Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia

——Interfaith Dialogue Towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era

Edited by Yoshihiro Yakushige

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Acknowledgement

Yoshihiro Yakushige
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Introduction

Yoshihiro Yakushige

As global crises such as widening inequality, global warming, dysfunctional democracy, and racist hatred rapidly accelerate, the opportunistic relationship between religion and politics has become increasingly evident worldwide. In Israel, radical ethno-religious groups have taken key government positions and have fully exercised their influence on the genocidal war in Gaza. In the United States, the Trump administration, supported by evangelical churches, has been reinstated. In India, the ruling BJP, which is ideologically based on Hindu nationalism, has been taking the reins of government for more than ten years. In Myanmar and Sri Lanka, the influence of Buddhist fundamentalism is growing, and the persecution of minorities continues. In Japan, even after Prime Minister Abe's assassination, there is no sign of the liquidation of the collusion between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the religious right. Governments worldwide are increasingly relying on religious nationalism rather than democratic processes for securing electoral votes and ideological legitimacy. These phenomena have resulted in severe xenophobia and violence against minorities. Especially, women are often the target of violence.

Based on the above-mentioned recognition of the severe situation, "International Roundtable: Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia—Interfaith Dialogue towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era" was conceived. Participants from various countries and backgrounds shared the view that the decolonization process in Asia had not yet finished, as is clearly manifested in the genocide in Gaza by the Israeli army. The underlying theme of the conference was that to break through this situation, we must decolonize the various cognitive frameworks that constrain our patterns of thinking.

As the late Kim Yong-bok, one of the pioneers of people's theology in Korea, has pointed out, when we look back at the history of the Asian continent, we can see a rich spiritual tradition of people's resistance against oppression, such as Hong Xiuquan's Taiping Rebellion in China and Gandhi's nonviolent resistance movement in India. Grassroots development of liberation theology in Asia is an extension of this tradition.[1] Evidently, the independence and subsequent development of many Asian countries were based on these popular traditions.

However, the decolonization process in Asia so far, whether based on socialism (as in the Chinese Revolution) or Islam (as in the Iranian Revolution), has been conditioned by the

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1 Kim Yong-Bock, "Minjung Theology - In Search of Solidarity with the People of Palestine" in Yoshihiro Yakushige (ed.), *Global Transformation of Christian Zionism* (Global Transformation of Christian Zionism Organizing Committee, 2022).

framework of the modern nation-state system, a colonial legacy of the European powers. Consequently, in many regions, the universality of socialism and religion has degenerated into a form that is subordinate to state institutions and has become a complement to authoritarian regimes.

The problems facing humanity today transcend the scope of nation-state ideology. Many of these problems are rooted in modern colonialism and its twin, the nation-state system. Moreover, today, the nation-state system itself is being weakened and transformed into the "dog-eat-dog" world that it has created. In the face of this reality, an increasing number of people are re-acknowledging that the state can be a component of human identity, but it cannot be everything. However, the vision for the future is still chaotic and has been usurped by mega capital, and grassroots solidarity is being hindered by state-capital collusion.

We need to reassess the long history of the Asian continent, which has developed through the dynamism of the overlapping and transformative identities of diverse people. Today's Palestinian crisis shows that the nation-state system, which was installed in this diverse system in the last few centuries, is becoming dysfunctional as its contradictions deepen. The qualitative development of the political and religious imagination that has supported the global anti-colonial struggle has never been more necessary.

In particular, feminist and class perspectives will be crucial for the new popular development of a future vision and liberation theology. This is important because they have the potential to fundamentally criticize the collusion between the state and religion owing to their ubiquity that extends beyond political and religious borders. Such intersectional perspectives are already being strongly advocated by younger generations who are participating in global activism, such as the Palestine solidarity movement and the climate justice movement. The dialogue we pursue must be comprehensive and multifaceted to critically reconsider political and constructed binary frameworks, such as secular/religious, orthodox/heretical, monotheistic/polytheistic, modern/pre-modern, East/West, and male/female. This is because we already know of many cases in which these binary constructions lead people to internalize division and discrimination within themselves and their society and become mobilized for the violence of colonialism and patriarchy.

Below, I would like to look back on the events that led to this conference. The Global Kairos Asia-Pacific Palestine Solidarity (GKAPPS) network has played an important role in realizing this conference. This grassroots initiative was formed as a response to the Palestinian Christians' call through the Kairos Palestine document, "A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering" in 2009.

The GKAPPS held an online event titled "Christian Zionism: A Threat to Christian-Muslim Relations" in December 2020.[2] Inspired by this conference, I organized an online

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2   https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_-NstfOtnb8KSxuMiYa6dRISW8WXX-TD

conference in 2021 titled "The Global Transformation of Christian Zionism" with the support of Professor Oka Mari at Kyoto University.[3] Thereafter, I participated in the two important events: In April 2022, the GKAPPS held a four-day online conference titled "Embracing Solidarities through Sharing Stories of Struggles to Resist Empires."[4] In February 2023, at the initiative of Huang Po Ho, a core member of the GKAPPS, "An Inter-religious Dialogue on 'Religionization of Politics'" was held at Tainan Theological Seminary.[5]

The encounters and dialogues that took place during these events formed the basis for holding a conference in Mumbai. What we realized at the 2022 and 2023 conferences was that the issues of "postcolonial" decolonization in Asia should be linked to the Palestinian issue in both epistemological-level and grassroots activism. While we decided, in the summer of 2023, to hold the conference in Mumbai, we were further convinced of its importance through the developments in Gaza after October 7. I believe that the spirit that has driven this conference is expressed in the "Mumbai Declaration," which was drafted by Lakshman Gunasekara and finalized through the discussion in the afternoon of the second day of the conference and on the mailing list afterward.

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3   https://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2433/274116/1/gtcz.pdf
4   https://www.actt.org.tw/l/2205112/
5   https://www.actt.org.tw/l/230206/

Opening Remarks

Ram Puniyani

Good morning. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to welcome you all. I am pleased to be amidst a plural gathering of people from different backgrounds but with a shared focus on peace, pluralism, and harmony. So, it is an immense pleasure to welcome you to this two-day conference. Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend the whole conference.

However, I want to present some initial reflections on this vital topic. Many issues are gripping the world today, but this conflict in Palestine is crucial. It also reflects different conflicts in South Asian countries orchestrated in the name of religion.

It is sad that religion, which should be basically a code of moral values that teaches us to love humanity, is being misused for political goals. In religion, there are diverse tendencies, especially notable being liberation theology. People like Mahatma Gandhi, steeped in deep Indian traditions, tried to incorporate people of different religions into a single thread of humanism. He called himself a Hindu, but he once said very importantly: I'm a Hindu and a Muslim, I'm also a Christian, and I'm also a Jew. Initially, I was confused about what he was saying. But I understood that he was speaking of the humanistic moral aspect of religions, which teach us to love the whole of humanity.

Now, as we see today's war in Palestine, everybody is so disturbed. What is going on in Palestine is beyond words. To show solidarity with Palestine is also difficult for many of us in India because it is supposed to be pro-Muslim, and becoming pro-Muslim is a massive stigma in the Indian political scenario.

Of course, we know that this politics is in the name of religion, as all of us here are deeply seized by this matter. Especially from the decade of the 1990s, global politics, particularly in the post-colonial South Asian states, has presented itself in the language of religion. This is not the religion which we understand as humanism. These are identity issues around religion, or ritualistic aspects of religion, around which this is built. Of course, my presentation will be colored more by the Indian experience, where we have seen a drastic political rise in the last three decades. It is not the only reason, but it is against the basic consensus for integration, pluralism, and diversity, which was the dream of freedom fighters of the country.

At the same time, the decades of the 1980s and 1990s have been very significant for another reason, some sort of right-wing shift started taking place globally. This right-wing shift was orchestrated by the imperialist powers. Now, colonial powers are on the same page as imperialist powers. Colonial powers occupy areas and plunder these areas. Imperialist pow-

ers are sitting in their offices and capitals, from where they extract the wealth.

Now, in the 1990s, what we witnessed was a planned coming-up of forces like the Taliban and Al-Qaida. They were propped up. These were trained and propped up by American imperialism so that they could control the oil wealth of West Asia.

I also see the issue of Palestine being partly controlled from a West Asian oil wealth perspective, which Western powers want to appropriate and control in different forms. They don't care how inhuman, how much torture is inflicted upon people of this country, this area. So, on one side, there are forces like the Taliban, al-Qaida, etc., with very intense training in some madrassas in Pakistan sponsored by USA. That was presented as the faith of Islam. I'm sure that has nothing to do with the understanding of Islam. Islam is the religion, and one of the great liberation theologians of Islam in India, my friend and guru, Asgar Engineer, had pointed this out.

That worsened and shifted the politics towards the right, even more than colonialism did in India. This is one thing that caused the focus to move towards the right wing. There was a Language of religion in West Asia and South Asian politics.

Now, coming to India, if you look at it during the colonial period, the worst thing that happened was coming up with political streams in the name of religion.

On one side, we saw political streams emerge that were inclusive, including all people of all religions. This was represented by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (INC).

Of course, the Indian National Congress was complex, and it cannot be given a simple explanation a lot of communal elements; some people believing in politics in the name of religion also entered Congress, but predominantly, it remains under the influence of people like Gandhi and Nehru who were firmly anchored in the idea of basic respect for all human beings irrespective of religion, and basic respect for all beings regardless of their caste and gender.

I must say that caste and gender have been the very central aspect of Indian politics. We see that in India, on one side, there is the rise of people who are steeped in the tradition of Indian nationalism. At that time, Indian nationalism was a relatively progressive set of values. It was fighting against colonialism. It was fighting against various oppressive tendencies that British colonialists imposed. This Indian nationalism, which came up on principles of liberty, equality, fraternity, and social justice, is the base of our constitution.

Supplementing this type of nationalism are people like Bhagat Singh, one of the great freedom fighters whom we lost when he was 23 years old, and Babasaheb Ambedkar, who again articulated the need for social justice through his social movements and the constitution he drafted.

But what happened on the other side? Some people opposed these changing class, caste, and gender relations. Indian nationalism was marching towards equality. This march was in the form of baby steps. The retrograde forces were the feudal-type forces, rulers and land-lords, Hindus and Muslims. They were very much opposed to the values of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. They represented their politics under the garb of religion.

Here, we can see how retrograde forces came to power in Pakistan. Pakistan's case is very clear right from the beginning. Sri Lanka's case is different but lies dormant now. In a very naïve way, I believed Sri Lanka to be a very ideal, beautiful island, but after the uprising a couple of years ago, I realized through an article by my old friend that Sinhala Buddhism dominated there. Again, politics in the name of religion dominates there.

Indians did struggle to undermine politics in the name of religion. But in India, there was a very peculiar phenomenon. This peculiar phenomenon in India, politics masquerading in the name of religion, in the name of Hinduism, is RSS.

I don't know if there is any other organization like this, which indoctrinates young boys from the age of 5 years to 15 years in the ideology of Hindu nationalism; in this ideology, there is hatred for people of other religions and the glorification of the value of the past, values of caste and gender hierarchy. What do I mean by the glorification of the value of the past?

There is a holy book in India called Manusmriti. Babasaheb Ambedkar burned it because it values slavery for women and low-caste Shudra. Shudra is the word used for low castes in the four-caste system. This was the core politics of RSS. RSS is the major reason for propping up and strengthening politics in the name of religion. Its methodology is very negative. I don't know any country where communal politics has done it this way.

What is the implication of this in India? India was trying to follow the path of Gandhi, Nehru, and Bose. In this scenario, they created issues related to religious identity.

So here are things related to identity issues. Ram Temple, you must have all heard millions were spent building it. One can say that our prime minister is leading a whole assault in the name of politics in the garb of religion.

In India, religious nationalism built itself around the identity issues of Hinduism.

Ram Temple is one. The second came in the form of cow beef and what we eat. Here I must tell you an exciting thing. The cow beef issue was propagated aggressively, because of which nearly hundreds of lynchings took place. Ninety of those killed were Muslims, while ten were Dalits. At the same time, I came across a biography of one of the BJP politicians who founded the BJP. I hope you know the name of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. I want to tell you a story about Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Now, on one side, there is the campaign that people are being killed on the ground for eating beef. On the other side, Vajpayee was having meetings in the US, where he was seen

eating beef by his neighbor on the dining table. He was questioned, "Oh, what you are eating is beef!" When questioned that he was eating beef, he shot back, "So this is not from an Indian cow; what I am eating is from an American cow."

The colonial powers never repressed these tendencies, which are in the name of religion. They imprison people fighting for India's independence. They hanged people like Bhagat Singh, who was a revolutionary, a Leftist, an atheist, and a Marxist. However, the religious nationalists were constantly collaborating with colonial powers. So, we tried to escape the colonial grip, got our freedom, and framed our constitution. So, on the one hand, we came up like this, seeped in values of pluralism and democracy. But People's mindset gradually started being captured by sustained RSS propaganda.

This indoctrination of people was taken further by the thousands of schools. Then, they started their social media. In 2003, they bought all our media, television, newspapers, and social media, which were used extensively. People's mindset is totally dominated by this RSS ideology, religious nationalism, in the name of Hinduism. As such, the most significant Hindu of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi, was murdered by a person who was trained by these religious nationalists. That is the situation we see in India.

Today, we see what happens in Palestine, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. I don't know if there is somebody from Myanmar here. I have little exposure to Myanmar. Once, I visited Myanmar. There, I came to know that in Myanmar, the democratic plural aspiration has been curbed by a combination of three forces: No 1: military, No 2: Buddhist sangha, and No 3: landlords.

This combination of forces is present in various Southeast countries. According to me, landlordism may not be there in that sense, but the ideology that stands at its roots is land-lordism, an ideology based on caste and gender hierarchy. If you are a woman, you are supposed to be the property of a man. If you are Shudra, you are the slave of a landlord. This is the microcosm of this politics that has gripped large parts of the world.

Initially, Muhammad Ali Jinnah had secular values, but Pakistan's political system was complete with communal forces. So, immediately after the death of Jinnah, communal troops took over, and now these forces are ruling Pakistan in the name of Islam. They targeted Hindus and Christians in the beginning. But they didn't stop there. After that, they started to target some sects of Islam. So, in India and other South Asian countries, these sectarian politics may grow. Basically, the question is not about a conflict between religions.

We can talk about harmony. Interfaith dialogue is aimed at promoting peace. Religion's morality is basically overlapping. They supplement the humanism which has evolved in human society. That's where I see the hope for the future, where friends like us, groups like us, can work upon those harmonious things that religions teach us based on the interfaith dialogue and interfaith programs, which I think our center (Center for Study of Society and Secularism) is promoting. They are mainly very much involved in those activities. There are very positive results also. Ultimately, society cannot sustain pluralism and diversity unless we see that people's thinking and minds are oriented toward that. So, a massive attack by the

media, social media's might, and propaganda by RSS can be negated. To counter that, a significant social movement is needed. Nothing short of a social movement for promoting interfaith dialogue; promoting interfaith programs can bring harmony to our society.

Trying to dispel the wrong notions about religions that these sectarian nationalists promote needs to be combated.

Believe me, in India, at least, the significant harm that religious nationalism is doing is an intensification of hatred. This, in turn, is due to indoctrination of people's minds. The hatred that is filling people's minds against Muslims and Christians is horrendous. I must tell you my personal example of 20–25 years ago. Many of my Muslim friends, who were very progressive and very liberal in 2003 and 2004, started feeling that 'we are Muslims', which I never heard before. Because this is how they are looked upon in society and the community.

The process has become much more frightening and much more dangerous as time is passing by. So, friends, again, I welcome you with the hope that we will try to chart out a program. The interfaith dialogue, inter-faith communication, and promotion of our own narrative. Our narrative should be based on pluralism, diversity, and democratic values. We must create a positive movement for liberation theology for humanism for interfaith interaction at all possible levels.

Thank you very much.

Session 1

Politico-religious relations in the geopolitical transformation of Asia

1

Religion-Politics Relations in the Geopolitical Transformation in Asia

Achin Vanaik

Religio-political organizations and movements can be, and have been, both positive and negative. Unfortunately, in recent times in Asia and beyond, it is the negative politics of cultural exclusivism based on race, ethnicity, and religion that have been more dominant and seeking to transform the character of prevailing nationalism in different countries. In much of Asia, to the detriment of the effort to establish and sustain a secular democratic polity, there has been the rise and strengthening of religious nationalist forces of one kind or another. This is so for the Buddhist-majority countries of Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. Hindu nationalism is expanding its hegemony in India. Conservative Islamist forces are active in various countries of West, Central, and South Asia, not to mention their presence in Malaysia and Indonesia. Even in Japan, there is a growing nexus between right-wing religious sects and the state, while in China and elsewhere, conservative interpretations of past cultural traditions and thinking are used to justify anti-democratic, repressive, and exclusivist policies of existing regimes. Where such religious forces are ensconced in state power, their doctrines and practices radiate downwards, and when located primarily in civil society, they exercise varying degrees of anti-egalitarian influence on the governments above.

The Power of Nationalism

But these are, along with Christianity, world religions. So why do such religio-political formations find the most excellent efficacy when they operate within the framework of the nation-state? Why is nationalist belonging so much more potent than a broader sense of religious belonging that should go beyond specific territorial-political bounds? Sunni Islamic states have no desire to dissolve themselves in the name of an overarching Islamic Caliphate. The two majority Shia countries, Iran and Iraq, had the second-longest war of the twentieth century. Right-wing Christian evangelical sects have transnational links, but their major political thrusts are within existing nation-states. Buddhist-majority countries have no desire to forge a wider confederation. If Hindutva leaders told Nepal, a majority Hindu country, to abandon its separate existence and become part of forging a broader territorial entity of supposedly ancient origin, namely Akhand Bharat, its citizens would tell 'Big Brother' India to get lost. So why the power of nationalism that pushes exclusivist religio-political forces to try and co-opt nationalism?

Yes, the religious community is a community of believers. But the nation and nationalism also embody a community of believers. Moreover, the structures of religion and nationalism have striking similarities. Both have doctrines, myths, rituals, and social organizations that cultivate strong emotional attachments. Both have the power to invoke large-scale martyrdom and sacrifice. Both appear to be 'communities of fate'! Nationalism's believer-ship principle can be founded religiously or secularly, but it is more than this. It is also a community of citizens and operates with a uniquely powerful (and secular) principle of legitimacy and popular empowerment----that of citizenship and its rights. If religion is an imagined community, the nation, as the late Benedict Anderson pointed out, is an imagined political community!

Political arrangements which embody the principle of citizenship rights need not be confined to the nation-state. Indeed, given that the five great evils of our time are transnational, they will require a sense of commitment and practice that goes beyond the prioritization of the so-called national interest and the framework of the nation-state. These evils are the persistence of mass poverty. Some 1.5 billion people are under and malnourished, and if basic needs of healthcare, education, social security, etc. are considered, the number of those suffering will double. All this amidst the most obscenely rising levels of income and wealth inequalities that then feed into the creation of ever more significant inequalities of class power. So, it is not a surprise that there has been the erosion of the substantive character of democracy everywhere even as its procedural aspects are also under threat. (ii) The rise of the ugly politics in all five continents of cultural exclusivism in its various forms, namely ethnicity, race, religion, nation either singly, or more often, as a form of nationalism. (iii) The post-millennial rise of regular pandemics arising from diminishing distances between human habitation and wildlife, industrialization of livestock production, global tourism, and burgeoning metropolitan slums in the South. (iv) All kinds of ecological devastations that include and go beyond the danger of climate change. (v) Then there is the always present possibility of a nuclear war somewhere, sometimes with devastating consequences globally.

The first four of these evils are decisively related to the nature of capitalism in its contemporary avatar of neoliberal globalization. This economic dynamic operates transnationally and represents an enduring right-wing shift in the character of capitalist accumulation as compared to earlier phases of Keynesianism and state-directed developmentalism in the formerly colonized world. However, this ongoing neoliberal process must be stabilized by a corresponding right-wing shift in politics and ideology, which, because we live in a world of multiple nation-states, are unavoidably nationally specific. It follows that there is no escape from operating, to begin with, on the terrain of the nation-state even as we must seek to go beyond it by seeking international cooperation between governments and, in time, to promote more expansive, more encompassing political units that transcend the nation-state and a narrow nationalism. To the extent that there is a strongly eco-sensitive, egalitarian, and humane transformation in the political, economic, social, and cultural character of countries, for example, in Asia, the greater the knock-on effects will be on others and the path better cleared for moving beyond the nation-state system.

Multi-Polarity or Multi-Imperialism?

The Asian geopolitical scene is shaped by three significant powers---the US, China, and Russia. The US attitude toward China has gone from seeing it as a strategic partner to an economic competitor to it as a strategic and economic rival, with growing circles in the US deeming it no less than an enemy. Russia's unjustified and cruel invasion of Ukraine and its attempt to counter NATO by creating its own dominant military-political 'sphere of influence' in its "near abroad' and in Central Asia through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has pushed it much closer to China. Although most countries of Southeast Asia have their economies tied much closer to China and do not fear any land invasion by their powerful neighbor, they prefer in varying degrees to politically align with the US, especially since China's illegal expansionist plans are evident in its activities in the East and South China seas. This behavior is not simply a reaction to the ugly US efforts to contain it and retain its imperialist dominance over the East Asian region. While we oppose these power plays in Asia, we should have no illusions in, nor side with, these pro-capitalist rulers everywhere. Nor should we be deluded by the claims of 'middle powers' like Turkey, India, Saudi Arabia, and Iran that cover up their own sub-imperial ambitions in the name of wanting to promote 'multi-polarity.' Nor are any of them serious challengers to the 'Big Three.' Indeed, the first two align with the US-led NATO and Quad. Any genuine geopolitical transformation must rest on a much deeper and broader transformation in the very nature of all these societies.

In Asia (and elsewhere), what positive resources can religion as a civilizational culture---deeply embedded in regional histories over many centuries and involved in cross-cultural dialogues---provide for geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, and moral transformation? Its capacity to move in this direction depends on a universal humanism in its teachings and practices rather than a religious specificity of beliefs and rituals as the guiding spirit in its struggles within the spiritual community and hierarchy and, of course, in society. This is easier said than done. We need to understand what potential power religion(s), among other secular or non-religious sources, have in the collective project of bringing about a positive transformation nationally, regionally, and globally.

Earlier, I have stressed the danger of underestimating the power of nationalism, which, I would also add, is not to be seen simply as a 'colonial relic.' Among the sources of its emergence are capitalist industrialization, the struggle for liberation against colonial powers, and, after the end of the colonial era, the desire of oppressed groups against cultural discrimination and greater political control over themselves. There have been five great waves of nationalism and of nation-state formation. First, it was Settler-colonial nationalism that saw most of South America free of Spanish and Portuguese rule by the mid-1800s. Then, the linguistic nationalist formations of Europe, such as Italy and Germany. In the first half of the twentieth century, nationalism emerged from the break-up of the Tsarist, Austro-Hapsburg, and Ottoman empires. Then came the decolonization process in Asia and Africa against the capitalist colonial powers such as Britain, France, Holland, Portugal, and even the US (the Philippines). Finally, the last wave came through the break-up of the USSR and Yugoslavia. Even elsewhere, we have seen new nation-states arising and dying through mergers (East

Germany) and the break-up of territories like Czechia and Slovakia and Sudan and South Sudan. Who is to say we won't see a future independent Scotland or a united Ireland?

The Importance of a Universal Humanism

So, what about the transformational power of religion? Here, I have stressed that the universal humanist qualities embedded in its overall civilizational-cultural character are the most important. Let me clarify what I mean by this. There are two basic approaches to trying to understand and explain religion's powerful influence on human beings and their societies. The philosophical approach focuses primarily on the beliefs and their appealing power. The sociological approach concentrates not on the believer's beliefs but on why believers believe. This focus on the believer naturally cuts across any religion's specific beliefs, rituals, and claims and is clearly more universal and even somewhat non-religious in its essential thrust. It can help explain why there is such diversity in the beliefs and practices of those in different parts of the world who see themselves as Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu. Cutting across religions and regions, the ordinary believer sees religion and prayer as helping to cope and hope with the realities of everyday existence in seven common domains. Four concerns are related to health, wealth, power, and solace. Fifth, religion provides some kind of moral compass of what is right and wrong, good or bad, to guide social life and behavior. Sixth, it gives a sense of community since there can be no 'I' outside of a 'we.' Among the multiple identities we have, the religious one, because, like family and kinship, it is ascribed by birth, provides a more stable sense of the self in a modern world of great complexity and continual change. It seems a more comfortable answer to the perennial questions of 'Who am I' and 'Where do I belong.' Finally, religion helps to cope with the inescapable reality of death by providing a sense of immortality.

Confronting the 'Civilization of Capital'

Given all these functions, religions will endure. But what we need is not the continuity for so many people to simply hope and cope but with the actual fulfillment of those aspirational needs to secure a decent material existence for all, to achieve a far more egalitarian distribution of power, to overcome various forms of cultural and social discrimination to enable much greater self-autonomy, mutual respect, and dignity for all. Today, the principal nemesis we face is the 'civilization of capital' sustained politically, economically, and culturally by the dominant classes of whatever country and whatever religious or non-religious affiliation. The ecological crisis makes the idea of a stable, highly humane, and benevolently liberal democratic capitalist order a chimera. Transcending capitalism is the necessary task in front of us, even as further struggles await us to achieve the overall geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, and moral transformation we need.

Here, the principal strategic actor is the broad working class in and across countries, and the guiding goal is the pursuit of a profoundly democratic socialist order that rejects one-party authoritarianism. All the oppressions related to caste, race, gender, religion, etc. must be fought against since this is the only way to unify the working class. Furthermore, the majority of those oppressed on these separate grounds are themselves part of this broader working

class. Religious groups, currents, and individuals of a progressive kind can and must be part of this broader collective struggle against exploitation, oppression, authoritarianism, militarism, and ecological devastations. It would be an even more significant step forward if they recognized the evil of capitalism and joined the struggles not just for desirable reforms but for radical transformation beyond it. They are exceptionally well placed to take the lead in the battle against right-wing and religiously exclusivist forms of politics, given that this is the constituency and community in which they are already implanted and have a widespread hearing.

From the middle of the 18th century to the third quarter of the 20th century, internationalism was associated primarily with the left and socialists. They supported the struggles for equality and liberation by women, against racial discrimination, against colonialism and imperialism, and against class exploitation. Marx said, 'Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!' Today, in the era of neoliberal capitalist globalization, internationalism and international linkages have primarily been taken over by the right. The new slogan is 'Ruling, and upper classes of the world unite. You have nothing to lose, certainly not your privileges!' We on the progressive side need all the international linkages, support, and networks of solidarity that we can get, whether at the level of trade unions, on specific struggles, for different oppressed groups, against democratic erosions, on Palestine, and so on. We can only welcome the international linkages and ties that progressive religiopolitical organizations and campaigns seek to establish to help build, to whatever extent possible, a stronger momentum toward positive geopolitical transformation in Asia and beyond.

2

Religio-Political Dynamics and Their Social Impact—the Sri Lankan Experience

Lakshman Gunasekara

1. Introduction[1]: framework of the approach

I formulated my subject title in line with the focus stipulated by the conference organizers in the preliminary agenda formulations communicated to the invited participants. This is within the scope of the first panel of the conference. Given the immense, exciting, and disastrous complexity of current religio-political dynamics in Lanka, my presentation is necessarily a very brief sketch and overview of the social reality.

I first outline the historical background in Sri Lanka that has led to the current dynamics of 'religion' and 'politics' in Lankan society. At the outset, I must explain that, in terms of intellectual rigor, I will refer to my country as 'Lanka,' the historiographically designated and continuously used nomenclature that has had long-term cultural substance. The word 'sri' (more correctly pronounced 'shree') is only a recent, modern, political addition in the first Republican Constitution of 1972.[2]

In Section 2, I explain how the current extant religiopolitical dynamics evolved into what they are today, principally through the extensive impact of the colonial occupation of the immediate past. There is a brief discussion on the transformation of the pre-colonial dynamics of religion and politics through the systematic intervention of successive colonial occupiers.

In Section 3, I outline how postcolonial Lankan society, influenced by colonialist modern state formation, further solidifies the ethnocultural nature of modern Lanka. I describe the

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1 I must first thank the conference organizers for inviting me to participate in this activity on a subject that is very much among my core intellectual and activist interests. However, I am no professional scholar; therefore, the content of this presentation cannot be considered as meeting the basic standards of scholarship either in form or, more importantly, in content, in terms of the rigor with which I deal with my subject. My paper should be regarded purely as an activist's approach.

2 A second historically used name for the Lankan island is 'Sihala' or 'Sinhalé' or 'Sinhala Dveepa' (Dveepa=island). This name, which is directly linked to the single largest ethnic community, the Sinhala, is a term used today in an aggressively exclusivist way in the Sinhala ethno-supremacist political discourse.

socially transformative impact of this ethnicization of the polity and its sociocultural outcomes.

In Section 4, I outline the current ongoing societal disaster that is 'Lanka,' and I also briefly discuss some similarities in terms of dynamics with the ongoing – and far worse – postcolonial societal disaster that is Palestine-Israel.

Finally, in Section 5, I explore some new technological and political developments in Lanka and point to promising prospects for transcending this civilizational trap of colonially engineered religio-political dynamics. Because the European colonialism that extended across the world at a particular historical juncture is of a specific politico-cultural nature, that same 'hopeful prospect' can also be seen in relation to the Palestine-Israel crisis.

2. The 'religio-political' evolution in Lanka

The interaction between religion and politics in society necessarily has unique, country-specific characteristics. However, at the same time, generic sociopolitical aspects are common to other societies with affinities derived from geographic proximity and similar historical experiences, such as the South Asian subcontinent.

There are two broad aspects of Lanka's social evolution in relation to its religiopolitical dynamics. One broad aspect is the _internal and domestic processes of the geo-social context_ of Lanka; that is, processes that have foregrounded and continuously impacted the societal characteristics of the island society.

The second broad aspect is the _common experience by South Asian subcontinental society of invasive social engineering by modernist European colonialism_, an organically alien, aggressive intrusion of extra-regional origin. It is an intrusion that was and is socially traumatizing and continues to have immense residual impact. For example, the trauma of lengthy, sustained colonial subjugation and forceful expropriation has created long-lasting social psychologies that are expressed in conflicts within postcolonial South Asian society. Various current social groups suffer repeated cycles of elite-subaltern contests and ethnic-elite dominance at huge societal costs.

2.1. Intra-subcontinental dynamics or interactions between peoples

First, in the Lankan case, there is an intimate socio-geographic linkage with the rest of the South Asian subcontinent and especially Lankan island society's intertwined destiny with the closest part of that region, namely, southern India.

Thus, from the very beginning of the Hominin (both pre-Sapiens and Sapiens) settlement of the South Asian subcontinent, archaeology and DNA mapping confirmed the comprehensive spread of the Hominin culture across the whole region. The entire region has an anthropologically _homogenized_ population.

The subsequent geologically created Palk Strait, which has separated Lanka island from the subcontinent since about 9000 BP, should be treated as a 'unifier' rather than a divider, to quote distinguished Lankan historian Prof. K. Indrapala[3]. I have yet to see anyone vigorously rejecting such a description of the hard evidence of intimate interactions between the subcontinent and the Lankan island, especially between polities and social segments closest on both sides of the Palk Strait.

These interactions range from actual kin relations through intermarriage and the settlement of entire clans and other social groups from South India on Lankan island to trade ties; religious ties; linguistic commonality; intertwined architectural, literary, and other cultural traditions; technological exchanges; military and other political interventions on both sides; and current-day fisheries and ocean resource sharing and management (or mismanagement). My list is not exhaustive – I could add modern cinema and music production, literary production, etc.

These millennia of precolonial interaction among polities, clans, and communities are inevitably organically complex, given the multiple dimensions of interactions.

There is no doubt that religion has played a profoundly influential role in society throughout history and up to the present, primarily in the cementing of patterns of social behavior that functioned as elements of social structure. These include social stratification in terms of differentials in power accrued to individuals and groups. Hierarchies of power, differentials in the sharing of resources and capacities (opportunities, benefits, and deprivations), ideological management of internal stability, and conflicts arise from such differentials.

The ritualized elaborations of the fundamentals of behavioral norms and 'best practices' at any given social moment were almost entirely directly or indirectly religion-rooted. This ideological function has long transcended its religious origins, just as much as 'religiosity' itself has become redefined through new cultural definitions and other ideological phenomena created through new forms of communication. These new developments in ideologies, community formation, and communication are discussed later in this paper.

However, it was not so much of a case of simplistic use of religious tenets to create hostility between interest groups as much as to manage social stability through a comprehensive institutional provision for corrective behavior that is nurtured generationally with definitive cultural legitimacy. The rules laid down in the Rg Veda, the Upanishads, and the Tripitaka were not impositions of foreign colonial dominance. They were created internally and espoused through existing – indigenous and organic – spiritual/intellectual community resources. The rules were thus fully legitimized and rationalized and did not traumatize communities with perceived threats of loss of community identity and existence, as happens when there is an external disruption of social discourses, such as disempowering religious roles imposed on a society by external forces.

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3   See K. Indrapala - *The Evolution of an Ethnic Identity: The Tamils of Sri Lanka C. 300 BCE to C. 1200 CE.*

Just as in the rest of South Asia, we see these dynamics of religion – namely, the legitimation of social oppression as well as the containment and management of resulting conflict – in Sri Lanka.

Certainly, religion enforced and legitimized the inequality and extreme exploitation of some groups by other groups – by feudal nobility over slaves and vassals, by masculine gender dominance over all other genders, and by caste domination. The relationship between these different social categories and the state system was that of legitimized (however unjust and oppressive) interactions among the organically constituent elements of the state system. These intergroup interactions could be hostile and negative but, being part of the state complex itself, did not threaten to bring down the entire edifice. There was an internal rationalizing of oppression and injustice that helped perpetuate these features.

Therefore, religion's influence over the polity (at whatever level) in the pre-colonial period served to contain and channel internal conflict, thereby preserving system stability rather than weakening or undermining it. Thus, caste hierarchies, economic class power, gender inequality, ritualized exclusions (e.g., sexual taboos, untouchability), and marginalization have been strong and distinctive elements of South Asian culture and society throughout history.

These elements have evolved internally in different areas, including the Lankan island, and continue to the present, although to differing degrees of intensity due to internal social dynamics (e.g., resistance, changes in conditions) and external influences, mainly colonialism. As ideology has evolved, the level of contestation among differently empowered groups has also evolved. 'Emancipations' have occurred or emerged as the goals of struggle.

2.2.1. Moghul influences

Interestingly, the invasion by the Islamic Central Asian clans of the late medieval period did not focus much on differentiating between the social groups of South Asian regions. The invading Islamic forces (the Ghazni dynasty, Persian clans) simply treated all pre-existing indigenous South Asian communities as singularly 'infidel,' to be dominated for religious purposes (conversion) and also to be managed in a stable manner to ensure success in building newly Islamicized subjugated societies.

The Moghul intent was to ensure the spread of their central Asian and Persian polities into the immediately adjacent regions of South (the subcontinent) and West Asia (Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Levant). To that degree, while Moghul religion (Sunni, Shiite Islam) was foreign to South Asia (and some parts of West Asia), their social practices in terms of hierarchies, social roles (including gender and labor inequity), and economic practices were largely similar.

Interregional religiosity: Interregional interactions between adjacent regions of Central, South, and West Asia have occurred since the earliest historic times. There have been several significant exchanges of religiosity. They include the introduction of elements of the Vedic

religion from Central and Western (Persia) Asia into South Asia (superimposed over the indigenous Indus-Harappan religiosity) in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Subsequently, in the late Iron Age of classical antiquity (the 1ˢᵗ millennium BCE), Buddhism rapidly spread from what is now north India to Central Asia, where it evolved into a distinct religious culture. The briefly established Alexandrian Greek dynasties in Central Asia at the end of the first millennium BCE experienced another type of influence of Central Asia on South Asia. The Moghul invasion was the most recent powerful interaction between these two neighboring regions.

2.2.2. Caste and gender inequality, violence

Caste and gender inequalities are so powerfully rooted that there has been a continuation of these two categories of differentiation, even if religion has changed throughout South Asian history. The religious definition of caste and gender differentials was first legitimized in the earliest identified forms of religiosity, namely the varieties of Hinduism (Lokayata, Shaivism, Tantrism, Veda), which evolved from the earlier, less formalized animism and totemism. However, even as this region-wide corpus of Hindu ideology evolved and branched into new faiths, such as Jainism and Buddhism, the religious legitimation of social differentiation persisted in new forms in these new branches.

Specifically, there has been continuity of caste hierarchies (new castes) and somewhat modified gender inequality in these branches. Buddhism, which prevailed in much of Sri Lanka (parallel to Shaivism, which remained a smaller community), saw the continuation of the ritualized legitimation of caste and gender differentials up to the present.

Gender and caste have been incorporated into new forms in both later-arriving religions, namely Islam and Christianity, in Sri Lanka, just as in the subcontinent.

2.2. Colonial social engineering and conflict creation

Overlaying various nation-states in modern South Asia was a common experience in invasive European colonialism. This is the experience of expanding, nascent European capitalism. European colonial expansion far beyond its own geographical part of the globe is itself an organic characteristic of modernist capitalist growth. The emerging European centers of capitalism required the expansion of productivity and surplus. Furthermore, this economic expansion needed to occur in new social contexts so that the original European capitalist home societies would not be damaged by further oppressive exploitation. The expropriation of surplus value by nascent capitalism in Europe caused severe disruption with peasant revolts and warfare among emerging capitalist city states. At the same time, rapid population growth had to be accommodated by the expansion of living space.

Hence, the colonial thrust into regions beyond Europe was made accessible by European innovations in seafaring (large-capacity sailing ships) and warfare (the industrial production of guns). The spread of the European population elsewhere was seen as both the creation of new areas for resource extraction and new markets.

The social engineering of colonized societies by European colonial occupiers, however, was motivated not to perpetuate an existing social order but to undermine it to enable colonial dominance and the enhancement of that foreign dominance. Hence, the colonial interventions were intended to weaken South Asian society.

There was no sociocultural affinity between European colonizers and South Asian victim societies. At most, the colonizers attempted to exploit any minor convergence of interests with a few elements in the region, such as the occasional ruler or ruling class who mistakenly sought aid from colonial invaders. A notorious example of this is a segment of the Lankan Hillcountry feudal who sought British help to overthrow their own king so that they could consolidate some narrow clan interests.[4]

2.3. Colonized Sri Lanka

In the Sri Lankan case, this colonization was successively carried out by three European capitalist powers – Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – over a period of nearly half a millennium, from 1505 to 1948.

Colonial rulers sought to manage and transform the societal features that they saw as useful for the broadening and deepening of dominance and surplus extraction. Thus, there was an immediate identification of social groups, similar to castes, involved in existing production processes and available for new colonial economic tasks. At the same time, existing dominant social groups were conscripted and empowered by giving them a new formal status but depriving them of control over their previously subordinate populations.

2.3.1. Colonial socioeconomic engineering

Thus, in Lanka, as in the rest of the subcontinent, we saw the colonial emphasis on ethnic and religious identity as social categories that were convenient for manipulation to affirm control over the population. Hence, certain numerical majorities were assigned military functions, whereas some minorities were assigned other special functions in the colonial state.

Initially, such mobilization of existing social categories avoided the recognition of new, colonial-economy-related social class stratification created by the modernist colonial-capitalist economy through colonial administrative measures, such as the following:

> A colonial census system
> Administrative provinces created by regionalized ethnic identities
> Political deals with ethnic-based feudal elites: intermediary administrative powers given to feudal ranks (again, ethnocultural identities)

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4   The motives of the Kandyan feudal clans that collaborated with the 1815 British invasion of the Hillcountry
     kingdom of Senkadagala (Kandy) are popularly depicted as Sinhala-Buddhist patriotism to overthrow the
     'Hindu-Tamil' monarchy. That collaboration only resulted in the complete conquest of the entirety of Lanka
     by the British, something that neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch had achieved.

> Governmental recognition of religious ecclesiastical hierarchies: expressly empowering and enforcing Christianization
> Transforming traditional Buddhist vihara, Hindu kovil, and Muslim madrassa education into a homogenized church-dominated European modernist school system
> Social and bureaucratic recognition of Christianized citizen identities in economic and social opportunities
> Forcing the creation of a market system through arbitrary colonial land and other natural resource applications.

The old economic life has drastically changed. By the 20th century, a new culture of competitive life had emerged. It was a colonially nurtured market-based competitive life, a livelihood culture that replaced the non-competitive and cooperative/collective (yet class-exploitative) feudal economy.

The economic utility of castes largely ended, disempowering many castes that had livelihood security in fixed forms of labor. The creation of a flexible labor market, individual private ownership, market time-based productivity, and the social and administrative recognition of individual and corporate entrepreneurship fundamentally ended the pre-colonial society that ensured livelihood security.

The emphasis shifted away from caste to ethnicity and class.

2.3.2. Creation of Euro-modernist political system

The existing indigenous political system was systematically cannibalized for the convenience of colonial political control. In Lanka, the feudal political system, which included strong localized political decision-making, including village-level participatory democracy (the ancient Gam Sabha), ended. The Gam Sabha was retained as a disempowered tool of local governance by the colonial center. The centrally appointed and controlled system of 'Government Agents' was firmly established and remains as a major tool of centralized control overlapping the recently created Provincial Council system that is supposed to provide more province-based governance autonomy for regional ethnic minorities.

Over nearly two centuries of British rule, the emerging modern colonized Lankan society experienced a national political culture formed in accordance with the above-mentioned ethnic and social-elite characterizations. The first system of elected representation involved electing representatives from ethnic communities. This was followed some decades later by a more advanced system that was also based on both ethnic and religious representations (in the 1920s). Economic class was also given political prominence in the ethnic representation system. The ethnic-based representatives were qualified for election on the basis of a minimum formal education (colonial-style) and a high income level, often based on land or commercial ownership.

3. Religio-political relations and their ideological function in the post-colonial State

The post-colonial Lankan state inherited this emphasis on ethnic representation and power as a critical basis for community empowerment. It is noteworthy that when the new system of universal franchise was implemented in the first political election, various hitherto socially depressed class groups obtained greater representation in the national legislature because of population numbers.

3.1. Ethnic-based citizenship and enfranchisement

The best indicator was the election of a large number of representatives from the estate sector labor community. Estate labor was almost a slave community restricted to living on estates owned by large corporations. Such new political empowerment immediately threatened the stability of the cheap estate labor market, thereby threatening the country's economic stability, which was based on estate-grown export crops.

This alarmed many political elites of all classes. Within a year of the first parliament, the elite-linked political parties collaborated to legislate an ethnic identity for this estate labor class. They were designated 'people of recent Indian origin.' They were designated non-citizens.

Thus, in one of postcolonial Lanka's first political actions, ethnicity became a definer of citizenship and the right to vote. By legislation, estate labor, at the time the chief creator of economic surplus value on which the entire nation depended, lost the right to vote, elect representatives, and participate in governance.

This ethnicization of politics then moved further with the insistence of the largest vote bank, namely, the ethnic Sinhala community (about 72% of the population), that their language, Sinhala, should be the sole state language. This deprived the other two large ethnic minorities, the Tamils and (mainly Islamic) Moors, of the official use of the Tamil language, which was the mother tongue of both groups.

Given that the state became a major employer and access to state-funded free higher education was also language-based (the medium of teaching), minorities suffered from numerical population-based selection for access to these vital socioeconomic opportunities.

3.2. Anti-Tamil hostilities and Tamil revolt

By the 1950s, civic protests by the main minority, the Tamils, created conditions of severe interethnic mistrust and hostility. Such political resistance was met with state police suppression deployed by governments that were inevitably dominated by Sinhala-voted bank-based political parties. By the 1960s-1970s, politics had become ethnicized to such a degree that there was a regular occurrence of anti-Tamil violence by Sinhala mobs.

Additional legislation that further economically privileged the Sinhala majority ethnic group included the granting of state land to the landless Sinhala peasantry in the less crowded northern and eastern regions, which are the home areas of the Tamils and Muslims. The refusal to grant citizenship to the Tamil estate community until the 1970s perpetuated ethnic political hostility across the entire population.

The social pressure on rural youth due to metropolis-oriented economic development prompted an armed rural youth insurgency in 1971, which was quickly crushed.

By the late 1970s, the frustration felt by the rural youth of the politically oppressed Tamil ethnic community also launched a Tamil nationalist insurgency for a separate Tamil state in northern Lanka and part of the island's eastern region. This resulted in a cycle of worsening violence among ethnic communities. At one end, the counter-insurgency by state forces soon resulted in severe human rights violence, including massacres of rural Tamil civilians in insurgency-prone areas. Simultaneously, the military actions of the secessionist Tamil movement caused a backlash in the form of anti-Tamil civilian riots.

The worsening of anti-Tamil programs also caused a refugee crisis that made Lanka a focus of United Nations attention as well as big power manipulation.

By the 1990s, the insurgency had become a full-scale internal war that lasted more than 30 years, severely disrupting normal development and civilian life.

4. Sri Lanka as an ethnic supremacist state

Today, there are several generations of Lankans who have been traumatized and physically harmed (through their own injury or loss of kin) by decades of war and devastation. There are nearly a million Lankans now domiciled overseas, either as ethnic-minority political refugees fleeing direct military violence or harassment or as ethnic-majority economic refugees fleeing economic hardship and insecurity due to the war.

