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DAVID MORGAN
Is the International Criminal Court
fit for purpose?

Cover Photograph by Mark Ulyseas



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

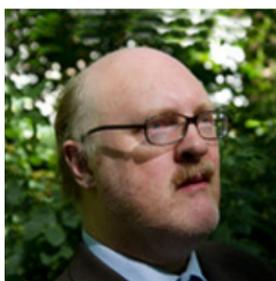
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Is the International Criminal Court fit for purpose?

David Morgan

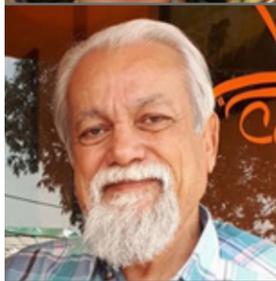
David has been a professional editor and journalist for over thirty years beginning his career on the subs desk of the *Morning Star* newspaper. He is editor of numerous historical publications under the Socialist History Society imprint. David's interests and research include Turkey and the Kurds, literary figures like George Orwell, Edward Upward and William Morris, British anarchism, the 17th century English revolutionary era and the history of psychoanalysis. He has contributed towards many different publications and writes review articles, commentaries, opinion pieces, polemics and poetry.



Women in Indian Borderlands

Professor Paula Banerjee

Professor Paula Banerjee, best known for her work on women in borderlands and women and forced migration, is the President of International Association For Studies in Forced Migration. She is a faculty member of the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta, one of the largest and oldest Universities in South Asia. She has written and edited over 15 books and monographs and has published widely in international journals such as *Journal of Borderland Studies*, *Canadian Journal of Women's Studies*, *Forced Migration Review* and *Journal of International Studies*. Acknowledged as a radical and prolific speaker she has delivered lectures in all five continents.



The Living Word

Randhir Khare

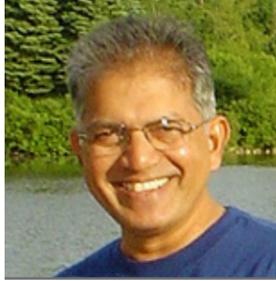
Randhir Khare is an award winning poet, artist, writer, playwright, folklorist and distinguished educationist who has published numerous volumes of poetry, short fiction, essays and novels and educational handbooks and has travelled widely, reading and presenting his work, nationally and internationally. He has presented his work at the Nehru Centre in London, at the Ubud Writers Festival in Bali, the India Festival In Bulgaria, at the Writers Union in the Czech Republic, in Bulgaria, Slovenia and at the Europalia Arts Festival in Belgium.



Excerpt from The Defeat of Gilgamesh

Dr Greta Sykes

Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café.



Religiosity and Morals

Dr Ivo Coelho

Father Ivo Coelho earned a PhD in philosophy at the Gregorian University, Rome, for his work on the hermeneutics of the philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984). After teaching philosophy in Divyadaan: Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nashik and holding various offices in his religious congregation, in Nashik, Mumbai and Jerusalem, he is currently based in Rome, where he is in charge of the sector of training and formation for the Salesian society of Don Bosco. Besides his interest in Lonergan, he has also edited collections of the essays of the Indologist Richard De Smet, SJ (1916-1997).



Hanoi - Culture Capital of Vietnam - Part III

Mark Ulyseas

Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photographer. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*. He is the author of three books: *RAINY - My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya - Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*.



Fragmentary Emotion

Carl Scharwath

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 150+ journals selecting his poetry, short stories, interviews, essays or art photography. Two poetry books 'Journey To Become Forgotten' (Kind of a Hurricane Press), and 'Abandoned' (ScarsTv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for Minute Magazine, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black-belt in Taekwondo.



The People I Met - My Beloved Asia

Mikyoung Cha

Mikyoung Cha is a graduate in Oriental Painting from Hyosung Women's University, Daegu, South Korea. She has participated in a number of group art exhibitions in South Korea and Japan. In 2016 she took up photography - the camera becoming her paint brush. This globe trotting photographer is a regular contributor to Live Encounters Magazine.



My favourite photographs - Part 1

Andrea Lamberti

Andrea Lamberti is a nature photographer and a vegan. As well as supporting his physical health, Andrea found veganism is naturally aligned to his philosophy of living simply and minimally, allowing less packaging, chemicals and processing, and avoiding the unnecessary commodification of animals. Andrea documents the geography and underwater plant and animal species of his local coastline, to explore his relationship with the natural world, and his belief that humans should inhabit the planet primarily as curators rather than as consumers.



Okra with chicken, vegetables and chickpeas...

Ozlem Warren

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



David has been a professional editor and journalist for over thirty years beginning his career on the subs desk of the *Morning Star* newspaper. He is editor of numerous historical publications under the Socialist History Society imprint. David's interests and research include Turkey and the Kurds, literary figures like George Orwell, Edward Upward and William Morris, British anarchism, the 17th century English revolutionary era and the history of psychoanalysis. He has contributed towards many different publications and writes review articles, commentaries, opinion pieces, polemics and poetry.

Donald Trump's top national security adviser has launched a bellicose attack on the International Criminal Court, describing it as "fundamentally illegitimate" and "outright dangerous" in a speech that has alarmed human rights groups.

John Bolton threatened to prosecute judges from the International Criminal Court (ICC) or ban them from entering the United States if the organisation pursues an investigation into the conduct of American soldiers in Afghanistan.

"The United States will use any means necessary to protect our citizens and those of our allies from unjust prosecution by this illegitimate court," Bolton said in a speech to the Federalist Society, a conservative legal group, in Washington D.C on Monday US time.

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/afghanistan-war-crimes-claims-victims-millions-submitted-court-isis-taliban-a8214301.html>

Afghans have submitted 1.17 million statements to the International Criminal Court in the three months since it began collecting material ago for a possible war crimes case involving their homeland.

The statements include accounts of alleged atrocities, not only by groups like the Taliban and the Isis, but also Afghan Security Forces and government-affiliated warlords, the US-led coalition, and foreign and domestic spy agencies, said Abdul Wadood Pedram of the Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organisation

- <https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/dead-to-us-trump-will-ban-arrest-international-criminal-court-judges-20180911-p502zb.html>

DAVID MORGAN

IS THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT FIT FOR PURPOSE?

The International Criminal Court forms part of the architectural of a contemporary world that has sought to learn hard lessons from its dreadful experiences of modern history marked by two world catastrophic wars, genocides, mass murder, the dropping of the atomic bomb, the use of agent orange and ethnic cleansing, to name but the worst in a catalogue of continuous barbarities.

The court stands as a counterweight, in an unfair and unequal world, to the excessive and abusive powers of authoritarian governments and faceless corporations. We live at a time of appalling atrocities and terrible war crimes in a world beset with conflicts where ethnic cleansing has become all too frequent and where women and girls are too often the most vulnerable targets of barbaric attack.

It is a world in which reckless national leaders are constantly flouting international law and where big powers armed to the teeth blunder across the planet unrestrained by every norm of decency and justice.

Nuremberg, Rwanda, Bosnia; these are some of the names that immediately spring to mind when one thinks about the international tribunals or courts that have tried to impose punishment on the perpetrators of war crimes and human rights atrocities and to provide a modicum of justice for the victims and their descendants. The very existence of such an institution possesses the potential to act as a moderating influence on those who feel they can exercise their autocratic powers with impunity. It also acts as a beacon of hope for any victims that there exists a viable means of obtaining justice in a world without mercy. In its most idealistic characterisation the ICC can be seen as an embodiment of the values of international solidarity and an arbiter of justice throughout the world shining its light on all the darkest corners of the globe where abuses of power take place far from public view.

The US Senate has rejected an effort to end support for the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and driven the country to the brink of famine. “The relationship is probably the strongest it’s ever been,” Trump said. “Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation and they’re going to give the United States some of that wealth, hopefully, in the form of jobs, in the form of the purchase of the finest military equipment anywhere in the world.” - [LINK](#)



Forty children were killed in the Saudi Arabia coalition air raid on Saada province. The missile was made in the USA. [LINK](#)

But is the ICC actually fit for purpose? Steeped in controversy since its foundation, the court has never received universal acceptance. Many of the big powers have effectively ignored it, refusing to take part or accede to its jurisdiction. It has been charged with bias, even prejudice, in its selection of cases. But it has come to public attention most recently in the light of the threats made against it by the Trump Administration after it had the temerity to investigate allegations of abuses committed by US troops in Afghanistan. These threats against it have prompted others to leap to its defence. In this heated atmosphere of polarised debate the true record and validity of the court needs to be properly analysed.

So, in attempting to draw up a non-partisan balance sheet, it is important to acknowledge the contesting views but vital to resist the temptation to take sides. The court certainly offers inadequate remedy to the enormity of the war crimes and crimes against humanity that are taking place in every continent of the world.

The vast and seemingly never ending scale of the atrocities that blight the world are more than enough to fill even the most hard-bitten cynic with despair. Just imagine residing in a country without even the semblance of an independent judiciary, where an aggrieved citizen is left bereft with no recourse to any legal mechanism to achieve a just settlement of a legitimate dispute. The law courts are part of the essential foundations of any decent, civilised society. They are absolutely necessary for the protection of the well-being of the person and of the property of a nation’s citizens.

Imagine also trying to eke out a living in a war zone as many millions of the world’s population are forced to do. Daily life is a struggle for survival where one counts oneself fortunate just to get through the day unscathed. Consider if your home was ransacked by invading armies or worse still by the armed forces of your own country. How would you expect to protect your family and community in such circumstances especially if the legal system of one’s country was corrupted or non-existent?

Consider what the lives of citizens are like when the rulers of a nation abuses their power, where they routinely circumvent the law, appoint allies and family members to the bench, buy off juries or suspend legal proceedings on a whim. There are too many places where such things happen.

Imagine a multi-ethnic state where the civilised norms suddenly break down after a political or economic crisis, as occurred with the collapse of Communism in East and Central Europe or has happened in several countries in Africa and elsewhere.

In such circumstances as these and countless other scenarios, institutions such as the ICC will naturally appear like manna from heaven. This does not mean that in its practical operations the ICC always offers an ideal remedy. But in times of extreme crisis like civil war, protracted conflict, massacres on a scale approaching genocide, recourse to the ICC may seem to offer an urgent and necessary remedy, especially when there is a complete absence of remedy within the domestic jurisdiction.

In other situations the ICC’s pursuit of a case may seem like outside interference, even meddling in one’s internal affairs by busy bodies or the illegitimate use of power. It can even be construed as a threat or an affront to national pride. A haughty nation with a proud history that believes itself to be perfect in all things, that adopts an ideology where its own institutions and methods of governance are mature and perfected to the extent that they should be emulated worldwide, is not likely at all to take kindly to being judged by an external power or to be told what to do. It cannot even conceive that it can do any wrong and will not entertain even the possibility that its citizens can be probed, tried and convicted by any international system of law. This endeavour will be deemed totally illegitimate, which explains John Bolton’s attitude to the ICC. Bolton cited US “exceptionalism”, an argument which is by no means an exceptional one because nearly all American politicians will be heard making such claims. Absurd as it seems, they do appear to sincerely believe what they say in this respect, or at least they are sufficiently powerful to be able to compel others to accept it as a *fait accompli*.

The United States has, at least since the Cold War, always seen itself as the world’s leader, once the leader simply of what it termed the “free world”, but now in the age of post-Communism, it is the entire world that its remit seeks to encompass. The US is working towards “shared victories for all”, declared Mike Pompeo, Trump’s Secretary of State, at the United Nations, conveniently forgetting the repeated punch ups that US foreign policy tends to thrive on.

Pompeo’s colleague, John Bolton, President Trump’s National Security Advisor, and another very powerful person within the present American administration, sought to explain how the country’s conception of sovereignty was the reason why the US sees itself as “exceptional”. The US, Bolton said, understands sovereignty not to be vested in a head of state but within the framework of its constitution which declares that “we the people” are sovereign in America. This is a populism legitimised by reference to the country’s constitution.

The powers of the ICC are not without their controversial aspects. Its international jurisdiction is seen to infringe national sovereignty in the name of the principles of international human rights and justice. The role of the ICC has extensive powers to bring to justice people alleged to have committed crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. It can intervene when national authorities cannot or will not take action to prosecute. It has clashed with Russia, the United Kingdom, Sudan and various other states as well as the US.



Tony Blair should be tried as a war criminal over the Iraq War, according to a third of Britons surveyed in a new poll. [LINK](#)

From this perspective any infringements on American sovereignty are infringements not on the government but on the people themselves, according to Bolton, who offered this explanation at a press conference at the UN, on 24th September. Bolton has also maintained that the legal basis for his threat to the ICC lies in the law of his country. Bolton had earlier called the court “illegitimate” and a threat to “US national security”. The US was prompted to threaten sanctions against the court in response to news that the ICC was considering whether to prosecute American service personnel over alleged abuses in Afghanistan as part of investigations into alleged war crimes carried out during the Afghan campaign. This current clash between the ICC and the US was initiated by the publication in 2016 of a report from the ICC which argued that there was a credible basis to claims that the US military and intelligence personnel had committed torture amounting to war crimes at secret detention centres in Afghanistan. These centres were operated by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Another development which prompted Bolton’s wrath was the attempts by Palestinian representatives to use the ICC to hold Israel to account for its human rights abuses in Gaza and the West Bank. This action was cited as a reason for the closure of the Palestinian diplomatic mission in Washington (which is the equivalent of an embassy). The US is not the sole country that is opposed to the work of the ICC. Established by UN treaty in 2002, the ICC has only been ratified by 123 countries so far. The big powers such as China, India and Russia have joined the US in failing to ratify or give credence to the court. They will not recognise its rulings and they see its activities as illegitimate.

