

Fair Observer

Monthly

Abflug Departures		Terminal 1 ABC	Terminal 2 DE				
Flug Flight	nach to	über via	planmäßig scheduled	erwartet estimated	Halle Hall	Schalter Counter	Gate
OU 113	SPL		10:05		A	051-278	817
LN 888	KOEN		10:08		A	051-278	7
DE 7002	LAS-V		10:10	10:30	B	171-188	821
LN 3002	STOCH		10:10		A	051-278	A19
LN 3211	RIG		10:10	10:25	A	051-278	852
LN 3300	LARACA		10:10		A	051-278	832
LN 1000	DUBLIN		10:10		A	051-278	851
LX 1071	SUS		10:10		A	051-278	833
JP 117	LON		10:15		A	051-278	888
LN 1122	BOSTON		10:15		B	318-337	A03
LN 1130	CHICAGO		10:20		B	318-337	823
LN 822	HUEN		10:20		A	051-278	A03
LN 1100	HALT		10:20		A	051-278	850
LN 1500	SILB		10:20		A	051-278	812
LN 1110	WASHIN		10:25		B	318-337	A02
LN 3130	OSLO		10:25	10:15	A	051-278	811
LN 531	CARACAS		10:30		A	051-278	815
LN 1000	PIER		10:30		A	051-278	A02
LN 1071	AMSTERD		10:30		A	051-278	813
LO 302	MARSHAU		10:30		A	051-278	851

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Abflüge werden nicht aufgerufen
Departures will not be announced

GRUNDIG

Abflug Departures		Terminal 1 ABC	Terminal 2 DE				
Flug Flight	nach to	über via	planmäßig scheduled	erwartet estimated	Halle Hall	Schalter Counter	Gate
HR 821	BUDAPEST		10:30		B	003-008	811
LN 012	HAMBURG		10:30		A	051-278	A18
LN 3130	SOPHA		10:30		A	051-278	888
LN 3012	RON		10:30		A	051-278	A11
AF 1110	PARIS-CH. DE GAULLE		10:40		B	001-007	327
LN 3300	HATTONITZ		10:40		A	051-278	888
LN 5112	SUNARST		10:40		A	051-278	A01
NN 001	DETROIT		10:40		B	011-016	800
AY 022	HELSINKI		10:45		B	000-003	322
LN 1111	ATLANTA		10:45		B	318-337	A01
AC 070	TORONTO		10:50		B	001-000	810
SI 001	SUBLIN		10:50		B	013-011	8
LN 804	ACCRA-LAB		10:50		A	051-278	A00
LN 3101	HONGK		10:50		A	051-278	A07
LN 1002	BIRMINGHAM		10:50		A	051-278	8
LO 300	OSAKA/KANSUI		10:50		A	051-278	8
LO 102	POZHAN/POSEN		10:50		A	051-278	8
AA 071	DALLAS-FORT NORTH		10:55		C	722-728	C08
BA 1700	BIRMINGHAM		11:00		B	001-020	3
KL 1700	AMSTERDAM		11:00		B	001-007	3

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Fair Observer Monthly



February 2017

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct [educational and training programs](#) for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

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Fair Observer Monthly

Atul Singh

February 28, 2017

For intrigue, drama, bloodshed and secrecy, few countries can hold a candle to North Korea. Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, was murdered spectacularly at the Kuala Lumpur airport by two innocent looking women. Apparently, they used a nerve agent 100 times more potent than sarin. Only the US and Russia have admitted to owning this nerve agent.

The murder tells us three things about North Korea. First, blood feuds within the Kim clan now put the turns and twists of *The Godfather* to shame. Second, the chubby North Korean leader has weapons of mass destruction and is willing to use them on anyone anywhere anytime. Third, by killing his half-brother who was under the protection of the Chinese, Kim Jong-un has demonstrated that neither the Middle Kingdom nor Uncle Sam can restrain him.

The murder in Malaysia is an indicator of an important phenomenon. The world in 2017 is a far more unstable place than in 2007. Then, the Goldilocks economy was in full sway. Interest rates were low, private equity was booming and derivatives were the rage. One Deutsche Bank smart aleck smugly proclaimed to this author in London that the smartest people in the world worked in finance. Needless to say, that era came to a crashing end. Markets melted, banks imploded and the financial system collapsed like a house of cards. Ten years on, the global economy is still limping.

We now live in an unstable world with three factors more important than others.

First, there is a real risk that geopolitical tensions might spiral out of control. A world where Kim Jong-un controls chemical weapons and Donald Trump has his finger on the nuclear button is not exactly a reassuring proposition. China needs North Korea as a buffer to avoid American troops on its borders. It does not want the Hermit Kingdom to implode, triggering a flood of refugees into its northeastern states. Yet it can no longer control its vassal as in the past. Kim is a third generation spoilt brat who has little life experience and a warped version of reality. He lords over the fulcrum where Chinese and American interests clash. So, things could go very easily awry if either Beijing or Washington acts immaturely or hastily.

Second, the global economy is wobbling. Europe is struggling with mountains of debt, asphyxiating red tape, anemic growth, low employment and aging populations. Chinese banks have trillions of dollars of bad debts on their books. Besides, China's export-led growth has come unstuck as global trade has slowed down. The costs of this growth such as poor working conditions, mass displacement, environmental destruction and extreme materialism are now catching up with Chinese society. It is obvious that business as usual is no longer possible for the Middle Kingdom. The same is true for the US, the world's biggest economy and the Mecca of technological innovation. Protectionism, deficits and debts are on the rise in the land of McDonald's, Coca Cola, Uber and Facebook. Besides, excessively loose monetary policy has released a torrent of cash in the economy, increasing already extreme inequalities by boosting prices of assets such as house and share prices. This cannot last forever.

Finally, human beings cannot continue to wreak havoc on the environment. Species are going extinct, populations of vertebrates are falling alarmingly, and forests are continuing to disappear from Indonesia to the Amazon. Even as Americans cling to their delusion that climate change is a myth, polar ice caps and Himalayan glaciers are melting. In true Americano parlance, "something's gotta give."

Atul Singh is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer.

A Time of Darkness in the City of Light

Stephen Chan

February 1, 2017

Islamophobia and indifference in an age of terror tarnish the legacy of Paris as the city of light.

The old city is still beautiful in its elegant, well-designed, almost understated way. In fact, it's hardly old. What we see, the streets in which we play the *flâneur*, were designed and built by Georges Eugene Haussmann from 1853. His plans were still being used for city development as late as 1927. The iconic Eiffel Tower was completed in 1889. Essentially, the Paris of today is one and a half centuries old.

The difference between Paris and other cities that began at that time, such as Sydney, are the long wide boulevards and their trees; the plenitude of museums and cultural monuments; and the prohibition against tall buildings, the Tour Montparnasse being an exception. There is thus a skyline everywhere, a horizon. It is not blocked off by skyscrapers. Thus it is the city of light, amplified by those same wide boulevards.

Of course, it is also the city of art—and of exiled artists, writers, musicians and romantics. The Gene Kelly film, *An American in Paris*, set to Gershwin's music, ensured that the legend of Paris was enshrined even in Hollywood. Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso and Miles Davis all found their way there as celebrity exiles. Miles Davis said it was the only place he felt free from discrimination. Intellectuals from the emerging nations were also there: Leopold Senghor, the future president of Senegal; Frantz Fanon, who wrote a Bible of revolt; and Ali Shariati, the philosopher of the Iranian revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was also exiled there.

There was a great intermixing of foreigners and local writers and artists. Miles Davis had a relationship with Juliet Greco. Fanon and Shariati were mentored by Jean-Paul Sartre. They all used to drink and argue philosophy and art at La Coupole in Montparnasse. The café is still there, much redeveloped, but still with art works by its original patrons like Jean Cocteau.

Outside the café these days, Syrian refugees beg for coins on the broad sidewalks. A family down the street, both parents and two young children, settle down for the night. The children are smiling as they are told their bedtime stories.

THE REIGN OF TERROR

Terrorism has long been a staple of postwar Parisian life. Targets were blown up during the Algerian War of Independence, both as the French tried to hang on to the colony, and as they tried to let it go. The pro-colonial group, *Organisation de l'armée secrete*, was responsible for a major attack on a train in 1961. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Paris endured sporadic attacks, including those by Carlos the Jackal. In the 1990s, the Algerian Civil War spilled over into France and the Armed Islamic Group attacked public transport.

However, all these attacks could be linked to clear political issues in the Middle East and to French foreign policy. There was a comparative lull in the frequency and intensity of attacks in the 2000s, until 2015. Then, in January, the Charlie Hebdo attack took place, and in November the carnage at the Bataclan.