The entire ethos of Lankan statehood is now ethnicized to the degree that the state itself and a militarized administrative system espouse Sinhala's ethnic supremacy in all sectors of life, including sports. Militarization due to the war created a national ethos of Sinhala heroism and open, unashamed supremacism.

This has enabled a parallel massive corruption of the 'democratic' political system by the constant use of electoral ethnic dominance. The fears and aspirations of an ethnocentric Sinhala vote bank have enabled the most decadent governance with emphasis on family political power and bribe-based economic management.

This irrational form of governance resulted in the loss of all economic advantages gained by Lanka in an intensely competitive world economy. This complete mismanagement by an incompetent family-based government resulted in a severe fiscal collapse in 2021, when the government found itself without an adequate budget or foreign currency to import vital

goods such as fuel and fertilizer. The Lankan rupee collapsed by 300% in exchange value.

Consequently, the impoverishment has resulted in new underdevelopment. Lanka has now declined from being a middle-income and the most socially affluent country in South Asia to a lower-middle-income country. Data now indicate that nearly one-third of the population is compelled to either forego a meal daily or have smaller meals. Child nutrition has slumped. A large number of newly married couples postponed their plans to have children last year.

New waves of economic refugees have created brain drain in critical sectors, such as healthcare, construction, and infrastructure maintenance.

5. Revolts and new technology empowerment

Public frustration over the economic collapse resulted in a wave of spontaneous public protests led by the government's entirely ethnic Sinhala vote bank. Precisely because it was the privileged Sinhala citizenry who led the protests and because they were primarily the ruling party's voters, the protest waves could not be brutally suppressed. In the past, this same family-led regime routinely used lethal force from military or paramilitary units to brutally suppress worker, student, and ethnic minority protests. Many have died or disappeared during these struggles.

The protests of 2020 were also noteworthy for the speed of popular mobilization, entirely enabled by social media usage. Lanka was the first country to undertake largely cyber-based political mobilization.

However, the protests themselves were notable for the transcendence of Sinhala ethnocentrism and the partial inclusion of non-ethnic civic groups in the struggle.

These two new factors indicate hope for the future.

3

The Khan Factor and the Resurgence of Political Theology in Pakistan

Junaid S. Ahmad

Introduction

The formation of Pakistan in 1947 was deeply rooted in the two-nation theory, which posited that the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent required a separate homeland where they could practice their religion freely. The idea of Pakistan was not merely a political maneuver but a response to the socio-religious aspirations of Muslims who feared marginalization in a Hindu-majority India. The creation of Pakistan was fueled by a deep sense of Muslim identity, shaped by centuries of Islamic civilization in South Asia. However, since its inception, Pakistan has grappled with an enduring question: should it be an Islamic state, governed strictly by Islamic laws, or simply a nation for Muslims where religion plays a cultural rather than a legislative role? This fundamental question has sparked intense debate about the relationship between Islam and the state, a discourse that continues to shape Pakistan's political and social fabric today. These debates are not only local; they fall within broader global discussions about Islamism, political Islam, and the role of religion in governance, influencing and being influenced by movements in the wider Muslim world.

The ideological struggle over Pakistan's identity has had profound implications on its political landscape. The country has oscillated between periods of democratic rule and military dictatorship, with each regime imposing its particular interpretation of Islam's role in governance. Some leaders have championed a modernist approach to Islam, aligning with Western notions of modernization and progress. Particularly during the early years of Pakistan, such leaders sought to establish a state in which Islam provided cultural guidance but did not dictate governance. In contrast, others have embraced more conservative interpretations, often bolstered by geopolitical exigencies. The latter view gained significant traction during the Cold War, when global superpowers engaged with Pakistan as a strategic ally, especially in the context of its Islamic identity. Most notably, General Zia-ul-Haq's regime in the 1980s institutionalized a form of Islamism that left a lasting impact on the nation's socio-political structure. Zia's policies not only redefined Pakistan's legal and social frameworks but also entrenched religious conservatism in a way that continues to influence the country's institutions and political movements.

The two-nation theory has itself been subject to varying interpretations. While some historians argue that it was merely a means to an end—a strategy employed by the Muslim League to negotiate political power—others contend that it represented a deeply held belief in the necessity of a separate Islamic polity. This ambiguity has persisted in shaping Pakistan's identity crisis. Was Pakistan meant to be a theocratic state, modeled on early Islamic governance, or was it intended to be a secular democracy in which Muslims could freely practice their faith? The failure to resolve this question in the early years laid the groundwork for future political and ideological conflicts. The inclusion of Islamic provisions in Pakistan's legal framework, such as the Objectives Resolution of 1949, marked the beginning of an ongoing struggle between secular and religious forces in the country.

Over the decades, various political and military rulers have sought to define and control Islam's role in Pakistan, often manipulating religious narratives to consolidate power. The initial period saw an attempt to balance Islamic identity with modern governance. Leaders like Ayub Khan promoted a more progressive version of Islam, advocating for economic development, scientific advancement, and women's empowerment, all while maintaining an Islamic identity that was acceptable to the majority of the population. However, this approach encountered resistance from religious scholars and conservative factions, who regarded modernization efforts as attempts to dilute Islamic values. As a result, the tension between modernists and traditionalists intensified, culminating in a political landscape where Islam became both a tool of governance and a battleground for ideological supremacy.

The Islamization drive under Zia-ul-Haq fundamentally changed Pakistan's trajectory. Zia's policies, which included the implementation of Sharia laws, the establishment of religious courts, and the introduction of Islamic banking, were aimed at creating a state with explicitly Islamic governance. These policies were not implemented in isolation; they were part of a broader geopolitical strategy as Pakistan played a crucial role in the U.S.-backed jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The influx of foreign jihadist ideologies during this period further complicated Pakistan's religious landscape, leading to the rise of militant groups that would later pose significant challenges to state authority. The long-term effects of Zia's Islamization continue to reverberate, with religious extremism and sectarian division remaining as pressing issues in Pakistan's socio-political fabric.

Amid this historical and ideological landscape, Imran Khan's emergence as a political leader has introduced a new paradigm of political theology in Pakistan. Unlike his predecessors, Khan's articulation of Islamism challenges both the modernist and conservative strands that have dominated Pakistan's political discourse. His vision integrates social justice, interfaith harmony, and an emphasis on the welfare state, drawing inspiration from the early Islamic model of Medina. This approach resonates with millions of Pakistanis who seek a balance between religious values and contemporary governance. Khan's emphasis on social justice, poverty alleviation, and ethical governance appeals to a broad social spectrum, from urban professionals to rural communities, who envisage him as a leader capable of reconciling Pakistan's Islamic identity with modern aspirations.

Khan's political ideology can be understood in the context of global political Islam, which

has seen various manifestations across the Muslim world. Unlike radical Islamist movements that seek to establish strict theocracies, Khan's version of political Islam aligns more with those of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey or Mahathir Mohamad in Malaysia, where Islam is used as a guiding principle for governance rather than a rigid legal framework. Khan's rhetoric frequently invokes Islamic teachings on justice, equality, and governance, positioning himself as a leader embodying both spiritual and political authority. This blend of faith and governance has allowed Khan to build a strong support base, particularly among the youth and middle-class voters who view the traditional political parties as corrupt and ineffective.

This essay examines the evolution of political theology in Pakistan, the competing strands of Islamism, and the transformative impact of Khan's political ideology. By exploring the historical context of Pakistan's Islamic identity, the various interpretations of Islamism, and the implications of Khan's leadership, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of religion in Pakistan's political landscape. The discourse on political theology in Pakistan concerns not merely governance; it also encompasses identity, legitimacy, and the future direction of the nation. As Pakistan continues to navigate its complex religious and political dynamics, the question of Islam's role in the state remains as relevant today as it was at the country's inception.

Historical Context: The Evolution of Political Theology in Pakistan

The ideological foundations of Pakistan were laid by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose vision remains a subject of debate. Did he intend for Pakistan to be an Islamic state in theocratic terms, or did he envision a Muslim-majority state in which religious freedom and secular governance coexisted? This ambiguity has fueled divergent interpretations of Pakistan's national identity. Jinnah's speeches and actions reflected this paradox. His famous address on August 11, 1947, emphasized religious freedom and equality, suggesting a secular state. However, he also mentioned the role of Islam in governance, leaving room for multiple interpretations. This ideological uncertainty established the foundation for a continuing struggle over Pakistan's identity and governance model.

During the early years of independence, Pakistan's political structure was dominated by colonial-era bureaucratic and military institutions. Unlike India, which inherited a mass-based political party in the form of the Indian National Congress, Pakistan's Muslim League lacked a strong grassroots presence. This power vacuum enabled the military and bureaucracy to assume disproportionate influence, shaping Pakistan's trajectory toward authoritarianism. The Muslim League, which had been instrumental in the creation of Pakistan, struggled to transition into an effective governing body. Its weak organizational structure and lack of a clear political roadmap led to frequent political instability, allowing non-elected institutions to gain influence. In the resulting governance model, democratic institutions remained weak, while the military and civil bureaucracy became the dominant forces shaping state policy.

Throughout its history, Pakistan has witnessed two dominant strands of Islamism. The first is a modernist approach that seeks to align Islam with Western modernization. This trend was particularly prominent during General Ayub Khan's regime in the 1960s, which

promoted an interpretation of Islam that emphasized economic development, technological progress, and a sanitized version of religious practice. Ayub Khan's policies reflected a broader global phenomenon, similar to the Kemalist approach in Turkey, where Islam was reconfigured to align with state-led modernization. Ayub attempted to introduce reforms such as the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, which sought to regulate marriage and divorce in accordance with modern legal principles rather than traditional interpretations of Sharia. His government promoted scientific advancements, industrialization, and education reforms, all within an Islamic framework. However, his top-down approach alienated religious scholars and conservative elements, leading to widespread resistance. Opposition to Ayub's vision for Pakistan ultimately contributed to his political downfall.

The second strand of Islamism in Pakistan has been more conventional, manifesting as Islamist political parties, military-backed religious movements, and militant groups. This form of Islamism gained significant traction under General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), when Pakistan underwent a state-led Islamization process. Zia's policies institutionalized Sharia-based legal reforms, promoted conservative religious education, and cultivated a religious nationalist identity. Unlike Ayub Khan, who attempted to modernize Islam, Zia sought a deeper embedding of Islam into state structures. His Islamization drive included the introduction of the Hudood Ordinances, which enforced harsh punishments for crimes like adultery and theft based on conservative interpretations of Sharia. Additionally, Zia restructured Pakistan's education system to reflect a more religiously driven curriculum, emphasizing Islamic studies in schools and universities.

The Afghan-Soviet war further amplified this trend, with Pakistan becoming a key player in the U.S.-backed jihad against the Soviet Union. The influx of foreign jihadist ideologies and the patronage of militant groups had long-term consequences, entrenching radical elements within Pakistan's socio-political landscape. The war led to the proliferation of madrassas that trained thousands of fighters, many of whom later joined extremist movements. The war also strengthened the military's partnership with religious factions, a relationship that persists today. The long-term effects of Zia's policies can still be identified in Pakistan's legal and educational frameworks, as well as in the rise of religiously motivated political movements.

Beyond Zia's era, the interplay between Islam and politics has remained a defining feature of Pakistan's governance. In the 1990s, successive civilian governments, led by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), struggled to balance religious identity with modern governance. Despite their political differences, both parties avoided directly challenging the religious laws introduced by Zia, fearing a backlash from conservative segments of society. Instead, they sought to integrate religious rhetoric into their political narratives while focusing on economic and social reforms. However, their inability to effectively counter the religious elements entrenched in the state structure limited their success in reversing the historical Islamization policies.

Following the events of 9/11, Pakistan again found itself at the center of global discussions on Islamism and political theology. Under General Pervez Musharraf's rule (1999–2008), an attempt was made to promote a concept of "Enlightened Moderation," which sought to

project a more progressive image of Islam. Musharraf's government took measures to curb extremist groups, banning several militant organizations and reforming the madrassa system. However, these efforts faced significant resistance from religious political parties and radical factions, highlighting the deep-rooted influence of conservative Islamism in Pakistan's power dynamics.

The post-Musharraf era has seen a growing divide between different interpretations of political Islam. While militant groups and hardline religious parties continue to exert influence, more inclusive and progressive interpretations of Islam have arisen, championed by civil society activists and reformist politicians. The emergence of media as a powerful force has further fueled the debate, with religious scholars, political leaders, and intellectuals engaging in discussions about the role of Islam in Pakistan's future.

In this evolving landscape, Imran Khan's approach to political theology represents a significant departure from previous models. Unlike Ayub Khan's modernist Islam or Zia-ul-Haq's conservative Islamism, Khan's vision integrates faith with social justice and governance. His emphasis on the welfare state, inspired by the early Islamic state of Medina, seeks to blend Islamic principles with contemporary governance models. By focusing on issues such as poverty alleviation, anti-corruption measures, and education reforms, Khan has positioned himself as a leader who bridges the gap between religious and secular ideologies.

Khan's rhetoric frequently draws upon Islamic teachings to justify his policies, making Islam a central theme in his approach to governance. Unlike traditional Islamist parties, which emphasize legalistic interpretations of Islam, Khan presents Islam as a moral and ethical compass for governance. His policies reflect a blend of populism and religious sentiment, appealing to a wide range of voters, from conservative religious groups to progressive urban youth. However, his tenure as Prime Minister (2018–2022) demonstrated the challenges of implementing his vision as he struggled with economic crises, political opposition, and institutional constraints.

In conclusion, the evolution of political theology in Pakistan has been shaped by a complex interplay of ideological visions, political expediencies, and global influences. From Jinnah's ambiguous vision to Ayub's modernization efforts, Zia's Islamization policies, and the post-9/11 debates on extremism, the role of Islam in governance has remained a central question in Pakistan's political discourse. Imran Khan's approach represents yet another chapter in this ongoing struggle, reflecting the persistent tension between religious identity and modern statecraft. The future of political theology in Pakistan will likely continue to evolve as new leaders, societal changes, and global dynamics shape the country's trajectory.

The Khan Factor: A New Political Theology

Imran Khan's political ascent has introduced a new dimension to Pakistan's political theology, one that is distinct from both modernist Islamism and the conservative Islamist frameworks that have historically dominated the country. Unlike previous leaders who instrumentalized Islam for political expediency, Khan integrates faith with his vision for governance in

a way that resonates with a broad segment of society. His approach offers a synthesis of religious values and contemporary governance, positioning Islam as a source of moral guidance rather than as a strict legal code.

Khan's understanding of Islam is deeply rooted in what is often referred to as "folk Islam" or "Sufi Islam." This tradition emphasizes spirituality, social justice, and inclusivity, in contrast to the exclusivist tendencies of fundamentalist interpretations. Unlike the rigid, text-centric Islamism promoted by many conservative religious movements, Sufi Islam has historically been more adaptable and focused on personal transformation. Khan's faith-based approach to politics aligns closely with his advocacy of a welfare state, a concept that he argues is central to Islamic teachings. He frequently cites the early Islamic state of Medina as a model for governance, emphasizing principles of justice, compassion, and the protection of the marginalized.

One of Khan's notable initiatives was the restoration of religious sites for minority communities, particularly Shia Muslims, signaling his commitment to interfaith harmony. This move contrasts starkly with the exclusionary practices of previous Islamist regimes that sought to homogenize religious identity. His government facilitated the reopening and preservation of Hindu and Sikh temples, an unprecedented effort to integrate religious minorities into Pakistan's broader national identity. Khan's discourse consistently challenges the binary categorization of Islam as either "moderate" or "extremist," rejecting these imperial constructs and instead promoting an Islamism centered on dignity, justice, and human rights.

Khan's vision for governance also includes economic and political policies inspired by Islamic principles. He has repeatedly invoked the Islamic concept of "Riyasat-e-Madina" (the State of Medina) as an aspirational model for Pakistan's political future. In his speeches, he outlines a vision where economic justice, the eradication of poverty, and the fight against corruption are moral imperatives rooted in Islam. This framework provides a compelling alternative to both Western neoliberalism and the authoritarian religious nationalism that has shaped much of Pakistan's political history.

Unlike previous Islamist leaders who focused on implementing religious laws, Khan has positioned Islam as an ethical and moral guide to governance rather than a rigid legal structure. This has allowed him to build a broad-based political coalition that includes religious conservatives, progressive Muslims, and even secular voters disillusioned with traditional politics. His government's introduction of social welfare programs, such as the Ehsaas program, reflects his commitment to social justice—an idea he frames within Islamic values. This welfare initiative, which provides financial assistance to low-income families, is reminiscent of the early Islamic principle of Zakat (charitable giving), reinforcing Khan's argument that social equity is a fundamental Islamic obligation.

However, Khan's political theology is not without contradictions. While he advocates for interfaith harmony, his tenure also witnessed instances of political alliances with hardline religious groups. His government's response to blasphemy cases, for example, was inconsistent, sometimes yielding to extremist pressures rather than firmly upholding principles of

justice and fairness. This delicate balancing act between appeasing conservative factions and advancing a more inclusive Islamic vision remains one of the greatest challenges of his political project.

Another critical aspect of Khan's religious discourse is his strong stance on international issues concerning Muslims. He has been vocal about Islamophobia in the West, calling for global efforts to counter anti-Muslim sentiments and policies. His advocacy on behalf of Palestinians, Kashmiris, and the Rohingya Muslims reflects his attempt to position Pakistan as a leader of the Muslim world. By framing these geopolitical struggles within the broader narrative of Muslim dignity and justice, Khan has been able to mobilize both domestic and international support.

Khan's approach to Islamism also extends to his engagement with Western political and economic models. Unlike many Islamist leaders who reject outright Western governance structures, Khan selectively adopts and integrates elements that align with his vision for Pakistan. He frequently cites the welfare states of Scandinavian countries as examples, arguing that their social policies closely resemble Islamic principles of economic justice. This pragmatic approach allows him to advocate for policies such as universal healthcare, educational reforms, and progressive taxation, all while maintaining an Islamic ideological framework.

Despite these strengths, Khan's political theology faces substantial obstacles. His tenure as Prime Minister (2018–2022) demonstrated the difficulties of translating Islamic ideals into practical governance. Economic crises, political instability, and resistance from entrenched power structures hindered his ability to fully implement his vision. Additionally, his reliance on populist rhetoric sometimes obscured the line between religious idealism and political pragmatism, making it difficult to distinguish between genuine policy initiatives and symbolic gestures.

Furthermore, Khan's early reliance on the military establishment created tensions when he later attempted to assert civilian supremacy. This struggle highlights a broader challenge within Pakistan's political landscape: the extent to which religious narratives can be leveraged for governance without being co-opted by institutional power structures. The durability of Khan's political theology will depend on whether it can transcend personal leadership and become a sustainable ideological movement.

In conclusion, Imran Khan's approach to political theology represents a significant departure from the traditional Islamist frameworks in Pakistan. By emphasizing social justice, interfaith harmony, and governance inspired by the principles of the State of Medina, he has introduced into politics a more inclusive and pragmatic vision of Islam. However, his movement remains fraught with contradictions, particularly with regard to its balancing act between religious inclusivity and political expediency. The future of Khan's vision will depend on its ability to institutionalize reforms, navigate political realities, and maintain its moral and ideological consistency in the face of evolving challenges. Regardless of the outcome, Khan's impact on Pakistan's political discourse has been profound and will reshape the debate

on the role of Islam in governance for years to come.

Khan's Support Base and Political Mobilization

Khan's appeal extends beyond conventional political and religious divisions, attracting a diverse coalition of supporters. His political movement has mobilized both urban middle-class youth and rural populations, creating an unprecedented mass social base for his vision of political Islam. Unlike traditional Islamist parties, which often rely on religious rhetoric to enforce conformity, Khan's movement engages with contemporary socio-political issues, framing Islam as a force for ethical governance and societal transformation. His ability to connect with different demographics, including those disillusioned with the status quo, has allowed him to build a broad-based support network.

A key factor behind Khan's widespread support is his critique of entrenched power structures, particularly the military and bureaucratic elite. Historically, Pakistan's ruling establishment has utilized religious narratives to maintain control, whether through modernist Islam or conservative Islamism. Khan's movement disrupts this pattern by advocating for a more populist and grassroots-driven political framework. His rhetoric frequently targets corruption, inequality, and elite privilege, themes that resonate with a populace disillusioned with traditional power brokers. This anti-establishment stance has made him a symbol of resistance among those who feel marginalized by Pakistan's political elite.

Khan's stance on international issues, particularly his vocal criticism of Western imperialism and his solidarity with oppressed Muslim communities, further strengthens his appeal. His condemnation of U.S. interventionism, advocacy of Palestinian rights, and critique of global economic structures position him as a leader who challenges hegemonic power dynamics, both domestically and globally. By aligning himself with broader struggles for justice, Khan has managed to transcend national politics and position himself as a global advocate for Muslim causes.

However, his brand of populism is not without its contradictions. While he portrays himself as a challenger to the status quo, his political journey has included alliances with traditional power players, including the military, which facilitated his rise to power. His ability to mobilize popular support has occasionally relied on nationalist rhetoric, appealing to a sense of Pakistani identity that blends religious and cultural pride with anti-Western sentiment. This approach has energized his supporters but also drawn criticism for fostering a polarized political environment.

Challenges and Controversies

Despite his popularity, Khan's political theology is not without its challenges and contradictions. His tenure as Prime Minister (2018–2022) witnessed both successes and setbacks in implementing his vision. Whereas his government made strides in expanding social welfare programs, including the Ehsaas initiative aimed at poverty alleviation, it also faced criticism concerning economic mismanagement and political instability. High inflation, an increasing

debt burden, and challenges in managing international relations also strained the credibility of his administration.

Additionally, Khan's reliance on military support during his rise to power contradicts his later opposition to military dominance, raising questions about the consistency of his political stance. His eventual disagreement with the military establishment resulted in his removal from office, highlighting the fragility of civilian leadership in Pakistan's political system. This shift from military-backed governance to opposition figure has tested his ability to sustain political momentum despite a lack of institutional backing.

Moreover, the ideological flexibility of Khan's movement entails both strengths and vulnerabilities. While his broad-based appeal allows him to transcend traditional political divides, it also creates ambiguities in policy implementation. Critics argue that his emphasis on faith-based governance lacks concrete structural reforms, making it susceptible to the same pitfalls that have historically plagued Islamist political projects. His vision of an Islamic welfare state, while compelling, remains largely rhetorical, with its practical execution facing significant challenges.

Another key challenge is the role of religious conservatives within his movement. While Khan has advocated for interfaith harmony and minority rights, his political alliances with hardline religious groups have raised concerns about the extent to which his inclusive rhetoric aligns with his political actions. The balancing act between appeasing conservative factions and advancing a more progressive Islamic vision remains one of the greatest conundrums of his political project.

Conclusion

Imran Khan's political theology represents a significant departure from the dominant strands of Islamism that have shaped Pakistan's history. By rejecting modernist and reactionary Islamist frameworks alike, Khan has introduced a vision of Islam that emphasizes social justice, interfaith harmony, and grassroots mobilization. His movement challenges entrenched power structures and offers an alternative paradigm for integrating faith and governance. However, the contradictions within his political approach, particularly his shifting alliances and reliance on populist rhetoric, raise questions about the sustainability of his vision.

The future of Khan's political project remains uncertain. As Pakistan navigates ongoing political and economic crises, the durability of his vision will depend on its ability to translate ideological commitments into tangible policy outcomes. Whether Khan's political theology can sustain its momentum or succumb to the same institutional constraints that have hindered past Islamist movements remains an open question. His movement's ability to maintain mass support despite the lack of institutional backing will be a crucial test of its long-term viability.

Ultimately, Khan's impact extends beyond electoral politics. His movement has reshaped

Pakistan's political discourse, reconfiguring the relationship between religion, governance, and social justice. In doing so, he has reinvigorated debates about the role of Islam in the modern state, positioning Pakistan at the center of a broader global conversation about political theology in the 21st century. While his leadership has introduced a new political paradigm, the long-term implications of his approach remain unclear. Whether his movement results in lasting structural change or remains a momentary populist surge will determine his legacy in the annals of Pakistan's political history.

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Session 2

Trans-imperial perspective and challenge of decolonization in Asia

4

Solidarity against nationalism as religion

Tagore and the possibility of inter-faith dialogue

Satoshi Mizutani

India, where our roundtable was held in March 2024, is suffering from two interrelated problems. One is the hegemony of a nationalism strongly informed by the religion of the majority, Hinduism, causing immense suffering to those Indians, particularly Muslims, who are now seen as an enemy within because of their faith. The second problem is the government's identification with, and support for, the colonialist cause of another nation, Israel, which it sees as fighting a sacred fight, defending its own faith from 'Islamic terrorists'.[1] India is not without hope, however, for there are people, both secular and religious, who protest against Hindu nationalism whilst calling for Indian solidarity with the Palestinian cause for justice. Our roundtable was testimony to that hope, and I am honoured to have participated in it. As a historian in the field of Transimperial History, I have explored the problematic coupling of nationalism and religion by locating it in a space in-between and across two empires, those of Great Britain and Japan. It has not escaped my notice that, in that transimperial space which existed in the last century, there was something similar to what we are witnessing today. On the one hand, there were Indians who not only believed in the ideal of nationalism as religion, but also admired another nation, Japan, as an embodiment of that ideal. On the other hand, there were also Indians who criticized that ideal whilst calling for solidarity with peoples who were suffering under Japan's colonial expansion—an expansion fuelled by a strong sense of patriotic nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore, on whom this essay will focus, was one of those Indians in the latter category. Tagore is relevant to our roundtable's theme, inter-faith dialogue, because his critique of nationalism and religion was done in an uncompromising way, but without rejecting the centrality of spirituality itself.

Nationalism as religion

The origins of what is known today as Hindu nationalism can be traced to a specific form of anticolonialism that evolved in the early twentieth century. During the Swadeshi Movement (1905–1908), a self-sufficiency movement which opposed the proposed partition of Bengal, revolutionaries such as Aurobindo Ghose argued that Indian nationalism should

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1 Amrit Wilson, "The unholy alliance: Hindutva and Zionism," 29 June 2022, *The Cradle* (https://thecradle.co/articles/the-unholy-alliance-hindutva-and-zionism [accessed on 10 February 2025]).

be seen as a religion in its own right. But the explicit formation of Hinduism as the basis of an Indian nation-yet-to-come emerged in the 1920s through Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. It was Savarkar who created 'Hindutva' as an ideology of this nationalism. It is this ideology that the BJP government today, led by Narendra Modi, uses to justify its Hindu-first politics, allowing violence and discrimination against Muslims to take place with impunity. Thus, the idea of India as a Hindu nation is actually a century old. What is almost completely unknown is that there was a transimperial dimension to the historical unfolding of this brand of Indian anti-colonial nationalism. A Bengali named Rash Behari Bose, a revolutionary in permanent exile in Japan[2] (not to be confused with the more famous Subhas Chandra Bose) established a Japanese branch of the Hindu Mahasabha. In the last half of the 1930s, Savarkar and Rash Behari Bose began corresponding with one another[3]. Rash Behari had been strongly influenced by Ghose, and like the latter ardently admired Japanese elites and their nationalism. Like Ghose, he also argued that Indians should view Japan's imperial expansion positively, as a form of 'Asian unity'. Thus, to Savarkar, as well as to Subhas Chandra Bose, Rash Behari argued that Indian nationalists should support the Japanese, who in the future could be expected to come to India to fight against the British. Rash Behari played a major role in establishing the 'Indian National Army' (INA), with the support of the Japanese government. In the end, it was Subhas Chandra Bose who served as the INA's commander, but it was 'another Bose' in Japan who had done the necessary work to gain Japanese support. Ultimately, Rash Behari's long-term dream for Indians to fight against the British under Japanese guidance was realized, if only partially, as the INA, alongside Japanese troops, entered British India in 1944.

The significance of the INA's role in India's gaining of independence in 1947 remains a question of debate, but those Indians who participated in the INA, particularly Subhas Chandra Bose, have generally been regarded as patriotic heroes who fought for the country. While this is undoubtedly true, it is also important to remember that Indians never had to face the question of potential or actual occupation of their own country by Japan. Because the Japanese Empire collapsed prior to Indian independence, we do not know what would have happened to India if Japan had won the war, except in the case of the Adaman and Nicobar Islands, the only part of British India that was actually occupied by Japan. As it turned out, the Indians there had to endure a traumatic period of military occupation, which included the execution of hundreds of people who were wrongly regarded as spies working for the British.[4]

In any case, what is important for the present discussion is Rash Behari Bose's view of nationalism and religion, a view he eventually came to share with Savarkar. Rash Behari saw Japanese nationalism as an exemplary model of nationalism as religion, with the people having a strong sense of patriotism and being ready to sacrifice themselves to the national whole. He also argued that Japan was one of the centers of Buddhism, and that Buddhism had

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2   For the life and politics of Rash Behari Bose, see Joseph McQuade, *Fugitive of Empire: Rash Behari Bose, Japan, and the Indian Independence Struggle* (La Vergne: Hurst Publishers, 2023).

3   For these points on Rash Behari Bose, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Savarkar see, Marzia Casolari, *In the Shadow of the Swatstika: The Relationships between Indian Radical Nationalism, Italia Fascism and Nazism* (London: New York: Routledge, 2022), pp.92–99.

4   Saini Ajay, "Japanese Occupation of Nicobar Islands: Slavery, Espionage and Executions," *Economic and Political Weekly* 53, no.22 (2018).

originally come from India and had connections with Hinduism. Holding this Pan-Asianist idea of Indo-Japanese linkage, Rash Behari worked closely with Japanese ultranationalist ideologues and a circle of high-ranking officials under their influence. These Japanese had increasingly exhibited fascist tendencies, advocating an unquestioning reverence for Ten'no (the Japanese Emperor) as the head of the nation and promoting military values to serve the nation's expansion, which they claimed was a God-ordained mission to defend 'Asians' from 'white' intrusion. Domestically, the Japanese Pan-Asianists opposed democracy. Nurtured through his close collaboration with these Japanese men, Rash Behari Bose's vision of an ideal Indian society naturally resembled Savarkar's. In one of his letters to Savarkar, Bose wrote:

> The old ways of thinking and doing would be of no avail. Especially the Hindu community must discard the old ways and adopt new ways and methods. There should be standardisation of customs, manners, food, dress, religious ceremonies etc. There should be a well organised corps of Hindu volunteers in every village, town and city under the Hindu Maha Sabha whose duties would be to educate and protect Hindus and Hinduism[5].

Such a call for the strict regulation of Indian society closely echoes the dogma of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the right-wing paramilitary organization that promotes Hindutva today.

Considering the problems India is facing today, the historical transimperial solidarity among groups in Japan and India is disturbing because such a 'solidarity' was not purely 'anticolonial'. Rash Behari Bose, in his blind admiration of a nation that was colonizing other peoples against their will, including the people of Korea, many of whom resisted Japanese rule right from the beginning, in fact resembles today's Indian supporters of Israel. Deeply enamored of both Japanese nationalism and the Pan-Asianist vision of Japan's expansion, Rash Behari even cooperated with Japanese officials in their colonization of Korea, advising Koreans he met to give up independence and join in the Pan-Asianist movement. Not all Indians fighting against British colonialism regarded Korean anticolonialism as meaningless, however. Like Indians today who identify with the Palestinian struggle, there were Indians in the colonial period who saw Korea's suffering as analogous to their own, and Tagore was one of them. In contrast to Rash Behari Bose, who collaborated closely with the Japanese who governed Korea, Tagore expressed solidarity with Koreans, seeing them as a people suffering from foreign oppression. Unlike Bose, Tagore was sharply critical of Japanese nationalism, and strongly objected to the idea of it being adopted as a model for India[6].

Spirituality and solidarity in Tagore

It is not the case that Tagore was critical of nationalism from the beginning. In fact, when

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5   Casolari, p.104.
6   For the difference between Rash Behari Bose and Rabindranath Tagore over the question of Korean anticolonialism, see Satoshi Mizutani, "Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese Colonialism in Korea in the Inter-War Period," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2015.0005.

the movement against the partition of Bengal started in 1905, Tagore was one of its leading figures. He was regarded as a patriot, passionately protesting against British rule. Around 1907, however, as the movement was gaining momentum, Tagore's attitude regarding nationalism shifted. This was not because he became less critical of British rule. Rather, he had become increasingly unhappy about the ways in which opposition to the partition of Bengal was being pursued by his Bengali colleagues. It was not just the use of terror as a method of resistance that disturbed him; what profoundly concerned him was how the Hindu elites were leading the movement in ways that alienated Muslims, who actually constituted the majority of the population of Bengal. The elites in the province were predominantly English-educated, and the British authorities were trying to divide the region precisely in order to weaken Muslim influence. What bothered Tagore was that the nationalism of these elites leaned strongly towards the ideal of an Indian nation-to-come based on Hindu traditions and customs, unsullied by any foreign influence[7]. As mentioned above, Aurobindo Ghose, one of the visionaries of this nationalism, influentially visualized it being endowed with a sense of religious piety and sacrifice. But Hindu revivalism carried the danger of dividing India along religious lines. As present-day adherents of Hindutva tirelessly claim, it was not just Christianity—the religion of the oppressor—that came from 'outside': Islam did as well. Thus, years before Savarkar formulated Hindutva and nearly a century before the ascendancy of today's BJP, Tagore was keenly aware of the danger inherent in the coupling of nation with religion.

Tagore did not, however, frame his attitude regarding religion in a secularist or rationalist attack on religion. If anything, his poems, which he continued to produce throughout his life, were saturated with references to the divine. He was not religious in the conventional sense of believing in a particular religious creed. Through his creative work, he established an aesthetic relationship to 'God'. As he wrote, 'my religion is a poet's religion, and neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian'[8]. In Tagore's artistic and philosophical work, 'God' was often invoked in negative references to what he saw as forms of materialism; along with 'nation', 'religion' was one of such forms. While singing often about a purely spiritual relation to 'God', Tagore as a poet was deeply suspicious of religion as an institution. This ambivalent view of religion is seen, for instance, in one of his poems collected in *Gitanjali*. It reads:

> Save this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!
> He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!
> Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all forever.
> Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is

7   Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908. 2nd ed.* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), pp.69–70.
8   Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion Of Man* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), p.93.

there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow[9].

In this poetical vision, 'God' is present wherever there are people who suffer but, paradoxically, *not* in those supposedly holy places where religious rituals are performed according to rules set by the authorities, whether religious, national, or the two combined. This view was the exact opposite of that held by Hindu nationalists. We may recall here how Rash Behari Bose told Savarkar about the need to standardize the ways in which Hindus should structure their everyday lives according to their religious tradition. For Tagore, there was nothing genuinely spiritual in such an ordering of behavior and thinking. In fact, nothing was less spiritual than religion in this sense. He wrote, 'This mechanical spirit of tradition is essentially materialistic, it is blindly pious but not spiritual, obsessed by phantoms of unreason that haunt feeble minds in the ghastly disguise of religion'[10].

Of course, Tagore's critique of religion was aimed not just at the nationalist brand of Hinduism, but at all religions which became rigidly institutionalized. 'God' had been hijacked by imperialists as well as by their anticolonial opponents. As he wrote:

There have been hypocrisies and lies, cruel arrogance angered at the wounds it inflicts, spiritual pride that uses God's name to insult man, and pride of power that insults God by calling him its ally; there has been the smothered cry of centuries in pain robbed of its voice, and children of men mutilated of their right arms of strength to keep them helpless for all time; luxuries have been cultivated upon fields manured by the bloody sweat of slavery, and wealth built upon the foundations of penury and famines[11].

For Tagore, the problem with any institutionalized religion was that it was materialistic, and readily incorporated, whether consciously or not, into nationalism and imperialism, which were incarnations of materialism evolving in tandem with capitalism. As such, religion made people preoccupied with earthly pursuits such as the acquisition and defence of territories and markets, taking them further away from an inner bond with the divine. The most serious aspect of this process of de-spiritualization was that it anesthetized people to the sufferings felt by those who were oppressed. It was this lack of feeling among the Japanese that shocked Tagore when he first visited Japan in 1916. In their ever-growing pride in their own country's success in expanding abroad, the Japanese had lost an ability to feel. What disturbed Tagore was the Japanese people's disinterest in understanding the deep sense of humiliation endured by Koreans and other non-Japanese subjects of their colonial empire. When Japanese intellectuals called Tagore the poet of a 'defeated' country in their response to his criticism of Japanese nationalism and imperialism, Tagore willingly accepted this term of abuse, turning it into an idea used for a radical critique of colonialism. At the same time, Tagore's attitude grew from the vantage point of solidarity among colonized peoples. The poem he wrote especially for Koreans, entitled 'The Song of the Defeated', ran as follows:

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9   Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), pp.8–9.
10   Tagore, *The Religion Of Man*, p.121.
11   Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p.103.

My Master has bid me while I stand at the roadside, to sing the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.

She has put on the dark veil, hiding her face from the crowd, but the jewel glows on her breast in the dark.

She is forsaken of the day, and God's night is waiting for her with its lamps lighted and flowers wet with dew.

She is silent with her eyes downcast; she has left her home behind her, from her home has come that wailing in the wind.

But the stars are singing the love-song of the eternal to a face sweet with shame and suffering.

The door has been opened in the lonely chamber, the call has sounded, and the heart of the darkness throbs with awe because of the coming tryst. [12]

With its distinct reference to 'God', there is no doubt that it was the unambiguous spirituality of this poem that allowed it to sink deep into the collective psyche of many Korean people suffering under foreign rule.[13]

However, 'The Song of the Defeated' can also be read as a powerful critique of nationalism as religion. At the time, the Japanese—known by their Indian admirers for their devotion to their nation—were, in a sense, singing what may be called the 'Song of the Victorious'. Tagore's message was that 'God' would never be found in such a song of national / imperial triumph. For Tagore, nationalism as religion was a scheme devised for material gain, keeping people blind and unable to see the light of emancipation emanating from the divine. 'God' was only with those who suffered from the violence meted out by the pious believers of nationalism. 'Suffering' was important for Tagore not because he was a 'defeatist', as his Japanese critics labelled him, but because he believed that those who knew suffering also knew the true ideal of the world-yet-to-come. He wrote:

Our greatest hope is in this, that suffering is there. It is the language of imperfection. Its very utterance carries in it the trust in the perfect. Like the baby's cry which would be dumb, if it had no faith in the mother. This suffering has driven man with his prayer knocking at the gate of the infinite in him, the divine, thus revealing his deepest instinct, his unreasoning faith in the reality of the ideal, — the faith shown in the readiness for death, in the renunciation of all that belongs to the self. God's life flowing in its outpour of self-giving has touched man's life who is also abroad in his career of freedom.[14]

Tagore's poetic expression of solidarity with the Korean people was not about awakening Koreans to a patriotic nationalism of their own. It was universalist, albeit from below. Whilst advocating solidarity in humanity's fight against colonialism, Tagore did not presuppose the

12 Chin Hakmun, "Indo-ŭi segyejŏk tae-shiin rabindŭranadŭ, t'ak'urŭ Sunsŏng," *Chŏngch'un* 11 (1917); p.99; Rabindranath Tagore, Fruit-Gathering (London: Macmillan, 1916) , pp.120–121.

13 For a discussion on the impact of this poem on the Korean people, see, Mizutani, "Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison".

14 Tagore, *Personality*, p.105.

building of one's own nation as a requisite for emancipation. Neither did he think that the identification of suffering as the starting point of anticolonial resistance needed to be based on a common identity, whether religious or racial. Ultimately, Tagore's sense of solidarity was connected with an anarchic vision of worldmaking from below.

It is this anarchic and non-identitarian approach to nationalism and religion that makes Tagore's sense of anticolonial solidarity relevant to our own pursuit of anticolonial solidarity in the present day. When anticolonial activists in previously colonized countries, including those in India and South Korea, work for the Palestinian cause, they are not raising their voices in concert with their own national governments. In the wake of decolonization, post-colonial nations today tend to be led by political leaders who pursue realpolitik, forgetful of the days of anticolonial solidarity. One of the most important agendas of activists from these nations is to challenge their own governments' support of oppressor nations in 'international relations'. India offers a prime example of this. The most promising signs of solidarity come from groups of people who are victims of state oppression in their own nation, as in the case, for example, of Black American activists. In various contexts across the globe, such people protest against their own governments, which suppress them using the majoritarian rhetoric, often religion-inflected, of so-called 'national unity'. If the various spiritual sources of religion in the world have a role to play in a truly radical form of worldmaking, it would be in the context of an anti-statist kind of solidarity, challenging the nation / religion dyad. It is here that inter-faith dialogue would have a genuine anticolonial meaning. Tagore's profoundly spiritual and emotional approach to the suffering of all colonized peoples in the world would encourage such dialogue.

5

Connecting Struggles

International Solidarity in Resolving the Japanese military sexual slavery and the Palestinian Liberation Movement

Sijin Paek

Palestinian flags were flown in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul during the 1663rd weekly Wednesday Demonstration, demanding redress for Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, commonly known as the 'comfort women' issue, on January 31, 2024. Butterflies, symbolizing women who suffered from the Japanese military comfort system, in the colors of the Palestinian flag - red, black, white, and green - fluttered from the stage, and activists in kufiyahs gathered in front of the demonstration chanting the slogans. This scene vividly illustrates the solidarity between the international freedom movement for Palestinians and Asia's feminist movement against gendered violence.

At first glance, the connection between these two issues may not be immediately apparent, as each movement possesses unique characteristics that cannot easily overlap. Japanese military sexual slavery refers to a system that mobilizes women to protect Japanese soldiers from venereal diseases, which are believed to degrade their warfighting capabilities. Prior to 1945, this system weaponized women's sexuality as a means of achieving military victory, enslaving and sexually exploiting them across Asia and the Pacific. Japan mobilized women from the Japanese mainland and those from its colonies and occupied territories. However, at the war's end, Japan failed to take responsibility for these actions. The women mobilized to the battlefield were either killed, abandoned on the battlefield, or forced to return home on their own, leaving the issue hidden and unresolved for decades.

Unlike the Japanese military sexual slavery that operated until 1945, Israel's occupation of Palestine came afterward (although it should be noted that the Zionist movement began in the late 19th century and there was a prelude to the process of occupying Palestine, such as the mass immigration of Jews and the Belfour Declaration). In 1947, the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was announced, leading to the first serious Israel-oriented regional conflict, the Nakba, in 1948 and the ongoing colonization of Palestine.

Not only do the two issues differ in their historical periods, but the geopolitical contexts in which they emerged also vary: the Japanese military's sexual weaponization of women

occurred in East Asia and the Pacific, whereas Israel's occupation was rooted in North Africa (or West Asia). Despite these geopolitical and historical differences, the two movements have continued to engage in solidarity, even though they may have more differences than similarities, in contrast to solidarity based on shared commonalities.

If so, why have East and West Asian activists come together to work on distinct issues in different periods? How did this collaboration occur, and what are the implications of solidarity between international movements?

This autobiographical article reflects on my work and activism over the past ten years. I began volunteering with Palestine Peace Solidarity in South Korea (PPS) in 2014, after first encountering the Palestinian issue while working as an official staff member of The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (Korean Council) in 2013. Despite my interest and experience in both fields, I struggled to connect the issues as their distinct characteristics seemed more pronounced. However, a turning point came in 2015 when I realized there was a meeting between victims and survivors of colonial and wartime-gendered violence from Korea and Palestine. This inspired me to explore how these issues could be meaningfully linked and mutually reinforced. Drawing from the activism and resilience of two inspiring figures—Kim Bok-dong, a survivor of Japanese military sexual slavery in South Korea, and Rasmia Odeh, a survivor of sexual torture by the Israeli military—my colleagues and I delved deeper into connecting these struggles and fostering solidarity between the two movements.

At the same time, it is essential to note that these two issues were brought together through the efforts of activists from various organizations such as the PPS, where I was involved, the Asian Dignity Initiative (ADI), and the following group of the Korean Council: the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. In other words, the encounter between Korean feminist, anti-colonial, and peace movements was made possible by activists with the same or deeper concerns than the author. Therefore, this article is a self-description and a story of activists working together. It is also a record of Korean civil society's willingness to consider these two issues seriously.

To understand the convergence of two streams of activism—the Japanese military sexual slavery movement and the Palestinian liberation movement in Korea—I will recount two pivotal encounters: the first, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 1993, and the second, over two decades later, the solidarity forged between two survivor-activists, Kim Bok-dong and Rasmiya Odeh, in 2015.

To avoid linear explanations, I will explore the movement's dynamics and complexities by drawing on Setsu Shigematsu's centrifugal and centripetal dynamics concept, as illustrated in the Japanese feminist movement of the 1970s known as *ūman ribu*. This framework highlights the interplay between domestic and non-domestic issues, weaving these seemingly separate areas together by acknowledging political responsibility, expanding our understanding of power and geopolitical specificity, and representing memory.

These two movements exhibit dynamic processes in recognizing their interconnectedness or plasticity, crafting their own language to illuminate the past for remembrance and historicization. Ultimately, they expanded the scope of their respective movements—not through solidarity rooted merely in sympathy but through a concrete understanding of each other's struggles' interwoven nature while acknowledging their differences. Each movement adopted another's agenda as a catalyst for its own activism. This form of solidarity offers valuable insights into how movements from different regions can connect, how transnational movements can be rooted in their specific contexts, and, in turn, how solidarity grounded in differences can evolve and broaden its impact.

