



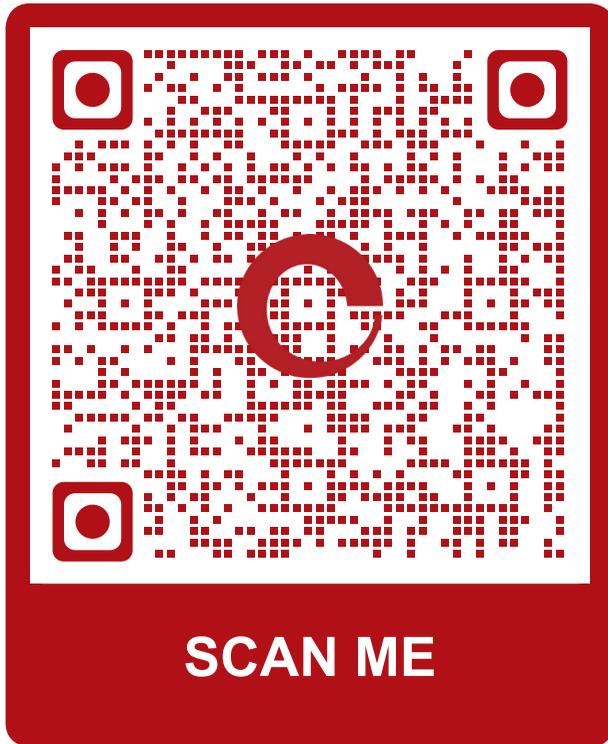
# ANTHROPOLOGY

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MAGAZINE

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# THREE QUESTIONS WITH ALICE BEBAN

author of *Unwritten Rule*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

Imagine you are quietly sitting in class. Suddenly the university president announces that classes are canceled for the semester, and all students are encouraged to volunteer for a national land reform. You're given three days of training and a set of military fatigues. Then you're trucked across the country to survey land. I shadowed teams of these volunteers. They told me they barely knew how to operate the GPS units (one young man said he didn't

to something of an old school anthropological model: the lone ethnographer with a firm plan doggedly rooting out the story. But the greatest insights in the book—on the political power of uncertainty, and how this shapes understandings of land and property—emerged when everything fell apart. They came from moments of vulnerability, from failure, from constant adaptation, and from leaning on and working with others. Failure opens us up to different ways of seeing.

“You're given three days of training and a set of military fatigues.”

know where the 'backspace' key was, so “we didn't know how to delete a mistake! So then we deleted everything, and sometimes we input the wrong numbers. Sometimes we got completely lost!”). They had no training in mediation, yet they found themselves dealing with angry farmers and government officials. The speed and uncertainty with which this campaign rolled out has parallels to Trump's “build the wall” and other recent populist authoritarian policies, and has much to teach us about how populist politics works.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

There are many ways to be a field researcher. When I started research for this book, I aspired

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

There is growing recognition within political ecology and related fields that the traditional focus on material dimensions of environmental conflict cannot fully explain how power operates and why people resist. I'd like to see more work that grapples with the centrality of emotions to projects of state making and social change. We need to work through the complexities of how we know emotions, how we write about them, and the ontological implications of how attention to emotions allows us to understand objects in new ways.

## The Article

# BEING POOR AND BEING SICK

## A Thin Line

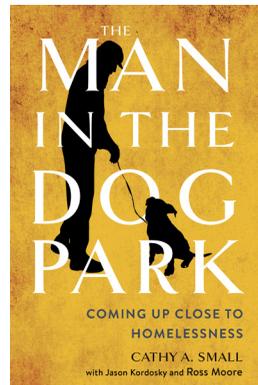
by *Cathy A. Small*

April 15. Today is the day that seven years of interviews with homeless people would come to fruition in the release of our book, *The Man in the Dog Park*, co-authored with a homeless man. It is a book about compassion and about blind spots, too, that let us see, among other things, how homelessness is more a casualty of being poor than it is a product of mental illness or addiction.

The thin line I came to see between being poor and being homeless is the same thin line we are now seeing between being poor and being sick. COVID-19 is revealing to us some disturbing truths in its clear, stark statistics.

If we are willing to open our eyes, we can see how poor people (disproportionately people of color) are dying at higher rates than others. We can see how the likelihood you have a pre-existing condition that enhances your virus danger is intimately tied to your economic strata; how poor families, cramped into tiny domestic spaces, have no saving option of separating onto different floors with different bathrooms if one person becomes ill; how the working poor have job categories—like nurse's aide or elder care provider or factory line worker—where you cannot work at home to keep your job. There is no clearer time to see the tentacles of poverty than who and how many will die from this crisis.

The thin line I came to see between being poor and being homeless is the same thin line we are now seeing between being poor and being sick.



The virus packs a double punch for those who are poor and homeless. Today, I would have thought I'd be going to work at the homeless shelter in my town, as I started doing regularly a couple of years ago as a volunteer. When the virus statistics began spiraling in mid-March, I wrote to the shelter manager that I would no longer be able to keep my commitment to come there. He was sympathetic and supportive; "Yes, I think it's wise," he wrote back. I am "old," in the at-risk category, and everyone understands. I have a choice, regardless.

I worry about the many men and women in the shelter, particularly my age and older. The shelter is set up with rows of bunk beds, closely positioned to house as many clients as possible who want a place to sleep and a warm meal. People stand in a crunched line to get their food, use the same couple of bathrooms for the 150 people who are often there at one time. People

cannot reasonably practice social distance.

I heard through our grapevine about the first cases, people in the shelter with symptoms. Everyone is scrambling, doing the best they can. They are putting sick people in a low-end motel, with a staff member to look in on them. No one has N-95 masks or gowns. The shelter has put up makeshift boundaries (a wooden piece of rail, I think) around the reception desks so the staff have some measure of physical distance. It is all improvised, and the staff and residents all know that on some level it is a crap shoot.

Some homeless people may decide, perhaps rightly so, that their safest option is staying in the forest or on the streets. This can appear better than a shelter doing its best, but filled with coughing residents, kerchiefs for masks, and no guarantees. And so, I know the unsheltered will hang out during the day at an open drugstore, or library, or wander in a food store. How many people will be infected because “shelter in place” is not binding for those who have no safe space to shelter? Will our newspaper headlines be about the “dangerous homeless people infecting others” or will they sound the wake-up call about our interconnectedness, and the responsibility we have to look deeply at our own NIMBY efforts to keep affordable housing out of our neighborhood?

The real testimony to our nation, and its future, is what lessons we will have learned when this COVID-19 episode is over.

The virus packs a double punch for those who are poor and homeless.

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH ALBENA YANEVA

author of *Crafting History*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

During a visit of the vaults of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) I saw for the first time some original drawings of the Chandigarh building of Le Corbusier. Perplexed and dazzled at the same time, I attempted to touch. A vocal, spontaneous and firm “NO!” resonated in the room. That “NO” denoted an acute awareness of the importance of archives and at the same time worry about destruction.

It is precisely that subtle balance between

practicing architects; hence, archiving and designing go hand in hand to shape the future of built environment.

That Architectural History is fabricated, made out of many heterogeneous and ephemeral fragments, carefully ‘crafted’ just like a building is.

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

I wish to see Anthropology embark on a journey that will explore expertise qua process, the

“There is a huge army of commonly invisible actors involved in archiving.”

idolatry and iconoclasm that defines an archival institution and led me to discover the hidden world of archiving and conservation.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

That there is a huge army of commonly invisible actors involved in archiving: technicians, conservators, paper and digital archivists, cataloguers, curators, and librarians thanks to whom fragile drawings, models, and prints battle time and reach the ‘golden books’ of History.

That there is a relationship between archives and design process that is significant for

formation of expertise, expertise as emerging in concrete situations where practitioners share doubts, anxieties and disagreement and talk back to objects, scripts, and instruments. Situations where both the fragile bodies of humans and the material granularity of non-humans are exposed, strained, and reconnected in a symmetrical way.

Emphasizing the contingent, active and reciprocal nature of knowing, I advocate an anthropology of archiving that would scrutinize the technologies of archive making integral to the work of various practitioners (not just designing architects) and would unravel the underlying conditions of knowledge production in all its forms.

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A professional broadcast microphone on a boom arm is the central focus of the image. The microphone is black with a silver grille and is mounted on a black boom arm. The background is a dark, solid color. The text is white and positioned in the upper left and lower left areas.

AN INTERVIEW WITH **SARA LEWIS**,  
AUTHOR OF *SPACIOUS MINDS*,  
HOSTED BY JONATHAN HALL

**1869**

The Cornell University Press Podcast

THE TRANSCRIPT

**JONATHAN** Welcome to 1869, The Cornell University Press Podcast. I'm Jonathan Hall. This episode we speak with Sarah Lewis, author of the new book *Spacious Minds: Trauma and Resilience in Tibetan Buddhism*. Sarah Lewis is Associate Professor of Contemplative Psychotherapy, and Buddhist Psychology at Naropa University. We spoke to Sara about what inspired her to write her book, how Tibetan Buddhists treat trauma differently than Western psychologists, and the ways in which her research will help shake up the field. Hello, Sara, welcome to the podcast.

