



**PARTICIPATING  
SHARING  
EXCHANGING**

## PARTICIPATING SHARING EXCHANGING

From the late 1960s onwards a powerful idea has evolved, contemporaneously with and inspired by the student movement, encompassing both art and politics. It's referred to by the term 'participation'. In brief, this is about breaking down barriers between artist and public, between politicians and people; ideally, doing away with them altogether.

In politics, this means that the people are involved in both the decision-making and the responsibility. Indeed, they have to be involved if a democracy is to function properly, and if the goal of politics is to act in people's interests. In the field of art, participation means that artists see people as part of their creative work, and that the artist himself is nothing special, but just another person. And on the other hand, as in the famous phrase by the German artist Joseph Beuys: 'Everyone is an artist.'

The idea of participation has often remained mere wishful thinking, an idea it wasn't possible to put into practice. Often, it has been misused to create the illusion that people will be able to participate in art or in politics, when in fact they have no say in the matter. However, many artists have taken the idea seriously, as **SUSANNE BOSCH** demonstrates in this edition of *Art&Thought*. The idea of political participation in the form of a plebiscite is also a topical one, as we see in the report on the Omnibus for Direct Democracy, which resulted from one of Beuys' ideas. There are a great many suggestions as to how the idea of participation can be revived in the current circumstances: some of these are detailed in our articles by **MARK TERKESSIDIS** on 'collaboration', or **CLAUS LEGGEWIE**'s on 'convivialism'.

If we apply the concept of participation to the world of business, we quickly encounter the key words 'share' and 'exchange', and these constitute another important aspect of our coverage. Thanks to the Internet, the term 'sharing economy' has become fashionable. But does the sharing economy really have anything to do any more with sharing, in the original sense? Or is it simply the displacement of profit-making onto the individual, whereby he or she also assumes all the associated burdens? This is what **CAROLINE MICHEL** suspects: she's written a reportage for us about the world of this new economy.

Questions of social justice remain topical, then, despite these new economic phenomena. In this light, the question of how social justice is perceived beyond Western concepts of socialism or liberalism is particularly interesting. **SOUHEIL THABTI**, **ADNAN ABBAS** and **ALI AL-SALEH** report on the relationship between business and social justice in Islam, **SASKIA SCHÄFER** describes conditions in South-East Asia, and **MUNYARADZI FELIX MUROVE** reports on *Ubuntu*, the African philosophy of sharing.

Our featured artists and photographers show that these are not merely dry, intellectual topics; they can also be experienced with the senses. So in the spirit of this edition, do please share this magazine with other readers and pass it on to your friends! We're sure they'll be delighted.



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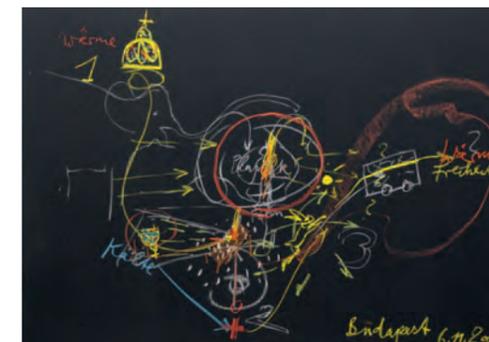
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The Mosque of Gurna.

Photo:

Mark Ryckaert

■ Over-powerful, authoritarian bureaucracies still predominate, and repeated attempts are made to exclude people from participating in society around the globe. But movements are springing up all over the world where people are not only protesting against the arrogance of the powerful, but also trying out practical new forms of co-operation. Mark Terkessidis has considered the reasons for these emerging forms of participation and their prospects for the future.

## RETHINKING PARTICIPATION ON THE NEW ETHIC OF COLLABORATION

BY **MARK TERKESSIDIS**

In German, and in a number of other languages too, it sounds very strange to propose collaboration to somebody. For people in Europe, the word suggests co-operation with the cohorts of the Third Reich. For people in the Arab world and South-West Asia, their ample experience of autocratic regimes means that the term holds a similar meaning for them. But, hand on heart, who among us has never had to 'collaborate' with (bad) prevailing conditions in some way or another? Very few of us are blessed with complete autonomy. Whether one feels powerless in the face of political circumstances, economic constraints, or global market turbulence, the powerlessness is still real and frequently requires collaboration in the negative sense of the word.

**DUPED BY HISTORY?** In the Mediterranean region, where countries have been rocked by crises in recent years, a state of fatalistic political abstinence has traditionally been part of the fundamental affective attitude. The social anthropologist Christian Giordano has said that those affected feel that they are the 'dupes of history' (the title of his 1992 book). To roughly sum it up, the 'mentality' that goes with this attitude is based on the following assumptions: important decisions are made not in one's own country but by powerful figures abroad; doing an honest day's work will not get you far, to get ahead you need the right patrons or assets; all politicians are corrupt, they just look after themselves and their own; real change is impossible. Nevertheless, a wave of protests has washed over the entire Mediterranean region in recent years. In some countries, the 'political class' has once again occupied its former position of power, but the question is now whether the experiences gained during the protests can ever be erased. During their campaigns, the demonstrators and activists saw what can be achieved when a group of angry people join forces, look for something, educate themselves, and create something, in other words, when they collaborate in the positive sense of the word.

**ACCESS INSTEAD OF OWNERSHIP** In recent times, the word 'collaboration' has made quite a career for itself, especially in the fields of economics and art. Today's knowledge-centred economy demands a different kind of work culture. Old hierarchical structures in which power was based on securing one's own superior knowledge and shielding it from attacks are proving dysfunctional: in order to ensure rapid progress, responsibility is shifted downwards and knowledge is shared

more quickly. Many people are working to develop a 'culture of sharing'. The English language has a whole host of new words for this phenomenon: the share economy (or shareconomy), Wikinomics, the collaborative economy, or mesh. Typical examples of this new culture are the non-commercial sharing of source codes, knowledge, music, etc. online. It is really quite astonishing to consider that it has become such a matter of course to look something up on Wikipedia, an encyclopaedia to which people all over the world can contribute their knowledge and who largely regulate its content themselves. From car-sharing to crowd-funding, the number of examples is steadily increasing. Many people no longer want to own things at any cost; for them, it is enough to have secure access to certain goods. In the world of art, co-operation is playing an ever-greater role because the figure of the artist who draws exclusively on himself and his suffering in his creative process has been consigned to the past and has given way to groups of young artists who see their art as a dedicated contribution to the exploration, criticism, or even improvement of societal processes.

**INEFFICIENT POLITICS** Despite all this, these changes have barely made an impression on the world of politics. In view of its lack of future vision, the prevailing political class is increasingly falling into line with bureaucratic processes, whose planning requirements often date from the post-war period. Civil servants sit down around the table with willing experts and together they define what they consider to be the 'welfare' of the people, then implement their ideas in an authoritarian manner. In Egypt, for example, the government of Abdul Fattah al-Sisi began by focusing its efforts on the upgrading of the Suez Canal and the construction of a new capital city. Although the economic forecast is unclear, megaprojects such as these lend politicians a feeling of power and prestige. Despite some protests, citizens have no role to play in these plans. 'It is like the relationship between a father and his children,' wrote political economist Amr Adly in the Berlin-based newspaper *Die Tageszeitung* on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2015. 'The Egyptian father state wants the best for his children without actually consulting them.' That said, even in Western countries, bureaucracy in its current state is far from really being

potent: in recent decades, the state's withdrawal has seriously restricted planning opportunities. This is why patriarchal dreams often culminate in a toxic mixture of over-regulation and inefficiency.

In Germany, the problems relating to the opening of the new airport in Berlin generated a lot of ridicule. The date for the actual opening had to be indefinitely postponed in 2010 because of the discovery of a growing list of structural defects. The difficulties experienced by the airport seem to be the perfect allegory for the abysmal state of bureaucratic planning. During the construction phase, several of the clients and authorities involved in the project repeatedly made new proposals. These proposals were not implemented, they were just added on: existing plans were simply 're-planned'. As soon as the first obstacles arose, everything came crashing down like a house of cards; as soon as one weak point was identified, ten more came to light. The principle of 're-planning' is illustrative of the main work method of the entity that comprises politics and bureaucracy entirely lacking in vision. There is absolutely no sign of a real, meaningful effort to introduce reform. The simulation of control only makes everything even more chaotic.

**BEYOND DEMOCRACY** All major protest movements in recent years (in Germany, Turkey, the Arab world, Brazil, Chile, etc.) also targeted authoritarian planning, institutions that were working poorly, and a lack of both popular participation and 'good governance'. Democracy is in the middle of an on-going crisis of representation: citizens do not have the impression that their detached 'political class' still represents them. In his eponymous book, Colin Crouch used the term 'post-democracy' to criticise a new form of rule by experts to which there would appear to be no alternative. However, instead of the term 'post-democracy', one could speak of the significance of what Pierre Rosanvallon referred to as 'counter-democracy' (the title of his book: *La contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*, Paris 2006). By this, the French historian did not mean the opposite of democracy, but the mechanisms with which the population organises an informal compensation for the erosion of trust in politics. According to Rosanvallon, the vigilant or also denunciatory and evaluating public has a living veto power and, in the form of a protest, even a

## Fathy's guiding principle was not to build 'for' the poor, but to let the poor build for themselves.

'negative sovereignty' (Rosanvallon). The public can also refer political conflicts to the courts, something that is happening with increasing frequency in Germany. In many cases, however, citizens have quite simply taken matters into their own hands. In those areas where the state is withdrawing or not working, they step into the breach. In the Arab world, money transfers from those who have emigrated are financing both infrastructure projects and social security. The success of the religious parties is also down to their 'social work': political Islam relies on its reputation of 'looking after others', on its good reputation as a non-corrupt supporter in many different life situations.

Within the neo-liberalism of recent decades, citizens have constantly been called upon to – or have quite simply been forced to – assume personal responsibility. The state has increasingly declared itself not responsible for areas such as public welfare, claiming instead that its main task should be to restrict itself to the provision of security in the criminological sense. In one way or another, the citizens have assumed this personal responsibility and have increasingly taken care of themselves and of collective matters in their immediate environment. However, the state does not want to grant anything or give up any authority in return for its withdrawal: its bureaucracy remains as authoritarian as it was in the days when its institutions omnipotently defined what was 'good' for its people. Today, however, what is 'good' for the people must be considered by the community. The population is not just made up of individuals with personal responsibility; these individuals also have very different concepts of values.

Above all, flows of emigrants and immigrants and the resulting permanent establishment of transnational links – i.e. links between lives in several places and in different 'areas in between' – have made society an unavoidable *multeity* that calls into question the national framework. This *multeity* has also been articulated in the most recent protests. The long-term effects of what people experienced in Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, or Syntagma

Square must not be underestimated; nor should the experience that an autocratic 'democratic' government, like the Ben Ali government in Tunisia, was nothing but a front that collapsed within a matter of days.

**IDENTITY VERSUS PROCESS** New forms of collaboration, in the positive sense of the word, were discussed worldwide after World War II. For example, the well-known Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy proposed collaborative working methods. He was not the only one: so too did architects and urban planners like C.A. Doxiadis and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, the members of the so-called 'Team X' (Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, Peter and Alison Smithson, Aldo van Eyck, and others), Ralph Erskine, Lawrence Halprin, or John Turner, who all opposed the modernist practice of standardising residents in the planning process. Instead they focused on real, existing, different people who are, in one way or another, integrated into communities. In this respect, efforts were made to learn from existing forms of self-organisation (including in the slums), especially in the field of poverty eradication. Fathy launched projects in rural areas of Egypt. The guiding principle of these projects was not to build 'for' the poor, but to let the poor build for themselves using local stores of knowledge and local materials. In doing so, Fathy was not assuming that the villagers would value the 'old' materials (e.g. clay bricks), that they were already familiar with traditional skills and craft methods, or that they would build the most beautiful houses in a natural way. As he explains in his 1973 book *Architecture for the Poor*, his intention was that they would make discoveries and acquire knowledge during the building process, while the architect would act as a kind of advisor or coach. Fathy stressed that an advantage of this construction method was that residents would be able to repair their homes themselves should any problems arise. Many of the decidedly modernist construction projects that had been built up to that point were already falling into disrepair because the experts had left without giving the locals the materials and the expertise they needed to make repairs.

However, turning to local stores of knowledge and traditional materials is not about things like identity. In his book *Bauen ist Leben* [Building is life], the architect Georges Candilis relates an interesting conversation he had during his time working in Morocco. During the French colonial period, Candilis was director of an office in Casablanca belonging to the 'Ateliers des Bâtisseurs' (ATBAT), an office for the study of architecture and urbanism supported

by Le Corbusier. At that time, it was necessary in Morocco – as it was almost everywhere else – to build as much housing as possible cheaply and quickly. Candilis was given the opportunity to plan and build a series of residential buildings, the form of which he based on his research into the circumstances of the residents. He tried to take into account their origin, status, and religious orientation – a practice that was a far cry from the dictates of modernism (Cf. Tom Avermaete: *Another Modern: The Post-War-Architecture and Urbanism of Candilis-Josic-Woods*, Rotterdam 2005, p.30 ff.) His buildings looked so different that they attracted the attention of the Moroccan independence movement, whose activists invited him to a meeting with them. However, instead of the praise he expected to hear, he was confronted with the question as to why he wasn't building 'the same houses as for the Europeans'. 'I am trying to find your identity,' replied Candilis naively, before being rightly accused of neo-colonialism.<sup>1</sup>

The Moroccan sociologist Abdelkebir Khatabi once coined the phrase 'long-suffering duality' to describe the way the Arabs think: criticising the West from the viewpoint of the East one minute, only to turn around and compare the East with the West the next.<sup>2</sup> Since the dawn of the modern age, the difficulty of finding a reference point has shaped the articulations of the marginalised and those who 'arrived too late'. Poor copies of the West have just as much appeal as the supposed return to tradition and one's 'own' identity. However, the more various returns to the past in one's own 'major' past have failed or have proven arbitrary or repressive, the more caricature-like are the identity-related movements that are themselves deeply shaped by Western concepts – a point illustrated by Islamism, for example.<sup>3</sup> Today, all positions are mixed, not pure, and have gone through 'the eye of the needle of the other', as Stuart Hall once put it.<sup>4</sup> Even Hassan Fathy suggested not allowing oneself to be led by false dichotomies, but instead initiating a process of negotiations in which one can work towards a goal on the basis of the opportunities available and the resources at one's disposal.

Although Fathy's reflections were based on rural Egypt, collaborative processes have also proven extremely effective for planning processes in urban areas. Individuals who assume personal

responsibility have considerable knowledge resources that they can put to good use, not only in their own lives and immediate environment, but also in the use of taxpayers' money. There is huge potential for the development of society in this area. As illustrated by Fathy's model, collaboration should not be seen as a straightforward grass-roots democracy process of consensus made up of endless discussions, which act as a deterrent for many people. In order to ensure good collaboration, a meaningful procedure must be defined for each area. As part of this procedure, comprehensible targets must be formulated and superior knowledge (such as the expertise of the architect) must be taken into account. Moreover, every procedure should include a point where there is the opportunity to reach a decision. Collaboration does not do without authority, it just embeds it in the context of a project that is jointly developed. In addition, collaboration also provides the opportunity to make mistakes. While major projects are developed by planners working alone at their drawing boards and are then implemented, collaboration provides the opportunity to make constructive criticism at various points during the process, which in turn allows for constant review.

**DISCIPLINE V. COLLABORATION** Collaboration is not a revolutionary concept; it is rooted in the spaces, or gaps, that exist in the societal structure. Governing a people in a democracy has always been associated with specific behaviour-regulating power techniques that ensured individuals did not simply do what they wanted. Michel Foucault de-

1 Georges Candilis: *Bauen ist leben. Ein Architektenreport*, Stuttgart 1978, p.146 ff.

2 Cf. Abdelkebir Khatabi: 'The Decolonization of Arab Sociology' in: Halim Barakat (ed.): *Contemporary North Africa. Issues of Development and Integration*, Washington, D.C. 1985, p.16.

3 Sadik J. Al-Azm: *Unbehagen in der Moderne. Aufklärung im Islam*, Frankfurt am Main 1993.

4 Cf. Stuart Hall: *Rassismus und kulturelle Identität. Ausgewählte Schriften 2*, Hamburg 1994, p.44.

5 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, 'Postskriptum über die Kontrollgesellschaften', in *Unterhandlungen 1972-1990*, Frankfurt am Main 1993; Giorgio Agamben, 'Die Geburt des Sicherheitsstaates', in *Le Monde diplomatique*, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

## After World War II the discipline of the nineteenth century was plunged into a massive crisis.

scribed a kind of social training where individuals learned to steer themselves. The guiding principle in this respect is discipline, a technique used to drill people, as it were, though on-going physical exercises and individual monitoring in so-called enclosed environments such as the family, school, the military, factory, office, prison, etc. In this context, it is important to remember that the decades that followed the Second World War were still dominated by the world of industry. People's lives were largely oriented towards the imperatives of production: work, career, competition, performance, possessive individualism, family, and an intact home. Mass consumption, however, put completely different values at the heart of society: spending money instead of frugality, style instead of living a modest life, throw-away products instead of durability, quick gratification instead of the constant postponement of one's needs. The discipline of the nineteenth century was plunged into a massive crisis.

Since then, the firm grip of discipline has been loosened, although it has not disappeared altogether. So far, no other guiding principles have taken its place. Although the critics of neo-liberalism and the security state speak of a control society where the behaviour of individuals is no longer centrally monitored, but is regulated by peer assessment, the determination of limits, and penetrative evaluation,<sup>5</sup> social conditions appear to be more joined up than they actually are. Moreover, these critics consistently overlook the increased freedoms of recent decades and the above-mentioned new forms of self-organisation.

For this reason, collaboration could become a new guiding principle. As far as upbringing and education are concerned, the old concepts – where an omniscient teacher equipped with unassailable authority drums 'material' into children from the front of the classroom, thereby evaluating them from a central position – are increasingly showing themselves to be obsolete. The best schools involve pupils in the planning of the class and their own learning targets, are getting rid of the traditional

panoptical structure of the classroom in favour of flexible learning arrangements, and are using several teaching staff as 'coaches'. A new orientation of this kind also requires the abandonment of the classical educational ideal, according to which education helps us develop our inner aptitudes, therefore helping us to become what we 'really' are. Instead, it is about developing our skills in a collaborative manner, in other words, an ability that is turned outward, that is tried and tested through interaction and exchange, in order to guarantee the highest possible level of autonomy and freedom to act. Incidentally, this also contradicts the conventional ideas of identity, in other words the notion that each of us has a 'real' core.

In the last edition of *Art&Thought* (no. 103), the Egyptian author Saad Al-Kirsh wrote that the first innocent days of the Egyptian revolution 'revealed a core of civility' that was barely tangible during the rule of Hosni Mubarak. We are collaborators in both the positive and the negative sense. The proposal to collaborate in the positive sense of the word might seem naive, especially when one considers the enemies of such fair co-operation. Hassan Fathy was not able to finish any of his projects because an uncomprehending bureaucracy always interrupted the process at some point along the way.

Not much has changed in the intervening period. That said, the bureaucrats have indeed noticed that it can be more cost-effective to conduct discussions with the people *before* new planning begins, rather than to be confronted with loud protests after the fact. Other enemies of collaboration are the identity-related movements, i.e. those parts of the populist-nationalist parties in Europe who simply want to avoid entering into discussion at all. Simply put, these groups also have to be fought. However, collaboration has the advantage of concentrating on small developments that are often not picked up by the radar of such retrograde movements. Collaboration can be found in the spaces in between, and can work – despite adverse conditions – anywhere where people strive together in a spirit of seeking solutions.

**MARK TERKESSIDIS** is a German theorist and writer who focuses on the subjects of pop culture and migration. He lives in Berlin. He has already published a number of books including, most recently, the book *Kollaboration [Collaboration]*, with Suhrkamp Verlag in 2015.

Translation: Aingeal Flanagan

■ Convivialism is a school of thought that is based on the idea of sharing and exchanging. It stands in opposition to the self-serving mentality of pure economics and seeks to ensure an intact relationship between humankind and nature. But can something that works in a restricted, local context also be a success at global level?

Claus Leggewie, one of Germany's leading intellectuals and an activist for the convivialist movement, investigates.

## IS WORLDWIDE SHARING POSSIBLE? CONVIVALISM AS THE NEW INTERNATIONALISM

BY CLAUD LEGGEWIE

Frank Adloff, co-publisher of the Convivialist Manifesto, which was made public in 2013, neatly sums up in his introduction to the text what it is that makes this manifesto so special: 'What is particularly notable about this Manifesto is the fact that a large number of academics of very varied political persuasion have managed to agree on a text outlining the negative trends that run through contemporary societies. The Manifesto identifies two main causes here: the primacy of utilitarian – in other words self-interested – thinking and action, and the way in which belief in the beneficent effects of economic growth is accorded absolute status. As a counter to these developments, the Manifesto sets out a positive vision of the good life: the prime concern, it says, is the quality of our social relationships and of our relationship to nature. The term it employs in this connection is "convivialism" (from the Latin "con-vivere", to live together). The term is meant to point up the fact that the main task we face is that of working out a new philosophy and developing practical forms of peaceful interaction. The aim of the Manifesto is to show that another kind of world is not only possible – witness the many forms of convivial co-operation already in existence – but also, given the crisis-scenarios outlined above, absolutely imperative.' (Frank Adloff)

The purpose of this article is to examine whether the convivialist approach is suitable for protecting global common pool resources (goods that in principle belong to everyone) and pushing through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In other words, it considers whether convivialism is not only suitable for shaping the immediate environment of our life-world, but also for influencing the 'realistic' world of international relations.

**THE INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE OF GIFTS?** A convivialist foreign policy is based on the concept of the exchange of gifts as outlined by the French ethnologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss, which I will briefly sum up here. A gift goes beyond straightforward reciprocity (in the sense of interaction) in the sense that the ecstatic, self-transcending character of the relationship with the other person is inherent in the voluntary act of giving, which works along increasingly anonymised lines of giving, receiving, and responding; the experience of being moved by the other and his/her gift is inherent in the act of accepting a gift. The paradox here is that there is no contractual or normative *obligation* to give, accept, or respond. Everyone involved can 'opt out' of the cycle at any given point in time. In other words, the giver cannot assume from the outset that he or she will get something back in exchange for the gift. Although a gift *does* indeed frequently elicit a response, the motivation to give cannot directly be traced back to the motivation to receive something. For this reason, freedom is just as constitutive for a gift as obligation is. One cannot take legal action to enforce the obligation that is often felt and generated by a gift; but the principle of reciprocity is a *necessary* part of an exchange, even though the response does not have to be addressed directly to the giver. The counter-gift circulates between various collectives and down through several generations.

Unlike purely symbolic gestures/gifts, a transfer of resources that is based on a gift is fundamentally different from the kind of exchange that takes place on a market, in that one doesn't know whether one will get anything back, what will be 'reciprocated', and when one will get a response.

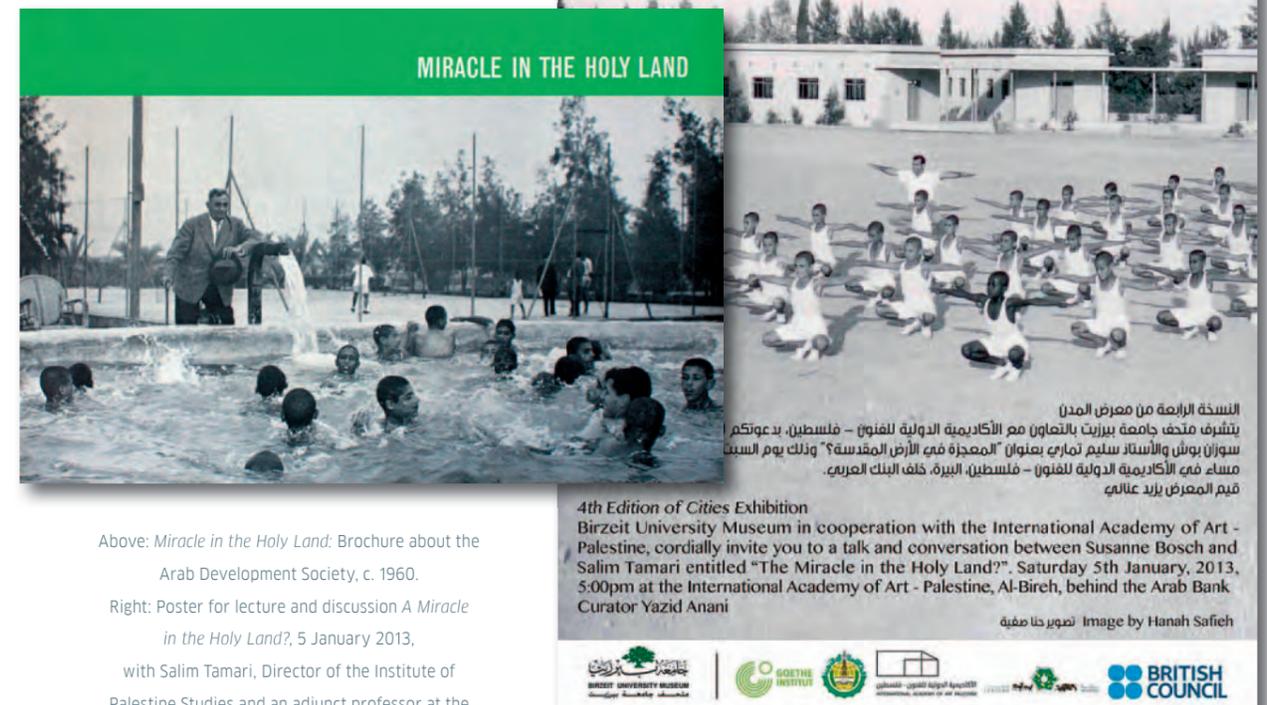
This is all down to the person who receives a gift. From this, we can draw conclusions that seek to re-establish moral economic forms of action that are based on solidarity. Co-operatives, charities, non-profit organisations, donations, foundations, participation in civil society – all these terms relate to the broad and diverse area that can be reduced neither to the logic of the market nor to state allocations. This area is also known as the 'third sector'. It is all about a transfer of resources on the basis of trust without the expectation of a specific recompense, but with a view to creating a convivial moral economy and a material benefit for all or for many.

It is interesting to consider that Mauss developed his ethnologically-based theory against the backdrop of and in clear reference to a contemporary problem at the time, namely the repayment of debt and reparations that the German Empire, as the vanquished nation in the First World War, had to pay to the victorious powers. In some lesser-known political writings, Mauss put forward the theory that while it was indeed the obligation of the German Empire to make repayments and reparations, it would be better to temper these repayments and reparations with moratoria and debt cancellation in order to prevent a nationalist reaction of defiance on

the part of the debtors (and creditors!). To simplify: Durkheim, Mauss's teacher (and uncle), saw solidarity as intra-societal while Mauss saw it as inter-societal. In Mauss's opinion, societies always constitutively rely on 'international' – i.e. intercultural – exchange.

### EXAMPLES OF CONVIVALIST 'FOREIGN POLICY'

**A) DEBT RELIEF** The focus here is on the current debt problem, i.e. public and private debt in both affluent OECD countries and also in particular in the countries on the periphery in the 'global South'. Instead of the creditors (states and banks) forcing a repayment on these indebted countries (at the cost, in this case, of unavoidable collapse), they should grant them a debt write-off and moratoria on payments, and combine these with measures that will allow for self-supporting development. The concept



Above: *Miracle in the Holy Land*: Brochure about the Arab Development Society, c. 1960.

Right: Poster for lecture and discussion *A Miracle in the Holy Land?*, 5 January 2013,

with Salim Tamari, Director of the Institute of Palestine Studies and an adjunct professor at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at

Georgetown University, and Susanne Bosch, artist, at the International Art Academy Palestine, Ramallah as part of *Jericho – Beyond the Celestial and Terrestrial*.

Cf. text by artist Susanne Bosch on page 49ff

in this edition of *Art&Thought*.

4th Edition of Cities Exhibition  
Birzeit University Museum in cooperation with the International Academy of Art - Palestine, cordially invite you to a talk and conversation between Susanne Bosch and Salim Tamari entitled "The Miracle in the Holy Land?". Saturday 5th January, 2013, 5:00pm at the International Academy of Art - Palestine, Al-Bireh, behind the Arab Bank  
Curator Yazid Anani

تصوير: حنا صافية Image by Hanah Safieh





'Crossing Jericho',  
Intervention in the  
public space, as part of  
*Jericho – Beyond the  
Celestial and Terrestrial*,  
5.10.2012  
© Birzeit Museum 2012  
Cf. text by artist  
Susanne Bosch  
on page 49ff  
in this edition of  
*Art&Thought*.

of debt forgiveness seems less bizarre when one considers the *mutual* entanglement of debtors and creditors and the associated loss in the freedom to act, not only for the debtors but also for those who would (quite literally) have to wait forever for the payment of interest and the repayment of debts in the event of the collapse of the completely overburdened economies of southern Europe, and would consequently also be dragged into the vortex. One would have to admit that the current financial crisis was in fact created by *both* sides.

A collapse can only be prevented by further gifts, in the hope that these investments will bear better fruit. The alternative to paying off debts is forgiveness; the alternative to an enslavement to debt is freedom. According to this view of the situation, only the radical interruption of the grim business of repayment allows for a new beginning and would give the indebted party – probably to its amazement – its freedom back.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR GREECE** One possible way of reviving Hellas' structurally weak economy – which is ailing as a result of both its own business community and pressure from outside the country – is, therefore, to provide financial support and investment for the use of solar, wind, and hydro-electric power in Greece. When compared with other Mediterranean countries, Greece is disproportionately dependent on expensive oil and coal imports (the Greeks are in fact one of the greatest climate of-

fenders in the EU), despite the fact that it has almost twice as many sunny days, providing high levels of solar radiation on its coasts, than countries in north-western Europe. Even if awareness of the problem of climate change and of the subject of energy efficiency has thus far been relatively low among the general public and the political and economic elite in Greece, what could be more reasonable than to put two and two together in this respect and launch a corresponding industrial and energy policy initiative?

At present, the EU's climate objectives are not being taken very seriously in Greece (the logic being 'let's deal with the economic crisis first'). Moreover, they are often seen by the extreme left and the nationalists as an expression of 'green imperialism'. But there is a serious flaw in this reasoning. Initiatives in the energy transition sector in particular could breathe new life into the ailing economy. This potential was acknowledged – at least rhetorically – in the form of the Helios project, the plan for what the EU commissioner at the time, Günter Oettinger, described as 'Europe's largest solar park'. The aim of this project was to export ten gigawatts of solar power in 2050.

The intention was that the first plants would be hooked up to the grid in 2015. However, the project never got past the planning stage because both the financing and the construction of the power lines and infrastructure needed to feed the power into the European grid remained vague. This is par-

ticularly regrettable considering the risks associated with the current race to develop new oil and gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean, especially off the south coast of Cyprus. The national claims of Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Lebanon all collide, generating the potential for great conflict, in the waters around Cyprus. What's more, because Cyprus is a divided island, whose Greek majority does not recognise the existence of an independent Turkish republic in the northern part of the island and whose vulnerable position in the eastern Mediterranean exposes the island to the claims of various medium-sized and major powers, the focus on an energy supply that relies primarily on natural gas is certainly not an optimum solution. Renewable sources of energy, which are abundantly available in the countries of the region, are the better political option for the crisis-rocked Mediterranean.

An energy transition in the South would exert a positive influence on other areas. To this day, about a third of all tourism in the world is centred on the Mediterranean region, where both infrastructure and mentality have been deeply influenced by this sector. Tourism is often not only a leading sector in the region, but also a veritable monoculture, the negative effects of which become immediately apparent during political crises and periods of bad weather. All things considered, mass tourism has caused serious environmental and economic collateral damage down through the decades. This is why a transition is necessary, from the reck-

less mass invasion from the North to tourist destinations on the Mediterranean, to a respectful and creative meeting of the peoples from the North and South that also allows for co-operation and empathy outside the traditional holiday season.

Despite industrial development and the emergence of a services sector, the countries of the Mediterranean are still caught in an asymmetrical division of labour with wealthy EU countries, which has kept them in a permanent state of dependence and is now resulting in the mass exodus of qualified and unqualified labourers. This is why it is necessary to negotiate an environmentally sound agricultural economy that is much more focused on local needs and markets, a fair exchange of trade, and a reasonable migration regime that serves both sides.

The vulnerable environmental habitat that is the Mediterranean Sea is in urgent need of protection. At the same time, environmentally friendly initiatives in the form of sustainable fisheries (including aquaculture) and renewable energy services from the sea can be considered. Both these things presuppose that we stop using (and abusing) the sea as nothing more than a well and a gutter, and that we instead start learning to anchor the Mediterranean in the European awareness as 'our sea' and start to cherish it as such.

