Tikkun

POLITICS • SPIRITUALITY • CULTURE

(tē•kün) To heal, repair, and transform the world.

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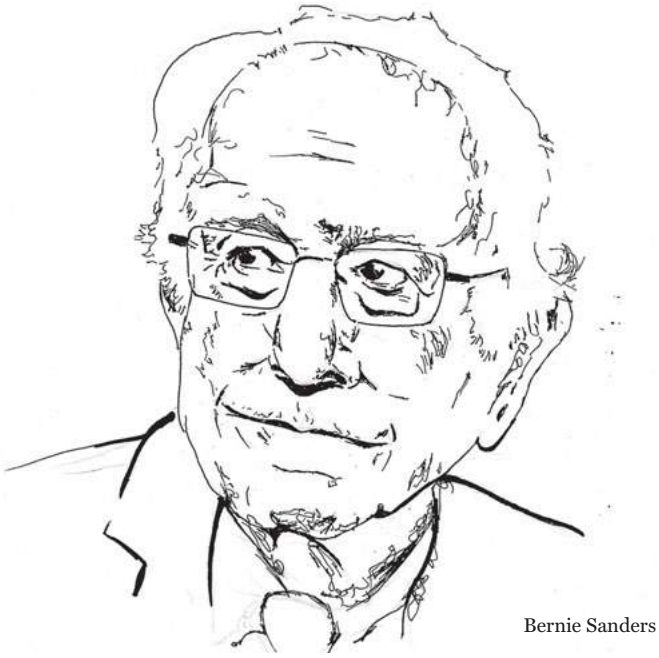
Beyond the 2016 Ballot Box

Why We Need a National Organization on the Left—And How to Build It

BY MICHAEL LERNER



Bernie Sanders

Oona Taper (http://cargocollective.com/oonataper)

As a nonprofit, we at *Tikkun* are barred from endorsing candidates and political parties (though you, our readers, are not, and we are not barred from printing your responses and letters on our website). But we can talk about the issues.

Many of our readers have been delighted to witness and support Senator Bernie Sanders's candidacy for the Democratic Party presidential nomination. Some have made the argument that even if Sanders could never defeat a corporate-financed Republican candidate who harped on the senator's radical past, simply having Sanders's ideas presented to the American public during presidential debates in the fall will do more good and make more progress toward changing the American political consciousness than would eight years of a Hillary Clinton presidency. Her administration, some progressive critics believe, would inevitably be run by the same people who controlled the economic, political, foreign, and military policies of the Clinton and Obama presidencies: people who effectively erased most progressive ideas from public consciousness.

Many progressives rightly wish that progressive ideas were far more widely understood and intelligently discussed in American politics. I ask you to consider with me why we, as progressives, have not created a national organization for the left that would have an impact equivalent to the Tea Party's success in placing far-right ideas before the public consciousness. Why have we been unable to generate a national understanding of a progressive worldview? Record-setting crowds of thousands of people have turned up to cheer on Sanders, but what will that campaign do now to move them beyond an election-oriented activism that will fade once the ballots are counted? What specific steps is the Sanders campaign taking now, at the moment when it draws large crowds? What measures are his supporters taking to create an organizational framework that persists beyond the 2016 campaign?

I contend that one part of the reason we don't yet have such a national organization of progressives is the widespread belief that change must come from the bottom up, and that any nationally organized movement would by definition be top–down in design. Leftists still adhere loyally to the bottom-up mentality—that is, until presidential-election fever every four years produces a seasonal change in their tune and the reallocation of their money and energies in support of whichever progressive candidate might win the Democratic Party nomination for president. I do not for a second wish to diminish the contribution that Sanders is making with his campaign, but now is the time to envision a long-term national strategy among those of us who still remember promises by the Obama and Kucinich campaigns to create such an organization—after the election! If it isn't created now, while their supporters' attention is focused, it is unlikely to happen afterward.

Now I'm a strong believer in the importance of local organizing. But I also believe it can have only limited impact if it does not *simultaneously* work on other, more expansive fronts.

There are literally millions of Americans in any given year involved in local projects for social justice, peace, nonviolence, economic and political equality, environmental sanity, challenging discrimination and prejudice, and ensuring the rights of women, the LGBTQ community, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, people with disabilities, and animals. Yet in my fifty-two years as an activist I've watched generations of similar people abandon these struggles,

Create a Monthly Reading Group

Tikkun invites you to start a monthly study group. Invite friends, co-workers, professionals you know, or people from your civic, political, or religious organizations. For information on the forms of support available to readers who want to create such a group, contact leila@tikkun.org.

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Tikkun magazine is . . .

. . . a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview. But what is that?

What Do You Mean by "Spiritual"?

You can be spiritual and still be an atheist or agnostic. To be spiritual, you don't have to believe in God or accept New Age versions of spirituality. You don't need to give up science or your critical faculties. We use the word "spiritual" to describe all aspects of reality that cannot be subject to empirical verification or measurement: everything pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, music, art, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, dance, love, generosity, and joy. We reject the notion that everything worthy of consideration to guide our personal lives and our economic and political arrangements must be measurable.

What's a Spiritual Progressive?

To be a spiritual progressive is to agree that our public institutions, corporations, government policies, laws, education system, health care system, legal system, and even many aspects of our personal lives should be judged "efficient, rational, or productive" to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, and ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior. We call this our New Bottom Line.

Spiritual progressives seek to build "The Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth." Our well-being depends upon the well-being of everyone else and also on the well-being of the planet itself. So we commit to an ethos of generosity, nonviolence, and radical amazement at the grandeur of all that is, and seek to build a global awareness of the unity of all being.

If you are willing to help promote this New Bottom Line for our society, you are a spiritual progressive. And if you are a spiritual progressive, we invite you to join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org.

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either because they thought they were already won or never would be—both mistaken ideas. Most of these local struggles avoided efforts to add another dimension to their activism: to challenge the larger economic and political systems that need to be changed. They evaded discussions of how those larger changes could be achieved, and skirted any discussion of the world they wanted to build, to say nothing of the strategies and organizational forms that would be needed to build it.

The organizing strategies of these local organizations have often been influenced by what have become known as Alinsky-style organizations. I had the opportunity to meet with and address one such organization, the same one that trained Barack Obama in Chicago, the city where the Alinsky model reached its perfection and enjoyed new successes in organizing in churches, synagogues, and mosques.

The key ideas of this organizing style are these:

1. Pick a goal that is small enough to be attainable within a short period of time in the local community. Let your goals be defined by what people tell you they want for their community, and what they think are their most pressing needs—don't tell them what those needs might be, and don't try to educate them about the larger economic, political, or cultural forces that are at the root of the problems they face. Instead, help them find a path to organize people around one or two of their existing goals.
2. Build communities around that specific goal. Don't undermine the focus by teaching people about other problems in your community or how they link to national problems.
3. Avoid ideological discussions—focus on the practical steps of winning.
4. Be realistic—don't get caught up in fights that might seem "too big" for the people in your community.

These are actually smart rules for winning tiny fights, like getting a new stoplight on your corner to stop speeding traffic, or forcing a school in your district to stop expelling students for minor disciplinary infractions, or even for something more important like getting your city to raise the minimum wage. But they are less relevant when you're interested in combating systemic racism, like police violence against minorities and discrimination in housing and employment. Just look at the despair of people in Ferguson, Missouri, a year and a half after the first protests that followed the murder of Mike Brown, or at the dismay of environmentalists trying to protect the planet from destruction, or at any number of the groups attempting to reverse the vast economic inequalities generated by global capitalism.

I've watched as millions of people engaging in these narrowly focused struggles come away without any sense of their connection to all the other struggles going on in the world. I've watched as a group of anti-fracking activists in one small town ignored the campaigns of anti-fracking

Jill Stein

activists elsewhere and remained on the sidelines as activists in nearby towns fought to prevent a pipeline from cutting through their community. Often missing is a discussion of the ways the global capitalist order creates dozens of new assaults on the planet's life-support system at a faster rate than activists can put a stop to them.

Eventually people become disillusioned as assaults on social and economic justice, environmental sustainability, health care, retirement security, etc., outpace the advances being made by local struggles. Not having learned about any shared strategy among the different struggles—and worrying that their activism keeps them away from their children and families and depletes their own economic well-being—they begin to feel their time and energy would be better spent elsewhere.

A similar shortsightedness affects national single-issue organizations. As important as their social justice or environmental sustainability work may be, they rarely encourage serious exploration of the economic and political systems that underlie the problems they confront. A movement to humanize the legal profession ends up focused on teaching lawyers how to meditate and take care of themselves but fails to focus on how to change laws to be less class-biased and subservient to the needs of the wealthy and powerful. A movement to bring ethics into psychology may halt psychologists' participation in torture, but falls short of helping psychologists empower people to challenge the devastating impact of a narcissism-generating society and competitive marketplace. A movement for integral medicine rightly disputes one-dimensional views of human beings in medicine, yet avoids challenging all the economic and political realities that encourage people to treat each other as objects to be manipulated rather than subjects to be treated with love, respect, and generosity. So even progressive professionals who genuinely want to contribute to the healing of the

Oona Taper (http://cargocollective.com/oonataper)

Hillary Clinton

world focus on narrowly defined problem areas, and end up becoming non-activist donors instead of uniting with others to build a coherent progressive movement on the national and international levels. Most people never hear talk of an organized progressive worldview, not to mention a spiritual-progressive worldview.

The result of all this is that for much of the past forty years the country has moved further and further to the right on most economic and political issues, except on matters of identity politics. In those spheres, feminist, African American, LGBTQ, and other identity-politics activists have often focused on undermining at least a part of the ideology that generates discrimination based on their racial, sexual, or gender identities. Yet they've often avoided anything beyond self– or identity group–empowerment, ignoring the class structures that leave so many people feeling disempowered, thereby setting themselves up for right-wing-manipulated backlash against their so-called special interests.

It's not that people's caring for each other has been snuffed out, but rather that it has been narrowly channeled into one's own family, religious, ethnic, or geographical community. Meanwhile, our daily experience in the competitive marketplace, reinforced massively by the media and the champions of global capitalism, infuses us with the belief that everyone is out for themselves and that nothing much can change, so we must narrow our expectations and the scope of what we come to believe is "realistic." These forces are increasingly successful in putting forward worldviews that sanctify the competitive marketplace, helping people believe, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that economic mobility is easy to achieve if they work hard and "merit" success. In this fantasy meritocracy, people have no one to blame but themselves if they don't "make it."

Polls indicate that most Americans hold a set of contradictory beliefs, at once recognizing that the economic and political spheres are unfairly tilted toward the well-being of the rich and powerful, yet engaging in self-blame for not having been more successful. They are delighted by outright assaults on the unfairness of it all, yet still hope inwardly that someday they might become one of the rich—and hence, they are unwilling to support measures to create genuine economic and political equality lest their imagined future wealth be limited should they suddenly ascend the class ladder.

Many believe that "there is no alternative" to the way things are now. And one major reason they think so is that they almost never hear an alternative presented. The Democratic Party is called "liberal," yet the vast majority of those who have been its presidential and congressional candidates are beholden to the interests of the rich and powerful—people who are uninterested in articulating what an alternative system might be. Even those candidates the media dubs leftist "populists" rarely go beyond the ideas developed 100 years ago by the Progressives and then by New Deal Democrats. No wonder that most people do not believe there is an alternative to the capitalist system, and do not risk offending the powerful rich or their corporations for fear of making them more likely to move their money and businesses outside the United States or simply disinvest and lay off huge swaths of working people. Why risk that, they reason, if you have no other system to replace global capitalism?

The Sanders campaign has shown once again that a significant population of Americans can be mobilized toward a more positive vision. But to keep that energy going, we will have to build a national organization to provide leadership and direction to a coherent and powerful progressive movement. This movement requires the following elements:

1. Internal work to overcome our own fears, our own tendencies to devalue ourselves and others, our own egotism, our own belief that we can achieve security for ourselves and our families while the world degenerates into hatred and environmental catastrophe, and our own inability to feel connected to and caring for all the people on this planet. This is an ongoing project, and too many people get overwhelmed by all the pain that they see around them, and by their own inadequacy.

Overcoming ego, for example, is a life-long endeavor. But it is pure self-indulgence to think that one must first achieve self-perfection before engaging in any other activism. Truly, the various forms of psychological and spiritual deformities in each of us will limit how effective we can be in political activism. But the message "work on yourself first" is a great recruitment line for political passivity and ethical obtuseness. Its younger cousin, "I'm changing the world one person at a time," now adopted as a slogan by the PR firms of many major corporations, is similarly effective in helping people avoid commitment in worldwide struggles for justice. Furthermore,

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it is foolhardy to believe that we can actually become spiritually realized or psychologically healthy beings while averting our attention from the suffering of the global and domestic poor, homeless, and refugees, and while ignoring the way we unintentionally but consistently participate in destroying the life-support system of the global environment.

2. Local projects to challenge the way the global capitalist system undermines the well-being of our world. Local activism gives people a way to enter the public arena and realize that we are not alone in our desire for fundamental change. But it can also be massively discouraging when battles are not won, or if the struggles are framed in ways that fail to move the participants to a larger understanding of the global system we are up against or to provide a vision of the world we want and how it might be achieved. So these local projects also need:

3. A clear articulation of an alternative vision of what the world should and could look like, and the involvement of many others in that discussion. One reason why we urge you to help us create a local chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) is to become part of a group that can bring this alternative vision to social change organizations and help activists begin to do this envisioning. (And we will help you get the skills you need to do this once you start or join a chapter.) Spiritual progressives could invite activists and community members to be part of visioning groups to discuss their positive vision and how to achieve it. Imagine, for example, helping teachers infuse their struggles for better pay, less testing, and smaller class sizes to include demands to help foster social values like caring for others and caring for the earth. Imagine combating cuts to Social Security by talking about the need to preserve and expand the caring between generations. Imagine encouraging people in every line of work to envision what an ethically coherent and psychologically nourishing workplace would look like.

Spiritual progressives can also play a critical role in educating members of local activist groups about the Global Marshall Plan (www.tikkun.org/gmp) and the NSP's Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (www.tikkun.org/esra). The GMP and ESRA help local activists envision some intermediate steps that are not yet the full overcoming of global capitalism, but are major steps toward the democratization of our economic and political lives, and toward environmental sanity. And when we encounter others whose worldview seems irrational or self-destructive, we can teach local activists how to ask themselves, "What legitimate needs are these people trying to address? Why are these needs unmet by our society? And how do we find ways to validate decent underlying needs and separate them from ways of satisfying them that are destructive or hurtful?" Movements that seriously consider these questions will never be defeated.

4. And finally, the movement must create a national organization of both secular and spiritual progressives whose intent is to evolve into a progressive version of the Tea Party. Working inside the Democratic Party, Green Party, and other parties—and outside and in opposition to them—the movement can redirect existing liberal or progressive political parties, like the right-wingers did to the Republican Party, or create a new party altogether. That organization and political party must move way beyond the progressive politics of the past by articulating a vision for a New Bottom Line of love, generosity, caring for one another, and caring for the earth (see www.spiritualprogressives.org/covenant).

Donald Trump

Arif Qazi (arifdraws.com)

An effective national organization of progressives must speak to the hunger for a higher meaning for life than the accumulation of goods, and connect this meaning to the need to preserve the earth by reducing the consumption of its raw materials to a sustainable level, limiting the goods and services available to those absolutely necessary and consistent with planetary survival. It must foster an ethos of awe and wonder at the grandeur of our universe rather than a desire to "conquer space." It must reject views of progress that depend on endless growth without regard to how that growth contributes to the well-being of everyone on the planet. It must unashamedly call for the Caring Society—Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth, and give focus to the ways that we can replace capitalist thought-conditioning with institutions that foster and enhance our capacities to be loving, generous, empathic, compassionate, cooperative with each other, and filled with love of life. And it must recognize those who do not yet agree with this vision as equally valuable and deserving of respect, even as we strongly challenge ideas and practices that are destroying humans and the environment.

This is the kind of discussion that localist focus almost always avoids, because the media and the political leadership

of our country for the past fifty years have convinced many that these discussions are unrealistic and hence a waste of time, certain to divide rather than unite us. Yet without the national organizations and political parties able to encourage this kind of discussion, our country is likely to continue its march in an ever more militaristic, human rights– and civil liberties–denying, and environmentally destructive direction.

So don't be shocked if even the most progressive political leaders, if by chance they are able to get elected, end up reinforcing rather than fundamentally challenging the worldviews that sustain the globalization of selfishness and materialism. Without a national movement in place, we will see only a flash-in-the-pan upsurge of progressive anger without a coherent worldview, political program, or strategy. It is not "the state" but "the movement" that withers away without these four levels of activity for social change. If the Sanders campaign creates an ongoing organization beyond 2016 that explicitly links to these four goals and embraces the consciousness articulated above, it will have played an important role in transforming our society, whether he wins or not. ■

of our country for the past fifty years have convinced many that these discussions are unrealistic and hence a waste of time, certain to divide rather than unite us. Yet without the national organizations and political parties able to encourage this kind of discussion, our country is likely to continue its march in an ever more militaristic, human rights– and civil liberties–denying, and environmentally destructive direction.

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Israeli Arrogance

(After the Burning to Death of a Palestinian infant and his father)

BY MICHAEL LERNER

When will Israelis stop their settlers from killing Palestinians? The simple answer is, "never—not while the Occupation continues." As long as Israeli settlers remain in the West Bank, protected by the Israeli Army and armed with the teachings that have led them to believe that Palestinians have no right to be there, a faction of the settlers will choose violence over negotiation as a means to achieve the Palestinians' removal. Most Israelis and most American Jews are almost totally unaware of the ongoing harassment that the settlers frequently visit on their Palestinian neighbors: they uproot their olive trees, destroy their fields, attack their homes, and have physically assaulted Palestinian men, women, and children. This aggression is supplemented by acts of violence on the part of the IDF as it tries to enforce the Occupation.

Such accounts are readily available online at the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, and are documented by B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (btselem.org), and by various Israeli organizations like Breaking the Silence, a group of former IDF soldiers who are morally outraged by what they were ordered to do by their IDF superiors. Nevertheless, most Israelis and American Jews do not wish to know about any of this. They rarely consult these reports, because doing so might weaken their ability to blindly support Israeli policies regardless of how far those policies and the daily realities they create diverge from the Jewish values that many Jews still uphold when it comes to issues unrelated to Israel.

Israeli policies and Israeli arrogance are the major reason for the deplorable growth of anti-Semitism around the world. Those who cheer on Israel's current policies, including many American Jews who think they are doing the Jewish people a favor or performing an act of loyalty, are actually Israel's and the Jewish people's worst enemies. They empower the racists and haters who run Israel today to continue policies that would rightly offend any human being on the planet who's paying attention.

Much as they try to hide from themselves what they are doing—either by repeating the pathetic excuse that the world wants to destroy all Jews, or the irrelevant claim that ISIS and Hamas are far worse (yes, they are!)—the behavior of the Israeli government, endorsed by the Israeli majority, is a *shanda*, a true *chillul ha'shem*, a desecration of God's name when Judaism is invoked to defend violent Israeli policies.

This is not the Judaism that I and many of my rabbinic colleagues teach in our synagogues, and it is not a Judaism that is sustainable. Much as I believe in the need for compassion for the traumas that distort the consciousness of both Israelis and Palestinians, we also need to address the moral distortions on every side of this and all such struggles with tough love and unwillingness to tolerate violence. We at *Tikkun* have many times unequivocally condemned Palestinian violence against Israelis and we have for thirty years now been a voice of prophetic critique of our own people when that is appropriate. And it is certainly appropriate to criticize the policies of the current Israeli government. ■

LESS EVIL?

EVERY FOUR YEARS liberals and progressives are faced with the same conundrum: whether they should support the Democratic candidate for president, and in many instances, the candidates fielded in local congressional and gubernatorial elections; support the Green candidates; or simply abstain from voting altogether. On the issues that matter most, rank-and-file Democratic candidates are almost always far from supporting a liberal or progressive agenda, much less a spiritual-progressive agenda.

Faced with the increasing extremism of the right, progressives have tended to stick with the lesser-evil candidate. The reasons are compelling: if right-wingers win the presidency and more senatorial or congressional seats, the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary could be filled with judges committed to serving the 1 percent and the reactionary social agenda of right-wing evangelicals. We could be dragged into more wars, civil liberties and programs to help the poor (including the Affordable Care Act) could be further eroded, and the minimal governmental restraints on environmental destruction could be dismantled.

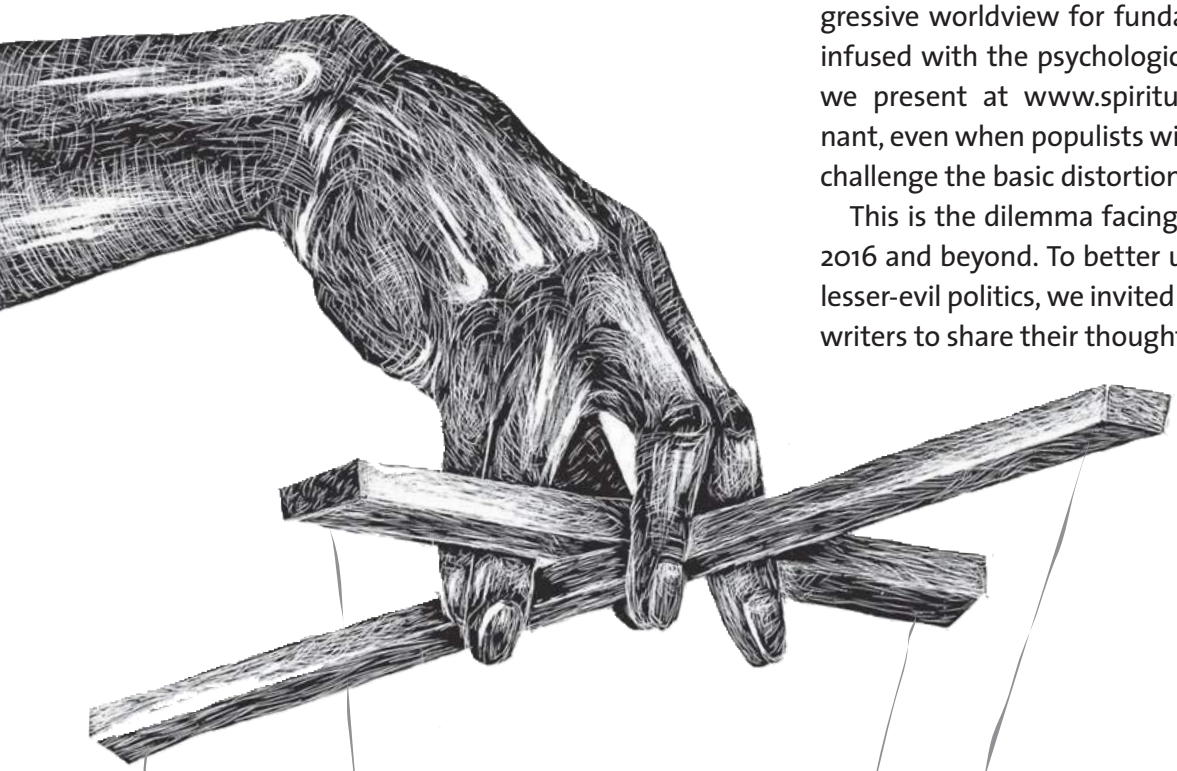
The counterargument is too often ignored in the national media. The success of the right in the electoral arena is largely due to the failure of progressive forces to articulate a coherent worldview that goes beyond a list of complaints and a limited program of economic redistribution and political empowerment for the most disadvantaged. Rarely do leftist Democrats or even Greens articulate that the individualistic, "look out for number one" ethos of the competitive marketplace leaves many Americans feeling surrounded by people who seem to care only about themselves and who will do anything to advantage themselves without regard to the consequences for others. Many people feel that they are not recognized for who they really are, even by friends and family, but are valued instead only for what they can accumulate or "do" for others. They are angry that the left seems to dismiss their spiritual or religious hungers as proof that they are less intelligent and less deserving than the upper-middle-class and rich people who seem to be running society.

Tú que no puedes, by Francisco Goya.

Francisco Goya

Liberals and progressives rarely address the psycho-spiritual crisis generated by the capitalist marketplace, because doing so would seem too unrealistic and turn off a significant section of liberal donors to their campaigns. And religiophobia on the left makes it hard for them to understand that people seeking spiritual or religious communities are looking for a way to compensate for what is missing in a society dominated by materialism and selfishness. A populist movement, even led by someone as smart as Bernie Sanders, rarely sates this deeper hunger. Without a coherent progressive worldview for fundamental system change, infused with the psychological and spiritual nuances we present at www.spiritualprogressives.org/covenant, even when populists win they lack a mandate to challenge the basic distortions of our society.

This is the dilemma facing spiritual progressives in 2016 and beyond. To better understand the stakes of lesser-evil politics, we invited progressive activists and writers to share their thoughts in the pages ahead. ■



Oona Taper (http://cargocollective.com/oonataper)

"Less Bad" Isn't Good Enough

BY ANDREW LEVINE

THE CASE FOR lesser-evil voting boils down to this: when choosing between X and Y, rational agents who think that X is better than Y ought to choose X. The logic is unassailable. But even if we stipulate that, come November 2016, the winner of the presidential election will be either a Democrat or a Republican and the Democrat will be the lesser evil, it doesn't follow automatically that rational citizens ought to vote for her.

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From a logical point of view, "better," "less bad," and "less evil" are interchangeable, but there is a practical difference. Better choices are less bad or less evil only when the alternatives are, or are thought to be, bad. Theologians and secular thinkers who don't admit that God is dead sometimes distinguish "bad" from "evil" implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, invoking the religious connotations of the latter concept. For the present purpose, American electoral politics, the difference is rhetorical: "evil" just means "very bad." However, there is an echo of theological understandings that lesser-evil voters would do well to bear in mind: the idea that there are thresholds beyond which it doesn't matter how much "less bad" something is—that voting for any evil is something thou shalt not do.

Where to draw the line? I would draw it in a way that excludes proponents of policies that benefit the "1 percent" at the expense of everyone else; and, in elections for Congress and the presidency, I would exclude politicians who think that the United States ought to go on dominating the world, and for whom war is the first, often the only, answer.

"From a logical point of view, "better," "less bad," and "less evil" are interchangeable, but there is a practical difference.

I would never vote for any Republican or any Clinton or any Clinton-like Democrat. Thus I am proud to say that I never voted for Barack Obama. Liberals and some self-described leftists disparage such fastidiousness. Some of them even think that the Clintons and other Democrats would be forces for good if only those pesky Republicans would back off. I would suggest instead that my criteria are, if anything, too forgiving: that, in an only slightly saner possible world, candidates who cannot see beyond capitalism's horizons and candidates who support reckless environmental policies ought to be excluded as well.

But even liberals who have no moral problem voting for Hillary in 2016 should realize that America's ridiculously undemocratic electoral system gives them options. Unless they live in the dozen or so "battleground states," they can elude the demands of lesser-evil logic at virtually no political or psychological cost. Most Americans already know whether the Democrat or the Republican will get their state's electoral votes. The logic of lesser evilism doesn't compel them to pile on votes for the winner; they can vote, or not, in ways that send a message instead.

There are two further considerations that bear mentioning: the first is that, no matter how clear it seems, lesser-evil voters are often wrong about who the lesser evil is; the second is that, in most circumstances, lesser-evil voting contributes to a downward spiral.

Myopia is the main reason it can be hard to identify the less bad or less evil choice. For example, the liberal consensus in 2012 was that Barack Obama was a lesser evil than Mitt Romney. Was he? Even conceding all the familiar reasons, the answer is not so clear—not if we look beyond the candidates themselves.

Obama's victory made Republicans worse than they would otherwise have been, and those Republicans then went on to make the government more dysfunctional than it would otherwise have been—in ways that made most Americans worse off. And Obama's victories made Democrats a lot worse; they are now even more spineless than they used to be. It isn't just that they won't stand up to Republicans. The bigger problem is that they stand by their man, Obama—no matter how corporate-friendly, bellicose, and environmentally reckless he becomes.

Finally, there is the fact that, in the absence of intervening factors, lesser-evil voting tends to make the lesser evils of the future even worse than the lesser evils of the present. Eruptions of people power are welcome intervening factors; others arise from time to time. But the underlying tendency is strong. Indeed, we are presently in the grip of its effects: Hillary Clinton, the likely lesser evil in 2016, is worse, by orders of magnitude, than Obama, the lesser but still very considerable evil of four and eight years ago.

Even so, it is arguable that, if the Republicans nominate a bona fide abomination, as they very likely will, voters in battleground states should hold their noses and cast their votes for Hillary. But for everyone else, the time spent pondering whether or not to vote for her and others of her ilk would be better spent figuring out how to change American politics so fundamentally that lesser-evil voting and the perplexities it raises become moot. ■

Volunteer at *Tikkun*

We need volunteers and interns to help us with a wide variety of tasks, both online from home and in person at our office in Berkeley, California. Would you or someone you know like to work with Rabbi Lerner on the Global Marshall Plan or the campaign to get Money Out of Politics, on spreading the ideas in *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, or on helping him develop a spiritual commentary on the Torah and a new book about God?

We also need help with social media, help finding ways to persuade foundations or philanthropists to help us financially, help recruiting young thinkers to write for *Tikkun*, help proofreading magazine articles, help finding beautiful art to use as illustrations, and tech-savvy help to create a more user-friendly index of our past articles.

If you're interested in volunteering, contact us at internships.tikkun@gmail.com and tell us about what you want to do, whether you're able to come to Berkeley, and why you are the right person to be working with us. Because we have a tiny core staff, we need people who do not need much guidance, especially for those who are seeking to volunteer from home. It's also important to really understand what we are about, so please do take the time to read *The Left Hand of God* and *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, as well as recent issues of *Tikkun*.

Capitalism, Greece, and the End of Lesser-Evil Choosing

BY RICHARD D. WOLFF

THE QUESTION of whether to vote for the lesser evil in the upcoming presidential election is being resolved even as we wrestle with it. The last few years of global capitalist change and the response thereto in Greece show the historic moment now breaking out of such dead ends.

Greece, like the United States, was long dominated by two old parties. As they divided governmental power between themselves, they became ever more alike. One, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), "moderated" over time and eventually even embraced the vicious austerity imposed on Greece by Europe's conservatives. The other, New Democracy, represented Greece's corporate and wealthiest elites allied with whatever conservative cultural and regional allies they could find. As with the Democrats and Republicans in the United States and parallel dualisms elsewhere, a changing global capitalism is dissolving this old style of politics.

In 2004, a coalition of the left, disgusted with PASOK's "moderation," formed the new Syriza party. It got the 2–4 percent of the Greek vote expected to be its limit by the complacent old Greek political establishment. Meanwhile, capitalism went on relocating from its old centers (Western Europe, North America, and Japan) to its newer and more profitable factories, offices, and stores in China, India, Brazil, etc. The lure of much lower wages for workers who could easily be supervised and controlled from great distances thanks to telecommunications proved irresistible. Workers' standards of living in the old centers atrophied while in the new developing zones, the regional partners engaged in relocating capitalist production became very wealthy in a sea of still-poor masses. Capitalism's global relocation thus deepened wealth and income inequalities in all countries, strained existing economic and political alignments, provoked excessive debt manipulation everywhere, and eventually crashed global capitalism in 2008.

Thus began the demise of the old political deals, organizations, and alignments exposed by their own failures to anticipate, let alone prevent, the crash. The death of the old system was ensured by its two-pronged response to capitalism's crash: (1) using public funds to bail out the very financial institutions and other major capitalists who caused the crisis and (2) deciding to shift the costs of both crisis and bailouts onto the mass of middle- and lower-income people by imposing "austerity" on them.