**SARA** Thank you. It's great to be here.

**JONATHAN** Well, congratulations on your new book, *Spacious Minds: Trauma and Resilience in Tibetan Buddhism*. It's hot off the presses. And it's available everywhere now online and in bookstores, around the country around the world. I had a question. First question, What inspired you to write this book?

**SARA** Yeah, thanks. That's a great question. You know, I think what really inspired me to start doing this research was my own work that I had been doing as a psychotherapist, before I kind of alongside training as an anthropologist. So I'm a psychological anthropologist, and I'm interested in concepts of mental health and distress and healing across cultures. And then alongside that academic work, I was working as a psychotherapist in community mental health, and, you know, working with a lot of people with trauma, and depression and anxiety, all the kinds of things that we go to therapists for help with. And, you know, so I had this longtime interest in in psychotherapy and mental health, but also, you know, kind of saw the limits of that practice. And, you know, through that work, I became interested in meditation and mindfulness, which is now really considered, you know, in many circles and evidence based practice, for clinical clinical work of different kinds. And, you know, through my own kind of work as a therapist, and as a meditator, began to develop an interest in, you know, where some of these practices that I was learning about where they came from, and, you know, so I think it was really through that mental health practice, you know, itself that led me to become interested in, in Tibetan Buddhism and to exploring as an anthropologist, you know, what, what some of these practices are in, in local settings?

**JONATHAN** Interesting, interesting. what way do you hope your book will make a difference in your field?

**SARA** Um, yeah, that's a good question. And, you know, having just launched this book, it's always like, kind of a mystery of like, who will read it? And where, where will it go? And, you know, sort of where, where will it travel, you know, certainly in thinking about the broad field of global mental health, you know, of which I see my work being situated within as an anthropologist, but also as a mental health practitioner. And so I do continue to also have a clinical practice, I hope that it will make a difference

in terms of advancing our understanding, you know, both of definitely have trauma, but also have resilience now, which I think is something that really has kind of, you know, become a global interest in many ways. And, and something that I feel like, you know, sort of a new or more recent interest within mental health circles is this idea that, you know, talk therapy is not necessarily the best way to approach healing from trauma. And that's something that I really learned about through doing my fieldwork. And, you know, in the book, there is some moments where I kind of present the Tibetan Buddhists ways of understanding trauma and healing from trauma and looking at resilience, almost as in opposition to Western forms of psychotherapy, which of course, you know, usually involve talking and sort of processing past events. And so in the book, I describe, you know, kind of a tension between those two. But it's interesting to me to see that more recently, there's a lot of emphasis on somatic based approaches to trauma, you know, I'm really looking at how trauma is held within the body. And actually these you know, very standard forms of psychotherapy that many of us are familiar with, say in the US, you know, maybe maybe are not actually the best way to approach trauma. And a lot of what you know, some different neuroscientists and clinicians are saying actually is pretty similar to what some of my Tibetan Buddhist interlocutors described throughout the book. So that's, you know, kind of interesting to me that, that's the Horizon.

**JONATHAN** So let's say for example, someone was in a traumatic experience, let's say, someone ran a red light and smashed into their car and they were severely injured, but then they survived, and they're recovering. But there's obviously a traumatic experience that still haunts them. How would you explain the Western approach? How is that different from the Tibetan Buddhist approach to treating this person?

**SARA** Yeah, well, one, you know, one big difference that my Tibetan interlocutors wouldn't remind me of all the time is they would say, like, yeah, it's kind of interesting, like the Westerners that we meet, they seem to have this idea that like, we can get life just so like, we're just on the brink of making life, perfect. Once I do this, you know, that everything will be in place. And they found that kind of amusing, and my Tibetan friends and neighbors would kind of tease me for that and say, like, wow, Westerners really like, you know, in some ways are like, not understanding that suffering is a really ordinary part of life. And, you know, so for any Buddhist scholars, listening, you know, they'll know that this is known as the first noble truth, the truth of suffering. And that's a really important point that I make throughout the book, that the expectation of suffering and seeing suffering that happens as ordinary, you know, and not something to see as like, Oh, my God, you know, this is so shocking that something bad has happened, but actually use it as a way to connect more deeply with others. So that's the first big difference is that that really is built in, you know, that I think Tibetan Buddhists don't. You know, these are religious ideals. So it's not that all Tibetans are kind of doing this perfectly,

right. But built into Buddhism is this idea that we have to contend with samsara, and samsara is this endless cycle of rebirth, which is fueled through karma, and a misperception of reality. So the more we resist suffering, you know, the, the more suffering we actually have, you know, interestingly, I noticed that you use the term survive, or thinking of being a survivor. And part of what I talked about in the book is that that's a very modern idea. And it's, or we could say, it's a very contemporary idea. And it's really an idea that's kind of coming from North American and European ways of thinking. So in describing this idea of being a trauma survivor to some of my Tibetan friends and neighbors, and people who I interviewed, they really push back against that idea, saying that, like, wow, you know, taking on this identity as a survivor, they felt like was really antithetical to suffering. And the reason for that is because they felt like it solidified something and solidified an identity. And they said, well, wouldn't it be better to see that that event that happened in the past is it's impermanent And better yet to think it's illusory, right? And so this is getting into these Buddhist ideas of impermanence and emptiness. So like the events that happen and even the person who they happen to, there's, you know, this idea of emptiness or impermanence within that, and they would say, the more that you can, you know, see these events as something that has already happened, it's, you know, it's not real now. And in fact, there are some elements that weren't even quote, you know, real at the time, the more that you can sort of move past past events, you know, the more resilient you'll be. So the the title from the book, spacious minds, comes from this idea that I learned about which in Tibetan is called Sanford Shambo. And that just means literally vast, big or spacious mind. So it's this approach to thinking about difficult things that happened in our life in this big mind kind of way. And a major element of that that idea of a big or a spacious mind is seeing that things that happened to us are actually not unique. So, you know, there's some part of that which I think Westerners kind of bristle against, you know, because it's almost like Wait, so are they saying you know, that bad things that happen, even trauma and torture, right? So that's a big part of this book is talking about these, you know, political refugees, that somehow things that have happened to them. Ordinary in a sense, you know, or something that is not unique to them. And so that is an interesting question I think of like why that would lead to resilience.

**JONATHAN** Interesting. Yeah, I can see the bristling because people, it doesn't feed their ego that they're somehow special in their unique suffering or pain. I can see the other side how, how freeing that would be from that perspective. In your practice, how have patients or clients experienced this bringing in spacious mind into the equation?

**SARA** Mm hmm. Well, yeah, that's a good question. And you know, a question I get asked a lot of like, oh, as a, you know, anthropologists, but also a therapist, can you import these ideas into a Western psychotherapy practice? And there's some ways that I think, no, you know, like, we don't have the

same ideas of karma of emptiness of, you know, past and future lives. Right. And then in other ways, I think there are some ideas that can be incorporated, you know, so for example, learning to see things through another person's point of view. So a lot of Tibetans who I interviewed, you know, even about things like torture and imprisonment, they would say, like, Well, you know, sometimes we would give each other advice in prison and say things like, you know, this prison guard, who's, you know, beating us or torturing us. Maybe he's also a father. And he's also a loving friend, maybe he's here because he needs this job, like to feed his family, that's not excusing what is happening, or saying that it's okay. But it's seeing that, you know, our own vantage point is just one view, or one perspective. And this is linked with, you know, all kinds of Buddhist ideas, again, about emptiness, of seeing that it's not that our view was like, wrong, or doesn't matter, but it's just one perspective, right? So it's like, there's no what I mean, so is this person, is he a loving father and friend? Or is he a prison guard? Well, he's both right. And that depends on the vantage point. So this is another example of kind of creating, you know, this more spacious or flexible mind, you know, so to your question of like, well, could any of this be kind of brought into, you know, Western psychotherapy practice? That's one example where I think that's something that, you know, we could learn from and, and benefit from that idea, you know, of seeing like, we don't have to discredit our own views and our own perspective, but learning to see that like, we kind of suffer more, you know, the more fixated we are, or the more so Tibetans call this freedom from fixation, freedom from fixation, learning how to kind of broaden out, you don't have to abandon your view, but you can also see like, it's, it's just one perspective. And then healing or resilience could come from, you know, creating some more space around that.

**JONATHAN** Wow, that's exciting. I mean, I know that, for example, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy has ties to Buddhist mindfulness practices. And so Buddhism is making inroads into psychotherapy and, and this whole idea of seeing a traumatic experience as empty. I can see the bristling but again, you can see also the power that that holds where you can step back and see the big picture. And that gets stuck in the in the suffering, as you said, it's ends the fixation of the trauma.

**SARA** Yeah.

**JONATHAN** I could see that being very powerful, very powerful. And controversial... which leads which leads to my next question. In what way do you see your argument being controversial, or one that shakes up preconceived ideas?

