

Bimonthly international journal by citizens of planet earth



CONTACT

EDITORIAL



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We thank our well wishers in Indonesia, India, South Africa, U.S.A, U.K., Singapore, Australia and the Middle East for supporting our endeavor to bring people together regardless of time zones, cultural divides and religious affiliations. In this inaugural edition we present a slice of 'real' life. The special feature is on The Bali Heritage Trust. A must read for those who want to help in the preservation of Balinese culture. Also in this issue is an enlightening encounter with The Guru of the Art of Shaking – Ida Pandita Mpu Parama Daksa Nata Ratu Bagus; and a walk with spirits in South India followed by Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Infidel.

Live Encounters is conducting a symphony of peaceful co-existence being performed by citizens of planet earth. Join us and become a citizen of planet earth. Help us create a world that the great Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate spoke about...

*"Where the mind is without fear
And the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up
By narrow domestic walls"*

- Rabindranath Tagore

A peaceful 2010 to all our readers and well wishers.
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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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The Bali Heritage Trust

A blueprint awaiting implementation

Mark Ulyseas



Wisnu, Siwa, Brahma made in Panca Datu made by Kamasanbali.

Bali has the distinction of being the ultimate tourist island destination in the world. The mighty tourist dollar has created jobs, businesses and has to an extent raised the overall standard of living. But the flip side tells a different story. It reveals the ‘after effects’ of Hidup Manis (sweet life)...a burgeoning economy reflected in the frantic construction of dream homes for outsiders, a growing disregard for the basic tenets of Tri Hita Karana and the theft of its intellectual and cultural property by persons from other countries.

So how do many self respecting Balinese respond to this trend without upsetting the general flow of the economy and peaceful daily life?

Live Encounters has asked three eminent persons from the Balinese community and the brains trust of The Bali Heritage Trust (BHT), Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa, Popo Danes and Made Sukma Swacita, to present their views/suggestions to the readers on the role BHT can play in safeguarding Bali’s heritage. Their message is loud and clear – accountability, education and empowerment of the people, and adhering to the supreme concept of Tri Hita Karana – harmony between human and God, human and the world, human and human – is the only path towards protecting and sustaining the ethos of the Isle.

Background

The former Governor of Bali, Bapak Dewa Made Beratha, set up The Bali Heritage Trust (BHT) on February 28, 2003 and appointed Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa (Pak Tjok) as the Chairman. Pak Tjok was dispatched to do a comparison study in London and Washington. He returned armed with data, systems and a plan for BHT. The two systems that were to be put in place covered two main aspects – (1) Tangible - architecture/ecology (2) Intangible – ‘Puranas’ - rituals, customary law (Adat), tradition and the unwritten ancestral code.

Tjokorda Raka Kerthyasa

“I believe that though progress is vital to sustain the economy it should not be at the cost of diluting or digressing from the fundamentals of religious/socio/ economic systems installed by ancestors. In many areas progress has brought about development. However, there are questions that need to be answered to arrive at a comprehensive and lasting solution for the protection of the island’s religious traditions, social set up, environment and way of life of the Balinese.

The Bali Heritage Trust encompasses all aspects – language, buildings/temples, traditions, rites and rituals, religion, Adat and more.

Presently, communication needs to be fine tuned between the Desa Adat, Regency, Province and the Central Government in Jakarta. There are many gaps in interpretation and enforcement of laws relating to building, conversion of farm land, the rights and duties of local authorities etc. This gives many unscrupulous investors opportunity/advantage for they side step prevailing laws and do whatever they choose, thereby resulting in projects coming up that do not adhere to Balinese sensibilities nor conform to international environmental standards.

Take for instance the international hotel that was being built in Padang Bai. The promoters actually cut away huge parts of a cliff and destroyed the ecosystem in that area. To repair the ecological damage would take millions of dollars and many decades. This is truly a sad reflection of our system of controlling and preventing such mindless acts that deface our sacred island.

An excellent example where local people and government have acted positively to preserve our old buildings is the Taman Ayun Temple at Mengwi. The Head of this temple is the Mayor of Badung, Anak Agung Gede Agung whose hands on work has helped preserve and maintain this beautiful temple. This could not be done without the local people and authorities joining together harmoniously/unanimously.

Education of the community is necessary to give them the right information and training in terms of preservation of their heritage. They need to be aware of the intrinsic value of old things/buildings and not just the monetary gain if/when they are sold to be replaced by antiseptic structures that do not have soul or character nor conform to our ethos.

There is a gap between the existing laws and reality.



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These two must come together to achieve some semblance of control over the frantic building that one is witnessing. Do you know that many buildings/temples in Bali are owned by groups/villages who have the right to decide the fate of these assets – to continue maintaining them or selling them off for large sums of money? It is imperative that these people are educated through a sensitive process of imparting of knowledge. Knowledge that could help them realize the importance of keeping ownership and maintaining old things/structures because they spiritually belong to the Balinese as a whole, belong to our descendants.



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But education alone is not enough we have to work on giving a subsidy to these groups and financially assisting them in maintaining the fixed assets. Lip service and thank you notes do not help put food on the table. We need to become proactive and not reactive i.e. reacting only when the deed has been done like the demolition of a very old building and the rise of an alien one in its place.

Let us not forget that the Desa Adat is the first line of defense against people knowingly/unknowingly circumnavigating traditions, laws and community aspirations to erect structures that are in contravention to the sensitivities of the prevailing culture. Ensuring the Desa Adat, which is a unifying force for Balinese culture, works effectively with the Regency, the Regency with the Province and so on is the only method of preventing the clandestine dismantling and desecration of Bali's heritage.

In Australia, U.K. and India, government and semi-government organizations offer support in terms of financial aid, free legal service, community based profitable schemes. For example, in India the Archeological Society of India classifies buildings/areas etc. as heritage sites and no one can overrule their decision. This society has special powers and without their explicit approval of a proposed project coming up in a designated heritage area no work can commence. We need to arm BHT with some legal status (like the Archeological Society of India) so that it can be more effective in preventing destruction of our heritage. This must be done with the Balinese and by the Balinese for it concerns our cultural heritage and therefore, our responsibility to preserve and sustain it."

Mark Ulyseas met Popo Danes at Inna Bali Hotel in Denpasar to discuss the hotel's past, present and future. The hotel in question was built by the Dutch in 1927. It was the central meeting point for all visiting dignitaries, Indonesian and International. It is proposed that this grand old dame of Denpasar be given a face lift and resurrected by The Bali Heritage Trust.



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Popo Danes is an international award winning distinguished Balinese Architect who has been at the forefront of designing and setting up hotels and homes worldwide that are representative of his brand of philosophy –simplicity in design (color and form), usage of natural materials, harmonious synchronization with the environment. He is a source of inspiration for many aspiring young Balinese artists who are on the threshold of the old and new worlds fighting to be heard above the cacophony of the bloated art society. Popo Art Veranda, an art gallery set up by him has become a rendezvous for many a budding gladiator with a paint brush.

www.popodanes.com

"Why do you ask me about the restoration of this 80+ year old Hotel? Okay let us assume we renovate this heritage building, then what? Doesn't it have to sustain itself financially? How is this going to be done?"

I support BHT in its bid to restore Bali hotel to its former glory. But this is not where it should end. Everyone living and working in this area must be made 'stake holders' i.e. the businesses and citizens of Denpasar must be convinced of the rewards of its physical restoration and the impact it will have on revitalizing the local economy. For example, the restored hotel can become the business/tourist hub for the whole area. A tourist destination. A place for business conventions. A venue for weddings. A launch pad for tourists who can be taken on walkabouts in the surrounding areas. A photo gallery can be set up in the hotel displaying pictures of world famous Indonesian and International dignitaries who

visited/stayed at the hotel. Small warungs and other businesses around the area that thrive on tourism can be helped financially to refurbish their outlets. Redevelopment of the Bali Museum is essential. The branding of Denpasar with the help of the tourism department can be done by using the Bali Hotel as the fulcrum for all activities. The hotel will become the catalyst for redevelopment of Denpasar. Involvement of the local businesses and empowerment of the people is a sure way to make this a resounding success.

But this is just one of the many examples where our heritage can bring us prosperity without having to sell the family silver. And it can only be done if a good relationship is maintained between economics and politics.

All across the Isle we have the green belt. Why not have a cultural belt that prevents all and sundry from demolishing heritage sites and converting them to eye sores. Preservation of our heritage should not be cosmetic e.g. erecting a structure that has a façade which is Balinese in nature. This is just decoration; there is no intrinsic heritage value. One must look into the various aspects like design, building materials, drainage, electricity, safety, impact on the environment and relevance to the Balinese architectural code, Asta Kosala Kosali.

Many villas are sprouting up across the island. The owners pay top dollar for a rice field view. Did you know that this development directly interferes with the age old Subak system (irrigation system) that has been successfully planned and implemented centuries ago when the original setting on Bali was homogeneous? Everyone was a farmer then. But with the sudden

introduction to the industrial revolution Bali became heterogeneous, leaving many unprepared for this new age development. The result has been lopsided development which continually impacts our daily life. This is culture in conflict with commerce. We must realize this and deal with it appropriately.

The advent of ecotourism in Bali is heartening. This is a positive step. Bali Heritage Trust can be a guiding force by teaming up with business and government and providing guidelines to international investors - like the principles of tropical architecture, how we can include cultural content in architectural design and how much we can put into effect in terms of a green life style, an eco friendly waste disposal system and more. BHT can play and should play a decisive role in deciding the positive outcome of 'exploitation versus conservation'.

But prior to all my suggestions, BHT will need to work closely with community leaders, businesses and government to build a consensus that will morally/legally empower the organization to spearhead the fight for preservation of our heritage through education, road shows and talks by religious heads to affect a change in the mindset among the Balinese. It will have to set up a proper office to be managed by trained personnel and embark on an aggressive campaign to not only 'educate' foreign investors on adhering to Bali's heritage but also enlighten the Balinese that they are the prime stake holders of Bali and therefore the island's well being is fundamental to the survival of our (Balinese) culture and all that it stands for – Tri Hita Karana. To achieve this, BHT needs urgent funding, support from Balinese, businesses and the Tourism Department; and more importantly political will to help BHT convert its blueprint to a reasonable/tangible/acceptable reality."



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I Made Sukma Swacita
Ibu Ni Nyoman Adnyani
I Gede Andika

© Mark Ulyseas

I Made Sukma Swacita is a traditional artisan living a life dedicated to preserving the Balinese way of life. Made talks about the manufacture of coins and other items used in religious ceremonies in temples at his production centre in Klungkung, where he resides with his wife and son.

“The unit **Industri Uang Kepeng Kamasanbali** was set up under the aegis of The Bali Heritage Trust on April 29, 2004, with the support of the then Governor of Bali, Bapak Dewa Made Beratha.

Kamasan village is historically famous for its gold and silver fashion accessories (rings/necklaces/ear rings etc.). A long time ago the erstwhile King of Klungkung wanted to develop/promote the arts and crafts and therefore decided to make Kamasan village a centre for crafts persons to live and work. A short distance away is Kertagosa, a place where a unique style of painting on cloth is done using natural colors made from stone. The images are from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Kamasanbali produces coins and other items made of Panca Datu – 5 metals. The metals and the corresponding colors, elements and Gods are:

Direction	God	Element	Metal	Colour
North (A)	Dewa Wisnu	Water	Iron (Besi)	Black
South (Ba)	Dewa Brahma	Fire	Copper (Tembaga)	Red
East (Sa)	Dewa Iswara	Air	Silver (Perak)	White
West (Ta)	Dewa Mahadeva	Earth	Gold (Emas)	Yellow
Central(I)	Dewa Siwa	Ether	Bronze (Kuningan)	5 colors

These five elements represent our body and the micro cosmos. We also believe in Panca Shrada (5 beliefs), in God, the rule of Karma, Reincarnation, Moksa (liberation of worldly attachment), and Atman (Soul).

As you probably know, Chinese coins came to Bali around the 11th Century. The symbols on these coins were that of the Chinese dynasty and the date when they were manufactured. The coins were made of 3 Datu (3 metals) – Timehitem (lead), Kuningan (bronze) and Tembaga (Copper).

It was as late as the 1970s that these coins were used as currency as well as in all religious ceremonies, rituals and offerings.



© Mark Ulyseas

Balinese Coin made in Panca Datu by Kamasanbali



Ang and Ah are symbols of Rwa Bhineda, Purusha Predana and Akasa Pretiwi. Ang symbolises woman, Ah symbolises man. In Balinese Hinduism everything is viewed from bottom to top (Sor to Lor). This is why the letter Ang is placed at the bottom and the letter Ah on top.

Coin dimension and weight : 2cm diameter and 1.2mm thick. ±5 gms:

© Mark Ulyseas



Patung Rambut Sedana by Kamasanbali. Pic © Mark Ulyseas

But as time went on and Bali ran out of these coins it was decided that we should have coins depicting our language and religious symbols and made of the five metals. It was Ida Pedanda Made Gunung, a Siwa High Priest, who guided us on the nature and meaning of inscriptions and symbols to be engraved on coins and how each should be used in rituals and ceremonies. The coin may be used as a fashion accessory or as decoration. But once the coin has been blessed, it then becomes a holy object and should be given due respect.

If you see the products on display in our showroom you will notice that a number of objects like the Gedong Arta and Patung Rambut Sedana have been made with coins.

All the metal craft including the statues of Wisnu, Siwa and Brahma and the Caket Siap Antik are made with the five metals.

My dream is to reproduce in Panca Datu all the sacred metal implements that are used for religious ceremonies at the temples and to make them available at a reasonable price so all the temples can afford to buy them.

Presently, there is an acute shortage of these sacred objects and therefore temples borrow/lend them from/to one another. They are also very expensive in the market. Kamasanbali will be helping the temples and at the same time preserving our heritage.”



Gedong Arta by Kamasanbali. Pic © Mark Ulyseas



© Mark Ulyseas

Antiques for sale?