What is new is the origin of the 2015 attacks is an ideology of faith rather than politics—certainly not the politics the French themselves pioneered with their own revolution, constitutions, and philosophical writings. Because the ideology is faith-bound, there is no discourse between French political philosophy and a militant Islamic theology. There is no Islamic equivalent of Frantz Fanon, with a foreword by Sartre, and using Lacan as an explicator of the psychology of revolt.

But one must surely be needed soon, as a city as worldly as Paris cannot continue to treat outrage simply as outrage; discuss superficially its sociology, but not its psychology and philosophy. Like all Western intelligence and security forces, the French concentrate on how the Islamic State (IS) does what it does. It tries to defeat the “how.” It does not ask too deeply about the “why.”

But at least the French do a little better than the Belgians. The Paris attacks of late 2015 were planned in Brussels and included several Belgian Islamists. Those who survived fled back to Brussels. Then they attacked Brussels too. Belgium is a state with six rival police forces without intelligence-sharing protocols. They simply collapsed under the challenge of forecasting and preventing attacks on its neighbors and itself.

Nevertheless, after the March 2016 attacks in Brussels, the Eiffel Tower in Paris was lit up every night in Belgian colors of red, gold and black. As they had been in red, white and blue after the Paris attacks.

From where I stay in Paris, and was staying throughout March 2016, across the road from Montparnasse Cemetery, one could see the tower. I stayed in the building next to where Simone de Beauvoir lived. She and Jean-Paul Sartre are buried together in the cemetery. For a city that impersonates space, light and elegance, it is strange to contemplate how famous lives were conducted, ended, and were buried in a small suburb—and where they were buried others of the great and the good were also buried. Foreigners like Samuel Beckett and Susan Sontag are there. French legends like Baudelaire are there. Durkheim, Ionesco, Man Ray, Proudhon, Rohmer, even Serge Gainsborough, are there.

At night, one looks across the sweep of their remains, slabs and monuments, to see the sweep of the Eiffel Tower's searchlight as, underneath, it is lit in the colors of yet another country bloodied in the 21st century's reign of terror. The searchlight still sweeps, not yet for other countries, but it did for the sister French city of Nice in July 2016.

THE BANLIEU

The elegance, even of a cemetery, is hardly found in the outskirts of Paris. Actually, they're not outskirts. They're the reality of Paris—a reality of a seemingly segregated and schizophrenic city. Here there are high-rise apartment blocks. The horizon seems foreclosed. Elegance and philosophy seem far away. In suburbs like St. Denis, with their heavily mixed populations, the grimier feel seems both invigorating but also, looking over one's shoulder, treacherous. The main street feels like a seedy part of Beirut but one imagines debates from Mosul, Damascus, Baghdad. One imagines.

The debates are probably no different in the restaurants and bars of the Edgware Road in London. And the cafes serve wine—and almost anything else that is alcoholic. The mixture is precisely an antidote to paranoia. Everything can be discussed over a glass of wine. And Paris is unpredictable. I've had my jacket slashed outside Sonia Rykiel on the Boulevard St. Germain in the heart of the Latin Quarter. Knowing it can happen anywhere, one doesn't go to a city for safety. One goes to Paris for elegance and

philosophy. The question is why are the French frightened to take philosophy to the *banlieu*?

In the 2005 crackdown on the purported violence and anti-social attitudes of the *banlieu*, former President Nicolas Sarkozy's harsh tactics achieved nothing. With the strictures and the rigor of policing, there was no admixture of engagement and dialogue. The youth, precisely of St. Denis, felt restless and resentful over mass unemployment and police harassment. Despite being second-generation French, they felt exiled from France. Sarkozy's heavy-handed response led to a spiral of attacks and counter-attacks until, finally, 20,000 police were deployed in the Paris suburbs. A state of emergency was declared. The rhetoric was about deportations and against foreigners. But the bulk of the unrest had featured local people.

Sarkozy's effort having failed, his successors have fielded neither stricture nor engagement— although they have come down hard on atrocities, and President François Hollande has declared the country is at war. And no modern philosopher has spoken for the Islamic community, moderate or radical, although many thinkers, those on the covers of *Le Point* or *Le Nouvel Observateur*, or dashing in the gossip pages of *Paris Match*, have written portentous tomes of what can only be called Islamophobia.

No one thinks for or with Islam. No one has tried to bring this part of France into France. But, for a city that hosted Shariati and Khomeini, that objected with great eloquence in the UN Security Council to the second Gulf War, this absence of thought and speech, whether in the *banlieu* or the great organs of state, or in the intellectual journalism that these days passes as philosophy, is a mystery.

ON THE STREETS

Yet French radicalism is not dead. Students and workers still protest against the state's proposed liberalization of labor laws. The railways go on strike. Cities taste tear gas now as ever before. Before his decision not to contest the 2017 Presidential elections, Hollande was challenged within his Socialist Party by Martine Aubry, a heavyweight of the left.

But her agenda seems a curious throwback to the left agenda of decades ago, with labor laws at its heart. The "worker" is still the heartbeat of the left, not the migrant, not

the refugee. There will likely not be a candidate from the left in the 2017 elections but, for left and right, when it comes to terrorism, there is only rhetoric and intensified exercises in intelligence-gathering— all to do with the “how” of atrocity, and still not the “why.”

The November 2015 attacks saw St. Denis as the epicenter. It had been easy to stage the assault from there. The “how” to fight terrorism of even the French intelligence services had not penetrated the social networks and knowledge banks of the *banlieu* both on and away from the main streets, and their counterparts in Molenbeek, Belgium, from where the attackers, with their links to the Paris attacks, had set out to bomb the Brussels airport and the metro in March 2016.

On the streets of Paris, because they could not make it to the streets of London, entire families can be seen every night. The success of a British policy against refugees in large numbers has been to see those numbers making do elsewhere. Many are clearly Syrian. They have not yet been able to join in the practice of the local homeless who buy tents and pitch them on the sidewalks.

Beside the Montparnasse Cemetery there is a little encampment of tents, one with an armchair outside, a birdcage with a wooden hoopoe, a sun umbrella. The householder’s little precinct is patrolled by his dog, his leash tied to a tree allowing a circumference of total control. Passers-by walk around the circumference. It is as settled as street life can be.

The Syrian refugees one encounters are without tents and wooden birds in cages. They have not yet reached the appreciation of existential absurdity shown by their local counterparts. They are unfailingly polite. Both husband and wife smile their thanks for a donation. One wonders what the children will remember of their young years on the streets. They all seem aged about five, although one mother was breastfeeding a baby on the bridge beside Notre Dame.

But the poignant aspect about what is a spectacle of deprivation and uprooting is the nightly telling of bedtime stories to the children—and the children, knowing there is no choice but to make so, smiling. But they will remember, and the memory may be carried into the *banlieu* as social ladders are climbed from streets to petty criminality and gangs, and radicalization.

The sight of destitute families is no doubt repeated in all the great cities of Europe. It looks a disaster in the city of light. And culture, and learning and elegance. It answers the city of philosophy with its own questions about the meaning of life. And compassion. And the moral destitution of jadedness.

A PARIS OF OUR TIMES

The great philosophers are dead. Many are buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery. Many of their successors are narrow-minded *flâneurs* of the intellect. The successors too are dying—André Glucksmann on November 10, 2015, just three days before the atrocity at the Bataclan. In his late life, amidst the bewildering curves that French intellectual life now takes between left and right, he repudiated the notion that Islamic terrorism was the result of a “clash of civilizations.” But human rights and a sense of compassion have always been in his thought. A sense of nostalgia for solidarity too.

In the late 1970s, Glucksmann helped convene a conference of indignation against the lack of international governmental help for the boat people of his day—fleeing from Vietnam. To the conference came the elderly and frail Jean-Paul Sartre, and the historian Raymond Aron. They had quarreled decades ago. No one remembered why. There is a wonderful photograph of the young Glucksmann bringing the two old sages together. And they reconciled. It was a nice sideshow that set off the real issue of the Vietnamese refugees. How they should be accepted and, in France, help with the merger of civilizations.

Today, Sartre and Aron are buried in the same cemetery—Glucksmann elsewhere, in the Père Lachaise Cemetery, where Jim Morrison also lies. In France, for the great and the good and the accepted foreigners, those with art and intellect like Morrison and Sontag, it has to be one of those two cemeteries.

In a sense, the cemetery became a symbol of my stay in Paris. All the great thought has gone. All the efforts to say that refugees are one with us has disappeared into an unquestioned puff of Islamophobia. Critical thinking about life and the destiny of history lies under marble slabs. People bring flowers. There seems always a long-stemmed rose on the grave of Sartre and de Beauvoir.

