

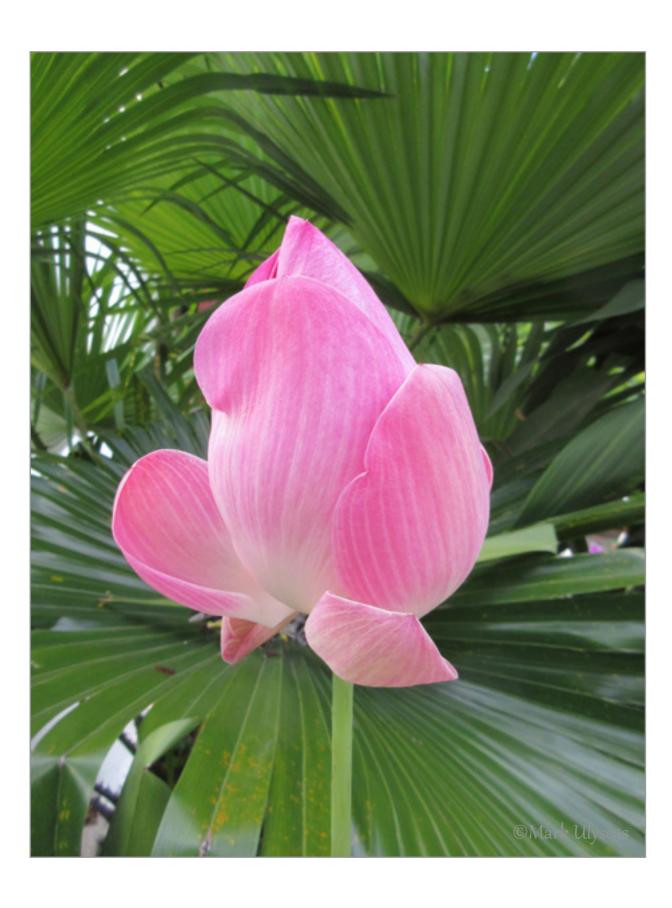


Free Online Magazine From Village Earth June 2021

David Morgan How good was the lock down for you?

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ULYSEAS





Lotus. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Om

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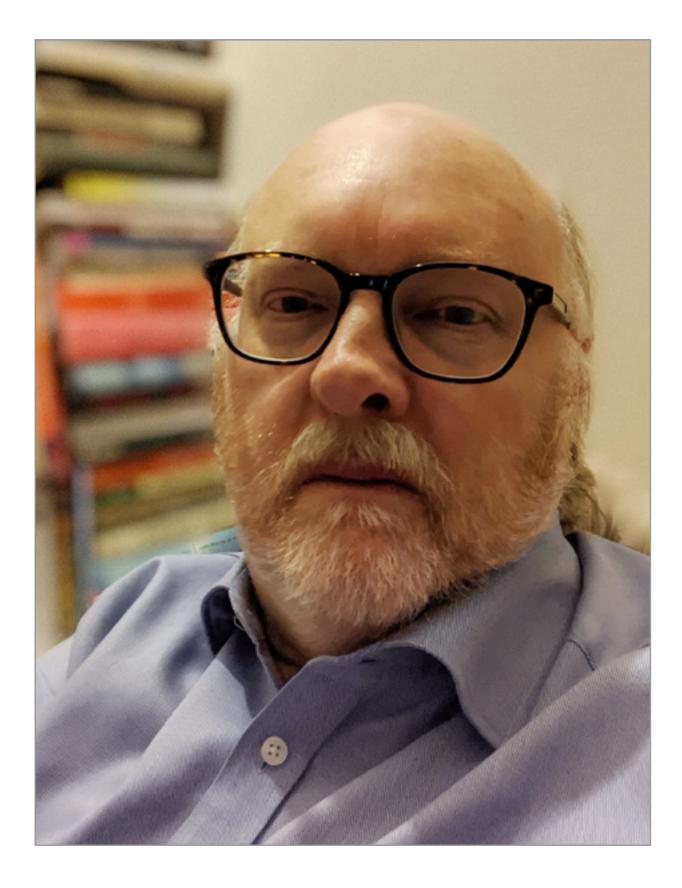




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LOCKDOWN DAVID MORGAN



David Morgan

David Morgan is the author of *The Good Old Cause – Communist Intellectuals and the English Radical Tradition,* published in September 2020 by the Socialist History Society, of which he is the secretary. David is a journalist and editor who is interested in exploring the connections between literature and history. David is co-author of the recently published, *Writers of the Left in an Age of Extremes.*

DAVID MORGAN HOW GOOD WAS THE LOCK DOWN FOR YOU?

The global pandemic caused by the emergence of the COVID-19 virus led to an unprecedented lockdown in large parts of the economy. Millions of people worldwide were relieved of the burden of daily commuting to their workplaces as they heeded the instructions issued by governments to stay safe, keep their social distance and work from home. Some industries came to a virtual halt while the burdens on essential services were strained to breaking point. At the same time, many people were simply unable to keep themselves safe or take advantage of the instructions to work from home because of the nature of their work tasks.

The unfair distribution of what can be seen as a benefit of the lockdown inevitably reflects the unfairness inherent in an economic model whose very success is founded on the unfairness of ever increasing inequalities and an unequal distribution of resources.

The experience of the pandemic, which we must acknowledge remains a living nightmare for millions of people around the world, brought to the popular attention just exactly how ludicrous are many of our daily patterns of behaviour and forms of social organisation. It has led people to seriously question their lifestyles and change their priorities. It has made people realise that many of their routine professional activities can be performed more efficiently and productively without the requirement to cluster together in an office space where staff were often obliged to share desks and work shoulder to shoulder in very close proximity. The olds ways have become unsustainable.

LOCKDOWN DAVID MORGAN

Historically, plagues and pandemics have inflicted their misery very unequally. The victims have been drawn largely from the most vulnerable in the community, the poor and marginalised in particular. Unfortunately, the same situation prevails today. We should not be surprised that the poor and the socially disadvantaged have suffered most.

Technology has been advancing to such levels of sophistication that many tasks relating to research, information gathering, data analysis, writing, editing, design and such like, can now be done perfectly well, and possibly more effectively, without the need to even leave the home. With a modern broadband internet connection, a workstation, a smart phone and a tablet, we have a window onto the world available to us within our own sitting rooms. We have immediate access to information undreamt of by earlier generations at the simple flick of a switch. This access does not depend on our physical location any longer.

There is no need to waste two or three hours of each weekday in getting ready and travelling to a remote workplace when you can spend this time much more productively, enduring less stress and causing less pollution into the bargain. This makes perfect sense on all levels. We are in the midst of a new Industrial Revolution driven by technology whose outcomes are still far from certain but whose momentum has been propelled forward by the impact of the global pandemic.

Commuting by road has been identified as one of the prime contributing factors to the environmental and atmospheric pollution that is causing rapid climate change that will eventually destroy the planet. If we want to save our fragile planet and secure life on earth for our own species and all the others that depend on clean air and stable climactic conditions, then these new patterns of working, that grew apace during the pandemic out of necessity to curb the spread of the deadly virus, should become more permanent as a means of ensuring our survival. We will be doing it for our children and future generations will thank us. The losses in social interaction and the loss of income to the retail and service sectors are prices well worth paying for the enormous benefits that will be accrued.

Advances in scientific discover and technology offer the potential for the wholesale restructuring our economy and society for the benefit of all. Learning and education can be brought to people in the remotest locations where libraries and universities were previously unobtainable. Technology can be used to make improvements in health services for people who currently are deprived of access to even the most basic treatment. Devices now exist to enable the most intricate surgical operations to be carried out remotely. The possibilities opening up for us are limitless. We only need the imagination and commitment to realise in real life what was once seen as merely the Utopian dreams of unworldly philosophising. But there are of course many obstacles in the way, not least of which is the wide and growing imbalance of power and wealth in all our societies. These are common features of countries of the North, South, East and West, irrespective of their levels of GDP and industrial modernisation.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has been a global experience, its impact has thus been far from equal. The many have inevitably suffered more than the privileged few. But the pandemic has inevitably exposed the deep social divisions and imbalances in power and wealth at the heart of the global economy. The wealthy have thrived during the crisis, accumulating more wealth, while many more families have been pushed into the direst poverty and destitution. These trends have unfolded on a global scale.

Historically, plagues and pandemics have inflicted their misery very unequally. The victims have been drawn largely from the most vulnerable in the community, the poor and marginalised in particular. Unfortunately, the same situation prevails today. We should not be surprised that the poor and the socially disadvantaged have suffered most. This has always been the case in all countries. In this respect, it is perhaps less helpful to speak of "poor countries" and "rich countries", than it is to speak simply of countries with large numbers of poor people. Even poor countries have their very rich, whose lifestyles resemble more their global counterparts than their poor compatriots.

The world's super rich have been virtually unscathed by the pandemic, even though a few rich individuals have succumbed to the virus. One imagines that the partying that is the basis of their existence has continued secretively beyond any inconvenient media exposure. The power of money and the power of the image are always natural allies. It is the media after all that feeds like a parasite on the activities of the rich and famous and that is employed to manufacture a cult of celebrity that forms such an important component of how the global economy is currently constituted. The excesses and decadence of this modern elite at the heart of the modern economic model make the notorious Roman orgy of the history books look like a veritable tea party by comparison.

Technology offers the possibility of rapid communication, dialogue and access to knowledge that were just unavailable to all previous generations. But the new social media functions as a mechanism of social control rather than one of social interaction or a route to human liberation. It is a method of advertising and manipulation of needs and desires; the fact that we either do not realise this or we collude in the process is part of its success in controlling us. We are increasingly immobilised as social beings by our social media habits as we are encouraged by the main media outlets to use our smart phones, laptops and tablets simply as sources of entertainment and diversion. Serious debates are simply too wearisome.