**SARA** Mm hmm. Yeah, I love that question. And it's a topic that interests me a lot. So I open the book with an anecdote that, you know, I've discussed in different talks that I've given before, and it is something that people yeah, like, you know, I think it kind of like shakes up our ideas in some ways.

And so I opened the book by describing this monk who I interviewed, named Sonam, Tashi, and he describes using his time in prison as a retreat house. And yeah, and he talks about like, yeah, you know, I was in prison. So he was putting up political posters around his monastery in support of the Dalai Lama. And so he was imprisoned for that, you know, Basically accused of being a political dissident. And so he talks about trying to relate to prison as a retreat house and a time to do various Buddhist practices. And one quote that I have from him and the opening is he says, if we have to say, our whole lives here and even die in prison, then it's not really prison if we use this experience to develop compassion. So yeah. And so some of the questions, you know, that this raises for people, you know, particularly if they're kind of oriented towards social justice, you know, and kind of thinking about, you know, oppression in various ways, as I think it raises this question of, you know, what some scholars call internalized oppression. And, you know, people hear this and think, like, wow, and, you know, instead of just saying, like, I'm going to use this time and present as a retreat house, wouldn't it be better, you know, for us, as scholars, or for these Tibetans themselves, to be looking at political violence, right, to be looking at, you know, sort of the global refugee crisis to be looking at, you know, various forms of political oppression, and that somehow talking about, you know, looking at the ways that people work with their minds within the circumstances, I think leaves for some people kind of an uncomfortable feeling. You know, and, and a sense that, like, Well, where's, where's the resistance, like, isn't this, you know, just victimhood or, you know, again, this idea of internalized oppression?

JONATHAN They're not fighting back, they're just accepting the reality?

SARA Mm hmm. Yeah. And I think what's kind of interesting about the Tibetan case is that they're doing both, right. I mean, the sort of fight for Tibet, you know, is a very globalized movement. And so it's like, both are happening. And that's kind of interesting to me. And something that I talked about in the book is that some Tibetan activists, have actually begun using the trauma narrative, you know, which, as I say, in the book, is really kind of a Western idea, the creation of a trauma narrative. But some Tibetan activists are using it not for political healing, but for political aims, right. So they've learned that a successful Human Rights Campaign is really predicated on the trauma narrative. And that that's a very specific way of, you know, speaking to the veracity of suffering of deservingness. Now, there's many other scholars within anthropology and other disciplines who have noted this elsewhere as well. We're in a particular global movement, right, where there's a very specified way of sort of garnering international support. So if you look at the Tibetan movements, and the 1970s, or 80s, a lot of the narratives were focused on land rights, you know, and sort of pointing out like the way that you know, the map has changed over time. And, and then there was a certain shift, you know, in the 1990s and early 2000s, like really where it was kind of the the rise or the elevation of the trauma narrative. So that's kind of interesting to me

that that both are are happening simultaneously.

**JONATHAN** Wow, well, we've really just scratched the surface. And, you know, I think, I think it was Carl Jung that said that, you know, Buddhism has come to America and the next 500 years is what we'll see how it impacts the culture is, it's infiltrating in all areas. And in this particular case, specifically with psychotherapy, the impact is already being felt and will only increase and you've really shined a amazing spotlight on Tibetan Buddhism in its role. It's different way of thinking, or experiencing trauma and resilience. And I think a lot of people will find it fascinating. So thank you so much for your contribution.

**SARA** Well, thank you, and it was great to chat with you.

**JONATHAN** It's great chatting with you. And yes, Congratulations once again on your book. Thank you. All right, take care. That was Sarah Lewis, author of the new book, *Spacious Minds: Trauma and Resilience in Tibetan Buddhism*.

## The Article

# AMBIVALENT REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ARAB WORLD IN INDONESIA

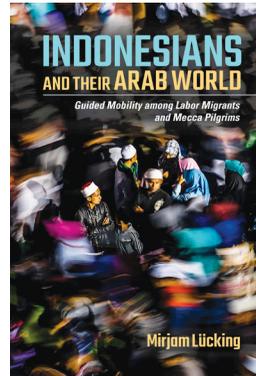
*by Mirjam Lücking*

In November 2020, one of Indonesia's most well-known Islamist public figures, Muhammad Rizieq Shihab, returned from exile in Saudi Arabia to his home country, Indonesia.

### Arab Influence in Indonesia?

As founder and leader of the Islamist group Islamic Defenders Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam) Rizieq Shihab has been accused of threatening Indonesia's constitutional commitment to interreligious pluralism and for inciting violence. Following criminal charges for spreading pornographic images, Rizieq Shihab fled to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2017.

His alleged alliances with Islamist groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, his ideology and appearance lead to claims saying that "Arab influence" shaped Rizieq Shihab. Moreover, the fact that he is of Hadhrami-Arab descent nourishes the perception of radical Arab-Islamic influence in Indonesia.



Contemporary architects employ an archival logic in their current work, but this was not the case thirty years ago.

However, being Hadhrami or of any other ethnicity does not allow conclusions about a persons' ideological orientation and seminal studies on the Hadhrami in Southeast Asia reveal the complexities of the ethnic minorities' engagement with "Arabness." Furthermore,

Rizieq Shihab might mobilize the masses, but many of his followers appear to be first and foremost attracted by the eventful character of his protests.

### Arabization and Arab-Phobia

Also among ordinary Indonesians, increasingly prevalent Islamic religiosity in private and public life has been associated with outward influence and is sometimes labeled as "Arabization." Even though several studies have shown that a turn towards more conservatism in Indonesia is related to domestic social and political changes, the pop-

ular perception of Arab influence remains. Globalized Islamophobia manifests as “Arab-phobia” among some Indonesians and international observers. Yet, at the same time, Arab culture and heritage, do have historical and contemporary significance in Islam beyond a specific ideology, in particular Arabic language as the sacred language of the Qur’an.

In my new book *Indonesians and Their Arab World*, I show that the experiences of Indonesians who physically travel to Arab countries complicate these ambivalent representations of the Arab World even more.

The most important reason for Indonesians’ overseas travels is the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, to the holy land of Islam, gaining spiritual fulfillment and—given the high expenses of the hajj—also an economic achievement. A sharp contrast to this is the mobility of women from Indonesia’s rural areas who migrate to the Gulf in search of higher incomes, working mainly as domestic workers in private homes. Reports about the abuse and exploitation of migrant women create a rather gloomy image of the Arab World.

When returning home, labor migrants and Mecca pilgrims seek to make sense of their experiences.

#### Labor Migrants and Mecca Pilgrims

On the airplanes from Indonesia to the Middle East, labor migrants and Mecca pilgrims sit next to each other, although in many regions in Indonesia their worlds barely overlap in terms of social class and economic status.

When returning home, labor migrants and Mecca pilgrims seek to make sense of their experiences. Interestingly, their representations of the Arab World often relate much more to moral values in their home context rather than to actual experiences abroad. Personal relationships, public discourse, and matters of religious self-understanding guide migrants and pilgrims in becoming physically mobile and making their mobility meaningful.

The return connects migrants’ and pilgrims’ representations of the Arab World to their home context. This includes references to more famous returns from Arabia, such as the one of Rizieq Shihab who stands for an image of the Arab World that works within Indonesia’s internal public debates. Migrants and pilgrims refer to such representations, affirming or neglecting them, to express their position within Indonesia’s religious landscape. Yet, these expressions and representations are not proof of “Arab influence” in Indonesia. They are rather symbolic markers of social divisions within Indonesia.

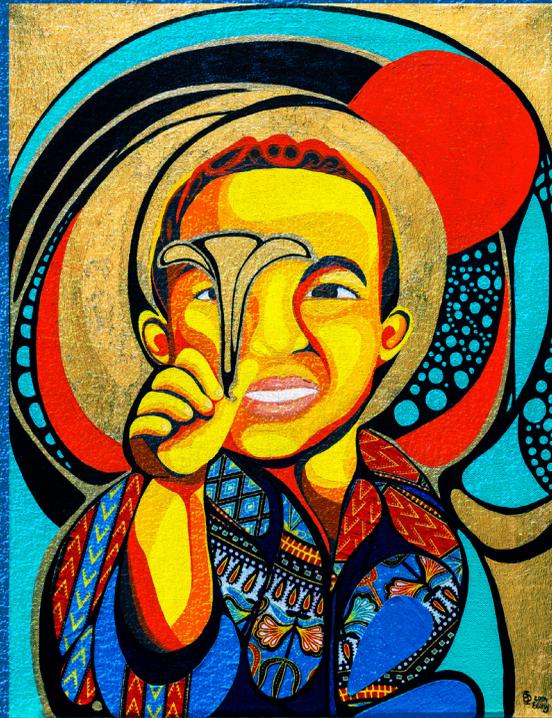
Meanwhile, Rizieq Shihab remains in police custody. This time, because of violating COVID-19 health protocols while holding mass gatherings in Jakarta and his organization, FPI, has been banned.