**B) TRANSNATIONAL JUSTICE** During the reparation negotiations between the opposing sides in the First World War, Marcel Mauss assumed the pos-

'Crossing Jericho',  
Intervention in the  
public space, as part of  
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sibility of a joint and mutually agreed understanding on evil that occurred in the past (in this case the actual war itself). This expectation was fulfilled after 1945 in the form of Franco-German and German-Polish 'reconciliation'. Accordingly, a corresponding element to the material compensation is the moral aspect of 'coming to terms with the past'.

In this context, it is interesting that within the framework of the intervention to solve the debt crisis in Greece, which was initiated by Germany or was attributed to the German government, old demands for reparation payments for war crimes committed by the Third Reich resurfaced. Among other things, the Jewish community in Thessaloniki brought Germany to the European Court of Human Rights claiming payment of compensation, after a lawsuit in the Greek courts lasting over two decades came to nothing. The crux of the case was 'immaterial damages' and ransom money to the tune of 2.5 million drachma, which the Jewish community says it paid to the Nazis' regional commander, Max Meten, in 1943. The claim is that this sum, which is the equivalent of about €45 million in today's money, was paid in exchange for the liberation of 9,000 Jews from forced labour. Before the Second World War, more than 50,000 Jewish people lived in Thessaloniki. Fewer than 2,000 of them survived the Holocaust. The German government repeatedly makes reference to the fact that the question of reparations has long been settled by international agreements. Quite apart from the question as to whether such claims are justified in the legal sense, the case illustrates once again the close links between blame and debts: the creditors' claims are countered with claims for reparations.

The famous German philosopher and political scientist Hannah Arendt emphasised two abilities of the *zoon politikon*, the human as a political entity: the ability to *forgive* (a tool against the irrevocability of what has happened) and the ability to make and to keep *promises* (a tool against the assumption that the future is unpredictable). 'With recourse to Hannah Arendt's concept of action, which is basically very close to Mauss's gift, one can describe a general category that could be termed "constitutive action". Such actions open up and create opportunities that did not previously exist and allow something to emerge in places where there was previously nothing' (Caillé 2008: 218). Such actions make it possible to rebuild trust where previously there

was only mistrust. Arendt focused heavily on forgiveness because it allows for a new, unpredictable beginning. In doing so, she picked up on a Christian subject, whereby she historicised and secularised the experience of the original community of Christ's disciples; she interpreted Jesus' personal love in a 'thoroughly earthly sense', which goes beyond the individual and private relationship between the wrong-doer and the person who forgives the wrong-doer. What was important to Arendt was that both sides were given the freedom to start anew: both those who are forgiven and also those who forgive are liberated from the long-term consequences of an awful past or action. Just like punishment, forgiveness does not deny the injustice of an act, but interrupts a fatal spiral of fixation on this guilt-ridden past.

Since the debate about the Holocaust in the 1980s, the link between reparations and 'coming to terms with the past' or transnational justice in the wake of war crimes or crimes committed by states, ethnic cleansing, etc. – in other words, the moral and material compensation for past injustice – has led to a global compensation movement. This movement stretches back to historical slavery and includes the expulsion and wiping out of indigenous peoples, colonial crimes, numerous genocides, and also the ongoing campaign for restitution of different kinds of art theft. Without being able to go into greater detail here, it would be very interesting to discuss such acts of global interaction not only in terms of international law and historico-political and moral aspects, but also to view them *ex negativo* from the viewpoint of the gift theorem: violent misappropriation and mass murder are 'redressed' by moral recognition and material compensation from the aspect of inclusive co-operation.

**C) PHILANTHROPY AROUND THE WORLD** The corresponding opposite of financial 'generosity' is the various kinds of philanthropy which have increased dramatically in recent decades and become a factor in transnational politics, the kind of philanthropy practised (and, according to critics, compromised) by incredibly rich patrons such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. With these philanthropic activities, most of which focus on combating epidemics and life-threatening diseases, the pattern of reciprocal exchange that prevails in the economy is modified and asymmetry becomes a structural



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characteristic. Because this social activity is often suspected of serving the selfish motives of the donor, the time has come to put today's philanthropy into its historical, ethnographic, and religious contexts and to note its globally diverse practice. Egoistic gratification may indeed play a role here, but disinterested concern, primarily support and promotion, which express a general 'love of humanity' (the literal translation of the term 'philanthropy') and go beyond an actual transfer, remain the original aspects. Herein lie the main differences between philanthropy and corporate market activities and political state activities, whereby both can indeed play a role in philanthropic activities in those cases where philanthropic undertakings are professionalised.

Even if philanthropy is characterised in material terms by the radical asymmetry of the order of interaction, this does not call into question its links to the gift theorem. What is more problematic is the fact that like business transactions and unlike social transfers that are financed by taxes, selective and unequal preferences can become generally accepted, resulting in a lack of public accountability. The definition of the 'neediness' of the groups to be supported can be determined by ethnic, religious, aesthetic and other prejudices and stereotypes, which is not in itself necessarily reprehensible, but which can ultimately exacerbate social inequalities and can unintentionally or contra-intentionally promote discrimination.

**D) TRANSNATIONAL CITIZENSHIP** Finally, the naturalisation of stateless citizens, as suggested by the United Nations and postulated in a number of conventions, illustrates the form an indirect gift can take. According to calculations published by the UNHCR in Geneva, at least ten million people were stateless

in 2014. This also means that they do not hold the citizenship of the country where they reside. This not only restricts their access to education, health care, and the labour market, it also restricts their freedom of movement, creating a permanent fear of being expelled. Most stateless people are victims of relatively recent ethnically and religiously motivated discrimination; the vast majority have fled war and civil war. However, the number of stateless people is growing not only for these reasons, but also because of the fact that (according to the UNHCR), a stateless child is born somewhere in the world every ten minutes, which means that this extralegal status is being passed on from generation to generation, making it a condition that can become permanent. For a European community that has compromised itself in the recent past through colonial crimes and ethnic and political cleansing of various kinds, but has at the same time achieved a phenomenal success story in the form of supranational unity, making it easier to obtain European citizenship and ending statelessness must seem like an obvious solution.

**CLAUS LEGGEWIE** is a German political scientist.  
He is Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in the  
Humanities in Essen, Germany, and co-publisher of  
the magazine *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*.  
He has published numerous books on contemporary  
global issues. This is an abridged version of an article published in Frank Adloff/Volker Heins (ed.), *Konvivialismus*.  
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Translation: Aingeal Flanagan

■ The Theatre of the Oppressed, established by the revolutionary Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal, is an ideal way of addressing the situation in Egypt. The well-known Egyptian activist and theatre maker Nora Amin explains how this form of theatre works, and what it is capable of achieving in that country.

## THEATRE OF PARTICIPATION

### THE PROJECT OF CREATING A 'THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED' FOR EGYPT

BY **NORA AMIN**

My first meeting with the Brazilian theatre maker and popular hero Augusto Boal (1931-2009) took place in Egypt in 1997. I had just finished translating his book *The Rainbow of Desire* into Arabic. It was published under the prosaic title *Manhag Augusto Boal al-masrahi* [The theatre method of Augusto Boal] – avoiding, of course, the Arabic word *raghba* (wish, desire), which was apparently felt to be too indecent. In addition to translating, I was at the time a lecturer at the Cairo Academy of Arts, and was also working as an author, actor and the-atre director. Translating this standard work from the series detailing the methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed opened my eyes for the first time to a completely different theatrical world. Speaking with Boal in person then enabled me to fully comprehend the extent of the interplay of theatre performance and social change.

**IN THE MINEFIELD OF OPPRESSION** Back then I was entirely devoted to a theatre that was orientated towards aesthetic effect. My aim was incrementally to open a new chapter in experimenting with physical forms of expression, i.e. to combine my experience as a dancer and choreographer with my experience as an actor and writer. I wanted to find a language that was capable of laying bare all the things – coercion, repression, lack of freedom – that had been swept under the carpet. Like others of the Nineties generation, I wanted to poke about in the minefield of oppression. I was totally unaware that there was already an entire genre, separate from the aesthetics of conventional theatre, that had devoted itself to this approach: namely the 'Theatre of

the Oppressed'. It was through this that I first encountered the political, interactive and pedagogical dimension of a theatre orientated towards social change. My search was over.

Boal and I developed a wonderful friendship. In 2003 I travelled to Brazil on a UNESCO grant for up-and-coming artists, to train with the master himself, Augusto Boal, and his team at the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido in Rio de Janeiro. Back then, I had already founded my own independent theatre group, 'La Musica', with which I had put on a series of performances, travelling around various parts of the world. However, the trip to Brazil was for me a qualitative leap in my perception of the world, of Egypt, and the possibilities of integrating theatre into the practices of social and political transformation. I saw the similarities between Brazil and Egypt, saw a history of oppression and totalitarian rule, of revolutionary uprising and triumph. I saw Boal the popular hero, who took a stand against the government of the 1970s, was imprisoned and tortured. Only by going into exile was he spared the death penalty. Later he returned and, with Paulo Freire, took part in the psychological liberation of the oppressed people, as well as their pedagogical re-orientation with the aid of theatre. This was to enable them to free themselves from repressive patterns of thought, and the system inherent in them, in order that such a regime would never be able to reproduce itself.

The methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed are based on five fundamental techniques: image theatre, newspaper theatre, invisible theatre, forum theatre and legislative theatre. All aim to involve

the audience members directly, to turn them into more or less active agents. The production should become a performance that is always, every time, open to the interventions of the audience, developing accordingly. The stage transforms into a forum for criticism, a space for lively interaction with the audience. In this sense the last two techniques are the most interactive.

**BRAZILIAN IDEAS IMPLEMENTED IN EGYPT** As a theoretician of theatre who is also a political activist, Augusto Boal knew from his own experience that the overthrow of a dictatorial regime or the replacement of its figurehead does not go hand in hand with a true liberation of its citizens, who have lived so long under the auspices of an ideology of oppression. Because they know nothing else, these citizens are ultimately guarantors for the reproduction of the system of oppression: it has become, for

forum for democratic action and participation. It was of central importance for me that the theatrical performance should essentially proclaim and testify to the right of citizens to express their opinion and be included in the analysis of the theme of oppression. In the words of Boal: theatre – with all its drafts for making revolutionary changes – is not the revolution itself, only its dress rehearsal.

**THEATRE AS A MIRROR OF SOCIETY** For decades, Egyptian theatre was a theatre based on the same cognitive and ideological system as the one the regime in power and traditional society had made their own. It was a theatre that adhered predominantly to class-based ideas about communicating insight. This was always one-directional: from the boards of the stage, to the audience. There was a clear spatial division and an equally clear knowledge imbalance between theatre stage and auditorium. All the aspects of social hypocrisy had to be maintained, in that they were reproduced within the system of the theatre and its dramaturgical means. The theatre often functioned as the mouthpiece of the authorities, of the regime's ideology, for the glorification of the peerless, heroic ruler – just as in our culture of pharaonic worship. And aesthetic and artistic specifications also put in an appearance that cemented the division of the people into creative artists and intellectuals on the one hand, and a silent, passively recipient herd on the other. Against this backdrop, 'participation' must have seemed like a violation of the ancient traditions and a contravention of the code of collective societal conventions.

Yet at the start of the third millennium, Egypt was well prepared for change – thanks, on the one hand, to the Nineties generation's contribution to the arts scene and societal change, and on the other to the emergence of a series of committed and determined civil society organisations. The cause of this was the accumulation of arbitrary actions by the state, as well as a complete change in individual attitudes among the young generation against the backdrop of drastic social and political events. The main obstacle was, in any case, not the population itself, but the repressive political system. Egypt was subject to emergency legislation; street performances were forbidden for security reasons, the very idea a dream. The prospect of interactive participation and situating the theatre in the public realm was in itself already a rebellious, inflammatory idea that required a political, revolutionary, patriotic moment to pave the way for it. Which was exactly what happened with the Revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

Scene from a play staged by Nora Amin.  
Photo: La Musica/Nora Amin



them, a perfectly self-evident pattern of thinking. This is why the revolution has to be taken further, not with political action but with cultural, didactic and social activity: by creating a comprehensive pedagogical system capable of generating a new mentality among the population. Only in this way can democratic participation, justice, equality and freedom be guaranteed.

Back in Egypt, I stubbornly persisted in my endeavours to implement what I had learned. Together with dedicated non-governmental organisations, I led training sessions as part of many very successful workshops. Yet from 2008 to 2010 my true dream still remained unfulfilled: to go out into the street and encounter people informally, spontaneously, on the street, in squares, in parks, in schoolyards, in youth centres, in sports and community centres. Then the theatrical stage would take its place in the public realm, and become a

**THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED IN EGYPT** In the autumn of 2011 I initiated the 'National Project of a Theatre of the Oppressed for Egypt'. I began to train a group of activists in Alexandria, who for their part were gradually to become my assistants and, eventually, independent trainers. My plan was to create a national network in which everyone practising forum theatre would be represented. Every town and province would have a local ensemble that would present forum theatre performances, and could possibly even train additional comrades-in-arms for the ensemble. Furthermore, I planned exchanges with the other ensembles and groups and an internal rotation. It seemed to me that in this way it was possible to create a theatre movement in the service of social change, and avoiding Cairo centralism.

Unlike other genres of folk and street theatre, forum theatre addresses situations of oppression directly, in concrete terms. It is not intended as spectacle, light entertainment or a source of amusement; rather, it is intended to have a positive effect on our daily life, our consciousness and our thinking by allowing us to experience a better reality. It is a theatre that presents very straightforward scenarios of oppression. They are, however, real, comprehensible situations, taken from the audience's daily life. And that's not all: it also opens up the stage to active members of the audience, who can participate in the performance by presenting their own suggestions as to how one can fight back against existing oppression, transform it, avoid it, or at least limit its influence.

**AUDIENCE INTERVENTION** This is how it works. First of all, the 'Joker' (the moderator of the theatrical performance) conducts a dialogue, a debate with the audience, until somebody volunteers an idea. At this point the Joker insists that you can't try out the idea by talking about it, only by applying it in practice. In other words, by getting up on stage with the actors and trying out the idea within the framework of the scene. The member of the audience then selects an oppressed character from the play whose place he would like to take, as this character seems to him the one best suited for the implementation of his idea. He chooses a particular moment in the scenes that have been performed, perhaps even puts on some of the character's costume. Then the other actor makes way for him on stage. It is, of course, out of the question that the audience member should take the place of the oppressor, as an oppressor wouldn't give up his position that easily – he's the one who benefits most from maintaining the state of oppression. All the

participants are urged to respect the fundamental principles of this approach, by not suggesting unrealistic fantasy solutions or unethical solutions, based on trickery, lies and bribery in any of their forms, or solutions based on physical violence. These would only further aggravate the vicious circle of oppression, eventually even turning the oppressed into oppressors.

In trying to improvise spontaneously, the audience member has effectively already begun to mentally adapt to a change in circumstances, as he is breaking through the old patterns of indifference, passivity, and the conviction that change is impossible. Instead, he can now develop a mentality of positive, free thought, self-criticism, and belief in every individual's dignity and force of will. Even more importantly: this audience member has become active – albeit, for now, only symbolically and for a limited time. This means that when he is con-

fronted with a similar situation in future, he will be able to take this active approach again. Also, we should not forget that all this is taking place before the eyes of the audience, and in a public space. In this way the audience member himself, with his specific ideas, participates in shaping the public realm. The reactions of the other audience members bear witness to this, as they gradually realise that the play is transforming into an open workshop, a pedagogical democracy game. They regain their voice, the means through which the public realm and structures of civil society can re-emerge.

It may be that the audience's suggestions do not result in overcoming the oppressive situations (or even come close to doing so), but the journey is its own reward. It's not a question of finding a definitive solution to the problem: if it were, you could just as well cancel the performance and send everybody home. Rather, it's a question of trying



A performance of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Egypt. Photo: La Musica/Nora Amin

again and again, and of offering heterogeneous, open-ended perspectives for new suggestions. In this context it's important to know that the actors and other artists involved in the forum theatre prepare intensively according to precisely defined, systematic techniques developed by Augusto Boal. As a result, they are able to improvise spontaneously with the audience member if his suggestion leads to deviations from the original plot. These techniques help the actor to acquire, in a highly professional manner, the philosophy of oppression and the methodological principles of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Thus he is able to improvise without contravening the methods, and in doing so to motivate the audience member to use his dreams to sketch out a concrete goal.

The National Project of a Theatre of the Oppressed for Egypt is supported by fifty-five activists from around thirty Egyptian cities, covering most of the provinces of Egypt. The project is backed by numerous NGOs, as well as by governmental organisations such as (in 2012) the General Authority for Cultural Palaces, a part of the Ministry of Culture, or the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), or various civil society associations and institutions all over Egypt. Furthermore, the project was extended by the foundation of a pan-Arab network, which brought together people we had trained in our method in Lebanon and in Morocco. Over the course of 2011, 2012 and 2013 the project worked with extremely diverse groups of people – diverse not only in the geographical but in every possible sense: students, employees, pensioners, artists, actors, cultural activists, and people doing voluntary work to rebuild modern Egyptian society. They were all citizens who believed in the possibility of change, thus fulfilling the only requirement for participating in this kind of theatre, whether as performer or member of the audience.

**OPPRESSION WITHIN THE FAMILY** In February 2013, as a contribution to the art festival 'El-Fann Midan' ('Art Is a Town Square'), which takes place once a month on Abdin Square in the centre of Cairo as well as on other squares in the provinces, our Alexandrian group presented the play *Hikaya Samah* [The story of Samah]. This is about sixteen-year-old Samah, whose father is making her stay at home, thereby preventing her from attending school. Various social activities are forbidden to her; he also seems to be trying to force her to wear the headscarf. He is an authoritarian father in the true sense of the word, whose orders must be unconditionally obeyed by all the members of the family; the mother, who lives completely in her hus-

band's shadow; the eldest son, who just sucks up to the father. Samah goes to the birthday party of her childhood friend and neighbour, Muna, the daughter of a dead friend of the father. She does this without her father's knowledge but with the complicity of her mother, who secretly supports her daughter. The son gets wind of it when he sees Samah coming out of Muna's house – worse still, without a headscarf. He drags her home by her hair, where the father bullies her and the mother, beating and abusing them. He then forbids her ever to go to school again, or in fact to leave the house at all, thereby robbing her of any chance of a better future.

From the very first moment the audience took an active part. Historically speaking, the patriarchal system has always gone hand in hand with repressive political systems of all kinds, for which women have always had to pay the price. A member of the audience, a mother in her early fifties, proposed as a solution that the family should jointly kill the father. This, of course, constituted a contravention of our method, as violence only ever leads to more violence and an endless cycle of destruction. We therefore had to explain again to the audience member both the principles of our approach and the principles of social change, and the fact that we weren't looking for solutions that involved revenge but rather to convey a new mentality to the people. For this woman, and for everyone else, the father in the play seemed at that moment to represent the tyrannical ruler. As a result, her spontaneous reaction was to combine her anger at patriarchal rule with her rebellion against the tyrannical ruler. The customary mentality of oppression misled her into seeing revenge as a solution. Shortly afterwards, though, she got up on stage and, through spontaneous performance and collaboration with the actors, recognised that there was another possibility for change, namely that of negotiation and making use of the 'island of change' hidden in the script of such a play. The script is conceived in such a way as to always have on hand potential possibilities for the audience to change the situation, up to a certain point.

In interactive theatre, this manner of constructing a script is called the 'dramaturgy of forum theatre'. Its very clear purpose is not to hand the playing field over exclusively to the play's creators, not to surround it with an aura of inviolability, but to leave open possibilities for participation and transformation. This is why we should allow all stories and plays to have a developmental dynamic, without prescribing to the audience member what he may or may not try out. With this kind of theatre, the most important thing is that the audi-

ence members retain their freedom, to the point that we do not wish to force the audience member to change the oppressive situation if he is convinced that it is necessary to maintain it: because true change cannot occur if it is imposed upon people. In such a case, it would only be depriving them of their freedom and free will all over again, in the name of liberation.

**THEATRE AGAINST POLICE DESPOTISM** We also put on street theatre performances in Port Said, which constituted a premiere in what the regime describes as a 'heroic city'. For the audience, it was something completely new. In Port Said, there was a wild confusion of conflicting movements and currents. The streets were like a sea in which remnants of the Mubarak regime, security people from the Interior Ministry, gangs of hired thugs, Muslim Brothers, ordinary people from old, established families, and young liberals were all surging and crashing together. We presented the play 'The Story of the Citizen and the Informer'. This is the story of a simple young man who is arrested, along with his fiancée, by an informer, while they are out walking beside the river. Although he is completely innocent, he is taken to the police station. There we meet a corrupt and violent policeman, and his less corrupt but utterly servile colleague. This less brutal policeman releases the underage girl, who is dressed in school uniform, but gives her a harsh reprimand first, during which she has to suffer the corrupt policeman's lewd attentions. The boy is then, completely gratuitously, thrown into a dungeon. Here he meets a revolutionary who tells him to stay calm, to exhaust all the legal means at his disposal and request legal counsel. Then the informer, 'Abu Sayed', turns up again and humiliates the two young men in a vile and provocative way. The two officers walk in on these highly-charged situation. The boy challenges them, shouting in their faces, whereupon one of them, 'Hazem Basha', instructs the informer to finish the boy off. When he attacks the boy with his truncheon, the other boy tries to defend him. The action breaks off at this point.

The fact that we chose this piece at this particular time was the main reason why it was so successful. Its huge popularity outweighed the disputes as well as political and psychological tensions in the audience. Everyone there had experienced oppression, and saw that this situation urgently needed to be changed. A couple of grim-faced security service agents were in the audience, but they stayed quiet. Keeping the whole square under control was extremely difficult and constituted a sig-

nificant element of my duties; after all, I was responsible for everyone's security and for ensuring that the event went as well as possible. There were a small number of drug users in the audience, as well as a few street kids who sniffed glue. A *baltagi*, one of the regime's hired thugs, was also sitting there, with his knife, looking very interested. We succeeded in encouraging him to join in, but in order to take part in the performance and be able to improvise with the actors he had to hand over his knife. This confronted him with an extremely difficult decision, as his knife, to him, was his identity, protection, profession. He obviously found himself in a major existential dilemma. The recognition he was experiencing was visibly doing him good. The group was treating him as an equal, in front of the rest of the audience, and in response a new sense of self-worth seemed to be taking root in him. But would that be motivation enough for him to expose himself like this, in front of everyone?

This audience member did in fact indeed succeed in separating himself from his knife. This meant he was able to take part in the performance and, together with the actors, present an improvised scene that showed how the oppressed young man in the play could evade death, without either killing anyone himself or using violence. This audience member's engagement with the 'Story of the Citizen and the Informer' within the forum theatre framework was, for him, an attempt to reinvent himself. As if for a moment he were, in his imagination, travelling back in time, with the prospect of being able to confront the present with a different mindset. In that moment we forgot all the worries round about us. The whole square seemed to be harmoniously going with the flow. The 'sniffer' kids were wide-eyed: their older colleague had given them a warning to take away with them and shown them a possibility for breaking the vicious circle of oppression in the future.

The man smiled and left the stage. He very nearly forgot his knife. Then it hit him, and suddenly he remembered. Perhaps the time wasn't yet ripe for him to let go of it for good and whole-heartedly trust the dream.

**NORA AMIN** lives and works in Cairo. She is a writer, performer, choreographer and theatre director. Amin has written three novels, four collections of short stories and an audio book, and has translated fifteen books on theatre and dance.

Translation: Charlotte Collins

■ Islamic economic thought has, since time immemorial, contained numerous elements that can still offer solutions to current economic problems. According to Islamic teaching, the pursuit of profit can be reconciled with being socially considerate. Souheil Thabti explains how this harmony between the economic players is established and created.

## SHARING UND CARING

### ISLAMIC IDEAS FOR FAIR ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT TODAY

BY SOUHEIL THABTI

The current prevailing understanding of the free market as characterised by neo-liberalism allows persons of either an individual or a legal nature to gain possession of almost all resources and commodities, thereby excluding the rights of others to control them. The consequences of this understanding are very apparent if you consider natural resources such as oil. A handful of families and companies control these natural resources, and are thus authorised and empowered by law to exclude others – in this case, the rest of society – from the revenue they generate and the profits they secure.

This concept has had a dramatic impact on our world. According to an Oxfam study of the worldwide distribution of wealth, projections for 2016 show that the richest 1% of the world's population have accumulated more wealth than the remaining 99%. In addition, riches are increasing faster than ever before. Private wealth adds up to more than 160 billion US dollars. Also, food production worldwide is enough to supply the entire world population with sufficient food – yet according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), in 2014 more than 1.5 billion people were living in multi-dimensional poverty, meaning that they lacked food, healthcare, education, and an adequate standard of living. Redistribution, then, is taking place not so much from rich to poor, but from poor to rich.

**HUMANITY AS A BODY** We must therefore ask ourselves the fundamental question of whether we humans want to see ourselves holistically, as a body that is, for the most part, developing healthily, or whether each of us should individualistically

accept the disadvantages caused by others and structure his life according to his own self-interest?

Here's a thought experiment to illustrate the problem. Imagine that our organs and limbs – i.e. every part of our body – were free to determine for themselves what they wanted to do and behave however they liked. Imagine that the left leg decides to walk to the left, but the right decides to walk to the right. The question of which direction the whole body will move in is easily answered: nowhere. Or let's assume that, as the result of an injury, the brain needs blood and oxygen, but the organs responsible – the heart and the lungs – refuse to help, or will offer to do so only if the brain, which is entirely without means, reciprocates, which at the moment it cannot do. One wonders how long such a body will survive.

People all over the world are fleeing crisis regions and war zones, in their hundreds, thousands, soon in the millions, hoping for a better life. This is a problem that affects the whole of Europe, irrespective of the questions of whether Europe should take in more or fewer refugees or whether it should take them in at all, or of how the people of Europe are reacting. Some are protesting against it; others are mobilising in order to donate, to give, to help. The helpers are not necessarily well-off, or people who can easily afford it, as recent events on the Greek island of Kos showed. Even needy people, who have little themselves, are helping those who, in comparison, have even less. The characteristic of wanting to give, and being able to give, seems to be a natural predisposition that people are born with. It is referred to in Islam as *fitra* – instinct – and is an



essential element in the Islamic concept of an ethical and socially sustainable understanding of economics. This natural predisposition to give, 'to do good', arises from a spontaneous inner willingness.

**DONATION, EXCHANGE, COOPERATION** Donation is one of three (economic) intersubjective relationships. In this first relationship, the beneficiary is a person in need, who is dependent on the giver. As long as the giver does not give, the beneficiary remains in need. He cannot haul himself out of his neediness (dependency) on his own. What constitutes neediness is both a societal and an individual question that has to be clarified in relation to the other participants in society. A prime example of this relationship are infants and children. They cannot provide for themselves on their own, and need the support and love of their parents in order not only to meet their material needs, such as hunger and thirst, but also, above all, because of their emotional neediness for love and security so that they are able to develop their trust in themselves and muster the strength to develop their personality and, later, to be able to act positively within society. Donating to needy adults can consist of merely giving an amount of money without emotion or sympathy. Or it can consist of an empowering, empathetically-charged gesture of encouragement, hopefully with the result that it gives the needy person hope and thereby also strength. In Islam the concept of *zakat* (donation) takes care of the monetary support of this societal group who, depending on need, either receive an amount of money equivalent to an average annual income, or are given money for a period of time required by the recipient for them to be able to work again.

The second form of economic relationship is characterised by a corresponding, equivalent exchange – insofar as it is possible, with today's money, to speak of equivalence with the goods that are exchanged for it. In a free market, those participating in the exchange are not dependent on each other; they can find other partners with whom to exchange (independence). This kind of relationship is geared towards profit. The players follow their own interests and are not in a dependent relationship with each other, because they can satisfy their needs through the resources available to them, or use their financial means to this end.

The third relationship is characterised by cooperation and represents, so to speak, the highest level in terms of innovation and human collaboration (cf. Mark Terkessidis' article on collaboration on page 5). This level can be motivated by the pursuit of profit, but this is not absolutely necessary. It can be seen as a mixture of the two dimensions already referred to. The cooperative, reciprocal element is characteristic. In this area, there are in Islamic law a whole array of types of

contract that enable people with capital and impecunious businessmen and -women to set up either profit-making or not-for-profit businesses together – the so-called *Mudarabah*, a kind of silent partnership, the *Musharakah*, comparable with a joint venture, or the *Sharikat al-Wujuh*, an 'association of good reputation', to name but a few.

In each of these three relationships within our prevailing economic system, money-lending against interest is practised in order to satisfy various needs. If, then, we were to follow the prevailing understanding of economic management, which is characterised by utility maximisation, this would have to mean that we should constantly strive, on all three relationship levels, to maximise our utility that can be measured in material and monetary terms, with a minimum of financial expenditure. The provision of money against interest inevitably comes under consideration. In addition, the credit must be secured with assets. This does not address the question of how people from the third and, especially, the first sphere of relationship, who do not possess anything as security, are to come by capital.

Because people are not always in a position to help themselves, or to look after themselves. In these cases it is appropriate that we make haste to help them, to remove their burdens. And we must not fail to realise that this kind of help should be given as a matter of course. This is the view of Islam, which is why it compares society to a body that can only develop and evolve if all its constituent parts serve the body as a whole and support one another. If one body part despises or is ignorant of the others, it contradicts the understanding of healthy growth and sustainable evolution.

**BAN ON INTEREST** The best-known characteristic of Islamic finance is the ban on money-lending with the accrual of interest. It is therefore not permitted to lend money against interest payments. Only commerce is allowed. In this way the performance principle is prioritised, and is seen as legitimising the profit. By contrast, with money-lending against interest, it is precisely this principle that is undermined. The money owner is tempted to let his money work for itself, i.e. to collect interest from the borrower without having taken any notable risks, compared with the trader – the businessman, that is – whose business risk is rewarded with a margin that is ultimately linked to the commodity sold.

Along with the topic of interest, the question also arises of the nature and function of money. In his work *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, the Islamic scholar al-Ghazali asks, in relation to the exchange of different goods, how one can compare two things that have no qualities in common, and comes to the conclusion that this is only possible if both things are compared with a

The  
twin towers  
of the National  
Bank of Egypt  
in Cairo.  
Photo:  
Stefan Weidner

third thing that has no qualities. For Ghazali, this thing without qualities is money. This is the only reason why it is in a position to serve as a universal unit of measurement for all other goods. If, however, this unit of measurement is commodified, meaning: if it becomes a commodity like every other, this leads to the distortion of money and, eventually, the price of goods. The commodification of money means, in the final analysis, the commercialisation of debt, which itself now becomes a commodity and can be sold. In the end, interest-bearing money-lending decouples itself from the real economy and starts its own economy: financial management. With the aforementioned commercialisation of debt, and based on the system of interest and compound interest, this can now grow exponentially, independent of the real economy. Crises resulting from this, which can or even must inevitably occur, have devastating effects on the real economy and thus on many people's financial situation, as the recent international financial and economic crisis has taught us. In the current economic situation, it is practically impossible to get credit, without supplying appropriate securities intended to minimise as much as possible the risks to the creditor in the event of a default. This carries two negative implications: firstly, it perpetuates the notion that, as soon as they are released from the security obligations, debtors do not pay their debts on time. This reinforces the image of the debtor as an immoral person who does not fulfil their obligations. Secondly, in this way access to capital is denied to those who have no securities to offer, with the result that they are excluded from participating in shaping the economy and liberating themselves from financial dependency – on the state, for example.

**SHARING AND CARING** The basic premise of the swiftly-expanding sharing economy, which no longer categorises people as consumers or producers but turns them into so-called 'prosumers', is reflected in the source texts, in both the Koran and the *hadith* (Prophetic sayings). Here, however, this idea serves as the basis for a *caring society*, in which not only does the state take care of those in need, or certain businesses offer to meet the needs of the many, but everyone does so who can demonstrate the qualifications and competence to do so. Right in the second *sura* of the second verse of the Koran, the faithful are described as, among other things, those who give of what is bestowed upon them ('who spend out of what We have provided for them'). This establishes an opposing concept to our understanding of property, the corollary of which is that commodities a person possesses are not, strictly speaking, his property, but that of God.

