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DR NAMRATA GOSWAMI  
*International Relations Theory*

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Stone base relief, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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This year is grinding to a close, so what will it be in 2021?

More wars for religious or commercial purposes or  
perceived historical lands or injustices?  
Cultural genocide ... like the deconstruction  
of indigenous cultures for homogenisation by a godless State?  
Child abuse?  
Human slavery?  
Beheadings of teachers for expressing freedom of speech?  
Another Mass Extinction, perhaps humanity?  
More insidious revelations that expose the all-pervasive  
criminality of governments, international politics  
and sections of the Media?  
And is the UN still a coffee shop for the rich and powerful  
to hang out and where honour exists among thieves?  
And are the medusa-like social media barons  
new lords of the manor?  
Do they control our hearts and minds  
and our freedom of thought?  
And is this the age of *artificial* intelligence?  
And is tourism fast becoming *online* voyeurism?  
And is *woke liberalism* the bastard offspring of fascism?  
And has *exceptionalism* become a fundamental right?

– Mark Ulyseas, *2020 Year of Living Foolishly, Again?*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## DR NAMRATA GOSWAMI

### A Challenge to International Studies to Make its Theories and Concepts Truly 'International'.

As I approach my 21st anniversary of studying International Relations (IR) and Security, I get the uncomfortable feeling that IR concepts and theories, and the statistically neat models, are mostly aimed at those scholars who are already sold to these concepts and methods, to the exclusion of those who do not necessarily find them useful to explain international politics. In the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Conference, 2019 held in Toronto (Canada) I presented a paper with the same title as above, addressing key questions asked by the organizers: 'how can we communicate our theories and findings beyond scholars who share our approaches and methods?'; and 'are there more integrative and inclusive ontological and epistemological possibilities that do not compromise diversity?'.<sup>2</sup> While such questions were/are timely, IR as a discipline will not progress much if we continue to utilize the same old concepts, models and theories, drawn heavily from Western academia to study progress, human emancipation, conflict, change and innovation. This article offers perspectives coming from a multiplicity of sources [to include African sociology, South Asian history, Southeast Asian IR and policy, West Asian politics and culture, and European history], to fill the gap on a discipline that argues for multidisciplinary approaches and conceptual diversity, yet whose language and concepts are not truly inclusive.

Dr Namrata Goswami

The critical problem with the field of international relations and studies as I know it, is that concepts that dominate (what is, and how we know what is) through theories like Realism, Marxism, Neo-Classical Realism, Critical Theory, Liberalism, Constructivism, Post-Modernism, are based on ideas originated in their modern form in academic circles that trace their affiliations in the West. This ethno-centric approach is then passed off as universal, instead of being offered as the North American area studies field or British or German, or French International relations. Stephan Walt vindicates my point by asserting that scholars outside of the Anglo-Saxon world are not offering big ideas or thinking on international relations, by which he means Great Power behavior, and hence, in this endeavor, U.S. centric authors dominate.

At the outset, let me explain the meaning of ontology, drawn from the Latin word (*ontologia*), to mean the science of being. This term was popularized by German rationalist philosopher, Christopher Wolf, in his book, *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia (1730; "First Philosophy or Ontology")*. Kant argued that Wolf's method was premised on "the regular ascertainment of principles, the clear determination of concepts, the attempt at strictness in proofs, and the prevention of audacious leaps in inferences."<sup>4</sup> Epistemology is defined as how do we know, what we know. This concept determines the nature of knowledge, critically, what does it mean when we assume that someone knows something. Epistemology deals with "the *extent* of human knowledge; that is, how much do we, or can we, know? How can we use our reason, our senses, the testimony of others, and other resources to acquire knowledge? Are there limits to what we can know? For instance, are some things unknowable? Is it possible that we do not know nearly as much as we think we do?"<sup>5</sup>

The critical problem with the field of international relations and studies as I know it, is that concepts that dominate (what is, and how we know what is) through theories like Realism,<sup>6</sup> Marxism,<sup>7</sup> Neo-Classical Realism,<sup>8</sup> Critical Theory,<sup>9</sup> Liberalism,<sup>10</sup> Constructivism,<sup>11</sup> Post-Modernism,<sup>12</sup> are based on ideas originated in their modern form in academic circles that trace their affiliations in the West.<sup>13</sup> This ethno-centric approach is then passed off as universal, instead of being offered as the North American area studies field or British or German, or French International relations. Stephan Walt vindicates my point by asserting that scholars outside of the Anglo-Saxon world are not offering big ideas or thinking on international relations, by which he means Great Power behavior, and hence, in this endeavor, U.S. centric authors dominate.

I was discussing this issue with a colleague in D.C. the other day, and he argued that one reason was the simple fact that there were hardly any world-class foreign policy intellectuals outside the Anglo-Saxon world. He wasn't saying that there weren't smart people writing on world affairs in other countries; his point was that there are very few people writing on foreign affairs outside North America or Britain whose works become the object of global attention and debate.<sup>14</sup>

By global attention, Walt and his colleague perhaps meant those that did get attention in the U.S., U.K. or Canadian academic circles to merit world class status. At least, that's what I understood from his concluding statement: "put these two reasons together, and it's not surprising that the IR field is still dominated by scholars from the Anglo-Saxon world (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada)".<sup>15</sup> And what are those two reasons Walt specifies, that merit attention.

First, that Great Powers spent a lot of their time thinking about global issues, and what they do catches world attention, and by extension, what scholars from Great Powers write or say in public 'triggers cross-national debates'. This first notion, he draws from Stanley Hoffman's article on a similar topic<sup>16</sup>. Second, because the U.S., U.K, and Canada have competitive academic institutions, they generate world class scholars. As for the countries beyond the three, Walt asserts, "You might have first-class mathematicians or doctors or engineers in such a society, but you aren't going to generate many (any?) world-class social scientists".<sup>17</sup> Why? Because, the U.S. alone has thousands of colleges and universities, which ensures that no single intellectual paradigm dominates any field of study.<sup>18</sup> And by big thinking and big ideas, which Walt faults the world outside of the Anglo-Saxon world as lacking, implies, "And by "big thinking" I mean ideas and arguments that immediately trigger debates that cross-national boundaries, and become key elements in a global conversation".<sup>19</sup>

Yet big thinking and big ideas animate the world outside of the U.S, U.K. and Canada. Take for example, big ideas like non-alignment as an instrument of global studies,<sup>20</sup> Indonesia's Pancasila-or the five principles of peaceful co-existence, Chinese concepts of 'what is a major power',<sup>21</sup> or their Belt and Road initiative.<sup>22</sup> These ideas animated a large part of the globe, triggered a heated debate and crossed national boundaries, fitting well within Walt's definition of big thinking. To be fair, Walt does throw in a few names, of scholars, he thinks have contributed to international relations, from outside the Anglo-Saxon world, like Ole Weaver, Kanti Bajpai, Thomas Risse. However, please notice the absence of any Arabic, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Ghanaian, Nigerian, or Russian scholar in this mix.<sup>23</sup>

This brings me to my central thesis.

Most scholarship that originates in Asia, Africa, or Middle-east is posited within the already existing frames of reference (European/American based) who act as gatekeepers on which ideas fit in and which don't. These stringent gate-keeping forces academics to either locate their own scholarship within that Western field of generalizable knowledge or be relegated to the domain of area studies. I had this unique experience in an International Studies Association Annual Conference a few years back, in which I offered a general theory of insurgency and counter-insurgency utilizing insights from Kautilya and Gandhi. Instead of my paper finding its place in a panel that debated on general theories of insurgencies, some of which used insights from French military officer, David Galula,<sup>24</sup> and Jomini,<sup>25</sup> or from British officer, Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency*,<sup>26</sup> my paper made it to a panel on India, where papers were mostly focused on India's nuclear weapons and foreign policy.



The central point I make here is that the field of international relations is dominated by European history and concepts. The mainstream discourses to include Marxism, Liberalism, Post-modernism, Realism, Critical Theory are conceptualized in universities in the West. All then that is left for scholarships from Asia or Africa or Middleeast is to be transferred to the 'domain of area studies' including those papers that offer interesting generalizations. We simply must fit in, to the academic powers that be. Having an Asian or African scholar that has perfected Western concepts as a representative of diversity, does not change my central claim.

It dawned on me suddenly as I was navigating the difficult task of being relevant in this panel, that I had been assigned to the 'area studies realm' of South Asia. Whereas, my paper utilized Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (a general treatise on statecraft)<sup>27</sup> that offered abstract stratagems across time and space and had no reference to any Indian kingdom.<sup>28</sup> As George Modelski, writing in the *American Political Science Review* specifies:

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is, above all, a manual of statecraft, a collection of rules which a king or administrator would be wise to follow if he wishes to acquire and maintain power. In inspiration it is therefore close to other digests of rules of statecraft and of advice to princes such as Sun Tzu's work on *The Art of War* or Niccolò Machiavelli *The Prince*... Today's students of international relations, ever sensitive to the criticism that their work lacks "historical illustrations" or "empirical concreteness" should be delighted with Kautilya's complete lack of historical sense... A work of learning must detach itself from its immediate milieu if it is to endure for long. Kautilya achieved this not only by avoiding historical references, but also by making his work remarkably abstract. Indeed the strength and the interest of the *Arthashastra* lie in its abstractness and in the systematic quality of its propositions.<sup>29</sup>

My paper also utilized Gandhi's ideas on 'Conflict Transformation' which again were abstract theorizing on how to achieve that, and did not refer to any specific instances in South Africa or India.<sup>30</sup> Imagine a situation where a paper that utilized Machiavelli's insights limited to a panel on Italy, or Clausewitz being relegated to a panel on Prussia or Galula to a panel on France or Johan Galtung to a panel on Norway, or Jiurgen Habermas to a panel on Germany. Interesting thought experiment that, isn't it? So why is it that scholarships based on an African, Asian, or Middle-eastern thinker offering abstract ideas and concepts, very rarely make it to a panel on theoretical concepts like Realism, Neo-realism, Liberalism or even Constructivism. I cannot simply buy the argument that such scholarship does not exist. It does.<sup>31</sup>

The central point I make here is that the field of international relations is dominated by European history and concepts. The mainstream discourses to include Marxism, Liberalism, Post-modernism, Realism, Critical Theory are conceptualized in universities in the West. All then that is left for scholarships from Asia or Africa or Middleeast is to be transferred to the 'domain of area studies' including those papers that offer interesting generalizations. We simply must fit in, to the academic powers that be. Having an Asian or African scholar that has perfected Western concepts as a representative of diversity, does not change my central claim.



Main stupa of Sariputta in the ancient Nalanda University, Bihar, India.  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nalanda.jpg>





<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MongolsBesiegingACityInTheMiddleEast13thCentury.jpg>

This is not about ethnic diversity, for example, an Indian scholar from Assam, Northeast India presenting papers on Realism, as offering up a diversified experience and inclusivity. This is about whether IR concepts themselves are diversified and truly based on a general experience; a reflection of western and eastern thinking on IR or a blend of both.

This critique is not something new,<sup>32</sup> and has been often highlighted by several scholars, to include David Kang. In an article published in *International Security*, titled “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks”, Kang specified:

because Europe was so important for so long a period, in seeking to understand international relations, scholars have often simply deployed concepts, theories and experiences derived from the European experience to project onto and explain Asia...western analysts have predicted dire scenarios for Asia, whereas many Asian experts have expressed growing optimism about the region’s future...this is not to criticize European-derived theories purely because they are based on the Western experience: The origins of a theory are not necessarily relevant to its applicability. Rather these theories do a poor job as they are applied to Asia.<sup>33</sup>

Let’s revert back to *Wolf’s method*, which as Kant specified was premised on “the regular ascertainment of principles, the clear determination of concepts, the attempt at strictness in proofs, and the prevention of audacious leaps in inferences”.<sup>34</sup>

To an African or Assamese scholar from India, audacious leaps of imagination are an integral part of how our societies were formed. The Nagas from India, for instance, believe in their oral folktales that their tribes travelled from somewhere near the seas, and gathered in a place called Makhel (present day Nagaland in India) and then dispersed.<sup>35</sup> “The hypothesis that the Nagas must have come from the seacoast or at least seen some Islands or the seas is strengthened by the life-style of the Nagas and the ornaments being used till today in many Naga villages...Their fondness of Cowries shells for beautifying the dress, and use of Conch shells as ornaments (precious ornaments for them). Nagas have customs very similar to those living in the remote parts of Borneo, Sarawak, Indonesia, Malaysia etc. indicating that their ancient abode was near the sea, if not in some islands”.<sup>36</sup> However, Naga oral traditions were the only source and there were simply no written records. So, how do we know, what we know, based on that source. British anthropologists and colonial administration passed these stories off as folktales and myths,<sup>37</sup> whereas for the Naga societies, this was a realistic retelling of their history and formed an important part of who they were as an ethnic community.

