

# ORIGINS

Current Events In  
Historical Perspective



“Study The Old But Create The New”

# ORIGINS

Current Events in  
Historical Perspective

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Front cover: *Study the Old But Create the New* by Varvara Stepanova, c. 1919

[Galerie Gmurzynska]

Back cover: Tombstone from Novodevichy Cemetery, Moscow, 1991

## A Guided Tour of *Origins*

"For insight into the complicated and complicating events ... , one needs perspective, not attitudes; context, not anecdotes; analyses, not postures. For any kind of lasting illumination the focus must be on the history routinely ignored or played down or unknown." [Toni Morrison, *Racing Justice, Engendering Power* (Pantheon, p xi)]

It is the mission of *Origins* to provide this context, perspective and history so frequently avoided by today's popular press. The world is a complicated place, yet the news tries so often to simplify it into ten or twenty second sound-bites or single-faceted opinions—almost to the point that the information has lost its value. To truly grasp contemporary events, a grounding in the history and the context is essential. *Origins'* historical analysis will embrace the complexity of an issue and work to balance the disparate viewpoints and beliefs so as to provide a more complete and non-partisan picture.

Here is a tour of what you will find in *Origins*.

*Origins'* main articles will focus on the long-term trends and patterns, search for the foundations of today's events, and explore the multi-faceted nature of a particular problem, thereby providing the reader with a base of knowledge from which to develop an informed opinion. These articles will complement the day-to-day news provided by the television and newspapers. Main articles, diverse in both subject and scope, will be divided topically between International ("**Around the World**") and North American ("**Here At Home**").

In addition to the principal articles, *Origins* will regularly run a series of other columns. "**Reviews and Commentary**" will include reviews of books and films that illuminate aspects of contemporary issues. Rather than regular reviews ("I liked this book because ..."), *Origins'* reviews will act as springboards for a discussion of the larger questions brought forward by the work in question. Through analysing the author's opinions and arguments and providing alternate perspectives, the reviews will give the reader an understanding of the many sides of a particular issue.

"**Questions and Comments**" will be the one column in which overt, direct opinions are voiced. It is also where letters to the editor (and responses thereto) will be printed.

"**On the Road**" will be an occasional column that will include stories and memoirs of people's travels. As the world becomes increasingly smaller, the understanding and insight that submersion in a country or a culture can provide is essential. "On the Road" articles will bring out an understanding of regions of the world that cannot always be found in textbook explanations.

*Origins* will regularly include a column called "**Milestones**." "Milestones" will celebrate and explore the anniversaries of past events that have made an impact on the world of today. They will strive to "grasp the moment" both for the people involved and for the world around them.

Each issue of *Origins* will be rounded out by "**Continental Divide**." On the lighter side, this column will look at quirky, off-the-beaten-track topics as well as natural and social oddities.

*Origins* is designed with the reader in mind. Each article will include photographs, drawings, maps, charts and graphs that will visually elucidate important concepts in the articles; will begin with an abstract of its subject matter as well as a table of contents of the various topics and sections into which the article is divided; and will include a section of further or suggested reading that will provide the reader with the opportunity to delve deeper into issues of particular interest.

Finally, *Origins* is interested in what you think about current events. Please send along comments you may have about *Origins* and its articles.

Nicholas Breyfogle  
Editor



# A Gordian Knot: The Ethnic Relations of the South Slavs

It is likely that the violent war now raging between the south Slavic peoples will be included among the most tragic of the twentieth century. The roots of the animosity extend far into the past. While a solution to today's horrors will have to address the complicated interactions of history, the participants themselves must step outside their attachment to the past and attack the problem from new perspectives.

**Old Wine, New Bottles • Of Christianity and Empire: the Early History of the South Slavs • Under Austria and the Ottomans: Conquest, Migrations, Conversion to Islam • The 19th Century: Intellectuals Debate Nationality • Coming Together, Breaking Apart: Yugoslavism, Greater Serbdom, Croatian Separatism • The Slovenes and Macedonians • The First Yugoslavia Is Born, 1918 • Circus Democracy and a Police State: Yugoslavia During the Interwar Period • World War II: Yugoslavia Shattered, Genocide and Resistance • Tito Tries to Solve the National Question • Tito Steps In • The Succession: From Tito's Death to Today • Books, Gitanes and CDs**

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By Nicholas Breyfogle

## Old Wine, New Bottles

We lived in peace for 50 years. We were neighbors, friends—Yugoslavians. I grew up never hearing ethnic hatred or plans for war. I loved summers in Sarajevo, when everyone would walk along the main street in the evening, stopping at cafés filled with friends and happy laughter. My friends were normal teenagers. We wanted to have fun, go to movies and parties and shop. We didn't choose friends based on whether we were Serbs, Croats or Muslims. (*Newsweek*, March 8, 1993)

So wrote Naida Zecevic, an eighteen year old Bosnian, now a first year student attending college in the USA and a de facto refugee, exiled by the course of events from her family in Sarajevo. Her description fits well with past images of Yugoslavia as a tourist destination replete with startling mountains, lush coastal resorts, and a warm, inviting population who extended hospitality in old European style. Yet, they are strange words to be reading these days. Hardly a day goes by without some further unfolding of the wars that rage between the people of Yugoslavia's successor states. These wars now account for the most terrible fighting Europe has seen since the end of the Second World War—some 50,000 to 150,000 dead, anywhere between two and three million displaced persons, institutionalized policies of rape, and the habitual assortment of torture, slaughter, imprisonment, deprivation, and starvation. It is a war without boundaries in which the line between civilian and soldier, in the true Balkan tradition of brigandage and guerilla warfare, is so blurred and besmirched that it all too often disappears.

The ethnic relations of the south Slavs are like the mythical Gordian knot. For hundreds of years they have struggled to untangle the intertwining chords, proposing different solutions at various times. Recently, however, the solution of choice has become, not for the first time in their history, the forcible separation of the knot by violently hacking the bonds that tie, splitting

chords and spraying rope dust.

Throughout their tangled history, the south Slavic people who came to make up what the twentieth century has known as Yugoslavia have struggled with the forces of history. Their memories reach back to an almost inconceivable degree, to Empires and religious conversion a thousand years ago. They relive their history in the conflicts of today, in stories, political speeches, and radio and television. Each new step is justified by a past step, each claim by a past claim, and each victimization by a past victimization. History has brought them together but it has also torn them apart—sometimes with violence, sometimes with words.

Today, the south Slavs continue to struggle with their past—with religions, with ethnicity, with medieval empires, with the scars and changes made by the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires, with diaspora, with the impact of western notions of nationalism, with the violent breakup of those Empires, with the hungry "Great Powers" who stood at their doors to gobble up the scraps, with different conceptions of the unity of Yugoslavia, and with the approximately eighty years that they lived together under one roof, often squabbling like the members of a family. It was a family, but perhaps only one of convenience—never the best, only the better, solution. When the external threat of conquest disappeared and the economy disintegrated in the late 1980s, the family began to break up—each member now striving to take with them as many of the family possessions, and, in fact, as many of the other family members, as possible.

After centuries, the longstanding questions still remain to be answered. Who shall control the lands of Bosnia and Hercegovina? Will it be the Croats or the Serbs who lead the south Slavs? How are national boundaries defined—by ethnicity or historic precedent, by religion or by language? Who are the south Slavs, one group or many? Who are the Bosnians? Are they all Serbs or all Croats? Will it be a federal or central political structure? Who will decide?

With all this history, the south Slavs are caught in a paradox. On one hand, lasting solutions to the struggle will inevitably

have to come to terms with the causes—causes whose origins lie deeply entrenched in the past. On the other hand, today's participants must escape that very same history—must break the bonds that condemn them to relive the past—so that they may address the contemporary situation with clear and rational minds.

### **Of Christianity and Empire: The Early History of the South Slavs**

The Slavic peoples who now inhabit the majority of the Balkan peninsula migrated to their new homeland during the 6th and 7th centuries and soon thereafter converted to Christianity. Those in the west—the Slavs of modern day Croatia, Slovenia—were converted by German speaking Roman Catholics, those in the east—Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia—by Eastern Orthodox Christians. With the schism that tore the Roman and Eastern churches apart in 1054, the south Slavs were permanently separated one from the other. Bosnia and Hercegovina, situated on the dividing line between the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox, were converted by both and were already a bone of contention between the two sides.

During Medieval history, the south Slav lands developed two important empires—one centered on Croatia, the other on Serbia. Each empire expanded to control lands that today fall under the jurisdiction of other nationalities. The Croatian kingdom, which included parts of what is today Bosnia, began in 924 and lasted for close to two hundred years. The Serbian peoples developed and maintained the strongest of the south Slav medieval kingdoms, uniting the peoples of Montenegro, Hercegovina, and Serbia. The kingdom reached its apex during the reign of Stepan Dusan (1331-1355) who expanded the borders to include all of modern Albania, Macedonia (where Dusan located his capital city, Skopje), parts of Bosnia, as well as a good portion of Greece. In 1389, the Serb army was defeated by the Turks at Kosovo Polje—a battle that has taken on a mystical importance for the Serbian people and which lies at the heart of the Serbian determination to hold Kosovo.

### **Under Austria and the Ottomans (14th to 19th Centuries): Conquest—Migrations—Conversion to Islam**

Today, pockets of ethnic Serbs are found spread throughout former Yugoslav lands—in Croatia, in Bosnia and Hercegovina, in Kosovo, in Vojvodina. This diaspora originated with the mass migrations westward that followed in the wake of the Ottoman (Turkish Muslims) invasions. The mass transfer continued in fits and starts over the course of the following centuries. It brought Croat and Serb together to live side by side and, over generations, they began to develop similar customs, traditions, and language.

Ottoman rule enhanced the power of the Serbian Orthodox Church and religious leaders took on new roles. The Orthodox Church quickly became the vessel in which Serbian tradition and national consciousness was fostered and transported through the ages. Moreover, the Orthodox church acted to bind Ottoman Serbs with the other Serbs spread throughout the Hapsburg Empire.

Ottoman rule served to distance its subjects from the developments in the West. The bureaucratic, administrative, feudal structure of Ottoman rule remained virtually unaltered by capitalism and the development of new classes. The consequence has been a permanent economic lag on the part of the eastern south

Slavs.

The final important result of the Ottoman conquest was the conversion of a significant part of the population to Islam. The greatest incidence of voluntary conversion took place in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Many Bosnians and Hercegovinians had come to adhere to the breakaway Bogomil Christian sect. They welcomed the coming of the Muslims, only too happy to escape the persecution of their Christian brothers. To this day, Bosnian Muslims are resented by the other south Slavs as Turkish collaborators and traitors.

Those Yugoslavs who fell under Hapsburg control—Slovenes, Croats, Serbs—underwent a very different series of changes and developments than their cousins under Ottoman dominion—changes that have left their mark to the present. The Hapsburg Slavs were exposed to German culture and the forces of evolving capitalism. Administratively, the Hapsburg Slavs maintained traditional governing structures through the institution of the *sabor*—a governing assembly—and the *ban*—a governor. Unlike the Ottoman Slav reliance on the church, the Croats and Slovenes relied on these political structures as national rallying points and for the upholding of tradition.

### **The Nineteenth Century: Intellectuals Debate Nationality**

During the beginning of the nineteenth century, the concepts of nationality and nation that had developed from eighteenth century western European romanticism were taken up and applied by south Slavic intellectuals. Language, more than religion, custom, or even ethnicity was considered to be the all important foundation of nationality.

In Serbia, Vuk Karadzic standardized the Serbian language around the "stokavian" vernacular dialect. This act had a significant effect on Serbian-Croatian relations. The majority of the Croats also spoke in the stokavian dialect—a potentially unifying



**POLITICAL MAP OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**—Vojvodina and Kosovo were autonomous regions within Serbia, the other countries were full republics. [Electromap, Inc.]

force and basis for a nation state. However, the linguistic issue also served to divide the Croats from the Serbs. Karadzic argued in an article "Serbs All and Everywhere" that all people who spoke stokavian were in fact Serbs—an interpretation that denied the existence of Croats who spoke in that dialect. The argument quickly led to the interpretation that all lands in which the population spoke stokavian should belong to Serbia. Many Croats argued in a similar fashion, everyone was Croatian.

These linguistic debates took place in the backdrop of a pan-Yugoslav ideology that developed in Croatia at the same time—Illyrianism, named for the Roman province of Illyria that covered the land on which the south Slav states later developed. Adherents to the Illyrian view asserted that all Balkan Slavs were descendents of the same tribe called the "Illyrians" and were ethnically united. Distinctions between the Illyrian people existed because of the years of foreign rule. The Illyrians could and should unite in the future.

### **Coming Together, Breaking Apart Yugoslavism—Greater Serbdom—Croatian Separatism**

From the 1850s, movement towards south Slav unity accelerated. Nevertheless, "Yugoslavism" always took a back seat to the stronger and more quickly developing sense of individual national identities. In 1866-67, secret meetings took place between the representatives of the Croatian assembly and the Serbian foreign ministry. A general agreement was reached for the "formation of a Yugoslav state independent of Austria and Turkey." However, almost immediately it became clear that disagreements existed

on most of the specific proposals for unification. At the heart of the disagreement lay two questions which have continued to the present day to plague south Slav leaders—Who would assume the mantle of leadership in the unification of the Yugoslavs? and, related, but equally as important, How would the lands that made up the territories of Bosnia and Hercegovina be disposed of within any future Yugoslav nation?

Serbia became the first south Slav state to gain its autonomy from the Ottomans or Austrians with the establishment of an independent monarchy in 1878. The road to freedom had begun as early as 1804 and followed a tortured path of peasant rebellions and external meddling that left many dead and the final Serbian state frustrated by the interference of the Great Powers.

Within the Croatian political spectrum, three parties emerged during the mid-1800s, each with a slightly different policy on the issue of nationality. The Unionist party believed that Croatia's best interests lay in maintaining historic ties with Hungary and was anti-Serb, anti-Orthodox, and anti-Yugoslav. The National Party espoused the Illyrian idea, believing in the pan-Slavic vision but based around a Croatian nucleus. The Party of [Croat State] Right led by Ante Starcevic stood for an independent Croatia. Starcevic argued that "the entire population between Macedonia and [German-speaking Austrian areas], between the Danube and the Adriatic Sea, has only one nationality, one homeland, one Croatian being."

Two events during the 1870s served to rapidly distance the south Slav groups from one another. First, an educational law was passed in 1874 in Croatia whose mission was to secularize education, shifting control from the churches to the savor and, thereby, to foster a sense of "Croatness" among all Slavic peoples in Croatia. The Orthodox Serbian population under the Monarchy resisted this legal action and demanded that they be exempted from the law. That the law was passed rankled Serbian citizens. That the Orthodox called for an exemption, stimulated suspicions among nationalist Croat leaders.

Second, the Balkans found themselves in crisis from 1875-78 which began with an uprising in the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Hercegovina. At the international Congress of Berlin, the latter were placed under the occupation and administration of the Hapsburg monarchy. Serbs in both Serbia and Austria objected as they considered the lands rightly Serbian. Croat response varied. Some censured the act, considering the lands Croat lands. Others embraced the freeing of south Slavs from Ottoman control and saw in Austrian occupation the promise of a future amalgamation of Croatia with Bosnia and Hercegovina under the Austrian Monarchy.

The antagonism that grew up during the 1870s, increased significantly as the twentieth century approached. In Serbia, extreme forms of national zeal were consciously fostered through the press, church and schools. On the extreme of Serbian chauvinism was an article written by Nikola Stojanovic in 1902 called "Serbs and Croats" in which he argued that the Croats "did not have their own language, nor common customs, nor a strong common identity, nor, what is important, consciousness of belonging to one another, as a result they cannot be a separate nationality." He continued by stressing that the conflict between Serbs and Croats would continue "until either we or you are eliminated. One side must surrender."

At the same time, Croatian nationalism was fed not only by ongoing confrontations with the Serbs but also by the rule of



*Nineteenth century Muslim Bosnian warrior—they need his help now.  
[Metro Toronto Reference Library]*

Karoly Khuen-Hedervay, the Hungarian governor of Croatia. He governed by the principle of divide and rule, pandering to the desires of the Serbian minority on matters religious, economic, and educational in return for their support in the *sabor*. The Croatian Party of the Right, moved even farther to the extreme in their chauvinism and under a new leader, Josip Frank, turned to violence as well as harsh rhetoric. In 1896, Hapsburg Serbs were confronted by Croat nationalists with demonstrations and flag burnings and in 1902, following the publication of "Serbs and Croats," Croats took to the streets beating and harassing Serbs and destroying their property.

In 1905, five Serbian and Croatian parties within the Hapsburg Monarchy came together to form the Croatian-Serbian Coalition. The party believed in the existence of one nationality—Yugoslav—with three names—Serb, Croat, and Slovene. Just as the Catholic and Protestant Germans could make up parts of the same Germany so too could Catholic and Orthodox south Slavs. The party won at least a plurality in each of the succeeding pre-war free elections, indicating support for their "Yugoslav" ideas. However, even this party did not completely agree as to the future of a Yugoslav state. Whereas a vocal portion conceived of a unitary state consisting only of Hapsburg Slavs another section argued that any south Slavic state must comprise the Serbs of Serbia and Montenegro. Moreover, while agreement could be reached concerning opposition to the Austro-Hungarian government, the issue of Bosnia and Hercegovina remained a profound obstacle. Each group laid vocal claims to their historic and ethnic right to the lands, realizing that whoever controlled those lands would in essence have the upper hand in arbitration over south Slav leadership.

Following the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Hapsburg throne, in 1914, Croatian ultra-nationalists, taking their cues from Vienna, organized and carried out a campaign of persecution against the Serbian population, especially in Bosnia-Hercegovina where Sarajevo turned into a "frenzy of hate." Simultaneously they harangued the leaders of the Croatian-Serbian coalition in the Croatian Assembly calling them "murderers of the Croatian heir to the throne." They sought and took advantage of any opportunity to open a chasm between Serbs and Croats.

### Nineteenth Century Nationalism: The Slovenes and Macedonians

The Slovenians gave little serious consideration to the Yugoslav idea until the 1880s and 1890s. Slovene national consciousness was slow to make its way out from underneath the domination of German influences. As such the Slovenes were more interested in the development of their own identity than they were in a south Slav identity. They frequently spurned Serbian advances because they regarded them as both politically and economically backward.

Nationalist sentiments were also growing, although at a much slower pace among the Macedonian population. In 1896 the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was born which struggled to throw off foreign rule. In the Macedonian region that came under Serbian control in 1913 (an area that had formed part of Dusan's Medieval empire), the new Serb masters began a policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation. Macedonians were compelled through threats of imprisonment, torture, and death to change their names to Serbian style by

adding "itch" to the ending.

### The First Yugoslavia Is Born, 1918

In 1914, the concept of Yugoslavism nowhere received any more than reserved support from the south Slav peoples. The final creation of Yugoslavia came almost as an accident and was fraught from the outset with internal weaknesses and contradictions.

Wartime meetings between representatives of the Hapsburg Slavs and the exiled Serbian government culminated in the Declaration of Corfu in July of 1917 which agreed in principle to the union of all south Slavs. Despite the enumeration of specific characteristics for the new state—constitutional, democratic monarchy, freedom of religion, use of both alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin)—the issue of a federal or central state structure was not resolved and remains unsolved to this day.

Two threatening forces—one internal, one external—acted as the catalysts for the eventual creation of the first "Yugoslav" state in 1918 (called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes ruled by the Serbian King Aleksandar). On the one hand, the collapsing Hapsburg lands were caught in a spiral of spontaneous peasant unrest that resulted from a combination of wartime deprivations and longstanding hardship. On the other hand, Italian troops were advancing into south Slavic lands. The Italians had been promised parts of Croatia and Slovenia by the Allies at the secret London treaty of 1915 in return for entering the war on the Allied side. When the war ended they came to collect payment.

### Circus Democracy and a Police State: Yugoslavia During the Interwar Period

From the outset, internal problems threatened to break the new state apart. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was



**ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**—Areas shaded represent regions in which that religion and/or ethnicity formed the majority. (Macedonia and Serbia have separate branches of the Orthodox church.) [Electromap, Inc.]

very much more than that. It was a mosaic that included five Slavic peoples and a variety of minority non-Slavs, three religions, eight historical provinces, three main languages as well as a host of dialects, two alphabets and a plethora of both bad and good feeling that was the legacy of relations during the pre-war years. Moreover, the component peoples found themselves at very different economic and social conditions. The old Austro-Hungarian lands (Croatia, Slovenia, and Vojvodina) were more industrialized. Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina accounted for no more than 15% of the nation's industry.

Serbs viewed the new state as a continuation of the pre-1914 Serbian Kingdom, with its constitution, army, monarchy, and bureaucracy. They promoted Serb-dominated centralization and the slogans, "three names—one people" and "the three tribes of the Yugoslav nation." However, overt forces of division came from Croat separatist movements, the Party of Right and the Croat Peasant Party led by Stepan Radic. By 1930, the Party of the Right (led by Ante Pavelic) had turned into an ultra-nationalist paramilitary terrorist organization (the *ustasa*), finding support in Mussolini who wished to see an independent Croatia that he could pull into his sphere of influence. Radic and the Croat Peasant Party called for a loose confederation of republics and



King Aleksandar—first king of Yugoslavia, 1918-1934.  
[Metro Toronto Reference Library]

refused to compromise. They took their complaints to the international community trying to find a backer for their vision of an independent Croatia. These actions smacked of betrayal for the Serb populations who were dismayed that the Croats wanted out so soon.

