and the great moon sail into her own fullness as a matter of time. Waiting is the necessity for growth. All this readies for you, *Beloved*, and when you come your soft kiss will give me again the first spring-time of opening.





## Burnt Words

*'Black Saturday' was named for a series of 400 bushfires in Victoria, Australia, around 7 February, 2009. 173 people died, 414 were injured, 2,100 homes destroyed, 7,562 people were displaced.*

Wind was never useful in a poem,  
but flame, now, yes flame was the core –  
heart aflame, passion aflame, longing aflame;  
love's burning desire, night's candle of soft light, moon's flare,  
the altar of Quan Yin with its flickering quiet, flowering stones,  
pink shells lit by the glow of tapers.

We knew the world was altering.  
We were told – look to the waters, the shoreline,  
ice-storms, poles with their melting caps.  
No-one mentioned firestorm, air-ignition.  
No-one talked of trees raging with their bursting  
heads of fire, sky a turmoil of blood-orange air.  
That our forest would ignite  
fuelled by its own eucalypt oil,  
Mountain Ash dried keen enough for self-immolation.

We knew the fire-bombings of Dresden,  
human forests burning in Nagasaki.  
Yet still we weren't prepared for the earth itself  
to turn tenderless, heave up through its green growth  
the unyielding heat of 1500 Hiroshima bombs.  
Ember attacks hammered nails through metal and skin,  
jet-engines roared in walls of fire to deafen the old,  
flames sucked oxygen from the air, lungs left slack.

And poems? All that 'burning in the line',  
those 'flame on the tongue' images, seem crude.  
Too much ash has fallen;  
too many boneless burials.  
And poems can't undo the burning.  
That new language of terror,  
all the frenzy of flame, has  
burned away my tongue.

## Sailing to Cong along the N59

*for Eileen Keane*

It's blowing hard.  
Water cascading down the Bens' bare bones  
is spume on the ocean,  
fingers of it stretched across their stone rumps;  
it's steam from the fat funnel of an old tug  
struggling in a storm.  
The road is a slipstream I'm shooting,  
white line just a vague border to cross and  
recross in the glide.  
Exciting,  
frightening.

Up to Maam the grasses are old-gold, rose-gold  
and swept flat by force, juddering upright in the breaks,  
but after Corr na Móna avenues of tall plane trees  
shake leaves free, spiralling across the road tight as a tune,  
then, ungrasped, lost and foundering  
spin out across Joyce's loughs.  
It doesn't matter.  
The yellow and red glee of their flight was worth it.

But I'm following the rainbow.  
Out of torrential rods of grey,  
sun has suddenly cleared the sky of cloud  
so that purple, pink and green can ribbon the earth,  
a great thread round the perfect gift,

and I'm chasing it with no desire,  
no need to get over it to the other side,  
simply to follow along, mouth open in awe,  
until here it stops at Cong with you  
on your fiftieth birthday, showering Lisloughrey Lodge with  
a swatch of colour in that sudden clarity of an autumn day.  
How difficult it was to get this far,  
how easy to go on.



from *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*,  
 Turkish translations Mehmet Ali Çelikel

## Green Road

This is the way that we went  
 to get here – past lochs in early dawn,  
 reeds so still they were painted in,  
 green shamrocks we'd sewn  
 into our jacket sleeves  
 never to match those shimmering Connaught fields  
 clotted white with sheep –  
 but travelling with us anyway. And out of Dublin's  
 grey light we came, out of the poor, the cold,  
 always hungry and now to be fed by our work.  
 And out of Trinity, the future of a new nation.  
 They would know us then –  
 our imperial overseers –  
 know our worth in battle,  
 pay the value in our freedom after.  
 That is honour. That is why we came.

The Fife band of the Irish Fusiliers played  
*The Wearing of the Green*  
 as we sailed out to war from Devonport,  
 those of us coast-born, knowing the fear  
 of a rough sea and the want of swimming in it.  
 We had thought to save poor wee Belgium.  
 We knew it wasn't France when they  
 shaved our heads for the heat, lads  
 running anyways to avoid it.  
 We'd heard from the Irish gone before,  
 Gallipoli was hell, but when they landed us  
 under sheer cliffs, and no artillery, it didn't make sense.

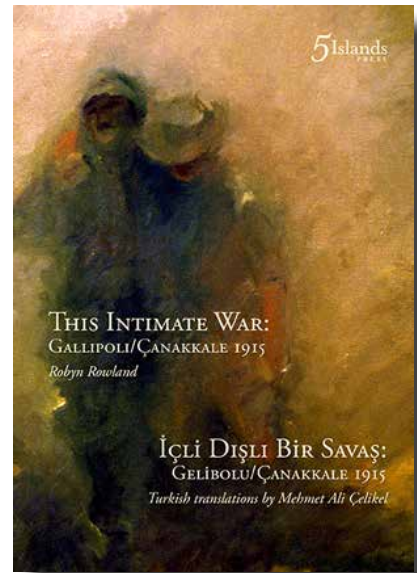
We waited. We waited too long.  
 In heat I've never known. Shears your skin off,  
 peeling it back, sunburn red-raw.  
 Water now, I knew about water, and rain.  
 I lived on land that was watery earth,  
 it never went dry. But I never knew  
 how precious it really is, how alive  
 it brings you, how strong it makes you, and  
 what it can do to you – going without –  
 slit lips, mouth full of pebbles for the wet,

stumbling about so mad for it,  
 you don't care if anyone can shoot you.  
 Honest men made thieves, liars,  
 some gone so crazy they might kill for it.  
 Wild flowering plants over those hills,  
 there must have been clear springs somewhere –  
 if anyone in charge had a map.