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Based on the above, the problem I have with the assertion about ontology or the science of being is that, is it really a science? Not many things in the social world can be proven with such preciseness; for instance, while the existence of the ‘mouse’ that you use as part of your computer can be easily proven, how do you prove love or hate, or intentions, or any other such human feelings and emotions. An interesting perspective is offered by Lee M. Brown in his essay, “Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought”.<sup>38</sup> Brown argues that “ontological commitments within modern Western culture are no less problematic than those within traditional African cultures. Each posits unobservable entities to explain the experiential world, and neither has ready access to those posits held as grounding or as otherwise determining what is experienced”.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes, I have found myself assuming human emotions based on my own observable life and being, and of others in a structured orderly way, to be completely proven wrong. The idea of ontology or Wolf’s assertion gives one the impressions that human life or even the state as a ‘socially constructed entity’, can be observed by using mathematical principles. But as Michal Walzer asserted in his book, *Just and Unjust Wars*, that while the idea of proportionality in war (*jus ad bellum*-Right Conduct in War) gives one the impression that there is a precise mathematical calculation on what is proportionate, nothing can be further from the truth.<sup>40</sup> While to an extent *statistically driven* models have proven useful (polls, military balances, conflict datasets),<sup>41</sup> consequently, in a larger number of cases, for instance, how Iraqis would greet the 2003 U.S. intervention as liberators, as the neo-conservatives asserted<sup>42</sup> have proven to be completely false.

Interestingly, while western ontology and epistemology only considers the historicity of an idea, as knowing something essential about statecraft (unit of analysis: actual historical states) in Eastern thinking, mythology and folk stories are as important in forming ‘belief systems’ as is actual state behavior.<sup>43</sup> As Louise Fawcett argues, sometimes Western binary levels of analysis as strong or weak states, good or bad governance, misses a lot of complexity in attempts to offer a simplistic view of reality based on rational choice. This is true when one analyses the so-called concept of Arab spring, that ushered the false hope of democratic orderly states to follow the end of centralized authoritarian rule. Instead, what we experienced were “the subsequent failure to install new, more legitimate and inclusive governments exposed the systemic fragility of the state-society contract leading, in some cases, to anarchy or the return to a kind of pre-state model, with authority divided between different regional, ethnic, tribal and religious groups, some aided by external powers”.<sup>44</sup> Fawcett cautions that despite that, one cannot assume that there is state failure or that the state system in the Middle-east is weak just because it does not fit the idea of a Western modern and developed state. Moreover, Arab states are too diverse to fit into any generalization schema.



Myths could be a direct expression of reality. I suspected this when I read the stories of the Mahabharat, the Ramayana and the Panchatantra in India, as a child and then as an adult. The authors of these complex stories of statecraft utilized myths, stories and imagination to make simpler socio-economic and political systems, and explain the various complexities of human nature: order, justice, good, evil, moral, amoral, power, strategy, statecraft, concepts of war, relationship between ruler and ruled, notions of a just king, and what constitutes a normative political order.



Stone base relief depicting a scene from the Hindu epic, Mahabharata, Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

As scholars of developing countries frequently remind us, we should beware the pitfalls of generalizing theory and of its crude application to any given regional environment.<sup>20</sup> Calling states 'failed' could be self-fulfilling if the definitions favour the strong and disempower the weak state. States such as Venezuela today are labelled 'failing', perhaps to justify the view that intervention by the international community to fix its sovereignty deficits might, at some point, become justified...just as the discussion of state failure is not new, nor is the argument that the Middle East system itself is endangered...scholars and media pundits have regularly predicted and speculated about the demise of this configuration. The same holds true for other regions, such as Africa and south Asia, where borders have been imposed by former colonial powers, even where such imposed borders have become robust.<sup>45</sup>

Does international relations and security account for such mythology that is part of state creation in Middle-eastern, or eastern or African understanding of statecraft. Or that ethnicity, morality, statecraft, to include stratagem to win battles can be imbibed from lessons found in mythological epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in India,<sup>46</sup> or African literary works, especially their oral traditions and folk stories that are popular in such societies.<sup>47</sup> In African societies, myths played a critical role, as defined by Jones M. Jaja from Nigeria, "Myths are man-made stories that play explanatory functions in the African understanding of reality... It can be argued that some myths represent complex logical systems which are different from those which are usually found in contemporary western societies."<sup>48</sup> Myths could be a direct expression of reality. I suspected this when I read the stories of the Mahabharat, the Ramayana and the Panchatantra in India, as a child and then as an adult. The authors of these complex stories of statecraft utilized myths, stories and imagination to make simpler socio-economic and political systems, and explain the various complexities of human nature: order, justice, good, evil, moral, amoral, power, strategy, statecraft, concepts of war, relationship between ruler and ruled, notions of a just king, and what constitutes a normative political order. Similarly, as Jaja argues, myths are seen as illogical and irrational in Western analytical framework, and cannot be even termed as philosophy; a search for the logical and the rational. Myths are therefore seen as super-national explanations of the world that cannot have any philosophical generalizations, and hence rejected as part of an evidence based analytical approach. However, that rejection misses the whole picture of how African societies might view life and by extension state and societal relations.



I must clarify that I am not saying that International Relations theories like Realism Liberalism, Constructivism are not useful. I am neither saying that statistically derived models should not be attempted, or that they have no relevance. Quite the contrary. They have their own usefulness, as I have mentioned before, to include election studies, exit polls, military balances, levels of conflict datasets, economic data, etc. However, my article shows how these theories have used empirical evidence based on European history, dominated by the World Wars, the Cold War, and the British colonial experience.

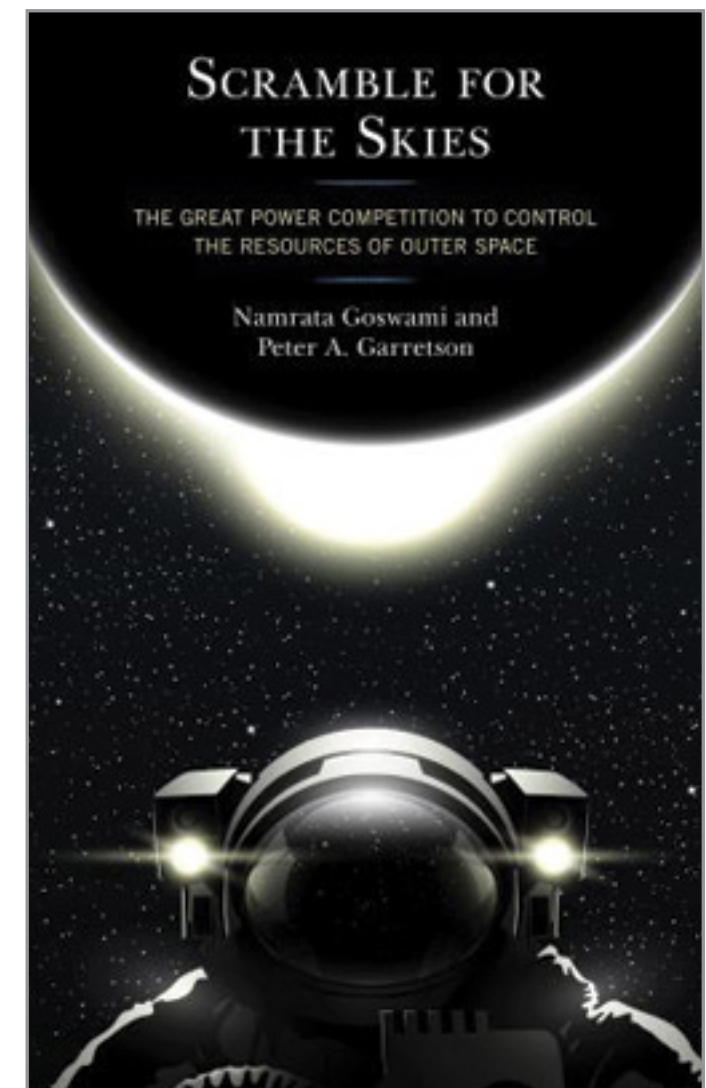
Generally, myths contain three kinds of stories namely, stories of origin, explanatory stories and didactic stories. Each of these stories is meant to explain a particular phenomenon. Myth is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but living chronicles in the minds of Africans. They contain and express the history, the culture and the inner experience of the African himself. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do. It is indeed surprising that up till this age (2011), some scholars still doubt the existence of African philosophy. The reason being that some philosophers having basically studied Western philosophy treated African philosophy from a typical western standpoint. It is necessary to remind this class of scholars that in traditional Africa there are individuals who are capable of critical coherent and independent thinking.<sup>49</sup>

This perspective is supported by Stephen Belcher who argues “The paucity of written records has been grounds for dismissal of the notion of African history—most notoriously in the case of Hegel, who in ignorance wrote off the home of the human species—and more recently a cause of pride among African intellectuals who have asserted the value of the oral tradition in the face of skepticism rooted in prejudice and too often in overt racism”.<sup>50</sup> In Africa, the usage of oral traditions, very similar to remote areas of India (Assam, Nagaland, Manipur), where I come from, are the key to understanding pre-colonial history, of who or what kind of societies and state structures evolved over centuries, as well as offer explanations of the uniqueness of cultures and traditions, that survive the colonial period.

I must clarify that I am not saying that International Relations theories like Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism are not useful. I am neither saying that statistically derived models should not be attempted, or that they have no relevance. Quite the contrary. They have their own usefulness, as I have mentioned before, to include election studies, exit polls, military balances, levels of conflict datasets, economic data, etc. However, my article shows how these theories have used empirical evidence based on European history, dominated by the World Wars, the Cold War, and the British colonial experience. Therefore, even the field of studies called pre-colonial and post-colonial, are based on the colonial experience as the main point of departure. My article highlights power politics, cultural insights, original foreign policy constructs, for example, offered by a country in Southeast Asia (Indonesia), to then make the point that somehow those concepts never make it to the general theory of state behavior;<sup>51</sup> or that their insights are used to study international relations theory.

Instead, I can imagine a forthcoming paper on ‘Pancasila’ being relegated to Southeast Asia area studies or a panel on ASEAN whereas Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen points are viewed as a universal construct.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps, I understand why. Woodrow Wilson offered those points as a negotiating framework at the end of the First World War imposed on the world by European states through their colonial systems. It had deep impact but so did Abdurrahman Wahid’s conceptualization on states in Asia. Yet we find very few universal concepts offered as general theory based on Indonesia’s first democratically elected leader.

I will finally end by stating that Western rationalist assumption of historicity,<sup>53</sup> and de-legitimizing ‘knowing truth’ through examination of myth and stories dominates IR. It is by no means clear that Africa, Middle-East, Asia and in particular South Asia have made this commitment. In fact, it is quite likely that practitioners of statecraft come to their understandings of the world not through reading IR literature, but through stories, myths and fictions. If broadening of the audience of IR is the goal, then it is worth reconsidering the limitation of historicity, and to consider the use of IR through parable, societal imaginations and coming together of East-West thinking on IR.



Book available at :  
<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781498583114/Scramble-for-the-Skies-The-Great-Power-Competition-to-Control-the-Resources-of-Outer-Space>

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In conclusion, IR as a discipline will not progress much if we continue to utilize the same old concepts, models and theories, drawn heavily from Western academia to study change and innovation. Let us strive to be truly ‘conceptually’ international.

If our theories in fact capture great truths, then we should expect such truths to be relatively timeless, and to provide explanatory power not only of historical records, but also of other human attempts to capture essential truths such as through drama, fiction, story and myth.

In terms of inclusion and broader case studies, the rise of machine scanning and translation technology now unlocks a treasure trove of records of pre-colonial sovereign polity relations across Africa, Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, South East and East Asia. We can now think of a grand project to code such records to look for whether or not they provide confirming evidence of our theoretical outlook outside the European Westphalian model, or whether there are, in fact, novel truths and patterns to be uncovered.