Tracing the encounters

In the early 1990s, the Korean Council, which had been demanding an official apology from the Japanese government, began to appeal to the international community for a breakthrough, as the Japanese government showed no sign of willingness to resolve the issue. The Council's participation in a subcommittee of the United Nations Human Rights Commission marked the beginning of raising awareness about this historically gendered issue on the international stage in 1991. Two years later, in 1993, the Korean Council and victim-survivor Bok-dong Kim traveled to Vienna to present the issue of "comfort women" at the Global Tribunal on Violations of Women's Human Rights and the World Conference on Human Rights.

The Global Tribunal aimed to address gender-based violence and women's human rights as fundamental human rights, challenging the historical establishment of its principles since WWII, which primarily protected male-defined rights and obscured gendered violence.[1] During the conference, 33 women from 25 countries shared testimonies about their experiences with gender violence, attracting approximately 1000 observers.[2] In the second section of the tribunal war crimes against women, activists from Korea and Palestine delivered speeches highlighting the various forms of gendered violence during wartime, demonstrating their interconnectedness with discriminatory social structures and domestic violence.

Regarding the Korean case, the researcher-activist Chin-Sung Cheong presented the concept of the "comfort station."[3] She identified three key characteristics of these facilities: they were systematically planned by the Japanese military, making their scale incomparable to other cases; the Japanese imperial accountability was not questioned because of the desire to stabilize the capitalist system in Asia during the Cold War era; and the severe consequences faced by victim-survivors. Subsequently, victim-survivor Bok-dong Kim shared her testimony regarding her experiences in the "comfort station" and the impact of those experiences.[4]

Following the Korean speakers, Palestinian feminist activist Randa Siniora shared the experiences of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation. She categorized gender-based violence into two levels: the national level, which involves Israeli occupiers, and

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1 Bunch and Reilly (1994, 11)
2 Leadership, Biceño, and Fried (1993, 46)
3 Reilly (1994, 1:21–22)
4 Ibid. 23–26.

Palestinian patriarchal practices. At the national level, Palestinian women are subjected to sexual harassment and insult by Israeli male soldiers in their daily lives. Despite an increase in awareness about gender-based violence, Palestinian patriarchal politics have not addressed it seriously, and the rights of women are not met with the necessary seriousness or acceptance by the leadership.[5]

At this conference, women from the Asian continent gathered with the goal of elevating women's rights to fundamental human rights. The conference focused on the direct or systemic violence and discrimination perpetuated by an androcentric society. However, women's experiences were often framed in an abstract and oversimplified manner, reducing their struggles to a single narrative of "women subjected to violence by men." This framework fails to address the experiential differences among women or explore what makes their experiences recognizable as women's issues despite the various forms of racial, colonial, national, and capitalist violence they endure. In questioning these differences, it is necessary to challenge the problem of universalism, which tends to subsume diverse voices and experiences under a singular narrative. It also calls for recognizing political responsibility and acknowledging the complexity of structures perpetuating and reinforcing differences or the concept of the Other. However, the differences arising from their varied positions, expressed as violence against women, did not extend to the idea that they should take responsibility for "interfering" in or intervening in each other's struggles. I believe this limitation accounts for why, while they identified commonalities arising from colonization and the various forms of discrimination and social stratification caused by war, there were no continuous encounters among them. This reflects the limitations of the universal human rights framework, which, in abstracting each other's experiences, hinders the discovery of their interconnectedness and shared history. Nonetheless, these efforts led to the inclusion of violations of women in war within the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, marking a significant step forward.

After a decade, in 2015, East and West Asian feminist activists gathered in Chicago, United States. After a brief pause since the Vienna conference, bok-dong Kim, who dedicated herself to the 'comfort women's issue movement, met Rasmea Yousef Odeh and donated to her the Nabi Fund. The Nabi Fund was established on March 8, 2012—International Women's Day—by two survivors and activists of the Japanese military sexual slavery system: Kim Bok-dong and Gil Won-ok. They declared that if the Japanese government issued an official apology and compensation, they would use the funds to support women who, like them, had suffered wartime sexual violence. Per their wishes, the Korean Council founded the Nabi Fund, which has since supported women in conflict zones, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Vietnam. Nabi, meaning "butterfly" in English, carries deep symbolism. It represents the transformation of the "comfort women" survivors, who, like caterpillars forced into silence by a patriarchal society, underwent a metamorphosis as they found their voices and demanded justice.

Odeh, a Palestinian feminist activist and victim-survivor of sexual torture, was arrested in 1970 for involvement in the 1969 Jerusalem supermarket bombing carried out by the

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5   Ibid. 27–28

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which resulted in the death of two civilians. She was coerced to confess and endured torture and rape in prison, leading her to allege it in court. Despite the trial in Israel being deemed a sham due to evidence obtained through torture and the disallowance of expert testimony, she was sentenced to life imprisonment. After her release in a 1980 prisoner exchange between the PFLP and Israel, she testified to her experience at the United Nations. She moved to the U.S. in 1995, dedicated herself to local civil movements, and obtained U.S. nationality in 2004. However, in 2013, she faced indictment for failing to mention her conviction in immigration papers. While Odeh fought in court to prevent her deportation, she met Kim Bok-dong, who visited the United States for a campaign. The Korean Council documented its meetings, marking a significant moment in converging its struggles.

> The pain Kim Bok-dong suffered was translated into Ode's anger and cries. At the end of Kim's story, Ode sheds tears and criticizes injustice. It was a moment when tragedies from different places and histories, similar to ours, came face to face. Kim held Ode's hand to encourage her, and Ode promised that her justice was Kim's justice and that she would continue to struggle without giving up. The Nabi (Butterfly) Fund, created in honor of Kim's wishes to help women victims of wartime sexual violence, was presented to Ode at this meeting.[6]

Odeh and Kim's meeting was briefly reported in a local newspaper, and for years, their encounters remained largely unnoticed. However, two years later, an activist's discovery brought their meeting to the forefront, framing it as a significant Palestinian-Korean encounter.

Centrifugal dynamics between two movements

The encounter in the U.S. at 21C, which was considered inconsequential, was brought to light two years later in 2017 through a newspaper article in South Korea written by PPS member Yaping Dyung. This article begins with an introduction to Kim's meeting with Odeh and then goes on to tell the story of Rasmia Odeh's life, raising awareness of the U.S. censorship of Palestinian liberation activists.

Reporting on Odeh in South Korea has continued. In 2019, PPS members produced a podcast about Odeh's court struggle and recent life. In this podcast, another member, Jemma, and I introduced Ode's life and her struggle against Israel and the U.S. Speaking about Ode and Kim's encounter, Yaping Dyung, a member of PPS who wrote an article in 2017, expressed how her feelings about Ode had changed since she realized that the two activists had met.[7]

> Yaping Dyung: The meeting between Kim and Ode felt particularly significant to me compared to the past. Personally, Ode's article appeared abstract. Even though I do

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6   The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan (2015)
7   Palestine Peace Solidarity (2019)

not know much about Kim Bok-dong, when I heard that Kim went in person and talked to her, it transformed into a specific historical account of a particular struggle for me.

After learning that Odeh had met a feminist activist from South Korea, Yaping Dyung mentioned that she began to think more deeply and concretely about women's activism, an understanding that eluded her while she had been solely reading about it in online newspaper articles. Here, Dyung Yaping's affinity for Kim Bok Dong is not due strictly to their shared nationality but rather to the accumulation of memories of Kim Bok Dong and the symbolism of her persona. Kim Bok-dong publicly came out in 1992 and testified at the First Asian Solidarity Conference and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. After a brief hiatus, she resumed her activism in 2010 when she began living at the civil society-run "Peace House" and received medical support. Kim Bok-dong's life has been depicted in the films *A Low Voice 2* and *Kim Bok-dong*, as well as in interviews and various documentaries on the "comfort women" issue.[8] Here, Kim Bok-dong confronts her past, vocalizes violence against women, and works for future generations. In particular, being on the frontlines whenever the "comfort women" issue was discussed diplomatically between Japan and South Korea, she was a witness to violence against women and a senior feminist activist for civil society movements in South Korea. Given this characterization of Kim Bok-dong, it would be more appropriate to understand Dyung Ya-ping's response as that of a colleague in the same movement rather than a simple nationalistic one.

The last meeting episode between the two victim-survivors resonated with activists, prompting them to consider ways to broaden their social activism. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2020, PPS organized a demonstration in front of the Japanese Embassy to demand redress for the "comfort women" issue. This helped strengthen the solidarity between the two movement groups. PPS members delivered a speech at the event concerning the "comfort women" issue, and the Korean Council became a member of the Task Force Allied with Palestine, which was formed after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood when Israel bombed Gaza, leading the genocide. The Korean Council also participated in one-person protests before the Israeli Embassy and organized spaces for Palestinian solidarity to speak out at large rallies and other events. As the interactions between the two groups grew, the 2015 encounter was repeatedly cited as a pivotal moment in their standard memory, serving as a reminder of their shared feminist solidarity in Asia. For example, during the 1467th Wednesday demonstration, a PPS member advocated for interconnectedness, citing the encounter between Kim and Odeh. This is a part of the speech:

"It is incredible to see how Palestinian women and victims of Japanese military sexual slavery have shown solidarity based on their shared experiences of victimization under the occupation, colonialism, and patriarchy. In 1993, Palestinian women's liberation activists were present when Kim Bok-dong raised the issue of wartime violence against women at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. In 2017,

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8   전쟁과여성인권아카이브 (2023)

Kim Bok-dong had an incredible opportunity to meet with the Palestinian liberation activist and sexual torture victim Rasmia Odeh. She delivered the Butterfly Fund in person, and the encounter was truly special. We recognized that the oppressions surrounding each other were connected, and their problems became 'our' problems. We are passionate about opposing sexism, sexual exploitation, racism, imperialism, colonialism and militarism. We call on the Japanese government to sincerely apologize for the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery, make reparations, and work to prevent its recurrence. We believe that the problems of the present can be solved by confronting past injustices."

This intended recollection can be paralleled by understanding women's experiences through Catherine Malabou's concept of plasticity. Citing Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* Malabou explains that Grammatology functions as a science or logos, and the contradictions and limitations it imposes make it possible to rewrite what has already been written. In other words, what was previously defined as essential through alternative historical writing is newly meaningful. By reconstructing the harms she experienced as a philosopher, Malabou pointed out how women are constructed and how they can be transcended. This process of rewriting presents a more concrete picture of wartime violence against women than that discussed in Vienna in the early 1990s: one that moves beyond the European discourse on women's rights, where the question of colonialism was not addressed, and racial differences were quickly dismissed. It enters a space of solidarity where commonalities based on differences are understood and built upon. Kim's encounter with Rasmia Odeh resonated with PPS members, who subsequently cited—rewriting the past—the activists' encounter on several occasions, drawing out the possibilities for solidarity in the specific spaces of East and West Asia by recollecting their solidarity and rewriting their history.

Meanwhile, the Korean Council signed an agreement with the ADI, an organization that has long been concerned with the issue of Palestine and conducts alternative tours to protect and support survivors of gender-based violence in conflict zones in Asia. Together, they established the Palestinian Women's Trauma Healing Center in Palestine, Nablus, and the West Bank. The center aims to "provide human rights protection programs and establish a safety net for Palestinian women suffering from physical and gender-based violence due to the Israeli occupation." [9]

Specifically, the center will offer trauma healing programs to survivors of gender-based violence, legal counseling, legal support, and emergency financial assistance to victims. While the Butterfly Fund has traditionally focused on supporting victims of rape in war, in Palestine, the organization decided to help women even if they did not directly report being raped, considering the occupation and its violent social structure. These activities can also be seen as an attempt to understand and address wartime violence against women as a structural issue rather than solely focusing on the isolated instance of rape.

This section examines how the two international movements came together in Korean

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9   정혜민 (2021)

society in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, Palestinian and Korean women met under the umbrella of universal women's rights, but the specificity of women's situations in each country went relatively unnoticed because the meeting aimed to understand the universal. Thus, it did not lead to a shared understanding of each other's positionality or problems. However, in 2015, the meeting of two women who had experienced colonization and were under attack by anti-movement forces such as Japan and the United States became an inspiration for activists, leading to the expansion of their activities. Since then, the two areas have interacted through financial support, participation in rallies, etc.

From the language of victimization to the language of involvement

In this section, I will disclose how these two feminist groups considered their positionality, which made their movements centrifugal. Setsu Shigematsu, who has written about the *ūman rib*s—the feminist movement in 1970s Japan—described the movement of Japanese feminists as both centripetal and centrifugal. While centripetal movements are directed towards creating local community networks and spaces, centrifugal movements are about standing in solidarity with women in different positions.

In addition to critically engaging with second-wave feminism, the Ribu movement was influenced by the Japanese anti-war movement and security struggles of the 1960s and the early 1970s. This resulted in a leftist perception and critical stance towards imperialism and militarism. As a country that had previously committed war crimes, the call for anti-war and peace awareness has highlighted internal contradictions.[10] Additionally, they demonstrated solidarity with women from all social strata, particularly those subjected to oppression. For instance, their efforts to support women who had killed their children, known as *kogoroshi onna*, were predicated on an appreciation of women's contradictory positions and an attempt to comprehend their violence as a manifestation of structural violence.

Although Shigematsu does not explicitly connect the discussion of Japanese women's war responsibility to the perception that women can also be perpetrators, particularly concerning *kogoroshi*, this perception may have helped other women understand the contradictions they faced. Rather than morally judging them, they sought to understand the social structures surrounding them.[11] In other words, they began by considering their positions, which led them to think about others. Rather than viewing the other as an object to be pitied or easily objectified, they considered it a potential ally.

In this section, I discuss how the solidarity between the "comfort women" issue movement and other Korean feminists demonstrates an awareness of complicity. This is what we might call the feminist tradition of making sense of the experiences of women of color, who have been invisible in traditional Western feminist discussions, and making the private public.

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10 Shigematsu (2012, 46–48)
11 Ibid. 67.

The Japanese military sexual slavery issue movement not only calls for Japan's responsibility but also for the recognition and remembrance of the duty and responsibility of the countries whose citizens were victimized. While the issue refers to the exploitative system in which women were sexually weaponized by the Japanese empire, it is essential to acknowledge that the Japanese were not the only ones to negatively impact victim-survivors.

In South Korea, discussions about the lives of women during the colonial era emerged only after the war. Rather than aiming to redress the victims, these discussions were often motivated by concerns over national honor or the desire to preserve the authority of patriarchal structures. Women's experiences were graphically portrayed in the media, but they could not voice their own stories, and responsibility for being mobilized to the 'comfort stations' was still placed on the women themselves.

However, in the late 1990s, feminist activists formed the Korean Council. In 1991, Kim Hak-soon officially testified for the first time, demanding an official apology and reparations from the government. This has led to the recognition of gendered issues as social problems. Korean society could not be absolved from its responsibility for the issue, and the movement began to critique the patriarchy and androcentrism that silenced women. This was also an effort to recognize the political responsibility of Korean society for blaming and silencing women, which made it difficult for the Japanese military sexual slavery issue to come to the surface. The Palestinian solidarity movement in South Korea sought to hold South Korean society accountable. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2004, Korean society developed an interest in international solidarity movements. Amid various peace movements, Palestine Peace Solidarity (PPS) was established. The PPS organized activities, including visits to Palestinian sites, to inform the Korean society about Palestinian issues. Concurrently, the organization aimed to mobilize solidarity by exposing how Korean society is involved in and contributes to Israeli occupation.

For instance, a report titled *Israel-South Korea Relations: Republic of Korea's complicity in Israel's occupation, colonialism, and apartheid,* published by PPS in 2012, is a significant document. It provides a comprehensive overview of relations between Israel and South Korea, detailing military ties, economic relations, academic connections, and South Korean religious tourism in Israel. The report presents the current state of affairs and identifies the factors behind these ties. These include a pending free trade agreement between the two countries, increased dialogue regarding improving academic cooperation, and an augmented South Korean military budget with a desire to diversify weapons suppliers outside the U.S.[12]

> Israel's ties with South Korea are on the rise, with Israel expressing a strong desire to sign a free trade agreement with South Korea the following year. Ma Young-sam, former Korean ambassador to Israel, estimates that trade and investment will increase by 20 to 30 percent due to the FTA. However, concerns have been raised that this closer relationship with Israel could lead South Korea to violate its own values and become complicit in Israel's occupation, colonization, and human rights violations in

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12 Palestine Peace Solidarity (n.d.).

Palestine.

In discussing the responsibilities of South Korean society, the PPS recognizes that members of the Korean community are complicit in the occupation of Palestine. To break this chain of complicity, the BDS movement must terminate agreements, contracts, and relationships that perpetuate Israeli occupation.

Identifying oneself as an agent of responsibility provides an understanding of one's multiple complicities. The agency that comes from discovering one's position on an issue, which one had approached benevolently before recognizing one's responsibility, creates a space to imagine that the 'I' is also complicit in other matters and can take political responsibility for them. This imagination of solidarity makes sense of the connections between topics and reframes the activists engaged in multifaceted and complex problems.

Conclusion

On May 24, 2024, South Korean feminists held a declaration in front of the Israeli Embassy in South Korea, calling for an end to the genocide and colonization of Palestine. In response, the Korean police forcibly removed feminists from the area as they conducted press conferences, violating the freedom of expression guaranteed by South Korea's constitution. Despite governmental pressure, feminists advocating for women's and queer rights, climate justice, and animal rights have united to highlight the connection between the oppression of women in Korea and Palestine. Although the declaration was lengthy, I would like to quote some.

> We oppose imperialism, militarism, and colonialism and demand an immediate end to the Korean government and the capital's complicity with Israel. The South Korean government has expanded its arms trade with Israel since the 1990s. Among the capitalists, HD Hyundai Construction Equipment, which supplies excavators that destroy Palestinian lives, and Hanwha, which collaborates in the manufacture of munitions, whitewashed their image while exploiting workers in South Korea. Workers who stand up against this also shout for freedom from Palestine. Their voice is also our own voice.
> A person born on one side of the world is deprived of human dignity, human life, and even death simply because they are Palestinian. This means that no one on Earth is free from such oppression and genocide. The Palestinian cry is the cry of humanity. It is the cry of women and LGBT people. It is the crying of all workers and the crying of all people. In Korea, let us respond to the cries of Palestinian women, workers, and people.

Stand in solidarity with Palestine as feminists.

> Feminists are connected to those who struggle under the oppression and exploitation of unjust power. Unity alone can end this devastation. No one is free from the reality of colonialist genocide, the culmination of "dehumanization" and othering—the idea

that one human being can rule over another. Women's liberation is not possible without liberation from Palestine.

We stand in solidarity with Palestinian feminists. For 76 years, the Palestinian people resisted in their own land and under harsh conditions. Before the massacre, Palestinian feminists had been organizing against Israeli imperialism, patriarchy, and all forms of violence in the Palestinian lands. When the massacre ends, we want to share the joy of liberation with the surviving Palestinian feminists.

With the urgency of not losing a sister, Korean feminists pledge to join Palestinian struggles. Only our resistance has the power to stop the massacre and occupation. As human dignity is being stripped away in real time, feminists will shout to stop the genocide: No Palestinian liberation, no women's liberation![13]

As the above statement suggests, they are not merely expressing sympathy; they are aware of their positionality and connections, fixed in some ways but can be in others. Is this not a way of redefining women through plasticity? I also participated in a press conference as a declarer and gave a presentation on what Korean feminists should do to stand in solidarity with Palestine. While writing this position paper, I was most concerned with how women from West and East Asia can meet and stand in solidarity in a non-violent way and our responsibilities in this regard.

As stated above, it is essential to understand the violence that constitutes women's experiences and to recognize their resistance. Otherwise, we risk representing women as victims of violence only. The statement calls for a discussion that understands the imbalance of narratives between colonizers and the colonized rather than relying on the binary constructs of violence vs. non-violence or war vs. peace, which erase context when describing violence and oppression.

However, as with the previous statement, this article only highlights the potential for solidarity between Palestinians and Korean women. The connection between the two should be studied more deeply. New languages should be developed based on concrete experiences and examples. In particular, the third point I mentioned in my speech, which considers the plasticity of women without introducing it as binary, needs to be discussed in the future.

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6

Pollution as Trans-Imperial Colonialism

Mothers of Nguter Sukoharjo caring for Bengawan Solo River

Dewi Candraningrum

Introduction

Human civilization has reached a stage where regular activity has destroyed the ecological basis of its life on Earth. In 1973, legal expert Richard Falk acknowledged that humans were beginning to realize the magnitude of the damage caused by their activities. The use of destructive weapons during wars and the impact of extractive industries such as mining, fossil fuel extraction, agriculture, monoculture plantations, forest encroachment, etc., have gradually destroyed the planet, threatening the well-being of humanity and other species. Falk's question is still relevant this year and in the future. Almost every second, hour, and day, there are new reports or new evidence of significant environmental damage occurring worldwide, simultaneously affecting the livelihoods of millions of people and species. One of the newest ecological problems is climate disasters' devastating social and environmental impact. The clearing of large areas of tropical forest for the development of monoculture plantations, industry, intensive agriculture, mining, etc., has caused air, water & soil pollution, soil erosion, destruction of habitat for endangered species, and increased social conflicts between local communities and indigenous peoples whose livelihoods depend on forests.

Discourses and debates around climate disasters prioritize the need for short-term solutions from technology and the political economy sector and then marginalize organic knowledge about environmental health, body health & human reproductive health, habitat & species, and subsistence livelihoods, which are mainly carried out by marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, sexual and gender minority groups, disabilities people, elderly & young people. The scale of environmental destruction around the world is occurring at a faster rate than previously thought. The political economy treatment of this planet is limited to mere commodities to extract unlimited exponential economic growth. The context of conflict has led to increasing levels of violations of human rights and the environment. In the context of no conflict, the destruction of nature has also sown new seeds of conflict caused by climate change, such as climate migration, competition for resources, etc. This process of repeating damage on a massive scale destroys the biodiversity of planet Earth, which is then often referred to as ecocide.

The term ecocide has no formal legal definition, but researchers have found increasing efforts by academics to define the term precisely. Richard Falk, Mark Allan Gray, and Polly Higgins have championed the concept of ecocides. Eco' comes from the ancient Greek 'oikos,' which means home. 'Cide' comes from the Latin verb 'caedere,' which means 'to kill' or 'to cut/destroy' (Dogbevi, 2016). Therefore, the literal translation of ecocide is: 'killing our homes' (i.e., 'destroying the natural environment') (Merz et al., 2014). Why should ecocides be tackled at the international level? There are several reasons, the most apparent being that environmental issues cannot be confined to regional boundaries. Today, what happens in one country can have a very good or terrible impact on the welfare of other countries. An example is the river pollution incident in China in 2005, where a petrochemical factory explosion in China caused a large spill of cancer-causing chemicals in the Songhua River, which eventually spread to Russia. This case exemplifies the increasing transnational impact of environmental degradation, which makes calls for international cooperation and intervention critical and urgently needed.

Despite the severity of the consequences of ecocides, the currently integrated protections provided by the international legal framework for human rights and the environment are too weak to prevent, stop, and repair the planet due to ecocides. Therefore, establishing ecocide as an international crime is a necessary way to increase this protection. Elevating ecocide's gravity to the status of an international crime would act as a powerful deterrent, pressuring state and non-state actors to carefully examine possible impacts on the environment and human rights. The world does not have to wait for another major environmental disaster with devastating effects on humanity to realize the need to define ecocide as a new international crime. A feasible way to do this is to introduce ecocides under the jurisdiction of the ICC; this will ensure an end to impunity for those who commit ecocides and provide more protection for the environment, planet, water & air, biodiversity, ecosystems, diverse species, and humanity.

Global Conflict in the Body of Water

The shrinking of the longest river in the world, the Mississippi River in America, and several rivers in Europe is news from water ecocides. Water scarcity affects around 700 million people in 43 countries worldwide (UN World Water Development Report 4). Historically, the variability of water supply, high population density, economic dependence on agriculture, and prolonged periods of vulnerability to water shortages have been key factors in climate-induced migration of people. This migration is carried out by humans and various other species whose lives depend on water. This can lead to temporary and permanent displacement, depending on the duration and severity of the population's stress & water supply and consumption capacity. Climate change is also causing the multiplier effect of water scarcity, and it can exacerbate water scarcity caused by exploitation and undermanagement of water and related ecosystem services. Given the uncertain impact of climate change and socio-economic trends on water infrastructure, there is a risk that in deciding the allocation of resources, some interest groups are favored over others, which could lead to conflicts between water users.

Water management across sectors and even countries is related to the issue of very competitive access to resource management. Water is needed to grow the food sources of humans and other species and is widely used to generate electricity. Even in many water infrastructures, many species of fish and amphibians in many freshwater rivers and lakes are being defeated and killed for the energy and economic benefit of the human species. Water often catalyzes local, national, and international tensions because the peaceful governance of transboundary waters is essential for the integrity of nature, human and species welfare, community economic development, and peaceful relations between countries.

The cumulative impact of climate change has strengthened evidence suggesting a positive relationship between temperature extremes, climate change, and conflict. Over 20 percent of the risk of conflict during the 20th century is climate-related. A better understanding of the relationship is needed. One of the main concerns is the water problem. As the flow rates of the world's rivers begin to wane, diversion or increased mismanaged water withdrawal can become a dangerous source of transboundary tension and fuel further conflict. In addition to reduced water reserves, melting glaciers in many of the world's mountains (such as the Alps, Himalayas, etc.) have been catastrophic, such as submerging more than 30% of Pakistan in mid-2022. This problem is exacerbated by the poor management of water resources, including irrigation infrastructure, which is under threat due to toxins and effluents from many factories, inadequate management of irrigation, and over-exploitation of groundwater. Meanwhile, on Java Island, Indonesia has large rivers that have become victims of the textile industry, consuming the Citarum River, Bengawan Solo, Brantas River, and others.

In the case of flood risk management, flood control infrastructure such as dikes and dams often destroy aquatic habitats by altering the natural flow of rivers and cutting riverbanks that protect against flooding. Conserving riverbanks and connecting them to rivers can benefit flood management while conserving ecosystem values and functions. Policy options for increasing outcomes for peace and nature through better water management include: 1) Developing and implementing nature-based solutions for flood risk management, such as sustainably managed forests, wetlands, and floodplains; and 2) Ensuring that infrastructure is built & designed with comprehensive environmental standards because built and natural infrastructure is necessary for efficient and effective management of water resources.

Trans-Imperial Ecological Debt

As the latest lifestyle, fast fashion produces clothing and sells it on the mass market at low cost due to its high demand from the demographic explosion of the planet's population at a high price of ecological damage. Shopping for clothes was once considered such a chore that people used to save up to buy dresses for specific occasions or only during certain times of the year. But this changed in the late 1990s, and shopping became entertainment, and money spent on clothing increased dramatically. Fashion is fast evolving, and in social media, TV, and movie commercials, people have to buy trendy clothes at low cost, which allows them access to the same clothes as their favorite famous personalities, like movie stars, singers, or celebrities. The world today is starving because of fast fashion consumption. To meet demand, fashion brands overstock their products to satisfy customers. "The global population

has doubled since 1970, but the growth in fashion has outpaced this growth by several folds. With the annual consumption of around 80 billion pieces of new clothing worldwide, there has been a 400 percent increase since 2000. The effects of this insatiable appetite for fashion are extremely impacting people and the environment," reports Healthy Human. The impact of fast fashion intersects not only with gender but also with ecology, with environmental destruction and destructive exponential economic growth, as well as encouraging extreme consumerism. Producing clothes requires a lot of energy and resources, and these toxic remnants of fabric dyes contribute to environmental damage and the chemicals pollute the bodies of fresh water, especially the bodies of the planet's rivers.

According to Levi Strauss & Co., the production of jeans emits the same amount of carbon as driving a car 80 miles (128 km). Fashion and mass production are having a more drastic impact on the pollution of freshwater supplies. A pair of jeans requires 2,000 gallons of water, and textile waste and dyes comprise 20 percent of global wastewater. This wastewater is discharged directly into the river's body, thereby increasing the risk of environmental pollution for aquatic animals and other living organisms. Fast fashion creates an unsafe space for the human species, especially women and other minority groups. It forces them to enter a cycle of exposure to harmful pollution and insecurity, such as psychiatric problems in addition to heavy pollution that can damage their reproductive health system, namely body image, creating incentives for the consumption of trendy clothes to fit the narrative created for them by society, and this is detrimental to mental health. It promotes a highly reductive, narrow, and preposterous ideal of a body type, which teaches children, adolescents, and women that they are not worth much unless they dress and behave exactly as advertisers expect. A woman must care for her appearance, what she wears, and body movements, apart from being constantly judged and objectified.

Fast fashion is also a gender issue because most employees in the fashion industry are women, who make up 80 percent of the 75 million people who currently make clothes. After all, fashion and clothing production moves quickly to turn a profit and drive sales but forget essential issues such as pay, gender equity in leadership, and violence & harassment in the work environment, among others. The fashion industry is quick to ignore discrimination and unequal opportunities, and children, youth, and women are vulnerable to being exploited either as garment workers in textile factories, fashion models, or fashion consumers.

Women workers in the garment/textile and fashion industries are paid very little, and sometimes, they do not earn enough to meet their basic subsistence needs. They do not receive much time off and are often even forced to sign contracts stating that they will not get pregnant during their employment. Working conditions were usually very unpleasant, and female employees complained or reported experiencing sexual harassment at work. There is no minimum protective or preventive action level in the garment industry, such as a standard industry-wide sexual harassment policy or acknowledgment and action against sexual harassment from senior management. As a result, women workers reported that they had few means to protect themselves or to receive appropriate support from factory management and duty-bearers in the community. The fashion industry causes great harm not only to female workers but also to the planet's environment via its pollutants. One way to break the trap of

fast fashion is to start a conversation about sustainability and gender equality. Fashion can also be sustainable. This paradigm shift will occur when fashion brands change their view of the industry and its pollutants, become transparent, and practice treating all employees equally. The potential for this change exists by opting out of brands that harm the environment and their workers. Slow and sustainable mode is one of the future choices for the health of the human species, biodiversity, and the planet.

Caring for Eco-feminist Solidarity

In The Fifth Sacred Thing, Starhawk highlights how technology is a problem for humans in the 'North' hemisphere. This book discusses how technological developments bring benefits to some people but at the same time cause natural disasters to others. Given these facts, eco-feminist theory negotiates this and revives socialist attention to appropriate kinds of industrialization and is more sympathetic to the resilience of nature. Various studies have discussed industrialization through the lens of ecofeminism. Annabel Rodda (1991) states that natural damage is caused by human industrialization-related activities. Rodda further emphasized that unsustainable natural resource exploitation and unhealthy agricultural practices have resulted in the degradation of the natural environment. In addition, Maria Mies, in her book Ecofeminism, states that "technology... cannot be said to be neutral; nor is it free from sexist, racist, and ultimately fascist, biases in our society. These biases are built into the technologies themselves; they are not just a matter of application" (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 195). Mies, therefore, does not believe in the neutrality of technology, and she denounces technology for its inherent features and consequences, including sexism and racism. Ariel Salleh (1997), in her book Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern, also emphasized the importance of sustainable development in maintaining a balance between humans and nature. And she fears the term is being misused by supporters of economic globalization. Similarly, Jennifer Micale (2002), in Strange New Worlds: Ecofeminism and Science Fiction, examines some science fiction, including The Fifth Sacred Thing, and focuses on how eco-feminist science fiction can help imagine and create communities in which we can truly live.

Here, it is essential to refer to Maria Mies' attitude towards technological developments. Mies (Mies & Shiva, 1993) describes technology as having four roles. The first aspect shows that the development of technology in a capitalist patriarchal society is not meant to make people happy but to enable the continuous accumulation of profits. Second, as a historical fact, technological innovation has resulted in exploitation and social inequality. It has been proven that industrialization and technological development lead to the exploitation of the marginalized classes in human beings. The third aspect focuses on biotechnology designed to manipulate and adjust women's ability to reproduce, thus reducing their human dignity. Finally, the fourth aspect that Mies put forward is that the advantages and disadvantages of a technology depend on its application, its accessibility for everyone, and its impact on social relations. However, as Mies argues, feminists point out that societal domination is a central element of technology (pp. 174–175). In another study, Mies (1985) reiterated that genetic or reproductive technology must be harshly criticized to prevent further damage to humans and nature. Mies (1986) also argues that the economic exploitation of nature, sexism, racism, fas-

cism, and the subordination of the poor lie at the heart of new productive technologies.

Environmental degradation is one of the key themes presented by Starhawk. Through reading the novel The Fifth Sacred Thing, it is narrated that water pollution and air pollution are evidence of environmental damage. In the South, human rulers cleared forests to use wood for industry and replaced open land with new buildings. In addition, nuclear power is used as a significant source of energy, and many advanced and modern firearms are produced in the South for national security. As a result of industrialization and nuclear waste, landscapes and seawater have been poisoned, polluted, and rendered unusable. In addition, air pollution has caused sufficient damage to the ozone layer to make flights nearly impossible (Starhawk, 1993, p. 17).

On the other hand, the government owns the water supply, which everyone cannot use. Scarce water supplies were rationed, and only the rich could afford more. Given such a scenario, we must accept Mies' claims about technology. It cannot be ignored that in the South, as Starhawk characterizes it, industrialization and technology have been exploited by the ruling class to help them stay in power. The destruction of the natural environment and the marginalization of many vulnerable groups, including women, the poor, and people of color, are intertwined.

The new notion of materialism embodied in ecofeminism shifts attention from material means of production to practical, life-oriented solutions to environmental and social problems. The crisis created because of the unsustainable growth of patriarchal capitalism and its technology cannot be resolved and compensated for in kind. Mary Mellor, echoing Bookchin, argues that a good society is ecological; it does not go beyond natural conditions or environmental limits, and people do not take more than they need (Bookchin, 1980; Mellor, 1997). Environmental resources will survive and regenerate only when respect for nature appears in human society. Starhawk believes that technological developments can still exist within a framework of sustainability. Starhawk and Plumwood tend to think that ethics and spiritual understanding are sufficient tools for change, while Mies and Salleh challenge the global economic system.

On the other hand, eco-feminists also fight for the equality of all human beings regardless of their gender, race, and socio-economic class position. As the title of The Fifth Sacred Thing implies, when everyone respects the four sacred things, including Earth, air, water, and fire, they can attain the fifth sacred thing, spirit. By respecting each other and the natural environment, people can experience freedom, livelihoods, and sustenance for all the planet's species. Most eco-feminists agree to negotiate for a better understanding of natural domination through the means of production. And they do this to highlight technology's too often unanticipated effects and the social injustices it can cause. As Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva put it: "In a natural economy, the currency is not money, but life" (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 270).

Decolonizing Method: Reading Pollutants from Women's Eyes

On Wednesday, 26 April 2023, Mbok Sarmi sent a message on WhatsApp that she would

go to the Sukoharjo District Court to be able to attend briefly and then continue to PKU Hospital in Wonogiri near her home in Nguter. Her daughter was treated at PKU Hospital because she had a headache and fainted in the morning. According to Mbok Sarmi, air pollution from the rayon fiber factory in front of her house had made them both sick three days earlier. Meanwhile, Mbok Sarmi also experienced severe migraines almost every day. Since 2018, both have been in and out of the hospital because they experience vertigo, nausea, dizziness, and vomiting. Why didn't Mbok Sarmi move out from her place if, since 2017, she smelled H_2S from viscose factory waste that was not treated properly before being discharged into the air and the liquid waste was dumped into the Gupit River then flowed into Bengawan Solo, and then some of the other contaminants leaked onto the ground? Thus, I asked several questions while she was showing some of the drugs that she had to take frequently now since the pollution occurred: Ranitidine Hcl 150 mg, Aspilets Acetylsalicylic 80 mg, and Gestrucid suspension 60 ml.

> "I will not move from here. This is my place. This is an inheritance from my ancestors. I will defend myself, my children, my family, and this land and ancestral home. I like living here, although my children and I are getting sick now. I am not strong; it hurts my head and chest when I smell it. But my ancestral land calls me to defend our territory here." (explained by Mbok Sarmi on 12 April 2023 during the interview)

On 11/08/2020, several media reported that the factory was again emitting the smell of H_2S waste, which had an impact on three villages which were located adjacent to the factory and several areas in the Nguter area, Sukoharjo (Ekonomi.Bisnis.com). In December 2019, Mbok Sarmi and other affected residents asked PT RUM to immediately realize its promise to provide H_2SO_4 recovery or stop production again so that the smell of the waste no longer endangers the lives of many species, the habitats, and the ecological environment of the residents of Nguter District.

Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) is a colorless, highly toxic, flammable gas with a characteristic like rotten egg odor. H_2S is absorbed more rapidly through inhalation/inhalation than through oral exposure (ATSDR, 2000). This gas is corrosive to metals and discolors many materials. H_2S can be found in the lower layers of the air, such as wells or sewers. Usually, H_2S is found in other toxic gases such as methane (CH_4) and carbon dioxide (CO_2) (Slamet, 2002). H_2S can cause adverse effects on human health, especially if exposed to the air. The lungs can quickly absorb this H_2S gas.

Meanwhile, the respiratory system of humans and various animal species is the most sensitive organ when exposed to H_2S (US EPA, 2003). H_2S gas with a konasphyxiant has a paralyzing effect on the respiratory center, so death caused by respiratory arrest can occur if the accumulation of inhalation of this poison occurs continuously. Hydrogen sulfide can cause chronic effects in the form of coughs, respiratory tract infections, and headaches in exposure to H_2S with maximum concentrations of 2.3 $\mu g/m^3$, 24 $\mu g/m^3$, and 152 $\mu g/m^3$ for 24 hours (Parti-Pellinen et al., in Sianipar, 2009). Complaints found in this study while with affected residents included coughing, shortness of breath, migraines/headaches, and itchy throat. Chemists call this the silent killer.

"If I am vomiting again (when the smell is released by the factory), I take paracetamol almost every day because I'm sure my head will immediately get dizzy. Apart from taking paracetamol daily to relieve headaches, I also drink coconut water because it can help eliminate toxins in the body. So, if smelly waste attacks us, we consume paracetamol and coconut water daily". (interview with Mbok Sarmi on 10 April 2023)

For six years, Mbok Sarmi and other residents had to experience double pollution. Not only water pollution but also the main problem of air pollution in the form of odors experienced by the community around the factory since 2017, as explained by resident Pak Sutomo (Pak Tomo). This waste affects the health of residents and children who experience acute respiratory infections (ARI). Etik Oktavia and Nico Wauran from LBH Semarang, who assisted residents, explained that PT. RUM was founded in 2012 to supply rayon fiber to PT. Sri Rejeki Isman, Tbk (PT. Sritex). Sritex is a textile company operating since 1966 to produce military uniforms for the TNI and soldiers in 30 countries, including the United States, Israel, and other countries that are members of NATO. Sritex also produces fashion products for well-known brands such as Zara, Disney, GAP, and H&M. PT. RUM was established to supply raw materials for Sritex viscose rayon fiber. Meanwhile, the raw material comes from a 100-thousand-hectare industrial rayon fiber plantation concession in Kalimantan, as reported by the company (Bergelora.com). Currently, 56% of Sritex shares are owned by PT Huddleston Indonesia, and in mid-2017, Sritex made a profit of half a trillion rupiah in just 6 months in this business.

In March 2018, Bergelora.com, apart from reporting these benefits, also explained that at least 28 residents had ARI, 72 mild ARI, and 152 other residents were recorded to have experienced dizziness and nausea because of inhaling the smell of PT. RUM. It was also reported that a 10-month-old baby who had a heart defect had died because it was exacerbated by the odor contamination that the baby had to breathe every day. Since October 2017, residents of Sukoharjo have been forced to inhale the polluted odor that flows 4 km along the Gupit River to the polluted Bengawan Solo, which has resulted in increasingly severe damage to the river's ecosystem. Many fish, amphibians, crustaceans, and other species were found dead and now missing from the Gupit River. The Gupit River is becoming a dead zone at present. Since then, it has been reported that the residents' wells have been polluted, making it difficult for them to get clean water. Complaints about this pollution are increasing again, with the contamination of not only the Gupit River but also the Tawangkrajan River, which is also a tributary (sapling in the system) of the Bengawan Solo River, as reported by Pak Tomo below.

"The Gupit River has started to return to normal, only the pipeline has not been installed properly. Instead, the Tawangkrajan River has turned black in color because of water coming from behind PT Rum's fence. Truly unjust…'"
(interview on 13 April, 2022)
"When the leaking waste was dumped in the Gupit River and continued through a 4 km long pipe to Bengawan Solo, many residents harvested dead fish. Lots of floating fish. It turned out that the fish were poisoned by PT RUM's waste. We were shocked in several villages because we saw these fish die. It's on YouTube. The residents had already videoed it at that time. Here are the links!"

https://youtu.be/h3TseMi3M9c
https://sukoharjo.sorot.co/berita-2064-diduga-tercemar-air-limbah-ratusan-ikan-di-sungai-gupit-mati.html
https://youtube.com/shorts/10JgIvgTTxE?feature=share
(interview with Mbok Sarmi 14 May 2023)

Meanwhile, Nico Wauran, a companion for affected residents from LBH Semarang, narrated at the evening event socializing Class Action process updates and strengthening residents on 5 June 2023 that PT RUM does not actually have a permit to install pipes, let alone dispose of waste in the Bengawan Solo river and its tributary rivers such as the Gupit river, Tawangkrajan river, and other small rivers, and ditches around the factory. If COVID-19 is the "direct killer," Mbok Sarmi, a woman whose house is right behind the factory and organizing residents for protests, calls this waste and air pollution a "silent killer."

"I have experienced how the waste and air pollution from this factory has a direct impact on my child and my family; at least five to seven times each year, we have to stay in the hospital alternately because of illness. Considering that I am old, and the children are at school, who need clean air, all of this makes me really scared." (Interview with Mbok Sarmi on 1 June 2023)

Ecocide in the river body: Nonylphenol (NP), Nonylphenol Ethoxylates (NPEs), Tributyl Phosphate (TBP), Pb, Hg, Cd, Cr, As, Sb, Ti, U, …

Along the Bacem Sukoharjo bridge, there are bottles, cans, and bits of plastic, or anything that can't be recycled that can be thrown away, probably by anyone. Broken Styrofoam coolers, broken plastic children's toys, clothes, food containers, deflated soccer balls, and even car batteries and metal, supported by bits of plastic beneath, drifted with the tide. Piles of human waste travel across two provinces on Java Island and along the banks of the Bengawan Solo River. If the water content is checked, it will also contain harmful pollutants and heavy metals from runoff and waste, especially the large textile industry in Solo and other household industries. In the water flows, not only household waste, agricultural pesticide runoff, and chemicals are dumped into the river by the factories that line its banks. This is the case with the Citarum and Brantas rivers, which are routinely referred to in a lot of research and media as the most polluted rivers in the world. The ancients told of healthy rivers full of fish until the late 1970s when Indonesia's manufacturing sector—primarily driven by textile producers and other companies from the First World fleeing rising labor costs and environmental regulations in the "West"—began growing and dumping their waste into the bodies of rivers in Indonesia. With the pollutant boom came a flood of factory workers, which quickly flooded the city's sewage system and further overloaded the river.

Today, Indonesia is among the world's top 10 textile and apparel-producing countries, with exports of over $12.7 billion, including $3.96 billion to the United States in 2014, according to World Integrated Trade Solution, a World Bank trade database. According to Indonesia Investments, an investor news service covering the economy, three million people work in the garment and textile industries. For residents around significant rivers in the cities

of the island of Java, both in the provinces of West Java, Central Java, and East Java, this economic growth has come at a cost with the collapse of the ecosystems of the Citarum River, Bengawan Solo, Brantas River, and their tributary rivers from upstream to downstream and damage to rice fields polluted by pollutants & heavy metals from textile industry waste. In December 2015, two local community organizations, Pawapeling and WALHI (Indonesian Forum for the Environment), with support from Greenpeace Southeast Asia Indonesia, sued the Sumedang district government and three factories for allowing them to dispose of water into the Cikijing River, a tributary of the Citarum. The plaintiffs argued that the government did not monitor factory discharges and failed to conduct environmental impact studies before issuing wastewater permits.

Greenpeace and the Padjadjaran University Ecology Institute also released a report in April 2016, one month before the court ruling, in which they reported that industrial wastewater used for irrigation had contaminated 2,300 hectares of paddy fields with heavy metals, and caused an estimated $866 million in economic losses over two decades. The Bandung court concurred with the plaintiff's argument and ordered the Sumedang District Government to "suspend, revoke and cancel" the wastewater disposal permits for PT Kahatex, PT Five Star Textile, and PT Insansandang Internusa, the three named textile factories that polluted the land. "Clearly, they violated the principles of good governance by granting wastewater permits to those companies," plaintiff Agus Rasyid's attorney said of Sumedang Regency's failure to monitor wastewater permits. In October 2016, the Jakarta High Court upheld the lower court's decision. The defendants appealed the decision to Indonesia's Supreme Court in December. "This indicates that there are still judges who still have a conscience," said Anang Sudarna of the West Java Environment Agency. "We all know that if they had to comply with sewage treatment standards," he added, "we would not see the destruction of rivers, rice fields, and fields today."