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**LOVE AND LIBERATION**

HUMANITARIAN WORK IN ETHIOPIA'S SOMALI REGION

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ LAUREN CARRUTH ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

# **HUMANITARIANISM IN THE MARGINS OF EMPIRE**

The research that went into writing this book began with a series of questions I have been thinking about for more than seventeen years, as I worked in and studied humanitarian response, and as I traveled and lived on and off in Ethiopia, in places where relief organizations repeatedly intervene. Who and what is “humanitarian”? What kinds of actions and people are characterized as humanitarian in our world today? Who comes to mind when we picture an aid worker, and whose labor is not typically signified, imagined, recognized, and budgeted? Finally, what does humanitarianism mean to the people who carry it out? To answer these questions, in the following pages I examine humanitarianism as it is lived, debated, evaluated, and enacted by people like Aden—front-line aid workers, health workers, program officers, policy makers, and bureaucrats within relief organizations serving communities in the Somali Region of Ethiopia.

The English-language descriptor, *humanitarian*, is frequently invoked by the news media and Western donor governments for many reasons—it can pull at the heartstrings of the public and donors, it can sell news stories, justify wars, justify extraordinary expenses and actions, and it can even justify cooperation with abusive governments and armed groups.<sup>1</sup> Within the quiet halls of the headquarters of international aid organizations, in cities like Geneva and New York, far away from sites of crisis and conflict, humanitarian responses continue to be much more narrowly defined as temporary interventions focused on saving and protecting human lives.<sup>2</sup> These kinds of interventions are justified and structured

## INTRODUCTION

by International Humanitarian Law and the Fundamental Principles of Humanitarian Response outlined by the Red Cross,<sup>3</sup> and they are designed in response to discrete, measurable, and time-bound crisis events. This limited conception presents a fundamental dilemma. As David Rieff phrased it, “Humanitarianism is an impossible enterprise. Here is a saving idea that, in the end, cannot save but can only alleviate.”<sup>4</sup> Humanitarian response, as it is defined by the Red Cross and other relief organizations and enshrined in international law, is not designed to solve the entrenched societal injustices and inequities that cause humanitarian crises and so often worsen human suffering long after relief organizations depart.

There are, however, other ways of understanding and carrying out humanitarian work. This book centers alternative but related perspectives—ones articulated and enacted by professional aid workers and health-care providers like Aden. Humanitarianism, as discussed and enacted by Somali aid workers in eastern Ethiopia, was not primarily structured by International Humanitarian Law, principles and standards delineated by the Red Cross, or the definitions, budgets, and programmatic mandates set by foreign relief organizations. Humanitarianism was also neither neutral to nor independent of Somali and Ethiopian politics and history. Instead, *samafal*—an approximate translation of “humanitarianism” in the Somali language—signifies both the affective forms of care provided at the site of individual bodies affected by years of crises, and the collective forms of healing and liberation attempted by aid workers at the site of bodies politic.

## Going East

The Somali Region, in the eastern part of Ethiopia, is located in what tipsy foreign service officers at the Hilton Hotel bar in the capital Addis Ababa laughingly called “the Wild Wild East.” “Be careful over there!” a blonde twenty-something American with a buzz cut warned me before I left town once, his eyebrows raised, and his head tilted in disbelief.

“Do they have food out there?,” one Ethiopian staffer, originally from Addis Ababa, asked me on a different occasion, as we shopped together for groceries. The regular characterization of the Somali Region of Ethiopia by outsiders as “wild,” hungry, savage, marginal, and constantly beset by disasters and conflict is, however, largely a product of ignorance and the unwillingness of most expatriates and Ethiopians from Addis Ababa to spend any length of time getting to know people and circumstances there.

Somali Ethiopians alternatively characterized the region as a historically rich, spectacular desert landscape, a gateway from Africa to the Middle East, the northern edge of the seasonally verdant *haud* pastureland, and a place where



**FIGURE 1.** Camels grazing on a mountain overlooking Jigjiga, Ethiopia, 2018. Photograph by David Machledt.

children can grow up strong and healthy thanks to an abundance of fresh livestock milk and time outdoors grazing and herding animals. While not in continuous and unavoidable states of crisis, as it is so often portrayed in the news media and in many outsiders' popular imaginations of the place, residents did describe the Somali Region as marginalized and unsettled. Politicians have come and gone quickly in recent years, often in dramatic fashion;<sup>5</sup> police battalions, secret militias, and military patrols occasionally roamed the region, regularly detaining activists and contraband traders; and the future of ethnic Somalis within Ethiopia and the greater Horn of Africa was a constant source of discussion and debate.

Ethiopia's national capital, Addis Ababa, is located almost four hundred miles west of Jigjiga. Addis Ababa means "new flower" in the Amharic language, and was chosen in 1886 by Empress Taytu Betul, the powerful wife of Emperor Menelik II, to be the Ethiopian Empire's new, centralized capital city in the mountainous center of the country. Ranging from 7,200 feet above sea level at its southern tip to over 9,800 at the edge of the verdant Entoto Mountains, Addis Ababa is nestled in a densely populated and hazy high-altitude basin. Approximately 4.4 million Ethiopians reside in the fast-expanding urban area, alongside a sizable contingent of foreign diplomats, aid workers, private investors, and economic development specialists from around the world.<sup>6</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Addis Ababa is known as the “Capital of Africa.” It hosts the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa, among hundreds of other international organizations, and it boasts the recent construction of several glassy new hotels and shopping malls near the city center. Ethiopia is a typical “developmental state.”<sup>7</sup> From the years 2000 to 2013, the country’s gross domestic product annual growth rate averaged 9.5 percent, the second highest in all sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>8</sup> Chinese investments have helped fund the paving of several major roadways across the country, the construction of a new railroad to the port in Djibouti City, and a new light rail crisscrossing the city.

On April 2, 2018, a charismatic leader, Abiy Ahmed Ali, assumed the office of Prime Minister of Ethiopia and chairmanship of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ruling coalition party, reconceptualized in 2019 as the “Prosperity Party.” Abiy’s ascension, his public discourses on Ethiopian unity, and his attempted reforms represent a watershed moment for the



**FIGURE 2.** Addis Ababa welcomes Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, 2018. Photograph by Brook Tadesse Woldetsadik.

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH TOM G. HOOGERVORST

author of *Language Ungoverned*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

On my first day in Surabaya I was having lunch in the historical neighborhood of Ampel. I was eating Yemeni food in a popular restaurant and two university students were sitting across the table. We started chatting and it turned out that their teacher was someone I had been trying to reach but didn't have a phone number of. After we were connected, I visited her university, which, as it turns out, had many relevant publications for my research. I would not have known any of this if not for that chance meeting in a restaurant. It is precisely that subtle balance between idolatry and iconoclasm that defines an archival institution and led me to discover the hidden world of archiving and conservation.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

It would have saved me quite some time to know that many Dutch summaries of the topics discussed in late-colonial Indonesian newspapers have recently been digitized. What I would have done differently, then, would be to download all these summaries, compile a list of specific topics, and take that list to the National Library in Indonesia, where the original newspapers are stored. I think this is the best way right now to locate information on historical topics that Indonesian journalists wrote about. It's a good thing these summaries are online these days rather than in some inaccessible Dutch archive.



“I hope the field will realize more deeply the importance of translation and especially translators as struggling human beings.”

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

I hope the field will realize more deeply the importance of translation and especially translators as struggling human beings. Outside the West, they are often underappreciated and underpaid. This often leads to exploitative practices in which better funded international organizations translate, say, modern Indonesian literature in ways that do not always respect the original creation. The way ahead is more collaboration between authors and translators from different parts of the world—and a better allocation of resources to achieve this—so that international audiences can increasingly enjoy the work of upcoming authors from other continents.

## The Article

# MOUNTAINS OF PAPER

## Archiving and Architecture

by *Albena Yaneva*

Contemporary architects employ an archival logic in their current work, but this was not the case thirty years ago. 'Mountains of paper piled up in the office in the 1990s and we had to start organizing the archive,' states architect Álvaro Siza in an interview in August 2018. Siza's firm was one of the first to engage in archiving activities at that time. A number of developments in the social sciences and the arts, dating back to the 1990s also point to the importance to study archives as practice: the 'archival fever' in the arts and philosophy (Derrida, 1996), the emergence of the trend of 'archival ethnography' in anthropology, and the 'empirical turn' in archival science.

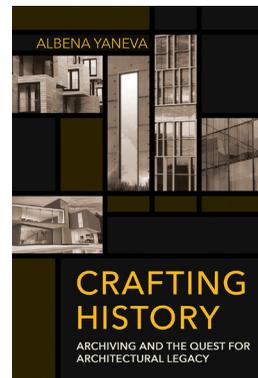
The radical change of architectural practice, triggered by computerization, also led to its own 'archival turn,' prompting practitioners to reflect on the techniques of archivization, both traditional and novel, and prompting architects like Siza to appoint their own archivists. Chiara Porcu has worked as archivist at his practice for more than two decades; as she organized the archive the archive

Contemporary architects employ an archival logic in their current work, but this was not the case thirty years ago.

trained her too and she became sensitive to the signs of the drawings, their 'hieroglyphs,' and the multiple layers and overlapping temporalities of design process (for instance, she can distinguish Siza's drawing style and handwriting from 1950s with the ones in the 1970s).