In conclusion, we need to answer a fundamental question. Who is our scholarship aimed at? This is connected to my question I highlighted in the beginning: Are these scholarships aimed at those scholars who are already sold to these concepts and methods, to the exclusion of those who do not necessarily find them useful to explain IR? Consequently, a few other questions should be discussed.

- Why don’t others find them useful? Is it alien jargon?
- Where is the role of statistical models and where is their overreach?

In conclusion, IR as a discipline will not progress much if we continue to utilize the same old concepts, models and theories, drawn heavily from Western academia to study change and innovation. Let us strive to be truly ‘conceptually’ international.

End Notes

1. This is an abridged version of a paper I presented at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Conference, Toronto, 2019. The original ‘unpublished paper’ offers in-depth analyses, cross cultural case studies and recommendations.

2. “ISA 2019 Call for Proposals,” <https://www.isanet.org/Conferences/Toronto-2019/Call> (accessed October 21, 2020).

3. “Christian Wolf”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, *First published on July 3, 2006; substantive revision November 11, 2014 at* <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wolff-christian/> (accessed on March 12, 2019).

4. Ibid.

5. “Epistemology”, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at <https://www.iep.utm.edu/epistemo/> (accessed October 11, 2020). Jonathan M. Moses and Torbjorn L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

6. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley,1979).

7. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Germany: Verlag von Otto Meisner, 1867); Alexander Anievas, ed., *Marxism and World Politics Contesting Global Capitalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

8. Randall L. Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing”, *International Security*, 29/2 (Fall 2004), pp. 159-201.

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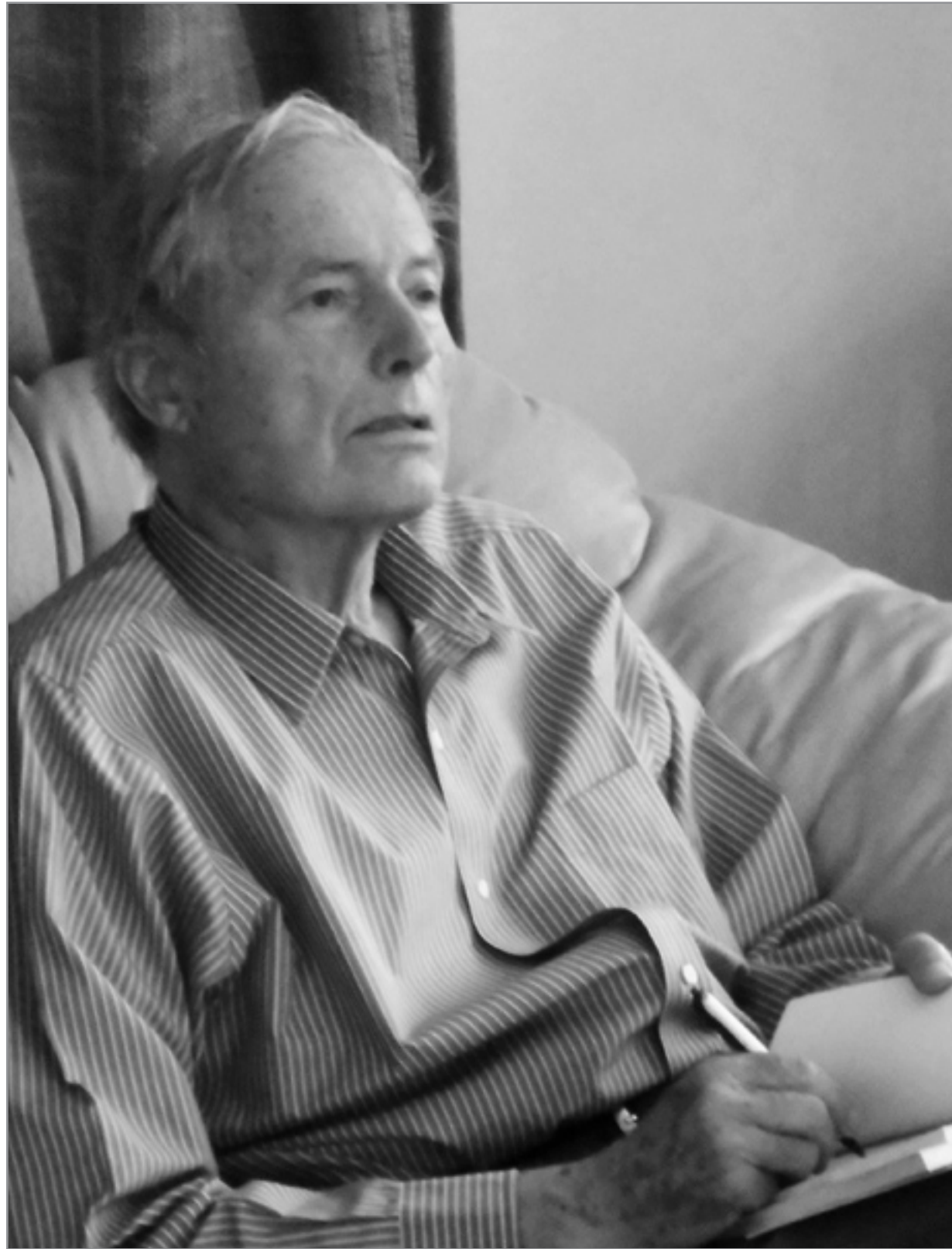
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Dr Howard Richards

## DR HOWARD RICHARDS

### Surviving Today's Crises Requires the Transformation of the Basic Cultural Structure of the Modern World.

Over a million hectares burned in the Amazon forests in 2019. An even larger – although harder to determine- number of hectares burned last year in African forests and savannahs. The media often mention that the Australia and California fires of 2020 continue a negative feedback cycle. There has been worldwide a steadily increasing loss of vegetation to flames that has been accelerating for several decades. Less vegetation means less rainfall means less vegetation.

It is in the news that millions of people around the world – inspired by a Swedish teenager so honest that looking at a picture of her will cure a headache—have taken to the streets demanding that something must be done. I will here offer an open-ended answer to the question what must be done: The basic cultural structures of the modern world must be transformed. I will wait until I have set out more context before defining 'basic cultural structure,' but I will say now that many people say essentially the same thing I am saying using different words. In principle anything true can be said in many different ways –would you not agree?

Walking back in time to 1990, when I wore a younger man's clothes, I imagined I could contribute to saving the world by selling my car. The train of reasoning leading to my fantastic belief began more with nausea than with logic. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana, where I was then living, was the Chair of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The first U.S. invasion of Iraq was about to begin. I read in a newspaper that Senator Lugar had threatened that if the French would not join in the invasion, then we would not share the petroleum with them. Gasping for air and trying not to vomit, I did a little research.





<https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/vehicles-air-pollution-human-health>

I learned that the number of people in the world driving automobiles was then a little under one billion. The number of people living in extreme poverty was nearly equal. Then I imagined that all the cars and all the poor people were lined up in pairs, with each car matched with one poor person, that is to say one loser in today's economic game *whose goods and/or services offered for sale had remained either unsold or sold for too little to live on*. At that time, in 1990, at the equilibrium point where supply equals demand leaving some people unemployed or underpaid; that is to say, at the point where the number and the identity of the losers were determined, the number of extremely poor people, was about a billion. That number was about equal to the number of people who owned a car. Rounding off, there were a billion very poor people and a billion owners of private automobile. Then if the pairs (x, y) where x is a car and y is a poor person were lined up, they would have formed a line stretching several times around the earth. The last x and the last y –as a close approximation-- would have been located at the same place. If that place turned out to be over an ocean, then you would have to imagine that the car and the person were held above the waves by an angel or by a helicopter.

I reasoned that I could use the money I saved by selling my car and then walking, bicycling and using public transportation, to lift one person out of poverty. If I could explain the simple math to everyone else, then all other car owners would do the same. The outcome would be no private cars, no extreme poverty, less CO2 in the atmosphere, fewer wars like the first Iraq war (because petroleum would be less valuable), and (because people would walk more) fewer heart attacks.

Subsequently, when my mathematical model was tested using myself as a one-person empirical sample, the money saved by one person not driving a car proved to be enough to lift more than one person out of extreme poverty. But when I attempted to enlarge the sample, it turned out that nobody else understood my math. Or if they did understand the math, they preferred to continue driving, while leaving in poverty the people they could have promoted to the lower middle class by walking and sharing.

Or – perhaps more likely—everyone else understood my math perfectly well. They would have given up their cars if they had believed that walking would save the world. But everyone else was smarter than I was. They always knew my reasoning was invalid. They always knew that the auto industry was indispensable to keep the economy going, and that long before advocates like me of the slogan 'live simply, that others may simply live' succeeded in shutting down most of its factories, dealerships, repair shops, service stations, insurance agencies, oil refineries, and other auto-dependent

sources of employment for workers and profits for owners; whatever it takes –a fascist coup if necessary—would be done to keep the automobile industry going. Everyone but me also knew from the beginning that the more people got out of poverty the more they would become drivers of cars.

They also already knew more realistic solutions to the climate crisis. For example, all cars could be electric and non-polluting. All electricity generation could be non-polluting too. Electricity generation could be from renewable sources. The production of new green technologies could be made so labour-intensive and so profitable, that nobody would miss the demise of all the polluting industries.

Contrary to my 1990 fantasy of frugal peace, but also contrary to other people's perhaps more realistic plans for mass technological and economic conversion to sustainable lifestyles, the last thirty years have brought little encouragement. While extreme poverty has declined, conventional automobile ownership has increased. Every victory for economic growth has been a defeat for mother earth. The use of non-polluting technologies –here it must be mentioned that more are in the pipeline<sup>1</sup> — like electric cars and wind-generated electricity has increased; but as the human population has grown and economies have grown, worldwide pollution has increased even more. Bottomless violence and deceit and muddled thinking have gone baroque. The climate crisis has gotten worse. As we speak, many of the small gains of green policies are being erased by political movements led by figures like Trump and Bolsonaro. The Trumps and the Bolsonaros are supported by elite donors and by working class voting publics who view green policies as threats to their profits and jobs.

Also, during those same forty years I, co-authors and allied authors (hereafter 'we') have demonstrated in detail in numerous mostly unread read books, chapters in books, and papers that surviving the climate crisis (and other crises) requires the transformation of the basic cultural structure of the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

Let me try again. I might suggest a more precise definition of the problem and more effective ways to solve it even to somebody who already understands that the chaos and destruction all around us has deep structural causes that do not appear in the media or in academic orthodoxy.

God help me to be clear.

What is the basic cultural structure of the modern world?

In one word: Sales.

In two French words: *séparation marchande*.<sup>3</sup>





<https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/the-amazon-fires-the-burning-of-rights/>

The French phrase –literally ‘merchant separation’ or ‘commercial separation’—corresponds to what is sometimes called in English ‘the exchange relation’ which might also be called ‘the exchange non-relation,’ or ‘your problem is not my problem’ or ‘what’s in it for me?’ It corresponds to the point Adam Smith makes when he writes that to get our bread from our baker we appeal entirely to his interests and not at all to our needs or to any family or social or ethical ties that bind us; and to the similar point the Pie man makes when he says to Simple Simon, ‘Show me first your penny!’

Remember that twelve paragraphs above I identified the poor people with the people *whose goods and/or services had remained either unsold or sold for too little to live on*. I was relying on Keynes’ point that supply usually equals demand (so that everything supplied is sold and if more were supplied it would not be sold) *not when all needs are met, or when any kind of optimum is achieved but when the ‘revealed preferences’ of people with money and a desire to spend it have been discovered.*<sup>4</sup>

Transposing to an ethical key, the game is set up in such a way that some people lose even when they play by the rules and try as hard as they can. There can be a duty to work, or at least a duty to be willing to work, but there can be no duty to earn an income by working. Being employed requires finding someone able and willing to buy your work. There can be no duty to buy, hence no duty to employ, and hence no duty to be employed. (Gandhi provides an example of a different ethic: the able unemployed should volunteer; their needs should be met by the sharing of those more fortunate.<sup>5</sup>)

Given the dominant modern ethic supporting sales as the basic structure, history and logic tell us that over time, inevitably, investing in order to produce for sale for profit will become essential.<sup>6</sup> It will become essential to ‘create employment’ by investments that hire people to make something to sell. Without investment many (normally most) people’s physical needs will not be met. As happened in Chile in 1973, and as is happening in Venezuela now, ‘the economy comes to a standstill.’