The south Slavic experience with democracy in the 1920s was one of exasperation and frustration in which little was achieved. The nationwide elections of 1920 returned candidates from a whole spectrum of regionally based parties. The divided parliamentarians vetoed, obstructed and blocked any legislation that came through, struggling to tailor it to the needs of their specific locality. To cap things off, Radic and four other members of parliament were shot by a disaffected Montenegrin politician. King Aleksandar took this opportunity to terminate the unworkable parliament and institute a royal dictatorship. In October, 1929 the name of the nation was officially changed to Yugoslavia. Aleksandar decreed a constitution, proclaiming a centralized state. In an effort to foster a national unity, citizens were henceforth to consider themselves "Yugoslav," all signs and symbols of the old nationalities were removed and all measures were backed with force.

The assassination of Aleksandar in France in 1934—apparently coordinated by the *ustasa* and IMRO—once again remapped the national landscape. By 1939, Yugoslavia was effectively divided into two spheres of influence, one Croatian, the other Serbian. Croatia was made into an enlarged province with special autonomous powers, a separate legislature, and control of fiscal and administrative matters. This looked very much like the loose confederal solution that Radic had searched for during the 1920s. The final boundaries between the two spheres, however, were never specifically defined—the issue of the mixed populations of Bosnia and Herzegovina remained unanswerable. This new agreement also entirely dismissed the equality of the other nationalities within Yugoslavia, a fact that they very much resented.

#### **World War II: Yugoslavia Shattered, Genocide and Resistance**

Of all the incidents in the past relations of the south Slavs, World War II and the treatment of the Serbs by the Croat *ustasa* government is most often rehashed and is by far the most incendiary. Following the Axis victory, Yugoslavia was cut up into tiny pieces and divided amongst the victors—Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania. In Croatia, a fascist government, led by Pavelic, was erected on the foundation of the *ustasa*. It was the realization of the long desired independent Croat state and included all of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its population of approximately 50% Serbs and 30% Muslims.

The Croat *ustasa* government organized systematic massacres of the Serbs on Croatian territory. The extent and degree of the horror is bitterly debated today between Serbs and Croats. Certain historians have claimed that the destruction of the Serbs ranks second only to the Jewish Holocaust in both ferocity and volume. Others argue that it was the Germans, not the Croats, who carried out the massacres. Some put the number of Serbian victims at 200,000, others at 600,000, still others at more. In one documented case, 1,260 Serbian peasants were locked in an Orthodox church, murdered and incinerated. Moreover, the Catholic church instituted a policy of forcible conversion of Orthodox Serbs that turned some 200,000 Serbs into Catholics.

As World War II came to a close, civil war and anarchy broke out in Yugoslavia. The two primary resistance forces—Mihailovic's *Chetniks* and Tito's Partisans—fought both the conquering Germans, the Croat *ustasa*, and each other (the *Chetniks* tended to be royalists, the Partisans, communists and the *Chetniks* often collaborated with the German forces against the Partisans). Local populations armed themselves against the invaders, against the different paramilitary organizations and against their neighbors. The civil war involved everyone and it left deep scars.

### Tito Tries to Solve the National Question

The development of Tito's response to the national question can be seen in four relatively distinct stages. The first stage, until 1948, reflected a Soviet, Stalinist solution to a multi-ethnic society. Five distinct Yugoslav nations, six republics, and two autonomous regions were recognized. Administrative structures were created to support and bolster ethnic complexity but counterbalanced by a highly centralized, single-party dictatorship with a strong police presence and centrally managed economy.

Following the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, the central government took its first steps towards the decentralization of both the economy and the political structure to lower levels and workers cooperatives (thereby beginning the second stage). In Yugoslavia, 'local' means 'ethnic' and the decision to divest the center of its monopoly served to inflame regional animosities and enhance inter-regional competition as they grappled for scarce resources.

That regional allegiances were once again on the rise was shown by resistance to a "Yugoslavism" campaign designed to foster an overarching supranational sentiment that would override the centripetal regional-nationalist forces. The industrially more advanced Croatia and Slovenia, believing that they had received the short end of the stick, lobbied for greater liberalization while at the same time complained that many of the state departments and especially that of security, were dominated by ethnic Serbs. They saw the policy of "Yugoslavism" as a veiled attempt on the part of the Serbian center to re-instate the type of Yugoslavia that had existed under King Aleksandar twenty-five years before. In the face of this negative reaction the "Yugoslavism" program was scrapped and the liberalizers finally swayed Tito to their side. The centralizers were purged in 1966 and Yugoslavia moved on to the third stage of the Titoist national solution.

From 1965, the move towards local "self-management" took

on a new and accelerated speed. Economic reforms were undertaken that, for all intents and purposes, ended central decision making and placed control of investment funds and the banking system into the hands of local ethnic authorities. These bodies quickly came to function only within a specific region or locality in small, inefficient units.

At this time, moreover, the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, technically within the jurisdiction of Serbia, gained official autonomy. In Kosovo, nationalist demonstrations by the majority Albanian population resulted in the flight of large parts of the ethnic Serbs who, filled with resentment, feared for their future. The Serbs considered Kosovo to be the heartland of the old Medieval Serbian state and claimed it on historical grounds. The Albanians rightly pointed to their demographic dominance—approximately 80% of the population—and their historic roots on the land which date back to well into the eighteenth century.

At the same time Croatian leaders were becoming even more assertive in their demands for greater autonomy and overt signs of sovereignty. The 1967 Croatian "Language Declaration" called for the recognition of Croatian as an equal, official Yugoslavian language—to be taught in schools and used in the media—and rejected Serbo-Croatian as an artificial, Serb inflicted "political language."

This period also witnessed the recognition of two "new" nations—the Bosnian Muslim (1968-69) and the Macedonian (1967). For the first time in hundreds of years Bosnia and Hercegovina as well as Macedonia were officially considered ethnically based nations, rather than simply distinct cultural communities.

### Tito Steps In

The administration of the country was collapsing and deadlocked in the maze of mutual vetoes built into the constitution. In this atmosphere of growing internal ethnic tension, Tito stepped in (1971), threatening military intervention, to bring the crisis under control.

Tito's drastic measures of 1971-72 inaugurated the fourth phase of the national solution. The federal system remained in place and was even bolstered by the 1974 constitution that left only questions of foreign policy, defense, and general economic direction to the central powers. The greatest difference between the third and fourth phases was Tito who asserted his great personal power to keep a lid on the boiling pot. The new leaders had learned that Tito would no longer tolerate the overt expression of regional interests. Moreover, these same leaders had come to realize that localist sentiment could, if out of hand, act to disrupt other, perhaps more important, components to their

### Word Watch

**Yugoslavia:** from "yugo" meaning south, i.e. nation of south Slavs.

**Slav:** uncertain origin, either from "slava," word for glory in ancient Slavic tongue, or from Latin word "sclaveni" meaning slave, or derives from swampy area called "Slava" or "Slova" in Poland where the Slavs originally came from.

**Balkans:** from the Turkish word for mountain, includes former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, parts of Greece and Turkey.

**Bosnia:** from the Bosna river that flows through it.

**Hercegovina:** name originated in the 15th century, from the title "Herzog," meaning Duke.

**Macedonia:** apparently derives from Macedonius, a heretical Bishop of Constantinople in the 4th century A.D.

**Montenegro:** from the Italian for "black mountain," called Crna Gora in Serbo-Croatian.

**Slovenia:** apparently derives from the ancient slavic word, "slovo," meaning word.

lives, such as the economy. During the 1970s the economy was on the rise and few people wished to disturb the success.

Despite the relative quiet of the 1970s—a significant rise in the number of citizens who described themselves as “Yugoslav,” rather than as a member of a specific ethnic group, appeared to bode well for Yugoslavia’s future—the regional-nationalist waters continued to boil, shown by further demonstrations and arrests in Kosovo in the mid-1970s. With the death of Tito in 1980, the safety catches on the lid disappeared.

### The Succession: From Tito’s Death to Today

The two most important factors that kept Yugoslavia from breaking apart before 1980 had disappeared by the second half of the 1980s—Tito was dead and the economy disintegrated. Foreign pressure, traditionally the other important force keeping Yugoslavia together was incoherent and internally disorganized—the Cold War was over and the European Community, in dispute.

In this environment, regional political leaders—who espoused chauvinist, ethnic, populist messages—combined with the people to work each other into a frenzy. Slobodan Milosevic, who became Communist Party Chief of Serbia in 1986, remains the most prominent of these nationalist leaders but was certainly not the only one. By fostering street democracy and mass rallies, Milosevic started in motion a perpetual backlash between the republics, most especially between Slovenia and Serbia.

Milosevic capitalized on Serb grievances under the federal system. Serbs complained about their lack of influence in federal Yugoslavia where the significance of their larger population was lost in a system that gave equal weight to each ethnicity, and specifically of what they perceived to be their raw treatment in the economic sphere; about the division of Serbia into three parts (Kosovo and Vojvodina) by the Croat Tito and his second in command Kardelj, a Slovene; and about the nationalism and irredentism of the separatist Albanians in Kosovo, which they believed was being fostered by the other republics.

The multi-party elections of 1990 brought non-Communist, regionally centered governments into power in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Macedonia. Just days before the fighting began, they continued to rehash the longstanding issues of federal versus central and the splitting of Yugoslavia into its Ottoman and Hapsburg components. But where would the borders be and how would Bosnia and Hercegovina be dealt with? Fragmentation ran amok as two hundred regionally based parties emerged. All attempts at reform by the Prime Minister Ante Markovic were blocked or undermined by different ethnic parties, reminiscent of the political stalemate of the early interwar years. This time there was no Tito or Aleksandar to restore stability.

Regional nationalism grew like wildfire. Fear of separatist movements soared among Serbs living outside of Serbia and relations between the republics soured. The memories of past



[Kirk Anderson]

conflicts were blown out of proportion for political end. Serbs pointed to the horrors of the independent Croatian state during World War II and, in a highly publicized incident, Croat leaders renamed a square in Zagreb after Ante Starcevic, the 19th century Croatian ultra-nationalist who unfavorably compared Serbs with barnyard animals.

Fear of an independent Croatian government was especially fierce in the Krajina region where the Serbs represented the majority of the population. Milosevic came to the support of the "foreign" Serbs demanding rights and protection for their communities. He did not oppose self-determination on the part of the other republics but asked that the same courtesy be extended to the majority Serb populations within their boundaries. He quietly encouraged the "foreign" Serbs to demand it—this despite his blatant denial of self-determination of the Albanian population in Kosovo.

In the Krajina, local Serbs, not always following Belgrade's lead, took matters and the initiative into their own hands. They armed themselves, blocked roads, and took over local facilities. As pessimism grew, Slovenia and Croatia prepared for a gunfight. The Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) believed in the importance of maintaining Yugoslavia intact (without which they would have no job) and often came to side with the Serbian government and local Serb militias. In June of 1991, following the Serb sponsored blocking of the rotation of the presidency, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. Sabers rattled, leaders misjudged, and both the people and their states accelerated arming. The violent conflict had begun.

#### Books, Gitanes, and CDs

Over the past two years, the fighting has moved from Slovenia to Croatia to Bosnia and Hercegovina. While Slovenia is now relatively quiet, battles continue to rage in Croatia between the Krajina Serbs and the new Croat government. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbs and Croats—as they have for hundreds of years—are fighting the Slavic Muslims to carve out control of a region that they both claim. Overt violence has yet to sweep Vojvodina, Kosovo or Macedonia. However, these three regions may prove to be the most tragic. Each area includes a large non-Slavic population (Hungarian, Albanian, and Bulgarian and Turkish respectively) and conflict could conceivably drag neigh-



Slovenian peasant in more peaceful times.  
[Josephine King]

boring nations into the Yugoslav maelstrom.

George Santayana warned that those who do not remember their past are destined to repeat it. But the south Slavs remember their history all too well and nevertheless seem condemned to relive it. While the forces of history have led to the breakup of Yugoslavia and serve as the wellspring of the violence, if the south Slavs are to come to a resolution of the problem (outside of mutual annihilation), they must forget their past and concentrate only on salvaging the present—a formidable task in Yugoslavia.

As always, however, it should be remembered that this is a war fought by people, not the forces of history. The reasons for fighting are not always as clear as history might make them appear. In a report published in *Harper's Magazine* of March, 1993, "Balkan Death Trip—Scenes From a Futile War," Tony Horwitz relays the personal motivations of a Serb named Zjelko fighting for hometown Sarajevo. It is a painful reminder that war is often about nothing at all, that people continue to fight because they want simply for the fighting to end.

I don't fight for nationalism—I sleep with girls of all nations. I don't fight for religion—God is no place. I fight because I want to go back down there [the downtown house he left months earlier in fear of attacks on Serbs] with my books and my CD player and my Gitane cigarettes.

#### Suggestions for Further Reading:

- Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia - Origins, History and Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1984)
- Christopher Cviic, "Calm Look at a Troubled Land: the Nations of Yugoslavia" in *Encounter* (May 1990, vol. 74, #4)
- Vladimir Dedijer, *A History of Yugoslavia* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974)
- Tony Horwitz, "Balkan Death Trip - Scenes From a Futile War" in *Harper's* (March, 1993)
- Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms* (Ohio State University Press, 1990)
- Richard Nyrop, ed., *Yugoslavia - A Country Study* (Foreign Area Studies, The American University, 1982)
- Pedro Ramet, *Yugoslavia in the 1980s* (Westview Press, 1985)
- Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962-1991* (Indiana University Press, 1992)
- Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (Westview Press, 1985)
- Srdjan Trifkovic, "The First Yugoslavia and the Origins of Croatian Separatism" in *East European Quarterly* (Fall 1992, vol. 26, #3)

# Tragedy in Somalia: Clans, Colonizers, Superpowers, and the Cult of Personality

Famine and civil war rage today in the southern regions of Somalia. Much attention has been given to Somali clan relations as the root of the tragedy. However, while drought and clans are repeated themes in Somali history, famine and anarchic civil war are not. A specific confluence of external forces (along with external arms) and internal disruption of the clan system were necessary to create the extreme disintegration that is witnessed today.

**Clans, Somalis, and the Turn to Violence • The Colonial Period: Beginnings of Foreign Interest • Experiments With a Pan-Somali Movement: The Precedent of Famine, 1912 • The Mad Mullah's Success, Northern Somaliland's Catastrophe • Somalia's Nationalist War: Superpower Rivalries in the Horn of Africa • Cold War Jockeying: Siad Barre Turns to the U.S. • Forging Somali Nationalism: Siad Barre and the Cult of Personality • Dissension In the Ranks: The Cult of Personality Damaged • Many Weapons, Little Food**

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By Fraser Brown

On January 19th, 1991, Mohammed Siad Barre, President of Somalia since the military coup of 1969, former ally of both the Soviet Union and the United States, and member of the Marehan clan, fled the capital city, Mogadishu, with the armies of the United Somali Congress (USC) hot on his heels. He had been successfully ousted by a rebel coalition made up of the USC, the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the Somali Patriotic Front (SPF).

Over the course of the next few months, these three groups, which had come together only in the final stages of the rebellion, in the decisive push to depose Siad Barre, could not agree upon new leadership for Somalia. The northern SNM was the first of the rebel groups to be formed (in 1981) and the Isaak clan that was its power base had been the primary recipient of the violent repression of President Siad Barre. They were not consulted about the composition of the new government by the southern USC and SPF. Faced with the fact that a united Somalia would most likely be dominated by the southern factions, the North seceded and declared the Republic of Somaliland on May 18, 1991. By November 17, the current civil war in the South had begun and Somalia had ceased to exist.

Despite the nationalist or "Somali" trappings of each faction's name, they were essentially confined to one geographic region and consisted primarily of one clan. The Hawiye, who inhabit southern and central Somalia (including the area around Mogadishu) made up the largest part of the USC. The Ogaden, inhabiting southwestern Somalia and Ethiopia, formed the majority of the SPF. The Isaak composed the SNM.

The Somali clan structure has been scrutinized by the West as the wellspring of today's horrors. Yet, clans are not necessarily the cause of the contemporary violence. Rather, they are the vehicle through which it is being carried out. That Somalia has been reduced to famine, civil war, and division into two nations results from a complex interaction of colonial history, superpower interference, and the internal policies of Siad Barre. His cult of personality, his efforts to promote Somali (as opposed to clan)

nationalism and, as he grew older and his power weakened, his cynical manipulation of traditional clan rivalries caused the fragmentation of the long-standing clan structure and with it, the built-in checks and balances.

## Clans, Somalis, and the Turn to Violence

The Somali people are among the most homogeneous in Africa, both ethnically and religiously (Islam is prevalent). However, they are strictly divided by an ancient family or clan system that developed in response to the needs of survival in the relatively barren Horn of Africa. These structures stand at the foundation of political and social life. In a nomadic society in which individuals maintained no fixed address, and in which boundaries were by nature fluid, clan allegiance was the only form of identification outside of one's name. It was the means to place someone, to determine their social standing, their region of origin and who their family and friends were. Clans are named for their founding male and, in fact, the name Somalia derives from an ancient progenitor. Until recently, clan structures were generally static. Divisions into sub-clans did occur but these sub-clans remained intimately tied to one another.;

The clan structure has existed for thousands of years. Its relatively peaceful history demonstrates that the system is not inherently given to inter- or intra-clan fighting, and especially not to anarchic violence. Today's clan warfare is unusual because of the prevalence of intra-clan fighting (i.e. between sub-clans) which is traditionally unheard of. The most prominent figures in the current civil war that rages around Mogadishu, Mohammed Farrah Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohammed, are both members of the Hawiye clan. There is no history of intra-clan fighting among the Hawiye, nor are Mahdi's sub-clan, the Abgal, and Aidid's sub-clan, the Habr Gidir, traditional enemies. It appears that they are fighting over which Hawiye sub-clan will run the Mogadishu government, and therefore reap the spoils of war. Control of the government apparatus means access to arms supplies as well as to printing presses to make money—money that will enable the victor to pay off war debts.

## The Colonial Period: Beginnings of Foreign Interest

During the colonial period of the nineteenth century, the area in which ethnic Somalis were found was divided between Great Britain, Italy, Ethiopia, and France. Colonial boundaries were generally arbitrary and only on rare occasions followed clan lines. However, these divisions have left their mark. The 1991 breakup of Somalia fell uncannily along the colonial British and Italian borders.

The rivalry between the north and south, which has always existed to a certain extent because of clan differences, was accentuated and increased during the colonial period. The south, colonized by the Italians, speaks Italian (if any European language) and had an Italian-style government and education system. The north, on the other hand, the current Republic of Somaliland, was colonized by the British, speaks English if any European language and had a British-style government and education system. The West was engulfed by Ethiopia and the region around Djibouti became French.

British interest in Somalia dates back to 1839, when Great Britain captured the port of Aden on the Arabian Peninsula for use as a station on the short route to India. The area around Aden was mostly barren and the British installment there was dependent upon northern Somalia for supplies of meat. British interest in Somalia was initially limited to ensuring a steady supply of food for its Aden station. As such, they remained primarily on the coast and made few inroads into the Somali interior. From 1877 to 1908 a series of treaties were signed between Great Britain, Italy, France, Egypt, and Ethiopia that delineated the boundaries between colonial holdings, such as the British Somaliland Protectorate, as well as the current boundary line between Somalia and Ethiopia.

It is crucial to any understanding of Somali history to recognize the importance of the long-standing conflict with Ethiopia. With the exception of a small period of time during the twentieth century, when Ethiopia fell under Italian jurisdiction, the ancient Christian kingdom has been one of Somalia's worst enemies.

The emergence of Ethiopia in the 1890s as a powerful nation rather than just another African region to be colonized meant that the division of the Horn of Africa had four participants: British (in the North — the current Isaak-declared Republic of Somaliland); Italian (southern Somalia — the current arena of famine and fighting); French (Djibouti) and Ethiopian. Ethiopia was able to stake its claim upon territory that was not traditionally Ethiopian—the Ogaden clan, wholly ethnically Somali, today resides almost entirely within the boundaries of the Ethiopian state—and thereby lay the roots of some of the current difficulties in Somalia. (Moreover a great deal of northeastern Kenya is ethnically Somali.)

