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# PRESIDENT'S NOTE

## Or, the Vicissitudes

**SUBTITLING IS AN ART** all its own. Mary Shelley opted for boldness and drama with "or, The Modern Prometheus" for her 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, while Joseph Conrad, with characteristic irony, employed "A Simple Tale" for his unsimple *The Secret Agent* (1907). A personal favorite is Herman Melville's choice for his bewildering, puzzling, maddening novel of 1852, *Pierre; or The Ambiguities*. If we had subtitles for each issue of the *Berlin Journal*, for this one I would choose "Or, the Vicissitudes"—reflecting not only the contents but also the past year.

The definition of vicissitudes is "variations in circumstances, fortune, and character," according to one online dictionary. Common usage emphasizes great differences between the ups and the downs. On the minus side of the ledger, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been shocking—the word may be too weak—because of the long and widely held certainty that a war of conquest in Europe was no longer conceivable. The positive side has also been eye-opening in its own way: the astonishing revitalization of the transatlantic alliance, which no less a personage than the French president had recently characterized as brain-dead. Few—and certainly not Vladimir Putin—reckoned with this kind of unity and rededication. While the war grinds on, the revival of the West, in this respect, is extraordinary.

Here in Berlin, the sense of dramatic change is particularly strong, as the government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz seeks to steer the country through a *Zeitenwende*, a pivot between eras. Transitioning from a post-Cold War period in which Germany could afford to focus on development, trade, and global good works to one of rearmament and the robust policies of a front-line state is no simple task. It won't happen quickly, of course, but there is now a palpable sense that a sharp corner has been turned. One approaching test of this new resolve is skyrocketing energy prices and a winter in which heating fuels are likely to be painfully scarce.

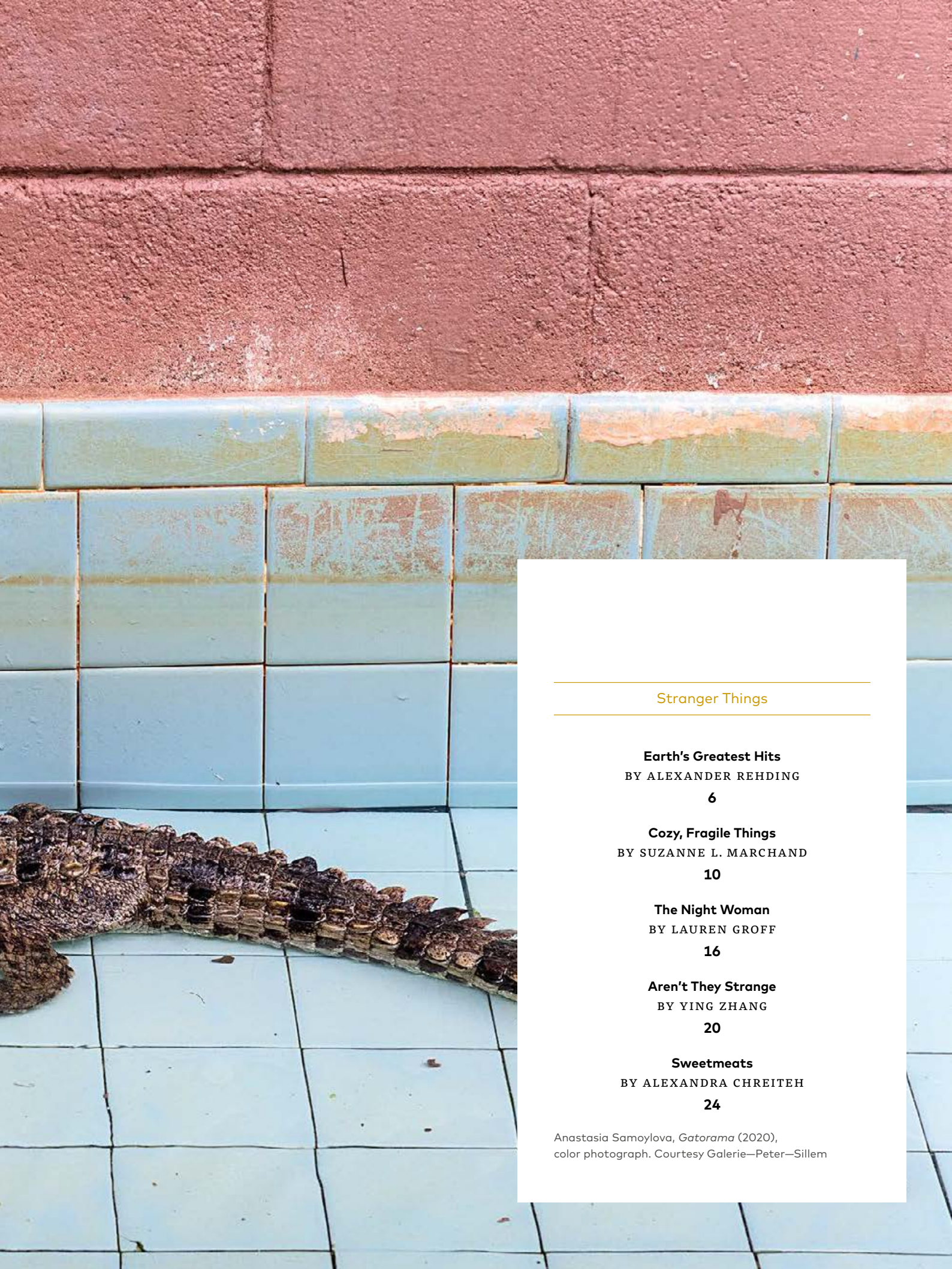
In the United States, there is also a feeling of astonishment at events that are hard to reconcile. President Joe Biden delivered a speech on the internal threats to American democracy, using the word "semi-fascist" to describe a sizable part of the nation's electorate, denouncing the Supreme Court's recent ruling on abortion rights, and decrying efforts to undermine existing election rules. At the same time, he managed to push Congress to a level of productivity unseen in decades, with major achievements on spending for infrastructure and climate, the first modest step on gun regulation in ages, and new constraints on drug pricing. All in all, these vicissitudes bring a strong feeling of whiplash.

At the American Academy in Berlin, all these developments have engendered vigorous discussion. Wherever our conversations began, the ultimate focus was usually the war in Ukraine, a country just a day's drive away. We have been riveted, as well, by the investigation into the events of January 6, 2021, and the fraught 2022 midterm elections. (Germans, it is worth noting, often express stronger concern about the fate of democracy than about the war in Ukraine.) The vicissitudes are aptly reflected in this issue of the *Berlin Journal*. Harvard musicologist Alexander Rehding's article about that curious and optimistic moment in the late 1970s, when NASA affixed a disk containing a variety of Earth's music on the Voyager space probes for the delectation of intelligent beings outside our solar system. (After more than a generation of Hollywood movies about aliens coming to earth to wreak havoc, one wonders who thought that was a good idea.) Compare that with anthropologist Cymene Howe's discussion of rising water levels around the globe due to climate change, and even more starkly, novelist Lauren Groff 's disturbing post-apocalyptic short story about a woman who has escaped to a remote cabin in the woods after a catastrophe has seemingly wiped out civilization. Those are reflections of our best-of-times-worst-of-times moment. More direct addresses are offered by historian John Connelly, who examines Russia's deeply rooted sense of its own imperial imperative, and legal scholar Joshua Sellers, who examines the American "polycrisis" centered in state legislatures and the Supreme Court and threatening decades of work to make US elections more genuinely representative.

There is much more herein, and I hope you will plunge into all these diverse writings. To paraphrase Melville's contemporary Walt Whitman, the American Academy in Berlin, in print and in its intellectual community on the Wannsee, contains multitudes—as it should during these fascinating, heartening, and dispiriting times.

Daniel Benjamin

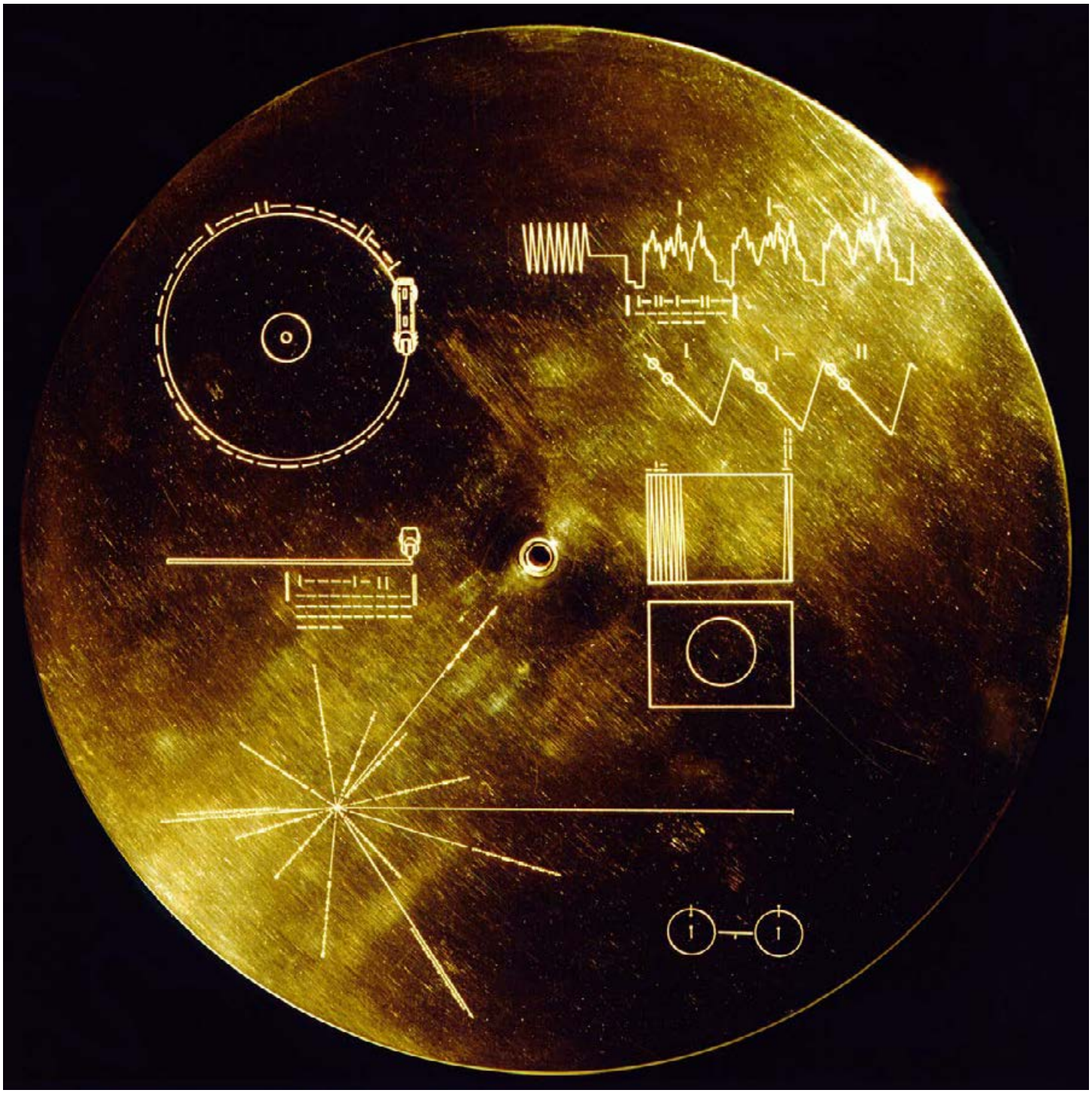

FOCUS



## Stranger Things



Anastasia Samoylova, *Gatorama* (2020), color photograph. Courtesy Galerie—Peter—Sillem



The Golden Record cover shown with its extraterrestrial instructions. Credit: NASA/JPL

# EARTH'S GREATEST HITS

## Do aliens like human music?

by Alexander Rehding

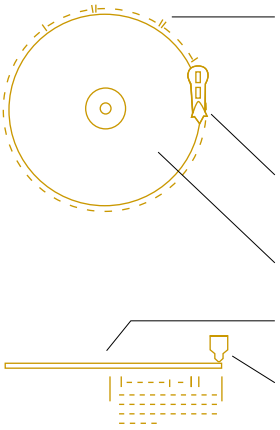
**IN 1977, NASA** shot a mixtape into outer space. Technically, it wasn't a cassette tape so much as two LP records, gilded for protection against the extreme conditions of outer space, and each mounted to the outside of a spacecraft, Voyagers I and II. But other than that, these so-called Golden Records were very much mixtapes in the spirit of the 1970s, carrying a special musical message for a significant other. This interplanetary playlist contains music from all parts of our world and in all styles, from Australian didgeridoos to Zairean initiation songs, from J.S. Bach to Chuck Berry. Traveling at some 35,000 mph in the direction of two of the nearest star systems, the Voyagers and their Golden Records left our solar system in 2012 and 2018. They are now on their way into the unknown, barreling into areas of our galaxy where no human-made object has ever ventured before.

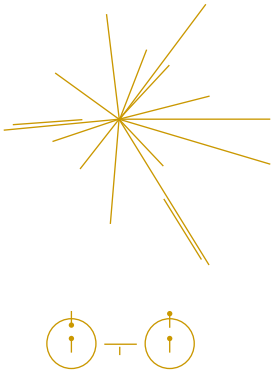
Conceived at the height of the Cold War, the Golden Record was an ambitious effort to represent the entire planet in sounds. Etched into the two sides of the LP were music and noises that would give aliens a sense of what it means to be human. It was especially important for the creative team that the telegenic astrophysicist Carl Sagan (1934–1996) had assembled around this project to highlight that this compilation encompassed not only America but the whole planet. The 27 musical numbers on the Golden Record include a diverse mix of pieces chosen from the Western classical canon, African American blues, as well as a great many popular and high-art traditions from other parts of the world. The Soviet Union is delicately represented with two contributions: Azerbaijani mugam and Georgian choral singing. The creative team was hoping to include the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun," but NASA could not secure the copyright from EMI in time. Besides musical traditions from all habitable continents, the Golden Record contained greetings in 55 languages, including whale song, a sound collage of Earth noises, and over a hundred sonified images depicting scenes from our planet and its inhabitants. Any hints of war, conflict, and suffering were carefully omitted. After all, we want to present ourselves from our best side.

Why music? Three distinct theories, or rather vernacular philosophies, are at work behind the Golden Record. First is the age-old connection between music and mathematics going back to Pythagoreanism, overlaid with the Romantic trope of music as the universal language, and third, the mixtape concept that music gives away something deep and personal about our identity, individual or collective. An additional attraction of the auditory dimension is related to its predecessor, NASA's Pioneer mission (1972). An iconic plaque was mounted on that spacecraft on which is seen, among other things, a line drawing of naked man raising his hand in greeting, with a naked women standing beside him. Anatomically accurate, the nudity depicted in this plaque caused a firestorm in conservative religious circles. Because NASA relies on taxpayer money apportioned by Congress, they decided to steer away from controversy and moved away from visual images toward sonic representation.

**THE GOLDEN RECORD** is a tool in the attempt to answer a well-honed existential question: Are we alone in the universe? In the last few years, astrophysicists have confirmed the existence of several thousand exoplanets and estimate a further one hundred billion exoplanets in our galaxy. From a purely statistical perspective, then, it is highly likely that life, even intelligent life, exists on other planets. The Golden Record is, after all, the brainchild of SETI, a group of star-studded scientists dedicated to the Study of Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. However, the hope that an alien civilization would somehow pick up our Golden Record had always been a pipe dream. Sagan knew well that the Voyager spacecraft were merely two shots in the dark. Human culture, he reckoned, was still a "baby civilization," far away from reaching its full potential to communicate. Records piggy-backing on spacecraft is about the best we could do.

To be sure, none of us will be around to find out whether the Golden Record will reach anyone at the other end. Even at the unimaginable speed at which the Voyagers travel, it will take them at least 40,000 years to be closer to the nearest stars than our own sun.




The odds are wildly stacked against successful contact. Even if an intelligent alien species were at the right place at the right time to intercept a Voyager on its trajectory, their physiology would have to be reasonably similar to human anatomy—with visual organs to decipher the wordless instructions, an auditory sense to listen to the music, hand-like extremities to handle the record, and the technological know-how to build a record player. We won't even go into the more complicated aspects of listening to music, such as a feeling for rhythm and phrase, or the capacity to form an emotional response to different musical styles. The likelihood that all these factors come together is not quite zero, but very close to it. For a thought experiment, take a non-human intelligent species on our planet: whales. Floating in their watery medium, their fins would not be able to hold the record, let alone take any of the other necessary steps.

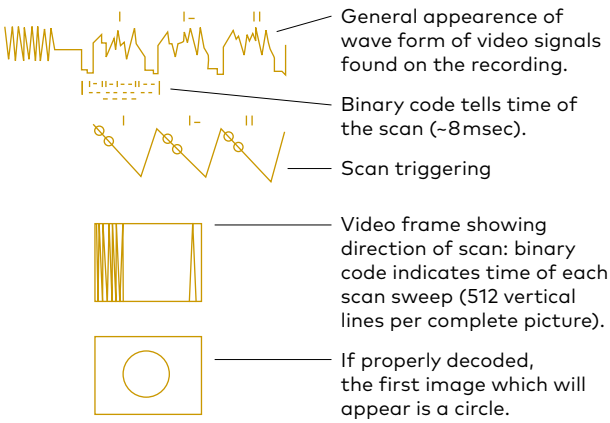
In the end, though, none of this matters much, because the Golden Record was primarily created to inspire a domestic, Earth-bound, human audience. And in this regard it was wholly successful. The Golden Record stood so much in the limelight that it outshone the considerable scientific aspects of the Voyager mission, which gave us the first high-quality photographs of the gaseous outer planets of our solar system.

NOT EVERYBODY WAS satisfied with the majestic—and perhaps a little cheesy—Golden Record. A few years later, in 2001, Aleksandr Zaitsev (1945–2021), a Russian astrophysicist, came up with a rather different approach to communicating with extraterrestrial civilizations through the power of music. Zaitsev was a vocal proponent of a more active approach to SETI and seemed particularly bothered by the relatively slow speed and limited success rate of the Voyager project. He chose to pursue an alternative route.

SETI builds on a problem known as the Fermi Paradox, which can be summarized as follows: If the universe is teeming with life, where is everybody? Why has no alien civilization ever made contact with us? There are various plausible answers to this paradox, including the humbling thought that our species might simply not be interesting enough. One important consideration is Sagan's "baby civilization" idea: humans have only had the capacity to receive radio messages for a few decades, which in astronomical terms is nothing. SETI aims to determine the conditions of alien intelligent life. These are, in fact, more limited than one might expect: a few fundamental assumptions can reasonably be generalized, such as alien life forms are likely carbon-based and that they most probably exist in a fluid (gaseous or liquid) medium. And Sagan and his colleagues were convinced that mathematics, as the language of science, would provide the basis for any interplanetary, interspecies communication. At its loftiest level, SETI aims to determine the optimum conditions in which humans can receive and send messages to engage in communication with alien civilizations.

This aspiration to make contact had always been controversial. The physicist Stephen Hawking (1942–2018) thought it was dangerous folly to send messages to outer space. Without first knowing whether anyone out there would be hostile or friendly, SETI might unwittingly bring doom to our whole planet. Meanwhile, METI (Messaging Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence), a movement spearheaded by Zaitsev, swept such hypothetical concerns aside and argued that if every civilization in the galaxy is too timid to take the first step in making contact, then we will never find each other.

Zaitsev put his money where his mouth was and organized a concert for aliens, or as he called it "TAM for ETI"—Teen-Age Message for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. He first approached the Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico with his idea, but it was turned down because of security concerns. (This, despite the fact that several widely publicized messages into space had previously been sent from Arecibo.) The concert finally took place at the radio telescope at Yevpatoria, in Crimea. Over a week at the height of the summer of 2001, Zaitsev, with the help of a youth group from Moscow and financial backing from the Russian ministry of education, organized a series of concerts for theremin—an iconic electronic instrument patented in 1928 by Russian




engineer Lev Termen (Leon Theremin, 1896–1993) that emits wobbly tones easily recognized as the "sound of outer space" in countless science-fiction movies—that were broadcast in different directions within of our galaxy.

Zaitsev focused on a small repertory of Western (and specifically Russian) classics—including such hits as Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, Saint-Saëns' *Swan*, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, and the folk song "Kalinka." These tunes had the benefit of being well-suited to the theremin, but better yet, the sound the traditional theremin emits is a simple sine wave, which rarely occurs in nature. This mode of transmission makes it easy to separate signal from noise. Intelligent aliens, we can assume, will likely understand that these are not random waves, but a deliberate message.

NASA's Golden Record selection had stressed the worldwide diversity of musical styles, genres, and provenances. It aimed to strike a delicate balance during politically unstable times. Zaitsev's project, by contrast, was closely circumscribed: its musical selection hewed closely to the Western canon, and its presentation completely gave up on any kind of timbral variety. But the virtue of such frugality was a highly specific, recognizable signal that conveys unmistakably, "We are here." Most importantly to Zaitsev, these "concerts"—or, really, radio transmissions—are not bound to a physical object like the Golden Record. That is, they are not held back by the relatively slow speed that rocket fuel provides. The concerts travel through space at the speed of radio waves and will arrive at near star systems in a matter of years, not millennia.

The first of these transmissions may arrive at their target star, within the Ursa Major constellation, as early as 2047. Will aliens like human music, played on the theremin? Maybe, just maybe, we will find out by the end of this century. □

# COZY, FRAGILE THINGS

## The remarkable diversity of Biedermeier porcelain

by Suzanne L. Marchand

THE TERM "BIEDERMEIER" calls to mind gentle caricatures inhabiting the pictures of Carl Spitzweg and other nineteenth-century genre painters, in which plump, prosperous, self-assured bourgeois husbands and wives disport themselves in comfortable salons or provincial gardens. Be that as it may, we actually know little about the actual tastes of these happy denizens of German-speaking lands in the first half of the nineteenth century—or how entrepreneurs discovered and catered to them.

For too long, we historians, propelled perhaps by a lingering Marxian hangover, have assumed that the era's consumers were simply "feudalized," falling into the habit of copying their aristocratic betters. In so doing, we have ignored small business owners in favor of focusing on large industrial concerns and the impoverished workers they produced.

But recent, careful explorations of the economic and cultural history of the early nineteenth century have unearthed a rich and eclectic world among this generation of ingenious (and not so ingenious) entrepreneurs, who sought to satisfy growing demand for a wide range of semi-mass-produced products—from books, straw hats, and soap to tea sets, soup bowls, and iconic figurines. In what follows, I focus on a single industry as a means to explore the neglected story of "the consumer revolution" in Central Europe and to probe what the porcelain tastes of this generation might tell us about the aspirations and self-conceptions of this generation.

TO BEGIN WITH a broad generalization, consumers in the Biedermeier era favored porcelains that created a *gemütlich* (cozy) and *gebildet* (cultivated) atmosphere, or which spoke to a kind of local patriotism mixed with a gentle nostalgia for days gone by. "Gallantry objects" such as asparagus-shaped needle cases, made for eighteenth-century courtiers, had gone the way of the powdered wig. After 1820, buyers increasingly demanded more serious statuettes—Frederick the Great, Aristotle, and John the Baptist—rather than the playful and slightly risqué figurines ubiquitous in the pre-revolutionary era. Most of the porcelain Biedermeier consumers bought was plain white, or blue and white, either in an "Asian" style or adorned with "German" or "Indian" flowers. But there was another less popular, less available and therefore more expensive repertoire of ceramics comprised of painted pipes, tableware, figurines, and busts whose shapes and designs shed light upon a dynamic world of the era's aesthetic and moral sensibilities.

In the case of the painted pipes, we can be relatively sure we are seeing men's taste reflected; in the case of much of the tableware, we can guess that women were the foremost choosers, especially as shops spread to smaller towns. As for the figurines and busts, some of these seem to be oriented to the male study or smoking room; others seem more likely to have appealed to women, for display in boudoirs or family spaces, but we can't be entirely sure. We also know that factories were willing to cater to individual orders. Consumers could, for example, choose a dinner-plate


Albrecht Adam, *Eine junge Münchener Bürgersfrau genießt die Freuden des Kaffees* (1825), lithograph.
Credit: bpk/Kunstbibliothek, SMB/Knud Petersen

style, then a rim color and painted decorations, if desired, or order services tailored to their needs. Individualized poems, inscriptions, or portraits could be added, just as the customer wished. Chances are that no two homemakers in Leipzig, for example, had exactly the same tea service.

Let us consider, first, the diversity of shapes. Each manufactory offered at least two choices of "forms" for their services—one simple, the other more intricately modeled. In 1826, for example, the Gießhübel porcelain manufactory, near Karlsbad, offered cups in "Chocolate," "Antique and Conical," and "Campagnian and Etrurian" forms; having made this choice, the customer could then opt for blue, multicolor, or white decoration, with or without gold rims.

*Individualized poems, inscriptions, or portraits could be added, just as the customer wished. Chances are that no two homemakers in Leipzig had exactly the same tea service.*

Form fashion changed over time; the sling-handled "Compagnia" cup was popular between about 1800 and 1815, together with delicate, thin-handled conical shapes. The 1820s preferred footed, fluted cup forms.

In addition to the full tea-services, customers could choose from hundreds of types of teapots and cups. One could buy butter boxes, soup tureens, sugar bowls, inkstands, mirror frames, pitchers, and, of course, chamber pots. Figurines of very various sorts were also available, as were a dizzying array of pipe designs. "Lithophanes," too—thin, unglazed porcelain reliefs made to stand in front of lights or windows—proved big sellers for a time and were made by most fine manufactories. All these things could be had in different sizes, at differing levels of quality, with or without gilding or decoration. Prices also varied widely, but, in real and often absolute terms, they had fallen sharply since the mid-eighteenth century. Hoping to impress the finance ministry in 1828, Meissen officials noted that a large gilded plate could now be had for less than half its price in 1765.

Falling prices made the increasing accumulation of porcelain more possible for people of middling means. At a time when a well-paid clerk would have made no more than 150–200 *Taler* (T) a year, full, top-quality services remained quite expensive: a 102-piece, 12-place Meissen white service came to 41 T; a blue service such as the "Onion" pattern came in at just over 52 T. Adding flowers and gold rims brought the cost up to 116 T, or more than a half year's labor for our clerk. Stoneware was a bit less expensive, though a fancy service would still have cost our buyer about two months' income. Smaller, plainer pieces were much more affordable. In 1828, one (private) factory offered a white coffee-service for 12 for slightly less than 5 T (9 T with gilding). At about the same time, a stoneware factory in Prague, advertising its Wedgwood-like styles, offered its top-quality coffee pot for a little less than 1 T. One could buy a small teapot from Berlin's Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur (KPM) for about the same price, and a teacup for five *silbergroschen*, or about one-sixth of the cost of the pot.

To paint a general picture of decoration, we can note a great uptick in the number of landscapes and city vistas, often local. In the 1820s and '30s, we find increasing numbers of tea sets designed for intimate moments, between friends, family members, or lovers, with images or mottos that emphasize the virtues of friendship or familial affection. Following a spate of popular books on "the language of flowers," porcelain makers were flooded with orders for specific floral patterns; high-quality flower-painters, such as the Viennese Royal Manufactory's Joseph Nigg, were in great demand.

The usual classical subjects remained in the repertoire—Cupid and Psyche, Venus, Hercules, Zeus—though the more risqué figures—satyrs, nymphs, Europa—flagged; a Biedermeier Priapus seems almost a contradiction in terms. Correspondingly, religious scenes, particularly Madonnas, now flourished. By the 1830s and '40s, neo-Gothic, neo-Byzantine, and Moorish designs could also be ordered, heralding the full onset of historicism. Extremely popular in the period—and speaking directly to its eclecticism—were mismatched teacups, suitable for placing on display on a mantel or handing out to specially chosen guests. These might feature a special poem or marriage date, a favorite flower or portrait, a beloved landscape or bird. In one 1826 example from the Viennese manufactory, "Without You, I Can Not Live," was inscribed on the saucer, which accompanied an elegant gilded cup adorned with a flowering coffee plant.

TO IMMERSE OURSELVES fully in the porcelain culture of this age, let's look at some additional concrete examples of decorative options offered by the manufacturers, starting with the less expensive wares. In cheapness, after the plain whites came copperplate-printed and underglaze painted wares. Meissen perfected underglaze green and succeeded in attracting bourgeois customers with its "Old German" vine pattern and with painted relief decorations adopted from pressed-glass models. The KPM, too, offered green-and-black designs, including lion paws, a *memento mori*, a wild boar, and Frederick the Great on horseback. Standard inscriptions included "May your hopes and dreams be realized," "For the lady of the house," and "For the good child." The Villeroy & Boch model book for 1831–44 displays a range of available copperplate-printed landscapes, some local, some Italian, including many churches and ruins; some animals (deer, cows, rabbits, donkeys) and soldiers; some gentle jokes (usually involving soldiers); a few Turks on horseback; and two Chinese scenes, one with a figure kowtowing and another featuring

a highly "orientalized" mandarin. For fuller purses, Nymphenburg issued plates depicting picturesque Bavarian scenery and folk costumes as well as a set narrating the *Nibelungenlied*; recognized Romantic artists such as Wilhelm von Kaulbach and Peter von Cornelius contributed designs. Fürstenberg expanded its flowered offerings, as well as its military heroes, holy families, and local landscapes; both the playwright August von Kotzebue and his republican assassin, Karl Sand, were portrayed in porcelain, as was the Wartburg, Martin Luther's erstwhile refuge and scene of an important nationalist rally in 1817. The KPM answered with an elegant cup and saucer commemorating the 1813 Battle of Leipzig, the key turning point in the fight against Napoleon.

Figurines had perhaps lost their fashionableness, but they were still made in astounding varieties; they also give us an even stronger sense of what Biedermeier buyers thought worthy of display in their homes. On the whole, a combination of seriousness and *Gemütlichkeit* won out over the eighteenth century's love of playful gallantry and soft porn (though there was still nudity on display, especially in figurines of Venus and Psyche). Real historical personages were now more common than allegorical or perhaps even mythological ones, though the Greek gods and nymphs held their own. An 1828 KPM price list, for example, featured Prussian royals, two czars (Alexander and Nicholas), and four Napoleonic-era generals, all in biscuit porcelain—unglazed white wares with a matte finish. Goethe, Schiller, Mozart, and Herder represented the intellectuals, and one could also opt for Christ, Cupid and Psyche, or Bacchus with fauns. Most manufactories made folk figurines, with Russians and Circassians joining the ranks of the exotic.

Lithophanes, too, give us insight into the imaginations and self-projections of the world of the 1820s and early 1830s. Patented in France in 1827, these novelties were made by transferring a copperplate engraving to a wax mold, from which a porcelain plate could be made. The result was a semi-transparent relief that could be displayed near a window or in front of a lamp to illuminate the scene. An 1828 list from a Paris manufactory included the omnipresent Raphael Madonnas and

Porcelain painting on a pipe bowl by Meissen; motif from Goethe's *Faust* by Gustav Heinrich Naeke (1785–1835) and Carl August Schwerdgeburth (1785–1878). Private collection of Detlev Dauer, Wettmar, Germany. Source: Wikimedia

Thorwaldsen's *Night and Day*, as well as Cupid's uncovering of Psyche. There were numerous children, cupids, and cats, as well as a drunk and a shepherdess, Charles X, Henry IV, the English politician George Canning, and the Greeks at Missolonghi. An 1830 list added monkeys, a shipwreck, more landscapes, and Susannah bathing. Not to be outdone, the KPM offered Madonnas, castles, and cats, but also the head of John the Baptist, Faust and Gretchen, and the Rape of Hylas—181 scenes in all. By 1840, this list had expanded to 231 offerings, now including a whole series of Greek (18) and Roman (9) heads in which Lycurgus, Pericles, and Cicero were included, but, interestingly, no Caesar or Augustus. By about 1860, the KPM was offering an astounding 554 different lithophanic images, the older models retained but now enhanced by more generals and kings (including Frederick the Great as an idealized child), Romeo, Alexander von Humboldt, and the Indian princess and eponymous heroine of the Sanskrit poem beloved by the Romantics, "Sacontala."