According to some estimates, around 2,000 industrial and manufacturing facilities are in the Citarum watershed, including at least 200 textile and apparel factories near Bandung. The government has allowed factories to discharge wastewater into rivers for decades, provided the waste does not contain some four-dozen banned industrial chemicals. These textile pollutants flow into the Citarum, which irrigates crops and provides drinking water for more than 25 million people, including residents in the Greater Jakarta area. A 2013 Asian Development Bank report found that most of the water quality parameters of the Upper Citarum River were far outside the permitted limits. Fecal coliform bacteria - likely from manure and sewage - is 5,000 times the mandatory limit in some locations. The municipal and solid waste disposal systems in communities along the Citarum are inadequate and jeopardize the ecosystem's living space.

Greenpeace continues to pressure the fashion industry to stop using hazardous chemicals and source textiles from factories that cause pollution and harmful pollutants, mainly from third-world countries such as Indonesia. A 2013 report by the group Toxic Threads criticized several big fashion names for buying clothes from a company with a factory on the island of Java, which was accused of pumping untreated sewage into the Citarum, Bengawan Solo, and Brantas Rivers. Environmental groups say they found nonylphenol (NP), nonylphenol

ethoxylates (NPEs), which are used as detergents and surfactants, tributyl phosphate (TBP), antimony, which is a metalloid used in the manufacture of polyester, and wastewater with a pH of 14 — sufficient high enough to burn the skin — from the overflow that comes out of the many textile factories near those marvelous rivers. This water ecocide marks a climate disaster that is becoming more serious for the collapse of the planet's ecosystems, which in turn creates conflicts and reduces environmental services even to fulfill basic human needs for a healthy living space. When the body of water gets sick, the human body gets sick, too.

How are you, PT RUM? Death of the Fish, Reptiles, and Amphibians in Kali Gupit River

Bengawan Solo (English Version Song Lyrics)

Bengawan Solo
River of love, behold
Where the palms are swaying low
And lovers get so enthralled
Bengawan Solo
River of love, we know
Where my heart was set aglow
When we loved not long ago

Chorus:
Nightingales softly singing
The guitar is gently playing
Moon and stars brightly shining
Shining for you and I

At that moment, divine
You whispered you were mine
And you vowed we'd never part
Down by the river of love

Chorus:
Nightingales softly singing
The guitar is gently playing
Moon and stars brightly shining
Shining for you and I

At that moment, divine
You whispered you were mine
And you vowed we'd never part
Down by the river of love

Bengawan is the Javanese word for a large river. The largest river in Solo is often referred

to as the Bengawan Solo. The name Bengawan Solo is well-known worldwide today. Gesang Martohartono is a singer and songwriter for "Bengawan Solo," famous in Asia, especially in Indonesia and Japan. "Bengawan Solo" is a song by Gesang that tells about the flow of the Bengawan Solo River. Gesang composed this song in 1940 when Gesang was 23 years old. Besides being well-known in Indonesia, this song is renowned throughout Asia since it was introduced by Japanese soldiers. The intro of this song is quite famous: "Bengawan Solo, riwayatmu kini (how is your history now) …". Many fossils and primitive civilizations were found on the banks of this river. Why are so many fossils found along the Bengawan Solo River? Considering that early humans in their era depended on what was provided by nature, by living around rivers, they would quickly get food to sustain their lives. That is why many ancient human fossils have been found along the Bengawan Solo River. Pithecanthropus Erectus, discovered by Eugene Dubois, is the first human fossil discovered in Indonesia. Pithecanthropus Erectus was found in Trinil, a village on the edge of the Bengawan Solo, in 1890. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), Bengawan means a large river. Another meaning of rivers is swamp. Example: If we also violate it, the land of Majapahit will become a green river.

The Bengawan Solo River is the largest river on the island of Java and drains water from a watershed (DAS) covering an area of ± 16,100 km^2, starting from the Sewu Mountains in the west-south of Surakarta & Yogyakarta, to the Java Sea in the north of Surabaya through a channel that is ± 600 km long. In the upstream section, it has a width of between 20–75 meters and a depth of over 1 meter; in the middle section, it has a channel width of between 75–100 meters with a depth of above 2 meters; and in the downstream, it has a channel width of up to 150 meters which ends in the Java Sea, the north coast of Java. The Bengawan Solo Watershed has a relatively flat topography, and most of it is in lowland areas, which forms a meandering river flow. Until now, the flow of the Bengawan Solo River is still used as a means of transportation, agricultural irrigation, a source of water for the private needs of the community, and fishponds in the upper reaches of the river to the Gajah Mungkur Reservoir in Wonogiri. This river has a length of 548,53 km and crosses two provinces, namely Central Java and East Java. This river has its headwaters on the slopes of Mount Lawu and flows through various big cities such as Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, Solo, Sragen, Ngawi, and Bojonegoro before finally emptying into the Java Sea. There are 12 regencies/cities in Central Java and East Java directly dependent on the river. The 12 regencies/cities are Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Klaten, Solo, Karanganyar, Sragen, Ngawi, Blora, Bojonegoro, Tuban, Lamongan, and Gresik respectively. The condition of Bengawan Solo is quite apprehensive due to many pollutants being dumped into the river's body. Several social and ecological protests have started to appear in the last decade, especially the most visible one, the protest by the people of Sukoharjo regarding the activities of PT RUM, which is part of a large Southeast Asian textile company, PT. Sritex.

According to the Solopos report, PT RUM's waste pollution has been complained of since 2018; based on records from various media, including DetikJateng, PT RUM has received rejection from residents since the trial was carried out in October 2017 because the stench continued to appear when the rayon fiber factory was in production. The residents' refusal was carried out by demonstrating, which was initially attended by 300 residents from the

three villages closest to PT RUM, namely Plesan, Gupit, and Celep Village, Nguter District. But then these protests spread to other sub-districts as air, water, and soil pollution worsened. At that time, the Regent of Sukoharjo, Wardoyo Wijaya, was forced to sign a letter containing the permanent closure of PT RUM but was refused for various reasons. The peak of the residents' anger was on 23 February 2018, when they raided PT RUM, which resulted in the arrest of several demonstrators by the police. However, this pollution problem continued until the following year. Pollution of this waste is not only complained about by the local community regarding the pungent smell but also by farmers around the Gupit Tiller River, Bengawan Solo. The waste also pollutes the two freshwater rivers, which, in fact, are the mainstay sources of water sources for the lives of residents, not just farmers. "The stench is not only felt by one village or sub-district but has reached other districts such as Wonogiri. Where the wind blows, the smell of waste will be carried," Detikcom reported. It was also reported that fish, amphibians, and river biota died because of this waste contamination.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) notes that there were 128,918 species globally on the red list (red list) until 2020. Of these, 35,765 species, or 28%, are threatened with extinction. Amphibians are the most endangered species, namely 41%. In addition, the IUCN records that 31 species have been declared extinct. All freshwater dolphin species worldwide have been declared endangered due to pollution in river bodies. The great rivers of the archipelago that were once safe homes for freshwater dolphin species have become their deadliest. Indonesia is one of the countries with the most significant biological wealth globally, including amphibians. Unfortunately, the existence of amphibians is not widely known by the public, and many are even threatened with extinction.

In a Republika report, Mirza Dikari Kusrini, a herpetofauna expert from IPB, said research in the field of amphibians in Indonesia is still far behind compared to research on other wild animals such as orangutans, tigers, and elephants. Research on amphibians is still very minimal and tends to be ignored. This is unfortunate, considering that Indonesia is among the top five countries in the world with the highest population of amphibians. "There are 436 species of amphibians living in Indonesia, and 20 percent of them are endemic to Indonesia," said Mirza. Mirza said of the total number of amphibians in Indonesia, 10 percent are at risk of extinction due to changes and loss of habitat, pollution, disease, and other factors. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Redlist in 2014, at least 2 species of frogs from Java are categorized as vulnerable, and the frog species L. cruentata is classified as endangered. The same thing happened to reptiles in Indonesia. The existence of reptiles is increasingly threatened due to changes in habitat and illegal trade. Until now, 721 species of snakes have lived in the territory of Indonesia, and not a few of them are threatened with extinction.

A collaborative investigation by several environmental groups found that dozens of fish species had become extinct in several major rivers in Java Island due to the river's habitat being damaged due to contamination by factory waste. The environmental observer organizations involved in this investigation are the Ecological Observation and Wetlands Conservation (Ecoton), the Citarum River Basin Community Forum, the Ciujung Institute, and the Ciliwung Institute. This alliance made an inventory of the diversity of fish species and

sources of pollution in Bengawan Solo, Citarum River, Ciliwung, Brantas, Ciujung, and Surabaya River in the period March - April 2021. Researcher from the National River Ecoton Field Researcher, Andreas Agus Kristanto, said the results of the investigation show that important rivers in Java Island are "in a sick condition" because they are used as dumping grounds for textile and paper factory waste, which then results in the mass death of fish, amphibians, reptiles, and other species such as crustaceans. In Kali Brantas River, for example, now only 25 species of fish were found from previously 60 species in 1990. "In Bengawan Solo, the number of disappeared fish species has reached 20, leaving less than 10 species. What is more concerning about the decline in species is the Citarum River," said Andreas, as reported by Republika. In Citarum, species that have become extinct 50 years ago are Bagarius lica (Baung family), Chitala lopis (Belida/Papar), and Lobocheilos lehat (Lais fish family). Meanwhile, in the last 10 years, seven fish species have become extinct in Citarum. The seven species are Ladies hexane (River Catfish family), Helostoma temnickii (Tambakan Fish/Smelling Gourami), Rhyacichthys aspro, Pseudolais micronemes (River Catfish family), Pangasius macronema (River Catfish family), Acrochordonichthys ischnosoma, and Acrochordonichthys rugosus. Bengawan Solo, said Andreas, recorded one species that became extinct 50 years ago, namely Bagarius lica (Baung family). Meanwhile, those that have become extinct in the last 10 years on the Bengawan Solo are Macrochirichthys macrochirus, Pangasius macronemus, Luciosoma setigerum, and Homalopteroides wassinkii. As for Ciliwung, six fish species are now demanding to find. The six are Pangio kuhli, Betta picta, Tor tambroides, Tor tambra, Neolissochilus soro, and Lobocheilos falcifer.

In Katadata, Andreas explained that the leading cause of the extinction of dozens of fish species was pollution. His investigation found that textile factories and paper mills dumped their waste into the river without being properly processed. The imperfectly processed liquid waste requires a longer decomposition process in the river ecosystem. As a result, the waste produces a black substrate that smells and is toxic. The black substrate then covered the riverbed. Fish need a rough, rocky, or gravel bottom river surface to attach their eggs. "The black substrate causes the surface of the river bed to become slippery so that the fish eggs cannot survive, then die, and drift away," said the study. According to Veryl Hasan from the Faculty of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Airlangga University, the extinction occurred because the industrial wastewater affected fish hormones. The chemical blocks protein synthesis to form male-sex fish. As a result, said Verile, the river was dominated by female fish. Now, the composition of female fish is 80 percent. The composition of female and male fish should be 50 percent equal. "The imbalance in the sex composition of these fish has caused a decline in the population," said Veryl in Katadata. He added that the poison in industrial waste also resulted in the mass death of fish. Ecocide in water bodies also gives rise to ecocide in ecosystems and the species that live in them, threatening water security, food security, and the security of healthy living spaces for all species.

Conclusion: Going beyond restoration, caring for relationships

Taking ecocide case advocacy into local, national, and international campaigns is an urgent need as part of adaptation and mitigation of ecological damage, environmental pollution, and climate change because a healthy planetary life comes from healthy habitats and

homes from and for all earth species. Today, the world is witnessing the mass death of fish, reptiles, amphibians, and others everywhere. The death of the rivers on Earth also began to appear in ecocide discourse. Humanity's exponential economic culture has dumped pollutants into waterways and directly and indirectly affected fish, amphibians, and reptiles. Amphibians can be exposed to chemical hazards through direct water absorption or ingesting contaminants from soil sediments. They are very vulnerable and sensitive to poisons because of their transparent/permeable skin, like many frogs in rivers in Indonesia today. Our home, our habitat, has been destroyed. Many water snakes and other aquatic/semi-aquatic reptiles are also susceptible to pollutants, poisons, sewage, and contaminants. Knowledge of the effects of contaminants on rare amphibians and reptiles has been largely neglected. The intense interaction between physically and chemically hazardous waste materials has degraded the planet's amphibians, fish, and reptile populations. Ecocides in aquatic life have paid a heavy price from the fashion industry and beyond.

In the COP26 Coalition, environmentalists made the case of 'ecocide' a crime recognized in international law. The ecocide cases that then change the climate and undermine the planet's ecosystems have deprived the rights of hundreds of years old trees and rivers and other species, compared to the legal protection of the many companies that destroy them. The legal definition of ecocide was written for the first time in June 2021 by a panel of distinguished lawyers convened by the global NGO Stop Ecocide Foundation (SEF). This word is essential for demanding ecocide to be brought to the International Criminal Court (ICC), where genocide is tried.

The mention of nature as a natural resource has negated, envied, marginalized even, and made it only an object, whereas nature is the origin and invaluable treasure that has become the mother and parent of the human species. Changes to this paradigm and perspective can be started by changes in vocabulary and ways of mentioning the planet's rivers. A river on Java, Bengawan Solo, records, re

ZF'ads and consumes hazardous waste along with biota and its species, which then suffer mass death. The law has regulated a lot of inter-, intra-human, and state relations, but the law has failed to respect and fulfill the right to life of nature, species, biodiversity, and the planet. Legal culture and how humans relate to their natural surroundings must be restored, relations and respect must be respected, and they must be protected together. Going beyond restoration toward caring relationships might be one of the other ways to live peacefully with other planetary communities.

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7

Islam and the Relativization of Colonialist Institutions

From the Perspective of the Logic of Self-Determination and the State

Hani Abdelhadi

Introduction

The limitations of the nation-state institutional framework have long sparked debate, with the Palestinian issue epitomizing such constraints. Various proposals for its resolution, like the two-state solution, one-state solution, and federalism, lack consensus due to their perceived feasibility and sacrifices.

The two-state solution, for instance, views historical Palestine's land as a zero-sum game, making territorial division and holy site allocation contentious. Moreover, it entails potential areas where many refugees must effectively abandon their right of return, a controversial prospect. The concept of partition itself has been criticized as unjust since the Arab rejection of the 1948 UN Partition Plan. Hamas, initially embracing such ideology, garnered broad support despite slight shifts that followed (Hroub, 2000). Nevertheless, the international community favors the two-state solution, forming the basis of past peace talks. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has primarily accepted it, but challenges like settlements and refugees hinder its realization.

Opposition and practical concerns have brought attention to the one-state solution. However, its roots trace back to the 1930s-60s when spiritual Zionists and certain communists advocated supra-religious coexistence but were overshadowed by hardline Zionist ideology. The "bi-national state proposal" by the PLO until the 1970s gradually gave way to the mainstream two-state solution. Yet, following the Oslo Process's failure, the one-state solution regained prominence. Edward Said noted its inevitability (Said, 1999), while it's now seen as an ideal embodying democratic and liberal values, guaranteeing equal citizenship regardless of territorial division and including the right of return (Abunimah, 2007; Faris, 2013; Tilley, 2010). However, support remains stagnant, and pessimism toward coexistence prevails (Shikaki, 2012).

The two-state solution perceives the Palestinian question as a zero-sum game, yet the power dynamics among actors are asymmetric. Palestinians have been compelled to compromise against the demands of Israel, the political and military powerhouse. Indeed, following the Oslo Accords, the region designated as the Palestinian Autonomous Territories accounted for only 22% of historical Palestine, with a mere 18% granted for autonomy (Area A), roughly 4% of historical Palestine. Even this 4% is fragmented by settlements, often cited as violations of international law, and enclosed by separation walls. Settlement expansion continues unabated, and without geographical integrity, the realization of a Palestinian state is deemed nearly impossible.

Confronting the difficulty of territorial division, exploring alternatives that do not presuppose territorial partition has become imperative. This paper delves into the background of zero-sum thinking, tracing its metaphysical underpinnings, and examines counterthoughts to relativize it.

Philosophical Foundations

Firstly, it is crucial to address the assumption of the exclusive relationship between territory and sovereignty. According to Kedourie's discussion on nationalism, human collectives' demand for statehood is essential within the German idealist tradition.

In accordance with Kantian philosophy, human freedom is construed as self-legislation, wherein a rational individual adheres to laws that are autonomously formulated, encapsulating the concept of self-determination. Kant posits that moral virtue is synonymous with autonomy, thereby emphasizing the significance of self-determination as the pinnacle of political virtue, presupposing freedom as a prerequisite for independence. This philosophical tenet underwent further elaboration by subsequent German thinkers, converging with political discourses to engender a political ideology prioritizing the primacy of the state. As posited by Kedourie (1993: 30):

From this metaphysics, the post-Kantians deduced a theory of the state. The end of man is freedom, freedom is self-realization, and self-realization is complete absorption in the universal consciousness. The state, therefore, is not a collection of individuals who have come together to protect their interests; the state is higher than the individual and comes before him. Only when he and the state are one does the individual realize his freedom.

As widely recognized, the notion of national self-determination extends beyond mere separatist independence —particularly within the Leninist framework— and encompasses diverse interpretations, such as autonomy within a unified state and cultural independence, exemplified notably by Austro-Marxist theorist Otto Bauer (1924). However, in contemporary political dialogues, particularly in the context of Israel and Palestine, the pursuit of national independence through separatism holds significant prominence, as highlighted by Khalidi (2010).

Within the prevailing backdrop, whether about the two-state or one-state solution, the

conventional assumption posits an exclusive relationship between territory and sovereignty, wherein sovereignty has typically been conceived to reside within the construct of the "nation."

Nevertheless, there has been a growing discourse challenging these premises. Levine and Mossberg (2014) proposed the concept of shared sovereignty, wherein multiple sovereignties overlap within a single territory. Instances of such joint sovereignty, termed condominium, exist in Europe. Thus, while the assumption of exclusive sovereignty is prevalent within the contemporary international system, composed of nation-state entities, it has not always held a preeminent position throughout history. Particularly notable is the argumentation exemplified in my previous work (ハディ, 2020), which reevaluates the current situation in Palestine from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence. This is because the general doctrines of Islam entail a significantly different logic concerning the relationship between humans and the state compared to Western philosophical frameworks.

Islamic Perspective

In modern philosophy, since Kant, it is presupposed that political humans are the origin of freedom and, therefore, can be sovereign. However, humans typically do not live alone; they form societies wherein they establish frameworks for security while reconciling interests, leading to social contracts and the demand for states. In Islam, however, sovereignty and legislative authority rest solely with the one God, Allah, and the head of state (typically, the single Caliph according to classical legal theory), and the citizens are subject equally to the sovereignty of the sacred law decreed by Allah. The head of state is merely the earthly representative of this sovereignty, embodied by the Prophet Muhammad. This classical theory, derived from the governance of the Rashidun Caliphs following the death of Prophet Muhammad, was theorized over subsequent centuries and predominantly practiced within dynasties such as the Abbasid and Ottoman.

In the Western context, metaphysical debates on the existence of God have ceased mainly due to the lack of empirical verification. However, even if verification is impossible within Islam, it is considered logically self-evident (given the inherent limitations of human observation) and has been perpetuated as the cornerstone of faith. Moreover, Kant argued that a transcendent being, i.e., God, is requisite for humans to be moral (Kant, 2015). Yet, in contemporary times, such discussions are no longer regarded as foundational in political philosophy.

Islam is a religion of law, and humans are expected to apply the divine law (Sharia) revealed by Allah to the present world through secular and specialized legal studies (Fiqh). Consequently, Islamic states do not envision direct governance by God or rule based on direct access to divine intent. Even the highest authority, the Caliph, is presumed subject to the rule of law. Therefore, Islamic governance, distinctively from the medieval European context of theocracy, is clearly distinguished. There is an argument suggesting that even in secular states, which stand in contrast to theocracy in Europe, the conception of human freedom, rights, and sovereignty finds its origin in the mythological realm, akin to the dominance and

structure of Islamic law (referencing documents such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and the American Declaration of Independence).

Furthermore, leadership is ideally based on consultation (Shura), following the tradition of the Rashidun Caliphate era, with only minor conflicts between modern democracy. While deviating from the ideal state, hereditary monarchies and similar systems have been exceptionally accepted, though criticized by contemporary Islamists.

Next, the citizens' identity is examined. In Islamic law, humans are not differentiated except by faith. While acknowledging differences based on race or ethnicity, it's deemed incorrect to use them for distinction and discrimination. This is analogous to Anderson's argument that ethnicity is always imagined (Anderson, 2006). Examples of Islamic empires like the Abbasid, Ottoman, and Mughal were multi-ethnic, an inevitable consequence of Islam.

However, since the colonial rule in the Middle East, political independence has been pursued by importing Western ideologies like nationalism and secularism. There's no scientific conclusion on the superiority of these Western models. Instead, it was a historical contingency that Arabs believed strengthening themselves similarly to colonial powers was necessary for political independence. Furthermore, this logic led to backlash from pan-Islamists until the early 20th century and faced criticism from contemporary Islamists.

Discrimination and Institution

Another crucial feature of Islam is its treatment of non-Muslims. In Islamophobic discourse, Islamic states are portrayed as either denying the existence of non-Muslims or subjecting them to discriminatory treatment. However, this requires reconsideration. While it is a standard view that non-Muslims are obligated to pay the poll tax (Jizya) and face some restrictions on religious practices in public spaces, it is essential to note that in many secular states, religious communities adhere to secular principles established by the state's supreme law and are allowed religious practices as long as they do not violate secularism, as Asad (2003) suggested. This situation is clearly expressed in modern France, for instance, an extremely fundamentalist secular state. This parallels the institutional discrimination faced by non-Muslim communities in Islamic states. In essence, the discourse on "discrimination against non-Muslims in Islamic states" structurally resembles institutional discrimination in secular states. Ultimately, complete unanimity in political interests and metaphysical beliefs among individuals is unattainable. Therefore, even in religiously homogeneous states, political structures are necessary. Acknowledging the institutional discrimination in Islamic states alone necessitates questioning the discriminatory nature of secular states, and consequently, it recognizes the impossibility of unified governance or the rule of law. However, beyond that lies only the diffusion of all values and anarchy.

In this regard, a type of belief called secularism may also need to be considered here. Today, for example, in English and Japanese, 'faith' and 'belief' are understood as distinct. However, faith usually refers to belief in a particular recognized religion, while belief refers to the proactive adoption of some way of thinking, not limited to a specific religion. In other

words, the term faith is essentially encompassed by the term belief. People have beliefs without exception, irrespective of whether the subject has a name or system, and some such beliefs can be given the name of a traditional religion and described as faith. However, from the general standpoint of monotheism, or at least Islam, such a categorization of faith and belief is meaningless in the first place. This is because any belief in anything other than Allah can be understood in Islam as a projection of false consciousness or desire, which is ultimately, without exception, akin to idolatry. Therefore, today, not a few people believe that human beings can be divided into two groups: those who have faith and those who do not. However, from the above perspective, this is an apparent misunderstanding. Instead, all human beings, without exception, have faith, and the only meaningful classification lies in whether the object is Allah, the logical necessity and the only absolute metaphysical existence, or some other idol.

Now, secularism is, in this sense, nothing more than one object of faith. The idea that political and religious principles should be separated can only be founded on worldviews and metaphysical and philosophical beliefs that justify it. There is no empirical basis for the legitimacy of secularism. It merely means that it has partly prepared the way for relative Western economic growth, industrial revolution, and military hegemony, thus strengthening Western colonialist ambitions. The non-Western world was led to believe that it was an alternative to traditional belief systems and a path to political autonomy, but it was swallowed up by the frenzy of material development it brought. Still, it must be remembered that it had no logical coherence or ethical legitimacy in traditional belief systems.

Back to the main point, the real difference between a secular state and an Islamic state is not the presence or absence of religious autonomy but the size of the space. In Islamic states, minorities are usually protected by paying the poll tax. They're guaranteed security, and aspects other than religious identity are shared with other communities. Historically, Islamic empires have generally tolerated non-Muslims, allowing coexistence. Non-Muslims have held bureaucratic positions, suggesting political freedom isn't necessarily low. The unique merits of Islamic states, such as freedom based on Islamic law, wealth redistribution, and public goods, challenge the provision of a unified assessment.

Despite these principles, Islamic empires historically varied. The Abbasid Caliphate reformed Arab superiority, enabling political freedom free from discrimination. Christians contributed to scholarship, and the Ottoman Millet system allowed autonomous communities for each religious group, ensuring security without forced conversion.

Here, faith is an internal matter and is selective. On the other hand, "ethnicity" and its institutional embodiment, nationality, are typically not subject to subjective choice. Hence, there is concern that the awareness of differences with other ethnic groups and institutional discrimination may become fixed. Currently, nationality criteria in many countries are based on either jus soli or jus sanguinis, which institutionalize discrimination based on non-selectable categories. Restriction of movements based on nationality, an innate characteristic, is a violation of human rights from an Islamic perspective.

Additionally, the boundaries of ethnicity are ambiguous, and their emergence or origin

can be imagined in various ways. Therefore, particularly in the contemporary context where diversity is promoted, it is practically impossible to prevent the emergence of minorities and nation-states endlessly. The situation where ethnic self-determination and national independence, advocated not only in Palestine but also worldwide, are effectively restricted based on the interests of significant powers amounts to a double standard in these respects. However, continued acceptance of this situation would lead the world closer to a state of nature, institutionalizing wealth disparities based on power and inevitably leading to anarchy. The governance of Islamic states may appear discriminatory from external perspectives as they seek to permeate the rule of Islamic law while allowing autonomy as a minimum receptacle. However, its approach is relatively consistent.

Conclusion

In the historically diverse Middle Eastern region, nation-states were initially shaped by colonial forces imposing borders, leading to distinct national histories. These shared but divergent histories nurtured new senses of belonging, giving rise to national consciousness or quasi-patriotism known as Waṭanīya in Arabic. However, these fractures have manifested in persistent conflicts, necessitating institutional frameworks for transcending ethnicity and achieving ecumenical coexistence. To envision such frameworks, a metaphysical foundation divergent from the prevailing hegemonic paradigms, rooted in Greco-Christian worldviews and Western philosophies derived therefrom, namely secularism and nationalism, is essential. Islam, as discussed herein, presents a case for relativizing these paradigms.

Reflecting on the above, significant insights can be summarized from the Islamic state model: Firstly, sovereignty and legislative authority in Islamic states are attributed solely to Allah. However, Allah is not authoritarian but rather profoundly compassionate towards humanity, allowing believers substantial freedom in exercising sovereignty within the bounds of divine law. As Allah is the sole legislator, humans derive secular laws through legal interpretations of Sharia. Secondly, while the assumption in the Islamic state model is that the highest leadership can democratically be elected Muslims, non-Muslims as governed subjects are ensured safety and can coexist through a degree of autonomy. This mirrors the status of religious communities under secular state governance. Since Islamic law is personal law, Islamic states envisage all Muslims worldwide as their citizens, drawing parallels to the contemporary European Union. Thirdly, Islam regards faith as the selective attribute defining human identity. The institutionalization of categorical discrimination based on fixed attributes is prevalent in today's international society. However, constructing governance based on faith as a selective identity offers the potential to regain the flexibility lost in nation-states. Overall, the Islamic state model provides insights that challenge prevailing hegemonic paradigms and offer potential avenues for transcending ethnic conflicts and achieving coexistence.

Considering the current situation in Palestine, Israel, and the international community, it is unlikely that the idea of establishing Islamic states will be widely accepted shortly. This skepticism stems from persisting misconceptions about Islam that heavily influence political discourse, diverging significantly from reality. However, through the governance of Islamic states, Middle Eastern countries could break free from the shackles of nationalism, achieve

unity across the Islamic world, and construct a cooperative sphere akin to the EU, liberating the movement of people, goods, and capital from discrimination. Israel, as a Jewish Millet, could find security and coexistence in this context. Admittedly, adhering to contemporary political philosophy could be perceived as limiting Jewish sovereignty and violating self-determination. Yet, genuine conflict resolution cannot be achieved without dialogue and dialectics. Overcoming exclusivity is imperative. Reflecting on the endless conflicts and historical persecution of Western Jews, Islamic governance could potentially offer them a more flexible and tolerant system. In essence, the decolonization of the Islamic world entails not merely overcoming or amending the colonialist aspects observed within Zionism but also decolonizing and breaking free from the deception of nationalism and secularism and their metaphysical foundations to envision a new world.

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Session 3

Overlapping identities and self-determination in Asian continent

8

The Contribution of Indian Christian Women Towards Nation Building and the Ongoing Challenges

Shalini Mulackal

Introduction

Becoming a nation is not a finished task for India. The geographical territory we call India today was home to many small and large princely states before the British colonized. As one nation, India came into existence in 1947 after a prolonged struggle for freedom from the British. The prominent leaders then were M.K. Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi led the non-violent movement for a free, independent India. Thousands of people, including women, from all walks of life and from all parts of India joined the movement. Some of them were imprisoned for their activities.

On the other hand, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was responsible for laying the foundations for building India into a modern, democratic, socialist republic. Their influence on Indian nationalism was immense, but their approaches to gender and religion in their political engagements were very different.

Indian society, by and large, was patriarchal and was characterized by male dominance and female subjugation during pre-colonial and colonial times. Women were always considered inferior. They were kept under strict gender roles at home and in society. For the colonial rulers, the degraded condition of Indian women became an indicator of India's inferior status in the hierarchy of civilizations. Consequently, the colonial rulers identified the Indian civilization as backward and needing change. We can see this reflected in the colonial discourses of the time, which were gendered from the beginning. The colonized society was feminized, and its effeminate character was put in opposition to colonial masculinity and thus justified the loss of its independence. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the nineteenth century began to work towards liberating women from the oppressive religio-cultural and social practices like Sati, child marriage, denial of marriage to widows, and female infanticide.

The present paper explores the contribution of Christian women in this context to the

formation of Indian nationalism and freedom struggle and their efforts in the decolonization of Indian society. Despite being a tiny minority in India, Christians, and Christian women in particular, played a significant role. The paper identifies ten Christian women who contributed in various ways to the freedom struggle, self-rule, and the formation of the Indian nation.

The status of women in colonial and post-colonial India

The situation of women about their dignity, rights, and freedom has changed from prehistoric times to the present. Several writers opine that women in prehistoric India enjoyed a higher status, while others contest the same. Many consider that girls were valued at an early Vedic age and were free to get educated. Remarriage of widows was permitted at this time. However, at the time of Manu, women lost their freedom since Manu decreed that women should not be independent at any time. A male, be it her father, husband, or son, always protected her. Men began to take a superior position due to muscle power and money as time passed. Gradually, the daughters were considered a source of misery, and the practice of polygamy further deteriorated the status of women. They were not allowed to go to school.

The medieval period saw the further deterioration of women's status with added practices of *the Partha* system,[1] dowry and sati.[2] Sati was religiously glorified. Women were generally confined to their homes. Their main role used to be cooking and taking care of the children and the elderly. They were fully dependent on men. Religious practices and traditions ascribed their complete subordination to men in all matters. Due to ignorance and patriarchal conditioning, they were unaware of their basic rights.

During the British colonial period, Christian missionaries came to India from different parts of Europe. They were shocked to see the deplorable and dependent state of women. Many of them started schools to educate girls about their rights. They were alarmed seeing inhuman practices like Sati, child marriage, female infanticide, the Devadasi system,[3] *the Partha* system, and others. They wanted to free women from evil practices and create a political platform.

In the post-colonial times, women were given more importance. The Indian constitution, for instance, made many provisions for women's safety. Besides, citizens of India are given equal rights to education and employment. Women who got the opportunity to get educated began to strive hard and excelled in all fields that were once dominated by men. Moreover,

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1 It is a religious and social practice of gender segregation prevalent among some Muslim and Hindu communities in India. It takes two forms. First, the social partition of the sexes, and second, the requirement that women cover their bodies to cover their skin and conceal their bodily form.

2 Sati was a religio-cultural practice in which a Hindu widow burned alive on her deceased husband's funeral pyre, either by entering the pyre voluntarily or by coercion or due to lack of other options to continue living.

3 Initially, a devadasi was a female artist dedicated to the worship and service of a deity or a temple for her entire life. The dedication used to take place in a ceremony that is like a marriage. She was considered high in ranking and dignity in society. Royal patrons provided them with gifts of land, property, and jewelry. During the British rule, the royal patrons lost their power, and consequently, the Devadasis were left without their traditional means of support. Now, they are commonly associated with women who are dedicated to the temple or deity and are making a living by prostitution. It still exists in a rudimentary form.

since independence, one could see the remarkable leadership of women as politicians, entrepreneurs, astronauts, and sportspersons who bring glory to the nation. Besides, the independent India also saw women who created their own literature, placing women in the context of the changing socio-political scenario. Increasing education, better job opportunities, and awareness of women's rights and privileges have enabled them to ponder and define their societal role. The prominent line of difference between men and women thus began to become thin till the beginning of modern times.[4]

The Birth of Indian Nationalism

The emergence of Indian nationalism is closely connected to the anti-colonial movement. Under British rule, the people of this country, though diverse in culture, religion, and language, shared a common experience of being oppressed and thus shared a common bond. Many such groups came together under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, forming a massive movement. Indian nationalism, therefore, came into being during the independence movement. It was more of a territorial nationalism that included all the people residing in the Indian territory despite their diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

Many factors contributed to the emergence of Indian nationalism. Some of them were the political, economic, and administrative unification under the British Raj in the 19th and 20th centuries, the impact of Western education, the development of means of Transport, socio-religious reform movements, and the development of Media, Newspapers, and Magazines.

Indian nationalism was not just one single nationalism but was a combination of four distinct nationalisms. "These included the secularly-oriented western-type nationalism of men like Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917) and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915), the Hindu nationalism of such leaders as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1836–1886) and Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920), the Muslim nationalism of Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and the poet Muhammad Iqbal (1873–1938), and the regional nationalism so dominant in Bengal and Maharashtra."[5]

Since the early 20th century, India has witnessed various nationalist groups and movements, each with distinct objectives and ideas. The amalgamation of these different groups was not an easy one. The Indian nationalist movement was crucial in gaining the country's independence and influencing the nation's politics and history. However, it has also faced many difficulties and controversies. In recent years, Hindu nationalism and cultural nationalism have been gaining prominence and are often creating tension and conflict amongst various groups.[6]

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4   See Sangeetha. J, *Status of Women in Colonial and Post-colonial India*, © 2018 IJCRT | Volume 6, Issue 2 April 2018 | ISSN: 2320-2882, p. 956–59.
5   B. G. Gokhale, "Swami Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism," in *Journal of Bible and Religion*, Oxford University Press, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1964): 35–42 at 35. Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1460427
6   https://www.studyiq.com/articles/rise-of-nationalism-in-india/ accessed on 26/02/2024.

Women Question in Nehruvian and Gandhian Concept of India

Any discourse on Indian nationalism cannot circumvent the two leading figures of Indian independence, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. Their contribution to the birth of this nation and its development is enormous. However, they were different in their vision of India. Being educated in the West, Nehru imbibed secular and liberal thinking. So, keeping aside religion, Nehru tried to build India as a modern democracy based on industrial, scientific, and technological development which would benefit all. Gandhi, on the other hand, was much more attuned to religious nationalism and believed that politics without religion had very little meaning.[7]

They were also different when it came to women's issues. Nehru did not consider the gender question, thinking that the modernization of India would take care of the needs of all, including women. Without giving due importance to religious and gender elements in Indian politics, Nehru wished to establish a nationalism based on "equal opportunity" for people of every backward group [sic], race, and creed.[8] Even though Nehru constantly referred to India in feminine terms like *Bharat Mata* or Mother India, women could not represent themselves in their female identity or in their Indian-ness in his imagined India.[9]

On the other hand, Gandhi saw women as central to the emerging discourse of swaraj (self-rule). While Nehru thought that scientific advancement and economic growth would lead to equality for women, Gandhi used specific Hindu mythological/religious female characters like Draupadi, who embodied the virtues necessary to fight for the national cause. He, in fact, essentialized female sexuality by appealing to the female virtues of chastity, purity, self-sacrifice, and suffering. "Gandhi's female strength was Draupadi, not the militant Rani of Jhansi who, dressed like a man, led her troops in a battle against the British. Draupadi is the more appropriate, feminine courage which, in the face of imminent dishonor, calls upon Lord Krishna for help." [10]

Unlike the Nehruvian vision of attaining equality for all through development alone without addressing the root causes of women's oppressive conditions, Gandhi's *Satyagraha* and *Swadeshi* movements allowed women to participate in the public sphere. However, it did not allow women to organize themselves and transform the religious and social roots of their oppression. They remained merely as depoliticized agencies of national liberation. Gandhi's writings show that he could not see this lacuna in his mobilization of women for the national cause.

The emerging picture shows that the women's question in India has been different from

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7   See Shakuntala Rao, "Woman-as-Symbol: The Intersections of Identity Politics, Gender, and Indian Nationalism," in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1999, 317–328.
8   Jawaharlal Nehru, *The discovery of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1946. 533.
9   See Rao, "Woman-as-Symbol: The Intersections of Identity Politics, 319.
10 Ketu Katrak, "Indian nationalism, Gandhian Satyagraha, and representations of sexuality." In Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, & Patricia Yeager (Eds.), *Nationalism and sexualities*. New York: Routledge (1992), 395–406 at 398.

the feminist struggles of the West. With an oppressive patriarchal culture almost intact, women stepped out into the public only for the nationalist cause during the independence movement. Even though they were hoping to get their own liberation together with the country's political freedom, they had to return home to their roles as wives, mothers, and sisters.[11] Women in the West who left their homes to work in factories had a long-term impact, shaking the unequal gender roles within and outside the house.

Though women's social and political position was much debated in early 19th-century India, it disappeared completely from the public agenda by the end of the century. One notable reason is the emergence of a competing and seemingly more fundamental discourse on nationalism.[12]

Role of Christian Women in the Freedom Movement

Christians in India form a tiny minority, with approximately 2.3 percent of the population. They belong to different Churches.[13] Despite their small number, they have contributed to nation-building in varied ways, including their participation in the struggle for independence. Among the thousands of women, Christian women also participated in the freedom struggle, responding to Gandhi's call. Some of them even held leadership roles in the independence movement. However, they have not been getting the recognition they deserve.

Despite the patriarchal and feudal setup, many women managed to get educated and started to struggle for their freedom and rights. The Christian Missionaries played a momentous role in this by providing education, especially to girls. As a result, many women took part in the freedom struggle, and they also organized rural women to take part in the freedom movement beyond caste and religion.

In recent years, several women leaders have been identified, and their role in the freedom struggle has been most appreciated. In this scenario, too, the role of Christian women has been unnoticed and mainly claimed only by Christian missionaries. But they have been the identity of India many times towards nation-building, freedom struggle, and providing health, sanitation, and education to the rural women in those days. Moreover, many Christian women leaders have contributed to the freedom movement and achieved confidence in changing people's minds beyond religion. Ten Christian women contributed substantially to nation-building before, during, and after the independence movement.

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11 *Ibid.*, 317.

12 See Partha Chatterjee, "The nationalist resolution to the women's question," in Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (Eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian colonial history*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. (1990): 233–253 at 233.

13 Approximately 37 percent of Indian Christians are Catholics, 13 percent are Baptists, and 7 percent belong to the Churches of South India and Churches of North India.

Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (1858–1922)[14]

In nineteenth-century India, Hindu social and religious reformers, Western missionaries, British colonial rulers, and, later, Indian Nationalists used education to re-form and recast India's upper-caste/class women. The most radical of these educated nineteenth-century women was Pandita Mary Ramabai. She headed a self-sufficient community of women, experimenting with new and enabling modes of femininity.[15]

Pandita Ramabai, a social reformer and activist, was born into a Hindu Brahmin family. At the age of 23, she became a widow and a single mother and began to dedicate her life to women's rights. In recognition of her knowledge of Sanskrit works, she received the titles of 'Pandita' and 'Sarasvati' from Calcutta University.

She founded the Arya Mahila Samaj to promote women's education and eliminate anti-woman practices like child marriage. She advocated for women's education in a society that opposed that idea, especially for training women to be teachers and administrators. In 1883, at 24, she traveled to the United Kingdom, where she converted to Christianity. Later, she traveled to the United States, where she gathered support from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

In 1896, during a severe famine, Ramabai traveled through rural Maharashtra on a relief mission and rescued thousands of women and children. Soon, she founded Mukti Mission to provide a home for destitute women, children, and disabled persons. Within four years, it was home to nearly 1,500 inmates.

Meanwhile, Ramabai got involved in the Indian Independence Movement. She was among the 10 women delegates to the Indian National Congress in 1889. She contributed much through her literary works. Among the many books she authored, 'The High-Caste Hindu Woman' deserves a mention. This book detailed misogynistic religio-cultural practices in South Asia, such as child brides and the social alienation widows endure. Moreover, she translated the Bible into Marathi from its original Hebrew and Greek. She earned many honors for her contribution as a nation-builder, women's rights activist, and devout Christian. The Episcopal Church recognized her with a feast day on 5 April in their liturgical calendar. There were commemorative stamps and roads named after her.

Accamma Cherian (1909–1982)

Accamma Cherian was born into a Christian family in Kerala. She began her career as a teacher in 1931 after completing her university education. Eventually, she became the headmistress, and by 1939, she quit her job to join the State Congress and dedicated herself full-time to the Indian freedom struggle.

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14 See 10 Indian-Christian Women Nation Builders & Freedom Fighters | by Indo-Christian Culture | Medium
15 Parinitha Shetty, "Christianity, Reform, and the Reconstitution of Gender: The Case of Pandita Mary Ramabai," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 25–41 at 25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jfemistudreli.28.1.25.

When the State Congress was banned, she led a mass rally at the Kowdiar Palace demanding an end to the ban and to drop the charges against its leaders. When the British police chief ordered his men to prepare to fire on the 20,000 marchers assembled there, Accamma intervened, saying the now famous lines, "I am the leader. Shoot me first before you kill others." This led to a de-escalation and prevented a massacre. This news of her bravery spread across the country, and she was nicknamed 'Jhansi Rani of Travancore.'

Accamma Cherian founded an all-woman volunteer group called *Desasevika* (service to the nation). The aim of *Desasevika* was to increase women's involvement in the Indian Independence Movement. She was imprisoned twice by British officials. After independence, she served in the Travancore Legislative Assembly. Her memory is kept alive with a statue and park in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Cornelia Sorabji (1866–1954)

Cornelia Sorabji was the first female graduate of Bombay University. Her father, Rev. Sorabji Karsedji, played a key role in persuading the University of Bombay to begin admitting women. She studied law at Oxford University and was the first woman to do so. 1894 she returned to India and became India's first woman advocate.

As a woman advocate, Cornelia noted that many women were denied inheritance left to them by their male relatives because of the *Partha* system, which prevented them from leaving their homes or speaking to a male lawyer. Sorabji was given permission to enter the court on their behalf, but she could not defend them because she was not a barrister. It was only in 1923 that the laws changed, allowing women to be barristers.

As early as 1902, Sorabji began petitioning for a female legal advisor to represent women in provincial court. She was appointed to such a position in 1904. She helped hundreds of women and orphans fight legal battles, often charging no fees to those who could not afford to pay.

Sorabji was also involved in several feminist organizations, including the National Council for Women in India and the Federation of University Women. She opposed the idea of wholesale Westernization but believed that reform was needed to eradicate anti-woman practices prevalent at that time. She also opposed Indian Independence, fearing that the women's liberation movement was not strong enough to withstand the pressures of religious fundamentalism.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (1887–1964)

Amrit Kaur was born into a Punjabi royal lineage. Her father was the youngest son of the Raja of Kapurthala. He converted to Christianity and married the daughter of a Bengali missionary. Kaur was the youngest of their 10 children. Kaur was raised as a Protestant Christian.

She entered the Indian Independence Movement after the British forces killed 400

peaceful protesters in Amritsar, Punjab, known as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. She joined the Congress party and began working in the Indian Freedom Movement. She was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi. Within the movement, she became a strong advocate of women's rights, campaigning to abolish practices like child marriage, *Partha* (the segregation and confinement of women inside the home), and the Devadasi system.

In 1927, she founded the All-India Women's Conference. She participated in the Dandhi March led by Mahatma Gandhi and was jailed by the British authorities. In 1934, she began living in Gandhi's Ashram, giving up the royal luxury she was born into and adopting an austere lifestyle. With J.C. Kumarappa, a Tamil economist and freedom fighter, she became one of the two Indian Christians in Gandhi's inner circle.

She was jailed in 1937 and 1942 for involvement in activities related to the Freedom struggle. In the 1940s, Kaur began to advocate for universal suffrage when Indian Independence began to appear as a near possibility. She served as the chairperson of the All-India Women's Education Fund Association. In 1947, TIME Magazine declared her the 'Woman of the Year' for all her efforts towards women's empowerment.

Kaur served as Minister of Health for 10 years in the Post-independent India. During this time, she led several major public health campaigns to eradicate and limit the spread of malaria and tuberculosis. She also established the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, a collection of medical colleges and research institutes. Despite her old age, Kaur continued to work tirelessly to advance the causes of women's rights, children's welfare, and improving public health. She was a key founding member of the Indian Council of Child Welfare and chairperson of the Indian Red Cross.

Dr. Hilda Mary Lazarus (1890–1978)

Dr. Hilda Mary Lazarus was born in 1890 in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, which is situated in South India. She received her medical degree from Madras Medical College, a specialization in obstetrics and gynecology in the United Kingdom. She then joined Lady Harding Medical College in New Delhi. This was the only medical college in India that was women-only and open to people of all religions.