## Experiments with a Pan-Somali Movement: The Precedent of Famine, 1912

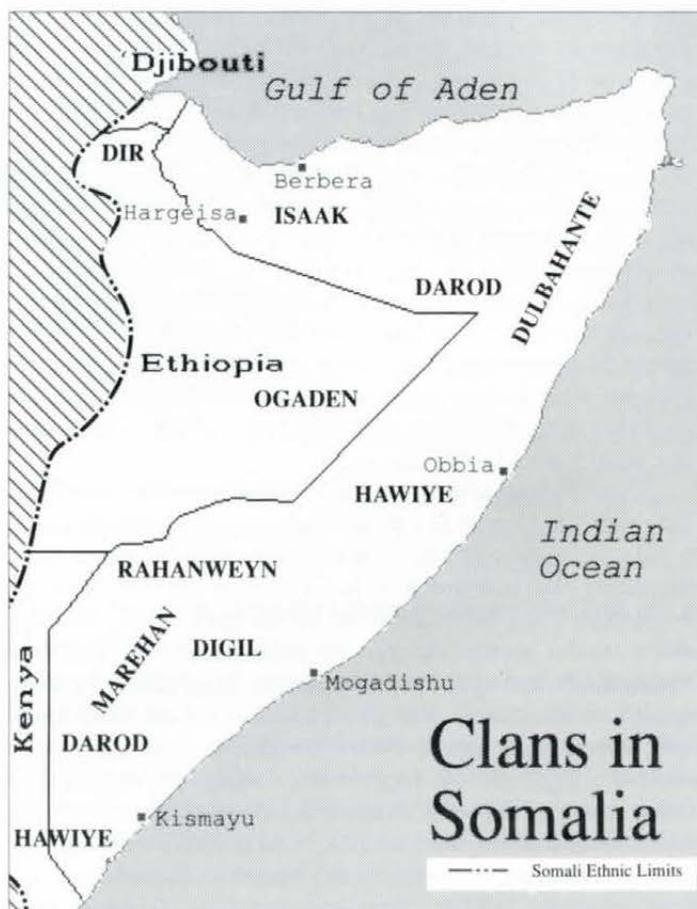
Drought is relatively common in Somalia, famine is not. Historically only the confluence of drought with warfare and/or other kinds of organizational disruption have created such alarming food deprivation. The last serious famine in Somalia occurred in 1912, when approximately one-third of the population of the Somaliland Protectorate, the northern region colonized by the British, died of starvation in what was called "the time of eating filth." At that point, Mohammed Abdille Hassan, known to the British as the "mad Mullah" was leading a rebellion against for-

ign intervention: British, Italian and Ethiopian.

In the mid-1890s, during a pilgrimage to Mecca, Sheik Mohammed Abdille Hassan met Sayyid Mohammed Salih, founder of the militant Islamic Salihya Order. Hassan, already a fervent believer, adopted the Salihya teachings. He changed his name to Sayyid Mohammed and returned to Somalia to preach Islamic reform. At Berbera, where Sayyid Mohammed settled briefly, he began to zealously teach the new Salihya Order, admonishing his fellow countrymen to turn away from their soft living and follow the strict path of Muslim devotion. He denounced smoking, chewing the narcotic Khat plant and generally condemned hedonist practices.

Over the course of his early teaching, Sayyid Mohammed came into contact with European, Christian colonizers, and he became gradually convinced that they were destroying the Muslim faith of the Somalis. He asserted that Somalia was in danger from foreign influence and exhorted his countrymen to get rid of the English and their missionaries.

His militant version of Islam and assertion of Somali nationalism met opposition from many of the people he wanted to lead. He encountered a great deal of resistance from adherents of the established Qadiriya Order—the dominant strain of Islam in Somalia since the eleventh century. They resented the messianism of Sayyid Mohammed's teaching and the criticism implicit in it, that Qadiriya beliefs and practices were stodgy and stale. By the same token, the North coast, where Sayyid Mohammed began his teaching, was experiencing the benefits of contact with



The extent of ethnic Somalis in the Horn of Africa—Somali clans and their geographic location. [Electromap, Inc.]

the British (expanded markets) and had yet to experience many of the negative aspects of that contact (colonization and exploitation) since the British presence was still quite small. Few Somalis who benefited from this new prosperity cared to listen to Sayyid Mohammed's message of austerity and piety.

In 1898, Sayyid Mohammed moved from the coast into the interior to settle with the Dulbahante, his maternal clan. Significantly, the region he moved to, although entirely ethnically Somali, is part of present-day Ethiopia. Unlike the coastal dwelling Isaak and Dir clans, the Dulbahante had not signed a treaty with the British. They had gained none of the wealth that the Isaak had and they had had little contact with the British. Sayyid Mohammed was able to travel widely, preaching to pastoral nomads against Christian missionary efforts. He exploited the external threat of Christianity to encourage peace between warring clans. Everywhere along the way he enhanced his image. He acquired a reputation as a gifted poet and gathered a cult of personality around him.

In response to the increasing encroachments onto Somali territory by the British, the Italians and the Ethiopians, the twenty-year (1900-1920) *jihad* (Islamic "holy war") of the "Dervishes" began. (The term "dervish" was used to describe any adherent of the Salihya Order and therefore applied to the followers of Sayyid Mohammed). The *jihad* was conducted against all Christian colonizers, but the British and the Ethiopians were the primary targets.

#### **The Mad Mullah's Success, Northern Somaliland's Catastrophe**

The successful results of Sayyid Mohammed's campaign were disastrous for northern Somaliland. By 1908, having spent funds totally out of proportion to the Somaliland Protectorate's strategic and colonial importance as beef supplier to the port of Aden, the British decided to abandon their settlements and operations in the interior and withdraw entirely to the coast. The British Protectorate Administration (BPA) also armed the Isaak clan and left them to protect themselves against the Dervishes. These actions were decried by *The Times* (April 8, 1910) as "one of the most deplorable acts ever committed by the British government." The withdrawal met with Italian protests, as it effectively left the Sayyid Mohammed problem solely in Italian hands. Italy and Ethiopia were further concerned that the British withdrawal would result in a time of uncontrolled clan warfare. Which is, in fact, exactly what happened.

The BPA misunderstood Sayyid Mohammed's movement. They saw him as an ordinary clan leader acting within the usually balanced system of inter-clan struggle. They assumed, quite mistakenly, that in response to the impending Dervish threat, the Protectorate clans would unite, as was the norm among Somalis, and a leader would emerge to guide them. But Sayyid Mohammed's movement had, to a degree, transcended the traditional clan structures. Religion provided Sayyid Mohammed with a pan-Somali appeal. While the clan system could not be avoided altogether—his support was limited primarily to the Ogaden region; inter-clan rivalries did threaten the brittle unity he had created among the Dervishes; and his followers were of a different religious order than most Somalis—nevertheless, the members of the Salihya Order were Muslims. To attack them would have been to adopt the role of the Christian colonizer. In spite of the threat that Sayyid Mohammed posed to the coastal

clans, his *jihad* was against Christians, not against fellow Muslims. The Protectorate clans did not band together to fight the Dervishes. In fact, the polar opposite occurred.

The presence of the British colonial government had temporarily halted most inter-clan antipathies within the Protectorate. However, after the British pulled out, bequeathing a supply of British arms, the clans were free to pursue old feuds. They did so with vigor. Any kind of social organization disintegrated, reducing much of the population to starvation. At the end of 1912, the British felt compelled to restore an active presence in the interior to re-establish order. Sayyid Mohammed's *jihad* continued until its abrupt end with his death in 1920. Yet, after the debacle of 1910-1912, the British maintained an active force in the Protectorate, even from 1914-1918, despite heavy military commitments elsewhere imposed by World War I.

Contemporary analysts have often drawn comparisons between 1912 and today (comparing Sayyid Mohammed to Siad Barre) to demonstrate Somalia's penchant for famine and civil war. Although they are not directly analogous—the earlier famine took place in the north, today's is primarily in the south; and Sayyid Mohammed was fighting against the foreign political entity of the British Somaliland Protectorate—the combination of internal disequilibrium and external impact is instructive. The balance traditionally inherent to the clan structure was put off-kilter. Sayyid Mohammed used Islam to cut across clan divisions while the British presence had put clan rivalries and their resolution on hold. At the same time, the BPA had armed the clans, hoping to use them as mercenaries to fight their battles.

A similar convergence of internal and external factors spawned the present horrors. Most significant to Somali history is the lasting nature of inter-clan rivalry and what happens when they are bottled up and then suddenly released. Siad Barre used the tenets of socialism to do away with clan rivalries and forge a Somali consciousness in much the same way that Sayyid Mohammed used Islam. Moreover, Siad Barre's reliance upon his own clan and the persecution of other clans in the latter years of his Presidency—in other words, his disruption of the equilibrium between clans—aided and abetted by the superpowers, who gave Somalia billions of dollars of military hardware and who used Somali turf to play out their cold war battles, proved disastrous for Somalia's political organization and has led to the contemporary tragedy.

#### **Somalia's Nationalist War: Superpower Rivalries in the Horn of Africa**

One of Siad Barre's primary goals was to establish a "Greater Somalia"—one whose boundaries would have pre-dated those of the colonial partition; would have included the Ogaden, some of Kenya and the whole of Djibouti; and would have encompassed all ethnically Somali territory. However, these efforts were coldly regarded by other African nations, the majority of whom are multi-ethnic conglomerations. Despite the fact that these conglomerations are the result of colonial interference, a recognition of Somali claims would implicitly have recognized the right of every minority ethnic group to declare independence—declarations that would massively, and probably disastrously, destabilize Africa.

Siad Barre's ambitions led to the calamitous (for Somalia) Ogaden War during 1977-78 which cost Siad Barre his friendly relationship with the Soviet Union. The U.S.S.R. briefly sup-

ported both his "Scientific Socialist" government and Colonel Mengistu's Ethiopian Marxist government. The political events in the Horn of Africa over the next nine months would be a distillation of years of cold-war jockeying for position.

Since the withdrawal of British forces in the 1950s, Ogaden Somalis had been waging a constant guerrilla war against Ethiopia with few formal peace agreements. In the 1960s a group headed by Wako Guto called the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) was officially organized. As a political entity it dealt independently with the Ethiopian government and without the support of the Somali government. However, in the mid-1970s, disorder in Ethiopia along with more strident popular support for the WSLF in Somalia itself led to Siad Barre's taking a more favorable attitude towards the WSLF.

In anticipation of an advance towards the Ogaden by Ethiopia—which now had strong Soviet support and a newly Soviet-supplied and Cuban-trained army—the WSLF moved first. They disrupted Ethiopian communications in the area and prepared to attack Ethiopian garrisons. Ethiopia accused Somalia of instigating an unprovoked war and looked for external help. An attempted mediation by the Organization of African Unity in August bogged down when Ethiopia refused to consider Somali self-determination and refused to allow WSLF representatives to attend the talks.

#### **Cold War Jockeying: Siad Barre Turns to the U.S.**

Siad Barre, cold-shouldered during his visit to the Soviet Union at the end of the month, embarked on a tour of Arab states in September. During this tour, Saudi Arabia apparently promised hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid to Somalia on the understanding that Somalia would no longer be linked with the Soviet Union.

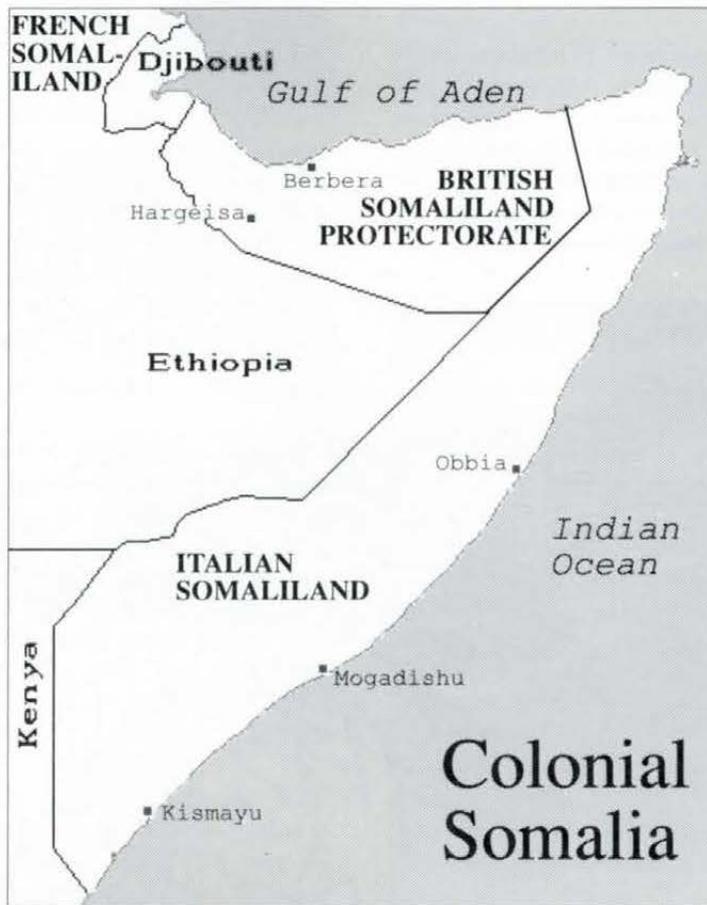
However, it was not until November 13, two months after Ethiopia formally ceased diplomatic relations with Somalia, that the Somali break with the Soviet Union was announced. Siad Barre accused the Soviets of violating the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the two nations. He pointed to their generation of false propaganda about Somali aggression in the Ogaden, the giving of military aid to Ethiopia and the mobilization of Cuban troops to help Ethiopia. With a huge influx of military aid (total Soviet aid is estimated to be in the billions), Ethiopia was able to launch a successful counter-attack on the Ogaden region.

Although Siad Barre was willing to allow the U.S. to take

over former Soviet installations in Somalia, especially its facilities at the port of Berbera, which could be used for surveillance of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, his reluctance to abandon his designs upon the Ogaden stalled the eventual treaty. The United States ambivalence towards aiding Somalia (it risked friendly relations with Kenya and potentially messy involvement in the local politics of the Horn for bases of dubious strategic value) was primarily dispelled by the fall of the pro-Western Shah of Iran and the resultant seizure of American hostages in Teheran. The aid package agreed upon in August, 1980 was small—much smaller than Siad Barre had hoped.

Nevertheless, the United States proved to be a faithful supplier of military hardware for the next ten years, until Siad Barre's aggressive and violent persecution of the northern Isaak clan became too great to ignore. Then, at the insistence of Congress, President Bush halted all aid to Somalia in 1991.

Over the course of thirty years, superpower support in the Horn of Africa completely flip-flopped. The possibility of one gaining the upper hand, as the Soviet Union came close to doing in March 1977 with the Cuban sponsored "socialist federation" between Ethiopia and Somalia, was enough to send the United States scrambling to at least open up discussions and ease Somali fears about the loss of Soviet patronage. The collapse of the Soviet Union completely removed the necessity of any U.S. efforts to maintain a presence to counter-balance the Soviet position. The stabilizing external influence of the superpowers—the influence that had enabled Siad Barre to maintain his dictatorial position for some twenty years—vanished more or less overnight. However, that same influence left most of its hardware behind.



*Colonial Somalia—divided between Great Britain, Italy, France, and Ethiopia, late nineteenth century. [Electromap, Inc.]*

#### **Forging Somali Nationalism: Siad Barre and the Cult of Personality**

As long as Somalia's geographic location remained important during the cold war, Siad Barre was able to obtain enough money and weaponry from the superpowers to keep rival clans from overpowering him. However, it is not strictly due to the end of the cold war that Siad Barre's enemies increased their efforts against him. Over the course of his Presidency, Siad Barre built a cult of personality, re-creating himself as the father of Somalia. Radio newscasts and public appearances would begin with a song dedicated to "Our Father, the Father of Knowledge." Initially, Siad Barre constructed a multi-clan framework

that strove to develop Somali national consciousness and end clan importance. However, as his power waned later in his rule; he came to rely more and more heavily on his own clan for support, persecuted certain clans, and played games of divide and rule with the others.

In October 1970, on the first anniversary of the military coup that brought Siad Barre to power, he announced that Somalia would in the future, follow the doctrine of "Scientific Socialism." This announcement—foreshadowed by the after-the-fact transformation of the coup into a "Revolution"—reflected the army's increasing dependence upon the Soviet Union for equipment and advisers. The doctrine of Scientific Socialism (literally in Somali "wealth-sharing based on wisdom") was closely related to the newly-proclaimed ideals of "togetherness," "self-reliance" and "self-help."

It was also coupled with a denunciation of tribalism which, as the official slogan went, "divides rather than unites." Siad Barre also outlawed clan identifications—a crucial attack on nomadic Somali culture. Somalis engaging in traditional clan activities were subject to fine and/or imprisonment. The government also took over communal activities such as funerals and marriages forcing Somalis to hold these ceremonies at state orientation centers.

The importance of the clan (and a corresponding ambivalence towards nationalism) may be indicated by the method used

towards the end of the colonial period and during the first nine years of independence (1960 - 1969) to establish clan relationships. It had become fashionable etiquette among the European-educated Somali elite not to reveal one's clan in favor of the all-purpose appellation "Somali," referring to clan loyalties in the past tense. While it was simple enough to reject the supposedly primitive, pre-colonial identification system, this rejection then posed the problem of a new method of identification. Rather than create or discover an entirely new system, Somalis increasingly accepted the term "ex-clan" as a way of politely inquiring into or replying about family allegiance.

However, Siad Barre's subsequent actions—empowering his clan, the Marehan, at the expense of other clans and exploiting clan rivalries—would seem to indicate his cynical manipulation of socialist rhetoric to prevent sectional conflicts from interfering with his rule over Somalia. Indeed, although it was illegal to mention clan affiliations publicly, Siad Barre's power base was a tripartite clan allegiance known by the code-name M.O.D. It consisted of the Marehan, his own clan, the Ogaden, his mother's clan, and the Dulbahante clan of his son-in-law, head of the National Security Service (NSS), the Somali secret police.

The M.O.D. configuration, serendipitous or not, was cunningly constructed to maintain a tight grip upon the sectional tensions that could divide the Somali state. The Ogaden inhabit western Somalia and Ethiopia. Through his mother's kin ties he



"Superpower Cornucopia"  
[Kirk Anderson]

could control Somali relations with Ethiopia. The Dulbahante occupy both sides of the boundary between former British and Italian Somalilands. Through his son-in-law he could minimize friction between north and south and the Italian and British colonial traditions.

### **Dissension In the Ranks: The Cult of Personality Damaged**

In May, 1986 a near-fatal car accident shattered the long-standing illusion of invincibility of the 'Great Leader' persona Siad Barre had so painstakingly constructed. Consistent with the Somali Constitution, Senior Vice-President General Mohammed Ali Samatar stepped forward to be interim leader and declared a state of emergency. Much to the consternation of those close to Siad Barre, Samatar's regency was supported both by the military and by the Central Committee of the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party. The President's intimates worried that they would lose a great deal of influence if Siad Barre was unable to return to the Presidency.

Effectively, the government was divided into two groups. The first was the Dastouri (the constitutional faction), a multi-clan group consisting of members of the Central Committee as well as Samatar himself. The second was the so-called 'Gang of Five' from Siad Barre's immediate family; his wife, her eldest son, a cousin and others. Under pressure from his clansman, Siad Barre returned to Somalia from his Saudi Arabian hospital bed in June, 1986. Samatar promptly handed back the reins of the government.

Despite the fact that Samatar had not tried to undermine Siad Barre's position, the damage had already been done to the President's authority. For the first time in Siad Barre's reign there was open speculation about who would succeed him. Furthermore, the prematurely de-hospitalized Siad Barre was still physically weak and vulnerable to his own kinsmen who were frantically trying to shore up their own positions should Siad Barre lose control of Somalia. In September 1986, the Central Committee of the Party proposed another seven years for Siad Barre as President. He won 99.9% of the vote in the national elections on December 23.

After the election, Siad Barre promoted a number of Marehan to the senior ranks of the army and reshuffled the cabinet to give the Marehan stronger control of the Ministry of Defense. In February 1987, General Samatar was appointed 'First Minister' in the new government. Because the vital ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense reported directly to the President instead of the newly-created 'First Minister,' Samatar was effectively removed from the chain of command. In fact, his office and official residence were quickly taken over by the new Minister of Defense. Siad Barre had constructed two governments, one officially constituted around General Samatar and the other conducted around the final authority, the President himself.

Siad Barre's increasing reliance upon the Marehan destroyed the fragile poly-clan framework he had formerly constructed, leaving him open to opposition from every clan other than his own. This alienation led to brutal repression of opposition, which, combined with the loss of strategic value after the cold war, led to the United States' termination of economic and military aid to Somalia. Without a superpower ally to support him, Siad Barre quickly fell.

### **Many Weapons, Little Food**

No one clan was powerful enough to unseat Siad Barre. It ultimately took an alliance of clans to defeat him, one that disintegrated soon after that defeat. Currently, there is no group strong enough to establish a stable political state. The United Nations, following the recommendations of the United States, has refused to supply the force necessary to politically reconstruct Somalia. They are providing humanitarian aid instead. This aid is helpful, but it is a temporary salve which does not address the larger questions. While the present situation is certainly a result of internal disequilibrium, other nations are also partly responsible. Many of the weapons currently used in Somalia were supplied by the United States and the former Soviet Union. Somalia at this point has little but military hardware, enabling soldiers to use starvation as an even more powerful weapon to enforce their political power.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Of the books, the best are those produced by I.M. Lewis, who is the pre-eminent scholar on Somalia. Samatar's book is a little too Marxist to be very useful, although it has some interesting facts. Ray Beachey's book is fascinating, but less academic than Lewis'.

Of the articles, Rakiya Omaar's is definitely worth looking at. She is a Somali and was, as of May '92, the Executive Director of Africa Watch (Human Rights Organization)

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# India's Dream State

In the wake of the riots and violence that followed the storming of a mosque in Ayodhya, ancient religious hatreds are being touted as the cause. Yet, India's history is characterized more by religious toleration than conflict. These hatreds are often invented by Hindu nationalists who are revising history to support their plans for a Hindu state.