This is the way we went and nothing more to know.  
 Jumping from lighters and drowning,  
 the chuck of bayonet up the guts,  
 or hailed into with lead, 'riddled' such a true word.  
 Say it fast many times – *riddled riddled riddled* – that's it.  
 General Sir Bryan Mahon, a Galway man,  
 had a tantrum when he didn't get promoted, resigned and  
 headed off to an island, leaving his men under fire,  
 and no-one game to pull us back without command.  
 The Fife Band was swallowed by Suvla. One great bite.  
 Most of us were dead in the many ways of war.  
 Most of us wearing the green, never got back.

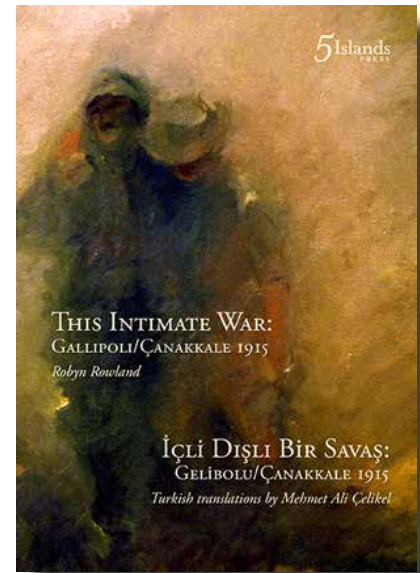
This is the way we left, in early dawn,  
 past the broken wire, small heaps of charred khaki –  
 wounded burned to death by gorse fires –  
 bodies heaped so you couldn't tell  
 what country they were from, scattered about,  
 half-buried, the smell of crushed thyme  
 never to leave the company of blood, of cinders.  
 We sailed over the ones that never made it to land,  
 never fired a gun, or saw the carnage,  
 drowning out of the *River Clyde*.  
 They were from my home-place and I left them there  
 in those razor ravines, too far from Irish earth.

I shake out of rage now as I did then, frustrated,  
 throwing stones when grenades were gone.  
 All I want to do is drink water, drink and drink,  
 drown in it, drink anything.  
 Will they pay that honour-price now,  
 do you think? Will I have my own country  
 when I get back to it? The Turks have theirs.





from *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*,  
 Turkish translations Mehmet Ali Çelikel



## Nightingale

*Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
 In such an ecstasy!*

– John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*

Sweet bird, rejoicing in clean salted air over Gelibolu,  
 silent ridges full of food, pine forests,  
 nests among filigreed branches under a  
 star-crushed heaven above a cobalt sea.  
 Here you do not need the rose, nor adoration,  
 where you are free and the joy of it rings.

Sweet bird with liquid-throated song a richer nectar  
 than thyme-honey that bees busy themselves with  
 in hives for the village below.  
 Night vibrates with trill, whistle, gurgle,  
 melody of the single male in hope;  
 ‘but how will she find you,’ he thinks,  
 the boy sitting with his mother’s letter open  
 April 17, before the sky was ash.  
 He thinks the song in this day’s light a special gift  
 that opened the beauty of place to him, and her letter.

Sweet bird thrilling inside the ear, along the spine,  
 bringing all nature’s loveliness to his soldier’s eye,  
 the stream laughing, grasses waving,  
 his back against the tree’s rough bark,  
 drinking goat’s milk hot from the teat,  
 the last for years to come, if he lives.

Sweet boy, Hasan Ethem, writes to his mother –  
 ‘beauty here speaks to me of God  
 and the love in your letter is a blessing.  
 Amazing, mother, that a nightingale sits on a pine branch  
 singing, everywhere green nature thrives  
 and I must fight for my country, repel invaders,  
 take this song into my ears, trying to  
 drown the fear of what I will hear in combat –  
 a clamour of dying, a crying out; to block the torture of  
 what I must do – to kill, anything, anyone, so foreign to me.’

Sweet bird – Hasan listened and sat,  
 watched your feathered throat rise and fall with lyric  
 as it muscled its way to the sky. He knelt and prayed,  
 ‘God, you gave this treasury to the Turkish Nation.  
 Grant it to the Turkish Nation still’,  
 picked up his gun,  
 led his men out to meet wasteful death.