In 2014, assisted by Magda Seifert, she started preparing the archive for its 'journey' to distant Montreal, as Siza's fonds has been acquired by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA).

Shifting the analysis back to Montreal, in 2015, we trace the work of Adria Seccareccia as she re-houses material received from Porto. She inspects the drawings and sketchbooks, she adds new notes, she questions the order: 'Why is this document here?,' and if Chiara cannot answer, the question will go back to architect Siza. A simple question like this reveals both Chiara's reading of Siza's work as well as Siza's own perspective on



how his work is to be archived, structured, and understood. Adria's work is epistemically rich, gaining knowledge about the process in Siza's firm and leading towards the production of the CCA map of this archive.

If an archive reflects the thinking process of architectural practitioners, what exactly is the connection between this thinking and the debris that collects in an office? How does the archive reflect also the collaborative working dynamics in a creative practice? To what extent does experimental design work depend on intimacy with the archive? How is design practice changing now, in the heyday of the digital era—as archiving is becoming part of a broader culture of sampling, sharing, and recombining visual data in infinite calibrations of users and receivers? Addressing these questions, we take a glimpse at the design work of firms like Siza's and the practices of conservators, archivists, and curators at the CCA, a leading archival institution. Advocating an anthropology of archiving that follows ethnographically the daily work and care of all its participants and scrutinizes their variable ontology, scale, and politics, we witness how archival objects are processed and cataloged, how models are preserved, and how born-digital material battles time and technology obsolescence.

Retracing the moves of archiving allows us to witness the usually invisible work of a great variety of silent actors involved in the making of architectural collections who generally remain outside the limelight of mainstream architectural historiography.

*Crafting History* is the first book to address the construction of archives in architecture, the epistemology they perform, and the craft of archiving. It also presents the first in-depth study of the expert knowledge of architectural archivists. It is based on a two-year-long ethnographic observation at the CCA, and interviews with architects conducted between 2015 and 2018, including Álvaro Siza and Peter Eisenman. It comprises fifty-two interviews (in English and French) with archivists, architects, conservators, cataloguers, digital specialists, librarians, and curators; the transcriptions amount to thousands of pages, without the ethnographic notes; it is complemented by institutional, private, CCA and firm archives never explored before.

The book adds another layer to the beginnings of Architectural History. While Álvaro Siza's name is engraved in the golden books of this History, no one has ever heard of Chiara or Magda or Adria, and we can continue the list. Retracing the moves of archiving allows us to witness the usually invisible work of a great variety of silent actors involved in the making of architectural collections that generally remain outside the limelight of mainstream architectural historiography. When we dive into the ontological granularity of archiving, we suddenly realize with surprise and total bewilderment, how limited, complex, local, and unpredictable architectural objects can be, and how circumstantial, contingent, and partial the production of Architectural History is.

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH MIRJAM LÜCKING

author of *Indonesians and Their Arab World*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

As part of my research on imaginations of the Arab World, I wanted to know more about everyday products that are labelled as 'Arab' in Indonesia. It was especially religious paraphernalia, like prayer bracelets, carpets and a specific attire that my interlocutors described as 'Arab' even though joking themselves that many of these products are 'made in China'. Engaging with material culture led to lively interactions and insights about what people

considered too modern among some Muslims in Madura with preference for the sarong (a skirt like cloth). Among other Madurese Muslims however, like in some Qur'anic schools, pants were part of the school uniform. Thus, slowly I understood that there is no simple answer to what is a 'proper Muslim dress code.' An example from women's dress codes are different styles of wearing a headscarf. One of my friends, a young student from the public University in Bangkalan, explained that she was wearing her new long headscarf with hesitation. It covered not only her head but also

"I thought I could draw conclusions from a person's outward appearance or rhetoric and was too quick with some research assumptions."

see as foreign, religious, blaspheme, traditional, modern, Indonesian, Arab and so on. It became clear that 'Arabness' is an ambivalent and broad label for what seemed to be Islamic. Most interestingly, my research partner Ubed raised my awareness for the music of a Lebanese singer who is popular among Madurese Muslims who like the Arabic music and who are unaware of the fact that the singer is a Lebanese Christian.

Another situation concerns clothing and what is perceived as polite-Muslim dress code. Once my hosts and I coincidentally met a Kyai (a religious authority) and it struck me with surprise that one of the men apologized in front of the Kyai for wearing pants. Through this situation I understood that pants are being

the upper part of the body. She explained that this style is very different from the common headscarf style in her village, where women tie a short piece of cloth in the nape of the neck, covering the head but not the neck. She said that this style is more practical when working on the fields and markets, whereas for her as a University student it would not be appropriate.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

I wish I had known that features of so-called 'Arabness' are for many Indonesians interchangeable with other features, like 'Chineseness' or 'Indonesianness'. In the beginning of my research, I thought I could draw conclusions from a person's outward appearance or

rhetoric and was too quick with some research assumptions. Only after several months of research and after getting to know research participants better, I realized how such trends change and that a certain rhetoric or style can be a phase in a person's life and does not necessarily reveal much about deeper values and worldviews.

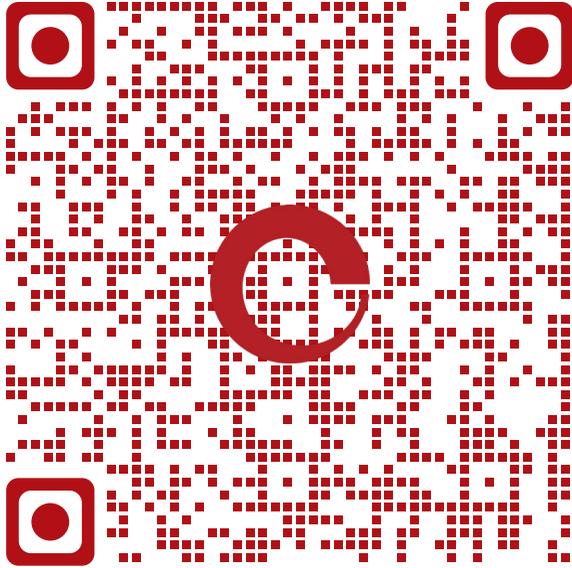
Something I still don't know—but I wish I had known—are the Javanese and Madurese languages. A proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia is sufficient for most research activities and in average Indonesians feel comfortable to express themselves in Indonesian. However, in both of my research areas, in rural Central Java and on Madura Island, the Javanese and Madurese languages were important for my hosts, friends and interlocutors. Some nuances can only be expressed in the mother tongue and many daily interactions, humor and etiquette are not translatable to Indonesian.

### 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

I wish I could change the structural inequality between anthropologists who are educated in leading Western Universities and my colleagues in Indonesia and the Middle East. Many of my colleagues in Indonesia and the Middle East do “Anthropology at Home” and they collaborate with me and other anthropologists who did not grow up in the research area and who have an outsiders' perspective, which can be enriching. Likewise, it would be very enriching if they could also contribute their perspective on my lifeworld. I wish there were more research funds for anthropologists from the 'Global South' to do research in Europe and North America, as it can be truly eye-opening to exchange perspectives on differences and commonalities between societies.



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**SCAN ME**

# THREE QUESTIONS WITH SOMDEEP SEN

author of *Decolonizing Palestine*

## 1. What's your favorite anecdote from your research for this book?

During my fieldwork in the occupied West Bank, a Palestinian friend would often accompany me to interviews. I considered him a source of support in a “dangerous” field. At the end of my fieldwork, I thanked him for “keeping me safe”. He seemed genuinely baffled and said, “keep you safe? I thought you were keeping me safe?”. I said, “I’m brown. Israeli soldiers think I’m Palestinian. How am I supposed to keep you safe?”. We laughed. However, in that moment the complicated nature of the relationship between the researcher and the gatekeeper became clear. This is the very stuff that makes ethnographic research a complex, yet captivating endeavor.

## 2. What do you wish you had known when you started writing your book, that you know now?

I found the task of writing my first book to be daunting – not least because I was now writing for an audience that went far beyond the safety net of my supervisors and doctoral assessment committee. Intimidated, it can be easy to become apologetic in one’s writing style. And, when I began writing this book, I became overly concerned with positioning myself in the field and this drowned out my own voice. At that point, I wish someone had reminded me that my perspective needs to take center stage and that the reader is concerned not with what others have said about the topic but with how I view the subject matter at hand.



“Intimidated, it can be easy to become apologetic in one’s writing.”

## 3. How do you wish you could change your field of study?

I often find that anthropological knowledge is not valued enough within the social sciences. My hope is that there is greater recognition of the importance of the anthropological, nitty-gritty and everyday perspective on life and politics. Here, we must remember, how things happen is what they are. That is to say, how institutions, ideologies, policies, laws etc. manifest in the everyday is what truly personifies their character. And, as a discipline, it is anthropology that is best equipped with the conceptual outlook and methodological tools to give us access to this knowledge.