**The Art of History • Ancient Hatreds, Modern Inventions • Ayodhya and Rama • Hinduism and Hindu "Unity" • Enter Rama, Modern Television Star • Reshaping Reality: India's Muslim Era • Indian Culture: A Muslim-Hindu Blend • The BJP—Whose Movement? • Popular Dissatisfaction: Congress Struggles to Hold the Middle • A Cautionary Tale.**

By Tom MacFarlane

## The Art of History

As curious as it may sound, perhaps the best history of India I have ever come across is a piece of fiction. I am referring to Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel, *Midnight's Children*. In it, the narrator, Saleem Sinai, relates the fantastic story of his life. He is born at midnight on the fifteenth of August, 1947, the very moment that the Indian state achieved her official independence. From that instant, his story and India's history are yoked mythically and metaphorically.

I know as I make such a claim that there are plenty of accomplished historians who would laugh off my impertinence. After all, what use is fiction to the purposes of history, much less a stream of consciousness narration which misdates the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi? Still, Saleem's fabulous history (he calls it a "chutnification [or pickling] of history")—self-consciously trying to "encapsulate the whole of reality" while at the same time giving it shape and meaning—introduces, explains, and represents contemporary India, with all its magical (and explosive) energy, in a way that a more conventional historical text cannot.

For a country in which the majority of the population uses the same term for 'yesterday' as 'tomorrow' and understands all earthly existence as the dream of a god, the idea of history is a complicated one. There exist few other countries in the world whose facts are so tangled in fiction and whose past is so intricately knotted to its present. It is a country of invention in which languages, customs, cuisines, histories, and religious practices vary from region to region and person to person.

When recounting to a friend recently the latest rash of disturbing news out of India—the January Hindu-Muslim riots sparked by the

storming of a mosque, the fatal explosions in Bombay and Calcutta in March, reports that Pakistan and India were on the verge of nuclear war for Kashmir in 1990—I remembered Saleem Sinai and the "fear of absurdity" which prompted him to find connections in everything. Were there any connections in the frenzy of these events?, I wondered.

Still puzzling about India, I pulled *Midnight's Children* off the shelf and was startled upon re-reading the book's final passage in which Saleem shares an apocalyptic vision of the future. "I am the bomb in Bombay, watch me explode," he announces. Then later, "they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust." The first allusion—bombs in Bombay—caught my eye immediately. As for the second, the six hundred million people of India (now, in fact, closer to nine and counting) obliterate their collective history as it is made, marching restlessly through, and over, it to find themselves in familiar yet new places, tracing the inner logic of a dream.

## Ancient Hatreds, Modern Inventions

I will concentrate here on the most disagreeable of contemporary developments: the rising tension between Hindus and Muslims, as exposed by the destruction of a sixteenth century mosque at Ayodhya (a city in the northern province of Uttar Pradesh) and



Mohandes K. Gandhi, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and Jawaharlal Nehru.

by the subsequent wave of mob violence that crippled much of north and west India in early January.

On the surface, perhaps, the reports of these incidents correspond more rigidly to a pattern of history than the other events—bombings and proposed bombings—brought lately to our attention. Certainly our news media manages hastily to package the unrest in language which has become conventional. We see a ten second highlight package on television and are made to believe we understand that the people on our screen are acting this way out of “ancient hatreds” and “religious fanaticism.”

But, these simplifications—true only to a point—so often only make us co-conspirators, sharers of the myths and fantasies at the root of the violence. More often than not they conceal the particularity of the upheaval—the complex and decidedly modern set of circumstances that combine to make it possible—and, in India’s case certainly, the haphazardness of it. The impetus behind the Hindu extremist movement has, some would say, as much to do with political and economic power as it does with religion or deep felt hatreds. Nevertheless, Hindu nationalist leaders struggle at every turn to reinvent India’s past by exploiting religious sentiment and merging history with legend and fiction.

As politically radical as the Indian nationalist movement was (led by Gandhi and India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru), its emphasis on pluralism, secularism, and tolerance—ideals reflected in the evolution of India’s legal and political structure since independence—was nothing new. In fact, throughout the subcontinent’s long and turbulent history, there is surprisingly little record of religious intolerance. Early Hindu Kings are known to have respected the various practices of their immigrant populations. Subsequently, as the power of these kings began to decline in the eleventh century, the conquering Muslims, who maintained control until the collapse of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century, were, with few exceptions, every bit as lenient.

Incidents of conflict between Hindus and Muslims took on new, more serious, characteristics following British colonization. The division of the subcontinent into administrative units often fell along religious lines—for example the 1905 division of Bengal into what is today easternmost India and Bangladesh. With the traditional multi-religious principalities gone, indigenous leaders found mono-religious administrative pockets in which to build support. Politicians exploited Hindu and Muslim fears to their advantage.

Moreover, events with non-religious origins often resulted in communal conflict. In 1920, thousands of Muslims returning early from a failed pilgrimage to Mecca found their lands appropriated by their Hindu neighbors. The violence that ensued pitted Hindu against Muslim but had equally as much to do with economic necessity as sectarian hatred. The violence of 1924-26 had similar economic roots as the poorer Muslim peasants and landless laborers lashed out against Hindu landowners.

### **Hinduism and Hindu “Unity”**

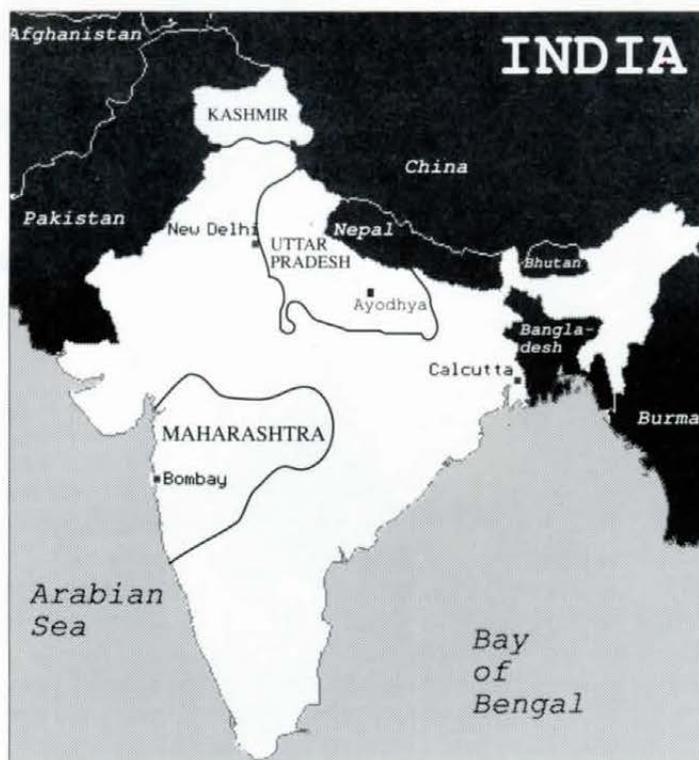
Hinduism has always had a dynamism and flexibility that belied any attempt to discriminate on grounds of faith. Anciently derived from a mixture of imported Aryan beliefs and indigenous customs, Hinduism’s earliest doctrines all acknowledge diverse theories and standards. The rigid caste divisions between followers of the religion—which still exist despite the fact that

Gandhi insured their constitutional abolishment—are severely discriminatory. However, they also emphasize the fundamental plurality within Hinduism, giving a place to all—rich and poor, low and high. Moreover, among Hindus, no central structure of authority or hierarchy of clergy exists. Nor do Hindus subscribe to one central set of scriptures. Rather, there are only regionally based groups. Virtually no formal coordination has evolved between regional leaders and differing schools of thought.

In fact, Hinduism has only relatively recently come to be understood as a religious designation at all. The travelers who first coined the term used it as a tag for the peoples of, and around, the Indus river valley—a large and various assemblage grouped together as a result of geographical orientation only. It was common even in the early British period to refer to “Hindoo Muslims” and “Hindoo Christians.” One might well still argue that Hindus, with their loose confederation of legends and philosophies, comprise more a societal body than a religious one. Mocking the past, today’s Hindu nationalists and opportunistic militants do their best to obscure the history of Hindu diversity.

### **Ayodhya and Rama**

Ironically, the fuss over the Ayodhya mosque (commonly known as the Babri Masjid, or ‘Babur’s Mosque’—mosque is the name given to Muslim houses of worship) serves to highlight both the traditional diversity within the Hindu faith, and the uniquely modern sources for recent declarations of Hindu unity. The site on which the mosque stood is reputed to be the birthplace of Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Hindu nationalists argue that an original temple to Rama had been destroyed by Babur (the first Muslim Mughal emperor) and the mosque erected in its place. They hold, thus, that the December 6 razing of the Babri Masjid was not an act of vandalism so much as one of restoration, and that destroying such an enduring symbol of



[Electromap, Inc.]

repression hails a reclamation of their historical and religious roots. They are now impatient for a new temple to Rama to be built, no doubt to function as a centrepiece for the struggle towards the recognition of a Hindu nation.

Whether or not one were to dispute the justifications for the raid on the mosque—all based on historical speculation—the very figure (Rama) in whose name the raid was carried out, is marked by an ambiguity that has also been ignored. While in the northwest Rama may be worshiped as the preeminent god, most Hindus would probably question granting him such a high status. Moreover, many in the south might dispute that he is a god at all. The idea, then, of uniting Hindus through the reparation of this “insult to Rama” seems incongruous.

### Enter Rama, Contemporary Television Star

What emboldened the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to seize on the issue of the Ayodhya mosque, though, was the power of television combined with that of a good story. In January 1987, the state-run television network (Doordarshan) began to air an eighteen month long megaserie of the *Ramayana*. The *Ramayana* (“Rama’s Way”) is one of the two great epics in South Asian history. As William Buck, scholar of Hinduism, describes, it “tells a story of courtly intrigue, heroic renunciation, fierce battles, and the triumph of good over evil” and depicts the noble god-king Rama’s twelve-year exile and battle with the demon Ravana. An estimated audience of 100 million watched the series. Hinduism became standardized in such a way that gave self-serving militant political factions, formerly quite obscure, a collective enthusiasm to harness, and a cause to exploit.

Not long after the concluding episode was televised, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) was calling on Hindus across the country to make bricks with inscriptions of Rama’s name for a temple at Ayodhya where Babur’s mosque was. Then, appropriating this concept for its campaign, the BJP began its abrupt climb to prominence in the 1989 national elections. This is an ascent that has now made it the second largest party in India, currently holding 119 parliament seats (up from two in 1984!). Polls suggest that the party would win 170 were elections held today—not the 273 needed for a majority, but a momentous, and still growing number. During these last few

years it has also won four state elections, including that in Uttar Pradesh.

As clear as it is that the *Ramayana* series contributed to the recent rise of Hindu nationalism, this would have certainly been difficult to predict. Doordarshan, which produced the epic, has always been a secularizing vehicle that attempted to forge “national” or “Indian” consciousness. It was the voice of modernity and international culture, uniting caste and creed behind its national cricket team. Furthermore, the *Ramayana* itself is generally treated as a piece of shared folklore, and was watched as eagerly by Muslims as Hindus. The story is, in fact, popular throughout Southeast Asia, and integral to the dramatic traditions in Buddhist Thailand and Muslim Indonesia. What’s more, the Rama we find in it, while idealized, is more an exemplary worldly ruler than a deity. However, an all-too easy target, he has been co-opted and re-invented for the political purposes of Hindu radicals and their reconstructive tendencies.

### Reshaping Reality: India’s Muslim Era

The BJP platform rests almost entirely on similar creative self-fashioning. Ironically enough, they have adopted the “two nation” theory that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, former head of the Muslim League, initially proposed in his campaign for the creation of Pakistan in the 1940s. This theory rests on the inaccuracy that the Indian Muslim community descends from immigrant populations, and thus is not native. Most of the Muslims in India have, rather, an indigenous ancestry, their families having simply converted to Islam at some point since (and quite possibly for nothing more than political expediency).

Moreover, many Hindus voice suspicions that Indian Muslims are more loyal to the hated enemy—Pakistan—than to their own country. Others, however, cast these questions of allegiance aside. During the partition period in 1947—that separated British Colonial India into India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)—Muslim Indians made specific decisions to stay in India when given the choice to leave. However, it must be said that the partition was a time of near anarchy in which approximately ten million people changed lands and more than one million died. Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs butchered each other as the migratory stream became a flood.

The primary theme of Hindu nationalist revisionism is that of Muslim religious repression. There is a grain of truth to the accusation but Hindu nationalists have cultivated it into a general principle. The early Muslim invaders, first arriving in the eleventh century, did leave a path of devastation over much of the territory they conquered. They destroyed lavish temples and ravaged great cities. However, this pattern became less and less frequent as the Afghans and Turks began to settle on the subcontinent. The Mughal empire, founded under Babur in the early sixteenth century, had, as I mentioned above, a remarkable record of religious openness.

Akbar (1556-1605), who, more than Babur and Homayun before him, established the lasting structure of the empire, did so by allying himself with the Hindu Rajput warriors in Rajasthan and giving Hindus positions in his government. Akbar tried to find a common ground between the peoples. He devised a composite religious cult which, while it centred on himself—consolidating the emperor’s status as something akin to a divine right—also detached Mughal rule from any strict Muslim orientation. Such moves were to insure that the Mughal empire, with



Durga Puja—Hindu Festival, Calcutta  
[Government of India Tourist Office]

its Persian cultural mantle, would cease to be thought of as a 'foreign' rule. As Percival Spear points out in his *History of India* (Vol. 2): "[the Mughal empire] has remained a legend in India because it lasted long enough to be part of the accepted order of things and because, though not Hindu, it was generally felt to be Indian."

Hindu obscurantists tend to neglect Akbar, though, in favor of Aurengzeb, who ruled during the late seventeenth century. An orthodox Sunni Muslim, he won the throne from his elder brother Dara (whom his father Shah Jahan (builder of the Taj Mahal) had endorsed). He ruthlessly held on to power, after imprisoning Shah Jahan and beheading Dara, for over forty years. He did not treat Hindus as well as Akbar, and he tore at least one temple down in Varanasi to build a mosque. But he was in all likelihood not the cruel zealot portrayed by some. Besides, outside observers believe that Aurengzeb's religious intolerance was a minority in the duration of the Mughal empire. Notwithstanding the probability that his record of misdeeds has been exaggerated, to hold him up as a typical Mughal leader is an overstatement.

### **Indian Culture: A Muslim-Hindu Blend**

In an attempt to legitimize their reinterpretations of the past, the BJP and the neo-fascist, Bombay-based Shiv Sena (Shiva's Army) are pushing to revise school textbooks to minimize the positive contributions and inflate the transgressions of Muslims in India. They deny the contemporary evidence that Indian culture is a thorough blend of Islamic and Hindu influences. Mod-

ern literature, painting, music and architecture draws from both traditions, as does popular culture. It is not unconventional that the scriptwriter and lead actor of the *Mahabharata*, the second Hindu epic made into a television series (capitalizing on the success of the *Ramayana*), are Muslim. The enormous Indian film industry, so central to the collective subconscious of Indian society, has virtually since its inception drawn on an integrated community of collaborators.

Even the actual contemporary religious beliefs and customs of Hindus and Muslims in India show a tremendous cross-pollination. Some would argue that Islam is as much an Indian religion as Hinduism is. The conventions of India's Muslims have evolved quite distinctly and discretely from those of the rest of the Islamic world and are closely allied to Hindu practices. In fact, the over 100 million Indian Muslims effectively comprise the second largest collection of Muslims in the world. Furthermore, it is an Indian version of Islam that spread to what is now the largest Muslim country, Indonesia.

### **The BJP: Whose Movement?**

When analyzed closely, the idea of making India a Hindu state seems unfeasible. Perhaps not even the BJP can ultimately believe in it. While the Muslim population amounts to only around eleven per cent of the population relatively speaking, the real numbers of Muslims are formidable. It would be impossible to suppress such an enormous community or be rid of them. Further, because out of all the states only Kashmir (a different case



*Fiddling while Ayodhya burned.*  
[Government of India Tourist Office]

entirely) has a Muslim majority, another partition of the country appears out of the question.

The BJP have, indeed, mixed religion and politics in theory only. L. K. Ardvani, BJP's top man, and the rest of the party leadership (all from the high Brahmin caste) admit no holy men to their inner circle. Even if a Hindu theocracy were conceivable (and it is unlikely for a splintered faith like Hinduism), it would run contrary to the self-interest of the BJP's power-hungry elite. In fact, what the BJP has always espoused is a more moderate, even a secular line, stressing cultural over religious unity.

The grievances voiced by the BJP have had to do primarily with certain legal concessions to Muslims guaranteed in the constitution. In radically overhauling Hindu personal law to conform with his western liberal concept of the rights of the individual, Nehru not only abolished caste restrictions but managed to pass less popular bills certifying the rights of women. These laws, however, are not binding on Muslims. Thus, a Hindu can be taken to court for polygamy while a Muslim cannot. Equally, the liberal terms for divorce apply only to Hindu marriages. Not so much sanctioning a bias against Hindu men as against Muslim women, these differences are nonetheless brought up constantly as unfair to the majority. A call for their correction has been the BJP's central plank.



*Selling dreams on the street.*  
[Tom MacFarlane]

It would not be fair to blame the BJP alone for the riots and communal atrocities of January. One might well argue that a violent hatred of Muslims is the true expression of the party and that the moderate goals it professes are only a thin veil. However, if it set out to exploit the ignorance and disaffection of the masses with its latest rhetorical stances, it clearly lost control of them in the end. The frustrations that fed the anarchy were certainly more deep-seated than the BJP could have imagined, and came to be directed by more extreme elements—*sadhus* (holy men) with megaphones, organized crime bosses, and the Bombay-based Shiv Sena.

Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena leader contorts the idea of a privileged minority (Muslims are, on average, poorer and less literate than Hindus) into a frightening hysteria. In a *Time* magazine interview (January 25, 1993), he takes credit for controlling the Bombay mobs and, rather shockingly, adds that because Muslims "behave...like Jews in Nazi Germany," he sees "nothing wrong if they are treated as Jews were in Germany." Such extremism has never been associated with the BJP; but the fact that it made no attempts to detach itself from the likes of Thackeray raises the suspicion that the party is radicalizing as it expands.

### **Popular Dissatisfaction: Congress Struggles to Hold the Middle**

What is it that appeals to so many Hindus about the BJP, the Shiv Sena, and other more marginal extremist organizations similarly bent on revoking the civic status of their Muslim neighbors? Why have the lies suddenly become so dangerously seductive? These are not simple questions to answer. But the issue, no doubt, has something to do with the fact that the Congress party, which has so dominated Indian government since Independence, seems to have lost its vision of secular, pluralist democracy. They are unsure which political winds to follow—those to defend the secular state or those to color the state structure Hindu. The public's trust of politicians and patience with the system have been diminishing steadily over the last decade, with increasing reports of endemic corruption, societal ills, a stalled economy and failed projects.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's reactions to the storming of the Babri Masjid did nothing to help avert the ensuing chaos. At first he expressed rage and vowed to rebuild the mosque. Then, he gave in to the 'soft Hindu' line favored by many in his cabinet of establishing funds for both a Muslim mosque and a Hindu temple. He was attracted by the support he might win for moving quickly on plans for the temple, and of the ease with which he might delay the building of the mosque until a more politically opportune time.

On the other hand, he has, indeed, taken strong action against the rival BJP, dismissing its four Hindi-belt state governments (an act now being challenged in the Indian courts) and efficiently imposing a ban on their rally in New Delhi. But his party made relatively little attempt to either control or condemn the Shiv Sena in Bombay. The Bombay police force, over which the Congress-ruled Maharashtra state government presides, is actually under Indian court investigation for being complicitous with the Hindu rioters. All of this points to a confusion in Congress party strategy, with some advisors nudging the Prime Minister towards open confrontation with the BJP, and others asking him to be more indulgent towards its followers. Rao has

since tried to deflect attention towards the economy which, with a wave of foreign investment and a decreasing inflationary burden, has showed recent signs of renewal.

An economic recovery would go a long way towards answering the suspicions about the advantages of secular democracy. It would also give the government the confidence to challenge the ideology of Hindu nationalism head-on, and expose its historical revisionism. Most of the severe problems arose in regions with high rates of poverty and illiteracy. A liberalized and growing economy could very well provide the upward mobility that would keep Hindi-belt communities from becoming such easy prey for politically motivated obscurantists.

By no means are all of the trouble-makers poor and illiterate, however. The most ardent and dangerous of the Hindu nationalist camp could be characterized as quite the opposite. They are the educated middle class whose hopes and ambitions have, more and more, been exceeding their opportunities. Born into privilege, they have grown disenchanted with Indian society. They are resentful of those upstarts from minority groups or lower castes who have benefitted from the modern economy's expansion and threaten to overturn the formerly rigid Hindu social hierarchy. They feel much the same bitterness as Nathuram Godse, the Hindu who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi for championing 'outcaste' and Muslim rights. Self-immolations are carried out every year by frustrated middle class youths as a demonstration against government affirmative action hiring quotas for lower castes.

It is Hindus from this group to whom Bal Thackeray appeals when he refers, odiously, to Nazi Germany, and the very same who burn Muslim shops and enter wealthy Muslim neighborhoods in Bombay to harass, vandalize, and murder. In a way that so typifies the enigmas of India, the two groups—illiterate poor and middle class—that apparently rallied together in a movement to unite all Hindus are, themselves, at cross-purposes. The lower caste believe that they are not receiving their fair share in the new India and cry for more. The middle class also feel they are deserving of a greater piece of the pie and would do so by entrenching the lower caste where they are now.