*Hasan Ethem, Turkish teacher, early twenties, died of wounds April, 2015.*





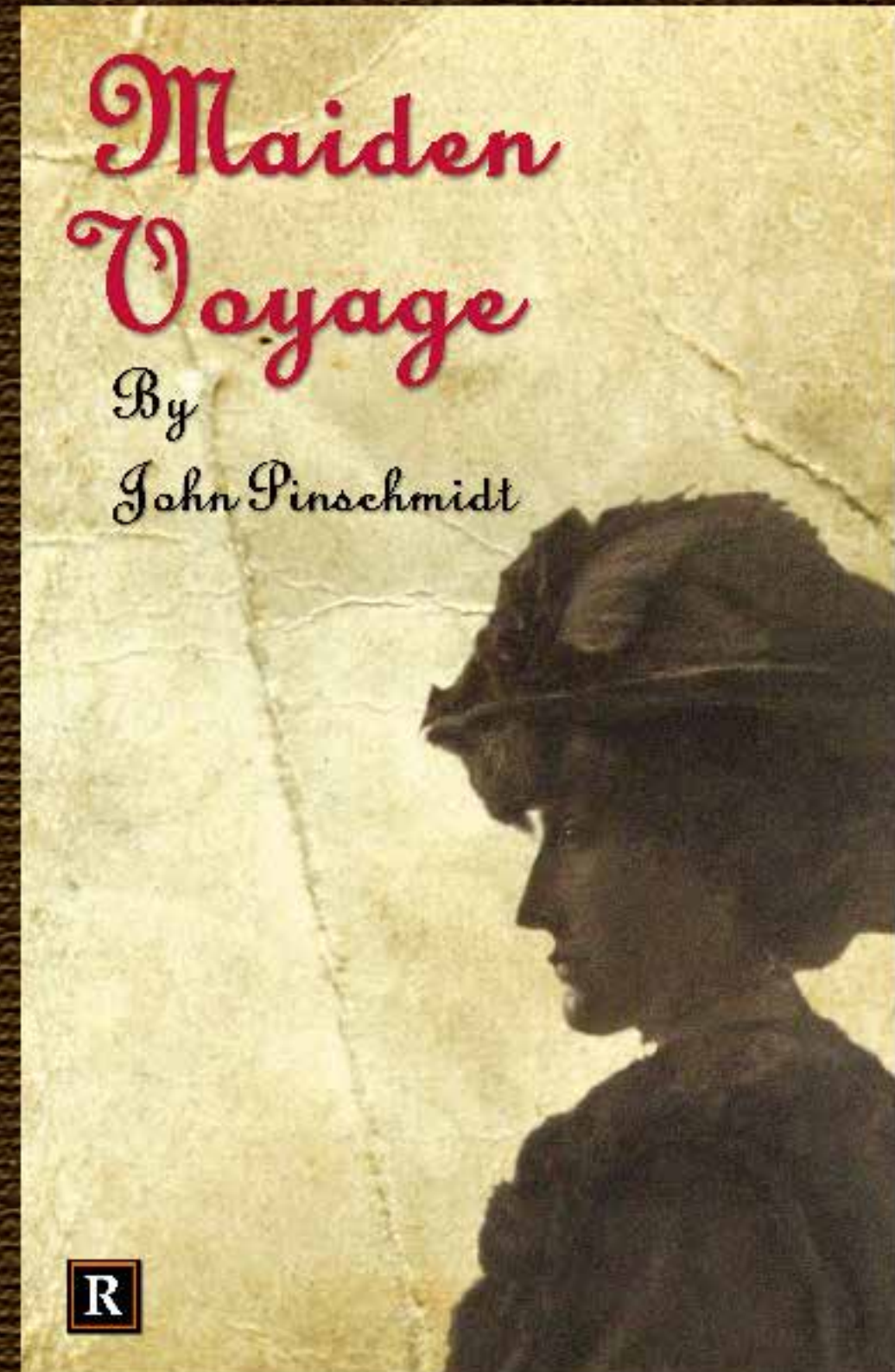
Pinschmidt is a retired high school English and drama teacher who lives in Herbertstown, Co. Limerick, Ireland with his Irish wife in her family's ancestral stone farmhouse. Although he has written poetry for over 40 years, he only seriously pursued publication since unexpectedly taking first runner up in Limerick City's October 2009 *Cuisle International Poetry Festival Slam*. It opened doors to a performance poet who writes accessibly about what moves him, capturing and celebrating current and past lives. His first collection, *Maiden Voyage*, was published by Revival Press in February, 2014. Available at [www.limerickwriterscentre.com](http://www.limerickwriterscentre.com) and [www.omahonys.ie](http://www.omahonys.ie).

## MAIDEN VOYAGE

To our "Titanic Lady", signed Karl Sawert, 23 Dez, 1911

Well wrapped against bitter Berlin breezes, you set out  
 For the studio of the young artist, his age same as the day,  
 And on parchment, in charcoal with chalk highlights  
 He etched your life-size head and shoulders portrait  
 Surely a present given to another  
 Young man the next night, to remember you by.  
 Such a stylish age to come of age  
 And how your profile must have pleased  
 The great sweeping feathered hat as wide  
 As your fur-warmed shoulders,  
 The confident clear gaze just touched with light  
 On eye, nose, lips and chin, looking west  
 Four months from the maiden voyage  
 That would leave Queenstown April 11,  
 Sailing into history.

We've always imagined your beauty on that great ship  
 Not as in the film, cresting the bow arms spread  
 Into the wind with a young Irish artist met on board,  
 Though the music is perfect. A century later  
 On stone in the back hall, your image, under glass,  
 Night and day reflects us as we come and go,  
 Your rich dark hair never graying like ours  
 Your soft left shoulder never turning, your eyes  
 Ever west, your ever-warm life suspended  
 On floating white, frozen in time.





## CHRISTY MAHON'S LOY

Into the barn last week for a whetstone  
 But emerged instead with a touchstone  
 Of sorts, from behind a jumble of old tools.  
 There was the long-handled loy made from a spade  
 Rust and dirt nearly concealing the original green paint  
 On the narrowed blade, but still a fine tool to woo  
 "Young, limber girls, and fine prancing women"  
 Or for killing your da.