Caket Siap Antik made in Panca Datu by Kamasanbali. © Mark Ulyseas

It is common knowledge that traditional Balinese designs, music, dance, puppetry etc. are being surreptitiously 'appropriated' by unscrupulous people from other countries.

These folk make regular forays into the Indonesian diaspora to offer top dollar for a piece of Balinese heritage.

Also, it is a known fact that movable antiques are being stolen and 'exported' to foreign countries.

There are concerns voiced by Indonesians about safeguarding their heritage and suggestions made: international copyright protection and stringent laws enacted and rigorously enforced by the Indonesian Government to protect this heritage from being looted. Prosecution of offenders must be swift to send a message to all who plunder Indonesian Heritage.

**When you buy a piece of Indonesian heritage
make sure it is a made to order antique!**

Wherever you are in the world,
if you want to help The Bali Heritage Trust please email
markulyseas@liveencounters.net
and we will put you in touch with Indonesian officials.

Prior to buying, selling, transporting or keeping antiques it is essential to know the laws in Indonesia.

Governor's Decree 1931 (Dutch) Indonesian Law No.5 (1992)

Indonesian Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 10 (1991) concerning items of Cultural Property.

(Source : UNESCO Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws <http://www.unesco.org/culture/natlaws/> IFAR – International Foundation for Art Research: <http://www.ifar.org>. And for more information please contact: Director General of Museums, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, J1. Medan Merdeka Barat 17, 10110 Jakarta, Indonesia).

A few extracts from the Laws:

Items of Cultural Property are:

a. artifacts made by man, movable or immovable, individually or in groups, or parts thereof or remains thereof, which are at least 50 (fifty) years of age, or represent a specific stylistic period of at least 50 (fifty) years of age, and are considered to possess value of importance to history, science and culture;

b. natural objects which are considered to possess important value for history, science and culture.

2. A site is a location which contains or is presumed to contain items of cultural property together with the surroundings which require safeguarding. (Law No.5 – Article 1)



Old Chinese Coin. Pic © Mark Ulyseas

The penalties as stated by the Laws are:

Whosoever intentionally damages or destroys items of cultural property and sites together with the immediate surroundings in which such property is located or brings, moves, takes away, or changes the shape, form and/or color, restores, or dismantles part of items of cultural property or valuable items without the permission from the Government...shall be sentenced to a maximum of ten years in prison and/or a maximum fine of Rp. 100.000.000 (one hundred million rupiahs). (Law No. 5 – Article 26)

Whosoever intentionally searches for items of cultural property or valuable goods of which the owner is unknown by means of excavation, diving, taking away or any other means without the permission of the Government...shall be sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison and/or a maximum fine of Rp. 50.000.000 (fifty million rupiahs). (Law No.5 – Article 27)

Whosoever intentionally:

a) fails to fulfill their obligation to register their ownership, transfer of ownership's right and removal of location...

b) fails to fulfill their obligation to report the loss or damage to items of cultural property...

c) fails to fulfill their obligation to report the discovery or knowledge of the discovery of items of cultural property or objects which are presumed as cultural property or valuable objects of which the owner is unknown...

d) reuses any items of cultural property of which the original function has been abandoned...

e) utilizes any items of cultural property by means of duplication without permission from the Government ... for each and every offense shall be sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison and/or a maximum fine of Rp. 10.000.000 (ten million rupiahs). (Law No. 5 - Article 28)



Carmen Roberts is an awarding winning producer/journalist on fast:track, BBC World News' flagship travel programme. She has written this column exclusively for the readers of Live Encounters.



© Carmen Roberts

Most people think I have one of the best jobs in the world (until they see my pay cheque!) Actually, I wish I had a dollar for every time someone asked me "so, you work on a travel program, do you get to travel?" Yes! And I'm one of those lucky few people who get to truly say "I love my job". I don't say that to be smug or presumptuous, but in my opinion there is certainly no better "office" than the refreshingly unpredictable world around us. Sure there are the long flights, layovers and delays in uncomfortable airport lounges, the constant threat of DVT but the places we go, the people we meet and the stories that come thick and fast - from camping out in the Australian outback, whale watching in Canada to African film festivals and even the odd beach destination.

So what's it like being a woman in this business? Funny, a lot of people think I'm a Robert anyway. Invariably it's in Asia. I've lost count the number of times I've walked out into a brightly lit circus of an arrivals hall filled with families reunited, business travellers and back packers with no fixed agenda, to find my host brandishing a name board that has ROBERT CARMEN. Surprised looks usually follow, which results in the pantomime of me pulling out my passport proving that I'm in fact Carmen Roberts, not Robert Carmen.

Still, sometimes being the unexpected guest has its plus points. Some people assume that because I'm a fashionable, young woman I might not be very knowledgeable. Well this can work to your advantage. I always say it's best to convey what you don't know, than what you do know. So it's often in these cases that you get the best answers or soundbites, when someone assumes you aren't so well informed. It's an old reporter's trick, but it certainly works.

Sometimes it's when things don't go quite to plan that we get the best stories and the best memories. A few years ago I was filming in the whale watching town of Tofino on Vancouver Island in Canada and had a rather rude awakening on my first night. I had flown from London to Vancouver, via Toronto and then had a long layover at Vancouver airport to catch a tiny shuttle over to Vancouver Island. Needless to say I was totally exhausted after travelling for the better part of 15 hours.

My cameraman and I checked into our hotel and I had a quick peep out the balcony door onto the most amazing view overlooking a lake and woodlands. This was seriously the most sumptuous 'Best Western' I'd ever stayed at.

We dropped our bags, headed out to film a few shots on the beach and then get some dinner, after which, I pretty much fell into bed. Fortunately, I put the chain on my door, not something I usually do (don't tell my mum) I was woken up a few hours later to voices outside and then someone trying to open the door. The chain prevented it from fully opening and through my

sleepy haze I was able to mumble "what are you doing?" There was more chatter and then silence. So I naturally assumed they'd gone away. But a few minutes later the sliding door of my balcony burst open and there was a groom carrying his bride over the threshold! It appears I had mistakenly checked into the honeymoon suite.

In fact, I seem to run into hiccups over sleeping arrangements. A few months ago I was filming a story about star gazing in Australia and the New South Wales tourist board had suggested I go camping in the Blue Mountains and experience sleeping under the stars. This was all part of events to mark the international year of astronomy this year. I was told there wasn't space for a cameraman at the 'posh camp' - so I agreed to film the experience myself.

Our meeting point was a vineyard, about an hour outside of Sydney. My guide was a rugged outdoorsy chap, no more than 40 years old. We drove for almost two hours before we reached the camp site and as we neared I mentioned the need to send a few emails after dinner - it was one of those moments where you wished you could swallow the words back in as they are coming out of your mouth. The look of disbelief on my guide's face said it all.

So I rather sheepishly sank down in my seat and waited for the camp to appear into view. Again, another classic faux pas, thankfully not spoken out aloud this time - but I honestly expected to be greeted by a bevy of women preparing my dinner and fluffing up my quilted swag. In fact, we were met by an open tent, some chairs and tables and not much else.

It then dawned on me that I was to spend a night with a man I'd just met, in a secluded spot in the Blue Mountains with no mobile phone reception or internet. Surely Tourism New South Wales weren't going to send me into the bush alone with an axe murderer? This, of course, was the crazy rambling thought process of a paranoid woman who's read far too many Patricia Cornwall novels.

Fears aside, the roast lamb dinner cooked over an open fire was seriously one of the best I've ever had. After dinner I bid a hasty retreat to the comfort of my swag - pitched a few hundred meters away from where my guide was sleeping. But hang on, who will protect me if a dingo were to come calling in the middle of the night? My trusty guide assured me he'd hear me if I screamed. So I hunkered down, fully clothed, inside the swag and pulled it up tight around my neck.

The only time I think there was a real gender issue was

when I was filming in Zanzibar. Some of the Muslim Tanzanian residents found that the scantily clad tourists offensive an insult made worse by the place being marketed in the west as a honeymoon and beach destination, complete with brochures filled with bikini-clad models. It's an issue I've seen crop up time and time again and is something that even affects some parts of Indonesia.

We had secured an interview with the secretary to the Zanzibar Mufti, a senior Muslim scholar. I arrived at the interview in long trousers and a long sleeved shirt, with the best intentions. To my horror I managed to upset the cleric and after the interview he shooed me away gesturing in disgust at my collar area. I was appalled at my mistake and I found out later I should have worn a longer shirt and covered my neck. At least he'd realised it hadn't been done deliberately and went through with the interview. But I couldn't help but think that if I really were a 'Robert', this wouldn't have been an issue.

Irrespective of whether you're a man or a woman, all my experiences point to a several reliable truths - even the best laid plans never work out quite how you'd expect them to and often it's the journeys you take to get there, rather than the destinations themselves, that hold the most memories. But, above all, that this is an amazing world we live in and I, for one, don't think I'll ever stop exploring.



© Carmen Roberts

Carmen Roberts has been a journalist for Fast Track, BBC World's flagship travel programme since 2003 and has reported from over 60 countries. After the Asian Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004, Carmen cut short her holiday in Langkawi, Malaysia to report from the devastated resort town of Phuket. Carmen's most recent reports about liquor licensing and buying property in Bali was telecast on Fast Track.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk>

Red Sands – *Morganics*

Exclusively for readers of Live Encounters, an excerpt from Morganics upcoming book, Memoirs of a Hip Hop Nomad.



© Morganics

The cold, yellow paint is brushed onto my chest first, then the black. It represents the goanna - parenti - dreaming. Wire and I get the same colours. Then Manu starts getting painted up black and white, I ask our teacher, Tjapaya,

“What do the colours represent?”

He looks at me, as if to say, don't you know anything? and says “The magpies” the Aussie rules football team, and walks off.

Once us men have been painted up then we return to the group where the women too have been painted. There are six women and four men and we all assemble in front of Mantitjarra (Mrs Wilson) like a bunch of schoolkids on our first day of school, proud to have been painted,

anxious that we don't make a mistake in the dance. Mrs Wilson looks us up and down, laughs from her large belly

“Ooh look, you lot looking good now eh?”

We laugh a little and smile ourselves into a slightly less awkward posture. In ten years of intermittent work with different Aboriginal communities, I've never been painted up and done a traditional dance before - I'm trying to look relaxed.

We're standing on red sand hills beneath the most magnificent blue sky, looking out onto a prehistoric vista of dark green desert oaks that disappear into valleys of Grand Canyon proportions. Most of the teenage women we have travelled here with have opted to slink away.

They are talking by the fire, doing milputjanyanni (drawing stories in the sand with sticks) or digging for water just 3 feet beneath the sand to make tea. I get the feeling they are all watching us though.

We are a motley group from Sydney and Adelaide along with some local Amata mob, all brought together by an ongoing community outreach project by Carclew Youth Arts who are based in Adelaide. Lee-Anne, my boss, is the woman who initiated this project, a Nunga woman, barefoot in a black negligee painted up and looking proud as punch. Finton, our video artist in charge of making video clips and short films looks like the six foot three half Fijian Tex Perkins that he is, or as Sammy Butcher from the legendary Aboriginal rock band, The Warumpi Band, refers to him as “This is my friend Nick Cave!”. Wire is a short, nuggetty, Ghumbingaree Koori from the East Coast – a long way from his homeland – and I, a Brissy born, Sydney dwelling, slim, lanky white fella, am about as far away from the glimmers of Bondi Beach as you can get.

Manu is selected as the goanna and as he stands there, the rest of us fan our hands over and around him while Mantijarra sings away with the help of two other women. No clapsticks here, they are banging two plastic cups together to keep the rhythm. Tourists like myself buy the clapsticks from the community art store but living culture like this can use anything. It reminds me of a corroboree I was invited to in Numbulwar community in Arnhem Land.

Car headlight illuminated the scene in the dirt driveway of the backyard, aunties, uncles and dogs gathered around as the women danced in the dirt. Five women with two of them being albino sisters gave the scene a slightly heightened sense of the surreal. But the highlight of the night was when a five year old boy leapt out to do his dance in front of his grandfather, mother, father and family....in a Spiderman suit. No problem, they sung their song, he did his dance with the same sharp intensity as his aunties and uncles, hit his final freeze in a cloud of dust to howls of applause and laughter from everyone around the fire. One woman turned to me and said with a smile,

“That was a good one eh? Spiderman corroboree.”

Back in central desert Pitjantjarra lands it's time for the men's dance. We have been given a quick five minute lesson by Tjapaya, only twenty one years old but already a keeper of knowledge, strong traditional dancer and occasional university lecturer. With cups of tea being passed around, the aunties and women dancers sit and prepare to watch Manu, Wire and myself. Like a footy coach Tjapaya is running alongside us telling us what to do.

“Step, step, arms up, run in now”

Mantijarra starts knocking the plastic cups together and her singing seems to wind up from the soft, cool, red sand hills we stand on. I'm nervous. Put me in a Bboy circle and I can bust a move no problem, but this a whole other level. As we run through the sand, jamming our heels into the earth, kicking up the dust with these ancient voices singing to us I feel a bit like an empty vessel, floating, being guided, no room for ego, it's not really about the choreography.

As the sun sets in the valley and we dance I realise it's not really my body that has to learn to dance here, it's my spirit.



morganics is an awara winning hip hop artist, spoken word performer and director as well as a passionate community worker. He has performed from New York to the UK, the Sydney Opera House to Prague. His extensive work with indigenous communities throughout Australia includes The Wilcannia Mob's "Down River" which he remixed for MIA's latest. He produced an album for ex street kids Wayahudi Family in Tanzania and has recently released his CD/DVD "Hip Hop is My Passport". Morganics is currently working on his forthcoming book "Memoirs of a Hip Hop Nomad" and Australia's first Hip Hop musical feature film "Survival Tactics". www.morganics.info

Walking With Spirits

Randhir Khare



Start of the spirit journey © Randhir Khare

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Later, where the path climbed up along the side of a hill



An Irula sacred space © Randhir Khare



Hills roll towards Amunore © Randhir Khare

face, we encountered Ovvunni Karsh...the place where the spirit throws three stones and calls out “Ovvunnikku Karsh Vodhu” (beware the stones are coming) - symbolic of the penetration of darkness by light.