### A Cautionary Tale

It is exceedingly difficult to anticipate anything when speaking



Gateway to Bombay in quieter times.  
[Government of India Tourist Office]

of India—except, that is, its constant surprise. I am tempted to say that the historical, religious and cultural fictions which cloak the contemporary political and economic negotiations of the Hindu nationalist movement will dissolve once those negotiations begin to show progress. Yet, despite government efforts, the prevalence of deeply ingrained legend (understood as fact) continues unbowed. Myth, legend, history and fiction remain intertwined. It is not an easy task to separate them.

The news out of the country since the suppression of the BJP's rally in New Delhi has served further notice of the country's ever-shifting sources of self-revelation (and self-annihilation). To begin with, only weeks after the January sectarian violence in Bombay that followed the storming of Ayodhya, 45,000 people cheered the Indian cricket team to a test match victory that marked their first-ever series sweep of England. The triumphant captain, Mohammed Azharuddin, is a Muslim; the president of their host Bombay Cricket Association, Manohar Joshi, a deputy of Shiv Sena.

Then, in mid-March of this year, came the bombs throughout that very same city, dozens of them exploding simultaneously according to some latest hideous master plan, killing 317 people without an apparent reason. The conclusion being drawn—and the sophistication of the terrorism demands that we decipher its message—is that a Muslim underground family, in the pay of Pakistan's secret service, coordinated the bombings (with the help, evidently, of several hirelings each of whom they paid the equivalent of 167 US dollars). No doubt, if there is any truth to this theory of outside authorship, the motive would involve some conjured history.

Less is known about the crude bombs which killed 90 people in Calcutta less than a week later—four in a train station when a bag that a vagabond was carrying exploded, and 86 when explosives stored in two old tenement buildings were set off. Surely, in such sad coincidences, lies yet further fictions, more private ones maybe, which impose their tragic structures on a nation all too susceptible to the charms of fantasies.

Finally, Seymour Hersh (in the *New Yorker*, March 29) gave us news of the most destructive fantasy there is, when he reported that, in the Spring of 1990, India and Pakistan were on the verge of a nuclear confrontation over the quintessential vale of dreams: Kashmir—literally the "K" in "Pakistan"—and the backdrop for probably every romantic Indian movie ever made. Hersh reminds us that, when thinking of India, one should not underestimate the powers of invention.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

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# Abortion in Canada:

## Legislative Limbo and the Morgentaler Factor

While abortion remains one of the central policy issues of the late twentieth century, Canada exists without a federal law concerning the premature termination of pregnancy. That such is the case results in many ways from the legal actions of pro-abortion activist Dr. Henry Morgentaler. In 1988, his constitutional challenge brought down the existing legislation. In the federal vacuum, other Canadians struggle to define a new policy.

**Canada's Legislative History • Abortion Becomes Public Debate, the Code is Revised • Section 251 Struck Down • Daigle, Dodd and the Rights of the Fetus • Bill C-43 • Dr. Henry Morgentaler • Arrested in Montreal, the 1970s • Morgentaler in the 1980s • Morgentaler Battles On: Nova Scotia • Manitoba • RU-486, A New Twist on an Old Debate**

By Lianne Ollerhead

The debate over abortion is seldom without passion. Proponents of Pro-Choice and Pro-Life are spirited in their deep felt belief of the correctness of their cause. The shooting of Dr. David Gunn in Florida this past March, as well as the verbal volleys between protesters on both sides, is testimony to the depth of feeling. But, there exists another side to the abortion question. While often receiving much less press, it is equally, if not more, important than the protests, pickets, marches, and demonstrations of Choice and Life advocates. This is the debate over laws that takes place in the legislature and the judiciary.

It is truly only in the past thirty years that the question of abortion has been up for public debate. However, those years have been packed with struggles between the different branches of Canada's legislative and judicial structures. The question of which group—the federal or provincial governments, the lower courts or the Supreme Court, the legislature or the judiciary—has the final say concerning abortion remains to be answered. The struggle between these loci of power strikes at the heart of the balance of powers in Canada. Is abortion a federal concern or a provincial one? Constitutionally, the federal government maintains jurisdiction over criminal legislation (where abortion has traditionally been addressed) whereas the provinces regulate medical practices. Who will be the final arbiter, the Supreme Court, the provinces or the Houses of Parliament?

The abortion issue finds itself further caught up in the debate over nationalized versus private health care. Often legislation barring access to abortions in private clinics results not from any desire to prevent abortion but from efforts to block the privatization of health services.

At the center of the maelstrom, quite outside court and parliamentary affiliation, stands Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his pro-abortion stance, Morgentaler remains the most prominent of all the players in the battle to either legalize or criminalize abortion in Canada. His struggles within the court system to defend his private clinics and legalize access to non-hospital abortions have greatly changed the face of Canadian abortion legislation. Since January 28, 1988 Canada has been without a criminal law to regulate access to abortion

and Morgentaler's challenge in the Supreme Court had much to do with it.

### Canada's Legislative History

When Canada inherited British civil and criminal legislation at Confederation in 1867, it also retained laws that made abortions illegal. In 1803, Great Britain had passed a statute outlawing abortion that codified what had been up until then a criminal offense by custom. Abortion was not considered "murder," however, a term that was reserved for the ending of a life already born. The section of the new Code dealing with abortion used the term "unlawfully." Part of the clause read as follows:

...whosoever, with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman, whether she be or not with child, shall unlawfully administer to her or cause to be taken by her any poison or other noxious thing ... shall be guilty of felony...

The use of the term "unlawfully" in this case created an uncertainty over whether there were in fact circumstances when abortion could be lawful.

This uncertainty led to the passing by the British parliament in 1929 of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act which allowed abortions, if performed to save the mother's life. A new Canadian Code included this British Act and it remained in place until it was revised in 1955. At that time, the term "unlawfully" was removed but ambiguities remained. According to some interpretations the absence of the word changed the law to mean that no abortions were permitted for whatever reason.

### Abortion Becomes Public Debate, the Code is Revised

Shortly after the 1955 revision, the abortion issue began to be discussed more publicly. In August, 1959, the Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine* published one of the first articles in Canadian history that advocated legalized abortions and in doing so sparked a debate that continues to this day. By 1959, the abortion issue was taken up by other publications such as the United Church *Observer* and the Toronto *Globe and Mail*. Within a few years, public discussion came to include the Canadian Bar Association and the Canadian Medical Association who had also begun to address the legalization of abortion.

The federal government officially started to review abortion

legislation in October 1967. A committee, Parliament's Standing Committee on Health and Welfare (SCHW), was struck in June 1967 to consider and report upon three abortion bills put forward privately by members of parliament. The bills were proposed by Ian Wahn (Liberal, St. Paul's), Grace MacInnis (N.D.P., Vancouver-Kingsway), and H.W. Herridge (N.D.P., Kootenay West). Each bill set forth a different set of conditions for legal abortion but all three bills left the decision in the hands of either two doctors or a hospital committee. The consent of the pregnant woman and her husband, if she were married, would also be necessary.

The bill that was finally passed by Parliament most closely resembled Wahn's proposal. His bill sought to clarify the existing law, to create proper safeguards and a uniform procedure for all hospitals in the country, and to make it clear that therapeutic abortions which preserved either the life or the health of the pregnant woman would be legal. The final draft of the bill was passed by the House of Commons on May 14, 1969 and became effective as law on August 28, 1969.

According to the law, section 251 of the Criminal Code, abortion was illegal except under certain conditions. The abortion had to be performed by a qualified physician in an approved hospital; a therapeutic abortion committee of three qualified doctors was required to decide whether or not continued pregnancy would be risky to the woman's life or health; and the doctor who would perform the abortion could not be on that committee.

During the proceedings, a woman was not allowed to meet the hospital committee and had no right to appeal a rejected application for abortion. Moreover, hospitals were not compelled by law to set up abortion committees and many chose not to. As well, section 251 did not explicitly define the term "health." Differing interpretations over whether a continued pregnancy would jeopardize a woman's "health" led to arbitrary applications of the law. The reasons that women were granted abortions varied widely.

The arbitrariness of the law caused dissatisfaction amongst many national groups and renewed parliamentary action. The authors of the Badgley Report (1977)—the summary of the findings of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law (chaired by Robin Badgley) which had been established by the Minister of Justice in 1975—stated that the procedure for obtaining therapeutic abortions was, in practice, illusory for many Canadian women. The committee also found that women faced eight weeks, on average, of bureaucratic delays from the time a doctor was first consulted about a suspected pregnancy until the time a requested abortion was granted. The committee's report, combined with popular discontent, demonstrated that existing abortion legislation was functioning unsatisfactorily. The federal government was repeatedly urged to repeal or reform the law but instead they refused to change the situation.

### **Section 251 Struck Down**

The abortion law, section 251 of the Criminal Code, remained intact until January 28, 1988. On this day the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the existing legislation. The Supreme Court had been deliberating on the issue since October 7, 1986 when they first heard an appeal by Dr. Henry Morgentaler and Dr. Robert Scott of their conviction of conspiracy to procure a miscarriage.

The Court ruled the law unconstitutional, arguing that it vio-

lated Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms by usurping a woman's rights to life, liberty and the security of the person. Chief Justice Dickson stated that: "Section 251 clearly interferes with a woman's physical and bodily integrity. Forcing a woman, by threat of criminal sanction, to carry a foetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her own priorities and aspirations, is a profound interference with a woman's body and thus an infringement of security of the person."

### **Daigle, Dodd and the Rights of the Father**

The 1988 Supreme Court decision was not the final word on the abortion issue in Canada. The Court was soon called upon to make a ruling concerning the rights of a prospective father to prevent an abortion. In July, 1989 the ex-boyfriends of Barbara Dodd, resident of Ontario, and Chantal Daigle, resident of Quebec, attempted to obtain injunctions to stop their former girlfriends' abortions. The injunctions were granted by both provinces, preventing the women from terminating their pregnancies.

Daigle appealed immediately to the Supreme Court when the Quebec Court of Appeal upheld the injunction against her. In Ontario, Dodd's injunction was set aside for technical reasons. Daigle was eighteen weeks pregnant at the time of her appeal. By the time the Court was ready to convene, she would have been twenty-two weeks pregnant. It was announced at the trial that she had gone to the United States for an abortion as it would have been too late to perform one in Canada if she had waited. In spite of this, the Court heard the appeal and decided unanimously to overturn the injunction. The Court found that the law does not recognize a parental right to stop an abortion. It also found that a fetus does not enjoy any rights unless it is born alive.

### **Bill C-43**

November, 1989 proved to be important to the abortion issue for another reason. During that month, the federal government introduced Bill C-43, legislation to recriminalize abortion in Canada. Efforts had already been made by Ottawa in July, 1988 to amend those sections of the Criminal Code pertaining to abortion. At that point, a resolution was introduced to Parliament that contained a broad outline of a new abortion law that was gestational-based—i.e. one that would allow abortion only within a certain period from the time of conception. The 1988 resolution, along with five amendments, was defeated.

Bill C-43 was another attempt to amend the Code. The amendment would have made illegal abortions punishable by up to two years in jail. Abortions would have been legal only if a qualified physician determined that continued pregnancy would be harmful to the pregnant woman's physical, mental, or psychological health. On May 29, 1990 the House of Commons narrowly approved Bill C-43 and sent it on to the Senate for approval. However, the Senate defeated the bill early in 1991.

Since no federal law exists at present pertaining to the premature termination of pregnancy, abortion in Canada sits in limbo. In the legislation vacuum, provincial governments, who have jurisdiction over other medical procedures and regulations, now wield a certain amount of de facto control.

### **Dr. Henry Morgentaler**

Dr. Henry Morgentaler has been found at the centre of the debate over abortion almost from the outset. An advocate of legal and

available abortions, he has been a primary driving force behind the changes in legislation in Canada. As early as 1967, Morgentaler presented a motion to the parliamentary SCHW, urging that the abortion law be repealed. Following the revision of the abortion law in 1969 that made abortion legal under certain conditions, Morgentaler took up the abortion cause full time. He left his general medical practice to become a specialist in abortions and opened an abortion clinic in Montreal.

### **Arrested in Montreal, the 1970s**

By 1973, the clinic had been raided twice by the Montreal police, and Morgentaler had been charged a total of thirteen times for performing illegal abortions. During the second raid on the clinic (August, 1973) Morgentaler was arrested, charged, and taken to court. During the trial, Morgentaler's lawyers endeavoured unsuccessfully to nullify the abortion law on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. However, in November, the jury did acquit him of the charge. In an appeal by the Quebec Crown (1974), the Quebec Court of Appeal overturned the acquittal and Morgentaler was convicted of performing an illegal abortion (one done in his clinic without the approval of a therapeutic abortion committee). In turn, Morgentaler appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada but had his appeal dismissed.

In 1975, Morgentaler began serving an eighteen month sentence in jail. While in prison, Morgentaler was brought to trial on another count of performing an illegal abortion. Again, he was acquitted by the jury. This second acquittal was taken to the Quebec Court of Appeal but this time the appeal was dismissed.

In response, the Minister of Justice set aside the 1974 conviction, ordered a new trial on that charge, and released Morgentaler from prison. He had served ten months of his sentence. A third jury trial was held in March, 1976 and it resulted in acquittal. Later that year the newly elected Parti Québécois dropped all outstanding charges against Morgentaler, and the Attorney General declared that doctors would not be prosecuted for performing abortions as long as the medical conditions were safe.

### **Morgentaler in the 1980s**

In the spring of 1983 Morgentaler opened two more clinics—one in Winnipeg, the other in Toronto. Almost immediately, the clinics were raided by the police. As in Quebec, charges were pressed against Morgentaler, in this case for conspiracy to pro-

cure a miscarriage. In the Ontario case, Morgentaler's lawyers began a pre-trial motion, similar to the motion made in 1973, that challenged the constitutional validity of the abortion law. However, the motion was once again dismissed, this time by Justice Parker (July 20, 1984).

The trial began in October 1984, and the jury had acquitted Morgentaler by November 8. One month later, Attorney-General Roy McMurtry appealed the jury's decision to the Ontario Court of Appeal. Between the time of the acquittal and the appeals hearing (April 1985), Dr. Morgentaler had re-opened his clinics in both Toronto and Winnipeg. Once more, he was charged, twice in Toronto and six times in Winnipeg. The total number of outstanding charges in Winnipeg then stood at seven.

The Ontario Court of Appeal released its decision October 1 1985, stating that the acquittal had been set aside and that a new trial would be held. In response, Morgentaler appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Supreme Court hearing began October 7, 1986 and not until well over a year later, on January 28, 1988, did it end, when the Court struck down the abortion law.

### **Morgentaler Battles On: Nova Scotia**

Morgentaler's legal struggles did not end with the 1988 Supreme Court decision. In March 1989, the province of Nova Scotia passed legislation that banned the performance of abortions in private clinics. Morgentaler had opened a Halifax abortion clinic planned prior to the passing of the legislation. He announced in October, 1989 that he had performed seven abortions at this clinic. Immediately he was charged under the provincial Medical Services Act. One month later Morgentaler was further charged for seven more counts of performing illegal abortions, and was

served with an injunction prohibiting him from performing abortions until all the charges against him had been heard.

Within the year, Nova Scotia's Medical Services Act was struck down by a provincial court judge, and Morgentaler was acquitted of all charges. The court found that laws concerning abortion fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, not a provincial government. Frustrated by the judge's decision, the government of Nova Scotia appealed to the province's Supreme Court. In July 1991, the latter upheld the lower court's decision—a further victory for Morgentaler. Still not satisfied, the Nova Scotia government then decided to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. The appeal was heard in November, 1991 and remains unresolved. A decision is not expected until the end of



*Morgentaler speaks out.*  
[Halifax Daily News]

this year.

The Supreme Court must decide whether or not Nova Scotia passed a law that was properly in the federal government's domain. Morgentaler argues "yes." He believes that it is an illegal attempt by Nova Scotia to recriminalize abortion and feels that the 1989 ban on private clinics was a criminal sanction masked as a health policy.

A representative of the Attorney-General of Nova Scotia, Marian Tyson, has admitted that the initial ban was specifically aimed at Morgentaler in an attempt to keep him out of Nova Scotia. However, she further stated that the primary goal of the ban was to block any privatization of health services. Nova Scotia has banned nine other medical procedures from being performed at private clinics, including liposuction. If non-hospital abortions were allowed, precedent would be set for the provision of other medical services, such as mammograms and CAT-scans, on a fee for service basis. The Nova Scotia administration believes that a move towards increased privatization would result in a rise in the cost of Medicare. Reducing costs, they argue, will regulate in the most efficient way access to medical service.

### Manitoba

Nova Scotia is not the only province in Canada with which Morgentaler remains entangled in legal battles. In April 1992, Morgentaler challenged the Manitoba government's decision to pay for abortions in five provincial hospitals but not for abortions performed in his clinic or in any other clinics. He asked the court to make the government pay, arguing that the government's refusal to foot the bill discriminates against women who prefer clinics.

On June 12, 1992 the Court of Queen's Bench of Manitoba announced a decision in favour of Morgentaler. The Court found that the province's refusal to pay for abortions performed in clinics was discriminatory. In response, the Manitoba provincial government challenged the Court's decision in the province's Court of Appeal, and lost (March, 1993). The Court of Appeal once again ruled that doctors must be paid for performing abortions in clinics as well as in hospitals.

The prospect remains for another appeal by the provincial government, or some amending legislation. Health Minister Donald Orchard stated that the government did not want to pay for the abortion procedure at private clinics, and would likely introduce such legislation. Despite this, Morgentaler was in high spirits about the ruling and indicated the possibility of asking Manitoba to compensate him for the more than two hundred abortions he has performed since 1988.

Morgentaler is also challenging the provincial governments of Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland for refusal to pay for clinic abortions under Medicare. Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have already agreed to pay doctors for performing clinic abortions.

### RU-486, A New Twist on an Old Debate

A new aspect to the question of abortion legislation appeared in Canada in the 1990s—the RU-486 abortion pill. Developed in France (where it is widely available) by Dr. Etienne-Emile Baulieu, the pill is used to terminate pregnancies of less than seven weeks. Canadians must now decide whether to introduce such a pill to Canada.

In July, 1992 Ontario Health Minister Frances Lankin

claimed that Canada's health ministers wanted the abortion pill to become available in Canada. Federal Health Minister Benoit Bouchard was asked to contact the manufacturers of the pill and to encourage them to apply for permission to distribute the drug in Canada. To entice the company, Ms. Lankin—covertly indicating that abortion is now a health issue—stated that the federal government could "assure the company that in this country there are no criminal laws ... with respect to abortion and that it is an issue of delivery of health care and that every province is in the business of delivering safe, effective abortions in this country" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, July 21, 1992). The approval process could take eighteen months to two years before the RU-486 pill would be available for marketing in Canada.

That abortion will remain a central public policy issue well into the twenty-first century is clear. While Canada sits without federal legislation concerning the premature termination of pregnancy, skirmishes continue between governments at the provincial and federal levels, as well as between the judicial structure and the legislative branch, over who has the final say in permitting or restricting access to abortions. Morgentaler, whose fights through the courts have so greatly changed abortion laws in Canada, continues to operate clinics in five provinces.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

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- Paul Carrick, *Medical Ethics in Antiquity: philosophical perspectives on abortion and euthanasia*. (D. Reidel, 1985).
- Anne Collins. *The Big Evasion: abortion, the issue that won't go away*. (Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1985).
- Angus McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: the changing practices and politics of contraception and abortion in Canada, 1880-1980*. (McClelland & Stewart, 1986).
- Maureen Muldoon, *The Abortion Debate in the United States and Canada: a source book*. (Garland, 1991).
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# Ambivalence: America's Historic Approach to Welfare Reform

Within his first few weeks in office President Clinton has begun to formulate a welfare proposal that calls for expansions in welfare benefits, but at the same time seeks to reduce the number of people receiving public aid long term. A look at the history of American welfare reform suggests that the President has in fact recycled many old solutions and been swept up in the conflicting whirl of American desires to both protect and punish the poor.

**Welfare Reform Today • The Rise of Poorhouses: Nineteenth Century Reform • Saving Children: The Movement of the Early 1900s • The Great Depression & Welfare Expansion • The War on Poverty: Reform during the 1960s • Nixon and Carter Attempt Fundamental Change • War on Welfare: Reform during the Reagan and Bush Era • Possibilities for Clinton**

By Alison Pion

## Welfare Reform Today

No one is comfortable with the idea of welfare. Critics say that the system is incoherent and inefficient. Many charge that welfare programs erode the American work ethic and lead to idleness and unproductivity. Low income people who are enmeshed in the system view it as a frustrating and humiliating experience. However, after over two centuries of complaints, the American welfare structure has still managed to resist fundamental change.

This year, President Clinton has pledged to make welfare reform a priority during his four year term. Although the budget sets no money aside for changes in welfare policy, the Administration has stated that it is committed to developing a substantive public relief reform initiative.

During both the campaign and the transition, Clinton called for a two year limit on non-regulated welfare benefits. After this time, welfare recipients would be required to accept public service employment and participate in a job training program in an effort to promote work. An intra-government task force on welfare is now being formed and is expected to submit a comprehensive proposal on welfare reform to the Administration within the year.

Although all of Clinton's welfare policy has not been

revealed, the pieces he has put forward lead one to wonder whether his assertion of reform truly can be heralded as fundamental change. Some welfare analysts have already voiced criticism about Clinton's plan.

