

Will Bougainville's bloody past repeat itself?

New

Internationalist

The world unspun

NI 512 May 2018
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word in Pakistan

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and greed

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The common interest



Imagine if the air that we breathe were privatized.

Companies would allocate it for payment and profit, and, one would hope, throw in a bit of quality control.

A completely crazy idea, of course, but it puts into perspective just how much of what we consider public goods or the commons has already been carved up. In many parts of the world, even water – the next of life's essentials – is already in private hands. No-one grows or makes it, yet corporations are allowed to control it.

For over four decades the mantra of 'private good, public bad' repeated by global financial institutions and proponents of small (read 'corporate') government has fed the fiction that the private sector is better, more efficient at almost anything. The notion barely registers that private profits made from public goods and services deplete the commons even further.

Despite flop after expensive flop requiring public bailout and tales of corporate corruption that match anything levelled at state bureaucracies, the drive to privatize is still in full vroom. Except, now counter currents are also flowing. Often at the city and citizen level, there is an upsurge of public ownership, showing that it can be done and done better in the common interest. This edition's *Big Story* celebrates this highly significant shift, while not glossing over the difficulties posed by the hostile climate in which it is occurring.

In our other features, we travel to the island of Bougainville for a classic tale of the resource curse. After a history of strife related to mining, followed by a hard-fought victory for eco-rebels, the possible exploitation of the island's fabulous mineral wealth is stirring up old tensions. ■

Dinyar Godrej

DINYAR GODREJ
 for the New Internationalist Co-operative
newint.org

This month's contributors include:



Youssef El-Gingihy is a GP in Tower Hamlets, London, author of *How to Dismantle the NHS in 10 Easy Steps* (Zero Books) and a regular contributor to print and broadcast media.



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Ricardo Airdiengo/AFIP/Getty Images

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Magazine designed by Ian Nixon and Juha Sorsa.
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Praise, blame and all points in between? Give us your feedback.

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They might be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Letters should be sent to letters@newint.org or to your local **NI** office. Please remember to include a town and country for your address.

One of us

Thank you for *No justice, no peace* (NI 510). Re: Amy McQuire's 'Our lives, our lands'; although there seems to be political stasis here in Australia, solidarity with indigenous people is quietly growing: 60,000 people marched on Invasion Day (in January) in Melbourne; 10,000 here in Sydney [...] Melbourne always beat us in the civil society stakes. As I write, there is a big 'Time2Choose' rally gathering in Sydney. One of the main speakers will be Auntie Pat Hanson, a Wannarua woman from Bulga, under threat from a nearby open-cut coalmine. So many Aboriginal people feel the destruction of the land in a way the rest of us cannot really grasp. But they and the later invaders, white farmers, are making common cause against the mining companies and the politicians they have bought off.

But thanks most of all for the interview with Noam Chomsky. To me, his great contribution, apart from his books, films and interviews, is the way he deals with people personally. I have heard that he has said that he regards it as a privilege to engage with people who want to make the world a better place. And that has been my experience. I have lost count of the number of Australian 'intellectuals' I have tried to contact and had no reply. On the other hand, Noam is friendly and the ultimate egalitarian. While many of us blokes have trouble with our own egotism (and I have made some blunders), Noam listens to criticism and engages. I corrected him once on the Tasmanian genocide of Indigenous people by Europeans. It was not complete, thankfully, although pretty close. Noam accepted that graciously. I think many of us can learn from him [...] not only the substance of what he says, but the 'style'. He connects people. Noam is one of us: not only a commentator, but an activist.

Stephen Langford Paddington, Australia

Not stepping back

Re: Kristina Wong's 'Six ways to be a better ally' (NI 510). Anybody of any race or ethnicity can be on the receiving end of discrimination. If they are not black they can certainly

equate with the 'black experience' – the black experience that Kristina refers to is presumably a reference to the appalling treatment that black people have been on the receiving end of particularly in America and the Caribbean for centuries, including slavery and segregation. In Vietnam there are several thousand mixed race descendants of the American military and Vietnamese women. Many of these people have also experienced a lifetime of exclusion and racism.

I'm intrigued to know what exactly Kristina's white male friend was asked to 'step back from'. A campaigning group like Black Lives Matter presumably has people in it who have various talents and skills that they can give for the benefit of the cause. Was this man perceived as not being competent enough to fulfill a certain

role in BLM? If he has something to offer BLM why would he be asked to step back?

As a white person I certainly wouldn't expect to be rewarded for turning up and supporting a BLM event or try to be some kind of hero, as surely the whole point of such a campaign group is simply to do the right thing and not gain some kind of personal glowing status. Kristina's comment in reference to non-black people that the movement for black struggles and justice is 'not about you' is surely wrong. Some white people are married to, or have partners who are black with whom they have children. Many of these white people who have family and loved ones who are black are going to believe this struggle is very much about them, and rightly so.

Phillip Hadlow Margate, England

OPEN WINDOW

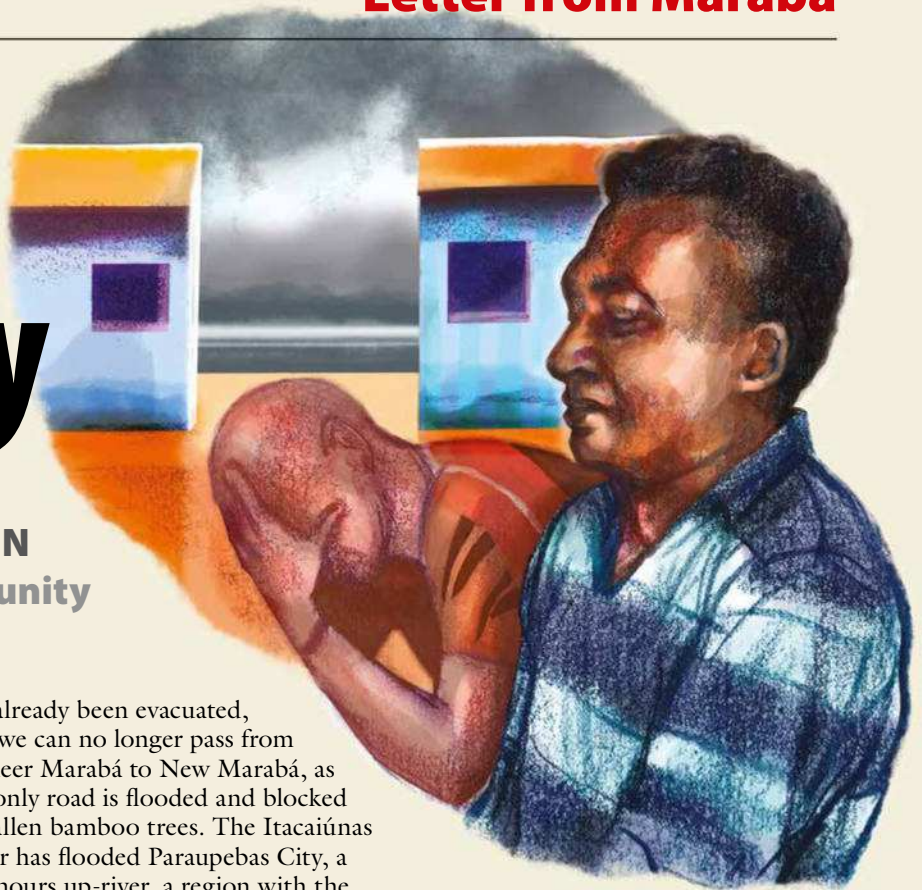
Each month we showcase the work of a different cartoonist – in collaboration with cartoonmovement.com

THIS MONTH:
Hossien Rezaye from
Afghanistan with
'Child Marriage'



Storms and fury

Violent weather presages human violence. DAN BARON COHEN writes from a community and country on high alert.



Right at the peak of the carnival's last night, the storm broke, scattering the crowds. In seconds, the tempest cleared the village square of macho funk and competing sound systems as well as the skies over Cabelo Seco of the military helicopters that had scanned the community's streets and River Tocantins' walkway since the carnival began. We barely slept, moving buckets from our bedroom to kitchen, front room to hallway, as the wind changed direction and new leaks appeared in our tiled roof.

I mop the floor and open the window, catching sight of the river in the gap between two houses, which a year ago promised to become a new home for a headteacher, who was hoping to profit from the 'revitalization of Marabá'. Like a missing front tooth, it attracts attention, accumulating symbolic power as the community's riverside story changes behind it.

'The river has risen again!' I shout to Manoela, as she prepares a green juice from the plants in her herbal garden. 'At least a metre. Today, the waterfront could flood.' The neighbour's parrot in the street behind the herbal garden squawks the national anthem continuously, catching the urgency of Brazil's political crisis in its insistent pitch. 'There are hundreds of families camped in that empty lot beside the school,' shouts Manoela over the juice-mixer. 'The army isn't posted there just for emergency aid. And now six cities have declared a state of calamity. My god in heaven!'

The Tocantins has changed from drought to flood alert in just days. Higher up, the Santa Rosa community

has already been evacuated, and we can no longer pass from Pioneer Marabá to New Marabá, as the only road is flooded and blocked by fallen bamboo trees. The Itacaiúnas River has flooded Paraupébas City, a few hours up-river, a region with the largest iron mines in Brazil. Everyone knows deforestation causes climatic chaos, yet no-one protests against the sweeping changes to the Forest Laws designed to protect the Amazon.

Our neighbour Zequinha, Cabelo Seco's minstrel and guardian of the community memory, passes below our window. He holds out his mobile phone, which plays a triumphant military parade and chants, and beckons with a sharp jerk of his head. 'They suspended government in Rio last night. Presidential decree. Gave full control of security to the army to clean the streets of drug barons and homeless youth. And the people cheered. Does no-one remember the military dictatorship?' I sit beside him. He replays the clip of a brutal military invasion of Rossinha *favela*. 'They should invade the supreme court and the senate,' Zequinha seethes, 'if they want to root out the cause of the corruption and violence.'

The video is shocking. Gunfire rakes streets which look just like Cabelo Seco's. Zequinha shows me photos of dead bodies and weapons. 'They've already removed this clip from Facebook. I'll pass it to you.' I nod. 'Who shot the clips and the photos?' I ask. So much is circulating, creating a national climate of panic and desperation, strengthening the call for military intervention. Zequinha shrugs and stands to show

another neighbour the clip. 'And Évany?' he asks, 'any news?'

I suddenly begin to cry, silently. Zequinha returns to sit beside me, looking down at the open sewer behind our feet. I breathe deep. 'It's a miracle she didn't lose the eye. Imagine the force needed to break a beer bottle on a face.' Zequinha is impassive. Évany is his protégé, a virtuoso musician at just 18. 'Does she know who did it?' he asks, without looking up. I shake my head. 'She took refuge in the California from the storm. It was dark. Packed with dancers. Emergency surgery removed the shards, then they stitched up her face. She's brave, but terrified she'll lose her vision.'

We sit in silence. Évany's chance to lift herself beyond the socio-economic apartheid in this region trembles on a horizon of no hope. Territorial disputes between dealers claimed Zequinha's youngest son. Crack turned his first-born into a shell. But this arbitrary violence has merged with state repression to create a pervasive panic and mistrust. I look up at the gap between the simple wooden houses, missing tiles on every roof. 'The rivers of the world,' Zequinha warns, 'will rage.' ■

Dan Baron Cohen is an eco-cultural activist who lives in Marabá and has been working in the Amazon since 1999.

HONDURAS

Election results defied

Months after November's rigged re-election of President Juan Orlando Hernández, demonstrations and widespread acts of rebellion continue in Honduras, as does a pattern of arbitrary arrest, police brutality and paramilitary violence.

Hernández won by less than two per cent after the reporting of results was suspended several times and the poll lead of his opponent suddenly evaporated. Despite monitors from the pro-US Organization of American States refusing to endorse the results because of 'widespread irregularities', the Trump administration congratulated Hernández on his victory. European governments, Canada and Mexico fell in line too. This is in contrast to the widespread condemnation of the various electoral manoeuvrings of Nicolas Maduro's government in neighbouring Venezuela.

The Hondurans who took to the streets following the election were met by a hailstorm of teargas and sometimes live gunfire which has left 38 dead and hundreds injured. The continuing repression is led by the notorious US-trained TIGRES special forces. Night-time raids and the brutal treatment of detainees are standard fare in the departments of Cortés, Atlántida and Yoro where activists continue a series of highway blockades.

Elsewhere there were demonstrations at the UN office in the capital Tegucigalpa in opposition to a visit from Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, in order, she claimed, to



Opposition to President Hernández spills onto the streets in January 2018.

Gustavo Amador/EEA/Alamy Live News

thank Hernández for the Honduran vote in favour of Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Honduras joined a handful of tiny Pacific US dependencies and neighbouring Guatemala as the only votes in favour of this anti-Palestinian manoeuvre. The US has a big stake in Honduras where they maintain the large Soto Cano Air Base and agribusiness giants like Chiquita Brands (successor to the infamous United Fruits Company) control the plantation fruit trade.

The police continue to round up leaders of social justice movements, most recently long-time protest organizer Edwin Espinal and activist Raúl Álvarez, currently being held in solitary confinement in a military base and facing a laundry list of charges, including damaging the Marriot Hotel in Tegucigalpa during anti-election fraud demonstrations. Journalists of integrity such as Bictor Ruiz Hernandez are fleeing Honduras in fear for their lives. No small loss in a country where news stories often differ little from government press releases. ■

Richard Swift

THE GAMBIA

Pollution struggle

Residents from a coastal village in the Gambia are suing a Chinese-owned fishmeal plant accused of pollution.

Campaigners say Golden Lead's chemical waste pipe runs directly into the sea at Gunjur beach, a protected reserve that lies an hour south of the capital Banjul.

Pollution is not the only problem posed by the factory. Village representatives say the price of bonga fish, the main ingredient of the fishmeal exported as animal feed to China by Golden Lead, has gone up for locals since the factory opened in 2016.

'They are using the affordable fish, which impoverished people depend on,' explains environmental activist Badara Bajo.

'Golden Lead pay better than the local market so it has reduced the amount that fishermen [sic] send to the

market,' says Madi Jobarteh, a local activist. 'Often the fishmeal factory cannot use all of the fish because some get spoiled when they are in the trucks, and so then they just get dumped on the beach.'

Golden Lead has a licence to process and export three and a half times more fish to Asia annually than the amount currently consumed by all Gambians.

In June 2017, protests held by villagers prompted the Gambian environment agency to file a lawsuit, but this was later settled out of court, with the company promising to remove the waste pipes and to treat water before discharge. In March 2018, finding the pipes still present, locals removed them by force.

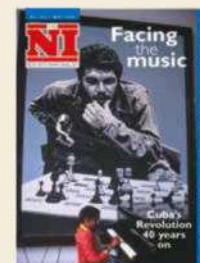
Gambia's new President Adama Barrow is keen to maintain a close relationship with China, seeking investment to build much-needed infrastructure.

Golden Lead reject all allegations. The company's lawyer said via email: 'We are negotiating with a view to the amicable resolution of this matter but are yet to reach any agreement.' ■

Nosmot Gbadamosi

This story was funded by a grant from the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting.

20 years ago...



...Wayne Ellwood visited Cuba and reported on the state of the country 40 years on from its revolution (nintl/Cuba1998). Cuba has always been a source of fascination for the **New Internationalist**.

We have repeatedly focused on the country's remarkable record in health, pointing out that it has higher average life expectancy and lower infant mortality rates than the US despite being



ON THE WEB
newint.org

Revealed: Princess Diana's Bahrain visit linked to crackdown

Marielle Franco: favela activist slain



BRITAIN

Sanctuary boroughs

A community group is campaigning to turn the London borough of Haringey into a safer place for migrants by asking residents and the council to push back against the Conservative government's 'hostile environment'.

Modelled on sanctuary cities in the US, which explicitly defy federal government in order to shelter undocumented migrants, Haringey Welcome was launched earlier this year with support from Labour MPs.

'There's a lot councils can do to resist,' says Akram Salhab from the platform Migrants Organise. He explains that local authorities can decline money to enforce immigration rules, refuse to share data and choose to house families with no access to public funds.

Since 2012, the government has outsourced the policing of immigration controls to 'an auxiliary militia' of teachers, doctors and landlords, asking them to perform residency checks on people when they access services, Salhab reports. As a result, vulnerable families are regularly made homeless and migrants are denied free healthcare.