Others are less fortunate. They get the ceramic flowers in artificial planter boxes that can be bought from the six funeral accessory shops that surround the cemetery.

Looking toward where she lies, the apartment block of de Beauvoir is being renovated and some parts gutted. One looks into the hollow space, the cave, and hopes a new elegance will grow in Paris.

Once I passed by, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse, down the road from La Coupole and a block away from the Montparnasse Cemetery, an ambulance crew attending someone who seemed to have had a heart attack or a stroke. The French are sanguine. No crowds formed. The victim looked like one of the Syrian refugees. It won't be Montparnasse or Père Lachaise Cemetery. No philosopher will come to his brief funeral. But some few meters of elegant French ground will finally accept him.

**Stephen Chan is a professor of international relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.*

False Perceptions of Muslims in the Age of Trump

Samantha North

February 1, 2017

The power of the online world must not be underestimated, particularly when examining how Muslims are viewed.

Muslims living and working in the United States are being forced to reconsider their futures in light of Donald Trump's [Muslim ban](#).

Citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries—Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Somalia—will be denied entry for 90 days while the new Trump administration “tightens” already draconian visa laws. The move has been [widely lambasted](#), with critics comparing it to the atmosphere of 1930s Germany that led to the Holocaust. In a twist of irony, Trump announced the refugee ban on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

There are many implications arising from this ban, all of them worrying. But rather than causing us too much speculation on an uncertain future, the US Muslim ban offers a pressing opportunity to explore the social and political attitudes that have created a

zeitgeist where this ruling could emerge. What kind of narratives has the public absorbed to lead large swathes of it in a direction where a Holocaust-esque move could become socially acceptable? Fear is somewhere at the heart of the matter. But how did it get there, take root and flourish?

Researchers have traditionally used focus groups, polls and interviews to analyze social attitudes. Pew polls and YouGov surveys give a useful indication of generalized attitudes to certain topics. But people are less likely to offer their true opinions in a formal research situation. Instead, they may sanitize or edit their responses to appear more acceptable to the researcher. One of the more objective ways to capture true social attitudes is by analyzing what people say and do when they think no-one is watching.

SHAPING THE ONLINE NARRATIVE

Rhys Crilley and Raquel da Silva take this exact approach in their recently published study, "[Talk About Terror in Our Back Gardens](#)," which examines attitudes among the British public displayed online in relation to British foreign fighters joining the Islamic State (IS). They argue that the views of ordinary members of the public, as well as media and elites, play a key role in shaping and generating the discursive environment, through which people filter their opinions on foreign fighters and terrorism, and form views on Muslims and Islam as a whole.

Crilley and da Silva analyze a range of online comments from social media, forums and newspaper comment sections. What they discover is problematic and disturbing, but unsurprising in light of recent developments. This study is important because it indicates how the stage has been set for the ramping up of racism, intolerance and division that has now become part of official government narrative, embodied in the figure of Trump and his administration, delivered to the masses through harsh policies that would have once been inconceivable. Although this particular research focuses on a British sample, US results of a similar study would likely reflect a related range of troubling views. The process seems to unfold something like this:

- 1) Filtering down of certain narratives from elites/media to the masses;
- 2) People reproduce and reinforce (and sometimes challenge) those narratives through means of online discussion ("echo chambers");

3) Narratives then become part of the social “milieu”; as a result society becomes fearful, divided and more likely to back repressive policies such as Trump’s Muslim ban. This sense of victimization could also feed into the variety of factors that push certain vulnerable individuals into violent extremism.

RELIGION SEEN AS KEY DRIVING FORCE

In analyzing the online comments, Crilley and da Silva focus on: a) the motivations people attribute to foreign fighters; and b) their views on suitable government responses. The most striking feature of a) is that the most commonly-held view (51% of the sample chose it), which is foreign fighters “are pursuing their own religious beliefs,” is one that has been consistently disproved by counterterrorism experts and behavioral psychologists alike. In contrast, just 2% of respondents chose the option that foreign fighters “seek adventure or excitement,” although that is probably a more common driver than religion.

So far, the conclusion is clear: British public opinion still believes religion is a key driving factor for foreign fighters, despite expert research showing the contrary. This fixation on blaming religion (specifically Islam) carries disturbing implications about the nature of British social attitudes toward the country’s Muslim community, and toward Islam in general.

CRUEL AND EXCEPTIONAL

Things get worse in the second part of the research, which focuses on the public’s views of suitable ways to deal with foreign fighters returning to the United Kingdom. The majority of commenters (38%) want to “forbid them [foreign fighters] from returning,” while 32% of comments suggest foreign fighters should be “criminally punished.” Only 5% of comments suggest a view to “allow them to return to the UK.”

Let’s unpack the possible sentiments behind the first two responses. Forbidding foreign fighters (who are British citizens) from returning to the UK would mean rendering them stateless. For starters, this is illegal under international law. But more than that, the fact that such a large proportion of the British online public suggests stripping away the citizenship of foreign fighters points to an innate belief that British Muslims are less than “British.”

This raises questions such as: Would forbidding return still be as often suggested if the people in question were non-Muslims, specifically white Britons? Does being Muslim make them “less British” in people’s minds? The answers to these questions would be “no” and “yes” respectively.

The second most popular response was that foreign fighters should be “criminally punished.” Types of punishment discussed usually fell into the “hard” category, such as deportation (without trial), life imprisonment and even death. The latter suggestion is particularly disturbing as some see it as the “only thing that will stop British Muslims fighting in Syria” and the “only way” to silence their “vile inhuman ideologies.” This, mentioned in conjunction with the singling out of British Muslims, suggests a high level of contempt for their human rights.

In fact, many of the comments recommend cruel and exceptional punishments, implying a “state of exception” that puts British Muslims outside of the law. It dehumanizes them, reducing them to a status better suited to “savagely and wild animals.” Attitudes of this kind emerge in the mainstream media and filter downward into the general population largely by means of online commenting.

FEAR, PROPAGANDA AND THE ONLINE WORLD

Terrorism inspires such primordial fear that it has become an effective tool for manipulating public opinion. These views drive the zeitgeist and, leveraged in certain ways, can propel societies into situations [such as the Holocaust](#). We have not learned from history, despite many illusions of progress. Those illusions have now been shattered by the election of Trump and what has followed.

The power of the online world must not be underestimated. Harnessed effectively, it is probably the best propaganda tool the world has ever seen. As we have now seen, it can [shape the outcomes of elections](#) and shift global opinion in startling directions. Critical thinking is the solution. But, as the work of Crilley and da Silva shows, much of society remains quick to jump on the bandwagon, targeting certain groups without pausing to analyze the facts.

**Samantha North is a journalist, content strategist and independent researcher.*

Trump's Flawed Logic Regarding US-Mexico Relations

Adrian Calcaneo

February 2, 2017

The Trump administration's proposed Mexico policies regarding immigration and trade will make America's fears a reality.

Minutes after descending from the golden escalator at Trump Tower, Donald Trump fired the first salvo at what would eventually become one of his favorite electoral targets during his presidential campaign: Mexico. Trump attacked the southern neighbor from two different fronts: immigration and trade. In his [first speech](#) as a presidential candidate he stated clearly his adversarial vision of Mexico:

“When do we beat Mexico at the border? They’re laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they’re killing us economically. The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems... When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best... They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”

On the surface, these two issues—immigration and trade—could seem unrelated. In reality, these are two policy areas that are heavily intertwined and, along with national security, are the main pillars of one of the United States’ most important relations with a foreign nation.

IMMIGRATION

The focus on immigration, particularly undocumented, soon gave birth to one of Trump’s greatest campaign devices: the building of a wall between the US and Mexico. Taking the issue further, not only was he advocating that the wall be built, but also proposed that [Mexico pays for it](#). “Build That Wall” became a campaign rallying cry in subsequent months and one of the key promises of the Republican candidate.

The purpose of the wall came along with the [promise](#) to “secure the border” and create a “deportation force” to remove the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants living in the US. Since about half of the undocumented US population is thought to come from Mexico, this narrative quickly added toxicity to the rhetoric that the Trump campaign had toward Mexico.

The electoral benefits of such a stance were evident, as hard talk on immigration remains one of the best ways to mobilize the conservative base. Moreover, adding trade and NAFTA to the rhetoric allowed Trump to break a traditional democratic stronghold and gain support of middle-class workers whose jobs prospects might have suffered due to globalization.

This perception of a southern border being overrun by undocumented people, however, is very different from what the numbers say. The Pew Research center recently reported that [more Mexicans are leaving the country](#) than coming in, and the US Border patrol statistics show that apprehensions at the border, a metric used to calculate undocumented crossings, are currently at a [40-year low](#). In other words, the facts regarding immigration from Mexico do not match Trump’s campaign rhetoric.

