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DR HOWARD RICHARDS
South Africa
Credible Threats and Incredible Promises

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Butterflies on the banks of the Mekong. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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DR HOWARD RICHARDS

SOUTH AFRICA

NOW AS A LAND OF CREDIBLE THREATS AND INCREDIBLE PROMISES

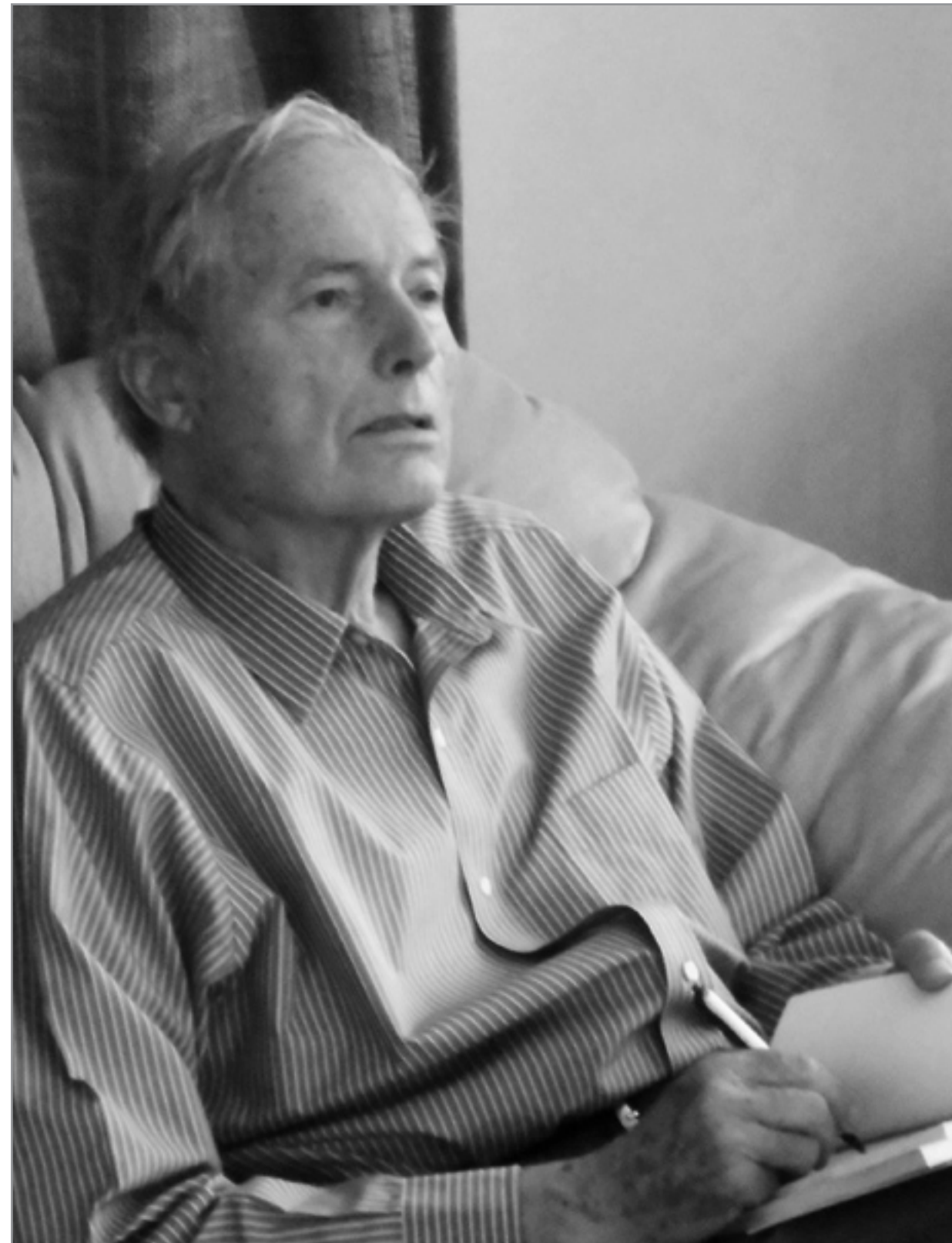
Overview

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Consideration of the first five topics leads to an appreciation of the importance of the sixth.

1. Methodological Remarks

The brief discussion of constitutive rules in the introduction already hints at our sympathy with John Searle's account of the construction of social reality, which he reads as the creation of institutional facts out of brute facts. Brute facts (like pieces of paper with certain markings on them) are assigned social status (like the status of money). That social status makes them institutional facts.¹ The rules that turn brute facts into institutional facts Searle calls constitutive rules. A constitutive rule takes the form of 'X counts as Y in context C'. To continue with Searle's example: certain brute facts in the form of pieces of paper count as money in certain historical contexts. Another example (our adaptation of Searle, not pure Searle) is the legal rules that constitute property rights; here it is members of the species *Homo sapiens* who are the brute facts assigned a social status—that of 'owner'. 'Owner' is an institutional fact.



Dr Howard Richards



The general acceptance of constitutive rules is the means by which cultural facts about meanings create material facts about social structure² and by which material relations are established among social positions. To revisit Sen's example presented in the introduction, it is a constitutive rule that establishes who, at some given time and place, has a legal or customary right to eat and who does not. Transposing this idea from the Anglophone idiom of Searle and Porpora into the Francophone idiom of Michel Foucault, at certain historical moments material practices and regimes of truth converge to form *dispositifs* (devices) of power/knowledge.³

A key purpose of this book is to contribute to rebuilding not only economic theory but also the basic social structure that (mainstream) economic theories presuppose. However, this effort begs for sympathy. The words available to us as building materials denote essentially contested concepts. They are words with long histories marked by socially violent and academically convoluted confrontations. We therefore find ourselves in a distressing situation not unlike that of seasick passengers on Neurath's boat.⁴

Otto Neurath likened scientific knowledge to a boat that must be repaired while at sea. The sailors must reconstruct the boat they are sailing on, so they can replace only one plank at a time. If they removed and replaced too many planks at once, the boat would sink. Similarly, we are constrained to work with mainstream thinking and the basic social structure as they are, even when we believe they are mistaken not just at a few points but *ab initio* (from the beginning).

Our situation, however, is even worse than that of Neurath's sailors because, much more than the history of physics that Neurath mainly had in mind as his boat, the history of economics is a history of the construction of social realities. We claim that economic theory did not arise just to understand its object of study, i.e., modern economic society; it arose as part of the social construction of its object of study. Adam Smith was not just a student of market exchange; he was an advocate and an architect of a society under construction whose most powerful institution would become market exchange organized by the rule of law.

Economics did not begin with Smith's political economy or as a science at all. Before it was a science, it was a moral and political movement in favour of what was called natural liberty.⁵ Preexisting social structures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries established what Foucault would call the historical conditions of the possibility of economics.

These conditions were established only in Europe; economics as we know it became possible in the rest of the world only when its European conquerors brought European law and customs with them.⁶ Among the preexisting discourses that facilitated the emergence of the discourse on political economy in Western Europe were those of Roman law, the similar common law of England, eighteenth-century notions of natural rights and social contracts, Protestant theologies, several schools of ethics, and Newtonian mechanics. Our plight now, in the twenty-first century, is that of passengers on Neurath's boat who wish they had some influence over the direction the boat is going but have good reason to doubt that they do. Today, an account of economic theory should—so we claim—offer ideas about where society is going and why, and about how to change economic theory's object of study: the basic social structure. It should give people hope that they can contribute to transforming economic society. It should propose a strategy for changing the course of history.

This book does indeed propose such a strategy, and it intends to encourage readers to believe they can make a difference. The strategy, which we call *unbounded organization* and *ethical realism*, hits the ground running by building on community development methods that already exist and are already achieving some success. The discursive approach of this book starts from the premise that one will not get far in changing the linguistic side of discourse without changing its practical side. For this reason, this book includes many pages filled with brute facts. Otherwise put, if, in terms of Searle's story about how to construct social reality, the brute facts are where the institutional facts come from, and if we want to change the institutional fact that humanity is currently condemned to live under one or another regime organized to facilitate accumulation to the detriment of nature, then we would be wise to ground our search for change strategies at the brute-fact level.

Some might challenge our approach by claiming that there are no brute facts. For instance, while John Searle proposes a plausible vocabulary and viewpoint in which concepts like *brute fact* and *basic fact* are given reasonably clear, nuanced meanings, Martin Heidegger proposes an equally plausible vocabulary⁷ expressing a quite different viewpoint. Most people would agree that every so-called brute fact is actually a description by some speaker speaking some language. It does not necessarily retain the same brute status when it figures as a fact in some other speech. Martin Heidegger goes further: To see something is already to interpret it;⁸ that is, we cannot see without *Auslegung*—without interpretation, without reading. Even before we open our mouths to describe a fact and thus sully the fact's pristine bruteness with the cultural baggage of our language and our extempore choice of words, our eyes have already betrayed us.

Our defence, our appeal to the mercy of the court, as it were, is that we will do our best to ground our word choices in physical realities (ecology) and in the realities of people's lives (what they experience). To back up our defence we again call upon the author of *Reclaiming Reality*,⁹ Roy Bhaskar, as a witness to make one key point that he qualifies at length elsewhere in his extensive writings. He testifies that, although it is true that every fact is a fact only under some description and only in the light of some way of seeing, it is also true that science can detect underlying causal powers that produce observed phenomena. So it is okay to repose some faith in a naturalist worldview (in an emergent-powers materialism neither wholly like nor wholly unlike Searle's naturalism) and at the same time agree with Heidegger that all seeing is seeing as. Roy Bhaskar's early work (known as 'first wave critical realism') was nothing if not a reconciliation of science and hermeneutics; we intend to stand barefoot on his shoulders and let our ankles be tickled by his long hair.

Having set out our methodology, we offer next a plausible description of facts about contemporary South Africa. While these facts may not be wholly brute, they are at least *more brute and less institutional* than—to cite an economic theory discussed later—Dani Rodrik's theory of economic growth.

2. Anger and Violence

A wave of violence swept across South Africa's poor townships starting in May of 2008. In some places it was preceded by a history of protests dating back as far as 1996, just two years after democracy was established in the country. It was followed by even more protests, many of them violent, in the succeeding years. We focus on 2008 and 2009 because we have access to careful case studies of those years' violence at eight locations.¹⁰

Various incidents triggered the violence. Protests led to mass meetings and marches. Then came the burning of private and public buildings, and work stay-aways and deaths. Once the protests began, the police became a factor, either because of their absence or because their excessive violence led to running battles between youth and police. In most cases, there were attacks on foreigners and foreign-owned shops and dwellings, and in one case study (of Slovoview), the researchers found xenophobic violence to be the primary violence.¹¹ A common trigger for the violence was real or alleged corruption; for example, in the town of Voortrekker in the province of Mpumalanga, the trigger was the disappearance of 150 thousand rands. Whatever the underlying structural causes may have been, the proximate cause of that violence was that money intended as prizes for winning athletes in a competition had disappeared. Somebody had stolen it.



DW News youtube screen grab.



In each case of violence studied, there was some form of broken trust or broken promise. For example, a protest organizer in Voortrekker asserted: ‘That the houses were burnt down was the mistake of the premier. He promised to come but did not.’¹² Sometimes the violence was triggered by a faction in local politics mobilizing popular discontent to serve its own interests. A protestor at Kungcatsha described the discontent this way: ‘People of this township are very patient, but this time they are very angry. They are sick and tired of waiting.’¹³ Another described partisan and even self-serving mobilization: ‘Some of the leaders were angry that they were no longer getting tenders, and then they decided to mobilize the community against the municipality.’¹⁴

Over and above the particular sparks that ignited particular conflagrations, three recurrent fact patterns stand out. The first pattern underlies the partisan mobilization of discontent and is well summarized by Karl von Holdt, author of one of the case study reports: ‘Using the appropriation of state activities as a basis for accumulation, a thuggish local elite is able to rise through a combination of criminal, extra-legal and quasi-state activities.’¹⁵ The protests frequently did not target the national government or the ruling African National Congress. Rather, they targeted the misdeeds of local authorities and then looked to higher authority to correct them.

The second pattern is the continuity of the ideas and repertory of the protest activities with those of the decades-long anti-apartheid struggle before 1994. A protestor in Azania said, ‘The Freedom Charter says people shall govern, but now we are not governing, we are being governed.’¹⁶ During the struggle against apartheid and again in 2008–2009, violence was preceded by peaceful protest in the form of mass meetings, marches, petitions and strikes. During both periods of protest, the burning of a public building—a library, a clinic, a community centre—was a symbolic disruption of oppressive authority. The report says, ‘It is a symbolism that is well understood, both by community and by authorities, since it was central to the struggle against apartheid authority.’¹⁷

Burning down the homes of local authorities perceived as corrupt in 2008–2009 was similar to the burning out of collaborators practiced in the 1980s. The protestors of the later era burned tyres and barricaded streets, as their predecessors had done. They engaged in *toyi toyi*, marching aggressively while singing struggle songs. Video footage of protestors at Voortrekker shows them chanting *Tambo, kumoshekile; bayasithengisa*—‘Tambo, things are bad; we are being sold out’—referring to Oliver Tambo, who headed the African National Congress during the freedom struggle.

The third and most fundamental pattern is the contrast between the prosperity promised to the masses during the struggle against apartheid and their present reality of grinding poverty under democracy. Jacob Dlamini, in his report on violence at Voortrekker, provides some detail: ‘In Mpumalanga, as in the rest of South Africa, despite the ANC commitments to eliminating poverty and the expectations of the majority of black people, poverty and inequality have increased dramatically since 1994. For example, South Africa’s Gini coefficient [a measure of inequality] moved ahead of Brazil’s to become the world’s worst among major countries: from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.70 in 2008. The income of the average African person fell as a percentage of the average white’s from 13.5 percent (1995) to 13 percent (2008) (Development Policy Research Unit, 2009).’¹⁸

Young protestors in Azania Township responded angrily to the suggestion that, in protesting, they were being manipulated by the local elite. One said: ‘It is an insult to my intelligence for people to think we are marching because someone has bought us liquor. We are not mindless. People, especially you who are educated, think we are marching because we bored. We are dealing with real issues here. Like today we don’t have electricity. We have not had water for the whole week.’¹⁹ The violence of 2008 has recurred at different moments and places in the years since then. At times it takes the form of service-delivery protest, or xenophobic violence, or, as a daily painful reality, violence against women and children. Violence is an ongoing social reality for the vast majority of South Africa’s people.

3. The Economic Freedom Fighters

We write here of a particular political party now (in 2019) active in South Africa. In the interim between when we write this and when someone reads this, this party as a specific movement may have waxed, waned, or disappeared. But political movements that articulate and mobilize popular discontent will not disappear. They will recur as long as there is popular discontent and as long as there is politics.²⁰

On July 26, 2013, on the sixtieth anniversary of Fidel Castro’s unsuccessful storming of the Moncada Barracks in Havana, a radical movement rolled out its founding manifesto in Soweto, South Africa.²¹ They called themselves Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and they called their leader commander-in-chief. They cast themselves as the finishers of the unfinished revolution that had won democracy for South Africa.