This blatant outrage to both democratic sensibilities and even minimal standards of justice and decency now provokes masses of people to move toward new, different political alignments. Greece epitomizes this process, as Syriza grew from single-digit support to last July's stunning 61 percent victory in a referendum on its stance against austerity. The old Greek parties' support collapsed, especially that of PASOK. Something similar is happening in Spain around the Podemos political formation and alliances. The signs are there as well in Jeremy Corbyn's struggle for Labour Party leadership in the United Kingdom and Bernie Sanders's campaign in the U.S. Democratic Party.

> **Syriza underestimated how its rise threatened the lesser-evil stagnation of conventional European politics.**

What these and many other comparable examples in other countries share is the dawning recognition that an old politics is giving way to a new politics. The new has been brought on by fundamental changes in how and where capitalism works its mechanisms of deepening inequality (à la Piketty), undermining economic security, and constricting or simply ignoring democracy.

An immense new political space and opportunity has been opened on the left. A crisis-ridden capitalism that serves an ever-smaller slice of the population in capitalism's old centers

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increasingly alienates millions. At the same time, old forms of expressing anger, resentments, and demands for change—even modestly—will no longer do. They are too compromised, too complicit in what caused the 2008 crash and the bailouts and austerity shifts thereafter.

Something new is emerging to express fast-maturing disaffections with austerity and with the capitalist system that needs and imposes it. This is happening today in many places. So now is precisely the time to seize the moment and break with the old parties and the old selection of the lesser evil between them. The conditions for the success of that break are in place and increasingly beckon us not to miss a historic opportunity.

The about-face in Greece in July shows the immense stakes of the heightened level of political struggle shaking capitalism. Led by Germany, most of Europe's governments decided to risk the decades-old project of European unity by using all their power and wealth to crush the leadership of one of their poorest member states, the new Syriza government in Greece. On full display was the savagery of literally denying Greece the currency needed for its economy to function even minimally. That this went against the democratic referendum results made no difference. No matter that large numbers of Greek citizens suffered severe poverty and deprivation, or that growing numbers of young Greeks have emigrated, or that it consigned Greece to an almost colonial substatus within Europe. The enraged old parties of Europe ruthlessly tried to strangle the foremost example of "no-more-lesser-evil" politics after it won multiple elections in Greece.

The Greeks seem to have been ill prepared for the onslaught they suffered, this savage counterattack against their struggle to break out of old politics. Syriza underestimated how its rise threatened the lesser-evil stagnation of conventional European politics. It was not prepared for the exit from the Euro that, if properly prepared, might have enabled a real alternative to capitulation. But more important is the lesson being learned: breaking from lesser-evil politics is not merely about breathing fresh air into stale political compromises and corruptions. It threatens a capitalism that has secured for itself the protection of lesser-evil politics.

Syriza, like Podemos in Spain and their counterparts growing everywhere, knew that the path forward out of lesser-evil politics would not be straight, upwards, and onwards. There would be reverses and battles lost, like the July decision by the Tsipras government to accept the harsh terms of economic survival imposed by the German-led troika. However, all the conditions that provoked the breakout from lesser-evil stasis are only pressing the poor and middle classes further in the direction that Syriza courageously pioneered. After what happened in Greece in July, Greeks and their counterparts across Europe and beyond better understand what they are doing, what they are faced with, and how they need to plan for and coordinate sharper breaks from a fast-polarizing and increasingly unacceptable capitalism. ■

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Greeks have experienced setbacks in the struggle against austerity, which is also ongoing in Spain. Housing rights activist Ada Colau was elected Barcelona's first female mayor in 2015, backed by a coalition of anti-eviction and anti-austerity voters.

Time for a New Strategy

BY BRIAN JONES

For those on the front lines of the fight to defend and improve public education, the 2016 presidential election is already a minefield. On July 11, 2015, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president Randi Weingarten announced that the roughly one-million-member organization would officially throw its weight behind Hillary Clinton's candidacy for president of the United States. The million members had zero opportunity to discuss or vote on the matter. This was not surprising in the least, given the union's historic allegiance to the strategy of backing whichever Democrat is most likely to win, regardless of what he or she is likely to do in office.

We're living through an unprecedented attack on the public schools, on the teaching profession, and on unionized teachers in particular. The AFT could use its collective strength to alter the political landscape. At the very least, it could open up a political discussion in every local about the candidates and their positions. At best, it could do the unthinkable and dare to throw its weight behind "unelectable" candidates who actually support public education and teachers' unions.

New York politics might offer some lessons for the presidential race. Here, Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo has been a fierce advocate of what many call "corporate education reform"; the governor stoked statewide anger by starving public schools of funding while aggressively promoting charter schools. But when Cuomo faced a progressive challenge from Zephyr Teachout in the Democratic gubernatorial primary in fall 2014, Weingarten lent her voice to a robocall to voters, encouraging support for Cuomo's rightist running mate, Kathy Hochul (the union didn't dare openly endorse Cuomo himself). To the union's most engaged and active members, those who had organized countless forums, town halls, pickets, and protests to save our schools, this was widely perceived as something of a kick in the teeth. Fortunately, after the primary, many of them backed Howie Hawkins's Green Party bid (I was the candidate for lieutenant governor), which pushed the campaign to a historic 5 percent of the overall vote.

> **"So-called "lesser-evil" voting gives the Democrats a free pass.**

Needless to say, Cuomo and Hochul won the primary and the election. When the dust settled, Cuomo admitted that one of his goals for the next four years was "to break what is in essence one of the only remaining public monopolies"—public schools. So-called "lesser-evil" voting gives the Democrats a free pass. As long as they don't have an "R" next to their name, there is literally nothing they can do to lose the union's official support.

Tragically, the Clinton endorsement is a repeat of this approach on the national stage. Clinton is funded by the same banksters who are sinking their fangs into public education coffers. The privatization of public education—through charter schools, standardized testing, and union busting—is not a right-wing Republican conspiracy. It is being carried out by liberals in the Democratic Party. Clinton is a former board member of Walmart, a company owned by a family—the Waltons—deeply invested in privatizing public schools. Hillary Clinton does not represent a genuine alternative, or even necessarily a "lesser" evil.

Meanwhile, the candidate tapping into the desire for change is Bernie Sanders. Sadly, Sanders has already vowed to back whichever Democratic candidate wins the primary, at which point his supporters can either hold their noses and vote for the establishment candidate, likely to be Clinton, or support a principled candidate like the Green Party's Jill Stein. The Democratic Party is smart to use Sanders in this way. Without him, angry voters in their historic base would have good reason to sit this one out or seek out a new party. For those of us who are trying to build that new party, 2016 is going to be a difficult year. But real change is never easy, and in the long run "winners" often turn out to be losers. The AFT leadership has given Democrats a license to keep taking teachers for granted. In order to change that we need to start supporting candidates who actually support us. That's why I'll be voting for Stein in 2016, and I urge others concerned about the fate of public education to do the same. ■

BRIAN JONES is an educator and a socialist. He was the Green Party candidate for lieutenant governor of New York in 2014.

A Rare Opportunity for Progressives

BY ROBERT W. McCHESNEY

I HAVE NEVER QUITE liked the framing of "lesser evilism," because having that category suggests there might be "no evilism." The expectation that any candidate or party would ever be perfect to a substantial body of people is unrealistic, and compromise is a necessary part of politics, even for those, like myself, on the left. I understand why it is necessary to vote for the least-bad candidate in many cases, but that approach is largely defensive. It seems like you eventually lose on issues of central importance to the plutocrats who own the country.

Nowhere is this more evident than in my research area: media policies. Republicans are almost invariably the unabashed champions of the most corrupt form of crony capitalism, in which wealthy interests get what they want. Democrats are somewhat better, to the extent that they feel heat from their voting base. The immense struggle over net neutrality showed how difficult it was to get the Democrats to finally keep their word after vacillating for six years in the warm, corporate-funded winds of Washington. And the Democrats are virtually worthless on the central democratic media issue of our era: how to have well-funded, independent, competitive, uncensored, nonprofit news media.

This leads to the strategic issue that is my primary concern in electoral politics: can we find candidates and movements and, perhaps, parties whose purpose is to change the contours and tenor of American electoral politics, to expand the range of debate, and to draw tens of millions of alienated people into politics? I was active in Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential bid for that reason, as well as Ralph Nader's 2000 campaign. I had no interest in making a "protest vote"; their campaigns were purportedly about building a sustained, long-term political movement to fundamentally change American politics. They were to be political-education campaigns that reached tens of millions of people who would otherwise not pay as much attention to politics. Regrettably, neither campaign generated the long-term institutions I hoped for.

This year I am supporting the Bernie Sanders campaign for the same reasons. He is not flawless, but on core economic, social, and environmental issues he is well to the left of the mainstream. His campaign is already far more successful than anything like it in many generations. It reflects how much political conditions in the United States have changed in the past few decades, unbeknownst to the self-congratulating punditocracy, which is clueless once one moves outside the conventional wisdom of elite cocktail parties. Sanders is a rare combination of a principled "movement" activist and an accomplished politician who gets stuff done. His campaign exists to advance democratic-socialist politics, and that is a project to which I have devoted my life. The Sanders campaign has tapped into a fervor that barely existed two or three decades ago, and is almost certain to grow in the coming years of stagnation, inequality, and corruption.

With regard to the entire range of media policies—from community broadcasting and internet access to government and corporate surveillance and media ownership—Sanders, too, is a dramatic shift from standard-issue corporate Democrats like Hillary Clinton, who can talk a good game on the campaign trail to gin up votes, but tend to forget their promises after the election in the quiet backwaters of Washington when Wall Street comes a-knockin'. Bernie's entire career has demonstrated that media issues are in his bone marrow, and he understands that having viable independent, uncensored, corporate-free news media is a precondition for a credible self-governing society.

This is a golden opportunity for the left to expand beyond the dead-end street of lesser evilism and irrelevance, and it is imperative that we don't squander it. I am not sure we can afford to have this same discussion in 2032. ■

Olivia Wise (oliviawisestudio.com)

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Start a Progressive Alliance

BY GAYLE McLAUGHLIN

It is my belief that the two-party system in the United States is an impediment to achieving true democracy. Both major parties are funded heavily by corporate money. In fact, most big corporations donate to both parties to keep their corporate-backed, two-party system in place. In all other advanced countries, there are parties based on promoting the specific interests of non-corporate sectors, such as the interests of ordinary working people. What a novel idea!

For over 140 years the two major U.S. parties have effectively prevented the emergence of any mass political formations that could challenge them. Their ties to corporate America and the corporate-backed media have assured the two-party monopoly.

In spite of this monopoly, mass struggles for social progress to expand democracy and civil rights have periodically exploded throughout U.S. history, demonstrating the power of independent political action. However, such mobilizations have been unable to expand their efforts due to co-option by the Democratic Party, which has continuously led strong, empowering movements to their burial grounds. As a party, the Democrats have always stopped short of any serious challenge to the corporate system that backs them. As a result, under both parties, wealth inequality has grown, wars have continued, Wall Street has been bailed out, public education has suffered, and our planet is in peril.

I know there are good people who believe the Democratic Party can be reformed. And if someday they conclude that such a goal is not possible, they know already that there are many of us willing to build *with* them, and with all our progressive sisters and brothers, an alternative political structure that will take our nation where it badly needs to go.

In the meantime, some of us could not wait for a major shift in national consciousness, and instead have built an independent movement right in our local communities. That is what happened in Richmond, California. We formed the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) in 2003 and have been transforming our city ever since. With elected officials who take no corporate money and principled community leadership, we are demonstrating a successful model of social change and transformation. While I am a member of the Green Party, our local elections are nonpartisan, so the RPA has focused on building an alliance of people based on our progressive values and vision rather than on party affiliation. The RPA has built a strong local movement through our independent grassroots organizing and by running independent candidates who take no corporate money. I was elected to the City Council in 2004, and then was elected as mayor in 2006 and again in 2010. I termed out as mayor after serving for eight years, but decided to run for City Council again in 2014 to keep our work moving forward in Richmond. Other RPA progressives were also elected through our progressive electoral work.

Our biggest challenge has always been the fact that we live in a city that is also home to the most productive oil refinery in California, the Chevron Richmond Refinery. This refinery pollutes us daily; periodically has major incidents, like the 2012 refinery fire that sent 15,000 people to local hospitals for respiratory treatment; and is the largest single greenhouse gas emitter in California. We have overcome the influence of this big 1–percenter in many ways. First and foremost, we defeated their candidates and preserved our democracy on the electoral battlefield. In 2014, they spent over $3 million trying to defeat progressive candidates and elect Chevron-friendly officials. In a clean-sweep victory, all the Chevron candidates lost, and all our candidates won!

In addition to our electoral victories, we put strong pollution and safety regulations in place for the refinery. Chevron also agreed to a major tax settlement in 2010, thanks to a high-profile, multiyear grassroots pressure campaign for fair taxation of this oil giant. This campaign and a proposed ballot initiative, which if passed would have required Chevron to pay significantly more in taxes, brought Chevron to the negotiating table. We reached a settlement that requires Chevron to pay us $114 million in additional taxes over fifteen years. And to further hold them accountable, we are now suing them for impacts of the 2012 fire. None of this would have happened without independent councilmembers and an independent movement.

With our unique progressive model of governance that includes progressive representatives working side by side with a local movement, we have made great strides. We are a leader in the Bay Area for solar wattage installed per capita, we operate an award-winning green job training program,

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The City of Richmond is currently suing Chevron for damages caused by the 2012 Chevron Richmond Refinery fire, pictured above. Photo by Nick Fullerton.

Flickr/Nick Fullerton

we have raised the minimum wage, and we have implemented cutting-edge health and environmental initiatives. Thanks to our focus on community policing and root-cause solutions to crime reduction, we have dramatically reduced crime in Richmond, including a 75 percent homicide reduction during my tenure as mayor.

We recently achieved a new victory by introducing a Rent Control and Just Cause for Eviction ordinance to protect tenants in Richmond. As with all our victories, this did not fall from the sky. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication by many to move our progressive initiatives forward. We understand that progressives cannot accomplish the kind of comprehensive social change that is needed in the United States by working only on the local level, but we have shown and will continue to show what a strong local movement can accomplish.

Models are small examples of what can happen on a larger scale. In Richmond, we believe our success offers hope for what can happen nationally when people stand independent of the corporate system that the two-party system protects. ■

Changing the Matrix

Moving the Left Toward Communalism

BY CHAIA HELLER

In November 2016, U.S. leftists will be offered up a blue and red pill provided by the matrix of our own failing democracy. Candidate #1 (let's call this the blue pill) will be deemed the lesser of two evils, the greater of which is candidate #2 (the red pill). But what if, after responsibly choosing the pill determined to be less evil (an act of damage control), leftists then set their sights on going off their meds—that is, what if they aimed to leave the state matrix altogether? Local communalist politics, such as those outlined by Murray Bookchin's theory of social ecology, beckon to leftists and offer a way to transcend the state by creating a confederation of directly democratic communities.

Women in traditional Kurdish holiday dress at Newroz, the spring equinox celebration in Istanbul, Turkey.

Flickr/Isa Fakir

Leftists today could build a matrix apart from state power, locating political power on a communal, municipal level rather than on the level of the state. Bookchin saw municipal elections as vital public activities in which citizens have the opportunity to engage in critical debate, setting the bar high not only by discussing political issues (such as poverty, social injustice, and ecology), but also by addressing the very structure of the political process itself. Instead of running a representative for mayor or head of city council, leftist groups would run a political program that is explicitly antistate and anticapitalist while promoting decentralized, directly democratic political power. This *communalist* program would guide stateless citizens as they forge a common charter based, in turn, on a set of general principles—such as *direct democracy*, *confederalism*, *moral economy*, *ecology*, *non-hierarchy*, *social justice*, and *equality*. This common charter would link an interdependent network of communalist municipalities, forming a confederation of self-managed towns and cities that would create the very public policy that shapes their lives by meeting in popular assemblies. In the United States, the type of popular assembly that still exists

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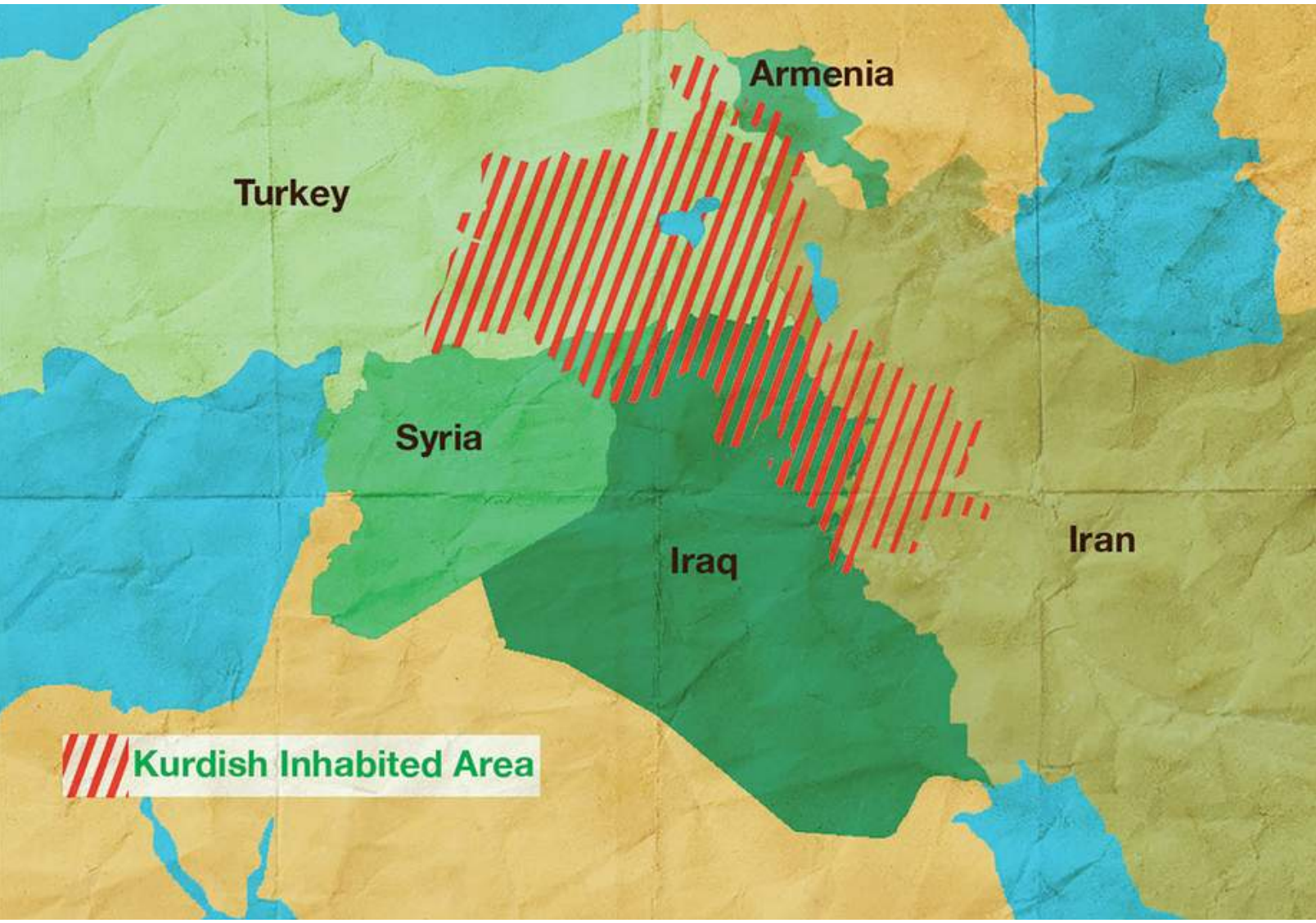


Kurds currently inhabit territory controlled by Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.

Creative commons and Oona Taper

today in the form of the Vermont town meeting would be resuscitated and reclaimed via communalist politics.

While U.S. leftists debate whether the blue or the red pill is the one with fewer ill effects, radical Kurds throughout parts of Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have stepped outside the logic of the state, building a communalist vision of their own: in 2002, the leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, first read the works of Bookchin while serving a life sentence in a Turkish prison. Refuting his former Marxist framework, Öcalan called upon radical Kurds to drop their demand for an autonomous Kurdish state. Instead they would create a stateless confederation of directly democratic communities guided by principles including social justice, gender equality, and moral economy. Citizens living in these communities would be linked by civic humanist ties rather than by ties based on shared ethnicity. The full details of the Kurdish case cannot be addressed here. But it is worth noting that for nearly fifteen years (more recently, during a war against the Islamic State and various state powers), radical Kurds have been experimenting with direct democracy, creating a confederation of autonomous communities whose political crucible is the popular assembly.

Bookchin, who passed away in 2006, never lived to see the Kurdish experiment with democratic confederalism. Perhaps, as leftists prepare to determine which pill to swallow next year, we can look to the Kurdish case for inspiration about transforming the matrix of electoral politics by building power on the municipal level, beginning a revolution that would create a society in which citizens are empowered to self-govern rather than remain passive choosers of options deemed merely less evil. ■

Don't Whine, Organize!

BY DAN CANTOR

Politics is not about perfection. Anyone who has ever faced the choice of a not-so-good Democrat running against a horrendous Republican knows what I'm talking about. In the vernacular, it's the lesser-evil dilemma, and most people handle it sensibly. You do the best you can at any given moment.

But finding ourselves up against the lesser-evil problem means that we may have missed earlier points of intervention.

Was there a better candidate running in a primary? Primaries are won by many fewer votes than general elections are, and require less money. Backing progressive champions—candidates whom we think of as Working Families Democrats—in primaries is the single best way to solve this problem. Progressive leaders like Bill de Blasio don't come out of nowhere.

If there wasn't a progressive in the primary, could we have recruited a candidate? Running for office is a skill that can be learned and mastered. If we cede the field to the wealthy and those running in service to their agenda, we can never truly win. We need a new generation of progressives to run: civil rights leaders and environmental justice advocates, community organizers and educators. You might even consider running yourself. Some of the best leaders we have are local elected officials—city councillors and school board members and state legislators—who said they'd never want to be a candidate. But when they didn't see anyone else who really represented them, they stepped up.

What did you do to shape the terrain? Organizers and campaigners of all stripes can set the stage for an election and change the terrain on which the contest is fought. Occupy did it. So have the DREAMers, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the fast food workers. There's a reason we're seeing victories on raising the minimum wage in cities and states: a big part has been the bravery of workers walking off their jobs and demanding it. That has created space for candidates to move on the issue.

What did you do to change the rules? Let's be honest. With a rising tide of big money in politics and voter suppression, none of this is easy. That's why we need a constant focus on fixing the rules. There are voting rights laws that determine who can participate; districts that determine whom you can vote for; ballot access laws that determine who can run; and, above all, campaign finance laws that determine whose voice gets heard. We can't afford to ignore any of those fights.

So the next time you are faced with unappealing choices in the voting booth, don't despair. We can't walk away or abstain, as that only yields to our enemies. But before pulling the lever for the candidate whose views are closest to yours, however imperfect they may be, you should also pause and resolve to get to work—that night, before you go to sleep—on setting up a better choice for the next election. And the one after that, too. ■

A protester at a 2013 rally holds a sign in support of the DREAM Act.

Flickr/Michael Fleshman

DAN CANTOR is the national director of the Working Families Party.

INTIMATE VIOLENCE SOCIETAL VIOLENCE

As the national conversation on intimate violence continues to unfold in public discourse, *Tikkun* is issuing a call to activists, researchers, spiritual leaders, mental-health professionals, and others working to prevent and heal intimate violence. We want to expand and continue this much-needed conversation to include intersectional aspects that are often ignored. Three responses to our inquiry follow: legal expert and cultural historian Riane Eisler sets forth a plan for using human-rights law to protect women and children worldwide; sociologist Nikki Jones exposes the congruence between police violence and intimate aggression; and essayist Chelsey Clammer recounts her struggles with self-harm and loss of community after an assault. To read more responses, visit tikkun.org/violence. To join the conversation, write to letters@tikkun.org.

Galine Tumasyan (galinetumasyan.com)

Protecting the Majority of Humanity

Stopping the International Pandemic of Intimate Violence

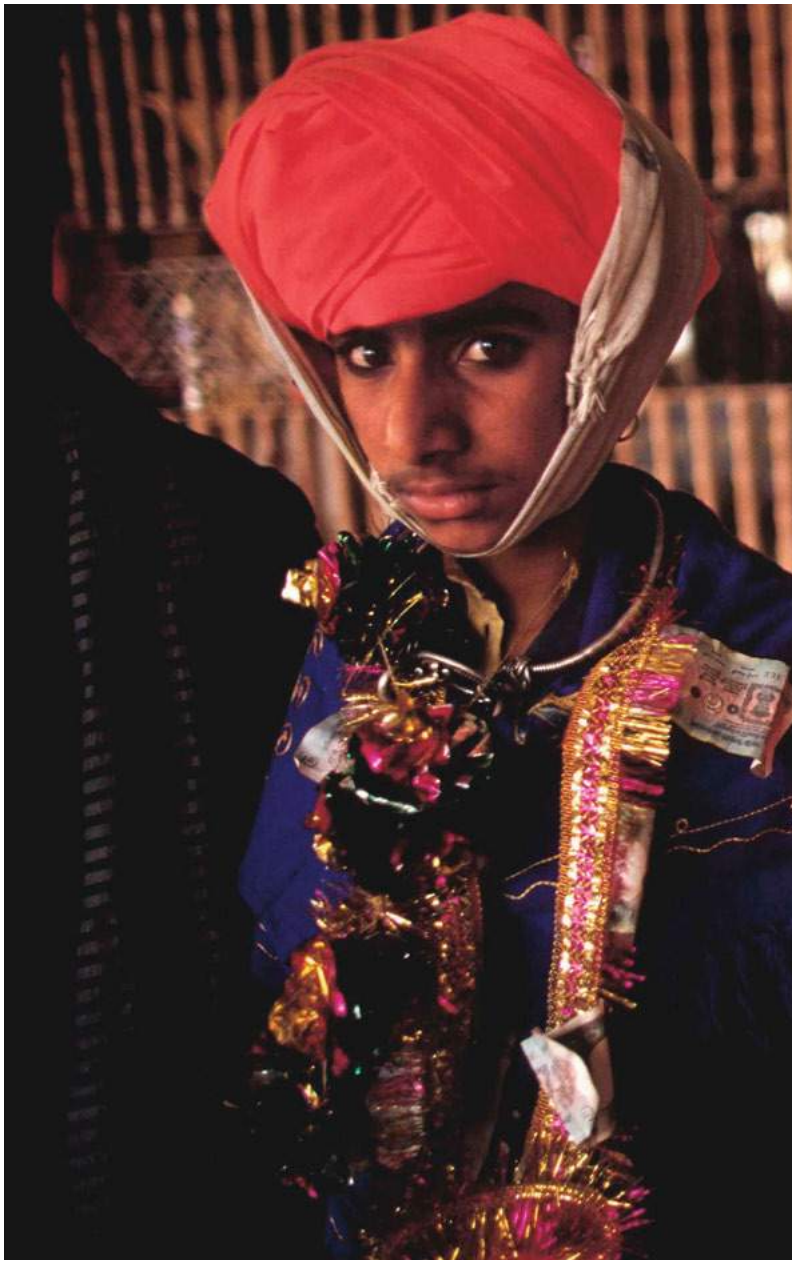
BY RIANE EISLER

THE WAR IN Ukraine, ISIL's beheadings in Iraq, the barbarity of Latin American drug cartels, the mass shootings in U.S. malls and churches: these stories regularly get front-page coverage. But the public stoning of a young woman in Pakistan, the murder of a wife in the United States, an African girl's forced genital mutilation, an Indian child-bride's internal injuries, a nine-year-old girl sold into prostitution in Thailand, and thousands of other such brutalities get a back-page story at best—and more often are ignored. Also ignored is the fact that these are far from isolated instances: they are the tip of the iceberg of a pandemic of intimate violence that claims millions of lives every year—more than all the world's wars combined.

I coined the term intimate violence over twenty years ago to describe domestic violence, rape, child abuse, female infanticide, and other brutal practices, many of which take place within families and are still not prosecuted in many regions of the world. Some countries in Southeast Asia do not even have laws against wife beating, though beating a stranger is of course a crime. Even human rights organizations have only in recent decades started to address intimate violence. For instance, in 1987, I wrote the first article published in the *Human Rights Quarterly* on women's rights as human rights. Subsequently, I argued that violence against children must also be included in human rights theory and action. Recently, in a 2013 Cambridge University book, I proposed that international law, especially the Rome Statute's sections on crimes against humanity, be expanded to include egregious, customary, systematic, unprosecuted violence against women and children.

Legal remedies—and ensuring their enforcement by holding public officials at all levels accountable if they fail to do so—are certainly essential. But they are not enough. The problem goes much deeper. It is rooted in cultural and religious traditions we inherited that condone, and all too often command, violence against women and children.

This intimate violence was for much of recorded history key to maintaining rankings of domination—man over man,



RIANE EISLER is the author of *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body*, and *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. She is a constitutional law expert and attorney, as well as cultural historian, evolutionary systems scientist, and president of the Center for Partnership Studies.

man over woman, religion over religion, race over race, nation over nation—in more authoritarian and chronically violent times. It was not only used to maintain strict paternal rule in families; it also provided training for using violence as a means of imposing one's will on others, be it in families or among the family of nations.

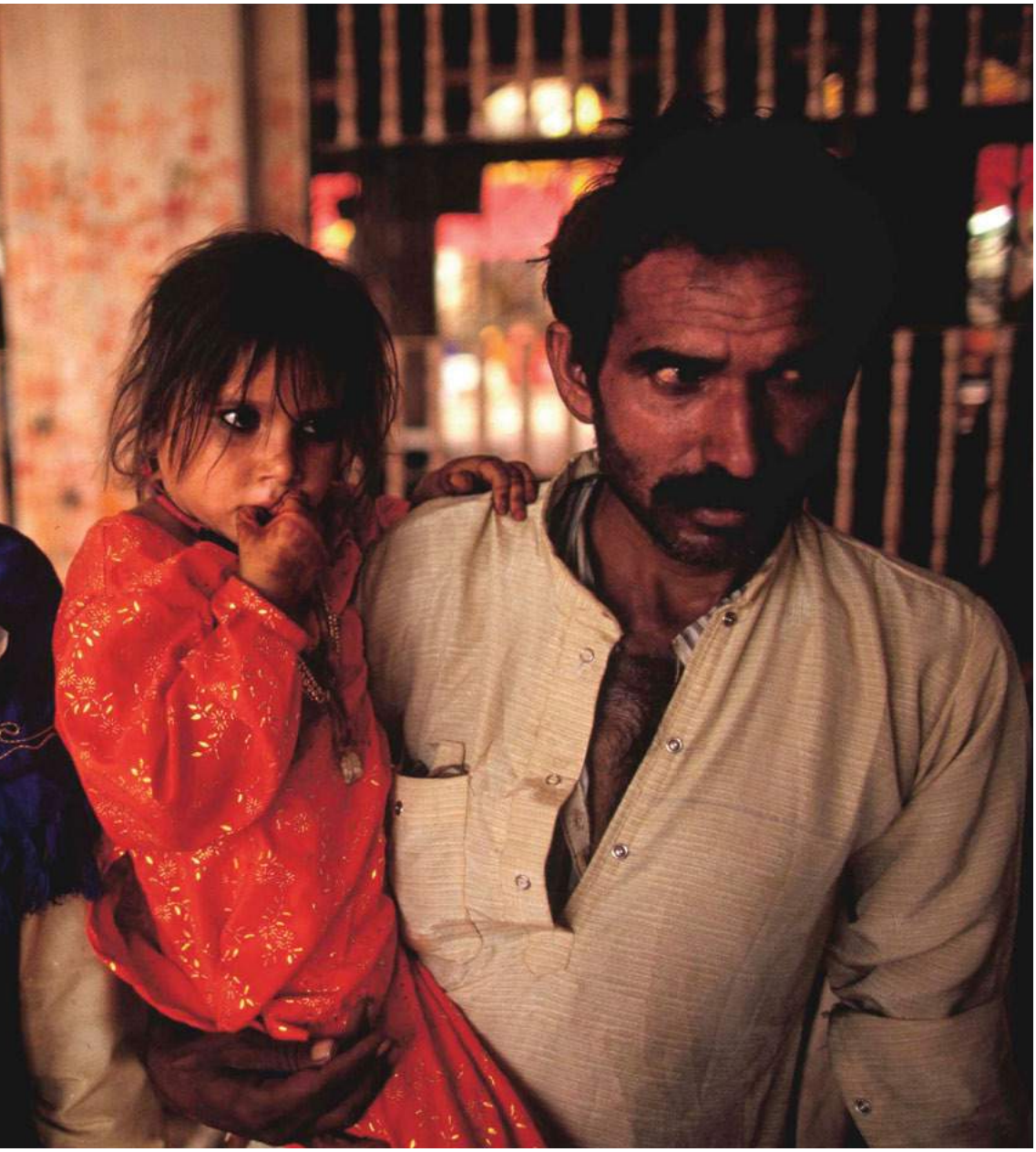
This is why progressives must make ending intimate violence a top moral and political priority, not only for the sake of all those whose lives are blighted or taken by it, but for the sake of us all.