In particular, critics charge that Clinton's two year limit is based on the incorrect premise that people who go on welfare stay on welfare. A recent study conducted by Harvard researchers Mary Jo Bane and David Ellwood found that the majority of people remain on welfare for a period of less than one year. For the majority of families, welfare is a transitional means of support following some economic hardship, such as the loss of a partner or job or the birth of a baby.

However, supporters of Clinton's plan point out that long term welfare reciprocity still remains a significant problem. Approximately one in six recipients stays on public assistance for eight consecutive years or more. These long stays account for about 60 percent of total welfare costs.

Clinton's emphasis on promoting a work ethic through strict federal relief provisions situates him directly in a struggle that has plagued the American welfare system for over two centuries. Throughout its history, American welfare policy has been defined by conflicting purposes. On one hand, the image of America as a safe haven for the victimized has fostered a desire to help the poor, the sick, and the needy, through federal relief programs.

Alternatively, however, there exists a powerful American mind-set which celebrates independence and individual effort. America's worship of self-sufficiency has led to repulsion for those unable to "pull themselves up by their boot straps" and realize the American dream. Americans often accuse the poor of laziness and immorality and view those on welfare as failures.

These inconsistent beliefs have produced unresolved tensions in welfare legislation that have hindered all attempts to develop a coherent policy. In an effort to end dependency many leaders have tried to dismantle America's system of public assistance through lower benefit levels and strict eligibility requirements. In particular, those receiving the majority of disdain have been the able-bodied poor—those who are poor but deemed employable. However, America's sense of itself as protector has

## WORD WATCH

The word "welfare"—understood to mean public assistance or, more technically, "means tested relief" (i.e. if the means available to an individual exceed a certain level, then relief is not given)—is a relatively modern term which only became commonly accepted in the second decade of the twentieth century. Initially, "welfare" was used in a positive manner to differentiate older relief practices from newer, more adequate ones. It is unclear when it acquired the negative connotations attached to the term today.

resulted in the enactment of conflicting legislation that has expanded eligibility requirements and increased benefit provisions. Both out of concern and as a result of suspicion, welfare reform has been used to try to establish social order and control the labor patterns of the poor. America's incompatible purposes regarding welfare have resulted in contradictions between policies of deterrence, compassion, control, and patronage.

### The Rise of Poorhouses: Nineteenth Century Reform

The 1850s marked the first significant governmental reform in the American welfare system with the emergence of public institutional programs known as poorhouses or almshouses. Prior to this time, public relief was neither systematic nor structurally sound, generally run through local, parish or neighborhood organizations. Concern that poor people were becoming too dependent on the old system of local public assistance lead taxpayers to encourage the government to push state and local communities to establish poorhouses. These efforts were motivated less by a philanthropic desire than by the wish to discourage low income families from asking for poor relief.

The poorhouse system was designed to control low income people's behavior by suppressing intemperance and indoctrinating them with the habit of steady work. Within the poorhouses there was no separation by age, sex, or condition. Poorhouses were viewed as "human dumping grounds." Delinquents were thrown in with the insane and those whose only crime was to request public assistance. The work ethic was taught to those in the poorhouses through meaningless, systematic labor tasks. For instance, in a Providence, Rhode Island almshouse inmates were instructed to carry wood from one side of the room to the other, all day long, in an effort to keep them busy.

In 1875, legislation ordered children out of the poorhouses. While this law was in part developed to protect children from the squalors of the poorhouse, institutional relief now meant breaking up families and sending children to orphan asylums. Many felt poor parents could not do a good job of raising their own families. In order to reverse the legacy of poverty and dependence, taxpayers believed children needed to be taken from their families and taught "better" values.

As a result of these policies, the poorhouse became a place for poor parents to avoid at all cost. In this manner, taxpayers and government officials were able to mount an attack against those receiving public assistance and ensure that those who might be able to work did not turn to public relief. This deliberate attempt to define, locate, punish, and purge the able-bodied poor from welfare was to resurface time and again in welfare reform policy.

### Saving Children: The Movement of the Early 1900s

In the 1890s welfare reform developed two converging courses.

Policy became increasingly concerned with improving the "immoral" behavior of the poor. At the same time, saving the children emerged as a preeminent theme of reformers—an idea which resurfaces in contemporary times through Clinton's "investment in the future through the children of today."

In contrast to previous welfare policies which advocated the separation of poor children from their families, preservation of the family unit became the guiding force of early twentieth century welfare reform. Nineteen hundred and nine was the year of the first White House Conference on Children. Soon after, legislation was enacted which offered women with children, who were below a certain income bracket, benefits through the government's "mother's pensions" program. By 1931 over 200,000 children in every state, except Georgia and South Carolina, lived in homes supported by mother's pensions. Most of these pensions went to widows.

Saving the children and attacking immorality did not, however, mean simply offering public relief to low income people without strings attached. Welfare policy was also used to deliberately reinforce certain values. For instance, Illinois legislation of 1913 mandated that divorced women were ineligible for mother's pensions. Again in the late 1940s, attempts were made to reduce illegitimate births among black women through the implementation of stricter "suitable home" provisions in state Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) regulations. By using a specific, narrow definition for what constituted a "suitable" home and could, therefore, qualify for aid, federal public assistance was used to establish a certain social order and define the standards for a "deserving" mother.

### Trends in Welfare Reform Over the Last Two Centuries:

1800s	Reliance on Local Public Relief
1850s	Establishment of Poorhouses
1890s	Enactment of "Save the Children" Legislation
1930s	Creation of First Federal Relief System, Development of Federal Work Programs
1960s	War on Poverty, Emphasis on Systemic Obstacles and Opportunity
1970s	Movement to Simplify System of Relief
1980s	War on Welfare
1990s	Investment in the People

### The Great Depression and Welfare Expansion

The Depression that began in 1893 and exploded during the late 1920s and mid-1930s exposed the inadequacy of contemporary welfare ideas and institutions. Until the Great Depression, states and local communities, not the federal government, had provided direct relief to the poor. However, with official unemployment rates increasing from 3.2 percent in 1929 to 24.9 percent by the summer of 1933, the need for assistance was more than either state or local community budgets had the capacity to handle.

Within the first 100 days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) term as president (1933-1945) he created the nation's first federal relief system, Aid for Dependent Children. However, Roosevelt was reluctant to provide direct cash assistance to the poor. Instead, Roosevelt favored work relief programs such as Public Works Administration, and later the Works Progress Administration, which provided training and jobs to the able-bodied poor in an effort to keep them off welfare. Though FDR's vision of welfare deviated from previous reform efforts, the new system of public assistance did little to challenge the categories of able-bodied versus needy.

### The War on Poverty: Reform During the 1960s

Welfare reform once again shifted its scope and focus during the 1960s. Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and renewed optimism in the American dream, the need to improve poor people's opportunities became the central focus of welfare reform. However, consistent with America's historic dislike of welfare, much of the discussion emphasized the need to fight against poverty by improving opportunities for poor people through education and equal rights and paid little attention to the welfare system itself.

The War on Poverty, begun during the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) and continued through Lyndon B. Johnson's time in office (1963-1968), launched new community development programs, job training programs, and various education programs such as Head Start. These programs marked a significant shift in the focus of welfare. Instead of blaming or attacking the individual for his or her failure to succeed, the new thinking now stressed that the economic system was not working as it should. Structural problems and obstacles barred the way to success. The war was now to be fought against artificial and unjustifiable barriers that hindered the open, competitive structure of American capitalism.

Kennedy's and Johnson's poverty programs had largely bypassed the welfare system, substituting other programs in its place. However, by the mid-1960s the government did expand Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits and

challenged some of the ways in which the welfare system treated recipients. In particular, they contested midnight raids to see if single mothers on welfare had men in their homes and regulations that denied aid to single mothers deemed employable by the welfare office.

However, the relaxation of welfare regulations and the expansion of eligibility requirements ultimately reignited old fears. People were caught between wanting to help the poor and their concern that public assistance destroyed the desire to work. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the welfare system was increasingly criticized for undermining the work ethic among recipients.

This atmosphere led to the development of legislation in 1967 that built work incentive benefits into the AFDC structure and established the Work Incentive Program (WIN). Like previous welfare reform policies, this legislation tried to use both rewards and penalties to encourage those receiving welfare to work. For the first time, recipients were allowed to increase their incomes above states' need standards and still remain on welfare.

WIN also used penalties to encourage work. WIN legislation mandated that states require "appropriate" members of AFDC families, including mothers, to participate in work or training programs to the extent that space was available. Refusal to participate in these programs could mean a reduction in AFDC benefit levels. In 1971, Congress passed legislation which required all mothers on welfare with no pre-school children to



*Historic American ambivalence—punishing while protecting.*  
[Kirk Anderson]

participate.

WIN, however, was not as effective as it could have been. Congress failed to appropriate enough funding to enable WIN requirements to be applied to more than a modest portion of eligible AFDC mothers. At its peak, WIN rarely served more than one third of those required to enroll.

### **Nixon and Carter Attempt Fundamental Change**

In 1969, Richard Nixon attempted to restructure social welfare more fundamentally than any previous president since FDR. Nixon proposed to simplify public assistance and construct a system that awarded work by establishing a minimum benefit level for poor families across all states. The program, called the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), was to replace AFDC, food stamps, and several other social welfare programs with a refundable income tax for poor families.

However, FAP failed to win Congressional approval as a result of political difficulties. Conservative southern legislators were concerned that FAP's benefit levels, more generous than what their states offered now, would threaten their regions' low wage structure and increase black political power. As well, welfare advocacy groups, such as the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), opposed FAP because it lowered recipient benefit levels in some of the higher benefit level northern states.

FAP's unpopularity was also the result of Nixon's refusal to make FAP benefits contingent on the willingness of welfare recipients to work. FAP brought all government help organizations, and therefore all individuals supported by them, under one roof. It threatened the distinction between public assistance—special aid to those who could not help themselves—and social insurance—those benefits such as Social Security and Medicaid which are considered a right for all citizens. Moreover, by refusing to differentiate between the able-bodied and needy poor, FAP further violated the foundations upon which the American welfare system had been established.

President Jimmy Carter shared Nixon's desire to simplify the welfare system and increase benefit levels in low benefit level states. In 1977, Carter proposed a welfare reform package, the Program for Better Jobs and Income (PBJI), which greatly resembled Nixon's FAP. PBJI combined several direct cash assistance programs for the poor, including AFDC and food stamps, into a single cash payment and established a national minimum benefit. However, like FAP, Carter's plan failed to win Congressional approval as a result of similar political conflicts.

Thus, despite Presidential attempts to reform the welfare system during the late 1960s and 1970s, only minor changes in the system occurred. However, with the election of President Reagan during the 1980s a new era in welfare reform began. The Reagan administration sought to make unprecedented reductions in welfare programs for low income families.

### **War on Welfare: Reform during the Reagan and Bush Era**

During President Reagan's 1986 State of the Union address, he charged the welfare system with being wasteful, destroying the American work ethic, and fostering dependency. Soon after, Reagan pushed through Congress an administration package which cut federal support for many social programs, including AFDC, Medicaid, food stamps, school lunch, and Social Security. Whereas previous efforts to push people off welfare had

often been limited to those considered able-bodied and had been accompanied by work incentive benefits, Reagan's policies had none of these features.

Although Reagan's attempts to cut social security received strong opposition from most recipients, he did manage to cut social security to the disabled—a group often protected in the past—as a result of their inability to galvanize extensive resistance. As well, Reagan's welfare policies had little financial incentives for welfare mothers to engage in part-time work, which had been considered the norm for mothers with young children.

Reagan's welfare reform was an aggressive act, not only against the able-bodied on welfare, but against the welfare system itself and all recipients of public assistance; a welfare policy reminiscent only of the poorhouse era.

With the election of George Bush in 1988, the attack on welfare eased slightly. Disagreements remained within the Administration over whether work requirements were appropriate, especially with regard to mothers with young children. As well, there was reluctance to raise the low benefit levels which continued to exist in some states.

However, the Family Support Act, which passed in 1988, mandated that single mothers with no children under three must participate in training and job programs. Much of the proposal left responsibility for determining benefit levels and offering families needed services up to individual states and localities.

### **Possibilities for Clinton**

Having examined the trends in welfare policy, it is apparent that America's newest president is caught in an ancient battle of welfare reform with only the assistance of old solutions. Clinton's proposal to expand federal aid reverses a trend begun by Reagan and continued by Bush and, instead, follows the examples of welfare policy developed during the time of FDR and expanded until the early 1980s.

In addition, Clinton's emphasis on job training appears to follow a long line of similar reform policy that has seen retraining as a viable solution for helping welfare recipients to escape dependency. However, Clinton's call for a two year limit on welfare benefits seems reminiscent of Reagan's welfare policies that were interested only in cutting the numbers of eligible welfare recipients regardless of need or circumstance.

Overall, Clinton's stance reflects the same ambivalence towards the poor that has characterized the history of American welfare reform; a history shaped by Americans' conflicting desires to help the poor while, at the same time, to punish them for their dependency.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

- Gordon Berlin, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future*. (Ford Foundation, February 1988).
- David Ellwood, *Poor Support*. (Basic Books, Inc., 1988).
- Judith Gueron, *Reforming Welfare With Work*. (Ford Foundations, 1987).
- Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poor House*. (Basic Books, Inc., 1986).
- Paul Sommers, ed., *Welfare Reform in America*. (Kluwer & Nyhoff, 1982).

# Future Schools, Future Children: The Road to Reform?

"The schooling model is laden with sores, tumors, fat, transplants, grafts, prostheses, shackles, back burdens, adornments, cosmetics, bandages and patches. Its skeleton is warped, its vital organs diseased. It begs to be disconnected from the life-support system that prolongs its agony. But no country has desirable images of future schools, so they try to prolong the past."

***Future Schools and How to Get There: A Primer for Evolutionaries*  
by R.G. Des Dixon. ECW Press, 1992. \$16.95.**

By Jillian Gustin

As illustrated in the above quotation, R.G. Des Dixon, a well-established Canadian educator and education analyst, sees few redeeming features in current educational practices nor in recent educational reforms. A whole new model, not just facelifts, is needed to avert the demise of contemporary schooling. In *Future Schools*, Dixon puts forth his new blue-print for educational reform. To become truly honorable and worthwhile institutions, schools must accommodate the changing social status of children while simultaneously helping to redefine what childhood means. *Future Schools* is controversial and, in many cases, ends up contradicting itself. Regardless, Dixon's flamboyant writing style and vision of future education appeals not only to emotions but also to rationale.

Dixon's vision for future schools calls for the disposal of what he considers an antiquated model of schooling that has been stagnating since the late nineteenth century. Dixon challenges that the once useful "factory" model of education holds little value in today's context. Under the "factory" model, students are shuttled along an assembly-line of classes in which pieces of raw material, already fully formed, are inputted through rote learning in order to produce finished students—"adults"—with a prescribed body of knowledge. Innovations to adapt and lead schools through an ever-changing society that is less and less production oriented have been few and far between. "School remains," he states, "a puffer-

belly locomotive chugging incongruously through a high-tech landscape, spewing human soot."

### **A New Understanding of Childhood**

At the heart of Dixon's primer lies a re-conceptualization of childhood. Dixon asserts that schools should not only reflect societal values concerning children but should also lead society in the creation of those values. Defining what constitutes childhood has been one area in which Dixon feels schools have failed miserably in their prescribed role of mirror for, and leader of, society.

The notion of childhood, in its most recent (and ideal) form, has come to denote a time of innocence, nurturance and protection. What others call idyllic, however, Dixon calls "protracted helplessness." By keeping childhood static and powerless, children have become mere chattels without human rights. Dixon compares late twentieth century conceptions of childhood to the bound feet of women in nineteenth century China. "Both conventions require constant restriction, retard growth, subjugate a large minority, deform for life, and are thought by the perpetrators to be beautiful."

Moreover, Dixon purports that our concept of childhood is being challenged by a new and different world and no longer fits the actuality of today's child. While children are conceptually kept in a state of protracted helplessness, the trials and responsibilities they face require an independent person. Innocence and nurturance are mere fantasies. Economic

survival and self-sufficiency are, more often than not, their realities. Children confront "adult" responsibilities every day. As Dixon describes: "At this moment, millions of high school students are working 55 hours a week or more when school, home and paid-job hours are totalled, but nobody has bothered to create a complete job description for students that matches the reality of their lives—school, extra-curricular activities, homework, after-hours jobs, household chores, etc."

Yet the older notion of childhood has been fervently entrenched and institutionalized through laws and schools. According to the United Nations, the rights of a child, put simplistically, are to have her needs met. In reality, this translates into the protection of children who society deems are unable to protect themselves. Despite the humanitarian overtones, Dixon argues that, in many cases, children's "rights" have boiled down to a negative institutionalized paternalism. The adult world decides what is in the best interests of a child.

Such paternalism has ranged from deciding the future living arrangements of a child in terms of "custody" disputes to running schools in which students have little or no voice in management and curriculum decisions. Schools, according to Dixon, are a prime example of the institutionalized marginalization of children in our society and the "age-ism" (disempowering discrimination based upon age) that they face in every aspect of their life.

Dixon envisions a new definition of

childhood that would diminish the possibility of "age-ism." He reworks our present conceptions in order to better reflect a child's life and echo her desires and capabilities. All individuals should have complete civil and human rights from birth regardless of age. These rights would be safeguarded by society until that individual makes a conscious choice to exercise them. Thus, society would continue to play a paternalistic role in meeting the needs of a young individual until that individual decided to make choices for herself. For example, a child would be compelled to go to school from an early age but she would never be forced to attend.

Dixon's proposal is both compelling and disturbing in the way it delineates the incongruities between children, society and schools. Obviously, more self-determination for young people is essential to building their self-esteem and teaching them skills needed in today's world. However, according to developmental psychologists, most young children view the world in concrete terms. Abstract thought and reasoning are developed in the latter part of the childhood years. Dixon does not address these developmental levels of children. Even though many children let themselves into their house every day, cook all their own meals, and hold down jobs, do they have the life experiences and developmental abilities to make rational choices about their future?

Dixon's idea of full rights for children is admirable in its respect for children and their capabilities. Nevertheless, since he makes no clear distinction between the parameters of "childhood" and the parameters of "youth," full rights for children, when taken to its extreme, borders on ludicrous. Are children ready to take on full-scale responsibilities attendant with such rights? Can a child of three exercise her rights to self-determination? Would she be able to make a decision in her best interests regarding which parent to live with in lieu of a divorce?

Yet, in the USA, society is already moving in Dixon's direction. Recently, a child was legally allowed to divorce his mother. Perhaps in that particular situation, the right judgement was handed down. However the boundaries of such situations are so hazy that the possibility exists for them to go haywire. What is to

stop a child from divorcing a parent for sending them to bed early? What if the majority of children decide school is a waste and we end up with an entirely illiterate generation?

Obviously, these are extreme examples. Nonetheless, they elucidate the consequences of further fracturing children from their childhood. If society was to continue in this vein, children would be tried under adult laws, given adult sentences, have adult responsibilities with little aid. Any sliver left of innocence would be smashed the minute a child decided to exercise any of her rights, regardless of her developmental capabilities to deal with adult life.

Granted, children have to contend with some traditionally "adult" problems. Yet, the question remains, if given the choice with full knowledge of the ramifications, would children choose to take on such responsibilities? Dixon proposes that since the "childhood" contract—no responsibilities, protection as a trade-off for minimal decision-making, reduced rights—has essentially been broken, children deserve the rights and freedoms attendant with their lifestyles and responsibilities.

I wonder about the possibility of making societal changes that would allow children to take back their childhood

without necessitating a return to "chattel" stature. Are the childhood years a period in an individual's life that is better to discard than to fight for? Regardless of Dixon's answer to this question, at the very least, he forces us to think about the current state of childhood and the way in which we can respond.

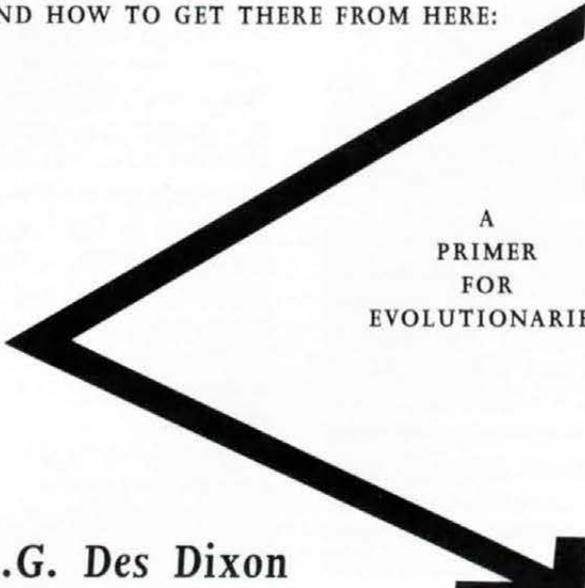
### **Autonomous Children, Student-Centered Schools**

Dixon's future schools would treat children as autonomous individuals in a supervised, supportive and community oriented environment. School would not only give students the skills, knowledge and technical responsibilities to cope throughout their lifetime but also would nourish self-esteem as an essential ingredient to a successful and happy existence.

The school would shift the current curriculum focus from "content" to "process". Students would become "active participants" instead of "passive recipients". In accordance, the school's tenets would be the promotion of "self-propulsion and excellence." Inherent here is a respect for, and encouragement of, each student's capabilities to assess his or her own learning. Along the same lines, Dixon's future school would be entirely student run. This would include organization, management and evaluation of

# FUTURE SCHOOLS

AND HOW TO GET THERE FROM HERE:



A  
PRIMER  
FOR  
EVOLUTIONARIES

R.G. Des Dixon

school activities ranging from budgetary matters to curriculum design to extra-curricular activities.