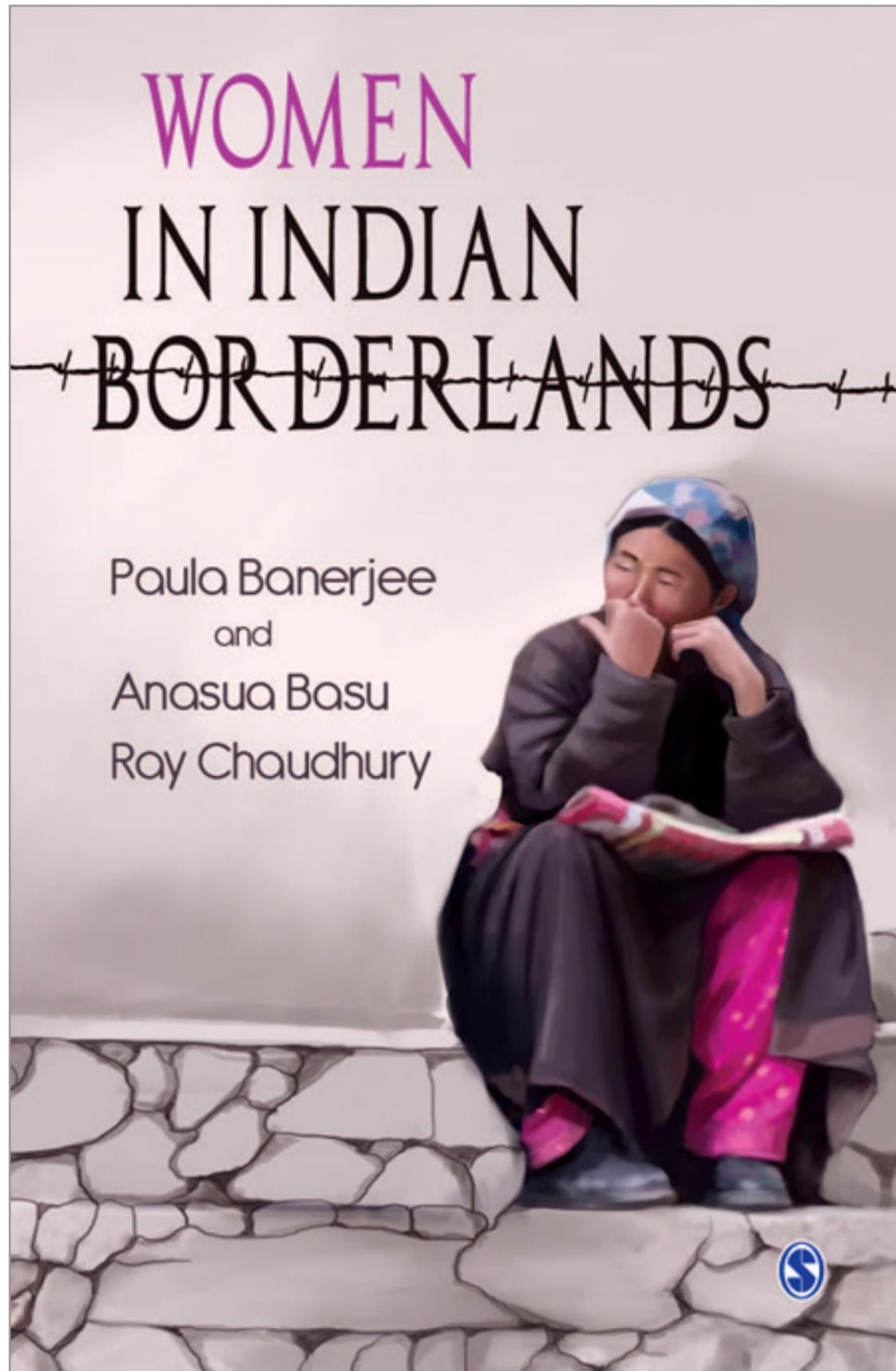
The court’s activities have not proved uncontroversial. It has largely been citizens of African states who have been dragged before the court which has angered African governments prompting some to threaten to withdraw from the ICC. In 2016, for instance, Gambia’s Information Minister Sheriff Bojang declared that the court existed only to “persecute and humiliate” people from the African continent. Philippine President Duterte also threatened to leave the court describing it as a “useless” tribunal.

Their declarations came in the wake of Russia’s announcement that it was formally withdrawing its signature from the ICC’s founding statute, following the court’s publication of a critical report classifying the Russian policy towards Crimea as an “occupation”. Crimea returned to Russia following a referendum of the population of Crimea who voted overwhelmingly to reintegrate within Russia. Western powers have insisted that the referendum was flawed and did not meet international standards. Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, has said: “Russia stood at the origins of the ICC’s founding, voted for its establishment and has always cooperated with the agency. Russia hoped that the ICC will become an important factor in consolidating the rule of law and stability in international relations. Unfortunately, to our mind, this did not happen.

In this regard, and in the light of the latest decision, the Russian federation will be forced to fundamentally review its attitude towards the ICC.”

The ICC is by no means uniformly supported as an institution. It can be argued that it was a product of the New World Order proclaimed by the Western powers following the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. This collapse was seized on as an opportunity by the West to gain the upper hand and seek to impose its will on the globe. While the immediate transition from Communism to the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and the main East European states was marked by relatively little conflict and minimal casualties, this was not the case in the former Yugoslavia. A country that was formerly a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement and once held up to be a model of a devolved system of government, broke up in bloody ethnic and religious conflict whose scale and duration prompted military intervention to manage the transition and ostensibly prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. The international tribunals that followed the Balkan conflicts were forerunners to the establishment of the ICC. The powers of the ICC are not without their controversial aspects. Its international jurisdiction is seen to infringe national sovereignty in the name of the principles of international human rights and justice. The role of the ICC has extensive powers to bring to justice people alleged to have committed crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. It can intervene when national authorities cannot or will not take action to prosecute. It has clashed with Russia, the United Kingdom, Sudan and various other states as well as the US.

The Trump Administration’s opposition to the ICC is not a new departure for America. The US has opposed the ICC from the time that George W Bush was in the White House even though Bush’s predecessor, Bill Clinton, had agreed to formally sign the treaty in 2000 that set up the ICC. When Barack Obama became president he did not change US policy towards the ICC and never ratified the treaty, which is known as the Rome Statute. The US has expressed support for “international accountability” without ever accepting that the court’s remit should extend to US citizens. The US is content to see the ICC prosecuting foreign heads of state and governments that it regards as rivals or enemies but it has problems with the notion of universal human rights when they are extended to the US itself. It would prefer to set itself up as judge and jury of the world in these matters. Nobody should therefore be surprised that the White House views the threatened actions of the ICC against US servicemen in Afghanistan as “unjust prosecution”. Likewise, several African nations have accused the ICC of bias in singling out Africa for prosecution. The ICC is certainly a far from perfect mechanism for prosecuting human rights offenders, but it is probably doing something right to provoke the wrath of belligerent hawks such as John Bolton and various dictators from the Philippines to Rwanda.



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Professor Paula Banerjee, best known for her work on women in borderlands and women and forced migration, is the President of International Association For Studies in Forced Migration. She is a faculty member of the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta, one of the largest and oldest Universities in South Asia. She has written and edited over 15 books and monographs and has published widely in international journals such as *Journal of Borderland Studies*, *Canadian Journal of Women's Studies*, *Forced Migration Review* and *Journal of International Studies*. Acknowledged as a radical and prolific speaker she has delivered lectures in all five continents. *(This interview was first published in Live Encounters Magazine Feb 2013.)*

PAULA BANERJEE

co-author of *Women in Indian Borderlands*
in an exclusive interview with Mark Ulyseas

Why did you choose this subject?

I have been working on the theme of borders for some time now. A few years back I published another book entitled *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond*. This book became instrumental in popularizing border studies among my students. They found out that in recent years a few studies have appeared on the borderlands but hardly any on the myriad roles that women play here. On verifying this we from Calcutta Research Group decided to undertake a project on this issue. We approached ICSSR and they approved of a project that led to a series of papers on women in Indian borderlands that was ultimately published in this volume.

What do you hope to achieve with the publication of this book?

In the case of India, military security dominates over human security in the border region. The book concerns itself with women living in these borderlands and discusses how they negotiate their differences with a state, albeit democratic, which denies space to difference based on either ethnicity or gender. Women living in the borders are the subject of the series of research papers presented in this volume not merely because they belong to these perilous territories or the borders but also form them. Further, as transmitters of cultural value women construct differences that shape the future of the nation and the border. But in fact most of our traditional efforts to make geopolitical regions more secure are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that result in only feminine insecurities. In addressing questions of security the insecurities of women always remain behind. In publishing this volume we wanted to foreground feminine insecurities in the border that ultimately leads to human insecurity. By foregrounding this we wanted our readers to think of how to envisage a more peaceful world.

They are the lines of hatred, disunity, informal connections and voluminous informal trade, securitized and militarized lines, heavy para-military presence, communal discord, humanitarian crisis, human rights abuses, and enormous suspicion, yet informal cooperation. Borders become the site where this contest over inclusion and exclusion is played out.

Kindly share with us a detailed overview of your book?

There is hardly any literature on women's role in the borderland in India and this series of articles are meant to address that lacunae. The present state system in South Asia, in particular the state system of the sub-continent, is a result largely of the partitions in the eastern and western parts of the erstwhile united India, giving birth to three states – India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The borders dividing these countries are markers of past bitter history, current separate, distinct, and independent existence, and the sign of the territorial integrity of these states. The bitterness of the past, the lack of mutual confidence at present, the security concerns of all these states, at the same time the existence of thousand and one linkages make the South Asian borders unique. They are the lines of hatred, disunity, informal connections and voluminous informal trade, securitized and militarized lines, heavy para-military presence, communal discord, humanitarian crisis, human rights abuses, and enormous suspicion, yet informal cooperation.

Borders become the site where this contest over inclusion and exclusion is played out. They demarcate the inside from the outside, sovereignty from anarchy and the singular from pluralistic space. They construct what Nira Yuval-Davis has termed “the space of agency, the mode of participation in which we act as citizens in the multilayered polities to which we belong.” Hence borders are not merely lines. They are zones that situate the gray areas where the jurisdiction of one state ends and the other begins. They are the common ground of two or more states that share them and also interpret its meanings in very different ways to its citizens in their national narratives, history writing and collective spatialized memories.

In the case of India security concerns overwhelm all other equally legitimate concerns and values. Military security dominates over human security in the border region. These borders, or more precisely borderlands, are also peopled by groups that have linkages to both sides of the borders. Yet in their efforts to emphasize the national identity, state sovereignty demands a severance of those linkages that “encourages difference” leading to a conscious exclusion of the recalcitrant from the inner circles of privilege. As a result of this, States often forget that borders are not only lines to be guarded, they are also lines of humanitarian management, because borders are not lines but borderlands – that is to say these are areas where people live, pursue economic activities, and lead civilian lives attuned to the realities of the borders. Human security in the borderlands would mean first security of the civilian population along the borderlines which hardly ever happens in this sub-continent.

States often forget that borders are not only lines to be guarded, they are also lines of humanitarian management, because borders are not lines but borderlands – that is to say these are areas where people live, pursue economic activities, and lead civilian lives attuned to the realities of the borders. Human security in the borderlands would mean first security of the civilian population along the borderlines which hardly ever happens in this sub-continent.

This project concerns itself with women living in these borderlands that Edward Said calls “the perilous territory of not-belonging,” and discusses how they negotiate their differences with a state, albeit democratic, which denies space to difference based on either ethnicity or gender. Women living in the borders are the subject of this series of articles not merely because they belong to these perilous territories or the borders but also form them. Nira Yuval-Davis once stated that women have a dualistic relationship with the state:

On the one hand women are always included, at least to some extent, in the general body of citizens of the state and its social, political and legal policies; on the other – there is always, at least to a certain extent, a separate body of legislation which relates to them specifically as women. (Yuval-Davis in *Gender and Nation*, p. 27)

In the case of the borderlands of India such dualistic nature of women's engagements with the national and ethnic collectivities leads to further discrimination against them. This becomes problematic because social attitudes over time get transformed into legal provisions. Therefore, women have to live not only under draconian national laws, by virtue of their location, but also suffer other discriminatory traditions and practices by virtue of their gender. How do they negotiate such multiple borders given borders propensity to violence is the question that we ask?

The universalistic nature of citizenship that emanates from traditional liberal and social democratic discourses is extremely deceptive as it conceals the exclusion of women from national identities of citizenship. Thus the ideological constructions of the state are weighted against women who remain in the borders of democracy. Yet in moments of conflict at times they assume centrality. This is because in areas of civil conflict men withdraw from civic life for compulsions of war and self-defense. In such a situation the public sphere retreats into the private and women form the civil societies. They assume roles that are completely new to them and confront and negotiate with the massive power of the state machinery in their everyday lives. Further, as transmitters of cultural value women construct differences that shape the future of the nation and the border. But in fact most of our traditional efforts to make geopolitical regions more secure are nothing but attempts to privilege a masculine definition of security that result in only feminine insecurities. Yet in addressing questions of security the insecurities of women always remain in the back of beyond. In this series of articles we deal with insecurities of women posited on the borderlands and analyse how they deal with them. A further question that we pose is how globalization impacts on all of this. This collection of articles include two on the Bengal/Bangladesh border, two on Kashmir/Pakistan border and two others on Northeast/Myanmar border.