By the 1840s, much of the porcelain intended for domestic use was probably purchased by women, but men, too, were purchasers. Tobacco, which had been cut off by Napoleon's blockade, had become affordable to most men by the 1830s, and pipe smoking was highly popular at least until the 1850s, when cigarettes and cigars came into fashion. Smoking even gained new respectability after the cholera epidemic of 1831, when the rumor spread that smoking kept dangerous miasmas at bay. That year, Berlin makers alone produced more than one million pipes, half painted with colorful enamels. Evidently, as the upcoming lists suggest, men of the period chose or commissioned pipes that expressed something particular about themselves, rather as their wives and daughters expressed themselves in choosing coffee cups featuring sentimental scenes or silhouettes of the beloved. In their own way, Biedermeier pipes testify to the emergence of a new form of bourgeois self-confidence.

A list of pipe designs offered by Meissen, most of them costing less than 1 T, reflects the wild diversity of men's tastes in this eclectic era. It began by offering probably its most popular images: of the hunt, landscapes and seascapes, military troops on foot or horse; of prominent royals, writers, or musicians; of cities in "interesting" regions; of symbols or scenes pointing to the smoker's employment in a particular trade such as medicine or mining, or his status as a freemason, or both. Standard depictions included a Tyrolian brewer with the ambiguous motto: "My tap/cocks serve all comers" and a macabre scales with two skulls and the motto: "Rich or poor, in death the same." For a bit more (2 T 12 groschen) the customer could order Aesclepius, Venus, Bacchus, or Jupiter, alone or in various groups with Leda, Europa, or Danae. Or one could choose a man leaning on the breast of a maiden with the timelessly cheerful motto: "He who dies like this, dies well." The Christian could choose Jesus declaring, "I will conquer"; or the sly anti-Semite Nathan Rothschild captioned with a line from Schiller's "Ode to Joy," "Millions, let yourself be embraced!" The unrepentant Saxon soldier could contentedly smoke a pipe picturing Napoleon's grave on St. Helena. And the list continues: the literary man could choose scenes from *Macbeth* or from Walter Scott; the history buff, Joan of Arc, Wallenstein, or Wilhelm Tell. Rogues could purchase pipes depicting scantily clad girls of all classes, or a scene described as "the Turkish maiden market." Other manufactories, too, produced a similar range of pipes, with the romantic or gently erotic frequently featured. One design even twitted men so ignoble as to consume their tobacco in the shape of cigars, picturing the offending items being stuck firmly into life-sized human buttocks. Together with sentimentality and piety, lashings of humor are indeed to be found in the consumer culture of this era.

DESPITE THE EXHAUSTIVENESS of these lists, however, they don't even begin to capture the immense variety of Biedermeier porcelains as a whole, for it is also during this era that porcelain painting at home became feasible, offering an apparently attractive way for women to pass their time and to create personalized gifts. The nineteenth century was the great era of women's crafts, ranging from simple embroidery to the creation of intricate shell collages and jewelry made from the hair of the deceased. For middle-class women and girls, the making of gifts for family and friends consumed untold hours and generated powerful emotions. Although embroidery and knitting—taught to girls as young as three years old—played the major role here, porcelain too took part in this almost oppressive cult of the homemade.

All this diversity flies in the face of our assumptions about industrial standardization, and about Biedermeier "feudalization" or homogeneity. Even as "populuxe" items became cheaper, in this industry at least, they also became more diverse. Middle-class consumers did not necessarily imitate the tastes of their betters but rather sought domestic items with personal appeal. They did not worry much about things matching, and their souvenirs and gifts became hodge-podges in their salons. These were the developments that lay behind artists' and reformers' complaints about stylistic incoherence and the overproduction of cheap goods. The porcelain industry, it turns out, was quite good at producing both numbers and variations, and in providing a diverse set of customers a highly eclectic set of design choices. Biedermeier entrepreneurs recognized that their customers were neither homogenous nor "feudalized." Perhaps it is time we tried to see the world through their eyes. □

This essay was adapted by the author from her book *Porcelain: A History from the Heart of Europe* (Princeton University Press, 2020). Examples draw on price lists from the Sächsische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden; KPM Archiv, Berlin; and the Villeroy & Boch Unternehmensarchiv, Merzig.


# MARKUS LÜPERTZ

## LE FAISEUR DE DIEUX

**05 MARS 2022**
**12 MARS 2023**

ORLÉANS
**→ musée des Beaux-Arts**
L'exposition des sculptures monumentales dans le paysages urbain
**→ centre ville & parc Pasteur**
prolongée jusqu'en 12 mars 2023.

en collaboration avec la **Galerie Michael Werner**

Affichage de l'exposition d'Orléans à la station de métro Concorde, Paris

# THE NIGHT WOMAN

Fiction by Lauren Groff

Photo: Henning Sørby, 2020. Courtesy Unsplash

A SUDDEN SCREAM in the dark woods in her dreams.

She woke fully when the sound came a second time, and she knew it was not a dream, it was a two-toned bloody woman's scream starting high then dipping low, chased by an owl shouting Who-who-who.

Precisely, old bird. Who.

Because now that the wakened world was pouring in, the impossibility also poured in: there could not be a woman out there in the dark woods, screaming.

Not after the great catastrophe.

Which had gone fuzzy in its particulars in her mind.

Which wasn't so surprising, she had been out here in the woods all alone for so very long.

Though, as there were no clocks or calendars and she had been extremely lax in cutting the daylines into the shitter wall, the time she had been out here could no longer be accurately counted, alas.

Perhaps she had arrived when the paths were muddy and there was a paper-thin ice around the edges of the pond, but no, perhaps she had arrived in the full swelter of the hot season; there were enormous wasp nests in the rafters of the cabin.

So much had begun slipping from her.

Now the scream came a third time, and this time it showed itself somehow funny, not terrifying, and the understanding arrived that it must a scream from a rutting fox. Or a, what do you call it, a fisher cat.

Perhaps she had read once that fisher cats had been so plenteous at the time of the first colonists and had screamed so like women that the suspicious Europeans thought the forests were full of roving witches, devils, shades of the dead, fornicating under the full moon in their pale writhing orgies.

Where said fact came from she had no idea.

Must have been a book.

Awful that, out there in the dead world, in the terrible silence and stillness of the after, there were vast libraries moldering, that all those careful words accumulated on the shelves were being eaten up by mildew and damp and quick little silver bugs and cockroaches, millions of words drifting away every single day.

The whole forest was braced for the creature to scream a fourth time. She too lay rigid in the cot, holding her breath.

But the creature, whose whole career out there hinged on its mastery of surprise, would not.

She unearthed herself from her many sleeping bags and blankets and rose into the cold and poked at the embers, blowing, until the fistful of twigs caught fire and the splinters at the edges of the logs caught as well, then the logs at last began to burn.

She poured water out of the big bucket into the kettle and nestled it into the fire. She took out the coffee beans, which were dwindling like everything else, and ground some.

The last thing of the before that she remembered was being in her car, and the voice on the radio had said something so appalling, she saw her hand floating forth to twist it off, she twisted the voice off and drove blindly, panicked, and then, coming near a great box store, she abruptly pulled in and ran in, and filled as many carts as she needed with sleeping bags, blankets, beans and rice and cans and sugar and salt and flour and coffee and spices and vinegar and oil and chocolate chips and matches and batteries and lanterns and kerosene and candles and a can opener and duct tape and plates and cups and forks spoons and knives and kettles and pans and multiple frighteningly large knives and hatchets and axes and six pairs of running shoes and flannel shirts and tee shirts and undies and jeans and socks and work gloves and a rainbow fleece beanie and storage bins and a backpack and Castile soap and vitamins and iodine and bandages and medicines and tampons and toothbrushes and toothpaste, et cetera, something like ten carts full.

The cashier smirked when she maxed out one credit card but he didn't understand that credit was already a figment of the before and she maxed out her debit card, too.

Obviously, the cashier was not the kind of person who cared about the news. She met his scorn with a godlike pity. He was about to be dead, like everyone else.

The car, which was roomy, a station wagon, was so crammed that she had to drive with a fifty-pound bag of rice on her lap out of the city.

No time to stop at her apartment. She had everything she needed but the cat, and the cat was already lost. Sad. It was a nice cat. It would have helped with the mice, the loneliness. It was either white or orange. Surely, it once had a name. In any event, there had been no panic on the roads, not for hundreds of miles, and there was still gas at the general store when she topped up the car in the town closest to the cabin, in that place where people of the city, and their panics, were viewed with skepticism.

Though of course it was true that the people of the country should have been panicking too.

As they would come to see.

And the cabin was still over thirty miles from that little village, also, including the class-four road where she hid her car, it took a full half-day to hike out from it to take an armful or backpack-ful of the stuff back to the cabin, something she did over and over again in the first weeks until the station wagon was empty of everything, including the driver's seat and the carpet in the back, which she had laid on the dirt floor of the cabin, and which was very filthy now but still felt like a luxury.

It was a very good little cabin. The shell to her nut. She loved it so.

The cabin was at the crux of three separate vast forests, owned by two states and a township, and therefore belonged to none. It belonged to itself, sovereign.

She supposed that this is why the cabin had called to her urgently out of the decades before, when she was young and used to hike for fun. She had first seen it with a man, perhaps. She remembered him between her legs, pressing her back against the rough bark walls, very nice. The man's face had grown over in her mind with smooth skin, however.

Like everyone else's face, including her mother and father, including her little brother.

Her brother's name, also, having faded away as well.

Only the heaviness of childhood Sunday dinners lingered, starched dress and table prim with roast cow and beans, the something something, the *bitterness*, in the air, mother and father's words sniping like bullets past each other's heads and her little brother's hand finding hers. This, she remembered.

And her own children's hands, sweaty and curled when they were small, their faces too were blank. But she couldn't think about them, what happened to them. No.

In the window there was a light at the top edge of the trees, which she thought was the great round silver coin of the night dashing its last light to the ground, at least until the ground itself began to grow yellow, and she knew the light was from the sun and that morning had come.

THE KETTLE WHISTLED. She poured the water over the grounds and watched the bare branches of the trees make themselves clear out in the openings. The glass openings. Curious. The word of them escaped her. The cabin's eyeballs looking outward.

Humanity might be over, but the sun still did its job.

The birds that were much thicker in the trees, now, sang to banish the cold. In the branches, the bare ruin'd choirs.

The wind swept its fingers through the naked forest, either rushing into this winter or rushing out of it.

She watched the light catch on the clearing then slowly grow up the trunk of the trees and fall with relief into the pond, where the water kindled into a color that she hadn't forgotten but that didn't have a name, both green and glowing amber all at once.

And the thrill from the screaming thing in the night had vanished, and her body was suddenly heavy, heavy and tired, and she climbed back into the nest of blankets and sleeping bags, which still held the warmth of her previous sleep.

Later, perhaps hours, perhaps days, she put on her shoes and jacket, took a handful of dried berries and filled a bottle with water and put them in her backpack, and went out on her daily hike.

There were trails in every direction, one state forest marked with blue metal circles nailed to the trees, the other with simple spray painted purple markings, and the township had not marked its trails at all.

The trails cut into all three forests like masses of dropped thread, like thread unspooled through the labyrinth, and she knew this was a reference, but to what exactly escaped her right now.

She chose purple, the ridge hike. It felt nice for her body to be moving in the cold.

On one of the blue paths, she'd once hiked all morning and saw a strange green thing through the trees and crouched and neared through the underbrush until she understood that the green was a house, a house in the woods at the far edge of some town. She had crouched there frozen for a very long time, thinking about what might be in the house. Perhaps books. Perhaps people living. But almost certainly people dead.

She only hurried off when she heard a howling nearby. Where there were people, there were dogs. When the people were gone some of the dogs reverted to the wolves that still loped along in their blood.

One time she had hid at the edge of a meadow and watched a pack of what had once been pets, some still wore collars, take down a deer. It was not pretty.

THIS MORNING WAS calm in its light, though. She breathed heavily.

At the top she felt a pulse of pleasure, for there stood her dearest friend.

It was a birch tree, an especially beautiful one, shyly gleaming alone in the chill air. She put her cheek to the birch tree, her arms around it. If she closed her eyes, the skin of the birch felt like the skin of a human cheek, the body a narrow and bony body. A softness there that other trees did not have.

She said a silent thanks to the tree and stepped back at last. Then she put the tree's warmth behind her back and scanned the sky for planes.

In the beginning of the end, there were still planes, a few every day, their long white marks in the blue. The marks behind the planes had once had a name, but it was vanished now and she called them scars.

It had been a very long time since there had been any scars in the sky at all.

Once, in the beginning of the end, she had stood there even as dusk began to fall and she knew the night would make the trail back very tricky indeed, but she could not move because, extremely far off, over the plain, she saw a column of smoke braiding into the sky and a tiny redness that was fire beneath, and knew that something large and human out there was burning.

Hospital, power plant, town. The not-knowing kept her stuck there until dangerous night fell full and she had to sneak down the mountain as swift and silent as she was able.

She could see for a very great distance from up here. Where at first had been fields of some crop were now velvety textured patches of pine trees. Elsewhere, the bare branches of this time of year and the few distant roads cutting through.

The sun was dimmish, and the other body in the sky, the nighttime silver one, the body in the sky that had once brought her blood with it, was pale and whole up there as well.

But she had not bled for a very long time, and she had used up the tampons for her nosebleeds, which came regularly.

And she looked now at her hands, wondering yet again how old she must be, and they were dry and cracked and spotted and gnarled at the joints, but she didn't feel old inside, so she thought they were prematurely aged by the hardness of life in the cabin.

Perhaps she wasn't so old, or perhaps she was ancient, perhaps decades had passed.

She wasn't unhappy, as long as she didn't try to remember the faces of the people she'd lost.

Something in the distance was bothering her. She stayed put because she did not know what it was.

The sun lowered itself all the way down and the edge of the sky burned then the flame went out.

What was it called? The light of the edge of night?

She kept her eyes fixed on the spot off in the distance that bothered her. It was an open space near one of the old roads, which ran over a marsh. Surprising that the rains hadn't washed the bridge away.

She squinted. Then she crouched, out of instinct.

All at once, something moved there. A deer, a bear, a large porcupine, she presumed. But then the breath left her lungs because whatever it was had red on it. Red where the head was.

Blood?

No. Not blood.

A hat.

A hat meant a head, meant a person.

A person was moving toward her below in the distance.

And it all poured back into her, everything she thought she had lost these months or years or decades she had been alone. It was wordless, vast, what this tiny person, far off, meant. There would be a face to look at. Words to meet her own words. A hand to hold her own. A story to hear, infinite. A heartbeat that wasn't her own. The labor and grand beauty of this life would be shared.

There was a pain in her so great that she knew that it would either kill her right here on the ridge, split her asunder until she died, or it would spur her down the ridge, flying, over the ground, to stand in the road, and to wait until the person turned the bend and saw her there.

The world spun, the birch held her from behind, her heart beat.

The moment passed and she was still alive. She began to run. □

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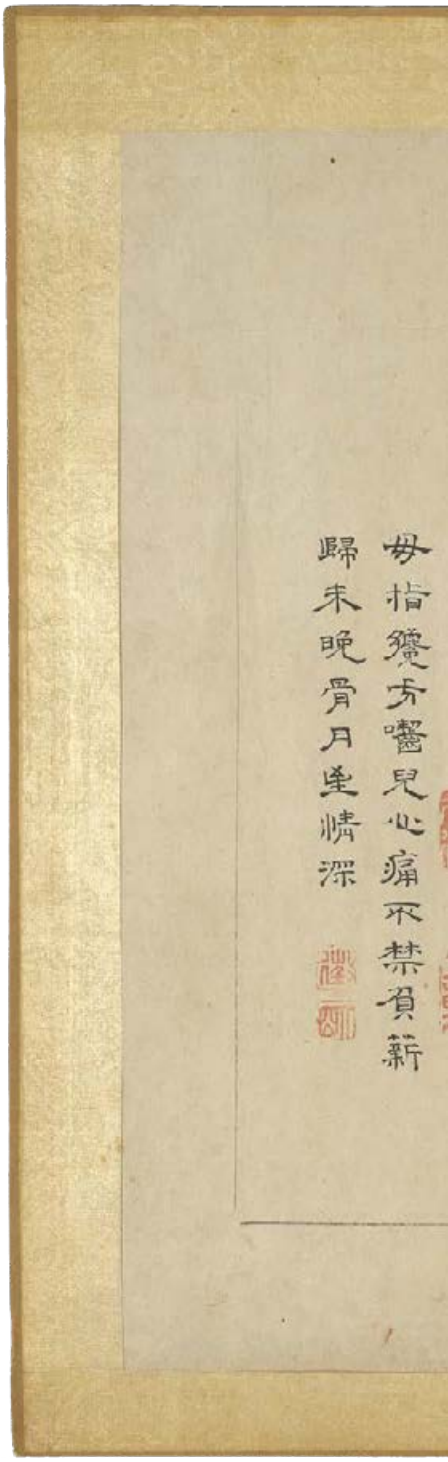
# AREN'T THEY STRANGE

## The exemplary deaths of premodern Chinese individuals

by Ying Zhang



TWO COMMON ATTITUDES arise when we read about peoples and cultures that seem alien or strange: we adopt either a linear view of human progress—"That was a terrible world. We are in a much better place now"—or we adopt a kind of moral relativism—"That's certainly a very different way of life. But we should not judge it." Both these attitudes, by reinforcing the divide between the familiar and the unfamiliar, prevent us from confronting difficult questions in meaningful ways. Studying some of the most characteristic phenomena in premodern Chinese history—for example, extreme behaviors motivated by strong Confucian ethical convictions—has led me to think about how to help us go beyond these two attitudes.

We can learn, for example, from the experiences of Western-educated intellectuals in modern China who viewed "traditional China" as being as strange as it is to us today. I encountered two such intellectuals in my research on imprisonment, spirituality, and politics: Zhang Dongsun (1886–1973) and Su Xuelin (1897–1999). Zhang refused to explain his suicide attempt as a conventional act of political loyalty, and instead confessed his vulnerability as a human being. Su acknowledged the critical thinking capabilities of premodern exemplars and recognized a universal quality in their spiritual pursuits. The ways in which their actions and writings engaged the past defy simple generalization. Once we disentangle them from modern discourses of nationalism and gender, they become more relatable to us.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the breakout of the Pacific War, in December 1941, some faculty members of the Yenching University, an institution with deep connections with the United States, became war prisoners in Japanese-occupied Beijing. Among them was the renowned philosophy professor Zhang Dongsun. While in prison, Zhang attempted suicide multiple times. The first method he tried was hanging. According to his own account, he felt so thrilled about the idea of suicide that his heart raced, and his hands were sweating. He blamed the failure of this first attempt on his excitement: had he been able to control himself and waited longer, till midnight, the noise made by his struggling body would not have alerted the guard. Zhang then tried to starve himself to death, but then changed his mind because it would have taken him a long time to die. He hit himself with the handcuffs. But already physically weak, Zhang could not hit his head forcefully enough. Again, the noise alerted the guard.

Next, Zhang yelled at the guards, hoping that they would be provoked to give him a quick execution. The Japanese saw through him and left him alone. Zhang then tried to stuff his nostrils to suffocate himself. But this experiment failed miserably. After all these unsuccessful attempts, he became more obsessed with his suicide mission. One day, he saw a nail on the wall, "a really big one!" The excitement struck again. He pointed his head at the nail and ran toward it. Only then did he realize that "the human skull is the toughest thing in the world." The nail did not immediately kill Zhang but instead caused severe bleeding. He tried to make himself bleed more. "The more the blood on the floor, the happier I was!" is how he described his state of ecstasy.


Image attributed to Qiu Ying (d.1552), *Pure Filial Piety*, Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), ink on paper, painting album. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan. Calligraphy by Zeng Shen (505–435 BC): "Went to the mountains to gather firewood. One day some guests came to visit. Zeng's mother did not know what to do. Waiting for her son anxiously, she bit her finger. Zeng felt a sharp pain in his heart. He rushed home with the wood he had gathered."

As scholars in the discipline of prison studies have shown, experiences of confinement vary significantly for individuals, ranging from depression to bliss. These very human reactions require us to resist simple generalization and to instead vigorously contextualize suffering and agency. Zhang himself confessed that the psychological pain caused by solitary confinement, threat of torture, and physical illness pushed him to the limits. Although he felt that a successful suicide might upset the Japanese because it "could be seen as a sort of resistance," his primary goal was to end the unbearable physical and mental suffering.

Zhang described how the confinement had driven him to commit suicide to the theologist Zhao Zichen (1888–1979), a colleague also imprisoned by the Japanese. Zhao believed that Zhang was experiencing a spiritual crisis. In his eyes, Zhang's "restlessness" confirmed the necessity of

the Christian faith. When they began to share the same cell, Zhao spent some time explaining to Zhang the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the importance of preserving their lives as a patriotic act. This documentation directly contradicts the popular interpretation of Zhang's suicide attempt. The Chinese public, including scholars today, have insisted on reading Zhang Dongsun's suicide attempt as motivated by anti-Japanese patriotism.

THE FIRST REACTION I had when coming across Zhang's account of his suicide attempt in prison was quite different. I had just read a very similar suicide story in a book published around the same time of Zhang's arrest, about a chaste wife in the mid-seventeenth century. I found the similarities between these two suicide stories striking, but I also found it fascinating that they triggered different public reactions.

In 1646, during the Manchu conquest of China, a woman surnamed Zhou learned that her literatus husband had been imprisoned by the invaders. She decided to commit suicide and tried a few methods. First, Zhou attempted to hang herself, but she did not die. Drowning failed as well. She then tried the ancient method of swallowing gold. It did not kill her. A friend of her husband's thought the gold she had swallowed was not pure enough. So he ground his wife's rings to obtain purer gold for Zhou. The purer gold, however, did not produce the ideal result. Next, Zhou slashed her own throat, but somehow she came back to life. Desperate and determined, she hanged herself once more. This time, it worked.

Stories of loyal men and chaste women who used suicide as a means of self-expression fill the pages of Chinese imperial histories. They were commemorated as Confucian moral exemplars, earning mentions in local gazetteers and dynastic records. The story of Zhou's suicide would not have been so problematic if it stayed *as the past*. But it appeared in 1941 in a book published in the wartime capital of the Republic of China during WWII. *The Biographies of Loyal and Brave People in the Southern Ming* presented individuals who died heroically during the violent transition from the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Commissioned by the Propaganda Department of the nationalist government, the Catholic scholar Su Xuelin compiled it for the war mobilization effort. The first edition of this book, which I examined at the Harvard-Yenching Library collection, carries distinct marks of war-time hardships: coarse paper, poor printing, fragile binding.

Artistic and scholarly representations of the historical "heroes" exploded during the anti-Japanese war. The public generally accepted the war propaganda that promoted patriotism by invoking loyalty to the imperial dynasties threatened by foreign invasions. Su Xuelin's book fell in this category of publications. But it met with harsh criticism from some prominent male scholars at the time, who judged her book with conventional historiographical expectations. When I read the book as a typical seventeenth-century specialist, I would agree with such criticisms. But Su's decision to include records of chaste women in this book intrigued me, and it further convinced me that her intellectual and moral explorations deserved serious consideration.

Su's editorial choice was so extraordinary because, in the Republic of China, female chastity was denounced as a symbol of Confucian oppression. Whereas Zhang Dongsun's suicide attempt could be readily (mis)interpretated as an act of patriotism, Su's representation of the woman Zhou's suicide did not fit well in the modern discourses of nationalism and women's liberation. Comparing the two suicide stories and the public reactions to them, I could not help but ask: Does this really confirm Su's inability to break away from her traditional gender upbringing, as scholars of modern literature often lament? Are there other ways to understand why she refused to treat the Confucian exemplary men and women differentially?

In the young Chinese republic, Su had enthusiastically embraced the New Culture movement that condemned the Confucian tradition that dominated the imperial past. She became one of the first modern Chinese female writers. While in high school, she composed biographies of several chaste women in her hometown and an essay documenting a classmate's cutting her own flesh to save her mother's life, a common way of expressing one's Confucian filial piety. In the 1920s, after returning from France, she published several articles on two important topics: patriarchy and relativism. Recalling how her mother fulfilled her feminine roles gracefully despite the mother-in-law's abuse, Su pointed out that men and women of the old times were victims of the dominant Confucian ethics, from which they had nowhere to escape. She argued that "each generation has its own moral standards" and one should not measure the previous generation by the new standards.

Witnessing endless human suffering, especially during the war, however, seemed to have changed how Su Xuelin related to historical figures' choices and actions. She began to actively seek ways to solve the contradictions among her different beliefs, especially in terms of reconciling her Catholic faith and her other interests such as Confucianism, science, and literature. She proposed that the older generations' practice of Confucian virtues such as loyalty and filial piety did not necessarily mean they blindly followed oppressive norms. What really mattered was "sincerity" in their selflessness, Su argued in her commentaries on prominent contemporary figures who, like premodern moral exemplars, cut their own flesh to make medicine for a parent. The recognition of and emphasis on sincerity, a spiritual quality pursued universally in human history, allowed Su to empathize with premodern Confucian moral exemplars despite her strong opposition to patriarchy. This empathy helped connect her varied self-identities, Chinese, Catholic, and modern. This also explains her decision to include a woman's sensational suicide, together with many other stories of seventeenth-century loyal, filial, and chaste subjects, in a modern war-mobilization book. Su hoped these stories would inspire individuals to take courageous actions motivated by sincere self-sacrifice.

By situating Su Xuelin's personal exploration in the longer history of Confucianism and Chinese religion, her scholarly and literary choices become more intelligible. At the risk of being blamed for endorsing female chastity, she wanted to reflect on a historical woman's agency and spirituality. Su's transformation illustrates something not only central to Confucian classical studies but also universal: the process of learning to understand Others is a process of self-discovery and self-cultivation. Many Confucianists in premodern China underwent a similar process. They did not simply memorize the classics for examinations. In their everyday life and work, they reflected critically on the philosophical and social theories passed on from the olden times, including biographies of moral exemplars and their extreme behaviors. Many Confucian scholars theorized tirelessly on the concept of sincerity in their practice of Confucian ethics and rituals, even if they did not take extreme actions in their own lives.

A similar pattern of empathetic emulation and critical reflection is apparent in the history of imprisoned elite men in imperial China. A handful of them were firmly established as exemplary prisoners, thanks to the efforts made by many generations of Confucian-educated men who, in poetry and art, commemorated the suffering and injustice that these men had to endure. Ordinary folks installed these Confucian exemplars as cult deities out of the belief that their extraordinary moral convictions (which sometimes resulted in a heroic death) could generate magical protective power. Maritime merchants and migrants took these worshipping practices with them on long journeys and to new homelands. What motivated both the elite and ordinary folks was a *sincere appreciation* of—not dogmatic imitation of—the *sincere selflessness* demonstrated by those historical figures in particular situations. This historical phenomenon cannot be reduced to ideological brainwashing.

In the end, these Chinese historical subjects—premodern elite prisoners and their worshippers, Western-educated modern intellectuals and their personal struggles—present to us the complexity of humanness that needs deep contextualization to be fully grasped. Emotional vulnerability and spiritual conviction could both lead to the extreme action of suicide. The Confucian exemplarity could be invoked to serve drastically different spiritual needs. It takes open-mindedness and willingness to suspend our analytical habits and communicate with them. But the reward is priceless: humanizing strangers from a different time and space and making their lives and choices comprehensible to our contemporary selves. □

# SWEETMEATS

Aref El Rayess, *Untitled* (1977–78), oil on canvas, 80 × 110 cm. Copyright: The Estate of Aref El Rayess.
Courtesy Sardar Collection, Beirut, Lebanon, and Sfeir-Semler Galerie, Hamburg

## Or, Who killed Issam Sukkar?

Fiction by Alexandra Chreiteh

THERE WERE MANY butcher shops, toy stores, and corpse-washing facilities in the peripheral town of Nun. So many, in fact, that anyone driving through would think the inhabitants of this town were only born to kill a poor calf for the *Fitr* holidays and light some fireworks from the roof of a low building, before departing from our world, reeking of orange-flower water and the stench of *Foole* restaurants that bordered most local funeral homes.

In reality, however, the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun were rarely ever born; they rarely celebrated holidays, and did not particularly care to burden their neighbors' noses with the smell of sulfur dioxide. The air in their town was already heavy with

diesel fumes emanating from the continuous flow of cars and various other vehicles on their way to cross the border between Lebanon and Syria. For when the events of this tale began, the peripheral town of Nun was the final resting place for exhausted travelers—bodies dripping with summer sweat and nipples frozen by the winter chill—before their entry into the narrow purgatory between the two national checkpoints.

And all the more, matters of life and death rarely bothered the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun (that lies on the Lebanese side of the border), since most of its corpses remained unwashed anyway. They usually perished as *shahid*s in armed conflict between Nun's warring families, who controlled the movement of every insect and blade of grass in town and disagreed on most things. So, grounds for a friendly exchange of fire could vary between a dispute over the lineage of someone's mother to a mosque's violation of the agreed-upon schedule for the *azan*. Since every neighborhood was controlled by one extended family, its mosque had to wait its turn to call for prayer—a peculiar yet calculated arrangement relative to every family's position in the local food chain.

These warring families owned most of the arteries comprising the town's economic center, so they agreed upon one thing and one thing only: a universal obligation to solve their differences, to the greatest extent possible, away from the establishments of business and pleasure that dotted the town's main street.

This main street was straight as a ruler, with cafés and little shops on either side and money exchange centers nestled in between. The street led right up to the border crossing, where tired travelers stepped outside of their vehicles for a bite or a drink, stretching their limbs after hours of confinement in shared taxis. The careless among them translated bills between the two liras—the Lebanese and Syrian—at exorbitant tariffs. In exchange, they would receive three wry winks from cashiers: one from the right eye, another from the left, and a final wink from a third eye nestled in the back of their hairless heads.

In keeping with their shared economic interests, the warring families of the peripheral town of Nun settled their accounts in the town's slender alleys or in the surrounding thicket, where the border was drawn with invisible ink and never bothered anyone. It was practically impossible to discern whether this rock was Syrian, or if those goat droppings were Lebanese, making it all the easier for the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun to smuggle certain hot commodities—Somali bananas, banned books by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, various sorts of "medicinal" plants, as well as deadly metal playthings eerily similar to children's toys.

While there is little doubt about the factual nature of our little story, the peripheral town of Nun has always been the subject of local lore, its peculiar location and tangled history the stuff of legends, some urban and others less so. One legend has it that on rare occurrences, when the army descends upon the town to secure the border—soldiers lined up on its invisible line like a row of crooked yellow teeth—the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun shapeshift into rabbits or moles, and occasionally into a buzzing ladybird that descends on the smooth barrel of a rifle gripped between the fat fingers guarding the fatherland. It is a known fact that the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun can identify every hole and cavity that punctures the threshold between the two states like pores in a sieve. Nothing under the sun can stop them from crossing this threshold, not even the dire matter of national security.

So, as any old cockroach scuttering through the dark labyrinths of State Security would confirm, there was no way of keeping the inhabitants of Nun within Lebanon's borders; it was a task more difficult than milking a goose.

The street led right up to the border crossing, where tired travelers stepped outside of their vehicles for a bite or a drink, stretching their limbs after hours of confinement in shared taxis.

Still, none of them ever wandered more than fifteen kilometers away from the soil where their head first crowned; most of the town's heads entered the world and immediately plopped onto the moldy sheets of its only midwife. Her shaking hand, in the final years of life, would drop every fetus that burst out, failing to redden the slimy skin on their behinds and delaying their first screams until it was almost too late.

In short, the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun satisfied themselves with watching the ebb and flow of the passing masses, their eyes laden with indifference. They had truly seen it all: elderly ladies on their way to Damascus to buy bedsheets and underwear; families traveling to Turkey in old cars that were destined to collapse midway; young men exporting live chickens and looking for cheap nightclubs that they will not find, since they usually passed by their inconspicuous doors, not realizing what really goes on behind them. People arrived in Lebanon and departed; the Earth went round and round; the sun rose and set; the moon blew up and shrank; border control agents flipped through passports—and the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun remained fixed in the same place, like an entry visa stamp etched on the colorful gloss of embassy paper.

EVERY YEAR, IN the beginning of the summer holidays, Sawsan crosses the border into Nun to visit her cousin Hind.

Cousin Hind moved to Nun in the '90s from their hometown of H. that buttresses the customs building of the Syrian Arab Republic. She had married her Lebanese maternal cousin, and the entire extended family lived so

close to the border from both sides that it almost certainly ran between their kitchen and the living room. If Mr. Sykes—they would all say jokingly—had suddenly sneezed, or if a reckless mosquito had landed in Mr. Picot's coffee, then the border would have shifted slightly in that fateful moment, and both Hind and her husband could have been born in the same country.