Haringey Welcome is encouraging public sector workers to lobby the council to become an ally against central government while residents are invited to sign a pledge to respect, protect and welcome migrants. Other boroughs have already expressed interest in the scheme and Salhab hopes Haringey will be the first of many. ■

Charlotte England

vastly poorer in economic terms than its giant neighbour. Its levels of equality have continued to set it apart, particularly since neoliberalism took hold across the West. But we always took care to acknowledge a 'but' in the shape of restrictions to expressing political opposition – and highlighted problems in the regime's attitude to LGBT rights in particular.

Wayne's visit came at a time when the country was still coping with the devastating impact of the Soviet Union's collapse. By the time Vanessa Baird visited in October 2014 (nin.tl/Cuba2014), Fidel Castro had taken a back seat and his

Introducing... Cyril Ramaphosa

The parliamentary election of Cyril Ramaphosa as President of South Africa in February is the latest attempt by the once-proud African National Congress (ANC) to recover its tattered reputation after decades of corruption and insolence at the top. The ANC-dominated congress chose him to replace the disgraced Jacob Zuma, who reluctantly resigned under a cloud of suspicion.

Ramaphosa is an astute politician who played a key role in the peaceful transition that ended the apartheid system in 1991. He was elected ANC secretary-general that year and then as an MP in 1994. At the centre of the anti-apartheid struggle and trade union politics in South Africa since the 1980s, he was arrested on many occasions.

But these radical days are long gone. At 65, he is now one of South Africa's richest men who has taken advantage

of the ANC's highly selective 'black economic empowerment' policies to garner a fortune. His riches have shifted his loyalties. In 2012, he encouraged decisive police action that resulted in the Marikana massacre of 34 mine workers striking against the Lonmin Mining Corporation – where he was a non-executive director at the time.

Whatever his shortcomings, Ramaphosa is probably the last chance for the older generation of ANC leadership to make good on long-promised equality and justice. To do this, he will need to tackle the tricky question of land ownership by wealthy white farmers. A new generation of activists in the opposition Economic Freedom Party are openly sceptical of both his intentions and ability to achieve this. ■

Richard Swift



GovernmentZA/Flickr

TURKEY

Boycott resorts, say Kurds

As Turkey continues to occupy Kurdish-controlled northern Syria – an invasion that, at the time of writing, has killed over 500 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands – the Kurdish freedom movement has called for a boycott of Turkish goods and services.

Despite its appalling human rights record, Turkey is still one of the most visited holiday destinations in the

world. In 2017, it made \$26.3 billion from its tourism industry, which is intrinsically linked to its war machine.

The huge Turkish holding company Nurol, for example, which owns the Lugal and Sheraton Hotels in Ankara as well as the Club Salima holiday village in Antalya, also owns arms companies that produce tanks and other armoured vehicles used to suppress demonstrations and raze villages in Kurdish regions inside Turkey.

Koç Holding, which owns Beko, produces 17 per cent of all white goods sold in the UK, and also holds a 45 per cent stake in Otokar, which manufactures armoured vehicles for the Turkish military and police; Turkish Airlines, the fourth largest carrier in the world by number of destinations, has board members that are close to the ruling repressive AKP party.

'Turkish tourism directly funds the state's war on the Kurdish people,' says Elif Sarican, a co-ordinator of the Kurdistan Student's Union UK. 'In the name of humanity, we ask everyone to boycott holidaying in Turkey.' ■

Sara Woods

brother Raul was overseeing substantial economic reforms allowing more private enterprise – and ultimately led to the US economic embargo being relaxed in the last days of the Obama administration. Vanessa's concluding lines were telling: 'Given free choice, and the option of political alternatives, Cubans might well vote to stay and grow their own type of socialism at home – and it may be the stronger for it. Then the country that has defied all expectations may provide an inspiring example to the world that comes without the big 'yes, but...'' ■

Chris Brazier

Understanding Corbyn's approach to development

Why spycops victims walked out of inquiry



Lebanon's waste is spilling beyond its shores

CAMEROON

The politics of grazing

Farmers and cattle herders in West Cameroon are finding new ways to solve long-running conflicts over access to land and water.

'Grazers' cattle often break into farmers' plots, destroying their livelihood,' explains Giorgia Nicatore from international NGO United Purpose. To build peace between communities, the NGO has partnered with a local association of cattle grazers from the Mbororo-Fulani ethnic group to set up Dialogue Platforms, which are mediated by trained individuals from the farming groups.

'My neighbour Manou Mbelori's cows came through my fence for my crops and I had to contact the police,' says corn farmer Tenyi Mbah Marcus, from Ashong near Bamenda, the capital of one of Cameroon's English-speaking regions. 'But when I heard about the programme I was inspired to see if we could make friends.'

The conflict between crop growers and herders is worsened by a lack of inter-group communication.

The violence also has political roots. The Mbororo herders have historically supported the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. But the majority in this Anglophone region advocate the opposition party, the Social Democratic Front.

Political divisions have worsened in light of perceived discrimination against English speakers by the government



Natalia Riley

and Cameroon's long-serving president, Paul Biya. Dozens have died and hundreds more were imprisoned after a government crackdown on peaceful protests last year.

'Farmers consider grazers as supporters of a repressive regime, which deepens mistrust between the two groups,' says Nicatore.

But for Manou and Tenyi (pictured above) the Dialogue Platforms seem to be working. Under a mutually beneficial 'alliance farming' arrangement, Manou's cattle are allowed access to Tenyi's field to graze while their manure fertilizes the land.

'Tenyi helped me build a fence so when my cows are finished grazing inside the paddock he can grow crops in the fertile soil left behind. It's because of this project that we now live in peace with the farmers,' says Manou. ■

Natalia Riley

CAMBODIA

Life after Nauru

It's a hot, fummy night in central Phnom Penh, and Mohammed Rashid is serving up a roadside roti. He cracks an egg onto a carefully kneaded flatbread. When it sizzles, he adds a healthy

serving of chilli sauce before rolling everything tightly.

While the food stand – 'Rashid's Roti on Wheels' – is basic, it cost vast sums of money to get Rashid here. The 28-year-old Rohingya refugee is the unlikely face of an expensive experiment carried out by the

Australian government, which shipped him here from one of its notorious 'offshore' detention centres on Nauru, a tiny South Pacific island. The controversial deal – which included a \$30-million aid package to Cambodia – only convinced a total of seven refugees to move.

Australia has been sending people to Nauru since 2001. Hundreds of men, women and children are held there indefinitely, even after they're identified as 'genuine refugees'. Strongly condemned by human rights groups, offshore detention is an integral part of a punitive refugee policy, which bars anyone who arrives in boats seeking asylum from ever settling in Australia.

Australia offered an additional \$11 million in resettlement costs via the International Office for Migration for Cambodia-bound refugees. Yet, according to the *Phnom Penh Post*, only three of the refugees remain in Cambodia: two Syrians and Rashid.

Rashid's journey to Nauru was a long one. He arrived in Malaysia 10 years ago, after escaping Myanmar where Rohingya Muslims are heavily oppressed, subjected to brutal attacks

Scratchy Lines
by Simon Kneebone



THE BALKANS

Stop the dam craze

A group of NGOs is ramping up efforts to protect some of Europe's last pristine rivers.

Riverwatch, EuroNatur and local Balkan NGOs are among those behind 'Save the Blue Heart of Europe', a campaign to preserve the Balkans' spectacular untouched rivers, now threatened by plans to build hundreds of hydropower plants.

'We have evidence of about 3,000 dam projects to start in the next few years between Slovenia and Greece – with 180 already under way,' says Ulrich Eichelmann, CEO of Riverwatch. 'We call it the "dam tsunami".'

Campaigners fear the dams would leave hardly any river unaffected, threatening the area's biodiversity – Balkan rivers host 69 unique fish species – and human communities, leaving thousands without access to water.

Some core funding comes from international financial institutions, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development,

World Bank Group, and other western European banks including Italy's Unicredit and Austria's Erste Bank.

'Many of the plants they have financed would never be allowed in their home countries,' says Eichelmann.

Hydropower is heavily subsidized because it is regarded as green but it's 'probably the worst energy source' for nature, according to Eichelmann. 'It's so bad because it destroys a river entirely: its chemical balance, temperature, ability for self-purification – at the dam site but also up- and downstream.'

Gabriel Schwaderer, Executive Director of EuroNatur, says the good news is that it's not too late. 'Over a thousand planned hydropower plants have no financing yet, so there is still much that can be done to save the Balkans' rivers,' he says.

The group has helped to stop one dam in Albania and several in Macedonia. In May 2018, the campaign will release an 'Eco-Masterplan' featuring no-go zones for hydropower and call on financial institutions to endorse it. ■

Alessio Perrone

Turtles swim free

The trafficking of wildlife is a problem in Peru, where species like the vulnerable yellow-spotted river turtle are often illegally sold as domestic pets. Animal Defenders International (ADI) are taking action, seizing trafficked turtles and reintroducing them to the wild in the Peruvian Amazon. As of March 2018, 79 turtles and 10 tortoises had been returned to their natural home.



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Rebel bank

An activist-project-cum-art-installation in a former bank in north London is hoping to abolish £1m (\$1.42m) worth of private debt. The Hoe Street Central Bank has started printing its own fake money – featuring the faces of local people – which it plans to 'sell for real tender and use the proceeds to buy back debt,' according to *The Guardian*. As many private loans are eventually downgraded to a fraction of their value, the rebel bankers only need to raise £20,000 to hit their target. The project was partly inspired by US campaigns, such as Strike Debt and Rolling Jubilee, which have raised large sums to write off student and medical debt.

Atlas of utopias

A new co-operative in the Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius has a plan to tackle the island's food and energy problems. The People's Cooperative Renewable Energy Coalition wants to install solar panels on the land of unemployed sugar planters, generating energy that in turn helps to produce food in nearby greenhouses. Listed on the Transnational Institute's online 'Atlas of Utopias' project and supported by social movements and trade unions, the co-op has made headway despite resistance from multinationals and oligarchs.

by the military and denied basic rights; the United Nations has described the Rohingya as 'the world's most persecuted minority'.

Five years later, Rashid paid a smuggler to take him by boat to Australia. Instead, he washed up at Christmas Island – another offshore detention centre – and was later transferred to Nauru, where he stayed for two years.

Rashid says he was supported by the Australian government until recently – they helped him set up the roti stand. But he's not happy in Cambodia. Two months after setting up, business hasn't picked up like he'd hoped. After a slow night on the stall, he sent me a message to say: 'I don't have any good situation.'

When Rashid first arrived in Cambodia, he warned other Nauru detainees not to come. A lack of quality healthcare was just one reason he cited.

The people still holed up on Nauru include survivors of torture, war and sexual abuse. This year, some have left for resettlement to the US, but Australian authorities admit there are not enough places for everyone. ■

Sally Hayden

AMERICAS

Frida revisionism

A toy corporation has tried to appear more diverse and progressive by creating a Frida Kahlo doll – but its efforts have backfired.



Soon after Barbie producer Mattel unveiled a doll of the beloved Marxist artist, as part of a series expanding role models for girls, it was criticized for a design that appeared to force Kahlo into the mould of white, Western beauty standards.

'I would have liked the doll to have traits more like Frida's, not this doll with light-coloured eyes,' Kahlo's great-niece Mara Romeo told AFP.

Critics complained that the doll bore no sign of Kahlo's signature monobrow, nor her elaborate dresses. It also erased all scars that polio had left on the artist's body and traces of the bus accident that forced her into a wheelchair in late life.

Some Twitter users also remarked on the irony of turning of a communist icon into a mass-produced commodity. ■

Alessio Perrone

The case for public owners

After decades of denuding privatization policies, the green shoots of a public takeback are finally appearing. DINYAR GODREJ on the promise and the threat.



**Fighting for their livelihoods:
Puerto Rican teachers come out
against the government's drive to
privatize public education.**

hip

Come election time and politicians' promises fly thick as clouds of swifts. Imagine if a candidate aiming for high office were to promise at the hustings – after the usual guff about government not interfering with ordinary people's lives, of course – that their party also intended to keep its distance from providing public services and would strip those that remained to the bone. Political suicide, one might think.

Yet after decades of an ideological war on the public sphere, when tirades against 'big government' are shorthand for the privatization and marketization of the vital goods and services that governments would normally be expected to provide, such a claim would not be far from the truth.

One of the conclusions of the year-long Australian People's Inquiry Into Privatization was that 'there is more, not less, demand for government services – but increasing reluctance from governments to provide them. Communities did not agree to accept less coverage or less quality from government, but that is increasingly their experience.'¹

Recently British Prime Minister Theresa May admitted in a speech at her party's spring conference that voters had 'doubts' over the Conservatives' handling of public services, especially the National Health Service (NHS). She then made this curious statement that was also tweeted by the Conservatives' account: 'Brilliant Conservative councils keep taxes low so people can keep more of the money they earn and deliver high-quality services for those who rely on them.'

It is one of those utterances that overflows with signification. But the main promise is that the state will keep its hands off individuals' hard-earned cash by not making them pay too much of that nasty tax, while still magically delivering on the services that tax could be paying for. (May is no stranger to 'have your cake and eat it' thinking on other fronts, too.)

The tax smokescreen employed here is a common one for proponents of the deeply unpopular but entrenched privatization dogma that has dominated public service provision. Opinion polls routinely show public support for public ownership.² And privatization, whether it has taken the form of outright sale of an asset that should have remained public, a so-called public private partnership (PPP) or outsourcing, has had one spectacular failure after another.

This is because the model of market liberalism – that private companies borrowing through financial markets could deliver better public services than democratically elected governments drawing on public funds – that has been promoted since the 1980s has more than a few fatal flaws. The much-vaunted efficiency of private companies was solely directed at returning a profit for shareholders. The moral distinction of vital services that need to be run

Ricardo Aduengo/AFP/Getty Images

for people rather than profit was lost on the captains of business.

The logic of private entrants into this arena was to pick and choose the juiciest contracts, milk them for profit, and cut and run if things fell apart. Plus the current top-heavy culture of high shareholder dividends – fat-cat CEO salaries, and the rest be damned – makes private corporations a particularly bad fit with public provision. The competitive discipline of market forces does not apply. As Cat Hobbs, director of the public services campaign group We Own It puts it: ‘Vital public services, like water provision, tend to be natural monopolies. You don’t get to choose the water coming out of your taps – there is one set of pipes. It would be impossible for any company to provide real competition to that, so what you effectively have is private monopolies.’ Consider the private British water companies, which raked in profits of \$2.8 billion in the financial year ending 2017, with a so-handsome-it’s-cosmetically-enhanced profit margin of 17 per cent. They have paid out dividends to shareholders that are roughly equal to profits over the last decade, which means infrastructure investment is a low priority.³

Such gushing profits get reflected in bills, of course. In the higher income OECD countries, the average price for energy charged by private companies is 23 per cent higher than by public companies. In France privatized water company bills are on average 16 per cent higher than those of their municipal counterparts.⁴ And of course the Cochabamba water wars of Bolivia are legendary, when US transnational Bechtel hiked up prices for this vital resource way beyond the ability of poor people to pay.

Partners or sharks?

The rotting fruits of neoliberalism ironically only sweetened privatization when they should have poisoned it. The 2007-08 global financial crisis, which resulted in austerity policies in most high income countries, did little to shake our political elites’ conviction in the value of private sector contracts. Underfunding and undermining of the public sector continued. International financial institutions, often with the support of government, prescribed not only sell-offs, which led to the loss of income to the public purse, but dubious PPP schemes meant to transfer risk to the private sector. If private companies invest, then they are taking the up-front risk, goes the logic in its simplest form. But PPPs usually turn out far more expensive than public procurement because private companies borrow money at much higher rates of interest than government can. Then there are the profit margins that are often written into contracts and the fortunes handed out to the big accounting and financial advice firms who guide the deals.

Eventually, of course, the investment must be repaid (many times over) by the public purse. The National Audit Office reckons that the British taxpayer is in hock to the tune of £200 billion for Private Finance Initiative (another term for PPPs) ventures. A 2016 report found that a quarter of the European PPPs it studied, generated annual returns on investment of 12 per cent – all draining into private hands. In the Majority World, where the risks are perceived as higher, investors expect returns closer to 25 per cent – this is the stuff of pay-day loan sharks.⁵ Yet PPPs are being pushed through the usual development finance and aid channels by the World Bank and Western governments onto countries in the Global South seeking cash for public projects.