Among the most important reasons for this shift is the fact that Mexican population growth has decreased considerably. In 1970, Mexican fertility rate was almost seven births per woman, one of the world’s highest. A couple decades later, about the time where the population born in the 1970s reached adulthood, the US experienced a peak in undocumented immigration from Mexico. The Mexican fertility rate since 2000 has been just above two births per woman and declining. In short, there are simply not enough young Mexican people for the migration levels to return to the levels of the 1990s.

Immigration is usually composed of both “push” and “pull” factors. The example of high fertility rates combined with the macroeconomic mismanagement Mexico experienced in the 1980s and 1990s were obvious “push” factors that led to more Mexican migration to the US. Since the late 1990s, macroeconomic management in Mexico has been prudent and has not experienced any self-inflicted recessions.

Economic growth, while not at the country’s full economic potential, has been consistent and allowed the economy to create enough jobs and stability to produce a “pull” effect that allowed Mexicans to have other options rather than immigrating to the

US. The impact of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the opening of the Mexican economy to the world were key components of this new Mexican reality.

BILATERAL TRADE

Regarding trade, Trump's statement that Mexico was "killing us economically" was the preamble of another great campaign device: the desire to renegotiate or repeal NAFTA. Early in the campaign, NAFTA became one of Trump's favorite targets, often referring to it as the "worst trade deal ever."

Along with China, Mexico—through NAFTA—was blamed for the loss of thousands, if not millions, of US jobs, particularly in manufacturing. Through this anti-free trade rhetoric, Trump was able to tap into the anger of certain strata of the population, particularly those in the manufacturing sector, who saw their factories close and move abroad over the last few decades. This allowed him to break the so called Democratic "blue wall" and capture the support of people in the rust belt and key states like Ohio and Wisconsin that paved the way for his presidency. Mexico, in the eyes of some [Trump supporters](#), is not only a source of undocumented immigration, but also a country that is taking jobs away from the US.

According to the [US Census Bureau](#), in the first 11 months of 2016 trade between Mexico and the US reached \$482 billion dollars, making Mexico the third largest US trading partner and second largest destination for US exports in the world. As a matter of perspective, during the stated period, Mexico bought more US products than China, Japan and the United Kingdom—the third, fourth and fifth export destinations for the US, *combined*.

One of Trump's [main arguments](#) to support his animosity toward Mexico and China is the current trade deficit the US holds with these countries. The US Census Bureau [data](#) shows that while the [trade deficit with China](#) is by far the greatest (\$319 billion), the deficit with Mexico is much smaller (\$58.8 billion) and similar to other US trade deficits with Germany (\$59.6 billion) and Japan (\$62.4 billion). It goes without saying that none of these three countries are part of NAFTA.

Deficits cannot be solely attributed to free trade agreements. One explanation for President Trump's focus on China and Mexico could be outsourcing. Companies are

not known to move US jobs to Germany, Canada and Japan, but there is no denying that this has occurred to some extent with China and Mexico.

However, placing outsourcing to China and Mexico in the same category is a gross misunderstanding of current international trade trends and the benefits of regional integrated supply chains. When a company moves jobs to China, it takes the vast majority of the production chain with it. This makes sense from a geographical standpoint, since production requires proximity to the supply chain.

The case of Mexico is very different. As a general rule, companies moved only part of their production to Mexico. In most cases, it was the low-skilled, labor-intensive portions of the production process. This allowed companies to keep higher-skilled jobs in the US by leveraging the cheaper labor in Mexico to produce parts and other necessary components of production. In other words, by moving some low-skill jobs to Mexico, manufacturers are allowed to keep part of their production in the US as opposed to sending the whole production chain to China.

The results are quite clear. According to the [Wilson Center](#), a Chinese export has about 3-4% of US made contents/inputs, while a Mexican export product has, on average, 40% of US made content/inputs. Out of the \$270 billion Mexican exports to the US, \$108 billion—around 40%—eventually end up back in US companies due to the benefits of supply chain integration.

As an example, the number one US import and export with Mexico is the automobile. Due to supply chain integration, cars cross the border multiple times during production. One can argue that there is no such thing as a US, Mexican or Canadian-made automobile but rather a North American one. In the words of President John F. Kennedy: “A rising tide lifts all boats.”

President Trump continuously boasts his business acumen and credentials. Is it good business to ostracize your second largest customer? Furthermore, supply chain integration with Mexico makes the US and its exports more competitive worldwide. The US Chamber of Commerce states that trade with Mexico supports up to [six million US jobs](#). A high percentage of these jobs will be put in jeopardy if relations are meddled with. Is it wise to trade those jobs for the estimated 800,000 low-skilled and low-paid jobs that the US lost to Mexico?

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

As stated, thinking of immigration and trade policy as two different issues is a mistake. Along with national security, these are deeply intertwined and one must be careful to act without considering the implications across all three realms.

Unfortunately, so far this is what Trump's policy toward Mexico appears to be doing. The historical low levels of apprehension at the border, not seen since 1973, hardly justify building a \$25-billion wall on the border. Indicating that NAFTA is the main culprit of the loss of manufacturing jobs in the US without mentioning advances and growth in robotics used in manufacturing only tells a small part of the story.

Mexico has made tremendous strides during the last decade toward creating economic incentives to keep its citizens within its borders. A large part of these economic incentives is derived from the burgeoning trade with the US. In 1993, the year before NAFTA was implemented, US-Mexico trade was [\\$81 billion dollars](#), according to the US Census Bureau. In comparison, through November 2016, yearly total trade between the countries reached more than \$481 billion dollars. Mexico made the transition from a natural resource-based economy into one based increasingly on complex manufacturing.

Prosperity in Mexico has several benefits for the US: less undocumented migration, increased security and higher demand for US products. It is hard to find a better example of a win-win-win.

The frontal attack of the Trump administration on this equilibrium, particularly NAFTA—and hence the stability of Mexico—could have dire consequences for both countries. A withdrawal from NAFTA could prove disastrous in the short term for Mexico as 80% of its exports are destined for the US. Mexico could easily end up in a steep recession that could cost millions of Mexicans their jobs and sources of income. It is easy to imagine the consequences of what would happen if up to a million maquiladora workers right across the US-Mexico border suddenly find themselves unemployed. If history serves as guide, [Mexico will see a spike in organized crime activity and migration to the US.](#)

While the argument has been that current undocumented immigration numbers do not justify President Trump's focus and escalation on the border, his nationalistic vision on

trade could end up destabilizing Mexico to the point where people begin migrating north in numbers large enough to make the need for a wall a reality. His proposed policies are, therefore, counterproductive for both the US and Mexico as they could deteriorate this delicate balance to the point that his pessimistic and largely unsupported by facts vision becomes a reality.

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Helping Girls Escape the Sex Industry

Rohin K. Patel

February 17, 2017

Civil society steps in to pick up where governments fail to support women and children exploited in the sex industry.

Every day, young girls are forced into commercial sexual enterprises all over the world, leaving them physically and emotionally anguished. In the red light district of Kolkata, there are approximately [10,000 sex workers, 40% of these children](#). Just like many metropolitan areas across India, Kolkata is crowded and noisy, with millions wandering the streets. In the backdrop of the constant clamor of the city, among these ordinary people, are the screams of young girls, some of whom are thousands of miles from their homes, alienated, alone and afraid.

A GROWING BUSINESS

Sex trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises, with approximately [20.9 million adults and children](#) sold into sexual servitude globally. Moreover, children make up a significant portion of those exploited—approximately 2 million—predominantly young girls, sold into the commercial sex trade. This practice transcends international borders and stretches all the way from the United States to South and East Asia.

There have been significant efforts to combat sex trafficking, but while the motives are well intentioned, there needs to be more collaboration. A novel task force, bringing together many aspects of the healing process, is necessary to help bring these

children to safety, ensuring they continue to receive medical and psychological help they need.

Sex trafficking violates human rights on all levels. [The Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), an international human rights treaty, labels sex trafficking as a human rights violation and form of sexual discrimination. To many, it is often unimaginable that millions of actors, globally, fuel this criminal industry. Even more disheartening is the fact that these actors oppress, through sexual assault and abuse, millions of young girls worldwide for their own vile fulfillment.

The commercial sex trade relies on a lack of education on the part of children and their families. Throughout Asia, many poor families are deceived into sending their daughters away with strangers promising employment, believing they will return with money and job prospects.