LOCKDOWN DAVID MORGAN

Living through the pandemic has forced many of us to deeply question our lifestyles and social relations. Now we have a responsibility to ourselves and to all our fellow human beings to follow through on the promises and opportunities that have been opened up for us. We must resist the instructions and the temptations to return to the old norms and relationships. The time for partying is well and truly over.

As consumers, we are compelled to take a compulsive interest in trivia, tittle tattle and to obsess ourselves about the romantic liaisons of the rich and famous, who enact the lifestyles that we dream of emulating, or so we are repeatedly told. Gossip has replaced true dialogue as the key form of communication on social media. Chatter about who is hooking up with whom is far more exciting than taking an interest in fighting social injustice or discussing a remedy for ending world poverty, or so we are told.

The weak and the poor do have their advocates in the media, but their voices tend to be mostly drowned out by the clatter and clamour of celebrity that dominates the global culture that flourishes on social media ensuring our conformity as never before. Too many people remain gripped as passive consumers transfixed by these antics of celebrities.

The only Internationale that seems to function with any degree of effectiveness these days is that which unites the High Net Worth Individuals otherwise known as super rich, who, as a global class, have their interests universally protected by established legal norms, customs and a popular culture that is validated by the mass media, including the new social media that was created by the new super rich in the first place. But for the sake of the planet and our future, we must see through the glamour of the rich and seize the moment post-pandemic.

Until we break the spell of this magic system, we will not be able to seize hold of the solutions that are now available to us and reshape our future to secure our survival and that of our planet. Living through the pandemic has forced many of us to deeply question our lifestyles and social relations. Now we have a responsibility to ourselves and to all our fellow human beings to follow through on the promises and opportunities that have been opened up for us. We must resist the instructions and the temptations to return to the old norms and relationships. The time for partying is well and truly over.



Cocktail, Bali, Indonesia. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



Navaneeta Majumder

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ASSISTANT PROFESSOR NAVANEETA MAJUMDER PARADIGM WAR: A DISTINCT INDIGENOUS VISION

Introduction

The world we live in is multi-cultural with a corresponding plethora of worldviews. This paper highlights a distinct understanding of an Indigenous vision of world, as compared to Western world views. This can be best explained by discussing the acclaimed work 'Paradigm Wars: Indigenous People's Resistance to Globalization', edited by Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, as part of International Forum on Globalization.

The editors have described two sets of paradigms in their work *Paradigm Wars*, i.e. paradigm of economic growth and paradigm of Indigenous way of life. Here, Mander have shown how both the paradigms are at war with each other.

According to Mander, there are immense dangers of a paradigm that focus on economic growth. This he explained by drawing attention to the manner in which economic globalization poses devastating threats to human and other biological life. Therefore, as per the paradigm of economic growth, Governments who promote economic globalization are motivated by their own economic growth and thus, they sign different multinational agreements, like, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These agreements are advocated and mediated by international organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The main aim of these agreements is to follow the principles of geo-economic, by relaxing the boundaries between countries, so that it becomes easier to extract resources and expand economic growth of the corporates.

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Anthropology and Indigenous populations have seen a debate between nature and culture. This has a bearing on the on-going paradigm war, as witnessed in the 21st century. In the late 19th century, indigenous populations were seen as being unable to distinguish between nature and culture, or a monolithic world-view. French structuralism of the middle 20th century eventually concluded that this premise was false and that Indigenous societies could differentiate between nature and culture.

A recent study by Hershey, has underlined, that, economic globalization continues to be a form of colonial domination by the erstwhile empires, just with a different nomenclature. Likewise, the term globalisation has an ethical connotation like 'democracy' and 'freedom'. In this regard, Hershey has pointed out that, globalization has a specific urgency for the tribal/indigenous people of this world, as most Indigenous ways of collective economic endeavours do not auger well with the capitalistic notion of 'individual accumulation', thus, leading to creation of two antithetical worldviews.

According to the editors of Paradigm Wars, the policies of the IMF, the WTO, and the World Bank provide corporations the 'same legal rights as humans' because they are treated as 'persons' and can thus, legally assert 'human rights' to conduct their businesses as usual. (Mander, 2006)

As per Mander, this economic paradigm, not only emphasizes on the damaging effects of extractive industries, such as, oil, natural gas, and mineral mining, but also impacts many other aspects of native life, such as, food, water, language, education, and genetics. Mainly the concepts of water war and bio-colonialism have most wide-reaching impacts of an economic growth paradigm. While discussing the paradigm of economic growth, the editors of Paradigm Wars, describes the next paradigm, i.e. how the Native communities are changing the 'rules of the game' by trying to preserve life in its many diverse forms, which includes their determination to challenge corporate privatization efforts, to assert the claims of Indigenous population over their land and natural resources, and of developing renewable wind energy. The efforts of the indigenous people to counter the hegemonic paradigm of economic growth, has been established on a war footing. And this clash of paradigms has been termed as 'paradigm war' by Jerry Mander.

Debate Between Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Paradigm as Developed by Descola

Anthropology and Indigenous populations have seen a debate between nature and culture. This has a bearing on the on-going paradigm war, as witnessed in the 21st century. In the late 19th century, indigenous populations were seen as being unable to distinguish between nature and culture, or a monolithic world-view. French structuralism of the middle 20th century eventually concluded that this premise was false and that Indigenous societies could differentiate between nature and culture. (Ouellette, 2010) But Descola, has contested the dualism between nature and culture, as a result, once again, the Indigenous people no longer see the difference between the both.

Descola writes that science must "metamorphose" to include objects which are not just anthropologic, but also the collective "existents" [elements or holistic] which are connected to humans in relationship. He has conceived of four ontologies that may be used to categorize man and his environment across all continents: *totemism*, which highlights the material and the continuity of material and morality between humans and non-humans; *analogism*, which holds that between the elements of the world, a matrix of discontinuity exists, structured by corresponding relations; *animism*, which gives nonhumans the interior of humans, but are only differentiated by their bodies; and *naturalism*

which attaches humans and non-humans by a continuing material, but still separates us with cultural specificity. So according to Descola, world vision of a society is an organic construction. He finds that the Western duality of nature and culture is being rebuilt or at least contested by a 'primitive' monolithic idea of nature and culture. (Descola, 2005)

In the first chapter of the *Beyond Nature and Culture*, "The figures of continuities" Descola shows, that in other cosmologies, everywhere in the world, the frontiers between human and objects are imprecise or even absent. The Achuar are animist. They think that wild animals and plants have a soul, act like persons and share social values. In the Amazonian thought, it is impossible to see the world from a unique human perspective. Animals and plants see themselves as humans. But they don't see the same things as we the humans see, because they don't have the same body or sensorial abilities. For instance, jaguar and spirits see humans as prey, but the animals, which are hunted by humans see humans as spirits or predatory animals. This example invites us to consider the 'agency' and 'potency' of non-humans. That is to say how non-human can have an intentionality, an ability to act and a spiritual power, so that they can transform the world and have social relations with other species of beings. (Descola, 2005)

Such examples, of a monolithic idea of nature and culture of Indigenous population, as envisioned by Descloa, is a paradigm in itself. This paradigm forms a distinct indigenous vision, which is in direct opposition with the Western vision of nature and culture as 'inorganic constructions' and 'figures of discontinuities'. A similar discourse on the increasing relevance of indigenous/tribal culture and its role in promoting sustainable development, has been elaborated in the book titled, "Indigenous Sustainable Development in Latin America". It has dealt into the issues, related to the role of indigenous culture in creating sustainable planet in the 21st century. (MacNeil, 2020)

Globalization and Indigenous Vision

The above section provided us with an anthropological perspective of the traditional vision of Indigenous population. But since late 20th century, it can be seen, that, the process of globalization is changing the rules of games and shaping Indigenous vision and perspective vis a vis the dominant western economic paradigm. A recent study by Hershey, has underlined, that, economic globalization continues to be a form of colonial domination by the erstwhile empires, just with a different nomenclature. Likewise, the term globalisation has an ethical connotation like 'democracy' and 'freedom'.

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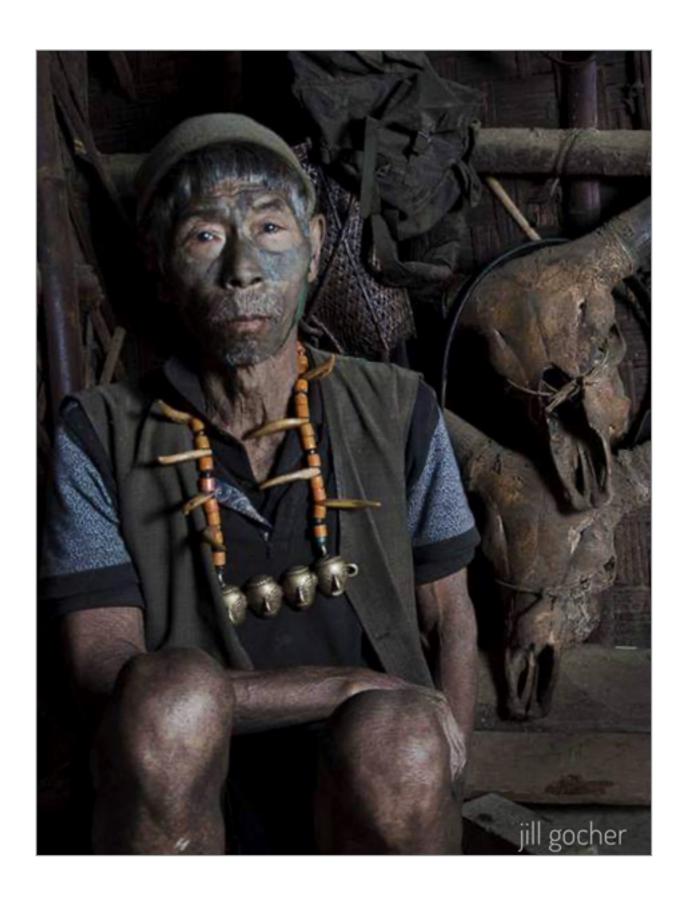
History of indigenous struggle depicts the amount of exploitation faced by native people for natural resources, animals and cultures, as these has been rendered as commodities, i.e. how native land and culture has been commodified by the Westerners. But now a new form of mode of invasion, has arrived, known as 'bioprospecting'. It is being used by transnational corporations for privatizing and monopolizing genetic structures, cell lines of native plants, seeds and even people.