But no matter, since Cousin Hind became a Lebanese citizen faster than a cock could crow, thanks to the two eggs and skinny sausage hanging between her husband's thighs. The Lebanese Republic knighted her into citizenship before the ink on the marriage license was dry. It then stood

If a reckless mosquito had landed in Mr. Picot's coffee, then the border would have shifted slightly in that fateful moment, and both Hind and her husband could have been born in the same country.

by in anticipation of any fruit that tumbled out of her womb, but Hind's womb remained empty, and things didn't tumble out of there quite so often.

And so it was: a month into her marriage, Hind packed her bags and left her immediate family behind in Syria. "Strange," she said to herself one morning, because it seemed to her like she had never really left. Her family was still no more than half an hour's drive away, a journey that could have been much shorter were it not for the occasional traffic congestion at the border. And Hind would cross this border freely—no permit or visa were required then—popping by her mother's house for a morning coffee whenever she was able to miss her enough. She still lived in the border area and her life was good. It was all as easy as gliding over margarine softened by the warm brotherhood between the two nations.

"It's a forced brotherhood, though, isn't it?" her husband blurted out once, after years of silence, when protests filled Martyr's Square and red flags fluttered everywhere.

"What kind of brotherhood is ever voluntary?" Hind snapped back. "Did you handpick your brothers and sisters yourself?"

The husband sighed in silence: his wife was right, as usual. And he never mentioned this again, even on the day that they sat sipping tea on their balcony as Syrian military vehicles roared through Nun's main street. One by one,

the vehicles crossed the border back into Syria. Dust floated in the air in such quantities that it gave everyone momentary asthma and sedimented in a thick layer on the surface of the husband's tea, but this didn't prevent him from finishing it, in heavy silence.

OUR STORY REALLY begins one scorching summer day, during one of Sawsan's yearly visits to Cousin Hind, when a swarm of blackberry brambles invaded the peripheral town of Nun. The events that unraveled that day left their mark on the town and its inhabitants, as permanent as the dent of a boot brushing past a corner of wet cement.

It began suddenly: the green, prickly arms crept from the surrounding thicket with the speed of an army of slugs, unnoticed at first by town's warring families, who were busy shooting out an argument over the nature of hyenas nearby (were they more like dogs, or foxes?). By the time the vines flooded the little side alleys, the general sense of panic had risen in the air like static before a storm. Soon, the brambles arrived in the main street and climbed the walls of its little cafes and butcher shops. Branches slithered and hung over window frames like green curtains swaying in the wind. Their leaves spread, their flowers bloomed and withered, lumps of fruit began to appear, and the shaggy green mass that now covered the buildings' facades was immediately infested with rats.

Movement stopped in the peripheral town of Nun, but the vines crept on, unfolding in the middle of the main street like a lush, green carpet. They swallowed the cars waiting to cross into Syria and twisted around giant lorry wheels. Then, they surrounded the offices of the Lebanese customs and began to rise upwards, weaving a green wall right at the border. The blackberries ripened and hung heavy on their branches; their black syrup stuck to the hands of anyone who dared touch them, refusing to be washed off, even with turpentine.

THIS WASN'T SAWSAN'S day to begin with anyway. It started off with the arrival of Lebanese Health Ministry workers to the town, early that morning. They were tasked with shutting down the majority of Nun's butcher shops, where Sawsan worked as a cleaner during the summer months, washing the blood off the floors, scrubbing cement walls with thick brushes, throwing cold water on glass storefronts, peeling sedimented meat residues from dark corners, and pulling old skin off the blades of butcher knives. The remaining nine months Sawsan spent cleaning a school in the Syrian town of H., but since there were no teenagers in the building and no bodily fluids to clean during the summer months, she needed another source of income. Otherwise, her meager finances would tumble down towards the sea like streams of thawing snow.

Her husband the date picker had passed away five years ago, when his foot slipped as soon as he climbed to the top of a tall palm tree. Sawsan was left with four children to support, in addition to her mother the *Hajjeh*, who swallowed so many pills that Sawsan suspected that a small black market in the area catered to her needs alone. On top of that, Sawsan also helped out her careless sister Nafiseh, who treated money like toilet paper—as far as Sawsan was concerned—and didn't trust the banks. Instead, Nafiseh kept her cash inside the casing of a neon lamp and didn't even notice when a some of it was gone (Sawsan was used to borrowing small amounts from her sister and stuffing them back into the neon casing later).

So, on that fateful day—the day that the crazed fruit began spreading in Nun's soil—Sawsan found herself outside the closed doors of one of the local butcher shops. She watched as security forces cordoned a small number of ministry employees, as they prepared to seal the shop's doors with red wax. It was stressful to watch, and Sawsan chewed her nails until she bit into the flesh. Drops of blood seeped into her white shirt when she crossed her arms in tense anticipation.

Then, an event even more astonishing befell the peripheral town of Nun. Its warring families momentarily forgot their differences and arrived at that butcher shop in rusted pick-up trucks, the same trucks that usually transported meat to the coastal markets. The families were there to protest the Lebanese state's meddling in the town's affairs, disrupting its places of business. The families hoisted their rifles; the security forces held up their shields; riot squads were called in for reinforcement, and Sawsan moved away to avoid the stray bullets that never came, because the green blackberry branches wrapped themselves around the men's feet, planted thorns into the fabric of their pants, and secured their bodies to the ground. Perplexed, all the men stood there silently, staring in horror as the little green prickly arms curved around their nostrils and inserted themselves into the narrow darkness of their ear canals.

Soon, the brambles arrived in the main street and climbed the walls of its little cafes and butcher shops. Branches slithered and hung over window frames like green curtains swaying in the wind.

Rumors rang far and wide, finally flowing into Sawsan's ears: several shipments of rotten meats had killed one person in Beirut and poisoned many others, who were rushed to hospitals in critical conditions. All of this happened months ago, but water flows slowly through rusted pipes, and the ministry arrived in town only today, ready to take the appropriate measures for the protection of citizen consumers.

An hour passed, and the brambles spread through the town like an egg on the sizzling face of a frying pan. The security forces and the local militiamen still stood, statue-like

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and sweating, in front of the butcher store. The summoned riot squad sped towards Nun but was forced to come to a screeching halt once it reached the town's eastern limits. They were met there by the brambles, which twisted around their side mirrors and tickled the soles of military boots. Drivers pressed angry feet on gas pedals and engines growled ominously, but the military vehicles failed to inch any closer to the town.

Meanwhile, the western periphery of Nun was awaiting the arrival of the creeping plants with flagrant incredulity. The potato seller busily marketed another harvest that no one really wanted to buy, since imported potatoes were cheaper. Suddenly, a sea of green appeared in his rearview

They were met there by the brambles, which twisted around their side mirrors and tickled the soles of military boots. Drivers pressed angry feet on gas pedals and engines growled ominously, but the military vehicles failed to inch any closer to the town.

mirror, inching closer like an advancing tide. His truck puttered and wheezed as the potato seller drove calmly up the hill, but the brambles soon rubbed their thorns against his back wheels and began racing him to the top.

The potato seller wasn't a reckless man: he stopped his truck in the middle of the hill and climbed onto one of the nearby roofs. His friend the mayor then declared a state of emergency and began sending him instructions via text message, so the potato seller lifted his loudspeaker and projected the mayor's words into the skies. He urged the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun to join the counterattack against the advancing plants, and all those who heard his incessant pleas felt the hair on their bodies suddenly stand erect. They were used to hearing the potato seller's chirping voice as he shuttled through the town's narrow side streets, and the rising panic that now buzzed from the depths of his throat was a testament to the scope of the disaster that was slowly engulfing their town.

"People of Nun!" the potato seller cried. "Follow your mayor into the darkness to emerge into the light!"

But the mayor of the peripheral town of Nun wasn't interested in leading his own vine culling campaign. He was conveniently trapped in one of the cafés on the main street, where his gang sat holding their hookah hoses in silence. They watched anxiously as the green prickly arms slithered through the window cracks, even though the men had made sure to shut the windows as soon as news of the invasion broke, and to secure all the locks.

Not a single person in the peripheral town of Nun responded to the potato seller's desperate call. So, the mayor released another statement, this time through one of the giant loudspeakers attached to a nearby minaret. His words rumbled over Nun's skies melodically, straining the vocal cords of a local muezzin, who had gone up the narrow pedestal to call for prayer and couldn't come back down to see it answered.

In his second message to the people, the mayor promised monetary compensation—payable immediately and in full—to anyone who helped stop the plants from spreading. "The berries have already swollen to the size of apples," the mayor warned, and if the townspeople allowed this monstrous fruit to ripen and drop onto our soil, its seeds would spread like a flame on a puddle of diesel oil, and the brambles would soon swallow Nun whole, leaving behind a desolate desert. But no one moved a muscle this time either, so the plants continued to grow and twist and creep and swallow and ripen seven days and seven nights. All the while, Sawsan was flooded by a sense of relief, the like of which she hadn't felt in years.

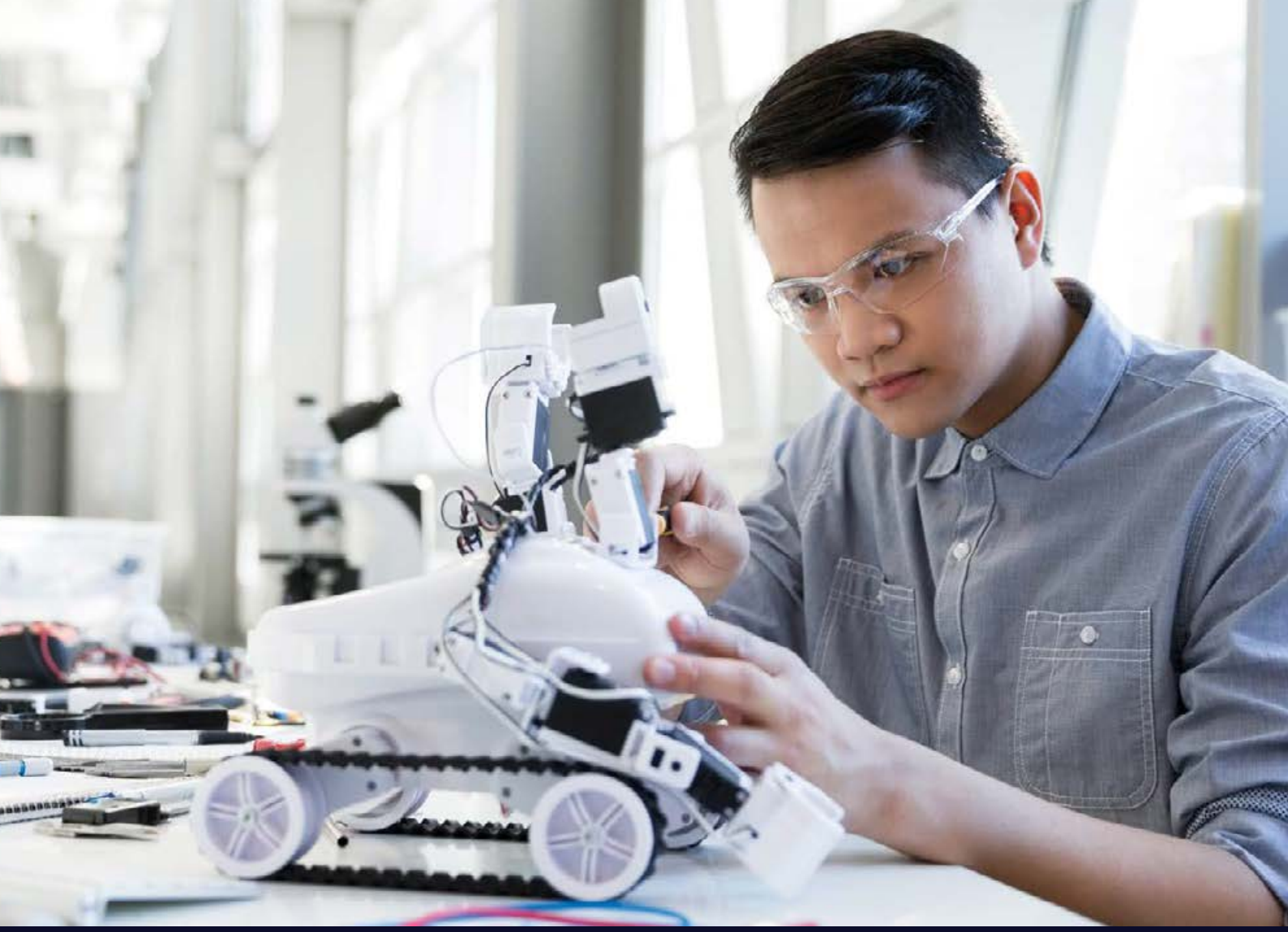
Then, one morning, she was rudely awakened by the smell of smoke. A fire crackled outside one of Cousin Hind's windows, and the large trees that shaded that part of the house were already reduced to piles of ash. The fire had crept to the peripheral town of Nun from the surrounding thicket and sent the inhabitants to their roofs, where they raised their tongues to the sky and prayed for rain. The flames also raised their tongues, licking the bellies of swarming birds that soared, confused and homeless, over the town.

The fire raged for many days and many nights. When it finally subsided, the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun descended from their roofs, closed their blinds, and drowned in a fatigue so deep that they fell into a weeklong slumber.

When they finally awoke, none of them dared step out into the sun during noon hours. June passed, water froze in the surrounding springs, and the sky spit grey ice on the streets. Then, in July, geraniums bloomed in powdered milk cans lining the town's balconies. And all the while, the inhabitants of the peripheral town of Nun remained numb; their bodies lay limp on sweaty bedsheets like colored playdough softened by the warmth of small fingers.

When Sawsan's sister, Nafiseh, found the body in the basement, the peripheral town of Nun was still so dazed by the creeping brambles that no one noticed who had dragged it in there, and how they had gone out undetected, even by the cameras mounted on the building's austerely concrete siding. □

This excerpt from *Sweetmeats* was translated from Arabic by the author and is here reprinted with permission.



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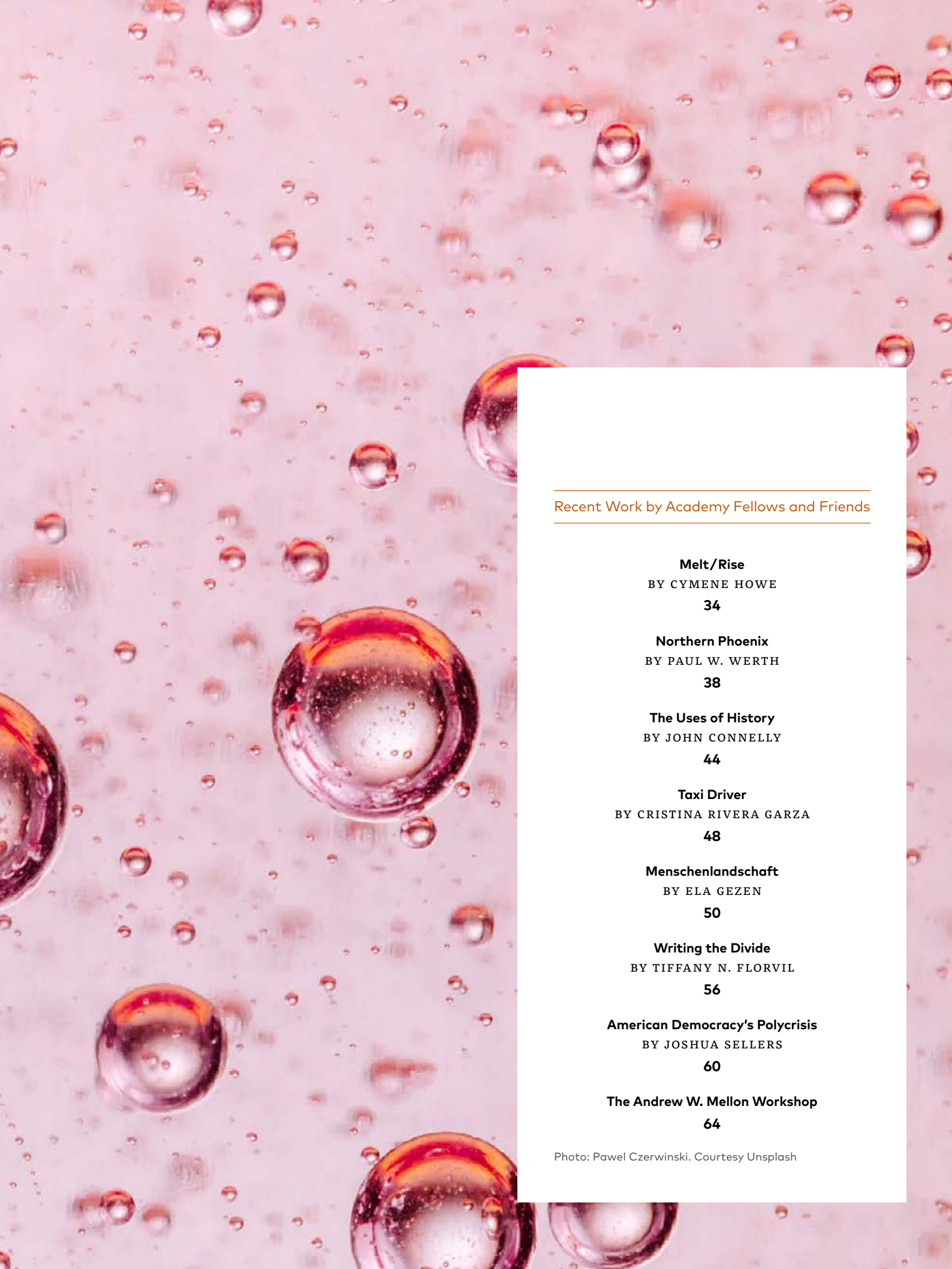

Recent Work by Academy Fellows and Friends



Photo: Pawel Czerwinski. Courtesy Unsplash

# MELT / RISE

Climate change and the global interconnectedness of water

by Cymene Howe

"An ocean erases everything
that is written in sand."
— *Oral Traditions*, by William
Nu'utupu Giles and Travis T.

**FOR OCEAN SCIENTISTS,** water encircles the Earth in a relatively uninhibited interchange and transference across the world hydrosphere. The seas of the planet are one body, in fact, never quite captured in a name—Pacific or Indian or Atlantic. And this world ocean does not just lie there inert and subdued. Its motion is constant, in tides, currents, and conveyors. Its movement is also skyward, rising-up into the atmosphere, evaporating into clouds, and returning as rain and snow, sleet and storm. A hydrological cycle of watery interplay. As such, the world ocean erodes and carries, flows and sweeps. As anthropologist Hi'ilei Julia Hobart reminds us, "Water's nature is diasporic. It transits and carries and adapts to environments whether engineered, neglected, or carefully preserved. Often, it misbehaves in such a way that reminds humans of the limits of their own power and control." Its disobedience is its magic.

Bodies of water have always held a special place in our collective human imagination. Water is a life *force* that sustains all living beings; it is also a life *space* that creates environments and ecosystems for organisms to thrive. In many cosmological systems, bodies of water are also life *forms*, sentient beings, with powers uniquely theirs and forever interacting with other beings around them. But bodies of water in these times of environmental distress are becoming infused with new meanings and new potentials as they are impacted by human-created heat now channeled into the world's waters through rising atmospheric temperatures and a warming earth.

Think, for example, of the water called ice. At the southern pole of the world, the frozen continent of Antarctica has lost almost six-trillion-five-hundred-billion tons of ice in the last thirty years. In the Arctic north, heat is turning glaciers and ice sheets into meltwater faster than anywhere else on Earth. We know that these sites of melt are pouring vast quantities of water into the world ocean. Arctic glaciers, as they are transformed from solid to liquid, now represent the source of more sea-level rise than any other: more than the distending effects of oceanic thermal expansion and more than the disintegration of the icy continent on the southern end of our planet.

I am not a glaciologist or an oceanographer. I am a cultural anthropologist who wants to understand the social consequences of a melting world. For several years, I've been studying the loss of ice in places where it has long been a part of lives and landscapes. My focus has centered on how people understand their environments and all that is sustained by them, historically and in the present, and how that is being transformed by climate change. In the course of this work, my research partner and I came across Okjökull—the first of Iceland's major glaciers to be destroyed by climate change. Scant attention had been given to Okjökull's passing, and so we enlisted a handful of Icelandic colleagues and held a public funeral for the little glacier called Ok; it was the world's first memorial for a glacier and was covered by media outlets all over the world.

In trying to understand the social impact of melting ice, I have also been keenly aware of the other end of this geohydrological event, namely, the *rise of seas* brought on by the melt of ice. And so I began to ask: What if we could follow the water from our melting glaciers to the coasts of the world where glaciers now manifest as sea-level rise? Where would we go and what stories would we find along the way? Is the ice that has now become water creating routes and passages of connectivity between otherwise distant places? If so, how might melting ice, transformed into rising seas, tie us together across continents through the connective reach of the world ocean?

**MARY DOUGLAS,** a cultural anthropologist writing in the mid-twentieth century, thought quite a lot about what she called "matter out-of-place." She wrote specifically, and quite eloquently, about dirt. Dirt was an idea. But it was also a substance that might be just fine over there, on the "outside," but that was never welcome here, on the "inside." Indeed, some dirt, when out-of-place, could even rise to the level of taboo.

Water moving outside of its usual boundaries is, of course, much more than a philosophical question. It is a painful, sometimes deadly, reality in times when extreme storms, sea-level rise, and floods are increasingly flowing into our lives and over our doorsteps. Douglas's meditation on dirt still reveals attitudes that many people continue to hold about how earthly, or watery, substances can be made to remain under human control. Like dirt, we may want water to stay in its place. But that human conceit of control is being increasingly challenged in times of anthropogenic climate change, when there is a lot of matter—in fact many matters—out-of-place. Although responsibility for these outcomes or their impacts are not equally shared, it is clear that momentous environmental changes are upon us, and we are collectively struggling to manage

all that is now out-of-place, including water in the form of sea-level rise, storms, and floods.

As ice continues to transform around the world, we have now started to follow its water from once-frozen places to others, where the ocean swells and rises. In this multi-year research project, supported by the US National Science Foundation, we begin in the Arctic region and then land in coastal cities further to the south. Part of this work involves trying to unravel how water in motion is being charted and graphed by scientists. Another part of this work requires asking questions about how communities, industries, government officials, and others are coping with ice loss or, alternately, bracing for sea-level surges. I am interested in how these responses, or "adaptations," might be similar or different across sites, not only in terms of their adaptive actions—like the installation of seawalls or new infrastructures to control overflowing glacial rivers—but also how these responses are scaled, across time and space, as well as the political and economic commitments behind them. Equally important to me is how local communities are reckoning with these tremendous changes in their local environments and how this may result in a sense of loss, or outrage, or even hope for new possibilities.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN** a changing cryosphere—Earth's ice—and its precise impact on sea levels along the world's coasts has been very challenging for scientists to track. In part, that is because the "bathtub model" predominates in many climate projections—showing us simply how the volume of meltwater adds to the world ocean but not how it manifests very differently in coastal locations according to a whole host of criteria, including local currents, subsidence, and erosion, to name a few. But a group of physicists at NASA has recently created a way to map this relationship. Their model, called the Gradient Fingerprint Map (or GFM), can calculate where specific sites of melting ice will appear as sea-level rise in 293 of the world's coastal cities. By pinpointing mass and meltwater contributions from each major glacial basin on Earth—from the Himalayas to Antarctica and from

As ice continues to transform around the world, we have now started to follow its water from once-frozen places to others, where the ocean swells and rises.

the Canadian Arctic to the Southern Andes—the model demonstrates a precise relationship between lost ice and sea-level gain. In short, it shows how Earth's gravitational and rotational processes, as well as the redistribution of mass, are contorted by the melting of the world's ice and how that influences the world ocean on a planetary scale.

When we try to follow meltwater in its passage to become sea-level rise elsewhere, we learn that, unlike the borders drawn on maps, the movement of the world's water does not conform to a linear path. In a sense, there is no path at all but instead a contortion of earth's "liquid envelope." As meltwater from glaciers and ice sheets conjoins with the world ocean, the planet's gravity, as well as its rotation, are shifted, creating different spatial patterns of sea-level rise around the world. In one of our conversations, Eric Larour, a lead physicist in the development of the GFM tool, described it like this: "It's like a spinning top. If you could modify the spinning top while it rotates, maybe touch it and remove some mass, it will start wobbling very differently. . . [A]s soon as you remove a bit of mass from that big giant spinning top, which is the Earth, the rotation axis of the spinning top wants to move towards the mass that was lost." Drawing upon the physics of shifting ice and water, the GFM tool allows users to see with precision where melting ice results in specific amounts of sea-level rise in particular cities the world over. It shows, for instance, that Cape Town, South Africa, is more affected by Icelandic melt than any other city in the world, and that Greenlandic melt impacts sea level rise in Honolulu, Hawaii, more than any other city in the United States.

**THE WORLD OCEAN** is not simply water in motion, however, it is also in concert with ice, connecting points on the globe in rather counterintuitive ways. The consequences of a melting world and its effects on the world ocean and those of us—indeed all of us—impacted by it cannot focus only on the physics of displaced water as an Anthropocene fugitive. Instead, we ought to look to the multiple (and multiplying) socio-natural interconnections that are made through these processes. Can we begin to think of this watery diaspora as a kind of hydrological globalization? A set of planetary relationships that may not have been uniquely created by a warming climate but which are made more apparent, and perhaps urgent, by the rapid transformation of the world's hydrosphere?

The concept of "globalization" proliferated at the end of the Cold War, when neoliberal capitalism became the economic norm on a planetary scale; originally this was meant as economic globalization. But very quickly in the human sciences, globalization came to designate many more processes, including links of trade and migration, financial markets, and the circulation of media. Conceptually, these accounts of human exchange and movement were predicated upon ideas of circulation and the flow of ideas, persons, capital, and so on. Theories of globalization have generally ignored the *physical* drivers of global transformation, such as the Earth system, in their analyses of *social*

outcomes. But the concept of globalization requires rethinking in the Anthropocene—this time of exceptional, traceable, pervasive human impact. Ideas about globalization need reworking not only because human movement across borders or the direction of commodities may be changing, but because the natural world is perceptibly transforming all around us. Places, things, and people are now being markedly altered by changing biospheres, atmospheres, cryospheres, lithospheres, and hydrospheres in ways that can be empirically tracked and diagnosed. This demands new ways of reckoning with globalization as a process that is not simply market-oriented or even explicitly human-focused, but instead attentive to the socio-natural connectivities brought about by an altered earth.

As the world's water becomes distributed in unexpectedly new ways under the impact of anthropogenic forces—through a collapsing cryosphere and sea-level rise, extreme rain events and groundwater depletion—the concept of hydrological globalization signals the emergent connections between water in motion and responses to it. Hydrological globalization emphasizes global connectivities not primarily through links of trade, migration, finance, or media, but rather through physical relationships created as our hydrosphere is reshaped. Conceptually, it allows us to follow the impacts and uptakes of watery rearrangements—connecting geographical sites, both materially and socially, by literally connecting them through their water.

Global hydrological changes are affecting, and will continue to affect, every population on Earth—as waters move and transform through storms and drought, melt and rise. What ties of hydrological connectivity might be arising in this process? What are the deep blue threads they reveal? As these strands begin to become woven together, we hope that our research may share not only the divergences but also the similarities across places and populations experiencing both melt and rise. We imagine these connections as a kind of "Sister Cities of the Anthropocene" that could be marked in informative maps and graphical visualizations, ultimately informing public and environmental policies based on hard-science conclusions that clearly link distant places through the interconnectivity created by a world ocean being reshaped by global climate change. □

# NORTHERN PHOENIX

Pierre Marie Joseph Vernet, *Fire in the Winter Palace* (1838), oil on canvas. Location: The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

# The conflagration of the Winter Palace, 1837

by Paul W. Werth

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT other people, but if I owned one of the world's grandest palaces, and if that palace suddenly burned down, and if on top of that I had unlimited power (I realize that this is all rather unlikely), then I would definitely rebuild that palace immediately. And it turns out that I am not alone, for this is exactly what Russian Emperor Nicholas I resolved to do after one of Russia's most spectacular fires, which broke out at the Winter Palace on December 17, 1837, and burned itself out thirty hours later.

The conflagration was a stunning spectacle. As an eyewitness recounted, "The entire palace, from one end to the other, appeared as a blazing sea of flame, a massive bonfire drawing everything into its gradual incidence." It was also a powerfully public event. It was visible from as far away as seventy kilometers, and, as the *Northern Bee* reported, "People from all corners of the city gathered in thick crowds on adjoining areas and on the Neva River and in speechless sorrow beheld the destructive effects of the flames." All that was left standing was the hulking skeleton of what had been among the greatest palaces in the world. An unknown number had perished, many in desperate attempts to save articles from the fire and to prevent its transmission to the adjoining Hermitage, which housed the tsars' extensive art collection. Thus for the imperial family—and for all those in Russia who identified

with it in one way or another—the year 1837 ended on a sour note, with the autocracy's principal symbol in utter ruins. As one of Nicholas's close servitors, Alexei Orlov, wrote in late December, "The expiring year has parted with us in a most grievous fashion."

How exactly did the conflagration unfold? A smell of smoke had been detectable in and around the Field Marshals' Hall as early as two days before the fire emerged in full force, but efforts to identify its source had been unsuccessful. By the evening of December 17, the smell of smoke had reappeared and become stronger, and even as no flame was visible it became difficult even to see across the hall.

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When firemen began to break up the parquet floor around a suspicious stove vent, a false-mirror door into the next corridor came crashing down, and bright flame emerged from the opening. The emperor, at the theatre that evening, quickly returned to the palace when informed of the situation. After dispatching his children to the Anichkov Palace for safety, Nicholas made an inspection and unwisely ordered the windows of the Field Marshals' Hall to be broken so as to clear away the smoke. A strong wind entered the room, and tongues of flame jumped forth and quickly reached the ceiling. Around 10 p.m. the windows on the second floor broke with a terrible cracking sound, and flame emerged from the edifice along with clouds of smoke. One witness on the square below recounted how up until that point things had been calm and there was no sign of the fire from outside.

But then: "Suddenly, as if by someone's command or by an act of sorcery [. . .] the glass fell out of the palace's windows, the frames fell burning to the square, the blinds on the windows suddenly dropped, and at that moment snakes of fire began to rise up. And at that same moment the entire palace was illuminated from within." That sudden transformation of the palace from darkness into flame caused everyone on the square "to gasp in one voice simultaneously." A "frightful mass" of smoke poured out from within the palace.

Many factors converged to facilitate the fire's dramatic spread. Originally completed when the science of fire prevention was still young, the palace contained much that was combustible and little to prevent a fire's movement. Existing firewalls included apertures, and there were no firewalls at all in the palace's attics, which thus opened a pathway for the fire to spread easily across the building. Ceiling and roof constructions—densely packed rafters, beams, and footbridges—were all made of wood, representing plentiful food for the fire. The palace's attics, wrote one commentator who had grown up in the palace, featured "forests of immense trees, standing more closely packed than masts of a numberless and compressed fleet at harbor." Once the fire arrived here, nothing could extinguish it. Although the palace had its own fire brigade and there were reservoirs of water under the roof, the pumps malfunctioned, and the fire continued its march across ceilings and down walls. The pumps of the city fire department meanwhile proved insufficient to cast streams of water to the upper parts of the building, where the fire was most intense. To top matters off, the evening featured a piercing wind that fanned the flames energetically.

By all accounts the fire was stunning in magnitude. George Mifflin Dallas, the US minister to Russia at the time, reported on the evening of December 18 that the palace was still "blazing in every direction with almost unabated fury. As a spectacle, it is more grand and imposing than any exhibition I ever beheld." The poet Vasilii Zhukovskii confirmed: "The spectacle, according to eyewitnesses, was indescribable: a volcano had erupted in the center of Petersburg." In such a phenomenon "there was something inexpressible: in its very destruction it was as if the palace, with all its windows, columns, and statues, was being engraved as a black mass on a bright, palpitating flame." Another witness, guardsman D. G. Kolokoltsov, noted that everyone on the palace square was bathed in the color of flame, while only the palace's stone walls provided shade. The palace's window openings became "immense gates through which that thick smoke poured out and was spread into the air by the raging wind." Appearing out of the smoke above the palace's roof was "a black cloud, indeed a storm cloud, which was illuminated by an immense glow in the sky." Another witness recounted, "The sky changed in appearance by the minute; violet, then black, then scarlet clouds flew out from the furnace. [. . .] The fire lashed out from the windows, flowed along the pillars in cascades, beat like fountains, and ran along the cornices, eagerly seeking out forgotten fuel." The composer Mikhail Glinka, giving a night-time singing lesson at the time, recounted that the fire illuminated his apartment enough that he could read by its light.