Rape and sexual abuse is nothing new in the history of warfare. Marauding armies have through different periods of history, around the globe, taken advantage of women in the course of military conquests. What is new is the role of media. Instant reporting from the field has resulted in rapid sensitisation of public opinion, greatly reducing the time lapse between the perpetration of such tragedies and their responses to them.

The first paper by Paula Banerjee's is entitled *Bengal Borderland Revisited: Chronicles from Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda*. Banerjee in this paper addressed a vexed issue that she has not previously dealt with. She looked at the notion of flows and how that impacted on notions of security. With every election and every census borders become an issue. The concern remains over undocumented migrants and whether their arrival threatens the nation form? She also addressed notions of increasing violence in the borders, fencing as a marker of such violence, women and the evolution of their relationship to the border etc. She returned to an intensive study of the Bengal-Bangladesh borderlands in the three districts of Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda. Instead of meta-narratives she came back to the question of micro politics and questioned whether present day flows have any relation to past histories or not. Her argument is that borders have historically evolved as gendered entity and thereby these have become spaces of extraordinary control and violence.

In the next paper, entitled *Narrated Time: Constructed Space - Remembering the Communal Violence of 1950 in Hooghly*, Anasua Basu Ray Choudhury argued that borders are not just lines in the landscape they actively shape the societies and cultures that they enclose. Borders denote a spatial dimension of social relationships that are continually being configured and, in this process, the meaning of borders is produced, reconstructed, strengthened or weakened.

The notion of borders in today's world is a testimony to the importance of territoriality with the creation of the 'other'. The imagery of borders has become a popular metaphor in the study of socio-spatial development in post-Partition societies. In this study, Basu Ray Choudhury unraveled the stories of three Muslim women of Hooghly, an otherwise calm and quiet place during the turbulent years of partition. Anusua's study captured the lives and experiences of the people who lived through the 'partitioned time', of the way in which the events accompanying the partition were constructed in their minds, and the identities or uncertainties that partition created or re-enforced.

The main purpose of the study was to enquire on how women negotiated borders – borders of sect, community, patriarchy, and of conflicts not only in their own land but also in an alien land away from their homeland.

In the next section there are two narratives from Kashmir. The two papers are entitled *Women's Voices on Borders* by Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal and *Borderlands and Borderlines: Renegotiating Boundaries through a Gender Lens in Jammu and Kashmir* by Sumona Das Gupta. Anuradha in her paper highlighted women as the major victims of warfare.

The brunt was borne not simply by women living on the borders; the prolonged trauma is also shared by women living away from the borders but affected in many ways by the sudden carving of new boundaries, dislocation and its multiple consequences.

One of the most obvious examples of specific victimhood of women in armed conflict, she argued, is their vulnerability to sexual assault and rape. Rape and sexual abuse is nothing new in the history of warfare. Marauding armies have through different periods of history, around the globe, taken advantage of women in the course of military conquests.

What is new is the role of media. Instant reporting from the field has resulted in rapid sensitisation of public opinion, greatly reducing the time lapse between the perpetration of such tragedies and their responses to them. However, in the case of borders, lack of access and no reportage make the consequent sensitisation elusive. She argued that, the victimisation started when the borders were carved out in 1947-48, when people living in fairly peaceful areas suddenly found themselves on the fringes of nowhere, close to places that had become simply lines drawn on a map for everybody else in South Asia.

The brunt was borne not simply by women living on the borders; the prolonged trauma is also shared by women living away from the borders but affected in many ways by the sudden carving of new boundaries, dislocation and its multiple consequences.

For majority population of India and Pakistan, the traumatic memories of partition have become historical narratives but in J&K because of the disputed nature of its borders, these memories are a festering sore, which continues to bleed and makes people to suffer in the form of displacements, dispossession on account of border skirmishes between the hostile neighbours. She claimed that, weird border contours on the maps of J&K have intensified the militarisation of borders on both sides thus adding to the insecurity among the border population in general and women in particular. A continuum of tragedy and victimisation has followed till date due to constant hostility and wars that have adversely affected the border people in many ways.

At the very outset Sumona Dasgupta identified the term borders not just as physical boundaries represented by de facto and de jure cartographic lines that separate the sovereign writ of one state from another, but also as other faultlines generated or accentuated by a conflict. Acknowledging borders as lines that separate and delimit spaces, in her paper she went beyond 'cartographic anxieties' and physical landscapes to 'non cartographic anxieties' -borders that are etched on mindscapes – lines that separate 'us' from 'them.' In doing so she recognized that there can be an overlap between these two sets of anxieties and that where they intersect faultlines come into even sharper relief. In her research she portrayed how these border-lines are mediated by gender.

The everyday life stories of these women reflect not only their identity as women but how these realities are shaped by their location near a porous international border-town where the border not only divides the lives of “women” but plays a crucial role in joining them in their labouring lives as women continue to cross borders takes on multiple roles as traders/ sex workers/ household workers etc.

Gender is used not just as a descriptive category but as an analytical tool that is as much about men and masculinity as it is about women and femininity. A gender perspective consequently explores how men and women’s roles are constructed in society and gender sensitive conflict analysis will look at ways in which gender roles, gender identities, gender ideologies and gendered power structures may be altered in the course of a protracted conflict.

The next section is composed of two articles from the Northeast India-Myanmar border. Chitra Ahanthem’s paper entitled *Sanitized Society and Dangerous Interlopers: Women of a Border Town: Moreh* focused exclusively on the plight of women, in the border town of Moreh.

In her study through the narratives of women living in the border town of Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border she intended to examine the contradiction, paradox, difference and conflict of power and domination in contemporary global capitalism and the nation state, especially as manifested in local level practices. The everyday life stories of these women reflect not only their identity as women but how these realities are shaped by their location near a porous international border-town where the border not only divides the lives of “women” but plays a crucial role in joining them in their labouring lives as women continue to cross borders takes on multiple roles as traders/ sex workers/ household workers etc. Women not only negotiate with the “borders” through crossing as a “labouring subject” but also negotiate at a socio-cultural level on a day to day basis through shifting identities produced by “borders”. This study examined the relationship between women who stay in Moreh during daytime, crossing over from the Myanmar border as traders/sex workers and women of Moreh. The lives of women in Moreh indicate the multiple realities faced by women living at a border area with a history of protracted conflict.

Sahana Basavapatna in her paper entitled *Sanitized Society and Dangerous Interlopers: Burmese Migration into Mizoram through the Legal Lens* analysed from a legal perspective the experiences of Burmese women who in migrating across international borders problematised democracy, identity and citizenship. She explored the theme from two perspectives— first how the legal frame and secondly how cultural, political ties of Mizoram itself affect the Burmese migrants in India. A host of factors led to the migration of the people from the Chin state to Mizoram.

The Indo- Burma border thus becomes extremely significant for continuing migration and cross border terrorism. Sahana focussed on the experiences of women crossing these borders and the response of both the state and the Central governments. It is through the legal frame that she sought to analyse how women who have been forced to migrate negotiate the complex social, political and

The Indo- Burma border thus becomes extremely significant for continuing migration and cross border terrorism. Sahana focussed on the experiences of women crossing these borders and the response of both the state and the Central governments. It is through the legal frame that she sought to analyse how women who have been forced to migrate negotiate the complex social, political and economic web of relationships of being branded as a foreigner and in many cases illegal. The law being rooted in the patriarchal mindset is inadequate in perceiving and responding to women’s needs.

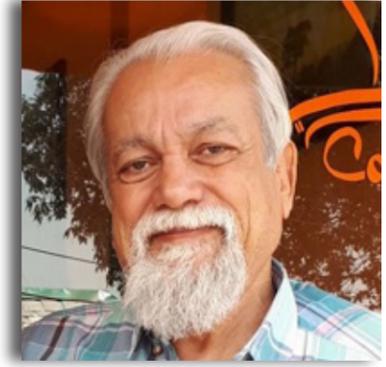
economic web of relationships of being branded as a foreigner and in many cases illegal. The law being rooted in the patriarchal mindset is inadequate in perceiving and responding to women’s needs.

This series of articles is exceptional in many ways. It deals with an issue that is seldom dealt with in Indian social science. There is currently only one book on the gendered dimension of borderlands in South Asia. Therefore this in many ways is an exceptional topic. Yet borderlands are an extremely vexed issue in this day of securitization and cross border flows of all kinds. And the role that women plays in this flows is extremely pertinent. Apart from that this series of articles also confirms that violence is a constitutive element of borderlands when analyzed from a gender perspective. All of these articles deal with violence in their own respective ways. Apart from that these articles go beyond the trope of “coping” and “agents”.

It makes the theoretical claim that all coping mechanisms are agentive. So in terms of feminist theory this series of articles mark a departure. It also deals with a number of contentious issues such as aids in the borderland, migrant trade, migrant labour, affects of globalization on borders. Above all it celebrates what it means to be a woman in the border and a survivor, notwithstanding whether the state recognizes her as an agent or merely coping for survival.



Kittung the Creator (acrylic on canvas) © Randhir Khare.



Randhir Khare is an award winning poet, artist, writer, playwright, folklorist and distinguished educationist who has published numerous volumes of poetry, short fiction, essays and novels and educational handbooks. He has presented his work at the Nehru Centre in London, at the Ubud Writers Festival in Bali, the India Festival In Bulgaria, at the Writers Union in the Czech Republic, in Bulgaria, Slovenia and at the Europalia Arts Festival in Belgium. In India, he has performed his poetry with various traditional and contemporary musicians and founded (and leads) MYSTIC, India's first poetry-music band. Randhir is the recipient of The Sanskriti Award for Creative Writing, The Gold Medal for Poetry awarded by the Union of Bulgarian Writers, The Human Rights Award, The Residency Grant 2009 for his lifetime contribution to literature in English awarded by The Sahitya Akademi and The Palash Award (for his lifetime contribution to education and culture) among others.

Randhir Khare

THE LIVING WORD

In tribal India, stories have always occupied a special space in the life of the individual, the family and the community because they hold within them the collective wisdom and lore of past generations, kept alive by the word and passed on through the oral tradition.

Because of this, they carry the richness of individual and collective awareness, understanding and perception of the world around and the reverence for all living beings. Probably as important as this, is that they seek to explain the environment around, natural and supernatural phenomena and the whole gamut of human existence including the origins of communities, customs and attitudes. In this way, a single story is multi-layered and swollen with cultural symbols.

I discovered that the stories that I collected during my travels were rich with cultural symbols that had been carried along by a language which was emotive, vibrant and throbbing with reality. They were soaked in centuries of reverence for life and reflected the awareness that the environment within which the community survived wasn't merely earth, rivers, trees, animals, birds, plants, insects...waiting to be pillaged. It was the cradle of its culture and the regenerative force that kept its identity alive.

According to the Konds of Kalahandi, there was a deluge which destroyed every living being except two children who were fortunate to have been washed up on a hill. They remained there for ages, struggling to keep alive. And then the salap tree gave them its juice and saved them from starvation. When the waters settled down and dry land appeared everywhere, the children grew up and multiplied, creating the Kond community of Kalahandi. Because it had nurtured the first Konds, the salap tree is still considered sacred.

Early Toda lands (acrylic on canvas) © Randhir Khare.



The Gonds of Koraput believe that in the beginning there was a divine cow. Man and woman were created from her feet, and that is why they are called Gond. The Ankiya Konds of Ganjam say that they are descendants of a Kond man and woman. These two beings were made from various trees, vegetables and fruits such as the bael, saral wood, karela, mushrooms, oranges, lemons, brinjals, onions and wild mangoes which were sour and green. The Saoras describe their first couple as having popped out of a gourd. Some of them are of the view that it wasn't a gourd but a tobacco plant. The Saoras god Kittung created all other living beings from parts of his own body. A lover of nature, Kittung blessed every form of life that he had created, especially the sago palm, the date palm and the palmyra palm.

From the Hill Saoras of Koraput, there is a story which celebrates Kittung's compassion. One day, the story goes, Kittung was out in the forest, taking stock of his creations when he came across a dove who complained, "Lord Rama has killed most of my family."

Kittung was furious. He confronted Rama who refused to mend his ways. "I have created this forest out of love," cried Kittung, "how can you lay your trap here?"

"I am Lord Rama," the other replied.

"So what?" asked Kittung and destroyed the trap. He turned the birds into fruits, the cords into a vine, the bladder into leaves and the trap into a siari vine. "Instead of birds," said Kittung, "roast the seeds of the vine and eat them, use the leaves for your sacrifice and the vines for your ropes."

"And if I don't?" asked Rama.

"I shall turn you into the scum of the earth," replied Kittung.

Interestingly, this story also reflects, in a subliminal way, the struggle of hunter-gatherer communities against settled ones – as well as the confrontations between traditional faiths and beliefs and emerging new ones (a confrontation that exists even today in the tribal lands of the Indian sub-continent. There are of course, numerous stories that describe the mythic creation of tribal lands. The Bhils and their relatives the Bhilalas of the Jhabua and Alirajpur region of Madhya Pradesh in Central India have a lucid explanation of why their lands are drought prone. According to them, in the beginning, there was only water. Jugnu Mata stood on the surface of the water and wondered to herself, "Will anything good ever come of this water? Will there ever be something like firm land?"