Holding it in my matching rough garden hands  
 It cut through 30 years and a high wall to West Berlin,  
 Where I directed *The Playboy of the Western World*,  
 The players a worried group of young Americans,  
 Scared *Playboy's* strangeness wouldn't connect.  
 But I insisted we'd tackle it uncut, like the  
 Shakespeare we studied. A glossary was added  
 To the program for words like *boreen, the spit of,*  
*Gob, tinker, the divil a one, wake, poteen, whisht!*  
 And yes, *loy*: "A farm tool for digging peat  
 From a bog, dried for fuel, called turf".

After long weeks of rehearsals and a near mutiny,  
 Nervous opening night, and the lights dimmed,  
 To Irish music, and then, lights up, and slowly  
 The lyrical, comic, coarse language wove its spell,  
 On actors as much as audience, rapt from the  
 Richness of image and emotion that captured  
 Synge's joyous, dark, raw old Ireland.  
 Again next night, the last, and after, we struck the set--  
 Bar counter, sugans, settle, dresser, turf fire, gone  
 To the traditional oblivion of the stage.

Later, at the cast party, Robin McDonald, who should  
 Have played Pegeen Mike, presented a gift from them all  
 Reading the quote, accent perfect, attached to  
 A large bottle of Irish whisky:  
 "It'd be a poor thing to have you eating your spuds dry".

Hefting the loy in the mouth of the barn, in rainy sunlight,  
 On our few "wide and windy acres of rich Munster land",  
 I wonder where they are, the students, now nearing 50.  
 Do fiddles or tin whistles, half-remembered lines  
 Ever take them back, like me, as I hold, proudly, happily  
 The loy that never worked a bog, but heard poetry.

## PR AGUE

Franz Kafka, you who wrote nur echte Deutsch,  
 Each word a stone, your eyes black,  
 Shyly but monstrosly paranoid  
 Other eyes weighing you as you crossed the Vitava  
 The stone towers of Karluv Most rising to meet you  
 Walking towards the Old Jewish Cemetery  
 100,000 bodies in the compacted island of tombstones  
 Twelve layers deep like impacted rotting teeth  
 Sinking the mass burial 10 centimeters a century  
 Dark ravens screaming in the trees above  
 "Juden!" "Golem!" "Juden!" "Golem!"  
 Till later you regained your garret  
 And wrote of a man turned insect  
 Matted with dust balls from under the bed  
 Sprawling legs silently batting the air  
 Dying from an apple festering in his back.



## LIFE'S A PIECE OF SHIT, WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT

To Robert Hanks June 8, 1935 -- April 13, 2002

Well before dawn, just up, half awake, rekindling the woodstove  
When from the radio: "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life..."  
*Awriiight*. But wait...something strange... heavy orchestration...  
Not Monty Python. It's the deballed cover by Art Garfunkel,  
With the replaced line, "Life's a counterfeit, when you look at it."  
My ass.

Hey, Art: Paul and you have left your mark---  
Solitary despair on the Greyhound bus, the fighter still remains,  
The haunting Andes pan pipes, "Sail on, Silver Girl, sail on by..."  
That I wish I had cited on our blond Sue's wedding day---  
But, Art, you shouldn't have messed with this song.  
"The Bright Side of Life" is sacred ground.

It triggers Friday-afternoon beers with Bob,  
And later, Teasie and Maureen too  
Down in my classroom, unwinding after the week's teaching  
Both in our elements, Bob biology, me literature  
Merrily swapping tales from the trenches, playing with words...  
We'd hoist bottles of cheap Stuttgarter beer,  
"Urtyp" becoming "your tip",  
Me: "Up Yours, Mate!"  
He: "Up Yours, Mate!"  
Loud CLICK.  
We: "WITH A WIRE BRUSH!"

And during those sessions sometimes  
We played Python's irreverent masterpiece, which obliterated  
Any attempt to view life as serious or meaningful  
And I laughed deeply with that brilliant teacher,  
The funniest man I have ever known.

Until it ended, Spring Break 2002, while I was in Russia.  
On a bird-song, warming, April evening  
Bob reached the end of his rope, literally,  
In the stairwell down from his classroom.  
A week later I had to deliver his eulogy  
To our still-devastated community.

Art Garfunkel, at times life is indeed a piece of shit,  
Not a *counterfeit*, especially when it suddenly erupts  
Splintering everything into before and after.  
And here in the dark on this bitter morning,  
Without that greatest line, I'm badly needing  
A laugh, and not finding it.

October 16. 2009

## BEFORE WE DISAPPEAR

*After Life*, the Japanese film we saw a few weeks ago  
Unfolded fitfully, but such a moving premise:  
After we die, but before we disappear  
We must each declare a moment from our life  
To live with eternally.

Mine would be one with Teasie O'Dwyer  
That first summer, that winter in Ireland.

Before me now is a picture of you  
In a blue coat, wrapped against the cold  
December of '68 here in Ballinard,  
Cattle grazing the green pasture behind  
The lichen-covered stone wall  
Under leafless chestnut trees,  
Your brown hair gathered with a red scarf  
Your left glove off, surely to hold my hand  
As we slowly walked that quiet road,  
Lost to everything, everyone,  
But each other.

That moment will do.



\*On August 6th, 1945, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, the American B-29 found its primary target, Kokura, covered by clouds. The bomb was detonated on the city of Nagasaki instead. Kyoto had been removed from the target list by Secretary of War Stimson because of its beauty and cultural significance. Tokyo was scheduled for destruction on August 19, but on August 15 Emperor Hirohito announced the capitulation of Japan.