She dedicated herself to promoting women and maternal care. She learned several Indian languages to train more women as nurses and midwives. Later, she served as Director of Vellore Medical College. She also authored a book based on her experiences as a doctor.

She received the Padma Shri award for her contributions to women and maternal care and other awards from the United Kingdom.

Violet Hari Alva (1908–1969)

A Gujarati Christian freedom fighter and lawyer, Violet Hari Alva was the daughter of an Anglican reverend. Although she was orphaned at the age of 16, she eventually became an

English language professor at the Indian Women's University in Bombay.

Alva was the first woman advocate to argue a case before a full High Court bench in 1944. She began the 'Indian Women' magazine. She served as deputy chairman of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and as President of the Juvenile Court. She was involved in several organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association and the Business and Professional Women's Association.

Alva was a supporter of the Indian Independence Movement and a member of Congress. She married Joachim Alva, a fellow Indian-Christian freedom fighter. As a freedom fighter, she was imprisoned by British authorities in the Arthur Road Jail. Alva went to jail with her 5-month-old baby son. In 1943, she started the Forum magazine to publish and disseminate pro-independence writings and to give fellow freedom fighters a platform to voice their ideas.

After India gained independence, Alva served as a member of parliament, where she advocated for the increased availability of family planning education and tools and the expansion of the Indian Navy. She became the Deputy Minister of State for Home Affairs and then the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. In 2007, she and her husband were honored with a portrait in Parliament House as the first parliamentarian couple in Indian history.

Constance Prem Nath Dass (1886–1971)

Constance Prem Nath Dass was born into a Punjabi-Protestant family. She was the first Indian woman to serve as the principal of a Christian college in India. She reached out to the underprivileged by securing admissions, organizing donations, and providing information on scholarships. Even during World War II, she continued this work, especially when the ability of many Indian students to pursue their education was adversely affected. She also worked to promote the expansion and modernization of university education in India.

Dass was also a strong supporter of the Indian Independence Movement. She had highly progressive views on education. She believed in a holistic model of learning that emphasized the duties and responsibilities of Indian graduates towards building up their country. She also believed that students from different religious and cultural backgrounds must study together to promote tolerance and cooperation across communities, which would be vital for India's success.

Dr. Gurubai Karmarkar (?-1932)

Dr. Gurubai Karmarkar is of Marathi background. She was the second Indian woman to graduate from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1886. She returned to India in 1893.

Her medical practice was dedicated to caring for the poorest and most marginalized people in Indian society. Lower caste people, including the so-called "criminal castes," child brides, widows (seen as cursed), and lepers. She also provided medical care during famines

and during the 1916 plague outbreak.

She spoke openly about the evils of cultural practices such as child marriage, discrimination against widows, and casteism.

Neidonuo Angami (1950- present)

Neidonuo Angami was not a freedom fighter but a social worker from the Northeastern state of Nagaland, home to the Christian tribal Naga people. In 1984, she founded the Naga Mothers' Association to address the growing public health challenges of alcoholism and drug abuse facing the Naga people.

She began by organizing women across Naga tribes with the common goal of addressing the issues of addictions and the social ills it can cause, such as domestic violence, crime, family breakdown, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Shelters and rehabilitation centers for addicts were established, along with a clinic and hospice center for people with HIV/AIDS.

She also began the 'Shed No More Blood' campaign, which sought to promote national unity and end separatist violence in the state by encouraging insurgents to drop their weapons and join mainstream politics. She played a critical role in brokering a ceasefire between the insurgents and the government. Her social activism and contributions to peace and national unity led her to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 and receive the Padma Shri in 2000.

Lilavati Singh (1868–1909)

Lilavati Singh was born in Uttar Pradesh to Indian Christian parents. In 1895, she earned a degree in English literature from the University of Allahabad, becoming one of the first two women to earn a degree.

Later, she became a professor of literature and philosophy at Isabella Thoburn College, becoming one of the first Indian women to become a professor. While teaching, she devoted her energy to inspiring her female students, who belonged to the first generation of Indian women, to receive a modern education and take advantage of all opportunities they receive to achieve their full potential. She would go on to serve as chair of the women's committee of the World Students' Christian Federation. She also edited a women's newspaper entitled Rafik-i-Niswan.

Singh understood the importance of Indian Christians developing their own indigenous literature. She dedicated herself to translating Christian works into Indian languages. Singh's life was cut short by post-surgery complications, and she passed away at the age of 40. A Lilavati Singh dormitory at Isabella Thoburn College was built in her honor.

Role of Christian Women in Decolonizing the Indian Society

Christian women contributed to decolonizing Indian society long after the country won its political freedom from the British in 1947. Despite being a minority, Christians contribute substantially through their educational institutions. Education is a powerful means of inculcating love for one's motherland and learning to live with others. At present, a hundred thousand women in the Catholic Church in India have dedicated their lives to the service of others. Many of these are engaged in women empowerment programs through formal education or informal education or by forming small groups of women called Self-Help Groups. In 2014, the Indian Christian Women's Movement was started, and women from different churches are members. They also contribute to addressing many issues facing women and creating awareness among them.

Ongoing challenges to nation-building on secular democratic principles

Today, India is facing a real threat to her hard-won freedom. Radical right-wing groups indulge in hate speech against followers of other religions. Since Christians and Muslims come under the category of minorities, they often face threats and violence. In this context, Christian women and other secular-minded women initiated the '*Mere ghar aake deko*' movement. *Mere ghar aake deko* means 'come to my house and see.' This movement has gained momentum in some parts of India for the past few years.

Conclusion

Indian Christian women, though a tiny minority in this vast country, did make their contribution to gaining independence for our nation. Even today, Indian society is highly patriarchal. Women joined the freedom struggle movement hoping to get freedom from the oppressive patriarchal structures together with the political freedom of the country. Unfortunately, women's situation remained dismal even after decades of self-rule, as the report of the Commission constituted to study the status of women shows. This Commission published its report in 1974 and found that women continued to be on the margins despite the nation's progress. Women, including Christian women, continue their struggle for freedom from the internalized patriarchal and colonial mindset both among men and women.

9

People's Security and Self-determination

Overlapping identities and Self-determination in Asian Contexts

Huang Po Ho

Before commencing my presentation, I'd like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Yoshihiro Yakusige, the organizer of this roundtable meeting, for extending this gracious invitation. It's an honor to be part of this gathering, and I'm sincerely thankful for the opportunity. While this is the second occasion, I've met Dr. Yosihiro in person, we've had numerous virtual encounters through online platforms.

Our previous discussions in person and virtually have predominantly centered around Palestinian issues. Hence, my presentation today will also delve into this area of concern. "People's Security and Self-determination" explores these themes within the subtheme "Overlapping Identities and Self-determination in Asian Contexts."

In navigating the intricate landscape of "overlapping identities and self-determination in Asian Contexts," my presentation will be structured into seven pivotal sections. These sections aim to provide a comprehensive exploration of the relationships between these aspects:

1) Asian Overlapping identities and their Challenges
2) Religious Adherents and Their Hyphenated Identities
3) Historical Roots of Anti-semitism
4) Who Are the Real Chosen People?
5) Zionism and Palestine Apartheid
6) Self-Determination as A Way Out.
7) Solidarity is Power

The foundation of my presentation is rooted in two theological principles and a central affirmation: first, the recognition that the divine Gospel does not exist as an isolated entity separate from cultures but instead finds its essence within diverse cultural contexts. Second, cultures play a pivotal role in shaping human identities, while the Gospel, in contrast, liber-

ates individuals.[1]

This dynamic interaction between cultures and the Gospel highlights identity as a fundamental component. It serves as a lens through which we discern and evaluate human behaviors, ultimately paving the way for paths toward justice and reconciliation. Identifying this relationship underscores the pivotal role of identity in our pursuit of these crucial values.

Therefore, it becomes imperative to examine and discern the issues of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism through the lens of identity characteristics and their historical backgrounds. Understanding these facets allows for a deeper exploration of the complexities surrounding anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, shed light on their nuanced historical contexts, and how they intertwine with identity dynamics.

Asian Overlapping identities and their Challenges

The intricate tapestry of Asian identities, interwoven with overlapping layers of culture, ethnicity, and social dynamics, presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the convergence of diverse identities fosters rich cultural exchanges, creating an environment where individuals can draw strength from their multifaceted heritage. This intersectionality often leads to the emergence of innovative ideas and perspectives that contribute to a vibrant and dynamic society.

However, these overlapping identities also pose challenges as individuals navigate the complexities of belonging to multiple groups. Striking a balance between these identities, each with its own expectations and norms requires continual negotiation. The challenge lies in fostering inclusivity and understanding within a diverse Asian context, embracing the opportunities that arise from intersectionality while addressing the potential tensions that may occur from overlapping identities.

The significant diversity of identities in Asia is derived from the profound variety of ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, and religions, all intricately entwined with geopolitical interactions. The following sections will focus on the role of Asian religions and their impact on people's security.

Religious Adherents and Their Hyphenated Identities

Asia is renowned as the cradle of several major world religions, nurturing many diverse beliefs. Its cultural canvas is woven with a rich tapestry of religious traditions. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism flourished within Asia, enriching its religious panorama. Asians embody a spectrum of religious affiliations, including at least:

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1   See Po Ho Huang, *Paradigm Shift of Theology*, Series of Contextual Theologies volume one,《神學的典範轉移》黃伯和本土神學文集第一冊 , Tainan, Grace foundation, 2021

Jewish Asian
Christian Asian
Muslim Asian
Buddhist Asian
Hindu Asian
Taoist Asian and
Confucian Asian

These hyphenated religious identities indicate, on one side, the profound and rich spirituality of being Asian. On the other side, they also create historically brutal clashes of religious conflicts as well as politically cohesive oppressions. Among these confrontations, Western Christianity has developed an anti-semitism ideology, which inevitably affected the relationship between Jewish Asians and Christian Asians. Not to mention the direct tensions between Christians and Muslims in many places in Asia.

The evolution of Anti-semitism and Zionism exhibits distinct trajectories in the Christian West compared to Asian Christian perspectives. Historically rooted in the Christian West, Anti-semitism is less familiar among Asian Christian communities. Despite this, prevalent teachings in Asian Christian circles often endorse Zionism, even in the absence of a comprehensive understanding of Anti-semitism.

Asian Christians have little understanding of anti-semitism but are frequently taught to support Zionism, which has ultimately resulted in oppression and ramifications for Palestinians.

Historical Roots of Anti-semitism

The history of anti-semitism, defined as hostile actions or discrimination against Jews as a religious or ethnic group, goes back many centuries and is called "the longest hatred." Jerome Chanes identifies six stages in the historical development of anti-semitism.[2] While instances of anti-semitism are noted in the intellectual and political realms of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, its institutionalization gained momentum within European Christianity after the dissolution of the ancient Jewish cultural center, Jerusalem. This led to the forced segregation of Jewish populations and imposed restrictions on their participation in the public life of European society at various times.[3]

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2   See Wikipedia History of Anti-semitism: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_antisemitism. The six stages are:
    1) Pre-Christian anti-Judaism in Ancient Greece and Rome that was primarily ethnic in nature
    2) Christian anti-semitism in antiquity and the Middle Ages was religious in nature and has extended into modern times
    3) Muslim anti-semitism was—at least in its classical form—nuanced in that Jews were a protected class
    4) Political, social, and economic anti-semitism during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Europe that laid the groundwork for racial anti-semitism
    5) Racial anti-semitism that arose in the 19th century and culminated in Nazism
    6) Contemporary anti-semitism, which has been labeled by some as the new anti-semitism
3   Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisemitism_in_Europe

In the Christian West, anti-semitism has deep and multifaceted historical origins, entwined with theological, social, and political factors that span centuries. Historically speaking, the roots of anti-Semitic ideology can be traced back to pre-Christian Europe. During the medieval period, certain Christian teachings reinforced negative perceptions of Jewish people. Misinterpretations of religious texts, including the portrayal of Jews as "Christ-killers," contributed to the development of prejudices and animosity.

These Christian contributions to anti-semitism were not confined to the beliefs of ordinary Christians; they were publicly advocated by church officials and prominent theologians. One notable figure in this regard was Martin Luther, a leader of the Reformation, whose teachings further propagated anti-Semitic sentiments.

Here are a few significant examples of anti-Semitic events:

1) Pogroms in Russia (late 19th and early 20th centuries):
   Organized violent attacks, often supported or condoned by authorities, targeted Jewish communities in Russia, resulting in widespread violence, looting, and loss of life.
2) Dreyfus Affair (France, late 19th century):
   Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was falsely accused of treason, highlighting deeply ingrained anti-Semitic sentiments in French society. The affair had significant social and political repercussions.
3) Blood Libel Accusations (Medieval and Early Modern Europe):
   False accusations, such as the blood libel myth, where Jews were falsely accused of using Christian children's blood in rituals, led to persecution, violence, and baseless hatred.
4) Nuremberg Laws (Nazi Germany, 1935):
   The Nazi regime implemented anti-Semitic laws, known as the Nuremberg Laws, which stripped Jews of their citizenship, prohibited intermarriage, and restricted various aspects of public life, paving the way for more systematic persecution.
5) Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass, 1938):
   A violent pogrom orchestrated by the Nazis in Germany and Austria resulted in the destruction of synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses and the arrest and persecution of thousands of Jews.
6) Holocaust (1941–1945):
   The systematic genocide carried out by Nazi Germany and its collaborators resulted in the mass murder of six million Jews through methods such as mass shootings, gas chambers, and forced labor camps.

These examples represent a small fraction of the historical events reflecting anti-semitism. Each of these events played a significant role in shaping the narrative and impact of anti-Jewish sentiments throughout history. The extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis remains a stark reminder of the consequences of unchecked hatred and discrimination.

Drawing from these absurd and agonizing historical experiences, we can gain a deeper

understanding of the Western world's sentiment—its profound disdain for anti-semitism and empathy towards the emergence of Zionism.

Who are the Real Chosen People?

However, historical anti-semitism did not arise without cause. The identity politics surrounding the concept of the "chosen people," as pronounced in the Hebrew and Christian Bible, led to various interpretations among both Jewish and neighboring nations. These differing perspectives generated tensions and fostered sentiments of hatred between these groups.

Derived from the concept of the "chosen people," a dispute arose between Jewish and Christian interpretations. For instance, St. Paul, one of the greatest missionaries and theologians of the early Christian church, reinterpreted the concept of "chosen" with the following theological arguments. He stated:

"I am speaking the truth as a Christian; my conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, assures me that I do not lie when I tell you that there is great grief and unceasing sorrow in my heart. I would even pray to be an outcast myself, cut off from Christ, if it would help my brothers, my kinsfolk by natural descent. **They are descendants of Israel, chosen to be God's sons**; theirs is the glory of the divine presence, and theirs are the covenants, the law, the temple worship, and the promises. The patriarchs are theirs, and the Messiah came from them by natural descent. May God, supreme above all, be blessed forever! Amen."

"It cannot be that God's Word has proved false. Not all the offspring of Israel are truly Israel, nor does being Abraham's descendants make them all his true children. But in the Word of Scripture, 'It is through the line of Isaac's descendants that your name will be traced.' It is not the children of Abraham by natural descent who are children of God; it is the children born through God's promise who are reckoned as Abraham's descendants. The promise runs: 'In due season, I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.' (Romans 9:1–9)"

"What shall we say to that? Is God to be charged with injustice? Certainly not! He says to Moses, 'I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and have pity on whom I will have pity.' Thus, it depends not on human will or effort but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:14–16)"

Considering himself an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul argued for the legitimacy of including Gentiles in God's so-called "chosen" people. In doing so, he redirected the meaning of "chosen" from the Jewish interpretation based on Abraham's bloodline to that of God's promise and mercy.

As a result of this reinterpretation of the concept of "chosen," Gentile Christians were considered legitimate, potentially replacing or at least sharing equal status with the Jews, thereby creating a competitive dynamic between the two groups. Given that Paul's mission was primarily westward towards Europe, tensions and conflicts inevitably arose, particularly within that geographical context.

European anti-semitism originated from this identity dispute over being "chosen" and was further reinforced by the ideological interpretation of Jewish economic success. Additionally, the misreading of their supposed racial superiority politically contributed to the unfortunate rise of pogroms, various forms of discrimination, and, ultimately, the Holocaust. This tragic history gave birth to Jewish Zionism as a response to the need for a secure homeland.

Zionism and Palestine Apartheid

Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, foresaw in his book "Der Judenstaat" (The Jewish State) that his fellow Jews would find a secure haven to live and thrive. In making this promise, which he believed would be a blessing for all, he stated in his book.[4]:

> "Therefore, I believe that a remarkable generation of Jews will come into existence. The Maccabeans will rise again. Let me reiterate my opening words: Those Jews desiring a state will attain it. We shall finally live as free individuals on our own soil and peacefully pass away in our homes. The world will be liberated through our liberty, enriched by our prosperity, and magnified by our greatness. And **whatever we endeavor to achieve for our own well-being will resonate powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity.**"

However, this promise seems to have been forgotten. While the State of Israel was eventually established, the indigenous people of the land from which Israel was built have either been displaced into exile or subjected to segregation under the firm control of Israel. The forms of Palestinian apartheid include[5]:

1) **Occupation and Settlements:** The establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, such as the West Bank and East Jerusalem, gives rise to a system of segregation and discrimination.
2) **Separation Barrier:** The construction of the Israeli-West Bank barrier reinforces a physical division between Israeli and Palestinian communities.
3) **Movement Restrictions:** Palestinians face significant restrictions on their movement, particularly at checkpoints and barriers, constituting a form of discrimination.
4) **Resource Allocation:** Disparities in the allocation of resources, including water and land, are evident, with a bias favoring Israelis over Palestinians.

The anti-semitism that Israel once experienced is now being mirrored by Israel toward the Palestinians. What was once supposed to be a promised land has now turned into a cursed land.

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4   See Wikipedia: Theodor Herzl, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Herzl
5   See A Threshold Crossed, Human right watch: https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution

Self-determination As a Way Out

The historical and religious complexities surrounding identity have resulted in numerous tragedies for both sides. International intervention, especially from superpower nations, has failed to resolve problems. Instead, their self-interest calculations have only deepened the situation's intricacies. National security has often been exploited as a smokescreen to suppress the people, serving as a shield for the struggle for regional hegemony in geopolitical reshaping.

People on all sides have been mobilized to align with different hegemonic powers, fostering hatred and escalating confrontations. This vicious cycle must be broken to pave the way for a more constructive and peaceful resolution.

The true freedom of the people does not hinge on the benevolence of totalitarians granting dominion. Instead, genuine freedom is rooted in people's self-determination—an expression of the human "imago Dei" and accountability. Self-determination, recognized by the United Nations as a foundational value in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is considered a political strategy for resolving international conflicts and safeguarding individual human rights.

Despite the United Nations serving as an international political arena, it has repeatedly proven incapable of safeguarding this cornerstone and upholding justice. Nevertheless, stemming from the religious sanctification of human value through the concept of "Imago Dei" (in God's image), self-determination retains its moral power, encouraging people to resist injustice and protect lives.

From a theological perspective, self-determination embodies a cultural manifestation of Christian human doctrine, implicitly showcasing human creation with the potential for freedom (the image of God) and its finite nature (created from dust). In other words, self-determination is contingent upon sustaining the subjectivity of self-identity while being granted freedom. While identity is shaped by cultures, freedom is an objective achieved through the Gospel.[6]

Therefore, self-determination becomes a process that illustrates an ideal human nature—a new being that Jesus Christ sought to transform through his incarnational event (the Word becoming flesh). Though rooted in the religious divine affirmation of human value, the advocacy of self-determination takes a bottom-up approach. Namely, self-determination is not a plea for mercy or benevolence but an assertive act affirming the rights of individuals, minorities, or marginalized communities in resisting various forms of injustice that cloud their circumstances.

In other words, the objectives pursued through the self-determination approach are not

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6   See: Huang Po Ho, *A theology of Self-determination*, Tainan, Chhut thau thinn Theological Research Center, 1996.

centered on national sovereignty or national security. Instead, they revolve around the broader principles of universal human rights and the security of people.

Solidarity is Power

Self-determination, rooted intrinsically in individual rights, possesses collective dimensions as well. It diverges from democracy, where the prevailing principle is majority rule, by instead representing the advocacy of minorities. While democracy emphasizes the majority's decisions, self-determination recognizes the rights and aspirations of marginalized or minority groups. It underscores the importance of empowering individuals within these groups to actively shape their destinies, safeguard their unique identities, and resist forms of injustice that may otherwise go unaddressed within the confines of majority rule. In essence, self-determination serves as a crucial counterbalance, ensuring that the rights and voices of all, especially those in the minority, are upheld and respected. Therefore, the solidarity of oppressed and marginalized individuals is integral to realizing self-determination.

"Solidarity among oppressed or marginalized people" embodies a powerful and transformative alliance among individuals who share everyday experiences of hardship, discrimination, or marginalization. In recognizing their collective struggles, this solidarity becomes a potent force for change, advocating for justice, equity, and dismantling oppressive structures. It emphasizes that the shared narratives and challenges of the oppressed or marginalized create a bond beyond superficial differences. This form of solidarity is not merely an alliance but a commitment to amplifying each other's voices, addressing systemic injustices, and collectively working towards a more inclusive and equitable society. It stands as a testament to the belief that in unity, the strength of the marginalized can challenge and overcome the forces that perpetuate their oppression, fostering a sense of empowerment, resilience, and shared humanity.

In this context, it is imperative to acknowledge that people's solidarity must navigate the complexities of interest conflicts that may arise among the oppressed. These conflicts can be particularly challenging when intersecting deeply ingrained national or religious identities. Despite shared experiences of injustice, oppressed individuals may be at odds on specific issues that challenge their core beliefs. For instance, due to geopolitical tensions, individuals suffering under oppressive policies from rival empires may face difficulties supporting another camp of suffering people. However, fostering a resilient and inclusive solidarity requires the recognition of these nuanced conflicts. Through open dialogue and understanding, those facing various forms of oppression can voice their concerns for justice and liberation, even when divergent interests momentarily intersect with their national or religious identities.

10

The Power of Palestinian Women's Agency

An Essay of Intersectional Solidarity from East Asia

Miyuki Kinjo

Having witnessed live-streamed genocide in Gaza for more than 15 months and its explicit expansion to the West Bank, the renewal of solidarity with Palestinians became an urgent issue. However, since the beginning of the Gaza genocide, The following serious questions have kept haunted me. Is this genocide in Gaza the result of the defeat of our solidarity movements? Or, is this a moment of truth that advances the liberation of Palestine, and are the Gaza people testifying it at the expense of their lives? Since October 7, 2023, while having been involved with solidarity campaigns for Palestine, I have been searching for words to rebuild solidarity in the time of global crisis in the place I reside, Japan, where the system of colonialism has been embedded in the same way as Israel. This paper describes a part of my solidarity journey to overcome Israeli settler-colonialism in Palestine.

1. My journey of solidarity

I was born and raised in Japan with the multiple identities of East Asian-colonized countries. My father's family was originally from the Korean Peninsula, which was colonized by imperial Japan from 1910–1945. They emigrated to the Japanese mainland during and after the colonization period because of the severe economic and political situation in their homeland. My grandfather on my mother's side served as a military doctor of the Japanese Imperial Army in the 1930s, then joined invasive operations in China, where he became captive to a family of high-ranking Chinese Nationalist Party. During the captivity, he was ordered to serve as a doctor at a clinic annexed to my Chinese great-grandfather's house and met with my grandmother.

Thus, Japanese colonial violence in Korea, China, and Taiwan was engraved in my family's background. However, in post-war Japan, where the colonial past was suppressed mainly, the memory of Japan's colonization, including that of my grandparents, was suppressed and rarely publicly discussed. This situation made it difficult to grasp the depth of the colonial violence hinted at through my family members' experiences. The turning point for me appeared at the beginning of the 2000s. As a university student, I joined campus activists to confront Japan's colonial past in Asia. In one gathering, I met female survivors of Japanese military sexual slavery for the first time. Her testimonies struck me, and I felt compelled to work to

face the voices of people whose suffering had never been adequately approached.

However, as an immature university student, I had no vision of how to embrace these testimonies based on my mixed identities. Should I carry responsibility as a member of a colonizing nation because of my Japanese grandfather, who definitely served to sustain the sexual slavery system as a Japanese military doctor? Or should I uphold solidarity with these women survivors and call them my "halmoni (meaning "grandmother" in Korean)' because of my Korean origin?

In fact, it was the works of Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian author, intellectual, and spokesperson of the PFLP assassinated by Israel in 1972, that brought me to the understanding of the structural violence of colonialism in modern history in the world. When I read his novel *Men in the Sun(1962)*, I was so struck by the fact that the Palestinian refugee's experience was very similar to what I heard and read about the life of Koreans living in Japan, whose Japanese citizenship and passport were deprived in post-war Japan. Kanafani's story made me realize that the experiences of the Palestinian refugees and the colonized people of imperial Japan were far from unique or exceptional since the underlying structural violence of colonialism and nation-states is a universal one in modern, European-dominated history.

2. Colonialism, Feminism, and Intersectionality

Besides encountering women survivors' testimonies and Kanafani's story, my 4-year-long fieldwork in occupied Jerusalem also opened my eyes to Palestinian women's suffering. While I conducted fieldwork in Palestine, I was often invited to houses in refugee camps with my little daughter, and we met many refugee mothers. Joining Palestinian women's conversations as East Asian mother researchers was a great privilege. These women shared their experiences as daughters, mothers, wives, and caretakers in occupied Palestinian society.

Through conversations with Palestinian refugee women, I realized the gravity of the harsh conditions they had faced. Under prolonged Israeli occupation, Palestinian women had to live with a constant fear of losing their families. The male family members—husband, sons, fathers, grandfathers, and uncles—can be arrested by arbitrary suspicion at any time in the form of either administrative detention or arrest, or even worse, be killed by the occupation army. In this case, these women not only endure the pain caused by the family members' absence but also carry the burden of sustaining the family psychologically, physically, and economically. Spending time with refugee women who had lived with these persistent fears made me realize their precarious psychological condition, drifting between resilience and existential anxiety. These women usually acted brave in the presence of their family members, but sometimes they confessed their suffering in some casual conversation with me because they did not have to show normative behavior as a grandmother/mother/daughter/aunt to a foreign mother researcher from outside their community.

While learning from these women's stories, I found that Third World feminist theory could be an important reference point for analyzing the situation of Palestinian women. Within this theory, US Black Feminist theory has dealt specifically with the structure of

discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization of women within the liberational movement and used the concept of intersectionality as an impulse to transform the anti-racism movement.

Intersectionality was defined in US Black Feminist Kimberly Crenshaw's article in 1989. Crenshaw offered this concept because, in the US, anti-racism theory or existing feminist theory by large, had assumed that discrimination occurs only in a single dimension, such as race or gender. However, Crenshaw stated the following.

> Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes, they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet they often experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices that discriminate based on race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (Crenshaw 1989: 149)[1]

Intersectionality explains the complexity of the power-sustaining discrimination. Discrimination occurs in the interconnectedness of various categories, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ableism, and ethnicity.

3. The Settler-Colonial violence and Patriarchy in Palestinian society

Inspired by Black Feminist theory, Palestinian feminists have also analyzed the relationship between the violence of setter-colonialism and the violence of patriarchy in Palestinian society. Their basic understanding is that settler-colonialism attempts to control indigenous Palestinian women's body and sexuality by preserving, expanding, and exploiting the patriarchal system in Palestinian society.

One analysis would help us to understand this situation. A Palestinian feminist researcher, Nadela Shalhoub-Kevokian, points out that Zionist Settler-Colonial violence, which constantly endangers the indigenous community, often adapts a strategy to disturb the gender system of Palestinian communities.[2] Thus, settler-colonial violence would incur the reaction of Palestinian communities that try to preserve and intensify the existing gender system. For instance, the Israeli army often intervenes in the daily lives of Palestinian men using controlling military checkpoints or abrupt detention and dares to shatter their masculinity in front of the public eyes of the community through sexual or physical humiliation. Being exposed to these violent incidents, Palestinian men often adopt a patriarchal attitude toward their female family members to restore their masculinity by controlling their bodies, behavior, and sexuality. In some cases, such a way of control is justified in the name of "family honor."

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1 Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989, Iss.1(1989): 139–167.
2 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Militarization and Violence against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case-Study*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Shalhoub-Kevokian argues that since men in oppressed groups are deprived of the power to control their public sphere, they can exercise their masculinity only in the private sphere. This is precisely the situation in which intersectional violence comes into play in Palestinian women's body. Shalhoub-Kevokian refers to an example of a female friend who attempted to drive across an Israeli military checkpoint with her husband. As they passed through, she saw Israeli soldiers pulling down the pants of a Palestinian male passerby, stripping them naked from the waist. It was the month of Ramadan, and he was on his way home with two plastic bags full of food for the iftar. She exited the car and protested against the soldiers. After 15 minutes of arguing, she noticed that her husband had gone with the car, thus leaving her alone in front of the soldiers. When she called her husband to find out where he was, he said, "Look, if I had been there, they would have taken my pants off, just like they did with that man." Shalhoub-Kevokian argues that this is one example of an indigenous man whose gender norm was put in danger, trying to control his wife's behavior and thus suppressing her agency.

4. The Violence of Global Representation and the Western Feminist Trap

To understand the structure of violence surrounding Palestinian women, we also need to examine the representation of Palestinian women in Western-dominated global discourses. It is often criticized that Western discourses portray the Palestinian patriarchal system as the essential core of Palestinian culture rather than the consequence of the settler-colonial attack on indigenous culture. This argument framework is often adopted by Western feminist discourse.

It should be noted that in the reality of Palestinian women, this misrepresentation of the Western feminist discourse has also been operating as physical violence against them, especially in the post-Oslo era. Since the Oslo Accords, the massive flow of Western aids has urged many projects targeting to protect "women's rights" and influenced the reality of many Palestinian women. However, these projects mostly portray Palestinian women simply as victims of patriarchal violence in their own society. Despite the fact that Palestinian women face the intersection of violence of colonialism and patriarchy, Western aid projects carve out only the patriarchal aspect of the Palestinian society, defining Palestinian women as "victims" of a "backward" culture and thus reproducing a Western self-image of the civilized agency that "salvages" the Orient women. In this epistemological framework, if a Palestinian woman is willing to be engaged in national resistance against the Israeli occupation through participating in demonstrations, confronting soldiers, and throwing stones, she would end up in the outside of the Western aid discourses and be represented as a "terrorist" instead of recognized as a "victim."

In other words, Palestinian women's freedom is protected only when it is violated by their family or relatives; nevertheless, the same women's freedom is denied protection when it is violated by external settler-colonial power. This situation could make these women's social status vulnerable and sometimes drive them away from their communities.

5. Palestinian Women's Agency

It should also be noted that Western discourses, positioning Palestinian women only as objects of their representation, often dismiss these women's agency. Focusing on Palestinian women's local narratives, Shalhoub-Kevokian presents their agency speaking out in negotiations with settler-colonial and patriarchal discourses by calling attention to their life practice including everyday conversations, their care work for the families, pursuing education, and their marriage and reproduction.

Gayatri Spivak, a post-colonial woman intellectual, once posed a related question in her famous book "Can Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argued that Subalterns cannot have a voice because colonial and patriarchal discourse cannot grasp the Subaltern woman's voice. After all, these women act outside the Western and patriarchal frameworks of understanding.

In contrast, according to Shalhoub-Kevokian, there is no need to pose this question because their voices are always out there.

It should be added that these women's agencies could provide a new horizon for national liberation. For instance, in the summer of 2019, Palestinian women organized protests following the murder of Israa Ghalib, a 21-year-old woman living in occupied Bethlehem. Israa was assaulted by her family members by the reason that she posted a photo of herself with her fiancé on Instagram. The assault on her signified the brutality of patriarchal violence, as she was chased and beaten to death by her family after she sustained the initial abuse and was brought to the hospital.

After Israa's death, solidarity demonstrations were organized protesting the violence against women, which had conventionally been justified as "honor killing" in the society. After some weeks of the demonstration, a new women's group called Ta'lat started organizing throughout Palestine beyond its geographic and apartheid segregation. It was also joined by Palestinian LGBT networks, students, and young women who had never participated in any movement. Many Palestinian women in the Diaspora also supported the Ta'lat movement on social media. It marked women's protests on the unprecedented level, and their voices spread in the Palestinian public discourse.

"Ta'lat" means "going out" in Arabic. It also stands for bringing issues of gender-based violence into the Palestinian public sphere, positioning personal issues at the center of national liberation. Suheir As'ad, one of the movement's organizers and a resident of Haifa, said that the demonstration offered a forum for Palestinian women to discuss how to relate gender-based violence to national liberation, thus offering Palestinian women a space to discuss their visions for national liberation.

Laiya Sanna, another leader of the movement born in Naqab, says that the issue of women's oppression has long been marginalized under the more prominent theme of the Palestinian national struggle. Sanna emphasized that the question to be posed now is how both struggles are interrelated. As indicated by the movement's slogan, "no free homeland

without free women," their goal was not just to reform the current Palestinian social structure. They are seeking a feminist revolution that would simultaneously end the occupation and liberate women from patriarchal rule.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I shed light on the Palestinian women's agency despite the various structures of violence surrounding them. Although their agency has long been invisible on the local, national, and global level, it has great potential for the renewal of the Palestinian national movement in times of crisis. The significance of their agency has been discovered by Palestinian feminist scholars in recent years, and one of the public manifestations of these women's voices was the Tala'at movement. We find Tal'at's vision significant in light of the fact that virtually every attempt to overcome divisions among the Palestinian people since the post-Oslo era has failed. The Tal'at movement presents a new vision of national liberation that bridges Palestinian society's social and geographical divisions.

As a mother researcher residing in East Asia and whose family history is imprinted with a colonialist background, I believe that upholding the agency of the Palestinian women could be a foundation upon which the global Palestinian solidarity movement can be advanced further. The slogan "No Free Homeland without Free Women" offers a common vision to create of a new world for various global actors experiencing the intersectional oppression including racism, colonialism, sexism, and ableism, and can be one of the guiding principles for confronting the current crisis.

11

Gender, Construction of Nation in India and the Role of Hindu Nationalism

Neha Dabhade

Asia has long been a site where diverse ethnic, religious, linguistic, and caste-based groups coexist, with these multiplicities frequently producing overlapping identities. These significantly shape individual experiences of inclusion and exclusion, as well as hegemony and marginalization. One of the most pivotal identities that intersect with others in defining the political and social landscape of nation-states is gender. As a historically marginalized and oppressed group, women occupy a central position in this intersectional analysis. The process of colonization has been critical in shaping and reconfiguring the political and social institutions of Asia, including those in India, by providing an overarching framework that structured power dynamics.

In the colonial context, gender politics did not evolve in a linear fashion, instead intersecting with other identity markers to influence the roles and status of women in various Asian societies. Religious nationalism further reinforced the subordinate status of women, embedding them within unequal institutions such as family and marriage while also entrenching patriarchal structures within the newly constructed "nations." The colonial project in Asia, as in Africa, involved the imposition of the knowledge systems, cultural practices, and social and political institutions of the colonizers, which were regarded as superior to indigenous traditions.

The British policy of "divide and rule" exacerbated the already complex intergroup relations in Asia, further entrenching divisions and redrawing boundaries with little regard for existing social or cultural realities. This arbitrary boundary-making and induced migration contributed to the creation of a complex socio-political landscape marked by fault lines that continue to influence contemporary power dynamics in the region.

Historically, nationalism has often been constructed through the use of symbols and imagery associated with women. In various contexts, women have frequently been portrayed as emblems of the freedom struggle and revolutionary movements, such as Marianna, the "Goddess of Liberty" in the French Revolution. In Nagel (1993), Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias identified five ways in which women have participated in ethnic, national, and state processes and practices: (a) as biological producers of members of ethnic collectivities; (b) as

reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups by enacting feminine behavior; (c) as participating centrally in ideological reproductions of collectivity and as transmitters of culture; (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and (e) as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles (Nagel 1998). This symbolic role of women mainly extends to their representation as idealized mothers, tasked with raising heroic sons—warriors and soldiers—who are expected to defend the nation. Beyond these reproductive roles, women are also entrusted with the responsibility of transmitting and preserving culture. Their role as socializers of children involves instilling values, morals, and narratives that align with the dominant societal norms, thus reinforcing the status quo. Thus, women are positioned as custodians of collective identity and memory, functioning as key reproducers of cultural continuity.

In the Indian context, women are often glorified in mythology, with these mythological figures serving as reference points for defining the "ideal" woman in society. A prominent example of this is the character Sita in the *Ramayana*, whose virtues and actions are elevated as a standard to which women should aspire in terms of loyalty, chastity, and self-sacrifice. This construction of women as repositories of cultural ideals underscores the centrality of gender in the formation and perpetuation of national identity.

Samarasinghe (2000) notes that in Sri Lanka, the image of "Sita" as a portrayal of Indian womanhood was seen as a parallel to the image of Vihara Mahadevi, a historical figure projected as a significant model of Sri Lankan womanhood. Malathi de Alwis, in Samarasinghe (2000) shows how the image of Vihara Mahadevi has been repeatedly used by Sri Lankan male politicians since colonial times to depict the model of a perfect daughter, a devoted wife, and a courageous and patriotic mother (Kataria, 2013). In India, the fight for independence from the British was inspired by the imagery of "Bharat Mata" (Banerjee 2003). Ironically, the same imagery is now being used by Hindu nationalists in India to exclude Muslims and other groups by invoking the protection of Bharat Mata against the lustful Muslims!

During British colonial rule in India, women were predominantly confined to the private sphere, with limited agency and participation in public and political life, although there were notable exceptions. As the Indian freedom struggle gained momentum, it was accompanied by a parallel movement for social reforms. However, a pervasive undercurrent in these reforms was the emphasis on revivalism, which sought to restore the perceived glory of India's Hindu past. This revivalist discourse was grounded in a conceptual binary between the "inner" and "outer" and between the "spiritual" and "material." In this framework, Indians were portrayed as spiritually superior, with the "inner" realm, symbolized by the domestic family space, regarded as central. Consequently, improving the condition of women within the family, or in this "inner" space, became a focal point of reform.

Reforms during this period included opposition to and the abolition of practices such as sati (the immolation of widows) and child marriage, as well as the legal sanctioning of widow remarriage. Additionally, the education of girls was increasingly emphasized as part of the broader reform agenda. Although framed within a revivalist narrative, these social reforms aimed to address the subjugation of women while simultaneously reinforcing traditional gen-

der roles and the sanctity of family life.

The first phase of feminism in India was largely initiated by men, focusing on addressing social issues such as the practice of sati (widow immolation), advocating for widow remarriage, prohibiting child marriage, reducing illiteracy, regulating the age of consent, and ensuring property rights through legal reforms. During this period, women were often categorized alongside lower castes as subjects of social reform and welfare, rather than being recognized as autonomous agents of change. The reformist agenda sought to reshape women's roles within the existing societal structures, particularly in the caregiving domain, rather than challenging or transforming those roles. The women involved in this early phase of activism were predominantly linked to male reformers, and they were typically elite, Western-educated, upper-caste Hindus. Their participation in the movement reflected the intersection of gender, caste, and class dynamics, with a focus on the preservation of traditional feminine roles within the broader social reform agenda.

The social character of the reform movement in India warrants critical examination, particularly given the implications of its leadership, which was predominantly male and drawn from upper-caste communities. The focus and methods of the reformers were often constrained by factors such as region and caste location, as pointed out by scholars such as Sangari and Vaid (Anagol-McGinn 1994). A striking example of these limitations can be found in the Widow Remarriage Act, which legally facilitated the remarriage of upper-caste widows. However, this law simultaneously negated the rights that lower-caste widows had historically been able to exercise under their customary laws (Chaudhuri 2011a, 38–41). This instance highlights the intersection of gender practices with caste, community, and regional identities in India. Moreover, it illustrates how the gender norms and practices of dominant communities were often institutionalized as the normative standard for the entire nation, a trend that has been increasingly contested by diverse feminist perspectives. It is crucial to recognize that religious nationalism tends to promote such homogenization, consolidating a singular, dominant cultural and gendered model while marginalizing alternative voices and practices.

Cultural regeneration in India is imbued with complex conceptions of what constitutes culture, often centered around practices that regulate women's mobility and control their sexuality. Practices such as child marriage, purdah, and sati are frequently chosen as being emblematic of community identity. In this context, if women are positioned as icons of Indian culture, a contentious question arises in a plural society like India: Which women and which cultural practices should be recognized as "national" symbols? One of the most enduring and contentious issues in modern India has been the conflict between the rights of community identity, the rights of women, and the authority of the state. This ongoing debate reflects the tension between preserving cultural traditions and addressing gender inequality, highlighting the complex interplay between identity, culture, and the nation's evolving legal and political frameworks.

With the rise of the Indian National Congress and under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the participation of women in the freedom movement was significantly encouraged.

To some extent, this shift succeeded in broadening the base of the independence struggle and granted women the agency to assume active roles, including leadership positions. However, the prevailing discourse still emphasized that women were primarily idealized "mothers," reinforcing traditional gender roles. The efforts of the Congress to build alliances with organizations of peasants, workers, and women were aimed at demonstrating mass support and contributed to the social legitimization of women's political participation. Notable achievements, such as the constitutional guarantees of equal rights for women and the establishment of universal adult suffrage in independent India, were the direct results of women being included in the national political process. The 1940s marked the entry of women into political activism, while the 1950s saw advancements in women's rights, such as the legal entitlement to inherit property (Sen 2000).

The formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 represents a significant watershed in the history of cultural nationalism in India. With its ideological vision and agenda, the RSS has been instrumental in shaping and consolidating communal identities within the Indian socio-political landscape, particularly influencing the discourse on gender and the positioning of women in society. The organization, historically and predominantly led by upper-caste Hindu men, has been pivotal in shaping the political narratives of other Hindu organizations. One such narrative involves the depiction of Muslim men and "Muslim" rulers as historically responsible for the degradation and violation of Hindu women, thereby fueling a sense of collective victimhood and the imperative for retribution. This discourse not only serves to establish Muslims as the common adversary of Hindus but also underpins contemporary conspiracy theories, such as the notion of "love jihad." Ultimately, the RSS envisions the establishment of a "Hindu Rashtra," a socio-political framework founded on principles of hierarchy and exclusion.

The Indian freedom struggle against British colonial rule witnessed the emergence of prominent female leaders who played crucial roles in shaping the trajectory of the nation's political and social future. Women such as Sucheta Kriplani, Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Madam Cama were central to the movement, offering unique perspectives on social justice, inclusion, and equality. Such women contributed significantly and influenced the drafting of the Indian Constitution, advocating for the recognition of women's rights and political independence. The involvement of these women in the nationalist movement and their advocacy for gender equality appeared to promise enhanced social, political, and economic status for women. However, despite these advances, the post-independence reality did not fully reflect these aspirations for gender equity.

In the immediate aftermath of India's independence, the feminist movement predominantly focused on issues of sexual violence, particularly rape, and physical abuse. However, this discourse was narrowly framed as it primarily addressed the experiences of upper-caste Hindu women, often neglecting the intersecting dimensions of caste, religion, and ethnicity. A major focus of the post-independence feminist narrative was women affected by the Partition of India in 1947, particularly the notion of their "return," which framed them as victims who needed recovering and restoring to the "rightful" cultural and familial order. This discourse, however, largely overlooked the complex dynamics of caste and religious

identity in shaping women's experiences during and after Partition.

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist activism in India began to shift its focus to issues such as rape, specifically by challenging the legal and cultural definitions of rape, which were often restrictive and failed to encompass the full scope of sexual violence against women. This period saw increased awareness of sexual violence as a tool of patriarchal control, with calls for legal reform and greater social recognition of women's autonomy over their bodies.

A critical examination of post-independence feminist discourse reveals that, while issues concerning women's rights were formally addressed in the Constitution, their political rights were not meaningfully integrated into the broader discourse of the Indian state. The Country Report for the Beijing Women's Conference observed that, unfortunately, women's political rights were not seriously addressed in the state discourse of independent India, where women were primarily understood as recipients of welfare and as wives, mothers, and daughters.

This framing limited the recognition of women as active political agents with the capacity to shape policy or engage in public life beyond these traditional familial roles. Consequently, the feminist movement's early focus on political rights and social justice faced considerable setbacks in the post-independence period, with the broader state narrative relegating women's rights to the sphere of familial duty rather than recognizing women as equal citizens with the same political and social agency as their male counterparts.

The 1980s in India was marked by significant social and legal upheaval, with the cases of Shah Bano and Roop Kanwar serving as key flashpoints in the contestation of community identities and boundaries. The Shah Bano case, in particular, highlighted the tensions between individual rights, religious law, and secular governance in the Indian state. Shah Bano, an elderly Muslim woman, was divorced by her husband and subsequently sought maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) of 1973, which mandates that a man must provide for his wife during and after their divorce if she cannot support herself financially. Her husband, however, argued that his obligation to support her was limited to the *iddat* period, a three-month duration prescribed by Muslim Personal Law. The court ruled in favor of Shah Bano, granting her alimony under secular law, a decision that was regarded as a victory for women's rights.