In their manifesto they state that political power without economic emancipation is meaningless:

Concerning real economic transformation, the post-1994 democratic state has not achieved anything substantial owing to the fact that the economic-policy direction taken in the democratic-dawn years was not about fundamental transformation, but empowerment/enrichment meant to empower what could inherently be a few black aspirant capitalists, without the real transfer of wealth to the people as a whole.²²

The Freedom Charter of 1955 had inspired much of the resistance to apartheid before the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994. It continues to play an important role in South African politics. The Manifesto of the EFF reads the Freedom Charter radically. The Charter says that South Africa belongs to all who live in it. In the EFF Manifesto, that principle is read to imply public ownership of natural resources and key industries,²³ as well as nationalization of mines, banks and monopolies. It is also read to mean that the state should assure economic opportunities to all. The Charter also says that while the state should be in control of the commanding heights of the economy, 'people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts, and professions'. Therefore, there will never be nationalization and state control of every sector of South Africa's economy.²⁴ However, says the Charter, 'there will be cooperatives and other kinds of common and collective ownership'.²⁵

The EFF Manifesto goes on: 'The struggle for economic freedom is not a struggle against white people, but a struggle for the emancipation of the working class and for equal benefit of those who are not benefiting from the current economic realities.'²⁶ It declares that the EFF will be present at the barricades. It will be involved in mass movements and community protests.²⁷ From this it appears to be reasonable to anticipate that, in the future, successive waves of protest triggered by local issues will be joined and supported by militants of one or more national organizations with a definite ideology.

In its Manifesto the EFF self-identifies as leftist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist. It purports to draw inspiration from Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Frantz Fanon and all those who over the centuries have struggled for the economic liberation of humanity. In 1992, Francis Fukuyama looked around the world and concluded that history was over;²⁸ from then on and into the indefinite future, all leftist ideologies would remain in the dustbin—defeated, disproven and discredited. The EFF Manifesto of 2013 says 'not anymore'. Not in South Africa.

DW News youtube screen grab.



However, the admiration of the EFF for nineteenth- and twentieth-century leftist revolutionaries appears to be more a matter of honouring the lives of heroes than one of advocating an economic model like that of the former Soviet Union. (When it comes to naming models, according to the EFF, South Africa can learn from the countries on an honour roll that includes Brazil, India, China, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Finland.) Much of the Manifesto is not so much about the choice of an economic model as it is about basic morality (which critics of the EFF are quick to charge its leadership with violating). It denounces the juicy perks of public officials, cronyism, sexism, silencing the truth for fear of losing your job, putting profit before people and self-serving venality.

It declares seven cardinal pillars of a strategic mission for economic freedom in our lifetime.²⁹ The seven cardinal pillars are (slightly simplified) as follows:

1. Expropriation of South Africa's land, without compensation, for redistribution in use. (Redistribution in use is later explained as granting permits to use land for up to twenty-five years for stated uses, presumably mainly as farmland.)
2. Nationalization of mines, banks and other strategic sectors of the economy without compensation.
3. Building state and government capacity, which will lead to the abolition of tenders.
4. Free quality education, health care, houses and sanitation.
5. Massive protected industrial development, leading to jobs and adequate minimum wages for all.
6. Massive development of the African economy on the entire continent.
7. Open, accountable and corruption-free government.³⁰

While the EFF's campaigns against corruption and its admiration for Asian developmental states are not especially radical, its first two cardinal pillars are undoubtedly radical. Not even five years after the party's launch, however, the call for the expropriation of land without compensation had won such a degree of support that the ruling ANC adopted the same position.

Were these pillars to become facts on the ground, they would lead to what Lewis Coser calls 'absolute conflict'.³¹ In an absolute conflict, the parties do not acknowledge a common frame of reference for rationally negotiating a compromise or a mutually agreed-upon settlement.

In the terminology of the ancient dialogues featuring Socrates and composed by Plato, there is no presiding *logos* (reason or plan) for making the outcome of the argument independent of the will of the arguers. Nothing enables the arguers to convince each other with reasons. Let us look at the two views of this issue.

In the first view, which is the EFF's discourse, the dispossessed have been cheated and have a right to take back what is theirs. The liberation movement had promised that a free South Africa would belong to all its citizens. Liberation came, but that promise was not kept. Therefore, the anger of the masses, articulated and mobilized by the EFF, is righteous.

Quite apart from the unkept promise made in the Charter, a number of arguments can be made in support of sharing property. One is that communal property is a desirable part of the cultural heritage of South Africa; it was suppressed through force of arms by European conquerors and should in some form be restored. According to that heritage, the land is sacred to the ancestors, while the living are stewards of it and use it (prefiguring the EFF's proposal to organize use without ownership) not only for themselves but to improve it for those yet unborn.³² Africans did not know or practice the Roman law concept of *dominium*, imposed on them by colonialism and now enshrined in the rules of the World Trade Organization that are obligatory throughout the global economy.³³ This indeed is one of the constitutive rules of modernity spoken of earlier. The Africans did not accept modernization (read: marketization and immersion in the cash economy) willingly but had to be coerced—for example, by being forced to pay a tax in money, which in turn forced them to work in the mines or on farms to earn the money.³⁴

Throughout the world precapitalist and non-Roman law traditions express, in one way or another, the idea that the resources of the earth should be shared and used for the good of all.³⁵ Pope Francis I underscored this tradition when he wrote in 2013 of 'creating a new mentality that thinks in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of property by some'. He continued: 'Solidarity is a spontaneous reaction of those who recognize the social function of property and universal purpose of property as realities prior to private property. The private possession of property is justified to the extent that it serves to take care of it and to use it to better serve the common good. Therefore, solidarity should be lived as a decision to return to the poor what belongs to them.'³⁶

There is, then, a convincing logic underpinning the EFF (and later the ANC) position about land expropriation. However, if we apply here Heidegger's insight that all seeing is seeing as, all seeing is interpretation,³⁷ then expropriating the commanding heights of the economy and using them to serve the good of all can not only be seen as justice for reasons such as those sketched above; it can also be seen as tyranny. In the first place, the social rule of private property is so ingrained in modernity that any diversion from it appears anarchic and destructive to the economy; indeed the South African Banking Council issued a strongly worded condemnation of appropriation without compensation, noting that the entire banking system was underpinned by loans against land.

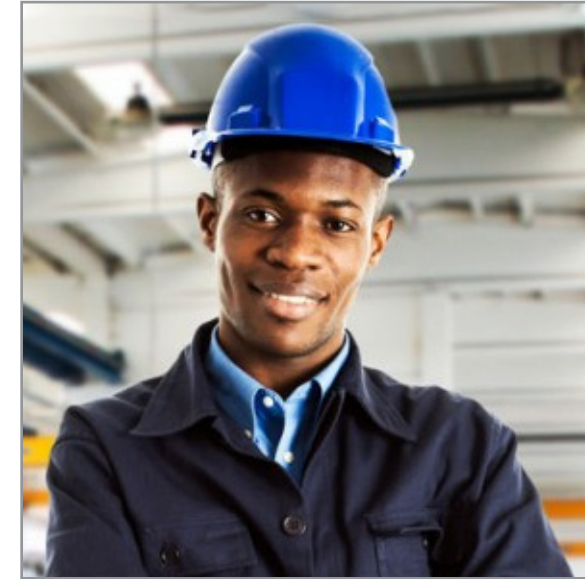
In the second view, in opposition to the EFF's stance, one can imagine the anger of men and women faced with expropriation of land they 'own' without compensation by an EFF-led government. Regardless of what happened during the past few hundred years, in their own memory and the fairly recent past, they bought their land with hard-earned money. They put their own sweat, blood and tears into farming it. These people, farmers and city dwellers alike, are not likely to see EFF government officials as saints who selflessly administer the land for the benefit of all. They are more likely to see them as twenty-first-century versions of the monarchs of old who stole whatever they wanted from their subjects until, thank God, modern republican constitutions were instituted to protect the people against having their property seized by their rulers. They are likely to see them as twenty-first-century versions of twentieth-century dictators who stripped citizens of all their rights. They will send a call around the world to show how the basic rules of the game are being flouted in South Africa. Solemn promises to protect property rights were part of the democratic transition and then became part of the Constitution. International law will support them, not least because South Africa has signed and ratified international treaties guaranteeing human rights that include property rights.

This brief analysis suggests that the radical pillars of the EFF Manifesto would indeed lead to *absolute conflict*. Even if the EFF as an organization proves ephemeral, similar thinking proposed by another organization would lead to absolute conflict, with no apparent common moral framework that could be a basis for negotiation, compromise or cooperation.

The facts are telling us that economic theory bears on questions more serious than the allocation of scarce resources among competing uses. It bears on meeting basic needs without which life cannot go on (what heterodox economists sometimes call 'provisioning'). It bears on creating social peace and on avoiding civil war.



Photograph credit: Reuters



In this book, we advocate for unbounded organization as a successor to conventional economic thinking and a contribution to management science. In the course of this text we will explore fully what we mean by ‘unbounded organization’. For the moment, we mention two supporting lines of thought that count, among their benefits, the defusing of absolute conflict over property rights. The flexibility these lines of thought offer is to be contrasted with the rigidity of the juridical framework that has been decisive for the social construction of both economic society and the science that studies it. They suggest that there are superior alternatives to the conventional economic response given by South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP), which promises, though not credibly, economic growth as a path to defusing conflict by enriching all parties. Our hope is that these two lines of thought will help South Africa to step back from the brink of absolute conflict.

The first such line of thought is *ethical realism*. For a realist ethical philosophy, there are no absolute rights; therefore there can be no absolute moral conflict, as when one party claims to have an absolute right incompatible with an absolute right claimed by the other party. The nonexistence of absolute rights entails that anyone who claims to have such rights is mistaken.

Rights talk is often recommended for good, practical reasons, one such good reason being the observed empirical fact that the security of property rights keeps the wheels of industry turning and the ploughs of agriculture churning.³⁸ However, the very fact that rights talk is recommended for good practical reasons implies that there can be good practical reasons for backing off from rights talk when it leads to absolute conflict. By the same token, there can also be good reasons for modifying property rights. Once we start having rational conversations about the social functions of property, we can take into account empirical evidence supporting the idea that property rights usually work better when they are more widely distributed, when more of them are common, and when more of them are public.³⁹ For a realist, a pragmatic compromise is not a second-best solution that falls short of the ideal; pragmatic compromise is the ideal.

The second line of thought consists of whatever improves social theory and transformative practice. As things now stand, the poor people of South Africa are urged to be patient because help is on its way in the form of social and economic development. They are told that their eventual prosperity will be delayed or will not come at all if they frighten away investors. They are admonished not to listen to populists. Behind such pleas to the poor lies a faith, widespread among governing elites, in the teachings of mainstream liberal economics.

But if it is the case—and we will argue that it is the case—that mainstream liberal economics does not work for the poor, then the faith elites have placed in it is erroneous, and the grounds for asking the poor to be patient lack credibility.

Stepping back from the brink of absolute conflict calls for a more believable story. We offer our unbounded approach as one such story. We believe it contributes to building better social theory and more effective practices that will, in turn, contribute to defusing violence. The spectre of absolute conflict will fade away to the extent that better science leads to better practical results that demonstrate sincerity and meet needs.

Related to the topic of how the absolute conflict inherent in talk of absolute rights might be defused are a pair of questions. The first is whether government control of the commanding heights of land, banking and industry *would or could lead to the results desired*. The second is whether the *absence of government control* of the commanding heights of the economy *would or could lead to the results desired*. One of the aims of this book is, in G. W. F. Hegel’s terms, to *aufheben* these twin questions (raise them to a higher level, taking seriously Albert Einstein’s warning that our main problems cannot be solved at the same level of thinking as the thinking that caused them).

If economic theory, like any scientific theory, is about which causes produce which effects, then questions about what will work to achieve the results desired are questions about economic theory. They are questions for empirical research and theoretical reflection. The framing of the research and the interpretation of the results are embedded in the theory.

A first observation concerning the question economic theory should answer—the question of what will work—concerns the claim in the EFF Manifesto that, according to *heterodox economists*, nations that have successfully developed have succeeded because of state-led industrialization and because of protection of key home industries. We observe that there is no nation that has successfully developed, certainly not the countries named in the manifesto: Brazil, India, China, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Finland. In fact, the modern world system is in crisis everywhere in the world. Further, there is certainly no relevant model for successful development if one thinks not of industrializing using yesterday’s technologies but of achieving social justice in harmony with nature, using tomorrow’s technologies.



Photograph <https://pixabay.com/photos/city-cape-town-south-africa-morning-2096093/>

A second observation concerning the question of what will work is that the ANC leaders during the freedom struggle believed that socialism (in some generic sense of that capacious term) would work, but by the time they became the government they had for the most part changed their minds. This second observation leads to our next topic, which is why the ANC backed away from a socialist reading of the Freedom Charter.

4. Mandela's Choices

According to his authorized biography, at some point in 1992 Nelson Mandela called together his inner circle and said to them: 'Chaps, we have to choose. We either keep nationalization and get no investment, or we modify our own attitude and get investment.'⁴¹ A logical first response to this statement would be to say that Mandela was wrong: South Africa did not have to choose.

South Africa already had a large public sector, built largely by Afrikaners as a counterweight to Anglo economic supremacy, and if it had any difficulty in accessing international capital markets, such difficulty was because of moral condemnation of apartheid, not because financial institutions refused to lend to government-owned enterprises or to buy their bonds. Brazil's state-run Petrobras has had no problems raising investment funds in capital markets or partnering with private-sector petroleum giants like British Petroleum. Indeed, Brazil's experience in establishing a plastics industry was the opposite of what Mandela appears to assert: private capital was not willing to take the plunge until public capital had put up most of the money and assumed most of the risk.⁴²

To be sure, ideological prejudice exists. When the American retail giant Walmart acquired the Chilean supermarket chain Lider, all products made in Cuba or Venezuela disappeared from Lider's shelves. But for the most part, business is business. When an enterprise in any sector is profitable enough to pay the cost of capital at market rates, it can acquire capital.

This is especially true today, when the world is awash in accumulated funds unable to find productive use in the real economy. Today enormous sums find no better use than speculating in the ups and downs of currencies and other paper and electronic fictions in what has become known as the global casino economy. Today what John Maynard Keynes called a 'liquidity trap' has become the stuff of everyday life—as is shown in European countries where central banks have lowered interest rates to zero and still there is a shortage of entrepreneurs brave enough to take out loans.



An enterprise in any sector with real resources producing real products for real customers holds the aces when playing poker with global investors. And for every Walmart there is an employee-controlled pension fund or an investors' social responsibility fund somewhere in Europe or North America that positively prefers to invest in social and ecological progress and is happy to fund viable enterprises with worthy purposes in any sector.