In this regard, Hershey has pointed out that, globalization has a specific urgency for the tribal/indigenous people of this world, as most Indigenous ways of collective economic endeavours do not auger well with the capitalistic notion of 'individual accumulation', thus, leading to creation of two antithetical worldviews. (Hershey, 2019)

This economic paradigm is characterised by resource wars, which have resulted in serious conflict, invasion, double dealings, forced removals, cultural and political assaults, and extreme violence in the lands of the native people. (Alvarez & Coolsaet, 2020) For instance, during the 1990s, as part of World Bank mandated Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the coal mining was privatised in Indian state of Odisha. Therefore, rivers were contaminated, along with rise of fluoride poising, causing infectious and cancerous diseases among the native tribal population. It also witnessed displacement of villages and townships, along with an 500% enhancement of power rates. The SAP also weakened the environmental and labour laws of India, thus, adversely impacting the tribal population, as many used to rely on such laws to retain their control over their community land and resources. (Hershey, 2019)

This situation aptly describes the concept of 'paradigm wars', i.e. a world view based on opposite understandings of how human beings should live on Earth. The primary motive for targeting natives by multinational corporations rises from the fact that indigenous people were successful over millennia, upholding their cultures, economics, world views and practice, which are not built on the idea of geo-economics.

This paradigm has been aptly dealt by both Anne Waters and Mander in their respective edited books on Indigenous vision. To understand the issue in detail, the example of 'bio-colonialism' is quite appropriate. This Debra Harry calls a 'High-Tech Invasion'. History of indigenous struggle depicts the amount of exploitation faced by native people for natural resources, animals and cultures, as these has been rendered as commodities, i.e. how native land and culture has been commodified by the Westerners. But now a new form of mode of invasion, has arrived, known as 'bioprospecting'. It is being used by transnational corporations for privatizing and monopolizing genetic structures, cell lines of native plants, seeds and even people. This search for genetic resources for economic gains have led to the development of a new form of colonialism, known as 'bio-colonialism'. This has made possible the free trade of genetic materials and life processes. This process has been facilitated by TRIPS, through WTO. (Harry, 2006)



Wan Cha aged 77, Nagaland, India. Photograph by Jill Gocher.

Therefore, on the basis of these studies, certain distinct Indigenous ideas has become prominent, such as, ideas of survival, structural violence, native lifestyle, and other similar theories, that help to create conditions for decolonization and post-development. And these distinct ideas have come together to form, what we call 'Indigenous vision'.

It allows the companies to claim monopoly on ownership of human genes, biodiversity of native land, water and knowledge, which were traditionally acknowledged as 'gifts' and now been converted to 'commodities' for sale. In this regard, the Indigenous people have been persistently asserting 'no patent on life' as expressed in the declaration issued in 1995 by stating that life cannot be bought, owned, sold, discovered or patented even in its minute or smallest form. (Whitt, 2004)

In her paper, Debra Harry points out various examples of bio-colonialism across the world. First among them was the 1984 law suit filed by John Moore against Los Angeles Medical Centre and University of California against using his cell line for advances in treatment of cancer without his consent. In a landmark judgement, it was established that patients do not have a 'property right' in the tissues removed from their bodies. This resulted in a dangerous legal precedent, which allowed the hospitals and pharma companies to take advantage on the research on genetic resources, cell lines, blood cells, etc. (Harry, 2006)

This shows the fear of the indigenous population, who have endured more than 500 years of colonization, and are currently concerned about the arrival of yet another weapon in the arsenal of colonialism. This time, they fear that the new weapon is to know the 'the secret of life', thus striving to control the definition of what it means to be human and their understanding of 'life itself'. (Chiro)

Conclusion

This paper presents a 'pan-Indigenous' vision, based principally on the work of Indigenous scholars. This vision is shaped by long held views by numerous Aboriginals from both within and out of academia. (Ouellette, 2010) Recently, the book titled, "Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary", has engaged in a retrospective discussion on the issues of development and its aftereffects. It has attempted to reassess the meaning of development and discussed the meaning of post-development in contemporary times, especially in relation to the indigenous/tribal people inhabiting this world. (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, & Acosta, 2019)

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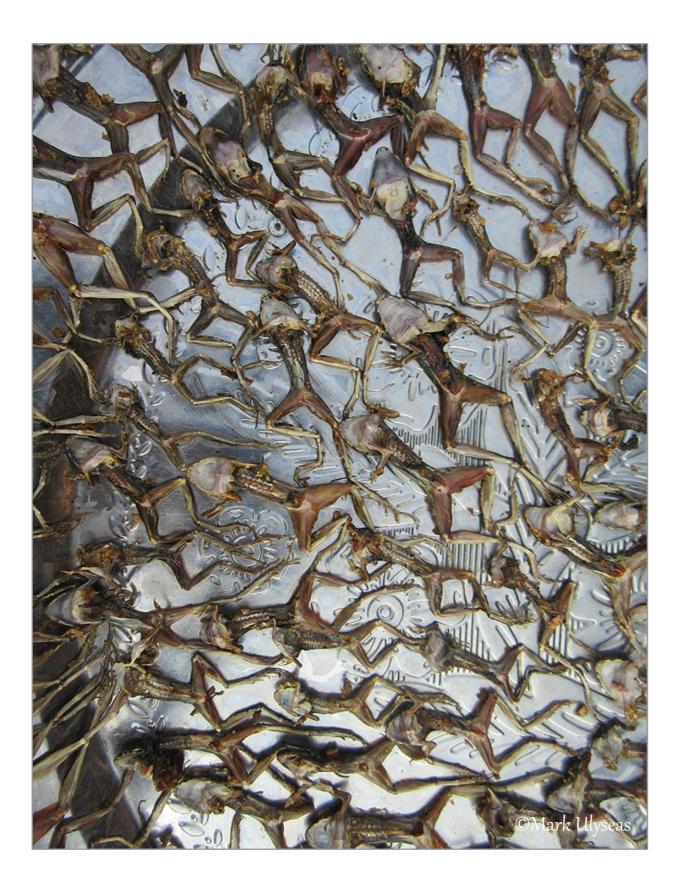
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OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE MARK ULYSEAS



Frogs gutted and laid out to dry in the sun. Laos. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced all of *Live Encounters'* 215 publications (till June 2021). Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: RAINY – *My friend & Philosopher, Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas/https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Ulyseas/e/B01FUUQVBG



MARK ULYSEAS Offending the Audience*

Shall we begin with a number from Paddy Roberts' *Songs For Gay Dogs*?/ Or do we rerun the CCTV images of a black beating an Asian on a street in the USA?/ Or should we watch the funeral of the pregnant Palestinian woman killed in an Israeli air raid to the cheers of a select group of exceptional online onlookers?/ Or the reports of Chinese concentration camps for Uighyurs?/ Or watch the stoning to death of those accused of blasphemy?/ Or the hijack of a commercial airliner by a country *just* to capture a blogger accused of sedition?/ Or the beating to death of a man suspected of inhumanity to cows?/ Or the hazy images of a female foetus being aborted?/ Or a sneak peek at human trafficking and slavery?

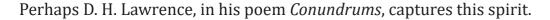
The good news is that we can access any aberration of human nature with our thumbs by running them across the keyboard of our phones. Many among us join in with not just our thumbs. And the amazing thing about this is that we can add our misinformed opinion and then pass it off as *our truth*. This is *our version* of pornography - salacious, mendacious, violent images and words intended to tickle the animal within, to arouse within it the feeling of being part of the *pack* that bays for those that do not conform to its rules of engagement.

There are many *packs* across the world, each with its own version of rules. Some for their affinity to colour, language, religion or genitalia, or all these attributes prepacked in one special *limited pack*. The *outsider* is not permitted to question anything and must abide by those wonderfully twisted woke and/or politically correct gendarmerie, gendarmerie that has made enlightenment appear like a castrated bull in a field of cows.

*Publikumsbeschimpfung (which better translates as "Insulting the Audience") by Peter Handke, 1966.

OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE MARK ULYSEAS

There are many *packs* across the world, each with its own version of rules. Some for their affinity to colour, language, religion or genitalia, or all these attributes prepacked in one special *limited pack*. The *outsider* is not permitted to question anything and must abide by those wonderfully twisted woke and/or politically correct gendarmerie, gendarmerie that has made enlightenment appear like a castrated bull in a field of cows.



Tell me a word
That you've often heard,
Yet it makes you squint
When you see it in print!

Tell me a thing That you've often seen, Yet if put in a book It makes you turn green!

Tell me a thing That you often do, When described in a story Shocks you through and through!

Tell me what's wrong
With words or with you
That you don't mind the thing
Yet the name is taboo!