But she received no answer. So she set out on a great search everywhere. All that she ever saw was water and more water. She flew up into the air, high up, high up – beyond the clouds and searched there too, hoping to find land floating in the air. But there was no land. Nothing as far as the eye could see. Only water and more water. She divided herself into four parts and sent each part out in search of land. One went east, the other west, and north and south. For hundreds of years they searched but could not find land. They then decided to look for God. After a very long search they finally found Him. He was on holiday in his mahal in the sky. The four Jugnu Matas went into the mahal and found him sleeping on his bed in a secret chamber.

He had been drinking mahua, the traditional liquor, and didn't want anyone to catch him. So the four Jugnu Matas stood around his bed and started shaking his body, "Get up you drunkard," they shouted. But he didn't wake up. So one Jugnu Mata caught one hand and the other caught the other hand and the third caught one leg and the fourth caught the other leg. They pushed him and pulled him and bounced him on his bed and then they jiggled him around. They put him down and tickled him too. But God didn't get up. He was drunk. Asleep. And on holiday.

One Jugnu Mata changed herself into an egg and they placed the egg near God, on the bed. The egg grew until it cracked open and a baby was born. Now this baby lay next to God who was drunk and asleep, and started crying.

This forced God to awaken. He was surprised when he saw the baby crying near him so he stuck his finger into the baby's mouth. Milk came out of his finger and the baby started drinking greedily. As she drank milk from God's finger, her body became bigger and bigger. God became weaker and weaker. This confused him. He didn't know what was happening. So off he went to a palmist and astrologer who sat floating on a lily leaf. "Please tell me what is happening. There's a baby in my bed and she's growing bigger and bigger and because she drank milk from my finger, I have grown very weak. Tell me, who is this baby?"

The palmist and astrologer told God that the Jugnu Matas had created the baby because they wanted to wake him up from his slumber and find out from him if he could find land for them. "And will I find land?" asked God.

"No" said the palmist and astrologer.



The Sacred Tortoise pic © Randhir Khare

So God made himself invisible and hid from the Jugnu Matas. They searched for him everywhere. Finally, one Mata created four bumblebees from the dirt between her breasts. And the four bumblebees helped the Matas to find God, even though he was invisible. The moment they found God they gave him a good thrashing. He pleaded to be spared and asked them instead to go to the palmist and astrologer. So they went to the palmist and astrologer who sent them instead to Kanikarchoob the crab. But the crab couldn't help. She was far too busy sharpening her pincers. She sent them instead to Kalikarchab the tortoise.

When Kalikarchab heard their request he went down into the depths of the waters and after five hundreds years came up with an egg. "Take care of this egg," he said "let it be touched by the sun and the wind and the rain and one day it will hatch."

And so they followed his instructions and looked after the newly hatched land so well that it grew and grew and never stopped growing ... that's why today the region has so much land and so little water.

Other clans of Bhil even have stories about how they were created. According to one clan, a fish brought news one day of an approaching deluge. No one believed his story. Up and down the river course he went, warning other creatures, but no one would take any notice of him. Finally, he met a proud cock staring at his own reflection in the river. "The world is going to end, the world is going to end," said the fish. So carried away was the cock with his own image that he was sure it was his reflection talking to him.

He rushed off and informed his master who was a washerman. The young man quickly made a large box and put his sister and the cock inside it, along with a supply of food. Then he climbed into the box himself and sealed it when the rain started.

For many days it rained and the seas and the rivers overflowed their banks and all living things on the face of the earth were drowned. Only the box remained, floating in the flood. Once the rains stopped and the water returned to the rivers and the seas, the cock began to crow. Just at that moment, the messengers of God were flying overhead. They heard the cock crowing and located the box. When they opened it in God's presence, the three creatures came out. "I thought I had destroyed every living creature on the face of the earth. How did you survive?" asked God.

The frightened washerman narrated his story.

And Jugnu Mata saw the Water World
(acrylic on canvas) © Randhir Khare.



God turned to his messengers. "I had planned to let the earth rest a while before I created new creatures to live in it. Now what am I going to do with these three? Should I sacrifice them?"

"You have sacrificed all creatures that once lived on the face of the earth. You can't perform another sacrifice so soon," they replied.

"But if they are brother and sister, how can they multiply? Besides the cock cannot be mated with the girl," said God.

"But Lord," said the first messenger, "this is a New World. The Old World has passed away. In this New World past relations do not matter any more. They are now only man and woman. Surely they can be mated."

God listened carefully and then agreed. He made the washerman stand facing east, then west, then north and then asked him to swear that the woman with him was in fact his sister. The washerman did as he was told and swore that the woman with him was his sister. God then asked him to face southwards and close his eyes. The washerman did that. Then he made his sister stand naked in front of him. "Stretch out your hands before you," God said, "and tell me what is it that is before you, a man or a woman?"

The washerman did as he was told and then answered, "My sister."

God repeated his question, "Is it a man or a woman?" The washerman replied, "A woman."

God asked, "Is it a beautiful or an ugly woman?" The washerman replied, "How will I know Lord, I cannot see."

"See with your hands," said God.

So the washerman saw with his hands and indeed what he saw was beautiful.

God asked, "Is it a beautiful or an ugly woman?"

"Lord, she is beautiful," he said.

"Then take this woman as your wife," the Creator said. When the washerman opened his eyes, he had forgotten that it was his sister who was standing before him. All he saw was a beautiful woman. As time moved on, they had seven sons and seven daughters. These children grew up and inter-married. God blessed the first son and gave him a horse. But the young man didn't know what to do with it. So he set it free and went away to live in the forest. He was the first Bhil.

Stories of creation of either land, human beings or customs and beliefs abound in all communities. Consider the pastoral Todas of the Nilgiris for example. They believe that in the beginning, there was only the sky and the earth. Haen, the first Toda flew across the open blue in search of an ideal place for The Land of Belonging. After centuries of travelling, he finally found himself hovering over the beautiful blue mountains of the Nilgiris. Circling the verdant region, he saw endless cool grasslands, fruit trees, flowering shrubs, streams, rivers, waterfalls, wild animals, birds, insects and all manner of living beings, except of course humans. It was then that he realized that in fact this was the Land of Toda Belonging that had been created specially for the community and had been waiting through the centuries to be finally inhabited. And so, Haen descended and stood with his feet firmly on the soil of the Nilgiris. When he did this, an amazing power coursed through him like a brilliant white light. When surge of energy subsided, he saw before him – his wife. Now the two of them created the first Todas on earth and they multiplied like the stars in the heavens – hundreds of them, thousands. When the land was sufficiently populated, he divided it into the land of the Living and the land of the Dead (which he called Amunore). Once this was done, Haen decided that his task in the world of the living was over and he retreated to Amunore, becoming the Lord of the Other World. He left the world of the Living in the charge of his beloved daughter Porshaey.

Porshaey was an enlightened young woman who was endowed with the power to create the religious, social, cultural and economic identity of the Todas. She divided her people into fifteen clans and gave each a specific geographical location to settle and live in. Then she created a separate divine female force to be worshipped by each clan in their mund (or settlement), along with prayers and family, religious and social rites and customs, attire and eating habits. When this was done she chose a sacred space where she sat and prayed.

One day, after she had concluded her prayers, she drew a magic circle on the earth. The moment she did this, the earth opened up and she leaned in and began to draw out one sacred buffalo after another. Then the Creator stroked the bird's back and it became gold. This is why, till today, the woodpecker has a golden back and a crimson crown. Another story tells about how the Black Winged Kite got the markings on its wings.

Sacred Lands (acrylic on canvas) © Randhir Khare.



There was a time, a long long time ago when the world was white with ice and snow. It was bitterly cold and creatures everywhere had to live in holes in the ground. Because of this, they lived in darkness. The sun did little to help because he too was frozen stiff. The people were amazed and watched in awe as fifteen animals emerged from the earth. The sixteenth to appear had deformed horns so they began laughing. The process of creation stopped. One sacred buffalo was assigned to each temple of the fifteen clans and the sixteenth animal did not have sacred powers but it gave birth to innumerable others who formed the vast herds of the Todas, supplying them milk – the very basis of their economy.

Porshaey marked out the sacred and ordinary migration routes for buffalo herding and ensured that the seasons provided the right support for special varieties of grass to grow that would provide feed stock for the animals. Since she ruled the Land of the Living and had placed female sacred powers in each clan temple, the Toda woman became the embodiment of the community. This is why even till today Toda women do not worship at the temples. In fact they maintain a distance from the temple's precincts. The men are assigned the task of worship at the temple.

Muthanad mund is the place where Haen first arrived on earth and created the first Todas. It is also the place where Porshaey created religious, social, community and economic customs. Located near Ooty, a popular hill resort, the mund is tucked away among the woods. The sacred spot is marked by a Toda 'cathedral'. Not far from this spot is a circle of stones in an open field which marks the place where Porshaey created buffalos. And so the Todas continue to regard the Nilgiris as hallowed ground and their people, animals and customs as sacred.

The tribal world, if one can use such a term, also endows birds and animals with powers. These powers are manifested in the stories that describe their origins. According to traditional communities of South Gujarat birds are more than just birds. They are carriers of folk tales and ancient lore. The Golden Backed Woodpecker for example. As a traditional tale goes, long ago, this was a very ordinary looking bird.

One day it came across a tree-trunk that promised to be full of juicy insects and grubs. So without much ado, it set to work tapping rat-a-tat-tat on the trunk. It was so full of delicious little creatures to eat that the bird went higher and higher. Suddenly it realised that it had climbed the roots of a divine tree that was growing in paradise above. At that very moment, God was tending to his garden. The bird popped out of the earth before his eyes and gave him such a start that his gardening tool slipped and fell, cutting off his toe. The woodpecker used a blade of grass and with his beak stitched the toe back on.

Then he bowed down and wiped away the blood with his head. "I forgive your act of carelessness," said God, "because you used your presence of mind and that beak I gave you, thank you."

One day all the creatures got together and had a meeting to try and work out what was to be done. There were many wise ideas and suggestions but they were of no help at all. Then a flock of swallows said that there was a shell of ice that covered the entire world like the shell of an egg. This stopped the world from warming up. This shell had to be broken. A scouting party consisting of other birds accompanied the swallows one day to see if it was true. Sure enough, there it was – the thick shell of ice. So now, the creatures met again to decide how to crack this shell of ice. Many birds offered to help but were unable to fulfil their promise. Finally, the birds requested the tallest teak tree in the forest to help.

"If you give me enough food and water I'll be able to grow fast," said the teak tree. And so that's what they did and the tree grew so fast and tall that it went right up into the heavens and cracked open the shell of ice.

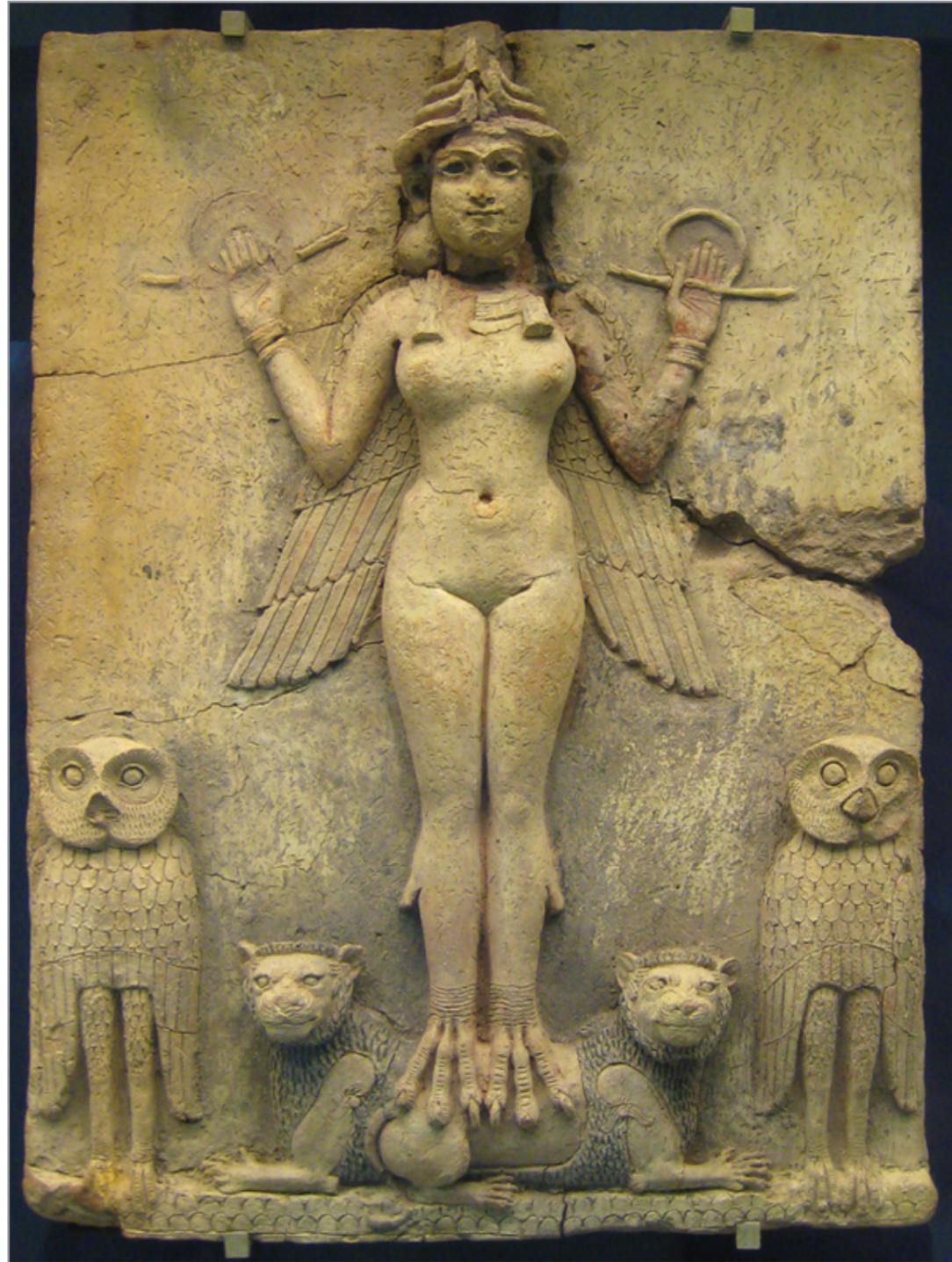
The shell cracked of course but not enough to let enough light and heat in. So a flock of white kites offered to make their way through and represent the case to the Creator. When they flew out into the beyond, they discovered the world outside was a blazing furnace. Flying through the furnace they reached the home of the Creator.