Nazim Hikmet is the great Turkish poet who wrote "I come and stand at every door."

## Hiroshima Mon Amour\* *for Nazim Hikmet*

### Kokura

Oh no. Oh yes.  
Some are vaporized  
that others may rest.  
That day, the clouds  
played lesser gods,  
and a B-29,  
American Wotan.

We are still whistling Dixie  
in the cockpits of F-16s,  
while the big boys deploy  
the children machines  
into targeted *Gotterdammerung*  
like a line of thunderhead engines  
rumbling to the end of the line.

### (Kyoto speaks):

O my sisters! What can the lovely one say  
as she stands in the sun in her tresses and lace?  
Yes: In the company of rapists are cultivated men  
who would not disfigure beauty. One spared me.  
Yes: Before the smiling countenance of the sun  
I stood, as bitter fire fell down from heaven  
until I longed to throw myself over the bodies  
of my spindly sisters upon the violated earth.

And all who did not shut their doors in the face of that day –  
boys, graybeards, retired colonels and courtesans, became,  
all became, sisters: mute, unmoveable, griefstruck  
as oxygen fled from air.

Wolinsky struggles and thrives in central Maryland with his wife, two very old mothers, and a rocky hillside. He also helps care for 3 non-biological grandchildren. In between (!) he writes and listens to music exorbitantly, and shows up to help with peace and climate work. He adopted 'Almaleck' to honor his Jewish grandmother and Al-Andalus (Muslim-ruled Spain). His first book *The Crane is Flying* will be published by Dos Madres Press in 2016.



### August 19 (Tokyo speaks):

What is it to you  
if I do not come and stand at every door  
as my little sisters do?  
Who is it that cannot see their ghosts?

Sister H., honored in all heavens  
and all hells -- the eldest, the first --  
smooths her torn gray dress.  
God has truly blessed  
America.

Sister N., forever condemned  
to walk in a sister's fiery shadow,  
forever wrapped in sister-love  
and the love of all who love the dead,  
smooths the isotopes from her faded dress

and stands at your door.  
Do you not see them there,  
the two sloe-eyed girls?  
Do you not have a door?  
Do you not have eyes?

I come now to stand with them.  
We will stand here forever, and longer,  
with our sad eyes and black hearts,  
like triplet invisible sunflowers  
climbing the steps of the sun.

And you. What are you doing there  
in your backyard with its brushed-metal grill,  
its razor-wire, its fire, with your progeny  
that speed over oceans, brighter than a million suns?

### All:

We forgive where there is nothing  
We forgive where there is nothing  
to forgive. We forget nothing  
dead or alive or dead. We live,  
a sisterhood of ashes  
smearing love-characters  
on doorsteps and pale skin.



## The Auschwitz Cookbook (revised edition)

### 1. Praeludium

Ice-burn, Carolina Reaper  
spike in the spine.

You think it is this alone?  
No. But it is  
the some nerve, the sum,  
the rub, the bit, the this  
the sigma alpha omega  
*liberte-egalite-fratboy*  
of what humans may  
and ruin is.

Nor would you breathe another breath  
afterwards, except that you would –  
and joke and cook, and laugh, and quote  
the jerk to the womanizer: “wife goes on”.

Indeed. And as before?  
I do not know offhand if that’s  
gavotte or minuet on the radio just now,  
or what old J. Sebastian would have said  
about the blitzkrieg band.

Surely not *on the one hand*  
counterpoint for him. As if  
there were two sides to every story,  
every geometry, each annihilation,  
and a bottom  
to the well of temperament.

*Old Mother Albrechtsberger  
went to the brain-burglar  
to fetch poor humanity a bone.  
But when she got there  
the keyboard was bare:  
On the one hand  
Beethoven, on the other... IG Farben.*

No Bayer aspirin  
for that headache,

just another ingredient  
for an old recipe:  
*Mordant*. Just a stumble before  
full stop -- from which not father Bach,  
Yehuda HaLevi, nor Maimonides  
(*ibn Maimon, ya akhee*) can rescue me.

### 2. The MacRagamuffin

And what was it, O child of tenderness and fury,  
that you could not make peace with?

Suicidal *animus* of so-called humankind?  
Our motherfucking depredation of Earth?  
And who so obdurate to not find  
peace, in war itself?

Whatever it was: you are a fool.  
Murder is older than the hills,  
hatred righter than rain.  
And is it another’s pain  
or your own that riddles your dreams?

Oh we know. Yes we do,  
who sold our birthright for a mess,  
and high-yield income streams.

We know. As the wife who gets punched in the mouth  
knows, shivering in some twinge of truth  
before moaning *But he loves me...*  
Like her we betray, betrayed.  
Like a sacred crystal  
garnished with crystal meth,  
we know what profiteth.

The wise, goodguys and otherwise,  
still sell death. Now get in the car. Go blow  
with the flow. For the masters shall go far  
on the dreams of ragamuffin children  
breathing slow, hidden below,  
asleep in the arms of war.