Quickly it became clear that the palace itself could not be saved; one could only hope to rescue its most valuable possessions and above all to secure the neighboring Hermitage. Nicholas instructed soldiers to focus on furniture and similar items, and to leave behind heavier articles, such as statues. "Save what you can," he said of the empress's quarters, "but I ask that you don't put yourselves at risk." Historian W. Bruce Lincoln's 1989 biography of Nicholas notes that "crowds of soldiers with the full ardor of devoted zeal threw themselves into the burning building and spread out in various directions." Of personal priority to Nicholas were his wife's

letters from before their marriage ("Let everything else burn up," he supposedly said). Also of priority were military banners and portraits that decorated the Field Marshals' Hall and the Gallery of 1812. Soldiers of the Preobrazhenskii Guard, among the first to arrive on the scene, were able to remove all of those quickly on the emperor's command. At one point, with so many soldiers rushing up the stairways with bricks for impromptu firewalls, it became impossible for others to carry anything down, and some simply started throwing less fragile items out the window. At times anarchy reigned. Kolokoltsov described the situation inside the burning palace as "sheer chaos" and "genuine disarray," in which "the soldiers themselves did not know what they were doing." There was smoke everywhere, nothing was discernible, and few even knew where they were.

Objects saved from fire—furniture, dishes, marble statues, porcelain vases, crystal, paintings, clocks, chandeliers, etc.—were deposited on the Palace Square, by the Alexander column, where they mingled weirdly with the less luxurious possessions of servants, chimney sweeps, and waiters. From the collections of the palace's silver, reportedly not a single one went missing or was even damaged. In January the empress praised the "unbelievable solicitude" underlying efforts to save the palace's material possessions, "even the smallest items."

As the fire claimed more of the palace, the task of saving the Hermitage acquired heightened significance. Doors and windows connecting it to the palace were hastily bricked up, and the wooden gallery between them was knocked down, leaving only iron beams between the two structures. Soldiers and fireman sat on the beams and directed water at the palace to prevent the fire's advance; several were killed when a burst of flame from the palace knocked them to the ground. All of Millionnaia Street (leading northeast from the Palace Square) was packed with fire teams and their equipment. "A large quantity of fire hoses were working non-stop," shooting streams

of water not only into the palace, but also onto the Hermitage itself. Everyone in the vicinity was soaking wet, including the emperor and Grand Duke Michael, whose efforts were central to the Hermitage's salvation. Its defense "was an extremely dangerous task" requiring "supernatural human strength." But it was accomplished.

In the main, the fire had subsided by the morning of December 19, though by some accounts it continued to smolder for a week or more. In the end all that was left were the blackened walls of the palace. Zhukovskii provided some sense of the awe created by the resulting picture:

> Looking at those burned out walls, behind which just a few days ago there was such magnificence and such life, and which are now so empty and gloomy, your soul involuntarily feels reverence: you don't know whether to marvel at the grandeur of the thing that has been destroyed and yet even in ruins remains so solid; or at the might of the force that could so easily and so quickly annihilate something that seemed so permanent.

Another observer reported vividly that the building's remnant "stood sullenly like a warrior, powerful but covered with wounds and blackened by the smoke of an unprecedented battle, with his helmet in pieces and his armor shattered."

Such, then, was the famed Winter Palace on December 19, 1837.

EVEN BEFORE A COMMISSION had been formed to identify the precise causes of the fire (its conclusions were vague so as not to implicate the emperor's own earlier judgment), reconstruction had begun. The emperor's aggressive plan called for the palace's restoration in just over a year so that he might celebrate Easter of 1839 in the restored edifice.

First to appear was a temporary roof to protect the salvageable walls, and architect Vasilii Stasov immediately oversaw the placement of scaffolds. So hot were the remaining walls that the scaffolds quickly dried out and periodically burst into flame, thus requiring monitors day and night. Workers constructed a tall wall around the entire construction site, while various service buildings—sheds for tools, offices for foremen and architects, kitchens for feeding work crews, ovens for firing alabaster, a field hospital, etc.—appeared within. Engineer L. M. Baranovich, who was directly involved in the restoration, reports that there were no fewer than 1,000 people on the site every day, and around 10,000 workmen labored on the project at one point or another.

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The work was hard and almost continuous. The architects faced exceptional challenges given the strict deadline, and many problems demanded uncommon ingenuity. Consider, for example, that certain phases of the work had to occur at unsuitable times of the year. In order to accelerate the drying of 52 new walls and other structures inside the new palace, crews constructed ten enormous coke furnaces and twenty immense fans to blow hot air into the emerging edifice. Window openings were closed over with the goal of attaining a consistent temperature of 45 °C, which proved harmful to the workers and caused stoppages. For the most part, though, the work, once in train, did not stop. Even on July 1, the empress's name-day (a holiday), Nicholas ordered the work to continue, though he did provide 7,500 cups of vodka for workmen to celebrate the event (his provision of 1,200 liters of the stuff on an earlier occasion demonstrated that he knew how to motivate his workers).

The progress was rapid. Already by August 1838 one observer could claim (probably with exaggeration), "There is almost no trace of the calamitous fire." By mid-October, repairs of the walls and roof were done, and the scaffolding was removed to reveal the renewed edifice to the city's inhabitants. Because the fire had started in the Field Marshals' Hall, Nicholas set as a goal to have that room fully restored on the first anniversary of the fire—December 17, 1838. On that same day, portions of the palace were illuminated from within, already creating the impression that the fire had never occurred. On February 2, 1839, the palace's Small Chapel was reconsecrated, and on Easter Night (March 25–26) Nicholas formally dedicated the new palace and began residing there with his family. He and over 3,000 of his subjects attended Mass at the palace's church on Easter Sunday. Soon, 6,000 workers received silver medals from the tsar. One side featured the inscription "I thank you," and the other, alongside an image of the palace façade, "Zeal overcomes all."

The 1830s in Europe were a time of uncertainty and revolution—something of which the Russian Emperor was well aware. The destruction of the palace represented a potential challenge to the country's autocracy and the social order that it sought to uphold. It was in part for this reason that Nicholas put such a premium on the palace's rapid reconstruction and insisted that the new palace be identical (outwardly, at least) to the old—as if to negate that the catastrophe had even occurred. Today as well, few visitors to Russia's famed State Hermitage Museum are aware that the building is not the original Winter Palace, but rather the new version, constructed in exceptional haste in 1837–39. □

This essay is adapted from chapter ten of Paul W. Werth's monograph *1837: Russia's Quiet Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

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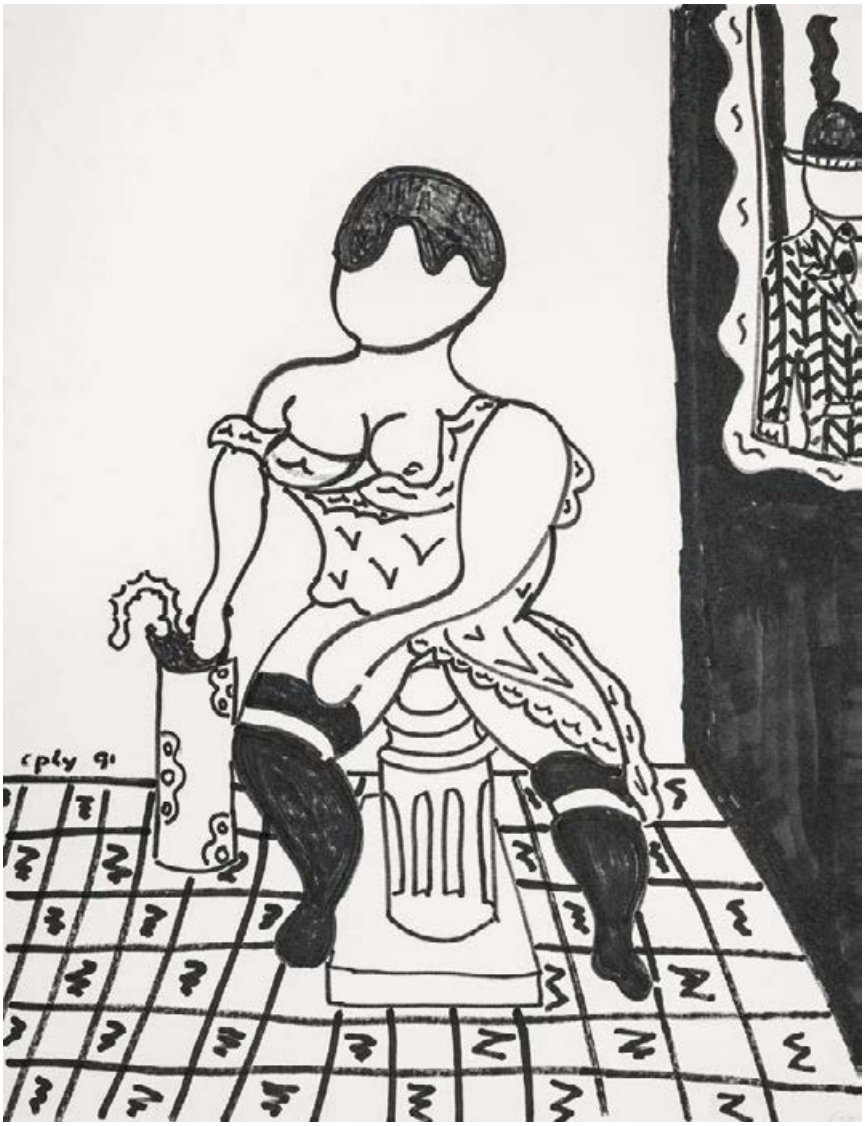
# William N. Copley

## *WORKS ON PAPER*



*Untitled*, 1991, marker and white out on paper, 59.7 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy William N. Copley Estate and Galerie Max Hetzler

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# THE USES OF HISTORY

## The war in Ukraine and Russia's imperial past

by John Connelly

Marjan Blan, *Soviet Uniform from the Kiev Children's Railway Museum* (2019). Courtesy Unsplash

**Numerous commentators,** mostly on the political left, have accused the United States of hypocrisy in the policies it is pursuing in the Ukraine war. They say we hold Russia to standards we ourselves do not honor. How would the United States respond, they ask, if a country on our borders joined a hostile alliance? The case of Cuba reveals our actual intolerance. Our government placed missiles just south of Soviet borders on Turkish territory in 1959 but risked all-out war when the Soviets stationed their own missiles in Cuba, three years later.

What hostile alliance might Mexico or Canada join? Once there was a Warsaw Pact, but that was an organization the USSR foisted upon its satellites for the sake of its own security. NATO, by contrast, emerged

freely among states made fearful by Soviet behavior—Communist seizures of power across Eastern Europe, topped off by an attempt to seize West Berlin, in June 1948. The fear of Soviet aggression was mightily reinforced among small nations with the armed interventions of 1956 and 1968, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It's no wonder that East European states lined up to join NATO.

Critics urge us to see the Russian point of view. Former *New York Times* reporter Chris Hedges says Russia has suffered repeated incursions over the centuries, and NATO expansion harms its "legitimate" security interests. But the opposite is the truth: Russian aggression among neighboring lands did not begin with the Soviet Union. Going back to the sixteenth century, Russia has been a tenaciously expanding imperial force, occupying and ruling territories far beyond the Russian ethnic core, out to the Pacific Ocean. If we adopt the lenses of peoples Russia has colonized over the centuries, we see a simple fact: for them NATO is a shield, a threat to Russia only if you assume it has a right to control other nations' destinies. Thus when Lech Wałęsa implored Bill Clinton to permit Poland's entry into the Western defensive alliance in 1993, he was thinking not just of Soviet occupation after WWII but of Russian behavior dating back as long as there has been a powerful Russian state.

Back to hypocrisy. When the US seeks to enforce a "sphere of influence" over other countries, it indeed acts against its ideals; an American patriot can forcefully condemn US interference in Guatemala, Chile, or elsewhere. The solution is simple: The United States should respect the sovereign will of other peoples in accordance with its own belief in the universal virtues of democracy.

In Russia, by contrast, imperialist foreign-policy does not trigger accusations of hypocrisy. As I discovered during research visits to Moscow in the 1980s and '90s, average Russians considered Soviet control of Poland or Czechoslovakia fully justified. Poles or Czechs see things differently. Soviet rule during the Cold War was a disaster for their nations' development. They were forced to recite Leninist distortions of history as if they believed them; saw their forests and rivers spoiled by a wasteful economic regime not of their choosing; and lived behind barbed-wire borders, closed off from the world. Historian Jan Gross says Stalinism was the sum of books never written, but one can go further: it was millions of human lives not lived to their fullest potentials.

Many Russians will brush such grievances aside. What importance can small nations have in the shadow of history's crowning event, their country's victory over Nazi Germany? That victory, as important as it was for humanity, has had the effect of distorting Russians' historical memory. If elsewhere the twentieth century taught the evils of imperial rule—to the publics of Britain, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, or Germany—Russians learned the opposite. The legacy of the Nazi attack of 1941 is that Russia must have a huge and permanent security buffer, consisting of colonies old and new, in order to keep the resurgence of "absolute evil" at bay. Such is the language used in a recent article by Russian historian Alexei Miller, a well-known and respected historian, by no means an extremist, to describe the Russian position:

> The narrative that we defend—and it would be strange if we did not do this—depicts the struggle between good and absolute evil, which is Nazism. We play a key role in this narrative as the force that made the decisive contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Outlines of this narrative were in place soon after the war's conclusion. At the founding of the Communist Information Bureau, in November 1947, Stalin's lieutenant Andrei Zhdanov denounced the US and its allies as "pro-fascist." In fact, they were mainly alarmed at the spread of communism, but for Soviet leaders such concerns seemed disingenuous. Communism was nothing to fear. Throughout the Cold War, Moscow routinely accused the West of abetting fascism when it supported—even just rhetorically—efforts of colonies to loosen the imperial group. For instance, the Soviet press portrayed Czechoslovak reformers of 1968 as lackeys of West German revisionists and Nazis. No one knows if the Soviet leaders believed their own propaganda; what we do know is that Leonid Brezhnev told Aleksander Dubček in a private moment five days after the August 1968 invasion that the tanks had not arrived in order to strengthen socialism, something that passionately concerned the Czechoslovak leader. In fact, the reason was geostrategic; Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev said, on the verge of shouting, was "part of the Soviet security zone" gained after World War II, and that was its fate for the indefinite future.

**The extreme public rhetoric,** verging on the apocalyptic, continues into our day, when Russia acts to "denazify" Ukraine. All that we know for sure is that its troops endeavor to seize as much territory as possible while committing atrocities of the sort that imperialist forces have perpetrated from the earliest recorded history (more on why in a moment).

We can learn important lessons about deeper forces guiding Russia from Germany, Europe's other, former great land-empire, once also imbued with a sense of living under constant threat—indeed being "surrounded" by its neighbors. For generations, German intellectuals argued that their country's security required rule over small peoples on the German perimeter: Danes, Poles, Czechs, Belgians, Hungarians. The empire—the *Reich*—brought "peace" and was supposedly accepted happily by these peoples and more.

Imperialism became so deeply ingrained in German thought that even moderates argued for Germany controlling huge spaces in Central Europe—*Mitteleuropa*. That word is associated not with fascists but with liberals like Friedrich Naumann, or the great industrialist Walter Rathenau.

Rathenau, later a German foreign minister assassinated by a right-wing fanatic, devoted his considerable energies during World War I to securing German dominance deep within Eastern Europe. After the Nazis' ascent to power, even their critics believed Germany was destined to be an empire within Europe. In 1938, leading Austrian Social Democrat Karl Renner applauded the absorption of his country by Germany, and Count Claus von Stauffenberg—who later led the plot on Hitler's life—commanded a company of German troops who marched into the Sudetenland.

Germans right, left, and center were hostages of basic political imagery. *Reich* was an ultimate value, signaling order, harmony, and prosperity. It was also an ancient word, recalling supposedly better times centuries earlier, when Germany had been a boundless and expanding entity, deep into France, Poland, and Italy.

Franklin Roosevelt understood the dangers emanating from this simple word, and wrote to his staff in April 1944: "As long as the word 'Reich' exists in Germany as expressing a nationhood, it will forever be associated with the present form of nationhood. If we admit that, we must seek to eliminate the very word 'Reich' and all that it stands for today." The elimination involved the German Reich's political and physical destruction, so that in 1945 Germans beheld a land in ruins that could be rebuilt, but where the clock could not spin backward. If "Reich" appears in German discourse today, it's on the extreme right. More positively, the Germans' record suggests that only by surrendering the claim to rule other peoples could they begin to rule themselves—as a democracy.

**History is not destiny.** No country needs to repeat its past, and the record of its deeds does not constitute an inescapable pattern extending into the future. But if the past is not carefully studied, it will be a force that drags a country down. The first question Russians might ask is where does the idea originate that their country is eternally threatened?

Part of the answer is that Marxism-Leninism assumed a natural right to expand, but deeper history points to a long imperial tradition that vied for a proportional relation between growing size and growing insecurity. That is, empires don't recognize boundaries; their only logic is to grow. As Henry Kissinger wrote: "Empires have no interest in operating within an international system; they aspire to *be* the international system." But as they grow, they create more enemies. The response is to craft an ideology of ultimate right to govern many peoples (usually in the name of "peace"), and when that fails, extreme brutality ensues. The record goes back centuries, from the Jewish-Roman wars of antiquity to Frederick Barbarossa's sacking of Milan in 1162, and from the razing of Magdeburg by imperial troops in 1631 to the Ottoman crushing of uprisings across southeastern Europe in the generations before World War I.

The challenges only proliferated during that Great War, as a counter-ideology affirming that peoples should govern themselves spread across the globe. Now even purportedly liberal empires revealed their dark sides, because of the dangerous contradiction between support for democracy at home and a claim for the right to rule over others on the imperial peripheries. Thus the Habsburgs Empire, often idealized as a humane empire that respected law, executed many thousands of Slavs during WWI, men and women, usually by public hanging, while after the war British troops shot hundreds of peaceful demonstrators in India. In both cases, the "traitors" wanted what President Woodrow Wilson preached at Versailles in 1919: national self-determination.

The Nazis derided liberalism's hypocrisies, especially as applied to Germany at Versailles, and claimed to represent a higher form of national self-determination—that of the hierarchical "people's community." What would make Nazi policies much bloodier than those of liberal states, however, was the claim that the Reich consisted not of many peoples (as had the Roman, British, and Habsburg empires), but of one, and that its rights were absolute. As Nazi forces expanded the Reich through conquest after 1939, the result was genocide, the eradication of those who would not or could not be German—foremost Jews, of course, but also Sinti, Roma, and many Slavs, chiefly Poles, Russians, and Ukrainians.

This, unfortunately, is a close parallel to today's war in Ukraine. Vladimir Putin has taken the Russia's imperial tradition beyond what Brezhnev would have contemplated and claimed that Ukrainians and Belarusians are not separate peoples but one with the Russians. He also goes beyond the Soviets and the tsars in the outright killing and abduction of those who dissent.

**It's not quite true** that those who don't know history are bound to repeat it. What is true is that those ignorant of history cannot learn from it. For years, Russian authorities have taught an uncritical view of the Soviet and deeper Russian past, and in recent months shuttered institutions dedicated to openly exploring darker chapters of Russia's history. Only if Russia loses this war is there hope that Russians' eyes can be opened to their own imperial past, in particular the centuries of their subjecting other peoples to foreign rule.

When one puts on non-imperial lenses, history begins to look different. For instance, Russia did not win World War II. Rather, the Soviet Union, itself many peoples, combined with other peoples to destroy fascism. Among Soviets, Ukrainians bore perhaps the heaviest burden, with some ten million victims (including the great majority of Ukrainian Jews). Putin's war turns out to be worse than hypocrisy blind to history. It is also a desecration, making Russian killers of Ukrainians stand in supposed league with the Red Army soldiers who once gave their lives to halt genocide—and often enough on the very Ukrainian soil that is now once more drenched in blood. □

# TAXI DRIVER

Tears from Tijuana

by Cristina Rivera Garza

He says he isn't a believer but that some things have happened to him recently that are making him reconsider. He says I won't even believe him. After I insist, he says he'll tell me, but that he still isn't sure. And that's when, between one turn and the next, he looks at me in the rearview mirror and I can see a difference in his gaze.

Beto is a taxi driver who always takes me to the airport when I'm leaving Tijuana. As long as I've known him, which has been for quite a while, he insists that one day I will end up writing one of the stories he tells me. And he tells so many! On our trips to the airport I've become familiar, through his voice, with a certain underworld of this border town that I otherwise would never have experienced. Beto also works a lot with the women in Tijuana's red-light district, and once I shared a ride with a few, because, as he explained to me, they were in a rush. An *If you don't mind*. This time is different. Instead of beginning the story by making his characteristic racket—he usually turns up the volume on the radio as he starts talking—he avoids my gaze and even rolls up the car windows. In a moment or two I will remember how, upon climbing into the car, I had admired how clean it was, how good it smelled. Its immaculateness.

He says he picked her up, like so many others, on your average street corner. He says she had long copper hair, blue eyes, and spoke with an accent from southern Mexico. He says she was a young girl, the kind who claims they're twenty when they're barely sixteen, and that's why they're so stunning. He says the girl received a call and that, with the phone still at her ear, she told him where she was headed. He says that there, in the back seat where I was sitting, she took off her sweatpants and put on a tight dress—green, quite pretty. He says her final destination was a hotel.

Beto's stories have never given me chills before. But this one, even before hearing the ending, already makes me shudder. Suddenly I want him to be quiet. Suddenly I hope that something will happen on the road or in his head that will make him stop telling me what I know he is inevitably going to tell me. Who has lived in Mexico for the last six decades and doesn't already know the ending to this story?

He says she asked for his phone number so that, after her job was done, he could pick her up at the same place. He says between one thing and another, they broke the ice and told each other as much as they could about themselves in one ride. He tells me this while fixing me with his troubled gaze in the rearview mirror, his eyes affected by something that in the moment I could perhaps call metaphysical. He says she never called him back.

I know he hasn't yet reached the point in his story that he really wants to share because he keeps pausing for increasingly long periods of time. We discussed this once before—something about the role of silence, of empty space, in the construction of suspense. While he's quiet I watch huge billboards pass by.

He says the next morning he learned what happened while watching television. He repeats the same words we always hear: *found dead, strangled, unidentified body*. He says he had to

answer questions at the police station. And he says the same words as always: *no identity, no family, nothing at all.*

I DON'T KNOW if it's at this moment or later that the nausea starts. I don't know at what moment I realize that, just a few days ago, I read similar words about a poet and translator whose "crime" is still unclear: his hands and feet bound, packing tape around his head, the final blow or shot. They keep getting closer, I tell myself as I instinctively move my hand from the seat where the girl changed her clothes.

He says another day, also a weekday, something similar happened to him. He says this is the part I won't believe. He says, opening his eyes wide even though they maintain a paradoxically somber look, this time when the girl got in the car she was already on the phone. He says she sighed deeply and hesitated. He says, emboldened or concerned, out of his element either way, he told her what happened to the other girl to try and convince her not to go to the hotel alone. He says he told her: That girl was just as young as you. He says right at that moment she sat there speechless, as if struck by something divine, and then she began to ask questions. He says, despondent yet not shedding a single tear, that she told him the girl was her sister. He says she then dialed a number and in a quiet voice, quiet as a mouse, she told her mother the news. He says she said: Now I know where my sister is.

What are the chances? he asks me, as if I know. Can I not clearly see the intervention of something beyond human understanding? he insists. I don't know what to think about his religious conversion or of the gray landscape that unfolds into dust and noise on the other side of the window. Social sadness is so intimate sometimes. And intimacy can be so sad.

Carlos Beristáin, sociologist, doctor, and specialist for the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, says that violence in Mexico has reached a catastrophic level. He also says that the legacy of this violence will impact, at the very least, entire generations. The pain. The rage. The impotence. □

This essay was originally published as "Nonfiction," chapter VIII of Cristina Rivera Garza's *Grieving: Dispatches from a Wounded Country* (The Feminist Press, 2020) and is reprinted here with permission.

# MENSCHEN-LANDSCHAFT

## Traces of Turkish migration in West Berlin

by Ela Gezen

Public art at Oberbaumstraße, November 27, 1987. Photo: Jürgen Henschel. Courtesy FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum

DURING A VISIT to the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum archive while doing research for my first book, *Brecht, Turkish Theater, and Turkish-German Literature: Reception, Adaptation, and Innovation after 1960* (Camden House, 2018), I came across a catalogue featuring the exhibit *Mehmet kam aus Anatolien* (Mehmet came from Anatolia, 1975). It was organized by the Kunstamt Kreuzberg and the Türkischer Akademiker- und Künstlerverein—institutions unknown to me, and focused on the documentation of Turkish life and experiences in West Germany, from living and working to childcare and leisure, as well as Turkish economic and political realities prior to emigration. Beyond the display of photos, tables, and statistical information, the exhibit centered on artworks by three Turkish artists living in West Berlin: sculptor Mehmet Aksoy, painter Mehmet Hanefi Yeter, and ceramist Mehmet Çağlayan. All three "Mehmets" came to West Berlin as trained artists—not labor migrants—and were affiliated with the University of the Arts in West Berlin.

This exhibit catalogue became a starting point to examine additional cultural events that took place throughout the 1970s in West Berlin, predominantly in the Kreuzberg district. This led to further archival discoveries, including press coverage in German and Turkish newspapers of a hitherto unexamined spectrum of cultural activities and lively art scene, correspondence by artists, cultural, and municipal institutions, program and event brochures, and official documents. The latter provide insight into the conceptualization and funding structures for cultural work in the context of Turkish migration.

Turkish artists, intellectuals, and academics had founded numerous associations in West Berlin throughout the 1970s and '80s, in order to establish institutional settings for cultural activities. One of them was the Türkischer Akademiker- und Künstlerverein, co-founded in 1972 as Akademikerverein der Türkei West-Deutschland—West Berlin by sculptor Mehmet Aksoy. The association's initial focus on Turkish academic contexts was expanded in December 1974—evident in its name change to Türkischer Akademiker- und Künstlerverein—to include artists and to outline a position and goals within the cultural sector. The expansion of cultural offerings for Turkish labor-migrants and the facilitation of exchange between Turkish and German residents of West Berlin were central to the association's cultural activities. As its chair, Aksoy was involved in a variety of collaborative projects with municipal institutions, such as the Kunstamt Kreuzberg, including a 1977 festival in honor of the Communist poet Nâzım Hikmet (1902–1963), for what would have been the poet's seventy-fifth birthday.

Aksoy came to West Berlin in 1972 on a fellowship (he returned to Turkey in 1989), and West Berlin became an important setting for his work. His early sculptures center on the working class and working-class solidarity, as evident in two cycles: one focusing on unemployment and the other on demonstrations. In addition to collaborative and individual exhibits, Aksoy also participated in group projects such as the sculpture trail *Menschenlandschaft Berlin* (Human Landscape Berlin, 1985–1987), one of the few extant projects that has preserved his sculptures in Berlin's contemporary cityscape.

Dedicated to Kreuzberg as a focal point for immigration, *Menschenlandschaft Berlin* stretches between Schlesische Strasse and the May-Ayim-Ufer—and for a good reason: Schlesisches Tor is one of the oldest developed spaces in Berlin and was once the location of the Schlesisches Stadttor (Silesian city gate), through which immigrants from Silesia entered the city throughout the eighteenth century.

One aim of placing art in this public space was to offer an opportunity for encounter and coexistence; another was to provide the immigrant population who lived there with reference points for their own histories. The art here would document their paths while also making them visible to West German residents.

The idea of bringing art in dialogue with Kreuzberg's diversity in a public space had arisen earlier, in the late 1970s, in a conversation between Aksoy and art educator and director of the Kunstamt Kreuzberg, Krista Tebbe. On Tebbe's initiative, individuals and representatives of various artistic, district, and planning institutions came together in a working group to explore potential concepts, locations, topics,

*Turkish artists, intellectuals, and academics had founded numerous associations in West Berlin throughout the 1970s and '80s, in order to establish institutional settings for cultural activities.*


Mehmet Aksoy, *Labor Migration* (1987), Oberbaumstrasse. Photo: Ela Gezen, May 25, 2022

and processes for such a project. The project itself was carried out through a collaboration among organizing and coordinating institutions, the jury, residents, the district administration, and participating artists.

*Menschenlandschaft Berlin* was embedded in the 750-year anniversary of the city of Berlin (in 1987) and commissioned by the Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen (Senate for Building and Housing). Artists were sought through a call for applications, yielding 82 submissions, eight of which were selected by a 13-person jury, led by sculptor Waldemar Otto, comprised of artists, architects, and representatives from institutions including the Senate for Building and Housing, IBA (International Building Exhibitions), Kunstamt Kreuzberg (Arts Council for Kreuzberg), the BVV Kreuzberg (district council Kreuzberg).

The conceptual phase of the project lasted a year and provided several opportunities for the public to follow its stages and participate in discussions during town hall meetings. Archival documents confirm high participation by Turkish residents, with the vast majority supporting the project. Participating artists presented six broader spatial concepts, which resulted in a majority vote for Azade Köker's proposal, "Skulpturenweg zum Ufer" (Sculpture trail to the river banks) in December 1985.

Individual components were integrated into the entire concept and required extensive exchanges and coordination between participating artists (Mehmet Aksoy, Azade Köker, Andreas Frömberg, Louis Niebuhr, Andreas Wegner, Rudolf Valenta, and Leslie Robbins). A trail made from granite plates connected the individual components (as well as public spaces) physically and visually, which also engaged various aspects of immigration and coexistence (*Miteinanderleben*). Since the project's inception, the relationship between art and its surroundings was a priority, foregrounding an engagement with the urban space over an intervention (and radical change of the environment), thus underlining the thematic and local integration of the chosen concept. In some instances, as in Aksoy's case, this also involved working at the site itself. The title *Menschenlandschaft Berlin* was proposed by writer Ingeborg Drewitz, referring to Nâzım Hikmet's multivolume epic *Memleketimden İnsan Manzaraları* (Human Landscapes from my Home Country), written between 1941–51 and published in 1966–67, which Hikmet conceived of as "poetic history of the present."

Importantly, *Menschenlandschaft* replaced the working title *Ausländer in Berlin* (Foreigners in Berlin), due to its negative and discriminatory connotations. With its focus on "foreigners" in Berlin, the project aimed to draw attention to Berlin's longstanding history of immigration, and in particular to address Turkish-German relations. The sculpture trail was envisioned as a place of encounter but also as a reference point for immigrants.

*Since the project's inception, the relationship between art and its surroundings was a priority, foregrounding an engagement with the urban space over an intervention.*

When you visit the *Menschenlandschaft* sculpture trail today, you will find its components heavily graffitied. Since reunification, traffic patterns and the spatial environment around it have also changed. And apart from the Hikmet inscription on one of Aksoy's sculptures (an excerpt from his poem "Ellerenize ve yalana dair"/"About your Hands and Lies," written in 1949 in Bursa prison), there is no identification of or reference to the artists, the project, its framework, or the historical relationship to the surrounding space in Berlin.

Aksoy's marble sculpture cluster *Labor Migration* is located between Schlesische Straße and Oberbaumstraße and represents the stages of immigration through the varied placement of figures in relation to the trail. These invite visitors to reflect on the artistic working methods of a stone sculptor. The direct-carving exposes something that would otherwise remain hidden from the viewer, offering a connotation inherent in the sculpture's materiality. And since direct carving is a laborious process, it also emphasizes "labor" in its various interpretive guises, in addition to the "labor migration" in Aksoy's title.