Nevertheless, Mandela's conversion to accommodating liberalism is understandable, and when he backtracked on socialism, he did not backtrack on his ideals. Instead he became an ardent advocate of human rights, chairing the writing of the world's most progressive constitution, which guarantees a record 35 inalienable rights.

In 1990, when Mandela was released from jail, he told a cheering crowd in Cape Town during his first public appearance that he was still a loyal ANC member and that the Freedom Charter was still its programme. Two years later, he told his inner circle that they would have to modify their attitude to get investment. We can assume that what was going on in his mind from 1990 to 1992 was a gradual adjustment to a world and to an economic science that had changed while he was in prison. In 1993, he wrote as the first paragraph of an article he contributed to the American magazine *Foreign Affairs*:

As the 1980s drew to a close, I could not see much of the world from my prison cell, but I knew it was changing. There was little doubt in my mind that this would have a profound effect on my country, on the southern African region, and on the continent of which I am proud to be a citizen. Although this process of global change is far from complete, it is clear that all nations will have boldly to recast their nets if they are to reap any benefit from international affairs in the post-Cold War era.⁴³

In the article, Mandela spells out how South Africa would join the 'new world order'. By the early 1990s, the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc that might have supported a socialist South Africa had melted away. Social democracy was melting away in western Europe. In Sweden, which like the Soviet Union had faithfully supported the freedom struggle in South Africa, a conservative government had been elected after the world-famous Swedish model had proven to be unsustainable.⁴⁴ The proposition that socialism does not work appeared to have been demonstrated by historical experience.

The proposition that socialism does not work appeared to have been demonstrated by historical experience. Neoliberal thinking was firmly entrenched in the governments of the world's major powers, including those seated at Moscow, Beijing and Hanoi.⁴⁵ It was entrenched in the International Monetary Fund and at the World Bank, as well as in the World Trade Organization, which would soon meet in South Africa with Mandela as host. The neoliberals had the power. South Africa was largely constrained to play by their rules; in particular, it needed the 850-million-dollar emergency loan that the ANC had secretly negotiated with the IMF.⁴⁶

In addition to the de facto power of the new neoliberal world order, by the 1990s academic neoliberal economists had been generating intellectually powerful theories supported by persuasive empirical findings for half a century, in the process generating a dozen Nobel Memorial Prizes in Economic Science. It seemed reasonable to believe their claims that minimal government and maximum free markets would bring employment to the unemployed, reduce inequality, and lift the poor out of poverty.⁴⁷ Their superficially plausible theories had not yet been refuted by tragic historical experience in South Africa and the rest of the world. It is easy, then, to understand why in the early 1990s Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders put their faith in somewhat nuanced neoliberal ideas. It was a necessary accommodation to the perceived realities of economic and political power. It was a defensible intellectual judgment.

We suggest that one reason for the persistence of such ideas today is that even though neoliberal economics is discredited, the well-known alternatives to it have also been discredited. As we write this book in 2019, experience and thought are still in flux. The implausibility of neoliberalism does not prompt a return to Soviet-style central planning. Nor does it mean reviving the Western European style of social democracy that was dying in the late eighties and early nineties even as democracy was being born in South Africa. Rather, at this point in history a reconsideration of premises common to all three (central planning, social democracy and neoliberalism) is called for. We are being asked to reconsider what Joseph Schumpeter in his *History of Economic Analysis* named the 'institutional frame' of economics.⁴⁸

Today the physical realities of ecology and the social realities of deepening structural unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment are happening off the blackboards of mainstream liberal economics in a space different from the Cartesian space of its curves.

The breaching of the natural boundaries of the biosphere makes daily more poignant Kenneth Boulding's remark that anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a lunatic or an economist. The onward march of technologlocaust deniers, and global-warming deniers.⁴⁹ But a call to reconsider the institutional frame need not imply a free pass for dissident economists. Nor is it a call to revive without amendment the economic beliefs held by Nelson Mandela and his colleagues when they first set foot on Robben Island.

5. The National Development Plan

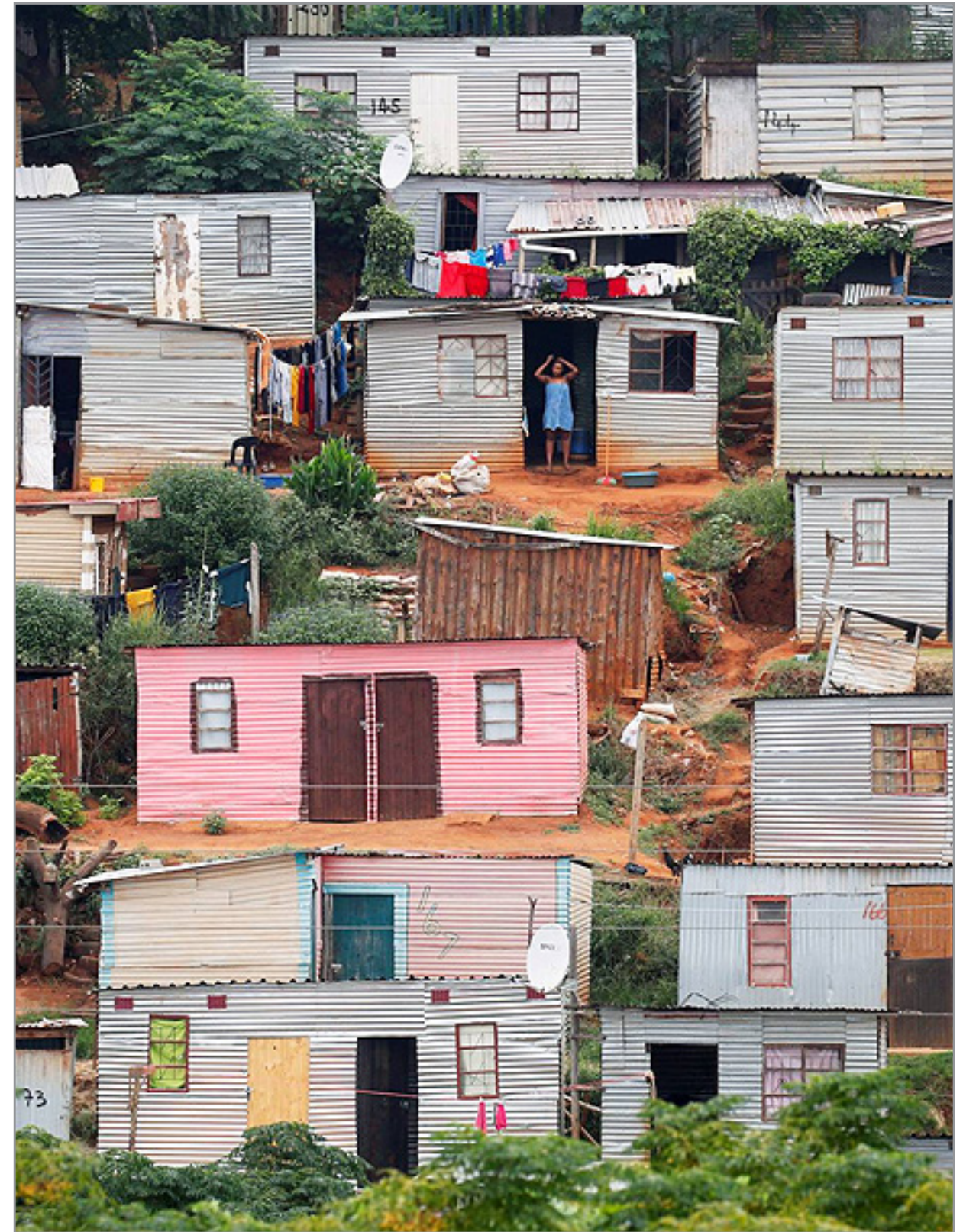
In February of 2010, President Jacob Zuma constituted a National Planning Commission to 'take a broad, cross-cutting, independent and critical view of South Africa, to help define the South Africa we seek to achieve in 20 years' time, and to map out a path to achieve those objectives'.⁵⁰ In June of 2011, the Commission released a diagnostic report, and in November of that year, it submitted a draft plan. Many thousands of people from all walks of life discussed the draft in meetings held throughout the country. In August of 2012, a widely owned revised version became South Africa's official National Development Plan (NDP). We comment on a few of its key statements.

The plan draws extensively on the notion of capabilities. (NDP, Executive Summary)

The source of the notion of capabilities is Amartya Sen and his co-authors, Martha Nussbaum and Jean Dreze. Sen, Nussbaum and Dreze also emphasize pluralism—the idea that no one institution, in particular the market, and no two institutions, in particular the market and the state, can solve society's problems. Sen wrote of 'the mean streets and stunted lives that capitalism can generate, unless it is restrained and supplemented by other—often nonmarket—institutions'.⁵¹ In this book we extend the idea of pluralism to the idea of unboundedness.

The fragility of South Africa's economy lies in the distorted pattern of ownership and economic exclusion created by apartheid policies. (NDP, ch. 3, 'Economy and Employment')

We show in chapter 2 of this book that every economy is fragile. There may or may not be investment. There may or may not be buyers. There may be—and sooner or later there always are—new technologies producing new products or producing the same products more cheaply, thus making whatever a person, firm or nation has to sell unmarketable.



Durban. Photo The Japan Times/Reuters.



The phrase ‘community development’, when associated with unbounded organization, names ways to make people more secure in a world where purely economic relationships are always relationships at risk.⁵²

Several studies, most notably Aghion and Fedderke, argued that profit margins are already very high in South Africa, even in the manufacturing sector. The high profits have not generated higher investment levels because many of these markets are highly concentrated with low levels of competition. (NDP, ch. 15, ‘Transforming Society and Uniting the Country’)

This statement implies a dubious scientific assertion: that if manufacturing in South Africa were more competitive than it is, there would be more economic activity. This assertion relies on theories that regard competitive markets as normal and normal markets as tending toward full employment of all factors of production.

We argue that such theories have never accurately portrayed the real world of business, and that, in any case, they will be useless in a high-tech future. Instead of making business more competitive, a better approach is to make business contribute more to society by generating a larger social surplus, and then to transfer the surplus to create more livelihoods that do not depend on sales. To this end, instead of sending high-powered promoters of South Africa to scour Wall Street and the city of London to find new investors and convince them that new businesses in new niches can be new sources of profit in South Africa, it is better to work hand-in-glove with enterprises that are already in South Africa—develop more transparent and ethical relationships with, and expect more contributions to the common good from, businesses that already have an emotional attachment to this long-suffering country and that have already proven themselves to be profitable here.

South Africa’s level of emissions will peak around 2025, and then stabilise. This transition will need to be achieved without hindering the country’s pursuit of its socioeconomic objectives. (NDP, ch. 5, ‘Transition to a Low Carbon Economy’)

There is no more graphic or poignant illustration of the clash of social structure with physical necessity than the struggle of South Africa’s planning commissioners to come to consensus on environmental policy. As the quote above reveals, their efforts ended in a nonconsensus prescribing an impossibility.

As further evidence of the commissioners’ split opinions, chapter 4 of the NDP calls for a new rail corridor to the Waterberg coal fields and for generating more coal-fired electricity. Stabilising South Africa’s carbon dioxide emissions by 2025 is too low an objective, despite the objective stated here to reduce emissions.

The carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere is already over 400 ppm, which is too high, and experts tell us it cannot be stabilised short of 500 ppm, which is much too high. Nobody should be surprised if even the too-low goal of 500 in 2025 is not achieved. And nobody should be surprised that whatever South Africa does will be ineffective, since success would require concerted global action that included the large economies.

None of this is the fault of the NDP. Nor is it the fault of the commissioners or the South African government. It is the fault of the logic and dynamics of the economy, which in turn is the fault of the basic social structure, which in turn is the fault of history. As history has turned out, although it is physically possible to save the biosphere and with it the human species, it is not, as things now stand, socially possible. In this book, we are proposing unbounded organization as an approach to making socially possible what is physically possible.

Society is constrained by a socially constructed reality called economic reality, and the current economic reality is that human needs are met by a system that either runs on profit or does not run at all. Specifically, the commissioners could not, even if they wanted to, shut down a large privately owned business that brings money into South Africa by exporting coal to Asia. They knew this. We quote them: ‘Indeed, in the era of globalisation, is it possible for any government to be able to discipline capital?’ (ch. 15, p. 477). The NDP’s power, like the government’s power, does not extend to reversing the dynamics driving the self-destruction of Homo sapiens.

A footnote in chapter 1 of the NDP, ‘Key Drivers of Change’, includes a quote from Dani Rodrik’s book *One Economics, Many Recipes*⁵³: “‘You don’t understand; this reform will not work here because our entrepreneurs do not respond to price incentives,’ is not a valid argument. “You don’t understand, this reform will not work here because credit constraints prevent our entrepreneurs from taking advantage of profit opportunities” or “because entrepreneurship is highly taxed at the margin,” is a valid argument’. Rodrik’s unabashedly neoclassical book was published in 2007, prior to the 2008 meltdown leading to the global recession that has continued.



A few buildings away on the same Princeton campus where Rodrik works is the office of Paul Krugman, a Nobel Prize winner in economics. In his 2009 book *The Return of Depression Economics*, Krugman argues that whatever may happen on a practical level, on the level of economic theory, the series of crises in the last few decades, culminating in the 2008 meltdown, demonstrates that on some key issues the neoclassicals were wrong and the neo-Keynesians are right.⁵⁴

In this book we criticize Rodrik (and his co-authors, Andres Velasco and Ricardo Hausmann) in some detail. Although theirs is the only mainstream book we critique, we mean our critique to apply to other books of the same genre, which we call ‘mainstream empirical studies’.⁵⁵ Such books compare the results of left-leaning and right-leaning economic policies. The weight of empirical evidence tends to favour right-leaning policies, in spite of the exceptional empirical counter-evidence cited by left-leaning economists. Our approach is to analyse the basic structural causes of the empirically observed relative success of, for example, lower wages, lower taxes on profits, less welfare and more austerity. Instead of concluding that right-leaning policies should as a general rule be adopted, we propose (and empirically illustrate the effectiveness of) transforming the basic social structure.

We hold that in the long run, and perhaps in the medium run, there can be no future for humanity or the biosphere without emancipation from the social structures that produce the anti-life results that are, unfortunately, currently observed. Emancipation so conceived does not require imposing on humanity an abstract totalitarian utopia. It does require an open-minded (unbounded) approach to economic theory, along with a psychologically effective and multicultural approach to ethics. A better theory will be capable of seeing—and a stronger ethics will be capable of actively supporting—the thousands of transformative social innovations already happening. Some achievements at some sites of South Africa’s Community Work Programme are among them.