In other instances, local village communities will knowingly sell orphaned girls directly into the sex trade, and tell them they are sending girls to work for a certain amount of years in the city, after which time they are permitted to return home. Even more saddening is the fact that most of these girls do not even know, let alone comprehend, the nature of the work they will be doing until it is too late.

What truly makes the global commercial sex trade difficult to thwart is its ability to transcend international borders, specifically in Asia and the Middle East. Because of a growing presence of South Asian migrant workers in countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), many women find themselves originally working in situations of forced labor, including debt bondage. High debts leave many vulnerable to [exploitation by foreigners](#). This is further exasperated by the policies of Gulf nations that allow for the withholding of migrant laborers' passports, restrictions on movement and religious justification for some forms of physical or sexual abuse.

COMBATING THE SEX TRADE

Attempts to combat commercial sex trade are multifaceted and rely on intergovernmental collaboration, as well as actions by local law enforcement. Current efforts against sex trafficking work to eliminate gender discrimination that fuels the industry. Women, particularly in the Middle East and Asia, lack access to resources

such as housing and land. In addition, they are not included in familial inheritance, forcing them to either rely on a husband or fend for themselves. In a system that does not prioritize the education of women, they are often left vulnerable with little to no job prospects.

A lack of sanitation systems in many rural areas of the world also accounts for instances of rape and sexual violence. It risks the safety of women who must go outside, often times alone in the dark. Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) as well as local health clinics are currently working to institute adequate sanitation systems in Indian villages, with an obvious intention of curbing sexual violence. In addition, the Indian government aims to make India open-defecation free (ODF) in the coming years. Since 2014, [Narendra Modi's administration](#) has constructed 33.4 million toilets, with the aim of increasing this to 119 million by 2019. This has left over 158,000 Indian villages ODF, and given 60% of households access to toilets.

India and countries such as Norway, Sweden and Iceland have also experimented with decriminalizing sex work. Instead, authorities have begun placing the crime burden on those who purchase sex, specifically sex with minors. This prevents transferring legal blame to the women who are already being exploited.

THE HOPE HOUSE

Even more than government policy, the [efforts of ordinary citizens](#) in cities across the world are essential to combat the psychological and physical abuse inflicted on these young girls. There is a growing movement dedicated to alleviating the aftermath of sexual abuse and discrimination, which relies on a collaboration between law enforcement, medical professionals, and educators.

In downtown Kolkata, amidst the hustle and bustle of the city, there is a small compound known as the [Hope House](#). The purpose of it is to serve as a safe and nurturing environment where girls who are born in the red light district can grow up to achieve bright futures. The Hope House partners with local law enforcement agencies to investigate and raid brothels throughout the city, taking in the afflicted children for treatment, as well as well as a vocational and self-defense education.

Situating law enforcement, education, and health care under the same roof provides these young girls with comprehensive support, allowing them to grow up in a safe and productive environment.

These efforts have reconciled hope with tragedy in response to the abhorrent practice of sex trafficking. Nevertheless, more work still needs to be done. Not just to put an end to the sex trade, but to provide a new beginning for these brave young girls—the beating heart of India and the rest of the world.

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If You Don't Lie, You Don't Exist in Politics

Peter Isackson

February 20, 2017

Donald Trump is a response to what many perceive as the tyranny of normal.

I'm not a fan of Adam Gopnick. I mildly appreciated his [Paris to the Moon](#), but gave up late in the book when he started gushing with enthusiasm about Paris's fashion industry, a subject that tends to bore me. If this [article in The New Yorker](#) is anything to go by, it's time to acknowledge that as a political thinker Gopnick is definitely a lightweight. At the same time, he inadvertently exposes one of the deepest issues in US political and intellectual culture today, the one everyone is talking about: the status of truth in public discourse.

Here's one quote that particularly struck me from this article: "This is not 'I am not a crook' [Richard Nixon]; it is not a claim that there are weapons of mass destruction [George W. Bush]; it is not 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman' [Bill Clinton]. These are all ways of parsing reality, or normal fibs told by normal people."

Let's begin by acknowledging this as the worship of normalcy or a fanatical faith in the status quo. Nixon—aided and abetted by Henry Kissinger—committed the equivalent

of genocide in several places around the globe, but in Gopnick's eyes he was "a normal person" telling what he appears to think is an innocent lie. In a certain sense Gopnick may be right: Nixon didn't say "I'm not a murderer"—he simply denied being a crook.

Bush's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were for Gopnick an equally "normal" example of conversational exaggeration. Never mind that his lie resulted in millions of deaths and displacements and resulted in the ongoing destabilization of an entire region more than a decade later, the consequences of which are not only still being felt, but have given Donald Trump one of his best and most effective delusional themes: banning an entire religion from entry into the US.

THE NORMAL LIE

Gopnick seems to believe that Nixon was normal because his lies were linked to crimes that didn't upset the status quo. But also because it was the kind of lie one expects from someone accused of a serious offense, just like Clinton's lie. And, of course, that wasn't the only time Nixon or Clinton lied. Those are just the lies everyone remembers.

Gopnick wants us to accept those lies as normal. But the WMD lie of Bush was far worse in its historical implications than anything Trump has done, in particular because the so-called respectable, truthful *New York Times*, *Washington Post* et al. not only bought the lie but promoted it with zeal, whereas none of the mainstream press—not even Fox News—is repeating Trump's lies, which in that sense makes them much more innocent. The only think they seriously violate is "normative thinking," which Gopnick appears particularly attached to.

In the final analysis, it would be reasonable to suppose that Trump himself doesn't expect anyone to believe his lies. It's just a way of intimidating people, making them kneel to the "boss man's" authority, grabbing the public and the press by their minds in the same way he believes himself entitled to grab ladies by their private parts. It's the "professional pathology" of a man who thinks everything is about negotiating from a position of force. The strategy is simple: establish your position of force and then begin negotiating. In the course of negotiation, positions will change and what you claimed earlier will soon be forgotten.

ANOTHER UNIVERSE

Trump may have been astute enough to perceive that over recent decades American democracy has increasingly trended toward holding the people in contempt. The establishment has its reasons, which are too complex for the public to even try to understand. This was part of Hillary's image and the main reason why, in spite of her normalcy, she was never perceived as a leader and couldn't inspire the slightest enthusiasm in her candidacy, even among those who were loyal to her.

Trump has taken contempt to a higher level and applies it to everyone: politicians, the press, foreign leaders, the intelligence community and indeed anyone who doubts his word. He may well see himself as following in a great tradition. He is perfecting the techniques that work for those in power. He may even see it as a necessary test of his power. Gopnick cites those who say Trump isn't Benito. But you could make the case that there's a fair measure of Caligula in him.

So Gopnick is right about one thing. Trump lives in another universe. He isn't normal. Which means his one merit is to force us to think about whether "normal" is as reassuring as Gopnick seems to think it is. The problem of the democratic/liberal elite to which Gopnick belongs is that they simply cannot see that for most people—including practically the entire millennial generation—"normal" is no longer what they are hankering after.

Trump is not the answer, but he is a response to what many perceive as the tyranny of normal. In many ways he's a comic response. An Ubu Roi response. An *Alice in Wonderland* response. A bipolar response. He's the manic side of the bipolar logic as opposed to the depressive (i.e. normal) side, which Hillary Clinton represented.

BIPOLAR NATION

In terms of its political institutions, the US has become a bipolar nation. A disturbed bipolar nation. Both of the camps, Republican and Democrats—the supposed champions of the ideals of "normal" Americans—failed miserably in the 2016 election. The Hillary establishment failed to secure a victory in the Electoral College. And the Trump insurgency failed to gain a majority of the popular vote. Many registered voters abstained. Many who voted were motivated mainly by fear of the other candidate.

With a bit of statistical analysis it should thus be clear that most people don't actually fall into one of the two official bipolar categories, but Gopnick clearly believes they should. The parties no longer represent the voting population in any significant way. So, to correct myself, it clearly isn't accurate to affirm, as I've just done, that the nation has become bipolar. On the other hand, the voices one hears in the media have become so.

The nation has become surreal, or rather hyperreal (i.e. when fiction effectively displaces the real and implants itself in the popular imaginary.) Whether it's WMDs or 3 million illegal voters, imaginary reality routinely take the place of any and perhaps every aspect of tangible reality. One of the features people of other nations find difficult to grasp in US culture is the notion—felt rather than theorized by most Americans—that what's important is not what is but what you believe. It's the sentiment that founds the idea of self-reliance. Believe in yourself. Assert what you believe in. Don't back down. Show them you mean it. And the corollary of that is “don't waste time thinking about it.” Action is all that matters.