And despite our induced *unmindfulness* there remains an iota of delusional self-respect embedded in our psyche that abhors the *open sesame* to reality in its purest form, like rapists who presume they are making love to a loved one. In some cases, they (rapists) are actually...with their wives or partners who have refused them *entry* and are forced to bear the joy of the rapist/s.

France was right when it drew the line of sexual consent to 15 years (?). Prior to this there was no specific age of consent. Meanwhile in other parts of the world child marriage is blessed by the elders, including the elderly groom. One never hears about an elderly bridegroom marrying a boy child? Much like FGM, which is assumed to be solely perpetrated by male members, when in fact it is a section of women who ensure the 'cut above'. And to the delight of some, it has now been elevated to a religious act.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Perhaps we should remove self-imposed limitations of 'consent' for anything in any form, in mind and body, and liberate the animal within. To let it openly challenge the so called 'decency' of societies. To release the *Alex* within (fictional character in Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*) could be the first step.

Now let's make it clear – there is no suggestion of freewheeling sex here (like there is in professional pornography or open marriages) – just the opening of *The Doors of Perception* (Aldous Huxley) ...

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

The keys to the doors are our thumbs that appear to have been delinked from the embodiment of our soul. The brain works in tandem with our thumbs. Hence, the smell of iniquities remains on our hands, never to be removed. This cycle never breaks for most of us. Our souls remain in suspended animation quite often in cultural appropriations

And so, we soulless wonders create and populate *our* world with like-minded fellow travelers to build a habitation that decries and derides all those that do not conform to our rules of self-incarceration – like whose WORD *is* the Truth. Exceptionalism is our banquet of self-indulgences.

And as our enclaves multiple so do the hashtags.

From hash browns to hashtags, we've come a long way...

A long way from tree tops to concrete jungles.

Perhaps the only way out is in...

...the first step being to release the animal...

back into the wild.



Jill Gocher, a Bali based international photographer, has spent her life exploring and enjoying Asian cultures. Her work has appeared in National Geographic, Time, International Herald Tribune, Asia Spa, Discovery, Silver Kris and many more. Her books – Asia's legendary Hotels, Periplus, Bali- Island of Light – Marshall Cavendish, Indonesia – Islands of the Imagination. Periplus, Australia – the land down under – Times Editions, Singapore, Indonesia – the last paradise – Times Editions. She has held exhibitions in Singapore, Kathmandu, and Bali. Photojournalist + Media Consultant, AmazonPage: www.amazon.com/author/jillgocher instagram jillgocher

JILL GOCHER THE REJANGS

In Bali, every year after the holy week of Galungan, the tiny hamlets surrounding the holy Mt Lempuyang come alive with their own celebrations.

Each village showcases the sacred Rejang dance, performed by the young village virgins. Each village boasts distinctively different headdresses although the dance remains the same.

The dance is accompanied by an ancient gamelan known as Selonding whose stately silvery tomes enhance any occasion.

In these photos I have abstracted the girls from their surroundings to highlight their natural grace and beauty without the distractions of too much colour or crowd.

Jill Gocher



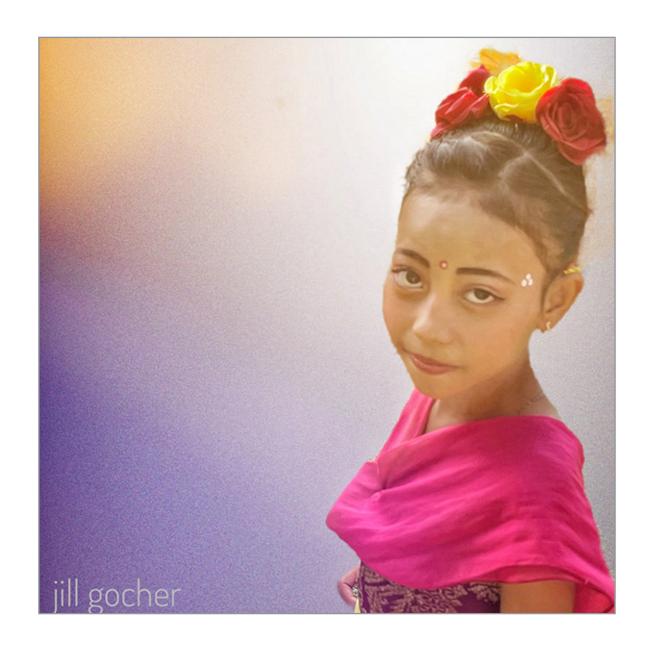


















Kenro Izu (b. 1949) was born in Osaka, Japan. During his studies at Nippon University, college of art, Izu visited New York in 1970 to study photography, and subsequently decided to stay and work. In 1975, after working as an assistant to other photographers, Izu established Kenro Izu Studio in New York City. He has had numerous exhibitions of his work across the world, published books and founded *Friends Without A Border*, an NGO, which set up two children's hospitals - one in Cambodia and the other in Laos, www.kenroizu.com

Kenro Izu

PHOTOGRAPHER AND PHILANTHROPIST WHO IS SEARCHING FOR THE DIVINE THROUGH THE LENS OF HIS CAMERA.

In this article we come face to face with the artist who shares a glimpse of his life and works in a candid conversation with Mark Ulyseas. INTERVIEW

Several years on my studio was doing well and I started to make money. At this stage I realised that I had not come to New York to just make money. I wanted to create fine art with my photography. So I began set out to do just this. In 1979 I decided to pack my equipment and visit Egypt. The visual and spiritual impact of the pyramids inspired me to begin the series – Sacred Places.

The income from a single advertising campaign, on which I would spend about a week, could support me for several months! Whereas with fine art photography I could never do this. So until recently, I think about two years ago, I finally stopped commercial photography when I passed the age of 65 years... now I collect pension and focus only to fine art work. I am 67 years of age.

Why did you become a photographer?

When I was in school I wanted to be a medical research doctor. So my first camera, Minolta, was purchased to photograph micro-organisms. I attached it to a microscope.

As a kid I read the story of Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch and Hideyo Noguchi - who was involved in making discoveries and finding cures to incurable diseases. I wanted to be that kind of doctor...not a surgeon or anything else...but to research and find cures - so I was doing my own study when I was in high school. But when it came time to enter medical college I realised I was not really suited for such study as I possessed rather an artistic brain. And since I was already photographing small objects under the microscope I thought...why not photograph landscapes or flowers or people - I had become good at it. So I decided to become a fine art photographer. I joined Nihon University, College of Arts, in Tokyo in 1969. Unfortunately, in those days there was no fine art photography in Japan. The only option was commercial photography, journalism or portrait photography.

I had read a number of magazines, art magazines, that in New York there was a museum that 'treated' photography as an art form. They displayed photography on the same level as paintings, sculptures and also there were art galleries that handled photography as objects of art...buy, display, sell. New York beckoned me and so I decided to take a few months break from college and travel to this city in 1970. And in this process my life changed forever. I fell in love with New York. I was 21 years of age. I think the city was really addictive. Soon I ran out of money. My mother refused to help me because I had left college without graduating. She was quite upset. So I took to doing odd jobs, mostly dish washing and working as a mover's assistant. Fortunately, in a matter of three months, I found a job as a commercial photographer's assistant.

Of course I was continuing to create my fine art photography but at the same time realised that that kind of work was not going to support me and that it would take at least ten years to reach such a level. So I learned the skill of commercial photography. Soon I opened my own studio to do still life photography - because I was better at photographing objects than people...fashion models...partly because of my language. That was the beginning of my career as a commercial photographer.

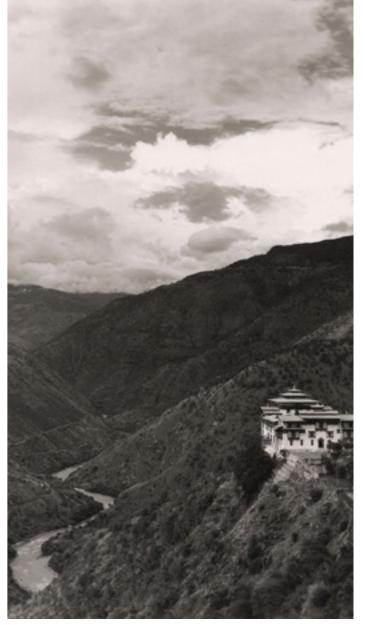
Several years on my studio was doing well and I started to make money. At this stage I realised that I had not come to New York to just make money. I wanted to create fine art with my photography. So I began set out to do just this. In 1979 I decided to pack my equipment and visit Egypt. The visual and spiritual impact of the pyramids inspired me to begin the series – Sacred Places.

Why Egypt?

It was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. From childhood the Seven Wonders of the World always fascinated me. I randomly selected Egypt...maybe Giza Pyramid was more attractive to me than others. From the trip, one photograph became my debut piece. It was featured in a book produced by The Metropolitan Museum, the curator of photography. At about the same time Howard Greenberg, who was about to open a fine art gallery for photographs, saw my debut photograph in a charity auction where I donated the piece, and approached me with an offer to exhibit my work in his soon to open gallery. Since then Howard Greenberg has become one of the major dealers in fine art photographs. I was kind of moved up with him, thanks to Howard, he always supported me... he exhibited my work regularly and helped in publishing my books. (see LINK) The reality is that the financial returns from my fine art photography cannot compare with that of my commercial assignments. The income from a single advertising campaign, on which I would spend about a week, could support me for several months! Whereas with fine art photography I could never do this. So until recently, I think about two years ago, I finally stopped commercial photography when I passed the age of 65 years... now I collect pension and focus only to fine art work. I am 67 years of age.

But you don't look 67 years old.

People say that when you do something you love then you don't age.