This has far-reaching implications for the understanding and further development of the sharing econ-

omy. Perhaps it becomes clearer what is meant when it is viewed in conjunction with an utterance from the *hadith*, which explains that one person's meal is (also, essentially) enough for two, and a meal for two is (also) enough for four, etc. – i.e. that things (here with a focus on consumable things) that are a person's property serve, in the first instance, to satisfy their needs. What is left over, above and beyond this, is still that person's property, but others who possess nothing, or very little, with which to fulfil their needs would in fact be entitled to it. Food and catering businesses are a good example: when these shops close, foodstuffs left over that cannot be offered for sale the following day find their way that evening not into the stomachs of those in need, but into the rubbish. This method of dealing with foodstuffs also makes the standards of value very clear. These actions are not measured by how social and sustainable they are, but how cost-effective. In a case like this, efficiency not only leads to but enforces socially undesirable and ethically almost indefensible behaviour.

**FOCUS ON PEOPLE, NOT PROFIT** The Islamic approach also follows the principle of economic profitability, which consists of obtaining the greatest possible benefit for minimal expenditure. However, this principle reaches its limits at the point where it starts to result in social disadvantage. When there is a social

cost, economic costs are not the priority. The principle of low expenditure with the greatest possible benefit therefore has no validity if it leads to the socio-economic disadvantage of third parties. Thus, from the Islamic perspective, it is people who are the primary focus of the economy, not profit.

The market and the attitude of its players play a key role in addressing this problem. When Mohammed emigrated to Medina, he did not proclaim a state and did not declare himself a statesman; instead, he set up two institutions that were responsible for the economic prosperity of the community at that time: the mosque and the market. The mosque – comprehended as a place with a connection to the transcendental – was assigned the role of the spiritualisation of Muslims. This meant also the creation of an attitude corresponding to Islamic moral values that would create space for a fairer, more humane form of economic management – whereby Islamic moral values are understood to be universal, because Islam sees itself as the religion that accommodates human nature in every way.

In place of the purely material-monetary view of the market, the nature of the market player (i.e. the person) should be taken into account, to the same if not to an even higher degree, so that the market becomes simultaneously a place of both the pursuit of profit and of the common good. In this the mosque is assigned a role as an education and training centre for fair eco-

nom management. There, ethical foundations are established and individual norms regarding questions related to the economy are passed on. Economics is preceded by a spiritual education that conveys the ethical foundations and moral requirements for economic management. This is why, from the perspective of Islam, an economy is not based on the laws of economics alone but, to the same degree, on spiritual elements, which constitute an integral component in everyday economic practice. Alongside market policy interventions, which carry out a steering function, a certain degree of spirituality in the individual is also deemed important. This is intended to ensure that the religious background to trade is inherent in economic transactions. This background is kept alive through certain forms of ritual prayer and meditation that take place several times a day. In this way the view of what belongs to the individual is extended by a larger view that encompasses society and the ecosystem. The aim is for this to foster people's ability to put themselves in someone else's place, or swap roles with them, so that ultimately they are able to negotiate as if they were both parties at once.

It is notoriously difficult to speak of justice as a finite entity, let alone actually allow it to prevail. And so, with the help of a spiritual education that takes place on a daily basis and in certain windows throughout the course of the year, the individual is trained to do good. This abstract commandment assumes a crucial role with regard to economic life. For it is essentially none other than an interpersonal relationship, consisting of a cry for help on one side and, on the other, the corresponding wealth with which to supply the remedy. As a rule, the remedy will take the form of financial compensation.

If we comprehend our economic life as a forum of solidarity and mutual support (goods in exchange for financial compensation), in which every market player identifies with the others, the relationships between the different interests harmonise, and exploitation and the abuse of asymmetric information relations decrease, without the need to renounce the individual pursuit of profit.



Beggar in Izmir, Turkey.  
Photo: Achim Wagner

**SOUHEIL THABTI** is writing his doctoral thesis on Islamic business ethics at the Institute for Islamic Theology at the University of Osnabrück. He is a member of the internal ethics council of KT Bank AG in Frankfurt, and an academic advisor on the council of Muslim students and academics (<http://www.ramsa-deutschland.org/>).

Translation: Charlotte Collins

■ To a large degree, the public perception of Islamic finance has been formed by ideals which are often misunderstood as descriptions of realities. This has created a number of serious misconceptions about Islamic finance. While its global progress cannot be denied, it is sometimes measured by inadequate benchmarks.

## ISLAMIC FINANCE IDEALS, MISCONCEPTIONS, PROGRESS

BY VOLKER NIENHAUS

The Koran prohibits *ribā* (interest), *gharar* (ambiguity in contracts) and *maysir* (gambling). In addition, Muslims must not consume, produce, trade or finance *haram* items such as alcohol, pork, or pornography. Islamic finance has to observe all these restrictions. Ideas and concepts on how to achieve this in modern economies have evolved over a period of roughly five decades. Today Islamic finance has become 'mainstream' in a number of Muslim countries, and it is recognised as 'alternative finance' in other jurisdictions, including European countries.

**1. IDEALS** Roughly speaking, two types of ideals have guided Islamic finance: the ideal of a betterment of the economic conditions of non-affluent or poor communities, and the ideal of a unique, superior, *ribā*-free financial system.

**1.1. COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE** The *hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca – is a religious duty of every Muslim. To pay for the expensive pilgrimage, poorer people had to accumulate money over a lengthy period of time. To make sure that their savings were not tainted by *ribā*, many kept the money in cash under the pillow. This was very risky in terms of security and value depreciation. Other people borrowed funds from a money lender at usurious rates of interest, while again others sold off their house, livestock or other property to finance the pilgrimage. When they returned from *hajj*, they were strained by the usurious interest or suffered from having abandoned vital assets. Ungku Abdul Aziz identified the lack of a *ribā*-free savings scheme as the root cause of this behaviour that was detrimental both in a micro- and macroeconomic perspective. He submitted 'A Plan to Improve the Economic Position of Potential Pilgrims' to the Malaysian government in 1959. This plan became

the basis for the *Pilgrims Savings Corporation*, launched in 1963, which later converted to *Tabung Haji* (the *Pilgrims Fund Board*)<sup>1</sup> as a financial institution that collects savings of prospective pilgrims and invests them in *halal* businesses. The advantages for the pilgrims are the safety of the savings and *ribā*-free returns. What started as a modest scheme to support persons of small means in rural areas has grown into one of Malaysia's largest Islamic fund managers.<sup>2</sup>

A seminal project for the interest-free financing of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was launched by Ahmed El-Naggar in the Egyptian town of Mit-Ghamr in 1963. His starting point was the observation that persons of small means such as farmers saved parts of their current income for future use (e.g. for the marriage of the children or in cases of illness or old age). However, the form of their savings was very inefficient both from an individual and a macroeconomic perspective: the savers did not hold their savings in financial assets (for example as a savings account with a bank) but in real assets such as gold, jewellery and durable consumer goods. These assets were purchased from traders and later, when liquidity was needed, sold back to traders who earned a profit twice (from buying and selling). The individual transaction costs of this form of savings were very high, but there were also significant macroeconomic costs: money represents command over resources. If the resources are transferred (through intermediation of a financial institution) from savers to entrepreneurs, they can use them for productive investments which generate an added value. But if the savers spend their money on real assets, the resources have been disposed of and are no longer available for productive investments. From a macro-economic perspective, the individual savings in real assets are not savings but consump-

tion. If the savers could be convinced to change the form of their savings – from real to financial assets (such as a savings book) – then the saved resources could be used for productive investments. This would boost the national capital formation without any additional reduction of the real consumption of the savers, who will, in addition, benefit from much lower transaction costs.

A switch of the savings form requires trustworthy financial institutions that are within the reach of the savers in rural areas. A requirement for a trustworthy financial institution was that the savers could see how their money is put to good use. Therefore, a significant part of the funds mobilised locally had to be invested locally in SMEs. Another condition for trust was that the financial institution does not violate religious beliefs of the people. Therefore, the financial institution had to operate *ribā*-free. With these ingredients (plus locally recruited personnel), El-Naggar's *ribā*-free savings bank has been able to change the savings behaviour of the people and to mobilise substantial amounts of investible funds for the betterment of the economic situation of the Mit-Ghamr community.<sup>3</sup>

**1.2. SYSTEMIC APPROACH** Theoretical concepts of a genuine Islamic economic system date back to the 1940s, when the idea of a separate Muslim state on the territory of British India after the retreat of the colonial power took shape. The goal was to create an economic system fundamentally different from the known economic systems of that time, namely the British type of (colonial) capitalism and the Soviet type of (atheistic) communism. The system was to be based on private property and entrepreneurship, but the financial sector was to adhere to the instructions and principles of the Koran and Sunna and operate *ribā*-free. When Pakistan became a reality in 1947, this Muslim state was rather secular in its institutions, including the economy. Hence, the debate on the appropriate economic and financial order continued. In particular, Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqi's approach of financial institutions based on profit and loss sharing (PLS)<sup>4</sup> found many supporters.

His idea of a replacement of interest-based debt finance by equity-like partnership finance was formalised by Islamic economists in the 1970s and 1980s. It became known as the 'two-tier-*muḍārabah*' model because the proposed PLS contracts were conceptually close to *muḍārabah* partnerships of the Sharī'a, and they should be applied both in the savings and the financing business of the Islamic financial institutions. The literature usually called PLS-based financial institutions 'Islamic banks', and in theory a system of PLS-based Islamic banks could be more just, stable and efficient than a *ribā*-based system. It should also boost economic development and facilitate poverty reduction.<sup>5</sup> However, such a system has never been implemented, and the practice of existing Islamic banks differs substantially from this ideal.

**1.3. COMMERCIAL VENTURES** In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Islamic banks became a reality in several countries. Many of the new Islamic banks were established by business-

men who were previously successful in trading and construction, such as Saeed bin Ahmed al Lootah, who established Dubai Islamic Bank in 1975, or Saleh Abdullah Kamel, who set up a number of Islamic financial institutions in different countries from 1978 onwards. Their perspectives differed considerably from those of the Islamic economists. As traders and contractors, they had used the full range of financial services of conventional banks and wanted to get the same services from their new Islamic banks on a *ribā*-free basis.<sup>6</sup>

The structuring of *ribā*-free equivalents of conventional instruments became the task of Islamic jurists. They focussed primarily on alternatives for debt-based financing tools in a *ribā*-free manner, and they neglected PLS contracts as these were not applied by conventional banks. The Sharī'a scholars amended or modified traditional trade and rent contracts which allowed for the incorporation of a financing component (such as a deferred payment). This resulted in a broad range of Sharī'a compliant debt-based financing tools with fixed costs for the financed party, respectively fixed returns for the bank. Although the fixed costs or fixed returns look like interest from an economic perspective, they are *legally* profits from trade and leasing, and the legal perspective is the decisive one. The typical financing contracts applied by Islamic banks are known as *murābahah* to the purchase order, parallel and hybrid salam, parallel *istiṣnā'*, *ijārah muntahia bittamleek*, and *tawarruq* or commodity *murābahah*.<sup>7</sup> The dominance of debt-based instruments in the Islamic banking practice was long ignored by proponents of abstract models of a PLS economy. There was and still is a significant discrepancy between equity-inspired models and the debt-based practice of Islamic banking.

**2. MISCONCEPTIONS** It cannot be denied that Islamophobia is growing in the West, and the term 'Islamic' finance has a negative connotation for many people. Ignorance, prejudices, anti-Islamic sentiments, and hostile political agitation produce radical misconceptions about Islamic finance (e.g. as a giant sham, religious propaganda, great leap backwards, financial jihad, or terrorist financing). It is impossible to deal adequately with all misconceptions in a single paper. Only four economic

1 See *Tabung Haji* 1995 and <http://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/background#>.

2 As at the end of 2013, Tabung Haji had more than 8 million savers and a savings volume of approx. 13 billion US\$; see <http://www.tabunghaji.gov.my/number-of-depositors-depositors-saving>.

3 See Ready 1967, El-Naggar 1978.

4 See Siddiqi 1973/1983, 1983.

5 See, for example, Ahmad 1980, Ahmed, Iqbal and Khan 1983, Khan and Mirakhori 1987.

6 See Alim 2014.

7 For details of the different contracts, see Hasan 2011, Dusuki and Abdullah 2011, Rahman 2012; for an exposition of the regulatory implications of different products and instruments of Islamic banks based on these traditional contracts, see IFSB 2013a.

misconceptions of both Muslim and non-Muslim observers of Islamic finance as well as clients of Islamic banks shall be discussed here.

**2.1. RISK SHARING?** It is claimed as a strength of Islamic finance that capital providers share the entrepreneurial risks of the capital users. However, risk sharing by PLS contracts is rarely practised in Islamic finance as it stands today. In consumer finance there is usually no profit that banks and consumers could share. In corporate finance, PLS is considered too risky by banks and too expensive by most enterprises. Both parties prefer instead trade-related modes of finance with fixed costs and leasing. The neglect of PLS financing should not be due to ignorance or the ill will of the bank practitioners. It is largely due to the fact that the risk-sharing, systemic ideal of visionary theorists is not part of the typical mission statement of a profit-oriented Islamic bank operating in an interest-based environment. Non-PLS modes of finance are usually more attractive from a commercial perspective. In such an environment, the Shari'a compliant replication of conventional products and techniques (via 'reverse engineering') is a rational adaptation to the market situation.

There are more reasons why Islamic banks shy away from PLS modes of finance, for example the lack of reliable accounting systems in many developing countries, or maturity mismatches between short-term customer funds and the medium to long-term capital lockup in PLS ventures. But since the risk-sharing ideal attributed many appealing qualities to Islamic finance (justice, stability, developmental impact, etc.), arguments of theorists were taken up by practitioners to extol their activities in advertisements, media appearances, keynote speeches, glossy brochures, etc. This created a mixture of ideals and realities that is hard for less well-informed observers to understand. It also nurtured a number of further misconceptions.<sup>8</sup>

**2.2. FINANCE TIED TO REAL ASSETS?** Proponents of Islamic finance claim that the Shari'a contracts automatically tie financing to real assets. This allegedly prevents speculation and implies a higher stability of an Islamic financial system compared to conventional finance. Unfortunately, this proposition is built on shaky ground.

It is correct that Islamic financial institutions are not allowed to participate in the speculative trading of those types of financial assets which had created unmanageable volatility and risks. However, speculative bubbles are not confined to financial assets. Commodity or real estate bubbles and speculative transactions have occurred quite regularly, and there are indications that Islamic banks have been involved to some degree.

Another caveat is that each Shari'a-compliant contract may be linked to a real asset individually, but by combinations of two or more Shari'a contracts, the real asset can effectively be cancelled out (as outlined below). In such structures, none of the contracting parties actually has any commercial interest

in the real asset, and the asset may factually be held by the same owner as at the beginning of a series of interwoven transactions. The best-known example for such a type of transaction is *tawarruq*, which can best be explained by a simple numerical example:

Party A needs money today and is willing to give up a larger amount of money in the future. A can buy an asset with a market price of \$100 today from bank B for \$110, to be paid in one year (contract AB). A can sell the asset at somewhat less than the market price, e.g. for \$95 cash to broker C (contract AC). C sells it on to B for the market price of \$100 (contract CB). Using modern means of communication and an asset that is traded on an electronic exchange (such as platinum traded at the London Metal Exchange), this series of transactions can be executed within seconds. The end result is the following:

- Party A has \$95 cash in hand and a debt of \$110, meaning that A holds no real asset and bears costs of \$15 (\$5 now and \$10 in the future) to get \$95 cash today.
- Bank B has a claim of \$110 against A, and B has paid \$100 to broker C for (re)purchasing the asset. Bank B holds (again) the asset and earns a profit of \$10.
- Broker C has paid \$95 to A and received \$100 from B. As C has sold the asset to B, C holds no asset and has earned a profit of \$5.

Such transactions have been strongly criticised because they are extremely close to prohibited *ribā*, and they were allowed only as an exemption (in particular for interbank transactions). But some Islamic banks apply *tawarruq* or similar arrangements (commodity *murābahah*, *bay' bithaman ajil* [in Malaysia]) in their regular business.

The *tawarruq* practice is a good illustration for the 'form over substance' debate. In a formal sense, *tawarruq* is *ribā*-free because it is based on sales of a real asset. The contracting parties do not pay or receive interest, but pay for an asset and earn a profit from trade. In substance, however, the purpose of the whole structure is the provision of liquidity at a fixed price. No party has any 'real' interest in the asset that is traded. It is only needed to facilitate the generation of a payment obligation and of profits from trade. If the whole transaction is 'packaged' by the bank into one contract, this would be an 'organised *tawarruq*', which is explicitly prohibited by Shari'a authorities. However, if there are three separate contracts and if the customer has to take action by himself (e.g. contacting broker C), *tawarruq* is disliked (*makrūh*) but not prohibited.<sup>9</sup>

**2.3. SUPERIOR INHERENT STABILITY?** Practices such as large exposures to bubble-prone (=possibly speculative) real estate markets and the provision of liquidity through structures which are functional equivalents of interest-based loans do not support the claim of an inherently more stable financial system. But proponents of Islamic finance reinforce their position by reference to the experiences during the 2007-2009 financial crisis: some of the largest and iconic global players of

Western financial capitalism collapsed during the crisis while Islamic banks were not affected by the first round of the crises (only later by the global economic downturn in the second round). This is remarkable, but by no means a proof of an inherent stability of Islamic finance: in many emerging markets not only the Islamic banks but also the conventional banks were not affected by the first round of the crisis, simply because the international exposure of all banks of these countries was rather moderate. Even in Western countries like Germany with approximately 1,800 independent banks, by far the largest number of conventional banks weathered the first round of the crisis quite well. Their relative size and focus on local or regional businesses and retail customers are quite similar to the characteristics of many Islamic banks, so that it is a plausible hypothesis that the resilience of Islamic banks was not due to legal differences respective to Shari'a specificities in contracts, but to a business strategy that is not unique but shared by conventional and Islamic financial institutions.

**2.4. ETHICAL FINANCE?** There has been a misconception that Islamic finance is for Muslims only. Proponents of Islamic finance countered this view and argued that Islamic finance is not only open for everybody, but that it even should be particularly appealing to non-Muslims who are looking for ethical finance and socially responsible investments. Some went as far as to claim that Islamic finance is ethical finance *per se* because it has a religious underpinning from the Koran and Sunnah. More specifically, it was pointed out that the Islamic teachings prohibit items and practices that are unethical. The list of these prohibited (*haram*) items includes interest, pork, alcohol (intoxicants), pornography, gambling and sometimes also tobacco and arms (weapons of mass destruction). Customers of Islamic financial institutions can rest assured that they are shielded from *haram* businesses, that their money is not employed in speculative financial transactions (gambling), and that their investments insofar meet ethical criteria. It was assumed that these qualities of Islamic finance could attract non-Muslim customers who had realised during the global financial crisis how Western banks had 'misused' depositors' funds as 'stakes in the global financial casino'.

Although this view is not unreasonable, it conveys a somewhat lopsided message: it is a call upon non-Muslims to discover Islamic finance if they search for ethical finance and responsible investing. It ignores, however, that there exists already a highly-developed ethical finance and responsible investment sector in the Western finance industry. This sector is at least four times larger than Islamic finance (see figure 1 below), and it is growing at rates that match or exceed the impressive growth rates of Islamic banking. Moreover, this sector applies ethical criteria for the evaluation and selection of projects, and for the identification of companies with good corporate governance and corporate social responsibility records, in a far more sophisticated and transparent manner than Islamic finance does at present. Islamic finance generally applies only negative lists ('blacklists') to sort out *haram* items, and finan-

cial screens to avoid too much 'interest pollution' in the income from an investment. The final selection from the range of the permissible investments is typically made on the basis of profitability. A considerable number of Western responsible investment institutions go one step further and apply 'whitelists' to facilitate, for example, investments or projects under preferred themes such as biodiversity, energy efficiency or community development (impact investments). They extend the financial analysis by environmental, social and governance factors, and asset managers integrate such criteria into their investment decisions. The final selection from a range of projects with a minimum financial return may be made on the basis of non-financial criteria (as reflected, for example, in a whitelist).

Islamic finance as ethical finance does not yet meet the high technical standards which have been achieved in the West. For the time being it is not the West that could learn from Islamic finance in the realm of ethical finance, but the other way round. Unless Islamic finance matches the existing evaluation and selection standards, it is hard to envisage that non-Muslim investors and institutions who are familiar with the state of the art in ethical finance and responsible investing will switch to Islamic finance.<sup>10</sup>

**3. PROGRESS** The following summary of key data on the size and structure of Islamic finance demonstrates the impressive growth and the differentiation of the global Islamic finance industry. It provides only a snapshot in time of an industry with a strong momentum. The concluding outline of a remarkable initiative by the government and central bank of a Muslim country can be seen as a manifestation of dynamic forces that may bring the practice of the Islamic finance industry closer to the ideals of the developmental pioneers and Islamic economists.

**3.1. SIZE AND STRUCTURE** Islamic finance has grown over the past four decades from zero to a diversified 1.7 trillion US\$ industry with persistently double-digit growth rates. Nevertheless, compared to the global finance industry, it is still small: Islamic banking assets amount to only 1.5% of the global banking assets. However, such a comparison underestimates the importance of Islamic finance in individual Muslim countries. Ignoring the fully Islamised systems of Iran and Sudan, Islamic

8 PLS contracts are applied by Islamic banks for funds accepted from customers and in the Islamic capital market, but the legal form of the contracts does not match their economic substance: PLS accounts are *de facto* treated like deposits in conventional banks, and securities contracts with a risk-sharing form (*mu'ārabah* and *mushārahah sukūk*) typically include clauses that effectively transform them into bond-like debt securities. On the treatment of PLS accounts, see IFSB 2013a; on the 'transformation' of *sukūk* see Kapetanovic and Becic 2009, Mokhtar 2011, Nienhaus 2014.

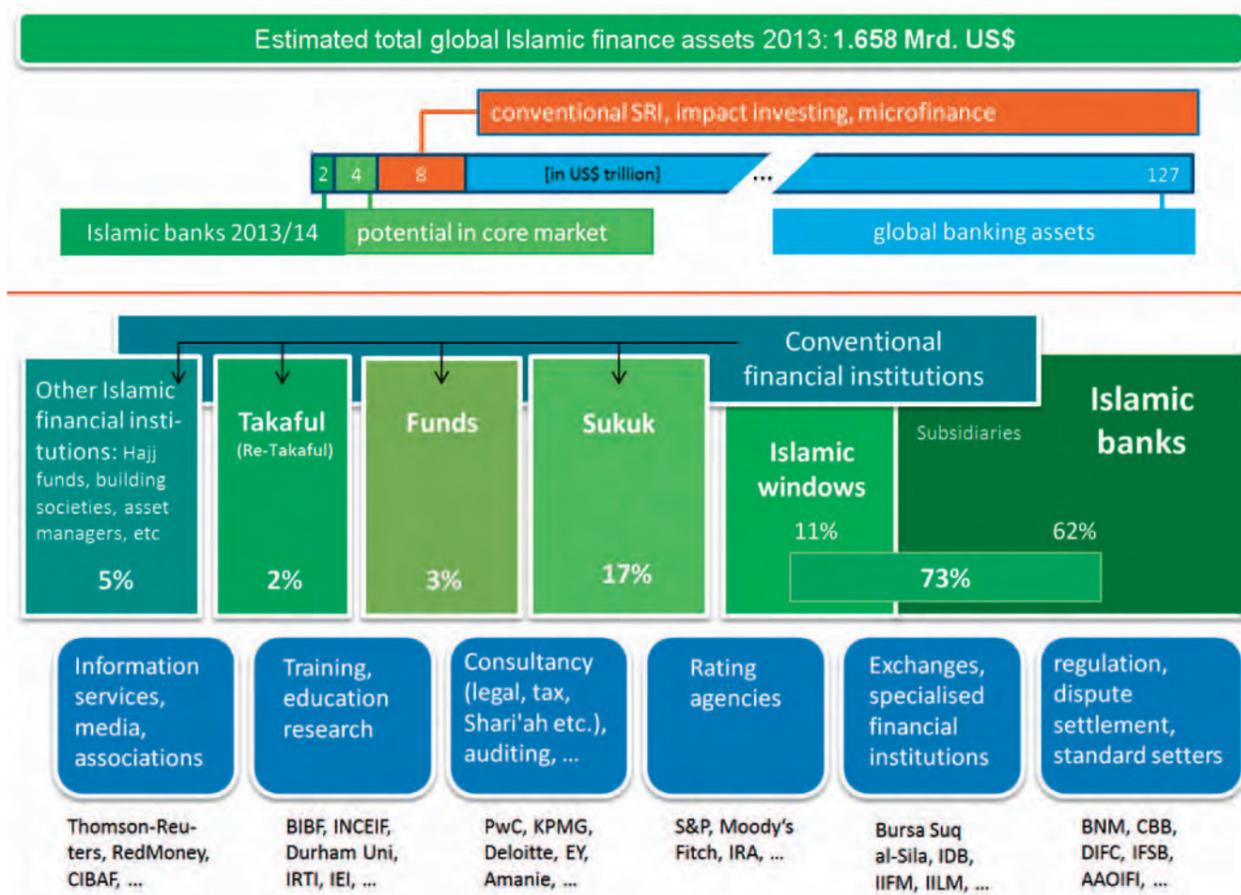
9 See Ali 2008, Mohamad and Rahman 2014.

10 See Nienhaus 2011, IFSB 2013b.

banking has achieved a market share of 20% or more in Kuwait, Brunei, Yemen, Qatar and Malaysia, and it is approaching this mark (quite rapidly) in the UAE and Bangladesh.

Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the relative sizes of the different segments of Islamic finance: banking, securities (*sukūk*), funds and Islamic insurance (*takāful*). Banking is by far the largest segment, but *sukūk* have become the fastest growing segment in recent years. Figure 1 also points to a diversified 'infrastructure' of the Islamic finance industry (including specialised information providers, training and research institutions, consultancies, rating services, etc.) with a significant participation of Western firms.

FIGURE 1: SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF THE ISLAMIC FINANCE INDUSTRY



Sources: ICD Thomson Reuters, *Islamic Finance Development Report 2014*; Thomson Reuters, *State of the Global Islamic Economy 2014/2015 Report*

CIBAFI = General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions, BIBF = Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, INCEIF = International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance, IRTI = Islamic Research and Training Institute, IEI = Islamic Economics Institute of King Abdulaziz University, PwC = PricewaterhouseCoopers, EY = Ernst & Young, S&P = Standards and Poor's, IRA = Islamic Rating Agency, IDB = Islamic Development Bank, IIFM = International Islamic Financial Market, IILM = International Islamic Liquidity Management Corporation, BNM = Bank Negara Malaysia, CBB = Central Bank of Bahrain, DIFC = Dubai International Financial Centre, IFSB = Islamic Financial Services Board, AAOIFI = Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions

**3.2. GUIDANCE FOR THE MARKETS** Islamic banking in Malaysia started in 1983. Since then, the country has developed the most elaborate Islamic financial system (in parallel to its conventional finance industry). It has a strong track record in innovation and game-changing initiatives in Islamic finance. Outstanding measures taken by the Malaysian authorities include:

- the establishment of *Tabung Haji* in 1963
- the installation of national *Shari'a Advisory Councils* (as the highest authorities on *Shari'a* issues) at the central bank and the securities commission
- the creation of a *Shari'a* compliant interbank market and monetary policy instruments
- the authorisation of Islamic windows<sup>11</sup> of conventional banks in 1993, and after approximately 20 years the urge to convert the windows into subsidiaries, i.e. separate Islamic banks
- the establishment of the first dedicated university for Islamic finance (the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance, INCEIF)
- strong support for the establishment of the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) as a global standard-setter for Islamic finance regulations
- the systematic and successful development of the *sukūk* market.

Nevertheless, the practice of Islamic banking is far removed from the PLS ideals of Islamic economists, and it is openly criticised for that. Seemingly, these ideals have found a sympathetic ear in the government and the central bank (Bank Negara Malaysia, BNM): The Malaysian Islamic Financial Services Act of 2013 makes a clear distinction between Islamic deposits and Islamic investment accounts, and BNM (2014) clarifies:

- Islamic deposits are funds accepted by banks on the basis of a *qard*. or *wad'i'ah* contract. The banks are obliged to repay the funds in full so that Islamic deposits are risk-free.
- Islamic investment accounts can be based on *mud.ārabah*, *mushārah* or *wakālah* contracts which all have a PLS dimension. Money paid into Islamic investment accounts is exposed to a market risk.

The bank invests the investment account holders' money, and losses have to be borne by them. The bank is obliged to repay only the net value of the money received after the deduction of investment losses. Banks are now (contrary to their past practice) obliged to point out unmistakably that money paid

into investment accounts is exposed to a market risk by putting eye-catching risk warnings on all promotional material, and to disclose to the customers the investment objectives and strategies, risk factors, data on past and realistic projections of future performance, as well as details of the profit calculation and distribution policy. The central bank explicitly prohibits the smoothing of profit payouts by banks that made Islamic investment accounts look like conventional savings or term accounts for the customers.<sup>12</sup> Islamic banks now have to satisfy themselves that a particular investment account is suitable for the needs and loss-bearing capacities of the individual client.

Malaysian investment accounts will become risk sharing products in form and substance. But this becomes a real game-changer only if accompanied by more PLS transactions in the financing business. This could be achieved by a recently announced Investment Account Platform (IAP) where fund-seeking small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can tap into investment account funds that Islamic banks invest via the IAP. A portion of these funds shall be channelled into PLS modes of financing. Operating for a possibly large number of banks, the IAP could provide expert services for the evaluation of SME business plans that are too expensive for an individual bank. With these pooled services, problems resulting from information asymmetries, moral hazard and adverse selection in PLS structures could be overcome. If the new initiative becomes effective, then the Islamic finance practice in Malaysia will be closer to the ideals of the developmental pioneers and of Islamic economists. This would lead to more genuine Islamic products and more distinctiveness or authenticity of Islamic finance – at least in Malaysia.

**VOLKER NIENHAUS** was Professor of Economics in both Trier and Bochum, and President of the University of Marburg. He is now Honorary Professor at the University of Bochum, Visiting Professor at the University of Reading and the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF) in Kuala Lumpur, and Consultant to the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB). He is the author of numerous works on Islamic economics and finance published since the 1980s.

<sup>11</sup> Islamic windows are departments of conventional banks that offer Islamic financial services. They may use the infrastructure of the bank (such as buildings, IT facilities or ATMs), but they have to segregate their Islamic business strictly from the conventional business. A bank with an Islamic window has to install a *Shari'a* board that monitors and certifies the *Shari'a* compliance of the Islamic business.

<sup>12</sup> This is a common practice also of Islamic banks in other countries.

■ Religious reasons are often said to be behind the greater economic development of the West compared to that of the Islamic world. A look at the economic history of the Middle East dismisses this idea, and highlights instead the question of which economic system better serves people's real interests, as the Syrian economic historian Ali Al-Saleh explains.

## ISLAM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THE EXAMPLE OF SYRIA

BY ALI AL-SALEH

Some Western scholars who make no secret of their hostility towards Islam believe it was Islam itself that brought its followers into a morass of backwardness and stagnation by strangling every economic initiative undertaken by Muslims, whereas Western societies had a different experience because of the capitalist revolution and democratic liberalism. Few of them address the problem of progress and backwardness in the Islamic world fairly, or by adopting more scientific benchmarks to assess the correlations that exist between beliefs and the social realities in our societies.

The question that needs to be answered is why capitalism flourished in recent times as a symbol for modernity and progress in Europe and in other countries such as Japan, whereas the same thing did not happen in the Arab countries of the Middle East, such as Syria.

I will offer some of my observations on the subject, starting with the time of the Crusades – or, as the Arabs call them, the Frankish wars – against Syria, which coincided with the first signs of mercantilism in the West, which later provided a basis for capitalism. I will then move on to the Ottoman history of the Levant and finally to the modern state of Syria, which arose under the French mandate and later became independent.

**THE CONCURRENCY OF CAPITALISM** Some Western sociologists such as Max Weber, Werner Sombart and Karl Marx suggest that modern capitalism, a symbol of prosperity and progress, emerged from commercial capital and the financial exchange sector in the late European Middle Ages. The same period witnessed the rise of similar, even pioneering, financial sectors in

the medieval Islamic world, which confirms that Islam at the time did not pose an obstacle to development in this direction. In the Levant at the time of the Crusades, the existence of clearly defined capitalist sectors can be detected – some of them directly capitalist, such as the commercial and financial sectors – at a time when the West was at the pre-capitalist mercantilist stage. On the other hand, it is still widely believed that the feudal stage in social development is an essential indicator for an imminent transition to the capitalist stage, and that it lays the foundations for capitalism.