"But I created the ice shell to protect you from the heat," said the Creator.

"We'd prefer the heat," they said.

So the Creator melted the ice shell and the world was filled with light and heat. Of course, it is not hot all the time because the earth floats away from the furnace when it gets too difficult to stand the heat. And that's the way we have both heat and cold and even rain. Even today teak trees grow straight and tall as if they are trying to touch the sky. And the snowy white kites? Well, they burnt their wings black when flying through the furnace. Even today, all kites of this family have black markings on their wings to remind them of the great feat of courage that their ancestors performed.

Let me close the living book of tribal tales for the moment, and allow you to reflect on the amazing inner life that each story carries. And while you reflect, listen to the song-poems of tribal composers and singers...and to the words of the elders...



Inanna is an ancient Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, beauty, sex, desire, fertility, war, justice, and political power. She was originally worshipped in Sumer and was later worshipped by the Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians under the name Ishtar. (c. 19th or 18th century BC). [LINK](#)

Poet, writer and artist Greta Sykes has published her work in many anthologies. She is a member of London Voices Poetry Group and also produces art work for them. Her new volume of poetry called 'The Shipping News and Other Poems' came out in August 2016. The German translation of her book 'Under charred skies' has now been published in Germany under the title 'Unter verbranntem Himmel' by Eulenspiegel Verlag. She is the chair of the Socialist History Society and has organised joint poetry events for them at the Poetry Café. She is a trained child psychologist and has taught at the Institute of Education, London University, where she is now an associate researcher. Her Particular focus is now on women's emancipation and antiquity. *Twitter: g4gaia. Facebook.com/greta.sykes. German Wikipedia: Greta Sykes.*



A taster from Dr Greta Sykes new historical novel
The Defeat of Gilgamesh
a reinterpretation of the famous legend/myth
from a woman's point of view.

THE FIGHT WITH THE LION

Miah, my love, I have written these notes for you in case we shall never reach home again. Our journey was becoming so full of adventures I might also forget them. For a while we wandered along with the forest closing in on the other side of the river bed. We kept peeping into its magic range of trees, acacias, tamarisks, cypresses at the edge and oaks spreading their branches wide. Pistachio trees. We had been told that it would be difficult to move through the thick forest, especially as the path was so bad. But being between the rivers had its own dangers, as swamps could be hidden under lush grass. In the distance to our left on days of good clear weather we could make out the Taurus Mountains rising sharply into the heavens.

Days drifted by without us taking much notice. We were now marching in a routine and we lost count, although we tried to keep on top of days going by, as well trained scribes would do, making notes of the animals we saw and changes in the landscape. Every day gazelles leapt past us. We shot one and cut up the meat hanging it to dry in the sun on the back of our bags. We knew to look out for bears and boars but were surprised by another animal.

On one of those endless, wearisome days towards dusk with the sun's rays coming at us more mildly after burning all day like a fire we were traversing the silent, wild land many miles away from the village in the forest. Maybe we were tired and had not watched out carefully enough, but suddenly we stood face to face with a lion. His coat was a smooth yellow colour. His mane was huge and black, and he looked eagerly and confidently at us, as if sure of his evening meal. We both stood stock still, shocked into sudden alertness. We had discussed how to prepare for such a situation, but when it happened it took our breath away. How enormous this creature was!



We began to gather our wits briskly. We stared at it making our eyes wide open. He stared back. We used our garments to pull them wide to make ourselves look huge. I wrestled to get control of my bow and arrow with as little movement as possible; any motion could precipitate a leap. I saw Ninatta reach for her knife. My scimitar sword was to hand in case the arrow missed. I had regained my breath and pumped air into my lung breathing loud and hard. I began to feel strangely calm. I knew I wanted to achieve being the master of the lion and stayed concentrated watching him. I slowly stretched my bow and the arrow shot through the air and hit the lion between his eyes. I held my scimitar, while Ninatta had her knife in her outstretched hand. I shot a second arrow into its side near the heart. The animal roared, threw his head up in the air and pressed his paws into the desert sand as if holding on to life that way. He then dropped his head and the blood was pouring like a river in red out of his mouth, eyes and nose. We were awe struck. The proud animal in its death throes stirred conflicting feelings in me. I felt proud to have been the victor over such a powerful creature, but I also felt sad for it in its awesome beauty and oneness with nature, of oneness in life and in death. He had to die, because we had to live. We did not have a choice. We turned away from the dying animal and gave each other a hug. Exhaustion took over in my limbs and we walked on silently.

Dumuzi, the wanderer

Miah, little sister, you have to hear my next story as well. You are of an age when you can sense the power of love, so listen to me. It was not that many days later when we had made our abode with reeds and linens as usual hidden in gorse bushes with a couple of small trees nearby. In fact they were fruit trees and we ate our belly full of apricots. Some beer helped to wash it all down. We were back to love stories, when we spotted a lone wanderer with a bundle and a stick. He could not see us, but we watched him and got our bows and arrows ready. He stopped not far. We could see it was a man. He had a beard and long brown hair down to his shoulders. We saw him drop his bundle and get undressed. He walked to the edge of the Wadi el Batin river that was here close to us. We watched in awe to see him swim. He must know it is safe to swim. Should we speak to him or not? We both longed to speak to someone else and were also too curious to miss this opportunity. Anyway we were two against one. I decided to approach him first. I walked over to his bundle. He did not notice me. I heard him splash and sing unaware of my observing him. A man who sings cannot be a bad man; I decided and called out to him, now standing right at the grassy embankment. He looked up and beamed a smile at me.

'Hey join me. The river is good and fresh. Water from the mountain,' he called. It was too tempting. I stripped my clothes off and was in the cool of the river in moments. It was delightful. I felt a rush

of excitement feeling my naked body, caressed by the soft water, my breasts wet and shiny, nipples sticking out in the ripples. I felt warmth between my legs and thought I had not been with a man for some weeks now. He swam nearer. He was young with smiling eyes, his hair glistening in the evening glow. It turned the water to silver and gold.

What are you doing here, sister? Are you on your own and so far from habitation? There are two of us. Ninatta! I called. Come and join us.

No sign of her. I indulged in a swim, diving under and watching the fishes and saw him dolphin like with his maleness looking so fragile, I wanted to kiss him. We gave each other a race between the embankments, to and fro and laughed full of bliss. We swam next to each other as we returned to the embankment. I could feel the sand under my feet and stood up. So did he. He was as tall as I. My longing was so powerful that I flung my arms around him and kissed him. He responded making me feel even more amorous. We wriggled and writhed squeezing the water out between us. He held my breasts and kissed them. My breath came in sharp bursts and so did his. We heaved each other out of the water and he entered between my legs with warmth and strength. I did not let him inside, but held his forceful member and pressed it between my thighs, until the juice streamed out and it softened. I then ran my hand over my wet garden and pressed my fingers into my vulva until I exploded into a violent spasm. He held me tight and pushed his tongue into my mouth filling me up and giving me another spasm, when he also strengthened again and pushed himself between my legs. He made no attempt to enter, and I realised he was a good man. He had learnt that you have to ask special permission to enter a woman's deep swamp. We might have been there for hours. Time was lost on us. The darkness had long enveloped us. We embraced. I did not even know his name. Eventually we must have fallen asleep among the reeds and only woke when growls from some wild animals could be heard. We quickly got up grabbed our clothes and made our way to the campsite. Ninatta was fast asleep. I took out my bow, but he had already taken a shot at some creature in the dark and the noise abated. No moon lit up the night, but a million stars shone and life felt like heaven. Kisses sent us to sleep. Love I thought and fell asleep in his arms.

The sharp rays of the sun distributed a thousand tiny sparkles through the cloth that covered our make shift. I looked for Ninatta, but she was gone. Next to me lay a man. First I was shocked by his presence. It was rare indeed for me to have a man next to me when I wake up. Then I remembered his name, Dumuzi. He must have said to me during our embraces, and then I spoke it to myself many times in my dreams. Dumuzi. Dumuzi. It was the first time I met him, but I knew it was not the last. I would meet him again and again. It was written in the stars and in Nannar's predictions.

I looked at his bronze arms in the sparkles from the sun. He lay on one of them and had the other one stretched out near me. His skin looked soft and supple. I slid my hand along his arm feeling his muscles, the firmness of his skin, over his shoulder and down his back. His warmth made me feel longing for him, but I knew I had to send him away. I got up wrapped myself in my travel garments and looked for Ninatta. She held a cup out for me with fresh water. A cheeky smile on her face reassured me that she was not offended.

'So you found him to be a good lover, Inanna? You know you were out for hours, I was worried about you but found the two of you wrapped around each other with not a care in the world.'

I laughed the laugh of the happily sated woman who has had her fill with a man. What could I say. I was still full of sexual juices that stirred my senses.

I will send him away as soon as we pack up.

'You don't need to. He can join us and be helpful.'

'Actually, he is a shepherd and needs to go back to his flock so we let him go, as much as I would like him to stay.' I smiled at her meaningfully and she had her cheeky smile again.

Just at that moment Dumuzi appeared like a god out of our abode. I had to turn my eyes from him to stop myself lusting after him. He walked towards us and embraced me with his strong arms and kissed me passionately while Ninatta was watching. I freed myself although I felt like melting into his arms. I asked him to join us for food and drink and explained that we had to be on our way. I said it very slowly and looked deep into his eyes by way of pleading with him that he would understand that we had to part company.

He looked at me, and I think he understood. We shared flat bread, grapes, figs and dates and a drink of fresh water.

'May the divine element of the plant world contained in the food I eat from this bowl fill me with fertile power' he said softly and we all three bowed our heads in prayer to Ishtar.



Ancient Akkadian cylinder seal depicting Inanna resting her foot on the back of a lion while Ninshubur stands in front of her paying obeisance. [LINK](#)



Gracious Ishtar, who rules over the universe,
 Heroic Ishtar, who creates humankind,
 Who walks before cattle, who loves the shepherd.

I walked him a short way and said that I knew we were destined for each other and that we would meet again. He took my hands and kissed them. He kissed my neck and whispered he would look for me all the way to the end of earth.

We packed our belongings silently each following our own train of thoughts. I had to use my utmost self control not to burst into tears at having to let Dumuzi go, and Ninatta knew I felt aggrieved. But I soon managed to control my desires for him and walked on holding my head high and feeling the joy of love between my thighs. With our packs on our back we headed south on a path meandering through shrubs of wormwood, juniper and heather, the magic forest fading into the distance and in front of us uncertain terrain. We knew hidden bogs might be there and were told to look out for the characteristic soft and sweet looking bog herb with woolly white cotton flowers. We marched slowly and carefully, aware that any step could open up into muddy, boggy ground from which you can slip off into treachery.

The wild boar

While the women's attention was focused on the path before them they missed a wild boar with young who emerged out of the shrubs looking at them with aggressive eyes. They could be her enemies by taking young ones from her. She sped towards the travellers at a relentless speed. Looking at such an animal was a waste of time. She had in mind to drive into them to save her young, come what may.

Ninatta had her knife ready. Inanna roared like a lion which stopped her for a moment, her knife in her hand. Both drove their knives into her neck as she tried to ram them with her huge teeth. She collapsed instantly and her young tried to scatter. They managed to shoot one with arrows. It would make a couple of nourishing meals. While they cut the animal and cleaned it out and cut it into chunks Inanna suddenly felt her foot sink right down into a hole with her whole leg. She was about to topple over and screamed for Ninatta to help. The bag had already slipped precariously and was tilting into the reed bog. She grabbed the bag with all her might but felt herself sink sideways with the other leg losing ground. Ninatta cut two strong reeds with her sharp knife and, being careful not to step closer to her companion she held both sticks towards her to get a hold on with her hands.