The Replication of Violence

What we experience or observe in our early years plays a major role in who we become, affecting nothing less than how our brains develop. As children, in our families and in other intimate relationships, we learn either to respect the human rights of others or to accept abuse and violence as normal, even moral. Our first lessons about human relations are learned not in the public but in the private, or intimate, sphere. So while some people transcend these teachings of violence and injustice, many carry them into other relations and accept violence and injustice as "just the way things are."

Throughout history and cross-culturally, the most despotic and warlike cultures have been those in which violence or the threat of violence maintains domination of parent over child and man over woman. We vividly see this connection in the European Middle Ages and in fundamentalist cultures today. In the violent and authoritarian Roman Empire, the male head of household had power over life and death, not only over his slaves, but also over the women and children in his household. Under English common law, which developed in a time when monarchs maintained their rule through fear and force, even extreme parental violence against children was not unlawful, and husbands were legally permitted to beat their wives for disobedience. Even in democracies such as the United States today, groups that espouse violence against "inferior" races also characteristically embrace rigid male dominance and highly punitive childrearing.

The connection between rigid male domination in the family and despotism in the state helps explain customs



Polaris Images/Christopher Brown

The stories of child brides, like the girl in the photo above, rarely receive the same level of attention as war or terrorism, but these forms of violence are closely connected.

such as the "honor killings" of girls and women by members of their own families and the stoning of women for alleged sexual offenses in authoritarian Islamic regimes that support terrorism. Studies such as the classic *The Authoritarian Personality* document how individuals who acquiesce to authoritarianism, violence, and scapegoating in the state tend to be individuals from families in which authoritarianism, violence, and scapegoating were the norm.

As psychotherapist Alice Miller noted, the biographies of demagogic arch-criminals like Hitler reveal that their violent persecution of "inferior" or "dangerous" people is in large part rooted in the violence and cruelty they experience as children. Moreover, that so many people have followed, and even loved, such cruel despots is also rooted in their early experiences. It is in the family that both women and men learn to accept rule by terror as normal and "moral"—be it in their own societies or against other tribes or nations.

"... the link between *intimate violence* in the home and at school and *international violence* in terrorism and war is still largely ignored.

Yet while there is much talk about economic and social factors behind warfare and terrorism, the link between *intimate violence* in the home and at school and *international violence* in terrorism and war is still largely ignored.

Cultural and Political Transformation

Some argue that applying human rights principles to intimate violence constitutes "outside interference" in family affairs. There is also the charge that to do so is "Western cultural imperialism" because this violence is still perpetuated on the basis of tradition and/or religion in some non-Western cultures.

Of course, every institutionalized behavior, including slavery and cannibalism, is a cultural tradition. Yet no one today would justify cannibalism or slavery (which were traditional practices in some cultures) on cultural or religious grounds.

Indeed, the basis of the modern human rights and democracy movements is the rejection of autocratic cultural traditions backed up by fear and force. It is time for traditions of intimate violence against women and children to be recognized for what they are: brutal practices to exert control through the infliction or threat of pain.

That intimate violence is receiving more attention today reflects major changes in cultural values and social institutions: a gradual shift from a *domination system* to a *partnership system*. Using the lens of a *partnership/domination continuum*, we see what conventional categories—right vs. left, religious vs. secular, Eastern vs. Western, and so on—obscure: the way a society structures the primary human relations—between the female and male halves of humanity, and between them and their children—is integrally linked with whether it is violent and inequitable or more peaceful and equitable.

We see this link in the most repressive and violent regimes of modern times—from Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR to the Taliban and the ISIL. Despite their many differences, they all closely orient to the domination system's configuration of authoritarian rule in both the family and the state or tribe, rigid male dominance, and a high degree of socially accepted and even idealized violence, from wife- and child-beating to terrorism and warfare.

We also see this link in contemporary societies that have been at the forefront of the movement toward the partnership system, such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland. These nations adopted the first laws against physical discipline in families and have a strong men's movement to disentangle "masculinity" from its association with domination and violence. They launched the first peace studies programs. And they have more democracy in *both* the family and the state, a generally high standard of living for all, and the lowest gender gaps in the world, with women composing 40 to 59 percent of national legislators.

A Call to Action

As outlined in my book *The Power of Partnership,* progressives need a political agenda that encompasses *both* the public sphere of politics and economics and the personal sphere of family and other intimate relations. Spiritual leaders can play a major role in changing hearts and minds to embrace this integrated agenda.

This is why I cofounded the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (www.saiv.org). More than 80 percent of the world's people identify with a religious faith and look to religious leaders for guidance. By using their moral authority to forcefully condemn intimate violence, spiritual leaders can make a huge difference.

It should be enough to say that intimate violence must stop because of the horrible damage it does to the millions directly affected. But it has not been enough. Nor has it been enough to point to the massive and extensively documented economic and social costs of this violence.

So we must also show the link between intimate and international violence. With the specter of biological or nuclear

terrorism and warfare hanging over us, many religious leaders have spoken out against international violence. Now they must raise their voices against the intimate violence that sparks, fuels, and refuels international violence.

We need international education to change entrenched traditions of abuse and violence. We need legal reforms and real law enforcement, which can be achieved by influencing the United Nations and other international bodies to support the inclusion of gender and childhood under the protected categories in the sections of the Rome Statute that define crimes against humanity. We need national policies that more effectively address intimate violence, starting with education for partnership gender relations and partnership parenting (as through the Caring and Connected Parenting Guide that can be downloaded from www.saiv.org), and by seeing to it that foreign aid is conditional on agreements to initiate substantial efforts to stop intimate violence.

Our challenge at this critical time in human history is to accelerate these changes both through grassroots actions and by influencing world leaders. It is time to act! ■

The Gender of Police Violence

BY NIKKI JONES

"Bye, sexy."

A teenaged boy launched the comment in my direction from just a few feet away. We'd just been sitting at a table together for about an hour, at a weekly meeting for young men in the neighborhood. I was stunned by the young man's transgression, but, as many women are conditioned to do, I didn't respond. Instead, I let the inappropriate comment hang in the air as I left the room.

Like most American women, I have been the target of uninvited comments like this one in the past. The regularity with which such intrusions are directed at women in public space recently inspired its own hashtag, #YouOkSis. The co-creators of the online campaign, Feminista Jones and @BlackGirlDanger, hoped the use of the hashtag would break the silence surrounding the experiences of black women and girls with street harassment. "I wanted to center our voices," said Feminista Jones in an interview published in the *Atlantic*, "because I feel like black women's voices are not always amplified. And I feel it's my responsibility to do that." Another recent online effort is #SayHerName, which was inspired by the activism of the Black Youth Project 100 and allies like the African American Policy Forum, a group that published a report called "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women." This report seeks to amplify and center the experiences of black women and girls in local and national debates about police violence and reforms.

#YouOkSis and #SayHerName are modern-day campaigns made possible by the technological advances of the twenty-first century and fueled by the power of Black Twitter. Yet the efforts to understand violence as a continuum that includes black women, who also confront police violence and are disproportionately affected by various forms of violence against women, are a throwback to an unfinished black feminist project, one that Kimberlé Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie address in the #SayHerName report: "Black women have consistently played a leadership role in struggles against state violence—from the Underground Railroad to the anti-lynching movement to the current Black Lives Matter campaign—yet the forms of victimization they face at the hands of police are consistently left out of social movement demands."

#SayHerName and #YouOkSis challenge the legacy of excluding black women and girls from conversations about violence in the black community. In doing so, these online efforts and their on-the-ground actions document the painful and liberating stories of black women and girls. The parallel movements also run the risk, however, of once again presenting these experiences as distinct and competing, rather than parts of a larger whole. Yet it is crucial for the safety of black men and black women to see structural violence and interpersonal violence, police violence and street harassment, as interconnected.

The "bye, sexy," farewell followed a discussion of police aggression. The discussion took place at a weekly meeting in a public housing complex in San Francisco's Lower Fillmore neighborhood. I lived there for more than two years while researching a new book. Lincoln, an African American man and father figure to several local teens, led the group. (Names in this article have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.) The weekly discussions helped participants process difficult events in the neighborhood, including arrests. On this night, the group was grappling with a recent arrest in the neighborhood. As Lincoln tells it, the incident began when the police got a call that a black man wearing a white T-shirt—a description broad enough to fit every young man in the room—had a gun. When the police arrived, they arrested a man known to the group but, it appears from the conversation, not known for his involvement in street violence. The police handled the man roughly, handcuffing him and slamming him to the ground before throwing him in the back of the police car.

Some of the boys at the meeting saw the arrest; they are saddened and frustrated. I join Lincoln's efforts to help the boys make sense of the incident, asking them how they felt after witnessing the arrest. One boy says that it makes you feel like you want to hurt the police. Lincoln reminds the boys that they can't hurt the police and returns to my original question. He asks the group again to talk about their *feelings*. One of the younger boys, about twelve years old, answers, saying that the arrest of the man makes him feel like it is racist, like the police do not like black people. They deliberately go after the older black men, he says, so that soon just young

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No Haiti No Orleans by Michael Massenburg. In his work, Massenburg explores issues class, race and culture "in an attempt to engage the subjects through representational, psychological, and spiritual perspectives."

boys like them are going to be left on the property, and then they will need a pass to get on housing-complex property. I ask whether after witnessing the arrest they feel like the police are there to protect them. They say no, adding that the police do not care if somebody gets shot. When I question how it makes them feel about power, one boy says he feels like he has no power. I ask the group what they can do if they have no power. Stay out of trouble, do well in school, one boy suggests. Pressing, I ask, what else? The usually boisterous group falls silent.

Shortly after this conversation, I said my goodbyes to the group. I had an early flight the next day. I rose from the table and made my way to the door. As I placed my hand on the door's handle, one of the young men from the group—a young man who had always treated me with deference and respect—lofted the loud farewell into the air: "Bye, sexy." I knew my silence would not be the end of it. I was sure that Lincoln would scold the young man for his lack of respect—a lesson that he sometimes punctuated with a swift jab to a boy's chest.

I was frustrated by the boy's outburst, but in that moment I also understood the young man's actions with a clarity that I'd never had before. Although young, he understood the fragility of his masculinity and had already learned that his effort to repair an injury to his budding manhood required a female body. Yet, I also understood that "bye, sexy" was more than an adolescent's jocular attempt to reassert his manhood. Our conversation was so powerful, so revealing, because it made visible the *origin* of the threat to the young man's sense of manhood and developing sense of self. The threat wasn't me or my body or my status position, as women who are the targets of uninvited comments in public are often encouraged to believe. Rather, the source of the young man's sense of powerlessness was, as the group conversation made clear, his own marginality and the seemingly arbitrary and all-controlling actions of the police in his neighborhood. His comment was not just a desperate grasp at a semblance of power and control over his social world after having his sense of power*less*ness laid bare before me. It was an attempt to *escape his own vulnerability*—a vulnerability that women

Michael Massenburg (www.michaelmassenburg.com)

and girls know well. If he hadn't made such an effort, then he would have had to settle in with an unsettling social fact: that he is embedded in a set of power relations that make him more like a woman or a girl than he'd like to admit.

The experiences of black women and girls with street harassment, and of black men and boys with police aggression, are both similar and interconnected. The experiences are far more similar than competing discourses around police violence and violence against black women suggest. Police violence and street harassment reveal a *shared* vulnerability to dominance and violence. Both forms of violence are gendered violence. Routine practices that come along with contact with the criminal justice system force black men into submissiveness. In effect, poor black men are subjugated in a way that mirrors the street harassment of black women: they become bodies that can be accessed, penetrated, and controlled at will and without recourse. The emotional impact of such encounters lingers long after the encounter ends, as is often the case when women are subjected to uninvited comments or physical aggression in public.

After another boys' group meeting, for instance, the boys finish the plates of food that are provided at each meeting and, one by one or in pairs, begin to trickle out of the meeting area. As they leave, they are confronted with a familiar scene. Two police cars have pulled into the parking lot near the meeting room's door. The activity draws the group outside en masse. Once outside, Lincoln takes a stand near the four officers who have arrived on the scene. Lincoln says that the officers are claiming that three of the boys attending the meeting broke into a resident's home. He says the boys were in the room the whole time. A small group of kids, who appeared to be between the ages of eight and eleven, gather around the officers. Lincoln orders the kids to run along. The older boys in the group walk away on their own, spreading out like water on pavement as they make their way across the street and away from the officers.

I hear Larry's voice rise from the crowd of observers. Larry is Lincoln's son. A senior in high school, he's been studying for the state-mandated exit exam. I've provided some support for him along the way. A few weeks earlier, at the end of an emergency tenants' meeting called to address a wave of evictions affecting the housing complex's residents, Larry shared a recent encounter with the police. He had been picked up and taken to the local station and "strip-searched," he said. He looked disheartened, frustrated, and somewhat defeated as he shared his experience.

The strip search Larry references is a routine practice in law enforcement and corrections. During the invasive search, a male suspect like Larry is coerced to bend over, spread his buttocks and manipulate his genitalia (or have it done by an officer) to show that he is not carrying contraband or weapons in or on his body. Invasive body searches can also take place on the street. Any failure to comply with an officer's direction would be seen as resistance and met with coercive force. The largely hidden nature of this invasive practice mirrors black women's experience with sexual violence as a form of social control.

"Not tonight, not tonight," Larry repeats in a monotone chant. "Ya'll ain't taking me in tonight," he says, bouncing on his toes like a boxer getting ready for a match. "You're not going to strip-search me. That's illegal."

Larry makes his way over to my place in the small crowd. He continues to bounce and chant as we watch what's going on from behind the railing that separates the entrance from the parking lot. Larry raises his voice and begins to yell in the direction of the officers. I turn to him to get his attention. In a low, soft tone I encourage him to calm down. He pauses for a moment.

"It's frustrating," he says, "they can come up in here, take me to the station, strip-search me, and I can't do anything back to them." I tell him that I understand, but that the way to get back at them is by taking and passing his exit exam. "You're trying to go somewhere," I say. I encourage him not to court the police into disrupting his path. He takes in my suggestion before retreating back into the crowd of bystanders.

It's not uncommon for bystanders to launch accusations at officers from the outskirts of a confrontation. But I was struck by the specificity of Larry's accusation: "you're not going to strip-search me, that's illegal." His accusation made public what was an otherwise private and intimate violation he had experienced at the hands of the police. As with the efforts of #YouOkSis and #SayHerName, he is challenging a routine but degrading experience. In doing so, he also challenges the idea that such practices are a natural or normal condition of social life for young black men. Like the supporters of #YouOkSis and #SayHerName, Larry's efforts to break the silence surrounding his experience also open him up to the potential for harsher forms of aggression, including the possibility of lethal violence at the hands of the police—a threat from which I hoped to insulate him by redirecting his frustration.

The omnipresent threat of sexual violence operates to keep women and girls (and other gendered outsiders) "in their place," Patricia Hill Collins writes in *Black Sexual Politics*. For black women, she says, the threat of violence acts as "an invisible cage of control." The penetration and expansion of law enforcement into the daily lives of young men is like an invisible cage, too. Reactions to these constraints can send ripples of aggression through a community; the aggression of the dramatic arrest that the boys witnessed eventually found its way to me. Yet, the hand that local policing efforts play in perpetuating aggression and violence in black communities, especially violence against black women at the hands of black men, is often made invisible. Disrupting the silence surrounding *this* relationship will require a broader analytical understanding of how

violence moves through people's bodies and minds, landing on whoever is on the lower end of the social hierarchy.

That understanding won't emerge through competing discourses, but by acknowledging the similarities in the violence directed at black women and at black men, connecting concerns reflected in #YouOkSis and #SayHerName with recent debates over police violence. Such a conversation would not only make the necessary point that black women and girls are targets of police violence *too*, but would also reveal the striking similarity between men and boys' encounters with the police and women and girls' experience with street harassment and sexual violence. We should organize around a shared experience of vulnerability and challenge the acceptability of expressions of dominance *in any form* as a reaction to this vulnerability. To do so is the path to equality and justice, one that is liberating for black men and boys, black women and girls *at the same time*. ■

Skin and Kin

BY CHELSEY CLAMMER

We were the ones who stuck together. We were the survivors and the dreamers, the givers and the movement makers. We held each other up—saviors. We discussed accountability. Discovered spirituality through supporting one another.

There, above my doorway, the purple-painted wooden sign that reads *Intend*. Harm-reduction. Trauma-informed. Advocate. Intentions we made to heal from oppression. We kept each other strong, empowered despite struggles. Gave each other care, confidence, survival. We thrived, together.

My community extended past friends and unfurled through the neighborhoods in which we lived. Those spaces made of safe, well-lit sidewalks, our flourishing community gardens, and the welcoming courtyards of each apartment building—from many windows waved a rainbow flag. Our little corner of Chicago. The one I floated through, peacefully, on that one particular July night. Weaving my way from bar to home, alone, I soon heard a jogger's footsteps barreling down the sidewalk behind me, toward me. I stepped aside to let him run by, but the end of his run—that finishing line—wasn't beyond me. It was me, my body.

Hands pulling, clawing. My screaming and fighting until I finally broke away from his grasp. Then he left. But not soon enough. The one-minute interaction my memory could never ungrasp.

I was assaulted on a Sunday. I taped signs to a sidewalk on Wednesday. Because three days after that Sunday assault, my friends cooked me dinner and we took Sharpies to poster boards. "My short dress does not give you the right to grab me." "He took my safety but not my strength." "I was assaulted here X on Sunday." "Protect your community."

And the edited street sign my lover graffitied:

DO NOT ENTER
someone else's space

Regardless of the care we held for one another, regardless of the support and strength my community gave me, I still felt scared, anxious, defeated. Violated. Flayed. I needed to get away from the places he touched—my body. All of it. I came up with a strategy. Without a body, there would be nothing of me for the next him to grab. I started to get rid of my body—to separate myself from it. I cut.

I cut until I needed stitches. Then I cut again. I cut until I had to go to the psych ward, then I went again. When I got out, I continued to cut. I cut enough one morning that by night I was still bleeding. Sleeping next to my lover, my arm draped over her naked stomach, the sharp lines on my skin starting dripping, the red liquid of self-harm waking her up. She stayed calm that night as she wiped clean the places where the cuts had wept, but she would soon begin to retreat from me—my community promptly following.

We were great at supporting one another. Until we weren't. Until the stress of supporting me became too much and my community had to break away. They needed to tend to their own struggles. Because one friend's sister was in the hell of an active eating disorder. One friend was working to heal from the violence of her last relationship. One friend was depressed. One was labeled unstable because she wanted to be *he*. One friend lost her food stamps. Another lost his father. One friend lost her partner. My friends were losing me.

Yes, we took care of each other, but caring for ourselves had to be a part of that. You can't be a friend to someone if you're not a friend to yourself. And so my community didn't know how to help me since I wouldn't help myself. I cut. I wept. I dragged them down. Because they didn't know how to help themselves when I was around, draining their energy, their resilience.

For their own sanity, their own emotional safety, they turned their backs to me.

Like my assailant, they walked away, left me shattered.

What I want to say is that it didn't have to be that way. But how can we be there for someone who has already vacated herself—someone who has left her body because she couldn't escape the memories?

This is about more than our bodies, though. It's about our voices, our stories. It's about our space. Space needed to explore those voices, those stories. To put words to what we can't comprehend. *Why this? Why me?* We need to feel like someone is listening. Need that space in which we support someone, not force her to be fixed. An understanding. Our stories heard.

There is a certain type of silence that permeates a psych ward's hallways at 2 AM. I know this because of the cutting and how it led me there, again. The support I needed was

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beyond my community's capabilities. It was time for the professionals—those who had the resources to stitch me up—to swoop in and save me.

The psych ward protected me from the razor. And in that space of the razor removed, I realized I had been trying to tell my story with swipes and slices. But the cuts only silenced me, cut me off from my community. I had to find a different way—a way that didn't harm me—to put language to my pain.

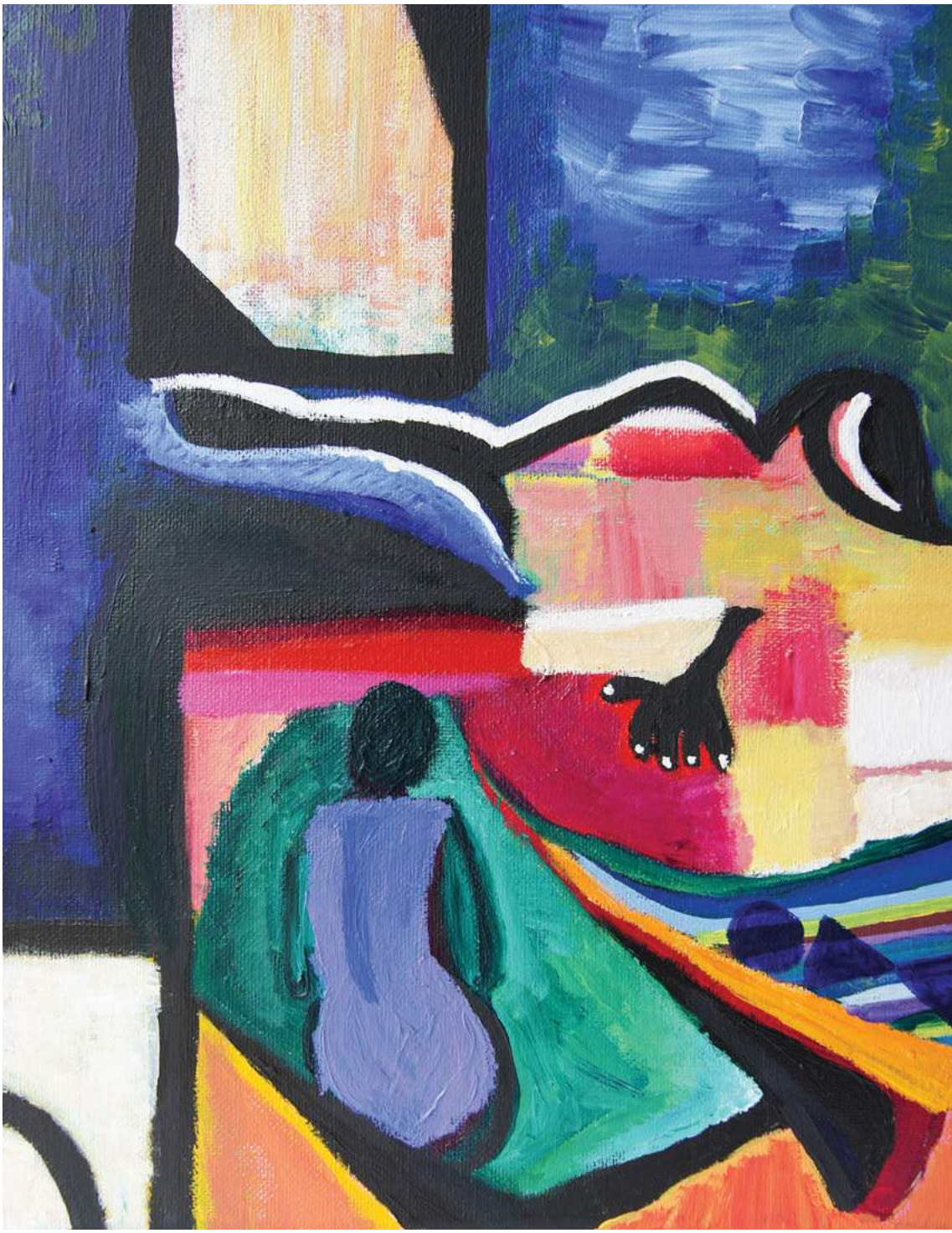
I had adjectives and verbs, had stories built inside of me full of metaphors and allusions and specific words that wanted to be heard. The stillness and safety of the psych ward gave me the space to write the pain out of me, to put down the razor and pick up a pen.

I put down the razor.

I picked up a pen.

I inked my way toward repairing the ruins my life had become.

It was a process of discovering. Each time I wrote, I found a new angle into my past, a new way to approach and consider life. Get that narrative out. Turn pain into art. Craft it. Share it. Gain strength from gaining a voice. Surviving is an art. No matter how harsh and scary the words were, I had to write them out of me to gain some understanding about who I was without my community, how they had to continue without me.



Apna Ghar, a community organization in Chicago, works with immigrant communities to end gender violence using art therapy programs, in which community members create artworks such as the one above.

Apna Ghar

When I found my words and found myself, I discovered a community that knew how to listen, how to care for me by encouraging my self-exploration through creative writing. I encountered writers who told me to roll up my sleeves and dive right into those darkest moments of my existence. Don't avoid. Don't be scared. Go deep. Excavate beyond the cuts. Exhume through the scars.

Because if I didn't tell my story, it would continue to happen to me. Memories of trauma replaying in my

mind—that continuous loop of what I wished I could leave behind. Words were what got me through. Not so much documenting trauma, but transforming past pain into a tangible story. Writing as a way to see it all, right there in front of me, on the page. I shared it. I started to heal.

Having figured out how to attend myself, I could finally be there for some-one else. I could create that co-healing space. I could listen.

I read my friends' stories as I continued to put words to my own.

In Minneapolis, Marya writes about mental illness. In Seattle, Bernard writes about drug addiction. In Chicago, Pat writes about a rape, and Abe in Austin un-silences the secrets of incest. Kineret explores spirituality in the landscape of Australia. In Tel Aviv, Morgan reckons with her body. Tayyba in Houston figures out her American identity.

I read these people's stories as they read mine. There's a type of encouragement that flows from each sentence, each story. Readers witness our past pain. They face the trauma with us, tell us to keep going, that we have a right to tell our stories. Writing is a spiritual practice, because, in essence, writing is about letting go. How a word after a word puts us out into the world. Stories connecting, we discover our spirituality. That larger something at work where words inspire and help us to move on. Let go. This is how connection is created. Stitch our stories together instead of cutting them out.

This is a type of spirituality that assures me we are living together in this world, not alone. We might not know how to fully sew each other up, but by encouraging each other to speak, to write, we are no longer avoiding our wounds. We figure out how to address those scars.

This isn't to say my activist community lacked a sense of spirituality. For years, actually, I felt that spiritual sense that is intrinsic to connection and community right there, between us. During those years I was involved and expressive. And then trauma, and then isolation, and then the sentence structure of my spirituality broke down. I was left with fragments no one knew how to translate. Silenced by a communication breakdown. Collective spirituality fissured.

My new community exists in my contacts, my friend lists, my connections. The journals and books I read. The rough drafts friends send to me. We are all one email, one page, one website away. We are the ones who read, who know the power of writing. We are the ones who make words flow in order to let go. And together, we grow. We thank each other for writing something that spoke to us so profoundly. We reach out to recognize and praise and discuss. We find our stories as we find ourselves, each other, this community. We create our own vocabulary for this continued healing. ■

Justice for Just Us?

Spiritual Progressives and Carnism

BY ALKA ARORA

As a spiritual progressive and a vegan, going out to dinner can be hard sometimes. This is not because of the paucity of vegan options at restaurants—not in the San Francisco Bay Area, anyway. While restaurant menus can sometimes be an obstacle, I consider them a minor inconvenience compared to the deeper issue troubling me at the dinner table: the uncritical carnism that's all around me. Coined by psychologist Melanie Joy, "carnism" describes an ideology that leads us to consume pigs, chickens, and cows, oblivious to the immense suffering that these beings experience on their way to our plates. We would never condone such violence toward our beloved cats and dogs, whom we recognize as sentient beings with feelings and subjectivities. Yet the ideology of carnism encourages us to overlook the similarities between species (between pigs and dogs, for instance) so that we can participate in a system that turns living beings into objects for our consumption.

Carnism leads most people to consider veganism merely a "personal choice"—as opposed to a political response to a corporatized agricultural system that commits systematic atrocities against our animal kin. My dinner companions are generally those who are well attuned to the harmful ideologies of racism, sexism, and classism; they are not afraid to call out these issues when they see them. Why, then, is it so hard to broach the issue of carnism at the table?

The social justice community lacks sustained critical discourse about the politics and ethics of consuming animal products. Veganism is often derided as a trendy choice of the privileged, who must consume expensive faux meats and nut milks to sustain themselves. Those of us who raise issues of animal suffering are seen as sanctimonious or as detracting from more pressing issues of human suffering. To be sure, a growing number of food justice activists are articulating links between how we as a society treat animals, treat the earth, and treat the exploited workers who produce our food. Despite these efforts, however, veganism remains rare among progressives, and "carnism" has yet to become a part of our organizing language.

I contend that we must begin to take seriously the impact of our food choices on the other sentient beings with whom we share the planet. A spiritually progressive paradigm must challenge the ideology of carnism and help shift our culture toward veganism. Compassion requires us to look at the immense suffering inflicted upon animals for the sake of profit and taste. Political awareness leads us to see how the exploitation and objectification of human and nonhuman animals are linked. And, finally, the survival of our planet depends upon us opening our eyes to the role that animal agriculture plays in catastrophic climate change.

Desanctifying Life: Racism, Sexism, and Carnism

Our social movements are often beset with a 'zero-sum game' mindset, leading some progressives to believe that concern for the oppression of animals will detract from concern for humans. However, a look at history reveals that the objectification of human life through racism and sexism has always been intertwined with the objectification of animal life through carnism. In *The Dreaded Comparison*, for instance, Marjorie Spiegel documents how the practices of confining, enslaving, and harming nonhuman animals helped give rise to the very same practices that were used in human chattel slavery. Not only were the same instruments of restraint and punishment used for nonhuman animals and dehumanized humans, but the same psychological mechanisms of numbing, dissociating, and othering were employed by the perpetrators of this abuse. Thus, the practice of torturing nonhuman animals made it both cognitively and materially easier to torture humans.