Namely, transforming a piece of stone into a sculpture points to the process of simultaneous unveiling and trace-leaving, underlining the intersection of temporality, sculpture, and artist. On the one hand, processing the stone makes something visible in the literal and allegorical sense, on the other hand, Aksoy suggests a continuation of time, and thus the past(s), in the sculpture. Moreover, his multi-part ensemble consists of partially polished and partially raw carved marble, which in addition to the thematic consideration of stages of migration—from departure to arrival to potential settlement—provides further contrasts and underlines processes inherent to migration. Migration is thus represented in its various stages with figures standing next to, moving toward, or intersecting with the path, and at the same time carved into stone and thus preserved for, and into, the future. As such, Aksoy's sculptures in the cityscape of Berlin invite us to follow the traces left behind and to engage with the memory of migration. □

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# WRITING THE DIVIDE

## May Ayim's intellectual activism in Germany

by Tiffany N. Florvil

DESPITE HER HECTIC schedule, the Afro-German writer and poet May Ayim (1960–1996) remained active in the Black German movement. She organized a variety of conferences, workshops, and projects, including annual meetings and Black History Month celebrations for the organization ISD (Initiative für Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland), which enabled Black Germans to reclaim spaces within the nation. Moreover, Ayim's activism in ISD and, to a lesser degree, ADEFRA—Initiative Schwarze Deutsche Frauen—helped her hone organizational skills and build networks in Germany. She also continued to give readings that engaged the themes of racism and sexism. Afro-Germans' new visibility improved the quality of her own life.

Ayim became involved in other German organizations that championed antiracism and multiculturalism and that attended to internationalist issues. She joined the German branch of the International League for Human Rights and became a member of the Antiracist Initiative. She attended that organization's forum, "Action Days against Racism, Sexism, and Fascism", held in the spring of 1988, and their subsequent international conference "Against Racism, Fascism, and Sexism" in the fall of that year. Both Berlin-based organizations advocated for human rights through antidiscrimination initiatives. While available sources offer evidence that Ayim desired social change and was dedicated to multiple organizations concerned with bigotry and oppression in Germany, less known is how she interacted with others at these events or how frequently she attended meetings. Still, Ayim's activism outside the Black German movement focused on human rights more broadly and exhibited her commitment to coalition-building.

BY WORKING WITH other German minorities, Ayim practiced fellow Berlin-based Caribbean-American writer Audre Lorde's mantra of "connected differences," and remained true to Lorde's vision of activism. Ayim and Nivedita Prasad, an Indian and

May Ayim sitting on a stone wall, South Africa. Photographer unknown (1994). Freie Universität Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, V/N-2 May Ayim (Opitz), Sig. 50.

German activist, organized the 1990 conference "Ways to Alliances" (*Wege zu Bündnissen*), occurring in Bremen for "ethnic and Afro-German minorities," and planned a 1991 national congress held in Berlin that addressed the plight of immigrant, Jewish, and Black German women. In 1992, they also published *Documentation: Ways to Alliances* with revised conference papers. At the 1990 multicultural festival "The Other Republic" (*Die andere Republik*), Ayim engaged with women of color and white German antiracists such as feminist Tatjana Böhm, Turkish-German Green Party member Sevim Çelebi, Indian antiracist Sanchita Basu, and Green Party member Ingrid Lottenburger. These conferences advanced ideas about Germany's growing diversity and signified Ayim's eagerness to build alliances with white Germans as well as other oppressed communities and to initiate critical dialogues about the problems plaguing German society. In the 1990s, she also attended meetings for the Black Women's Informal Information and Support Network that included Dionne Sparks, Branwen Okpako, and Auma Obama, consciously pursuing work with Black women. In a 1995 interview, Ayim explained how pleased she was to see that discussions on racism and multiculturalism gradually occurred in Germany and that these developments affected people's opinions, although they had yet to have a full impact in society.

AYIM'S ACTIVISM OUTSIDE THE BLACK GERMAN MOVEMENT FOCUSED ON HUMAN RIGHTS MORE BROADLY AND EXHIBITED HER COMMITMENT TO COALITION BUILDING.

A key source of Ayim's political and emotional energy came from her writing. This was not merely a component of her politics; it *was* her politics. It was her poetry more than her organizing that ultimately delivered her international acclaim. She gained recognition performing spoken-word poetry nationally and internationally. Such performance was not only therapeutic, it also validated her experiences and allowed her to support multiple causes. In 1988, she co-founded a Berlin-based literary association entitled Literature Women (*Literatur Frauen e.V.,* LIT). LIT galvanized diverse women writers, organized literary events, and undertook scholarly research on women's issues and history. The organization's membership included Elsbeth de Roos (Dutch), Ewa Boura (Greek), Sonia Solarte (Colombian), and others, and they organized events with authors such as South African feminist Ellen Kuzwayo. Ayim also read her own texts and served as a moderator on a panel about women's literature at the 1988 Women of the World (*Frauen der Welt*) conference, entitled "Africa-Women-Weeks" (*Afrika-Frauen-Wochen*), in Berlin. At the 1993 Frankfurt Book Fair, she participated in a conference called "Silence Is to Blame: German Is a Colorful Language" (*Schweigen ist schuld: Deutsch ist eine bunte Sprache*), with a number of other women of color authors. These events demonstrate Ayim's commitment to her writing as a tool for solidarity and advocacy.

At another 1993 panel, she read excerpts from her essay "The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective" (*Das Jahr 1990: Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive*) in *Distant Ties* (*Entfernte Verbindungen*)—from a volume she co-edited and published with Orlanda Verlag. In it, she considered the post-Wall climate,

> The Wall's shadow had been cast into our East–West brains. People from the two Germanys met one another like twins who know about their common parents but had lived separated from each other since birth. [. . .] The early excitement of encounter crumbled with unpredictable speed, and the deceitfully won unity suffocated just as quickly under the tight artificial cloak of liberal German folksiness. Of course, you saw the little "one-Germany" flags and banners waving. Who was embracing each other in German-German reunification, and who was embraced, pulled in, bumped out?

AFTER THE FALL of the Wall, Ayim expanded discourses on East–West and North–South divides by stressing the intersections of identity, racism, and nationalism. For her, East–West programming and initiatives needed to integrate discussions about the Global North and South. She sought to awaken individuals to the illusion of German unity on the ground, and cemented her role as a leading Afro-German "quotidian" intellectual. By this I mean that Ayim used vernacular cultural styles to impart knowledge about Black diasporic histories. In doing so, she destabilized the power of dominant knowledge and brought everyday experiences of discrimination to the forefront. Connecting with other diasporic writers in this vein, Ayim served as a moderator for a 1994 Berlin reading of Maryse Condé's newly translated book *The Children of Segu* (*Wie Spreu im Wind*) and later interviewed her and wrote a review of the book.

Ayim's inclusion of African, African American, and other Black diasporic themes and metaphors also enabled her to position Afro-Germans within a Black intellectual tradition. Through her existential and autobiographical poems, articles, speeches, and spoken-word performances, Ayim used her imposed marginal position to draw attention to Afro-Germans' collective and individual difficulties in German society. In particular, she defied a German epistemic tradition that included men such as G.W.F. Hegel, who believed the Africans lacked a history and the ability to reason because they were "children," and that Africans could not attain civilization or progress, because they were outside of Europe's borders.

Ayim's literature established her ability to reason and think philosophically, and her literature located

and placed the Black subject within the German nation and European continent more broadly, permitting for a more complex understanding of culture and the nation. She argues for a history of culture that revealed the heterogeneous histories of Black Germans and other minorities in various spacetimes, often outside the spacetime of slavery. Moreover, as a quotidian intellectual, Ayim captured the zeitgeist—in this case the spirit of the Black German community, and she demanded a critical assessment of racist discourses and practices in German society, all the while comprehending and accepting the differences that existed within and shaped the nation.

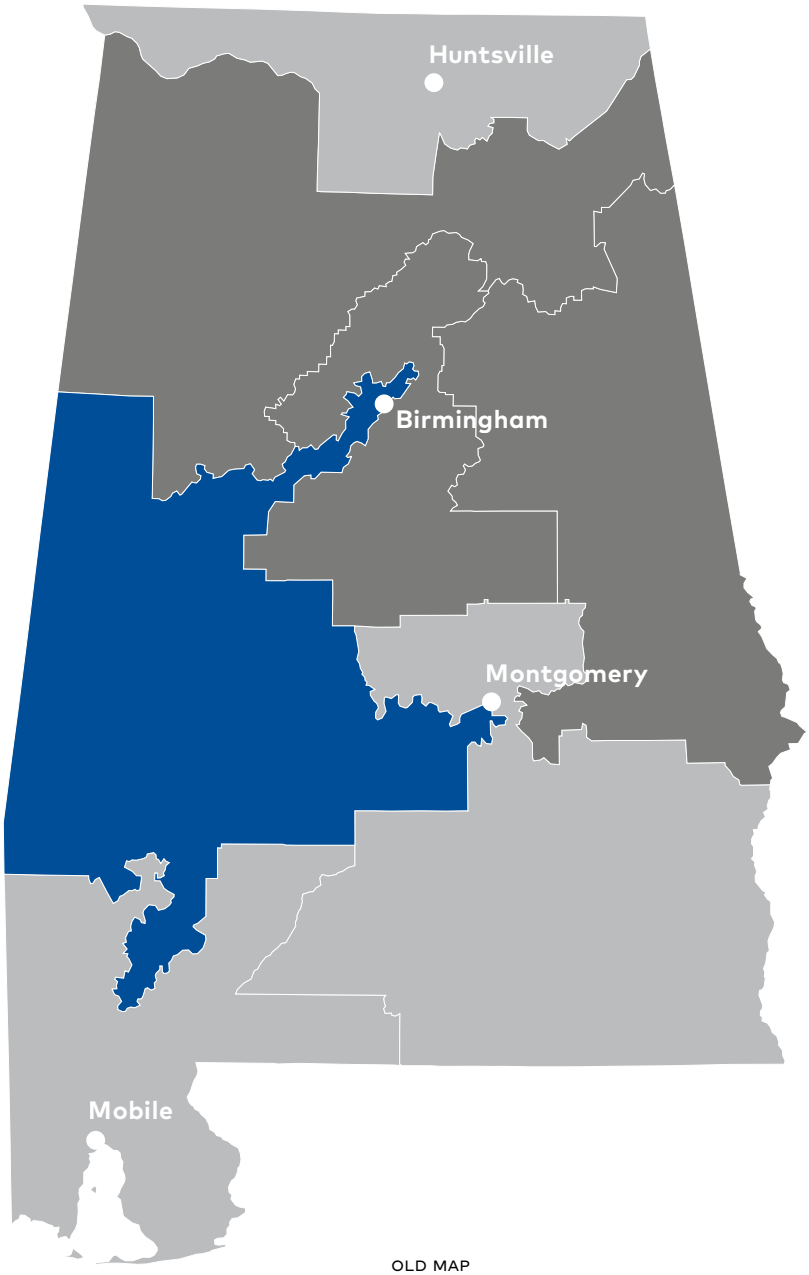
In her work, Ayim attended to Germany's colonial and fascist pasts and redirected attention to their afterlives in contemporary society. She explained how the history of German individuals of color was tied to racist exhibitions and racist colonial projects, and showed how Afro-German history predated the postwar period. Indeed, that history had long remained a significant part of German history, however overlooked and forgotten. She also critiqued the discourses that the reunified German government and media advanced by arguing that they sustained a system that indoctrinated a susceptible public. Throughout her critique, Ayim proposed that the racist elements of German culture manufactured discourses on integration and multiculturalism that ironically served to silence German minorities, preventing dialogue and transformation from occurring. Through her own intellectual activism, she would raise her voice against this silence. □

The original version of this essay was published in *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement*, by Tiffany N. Florvil.

# AMERICAN DEMOCRACY'S POLYCRISIS

## The Supreme Court and the future of democracy

by Joshua Sellers




How the districts voted in 2020, by presidential vote margin in percentage points:

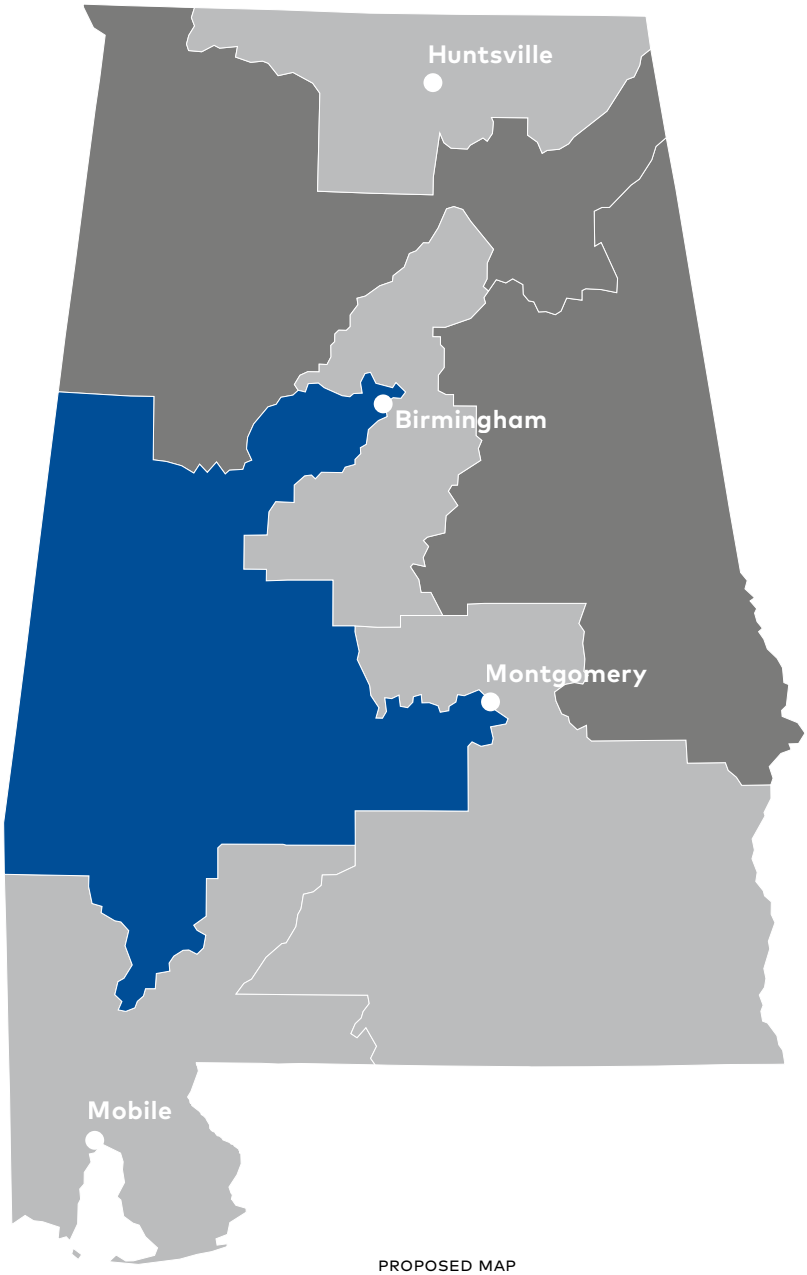
Democratic

30+

Republican

30+ 15+

OLD MAP




PROPOSED MAP

STANDARD DESCRIPTIONS of the multifarious threats to American democracy—illiberal, regressive, antidemocratic—are, though accurate, all seemingly inadequate in describing the gravity of the moment. In truth, we lack a sophisticated conceptual vocabulary for chronicling the country's slow yet steady democratic deterioration.

Such deterioration takes many forms. Half of the country believes that the last presidential election was stolen; the other half fears it is too late to prevent the theft of the presidential election to come. Congress, long defined by its dysfunction, failed to enact legislation to protect voters from discrimination and vote suppression, both of which are resurgent. The Supreme Court, firmly controlled by its conservative wing, thwarts representative democracy as a matter of course. The unmistakably malignant political violence of January 6, 2021, engendered not, as one might hope, a national reckoning, but further recriminations and division. And throughout the states—our great laboratories of democracy—dubious partisans are maneuvering into positions of electoral authority, increasing the risk of partiality, or worse.

This constellation of concerns calls to mind the French philosopher Edward Morin's concept of "polycrisis." This idea—later adapted by former president of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and, more recently, by the historian Adam Tooze—

posits that certain "interwoven and overlapping crises," as Morin said, can only be understood holistically. In other words, emphasis on only a *single* crisis ignores, at the risk of incomprehension, the "intersolidarity" of the crisis landscape. This framing might help us delineate, if not remedy, the interconnected crises imperiling our democratic future.

How did we reach this point? In offering a diagnosis, it is tempting to concentrate on the preposterousness of one man. If Donald Trump were the exclusive source of our inquietude, our interpretive task would be much simpler. There is no shortage of egotistical, boorish figures in American political history, even if Trump might be denominated the chieftain of the lot. But our problems far exceed the nefariousness of the former President. As brilliantly observed by writer Fintan O'Toole, "One of the reasons there cannot be a postmortem on Trumpism is that Trumpism *is* postmortem. Its core appeal is necromantic. It promised to make a buried world rise again." So, while Trump's outsized influence on American politics is noteworthy, the quest to renovate a buried world is the source code of American democracy's polycrisis. At present, this is perhaps most intelligible through the lens of our ostensibly apolitical branch of government, the judiciary.

In the months ahead, the Supreme Court will issue decisions in two momentous election law cases, each of which may transform American democracy in radical ways. Legal technicalities aside, both cases illustrate the intersolidarity of our crises. Consider first *Merrill v. Milligan*, which involves the perennially contestable redistricting process. As background, every ten years, states are obliged to redraw both their federal and state electoral districts to account for the prior decade's population changes. For decades, under the prevailing interpretation of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), states have been required to create "minority-opportunity" districts when certain conditions are met. In short, when minority voters comprise a sizable portion of a geographically compact area, are politically cohesive, and have historically been unable to elect their "candidates of choice," the obligation to create a minority-opportunity district in which a minority-preferred candidate will likely be elected may arise. This obligation reflects a national commitment to constructing an inclusive, multiracial democracy, one in which our federal and state legislatures reflect our country's great diversity. This is a decidedly modern commitment, an instantiation of the progress we've made since the days

In the months ahead, the Supreme Court will issue decisions in two momentous election law cases, each of which may transform American democracy in radical ways.

when racial political terror was, in many places, customary. Alabama was notorious as one such place.

Today, Alabama has seven congressional districts, and Black Alabamians comprise approximately 27 percent of the state population. In November 2021, the Republican-controlled Alabama legislature enacted a new congressional map that contains one majority-Black congressional district yet divides a large segment of the Black community among several other districts. This tactic—a common form of minimizing the electoral influence of minority voters—provoked a VRA lawsuit that resulted in a federal district court striking Alabama's map, and ordering the state to create a replacement map containing two majority-Black districts. Yet, before that process began, the Supreme Court stayed (i.e. suspended) the district court's decision and announced its intention to rule on the merits of the case. The merits here are no less than the future of the VRA. Conservatives, including those on the Supreme Court, have long despised the VRA's express attention to race. Race is, to their minds, an unwelcome social and political category. When foregrounded, they claim, it frustrates the goal of national unity. This superficially appealing yet rudimentary logic is best encapsulated by Chief Justice John Roberts's claim that "[t]he way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race." The subtext here is the headline: race-consciousness in law or policy is akin to discrimination.

By agreeing to hear *Merrill* on the merits, the Supreme Court appears poised to strip the VRA of its remaining force. The most incredible outcome would be an opinion finding the VRA unconstitutional, though such a brazen determination is unlikely. More likely is an opinion that effectively nullifies the VRA by disingenuously likening the *consideration of race* in redistricting (an inevitability, whether transparently or surreptitiously) to *overreliance on race* in redistricting. In other words, and as Alabama argues, creating a congressional district map with two majority-Black districts would itself violate the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause, because doing so would require overreliance on race and, repeating a line from above, race-consciousness in law or policy is akin to discrimination. If this argument succeeds, states like Alabama will be free to manipulate their electoral districts to the detriment of minority voters (and to the benefit of the Republican Party), all while claiming adherence to the principle of race-neutrality. The consequence would be far fewer minority-opportunity districts across the country, and more pointedly, as put by one of the briefs, the facilitation of "white-dominated state governments and congressional delegations, Black disenfranchisement, and racial apartheid." So, while lamentations about the reification of race in America always seem to find an audience, in the trenches of American

law and politics, race-consciousness remains an essential bulwark against entrenching injustice. In deciding *Merrill*, the Supreme Court will reveal its vision for America's political future. We should desperately hope that its vision is not a resuscitation of the pre-1960s, pre-VRA past.

The second case, *Moore v. Harper*, is potentially even more consequential. At issue is the extent of state legislatures' power over federal elections. The relevant background is somewhat intricate. Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution contains what is known as the "Elections Clause." This provision states that "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Place of Chusing Senators." The text, then, empowers state legislatures, unless overridden by Congress, to regulate the times, places, and manner of federal elections (no one denies that states may regulate the times, places, and manner of state elections). The question presented in *Moore* is whether state legislatures are *exclusively* empowered to do so.

Once again, the relevant facts arise from the redistricting context, though the implications of the case go beyond that arena. As was true in Alabama, the recent round of redistricting in North Carolina provoked litigation. That litigation culminated in an opinion from the North Carolina Supreme Court, holding that the congressional district map enacted by the Republican-controlled North Carolina legislature constituted partisan gerrymandering (i.e. the manipulation of electoral district lines to unfairly benefit one political party) and therefore violated the state constitution. In challenging that holding, the state legislature is now arguing in the Supreme Court that the Elections Clause—which, again, expressly empowers state *legislatures*—precludes the North Carolina Supreme Court from invalidating its congressional map.

The most muscular version of this argument suggests that no other state actors (e.g. a governor, a secretary of state, state-court judges) can override or limit the power of state legislatures when it comes to regulating federal elections. As far-fetched as this argument might sound, multiple Supreme Court Justices have expressed support for it. For instance, in related litigation, Justice Samuel Alito wrote: "The provisions of the Federal Constitution conferring on state legislatures, not state courts, the authority to make rules governing federal elections would be meaningless if a state court could override the rules adopted by the legislature simply by claiming that a state constitutional provision gave the courts the authority to make whatever rules it thought appropriate for the conduct of a fair election." If four other Justices agree, two centuries of election law will be upended.

As is apparent to any passing observer of American politics, many state legislatures are currently bastions of ultraconservatism, acting in aggressive pursuit of retrograde political goals, including the suppression of minority political participation. A broad ruling for the North Carolina legislature in *Moore* would validate these efforts and encourage further attempts to disqualify and discourage select groups of voters. Even a narrow ruling for the North Carolina legislature limited to the facts of the case might prevent state courts from invalidating egregious partisan gerrymanders, thereby eliminating partisan gerrymandering claims altogether (such claims are already "nonjusticiable" in federal courts). Either outcome would be calamitous.

Many state legislatures are currently bastions of ultraconservatism, acting in aggressive pursuit of retrograde political goals, including the suppression of minority political participation.

*Moore* is a curious addendum to a long-running national story about state legislatures' power to shape American politics. The closest historical analogue is found in the first half of the twentieth century, when state legislatures enjoyed largely unfettered control over the design of their electoral districts. For decades, that unchecked power was abused. The gross malapportionment of the era—in Tennessee, for example, county populations ranging from 2,340 to 25,316 were afforded the same level of representation in the state legislature—systematically favored sparsely populated rural communities, thereby rendering it impossible for electoral majorities to correct the problem through the normal political process. The Supreme Court's landmark "one-person, one-vote" decisions are widely celebrated for rectifying this inequity and advancing a vision of American democracy in which the equality of votes is paramount. It is worth recalling this history, and the necessity of oversight and checks-and-balances, as state legislatures once again seek autonomy over elections.

TAKEN TOGETHER, the disputes at the heart of these two cases encapsulate our democratic polycrisis. A responsible Congress could preempt the worst possible outcomes in both *Merrill* and *Moore*, but Congress is idle. An unbiased Supreme Court committed to political equality as a Constitutional aspiration, and deferential to precedent, would easily reject the radical claims presented by the Alabama and North Carolina legislatures. Regrettably, that is not the Court we have. Voters could, in theory, punish state legislators at the polls for compromising representative democracy. Yet voters are highly polarized and prone to the same antagonisms as their representatives. And so, we carry on, uncertain about solutions but at least cognizant of how these crises intersect, braced for the fights ahead. □

# THE ANDREW W. MELLON WORKSHOP

Since fall 2018, the American Academy has hosted two Andrew W. Mellon Fellows per year, each focusing on one of the following themes: migration and social integration, race in comparative perspective, or exile and return. In addition to the public lecture, each Mellon Fellow also convened a week-long, interdisciplinary workshop with approximately a dozen participants from Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Parallel to the workshop itself, the participants also took part in a public event, hosted in cooperation with an institutional partner or at the Academy. We are deeply grateful for the outstanding collaborations with the Institute for Cultural Inquiry and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, who hosted these public events. Our gratitude also goes to the institutions who welcomed our workshop groups for debates and tours: the Humboldt Forum and Ethnological Museum, Sound Archive, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Museum for Islamic Art, Museum of Near Eastern Art, Phonogram Archive, and Pierre Boulez Saal.

The workshop series was inaugurated with "Double Exposures," chaired by **Rosalind C. Morris**, in January 2019. Subsequent groups discussed "Phonographic Knowledge and the African Past" (chaired by **Ronald Radano**, in June 2019), "Mixed Motive Migrations and the Implications for Public Policy" (chaired by **Roberto Suro**, in January 2020), "Im/Mobilities: New Directions in the Humanities" (chaired by **Hakim Abderrezak** and **Laila Amine**, in June 2022), and "Past and Future Genders: Latin America and Beyond" (chaired by **Moira Fradinger**, in June 2022).

The following collection of essays shows the breadth of debate of the two workshops that were held in June 2022. Investigating new directions in the humanities, the first set of articles reflects on mobility in genres centering on movements across seas and borders. The articles ask how current scholarship on mobility and immobility and related themes, such as race, citizenship, and belonging, shape the humanities today. The second part focuses on gender and its translation into all aspects of our lives, offering new perspectives on our reading of literature and assessing activist movements, politics, and the law. We thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for enabling six fellows and 81 workshop participants to transcend established patterns of thinking, engage in (self-)critical conversations, and come together with new understandings of our world.

**Michael P. Steinberg**
Academic Advisor to the Andrew W. Mellon Workshops
**Berit Ebert**
Vice President of Programs, American Academy in Berlin

# Im/ Mobilities

## New Directions in the Humanities

by Hakim Abderrezak & Laila Amine

**WE HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR** with the key notions of this Mellon workshop for a long time, not only academically—since migrations are a central focus of our research interests—but also intimately. Growing up in France as children of Moroccan immigrants, we spent many summers caravanning in cars and busses across France and Spain towards Morocco and back. While our journeys were not clandestine, we did witness furtive escapes and heard testimonies of individuals and loved ones who had been returned by authorities—or worse: drowned in the deadly Mediterranean. Well before the advent of what we have come to call "the refugee crisis," we traveled across western and southern Europe, passing clandestine migrants or traveling on means of transportation with them.

The Academy's Andrew W. Mellon combined workshop in mid-June 2022 had one main objective: to identify new directions in how we think, discuss, and write about migrations in a world of accumulating "crises." The objective is undoubtedly timely, not just because these migrations have triggered a plethora of literary and creative works from around the Mediterranean that need to be studied, but also because the topic has only recently been taken up by scholars in the humanities.

One of the keywords of the workshop is "Im/Mobilities." This cut-word, or two words, convey(s) the idea of a Mediterranean Sea that has turned into a divided entity, one that is no longer synonymous with hope and potential crossings for those not born on the "right" side of the Mediterranean basin. The slash ("/") is akin to the treacherous wave or intruding military boat that cuts into the migrants' and refugees' plane of vision. This sliding line—ominous of a fall, of a failure, of the unbalance of power and rights—indicates also that mobility exists only on one side. On the other side remains the impossible and impermissible, allowing only one feasible scenario: immobility.

The subtitle of our workshop, "New Directions in the Humanities," is as important as the title. Several participants chose to probe potential new directions in the humanities with regard to questions of migrations' absence, difficulty, perilous nature, and tragic ends. Clandestine migration was tackled from a variety of angles, including ethnomusicology, museology, literary analysis, and film criticism. Brinda J. Mehta, for example, took an original look at the work of award-winning Libyan poet Khaled Mattawa and his work *Mare Monstrum*, which expresses the lived experience of clandestine sea-crossing and provides a "poetry of the flesh" long marginalized in academic scholarship. The ensuing conversation addressed questions of mourning and hope, as well as the paradox of martyrdom—when people become more powerful dead than alive. Hakim Abderrezak and Patrick Crowley showed that crossing the Mediterranean Sea is not the only attempted passage of a vast and deadly expanse; it follows crossings of a desert, which Abderrezak calls the "Saharan Sea," an appellation in use in the nineteenth century, when entrepreneurs, geographers, and diplomats had planned to fill the Sahara with water from the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean. Crowley examined two films by Tariq Teguia, one of which conveys the importance of the perilous journey that takes place before the final treacherous sea voyage. Restrictions on mobility also surfaced in Valérie K. Orlando's reading of the border in Rachid Bouchareb's understudied film *Two Men in Town*. Using this Algerian filmmaker's narrative about Islam, illegalized migration, and drug trafficking in an American borderland—rather than an Algerian or French one—Orlando looked at the implications for thinking of objects in motions, geographical disjunctures, and even a *cinéma-monde*.

The treatment of migration joined examinations of race, whether as a catalyst for African American migration, the object of stigmatization for sub-Saharan migrants waiting to cross North Africa, or the generation of European citizens born to African immigrants in Europe. Laila Amine considered how celebrated African American writers sought to escape the grasp of racial discrimination by exiling themselves permanently to the Old World. Scholars who foreground post-World War II African American writers' European cosmopolitanism have missed how their work rethinks the Saidian rift with the country of origin (exile) as something that precedes mobility. The racialized confinement that novelists such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, or William G. Smith experienced at home informs their writing about the European refuge. Contemporary artists such as Adrian Piper and Andrea Lee write in this long tradition of European exile. Internal exile today also explains the quiet exit of Muslims from France. Like the walls erected around Melilla and Ceuta, Spanish enclaves in Morocco, exile is also imposed by human beings on other human beings. It is incumbent on present-day scholars to interrogate the language that naturalizes so-called migration crises or cosmopolitan migration, distorting in the process our understanding of human movements, specifically the causes of exits and the distressing never-ending "seametery" (Abderrezak).

In a context of highly visible and deadly crossings from Morocco to Spain, Michelle Murray demonstrated how stigmatized Black Spaniards dodge the migrant story of African descendants in their photo-essays, favoring instead Black American iconographies and references to the Anglo-Atlantic slave trade. Murray contextualized this by pointing out

a 1992 Spanish survey that showed the association of migrants with crimes and degeneracy and recuperated an anti-Black Spanish history in which to locate this cultural production. Sandra Folie, too, touched on the slave trade, extending its deployment to an Austrian novel and film that frame sexual trafficking of African women as modern slave narratives.

The question of racism is linked to colonialism and empire, as Dominic Thomas addressed. His public talk examined hegemonic discourses and the propaganda that undergirds them. He made compelling connections between countries and epochs mostly on the African and European continents, but in addition, more presently and further east, Ukraine and Russia. He also confronted Germany's colonial past, evidenced still in street names throughout Berlin. Fatima El-Tayeb talked about colonialism as it relates to the Humboldt Forum, recently opened in the heart of the German capital. She highlighted the controversies surrounding the collections, particularly how they form part of a larger story about a colorblind and enlightened Europe and how that narrative erases important facts, such as how Germany came into possession of more than 47,000 objects, among them human remains, or how the activism behind the repatriation of some objects to formerly colonized regions and peoples has been erased.

It was important to have these kinds of exchanges in Berlin, home to a large community of refugees and artists who have come to Germany over the past half-decade, since the country opened entry to more than one million migrants. Many have passed through Tempelhof Airport, itself a subject of controversy since it was partially transformed into a shelter for newcomers from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East.