While South Africa’s planning commissioners cite Rodrik’s hard-nosed semi-standard economics, they also appeal to sentimental patriotism. The NDP begins with a picture of children putting their hands together in a gesture of solidarity. It continues with a long lyrical prose-poem vision that celebrates the traditional African value of ubuntu. The NDP calls for social cohesion across society. It calls on both business and labour to moderate narrow self-interest for the sake of the greater good. Integral parts of the Plan are more psychological than economic. Children are to learn social values in school—on this point we could not agree more. A ‘Bill of Responsibilities’ is included in the Plan as a tool to change behaviour.

Echoing the NDP, Adam Habib writes in an article on South Africa, ‘The successful consolidation of democracy requires . . . an expanding economic system within which resources are made available for redistribution, so as to lead to an appreciable increase in the standard of living of the populace.’⁵⁶ The opinion that higher economic growth is an indispensable prerequisite to higher employment and lower poverty is not only the opinion of the NDP commissioners, their academic advisors and, presumably, the thousands who participated in the planning process. A recent survey of public policy debates, reported in the South African media, concluded that it is an opinion nobody denies. The surveyor was himself surprised to find that, even though South Africa had its Economic Freedom Fighters and its share of left-leaning politicians, labour leaders and intellectuals, nobody—or at least nobody visible in the media—was offering an alternative to the standard International Monetary Fund prescription of investment to create growth and growth to create employment.⁵⁷ This prescription is implicit on every page of the NDP.

Nevertheless, chapter 1 of the NDP confesses that prospects for high levels of growth are not good for the foreseeable future. Every year so far, growth has been less than the NDP target of at least five percent. It was 2.8 percent in 2010, 3.1 percent in 2011, 3.9 percent in 2012, 4.4 percent in 2013, 1.5 percent in 2014, 1.3 percent in 2015, 0.3 percent in 2016, 1.3 percent in 2017 and 1.8 percent in 2018.⁵⁸ As we discuss later, Thomas Piketty has made a convincing argument that, except for nations doing what he calls technological catch-up, slow growth will be the norm for the twenty-first century.⁵⁹

In this book, we criticize the very concept of growth. With respect to growth, the famous words of Ludwig Wittgenstein apply: ‘A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.’⁶⁰ Growth is commonly pictured as a larger pie to be sliced. We argue that there is no such pie and that if there were such a pie, there would be no one authorized to slice it. Instead of advocating no growth or degrowth, we advocate what we call governable growth.

We agree with the NDP’s call for the wise use of rents from natural resources. Rent is a major part of surplus. To use surplus wisely is to use it to meet needs in harmony with nature. However, we propose a different vocabulary expressing a viewpoint that reworks theory in the light of brute facts and on-the-ground working alternatives. A first step must be to face the question of how to eliminate poverty and how to reduce inequality under conditions of slow or no growth.



Photograph <https://www.globalgiving.org>

We put community development forward as a big part of the answer to this question, and we put community broadly understood as, in principle, a complete answer. Later steps include critiquing GDP as a measure of growth.

Citizens have a responsibility to dissuade leaders from taking narrow, short-sighted and populist positions.
(NDP, overview)

The term ‘populist’ denotes a pattern of tragedy all too common in the twentieth century.⁶¹ Leaders seen as demagogues by some and as progressives by others win political power by promising a welfare state. To win and to keep power, they mobilize the masses. Ever more popular participation in politics leads to ever more demands on the state. Taxes go up. Wages go up. Capital flees. The state has assumed more burdens than it can carry. The leaders have made more promises than they can keep. The people come to feel that their leaders have betrayed them. The country is paralyzed by protests and strikes. Inflation makes wage increases illusory and business impossible. The dénouement is an authoritarian crackdown that persists until the authoritarian regime itself crumbles and the cycle begins again.

The NDP proposes in place of such a vicious cycle a virtuous circle. A social compact establishes the preconditions for economic growth. Economic growth makes it possible to fund a welfare state. The first principle of the social compact is the security of property rights, especially the property rights of the mine owners. With credible guarantees that there will be no nationalization, mine owners can invest with confidence. The requirement of a stable environment for economic growth is the reason why citizens have a responsibility to dissuade leaders from taking short-sighted populist positions. Populism chills growth because it chills confidence.

By the same token, as the NDP whispers and reality shouts, if economic growth leads not to welfare but to profits being taken out of South Africa and invested elsewhere, there will be no virtuous circle. Either populism or the socially irresponsible exercise of property rights can render the careful work of the commissioners vain.

In this context, we emphasize, the spectre of absolute conflict reappears. From a moral point of view, conservatives can argue that the legitimacy of any government depends on its respect for property rights.



Progressives can argue that everyone who is born on this earth deserves a fair share of the gifts of nature (products of nobody's labour) and the gifts of history (products of the labour of nobody now living), and sooner rather than later; the dispossessed have already waited too long to receive their rightful inheritance. While the NDP appeals to citizens to resist populism, its anti-populist appeal relies only slightly on a moral defence of property rights. It appeals much more to the human longing to be part of a social whole with a common purpose.

The NDP will inevitably be reconsidered. The numbers the commissioners projected as objectives for tomorrow will inevitably be replaced, one by one, by numerical descriptions of yesterday. It will always be possible to argue that the plan would have worked if only the masses had been less populist and if only the classes had been more socially responsible.

This book argues instead that any such plan cannot possibly work in the absence of a practical method for transforming the basic social structure. Unbounded organization is such a practical method. We argue that some things that South Africa's Community Work Programme has been doing on the ground show how such a method works.

6. Economic Theory, Community Development and South Africa's Community Work Programme

At this point, as Robert Frost wrote, two paths diverge in the woods, and we take the one less travelled. The more common path—the path of Spain's Podemos party, of Jeremy Corbyn and Yanis Varoufakis, and of much of the South African left—calls a plan like the NDP neoliberal, even though its authors and its ideological mentors, Rodrik, Hausmann and Velasco, deny that they are neoliberals. And the common path of the left, quite rightly, calls for alternatives that are not neoliberal.

The problem, as we see it, is that these very alternatives have not worked in the past for reasons inherent in their basic structure. They are old and inadequate versions of democratic socialism. Typically, their goals in the South African context include nationalizing the mines, implementing the Freedom Charter, bringing the banking system or at least the Central Bank under democratic control, rebuilding a shattered welfare state, crafting an industrial policy where the state plays a leading role in accelerating development and so on.

The political strategy for realising a not-neoliberal alternative usually calls for a broad-based coalition capable of achieving an electoral majority. It usually calls for exercising direct economic power through strikes, boycotts, cooperatives and worker-owned enterprises. It should be evident by now that this commonly travelled path regularly fails to arrive at its laudable goals.

Our less-travelled path treats the NDP and its mentors as a foil for rethinking basic economic theory and, moreover, as a foil for dissolving economic science altogether into a design science approach that does not separate constructing a world from understanding a world.⁶² We view the failures so far of efforts to build democratic socialism as consequences of the basic cultural structure of modernity.⁶³

Changing policies, changing governments, changing who owns the means of production and changing economic models will not get Homo sapiens off the endangered species list unless such changes are accompanied by deeper intellectual and emotional changes that refocus humanity as a cultural animal. (We want to say 'spiritual animal', but we use that phrase only occasionally because for many it calls to mind exactly what we do not mean.)

At a practical level, we often agree with the common path. We agree with building an electoral majority, strikes, boycotts, cooperatives and worker-owned enterprises. We have participated in those activities, and we support them as long as they are accompanied by rethinking, redefining the problems, and unbounded organizing. We are intellectually convinced that the common path without rethinking, without doing what Fritz Schumacher called 'inner work' and without building a broad consensus will not work because we ourselves have experienced it as not working.

It is becoming more evident to more people every day that economic theory and community have to be rethought, or unthought, from the ground up. Our effort claims to be distinct from the many other rethinkings of economics on offer because (1) it reframes the issues in terms of social structure, and (2) it combines a conceptual study with an empirical study of a programme that (quite imperfectly) demonstrates in action some of the principles our rethinking advocates in theory. Unbounded organization, like Latin American *economía solidaria*, is a new theory that already has some practical achievements to its credit.



The empirical parts of this book examine one part of the public employment that South Africa’s National Development Plan called for: the creation of a million new jobs in public employment by 2015 and two million by 2030. This was to be done principally through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), of which the Community Work Programme (CWP) is a part. The following are some of the reasons why the CWP at its best has demonstrated the idea of unbounded organization in terms of practical experience:

End Notes

1. John Searle, The Construction of Social Reality (New York: Free Press, 1995); Joshua Rust, John Searle and the Construction of Social Reality (London: Continuum, 2006).
2. Douglas Porpora, 'Cultural Rules and Material Relations', Sociological Theory, vol. 11 (1993), pp. 212-229.
3. See Michel Foucault, La volonté de savoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
4. Willard van Orman Quine discusses Neurath's Boat in Word and Object (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
5. This point is brought out in ch. 2 and in the discussion of Say's Law in ch. 9. It is fair to speculate that Adam Smith may have had a different view of natural liberty than did the people taken out of Africa as slaves at the time Smith was writing.
6. See Maria Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale (London: Zed Books, 1986); Catherine Hoppers and Howard Richards, Rethinking Thinking (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2012).
7. Heidegger's plausible vocabulary is hard to translate, since so much of it depends on plays on words in German, such as eigen, Eigentum, eigentlich.
8. Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986 (1926)), p. 149. Heidegger adds that every description is an interpretation.
9. Roy Bhaskar, Reclaiming Reality (London: Routledge, 1989).
10. Karl von Holdt, Malosa Langa, Sepetla Molapo, Nomfundo Magapi, Kindeza Ngubeni, Jacob Dlamini, and Adèle Kirsten, The Smoke That Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective Violence, and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Society, Work and Development Institute, 2011). One of the cases studied, Bokfontein in North West Province, was a case in which a result of the Community Work Programme (CWP) preceded by an Organization Workshop (OW) was '... the end of intra-community violence and the deliberate rejection of xenophobic violence' (p.3). The CWP, OWs, and the case of Bokfontein will be considered later in this book.
11. Ibid., p. 6.
12. Ibid., p. 15.
13. Ibid., p. 15.
14. Ibid., p. 16.
15. Ibid., p. 21.
16. Ibid., p. 23.
17. Ibid., p. 27.
18. Ibid., p. 34.
19. Ibid., p. 23.
20. See the studies of groups that articulate and mobilise popular discontent in Ted Robert Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton University Press, 1970); and the references to 'leaderships' in Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 2006), pp 160-161.
21. Economic Freedom Fighters Founding Manifesto, (<http://efffighters.org.za/documents/economic-freedom-fighters-founding-manifesto/>).
22. Ibid., par. 16.
23. Ibid., par. 30.
24. Ibid., par. 31.
25. Ibid., par. 36.
26. Ibid., par. 137.
27. Ibid., par. 33.
28. Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992). Fukuyama made an exception for certain countries that were 'not yet' capitalist democracies. He described them as 'still in history'.
29. Other documents of the EFF movement available on its website spell out details.
30. EFF Manifesto, par. 35.
31. Lewis Coser, The Functions of Conflict (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956).
32. Mfuniselwa J. Bhengu, Ubuntu: The Global Philosophy for Humankind (Cape Town: Lotsha Publications, 2006).
33. Hoppers and Richards, Rethinking Thinking.
34. Maria Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale (London: Zed Books, 1986).
35. For an Asian perspective see Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger, Gandhi and the Future of Economics (Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, 2011). For a Latin American view see Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). In the posthumously published Volume III of Capital (various editions), Karl Marx speaks of 'gifts of nature' which should not belong to anybody, and of 'gifts of history' which should not belong to anybody now living because they were created by the labour of people now dead.
36. Pope Francis I, Evangelii Gaudium (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 2013), pars. 188-89.
37. Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986 (1926)), p. 149.
38. Theodore Panayotou makes rational arguments for the ecological benefits of secure property rights in his Green Markets: the Economics of Sustainable Development, a copublication of the Harvard Institute for International Development and the Institute for Contemporary Studies (San Francisco, 1993).
39. See Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better (London: Allen Lane, 2009) and other works by the same authors.
40. The founding manifesto does not name any heterodox economists, but it may refer to the MERG report, proposals made from time to time by COSATU, and other technical studies that have been attacked and shelved in South Africa. See Matthew Kentridge, Turning the Tanker: The Economic Policy Debate in South Africa (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1993); and Hein Marais, South Africa Pushed to the Limit: the Political Economy of Change (London: Zed Books, 2011).
41. Nelson Mandela quoted in Anthony Sampson, Mandela: The Authorized Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), p. 429.
42. This and other similar experiences are documented in Cheryl Payer, The World Bank: A Critical Analysis (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982).
43. Nelson Mandela, 'South Africa's Future Foreign Policy', Foreign Affairs, vol. 72 (1993), pp. 86-97.
44. See Assar Lindbeck et al., Turning Sweden Around (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).
45. Two important influences in Mandela's conversion were his conversations with leaders from China and from Vietnam who told him of the acceptance of private enterprise in those Communist countries. 'They changed my views altogether', said Mandela (Sampson, Mandela: The Authorized Biography, pp. 210-211).
46. John Saul and Patrick Bond, in South Africa: The Present as History (Woodbridge, UK: James Currey, 2014), give details on the power-politics aspects of the imposition of neoliberalism on South Africa.
47. Such optimism is expressed in Milton Friedman's now classic neoliberal text Capitalism and Freedom, published by University of Chicago Press in 1962. Similar claims were made for a reform package proposed by the South Africa Foundation in 1996. We do not think they could be made today. The history of these issues in South Africa is reviewed by Hein Marais in South Africa Pushed to the Limit.
48. Joseph Schumpeter, History of Economic Analysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 544).
49. Bernard Stiegler, For a New Critique of Political Economy (New York: Wiley, 2010); Jeremy Rifkin, The Zero Marginal Cost Society (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Rifkin's point is not just that today's new technologies make human labour increasingly redundant. It is that in principle the tendency to replace humans with machines and electronics is infinite with no end in sight.
50. All quotations are from the plan itself and associated documents found at www.npcnline.co.za.
51. Amartya Sen, 'Sraffa, Wittgenstein and Gramsci', Journal of Economic Literature, Volume 41 (2003), p. 1247. We will quote this line several times.
52. See Ulrich Beck, Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity (London: Sage, 1992).
53. Dani Rodrik, One Economics, Many Recipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
54. Paul Krugman, The Return of Depression Economics (New York: Norton, 2009).
55. Other books of the mainstream empirical studies genre include David Neumark and William Wascher, Minimum Wages (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards, eds., The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Alberto Alesina, Carlo Favero and Francesco Giavazzi, Austerity: When It Works and When It Doesn't (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
56. Adam Habib, South Africa: 'The Rainbow Nation and the Prospects for Consolidating Democracy', African Journal of Political Science/Revue Africaine de Science Politique, vol. 2 (1997), p.19.
57. Keith Boyd, Over the Rainbow: From Closed Circles to Virtuous Cycles (Unpublished MBA Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2016), p. 40.
58. Statistics South Africa Statistical Release P0441; and 'World Bank: South Africa Country at a Glance', [www.worldbank.org/en/country/south Africa](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/south%20africa). These numbers would be lower if they were expressed in terms of GDP per capita, thus taking into account the growth of population.
59. Thomas Piketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2014).
60. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), par. 115.
61. Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards, eds., The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
62. Herbert Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Unbounded organization can be viewed as a science and art of the artificial and also as practicing what Paulo Freire called 'cultural action'.
63. Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger, The Dilemmas of Social Democracies (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).