As Michael Kalecki wrote: ‘Under a laissez-faire system the level of employment depends to a great extent on the so-called state of confidence. If this deteriorates, private investment declines, which results in a fall of output and employment (both directly and through the secondary effect of the fall in incomes upon consumption and investment). This gives to the capitalists a powerful indirect control over Government policy: everything which may shake the state of confidence must be carefully avoided because it would cause an economic crisis.’<sup>7</sup> The result is that whatever else happens, investors must be pleased. They can shut the system down for any reason or no reason. Jobs depend on them. Food depends on them.

Normally (and as aggravated in cases like those just mentioned where political motives are major factors) everything depends on sales being large enough at high enough prices to keep the motor that drives the system going. Some people call such a way of life a ‘regime of accumulation.’ This phrase has come to mean that everything about a culture, all its institutions and all its behaviour and beliefs and ideals, must be –whatever else they are—conducive to investors making profits. Is this clear?

This does not mean humans do not do other things that cause problems—like spending their free time having fun in ways that multiply the human population beyond the carrying capacity of the planet. Or like—as mentioned above—poor people when they stop being poor wanting to live like rich people, making ecological and other problems (like traffic) worse. Governments do not always succeed in attracting all the investors they need to get the growth alleged to be necessary to create employment that they (misguidedly) want. Indeed, to repeat *if they do get the growth they want, economic victory is ecological defeat*.

Thus until there is a culture shift of minds and hearts – nothing less -- all governments are compelled to play a game only some governments can win. Even the winners only win some of the time. Each has 195 other governments competing with it.<sup>8</sup> Usually all or most of the profitable business niches have already been found and occupied by someone else. When-- beating the odds-- a nation achieves a high rate of growth, mother nature suffers while the benefits that trickle down to ordinary people are often not just small but negative –negative, for instance, by driving up the price of real estate. Then fewer people can afford to own, larger portions of incomes go to rent; and more people sleep on the sidewalk or in their cars.<sup>9</sup>

The greed of the rich, or some fraction of them, no doubt explains some of the persistence of untenable ideologies that t (falsely) appear to serve their interests. Greed explains some of the concentration of wealth in their hands and some of the physical dependence of life on their decisions. But the main factor is not greed. I personally do not happen to know any business people I would call greedy, but I know many who stress out meeting payroll, paying taxes, and paying banks. Reality makes them less generous than they would like to be. The forces that make society conform to the requirements of investor confidence are appropriately attributed to cultural structures, to separation marchande. The necessities of business structurally depend on investing to produce for sale to customers who have money to buy. This is a fact about the rules of the game –namely the rules that govern sales.





Greta Thunberg

The cultural rules constitute the material positions that constitute the system.<sup>10</sup> (The material positions, for example buyer and seller, employer and employee, landlord and tenant are constituted by the rights and duties of the persons who occupy those positions.) Is this clear? Do you see how ethics –one could also say culture—is at the root of law that structures human relationships in ways that create economic necessity? The force driving modern governments to strive as hard as they can to attract investors is not a fact about psychology. It does not depend on who wins the elections. It is not created by self-serving ideology or by original sin. Redistributing wealth, and other necessary changes, on the scale necessary to achieve governability to cope with today's and tomorrow's mass unemployment, global warming, virus attacks and other existential crises, call for making the basic legal-cultural-social structure more susceptible than it is now to ethical change and amendment in the light of physical facts --physical facts like people sleeping in their cars and jungles burning.

In more detail: the reason why the main cause of inequality, exclusion, and paralysis in the face of climate change and other existential threats is structure, not greed, is this: The poor person gets a job (...the consumer finds a well-stocked supermarket, the government gets a tax base... etc.) only if the investor gets a profit. Therefore, people who already have money must end up with even more money, in order for the penniless to get anything. These things do not happen because people break the basic rules of the game. Once ethical individualism sets in-- the forgetting of traditional community values, the forgetting of religious practices like confessing the sin of avarice and doing penance-- it is inevitable, as a matter of history and as a matter of logic, that life will come to depend physically on the confidence of investors. Of course, there have always been counter-currents existing alongside *séparation marchande*: mothers, neighbours, people marching to the beat of a different drummer. Nevertheless markets –which Habermas called modernity's primary institution,<sup>11</sup> dominate us. We get tragic results like: humanity is marching lockstep to a place not one human being wants to go, namely to making planet earth uninhabitable. Like the recent wave of corporate commitments to racial justice which commit to hiring more blacks inevitably implying that there will be fewer good jobs for anybody who is not black –because corporations can only hire a total number of employees justified by their volume of sales.

Bottom line: the long series of failures to achieve social justice and to live in harmony with nature in the twentieth century and so far in the twenty first calls on us to widen our options by being more open-minded, to learn more from history and anthropology, to be more imaginative, to try social

innovations, to question ourselves doing what E.F. Schumacher called 'inner work' and Saint Francis called 'penance.' And to be less angry. The world is not in a catastrophic state because people are being bad by breaking the rules. It is the other way around: the rules are breaking us. Greta Thunberg has said that to keep the carbon in the ground and to keep global warming from going past or beyond the 1.5 Celsius mark we need to change the rules and change the system.<sup>12</sup> But what new rules and what new system or systems would accomplish such goals? Let's be honest: We do not know. This is where the idea of unbounded organization comes in.<sup>13</sup> Unbounded organization is not a theory. It is an attitude. It is an ethical commitment to work together across sectors for the common good. Starting with the cultures that exist –which is the only place we can start— we work with cultural zones of proximal development (growth points) through mission-driven organizations. We have to find the growth points in practice. We have no one size fits all theory telling us in advance what they are.

The bottom line is ethical: meeting needs because they are needs. That is what community means. That is what solidarity means. I cannot say more here. I have tried as hard as I can to communicate clearly what it means to say that the basic cultural structure leads to physical dependence on the confidence of investors. It is unreliable. It is ungovernable. It is on a collision course with nature.

#### End Notes

1. Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*. New York: Free Press, 2012.
2. For example, volume two, letters 26-50 of my *Letters from Quebec*. San Francisco and London: International Scholars Press, 1995 is titled 'Methods for Transforming the Structures of the Modern World'. More of our writings can easily be found on Amazon, Google, ResearchGate, [www.unboundedorganization.org](http://www.unboundedorganization.org), here in Live Encounters, in Transcend Media Service, Journal of Critical Realism, Pressenza.Com, and Divyadaan, the journal of the philosophy institute of the Salesian province of India
3. André Orléan, *L'Empire de la valeur : refonder l'économie*. Paris: Seuil, 2011. The expression is introduced at Position 328 and then woven into an account that expresses better than I can how the relationships –and absence of relationships—it describes are fundamental for economic theory and for economic society.
4. E.g. General Theory, p. 209, there agreeing with Hobson
5. See Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger, *Gandhi and the Future of Economics*. Lake Oswego OR: Dignity Press, 2013: and also *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 32, Article Five, reply to objection two: Martin Luther's essay on the freedom of a Christian, and so on and on one could make an unending list of basic cultural structures different from the one currently dominant.
6. This point is explained in more detail in Howard Richards, *Moral (and Ethical) Realism*. Journal of Critical Realism. Volume 18 (2019) pp. 285-302.
7. Michael Kalecki, *Political Aspects of Full Employment*. Political Quarterly. Volume 14. (1943) Pp.322-331. P.325. Paul Krugman makes a similar point in his *The Return of Depression Economics*. New York: W.W Norton, 2009. P.111-114.
8. Jeffrey Winters, *Power in Motion: Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
9. Michael Hudson, *Killing the Host*. San Diego: Target Books, 2015.
10. Douglas Porpora, *Cultural Rules and Material Relations*. Social Theory Vol. 11 (1993) pp. 212-229.
11. Jurgen Habermas, *The Legitimation Crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975. Karl Polanyi called modern society not capitalism but 'market society'. Any number of mainstream scholars like Alex Inkeles have made up any number of lists of indicators defining the variable 'modernity'.
12. In her TED talk of January 28, 2019 and repeatedly.
13. [www.unboundedorganization.org](http://www.unboundedorganization.org)



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David Morgan

## DAVID MORGAN

### THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

The thirst for knowledge and the love of learning were long much cherished characteristics of poor people in the days before state education became the norm and when opportunities for social advance were strictly limited. (In the British context, which is my focus here, compulsory state education only gained traction towards the end of the Victorian age and university remained the exclusive preserve of the elite until well into the 20th century). Bookishness was especially common among those who felt compelled to do something about their lot by becoming political activists fuelled by idealistic beliefs in the possibility of building a new society that would be founded on fairness and equality to be achieved through the combined actions of the organised labour movement. Raising consciousness through careful reading of good books was regarded as a means of winning their own liberation and that of their fellow workers. Enlightenment would be the first step towards emancipation.

Political parties, as they emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tended to attract to their cause workers who were awakened to the tremendous injustices that pervaded their society and, determined to do something practical about it, they aspired to leadership of their class. Socialists and Communists were often self-taught intellectuals who were thoroughly devoted to learning both as an end in itself and as a means to an end. Books had a highly treasured place in their households. One such typical worker activist and early British Communist, nowadays largely forgotten, was named T A Jackson. He gained quite a substantial following through a regular newspaper column that he produced for the *Daily Worker* and which appeared in the years between the two world wars.

In an essay called “Why the Novel?” that concludes his collected articles, Jackson argues that “for a full life, men need food for their minds as well as their bodies, so too, they need food for their fancy, their sympathy, their power of creative imagination.”

These were the decades of economic depression, mass unemployment, the rise of fascism in Europe and the onset of a calamitous world war. Jackson was fully aware of the political and economic turmoil that was all around him, but he was still convinced that it was vitally important for individuals to find a little time for reading and for acquiring knowledge. He believed that books gave people access to the greatest things in life and that fine writing provided rich food for the mind. Literature possessed the capacity to inspire the imagination which was dulled by repetitive labour and oppressive social conditions.

Jackson was an enthusiastic teacher and took on the task of educating his fellow workers in the classics of English literature fired by his own enthusiasm for reading which he acquired from an early age and his belief that the working people had as much right to culture as the privileged class. Jackson understood the value of reading literature in much the same way that the Victorian critic Matthew Arnold did: Arnold had argued that people should read “the best that has been thought and said” as a means towards their own education and learning.

Each week in his popular newspaper column Jackson would write about one author and introduce their key works to his responsive readership. Jackson was a shrewd critic and by no means biased towards the “proletarian novel” or works of socialist realism; far from it. The authors that Jackson chose would easily have impressed professional literary critics such as the influential Cambridge based, F R Leavis, the founder of the journal, *Scrutiny*, and who was a prominent advocate of what he called the “great tradition” of English literature. In Jackson’s column, readers would be made aware of Jonathan Swift, John Bunyan, Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett, Thomas Love Peacock, Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Dickens, the Brontes, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, Trollope, George Meredith as well as Shakespeare. Jackson wrote as if reading a book was a political act and he urged his readers to demand that the local library stocked the novels that he recommended if they could not afford to buy books for themselves. Jackson offered up a formidable list of authors, several of whom are not very widely read these days.

Jackson’s essays were later collected in a book titled, *Old Friends to Keep*. He regarded authors as “old friends” and was a strong proponent of the reading of literature for its own sake, not simply for the political messages that could be discovered in all good works of fiction. Jackson shared with Leavis an understanding of the true value of literature and its power to influence people’s behaviour, shape attitudes and develop sensibilities.

The great difference between the thinking of Jackson and Leavis was that the latter felt that only a minority of the public would ever be able to fully appreciate the meaning of great literary works, while Jackson believed that they could and should become accessible to everyone with sufficient learning, time and opportunity. Jackson was a believer in awakening the power of the imagination in everyone. Leavis, incidentally, was far from being entirely a conservative in outlook and was, in fact, inspired by the poet and critic Edgell Rickword, who in 1925 had founded a pioneering literary journal called, *The Calendar of Modern Letters*. Like Jackson, Rickword was a Communist. Leavis adapted the title for his own literary journal, *Scrutiny*, established in 1932, from a column of Rickword’s called “Scrutinies” that appeared in the Calendar. Leavis parted company from Rickword and Jackson in political affiliation; they were comrades in the struggle for socialism, while Leavis was a firm advocate of detachment and what he termed “disinterestedness”. Jackson was just as much a believer in the importance of literature as was Leavis; he was simply more optimistic about the possibility of converting the masses to a love of the finer things in life. Jackson’s enthusiasm is infectious and helps sustain hope even in the bleakest of times. We have need of such human qualities today.