While feudalism appeared in the West at a time when the central authority was weak, and the rural economy was dominant and almost the only source of wealth, in the Islamic world we see this transformation take place under the control of a strong central state in Baghdad, the Abbasid dynasty, and in a climate of diverse economic activity, including agriculture, trade and active artisanal industries. This led at a later stage to a system of military fiefdoms in the Levant under the protection of a strong and centralised Mamluk state, though the diverse economic activities did begin to decline there, for reasons unrelated to any ideology.

**CRUSADES AND MONGOL ATTACKS** In general this move towards a feudal system in the Islamic state took place for reasons different from those that led to this transition in Europe. In the Levant the regional state's financial resources were no longer sufficient to meet the increasing financial burdens that arose from the Crusader invasion and the devastating Mongol invasion following the decline in the material resources of the central government in Baghdad. So we see a

very clear contrast: on the one side the feudal lords in the West who, after the rural economy had proved itself incapable of satisfying the growing financial requirements, moved from the countryside, where they were based, towards the cities in order to appropriate additional financial resources for themselves at the expense of the inhabitants of European cities.

On the other side, in the Levant the state government originated in the regional metropolises, where political power was concentrated, then spread into the countryside and towns to fill the gap that arose from the failure of the previous taxation system to provide the state with the financial resources it needed to support its escalating war effort.

The background to this was that economically vital ports had slipped out of the state's control as a result of the Crusader occupation and the Mongol invasion, and of the destruction, depopulation, and plundering of both financial and material assets that ensued. It is also notable during this period that important merchants and landowners in Levantine cities, or what later came to be called the *bourgeoisie*, had no role in government, while their counterparts in Italian cities at that time, and in Levantine cities under Crusader control, helped the feudal lords manage both the political and economic affairs of the Crusader states.

**THE RISE OF ECONOMIC MODERNISM** In addition to this, also without citing the details here, one can say that the influence of religious doctrine on the course of economic events in the Levant during the Crusades was limited and that when any contradiction arose between theory and practice, meeting the demands of society took precedence over other challenges that were being faced at that point. The social structure of the Islamic world at the time was also similar to a large extent to the social structure in Europe, as well as in China, Japan and India before the shock of European colonialism. The economic development that took place in the Islamic world in recent times, however, has been different to the development that has taken place in Europe, and that has primarily been due

to worldly reasons unconnected with religion, some of which we will discuss shortly.

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was the last refuge and line of defence for most Muslim peoples who remained outside the control of European colonialism. It was also a pioneer in taking the first steps towards modernisation, sometimes in violation of the precepts of Islamic Sharia.

After the treaty of Karlowitz with the Austrian Empire in 1699, the Ottomans tried, from 1700 to 1914, to strengthen the authority of the central state in the face of growing European political and military pressure, just as had happened in the Levant at the time of the Crusades. This strategy on the part of the state on the economic level was accompanied by the gradual appearance of what can be called 'peripheral capitalism', in contrast to what is usually termed Central European capitalism.

Here too the motive for this was the Ottoman state's need to mobilise extra revenues. Starting in the nineteenth century, it began to convert agricultural holdings known as *timars*, which were in principle equivalent to their counterparts in Mamluk times, into hereditary holdings. For the same reason the state gave the *multazims*, the 'tax farmers' who collected taxes from state land, the right to dispose of that land, either by selling it or passing it on to their heirs. In other words, this privatisation process and the growth of private property in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire were the first signs of a move towards a capitalist market economy, before European colonialism took direct control of the country and claimed it had brought with it the beginnings of the *Nahda* [renaissance] and modernisation.

The mid-nineteenth century, however, saw a definite turning point as far as the government and civil society in the Ottoman Empire were concerned. The state's quest for extra financial resources and the accumulation of debts to European creditors led to new fiscal arrangements. As part of their policy of

infiltrating 'the sick man of Europe', as they called the Ottoman state, these European capitalists pressed for further privatisation in agriculture, and an increase in the cap on agricultural land holdings in favour of a minority of large landowners at the expense of the farmers who were the real owners of the land. The European creditors' objective was to encourage the Ottoman government to expand the tax base, primarily to ensure that their debts were repaid from the treasury's additional revenues, but also to support the emergence of a class of large landowners that they could influence by integrating them directly into the international capitalist market that they controlled beyond state supervision. To this end they pushed them to expand the cultivation of crops that were needed for the European market, such as cotton and silk, and extended to them the loans they needed, thereby increasing their indebtedness and that of the state itself, which was already heavily indebted to international money markets.

**THE SITUATION IN SYRIA** In the Ottoman provinces in the Levant, the state's appropriation of the agricultural surplus was more complicated and more extensive. The Levantine provinces had themselves taken fundamental decisions, such as introducing customs duties on the movement of goods and setting rules to regulate trade. This took place even before the colonialists arrived, because the Levantine provinces had to pay increasing amounts to the central government's treasury in Istanbul to cover the costs of the Crimean and Balkan wars, and the costs of the influx of millions of refugees who had been driven out of their homes in the Balkans and the Caucasus and had fled to the heart of the empire in Anatolia (tens of thousands of other refugees went to the Levantine provinces, including Circassians, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims). The retained and repatriated profits of the foreign companies working in the Levantine provinces and the growing financial needs of the big landowners and merchants in the cities created additional pressures, which in the end left too small a share of the agricultural surplus to make economically useful investments on behalf of those provinces, and in particular for those inhabitants suffering severe hardship.

This shows that the process of capitalist modernisation in the Ottoman Empire initially took place through its own indigenous efforts, when it tried to stimulate the traditional capitalist sectors in the economy. As soon as the nineteenth century began, it became clear how important it was to catch up with the Industrial Revolution and continue the vital reform process. There was no time to lose. But the military and economic superiority of the European empires prevented the Ottoman state from continuing in this field in the manner adopted by Muhammad Ali in Egypt. In fact, the Europeans destroyed the Egyptian experiment and prevented Ibrahim Pasha from modernising the Ottoman Empire when he marched his armies across Syria towards Istanbul, the imperial capital, for that purpose.

So it was not the religious ideology of the state in Ottoman times that obstructed its development. On the contrary, it happened because of policies and world events resulting from the confrontation with European imperialism and its mainstay, the system of international capitalism.

**MODERN SYRIA** The modern, 'secular' Syrian state emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman state on a part of the Levant that was placed under a French mandate. The French came to Syria in the framework of the mandate that the League of Nations assigned to France with the aim of leading Syrian society towards independence and setting up a modern state. It is true that the spirit of secularism was clearly delineated in the 1920 constitution of the Syrian Arab Kingdom in the time of King Faisal, and later in the constitutions issued during the French mandate. Nonetheless, they did all stipulate that the Syrian head of state should be Muslim, and the French mandate state gave the League of Nations a commitment to preserve the spirit of the laws that had been in force in the time of the Ottoman Empire and the last Islamic caliphate.

Under the mandate the tithe tax (*ushr*) continued to be levied according to Islamic law on all land revenue in Syria that the Ottoman lawmakers had in the past considered to be 'conquest' land, which was without exception liable to the tithe tax of 10%. The measures taken by the mandate authorities, when it came to granting agricultural loans for example, served the interests of the large landowners who were already resident in the towns and cities, and those of their allies who owned nascent industries, at the expense of rural people, who were left at the mercy of usurers who would charge small farmers interest at rates up

to 150% a year on loans that the usurers had themselves obtained on easy terms from state agricultural banks. The usurers were undeterred by religion, which in the case of Islam bans usury, or by worldly considerations.

Ottoman commercial law also remained in force. It can also be said that the social structure in Syria in the time of the French mandate did not differ greatly from that at the end of the Ottoman era. Then independence came and the 1950 constitution was issued, to be followed by other constitutions, most recently that of 1973. All of them said that the president must be Muslim, and that Islamic law was the main source of legislation. This implied that there was more than one source of legislation, which opened the door to the possibility of passing civil legislation that did not have to be completely compliant with Sharia. That may have been helped at the time by the fact that the social climate in Syria in general was conservatively religious but not fanatical, and with an undefined comprehension of social justice.

**ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES** At this point we will make do with a quick reference to some of the basic principles that a contemporary Islamic economy adopts:

It believes that money does not in itself generate money, meaning that money should increase as a result of actual profit (or decrease because of actual losses), through direct participation in real economic activity.

The fundamental principle is therefore that money should be used as an instrument in economic activity and should not be traded as a commodity in itself. In other words, the real mechanism is 'profit', not the interest rate. A fair number of contemporary economists say that interest rates are one of the most important factors behind instability in contemporary economies. Milton Friedman, the father of modern monetarism, speculated in the 1980s about the reasons for the unprecedentedly volatile behaviour of the U.S. economy, and replied that the answer that came to mind was that interest rates had been equally volatile. Fluctuations in interest rates affect money markets, which are subject to a large degree of uncertainty, which leads to sharp and unexpected fluctuations in real economic activity.

Advocates of an Islamic economy make the same point, and the modern Islamic banking system is based on this. Many Western banks in emerging market countries have been quick to set up Islamically-approved branches or special counters for Islamic banking inside their conventional banks. Some of them, such as Citibank and Chase, have set up completely Islamic banks that are independent of the parent company. There are no less than forty Islamic banks and

Islamic financial institutions in the United States alone. There are Islamic banks and branches, and counters for Islamic banking, in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, Austria and France. Of course that has not come about because of any ideological commitment to the idea, but to benefit from its banking and economic viability.

**REALITY BEFORE CONVICTIONS** To sum up, it is not possible to change a society by trying to change its culture and the way it thinks from the outside, without making allowance for its own laws and without respecting the rules that govern that society. That will not come about merely to satisfy outsiders, or without respect for that society's specificity, even in the age of globalisation and of large geopolitical groupings and transnational alliances, whether political or religious.

Generally speaking, societies are not formed around a bundle of interpretations, symbols, ideas and fantasies. They take shape around a tangible reality - functions and obligations, local and international, without which they cannot continue and survive. Foremost among those are the relationships of production, whether material or non-material, for the simple reason that they shape and define the basic functions in society, whereas intellectual and ideological incentives and motives, religions and schools of philosophy and so on are instruments of thought and cultural framing.

They are the means by which society expresses and explains how to produce and maybe reproduce the system in whose shadow they live, and also to understand their structure. These intellectual instruments make sense of society and many other things too, but they do not produce them; they put them in a philosophical context. This is not, however, to deny completely the influence of beliefs, whether religious or political, on social phenomena, including economic ones. But at the end of the day, especially in a time of globalisation, it is these that force beliefs to adapt to the social imperatives of people's real lives, and not the other way round.

**ALI AL-SALEH** gained his doctorate in Arab economic history at the University of Tübingen, and was a research fellow at the Institut français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) in Damascus until 2011. He currently lives in Germany.

Translation: Jonathan Wright

■ One of the most interesting and at the same time least-known ethics of participation and sharing is found in the African theory of *Ubuntu*. In this, people are not seen as individuals, as in the West, but as part of a network of a relationships to which past and future also belong. One of the most renowned experts on *Ubuntu* introduces us to the concept.

## THE VISION OF UBUNTU

### THE MAKING OF AN AFRICAN RELATIONAL ETHIC

BY **MUNYARADZI FELIX MUROVE**

Among the Bantu speaking people of Southern Africa, what it means to be ethical is encapsulated in the word *Ubuntu*, a word that means 'humanness'. *Ubuntu* manifests itself in the way one relates to other fellow human beings. It is within the context of relationships with fellow human beings that the individual's moral character or moral predisposition is revealed. A person who is described as endowed with *Ubuntu* is someone who lives virtuously in his or her relationships with other people, be they familiar or strangers.

**THE REALITY OF BELONGING** The ethic of *Ubuntu* is based on three primordial African indigenous anthropological presumptions about a human being. The first presumption is that the individual's ultimate wellbeing is indispensable to harmonious existence with others in the community, as well as with the transcendental contingent realm of immortality, which is culturally believed by Bantu people to be part and parcel of what it means to exist. Related to the first presumption in the ethic of *Ubuntu* is the idea that the individual's physical and psychological identity is derived from the reality of communal belongingness. In this regard, *Ubuntu* reminds us that what we are has been contributed to by those who existed prior to our own existence in the past, as well as those who are existing in the present, and that our present existence will also influence those who will exist in the future. The third presumption is based on the realisation that as human beings we are endowed with a natural urge to belong.

The conclusion arrived at in this discussion is that whilst *Ubuntu* remains one of the ethical traditions of the world, an element of uniqueness is that it is mainly an ethic based on the primacy of relationality as that which ultimately gives meaning to our human existence.

In the ethic of *Ubuntu*, harmonious relations are highly cherished on the grounds that they give rise to individual and communal flourishing. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe a person who lives harmoniously with others is usually referred to as *Munhu chaiye* – literally meaning a real human being. To be described as *Munhu chaiye* implies someone who is endowed with virtues, such as someone who is 'kind, humble and ready to help and share with [others], one who conforms to the social code of behaviour, respects others and is not greedy' (Michael Gelfand).



A scene from *Mitumba* by Stephanie Thiersch's dance company Mouvoir, illustrating the culture of giving and taking. Cf. the text on *Mitumba* on page 42 of this edition of *Art&Thought*. Photo: Mouvoir.de

A sense of concern for others or *Ukuzwela* – to feel for others – is usually cultivated into youngsters as one of the contributing factors to social harmony. Sickness and misfortunes are thus attributed to disharmony between the individual and the community. Thus one finds that in the realm of African bioethics, disease and sickness are usually interpreted by the African traditional doctor on the basis of harmony or disharmony in the person's relationships with the visible and invisible world. The quest for harmony in the ethic of *Ubuntu* is not restricted to human society only; rather, there is a strong presumption that social harmony should be reciprocated by cosmological harmony. Here the belief is that as human beings we are intimately related with all that exists within the universe. Nhlanhla Mkhize observed that through the principle of cosmic unity there 'emerges an ethic that prioritises social obligations to others, to one's community and to the cosmos in general. Individuals have to fulfil their duties and obligations to others and to the natural environment in order to maintain social equilibrium'.

**COSMOLOGICAL HARMONY** The idea of interpreting *Ubuntu* in relationship to cosmological harmony has been traced to the philosophy that was prevalent during the embryonic stages of African civilisation. Some scholars have maintained that African civilisation gave primacy to relationality as the underlying principle that cemented the whole of the universe together. In this regard, Ali Mazrui puts it more succinctly, as follows: 'African civilisations were characterised by the following attributes [...] no great distinction between the kingdom of God, the animal kingdom and the human kingdom; the crocodile would be a god; no sharp divide between the living and the dead. The pyramids were new residences of pharaohs.' Within such a cosmology the predominant understanding was that all that exists was in symbiosis. In other words, all that was real existed in a state of dependency and interdependence with other constituencies within the cosmos.

The belief in cosmological harmony led some African communities to identify themselves with a natural species through totemism, as their primordial ancestor from which

they traced their source of origins. The idea of totemic ancestorhood served as a principle that promoted harmony between humanity and the natural environment. In this mode of thought, what it means to be a person was not restricted to the existential realm of anthropocentrism; rather, our ultimate human identity was primarily heterogeneous in the sense that it encompassed the cosmos. For example, the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, narrated an African identity as something that encompasses the natural world. In his famous speech 'I am an African', which he read before the adoption of the constitution of the democratic South Africa in parliament, he had this to say: 'I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land.'

The prior existence of harmony between human beings and the natural world is observed by Philippe Junod when he observed that within the African totemic system 'there are feelings of affection and interdependence, of participation in one way of life, which in many ways are quite inspiring'.

He went on to assert that 'Totemism shows well one characteristic of the Bantu mind: the strong tendency to give a human soul to animals, to plants, to nature as such, a tendency which is at the very root of the most beautiful blossoms of poetry, a feeling that there is a community of substance between the various forms of life.' Within such a worldview, harmonious existence was thus prioritised over our habitual human tendency of abstracting humanity from the generality of existence.

**THE PRIMACY OF COMMUNITY** The idea that the individual is primarily a communal being is captured succinctly by an adage that says *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Zulu), or *motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho) – a person is a person because of other persons. As an individual, one is socialised in such a way that s/he should always remember that s/he has relational obligations towards the immediate family and the community at large. It is hereby submitted that in the light of the ethic of *Ubuntu*, to be a person is to live in communion and communication with others. The community is not a composition of individuals who happen to congregate on the basis of pursuing their diverse conflictual interests. By way of example, it is a common traditional practice in African communities that when the individual encounters a problem, such a death in the family, the whole community congregates at the homestead of the bereaved to express their solidarity with the bereaved, from the moment of death until burial. Sometimes the community contributes gifts in the form of food parcels and money to assist the bereaved family with their material and emotional needs.

A scene from *Mitumba* by Stephanie Thiersch's dance company Mouvoir, illustrating the culture of giving and taking. Cf. the text on *Mitumba* on page 42 of this edition of *Art&Thought*. Photo: Mouvoir.de



Individual achievements are celebrated with others in the community. Such achievements are not simply seen as the achievements of the individual, but rather as achievements of the community. In many African communities it is not regarded as an invasion of the privacy of the individual or family when you join in the celebration without any formal invitation. In the ethic of *Ubuntu*, the community is regarded as the source of strength for the individual's ultimate wellbeing and flourishing, because of the primacy that is given to care. A personal story I narrate with the aim of demonstrating the primacy of care in a community sensitised to the ethic of *Ubuntu* is that at the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic many children were orphaned at a tender age when their fathers and mothers died from the disease. My parents found themselves having to take care of twelve orphans who just came into the family without any formal invitation. My parents accepted these orphaned children without any complaint and treated them just as they treated us, their own blood children.

This sense of concern for the wellbeing of others is expressed in a way that shows the primacy of reciprocity. The individual's wellbeing is thus understood as the wellbeing of the community, inasmuch as the wellbeing of the community is also the wellbeing of the individual. John Mbiti captures this way of thinking as follows:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and other people. When he suffers he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group, his neighbours and his relatives, whether dead or living [...] The individual can only say: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.

What is implied in this mode of thought is that the individual's identity and ultimate wellbeing cannot be meaningful outside the domain of communion with others. This relation is ontological and transitive in the sense that the individual's being is communicative in such a way that it enters into communion with the lives of others, inasmuch as the lives of others enter into the individual's life.

Mbiti's assertion that 'The individual can only say: I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' is a rebuttal of the Cartesian individualism which emphasised the individual's incommunicability and singularity as indispensable to what it means to be a person. 'While the African definition of a person displays the human person as subsistent relationship – in other words, the person as fundamentally "being-with", "belonging to" – Western philosophy lays emphasis on the absolute originality and concreteness of the human person, "being-for-itself" [...] However, Western systems wish to guard against the dissolution of the person in relationship; the "I" is already constituted before it chooses to be related. The autonomy and the incommunicability of the "I" are fundamental.' (Elochukwu Uzukwu)

**UBUNTU AND COMMUNICABILITY** *Ubuntu* presumes communicability to be primary to what it means to be a person. A person is regarded as a person partly because of his or her openness to other persons. In this regard, people are open systems who communicate life or energy to other members of the community, or those they encounter. The self is basically an abstraction from the web of relationships whereby what is usually taken as a simple relationship is in fact a manifestation of a multiplicity of relationships. The individual's existence might manifest itself as particular, but detailed analysis of this existence will reveal a multiplicity of relations that are too complicated to analytically disentangle into meaningful parts.

For example, the Shona people of Zimbabwe have an adage about relationships which says *Ukama makore hunopfekana* – literally meaning that relationships are like clouds, they interpenetrate each other. Gabriel Setiloane expressed the primacy of communicability in *Ubuntu* by coining the word *seriti*, a Sesotho word which means vitality. As he puts it, 'Physically perceived, the human person is like a live electric wire which is forever exuding force or energy in all directions. The force that is thus exuded is called "*Seriti*" – *Isithunzi*.' In this regard, to be a person means to be in the position to

express vitality in relationship with other people in the community. The same idea of vitality or *seriti* was captured by Kenneth Kaunda as follows:

'Our whole life is togetherness, and to be cut off from our fellow human beings is to die of the soul. [...] We are known for our laughter, music and dancing. Rhythm is the very expression of the life force within us; it is symbolic both for our relationship with other people and with all created things. [...] We are conscious of only one world – living generations sway in rhythm with gods and ancestral spirits.'

The idea of human togetherness implies a form of existence that is based on relatedness and interrelatedness. A celebratory outlook towards life implies that whatever event that occurred in the life of the individual is shared with the whole community as an occasion of celebration. Within this context of celebration, the world of immortality and that of mortality are bonded into oneness. In this regard, the reality of communicability can thus be seen as an all-pervasive reality of existence. Because of the pervasiveness of relatedness, our human actions have consequences that pervade the present in a way that embraces the future. As human beings who exist in the present, we are bound to communicate our present existence into the future, for better or for worse. According to the ethic of *Ubuntu*, an individual is deemed ethical when s/he acts in way that takes into account the wellbeing of the present as well as that of the future. For example, there are proverbs that have the motif that one should always act in a way that does not compromise present relationships, because harmonious present relationships are a guarantee for harmonious existence in the future.

Within this ethical tradition, as Michael Gelfand observed, 'the present is the whole of the past looking into the future'. The implication of this observation is that future existence is basically an extension of the present, because that which will happen in the future is partly occurring in the present. Here the main presumption is that through our actions in the present we communicate with the future. Thus one finds a Zulu proverb admonishing an ethically short-sighted person that *Musa ukuqeda ubudlelwano manje ngoba kusasa uzofuna uku-buyela* – 'Do not disrupt harmonious relations because tomorrow you might find yourself wanting to come back.' A Zulu traditional doctor, Credo Mutwa, observed that the thoughts of the living sustain the souls of the ancestors through remembering. In this process of remembering, communication between the ancestors and the living is established.

**ANAMNESTIC SOLIDARITY WITH THE ANCESTORS** Another form of communication enshrined in the ethic of *Ubuntu* comes in the form of a celebration of the solidarity that is deemed to exist between the past and the present. Those who are still living actualise their communication with the past through a process of remembering. Thus, in this act of remembering, the living establish communication between themselves and the ancestors, whereby traditional beer, water, meat and snuff are offered as an expression of fellowship between the living and the ancestors, or the living as such. Here is how Kaunda expressed this communication: '[...] it is at such times that the barrier between the natural and the supernatural crashes down. We are conscious of only one world – the living generations sway in rhythm with gods and ancestral spirits.'

Benezet Bujo characterised this communication as based on anamnestic solidarity, which is a practice of establishing symbiosis between the past and the present. For Bujo, this anamnestic solidarity 'has to include the gratitude towards all forefathers [*sic*] who worked tirelessly to ensure the human future of later generations'. In anamnestic solidarity, the presumption is that whatever is happening now, at present, has to be acknowledged as happening because of its relatedness to the past – it has been partly contributed to by the past. In anamnestic solidarity with the ancestors, *Ubuntu* is expressed in the form of *isintu* (African traditional ethico-religious practices), which actualises communication between the living and the ancestors through the celebration of life. The conceptualisation of life as endless, which is embedded in this ethical tradition, unites members of the living and their ancestors.

**CRITICAL VOICES AGAINST THE ETHIC OF UBUNTU** In the light of the discussion proffered in the preceding sections, it is evidently clear that the ethic of *Ubuntu* is incompatible with individualism or egoism as entrenched in some of the writings of Western philosophers, whereby 'the self is always envisaged as something inside a person, or at least as a kind of a container of mental properties and powers'. Within such a conceptualisation of persons, individuals come together to form society instead of the community forming individuals. In other words, the individual can choose to belong to society or not. The individual is thus presumed to be endowed with properties that are incorrigible. The individual ontology that arises from *Ubuntu* is that an individual attains his or her personhood through belongingness to society. Ontologically, *Ubuntu* does

not define persons in terms of self-realisation; on the contrary, persons are persons through the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community. Stephen Theron critiqued the ethic of *Ubuntu* on the grounds that it undermines individual responsibility. He writes, 'As for the ethical implications, the proverb [*Umntu ngomuntu ngabantu*] simply side-steps the slow Western development of the idea of personal responsibility. [...] The proverb teaches Africans to evade responsibility, rather, to hide behind the collective decision of the tribe.' Obviously such a criticism is based on a misunderstanding of *Ubuntu* and what it ultimately means to be a person. The very idea of personal responsibility implies being in relationships and responding in kind to those relationships.

**INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY** The fact that in the ethic a person is defined in terms of relationships does not imply that s/he is conceived of as an individual who does not have responsibilities. Whilst the process of becoming a person takes place within the communal context, there is a strong belief in the ethic of *Ubuntu* that each individual is responsible for his or her own actions. For example, in Zulu there is a proverb that holds individual responsibility to be indispensable to a decent life. In this regard, an individual is admonished against irresponsibility with a proverb that says *Umntu uvuna akutshalile* – a person can only harvest what they have sown. In the ethic of *Ubuntu* a person is deemed to be a moral agent if s/he is able to reciprocate. For example, there is a Zulu saying, *Izandla ziyagezana* – one hand washes the other. This proverb presupposes that, for the individual to reciprocate, s/he must be a moral agent who can make his or her own independent decisions. Within this brief discussion it can be deduced that the ethic of *Ubuntu* recognises individuals as moral agents who can make their own independent decisions. What this ethical tradition does not favour is individualism; rather, one is admonished to exercise individual care for the wellbeing of the community.

Turning to the other criticism, it is claimed by the critics of the ethic of *Ubuntu* that such an ethical tradition does not have relevance to the modern life. Wim van Binsbergen argued that *Ubuntu* is being used by African academics to serve purposes that were not originally implied in the traditional articulation of this ethic. He avers:

'In the hands of academic philosophers, *Ubuntu/hunhu* has become a key concept to evoke the unadulterated forms of African social life before the European conquest. The world-view (in other words the values, beliefs and images) of pre-colonial Southern Africa is claimed to survive today, more or less, in remote villages and intimate kin relationships, and to constitute an inspiring blue-print for the present and future of social, economic and political life in urban and modern environments.'

In the light of the above quotation, it is evidently clear that van Binsbergen is obstinately refusing to admit that *Ubuntu* has any ethical relevance to today's modern post-colonial African society. I do not think this criticism can be supported by facts with regard to the African understanding of ethics.

When Africans in Southern Africa talk of ethics they usually refer to it as *Ubuntu* (Zulu/Ndebele/Xhosa) / *Botho* (Sotho/Tswana/Pedi) / *Hunhu* (Shona). An amoral person is described as lacking in *Ubuntu/Hunhu*, which implies a lack of humanness. As for van Binsbergen, because of the effects of colonialism and globalisation *Ubuntu* is not used even by traditional African societies. For this reason, he retorted that *Ubuntu* should be seen as serving certain ideological purposes.

The fallacy inherent in his critique of *Ubuntu* is that it fails to interrogate the dominant Southern African understanding of ethics. Both urbanised and rural Africans articulate ethics in terms of *Ubuntu* or humanness. To relegate *Ubuntu* to a dream that once prevailed in the past is tantamount to denying the existence of an ethical tradition among Africans. The idea that Africans did not have an ethical tradition is well enunciated by van Binsbergen when he said, 'If *Ubuntu* is to be Africa's great gift to the global world of thought, it is primarily not the African villager's gift, but that of the academic and managerial codifiers who allowed themselves to be distantly and selectively inspired by village life: ignoring the ubiquitous conflicts and contradictions, the oppressive immanence of the world-view, the witchcraft...' (van Binsbergen, 2002). It is important to note that van Binsbergen's observation is imbued with an aura of condescension which is partly caused by his ignorance of the African. His ignorance is demonstrated by the fact that he sees African academics as completely different from African villagers.

An urban or modernised African or academic and a rural African remain the same person, sharing the same cultural upbringing with those who stay in the village. For both the modernised African and the rural African, morality is based on *Ubuntu*. This point was demonstrated by Nkonko Kamwangamulu when he said, 'Sociolinguistically, *Ubuntu* is a multidimensional concept which represents the core values of African ontologies; respect for any human being, for human dignity and for human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism, to list but a few.'

In the light of this observation, it is clear that *Ubuntu* remains pivotal to African ethics. Any discourse on African ethics that omits it will thus remain perpetually deficient.

**MUNYARADZI FELIX MUROVE** teaches at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa. He is currently involved in research on applied African Ethics with specific reference to issues of peace and security in the world. Among the books he has edited is *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*.

Links:

[www.soweto.co.za](http://www.soweto.co.za)

<http://srpc.ukzn.ac.za/staff-profile/ethics/munyaradzi-felix-murove.aspx>

■ Dance and economics, dance and politics, dance and criticism – this combination is not an avant-garde artist's fantasy but reality, as demonstrated by the international cast of *Mitumba*, a dance performance by the German-based dance company MOUVOIR. The dance critic Arnd Wesemann introduces the piece.

## THE WORLD ORDER OF CLOTHES

### STEPHANIE THIRSCH'S *MITUMBA*: MADE IN KENYA

BY ARND WESEMANN

Two-metre-high upright steel containers with a stiff hatch are part of the streetscape in Germany: you see more of them here than anywhere else in Europe. They stand at the side of the road, where they're filled with sackfuls of discarded clothes and shoes. As the hatch closes, the iron jaws squeak. It's supposed to feel as if a bank vault is swallowing expensive materials. If you leave your wallet in the pocket of a pair of trousers and throw them in by mistake, you've lost it for good. Hardly anyone knows what happens to these clothes and shoes. Initially set up as 'clothes donations for a good cause' – for the homeless, refugees, other persons in need – many of these bins have long since been inscribed with the more sober description 'Recycling bin'.

**NEW FROM OLD** Most of their contents are sent to East Africa, for 'charitable purposes'. Last year, they made more than 12 million euros for the German Red Cross alone. As 'mitumba', the Kiswahili word for old clothes, they finish up at the enormous markets in Mombasa and Nairobi, which are now also attracting the attention of the international clothing industry. There are hundreds of tailors at these huge markets, skilfully altering suits and letting out skirts at their sewing machines in the midst of all the turmoil. The idea is for them in future to constitute the core workforce in brand-new textile factories, which will produce cheap clothing for Europe and the US at an even lower cost than in Vietnam or Bangladesh – in Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia.

It's the small man's market that inspires the choreographer Stephanie Thiersch. Her performance *Mitumba* doesn't start on the stage; instead, it establishes itself as a marketplace where goods are offered for sale, where visitors try on clothes, and dancers, as feisty traders, haggle for the best price. It's almost like in Gikomba, Ngara or Githurai, the biggest markets in Nairobi. 'Kilometres of labyrinths, where every vendor is specialised: one deals only in white men's trousers, another in babies' romper suits, and they all benefit, they've got work. You wear something on your skin that somebody else wore before you. I buy super-hip 1970s clothes there for 20 cents, take them back with me to Germany, sell them here to upmarket second-hand shops. Maybe we could finance our project that way,' Thiersch mused some years ago.

Where this market feels like an industry, Germany now has only its diminutive form: the flea market. Stephanie Thiersch relocates it in a museum or a theatre foyer. There are even improvised changing rooms. The visitors-cum-audience barter a little, hesitate too, because they may not be convinced by the wares, until gradually eleven dancers emerge from among the African traders and European audience, characters in a transcontinental happening designed to take place on an equal footing, which aims to inquire into the mindsets behind this spirit of recycling scraps.

**COSTUMES OF HAPPENSTANCE** The things being traded in the context of a performance like this are not anonymous clothes but local donations, items from real wardrobes. Thiersch, a trained dancer and media artist with a degree in Romance languages, skilfully enquires as to the reasons why this pullover has been sacrificed, why that suit has to leave the sphere of private ownership. The clothes enter into the costume stock, become costumes of happenstance in that the dancers happen upon them and are transformed by them. That in itself is enough to make us think of Mombasa, where every day the city, the country, the people are flooded with tonnes of used clothes, transforming their world into a second-hand market where tourists buy things, too, and European buyers purchase stock for their boutiques back home, as if it were Africa's job to fish the pearls out of the rubbish that these clothes really are. Appropriately, homage is paid to this resurrection of the rejects with a zombie dance. The third-rate clothes are paraded on a catwalk, displaying great relish in colourful combination.

An auction with very low bids is even fleetingly reminiscent of a slave market from days of yore, even if those wearing the clothes are just models and not themselves the wares. Kenya buys bundles of old clothes by the container, as one buyer tells Stephanie Thiersch; they are sold on to middlemen who sort, repair and transport them, thereby creating a long chain of added value right down to the furthest villages. Meanwhile a female dancer, who is carelessly pushed around, represents an engine of this chauvinistically-structured trader culture. The woman, greedy for fashion, literally becomes the bearer of fashion, laden with more and more clothes until she stiffens into an icon of this very rudimentary-looking fashion business.