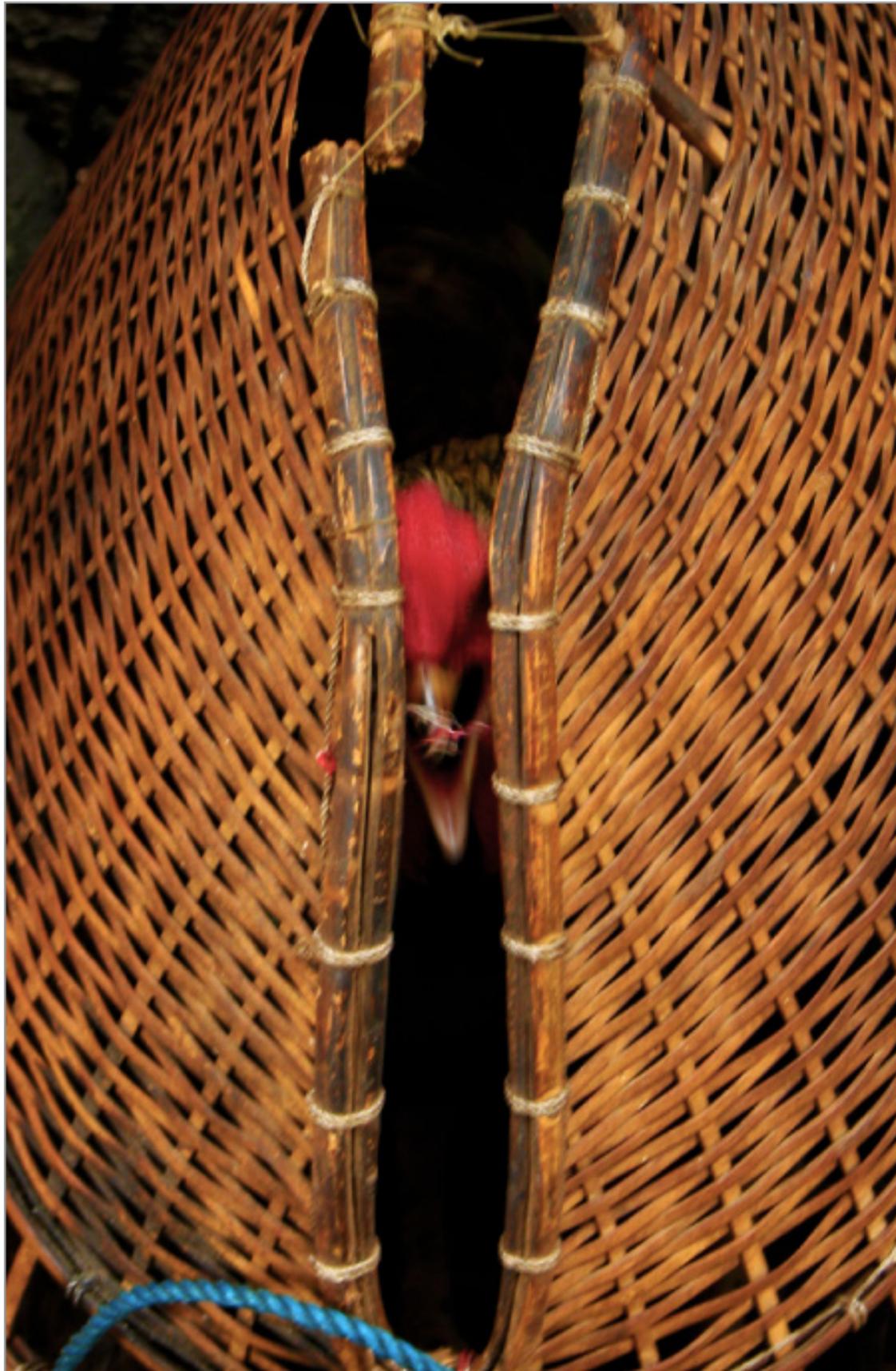
The bag slung over her back Inanna grabbed the reeds with the desperation of a drowning woman. She held on them with all my might. Ninatta leaned back and inched away from her friend thus dragging her bit by bit gradually with her. Inanna reached the solid ground and sat down on it feeling sheer exhaustion. Two emergencies one after another were a bit overwhelming. They hugged and breathed a sigh of relief. Inside them they both wondered if disaster might strike a third time. But they did not say anything to each other.

'Goodness, me! That was a terrible shock. I'd rather have any wild animal than these bogs,' Inanna exclaimed.

'Don't be too certain about that. We don't want to tempt fate. Wild animals are just as dangerous. It's just that we have learnt how to cope. Do you remember how our mothers showed us how to eye the enemy with a stare. We did not even use song, but that works well too.'

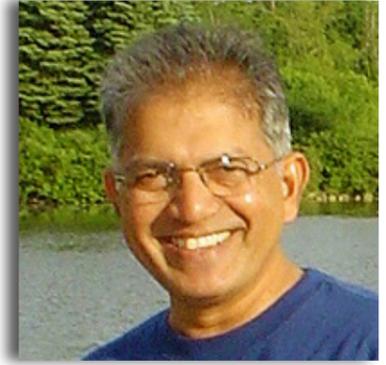
Neither of those methods works with a swamp like these ones. How long has the water stayed here, they wondered and how many men or women have sunk into them.

'I suggest we have something strengthening to eat and then march promptly to reach a safe area for the night. We can't be too far now.' Ninatta was right to urge them on, even if they were tired already. This place was perhaps the worst. They had been forewarned. They ate some of the meat charcoaled on the fire, followed by dates and almonds and drank their fill of fresh water. Ninatta complained about a swollen ankle, which she might have twisted pulling Inanna out of the swamp. Inanna covered it in Arnica, and they moved on. They had reeds with them, their knives ready and glared at the plants for tell tale signs of further swamps. It must have been past four in the afternoon. The sun was striking down at their necks with force, and both of them pulled shawls tight to stop it making them faint. Ninatta was limping and it worried Inanna.



Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Father Ivo Coelho earned a PhD in philosophy at the Gregorian University, Rome, for his work on the hermeneutics of the philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan, SJ (1904-1984). After teaching philosophy in Divyadaan: Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nashik and holding various offices in his religious congregation, in Nashik, Mumbai and Jerusalem, he is currently based in Rome, where he is in charge of the sector of training and formation for the Salesian society of Don Bosco. Besides his interest in Lonergan, he has also edited collections of the essays of the Indologist Richard De Smet, SJ (1916-1997).



DR IVO COELHO

DO WE HAVE TO BE RELIGIOUS IN ORDER TO BE MORAL?

The question proposed to me by the Editor of Live Encounters is:

How does one define right from wrong? Does it have to be religious based or is there any other yardstick?

Let me begin by noting that every one of us is capable of making moral judgments, distinguishing right from wrong. How exactly we make such judgments is, however, the question. I believe we have what Aristotle called *physis*, which is translated as 'nature,' but which really means inbuilt principles of motion and of rest. One such principle is our desire to know: this desire, which manifests itself in questions, keeps us moving till we attain a satisfactory answer, and rests only when that answer is attained. The other familiar principle is what we call conscience. We are hopefully all familiar with good conscience and bad conscience; where the desire to know deals with matters of fact, conscience deals with right and wrong, good and bad. The good conscience is the conscience at rest, whereas the bad conscience is the conscience that is restless. When our conscience is at rest, we feel we have done something that is good, or that we have reached a decision that is good, that we have hit upon a good course of action. When instead our conscience is restless, we know that we have either not arrived at a good course of action or a decision, or that we have decided or done something that is bad. This is conscience as *physis*, as inbuilt principle of motion and of rest.

The smart person will, however, be quick to point out the utterly subjective character of conscience as described here. Are we to rely merely on the restfulness or restlessness of our conscience? Will not each one of us, and each of the different traditions that have formed us, arrive at different moral judgments? And this is true, which is why the Catholic tradition defines the criterion of moral judgment not just as conscience, but as the well-formed conscience.

So in the case of the moral judgment: if one does not yet have the virtue or the wisdom to make a correct moral judgment, one always has the possibility of borrowing. Borrowing here is learning, being willing to learn, from one's neighbours, from one's family, friends and society, from one's tradition, religious or otherwise. And we learn till such time as we ourselves have become masters. This is a common phenomenon which we do not have to argue about: there is a continuum that leads from learning to mastery, and we all have experience of it in different fields.

At this many will be tempted to cry foul. Is not the Catholic Church subtly inserting itself into the picture here? Is it not pushing itself inside as the teacher of conscience, as the one who forms conscience? Perhaps. But it might give us pause to remember that it was Aristotle who defined the criterion of the moral judgment as the good conscience of a virtuous man. Not just 'good conscience,' but the *good conscience of a virtuous man*. This, as Bernard Lonergan liked to say, is infuriatingly circular. For how is one to become a virtuous person, if not by making good moral judgments? And how is one to make a good moral judgment, if one is not already a virtuous person?

Like most vicious circles, however, this one also, insoluble on the logical plane, is easily broken on the practical plane. *Solvitur ambulando*. In the old days, when one did not have sugar in the house, one could borrow it from the neighbours. So in the case of the moral judgment: if one does not yet have the virtue or the wisdom to make a correct moral judgment, one always has the possibility of borrowing. Borrowing here is learning, being willing to learn, from one's neighbours, from one's family, friends and society, from one's tradition, religious or otherwise. And we learn till such time as we ourselves have become masters. This is a common phenomenon which we do not have to argue about: there is a continuum that leads from learning to mastery, and we all have experience of it in different fields.

But here rises another question. If, in order to make moral judgments, we are in a very vital way dependent on the formation of conscience provided by our societies and our traditions, what guarantee do we have about the soundness of those cultures and traditions themselves? This is a much larger question, one that cannot be solved simply by appealing to the inbuilt principles of movement and of rest that we are endowed with.

There is a way, however, something that has been called, by *Etienne Gilson* and others, the experiment of history. The theory is that traditions that have become bankrupt lead in the direction of self-destruction – not necessarily in the short term, but certainly in the long term. Sound moral choices, in other words, have healthy long term consequences, whereas unsound choices have unhealthy and destructive consequences. Does this sound too pragmatic? I will certainly have to think about that. But for the time being, for more on this phenomenon, one could look up Lonergan's book, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, especially chapter 7 where he discusses the shorter and longer cycles of decline rooted in what he calls 'group bias' and 'general bias,' group bias being what we usually call the prejudices accumulated by social groups, and general bias being the inbuilt tendency of common sense to concentrate on the short term to the detriment of the long term.

There is a deep truth in the postmodern recognition of fissure, brokenness, difference. But governing all this, I believe, is the providence of a loving God. Non-theists might not be comfortable with this kind of language; but I have found non-theists also willing to believe that at the heart of the universe there is something that works for good.

But there is also another way worked out by Lonergan, a way that he calls dialectic. Dialectic recognizes that radical differences in opinions and conflicts, including those in the moral area, are rooted not so much in the area of logic and argument as in basic options that we either inherit or drift into, or else make deliberately. Dialectic encourages conflicting parties to recognize this fact, and to engage in steps that will bring these basic options to light. And when these roots have come to light, there opens up the moment of dialogue.

Dialogue here presupposes deep mutual respect and peaceful feelings. Friendship, as Aristotle pointed out so long ago, is the condition for doing philosophy. Within such an atmosphere of friendship, parties might make bold to gently invite one another to change. I might be able to say to you: you know, I think your basic option is problematic. Why don't you have a look at this other possibility? And you might be able to say the same or something similar to me.

This kind of procedure seems to be dealing with individuals in conflict, but, as might easily be imagined, individuals operate inevitably from the womb of the traditions that have formed them. And so it is traditions themselves that are called into question, the deep roots of traditions in philosophical, moral and religious choices that are brought to light.

Is this a foolproof solution? No, certainly not. At the heart of the human condition there lies a mystery, which is the mystery of option, of choice. There is a deep truth in the postmodern recognition of fissure, brokenness, difference. But governing all this, I believe, is the providence of a loving God. Non-theists might not be comfortable with this kind of language; but I have found non-theists also willing to believe that at the heart of the universe there is something that works for good.

The universe works for those who are in deep harmony with it. Whatever: I believe, with Lonergan, that authenticity is a prized human possession. The method of dialectic is built upon this premise. None of us in our saner moments wants to be deliberately unauthentic. Often it is a question of expanding horizons beyond oneself, beyond the narrow confines of one's group, beyond also short term needs and concerns. Under the guidance of a provident God, in a world that has been basically redeemed, I believe there is hope for humankind. And signs of this hope are not lacking.

Human beings have made great strides in recognizing mutual humanity across cultures and traditions over the last several hundred years, and this despite the very real wounds, wars, genocides and conflicts.

The myth of the self-enclosed atomic individual was born in the modern period of the West, with roots perhaps stretching back, according to some like Richard De Smet, to Duns Scotus. This atomic individual replaced a very much more organic conception of the human person that is found in thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, and also, for that matter, in the ancient reaches of the Indian tradition. The atomic individual is a myth, and it is high time that it be recognized as such. In reality, it is impossible to grow up without constant interaction with a tradition. We grow up into the persons that we are in what has been called by Lonergan a process of mutual self-mediation through a tradition or traditions.