However, this judgment provoked strong reactions within the Muslim community, leading to heated debates over the role of the secular state in regulating religious matters. The 1985 Shah Bano judgment became a landmark in India's constitutional history, raising critical questions about the relationship between state law and religious law, particularly in a pluralistic society. The case also highlighted the complex intersection of religious principles and individual rights within the framework of a liberal democracy. A central issue in the debate was the reform of Muslim personal law, with the judgment highlighting the gendered dimensions of religious practices and the need for legal reforms to ensure greater protection of women's rights. Therefore, the controversy surrounding the Shah Bano case encapsulated broader struggles over identity, community, and the role of the state in mediating between religious customs and secular legal principles (Sen 2000).

The Shah Bano and Roop Kanwar cases rekindled the national discourse on gender justice and the intersection of personal laws with women's rights in India. The 1980s were also marked by significant socio-political turbulence, particularly with the rise of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the resurgence of Hindu nationalism. Seeking the construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya on the site of the Babri Masjid, the movement mobilized a large number of Hindus, including women. The latter were actively involved in protests, blocking the arrest of political leaders, looting stores, and attacking Muslim women. The extent of women's participation in these public actions was seen as a noteworthy social development, with some scholars considering it an unusual phenomenon in the context of women's roles in Indian society (Banerjee 1996).

However, while women were mobilized and sought after for public participation in order to further the "religious" objectives of the movement, their status in private spaces remained largely unchanged. Women's roles were largely confined to their identities as bearers of community honor and of culture, reinforcing traditional gender norms. In this context, Hindu nationalism, much like other forms of ethnic nationalism, instrumentalized women as both symbols of the nation's honor and active participants in the performance of masculinized roles. This paradox is exemplified by the formation of organizations like Durga Vahini, which sought to impart martial training to women, framing them as warriors tasked with defending the nation against the perceived "virile" and "lustful" Muslims (Hasan 1994). Thus, women were represented as not only passive icons of the nation's purity but also active agents in the propagation of Hindu nationalist goals, emphasizing their involvement in a gendered and politicized struggle that simultaneously reinforced traditional patriarchal structures.

In India, the women's movement produced largely inadequate and fragmented responses to the rise of Hindu nationalism and the accompanying narratives during the 1980s. The women's movement at this juncture appeared disjointed, struggling to address the emergent dynamics of Hindu nationalism, which increasingly challenged the solidarity of women's advocacy across religious lines. On the one hand, Hindu nationalism was gaining strength in the late 1980s; on the other hand, India was poised to enter a new phase in its economic history, characterized by the introduction of economic reforms aimed at integrating the country into the global capitalist economy. This period marked the expansion of the informal sector and greater demand for equal opportunities and wages for women workers.

While these shifts necessitated a robust and unified workers' movement that would address the growing concerns for gender equality in the labor force, this movement often overlooked the intersectionality of identity politics. Both the women's and workers' movements failed to adequately address the specific concerns of marginalized groups, particularly Muslim women. The participation of the latter in these movements was frequently sidelined, and their unique struggles, shaped by both gender and religious identity, were marginalized. Their bargaining power and capacity to engage in public spaces are seriously curtailed by their religious identity and the restrictions they face from within the community and from the outside (Khan 2007). This exclusion reflects a broader challenge within the women's movement to reconcile its objectives with the realities of religious and communal politics, thereby limiting its capacity to form inclusive, cross-community solidarity.

Since 2014, with the consolidation of Hindu right-wing politics in India, the position of women has again become central to the political and social discourse. The intersection of communal politics and women's bodies has become increasingly evident, not only in public narratives but also in the formulation of laws and policies. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014 has been accompanied by the establishment of state-sponsored initiatives such as the Anti-Romeo Squads in Uttar Pradesh, which were framed as efforts to safeguard women but have also been criticized for promoting communal vigilantism. Simultaneously, several Indian states have passed anti-conversion laws, often referred to as Freedom of Religion Acts, which have been justified through claims that Hindu women are being enticed by Muslim men into interfaith marriages in order to increase the Muslim population. This discourse links women's bodies to the perceived demographic and religious threats posed by Muslims.

Furthermore, the RSS leadership has explicitly encouraged Hindu women to increase their reproductive output in order to boost the Hindu population, further embedding women in the rhetoric of ethnic and religious nationalism.

Anti-Muslim sentiment has also been evident in protests, such as those opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), where significant participation from Muslim women, particularly at sites like Shaheen Bagh, was met with repression. The protests were followed by the arrest of Muslim women students, the demolition of their properties, and the public humiliation of prominent Muslim women activists, who were targeted on online platforms such as Bulli Bai, where they were featured in public "auctions."

The decision of the BJP government to ban the practice of triple *talaq* was initially welcomed by many Muslim women as a step toward legal reform. However, the subsequent criminalization of the practice raised concerns within civil society and among Muslim women themselves because it was perceived as not a measure to protect women but a politically motivated move that disproportionately targeted Muslim men. This legal intervention has been widely acknowledged as counterproductive to the cause of Muslim women as it risks exacerbating their vulnerabilities by placing them at the intersection of communal politics and legal retribution, rather than addressing their broader socioeconomic and legal needs.

In recent years, Muslim women students in certain universities have faced restrictions on sitting for exams if they wear the hijab, leading to prolonged legal battles. In 2024, the state of Uttarakhand passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), and in 2025, the state of Gujarat announced plans to enact a similar law. It is anticipated that other BJP-led states may follow suit in enacting similar legislation in the near future. Alongside other legal measures targeting the Muslim community, these developments have the potential to further marginalize Muslim women, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. This is particularly concerning for other historically marginalized groups, including Dalit women, Adivasi women, and Christian women, who are similarly at risk of being pushed to the margins of society.

The mobilization of women on the basis of religion and identity, without adequately

addressing the underlying issues of inequality perpetuated by the patriarchy, has weakened the broader women's rights movement. Rather than empowering women with the agency and ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, ethnic nationalism exploits their bodies as symbols when attempting to redefine the contours of nationalism. In this context, women are not empowered as active agents of social change but utilized as passive instruments to further the ideological and political objectives of ethnic and religious nationalism.

It would be wrong to assume that women from religious minority communities are the sole recipients of disadvantage and discrimination under Hindu nationalism. Nor should it be presumed that Hindu nationalism positions Hindu women in more equitable or empowered societal roles. In the context of Hindu nationalism, Muslim women are often portrayed as victims who need rescuing from men of their own community. In contrast, Hindu women are mobilized within a narrative that frames them as vulnerable and subject to the threat posed by Muslim men. The responsibility for building a powerful "Hindu Rashtra" or "Hindu Nation" to resist the Muslims and avenge "ravaged" Hindu women is placed squarely on their shoulders (Visana 2023).

While Hindu women are expected to assume masculinized roles in the public sphere— often participating in violence against Muslims—their roles in private spaces remain rigidly confined to traditional expectations of wives, mothers, and daughters. In this configuration, their position remains secondary to that of men. Hindu women are stripped of agency under the guise of "protection" from Muslim women. The notion of "love jihad" exemplifies this paternalistic dynamic. Inter-religious or inter-caste marriages are framed as threatening to Hindu identity, and such marriages serve to embed women's bodies and sexualities within family structures, with only minimal challenges being offered to the traditional gendered roles that women occupy.

In this context, the rights of Hindu women to privacy, autonomy in choosing a life partner, and freedom of expression in terms of attire, reproductive rights, and other personal freedoms are becoming increasingly state-regulated. These rights no longer rest solely in the hands of women but are being determined by the state apparatus, which seeks to govern their lives through the lens of communal and patriarchal ideologies.

In Asia, identity formation is shaped by the complex interplay of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion, with colonial histories leaving an indelible mark on the region's social fabric. India, in particular, presents a unique case where the trajectory of women's rights has been anything but linear. The struggle for independence against British colonial rule brought Indian women into the public sphere, yet the rise of Hindu nationalism has posed significant challenges to the advancement of women's movements for better wages, equal opportunities, and improved healthcare and education. The fragmentation and weakening of the women's movement in India can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the pervasive influence of identity politics.

The critical forward step requires a cross-sectional approach, wherein the diverse

populations in both the women's and the democratic movements actively raise their voices. The women's movement must broaden its scope to address the concerns of excluded identities, particularly those defined by religion and caste. Concurrently, democratic movements must critically examine the instrumentalization of women and ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into their discourses. The antidote to the rise of religious nationalism lies, to a significant extent, in the strengthening of inclusive democratic movements, particularly an inclusive women's movement that actively incorporates the experiences and needs of marginalized groups. Only through such an approach can the full potential of both the women's and the democratic movements be realized, ensuring that gender justice is not relegated to the periphery but central to the broader fight for equality and social justice.

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Session 4

Theology and culture
for intersectional liberation
in the era of global crisis

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Theology and Culture for Intersectional Liberation in the Era of Global Crisis

John S. Munayer & Samuel S. Munayer

Introduction

The title of this panel is 'theology and culture for intersectional liberation in the era of global crisis'. We will draw on our own experiences as Palestinian theologians and scholars who wrestle with decolonial and indigenous approaches to examine this topic. Therefore, our brief presentation will focus on the following points of theology and intersectionality, and their connection to decoloniality: (1) Liberation is perfect communion with God, people and creation; (2) Every era is an era of global crisis; (3) Grassroots theology and culture should be the driving forces behind intersectional liberation.

Liberation

Liberation is a term that can often be thrown around, with people assuming they are speaking about the same thing both theoretically and practically. As Palestinian theologians, when we speak of liberation, we speak of perfect communion with God, people and creation. In some ways, one can speak of liberation as a description for ultimate reconciliation. This is of course grounded in the Christian theological tradition. We also learn from our own tradition, that all three components need to be liberated (relationship with God, people and creation), in order to restore us to the peace of the Garden of Eden. This is in essence the biblical narrative. Thus, liberation assumes intersectionality. A fact that is often neglected or blurred due to our own biases. Hence, liberation necessarily assumes collective liberation as a joint project, and not an individualist quest only.

We can only speak, with our limited vision, about the Palestinian context for practical implications for the aforementioned understanding of liberation. Nevertheless, these reflections may bear importance to other areas around the world. Therefore, in order to begin the process of liberation in Palestine, one must begin with the liberation of one's individual and collective consciousness. As Palestinians, and indeed most people in this world, have been deeply influenced by colonial logic and understandings. It has led to the disregard of our own sources of knowledge, traditions and ways of being. As such, our theology/culture has suffered in its relations to the divine, to each other and to creation.

To take the Palestinian Christian theological tradition as an example, we have often relied on Eurocentric methods, sources and audiences in our theological thinking, writing and action. One negative consequence of this, is the oversimplification of oppression and the one-dimensional analysis of Israeli-colonial aggression. And instead, highlighting for the most part, the oppression that Palestinian men from middle class backgrounds suffer from. That is not to say that this population does not bear the consequences of apartheid (We are part of this population by the way), but it fails to embody the holistic liberation we mentioned above. For this reason, as we think, write and reflect on liberation, its holistic approach forces us to question western assumptions and methods, and dig deep into our own beautiful traditions that address all systems of oppression; which distort our peaceful and justice relations with God, other fellow humans and creation.

Global Crisis

This brings us to the second point; every era has been an era of crisis. Whoever gets to dictate when an era is an era of crisis, often does not take intersectionality seriously. For at any given moment, there has been entire populations under severe oppression, leading to the breakdown of societies and immense suffering. We see every era as an era of crisis until all people are truly liberated and free from systems that dehumanise them and destroy the earth.

To take the Palestinian example once again, all eyes are on the conflict at moment. And rightly so, the situation in Palestine deserves attention, but where was everyone before the 7th of October? When Palestinians were being killed on a weekly basis and millions were suffering under the regime of apartheid. Was that not a time of crisis? Or is a time of crisis only when the powerful suffer? One could take this a step further and ask why people are looking at Palestine and not other contexts were atrocities are being made in the world. If we want to speak about an era of crisis, every day is a crisis.

The sense of urgency should be a driving force. We should all, including the academia, work hard to struggle against all forms of oppression. For it is literally a matter between life and death for people. And this is why spaces like these are so important, we need each other to illuminate our blind spots in terms of the contexts and realities that other people live in. Our liberation is interconnected and dependent on each other. When should we act we ask ourselves? Now is always the answer.

Grassroots Theology and Culture

What does this mean for theological and cultural perspectives, movements and production of knowledge? Grassroots theology and culture serve as potent catalysts for intersectional liberation, melding diverse theological perspectives with cultural movements to foster social change. From liberation theology's emphasis on solidarity with the oppressed to womanist theology's intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender, theological frameworks provide critical lenses for understanding and dismantling systems of oppression. One cannot write about liberation theology from comfortable and safe spaces in academia, or for an academic audience alone. Rather, liberation theology must be formed in and around the streets,

refugee camps, checkpoints and prisons, and for the people who suffer most.

Cultural production, including literature, art, and music, plays a vital role in shaping intersectional liberation narratives. Through mediums like literature, authors articulate the complexities of identity and resistance. Artists have the potential to challenge dominant narratives through their work, highlighting the intersections of race, gender, power and more. Music, too, serves as a cultural battleground, with genres providing a platform for marginalized voices to critique systemic injustice. Moreover, cultural expressions of the oppressed become a theological source. For if God is working in the margins and among the oppressed, their expressions should deeply matter for theology. In fact, some of our biggest questions in theology, are best understood or even answered in these contexts of oppression.

Therefore, we must shift our gaze and questions to that of oppression. If liberation of the oppressed, whoever they may be, and the restoration of creation are our guides, all of our work should be directed at these issues. And it is not merely enough to simply research or write about these topics, we are in need to embody the struggle for liberation. Thankfully, intersectional approaches to liberation allow us, and indeed forces us, to form deep and wide solidarity movements. Ones that transcend boundaries, social categories and forms of oppression. We need to take this seriously.

Conclusion

To conclude, we present to you today when our people are going through a genocide. In many ways, this presentation has little to no significance if we do not translate our liberative academic work into action and true solidarity with the most oppressed in our context. If our theology and solidarity does not empower the weak and mobilise to true liberation, there is no point in our endeavours. More broadly speaking, Palestinian Liberation Theology might have succeeded in terms of advocacy efforts in some spaces, especially outside of Palestine, but the true measure of success for Palestinian Liberation Theology is in contributing to the holistic liberation of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, our liberation and solidarity movement are subject to another criteria besides the liberation for the Palestinian people. That is, the liberation for Israeli people. In contexts of deep-rooted dehumanisation, the oppressed become less than human and the oppressors become more than human. The oppressors claim a higher status of human which justifies their exploitation of others. Therefore, our vision, mission and solidarity most include the liberation of Israelis from the higher status they believe to be in. As such, Israelis who understand this to be true, are to be part of our solidarity and liberation movement as comrades.

So, this panel and our work is important as we reflect on liberation for all peoples in all places. We perhaps agree generally in theory, and we have heard about the importance of it. Indeed, liberation and culture make theology relevant, but martyrdom and sacrifice make it credible. Yes, we are here to talk about liberation which we have done, lets see if we have also credibility.

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"The stones are shouting out!" Towards a spirituality of uprising, decolonization, and liberation

ARIZUMI Wataru

"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out!" (Luke 19:40)

1. Uprising, as an issue of liberation theology

What is an uprising? In general, an uprising is defined as disorderly behavior by a crowd or a disturbance of social order caused by a multitude of people. You may think of rioting mobs throwing stones, setting fire to the town, breaking store windows, clashing against police, and then dragging away. Uprisings are distinguished from demonstrations based on specific demands or slogans. Instead, it is considered a simple vandalism or distraction. The Japanese police call uprisings "mass illegal incidents" and criminalize them. In most of society, uprisings are seen as unplanned and meaningless mayhems that should be cracked down immediately.

However, the definition of an uprising is one-sided and depends on the perspective of those suppressing it. Most media reports on uprisings are based on information from police or administrative authorities. There are very few reports on what people are shouting, talking, and asking about at the frontline of the uprisings. The voices of the 'rioters' are heard only as unintelligible. While stone-throwing by unarmed people is criticized as excessive violence, aggression by armed police against people is always justified. This unbalanced relationship between people and power does not appear only in the extraordinary time and space of an uprising. However, inequality exists in the ordinary situation.

Uprisings are a liberating practice that exposes unbalanced and unequal relationships and creates new relationships of power. The people's voices echoing on the streets and the countless stones thrown at the police are radical politics itself, for the destitution of the oppressive social order.

In this paper, I will take on the uprising and collective action of the people as an issue for liberation theology and consider how it can be a source of spirituality and solidarity in the era

of global crisis. Unfortunately, no entry for the 'uprising' exists in any theological dictionary. If so, we must leave the dictionary on the desk and go to the streets to find our resources. From the many resources on the street, I would like to focus on a place called Kamagasaki, which is known as the only town in Japan where uprisings occur. Let us begin by hearing the sounds and voices echoing from the uprisings in Kamagasaki that have been unfolded more than 20 times since 1961.

2. Kamagasaki and uprisings

Kamagasaki is located in the southern part of Osaka, a city in Japan. This town was formed in the late 19th century as a relocation site for people displaced by the slum clearance for the World Expo. In the 20th century, Japan began to move towards heavy industrialization, and the number of workers engaged in construction and transportation increased. From then, an influx of single male laborers began flowing into Kamagasaki. After World War II, Kamagasaki became a waiting area for workers and a supply center for labor. Since the 1960s, Japan's energy and industrial policies have shifted from coal to oil, and coal miners, shipbuilders, and farmers who had lost their jobs gathered in Kamagasaki. Gradually, Kamagasaki became a town of day laborers who worked at the lowest level to build the urban development of Osaka. The day laborers of Kamagasaki were subjected to poor working conditions and sacrificed for Japan's economic growth as a disposable human resource.

One of the most critical moments in Kamagasaki's story was August 1, 1961. On this day, the collective action of day laborers, later called the First Kamagasaki Uprising, arrived. What happened that day? At approximately 9 p.m., a 62-year-old male worker was hit by a taxi. Upon arriving at the place of the accident, the police officer covered the worker with a corpse cloth and left the worker on the street. Even though the worker was still alive at the time, the police failed to take care of him. Leaving him to die. In response to the police handling of the accident, approximately 300 workers in Kamagasaki gathered and surrounded the police box to protest. The protest was soon accompanied by the throwing of stones at the police station and the setting of fire in police cars. The police tried to control the situation by using tear gas to suppress workers, but more workers joined the uprising, and more heated protests continued. Uprisings are always motivated by people's anger towards neglect and disregard for life. In Kamagasaki, the first uprising broke out due to police disregarding workers' lives. It was the seminal moment ('kairos') in which the community of laborers' empathy and mutual suffering ('compassion'), nurtured everywhere else in the city, manifested itself on the streets.

Even after that, uprisings frequently occurred in Kamagasaki. In particular, the uprisings of the 1970s were connected to the rights struggles of day laborers as the energy of direct action that emerged as protests against the police deeply intersected with the labor movement. Kamagasaki has various welfare systems and resources that support workers' lives, forming a unique safety net. During this period, employment insurance, unemployment benefits, and summer and winter lump-sum payments, which had not been provided to day laborers, were won one after another. But that is not all. The seeds of Kamagasaki's unique lifestyle and culture, such as soup kitchens, night patrols, winter struggles, and summer festivals, were sown and blossomed amid the successive uprisings of the 1970s.

These uprisings created a sense of community in Kamagasaki. On May 26, 1972, a worker was assaulted when he protested against a construction company's job description, which was different from the actual one. Angered by the assault, the workers continued to protest against the arrogance of gang-run construction companies. As a result, Kamagasaki won an apology from that construction company for assaulting its workers. This was a revolutionary moment for day laborers, who until then had been forced to be silent in the face of violations of their working conditions, pinch money, and violence by organizers and field overseers, to take a stand against exploitation and oppression with their own hands.

The first summer festival was held in Kamagasaki in August 1972. The park where the event was held had long been occupied as a gambling den run by gangsters. Therefore, keeping the summer festival at this location meant returning to the park as their shared space. The summer festival shook up the relationship of domination between laborers and gangsters in Kamagasaki.

The various safety nets in Kamagasaki were created during frequent uprisings. The uprising in Kamagasaki was a protest against the neglect of the lives of day laborers and was nothing more than a direct action to reclaim their rights and space.

3. The spirituality of the uprising, demonstration, and resistance

Everyone says that the Kamagasaki uprisings are like a festival. The expression "festival" accurately describes the reality that the Kamagasaki uprising was not an act of vandalism but rather a communal act. The commonality in uprisings such as that seen in Kamagasaki can be seen in other places worldwide where people struggle for their lives.

The explosive and liberating energy of the uprising, as if it were a spark, reminds me of the events of the liberating Day of Pentecost in Acts of Apostles in the New Testament (the Greek Bible). The apostles witnessed the execution of Jesus and were unable to stand up, cowering in the midst of violence, loss, pain, and guilt. Then, "Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them' (Acts 2:3). Finally, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, their silence was broken, and they were urged to stand up again.

Or it may be remembered that worship in Christianity is essentially a reenactment and reenactment of the "festival" celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. The spiritual practice of creating "worship spaces" on streets can be seen in demonstrations and sit-ins worldwide. In 2020, Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations sprung up across the United States to mourn the death of George Floyd, who was unjustly strangled by a police officer on the streets of Minneapolis, and to protest with all their might against the racism and police power that had caused his death. Interestingly, these demonstrations always include ritualistic practices. For example, when the protesters of the BLM reached the site where black lives were taken by police officers and whites, a ritual called" liblibation' took place. The ritual of pouring alcohol or water on the ground looked like a place of worship for mourning, protest, and solidarity that suddenly appeared on the street.

The "sacred space" that emerged at the frontlines of demonstrations was also seen in Korea during the struggle for democratization in the 1980s. The demonstrators prayed in front of a large crowd gathered in the city center and celebrated the sacrament amid the demonstration. The demonstration rally of citizens protesting the sudden declaration of martial law in December 2024 also witnessed people praying for and performing sacraments.

Indeed, spirituality dwells in the vortex of uprising, demonstration, and resistance. Such collective consciousness and its explosive communal outpouring, rooted in empathy and shared suffering, are truly worthy of being called "a spirituality of uprising."

4. Politics of stones

Let us return to the riot scene in Kamagasaki.   When someone threw a stone on the glass of the police station, the first uprising in Kamagasaki was born. One journalist described the first uprising: Someone threw a stone for the first time. This was the act of the hero. The second threw a stone, which can be called bravery. The third threw the stone. This was a curious bystander. After that, countless rocks were thrown into politics. The residents of this area have transformed their feelings into politics and spread them.

The politics of stones! The stones thrown in the uprising were the political languages of the workers, who had been silenced by police and structural violence. Stone-throwing was also the only language that the unarmed and alienated workers could have. During the first uprising in Kamagasaki in 1961, countless stones were thrown over five days. The police were forced to take action against the politics of rocks. The police station, which had been the target of stone-throwing, increased in defenses and turned into a vast fortress. Monitoring cameras were installed throughout the town, and the residents of Kamagasaki were constantly monitored by the police, who wanted to quickly suppress any outbreak during the uprising. The back alleys were covered with asphalt to remove stones from the streets. These measures taken by the police against uprisings genuinely show that the direct action of stone-throwing has the potential to scare law enforcement and shoot up the repressive social order.

At all times and in all places, stone-throwing has been the only instrument of struggle for the oppressed and those who have nothing. The Hebrew Bible describes a stone-throwing scene. Confronted by the Philistine soldier Goliath, David, a young boy from Bethlehem, "chose five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in his shepherd's bag; in the pouch, his sling was in his hand, and he (…) put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground" (1 Samuel 17:40, 49).   This story is interpreted as a heroic tale of the later king of Israel's defeat of the Philippines, who had formed a city-state on the Mediterranean coast of southern Canaan, adjacent to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and especially as a prediction of the formation of a unified nation by David.   Interestingly, the Philistines are considered the origin of the word "Palestine" and were a federation that included Gaza.   The battle between David and Goliath is an essential story for Christian Zionism and is often used as a theological resource to reinforce Israel's superiority over Palestine. However, stone-throwing in the face of overwhelming asymmetries of power has been a traditional method of

resistance by people oppressed and occupied by military power from ancient times to the present. This is not unique to Israel. Moreover, the "politics of stone" has arrived in Palestine today rather than in Israel.

Stone politics has appeared everywhere in the world. As in Kamagasaki, the politics of stones arrived in Palestine. During the first intifada, which began in 1987, stones were in the hands of Palestinian people. The immediate cause is said to be the incident in Gaza on December 6, when an Israeli truck hit a Palestinian worker's car, killing four Palestinians; however, large-scale intifada protests were sparked by the anger that had been built up among the Palestinian people over the past several decades. It confronted Israel's overwhelming military power with a stone-throw. The intifada that began in Gaza could not be stopped by Israel, and the grassroots struggle against military occupation and colonization continued for several years. The presence of Palestinian children throwing stones in Israeli tanks showed that the state built on Palestinian occupation had no legitimacy whatsoever. The Palestinian people resisting Israel also manifested a collective action that could be called "the politics of stones."

The stone that David once threw against Goliath did not become a holy relic of King David but was left lying on the land of Gaza. The people of Gaza, living under the oppressive and dehumanizing occupation of Israel, have picked up the stones that once struck the Philistines, and those stones have become the "politics of stone" that shoot the current Israeli ruling regime. The intifada decolonized the canonical story of Israel's later king David and his neighbor's "enemy," Goliath the Philistine, and reversed the biblical interpretation of Christian Zionism that justified the occupation of Palestine. Moreover, the intifada also fulfilled Jesus' words that "the stones would shout out" in occupied Palestine.

5. Towards a Spirituality of uprising, decolonization, and liberation

Even though Palestine and Kamagasaki are very different in time and space or scale and context, they are tightly connected by the politics of stones. Indeed, solidarity with the Palestinian intifada was expressed within the Kamagasaki Uprising of 1990, three years after 1987. Sugihara Yoji, a labor poet of Kamagasaki, wrote the following poem during the 22nd Kamagasaki Uprising in 1990: …like the Palestinian people, we could not make it through the 1,000-day intifada, but we workers stood up for a five-day uprising. Fire bottles were thrown, sidewalk blocks were broken, and stones at a metal shield made noise…

Interestingly, the day laborers of Kamagasaki called for solidarity with the Palestinian people, both of whom were living through uprisings and struggles. The workers in Kamagasaki must have felt a connection to their own lives as they were reminded of the Palestinian people who had been struggling through the intifada for years in the midst of the uprising.

Not only in Kamagasaki, Palestinian struggles have been strongly connected with struggles in other parts of the world. The BLM, which demands the abolition of the police and the dismantling of the military-industrial complex in the United States, continues to express

solidarity with Palestine. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement is an international action against Israeli-supported corporations modeled after the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. A mooring point connects each life struggle between Palestine, Ferguson, Minneapolis, South Africa, Seoul, and Kamagasaki and the uprisings, liberation struggles, and decolonization movements in various places.

We must explore the possibility of solidarity, which is difficult to see. To see what is difficult to see, make visible what is made invisible, and reveal what is hidden are possible through spirituality. We need to learn from the stories of the diverse liberation movements struggling in all regions, share the spirituality of uprisings, decolonization, and liberation that reside in their struggles, and find ways to overcome ongoing colonialism, military violence, and genocide. We need to pick up stones from the streets, feel the spirituality of the uprisings embodied in those stones, and pull together the invisible ropes of solidarity and tighten them to destitute the laws, institutions, state, police, and military that crush our lives.

Stones are important for liberation. I would like to make Stones an important theological resource for liberation theology. It may seem somewhat strange to use stones as theological subjects or resources. The tradition of Western theology has strictly avoided the use of natural things as subjects of theology. In spiritual culture and tradition in Asia, however, stones are considered to be things that have been around longer than humans and that also represent the "divine."

The liberating material of stone is scattered and rolled at the feet of those who live under oppression and never give up liberation from it. The stone that strikes the world of occupation and oppression passes through the hands of children and day laborers from Gaza to Kamagasaki and back again from Kamagasaki to Gaza. It has the potential to bridge, mediate, and lead to solidarity between workers and children from Kamagasaki to Palestine. We must firmly hold on to the stones for liberation and let the daily life of uprising=liberation, not the daily life of oppression, arrive at Kamagasaki, Palestine, and everywhere. Bringing together the politics of stones and the liberation theology of rocks with the struggles and practices in our lives, let us strike out in this era of global crisis.

Free Free Palestine! Peace and Justice!

14

Hineni! The Role of Anti-zionist Jewish Artists in the Palestinian Solidarity Movement

Rebecca Maria Goldschmidt

Hineni! Drop Everything

Hineni! הִנֵּנִי "Here I am." Spoken multiple times in the Torah, often at moments of high intensity, this phrase is a statement of readiness to listen and preparedness to take on whatever one is called to do by G!d. Rachel Corrie, the American activist crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza in 2003 while trying to stop a home demolition, wrote in her diary a few weeks prior to her death: "'I want this to stop. I think we should all just drop everything and devote ourselves to making this stop.'"[1]

Since October 7th, 2023, anti-zionist Jews have been *dropping everything* to end the genocide of the Palestinian people being perpetrated by the state of Israel. Through direct action, political campaigns, the Boycott, Divest Sanctions (BDS) movement, mass demonstrations, cultural interventions, and many other tactics, we have demanded an immediate end to the siege on Gaza, ethnic cleansing, and Israel's long-term, illegal military occupation and Apartheid in Palestine. We have demanded a permanent ceasefire, an arms embargo, and yet for all the work we have done, the loss is immense and irreplaceable in Gaza and the violence has not ended. With the current tenuous ceasefire in place, still more bodies are being uncovered from

Kate Laster & Steph Kudisch, Viva Palestina, nisht keyn tzedek nicht kein sholem (no justice no peace), & Refuse to let the fire in your heart go out, collaborative print, June 2024.

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1   Rachel Corrie, email to her mother, February 27, 2003 via https://rachelcorriefoundation.org/rachel/emails

below the rubble of bombed out buildings with high estimates of the death toll up to 300,000.[2]

I remember hearing of Rachel Corrie's murder twenty years ago, before I knew the truth of the occupation, but having an inkling that something about my Jewish zionist upbringing was dreadfully wrong. The time has long passed for Jews to openly declare Hineni! and rise to the task of fighting for Palestinian Liberation alongside peoples of conscience around the world.

This paper is a reflection on my experience as an anti-zionist Jewish artist and activist living in Japan during the period after October 7th. I will discuss my work in the Palestine Solidarity movement in Hiroshima and as a transnational community organizer. As anti-zionist Jewish activists, we have been taking multi-faceted approaches to ending the violence against Palestinians, as well as facilitating a rapid

The author creating an altar to mark 100 days of genocide in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome memorial in Hiroshima's Peace Park.

cultural shift away from zionism that has been decades in the making. We are doing this alongside and in support of Palestinians who are leading the way to their own self-determination. We are rewriting the narrative of what it looks like to be Jewish *without* Israel and its heinous crimes against the Palestinian people and humanity itself.

Our work is sacred and deep, and it is also under-appreciated and erased. Our voices are generally silenced by mainstream Jewish community that dismisses our critique of Israel as self-hating, treasonous, distracting, or mental illness. We are excommunicated from our families and congregations; fired from jobs; suspended from universities; canceled and defunded. We are being arrested, raided, brutalized by police, cyber-attacked, silenced, and doxxed. Jews expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people are being punished for revealing the cruel reality of the occupation - and this is nothing compared to the full dehumanization and demonization of the Palestinian. Despite these challenges, we know the Jewish diaspora is a key element of the equation for a Free Palestine. We are acutely aware of the necessity of our voices and we try to use them strategically towards liberation.

Hineni! הִנֵּנִי "Here I am" appears in the Torah in some of our most poignant moments of

2   Alejandra Bejac, "Counting the dead: How the ceasefire will reveal the true scale of Gaza's death toll," *The New Arab*, January 22, 2025. https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-ceasefire-will-reveal-true-scale-gazas-death-toll

crisis and change. The phrase was featured in my bat mitzvah portion, where G!d challenges Abraham to bind his only son, Isaac, on a stone altar to offer him as a sacrifice in the place of a lamb. He speaks Hineni! three times, the final time proving his ultimate faith in G!d as he prepares to kill Isaac. Moses, after seeing the burning bush and being called upon by G!d by name, replies in return - Hineni. During the Days of Awe, the high holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jews take time to reflect, repent and reimagine the coming year with changed and improved behavior. The Hineni prayer is sung by the cantor, the prayer leader, as a statement of humility, admitting their unworthiness and asking G!d to hear our communal prayers of inadequacy and desire for improvement. The phrase itself is indicative of time, space, as well as spiritual and relational dimensions. It is an expression of readiness, commitment. A marker of here and now.

In this time of great crisis, Jews across the world, about 15 million in population, are deciding whether loyalty to a state is greater than the ethics of our ancestors that teach us to protect life and revere the world around us. Anti-zionism has of course always existed parallel to the development of political zionism, and even before the Hamas attacks on October 7th, anti-zionist Jews have been at the frontlines of the international Palestinian Solidarity movement. But the majority of the world's Jews have capitulated to idea of this "conflict" as "terrorism" and prioritize Jewish "safety" over human rights. The silence of our fellow Jews is a shanda - a shameful disgrace to our tradition of social justice and our legacy as oppressed peoples ourselves.

Since October 7th, Jewish-led organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow in the US have created scenarios of civil disobedience with widespread media coverage, shutting down bridges, freeways, and train stations to disrupt "business as usual" and draw attention to the US facilitation of the slaughter in Gaza. In Europe, Jüdische Stimme in Berlin and Na'amod in the UK have organized large demonstrations and boycotting campaigns despite heavy censorship, media manipulation, and, particularly in Germany, brutal police violence, arrests and institutional backlash. South African Jews for a Free Palestine has been vocal in combatting mainstream Jewish opposition to the ICJ case brought against Israel by South Africa. Public outcry against the genocide has been widespread - but does not make up the majority of Jewish voices.

Young Jews have been challenging zionism en masse as they awaken to the realities of the Jewish-supremacist Apartheid state. Many have been redefining their own relationships to their inherited religion and are attempting to "decolonize Judaism" from traditional, rabbinical, patriarchal "Ashkenormativity" (the centering of European Ashkenazi narratives & cultural practices) and racist, colonial zionism. For Jews newly divesting from Israel, and even those who have been doing so for years, many existential questions have arisen in the shocking total destruction of Gaza: Do we seriously continue to support a Jewish "homeland" that is built upon the pain, suffering, rubble and bones of the Palestinian people? How is our own liberation as Jews intrinsically bound to the liberation of the Palestinian people and other oppressed peoples? And the forever Jewish existential question: if not "the Jewish state", then where is "Home"?

Hineni! Doykheit/Hereness

The answer to these questions could also lie in the potential of Hineni! - <u>Here</u> I Am - and its relation to place.

Der Bund was a group of Lithuanian, Polish, and Eastern European Jews founded in 1897, the same year as Theodor Herzl's zionism. The Bundist concept of doykait or "hereness" has found renewed interest in diasporist, anti-zionist Jewish circles.[3] Bundists reject the ethno-nationalist project of zionism and emphasize developing local relationships, communities, and thriving labor conditions in the place where you find yourself. Similarly, Hineni is both about being ready *from* a place. It is locative. The phrase itself breaks down into the Hebrew "hine" - here - and the first-person ending "ani" - I, myself.

The author harvesting kudzu in Hiroshima, Summer 2022.

For those of us raised in the aftermath of the Shoah, zionist ideology and the connection to the "homeland" of Israel is so deeply intertwined in our personal histories and identity formation that the dismantling of political zionism requires overhaul of our identification with Judaism from the ground up. The deep psychological root that we have been convinced to link our sense of safety and refuge to the "Land of Milk and Honey" must be dug up from the soaked soil soaked with Palestinian blood. Jews must realize that our place in the struggle for Palestinian Liberation also depends on our ability to undo and redo ourselves, which requires deep reexamination of our relationship to place - and in particular, to the land and waters themselves.

My place-based arts and research projects are aligned with the concept of doykait and are my attempt to build home and connection in the place where I find myself. My artwork may fall into the category of "social practice" or what German artist and art theorist, Joseph Beuys, considers "social sculpture."[4] Beuys believed that 'everyone is an artist' and that our lives are shaped by our interconnectivity, lending art an inherent ethical responsibility and possibility for social change.

I have spent the past few years in Hiroshima building my relationship with the plant, kudzu, and the mountain where I live, located within the zone of the Black Rain that fell after the

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3 See derbund.org for a contemporary application of Bundist thought encompassing the "rejection of ethnonationalism in favor of working toward a fairer world on a local level."

4 Shelley Sacks, "Contemporary Social Sculpture and the Field of Transformation" in 'Übergangsformen von Kunst und Pädagogik in der Kulturellen Bildung – Künstlerische Kunstpädagogik im Kontext Kunst und Bildung' eds. Carl-Peter Buschkühle, Joachim Kettel, Mario Urlaß, (Oberhausen: Athena 2017).

Hiroshima-Palestine Vigil Community on Valentine's Day for Palestine, February 14, 2024.

use of the first atomic weapon in war by the US military in 1945. While I don't have a genealogical connection to this place, my practice emphasizes getting to know it through observation and interaction. I have been studying the ancient process of making fiber from kudzu vines to be used in weavings. This process is slow and long and requires patience and paying attention to my immediate surroundings, the change of seasons, and building a relationship with Hiroshima environment.

Through this process, the cloth I have produced speaks to my personal history and the material history of the place contained in the fibers themselves. As the descendent of both displaced German Jews-turned-early-Israeli-settlers and Ilokano and Pangasinense working class immigrants to the US from the Philippines, making my own cloth challenges notions of "exile" and "displacement" and tethers me to this mountain, this point in time and space — not to a mythology of nation, state, peoplehood, or birthright. Working with kudzu fibers in Hiroshima inherently tethers me to a human and ecological timescale that ranges from the post-nuclear landscape to the Neolithic bast-fiber production. With it, I can bend time, space, and notions of identity and belonging.

When October 7th happened, my commitment to Palestine took precedence over art-making. Or rather, I shifted my art-making to be in service of Palestinian Liberation. Taking action from Hiroshima has had a certain nuance and responsibility. As a Jew living in this city, a place that is not "my home", I have had to negotiate my "right" to speak about Peace from the "International Peace Culture City." On October 13th, along with Hiroshima City University professors, Aoe Tanami and Masae Yuasa, students, and anti-nuclear and anti-war activists, we lit candles in front of the historic ruins of the Atomic Bomb Dome, the iconic

building that survived the nuclear genocide. We shared our thoughts in an open mic format, cried, and comforted each other. It was Friday night, Shabbat, and I sang and began what I considered a "sit-in shiva" - a hybrid form of sit-in and sitting shiva, the Jewish mourning process that takes place in the home after a death. We kept coming back every night, and we didn't leave for 415 days and more as the genocide dragged on.

The Hiroshima-Palestine Vigil Community (HPVC) has grown throughout the past fifteen months into a loose network of individuals determined keep Gaza within public consciousness. Since that day, we have committed every single day to Palestine solidarity work, planning demonstrations and actions, writing and speaking, hosting events, online organizing, fundraising, and more. Unfortunately, none of it has been enough to end the massacres, bombings, disease and famine.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb in Berkeley has theorized 'shomeret shalom'[5] or practicing peace, as a methodology for Jewish activists. She has taught me that civil disobedience can be a form of public lament, a way to express grief for the Palestinian people, as well as the Jewish Israelis who were killed on October 7th. "The first step toward repair for the sins of Zionism, in my view," she writes, "is to accept accountability for our part in the murderous tragedy of this moment and to take action steps to build a movement of resistance and solidarity with other Palestine solidarity activists."[6] This is what we have been working towards alongside our community here in Hiroshima.

Since that first week in October, we have been joined by a rotating group of volunteers who gather every night in front of the Dome. We distribute informational leaflets, collect signatures on petitions, donations, and hold one-on-one conversations with tourists and locals. We are an interfaith group with Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and non-religious members. On Saturdays, we hold our Art Vigil, which features DJs, musicians, performing and visual artists from Hiroshima and throughout Japan. The hardcore punk community in Hiroshima, which is both anarchist and deeply committed to the anti-nuclear struggle and emergency mutual aid (post-earthquake and landslides), has been essential in growing our numbers and making noise for Palestine. We are joined by printmakers, photographers, designers, dancers, sculptors, and artists of all kinds who contribute to support the movement for Free Palestine in Hiroshima.

The movement in Japan has been punctuated by artistic interventions that have created a unique aesthetic for Japan's expressions of solidarity. *Tears for Palestine* was an art action organized in Tokyo in November of 2023 by Palestinians of Japan. A crowd gathered at Shinjuku station to paint red teardrops on a large white canvas while Palestinian organizers read the names of the dead aloud. At that time the list was only about 6,000 names, and now we have surpassed possibly *fifty times as many Palestinian deaths*. Hundreds of people

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5   Lynn Gottlieb, Rabia Harris & Kenneth L. Sehested, *Peace Primer II: Quotes from Jewish, Christian and Islamic Scripture and Tradition* (Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2017).

6   Lynn Gottlieb, "How Jewish nonviolence can help guide the path forward on Israel-Palestine", Waging Nonviolence, October 19, 2023 https://wagingnonviolence.org/2023/10/jewish-nonviolence-can-help-guide-path-forward-israel-palestine/

Delivering the 23,765 petition signatures in support of a ceasefire resolution to the Hiroshima City Peace Promotion Office located in the Peace Memorial Park, February 29, 2024.

stopped on their commute, removing their shoes to tread on the canvas, praying and crying as they drew each red tear with intention. I felt a great honor and responsibility in passing the brush to the next person, an action that tied us all together in grief. We shared the tools for this action with activists from México, to Hawai'i, to New York City. A week later, Tears for Palestine were painted in front of the White House alongside hunger strikers. We brought Tears for Palestine to Hiroshima during the 11/29 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People while reading of The Gaza Monologues in front of the dome. This symbolic action happened throughout Japan, in Malaysia, Canada and Germany. And the canvases are still used during marches and actions, as they contain the intentions and prayers of the people.

Hiroshima claims to uphold "Peace Culture", but Palestine exists in a realm outside of the concerns of institutional and mainstream Peace advocates. In February, the HPVC started the process of demanding a ceasefire resolution from the City government. We hand-delivered an open inquiry to the Mayor and City Council asking if they planned to address the genocide as both a Peace and nuclear issue. In response, they shifted responsibility onto Tokyo lawmakers. In fact, it is *illegal* for them to ignore the situation based on their own City Council basic plans, which require that the Mayor "work tirelessly" for Peace. Gaza and other cities in Palestine and Israel are also partner cities of the Mayors for Peace program led by the Hiroshima mayor. In response, we launched a petition to advocate for an official ceasefire resolution from Hiroshima City. Two days before the petition was delivered, the Council

released a statement calling the situation "armed conflict" and requesting a "truce". We then delivered printed copies of the signatures to the Peace Promotion office, along with giant red tears featuring the comments from those who signed. By midnight, the petition had reached 25,007 signatures from all over Japan and the world, including Palestinians themselves.

In Japan, where direct actions and risking arrest pose massive personal risk and social stigma, we discovered that using our bodies in performance allows us to make bold visual statements to communicate our messaging without fully alienating our audience. We used the mourning procession as a thematic form in various actions, including in our demonstration for Human Rights Day in December 2023, and in support of the BDS Japan campaign against manufacturers ITOCHU and Nippon Aircraft Supply in 2024. Both Japanese manufacturing companies signed an MOU with Israeli weapons company, Elbit Systems, in 2021, encouraged by the Japan Self-Defense Forces. In support of organized demonstrations throughout Japan, we created disruptive vignettes in front of ITOCHU offices, wrapping dead babies in white shrouds and processing to the dome to a noisy soundtrack of drones and voices from Gaza. This loud public shaming of ITOCHU and NAS, along with a coordinated boycott of FamilyMart convenient stores in Malaysia and Indonesia, put enough public pressure on both conglomerates to influence the cancellation of the MOU in February 2024 — a major victory for Japan's BDS movement.

As a Jewish person of color living in Japan, I feel a responsibility to share my personal story of divestment from cultural and political zionism and to use my skills as an artist to generate awareness around the reality in Palestine. Through our many efforts, we have also emphasized our anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-imperialist position and drawn clear relations between the US military's legacy of weapons production and testing from Hiroshima to Gaza. Palestine, as I maintain and have written, is a nuclear issue.[7] If Hiroshima citizens are serious about their commitment to "Peace" and internationalism, we must also speak out for the Palestinian people resisting the world's most powerful nuclear powers: Israel and the United

Procession in Black, a group performance marking Human Rights Day, December 10, 2023 in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Featuring 20 members of Hiroshima Palestine Vigil Community.

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7   See my articles for Counterpunch Media, "Palestine is a Nuclear Issue – Why is Hiroshima Silent?" & "How the Nobel Peace Prize Just Peacewashed the Genocide in Gaza" - "https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/02/23/palestine-is-a-nuclear-issue-why-is-hiroshima-silent/ & "https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/10/22/how-the-nobel-peace-prize-just-peacewashed-the-genocide-in-gaza/

States. From this place - the epicenter of nuclear genocide - solidarity with Palestine is essential, but as we have discovered, not a given. As artists and citizens of Hiroshima, we refuse to allow the "peacewashing" of genocide and continue to work towards "Liberation before Peace."

Hineni! Interconnectedness

Daniel Boyarin, in his 2023 book, *The No-State Solution*, writes of diaspora not as a sense of exile, but rather a state of *creative potential* for collaboration, exploration, and exchange.[8] There is so much potential when the walls fall! In addressing the question of "where to?", we must also then consider "with whom?" shall we collaborate, explore, and exchange? As artists materializing new worlds, we must lean into Hineni! as cultivation of relationality. "Here I am!" is not merely locative, it is *in relation to*, a call and response, a listening.