A scene from *Mitumba* by  
Stephanie Thiersch's  
dance company Mouvoir,  
illustrating the culture  
of giving and taking.  
Photo: Mouvoir.de



**CO-OPERATION WITH THE GOETHE-INSTITUT** *Mitumba*, created in 2012/2013 in co-operation with the Goethe-Institut Nairobi and the Foreign Office, shows the trade in second-hand goods, which can certainly also be considered to include disassembled cars, as spare-part graveyards, and even the organ trade. Behind recycling, a thriving sustainability movement in Europe since the 1980s at least, Thiersch reveals the shadow empire of survival on the African continent, whose own raw materials often don't belong to it and come back to it, via the circuitous route of Europe, as rubbish. In Europe, the ecological movement celebrates this as a successful model, the one-world market; especially as, for white people, goods from Africa give them a sense of their lost past returning.

Old cars, long since withdrawn from circulation in Germany, evoke a sense of elation in Africa tourists, just like the noisy, feisty, exuberant markets that spark a vague sense of a distant childhood before Europe rebuilt its markets as smoke-free, air-conditioned, stylised shopping malls so that people here in Europe could buy clothes sewn in Bangladesh, China and Turkey, which will at some point pass on to the final phase of their lives in the *mitumba* of Nairobi. Or perhaps, in the near future, with the help of market leaders like Zara, Primark or H&M, will be allowed to be produced there. At second-hand prices, of course.

A scene from *Mitumba* by  
Stephanie Thiersch's  
dance company Mouvoir,  
illustrating the culture  
of giving and taking.  
Photo: Mouvoir.de



**ARND WESEMANN** has been the editor of *Tanz* magazine in Berlin since 1997. His most recent publication was the polemic 'Made in Bangladesh' for *leesmagazijn.nl*, about exploitation in the art world in Europe, and in the sewing industry further afield.

Translation: Charlotte Collins

Link:  
[www.mouvoir.de](http://www.mouvoir.de)

■ Joseph Beuys' concept of art culminated in the sentence 'Everyone is an artist'. In this, romantic and anthroposophical movements came together in an all-encompassing philosophy of life, the central element of which is participation. Against the backdrop of current world economic problems, what can this idea of participation contribute to art, and to the world?

## EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST

### THE PARTICIPATIVE CONTEXT OF THE ARTIST JOSEPH BEUYS

BY **KONSTANTIN ADAMOPOULOS**

Joseph Beuys formulated a new understanding of art. Essentially, it is a very old concept of artistic creation that is not confined to individual geniuses and a small range of media. His view potentially encompasses every individual, as well as animals, the physical and the metaphysical world, as expressed in spirituality and science. Beuys recognised that 'Everyone [is] an artist.'

The early Romantic writer Novalis formulated this idea as an injunction in his aphorisms of 1798: 'Everyone should be an artist.' Beuys turned the sentence itself into a work of art, by raising it – strikingly changed – to the next level, in the sense of: you are the artist of your own biography (act accordingly).

**ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED** Even before World War Two, Beuys (1921-1986) was introduced to the ideas of the social and ecological reformer and anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner. After gaining a deeper understanding of the natural sciences, primarily botany, zoology, geography and their methodologies, from 1946 onwards he studied sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art; from 1947 with Ewald Mataré, who accepted him into his master class in 1951. Doubts about the classical conception of art and its formal language caused Beuys to suffer a deep psychological crisis of meaning in the 1950s, which he got through with the support of an anthroposophical farming family in the Lower Rhine area, working each day in the fields and drawing. In this phase of spiritual crisis and doubts about his identity, the way in which he had to extend the concept of art became clear to him.

All the collective requirements of society should be shaped by art as an attitude. The individual is the creative agent, who in his creation refers to the animate and the inanimate, the visible and the invisible, the internal and the external. We feel the extent to which that actually applies in, for example, environmental pollution or natural disasters, in the crisis of capitalism, in conflicting religious points of view or with regard to freedom, dignity and justice. Nothing seems to be a purely 'private matter' any more. Everything is shown to be connected to everything else.

With this in mind, with the term 'social sculpture' Beuys was formulating a task for both individuals and the commu-



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Photo: Volker Schäfer

nity. He opened up the art and creativity of the individual towards an ecologically-comprehended whole. In a 1973 interview he said that ecology didn't interest him 'directly, in the educational sense, about, say, "environmental pollution". I am [...] intensely interested in ecology, but not only in that of the external environment, in inner ecology as well – thoughts, feelings and urges – man's true powers. If we do not change these, we will never be able to change the given environment.' Steiner spoke along similar lines fifty years earlier in his *Philosophy of Freedom*, about an ethical individualism that comprehended itself as thinking, feeling, and spiritual in intention.

These insights could also be rewritten as follows: in every person there lives something that does not live in others. A successful life means making this thing that is special and individual effective in a way that is helpful to all. To do this I need to engage with others, in order to discover my own capabilities in so doing. Development requires this further step, to which we can only invite each other reciprocally. It is also about healing – from fear and a safety-conscious attitude, for example. As mankind we are connected with one another, from even before the egg and the sperm cells combine, right up until after our death, when what we leave behind as the results of our life – the forces, things completed and uncompleted – continue to have an effect.

Every day we recognise and set ourselves goals and tasks that we want to achieve and complete in the future. In this way we enrich our present with optimism and, as a result of the experiences we have later on, we are constantly re-explaining our past in retrospect. Creative shaping, then, goes beyond art

in the classic sense, as in music, literature, architecture and fine art, and lets each and every one of us form his individual biography, integrated into his communities and roles, convictions, truths and untruths. Beuys extended the task of art to include orientation: without the awareness of being integrated in cosmic forces and circumstances, we are very unlikely to get anywhere. At the same time, we act (at best) for our own internal reasons and as a result of our own insights, and correct each other.

#### CITY AFFORESTATION INSTEAD OF CITY ADMINISTRATION

The first big art exhibition I visited was *documenta 7* in Kassel in 1982. I was twenty-one years old, and arrived with my friends directly at Friedrichsplatz. In front of the main exhibition building we encountered 7,000 basalt steles, piled up on top of one another, impossible to miss. The effect was that of a wall. From photos taken at the time I know today that the wedge-shaped stones were laid out in a sharp triangle. The basalt pillars, each weighing between fifty and a hundred kilograms, were between one and a half and two metres long, and thus had human dimensions. In retrospect, in their similarity to each other, in form, materiality and, at the same time, in their peculiarity, they suggest something of notional possibilities tossed one on top of the other. The mass of stone radiated an immense pictorial power. It related to potentiality and the interaction of material and higher form, or their transformation. It had a spontaneous effect on me. Its capacity was insurmountable, irrefutable, irrevocable. It was a sheer force that knocked me over inside, struck me dumb. I can still feel the

power of it today, materially and intellectually, and it is almost too much.

As part of his art action, Beuys called for the 7,000 stones to be collected from the central square in individual, partial actions and erected all over the city. The idea was also, over the course of the five years until the next *documenta*, to plant a sapling beside each one, thereby creating an interaction between nature and organic material. It involved nothing less than doubling the tree population of Kassel at the time. With these *7000 Oaks* Beuys integrated two exhibitions, *documenta 7* and *8*, as well as the time in between. 'City afforestation instead of city administration' was the social art motto. There were protests. Many people got very worked up about him and about his action. But Beuys understood the action as social and ecological art between people. To symbolise the beginning, a first stone was erected at the apex of the initial sculpture, the triangle of basalt steles, and a first sapling planted beside it. This undertaking seemed to me to be futile, hopeless, pathetic, and at the same time audacious, brazen, sublime. Here was someone seriously undertaking a project that he could not accomplish on his own, either financially or in terms of its practical execution. Beuys was obviously committing himself with all his might into the hands of countless other people. In a documentary film he said, 'So I am of course also dependent on the people who recognised this idea as an art that is ecologically right, a social art, an ecological art.'<sup>1</sup>

The fact is that this gesture impressed not only me. It was a real scandal, with arguments of every colour, all sorts of malice and resistance. Nonetheless, or precisely because of this, the people of Kassel took up the invitation. Kindergartens, old people's homes, high schools, even the city council, and independent initiatives all began to consider it. Whether they felt that they were part of a bigger artwork, part of an organism, is hard to say. Certainly the majority could identify with it insofar as by planting the trees they were also taking a stand against their own impotence. Countless numbers of people set off to transform the pile of stones in front of the Fridericianum museum by way of their individual activity.

In Kassel, the action of one individual was taken seriously as an example and translated into a common initiative. One individual handed it on to many, who transformed it for themselves and for the whole, in a decentralised way. The initial image of a wedge of heaped-up stone steles produced individually-organised community actions with trees in the urban environment. The stone material, originally perceived as rather oppressive, becomes, in comparison to the growing trees, smaller and smaller. To this day these trees invigorate, in their incidental way, the cityscape of Kassel.

**CIRCUMSTANCES CAN BE CHANGED** What can the idea of participation achieve? We people create our own conditions for participation. The question is whether my Self flourishes in so doing, whether under these circumstances my spiritual identity finds its own true purpose, as Jelle van der Meulen emphasises in his book *Herzwerk* [Heartwork]. For him, civil society is

based 'on the idea that free citizens can grasp free initiatives that run right through states and organisations'. A new quality of creativity arises in the free interaction of non-institutionalised movements and social initiatives and individual manpower. With this, a third sector of society fortifies itself alongside the authority of state and the economy, which have until now been dominant.

Circumstances can be changed. Is the peaceful revolution at the end of the 1980s in the east of Germany still an encouraging example of this, twenty-five years on? In the sense of having been an artistic-creative impulse towards freedom, the numerous self-organised initiatives and their unifying power which led to the fall of East Germany as state socialism are certainly still not given enough credit. The elites mistrusted the possible surge of creativity by the confusingly large number of different forces.

'As far as I'm concerned, politics is unnecessary. The creative concept for all the tasks people have on earth is the one that will bring results in the future,' said Beuys, in the interview mentioned above.

**PARTICIPATION AND THE ECONOMY** Based on Beuys' concept of art as depicted here, we can learn the following about the connections between the economy and participative art like that of Beuys:

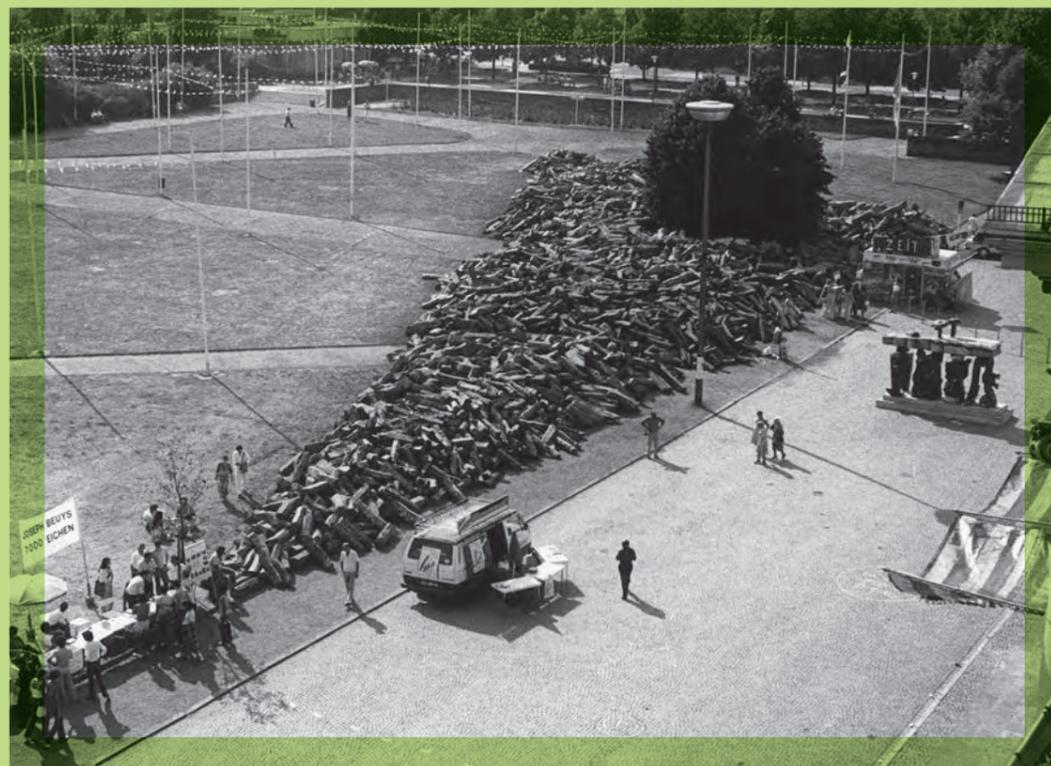
Artistic and economic activity are part of the respective social culture in which we live – here or there, yesterday or today. Artistic work and economic activity are both forms of human enterprise and as such are subject to historical, regional, global, anti-cyclical shaping factors.

'Everyone is an artist' does not mean that everyone should be a painter, musician, architect, author or actor, but that everyone is actively, creatively, forming their own biography. In this sense, even passivity is a creative, formative activity. As creator (or 'artist') of our respective biographies, we are integrated into historical, social, ideological, religious contexts, which we in turn co-create and alter in and with our biography, in that we adopt and support these circumstances, allow them to flourish, ignore, correct, accentuate, propagate them, and by the fact that we in any case pass them on to our children, more or less consciously. In this, the aim of the individual activities is to ultimately, despite all sorts of possible errors and detours, be helpful to the whole.

Rudolf Steiner construed the encounter between people as a sacrament. We live in relationships even before we are born; through birth we enter into an increasingly perceptible network of encounters. Communicating mantles such as parents, family, community are not just passively assigned to us; we also take an active part in shaping these mantles ourselves, from the beginning. The psychological and medical consequences of these interactions are so great that we cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Beuys – *Einschmelzung der Zarenkrone*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1982. Documentary film with an interview by Werner Raeune, © ZDF, 2004



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Photo: Dieter Schwerdtle

gin to get an overview of them. In the encounters, we are negotiating the earthly and the spiritual, which sustains us and which, at the same time, we embody. To put it emphatically, from the very beginning participation has, at its heart, contributed both to the world and reciprocally, to the same degree, to the constitution of the self. We are in participation – or we are not.

Capitalist economics are based on individual and collective fears and needs and, on this basis, encourage competition. Does it have to stay that way? Can it stay that way? The competition economy, to which we in some respects owe a great deal, increasingly confronts us with individual and collective misery, with the destruction of psychological creativity, with problems of global resources, with extreme inequality in the distribution of resources and wealth, and, finally, with climate change. Also, in the economy itself, connections and co-operations across 'competitor borders' are now recognised as essential for survival. The economic question here would be what transformation from competition to cooperation might look like.

The economy of the common good, then, is a subject that affects everyone, even if here and there it is differently formulated, understood, or indeed manipulated. The ecological question becomes a question of global design for the whole of humanity. We all participate in it, the dependent as well as the possibly less dependent 'players' in the economy. What sort of world do we want to live in? Participation has become a cross-generational task.

As a human being, I would like to be a participant in designing or even transforming our world. And whether I like it or

not, I am and have always been a participant in the daily transformation of my life. This also includes saying what I don't want (any more), e.g. factory farming, nuclear power, political/party dictatorship. I would like to be able to express my individual doubts and questions, even if I (still) have no alternative. For that, however, I need all the others before me, with me, after me. I need mental inspiration, to be mentally connected with all that exists. What I as a human would like to discuss and shape, I would like to take responsibility for, because only I, the human among humans, can take responsibility. A system logic can never do that, even if it were conceived as an optimised piece of clockwork. I cannot abdicate my responsibility. Participation, then, however indefinable it may be on an individual basis, is also a way of defining the standpoint of social culture, individual biography, art, the economy, spirituality. How does participation between people come alive? – Every thought counts.

**KONSTANTIN ADAMOPOULOS** is an art historian, cultural mediator and coach specialising in the field of art and business. Since 2005 he has been responsible for the 'Bronnbacher Grant Programme – Cultural Competence for Executives of the Future' of the economic cultural group of the Federation of German Industries (BDI). In 2013 he was Curator in Residence for the Goethe-Institut in Detroit.

Translation: Charlotte Collins

■ The German artist Susanne Bosch, who works internationally, explains how the concept of participation in the field of art came about, and examines current debate on the subject. In this article, she tells us why she herself is attracted to this type of artistic work, and what this new art form aims to achieve. With reference to an example of her work in the Islamic world, she explains how she puts the art form into practice.

## BETWEEN POLITICS AND AESTHETICS

### PARTICIPATION IN ART

BY SUSANNE BOSCH

For millennia, fine art has repeatedly returned to the subject of 'utopias'. The artist Joseph Beuys' theory of 'social sculpture' states that every human being is capable of contributing to the well-being of the community through creative action, thereby having a 'sculpturing' effect on society. Artistic processes must actively participate in society if they aim to creatively shape society rather than simply to create art. Claus Leggewie and Harald Welzer have given exemplary formulations of some of the questions that also preoccupy me:

*What is a just and sustainable way for democracies to react to the economic and ecological crises? Financial and economic crises, climate change, diminishing resources and the predatory exploitation of the future of coming generations constitute unprecedented social dynamite. Analysis of the mounting crises shows how democracies will go to the dogs unless they undergo radical renewal and find a way out of the dominant culture of wastefulness. Is it possible to transform a system based on perpetual growth into an economic and social system that is based, instead, on justice and quality of life?<sup>1</sup>*

In my capacity as an artist I have for many years now been interested in self-initiated enterprises that address themes such as local supply, cooperative financial management and community-building. This quietly-growing worldwide movement is trying to respond to contemporary global challenges. What this heterogeneous movement is doing is, for me, an artwork in the Beuysian sense, one that takes an exciting approach to engaging with the formation of a way of life that will be sustainable into the future. These initiatives move from ideas to action, a step that often requires you to enter completely uncharted waters on your own initiative: in other words, invent yourself.

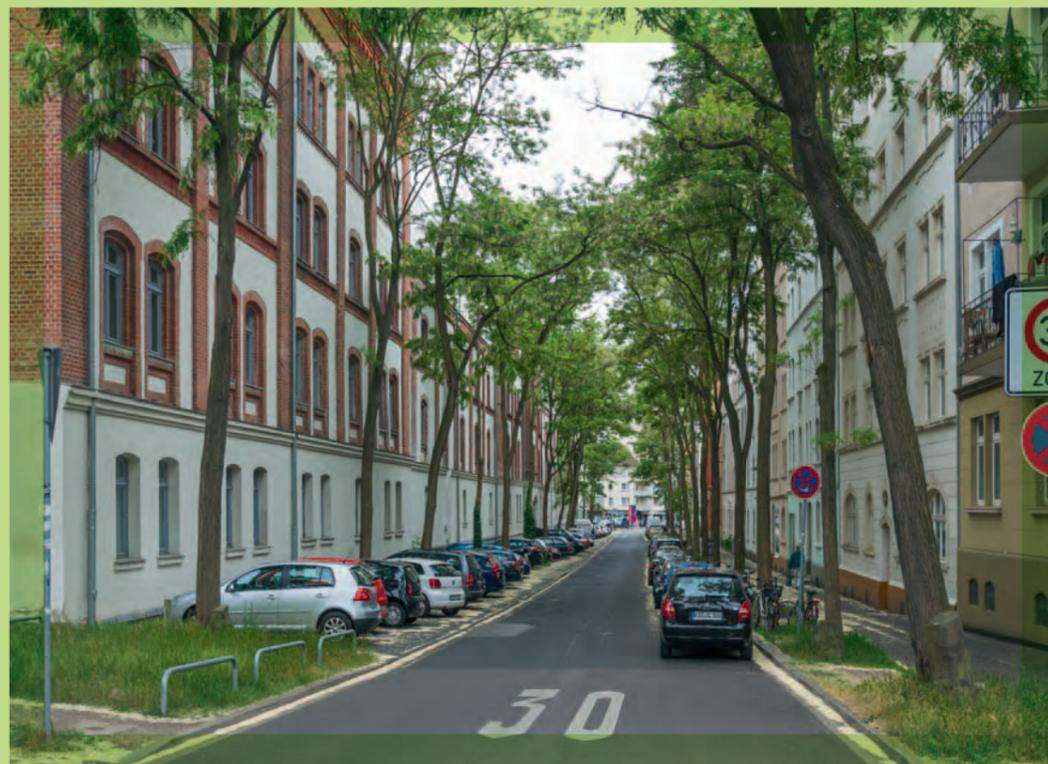
**GIVE AND TAKE** As an artist I am interested in discovering what attitude, structure and methods contribute towards collectively shaping the world as we would like it to be; how it can be life-sustaining, peaceful, and climate-friendly. In addition to my artistic skills, I am constantly learning from precisely these global movements about methods, structures and attitudes that facilitate collective, concerted action. How and when do collective intelligence, collaboration and self-organisation take place? Does it depend on the degree of developed democracy? Does it have anything at all to do with an idea of democracy?

*'Fundamentally, participation models and forms emerge from the artist's dissatisfaction with the status quo. Dissatisfaction with artistic parameters on the one hand, with cultural, social and political parameters on the other, or sometimes a combination of the two – that was and is to this day the most important motivation for artists to develop alternative artistic strategies – participatory ones, for example – and practices of development, production and distribution[...], whereas it is sometimes artistic, sometimes social/political stimuli, interrogations, connections and aims that take centre stage.<sup>2</sup>*

In an essay from 1997, the theoretician Miwon Kwon describes the remarkable changes that have taken place in forms of artistic practice in public spaces in the preceding thirty years.

<sup>1</sup> *Das Ende der Welt, wie wir sie kannten*, ed. Claus Leggewie, Harald Welzer. Fischer Verlag, 2009. <http://memory-research.de/cms/k104.Publications-Selection.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Feldhoff, Silke: *Zwischen Spiel und Politik. Partizipation als Strategie und Praxis in der bildenden Kunst*, College of Fine Arts at the Berlin University of the Arts, 2009



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Photo: Anli Latrich

According to her, there are three paradigms, which can be schematically differentiated from each other:

*'Art in public spaces, typically modernist abstracts in an external space intended to "beautify" or "enrich" the urban space, particularly in squares in front of official buildings or office blocks; art as public space, less object-orientated, more site-specific art that seeks a more intensive integration of art, architecture and surroundings, for which artists work together with those responsible for designing the town (from the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, town planning, urban design and city administration) on long-term urban development projects such as parks, open spaces, buildings, shopping malls, housing estates etc.; and finally, art in the public interest (or "New Genre Public Art"), often temporary urban projects more concerned with social themes than with the architectural surroundings, which favour cooperation with (marginalised) social groups over that with (design) professionals, and which work on developing communities' political consciousness.'*<sup>3</sup>

These three paradigms in art in public spaces – the sculptural, the site-specific and the contextual paradigm – reflect, according to Kwon, a complex change in art, which has experienced a reorientation towards social processes:

*'The shifting of emphasis from aesthetic to social concerns, from a primarily object-centred idea of the artwork to ephemeral processes and events, from permanent installations to temporary interventions, from the primacy of production as the source of meaning to reception as the place of interpretation, finally from the autonomy of authorship to its multiple diversification into participatory projects.'*<sup>4</sup>

**THE ISSUE OF QUALITY** The quality of the ephemeral processes referred to here is of crucial importance. Many art actions remain stuck at the gestural level in a space reserved solely for art and do not draw on the potential that exists in the interaction of observation and production, which Stefania Mantovani and Federica Thiene of *artway of thinking*, referencing Joseph Beuys, call 'co-creation'.<sup>5</sup> As in all other structures that allow degrees and forms of involvement at varying levels of intensity, we see that the more communication, dialogue, respect, humility etc. are consciously shaped and appreciated, the more open this space is, the more trust it creates in the competence of the community, the more actively the community will participate as a result. Ultimately, 'participate' means becoming a community of responsibility that is aware of its duties and rights, that takes an active part in decision-making. Silke Feldhoff defines participation in art as follows:

*'An artistic setting is therefore characterised as "participatory" in that it invites intellectual participation (purely intellectual understanding of an artistic work), or social participation (awareness-raising, re-enactment of particular social processes, integration in decision-making processes), or physical participation (concrete, active physical involvement). A focus on procedural work rather than the production of final works is another criterion.*

*Concentration on societal and social aspects, however, is merely an oft-encountered but not necessary form of participatory work. Especially with the criterion of "active participation", it is important to differentiate between participation and interactivity or collective action. Criticism and theory have often failed to make this distinction. This is one of the roots of the conceptual vagueness that characterises the discussion around participatory projects today.'*<sup>6</sup>

At this point I would like to return to my connection with the global sustainability movement referred to at the start of my article in the quotation from Claus Leggewie. The ethical criteria practised there are based on the idea of connectedness through participation in a community. The problem in the existing artistic context, including the art market, is a permanent insistence on authorship, uniqueness and artistic autonomy, all of which are disjunctive elements. There have been repeated calls for the abolition of these criteria for participatory art projects, and the situation and evaluation of this artistic genre within the existing artistic system remains an open question. Artists with participatory working methods often live within the ambivalence of two systems. They are constantly in danger of excluding themselves from one or the other discourse. Can, or even must, a participatory art project play a role in the context of a museum or a biennale, and if so, how does it get there, and how is it situated appropriately?

Giving and receiving form the basis for connectedness and co-intelligence, as well as co-creation. This internal attitude must be reflected in the form being offered, i.e. through the interaction of observation and production. People have a fine intuition regarding genuine invitations to participate, and can swiftly differentiate these from formats that look identical but are differently motivated. For this reason, factors such as the interests of the organisation or institution issuing the invitation, financial backers' conditions, and the requirements of other sponsors play a decisive role in the success of this artistic practice.

**RELATIONAL AESTHETICS** Relationships are central to this form of artistic work. In participatory art, we speak of relational aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> It deals with 'the processes of love'. Elements of these aesthetics are part of our everyday lives, while at the same time being components of an unusual – because ultimately invisible – sculpture. Beuys called this approach 'invisible

3 Kwon, Miwon (1997): *Public Art und städtische Identitäten*, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/kwon/de/>

4 *ibid.*

5 Jacob, Mary Jane and Baas, Jacquelynn (Eds.): *Modern Mind: Chicago Makes Modernism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2012. 'Integrating Art and Life', an interview with *artway of thinking* by Mary Jane Jacob.

6 Feldhoff, Silke: *Zwischen Spiel und Politik. Partizipation als Strategie und Praxis in der bildenden Kunst*, College of Fine Arts at the Berlin University of the Arts, 2009.

7 Bourriaud, Nicolas: *Relational Aesthetics*. Les presses du réel, Dijon 2002.

sculpture': formations that initially occur in the invisible relational space before materialising and becoming concrete. No one can ever see them as a whole.

The art historian Claire Bishop differentiates between two artistic strategies for opening up or creating the space for participatory art. One is an artistic practice that offers an alterna-

tive to social injustice through artistic actions that influence society. The second is an artistic approach that primarily confronts the situation with its own rules of the game. My practice undoubtedly belongs in the first category, and I very much respect the powerful influence of the second approach. The following is an example from my own artistic practice.

## THE EXAMPLE OF JERICHO: BEYOND THE CELESTIAL AND TERRESTRIAL 4<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF *CITIES EXHIBITION*, PALESTINE, 2011-2013

I responded to an open call for proposals from Birzeit Museum in Birzeit, Palestine<sup>8</sup>, with the following project: 'Change-makers'<sup>9</sup>. As one of five artists selected (besides myself: Iyad Issa, Samah Hijawi, Sarah Beddington, Shuruq Harb), we embarked on a process that was to last about a year, in which we were invited to engage with the city of Jericho. The process was divided into three phases: on-site research, which was published in a book, a participatory intervention in the field, and finally an exhibition in the Birzeit Museum.

Founded by Vera Tamari<sup>10</sup>, the initial idea behind the concept of the *Cities Exhibition* was to direct attention to a variety of relationships between people, place and time, and thus to highlight the uniqueness of each Palestinian city in its present-day incarnation. *Cities Exhibition* attempted to show, beyond typical representations of nostalgia and folklore in Palestine, the coexistence of past and present cultural reality, in order not only to reinforce the uniqueness of cities like Jericho, but also to evoke questions of memory, identity and change. To this end, Yazid Anani<sup>11</sup>, the curator of this project, invited us five artists to explore Jericho through a series of 'routes'.

During my research phase, which concentrated on using geomantic approaches to discover why this place has repeatedly played an important role, both historically and in the present, I 'co-incidentally' came across a project I had been unaware of until then: the Arab Development Society (ADS). It was founded in the 1950s by Musa Alami and exists, in part, to this day. The idea behind this project is that of communal, co-operative, social action, of collective learning and spatial settlement and cultivation of food.

Musa Alami, the founder, was convinced that there had to be water in the Jordan Valley. After months of digging, water was indeed found in the desert land they had purchased, and a not-for-profit organisation was established, along with an agricultural school and a test farm with up to three hundred

inhabitants. Several generations of Palestinians were vocationally schooled. The ADS still exists today, as a farm for milk products, dates and fish, supplying large parts of the West Bank with its local produce. Sixty-five people work on the farm, and twenty-one families live on the generously laid out plot of land.

**NOCTURNAL WALK** From the series of works that originated in Jericho<sup>12</sup>, I would like to focus here on a participative intervention that took place on site. On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012 I invited people to walk together on a silent march through the night. Seventy people turned up at the Ein Dyuk spring at the foot of the Mountain of Temptation, *Ġabal al-Qurunṭul*. We walked in silence for more than three hours through the Jericho landscape, following one another in a long chain: starting in the mountains, we walked along the irrigation canals through the fields, on through the outskirts and into the centre of Jericho, then into the final phase in the flat desert landscape towards Jordan, finishing in the ADS school (now empty). There we broke our silence, reflected on this experience of walking through this space together, and concluded the action with a meal in the open air, under the night sky, in a heat that had now become bearable.

This performative act of walking through space was about the collective creation of spatial knowledge through experience. The silent communal walking (always with someone else's back in front of you) created a sense of cohesion without the need to communicate with one another, verbally or non-verbally. We agreed the ground rules of co-existence while walking:

*I will remain completely silent.*

*I will walk in a line.*

*I will follow the person in front of me.*

*I will switch off my mobile phone and not use it.*

*I will not take photos.*

*I will not smoke.*

*I will not re-act if addressed directly by people passing by.*

We stopped twice for water and toilets. This time, too, was spent in silence. Some people wrote down things that were buzzing about in their heads. Walking in the dark sharpens other senses of perception: smell, hearing, and bodily senses.

8 <http://www.birzeit.edu/institutes/museum4>

9 <http://susannebosch.de/112.0.html>

10 <http://www.qalandiyainternational.org/artists/vera-tamari>

11 [http://www.artterritories.net/designingciviccounter/?page\\_id=13](http://www.artterritories.net/designingciviccounter/?page_id=13)

12 <http://electronicintifada.net/content/thought-provoking-art-exhibition-images-earthquake-palestine/12265>

The silence allows us to listen to what is going on around us, but also to become aware of our inner 'noise'. Hiking through landscapes creates a different form of connection with the place. The tempo enables one to form a completely different awareness of place.

I knew, from the many times I had stayed here, that for many Palestinians the occupation had ruined their ongoing experience of their living environment. People travel through the various administration zones - A, B and C - by car, by bus, or not at all. Historically, however, Palestinians are deeply connected with their agricultural land, from walking across it, from driving animals across the mountains, from the processes of harvesting crops. In art and literature there is an extensive wealth of expressions for the beauty of the land and of nature. The Palestinians' souls are deeply rooted in this landscape. The fact that, despite this, the space cannot be experienced today has created a division that takes multiple forms: the origin of materials and food is unknown; the localisation of family and origins is no longer relevant; respect for nature and landscape occurs only from the perspective of distance.

The majority of the participants were Palestinian men and women from the West Bank, many of them from Jericho itself, and quite a lot of them had never walked through this landscape in their lives. The context gave people of all ages and sexes the chance to perceive their living environment differently, in a clear, safe framework.

Here is some of the feedback from participants:

1  
 ليس أنا الخلق خلقني  
 Why I was created as  
 Palestinian?

2  
 مشحور جميل  
 المشي تحت ضوء القمر مع  
 طبيعة الملكات  
 وضوء الماء

A good feeling, walking in the moonlight, the natural surroundings, the sound of water.

3  
 حين تتحدث الطبيعة الانسان  
 ان تبصت لها -  
 - نسبة المكان وحجم الانسان  
 - افتلاق ضربة الهواء ودرجات الحرارة  
 بين الارتفاع والمنخفض  
 - سمعت صوت الحمار واللبل والمياه  
 - كنت مراقبا لأفاديك ومأكل  
 الناس  
 - القمر بدأ رحلته معنا  
 ورافقنا القمر أثناء سيرتنا

When Nature speaks, man should listen. Relativity in size between man and place, different proportions. Difference between high and low land sensed through air movement and temperature. I heard crickets and water. I heard people talking and arguing. The moon started its journey with us; we saw it during the hike.