When Boris Johnson was Mayor of London he lamented the multibillion-pound débâcle of a collapsed London Underground PPP scheme, saying: ‘In other countries this would be called looting, here it is called the PPP.’ Now elevated to the top job at the Foreign Office, his department is actively recommending similar private funding schemes for healthcare to Zambia and Liberia putting them at risk of ‘unjust and unpayable debts’.⁶

Outsourcing has penetrated into some of the most critical areas of service provision, such as home care, administering disability benefits, and running prison systems. Huge transnationals have cornered the market, tendering low to win hefty government contracts. Quite apart from the fact that they use their position to renegotiate contracts terms upwards soon after taking charge, their model is based on exploiting (less than) minimum wage labour and zero-hour contract workers – often to provide care for the most vulnerable. One can’t help but think that any notion of the ‘public good’ has left the room in such arrangements.

This corporate entrenchment in the public sector – and its shortcomings – is typified by the collapsed construction giant Carillion, a firm that held 450 taxpayer-funded contracts in Britain and employed 20,000 workers, which gave it a ‘too big to fail’ status, with ministers awarding it contracts crossing the billion-pound mark even after it had published profit warnings.

While Carillion is being seen by some as a British turning point, with opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn promising to ‘rewrite the rules to give the public back control of their services’ if elected, it remains to be seen if the current government will veer from its default of throwing money at the private sector. In Australia, things have got so bad that even a champion of privatization, Rod Simms, the

‘There is more, not less, demand for government services – but increasing reluctance from governments to provide them’

Competition and Consumer Commission chair, declared that ‘a sharp uppercut is necessary’ as privatization was damaging the economy.⁷ And indeed Australian regional governments are stepping up and taking enterprises into public ownership, where the market has failed.⁸

The defiant city

But as an influential study from the Transnational Institute documented last year, there is already a quiet revolution afoot on this front and it is taking place mainly at the city level. They found that ‘there have been at least 835 examples of (re)municipalization of public services worldwide since 2000, involving more than 1,600 municipalities in 45 countries’.

This is particularly remarkable as it is far easier to privatize than it is to take back into public ownership. Over the years, governments’ decision-making and operational abilities have been degraded with cutbacks in public servants and an over-reliance on private consulting firms. Austerity conditions that often necessitate the takeback have left public spending budgets depleted. As Cat Hobbs of We Own It says: ‘The public sector needs to have sufficient funding, it needs to have sufficient knowhow and expertise, and it needs to have the assets that make public ownership possible.’

And then there is always the issue of the degree of compensation owed to a private company and whether they will sue for large sums for the termination of the contract. There have been instances of private companies that have ratcheted up debts and turned around to sue for the loss of imagined future profits when their contract was cancelled. Investor protection mechanisms make it particularly lucrative for foreign companies to go down this route (see Lavinia Steinfort’s article on page 24). Argentina has suffered 59 such lawsuits when it enacted progressive measures to make public services work for the people.⁹

The amount of preparation should not be underestimated – both Paris and Buenos Aires took years to do the groundwork to take back their water services successfully.

Many of these obstacles are better surmounted at the local level where common cause for pressing issues is easier to find – and it is worth noting that support for public ownership in this local context can come from across the political spectrum. The benefits are obvious – no wasteful leakage of dividends to shareholders; returns to the public purse from profitable endeavours which can then cross-subsidize services which are essential but not profitable; a boost to the local economy as jobs are created, and the strengthening of workers’ rights and capacity to organize.

Of course municipalization is meaningless if it adopts the values of the marketplace and ignores the social dividends it is so well

placed to deliver. But it often delivers on both economic efficiency and social benefit. Valladolid in Spain made savings of 71 per cent by bringing street cleaning services in-house, while at the same time providing secure jobs to workers who normally had few rights.

Outfits like the Nottingham City Council-initiated Robin Hood Energy are all about reclaiming the public ethos and are a world away from the bloated, overly managerial cliché of old style public ownership. Operating as an energy generator and supplier, it was specifically set up on a not-for-profit basis in order to address fuel poverty and provide low-cost energy. Its motto: ‘No private shareholders. No director bonuses. Just clear transparent pricing.’ In Germany, 284 municipal energy providers have addressed popular demand for renewable energy, bringing about a wave of transformation that private companies were reluctant to be part of.

The way public ownership is being rethought often includes accountability to the people using the services and their participation in decision-making; it addresses issues of environmental and social sustainability.

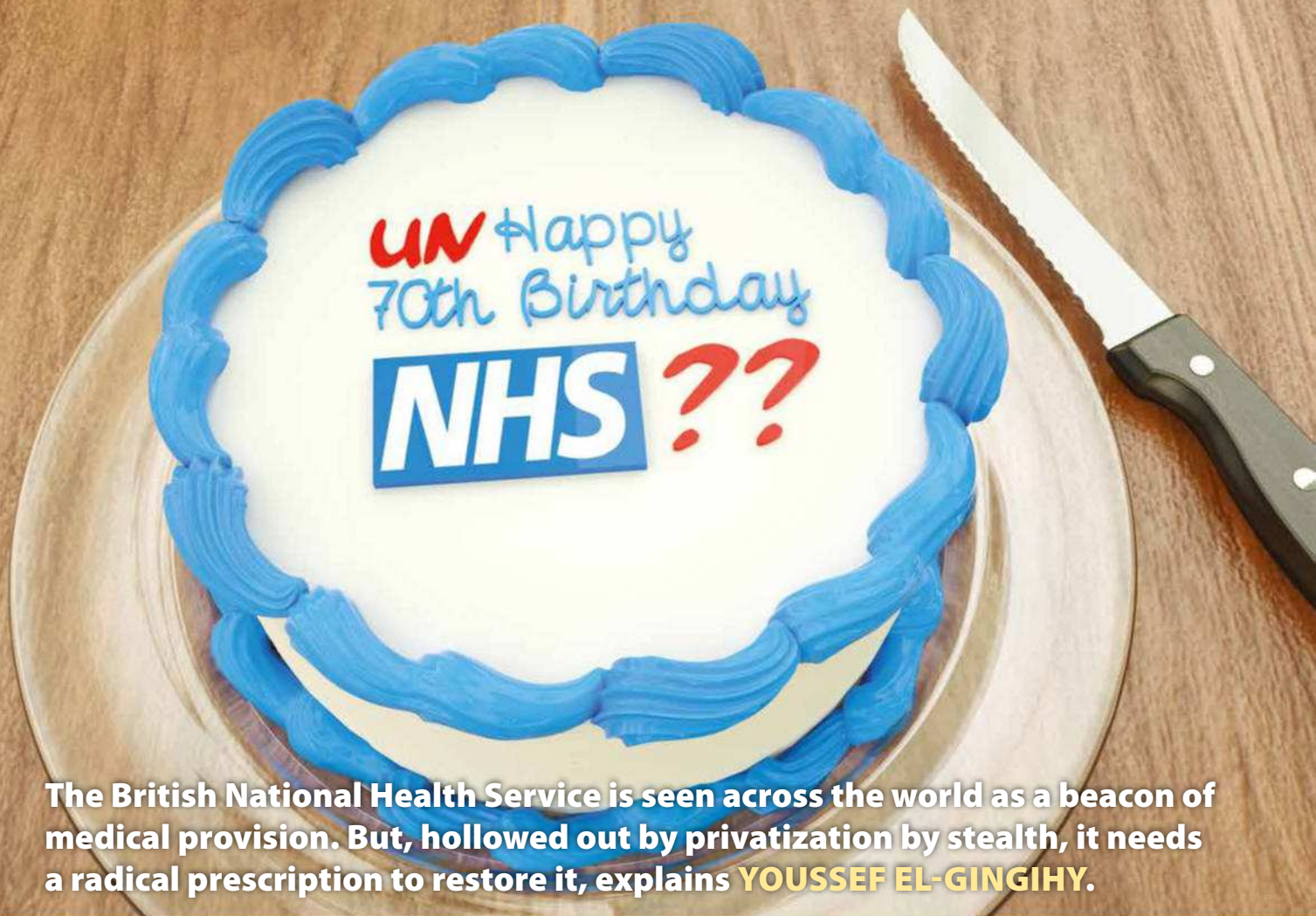
If there is a leitmotif to the new municipalist movements it is democratic engagement and popular participation, not just in terms of public services and resources but in terms of reimagining the city as a site of resistance (see Luke Stobart’s article on how it is being done in the Barcelona area, page 26). It is a realization that it is possible to exert positive power and transform the conditions of our lives by changing things at a local level.

Particularly strong in Europe, these movements are outward looking, reaching out to movements in the Global South that operate under different, much more challenging circumstances, sharing knowledge and helping to bring their struggles to wider attention.

This is a ball that is rolling, but in terms of current economic orthodoxies it is still rolling uphill. How far it can go will be determined by its successes, of course, but also by the continued engagement of the likes of you and me – the public. ■

The benefits of public ownership are obvious – no wasteful leakage of dividends to shareholders and returns to the public purse from profitable endeavours

¹ *Taking Back Control: a community response to privatisation*, 2017, nin.tl/peoplesinquiry ² For a round-up of British polls, see nin.tl/po-polls ³ Ben Chu, ‘Burst pipe-dreams’, *Independent*, 6 March 2018, nin.tl/Chu-water ⁴ Sol Trumbo Vila and Matthijs Peters, *The privatising industry in Europe*, TNI, February 2016, nin.tl/PIE-TNI ⁵ Nicholas Hildyard, *Corrupt but legal*, Counter Balance, December 2016, nin.tl/corrupt-but-legal ⁶ Jenny Nelson, ‘UK pushing dodgy Public-Private partnerships’, *New Internationalist* blog, 18 January 2018, nin.tl/exporting-PPPs ⁷ Patrick Hatch, ‘Privatisation has damaged the economy’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 July 2016, nin.tl/ACCC-chief ⁸ John Quiggin, ‘Governments are buying up where the market has failed’, *The Guardian*, 5 July 2017, nin.tl/buy-up ⁹ *Reclaiming Public Services*, 2017, nin.tl/TNI-reclaiming



The British National Health Service is seen across the world as a beacon of medical provision. But, hollowed out by privatization by stealth, it needs a radical prescription to restore it, explains **YOUSSEF EL-GINGIHY.**

On 5 July 2018, the National Health Service will celebrate its 70th birthday. It appears to stand as a monument to the era of social democracy in defiance against the tide of neoliberalism. It remains free at the point of use and for the most part publicly funded. It is a cherished, national institution more popular in polls than the monarchy, the army or the BBC. Its status is so sacred that any government contemplating full-scale privatization would likely confront electoral suicide.

Yet, in reality, there may not be very much to celebrate. In the winter of 2016/17, the British Red Cross took the unprecedented step of declaring a humanitarian crisis inside the NHS. This year, there was another winter crisis of similar magnitude. A recent paper found that there have been 120,000 excess deaths in England since 2010 linked to austerity.¹ Nearly £40 billion (\$55.5bn) of 'efficiency' savings over this decade have contributed to this state of affairs.²

Dismaying trajectory

The health system has come a long way from its Bevanite origins as a publicly funded, run and owned healthcare system. The past four decades have seen it on a familiar, dismaying trajectory from a public system towards a privatized, two-tier insurance system. Beyond cutbacks, the NHS insignia has been reduced to a logo; an umbrella brand obscuring the operations of a market system in full swing.

It has been a piecemeal privatization by stealth. The outsourcing of non-clinical services in the 1980s was followed by the limited, internal market of the 1990s. This internal market introduced a split between providers and purchasers of services attempting to use competition in order to supposedly improve efficiency.

In fact, a study commissioned by the Department of Health (and then hushed up) showed that the internal market led to a significant increase in administrative costs from 5 per cent of the NHS budget in the 1970s to 14 per cent in 2003.³ This is consistent with international evidence that market forces and privatization increase costs and reduce efficiency through fragmentation, while public healthcare systems are generally more cost-effective. The skyrocketing of costs is ironically due to increased layers of bureaucracy, such as payment tariffs and contract tendering administered by tiers of staff. It is also due to wealth extraction from captive, public sector budgets for corporate shareholder dividends.

New Labour's NHS Plan 2000 signalled the transformation towards an extensive market through public-private partnerships, most notably the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), as well as the expansion of outsourcing and the setting up of foundation trusts – in effect turning hospitals into semi-independent businesses.

The flagship Health and Social Care Act 2012 accelerated privatization under the Coalition government. The opening up of NHS contracts has seen the figure for private sector outsourcing double in recent years from 4 per cent of the budget in 2009-10 to around 8 per cent in 2015-16.⁴ This figure does not represent the true extent of privatization. Foundation trust hospitals can make up to half their income from private patients now that the cap on private patient income has been lifted from 2 per cent to 49 per cent.⁵ The NHS PFI debt could reach £80 billion (\$111bn) for hospitals with an original value of £11.5 billion (\$15.9 bn).⁶ The costs of running the internal market are estimated at between £4.5-10 billion (\$6.2-13.8bn) per annum.⁷

Wrong prescription

Under the present Conservative government, there has been a consolidation of privatization with moves towards an American concept – Accountable Care Organizations (ACO). US-style accountable or integrated care essentially means diverting care away from high cost hospital settings towards low cost, home-based self-care with a greater burden on individual payments, such as insurance deductibles and co-payments.

Many of these prescriptions have been translated from Davos – specifically two World Economic Forum projects examining the transformation of global healthcare. In fact, current NHS England CEO Simon Stevens was the project steward for the first of these reports and was, at the time, the President of Global Health operations for UnitedHealth – the largest US healthcare and insurance corporation.

We appear, therefore, to be in the endgame for the NHS. But the destination is far from assured. Recent political earthquakes indicate that the neoliberal status quo is starting to break down, perhaps irrevocably. Yet despite being at the fag-end of an ideology that is no longer persuasive, Brexit and Trump represent a turbo-charged, full throttle mix of neoliberalism and economic nationalism. This may explain the breakneck speed with which Accountable Care Organizations are being pushed through without recourse to legislation or parliamentary scrutiny. Admittedly, a planned and crowdfunded judicial review in the High Court may, albeit temporarily, put the brakes on this process.

Times they are a-changin'?

Meanwhile, PFI is in the process of unravelling, with the bankruptcy of construction firm Carillion, the collapse of the market value of outsourcing giant Capita and profit warnings issued for other government contractors. For the first time, the very notion of outsourcing is being seriously questioned. The prospect

of a Corbyn government is also cause for optimism for those fighting for a public NHS. The Labour leadership has endorsed the NHS Reinstatement Bill that would aim to repeal the Health and Social Care Act 2012, reverse privatization and the market and restore a publicly funded, publicly run and publicly owned healthcare service.

However, there is no doubt that powerful forces are aligned against a Corbyn premiership, not least from within the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Labour machine. PFI companies are already arming themselves with talk of compensation and litigation should contracts be nationalized. Extensive corporate and financial interests in the City of London, benefiting from the dismantling of the NHS, stand to lose including big banks, insurance companies, private healthcare, magic circle law firms, and accountancy and management consultancy giants.

Labour shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth is inconsistent, speaking of ending privatization and repealing the Health and Social Care Act yet, in the same speech to Unison last year, also stating that he will retain its integral structures – Clinical Commissioning Groups – as well as outsourcing. This approach is sickeningly familiar from the Blairite playbook of triangulation: signalling to the Left while moving to the Right in order to reassure vested interests.

It is necessary to define what a 21st century truly public NHS would look like. Renationalization in the traditional sense is not sufficient. The NHS should not simply be run either by the state or the market. It should be run by healthcare professionals, patients and communities while remaining funded by the taxpayer. In practice, this would mean that hospital and other health service boards would be run by these constituencies in order to protect the public interest. However, it would also be necessary to overhaul central policy and decision-making such that these groups are represented. Legislation would need to be implemented to counter damaging corporate capture strategies, such as the revolving door, lobbying and political donations.

Beyond this, the burgeoning local campaigns mobilizing in response to cuts and closures will need to be joined up into a broad-based mass movement to support a progressive government. Finally, far-reaching change must be effected across society. The NHS cannot be saved in isolation but must be part of progressive agenda incorporating the reversal of financialization's death grip, democratic public ownership of the economy, a green agenda and massive public investment and spending. ■

Youssef El-Gingihy is a GP and author of *How to Dismantle the NHS in 10 Easy Steps* (Zero Books). He tweets @ElGingihy.

The sky-rocketing of costs is due to wealth extraction from captive, public sector budgets for corporate shareholder dividends

¹ *BMJ Open*, Vol 7-11, November 2017, nintl/EnglandBMJ ² *gov.uk*, 8 May 2015, nintl/NHSefficiency and BBC News, 20 March 2016, nintl/NHS-savings ³ *The Guardian*, 30 March 2010, nintl/NHS-spend ⁴ *The Guardian*, 15 August 2016, nintl/creeping-privatization ⁵ *The Guardian*, 19 August 2014, nintl/private-patients ⁶ *gov.uk*, 2016, nintl/PFI-data ⁷ Full Fact, 31 March 2014, nintl/NHS-market and CHPI, February 2014, nintl/paying-the-price

The efficiency m

Heard the tale about the private sector always doing things better? NICK DOWSON wonders why it still has believers.