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Leaf butterfly. 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'* 219 publications (till August 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

Parenthesis

On reading the daily litany of hate and violence.

How can we ever be happy and content on earth if we live within the confines of our encapsulated worlds? Many of us have become weeds glowing brightly in a stagnant pond of our delusions; a world within worlds that nullifies the effect of the wonderful and enlightening aspects of *living*.

We reside in a parenthesis shrouded in a make-believe existence that we assume shields us from the ugliness of life. Our world has been carefully coordinated to merge with the flow of our reasoning. We imagine it is impervious to life on the other side of the wall. However, time and again we are faced with death and/or despair that makes us aware of a reality we mistakenly presumed could not touch us.

And why do we speak of darkness, spiritual or otherwise?

There is no darkness on earth.

The darkness is within us.

Grotesque aberrations of unmindful wanderlust.



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nataraja>

When I first set foot on earth and became aware many things escaped me; like the cruelty of poverty, plastic waste, lepers and the fact that the membrane of spirituality was being torn asunder in the mad scramble to create our little private worlds. To avoid being constantly confronted by the mushrooming of ugliness perpetuated by the new arrivals and the subsequent ‘clichés’ that were created by lotus-eaters in the rarefied atmosphere of a burgeoning ‘exceptional enclave’ – I hid in my own parenthesis, sometimes departing briefly to explore the nether regions of decadence. But one was not alone. There were many others who got lost in the deluge of self-indulgences.

Perhaps we are the protagonists in *A Clockwork Orange* who have entered rehab where there are no mirrors to see our reflection of what abominable beings we have become.

(Those in parenthesis may please step out for a moment and breathe in the fresh air of reality.)

We condemn one another with laws, religious and otherwise, to sustain and promote our self-imposed morality with hashtags and sanctimonious utterances.

Sometime ago I viewed Michael Franti’s film titled *I know I’m not alone*. The horrors of war in Iraq and the utter hopelessness in Palestine portrayed in a collage of blood-stained faces and children who had lost their limbs in the violence, to the soundtrack of *Habibi* (a chant that loosely means love for another), lifted the veil I had been wearing. The sentence was spiritual death and rebirth to the rhythm of the *Gamelan*.^{*} Resurrection was around the corner in the image of *Shiva* in his dance of *life and death*.^{**}

Living on earth is deceptive. It lulls us into a false sense of beauty without cruelty, love without belonging and life as an endless stream of pleasure. Nothing escapes the crab-like claws of delusion, which it sinks into everybody. The deception of a beautiful lifestyle ensnares us in the web of the present that bares no semblance to the world of natural born reality. We mimic the chameleon and vainly attempt to blend into social stereotypes so as to remain within the periphery of the parenthesis. The hashtag being the password.

We scuttle between home, friends and a lifestyle of falsehoods oblivious to the harsh truth that lurks on street corners ready to ambush us. We fight it because we fear the unknown, the perceived nothingness that comes with releasing the grip on our lives and freefalling.

We should seek oneness by undoing the parenthesis because if we don’t then we would continue to straddle the international dateline without ever having to live in either time zone except in one’s own self-deluded world.

Reality is the heartbeat that attempts to restore the balance of life by encouraging us to commit to ourselves, to instigate a change and to erase the warped perceptions and assumptions from our consciousness... To *not* use religion as a weapon, to *not* use skin colour as a *means to define another being* and to *not* impose our *Wokeness* (fashionable morality) in a futile effort to adjust the genetic fault lines in humanity.

The world continues to reel with growing new afflictions but what has remained constant is violence wrath by the inhumanity of humanity and its opportunists who have grown obscenely wealthy at the cost of *Life*.

The *paradise* we seek in the afterlife is the one we exist in *now*.

Perhaps we are not worthy to inhabit *this paradise*.

Perhaps it is time to move on or to be pushed out.

^{*} *Gamelan* is the traditional ensemble music of the Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese peoples of Indonesia.

^{**} Depiction of the Hindu god Shiva as the divine cosmic dancer. His dance is called *Tandavam*.

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 KHARE

Brave New Worlds

Mentors are meant to be invisible spirits who inspire, enthuse, guide and assist seekers to become who they truly are then walk away and leave them to strike out on their own adventure and strive towards their own goals in their chosen life purposes.

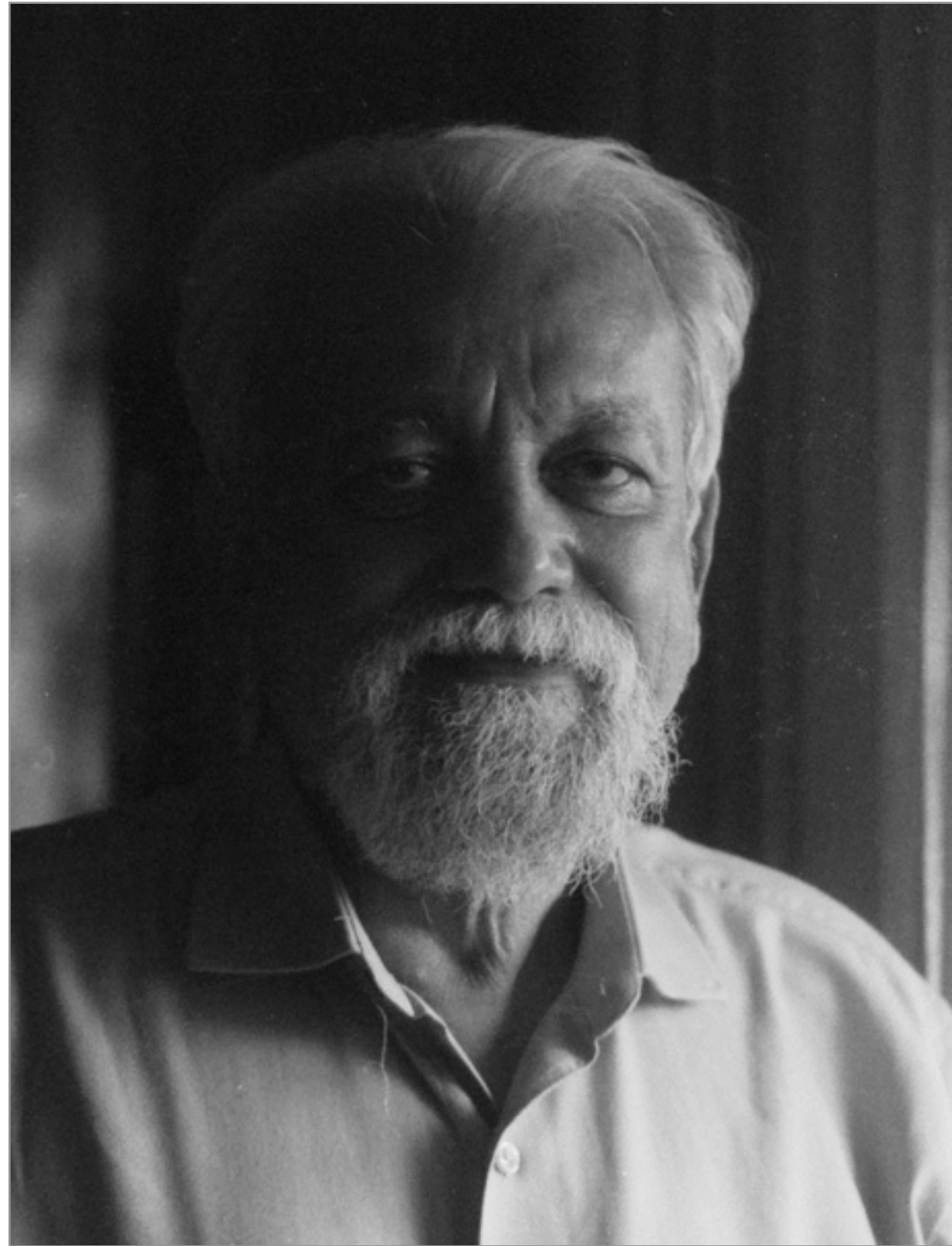
But it's quite a different experience when one chooses to be the mentor of writers, poets, artists and other creative individuals. How does one begin with them? When does one walk away? And between meeting and parting, when worlds collide, merge, separate and give way to new worlds, who changes? The mentor or the mentee?

In my opinion, both.

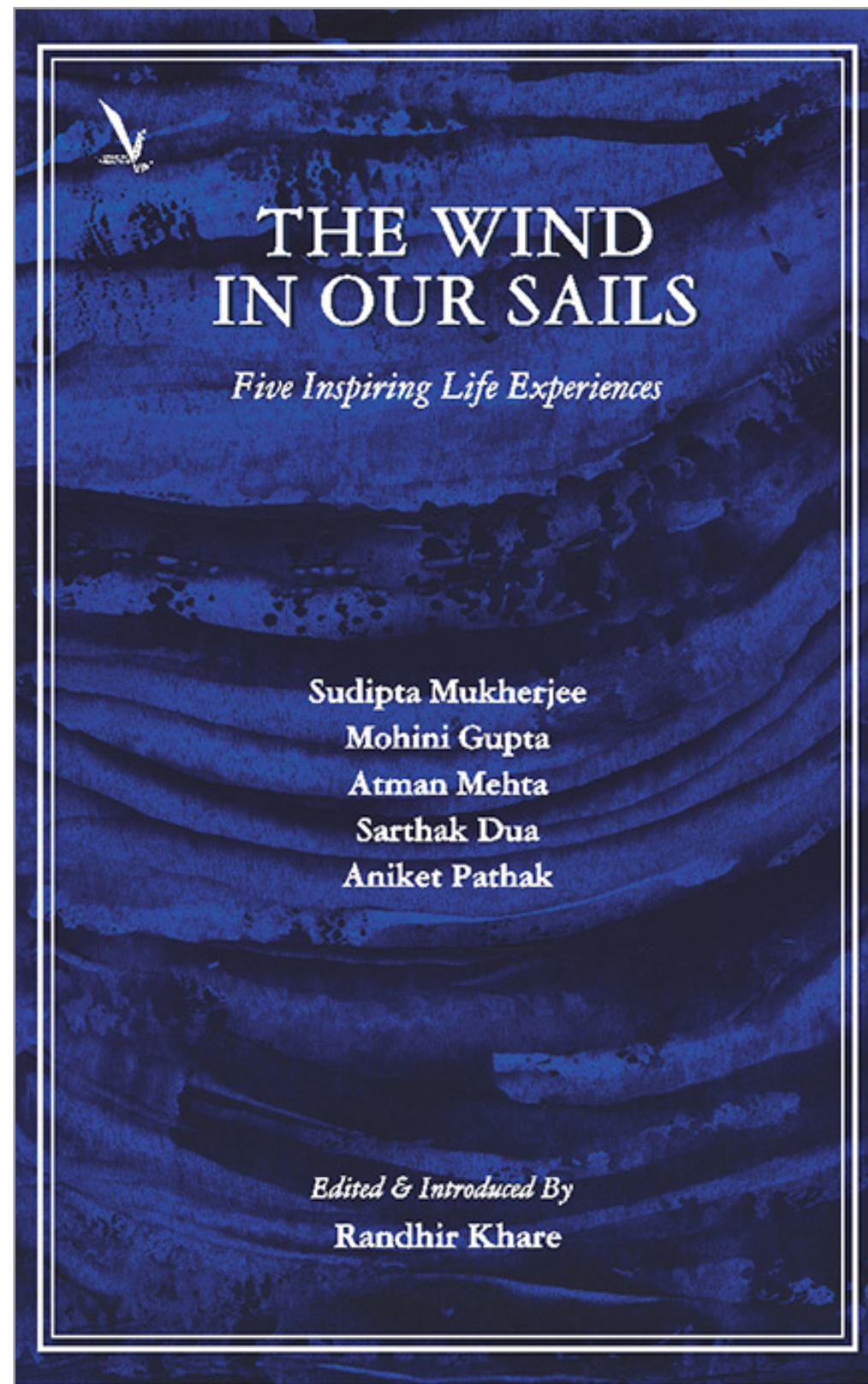
As a mentor of artists, poets, writers and creative individuals, across the decades, I am transformed along with each one of them in a special way. Sometimes dramatically, at other times subtly. Every time I am born anew.

From among the numerous writers who transformed themselves and transformed me through the mentorship experience, five are memorable. I remember each so vividly as they walked into my life for the first time, went through their epiphanies and then moved away, leaving me whole. During the mentorship process, I discovered that each of them had gone through experiences that transformed them and shaped them...but each had not been able to fully express these experiences enough to liberate themselves. And so our love affair with the experience of becoming began. Out of this love affair has emerged five powerful personal accounts.

Sarthak Dua, known for his soulful lyrics, hauntingly beautiful voice and accompanying guitar, has written powerfully in his account, *Sipping Tea With The Dark*, describing an uncluttered view of his journey of self-discovery through a sweeping narrative that gushed out like a turbulent spring and meandered away.



Randhir Khare



THE WIND IN OUR SAILS published by VISHWAKARMA PUBLICATIONS.

Film maker *Atman Mehta* has written a memorable account - *I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night* - a visual treat, drawing the reader into cinematic sequences of childhood and teenage experience sliced out of his life and eloquently fused together to produce a moving recollection of his very personal journey, still raw from the hurt and the searching. Its most precious gift is its warmth and deeply felt humanness, carrying within it the power of transformation.

Mohini Gupta's Unbounded, I Float, delicately explores the experience of not belonging and the struggle to fit in. It reaches out in a language that is at once personal and lyrical as well as embarrassingly honest. At its gentlest - it is inspirational and at its strongest it forces the reader to remember and acknowledge the fractured moments of instability that we have all had to face in our growing years and the personal courage and fortitude that we have displayed in overcoming them.

To B.E. or not To B.E by *Aniket Pathak* tells the story of a young man's dilemma in a world of parental expectations and societal pressures. In a straightforward and un-pretentious way, he traces the events of his journey, taking the reader carefully across a landmine of social and psychological challenges until he reaches a space of self-discovery and acceptance. Reflective and thought-provoking, his writing sets the reader thinking.

Sudipta Mukherjee takes on a wider canvas in *Turning Towards Light*, deftly negotiating the path between fact and fiction and telling her own story of coming to terms with life and death with responsibility and maturity. Through a carefully unfolding narrative, she holds the reader with her engaging manner of storytelling, making the bizarre and unfamiliar real and believable - a skill not easily found in emerging writers.

When these life-stories were written, I stepped and asked each of them what they experienced when writing out of their intimate worlds. What was that journey of transformation like? Here's what they had to say, each in their own inimitable way.