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

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

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

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

and travelled back to urbanity for a brief respite.... only to return again, as the seasons changed, to continue the trek to the land of the dead.

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

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



Ovvunni karsh © Randhir Khare



A Kurumba sacred space © Randhir Khare

clouds, grey, white, gauze-like. The wind that bore the clouds onwards towards us buffeted my body as I stood there gazing into the nothingness beyond.

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

“Yes,” I replied.

“There’s a stream down there, hidden among the trees.

That’s where Poodhiavre is. The dead person’s spirit washes itself at the stream, cleaning away all traces of the ashes of the funeral. When that is done, the spirit moves on until it reaches that forest there. That’s the last stop before Amunore. It’s called Pooverikaene, the Bubbling Stream. There’s a rope strung across the stream.

The spirit has to cross, walking along this rope. If it has not lived a just life, it will fall into the stream and a sacred buffalo will offer its horn to rescue the drowning person. But if the spirit fails to climb out, it will have to wait one year. There are only three chances. If it fails all three, the corridors to Amunore close forever for that person. But if the spirit succeeds, it is truly liberated from all the rites and practices and shastras of Toda life on earth and it travels on to Amunore. The Land of the Dead.” When he finished speaking, the advancing clouds swarmed around us and the land vanished.

I stood there among the clouds, overwhelmingly aware of the earth on which my feet rested, of the land I had traversed the many hours and days and weeks and months before that, of the rivers and streams I had forded, of the sacred stones I had seen and touched, of the trees whose fruit I had plucked and eaten...whose



The chest touching stone © Randhir Khare

flowers I had admired.... whose shade I had slept in... whose trunks I had leaned against for solace. It was indeed sacred earth.

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

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



The Journey’s end © Randhir Khare

Randhir Khare is an award winning author of twenty one volumes of non-fiction, fiction, translation and poetry. He is the Executive Editor of Heritage India, the International Culture Journal and Visiting Professor of Literature at Poona College. Recently he was given The Residency Award by The Sahitya Akademi (India’s National Academy of Letters) for his contribution to Indian Literature and has been given the Human Rights Award for his efforts to preserve and celebrate marginal and minority cultures.

A Gypsy Woman in Ireland - Terry McDonagh

These days in Ireland, people talk
about the price of sites,
the cost of tribunals, property abroad,
or foreigners...refugees:
lazy people come for our riches,
who won't work. They steal,
eat raw from our fields,
blacken our reputation and
colour the skin of our children.

I am Sonia, a Gypsy woman
who dreamed colours and grew up
gathering berries in a village
in Romania. I earned my way
to university to become a doctor
and the pride of my mother's heart.

My father never had a nation
and died in Auschwitz.

I was arrested with a bundle
of leaflets and when I had to flee
to Ireland, I was sad:
not to be a doctor,
not to visit my mother's grave,
to marry an Irishman.

I have never stolen. I am
spring clean, stalk strong,
proud and honest as

the memory of snails and owls
in our desolate garden.

I fled when a sneering bullet
ended my mother's life. She died
at the mean will of our state; in
our house; in my place.

Now, I can only shelter
behind my husband's curtains
in a childless fourth-floor flat
before closing time in Dublin.

I still see my uncle
blazing
with his shining sickle
in shirt sleeves.

My husband in Ireland
you gave me my first passport
and beat me daily:

- for the sighs and secrets
in our troubled death-songs
...like Irish songs.
- for my childhood in fields,
- for our hawks, falcons and silver,
- for the poetry in our people.

I should be able to talk
in the shops, but
they listen away from my accent.

I cannot tell them of our winters,
of our trees whistling like
the shades of accordion music.

I have learned to hide
behind candles in churches;
to disappear into the woodwork
and to listen to the distant patience
in the singing of my ancestors:

homeless in Romania
homeless in Serbia
homeless inland
homeless in Germany
homeless in the east
homeless in France
homeless in Italy
homeless in the west
homeless in England
homeless in Russia
homeless on the coast
homeless in Bulgaria
homeless in Albania
homeless in the north
homeless in Europe
homeless in the south
homeless in Ireland.

The flowers have gone out
on another summer.
I'm a year closer to my mother.

A Writer's Festival on Bali - Terry McDonagh for Rosa Herliany

In a few hours the Writer's Festival
in Ubud is to begin. The town is
on the verge of dawn –
sun and
rooster-rhyme climb in my bloodstream.

I try to visualise what I see
but only see
what I sense in the percolating dark.

I cannot wait for your message gods;
rebirth has already begun building
in my bones – I can hear it.

There are no windowpanes to filter
heady scents sauntering in and out
of my bedroom and the shower's open
to the sky. Life and I seem to be

pulling away from each other, and
there are other elements that just
won't be still,
- like flowers on the brain
- like colours on the tongue
- like so many shades whispering.

My feet have grown cold on the marble
but feel as silky fresh growth after rain.

Something small flits up the wall – there will
be workshops and readings, later.

It's special to be trapped in a morning ritual
with a little rice field across the street.

An electric drill and parrot-like whistle
have joined in. I feel undressed and clumsy,
yet sheltered in clusters of thicker wind.

Roosters have grown still, but a cement mixer
takes over as Rosa Herliany walks up the road
with my new book in her language.

This moment feels like a stairs
warming
step
by
step
as it leads
down
and
down.

No other words will do.



© Terry McDonagh

Terry McDonagh, www.terry-mcdonagh.com, poet and dramatist, has published four collections of poetry; a play; a book of letters and a novel and poetry for children. His work has been translated into Indonesian and German, funded by Ireland Literature Exchange. With piper Diarmaid Moynihan, he completes poet/piper duo, Raithneach. Twelve of his poems have been put to music by German composer, Eberhard Reichel. His latest collection, Cill Aodain & Nowhere Else, www.killedan-and-nowhere-else.com, illustrated by artist Sally McKenna, was published in 2008. His next collection is due in autumn 2009.

Agustian Supriatna

Artist, Musician, Fire Dancer (Tari Api) - Mark Ulyseas

On the outskirts of glittering art galleries, congregating culture chameleons, ‘production line’ art and self appointed guardians of an incestuous art world exists a small band of men and women who work with whatever materials they can collect from the refuse of mankind; metal scrap, bottles, spoons, wood et al to create avant-garde installations that appear to look like beautiful works of rearranged garbage. Sometimes they even sell these creations. Their lives are simple and their wants limited to a packet of cigs and a hot cup of Bali coffee. Meals are often Nasi Campur interspersed with a chilled glass of beer offered to them by eager visitors who want desperately to be a part of their world.

To assist lesser mortals in understanding their philosophy of life we present a member of this community of fringe artists...

Agustian or Agus as he is called by his friends was born in Lampung, Sumatra, in 1981. His grandfather, Datuk Raja Jaksa, was a well known Shaman. From the age of 15 he wanted to become an artist because he thought it was cool. However, unlike many contemporary artists he has no formal training in fine arts.

In 1999 he set up ‘shop’ in Ubud hobnobbing with kindred souls.

His studio looks like a scrap yard; nuts, bolts, chains, blow torches, gas cylinders for welding and large oil drums sliced into pieces. The paintings on canvass reflect a soul searching for paradise within and the used tyres lying around gives it the feel of a motor mechanic’s workshop. But lurking somewhere in the metal scrap is an installation waiting to be born, exhibited and (hopefully) sold.

Agus’s guru is the universe that teaches him a lesson or two every day. His inspiration for his paintings comes from images of daily life that he encounters. The metal installations mirror Agus’s endeavor to constantly recycle and recreate beauty from the debris of social excess.

In his words, “Fire dance or Tari Api burns the dirt from my mind, my heart, my body and my soul. It cleanses me time and again. When I play the guitar or percussion, sing or make things with my hands it is a kind of prayer, a prayer to the God which resides in me. It reminds me of my place in the Universe, that I am just a small creature. That I should be happy and content with whatever I possess.”

Last year Agus married Rachel a lass from Melbourne. His daughter Indah (which means beautiful Indonesian) was born eight months ago.

“When I hold my daughter in my arms it is like magic...I cannot describe the feeling, it’s too intense. My wife and Indah live in Melbourne. I will be travelling frequently to meet them. However, I also need to create to make money so that I can buy nice things for my family,” he says while lighting the blow torch to cut away parts of an oil drum to make a ‘art’ door, “Rachel has a beautiful heart and I am blessed for she understands what I am trying to do. I dream for the time we can travel the world together, to see and meet other people and to learn their language, their culture. I want to learn. But for now I have to create this door because it’s in my head.”

His advice to contemporaries, “Don’t surrender to the stomach”; translated it means not to compromise their creative work by commercializing artwork to boost sales.

As one was leaving the ‘studio’, Agus shouted above the rushing sound of the blow torch, “Brother, Bali has a two way door, one must learn how to open it, when to go in and when to go out for many use it like a revolving door and therefore are often caught in it...going around in circles...never entering never departing”.

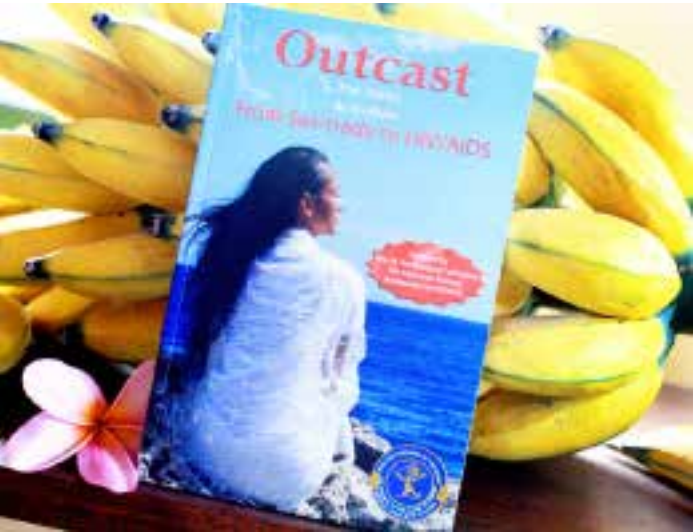
Khuda Hafeez Agus



© Mark Ulyseas

An Indonesian Woman of Substance

Mark Ulyseas



© Mark Ulyseas

Ari Murti is author of OUTCAST- from Sex-trade to HIV/AIDS – a book of true stories. She is an outstanding Indonesian living in Bali and spearheading the fight against HIV/AIDS/Drugs through her charitable work as a community leader, as well as, a woman and mother. She is the face of modern Indonesia – a country that has in the last few years emerged from the shadows of the past, shedding its perceived image of a backward nation to its rightful place in a world fast becoming a global village; Education, empowerment of its citizens, burgeoning economy and more have become the anthem of this Republic.

Ari, as she prefers to be called, is the Third Chairperson of the Supreme Mosque Ibnu Batutah Foundation in Nusa Dua, Bali; a Member of MUI (Advisory Councils of Indonesian Muslim Scholars), Bali Province; Deputy Chairperson of the Haj Brotherhood Union (IPHI) of Bali; Founder and Chairperson of Association of Orphans Institution in the Archipelago (APAN); She is well known for championing women’s rights.

In an informal chat with Mark Ulyseas, Ari briefly outlines her life and work.

When did you first come to Bali?

In 1980.

And then?

I stayed on and in 1984 helped Haj pilgrims from Bali by hosting them in my home (board/lodging), assisting in the ‘comunitas’ (documents) for travel to Mecca as there was no one or no facility to help these poor and usually uneducated people. If I recall correctly there were 40 persons in the first batch.

How did you become the first woman member of the MUI?

The ULAMA - Council of Muslims in Bali - had heard about the work I was doing for the Haj Pilgrims and invited me on many occasions to attend meetings of the Council. I was the first woman invited to do so. And as time went on more and more pilgrims were coming to me for help. It was while I was on holiday in Australia that I received the news that I had been appointed unanimously to the Council. It is an honor and more importantly it is a milestone for women in the community.

Could you tell the readers about your work in the HIV/AIDS/Drugs program in Bali?

In 1998, I heard about a 12 year old boy who had died of drug overdose. His parents were completely in the dark about their son’s addiction until it was too late. I, as a mother, felt extremely distressed and wanted to do something to educate youngsters on the isle about the dangers of drugs. So I wrote and designed a comic entitled ‘Wati & Adi’, Children of the Millennium. It became part of a package for Primary and Junior High school children. Ten thousand copies were distributed free across Bali.

My first introduction to AIDS was through a report in a newspaper about the body of a young Javanese woman lying unclaimed at a local hospital as there was no one who wanted to either touch the body (for fear of contracting the disease) or bury it as it would cost them US\$ 150/-. I suppose there was no profit to be gained from the remains of this pitiful soul. People had distanced themselves from humanity.

I went ahead and buried this woman. The experience took me down the road to where I am today fighting alongside likeminded people against the dangers of HIV/AIDS and the misnomers of the disease itself i.e. how it can be contracted.

And what about your work with orphans?

Through the HIV/AIDS/Drugs programs I came across many instances where orphaned children were the direct result of these social afflictions. Often they would be walking the streets or working as menials when they should have been going to school, eating three meals a day and living a ‘family’ life. In 1992 I started my first orphanage. Today there is an Association of Orphanages in Bali (34 orphanages). The children are taught life skills that would stand them in good stead like making honey, animal husbandry (goat), running a small warung. These children are empowered as part of the educational process. So alongside education they learn various skills.

Every year at the end of Ramadan we host a ‘Buka Puasa Bersama’ for 2000 orphans together with their donors in Bali. It helps foster an understanding between donor and child about living a fruitful life within a community. It also gives the donor an opportunity to view firsthand the progress of the child and how his/her money is being spent.

What are your future plans?

There are many people in Bali who do the ‘work’ I do and who continue to be of great help to my projects.

This reflects the Balinese spirit of community which I hold dear in my heart. Therefore, I wish to carry my work further into areas that will help this very same community.