The central myth of neoliberalism – ‘private sector good, public sector bad’ – persists in the face of all evidence to the contrary. The private sector is held up as better, more efficient, the way to modernize... Yet worldwide, hundreds of services are being brought back into public ownership, which suggests that people aren’t buying the hype around greater private sector efficiency.

Even the cheerleaders of global capitalism have admitted doubts. Here’s the International Monetary Fund in a 2004 policy paper: ‘While there is an extensive literature on [the relative efficiency of the private sector], the theory is ambiguous and the empirical evidence is mixed.’¹ Or take the World Bank, who have come clean and said that ‘privatization *per se* does not guarantee improved performance’.²

Large scale meta-studies have drawn similar

conclusions: ‘the evidence shows no significant difference in efficiency between public and privately owned companies in public services’.³ As researcher David Hall points out, this is particularly striking because these studies have ‘been carried out by economists expecting to confirm a theoretical argument that privatization is intrinsically more efficient’.³ Some research has even shown privatized services perform worse, including one of the largest studies, whose authors include Nobel Prize-winner Joseph Stiglitz.⁴

Even according to orthodox economic theory, the idea that the private sector can do more for less applies only in a limited set of circumstances. Where there is perfect competition between private sector firms, the argument runs, this will force them to provide better services at lower cost – and those that do not successfully compete by becoming more efficient will go bust, thus contributing to greater efficiency overall.

There are two immediate issues here. Not only is competition often lacking – some services are ‘natural monopolies’ where it simply makes sense

Waiting in vain: passengers at Clapham Junction, south London. According to a 2017 Legatum Institute poll 76 per cent of British passengers want the railways in public ownership.



yth

Even the cheerleaders of global capitalism are admitting doubts



Toby Melville/Reuters

for one company to run the whole service – but the idea of inefficient firms closing down is often unacceptable. You can't simply close a hospital or an ambulance service because market theory demands it. And when outsourcing firms – or even banks, for that matter – go bust, the state is forced to pick up the pieces. A prime example is the recent collapse in Britain of super-outsourcer Carillion, which may leave pension deficits and costs to the public sector of over \$1.39 billion.

Bills, bills, bills

Then there's a whole range of extra inefficiencies – described in economic theory as 'transaction costs' – that come with outsourcing: a bureaucracy of the market, creating lots of what anthropologist David Graeber calls 'bullshit jobs', which are needed to package out contracts, monitor and enforce them, tackle fraud and fight legal battles over which company gets their share of the public pie.⁵

Healthcare is an extreme example: the US, which has a highly marketized system, spends roughly twice as much on healthcare compared to many publicly provided systems as a proportion of GDP – while many people are denied care for life-threatening conditions.⁶ Studies in less economically developed countries have also shown that for-profit healthcare providers are less efficient.⁷

Another reason for increased costs is that private companies need to siphon off a profit. Since Bolivia nationalized its pension fund in 2006, the government has been able to redirect \$500 million to Bolivian pensioners that would have otherwise gone to private investors.⁸

Examples of the private sector failing to deliver can be found around the world. Towering debts have been run up under the Private Finance Initiative (also known as Public Private Partnership) model, where private companies use private loans to finance the construction of public infrastructure, then lease it to the government over a long period (often 20 years or more). Having already landed many UK hospital trusts in eye-watering amounts of debt, the model has now been exported around the world. In Lesotho, more than half the country's health budget is being spent paying the private consortium that built a single hospital in the country's capital.⁹ In Bolivia, water privatization was swiftly followed by a rate increase of 33 per cent, triggering the country's famous 'water wars'.

One area where the private sector does manage to be efficient is in reducing labour costs and shedding jobs. But this is simply making employees do more work for less pay and has impacts on service quality.

Beyond bean-counting

Under public ownership services can benefit from efficiencies of scale. When Paris re-

municipalized its water supply in 2010 it was able to make \$2.45 million of annual savings through improved co-ordination and reduce prices by eight per cent – all the while increasing the democratic involvement of staff, users and local non-profits. The municipality also worked with local farmers in catchment areas to decrease pesticide usage.¹⁰ When freed from the pressure of profits, services can also benefit from a shared ethos and trust between employees, rather than a culture of targets.

There are also broader questions when looking at the *effectiveness* of services. Are they provided where they are most needed, to those most in need? Do they provide fulfilling jobs and a decent standard of living while protecting the environment? 'In terms of sustainability issues, reducing waste and energy inefficiency, that's also efficient management,' says Satoko Kishimoto, a researcher at Transnational Institute and one of the authors of the recent book *Reclaiming Public Services*.

Even in terms of 'narrowly defined efficiency, that is money, [public ownership] is often more efficient than private,' says Kishimoto. 'But if you consider a broader sense of efficiency [too], social efficiency, the public sector has a much bigger advantage than the private sector.'

One of the most remarkable stories comes from Germany, where over 280 utilities in the energy sector have been brought into public ownership as part of the country's '*Energiewende*' (energy transition) – a concerted effort to rapidly shift to renewable forms of power. Citizens in Hamburg have been motivated by both financial and environmental concerns. And they have been vindicated: two years after a referendum to remunicipalize the city's energy grid, they had brought 23MW of wind and solar online – enough to supply around 15,000 households.¹¹ For Hamburg's voters, the case for public ownership was straightforward. 'Because', as the campaigners' slogan went, 'it is worth it.' ■

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The people strike back

With the failures of privatization all too evident when it comes to public resources and services, there is a global upsurge of interest in running things differently.

United States: Water, water, everywhere

It may come as a surprise but water supply in the US is mainly in public hands, with 86 per cent of the population served by public providers. Nonetheless, between 2000 and 2015, private water companies lost 169 contracts to municipal take-back.

One of the largest was the 20-year \$428 million contract that United Water, a subsidiary of French giant Suez, was awarded in 1999 to manage Atlanta's water. The result? Job losses, rising bills and general disrepair, with the city losing billions to inefficient metering and billing.

In 2003 the City Council took the tough job of managing this resource in a water-scarce area into municipal hands. There have been ups and downs but the public service now manages to treat 70 per cent of all waste water for re-use and has brought down water withdrawals by more than 10 per cent (despite a population increase of a million new residents). Progressive billing means those who use more pay more, while those on low incomes get reduced tariffs.

A subsidy programme has resulted in 125,000 water-wasting toilets being swapped for high-efficiency units.



Bolivia: striking oil

After holding a referendum which showed that 92 per cent of the Bolivian people supported renationalizing the country's hydrocarbons sector, president Evo Morales did just that in 2006. The oil and gas fields became national property. Private companies could still operate but they had a minority stake and could extract much lower profits.

The results? Ten years on, the state had collected \$31.5 billion in revenue, compared to \$3.5bn in the prior decade. GDP tripled as a result and public spending increased by 750 per cent. Subsequently, electricity, pensions and telecommunications were also brought back to public ownership.

Argentina: You've got mail

When Argentina handed over its postal service to investment firm Grupo Macri in 1997, things went pear-shaped – service provision plummeted, prices shot up and royalty payments to the government weren't made. In 2003, the government took back this loss-making service, and costs, reliability and accountability all improved. Rural routes that had fallen into neglect got connected up again.

However, the saga of the failed privatization's debts trundles on. Grupo Macri is the family firm of current president Mauricio Macri, though he passed on his shares to his children before being elected. In June 2016, his government agreed to forgive \$296 million of debt run up by the firm. The president denies any conflict of interest.



Mike_Kiev/Thinkstock
Maps: Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, MGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Image IBCAO
Image U.S. Geological Survey

France: Vive l'eau!

French water multinationals have got embroiled in controversy with their dealings across the world, and the level of privatization of water services within France remains high. Yet the remunicipalization trend has been gathering pace since the mid-2000s, and two major cities – Grenoble and Paris – are now models of democratic public ownership. A third of Grenoble's water board directors are civil society representatives, while Paris has staff, users and civic associations represented on the board with full voting rights.

Efforts are being made to guarantee a right to water with free public water fountains and rebates for the poorest residents, while issues of sustainability and conservation are taken seriously. All the while delivering on price and quality. In Paris effective co-ordination has led to savings of \$36 million per year ever since the take-back in 2010 – and lower prices for customers. In Grenoble, investment in infrastructure has increased threefold without raising bills.



Germany: Full of energy

Since 2005, there have been a remarkable 248 energy sector remunicipalizations in Germany. A firestorm of dissatisfaction with big energy companies has played a major role: their failure to meet the public demand for renewable energy, the feeling that municipalities had lost control over energy provision and, in many instances, rising bills.

In 2009, the city of Hamburg formed an autonomous energy utility with the aim of providing 'climate-friendly electricity (non-nuclear and coal-free)' and municipal-run infrastructure. Their solar initiative involved citizens and local businesses as co-investors. Over a 100,000 clients signed up for locally produced renewable energy. In 2013 a referendum was held to push the government to reclaim the entire energy grid (electricity, heating and gas). The electricity network was bought back in 2015, with the gas network to follow in 2018-19.



Nigeria: Privatization in hot water

A popular grassroots campaign against the government's plan to enter into a public-private partnership for water provision in Lagos has kept privatization at bay since 2014. While the Our Water Our Rights campaign spearheaded by Environmental Rights Action has not yet made the government change its mind about the proposed privatization, it has succeeded in getting it to allocate \$185 million towards easing the city's water crisis. Links have been made with other anti-privatization struggles around the world and the demand is for public provision with democratic oversight.

India: A bill of good health

With the election of the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man Party) in Delhi three years ago came a sorely needed health intervention. The Party set a target of opening 1,000 *Mohalla* (community or locality) clinics across the city to provide free primary healthcare; 164 had come into being by March 2018. These are no-nonsense portacabins staffed by a doctor, nurse, pharmacist and lab technician. They operate as the first stop for common ailments and offer 110 essential drugs and 212 diagnostic tests. Over five million consultations had taken place by the end of 2017. There are also plans to open 100 dental clinics.

Whereas most Indians have to rely on expensive private care or face long queues at government hospitals, the poorest citizens of Delhi at least now have an option suited to their needs.



Sources: S Kishimoto, E Lobina, O Petitjean (eds), *Our public water future*, 2015, nin.tl/PublicWater; remunicipalisation.org; *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*; transformativecities.org; enca.com; TNI, *Reclaiming Public Services*, 2017, nin.tl/TNI-reclaiming; thebetterindia.com; *Hindustan Times*; *The Hindu*; erafoen.org

An end to Jakarta's water woes?

A court victory has rewarded civil society efforts to end water privatization in the Indonesian capital but many questions remain unanswered. FEBRIANA FIRDAUS reports.



Left: Displaying a traditional water jug, these women join a rally against corporate control of the water supply in Jakarta on International Water Day.

Dasril Roszandi/NurPhoto via Getty

Right: A drinking water vendor sets off, looking for customers in Jakarta's poorer neighbourhoods.

Solo Imaji/Barcroft Media via Getty

Imagine waiting until two in the morning for the water tap to run. This was a daily occurrence for Nurhidayah six years ago in the northern Rawa Badak district of Jakarta. 'No water during the day,' she remembers. 'PDAM (the tap water company) only served water to the district between 2.00 and 5.00am.'

Rawa Badak, which literally means 'the great swamps', has a predominantly poor population. It has a serious problem with clean water supply and garbage maintenance, and is prone to flooding. Contrast this with adjacent Kelapa Gading, a neighbourhood that is home to Beverly Hills-style housing complexes for the elite, whose residents enjoy a much more reliable tap water supply.

The lack of service in areas like Rawa Badak meant that the city's poorest residents often had to resort to private traders for drinking water, paying about 43 cents for filling a 4.5 litre capacity jerry can – an exorbitant price compared to the 35 cents per 1,000 litres rate for tap water. When the PDAM water supply wasn't working, the private traders doubled their prices.

Nurhidayah, who works for the feminist organization Solidarity for Women (SP), knew also that the burden of responsibility for household water fell disproportionately on women. 'We started to think that we needed to

make a move to make sure this water should be available for everyone,' she says. 'I saw injustice: there's a gap between the rich and the poor. Look at Kelapa Gading – not a single resident there is struggling with the clean water supply. We are living in the capital city – why should we have to suffer from such problems?'

Under SP's auspices, Nur began to organize in the community in order to demand change. Which is when she was shocked to discover that 'the water was no longer managed by the state, but a private company'.

Guaranteed profit

Jakarta's water privatization story began in June 1991, when the World Bank agreed to lend the city's public water utility, PAM Jaya, \$92 million for infrastructure improvements but also pushed for privatization.¹ Suharto, Indonesia's most corrupt and dictatorial president, ordered the privatization in 1995 with the eventual carve-up, in 1997, of Jakarta's water utilities between two operations: one half a joint venture between the UK's Thames Water and a company owned by his eldest son; and the other split between the French giant Suez and a company owned by the family of a Suharto crony.² (In the intervening years the make-up of the two operators has changed, with company stakes sold on to other private operators.)

A sweetheart deal guaranteed profit to the private companies allowing them to liberally raise their charges for providing water, although the government, which was responsible for levying tariffs to residents, could not hike up prices at the same rate. Nevertheless water prices for Jakarta residents soared, far beyond prices in other major cities like Surabaya where provision remained in public hands. In this manner huge public losses accumulated, and the private companies also ran down the infrastructure so that asset values became a fraction of their privatization worth.³

agreements with the two private water operators and ordered the provincial and central governments to end water privatization. The court's decision was reached in April 2017, but only made public in October – in that time shares of both companies were sold to other investors.⁴ This raises questions for the future – why would anyone buy a company that had lost the battle?

According to human rights activist and lawyer Bambang Widjojanto, the coalition now needs to urge the government to set up a task force to guard the transition and ensure water is safely shifted to public ownership. Much



The city's poorest residents often had to resort to private traders for drinking water, charged at exorbitant prices

These intricacies became evident to Nur when SP joined forces with other civil society groups as the Coalition of Jakarta Residents Opposing Water Privatization (KMMSAJ) to file a citizen lawsuit in November 2012 for an end to privatization and a return to public water provision. The global trade union federation Public Services International also got involved, providing experts to testify in court.

In 2015, they won at the Central Jakarta District Court. However, a year later, the private firms, along with the president, finance minister and public works and public housing minister, filed an appeal and the decision was overturned.

'I was so disappointed that President Jokowi filed the appeal,' says Nur. 'Because when he was still serving as Jakarta Governor, he supported us to file the case. But he annulled it once he was elected as president.'

Eventually the case wound its way to the Supreme Court which annulled contract

will also need to be done to protect the jobs of water supply workers when the shift happens.

At the time of writing, despite the court ruling, the private contracts which should have been declared null and void, remain in force. The fear is that they could stay in force until 2023, their time of expiration, piling up public debt. On the other hand, were the government to act, there is the risk of the private companies suing the government for millions of dollars. It looks like an uphill battle and activists are gearing up, with international support, for round two.⁵

Despite the continuing uncertainties, Nur is firm about one thing: 'We have an equal right to a supply of water, whether you're rich or poor, no matter what.' ■

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Left: Filling up at a pump station, before he delivers water to sell to residents in Jakarta's slums.

Garry Andrew Lotulung/Pacific Press via Alamy

Right: Four-year-old Rizky bathes with a can-full of water.

Beawiharta/Reuters

The almighty investor

Trying to take back failing privatized public services exposes governments to the risk of being sued for gargantuan amounts by foreign corporations. LAVINIA STEINFORT reports.

The privatization of public services

is being rejected all around the world because it has led to underinvestment and price hikes. Yet undoing privatization when it's been carried out by foreign firms can run into serious problems; those who take this path can soon discover an adder in the grass. Tucked into the international trade treaties that countries often sign are 'investor protection' provisions, which give foreign corporations the ability to attack any attempt at a public take-back by suing the government.

International investment arbitration is also known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) and its powers are hard to overestimate. It makes populations pay for failed privatizations, allowing investors to claim sky-high sums from governments.