We are grateful for the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and to the Academy's Berit Ebert and Johana Gallup for making this workshop a memorable success. □

# Erasure

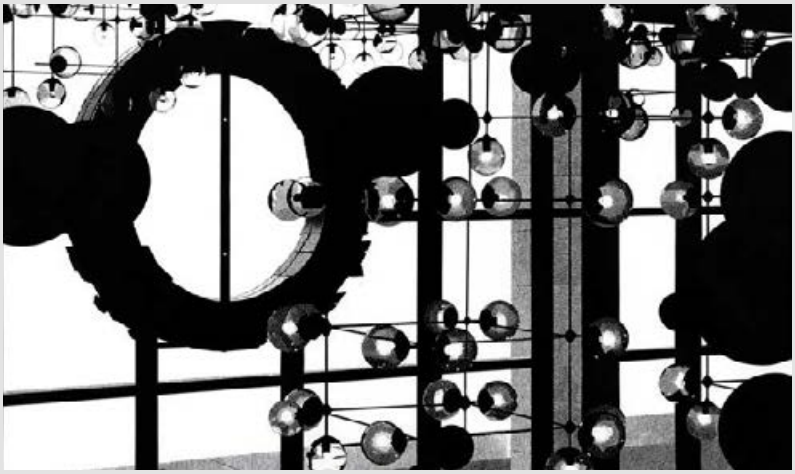
by Dominic Thomas

**I WAS INTRIGUED** as a child by those empty glass bottles in which small ships could be found, vessels whose seafaring days following ceremonial launches had come to symbolic ends. I did not share this curiosity with anyone, nor do I remember ever soliciting explanations to the obvious question as to how they had actually ended up in there. This reluctance to seek answers came with the full knowledge that the mental speculation provided by the mystery would be ruined by a dryly technical response. Today, a simple Google search reveals that these are categorized as "impossible bottles," a traditional craft with roots in the eighteenth century, that there are several ways of placing a model ship inside a bottle, and that they can be found on display in maritime museums around the world.

Of course, there are other intriguing childhood tales and unsolved enigmas, many of which have continued to shape my life. One of the earliest I pondered was whether the ubiquitous concrete wall that surrounded my family home in West Berlin was designed to keep people in or out. The watchtowers were less ambiguous, as were the armed border-guards. Yet, somehow, it was the hidden promises to be found on the other side that captivated my interest.

I was reminded of these early imaginative excursions when I visited the newly opened Humboldt Forum and first saw the boat that was transported to Berlin in 1904 from the South Pacific island of Luf, a German colonial possession in Papua New Guinea's Bismarck Archipelago. The 52-foot outrigger, splendidly decorated, remains a subject of controversy. Much like the ships of my childhood, sealed in bottles, the perimeter wall at the Humboldt Forum was constructed after the Luf boat was installed, thereby trapping and confining it in what the *New York Times'* architecture critic Michael Kimmelman has aptly described as a "fake Baroque palace [. . .] a manufactured charm, erasing traces of the bad years of the twentieth century." These matters are all the more disquieting given that the late-nineteenth-century merchant and showman Carl Hagenbeck aspired, in this same European capital, to tout Germany's African colonies, as commemorated in the Berlin quarter of Wedding (often referred to as the *Afrikanisches Viertel*), where one can still wander down Afrikanische Straße, Togostraße, Kongo Straße, or Koloniestraße. Hagenbeck also promoted "human zoos," placing non-Western people (often naked) on display in enclosures so that they could perform and entertain visitors, themselves caged in the ideologies and myths that served to justify colonial expansion. Their superiority remained unchallenged, comforted and re-affirmed by the staged hierarchy between observers and objects. *Extraction* and *provenance*, henceforth everlastingly betrothed.

**THE HUMBOLDT FORUM** has been front and center with public debates about the museological restitution of African artifacts pillaged during the era of colonialism. It struggles to reconcile "museological practices" with "historical reckoning." Various panels displayed throughout the Humdoldt Forum recognize that "museums are increasingly focusing on the critical reappraisal of holdings from colonial times and the violent methods by which they were acquired." Yet, as Nobel Prize laureate J. M. Coetzee once wrote: "I say to myself, we are all sorry when we are found out. Then we are very sorry. The question is not, are we sorry? The question is, what lesson have we learned? The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry?" Is it adequate to simply acknowledge a reprehensible past for culpability to be erased and for that gesture to open up different futures?



Class Gutsche, *Erasure* (2013). Linocut on Kozo paper, 168 × 237 cm

Glass, much like history, is fragile; walls are never permanent. This was the fate of the iconic Palace of the Republic that was demolished to make room for the reconstructed royal and imperial Berlin Palace now home to the Humboldt Forum. The former was inaugurated more than four decades earlier, on April 23, 1976, by the government of the German Democratic Republic, as the seat of the People's Parliamentary Chamber (*Volkskammer*) and the center of gravity for cultural, sporting, and social gatherings. German reunification got underway after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, inaugurating multiple processes of erasure in order to advance the imperative of forging common identities and a sense of shared belonging, the failed legacy of which continues to be evident in the asymmetrical relationship and lingering inequalities between what were temporarily two separate Germanies. With this knowledge in mind, how does one begin the process of confronting the truth, assessing extraction and provenance, and charting a path towards memorial evidence and recovery, all while simultaneously recalibrating dynamics between centers and peripheries and evaluating the concentric circles that ripple across these historical terrains?

The (fake) Berlin Palace rests on unstable layers and foundations. As with tectonic shifts or plate motions, these will continue to crackle until the process of historical reckoning is undertaken in a meaningful way. The Humboldt Forum shop now offers replicas—for a staggering €3,895—of the ceiling lights that once hung in the Palace of the Republic. One cannot help but be reminded of the protagonist Richard's words in Jenny Erpenbeck's 2015 novel, *Go, Went, Gone* (*Gehen, ging, gegangen*): "There's no better way to make history disappear than to unleash money, money roaming free has a worse bite than an attack dog, it can effortlessly bite an entire building out of existence." These are mockeries, contemptuous and insulting copies of the originals that were suspended in what was then referred to fondly as "Erich's lamp shop," in recognition of Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party. But these are also caricatures of the past that ignore East German sensitivities and downplay anti-capitalist impulses, privileging instead consumerist mentalities similar to earlier historic attempts aimed at commodifying ethnographic collections, objects also denuded and then reduced to static positions and stripped of cultural meaning. (The Palace and its lights were memorialized in Claas Gutsche's magnificent 2013 linocut print *Erasure*, what historian Pierre Nora has described as "realms of memory" [*lieux de mémoire*], establishing common denominators in a shared national consciousness and memory of the nation, evidence and traces of collective memory and spaces for dialogue about the past.)

**WALLS**—whether imaginary or concrete—continue to define twenty-first century life. New technologies operate in a similar fashion, and truth can be distorted and instrumentalized by misinformation and deepfakes that apply deep-learning technology to the process of replacing or substituting images or video of an individual with someone else's likeness. Today, we also speak of firewalls designed to monitor network traffic between the *inside* and *outside*. Access to information streams is often curtailed, and these mechanisms have also been accompanied by new forms of surveillance, legislative and technological measures designed to regulate, limit, and restrict access to information and content, control and monitor downloads and file-sharing, while also introducing new forms of activism through leaks and anonymous postings. Disinformation campaigns influence every facet of contemporary life and furnish us with a new vocabulary with which to describe and explain society. Likewise, new software allows for documents and information, records of experience, to be removed from hard drives with system erasers or data destruction software, thereby wiping away history.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of debates focusing on colonialism and postcolonial legacies. These are found in debates on restitution, reparation, historical accountability and responsibility, and have been most evident in the public space, with the toppling, spray-painting, or beheading of statues that have glorified or honored racist figures, signs and symbols of a painful history. The Orwellian dystopia warned of this polarization: "One could not learn history from architecture any more than one could learn it from books. Statues, inscriptions, memorial stones, the names of streets, anything that might throw light upon the past had been systematically altered." This is evident today in the bemoanings of the loss of a glorious past by people who refuse to relinquish their entitlement, clinging to the belief that they are deserving of privilege.

In an era of fake news and "post-truth," or perhaps, given that the radical right has won the discursive war about *truth* (and persists in exploiting polarizing rhetoric), it might make more sense to think in terms of post-*fact* rather than investing in truth or a *beyond* it. As we learned from the Ministry of Truth's slogan in the Orwell's *1984*, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." All of these questions can be inscribed in the broader postcolonial context and proliferation of technocratic rhetoric deployed in response to migration patterns that deliberately seek to obfuscate the human element. As the sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago has explained, a "tautology of fear" has been sustained according to which foreigners and others "constitute a threat," thereby compelling "the authorities to act" and implement a corresponding security apparatus that comprises camps and detention facilities built for the clandestine, undocumented, and illegals "captured" at sea and elsewhere. Having survived perilous ocean crossings—circumscribed in Hakim Abderrezak's neologism "seametery"—migrants now find themselves submerged in a sea of acronyms, abbreviations, decrees, treaties, directives, declarations, policies, strategies, and regulations, a lexical inventory structured according to exclusionary concepts and principles in what French lawyer Claire Rodier has called the "xenophobia business." European countries have adopted migration management schemes that outsource or externalize the processing of asylum claims to third-countries outside of Europe, leading to what Margaritis Schinas (EU Commissioner for Promoting the European Way of Life) said, in April 2021, will allow for "building a new ecosystem on returns." Likewise, the United Kingdom, having successfully lifted the drawbridge to "Brexit Britain," was quick to adopt equally unconscionable measures, now sponsoring deportation flights to Rwanda, a destination thousands of kilometers away that the asylum seekers did not leave and have never called home.

The mindset that enables the planning and enacting of such operations has deep roots in colonialism. The erosion of democratic institutions and principles, growing mistrust of journalists, and influence of illiberal populists determined to restrict media freedom, weaken constitutional and juridical standards, subvert elections, disenfranchise voters, and encourage voter apathy have been amplified by fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. This has coincided with a dehumanization of migrants and the debasing logic of political rhetoric and recourse to official statistics, measures that make it easier to deport and expel, and to dissociate such harsh measures from any reference to the migrants' own experience. These archipelagoes of the mind are prevalent on the mainland European island (that conveniently forgets that the EU includes departments, regions, collectivities and lands in the Caribbean and the Americas, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and Antarctica) and are aimed at promoting a "European way of life." They resemble the vacuumed glass bottles I so admired as a child—shelters for people who have withdrawn like mollusks into their protective shells, erecting barricades to shield themselves from imagined predators in an age-old dynamic of power. □

# Refugee Blues

by Brinda Mehta

**THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY** has witnessed an unprecedented refugee tragedy, propelled by war, climate change, state repression, hunger, poverty, human-rights abuses, and sexual and religious persecution. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that over 84 million people around the world have been internally and externally displaced as a result of political, social, economic, and environmental devastation. Refugees represent over 26.6 million people among these staggering figures. This unfortunate situation has propelled irregular or clandestine migrations from the Global South to northern shores through torturous land and sea routes across the Mediterranean and the Sahara (among other locations) that have compromised the security and safety of the dispossessed. Images depicting overcrowded or capsized boats, perilous rescue missions on the high seas, bloated bodies washed ashore, emaciated bodies withering under the desert sun, and expressions of refugee despair and defiance captured in print and on screen have flooded media outlets, alerting the world to an unfolding crisis of epic proportions. Writers, poets, filmmakers, and other cultural artists have also used their individual platforms to create compelling verse, meaningful imagery, powerful paintings, expressive lyrics, and moving documentaries and films.

Within this diverse corpus of artistic expression, music has played a pivotal role in both humanizing and personalizing the experiences of refugees through gut-punching lyrics that give voice to their stories from a more meaningful insider perspective. These compositions appeal to the heart of the listener in chords of compassion, empathy, and understanding. They are performed "freely" in the universal language of rhythm and harmony that transcends politically framed borders and boundaries. These songs are composed in multiple languages, both European and non-European, to underscore the transnational scope of these migrations. The musicians sing from the heart, using their powerful lyrics as a form of counternarrative to mainstream discourses on clandestine migration. Their moving words both highlight and contest the inhumaniy of the situation while indicting the Global North for its indifference and

hostility to the plight of others. Some of the musicians document their own trajectories of irregular migration through song as a form of life narrative, while others express their solidarity through music, even though they may not have necessarily experienced these clandestine voyages firsthand.

Algerian folksinger Dahmane El Harrachi's emigrant song "Ya Rayah" (The Traveler) was one of the first tunes to draw attention to the predicament of migrants and refugees. The song was later popularized on the international scene by Rachid Taha, a superstar musician from Oran, in Algeria, who modernized the song's rhythms to appeal to a younger generation of listeners. *Ya Rayah* represents a musical ode to exile, displacement, and deception while also serving as a cautionary tale:

> *Traveler, where are you heading?*
> *You embark, take sick and return.*
> *So many innocents like you and me*
> *were duped and lost their way.*

The song articulates the experiences of an elder who is imparting his wisdom to a younger generation of migrant travelers, "so many innocents," who are unaware of the perils at sea and the dangers of heading toward unknown destinations. The melody highlights the physical and psychological de-routing suffered by the singer when he embarks on this ambivalent trip that makes him sick with anxiety and loneliness. He shares these emotions with youngsters who have "lost their way" after they are duped by deceitful human traffickers, touristy images of a European paradise, and the ravages of economic and political precarity. When all illusions are dispelled, the plaintive notes of the migrant's exilic tune begins its painful refrain couched in nostalgia and a deep regret for a worthy life left behind. The singer asks: "How much time have you wasted?/ How much time have you yet to lose?" *Ya Rayah* has been compared to a blues song through its emphasis on the pain of exile and the hardships encountered as "a stranger in those foreign lands."

**A YOUNGER GENERATION** of singers, such as Nigerian pop musician Chris Obehi, use their words to convey explicitly political messages. In his song "Non Siamo Pesci," Obehi repeats the refrain, "We are not fish/but we are human." By comparing refugees to fish, the lyrics refer to the ways in which refugees and migrants are made to languish at sea through aborted rescue missions or death. Their drowned bodies in the Mediterranean's watery graves become fodder for carnivorous sea creatures, like sharks, while their very presence in European waters feeds the impetus for anti-refugee legislation. The song was inspired by Obehi's own irregular journey from Wari, in Nigeria, to Palermo, in Sicily, a journey that almost cost him his life as a result of his kidnapping and detention in a Libyan prison for several months. "We will walk on roads that we do not know," he croons in "Non Siamo Pesci."

Obehi left Nigeria at a young age to escape the clutches of the terrorist Islamist group Boko Haram. Scarred by his own traumatic experiences of clandestine migration, the singer makes particular reference to the consequences of ill-fated migrations on children left to negotiate the sea's devastation without protection. Their fate is an indictment of the world's indifference to the plight of innocent children who are forced to leave home on a voyage of no return, when "hatred and envy shape war." Vulnerable children are the primary casualties of war. Their premature deaths during sea crossings can only be mourned through sorrowful moans that draw attention to their submerged lives at sea: "I heard a moan in the dark/all I saw was a child/under the sea/forced to live as a fish." When children are transformed into fish in the sea's belly the situation is "not great/but it's not great," laments the singer.

Moroccan singer Redouane's composition "I-hrig" describes the process of clandestine migration known as *hrig* in Arabic, a journey undertaken by North African *harragas* or burners of identity. Known to destroy all forms of identification that would link them to their countries of origin, *harragas* seek a new lease on life in the Global North by symbolically burning all signifiers linked to their past. The song can be described as a blues ode to the circumscribed lives of the *harragas*, a particularized *harraga blues*, by detailing the circumstances leading to their decision to migrate, "I can't find a way to make a living," the desire to provide for one's family, "I'm also going to bring back a car," and the seduction of Europe as a paradisiacal El Dorado or promised land, "with their eyes towards Europe." Instead of a liberating voyage toward prosperity, the hapless *harragas* face deportation or imprisonment in Spain's colonial enclaves in Ceuta and Melilla, in Morocco, while confronting the inevitability of death by drowning, "next to the prison there is death." The son who decides to migrate seeks the blessings of his mother to ensure his safe passage, despite her entreaties to "come back to your country, my son, it is better than Europe." The song documents the desperation of the *harragas*, "all the burners are worried," their struggle for survival, "a kilo of chickpeas to survive," and the ultimate tragedy that befalls them when they fail to make it to the shoreline, "the Italian Navy is searching where you are." The song's sad notes are enhanced by the mother's suffering: "Don't leave your wound in my liver," she cries when she is informed of her son's death. Her deep anguish resulting from this monumental loss, "My mother, prepare the funeral/your son will never come back," scars her for life. "Never again will I buy fish/it ate my son's eyes," she cries. These songs demonstrate how the sea has become a barrier between the North and South through its treacherous currents, militarized shorelines, and fortified borders.

The desert represents another zone of interdiction. Sahrawi singer Aziza Brahim's music highlights the incongruity and illegality of artificial desert walls and barriers in the Sahara. Hailed as the Queen of Western Sahara Desert Blues, Brahim currently lives in exile in Barcelona, Spain. She sings in three languages—Spanish, the Sahrawi language Hassaniya, and a creolized fusion of

both Spanish and Hassaniya as part of her multicultural identity that straddles Africa and Europe. Her song "Los Muros" (The Walls) highlights the ongoing exile experienced by the Sahrawi people of the Western Sahara as a result of their colonization by the Spanish until 1975, Moroccan occupation since 1979, and the construction of the 2,700-kilometer desert berm wall that has separated them from their homeland and confined them to refugee camps in southern Algeria.

Brahim's tunes draw attention to desert walls meant to isolate and confine marginalized communities: "And the walls keep rising still/On the land and the sea." Her compositions highlight the loneliness of exile imposed on her people for whom music is the only escape from the hardships of camp life. Brahim was born in one of these refugee camps; she sings, "This wall that you've erected/in a criminal way/with interference and injustice/is designed to segregate." Walls separate insider groups from outsiders. Brahim reveals the ways in which her people are denied access to their own history "in a criminal way." She uses her lyrics as historical narration, as a form of being in the world.

"Los Muros" is a song of exile, "because of the exile caused by the walls." It highlights the exilic blue(s) notes of the Sahrawi who use music as a powerful medium to reclaim their identity "in the verses of this song." For the Sahrawi, confinement represents an egregious violation of their nomadic existence and traditions. They long for movement beyond walls and refugee camps as they wait for that special moment of flight when "Another shooting star was seen/crossing the wall tonight/undetected by the radar/unnoticed by the guard." These songs of redemption and resistance likened to "another shooting star" represent the creative will and power of the Sahrawi to rise resolutely above the restrictive walls that surround them. Brahim's harmonies are a testament to their resilience and a united cry of justice for all those who have been criminalized and dehumanized by the illegal walls of injustice, exclusion, and violence.

**MUSIC HAS THE POWER** to heal fractured lives, provide a mode of resistance, and transgress boundaries. As a universal language of communication, it conveys the inner stories and struggles of these brave-hearted exiles, migrants, and refugees who will not compromise their humanity and dignity. As an expressive outlet, these songs give form and shape to their emotions and feelings while permitting them to narrate their life stories through memorable lyrics and haunting rhythms. These blues notes represent the language of the dispossessed and their allies, who will never stop singing against all forms of bigotry, using music as a social-justice platform to imagine a more clement world. These musicians oblige us to mobilize our creative forces to will such a world into existence through the emancipatory power of (blues) music. Until this transcendent world is realized, the plaintive refrains of Obeyi's song, "We are not fish, but we are human," will continue to resonate across delimiting barriers and boundaries. □

# Past and Future Genders

## Latin America and Beyond

by Moira Fradinger

**THIS SIXTH ANDREW W. MELLON** workshop addressed shifting notions of gender and sexuality that have been generating radical legal and cultural change. These notions question the Western paradigm of sexuality and gender as based on biological determination rather than historical and geo-specific cultural norms, taboos, and forms of social control. The recent steps toward depathologizing and decriminalizing Western sexual and gender practices have caused a backlash in the form of so-called anti-gender movements. While the Western world is making strides towards normalizing gender and sexual fluidity—by legalizing same-sex unions, allowing voluntary control over pregnancies, and adopting laws to depathologize behaviors such as a change in gender identity—some non-Western societies, as well as some contemporary non-state societies, have traditionally allowed for more fluid, non-binary concepts of gender and sexuality. A key innovator in the last three decades has been the Latin American region.

A decade ago, for example, Argentina became the first country to legally depathologize gender identity by redefining it as based on self-perception and self-declaration. Similar laws, though some still requiring medical certification, have since begun to appear around the world.

To debate these issues, this Mellon workshop convened international scholars from Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Germany, and the United States, from the disciplines of philosophy of law, legal studies, women's and gender studies, political science, history, anthropology, comparative literature, psychoanalysis, sociology, art history, Hispanic studies, and Black studies. The program was divided into daily themes, though certain topics ran throughout, such as the advantages and limits of a liberal human-rights regime, the legal framework for understanding gender and for advancing progressive agendas, and the imperative to study how transformative justice can be achieved in starkly different social and political contexts.

The first day of the workshop, philosopher of law Paula Viturro challenged the idea that this development in gender and sexuality was the next phase of international human-rights movements and looked at its local roots. The Academy's vice president of programs Berit Ebert (whose essay follows) looked at the genealogy of gender agendas in in the European Union legal system, where questions of gender identity have

traditionally emerged in cases of labor law. Philosopher Ana Miranda focused on gender violence in the Mexican and the German systems, giving an account of the Mexican legal instrument of "feminicide," which also allows for the indictment of state institutions.

The second day, the group focused on a uses and abuses of the Western concept of identity for progressive political agendas. Black studies and literary scholar Marquis Bey presented the case against "identity politics" as a basis for any movement striving for radical change, and for the uses of the non-binary concept of "transness" as a political project, whose genealogy Bey traced to black and trans* studies. Psychoanalyst Federico Ludueña, legal scholar Emiliano Litardo, and I (Moira Fradinger) continued a critique of the Western concept of identity vis-à-vis psychoanalysis; philosophical investigations into how language shapes who we are and what we think; mathematical studies of topological objects that provide models for how the mind works in non-linear, non-binary ways; and how gender and sexuality can be seen as determined by layers of social discourses imposed and appropriated throughout the course of life. Litardo, a member of the group that crafted the Argentine legislation, explained how the law juridically established self-perception as determining one's gender. Fradinger gave an account of how Argentina's depathologization stems from local genealogies merging a culture of psychological care with political action.

The third day of the workshop was devoted to non-Western, pre-Christian cosmologies and gender binaries as an effect of Western colonialism. Literary critic and human rights scholar Fernando Rosenberg constructed a genealogy of the idea of "dignity" that stemmed from Spanish colonialism in Latin America, and how the core human-rights idea based on this concept is used in both progressive and conservative agendas. Literary scholar and environmentalist Gisela Heffes discussed the connections between environmental studies and gender studies and the geopolitical tension between the science of ecology (for which alleviating human poverty in the Global South is paramount) and the philosophy of "deep ecology," in which no form of life or planetary element is superior to any other. Literary scholar Joseph Pierce presented how some indigenous cosmologies of the Americas conceive of the relatedness and co-dependence of all human and non-human beings, establishing non-hierarchical relationships to land as a sentient, reflexive part of the kinship matrix. Political scientist Andrés Fabián Henao Castro (whose essay follows) reoriented the group to a Greek myth he interpreted in light of debates over motherhood: Medea's famous decisions to marry, give birth, and to commit infanticide as an act of anti-patriarchal politics, rather than as an outburst of madness.

Our fourth day was devoted to new gender identities across the American continent, beginning with sociologist Ana Álvarez's research on the genealogies of *travesti* identities in Argentina and continuing with the emergence of "trans* studies" in the United States, an account of which was presented by American trans* historian Susan Stryker. Álvarez presented *travesti* identitarian formations as part of the defense of sexual work and the right to exist as a different embodiment of gender without conforming to binary presentation. Stryker offered a panorama of the emergence of trans* identities and the institutionalization of transgender studies in the Anglophone academy, including developments such as Black trans* studies and critical transphobia studies.

The fifth day was devoted to activism—for and against gender dissidence. While comparative literature scholar Clara Masnatta illustrated how art becomes activism in the global women's movement called "Not one less" (*Ni una menos*), Venezuelan lawyer and the first trans* congresswoman elected to the national parliament, Tamara Adrián (whose essay follows), focused on the structure, coherence, and financing of the anti-gender global movement.

The program was complemented with a public event in partnership with the Institute for Cultural Inquiry Berlin, on June 30: a roundtable conversation with Tamara Adrián, Susan Stryker, and German trans* activist Julia Ehrt, executive director of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA World). The panel—and the entire workshop—concluded with the observation that more cross-fertilization among disciplines is needed to imagine the future of the abolition of the current gender system, keeping in mind that the full potential of "trans" lies in its capacity to move across categories, identities, and disciplines, creating collective coalitions around political projects rather than fixed identities. □

# The Politics of Medea's Infanticide

by Andrés Fabián Henao Castro

**YOU MIGHT KNOW LITTLE** about the Greek mythological heroine Medea but probably do know her, most famously, for having killed her own children. Infanticide, however, is not exactly what distinguishes Medea from other tragic heroines. As the Chorus claims in Euripides' version of the tragedy,

> *I've heard of only one woman past, who killed the nurslings of her own nest. / And that was Ino, sent mad by the gods, / when Hera drove her wandering away from home. / She lept down into the salty waves, / wickedly drowning her clutch of babes. / She pressed her steps from land into the sea, / and died herself, along with her two sons.*

What distinguishes Medea is not so much that she kills her children but

that she justifies her act. She was not "sent mad by the gods." She kills her children to avoid "someone else's crueler hand to slaughter them." This is the action she anticipates the Corinthians will take in revenge for her own decision to kill the Corinthian king and his daughter, leaving Corinth without an heir. What is most troubling about Medea, however, is not even this political rationalization of the act, but that she survives the killing of her own children. Other tragic heroines, such as Clytemnestra, Antigone, or Ino, die by the will of others or their own hand. Only Medea survives and remains for us, inheritors of this tradition, to reckon with.

If Medea continues to haunt us, it is because she has no proto-feminist rival in Greek antiquity: she takes down not one but three royal patriarchal houses on her own. First, she destroys her own native *polis*, Colchis, when she kills her brother, Absyrtus (heir to the throne), to flee with Jason to Iolcus in Thessaly. Iolcus's king, Pelias, promised Jason the throne but only if he was able to retrieve the Golden Fleece, an impossible task. Jason, as we know, was only able to get the Golden Fleece because Medea not only saved all the Greeks aboard the Argo, but also killed the serpent watching over the Golden Fleece. And when the king fails to honor his word, Medea also destroys Jason's Iolcus, forcing their flight to Corinth.

Medea's tragedy orbits around her last revolutionary act, when she takes down Corinth's royal household in revenge for Jason's betrayal of their sacred oaths. But that is not all that she does to produce the household that she wanted to have with Jason. Known to have control over her own reproductive power as a famous witch—hence sought by the Athenian king, Aegeus, precisely to help him produce a child—she was willing to undergo birth-labor twice, having famously claimed, in the speech that has become a feminist manifesto of sorts, that she

> *would rather join / the battle rank of shields three times / than undergo birth-labor once.*

And for what has she done all of this? The conventional explanation is that she does it out of love for Jason, but this misses the point. For, as political scientist Demetra Kasimis argues, Medea "never received her father's permission to wed, because she arrogated this authority to herself." In other words, the oaths that bind Medea to Jason—those that Jason's marriage to Creon's daughter betrays—have no foundation in Greek antiquity. Medea and Jason's household is unique, in that theirs was probably the sole legally binding household in which he was no longer the master of her body but rather her equal. Her revenge is motivated by jealousy, and jealousy is the last interpretative resource used to neutralize the politics of her act. It matters little that jealousy, like envy, as cultural theorist Sianne Ngai argues, although lacking "cultural recognition as a valid mode of publicly recognizing or responding to social disparities," remains "the *only* agonistic emotion defined as having a perceived inequality as [its] object." Jealousy is the last subterfuge used to disqualify the politics of Medea's infanticide.

The late Austrian psychoanalyst Melanie Klein distinguished the triadic structure of jealousy from the dual structure of envy in ways helpful to elucidating the political nature of Medea's infanticide. In jealousy, Klein wrote, the jealous subject "fears to lose what it has," when perceiving the loved object as "in danger of being taken away" by the rival subject. In envy, the envious subject is instead "pained at seeing another have that which it wants for itself." But if Medea's is a case of jealousy, not of envy, who is the addressee of this jealousy? Is she jealous of Creon's daughter, fearing to lose Jason, the object of her love, who she perceives as in danger of being taken away from her not only by a younger woman but also by one able to make him a king? Or, as I would like to offer here, is she jealous of Jason, Creon, Aegeus, and all the other men she has never stopped defying? These are, after all, men who can freely go elsewhere "if irked with those [they have] at home," while women "are obliged to keep [their] eyes on just one person." Thus, might she fear instead the loss of the world that her oaths with Jason created, allowing her a similar mobility as Jason's equal refugee, compromised by the latter's decision to marry the sovereign's daughter to become one himself? Is she *envious* of their world, the one that she has rejected again and again, since she became a traitor to her own city to opt for inventing an entirely new one with Jason via their equally binding oaths? Or is she instead jealous of the power of their world, fearing the loss of her more egalitarian one, in danger of being taken away by the overpowering patriarchal violence of theirs?

Fearing Medea's wrath, Creon orders Medea's deportation, making her *de facto* stateless; she can return neither to her native Colchis nor to Jason's Iolcus. But she secures one day from him to enact her revenge and flee to Athens via the other binding oath that she performs with Aegeus. On that day, she chooses to protect the world that she invented with Jason, the one that depends on the recognized power of their binding oaths. Political equality, in *refugium*, rather than inequality in citizenship—that is her cause. And Medea has already given up everything for her cause, which is the more egalitarian world inaugurated by her oath with Jason, precisely because that oath was not supported by an earthly patriarchal authority other than their binding acts of equal consent. Her children are the materialization of that cause. Her infanticidal act is thus tragic to the extent that to defend her cause she must make one last sacrifice: she must give up on the cause itself. She must kill her own children so that her capacity to inaugurate new egalitarian worlds in consent with others can survive even the loss of her own. □

This essay is derived from Castro's chapter "Decolonial Ruminations on a Classic: Medea, Sethe and La Llorona," forthcoming in *The Routledge Handbook on Women and Ancient Greek Philosophy* (2023), edited by Sara Brill and Catherine McKeen.

# Now, Then, and Everywhere

by Tamara Adrián

**THERE WAS A MOMENT** in history, at the end of the last century, when it was common to believe that human development implied a continuous and unstoppable evolution toward the global recognition of human rights. Universality and progress toward achieving those rights was common as well in academic discourse. Under this idea, it was also easy to believe, by extension, that sexual and reproductive rights would be endorsed by all states. Moreover, the 1995 approval of the UN Declaration and Platform for Action concerning women's rights and gender-based rights created a worldwide coalition for action that led in many countries to the brisk establishment of equal and equalitarian rights for women and the LGBTI population. Those rights included education about sexual and reproductive matters, contraceptive methods, abortion, and modification of adoption rules to make procedures easier and faster, as well as LGBTI rights generally.

Unfortunately, this approach did not consider the regressive conservative forces that would come to promote the "relativity of human rights," or that "social and cultural beliefs" were an implicit limit to the universality of human rights. Today, these two divergent approaches are in conflict vis-à-vis international and regional systems of human rights. They are present in every relevant vote at the UN Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly, and UN treaty bodies. They also surface in the Organization of American States, African Union, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, among other regional organizations.

Conservatives forces have changed their strategies and tactics over the past several decades. Their center of activity used to be in churches; they argued the right to religious belief as the determining factor in opposing the above-mentioned rights. But the strategy of using religious beliefs as a tool for opposing sexual and reproductive rights gradually lost its importance, as judicial limits to the right to belief were established, whereby no belief could be used to deny others' human rights, and that no one may impose his or her own beliefs upon non-believers.

This is when conservative strategy and tactics began to copy the strategy and tactics of civil society groups fighting *for* human rights. Specifically, they created civil society organizations promoting freedom of speech and a defense of the family, obtaining UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status for such organizations. At the same time, they financed groups that opposed organizations fighting for sexual and reproductive rights. Finally, they created coalitions with these newly financed groups, aiming to divide the activities of those groups from other groups fighting for the same purpose, promoting confrontation between originally unitary causes.

One of the more conspicuous examples of this strategy is the financing of the originally small group of feminist biologists, who deny the concept of gender and its importance. These groups were practically nonexistent in 2010. But they have grown in influence over the past decade, owing to conservative-group financing. Consequently, their anti-gender arguments—which are often identical to those used by conservative groups within the Catholic and neo-Pentecostal churches—have attempted to divide the feminist movement as a whole. To do so, they have also been spreading conspiracy theories such as the "erasure of women" in order to spread collective panic.

Anti-gender movements are clear in their global and local strategies: they want to reverse sexual and reproductive rights in countries where they have been achieved and to block the establishment of those rights in the countries where they have not yet been achieved. To do so, they have targeted the concept of gender. They know that by attacking the concept of gender it is possible to provoke a backlash against all sexual and reproductive rights, and thus also against two minority groups: transgender individuals, whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth, and intersex individuals, who are born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit binary notions of male or female bodies. These are the two most vulnerable of groups in the LGBTI population.