## Occasional Verse on Contemporary Dilemmas

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### Attenborough's Malthusian Musings

Let population thrive  
soon none of us will be alive  
Reduce by 50 percent  
At least the rest will be content

\* on tv naturalist Sir David Attenborough's call for population control

### Off the Menu

"Full English" sounds so suspect  
Now it's even worse than what it seemed  
Black pudding is a congealed pool of blood,  
Consumed in your darkest dreams.  
Now bacon gives you cancer  
Whether it's smoky or it's not  
Those bangers consist of all that fat  
Even tomatoes aren't so good  
Fried bread serves you a heart attack  
And with scrambled egg you're dead.  
But where did you get those mushrooms?  
Think I'll stick to the muesli instead!  
You see, "Full English" was never very "PC".

## A Rose is a Rose is a Rose?

The pearly dew drops you see dripping down my petals  
- Are all my tears  
I'm the rose who was born to be a lily  
My lily-ness is clear for all to see  
True, I'm a short snubbed shrub  
Lacking elegant foliage or tendrils  
There are thorns all about my neck  
But I just feel like a lily  
Down to the sap that courses through my green veins  
I was born in the wrong floral body  
"A rose is a rose is a rose?"  
What do the poets know?  
Surely, I have a right to be a lily  
So, horticulturalists, please graft me.  
I give all my petals to you  
Transform me into a lily, do.  
What does nature know?  
A rose is a rose is a lily.  
That's an elemental truth.

## "My guardian angel was sleeping that night"

We went to see a dreadful band  
Classic or jazz are my thing  
That you must understand.  
My girlfriend's birthday treat  
So I had to relent  
Even though I was not at all content  
But now you see me in such parlous state  
Thus is fate, and "God is great?"  
A mangled wreck prostrate on the floor,  
Face half shot off, with several more  
Corpses strewn, all arms outstretched  
As if swimming in our own thick gushing blood.  
A curious tribute to the Great All-mighty.

The last name I heard spoken was God's  
Taken in vain as they inflicted their pain.  
With such delight they relished hate  
Now I'll never hear laughter again  
Life will never be the same again  
If the world won't mend its ways.  
My girlfriend survived to rock again  
Concealed beneath the agony piled high  
She's learned fast to groan discreetly.  
I guess my guardian angel was sleeping that night.  
They never even told us why we had to die  
We're reluctant sacrifices to a cause that's all lies.  
Even a savage God would avert his eyes.↑

\*inspired by a survivor of the Paris concert massacre who thanked her "guardian angel" for not being killed





## RAIN OVERNIGHT - TRAVELS IN ASIA.

**I think of you like the desert thinks of rain.**

**(journal-entry, july 2013)**

It was June. I was somewhere in a city in South East Asia which lay panting in the heat; a burning sky clapped tight overhead. The rains would not come. The usual noise of traffic and air conditioning units were interrupted by goats stumbling down narrow alleyways, their udders hanging slack and dry beneath them and all around me beggars cried for water. Dust-devils swept whistling and shrieking over baked clay and through the dry weeds on the side of the dirt-paths that branched off from the alleys. A little further on, asphalt burned my shoes, my socks, and in the end my feet. Nearby a narrow trickle of water crept along, shrunken and muddy, and women stood barefoot in it, beating their laundry against rusty pieces of metal. Occasionally one of them looked up, very aware that above a storm was brewing but the rains would not come, not yet. I returned to my momentary home, a tiny room in a run-down house and shortly after a nosy wind began to howl outside of the place and in an instant huge drops splat hard on the window pane. Lightning streaks made me count like I did when I was a child and without taking a breath, thunder halved the neighborhood with its blasts. The bluster screamed through the crevasses and nooks of my little safe haven and a huge deluge slid down like a torrent across the façade of my home. Only a few years ago not far from where I was a tsunami took everything in its path.

Everything is an event here, drizzle, even a shower are foreign to this part of the world. I looked around me and it was obvious that the devastation of that tsunami was still on people's minds, daily. The faded photographs of loved ones on walls and windows told the real story.

\*

angry water had swallowed a village  
hear the voices of the drowned  
their bones

you could  
water all through

seaweed laced their tired tongues  
could still hear the calling bells  
the women from the village wore around their necks  
water rose to snatch their song.

you  
that  
the night the

their bodies would never be found.



The packing of a suitcase or a backpack leaves me mostly satisfied and I am always grateful for the simplicity of life ahead. I am usually overwhelmed by the whole pre departure rituals as they always seemed to go hand in hand with the daily grind of working and tying up loose ends that appeared out of nowhere, as well as making last minute preparations for the various ventures I was about to undertake.

My travels through various parts of Asia have a habit of giving and taking in equal proportions. I am immediately alive in whatever place I come to and I want to share these experiences with anyone who cares to listen. Like Peter Carey I write 'out of the desire to make something beautiful that never existed before.'

I am alive and I'm always looking at the world with the open-eyed gaze of a traveler. My life in Melbourne has temporarily been packed up and I left, laced with the sad coating of departure but soon enjoying a beautiful release of stress. It was as if someone had taken out a pair of kidney stones which had bothered me in their unique painful ways for weeks. The packing of a suitcase or a backpack leaves me mostly satisfied and I am always grateful for the simplicity of life ahead. I am usually overwhelmed by the whole pre departure rituals as they always seemed to go hand in hand with the daily grind of working and tying up loose ends that appeared out of nowhere, as well as making last minute preparations for the various ventures I was about to undertake. Visas, international bank arrangements, phone cards, immunizations, flights became part of a rather ridiculous juggling act.