Efforts to end slavery rightly emphasized the humanity of enslaved African Americans. Today, antiracist, feminist, and other activists continue to decry the treatment of women, people of color, and disabled persons "as animals." However, these efforts leave unquestioned the implicit assumption that animals should be treated "as animals"—that is, with cruelty

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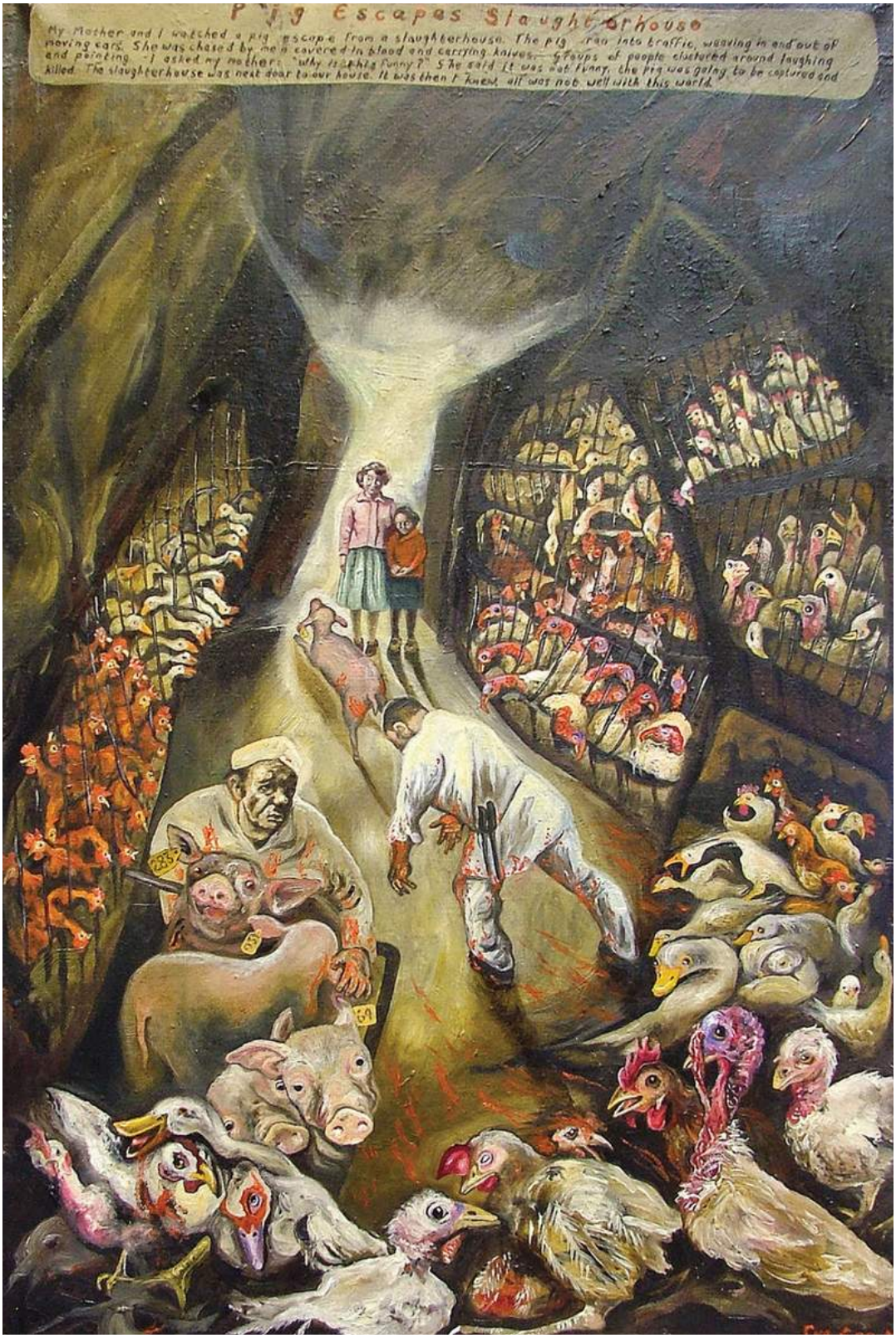


My mother and I watch a pig escape the slaughterhouse, by Sue Coe.
Copyright 2006 Sue Coe Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York

Sue Coe

and disdain. This logic has also helped shore up the notion among oppressed groups that we must assert our domination over animals in order to claim our humanity. Arguing specifically for an African American Christian veganism, theologian and pastor Christopher Carter argues:

> The liberation that the black church seeks cannot be realized apart from the liberation of all creation, unless we are willing to prioritize our desire for liberation above the well being of other oppressed groups. If the black church chooses to operate in this way, we would be settling for *equality with* our oppressors, rather than *liberation from* our oppressors.

Along similar lines, ecofeminist Carol Adams challenges women to see how our bodies have been objectified and commodified in ways similar to animal bodies. But she also points out that women's complaints of being treated "as meat" unwittingly uphold the legitimacy of slaughtering animals for *actual* meat. Adams's argument suggests that rather than decrying our own oppression while perpetuating that of animals, feminists must consider the ways in which our plights are connected. For instance, the control and commodification of female animals' reproductive capacities for eggs and milk is central to the factory farming system, just as the control of women's reproduction has been central to the creation of patriarchy. Furthermore, the values of power-over, conquest, and consumption that fuel our meat-centric society also perpetuate ideologies that teach men to view women as prey.

"As spiritual progressives, our critique of sexism, racism, and unrestrained capitalism remains incomplete so far as we fail to see the relationship of these "isms" to our treatment of animals.

Ultimately, economic concerns have been the driving forces behind racism, sexism, *and* carnism. While early human societies did not consider animals to be morally equivalent to humans, they did recognize each animal kingdom as having its own sacred value in the cosmic order. The ever-expanding profit motive of capitalism, however, helped bolster the Cartesian idea that animals were nothing more than soulless machines, undeserving of our ethical consideration. As capitalism has progressed, so has the intensification of large-scale factory farming and its utter disregard for animals' lived experiences. As spiritual progressives, our critique of sexism, racism, and unrestrained capitalism remains incomplete so far as we fail to see the relationship of these "isms" to our treatment of animals.

Similarly, animal rights activists' work against carnism is incomplete without an analysis of the race, class, and gender hierarchies that shape food production and consumption in the capitalist system. A. Breeze Harper, founder of the Sistah Vegan Project, points out that many vegan organizations will refer to chocolates as "cruelty free" as long as they lack animal products—whether or not child slave labor was involved in producing the cocoa. Thus, an individualistic and consumerist focus on adopting a completely vegan diet can sometimes privilege discussions of the best way to make nondairy cheese (it seems cashews are the way to go, by the way) over systematic, grassroots efforts to abolish factory farms or provide more accessible plant-based foods in "food deserts": urban neighborhoods that lack access to supermarkets and to fresh and local food sources.

A social movement based on interconnectedness recognizes that efforts to reduce animal suffering will alleviate human suffering, as well. For instance, slaughterhouse workers—low-wage employees who are predominantly people of color—often suffer from a type of PTSD called Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS). Physical injuries are also endemic among workers, and Human Rights Watch has called meatpacking "the most dangerous factory job in America." A recent study from the University of Windsor has also suggested that factory farm workers may be more prone to violence against other humans as a result of having to routinely suppress empathy.

Capitalism seeks to exploit the seemingly competing interests of different groups: under this logic, humans will be deprived if animals are allowed to thrive. While this logic has some validity in the short-term—a vegan society means no more bacon cheeseburgers—it breaks down when examined from a broad scale or long-term perspective. As the examples above have shown, the harm we do to our animal kin ultimately harms us as well—and this is most apparent in the way that animal agriculture is destroying the planet that sustains us all.

A *Really* Inconvenient Truth

While my own turn to veganism initially arose from a concern for animal suffering, any critique of animal agriculture would be incomplete without an analysis of its role in our current ecological crisis. Although Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and other mainstream environmental efforts have ignored or downplayed the impact of animal agriculture, there is a growing awareness that the animals we kill may actually be killing us. The documentary *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret* details the following facts:

The Peaceable Kingdom, by Edward Hicks.

Edward Hicks

- Over half of all worldwide greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to livestock.
- Meat and dairy industries use almost one third of the world's fresh water.
- Animal agriculture is the leading cause of species extinction, ocean dead zones, water pollution, and habitat destruction.
- Livestock and feed crops are the most significant causes of rain forest destruction.

Why, then, are there more public campaigns to address our transportation habits than our eating preferences? Could it be that the ideology of carnism is so entrenched that we will give up our cars before we will our meat? *Cowspiracy* argues that the meat industries are protected by an unspoken agreement among politicians and donors that criticizing animal agriculture is verboten. This agreement is further upheld by the prevailing carnist ideology that consuming large quantities of animal products is right, healthy, and necessary. It is incumbent on spiritual progressives to question this reigning ideology, reject denialism, and interrogate our own complicity in maintaining a food system that is destroying our beloved planet.

Another Paradigm: Spiritual Traditions and Animal Ethics

Despite their many differences, the world's spiritual traditions offer resources that can help us resist the commodifying and objectifying logic of capitalism. As spiritual progressives, we've drawn upon these teachings to object to wars, the

global exploitation of labor, and myriad other oppressions. I contend that we must now use these teachings to also become a prophetic voice for the elimination of the torturous systems that underlie our daily meals.

Among the world's religious traditions, the Eastern paths of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism are well known for advocating a vegetarian diet. Principles of compassion, *ahimsa* (nonviolence), and the belief that all sentient life is sacred underlie religious vegetarianism. (My choice to be at first vegetarian, then vegan, has been an outgrowth of my Hindu upbringing as well as my study and practice of Buddhism.)

These traditions seem removed for most Westerners, however, whose attitudes toward animals are more likely shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by Judaism and Christianity. While these traditions have historically permitted the taking of animal life for food, they do *not* sanction the confinement and cruelty that pervade modern factory farming systems. Rather, they demand that humans take their responsibilities as stewards of the earth seriously by treating animal life with compassion and care. Writing about Jewish vegetarianism in the July/August 2009 issue of *Tikkun*, Daniel Brook wrote:

> Just as we were strangers in Egypt and freed from our slavery, animals need to be freed from their narrow confines of slavery, suffering, torture, and untimely death, in order to feed the whole world with the spirit of compassion, love, life, and liberation. Animals should not have to suffer and die for our selfish pleasure. Consonant with the ethics of Judaism, vegetarianism offers compassion, respects the stranger, reduces suffering, and saves lives *every day*.

Similarly, the Christian Vegetarian Association draws on an understanding of God as compassionate and merciful to reject modern factory farming: "those who consume the products of factory farms are sponsoring violence. What does this say about their faith? Can we profess faith that God is good if we believe that God approves of cruelty to animals?"

Islam, too, commands that believers treat animals with compassion. Each animal community is believed to have its own manner of praising Allah, and is therefore dear to Him. Caging animals is prohibited in many Islamic texts, and the Prophet Muhammad said that "whoever is kind to the creatures of God, is kind to himself."

The world's diverse indigenous religions, meanwhile, have in common a reverence for animal life. While hunting animals for food and clothing was historically necessary for survival (and remains so today in some parts of the world), hunters asked forgiveness for their act and expressed gratitude to the animal's spirit. In climates where plant life was abundant, meat was eaten rarely. Modern factory farming systems violate the principles of interconnection, reciprocity, and respect that form the basis of human-animal relations in these traditions.

To be sure, none of these traditions have been vegan. Even Jainism, a lesser-known religious tradition of India that requires humans to take the utmost care in not hurting even the smallest insect, has historically prohibited meat, eggs, and even honey, but not milk. Traditionally, however, only a cow's or goat's *excess* milk was to be taken, ensuring that their offspring had enough to eat. Recognizing that this is by and large not the way milk is produced in contemporary times, many Jains today are seeking to update the tradition and are transitioning to veganism.

In a similar vein, Muslim vegans today see their shift to a plant-based diet as consistent with the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. Although in his time, ecological conditions made it necessary to eat some meat, the development of halal standards were meant to minimize any unnecessary suffering of animals. Given that today's halal meat may actually cause *more* suffering, some Muslims are arguing that the Prophet Muhammad's command to show mercy toward animals suggests that veganism may be the most ethically and spiritually consistent position.

To give a third example, contemporary Indigenous vegans situate their diet within a decolonial framework that resists the exploitation and ecological destruction inherent in modern meat consumption. Indigenous scholar Claudia Serrato, blogger for decolonialfoodforthought.com, writes: "Indigenous Veganism is centered on the clear understanding that as Indigenous People it is OUR RESPONSIBILITY to nurture and protect the land and our ecological relations. Supporting Confined Animal Feeding Industrial Operations along with their by products DO NOT fulfill this responsibility."

I contend that all of us with a progressive view on spirituality can learn from these faith-based vegans to evolve our traditions in light of our current social, political, and ecological context. Some traditions have sought to make the slaughter of animals for food more humane; others have advocated vegetarianism. Today, however, economic factors render most if not all "humane" farming scarcely less cruel than factory farming, and the production of milk and eggs has become just as harmful to animals as the production of meat. Thus, we must go beyond the food restrictions passed down to us from our spiritual forebears, recognize the interconnected sufferings caused by animal agriculture, and begin to build a strong, interfaith vegan movement.

Veganism and *Tikkun Olam*

To date, some spiritual progressives have made personal decisions to adopt vegetarian diets; many others have sought to reduce their meat consumption or participate in movements such as "Meatless Monday." While these efforts are commendable, there are two ways in which we must begin to move beyond them. First, by recognizing the violence inherent in the production of eggs and dairy, we can shift our ideal from vegetarianism to veganism. Second, and most

importantly, we must cease to view veganism as merely a personal lifestyle choice and understand it instead as an integral part of *tikkun olam*, or world repairing. Given the links between the well-being of animals, humans, and the earth, efforts to heal our world that fail to address the harm caused by animal products remain incomplete.

Understanding veganism as part of *tikkun olam* also moves us from individual choice to collective action. Such action can involve efforts to end federal subsidies to meat and dairy industries, ensure access to fresh and affordable plant-based foods in low-income communities, and insist that our spiritual organizations refrain from using animal products. On a deeper level, collective transformation requires that we broaden our paradigms of justice and morality such that they include nonhuman animals. This would require us to bring the concepts of carnism and veganism into the spiritual discourses taking place in churches, temples, mosques, and perhaps most importantly, at dinner tables. Such efforts will bring our progressive movements beyond a focus on "just us" and toward a vision of justice that includes all of earth's sacred creatures. ■

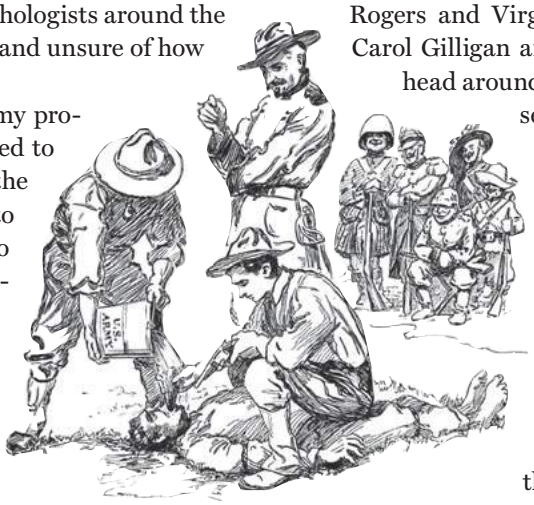
Our Psychological Crisis

Making Sense of the American Psychological Association's Collusion with Torture

BY DEB KORY

Last year's "Hoffman Report," the independent investigation conducted by former Inspector General of Chicago David Hoffman into the American Psychological Association's collusion in the torture of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay and other CIA "black sites," has sent shock waves through the psychology profession, whose members are not at all happy to be the public face of torture in America. Listservs around the country are erupting with consternation and outrage, with demands for accountability, justice, and reform, and with cries of betrayal. Our profession is in a full-blown crisis and psychologists around the country are confused, embarrassed, and unsure of how to respond in a meaningful way.

What shocks me is how shocked my professional community suddenly seemed to be, since much of the information in the Hoffman report has been available to the public for many years, thanks to the ceaseless work of activist psychologists like Steven Reisner, Stephen Soldz, and Jean Maria Arrigo, who first blew the whistle on the APA's cover-up back in 2006. Arrigo had participated in the APA's bogus "Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security," known as the PENS Task Force, which pretended to investigate the ethics of "enhanced interrogation" (torture) by delegating the task to an appointed panel made up almost entirely of military personnel who had direct experience with torture at one or more of the various CIA black sites. Reisner, Soldz, Arrigo, and a small handful of other psychologists out on the front lines of this battle have been intimidated, publicly maligned, and marginalized by the APA in an attempt to discredit the APA's critics and deflect attention from its dirty secrets.



United States officers use a "water cure" on a Filipino captive in this illustration from a 1902 cover of *Life*. The U.S. has a long history of resorting to torture during times of war and has consistently relied on the APA for cover.

Wikimedia commons

I was a doctoral student in clinical psychology when news first broke about psychologists' involvement in torture. I had entered my studies with such optimism and hope about my career, feeling that I had finally found my home in the world—a vocation, not just a job—where I might make good use of my deep love and empathy for people and my desire to do some good in the world. It was shocking, then, to hear in my second year of training that people in my new profession were torturing prisoners. I couldn't fathom how those people could be *psychologists*. Weren't we healers? Weren't we Carl Rogers and Virginia Satir and Sigmund Freud and Carol Gilligan and . . . torturers? I couldn't wrap my head around it at all, so I decided to write my dissertation about it in order to get to the bottom of this incongruous debacle.

As I began to research the events around the torture of prisoners at CIA black sites, I discovered that financial embeddedness and collusion between the APA, the CIA, and the Department of Defense spanned half the last century, beginning with mind-control research at the start of the Cold War, then continuing on to the torture of Vietnamese prisoners of war, CIA-backed training of torturers throughout Central and South America (at venues like the School of the Americas), and in a natural progression to the War on Terror. The degree of entanglement between the military and the psychology profession, it turned out, was so long-standing, broad, and deep that it would have been shocking had psychologists *not* been enlisted to prop up our latest war.

Though people are utterly enraged at the actions of the APA, let's remember the context in which these unscrupulous actions unfolded. Our president—no, our *entire government*

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save a dissenter or two—decided that bombing, kidnapping, torturing, and killing civilian populations in two Middle Eastern countries, one of which had absolutely nothing to do with 9/11, was an appropriate response to a terrorist attack on American soil. President Bush's legal counsel at the Department of Justice *rewrote American law* to circumvent constitutional and international law regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. In short, this was a time of collective national insanity—not a diagnosis covered by insurance, mind you—and the APA was, for the first time, at the seat of absolute power.

Let's also remember that one of President Obama's first acts in office, besides *not* closing Guantánamo as he had promised, was to summarily reject the notion of investigating, much less prosecuting, the Bush administration's torture crimes during the War on Terror. This was a powerful signal to those at the APA that they could simply "look forward, not back," without fear of punishment. If our former president, and all of the president's men (and Condoleezza Rice), could get away with lies, deception, torture, and the murder of civilians, why would these psychologists, this professional organization, bother to reckon with itself and its past?

What I struggle with today, as the "shocking" revelations finally seem to have penetrated the psychology profession and the public at large in a way they simply haven't over the last decade, is how to reckon with the intensity of our denial—as a nation, as a profession, as a collection of individuals struggling to make our way in the world. Even my socially progressive little graduate school in Berkeley, California, received my research with indifference. One administrator dismissed it as the "totally insignificant" concern of a couple of "ultralefties" with no relevance to our profession. This is *Berkeley*. We're supposed to be cultural revolutionaries in this town, and yet even here, the fact that the association that accredits and determines the curriculum for our training institutions was providing professional and legal cover for an illegal and deeply immoral torture program was deemed irrelevant. If that doesn't suggest a need for a radical overhaul of this profession, then this is not a profession I want to be a part of.

But I'm not turning in my shingle. What I know from this work is that crises of this nature open up the possibility of radical transformation. We psychologists—most of us at least—are loving people with big hearts and empathic natures and a desire to be instruments of healing and change. We are imaginative and inquisitive and have the capacity to hold many (sometimes too many) truths at once. But as we sort through the crisis in our midst, we must break free from thinking we are either confined or defined by this terribly dysfunctional professional organization. A change in leadership, changes to the ethics code, prosecution of those involved in illegalities, democratic checks and balances—these are essential acts of reparation. But to truly find our moral grounding again, nay to find our *passion* again, we must turn our sights beyond the APA and remember what it means to be healers, not just of individuals, but of society and the planet. If we put love of humanity at the center of our agenda and reorganize our leadership, our ethics codes, our research, and our training institutions around social, economic, and ecological justice, putting aside once and for all the advancement of profession over people, we are sure to find our way. ■

Activists protest the enhanced interrogation and indefinite detention of Guantánamo prisoners in front of the White House.

Flickr/Medill DC

Can Religious Culture Protect Society's Sacrificial Victims?

BY LEANN SNOW FLESHER AND JENNIFER WILKINS DAVIDSON

THE HATE CRIME perpetrated by a twenty-one-year-old white man at "Mother" Emanuel AME Church in Charleston last year left nine innocent people dead and a nation reeling in shock and pain.

It is no secret that our nation is riddled with prejudice, not the least of which is its pernicious discrimination against its own African American citizens. But mere prejudice cannot explain the degree of such atrocities as the one that occurred in South Carolina. The horror of the Mother Emanuel AME church slaughter reflects entrenched, systemic structures that have too often led to unrestrained and unwarranted violence against a group of people who have been deemed sacrificial.

We ask if religion can save society's sacrificial victims. We believe the answer to this question is not a simple yes, but that we are also compelled to ask *how*.

Sacrificial Victims

René Girard has noted that societies consistently designate substitutionary sacrificial victims to serve in the stead of highly valued perpetrators. He goes on to state that in some societies entire categories of human beings are systematically reserved for sacrificial purposes in order to protect other categories. Girard has concluded that only the introduction of some transcendental quality—such as ritual purification ordained by God—can succeed in bypassing the human propensity toward vengeance and thus stay the violence. In other words, according to Girard, "society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect."

Although the word "sacrifice" owes its origin to the word "sacred," there is nothing sacred about the way blacks have come to be the sacrificial victims of American culture. It is the design of a secular, systemic oppression. Many are the stories of black people, especially black men, being wrongly accused by whites of raping, stealing, or murdering, in order to satisfy the need for retribution in a white hegemonic culture, all the while protecting the perpetrating, falsely accusing community member and, by extension, protecting the entire white community from the discomfort of taking accountability for the sacrifice.

This methodical sacrifice occurs in systemic as well as personal ways. For example, the recent emphasis in the news of individual white police officers killing black men, women, and children is simultaneously personal and political. It may well be that the individual officers who commit extrajudicial murders are substituting their black victims for some other "enemy" that is not readily available. For example, many of our current police officers are former military who have been trained to kill the Other, and some police officers carry within their being a certain rage related to their own experience of inequity, often class-based, related to their position in society. Consequently, we must recognize and acknowledge that these police officers understand black bodies to be sacrificial, having been designated by society as legitimate substitutionary victims for whom there is no risk of vengeance.

Complicating this notion further is the lack of protection and state retribution for black communities that have been abandoned to inadequate police investigations. As Jill Leovy observes in her book *Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America*, "where the criminal justice system fails to respond vigorously to violent injury and death, homicide becomes endemic." African Americans have suffered from just such a lack of effective criminal justice, and this more than anything is the reason for the nation's long-standing plague of black homicides.

Leovy provides numerous examples of both informal and formal political policies from Tennessee to Mississippi, from Philadelphia and New York to Los Angeles, that serve to limit police protection and involvement in black communities wracked by violent deaths. She points out that this "lack of effective criminal justice" is anything but unintentional. A white-supremacist culture provides "inept, fragmented, [and] underfunded" investigative efforts that are "contorted by a variety of ideological, political, and racial sensitivities," and turns a blind eye to the pain of endemic murder that occurs in black communities. A chillingly cold-hearted

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example, Leovy writes, is the "old unwritten code of the Los Angeles Police Department" that referred to black homicides as "NHI – No Human Involved." As one prosecutor joked, NHI homicides were thought to be nothing more than "population control."

In many of our major cities the African American communities have been cordoned off and left to their own devices—forcing the community to function paradoxically as if no judicial system exists even as that same judicial system targets black men and, increasingly, black women, Latino/as, and other brown immigrants as sacrificial victims through mass incarceration and extrajudicial killings. As a result, these communities have seen a rise in gang cultures that establish their own rules, regulations, and forms of governance that lead to escalating levels of violence and result in the deaths of many "players" as well as many innocents. Those who do not live in these communities derogatorily refer to them as "ghettos."

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander exposed the ideologically driven master plan to replace overt Jim Crow, now illegal, with a different legal means of cordoning off a sacrificial portion of our citizenry and making a fortune doing it through the privately run, for-profit prison-industrial complex.

These prisons and the laws written to fill them, such as minimum-sentencing laws, are concrete evidence of the embedded racism against the black population of the United States. They are the historical manifestation of oppressive societal structures. The very existence of these structures and the rhetoric around their development and perseverance has socialized parts of white culture to accept a systemic evil that was established to maintain "order": an order founded on white supremacy.

Gunman Dylann Roof stated his reason for the shooting in the Emanuel AME church: to start a race war because blacks are "raping our women and taking over our country." Roof did not come to this ideology on his own. It was socialized into him. He understands black men, women, and children to be sacrificial. Indeed, his motive—and the implied objective of the culture that socialized him—is to offer up the lives of black American citizens for the preservation of white privilege.

While other minority groups experience racism on a regular basis, we think there is sufficient evidence to state that the African American population has historically held the unique role of being the nation's sacrificial people.

"It Is Finished"

The events that preceded the massacre at Mother Emanuel AME church on June 17, 2015, seem incongruous with the end result. The twenty-one-year-old white male shooter entered the church doors as an attendee of the midweek Bible study. The shooter was welcomed into the study circle by the small group of clergy and parishioners and sat with them for ninety minutes before pulling out a gun and shooting to death the majority of those who had gathered that evening. In one news article Roof was quoted as saying he almost didn't follow through with his plan because the people at the church had been so nice to him.

The Bible contains many allusions to sacrifice, and Girard's theories on sacrifice recall all sorts of theological doctrines and images drawn from scripture. For Christians like those at the Charleston Bible study, among the most obvious of these references is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, interpreted by the Gospel writers as the substitutionary death for all, replacing animal sacrifice in the temple and putting an end to the escalation of violence.

According to John 19:30, "it is finished" are the final words of Jesus spoken from the cross just before his death. Just before this, in verse 28, John quotes what he understands to be Jesus's penultimate words: "I am thirsty." He is the only Gospel writer to include this quote. Before this John has included the parenthetical comment "in order to fulfill the scripture." This parenthetical comment is often overlooked, but was inserted by John to signal his larger meaning, lest we miss it. With this inserted comment John is alluding to Psalm 69:19-21:

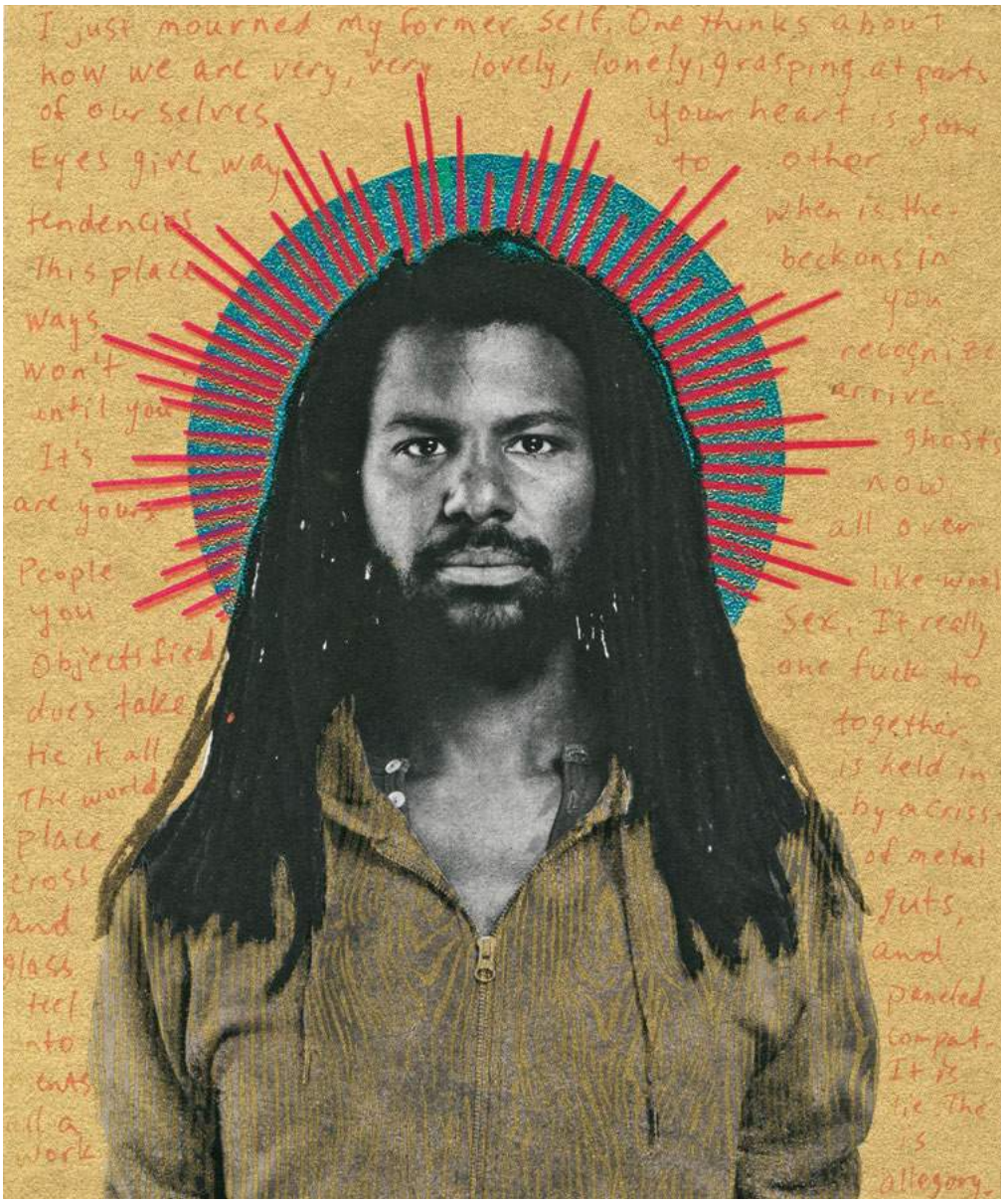
> [19] You know the insults I receive,
> And my shame and dishonor;
> My foes are all known to you.
> [20] Insults have broken my heart,
> So that I am in despair.
> I looked for pity, but there was none;
> And for comforters, but I found none.
> [21] They gave me poison for food,
> And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

A Yahrzeit Candle for Eric Garner

The flame, like all of us, survives on air.
Cup it, it gutters, dies. "I can't breathe,"
It iterates, till no breath's left to say it can't.

—July 17, 2015

—Paul Breslin



From the series "Queer Icons," by Gabriel Garcia Román.

Gabriel Garcia Román (gabrielgarciaroman.com)

While Matthew and Mark include the scene where the sponge is dipped in sour wine and lifted to Jesus on a stick for him to drink, John is the only one to highlight this event. John initiates the description of the giving of sour wine to Jesus with a quote from Jesus, "I am thirsty." John concludes this short scene with our traditional language around communion, "When Jesus had received the wine," followed by Jesus's final words: "It is finished."