In an essay called “Why the Novel?” that concludes his collected articles, Jackson argues that “for a full life, men need food for their minds as well as their bodies, so too, they need food for their fancy, their sympathy, their power of creative imagination.”

He continues,

“It is my conviction, supported by the experience of a life-time, that no class feels so hungry for these as does the wage-worker class – whose circumstances have tended drastically to deny them all power of satisfying this cultural hunger, except in mean and scandalously adulterated ways.”

He concludes that,

“The fight for leisure, and for the facilities which enrich leisure with recreational possibilities, has therefore been an integral part of the programme of working-class struggle from the very beginning.”

In a passionate advocacy of the power and value of literature, Jackson argues that what he describes as “the systematic cultivation of the imagination” is “the most fundamentally revolutionary work that there is to be done.”



The imagination is the ultimate of democratic concepts: we all have access to it given the right education that stimulates our curiosity, encourages us to develop our creative instincts and helps us to realise our full potential as human beings. Computer games, texting and social media are all poor substitutes for the kind of stimulus that is needed to enable the creative human imagination to flourish, as flourish it must.

Jackson's arguments amount to an emphatic repudiation of the concept of the division between "high" and "low" culture or of an elite culture that is far removed from popular culture. He looks forward to a time when there is a quality common culture that can be enjoyed and appreciated by a well-educated public with sufficient free time to make full use of the best that is available to them. It would be a rich common culture and shared experience enjoyed by everyone in a future that has so far remained elusive. Jackson believed that the people had the power to make his dream a reality and that literature would help them to realise how they could achieve it.

The writings of working-class intellectuals such as Jackson are sadly little-known today outside a small circle of enthusiasts. This is our loss because his very simply expressed arguments remain persuasive and he has much to teach us about the value of literature, the role of culture as an essential part of life and, most of all, how the power of the imagination can be stimulated by one's reading. The imagination is the ultimate of democratic concepts: we all have access to it given the right education that stimulates our curiosity, encourages us to develop our creative instincts and helps us to realise our full potential as human beings. Computer games, texting and social media are all poor substitutes for the kind of stimulus that is needed to enable the creative human imagination to flourish, as flourish it must.



Dharma Wheel (Chakra) lit up on the grounds of a temple in Luang Prabang, Laos PDR. This is the wheel of transformation. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Dr. Govind Bhattacharjee, a former Director General at the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India and a former Professor at the Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, is the author of a highly acclaimed and comprehensive book: *Public sector Enterprises in India: Evolution, Privatisation and Reforms* (SAGE, 2020). During his long career as a civil servant, he has served in various capacities in India and abroad, including as a Tax Advisor to a foreign government for four years. Dr. Bhattacharjee is a prolific writer and a columnist with versatile interests. He has so far published 10 books and authored more than 200 articles in various academic journals and national newspapers.

*Public sector Enterprises in India: Evolution, Privatisation and Reforms* by Govind Bhattacharjee—Professor, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi (SAGE India, 2020, Hardback; ISBN: 9789353883720) [LINK](#)



## DR GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

### OUR PUBLIC SECTOR UNDERTAKINGS

Inspired by his socialist underpinnings, Nehru wanted our public sector undertakings (PSUs) to scale the “commanding heights of the economy”. Yes, they did help the infant nation during its formative years, when the risk averse private sector was unwilling to build the industrial infrastructure of the new-born republic. At the beginning of our planning, there were only five Central (CPSUs) with total investment of Rs 29 crore. PSUs have grown luxuriantly since then, proliferating to 444 including 6 statutory corporations in 2017, with total government investment in them exceeding Rs 16 lakh crore in equity and long term loans. But the philosophy behind them has undergone a sea change, with redefinition of the State’s role as catalyst and facilitator rather than producer or distributor. In this changed paradigm of free market capitalism, they have been forced to submit to the market discipline and brace open competition. Protected and supported all along, and unprepared for such sudden exposure, many have perished. Today, most of our PSUs find themselves haplessly trapped in the vast no-man’s land between the State and the market.

Both UPA and NDA governments since 1990s have followed the policy of disinvestment and privatization of PSUs, initially by offloading of minority shareholding. The process gathered aggressive momentum after 2000 and by 2004, Government’s majority stake in many profitable PSUs like MFIL, BALCO, CMC, HTL, VSNL, PPL, ITDC, HCI, HZL, IPCL etc. were sold away, often allowing management control to pass onto monopoly industrial houses Sterlite, Tatas, Reliance, etc. Since then, both UPA and NDA Governments have disinvested many of our prized companies like ONGC, SAIL, NALCO, NTPC, BHEL etc. The remaining ones were left to struggle and survive in a hostile environment. Some negotiated this process of readjustment with aplomb, while many perished. Many are still languishing.

Dr. Govind Bhattacharjee



Privatisation, or returning public assets to the private entrepreneur, what Friedrich Hayek called the “spontaneous order”, has been universally equated with reform of the public sector. The process is necessarily disruptive, accompanied by job losses and workers’ miseries to which no answer has been found. The neo-liberal model destroyed the social compact and diluted the concept of the welfare state. As public assets are passed on to private hands which are often powerful conglomerates, economic and political power in society get redistributed and restructured.

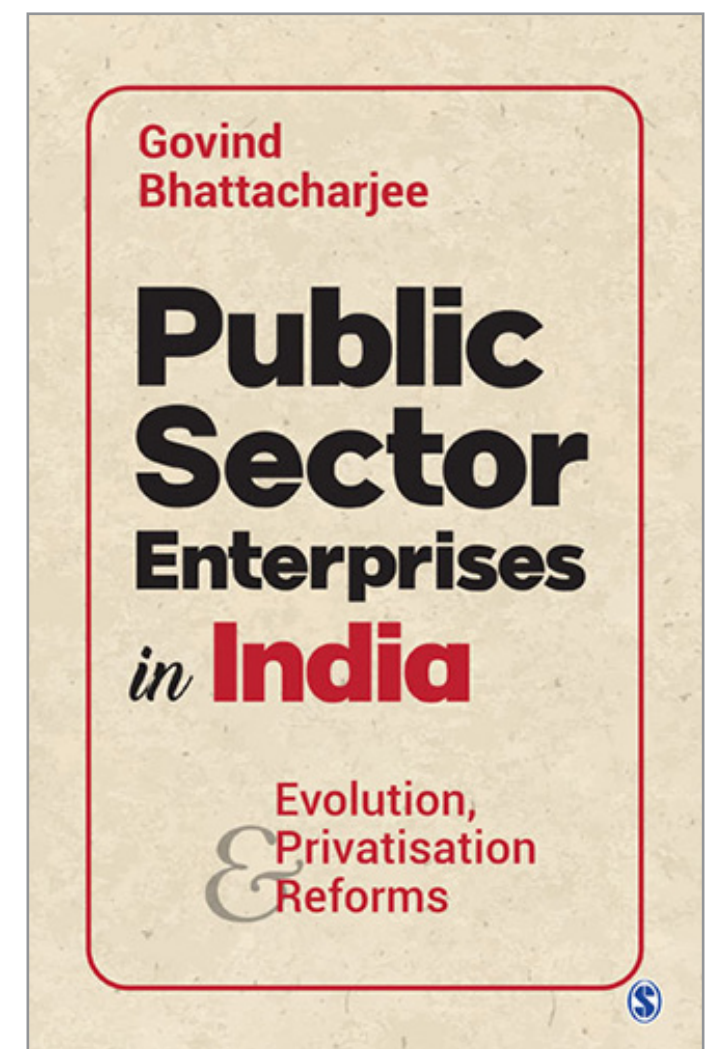
Debates about the merits and means of privatization is far from settled anywhere. But while many CPSUs have well-adjusted themselves, the State Public Sector Undertakings (SPSU) fit nowhere in the changed paradigm. They are indeed in a sorry state - a helpless pawn in the hands of unimaginative and greedy bureaucrats and politicians. SPSUs are devoid of logic, vitality, sustenance and a *raison d’être*, and by consuming scarce resources of the states, they are also impeding their growth. They constitute the wasteland of the states’ economy.

To judge the PSUs by their performance, 212 of the 444 CPSUs earned net profit of Rs 1.6 lakh crore in 2016-17, while 157 incurred net losses of Rs 30,700 crore, SAIL and MTNL leading the pack of the loss-making entities with losses around Rs 3000 crore each. 188 CPSUs had accumulated losses exceeding Rs 1.23 lakh crore over the years, and 77 have their net worth completely eroded by accumulated losses. The Government earned Rs 46,000 crore from their disinvestment during 2016-17. Four CPSUs even made it to the coveted Fortune 500 list in 2018: Oil India (ranked 137), ONGC (197), SBI (216) and Bharat Petroleum (314) – in company with Reliance industries (148), Tata Motors (232) and Rajesh Exports (405). 46 CPSUs were listed in the stock exchange and 57 were either defunct or under liquidation. CPSUs contributed Rs 3.86 lakh crore to the public exchequer in 2016-17 in taxes, cess and dividends, earned forex worth Rs 87,616 crore through exports while paying Rs 4.59 lakh crore on imports on royalty, technical knowhow, interest, consultancy etc. They provided regular employment to 11.31 lakh people.

If that is a mixed bag of performance for the CPSUs, the performance of the SPSUs is indeed dismal. As of March 2017, there were 1136 functional SPSUs in India, with total public investment of Rs 14.55 lakh crore. During the year, they received Rs 2.25 lakh crore from government grants and subsidies. But more than a quarter of them – 292 companies - had their net worth completely eroded – some, by many times over.

Out of 1136 working companies, only 541 had earned total profit amounting to Rs 18,415 crore, while the net losses of all working SPSUs amounted to Rs 84,118 crore. Their accumulated losses amounted to a whopping Rs 4.65 lakh crore as of March 2017. Only 117 earned some profit and paid total dividend of Rs 1253 crore to the governments in 2016-17. They provided regular employment to 17.4 lakh people. But a quarter of them -319 companies - were dysfunctional and produce nothing, some for more than 30 years. They can’t be liquidated because they have never made their accounts and nobody knows how much they own or owe.

Indeed, nobody knows why the SPSUs exist, but you can find them everywhere. There are development corporations for the welfare of all sections of society - backward classes, SCs and STs, minorities, teachers and handicapped, and even forward communities. Then there are finance and development corporations in every state for almost all human endeavour - fishery, poultry, piggery, live-stock, sugarcane, horticulture, pharmaceuticals and chemicals, industries, textiles, scoters and even films. Their primary activity is to provide loans which are refinanced by the Government under various schemes, and their only income is from interest. Lacking economy of scale besides technical skill and financial expertise, they are doomed to make losses from the beginning.



Book available at :  
<https://stealadeal.sagepub.in/public-sector-enterprises-in-india-govind-bhattacharjee-9789353883720.html>

Their purpose of providing subsidy or loans can be served much more efficiently by the existing network of public sector banks and financial institutions. But the real reasons for their creation and continuance is only to provide cushy parking places for senior bureaucrats, MLAs and powerful politicians as Chairman and Managing Directors so that state largesse can be extended to them through cars, perks and privileges which add to the losses at the cost of the taxpayers.

### Lessons from Abroad

The international experiences show us that economic risks arising from a large public sector can be mitigated either by complete state sellouts, or by establishing robust mechanisms to keep PSUs at arms' length from the government, while assiduously barring serving Government bureaucrats and politicians from exercising any control over them. Only a few countries have succeeded in this. They depoliticized their enterprises by insulating their PSUs from politicians and bureaucrats, professionalized their management and gave substantial autonomy by freeing them from bureaucratic interference, with the Government's role being limited to issuing broad directives on policy issues, while leaving all strategic, tactical and operational issues to the PSU-management.