Bhutan. Photograph © Kenro Izu

For example – Angkor Wat – this is a positive side of Cambodian society...aesthetic beauty carved in stone, the exquisite architecture, the shapes and how light plays across the surface and the shadows that lurk between the shapes. This series was titled *Light over Ancient Angkor*. The light was Angkor Wat and the shadows being what ails Cambodian society – the landmine victims and poverty. For me this was photography of *Life*. For it resonated with the senses and forced one to acknowledge the paradoxes in which we live.



Angkor Wat, Cambodia. Photograph © Kenro Izu

It would appear that with your camera you are making a spiritual journey. Could you elaborate?

I view myself as a pilgrim seeking a path towards the meaning of human existence with my camera. I am not that kind of person, like a philosopher, who sits and think at a desk for long hours. I am born a photographer. When I see something I respond to it. I begin to find a meaning. So my camera is a tool, perhaps a vehicle to transport me from one atmosphere to another.

Also, it is good excuse to travel to the other side of the world where I learn different culture and sense of beauty through the camera recording images of the wonders of life.

Whenever I travelled to different countries I often came across very poor people, destitute and sick children, much suffering. And this disturbed me. And so I would put a donation in the box of the Red Cross or UNICEF at different airports and at Christmas I would send \$100 or 200 to my favourite cause, *Doctors Without Borders*, and then I would forget about it. I thought I had done my bit. Many people also give money to charity and are done with it.

But my photographs always reminded me of what I had seen and confronted me with a reality I would have probably forgotten if I had not recorded the images with my camera.

Eventually it dawned on me that as a photographer I am privileged to be able to go to many places, to do so as part of my work, get paid for it, and have the honour of exhibiting my work at galleries and museum shows. But on the flip side I have obligations to record for posterity what I had seen... the external view of a society and the internal aspects of the same society that is often overlooked. For example – Angkor Wat – this is a positive side of Cambodian society...aesthetic beauty carved in stone, the exquisite architecture, the shapes and how light plays across the surface and the shadows that lurk between the shapes. This series was titled *Light over Ancient Angkor*. The light was Angkor Wat and the shadows being what ails Cambodian society – the landmine victims and poverty. For me this was photography of *Life*. For it resonated with the senses and forced one to acknowledge the paradoxes in which we live.

This prompted me to narrate a story, the story of my journey. Perhaps it was at this time that I was confronted with many soul searching questions about the purpose and sanctity of life and the futility of mindless violence.

I am known for my platinum prints. A platinum print is made with a hand coated paper. You cannot buy printing paper for this camera, you have to make it by hand...coat the paper by hand. Platinum prints need a big negative. You cannot enlarge the image. As the platinum paper senses only ultra violet light it captures the tonality... infinitive shades of gray, unlike a plain black and white print, it is fine gradation from black all the way to white. I was drawn to this process for the quality I could get when creating the series *Sacred Spaces* because at holy places I am not photographing the architectural sites, I am trying to capture the aura, air surrounding Angkor Wat...the atmosphere.

From my experience I have felt that the Spirit comes to earth only certain hours of the day. He is here for a while before the sun rises and as the sun gets brighter departs from whence He came. During broad daylight humanity takes over. He returns once again after sunset in the twilight hours and departs again when darkness falls. And because I am aware of this I do not photograph holy places at times when He is not present. Sometimes, I have to wait for as long as three days to sense His presence. And then, when the time comes, I take two photographs and leave.

In 1983 you bought a Deardorff camera which produces a 14" \times 20" image/print. Why? What did you hope to achieve with this camera?

Initially I used $4" \times 5"$ and $8" \times 10"$ formats. I tried numerous ways to enlarge the photograph, regardless of the negative size to only depict the architecture but the space, aura, around the object. Though the architectural aspects were sharp the aura was lost during enlargement...the air or atmosphere.

I came across the works of Paul Strand (October 16, 1890 – March 31, 1976) who produced platinum prints using an 8" x 10" camera. Hence, the print was small. I viewed his photographs at a Sotheby's auction. I observed that the aura, air, around the subjects in his photographs. He had captured the very essence of the object. I learned that this image was a contact print using platinum process. A platinum print is a contact print...it can be reproduced only in the size of the negative. It cannot be enlarged. Hence, I needed a large format camera. That is why I ordered to build a 14" x 20" Deardorff camera. The subsequent prints would be in a large enough size for my fine art photographs of my series *Sacred Places* which captures the aura, air, around the architecture in holy places.

I am known for my platinum prints. A platinum print is made with a hand coated paper. You cannot buy printing paper for this camera, you have to make it by hand...coat the paper by hand. LINK Platinum prints need a big negative. You cannot enlarge the image. As the platinum paper senses only ultra violet light it captures the tonality... infinitive shades of gray, unlike a plain black and white print, it is fine gradation from black all the way to white.

I was drawn to this process for the quality I could get when creating the series *Sacred Spaces* because at holy places I am not photographing the architectural sites, I am not photographing pyramids, I am not photographing Stonehenge, I am trying to capture the aura, air surrounding the pyramid, the air surrounding Stonehenge, air surrounding Angkor Wat...the atmosphere.

You pioneered a technique called Cyanotype over Platinum Print. What is this?

Cyanotype is the simple process of making blue prints. I have combined the cyanotype with the platinum print. At one stage in my career I experimented with deep blue images. This was between 2001-2004. It happened coincidentally exactly one hundred years after Picasso finished the Blue Period (1901 and 1904). My work was a little bit of a mutation of Picasso's.

I was researching a technique to produce a deep blue image over mainly nude and some still life photographs. Finally I came up with a combination of platinum print as a base print with layers of cyano chemicals and negative over the exact position i.e. one image of platinum and four layers of cyano- type. The resultant blue image becoming infinitively close to black, which can express the inner emotion of person.

When you visit a place do you see the photograph in your mind before you actually shoot it?

Both. When I set my tripod, because my camera is so big, I cannot casually move it around as it weighs 120 kgs (including the lens etc., with which I travel around the world for nearly forty years). So it's not easy to shoot this way or that way. I have to set up the camera and take just one shot. That's it for one day!

I can take only about 100 sheets of film for one trip (average of 25-40 days in India, Tibet, Nepal and other travels) – when I click 100 times, it's over. No more photographs are possible. So I have to be very careful, each day or at each given site how many sheets I allocate. So I'm very cautious about when to shoot. Basically when I see the place, I wait patiently to feel it in spirit and to visually observe its physical beauty. And I wait for something to happen...the awakening of the spiritual atmosphere. From my experience I have felt that the Spirit comes to earth only certain hours of the day. He is here for a while before the sun rises and as the sun gets brighter departs from whence He came. During broad daylight humanity takes over. He returns once again after sunset in the twilight hours and departs again when dark- ness falls. And because I am aware of this I do not photograph holy places at times when He is not present. Sometimes, I have to wait for as long as three days to sense His presence. And then, when the time comes, I take two photographs and leave.

After you take the photograph do you process the print immediately?

No. I bring them back to New York because the film is too big to process.

Is it true that these prints last for a thousand years?

History can prove only 170 years. No one can prove beyond this at this time...

I felt a presence, it was strong but I couldn't see anything – and the next moment I started to feel emotional for no reason – not sad – I just felt a warm feeling embracing me. I do not remember when I was a baby but I can imagine if a baby is held in a mother's bosom – that kind of feeling. I burst into tears, I felt an immense love.

When you visited sacred places did you have a spiritual experience at any point, like an epiphany?

I visited Mount Kailash three years in a row and one trip it was snowing so I could not do any photography for one whole week. I could not see Mount Kailash and I was so frustrated lying in the tent and every morning I couldn't even see where our kitchen or staff tents were...the weather was so bad. When I was lying in the tent looking at the ceiling of the tent, I noticed condensation, a droplet of water running on the fabric of the tent above me and I kept looking at it and at one moment when I was watching I felt frustrated because I had come here to take a picture but in the process I had forgotten that my journey was a pilgrimage, my purpose, my existence... so I thought to myself that I did not have to use my eyes nor my camera and it would be better to simply close my eyes. And when I did, it was an epiphany. From that moment on I was a different person. Perhaps it was the spirit of Mount Kailash.

The other time was in Angkor Wat, before the tourists hordes, in 1993-94. I was all alone in the monument and I wandered in the ruins and began to acclimatize myself, which is my regular routine. First day I walk around without the camera and try to absorb the spiritual air because when I arrive in a new place my body is filled with the New York air, New York pace of the time, everything alien to the place.

So if I go to Cambodia, Cambodian pace of the time, Cambodian air is different so I have to acclimate. To take a picture one needs to acclimate to sense the feeling of a particular place. So I started walking through the complex viewing the stones, flowers and ivy. Suddenly I started to feel a presence. I looked around. Of course there was nobody. There were corridors running north, east, west...I was at an intersection of a corridor near the statue of Shiva without a head, behind it was a Buddhist stupa. You probably know that Cambodia's witnessed the reign of two kings – one Buddhist and the other Hindu. I felt a presence, it was strong but I couldn't see anything – and the next moment I started to feel emotional for no reason –not sad – I just felt a warm feeling embracing me. I do not remember when I was a baby but I can imagine if a baby is held in a mother's bosom – that kind of feeling. I burst into tears, I felt an immense love.

The following year another experience followed, which led me to set up the children's hospital in Cambodia.



Mount Kailash, Tibet. Photograph © Kenro Izu

In 1999, *Angkor Hospital for Children* opened. Since then it has provided medical care and health education to over 1.6 million children across Cambodia. The *Lao Friends Hospital for Children* (LFHC) treats over 20,000 children annually, educates hundreds of local medical professionals, and prevents thousands of diseases through its Outreach Program.