Lithuania's experience is typical. In 2016, the Paris-based multinational Veolia sued Lithuania when its capital Vilnius, and several other municipalities, decided against renewing the district heating contract of Veolia's subsidiary, Vilniaus Energija. Instead, the cities prepared to return the energy service to municipal control. Additionally, the Lithuanian government scrapped gas subsidies, which according to Veolia, forced the subsidiary to close one of its power plants. Veolia used the France-Lithuania bilateral investment treaty (BIT) to sue the government of Lithuania for €100 million (\$123m).¹



This remunicipalization – returning a public service to local public control – was a response to mounting public pressure, alleged fraud and Vilniaus Energija's lack of financial transparency. Research by the Lithuanian energy regulator concluded that the company was responsible for manipulating fuel prices, thereby significantly increasing energy costs for households and generating an unlawful excess profit of €24.3 million (\$29.8m) between 2012 and 2014. In 2017 the local authorities brought the district heating back into public hands but the ISDS case is still pending.

Illustration: Jayesh Sivan

Lithuania's experience shows that investment arbitration puts excessive price tags on the reclaiming of public services. This is despite publicly owned essential services outperforming private management time and time again. Additionally, when energy, water or transport services are in public hands and democratically controlled, profits don't drain off to private shareholders but can be reinvested in service accessibility, employment and infrastructure.

One-way streets

What exactly is the ISDS regime? ISDS tribunals are one-way streets which are used and abused by foreign investors. They are inaccessible to governments, small and medium-size enterprises, to civil society organizations and ordinary people.

Investment protection gives privileges to foreign investors without any corresponding enforceable obligations, like creating jobs, protecting workers' rights, upholding environmental standards or guaranteeing universal access to public services. The governments that are party to such agreements, regardless of their democratic rights and responsibility to regulate, must comply no matter the social costs.

'ISDS constitutes an assault on democracy, subverts the rule of law and violates numerous civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights,' according to Alfred de Zayas, the first independent UN expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order.²

Foreign investors are often awarded obscene payouts, regardless of their misconduct or breaches of contract, while states stand defenceless against an ISDS claim since they cannot appeal a verdict.

Proponents present investment protection as a necessary mechanism to hold governments accountable. However, most of the countries that are sued through ISDS have effective and impartial legal systems that are sufficient to protect the properties of foreign investors. ISDS is not only unnecessary, it discriminates against domestic investors. In a European context this goes far beyond the legal and constitutional framework.³

Giving foreign investors special rights that can be enforced through opaque and biased international tribunals, which consist of three for-profit arbitrators who tend to put private investor rights above public interest, is a shocking state of affairs. As Juan Fernández-Armesto, an arbitrator from Spain, put it: 'When I wake up at night and think about arbitration, it never ceases to amaze me that sovereign states have agreed to investment arbitration at all... Three private individuals are entrusted with the power to review, without any restriction or appeal procedure, all actions of the government, all decisions of the courts,

and all laws and regulations emanating from parliament.'

The brick that flew

Argentina's eye-watering experience with ISDS tops even Lithuania's. In 2009, the Spanish multinational Grupo Marsans sued the government of Argentina for a whopping \$1.5 billion under the Argentina-Spain BIT, after the government deprivatized its two national airlines in 2008. On Argentina's side, the reasons for deprivatization were overwhelming: \$900 million of accumulated debt, poor management, lack of investment and suspicions of corruption.⁴

After the airlines were returned to public control, their financial situation improved with an 85 per cent rise in revenues, and, by 2013, the aircraft fleet had increased from 26 to 63. Regardless of Grupo Marsans' misconduct, the tribunal ruled in July 2017 that the government owes the foreign investor \$320.8 million.⁵ One can but imagine what a difference this massive amount could have made if spent in the public interest.

Since 2000, decisions to deprivatize public services have triggered at least 20 international arbitration cases (ten in the water sector, four in telecommunications, and three each in energy and transport).⁶

Feeling the chill

The spectre of an ISDS claim is enough to have a chilling effect on governments who want to regulate or deprivatize their outsourced services, preventing them from taking action. Take Bulgaria, where the residents of the capital Sofia and some city officials organized to reverse their water privatization by collecting enough signatures to hold a referendum. The reason: the private company Sofiyska Voda, another subsidiary of Veolia, is infamous for its lack of transparency, exorbitant management salaries and financial losses. On top of that, the company had disconnected 1,000 households and requested to prosecute 5,000 more for unpaid water bills. The local government did not permit the referendum to go ahead for fear that the private investors might invoke a clause secretly added to the contract which would potentially enable the company to sue Bulgaria at the Vienna International Arbitral Centre.⁷

But this chilling effect hasn't deterred the grassroots movements against privatization. In recent years, political opposition to investment protection and the gargantuan trade deals, like TTIP, that legalize them has been rising, with unions, local governments and citizens joining forces in their thousands. These movements are not simply oppositional, they help provide a positive vision of the future: a world of socially and environmentally just trade regimes where public services are controlled by democratic institutions, citizens and workers. ■

Undoing privatization when it's been carried out by foreign firms can run into serious problems; those who take this path soon discover an adder in the grass

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Reclaiming the city

Progressive city governments in the Barcelona area have showed the world how turning back privatization is achievable at a local level. But there remain obstacles to be overcome, says LUKE STOBART.



The people united: Ada Colau arrives at a municipal elections rally. She was voted in as Mayor in 2015.

‘Do you want water management to be public and involving citizen participation?’ This is one of the questions that Barcelona Town Hall (the city government) intends to ask residents in a citywide ‘multi-referendum’ this month. Although the referendum is non-binding, the inclusion of this question is being challenged in high court appeals. Resistance is driven by business groups – including the poorly performing subsidiary of the Suez water multinational – which rightly understand that residents will likely choose full public management. Opposition parties and the media have sided with employers in what is predicted to become a ‘water war’.

The dispute shines a light on the processes currently taking place in many localities in Greater Barcelona, the rest of Catalonia and Spain. Large cities in the area have taken back public ownership and control of water (Terrassa) or have started this process (Badalona and Sabadell). And municipalization – putting services under local control – has taken place of car-towing and parking services in Sabadell, sports facilities in Badalona, and offices for women suffering gender-based violence in Barcelona. More municipalization has been announced, including of funeral services in Barcelona with a view to making them more affordable.

The aim is to place the provision of a service under some degree of democratic control through the participation of city residents. It is an approach led by social movements, such as the ‘Water is Life’ campaign in Barcelona;

but also by the municipal platforms and coalitions that took over many Town Halls in 2015 and which themselves emerged from social movements: in particular, the Indignados (15M) square occupations and a housing movement (PAH) that resists evictions by forming human chains around properties threatened by repossession.

Town Halls of Change

To understand the advance of municipalization – and its unevenness – one needs to examine the politics and evolution of these ‘Town Halls of Change’. Here I look at two city experiences: Barcelona (run by the political platform Barcelona en Comú, or Barcelona in Common in English) and adjoining Badalona – Catalonia’s third city (governed by a coalition led by Guanyem Badalona en Comú, GBcC). Both have activist mayors – ex-PAH spokesperson Ada Colau in Barcelona and Dolors Sabater in Badalona – and centre on activist groups, including the pro-independence CUP in Badalona, allied with other leftwing parties, like Podemos.

The 15M occupations of 2011 were organized through mass meetings – their distrust of mainstream politics summed up by their slogan ‘no-one represents us’. Their goal of *real democracy* (including people’s control of economic decision-making) was seen as achievable at the municipal scale. Much energy was put into developing ‘ethical codes’ for representatives, which later led to the lowering of



David Ramos / Getty Images

Badalona Town Hall arranged a participatory process in which 7,800 people voted on how to spend half of the municipal budget

salaries for mayors and councillors. Candidates and political priorities were chosen in ‘primaries’ and assemblies – meetings in which participation was not limited to organization members, although Barcelona en Comú (BeC) also held closed meetings of organization representatives.

Arguably, the municipal platforms’ greatest accomplishment has been to actively involve thousands of residents. Large meetings in different neighbourhoods helped BeC produce a remarkably detailed electoral programme, drawing on the normally ignored knowledge and technical expertise of ‘ordinary people’. This democratic approach was one reason for the platform’s historic victory in the 2015 municipal elections – just months after its creation! In neighbouring Badalona, the new Town Hall arranged a participatory process in which 7,800 people voted on how to spend half of the municipal budget after proposals were made online and discussed in 20 neighbourhood assemblies. Top among their choices were improving educational facilities, sewage systems and street lighting. Each were allocated half a million euros.

The Town Halls have taken significant stands against racism. After a historically large protest in Barcelona in February last year demanding solidarity with refugees, the Colau administration led other cities to jointly denounce the low numbers of refugees being accepted by the Spanish state.

Obstacles and disobedience

However, there are also limits to their achievements. Undocumented African migrants forced to survive by street-selling counterfeit goods – suffering police repression as a consequence – believe the Town Hall is failing to fight for them and have set up their own union. In general the city’s social movements welcome the social and political transformations that have taken place but see them as limited. For sociologist and writer Emmanuel Rodríguez, a ‘politics of gestures’ – such as the call to take in more refugees – has become ‘on too many occasions a substitute for transforming the institutions, which required committing to harder battles’.

The new municipal governments have faced more obstacles than their predecessors. As well as being minority governments and having to reach deals with other parties in order to pass policies, resistance to change has emerged from within the city apparatus. After Colau was elected mayor, municipal police chiefs resigned – sending a warning to the new administration that it should not make policing changes, which is how things have developed.

Badalona Mayor Sabater admits that the functioning of local government ‘straitjackets us... more than we previously imagined’. Her Deputy José Téllez informed me that

sometimes council employees, including individuals hired through party connections by previous administrations, had to be prodded by protests in the town square to encourage them to do things differently.

The highest hurdle has been the ‘Montoro Laws’, named after the Treasury Minister who designed them, which oblige local administrations to use financial surpluses to pay off municipal debt, rather than spending them on social improvements. They also prevent councils rehiring privately hired workforces as public employees if a municipalization is implemented, encouraging workers to oppose such a change. Téllez says Badalona ‘bent’ the law by borrowing new debt at the value of the surplus being paid off. Because this coincided with preparations for the Catalan independence referendum, which the central government tried to repress, Montoro chose not to punish the city and thereby avoided opening up a parallel conflict. Yet once Madrid took direct control of the Catalan institutions in November, it used this power to hold back five million euros owed to Badalona.

For GBeC the incident confirms that the struggle for municipal independence cannot be separated from fighting for a Catalan state. Despite Badalona having a large Spanish-migrant population that identifies little with the goal of an independent Catalan state, the platform has brought the municipal and independence projects together through ‘building the Catalan Republic neighbourhood by neighbourhood’ (in other words creating a new inclusive republic – whether independent or federated to Spain – around making local social and democratic improvements). The Town Hall has taken clear sides in favour of the referendum and against the imprisonment of Catalan ministers and activists, and has suffered legal threats and actions as a result.

Barcelona Town Hall, on the other hand, rejected the referendum’s legitimacy, even if it later called on people to participate. This disappointed many of its supporters who disobeyed Madrid and the police to make the vote happen. Because reclaiming democracy was a central plank in BeC’s platform, the organization has been weakened by its failure to defend the only vote on independence available.

Initiatives such as May’s multi-referendum on returning water to public hands and the momentum to municipalize more services could help BeC inspire the people once again. But both plans have powerful enemies and their success will probably require new acts of disobedience – both inside and outside the institutions. ■

Luke Stobart is currently writing a book for Verso on recent challenges to the status quo in the Spanish state (which will be crowdfunded on verkami.com).

Lebanon

My 15-year-old daughter suddenly declared last week that she needed a break. A break from what? I inquired, imagining a teenage world of academic tests, peer pressure or girlish gossip. 'From Lebanon,' she said.

Lebanon is a country that goes through 'waves'. The early 2000s saw a wave of assassinations, a wave of bombs planted in various neighborhoods, a wave of demonstrations.

More recently, a wave of refugees from the Syrian war entered the country. By October 2016, according to the UNHCR, Lebanon was host to 1.1 million registered refugees – around a quarter of the number of permanent inhabitants, and this in a tiny country of just 10,452 square kilometres (about the size of Devon and Cornwall in the UK). Refugee camps were quickly set up. Schools opened afternoon classes to accommodate Syrian children.

As the Syrian war showed no sign of stopping, even more refugees arrived and the streets were filled with begging Syrian children. Lebanon felt like it was drowning. Local unemployment increased as Syrians, in their desperation, took on jobs at lower wages.

Then, suddenly, the influx of refugees began to slow – not much, but enough to notice the difference in the streets of Beirut. Now ships off the coast of Tripoli, in the north of the country, were

illegally shepherding refugees to Europe. We watched on television mesmerized as so many made their way into Europe. We were even more mesmerized to see some Lebanese of Syrian descent among them. Some I know well. They are now European residents, they tell me, as they grin mischievously during holidays back in Lebanon.

In 2014, a new wave: the kidnapping of Lebanese soldiers by ISIS. The Islamist group overran the town of Aarsal, on the northeast side of the fertile Bekaa Valley. Fear gripped the country: was ISIS about to invade Lebanon? Panic ensued.

The Lebanese army, along with fighters from the Shi'a group Hizbullah, surrounded the stronghold of the militants and then, in 2017, launched separate offensives against them. The battle ended with an exchange of dead bodies and prisoners and with the evacuation of the militants; the eight kidnapped soldiers were found murdered.

Meanwhile, a wave of a completely different kind: the closure of Beirut's waste dumps in 2015. Garbage piled up in the streets, even burying parked cars. The street leading to my apartment building was blocked with bags of garbage. The stench was unbearable. Night after night, the horrible odour of burning garbage

would infiltrate our homes.

A series of protests, aptly dubbed YOUTINK, erupted as thousands of Lebanese took to the streets in protest. The garbage crisis lasted for eight long months. As I write, a landfill site has been created near the airport. But this is only temporary and much of the trash is still strewn all over the beaches, rivers and forests.

The latest wave: our prime minister, Saad al-Hariri, suddenly resigned in November 2017 in a televised address during a visit to Saudi Arabia. This called forth accusations that he was being held hostage – the Saudis were unhappy with his accommodating attitude towards Hizbullah, which is backed by Iran.

Would a pro-Saudi camp and a Tehran-backed alliance take to the streets? Would Lebanon plunge back into turmoil reminiscent of the 1975-90 civil war? We held our breath.

After a month of invisibility, Hariri withdrew his resignation just as suddenly as he had tabled it. He claimed that the situation had been resolved after the government had agreed to keep out of the affairs of other Arab states; he resumed his post as if nothing had happened. We breathed again.

But there will inevitably be another 'wave' soon. I have to agree with my daughter. I, too, need a break from Lebanon. ■

Reem Haddad

At a glance



Leader: Head of state Michel Aoun; head of government Saad al-Hariri.

Economy: GNI per capita \$7,980 (Jordan \$3,920, France \$38,720).

Monetary unit: Lebanese pound.

Main exports: Cement, chemicals, clothing, electrical equipment, jewellery, metals, textiles, tobacco. Lebanon has a free-market economy with minimal government regulations. Banking secrecy is a key feature. Agricultural output is still only 20% of that before the civil war, and less than a third of the country's food is home-grown.

People: 6.1 million (annual growth rate 2.6%, not including influxes of refugees). People per square kilometre 575 (UK 271).

Health: Infant mortality 7 deaths per 1,000 live births (Jordan 15, France 3). HIV prevalence rate <0.1. Hospitals have doctors schooled in Europe or the US and have modern equipment. But the many Lebanese without insurance end up without medical care or in poorly run clinics.

Environment: The garbage crisis has severely polluted many of Lebanon's waterways. The piles of trash in the country's few remaining forests could contribute to future deforestation by sparking bushfires. Street burning of trash poses grave health risks.

Culture: Predominantly Arab, but with strong Western influences. The Levant has been populated and influenced by numerous cultures over the millennia: Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Crusaders, Ottoman Turks, French.

Religion: There has been no census since 1932, when there were similar numbers of Muslims and Christians. A new census is avoided so as not to upset sectarian sensibilities but it is accepted that the Muslim population is now larger than the Christian.

Language: Arabic, officially, but French and English are widely spoken. The Lebanese are renowned for their ability to switch between languages.



Human Development Index: 0.763, 76th of 188 countries (Jordan 0.741, France 0.897)





Clockwise from top left: **The historic market in the northern town of Tripoli; all smiles at a political rally in Beirut's Martyrs' Square; rubbish dumped on the road in north Beirut – the country's garbage-collection system has collapsed; and a family of Syrian refugees in a UN camp near Zahle, in the Bekaa Valley.** All photos from Alamy and (in the order above) by Mark Pearson, Geoff Dunlop, Char Abumansoor and François Razon.

Star ratings



INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★

The average salary of a Lebanese employee is about \$500 per month, which barely covers the basic necessities. There is a significant wealthy elite and little serious government effort at redistribution.