As I present these five amazing writers to you dear reader, a collection of these stories appears in the form of a book *THE WIND IN OUR SAILS* (Published by VISHWAKARMA PUBLICATIONS) and their life experiences travel out into the world like winged seeds.

As mentor, I can now walk away.



MOHINI GUPTA

When I started writing, I was scared to relive a time in my life that felt like it had been buried so deep inside me that I'd really have to make some serious emotional effort to excavate it. And yet it was clear to me that this was the part of my story that for that moment, had to be told. As I wrote, I could hear in my own words the heartbeat of a young girl yearning to both be understood and to understand a world that shifted too quickly before her eyes. At first, I attempted to tell her story with an almost objective distance, but I very quickly realised that it was my proximity with her - with her rhythm, her emotions and the thoughts most personal to her, that made her story worthwhile. Stripped of these, the story is quite ordinary. But having written this otherwise simple story, I do believe now that it is in being honest with and reflecting on our most seemingly ordinary experiences that we discover the most extraordinary truths about ourselves.

My biggest struggle was possibly not getting trapped in the past. Once I had decided to write intimately and honestly, there was no turning back. I wrote freestyle - without overly editing my thoughts as I moved along. I allowed the words to appear on the page in the same rhythm in which they appeared in my mind. It was a struggle to not 'retouch' those words and not overly edit them because some of them were painful. It was also a struggle not to cut out parts of the story that felt just too personal to share. I wasn't hiding behind a character, I was the character.

My biggest struggle was possibly not getting trapped in the past. Once I had decided to write intimately and honestly, there was no turning back. I wrote free-style - without overly editing my thoughts as I moved along. I allowed the words to appear on the page in the same rhythm in which they appeared in my mind. It was a struggle to not 'retouch' those words and not overly edit them because some of them were painful. It was also a struggle not to cut out parts of the story that felt just too personal to share. I wasn't hiding behind a character, I was the character.

I still have to remind myself that my story is just a part of the common human experience, and ground myself in the knowing that vulnerability is a kind of superpower that I should be proud of rather than shy away from.

There was also the question of "what part of this story is mine to tell and what isn't?" It wasn't easy to always make a compassionate decision, although I intended to. I hope in the end that I was able to share with integrity what was true to me, and I hope that I'm received with the understanding that this is only one person's version of this story after all.

Completing the story felt anti-climactic on the day of completion. I doubted that it was of any real worth in the world, I wondered if anyone but myself could understand it, and in the end, I just shut my laptop and decided to celebrate anyway. I could feel what writing this piece had done for me personally. It felt like a weight had been taken off my shoulders. I felt lighter and more alive that day, and so I decided to live that way while I was basking in that energy. The next day the self-doubt came creeping back in, and it was only really after I shared the story to be received, and I spoke to my mentor that I became comfortable at seeing my words as a completed piece of writing that could hold worth outside of what it held for myself. Re-reading the piece still feels strange because it's so personal, but I do feel a kind of healthy distance from that part of the story of my life now that I didn't feel before, and I'm grateful for that.



ATMAN MEHTA

I didn't know where I was headed initially so there was unease. A constant push and pull. A reluctance to carry on but a compulsion as well. Until a momentum took a hold of me, after which the piece just about wrote itself. One thing led to another which led to another and I simply began to let my instinct carry me through.

I had not written much before this and there was a lack of confidence and self-trust. There was a fear of exposing myself – to me and the world – of finding out that I knew absolutely nothing about how to go about this. Of shattering everything that I identified myself as. The initial days were nerve wracking. But as I went through those I realised that they seemed more difficult in my head than they were in reality.

It dawned on me that I don't have to write the whole thing at once – I can possibly only attempt what I'm writing in that present moment. So there was little use worrying about something that I wasn't facing in actuality. A lot in this phase of the process was about understanding my own responses, how my mind functions. And when it comes to a creative act the mind plays a lot of tricks on you because it wants to avoid discomfort at all costs. And writing is about confronting that discomfort and making friends with it.

The biggest challenge was self-doubt. I felt like I had a lot to say but would I find the right words to say it?

But when I overcame that block by just writing – and not judging whether it was any good, while at it – I was unstoppable. I found as I strung together line after line, page after page, that not only was I being able to express what I wanted to, but I was intensely re-living those moments and learning about my own journey in so many new and deeper ways. I could never have imagined it. I had always thought that I had to know myself before I began to write, when in truth I can safely say, that I hardly knew myself at all – until I began to write.

Would I be able to be truthful to the experiences that I speak of? Could words truly communicate what I went through and how I felt? I wondered how I could translate lived experience into writing without losing an energy and authenticity.

Only much later did I realise that all these questions were just masking my biggest fear which was that if I dove into myself and my life, I would never be able to get out. So, it was no surprise that for the longest time this worry didn't allow me to begin in the first place!

But when I overcame that block by just writing – and not judging whether it was any good, while at it – I was unstoppable. I found as I strung together line after line, page after page, that not only was I being able to express what I wanted to, but I was intensely re-living those moments and learning about my own journey in so many new and deeper ways. I could never have imagined it. I had always thought that I had to know myself before I began to write, when in truth I can safely say, that I hardly knew myself at all – until I began to write.

I felt an overriding sensation in my body which was a result of the ecstasy that comes with expressing yourself, and the void which follows the completion of a work. Comfort and discomfort. This simultaneous fullness and emptiness lasted for a while, leaving me with a bittersweet taste. There was the joy of having written it all out but also a tinge of sadness about the same. Eventually, a humility arose when the realisation occurred to me that I had no real understanding of how it was written, where it came from and what to make of it. I had become so engrossed in the activity that logic and reason had been suspended. Something else was driving the writing and I was just present, open for it to flow.

For weeks I wondered how it all came together. How did each moment I was describing open itself up into a whole world in front of me, where I could see new details, have new interpretations and draw new meaning? It was my first such experience of becoming a medium – it all came 'through me' and not 'by me'. I was not in control. This blooming of awareness brought about a respect for the creative process. I became more perceptive of its inherent meditative quality – the possibility of merging and becoming one with what you are creating. It brought about a dramatic shift in my perspective and personality.



SARTHAK DUA

The first thought that occurred to me was 'where do I begin?'; that when can I really say that this turning point happened for me. Though, the very word 'turning point' has 'point' in it signifying that it is kind of supposed to be something specific or clear in its existence but ironically this 'point' was as abstract and spread all over the space for me as it could have been. I realised that to really be able to write about my turning point, the one that really made me make this choice of wanting to go with music, writing and things alike, I'd have to start writing from the earliest of my childhood memories; as far as I could almost remember anything at all about life. The only thing clear in my head was that everything I was ever wanting to do was leading me towards this turning point; that the desire to finally be able to do something like this was there from a time unknown. So, there I was almost writing my life story until now and realising that how Music was a part of me for as long as I could remember.

To kind of sum it up, I'd say that my sense of hearing has been responsible for gaining a major part of my experience of life. It would cast like a spell on me and take me away from the world of language and words when I'd listen to a melody or a rhythm around me, and just let me be without the need of understanding anything. Now, the spell has become even more powerful with some melody or rhythm playing out from whatever I can fix my ears to and just LISTEN.

I had no real issues with being vulnerable or transparent about my life and the people in it. Just that, yes, I had to change a few names in case those people weren't comfortable about some details I put in. Also, I feel I don't have a very good memory and so when an experience that happened prior to another would come back to me after having written about the latter, I'd to go back and find a way to place it appropriately since I was writing in a chronological order.

I'd have to say that my biggest struggle was the same as the first feeling or thought I had when I had to start writing my story, which was, that where do I really start. Then after figuring out that it had to be kind of an autobiography of my life until now, the next big challenge was on how to keep it concise so as to be in line with the word limit. While I am writing this, I am realising that my major struggles with writing this chapter were mostly practical, with the last one being that 'Will I be able to finish it in time'.

I had no real issues with being vulnerable or transparent about my life and the people in it. Just that, yes, I had to change a few names in case those people weren't comfortable about some details I put in. Also, I feel I don't have a very good memory and so when an experience that happened prior to another would come back to me after having written about the latter, I'd to go back and find a way to place it appropriately since I was writing in a chronological order. Lastly, I wrote it the old school way, that is, using a pen, pencil and a paper, and so, to finally type it down and send it across was one of the most struggle some moments that I can remember but thankfully enough, the girl I was with at that time helped me with it. So, I'd have to say that one of my biggest struggles was neutralised by love.

Since it was kind of like writing an autobiography for me, it helped me really look at my life in a more clear way. It helped me give words and hence, establish an understanding of the things that I was just doing in a kind of flow may be. It was like these pages had become a teacher to me. One of the most important things I feel it gave me was to remind me of one of my major turning points in life where from being a bluntly honest, outright person I transformed into becoming someone who would keep everything to himself. It helped me see how it was only natural from here on to start developing different ways to truly express myself. After that incident, words had kind of become my enemy but the want to express was still very much there and so, it helped me listen more, see more, observe and really adopt other forms of expression like Music. So, in a way it also helped me see that how everything is so connected and that that incident, though very painful, was just a way to silence me a little so that I could be directed to where my heart was and still is.

I'd like to sum it up by saying that there was also a sense of relief, with both the extremes coexisting, and hence, it felt kind of complete for a while.



SUDIPTA MUKHERJEE

For me, initially it was immensely challenging; the very idea of penning down an age beaten memory. Bringing into light a story that is at once complex and ethereal; otherworldly. Because, until then, Pranab Kaku (the protagonist of the story) was an intimate affair, residing in the grooves of my mind. An aspect, I had never shared with anyone. Not that I was shy of revealing, but that, I never felt the desire to reveal. Never felt an urge to offer before the world the unique life of a person with whom I had once walked a few steps. He was neither my relative, nor was he a friend. But for some reason, he lingered in my mind, like a memory, a good memory.

Then once I started writing, all the thoughts and images came back to me, gushing, nearly overwhelming me. The feeling was amazing. It felt like a story of yesterday that I am writing today. It felt like reliving a small part of my life, all over again, and with an enhanced feeling of joy.

As a writer, I have not faced any challenge writing it, given the fact that transforming thoughts into words comes naturally to me. Knitting words is my passion, and I totally love doing it. Feeling the soft pulse of vulnerability within me, realizing with increasing finality, the unadulterated reality of my inside world. Whether it is fiction or non-fiction, I thoroughly enjoy the journey of walking through a blank page and crafting a story out of it.

I felt strangely liberated in the end. The fact that an element of my mind, that was locked within me for so many years, finally got emancipated. And in what better way than a story? A really heart felt yet powerful story. The feeling was exhilarating. The absolute delight of telling oneself, 'I have done it!' A chapter closed. I don't think I would ever go back to that chapter of my life, ever again. Once I have penned down all that I had inside me, I am done with it forever. It's kind of like shedding a load off my shoulder, 'a feeling light' kind of a thing.

A story that would remain alive in the minds of my readers, long after they put the book down. Its relationship of another kind.

But yes, since this was my first non-fiction work, technically speaking, I had to be little careful with the chronology of events, and details. An incorrect piece of information could portray a different character and, in the process, totally alter the dimensions of the story. That actually made me more conscious while writing.

And then, the theme of my chapter, dying and death, and coming to terms with both, as a topic, was slightly difficult to handle. Not that I was unsure of what to write. What worried me more was how to express the things that I intended to write without being too raw or too subtle. The proposition was difficult, undoubtedly.

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I have this quote that I often go back to which says, “we seek ourselves in what we write”, so after completing this story and with the book getting out I felt like the seeking for that self was done. Articulation can at times bring you reaffirmation of your choices and finishing this chapter, writing the final event in it brought me poetic pleasure; a conviction and closure of a sublime kind.



ANIKET PATHAK

When I started writing my story it had been six years since I had dropped out of engineering college. All that time had passed without my parents knowing about it and somehow I had managed to hide it all from them. At times I thought that it would be a secret that I would take to my grave and it wouldn't really affect our lives much...but yes, the burden of hiding something from your family, especially a choice that you take pride in brings a different kind of guilt and shame. So when I started writing this story and thinking about how it would shape up I decided to use it as an opportunity to have a conversation with my parents. And so I wrote it as a letter to my mother, trying to tell her the story of our lives, about everything that lead to the moment of me dropping out, about every choice, belief, nature and nurture factor that made me who I am and sincerely hoping that they see in it the liberation and happiness I find and feel proud about it like all my close friends and loved ones do.

I had told this story to so many friends and acquaintances in general conversations over a period of time that by the time I had actually gotten an opportunity to pen it, it was deeply ingrained within me. I had also been journaling sporadically since 2005 so I also had most of the events of my teenage years registered in my psyche in a literary sense and I knew that all I had to do was revisit that memory and the narrative would flow.

So for the most part writing this story was easy because it came naturally from a place of constant attempts at trying to achieve some sort of self-awareness and self-discovery. If anything, I guess my struggle was to stay away from romanticising the notion of dropping out. I think I am inherently romantic, so there is an inclination I have to hold onto hope and keep looking for the light at the end of tunnel...I wanted to be able to do that without glorifying the idea of dropping out, wanting to tell it as a story of personal choice and self-discovery. I hope I have been able to do that.

I have this quote that I often go back to which says, “we seek ourselves in what we write”, so after completing this story and with the book getting out I felt like the seeking for that self was done. Articulation can at times bring you reaffirmation of your choices and finishing this chapter, writing the final event in it brought me poetic pleasure; a conviction and closure of a sublime kind. You know writing something as personal as this about your past can make you reflect and ask yourself that cliched tabloid question, *‘If you had a chance would you do it all over again?’* and I am writing this answer from this beautiful study table that I am grateful for and just for that I think yes, *“For you my lovely compact table, a thousand times over”*.

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



MIKYOUNG CHA

JEJU ISLAND CUISINE

Text & Photographs

From 1948 onwards to the end of the Korean War,
Jeju Island witnessed some of the bloodiest battles.
The darkness in Man prevailed over sensibilities.
Today monuments stand mute testimony to the futility of war.

But as L. P. Hartley says, *“The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”*

Today Jeju Island has become a fabulous tourist destination
for Koreans and travelers from all over the world.

They are welcomed by this island paradise
with some of the most delicious indigenous delicacies.

The following photographs are
but a glimpse of what Jeju Island has to offer to the connoisseurs of the exotic.



각재기국 Gakjaegi Guk : Boiled with horse mackerel, chinese cabbage and green pumpkin.



보말칼국수 Bomal Kalguksu : Noodle with top shells and seaweed fulvescens.



오분자기뚝배기 Obunjagi Ttukbaegi : Boiled with abalone, red-banded lobster and mussel in the hot pot.



토종 흑돼지구이 Tojong Heuk Dwaeji gui : A mixture of salted anchovy with water and sauce on a hot grill and serve it with grilled black pork.



전복죽 Jeonbokjuk : Boiled with abalone, rice and sesame oil.