Lao Friends Hospital for Children. Photograph © Kenro Izu

Do you think the spiritual experience you had in Angkor Wat in 1993-94 was the force that guided you to build the hospital?

Yes, that experience taught me about love, a very big love that had embraced me. So in the next year when I returned I was interested in visiting the local hospital. In between a photography trip I stopped by the Provincial hospital.

My guide acted as a translator and got me permission to visit the children's ward. I stopped at the bed of a child patient with her father in attendance. And while I was enquiring about the girl's illness, she died in front of me.

My guide translated...that the father had brought her from a remote village for treatment by truck. His money was spent on the fare and he had no more money to pay for medicines. The doctor permitted the child to use a hospital bed but did not treat her. So she died. It was at this point that I decided to set up a children's hospital in Siem Reap for free to all Cambodians. (*see LINK*)

How did you go about setting up the children's hospital in Cambodia?

I had a clear vision. I made a proposal and circulated it among my friends. In the beginning we didn't have an organization. I found out that we would have to create a NGO to avail of tax benefits so my money and those of donors is exempt from tax. I went on field trip to Cambodia and met the UNICEF rep and met other NGO reps to seek their advice, and finally I went to the Ministry of Health.

I set up *Friends Without A Border* (see LINK) in 1995. In 1997 we raised enough money to start the building of the hospital, which was for landmine victims and the poor, like the child who died in front of me. In 1999, Angkor Hospital for Children opened. Since then it has provided medical care and health education to over 1.6 million children across Cambodia. (see LINK)

Why did you set up the children's hospital in Laos?

In 2013 when we handed over the Cambodian hospital to the locally established NGO, which was centered around the local staff of the hospital, the *Friends Without A Border*'s financial burden was reduced drastically because we no longer have to full-fund the hospital in Cambodia. So we conducted a retreat where the Board members discussed the future of *Friends Without A Border* – whether we would dissolve the NGO or look for another project.

With my photography the message is - in the most recent series titled *Eternal Light (of India)* – about the dignity of people whether they are poor, outside the caste, orphans, street children or those who are dying. These people possess a dignity that reflects an inner beauty. You know in western countries, maybe in Asia too, people tend to think being rich and famous is "The success".

It makes me think about the meaning of "success". And I believe those who exist on the threshold of society, the dispossessed, and the poor also have beauty in their life. They have a faith which guide their life. They also know how to share their things with others despite their poverty (in the material world).

The outcome of this meeting was that we would look for another project either in Myanmar or Laos. We travelled to Myanmar and Luang Prabang (Laos) in a group consisting of board, donors and a medical advisor.

We settled on Luang Prabang because the authorities were very helpful and welcoming. Also, it was a safer place for our staff and volunteers. Unlike Myanmar which had a democratically elected government but ruled by the army. The ground realities there not conducive to setting up the hospital as we couldn't risk the millions of dollars of our donors nor the safety of our staff.

We found that there was an existing relationship between Laotian and Cambodian doctors in our hospital in Siem Reap Cambodia. So there was already a connection. Also, *Friends Without A Border* had a good reputation with the Cambodians, hence the officials at the Lao Ministry welcomed us.

Finally we took the Head of Health Department, Governor and Head of Provincial Hospital on all-paid tour to Cambodia to show the hospital at Siem Reap. After the tour the Laos official gave us permission to set up the hospital in Luang Prabang because we were not trying to own or run a business but only to set up hospital, educate the staff, which would then be handed over in due course to the people of Laos. (*see LINK*).

Lao Friends Hospital for Children (LFHC) provides free medical care and health education to children in Luang Prabang, Laos. Through the model of *Treatment + Education + Prevention*, the hospital treats over 20,000 children annually, educates hundreds of local medical professionals, and prevents thousands of diseases through its Outreach Program. LFHC's guiding motto is "treat every patient as if your own child."

With the advent of the digital camera do you think we have gone the wrong way?

I don't think it is right or wrong. The convenience and speed is unbeatable by old-fashion film photography. I think this is a kind of phenomenon. People of late have developed very strong egos. Many loudly announces... *me, me, me, me.*... The selfie is symbolic of runaway egos.

If you travel to Luang Prabang and visit Wat Xiang Thong Temple you will observe swarms of tourists taking selfies with the beautiful temple in the background. Instead of admiring the exquisiteness and absorbing the sanctity of the place the tourists are admiring themselves in their camera lens.

When I was in Pompeii, Italy, at the archaeological site, where I am presently working on a new project, hordes of tourist descended on the site…everyone had a stick with a mobile-camera attached to it. They were obsessed with taking photos of themselves with the artifacts in the background… beautiful mosaic and frescoes. The ancient artefacts being of no consequence to these tourists posing in front of their own cameras. This is the bad side effect of the digital camera and the phone camera. I shall also add Facebook to this…the posts are all about *I, I, I* and *I*…everything I did today…eat, work, play etc. etc. They listen to others only when others listen to them

When you go to exhibitions of Contemporary Art you see art screaming 'look at me', 'listen to what I think', 'listen to what I believe'. They are about 'me' and many are about what they think, they concerned only with themselves and their ideas, instead of the art itself – Though occasionally there are great ideas and works...

Sometimes I question – is that art showing at the museum... visitors paying 20\$ entrance fee to view an artist's work that is more about the artist than about his or her artwork? The 'I' has displaced the art.

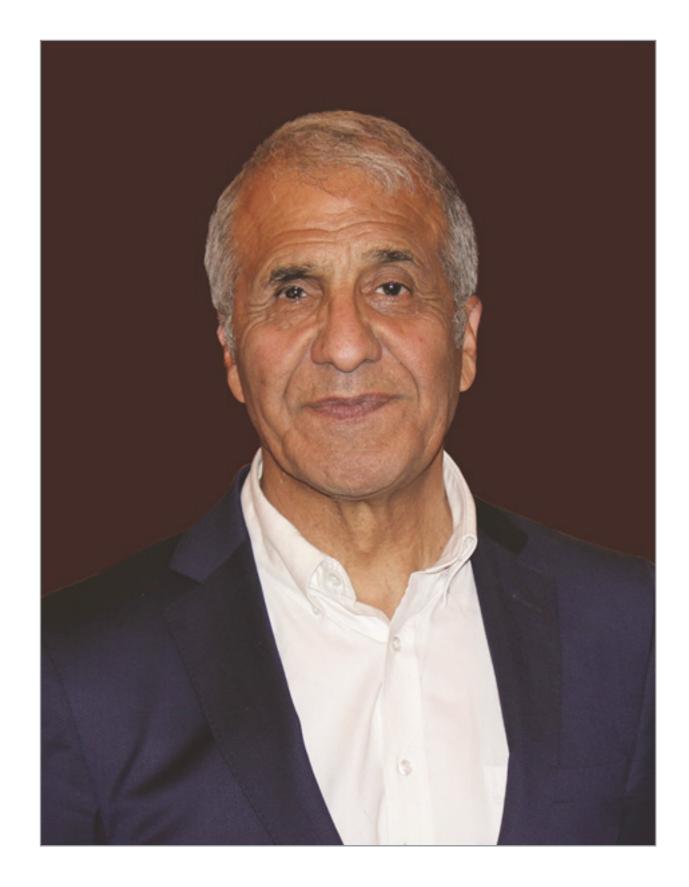
I have stopped going to the Modern Art Museum in New York lately. In the 70s it was different. Artists, then were isolated from their work, removed from the subject so the viewer could enjoy the beauty and complexities of the theme. Now it is the artist first and their work as a backdrop. Bit like the selfie.

What is your message to the readers of Live Encounters?

I often receive emails from young people who say they want to be like me – saving the children – they ask for advice. I just tell them to believe in themselves, move one step at a time and to get out of their comfort zone. As long as they are staying in their comfort zone they are not going to achieve anything new. It's the same with photography. One has to step out.

With my photography the message is - in the most recent series titled *Eternal Light (of India)* – about the dignity of people whether they are poor, outside the caste, orphans, street children or those who are dying. These people possess a dignity that reflects an inner beauty. You know in western countries, maybe in Asia too, people tend to think being rich and famous is "The success". It makes me think about the meaning of "success". And I believe those who exist on the threshold of society, the dispossessed, and the poor also have beauty in their life. They have a faith which guide their life. They also know how to share their things with others despite their poverty (in the material world).

AFGHANISTAN MASOOD KHALILI



Masood Khalili

The son of a renowned Afghan poet, Khalilullah Khalili, Masood Khalili is the current ambassador of Afghanistan to Spain and former ambassador to many other countries. He is respected both in his country and internationally as an honest, patriotic, and elder statesman, as well as a political leader.

This article was published over four years ago in Live Encounters Magazine. We republish the article on the eve of the withdrawal of western military forces from Afghanistan. Perhaps there is a lesson for us all in the words of the author, Masood Khalili, a friend of the legendary Afghan Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud who was one of the fiercest fighters involved in the defeat of Soviet Army in 1989. - Editor

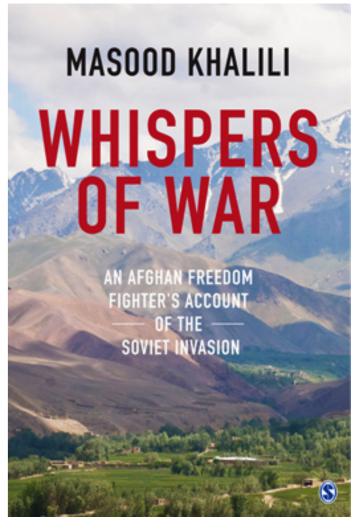
Whispers of War published by SAGE Publications

MASOOD KHALILI

Afghanistan diplomat, linguist and urbane poet

The only way a man can mobilize his people to stay in the fight against a super power is to be among them. So, by foot, donkey or horse, I would travel into Afghanistan to talk to my people, from the richest to the poorest, the wisest to the unwise, the oldest to the youngest, I would listen to their stories and they would listen to mine. Our common goal was to win the war against the invading Red Army and their Afghan Communist puppets in power in Kabul city. We were losing thousands of people every month but we believed that we would win the war.