So back our initial question: is it possible to make moral judgments without being dependent on religious traditions? My answer is: there is really no such thing as a self-enclosed individual. The myth of the self-enclosed atomic individual was born in the modern period of the West, with roots perhaps stretching back, according to some like *Richard De Smet*, to *Duns Scotus*. This atomic individual replaced a very much more organic conception of the human person that is found in thinkers like *Thomas Aquinas*, and also, for that matter, in the ancient reaches of the Indian tradition. The atomic individual is a myth, and it is high time that it be recognized as such. In reality, it is impossible to grow up without constant interaction with a tradition. We grow up into the persons that we are in what has been called by Lonergan a process of mutual self-mediation through a tradition or traditions.

Our traditions, in other words, are not to be seen as obstacles, hindrances, prejudices. They can of course become such, and history is full of examples that they have in fact been such. They need not. More to the point, it is quite impossible for anyone to get rid of all influence of traditions. The best we can do – and here we have the backing of greats like *Martin Heidegger* and *Hans-Georg Gadamer* – is to become aware of the fact that *we are constituted by our traditions*, and that the only possible way of rising somewhat ‘above’ them lies in such irenic and humble recognition of our historicity, our situatedness.

This is not to say that we should each one of us indulge in blind worship of the tradition or traditions that have formed us historically. I am merely making a plea for serene recognition of their inevitability. There is place for being critical: that is the prerogative of the human spirit. Only, criticism cannot be done on the basis of a pretended access to a non-existent Pure Reason.

So yes, our moral judgments are inevitably coloured by our religious traditions. I would go further to say that these traditions can often be a positive help in the formation of our consciences, though they have also sometimes been dreadful scourges. Perhaps the mutual interaction of traditions over the last several hundred years has itself been part of the experiment of history. The experiment of history is Lonergan’s dialectic worked out in history. Or perhaps it might be truer to say that Lonergan’s dialectic is method that is worked out on the basic of the inbuilt dialectic of history.

And what if one does not lay claim to any particular religious tradition? Obviously conscience still functions, and can function well, even very well. All of us have experiences of non-theistic persons who are deeply moral and utterly committed to the welfare of human beings. Only, I believe it is incumbent on the non-religious or a-religious person to recognize that she is still not exempt from

In the end, I would like to believe that life is not all that complicated. In most cases, our conscience serves us quite well in the making of moral choices. What Gandhi called the ‘inner voice’ mostly speaks loud and clear, especially when confronted with the *Face of the Other*. Then of course there are cases that are not quite as clear, cases where there are endless disputes. That is where, I guess, all that I have been saying kicks in.

the human condition. She does not and cannot lay claim to Pure Reason. She is as conditioned as anyone else – not, perhaps, by religious traditions, but by some traditions nonetheless, secular or civil or philosophical or whatever. And it might be good here to keep in mind something that I think the Italian philosopher *Croce* used to say: We are not Christian, but we certainly cannot call ourselves non-Christian. *Croce* was alluding to the fact that religious traditions have played large roles in the shaping of what we today regard as secular traditions. Meaning is constitutive of reality. It cannot be simply wished away. Integrity, therefore, demands recognition of the contribution of the religions to secular traditions, just as it demands also that religious traditions freely recognize the way they have themselves been challenged towards growth and purification by non-religious, rational, or secular traditions.

So the Christian tradition is not wrong when it holds that the criterion of moral judgment is the well-formed conscience, and when it lays claim to the formation of conscience. It will, however, recognize today that it is far from being the sole agent in that formation, and that it is called upon to recognize the positive role of both religious and secular traditions in this regard. The formation of conscience, in other words, is itself on the way to becoming pluricultural, with all the traps and pitfalls that this involves. So once again we are back to the need for something like Lonergan’s dialectic, or simply intercultural and interreligious dialogue. We need, in other words, to talk. We need conversation. If there are no self-enclosed individuals, there are no self-enclosed traditions anymore either. We are in this together.

In the end, I would like to believe that life is not all that complicated. In most cases, our conscience serves us quite well in the making of moral choices. What Gandhi called the ‘inner voice’ mostly speaks loud and clear, especially when confronted with the Face of the Other. Then of course there are cases that are not quite as clear, cases where there are endless disputes. That is where, I guess, all that I have been saying kicks in.

Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photographer. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. He has edited, designed and produced all of Live Encounters' 136 publications till date (October 2018). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. www.amazon.com

THE TEMPLE OF LITERATURE VĂN MIẾU AND THE IMPERIAL ACADEMY QUỐC TỬ GIÁM

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MARK ULYSEAS

The Temple of Literature dedicated to Confucius, the Great Teacher, and the Imperial Academy represents the very soul of Hanoi, the one thousand year-old city. Even today one witnesses Vietnamese and other visitors worshipping at the Great Hall of Ceremonies and the *Điên Đại Thánh* (High Sanctuary) where altars have been erected for Confucius and his disciples.

Scholars, college and school students often visit the Temple of Literature to seek blessings of The Great Teacher and to offer thanks.

Education is an important aspect of Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese parents will pursue all avenues to get the best education for their children.



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Entrance gate.

Note: For greater accuracy I have followed the text from information panels installed by the Centre for Scientific and Cultural Activities, Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám, Hanoi, Vietnam.

The first courtyard is called Nhập Đạo or Entrance to the Way. The first lesson for students to learn is how to behave respectfully. Acquiring knowledge comes later, with the final goal of becoming both virtuous and talented.

The Nhập Đạo courtyard is a relatively new architectural addition built in the nineteenth century under the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945 CE). Similar to the other courtyards, the garden in Nhập Đạo is symmetrically designed along a central axis. The central path (Hoàng Đạo) used to be for kings and high ranking mandarins, while the two side paths were for the students and common people. The courtyard contains two ponds that together with the tree planting, give the courtyard a spacious and fresh appearance.

The Nhập Đạo courtyard is connected to the next courtyard by three gates, or doors. At the centre is Đại Trung môn (Great Middle Gate) while to the left is Thành Đức (Accomplished Virtue) and to the right Đại Tài (Attained Talent).



Left: The Nhập Đạo courtyard. Above: Đại Trung môn (Great Middle Gate) while to the left is Thành Đức (Accomplished Virtue) and to the right Đại Tài (Attained Talent).

The second courtyard is known as the Great Central Courtyard or sometimes Courtyard of Great Success. It features the famous Khuê Văn Các (Star of Literature Pavilion). The name refers to the Khuê Star symbolizing the beauty of knowledge and culture. Khuê Văn Các is recognized as the icon for Hanoi, Vietnam's thousand year old capital, and its culture. On either side of the Khuê Văn Các pavilion are the Suc Van gate (Súc Văn Môn – Gate of the Crystallization of Letters) and the Bi Van Gate (Bi Văn Môn – Gate of the Magnificence of Letters).

The beautiful Khuê Văn Các is a symmetrical building that represents humility, clarity and refinement. Built in 1805, its square plinth symbolizes the earth, the high two-storey tower with images of the sun represents the sky, the breezeway through the open pavilion represents the wind, while the pool in front of the pavilion symbolizes Yin in balance with the pavilion symbolizing Yang.

The Khuê Văn Các pavilion links the second with the third courtyard. The absence of a gate or door in the pavilion's design indicates that the path towards enlightenment is a continuous one without limitation of space and time.



Above: Khuê Văn Các (Star of Literature Pavilion)

The most important historical relics are found in the third courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard is a square pool called 'Well of Heavenly Brilliance' (Thiên Quang Tỉnh). This is flanked on the east and west by two rows of stone stelae on pedestals shaped as tortoises, representing permanence.

The stelae record in ancient Chinese characters the names of the 1,304 successful candidates in the 82 examinations held between 1442 and 1779 under the Lê and Mạc dynasty dynasties. Under the feudal social system the king relied on a set of imperial officials (mandarins) to govern the country. This meant that not only had the king to be a man of virtue himself but he also had to select virtuous men from all quarters of his realm to assist him. This led to the establishment of a rigorous examination system to choose who would become mandarins.

The examinations were open to all young men of property. Under the Lê sơ (1428-1527 CE), three categories of men were not allowed to attend examinations: criminals, musicians and singers, and those in mourning. The examinations were gruelling, involving numerous stages over several months.



Rows of stone stelae on pedestals shaped as tortoises, representing permanence. The stelae record in ancient Chinese characters the names of the 1,304 successful candidates in the 82 examinations held between 1442 and 1779 under the Lê and Mạc dynasty dynasties. The Turtle (Quy) is one of the Vietnam's four holy creatures - the others are the Dragon (Long), the Unicorn (Ly) and the Phoenix (Phượng).

Courtyard of the Sages (công đại thành) with its two smaller side gates, Kim Thành (Golden Sound) and Ngọc Chấn (Jade Vibration). This courtyard is the ceremonial heart of the Văn Miếu Complex. It has two parallel single-storey buildings along either side of a large spacious square and these are linked to the north by twin pavilions. The front pavilion is the Nhà Đại Bái (Great Hall of Ceremonies) with two symmetrical dragons facing a lunar disc on the roof ridge.

Behind the Great Hall of Ceremonies is the Đền Đại Thánh (High Sanctuary), which houses altars worshipping Confucius, his four main disciples and ten of his leading scholars. These pavilions reflect the style of the early nineteenth century under the Nguyễn dynasty, when the earlier buildings underwent major repairs. The Great Hall of Ceremonies has a stone terrace and the main part of the building has an overhanging roof supported by iron wood pillars and a system of wooden brackets. The roof curves gracefully upwards at the ends and is covered with enamelled tiles and decorated with majolica statues.



Left: The Great Hall of Ceremonies and behind it is the Đền Đại Thánh (High Sanctuary). Above: Ancient altar in the Great Hall of Ceremonies which has a horizontal lacquered board honouring Confucius with the words 'Vạn Thế Sư Biểu' (The Great Teacher) in Chinese characters.



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Altars to Confucius' disciples.



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Confucius, The Great Teacher.

Khu Thái Học - Thái Học Buildings

These were erected in 1999. The new buildings are in traditional imperial style. They comprise of the Nhà Tiên Dương (the front building), a bell house and a drum house on the left and right.

The Nhà Tiên Dương is used for organizing ceremonies in memory of cultural scholars, scientific conferences, art activities and exhibitions. The larger Nhà Hậu Dương has two floors. The ground floor is used for displaying the statue of the director of the Temple of Literature, Chu Văn An (1292-1370 CE), as well as exhibits on the history of Temple of Literature, Vietnamese education and examination systems.

The upper floor of the Hậu Dương is dedicated to the three kings who contributed most to the foundation of the Temple of Literature (Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám) and the development of Confucian education in Vietnam: Lý Thánh Tông (1023-1072 CE), Lý Nhân Tông (1066-1128 CE) and Lê Thánh Tông (1442-1497 CE).



Thái Học Buildings.

Quốc Tử Giám – School for the Sons of the Nation

The fifth courtyard was formerly the Quốc Tử Giám founded by King Lý Nhân Tông in 1076 CE. The Quốc Tử Giám was a school for the children of the royal family and senior officials. Students lived together here and were taught from books made using wooden printed blocks.

The students learned Chinese, Chinese philosophy, and Chinese history. They had textbooks printed on paper which were in both Chinese and Vietnamese. They read The Four Books (Tứ thư): “The Great Study” (Đại Học), “The Golden Means” (Trung Dung), “The Analects” (Luận Ngữ) and “Mencius” (Mạnh Tử); Five Pre-Confucian Classics (Ngũ Kinh.): “Book of Odes (Kinh Thi), “Book of Annals” (Kinh Thư), “Book of Rites” (Kinh Lễ), “Book of Change” (Kinh Dịch) and “Book of Spring and Autumn” (Kinh Xuân Thu); ancient poetry and Chinese history among others.

The academy was headed by a rector (Tể tửu) and a vice-rector (Tư nghiệp). The professors of the academy held different titles: Giáo thụ, Trực giảng, Trợ giáo and Bác sĩ.

In 1236 CE under the Trần dynasty, the Quốc Tử Giám attracted the best students from many areas of the country. In the fifteenth century under the Lê sơ dynasty the Quốc Tử Giám was given a new name, Thái Học Viện, and extended with the construction of a large auditorium and boarding facilities for a further 300 students.

The Quốc Tử Giám had a chequered history. It fell into disrepair during the civil unrest of the late fifteenth century and was closed down when the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945) made Huế its imperial capital city. In 1807 King Gia Long constructed a new national school for the education of royal princes and mandarins’ sons in Huế. The former Quốc Tử Giám in Hanoi lost its roof and was rebuilt as the Khải Thánh shrine to Confucius’ parents,, only to be destroyed once again by French shelling when France re-took Hanoi in 1946.



©Mark Ulyseas

Quốc Tử Giám - The Imperial Academy.



©Mark Ulyseas

Bell in the Great Hall of Ceremonies.



©Mark Ulyseas

Drum House.

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 150+ journals selecting his poetry, short stories, interviews, essays or art photography. Two poetry books 'Journey To Become Forgotten' (Kind of a Hurricane Press), and 'Abandoned' (ScarsTv) have been published. Carl is the art editor for Minute Magazine, a dedicated runner and 2nd degree black- belt in Taekwondo.



FRAGMENTARY EMOTION

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CARL SCHARWATH

I use photography as a means of self-expression. The most important quality of a photograph, as in all of art, is to evoke an emotional response. I prefer to capture surrealistic moments when I can, the play of light and colors and unusual situations as they unfold. As a passionate runner, being aware of my surroundings tends to produce some surprise scenes instead of forcing an image of time with my camera.

Currently I have been concentrating on collaborations with other poets who interpret my photos with their powerful words creating an art form that compliments each other.