LITERACY ★★★★★

Education standards are quite high in the state-run schools and the huge array of private ones; most children are expected to speak three languages fluently by the time they graduate.



FREEDOM ★★★★★

There are no political prisoners and freedom of expression allows lively debate. But many Lebanese have disappeared in the past for criticizing the Syrian government and are thought to be in Syrian prisons.



POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★

Women represent 28% of the workforce – the highest in the Arab world. There are female doctors, lawyers, engineers and managers and the number of women entering the political arena and starting their own businesses has recently increased.



LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★★

79 years (Jordan 74, France 83).



SEXUAL MINORITIES ★★

Homosexuality is illegal and imprisonable for a year, but is quietly tolerated. Four years ago, an advocacy group was established to promote LGBT rights – the first of its kind in the Arab world. The gay community has recently become more visible.

NI assessment

POLITICS ★★

Lebanon has experienced some welcome stability in the past year since the election of President Michel Aoun and the formation of a new government headed by Hariri. In October 2016 Hariri finally agreed to support Hezbollah's candidate, Aoun, ending two-and-a-half years of deadlock between opposing parliamentary coalitions, one backed by the West and Saudi Arabia and the other by Syria and Iran. Hezbollah is now the paramount power in Lebanon. The continuing garbage crisis is a scandal that exposes the depth of corruption within the ruling elite.

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
 ★★★★★ GOOD
 ★★★ FAIR
 ★★ POOR
 ★ APPALLING

This land is my la

Nearly 30 years after eco-rebels sent mining company BCL fleeing from Bougainville for wholesale environmental carnage, it is planning its return to the mineral-rich island. But, as conflicts of interest and intrigues develop, locals are less than pleased. IAN NEUBAUER reports.

Most of the recent news coming out of Papua New Guinea is about the refugee crisis on Manus Island, where hundreds of predominantly Middle Eastern asylum seekers intercepted in Australian waters have languished in legal limbo for five long years. But 1,000 kilometres southeast of Manus, on Bougainville Island, a story with far

wider-reaching geopolitical and economic implications for the bloody 40-year-long independence struggle of a quarter of a million people is approaching an endgame.

Cut from a glossy travel brochure and just smaller than Hawaii's Big Island, Bougainville is blessed with incredible natural resources: warm waters teeming with fish, hyper-fertile soil and one of the largest untapped mineral deposits on the planet.

Bougainville's struggle sprouted from colonial exploits at the now-defunct Panguna mine. Between 1972 and 1989, the gaping hole in the Guava Mountains in central Bougainville provided nearly half of Papua New Guinea's GDP and made its operator, Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) – a former subsidiary of Rio Tinto – billions of dollars.

But less than one per cent of profits were reinvested into Bougainville, while hundreds of millions of tonnes of tailings – the toxic by-



and

Philip Miriori stands over the gaping wound that is Panguna Mine – the largest open-cut copper mine when in operation.

product of mining – were dumped straight into rivers; turning vast tracts of farming and hunting grounds into a barren moonlike wasteland.

In the late 1970s, a landowner group led by Francis Ona presented BCL and Rio Tinto with a multi-billion dollar cleaning bill. But the mining companies argued they were in compliance with the law, insisting they had not damaged the environment, while continuing to dump tailings down the mountain like a bad tourist drops a cigarette butt on the beach.

In 1988, push finally came to shove. Ona and his mob broke into BCL's storerooms, stole explosives and blew up Panguna's power lines. The war on mining in Bougainville had begun.

Papua New Guinea sent in its army to crush the rebels, pitting Australian-supplied helicopter gunships and gunboats against a ragtag militia armed with slingshots and homemade rifles. When that failed, soldiers burned down villages, executed collaborators and raped with impunity. And when even that failed, Papua New Guinea applied a cruel Australian-backed naval blockade depriving the entire island of fuel, medicine and contact with the outside world.

What started as an act of explosive protest turned into the longest conflict in the South Pacific since World War Two. By the time a lasting peace agreement was signed in 2001, 10 per cent of the Bougainville population (15,000-20,000 people) had been killed or had succumbed to curable illnesses. For its woes, the island was granted autonomy and tacit control of its fantastic mineral wealth, including the \$50 billion worth of copper and gold remaining at Panguna. However, a new-look independently listed BCL is presently scheming a return to the mine; promising jobs and prosperity for all, despite having never cleaned the mess it left behind. When I flew to Bougainville late last year, the Autonomous Government of Bougainville was astonishingly courting the proposal as it desperately needs tax revenue for an independence referendum scheduled for June 2019, and the prospect of running the world's newest country soon after. But many Bougainvillians warn if BCL does return, conflict will follow.

Happy valley

During the 'good times' of the 1970s and 1980s, Arawa and its port Kieta, an hour's drive from Panguna, was the second-richest town in Papua New Guinea. Hotels, restaurants and banks lined Happy Valley, Kieta's dreamy beachfront strip, while cruise boats and sail craft clambered around the old yacht club.

All that remains of Kieta today are ruins overgrown with jungle and the wrecks of two small steamships at the end of a pier where Queen Elizabeth II disembarked during a state visit in 1974. Arawa hasn't fared much

better. Its wide boulevards – once lined with villas, libraries, private schools, shopfronts and theatres – now feature overgrown fields, stained-coloured apartment blocks and abandoned petrol stations.

In Arawa, I meet Philip Miriori – the former private cabinet secretary of rebel leader Francis Ona, who died in 2005. Miriori is chair of the Special Mine Lease Osikaiyang Landowners Association (SMLOLA), a group of some 2,000 landowners who, under the new Bougainville Mining Act, hold rights to the topsoil and the minerals underground, giving them veto power over proposals to reboot Panguna. That makes Miriori one of the most powerful men in Bougainville and his opinion of BCL a concern.

'BCL does not have any compassionate feelings. They have made no apology and caused lots of trauma in Bougainville. I have seen what they are capable of,' he says.

'One night during the war, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force woke up everyone in my village and made us watch while they burnt all our houses down. I hold BCL directly accountable for what happened that night because they provided the soldiers with funding, logistics and shelter. Not as long as I am alive will I ever accept BCL coming back. People in Bougainville have great hatred for what they have done in the past. That memory will never go away.'

Allegations of BCL's complicity in the Bougainville war stem back decades and have been corroborated by the highest level of government. In 2011, Australia's Special Broadcasting Service unearthed an affidavit signed by former Papua New Guinea Prime Minister and Minister for Bougainville Affairs Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare that stated: 'Because of Rio Tinto's financial influence in Papua New Guinea, the company controlled the government.' In a separate affidavit, former Papua New Guinea Defence Force general Jerry Singirok said the army 'functioned as the corporation's personal security force and were ordered by BCL to take action to reopen the mine – by any means necessary.' The mining company refused comment for this story. But in a shareholder update released last October, BCL claimed it 'has always maintained positive relationships in Bougainville' and 'continues to respectfully build relationships with a range of stakeholders, including project area landowners'. The notice also refers to a SMLOLA leadership dispute between Miriori and his cousin Lawrence Daveona, a Port Moresby-based entrepreneur who has been advocating BCL's return to Bougainville for years. Daveona is former director and secretary of BCL's Roads Mine Tailings Lease Trust Fund – a body set up to administer mine compensation payments.

Daveona refused to talk about his relationship with the company, citing ongoing court proceedings with his cousin Miriori. But he pointed out Miriori has a corporate sponsor of his own: RTG Mining, an Australian consortium that operates seven mines in five countries and is challenging BCL's bid to reboot the Panguna mine.

Miriori acknowledges he's on RTG's payroll but says his support for the company is based on its environmental and social practices at Masbate, the largest goldmine in the Philippines. 'RTG will work well with the community,' he opines, adding: 'If this [article] doesn't go well, you will not be welcome back in Bougainville.'

Legacy of the pit

In the same shareholder notice, BCL also claimed it is 'increasing its presence in central Bougainville through the engagement activities of our local team'. However, the company has no official presence in Arawa. And it's hard to imagine how a car with their logos could get past Alex Dakamari, a crusty old rebel with hangdog features who controls Morgan's Crossing checkpoint – a roadblock on the only carriageway leading up to Panguna, set up by the late Francis Ona in the early 1990s. 'BCL are wasting their time. If they come back, we will fight,' Dakamari scowls. 'We don't want the mine reopened full stop! Otherwise, all of our money will go to white people like in the past. We were the owners and they turned us into beggars. They can't get away with it again!'

The road snakes up the western flank of the Guava Mountains, affording spectacular views of the palm-fringed coast. In places, the asphalt is nearly consumed by landslides; at others it all but disappears into the mist. Rainforest hugs both sides of the road until I reach a five-storey ore-sorting plant that's been dormant for nearly 30 years. More discarded mining equipment – from parts of a bucket-wheel excavator, to the massive wheels of mining dump trucks – pockmark the roadside like a trail of breadcrumbs leading to the mine.

Before it closed, Panguna was the largest open-cut mine in the world. Some 2.5 kilometres wide and half a kilometre deep, it is marred by copper bleaching – a blue-green oxidization caused by rain hitting exposed copper ore. On the far side of the pit, a wall of untreated tailings hundreds of metres high marches slowly down a ravine. Millions of litres of opal-blue water rush from pit water drains, forming waterfalls of the damned that lay waste to all life in the valley below. It is environmental mass murder.



Meeting Caesar

On a ridge above the pit is a larger settlement where BCL housed more than 2,000 employees during the 'good times'. Today, around 8,000 landowners and squatters reside in the concrete skeletons of residential towers rebel leader Francis Ona and his mob set fire to after BCL left. Masked in heavy fog, carpeted in moss and spattered with graffiti, it has the look and feel of a set from the Planet of the Apes.

Philip Takaung (above left), Ona's 77-year-old half-brother and Miriori's deputy, is Caesar of this post-apocalyptic world. With an imposing frame and crushing handshake to match, he makes an intimidating presence when I find him sitting with his family in the tallest tower. 'When BCL came here and started polluting our land, we didn't know anything about minerals. We had no education so they took advantage of us,' he says. 'When we asked them to clean up the rivers, they did a feasibility study and said there was nothing

Dapera is a village that once sat on land covering part of the mine. In the early 1970s, BCL moved Dapera's residents to a squatter settlement built on a plateau of crushed rock. A desolate collection of hardscrabble shacks, Dapera II is now home to a few hundred impoverished landowner descendants like Jayden Frankie, who was born on the site.

'You can see the destruction they did to this community,' he says. 'Before, my father had good land. We can't grow crops on this land and when heavy rain falls, rocks in the ground turn blue and green.'

His friend, Richard Onio, voices similar sentiments. 'To find good land for farming we have to walk up to those hills over there,' he says, pointing to a ridge. 'But it's dangerous in heavy rains because of landslides.'

What do they think about the idea of the notorious BCL coming back?

'They would not be welcome,' says a third Dapera resident, Freddy Bernora. 'We would send them off. They stole billions of dollars from us and I do not see how this company has changed.'

Frankie wants RTG to reopen the mine. 'We have seen some pictures of how RTG works in the Philippines; how people there live side-by-side with mining. They showed us how they produce benefits for landowners. They seem to respect landowners,' he says.

'For me,' says Onio, 'I am with neither. I am neutral. I want to see if they meet our terms and conditions. I am not convinced by either side yet.'



Nature fights back: the jungle returns to an abandoned ore-sorting factory at Panguna.



**'They burnt
our villages.
They tortured
our people...
They
slaughtered
us like
animals'**

poisonous in the water. We said "NO! Our crops, our rivers – everything is dead!" But they ignored us. They ignored us for 10 years until we decided to act. I was on that team that blew up the power lines.'

Takaung shows me his weapon-of-choice during the war: a nine-foot-long pole with a Y-shaped head known as the 'Rambo Stick' – a slingshot so powerful it can puncture a hole in a car, or take off someone's head. 'This weapon was very good because it's quiet,' he explains.

I ask Takaung how many soldiers he killed during the war. He looks at two of the small children in the room who are glued to his every word, decides against answering and returns to his sermon: 'They burnt our villages. They tortured our people. They cut off peoples' hands and threw them from helicopters. They raped our women, young children and old ladies! They put their machetes between women's legs! I saw it! They slaughtered us like animals!'

Before departing, I ask Takaung what he thinks about Panguna reopening:

'Yes, it will be a good thing,' he says. 'But first we must have independence. Then our government can talk with investors from around the world – anyone apart from BCL or Rio Tinto. They are never coming back.'

On the way back to Arawa I stop at Anewa Bay, home to Bougainville's modern port facilities. Built by BCL, it is the key to unlocking Panguna's riches. But unlike the mine and the road leading up to it, the port lies firmly in the hands of the Autonomous Government of Bougainville. Inasmuch, this gives them a veto on who gets to run the mine.

There I meet port worker Francis Baubake, a man with a wooden leg and a tragic story

to tell. 'In 1996, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force got a new mortar bomb that was untested. So they tested it on my family,' he explains. 'We were in church in a refugee camp in Buin, in the south, when it struck. My daughters Brenda and Alvina, aged 7 and 12, and my wife Sicilia were instantly killed. I lost my leg,' he says, tapping his wooden stump.

I ask Baubake who he holds accountable for his loss. He stares numbly and thinks for a while before mumbling: 'The Defence Force. And BCL.'

But when I ask what might happen if BCL returned to Bougainville, he answers immediately: 'War.'

The no-mining vote

On my fourth night in Bougainville, I'm struck with malaria and spend the evening shivering in bed; my joints and lower back burning with pain. The fever retreats the next day, but the experience makes me ponder the fate of an estimated 5,000 Bougainvillians who succumbed to malaria during the naval blockade of the 1990s, and the poor state of health of islanders today.

More than half of Bougainvillian adults are obese and alcoholism is endemic. Those with money drink South Pacific lager. Those without money drink 'steam' – a homebrew made from pineapples and yeast so potent it can cause blindness.

'The war took everything out of everyone. Everything stopped. Every house was burned down and the trauma has been passed on to this generation,' says Geoff McAndrews, a Californian who recently opened Bougainville's first surf camp on Tautsina, one of the main island's many picturesque islets. 'There are no jobs. The only thing they have for entertainment is volleyball and homebrew.'

Over the next few days, I speak with Bougainvillians from all walks of life and learn a significant minority are pro-BCL. 'If they come back, they can fix the environmental issues because they know about them,' says accountant Lindsay Kalio. 'I don't think any other company can do this as we have no relationship with them.'

Yet, more than half of those I speak to oppose any kind of mining.

'Our previous experience with mining was pollution and violence,' says Alex Takena, a fisher in Kieta. 'We should focus on sustainable industries like *copra* (coconut) and cocoa farming.'

Lawrence Robert, a carpenter in Arawa, agrees: 'I don't think it should reopen because our island is tiny and if miners come back, they'll tear it to pieces.' John Boscoe, a subsistence farmer from Oemah village in the south, adds: 'Mining did not benefit any of us in the past but we all lost our homes. The

landowners will drink milk and honey and we will get nothing.'

At an anti-BCL protest last June, women's group Mothers Against Re-Opening the Panguna chided SMLOLA for failing to consult them as the true custodians of the land in accordance with Bougainville's matrilineal lineage. 'When BCL mined our land, we were displaced and placed in settlements and still live in these settlements today,' said spokesperson Regina Eremari. 'Our gardening grounds were destroyed. Now, where will they put us if they want to mine the land again?'

For his part, Miriori simply discounts anti-mining sentiment. 'These people have to look at the bigger picture,' he says. 'Mining is the right choice... We need the revenue if we want to become an independent nation and generate employment and security. Panguna will reopen, whether they like it or not.'

Better the devil you own

A week passes until I'm strong enough to make the bone-jarring drive from Arawa to Buka, the capital. The 130km journey along Bougainville's primary arterial roadway takes four hours and fords several unbridged rivers – testament to the pitiful state of the island's infrastructure.

Buka is as fly-blown as a place can possibly be. When I arrive, the city has been under a total electricity blackout for a week for reasons no-one can explain.

When I visit Bougainville's House of Representatives to speak with President John Momis, no-one is there, and it's the same for the Ministry for Mineral and Energy Resources and BCL's little office.

Later in the day, news breaks that the SMLOLA leadership dispute has ended and Miriori has emerged victorious. 'That is correct,' Lawrence Daveona, his rival, says over the phone. 'I'm sick and tired of going to court and I don't have the money to fight it any longer.'

The latest twists in the game of thrones for Panguna's riches see RTG's share price soar 83 per cent in a single day and the inking of a 'historic' deal between the consortium and SMLOLA. 'Both the chairman [sic] and Mr Daveona have also pledged support for RTG as the preferred development partner,' RTG says in a statement. 'This is [an] important step for the landowners, with RTG being the first mining company that has been endorsed by SMLOLA in 30 years.'