4  
 صوت الماء كان  
 قوي وحلو  
 وريحة الرطوبة كان

The sound of water was strong and sweet, and the smell of damp grass and earth was so sweet.

5  
 اكثر شي اعجبني في الرحلة  
 اننا نكلم هادئ وكنت يستمع  
 في بعض حركات ومنه الكمال  
 والفضيل اكثر شي اعجبني  
 اني شفتها في ضلال ميرتيل  
 الرحلة

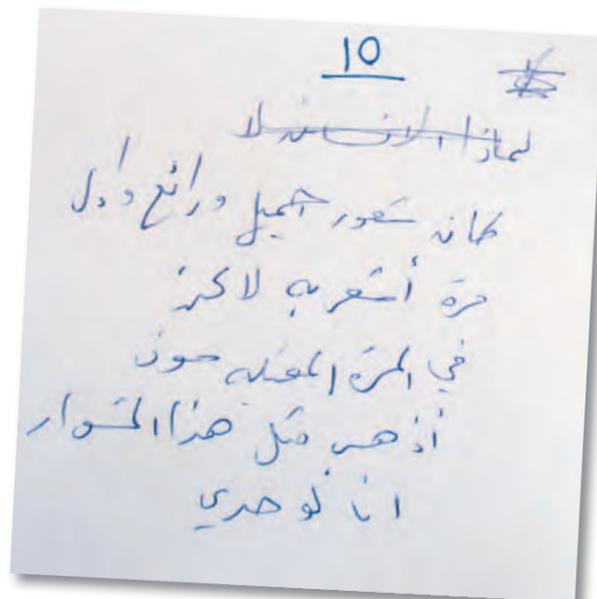
8

The best thing about the walk is the silence. I could hear each person's movement and saw some ruins.

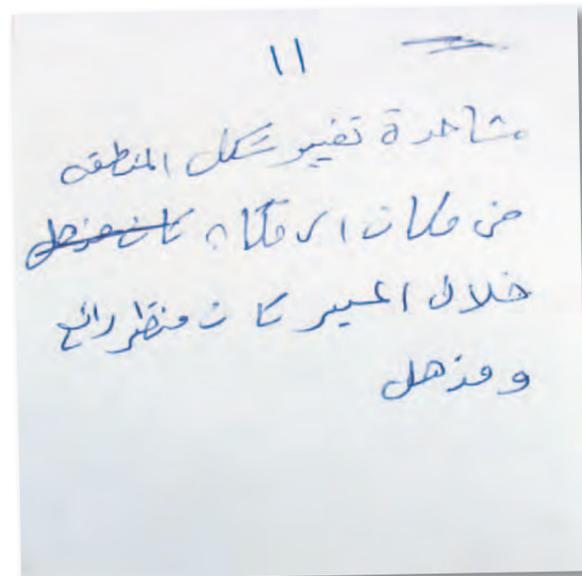
6  
 السفر في هذا المكان  
 حارة المحروخ حبهها لوفه  
 مرور لذاكرة بشرية  
 بأصوات وروائح المكان  
 - الانسان كان كأنه  
 في حلم  
 الحزن مع كما وكانه مع حزنه  
 الدم من حبه لوجوه اللجنون

A walk through the geography of the place, essaying the unknown. Human memory flows through the sounds and scents of the place. Like a dream. Flows together with the water, like the flowing of blood. Migration to the south.

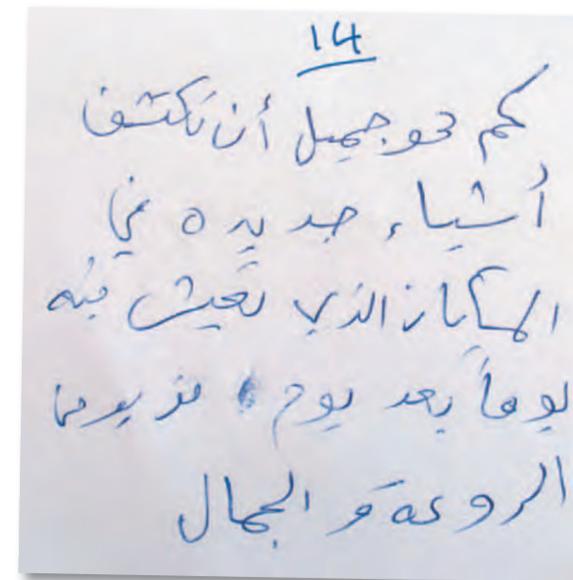
Participants' thoughts during  
 'Crossing Jericho',  
 a public intervention, part of  
 Jericho - beyond the  
 celestial and terrestrial,  
 5.10. 2012  
 © Susanne Bosch, 2012



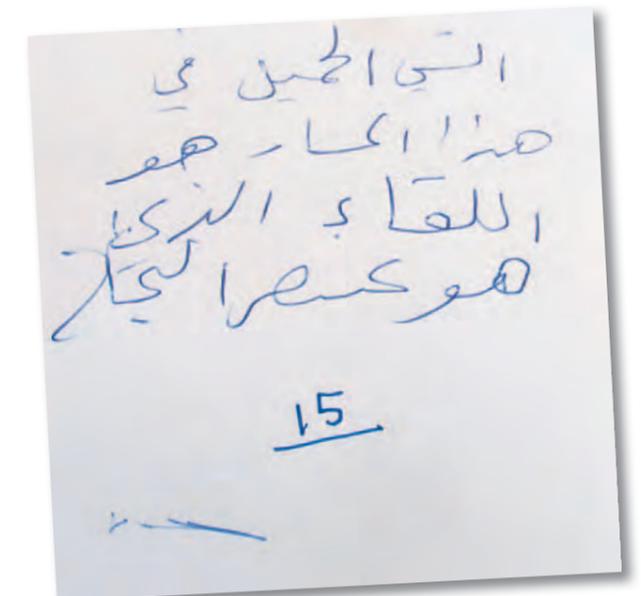
*It was a great feeling. I'm going to do it again on my own.*



*How nice it is to see new things in the place where I live each day, more beauty and grace.*



*Looking at the changing of the landscape from one place to another along the walk, it was a fantastic sight.*



*The nice thing about this walk is being together.*



Above:  
Participants' thoughts during  
'Crossing Jericho',  
a public intervention, part of  
*Jericho - beyond the  
celestial and terrestrial*,  
5.10. 2012  
© Susanne Bosch, 2012

Left:  
'Crossing Jericho',  
a public intervention, part of  
*Jericho - beyond the  
celestial and terrestrial*,  
5.10. 2012  
© Birzeit Museum 2012

Walking together in silence does not appear to be an unusually creative act. However, two things meant that this walking was in fact an artistic and participatory act: the format was consciously designed, in its visible and invisible components, and everyone was therefore able to experience it as a collective performance. In this context, where a landscape is to a considerable extent impassable, the act of conscious walking contains a component of civic reinforcement and local resilience. Some participants started walking together after this; others incorporated the possibility of going for walks at all into their consciousness for the first time. I myself had the unique opportunity of perceiving this nocturnal space in this form in such safe conditions.

**SUSANNE BOSCH** (b. 1967) is an artist, art-based researcher and teacher. From 2007-2012 she headed the Art in Public Masters programme at the University of Ulster in Belfast. She gained her Ph.D. in 2012 on the subject of artistic participation and civil society. She often collaborates with the Goethe-Institut. [www.susannebosch.de](http://www.susannebosch.de)

Translation: Charlotte Collins

■ The question concerning the political character of art is intertwined with the idea of the autonomy of art as its complementary counterpart. It keeps cropping up in alternative forms in different historical and social contexts. The answers to this question vary accordingly. They range from 'Art is always political' to 'Art can never be political', 'Art must never be political', and 'Art must always be political'. What position is designated to art in the social system? Ingo Arend reports on a congress in Berlin that marked a revealing change of heart by the left-wing art intelligentsia.

## PARTISANS OF SENSUALITY

### HOW TO THINK AESTHETICS IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

BY INGO AREND

Art is political, or it isn't art. Artur Zmijewski more or less flopped with this motto for the 7<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale. The junk shop of political activism that the artist and curator opened up with the artworks presented in 2012 discredited 'political art' more thoroughly than any right-wing defamation could have done. But what should such an art form look like, if it is to avoid being thrown out onto the rubbish heap of history?

In the mid-2000s, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière aired the opposing position, which has again been gaining popularity for a while now: that it is not politics but aesthetics that is political. For him, the power of art lies in what he calls the 'redistribution of the sensual', i.e. when symbolic or artistic actions and positions destroy an existing aesthetic, symbolic grammar, rule-governed poetics, or some other normative order.

As, for example, when the American civil rights activist Rosa Parks intervened in the public realm when, in Montgomery, Alabama, on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1955, she refused to give up her seat on the bus for a white passenger. And in doing so claimed for herself, and actively occupied, a new realm of visibility. At the symposium *Politics of Art: How to Think Aesthetics in a Political Context*, organised by the Akademie der Künste [Academy of Arts] and the Goethe-Institut in Berlin in June, there were, unsurprisingly, not many adherents of Rancière's approach.

For the Vienna art historian Ines Kleesattel, the 'indeterminacy' appertaining to a work of art, which according to Rancière is the thing that motivates the observer to political action, negates the 'truth' of any work. If the only thing that counted were the experience of Rancière's 'emancipated observer', it would no longer be possible to argue about objective criteria. Which would likewise mean the death of art criticism.

The participants at the symposium were sympathetic to this indeterminacy in art – something that the Offenbach art philosopher Juliane Rebentisch also refers to as 'irritability'. They felt that critical art should in future not be too definite. The left-wing intelligentsia has sensed that their oft-invoked 'social relevance' must look different to that in classical political aesthetics, somewhere between John Heartfield, Klaus Staeck and Rimini Protokoll. 'We were stuck in the blind alley of political unambiguity,' said the film-maker and newly-elected president of the Academy, Jeanine Meerapfel (b. 1943), in a self-critical summary of many art productions of the 1970s.

The Berlin art philosopher Helmut Draxler has been complaining for years about the trite mainstream of 'criticality' at biennales, triennales, *documentas*, and the sea of politically-motivated themed exhibitions. When a progressive man like Leonhard Emmerling, the head of the Visual Arts Division at the head office of the Goethe-Institut in Munich, complains about the 'misery of participation', the 'cross-financing of culture by morality', and the 'committed mainstream of relational aesthetics' which strive towards a 'better society' by 'mimicry of the language of administration', there is justification for saying that there is left-wing unease about socio-critical aesthetics of the contemporary variety.

'Political art has started to replace politics,' said Emmerling, warning, not without good reason, about a problematic switching of roles. 'Listening to music for its own sake is already political,'

concluded the composer and professor of art Mathias Spalinger, an institution on the New Music scene in Germany, adding his voice to the choir of critical voices during an evening podium discussion.

For many people, getting artists to become 'partisans of sensuality' in order to find a way out of this political blind alley, as recommended by the philosopher Christoph Bermes, had too martial a ring to it. However, it is obviously not possible to go back to good old 'artistic autonomy'. Isabelle Graw, also a professor of art, reminded participants that this credo had proved to be compatible with the 'new spirit of capitalism', as described by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their 1999 work of that name.

Self-determination and personal responsibility had, said Graw, long since become economic virtues. The ideal of an autonomous form of art therefore not only made this easier to market, it also correlated with the values of this new economy. The president of the Academy of Arts, Jeanine Meerapfel, is not a great theoretician, but even she dismissed the idea: 'Autonomy does not exist,' she stated, listing the network of her dependencies – from choice of genre to sponsors to collaborators.

The multifaceted notion of 'beauty' is also a tricky one. Not only because 'Beauty' – as the late jazz musician Ornette Coleman once titled one of his albums – 'is a rare thing'; having become a ubiquitous resource of our consumerist daily lives, it has probably long since forfeited its subversive potential. And the philosopher Christoph Menke demonstrated how those who want to rehabilitate it tend to revert to a neo-mystical tone of voice: he wanted to ascribe to works of art a non-economic 'potency' that gives them 'power over us'.

There was disagreement in Berlin as to whether the 'Gramsci Monument' erected by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn in New York in 2013 could indicate the 'Third Way' between the high-minded greyness of contemporary biennale seminarism, well-intentioned participation folklore, and the now obsolete 'Beauty' à la Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. This was the assertion of Christoph Bartmann, head of the Goethe-Institut in Berlin. Some found Bartmann's 'revolutionary hovel between failure and Utopia' too IKEA-trashy and therefore unaesthetic; others found the community-forum-as-art, in Forest Houses in the Bronx area of New York, to be the incarnation of utopian melancholy. So the discussion about the relationship between art and politics will always, always continue. But perhaps beauty can, in any case, only be comprehended dialectically. And in order to 'think aesthetics in a political context', what we need is, quite simply, a new punk movement.

**INGO AREND** is a political scientist and historian.

Based in Berlin, he has been an author and critic for both radio and print media since 1992. He is a member of the committee of the neue Gesellschaft bildende Kunst (nGbK) in Berlin, and co-runs the online magazine *Getidan.de*. He specialises in art and politics, and art and culture in Turkey.

Linkw:

[www.ingo-arend.de](http://www.ingo-arend.de)

[www.getidan.de](http://www.getidan.de)

Translation: Charlotte Collins

Panel at the  
Goethe-Institut's  
conference  
'Politics of Art'.  
Photo: Caroline Dose/  
Goethe-Institut



■ Inexpensive cleaners, taxi drivers and accommodation are now affordable for everyone in expensive Europe, thanks to networking via Internet and smartphone. Is this the first step towards a new, sustainable social order, in which everyone shares everything and we all have it better, despite – or indeed specifically because of – the fact that we are sharing?

Or is the opposite the case? Caroline Michel has conducted her own experiment in search of answers.



Test-drive with an Uber taxi. Photo: Monika Hoff

## WHO SHARES LOSES

### A SELF-EXPERIMENT IN THE SHARING ECONOMY

BY CAROLINE MICHEL

In March 2013, the technology sector heralded the dawn of the era of the 'shareconomy' at the Cebit fair in Hanover with the words: 'We are moving from a world of ownership into a world of sharing.' According to the US economist Jeremy Rifkin, who is regarded as the father of the so-called 'sharing economy', this is a significant historical event that will go down in the history books. At the heart of his vision is a circular flow of goods where nothing is thrown away before its time: 'We share our cars, our homes, our clothes, our tools. We share them with everyone over and over again.' This 'sharing', which is supposed to benefit everyone, but above all the environment, is made possible by global networking via Internet and platforms such as wimdu, Airb'n'b, Huffington Post, borrowmydoggy.com, rent-a-rentner (literally: 'rent-a-pensioner'), checkrobin, Car2go, ebay, Vinted, Facebook, 9flats, Spotify, Leihdirwas (literally: 'borrow something'), and parkatmyhouse. Rifkin is currently very much in demand. On any given day, he is addressing a conference somewhere in the world. He has even advised Germany's Chancellor Merkel. People love him and his ideas. But how does the sharing economy work in practice? And why is everybody getting involved?

**CONSUMPTION CONSTIPATION** Germany's economy is thriving and flourishing. Interest rates for borrowers have never been lower, and Germans can afford to buy more than ever before. But for all that, they are not happy. The world's most affluent consumer societies in particular are recording disproportionately high levels of burnout, depression, and hyperactivity disorder. 'What we are seeing is that modern societies are suffering from consumption constipation,' explains Niko Paech, environmental economist at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. The reason for this, he says, is the huge dissatisfaction with the way things are, with the economic growth dictated by industry and trade. After all, people know that the world's resources are slowly but surely being depleted. In the past, our options for rebelling against the 'faster, higher, further' mentality were limited to anti-consumerism and renun-

ation. With the sharing economy, however, the power is suddenly with the individual, who can decide how things develop. That, at least, is what the sharing economy promises.

To start my journey through the sharing economy, I decide to pay a visit to the food-sharing hotspot organised by the non-profit-making association NeuLand [NewLand] in Cologne. People come here to swap food, simply and unbureaucratically. In order to have something to swap, I take along a jar of marmalade, which I don't like and which has been gathering dust in my store cupboard for quite some time. To complement it, another benefactor has donated some bread rolls from the previous day. The items on offer were posted on the Internet beforehand, and lo and behold, people have come and are pleased to find them here. An elderly man happily sinks his teeth into a bread roll with marmalade, and who has he to thank for it? Me! It's a lovely feeling! One point to the sharing economy.

Spurred on by this initial success, on my way home I register with a number of platforms via smartphone: the borrowing platform leihdirwas.de, the free digital newspaper www.huffingtonpost.de, and the taxi service www.uber.com. As usual, I accept the general terms and conditions without actually reading them through, and agree to the use and processing of my data at the end of the data protection declaration. I'm not happy about it, but this is my ticket into the world of the Internet-based sharing economy.

'Collective consumption also helps the environment. The question is: how many lawnmowers does a neighbourhood need? www.leihdirwas.de: your borrowing portal on the Internet.' I myself don't have anything to lend, but I spontaneously decide to rent an Areca palm tree for €2 a day and a bicycle lock for €8 per week. Not all that cheap, and I have to make a 40-kilometre trip to Düsseldorf to pick them up. That and the fact that I have to agree to my data being used means minus three points for leihdirwas.de. But in this case it's not a problem, as being in Düsseldorf gives me the perfect opportunity to try out the Uber taxi service.

**A NEW WAY TO TRAVEL BY TAXI** In Germany, users pay a base rate of €1 for the Uber taxi service, 25 cents per minute, €1 per kilometre. This is much less expensive than official taxi services in Germany. To order an Uber taxi, there's no need to call a taxi hotline, where you can often be put on hold for what seems like an eternity. Once the Uber app is activated, it automatically knows where I am and where the next driver is who's prepared to take me. There are no doubts about what the trip will cost because I am told the price before I make a binding reservation. If the driver takes a detour along the way, that's his problem, not mine. What's more, before the car arrives, a photo of the driver pops up on the screen of my smartphone.

This app is undoubtedly the future that the traditional taxi sector didn't see coming, and which it is now fighting with all its might. However, according to my lovely driver, Jost Reinert, there is much more to Uber than just a convenient app – and by that he doesn't mean the bottles of still and sparkling water, or the chocolate bars tucked into the pockets of the doors on his slightly dented Opel Corsa, or the major investors like Goldman-Sachs and Google who are financing the whole Uber enterprise. He's referring instead to the idea that private individuals can share their time and their cars with other private individuals. 'Of course the shareholders have monetary interests; they're part of the capitalist system. Nevertheless, within this capitalist system there is some freedom that we can make use of. And Uber can, in principle, be one of these areas of freedom,' says Jost.

Jost Reinert, who was born in 1961, is a curator by profession and an anarchist at heart. He's also an idealist. What matters to him is not whether the motives of the Uber company are good or bad, but what happens when people see that they can do business without adhering to the usual rules. People are now realising that they can do business with each other without entering into the usual employer-employee relationship in which the employer has to pay compulsory social insurance: one without a clearly defined customer-supplier relationship, without a ten-page contract, without wages in the conventional sense, and without having to pay tax on profits. What users pay to Uber is just a 'flat service fee'; in other words, we are merely contributing to Jost's expenses. The 'suggested payment', as it's called on the German app, for my trip to Düsseldorf's famous Königsallee (in other words, the total that Uber will soon be charging to my credit card) is just €9, although I've been in the car for almost half an hour. I don't give Jost a tip; after all, we're equals. Brilliant! 'One thing is clear: hardly anyone does this to earn money,' says Jost.

Well, why do they do it then? Because being an Uber driver is a little act of anarchy! So the debate about whether a state should ban Uber is not about the rights of established taxi drivers, nor is it about the lovely, easy-to-use app. What's at stake here is much more fundamental than that. Those who work in the sharing economy and those (in this case, me) who avail themselves of the opportunities it offers are absenting themselves from the classical economy. What disappoints me a

little is the fact that there's no major outcry of the kind I would have expected would go hand in hand with such rebellious, revolutionary ideas.

In other words, the state is largely leaving the sharing economy to its own devices. This means that everyone can get involved in the big share. And everyone is getting involved in some way: entrepreneurs are willing to take entrepreneurial risks in order to run the portals that facilitate sharing; journalists are writing free of charge for free Internet newspapers such as the Huffington Post; major investors and Internet giants are willing to fund the sharing; even established companies with long histories (in other words, the ones that have the power and the money to really make things happen) are willing to get involved. For example: Car2Go, drive-now, and multicity are just English names for car-sharing services operated by Daimler, BMW, and Citroen.

**PROFIT THROUGH SHARING** It is claimed that the sharing economy affords access to goods and services that would otherwise be unattainable to the user in this form. The promise is that those who share do not end up with *less* – as used to be the case – but, on the contrary, with *more*. That's certainly true in my case. A sensationally cheap taxi ride used to be as far out of my reach as having my own cleaning lady, if only because the obstacles put in place by the complicated regulations that govern the hiring of cleaning staff in Germany seemed too onerous for me to navigate. Today, thanks to the sharing economy and cleaning portals like helping.de, the situation is very different. I pay €12.90 an hour and get a cleaner, who is referred to as a 'helping'. The state gets nothing.

'And that's why a legal market can suddenly make sense – yet at a price that is acceptable to the customers,' says Helping boss Benedikt Franke when I visit him at the company's Berlin headquarters. However, there is another reason for the attractive prices: the 'Helping system'. Contrary to what is suggested by the company's advertising campaign, 'helpings' are not employed by the portal, nor are they individuals who are 'sharing'. Formally speaking, they are self-employed. They decide which jobs to take on. However, they also assume the entrepreneurial risk, are liable for damages, have to take out their own insurance, pay taxes, and pay their own way if they get sick. Model helping Verena Weinert is willing to be interviewed. When she set herself up in business as a home help in 2007, she found it unexpectedly difficult to find work on her own. 'You have to apply for jobs, you have to win over customers, you have to advertise... and all of that costs money.' For a year now, most of her work has come via Helping.

This is what makes this kind of sharing economy so groundbreaking. If I hire a cleaner from a conventional cleaning company, I am the customer, the company is the supplier, and the cleaner is employed by the cleaning company. As far as Helping is concerned, both the cleaner and I are clients. Moreover, there's no reason why Verena shouldn't clean my home today and I hers tomorrow. However, in order to do so, I would need a trading licence, health insurance, and a tax number. In



Helping Verena Weinert can make a living as a cleaner. Photo: Helping

other words, 'Partner Caroline Michel' and 'Partner Verena Weinert' are not so equal after all. The invoice doesn't come from the self-employed cleaner 'Partner Verena Weinert' either; it comes from the portal 'Partner Helping'.

Nevertheless, 'Partner Verena Weinert' is satisfied. 'Yes, I can make a living from it. But I don't ask for much. I don't have a car, I don't have an expensive hobby, I don't travel. I don't give parties, I don't go away, I don't eat out.' For all that, though, Verena is 'free'. She can decide if and when and for whom she works. The same applies to all 'suppliers', all partner-managers, all micro-entrepreneurs I've met so far.

At this stage, I conclude that the customer benefits, the state loses out, and small suppliers like Jost and Verena benefit a little today, at least. Tomorrow, however, they will quite possibly be accused of being tax evaders, or will end up as hardship cases with no social security net to catch them when they fall. And what about the Internet portals? They're playing their cards very close to their chests. Although the newspapers report that Uber is now worth \$50 billion, and Helping has put out a press release saying that the company is proud to have collected a total €56.5 million from various investors since it was founded in 2013, all of the portals set up to act as mediators for those who want to share services are saying nothing about their revenues and their actual profit – if they're making any profit, that is. After all, there are rumours that many Internet portals in the sharing economy are not growing wealthy on the commissions they're charging, but are, in fact, currently paying through the nose to create a supply that doesn't actually exist. The theory is that major investors are involved and that they are intentionally destroying a market by injecting a lot of money into it. This is not the first time I've heard this rumour. It's also said with regard to Uber. There has been talk of large sums of money that Uber is alleged to have paid its drivers to persuade them to drive at all. The question is, why would the portal do such a thing? One possible explanation is the valuable data generated by all this sharing and swapping. And as we all know, data is the currency of the Internet.

**ACCOMMODATION PORTALS** The focus of this year's ITB International Travel Trade Show in Berlin was the sharing economy. Just like conventional taxi drivers, established hoteliers are worried. They – who have abided by all the state regulations on everything from fire protection to hygiene – are seen as stuffy and averse to innovation in the face of the sharing competition, above all from the shooting star in this sector, Airbnb, which has already put a temporary roof over the heads of 26 million guests in over one million places in over 190 countries. Airbnb is estimated to be worth \$20 billion.

There was general agreement at the International Travel Trade Show in Berlin that the future will be defined by the sharing economy. Photo: Stephan Robertz



I too have booked myself into a private flat via Airbnb. I stay with Angelika, who for €28 per night 'shares' a lovely little room, in a four-room flat, with strangers. Having attended a few events at the ITB, it has become clear to me that it's not the small, private accommodation renters like Angelika who are the bone of contention in this field. Instead, the controversy surrounds the people and companies who only rent flats in order to rent them out again by the room and by the day, so that they can pocket many times the rent they themselves are paying, or would get if they were to rent the property out 'permanently' to a single tenant. Allegedly, between 12,000 and 15,000 flats in Berlin alone are no longer on the market because of platforms like Airbnb, wimdu, or 9flats. This is why people are asking whether in the foreseeable future the whole city is just going to become one big hotel.

In my opinion, questions like these come much too late. After all, this market has long been in the hands of professional suppliers who know exactly what is permitted under German law and what isn't. Here, too, the state earns no taxes from such rentals, which is not the case when people stay in hotels. What's more, the cost of renting flats is rising. But who benefits?

'Everyone,' says Airbnb spokesman Julian Trautwein: because many of those who use Airbnb are travellers who would not have travelled were it not for these offers of accommodation. What's more, he says, they tend to stay longer. In other words, says Trautwein, Airbnb is not a competitor, but a supplement to the accommodation already on offer: 'We are making the cake a little bit bigger.' By a million guests a month.

**THE ADDICTION TO HAVING MORE** It's strange: once upon a time in our society, the ideal was to reduce our consumption and conserve our resources through charity and solidarity. Now, with the sharing economy, the cake on offer is getting bigger, not smaller. So we are now getting more, not less. Ultimately, the whole car-sharing exercise could lead to an increase in the number of trips being made because cars are now more easily available to a larger number of people. But if this is true, how were we talked into it?

According to trend researcher Peter Wippermann, we were targeted right where we're most vulnerable to seduction. For most people, says Wippermann, it's no longer about freedom, conservation of resources or co-ownership, but simply about making a profit. According to this theory, "sharing" in the sharing economy is no longer an act of charity, but [...] about being able to use things as cheaply as possible'. So what are we supposed to do with the money we save with the help of the sharing economy, if not consume more? But does sharing really help us make savings in the long term? Or is everything simply going to get more expensive? If fewer vehicles are sold, the companies will have to put up prices in order to be able to remain economically successful, says economist Daniel Veit. While this would mean that fewer vehicles are produced and sold, and those vehicles that are produced would be used more effectively, it would also mean that the costs for the individual would not sink significantly as a result. Indeed, it is possible



'We are making the cake bigger,' says Airbnb spokesman Julian Trautwein. Photo: Stephan Robertz

that a shared car in the future will cost just as much as having your own car parked outside your home and ready to use at any time. That said, resources would be conserved because fewer cars would be produced.

'If things really do develop like this, which is not unlikely, then there is a real chance that we can achieve the same level of prosperity using fewer resources. And that, of course, is desirable.' So: prices rise, work as we know it becomes rarer, wages fall. Environmental economist Niko Paech predicts that if this day dawns, sharing will be the new work – for everyone, even those who never wanted to share anything in the first place. In Paech's 'post-growth economy', people no longer share for the pleasure of sharing, but because they have to, in a small, closed, self-sufficient community 'without money, without markets, without fossil fuels, making the most of their own time, their own skills, and the social relationships needed for this'. Incidentally, there is no place for Airbnb or Uber in this vision because no one will be travelling any more. But thankfully we're not at that stage yet. At the moment, the cake is getting bigger and the prices are falling.

**A QUESTION OF DEFINITION** As children, we were always told it was better not to lend anybody anything that really mattered to us. When I think about it, with the exception of my

money, the only thing I shared throughout the course of this experiment was an old jar of marmalade. What I got was an inexpensive taxi trip, really cheap overnight accommodation, and a clean flat. I also met a lot of lovely people. But is that really the basic idea behind the sharing economy? And is 'sharing' really the right word for what is happening in that economy? After all, the question of who is sharing what with whom is not always easy to answer.

There is a limit to the extent to which a taxi ride can be shared. The same applies to food. After all, you can only eat food once; you can't use it jointly. This is why people who are sharing their food via organisations such as foodsharing.de are not actually sharing, says the economist Veit. They are *giving things away* that they no longer need. Other people *sell* things, for example on eBay. That's not sharing, either. 'Sharing for money' – in other words, what we used to call *renting* – is only sharing (if it can legitimately be called that at all) when it happens between two private individuals. The only things that can really be shared properly are things that are co-owned, as propagated by the visionary Jeremy Rifkin in his passionate speeches. In Rifkin's vision of the future, we will share everything, even our control over sharing. In other words, we will largely be ruled by the Internet, which will do the management for us. But this is not a bad thing *per se*, because the Internet belongs to us all and can, consequently, be controlled by everybody.

So far, so good. What is much more exciting is the question as to where all the co-owned property on which this utopia is based is supposed to come from? Is my private property the major resource that is not yet being fully exploited by the economy? My time, my labour, my flat, my car, my private life, my social security, my data? Should I voluntarily give it all away so that others can 'use' it? If so, then I would prefer to leave the 'sharing' to the 'major players', i.e. to the companies that are creating goods so that they can share them with me. That will mean the cake will get neither bigger nor smaller, it will just be divided up differently; that the state will lose both control and tax revenue, that people will lose their secure jobs, that old businesses will become the new rule, from which someone will benefit who certainly isn't likely to share their profits; but at least I'll be able to tell myself that there was once a time – albeit short-lived – when I too at last had the power to change something.

**CAROLINE MICHEL** read German Studies, English Studies, Educational Theory and Economics at university. Since 1998 she has been working as a freelance journalist for the German broadcasters Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Saarländischer Rundfunk, Deutschlandfunk, Südwestrundfunk, Bayerischer Rundfunk and Deutsche Welle, as well as a variety of agencies, specialist magazines and daily newspapers.

Translation: Aingeal Flanagan

■ The *Spiegel Online* journalist Stefan Orth travelled to Iran in 2014. His account of the trip, *Couchsurfing im Iran*, was published in German earlier this year. It's become a bestseller in Germany, where readers and critics alike have given it an enthusiastic reception.

## THE SHARING ECONOMY IN IRAN

### A GERMAN JOURNALIST GOES COUCHSURFING

BY PARISA TONEKABONI

Stefan Orth's 240-page travelogue, *Couchsurfing im Iran*, tells of his two-month journey around Iran in the spring of 2014. Orth found most of his accommodation for this trip through the website [www.couchsurfing.com](http://www.couchsurfing.com). For some years now, couchsurfing has been a popular option for tourists around the world, who find hosts through this website. Once registered, users of the platform can host travellers visiting their city, or, if travelling themselves, can stay as guests with other users. Couchsurfing gives tourists an opportunity to get to know local people and gain a realistic picture of the country they're visiting, in a private atmosphere far from tourist hotels.

To explore Iran, Orth stayed as a guest with Iranian men and women he found via the couchsurfing network. As Orth himself says in his book, while staying in the country he wanted to be an Iranian – to live like an Iranian, with Iranian people. Evidently he didn't plan his itinerary in advance, and instead visited on his travels all the places his hosts suggested to him. This is precisely what makes his travelogue interesting. Orth wasn't satisfied with just seeing big cities and well-known tourist attractions. He also visited smaller towns and border regions – areas that are probably unknown to many Iranians as well, and which few are keen to see.

**CHALLENGING CLICHÉS, OR REPLICATING THEM?** In numerous interviews with the German media, Orth always stressed that the Western image of Iran is one-sided, restricted to the nuclear programme and human rights violations. His aim, he says, was to show the lives of ordinary people in Iran and present a picture far removed from media clichés. Although Orth skilfully addresses various aspects of life for the younger generation of the Iranian middle and upper classes, their problems, hopes and desires, in substantial sections of the book he gets caught up in manufacturing artificial tensions and fresh clichés. To put it another way: Orth deploys precisely the media approach that he himself criticises, namely creating a fear of Iran.