AN INTERVIEW WITH **JUN ZHANG**,  
AUTHOR OF *DRIVING TOWARD MODERNITY*,  
HOSTED BY JONATHAN HALL

THE TRANSCRIPT

**1869**

The Cornell University Press Podcast

**JONATHAN** Welcome to 1869, The Cornell University Press Podcast. I'm Jonathan Hall. This episode we speak with Jun Zhang, author of the new book, *Driving toward Modernity: Cars and the Lives of the Middle Class in Contemporary China*. Jun Zhang is Assistant Professor of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. We spoke to Jun about what it's like to be the first person in your family to ever own a car, the massive increase of cars and car owners within China over the past two decades, and how the Chinese, particularly the middle class, have thrived as well as struggled with this unprecedented influx of new automobiles into the country. Hello, Jun. Welcome to the podcast.

**JUN ZHANG** Hi, Jonathan. Thank you for inviting me to do the podcast for the book that just came out.

**JONATHAN** Yeah, yeah. Congratulations - *Driving toward Modernity: Cars and the Lives of the Middle Class in Contemporary China*. just came out. So thank you. Thank you. So tell us what inspired you to write this book and get into this research.

**JUN ZHANG** So that is, well it says quite, let's say the whole project is actually quite as a an accident. It is, by no means it's not a by design project. So to start a little bit, you don't have time, everything that you wrote back to 2003. When I was just started, I was admitted to graduate school in the United States. So I wrote in China, I grew up in South China. So when I got the letter, and when I was prepared to move to the US, I was repeatedly told that I should learn to drive because live with our car in the US would be really difficult. So I enrolled myself in driving school. So at that time, actually, not many people had cars at home at all. And driving to work out for leisure was really rare in cities, even in cities like Shenzhen and Guangzhou, which was some of the most with the economically developed cities in China.

**JUN ZHANG** So when I went to the driving school, that the kind of vehicle that they use for students were actually pickup trucks, but of course, now pickup trucks is a cool thing in China, so and then now they are called pika. pika basically, is a Chinese direct translation of pickups. At that time pickups had the name, it's called the person's cars. So you sort of get a sense, you know, what? The car scenes of it at that period? So at that time, you already see the number of bicycles have already significantly reduced, and then are, the cities are gradually moving on to accommodating more and more vehicles. But still, that was in 2002-2003. And it was still really rare that you will ask, you know, people around you say, do you have a car, most people will be very unfamiliar with this concept. And so then, in 2004, I had a vacation in Germany, and I travel around for almost a month. So as a student, that was a quite eye opening experience for me. And so I saw a lot of different kind of way of driving interactions between cars, passengers, were very different from the way that you know, I was used to in China, and also the way how people drive, how roads were con-

structed, how people talked about cars, everything just was so different. It was just fascinating to me. And so after that, traveling, I went back to China. And then I suddenly realized a lot of these, say newsstands or that sells a lot of our car magazines. That was again something new. When I grew up in China most part in the most part of China. You don't see car magazines, and the very rare ones that actually came from Hong Kong typically, because friend friends or family visits so someone brought a magazine so we could actually see you know, what is a number guiney what is the Ferrari looks like? But that was again, really something rare in life. But then, in the early, let's say, 2003-2004 we started to see a lot of car magazines that came out from China printed in China, written in China. So I gradually then started to look into, you know what happens. And then so that was the time when car sales suddenly showed up in China. So that was the time what we typically a lot of Chinese at that time is causing pain. So basically saying that suddenly the sales goes a lot go up a lot. But then at the same time, that was a significant transitional moments when most of the car buyers shifted from government and company to private individuals. So I that's actually sort of the really the trigger point for me that I basically rewrite my entire PhD proposal and then switch to, I want you to note about this first generations of non professional drivers. Now how do they know how, how to buy cars? And how do they know how to drive, and these are people they are first generations drivers at home. So quite unlikely, for some a lot of American friends and colleagues or my European friends and colleagues, they grew up with a family car, they don't really need to go to driver driving school to learn how to drive because they already learn how to drive from their parents as they grew up. But these are very different. So a lot of my interlocutors have no prior driving experience before they enrolled in driving school. And they our car was the first family car ever. So this is the kind of issues that really interests me. So what do they see in a car? And what does a car mean to them? How do they learn to drive? What do they consider to be prestige way of owning a car and having a car? What is the weight of the propriety? You know, that comes with it? And, and also that's a lot of other things that are around it. So what happened to the mechanics? How about parking? You know, how do they deal with parking in cities in China, which is notoriously for heavy traffic? Highly densely populated? So how do they negotiate always, with all these people? And how do they find the space? And how do they find the flexibility? And how do they deal with that anxiety that comes with driving. So that is the really the issues that really intrigues me. And that prompts for that coming 10 years of research and writing on this topic.

JONATHAN

It's amazing to see the evolution of your study of this, you know, you taught you, you started the research back in the early 2000s. And you you have some statistics here, that you got from the World Bank that in 2010, the US had 423 passenger cars per 1000 people and China only had 44 passenger cars per 1000 people. Now, China is the biggest auto market in the world. So we're literally looking at a period of 10 to 15 years

of this incredible growth. And it's amazing to hear about as you're saying, first time car owners that no one else in their family ever even dreamed of owning a car, and now they're driving around. It's it's amazing to see.

**JUN ZHANG** Yes, well, the probably that's also one of the biggest challenge challenges in writing this book is that because everything is just happening, and it happened so fast. So I was constantly worried that within my observation, you know, was already outdated, where the direction the whole society a lot of the peoples were moving towards. I think that kind of uncertainty is also something that I find interesting. And as I mentioned in the book, that it also captures a lot of the feelings of being a middle class as a car owners, you know, how they feel about in, you know, this rapidly changing society, everything is changing, everything was growing, consumption was going up really fast, they suddenly can own a lot of things that their parents can never dreamed of owning before. But yet at the same time, not knowing where this whole thing goes towards. So I think there's the two actually the cars and then the middle class, therefore they serve not two sides of the same coin, but they should sort of more or less can help eliminate each other so they can becomes metaphor, so they're more or less for each other in many ways. So that's why I decided then to put these two together in the book.

**JONATHAN** I really like how you do it. Right off the bat. You have a story, using the metaphor... you have a story that the conversation you had with a friend Ming Lee, and you're in a car on the highway, expressway. And Ming Lee says, "we can afford a car now. Cars used to be for bragging rights, you used to dream about owning a car thinking, "then I could go anywhere. Now everybody owns a car, here we are in the middle of the road stuck. Life is like this, too." And I like how you then use that as a metaphor for the middle class. And there's a there's a saying that you had heard above us are the elderly, below us are the young, we are the true middle class trapped in the middle. And I like that, how there's all this dynamic change, and people are moving forward. But at the same time, there's all this uncertainty, so they feel a little bit stuck at the same time. That's great. Could you explain a little bit more about what you found with this?

**JUN ZHANG** Yeah, sure. Um, so I mean, to say middle class is actually a very weird concept for many of my interlocutors. So sometimes when I have a discussion with them, they actually, they often asked me back, what do you mean by middle class? So this is actually one of the posts that you just read, or, or something that actually comes out quite often, it's actually more than once mean is just one of the many that actually use a term that they describe himself in this way. So for one thing is that the term class itself is very historically politically loaded in China. So for all these, so first of all, for all my interlocutors, so this is a very specific kind of middle class. So when I say that this my middle class interlocutors, most of these people are professionals, most of them are college educated. So it's, you know, there are other books that are on Chinese middle class, there are

different kinds. So they are the more business kinds. And they are the more civil serving kinds, so mine is more mixed. But in general, they are characteristics by their higher education, and professional jobs, some of them are business as well, operates their own business well. So and these people all learned, you know, they are familiar with all these class terms that they know from school. And we all know that in in the socialist period, the class struggle was a big thing for the states for the governments, and a lot of people suffer from it. So for a lot of people, they actually really have a very, very, let's say, ambiguous at best, you know, the kind of attitudes is ambiguous, sometimes it's just, you know, avoidance in total, just like, we don't like the term class, I'm not sure what that term means. So that's, so they have other Chinese term to describe themselves. So they typically they if they really want to use they use ditton stratum, it's more or less stratum. And in most of the cases, they actually just omit the, the stratum or the class completely, just say, zhong chan. So basically, the middle property. So that is one aspect of that term. So when they, when they talk about middle class, there's often a little bit of the tongue in cheek attitude when they talk about it. And then, the other hand is, again, this is a middle class is something that they don't know what exactly that means. So they do know so that the set the metaphor, they use that, you know, I'm trapped in between, so that reverse of many aspects, actually many other aspects in their life. So it is still are very much not trapped, but they are still let's say they practice this more like multi generational families, though, they still have a strong sense of responsibility for how to take care of the elderly, but at the same time, again, this kind of newer generations of parenting, you know, new kinds of parenting, that means they also invest a lot in raising their children. So they feel that they are the, the generation that's in middle, sort of the pillar of the family, but at the same time, also being squeezed out by you know, all these family duties. So that's one aspect. On the other aspect is sort of a social and political. To be a middle class. It's actually not exactly it's quite different from what you will imagine in many other places. For the for one thing and they know that they have a remote, they have achieved our upward social mobility. But there's also a glass ceiling, they know that it's very difficult to move further up in their understandings, in order to move further out, you need strong very strong political network, and they do not have. So it is in that sense, they actually do not consider themselves to be social elite in any way. And so they could not really move up. But they also were quite conscious of that there are a lot of people below them who have a lot of difficulties in life, including, for example, their parents, many of their parents were forced into retirement, or being dismissed layoff from the state enterprises that is, you know, due to all these structural transformations in China. And then, of course, the migrant workers. So this people are realizing, you know, there's this kind of social structure, there is the social hierarchy, they have managed to move up a bit, but they couldn't quite see where they can move from here on. And so that's why this kind of a traffic jam becomes almost for them is a perfect metaphor for them to know that they can move, they can achieve something, they managed

to get to something to get something that they really wanted when they were young. But from then on, there's so many things that was out of their own control. And so I think that is something that I really want to capture that kind of achievement, but at the same time, anxiety that comes with like being a middle class.