The development programs are –

01. To encourage/educate/empower women to keep abreast of development in all spheres of society.
02. To set up a Koperasi for micro-financing (interest free) to assist women in the development of micro/small businesses.
03. To build a centre for conducting regular classes for prostitutes/their offspring/HIV/AIDS persons and children of poverty to teach them languages/maths and basic accountancy/health and hygiene/work skills.
04. To help institute and enforce a Charter for the Rights of Children – the right to education, the right to eat three meals a day, the right to protection by society and the State, the right to live like children.

Do you have any message for the readers of Live Encounters?

Yes, please buy and read my latest book, Outcast - True Stories of women afflicted by HIV/AIDS. All proceeds from the sale of this publication are reserved entirely for the improvement of women and children with HIV/AIDS through programs conducted by WIN (Women International United) Foundation, Bali, Indonesia.

And to visitors who holiday in Bali, please give something back to this beautiful island that gives you so much joy and love.



© Ari Murti

Cassandra, lady in waiting

Bencong (girly boy)...freak of nature or God's gift to mankind?

Interview with Mark Ulyseas



© Mark Ulyseas

Contemporary society is unrelenting. It is like a juggernaut that often crushes individuality and smothers the voices of the meek, usually sidelining Nature's genetic goof-ups, like the Bencongs (girly boys) in Bali: Boys who at a young age suddenly find themselves confronted with the reality that they are in effect 'female trapped in male anatomy'. The memories of the growing up years imprison the hideous humiliation of being beaten by the boys in the school yard and shunned by the girls who viewed them as freaks of nature. They stumble through the labyrinth of social stigmas, ostracized by a society hell bent on maintaining a semblance of 'normality' (whatever this means).

Cassandra, the Bencong who I had the privilege of meeting and interviewing, is a female in all respects except for the appendage of masculinity, preferred to be called a she and took umbrage every time I mistakenly addressed her as him.

Is Cassandra your real name?

No. But is it important what my name is? You ask me my name because you probably want to place me and know where I come from? Yes?

Yes.

Ok. I was born into a family of 3 girls and two boys in a village in Makassar. At the age of six I knew I was a girl. My parents reluctantly accepted my condition and often referred to me as their fourth daughter. They love me very much.

Where did you do your schooling?

In Makassar. In school I was taunted, beaten and my food stolen from me. Sometimes even the teachers treated me with disdain. I didn't want to study. I wanted to be an actress; to be beautiful and famous and loved by all men.

Did you complete your schooling?

Yes I did.

And then?

After that I worked in a beauty salon not far from home. I learned how to do pedicure, manicure and body massage. Many men and women customers would ask specially for me when they came to the shop. The customers were never rude and began tipping me generously. Once a customer gave me a tip of one dollar! I would give the extra money to my mother who would buy pretty things for me. It was at this time that a boy friend told me about the hormone tablets that were available to help me transit from male to female. I took them and still do take them. After sometime my body began changing and I grew breasts like a woman. Looking at myself in the mirror one day I realized I had become a woman. A few months later I got a job in Jakarta in a well known chain of beauty salons. It was the break I was looking for. My parents were sad to see me go but they were also happy, happy I was making my life as a woman.

How was life in Jakarta?

At first it was very difficult. My salary was not enough for board and lodging. I had to find a boyfriend to support me. Many men came and went in my life. Some helped me others abused me mentally and physically. At one time I went through a phase where I hated all men. But after a year, I think, things got better. I was being paid a higher salary and I had made many friends with people like me (Bencongs). We would dress up and go out in groups to the malls and restaurants and enjoy life spending money and making love. This was the first time I felt truly liberated, truly free, a free woman.

Have you thought about a sex change operation?

Yes I thought about this but I don't feel it's necessary. An operation for my breasts would be okay. I believe in God and believe he made me like this for a reason. So why make the change?

What do you miss about Makassar?

Food! My favourite is Coto Makassar. It is a soup made of beef broth, ketupat (sticky rice) and vegetables.

What about clothes? Where do you buy them?

What are you asking? I go to shops that sell women's clothes, where else? You still don't understand, ya?

Tell us about your job in Bali? Have you found love?

I came to Bali a year or so ago to work in a beauty salon. Often customers would fall in love with me, spend private time with me and then return home to their country leaving me with gifts and sad feelings. Sometimes regular men mistake me for a woman and when we finally reach the point of intimacy and they realize I am not a complete woman, run away or just chase me out of their room. I don't mind. That's life. I am still waiting for a good decent man to settle down with.

Do you want to get married? And do you know India has become the 127th country to legalize same sex marriage?

Yes I want to get married and adopt children. But the laws in my country do not allow it. Maybe if you help me travel to India I can get married there!

Have you had any illness related to your sex life?

I always use protection so I have never had any problem. I am thankful to the Yayasan in Makassar that helps HIV/AIDS patients and also teaches everyone on how to live healthy lives. From my earnings I send money to my

family and also to this Yayasan that is doing good work for my area.

Why do you like men?

Because I am a woman!

What is your favorite color?

Black and white – the color of my life.

If God gave you one wish, what would you ask for?

To be born a woman and to have children.

Yes, I want to get married and adopt children. But the laws in my country do not allow it. Maybe if you help me travel to India I can get married there?



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*“There is one problem with breast milk
no one can make money from it.”*

Maternal Nutrition And Infant Feeding

Excerpts from this writing were shared by Lim at the opening of the IFOAM 16th Organic World Congress, Modena, Italy.

Robin Lim

I live and work in Indonesia, where it has been found that one of the leading causes of death is hemorrhage after childbirth. These deaths are caused by maternal malnutrition. I believe they are preventable. If one speaks with the Dukun Baby, the Traditional Midwives who attended women at birth, they will tell you that the problem of women dying at such an alarming rate is a modern one.

In Bali they will tell you that in the late 1960s to early 70s, after the introduction of Green Revolution Rice (also called “High Yield” or “Miracle Rice” IR-8 and its successor IR-36), within one season, the women began to bleed to death. It is time for the midwives, who are kneeling beside the women in the villages as they bring their children into this world, and the scientists, who determine food composition (i.e. hybrid, GMO, chemically dependent or organic) and policy, to work together to find out why the women ingesting Green Revolution rice as their staple food are hemorrhaging in the third stage of labor (postpartum). There are questions of nutrition and the effects of human beings ingesting pesticides and fertilizers here, which must be addressed.

We would be wise to question the economic, social, cultural, and nutritional impact of all food inventions as does our colleague, Vandana Shiva in recent articles. I ask the scientists not to refute what the midwives both traditional and medically trained have discovered about mass changes in diet, simply because the research has not been done to prove what we are finding empirically in the field. For the scientist to say to a midwife; “You can’t tell these stories of maternal hemorrhage related to diet unless you do the research.” seems the same as if I as a midwife say to the scientist; “You must deliver the babies day and night as I do, to be acknowledged and respected.” **Someone must tell the stories of the casualties of modernization of food and childbirth, since the dead don’t speak, I as a midwife endeavor to ask these questions.**

We know that high-yield rice was invented to end hunger, and indeed it has increased rice yield. However what has been the price of changing the staple food of already impoverished people with a grain that is chemically dependent. In Central Luzon, Philippine Islands, where my mother is from, the rice yield increased by 13% during the 1980s but this came at the cost of a 21% increase in fertilizer use. In West Java, Indonesia a 23 % increase in rice yield came at the cost of a 65% increase in fertilizer use and 69% increase in pesticide use.

*Within a few years of the Green Revolution IR-36 / high yield rice varieties were legally mandated by



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the Indonesian government, in Bali the farmers were forbidden to plant native rice varieties which take much longer to mature, are less responsive to fertilizers, and produce less grain. IR-36 (or other high yield varieties) became legally mandated. Furthermore the BIP Bali Irrigation project took power away from the "Subak" the ancient Balinese Water Temple system of sharing water from mountainous source waters all the way to the seashore farms. The traditional ritual agrarian Bali Hindu Dharma Calendar of growing became obsolete as it was based on the growing cycle of native Balinese rice. Thus, the continuous cropping of rice in Bali undermined the Balinese system of ecological balance and management of water sharing and natural pest control achieved via hydraulic solidarity.

I have visited the women in the Philippines whose hands receive the babies. They will tell you that where there is pesticide, fertilizer, and mono-cropping, women hemorrhage after childbirth, they die. If you hike up beyond the reach of the Hanselma Highway in Mountain Province, where the people still grow their indigenous red rice, and sweet potatoes, where they have no money for chemical farming, and no means to transport pesticides and artificial fertilizers to their fields, postpartum hemorrhage is rare, nearly unheard of. There you will find the trees still so full of fireflies that they look lit up for Christmas. And there you find no hospitals.

In a 1986 study of world hunger The World Bank questioned the effectiveness of a rapid increase in food production as it does not necessarily result in food security, or, less hunger. The study concluded that hunger may be alleviated by "redistributing purchasing power and resources toward those who are undernourished," in other words, ...if the poor don't have the money to buy food, increased production is not going to help them. If the poor have sold their rice fields, as I have seen them do, to pay for expensive 'technologized' hospital births, driven by fear of maternal death and an all too high (though under reported) infant mortality rate, to preserve the lives of their malnourished women and high-risk infants - how will they eat? How will the future generations of Balinese, who will not inherit rice fields or any land for the cultivation of food, ever eat?

Even if they eat, as is the case for the Tsunami survivors, who must subsist on a donated diet of high yield rice, polished white, and white rice noodles with Mono sodium glutamate for flavoring, white sugar, and oil - in Childbirth they tear and bleed. Under this kind of nutritional stress pregnant women all too often suffer from hypertension. With these hands, kneeling beside women who survived the December 2004 tsunami only to suffer high blood pressure and pre-eclampsia in pregnancy due to malnutrition, I have delivered babies who died while still inside their mothers' uterus, just hours before their births. I call the is "full belly poverty" as many of the tsunami survivors in the early months after the disaster had access to World Food Plan donated white rice. They ate heaps of it, often plain, as they had no boats for fishing and, no vegetable gardens were spared by the tsunami.

When a woman and baby in my part of the world survive pregnancy and birth - the question of Infant Feeding becomes most important. Asian mothers, indeed all mothers of the world are bombarded with corrupt advertising promoting Infant formula.

Where I live it is nearly impossible to find a medical birth facility where breastfeeding is supported. Pediatricians habitually promote infant formula, even though a baby in Indonesia is 300 times more likely to die in the first year of life, if s/he is bottle-fed.

We must look at the ecology of infant feeding, imagine the impact of 550 million discarded baby milk tins plus paper labels and glossy non-recyclable paper for advertising, add to that plastic bottles and rubber teats. And that represents only the waste produced if the babies in the United States bottle-fed in 1978, today the impact would be worse.

Breastfeeding has a positive effect on our environment whilst bottle-feeding has a negative effect. Breast milk is a natural, renewable resource, the perfect food for our babies; artificial baby milks are processed, non-renewable poor substitutes for this resource.

Breast milk causes no waste as it is produced in quantities according to the baby's needs. The baby's suckling determines the amount of milk produced, I can tell you first hand that even malnourished mothers can produce enough quality breast milk to feed their babies well. Nearly all babies need no other food for 6 months. According to World Health Organization optimal infant feeding is exclusive mother's milk for the first six months of life. At Bumi Sehat's birth clinics in Bali and in Aceh we have achieved a 100% breastfeeding rate by implementing nutrition education with intensive support for the breastfeeding woman from the midwives and employing the families support as well.

Breast milk production is environmentally safe as it does not pollute, it fact it saves resources. Breast milk is free, requires no extra packaging, does not have to be shipped, it protects babies against infection, passes on natural immunization to the little consumer, while benefiting the health of the lactating mother. It lowers the individual's medical care costs over a life-time; research has shown it to increase the child's health and intelligence. Breast milk is the only wise choice of infant food. . The idea that breast milk, the world's most valuable renewable food resource, should be replaced by an artificial substitute is absurd, but it is business as usual in our world today. Infant formula producers team with medical professionals in one of the most corrupt lies in history; promoting Bottle-feeding as a viable alternative to mother's milk, even in countries like mine, where the average wage of a woman and of most men, is not sufficient to buy the infant formula needed to bottle feed one baby. **Why are we not protecting our smallest citizens of Earth from this corporate lie? Because there is one problem with breast milk --no**

one can make money from it.

I am radically opposed to artificial infant feeding. Technologized birth has many social, psychological, spiritual and physical side effects, including the sabotage of breastfeeding. We have a responsibility to protect birthing women and their babies. Every breastfeeding baby and woman is a pioneer in saving our environment and living simply in the world. In a profound way they are creating peace between humans and nature. If we want to heal our planet's food, environmental and social problems - we can make a huge impact just by promoting sound maternal nutrition, gentle birth and breastfeeding.

Gentle birth and breastfeeding lay the foundation for the next generation of humans to live with an intact ability to love. This love will manifest in their relationships with all sentient beings, and with the Earth Mother herself. It is time to stop impairing our babies' ability to love.

It is time to heal the planet.

www.bumisehat.org



R to L Margo Berdeshevsky, Lawrence Ferlingetti, Reine Marie Melvin, Wil Hemmerle, Robin Lim at Shakespeare & Co.

Ibu Robin Lim(CPM) can be found in Bali and Aceh, Indonesia, with her big wonderful family supported by an amazing staff at Bumi Sehat, where between 40 and 80 babies are born gently every month. At Bumi Sehat we wait a minimum of three hours before severing the babies' umbilical cords. WE really have implemented our beliefs, which are based in research, and respect for Nature and culture. The ancient Lontar Palm Books of Bali advise a long delay before separating baby from placenta. Look for her books, "After a baby's birth" and "Eating for two... recipes for pregnant and breastfeeding women". Her next book, "Placenta the forgotten Chakra" is nearly finished. Robin Lim is a mother and grandmother. In 2009 Ibu Robin's daughter, Déjà Bernhardt released her film "Guerrilla Midwife" which is about the work of Bumi Sehat and the essential importance of gentle birth for a more peaceful planet. www.skwattacamp.com

Hirsi Ali, Ayaan, author of *Infidel*

Published by Free Press, New York, 2008

Book review by **Elaine Farmer**



Neutrality is not possible which is exactly what South African Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu said a long time before Hirsi Ali:

‘Whenever people say to you, “in this situation, we are neutral”, you can always know they have taken a decision to side with the powerful.’