But it was all worth it because from the moment I walked out of an arrivals hall, a new world began to seep into my very being. I was often hit by hot, tropical smells, infused with spices, by unusual sounds of birds that I hadn't encountered before or simply the endless hum of the maddening traffic in the cities in this part of the world. The unruly trees and fleshy-leaved plants, the fragrant smoke from incense floating through the humid air, the frying cumin and the boiling cardamom: they did all make my senses soar as I breathed in the warmth of environments that affect me like no other.

There were times of detachment and the fact that I had set out to complete this book created conflict between traveler and writer which was an interesting experience to have. The task that I had set out for myself was appealing but seemed never-ending and it was entirely up to me to deal with in its magnitude and density.

It was mine alone to fathom and struggle through as the months went on and on. I wanted to finish the book. In the imagined comfort and peace of a series of inspiring surroundings, perfectly conducive to writing, I'd thought I'd find the energy to finish the book. In practical terms, that was accurate. But I soon realized that a positive frame of mind is far more important than your environment when wrenching words from your gut to a deadline, however self-imposed it might be. And eliminating everything but writing did not equip me with that state of mind; I was sometimes anxious about how much I still had to write, wanted to write to be true to the experience that had come my way.

I was working on a section about the effects of censorship on art in China when the foreboding words of an artist I had spoken to in Beijing – an artist who didn't see how censorship and art could coexist – suddenly became more poignant. The artist thought in a similar way about art as Ai Weiwei does who is notorious for creating art that borders on political activism and who was taken away by a group of policemen, without any formal charges, artistic freedom in China became a hot topic overnight



As the weeks went on, I wrote with varying success – but the book dragged on. I had already exceeded the anticipated word count by a few thousand words, but it was as if the story refused to end. There was always more that needed to be said, always a section that I had underestimated or another I had forgotten about, and the writing process went on and on, with the end nowhere in sight. I was working on a section about the effects of censorship on art in China when the foreboding words of an artist I had spoken to in Beijing – an artist who didn't see how censorship and art could coexist – suddenly became more poignant. The artist thought in a similar way about art as Ai Weiwei does who is notorious for creating art that borders on political activism and who was taken away by a group of policemen, without any formal charges, artistic freedom in China became a hot topic overnight. Ai Weiwei was only one of hundreds of outspoken Chinese citizens who were informally arrested, and I was not sure how I should respond in the book to this crackdown on dissidence and how it would affect the future of Chinese art. All this while everything was all around me: in thought, as a mental construct or, sometimes, as a vivid place that I was passing through: on a train, in a street, then in hotel rooms in new places; and in the people, the most constant reminder of where I was. But my locations could not be much more than a distraction; my focus was the book, and it had to be – if I was ever going to finish it.



At the airport in Kuala Lumpur, I enquired about nearby hotels for transit passengers, where I had planned to spend the night before catching a morning flight. There were no hotels, as such, but after writing my name, my father's name, passport number, visa number, occupation, address, religion and marital status in an enormous ledger and then again onto a form, a man directed me to my respective 'retiring room' for males on one end of a passage on the second floor of the airport, women had to retreat to the opposite end.



Often the travels were more of a whirlwind journey through several places and I had almost no time to spend on the book. There were times when I only had a few days in a city.

Sometimes I left by air, sometimes on a train or I drove myself. I left Melbourne looking for a new story. I was always excited to be leaving and equally to arrive somewhere.

Sometimes a new chapter began with half an hour of sweaty haggling over the price of a taxi to the airport, shouting prices over the noise of an elevated highway. I paid 50 percent more than a local, the price generously offered by a lone man after his pals all demanded double. At the airport in Kuala Lumpur, I enquired about nearby hotels for transit passengers, where I had planned to spend the night before catching a morning flight. There were no hotels, as such, but after writing my name, my father's name, passport number, visa number, occupation, address, religion and marital status in an enormous ledger and then again onto a form, a man directed me to my respective 'retiring room' for males on one end of a passage on the second floor of the airport, women had to retreat to the opposite end.

The room was surprisingly well-appointed. There were laundered white sheets on the rows of single beds, air conditioning units installed at intervals along the walls, a bathroom at the end of the room and shelves for my luggage at the end of each bed, on which rested complimentary towels and soap.

I explained my situation: it was very important that I send this parcel before my flight left without me. "What is inside this parcel?" he wanted to know. It was full of treasures I had bought in his lovely country, I told him, treasures that I needed to send home before boarding a flight out of the country. If I didn't, my luggage would weigh too much. He looked sympathetic, but repeated his previous answer: it was supposed to open at ten, but it might not open at all.

A Malaysian man – the only person I shared the large dormitory with – sat watching a television near the door, which we kept locked. It was characterless, but better value than any budget accommodation I'd known in a place like Uzbekistan or parts of Russia.

I started to write, fueled by coffee, in the airport's small branch of Café Coffee Day, Malaysia's version of Starbucks. Later that night I packed the collection of embroidered fabric, leather sandals and ornaments I had bought into a single carrier bag. I planned to send it back to Australia at the airport's post office to avoid exceeding Air Asia's paltry luggage allowance.

The next morning, I left my colorful shirts and shorts in my backpack and happily dressed in jeans and what felt like a rather out of place t-shirt. It was past ten o'clock when, after breakfast at Café Coffee Day, I walked over to the post office. It was still shut. I then went into the airport manager's office to ask when it would open. "After ten," I was told by the man on duty, without a trace of humor. Half an hour later, the post office doors were still closed.