**JONATHAN** It's very interesting, it's very interesting. With your, with your, with this decade plus of research culminating into this book, how do you hope that your research will make a difference in your field?

**JUN ZHANG** Well, I hope that like several aspect of it, and for one thing, I think a lot of the research on cars or middle class is continued to be very Western-centric or tend to be they these kinds of literature tend to focus on more developed economies. So you will see a lot of them on cars written by for example, large amount of literature's is on United States or in Europe, for middle class very similar to so that's what I, I tried to bring in, you know, some of different kinds of stories is particularly the rise of this kind of automobility middle class in what we consider to be the global set. So how they are experienced look like how those processes look like. So that is one thing that I hope that my book can contribute to. And then the second part of it is, there are a lot of like growing literature's on mobilities and infrastructures. So, I would like to bring in again, another set of questions and empirical analysis, and to see how this kind of a mobility, ideas of mobility, material aspect of mobility has been shaped, historically, politically, and culturally. And then to the on the third aspect is something that about social transformation. I want to provide a nuanced picture, a nuanced understanding about continuity and ruptures. And I think China provides a great example, would you think that? Well, we like to think, for example, China is a China's a neoliberal countries? Is it China a capitalist or not? Well, my quote, my answer to it is like, well, things are not that simple. And if you look at this kind of interactions, you know, this kind of mobility, social and physical mobility, and you realize that the past continues to play a very important role and shaping who can actually move up? Where do they start? What kind of edge do they get? And if we don't look at the past, it's quite difficult for us to understand why certain symbols become so important, why certain narrative could becomes such a discursive strategy that for the middle class to achieve something that they want, but at the same time without alienating themselves from the state or the government. So I think my book can contribute to the understanding Just kind of a more nuanced pictures about social transformation.

**JONATHAN** I like that, I like the the nuance that you're bringing into the conversation, as well as the bringing in the perspectives of the global south, these are all essential for us to understanding what's really going on. And in that vein, what ways do you see your argument being perhaps controversial or or ones that will shake up preconceived ideas?

JUN ZHANG

Well, I think one thing, one is that I have just mentioned, a lot of literature's and also in common understanding is whatever China achieve today is because of the market reform. So for example, the rise of the middle class is because market opens up and therefore there's a professionals. And then at the cars, similar story, China joined staebler to global global capital got in and therefore the car market was, is burgeoning and so on. And so my, my answer to it is, well, it is actually not quite, if you look at you know, look at the larger picture, you know, put it in a longer historical trajectory, we notice that, well, yes, the market reform did provide some kind of a structural transformation that makes certain things possible. But in order to turn that possibility into reality, we see there's a lot more other things that are going on, for example, we see a lot of this, for example, the middle class, the fact that they could actually rise up today, from, you know, where they start, you know, most of my interlocutors grew up with relatively poor family backgrounds, it's, it's not like that kind of poor, we have to put it in relative terms, because society at that time was generally poor, so everyone's or so it's relatively egalitarian. So it allows them, it's kind of relatively equal footing, that allows them to actually, by working hard, and by taking advantage, what the structural transformation, the markets, transformations, that, you know, that kind of opportunity that they can actually move up. And some of them actually work very, quite reflective and quite critical. And they will look at generations after them when they earn, or sometimes when they look at their own children, they will say, Well, today, sometimes you just know that for certain young people, it will be very difficult to move up the same way as they do, because the starting points are just so hugely, vastly different. So for the people who are trapped now, in the poor, really, like in a highly stratified society, when you're poor, it's very difficult to achieve the same kind of mobility, they, they could have, like, say 20 or 30 years ago. So I think that is one important message that I would like to bring up to look at it, you know, from a little bit of processes on to recognize that there are different kinds of institutional settings in the past, but we'll continue to shape the way how people lived, and their understandings and their practices and their, say, their morals, their morality, their ethical practices. And then the second findings, I think it's important to remember is that a lot of critics will say, well, China didn't quite doesn't quite have a civil society, because the middle class, we're not exactly solid, you know, a group of solidarity. And they didn't quite speak up light, you know, what they're, like the middle class in, in, in Europe or in United States, you know, how they constitute the backbone of civil society, you know, to counter the deviations of the state, state power, and so on and so forth. So my argument is to look at it is that, well, once we move beyond, you know, this kind of civil society state and society dichotomy, you really look at a middle class as an important force to shape political legitimacy. Then you will see actually, the Chinese middle class is very much doing exactly the same thing. What middle class in western countries are doing, are helping and shaping political legitimacy. So I think that might be the two points of dual. If that can bring us some conversations. I will be happy.

JONATHAN Definitely. Oh, definitely. Your Your research and work is definitely going to spark conversations and I'm looking forward to seeing how it's being reviewed in journals and the conversations that it sparks. And it's it's fascinating to see you're right there at an incredible turning point in, in China, in this transition towards an automobile society, it's great to have you, we have this time capsule this period. And obviously it's still expanding at a dramatic pace there's there's going to be plenty of new things to study as well. So you found a great topic to choose.

JUN ZHANG Thank you. And well, we do hope that it will stop at some point at certain points. And again, even though I wrote a book on cars, I myself actually don't drive or use public transportation I walk so I mean, there are a serious issue that comes with environment and also that kind of exclusion social exclusion, marginal groups issues, I think, while I am I feel exciting about seeing it, the rise of automobility as exciting moment to explore social transformation. But on the grounds that on the practical aspect of things I'm actually quite concerned about this as this kind of unhindered growth of car ownership continues. Where will we end up?

JONATHAN Yeah, there's there's a lot of unintended consequences that we've seen here in the US and in Europe where the car becomes everything and then they put highways and roads all over the place. And then you have somewhat unlivable cities. Then you see a transition away from that where people are saying, hey, let's get rid of cars in certain sections of the city. So you see that in New York City that there's Broadway is a pedestrian walkway so there's gonna be expansions and then contractions and readjustments and hopefully towards the better, but yeah, right now it sounds like wild west or wild east.

JUN ZHANG Yes. (laughter) Indeed.

JONATHAN Yes. So great. Well, it was great talking with you and a fascinating topic. Congratulations once again on your new book *Driving Toward Modernity*.

JUN ZHANG Thank you. Thank you.

JONATHAN Okay. You take care.

JUN ZHANG Alright, you, too.

JONATHAN That was Jun Zhang, author of the new book, *Driving toward Modernity: Cars and the Lives of the Middle Class in Contemporary China*.

THE  
EXCERPT

**CULTIVATING THE PAST,  
LIVING THE MODERN**



**THE POLITICS OF TIME  
IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN**

**AMAL SACHEDINA**

# INTRODUCTION

## Heritage Discourse and Its Alterities

This book is an immersion into the iconic imagery and discourse of national heritage in the Sultanate of Oman. It explores the significance of the institutionalization of material heritage and the political implications of public history unraveling its sway over daily life among Omani citizens. It came into being in the summer of 2007, during my two-month internship with the Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in Muscat. This small state gallery invited visitors on a journey through the Omani landscape, from the Musandam region in the North, into the interior, and south to the governorate of Dhofar, through a display of fortifications and traditional weaponry. The exhibition followed a chronology, displaying the earliest-known weapons in Oman's prehistory and culminating in nineteenth-century guns imported but covered with traditional Omani silverwork. In writing the exhibit labels, the director emphatically informed me, no mention could be made of anything with political ramifications, including tribes or tribal conflicts. The result was a small museum in which a linear chronicle focused entirely on aesthetic and technical elements of the displays, effectively depoliticizing time-space. This perspective was the object of much contemplative musing throughout my twenty months of fieldwork between 2007 and 2017, as I waded through official files on historic preservation, visited museums and heritage festivals, and accompanied ministry advisors to major forts and citadels in Oman's interior.