To the Iranian reader, the book's first and biggest mistake is its insistence that couchsurfing is banned in Iran. It is not new, nor does it come as a surprise, that the Iranian regime frowns on contact between Iranians and Western citizens, but this cannot be described as a systematic ban. In both his book and in interviews, Orth insists that he was breaking the law. Interestingly, at one point in the book one of Orth's hosts, who always has a lot of foreign guests, says that this had attracted the attention of the police. However, he continues, his answer to the police was that he liked having foreign guests – and that was enough for them. Another host, a woman in Kerman, lost her licence to work as a tourist guide because she had taken in guests via the couchsurfing network. Orth himself writes of this particular case that there seemed to be 'significant regional differences'.

In countries like Iran, where there are no legal certainties, the borderline between legal and illegal is frequently indistinct. Similarly, in many cases there is no consistent, clear regulation, or the law is not consistently applied. Either this complexity was not clear to the author or he wanted to make his story sound more exciting by giving couchsurfing a seal of disapproval.

Whereas in the past Iran's image in the West was determined by radical Islamists, women in *chadors* and burning US flags, in recent years media interest has focussed on modern young people. Writing about taboo-breaking by young Iranians, in their style of dress, the spread of Western music, underground parties and so on, is now a popular motif, to the extent that these topics have themselves become new clichés about Iran. Photo galleries on Western media websites with headings like 'Iranian women as you've never seen them' or 'The Iran you never knew existed' attract the interest of the public. Yet it's often forgotten that these dazzling pictures of the society's upper classes do not give a representative picture of Iran. Although Orth spent most of his time with this social group, and also uses the same methods to attract an audience, in the middle of the book he does at least make a self-critical observation, alerting his readers to the fact that the users of the couchsurfing network are from Iran's educated middle classes and he didn't get to know different sections of society.

**TRUSTING THE HOSTS** Anyone who decides to couchsurf and become a guest in a stranger's house has to have a deep sense of trust in his hosts. During his travels, Orth encounters his hosts with just such a sense of trust. For the most part he leaves it to the hosts to plan his trip, so one day he's picking saffron blossoms, one day he's in the desert, and another is spent on the former frontline of the war, along the border with Iraq. As a result, his trip and experiences are diverse, and the book is interesting.

On the other hand, his trust in his hosts and their stories sometimes means that he questions very little. At these points the Iranian reader is surprised by mistakes both large and small, and regrets the lack of an editor with knowledge of Iran. One of Orth's hostesses, for example, talks about the Iranian singer Haydeh, her popularity, and how she migrated to the US shortly before the revolution. Orth explains that since the revolution women in Iran have been forbidden to sing; but exactly one paragraph later he quotes his companion talking about Haydeh's death as follows: 'Millions watched the funeral live on television; all the shops in Iran were closed the whole day.' Strangely, Orth doesn't seem to notice the contradiction. Of course television in the Islamic Republic of Iran would not show the funeral of a singer who spent her final years in self-imposed exile abroad. It's true that Haydeh was so popular that video cassettes of her funeral circulated in certain sections of the population, but the picture Orth gives is a long way from what actually happened.

For those who want to get to know Iran, or are interested in going there, Orth's travelogue is certainly worth reading. For Iranians and readers familiar with the country, the author's view of its people and society may be more interesting than the story of his travels. The book is written in smooth, straightforward prose and is an entertaining read. Orth has been beguiled by Iranian hospitality, and some Iranians may enjoy reading his fulsome praise.



Stephan Orth  
*Couchsurfing im Iran*  
[My journey behind  
closed doors]  
Malik Verlag,  
Munich 2014.

PARISA TONEKABONI is a freelance journalist living in Duisburg.

Translation: Charlotte Collins

■ *Zakat*, the obligatory giving of alms as an Islamic tax, is considered to be one of the earliest historical manifestations of social security. In fact, it is only one element among many with which Islam seeks to safeguard social justice. Above all, *zakat* is in need of a contemporary reinterpretation that addresses the realities of today's global economy.

## ALMS AND MORE

### THE ROLE OF ZAKAT IN THE ISLAMIC SYSTEM OF SOCIAL SECURITY

BY ADNAN ABBAS ALI

Islam has laid down an integrated system to protect the poor and the destitute and has put into law many forms of social security, all of them intended to tackle poverty and inequalities in income and wealth between the individuals in society.

Islam does not see such inequalities, and the consequent variations in living standards, as a problem in itself or as a problem that can be detached from other aspects of life. It sees them as firmly linked to other aspects of life, and hence Islam treats them as part of its overall approach to human life and the problems that go with it. Islam recognises that people in need have a right to the wealth of the rich in amounts that meet their needs, however great those needs may be, especially as all wealth belongs to God and mankind is merely acting as its custodian.

It is worth noting here that, historically, many experts on Islamic law have asserted that the public authority's duty to meet the needs of the poor is not confined to the role of distributing money raised through *zakat*, the alms that Muslims are obliged to contribute under Islamic law. If the *zakat* that has been raised is insufficient, the authorities have the right to take money from the rich above and beyond the percentages set for *zakat*. So the right of the poor to the wealth of the rich is not restricted to *zakat*. Some experts on Islamic law have ruled, rightly in our opinion, that the state's obligation to help the poor does not apply only to poor Muslims. All those who live under the jurisdiction of an Islamic state, if they are old or unable to earn, should also be supported by the treasury, that is: from *zakat*.

Islam gave the poor access to the wealth of the rich by either of two methods: through voluntary action, when Muslims believe in the brotherhood of mankind and carry out the *sunna* of the Prophet Mohammed, or through compulsion, in the form of the financial obligations that Islamic law places on the shoulders of the rich as a way to redistribute income and wealth fairly between members of the community, and to break up fortunes that have accumulated with the passage of time.

In his work entitled *The Rights of the Poor*, the great Islamic law expert Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri emphasised the aspects of Islam that are humanitarian and that reject poverty. Ibn Hazm's approach to poverty was truly distinctive, in that he starts his discussion of the problem from a populist point of view, with the poor toiling masses, explaining their rights *vis-à-vis* society and calling on them to impose their will on the ruler and the ruling elites. His solution to the problem of poverty in human societies does not start by saying that the rich have an obligation to pay *zakat* and to be generous to the poor, but rather by saying that the poor have a duty to defend their rights

and to struggle to improve their living conditions. Based on this approach, we find Ibn Hazm asserting that *jihad* against oppression and exploitation is the highest form of holy war (Ibn Hazm, *al-Muhalla*, Volume 3, p. 456).

From these writings it becomes clear to us that *zakat* was never seen as the only way to redistribute income and assets, because by itself it is unable to fulfil that obligation. It is indeed one of the five pillars of Islam, and it is through *zakat*, along with monotheism and prayer, that the individual enters the fold of Islam and the community of Muslims. It is also certainly one of the many foundations of the Islamic economic and social system.

Since *zakat* was one of the methods supposed to bring about social justice, experts on Islamic law in early Islam, and especially in early Abbasid times, were interested in explaining the rules and arcane aspects of *zakat*. In each of the books on the practice of the Prophet Mohammed that are organised into chapters on various aspects of law, including the *Muwatta'* of Malik ibn Anas, the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, the *Sahih* of Muslim and the books by al-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah, there is a chapter that examines questions of *zakat* and what the various oral traditions have to say about it.

Since it is part of the economic and social system, Abu Yousuf talks about *zakat* at length and discusses it in an unusually scholarly way in his book *al-Amwal*, as does Yahya ibn Adam in his book *al-Kharaj*, Abu Obaida in his book *al-Amwal*, and al-Mawardi and al-Shafi'i in *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniya*. From these sources it is clear how much interest experts in Islamic law showed in *zakat*. From these writings it is also clear to us that the material needed by those doing research on *zakat* is plentiful and readily available.

It is noticeable that while books written in modern times focus on the subject of *riba* or usury, the question of *zakat*, despite its importance, does not receive the attention it deserves from those now engaged in studying the Islamic economic and social system, and it is not given prominence in a contemporary setting – a setting that goes beyond what was said by the early Muslims. Those eminent jurists thought about things that were appropriate in their time and in a way that was consistent with the needs of their time.

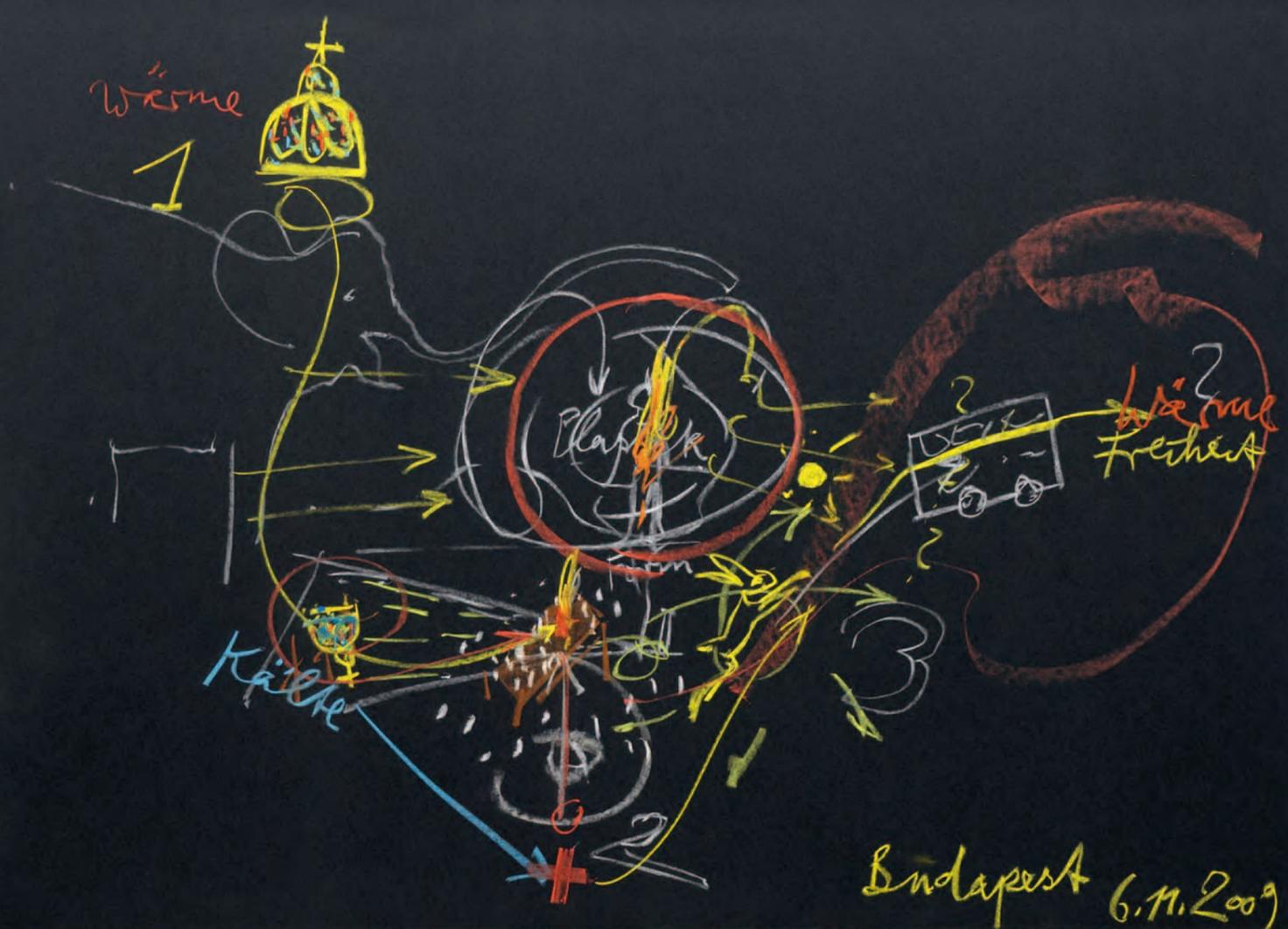
How much longer must we go on wasting our intellectual energies discussing whether minors or madmen have an obligation to pay *zakat*? How much longer must we continue to recycle the opinions of those who lived in the past, ignoring the fact that we live in a different age and that treating the hungry fairly and bringing about social justice is no longer a question of a few cents or dollars to be given as *zakat*? Assets and incomes these days are not counted in livestock or harvests, but in massive agricultural holdings and tower blocks built for rent and investment, in factories that make profits from the toil of wretched workers, in internal and foreign trade, and in oil wells and gas reserves that produce billions of dollars for those who acquire them.

ADNAN ABBAS ALI holds a Ph.D. in Economic Science, and has been an associate professor at several Arab universities. He now lives in Frankfurt, where he works as a translator from Arabic to German.

Translation: Jonathan Wright

Beggar in Ankara, Turkey.  
Photo: Achim Wagner





■ For many years now, the OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY has been travelling around Germany and Europe, encouraging people to wrest back democracy from the politicians and play a greater role in shaping it by taking the initiative. The roots of this initiative – the only one of its kind in the world – can be traced back to the German artist Joseph Beuys and his concept of how we can shape the way we live together ('social sculpture' – society as a work of art).

## THE WARMTH CHARACTER OF THOUGHT

JOSEPH BEUYS' IDEA OF AN OMNIBUS FOR ALL, BY ALL, WITH ALL

BY MICHAEL VON DER LOHE

Above: Drawing by Johannes Stüttgen illustrating the idea of direct democracy, for the OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY's stop in Budapest on 6.11.2009.  
Photo: Werner Küppers

This article is intended to be a manifesto: a manifesto on the dignity of humans, on the beauty of the world, and of a joint future filled with meaning. It is not intended to be yet another movement in the symphony of catastrophes haunting our world, nor is it a description of the angst-ridden paralysis felt by overwhelmed humans at the mercy of an incessant wave of unchangeable events. After all, we have created the situation we are in and we have the power to change it.

*'It is all about the warmth character of thought.*

*That is the new quality of will'* Joseph Beuys

We are witnessing an incredible moment in the development of humanity. We are living at a time when humans are, for the first time ever, experiencing themselves as humanity. It is called 'globalisation'. Our vision is no longer restricted to our immediate environment alone; instead, we are supplied with comprehensive information from all four corners of the globe. Even if there are those who say that, because of new technology, this information is saturated with a high dose of targeted disinformation, this does not change the actual experience itself. We know that we humans are responsible for the state the world is in; we know that Nature is out of kilter because of our actions, and we also know that we are responsible for the way we live together. Even if not everyone is consciously aware of this fact, we can at least feel it. Humans are now responsible for the way the Earth will develop from here on in. I am responsible for my own biography.

Yes, I am a natural being, a creation that does not know its origins. Yet at the same time, I – unlike the plants and animals that are tormented by us – am a mature being that is responsible for our current state and future development. From this moment on, anyone and everyone is responsible for the way our world is shaped.

**SOCIAL SCULPTURE** This experience in thinking, feeling, and wanting was the life discovery of the world-renowned artist Joseph Beuys, who passed away in Germany in 1986. He envisioned a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that can be created by humans, and called this joint work of art 'social sculpture'. The social sculpture is a living work of art that is constantly changing, that only exists and decays in the presentness of humankind as a result of the immediate, intuitive registering and generation of ordered proportions with and among each other – with Nature and with humans.

With this idea in mind, every human can immediately begin artistically shaping his or her own biography and can, in the same spirit, also dare to begin this total artwork of social

sculpture together with everyone else. 'Every human being is an artist' is probably the most famous sentence uttered by Joseph Beuys. Perhaps it is also the most misunderstood. Beuys never meant this sentence to mean that every human being is

an artist in the classic sense, i.e. that everyone is a sculptor, a painter, or a musician. He always meant it to mean that, from this point on, every human bears responsibility for shaping his or her life and the world, even if he or she does *nothing* at all.

**COMMUNICATION BY OMNIBUS** In order to move from the shaping of our personal and private lives to the joint shaping of the way all people coexist, we need a communication element, which is where the not-for-profit organisation OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY and the idea of the *Volksabstimmung* come in. A *Volksabstimmung* is a kind of plebiscite in Germany. The word literally means 'people's vote'.

Have you ever encountered a mobile school staffed by teachers who come to you, speak to you, listen to your ideas, thoughts, and desires, take them on board and pass them on? Whose teaching staff always consider themselves to be pupils too? Who are utterly convinced that we all have the same rights, which is why it is absolutely indispensable that we all agree together on the form our community takes in a manner that is based on equal rights? People who see this process of shaping society as art and are serious about Joseph Beuys' statement that 'every human being is an artist'? If so, you have probably encountered the unusual OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY that has been crisscrossing Germany and Europe for twenty-seven years, always reminding people to develop themselves as free beings.

Every spring, the OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY sets out on a new journey and spends eight months on the road. It travels from city to city, stopping at events, universities, and schools; it parks in pedestrian zones, marketplaces, school playgrounds, and university campuses – always in search of discussion and interaction.

Werner Küppers has been the captain of the OMNIBUS for fifteen years. He himself says that his work with the OMNIBUS has become his purpose in life. He is the fixed point, the one constant in the ever-changing team of everyday heroes. He and three other OMNIBUS passengers see themselves as gardeners, the people who are generating the humus for the future, creating the substance that gives people the opportunity to create a co-existence that is filled with meaning, interacting

with Nature in a way that fits their character. These four people live and work in and on the OMNIBUS. Schoolchildren and students often join the OMNIBUS as interns, travelling around with the team of four and experiencing themselves as meaningful co-shapers of a jointly-held idea.

At the heart of everything they do is the concept of the tool of a three-tiered *Volksabstimmung*. But what does that actually mean in practical terms? First and foremost, it means that the people involved in the OMNIBUS enterprise are really serious about the fact that every human has the same rights. They are not saying that everyone has the same abilities, opportunities, education etc., but that in the overall symphony of deciding how we will co-exist in the future, everyone has dignity, which is why, at the moment of decision-making, everyone has a voice, a vote, like everyone else. We give each other this dignity of being human. And anyone who falls silent and listens intently to his or her inner voice knows that this is the case.

In other words, shaping the community in a democracy not only happens when we elect the men and women who represent us and introduce legislation as a parliament or a government; it also happens when everyone takes part in a vote on individual issues. These *Volksabstimmungen* should comprise three successive stages, in this order: popular initiative (*Volksinitiative*), popular petition (*Volksbegehren*), and referendum (*Volksentscheid*). This system exists in all German federal states, albeit in different ways, some of which are more user-friendly than others. In those states where the system has been set up

in a meaningful way, it is the citizens themselves who determine its form, in a *Volksabstimmung*.

However, the major questions relating to co-existence have thus far been excluded from this form of direct democracy because there are still no statutory regulations in Germany for *Volksabstimmungen* at national level (or even at European level).

**WHAT IS A VOLKSABSTIMMUNG?** Unlike a conventional referendum, where a question formulated by the government is put to the electorate for a vote, a *Volksabstimmung* is based on the right of legislative initiative. The first stage of the *Volksabstimmung* process is the popular initiative, which gives every citizen the opportunity to make a proposal for change. Once a proposal is made, the proposal must obtain the support of a specified number of people in order for a legal procedure to be initiated. Once the proposal has been examined to determine whether it is in line with the constitution, the parliament has the option of turning the proposal into law. If it decides not to, the second stage of the *Volksabstimmung* procedure comes into effect: the popular petition. At this stage, a much larger number of people must declare its support for the initiative as evidence that the people really want to vote on this new proposal. Here too, the parliament can approve the proposal after this second step. If it does not do so, the process moves on to stage three of the *Volksabstimmung* procedure: the referendum. At this point, the parliament is entitled to make an alternative proposal. Voters then cast their vote in favour of one of the two proposals. In other words, the majority decides whether a new regulation for co-existence comes into force or not. With this system, everyone is involved in shaping the community, both through the opportunity to propose new ideas and throughout the entire *Volksabstimmung* procedure right up to the point of participating in the final decision, where every person has just one vote. It is only through a *Volksabstimmung* that democracy arises; before that, it doesn't exist at all. Moreover, the procedure for the *Volksabstimmung*

The OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY  
in front of the Reichstag  
parliament building in Berlin.  
Photo: Michael von der Lohe/  
Bus für direkte Demokratie.



has to be specified by the citizens themselves, not by their political representatives. The sovereign people itself, the community of people living in the same country, creates the rules that shape its community. In this context, it is appropriate to mention an event that took place in the federal city-state of Hamburg in Germany with the help of the OMNIBUS, an event that is unique in the world.

In 2004, the citizens of Hamburg gave themselves an electoral law that they had drawn up themselves and voted for in a *Volksabstimmung*. This was the first time that the people wanting to elect representatives – and not the politicians wanting to be elected – created the necessary regulations for this process. To this day, the politicians, with their vested interest in power, have not come to terms with this state of affairs, and try to grasp every available opportunity to amend the regulations again in such a way that their interests are served. Not once, but twice, these attempts have had to be stopped by the citizens of Hamburg in costly and time-consuming new plebiscites that eventually resulted in a change in the constitution of the city-state of Hamburg. Now, it is the voters who determine the regulations that govern the election and not those who want to be elected.

**THE THEMES ADDRESSED BY THE OMNIBUS** In addition to the daily attempts of the OMNIBUS crew to engage the willpower of the people and awaken its interest in *Volksabstimmungen* at national level, the OMNIBUS enterprise also undertakes a wide variety of other activities. Across the country, a team organises at least ten events every year. The themes of these events always relate to the next steps on the journey towards a society that is shaped by the members of society themselves. This year, for example, these themes are the free trade agreement known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the introduction of an unconditional basic income, the abolition of intensive livestock rearing, the discussion of a new monetary order, the liberation of schools and universities from state control, and the refugee movements around the world.

On all of these issues, Johannes Stüttgen, one of Joseph Beuys' most talented and devoted students, is always on board as a speaker. He and Brigitte Krenkers are also the initiators and associates of the OMNIBUS. They experienced first-hand how, in the 1960s and 70s, Joseph Beuys gradually developed and moved towards the idea that shaping society is an artistic task. Johannes Stüttgen has described this development in great detail in his standard work, *Der ganze Riemen* [The whole story].

In 2009, the Goethe-Institut invited the OMNIBUS to undertake a spectacular trip through twelve countries in south-eastern Europe, to the cradle of democracy in Athens and on to Istanbul. It became clear throughout the course of this journey just how much hope people invest in the German model. They admire our structured approach and ability to implement things, and consider us to be largely free from corruption. Moreover, most are convinced that these characteristics have

helped us develop a well-functioning democracy. However, they also feel very clearly that a purely parliamentary democracy can become a pawn in the game of specific interests because political parties pander to the hopes of the electorate before the election, but do not feel bound to keep their promises afterwards. Against this backdrop, the fruits of direct democratic plebiscites in Germany are directly comprehensible and are viewed as a breath of fresh air. During these journeys with the OMNIBUS, we saw what people expect of us and how important it is that we lead the way by good example and show and prove ourselves to be the carriers and cradle of political sovereignty, in other words of rule that is legitimised by grass-roots democracy. If we are honest, people already know the right form of political participation; we just have to remind each other of it and mutually strengthen our will in this respect.

**THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY** The yearning and search for ourselves leads to the breaking up of traditions and calls for a reorientation of all concepts that is rooted in ourselves. This is only possible by means of a temporary separation from the societal whole. Me on the one side, the world on the other. This is also the origin of a necessary egotism that must not, however, be allowed permanently to overshadow the discovery of commonality. People's sense of powerlessness in the face of the hidden, symbiotic collaboration between representatives of politics and business, who seek to further their own egocentric individual interests, is now increasingly generating a desire for clear rules. However, given this desire to free oneself from self-serving human needs in favour of such clear rules, it should not come as a surprise that some people believe that the rules governing co-existence should come from a divinity. Nevertheless, the conflict between people that arises as a result of the necessity to interpret divine commandments is unsolvable, and brings with it similar problems to those that arise from laws of an entirely secular nature. What is missing is the discovery of a level that is common to all: 'the God in me'. The rules must come from our common inside, from the level inside us that is shared by all people.

That brings us neatly back to the notion that every human being is an artist, not least in the joint and equal act of shaping that springs from our freedom, and in the form of a democracy where we formulate the rules ourselves. Every person has a voice. This is the sign of the times, and it is for this goal that the people in the OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY live and work.

**MICHAEL VON DER LOHE** was born in 1953 and is a photographer and author. He has been the executive secretary of the OMNIBUS FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY since 2004 and is the initiator of the campaign 'Der Aufrechte Gang' [Walking upright].

Translation: Aingeal Flanagan



Video still: Kelab Bangsar Utama,  
Sunday soup kitchen in Chinatown, Kuala Lumpur

© Susanne Bosch, 2014.

Cf. text by artist Susanne Bosch on page 49ff  
in this edition of *Art&Thought*.

■ Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur are two examples of Muslim cities shaped by colonialism that face tremendous challenges, despite progress made in recent years. These challenges relate above all to participation and integrating those sections of the population that are excluded from economic development. They also relate, however, to those who profit from this development and tend to create ghettos of prosperity for themselves. At present, the idea of participation is still best represented by street gangs.

## PARTICIPATION OR EXCLUSION?

### OLD AND NEW CITY WALLS IN JAKARTA AND KUALA LUMPUR

BY SASKIA SCHÄFER

The cities of Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta are neon-lit and cool, with a steady breeze of 20 degrees Celsius, interrupted only occasionally by brief rushes of hot wind. At least, this is how their upper and middle classes experience them, as they move from air-conditioned shopping malls into air-conditioned cars into their air-conditioned homes. The cities are different for everyone else. For those who manufacture and transport the goods to the malls, or who polish the shiny linoleum floors, or who listlessly guard the buildings, temperatures are at a constant 30 degrees under a dark cloud of pollution. After their shifts, they return to their own homes in hour-long bus rides, pressing greying handkerchiefs to their mouths and noses.

Typically, it is neighbouring Singapore that gets referred to as the 'air-conditioned nation', but the city-state's planners installed an efficient public transport system, sprinkled small but lush patches of tropical green throughout the city, and pioneered a congestion-pricing scheme in the 1970s. Singapore is pleasantly walkable. By contrast, in Jakarta, and to a lesser degree in Kuala Lumpur, walking is a demeaning experience, a mode of transportation only for those who cannot afford to do otherwise. Old women carrying home baskets of vegetables on their bent backs are honked off the street by SUV drivers.

Greater Jakarta, with a population of about 13 million in a country of 250 million, is one of the world's largest metropolitan areas. It suffers from the worst traffic in the world. Attempts to encourage car users to share rides are undermined by street children selling their temporary company. Once they've passed through the checkpoint and saved the fee for single riders, they collect a few coins and walk back along the highway to offer themselves to the next commuter.

But even if the city feels chaotic and organic-allygrown, Jakarta has experienced different phases of urban planning. The green and cool Menteng residential area was designed in the 1910s to accommodate Dutch colonial officials. After independence in 1945, the country's first president, Sukarno, dreamed of a large-scale city. He envisioned wide boulevards and prestigious monuments. The city's broad main streets, the tall National Monument, and the Hotel Indonesia roundabout still speak of the old

After independence in 1945,  
the country's first president, Sukarno,  
dreamed of a large-scale city.

grandeur. The large empty space and park around the National Monument buzzes with people. At weekends it is packed with Jakartans who come here for picnicking and kite-flying. The space remains one of the few green and public patches in the city. Rapid urbanisation and the influx from the rural areas has transformed the city over the past decades, even though the majority of Indonesians still live in rural environments. The traditional *kampungs*, village-like, organically-grown residential areas, began to spill over their boundaries. In the name of modernisation and development, many of them were demolished in the 1990s under Suharto to make space for shopping malls and office buildings.

**REFORMS IN A JAM** After thirty-two years of military rule, president Suharto stepped down in 1998. He resigned after massive protests amid the Asian economic crisis. The period since then is widely praised as the new democratic era of *reformasi*. The situation of free speech has vastly improved, state violence has massively reduced, and social mobility has increased.

But *reformasi* has yet to bring fundamental changes to the way Jakarta is governed. In the elections of 2014, the successful candidate was Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo, a representative of the newly-emerging class of business people who make their way up without elite networks. He was the first Indonesian president without a military background or close ties to the old elite. Jokowi has a special relationship to Jakarta. Before he took office, he was Jakarta's governor. He won people's hearts through his *blusukan* (surprise visits) to hospitals and poor areas. Opinions in the capital were torn about his candidacy. On one hand, many hoped that, as president, he would have even more power to improve Jakarta. On the other hand, sceptics argued that he would become too busy with national affairs and too absorbed in major power struggles to maintain ties to city politics. The hopes now rest on his former deputy, 'Ahok' Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who is vocally promising rigorous changes. But until this point, the formal democratisation and decentralisation haven't improved the urban politics of Jakarta. Some urban activists cynically say that they're grateful they can now voice their demands without getting arrested, but that their calls for more public spaces, for better-planned housing schemes and improved public transport remain just as unanswered as in the past. The problems lie not so much in the

planning and in the legal realm, but in the massive gap between these plans and concrete implementation.

Nearby Kuala Lumpur, with a population of less than two million, has a much less chaotic and suffocating feel. The Malaysian nation-state was formed out of the British colonial areas in south-east Asia in 1965. It is a multi-cultural post-colonial society *par excellence*. The British brought in thousands of workers from China and India, and to this day those old categories of the British colonial census are imprinted on people's ID cards. Those marked as Indian and Chinese make up nearly 40% of the population. A stroll through the old city centres of Malacca and Penang leads from Chinatown to Little India, still retaining the atmosphere of the old, ethnically-assigned boroughs. Since Malaysia has a policy of encouraging urban deconcentration, the capital, Kuala Lumpur, has a relatively small population, but its highly educated inhabitants play a major economic role in the region.

**RACIAL DIVIDE** Chinese tin-traders founded Kuala Lumpur in the nineteenth century. Only later did it assume its role as the administrative capital of the Federated Malay States. For the first decades, the town grew without any planning or administration. It remained the more chaotic cousin to the neatly-planned Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca, and Penang, which assigned particular areas to the different categories of race. But even without neat mapping, Kuala Lumpur became the capital of a highly racialised society. Even after independence, the colonial system of racial categories remained largely intact. To this day, racial categorisation is crucial in the country's politics. The government coalition that has been ruling the Malaysian nation state since 1965 is headed by the United Malays National Organisation. The name reveals the party's ethnic focus and self-understanding. In ethno-nationalist manner, it represents those classified as Malay. During the negotiations for independence with the British, those of Chinese and Indian origin had only been granted citizenship under the condition of being of a lesser status than the country's *bumiputeras* – a category literally meaning 'sons of the soil,' and comprising mostly those classified as Malays. Various policies guarantee the *bumiputera* easier access to education, loans, and jobs. Since the 1970s, the government has been encouraging Malay immigration from rural to urban areas to achieve a greater involvement of those classified as Malay in the country's economy. Thus, other Malaysians often criticise what they call 'Malay dominance'.

Both Jakarta's and Kuala Lumpur's origins lie in the early days of colonial conquest. The cities were founded as trading posts rather than as places for settlement. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company established the fort and settlement of Batavia on the ruins of the port city of Jayakarta. Built as a centre for trade and administration, the town's early residents were mainly traders, slaves, and workers brought in from China, India, and other regions of Asia. Javanese were barred from living within the city walls so that the Dutch could firmly control the trade. After an initial period of living together, inhabitants were ethnically categorised and assigned to live in their respective villages outside the city walls. The realities were always more complex than the neat administrative categories suggested. Over the next centuries the city changed vastly, and expanded far south of the harbour to become the massive metropolitan megacity of today.

Both cities are a place to come to for business. For decades, villagers have moved to the cities in search for economic opportunities. A sharp distinction between the urban and the rural would be misleading. All over south-east Asia, city-dwellers offer their labour to the urban economy but sustain close ties to their village life. They return home to their village as often as possible, send home money, and often remain registered at their place of origin. The boundaries between the city and its hinterlands are

often more blurred than the boundaries running within the cities themselves. The early days illustrate how cities are founded on exchange, immigration, and exclusion.

**BORDERS OF CLASS AND ETHNICITY** Since their early days, two main axes of separation run through Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur: class and ethnicity. In both colonial societies, individuals were categorised according to the concept of race. In Batavia, both within and outside the city walls, they were assigned distinguished living quarters. After 1945, the various ethnicised groups mingled and moved more than in colonial times, but old ties of ethnic identity live on and map onto business networks. One example of this is Jakarta's street gangs. They exercise a great deal of power and authority over both poor residential areas and some business parts of the city, extracting taxes from nightclubs, restaurants, and street vendors for 'protection', either in the form of pure extortion or against actual, existing rival gangs.