A group of friends and I discussed this book recently and our discussion was long and vigorous but, interestingly, revolved more about the issues raised by the book than the book itself. Hirsi Ali might well be pleased by that. By her own admission she is a passionate advocate of a single issue: the need to free women from the oppression of cultural customs that are violent, intimidating and destructive. That her autobiography could generate interest, passion and, most especially, debate, about the kinds of difficult issues many people and cultural groups find easier to ignore than address might well justify the dangerous over-exposure the book has brought her. She now lives hedged in by close police protection.

From a literary point of view, the book is well written. The narrative moves quickly; the author doesn’t allow extraneous political or religious detail to slow the pace of her story. There is nothing plodding about it; on the contrary, she manages to instil a degree of suspense and breathless uncertainty into a story where we already know the relatively happy ending. The language is simple without being unsophisticated. Her sentences are not cluttered with cumbersome language or convoluted constructions. One has the feeling that she writes more or less as she speaks—and all this from a non-native English speaker.

Infidel actually pursues three narratives: the first autobiographical, beginning with her childhood in Somalia; the second political, addressing the question of freedom and human rights for women; the third religious, focusing on Islam and especially the role of violence within some Muslim cultures. It’s easy to get caught up in the autobiographical narrative, especially in the description of her excision when she was five. That’s the point when one has to stop reading and spend time recovering from the horror of the description, let alone of the practice itself.

It’s also the point when attention broadens from the autobiographical narrative to include the complex cultural, political and religious issues of the other two narratives. The shift occurs via pictures of two prominent women in the story—blurred pictures of her grandmother and mother, both marked by ambivalence. Clearly, these women’s lives were governed by frequently unforgiving and cruel cultural attitudes. The grandmother at least is perhaps best understood as a simple uneducated woman whose world had never broadened beyond family and village and who would be unlikely to question values giving her value and significance even if embodying harshness and cruelty.

But the mother’s case is not so simple. She had not had such a confined life. She had education, and had lived and worked independently before marrying. Her relationship with her husband seems to have started well but deteriorated over time with more downs than ups and she appears to have lived in a state of simmering anger over his absences and her isolation and enforced dependence on the charity of others. Hirsi Ali’s picture is

of a woman who is a victim of culture and circumstances she was unable to change. Perhaps she acted as best she could within the confines of her cultural group and, powerless, retreated into anger and bitterness. Her outlet for her frustration was beating the children, particularly her older daughter, Ayaan.

It seems hard to understand how she could beat and abuse her daughter so mercilessly. How could she fail to protect her from harsh cultural mores? Certainly, she was outraged by the grandmother’s organising the two girls’ excision and the boy’s circumcision without permission and in defiance of the parents’ ban on the practice but her anger—at least as reported by Hirsi Ali—seems to have been trumped by the grandmother’s passionate defence of culture. We hear little more about it after the first flush of rage. Perhaps there is some kind of self-protection in resigned acceptance of something she couldn’t change but she could have focused her anger against the cultural practice rather than collapsing into resigned acceptance.

Hirsi Ali has certainly rejected her mother’s example and stayed with anger as a response to cultural (and religious) confines. She contends that silence, along with well-meant but short-sighted and sugar-coated liberalism, contributes to the perpetuation of cruelty and injustice. Passion and advocacy do not always produce the best results though the latter certainly needs the former if change and progress in any field is to be achieved. In Hirsi Ali’s case, there is considerable doubt as to whether her methods best suit her cause. She declared herself apostate which was inevitably going to bring her into conflict with conservative Islam. One could argue that she ought to have realised that, in publicly abandoning Islam, she would weaken her capacity to champion Muslim women and their rights. We cannot know whether the outcome would have been different had she kept silent about losing faith (and lived with personal hypocrisy) and simply continued with the political battle. Maybe all we can say is that taking an anti-faith position probably gave ammunition to those threatened by her criticism.

Infidel is a challenging book. Many of us reject hardline positions that pit religion against religion; indeed, some might have thought this a thing of the past, a past in which compassion and mercy had little strength against the power of state and religious institutions. Maybe we thought we lived in more forgiving, tolerant and gentler times. What Hirsi Ali is saying is, in effect: yes, this is tough; yes, we’d all prefer to think about something else. Yes, we’d all like to believe that tolerance and mercy rule. But they don’t and we can’t allow ourselves to be suborned by fine words and lofty principles. If we believe in the cause of liberating women from oppression and violence then we must take a stand and say ‘no’. ***Neutrality is not possible which is exactly what South African Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu said a long time before Hirsi Ali: ‘Whenever people say to you, “in this situation, we are neutral”, you can always know***

they have taken a decision to side with the powerful.’ And when they do, adds one scholar, ‘History is littered with the bodies of those broken as the world watched.’

So this is the challenge of Hirsi Ali’s book: which of us is giving the nod to injustice?

In her work on suffering, Dorothee Soelle makes two statements pertinent to Hirsi Ali’s life, the women who shaped it and the battle she has made her life’s work.

First, Soelle says that when we speak out on their behalf, the marginalised and forgotten are encouraged to stand up for their rights. There are, she continues, three things necessary to their renewal—new language, new life, and new communities—but these are only effected by re-ordering all those cultural habits, traditions and moral values that have created victims and crushed life and possibility out of them.

Second, of those who would perpetuate those crushing traditions, Soelle writes:

Anyone who lives with a static world view ... that is, one that is intent on imitation and repetition of the past, cannot see learning and change as the most important things that one can achieve in life. [Their] attitude toward suffering cannot get beyond acceptance and resignation. Only where change itself is comprehended as an essential human value and acknowledged by society ... can the passive attitude toward suffering change.¹

Think of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s grandmother perpetuating practices that might have been harsh but which were her only source of self-worth. Think of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s mother beating her daughter in rage and wild frustration. Both of these women were victims without the language to express pain and rebellion. Think of Ayaan Hirsi Ali herself trying to break the pattern of the past in her own life for the sake of countless other women’s lives and we come to the *raison d’être* of her book. From this perspective, perhaps the point is not where the truth lies in the autobiographical narrative she presents (some of her family disputes her tale) so much as the controversy and debate she provokes. The outcome of *that* might just be more important than the book itself. Only time and the rescue of women from oppression will tell.

In the meantime, we are left with the challenge of her book:

Which of us is giving the nod to injustice?

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Oh Palestine!

Rebecca Tyrer

The name 'Palestine' conjures up images of suicide bombers, fundamentalists, refugees, occupation, religion and stone throwers. Hold this thought and read on about a young woman's stay five years ago in Palestine. Then, ask yourself this question – 'Has the killing stopped and the hatred washed away by the blood of innocent Palestinians and Israelis?' - Editor.

In 2004 I joined a group of eighteen strangers – teenagers to pensioners, Muslims, Jews, Christians and *Humanists* on a cycling mission from U.K. to Palestine.

As we peddled on our two month journey from London to Jerusalem, we learned each other's stories and sang the stories of those we thought we already knew. We crossed the Alps (twice), cycled along sea cliffs, through freak thunder storms in the middle of summer, and hid in one another's moving shadow as we burned our way through the Jordanian dust.

At times I didn't even know which country we were in – had we left France already? Was this Switzerland or now Italy? We *cycled* our way through borders, *seeing* the change in architecture, road signs or even topography, as political demarcations of previous battles were dictated by mountains, rivers or sea. That was until we arrived on the border of Israel and then our weeks of free movement was interrogated, stripped and placed through an x-ray machine. Our band of merry cyclists was disbanded and separated into color and creed; brown on one side, white on the other, and coming from the UK, where all colors mix and 'race' is something you do at sports-day, we all felt a little violated... defensive of our 'oneness'. But our message of 'Peace' was allowed to cross another border - another 'frontier of civilization' - and we continued on cycling from Nazareth to Jenin from 'civilization' to destruction.

We were followed by a police escort along the bitumen road until it literally turned into rubble and a pile of concrete blocks which would have stopped even the most mighty elephantine remover of obstacles. This was our first experience of a check-point and according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, one of the 541 permanent road blocks in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, which prevent unrestricted travel; Choking the life-lines of a people trying to continue their businesses, social engagements and education. In many places human like animals are filtered through turn stiles, spun out into the farm 'paper control' as refugee status is checked for a people



© Martin Searle & Courtesy Rebecca Tyrer

still living in the country they have been made a refugee from...it was this restriction on movement that was most shocking to us.

As an occupied 'territory' the Palestinian Authority it is not in a legal position of independence to protect the civil liberties of its demi-citizens. And as I had suspected before my journey, despite the apparent freedom of information and globalised communication systems, distorted accounts of lived realities only manage to percolate through a maze of physical and metaphysical barriers. A philosophical definition of 'freedom' is to be able to exercise choice and make decisions without constraint – to be autonomous. And yet for those living in Israel and Palestine, even freedom of thought seems to be regulated from birth. Children live isolated from their neighbors of whom they share sacred religious spaces and essential natural resources. Meanwhile their parents and grandparents often speak Arabic and Hebrew, but the only contact Palestinian children will have with Israeli citizens are its soldiers. Concrete walls, electric fences and sonar systems separate communities living within a stone's throw of the other. Alternatively, children are growing up in an environment where it is *too* easy demonize the 'other' side; unable to interact with children their own age, of whom they absolutely need to grow up *understanding* in order to live without the fear of persecution for being of a different religion or race. Just as Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson stated, *"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."*

But as a political scientist I searched for logical explanations and in doing so I was drawn towards asking *how* people remain so disconnected from their political responsibilities. My search took me to join the

team of the Alternative Information Centre (AIC), which has its foundations firmly rooted in socialist ethics; where the common theme of humanity could be joined together in the interests of all. The mission statement of the AIC - <http://www.alternativenews.org>

"[T] to promote full individual and collective social, economic, political and gender equality, freedom and democracy and a rejection of the philosophy (ideology and praxis) (weltanschauung) of separation."

What this means in practice is that it is a truly joint Palestinian and Israeli venture, which was working for the 'same' side – for peace and for justice, and was doing so by remaining committed to providing free and fair information, without the colored lens of government or religious bodies. However, it was not simply to work together: my Israeli colleagues would have to sneak over the border every week to hold a staff meeting in our Bethlehem office, as it was far less of a risk for them to do so than for my Palestinian colleagues to risk imprisonment. In fact, it was this mutually beneficial dialogue which is often covered over by images of hatred and persecution. The reality is that the courage and bravery of those who have achieved enlightenment of truth and justice, despite the incredible pressures of society was astounding and far harder to achieve than those who remain on the fringes of internal propaganda. Incidentally, there is a growing voice of discontent among young and courageous Israelis who are uniting to fight their own powers, parents and precedents. By doing so they are juggling their reputation as a law-abiding citizen with a criminal record.

When I stood in demonstrations against illegal walls and demolitions, I stood side by side by Palestinian farmers, grandmothers, Imams and Israeli youths. I remember standing next to a Rabbi for Human Rights, who stood in defiance in Occupied Palestinian Territories fighting the illegal construction of the Separation Wall. Underneath his faded baseball cap was his kippah. Although his religious identity was superficially covered, it was his belief in the sanctity of the Torah that provided him with the passion to fight for the Rights and Freedoms of his Palestinian neighbors.

Now when I think about 'Palestine', probably the most vivid images which flicker across my mind are the faces of the friends I made and which I left behind there. I think of those in my office; the secretary who was Christian and Palestinian, who would dream about what 'peace' would mean to her and her family and about how it would mean being able to take her little girl to the zoo for the first time. I think about when I asked my friend why he was late for work one summer's day and

he replied because he spent the morning with one side of his face on the ground and the other underneath an army boot. And I think about when I sat face to shrapnel scared face with a Palestinian fighter; I *feel* about how I *felt* as I heard him recall his occupied youth and exploded dreams, about the beautiful peaceful future he envisioned for his baby daughter: baby in one arm, AK 47 in the other. I think about the clarity of the vicious circle of redemption which became so painfully obvious, as lives are destroyed taking with them the value of humanity and allowing the destructive cycle to continue.

But most of all I feel a deep uneasiness, for having the freedom to leave when my friends have only the tentative freedom to stay and only the dreams to travel.

As Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."



© Mark Ulyseas

Delhi 20.03.07

A huge storm hangs overhead in dark clouds. In the little park opposite they are practising for a wedding in the half-light, with thunder rumbling and the heavens waiting to open. They made, in 24 hours, this construction for the wedding, but now the clouds gather and I wonder how auspicious a downpour would be? I await, watch, my face still swollen by dentistry, but only one cigarette all day. It is now 3.15 and I shall try and wait till 7 before having one more. At 5 I have acupressure.

Where lies God in this land? Guru ‘G’, Patrick, Acupressure, the dentist Giroti, or could only a Man, who leads one to the inner self, be any real help, in this world of Magic?

The singer’s voice mingles with thunder, the Hindi words unknown to me, as The Tempest begins and despite torrential rain, the tents being ripped, the marriage ceremony continues, unabated. The singer and band play on.

All is accepted here even the interruption of nature is not to be run from, as we in the west would, no: they carry on awaiting lightening strikes and the eventual cessation of the huge drops of rain. The orator continues, the Sitar still plays, the blessing takes place despite, or in harmony, with nature’s offering. Perhaps this is why Tarun Giroti, (the dentist), would think it fine for me to get on a plane to Bombay with a face swollen like a football and yet indirectly, has he not forced me, to finally look at my nicotine addiction? Does this give him Guru status? For sure not possible with just a wish and a wish is such a nebulous term it can cover a multitude of sins...