In all my thirteen travels through the country, I had one thing always with me, and those were my three notebooks. One was for political things, the other was for all military stuff and the third I would write for my beloved wife, whom was waiting for me in Pakistan with my two sons and parents. The first two were important because I was the main political officer of my party who would travel the world to gain support from foreign governments but the third was closest to my heart. I would do my best to write as much as I could in this one.



AFGHANISTAN MASOOD KHALILI



Masood Khalili and Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. Photograph and on the right courtesy www.masood-khalili.com

One of my trips to the North of Afghanistan to see my good friend, the famous military commander, Ahmad shah Massoud, I had with me a yellow notebook, which my son picked up and decided to translate and make into Whispers of War. This old yellow notebook was written by me to my wife in 1986 and I still remember how sometimes I would write in it every half an hour even. I wrote to her of everything I experienced, saw, felt, and said, as well as the stories that the common people told me as I travelled through the very high and hard Hindu Kush Mountain range.

The things that I saw and the stories I were told were not easy on the heart and so I would write in my yellow notebook so I would gain some strength and my wife would also be able to understand the plight of our poor people. For example, the following story is so powerful on so many different levels.

My dear, leave last night's story of our nightmares to one side and listen to this one that Commander Massoud told me himself. It is the story of Commander Azmuddin who is one of his political intelligence officers.

The wife and only child of Commander Azmuddin had been internal refugees in Worsaj for a year. After one year, Commander Azmuddin decides to go see them. With a lot of effort, he gets permission from Commander Massoud. He goes speedily along the way on foot, so all the quicker to have his family in his arms and to rain kisses on his child. After all, he has been counting every night for more than 360 nights to see his small family.

With no telephone, no postman, no radio communication, and no way to even see a photo of them, it was a great day for him to have the chance to come home. He was dreaming of seeing his baby take his first steps in front of him. He buys a simple toy for his boy and one or two gifts for his wife. He reaches home. His young wife rushes to greet him. This is one of the happiest moments for all of them. Sounds of welcome and joy fill the house. He runs happily to kiss his son. His wife is highly excited and has no words to express how she feels at the sight of her husband playing, kissing, and talking sweetly to their little boy. The sky, the flowers, the trees, the grass, and all of nature seemed to be celebrating in her happiness. They all go inside. She gets her husband's combat rucksack to put it in a proper place in the next room. Commander Azmuddin shouts to her that he has put some simple gifts for the two of them in the rucksack. Their son frees himself from the embrace of his father and runs after his mother. The sounds of the little one's excitement and of his mother's laughter fill both rooms. All of a sudden, her unlucky fingers hit a hand grenade in the rucksack.

AFGHANISTAN

By chance, the needle of the grenade is loose, her gentle touch pushes the needle out of its place, and, in an instant, it explodes. Commander Azmuddin hears a loud explosion and runs to find what has happened. He is horrified to find the bodies of his beloved wife and his sweet child smeared and soaked in blood. Not an hour has gone by that the young wife who was eagerly waiting for him to come home, dies in the arms of her husband. His little son does not die but is severely injured. Azmuddin, who had just lost his beloved wife, could not stay for more than one or two days with his injured son, mainly because he had lots of work to do back on the Saalang Highway. He left the house for the war with a weeping heart and no loving wife to greet him when he returns.

Just like this story, there are dozens more in *Whispers of War*. My son is already talking about translating another notebook of mine, where I travel through the South of the country in order to get to the city of Herat. That is also a great story as I tell my beloved wife about the culture of the South, as it is totally different than the people of the North that I have written in *Whispers*. I hope you enjoy reading this book enough to want to read our second installment.

Sadly, you can still hear similar stories in the Afghanistan of today. We are still fighting but a different enemy. We won the war against the Red Army but we lost peace. Different Afghan warlords fought against one another for power and influence. Kabul City was destroyed by the hundreds of bombs per day by Hekmatyar and Dostum. Both were being paid by the intelligence agency of Pakistan to keep pressure on Commander Masood to give up power. They really destroyed the city and killed thousands of more people. Pakistan was trying its best to have its own puppet in power. It believed and still believes it has the right to rule over Afghanistan.

On September 9th of 2001, I was sitting alongside Commander Massoud in a place called Khaja Bahawodeen, (Northern Afghanistan) when two Arabs posing as journalists, assassinated my friend, Commander Massoud and left me severely injured with over 700 pieces of shrapnel in my body, loss of hearing in one ear and loss of sight in one eye. It seemed as if Al-Qaeda, Taliban and the Pakistani ISI had their victory in hand but fate had something else planned. Two towers in America were attacked and America was out for revenge. Afghanistan had another lifeline. Cut to the present and sadly, we still see war in Afghanistan, we still see refugees, poverty and the lack of security. The Taliban, Al-Qaeda and now there is even ISIS. The poor people of Afghanistan have still not seen the sweet taste of peace but just like I dreamed in the mountains of Afghanistan in 1986, some of those dreams are coming true, even though we are still fighting.



First press conference 1992 after defeat and withdrawal of Soviet Army from Afghanistan.

Over 5 million boys and girls are going to school. They look so beautiful in their little uniforms. Over 350,000 young men and women are members of the Afghan National Army. We have the freest media in the region, we have universities popping up every year and we have a system of government in place, although highly corrupt, it is still a functioning executive, legislative and judiciary. Over the last 17 years, we have also had three presidential elections with peaceful transitions of power from the Karzai government to the Ghani National Unity government of today.

Once we gain peace, I am sure that Afghanistan and the Afghan people will be able to very quickly develop their country because one of the main things that Afghans never gave up was hope in their hearts. If you have hope, you can achieve anything because you know that every bad situation changes and that wrong cannot stay for long. The spirit of the Afghan people can be seen in a very simple story which I wrote in *Whispers:*

After lunch, I went to visit a boy's school of this village. They were sitting under a big old green poplar tree. I tied my donkey to a rusted nail on its giant trunk. The boys were from 10 to 12 years of age. They were excited but I did not know of what, my donkey or myself. It was again a painful sight to see. Blood fills of one's eyes at seeing the poverty of these boys. Their shoes, their shirts and their overall appearance was very poor. Some of them were barefoot. Their clothes were full of patches.

My dear, now listen to what happened while I was in the small and poor class.

I very proudly told the cute boys, "write azaadee or freedom for me."

Only two little boys started writing.

I abruptly asked the teacher, "Why are only two of the boys able to write?"

While poor eyes of the boys were focused on me, in a soft voice, the teacher said, "Mr. Khalili, they can all write but in the whole class, we just have two pencils"

I was ashamed of my question.

My Dear, when we gain our freedom, it will not only be at the barrels of a guns, firing their thousands of bullets at the enemy but also at the tips of those two pens. I pray that one day millions of kids have schools to attend and endless pencils to write.

TRAVELOGUE



Percy Aaron

Percy Aaron is an ESL teacher at Vientiane College in the Lao PDR and a freelance editor for a number of international organisations. He has had published a number of short stories, edited three books and was editor of *Champa Holidays*, the Lao Airlines in-flight magazine and *Oh!* - a Southeast Asia-centric travel and culture publication. As lead writer for the Lao Business Forum, he was also on the World Bank's panel of editors. Before unleashing his ignorance on his students, he was an entrepreneur, a director with Omega and Swatch in their India operations and an architectural draughtsman. He has answers to most of the world's problems and is the epitome of the 'Argumentative Indian'. He can be contacted at percy.aaron@gmail.com`

PERCY AARON Holy Smoke in Điện Biên Phủ

War memories and dining disasters are a plenty on a visit in 2007 to one of Vietnam's historic battlefields.

My throat was on fire and I grabbed the bottle of mineral water on the table, almost wrenching off the cap. As the first sips trickled down my throat, I wanted to scream 'napalm'.

It had started the previous day.

We had spent a long, tiring day exploring the war sites of the epic battles for Điện Biên Phủ. Our stomachs were empty and our throats parched as we ascended hillocks and descended into bunkers but it seemed almost profane to think of food in a place where combatants on both sides had gone for days without food or water.

As a history buff I'm always drawn to war memorials and museums. As a pacifist I'm always appalled by the senseless waste of human life. As a thinking person I'm always angered by the fact that the most vociferous supporters of war are those who stand far removed from the arenas of conflict.

In the photographs we'd seen that day at the museum, the only people smiling were the politicians and generals, the former invariably in white suits, while the latter were in starched uniforms that had seen neither war nor work. These were the people whose sense of timing was perfect; departing before the shells came in, or the champagne ran out.

Back in our hotel I welcomed a shower and the opportunity to get rid of the dust and sweat of a sultry, sticky day. Now it was time to make up for the breakfast and lunch that we had skipped and so we set off in search of a restaurant.

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TRAVELOGUE

"Chiên is French for dog. In Vietnam dog meat is a delicacy." He nodded, getting my point. Vietnam had once been one of colonial France's jewels.

We entered a number of stylishly furnished places we thought were restaurants. They were pubs that didn't serve food! Alcohol, alcohol, alcohol. That was all on offer. We needed a cold beer but that could wait until we had something in our stomachs. Every place that we went into showed us only a drinks list. It was getting late and shops were beginning to close. We started walking faster and faster, desperate to eat. Eventually, we found to a restaurant; a real restaurant. We were so hungry that we scanned the menu before even sitting down. Everything was in Vietnamese and we couldn't understand a thing.