The set-up of the school would be structured to foster self-propulsion and autonomy. "Living rooms"—student-centered rooms consisting of couches, tables and computer carrels—in which daily life occurs from doing school work and tests, making presentations, eating lunch, and socializing with peers would be instituted instead of traditional classrooms.

Each living room would have an H.I. (human interactor) and some assistants who would act as mentors/guidance advisors to help monitor a student's progress, give academic advice and set the environment for that living-room. Students would have the freedom to pick their living room as well as their academic schedule. A quick read of Dixon's last chapter—a half day in his future school—gives the reader a clear sense of the self-propulsion inherent in the living room structure as well as the freedom and flexibility fostered in such a school.

### **The "Three Rs" and Much More: The Right & Responsibility of Every Child**

Having elucidated the concepts of self-propulsion and excellence, Dixon moves away from the goal of complete autonomy and emphatically declares the need for basic skills. He states that the ability to read, to do rudimentary arithmetic, to articulate ideas verbally and on paper as well as to listen and critically evaluate information are vital skills needed to survive and thrive in society. He proposes that reading, writing, listening and speaking should be considered essential skills that must be mastered before moving to other subject areas—such as history, geography, chemistry, or calculus. They should continually be evaluated according to past progress and used as prerequisites before enrolling in courses worth graduation credits.

Although the mastery of basic skills is a seemingly logical goal, this proposal contradicts the very essence of student control that he proposes. The criteria to assess mastery of basic skills run the risk of imposing another's standards, smacking of paternalism and setting up some students for imminent failure. Furthermore, the progress and success of a student should be individualized and tailored to reflect the student's capabilities and limitations.

Beyond "basic skills", Dixon pinpoints literacy as the nucleus around which all other subjects should be organized. Literacy, he explains, would include language and literary studies as well as computers, performance arts, audio-visual skills, international issues, health, sex and culture. In creating this core, Dixon predicts that students will have the necessary knowledge and understanding of the workings of the world to peacefully co-exist and contribute to a global society.

Once again, Dixon strays from his previously stated goals not only by defining the curriculum base but by specifically proposing the creation of a "cultural literacy". First, he wants his future school to have a common set of norms ranging from manners to living-room etiquette. Such uniformity in behaviour inhibits the expression of differences prescribed by culture or perhaps by individual make-up.

Second, Dixon openly states that cultural literacy stems from his distaste for the theory and practice of multiculturalism. He argues that common concepts, values and language should supersede all components of what he calls "subcultures." Students should focus on subcultures as parts of a national whole. He states that "there must be a robust, common national culture if there is to be a national identity" and "encouraging people to view their subcultures as alternatives to the national culture instead of parts of it is a disservice to minorities. It is divisive and it blocks minorities from mainstream success."

Such comments beg the question of who decides what constitutes the national culture and who are the so-called "minorities." Whether a national identity is contingent upon a national culture is an important debate that seems critical when considering the political climate of countries such as Canada and the United States. However, to mandate a way of thinking and acting is on the verge of despotism. A common set of norms and a defined cultural literacy seem inconsistent with his whole ethos of self-propulsion and autonomy.

Dixon claims that parts of *Future Schools* "were written on all continents in dozens of countries, developed, underdeveloped and communist." He believes that his vision for future schools applies to all countries—an ambitious goal. If

this goal is to be implemented, how would Dixon deal with varying cultures, notions of childhood and differences of bodies of knowledge? Would the basic skills that he proposes all be essential for survival and efficacy around the world? Imposing the same reforms on other societies, especially with the inclusion of "cultural literacy," seems dangerously close to the colonial negation of others' culture. Dixon deceives himself into thinking his views are globally focussed when, in fact, they scream of amercentric values and could therefore be applied to North American society only.

### **"Your Children Are Not Your Children"**

While *Future Schools* is often inconsistent, poorly substantiated and slightly disturbing at points, Dixon does address an important issue in North America today—what is childhood and how should children fit into contemporary society? His arguments are both salient and evocative. He compels us to rethink how we view children and the institutions, especially educational, that serve them. Kahlil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet* and Dixon whole-heartedly agrees:

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of  
life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from  
you.  
And though they are with you yet they  
belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not  
your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not  
their souls,  
For their souls live in the house of  
tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit, not even in  
your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but  
seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor carries  
with yesterday.

If nothing else, Dixon's *Future Schools* reminds us that society changes and with it, the role of children. Schools can and should be the leaders in addressing those changes to better reflect the lives of children.

# Modern Day Bedlam: Upstairs in the Crazy House

In a heartening tale of hope and triumph, Pat Capponi relates her experiences in Channon Court, a boarding house for released psychiatric patients. Unlike most of her neighbours, Capponi was able to transcend the harsh realities of post-hospital life and has gone on to try to ameliorate them.

***Upstairs in the Crazy House* by Pat Capponi.  
Viking (Published by the Penguin Group), 1992. \$16.99.**

By Sara Borins

Today, one seldom calls the dwelling for psychiatric patients a "crazy house." This term is associated with another era—a less enlightened time when the mentally ill were hastily classified as insane and left abandoned in large mental hospitals or private madhouses. And "crazy houses," like Bedlam, the popular name for the infamously appalling conditions of London's Bethlehem Royal Hospital, were to have disappeared with the advent of modern psychiatry.

Pat Capponi's tale of survival, *Upstairs in the Crazy House*, breaks ground by challenging the conception that the lives of psychiatric patients have dramatically ameliorated since the days of Bedlam. Crazy houses still exist. Ironically, however, the crazy house is not a clinical psychiatric ward nor mental hospital. It is the aftermath of hospital life, the boarding houses where psychiatric patients go after being released from treatment. Capponi's story chronicles a modern-day madhouse, a Bedlam we all forget.

Her upbringing in Montreal, dominated by an unspeakably abusive father, left Capponi suicidal. There followed a series of hospitalizations in Montreal and a move to Toronto where, once again, after a mental breakdown, she found herself in a psychiatric ward. When she was released, Capponi arrived at Channon Court, a boarding house for ex-psychiatric patients, in Toronto's Parkdale.

## "It's Not Good to be in the Hospital Too Long"

Her transition from hospital to boarding house was an overwhelmingly difficult adjustment. For years, Capponi was told that she had to be locked up. Physically, she grew comfortable with her controlled and routine life. Capponi's hospital was her home. Its staff and patients were her siblings. In the clean and caring medical environment, she was offered meals (as well as tobacco rations) on a daily basis. Capponi became used to the idea that she was where she belonged.

Capponi challenges her readers to imagine being set in such a pattern and then, one day, hearing that "it's not good to be in the hospital too long." She demands we consider what it is like to be sent out into the world with nothing other than the address of a boarding house and the possible comfort that a welfare worker might soon be by. Capponi's words for the released patient who faces such prospects are "Good Luck." All of a sudden, the taste of swallowing a concept called freedom is little other than medicinal.

At Channon Court, Capponi found herself living with seventy ex-psychiatric patients. Her story is their story, how she relates to the madness of those around her. We are introduced to characters like the clever and spoiled Andrea, who "had chosen to go mad to destroy her family for whatever obscure wrong haunted her." When Andrea's mother no longer calls for her at Channon Court, she throws away her clothing. In the dead of winter, Andrea parades barefoot, up and down King Street, wearing only a sheet.

*Upstairs in the Crazy House* is also the story of Debbie, a gangly ill-favoured apparition in over-sized men's trousers and a stained shirt, brought to Channon Court one afternoon by a determinedly cheerful social worker. Capponi paints a vivid picture of discovering Debbie in the basement only a few hours after her arrival. There Debbie sat in the dark by a man with pants down around his thighs and a large, uncapped bottle of PineSol at his foot. "With one hand," Capponi describes, "she flailed in the direction of the gulps, struggling against him now, looking for the bottle which he held just beyond her reach."

Between the tragedies, Capponi sprinkles her chronicle with humorous vignettes. She tells the tale of Antony, who never receives any calls, but is convinced of his need for a personal phone. After it is installed, Antony spends hours handing out his phone number to anyone in the house who will take it. When no calls come, he resorts to telephoning Capponi at the Channon office, where she had begun to work for the landlord. Antony insists he has to telephone Capponi continually to see if anyone is trying to contact him. The police, he claims, are on his trail. Later, when Antony is arrested for trying to rob a bank (he attempts a stick-up by pointing his finger under his shirt) he is hardly upset. Finally, he is able to prove his point to Capponi.

## An Activist Renewed

What rings clear throughout the book is that although Capponi lives at Channon Court, she is an outsider. Capponi's story is one of hope and triumph because she is able to transcend her environment. Within

a few short months of her arrival, Capponi starts working in the Channon Court office and caring for its residents. What seems to give Capponi her strength is that she arrived at Channon Court already a social activist.

In Montreal, at high school and university, Capponi had helped fight for change when she saw change was needed. She recalls standing up for people who were nervous about the consequences of standing up for themselves. Interestingly, Capponi claims she was motivated by a need to "expiate a lot of the guilt I carried, guilt shared by most abused children for not preventing the violence the six of us suffered."

At Channon Court, Capponi did not share most other residents' intense level of psychiatric malaise. She did, however, share their inadequate living conditions. Capponi recounts her shock of first walking into the dining room, where seventy residents are crammed into an excruciatingly small space. The scene is out of a crazy house. Capponi watches the woman beside her first sniff at her food and mutter suspiciously then slash the man across from her with a fork. At the next table, a man pours tea over his plate before spooning the soggy mixture into his mouth.

Channon Court was a place with no calendars or clocks. It was a place where many days were swept away by the profusion of psychotropic medication lying around everywhere. It was a squalid environment where bulbs were bare and rooms had no locks. In these conditions, the residents had no desire to bathe, no desire to hope. There was no night or day, all activity merged into one chaotic form.

Capponi has not only exposed this forgotten Bedlam, she has also improved it. After leaving Channon Court, she became the driving force behind the city's Parkdale Working Group on Roomers and Boarders. Through Capponi's efforts, the government was alerted that something had gone wrong with their policy of emptying the back wards of psychiatric hospitals. As a result, groups such as the Supportive Housing Coalition were established, made up of front-line workers. Capponi also served on the advisory committee to the City of Toronto's Mayor's Action Task Force on Discharged Psychiatric Patients which led to the Gerstein Crisis Centre where she is now based.

## Many Solitudes, One Canada

The abortive attempts of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords to bridge the constitutional divide and bring Quebec legally into the Canadian fold give *Two Solitudes* new and timely importance. Its discussion of the English-French confrontation as well as of questions of Canadian identity are illustrative given the present stalemate. However, the novel, like the authors of the Accords themselves, is so caught up in a dual French-English Canada that it forgets Canada's other "solitudes."

***Two Solitudes* by Hugh MacLennan.  
Macmillan of Canada, reprinted 1989. \$5.95**

### By Nicholas Breyfogle

No single word exists, within Canada itself, to designate with satisfaction to both races a native of the country. When those of the French language use the word *Canadien*, they nearly always refer to themselves. They know their English-speaking compatriots as *les Anglais*. English-speaking citizens act on the same principle. They call themselves Canadians; those of the French language French-Canadians. [From the forward].

When Hugh MacLennan first published *Two Solitudes* in 1945, this rift in nomenclature graphically symbolized the wide chasm that existed between the two peoples then considered to make up the Dominion of Canada. Despite the passing years, *Two Solitudes* continues to stand as one of the most important and most incisive works treating the questions of Canadian identity and the ethnic conflicts that lie within the fabric of Canada's makeup.

In the context of the successive failures of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords MacLennan's novel deserves a fresh reading. Within it lies a treasure of understanding and explanation that probes deeply into the roots of the French-English confrontation and goes far to explain the contemporary animosity and intractability of the two parties. MacLennan also addresses the question of "Canadian" identity that Canadians have recently struggled to answer.

However, MacLennan's primary conception of a dual Canada—one that stands split between the rural French and

the urban, wealthy English—reflects a misconception of Canada that has taken on a contemporary political importance. The authors of Meech Lake and Charlottetown were too blinded by the dual vision, by a Canada made solely of two "solitudes," that they were unable to see the other "solitudes" that surrounded them—the indigenous peoples, other ethnicities, genders, generations, classes and regions. It was these groups, and those people who recognized the plurality of Canada, that came to haunt the accords and to block their passing.

*Two Solitudes* is structured around the interplay and interrelations of individual, group, and Canadian identities. The fictional format allows MacLennan, in a manner often inaccessible to the political pundit or historian, to grasp the power of the social, cultural, and religious structures that form the straightjacket of communal *mentalité*. While not personages in their own right, the communal identities of the English and French serve to channel and constrain the characters' actions. Although at times straying too far in the direction of simple stereotype, MacLennan evokes a sense of group identity that is as tangible and convincing as it is truthful.

Set initially during World War I, *Two Solitudes* traces the lives of two extended families—the Tallards and the Yardley/Methuen clan—and of Huntly McQueen, a successful and politely unscrupulous business tycoon, through the interwar period. Of French-Canadian, aristocratic background, Tallard and his

family are the novel's centerpiece. The novel traces the family's relations to the rural Quebec community of Saint-Marc in which they hold property, especially to the local priest, Father Beaubien, and to English-speaking Montreal society.

Tallard himself believes that rather than be overrun by the English, French-Canadians must begin to take control of their own destiny and a leading role in the inevitable industrialization of Quebec—an act that often means a break with hallowed traditions and practices. The French-Canadians who will truly succeed, he argues, will meet the English on their own terms—business, science, English language, and the English old school tie. He struggles to close the chasm between the French and the English but with every effort he makes he meets an opposite, often stronger, force—the “French” and “English” identities—pushing him back, reducing his efforts to futility.

#### **Group Legends, Long Histories: The French and English**

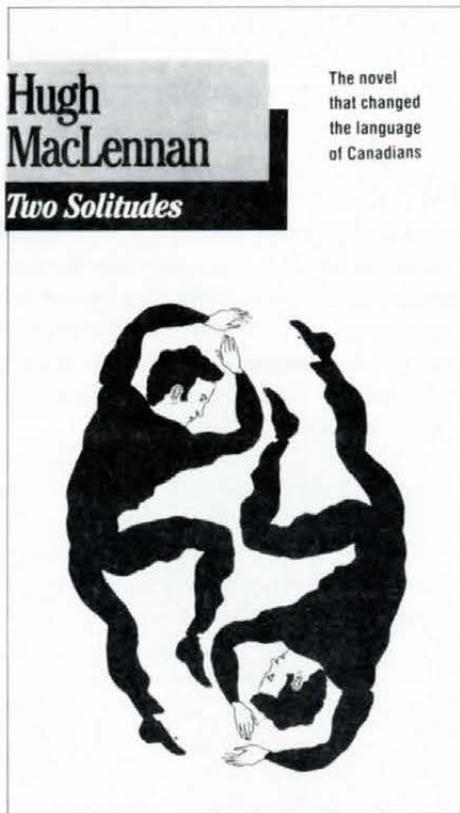
MacLennan is most evocative in his descriptions of the rural Québécois—descriptions that he builds upon the triad of church, land and people. He depicts a Quebec community that is pre-modern, self-sufficient, satisfied, and practically static. Saint-Marc is a village in which the inhabitants all know each other, in which the personal bond is all important and the giving of one's word, sufficient. The priest and the noble hold the places of most distinguished respect in the village and hold sway over the beliefs of the community.

Spirituality is deeply felt both through the organized Catholic religion and also through a quasi-animistic conviction of the power of the land and their integral connection to it. Knowledge of God, land and family are the key to an immortality and the essence of the French-Canadian soul. They are deeply connected to their family roots and are entirely cognizant that their bloodlines have for centuries saturated the same plot of land with their blood and sweat.

As for the English-Canadians, MacLennan addresses primarily the wealthy business community of Montreal. In work they strive with an almost messianic zeal to develop and build, to create, change and make money, and to amass power and influence. Like McQueen, but unlike Tallard, they do not see the trees in

the forest but rather the paper and lumber possibilities. Rather than a waterfall, they see the power for factory turbines.

In everything else they strive for stasis and to be as, or even more, English than the English are themselves. They recreate English architecture on the vast Canadian landscape, they build British



style clubs in which to meet their peers, and they develop elitist social circles around reserved dinner parties and endeavor, because of a perceived inferiority, to be even more patriotic than the British when it comes to the war.

MacLennan is equally skillful in his portrayal of the relations between English and French in Quebec. At their foundation, these are the relations of an imperial power to a colonized people. From their more or less closed communities, the French-Canadians view the English with distrust. They consider the English foreigners who have conquered French lands in Canada (decisively in 1759 at the Plains of Abraham) and subjugated the French-speaking people therein. They have brought English law and English government, have challenged the Catholic church with their Protestant practices, and, with World War I, have passed laws to enlist the flower of Quebec's youth as cannon fodder in an English war.

It is a conquest that has taken on two forms. Initially, conquest was military and political but, more recently, it has become economic—using French-Canadians as cheap labour in English owned factories. MacLennan's depiction of Quebec as an imperial holding of English Canada makes tangible the origins of the animosity that has developed between French and English. It is an animosity that combines a conflict of race, language, religion, tradition, and class and an animosity that is fed by the relations of superiority/inferiority that conquest and domination cultivate.

MacLennan considers at length the dilemma faced by imperial Quebec—a dilemma confronted by so many colonial holdings throughout the world. Their traditional way of life has come into contact with the violent forces of change that modernity and industrialization bring upon society. Tallard laments: “How could Quebec surrender to the future and still remain herself?...How could she become scientific and yet save her legend?”

But changes within their own rural communities would force French-Canadians to come to terms with the scientific, mechanized urban world. The signs of deterioration in the rural village structure were already tangible. There no longer existed sufficient work to support the entire population. Extraneous workers were being forced away from the villages and into the cities for work. As is argued in the novel, the building of a factory in rural Saint-Marc, while it would bring all sorts of change and potentially detrimental influences to the static community, would also provide the jobs necessary to keep the sons and daughters of the community at home—thereby keeping the community and its spirit intact.

#### **The Other “Solitudes”**

While MacLennan grapples primarily with English-French issues he does delve at points into a discussion of Canada's other “solitudes.” Here MacLennan begins to come to terms with the complexity of Canadian society. He portrays the other ethnicities and classes that form the patchwork of Canadian society and explores the ties that bind and separate the poor from the rich, the young from the old, and one ethnic group from another. Such analysis, however, comes only in illuminative flashes that add important texture and depth to the novel without

distracting too greatly from the main French-English struggle. Moreover, mention of the native peoples is strikingly absent.

Tallard's Irish second wife Kathleen, for example, grew up in a neighborhood that was neither the ethnically nor culturally homogeneous environment of the French speaking village or of wealthy English-speaking Montreal. She lived in an urban world of lower class immigrants of Polish, Irish, English and Jewish origin combined with transplanted French-Canadians driven for survival from the land. While all are working class people, MacLennan is quick to point out how the bonds of class are loosely tied since these groups had neither common schools, common language, common religion, nor common roots.

### To Be "Canadian"

MacLennan also addresses the question of Canadian identity. He delves into issues of "Canadian-ness" which have been revived by the current constitutional debate. While MacLennan demonstrates the power of the communal legends—the looking back to respective pasts, traditions, and roots—Canadians as a whole, he intimates, exist without a "Canadian" legend. Lacking the centrifugal force of an overarching concept of national identity, Canada resembles a nucleus, a core around which a variety of bodies revolve—different, detached and yet held in their path by an often undefinable magnetic pull.

Canada is forever dwarfed by the gargantuan sense of identity and manifest destiny that saturates the southern part of the continent. As well, they are burdened by the weight of the strong identities of the two peoples who colonized it—the French and the English. The power of these three identities—both internal and external to Canada—make the "Canadian" vision of itself, by nature less dramatic and all-embracing, seem somehow lacking and unimportant.

Yet, even without a "Canadian" legend, simply by virtue of their existence on a different land with a different past, Canadians stand distinct from those around them. MacLennan mockingly berates those who would strive to clone English, French or American identities in Canada's search for its own—those who would allow external cultural dominance. "Is there anything in the United States

like the Saint Lawrence valley? For that matter, is there anything in the States like us - the collective us?" MacLennan asserts that Canada, with its mixed salad of group legends, does have an identity both strong and powerful that is, in and of itself, even more solid and aged than its American, French and English counterparts. Perhaps, MacLennan seems to be saying, the quiet, understated knowledge of distinctiveness is in fact enough.

### Many Solitudes, One Constitution

In light of the recent constitutional failures, Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* deserves a careful re-reading. The novel provides important insights into the reasons why the French-English confrontation remains to be solved. Of course, much has changed since the time of writing and the world depicted by MacLennan is not always found today.

Quebec is clearly no longer simply a rural, agricultural society. It has developed industrially as well as commercially and many French-Canadians have taken part. Moreover, national consciousness among Québécois has grown in the post-war period into a political platform, demands for greater autonomy and, occasionally, terrorism. However, despite efforts on the part of the federal government to promote such projects as bilingualism, the longstanding questions and dilemmas outlined by MacLennan remain: the feelings of conquest and domination by English-Canadians, the fear of engulfment by English speaking North America, the problem of preserving traditions, language, roots and culture, and the issues of Canadian identity.