Given the allusion to Psalm 69:19-21, coupled with the final breath of Jesus on the cross, it may be that John intended a double entendre. Jesus's last words, according to John, certainly refer to the last moments of Jesus's life, but they also point to an extreme shift from the old ways of dealing with hatred and violence to a new way. As mentioned, "It is finished" also refers to the Psalm 69 passage. After verse 21, Psalm 69 shifts into imprecations of violence against the enemy, which at the time of its writing was the typical response to attack and violence. Note the language of verses 22 onwards:

> 22 Let their table be a trap for them,
> A snare for their allies.
> 23 Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
> And make their loins tremble continually.
> 24 Pour out your indignation upon them,
> And let your burning anger overtake them.
> 25 May their camp be a desolation;
> Let no one live in their tents. . . .

In his telling of the crucifixion story, John, building off of the Gospel stories that had come before his own, reinterpreted the insertion found in Luke's telling, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing," by ending the reading of Psalm 69 at verse 21: "and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink . . . It is finished."

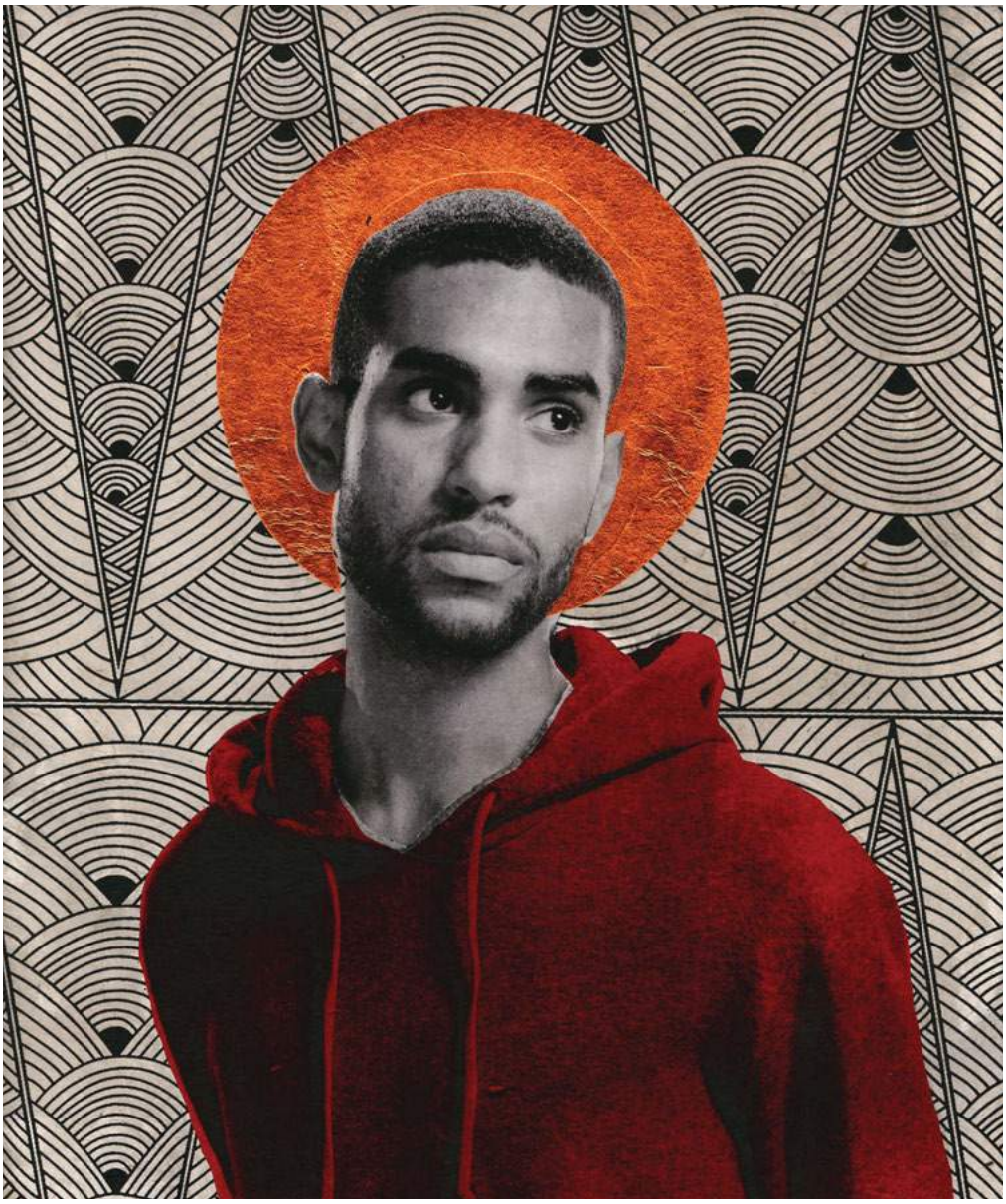
In other words, no more! We shall no longer meet violence with violence. We shall no longer call down the wrath of God upon our enemies. We shall no longer include in our lament the cry for God to pour indignation on those who accuse and attack us. John's depiction of the death scene signals the end of the theology of retributive justice. No more eye-for-an-eye.

The death of Jesus on the cross, according to John, is a call to nonviolent resistance against the evil of the world, a call to forgiveness, and a call to resurrection into a new way of living. It is a call to restorative justice.

In line with this theology, forty-eight hours after the Charleston shooting, family members of some of those who died at Mother Emanuel AME declared their forgiveness to the perpetrator during his arraignment. There have been many responses to these statements of forgiveness, some of

which have pointedly noted that in the black community, victims are expected to forgive the perpetrators, and that the fulfillment of this expectation sustains systemic white supremacist oppression. By contrast, restorative justice, intended to end the cycle of violence, is based on the concepts of repentance, forgiveness, *and* accountability.

The latter of these is often overlooked. But without accountability there cannot be restoration. It is not enough for perpetrators to confess their sins and be forgiven by the victims. There must also be mechanisms in place that hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviors lest they be reproduced in the future. There is a significant difference between confession of sin and repentance. Someone might confess their sin and turn around and immediately repeat the same act, but if they repent, they have chosen to change their behavior. Restorative justice requires true repentance, and true repentance is facilitated by accountability.



From the series "Queer Icons."

Gabriel García Román (gabrielgarciaroman.com)

Theorists like James Alison and Gil Bailie have built on Girard's work to assert a postcolonial analysis of the crucifixion. Their analysis reveals the violence committed by the state in its collusion with religion, thus deeming this secular violence *sacred*. The persistent innocence of the victim—made most visible in the person of Jesus—exposes the idolatry of human systems grounded in violent retribution. As scholar Paul Neuchterlein writes in his "Girardian Reflections on the Lectionary":

> Humankind kills. God raises to life. *This* is what we most desperately need to understand about the scriptures according to the cross and resurrection of Jesus. We are the ones who do violence, not God. And we need to finally leave behind all idolatries of gods who are violent like us and ask us to carry out their violence—which is simply the unconscious way we have of justifying our violence.

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ therefore exposes not only the violence of the Roman Empire, but also the violence of the U.S. Empire, violence that is otherwise hidden beneath the cloak of white supremacy.

White Supremacy and Systemic Crucifixion

We have a suggestion for how to unmask the white-supremacist idolatry inherent in the contemporary sacrifices of black and brown bodies in the name of safety and order. Our suggestion is for the Body of Christ to assemble in public places to perform rituals of renunciation of and repentance for white hegemony. An excellent recent example of such a ritual was created by members of the First Congregational

Church in Oakland and was performed on the campus of the Wiley Manuel Alameda County Courthouse in Oakland, California, on Good Friday, 2015.

The assembly gathered in front of the county courthouse around a very large wooden cross plastered with the faces of black and brown women and men who have been killed by the police in recent years. Beside the cross stood several black women locked to a tree with large and heavy chains. In front of them, on the ground, was a sign that read, "In (Still) Jim Crow America, the Body of Christ is Black."

In a litany composed and led by the Reverend Lynice Pinkard calling out through a bullhorn, the gathered assembly announced the apocalyptic power of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (by apocalyptic here we mean in the Greek sense of revealing or uncovering what lies beneath). The litany began:

> Today we come to reckon with the reality of crucifixion past and present. Today, we hold a mirror up to the blood, the brutality, the cruelty, and the suffering that is the daily reality of so many black lives, lives crushed under the boot of the American Empire.

The litany went on to identify the connection between sacrificial killings of black and brown bodies at home and abroad, as coefficient and interlinked modes of the sacrificial violence that maintains American Empire.

> The so-called lynching tree and the barrel of the gun and military drones are all symbols of terror, instruments of torture and execution, reserved primarily for those who are considered the Other, the lowest of the low in American society, expendable, outcasts. Crucifixion has always been about public humiliation, indignity, and cruelty. The point was then, and is now, to strike terror in subjected communities in sacrifice zones.

The power in this liturgy is the naming of both state-sponsored violence *and* white-supremacy-fueled violence as congruent with the repressive Roman Empire's use of the cross to quell any and all subversive and dissident activity. In the Roman Empire, as in the Empire of the United States, the very existence of some bodies is understood to be subversive. If one is black, or poor, or an immigrant, or young, or transgender, one need not even actively participate in subversive actions to be considered a threat to the empire's existence. Environmental racism, violence, imprisonment, neglect, and extrajudicial killings are deployed against these bodies for the sole purpose of preserving white hegemonic power. Bruce Morrill's notion of the "dangerous memory" of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ empowers Christ-followers to name this violence for what it is.

Moreover, we, those who overtly oppress as well as those who oppress by means of benign neglect, must renounce the privilege and power attributed to us. We must repent—constantly *and publicly*—for the ways in which we leverage this privilege at the expense of others.

So the litany continued:

> The appropriate response to Christ's suffering and to the broken flesh of black lives is not empathy. It is not philanthropy. It is not political activism on behalf of a less fortunate Other. Rather, it is meant to provoke us and to call us to repentance and conversion. We contemplate this suffering and death in order to become aware of our own complicity in that suffering.

To renounce and repent of white supremacy is to sacrifice the privilege and the exalted identity afforded to all those who are identified as white. Different from the sacrifice required of so-called sacred violence, this sacrifice is more akin to the death of the self that Paul describes in Romans 6. In this case, the self is the false self, created and sustained through the idolatry of whiteness. It is not a masochistic self-sacrifice. It is rather more akin to the mother standing before Solomon who is willing to sacrifice her claim on the living child so that it will not be cut in two (which would have been yet another form of sacrifice). To sacrifice one's claim to white hegemony is to allow the Other to gain full access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In "We Didn't Invent Sacrifice, Sacrifice Invented Us," Theologian and Girardian scholar James Alison writes that

> the whole of Christian living can be described as a movement away from the world of idols and sacrifice by which we make ourselves good and safe by the exclusion of others, and towards a world in which we share in Jesus' un-frightened self-giving up for others, confident that we are in the process of being forgiven by the one True Victim.

Public rituals of renunciation and repentance not only serve an apocalyptic function, they can also establish the criteria for accountability by specifically naming actions and systems that must cease and envisioning new behaviors that will bring restoration for the sacrificial Other, especially among white Christians and those who are in close proximity to the privilege that whiteness affords. Renunciation and repentance are not one-and-done actions, but necessarily repeated events that expose and undermine the insidious pervasiveness of white supremacy in all our lived experiences—from conferences to congregations, from cops to clergy, from boardrooms to living rooms, from classrooms to bedrooms. ■

First Comes Love

Building the Religious Counterculture

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

That gay marriage went from impossible to inevitable in this country in such a short span of time is a testament to the wonderful suppleness of the human heart. Through this process we all got to witness firsthand how societies, like individuals, have the thrilling ability to change from the inside. It has been breathtaking to watch as, household by household, gay people have become human in the eyes of the American public. Their commitments to one another have come to be seen as real commitments, their parenting as real parenting, their love as real love. Our collective hearts opened and then the laws changed, in that order, slowly at first and then quickly.

In a recurring drama of our American social theater, the hot-button issues of one generation are often matters of common decency for the next. In one generation it's acceptable to proudly fly the Confederate flag and fight for segregated schools; in the next generation it's not. In one generation you can argue with a straight face that women should be ineligible to vote; in the next generation you can't. In one generation it seems reasonable to pass sodomy laws; in the next generation same-sex couples can legally marry. Such changes build gradually over decades, even centuries, like separate trickles of water slowly forming streams and merging into rivers. But once they join, the current is strong and swift, and suddenly the naysayers find themselves on "the wrong side of history." And the current doesn't go backward: once we have identified a site of collective spiritual constriction and released it, our new openness and wisdom carry forward into the future.

The environmental movement today finds itself somewhere in the middle of this process. We are still living in a time in which it is politically acceptable to fight *against* clean air and water regulations, to try to obstruct international agreements on global warming, and to promote fracking and drilling for oil within fragile ecosystems. It is still socially acceptable to throw bottles in the garbage, get takeout in Styrofoam containers and plastic bags, eat meat daily, and water our lawns. Our paltry environmental victories are politically expensive, haggled in back rooms through gritted teeth and with pinched noses. We do, of course, have some political activism and books and movie stars arguing for environmental stewardship. But clearly the tipping point has not yet been reached. The current has not yet shifted the consciousness of our cultural soul.

What will it take to engender that shift? If we've learned one lesson from the success of the gay marriage movement, it's that it will take nothing less than *love*—in this case, love for the sacred, natural world and everything that is part of its delicate web. Ultimately there are no statistics dire enough, no news reports dramatic enough, no storms devastating enough to convince us to make the large-magnitude changes we will need to heal our earth. The shift is too profound for us to be reasoned into it. First must come love. We'll need to feel akin to all living beings, from the bees to the rain forest trees, and attach our hearts to the interconnected web of all life. We'll need to know that a mother lion will risk her life to protect her cub, just like we would for our children. We'll need to hear the flute sound of an owl and see how light filters through the summer leaves swaying high in the trees. We'll need to remember how much it used to snow when we were kids and the pure joy we felt as it fell.

Eco-Autobiographies

When I was a little kid, I didn't have just one imaginary friend: I had an entire jungle's worth of imaginary animals. They would follow me around wherever I went—gazelles and elephants and chipmunks and opossums and snakes and lions. I always had a mouse on my shoulder and maybe a bird or two on my head. I loved them and saw it as my job to protect them. I'll always remember the first time I went camping with my friends in high school. It was my first real forest with real animals. And it was magical. We were canoe camping down the Delaware River, pulling our canoes onto the shore and pitching our tents in the evening, cooking over a campfire, and talking long into the night, staring at the coals. I remember the sweetness of the cool, clean air, the night sounds, and the stars above. It's been a long time since I've slept outdoors and I miss it.

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This is all part of my personal "eco-autobiography"—the story of my relationship with the natural world. We all have such a story, whether it's a narrative of connection or of disconnection or, in most cases, of both. It's a healthy and beautiful thing to write and tell our stories. Many, like mine, are journeys from more connection as a child to less connection as an adult. Some of them are stories of salvation and joy. Some are repositories of sadness. Some of our stories have a violent edge to them: that natural place, the secret spot we may have loved as a child, is now ruined or gone. It has been replaced by a housing development or bisected by a highway. The stream is dry, fertilizer runoff has choked the marsh, the forest has been logged, the field is now a mall. How much do we let ourselves cry about that? How much *should* we let ourselves cry?

Drawing again on the wisdom of the LGBT movement, I believe we should let ourselves cry a lot. We should grieve privately and publicly for the loss of each species and each habitat. We should grieve for the people whose lives are already being ruined by rising waters and drought and polluted lands. We cry too little given the magnitude of the losses we face. We must not really realize it's happening. Instead, we are slowly acclimating to life on a fatal trajectory. We're desensitized: we don't feel our connection to nature and we don't feel our disconnection. We don't feel our utter dependence on our ecosystems and we don't feel the pain as they are harmed. We're insulated from it by our modern world. So we don't feel the gratitude, either. Most importantly, we don't feel the love. At least not often.

You could say that we know the natural world because we see it around us. But that "seeing," too, can be deceptive. We often don't grasp that a highway has bisected the patch of forest that some kid used to love, because we are usually only seeing the forest while traveling seventy miles per hour on that very highway. We may even be appreciating the trees, not understanding the devastation caused by the very means of our ability to see them. We see animals in a zoo; we see lush green lawns in desert climates. The list of all the ways we are alienated from nature goes on and on. It is a terminal alienation.

Rob Mulholland (Robmulholland.co.uk)

Vestige by Rob Mulholland.

Our relationship to food offers a sobering example. Farming, hunting, and eating used to offer humans a very conspicuous umbilical cord to Mother Earth. But in consumerist societies, food is often so reconfigured that it's barely recognizable as plant or animal. Take ice cream. What is ice cream? If you were telling an alien, you might say that ice cream is a cold treat that comes in many colors and flavors, with or without sprinkles (don't ask what a "sprinkle" is), with or without chocolate chips (don't ask where the chocolate comes from). Ice cream is delicious; it's a ritual; it's sold from trucks in the summer; entire pints may be consumed solo after a breakup. Ice cream as we know it is completely removed from its source: warm milk from a mother cow, intended by nature for the cow to feed her calves.

From "Issue" to Ethic

For most of us, there was some point in our lives, whether we were aware of it or not, when "the environment" became a cause: an "ism." Environmentalism. It became an issue that one could have different opinions about. You could be an "environmentalist"—or not. The word "environment" comes from the Old French word *environer*, which meant "to surround, encircle, or encompass." I think that's the best way to understand it still today. We all live inside the bubble of our environment. It surrounds, encircles, and encompasses us. Completely. There is no "outside."

When we humans harm the environment, we harm that of which there is no outside. In slow motion we are destroying literally *everything* that matters to us. Everything we love. With this understanding, it's hard to see how anybody could not be an environmentalist. It's hard to imagine how anything could be more important than reversing that harm and beginning the healing of the earth.

I care tremendously about our human social issues—I want people to be free from poverty and hunger and violence and to gain civil rights and equality. But if we don't get things right with the environment in which all those people live, we are all doomed, starting with the poorest, least powerful, and most vulnerable. All our good social justice work will have been, in retrospect, rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. We can no longer afford to see environmentalism as an "issue" parallel to other issues. We need to shift our thinking from "issue" to "ethic." Environmentalism, meaning the nurturing of the environment as a whole, has to infuse and guide all the other work that we do on behalf of any of its constituent parts. Fueled by love, from top to bottom, in every domain and dimension of our work and play, it has to become the ethic by which we live our lives.

I believe that the religious counterculture offers a way to move toward this ethic. Rather than passively accepting the desensitization that secular culture has bequeathed us, spiritual life prompts us to greater and greater sensitivity. Prayer and meditation invite us to stop and smell the roses. Contemplative traditions may teach us to spend time in nature or to write our eco-autobiographies, tracing our connections to the natural world. Religious traditions offer rituals of grief—contexts and formats for expressing communal grief that help open our hearts to what we've lost. They restore our senses—and begin to shift our spiritual consciousness. And many religious traditions teach us to bless our food and sanctify the act of eating, honoring the plants and animals to whom we are existentially indebted. We cultivate gratitude for all we have been given by the Source of Life.

Lastly, and most importantly, the countercultural ethic of progressive religion decenters the individual in the universe. The hubris of human conquest over nature is deflated and replaced by awe at the sheer grandeur of it all—awe at the chain of life balanced so delicately, with every element serving its essential function and with each of us only a tiny speck in the expanse. With this ethic, we do not think in the language of "rights," but rather in the language of reverence and the language of love. This has been key in the LGBT movement and it will be crucial for the environmental movement as we open our hearts to the sadness of loss and to a newly innocent love for the environment in which we live. By practicing this ethic in our community, we can cultivate the love we need to change the world.

As for me, my imaginary menagerie has been replaced by one real dog. And she gets me to go outdoors more than I would otherwise. And that's a good thing. But I hope that over time my eco-autobiography will recount a return to a more intimate connection with nature. I pray that my love will deepen and that I can transmit that love to my children. I pray for my love to be a trickle that will become a stream that will contribute to the torrent that will eventually sweep the land. A flood of love. And I pray that, if I am lucky enough to have grandchildren, I will be able to honestly say to them that, fueled by that love, I did everything I could to nurture and heal this gorgeous earth. ■

Most residents of the Kibera neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya, like those pictured here, earn less than one dollar per day. Eliminating $1.25-a-day poverty could require just 0.2 percent of global income, Makwana writes.

A Sharing Economy

Our Hope for a New Global Strategy

BY RAJESH MAKWANA

Whether catalyzed by Pope Francis's encyclical, the wake-up call presented in Naomi Klein's urgent polemic *This Changes Everything*, or the activists calling for system change worldwide, there is a growing realization that sustainable development goals and CO_2 emission targets simply won't be enough to remedy the climate crisis. Many millions of people now recognize that, without reforming the policies that are responsible for widening inequalities and for encouraging environmentally destructive patterns of consumerism in the first place, our response to socioeconomic and ecological crises will remain inadequate and fail to create what Charles Eisenstein calls the "more beautiful world our hearts know is possible."

Although periodic negotiations facilitated by the United Nations offer governments a vital opportunity to overcome national self-interest, prioritize the needs of the disadvantaged, and curb environmental damage, these conferences take place within a wider political and economic framework that is structurally incapable of delivering global social justice or sound environmental stewardship. The policies and institutions that drive our economic systems do not embody a basic spiritual understanding of our collective obligation to serve the common good of all humanity and protect the natural world.

To be sure, an outdated assumption that human beings are inherently selfish, competitive, and acquisitive has long defined the politics of domination and control and still underpins the way society is organized and the way the global economy functions. But the ongoing obsession with prioritizing national interests and safeguarding corporate profits has had devastating consequences for the world's poor and the environment. As the economist David Woodward recently calculated, it would take 100 years to eradicate $1.25-a-day poverty if governments relied on global economic growth alone—and twice as long if we used a more realistic $5-a-day poverty line. Meanwhile, humanity as a whole has been in "ecological overshoot" since the 1970s, and most people in rich, industrialized countries currently enjoy lifestyles that would require between three and five planets' worth of resources to sustain if they were the norm across the world.

In recent years it has become painfully clear that aggressive competition between nations, the lobbying power of multinational corporations, and the financial interests of an ultrawealthy elite severely impede the possibility of effective international cooperation. In 2012, the executive director of Greenpeace condemned the much-anticipated Rio+20 Earth Summit as "a failure of epic proportions" and lamented that its outcome document was "the longest suicide note in history." There has been little improvement since then: after

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Photo courtesy of Share the World's Resources

a series of ineffective UN climate change conferences over recent years, governments are widely expected to fail in their objective of keeping global warming below the already dangerous two-degrees-Celsius threshold. There is also a sizable gulf between the ambition and political feasibility of meeting the forthcoming sustainable development goals, particularly since it is not clear how governments will bridge the $2.5 trillion annual financing gap.

The Path Ahead: Sharing and Cooperation

Transforming the paradigm that generated these pressing crises will require moving beyond the aggressive, competitive ways of the past and embracing solutions that meet the common needs of people in all nations. In accordance with the maxim popularly attributed to Gandhi, "be the change you wish to see in the world," this process of reforming the global economy should begin in our hearts and minds with a profound realization that "humanity is one"—in other words, that all people are part of an extended human family that shares the same basic needs and rights. This simple spiritual insight must be translated into a heightened empathy for those who suffer needlessly in a world of plenty, as well as a sense of indignation toward the injustice of the world situation and a demand for change.

This is the approach we have taken at Share The World's Resources (STWR), where we emphasize the fundamental role that the principle of sharing can play in addressing interconnected global crises. As the organization's founder Mohammed Mesbahi explains, the new institutions and laws needed to heal our divided world must stem from engaging our hearts with the suffering of others and recognizing the all-encompassing spiritual, psychological, socioeconomic, and political significance of implementing the principle of sharing as a solution to humanity's problems. To quote from Mesbahi's essay "Uniting the People of the World":

> Sharing is inherent in every person and integral to who we are as human beings, whereas the profit-oriented values of commerce are not a part of our innate spiritual nature. The individualistic pursuit of wealth and power results from our conditioning since childhood, nurtured through our wrong education and worshipping of success and achievement. But you cannot condition someone to cooperate and share, you can only remind them of who they are. . . . True power is togetherness and sharing among millions of people, which is unifying, creative and healing on a worldwide scale. . . . When all the nations come together and share the resources of the world, when humanity brings about balance in consciousness and in nature—that is power in the truest sense.

But at a time when the institutions and policies that underpin the modern world in no way reflect the inner connectedness of all life on earth, how do we translate this spiritual vision into a political and socioeconomic reality that is inherently humane and ecologically sound?

Without question, *World Policy Journal* is in a class by itself. —Victor Navasky, *The Nation*

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Global Priorities Based on Radical Generosity

From the basic propositions of equality and sustainability, STWR has advocated a cooperative and just approach to sharing the world's resources in our "Primer on Global Economic Sharing." As outlined in this publication, a broad coalition of civil-society groups must pressure governments to coordinate a global program of wholesale economic transformation under the aegis of a reformed and democratized United Nations. This proposal broadly echoes a proposal put forward more than thirty years ago by the report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues.

Drawing on this commission's recommendations, STWR suggests that the first pillar of a transformative global agenda should include an international program of emergency relief to prevent life-threatening deprivation and avoidable poverty-related deaths—regardless of where they occur in the world. However, an emergency relief program can be only an initial stage in a broader transformative agenda, in which governments must also agree to a comprehensive plan for restructuring and cooperatively managing the

global economy in the interests of all nations. Particular attention should be placed on building an effective "sharing society" within each nation that provides social protection for all, establishing a just and sustainable global food system based on low-impact systems of farming, and instituting a cooperative international framework for sharing the global commons more equitably and within planetary limits.

STWR's vision of an international emergency relief program shares a central focus with the Network of Spiritual Progressive's (NSP's) Global Marshall Plan: completely eliminating poverty and hunger as *a foremost global priority* and placing responsibility on rich countries to mobilize the resources needed to address this long-standing crisis. There cannot be a more urgent international imperative than a coordinated program that seeks to end inhumane levels of deprivation: for every single day that nations fail to end this atrocity, around 40,000 people die needlessly.

Campaigning for "What Is Necessary"

We are often asked whether STWR's proposals for international sharing constitute a realistic demand to civil society, given that economic policy in most countries is increasingly based on neoliberal ideals. It is true that progressive calls for social and environmental justice will remain politically infeasible as long as real power continues to be taken away from ordinary citizens and concentrated in state institutions, unaccountable corporations, and a minority of high-net-worth individuals. However, it is surely far more unrealistic to think that we can continue on the current trajectory while millions suffer in abject poverty and ecosystems endure the devastating impacts of unbridled consumerism. From the most realistic and pragmatic perspective, ending poverty in all its forms by sharing the world's resources is now a moral, economic, and geopolitical imperative that governments can no longer afford to ignore.

To some extent, the very question of political feasibility fails to recognize how many progressive organizations and activists already propose economic alternatives or practice sustainable, democratic solutions for organizing society and managing the commons. The only sensible response to the world situation is to focus on what is now absolutely necessary, not what is merely possible to achieve within the current political framework—a determined approach that proved to be effective for both the civil rights and environmental movements in the past.

Similarly, concern that proposals for global economic sharing are unaffordable is also misguided. After all, these same financial concerns are quickly set aside by politicians when bailing out private-sector banks or financing military interventions. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, governments spent more than 13 percent of the global GDP on their military budgets and the economic impacts of violence and war in 2014. In comparison, the NSP estimates 3–5 percent of the world GDP would be required to end poverty and improve international security. Indeed, ending income poverty for the 21 percent of the global population who lives on less than $1.25 a day could require as little as 0.2 percent of global income.

In our report "Financing the Global Sharing Economy," STWR demonstrates that, by implementing a range of policy options that already have much support among progressives (such as redirecting a proportion of military spending, taxing financial speculation, and ending fossil fuel subsidies), governments could redistribute more than $2.8 trillion a year to prevent life-threatening deprivation, reverse austerity measures, and mitigate the human impacts of climate change. Moreover, the institutional structures, capacity, and expertise needed to utilize these additional resources for essential human needs are already in place—all that is lacking is a sufficient level of public support to overcome the political barriers.

Sharing as a Common Cause That Unites Us All

These fundamental changes to the international economic order can become a reality only if sufficient numbers of people support this pressing cause. That's why values-based civil-society proposals that embody the principles of generosity and sharing are so crucial at this time: they inspire people with a vision of the world that resonates deeply with an inner sense of justice and goodwill toward all people. Only through this heartfelt response to the world situation, anchored in a spiritual perception of what it really means to be human, can the possibility of a dramatic shift in global public opinion become reality.

The demand for sane economic alternatives will likely continue to mount until the crises of inequality and environmental breakdown reach a dangerous climax. If in response to these spiralling crises the U.S. government were to put its full weight behind a Global Marshall Plan, civil society organizations operating across Europe (including STWR) would be in a much stronger position to build public support. A truly global campaign of this nature would require a fusion of progressive causes and a consensus among a critical mass of the world population. A key task for progressives is therefore to work together in order to mobilize a movement of supporters and build momentum to help create such a tipping point.

In STWR's most recent report, "Sharing as Our Common Cause," we outline how a worldwide movement of movements is already on the rise. Never before has there been such a widespread and sustained mobilization of citizens across the world challenging leaders and influencing progressive social change. Everywhere, hope and evidence is emerging for a radical transformation of our values, imaginations, lifestyles,

and social relations, as well as our political and economic structures.

It's for these reasons that STWR recently launched the "Global Call for Sharing" campaign. As stated in the campaign report, the principle of sharing is already central to diverse calls for social justice, environmental stewardship, global peace, and true democracy. Whether expressed in implicit or explicit terms, all of these urgent demands relate to the need for a fairer sharing of wealth, power, or resources throughout our societies—from the community level to the international. By upholding the universal principle of sharing in a political context we can point the way toward an entirely new approach to economics—one that is based on overflowing generosity, deep humility, and the spiritual recognition that all life on earth is an integral part of an interdependent whole.

Rabbi Michael Lerner and the Network of Spiritual Progressives were early signatories to our online campaign statement. Moreover, their ongoing work is an important example of how individuals and organizations can help spark public awareness on the importance of sharing in economic and political terms. We look forward to continued cooperation and mutual support with the worldwide community of spiritual progressives. As our campaign continues to gain momentum, we invite readers of *Tikkun* and supporters of the NSP to endorse the Global Call for Sharing campaign statement by visiting www.sharing.org/global-call. ■

Further resources

The Global Call for Sharing campaign statement:
www.sharing.org/global-call

Sharing as Our Common Cause, December 2014:
www.sharing.org/common-cause

A Primer on Global Economic Sharing, June 2014:
www.sharing.org/primer

Financing the Global Sharing Economy, October 2012:
www.sharing.org/financing

Our Morbid Gaze

On Terrorism as Entertainment

BY RON HIRSCHBEIN

At a state dinner in 2012, President Obama confided to the actor Damian Lewis, one of the stars of the Showtime drama *Homeland*: "While Michelle and the two girls go play tennis on Saturday afternoons, I go in the Oval Office, pretend I'm going to work, and then I switch on 'Homeland.'" On the show, Lewis plays Nicholas Brody, a war hero who's not what he appears to be.

The president's guilty pleasure is intriguing, given that Obama is commander in chief of the most powerful armed forces in the world and personally oversees U.S. terrorism policy. George W. Bush referred to this policy as the "War on Terror"; Obama does not, for reasons that have much to do with my subject, as I will explain. The president presumably has little time to spare for television, so his choices are significant. His endorsement of *Homeland* matters much: Obama has always been considered savvy about his self-presentation in the media. The *Homeland* anecdote thus prompts my central concern: the role of entertainment in terrorism policy.