Sweden and Thailand have created a Directors' Pool from where all appointments are made to the Boards of PSUs. The reforms have turned most of their PSUs into profitable entities, and many of them have grown to become global brands. Strengthening the appointment procedures through such objective institutional processes and empowering the management to act autonomously, while making them accountable to the Government/ Parliament for achievement of commercial and non-commercial targets have worked wonders.

For better corporate governance of PSUs, a clear separation between the Government's policy, regulatory and shareholder functions is a sine qua non. Singapore's Temasek model effectively meets this end. As a holding company for all PSUs, Temasek professionally manages its subsidiary companies by appointing qualified managers and experts and procuring or selling their assets globally, while the Government only manages the policy at arm's length. The Temasek model has created national champions from among the state owned enterprises like Singapore Power as well as global brands like Singapore Airlines, SingTel, DBS, Keppel etc.

In India, reforms so far have involved outright privatization of CPSUs, unaccompanied by the necessary reforms in the overall regulatory framework in which they operate. The boundary between the Government's role as the owner and regulator also remains blurred. Privatisation has been driven primarily by public finance considerations - for using the funds raised to reduce fiscal deficits. As we have seen in many cases, mere change of ownership from public to private is no guarantee for better performance in terms of higher efficiency and profitability, unless accompanied by suitable market/ regulatory reforms ensuring a rule-based competitive structure covering entry, exit, bankruptcy and competition among companies. The landscape of the public sector in India remains paralyzed by excessive government interference and politicization. For making the PSUs vibrant, wholesale privatisation is not necessary, only the government needs to relinquish their control to a holding company or another intermediate entity than can manage them professionally, free from the stifling bureaucratic controls and rent seeking behaviour.



Margi has written about wildlife, international politics and law almost every day for the past 30 years as an international negotiator and independent academic. She has three books, numerous articles, and essays in circulation. Having lived and lost in Australia's 2019/20 Black Summer fires, she now writes because she believes time has run out. We must compress our attention, abandon our old divisions of hate and difference, and embrace the protection of the wildlife closest to us—to become radically local. Margi's book, *FIRE: A Message from the Edge of Climate Catastrophe* will be released by Stormbird Press in January 2021. [www.wildpolitics.co](http://www.wildpolitics.co) Twitter @WildPolitics



Margi Prideaux

## DR MARGI PRIDEAUX SPEAKING UNSPOKEN TRUTH

There is an unspoken truth—pain makes people change. I know this truth because the pain of this year has eviscerated my previously unshakable beliefs. For thirty years my *raison d'être* has been as a voice for nature in human affairs. I believed in progressive, incremental change. In protected areas and big laws. I believed in hope.

Now, I know it is too late.

Now, I am prepared to speak unspoken truths.

Steve Biko, the brave anti-apartheid activist, once said '*A community is easily divided when their perception of the same thing is different.*' There is wisdom in this statement. Division surrounds us. It has seeped into the DNA of our societies. It shapes our views and our dreams. The uber-rich elite separate us into camps, fuelling our divisions in their quest for resource and power, investing millions of dollars in convincing the public and politicians to make the same catastrophic mistakes we have been making for decades. And the conservation sector feeds that division by casting us in tribes—those for and those against nature, persisting with the myth that we must lock away tracts of land for nature, because only that will save nature from climate change. They demonise those who grow and harvest food, while speaking from the privileged access to city supermarkets with laden shelves of packaged goods. The elite agenda tolls in counterpoint to the conservation sector's mantra of 'parks and distrust'; they are the drumbeat at nature's wake.

These divisions ripple through governments, propping up the very systems that are driving the dual climate and extinction crises.

This year I have stood in the echo chamber of this division. And I am done.





Photograph by Dr Margi Prideaux.





Photograph: Anne McLean

After two weeks of relentless firefighting, the island's biggest fire—Ravine—escalated into an unnatural inferno that simultaneously reached the island's north and south coasts. Firefighters and earth movers had risked their lives to build breaks to halt the fire front.

Three days later, on January 3, 2020, it broke through their containments, formed a pyro-cumulonimbus cloud that sent a fast-moving firestorm of lethal, super-heated air and flame north-eastward. This previously rare phenomenon incinerated farms, animals, and infrastructure, setting alight decades-old plantations like candles, and overrunning vast ecosystems and the wildlife those precious systems contained. Ravine became so hot and so uncontrollable it literally devoured the landscape. Fire trucks shielded by halos of water witnessed lethal lighting inside the cloud. A weather station positioned centrally between the island's north and south coast registered temperatures of 428°C with 140km winds before it stopped transmitting—the fire itself was still kilometres away. Aluminium that melts at 660°C pooled across shed floors. Firefighters took refuge where they could or fled from the front.

Day turned to deep night, hours before the sun had set. Animals—sheep, cattle, kangaroos, wallabies, koalas—ran in panicked mobs and perished together in tortured heaps. Even big, fast-flying birds succumbed to the fire, sometimes in mid-flight. Stunned and confused, wildlife had nowhere to hide. Ravine burned eastward for another two harrowing weeks, taking more homes, farms, and wildlife in its path. When finally declared contained—but still active—it had burnt over 2115 square kilometres of agricultural land, plantations, and wilderness—and area nearly twice the size of London. Eighty-nine homes reduced to ash and 332 farm buildings destroyed, many with tools and equipment collected over farming generations. Almost 60,000 farm animals and 830 beehives were destroyed.

Our island suffered 75 percent of the nation's farm animal losses. We will never know the exact number, but millions of wild animals perished on Kangaroo Island from the three billion wild animals that perished across the entire country during the Black Summer fires.

Among these losses was our home, our farm, and our wildlife sanctuary—for my husband Geoff and I this was our everything.

Fire is part of our lives in this landscape, but never had Kangaroo Island experienced this phenomenon. Never had Kangaroo Island been so dry and the relative humidity so low, so early in the season.

ABC News: James Carmody. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-28/>

This fire, and the devastation it caused, drew its genesis from changing climate. How had this happened here? I could not cope with the implications of this knowledge the day after the firestorm. I had slipped into a painful parallel reality, one that would confront me for months as I looked upon the reflections it revealed.

From this parallel place I watched politics investing in more fossil fuel plans while proclaiming our lived experience wasn't climate chaos. At the same time the conservation industry reaped a windfall in fundraising about the massive loss that surrounding our farms—foolishly forgetting that people are part of nature—collecting millions of dollars to support wildlife rescue and feeding stations, while farmers on Kangaroo Island bent their backs to destroying their suffering farm animals without a whiff of support. Shunning the same men and women who had faced weeks of unrelenting firefighting. Never have I felt so disconnected from my peers.

Never has it been so clear how disconnected the conservation industry can be to people. Never have I felt that politics served another master as deeply as I do now. And division is dangerous.

They warned us this disaster was coming. Scientists have been telling for us decades a changing global climate is affecting Australia's fire weather by modifying the underlying climate drivers. Thirteen days after Geoff and I lost our world, academic Anthony Burke wrote that Australia's failure to prepare for the Black Summer's fires was because society has failed to value that humans are enmeshed in natural ecosystems. We reinforce our folly by allowing our system of government to be vandalised for the benefit of the powerful at the expense of the rest.

As a landholder stripped bare by the Black Summer fires, I have moved, psychologically and physically, into the camp of people who are now living inside the grip of climate chaos. Climate change is not a theoretical or distant horizon. It is real; it is now, and it bites hard. I know, and my community knows, it threatens the future of humanity, and the vast tapestry of biodiversity on which we depend.

And in this climate-changed bardo there are unspoken truths we must confront. We've just witnessed the might of fire to destroy decades of conservation in a single night, despite the razor wire in our minds we believed would protect it. One study has found that 3 billion wild animals—143 million mammals, 2.46 billion reptiles, 180 million birds, 51 million frogs—were killed or displaced in the Black Summer fires.

This year, across Australia, a vast network of the natural heritage estate became ash in the wind. We killed three billion animals.

This year I've stood on the very cliff edge of my beliefs, tempted to jump for the shame.

Pain changed me.

Three billion souls perished on our watch. I am done.

Done with the plans. Done with the talk. I am now radically local.



Dr Margi Prideaux

Alongside these were 125,000 sheep and cattle. Nowhere was the livestock tragedy deeper than on Kangaroo Island. The full impact on Kangaroo Island's biodiversity will not be understood for years to come, as extinction debts are slowly, painfully realised. Sure, trees will regrow. 'Nature will rebound' people are fond of saying, but we know these fires burned hotter, deeper, and were far more extreme than this landscape is adapted too.

Parks protected nothing. Arguably, the misuse of environmental laws sealed nature's doom.

And, who was it that stood in the face of the firestorms? Farmers and landholders fought harder than anyone to save nature along with their farms. These are the same individuals that have been hampered for decades by a scientific bureaucracy that 'counts' rather than 'feels', 'prescribes' rather than 'supports', and have designed themselves into an impenetrable mess arguably designed to exclude landholders from managing the risk of fire to biodiversity on their own land—trees, and animals, and insects they cherish. Our balled-up, metric-driven interpretation of laws, suppressed cool, controlled fires that might have saved a significant portion of those species and habitats. Landholders were disempowered and bureaucracies invested because we don't trust.

It's too late for another round of argument and obfuscation. I now know my small community, and the nature we love, must adapt on our own to survive. We are connected to this landscape; we understand we are a part of its ecosystems. A few short years ago I wrote that the empowerment of communities, who depend on healthy ecosystems for their lives and livelihoods, makes them effective stewards. I tuned those words to the ecological justice of communities in developing regions of the world, but they now ring true for my community too. We must banish the division and come together—all of us—conservation, farming, fishing, and forestry to work out how to carry on. We need to learn to hear and understand each other because we want the same thing. We want this landscape—one we all love deeply—to endure against the odds.

This ethic means truly acknowledging a community connection to a place and the wildlife we live with—recognising these forests, grassy plains, and wetlands are our home—can build powerful local conservation bonds. Our biodiversity is the most important element in our lives. It's the life force that sustains us, the food that feeds us, and the context that enlivens our souls. We cannot survive without it. Conservation form should be born of the community—our homes, our solutions, our management.

Communities should have the power to speak for the wildlife that surrounds us in national and international environmental governance. We should be free to adapt, change, and evolve. We should have the liberty to choose if we want to pursue voluntary area closures, or to consider if new activities should start. The solutions we form should be born of our context.

This proposal requires a leap of faith and commitment from the conservation industry and government actors. We must genuinely devolve decision-making to communities and to adapt the national and international political system to embrace a multitude of conservation expressions—a tapestry of conservation diversity.

Perhaps the most damning unspoken truth—the core of the greatest collective denial—is we have run out of time. Climate chaos is already with us and it will get worse from now on. Our community cannot afford the opinions of people in a city far away dividing us—no community can. We cannot survive the scientific bureaucracy that listens to a disconnected, distrustful conservation elite instead of us. We cannot persist if we are beholden to the budget cuts and sleight of hand as the priority of Federal and State Governments shift with the wind. We must control our own destiny and the destiny of the millions of souls we share this landscape with—the carpenter bees, the pygmy possums, the kangaroos, and the stringybarks. These are our neighbours and our kin.

We have no choice left but to do what was obvious all along—to empower radically local conservation, immediately—not incrementally, aiming for ten- or twenty-years' time. We need local roundtables of planning and decision, populated by those who carry the knowledge of our land, and of fire, flood, and drought—First Nations, farmers, fishers, and conservation landholders—with science there to educate and empower. We should seek agreement and understand compromise. We should banish division.

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Randhir Khare is a distinguished writer, artist, teacher and theatre personality. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his unique contribution to culture and education. His 36 volumes of poetry, fiction, essays, translation from tribal dialects and other writings as well as his seven solo exhibitions all explore themes of identity, belonging and the struggle to stay human in a violent and fragmented world. He has more recently spearheaded an initiative to enrich formal education through the experience of the arts. Randhir is a founding contributor to Live Encounters Magazine. <https://randhirkhare.in/>

Randhir is a founding contributor of Live Encounters Magazine.

## RANDHIR KHARE ON THE GREEN WINGS OF THE LIVING

*"She is your green mother, she gave you birth.  
If you trust her she will carry you on green wings of the living  
and you will always have the wisdom of a child."*  
**An old Bhilala in praise of the spirit of Nature.**

It was back in the late 1950s when I was 8 years old and our unusually large family was homeless and lived off the charity of a family friend. Even though we were crammed like sardines into one small room in their bungalow, the outdoors offered us a freedom that we hadn't had before. There was a sprawling yard dotted with shade trees including a beautiful motherly mango tree which offered enormous green fruits which were sweet and sour. And then there were two wild litchi trees with juicy green-red fruit in season... and the river Hooghly flowed past nearby, wafting the fragrance of silt and the breath of the faraway sea.