In such a culture Gopnick's distinction between Trump's “sinister” lies and what Gopnick sees as “normal” lies—a distinction worthy of some decadent form of scholastic philosophy—loses all its meaning. Not just because lying about WMDs should also be considered sinister—in what moral universe wouldn't that be the case?—but because lying has become the new normal. In some sense, and especially in politics and business, if you don't lie, you don't exist. If your lies pass, it's a proof that you have attained power and privilege, the concomitants of wealth and fame, which every American secretly aspires to.

Bookmakers now consider it practically an even bet that Trump will be impeached. In some sense, it's American culture as a whole that's up for impeachment, which may be the reason impeachment will ultimately fail. Let's hope that intellectuals such as Gopnick, who apparently have not let the surprising results of the 2016 affect their “normalized” worldview, will finally learn from the ongoing saga of President Trump the essential truths about their own culture.

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Afghanistan: The Stolen Tale of Khorasan

Laura Cesaretti
February 22, 2017

Afghanistan's Khorasan region is often associated with war and social conservatism, yet it has a rich history of religious tolerance and a passion for art.

Whether known to be the graveyard of empires or the land of lions, Afghanistan has always been perceived as the motherland of fearless, rural fighters. Yet the view of a mountainous, ruthless country does not give justice to the beauty of this historic land, regulated for centuries by codes and institutions that incorporated progressive thinking. Over 30 years of war and an unstoppable campaign against local tribal customs have contributed to enforce this conventional wisdom, portraying Afghans as conservative extremists who oppose any form of modernization.

Not surprisingly, this stereotype is also used by the Islamic State (IS). The group first set foot on Afghan soil in 2014, and it announced the establishment of the so-called Province of Khorasan the following year. "The people of Khurasan in general love Islam and warfare," Shaykh Hafidh Said Khan, the appointed *wali* of Khorasan, told the IS *Dabiq* magazine, "and because of this, the region has a dormant force for supporting *tawhid* and jihad."

The use of the term Khorasan is not casual. Historically, it refers to a broader area that includes northern Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The actual boundaries, however, have been the subject of tales and narratives that extend them to include the southern-central provinces of Afghanistan.

A controversial *hadith* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad), in particular, has later engraved the region with a deep symbolic meaning across many Islamist groups. It is said that an army will rise up from this region bearing a black banner, and it will lead Muslims to the final victory against the enemies of Islam. This has encouraged speculation, particularly referring to Afghanistan, spreading the belief that the Taliban or other groups like IS could be the prophesied army.

RELIGIOUS CROSSWAYS

What many, including the Islamic State today, ignore is how the Afghan Islamic tradition is profoundly unrelated to this apocalyptic view. Throughout history, Afghan nationalist movements have been inspired by an Islam that did not fear to include elements of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, for centuries making Afghanistan one of the most spiritual and tolerant religious crossways. Even nowadays, in the old city of Kabul you can find an old temple where people worship Baba Ratan, a Sufi saint for Muslims and a guru for Hindus and Sikhs, famous for having professed miracles across India and Afghanistan, including Jalalabad, Kabul, Peshawar and Khorasan.

The impact of his teachings and poems is still alive in today's Afghanistan, along with the spiritual footprint of other Sufi thinkers. Popular poetry, strictly related to religion and society, uses vocabulary of human rights and national pride, and Sufi scholars are believed to be the real architects of Afghan society.

This ascetic approach toward life is not relegated to the intellectual Afghan class. Afghan politicians recite lines of poetry in their speeches, and farmers use their birds as metaphors for life, recalling, perhaps, the lines that Iman Ghazali, the great 11th-century Sufi, wrote during his last state of illness: "A bird I am: This body was my cage/But I have flown leaving it as a token." Even conservative clerics often use poems in Friday prayers, and the most violent warlords prefer to have pictures of themselves taken with flowers rather than an AK47.

"Many Muslims around the world do not agree with the way of Sufism, and this is saying a lot about Afghan people. Things have changed in the past years, but most of our people are still very moderate, compassionate and caring about each other. We are one of the few cultures which have to allow Sufism to grow," explains Mahmud Kaber Khalili, grandson of the great poet Khalilullah Khalili and son of the political leader Masood Khalili. In his book, *Afghanistan Decoded*, Mahmud Khalili has dedicated an entire chapter to his family's historical *hujra*—a meditation room built in 1962 decorated only by poems.

Even during wartime, the *hujra* has been preserved with the highest respect by mujahedeen and Taliban alike. Poetry, in fact, has always been considered to have a powerful social role in Afghanistan, and people from different economic and social

background pay the same level of respect to poets. Poetry festivals are held regularly in many provinces of the country, even the ones controlled by the Taliban, who have a long-standing poetic tradition.

[Poetry of the Taliban](#) brings together over 200 poems about grief and battle, as well as love and mysticism. Contrary to music, banned under the Taliban as religious propaganda, poetry had little to do with political ideology, and more with local traditions that characterized the Afghan identity.

CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

The Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture has repeatedly lamented this misinterpretation of Afghan culture, and how the international community has paid so little attention to this fundamental peculiarity of the Afghan life. “We are the victim of terrorism,” says the spokesperson of the ministry, Haroon Hakimi. “It is unfortunate that birthplace of so many scholars who were spreading peace and love to the world has been affected by war, and known mainly for that.”

Sufism, in fact, has been used as a counterterrorism strategy by the West, but not as a source of interpretation and understanding of a great civilization. Khorasan’s Sufi intellectuals and poets such as Rumi are popular in the West, but not well-known for their religious beliefs and spiritual interpretations.

Indeed, the Khorasan region is also home of rigid interpretations of Islam, such as the Deobandi school, to which groups such as the Taliban belong. This interpretation is not much different from the Wahhabi teachings that inspired the Islamic State, and yet the space for political and social debate has always characterized this part of the region. Baqi Hilaman Ghaznawi, a Sufi scholar and writer of many books in Dari and Pashto, explains: “Taliban are not al-Qaeda or *Daesh* [Islamic State]. In the 1990s, when they arrived, they respected our spiritual traditions.”

It is this spiritual narrative that characterizes the Khorasan region more than war and conservatism. The aesthetic passion for poetry and emotion of Afghans is something that can be felt in every aspect of their every day life. Yet neither the West nor the Islamic State are ready to recognize it.

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Ukraine's Explosive Language Question

Brian Milakovsky

February 23, 2017

It is no longer a sustainable social contract in Ukraine that the east can be a Russian-speaking enclave and de facto ignore the state language.

The so-called “language question” has been a recurring motif of political conflict in Ukraine for the past 25 years. Too often, debates between proponents of obligatory *Ukrainizatsiya* (Ukrainianization) and of the two-language (Ukrainian and Russian) status quo have veered into culture war.

The question has proven particularly dangerous during the *actual* war in eastern Ukraine that began in spring, 2014. In the first days after the victory of the Euromaidan revolution, the Ukrainian parliament repealed the Regional Languages Law of 2012, which the disgraced ex-president, Viktor Yanukovich, had pushed through to placate his Russian-speaking political base in the country's southeast.

The repealing of the law's certainly would not “make Russian illegal”—it would only have limited its use in some public functions—but this is how it was interpreted in much of the restive Donbas Region, which was deeply upset by the ascension of pro-Western revolutions in Kiev. The acting president vetoed the repeal, understanding the disastrous effect the repeal was having on public opinion in the east. But the damage was done.

Indeed, language rights became one of the main fronts of the Moscow-backed Russian Spring project that engulfed Donetsk and Luhansk. Living at the time in distant Vladivostok, I recall radio appeals to Russians to join the Donbas “militias” to defend their common native tongue. In the early days of the war, Moscow-based journalist [Marina Akhmedova asked Donbas rebels what they were fighting against](#). They railed against the supposed humiliation of having Ukrainian imposed on them: “We couldn't read the labels on our medicine bottles!”

But while deep ideological fissures opened up in Ukraine, Kiev set the dangerous language question aside. No serious restrictions were imposed, and those regions of the Donbas under government control continued their familiar Russian-speaking

existence. However, this hands-off approach ended several weeks ago, when President Petro Poroshenko's party introduced a draft law that would mandate near-total [conversion to the Ukrainian language in schools and universities](#), local government, print and online media, and even in stores and restaurants.

To judge the wisdom of such a move is necessary to answer several questions: Is *Ukrainizatsiya* a just policy? And is it necessary at this time of profound national crisis for Ukraine?

LANGUAGE OF THE AGGRESSOR

The history of Luhansk Oblast (province) in the Donbas, where I presently live, offers a compelling prism of which to answer this question. Most of the initial settlers who braved nomadic and Turkish raids in this dangerous steppe frontier were Ukrainian peasants. But they were joined by fugitive serfs from overcrowded central Russia, Don Cossacks and Balkan refugees from the Ottoman Empire.