One early event was a 2009 trip to Jabrin Fort, a former seat of government for the Ibadi Ya'ariba Imamate (1624–1743). I accompanied a team from the Ministry of Tourism—an American consultant, a Filipino historical conservationist and architect, and a senior Omani official. As we walked through the castle, my

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American companion explained that the ministry was establishing the castle as an “authentic” historic site that would give insight into Oman’s past through in situ displays.<sup>1</sup> Books, handmade ceramics, wedding trousseaux, and weaponry from the ministry’s collections would be exhibited to evoke another age. There would also be cushions and straw mats, apparently the focal point in every room, handmade by the local women’s associations to give a sense of “local tradition.” Valuable artifacts would be placed behind glass in the many arched niches, their minimal labeling contributing aesthetics and ambiance more than information. The installations were being constructed to convey a sense of each chamber’s historical role, leaving an impression of vibrant regional history.

But the Omani past did not make itself felt only in museums, handicrafts, or restoration projects. My daily journeys through the labyrinthine streets of the capital city, Muscat, and regional centers, such as Nizwa, were often lightened by the sight of fortified architecture and national symbols, such as the coffeepot (*dalla*), the traditional trading ship (dhow), and the dagger (*khanjar*) as part of the street scene. As an urban aesthetic, these material forms saturated the urban landscape and were ubiquitous public memorializations of the past. Pictorial history embodied urban geography as colorful mosaic depiction in parks and montages on building facades. On street roundabouts, these and other national emblems regulated the movements of commuters—citizens and noncitizens alike. They appeared as icons in educational and audiovisual media, as national emblems on currency and postage stamps, and as popular design motifs for posters, postcards, keychain ornaments, and finer artistic depictions. These objects of heritage became a highly commodified set of images depicting Omaniness and a visual cascade that inundated public spaces.

Thus, at the heart of the broad sociopolitical and economic transformations that have undergirded Oman’s rise as a prosperous oil producer lies another phenomenon in which daily objects and architectures circulate as a visual, discursive mode of cultural production, called *turāth* (heritage). Since Oman’s inception as a modern state in 1970, its heritage industry and market—exemplified by the expansion of museums, exhibitions, and cultural festivals and the restoration of more than a hundred forts, castles, and citadels—fashions a distinctly territorial polity, marking Oman as a nation-state.

Even before traveling to Oman, I had perused scholarship and media reports that placed Oman in the emerging Gulf state phenomenon of new heritage enterprises, ranging from camel racing to megamuseums, as the basis for strengthening a national historical narrative and substantiating a sense of citizenness in the post-colonial era (Erskine-Loftus, Al-Mulla, and Hightower 2016, 3). In the Arab-Persian Gulf region, this approach followed the general lines of examining how sociopolitical elites have waded through entangled pasts and disparate relationships, with the

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help of Western professionals, to entrench a singular sanctioned national history. From this scholarly vantage, the influx of oil revenues in the 1960s and 1970s is seen as having led ruling families in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Oman to create a network of institutional media—museums, textbooks, heritage festivals, and sports, such as falconry—to forge a national imagination and displace sectarian and tribal affiliations. Media and scholarship construed the politics centered on the region’s mass inward migration and regimes of labor and citizenship as playing out through the growing ascendancy of institutional heritage practices, delineating an exclusive citizenship grounded in an indigenous sense of belonging to the Arabian Peninsula and patrilineal tribal relationships in order to differentiate “locals” from the overwhelming number of foreign migrant residents (Samin 2016; Vora 2013).

I had already seen these tensions play out in another Gulf country, Kuwait. Growing up in a society whose great oil wealth had generated its modern prosperity, I was sharply aware that foreign residents and migrant workers greatly outnumbered Kuwaiti citizens and that a ubiquitous but unspoken hierarchy was deeply imbricated in the everyday rhythms of life. This hierarchy was undergirded by sociopolitical status, linked to occupation on the one hand and ethnonationalism on the other (Ahmad 2017). South Asians, for example, were made aware of their low place in that hierarchy through daily interactions that established an autochthonous notion of “Arabness” and the Arabian Peninsula as central elements of Kuwaiti nationality.

Oman was different. There was greater fluidity in the ethnoracial makeup of Muscat and Nizwa, and one was just as likely to see Omanis in lower-income jobs—shopkeepers, supermarket cashiers, or security guards—as Indians or Pakistanis. Moreover, unlike the UAE, Oman offered a public and proud exposition of a rich maritime history and coastal empires as part of the Indian Ocean trade network right into the nineteenth century. Communities of traders, soldiers, and sailors from Gujarat, Sind, Baluchistan, Iran, and the Kutch region had settled along the coast, retaining connections and relationships with their homelands while participating in the creation of diasporic societies, ports, and even new peoples along the Omani coastline and major trading centers. The Omani population remained slightly higher than foreign residents, and Arabic was the official language, but it was not uncommon to hear Omanis speaking Urdu, Baluchi, or Swahili.

The issues animating my exploration of state heritage practices included how underlying assumptions about the past were reworking pre-1970 conceptions of history, religion, and polity. But this question opened up unexpected and unsanctioned lines of inquiry (recall the exhibition labels absent of any markers of tribal identity) about the lives of Oman’s varied ethnic groups. I grappled with

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the ways heritage discourse (and the history it encapsulated) had shaped how the past was reconstructed by different ethnic and tribal communities of Omanis and the manner by which it informed their sociopolitical sense of belonging to a codified national history and its ethical undertones. Although the questions this book examines could pertain to all Omanis, the people whose voices figure in these pages were primarily associated with two communities—groups who differ from each other on the basis of sect and ethnicity: (1) members of different generations of the old Arab scholarly and mercantile families of the city of Nizwa, a city in the heart of the interior of Oman, at the base of Jabal al-Akhdar (Green Mountain) and surrounded by the West Hajar Mountains; and (2) the al-Lawati community, those Khoja and Shi'a families of Sind origin renowned for their trading networks and business acumen, in Muscat.

Nizwa is about 170 kilometers, or a ninety-minute drive, from the capital city of Muscat. The city once had strategic military and mercantile importance due to its location at a crossroads linking the interior to Muscat and to the southern region of Dhofar. Today, Nizwa is the epicenter of the Governorate of the Interior (ad-Dhākhiliya) and the largest city in the region. It also has a violent history as the administrative capital of the twentieth-century Ibadi Imamate, an Islamic sect distinct from both the Sunni and the Shi'a. Ibadi doctrine and law claims that the golden age of the Muslim state was during the life of the Prophet and the first two caliphs of the Rashidun, Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. In accordance with the precedent they established, the Ibadi imam was chosen through *shura* (mutual consultation) among the *ahl al-hal wal 'aqd* (community elders, scholars, and tribal leaders) based on his morality, scholarship, and dedication to Ibadi *sharī'a*. In contrast, Shi'a imams descend from Ali bin Abi Talib. The Sunni sect has, over time, created a distinctive difference between worldly leaders who were selected via *warathiya* (by descent) and religious-juridical scholarship.

The al-Lawati community, or the Khoja, are Shi'a families of Sind origin renowned for their trading networks and business acumen. They had long been associated with their fortified enclosure, the *sur al-Lawati* in the port of Matrah, now a district of Muscat Province. The walled enclave once housed a vibrant communal mode of living along the coast of Matrah and remained a flourishing hub of economic activity into the twentieth century. The *sur* protected the al-Lawati, but it also isolated the community from the rest of the Muscat/Matrah city populace into the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In speaking with members of these ethnic communities, I sifted through memories and fragments of history that were often contradictory. What I pieced together were pasts full of nostalgia, pride, resentment, and exaggeration. My hope was to examine how their understandings of the past were informed by the heritage regime—the vast assemblage of policies, institutions, public discourse, and

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historic preservation—that developed to manage the material remnants of the pre-1970 past. Through the use of the term *heritage regime*, as Haidy Geismar aptly puts it, the processes at work to discipline the past through reconfiguring its contours foreground heritage as a “form of governance and an experiential domain for citizens” (Geismar 2015, 72; see also Bendix et al. 2012). Her work, moreover, opens an analytical space in which to scrutinize the historical circumstances by which “heritage” has secured ascendancy in shaping people’s experiences of the ethical mores of Omani citizenship. But it also forces into view those historic remnants whose pasts may be submerged by the hegemonic discursive practices of heritage, even as they persist through vigorous forms of thought and action.

Thus, as an iterative mode of public history making, how heritage renders the past (in)visible in the public domain does not lie outside Omani history; the construction of heritage is irrevocably context bound. Its full impact as a productive force unfolds within the specificity of sociopolitical conditions. Heritage, as an institutional mode of reasoning out the past and planning for the future—how these temporal dimensions are connected in the present and the sensibilities this rationale engenders—is the lasting effect of premodern governance in the region in the twentieth century: the last Ibadi Imamate (1913–1955) and British informal imperial rule of the Arab-Persian Gulf. To understand the full impact of heritage as a state campaign of intervention and colonization of the local histories of Nizwa and the sur al-Lawati, I work backward, through the pre-1970 era, to examine how the sultanate’s heritage project is historically situated as part of the greater context of colonial governance and modern statehood.

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