My whole mouth vibrates to a mending self that demands clean water more than anything. This chance of purity put upon me. A cleansing offered and yet all that has suffered and wishes, (like it or not, it is within us all), to continue suffering as a habit, rebels, against the opportunity. A chance, in advance... Can I be A real man; exert choice, take purity in a bottle of Himalayan, water? Why have two? When one is more than enough? Carrion birds, vultures, preventive medicines and Gurus, my own life, no more than a glimmer of a shadow in a hot, still, baking, Delhi sun. Another culture, ‘Kulcher’, as Ginsberg called it.

A night full of strange dreams. Surreal situations populated by the dead doing odd things, with the present. Where does it all go? -Time that is, nothing changing yet everything changing even, perhaps, each pulse rate? I am as unaware of the internal mechanism of life as I am the external. Disparities wage war in the stomach and the Middle East, neither fathomable. And I am no different, in being the same, as all molecules of man, making mankind that appears so cruel...but I do not know:

A salvation of sorts for everyone and so, to those who purport to know about either world, in which we participate, you live in a dream, dangerously infecting the species with your certainties...

Oh Rock & Mr Roll...

Two Worlds
Robin Marchesi

Bali 01.04.07

Bali after long exhaustive journey, my first trip to the Southern Hemisphere and it is hot, humid, as if the air itself has been boiled.

Lots of little temple like structures but we sleep, jet lagged beyond belief, stomach erupting like the volcano, which is a tourist trap situated in the middle of the island.

Sarah has a friend here who’s over effusive, wide-eyed look, although genuine and kind lurks on the precipice of sheer desperation. He dresses well, although his shock of premature white hair speaks volumes.

One can tell there is a suicidal trait to his devil may care attitude. He sees himself as some kind of Lothario, asking all the girls if, “they are married”. He speaks non-stop, gushing out his fears, in a volley of verbalism, that one can react too, only by smiling and nodding, in agreement.

He obviously has island troubles like Richard, in Ibiza, dodging people with well honed skills and ‘ligging’ a life through his charm, his poetry, his photos, his perpetual promise, that one day, his deserved fame and fortune, will drop, like manna from the heavens.

I like him.

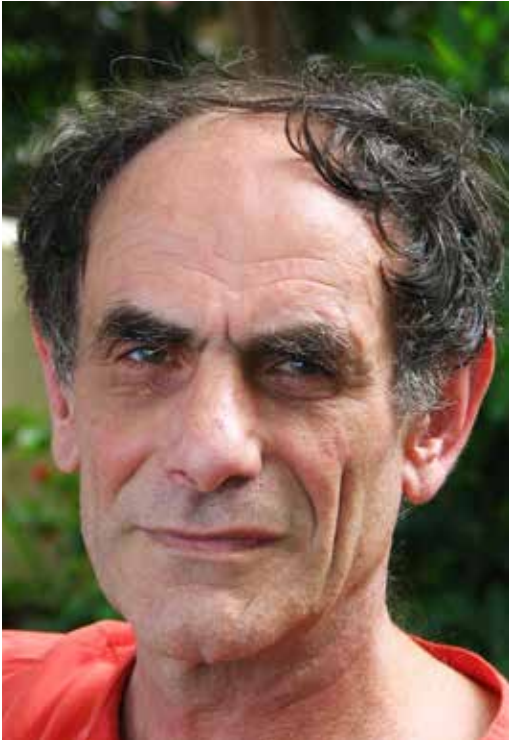
He is more real than the Guru/Healer, although his eyes definitely remind me of Guru G’s, in that they look at you, but at the same time, don’t! His life he informs me, has been reduced to a suitcase plus some digital equipment. He says it with a huge disillusionment but there is, Buddhist style, so much to be admired, in a man whose materialism has been stripped bare, especially an older one.

Hopelessness is very close to real hope if one is not counting the cost, going backward over the annals of one’s life, continually berating the self, for one’s present situation. One needs to let go, get back to the present...I go on... too much Ranting and Raving with the pen, in this closeness of air, humid above the huge palms, listening for an inner voice in this quiet. And although, I have slept, fitfully for 16 hours, I note the gentle calm of this place. Its tranquillity and peace...Dark vibrations and too many, or more motorbikes, than I imagined possible. The flash of a camera. Huge undulating clouds massing on the borders of night. The light flickers to an insectual dance.

Self-obsession written in every spoken word. These elements of communication lost in non-listening, where all want to only hear themselves. In the darkness, this murmur of magic set in small offerings before Gods at Temples, unable to eat through their non-physicality – Wish – For whatever, especially material success – Let me grant it

Believe in Macumba.

Superstition is a rather splendid thing as long as you don’t believe it.



© Mark Ulyseas

Robin Marchesi was born in 1951. He was educated at Oxford and London Universities. He has lived ‘on his wits’ throughout the world and has several published works including Kyoto Garden A B C Quest and A Small Journal of Heroin Addiction. He has worked on and off for the Sculptor Barry Flanagan OBE, a Rilke to a Rodin. At the moment he is living in London completing his latest work entitled:”Prospero’s Cell.”

Introducing Uniquely Singapore

X'Ho



© X'ho

What's this marvelous 'economic wonder' of Asia named Singapore really like? Well, it is almost everything you'd expect from a modern industrialized city. Things are pretty organized on the surface – loads of shopping malls, an efficient inter-district train system named the MRT, clean roads, hygienic tap water, etc. – to the point that it was all taken for granted as sterile. Being one who's keen on 'undercurrents', I am here to introduce another side of Singapore many Singaporeans would choose not to discuss for fear of reprisal from the powerful morning press *The Straits Times*. Powerful, because it is the national paper that defines all things Singaporean and what's acceptable within the establishment.

For a start, the press and all forms of the broadcasting media are firmly controlled by the Singapore Government through the MDA – Media Development Authority. If that doesn't raise your eyebrow, perhaps this might: Recently a pal mentioned to his fellow Briton that I have a new third book that critiques Singapore, to which the fellow Briton remarked - Isn't there any government in Singapore that X' likes? My pal's reply did shock the Briton – But there's been only one government since Singapore's independence in 1965!

Singapore is a young and *small* country. At the start, enough power was bestowed on a promising leader to govern, enough for that man to eventually wrestle it *all* from Singaporeans' hands – and for the good of the country too, it has been stated, lest you think the rationale is otherwise.

So, just an Orwellian example of authoritarian success... what's new? Surely not everyone knows what's behind the so-called 'economic wonder' and why some expatriates in Singapore have come away describing the tiny isle as a form of 'benign fascism'. Little wonder

why so many countries wish to emulate Singapore's success, benign does have its appeal. But ask our *true* opposition leaders and they'll surely have bones to pick about 'benign', especially when Singapore has a law that allows imprisonment without trial for the purpose of internal security. Just this year, a new law was passed to prosecute any unlawful assembly even when the assembly is a party of one! Don't bother brandishing the word 'ridiculous' on Singapore, she's circumvented that critique by branding herself 'Uniquely' to the world these last ten over years.

Let me cite an example to show how criticism of Singapore stops at *The Straits Times*. It reported on Oct 18, 08 that The Human Rights Watch – a New York advocacy group called on Singapore leaders to "end the practice of using defamation suits to stifle political opposition. The Singapore Government responded by saying that opposition politicians have the right to criticize the Government but that does not entitle them to tell lies or defame". The natural conclusion to be drawn from that would be – quite uniquely, only Singapore's opposition leaders are fond of telling lies since we don't hear much of other countries' opposition leaders being sued. Yet such simple logic of mine is never uttered or discussed in the local press! That should say much about our upright system.

When push comes to shove, the authorities in Singapore will always use the trump argument – we are a small country, therefore dire measures need to be in place for the country to survive. Truth is, they are not really talking about survival but excelling to be a world statistic. Nothing wrong with great ambition but guess who has to pay the price and at what cost? Come to Singapore to live and you'll understand who's at a loss.

Singapore's State Ministers are the world's highest paid, and that's a fact. Until this recent economic recession, the pay was a monetary-figure about six times that of the US president for each of the top guns in Singapore – that's guns with an s. For we have four here: the Prime Minister, his father (and modern Singapore's 'founding father') the Minister Mentor, the Senior Minister and the President. All that should work out to be roughly 24 times the US president's basic pay. Singapore's population? A mere 4 million. A wonder, indeed. It is certainly a tenable way of eliminating corruption at the top, if corruption simply means illicit appropriation of State funds.

Now you understand why, in Singapore, the majority

race (Chinese) – rather than the minority races (Malays, Indians & others) – have the most thumb-down and frustrated look on their everyday faces, especially those driving flashy cars. You'd think they'd be all smiles and jubilant. I can't wait for you to come and experience the *uniquely* wonder of my 'no ordinary country'. Warning: try not to pick up the ugly scowling look of everyday Singaporeans who don't even realize they are scowling or sneering gleefully away. I call them 'repressed ya-ya-papayas' – completely self-unaware, self-righteous, space-encroaching and defensive. Read on to know why.

Do come and learn about our ERP (Electronic Road Pricing), GRC (Group Representation Constituency), COE (Certificate Of Entitlement) and CPF (Central Provident Fund, a kind of State-enforced retirement saving, whose recent ruling is – withdrawal of the fund, possible only upon reaching the age of 85!). There's more yet.

I recommend opening the Pandora's Box on why we have NMPs (Nominated Member of Parliament); Speakers' Corner; the ongoing courtesy campaign plus endless other campaigns despite a so-called up-to-the-mark education system; why Singaporeans don't know how to co-operate with each other as a people; why the current urgent call for Singaporeans to 'think out of the box'; why there's a massive jam on the highway when there's a traffic accident on the adjacent highway moving in the opposite direction; why motorists don't give way to others; why that one-bottle of duty-free liquor a traveling Singaporean is entitled to purchase upon return is, under the law, not allowed to be given away as a gift; why all the different taxi surcharges passengers have to pay at different times of the day and week; why bar-top dancers are not allowed, as defined by law, to chat with patrons *before, during and after* their dance; and most of all, why the local jargon '*kiasu*' (the self-serving neurosis of losing out to another) is such an important catch-word in the Singapore system.

Pretty mindboggling stuff, I agree. It is precisely the reason why Singaporeans have become apathetic to the point of being self-unaware and lacking in social graces; grace being the key word missing from the Government's all-encompassing economic agenda.

To truly understand Singaporeans, let me paraphrase a quip I got from the Internet about being stranded on a desert-island. Two Italian men and a lady stranded on a deserted island, what happens? The two fought and one killed the other to have the lady. Two American men and a lady stranded on a deserted

island: They both had the lady together. Two Thai men and a lady stranded on a deserted island: The first man rented the lady to the second man for two baht a night. Two Singaporean men and a lady stranded on a deserted island: The two men did nothing because there was no instruction from their Government.

Perhaps now you can see why 'thinking out of the box' has become a national imperative in Singapore; but really, it just means thinking out of the box but within the box or else, Internal Security could still come knocking – a fact that leaves Singaporeans all the more skeptical of the maverick calling. Paralyzed by fear but having to condescend to a no-climate-of-fear turns the average Singaporean into a uniquely apathetic robot, if not pathetic defensive wreck. Check with *The Straits Times* and all you see are innumerable reports of Singaporeans being "upbeat".

And *The Straits Times* always has the last word since there's no other. Ah, but there's the Internet now. Hence, the newer Singapore climate – freer but supremely '*kiasu*'.

Party of one, my friend!



© X'ho

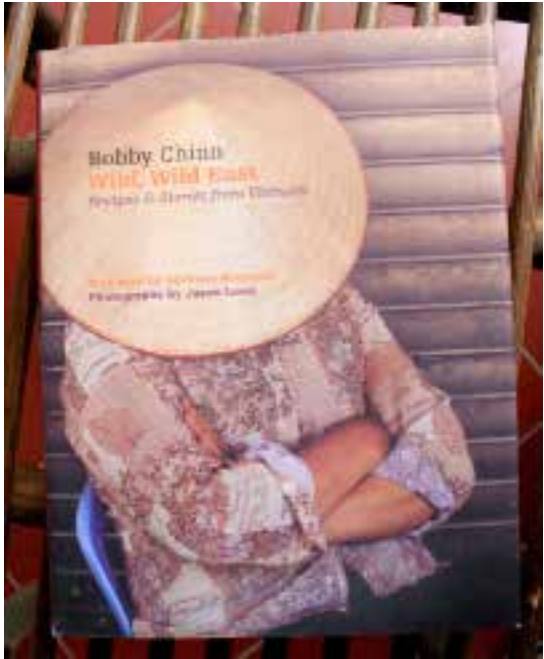
X'Ho is a Singapore musician/author/experimental filmmaker who is better accepted back home as Chris Ho, the DJ. To date, he has written three books about Singapore and made six shorts – the fourth Allen Ginsberg Gives Great Head was the only from Singapore to be in competition at the International Film Festival, Rotterdam 2008. His new solo music-album No Ordinary Country, now the first 'protest folk' album from Singapore, received this praise from *The Business Times*: "(It) should be required listening for anyone interested in plugging into a part of Singapore's zeitgeist that too often lies simmering below the surface." www.xhosux.com, www.myspace.com/xhosux

Editor – I met Bobby when he convulsed into spasms and shades of Lenny Bruce while demonstrating how he prepared Wagyu beef steaks and his signature dish, crab cakes, at a hotel in Bali. His captivating cuisine and equally enchanting true stories of his ongoing sojourn through the Asian Diaspora makes him a culinary magician. As an exotic treat we bring you, by special permission of Bobby Chinn and his publishers, a chapter from his bestselling book–

Wild, Wild East, Recipes & Stories from Vietnam.

HAIR OF THE DOG

Bobby Chinn



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‘Bobby Chinn, chef, long time resident of South East Asia, television personality, hustler, International Man of Mystery... what Bobby doesn’t know about Southeast Asian food is not worth knowing.’
- Anthony Bourdain

A friend of mine, Mark McDonald, a regular at my last restaurant in Hanoi, knew a young tour guide whose father cooked dog for a living. A regular dog caterer, in fact...grilled, braised, kebabs, schnitzel, soup, satay, stew – you name it, he cooked it.