Incoming villagers often settle down in areas that are widely populated by a particular language group, and which are under the tight control of an urban gang. The newcomers depend on the gang for access to jobs and other patronage. The networks do not merely stretch through the streets but reach high up to political levels. It is often very difficult to draw clear distinctions between some gangs and formal political youth organisations. The networks are also an important source for votes during political campaigns and elections.

In Kuala Lumpur, the ethnic cleavages are more openly visible. The old Chinatown still exists and retains its Straits-Chinese character beyond functioning as a tourist destination.

Workshop participant  
in a public intervention  
in Kuala Lumpur,  
'Connected: Dialogue  
through / with / in the arts',  
May 2014 in Lonstgens,  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
© Susanne Bosch, 2014  
Cf. text by artist  
Susanne Bosch on page 49ff  
in this edition of  
*Art&Thought*.



## Employing a driver is not much more expensive than buying and maintaining a car.

Other areas in the city are mainly of Tamil character. Restaurants mostly cater to specific ethnicised groups. In mixed neighbourhoods, little notes stuck to light poles offering rooms in shared housing often read: 'Looking for Malay room mate' or 'Room for rent, Chinese only'. In this highly racialised society, many resent the ethnicised character of various quarters and complain about alleged attempts to manifest the political dominance of those categorised as Malay.

**THE MESSAGES OF MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE** Malay identity and Islam have been closely tied together since independence. The constitution defines a Malay as Muslim. Due to this close connection, Islamic symbolism often functions as Malay symbolism. Since the 1980s, Islam has become much more visible in public life in Malaysia. Many thus resent the Islamic character of Putra Jaya, the administrative capital of Malaysia. The planned city was built 25 kilometres south of Kuala Lumpur in the 1990s. The seat of government was shifted there in 1999. The architecture in Putra Jaya stresses Islamic symbolism through the giant Putra Mosque. Its roof is designed in the shape of a dome, resembling contemporary mosque designs in the Middle East rather than traditional south-east Asian mosques. This design starkly contrasts with the old National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur. The National Mosque opened in 1965, and its modern style integrates traditional regional features. The design of the Putra Mosque sends a different message to the old National Mosque. It is reminiscent of Middle Eastern domes: critics accuse it of de-regionalising Islam and drawing connections with an imagined uniform, Middle-East-dominated Islam. Many non-Muslim Malaysians view this critically as an architectural manifestation of Malay-Muslim dominance.

More than Malayness or Islam, Kuala Lumpur's landscape showcases famous nationalist symbols of wealth and economic development. The Petronas Twin Towers were once the world's tallest building. Adjacent to them is the massive KLCC shopping mall

where hundreds of Gulf tourists clad in flowing *burkas* spend entire summers shopping and dining, with their maids and drivers from the Philippines and Indonesia waiting outside. The KLCC complex was erected on the city's former racecourse, one of the few green lungs in the city. Not far away, urban planners have torn down the historic nineteenth century Bukit Bintang Girls' School to make space for the high-end shopping mall Pavilion. Malaysia's capital parades its wealth and the nation's self-understanding as modern and highly developed. Malaysia's tourist industry is flourishing. It partly owes its success to creating an image of a technologically advanced, economically progressive Islamic society.

**EXCLUDING ONESELF - AND THE OTHERS** In the 2010s, the public and ostentatious display of wealth is becoming less important to the ever-growing middle-classes in both countries. Instead, they retreat from the city centre into more comfortable homes in the suburbs. From there, they commute. Employing a driver is not much more expensive than buying and maintaining a car. In Jakarta, many have whole mini-offices set up in the back of their cars to use the average three hours in traffic for work. Whole satellite villages have been set up on the outskirts of Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, complete with shops, restaurants, hair stylists, kindergartens, schools, and mosques. Into these, the country's elite withdraws. Here, they shield themselves against the noise and the dirt of the megacities they are a part of. In Indonesia, some of these gated communities are Islam-themed. Only Muslims are welcome to buy, the swimming pools have separate times for men and women, and the bathrooms are designed so as not to face the direction of Mecca. The advertisement slogan often features 'green living', referring to the patches of carefully-preserved green in the compounds, as well as to green being the colour of Islam. Their inhabitants wish to separate themselves not only from people of a different class and those of a different religion, but also from other Muslims who are less inclined to display their piety.

In both countries, the economic gap is growing. The boundaries between those who walk and those who drive are rising. This social separation only increases with the spread of mobile Internet access and the greater importance of privatised education. From cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, we can learn how these economic boundaries work together with old divisions of ethnic identity and newer divisions of displayed piety. In times where more than half of the world's population live in cities, this will help us understand how exclusion operates, and maybe even how to live together in ever more densely populated spaces.

**SASKIA SCHÄFER** is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Religion, Culture, and Public Life at Columbia University. Her research interests include public discourses on religious liberty, deviance, and factions within Islam, with a regional focus on Indonesia and Malaysia.

■ In today's world, access to an Internet where one does not have to constantly worry about being monitored is absolutely essential for political participation. The Tor browser is one way of getting such access. This browser has not only been used by people like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, it is also, unfortunately, exploited by criminals. Walter van Rossum takes a closer look at how surveillance-free surfing works.

## SAFE SURFING FOR ALL? FREEDOM AND PARTICIPATION AGAINST SURVEILLANCE AND CRIME

BY WALTER VAN ROSSUM

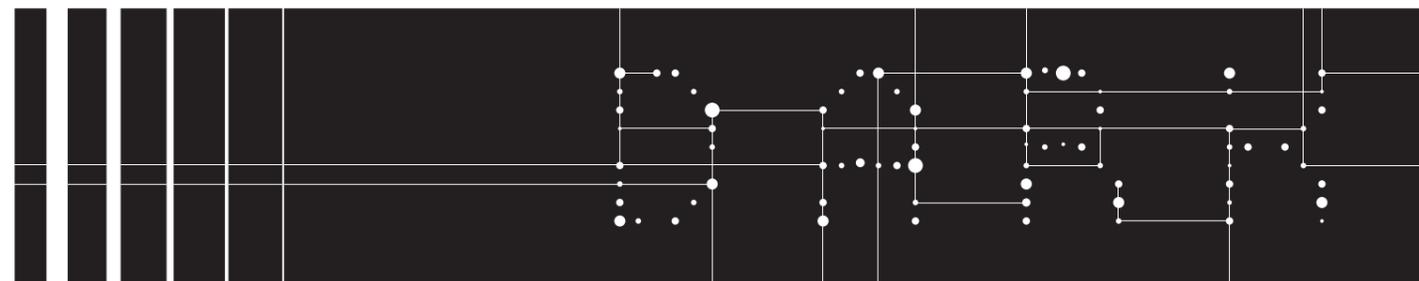
In the early days of the Internet, when it was still a place of dreams, an extension of the real world, an escape, the American writer Thomas Pynchon imagined the deep web to be a virtual enchanted forest, a digital underwater world that one could travel through in the form of an avatar – an artificial being, a pixel person in a virtual world, a cyber doll. However, Pynchon also told the story of a hostile takeover, namely of how the Internet degenerated from a kind of communicative utopia into an almost totalitarian surveillance machine run by secret services and technology corporations – a scenario that has now, uncannily, become reality.

First and foremost, the real deep web is that part of the Internet that is not indexed by search engines. It contains huge archives: just think of the data collected by the NSA, the weather data stored by NASA, all non-indexed websites, and the myriad dead-end links that sometimes, surprisingly, still clock up a couple of bytes. The deep web is estimated to be more than a thousand times bigger than the Internet we surf around on every day. However, here in the depths of the deep web is another network that has devoted itself to the old ideals of global, free communication for all and between all: the Tor network. Tor is an acronym derived from the network's full name: 'The Onion Router'. Tor describes itself as follows: 'a group of volunteer-operated servers that allows people

to improve their privacy and security on the Internet. Tor's users employ this network by connecting through a series of virtual tunnels rather than making a direct connection. Individuals use Tor to keep websites from tracking them and their family members, or to connect to news sites, instant messaging services, or the like when these are blocked by their local Internet providers.'

**SECURITY FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS** Jacob Appelbaum, one of the developers behind Tor, explains: 'It is a not-for-profit project. In other words, the source code is visible to all. Anyone can look and see how it works. And everyone who gets involved helps the project and makes the network stronger. Everyone can use it to communicate without leaving behind a data trail that could subsequently be used against them. It gives everyone a voice. Everyone has the right to communicate freely.'

Journalists use Tor to communicate more securely with whistleblowers or dissidents. Chelsea Manning (previously known as Bradley Manning), for example, the second most famous whistleblower of them all, used Tor to send documents to WikiLeaks. Director Laura Poitras, who won an Oscar for her film about Edward Snowden, *Citizenfour*, explains: 'Without the Tor network, it would be impossible for investigative journalists to do their work. And of course I wouldn't have been able to make



*'Most of us, however, have very few options when it comes to safe surfing.'*

Jacob Appelbaum

contact with Edward Snowden and to work with him. [...] Whenever I spoke to Snowden – months before I eventually met him in Hong Kong – we communicated via Tor. He considers Tor to be absolutely key to his survival in order to protect his private life from being monitored. For Snowden, it's the only tool. I know some examples of what happens when journalists do not use Tor.'

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange also communicates exclusively via Tor: 'Encryption and anonymisation didn't come out of nowhere. It was a long, hard search for free and anonymous communication from individual to individual. Tor was the first anonymous protocol that restored equilibrium.'

**FREEDOM VERSUS CRIME** But as is so often the case with freedom, there are those who occasionally take unintended liberties with it. This is why a whole range of so-called 'hidden services' – clandestine services, to a certain extent – have been set up which use the anonymisation opportunities offered by Tor. These openly offer virtually everything you wouldn't find in a shop window in the overworld, from drugs and weapons to child pornography and contract killings. These patently criminal activities have earned the Tor network the nickname 'dark web'.

And so drug dealers, arms dealers and right-wing extremists all over the world share their communication paths with opposition activists from places like Syria, China, and the US. The British Internet journalist Jamie Bartlett recently published a book entitled *The Dark Net*, in which he describes the people who operate in the digital underground. 'The dark net, for me,' he writes, 'describes an idea more than a particular place: internet underworlds set apart yet connected to the internet we inhabit, worlds of freedom and anonymity where users say

and do what they like, often uncensored, unregulated, and outside of society's norms.'

In physical terms, Tor is made up of computers that are hooked up to the Internet and are connected to each other using the Internet protocol. Logically and cryptographically, however, it is a subnet that is entirely separate from the Internet. The brain behind the Tor project in its present form is Jacob Appelbaum, who has come up with a whole range of new ideas to make it possible for people in places like China to continue using Tor.

Thirty-two-year-old 'Jake' Appelbaum is an American citizen. Not only is he an ingenious programmer, he also fights for the old Internet utopia of free, widespread, and global communication. 'We have to be aware of the political context of the situation, especially since the Snowden summer of 2013. We must understand that we don't have any other means of resisting the NSA and GCHQ. None whatsoever. The solution is not to pigeonhole people: the good guys over here, the bad guys over there. You over there on the left, you don't have the right to free communication. That's exactly not what we are saying. What we are saying is that our primary concern is to make it possible for everyone to practice and protect freedom of speech. The bad guys – whoever or whatever is meant by that – have a whole load of opportunities. Most of us, however, have very few options when it comes to safe surfing.'

In short, Jake Appelbaum knows all about the limits on freedom in the so-called 'free world'. He was an early supporter of Wikileaks and worked with Julian Assange. Appelbaum has been detained by American authorities on several occasions, his computer and mobile phone confiscated. He now lives in Germany. But even here he has no illusions about his safety. In December 2013, persons un-

known broke into his Berlin apartment and tried to manipulate his computer.

The Tor project is a private foundation. To begin with, the development of Tor was promoted by the NSA itself. To this day, in fact, up to 60% of the funding for the Tor project comes from the US government. 'On the one hand, the support from the government is great, because much of what Tor has done in recent years was developed by people who were able to work on it full time without having to worry where the money for the rent or the next meal was coming from,' explains Roger Dingledine, one of the key developers behind Tor. 'On the other hand, that is, of course, a bad thing: donors could influence the work being done. Having said that, there's no one who comes along and says, "Here's a shedload of money, build us a back door in." We will never build a back door into Tor.'

As so often in the past, the American secret services had a hand in creating one of their most successful adversaries. Jacob Appelbaum: 'It is strange: on the one hand, these people built up Tor because they believe in anonymity. On the other, they detain me at airports and threaten me. One said to me: "It's great what you're doing in Iran and China; that helps people. Fantastic! But why do you have to do that here too?"' The things that are supposed to foster freedom in China or Iran are viewed with hostility in Appelbaum's native country. The NSA wants to be able to see everything, allegedly in the name of security.

**THE LAYERS OF AN ONION** Anyone can download the Tor software from the Internet free of charge and install it themselves. It's as quick as it is easy. Tor always operates using three servers: the first logs on to the Internet, the second forwards the request, and the third (the so-called 'exit node') sends the request back out onto the normal Internet. Tor clients are structured in such a way that they try to use three nodes in three different countries. This reduces the likelihood that all three machines have been compromised by the same organisation.

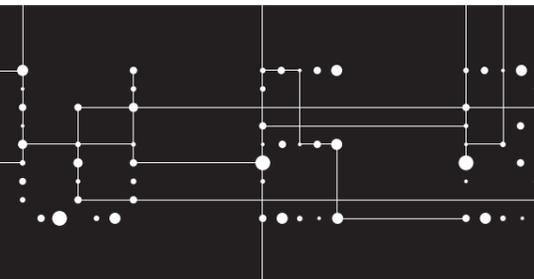
However, these clever detours come at the expense of speed, albeit only a little. In addition, Tor changes its paths once every ten minutes, even if

the same person is still at the other end of the line. Tor also encrypts the data up the point of the so-called 'exit node'. In terms of technology, Tor uses three-way encryption, which is then reduced by one encryption level by every forwarding node. In other words, the first node gets a triple-encrypted query. From this, it removes the outermost layer. The second node gets a double-encrypted message, from which it in turn can remove the outermost layer. The exit node then gets a simply encrypted message, from which it can remove the final crypto layer. This query is then sent out onto the Internet. This is where the name 'The Onion Router' (TOR) comes from: the three crypto layers surround the actual message like the layers of an onion.

The network currently comprises more than 6,000 servers that private individuals operate voluntarily and at their own expense. Anyone can become part of the network. These servers are based in a number of different countries, the majority in North America. However, there are no guarantees that several or even many of the servers are not being operated by secret services or so-called security agencies. Take the case of the student Sebastian Hahn in the German city of Göttingen, for example: his Tor server was hacked by the NSA, even though he was not suspected of engaging in either shady dealings or extremist activities.

Michael George, an IT expert at the Bavarian State Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Germany, suspects that some secret services do indeed control some Tor servers around the world, even if they don't have any hard and fast suspicions of involvement in terrorist activities: 'If you control the entry node for Tor, you can to a certain extent reverse the anonymity of Tor, which is why I'm pretty certain that some of these entry nodes are operated by intelligence agencies.'

Jake Appelbaum and those like him are constantly working to improve their network and, above all, to make it more resilient to attacks. Joachim Selzer of the Chaos Computer Club knows the power of the attackers and the weaknesses of even the most cleverly encrypted network. Nevertheless, he says, 'At the moment, there's nothing better on the horizon. The great thing about Tor is



‘... the game is fixed, and it won't end  
till the Internet – the real one, the dream,  
the promise – is destroyed.’

Thomas Pynchon

the flexibility, because anyone who wants to can decide to set up a Tor node at the drop of a hat. Above all, it's a system that is built on the highest level of mistrust. In other words, I don't even have to trust the operator of a node; I just have to trust the maths behind Tor, and I have to trust that the three nodes I've chosen are not co-operating with each other.'

**THE DIGITAL SILK ROAD** The Tor browser allows users to surf through the so-called 'clearnet' (in other words the normal Internet) in relative security. However, there is no need to surface out of the dark web at all. After all, you can get virtually anything down there. Above all, the dark web is a shopping paradise for those looking for all kinds of forbidden goods and services. It is also home to something that could be referred to as co-operatives, which form under the umbrella of the most varied suppliers. Until recently, one of the best-known of these was Silk Road, which was banned in 2014. The British journalist Jamie Bartlett took a closer look at Silk Road. He says: 'The astonishing thing is how familiar everything looks when you log in. Anyone who has ever visited Amazon or eBay will immediately be able to find their way around. The only difference is the products that are on offer. It's not just drugs; they're the main business, but you've got everything there. And do you know what the most popular item on offer last year was? Fake £20 supermarket vouchers, which were selling for £8 a pop.'

However, in order to find out how to reach the dealers, the user needs a directory of addresses, which can be found on Hidden Wiki. Here, the addresses look very different to those on the familiar Internet. For example, anyone who enters *zqktlwi4 fecuo6ri.onion* in the address bar of a Tor browser

can access a kind of directory of dealers operating within the Tor network. Here, everything on offer is divided up neatly, clearly and correctly into chapters. Right at the beginning are the links to Tor's own search engines. Scrolling down the table of contents brings you to the sprawling drugs department, for example to the link to a 'drug market'. You have to register using a fictitious name, then the shop window opens up to access more than 14,000 items from a variety of suppliers.

The suppliers have names like Turkiman, Capricorn, or Jobcentre100 and promise to deliver anywhere in the world within two or three days – as soon as payment has been received, of course. And therein lies the problem: Turkiman, Capricorn, Jobcentre 100 and their ilk only have Tor addresses, nothing more. The buyer has no idea where these people are – if they are anywhere at all. Which is where a category comes into play that seems almost archaic, one you would least expect to find in the Internet underworld: trust. In fact, the biggest asset down here is a brand name users trust. Silk Road, for example, where Jamie Bartlett had exceptionally positive experiences, says: 'The real trick, the secret of Silk Road is customer service. This is what keeps things running. Just like on eBay, it's a marketplace that works incredibly well. Hundreds of sellers are offering thousands of products. The decisive thing is that customers leave a rating like they do on Amazon. Customers are virtually pressed into giving a rating. How was the packaging? Did the delivery arrive on time? Was the item good value for money? Competition, supply and demand – that's how a good market works.'

Payment is made using the Internet currency, Bitcoin. But apart from drugs, what else was on offer? How about a couple of forged papers, just in case you have to make a quick getaway: 'US pass-

port, ID card and driving licence – €2,000 all together'. Or a brand new identity for a new life: driving licences from Germany, France, Belgium, Lithuania, and Poland. Worldwide passports. Express delivery. Or how about *Sol's United States citizenship*: 'Become a real US citizen. Citizenship for sale.'

**A MIRROR IMAGE OF SOCIETY** Naturally, Jacob Appelbaum knows this side of his network too. 'There are a fair few stories doing the rounds about anonymity. One of these narratives says that anonymity facilitates crime. Then we hear things being said about Silk Road, like: "How shocking! You can do illegal things on the Internet!" Well, welcome to the Internet! But the Internet can only provide a mirror image of human society. And sometimes things get criminal there.' That said, there is nothing available in the dark web that is not available in the analogue underworld. In other words, the Tor network doesn't generate this crime; it just offers it a certain platform for distribution. Crime is one problem. Surveillance is another. Those who use Tor are fleeing surveillance. However, just because someone is fleeing surveillance doesn't mean that he or she is a criminal.

Vast surveillance machines are watching our every move; complex and hugely powerful systems are gathering all the data that we incessantly produce. What both state and private data collectors then do with this data is largely unregulated. Michael George of the Bavarian branch of the German intelligence agency explains: 'There's nothing that can really be pitted against the security agencies. We shouldn't give the impression that such a form of security exists. The only thing you can do to really protect yourself effectively against this kind of spying is to have laws that prohibit agencies from actually spying on people. Then we have to have the political will to really implement these laws. This is really the only way to ensure anonymity. After all, if you don't have that, there will always be ways of getting around this security mechanism.'

**THE STUPIDITY OF MANY USERS** Of one thing George is absolutely certain: they will get you, regardless of who 'they' are. And anyone who tries to escape is a partisan who will be permanently on the run. In this respect, there is really no alternative but for everyone to take Michael George's appeal to heart. The only problem is that nothing could be further from the minds of the powers and the powerful in this great, mad cybergame. And they can rely on the sheer stupidity of the billions of users gorging themselves on their digital toys, like sheep in a fully-monitored herd. 'They get us, all right, we're all lonely,

needy, disrespected, desperate to believe in any sorry imitation of belonging they want to sell us ... We're being played [...] and the game is fixed, and it won't end till the Internet – the real one, the dream, the promise – is destroyed,' wrote the American author Thomas Pynchon in his novel *Bleeding Edge*.

According to all available information, the US National Security Agency monitors large parts of humanity on a routine basis, collecting data to an extent that is not yet entirely clear. The NSA already fulfils all requirements that would allow it – if it so wished – to one day operate as a central agency of perfidious tyranny. Already, the basic rights enshrined in the German constitution (Basic Law) are being intentionally and systematically annulled by a foreign intelligence agency. Despite the fact that we know all this, politicians and law enforcement agencies, who have sworn to uphold and defend these basic rights, are treating this complete meltdown as if it were a case of pickpocketing that they can't deal with because they lack the necessary legal instruments.

In these circumstances, to believe that the state will in the foreseeable future be willing and able to ensure and guarantee privacy and free communication is at best naive. We should prepare ourselves for quite a long and uncomfortable flight into tunnels. And whether we like it or not, we will have to share these tunnels with gangsters.

**WALTER VAN ROSSUM** studied Romance Studies, Philosophy, and History in Cologne and Paris. He has been working as a freelance author for the German broadcasters WDR and Deutschlandfunk and the German newspapers *Die Zeit*, *Merkur*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and *Der Freitag* since 1981. Walter van Rossum lives in Germany and Morocco. His best-known book is *Die Tagesshow. Wie man in 15 Minuten die Welt unbegreiflich macht* [The Daily Show: How to render the world incomprehensible in 15 minutes], which was published in 2007.

Translation: Aingeal Flanagan

■ The Syrian philosopher Sadik al-Azm is one of the rare Arab thinkers who have managed to criticise both Islam and the ostensibly secular regimes of the Arab world. His writings have given us – both Western and Arab readers – a better understanding of the Arab world. For this, Sadik al-Azm has just been awarded the Goethe Medal.

## INTELLECTUAL PIONEER AND CRITIC

### LAUDATORY SPEECH FOR THE ARAB PHILOSOPHER SADIK AL-AZM

BY **STEFAN WILD**

#### I.

At the beginning of the year 1969 I had not yet been long in Lebanon, but I had already heard a great deal about a Syrian named Sadik Jalal al-Azm. The Lebanese newspapers reported contentiously about this headstrong fellow from Damascus. And the correspondent for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Beirut at the time warned me about this leftist, this Marxist in the flesh. I overcame my fears and attempted to reach Sadik in his small flat across the street from the American University of Beirut, only to learn, however, that Sadik was in prison.

It happened like this. After his return from Yale University, Sadik taught European philosophy at Beirut's American University, and also wrote two books in Arabic, in 1968 and 1969, that instantly made him famous – for some, infamous – throughout the Arab world. The first book was entitled *Self-Criticism After the Defeat*. The defeat was Israel's routing of Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian troops in June of 1967. In spite of all their high-sounding propaganda, it blindsided the Arab regimes. And Sadik was the first to analyse this defeat as a shameful, self-inflicted failure and not, like almost all of his Arab colleagues, as a temporary 'setback.' Those Muslim scholars who entrenched themselves

behind the slogan 'Islam is the solution' – namely, the solution to all problems of the modern world – became Sadik's fiercest adversaries. One of Sadik's Arab fundamentalist arch-enemies, Salah al Munajid, succeeded in publishing a book in Germany in 1968 entitled *Wohin treibt die Arabische Welt?* [Where is the Arab world headed?] According to him, the Arabs had lost the June War because Muslims were not pious enough, and revered Communism and Bolshevism. It was exactly this religiously veiled obscurantism that Sadik would fight against all his life.

Sadik's second book put him behind bars for a short while. It was called *Critique of Religious Thought*, and it too was written in Arabic for Arab readers. It became a bestseller and is read in almost all Arab countries to this day, albeit banned regularly. The Mufti of Beirut took offence at Sadik's critique of the Koran and Islam and accused him of having incited 'confessional discord.' The prosecutor accused Sadik of doubting and ridiculing the existence of *djinn*, angels and devils as taught in the Koran. In Lebanon, to this day the Arab country where the press has most freedom, Sadik was discharged from detention after one week.

To me, the main motif in Sadik's life's work seems to be the word 'critique.' This has little to do with Kant's critique of reason, which Sadik had worked on at Yale. Rather, Sadik's critique was based mainly on the religious criticism of Karl Marx. Sadik's critique of the partnership of institutionalised religion and politics was, in a sense, his trademark. 'Speaking truth to power' was his motto. He also believes in making debate public. Sadik belonged and still belongs to the Arab left, which was greatly weakened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For many Arab intellectuals, Marxism long appeared to be the only way to better understand their societies. Socialism seemed best suited to make Arab societies more just. We in Germany have good reason to be sceptical of Stalinism and real Socialism, but in Arab societies secularism, rationalism, feminism, independent research and much more seemed possible only if these societies moved left.

In 1990, Sadik wrote a defiant book – also in Arabic – called *In Defence of Materialism and History*. He called for non-dogmatic Marxism at a time when many former Arab leftists began to flirt with Khomeini's Islamic Republic or embraced French post-modernism.

#### II.

Since Sadik is being honoured today with a Goethe Medal, it seems fitting to speak briefly about his relationship with literature. In April, when Sadik received word at Princeton that he was being awarded a Goethe Medal, he wrote me that he immediately ordered a copy

of *Faust Part I* from the university library. He had always considered this drama a milestone in modern history. In the 1970s and 1980s, Sadik held lectures on Goethe's *Faust* in English at the American University of Beirut and later in Arabic at the University of Damascus.

Sadik's understanding of literature was mostly politically shaded. When Salman Rushdie's magical-realist novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) appeared, Sadik recognised that the uniqueness of this book is that it forced the Muslim East and the secular West into a religious, political and literary controversy for the first time. Sadik saw Rushdie as a Muslim dissident; a literary heir of François Rabelais and James Joyce. He revised the overused quote by Goethe that Orient and Occident are inseparable. Sadik was one of few Arab authors who dared to clearly pledge themselves to this book and to condemn the politically-motivated 'fatwa of death' decreed by Imam Khomeini.

#### III.

Sadik was and is rightly celebrated in the West – as we are honouring him today. Yet we must not forget one thing: his books were and are widely read in Arab countries, but their author has never been celebrated there. No Arab politician has ever adopted one of his theses. To my knowledge, no Arab university has ever dared to award him a prize. A few years ago in an interview he said that he would do everything possible never to become 'an Arab intellectual in exile'. Today we sadly are forced to celebrate him as one. Sadik's homeland of Syria is sinking in fire and blood. Even in Lebanon his life is in danger. Is there a light at the end of this terrible tunnel? Yes, at least to a small degree. For some time, Sadik's most important essays have been available in a beautiful edition in English translation. Sadik knows, of course, what Voltaire's *Candide* knew: that the world is neither a Garden of Eden nor the best of all possible worlds, but is full of cruelty.

In the final sentence of Voltaire's book, despite fire and blood, *Candide* goes out 'to cultivate his garden'. Sadik Al-Azm may not have a garden to cultivate, but he is already working on a new book for us.

**STEFAN WILD** is Professor Emeritus of Semitic Philology and Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn.



Sadik al-Azm  
being awarded the  
Goethe-Medal.  
Photo: © Maik Schuck/  
Goethe-Institut.

# THE EYE CAN SEE BUT

## ON THE DEBATE IN GERMANY ABOUT MIGRANTS

BY AHMAD HISSOU

In a rare step, Spiegel Online, the website of the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, has written an apology to readers at the end of an article on refugees. 'Dear readers,' it said, 'unusually, you will not find a forum for your comments and opinions on this article. Unfortunately, on the question of refugees, we receive comments that are abusive and sometimes inappropriate and unpublishable. We are therefore obliged to be selective, in other words to open a space for comments on some subjects but not on others, as in the case of this article. We hope you will appreciate our position.'

The article in question was not very different from other articles and stories about the many attacks made on refugees over the years, especially in the east of Germany. It was about a Somali refugee who was hit on the back of the head with an unidentified weapon and by unidentified people when he was coming home from school one day in the town of Merseburg in Saxony-Anhalt in eastern Germany. This refugee, who had escaped the horrors of war in Somalia, was trying hard to learn German, contrary to the accusations made against refugees by those who stand behind such attacks.

**BEYOND RACIST COMMENTS** What has happened? Why are people frightened of racist and inappropriate comments, given that those making such comments represent a small minority in German society, which has opened its arms to refugees escaping the horrors of war, particularly those from Syria and other areas of war and conflict, and given that those racists have always existed? The issue may go deeper than just racist comments on a website or in a newspaper. Such comments have always existed too, and sometimes even went so far as threatening to murder anyone who offered help to refugees or advocates welcoming them.

When we say the matter goes deeper than that, we mean there is something that goes beyond racist comments by an extreme right-wing minority that is hostile to Islam and to foreigners and refugees in general. There has been a sudden shift in recent times in the public mood in Germany on the question of refugees. The prevalent mood is no longer one of enthusiasm to accept them, to show sympathy for them or to set up support groups and networks for Syrian and other refugees in various German cities.

Another language has started to creep into the discourse of some politicians and into the media coverage of the refugees. Not only that, but this new language has also found its way into German civil society organisations. It is a language that propagates

# THE HAND CAN'T REACH

fear about unknown people coming towards us, that promotes despair and casts doubt on the ability of German society to take in these growing numbers of refugees.

**SPREADING FEAR IN GERMAN SOCIETY** In fact, some media outlets have started to make new predictions for the number of refugees expected this year. The numbers are already at their highest level since World War Two. Some people say that a million and a half refugees are expected in 2015 alone. The prediction might be correct; however, the problem is not with the numbers but with the way they are presented and the psychological effects they have on the audience, i.e. German society. Apart from fear-mongering by exaggerating the numbers and by ratcheting them up in stages – 500,000, then 800,000, and finally 1.5 million – there is another level of discourse designed to frighten and create suspicion, in this case related to the nature of the people who are coming 'to us', and their religious affiliations.

Most of these refugees are Muslims coming from Syria and other areas where revolutions against tyrants broke out and morphed into sectarian and religious conflicts. In the beginning, when pictures of bombing and destruction arrived from Syria, people here paid no attention to the refugees' affiliations. It was the humanitarian aspect that prevailed. Germany knows what refugees and asylum mean: the country was responsible for two world wars and suffered the horrors of those wars. It has already seen waves of refugees and displaced people that were unprecedented in history. But when ideology is at stake, reason has no place; and so the shift began.

**WHAT REMAINS OF THE CULTURE OF WELCOME** The media have started saying that German Chancellor Angela Merkel's popularity is in decline, to the advantage of her critics in right-wing and populist parties. On top of this, some people have begun to say that she might lose her position if she maintains her stance in favour of welcoming refugees.

So what has happened to the culture of welcoming refugees, the culture of 'open arms' and 'open doors'? What is left of the image of hundreds, or rather thousands, of German volunteers waiting for hours in the main railway stations in Munich and other cities to welcome tens of thousands of exhausted refugees with flowers and with the basic supplies that they needed?

In fact, this culture has not disappeared, although caution and fear are prevalent these days – a change for which some German politicians are largely responsible. What else would one expect from an ordinary German with limited education who hears the president of the country say: 'We have a big heart. However, there is a limit to what we can do.' He might as well have said, 'The eye can see but the hand can't reach.' In other words, the message is that we will not be able to take in more. But on the other hand there is some consolation to be had in the fact that Chancellor Merkel is still saying, 'We will not close the borders, and I am proud that Germany is taking in refugees and welcoming them.'

AHMAD HISSOU works as editor at the Arab service of Deutsche Welle and a member of the editorial board of *Art&Thought*.

Translation: Jonathan Wright



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*Editor's office:*  
Stefan Weidner  
Art&Thought / Fikrun wa Fann  
Prälat-Otto-Müller-Platz 6  
D-50670 Köln  
Germany

*e-mail:*  
[fikrun@goethe.de](mailto:fikrun@goethe.de)  
*Internet:*  
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*Editors:*  
Manutshehr Amirpur  
Ahmad Hissou  
Stefan Weidner

*Copy editor:*  
Charlotte Collins

*Assistance with  
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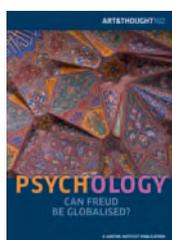
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