In many ways, terror became a lucrative industry after 9/11. The media didn't miss out: captivating terrorism-themed entertainment became quite popular. In addition to dramas such as *Homeland* and *24*, the entertainment industry produces films, miniseries, cop shows, and spy thrillers about uncovering nefarious plots—you can hear time bombs ticking. The public joins the president in binge-watching dramas like *Homeland*, which enjoys both critical and popular acclaim. Even news coverage is accompanied by musical scores, suspenseful timing, choreographed scenes, animated simulations, and other tropes of terrorism entertainment. Interviewed on *Meet the Press* (Aug. 16, 2015), presidential candidate Donald Trump cited these programs as his source of insight into military affairs: "I watch the shows," he told Chuck Todd, who had asked where Trump gets military advice, "I mean, I really see a lot of great— you know, when you watch your show and all of the other shows and you have the generals and you have certain people that you like."

I'm troubled by the evil of banality that denatures terrorism, reducing it to entertainment. However, I'm more concerned about the possibility that terrorism entertainment actually *promotes* the evils of violence and repression endemic in U.S. terrorism policy—whether this is intentional or not. Could the slow creep of terror entertainment promote unaccountable conflict beyond the pale of international law, as expressed in overt and covert military operations, secret prisons and torture chambers, and unprecedented domestic repression and surveillance? The answer is yes. The episodes analyzed here reflect and promote public opinion regarding terror policy.

Unlike during World War II, no federal bureaucracy, such as the Office of War Information, now produces and oversees wartime entertainment—there's no need. A Google search of "U.S. Military and Hollywood Propaganda" returns about 1,320,000 hits. The corporate entertainment media voluntarily promote U.S. policy—especially if they desire access to government officials and military sites, weapons, and troops. As Senator Gerald Nye remarked in 1941, Hollywood movies "drug the reason of the American people, set aflame their emotions, turn their hatred into a blaze, fill them with fear . . ." Look no further than the recent blockbuster *American Sniper* for proof that Nye's comment still applies today. Military contractors like Boeing also partner with Hollywood to produce self-serving terrorism narratives such as *NCIS* (Naval Criminal Investigation Service) and the *Avengers* comic fantasy.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the corporate media profitably pander to an anxious public obsessed with terrorist threats, even if it means broadcasting terrorism's signature message: be afraid, be terribly afraid! Thanks to the media, Americans just can't get enough terrorism: news coverage of terrorist threats is exaggerated, stripped of historical context, and ignores the terrorists' grievances. Meanwhile, American innocence is taken for granted: America is truly exceptional—it behaves better than other nations. Even so, this narrative continues, Americans are victimized by evildoers who hate our virtues. Thus the formulaic fictional narratives lead to the same conclusion: diabolical plots demand violent retaliation—you can't negotiate, let alone compromise, with evil. Only the naïve or terrorists themselves would

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Stills from a video of a drone strike uploaded to YouTube by the Department of Defense. In the United States, real footage of war is released for the public to watch.

think otherwise. Ensuing casualties in faraway places with strange-sounding names are ignored, dismissed as collateral damage, or treated as a laughing matter.

Munich, 1972

The media promotion of the War on Terror began with the 1972 Munich massacre—a wakeup call that revealed that *they*—America's nonstate enemies—could do to us what we do to them. Palestinian members of Black September invaded the Olympic compound and killed nine Israeli athletes. The atrocity marked a turning point: following the West's first modern confrontation with Middle Eastern extremists, terrorism became an *idée fixe*.

Sociologist Lisa Stampnitzky's *Disciplining Terror* reveals that, prior to Munich, terrorism was rarely discussed; when it was—primarily in scholarly journals—it was in the context of state terrorism. Not surprisingly, governing elites regarded *their* terrorism as necessary, even laudable. As I illustrate in *The United States and Terrorism: An Ironic Perspective*, elites praised strategic terror bombing for assuring victory in World War II and celebrated threats of nuclear terror for keeping the peace during the Cold War. Thucydides' observation seemed like a law of nature: "The strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak must endure the consequences"—a natural and desirable state of affairs for Athenian and American elites. However, in the corporate media it is not politically correct to refer to the United States as a perpetrator of terrorism.

Terrorism became the most loathsome evil when nonstate actors defied the states' monopoly on violence and used violence for *their* ends. Black September stood Thucydides on his head: the weak did what *they* had the power to do, and the strong had to bear the consequences. This shocking development captivated worldwide audiences. Sports reporter Jim McKay kept millions glued to the radio and television during his sixteen-hour, live broadcast. Writing in the *Hollywood Reporter* (July 24, 2012), his son explains:

> He didn't realize—and nobody realized, I think—the impact this story would have on the American public. Terrorism was something that America just had not dealt with. . . . In those days it was just unheard of. So I don't think he realized how many people were watching him and what a huge, huge national event it was.

A captivated public vicariously experienced the suspense and horror. Governing elites and defense intellectuals put out another message: nonstate actors were intent on terrorizing the strong through "asymmetrical warfare." "Terrorism" thus became a watchword. As Stampnitzky explains, indices of the *New York Times* and *London Times* rarely mentioned terrorism prior to 1972. But by 1977 it took eleven catalogs to track proliferating terrorism studies in books, journals, and op-ed pieces. She notes only one terrorism conference in 1972 but 591 in 1978. Cadres of counterterrorism experts emerged advocating robust responses to what they do to us while turning a blind eye to what we do to them.

In Munich's wake, as many feared, hijackings, hostage-takings, and murders began to target Americans. Rather than explore the grievances motivating terrorists, the corporate media scripted morality plays, encomiums to American innocence, and strident calls for retaliation. The Iranian hostage crisis provides a prime example.

In July 1979 revolutionaries deposed the American-backed Shah Pahlavi and celebrated the ascendancy of radical cleric Ayatollah Khomeini. President Carter permitted the hated Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment. In November, enraged students raided the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held Americans hostage for 444 days. The crisis warranted its own show—*Nightline*. ABC executives wouldn't allow a good crisis to go to waste. They hoped the drama would draw viewers away from Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.

Coverage encouraged the public to personalize the crisis by vicariously suffering humiliation and anger fomented by events far removed from their lives. Televisions flashed "America Held Hostage" every evening. Talking heads demonized Iranians if not all Muslims. Iranian mobs cooperated by screaming "death to America." Suspenseful speculation hooked viewers. And public sentiment reverberated in Vince Vance's popular song "Bomb, Bomb, Bomb, Bomb, Bomb Iran."

Once again, the networks reassured viewers of American innocence and victimization. Only the marginalized left put

Youtube, Department of Defense

the episode in context, reminding readers that, in 1953, the CIA had overthrown Mohammed Mosaddegh, a democratically elected leader who thought Iran, not Western interests, should control Iranian oil. Iranians were painfully aware of the Shah's secret police and the U.S. support of Iraq in its war against Iran.

Carter called his failed military efforts to rescue the hostages "a partial success." Apparently, Reagan's campaign staff, along with Colonel Oliver North, secretly negotiated with the Iranians and offered weapons for hostages. Iran released the hostages shortly after Reagan's January 1981 inauguration.

In contrast to the media obsession with the Iranian hostage crisis, coverage of what America does in the name of protecting its interests is limited—but usually entertaining. Real-life terrorism dramas feature ironic twists: former ally Saddam Hussein became a terrorist when he betrayed the United States and invaded Kuwait. The first Iraq War became prime-time entertainment, a televised video game—*Lawrence of Arabia* meets *Star Wars*. Glued to their televisions, viewers throughout the nation reportedly shrieked approval as smart bombs flashed down chimneys, demolished tanks, and severed bridges—much cooler than *Super Mario Bros*, one of the top-selling games of the day. There's no need for World War II-style propaganda when war is fun.

But the war didn't amuse Iraqis, who suffered immensely. On May 12, 1996, Lesley Stahl questioned then-Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright about the war and its aftermath during a *60 Minutes* interview: "We have heard that a half million [UN estimate] children have died. . . . Is the price worth it?" The ambassador responded: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it." The warfare was indeed asymmetrical, but in Albright's estimation, fair and necessary.

World Trade by Max Greis

Max Greis (maxgreis.com)

9/11 and Its Aftermath

After Munich, Hollywood began to mass-produce films that sensationalized the sort of threats that the hawkish elites repeated in their justifications for a war on terror. But we'll never see the climax of *Nosebleed* on the big screen because we witnessed the reality. The martial artist Jackie Chan starred in the film, and was scripted to save the World Trade Center from terrorists boasting that those who "bring those two buildings down would bring America to its knees." According to the *Guardian* (Sept. 20, 2001):

> A late script crucially delayed plans that would have landed . . . Chan on top of the World Trade Centre during last Tuesday's terrorist assault. [He] had been due to film a scene from MGM's action-comedy Nosebleed atop the North Tower at the moment when the terrorists hit. . .

Eyewitnesses to the New York attacks reported that, for an instant, it was just like television and the movies—unreal, it couldn't be happening. But it *was* happening. What could be done to apprehend and punish the evildoers? In *A Just Response*, Shawn Wallace captures the frustration: "Those who committed this unbearably cruel act . . . designed their crime in such a diabolic fashion . . . because they arranged to be killed themselves . . . and they are now all dead." Numb and powerless, ordinary Americans could get satisfaction only in fantasy. The entertainment industry complied.

Stunned Americans communicated in a familiar language: the language of entertainment consumption. As communication theorist Neil Postman observed in his prescient 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas; they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities, and commercials." Similarly, in *The Terror Dream*, journalist Susan Faludi listened closely to this lingua franca of entertainment: Americans, she wrote, "reacted to our trauma . . . not by interrogating it but by cocooning ourselves in the celluloid chrysalis of the baby boom's childhood." The chrysalis offered comfort food for anxious souls: cinematic images imbibed along with stale popcorn and sugary drinks at those long-ago matinees.

Bush thus became our entertainer in chief, dutifully playing the part of a Saturday matinee idol when he vowed to "smoke 'em out—bring it on!" According to Faludi, Republican speechwriter Peggy Noonan wrote that she almost expected Bush to "tear open his shirt and reveal the big 'S' on his chest." Inspired by Bush's post-9/11 rhetoric, UPI analyst Peter Roff likened the president to Batman, Bulletman, and the Shadow. Roff explained: "This is just the kind of hero America needs right now. . . . Comic book language rallies the nation to even greater accomplishments and sacrifice, bringing forth great leaders to rescue the country." *Time* effervesced about our latter-day Lone Ranger, while *Newsweek* fawned over their newfound dragon slayer. A paraphrase of Brecht's *Galileo* comes to mind: *woe* to the land that needs heroes.

Officials, of course, could do something—they *did* have access to superpowers, or at least the military resources of the world's premier superpower state, which they used to act out their fantasies. Bush attacked Afghanistan but failed to capture bin Laden. Having already fantasized about regime change in Iraq, his fantasies then took a different direction. Noonan's Superman vowed to deliver us from evil. Iraq became the avant-garde in the comic book hero's War on Terror—never mind that according to Richard Clarke, Bush's principal counterterrorism advisor, attacking Iraq made as much sense as attacking Mexico after Pearl Harbor.

But Superman didn't deliver us from evil: absent weapons of mass destruction, evidence of evil machinations were suddenly in short supply. The administration didn't even bother to lie or to plant WMDs. There's no need to avoid cognitive dissonance in a culture encouraging cognitive insolence: the truth wasn't merely ignored; it was ridiculed by the Supermen who put themselves in charge of state terror.

The terror suffered by Iraqi civilians and American troops became a laughing matter as Bush pretended to look for those pretend weapons at the 2004 White House Correspondents' Dinner. The March 25, 2004, issue of *The Nation* features David Corn reporting on the high-tech, big-screen production featuring a forlorn Bush gazing out a White House window with a plaintive sigh: "Those weapons of mass destruction have got to be somewhere." Bush clowned amid the laughter of corporate media elites and Hollywood celebrities. He looked behind curtains, peered under a desk, and checked drawers—all in good fun. "Shock and Awe" became "Aw Shucks."

From Farce to Fiction

If a real president of the United States can't deliver us from evil, perhaps the fictional Jack Bauer can. This, at least, is Hollywood's wager in promoting the precepts of Bush's War on Terror. In the March 3, 2010, issue of the *New York Times*, Brian Stelter writes: "If any one show has represented the post-9/11 era on television, it is '24,' the Fox drama that has offered counterterrorism as entertainment for nine years." In the world according to Bush administration officials, presidential candidates, and Justice Scalia, Rush Limbaugh's favorite show vindicates the necessity of practicing torture, disregarding civil rights, and treating all Muslims with suspicion. Stelter concludes that the show provides militarist wish fulfillment on the cheap—*the* justification of the War on Terror. The Fox Network hero stops at nothing to protect the American people: "'24' is part sum of all fears, part wish fulfillment in an age of shadowy enemies."

Turning at last to Obama's guilty pleasure, we find *Homeland*'s creators, Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, atoning for

their contributions to *24* by scripting *Homeland*—envisioned as *24* for grown-ups. The president requested copies of his favorite episodes. Mocking right-wing claims that Obama is a Muslim terrorist, Lewis gave him autographed copies at a state dinner, and joked that they were gifts "from one Muslim to another."

Lewis's character, Nicholas Brody, is a Marine returning to America after a long imprisonment by jihadists. The Stockholm syndrome turns him into a Muslim and a latter-day Manchurian candidate: an all-American closet terrorist. Predictably, the script depicts exigent circumstances justifying worldwide American intervention, if not Islamophobia, and increased domestic surveillance. The intervention involves the plot twists of secret agents, not massive military campaigns.

Suffering from bipolar disorder, CIA agent Carrie Mathison, the show's protagonist, dramatizes the show's mood swings regarding U.S. policy. Quoted in *The Huffington Post* (Oct. 20, 2013), Lewis laments: "It's . . . bleak that the one person who represents hope [Carrie] is a broken-down, polarized person who represents a broken, polarized America." Driven by her demons, Carrie struggles to stop Abu Nazir—a bin Laden avatar—from visiting another 9/11 catastrophe (or worse) upon the United States. Initially, the drama portrays Abu Nazir as the cartoon-like caricature of the evil Arab. But then a depressing realization emerges—sympathy for the devil. Abu Nazir and Brody—his co-conspirator—are not evil incarnate: They want to avenge the drone attack that murdered Abu Nazir's son, whom Brody befriended. This is the attack that radicalized Brody and drove him to terrorism.

Homeland (whether by accident or design) seems to showcase Obama's reformulated terrorism policy, a National Security Strategy that reflects his mood swings: disillusionment with Bush's War on Terror, leading to uncritical enthusiasm for his new approach. Chastened by policy failures in Afghanistan and Iraq, in order to distance himself from his predecessor, Obama abandoned the "War on Terror" in favor of another rubric: "Overseas Contingency Operations." Quoted in *U.S. News & World Report* (May 23, 2013), the president urged: "We must define our effort not as a boundless 'Global War on Terror,' but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America." *Homeland* dramatizes such operations.

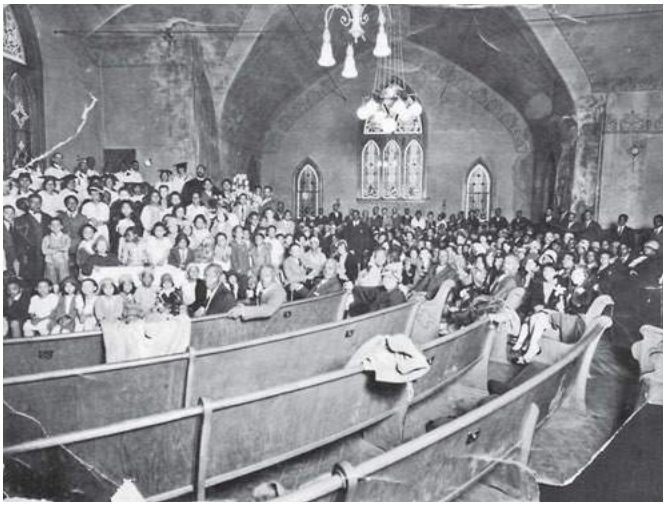
Obama's strategy doesn't abandon hegemonic aspirations; it simply offers a more streamlined, less obtrusive approach. Rather than massive infliction of state terror, such as the Iraq War, Obama practices terrorism lite, complete with drones and covert operators like Carrie. Obama doesn't promise to rid the world of evil; like *Homeland's* CIA operatives, he merely wants to eliminate some of the Abu Nazirs of the world—including some American citizens—who would harm the homeland.

Homeland doesn't seamlessly represent Obama's policy; it is a cautionary tale. His favorite show depicts American leadership striding the world as a source of resentment. By way of contrast, his strategy lauds the U.S. imperium: according to Janine Davidson's *Foreign Affairs* discussion (March 2, 2015), "American leadership" is extolled no less than ninety-four times in Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy document. However, like the show, the strategy relies on drones, assassinations, and disregard for civil liberties. True, for now terrorism lite results in fewer casualties than Bush's Shock and Awe in Iraq. However, as General John Abizaid and Rosa Brooks warn in the "Final Report of the Task Force on U.S. Drone Policy," even relatively few casualties "can anger whole communities, increase anti-US sentiment, and become a potential recruiting tool for terrorist organizations." Indifferent to enemy grievances, Obama may well provoke what he would prevent. The time is long overdue to recognize that what we do to them and what they do to us are not unrelated. ■

In the Spirit of Abolitionism

Recovering the Black Social Gospel

BY GARY DORRIEN



The leaders of the black social gospel movement, including AME Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom, often faced opposition from their own congregations. Here, an AME congregation is assembled at Brown Chapel AME Church in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Ypsilanti Historical Society

A TRADITION WITHIN modern social Christianity that should be renowned is the black social gospel. Long before Martin Luther King Jr. emerged, there was a black church tradition that fused the racial justice politics of abolitionist religion with the social gospel emphasis on economic democracy, comprehensive social justice, and modern criticism. King's mentors were steeped in this tradition, and nearly all of King's close associates in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) belonged to it. But the black social gospel is little known, despite its colossal legacy and ongoing importance.

The social gospel in general was defined by its commitment to changing social structures in the direction of social justice. White social gospel luminary Walter Rauschenbusch famously urged churches to oppose the ravages of capitalist inequality and bad politics. Otherwise, Rauschenbusch asserted, religion was irrelevant and the socialists would be right to charge that churches did not care about poor and vulnerable people. The founders of the black social gospel shared this progressive agenda but gave highest priority to the struggle against America's racial caste system and an upsurge of racial terrorism. They included William Simmons, Reverdy C. Ransom, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Alexander Walters, Richard R. Wright Jr., and Adam Clayton Powell Sr. The black social gospel applied the spirit of abolitionism to the new era of Gilded Age tyranny, conceiving the struggle against white racism as a trump factor that refigured everything else in the social gospel reform agenda. Like the white social gospel founders, however, the black founders had to fight for the right to talk about social justice politics in religious contexts.

The black founders did not take over the churches; they provided only modest ballast for the NAACP, and some were driven out of their congregations for espousing social Christianity. But they started something new. They fought to abolish Jim Crow, lynching, and economic injustice. They established that progressive theology could be combined with social justice politics in a black church context. They implored their congregations to welcome the migrant stranger. They refuted the racist culture that demeaned their human dignity and equality. They paved the way to something stupendous, the nation's greatest liberation movement. And this tradition remains important as a wellspring of progressive religion, liberation theology, and every form of religious progressivism that appeals to the witness of the Civil Rights movement.

Origins of the Black Social Gospel

Early black social Christianity can be defined broadly or narrowly. Broadly, there were four groups, plus a tiny socialist flank. The first group identified with Booker T. Washington, a towering figure in American life from 1885 to 1915 who advocated political accommodation, economic uplift, and social-ethical religion; Washington advised four U.S. presidents, befriended nearly every supercapitalist of the Gilded Age, dominated racial philanthropy and patronage,

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and forged alliances with white social gospel leaders, notably Lyman Abbott and Washington Gladden. The second group, led by Henry McNeal Turner and Alexander Crummell, contended that African Americans needed their own nation because white America was hopelessly hostile to blacks. The third group favored protest activism for racial justice, strongly opposing Washington; its early exponents included Ransom, Wells-Barnett, and Baptist pastor J. Milton Waldron. The fourth group stood against factional division, calling for a fusion of pro-Washington realism and selective anti-Washington protest militancy. They included Walters, Powell Sr., and Nannie Burroughs.

All four of these ideological factions existed before 1903—the year that W. E. B. Du Bois emerged as the intellectual leader of the protest tradition. A full-fledged black social gospel tradition coalesced from them. It stood for social justice religion and modern critical consciousness, emphasizing the social-ethical teaching of Jesus and the evil of racial injustice and oppression. This full-fledged black social gospel tradition came mostly from the Du Bois camp of racial-justice militants who opposed Washington. It shaped and defined the black church leaders who directly influenced King—Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin E. Mays, Howard Thurman, Vernon Johns, and J. Pius Barbour. For thirty years, however, the school of Washington dominated black social Christianity, and for fifty years after that, many black social gospel ministers continued to say that Du Bois–style militancy and Washington-style realism were equally valuable and went together.

“The black social gospel founders were ministers who doubled as public intellectuals.

The black social gospel had a distinct integrity *and* much of it had significant dealings with white social gospelers and progressives. Most of its founders were marginalized in their religious communities for pushing an unwelcome agenda. Black churches have always been theologically, culturally, and socially diverse, contrary to the stereotype of the politically active “black church.” This stereotype persists because the Civil Rights movement transformed the popular image of black churches, which obscured the long embattlement of the social gospel in black (and white) religious communities. Put differently, the success of the social gospel idea in many black churches has obscured the fact that it is a long-embattled social gospel idea.

An Uneasy Activism

In the late nineteenth century and for the entire first half of the twentieth century, only a minority of black congregations supported social justice preaching and activism. The chief founder of the National Baptist Convention, William Simmons, got rough treatment for his civil rights militancy, theological modernism, and broad political activism. Reverdy Ransom was even more embattled in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church; his clerical colleagues in Chicago and Boston were so offended by his advocacy of the social gospel that they drove him out of both cities. Carter Woodson, Adam Clayton Powell Sr., Richard R. Wright Jr., and Benjamin E. Mays wrote lengthy accounts of their struggles to legitimize the social gospel in black churches. King grappled with this problem constantly, as his own denomination opposed the Civil Rights movement.

Critically, most of the black social gospel founders were ministers who doubled as public intellectuals; many of them started social welfare agencies in their congregations; and some helped build the original civil rights protest organizations, notably the Afro-American League, the Afro-American Council, the Niagara Movement, and the NAACP. There were enough clerics and church workers in these organizations that there were always debates about whether there were too many. The lynching mania that exploded in the 1880s convinced some church leaders that Frederick Douglass had been wrong to oppose the formation of black protest organizations.

In Northern cities the social gospel created settlement ministries that provided care for infants and toddlers, nursed the sick, organized garbage removal, and offered lecture programs, concerts, reading groups, and discussion groups. Nearly every major American city had at least two large black congregations that launched social welfare ministries, sometimes in cooperation with white progressives. Du Bois and Wright launched their intellectual careers in the Philadelphia settlement movement, where they coped with condescending patrons and picked their battles carefully. In most places, white settlement leaders were usually female and socioeconomically privileged. They struggled with how they should relate to black communities and questioned whether their houses should be located in predominantly black communities. Waldron and Burroughs replied that the movement needed as many black social workers as it could find; otherwise white settlements merely reinforced white domination.

The social gospel and liberal theology did not necessarily go together. Liberal theology accepted Darwinian evolution and the various higher critical approaches to the Bible and Christian tradition, which made it threatening to theological conservatives. In the early twentieth century, however, the social gospel swept the elite Northern seminaries and divinity schools, where it was deeply intertwined with liberal theology. Many judged that the social gospel and liberal theology arose together, and fit together, because they were

the same thing. This reading was taken for granted across most of the theological spectrum, forcing a difficult choice. It was still possible to say that one could accept the social gospel without accepting a liberal approach to theology. But the leading black social gospel ministers of the 1920s and 1930s—Ransom, Powell Sr., Wright, Johnson, Mays, Thurman, Barbour, and Johns—did not take that tack. They pressed hard on the need for a modernized theology, urging that the church had to accommodate science and modern criticism to be credible.

Challenges of Modernity

The evangelical identity of black church religion had been hard won; thus, many ministers resisted the modernized theology of the social gospel. Significant Christianization of America's slave population did not begin until the 1760s. Christianization did not come into full swing until the 1830s, by which time most American blacks had been born in the United States. The great revival movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the so-called First and Second Awakenings—sent most black American Christians into the Baptist and Methodist camps. These two religious groups became the primary keepers of the dream that religion might bridge America's racial chasm and thereby bring relief to oppressed black Americans. From the beginning it was an evangelical dream. Black ministers kept it alive even after they were driven by white racism to form their own denominations. To make inroads in denominations to which they belonged, early black social gospel leaders had to be convincingly evangelical, even as they introduced critical perspectives on the Bible and Christian teaching that challenged the folk traditions of many congregations.

The social gospel would have gotten nowhere in black churches had it not been evangelical in the sense of being centered on the life, teaching, and cross of Jesus. But modern theology had a demythologizing spirit that introduced the way of doubt and negation wherever it entered. The black social gospel, though always embattled for being too modern and political, held off this doubt by holding fast to gospel norms about the sacred personality of God and all human beings.

Black social gospel ministers preached about a personal God who demanded justice and loved all the children. They welcomed pragmatists like historian Carter Woodson and drew strength from Du Bois, whatever they made of his personal beliefs. Today scholars vigorously debate the latter point, variously contending that Du Bois was a radical Christian theist, an atheistic Marxist, a skeptical Deist, a Hegelian idealist, or a pragmatic religious naturalist. I believe that Du Bois carved a place for pragmatic heterodox religion within the black radical Christian tradition. He drew upon the language of Christian prophecy, declaring that his work expressed "divine discontent with the imperfect," but he declined to call himself a Christian. He wrote moving prayers during his teaching career at Atlanta University but questioned "whether they were orthodox or reached heaven." Du Bois believed that religion is rightly about struggling with religious meaning and sacrificing for it, and he had a definite exemplar of good religion—the social gospel Jesus, who befriended the marginalized, prayed to a God of the oppressed, and taught that God was present in the poor and oppressed. That was enough for Du Bois, even as he variously mediated Marx, Hegel, Crummell, Turner, William James, and a host of others in thinking about religion.

Reverdy Ransom was the black social gospel leader closest to Du Bois and most like him. He prized his friendship with Du Bois and the work they did together. Ransom pastored AME churches in Cleveland, Chicago, Boston, and New York, and he gave electrifying speeches at abolitionist commemorations. After he got kicked out of Chicago and Boston, he took over the *AME Church Review*, which helped him gain a national following. Reluctantly he became a bishop to advance the social gospel. But Ransom lacked a movement vehicle, the tasks of the episcopacy wore him down, and the unrelenting hostility of white society exhausted him. Moreover, he lived to see his social gospel rhetoric of progress and ideals become quaint amid the devastation of the Great Depression.

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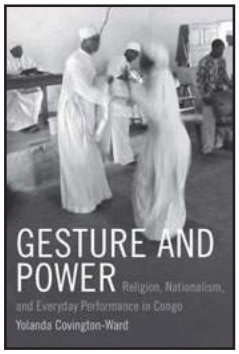

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From the early 1890s onward, Ransom spoke the social gospel rhetoric of democratizing American society and the world, even as black Americans suffered an epidemic of racial lynching and the contempt of both political parties. Then came the great disillusionment after World War I, when black soldiers were treated despicably upon returning home from the war. For a while Ransom took hope in the New Negro movement of the 1920s, also known as the Harlem Renaissance. But the Depression fell very hard on African Americans and Ransom was reduced to survival work in a tiny and hard-pressed denomination.

Opposition to the Social Gospel

Meanwhile Reinhold Niebuhr became famous by insisting that the Depres-sion shredded social gospel idealism and optimism. In the 1920s Niebuhr was a social gospel progressive and pacifist. In 1928 he joined the faculty of Union Theological Seminary. As a radical socialist in the 1930s, he repudiated social gospel idealism and pacifism. In the 1940s he blasted the social gospel from a neo-liberal perspective that he called Christian realism. The social gospel, Niebuhr claimed, failed to take seriously the realities of sin, evil, and power politics.

Niebuhr did not repudiate modern social Christianity. Throughout his career he assumed the core of the social gospel—that Christianity has a social-ethical obligation to support movements for social justice. Social ethics, the field in which Niebuhr taught, had no history and no basis apart from this assumption. Niebuhr shared most of the modernizing theology that went along with the social gospel, especially its recognition that biblical myths are myths. But he heaped powerful ridicule on the social gospel attempt to fashion a social ethic from both the teaching of Jesus and modern humanism. Niebuhr's neo-Reformation theology of sin and grace featured an existential rendering of the doctrine of original sin. He taught his readers to view the world as a theater of perpetual struggles for power among selfish, competing interests. He forged a dialectical, ironic, paradoxical approach to social ethics that both fired and limited his own involvement in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s, and he symbolized the adjustment of ecumenical churches to the global traumas of his time.

Everything that Niebuhr wrote comprised a public apologia for his version of modern, realistic, social Christianity. And everything that he wrote was of deep interest to King. But with Niebuhr there is always an irony, his favorite trope. Two ironies stand out in the present case. First, the foremost critic of the social gospel played a major role in advancing the causes and legacy of the social gospel, especially through his influence on King. But secondly, Niebuhr's influence also played a significant role in obscuring the black social gospel. If the social gospel was a bad idea, as Niebuhr was repeatedly, simplistically claimed to have said, then better not linger with it. For those who considered Niebuhr the hero of twentieth-century American theology, the black tradition of the social gospel was better left for dead, along with Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden.

King grappled intently with this possibility as soon as he was old enough to study Niebuhr. In graduate school he wrote papers comparing Niebuhr to the unreconstructed liberals favored by King's teachers. Niebuhr said things about power and social evil that rang true to King. He also said things about idealism, redemption, and proceeding slowly against racism that did not, undercutting the hope that kept black Americans from falling into cynicism and despair.

The importance of keeping hope alive outstripped all else. Here the black social gospelers who succeeded Niebuhr held the same conviction as the black social gospelers who preceded him. They did not believe that the biggest problem with the social gospel was that it dreamed too wildly. They never thought that the social gospel erred by projecting its ethical idealism into the public realm, and they did not have the cultural privilege that allowed Niebuhr to dichotomize between the religious and political spheres. They believed that the problem with the white social gospel was that it gave low priority to the struggle against racism. The black social gospel leaders who directly influenced King—Johnson, Mays, and Thurman—acquired their social agency on the social gospel conference circuit sponsored by the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. They came up through the Student Christian Movement, an international social gospel organization blending YMCA and YWCA activists, as did black social gospelers Channing Tobias, Juliette Derricotte, Frank Wilson, Marion Cuthbert, Max Yergan, and Sue Bailey Thurman.

For these ecumenical leaders and activists, the social gospel was indispensable and still in an early phase. They wanted church leaders to stir up their courage and idealism, advocating racial justice with the same ethical passion that the white social gospel devoted to peace, temperance, and economic cooperation. If Christianity had *any* moral meaning in the American situation, the churches had to confront the evils that oppressed black Americans. Black social-gospel leaders vehemently denied that the social gospel exaggerated the kingdom of God as a spiritual and social-ethical ideal. How was that possible, if the teaching of Jesus centered on the kingdom of God? That question kept social-gospel theology and ethics alive in black-church Christianity long after the elite Protestant divinity schools and seminaries left it behind.