성게미역국 **Sungea Miyeok guk** : Boiled with seaweed, sea urchin and sesame oil



한치물회 Hanchi mulhoe : Shred raw cuttlefish, pear, cucumber put in the iced water that seasoned with red pepper paste, vinegar, sugar, salt and crushed garlic.

Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray held the position of Visiting Professor and Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) chair, India Studies at Murdoch University, Perth between July-December 2017. He served as a Deputy Director in the National Security Council Secretariat, Government of India and Director of the Institute for Conflict Management (ICM)'s Database & Documentation Centre, Guwahati, Assam. He was a Visiting Fellow at the South Asia programme of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore between 2010 and 2012. Routray specialises in decision-making, governance, counter-terrorism, force modernisation, intelligence reforms, foreign policy and dissent articulation issues in South and South East Asia. His writings, based on his projects and extensive field based research in Indian conflict theatres of the Northeastern states and the left-wing extremism affected areas, have appeared in a wide range of academic as well as policy journals, websites, and magazines. This article republished by permission of www.mantraya.org

DR BIBHU PRASAD ROUTRAY

MYANMAR: URBAN INSURGENCY TAKES ROOT

Abstract

Since the 01 February 2021 coup, the civilian non-violent resistance to the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) has changed its character. In the civil disobedience movement, placard-bearing protesters appealed to the conscience of the international community, only to be crushed by the military. Since the end of March, in many parts of the country, collaborators and sympathizers of the regime have been systematically targeted by attackers who may have been trained by the ethnic armed organisations. An urban insurgency has raised its head. While it may not be enough to shake the regime, forcing it to reverse the coup, it will certainly drain the military off vital resources and delay its project of stabilizing the country.

Series of Attacks

In the morning of 2 June, a group of anti-military resistance fighters ambushed a convoy of four vehicles carrying police and military personnel near a hill in Kanbalu of Sagaing Region. Using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and hunting guns, they killed a police sub-inspector and fled leaving behind their firearms after military personnel arrived in the area from a nearby location.[1] On 27 May, eight explosives went off in Yangon's Thaketa Township in police stations, a local market, a primary school, and on the streets. While the damages were minimum, in another incident on the same day, three unidentified gunmen shot dead a local ward administrator.[2] On the same day, in the southern Mon state, two unidentified gunmen shot dead U Myint Swe, a regional lawmaker belonging to the *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar military)- aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).[3] In yet another incident, five people including an official administrator were injured in a homemade bomb blast at the village administration office in Ye township of the same state.



Bibhu Prasad Routray

These are among a series of ceaseless attacks—shooting, bomb blasts, ambushes, stabbing, and parcel bomb explosions—that have taken place in different parts of Myanmar in the past three months, in opposition to the military coup of 1 February. The media has reported only a few of these incidents. But it is largely believed that the number of such incidents are fairly large and difficult to quantify under the circumstances. A conservative account of the dead and injured in the attacks are over a hundred, till the time of writing this article. Even as the popular non-violent civil disobedience movement, which aimed to reverse the military coup of 1 February, is slowly losing steam, in the face of the military’s brutal repression, a new urban insurgency is taking root.

The Targets

Police officials and stations, soldiers, government offices, installations of the *Tatmadaw* and government officials like the ward administrators have been particularly targeted in these attacks. In Yangon’s Sanchaung township, at least two security forces were killed when explosives were lobbed into the General Administration Department (GAD) office in broad daylight in May. A soldier on sentry duty there was shot dead from close range. On 8 March, the residents of the same town had been subjected to a 12-hour siege by the troops in search of protesters. On occasions, basic education schools have been targeted, in defiance of the *Tatmadaw*’s move to open them. Boycotting education is a part of the nationwide civil disobedience movement. Some of the schools have also served as military camps. Explosions have also targeted at least one hospital linked to the military and the *Tatmadaw*’s recruitment centres.

Among government officials, the military appointed ward administrators have come under specific attacks. For instance, Bhone Ngwe, the local ward administrator shot dead in Yangon’s Thaketa township, had gained in notoriety for tipping off the security forces regarding the activities of the anti-government protesters. Myo Lwin, another ward administrator in the Lanmadaw township too had similar record. Locals had accused them of cooking and feeding the junta’s troops and accompanying them at the dead of the night to point at the houses of the protesters and the pro-democracy activists.

On occasions, the intended attacks have gone awry. For instance, a bomb planted on a street claimed the life of a cleaner in the Shan state, as he picked up the packet on 28 May. A bride was killed in Yangon as she opened a gift packet meant for her partner, who was suspected to be an informer for the *Tatmadaw*.

Urban Insurgency?

In the media reports, these attacks have mostly been blamed on unidentified persons. Searches conducted by the military and interrogation of arrested persons, however, have started throwing some light into what currently appears to be an unorganized, but rather expansive violent resistance movement. The available narrative, both from official accounts as well as media sources sympathetic to the pro-democracy movement, do fill in some of the knowledge gaps regarding the origin of these attacks and reasons for their continuity.

The source of such violent resistance can be traced to the military crackdown induced mass migration of the youth from the urban centres into the safety of the areas held by the anti-*Tatmadaw* ethnic armed organization (EAOs) in the country’s periphery. Some of these youths appear to have put their stay in those areas to productive use and upgrade their skills to assemble IEDs (described mostly as homemade bombs) and practice ‘hit and escape’ operations. The military also believes that some of these youths have trained along with the groups like the Karen National Union (KNU). This tactical alliance has possibly resulted in an army of trained attackers. While some of them could be aspiring to be a formal part of the People’s Defense Force (PDF), the armed wing of Myanmar’s parallel National Unity Government (NUG) of the opposition political parties, a large number of them seem to be taking on the military’s brutal repression with a tit-for-tat strategy.

According to the *Irrawaddy*, number of these trainees could be ‘at least several hundred, including doctors and other young professionals’[4]. They also include celebrities like ‘a former beauty queen who represented Myanmar in the Miss Grand International contest, Htar Htet Htet, to Han Htoo Lwin, known as Kyar Pauk, the lead singer of punk rock band Big Bag’.[5] Their statements, amplified on social media platforms, could be encouraging many others to join the same. Personal loss in military brutality and a sense revenge could be additional motivational factors, in addition to the urge to restore democracy. This is an ongoing trend and is unlikely to be disrupted unless the military finds a way to target the source, i.e. the training facilities in the EAO held areas.

During return to their respective cities, these trained men have carried explosives and weapons like pistols and revolvers to be used in the attacks. In other states, people who identify themselves as ‘resistance fighters’ have used their hunting guns in these attacks. In early May, the *Tatmadaw* claimed to have arrested 39 of such trainees in Yangon.

20 more people were arrested between 13-17 May. Again between 21 and 23 May, another ‘two-dozen’ people were arrested and ‘2080 homemade bombs, 44 time-bombs’ were recovered from them, also in Yangon.[6] Despite the arrests, attacks have continued. Posts in social media by the anti-regime ‘resistance forces’ continue to threaten a step up in attacks in the coming weeks.

Insecurity in the Air

In spite of their increasing frequency and casualties among the targets, these attacks have mostly remained crude, small scale, and seemingly uncoordinated. Executed mostly by ‘lone wolves’, large percentage of these explosions have either resulted in minor or no casualties. At the most, small teams comprising two to three members have participated in shootouts. However, the frequency and spatial spread of these attacks have been a source of lurking apprehension for the troops. These have severely restricted the movement and impunity with which they operated in the early days. Local media in Myanmar reports the soldiers manning the entry points of government buildings have all retreated inside the newly created outposts.

Few of the ward administrators have resigned after assassination of their colleagues. Offices and military installations, the visible symbols of de-facto power in the urban centres, have been barricaded with sand bags and high fences with wire mesh. Even the newly opened MoeKaung Treasure Maternal and Child Hospital in the compound of the Military Documentation Office in Yangon’s Yankin town-ship has been fortified by armed guards and sandbags on the rooftop, reports *Irrawaddy*. Under the circumstances, the narrative of ‘every civilian is a potential attacker for the military and every military trooper is a potential target for the attackers’ seems to be holding true. It is a classic case of an active insurgency instilling a sense of vulnerability in the very forces of the regime, who have been assigned to blow out dissent.

The Future

This violent resistance is certainly an unanticipated outcome of the 1 February coup. More than fourth months after its decision to undermine the popular political choice, the *Tatmadaw* finds itself struggling to establish order in the country.[7] As it attempts to prolong its rule by banning the National League for Democracy (NLD) and dismantle other edifices of democracy[8], the rise of an urban insurgency will invariably drain its resources and delay its project of silencing dissent.

The objective of spreading fear among the masses to extract legitimacy, which is a vital component of dictatorial rule, is likely remain an unfinished project, in the near to medium term.

While reversal of the coup and implementation of the results of the parliamentary elections are the unspoken goals of this urban insurgency, its success, in the short to medium term, will be measured by its ability to continue in the face of brutal and vindictive military campaign. Violence by the insurgency would be used by the *Tatmadaw* to intensify its operations. In some time in future, the insurgents would find it necessary to align their actions with that of the opposition’s National Unity Government (NUG). While dispersed violence has its own utility, at some point of time, they would find it necessary to coordinate their actions under a loose leadership which will provide direction to their action and provide clarity about its end objective. If they succeed in continuing, closer strategic alliances with the sympathetic EAOs and constant upgradation in the quality and frequency of attacks are likely to follow.

The *Tatmadaw* is still a very powerful institution. Defeating it won’t be either an easy or swift affair. But an urban insurgency, working in support of the NUG, can create sufficient pressure points for change, which peaceful protests have not been able to managed to do.

Endnotes
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Vũ Tuấn Hưng

THE CHAM - VIETNAM

PART - II, PHOTOGRAPHS BY

VŨ TUẤN HƯNG

The omnipresence of Lord Shiva is evident to all those who visit these exquisitely constructed Cham temples.

Nandi majestically presides over the ruins.

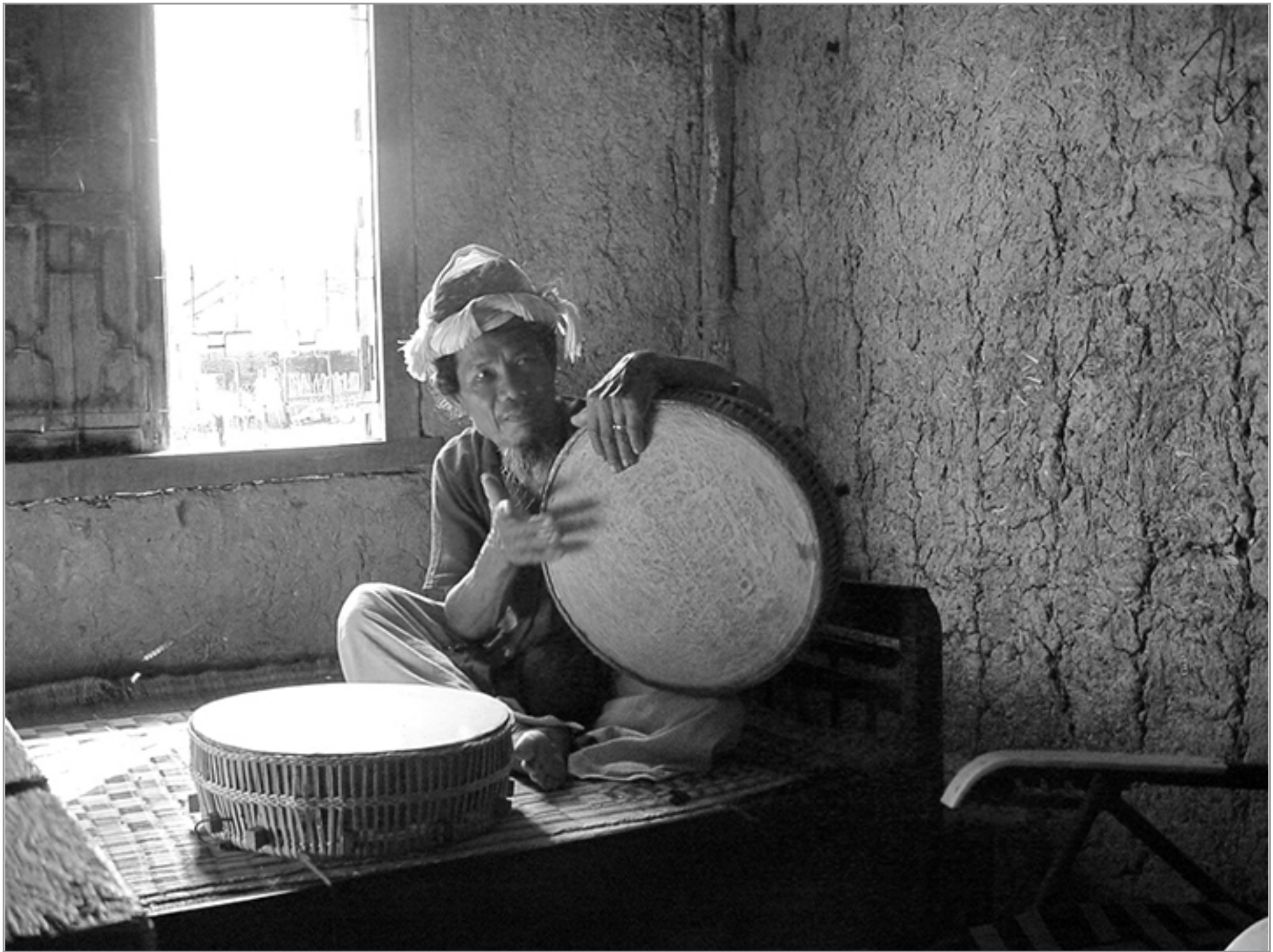
These images are but a fleeting glimpse of Cham architecture.

The majority of Chams in Vietnam (also known as the Eastern Chams) are Hindu mostly live in Central Vietnam, while Southern Vietnam's Chams and their Cambodian counterparts are largely Muslim, as Islamic conversion happened relatively late. A smaller number of the Eastern Cham also follow Mahayana Buddhism.

For a long time, researchers believed that the Chams had arrived by sea in the first millennium BC from Malaysia and Indonesia (Sumatra and Borneo), eventually settling in central modern Vietnam.

The first recorded religion of the Champa was a form of Shaivite Hinduism, brought by sea from India. Hinduism was the predominant religion among the Cham people until the sixteenth century. Numerous temples dedicated to Shiva were constructed in the central part of what is now Vietnam.

**<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chams>*



Musician Phú Sặng is also artist. He makes by hand the traditional wooden drums and clarinets.



Chiên Đàn



Chiên Đàn stone carving relief.



Tháp Po Nagar ở Nha Trang.



My Son Cham.



Shiva of Tower Po Klong Garai.