Palestinian Liberation is deeply intertwined with the liberation of Jews and all minoritized and racialized communities - queer, disabled, people of color, women, migrants, etc. As Jews, a "safety" based on division by apartheid is a farce antithetical to the Jewish concept of *areyvut*, interconnectedness. My grandparents wanted me to have an Israeli passport because of their fear of another Shoah, but this same passport denies Palestinians access to their historical homelands. Doykait calls us to live our Jewish values of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) not exclusively for the Jewish community, but for the broader communities in which we live. Judaism is an action-based, mitzvah-based (good deed) religion and many of us grew up in congregations committed to service and volunteer work. We should be investing in our immediate communities, as well as an transnational community, with similarly held beliefs of

"Artist Jeffrey Cheung alters his own work with a cloth that says 'Ceasefire Now!' during a demonstration calling for a ceasefire in Gaza and criticizing YBCA leadership for their support of Israel at the show Bay Area Now at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco on Feb. 15, 2024." (from KQED article "Artists Alter Their Own Work at YBCA in Pro-Palestinian Protest" by Nastia Voynovskaya).

Artist Sophia Sobko and Krivoy Kolektiv's "Four Mitzvot" series, "A Free Palestine" was one of the works withdrawn from the CJM exhibition.

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8   Boyarin, Daniel. The No-State Solution: A Jewish Manifesto. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

freedom of movement, access to housing, healthcare, clean water, and nutritious food. Militarized borders and militarized youth will never secure our safety, as October 7th has proven so clearly. We are meant to be in joyful interconnectedness, not forced to be policing and terrorizing other human beings.

Relationality also requires accountability. For the anti-zionist Jewish artist community, it is not enough to simply make work *about* Palestine, we must also hold accountable the Jewish institutions that supposedly represent us. This is also part of our responsibility to each other as Jews. In the current political climate, we find ourselves pushing back against cultural institutions that are silencing our creative political expression.

In February 2024, Queer, Black, White and anti-zionist Jewish artist, Lukaza Branfman-Verissimo, and Visayan artist, champoy, along with several others, took it upon themselves to alter their own works inside the Yerba Buena Center for Art (YBCA) in San Francisco as part of an action entitled, "Love Letter to Gaza". Together, eight of the artists in the annual *Bay Area Now* exhibition held a gathering in the galleries, writing messages of solidarity with Palestine on their own artworks and covering their installations with bloodied cloths and "Ceasefire" banners. By altering their works in situ, they aimed to call attention to the silence of the YBCA on the genocide. The museum promptly closed and stated that they would remove the works, refusing public access to the self-vandalized exhibition. This created a media frenzy. The artists formed a new collective, Bay Area Artists Against Genocide, and in the midst of the drama, the museum's Jewish interim CEO, Sara Fenske Bahat, resigned, citing fear for her own safety. She claimed that the artists had launched "vitriolic and anti-Semitic backlash" against her personally, and exited the scene, leaving the museum shuttered and artists without possibility for fruitful dialogue around their action.[9] As is often the case, claims of anti-semitism are weaponized against anyone who critiques Israel, even if the action included a Jewish artist, Branfman-Verissimo. BAAAG's calls for YBCA to divest and sign onto Palestinian Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) were dismissed as extremist.

A few months prior to the YBCA action, around 20 Jewish artists, myself included, "crashed" the *California Jewish Open* call for submissions, an exhibition put on by San Francisco's Jewish Contemporary Museum, across the street from the YBCA. By intentionally submitting works with pro-Palestine themes, we wanted to make sure the curators could not ignore the anti-zionist Jewish perspective in their show. We expected rejection. Surprisingly, several of the works were accepted to the show, as the Museum attempted to be "inclusive" to anti-zionism in a moment of great division within our communities. We quickly formed a new collective, California Jewish Artists for Palestine (CJAFP), to demand that the museum make a statement denouncing the Palestinian genocide and to comply with PACBI. We knew that our demands were far beyond the limits of what the museum, with its conservative, zionist funders, would be willing to commit to. When museum staff declined our demands and refused to allow artists full control over their wall text and placement of

9   https://www.kqed.org/arts/13952460/artists-deface-work-ybca-pro-palestine-protest
    https://www.kqed.org/arts/13953653/ybca-ceo-resigns-after-pro-palestinian-protest-and-boycott

their artworks, several artists pulled their work from the show. Others decided to keep their works in and use the platform to bring the message of Free Palestine to a majority Jewish audience. We used the press coverage to recenter the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the museum's complicity in it by exposing the ties of its board members and funders to Israeli weapons production (Elbit Systems), the Israel lobby (AIPAC), and zionist settler organizations like the Jewish Community Federation. In June 2024, we held a demonstration with live screen-printing, song, and a brass band, in front of the exhibition opening and distributed leaflets explaining our choice to boycott the museum: "We reassert our refusal as an act of <u>love</u> and <u>solidarity</u>!"

To our knowledge, this action was the first attempt by an all-Jewish collective to hold a Jewish cultural institution accountable for their direct role in "artwashing" the genocide, a critical step in Jewish community accountability. But it was only one of many international actions taken to expose the complicity of the cultural sector. In the past several years, anti-institutional art activism has drawn attention to the art world's complicity in neoliberal weapons, pharmaceutical, and real estate industries. This year, many artist collectives including Writers Against the War on Gaza, Artists Against Apartheid, and the Art Not Genocide Alliance, have emerged as a cultural front in the BDS movement, refusing censorship and proactively supporting Palestinian artists and others in solidarity with them whose exhibitions have been shuttered or book talks canceled. Because Jewish philanthropic funding in the US is overwhelmingly zionist, it is simply impossible to receive institutional arts funding for projects that are critical of the state's right to exist. Anti-zionist artists or those at all critical of Israel, whether Jewish or not, simply have no voice within mainstream arts insti-

Poster by Micah Bazant, member of California Jewish Artists for Palestine, featuring Schatzi Weisberger, a queer elder who was cared for until the end of her life by a community of radical anti-zionist Jews in New York, 2021.

tutions or even in private galleries. There has been and continues to be immense stifling of the Palestine perspective in the arts, particularly over the past year in Germany.[10]

But since the world has borne witness to the massacres and crimes of the Israeli state, that is quickly changing. After multiple actions by CJAFP and media coverage of the *Jewish Open*, in November 2024, the Contemporary Jewish Museum announced its temporary one-year closure, most likely due to financial difficulties and loss of funding. Since October 7th, massive amounts of donations and Jewish foundational funding have been donated to non-profit organizations with Israel-related missions, according to a report on Jewish philanthropy by

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10 See @archive_of_silence or https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/2/d/1Vq2tm-nopUy-xYZjkG-T9FyMC7ZqkAQG9S3mPWAYwHw/edit#gid=1227867224 for a crowdsourced list German "canceling and silencing" of Palestine solidarity since October 2023.

CCS Fundraising.[11] The large majority of this influx of funding has come from family foundations, which also provide large amounts of funding to cultural institutions. We can see a combined 67% of these funds moving towards issues such as "Supporting Israel," "Combatting antisemitism," and "Ensuring the security of Jewish institutions," while only 13% is allocated to "Enriching Jewish Life" and a meager 1% to "Jewish Youth education". With this trend of defunding of cultural and educational Jewish life and more investment into "safety," what we have seen as enhanced security, surveillance, and crackdown on pro-Palestinian on-campus activism, it is not surprising that our Jewish cultural institutions outside of Israel will begin to shrink and crumble alongside the collapse of the state.

While we cannot claim a full victory of permanent closure against the museum, we do believe that our work as artists has been effective in revealing zionist funding, narrative dominance and censorship of pro-Palestine artists. In our self-published zine featuring the artworks that were pulled from the museum, we chronicle our actions and recommit to full liberation for Palestine: "As we refuse our labor and grow our numbers, arts institutions will have to face a choice: embrace accountability or become irrelevant." This action was only possible through the cross-collaboration of many principled activists and artists who believe in the liberatory and boundless nature of art and creativity, and are committed to it as a life practice. "We pledge to confront zionism in all its forms - and win!" If so-called Jewish arts institutions refuse to uphold the basic tenets of Judaism, they should cease to exist. And luckily, at least for the next year, the CJM will.

Hineni! We Rise

The work in the cultural realm to build a Judaism beyond zionism is at the heart of anti-zionist responsibility and the massive task of artists, cultural producers, ritualists, and community leaders. As the acclaimed Israeli-Palestinian, Juliano Mer-Khamis of the Freedom Theater said, the third intifada will be the cultural intifada.[12]

The state of Israel has been constructed as the warp (foundational threads) of the cloth of global Jewry and culture for the generations after the Shoah. The mechanized destruction of European Jewish communities required a patchwork be crafted to salvage what remained of our families' lives and cultures. But Israel's foundation in racist, colonial ideology was flawed from the get go. Every single aspect of Jewish community life worldwide since the Shoah has been constructed to support the zionist state, from the donations made at our births to the trees planted at our deaths and everything in between. Divesting from and dismantling Israel, therefore, requires a true coming to terms with the insidiousness of that interwovenness and Jewish complicity, both conscious and unconscious, with over 76 years of Palestinian dispossession and oppression.

Artists are intentionally shattering and remaking our own identities as Jews, rereading

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11 Jewish Philanthropy Since October 7th, https://www.ccsfundraising.com/insights/jewish-philanthropy-since-october-7/
12 Mee, Erin B. "The Cultural Intifada: Palestinian Theatre in the West Bank." *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 3 (2012): 167–177.

family traditions, and tracing the roots of anti-zionist thought and action to remind ourselves and the world that Judaism does **not** equal zionism. As we go beyond the false boundaries of this Judaism, amplify Palestinian voices, demand justice, and build cross-movement solidarity, we do our part to contribute to the worldwide movement for a Free Palestine. We know that our liberation and freedom as Jews is tied to the liberation of Palestinian people and land. We are crafting a new tapestry of Jewish life and culture that honors this reality and our inter-relationality with the Palestinian people as humans with a shared past and future.

There is much more to report and this essay cannot possibly describe the many actions of the past 15 months. This is the work of my immediate communities and our commitment to the present moment from where we are with the tools we have. Is it possible for art to change the material realities of a genocide? We are trying. We know this is a long path to tread, and we know that whatever we do is not enough to honor the thousands of martyrs, families, children, grandmothers, animals, histories and waterways of Palestine that have been obliterated in the name of "Jewish safety."

Our Hineni prayer leads us into our collective prayer, and we can only be humble in the face of our great task. After witnessing so much death and destruction at the bloody hands of our cousins, and seeing so many Jews blindly defending mass desecration of life as "self-defense", we can only help but wonder: where do we go after this hell? And with who?

Hineni! I am here. Here I am. Hinenu! We are here. Here we are. Free Palestine.

15

Interfaith Solidarity Actions Towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era

Irfan Engineer

A global crisis is occurring. The ten richest men in the world own more wealth than the bottom 3.1 billion people. The richest people are also a threat to climate-driven humanitarian crises. Twenty of the richest billionaires are estimated, on average, to emit as much as 8,000 times more carbon than the billion poorest people, increasing the risk of climate-driven humanitarian crises (Oxfam, 2022). According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on inequalities, the richest 1% own 38% of global wealth, obtain 19% of all income, and emit 17% of all CO_2, whereas the poorest 50% own 2% of the world's wealth, earns less than 9% of all income, and emit 12% of all CO_2 (Stanley, 2022). Furthermore, this inequality has increased. The richest 1% have grabbed nearly two-thirds of all new wealth created since 2020, worth $42 trillion, which is almost twice as much as the bottom 99% of the world's population (Oxfam International, 2023).

In 2021, global debt reached a record $303 trillion, a jump from $226 trillion in 2020, as reported by the IMF in its Global Debt Database (World Economic Forum, 2023). Public debt in the developing world amounted to USD 92 trillion in 2022 and is continuing to grow (UNCTAD, 2023). Approximately 3.3 billion people now live in countries where debt interest payments are greater than health or education expenditures.

The latest State of Food Security and Nutrition report shows that the world is moving backward in its efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. Globally, the number of people affected by hunger has risen to as many as 828 million in 2021, reflecting an increase of approximately 46 million since 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2022).

In the last 25 years, approximately 67 million people have been killed in conflicts, including the two invasions of Iraq by the US and its allies; the invasion of Afghanistan; civil wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Rwanda, Sudan's Darfur region, Bosnia Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar; the war in Nagorno-Karabakh; the war between Russia and Ukraine; and other conflicts. This is more than the number of deaths during World War II (between 33–60 million) and World War I (approximately 40 million).

The weapons in the world today could destroy it 80 times over. Global military spending has nearly doubled from USD 1.139 trillion in 2001 to USD 2.240 trillion in 2023, and the US is responsible for nearly 40% of the global arms expenditure (Dyvik, 2023).

Inequalities are rapidly increasing not only between the Global South and North but also within each country. According to a study of inequality in India, "India is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with the top 10% of the population holding 77% of the total national wealth. The richest 1% of the Indian population owns 53% of the country's wealth, while the poorer half jostles for a mere 4.1% of national wealth… According to the World Inequality Report 2022, India is among the most unequal countries in the world, with the top 10% and top 1% of the population holding 57% and 22% of the total national income respectively. The share of the bottom 50% has gone down to 13%... Approximately 64% of the total goods and services tax (GST) in the country came from the bottom 50% of the population, while only 4% came from the top 10%" (Drishti, 2024).

How do the bottom 50% tolerate inequalities such as hunger, lack of nutrition, lack of access to proper and adequate healthcare and education, and lack of proper housing? One factor is the political use of religion as an instrument to force the poor to bear their living conditions. The political ideology of nationalism is constructed on the basis of religion by the political elite and cultural entrepreneurs, such as the Hindu nationalists in India, Islamic State and Caliphate declared by ISIS, and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Religion is often used as a cultural marker and identity to construct a political community alongside othering and excluding other communities. Religion can also be used as a tool for the political mobilization of oppressed groups against each other, as the recent election of President Trump demonstrates. White workers were mobilized against immigrant workers from Mexico and other countries. In India, the laboring classes and unemployed from the Hindu community were mobilized by Hindu nationalists against the Muslim community and targeted during communal riots. The Muslim community has been positioned as a threat to the Hindu community, despite being among the poorest and most socially backward, as they face discrimination in terms of livelihood and education.

Status-quoist religious institutions preach total and unquestioning submission to God and those who claim to represent God on Earth, even under adverse existential conditions. Submission to God provides solace, strength, and hope to endure adverse conditions with the promise of better conditions in the afterlife. This translates into submission and acceptance of the order established by the state and those in power, including the clergy. Religion and the nation-state are two total systems that require great control over individuals. Both are "models of authority, imaginations of an ordering power, and understandings of how one should relate to those who control forces upon which one depends, but over which one does not exercise control." Moreover, they both "partake a common symbolic order" (Tzidkiyahu, 2015). The consent and acquiescence to those at the helm of affairs are sought not only through coercive force but also through religious beliefs. However, in a multireligious world, to which God and representatives of God does one submit?

Islamophobia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islamophobia emerged as a new pole for building a global alliance under the leadership of the US to promote the build-up of arms and expand the NATO military alliance to rule over the world and undermine the rules and charters of the UN. The US has positioned itself as a global cop, unaccountable to anyone, by launching aggressive wars under the pretext of looking for weapons of mass destruction or "pre-emptive strikes" on regimes that are inimical to their interests on the ground. Its ideology is to export democracy while supporting the most repressive and oppressive dictators. The world is now more insecure and conflict-ridden than ever. The new world order imposed by the US-led alliance has forced regime changes in several countries to promote the economic interests of monopoly capital and giant multinational corporations.

The World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods Twins, through the World Bank and the IMF, are facilitating free movement for international capital, goods, and services across national borders, even while national borders are closed to migrant labor and economic and political refugees.

The US and other countries in the West used the threat of "Islamic jihad" to force the Soviet Union to withdraw its armed forces from Afghanistan, ultimately leading to its dismantling and collapse. However, when the so-called jihad turned against the West, fighting to force foreign troops out of countries with Muslim majorities, Islam was perceived as a threat to Western civilization. Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington developed the theses of "Islam and the West" and the "clash of civilizations," respectively, bringing Chinese civilization into the picture as well.

The so-called Islamic jihadis themselves pose a significant threat to the values and righteous path prescribed in several areas by Islam. Islamists' political objective is to establish an "Islamic state" and impose Sharia on the citizens of the ruling sectarian regime. Their understanding of Sharia is based on reading Quranic texts both literally and out of context. This includes brutal punishment at the end of kangaroo trials, such as stoning the accused to death and chopping off limbs. The Taliban, which rules over the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, restricts education for women, excludes them from livelihoods and employment outside their homes, and restricts their movement outside their homes. The Islamic State fighters headed by Baghdadi took "captured" Yazidi women for sexual slavery. Dress codes have been imposed, especially for women. Non-Muslims are discriminated against and treated as second-class citizens. They are denied freedom of religion and forced into subjugation. The Takfiri Islamists even persecute Muslims belonging to other sects, pronouncing them apostates. Takfirism advocates the killing of other Muslims, declaring them unbelievers.

Religion is often used as an identity marker to define communities of believers. Followers of Islam carve out Ummah at the global level and Millat at the national/provincial level. The Islamic Ummah or Millat emphasizes correct practices, mannerisms, and compliance with prescriptions by various schools of jurisprudence to demonstrate its exclusivity (and consequentially, its superiority).

Religious discourse has deep roots and is more widely known than other types of discourse. The state and oppressors, whether the capitalist or feudal classes, have used discourse and rituals associated with religion to justify their oppressive domination and as instruments of that oppression. Therefore, religion cannot be ignored in the struggle to liberate the oppressed. Most religions do have inclusive moral values. The moral values associated with religion can serve as building blocks of an inclusive, egalitarian society in which all citizens have equal rights and are treated with dignity, and society works towards meeting people's basic needs. A society built on love for everyone, with compassion and forgiveness as the moral compass, is a peaceful society.

Gautam Buddha propounded an eight-fold righteous path. Seeking knowledge and one's own truth are central to Buddhism. Buddha prescribed "*Ap deepa bhava*," meaning to be your own light and seek knowledge through your own queries. Mahatma Gandhi reversed the formulation that "God is truth" to "Truth is God." The search for the truth requires a rational approach. Faith and rationality do not need to be antagonistic or mutually exclusive. Sir Sayyid Ahmed argued that the work of God (nature) and word of God (Qur'an) cannot be contradictory. Such a contradiction would be tantamount to falsifying the word of God, as God's work is undeniable and self-evident. Sir Sayyid found a solution to exercising human reason in harmonizing and overriding the principles of the interpretation of the Qur'an and formulating modern theology. Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge of nature through science is also the pursuit of God.

Maulana Shibli Nu'mani found no conflict between science and religion as they have nothing to do with each other and address entirely different subject matters. For example, matters such as the weight of air, number of elements, and chemical composition of water do not concern religion and are in the domain of science.

Religion concerns the concepts of good and evil. Maulana Shibli noted that religion can be rational. His understanding of Islam was as a rational and human-centric religion. Religion guides followers in matters related to a good and worthy life, laws to build harmonious societies, justice, and the rights and duties of members of society towards each other. In contrast, science may not be equipped to address these issues. Science may discover laws of nature and properties of various elements that, for example, may equip human beings with the ability to harness nuclear energy. However, having discovered the effects of nuclear fission and fusion and measured the energy when they are unleashed, humans still need to determine what would be a good purpose for employing nuclear fusion and fission are to be employed – for manufacturing nuclear bombs, harnessing nuclear energy, or neither? The latter falls within the domain of religion. Therefore, the boundaries and demarcations between science and religion must be properly understood. Religion can be irrational if followers are required to follow its tenets blindly without questioning doctrines. However, religion can be rational if followers are encouraged to review its doctrines and understand their meanings in the context of changed situations.

Liberation theology

Religion has inspired many seekers of truth, including scientific and medical researchers. However, can religion inspire the establishment of an ideal society and a just order in which all are considered equal, enjoy freedom of thought and belief, and work toward the upliftment of those on the lowest rung of society? Liberation theology seeks to reinterpret religion from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. While the oppressors' religion represents stability, hierarchy, and the rich, liberation theology represents change, egalitarianism, and the poor. Liberation theology is a theological critique of society and its ideological underpinnings. It is directed towards alleviating the suffering of the oppressed and exploited, and gives hope to the poor in their struggle against oppression.

The Qur'an reveals a message of liberation for women, slaves, and all those oppressed by the powerful. Alid Shi'ism is based on the revolutionary interpretation of Imamate in which the struggle for justice is central to Islam: "Liberation of humankind, elimination of class conflict and social divisions, equality, justice and communal life."

The oppressed are not merely worthy of compassion but also have agency to change their situation. Liberation theology believes in orthodoxy (correct beliefs), prayers, and orthopraxis (correct action), and that actions performed in the midst of life are more important than prayers. Worship must be to build solidarity for emancipatory action. This should be a declaration of war against the oppressors. "*Looking at life from the underside of history, liberation theology is in some ways an attempt to retrieve authenticity from the victors, to free it from the notion that it is irrevocably tied to the powerful. It also questions the notion of a final authenticity that can be wrapped up nearly in a creed, but argues that liberating praxis leads to greater authenticity*" (Esack, 1997, p. 86).

The Khilafat movement in early 20th century India, then a British colony, is an example of how religion can inspire the oppressed and marginalized to resist oppression. Muslim subjects were agitating that the authority of the Ottoman caliphate be restored despite the defeat of the Axis powers in World War I, of which the Ottomans were allies. The centers of Muslim pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina, which were part of the Ottoman Empire, were now under British control, disturbing Muslims globally. The Muslim Umma wanted the Ottoman Caliphate to be restored so that their pilgrim centers would be looked after properly. This came to be known as the Khilafat movement. Although the immediate demand for the Khilafat movement in India was the restoration of the Ottoman Caliphate, its main political target was the dismantling of British colonial power and liberation of all Indians. The Khilafat issue was exploited by Indian Muslims, who mobilized in large numbers to support their religious and political demands for freedom from colonial rule.The leaders of the movement were Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, known as the Ali Brothers. They toured India extensively and encouraged Muslims to be ready to sacrifice everything they had for the cause of Khilafat. Until then, the Muslim community was dormant after the failure of the First War of Independence in 1857, inviting the brutal repression of Muslims and Hindus who had participated. Muslim soldiers who fought against the Britishers were tied to cannons and blown to smithereens. Their bodies were hung on trees, with reports claiming that no

trees were left in Meerut, Aligarh, and many other towns in the Western UP from which bodies were not hanged publicly. Such brutality was adopted to terrorize the entire community and all Indians to deter them from entertaining any thoughts of rebellion against the Britishers. The Ali Brothers and many other prominent Muslim leaders, including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first education minister of independent India, mobilized the entire community to again oppose British colonial rule.

Mahatma Gandhi of the Indian National Congress supported the demand of the Khilafat movement and, in turn, mobilized Hindus to support it. Gandhi argued that Hindus should stand in solidarity with their fellow countrymen (Muslims) on matters of their faith if colonial rulers put them in jeopardy. In turn, Gandhi sought the solidarity of Muslims to help Hindus in their religious observances, such as giving up the slaughtering of cows, which Hindus consider holy animals. Cow sacrifices during the Eid uz-Zuha festival and even other occasions nearly stopped. Hindus and Muslims joined forces and were determined to fight the colonial power. Restoration of Khilafat, an anti-cow slaughter campaign, and fighting for independence from colonial rule became rallying points for all Indians. In 1919, Gandhi launched his nonviolent satyagraha (insistence on truth) and civil disobedience movement. As per the call of the movement, Indians boycotted foreign (British manufactured) cloth and made a bon fire of them in several towns. Khadi, i.e. hand woven locally manufactured cloth and goods were promoted to inflict harm to economic interests of the British colonizers. People refused to pay taxes to the colonial government and generally refused to obey unjust colonial laws, and students boycotted the educational institutions providing colonial education. This was met with heavy repression, and tens of thousands were arrested, tortured, and jailed. However, the movement continued for nearly four years.

The Ali Brothers and other Muslim leaders were arrested, along with many leaders of the Indian National Congress. Their mother, Bi Amman, famously stated that she did not have a third son, as she would have also sent him to the struggle. The movement concluded only when it was withdrawn by Gandhi in February 1922, after the Satyagrahis burned down the police station in Chauri Chaura in the United Province. Gandhi felt that the Satyagrahis needed to learn more about non-violence. Many congressional leaders were unhappy that Gandhi announced the withdrawal of the movement when it was at its peak and was going well. However, what is noteworthy from our point of view is that the Ali Brothers used Islamic faith to arouse a dormant Muslim community against a mighty empire to fight for political independence from colonial rule.

In a recent case, Muslim women were inspired by their Islamic faith to fight an unjust law passed by the Indian Parliament in 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The CAA was piloted by the government, believing in Hindu nationalist ideology and wanting India to be a Hindu nation rather than a multicultural and plural nation. The CAA essentially excluded Muslims who had immigrated to India from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan before December 31, 2014, from filing for accelerated citizenship, while other communities could, including Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, and Parsis. This also meant that while Muslim immigrants from the three neighboring countries would be considered illegal and liable to be imprisoned and summarily deported, immigrants from other countries

would not be treated as such and would be entitled to citizenship under the CAA.

Muslim women began a peaceful sit-in protest movement in Shaheen Baugh (Delhi) on December 16, 2019, demanding that either Muslims be included in the CAA or the act be repealed altogether. Hundreds of women braved extreme weather and violent attempts by Hindu nationalist cadres, including an incident of firing. In December, despite the freezing weather in Delhi, the women sat out in the open. The Shaheen Baugh movement spread throughout the country, and Muslim women started sit-in protests in more than 120 locations, occupying the arterial passages of as many towns as possible to communicate their grievances. The women braved police pressure to dismantle their protests, as traffic along arterial roads was affected, refusing to move. They sat day and night, and the icons they displayed at their sit-in protest sheds were freedom movement leaders from all castes and communities and human rights crusaders from many countries, including Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. Muslim women came out of their homes, some wearing the veil and others without it, and demonstrated their ability to speak up for democracy, equality, and human rights and lead a democratic movement. Many important leaders visited the Shaheen Baugh protest sites and pledged their support. The state did not know how to deal with this protest because it was peaceful. Several people died during incidents of police brutality. In other places, women were assaulted and attacked, specifically in Ghantaghar, Lucknow, and Uttar Pradesh. Police took away protesters' water bottles, biscuits, and blankets and locked the doors of washrooms used by women participating in the sit-ins. Attempts by Hindu nationalists to provoke them into violence failed. The use of force would have been counterproductive and viewed as an undemocratic act on the part of the state. The sit-in protests had to be withdrawn when the lockdown was declared in India on March 24, 2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sit-in protests had persisted nationwide for nearly 15 and ½ months, and due to the Shaheen Baugh movement, the implementation of the CAA was postponed. However, the rules were finally framed, and the CAA was implemented on May 15, 2024.

Conclusion:

Religions not only teach people to serve the poor, marginalized, and needy but also to struggle to establish the *Kingdom of God*, or *Ram Rajya*, an ideal and just society on Earth and in this life. Believers have a duty to stand for justice and against oppression. Liberation theology must be regional, cross-cultural, non-essentialist, counter-hierarchical, and inclusive. It seeks not to be triumphalist but to be tolerant. The central message of the Qur'an, aside from tawhid (Unity of God and unity of being), is socioeconomic justice, alleviating suffering, and helping the needy. The conflict now lies between the forces of crony capitalism upholding the values of individualism and selfishness and the emerging revolutionary forces resisting it. God is just (Adil) and on the side of justice. This conviction can provide tremendous strength to resist and bear all the consequences of standing up for truth. We need not only inter-faith dialogue but also acts of interfaith solidarity to transform oppressive rules and regimes.

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Session 5

Solidarity with the Palestinian people in the post-Oslo Era from global perspectives

16

Ecumenical WCC begins its engagement in the Palestine-Israel conflict (1948–2002)

Ranjan Solomon

The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was a proposal by the United Nations that recommended a partition of Mandatory Palestine at the end of the British Mandate. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted the Plan as Resolution 181 (II). Resolution 50 (1948) / [adopted by the Security Council at its 310th meeting], May 29, 1948. [2] p. There were calls for the cessation of hostilities in Palestine by a Mediator who was mandated to supervise the truce with the assistance of military observers in line with resolutions and decisions of the Security Council, 1948.

The UN resolutions recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States linked economically with a Special International Regime for Jerusalem and its surroundings. The Arab state was to have a territory of 11,100 square kilometers or 42%, the Jewish state a territory of 14,100 square kilometers or 56%, and the remaining 2%, comprising the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the adjoining area, which was designated as an international zone.

The Partition Plan, a four-part document attached to the resolution, provided for the termination of the Mandate, the gradual withdrawal of British armed forces, and delineation of the boundaries between the two States and Jerusalem. Part I of the Plan stipulated that the Mandate would be terminated as soon as possible, and the United Kingdom would withdraw no later than August 1, 1948. The new states existed two months after the withdrawal but no later than October 1, 1948. The Plan addressed the conflicting objectives and claims of two competing movements: Palestinian and Jewish nationalism, or Zionism. The Plan also called for the Economic Union between the proposed states and to protect religious and minority rights. Jewish organizations collaborated with UNSCOP during the deliberations, and the Palestinian Arab leadership boycotted it.

The proposed Plan was considered to have been pro-Zionist by its detractors, with 56% of the land allocated to the Jewish state when the Palestinian Arab population was twice the Jewish population. However, the land given to the Jewish state included a significant portion of the Negev desert, an inhospitable environment that was worthless without substantial long-term investments. In addition, the Jewish state was expected to host an almost equal number of Arabs: 500,000 Jews, 400,000 Arab-Palestinians, and 92,000 Bedouins. In

comparison, the Arab state was envisioned to have a small minority of Jews: 10,000 Jews among 800,000 Palestinian Arabs.

World Council of Churches takes positions.

The Council has consistently advocated for justice, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and peaceful responses to conflicts. Churches have moral responsibility and should be able to speak out against what we think is contrary to the teachings of Christ.

In any case, the WCC's positions have been with our member churches in the USA, who have been consistently critical of their government's position regarding Iraq, as have the churches in Great Britain. The WCC's Executive Committee praised the courageous stance of both groups of churches. They have faced, as did we, the sort of criticism that a prophetic stand in the face of the powerful usually gets. To cut a long story short, it is essential to underline that the WCC never failed to take the side of the oppressed and condemned the colonial-imperialistic. It created various units within the WCC that would provide services to victims of oppression.

Perhaps the most vigorous WCC in those days was the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). A strong team of theologians-activists-champions of justice and human rights led the PCR. Every unit of the WCC organized programs designed to strengthen and influence its mission in radical terms. All this happened under Vister Hooft, the First General Secretary of the WCC, followed by Eugene Carson Blake and Philip Potter. The WCC has adopted a bold challenge. Apart from speaking out on complex issues and paying the price for its radical points of view with criticism, it confronted a backlash from conservatives, evangelicals, and strong dictators. They felt that politics was not the church's business and that the church had to be confined to religious rituals.

WCC begins to slide

Philip Potter was a giant whose vision and courage are unparalleled today. He was succeeded by eminent theologians and social thinkers, all of whom held radical theological positions. None of them had any courage or vision. Potter spoke vociferously about the struggle against apartheid and even supported the ANC as they hid in the jungles, providing them with a variety of needs and services. While the WCC took courageous stances on Palestine and other justice questions, there was a massive slide in 1999 when the WCC elected a Norwegian. Olav FykseTveit, as its General Secretary. From Day 1, Olav went into reverse gear until he found a spot where he had reversed the entire machine and seemed at a loss about where he should take the Question of Palestine.

Before that, Olav FykseTveit was elected Chair of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF). At this collective of churches around the world, churches united at a conference titled "Churches Together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East." In conclusion, they issued a statement designated the Amman Call. That call, issued in 2007, marked several historic anniversaries of great importance to the history and development of the situation in Israel and

Palestine and to the ecumenical community's response to this situation, including 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, 50 years since the Six-Day War of 1967, and 10 years since the 2007 WCC International Peace Conference in Amman, Jordan.

PIEF needed firm and capable WCC leadership to carry forward a radical and challenging agenda. When PIEF grew stronger, his intent was to weaken or eliminate it. When he visited Palestine-Israel, he first visited the Jewish people for two days. This visit began with the demise of the PIEF until Olav shut down.

It is helpful to recall what the PIEF did and influenced.

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) was created in 2007 as the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiative. The PIEF aims to:

1. Promote ecumenical solidarity: Among churches and Christians worldwide, with the churches and people of Palestine and Israel.
2. Support peaceful resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is based on justice, equality, and human rights.
3. Advocate for an end to occupation: For the establishment of a sovereign, independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel.

The PIEF brought together churches, church-related organizations, and individuals worldwide to work together to support peace, justice, and human rights in Palestine and Israel.

Some key activities of the PIEF include the following.

1. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)–A program that still brings international volunteers to accompany Palestinian communities and supports peaceful resistance to occupation.
2. Advocacy and lobbying: PIEF advocates for policy changes and raises awareness among governments, international organizations, and civil society.
3. Education and awareness-raising–PIEF promoted education and awareness-raising regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on Palestinian communities.

By creating the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, the WCC aimed to strengthen ecumenical solidarity and support for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The *Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel* (EAPPI) was created in 2002 by the World Council of Churches (WCC). The EAPPI was an initiative that aimed to support Palestinian communities and promote a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At an International Peace Consultation on June 20, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine issued an open letter to the World Council of Churches (WCC)

and the ecumenical movement, stating, "There is still no justice in our land."

In today's Palestine, discrimination and inequality, military occupation, and systematic oppression are rules. The letter states: "Today, we stand in front of an impasse, and we have reached a deadlock. Despite all the promises, endless summits, UN resolutions, religious and lay leader's callings – Palestinians are still yearning for their freedom and independence, and seeking justice and equality."

The coalition expressed its concern with Israel's "systemic assault on Palestinian creative resistance" and with the fact that religious extremism is on the rise, with religious minorities paying a heavy price. The letter also thanks the churches for their efforts towards refugees and ending regional conflicts. "We also thank you for your support of persecuted Christians in places like Iraq and Syria," states the letter.

The letter reflects that Christians in Palestine need the ecumenical movement more than ever. "We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy, Christians."

The letter urged churches to recognize Israel as an apartheid state, condemn the Balfour declaration as unjust, take a clear theological stand against any theology or Christian group that justifies the occupation and privileges one nation over the other based on ethnicity or a covenant, stand against religious extremism; revisit and challenge religious dialogue partners; lead campaigns for church leaders and pilgrims to visit Bethlehem and other Palestinian cities; defend the right of Palestinian Christians to resist the occupation creatively and nonviolently; create lobby groups in defense of Palestinian Christians; and create a strategic program within the WCC to lobby, advocate, and develop active programs towards justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

The letter expressed the urgent situation of the people in Palestine: "We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse," the letter states. "This could be our last chance to achieve a just peace. As a Palestinian Christian community, this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in this land."

The WCC leadership will bring the letter to the next meeting of its Executive Committee in November in Amman, Jordan. The WCC also invited its members' churches and partners worldwide to read and share the letter in a local voice from today's Palestine.

Palestine: thirty years after Oslo, accords benefit Israel

The Oslo Accords were historic events. However, nearly 30 years ago, no one used that expression to talk about the situation in Palestine. There is no longer any talk of the "peace process" or the "quartet" quartet', as was the case in the 1990s and the 2000s. Things have moved far from the hopes raised by these accords.

The agreements of September 13, 1993, signed by the Israeli state and the leader of the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), were intended to bring about a lasting solution to the "conflict" and enable the creation of a Palestinian state, a historic demand for the national liberation movement. The agreements provided for the gradual transfer of West Bank territories under the control of a newly created Palestinian authority.

This transfer occurred via the division of the West Bank territories into three zones, designated as zones A, B, and C, for a transition period of five years. This division endorsed Israeli demand for the differentiated management of these zones. The territories in Area A (18% of the total surface area) were essentially major Palestinian towns (except Hebron), where most of the population was concentrated, to be under Palestinian civil and military control. Area B, approximately a quarter of the territory, comprised Palestinian villages under Palestinian civilian and Israeli military control. The remaining 60% of the territory (Area C) was the only unfragmented strip of land entirely under Israeli control. It includes Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza (dismantled since 2005), and East Jerusalem, which is under Israeli military control.

The notion of incrementalism is critical to Oslo's architecture. The text did not address the key issues of Jerusalem, the right of return of 1948 refugees, the status of Jewish settlements built on occupied Palestinian land, or the borders of the Palestinian entity. All these "permanent status" issues were deferred for negotiations towards the end of the five-year transition period. The text did not promise or mention an independent Palestinian state at the end of the transitional period. The Palestinians believed that, in return for giving up their claim to 78% of historic Palestine, they would gain an independent state in the remaining 22%, with a capital city in Jerusalem. They were bitterly disappointed.

In pursuing the challenges from the Oslo Accords, there were some important milestones

1. In 1969, the WCC's Central Committee issued a statement condemning the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and calling for the rights of Palestinian refugees to be respected.
2. In 1974, the WCC's Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, adopted a resolution calling for an end to Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state.
3. In 2001, the WCC's Central Committee issued a statement condemning the Israeli government's actions in the Occupied Territories and calling for an end to the occupation.
4. In 2014, the WCC's Assembly in Busan, South Korea, adopted a resolution calling for an end to Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state and also condemned the use of violence by both Israelis and Palestinians.

The WCC continues to be actively engaged in promoting justice and peace in the Middle East, particularly in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The WCC's work in this area includes the following.

1. The WCC advocates for the rights of Palestinian refugees and for an end to Israeli occupation.

2. Support for Palestinian Christians: The WCC supported Palestinian Christian communities, including the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).
3. Interfaith dialogue: The WCC engaged with Jewish and Muslim leaders to promote understanding and peace.

Overall, the WCC's commitment to justice and human rights in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict reflected its broader mission to promote peace, justice, and human dignity worldwide, and The World Council of Churches (WCC) has hosted numerous significant meetings over the years. Here are some major ones:

At an International Peace Consultation on June 20, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine issued an open letter to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the ecumenical movement, stating, "There is still no justice in our land."

In today's Palestine, discrimination and inequality, military occupation, and systematic oppression are rules. The letter states: "Today, we stand in front of an impasse, and we have reached a deadlock. Despite all the promises, endless summits, UN resolutions, religious and lay leader's callings – Palestinians are still yearning for their freedom and independence, and seeking justice and equality."

The coalition expressed its concern with Israel's "systemic assault on Palestinian creative resistance" and with the fact that religious extremism is on the rise, with religious minorities paying a heavy price.

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The letter reflects that Christians in Palestine need the ecumenical movement more than ever. "We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy, Christians."

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peace. As a Palestinian Christian community, this could be our last opportunity to save the Christian presence in this land."

The WCC leadership will bring the letter to the next meeting of its Executive Committee in November in Amman, Jordan. The WCC also invited its member churches and partners worldwide to read and share the letter in a local voice from today's Palestine.

Rebuilding Health in Gaza: This conference aimed to develop a plan for rebuilding the health sector in Gaza, focusing on public health approaches and community-based initiatives. The conference highlighted the significant health disparities between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including differences in life expectancy, infant mortality rates, and access to healthcare. The conference emphasized the importance of international support in rebuilding the health sector in Gaza, including financial assistance, medical supplies, and expertise. Overall, the Amman Conference on Palestine played a crucial role in raising awareness of the health challenges faced by Palestinians in Gaza and promoting international support for rebuilding the health sector.

The WCC also initiated the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine-Israel. (EAPPI)

1. The EAPPI sends international volunteers to accompany Palestinian communities, providing a protective presence and supporting their non-violent resistance to occupation.
2. The EAPPI advocates for policy changes and raises awareness among governments, international organizations, and civil society about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on Palestinian communities.
3. EAPPI promotes education and awareness about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, its root causes, and its impact on Palestinian communities.

EAPPI's Impact

1. *Protective Presence*: EAPPI's presence has helped to reduce violence and harassment against Palestinian communities.
2. *Advocacy and Awareness-Raising*: EAPPI has raised awareness about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on Palestinian communities, influencing policy changes and public opinion.
3. *Supporting Non-violent Resistance*: EAPPI has supported Palestinian non-violent resistance to occupation, promoting peaceful and creative forms of protest.

The World YMCA and Palestine

For nearly 50 years, the YMCA has remained a welfare and relief organization. However, after the First Intifada, the YMCA shifted its gear to undertaking justice and human rights issues. This brought about a new mandate through resolutions adopted by the 2002 World YMCA Council, which included the following:

1. The World YMCA called for an immediate end to violence and bloodshed in Palestine and Israel.
2. *Support for Palestinian Youth*: The resolution expressed solidarity with Palestinian youth and supported their right to self-determination.
3. *Advocacy for Human Rights*: The World YMCA advocated for protecting human rights, including the right to freedom of movement, education, and healthcare.

These resolutions demonstrate the World YMCA's commitment to addressing global challenges, promoting peace, justice, and human rights, and supporting young people worldwide.

The Second Intifada (2000–2005) was a pivotal moment in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The following is a summary of the YMCA delegation's report. Key findings and recommendations

1. Humanitarian Crisis: The delegation witnessed a severe humanitarian crisis with widespread poverty, unemployment, and restrictions on movement.
2. Violence and trauma*: The team reported on the devastating impact of violence on civilians, particularly children and youth, who suffered from trauma, fear, and anxiety.
3. Restrictions and Checkpoints*: The delegation highlighted the difficulties caused by Israeli checkpoints and restrictions on movement, which severely impacted daily life, education, and economic opportunities.
4. Support for Palestinian Youth*: The YMCA delegation emphasized the importance of supporting Palestinian youth, who were disproportionately affected by the conflict, through education, training, and empowerment programs.
5. The YMCA delegation called for international advocacy efforts to address the humanitarian crisis, promote peace, and support the rights of the Palestinian people.

Resolutions and Statements in 2002

1. World Council Resolution*: The World Alliance of YMCAs adopted a resolution in its 2018 World Council, calling for an end to the occupation of Palestine and advocating for the rights of Palestinian youth.
2. 2019 Statement on Gaza: The World YMCA issued a statement condemning violence in Gaza and calling for an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian aid.
3. The World Alliance of YMCAs works closely with YMCA Palestine, supporting its programs and initiatives for Palestinian youth.
4. The organization collaborates with ecumenical organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, to advocate for Palestinian rights and promote peacebuilding initiatives.
5. The World Alliance of YMCAs continues to strongly advocate for Palestinian rights and promote peace-building initiatives in the region. The 2002 World YMCA Council was a significant event, and I've found some information about the resolutions adopted during that meeting:

6. Humanitarian aid*: The team recommends providing humanitarian aid, including food, shelter, and medical assistance, to affected communities.
7. Support for Local Initiatives: The YMCA delegation encouraged support for local initiatives such as community development projects, education, and training programs.
8. Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*: The team emphasized the importance of promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, including interfaith dialogue and people-to-people diplomacy.

There were many stresses and tensions within the organization, and The Zionist elements were peeved by the new radical statements of the YMCA. They demanded:

1. Removal of Palestine-Specific Content *: From the World Alliance of YMCAs' websites and publications.
2. The shift in advocacy focus: Away from specific support for Palestinian rights and towards more general advocacy for peace and justice.
3. Reduced engagement with Palestinian YMCAs and other organizations working for Palestine Justice.

The reactions of the Palestinian YMCAs include the following:

1. Criticism from Palestinian YMCAs*: Other organizations feel that the World Alliance of YMCAs has abandoned its commitment to Palestinian justice.
2. Concerns about neutrality*: Some critics argue that the World Alliance of YMCAs' shift away from explicit support for Palestinian rights may be perceived as neutrality or even complicity in the face of ongoing human rights violations
3. Impact on YMCA credibility*: The perceived erosion of the World Alliance of YMCAs' commitment to Palestine justice may damage the organization's credibility and reputation as a champion of social justice.
4. The ecumenical movement's rich history of promoting unity and solidarity among Christian denominations played a critical role in pursuing justice in Palestine. As a global community of faith, the ecumenical movement has a moral obligation to speak out against injustice and advocate for the rights of marginalized communities.

A Prophetic Voice for Justice

The ecumenical movement must be revitalized as a force for justice in Palestine, leveraging its collective voice to:

1. *Condemn systemic injustices*: Challenge the Israeli occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid policies that perpetuate suffering and displacement.
2. *Amplify Palestinian voices*: Center Palestinian Christians' and Muslims' narratives and experiences, ensuring their stories are heard and valued.
3. *Support non-violent resistance*: Encourage and participate in non-violent activism, boycotts, divestments, and sanctions (BDS) to pressure Israel to comply with interna-

tional law.

4. *Advocate for policy change*: Engage with governments, international organizations, and churches to push for policies that promote Palestinian self-determination, human rights, and dignity.

A Spiritual Imperative

Revitalizing the ecumenical movement as a force for justice in Palestine is not only a moral imperative but also a spiritual one. By standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people, the ecumenical movement can

Witness to God's love: Demonstrating God's compassion and justice amidst oppression:

· Reclaim the Gospel*: Embody the teachings of Jesus, who stood with the marginalized and challenged the powerful.
· Foster unity and reconciliation*: Bring Christians from diverse backgrounds to work towards a common goal of justice and peace.