Recovering the Movement

Today the black social gospel is being recovered. For many years, white religious scholars David Wills and Ralph Luker labored to keep it from being erased. More recently, black religious scholars Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Anthony

Pinn, Randal Jelks, Barbara Savage, Walter Fluker, and others have written valuable works exploring the history of black social Christianity. Like all these scholars, named and unnamed, I am committed to recovering wrongly forgotten figures. Simmons, Ransom, Walters, and Wright would not have been forgotten had scholars not ignored the black social gospel for decades. Unlike some scholars in this field, I oppose the view that historical recovery should diminish the historical standing of Du Bois and King.

Du Bois was widely regarded as the breakthrough genius of his time even by people who didn't like him. He was deeply learned, exceedingly brilliant, and historic. He was a warrior for humanity and human culture, exactly as he thought, and a prickly egotist who could be abusive to allies who deserved better, as he knew. Du Bois had warm and jovial relationships with a small circle of friends and gave brusque treatment to pretty much everyone else, in the manner of many withholding male hero types.

At least he was reflective about the gender factor. Du Bois grasped and acknowledged that churches, male intellectuals, and activist organizations lived off the labor of women, taking credit for their achievements. Here, prophetic brilliance, personal foibles, sexist presuppositions, and feminist insight meshed together. Du Bois handed out shabby treatment to his wife Nina, humiliated her with numerous long-running affairs, and excluded black women who threatened to steal attention from him. Ida Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Church Terrell got icy put-downs from him. His early writings on the "degradation" of black family life helped to fuel a pernicious tradition of attacks on the character and culture of black women, and black studies scholar Hazel Carby exaggerates only slightly in censuring Du Bois for his "complete failure to imagine black women as intellectuals and race leaders."

My caveat to this "complete" failure is that Du Bois played a role in lifting up black female writers during the Harlem Renaissance, and he commended the social activism of black women, which implied something about leadership. Sociologist and black studies scholar Cheryl Townsend Gilkes notes that Du Bois offered the first "self-consciously sociological interpretation of the role of African American women as agents of social change." Despite his personal chauvinism and his conflicted record concerning women's agency, Du Bois passionately defended the dignity and rights of black women, offering a feminist critique of male domination, with a pinch of idealistic chivalry. In *Darkwater* he wrote a perfect response to religious congregations (nearly all of them of every denomination) that depended on women they put down:

> As I look about me in this veiled world of mine, despite the noisier and more spectacular advance of my brothers, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count. Black women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are today furnishing our teachers; they are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches; and they have with small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property.

The churches in which the black social gospel was founded and broke through were not the ones that allowed women to be leaders, and the Holiness and Pentecostal churches that allowed women to be leaders were not the ones that supported the social gospel. Women played an important role in the black social gospel, but almost never as theological leaders, and even their social and political agency came mostly from creating a national organization outside the church, the National Association of Colored Women. The chief exception, the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention, played a huge role in the National Baptist denomination but not in theological leadership.

Legacies of the Movement

The black social gospel had debates about dual identities and permeable boundaries, it identified with the NAACP as soon as the NAACP existed, and it had a small flank that fused NAACP liberalism with social gospel socialism. Moreover, on the ground, the NAACP was more religious than it advertised, as was the NACW. For decades the NAACP routinely convened in church sanctuaries, welcomed ministerial leaders, and opened and closed its meetings with prayers. Often it sang a hymn or two. Du Bois, blasting NAACP leaders during his stormy departure in 1934, noted that the staunchly antisegregationist NAACP would have no place to exist or meet without its 20,000 segregated black churches. The issue of segregation, he said, was not as simple as the NAACP pretended to believe. Many black ministers boasted that the church was the one place where African Americans *chose* to be segregated. Black social gospel leaders negotiated this complex reality long before Du Bois made a ruckus about it, variously adopting simple, conflicted, and complex views in dealing with it.

Black social gospel theologians debated, in their language, what it means to say that race is a social invention and, at the same time, deeply embedded in psyches, social structures, and communal legacies. They did so long before the advent of critical race theory, sometimes citing Du Bois on double consciousness. They interrogated varieties of integration, cultural distinction and interchange, equality, and theological pluralism while giving priority to the political struggle for justice. The two denominations that produced most of the black social gospel leaders—the AME Church and the National Baptist Convention—despite operating very differently, espoused the same social ethic of moral responsibility, equal rights, and human brotherhood/sisterhood under the sovereignty of a personal God.

Black Baptists came late to the social gospel because they struggled more than any other group with the separatism versus integration issue. They had special problems, being Baptists, in trying to build a denominational structure beyond congregational and regional levels. More importantly, they debated separatism versus assimilation for decades before they assembled a huge denomination. By the time black Baptists founded the National Baptist Convention, the separatist party prevailed, usually with Booker Washington politics, conceiving the church as a refuge from a hostile white society. But that did not settle any aspect of the separatist issue, for black Baptists wanted two things that did not go well together: a separate identity and an important role in changing American politics and society. Neither of these things comported well with a fading Bookerism.

Northern Baptists had the same debates as Northern Methodists about whether they owed special obligations to Southern migrants and whether they needed to sing the migrants' gospel music. But Northern Baptists answered "yes" more often, which propelled them to the forefront of the black social gospel, resulting in a Southern movement organization in 1957 built around King and led almost entirely by black Southern Baptist ministers. Before and after these social gospel ministers founded SCLC, they held diverse views about what worked, how they should think about the separatist issue, and how deeply they should accept King's Gandhian rhetoric. But they shared the black social gospel view that the best way to overcome the pernicious doctrine of racial inferiority was to build strong black institutions. ■

Defending the Sikh Tradition

A Sikh American Feminist Perspective on Interfaith and Interracial Marriage

BY SIMRAN KAUR-COLBERT

On my wedding day, our officiant, the pastor from my husband's historic African American church in downtown Lexington, started our ceremony by citing Guru Amar Das Pyaare Ji of the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. He quoted, "They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together. They alone are called husband and wife, who have one light in two bodies." This message is central to the Sikh approach to understanding marriage.

Contrary to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Code of Conduct) that states, "Persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karaj ceremony," I took ownership of my sexuality and decided whom I would marry. The Sikh Rehat Maryada dictates that "when a girl becomes marriageable, physically, emotionally and by virtue of maturity of character, a suitable Sikh match should be found and she be married to him by Anand marriage rites."

I met my husband during my time in graduate school. I wanted my family to welcome our engagement and our marriage, but as a Sikh daughter I had stepped out of the traditions of the Sikh faith as ascribed in the SGPC Sikh Rehat Maryada. I made the decision to believe in love, and for that I was cast out and labeled a pariah. The patriarchal tradition of my family and the Rehat Maryada dictate that I do not have the authority to decide whom I marry. By stepping outside of the gender and familial traditions defined by that code of honor, I not only dishonored my family but also became a woman who had betrayed her faith.

My Sikh American upbringing taught me to see all people as equal in the eyes of Waheguru and to recognize that living in American society poses racial and class-based challenges to equality. In Sikh Day parades in the mid-Atlantic, many Baisakhis were celebrated with faith and community leaders announcing the need to "recognize all humankind as a single caste of humanity." Yet I was disowned for loving and marrying an African American man of the Christian faith. The tradition of love, welcoming all and any to *sangat*, to *langar seva*, seemed limited to just the insides of our gurdwaras, despite being displayed in Baisakhi celebration parades and social justice marches. This tradition would not welcome "outsiders" in our homes or our families, or recognize the legitimacy of an interfaith, interracial marriage.

In my journey since engagement, I've learned that other Sikh American women in interfaith and interracial marriages more often than not cope with this painful reality of exclusion from their families and sangats. I have also met women who are able to have functional and healthy family relationships with boundaries: zero tolerance for emotional and physical abuse, toxic language, or racial slurs. I have met women whose families are welcoming of their daughters' life choices in marriage. But in other cases Sikh women must walk away from their home gurdwara sangats and families in order to live their truths and to avoid the threat of domestic violence or isolating experiences within the sangat.

Sikh American women refuse to be regarded either as second-class citizens or as women who have somehow attacked the Sikh tradition by living their truth. I refuse to walk away from the gurdwara and the sangat. Yet, I find that Sikh American women like me are not easy to love in our communities and encounter much hostility. Introducing a feminist perspective and critique to Sikh identity and Rehat Maryada should be an urgent priority for the Sikh community.

Redefining What It Means to *Defend* Sikh Tradition

Sikh American feminist concerns include protecting a woman's freedom to marry whom she wants without fear of honor violence or domestic violence, forced marriage, or the hurt of being outcast from her sangat. It is important to actively create spaces and platforms that celebrate and defend the female Sikh identity. Our centers of worship must empower

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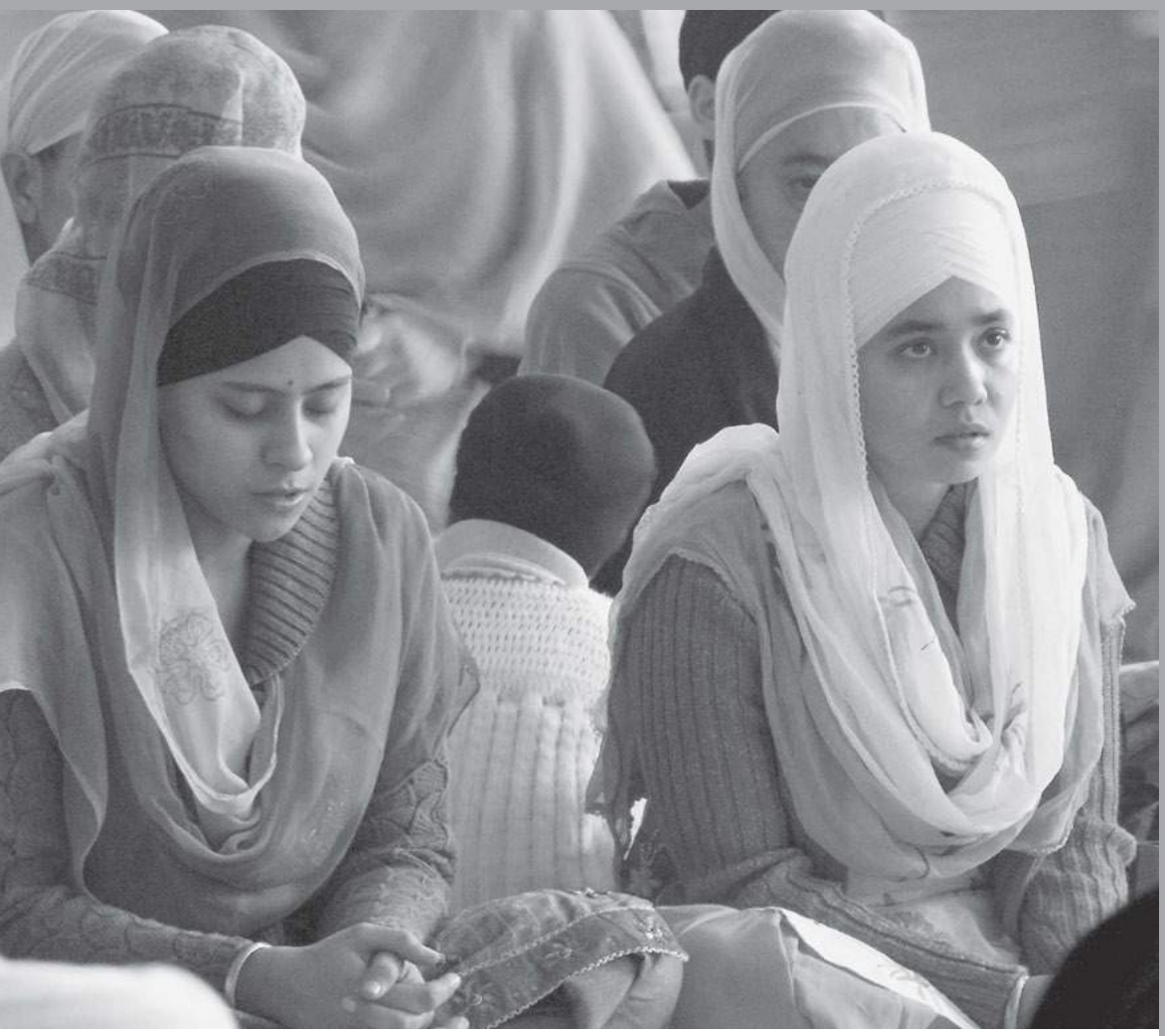


Sikh women gather in a gurdwara.

Flickr/Jasleen Kaur

girls and women and actively engage men in ways they can support such efforts.

In their 2014 article in *Tikkun*, "Sikh Ethics and Political Engagement," Simran Jeet Singh and Prabhjot Singh write that the challenge for American Sikhs is to gauge how much to define a "Sikh Identity that stands apart from others in a time when our tradition is not well recognized." Singh and Singh acknowledge that "the Sikh tradition expects its practitioners to engage in disciplined religious practice, to defend the tradition when it is in danger, and ultimately, to offer its energy and spirit to serve a common humanity." However, the dialogue in our mainstream Sikh American discourse has little to no discussion of how the defense of the Sikh tradition functions to silence the narrative of Sikh American women and, in many cases, to cast them out from their Sikh families and gurdwara sangats. Perhaps the greatest challenge for Sikh Americans is gauging how much to define our identity not to those who do not recognize our tradition, but to those within the community who recognize our tradition through a distorted, oppressive, patriarchal, male-dominated lens.

Sikh Americans should strive to engage with the narratives of Sikh women and the femaleness of their identity. American gurdwaras must aspire to become safe spaces for Sikh American girls and women to discuss and share their concerns, challenges, traumas, achievements, and experiences, without fear of being condemned as "Americanized" or elevated on a pedestal for being "traditional women." Sikh American women must attain the freedom to define our own womanhood in the community and in the sangat. Although existing efforts address these challenges by creating social media blogs for women's issues (such as KaurLife.org) and foundations with programs geared at sharing female narratives (such as the Kaur Foundation), they alone cannot change

Helpful terms

Shri Guru Granth Sahib: The living Guru, holy scripture of the Sikhs.

Gurdwara: Literally "the gateway to the Guru." This is the name of the Sikh religious house of worship.

Baisakhi: A Sikh religious holiday that celebrates the April 1699 transformation of Sikhs across the South Asian subcontinent by Guru Gobind Singh Ji via baptism through drinking Amrit, immortalizing nectar.

Sangat: A Sikh term with its origin in the Sanskrit word "sangh," which means company, fellowship, and association. In Sikh vocabulary, the word has a special connotation. It means a congregation assembled in the presence of the Sikh sacred scripture and living Guru, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Langar: A Sikh institutionalized tradition of communal vegetarian cooking and service to all people. The tradition is designed to uphold the principle of equality between all people regardless of faith, caste, color, age, gender, or social status. Today, Sikh gurdwaras across the world hold langar service. The Harimandir Sahib Gurdwara langar seva serves 80,000–160,000 people every day.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: An organization in India responsible for Sikh gurdwaras and historical sites across the country. In the United States and elsewhere, Sikh immigrants from India adhere to the SGPC policies and code of conduct and honor, known as the Rehat Maryada.

Anand Karaj: Name for the Sikh marriage ceremony, meaning "blissful union."

how gender oppression and the silencing of female voices persist in our gurdwaras. The silent acceptance of public condemnation of interfaith and interracial marriages in gurdwaras haunts many Sikh women and men as adults.

Furthermore, efforts to defend Sikh tradition in Europe and North America often translate into intolerance for a woman's independence and empowerment when it comes to rights such as the freedom to choose whom she marries and the ability to make decisions regarding her body and sexuality. These efforts are often led by young Sikh men who impart a violent, patriarchal interpretation of the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. These men often lead protests defending what they understand to be the sanctity of the gurdwara as a space strictly designed for marriages between two Sikh individuals. They threaten to disrupt interfaith and interracial marriages in gurdwaras should an officiant try to conduct the Sikh marriage ceremony of Anand Karaj.

An overwhelming silence prevails in the face of these patriarchal voices. In many cases the community rallies in defense of these protestors, citing the Rehat Maryada, which itself has been subject to reform and change over Sikh history. Often their calls against interfaith and interracial marriages are laced with, but not limited to, Islamophobic and anti-Black sentiments.

"It is taken for granted that Sikh heritage belongs to men alone," writes Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh in her book *The Birth of the Khalsa: A Feminist Re-memory of Sikh Identity.*

> Instead of symbols of self-respect and mutuality, as Guru Gobind Singh intended them to be, the five *Ks* operate as tools of male domination, with women excluded as the "other." They have, in effect, codified a division between male and female roles based on a stereotypical identification of gender characteristics. The five *Ks* have come to dictate who is to soldier and who is to submit, who is to demand and who is to give, who feels superior and who feels inferior, who expresses anger and who suffers in silence . . . The five *Ks* make men the upholders of the code of honor for their families. While men courageously guard the sexuality of their wives, daughters, sisters, and nieces, women have to submit to and depend upon and assist their men with all their physical and spiritual might. . . .The woman wears the same five symbols of strength that he does, but in her case they work against her; the very symbols that empower him nullify her through silence, invisibility, and oppression, and sometimes even lead to her murder or suicide.

The five Ks are articles of faith with which Sikhs adorn our bodies as a sign of our love for our Guru and our Guru's love for us. They are *Kesh* (unshorn hair), *Kara* (steel bangle), *Kirpan* (sword), *Kanga* (comb), and *Kachera* (drawstring underwear). The five Ks adorn Sikh men as they do Sikh women, yet their maleness dominates Sikh dialogue. Women's menstrual cycles, sexuality, reproductive rights, and the expression of our gender through the five Ks are rarely invoked outside male-dictated interpretations.

Earlier this year, Rupi Kaur, a female Sikh Canadian writer who published her poems in a collection titled *milk and honey,* shared a photograph of a fully clothed woman lying in bed with a period stain. Instagram removed the photograph twice, stating it went against their community guidelines, after which the image and Rupi Kaur's response to the image's removal from Instagram went viral. Rupi Kaur responded on her Instagram account:

> I will not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of a misogynist society that will have my body in an underwear but not be okay with a small leak. when your pages are filled with countless photos/accounts where women (so many who are underage) are objectified. pornified. and treated less than human.

Sikh women like Rupi Kaur are writing and sharing their North American Sikh feminist voices with the world and our sangat.

Sikh women and their narratives are often discussed within the community as though gender issues were resolved in the past and as if modern challenges of gender-based violence and oppression do not affect the Sikh American community. Rupi Kaur's viral Instagram post showed that female voices on issues concerning gender equality are necessary not just for the sangat but for the world. The perception that women in the sangat do not face gender-based challenges to equality is a myth. It needs to be actively challenged, and the gurdwara should become a space where this dialogue occurs. Single mothers, divorced women, and victims of domestic violence are rarely given the platform to share their testimonies with their sangats in the way men are allowed to air the grievances and traumas of seeking acceptance and incorporation into American society.

Insights on Interfaith, Interracial Marriages: Promoting Solidarity

Interfaith and interracial married couples and their presence in the Sikh American sangat provide an opportunity for Sikh Americans to walk in solidarity with the diverse members of our communities: both our neighborhoods and our gurdwara sangats. Rather than limiting our focus to how well Americans are able to differentiate between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, and to practicing single-issue activism on identity awareness alone, we should strive for solidarity in interfaith and interracial activism to educate our communities on how our struggles are interconnected and related.

The future face of Sikh Americans is changing. Immigrant Sikh American communities must address the discomfort and shame associated with Sikh women and men sharing

their lives with marriage partners of a different racial or faith background. Many Sikh American immigrants feel that defending Sikh tradition means defending the traditional patriarchal values that enforce stereotypes of gender roles and duties. Giving a platform to Sikh American feminists allows for this dynamic to be questioned, and for notions of shame and honor to be challenged. Ultimately, it fosters a Sikh activism that, in the tradition of our Guru, prays for and acts on the well-being of all human creation. ■

Culture

BOOKS

Buddhist Wisdom for Healing the Earth

REVIEW BY RUBEN L. F. HABITO

A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution, and Ethics in the Modern World
by David R. Loy
Wisdom Publications, 2015

This new book by David Loy could have also been given the title *Buddhism for a Post-Axial Age*, with a subtitle like *Enlightenment and Earthly Engagement*. Loy, Buddhist philosopher and Zen master, suggests that recent Buddhist encounters with the West—and vice versa—have opened up new horizons and possibilities that are profoundly transformative for both cultures. *A New Buddhist Path* charts out some of these directions, outlining key features of a contemporary Buddhism that is both "faithful to its most important traditional teachings and also compatible with modernity."

Like other religions that arose during the Axial Age, Buddhism envisioned ultimate human destiny as involving a passage to a realm beyond this one, in a heaven, paradise, pure land, or some ideally conceived realm of the afterlife. These religions thus exhibit world-denying characteristics and tend to deemphasize the value of efforts to make this world a better one, unless this endeavor is tied up with attaining a reward in the afterlife. (Christianity and Islam, though formed historically after the Axial Age according to Karl Jaspers's reckoning, exhibit similar characteristics and thus, broadly speaking, can be included among the "Axial Age religions.")

The cosmological dualism that posits a transcendent realm as a "higher order" over and above this worldly realm comes with other problematic features found in Axial Age religions. The dualism inherent in privileging the transcendent over the worldly realm is reflected in patriarchal attitudes and social structures based on a view of the superiority of the male over the female of the human species. The elevation of the human above the rest of the nonhuman realm of sentient beings and above the natural world is another concomitant feature of this dualistic view. Issues of gender equity and of eco-social justice are among the challenges posed by modernity and postmodernity to the traditions established by Axial religions. Assessing the impact of the Axial religions on human civilization as a whole, Loy himself suggests that "although Axial-type transcendence has been historically invaluable, it is no longer adequate for what we know today . . . we need to be liberated from their dualisms, which have outlived their role."

Varieties of Buddhist Experience

Partly as a backlash to the one-sidedly transcendent emphasis associated with the Buddhist message, there are those, especially in the West, who espouse a view of the Buddhist path that conveniently fits within or adapts itself to a postmodern worldview that rejects cosmological dualism.

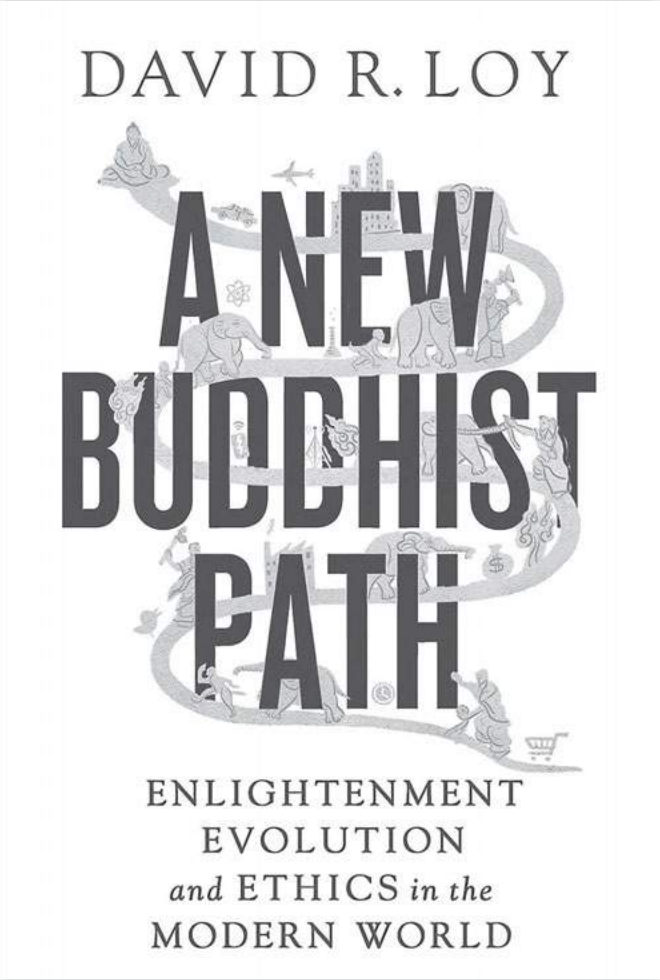
There are also those who take Buddhism to be a psychotherapeutic program that allows individuals to cope with life in a competitive, consumeristic society. Loy notes that philosopher Slavoj Žižek unmasks this truncated and totally inadequate understanding of the Buddhist message in the latter's critique of a therapeutic "Western Buddhism" focused on emotional and stress management, a Buddhism adapted to "the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism" in that "its meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics

while retaining the appearance of mental sanity."

Grounded in his own Zen Buddhist meditative practice as well as in years of reading and reflection and writing on the implications of the Buddhist message for our time, Loy describes for us, as the title suggests, "a new Buddhist path" that overcomes the cosmological dualism of the Axial religions without capitulating to the value systems of global, market-centered, capitalistic consumerism. He lays out a nondual path based on the fundamental Buddhist insight into "things as they really are," a wisdom that sees everything as intimately interconnected and that leads naturally to the dynamic activity of compassion.

Examining the history of Buddhism, one might point out that Loy's is not really a "new" Buddhist path. Rather, it recalls the basic themes of the Mahāyāna movement that occurred in India in the early centuries of the common era. Second-century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna's affirmation that "nirvāṇa is no other than saṃsāra, saṃsāra no other than nirvāṇa" is a formulation of this nondual understanding of ultimate reality that cuts through the polarity of transcendence and immanence. And as Sallie King, Christopher Queen, and other scholars have demonstrated, Buddhists in different socio-political contexts and in various epochs of history have been engaged in tasks of social transformation empowered by their religious experience and vision.

Although Loy's Buddhist path may not be totally "new," he offers a profoundly insightful and newly convincing contemporary interpretation of Buddhist thought. Loy forges a middle way between a "transcendentalist" view that looks to Buddhism for an escape from the toils and troubles of this world and an "immanentist" view that regards Buddhism as a source of empowerment for the frail, vulnerable, and psychologically challenged beings we call humans. This middle way is none other than the path of awakening embodied by the Buddha himself, a path of *realization*, that is, one that acknowledges the fact that "I" am not separate from the world. This nondual understanding of reality is what grounds the intimate link between personal transformation and socio-ecological transformation. After describing this nondual vision of the Buddhist path, Loy then presents a narrative enlightened by this vision, one that may allow for a sustainable and wholesome ecological future for all of us on this planet.



A New, Sustainable Narrative

Observing that our contemporary global community is in a dysfunctional state, facing a deep crisis that threatens our very survival on this planet, Loy claims we have been living out "the *defective* story we have been telling ourselves about who we are, what the world is, and our role in it." It is the old story about a devalued and desacralized world where we humans, as "rational animals," lord our superiority over the rest of the natural realm and exploit it in search of our own version of a materialistic and consumeristic kind of "happiness."

We can now see the urgent need to dislodge the faulty story that has held sway since the advent of "the age of reason" and "the age of science." In its place, we need a new story that can help us recover the sacred in our midst and in nature. Empowered by this "new Buddhist story," each one of us can thus give ourselves fully to actualizing it in our lives.

Taking the "new Buddhist path" is nothing other than living the life of the new bodhisattva (*bodhi* = "awakening"; *sattva* = "being"), that is, a person treading a path of awakening motivated by compassion for all living beings. For such a person, one's own personal awakening and the awakening of the entire society (toward its becoming more equitable, more just, more ecologically sustainable) are one and the same thing.

The path of awakening taken by the "new" bodhisattva thus entails "deconstructing and reconstructing the sense of self, not to qualify for a

blissful afterlife but rather [seeking] to live in a different way here and now" as much as it requires engagement in socio-ecological transformation. On this path, personal transformation and socio-ecological transformation go hand in glove and are understood as mutually reinforcing and complementing each other every step along the way.

What is particularly insightful, thought provoking, and challenging in Loy's work is his depiction of the traditional "three poisons" (greed; ill will, or aggression; and delusion, or ignorance), the root causes of human dissatisfaction and suffering (*dukkha*). The three poisons are not only characteristic of our individual, personal lives as unenlightened worldly beings, but also operative in our socio-politico-economic institutions. Since our individual and collective lives are inevitably and intricately entangled, the result is a state of affairs we can call our socio-ecological, or global, dukkha.

Greed is rampant in the current global economic system of capitalist consumerism that dominates our world, and it is propelled by an inner sense of *lack* that drives acquisition. Loy gives one definition of greed as the view that things are "never enough" at any level of the social: "corporations are never large enough or profitable enough, the value of their shares is never high enough, our national GDP is never big enough. . . . It is built into these systems that they must keep growing, or else they tend to collapse." Of course, such greed already forces billions of people to live in abject poverty and degrading conditions.

The enduring effects of aggression and delusion on our contemporary global society are also discussed, though less extensively. (Loy analyzed the symptoms of these two poisons in greater detail in his previous books.) The poison of aggression, or ill will, is institutionalized in the military-industrial complex that continues to feed lethal weapons to the numerous armed groups in different parts of the world, who use them in waging their particular battles under varying political, ideological, religious, and other banners, wreaking untold destruction that takes its toll in countless human lives. Delusion, or ignorance, is institutionalized in the mass media and information technologies that portray mainly what is useful, profitable, and favorable to those in control to help maintain the status quo of an unjust and exploitative system, and which tend to shield the vast majority of us from realities that would disrupt our complacency or expose the horrific origins of our privilege and comfort.

"The three poisons are not only characteristic of our individual, personal lives . . . but also operative in our socio-politico-economic institutions.

Traditional Buddhist practice is geared toward overcoming the three poisons of greed, aggression, and delusion. Loy's new Buddhist path enhances our vision and broadens the field of Buddhist practice, enjoining us not only to uproot the three poisons in our own personal lives, but also to work wholeheartedly toward dismantling the institutional forms of greed, aggression, and delusion that together comprise the root causes of our contemporary global malaise.

Loy claims it will take more than just some form of redistribution of wealth, and more than simply including social justice in Buddhist ethical teaching. He calls for "an alternative evaluation of our economic situation, which focuses on the consequences of individual and institutionalized delusion." We must, Loy insists, address the roots of socio-ecological or global dukkha by overturning that sense of lack that fans our consumeristic lifestyles and empowers the institutions that feed on it.

Along with this economic challenge, the ecological challenge is undoubtedly the most pressing among those confronting our contemporary global society. Loy names our collective sense of estrangement from the natural world and identifies our "collective response to that alienation—attempting to 'self-ground' ourselves technologically and economically" (that is, our tendency to place undue reliance on technology to find solutions to our ecological problems) as symptoms of a deeper, spiritual crisis. Resolving this crisis requires us to overcome the delusion of considering the self as separate from the natural world.

Overcoming Transcendence with Conscious, Compassionate Action

These arguments have of course been made separately from Buddhism. In her recent book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, Naomi Klein convincingly demonstrates that our deteriorating ecological situation is inseparably linked to the flawed economic system of a globalized capitalism that dominates the lives of all of us on this planet. Her book is alarming but also hopeful: the call to rescue our planet from ecological destruction is now being heard by more and more people across the globe and is leading increasing numbers of goodwilled people to concerted action on many fronts, in ways that cannot but bring about an across-the-board transformation in our economic, social, and political institutions.

For such a transformation to be truly effective and wide-ranging, it is crucial that people of good will heed the call and join forces with all those seeking change, doing their share, and participating in the various local, national, and international movements to address specific tasks. Loy's *A New Buddhist Path* describes the spiritual contours of the enormous work involved in healing our wounded world (*tikkun olam*). The "new bodhisattvas" that Loy describes as the bearers of this vision and path of practice are not those who have simply taken care of their own need for psychological and personal healing and, having done so, are thereby now prepared to take on the task of healing the world. Rather, they have acknowledged and accepted their own brokenness as inseparably linked with the woundedness of our entire global society itself and are prepared to give themselves entirely to a practice that addresses both individual dukkha and our socio-ecological or global dukkha.