"Your attention, please," said a voice on the intercom. "Flight number FD 37-83 to Bangkok is now boarding. Passengers are kindly requested to make their way to the boarding gate without delay." My flight was close to leaving. I quickly went back into the office, where three men were now sitting behind desks, chatting. "Excuse me," I began, trying to mask my concern, "Do you know what time the post office will be opening today?"

"Sit down, please" one said. I felt my lips pursing together, but I sat, trying to look patient. He called out to someone in the corner of the office, then turned back to me. "Maybe it will not open today," he said, blandly.

"Are you sure?" I said, still holding onto naïve hopes.

"Maybe after ten thirty," he said. "But maybe it will not open."

I explained my situation: it was very important that I send this parcel before my flight left without me. "What is inside this parcel?" he wanted to know. It was full of treasures I had bought in his lovely country, I told him, treasures that I needed to send home before boarding a flight out of the country. If I didn't, my luggage would weigh too much. He looked sympathetic, but repeated his previous answer: it was supposed to open at ten, but it might not open at all.

“This isn’t Cathay Pacific,” she replied, thrusting her head forward in rebuff. I stood in silence while she looked straight at me, but said nothing. Was she expecting a fight? Did she want me to get upset? I waited for her to speak – she was the airline’s employee, she needed to explain the protocol – but she remained silent. “So, what happens now?” I said eventually, unable to bear the tension. She had a calculator at the ready, on which she tapped out a few calculations and showed me a number: 1500.

There was another boarding call. I decided to check in before putting any more faith in Indian bureaucracy – and losing my ticket out of there. A woman behind one of the airline’s counters saw me approaching and, with a broad smile and an outstretched arm, asked me to proceed to the baggage scanning area. I was allowed 23 kilograms of check-in luggage each, but I knew my backpack weighed more. The unsent parcel added another five or so kilograms; I was anxious about being charged for excess luggage. I should go to the counter with the smiling woman but she was replaced by the time I approached, by a woman with her face set in a half scowl. Once she had seen me from under her eyelids, it was too late; I was already standing at the counter, passport and e-ticket in hand. I waited, but she didn’t acknowledge us. “Hello,” I offered. “Can I check in please?” She raised her head, eyes awash with boredom, and looked down again. “Ticket,” she said, leaving me to put them onto the counter. “Put your luggage here,” she said with a flick of her head, indicating the scale. I lifted my large backpack onto the machine, still wearing my daypack. The post office parcel was on the floor next to my feet. A digital number appeared on the scale’s screen. The woman suddenly perked up. “36 kilograms,” she said smugly. “That is six kilograms overweight.”

I briefly looked away and tried to assess my strategy and then turned back to her, trying to look remorseful. “Oh,” I said in a shaky voice. “When I flew here with Cathay Pacific I had the same amount of luggage.”

“This isn’t Cathay Pacific,” she replied, thrusting her head forward in rebuff. I stood in silence while she looked straight at me, but said nothing. Was she expecting a fight? Did she want me to get upset? I waited for her to speak – she was the airline’s employee, she needed to explain the protocol – but she remained silent. “So, what happens now?” I said eventually, unable to bear the tension. She had a calculator at the ready, on which she tapped out a few calculations and showed me a number: 1500. “You will have to pay 1500 rupees,” she announced, with no explanation about how she had reached the figure. 30 dollars seemed rather steep for six kilograms of luggage and she seemed to be enjoying her power to unnerve me too much.

“Is the flight full?” I asked with incredulity.

“I’m afraid I don’t have 1500 rupees,” I interrupted. She stared ahead. Again, I begged her to get it over with: “So... what happens now?” I would sooner have thrown some of my belongings away than paid this insolent woman a penny.

It had been a rather typical experience in some airports; how else could we have imagined leaving one of the most frustrating places on earth?

“Well...” she said with a smirk, “I’ll have to talk to my boss.” Still looking at me, she called out, from her seat, “Bo-oss!” A neatly dressed, unsmiling man appeared and looked at her by way of enquiry. She pointed at the scale’s screen. He gave a brief wave of his hand and turned away before I registered what had happened. It had been nothing but a show, a means through which the woman could exhibit some sense of the power she had, or wished she had.

I asked for luggage tags. “You don’t need them,” the woman spat. By now, I was angry. This woman was deliberately wasting my time.

“Well, I’d like to use luggage tags,” I said abruptly. She slapped two onto the counter. I wrote them out quickly and tried to attach them but I was not quick enough because my bag started moving along the conveyor belt. “My bag!” I called out. “Wait!” But she had already pressed the button to carry the bag away, ignoring my calls – and the tag that I was filling out on the counter, right under her nose, ignoring his calls – and the tag that he was filling out on the counter, right under her nose.

The show had made me late and I was striding to immigration, muttering complaints, when a polite young airline employee ran up to me with another luggage tag for my daypack. He was obviously embarrassed by his colleague’s behavior. The way he treated me was in stark contrast to the belligerent woman and highlighted just how unacceptable her behavior had been. She had scolded me – it was petty enough to be called that – for having a negligible amount of excess luggage. I strode back to the counter and asked the woman for her name. This wasn’t a post office or a government office – it was a privately owned airline, and an employee such as her deserved a formal complaint. I repeated it a few times until I had it correct and, satisfied, left the suddenly solemn woman.

It had been a rather typical experience in some airports; how else could we have imagined leaving one of the most frustrating places on earth?

Not the country, no, the airport!



Live Encounters celebrates 6 years 2010-2015

# Live encounters

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