David chose something but when my eyes followed his finger, I saw the word chiên. "You're going to eat dog?" I looked at him.

"Dog?" he asked impatiently.

"Chiên is French for dog. In Vietnam dog meat is a delicacy." He nodded, getting my point. Vietnam had once been one of colonial France's jewels.

Almost everything on the menu had the word chiên and we tried to make the waiter understand that we didn't want dog meat. We opened and closed our fingers to indicate canine jaws. We pointed to chiên and shook our heads. The waiter was nonplussed and the elderly man sitting behind the cash counter came over to see what the matter was.

"Bow wow, no eat," I shook my head vigorously from side to side. He didn't understand, lost interest and said something to the waiter, who started switching off the lights. Most places had closed by that time but luckily we found a minimart where we bought some yoghurt and crackers and headed back to our hotel room.

By the next morning my stomach was touching my backbone. David said that he hadn't been able to sleep because of hunger. We wanted a heavy breakfast before catching our noon flight to Ha Noi. Our guide book had recommended a restaurant for the best phở – a noodle, meat and vegetable soup – in town and we headed there. The waiters didn't understand our order for "poh" and we wondered if the cyclo driver had brought us to the correct place. It was going to be our last meal in Điện Biên Phủ and we wanted the best. There must be another restaurant by the same name nearby we thought and walked out of the place.



French defeated at Dien Bien Phu. Photograph by Percy Aaron.

As we were leaving David looked up and saw in big letters the word Phở. We called the waiter out and pointed to the word and he smiled. "Fer," he pronounced it. "Fer," he articulated once again, slowly and clearly. We realised our mistake. We'd had this dish hundreds of times back in Vientiane, where we lived, and pronounced it the same way. We laughed wondering why we had pronounced it differently here. The phở was very good, no doubt about that.

While we were eating two men at the next table took turns smoking a điếu cày – a wooden pipe that looks like a variation of a hookah. With total disregard for other diners, who didn't seem bothered anyway, they filled the place with smoke. For non-smokers like us, Vietnam can be an exasperating experience. We watched with a mixture of annoyance and fascination. One of the men noticed us staring and invited us to take a puff. David refused politely but I, who had never ever smoked in my life, did something crazy. I accepted the man's offer.

I went to their table and with gestures they explained what I had to do. Very hesitantly I put my mouth to the opening and inhaled but felt nothing. They tried explaining and I took another try. Then David called from the other table saying that I had to inhale deeply, taking the smoke into my lungs. I took a deep pull and gulped forcing the smoke down to my lungs. Then my throat caught fire. I gasped not knowing what had happened. The two men started smiling. I looked around desperately and spotted the bottle of 'mineral' water on the table. I grabbed it, wrenched off the cap and took a deep swig. Almost immediately, like a fire-eater, I spat the 'mineral water' out over the tables and on some customers. My gullet had been napalmed. I clutched my throat and pulled at my collar. David sprang up totally confused but the others were in hysterics. The man who had invited me to smoke was clapping his hands.

Suffocating, and now in deep panic, I jumped up from the plastic chair, knocking it over. I looked around for something to pour down my throat. David shouted wanting to know what was wrong but I couldn't say anything. I was dying and death rattles were coming from my throat.

I didn't trust anything on the tables and rushed to the toilet. I passed through the kitchen and saw heaps of dirty soup bowls in aluminum basins. Nearby was a drum filled with water. I dipped one of the bowls into the water and gargled and spat out. I did it again and again until the burning sensation had eased. I stood there, bent over the sink till the panic started to subside. Looking at the filthy water I wondered if diarrhea was to follow the scalded throat and lungs.

TRAVELOGUE

When I wobbled back to the restaurant, laughter broke out again. David came up to me with the bottle of 'mineral water'.

"It's rice wine," he said.

Much later, we arrived at the airport and checked in. I was starving but didn't feel like any food as my throat was still sore and my stomach queasy. We were approaching security when I remembered that I had left about \$200, in Lao kip, under the mattress in the hotel. Days earlier, while trekking in Laos I had fallen into the Nam Ou River. The money had been in one of the pockets of my cargo pants and I'd put it under the mattress for safety and to dry out. I was cursing myself when the policeman at security asked me if I was carrying a knife.

"No," I replied but he asked the question again staring at the TV monitor. He said something to a grim looking policeman who lifted my hand baggage off the x-ray machine and walked to a table. Everything was unpacked, checked carefully and left on the table. My empty bag was x-rayed again. The man at the monitor beckoned to me and pointed to something showing up in the corner of the bag.

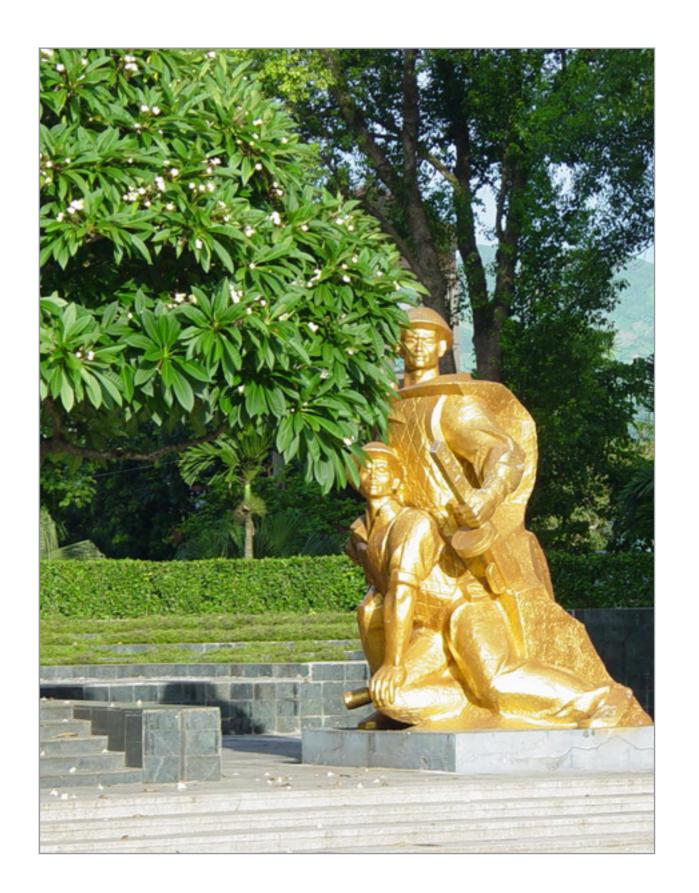
From where I was standing, I saw the queue behind getting impatient but also interested to see what was going to happen. Terrorists being apprehended can be fun to watch. David, from inside the security barrier stood looking at me. I shrugged my shoulders at him.

Officer Grimface brought the bag back to the table, gave me an unpleasant look and then started probing the area that had showed an object inside. Standing opposite him, I noticed the stitches in the lining had opened. He tore that open and pulled out a small Swiss Army knife. My reaction must have surprised the policeman and the passengers. I recognized the knife, grabbed and read the words engraved on it, 'Darling Percy – Yours Forever – J...' It was a gift, I thought I'd lost years ago.

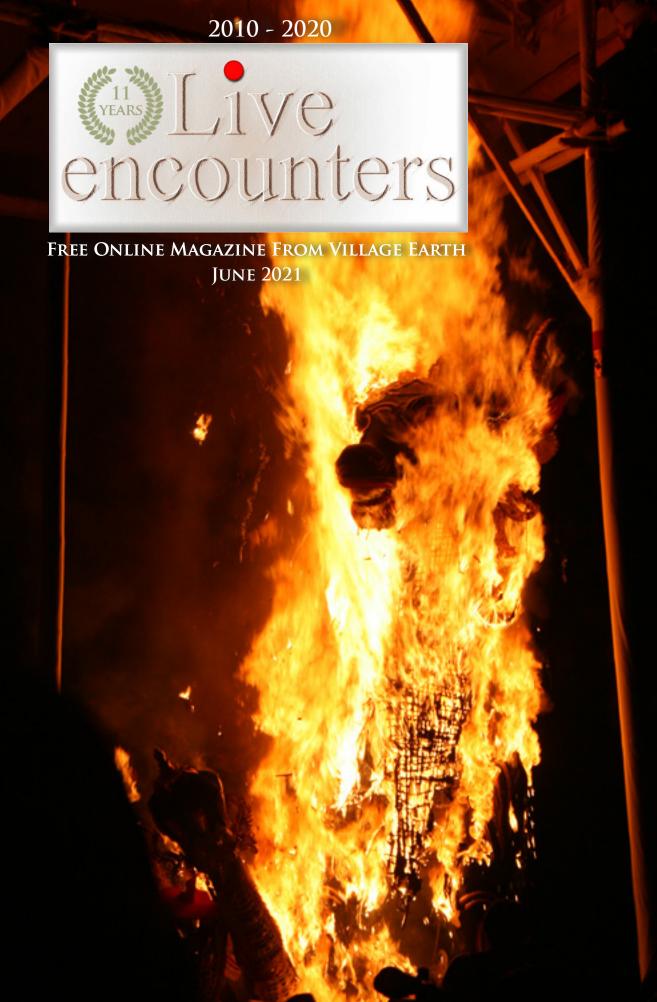
Both policemen smiled and then Grimface showed his softer side. He asked another policeman to take over and then rushed me all the way back to the check-in counter, where the knife was sealed in a see-through plastic bag and a receipt handed to me.

We smiled at each other and I pumped his hand gratefully.

Later, when we got back to Vientiane we found out that chiên in Vietnamese means 'fried'.



Điện Biên Phủ. Photograph by Percy Aaron.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK ULYSEAS