The kid was regaling my friend with his father’s tales of hardship during ‘The American War’: living in the jungle, suffering from malaria, lack of shelter, shooting tigers, and other wild animals for food, that kind of thing. The war, of course, was a living nightmare for everybody who went through it, whether they were in the jungle or the city.

Eventually he got on to the subject of how his father, a common Viet Cong foot soldier, had come across a dead American pilot who was caught hanging in a tree by his parachute. Since the old man was doing the cooking for his troop, and since they were suffering from serious fatigue and a lack of protein, he decided to cut a piece of flesh from the pilot’s thigh. He simply dropped it into the soup he was making that night. When the troops ate the soup, many of them didn’t like the flavour. ‘Too strong’, they said. ‘Too gamey.’

Now, twenty-five years later, the father is one of the great dog chefs of Vietnam. The kid invited us over for dinner with the promise that his father would prepare dog the customary and legendary seventeen different ways – a full-on buffet, doggie-style.

My pal, a reporter, asked his photographer and me to come along. He suggested I ask culinary questions during the dinner so it would appear that the story was about canine cuisine, although his real interest was in the gory tales of the war. What better way to talk about eating a side of a man than over a little dinner of dog?

The dinner took place in the old man’s house in a working-class district on the outskirts of Hanoi. The house was hidden behind a bunch of storefronts that were selling cheap pottery, electrical gadgets and various plumbing supplies that were laced in a thin layer of dust. I arrived late, and had to walk through a maze of scattered pots, PVC pipes, an array of coils and wires, and Soviet electrical gizmos that would best be described as really bad junk.

Everyone was waiting patiently, quietly sipping cups of bitter green tea. As I entered, I apologized for being late,



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but could not figure out why my friends were looking so tense. The faint sound of traffic was punctuated with the sound of two dogs – one howling, one barking – in the backyard.

‘With all seriousness, I have to ask, is that dinner?’

‘With all seriousness, I have no idea,’ Mark responded, blushing either with nerves or embarrassment, I could not really tell.

Dining on man’s best friend is a strange emotional dilemma and the three of us were petrified.

While the food was being prepared out of sight, in a kitchen out back, I started to run through all the culinary questions that I could muster in my head. We sat there speechless as the sound of a moaning dog filled the air like a cruel winter wind.

After about twenty minutes our host finally arrived and greeted us. He apologised for not having enough time to prepare all seventeen versions of dog. I think it’s fair to say he was a real expert. You know how people always say there are ninety-nine ways to skin a cat, but nobody can tell you ‘the way’ to skin it? If anyone could, it would be this guy.

The table was graced with sliced dog, stir-fried dog with lemon grass, and a dog soup, which contained what appeared to be the shank of the dog.

Like many Vietnamese dishes, dog is accompanied with a dipping sauce to complement the flavours and tie the dish together. Eating dog without the dipping sauce is rather like eating sushi without soya sauce and wasabi. Unfortunately this light purple sauce with the consistency of watery ketchup smells bad and tastes worse. It is the closest thing to fermented shrimp shit you can get and seems to continue fermenting in front of your eyes as fine white bubbles coat the inside of the dipping bowl. It has taken me eight years to acquire a taste for it, and I still do not really like it.

As we sized up the dishes, we darted looks at each other, knowing that the moment of truth had arrived. Wondering which one of us would start, visions of my first dog started to run through my head. Then all my friends’ dogs. They say that when you die, you watch images of your life hurtle by. When you eat dog, the experience is rather similar. You think about every dog you’ve ever been close to. The thought struck me: What the hell am I doing? Have I lost my mind?

Our host, wanting to honour his foreign guests at Tet, the lunar New Year, graciously pointed out the three boiled pigs’ eyes. They were sitting in a bowl, like Cyclops – a



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real treat here, especially during Tet. Tet does that to people – they are generally much more generous and thoughtful during this very special time. But having three eyes – with detached retinas – staring at us was more than a little eerie and I quickly retreated to my Islamic upbringing.

It was me who started eating first, under the pretence that I was the most adventurous one, when in fact I was just quickest to detect the smallest portion of boiled dog available. It sat there in front of me on an oval plastic platter – thinly sliced and fanned nicely over the plate, free of garnishes and vegetables. It was nothing, I reasoned, but beef.

I proceeded to remove the fat from the meat, peeling it away and placing it on the side of the plate. It reminded me of the fat from a breast of a duck, except it was slightly charred. I turned to our hosts, gave the most superficial smile I could muster, then dropped the meat in my mouth and started to chew quickly. As the flavours released, the tastes took me right back to English boarding school. The dog tasted exactly like the roast beef they used to serve every Sunday with Yorkshire pudding: dry, overcooked, and chewy except the dog had no large exposed blood

vessels. I quickly washed it down with beer, but the taste lingered heavily on my palate. I needed to reassure the other guys that the dog was actually edible and we are all just facing an emotional barrier. ‘Tastes a little like roast beef,’ I said, ‘but if you put roast beef next to it, I am sure I would be able to tell the difference.’

Next was fried dog. Just as I put it into my mouth my friend frowned and complained that it was very strong, which it was. It was hard to spit it out, so I manipulated it to the back of my tongue, reached for a beer and tried to wash it down. Gamey would be an understatement: ‘doggie’ would be a better description.

Then we went for the soup. Our hosts were both feverishly chowing down. As I watched them shovel up pieces of dog, like famished construction workers with a limited lunch break, I could only think to myself that we (the Americans) never had a chance here. The meal for us was pretty much over within three minutes. We were like three anorexics just doing face time at a dinner table. Conversation during a Vietnamese meal is usually very limited. The table usually falls into silence, with the exception of slurps and the ploughing of rice bowls and chopsticks. This was the opportune moment to ask all my questions and thereby avoid the food. I would learn that the best dogs for eating are six months to one year old, and the young females are best of all. The Chinese and Koreans, true connoisseurs, buy a lot of dogs from Vietnam.

When I asked our host if there was any part of the dog that couldn’t be eaten, he didn’t miss a beat. ‘The hair,’ he said, without the slightest trace of humour or irony. Surely the paws couldn’t be eaten? No, they’re savoured in soups and stocks. There is no prized cut from a dog, apparently, although cooking techniques and execution are critical.

The normal diet for a dog is rice and leftovers which sounds perfect for a Vietnamese pet, but the dogs raised for eating are special. **They’re a strange half-breed that’s older and fatter than the normal Vietnamese house-dog, but strangely favoured by expatriates. I know some who have gone out of their way to save a dog, which they will then feed and fatten up only for the poor thing to be dog-napped by someone.**

Curiously, those who eat dog only eat a certain type – an intellectual justification for those who regard the little darlings as part of the family. **The chef said other dogs do not taste like the mutts he cooks. He made a point of telling me that ‘the German dog’ is not good for eating. What? When was this guy in Germany? It sounded like he must have eaten a German shepherd. I imagine that during the hardships of war, they were forced to take on the K-9 corps of the US army. Hell, if**

he could eat a piece of leg from a dead pilot hanging from a tree, then dogs that were wounded or dead on the battlefield must have seemed like fair game.

On the Yin-Yang chart of hot and cold foods, dog makes you hot. It is a winter dish, eaten in northern areas, where the winters get very cold. When you eat dog in summer, it’s said that you release a strange smell when you sweat. Dogs, apparently, can pick up on the scent, and I suspect they think you’re some kind of werewolf.

Dog meat is more expensive than chicken, but cheaper than beef, and the price fluctuates according to the whole lunar calendar of karma and superstition. It is eaten for good luck during the last two weeks of a calendar month. Our dinner took place around Tet, when dog is in very high demand, and costs about \$1.25 a pound.

There were just five of us at dinner that night, so the neighbours were given the dog’s head. Others were awarded the intestines, liver and stomach. Thank God for neighbours. The chef asked us if we had a problem eating dog, which was very difficult to answer given that the guy had not only eaten a piece of American pilot, but had also cooked him.

As our hosts continued to work their way through the dog dishes, the rest of us were content to eat the bread and drink the warm beer. A small cat began to rub up against us, mewing and whining and twitching. When our hosts finished their meal and cleared the table, they fed the leftovers to the cat, which sent the scrawny feline into a kind of sexual rapture.

Yes, indeed, it’s dog-eat-dog world. Actually, it is worse than that. Man eats monkey brains, cat eats dog, cows eat sheep, and vegetarians are starting to make much more sense to me by the minute.



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Bobby Chinn is half Chinese, half Egyptian, raised in England, lived in San Francisco and New York and now based in Hanoi. He is one of the most respected chefs in Asia. Coming from a family of great cooks, Bobby has always been passionate about food and he was taken under the wings of various cutting edge San Francisco chefs – Hubert Keller, Gary Danko and Traci des Jardine – where he learnt his trade. His series on Asia is being filmed for Discovery. He has also appeared in the UK on BBC2’s Saturday Kitchen and Full On Food. © Bobby Chinn. By special permission of the publishers www.conran-octopus.co.uk It is available at all Periplus outlets in Indonesia.



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Navicula

Bali's Own Green Grunge Band
Lakota Moira

Music in Indonesia is driven by the cigarette industry, without their sponsorship, bands don't get heard. Navicula members; Robi (guitar, vocals), Dankie (guitar), Made (Bass), and Gembull (drums) have just released their sixth album titled 'Salto' (summersault) without sponsorship from cigarette companies. This is their way of singing out for a healthier new generation.

"Navicula" means "Little Ship" in Latin; it also is the name of a kind of single celled golden-green algae (which could also be the inspiration for the band's grungy fashion statements). Navicula, the band, formed in 1996 in Denpasar, Bali has reinvented itself many times. Their music has a grunge rock undertone, combined with many other genres of sound including, ethnic, psychedelic, alternative progressive, folk and straightforward good old rock and roll.

Gede Robi's lyrics are heavy with messages of peace, love, freedom, human rights, and environmental activism. This may be due to Robi's roots in the

agricultural village of Pupuan, Tabanan, where he hopes to return and work the soil as a farmer someday in the future, when he's too old to tour in grunge costumes. The son of a trans-migrant family, Robi was actually born in Palu, Sulawesi, six hours from Poso, the heart of the religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. Robi viewed this piece of history from center ground as a young Hindu.

On this new album the banner song is called, "Over Konsumsi". This song sums up the philosophy of the musicians as they strive to build awareness in the consciousness of their enthusiastic fans. The point of the song is not only to criticize the businesses and countries who are destroying our planet, it brings it all back to individuals and asks the listeners to take personal responsibility for preserving our fragile Earth home. "Save ourselves, from ourselves.... America, reduce your gas emissions, Germany stop producing agro chemicals, Japan and China, you should have cared for Asia. All of us have over consumed.... and here in

Indonesia the forests are gone as a result, disasters come."

Navicula is a local True Bali band, independent but active in the Indonesian music scene. Their national profile is growing with fans all over the globe. From 2004-2006 Navicula was signed with major label Sony/BMG and released one album titled "Alkemis", however because of differences in vision, Navicula chose to return to their independent roots, and released their 5th album "Beautiful Rebel" independently in 2007, it reflects the band's idealism with lyrics that are controversial enough to scare away television air time. "On the screen you sell religion... Mr. Commercial tell a lie, Mr. Consumer superstitious, Turn off the TV, turn OFF the TV." The biggest hit on this album is the song called, "Aku Bukan Mesin" (I am not a Machine). It harvested the Indo Music Critics' best praises.

Gede Robi looks like a grungy angel, in psychedelic clothing; while his mind is universal he is a true son of Bali's upcountry green hills with all its sunshine, clouds, poetry and storms. In his personal and professional life he 'walks his talk', or shall we say, he 'walks his ROCK!'

An "on the fly" interview with Gede Robi of Navicula.

Lakota: What values sing to your heart? What is your true passion?

Robi: First of all, I love music and I feel that music is very powerful in influencing people. I also have ideas that I spread to the world through my lyrics. These ideas are my perspective about social and environmental issues. I feel that I am just a journalist who delivers news through the medium of music.

Lakota: When you have your own children, would you want them to listen to the kind of music Navicula is making today?

Robi: I feel that music is a universal language, and can be enjoyed by everyone. The messages in my music are positive, and of course as a parent I will want my children to receive positive influences. But I would not force my children to like what I like. However, I do hope that they will like art, whether it is music, visual arts, or anything else. This world is so dynamic... maybe my children will listen to music of their own era. Aside from that, I will be very proud to show them that I have made a contribution to my generation, something that is priceless.

Lakota: Oppie Andaresta told us that she is a Navicula fan and that your music is healing for individual hearts and for the Planet. Do you believe that musicians have the power to heal?

Robi: Oppie is an amazing artist and I am honored that she enjoys my music. As musicians, we both are very aware that we have the power to influence our audience. This is an opportunity that comes with great responsibility. We agree that the world at this time is infected by very complex disease and hence requires extra attention to heal. Most of the text from holy books was originally written in song. The Bhagavad Gita (a holy Hindu book) means "Songs of God". So, yes I believe that music has the ability to heal, or even 'Save the World'.

Lakota: You have been called a Balinese John Lennon. You are raw and full of meaning. Can you stay unpolluted? Or, can we expect to find a lot of trashy plastic along the roadsides and rivers of your soul?

Robi: It is a struggle to stay idealistic in this society that is ever more materialistic and polluted. However, it is a satisfaction and even orgasmic experience to be like a lotus in the mud, with a clean flower (our soul) on the surface. The most important thing is that my soul already has a very functional and effective recycling system in place.

NAVICULA



After an interview with Rolling Stone Indonesia, which will be published in one of their upcoming editions, Navicula was invited to headline the Rolling Stone Magazine August Edition release party at the Rolling Stone Magazine Headquarters in Jakarta on August 5th, 2009. More info: www.rollingstone.co.id. Follow Navicula and find out about their upcoming gigs at: www.naviculamusic.com. Email: Navicula@naviculamusic.com

The Importance of Being Oscar Wilde

Mark Ulyseas



We are now into the second day of this lively festival of internationally renowned dead writers who have arrived in paradise wearing coats of many cultures waxing eloquent on the frailties of life and the temptations of physiological attractions.