The strategy for attacking these groups is different. For the transgender population, conservative groups have used various biological arguments, mainly those concerning the "erasure of women," biological differences, abuse of children, and the non-existence of the concept of gender. These arguments aim to deny transgender persons' existence—or the right to exist—and even to deny their human dignity. In the case of the intersex population, biological argumentation has left these individuals willfully ignored and unseen, and thus their human dignity likewise degraded.

Evidence of these long-view strategies and tactics can be seen most recently in the United States, where some conservative Republican legislators have been promoting regulations against abortion, sexual and reproductive rights, sexual education, access to contraception methods, access to health care for the transgender population, the recognition of gender identity for the transgender population, and related measures. The first step along this path, of course, was achieved by changing the composition of the Supreme Court, which led to the June 24, 2022, reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. Despite progress that has been made since the beginning of this millennium, I fear that we are witnessing the beginning of a conservative backlash that will unfold further and more dramatically in the years to come. □

# Poland

## The European Union's Bright Promise of Gender Equality

by Berit Ebert

**SINCE THE POLISH** parliamentary election in October 2015, the national conservative party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) has held the majority of seats in the *Sejm*, the lower house of the Polish National Assembly. Judicial reform that year passed new laws regarding the appointment of administrative and supervisory bodies of public-service broadcasters, on constitutional jurisdiction, the Supreme Court, and ordinary courts of law. This move has posed a serious threat to judicial independence, as judges can now be subjected to disciplinary proceedings controlled by the Polish president and minister of justice. Moreover, an October 2017 law targeting diversity in the judiciary lowered the retirement age for public prosecutors as well as judges on both standard courts and the Supreme Court. Previously, women and men alike retired at the age of 67. Since the reform, the retirement age for women has been reduced to 60 and for men to 65, a clear case of discrimination based on sex. Furthermore, the Polish minister of justice in a July 2017 revision of this law was granted discretion to prolong the period of office for judges on ordinary courts. The anticipated result is that in the years ahead there will be a reduction of female, often regime-critical, members of the judiciary and the establishment of a more patriarchal system of control.

Make no mistake: such judicial reform is accompanied by misogynist and homophobic policies. In January 2020, Polish Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro suggested withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, initiated by the Council of Europe in 2011 and aimed at combatting violence against women. Other laws restricted abortion rights (since 2021, fetuses that will not survive after birth must still be carried to term) and limited the possibilities to form registered same-sex partnerships. The presentation of non-heterosexual relationships in materials accessible to children has also been forbidden. Across the country, equality marches have been repeatedly hobbled.

Many local and regional Polish politicians support this retrograde path. In 2021, the European Parliament noted that some one hundred regions in Poland have declared themselves to be "LGBT-free zones" and have passed resolutions against what they call "LGBT ideology," thereby instrumentalizing the transgender movement to advance their own national conservative policies. Ordo Juris, an association of lawyers close to the Law and Justice Party, drafted the "Charta of Family Rights," a document advocating for heteronormative marriage, which was subsequently adopted by forty municipal and regional parliaments. Ordo Juris is largely comprised of Christian fundamentalists and promotes traditional hetero-patriarchal family roles, deploying the principles of freedom of speech and religion as stipulated by the Polish Constitution to exclude sexual and reproductive health rights. Working against the right to abortion, Ordo Juris posts numerous cases online for the like-minded *Fundacja Pro—Prawo do Życia* (Pro Life Foundation—The Right to Live), which distributes disinformation about homosexuality and trans* persons. In 2022, they introduced the law "Stop LGBT" into the Sejm. It was adopted with the support of 227 members, with 214 votes against.

The Polish government continuously crafts a nationalistic narrative that systematically discredits non-binary forms of gender identity, with the help of the church. The Polish Bishops' Conference criticized an initiative called Rainbow Friday, which supports the safety of LGBTQIA+ students. According to Education Minister Anna Zalewska, schools that take part in Rainbow Friday actually break Polish education law. Participating students were threatened with bad grades.

The rule of law requires that the state governs while observing rules and that it governs through those rules. German constitutional scholars such as Dieter Grimm and Gerhard Leibholz remind us that legal norms are derived from the dynamic consensus of the governed, not by the establishment of an unchangeable ideology. In Poland, however, the discrediting of minority groups in conjunction with a patriarchal, hetero-normative ideology in fact circumscribe the law and amend the power structures therein. In so doing, national conservative instrumentalizing tactics exclude the LGBTQIA+ community from the very political discourse that could evoke the societal consensus needed to revise current power relations.

At the European level, the Polish and Hungarian governments have attempted to do something similar, in preventing the use of the term "gender equality" in the joint final declaration of the 2021 Porto Social Summit of the EU heads of state and government. In March 2021, both countries took action for annulment of a new EU Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation, which makes a guarantee of the rule of law conditional for the disbursement of EU funds. The CJEU (Court of Justice of the EU) dismissed their request, stating that "the founding values of the European Union [. . .] include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, in a society in which, *inter alia*, non-discrimination, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

## ACTIVISM IN POLAND

**DESPITE THE REPEATED** reprisals visited upon them, victims of these new policies in Poland took an ever-stronger stance against the reforms, joining forces with local and regional governments. Schools continued to stage Rainbow Fridays; activist Bartosz Staszewski, one of the organizers of

the equality marches in Lublin, successfully went to court over the ban. In 2018, the mayor of Warsaw signed a declaration with a commitment to upholding LGBTQIA+ rights and, in 2021, led the first equality march since 2019, with 20,000 participants. In the city of Białystok—an "LGBT-free zone"—when right-wing protestors violently attacked participants of an equality parade, activists in other Polish cities expressed their solidarity with the victims: "No liberty without solidarity," the motto of the Polish civil-rights movement in the 1980s, was effectively reactivated by today's LGBTQIA+ community. Activist groups such as "Stop Bzdurom" (Stop the Madness) oppose the government's systematic defamation of the LGBTQIA+ community, and the group Aborcyjny Dream Team offers women science-based information about abortion. Nationwide women's strikes are calling for the resignation of the Polish government.

One prominent female voice against the Polish reforms is Małgorzata Maria Gersdorf, who in her former function as president of the Supreme Court of Poland asked the CJEU for a preliminary ruling in the Joined Cases *A. K. and a. v Sąd Najwyższy* (2019), in which the CJEU ruled against the differing retirement ages and the new disciplinary chamber. But the implementation of the ECJ (European Court of Justice) decision as ordered by the Polish Supreme Court was declared unconstitutional by the country's pro-government Constitutional Court. In addition, for the first time in Poland's history, the constitutional judges suspended their own colleagues on the Supreme Court. Gersdorf, however, who would have had to retire under the new Polish law, remained on the bench until the original end of her term, April 30, 2020. Numerous judges affected by the new discriminatory law sued against their early dismissal and evoked preliminary rulings from the ECJ by arguing on the basis of European law. This binding dialogue between national courts and the ECJ provides people advocating for equality and the rule of law with the means to challenge non-compliant Member States in a manner that would have been inconceivable without EU mechanisms. They may not always have the desired impact, but if the objective of current national conservative forces is to intimidate their opponents, then they have failed.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION

**THE POSITION OF POLISH** activists, subnational governments, and EU measures partially complement each other. The European Commission has positioned itself clearly: since 2020, it has published an annual report on the situation of the rule of law in its Member States, criticizing the dysfunctional legal system and the restriction of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights in Poland. In 2016, the Commission activated the first and second stage of the EU Framework to strengthen the rule of law for the first time. As part of this dialogue procedure, the Commission advises non-compliant Member States as to how to rectify their rule-of-law breaches. After the first stage failed and repressive Polish laws followed, the Commission initiated proceedings under Art. 7 (1) TEU, on December 20, 2017, at the behest of the European Parliament. It did so, first, to determine if there was "a clear risk of a serious breach by a Member State of the values referred to in Article 2" (Art 7 (1) TEU) and, second, to impose sanctions. Poland was heard several times by the Council, last in February 2022, but no significant changes were forthcoming, although the Commission recently noted some willingness to reform. Still, subsequent sanctions in the Article 7 proceedings are dependent on a unanimous decision by the European Council, the heads of state and government, who remain hesitant.

Together with the CJEU, the Commission has taken a much clearer stance against Poland. It tried to stop parts of the judicial reform by means of infringement proceedings, asserting breaches of the impartiality and independence of judges in conjunction with the reduction of the retirement age of the judiciary. Here, the rule of law breaches are directly linked to the principle of equal pay. On July 14, 2021, the ECJ finally demanded that the disciplinary chamber stop its work immediately and that the retirement rules discriminatory to women be suspended. Poland sought annulment of the order by claiming that the CJEU had exceeded its powers and wrongfully interfered in the Polish constitutional system. The CJEU dismissed the Polish motion, stressing the primacy of EU law. A landmark judgement of the Polish Constitutional Court's reaction followed promptly, on October 7, 2021, stating that the objective of "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe," in conjunction with the principle of loyal cooperation curtails Poland's functioning as a sovereign democratic state. On October 27, the CJEU enforced its decision and imposed a daily fine of one million euros.

**THE POSITIONS OF ACTIVISTS,** the EU Parliament, and the Commission are congruent. Yet the Parliament, without the right to initiate legal acts, and the Commission's active policymaking function in the field of gender equality, remain weak. CJEU decisions and its withholding of funds are important, but, in the long run, the concerns of EU citizens must become a constructive part of a political genesis. Although marginalized gender activists in Poland do make use of EU law, they are unable to exercise sufficient influence in the policy-creating process, despite their many lawsuits. A future challenge thus consists not only of making opposition heard at the European level through legal action, but also of ensuring necessary participation at the various national policymaking levels—coming full circle with the need to uphold the principle of democracy and the rule of law in each Member State. Gender identity cannot only be tried before courts; it must be included at a much earlier stage of the representational policymaking discourse in order to shape the subnational, national, and European arenas. Rights need constant action, not just codification. □

A version of this article appears in the current issue of *Open Gender Journal*.


NOTEBOOK

News from the Hans Arnhold Center



Photo: Ralph K. Penno

# REMEMBERING NINA VON MALTZAHN

(1941–2022)

On May 22, 2022, the American Academy lost one its most generous and deeply committed benefactors and friends, Nina von Maltzahn, who passed away peacefully at age 81, in Punte del Este, Uruguay. As much as Nina's presence brought vitality to the Academy, her absence has brought an equal sense of loss. The Academy's trustees, management, and staff share in her family's sadness—but also rejoice in her amazing life.

Nina von Maltzahn was the daughter of Ellen Maria and Fritz Gorrissen and a granddaughter of Hans and Ludmilla Arnhold, in whose erstwhile home the Academy was christened on November 6, 1998. Nina's family connection to the Hans Arnhold Center was one of the reasons behind her extraordinary dedication to the American Academy in Berlin. This dedication took many forms: from lively Academy dinners at her Potsdamer Platz residence to the intimate concerts performed at the Academy by musicians from Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music; from her horticultural vision for the Academy's grounds to her oversight of architectural renovations in the villa; and from her underwriting of the twice-annual presentation of Berlin Prize Fellows to her eloquent introductions at Academy lectures periodically throughout the year. Throughout all of these activities, Nina was a wellspring of intellect, wit, style, and aesthetic sensitivity.

Born in 1941 in New York City, Nina Maria von Maltzahn attended The Hewitt School, on the Upper East Side. She moved to Switzerland at age 15 to finish her studies, at the Kirche und Kloster der Ursulinen. In 1970, she married and moved to Montevideo, Uruguay. Thirteen years later, when she divorced and returned to Switzerland, she kept a property on the beautiful coastal Laguna del Sauce, convinced that she would return. Uruguay would become a second home for the rest of her life.

A language polyglot who spoke seven languages, Nina worked for the company Leading Hotels of the World, established in 1928 by Europe's leading hoteliers. But philanthropy would become her true passion—expressed by her support of education and music initiatives on three continents. In the United States, she served as board chairwoman of the Curtis Institute of Music, where she established the guitar department, string quartet program, and Curtis on Tour, a global touring initiative. In 2016, upon her departure as longtime chair, Curtis granted Nina an honorary doctorate of musical arts *honoris causa*. In Berlin, in addition to her support of the Academy, she was the founding benefactor of the Royal Garden Academy and served on the board of Sing Akademie, the oldest mixed choral association in the world. In Greece, Nina founded One Child, One World, a community-based organization established to improve the lives of children and their families in urban Athens. In Montevideo, she was the founder and president of the Fundación Retoño, a nonprofit addressing the needs of underprivileged children through education. What began as a small educational outreach center, Centro Espigas, today works with 500 children. Through Nina's support, they created a free secondary school, Liceo Espigas, which now serves 300 students. Fundación Retoño also established a medical and dental clinic on the premises, providing care to 600 students and their families. A vocal proponent of global health, Nina also established an observership fund for young Uruguayan pediatricians to attend the Visiting Clinicians program at the Mayo Clinic, in Minnesota.

Nina's legacy will live on through these projects, through the people she inspired, and through the thousands more whose lives have been improved because of her generosity. Each of Nina's organizations has been endowed in perpetuity, so they may continue with their work well into the future.

For the Academy's small part in celebrating Nina's life, a lively memorial was held at the Hans Arnhold Center on September 13, 2022, featuring words of appreciation from some of Nina's closest Berlin friends and peers, who were treated to performances of her favorite musical compositions and offered culinary treats from the countries in which her philanthropy touched the lives of so many. We know Nina would have loved it. □

Nina von Maltzahn and her maternal aunt, Anna-Maria Kellen, at the Hans Arnhold Center dedication, November 6, 1998. Photo: Thilo Rückeis


Photo: Annette Hornischer

# THE 2021 KISSINGER PRIZE AND JAMES MATTIS DISTINGUISHED VISITORSHIP

On the evening of November 18, 2021, the glass-roofed inner courtyard of the Deutsches Historisches Museum welcomed an audience of two-hundred invited guests for the ceremony of the 2021 Henry A. Kissinger Prize. Awarded annually since 2007 to a renowned American or European figure in the field of international diplomacy, the 2021 prize recognized General James N. Mattis—former Secretary of Defense (2017–2019) and Commander of the US Joint Forces Command—for his distinguished service to the government and military of the United States and for sustaining global alliances during his tenure as secretary of defense. Henry Kissinger honored Mattis as "a symbol of the role that America plays in the community of people who defend democracy and freedom."

Laudations for General Mattis were delivered by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO. "Jim Mattis is a soldier whose competence is matched by very few, a scholar who cares deeply about the men and women in uniform," von der Leyen said. "He is a man of the three C's: competence, caring, and conviction. There are no better words to characterize this evening's laureate." Stoltenberg, who spent much time with Mattis during his tenure, said, "Over the years

James N. Mattis accepts the Kissinger Prize from Academy chair Sandra E. Peterson

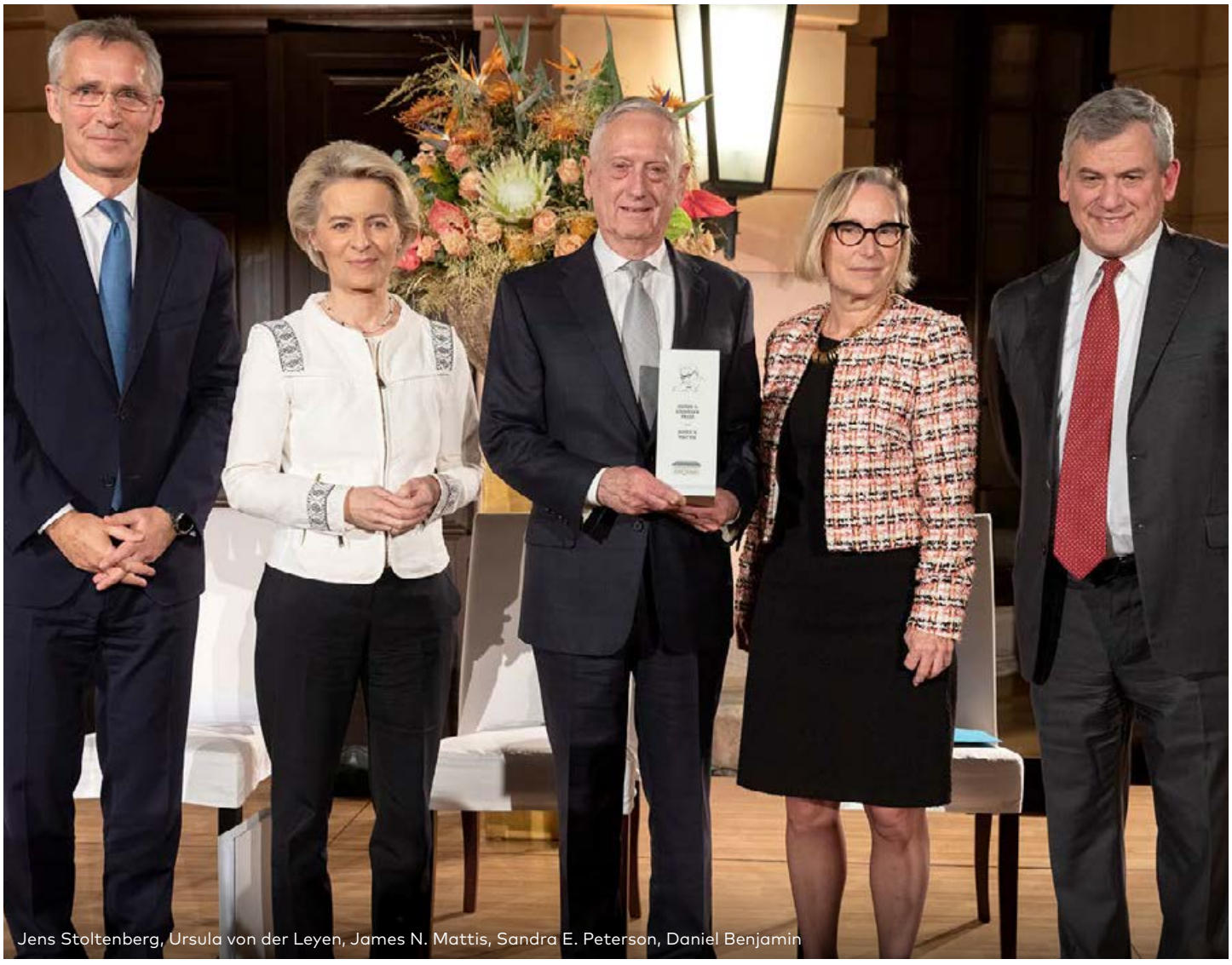
Photo: Annette Hornischer

we worked together, I saw Jim's commitment to our Alliance. [. . .] He committed himself and the US completely to NATO and to European security, but he always expected the same level of commitment in return. [. . .] Jim, thank you for being a steadfast ally, a skilled diplomat, a formidable Marine. But most of all, thank you for being my friend."

In a moving acceptance speech, James Mattis saluted "the leaders devoted to strengthening trust between two of the world's committed democracies and bringing us closer together," and expressed gratitude to his laudators: "I would not be standing here today were it not for President von der Leyen and Secretary General Stoltenberg. That's a fact; that's not fiction, and that shows what the Alliance is all about. [. . .] Our shared freedoms are our inheritance but also our promise to children's future. When the date comes that our generation turns leadership over to the next, it is my earnest hope that our democracies will be on a stronger footing than today. In this effort, Germany and America will play key roles."

As an enduring testament to General Mattis's achievements, the American Academy in Berlin has established the James N. Mattis Distinguished Visitorship, which will bring an outstanding individual from the worlds of politics, diplomacy, security, or international relations to Berlin each year. The visitor will deliver a public lecture and engage with counterparts in government, higher education, think tanks, and the business world. Appointments will last for up to four weeks and may include visits to other German cities and leading institutions. As with the Academy's other visitorships, the Mattis program will advance the bilateral conversation in an atmosphere of frank and civil exchange, with the goals of increasing clarity of understanding and strengthening connections between the United States and Germany.

The American Academy extends its gratitude to Eric Schmidt, General Dynamics, and Raytheon Technologies for leadership support of this initiative. And for underwriting the 2021 prize ceremony, the Academy's gratitude is again extended to Bloomberg Philanthropies, Robert Bosch GmbH, Google Germany GmbH, Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche AG, and Cerberus Deutschland Beteiligungsberatung GmbH. □



Jens Stoltenberg, Ursula von der Leyen, James N. Mattis, Sandra E. Peterson, Daniel Benjamin

Photo: Annette Hornischer

# THE DEUTSCHE BANK FELLOWSHIP IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

Photo: Annette Hornischer

The newly established Deutsche Bank Fellowship, supporting a Berlin residency of one music composition fellow per academic year, welcomed its first recipient at the start of the spring 2022 semester: Shanghai-born composer, multi-instrumentalist, performance artist, activist, and curator of new music Du Yun. A professor of music composition at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University and Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, she is the winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Music, a 2018 Guggenheim Fellow, and a 2019 Grammy nominee in the category of Best Classical Contemporary Composition. In 2018, Du Yun was named one of the "38 Great Immigrants" by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and, in 2019, "Artist of the Year" by the Beijing Music Festival. In 2022, Du Yun received a Creative Capital Award for an AR-intergenerational Kun-opera project. At the Academy, she worked with the Humboldt Forum for a sound project with the First Generation School Children from Yushu, Tibetan Prefecture.

"Deutsche Bank has been a committed supporter of contemporary art and music for many years," said James von Moltke, a member of the Deutsche Bank's management board who helped to spearhead the initiave. "With this fellowship in music composition, we are continuing the wonderful tradition of creating innovative cultural projects and fostering highly talented young artists and musicians. At the same time, we support the German-American dialogue, which is very important to us. I am really looking forward to the opportunity to engage with the young composers and the fruitful exchange with our American partners."

Scheduled to run for four academic years, the Deutsche Bank Fellowship in Music Composition will introduce composers to Berlin's dynamic musical world and to foster creative musical exchange on both sides of the Atlantic.

At a dinner inaugurating the fellowship, on March 17, Academy president Daniel Benjamin noted that the Academy "enjoys a long tradition of bringing exciting young composers to Berlin, and this fellowship institutionalizes this practice in a formidable way. We are deeply grateful to Deutsche Bank for their generous, visionary investment in contemporary music and the transatlantic cultural relationship. And I can't imagine a better inaugural fellow than Du Yun, whose innovative, eclectic, and engaging work is exactly what this program is all about." In spring 2023, the Academy welcomes the next Deutsche Bank Fellow, Tashi Wada. □

# CAROL KAHN STRAUSS FELLOWSHIP IN JEWISH STUDIES

The American Academy in Berlin is pleased to announce a gift of $2.4 million from Carol Kahn Strauss to establish an endowed fellowship in Jewish Studies. In recognition of this remarkable commitment, the Academy will name the fellowship in perpetuity for Ms. Kahn Strauss, the longtime director of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, renowned figure in German-Jewish relations, and a recipient of the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit (*Grosses Bundesverdienstkreuz*) and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

The inaugural Carol Kahn Strauss Berlin Prize Fellowship in Jewish Studies will be awarded in the 2023–24 academic year and will bring one scholar annually to the Hans Arnhold Center for a semester-long residency. This fellowship will further anchor the Academy's strong tradition of hosting scholars from the various academic disciplines that comprise Jewish Studies. "I'm tremendously grateful to Carol Kahn Strauss for making this gift," said Academy president Daniel Benjamin. "There is demonstrated demand for such a program among American scholars, and this fellowship will additionally help meet Germany's considerable demand for scholarly exchange and public education on Judaism and Jewish history and culture." The sentiment was echoed by Academy chairman Sandra E. Peterson: "On behalf of our board of trustees it is a great privilege to welcome the establishment of this fellowship in perpetuity," she said. "I would like to personally thank Carol for her extraordinary generosity and shared vision."

The Carol Kahn Strauss Berlin Prize Fellowship will join an eminent roster of named fellowships that honor their namesakes by concentrating on a specific academic field or research into a specific time period that was intellectually important to them. For Kahn Strauss, the motivation is also personal: "The remarkable German-Jewish legacy passed on to me by my parents, my grandparents, and my husband is very close to my heart," she said. "To quote from Goethe's *Faust*, '*Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen* (what you have inherited from your fathers, take hold of it to make it your own).' Through my years as director of the Leo Baeck Institute, and before that as president of Congregation Habonim in New York, my mission has been to preserve and perpetuate that legacy. My commitment could not be more perfectly reflected than through the establishment of the Fellowship in Jewish Studies at the American Academy in Berlin." □

Photo courtesy Carol Kahn Strauss

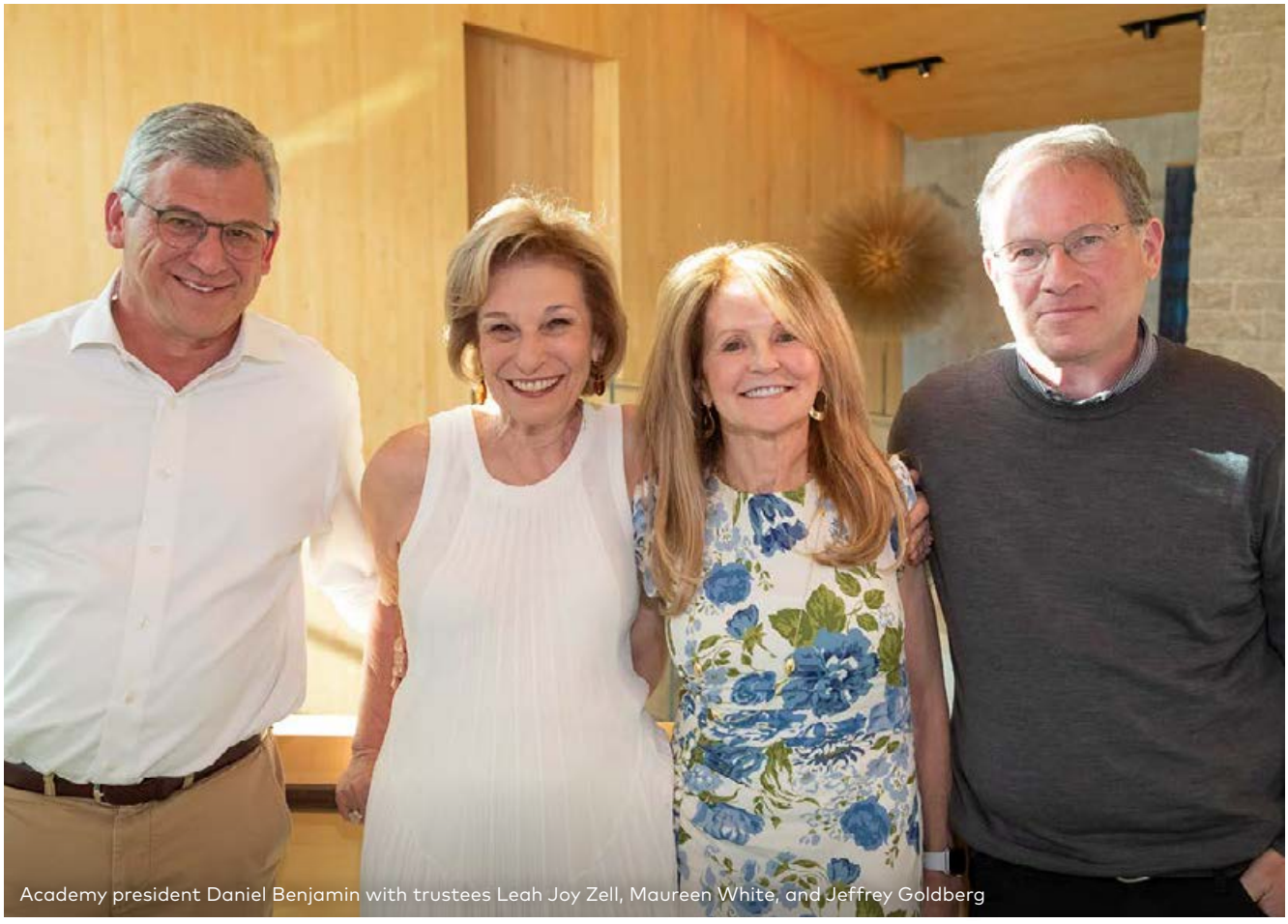
# WELCOMING NEW TRUSTEES

The Academy is pleased to welcome six new members to its board of trustees: **Stefan Asenkerschbaumer** is Managing Partner of the Robert Bosch Industrietreuhand KG and Chairman of the Supervisory Board at Robert Bosch GmbH. In 2017, the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg appointed him an honorary professor. Since 2019, Asenkerschbaumer has been President of the Schmalenbach-Gesellschaft für Betriebswirtschaft, a business economics association. **Jeffrey Goldberg** is the editor-in-chief of *The Atlantic*, which he joined in 2007 as a national correspondent. In 2020, he was named editor of the year by *Adweek*, which also named *The Atlantic* "Magazine of the Year." A 2015 Dirk Ippen Fellow at the Academy and former Washington correspondent of the *New Yorker*, Goldberg also served as a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and as a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is

the author of *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror* (2006). **Tim Höttges** has been the CEO of Deutsche Telekom AG since 2014. From 2006 to 2009, he was member of the board of management responsible for the T-Home unit. Under his leadership, T-Home became the market leader in new DSL customers and successfully developed its Internet TV service, Entertain. **Joe Kaeser** is chairman of the Supervisory Board of Siemens Energy AG, and chairman of the Supervisory Board of Daimler Truck Holding AG. During more than four decades at Siemens AG he has held a variety of leading management positions in finance and strategy, both within and outside Germany. In 2015, he was awarded the Portuguese Grand Cross of the Order of Entrepreneurial Merit; in 2017, he received the Prize for Understanding and Tolerance from the Jewish Museum in Berlin. **Michael Sen** is the president and CEO of Fresenius Kabi AG. Prior, he was a member of the management board of Siemens AG, where he was responsible for the healthcare business Siemens Healthineers and for Siemens's energy business. He also served as chief financial officer of E.ON SE. **Caroline A. Wamsler** is a lecturer in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University and Resident Director of the Columbia University Summer Program in Venice. Her scholarly work has explored civic imagery in Renaissance Italy and the Venetian city garden and its public–private spaces. Wamsler previously taught at Vassar College, Bard College, and Wesleyan University. □

# A GATHERING IN ASPEN

On June 29, 2022, Academy trustee Leah Joy Zell hosted a reception at her Aspen residence featuring Academy president Daniel Benjamin in conversation with Academy trustee and alumnus Jeffrey Goldberg. As editor-in-chief of *The Atlantic*, Goldberg and reporters at *The Atlantic* have published extensively on the invasion of Ukraine, which was the focus of the evening's program. Benjamin and Goldberg took questions from guests as part of their discussion. The American Academy in Berlin looks forward to additional events in Aspen and also with writers and editors from *The Atlantic* in the months and years ahead. □



Academy president Daniel Benjamin with trustees Leah Joy Zell, Maureen White, and Jeffrey Goldberg

Photo: Hal Williams

Photo: Hal Williams

Academy trustee and editor of *The Atlantic* Jeffrey Goldberg speaks at the Aspen home of trustee Leah Joy Zell, June 29, 2022.

# GAHL HODGES BURT VISITING POLICY FELLOWSHIP

Photo: Annette Hornischer

The Academy is pleased to announce the establishment of the Gahl Hodges Burt Visiting Policy Fellowship, which will bring an outstanding individual from the US policy world to Berlin each year for a stay of several weeks. Aligned with the Richard C. Holbrooke Forum, the fellow will participate in that program's work, deliver a public lecture, and engage in a series of meetings with counterparts in government, higher education, think tanks, and the business world.

A founding board member and still-active trustee, Gahl Hodges Burt became chairman of the Academy in 2015 and for five years led the institution through a significant time in its growth. She has been an indispensable member of the Academy community, providing strategic guidance, introducing innumerable leading figures in the creative, scholarly, and policy worlds to the Academy, and working indefatigably to strengthen the institution financially and intellectually.

Burt's unwavering dedication to the American Academy in Berlin, since its inception, reflects her conviction of its vital place in the transatlantic space and its importance for providing a place for leading figures from a range of disciplines to discuss the foremost issues of the day.