The proportion of ethnic Russians increased greatly with the opening of vast coal reserves and industrialization in the province's south. But when the Bolsheviks seized the region in 1917, it was an ethnic and linguistic mosaic in which Ukrainian played a central role.

The Bolshevik's language policy lurched wildly from enforced promotion of Ukrainian in the 1920s (to the deep resentment of some Russian-speaking proletarians) to [mass repression of Ukrainian national activists](#), which came on the heels of mass death of Ukrainian peasant farmers in the [artificial famine](#) of 1933. This was followed by moderate promotion under Khrushchev and finally to Russification as an instrument of pan-Soviet unity. In 1972, the [Ukrainian dissident writer Oleksa Tikhiy](#) wrote bitterly of the disappearance of his national language and culture in the Donbas, as Russian was imposed as the exclusive language of educational and professional advancement. Calling out the imperial nature of this policy was enough to get Tikhiy sent to a Russian prison camp, where he perished.

Today, Russian thoroughly dominates in Luhansk province, and not only in the separatist-controlled industrial cities. Soviet language policy obscured Ukrainian linguistic and cultural character even in the rural north, where its roots run deepest.

Thus, reviving the Ukrainian language in Luhansk Oblast, as in much of the country's east and south, is a fitting and justified answer to this earlier, deliberate marginalization.

But there must be limits. Repressive Soviet policies helped the Russian language expand its range in eastern Ukraine but did not establish it there. It can be legitimately considered one of the indigenous languages of the Donbas, spoken by a significant proportion of the region's pioneers and their descendants.

Having asserted that *Ukrainizatsiya* would be a just policy if it recognized the legitimate place of Russian in the cultural mosaic, we need to understand whether Ukraine needs it right now.

For proponents of the new law, pro-Russian separatism in the Donbas shows the need to eliminate mixed loyalties and mixed identities once and for all. They believe that the dominance of the "[language of the aggressor](#)" makes that region's residents susceptible to Russian world ideology.

This concept legitimizes Moscow's main propaganda point that Russian speakers comprise an organic, transnational community with shared identity and interests. But Ukrainian realities test this assertion. A huge proportion of the volunteers that rushed to the frontline to fight the separatists and their Russian allies speak the "language of the aggressor." So do most of the pro-unity local residents I have met. Speaking Russian does not obstruct them from being patriots of Ukraine if their hearts so direct them.

Furthermore, [many](#) of Ukraine's most popular papers, news [websites](#) and [blogs](#) express their uncompromising support for Ukrainian unity in the Russian language. Indeed, sweeping *Ukrainizatsiya* of these news outlets would directly contradict another key policy goal for Kiev: combatting the dominance of Russian media (especially television) in the Donbas. It is crucially important that Ukraine keep open lines of communication to Donbas residents. Will limiting the ability of Ukrainian media to reach out to them in their native language assist in that goal?

Ukrainian and Russian are related languages, perhaps as close as Spanish and Italian. Nonetheless, gaining fluency in Ukrainian would take at least a year of concerted effort. In wartime, many Donbas residents will not find the opportunity to dig into their

textbooks, especially internal refugees struggling to eke out a survival wage, or frontline civilians taking refuge in basement bomb shelters.

Put bluntly, this is not the time for Ukraine in the battle for hearts and minds.

HOW MUCH COERCION?

But the problem goes far beyond timing. All efforts to revive national languages require some amount of coercion. Experience shows that in moderate amounts coercion can produce more benefits than it incites resentment and resistance, such as requirements that all foreign films shown in theaters must be dubbed into Ukrainian. Many of my acquaintances from eastern Ukraine (and even Kiev) initially resisted this requirement, but with time realized that it was helping them achieve passive bilingualism and communicate better with Ukrainian speakers.

But there is nothing measured about the coercion in the draft law on *Ukrainizatsiya*. It is downright punitive. No transition period is anticipated for Russian speaking public officials or educators, and fines will be imposed immediately, theoretically on a daily basis, for failure to employ Ukrainian. “Language inspectors” will help enforce the requirements that the state language be used in government offices, schools and stores. No particular resources will be expended on helping Russian speakers learn Ukrainian, besides the placement of textbooks in public libraries.

The bill shares its punitive character the recent Ukrainian “De-Communization” laws. They approached the task of a long-needed honest reckoning with totalitarianism’s dark legacy by smashing and scrubbing out all things Soviet while breathlessly [whitewashing right-wing nationalism](#). No particular public dialogue or debate was involved, no real attempt to engage or persuade those immersed in Soviet nostalgia. This was history by diktat, which is to say entirely in line with the way history was treated in the Soviet Union.

The proposed *Ukrainizatsiya* bill also echoes early coercive Soviet policy in method and intent, aiming to drive what millions of eastern Ukrainians consider their native language out of the public sphere and “into the kitchen.” Such a sharp change from the permissive linguistic status quo of the past 25 years will release anti-Kiev and pro-separatism political energies at the worst possible time.

I have seen after three years of war that many Donbas residents who voted for separatism in the unofficial referenda of May 2014 are now prepared to accept Ukraine if it can provide stability, relative law and order and economic recovery. But a language policy that reaches into nearly every aspect of their lives could re-ignite dormant ideological anger. Even many pro-unity residents are frustrated that the government in Kiev is stoking culture war rather than focusing on policies that address their sharp decline in quality of life.

GETTING UKRAINIZATSIYA RIGHT

The proposed law needs a dramatic overhaul, which re-focuses it on an achievable goal: assuring the proficiency of all Ukrainian citizens in their state language. That goal will be much better achieved by establishing a realistic and implementable program and funding it accordingly. The core of the *Ukrainizatsiya* strategy should not be fines for offenders, but investment in Ukrainian language adult education. The latter is practically absent in the Donbas today.

That said, the right dose of obligation and coercion must be found. It is no longer a sustainable social contract in Ukraine that the east can be a Russian-speaking enclave and de facto ignore the state language. The very least that should be expected of all Ukrainian citizens is functional bilingualism.

But Russian speakers are likely to be far less alarmed and alienated by *Ukrainizatsiya* if they think it will respect the limits of their linguistic-cultural identity. The process should nurture and restore Ukrainian language and culture where it has been extirpated, especially in the Donbas. But it should not seek to tear out Russian identity that has roots in the region's black earth and chalk hills.

Ukrainizatsiya is too important and worthy a cause to be reduced to an instrument of culture war. It must serve and not undermine Ukraine's identity as a pluralistic, multiethnic republic.

**Brian Milakovsky works on humanitarian issues in eastern Ukraine.*

Hollywood Does it Again

Ajay Kothari

February 25, 2017

Hollywood does not fairly represent minorities in cinema. The Oscar nominations are proof of that.

In 2016, Hollywood actress [Jada Pinkett Smith](#), indignant at the Academy Award nominations, joined the [#OscarsSoWhite Twitter storm](#). Back then, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Yes, African-Americans were sparsely represented in all Oscar categories. But us guys, the other visible minorities—Asians, Indians, Hispanics, Middle Easterners and Native Americans—do not even have the kismet to be offered roles, let alone move to the next step on the nomination ladder, even though we are almost twice as many in numbers as African-Americans. Neither white nor black, we are the unfortunate “neithers” of today, the ones against whom unconcealed discrimination is allowed.

Yet this year, critics are shouting from the rooftop that the industry has suddenly changed, that the [#OscarsSoWhite](#) protest has been upended, and that racism in Hollywood has finally bit the dust. So, what did film executives do to atone for last year's sin and to absolve themselves of condemnation?

For 2017, many minorities have been included, both in the Academy Awards and the Screen Actors Guild Awards (SAG), except that almost all these minorities are African-Americans. No “neithers” here or there: no Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans or Middle Easterners. Consolation crumbs were thrown at South Asians with a nomination for British actor Dev Patel, who failed to pick up the Best Supporting Actor award at the SAG but is nominated for the same category at the Oscars on February 26.

In the United States, as per the [2010 census](#), there are 48.9 million (16.1%) Hispanics and 15.3 million (5%) Asian-Americans. Together, Hispanics and Asian-Americans are almost double the African-American population. But in the world of Hollywood, this doesn't seem to matter. Hispanics and Asian-Americans simply don't count.

But see it this way: Asia is the biggest and most populated continent in the world. So, when one in four people is and looks South Asian (1.75 billion) and one in three is and looks East Asian (2.3 billion), can we really be ignored?

To all Hollywood types who are protesting Donald Trump's immigration policy, what have you done for your immigrant brothers and sisters in the Oscar nominations? Or, at the very least, by accepting them, even marginally, as part of American society by affording them some worthy roles in cinema?