But the victory is short-lived. Bougainville vice-president and minister for minerals and energy Raymond Masono also accused the latter company of bribery and corruption. 'The Autonomous Bougainville Government rejects companies that think they can bribe their way into people's resources by giving certain individuals money to gain landowner consent,' he says.

RTG subsidiaries acknowledge paying landowners like Miriori monthly stipends – a normal part of doing business in Papua New Guinea. But BCL has also been busy handing out money, and stacks of it.

In March, it distributed \$1.5 million to landowners at a public ceremony in Buka attended by mining minister Masono. 'It is not the devil that we used to know, but it's now the devil that we own,' Masono said at the ceremony, adding that it would be foolish to go out looking for other developers when BCL was knocking.

Masono's comment about 'owning the devil' refers to Rio Tinto's June 2016 decision to finally call it quits on Bougainville, and the subsequent donation of the company's majority shareholdings in BCL to the governments of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea.

RTG chairman Michael Carrick says the move was partially an attempt by Rio Tinto to stack the deck in BCL's favour. But the cards had already been stacked in a very big way by the authors of the 2015 Bougainville Mining Act, who gave BCL the first right of refusal to redevelop Panguna.

Yet, Carrick insists the Act no longer applies: 'BCL "claims" it has first right to the exploration licence under the mining act,' he says. 'But our legal advice is that the renewal application for extension of the term of their licence is invalid because it was submitted out of time and was incomplete, which means that the exploration licence expired 15 months ago.' Masono remains nonplussed, insisting BCL is still at the head and RTG doesn't even have a seat at the table. 'Right now, the only legal applicant on the exploration tenement is BCL,' he says. 'Until that process is completed, there are no other applicants or applications over the same tenement. That's the position of the government.'

The President speaks

On my last day in Bougainville, I meet President John Momis at Buka's minute airport. Right from the get-go, he contradicts Masono's position and corresponding claims that BCL has the support of the Bougainville government.

'We currently do not have a preferred partner. We will ask people who are interested to submit their applications and we will scrutinize their applications quite stringently,' he says, adding: 'We are open to discussions with BCL but there's a whole new dimension, a new platform, today. They need to win the support of landowners who own the resources.'

I ask him what he thinks about RTG's bid to redevelop Panguna, and of rumours that China is eyeing the mine. (Momis was formerly PNG's ambassador to China and is said to keep close ties with Beijing.) 'We are not sure about

'We were the owners and they turned us into beggars. They can't get away with it again!'



[RTG],’ he explains. ‘They have to convince us first [and] I don’t know if they are in a strong position. As for the Chinese, they are not [in the picture] right now. But we are open for business.’

And so the race for Panguna’s riches continues with no clear frontrunner. But whichever company wins, two things appear certain.

First, if Panguna reopens, its riches will inevitably end up in the pockets of oligarchs, intermediaries, shareholders and hopelessly corrupt officials instead of a sovereign wealth fund where it belongs. The ‘resource curse’ or ‘paradox of plenty’ dictates that countries abundant in fossil fuels and minerals tend to have less economic growth and democracy than countries with fewer natural resources. One need look no further than Hela Province on the Papua New Guinea mainland for a textbook example. There, ExxonMobil’s \$19 billion liquified natural gas project has failed to deliver any significant development outcomes for landowners. ‘In fact, it has made life worse for the majority of people living in the project area,’ says Michael Main, an Australian National University doctoral student conducting fieldwork in the area. Moreover, tribal violence has surged in Hela. At the time of writing, ExxonMobil had withdrawn all non-essential staff.

This leads to prediction number two: there will be blood. According to the World Bank, countries that export around 5 per cent of GDP have a 6 per cent risk of civil war.¹ When exports reach 25 per cent of GDP, the chance of conflict rises to 33 per cent. But when Panguna

reopens, exports of minerals will account for close to 100 per cent of Bougainville’s GDP, which doesn’t bode well under the World Bank’s formula. There will probably be a lot more if BCL makes a comeback but, either way, there will be bloodshed.

But then the seas change. A fortnight after I leave Bougainville, President Momis announces an indefinite moratorium on exploration and mining at Panguna: ‘[We] will not allow this project once again to reignite the wounds of the Bougainville crisis and distract our focus for restoring peace and our preparation for our referendum in 2019,’ local journalist Aloysius Laukai reported the President as saying.

It is a rare example of a politician in Papua New Guinea making a brave and unpopular decision that is unequivocally in the best interest of the people. ‘We in Bougainville have a huge [and] passionate ambition,’ Momis told me before parting. ‘And that ambition is to liberate ourselves from all kinds of transgressors, evil, marginalization and so forth. There will be unity to effect the kind of changes we need to become free, so we can truly become agents of change and development.’ ■

Ian Neubauer is a Sydney-based freelance journalist and photojournalist with a decade’s experience of working as a visiting reporter in Papua New Guinea for *TIME*, *al-Jazeera*, *BBC*, *CNN*, *The Diplomat* and *The Australian Financial Review*, among others.

¹ World Bank, *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions*, 2003, nin.tl/Resources-and-Violence

**An uncertain future:
two children descend
moss-covered steps in
Panguna City.**

Southern Exposure

Highlighting the work of artists and photographers from the Majority World



Egyptian photographer **Mostafa Bassim** usually documents political and social unrest, having started his career during the 2011 revolution. However, this bittersweet scene of young factory workers preparing to sell cotton candy on the streets during their 'time off' in Cairo shows a different side to Bassim's work. With nearly a quarter of its population in the 18-29 age group, Egypt's disproportionately high rate of youth unemployment (currently 30 per cent) is sometimes referred to by analysts as a 'ticking time bomb'. Bassim's photos have been featured in *al-Jazeera*, *The Washington Post*, *AFP* and *Jacobin*. He is currently based in Washington, DC. mostafabassim.com



Almee Heat

Pass me my tinfoil hat

Conspiracy theories are, by and large, total guff. But with the state of politics as dysfunctional as it is, I find myself drawn to the comfortable surety of the conspiracist. Take Donald Trump. He is such a terrifying parody of the narcissistic megalomaniac that the idea he might be a lizard or a hologram is at very least an explanation. Besides, even if he is human, that hair has definitely been styled by the same alien that pioneered the crop circle.

It would be hard to say anything more ludicrous than Trump says already; if he were a lizard, I'm confident it wouldn't make much difference. It also helps the conspiracy that he looks like he spends a good few hours a day under an ultraviolet lamp.

Conspiracy theories gain purchase when traditional explanations of the world cease to add up; and face it, we don't have enough fingers between us to work out our current global conundrum. Once the President of the United States is suggesting arming teachers to solve the problem of school shootings, you're entering a realm where you have to leave your critical faculties in a little tray at the door.

Things are so utterly, utterly broken, simply not buying into the mainstream's narrow propaganda can make you seem like part of the enlightened, even if that rejection of received wisdom is replaced with a belief that Barack Obama was born in Glasgow and the Twin Towers were made of papier mâché. There has been a meltdown at the rationality reactor and it's every man, woman and lizard for themselves.

Conspiracy theorists are not after real solutions, they want easy answers to complex material problems that require real engagement, not cynical, defeatist, pseudo-

intellectual codswallop. Yet, as the old news outlets crumble, crackpot websites are filling the gap with titillating, fact-free clickbait and making a bloody fortune.

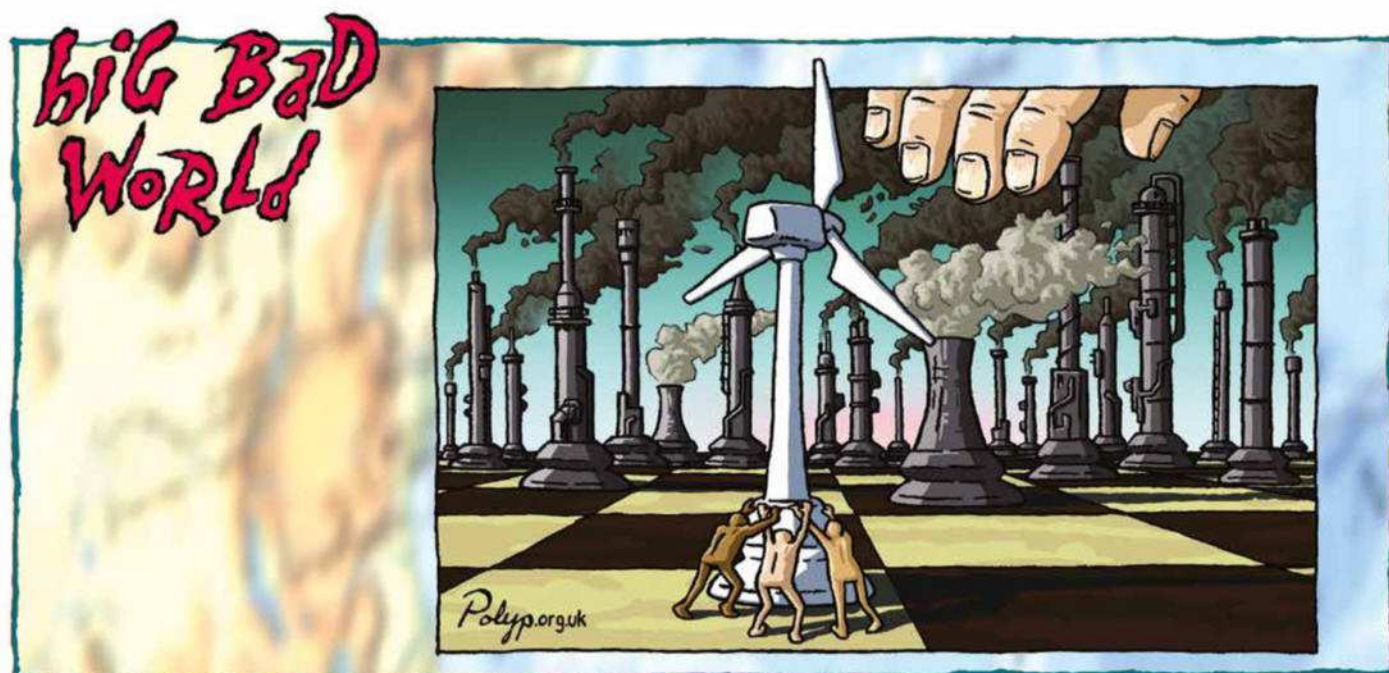
'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em,' I say. If there's good money in the conspiracy industry, then I'm in. You see, I've come up with a thesis that could make me a fortune and turn me into a kind of cosmic Che Guevara figure.

My conspiracy relates to a unique power. A power I almost certainly acquired when abducted by aliens. Whenever I visit a new country, my mere presence causes political earthquakes. I first noticed it on holiday in Barcelona last year where I was, in many ways, instrumental to Basque separatists, ETA, decommissioning their weapons. I don't like to make a fuss but would it really have happened without me drinking at a tapas bar off Las Ramblas at the time? It's not for me to say...

You might call this coincidence, a mere fluke. Indeed, I'd be with you were it not for a recent work trip to South Africa during which President Jacob Zuma resigned. If that's not proof of a potent political magnetism then I don't know what is.

So I'm going for it: down the conspiracy theory rabbit hole, where a future of lucrative keynote speeches and vanity publishing awaits. If any readers wish to test my incredible abilities I will gladly oblige in exchange for return flights, hotel reservations and a modest fee. Please bear in mind that my psychic skills work best in sunnier climates. ■

Steve Parry is a comedy writer and broadcaster. He's from south Wales and lives in north London. Twitter: @Stevejparry



The Beast (107 minutes)

directed and written by **Michael Pearce**

This, for the first 90 minutes, is a Jersey-set did-he-do-it thriller about a teenage girl whose family righteousness, snobbery and control take her passionately into the arms of a bad boy poacher. There are echoes of *Lady Chatterley*, with the complication that the police suspect him of a series of murders of teenage girls. Home-tutored Moll meets the slightly older Pascal when she's abandoned her own 18th birthday party, angered that her self-centred elder sister has hijacked it, and he's rescued her from a sexual assault after she's spent the night dancing at a club. This is all socially and emotionally perceptive, well-plotted, absorbing, and has a stand-out central performance from Jessie Buckley. The obedient, dutiful chorister, thoughtful and increasingly independent and bold, moves in with Pascal, stands by him when he's arrested, and lies for him.

It's nicely set up and we want the best for them – for the bad boy to be shown to be good, to have been misunderstood and undervalued. For Moll's intuition about Pascal to be right, for her family and the community to be

Is he – or is he not – the girl-murdering 'beast'?



wrong. It's a clever, well-constructed and executed debut feature, though, finally, and disappointingly, descends into mind-games and becomes more about genre and spectacle, than reality.

★★★★ ML

FILM

The Wound (Inxeba) (88 minutes)

directed and co-written by **John Trengove**

In the mountains, stripped to red-striped tribal blankets, their bodies painted a dull white, one by one the teenage boys part their legs for the elder to slice away their foreskins. It's the Xhosa coming-of-age ritual, and no-one screams or cries – they now have to be men. Each has a mentor who has been through it, shares their small round hut during two weeks of starvation, and tends the wound with traditional herbs.

Xolani, a warehouse worker, is a mentor who returns every year. He's reserved, gentle, sympathetic, and, though he can't admit it publicly, gay. He's there because he's in love with Vija, a boyhood friend, who is married, also in the closet, and as distractingly macho and loud as Xolani is

quiet. In Xolani's care is Kwanda, a hipster sophisticate with a nose ring and designer trainers. His flash SUV-driving father says he is soft. He's not. He's gay. And he doesn't take long to clock Xolani and Vija.

Trengove's debut sets us up for a South African *Brokeback Mountain*. In a wild, but normal, socially sanctioned setting, the two men can, secretly, be themselves. But it's a setting where the cultural model of what it means to be a man is passed on and is threatening for Vija and Xolani. Kwanda doesn't realize quite how much.

This is an acute discomfiting feature about social constructs, masculinity, intolerance, keeping feelings hidden, and what that does to you.

★★★★ ML

Men trying to be themselves in John Trengove's coming-of-age drama.



Visit Malphino

by **Malphino** (Lex CD, LP and digital)

You can live in the damp and dream of the Tropics: this is the founding myth of Malphino and the band's fantasy island of the same name. Malphino's founders, DJ Yu Sato, tuba player David Aird and accordionist Alex Barrow, share a passion for Colombian *cumbia* and *banda* and Pacific cultures, and this album has a lightness of touch and weather system distant from the band's east London home. **Visit Malphino** is a gentle, beguiling travel advert for Neverland, a place where the dancing never stops.

It's hard to resist the vision. The original band augmented by percussion and organ, their music draws on the premise of exotica music – think of the tiki music of bandleader Martin Denny or the samba spectacular of Carmen Miranda, both from the 1950s. Some of Malphino's members do have roots from the lands they draw their tools from, and the band certainly has a greater knowingness in how it utilizes its borrowings and ensuing creations than has perhaps been evinced by others in the



past. Postmodern in its methodology and post-production in its method, electronic squeaks and squelches nudge the dance along in a pleasant-enough way.

★★★★ LG
lexprojects.com

A gentle, beguiling fantasy brought to you by Malphino.

MUSIC

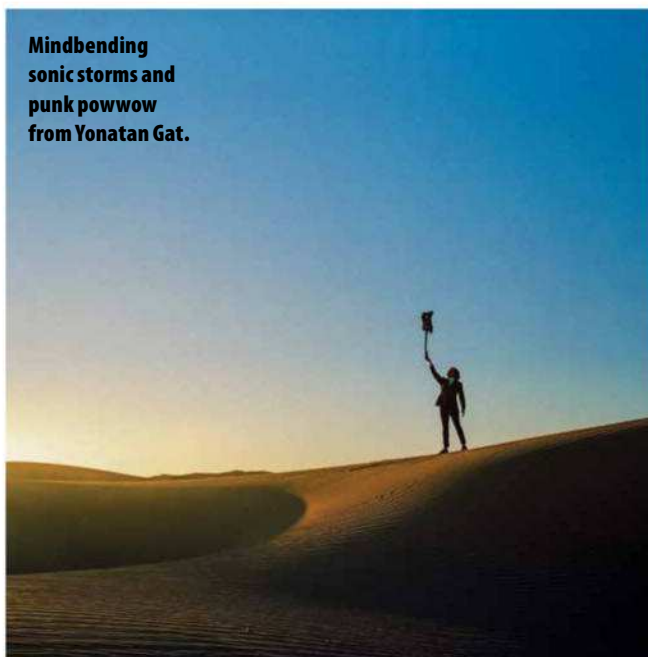
Universalists

by **Yonatan Gat** (tak:til, CD, LP and digital)

Making a fearsome noise on guitars and fuzzed feedback, comes Yonatan Gat, with a mission to unite the world in noise. Originally from Tel Aviv, although now based in New York, Gat has some form in his quest. His previous band, a post-punk trio named Monotonix, was so disruptive to the norms of the performer-audience relationship that they were banned from playing in Israel. Now, working under his own steam, Gat's **Universalists** album travels world cultures to find common cause in rhythm and sonic storms.