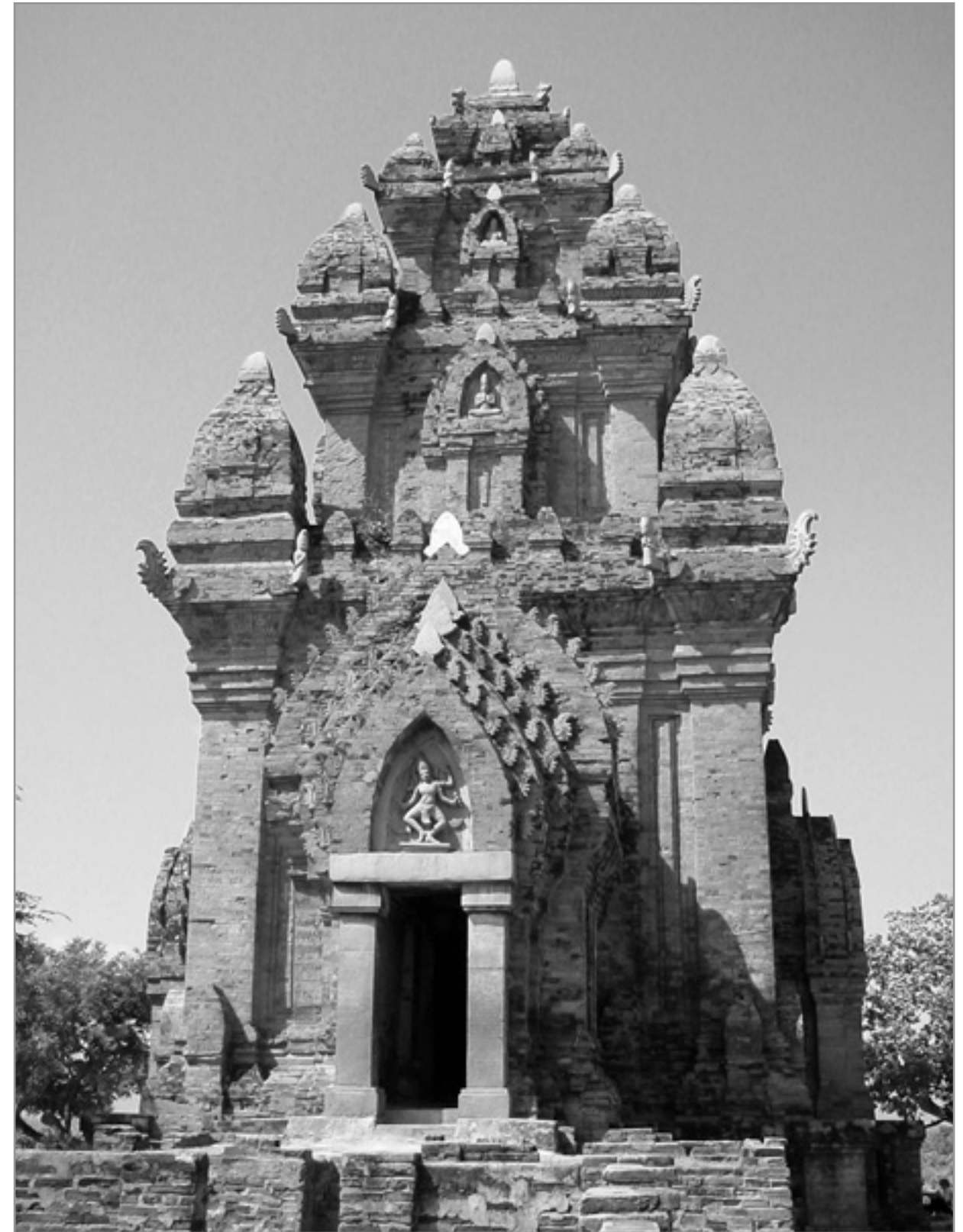
Tháp Chàm Po Nagar.



Nandi.



Tháp Po Nagar ở Nha Trang.



Shiva of Tower Po Klong Garai.



Shiva of Tower Po Klong Garai at night.

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Percy Aaron

PERCY AARON

Misadventures in the Mountains

The ups and downs of trekking in the highlands.

From Hatsa, a small trading post on the banks of the muddy Nam Ou River in remote northern Laos, we sailed upstream through some stunning and largely unspoilt scenery. At times the colour of the water changed to a deep ochre. The current was strong and the boatman guided us skilfully past the occasional rapids splashing water onto everyone and filling up the boat. His assistant sat on the prow using an oar to push the craft away whenever it got close to any of the rocks. On placid stretches he kept himself busy baling out the water.

At regular intervals the boat stopped for villagers to get on or off and after about forty-five minutes it was our turn. We waded onto a sandy, deserted bank. All around us the high hills were covered with tall trees and dense vegetation. The only sounds were the rushing waters and the various bird calls, some recognisable, most not.

Indian file, we started climbing through dense undergrowth. At times the vegetation was so thick we could see only a few steps ahead. I pulled my cap tight over my head and covered my face with my hands or elbows to protect it from nettles and thorny twigs. Almost immediately the leeches started feasting on us, while the mosquitoes hovered around waiting their turn. We climbed and climbed and I slipped and slipped. Bringing up the rear, it was difficult to keep up with David and Souk, our guide, who had to stop frequently to allow me to catch my breath.

After about an hour of steady climbing I was totally exhausted and just couldn't go on. I suggested they continue without me. Finding my way back would have been impossible and I was secretly relieved that David disagreed.

Soon I sat down on the path, dizzy from exhaustion and hunger. Sweat poured down my face and back as mosquitoes and large red ants bit me. David opened his backpack and gave me some biscuits and water. After a while I felt better but still didn't think that I could make it.



The mist in the mountains. Photograph by Percy Aaron.

David insisted on carrying my backpack and though I felt bad about it, agreed. He then had the brainwave of making me lead the group with the guide bringing up the rear. Souk handed me a thick branch to help me climb. For whatever reason, the journey was now easier with me setting the pace. We still stopped numerous times for rest breaks or to photograph the stunning scenery.

Despite the cool mountain air, we were covered with sweat and David, in particular, looked as if he had just stepped out of a sauna. After some time, we reached a clearing and took a longish break. Souk produced some juicy pears from his backpack and told us that this spot was usually the first stop on the trek - we had already stopped dozens of times - and that we were well behind schedule. Our four-hour trek, he felt, was going to be nearer six or seven hours.

We continued to climb with regular breaks for rest or photographs. As we tired, we conserved energy by keeping quiet, each of us lost in our thoughts. Except for the occasional bird call or rustle of leaves, the silence was total. For somebody like me, allergic to noise, the sensation was incredible. This was nirvana.

We ran into some colourfully-dressed ethnic women speaking a dialect that even Souk couldn't understand. One of them stuck her hand into the bushes and pulled out a bunch of grape-like fruit and offered it to us. They were deliciously tangy.

By early evening, about six hours later – and just one hour behind schedule - we reached the top of the mountain and the *Akha* village of *Ban Jakhampa*.

Ban (or Village) *Jakhampa* was a collection of thatched, squalid huts made of bamboo. Only the headman's place had wooden walls and a roof of corrugated asbestos. Built on the slopes of the mountain, they seemed ready to collapse like a pack of cards. Except for the sounds of cocks crowing and cattle lowing, the village was eerily quiet, almost like a ghost hamlet.

We walked past a number of huts towards the home of our host, the village headman. As we approached, people started popping out of their huts. They stopped what they were doing, or not doing, and stared at us with a mix of suspicion and curiosity. Some way behind, children had appeared and were following us. Much like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, their numbers were growing. Obviously outsiders, especially foreigners, were a rarity in this place.

We arrived at the village chief's hut, took off our shoes and entered. We were told to keep them on but out of habit had left them outside. Once inside though, I saw how dirty the earthen floor was and after a while went outside and put my shoes back on.

Despite looking small from the outside, the interior was surprisingly large with a big, soot-blackened stove in one corner. None of the huts had windows, and many had low doors. We wondered why *Akha* building techniques did not include these, since there was no electricity. However, with the cold Phongsaly winters, having no windows probably made sense. Snot-nosed children, dogs and chickens roamed inside freely. Everybody spat anywhere and one child urinated near me. Souk, the guide was given a basin with a little water and after washing his face, threw the rest in the corner near the bed. When it was our turn we did the same.

Though there was no electricity, the hut had a TV and VCR. Later, somebody explained that when rice was being milled, they ran a generator. This was the opportunity to watch a movie or two. The villagers loved Hindi films and I understood why Bollywood movies, with all their oomph and glamour, were so popular among these impoverished people.

We went outside the hut to look around and by now there was quite a large gathering waiting to catch a glimpse of us. The older boys stood close, while the younger ones watched nervously from a distance. I tried to photograph them but they fled as if they had seen a ghost.

After a while we were called into the hut for a bite. Souk had brought some food from Phongsaly. It was a very spare meal of sticky rice, strips of dried beef and some steamed vegetables, washed down with hot green tea. Later, we were offered some opium but politely declined. The village had no toilets and so after the meal we went for a walk to relieve ourselves. We were given a big stick to keep the pigs, and sometimes the dogs, at bay.

The *Akha*, one of Laos' many ethnic groups, are animists. They believe that everything, living or otherwise, has spirits and must not be offended by any word or deed. To this end their whole lives are governed by ritual. An abjectly poor people who prefer living in the highlands, they practise swidden or slash-and-burn agriculture. The women in the village wore colourful head-dresses, decorated with beads and silver coins; the more elaborate, the better the dowry they had received. Those carrying little babies, moved around with one breast exposed.



Ban Jakhampa - Akha Village. Photograph by Percy Aaron.

The unmarried girls generally stayed indoors. Like many mountain people, the womenfolk seemed to do all, or most of the work, while the men just sat around smoking. The younger men too hung around aimlessly, often preening themselves, while the poorly-clad children, most of them with runny noses, seemed so listless.

Life is a very harsh and dead-end existence for these simple people.

As the sun set, David and I sat outside on a wooden platform, looking out onto the valley and chatted with our guide or those who could speak some Lao. Some asked me about their favourite Bollywood stars, but not being a movie or TV person, I must have disappointed them. Many of the younger men walked around with red - yes, all of them were red – ghetto blasters which got louder as darkness descended.

Later, Souk offered us some more food but I refused pointing out that we had just eaten. The truth was that with no toilets I wanted to eat as little as possible. An anthropologist once told me that when researching in such remote areas, he always carried a big stick to fend off pigs and dogs trying to get at his excrement before he had even finished.

As the sun went down David and I sat on the platform discussing poverty and development. Souk told us that government had plans to move the village to the base of the mountain so that education and healthcare would be more accessible, but the villagers were ambivalent about this. The younger ones thought it would bring jobs and modernity. The older villagers were sceptical of officialdom's promises. Besides, leaving the land would cut links with the spirits of their ancestors.

Dusk made the village noisier with the many ghetto blasters at full volume. I wondered if this was to scare away the spirits. Many of the young men also carried Chinese-made torches that pierced the darkness like searchlights seeking out enemy aircraft.

Night came and despite the insomniac roosters in the village, I slept surprisingly well. The next day I stayed in bed for as long as possible to delay the need for a clean toilet



Inside the headman's hut. Photograph by Percy Aaron.

When it was no longer polite to stay in bed I joined David outside on the observation platform. A little later Souk brought me some water for a wash. It was barely enough to brush my teeth. Later he brought us some dry bread rolls and hot coffee. Coffee never tasted better. We munched our rolls and admired the mountains, most of them covered in the early morning by a thick mist. I had never had a breakfast amidst such spectacular scenery.

We left *Ban Jakhampa* at 8.05 am on the return leg of our journey. As we set off, we saw it was raining on some of the distant mountains. We had been lucky with the weather until now, and were sure that our luck would hold. Souk told us that we were returning by a much shorter route and should reach the Nam Ou boat a little after noon.

Once again I led the group, followed by David and then Souk. About fifteen minutes into our journey, it started drizzling. Souk gave me a plastic poncho but it was hot and sticky and kept getting between my legs. Then the drizzle got heavier and soon we were soaked and miserable. After about an hour, our descent started turning into a nightmare.

Coming down a mountain is more difficult than ascending and even worse in the rain. It should have been obvious that if our return route was shorter, the descent would be steeper.

Some of the paths were about a foot wide and animal hooves had worn them off making sections even more treacherous. Soon I began to dread them. On portions where the tracks were slippery I put my foot into the grooves made by the animals to avoid sliding off the mountain.

Despite this, I moved faster than David and the guide. On one slippery stretch, when I almost slid off the path, I thought it prudent to slow down and let them keep up with me. It occurred to me that we were so insignificant in that environment, that if anything happened to us, nobody would know anything.

Sometimes the easiest looking paths were the worst. I lost count of the number of times I slipped and fell in the slush. In panic I would grab at any plant or shrub to stop myself from going over. There seemed no end in sight to this nightmare. All around us the heavy silence was punctuated by the chirruping of birds and the patter of rain on the dense foliage.



Village elders sharing a smoke. Photograph by Percy Aaron.



The author with Akha villagers. Photograph by David Fairhurst.

Finally, I spotted stretches of the river deep below in the distance. I calculated that it was still several hours away. Our shorter journey was turning out to be longer. After some time, I began to hear the roar of the motors from the boats far below and my spirits soared.

Two men were coming in the opposite direction and I flattened myself against the side of the mountain to let them pass on the outside. There was hardly any space between me and the edge but they went by as nimble footed as mountain goats. They said something which I did not understand. A few minutes later I heard David and Souk shouting and stopped dead in my tracks. I called back but there was no reply. I sensed some urgency and turned back to look for them.

The men who had passed me told Souk that the *Lao Theung* - another ethnic group - village we were approaching was closed to all outsiders for the day. Somebody had died and as per their customs, no outsiders were allowed near the village. The thought of going all the way back filled us with horror and we pleaded with Souk to explain to the villagers that we were just passing through to catch the boat. He was adamant that we could not enter the village that day.

Animists are very strong in their belief that any deviation from their rituals will anger the spirits and that it could take weeks, if not years, to placate them.

Souk turned back to look for an alternate route and we trudged behind dejectedly. After about fifty metres, he stopped, looked down and then jumped off the path. From about ten metres below he beckoned us to follow. I have a fear of heights and was in sheer panic. Once again I begged him to reason with the villagers but to no avail. In these parts Souk was as much an outsider as we were. With my heart in my mouth I lay flat on the slushy path and started lowering myself over the side. I grabbed at every plant or shrub, thorny or otherwise. When David followed me, I saw how caked with mud he was.

We stepped into a rivulet and started following the current. The water was cold and smelled foul. I looked up to see the exposed buttocks of a villager on a ledge, defecating into the stream right on top of us. The nearest we got to the *Lao Theung* that day, was to their sewage.

Finally, we reached the banks of the Nam Ou River, five hours after we had set out. The relief when we saw the bank, the boats and the river was unimaginable.

2010 - 2020

11
YEARS

Live encounters

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
AUGUST 2021

COVER DESIGN BY MARK ULYSEAS