When I dropped into the festival office to collect my Press Lunch Pass I was greeted by the apparition of Oscar Wilde singing platitudes in a longitude position, sipping ever so gently on absinthe whilst tapping his upright knee with his index finger.

He glanced at me and said with a flourish, “My dear fellow are you one of the locals? Could you be so kind as to tell one what a gentleman of leisure may indulge in after 10.30 pm in Ubud, for I’ve noticed it gets awfully quiet and submissive to the elements?”

I invited him to join me on a nocturnal run, down to Kuta, to partake of decadence in throbbing environs.

“You’re a good soul, if ever one exists. Thank you,” he replied.

Before I embark on an evening with a Victorian celebrity permit me to enlighten you on the distinguished gentleman in question.

To understand this famous Irish Playwright of the Victorian Era it is essential to read his two famous works, a play titled The Importance of Being Earnest and the sole novel that he wrote, The Picture of Dorian Gray. Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854 and died penniless in Paris in 1900. His life as a dandy and bisexual was the subject of much gossip in the hypocritical and suppressed Victorian society. His downfall came when he was convicted of homoeroticism and incarcerated for two years. On his release he quietly left for Paris where he spent the last three years of his

*“As for society – civilized society,
at least is never very ready to believe
anything to the detriment of those who
are both rich and fascinating.
It feels instinctively that manners are
more important than morals.”*

Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde

life under the assumed name of Sebastian Melmoth. He is buried at the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris. The works of Oscar Wilde continues to be relevant even today where sections of society in many countries still remain suppressed by self appointed moralists masquerading as keepers of a faith.

Later in the day when the sun had set and the full moon rose to the occasion, we drove down to Mix Well on Jalan Dyana Pura to witness the likes of Priscilla Queen of The Desert perform, in the heat of the night, a hip displacing rendition of Dancing Queen.

The steamy atmosphere, blinking lights and perspiring bodies of plebeians sandwiched between Johnny Walkers and Bintang was acutely unbearable even for Oscar who appeared flustered by the scene.

“Let’s go somewhere else, please”, he said.

We walked across the street to Kudos and ensconced ourselves on a cement sofa festooned with red cushions; and soon we were whetting our whistles with strawberry martinis and gazing, albeit a bit distractedly, at the shenanigans of the night crawlers.

I turned to Oscar and asked, “Could you share with the readers some of your thoughts on life in general and a brief sketch of your novel The Picture of Dorian Gray?”

His reply encapsulated a number of his witticisms from his published works and is probably familiar to Wilde’s avid followers. However, for the benefit of those unfortunates who have yet to encounter this literary giant’s outpourings, here is a taste of Oscar Wilde!

“Let me begin by saying that it is perfectly monstrous the way people go about, nowadays, saying things against one behind one’s back that are absolutely and entirely true.

Mark, I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good character and my enemies for their good intellect.

I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world. What a fuss people make about fidelity. Why even in love it is purely a question of physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will. Young men want to be faithful, and are not, old men want to be faithless, and cannot.

And when it comes to reason, I have this to say – I can stand brute force, brute reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It is hitting below the intellect.

As for society – civilized society, at least is never very

ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It feels instinctively that manners are more important than morals.

However, I love scandals about other people, but scandals about myself don’t interest me. They have not got the charm of novelty.

I was married once and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties. Most of the time, I never knew where my wife was and my wife never knew what I was doing.

Those who are faithful know only the trivial side of love; it is the faithless who know love’s tragedies. Therefore, one should always be in love. That is the reason why one should never marry.

To love oneself is the beginning of a life long romance.



I believe that if a man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream – I believe that the world would gain such fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of medievalism. But the bravest among us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure or the luxury of regret. The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.

And speaking about temptation, let us yield to another round of martinis. What say you my friend”, said Oscar.

I ordered another round of drinks. By now two Bencongs (girly boys) were sitting at our table listening to Oscar craft each sentence and enunciate every word, rolling them on his tongue and spinning them out. Though they didn’t understand a word it was apparent that they were mesmerized by Oscar’s theatricals.

A rough sketch of The Picture of Dorian Gray:
Dorian gray is an effeminate and beautiful young man whose portrait is painted by an artist named Basil Hallward. When Lord Henry, a friend of Basil’s, meets Dorian he convinces him that beauty and fulfilling one’s desires were the main essentials of life. Aware at this point that he would in time lose his beauty the narcissist in him comes to the fore. “How sad it is!” murmured Dorian Gray with his eyes still fixed upon his own portrait, “How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!”

Though Dorian’s wish comes true his portrait absorbs all the ugliness of his life. It slowly morphs into a grotesque image. Dorian in a fit of conscious rage murders Basil Hallward (the artist) for having created the portrait. At the end of the novel he attempts to destroy the picture with a knife. He fails and is discovered by his servants in a mummified form with a knife in his heart. The picture reverts to its original splendor.

Oscar took a sip of his drink and looked at me and said, “Aaahhhh! ...fair youth and beauty are both impostors for they lull us into false notions that we can remain the same forever. But youth is a passing phase, just one part of our whole lives. Narcissism reigns supreme when we

feel the freshness in our loins and the brightness in our hearts. For a moment we think we can be young and beautiful forever.”

Loud music suddenly erupted in the restaurant drowning out all hopes of further conversation. I fondled my drink as Oscar went into spasms trying to communicate in sign language with the Bencongs. After a few minutes he turned to me and patted my hand to catch my attention. He gestured that he would not be returning to the hills with me that night.

I left the pulsating place for the comfort of my room and the words spoken by one of the greatest playwrights who had fallen from grace in his mortal life but was resurrected in death.

“It is better not to be different from one’s fellows. The ugly and the stupid have the best of it in this world. They can sit at their ease and gape at the play. If they know nothing of victory, they are at least spared the knowledge of defeat”.

(Parts of this article appeared in The Bali Times)
www.thebalitimes.com



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Warung Upon Sea



© Mark Ulyseas

Where your Kopi Bali is shaken not stirred.

Singaraja, Bali, Indonesia



Ida Pandita Mpu Parama Daksa Nata Ratu Bagus

The Guru of the Art of Shaking

by Mark Ulyseas

Why do we need Gurus – self appointed men and women who act as agents for God?
 Why do we allow organized religion to brow beat us with the threat of hell and damnation if we don't follow the precepts laid down through the ages? Why rituals? Why ceremonies? Why have faith in a Power that never shows its face, one that is intangible instead of a living, breathing entity that we can touch and converse with?
 Why believe in God when the earth bleeds with racism, fundamentalism of all forms and extreme cruelty fueled by greed and an insatiable hunger for power? Why live on earth if it's so wretched?
 Let us all commit mass suicide like lemmings do every year by simply running off a cliff and plunging to our death.

Yes?

No.

Why not?

This does not happen because many of us have Faith. Faith in God. Faith in karma. Faith in one another.
 And above all the power to love, forgive and rise up phoenix like from impossible situations.
 Where does all this Faith come from?



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***"The energy is the power of Nature coming from Water, Fire, Air and Earth.
These elements are also present in the human body.
Through Shaking the sacred fire within us is awakened."
– Ratu Bagus***

Many months ago during a discussion on Faith with Marian Hjelm a veteran of India, she mentioned to this writer about the Guru of the Art of Shaking.

It didn't take much convincing on her part for him to follow in her footsteps to the ashram door of Ratu Bagus on the slopes of the sacred Mount Agung. Having grown up on the cusp of a chillum and rock music, the writer needed a pathfinder to show him where he was at and a hint of the elusive future.

Entering through the ashram's impressive gate, he was confronted with India; shades of Bhagawan Rajneesh, Maharishi Yogi and memories of his stay at Parasnath. And when he met Ratujee he genuflected and touched the Guru's feet because that is what his culture had taught him, respect for holy persons.

Ratujee asked a few questions and then pointed to a building that housed a large hall and from which emanated pulsating dance music.

Entering the hall and witnessing people of all ages and nationalities, vibrating, twisting crying, shouting, Shaking and laughing before a display of holy objects and a large portrait of him that had written across it in bold letters ***Om Swastiastu Ratu Bagus***. The electrifying

energy was like none he had encountered before. He wanted to flee.

The Guru gently guided him to the front of the Shakers and showed him the posture to take for Shaking. He instructed the scribe to concentrate on the large portrait of him on the wall and chant Om Swastiastu Ratu Bagus. Then without a word he left the hall.

Legs slightly apart, feet firmly on the floor and palms clasped and extended like a namaskar, he slowly began to move to the music, glancing around self consciously to see if anyone was watching him.

In minutes his body grew warm then hot with beads of sweat racing down it. The lungs, the heart and all the other abused parts of his anatomy cried out for relief... then the pain seeped in, into sinews closely followed by deep sadness. He stopped and sat down breathless. Something inside him had stirred... another being... his soul? He wanted to run from himself.

Just then Ratujee walked in and placed his hands on the scribe's head motioning him to rise and continue. And continue he did for a while before leaving the place for the dining hall and water and food and silence... humbled by the energy he had encountered that was



Ratu Bagus and wife Niychola

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The Power of the Shaking

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within, around and emanating from the Guru.

So who is Ratu Bagus?

A former executive in a transport company in Jakarta, a former aspiring young man who wanted to join the army but failed, a Balinese born in Gianyar, Bali, in November 1949, into a poor family of nine children and named I Ketut Widnya, a farmer from Muncan Village (the site of his ashram) till a Divine visitor gave him the name Ratu Bagus Jaya Kesuma Kawi and directed him to go forth and help humanity as he had been born with the gift to transmit pure light/energy.

At that time, there lived many poor people in the surrounding villages. He moved around these villages dispensing spiritual and material aid. In time people began to arrive from all over the island for guidance from this Guru. For the last 30 years he has been healing, teaching and training people in his ashram at Muncan. Every year he conducts large retreats in Europe and Australia.

In 2006 he became a Brahmin of high stature and is frequently called upon to perform religious ceremonies in Bali. His title is Ida Pandita Mpu Parama Daksa Nata Ratu Bagus.



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Sometime ago, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of The Art of Living Foundation on a visit to Bali referred to him as the Chief Priest of Bali.

So why Shake? Why not go to the gym or for long walks or indulge in regular (daily) sex which is said to be the ultimate exercise for body and soul?

According to the Guru we are created by energy. Therefore, when we practice this ancient form of healing (Shaking) we tap into this sacred energy which is within us and this transforms our physical and mental being. There are many independently recorded cases where he has healed mentally and/or physically ill people by transmitting pure light/energy to the patient; and imparting the technique of Shaking which peels away the repressed feelings and replaces it with spontaneity; sadness to happiness (laughter); releases pent up emotions through crying and shouting even screaming for hours at a stretch.

The Art of Shaking is not mumbo jumbo. If one trains for a few months under his benign tutelage one can plug into the reservoir of sacred energy that is within all of us. This energy comes to the surface with rigorous Shaking. Heat is generated. This heat races through the body attacking the physical afflictions within. In essence



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***"The ego is a destructive force.
It imprisons our minds and bodies.
Shedding the ego through Shaking
and unabashed impromptu laughter is necessary to re-energize our bodies
and to connect to the pure being within us - our soul.***

***It (soul) is usually forgotten or over looked
because the ego and mind play games and is too preoccupied with our outside world
instead of concentrating on our inner world that is the source of enormous energy.
The ego and mind are susceptible to negative forces.
And this makes us live unhappy lives.
Unhappiness is a prelude to sickness of all kinds."***



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the body heals itself through this process. It also realigns the mind, assisting it on focusing on positive rhythms thereby creating a feeling of wellbeing in the person and extruding the same.

Shaking is a bio-energy that transforms a human being from a negative force into one that radiates energy and brings light wherever he or she goes.

Addiction to alcohol, drugs and smoking can be overcome through Shaking. The ashram has some followers who have been former addicts and who now live reformed lives and are an asset to their community.

The technique to get the energy flowing inside the body is to surrender to the energy and accept it with a smile.

But to Shake one needs proper guidance; Technique, Concentration and Discipline. That is why it is essential to spend sufficient time at the ashram to learn the basics and then with regular daily practice wherever one is on this earth, can begin to reach the source of the energy within thereby connecting to the soul. It is this process that teaches the follower to love oneself. When this is achieved life becomes a joyous experience," says Ratujee.

In the words of Lucy Williams from the U.K.,

"Shaking creates the opportunity to exist free from pain, free from the negative thoughts and patterns that may have controlled our lives in the past and it creates the opportunity to live to our greatest potential; to feel life, to feel love and to feel the light. It is a re-awakening of the soul, a chance to remember who we really are and a chance to be alive. The simplicity of it all is mind boggling; you can train anywhere at any time, you don't have to get on a plane, you don't have to make an appointment, you just stay true to yourself, train regularly and keep Ratu in your heart always"

The writer spoke to a number of local Balinese as well as those from other parts of the island who had come with sick family members, to Shake or to meet the Guru for a hearing of their problems and possible solutions. Their opinion is that he is one of them: A true son of Bali: A holy man who has been sent to help them spiritually and economically.

The ashram has set up a Koperasi that assists in education, healthcare, micro financing etc. for Balinese farmers and fringe folk of the island.

Those who have sought refuge in Bali in a bid to find themselves should visit the ashram of Ida Pandita Mpu Parama Daksa Nata Ratu Bagus, for it is here that the

Guru will teach one how to reconnect with one's soul through the Art of Shaking.

For over a year, the ashram has witnessed numerous manifestations of energy orbs that have been caught on video and still cameras, though unseen to the naked eye. These energy balls move at different angles across the screen during the Guru's discourses. This phenomenon, which has been reported by many independent sources, appears to be manifesting itself with increasing regularity. It is believed that he is the source of such energy and that this is a clear indication of the power of his Faith and that of his followers.

Om Swastiastu Ratu Bagus



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If you want to know more about The Guru of the Art of Shaking please contact:

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Thought for the day



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