The Gahl Hodges Burt Visiting Policy Fellowship is generously funded by a group of private donors and American Academy trustees who have made gifts in Burt's honor. □

# RÜCKBLICK 2021–22

A look back at the events of the last academic year

Fall 2021 fellow Lan Samantha Chang and Academy trustee Andrew Wylie, November 2021

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Artist Julie Mehretu, Academy alumna and trustee, September 2021

Photo: Ralph K. Penno

Fall 2021 fellow Channing Joseph

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Photo: Ralph K. Penno

Fall 2021 fellow Ladee Hubbard

Photo: Annette Hornischer

June 2022 Mellon workshop participant Dominic Thomas, of UCLA

Photo: Ralph K. Penno

June 2022 Mellon workshop participant
Joseph M. Pierce, of Stony Brook University

Photo: John-Thomas Eltringham

Spring 2022 music fellow Du Yun, at her May 2022 performance

Photo: Ralph K. Penno

Academy president Daniel Benjamin, September 2021

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Barrie Kosky, intendant of Komische Oper Berlin, September 2021

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Fall 2021 fellow Juana María Rodríguez

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Spring 2022 fellow Eric Wesley

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Spring 2022 fellow Howard Kyongju Koh

Photo: Ralph K. Penno

Fall 2021 fellow Joy Milligan and Berlin gallerist Bruno Brunnet

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Academy vice president of programs Berit Ebert and spring 2022 Distinguished Visitor Sir Ronald Cohen

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Spring 2022 fellow Javiera Barandiarán

Photo: Juliane Schallau

US Ambassador to Germany Amy Gutmann and Academy president Daniel Benjamin, June 2022

Photo: Juliane Schallau

Spring 2022 fellows Lawrence Douglas and Deborah Amos


Photo: Annette Hornischer

Artist Olafur Eliasson and Academy trustee Klaus Biesenbach, March 2022

Photo: Annette Hornischer

Lothar H. Wieler of the Robert Koch Institute, May 2022

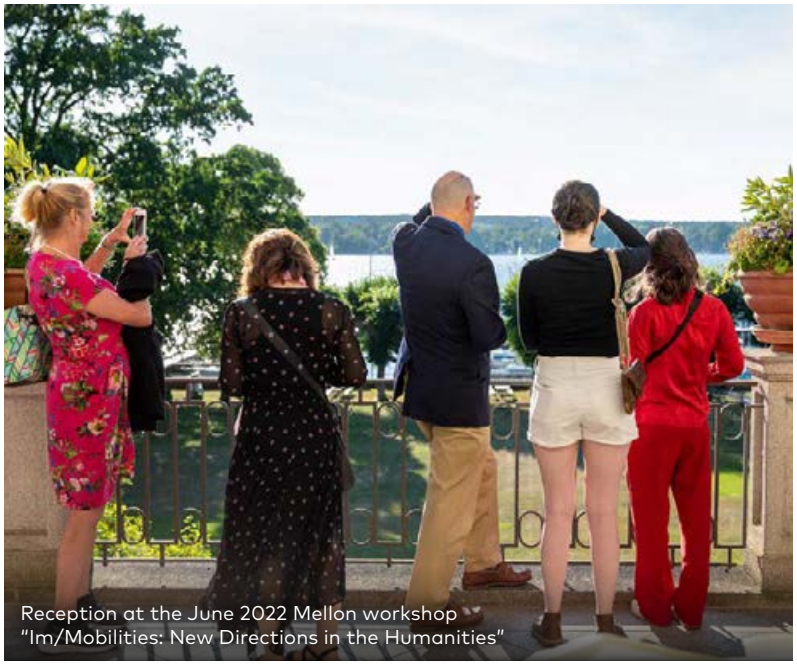


Photo: Annette Hornischer

Reception at the June 2022 Mellon workshop "Im/Mobilities: New Directions in the Humanities"

# PROFILES IN SCHOLARSHIP 2022–23

### ANNA-MARIA KELLEN FELLOWS

**Alexander Rehding** (Fall 2022)
*Fanny Peabody Professor of Music, Harvard University*
Music offers important lessons for human survival in the climate crisis. Namely, it teaches us to think carefully about temporality. Rehding's in-progress book, *A Playlist for the Anthropocene*, explores the intersections between musical sounds and the ticking clock that counts down humanity's remaining future on Earth.

**Tiffany N. Florvil** (Spring 2023)
*Associate Professor of History, University of New Mexico*
Florvil is working on a biography of the prominent Black German poet and activist May Ayim. The biography, entitled *Borderless and Brazen: The Life and Legacy of May Ayim, 1960–1996*, will offer the first full-length study on Ayim's political and intellectual corpus.

### AXEL SPRINGER FELLOWS

**Mary Elise Sarotte** (Fall 2022)
*Kravis Distinguished Professor in the School of Advanced Studies, John Hopkins University*
Sarotte is completing a book entitled *Grace and Gift: The Elusive Goal of European Partnership with Russia*.

**Cymene Howe** (Spring 2023)
*Professor of Anthropology, Rice University*
In her project "Melt/Rise, and Hydrological Globalization," Howe focuses on the interconnections between a melting Arctic and sea-level rise in global coastal cities, with specific attention to how water—transformed by a warming world—establishes novel links between distant places and populations. In Berlin, she is conducting research with climate scientists and climate adaptation specialists.

### BAYER FELLOWS IN HEALTH & BIOTECH

**Harvey V. Fineberg** (Spring 2023)
*President, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation*
Fineberg is developing a project entitled "Global Pandemic Preparedness and Response," which combines his longstanding interests in global health, medical technology assessment, vaccine evaluation and use, pandemic response, and the dissemination of medical innovations.

**Mary Elizabeth Wilson** (Spring 2023)
*Visiting Professor of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of California, San Francisco*
Wilson is continuing her decades-long research into antibiotic resistance, the ecology of infections and emergence of microbial threats, travel medicine, tuberculosis, and vaccines.

### BERTHOLD LEIBINGER FELLOW

**Alma Steingart** (Fall 2022)
*Assistant Professor of History, Columbia University*
Steingart is at work on her next book, *Accountable Democracy: Mathematical Reasoning and Representative Democracy in America, 1920 to Now*, which examines how mathematical thought and computing technologies have impacted electoral politics in the United States in the twentieth century. Focusing on the census, apportionment, congressional redistricting, ranked voting, and election forecasts, she investigates how changing computational practices, from statistical modeling to geometrical analysis, insinuated themselves into the most basic definitions of "fair representation" of the American electorate.

### DEUTSCHE BANK FELLOW IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

**Tashi Wada** (Spring 2023)
*Composer and Musician, Los Angeles, California*
Wada plans to create a new large-scale compositional work for voice and mixed-ensemble called "Hour of the Star."

### DIRK IPPEN FELLOW

**Claudia Rankine** (Fall 2022)
*Professor of Creative Writing, New York University*
Rankine is adapting the transcript of two recorded conversations between writer James Baldwin and poet Audre Lorde into a play. The conversations took place between fall 1983 and winter 1984 at Hampshire College, where Baldwin was a visiting professor. "It's a rare moment that we come up against the limits of Baldwin's brilliance when in dialogue with the feminist ideology of Lorde," Rankine writes. These intimate conversations were held with only a few others present and show two brilliant minds at work, reckoning with literature, American racism, gender, and education.

### ELLEN MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS

**Lauren Groff** (Spring 2023)
*Novelist*
Groff is finishing her novel "Doom-eager," about climate catastrophe, insomnia, existential threat, and God. She also hopes to finish a collection of short stories.

**Ela Gezen** (Spring 2023)
*Associate Professor of German and Director of German and Scandinavian Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst*
Gezen is completing her second book, *Cultures in Migration: Turkish Artistic Practices and Interventions in West Berlin*. It examines cultural practices by Turkish artists during the late 1970s and early '80s as an early manifestation of Turkish self-presentation in West Germany, and, more specifically, as a key part of the formation of a Turkish public sphere in West Berlin. While in residence, she is revisiting local archives to review relevant materials, including performance programs, event brochures, and municipal documents.

### GERHARD CASPER FELLOW

**Paul W. Werth** (Spring 2023)
*Professor of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*
Werth is continuing research and writing for his next book, *Russia's Enclosure: A History of the World's Longest Border*, which investigates the long and complex history of Russia's geographical expansion and delimitation, spanning three continents from the earliest boundary-making in the medieval period through the present.

### HOLTZBRINCK FELLOWS

**David Treuer** (Fall 2022)
*Professor of English, University of Southern California; Faculty Member, American Indian Arts Institute*
Treuer's Academy book project, "The Savage Mind," is a long autobiographical essay—mixing history, reportage, cultural studies, and memoir—about the nature and culture of American violence.

**Cristina Rivera Garza**
(Spring 2023)
*Author; M.D. Anderson Distinguished Professor, Director of the PhD Program in Creative Writing in Spanish, University of Houston*
Rivera Garza is working on her new project "The Solanum Tuberosum Diaries," a creative nonfiction work exploring family history in the context of the demise of potato production in the Toluca valley in central Mexico.

### JOHN P. BIRKELUND FELLOWS

**Jackie Murray** (Fall 2022)
*Associate Professor Classics, University of Kentucky and SUNY at Buffalo*
Murray's Academy project, "Idea and Image of Slavery in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic*," is part of a larger study of Plato's dialogues in which the image and language of slavery is used, enslaved persons figure, or where slavery is explicitly discussed.

**John Connelly** (Spring 2023)
*Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor of European History, University of California at Berkeley*
Connelly is exploring the long-term consequences of Germany's emergence as a nation state that was imperial and ethnic at the same time—occupying a huge space in Central Europe but seeking to make millions of diverse human beings into ethnic co-nationals. His study reaches back to after the fall of Rome but ultimately seeks to account for the modern, disruptive role the German empire of the 1930s had in occasioning, as Frank-Walter Steinmeier has said, a "unique break with civilization."

### MARY ELLEN VON DER HEYDEN FELLOWS IN FICTION

**Alexandra Chreiteh**
(Fall 2022)
*Mellon Bridge Assistant Professor of Arabic and International Visual Studies, Tufts University*
Chreiteh is continuing her work on *Sweetmeats*, a novel and fiction podcast in Arabic. Set in a border town between Lebanon and Syria on the cusp of the Syrian revolution, the project probes the relationships between gender and labor, global migration and ecological disaster, and mounting nationalism and domestic violence, tracing the intricacies of becoming a stranger in one's home and one's own body. She is speaking with refugee actors and artists in Berlin and hopes to begin her first novel in English.

**Lorrie Moore** (Spring 2023)
*Author; and Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of English and Creative Writing, Vanderbilt University*
Moore is working on a narrative inspired by her father's childhood trip to Berlin in the 1930s.

### MERCEDES-BENZ FELLOW

**Joshua Sellers** (Fall 2022)
*Associate Professor of Law, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University*
The "law of democracy," as designated by American legal academics, refers to the system of laws, institutions, and norms that define the rules of democratic practice. In his project "The Law of Democracy and Racial Equity," Sellers examines the relationship between election law doctrines, electoral structures, policies, and practices, and racial equity. Racial equity is defined here as political, economic, and social environments in which people, regardless of race, enjoy the same core entitlements and prospects for personal fulfillment.

### NINA MARIA GORRISSEN FELLOWS IN HISTORY

**Suzanne L. Marchand**
(Fall 2022)
*Boyd Professor of History, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge*
Marchand is writing a book on the modern uses and abuses of the work of that infamous ancient busybody known as both "the father of history" and "the father of lies": Herodotus. The tentative title, "Herodotus and the Instabilities of Western Civilization," points to the book's main purpose: to show that Europeans and Americans have never agreed upon the origins of "our" civilization—or about what it means to write a "true" history.

**Ying Zhang** (Fall 2022)
*Associate Professor of History, The Ohio State University*
Ying Zhang is completing a book that examines imprisoned officials in Ming China (1364–1644) at the intersection of bureaucracy, law, politics, and society.

### RICHARD C. HOLBROOKE FELLOW

**Abraham L. Newman**
(Spring 2023)
*Professor of Government, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University*
As global economic networks have increasingly been used by the United States and China for foreign policy objects, Europe often sits in the middle. Newman is studying how German and European policymakers are responding to this world of weaponized interdependence.

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*Distinguished Visitors (Fall 2022)*

### AIRBUS DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

**Barry Eichengreen**
*George C. Pardee and Helen N. Pardee Chair and Distinguished Professor of Economics and Political Science, University of California, Berkeley*

### INAUGURAL LEAH JOY ZELL DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

**Jeanne Gang**
*Founding Principal and Partner, Studio Gang*

### STEPHEN M. KELLEN DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

**Annette Gordon-Reed**
*Carl M. Loeb University Professor, Harvard Law School*

### KURT VIERMETZ DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

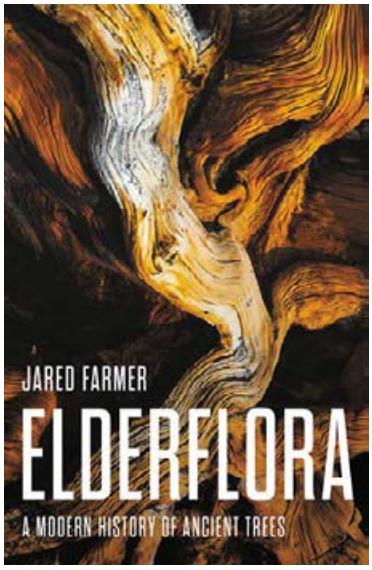
**Eric P. Schwartz**
*Former President, Refugees International; former US Assistant Secretary of State; Professor, Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota*

### MERCEDES-BENZ FOREIGN POLICY VISITORS

**Ruth Ben-Ghiat**
*Professor of History and Italian Studies, New York University*

**Evan Osnos**
*Journalist and Staff Writer,* The New Yorker

# BOOK REVIEWS




## ELDERFLORA: A MODERN HISTORY OF ANCIENT TREES
BY JARED FARMER

Basic Books
October 2022, 448 pages

A review by Dominic Boyer

If you are fortunate, you have had at least one special tree in your life. My first tree love lived in the garden next to my high school. At night, my friends and I would sneak out of our homes and gather in its branches to share stories and jokes. I actually don't remember anything we talked about; all I remember is the feeling of its bark on my finger tips and the simple joy of hanging in the air.

You may also have hurt some trees in your time. Speaking personally, I find myself quite ashamed of having ended the lives of trees. Most of them were Christmas trees, fast-growing conifers farmed for slaughter. One time a college prank went wrong: I felled a pine someone else cared about and spent a night in jail.

Trees are intimate human companions, inspiring contradictory human impulses. At any given moment trees occupy space like impassive infrastructure. But the truth is that they are alive and growing. Not all trees are equal in human eyes, however. Some trees are ordinary and unremarkable, background figures in human dramas, resources to be harvested to achieve human goals. Others are sacred and marvelous. *Elderflora*, a new book by environmental historian Jared Farmer (coauthored, he says, "with millennial plants") explores the complex relationship humans have with the trees that seem to affect them the most: ancient giants like cedar, olive, kauri, sequoia, ginkgo, yew, and baobab. As Farmer observes, "People cherish big trees, old trees, and especially big old trees."

A riddle hovers in *Elderflora*: wherever elderflora are found on the planet, human cultures have venerated them; these trees all have cultural legacies as intricate and resilient as their roots and canopies. But why the fascination with big, old trees? Perhaps because they embody the deep time of terrestrial life like nothing else on the planet, a seeming immortality contrasted to ephemeral human life. Yet, as Farmer correctly observes, not all long-lived beings become a focus of human fascination: "Other timeful life-forms—bacteria, viruses, fungi, lichen—fail to activate positive emotions in humans."

Farmer wisely does not seek to solve the riddle so much as to dangle it as a motivator of narrative flow. His objective is to offer an extended meditation on dendro-human relationships, a "place-based planetary history" that pursues "more-than-human timefulness" and multiscalar thinking adapted to the big, old trees themselves. One of Farmer's wonderfully insightful observations is that these elder trees—more so than any other class of beings graspable by human senses—have lived through multiple planetary states. "They are hyperlocals and ultraterrestrials and supermortals all at once. To play with Einsteinian language: these plants exist in *placetime*. They allow a story in which time operates at multiple speeds at once—the speeds of geology, evolution, and history."

*Elderflora* offers a trove of remarkable information about specific ancient species. I had no idea that the yew could change its sex ("No timeworn being can be so young," Farmer writes) any more that I knew gingkos have a default mode of immortality, avoiding senescence at both cellular and molecular levels.

But the rich, dense soil of *Elderflora* is really to be found in Farmer's many stories of dendro-human entanglements. Again, human impulses toward these big, old trees are cover a wide spectrum. In some placetimes, humans revere elder trees for their seeming ability to cheat death and channel vitality. In others, elderflora are hunted for their many knotless feet of woody flesh. Sometimes populists make elder trees into sacred symbols of national belonging, echoing the rising murmur of ecofascist overture in our own placetime. In other contexts, scientists become obsessed with unlocking the immortal secrets of ancient flora, sometimes knowing them to death. Finally, we hear many tales of attempts to conserve and care for elderflora, especially as climate change and other anthropogenic impacts disrupt their biomes.

This is not to say that Farmer's message is that there is a universal human ambivalence about elderflora. Quite the contrary, he ably pinpoints how centuries of European colonization and dispossession uprooted Indigenous traditions of elderflora

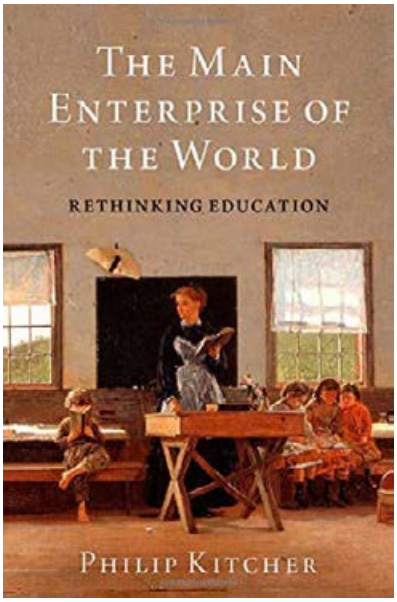
veneration and care and replaced them with a system of utilitarian violence and carelessness. The morning after my fateful night in jail, the reading of my booking charge brought riotous laughter to a somber courtroom full of people there for drug offenses (it was 1991, peak War on Drugs). No one could believe tree murder was a punishable offense.

Still, even though the book identifies the correct culprits for our present environmental destabilization, it is also sensitive to how modernity has generated its own (if perhaps somewhat inadequate and guilty) sense of care: "It's no coincidence that curiosity and care for the 'oldest living' tracks with Western colonialism and fossil-fuel capitalism, two great destroyers of oldness. Even as traditional knowledge, and the elders who kept it alive, became disposable in modernity, elderflora became more valuable to moderns."

There is artisanal craft in the organization of the book, but readers should be prepared for a resistance to linearity. Trees grow concentrically, adding layers upon layers of embodied history. *Elderflora* operates in a similar way. In each chapter, a certain subset of elder trees serve as central muses. Farmer probes through the tree rings of human and natural history, exploring dendro-human events and entanglements.

*Elderflora* also resists ending. The vegetal kingdom has seen it all, glacial ages and hyperthermals. Its endings and beginnings have been many. Although the arrival of the Anthropocene likely augurs the last chapters of the ancient giants, "woody plants and their microbial allies will reclaim this terrestrial kingdom. We're just passing through. But our passing can and should last indefinitely. There can be longevity under precarity."

Trees offer us much wisdom through the medium of Farmer's narrative. Short of actually having the honor of spending time in the presence of elderflora, I think *Elderflora* is the next best thing to provoke a sense of wonder in the placetimefulness of more-than-human life. □




## THE MAIN ENTERPRISE OF THE WORLD: RETHINKING EDUCATION
BY PHILIP KITCHER

Oxford University Press
November 2021, 440 pages

A review by Paul Reitter

Amid all the obvious instances of stratification in higher education—the football coach at my university earns about two hundred times as much as many senior lecturers—some important hierarchies are easy to miss. Consider how the philosophy of education fares at colleges and universities in the US and UK If you were to look for scholars who work in this area, you would find them at top schools, among other places, with profiles that feature all the trappings of academic success. Reading about these well-situated and accomplished professors, you probably wouldn't imagine that a disciplinary hierarchy weighs upon them, and yet one very well might. For within the broader discipline of philosophy, the philosophy of education has a serious status problem.

Philip Kitcher's book *The Main Enterprise of the World: Rethinking Education* starts with this problem and speaks to it in refreshingly blunt terms. Kitcher leads with a quotation by John Dewey: "If we are willing to conceive education as a process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellow men, philosophy may even be defined as the general theory of education." Whether or not you agree with Dewey's statement, it's hard to deny that it makes logical use of informed views about education and philosophy and is thus hardly outlandish. Hence what Kitcher says about it will surprise some readers: "From the perspective of my own training, and that reigning in professional Anglophone philosophy to this day, that is a bizarre claim." How so? "Philosophy of education is viewed not only as a narrowly applied subfield," Kitcher explains, "but also as one in which work is humdrum and unsophisticated. For those capable of probing the central issues of philosophy—the 'core problems'—turning to philosophy of education amounts to slumming it." I did say his language was blunt.

These are prefatory remarks, and although readers might be wondering why mainstream philosophy has treated the philosophy of education so disparagingly, they shouldn't fault Kitcher for not taking up this question. My own answer is that, at least in part, the biases have to do with the tensions between professional and liberal education. Philosophers of education often wind up in schools of education that have a pronounced teacher-training component and where some of the research produced is meant to help address immediate practical concerns. You might think that philosophers would be excited to see their colleagues in the philosophy of education appointed in schools of education, since philosophers of education tend to be trained in philosophy departments, and they therefore have the potential to bring the ethos of liberal arts research and teaching into an area where knowledge seems more "narrowly applied," to use Kitcher's phrase. But, instead, the connection to professional education has been staining.

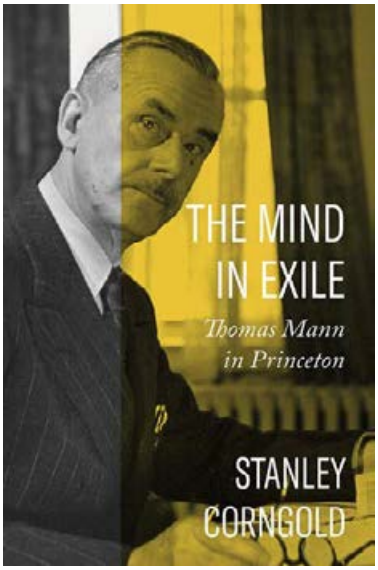
Kitcher also doesn't take up the question of how the biases he

describes have affected the production of knowledge in the philosophy of education, but it stands to reason that they have hindered it profoundly—that more than a few junior scholars and graduate students in philosophy have decided not to act on an interest in the philosophy of education because of how the field is regarded. If some philosophers of education have managed to establish themselves as successful academics, well, you can publish widely and land a job at a prestigious institution and still not have the respect of colleagues in your home discipline, without which the former markers of success will be harder to come by and probably less satisfying, too. Thus it means something when Kitcher, a very eminent philosopher (he is the Dewey Professor Emeritus in philosophy at Columbia University) with mainstream expertise (systematic philosophy, ethics, philosophy of science) emphatically rejects the idea that philosophers of education deal in superficialities. He writes that he spent years engaging with their work, which he found to accord with the highest standards of rigor. Even if his book did nothing else, this gesture alone would give it considerable importance.

But *The Main Enterprise of the World* does do much more than that. In fact, this major contribution to the philosophy of education does far more than most recent efforts to reimagine our educational institutions. There have been many such attempts—for example, Michael Crowe and William Dabars's *Designing the New American University* (2015) and Cathy Davidson's *The New Learning: How to Revolutionize the University and Prepare Students for a World in Flux* (2017)—and Kitcher is far from alone in proceeding from the idea that today's systems of education, and especially of higher education, don't align very well with the educational needs and challenges of the twenty-first century. Other authors, however, have also proceeded from an assumption that has no place in his book. Where they presuppose that the way to bring about better alignment between our education systems and society is to alter the former, which generally means promising that an educational redesign will have social benefits while tacitly consenting to pursue meaningful reform within social frameworks that haven't exactly been hospitable to it, Kitcher offers a much bolder vision. With John Stuart Mill and John Dewey as his intellectual touchstones, he makes the case that an educational system that revitalizes democratic values, broadly promotes human fulfillment (which he defines at length), and allows us to meet the great challenges coming at us—for example, living with vastly more automation and mounting a truly global response to climate change—requires social change.

If this position counts as bold within mainstream academic debates about education, given the well-documented fate of, say, public higher education under twentieth-century capitalism, it also seems quite sensible. And yet, as Kitcher knows, it leaves him open to the charge of impractical utopianism. This he counters most directly in his final chapter, "Utopia?" Here, Kitcher goes through a list of objections to the "Deweyan" social program he develops in the previous chapter. While "non-Marxist," "Deweyan society" would, for example, exclude labor expended to produce goods whose sole purpose is to elevate the status of their owners in a social hierarchy—clearly putting education at the center of society necessitates that society's human resources be redistributed. In challenging orthodox economic theory, Kitcher displays an impressive knowledge of that theory. But even more impressive is how he engages the theory in thoughtful conversation rather than simply trying to press on its weak points.

Whether outlining social reforms or suggesting better ways to teach natural science and the arts to children and young adults, Kitcher operates with a combination of evenhandedness, intellectual generosity, and erudition that should do much to soften whatever resistance the sheer scale of his proposals elicits. □




## THE MIND IN EXILE: THOMAS MANN IN PRINCETON
BY STANLEY CORNGOLD

Princeton University Press
March 2022, 280 pages

A review by Liliane Weissberg

For almost three years, from September 1938 to March 1941, the German writer and Nobel Prize laureate Thomas Mann (1875–1955) and his family lived at 65 Stockton Street in Princeton, New Jersey. Critics such as Hans Rudolf Vaget have written eloquently about Mann's stay in America. More recently, Irish writer Colm Toibin included a sketch of Mann's years of emigration in his novel *The Magician*. Now, Stanley Corngold's engaging book, *The Mind in Exile*, gives Mann's time at Princeton close consideration.

Mann had left Germany in 1933, shortly after Hitler's rise to power, and moved to Switzerland. In February 1938, he travelled to the United States on an extended lecture tour, with a newly acquired Czechoslovakian passport. Upon his arrival in New York, the 63-year-old author announced: "Where I am, is Germany. I carry my German culture in me," thereby claiming the preservation of a tradition and custodianship of values no longer to

be found in his homeland, but that he himself would still represent. This was not only a strong statement made by a famous emigrant. It echoed the words of another self-confident German writer, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who claimed that Germany was born when he was born.

Just a few months after Mann's arrival in Manhattan, the Munich Pact threw Czechoslovakia's independence into question. Mann's passport did not offer him any further security. For an intellectual known to be a staunch critic of the National Socialist regime, and whose wife was of Jewish descent, a return to Switzerland seemed ill advised. The American philanthropist Agnes Meyer, an ardent admirer of Mann's work, set out to arrange a place and livelihood for him in the United States. Princeton University offered Mann an honorary professorship, financed by the Rockefeller Foundation, and moved quickly to beat Harvard to the opportunity. Mann was to give a series of seven lectures during a three-semester turn, meet with students, and participate in Princeton's academic life.

Corngold describes how Mann accepted the offer gladly, how delighted he was by the warm welcome, and how positively disposed he was toward his American hosts. Mann had come to appreciate the American democratic system and admired President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in particular. Although Mann himself never earned a high-school diploma, he took to university life quickly and invested time in lectures and meetings with students and colleagues. He became a close friend of Erich Kahler, a literary critic and Jewish emigrant from Prague who had dropped the aristocratic "von" upon arrival in the States. Kahler worked at the nearby Institute for Advanced Studies and was at the center of a circle of intellectuals who had also found refuge in Princeton, famously among them Albert Einstein, as well as the Austrian writer Hermann Broch. Mann would also meet the members of Kahler's circle and eventually participate in a political publication with Kahler, Broch, and others, entitled *The City of Man*, published in 1940.

For Princeton, Mann's presence was a boon. His lectures at Alexander Hall attracted nearly a thousand auditors each, and his engagement with the university exceeded anything required by contract. Moreover, Mann saw Princeton as his base from which to continue his travels to present lectures and speeches on art and politics. Corngold describes Mann as a diamond that fell into Princeton's lap. Next to Einstein, he was perhaps the most famous German emigrant in Princeton, an intellectual who added greatly to the university's reputation. In 1939, Princeton offered Mann an honorary degree—one of many that he would receive in the States. "Yes, the homeless one has found a home. A new home, in Princeton, in America," he said at that occasion.

But times would change. After three semesters, Princeton did not renew Mann's contract. He was disappointed, but also tired of Princeton's bucolic, non-urban environs. Los Angeles beckoned Mann, luring him not only with its fast-paced cosmopolitanism but also with its mild climate and ocean views—and its larger German-speaking emigrant community in Hollywood. Mann left university life for good and in 1941 moved to Pacific Palisades.

After the war, however, he would sour even on California. By then Mann had acquired American citizenship, but he did not really become an American. He would come to regard the country's culture as soulless. When Senator Joseph McCarthy added him to his list of left-leaning intellectuals, Mann decided it was time to emigrate once again. In 1952, he returned to Switzerland.

In *The Mind in Exile*, Corngold carefully reconstructs Mann's time at Princeton. It was an extraordinarily productive period: he completed a novel, *Lotte in Weimar*, worked on a second one, *Joseph the Provider*, and wrote a novella, *The Transposed Heads*. He lectured on his own work and on literature in general, and wrote a number of impassioned political speeches. These were written and recorded not only for an American audience but also for Germans who would perhaps listen to them back home. As Mann became one of the strongest German political voices in exile, listeners and readers witnessed his transformation. The erstwhile conservative author who was hesitant to speak out against Hitler turned into a liberal democrat in America who promoted democratic values and criticized the National Socialists with blazing moral force.

*As Mann became one of the strongest German political voices in exile, listeners and readers witnessed his transformation.*

Corngold's study gives evidence for this political conversion by complementing his biographical sketch with a close reading of Mann's political writings, of which he provides extensive individual summaries. The reader thus witnesses the evolution of a German sympathetic to the national idea but hesitant to voice his political stance, into that of an emigrant eager to react with moral vigor to political events in Europe, and with blunt immediacy. Mann's stay in America and his encounter with American democratic institutions not only progressively influenced his political views, but also, at least to some extent, his literary work. Corngold gives evidence for this in his discussion of *The Transposed Heads*, a story set as far away from Germany as from the United States: India.

But it would be too easy to call this new Princetonian a liberal democrat in the stripes of our current understanding. Mann remained wed to tradition; he insisted on Christian values and on a vague, humanitarian ideal. In his speeches, he did not

mention the fate of the Jews in Europe, nor reflect on his own family's Jewish ties. He also imagined his audience as Christian and white. Not the circle of emigrants around Kahler, but rather Princeton's male student population may have given him the lead here. While Corngold appreciates Mann's literary work and moral investment, he is also rightly critical of some of Mann's views.

Corngold is a well-known Princeton professor, and as he offers his readers a better understanding of Mann's life and work, he also proffers a superb glimpse of his institution's own fascinating history during the mid-twentieth century. From the very outset of this informative work, Corngold draws parallels to our own time, when many Americans (as well as Europeans) have lost faith in their political institutions. Mann's years at Princeton, as such, might become an exemplar of the role a university can play in strengthening democratic values, and of the kind of responsibility a writer—or scholar, or public intellectual, or any mere citizen—could and should claim in defending our shared democratic ideals and achievements. □

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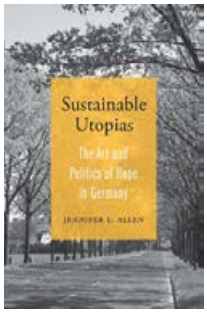


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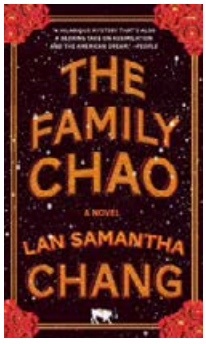


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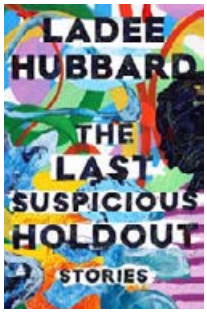


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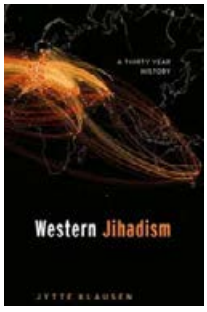


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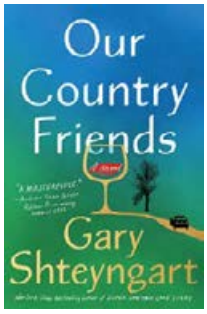


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