Yet, in the final analysis, *Two Solitudes*, as a work of social investigation, comes up slightly short in today's world. Canada can no longer be considered simply a bi-polar nation. For better or for worse, it is a land of many solitudes. However, few of the politicians and civil servants who framed the Meech Lake or Charlottetown Accords acknowledged this reality. They were as caught in the straightjacket of French/English identity as the characters in *Two Solitudes* themselves. In their intent and inherent in their assumptions they conceived of a Canada constructed of "two solitudes"—the problem as they saw it amounted to no more than the binding of French and English.

In place of this Canada, however,

they quickly and shockingly discovered a Canada built of multiple solitudes—of native peoples, of genders, of generations, of many ethnicities, of classes, of languages, of religions and of regions. As they strove to bridge the constitutional gap between Quebec and the rest of Canada, they discovered the gaps that also exist between the constitution and many of these other "solitudes." This fatal error, this misunderstanding of the true nature of Canada, led to the constitutional debacle in which Canada finds itself today. The authors of the Accords may not have been able to satisfy all needs and demands—and perhaps should not have tried—but an awareness of the snares that lay ahead could have mitigated the results.

In closing, however, MacLennan leaves us with a hope for the future of Canada that stands as valid today as it did when he wrote it:

In all his life, [Paul] had never seen an English-Canadian and a French-Canadian hostile to each other face to face. When they disliked, they disliked entirely in the group. And the result of these two group-legends was a Canada oddly naive, so far without any real villains, without overt cruelty or criminal memories, a country strangely innocent in its groping individual common sense, intent on doing the right thing in the way some children are...

And later, as World War II broke out:

Then, even as the two race-legends woke again remembering ancient enmities, there woke with them also the felt knowledge that together they had fought and survived one great war that they had never made and that now they had entered another; that for nearly a hundred years the nation had been spread out on the top half of the continent over the powerhouse of the United States and still was there; that even if the legends were like oil and alcohol in the same bottle, the bottle had not been broken yet. And almost grudgingly, out of the instinct to do what was necessary, the country took the first irrevocable steps toward becoming herself, knowing against her will that she was not unique but like all the others, alone with history, with science, with the future.

# Unity in Diversity: The Attraction of the Bahá'í Message in the 1990s

On May 29 of every year the Bahá'í celebrate the "passing" or "Ascension" of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í faith. This year's celebration comes on the tail end of the Bahá'í holy year, marking the 100th anniversary of the founder's death. The Bahá'í faith is growing rapidly. The Bahá'í faith claims followers in almost every country and a membership of over 5 million people. More than 30,000 Bahá'í from the world over came to New York in November, 1992 for the Bahá'í World Congress that commemorated the centennial of the prophet's passing.

**The Birth of a Religion • Universal "Oneness" • A Global Administrative Order • Social Justice and Sustainable World Development • Riding the Wave of Expansion**

By Nicholas Breyfogle

The picture that graces the front cover of the Bahá'í magazine tells at least a thousand words about the Bahá'í religion today. The photograph was taken at the 1988 Bahá'í International Convention in Haifa, Israel and shows a crowd of men and women smiling on the steps in front of a large building replete with facade of white classical columns. The color of the people's skin seems to vary as widely as the style of their hair and the color and fashion of their clothing. It is at once a microcosm of the world around us today and a vision of a desired future, reminiscent of Disney's "It's a Small World After All."

Over not much more than one hundred years, the Bahá'í faith has grown from its obscure roots in what is present day Iran to a worldwide religion that stands second only to Christianity in the scope of its geographic reach (measured in the number of countries in which adherents are found).

Accompanying the regional diversity is a numerical growth rate that has recently risen in almost exponential jumps. Adherents have grown from approximately 50,000 in 1892, to 400,000 in 1963, to the well over 5 million in 1991. In the last six years alone, the faith grew by 43% and has the fastest growth rate of any of the world's independent religions.

How is it that this religion, which has been around for little more than one hundred years, has come to boast such ethnic, national, class and gender diversity and to draw in increasingly large numbers of fol-

lowers? One answer lies in the Bahá'í beliefs and practices. The core of the Bahá'í religion responds to the very social problems that the world is facing today—problems about which people are talking whether they are Bahá'í or not. The faith seemingly provides answers and a framework to confront these issues.

It is an integral, holistic blueprint that encompasses spiritual, intellectual, emotional as well as social and physical aspects. Followers are inspired by Bahá'í beliefs in the inherent unity of humanity, in social justice and self-sufficiency, their commitment to environmental, educational, health, and development projects, and their drive for a world commonwealth based upon supranational, egalitarian administrative structures. As the earth becomes smaller and smaller and the goals of social justice become increasingly central to international movements, the Bahá'í faith stands prepared to provide the spiritual foundations and roots to those projects.

## The Birth of a Religion

The central figure in the Bahá'í faith is Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) whose name in Arabic means "The Glory of God." Born into a well-to-do family in Teheran, Bahá'u'lláh became a follower of the Bábí faith, a precursor to the Bahá'í. The Bábí faith began in 1844 when a merchant, who later took the name "Báb" meaning "Gate" or "Door," first declared himself to be the Qa'im promised in the Islamic religion. The Qa'im was understood to be the precursor—a preparer of the way—to the arrival of the next uni-

versal messenger of God.

Bahá'u'lláh paid with imprisonment for his Bábí beliefs. During this time, however, Bahá'u'lláh became aware that he was the next messenger of God. He revealed his chosen status to intimates at the end of April in 1863. Although he spent the remainder of his days in prison, the faith grew and he produced a series of writings documenting God's revelations to him.

What is notable about the Bahá'í faith is the lack of splinter sects. Whereas the Islamic faith, for example, split into factions following the death of Mohammed in 632, the passing of Bahá'u'lláh witnessed no such division. Stewardship of the faithful and the right to interpret writings and beliefs were clearly and efficiently passed from Bahá'u'lláh to his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá through a written will and testament. Certain sects did appear led by other relations or retainers of Bahá'u'lláh but none of these lasted beyond the life of the sect leader and never grew in any importance.

The same orderly pattern of succession occurred when leadership was passed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his grandson Shoghi Effendi in 1921 and again in 1957 when the powers were passed to the administration of the Universal House of Justice, which remains the supreme governing body of the Bahá'í. That the Bahá'í faith remains unified and not stricken by in-fighting provides greatly for its strength.

## Universal "Oneness"

Central to Bahá'í teachings is the theme

of unity. Bahá'ís believe that God and all of the world's religions are one "changeless and eternal faith." Each religion represents a distinct stage in the progression of divine revelations to humanity. The human race, just as an individual, must go through a maturation process. Throughout, the nature and specificity of information imparted to them changes and increases. The revelations of God to Bahá'u'lláh represent only the most recent and important in a series of revelations that date back thousands of years.

Bahá'ís acknowledge the existence and importance of such other prophets as Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed. Bahá'ís do not deny the validity of the message of these groups—in fact Bahá'í religious services are composed in part of readings from the sacred texts of these religions—only that the development of the human race has in certain ways outdated what they have to say.

The belief in unity extends to the oneness of humanity. Bahá'ís consider all humans to be of the same "race." Distinctions such as nation, class, and ethnic origin are considered human constructs that will disappear during humanity's maturation along with creeds of racial or tribal superiority. World harmony is humankind's destiny.

Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh specifically underscored the equality of the genders in his writings. To their credit, the Bahá'í became the first world religion to institu-

tionalize the equality of the sexes at a time when women's movements in the West were only beginning to gather steam. Paradoxically, despite these guarantees, Bahá'u'lláh stipulated that women could not form part of the Universal House of Justice. The Bahá'í state that this discrimination—otherwise a breach in their beliefs—is taken as "a matter of faith," the reason for which, Bahá'u'lláh stated, would become clear in the future.

#### **A Global Administrative Order**

Since the death of Shoghi Effendi, the Bahá'í, who have no clergy, have been governed by an administrative order that they consider a model for all governing systems the world over. In fact, they point to the negative aspects of western democracies—voter apathy, deadlocked and obstructionist parliaments, negative campaigning and the pandering of votes—as examples of a failing system. In general terms, the Bahá'í administration strives to function non-adversarially in a manner that will strengthen the bonds of community and unite, not divide, the peoples of different districts.

The system is structured around a three-tiered network of freely elected governing councils—Spiritual Assemblies—that act on the local, national and international levels. Bahá'ís believe that members of the Assemblies hold no personal power or authority in the community. They receive no special treatment or perks. Only when together as a group conducting community business are they considered to be divinely inspired.

Central to Bahá'í government is the concept of "consultation"—a "non-adversarial decision-making" process that seeks to unite and build consensus. Consultation is a four stage process. Bahá'ís seek information from a wide variety of sources. Once collected discussion takes place in which a diversity of opinion is encouraged and frankness of presentation desired. Once an idea has been put forward for discussion it becomes the idea of the group as a whole. In this manner, individual egotists and larger factions within the group are theoretically avoided.

Unanimity is the goal of all discussion. However, a majority vote does suffice if the group cannot entirely agree. Nevertheless, once a decision has been reached, Bahá'ís believe that the whole community must unify in unreserved sup-

port for the decision. As such, oppositions or minorities are avoided. In theory, the failure of a policy will result from the incorrectness of the decision itself, not the implementation of the decision.

#### **Social Justice and Sustainable World Development**

As part of their religious beliefs, Bahá'ís adhere to the goal of social justice and the development of a progressive, sustainable world order. Bahá'ís are actively involved throughout the world in educational, environmental, health and development projects—some 1,300 exist worldwide. Bahá'í tenets emphasize the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency combined with an integral or holistic approach to the solution of problems.

For example, Bahá'ís do not believe that injustices in one part of life can be fully resolved without also resolving other injustices. Thus, the struggle for gender equality cannot be divorced from efforts to alleviate poverty and these two are inseparably intertwined with environmental degradation, racism, and under-education. To solve one, the roots of all problems must be taken on together. The solution, as they see it, lies in the changing of human attitudes and behavior.

In the Chaco project in Bolivia—an agriculture oriented project that strives to aid farmers—technical training is combined with skills for community organization and decision-making as well as the



'Abdu'l-Bahá—second leader of the Bahá'í  
[Bahá'í Office of Public Information]



Shoghi Effendi—Bahá'í leader, 1921-1957  
[Bahá'í Office of Public Information]

requisite spiritual training. These latter, Bahá'ís believe, will allow the farming community to continue to function once the Bahá'í support is gone.

The greatest tragedy of the peaceful Bahá'í is their persecution in the religion's native Iran. There, where the 350,000 Bahá'í constitute the largest single minority ethnic group, more than 200 Bahá'í have been killed since the 1979 revolution, hundreds of others have been imprisoned or beaten, and all appear to have suffered from discrimination. The oppression has lessened since its apex in the beginning of the 1980s and the number executed has declined—in many ways due to the pressure of the United Nations—but Bahá'ís remain second class citizens without the guarantee of fundamental human rights.

### **Riding the Wave of Expansion**

Bahá'ís appear to be riding a wave of expansion and growth that will soon bring them into the limelight of world religions. Up to now the ride has been relatively smooth. Their beliefs in the unity of God and humanity, their social consciousness, the written nature of their religion, and the strengths of their administrative and

governing structures have seen to that. The unity that they have fostered among diverse peoples, classes and genders bodes well for the future. However, the future will provide a series of tests that may prove troublesome. The Bahá'í will feel pressures both from the inside and the outside.

Externally, conflict with the world's other great religions will increase as the Bahá'í expand into their domains. So too will secular and governmental pressure. Despite movements towards international integration such as the United Nations (which the Bahá'í support whole-heartedly) and the European Community, nations continue to carefully guard their powers and privileges from supranational organizations.

At the same time, the Bahá'í may also suffer from the absence of a majority population in any one country. The status of Bahá'ís as adherents to a minority religion may, as in Iran, result in negative action taken against them.

The greatest tests, however, will come from the inside. To this point, the Bahá'í have been successful in assimilating a variety of cultures and perspectives under their

umbrella. But, as a "minority" religion, adherents tend to be believers as well. The Bahá'í have increased their numbers primarily through conversions. But as increasingly larger numbers of Bahá'í are born into the religion it will undergo generational pressures and changes. Affected by other forces and beliefs, children often grow up having ingested the culture and practices of the religion without developing the spiritual faith. As in other religions, such changes have often resulted in the "secularization" of many beliefs.

While the social and the spiritual messages are inseparable for the Bahá'í, the danger does exist that the earthly call for social equality and justice will come to dominate the spiritual call. Many will join in the cause of humanity, fewer for the love of God. How the Bahá'í will address spiritual non-believers among the ranks and how the community will be affected by the presence of members who do not share the spiritual faith will to a great degree define the future of the religion. Despite these hurdles, however, Bahá'ís feel ready to take up the torch of the religious future and the peaceful growth of humankind.



*Global Unity—"Race Amity" Conference, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1921. This conference, one in a series, attracted 1,200 people. [Bahá'í Office of Public Information]*

# Ribbon Babel

By Nicholas Breyfogle

The socially conscious ribbon is becoming ubiquitous. If the recent Academy Awards are any indication, they are now pretty much *de rigueur* when it comes to fashion. Along with the black tuxedos and the glittering low-cut dresses, many celebrities sported a coloured ribbon on their chest to mark their support for, and promote awareness of, one of any number of social issues.

But it is not only celebrities who are wearing them. In this increasingly socially conscious age, support for different causes is on the rise. Look across any college campus these days and you will also see students with ribbons pinned to their shirts and jackets. For the activist, or even for the socially conscious arm-chair critic, a ribbon is essential.

Few are able to agree on where the ribbon idea came from. However, yellow is indisputably the colour of origin. Apparently, during the last century the wives and girlfriends of United States' cavalry soldiers wore yellow ribbons while their significant others were away in battle. The colour came from the yellow stripe that ran up the pant leg of the cavalry uniform. These ribbons were popularized in the 1949 John Wayne film "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" that also spawned a title song of the same name. Yellow ribbons reappeared at many different times in the military history of the United States. The Vietnam war gave birth to the 1972 song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree" (forever immortalized by Tony Orlando & Dawn). Yellow ribbons were worn to demonstrate support for the American hostages held in Iran from 1979 to 1981. The recent Gulf War generated a yellow ribbon bonanza throughout the American heartland.

Ribbons moved away from their military affiliation in the late 1980s when Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) began their Red Ribbon campaign to show support for anti-drunk driving legislation. The ribbons and the red colour were later taken up by AIDS activists.

Ribbons are not always distributed by the sanctioned group who addresses the particular cause. In the case of the pink ribbons for breast cancer awareness, the official Breast Cancer Societies have little to do with their creation or distribution. In October of 1992, Este Lauder began handing the ribbons out at their cosmetics counters. Despite the fact that many of the ribbons now sport the logo of the Breast Cancer Society, the ribbons are still organized through Este Lauder. In fact when interviewed, the Breast Cancer Society somewhat jokingly asked if I would pass on the message to Este Lauder that they would like some sent to their offices. The Society is extremely pleased that others are taking the initiative into their own hands.

Despite their prevalence (choose a cause, find a ribbon), there is much disagreement over the meaning of ribbons. Ask any two people what a particular colour ribbon stands for and you are likely to receive two completely different answers. Here are some of the colours and their meanings:

**Red**—symbolic of AIDS awareness and support for AIDS

sufferers; used by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in their red ribbon campaign; worn to show that the wearer is drug free; worn by sexual assault survivors and by those who are acquainted with survivors; distributed in college campuses to mark the anniversary of the December, 1989 Montreal massacre of female college students.

**Purple**—worn for gay pride or gay rights; demonstrates support for lifting the ban on homosexuals in the military; concern over urban violence and crime (purple is a mix of Los Angeles gangs' colors Red and Blue) and especially for the high death rate among young black men; opposition to domestic violence; associated with women's movements and often taken up by pro-choice advocates; recently displayed to mark the slaying of Dr. David Gunn at his Florida abortion clinic; used a few years ago to endorse gun control.

**Blue**—promoting action vis-à-vis child-abuse

**Green**—Symbolic of the disappearance of the rainforests; support of other environmental causes; worn on U.S. college campuses to denote support for need-blind financial aid for students.

**Black**—opposition to the slaughter in Bosnia.

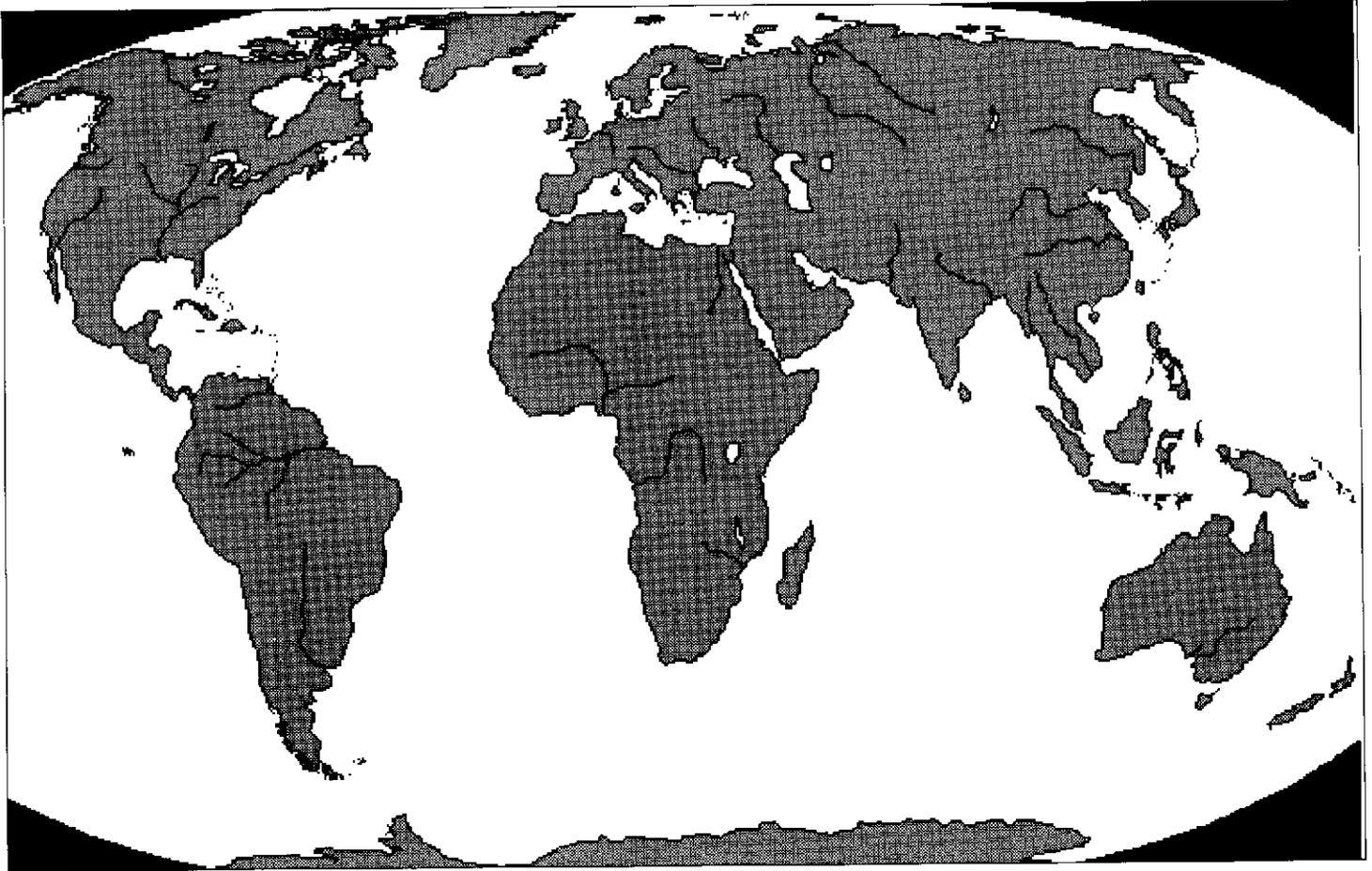
**Pink**—Breast cancer awareness and the need for research; also worn for gay pride and gay rights.

**White**—worn by men to show their opposition to violence against women.

All of these social causes are recognized by ribbons. Yet, just how effective are ribbons as a tool for change? On the negative side, as more and more causes come to use the same colour ribbon, the message is becoming confused and diluted. Some people have begun to wear the ribbons more out of fashion than any support for the cause. For others, ribbons are a quick and inexpensive way of purging their consciences of the social ghosts that haunt them.

But the benefits outweigh the detriments. The ribbons raise social consciousness. Even if there is confusion over the specific cause being touted, the ribbons are a constant reminder that there remain many social issues that we must face. More importantly, however, the ribbons allow people to feel a part of something bigger. In our increasingly atomized society, individuals frequently feel alone and overwhelmed by issues that are so numerous and so complicated. How can one get involved? What can one person do when work leaves little free time and little fiscal or political clout? The ribbons demonstrate on a day-to-day basis that we are not alone in our personal struggles. Furthermore, ribbons act as a bridge to bind the forces that divide. When men wear a red ribbon to show their support for sexual assault survivors, for example, the message is powerful and they are given a place in a social movement that women, the principal sufferers, have understandably not always left them.

Ribbons demonstrate an important change. Not only are we as a society coming to terms with the myriad social problems that surround us but we are no longer leaving the resolution of those problems to the political sphere. We are becoming a society that themselves acts to bring about change.



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