Unfortunately, Hollywood still naively conflates taking care of the two ends of the color spectrum, black and white, as end all and be all—as if this has resolved the race, color and creed problem.

No, Hollywood, I would never be called to audition or be cast as a white or a black character, nor would most Asians and many Hispanics. Our equality will never occur until you accept that we too are American. Is this turning a blind eye so you feel slickly acquitted, scot-free, and you get permission to freely live your glib life?

As an Indian-American actor-wannabe for the past three decades, and a Screen Actors Guild member for 25 years, the main reason I heard was: "You guys—Asians, Hispanics, Native Americans—do not complain!" We hoped things would naturally change instead of through protest, but not anymore. Some of us at least do and will protest. I urge that Asians, South Asians and Hispanics in America join forces, relinquish their individual identities and protest on the streets of Hollywood.

In 2017, Hollywood has once again failed to show any willingness to even listen to the pained voices of other minorities. This year was no exception, contrary to the industry's avid avowal. How long do we have to wait?

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Travel Ban Unites Americans Against Bigotry

Nahed Eltantawy
February 27, 2017

Donald Trump's controversial immigration ban was intended to divide America. It achieved the opposite.

“Make America Great Again.”

That's been President Donald Trump's motto since he decided to run for office. But is there really a need to make America great again?

As the Trump administration is getting ready to issue a new travel ban, one has to question whether this new executive order will indeed make America great again. Judging from events witnessed across the US following the issuance of the initial travel ban, I say, we are already great.

NO HATE NO FEAR

Nothing has reflected this more than the strong backlash the Trump administration received in the hours, days and weeks following the travel ban issued on January 27. As soon as Trump signed the executive order to temporarily suspend immigration from seven majority Muslim countries for 90 days, airports and streets across the United States were flooded with Americans from all walks of life who came together to protest this outrageous ban.

From Boston to California to Nebraska to Washington, protesters held signs that screamed, “No Ban No Wall,” “Resist” and “I am Muslim too.”

[Thousands of protesters](#) flooded the airports in major cities like New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago and Dallas. These protesters held signs and chanted slogans such as “No hate, no fear, refugees are welcome here.”

Immigration lawyers were also making their way to airports. Lawyers from prominent law firms and nonprofits huddled together in airport terminals, working pro-bono and filing emergency habeas corpus motions for detainees.

These initiatives were not only taking place in major cities, but were spreading throughout the nation. Here in the Triad, North Carolina, the travel ban led to protests in support of refugee and immigrant rights, a cultural event on [exploring Islam](#) held at the High Point Young Women's Christian Association, and just last week the YWCA held a refugee and immigrant Know Your Rights workshop.

I AM MUSLIM TOO

Many mosques and Muslim communities across the nation welcomed visits by local officials and non-Muslims—people who came to express their sorrow and regret for the ban and confirm their support for the Muslim community.

While for a time now, Muslim women wearing headscarves risked public verbal—and sometimes physical—attack, the travel ban brought an opposite reaction to veiled women. I have Muslim friends who were stopped by complete strangers in public just to tell them they were glad to see veiled women and that they were welcome here.

The ban also piqued many non-Muslims' curiosity about Islam. In a recent weekend event sponsored by our local mosque to provide clothing donations to refugees, two young women approached the Muslim female volunteers, requesting resources to help them gain a better understanding of Islam and Islamic teachings.

The ban also impacted media coverage of Muslims, introducing more diverse coverage and individual stories of Muslim men and women affected by the ban. Instead of the usual media images of Muslim extremists and terrorists, news outlets across the nation were spreading images and stories of Muslim husbands, wives, brothers, mothers, sons and daughters. There were stories of hardworking Muslim men and women who, thanks to Trump's ban, were prevented from getting back to their families, jobs or college studies.

For the first time, as a Muslim-American, I got to see diverse images of everyday Muslims, including doctors, engineers, artists, students, children and, most importantly,

Muslims as people with feelings. These stories and images replaced those of Muslim extremists, which more often than not supersede.

On the political side, everything from the Trump campaign to the administration's recent actions to the rise of Islamophobia and bigotry has encouraged members of the Muslim community to get involved in politics. This month, a campaign was launched by [Jetpac Inc.](#) to enable Muslim Americans to train and run for office, a move that will surely bring positive change on the long run.

UNIFYING AMERICA

Rather than divide us, I say this travel ban has unified America in so many ways. Trump's ban drew Americans closer together. Whether it was lawyers cooperating to help detainees, or strangers chanting in streets, or the media sharing stories of human struggle, this ban forced us to examine our differences and our diversity and to realize that this is what truly makes America great.

So, as the Trump administration gets ready to release its revised version of the travel ban, as a Muslim-American I can say that I no longer worry over outrageous and unconstitutional administrative orders.

The events of these past weeks have instilled in me hope, strength and confidence that the majority of my fellow Americans appreciate the melting pot that encompasses our diversity. The majority of Americans have indeed proven that we are already great and will continue to be great in our unity and respect for each other's differences.

As one protest sign held in a recent [Time Square protest](#) reads: "Ironically, he united us in solidarity."

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Building Responsibly is the Way Forward

David Segall

February 28, 2017

Engineering and construction firms join forces to protect workers in their supply chains.

This week, six major engineering and construction companies—CH2M Hill, Vinci SA, Amec Foster Wheeler, Bechtel Corporation, Fluor Corporation and Multiplex—are hosting the inaugural meeting of a new industry-led coalition called [Building Responsibly](#). The group will focus on the rights of workers in global construction supply chains, including those rights related to the recruitment of these workers, to their living and working conditions, and to subcontractor management.

The formation of Building Responsibly represents an important first step forward for an industry that has been slow to address labor rights issues, especially in the Arabian Gulf region.

Other engineering and construction firms around the world should join this new initiative. Collaborations like this can promote the sharing of best practices and the development of common industry standards and metrics.

Over the past 20 years, as global supply chains have grown increasingly complex, a number of industry groups focusing on labor rights and environmental justice in their own supply chains have been formed. In these sectors, multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSI) have been created to convene industry competitors, along with governments, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders. The strongest of these have adopted common industry standards and metrics—which member companies are expected to implement—as well as mechanisms for enforcing compliance.

The [Fair Labor Association \(FLA\)](#), for example, evolved out of a 1996 task force commissioned by then-US President Bill Clinton. It was partly created in response to public debate on college campuses and elsewhere about sweatshop practices in the labor supply chains of the apparel and athletic footwear industries. The FLA developed labor standards for its members' supply chains, developed a monitoring and reporting

process, and built a staff to provide guidance and training to both member companies and their suppliers. Today, FLA standards apply to factories around the world employing more than 4.5 million workers, and the organization has an annual budget of around \$5 million.

Other MSIs and industry groups have been created to address human rights issues that apply to the [private security](#), [mining](#) and [electronics](#) industries, among others.

Until now, the engineering and construction industry has yet to develop a similar collective framework. But in recent years, particularly in the lead-up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, large companies in the sector have faced negative publicity relating to labor practices in construction in Qatar and the broader Gulf region, making an organization like Building Responsibly crucial for the industry's major players.

These companies' and their suppliers' workforces consist largely of [low-paid South Asian migrants](#) who face a variety of [human rights concerns](#), including the payment of onerous "recruitment fees" to various agents in their home countries, being presented in the Gulf with different contracts than the ones they reviewed prior to departure, wage garnishment by employers or recruitment agents, passport confiscation by employers, and substandard living and safety conditions.

As in other industries, engineering and construction firms work with complex supply chains that are difficult to track. Small subcontractors are responsible for some of the worst abuses, and problems are exacerbated by inadequate local labor laws and enforcement measures both in the Gulf and in South Asia, the region from where most Gulf migrant workers are recruited.

GOING FORWARD

But we have seen global companies in other industries step up despite similar challenges when problems were identified in their supply chains. In 2012, when news reports highlighted [labor abuses at Foxconn Technology Group factories](#) in China, which make electronic products for Apple and other companies, Apple undertook a number of concrete steps both to investigate the problems and to take practical corrective actions. The large engineering and construction firms working in the Gulf, which directly benefit from low-cost migrant labor, are well-positioned to do the same.

To be truly effective, the architects of Building Responsibly will need to actively involve nongovernmental organizations (NGO), academics, governments, subcontractors and large clients. Its agenda should be to develop, implement and evaluate industry standards and metrics for working and living conditions in places such as the Gulf, and for recruiting practices from regions such as South Asia.

With five years to go before kickoff in Qatar, and with many other mega-construction projects underway in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, the creation of the Building Responsibly initiative is very timely.

The agenda is clear, and now is the time to act. This week's meeting is a good step, but it is only the first of many.

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