The litchi trees stood just outside our covered veranda. Being unemployed, my father was visibly restless, despondent and limp with low self-esteem. It was obvious that he felt useless. So, to while away his time, he took to teaching us all about the ways of wild birds. The litchi trees provided him a wide variety of avian creatures to talk about.

As small as I was, I could sense life coming back to him as his eyes sparkled. Digging into memories of his own childhood, he started bringing out stories of wild birds he had befriended and the relationships he had shared with them.

On one of the litchi trees a pair of parakeets had chosen a deep hollow high up along the trunk and set up a home inside. We watched with rapt attention when the babies arrived and the parents frantically took turns in feeding and taking care of them.....

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Randhir Khare at the shrine of Vaghdev.





“Within these plantations of God, a decorum and a sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed...there I feel that nothing can befall me in life, no disgrace, no calamity which Nature cannot repair.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Excitedly, my father went to the local flea market and came back with a small battered pair of binoculars. He mended the damaged parts as best as he could and we spent hours watching the parent parakeets take care of their babies. Our mother joined us after she had finished her household work and after more than two years in helplessly disarray, our family came closer as never before.

One day, the parent birds vanished, probably taken by a bird of prey. The babies called in desperation. We children sobbed as if we had lost our parents and our siblings' lives were in peril. Then a flock of crows arrived and dive bombed the babies till they managed to carry away one of the them. We yelled and tried to shoo them away but the birds wouldn't relent. Suddenly a magical moment happened. Before our eyes, our over-weight and out of breath father stripped down to his half torn shorts, scaled the trunk of the tree with incredible speed till he reached the nest and brought the nestling down to safety.

The same man who I had almost lost faith and trust in had become my hero. My mother was inspired too and together we created a cozy nest in a shoe box which we hung from a wooden beam in the covered balcony. We took it in turns to feed the baby until it grew big and brave enough to come out of the box and sit on the railing. One day, after a midday nap we came out to discover that a pair of adult parakeets were feeding the now growing baby. As the days passed, they even taught it to fly from bush to bush in the open yard till they got it up to the shade of the motherly mango tree.

That experience brought our family so close to one another that it helped us to appreciate our parents and their efforts to feed us and take care of us, even in those desperate times. Over the years I have learnt that no matter how complex and unfortunate our circumstances may be in life, Nature is always there to help us along the way - that is, if we open ourselves to her. There are inspirational stories everywhere, happening around us. Every moment offers us a unique experience.

Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it beautifully, “To speak truly, few adult persons can see Nature...the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.” He goes on to say that in Nature there is perpetual youth and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years, “Within these plantations of God, a decorum and a sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed...there I feel that nothing can befall me in life, no disgrace, no calamity which Nature cannot repair.”

We who live in urban habitations may not consciously experience this mysterious and nurturing power of Nature because we aren't in the company of woods of the sort that Emerson speaks of. Here, the spirit of Nature is in the resident and visiting free creatures, the shrubs and trees.

Last night, before I slipped into sleep I thought of my long-gone mother and how early one winter morning in Delhi, I walked out on to our terrace garden and found her sitting beside a flower pot and praying. Stepping a little closer I discovered that the pot held a scrawny plant, bent and almost leafless. I stepped away because I was an adult now and understood the need that elders sometimes have for privacy. The next morning at the same time she was singing a hymn to the plant. On the third morning, she was talking to it. I dared not interrupt her.

I asked myself why she had chosen to bestow such sensitive care on that half dead weed when all around her the garden was overflowing with flowers. But I minded my own business and withheld my urge to yank the weed out and prepare the mud in the pot for some seedlings that I and especially bought from a nearby nursery.

In the days that followed she had moved the pot away from its isolated space and placed it somewhere amidst the other flowering pots. “I moved the pot there so that it would have others around it,” she said. I smiled.

Quite some time passed. Then one day, she declared at the breakfast table, with a tender smile, that only mothers are capable of, “our plant is in bloom.”

My wife and I went out to take a look and were surprised to find that the weed didn't look like a weed any more. It had pushed shoots out in all direction. Every shoot had sprouted leaves and tiny purple flowers. My mother looked at us and there were tears trickling down her cheeks.

“You know,” she whispered to me, almost wistfully, “that's what I did for you when you were a child and very sickly.”

With those words, the past welled up inside me and filled me with a deep connectedness. I wasn't sure to “what” but it was a connectedness all the same. For weeks after that I became acutely aware of Nature around me, inside me. I could feel a powerful ‘female presence’, a female energy which nurtured my maleness.





As Khalil Gibran says, “Let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens dance between you.”

A couple of decades later, found me alone, in the city of Pune where I lived and wrote in a small studio, whilst all around me trees leaned over me, almost protectively. I had a small terrace garden of potted plants and fruiting shrubs where birds of all kinds would drop in to feed from the bowls of fruit and grain and quench their thirst from a large terracotta birdbath. Each species came in small groups or pairs. Just a couple came solo. Among them were a Pariah Kite with a damaged wing, a Racket Tailed Drongo who appeared to be in a constant state of meditation and a one-legged crow. It was the one-legged crow who was the most constant. Actually, she had one and a half leg. The section of the limb below the joint didn’t exist and she hobbled around partly on a stump.

I remember clearly, even now, the day she first arrived. It was seven in the morning and I was sitting at my desk sipping my first mug of tea. She balanced on the green bamboo trellis and cawed raucously.

“Shut up,” I shouted but she ignored me and flew towards the terrace door and sat balancing on the back of a chair outside the door, peering in – tilting and bobbing her head and looking into the studio first with one eye and then with the other. “What do you want?” I asked, in a softer voice.

“Caw, caw,” she responded also in a softer voice. But I continued to sip my tea and watched as she entered the studio, between the netted anti mosquito curtains. She then flew on to the kitchen counter and searched for titbits. Finding nothing, she turned and looked at me as if to ask, “What? Nothing here? What the hell do you live on? Poetry and fresh air?” After examining the interiors of the studio, she left.

The next morning, she returned again at seven. Perched on the back of the chair and cawed more civilly, as if she was trying to say something. I looked up and realised that she had brought with her the remains of a chipmunk that she had been eating. Leaving the portion out there she entered the studio again, searched for food and finding nothing, flew off. A while later I realised that she had actually brought me something to eat (of course I didn’t get down to eating it).

The next day, I kept a bowl of tasty leftovers on the seat of the chair. She arrived, civilly cawed a good morning and proceeded to polished off the contents of the bowl. Hopping off the chair she peered at me from between the netted curtains. Then left.

And so, I decided not to keep any food on the seat of the chair the next day. Ha ha, she was a self-respecting bird and obviously wanted to share her food with me. And guess what she brought? A stinking cluster of fishbones held together by rotten meat!

Morning after morning we made offerings of friendship to each other until the day arrived when she even decided to pop by at various times of the day to bathe in the bird bath, sometimes peer at me from between the curtains and then fly off. Soon I discovered that she roosted in the thorny keekar tree just outside the balcony. Interestingly, some mornings, when it was her turn to present me food, she would skip her visit and turn up the next day ready to accept my gift.

As time moved on, we had become companions and she visited every day for a small meal at seven. Sometimes, she’d even roost in the pomegranate shrub at night or hop across my desk when I was writing. She filled my lonesome times in the studio with companionship. But then as in all meaningful companionships, it ended. One beautiful morning when birds clustered around the feeding and the watering bowl on the terrace, she arrived unannounced and perched on the back of the chair. The other birds ignored her. She cawed excitedly but since I was deep in writing a poem she flew off. A while later I went on to the terrace and discovered her offering lying on the chair. It was a child’s t-shirt – jet black with a beautiful butterfly embossed on it. My companion had obviously nicked it from a nearby clothesline and brought it as a special gift to me. It was a farewell gift, something told me that.

I was right, she never returned. She had even stopped roosting in the keekar tree at night.

It took me some time to come to terms with her disappearance. And when I did, I began to realise the meaning and worth of the companionship that she had shared with me. She was Nature’s messenger, sent to teach me how to nurture the spirit of companionship through equal sharing, with no dependency, nurturing familiarity, maintaining one’s self-respect, being one and yet being apart... with no controlling.

As Khalil Gibran says, “Let there be spaces in your togetherness, and let the winds of the heavens dance between you.”

Tina Claffey is an award winning nature photographer and author of 'Tapestry of Light-Ireland's bogs & wetlands as never seen before' released in October 2017. For almost 10 years, she lived and worked in pristine wilderness areas in Botswana, and this experience awakened in her an appreciation of the natural world of Ireland. Her observations and unique perspective of the flora and fauna of the unspoilt raised bogs and wet woodlands of the Irish midlands are celebrated in her work.  
<https://www.tinaclaffey.com/>



## TINA CLAFFEY

### AUTUMNAL DELIGHTS

I love to get 'lost' in the bogs, eskers and wetlands of Ireland with my macro lens.

The macro lens allows me to capture what cannot be seen by the naked eye, and capture scenes that defy our sense of reality, glimpses of other miniature worlds that co-exist with us.

Much of the flora and fauna are at ground level, so capturing my desired shot requires me to lie down, sometimes getting soaked in the process as I look for new perspectives and ways of seeing. I am transported to other worlds as I look through the lens.

Autumn is an especially magical season, as the bogs, wetlands and eskers exhibit a wonderful display, a final eruption of colour before Winter sets in. The heather blooms into a sea of purple, while tiny Autumnal blooms appear providing much needed nectar in this late season, and are a godsend for the butterflies, hoverflies, bees & moths. These include the Grass of Parnassus, Blue Fleabane, Loosestrife and the magical Autumn Gentian. Bog Asphodel transforms from its bright yellow florets to its deep orange fruiting form. Devil's Bit Scabious bloom explodes like a firework of purple shades while otherworldly fungi peek from waterlogged branches. Sphagnum mosses display their wonderful colours and feathery limbs, the moody bog pools carry the falling leaves while reflecting the crisp Autumn sky above.

Tina Claffey





Grass of Parnassus





Heather and Birch





Bog Asphodel



Loosestrife





Autumn Gentian



Blue Fleabane



Firework of Devils Bit Scabious







Array of Sphagnum





Autumnal Bog Pool



Emma Barone is a contemporary visual artist. She makes still life and landscape paintings in acrylic on canvas. She studied animation and has an eclectic design background that ranges from interior design to architectural ceramics, and from stained glass to jewellery design. Barone's work has been featured in various publications including Live Encounters Magazine, The Irish Arts Review, Senior Times, House and Home, and the Sunday Independent; and she has published two books in collaboration with the Hennessy Award winning writer, Eileen Casey. Emma has exhibited extensively throughout Ireland, with 22 solo exhibitions under her belt, her work is in private and public collections including the Amsterdam World Trade Centre, Midlands Regional Hospital, Offaly County Council and Tullamore DEW Visitors Centre. <https://www.emmabarone.com/>



## EMMA BARONE SHOE ARTWORK

An external covering for the foot?

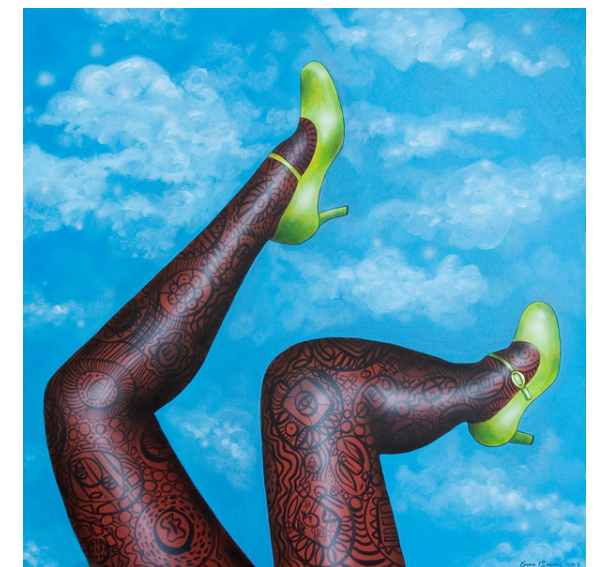
An unhealthy obsession? Or a peek into the inner workings of her soul?