© Carl Scharwath

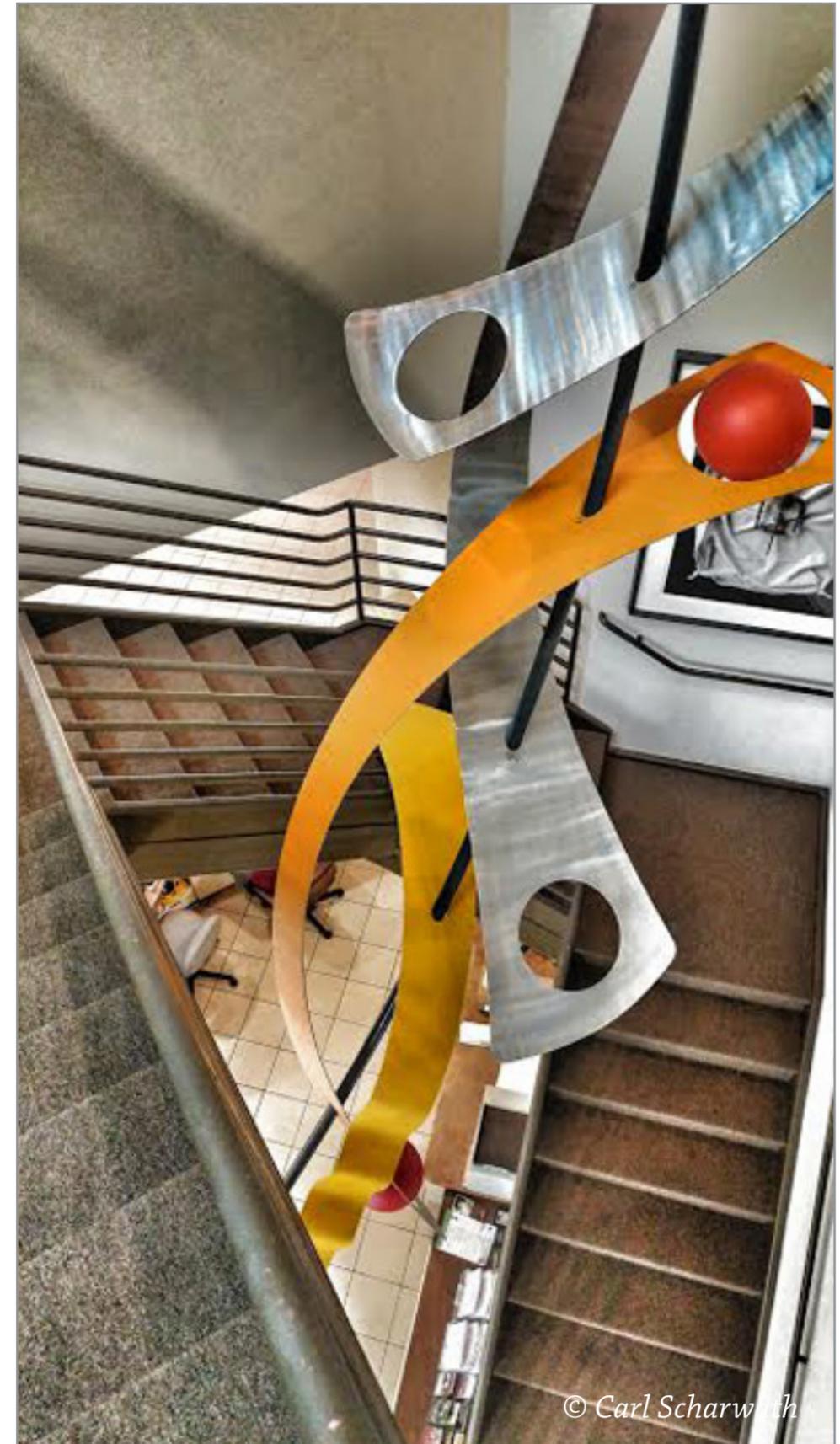
DISOWNED



© Carl Scharwath

FRAGMENTARY EMOTION

TABLEAU



© Carl Scharwath

ANTICIPATE



© Carl Scharwath



© Carl Scharwath

REVEL

Mikyong Cha is a graduate in Oriental Painting from Hyosung Women's University, Daegu, South Korea. She has participated in a number of group art exhibitions in South Korea and Japan. In 2016 she took up photography – the camera becoming her paint brush. This globe trotting photographer is a regular contributor to Live Encounters Magazine.



THE PEOPLE I MET
My beloved Asia
TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MIKYOUNG CHA

These photographs are taken from my ongoing exhibition being held at the International Art Museum, Pakse, Laos PDR from 4th September 2018 to 15th January 2019.



Nepalese, met at Pokhara, Nepal.



Indian, met at New Delhi, India.



Nepalese, met at Pokhara, Nepal.



Tibetan, met at Shigatse, Tibet.



Tibetan refugee, met at Pokhara, Nepal.



Tibetan, met at Lhasa, Tibet.



Nepalese, met at Pokhara, Nepal.

Andrea Lamberti is a nature photographer, taking panoramic images as well as close-up perspectives of the natural world, above and below water. His main passion is documenting the geography and underwater plant and animal species of his local coastline in the UK. Andrea uses photography to explore his relationship with the environment, and the belief that humans should inhabit the planet primarily as curators rather than as consumers.

The sixth in a photo series by Andrea Lamberti as he explores his relationship with nature.



MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPHS PART 1

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ANDREA LAMBERTI

Please enjoy this selection of photographs which capture some of my favourite images that I have taken over the years.



© Andrea Lamberti Photography

Pen y Fan, Wales



Durdle Door, Dorset, England



© Andrea Lamberti Photography

Stourhead, Wiltshire, UK



Rockface at Lulworth Cove, Dorset, England



© Andrea Lamberti Photography

Spider crab, Saw Mill Cove, Devon, England



© Andrea Lamberti Photography

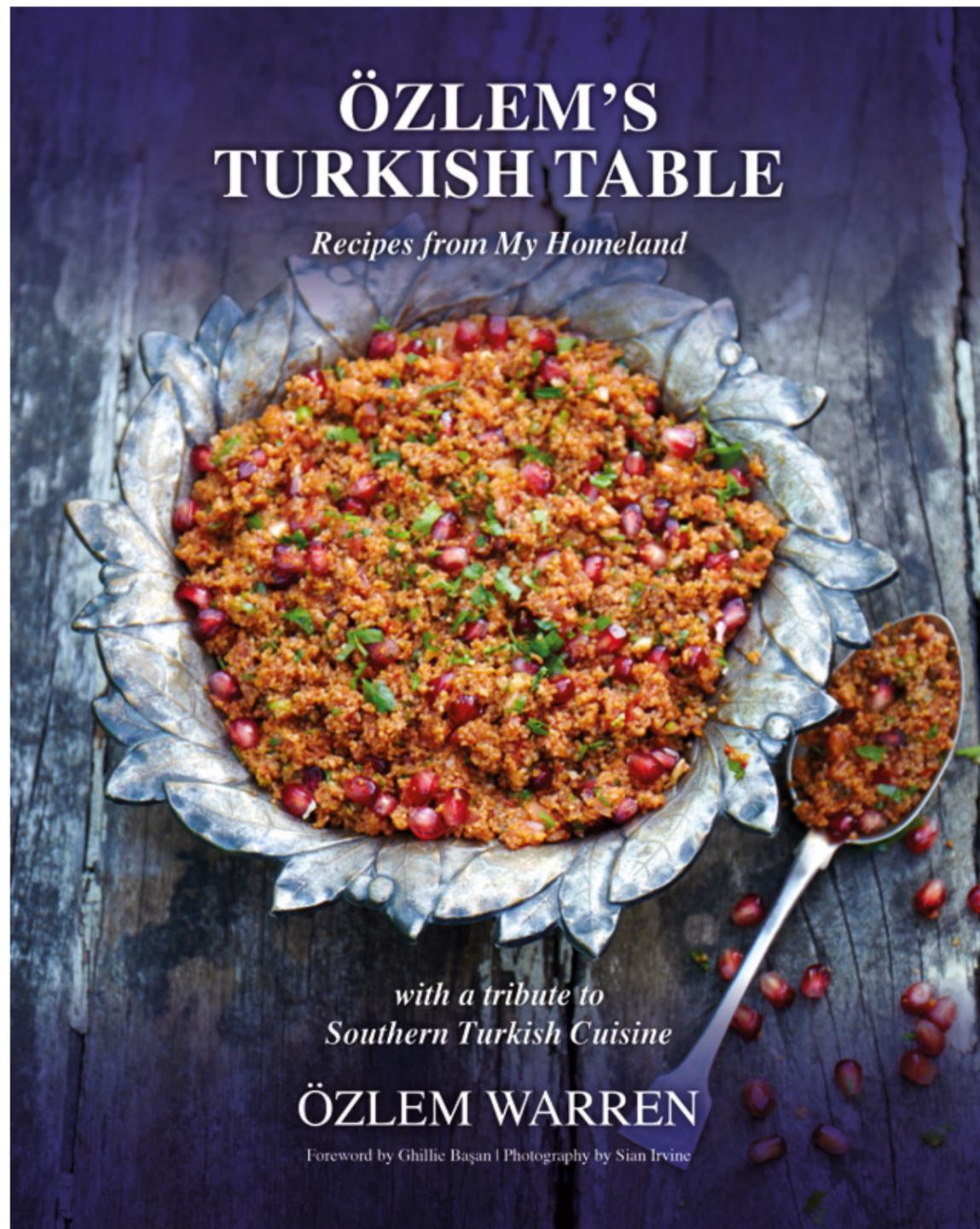
Conker



© Andrea Lamberti Photography

Underwater plantlife, South Milton, Devon, England

www.ozlemsturkishtable.com



Signed copies of
Ozlem's Turkish Table; Recipes from My Homeland
 by Ozlem Warren is available at
www.gbpublishing.co.uk/product-page/ozlem-s-turkish-table-hardback



OKRA WITH CHICKEN, VEGETABLES AND CHICKPEAS IN LEMON & MINT SAUCE

Turkish cuisine is based on using fresh ingredients; fruit and vegetables are bought daily and seasonality is the key. However, especially in Southern Turkey, we also like to dry vegetables like eggplant (aubergine), bell and pointy peppers and okra when they are fresh, to be used when they're not in season. In villages, these vegetables are simply attached in a piece of string when fresh (we scoop out the middle part/flesh of aubergines and peppers first; they are wonderful when stuffed with aromatic rice and/or ground meat), and hang outside village homes or terraces, to dry at the summer sunshine. With all the moisture gone, the result is intensely flavored dried vegetables ready to use.

Whenever I go to the Spice Market in Istanbul, I always get dried okra, aubergine and peppers. They not only taste great, but they also make wonderful decoration and a great talking point at my cooking classes. So here comes Southern Turkish style okra with chicken. In Southern Turkish cooking, we like to keep the okra as whole, give a little trim to the stalk. We use lemon juice to reduce the sliminess and flavor the okra with dried mint and red pepper flakes; I love the refreshing, tangy taste of the dish and the texture that comes with the chickpeas. For a vegetarian option, you can skip chicken; potatoes would really work well with this dish too.

Afiyet Olsun,

Ozlem



Pic 1 and 2: Simmer dried okra for a few minutes in boiling water. Saute onion, garlic, chicken, add the chopped tomatoes.

Serves: 4

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Cooking Time: 35 minutes

Ingredients:

225gr/ 1/2lb fresh okra or dried okra
 250gr/9oz chicken breast, cut in bite size chunks
 1 medium onion, finely chopped
 4-6 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
 400gr/14oz can of chopped tomatoes
 400gr/14oz can of cooked chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained and rinsed
 30ml/2 tbsp olive oil
 Juice of 1 lemon
 8fl oz/1 cup hot water
 10ml/2 tsp dried mint
 5ml/1 tsp red pepper flakes
 Salt and ground black pepper to taste
 Plain rice to serve
 Wedge of lemon to serve



Pic 3 and 4: Add lemon juice and hot water over the okra. Okra with chicken, chickpeas and vegetables; dried mint and red pepper flakes add a wonderful flavour.

Instructions

If you are using dried okra, simmer them in a pot of boiling water for 2-3 minutes, just soft enough to slip through the string. Drain the water and take out the string, set aside.

If you are using fresh okra, trim the stalks, then place the okra in a bowl. You can treat them with the juice of lemon to retain color and reduce sliminess. As an alternative, you can also or sprinkle with 2-3 tbsp white wine or cider vinegar over okra and leave it to stand for about 1 hr, as *Ghille Basan*, the prominent Turkish cookery author recommends.

Heat the olive oil in a heavy pan and stir in the onion. Sauté for 3-5 minutes, until they begin to turn golden brown. Add the garlic and chicken pieces and cook for 3-4 minutes to brown them. Stir in the chopped tomatoes, season with salt and ground black pepper. Mix to combine thoroughly.

Sprinkle the okra over the chicken and pour the lemon juice and hot water on top. Stir, cover the pan and cook gently for 20 minutes, until the okra are tender but not soggy. Add the (rinsed) cooked chickpeas, combine well and simmer for a further 2 minutes. Stir in the dried mint and red pepper flakes. Taste and add more salt if needed.

Serve hot with plain rice and extra wedge of lemon by the side.

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Live encounters

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Cover Photograph by Mark Ulyseas