A Call to Action

As the ecumenical movement seeks to revitalize its commitment to justice in Palestine, it must:

1. Listen to Palestinian voices*: Center Palestinian perspectives and experiences in all aspects of its work.
2. Taking bold action*: Engage in non-violent activism, advocacy, and education to challenge the status quo.
3. Build coalitions and partnerships* Collaborate with other faith communities, civil society organizations, and social movements to amplify its impact.

By revitalizing its commitment to justice in Palestine, the ecumenical movement can reclaim its prophetic voice, witness God's love, and contribute to a more peaceful world.

17

The Debt-based World Financial System as Enabler of Settler Colonialism in Palestine

Nazari Ismail

Introduction

The fact that we are witnessing a genocide taking place in Gaza in real-time with no country interfering directly to stop it from happening highlights the utter helplessness of the international community to stop Israeli crime towards Palestinians.

At the time of writing (25 December 2024), the number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli military has exceeded 45 thousand, with 70 percent being women and children. The killings are continuing despite the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordering Israel to carry out six provisional measures, such as ordering Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent genocidal acts, including avoiding and punishing incitement to genocide, ensuring aid and services reach Palestinians under siege in Gaza, and preserving evidence of crimes committed in Gaza. Unfortunately, Israel has completely ignored all the orders by the ICJ.

In December 2023, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution demanding an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire," the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and "ensuring humanitarian access" to the people of Gaza. The resolution was passed with a large majority of 153 in favor and 10 against, with 23 abstentions. However, this was also ignored by Israel, which was not surprising considering that its main backer, the U.S., was among those who voted against it. Moreover, unlike the U.N. Security Council, the UNGA's resolutions are non-binding.

Unfortunately, even at the U.N. Security Council, Israel is shielded from international actions by the U.S. and its main allies. For example, in the case of the Gaza genocide, on 16 October 2023, Russia proposed a resolution that called for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza after thousands of Palestinians in Gaza were killed after ten days of attack by Israel. China, Gabon, Mozambique, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates supported it. However, four countries, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, opposed it.

Four months later, on 20 February 2024, with the number of Palestinian deaths approaching 30 thousand, the U.N. Security Council again deliberated on a ceasefire resolution,

this time proposed by Algeria. The resolution received support from thirteen member states, who were concerned not only with the number of deaths but also the threat of famine facing 2 million Palestinians. Again, the United States used her veto to stop the resolution from being adopted.

Nine months later, on 20 November 2024, the U.N. Security Council again deliberated on a resolution demanding an "immediate, unconditional and permanent" ceasefire in the Gaza Strip as the number of Palestinians being killed totaled almost 40 thousand as Israel relentlessly bombarded Palestinian homes, hospitals, and schools. Again, the United States vetoed the resolution.

Hence, by Christmas of 2024, the world is still allowing Israel to continue its killing spree in Gaza and to continue blocking humanitarian aid from reaching the hungry people of Gaza, proving yet again the helplessness of the international community to stop Israel from committing the genocide in Gaza.

The sentiment is not reflective of Ordinary Citizens.

Most ordinary citizens are sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. For example, even in the U.S., the number of people who are against what Israel is doing to the Palestinians is enormous and growing, too, especially among the youth. According to a recent poll, half of U.S. adults say Israel's 15-week-old military campaign in Gaza has "gone too far." Among younger Americans and along political lines, divisions are more prominent. Almost half of those surveyed aged 18-29, 49%, say Israel is committing genocide, with 24% disagreeing and 27% uncertain. Of registered Democrats, 49% say Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.[1]

The German government is strongly pro-Israel, but a recent poll showed that the German public is against any siding with Israel and strongly opposes military support for it. About 43 percent of respondents to the said survey have said that Germany should stay out of the conflict, and only 34 percent said that they agreed with the view that Germany has a special responsibility toward Israel because of its Nazi-era past.[2]

In the U.K., a poll showed overwhelming British public support for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The survey conducted in December 2023 found that 71% of the British public believe there definitely (48%) or probably (23%) should be an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Palestine. Conversely, only 12% of people felt that there should not (6%) or probably not (6%) be an immediate ceasefire.[3]

Therefore, support for Israel in those countries comes mainly from the rich and powerful financial and political elites rather than from ordinary citizens.

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1   https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/24/americans-believe-israel-committing-genocide-poll
2   https://nournews.ir/en/news/159339/According-to-the-polls;-the-German-government-is-facing-its-worst-state,-due-to-its-support-of-genocide
3   https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1548-opinion-poll-shows-overwhelming-british-public-support-for-an-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza

Dependency on U.S. Aid

A situation where the sentiment regarding the colonization of Palestine among the rich and the powerful elites is not shared among the ordinary citizens also exists in some Arab or Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain. The governments of these countries may not be strong supporters of Israel but are nevertheless having diplomatic relations with Israel or are planning to normalize relations with Israel. Democratic freedoms do not exist in these countries, which explains why ordinary citizens' views are not translated into the official stance of the countries.

An important factor is economic dependency on the U.S. This applies to Egypt, the second largest receiver of U.S. foreign aid after Israel. The assistance is both financial and military. For 2022, the Biden administration requested a total of USD 1.4 billion in bilateral assistance for Egypt and provided grant aid that Egypt can use to purchase and maintain U.S.-origin military equipment.[4]

Turkey has had diplomatic relations with Israel since 1949. Despite strong words of condemnation of Israel, including regarding the genocide in Gaza, Turkey is still not willing to cut diplomatic ties with Israel. One of the most important reasons is the strong economic ties between the two countries. Two days before the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October, the Turkish Energy Minister announced his plan to visit Israel in November to discuss the shipment of natural gas to Europe through Turkey as well as domestic consumption. The plan is now suspended due to the current situation in Gaza. Nevertheless, it will likely be resumed since Turkey is keen to increase total trade between the two countries to improve its economy, which has been in a doldrum over the last decade.

Another example of a country that is highly dependent on the U.S. is Fiji. The U.S. provides numerous assistance to Fiji, including financial grants, support for early weather warning systems, technical assistance for development programs, forest and land management, conservation, funds to support the Fiji Election Office, and funds to help address violence against Fiji women. The U.S. also contributes U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy air assets to help Fiji protect earnings from fishing licenses in the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Most importantly, Fiji receives from the U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to equip its military, including sending Fijian officers and senior enlisted personnel to professional military education and leadership development courses in the United States. Therefore, it is not surprising that the only two countries that urged the International Court of Justice not to issue an opinion that declares the nearly six-decade occupation of Palestinian territory illegal are the U.S. and Fiji.[5]

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4   https://www.amcham.org.eg/information-resources/trade-resources/egypt-us-relations/us-foreign-assistance-to-egypt

5   https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-fiji/

External Debts

Another critical factor that has weakened many Muslim countries is the problem of unmanageable external debt, primarily denominated in U.S. dollars. The best example of how external debts forced a change in policy regarding Palestine is the case of Sudan, which was experiencing economic problems under the rule of previous President Omar Al Bashir, who was very corrupt and deeply unpopular. In 2019, the Sudanese military realized that the situation was untenable and decided to overthrow and have him imprisoned. However, Sudan's economic problems remain unresolved, including inflation, which worsened when the value of the Sudanese currency depreciated against foreign currencies, thereby increasing the cost of imported goods. The government also faced a severe debt problem. The new Sudanese government under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok is, therefore, in a very tight spot and facing the growing anger of his people.

Exploiting this situation, the Trump administration offered Sudan financial assistance, provided Sudan recognizes the state of Israel. The then U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, relayed the message during his August 2020 meeting with Abdalla Hamdok in Khartoum. The Sudanese government capitulated to the conditions imposed by the U.S. and agreed to recognize and normalize relations with Israel in October 2020. Of course, many Sudanese, especially the Islamist groups, do not agree with this decision. However, the Sudanese government felt that, despite widespread disagreement among many Sudanese with the normalization move with Israel, the people's anger over economic problems was the more severe threat to its hold on power. They thought that normalization with Israel would help to solve their financial problems. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Sudan is now in a worse situation due to the civil war that has been ongoing for the last few years.

Pakistan is another weak country due to external debt. Since its formation, Pakistan has been characterized by political instability and economic problems. Moreover, Pakistan is notorious for its culture of corruption. In 2017, Transparency International (T.I.) listed it among Asia's five most corrupt countries. Corruption and abuse of power are rampant, especially among the ruling elites.

Even though Pakistan's leaders have changed numerous times, the problem of corruption remains endemic. In the meantime, Pakistan's economic situation deteriorated. In the early 2000s, government debt climbed to the highest in South Asia at 99.3 percent of GDP. Pakistan's dependence on external financial assistance, especially from American financial institutions, resulted in Pakistan becoming indebted to the American government. As a result, it often acquiesced to American demands, including in military aspects, angering Conservative groups in Pakistan, some of which decided to resort to violent means, attacking government institutions such as mosques and universities, leading to many deadly encounters.

By 2013, the country's debt situation was critical. To prevent the country from defaulting

on its debt, Nawaz Sharif had to borrow U.S. $6.6 billion from the IMF in 2013.[6] In July 2017, he was forced to resign as prime minister again when the Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled that he was corrupt and unfit to hold the post. In July 2018, Imran Khan won the general election and immediately faced the problem of high external debt. By 2021, the Pakistan government had doubled its external debt to USD 85.6 billion. Pakistan's total debt and liabilities jumped to a record PKR 50.5 trillion at the end of September 2021. Imran Khan was toppled in 2023 and is now in jail. However, the country's indebtedness to the IMF and other American financial institutions means that it will never dare challenge the U.S.'s policy on Israel other than the customary vote in support of resolutions condemning Israel.

Why are lenders able to lend so much money?

Some people may wonder where the sources of money are for governments, corporations, and individuals to borrow. It must be remembered that money is no longer physical and can now be created out of thin air, which most people, whether political analysts or economists, are unaware of.

As explained by the Bank of England:

In the modern economy, most money takes the form of bank deposits. However, how those bank deposits are created is often misunderstood: the principal way is through commercial bank reserves making loans. Whenever a bank makes a loan, it creates a matching deposit in the borrower's bank account, creating new money. The reality of how money is created today differs from the description in some economics textbooks: Rather than banks receiving deposits when households save and lending them out, bank lending creates deposits.[7]

The system where banks can create money as they issue loans has facilitated the growth of the banking industry worldwide. However, the biggest is the U.S. banking industry, which has issued dollar-denominated currency to governments and corporations worldwide. The only limit to the ability of the banking industry to issue loans is the ability of the borrowers to pay back the loans. If borrowers fail to repay their loans, the banks' assets will disappear, causing them to become insolvent. The banking industry will then suffer a crisis. To be sure, there have been many crises in the past. The last major one was the 2008 subprime banking crisis in the U.S. Because banks can lend money quickly, the global debt has increased to more than USD300 trillion.

Who are the Main Creditors

Approximately half of all cross-border loans, international debt securities, and trade invoices are denominated in U.S. dollars, while roughly 40 percent of SWIFT messages and 60

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6   It should be noted the IMF's most prominent member is the United States, with a quota (as of 30 April 2016) of SDR 83 billion (about $118 billion).

7   Bank of England, 'Money creation in the modern economy,' Quarterly bulletin Q1, 2014

percent of global foreign exchange reserves are in dollars. F.X. transactions are also heavily dollar-based, with nearly 90 percent of all currency trades having the dollar as one leg. The U.S. dollar remained by far the most traded currency according to the latest Bank for International Settlements (BIS) Triennial Survey in 2019, and it has steadily increased its share of representation on one side of an F.X. trade to almost 90 percent.[8]

As the Bank of England explained, almost all new currencies are created when commercial banks make loans. As a corollary, nearly all new U.S. dollars are created when U.S. commercial banks give out loans. That explains why the U.S. banks are among the biggest in the world.

Sources of funding for the U.S. government

The previous discussions highlighted that the U.S. government has been providing considerable aid to many countries and is also the biggest funder of the International Monetary Fund. In addition to the countries mentioned above, it is common knowledge that the U.S. provides a considerable amount of financial and military assistance to Israel.

According to one report, the U.S. has given Israel more than $260 billion in combined military and economic aid since World War II, plus about $10 billion more in contributions for missile defense systems like the Iron Dome, the U.S. That is the most granted to any country throughout that time frame and around $100 billion more than Egypt, the second-highest recipient historically.[9]

The U.S. government may appear to have enough money to afford to provide all that aid. It does not have the money. However, it can do that because it has been able to continue borrowing considerable amounts of money from various sources, such as investment funds, pension funds, and the central banks of other countries.

Due to the massive borrowings by the U.S. federal government, its total accumulated debt in 2023 was approximately $33.1 trillion.[10]

Regarding the main components of that debt, about $26.5 trillion is held by the public and $12.1 trillion in intragovernmental debt. 'The public' refers to foreign investors and foreign governments (30 percent of the debt), individual investors and banks (15 percent of the debt), and the Federal Reserve (12 percent). States and local governments hold 5 percent of the debt.

China, Japan, Brazil, Ireland, the U.K., and others are the central foreign governments that have lent money to the U.S. via their central banks. In 2023, the total debt the U.S. owes

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8   https://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2022/07/the-u-s-dollars-global-roles-revisiting-where-things-stand/

9   https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2023-10-10/how-much-aid-does-the-u-s-give-to-israel

10 https://www.studycountry.com/wiki/did-the-u-s-debt-hit-30-trillion

to the central banks of China and Japan is $2.2 trillion.

1980, the total U.S. federal government debt was less than one trillion (30% of GDP). By 2000, the total U.S. Federal government debt was USD5.6 trillion (55% of GDP); now, it is more than USD33 trillion (120% of GDP). Based on the growth trajectory of U.S. federal government debt, many experts, including Professor Kotlikoff of Boston University, believe the U.S. government will never be able to settle its debt. Any attempt to reduce the debt will require a cut in government spending and an increase in the tax rates. That will cause a recession and will be deeply unpopular. In other words, the U.S. government is technically bankrupt. However, since it is not a corporation, it will continue to operate. However, the American masses will be pressured to help the government manage its debt. The bottom level of society suffers the most.

Implication for the Colonization of Palestine

Historically, any military endeavors are expensive. Therefore, colonization via military efforts, such as the one that is ongoing in Palestine, is a costly exercise. The Israeli government is spending a considerable amount of money to maintain the state of Israel. The amount is getting more expensive due to the heroic resistance by the Palestinians.

The reason why Israel can continue with their Zionist settler colonialism project for more than 75 years now is simply due to its ability to obtain a continuous supply of resources to fund its military operations. The primary funder of those resources are the United States government, private sector lenders, and tax-exempt donations, mainly from the United States. If the United States government is willing to borrow money to fund Israeli military efforts, there will be no end to the genocide and apartheid in Palestine.

However, the vast financial resources that fund Israeli military efforts are made possible by an economic system that can create money from thin air, which is then lent to borrowers. Over time, the system will generate super-rich classes of people, while the vast majority will face an acute problem of the cost of living. At the same time, the debt burden of the U.S. will keep increasing. There will come a time when the U.S. public will no longer tolerate the situation since ordinary Americans are suffering from a variety of economic problems due to this situation, including worsening cost of living problems, unemployment problems, and worsening public services provided by the government. When this will happen is difficult to predict since the financial institutions are still finding it lucrative for the situation to continue.

Unfortunately for Palestinians, it so happens that almost all U.S. and European financial institutions are strong supporters of Israel, as evidenced by their statements of support for Israel in the aftermath of the 7 October military raid by Hamas.[11] Moreover, the super-rich and powerful financial elites in America, Europe, and many other countries are also sympathetic to the Zionists, which is one crucial reason why the settler colonial project in Palestine

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11 https://www.reuters.com/world/us-banks-tech-firms-offer-support-israel-victims-announce-aid-2023-10-13/

is still ongoing after 75 years.

Conclusion

Many analyses of the ongoing genocide in Palestine have failed to factor in the economic and financial dimensions. Many focus on the policies of various governments, especially the U.S. government, without explaining how the financial elites in the U.S. have influenced its policy decisions.

The fact of the matter is that without financial resources, Israel cannot continue to commit horrible atrocities towards Palestinians. Israel can do it because the U.S. has been able to borrow a considerable amount of money, created from thin air, from the U.S. financial industry.

If the system allows this to happen, the ongoing atrocities will continue to occur even though the resulting outcome is a huge debt burden on the U.S. government, which is impossible to repay. As a result, U.S. citizens, including the weak and the poor, are also victims of the situation.

To redress the situation, the masses must do more than shout and protest the ongoing injustice. They also need to dismantle the current financial system. Nevertheless, that will require an understanding of the unjust economic system and a change in their value system, which, unfortunately, currently supports and strengthens it.

18

Pursuing Justice

The Palestinian Quest for Dignity and Freedom

Rifat Kassis

Dear sisters and brothers,

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to stand before you today to shed light on the Palestinian people's plight and discuss the aspirations of the Palestine liberation movement. For decades, the Palestinian people have endured colonial settler occupation and apartheid.

When our homeland was split into two in 1948 by force, over 580 Palestinian villages were demolished by the Zionist forces. Over three-quarters of the population at the time – more than 750,000 people – were expelled from Palestine. As refugees, they were dispersed across the entire world; to this day, the Israeli occupation continues denying these refugees and their descendants their right to return to their homeland, Palestine. The destruction and expulsions of 1948 – the Nakba, or catastrophe, that Palestinians still mourn – initiated about eight decades of dispossession and oppression by a foreign regime, over five of which have been endured under direct military settler colonial occupation.

As of 1967, the year when said military occupation was formally instated, the apparatus of injustice has only grown more entrenched and more complex. The Israeli government continues to confiscate Palestinian land and build illegal settlements on it; there are currently more than 200 settlements in existence, occupied by over 800,000 illegal settlers. Many other factors contribute to what is nothing less than an apartheid system, like the construction of roads to be used exclusively by settlers (Palestinians are forbidden), the demolition of Palestinian houses in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the construction of the separation wall (over 700 kilometers long), which has confiscated many Palestinian land and continues to place Palestinian communities in the oPt under an economic, social, educational, and political chokehold.

Over seven million Palestinian refugees, often enduring severe shortages and challenging conditions in refugee camps around the world, await their return with essentially no legal progress defending it. Thousands of Palestinian prisoners currently in detention, including women and many children – face physical hardship, physical and psychological abuse

(torture is a norm), and violations of their legal and human rights. The arrest campaigns never stopped! Palestinians in the opt live in a kind of straitjacket: their movements are restricted; their access to jobs, health services, places of worship, and educational institutions are limited; they are subject to humiliation, killing, maiming, and arbitrary arrest.

Jerusalem residents face evictions, house demolitions, ID card revocations (when they are no longer able to prove, according to the terms of the Israeli occupation, that their "center of life" is in Jerusalem), and settlement constructions within Palestinian neighborhoods. Palestinians who stayed inside Israel still face unending discrimination without receiving any reparations for the historical crimes committed against them since 1948.

And Gaza, where 70% of its residents are refugees living in an inhumane situation and have been subjected to destructive war more than three times in the past 25 years. For 18 years, Israel has been operating this open-air prison—people cannot come and go at all, cutting off supplies to the area; Israel controls the inflow of gas, electricity, medicine, building materials, and all imports and exports, not providing proper medical assistance, and leaving the unemployment rate in Gaza at 49.1 percent. And all this before this current genocidal war!

We are talking about decades and decades of loss on every possible front – and yet Israel and the USA, not to mention most Western countries, still insist that everything had started on the 7th of October 2023 with the attack of Hamas on Israeli settlements around Gaza.

The massacres that followed the 7th of October have only exacerbated the Palestinian, mainly Gazans, suffering, leading to further loss of life, destruction of homes, displacement of communities, and starvation.

The genocidal war on Gaza and the rest of Palestine has unveiled the brutal and ugly reality of the Israeli government and occupation, as well as the complicity of the Israeli society and the so-called international community, particularly the United States and Europe.

This war has highlighted the strategic importance of the colonial settler Israeli project to Western powers. It serves its broader hegemonic agenda in the Middle East, aiming to suppress national resistance movements and destabilize regional countries. The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the genocidal war on Gaza are intended as steps toward liquidating the Palestinian cause, normalizing relations with Arab countries, fragmenting regional resistance movements, and restructuring the region into perpetual internal divisions and conflicts.

The ongoing war in Gaza continues to devastate the Palestinian people. Daily massacres add to a death toll that has exceeded 30,000, with more than 75,000 injured. Many remain trapped under rubble and on roads, unreachable by rescuers. Around 70% of Gaza's buildings and infrastructure have been destroyed, leaving 85% of its population displaced, homeless, and starving as Israel severely limits the entry of humanitarian aid.

Israel offers Palestinians stark choices: death, forced displacement, or survival under

inhumane conditions without infrastructure or basic needs. These options make life unbearable for humans and animals alike.

Meanwhile, Israel's allies, particularly the U.S. and Western countries, are collectively punishing Palestinian refugees by cutting funding for UNRWA, effectively preventing life-saving aid from reaching Gaza and the West Bank. This unrelenting genocide and ethnic cleansing persist unchecked due to the protection and blind loyalty of the U.S. and other Western colonial powers.

However, the war on Gaza is not the primary or final front for Israel. For the right-wing, fascist Israeli government led by Netanyahu, the main battleground is the West Bank, including Jerusalem.

Amid the international silence on Gaza's genocide, the "soft" genocide and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank continue unnoticed. Palestinians face annexation of their lands, restricted movement, confinement to isolated areas, collective punishment, forced displacement, arrests, killings, maiming, military incursions, and violent settler pogroms—all of which have become the daily reality for Palestinians in the West Bank.

Separating the West Bank from Gaza in political discourse is a dangerous act of ignorance. The recent issuance of weapon licenses to more than 400,000 settlers by Israeli Minister Ben Gvir has emboldened these criminal and terrorist settler groups to escalate their attacks on Palestinians. This is compounded by the complicity of the Israeli judicial system and the absence of international and Israeli media coverage.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is incapable of protecting its citizens and has lost credibility among Palestinians due to its weakness and its ongoing security coordination with Israel.

Economically, the situation is dire. Israel has revoked the work permits of nearly 160,000 Palestinians, cutting off $370 million in monthly income to the West Bank. The private sector has ground to a halt, and the PA, under Israeli sanctions, is unable to pay civil servant salaries. Palestinians, already struggling from the economic fallout of the pandemic, face worsening hardship.

Israel was created as an apartheid state designed to control all of Palestine, forcibly displace its indigenous population, and replace them with Jews coming from all over the globe. It is worth noting that Israel uses biblical terminology to refer to the West Bank as "Judea and Samaria," reflecting its ideological claims to the land.

Despite these challenges, Palestinian resistance remains steadfast. The new generation is determined to reject reality and continue fighting for freedom, equality, and dignity.

Regionally, while many Arab governments have normalized relations with Israel, Arab populations continue to regard Palestine as their central cause and reject normalization with the occupiers. The American and Israeli efforts to reconstruct the region in their favor are

faltering as resistance movements and new regional powers continue to emerge.

Globally, solidarity for the Palestinian cause is growing. People, not politicians, serve as the moral compass, rallying behind Palestinians through movements like BDS and international advocacy campaigns. For the first time, Israel faced accusations of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), thanks to the bold case filed by South Africa.

Additionally, the era of U.S. global hegemony is waning, with emerging powers reshaping global dynamics. The double standards of the U.S. and its allies, evident in their disparate responses to conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine, are increasingly exposed, prompting shifts in global public opinion.

The resolution of the Palestinian cause is central to the region's stability and the broader quest for global peace. Normalization agreements with Arab leaders are superficial and will not endure, as the people will ultimately prevail.

To advance the Palestinian cause, a comprehensive vision is needed, one that prioritizes stopping the genocide, rebuilding Gaza, and uniting Palestinians across all fronts. The Oslo Accords must be abandoned, internal divisions must end, and a reformed and inclusive PLO must lead the liberation struggle.

We must also bolster global solidarity movements, creating structures for political education, advocacy, and coordinated action. The upcoming anti-apartheid conference in South Africa presents a vital opportunity to establish an international and more coordinated anti-apartheid movement that will leverage all solidarity groups around the world.

In conclusion, while Palestinians face immense challenges, the growing international solidarity movements and regional and national resistance movements offer hope. Hope for the future and hope for our children and grandchildren. We can confront injustice and work toward a future where dignity, freedom, and justice prevail.

Mumbai Declaration

Palestine as the Epicenter of a World Crisis

Declaration of the Round Table "Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia" held in Mumbai, India, on 4-5th March, 2024, at the YMCA International House

Preamble

We, the participants in the Round Table meeting on the theme of "Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia", comprising social justice activists, concerned scholars, theologians, and journalists of Asia, have met over the past two days and exchanged our specialized perspectives on a wide range of aspects related to the conference theme. Our coming together in Mumbai was prompted by our common concerns for social justice and the high standard of civilized norms in our shared global community. Our concerns arise from our common perception of the immense political crisis and shocking human tragedy currently occurring in West Asia, especially Palestine, that has appalled the entire world. Given our various intellectual and activist involvements and responsibilities as citizens of Asia, we felt compelled to devote ourselves to research and collective reflection so that we, as an organized group, could contribute our expertise and prognoses to the many ongoing efforts to end the immediate humanitarian crisis and advance toward genuine long-term solutions.

Our Concerns

Our deliberations on the broader subjects of religion, politics, and social order were prompted by the severely turbulent conditions confronting our region of Asia and the world as a whole. Our individual work as activists, scholars, and professionals provides us with a sharp awareness of the socioeconomic and geopolitical processes that are contributing to the current disturbing trends within our countries, in our region, and in West Asia particularly.

Ideologies Provoking Social Hostility and Violence

We perceive the spread of socially provocative and destabilizing ideologies and politics that engender mistrust, hostility, and even hatred and violent behavior between social groups in our nations and regions. These tendencies are evident across the gamut of social relations: between genders, castes, faith communities, economic classes, and many other interest groups. The tendencies that are causing the greatest instability, including inter-group violence, are those which conflate religious fundamentalism and ethno-nationalism, creating the desire for supremacy and dominance by one group over others.

Such ideological and political streams have given rise to authoritarian regimes across the

world, including in our Asian region. Movements and organizations that are hybrid formations of religious fundamentalism melded with ethnocentrism and ethno-nationalism have become impediments to social harmony and peaceful co-existence among diverse groups of people. Such exclusivist movements are the purveyors of social narratives of perpetual inter-group hostility and even genocidal intent. Once such movements have become regimes that hold state power, humanity will experience the worst in domestic political repression, cycles of ethnic pogroms, wars of ethnic dominance, and, ultimately, genocide.

Apartheid in Palestine-Israel, Genocide in Gaza

The stark nature of the crisis in West Asia is that the aggressor state of Israel is once more asserting large-scale military force and a racist governance regime in the land of Palestine, most of which is now arbitrarily and forcibly designated as the Jewish State of Israel. We realize that we live in a world which accustoms us to racist hate speech, spectacles of devastating warfare, and the transparently deliberate perpetuation of mass human suffering and bloodshed. We are compelled to watch, firstly, the perpetration of all these evils and more in the unending full-scale war on Gaza and, secondly, the parallel repressive military operations in the West Bank, committed by the Zionist, ethnic-supremacist State of Israel.

Palestine is being continuously subjected to overpowering military operations, aerial and naval bombardment, and the deliberate targeting of residential areas, civilian installations including medical centers, and even cultural sites. This destructive pattern has been repeated frequently in the past 75 years since the forcible creation of the State of Israel in the land of Palestine. In the State of Israel itself, a Jewish-centric polity provides Jewish citizens with privileged and exclusive citizenship status while affording severely unequal, differential, Apartheid-style treatment to non-Jewish Arab and other ethnic-minority citizens.

An even worse system than Apartheid is imposed on the Palestinian territories that have been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. In these occupied territories, the Palestinians suffer from the continual loss of farmland and living space to new, illegal settlements of Israelis. Additionally, security walls, segregated roadways, and multiple checkpoints enforce severe movement restrictions on Palestinians in their own territory.

Today, the war-besieged people of Gaza are reduced to malnutrition and starvation. They are suffering severe physical deprivation, including permanent injuries, maiming, and the undermining of women's reproductive health, as well as individual and collective mental trauma.

Even more ominous is the corollary pattern of Israel's military aggression against the neighboring states of Lebanon and Syria, as well as the threats issued by the Israeli government leadership to other West Asian states.

Palestinian Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Prior to October 2023, 94,000 women and girls in Gaza already lacked access to sexual

and reproductive health services, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This figure has now risen to over one million in under five months. The United Nations estimated that 50,000 pregnant women were living in Gaza at the time of the initial siege in October, and an estimated 183 women give birth every day – of whom 15% have faced complications of some form. Menstruating women and girls have no access to sanitary products, with many forced to use tent scraps and others missing their periods completely due to stress. Prior to the escalation, malnutrition was high among pregnant women, which impacted childhood survival and development. As access to food and water deteriorates, mothers are struggling to feed and care for their families, increasing the risk of malnutrition, disease, and death. Historically, women and girls have represented the greatest proportion of casualties in situations of conflict, apartheid, and genocide, and they are also prone to rape and trafficking.

Ploys of Western Colonialism & Economic Dominance

Most disturbing of all is the fact that all this destructive behavior is enabled and sustained by the lavish material military support provided by the Western power bloc, comprising the world's richest and most powerful nations. We note the fact that all these nations call themselves the "free world" even as their generous support ensures the systematic conduct of oppressive and illegal Israeli military operations. We also note that these Western powers coordinate their own military operations in the region in support of Israel. This geopolitical coordination is performed through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, and via bilateral alliances with Israel.

Our Round Table involved a careful assessment of the broader context in which this crisis occurs, namely the historical European colonial project, the settlement of European populations in diverse regions, and the creation of Europeanized nation-states in various parts of the world.

The Round Table regards the State of Israel as part of this colonial project, even as the colonial ethos now dissipates due to the long process of decolonization. This decolonization has been hastened by the emergence of new states built by indigenous populations in the territories previously colonized. We welcome the rise of a "Global South" comprising the bulk of the world population, which is now free of the shackles of colonialism.

Meanwhile, we recognize that many former colonized nations are not yet fully free of colonialism's economic grip. The world system continues to enmesh global humanity in an unjust, unstable economic system based on an unstable market framework that secures permanent dominant status for the metropolitan First-World economies. The rest of the world, except for a very few larger emerging states, struggles to survive cycles of bankruptcy, overpowering debt, and unequal economic and trade opportunities even as their agricultural and mineral resources as well as human labor are being extracted and utilized for the benefit of the First World.

Impeding of the Peace Efforts of the Global Community

Our deliberations also convince us that the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the wider military destabilization of West Asia are being enabled solely by the continuous military re-supply of Israel by the Western powers and other countries such as India. At the same time, this Western power bloc uses its diplomatic agency in the United Nations system to systematically obstruct all attempts by the broader international community to halt the war in Palestine.

Rising Tide of World Solidarity with Palestine

The Round Table also discussed and shared Asia-wide experiences of actions of solidarity among the region's peoples in full sympathy with the Palestinian people in their current tragic predicament. From the struggles of peasants against lethal environmental pollution by industries linked to the Western power bloc to the campaigning in Korea and Japan about sexual slavery during Japan's imperial war of the 20th century, the Round Table heard reports of solidarity networking by these suffering communities in support of Palestinian victims of war and occupation.

We note that the brave endeavors of Palestinians against decades of Israeli settler colonialism are now inspiring popular solidarity movements on a mass scale across the world, aiming to end Palestine's subjugation and support its freedom to fully exercise its right to self-determination.

The Round Table is confident that the growing alliances of people's movements and civic action groups worldwide, especially in the Global South, will become even stronger. We see a global human community seeking dignity and justice gather itself through collective action in support of Palestine and commitment to the defeat of great-power aggression and dominance.

The Round Table, therefore, calls for the world community and Israel to take the following actions:

1. Immediate, unconditional, and permanent cease-fire in all Palestinian territories;
2. Complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and payment of full reparations for the devastation caused;
3. An end to Israel's military occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, as well as the dismantling of all military occupation installations such as walls, fencing, and checkpoints;
4. The release by Israel of all Palestinian detainees held without charge or held in occupation-related administrative detention;
5. The imposition of a global embargo on military assistance to Israel;
6. The political and moral isolation of Israel through economic, social, and cultural sanctions until the oppressive system of Zionism-Apartheid is reformed;
7. Israel should end all forms of Apartheid-type discrimination against people in the State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Round Table joins the rest of the human community in all its endeavors and in support of the oppressed Palestinian nation to end this final colonial project that offends the new norms of global justice, peace, and civilization.

Contributors

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Dewi Candraningrum is a researcher with expertise on gender study with intersectionality to literature, education, religion, and ecology. She is Lead Editor of Book Series EKOFEMINISME in Bahasa Indonesia. She is also the founder of community initiative in Central Java, Jejer Wadon (Womb Document) as well as a Chief Editor to feminist journal SALASIKA. In leisure time, she painted & exhibited her painting such as North Kendeng Mt Women Ecological Defenders at Onca Gallery Brighton, etc, with her disability son.

Neha Dabhade is an accomplished alumnus of the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences, holding degrees in both social work and law. With a wealth of experience as a trainer, she specializes in educating others on freedom of religion or belief. Dabhade's research interests span gender studies, communal violence, diversity, and freedom of religion, and she is a frequent contributor to various scholarly journals. Renowned for her expertise in documenting communal violence, she currently serves as the Executive Director at the Centre for

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Irfan Engineer is the director at the "Centre for Study of Society and Secularism". CSSS works for peace and harmony in India. It is a member of South Asian Forum for Freedom of Religion or Beliefs" (SAFFoRB). He is editor of "Indian Journal of Secularism" and General Secretary of the "Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community". Irfan Engineer is a trainer and conducts courses to promote peace and conflict resolution.

Rebecca Maria Goldschmidt is an artist and cultural worker engaging in place-based art and research projects. Her recent work reflects studies of cultural and land-based practices of her Jewish and Filipino ancestors. She often works in collaboration with local organizations or groups to facilitate the exchange of knowledge intergenerationally and interculturally. She received her MFA from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in Honolulu in 2020 and is pursuing her doctoral studies as a MEXT Scholar at Hiroshima City University in Japan.

Lakshman Gunasekara is a senior Sri Lankan journalist, public commentator, political analyst and, social activist. He has served as founding News Editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper, Chief Editor of the *Sunday Observer*, Chief Editor of *Daily News*, and, for 25 years, as Sri Lanka Correspondent for *The Yomiuri Shimbun* (Japan). He played a role as a mediator in a confidential final attempt at political negotiations between the Government and the Tamil liberation movement. He is currently a board member of the Ecumenical Institute for Study & Dialogue. He is an adviser to the heads of Protestant Churches in the NCC-SL. He is member of the Sri Lanka Committee for Solidarity with Palestine and the Free Palestine Movement.

Mohd Nazari Ismail is an Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Business and Economics and Director of Hashim Sani Centre for Palestine Studies, Universiti Malaya. He is the chairman of BDS Malaysia. He obtained his BSc in Economics from the University of Wales, MBA from the State University of New York, USA, and PhD from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom. He is a former dean of the Faculty of Business and Accounting and former head of Universiti Malaya's corporate planning unit. He has written and edited eight books. His book entitled *Till Debt Do Us Part – The Growth of the Global Banking Industry and Its Insidious Effects* was one of the winners of the 2019 National Book Award in the Economics category.

Rifat Kassis has over 35 years of experience in human rights, mainly child rights. He founded the Palestinian section of the global child rights movement, Defense for Children International, co-founded its movement in the Arab World and was elected International President for two terms in Geneva. Furthermore, he was selected to be the State of Palestine candidate for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). He served as Executive Director of Est Jerusalem YMCA and founded the YMCA/YWCA Olive Tree Campaign. He also ran the WCC /EAPPI program in Geneva and worked as the country director of the Lutheran World federation in Jordan. He is a co-auther of Kairos Palestine document and its General Coordinator since its inception as well as its international coalition. He published two books, *Palestine: A Bleeding Wound in the World's Conscience* and *Kairos for Palestine*.

Miyuki Kinjo, Ph.D., is Research Fellow of the Institute of Ars Vivendi at Ritsumeikan University in Japan. She is currently conducting research about the historiography of the Palestinian Nakba and Palestinian refugees' memory of the homeland, while holding an identity as a third-generation of Zainichi Koreans (Koreans living in Japan as a result of Japanese colonization of Korean Peninsula). Her scholarly publications include: "In Search of Intersection with Palestine: Intersectional Feminism and Review of Solidarity," in Korean YMCA in Japan ed. *Palestine at the Intersection: Towards Renewal of Solidarity*, 2022, and "The Possible Renewal of Solidarity with the Palestinians: Through the Eyes of a Korean-Japanese," in Yakushige, Yoshihiro ed. *Global Transformation of Christian Zionism*, 2022.

Satoshi Mizutani is Professor at the Faculty of Global and Regional Studies, Doshisha University (Kyoto, Japan). He has engaged in Transimperial History for over a decade and, since 2022, has been the Director of Center for Transimperial History. He is the author of 'Anticoloniaism' in (eds.) C. Schayegh, D. Hedinger, N. Heé, D. Matasci, and S. Wu, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Transimperial History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming) and Satoshi Mizutani, *Transimperial Trajectories: Colonialism and Anticolonialism across the British and Japanese Empires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Shalini Mulackal is a Presentation Sister. Till April 2022, Shalini was teaching systematic theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, New Delhi. She completed her Doctoral studies from the University of Madras in 2007 and did her research on Religio-cultural practices of Dalit Catholic women of Tiruvallur Dist., Tamil Nadu. She is a member of Indian Theological Association (ITA) and served as Vice President and as the first woman president. She also served as the coordinator of Indian Women Theologians Forum (IWTF), Ecclesia of Women of Asia (EWA), and chairperson of Centre for Dalit Studies (CDS) Delhi. She was actively involved in the Conference of Religious of India (CRI) and has served as the President of CRI, Delhi Unit.

John S. Munayer is a Palestinian theologian from Jerusalem who holds degrees from King's College London, the University of Edinburgh, and VU University Amsterdam. John is currently a lecturer at the Bethlehem Bible College and editor of the Journal of Palestinian Christianity. John researches, writes and lectures on Palestinian Christian identity, Palestinian Theology and Interreligious Dialogue. He is also active in several Palestinian Christian initiatives in Palestine.

Samuel S. Munayer is a Palestinian theologian from Jerusalem. After completing a BA in Theology and Philosophy at Durham University, he is pursuing a Master's degree in Middle Eastern Politics at Exeter University under the supervision of Professor Ilan Pappe. Samuel. Samuel has recently co-authored an article with John on Palestinian Liberation Theology titled: Decolonising Palestinian Liberation Theology: New Methods, Sources and Voices.

Sijin Paek, also known as Zain, is from South Korea. She pursued her graduate studies in East Asian studies at the University of Toronto. Since the early 2010s, She has actively participated in movements addressing the Japanese military sexual slavery issue (commonly known as the "comfort women" issue) and the Palestine liberation movement. Engagement in the feminist

movement and international solidarity prompted her to question the interconnection between the past and the present. She conducted interviews with Tal'at activists during her visit to Palestine in 2020. Currently, her academic interest is directed towards studying the East Asian Palestine solidarity movement and understanding the dynamics of feminist alliances.

Rev. Dr. Huang Po Ho serves as the director of the Academy for Contextual Theologies in Taiwan and holds the position of chairperson at the Asian Forum for Theological Movements (AFTM). Additionally, he co-moderates Global Kairos Asian and Pacific Solidarity with Palestine. Dr. Huang also teaches as an adjunct Professor of Theology at Chang Jung Christian University in Taiwan. He served as the head of Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Taiwan's most historical theological institution. Among his many publications are "A Theology of Self-determination," "From Galilee to Tainan," "No Longer a Stranger," "Mission from the Underside," and "Embracing the Household of God."

Ram Puniyani is the president at the Center for Study of Society and Secularism, Mumbai. He was a Professor of Biomedical Engineering at IIT Mumbai, and took voluntary retirement in 2004. H is currently working for communal harmony. He has been involved with human rights activities for the past two decades. He has also involved himself with groups working for workers' rights. Ram Puniyani is also associated with various secular and democratic initiatives, namely, All India Secular Forum, Center for Study of Society and Secularism, and ANHAD (Act Now for Harmony and Democracy).

Ranjan Solomon served for 33 years with the YMCA in refugee services in Bangladesh and India. He was also Executive for the Justice and Development in the Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. He was also General Secretary of the Ecumenical Coalition for Third World Tourism (ECTWT) and a consultant for the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum of the World Council of Churches (2009–2016). Ranjan is the co-founder of the Movement for Liberation from Nakba (MLN), the Convener of Indo Palestine Solidarity Network and Global Kairos Asia Pacific Palestine Solidarity (GKAPPS).

Achin Vanaik is a retired Professor of "International Relations and Global Politics" from Delhi University. He was also Assistant Editor at the Times of India, Mumbai for 12 years (1978–90). He has authored, co-authored and edited several books ranging from contemporary Indian politics and economy to matters of religion, secularism, communalism and nationalism to issues of globalization and international politics to matters concerning Indian foreign policy and regional and global nuclear weaponisation and disarmament. He is a founding-member of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), India; an Associate Fellow of the Transnational Institute (TNI), Amsterdam and has twice served on the Board of Executives of Greenpeace India.

Yoshihiro Yakushige, PhD, is a researcher at the Institute for Study of Humanities and Social Sciences, Doshisha University. His main research interests are history of Christian Zionism and settler colonialism in Japan; and politico-religious analysis of historical relations between Japan and Middle East. He teaches Middle Eastern Studies at Keiai University. He is also

working as a researcher at the Peace Depot, a non-profit think tank aiming at nuclear disarmament and peace education in Japan. He is author of Japanese book, *Colonialism and Gentile Zionism in Modern Japan: Nationalism and Worldview of Uchimura Kanzo, Yanaihara Tadao and Nakada Juji* (2018), which received the Society of Historical Studies of Christianity Award in 2018. He is also editor of *Global Transformation of Christian Zionism* (2022).

International Roundtable

Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia

— Interfaith Dialogue Towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era

Date
4&5 March 2024

Place
International House, Bombay Young Men's Christian Association (*Mumbai, India*)

The current crisis in Palestine vividly demonstrates the extent to which the problems of violence and discrimination associated with religious nationalism haunt domestic and international politics throughout the world today. Such problems are not confined to Palestine under Israeli rule: they are simultaneously observed in and across a wide range of countries including the United States, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Japan, and India. Historically in Asia, various spiritual traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism played a critical role in the evolution of anticolonial struggles. The same traditions, however, have increasingly become bounded up with the "nation state" during the period of decolonization and beyond. Today, religious nationalism is a serious cause of majoritarian oppression across Asia. Even after the formal end of colonialism, Asia is not free from the kind of violence and discrimination which are reminiscent of the colonial kind. Today's crisis forces us to critically rethink the relationship between religion and nation. This international roundtable draws scholars / activists from around the world. Its aim is to engage with an interfaith dialogue, exploring the possibilities of alternative politico-religious relations.

Sponsors
-Executive Committee for International Roundtable: Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia — Interfaith Dialogue Towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era (Irfan Engineer, Neha Dabhade, Ranjan Solomon, Miyuki Kinjo and Yoshihiro Yakushige)

Affiliated organizations
-JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) "Formation of New Networks and Liberation Conceptions among the Palestinians in the Post-Oslo Era"
-JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) "The theory and practice of 'trans-imperial history': towards an open-ended framework of research"
-Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism
-Global Kairos Asia Pacific Palestine Solidarity
-Center for Transimperial History

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Timetable

Decolonizing Politico-Religious Relations in Asia
—Interfaith Dialogue Towards Sustainable Peace in the Post-Nation-State Era

Monday, March 4

9:30	Self-introduction
10:00	Opening remarks 1: Ram Puniyani (India)
10:15	Opening remarks 2: Taizo Imano (Japan, Online)
10:30	Aims of conference: Yoshihiro Yakushige (Japan)
10:50	Coffee break

11:10	**Session 1** Politico-religious relations in the geopolitical transformation of Asia - Achin Vanaik (India) - Junaid S. Ahmad (Pakistan, online) - Lakshman Gunasekara (Sri Lanka)
12:40	Lunch

13:40	**Session 2** The trans-imperial perspective and the challenge of decolonization in Asia - Satoshi Mizutani (Japan) - Shijin Paek (South Korea) - Dewi Candraningrum (Indonesia) - Hani Abdelhadi (Japan/Palestine)
15:30	Coffee break

15:50	**Session 3** Overlapping identities and self-determination in Asia - Shalini Mulackal (India) - Huan Po-Ho (Taiwan) - Miyuki Kinjo (Japan) - Neha Dabhade (India)
17:40	End of the 1st day

Tuesday, March 5

9:30	Recap of 1st day

9:45	**Session 4** Theology and culture for intersectional liberation in the era of global crisis - John Munayer (Palestine) - Wataru Arizumi (Japan, Online) - Rebecca Maria Goldschmidt (Japan/US) - Irfan Engineer (india)
11:35	Break

11:55	**Session 5** Solidarity with the Palestinian people in the post-Oslo Era from global perspectives - Ranjan Solomon (India) - Nazari Ismail (Malaysia) - Na' eem Jeenah (South Africa, Online) - Rifat Kassi (Palestine, Online)
13:45	Lunch
14:45	Committee meeting for drafting a conference statement
15:45	General discussion
16:45	End of the 2nd day