Shoes are a template on which I base my artistic experiments. I feel compelled to use shoes as subjects because of the way the shape of the shoe lends itself to the my choice of unusual colour schemes. Shoes have a certain presence, they have an instant recognition by the viewer.

Each style of shoe is almost like a sculpture in structure form, amalgamated in the dimension of art.

Mixing & combining nature with man-made... the natural world with the material world, this is what intrigued me to pursue the idea of making paintings of shoes.

This isn't so surprising. From an early age we learn that shoes have magical power. They promise romance, excitement and the possibility of transformation.



HEELS TO HEAVEN

Emma Barone. Photograph by Willie Dillon.





FLY AGARIC SHOES



EXOTIC PINK SHOES





MIDNIGHT WEDGES



ENCHANTED SHOES





PROM QUEEN



MILLION DOLLAR SHOES



Gauri Chaudhari is a brand coach, brand strategist and co-founder of Brand Innerword, a health care brand consultancy. In a career spanning 25+ years, she has handled assignments in health care brand building, marketing and advertising. In the past, Gauri has worked in marketing teams of Boehringer Mannheim and Knoll Pharmaceuticals and has handled brands from multiple portfolios.

*The Perfect Pill: 10 Steps to Build a Strong Healthcare Brand by Gauri Chaudhari* - Co-Founder Innerworld, Healthcare Brand Consultancy (SAGE Publications India/ SAGE Response, 2020, Paperback; ISBN: 9789353882518) [LINK](#)



Gauri Chaudhari

## GAURI CHAUDHARI

### THE PERFECT PILL: 10 STEPS TO BUILD A STRONG HEALTHCARE BRAND

30th March 2020 was the day filled with confusion. My entire family was with me, yet it was not vacation time. With a laptop at the kitchen desk and air pods in ears, my hands were cutting vegetables. While adding tomatoes to the curry, I instructed my clients to change the media plan. The domestic help was obviously not available, and while the work was distributed amongst the other family members, the cooking department naturally had come to me. When I finished the client call, I realized there were eight missed calls from an unknown number. What happened? Who is calling me so desperately? The call was from the bank.

Realizing that the bank had nothing specific to pandemic driven life issues, I advised them to send me an email instead of calling. The next day I found a mail from the bank in my email box. With hundreds of emails waiting for a click, I ignored the bank's email. Just in a couple of days, I received a Whatsapp message, again from the same bank. The message was about the online services, some fixed deposit rates and mutual fund updates. I quickly deleted the message and blocked the messenger. Soon I started seeing the ads of the same across the digital platforms I was visiting. I wondered how much money, time and efforts they might have spent on reaching out to me. I often hear the entire corporate world discussing about digitization, digitalization and digital transformation, but I wonder do they really understand the customer context?



What is the customer value that the brand is providing? How are you adapting the brand and the value that it provides in the given context? How is the value provided by the brand can reduce the current pain points? Only then should they work on the medium, be it digital, physical or virtual.

Brand Building is a systematic process that needs to be followed step by step. There are no short-cuts here. And building customer value is central to this process. My book precisely lays out these steps. Though the book is written keeping the healthcare brands at the center, the process elaborated in the book can be adopted by a brand irrespective of its industry. The ten steps explained in the book need to be followed one after the other.

Though one has to read the book to understand these steps and their sequence, I mention a few here to get an idea.

### # First thing first

Customers always come first. How cliched! But this is the most important step which companies often forget. Brands exist because the customers do and not vice versa. In a rush to meet the monthly sales targets, companies fail to understand the customer. (Yes, and must mention here, that finally, I did reach to the relationship manager mentioned above.

When I told him that he was actually troubling me by calling / messaging, he said, "What to do, ma'am? We have been instructed to call a certain number of customers each day. That is part of my monthly KRA.")

Understanding your customers is a skill that can be learned. It does way beyond interviewing them or listening to them. It is like getting under their skin. The companies that understand this create products, services and messages that are welcome by the customers.

While every other company was struggling to achieve its sales numbers, Amul grew by 17 percent. Not a mean task. The company tripled its new product launches, which are welcomed by Indian households. How could they do that? They have the pulse of their customers. Even when the customers didn't know how they may react to a pandemic, Amul could easily gauge.

A good marketer knows what his or her customer says, does, thinks and feels. At times all the four aspects of customers' life might be contrary to each other, but a marketer sees a thread running through it. That helps them to get into the shoes of the customers and predict their behavior.

At this stage, the need is to put all the information concerning customer's needs, wants and pain points together here in one basket.

### # Next Comes the Brand

What is the big point in understanding the customer, her context but have no solution for her? The next important step is to analyze how can you solve your customer's problem through your product and service? Where exactly is the fitment? Can you modify the offering? Can you deliver on that offering?

This step has to be done dispassionately. A lot of emotions and pride runs across the corporate ladder when it comes to brands. Need is to see your brands from the eyes of the customers.

When Reckitt Benckiser's Dettol launches surface sanitizer, customers trust it. Will customers trust Colin's surface sanitizer launched by the same company?



Book available at :  
<https://stealadeal.sagepub.in/the-perfect-pill-gauri-chaudhari-9789353882518.html>



Brand need not solve every problem through its product offering. Many product-driven brands offered services to make their brands more relevant in the given context. USV, a company that does not have any particular COVID 19 treatment product, launched a helpline for patients who wanted guidance. Lupin, another pharma company, launched a service to help patients with mental issues in the pandemic. The idea is to be relevant and partner with customers even if you don't have a product offering in that direction.

So, fill up the second basket of information that lists the current and potential benefits of the product/ services that you offer.

### # Coming to the Competition

How is competition helping customers? What are they good at? This is yet another important question. Copying the competition is a crime for which every marketer gets punished. Having understood customers, mapped your offering as per the customer requirement, next is to look for differentiation. Customers reward companies for their valuable differentiation.

It is often an interesting note that every other brand in the market may not be your competition. Some brands from your own category might be brand best companions. In the world of pharma and healthcare, there are many brands from the same category get co-prescribed.

Having decided on the right competition need is to put in all the differentiating points your brand has over the competitor's and put it together in another basket called competition basket.

### # Arriving at the key proposition

When all the three baskets of information are filled, arriving at the proposition is not difficult. Just put all the three baskets together and look at the cross-section.

To get more clarity on the brand value, you may ask a simple question, "In a given situation, what is it that my customers want, my brand can honestly offer, but my competition can't."

Believe me; this simple question provides multiple profound answers. All those answers provide that value

In my experience, this exercise brings out several value propositions, even from the most ordinary undifferentiated brand.

From this bundle of values, brand teams need to filter down one key value that is most relevant to the customers.

Once arrived at the most attractive value proposition, the book elaborates on several other steps that are critical in further building and communicating that value.

The last chapter in the book is about Media planning. It elaborates various ways a healthcare brand may adapt to reach out to the masses, digital being one of them.

Finally, the book warns its readers not to jump the steps. By quickly rushing to the last step of working on a media plan tantamount to putting the cart before the horse and wondering why the cart is not moving.



Within my practise I explore notions of reality. The age of digitalisation has blurred a multitude of realities to indistinguishability. There is also a disregard for truth whereby we are content with mere imitations and images of a reality. In many ways this is an expansion of reality. I explore this in my work through forms of faces and bodies that are recognisable as such yet differ from expectations of how bodies and faces do and should look. I observe notions of reality under the umbrella of my main protagonist: colour. It too carries questions of reality for it is dangerous, allusive, superficial and cosmetic. It also stands for a push to equality and peace for it has been pushed out in the past on the grounds that it is feminine, queer, primal, and for these reasons I want to bring it back.



## JAS SYKES 'SELF' PORTRAITS

With this series I explore notions of self and reality. Today, we take endless selfies. Meaningless, never ending photographs that nurture a societal obsession with perfection as the only way to be beautiful. These figures have beauty in a grotesque way. I chose the title (Self) Portraits because these figures could be me or anyone. Their identity is not important and we focus on their appearance.

This conceptualising of self is parallel to how we view each other through social media. Due to this, I haven't named these paintings, I wait until someone gives one a nickname, like 'Avocado Man'.



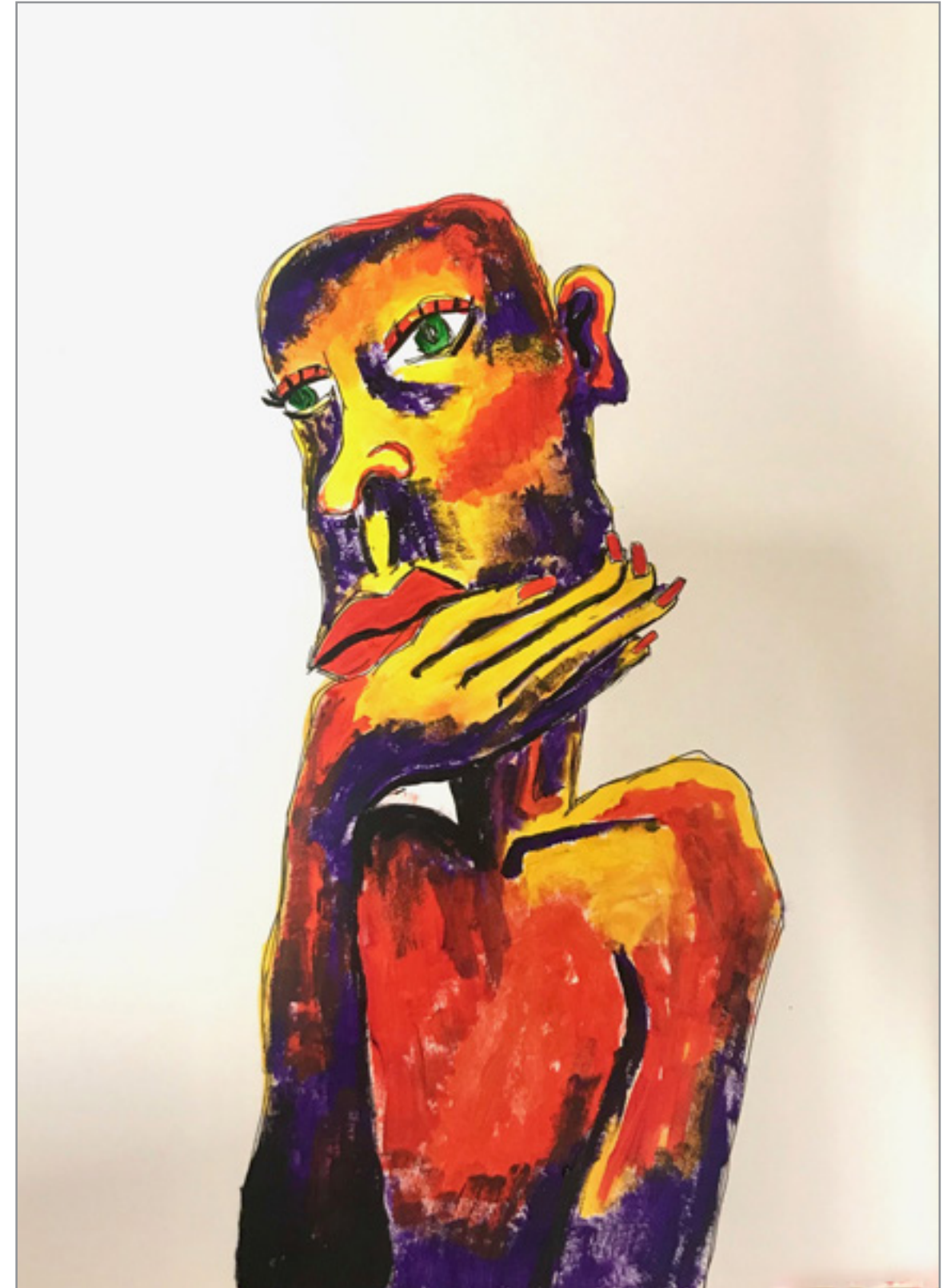
Avocado Man, 2017







Untitled, 2018



Untitled, 2020





Lady, 2018



Dark Thought, 2020



2010 - 2020

11  
YEARS

# Live encounters

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
VOLUME TWO DECEMBER 2020



COVER ARTWORK BY WOLFGANG WIDMOSER