The portrayal of a "Buddhism for a post-Axial Age" that Loy undertakes in this book may also mirror key themes reflected in an emerging Judaism, Christianity, or Islam (among others) for a post-Axial Age. Adherents of these religions, through the message of transcendence embedded in their respective traditions, are able to place their hearts' allegiance in something beyond what this-worldly pursuits can offer: their religious faith enables them to overcome the allurements of this world, the pursuit of which only enmeshes us more deeply in the poisons of selfish greed, ill will, and ignorance. Religion can empower the faithful to selflessly work toward the greater well-being of the world, freed from any self-serving interests and worldly motivations. But this can happen if and only if the attraction of transcendence does not become a *dis*traction and provide an escape into a dualistically conceived, otherworldly realm that entices them to cop out of their responsibilities in this world.

For Judaism, this could mean the recovery of the prophetic impulse as a dynamic power capable of criticizing the unjust structures of the world order and of envisioning a more just and equitable society for all people. For Christianity, a recovery of Jesus's message of the imminent coming of the reign of God can inspire Christians to take on the tasks of bringing "the Good News to the poor, proclaiming the liberation of captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed" (Luke 4:18) rather than remain numbed to the tasks of this world by a dualistic belief system whose main component is the promise of a reward in the afterlife. For Islam, such transformation may require rereading core teachings in a way that inspires Muslims to work for justice and mercy in the world, empowered by their act of submission to the Just, the Merciful One.

Inspired by and grounded in the spiritual teaching of their own respective traditions, adherents of the world's religions can join hands and work with one another as well as with all those of good will who profess no religion but are no less committed to the work of socio-ecological transformation and healing. It is a sign of hope for our time that increasing numbers of people of faith are connecting and cooperating with others who hold differing beliefs to raise their voices and stem the tide of destruction from the effects of our global dukkha. Empowered by their specific faith traditions, people are creating more and more initiatives to form interfaith councils or interreligious networks on the municipal, regional, national, and international levels, which has provided opportunities for people of faith across traditions to encounter one another, pool resources, form alliances, and expand one another's reach in addressing the various issues related to the sorry state of our contemporary global society. In ways resonant with what Loy's book lays out for Buddhists, they offer us hope through conscious, compassionate action. ■

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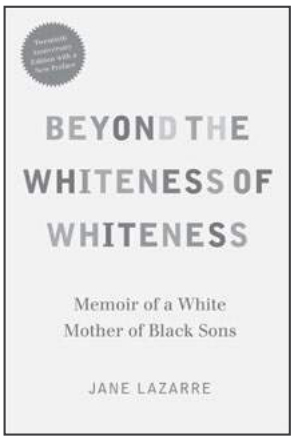

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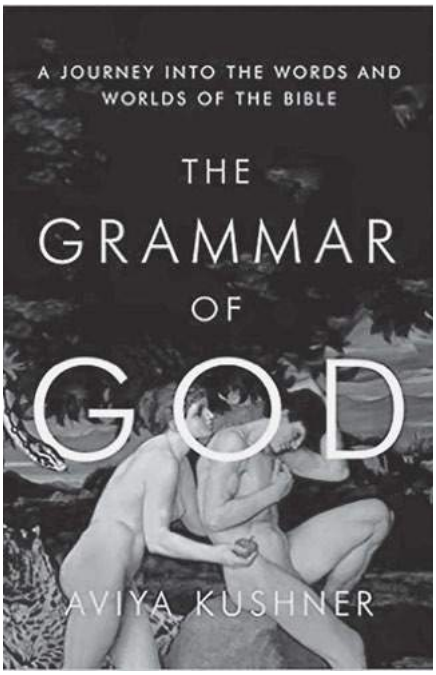
Lost in Translation

Faith, Misunderstanding, and Certainty

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH WRIGHT

The Grammar of God: A Journey into the Words and Worlds of the Bible
by Aviya Kushner
Spiegel & Grau, 2015



I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian church where gays were reprobate sinners, wives were made from their husbands' ribs and expected to remain obedient, and if parents spared the rod, their children would indeed be spoiled. Any time I asked my father questions about the Bible—such as the time at around the age of six, when I asked why God created humans if he already knew that they'd sin and therefore force him to send a flood to kill everyone but Noah's family—my father simply told me to have faith and not to question "the Word of God." Luckily, I didn't listen. I turned in the opposite direction, in fact, renouncing Christianity as a young adult. I chose the road of the questioning artist, as opposed to the person of faith. I eventually mellowed and decided Christianity was fine, as long as it helped people lead better lives. As for my own spirituality, I've found resonance in Buddhist teachings, and value in gathering wisdom from its many sources, but I've never found it necessary to choose a faith.

The Word and the Grammar

Aviya Kushner's upbringing was not like mine—and neither was her experience with the Bible. In my household, it was all about the *Word* of God, but in Aviya Kushner's, it was about the "grammar" of God. Kushner grew up in a traditional Jewish community. Until she went to graduate school, she had read the Bible only in Hebrew. Her initial responses to the translated English Bible she studied in a literary Bible course were surprise, even shock at times, and the feeling of being saddened "at what had been misinterpreted."

Kushner calls her debut book, *The Grammar of God*, "a chronicle of the largest" of these surprises, the biggest surprise being the certain, "lone voice" of the English version, as opposed to the endlessly questioning nature of the "Rabbinic Bible . . . crammed with commentary." Among the commentators, everything was (like life itself) "up for discussion . . . ambiguous . . . hard to pin down." Her experience with the Hebrew Bible was about understanding through debate rather than defining and then clinging to the definite.

Creation

The Grammar of God reads like an essay collection connected by Kushner's theme of comparing the Hebrew Bible to English Bible translations. The chapters are sprinkled with personal narrative and linked through a repeated form: each chapter is based on and titled after a theme ("Creation," "Love," "Laughter," etc.) that is in turn derived from a verse of scripture. This verse appears six times over at the beginning of each chapter, in each of the six English translations that Kushner collected and studied during her ten-year venture to conduct, in a sense, a Bible translation in reverse.

The first chapter, "Creation," begins with a scene of the Kushner family engaging in a longstanding tradition: a heated debate around the dinner table about "the grammar of Creation," Genesis 1:1–2, in particular. Kushner's scholarly mother, who taught her to love grammar and to see it as "a window into how a group speaks to itself, structures its . . . thoughts, and defines its world," encapsulates the debate at hand: "Do you read the verb . . . as *bara*, in the past tense, so that it means 'In the beginning God *created*,' or do you read it as *bro*, the infinitive, so that it reads 'In the beginning of God's *creating*'?" Kushner's brother, Davi, argues that it is the latter, and that this, along with thirteenth-century commentator Ramban's argument that what God created in Genesis 1:1 was formlessness, which

he later turned into form, supports the theory of evolution. But Kushner's father, a scientist, insists that rabbis could not have known about evolution, that this would have changed the entire course of the history of science.

When Kushner first reads the King James Version of Genesis 1:1–2, she continues this debate with herself, churning over the possibilities just as her family did at the dinner table, scrutinizing "every letter, every line break, every dot, every possible path."

There is a period at the end of the English version: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In the Hebrew there is a *sof passuk*, essentially a line break. To Kushner this determines the difference between God being done with creation (a period) or continuing (a line break). She questions other factors as well, approaching the Bible as one would approach literature. She questions whether these verses are prose or poetry; she considers sound (sound controls emphasis) and capitalization (there is no capitalization in Hebrew, and the English capitalizations make everything definite, just like the period and so many other aspects of English).

Kushner involves the reader in her process as she calls her mother or emails her poet friend with questions or gasps while reading a thought-provoking email in a coffee shop. It's as if you're studying alongside her as she solves a mystery. At the same time, there are moments when she delves into such a deep level of grammatical detail that I couldn't keep up. In the "Creation" chapter alone, details discussed include the rhythm of the masculine versus feminine plurals; the three-letter roots of all Hebrew words, which can be verbs, nouns, or sometimes even adjectives (which understandably often causes confusion); and sentence structure (English tends to have a standard order of subject, verb, object, while the more flexible Biblical Hebrew often switches them up, and reordering a sentence can alter meaning).

Kushner shares all of this to reveal all of the room for error in translation and to explain the various misinterpretations. This point is well made, but I found that the convoluted details of the how and why sometimes clouded the ultimate point. But then, this is one of the main arguments of the book: nuance determines actual meaning. And so Kushner is meticulous, revealing that seemingly minute details make all the difference in how we interpret one of the most read and influential books in history.

"... fixed words of the English Bible have been taken literally to legitimize killing, slavery, homophobia, sexism, and hate.

As such, the stakes are high. In many contexts the fixed words of the English Bible have been taken literally and as law, law that has been used to legitimize killing, slavery, homophobia, sexism, and hate. In this regard one could argue that obsessively inspecting every word, letter, structure, "every line break, every dot, every possible path" is necessary, that we should not take the words for granted.

"The only cure for a quick glance is context. That is what so many of the rabbinic commentators tried to provide—a map of how to read a verse within a neighborhood of other verses," Kushner writes. "The reader's task is not to be lulled by the promise of the familiar, not to simply accept a refrain as seemingly clear . . . The reader's task is to ask what is going on."

Other Misconceptions

In this spirit Kushner identifies several inconsistencies, including the description of slavery. The Hebrew Bible describes slavery in a much harsher manner. In English, the word used to describe the labor of the Israelite slaves in Egypt is *rigor*, as opposed to the Hebrew *backbreaking*; the taskmasters *afflicted* rather than *tortured* the slaves; and midwives referred to the slave women as being *lively* rather than *animals*.

Also, in English, "The children of Israel *sighed* and *cried* by reason of the bondage," as opposed to *moaning* and *shrieking* in Hebrew. In the Hebrew, "God saw the children of Israel, and God knew"; God understood. But in the English Bible "God knew" was replaced with "God had respect." Kushner argues that change "enslaves us all in an incorrect translation of what slavery was like: for man and for God," and she wonders "if it would have helped the abolitionist cause if all Bible readers in English could have sensed what God thought when he saw and heard slavery."

Another example of mistranslation is the Ten Commandments. The Hebrew Bible refers to the Ten Commandments as the "ten sayings," or "words," or "things"—not commandments. This and several other factors outlined by Kushner lead to her conclusion that "what Jewish law wants is an ongoing conversation between man and God, and between man and man—but most of all, between man and himself. It is not a command, exactly, but a conversation."

The Descending Darkness

As with most good writing, *The Grammar of God* was born of obsession. Kushner believes that "books choose their writers," and because of her unique position and drive to understand and to

help others understand, to bridge the gap, this book has anointed her.

In this vein, in addition to being about the differences between the Hebrew and English Bibles, this book is about heeding one's calling (one of several universalities about the human experience that Kushner extracts throughout). In the fifth chapter, entitled "God," Kushner writes about the darkness that many rabbis believed descended when the Torah was first translated from Hebrew to Greek. Likewise, reading the Bible in English is taboo in many Jewish communities, the fear being that it will convert Jews to Christianity. Kushner writes of the roots of this fear—of Medieval rabbis living in fear of death, of how many Jews lost their lives during the crusades—and uses this descending darkness as a metaphor for the disaster that followed biblical translators and those who sought to elucidate the Bible for the general public throughout history. Some were tried for heresy, strangled, and burned at the stake; others were flayed or exhumed and desecrated after death. Kushner then parallels this darkness with the calamity that befell her as she studied the English Bible and the ensuing setbacks in this reverse-translation project, which consumed her. She injured her right hand (from writing too much by hand, her preferred mode) and was unable to write for a year and a half. Soon after that, she broke her foot and was unable to walk for another year. "I certainly saw what for a writer is darkness: the possibility that she might not be able to write," she concludes.

"For centuries, translating a text signified that it was essential, that someone thought it was worth preserving," Kushner writes. She sees her endeavor in this light. She calls the reading of the Bible a struggle, a joy, and a war; she believes in the labor of study, the cross an artist, scholar, or translator must bear, her personal cross being the book that only she could write. She writes of the struggle in pursuing one's calling, as well as the darkness in avoiding it.

Kushner admits that "it is hard to be both an artist and a person of faith," that "belief implies acceptance while an artist questions." But she also believes in a combination of the two. Kushner points to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, also known as the Rav, who came from a *misnagdic* tradition, which valued scholarship and objected to Hasidism, "the . . . movement that insisted that belief and emotion mattered . . . above scholarship and rational thought." The Rav was not only an avid scholar, but also a man of faith. He believed and "wrote that God had ordained that there should be both Hasidism as well as *misnagdim* [those who objected to Hasidism] in the world."

Universal Truths

Kushner points out the inconsistencies between the Hebrew Bible and the English translation while at the same time deriving from the Hebrew text a universal meaning that transcends these differences. An example of this comes from Psalm 42. Kushner's understanding of the first verse in Hebrew is: "As the deer craves the riverbed, so my soul craves you, God."

But an English translation removes the word *afikei* (edge), which follows "water" in the Hebrew version. Kushner says this psalm is about the riverbank, the water's edge, the borders that separate us from what we long for, and that through translation, Psalm 42 (not only the first verse, but in its entirety) has lost its intended meaning, which is about our longing for God, for something larger than ourselves, the twists and turns of faith, and the great distance between what we want and what we can have.

Perhaps the chapters of *The Grammar of God* come across as loosely based because each touches on a different truth about the human experience, and in this way Kushner makes connections between the secular—the supposed vanity of critical thinking and the pursuit of knowledge, or the creation of beautiful art—and faith, or the divine, showing that both are part of one whole, that one doesn't have to be shunned for the other, that there's nothing wrong with being human, and that the Bible is in fact a very human text.

Again, there were moments when the semantics of the grammar threw me, as an English reader and speaker, for a loop, but Kushner anticipates this. "It is not easy to make a language come alive to someone who does not speak that language; it is a challenge to rename the seemingly familiar and name the unfamiliar," she writes, at the same time wondering if this is why "translators are often so reviled." She wishes that the intended meaning of the Hebrew could come through more clearly in translation. This wish is the crux of her endeavor. Unfortunately there are times when things are undeniably unclear, or perhaps graspable only in the moment. The Bible and the Hebrew language are deeper and older than my evangelical father or I could comprehend. He and many other Christians (not all, mind you) cling to this book for reasons that seem to contradict the intent of the original text: certainty. But life, like the Bible, is ephemeral, not to be pinned down, grasped, or seen in the literal sense, but in a way that Kushner refers to as "something richer than literal sight": a way that allows one to know and to understand and at the same time to seek, to question (even longingly), to derive one's own meaning, to embrace the descending darkness of uncertainty, to not have the answers. ■

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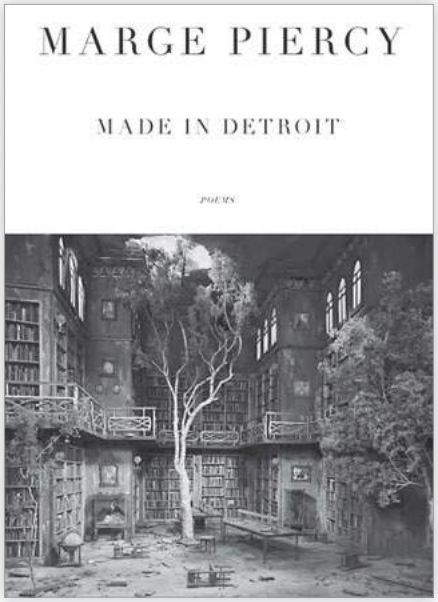
Mother's Milk and Rat Poison

REVIEW BY JEHANNE DUBROW

Made in Detroit
by Marge Piercy
Knopf, 2015



Over the past ten years, Detroit has become a symbol both of the American financial collapse and of the ensuing narrative of recovery, the story of how a great city began to rebuild itself after crisis. For Marge Piercy—former poetry editor of *Tikkun* and author of nineteen poetry collections, seventeen novels, a book of short stories, and the critically acclaimed memoir *Sleeping with Cats*—Detroit is a locus of memory. But *Made in Detroit* also joins recent books, such as Jamaal May's debut collection *Hum* and Erika Meitner's *Copia*, that depict the city as a brick-and-concrete representation of what has gone wrong with America's particular brand of capitalism. While she has long been viewed as an important feminist figure in American poetry, an environmentalist, and an antiwar activist, with *Made in Detroit*, Piercy proves that nearly fifty years of publishing have only sharpened her gift for articulating our current political concerns through the intimate medium of verse.

The book's title poem is a lyrical examination of the speaker's childhood, defined by tenderness as well as by the sharp edges of an urban setting. "My first lessons were kisses and a hammer. / I was fed with mother's milk and rat poison. / I learned to walk on a tightrope over a pit / where snakes' warnings were my rattles," Piercy begins. And later she tells us, "I suckled Detroit's steel tits," the city itself a parent, one that toughens its children into "coal and flame." Piercy frequently returns to this conceit, calling attention to the idea that we are so intimately connected to our environs that we might as well be part of the skyline. We should care about our cities because we become the landscapes in which we live, just as they, in turn, become us.

Poetry of Poverty

Much of the collection is concerned with the experience of American poverty. In "Detroit, February 1943," the poet remembers wearing clothes "shaped / by other bodies" and reading books already dog-eared by other readers. Like birds fed stale bread, the inhabitants of Piercy's poems survive "on what no one else wanted." In "The scent of apple cake," a mother only finds pleasure and sweetness in the desserts she bakes, the rest of her time spent "begging dollars . . . mending, darning, bleaching." Yes, these texts are set in the decades of Piercy's girlhood, but her descriptions of what it's like to be poor—the condition of always making do, the exhaustion of worrying about how to pay the next rent check or heating bill—remain fresh and relevant. And although Piercy's vision of city life is often grim, she argues that hope is possible, even when local jobs are "exported to China" and neighborhoods are abandoned to become "blocks of zombie houses." The poem "City bleeding" ends with this assertion: "Out / of ruins eerie in their torn decay / where people lived, worked, dreamed / something yet begins to rise and grow."

One of the collection's most potent (and vicious) poems, "The poor are no longer with us," catalogs how the poor have been made invisible. They're imprisoned "behind high walls," fed "fast garbage," provided with "cheap guns" to kill one another "well out of your sight," and put in schools to learn "how stupid they are." Piercy ends this awful litany by explaining that the poor "are not / real people like corporations." It's a well-placed reference to former Massachusetts governor, Mitt Romney, who proclaimed during his 2012 presidential campaign that "corporations are people, my friend." Poems such as "The poor are no longer with us" demonstrate Piercy's deep commitment to using lyricism, imagery, and irony in the service of social justice. In "A

hundred years since the Triangle Fire," the poet laments corporate exploitation and greed, and the infamous factory fire is an event that has much to teach us a century later. "Labor was cheap then," Piercy explains, "too often cheap now." Like machines, she says, we are still easily replaceable "to those with / power to replace us."

In addition to meditating on memory and history, Piercy explores how Jewish liturgy and ritual can help us make sense of the ethical and societal concerns of our modern era:

> We pick and choose what to
> cherish of those tales, our minds
> picking at them for spiritual sense
> so we can part the dangerous waters
> of our time to cross our Jordans.

While her earlier collection, *The Art of Blessing the Day*, functions as a siddur, offering new prayers and suggesting new strategies for entering tradition, here Piercy uses significant moments in the Jewish calendar and life cycle as a way of speaking about the present. How can we, as Jews, respond to all that's now broken? In "Where silence waits," the speaker admits "how hard it is to keep Shabbat, / to stop what crams days," when the "shrill voices" of technology are always shrieking, distracting us from our own consciences which issue "only from deep / stillness and silence."

Poetry of Place

Made in Detroit presents objects and locales that readers familiar with Piercy's writing will recognize from many of her other books. There are poems about her beloved cats, poems about sex and former lovers, and poems set in her home in Cape Cod. Recent collections, such as *The Crooked Inheritance* and *Colors Passing Through Us*, have shown Piercy's skill in scrutinizing the consequences of American policies, foreign and domestic. But *Made in Detroit* proves that, even when an artist returns to the same obsessions, she can uncover something new about her subject matter. We see such a moment in "Looking back in utter confusion":

> If all the edicts
> I put forth, manifestos, diatribes,

> all those didactic moments came
> swarming, I'd duck and run. I
> was so sure. Then not. Then not

> at all.

There's no question that political art risks shrillness. The poet, passionately dedicated to expressing violent truths, can alienate the reader. Here, Piercy, like an expert rhetorician or simply a wise thinker, anticipates such criticism. With gentle humor, she reminds us that certainty can crumble like the cinder block of cities. "Yet I go stumbling on," Piercy reassures us, "bearing my name-etag still wonder- / ing how I came to get here." The poem's final line break creates a radical enjambment, which emphasizes the speaker's *wonder*. Despite all the bleakness—on the nightly news, on the streets of Detroit, even on the storm-swept beach outside a window in Cape Cod—Piercy maintains the possibility of wonder.

The collection ends with "In storms I can hear the surf a mile away," in which the poet observes:

> The ocean is always beautiful
> here in all weathers it churns up. It
> does not approve of land and wants to
> take it back. Someday it will. Even
> the hill I live on: sandy bottom.

Turbulence, Piercy tells us, is necessary too; it can shake us loose from apathy or indifference. When we read *Made in Detroit*, we are asked to consider economic problems that few contemporary American poets of Piercy's stature have the nerve to explore in their work: deindustrialization, housing foreclosure, bankruptcy. We are asked to confront the shattered places in ourselves. In one of her timeliest collections to date, Piercy gives us art that is not only heartfelt but also carefully wrought, complex, and intent on repairing the fragmented world. ■

JEHANNE DUBROW is the author of five poetry collections, including most recently *The Arranged Marriage*. She is the director of the Rose O'Neill Literary House and associate professor of creative writing at Washington College.

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Where silence waits

How hard it is to keep Shabbat,
to stop what crams days, evenings
like a hoarder's house and to thrust
every worry, duty, command,

every list of What Is To Be Done
into a mental closet and bolt
that door. We feel half guilty
not to be multitasking.

Surely this space we eke out
is indulgence. Where's
the end product? How can we
walk into silence like a pond?

The computer, the smart phone,
the fax machine summon us
to attend to shrill voices. How
can we justify being idle?

How can we listen to that voice
that issues only from deep
stillness and silence? How
can we ever afford not to?

—Marge Piercy

For a sample of poems by Marge Piercy, visit tikkun.org/piercy.

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Tikkun invites people of all ages to apply to work as interns and volunteers on editorial, social justice, environmental sanity, and consciousness-raising tasks at our office in Berkeley, CA.

The Lords of Labor

—Karl Marx writing "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844."

It was the time when children scrubbed
inside chimneys, or crawled
the methane swamps of the coal mines,

lit by iridescent fish.
Mud streets and snuff and muck slops,
horsehair beds, grindwheel and harrow.

The time when *to show your mettle*
meant showing the flint chips
stuck in your arm; when

to fire a worker meant, burn down his house.
~

Time was, Karl Marx sat rubbing his back
(no bristling beard yet; no doctrines),
sat studying so long

he couldn't sit; the doctor said he'd gotten
Weaver's Bottom, new ailment
of the kitchen-industrial age.

Marx frowns at his Hegel. Hegel's ideas
flutter like angels overhead.
Lonely; he watches the fire grate;

the flames dancing . . . such indolence.
A philosopher can see, in
the burning branch, a devil-shape.

The worker puts his life into the object;
his life belongs to the object;
then the owner takes up the object.

Worker and owner, fighting for the beloved—
a tale of Romance.
When a man's work is torment,

the owner feels pleasure. . . .
The pages gather in Marx's hands,
and shift along his body.
~

A time when skull-lumps were measured,
when hot bottles pressed to the skin
sucked out disease. The mind,

its offices and strong-rooms, littered with stories.
The tongue, restless in the mouth;
the fingers grip the pen like a spike—

Charles Dickens holds up *Tale of Two Cities*:
"What is done and suffered
in these pages

I have done and suffered myself."
His novel splits him into
two parts, twenty, hundreds:

Dickens becomes both hero and lout,
the golden-breasted girl
and the vengeful, knitting Madame;

is Jerry Cruncher digging up corpses,
so the body can labor after death,
showing itself to students. . . .
~

Who are the lords of labor,
the lords of cure and crime—
the owners? Or the working body,

the broken mold of its work:
a stonegrinder's arm, heavy
with flecks of stone; a farmer's thumb,

swollen red with fertilizer.
(The almanac lists the ailments as
Mettle. Farmer's Thumb.)

The cop by the highway,
speed-gun in his lap
humming with cancer—

Say goodbye to what you have made,
watch your child flee from home;
wave and wave and wait for your coin

to drop like mercury into the palm,
nestling in divots and cuts,
passing through flesh. . . .
~

Marx shifts painfully. His notes pile up.
Someday, he becomes homework,
robbing students of sex and drink.

—Only the youngest students are free,
the children with their big books
and their helper, the Norfolk terrier:

speak to it, and its head cocks in curiosity,
as if suffering a pinched nerve—
the posture called *Wry Neck*.

The terrier is paired with kids
whose parents are away;
they read it stories,

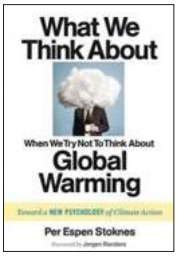
to which the terrier tilts wryly,
"Really? Is that so?"
And then one child,

thinking they are now friends,
holds out the book to the dog:
Now it's your turn. Read my story,

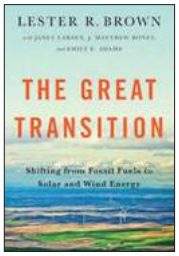
and the dog head bows on its slender stalk.

—David Gewanter

Tikkun RECOMMENDS



What We Think About When We Try Not To Think About Global Warming: Toward a New Psychology of Climate Action
Per Espen Stoknes
Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015



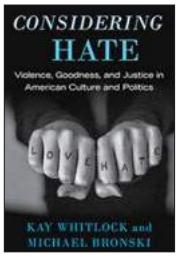
The Great Transition: Shifting from Fossil Fuels to Solar and Wind Energy
Lester R. Brown
W.W. Norton & Company, 2015

Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth
David C. Korten
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015

Read these three books along with the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (www.tikkun.org/esra) and Global Marshall Plan (www.tikkun.org/gmp) proposed by the Network of Spiritual Progressives to learn why we need a fundamental transformation of our economic, political, and cultural systems to save life on earth from environmental catastrophe.

Per Espen Stoknes presents "a new psychology of climate action," addressing everything from the psychological roots of resisting action to advice for coping with the depression that affects many of those who understand the depths of the disaster facing life on earth. At least one part of the solution is a switch from fossil fuels to an economy fueled by solar and wind energy. Lester R. Brown, one of the great pioneers in the science of climate change and its economic consequences, presents a hopeful picture: the energy transition is already beginning. And David C. Korten's message has always been core to *Tikkun*: "A viable human future depends on navigating a deep cultural and institutional transformation grounded in a story of unrealized human possibility. . . . We humans are living beings birthed and nurtured by a living Earth in a living universe. To survive and thrive, we must learn to live as responsible contributing members of the whole of Earth's community of life." Korten's powerful vision makes a fundamental change in our economy plausible. It works in tandem with Jerry Mander's *The Capitalism Papers*, but uses psychospiritual language more likely to appeal to a broader public than is the narrow, economistic, rights-oriented discourse predominant in much of the liberal and progressive world.

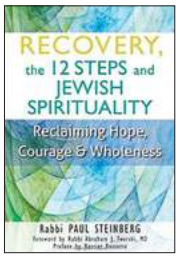
Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God
Kelly Brown Douglas
Orbis Books, 2015



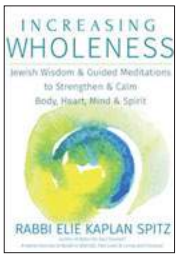
Considering Hate: Violence, Goodness, and Justice in American Culture and Politics
Kay Whitlock and Michael Bronski
Beacon Press, 2015

After the murder of nine African Americans by a white supremacist in a traditionally African American church, and after years of assaults on African Americans by police and white racists, it's clear that a major reason the left's environmental and social justice program has not reached all those it could benefit is America's culture of "othering," most obvious in the racist hatred of people of color, particularly African Americans. Kelly Brown Douglas forcefully contrasts the culture of "stand your ground" and its "grand narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism" to the black faith tradition that "generates a discourse of resistance that allows black people to affirm their innate and created worth, even when everything around them suggests their utter worthlessness." This tradition helps black people maintain their sense of divine dignity "in the face of a stand-your-ground culture that seeks to pervert their self-image and disrespects their bodies."

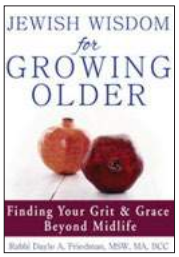
Whitlock and Bronski address violence, goodness, and justice in American culture and politics. They challenge the notion that racism works primarily through individual evil acts performed by ignorant bigots, and instead highlight systemic racism and insist that we develop a disruptive intelligence that challenges the existing systems that embody or legitimate oppression: "where the dominant culture erases peoples, the tasks are to publicly notice the erasure and to grieve those who are lost, to remember them, and to repopulate the world by bringing them to life again." And "where structural inequalities and violence are in ascendance, the task is to refuse their 'inevitability,' to repudiate them with new stories of what is possible through a public ethic of compassion and shared resources."



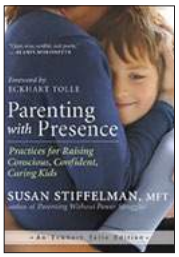
Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality: Reclaiming Hope, Courage & Wholeness
Paul Steinberg
Jewish Lights, 2014



Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom and Guided Meditations to Strengthen and Calm Body, Heart, Mind and Spirit
Elie Kaplan Spitz
Jewish Lights, 2015



Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older: Finding Your Grit and Grace Beyond Midlife
Dayle A. Friedman
Jewish Lights, 2015



Parenting With Presence: Practices for Raising Conscious, Confident, Caring Kids
Susan Stiffelman
New World Library, 2015

Jewish Lights publishing does an excellent job of supplying the Jewish world with self-help books that are equally useful to non-Jews. So Paul Steinberg's book on recovery, which adopts the 12 Steps of AA and deepens the AA philosophy by providing a Jewish theological, ethical, and psychological context, is a boon not only to Jews who deal with alcoholism and other addictions, but also to non-Jews who may be resistant to the 12 steps.

Similarly, Elie Kaplan Spitz provides a path to spiritual growth based on Jewish wisdom and guided meditation to "strengthen and calm body, heart, mind, and spirit" that should appeal to people of all faiths and none. And in a characteristically Jewish approach, Spitz teaches that inner peace must also be linked to actions of *tikkun olam*, bringing peace and justice to the world.

Dayle A. Friedman's advice on "finding your grit and grace beyond midlife" teaches the importance of squarely facing our inevitable death, how to deal with dementia as patient or caregiver, how to forgive ourselves and those who have hurt us, and how to retain hope and compassion as we age or care for aging parents. A wise and respectful approach.

Susan Stiffelman's new book, *Parenting With Presence*, provides practices for "raising conscious, confident, caring kids." Drawing on a wide array of psychological and spiritual teachers, Stiffelman teaches that "how a child turns out is a function of an infinite number of variables," and reminds readers that "even the most spiritually evolved people have been known to have had significant parenting problems." Parents could re-read this book at least once a year for much-needed guidance on what they can contribute to their children's development, how to develop their own spiritual resources, and how to gain a sense of humility about how much a parent can do for their child.