It's a mind-bending result, and while there's a lot of volume here, there are also sections of quiet sensitivity. If you define the concept of 'noise' as sound out of place, as something intrusive (this is an extension of the anthropologist Mary

Mindbending sonic storms and punk powwow from Yonatan Gat.

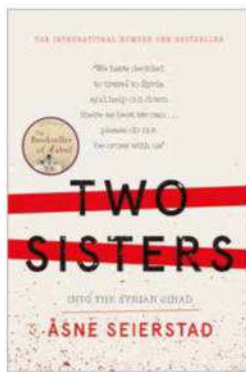


Douglas's definition of dirt as matter out of place), you then need to ask what is the 'in place' sound that it rubs against.

For Gat, alongside drummer Gal Lazer and bassist Sergio Sayeg, one answer lies in a questioning relationship to hierarchies. This is a process that's implicit, but very

much present nonetheless. Using field recordings of many different types of music – among them, an Italian choir from the 1950s, a Spanish harvest song, Balinese gamelan – and then splicing them into a mix structured around Gat's slabs of guitar, a sense of an outside music is created, one that is vitally charged and communally relevant. On 'Medicine', probably the most rhythmically frenzied track, Gat is joined by the Eastern Medicine Singers, an Algonquin drum group from Rhode Island: the punk powwow produced is powerful.

★★★★ LG
yonatangat.com



Two Sisters Into the Syrian Jihad

by **Åsne Seierstad**, translated by **Seán Kinsella** (*Virago*, ISBN 978 0 349 00905 6)

In October 2013, Ayan and Leila – then aged 19 and 16 – voluntarily left their home in Oslo and travelled to Syria to find husbands and support the creation of a new Islamic State. Convinced that they had been brainwashed or kidnapped, their father spent the next two years desperately trying to get them back.

Journalist Åsne Seierstad, best known for *The Bookseller of Kabul*, painstakingly recreates the girls' story from multiple sources – including, 21st-century drama that this is, fascinating social-media conversations between the girls and their family and friends both before and after their arrival in Syria. How did two intelligent and articulate teenagers come to be radicalized? What led them to take

such a bold and irreversible step?

Though this is their story, it is also the story of the girls' family – a father who risks everything, including his mental and physical health, and his integrity, to bring them home; a mother who takes her two youngest sons back to Somaliland to ensure a moderate Muslim upbringing away from the perceived threat of radicalization in Norway; and a brother whose response is to embrace atheism. The family's crisis is placed within a wider context of the war in Syria and the failure of the West and of society – even in a country trying hard to embrace diversity – to tackle the real issues behind it.

Two Sisters was a prize-winning bestseller in Norway. Its appeal is understandable, but don't expect a comfortable read: your sympathies may not end up where you think.

★★★★ JL
virago.co.uk

A Moonless, Starless Sky

by **Alexis Okeowo** (*Corsair*, ISBN 9781472153715)

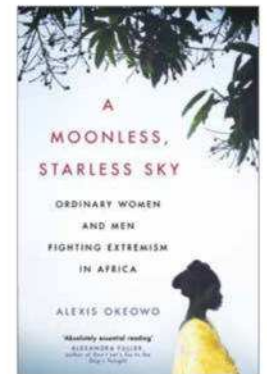
Alexis Okeowo has given her volume of reportage the subtitle 'ordinary women and men fighting extremism in Africa' and that is both an accurate description of the book's contents and a pointer to the author's fresh approach to her subject matter. Okeowo, an American journalist based in Lagos for six years, eschews both the flashy headline and the superficial overview in her attempt to portray the lives of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

In these interwoven narratives from four African countries she highlights successful community action to face down extremism. In Uganda we learn of Eunice and Bosco, teenagers kidnapped by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army who manage, against all the odds to escape and forge a life and family together. In Mauritania we hear how one man's opposition to modern-day slavery grew from a lonely, quixotic fight into a national

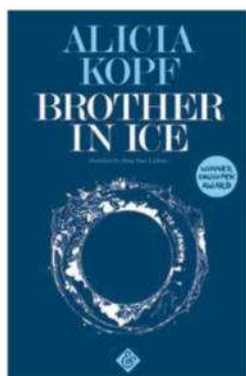
campaign. The third narrative thread concerns the foundation of community vigilante groups in Nigeria to combat the violence and destruction of Boko Haram. Finally, in Somalia, barely a country, the astounding tale unfolds of a women's basketball team's heroic struggle to survive in the face of religious bigotry and intolerance.

Alexis Okeowo has a journalistic eye for the telling detail and her vivid prose is a fitting testament to these courageous individuals. Each of these stories is an illustration of how seemingly small acts of resistance and rebellion can be the catalyst for change and the foundation for hope, even in the direst of situations.

★★★★ PW
littlebrown.co.uk



BOOKS



Brother in Ice

by **Alicia Kopf**, translated by **Mara Faye Lethem** (*And Other Stories*, ISBN 978 1 911508 20 5)

From the heart of Europe, Catalan Alicia Kopf's narrator (who may or may not be a fictionalized version of the author) finds herself drawn to the mysteries of the polar world, and she starts researching the explorers, scientists and artists whose life mission it was to unravel them. Snowflakes, snow globes and the wonderfully named ice blinks

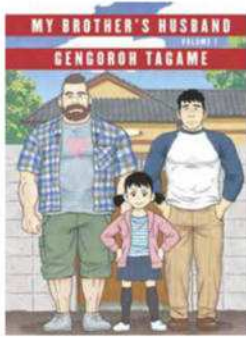
all hold a fascination for her, as does the polar silence which seems to reflect the situation of her autistic brother, who is unable to express himself properly and whose actions freeze up, so that simple tasks take lengthy amounts of time.

But like ice, this work – part research notes, part fictionalized diary, part travelogue – has many layers, and

the most interesting are those that focus on the narrator's own challenges as she undergoes an inner exploration of her creativity, her relationship with lovers and with her family – which she refers to as a 'cold war' – and the effects of recession and austerity on herself and her peers. Her inner journey, which she describes as a 'personal deconstruction', leaves her bruised and fragile, so she escapes to Iceland, her personal utopia, acknowledging that 'it is much easier to get to the Arctic than to reach certain areas of oneself'.

It is possible to escape to the ends of the earth, to seek the numbing of pain that can be found in ice and snow. But, as this brave and honest narrative reveals, the most important journey we can undertake is inwards – and that requires the courage to allow oneself to thaw.

★★★ JL
andotherstories.org



My Brother's Husband

by **Gengoroh Tagame**
(Blackfriars Books,
ISBN 978 0 349 13457 4)

Chunky, hairy and cuddly Canadian, Mike Flanagan turns up at the door of Yiachi, a divorcee who is bringing up his young daughter, Kana. Mike declares

that he is the widower of Yiachi's estranged gay twin brother. What follows in this remarkable and delightful graphic novel is the story of how Yiachi has to rethink his assumptions about what makes a family, about sexuality, and about how he treated his late brother. Leading him in his painful and difficult education is his sparky and perceptive young daughter, Kana. Manga artist Gengoroh Tegame's spare but deftly expressive style, captures the nuances in a stunning and highly imaginative way. Feelings and states of minds are conveyed with the simplest of lines, shifts of perspective, angle, proportion. So is the social context and attitudes towards sexual non-conformity in contemporary Japan. Moving, sometimes hilarious – and simply brilliant.

★★★★★ VB
blackfriarsbooks.com

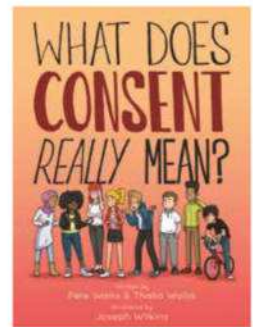
What does consent really mean?

by **Pete Wallis** and **Thalia Wallis**, illustrated by **Joseph Wilkins** (Singing Dragon, ISBN 978 1 84819 330 7)

A teenage girl is raped. Four of her peers respond in diverse ways. Some repeat the harsh words appearing on social media – the girl must have deserved it; she must have been drunk. Others challenge this view.

'What is consent anyway?' asks one in this lively graphic novel, aimed at a teenage market. This leads the friends to reflect upon their own experiences and interactions, a conversation that soon also involves the teenage boys they know, to explore the pressures of gender and sexual expectations. Effective, realistic, didactic – but with a light touch and a welcome (racial and sexual, though the latter only hinted at) diversity. The take-away message is that consent is a loud and enthusiastic 'yes', not the absence of 'no'. Spot on.

★★★★★ VB
singingdragon.com



Also out there...

MUSIC Catch them if you can: Lebanese rockers **Mashrou' Leila** command a big fan-base across much of the Middle East, but their progressive lyrics and out-gay vocalist, Hamed Sinno, predictably draws conservative ire. They'll be in Europe for a short summer tour; otherwise catch their 2017 single, 'Roman', online to get a taste of the flavour. The eponymous album from **The Turbans** (Glitterbeat!) comes courtesy of two Anglo-Iranians, Oshan Mahony and Darius Luke Thompson, who collided by chance on holiday in Nepal. They busked around India, returned to the UK and, rather than churn out a feel-good *mélange* of world beats, have turned in a debut that's politically conscious in all the right places. And it sounds good, too. **Sandra Bell's Net** (Drawing Room Records) was first released in 1994, then, due to small labels and lousy distribution, disappeared until this hugely welcome re-release. There is a swing and intonation to Bell's delivery that's reminiscent of the swagger of garage rockers such as Courtney Love.

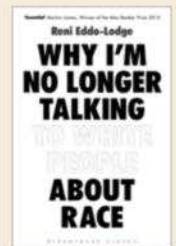


FILM In Canadian Kathleen Hepburn's **Never Steady, Never Still**, Shirley Henderson deals with increasing loss of function because of Parkinson's, as her similarly gutsy teenage son deals with his first job on a remote oil rig. Coming of age in a macho world; and fortitude, fragility, and tenderness at home. The great Claire Denis' latest **Let the Sunshine In**, has high-heeled, teeny-skirt wearing Juliette Binoche meet a succession of would-be lovers. She's flirty and beautifully dishevelled; they're

arses, and the film's a disaster. Raoul Peck, once Haiti's minister of culture, wrote and directed 2017's brilliant Oscar-nominated *I Am Not Your Negro* (about James Baldwin). His latest film, **The Young Karl Marx** again places a vital political character in their historical context and points to their passionate commitment and contemporary relevance. Accessible, entertaining, unmissable. Five stars.



BOOKS The new edition of bestselling **Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race** (Bloomsbury) includes an extra chapter in which author Reni Eddo-Lodge talks about what has happened since the book was first published in early 2017. It makes fascinating reading – and serves to confirm her previous observation that she wrote the book, ironically, 'to continue the conversation'. Eddo-Lodge shifts the debate to another level with no-nonsense directness and a vivid, chatty ease. Saudi Arabia is in the news these days – for bombing Yemen, for allowing women to drive, and attempting the reform of a failing oil economy. **Salman's Legacy: the dilemmas of a new era in Saudi Arabia** (Hurst), edited by Madawi al-Rasheed (see **NI 490**), is therefore timely as well as scholarly. Especially interesting is the forward-looking section on foreign relations with chapters on King Salman and his son (the belligerent young Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman), and the rise of China in the Gulf.



REVIEWS EDITOR: **Vanessa Baird** email: vanessab@newint.org

Reviewers: Louise Gray, Rahila Gupta, Jo Lateu, Malcolm Lewis, Peter Whittaker

STAR RATING

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ VERY GOOD ★★★ GOOD ★★ FAIR ★ POOR

'One of the most hated words in Pakistan is "liberal"'

PERVEZ HOODBHOY is one of South Asia's leading nuclear physicists and an eminent Pakistani academic and intellectual. He talks to ANDY HEINTZ about growing religious extremism and the troubled legacy of international actors in the region.

Do you think veiling is mostly an autonomous choice made by Muslim women in Pakistan? Or is it something forced upon them because of pressure from Islamists?

Pressure from Islamists to cover up is a fact. The extent varies from culture to culture. It is strongest in Saudi Arabia. Turkey was relaxed about it until Erdoğan took over. As for Pakistan, it was once a non-issue but the pressure has steadily increased from the 1980s onwards as people have become more pious.

The mullahs want every woman in burqa. In 2007, I brought a radio broadcast from Islamabad's Red Mosque to the attention of the authorities at Quaid-e-Azam University. The two institutions are practically next door to each other – just about two miles as the crow flies. The head cleric – our ex-student – had threatened that his female students would throw acid on the faces of QAU female students unless they covered their faces. QAU's vice-chancellor did not respond. So, as chair of the physics department, I called a student body meeting in the physics auditorium. That meeting ended with a vote condemning the throwing of acid, but not by a huge margin. There were many pro-burqa voices.

Veiling isn't only because of fear of violence. There are enormous social pressures now. Increasing conservatism among Muslims has led to uncovered faces being regarded as

sinful. Once upon a time there was no burqa on campus except maybe the odd one here or there. But today most women at my university – where I have taught for 44 years – are either in burqa or hijab. It's hard to associate names with these covered-up entities. Exams become a real problem, as do thesis defences.

What are the biggest reasons driving young Pakistani men to embrace religious extremism?

Biased education poisons minds. The curriculum, textbooks, teachers and exams all act to create an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. Islam is shown as under siege by the evil West as well as India. And then there's the electronic and print media – mostly privately owned – which drips with piety and with conspiracy theories that attribute all our ills to India, Israel and the United States. It seizes upon their every fault and then multiplies by ten. So a mindset is created wherein young people imagine that they, and their religion, are beset by enemies lurking behind every bush. The West is excoriated for being selective and hypocritical – which it surely is. But there's no introspection, no explanation for how *we* went wrong. Ask a student why East Pakistan broke off to become Bangladesh and you'll get the pat answer: it was a Hindu conspiracy. They won't know of the genocide West Pakistan carried out there in 1971.

Attributing religious extremism to poverty or lack of education was once a popular explanation. But local newspapers have countless stories of young religious killers from affluent middle-class families. Several had studied at Pakistan's best known public and private institutions.

Why is religious extremism so rampant in Pakistan?

I don't think that there is just one single reason. Think of a bomb, a fairly complex object. To make one you need the explosive, oxidizer, trigger, shell, etc. None alone can do the job. The same goes for religious extremism in Pakistan. One ingredient is to be found in the country's genesis. Pakistan was brought into being on the slogan that Muslims simply cannot live alongside Hindus. This wove religion into the national fabric. But, in spite of this, and rampant poverty and illiteracy, Pakistan could have moved in a progressive, secular direction. This appeared to be happening in the first couple of decades after independence but then other factors kicked in. In the 1980s, all progressive trends were rapidly reversed once Pakistan and the US created an international *jihad* consortium for fighting against the Soviet Union. That was a turning point.

From the day the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, American diplomatic strategy was to mobilize world opinion against them. Officials like Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defence, saw Afghanistan not as the locale of a harsh and dangerous conflict to be ended, but as a place to teach the Russians a lesson. Given the highly conservative nature of Afghan society, it did not need a genius to suggest that Islamic international solidarity could be used as a powerful weapon. The task of creating such solidarity fell upon Saudi Arabia, together with

other conservative Arab monarchies. This duty was accepted readily and they quickly made the Afghan jihad their central cause. It was a natural course of action to take. And very convenient too, for multiple reasons.

First, they felt genuinely threatened by the Soviets. Second, it shielded their patron and ally, the US, whose direct confrontation with the Soviets would have been dangerous and unwise in a nuclear-armed world. But still more importantly, to go heart and soul for jihad was crucial at a time when Saudi legitimacy as the guardians of Islam was under strong challenge by Iran, which pointed to the continued occupation of Palestine by America's partner, Israel. An increasing number of Saudis were becoming disaffected by the House of Saud – its corruption, self-indulgence, repression and closeness to the US. Therefore, the jihad in Afghanistan provided an excellent outlet for the growing number of militant Sunni activists in Saudi Arabia, and a way to deal with the daily taunts of the Iranian clergy.

In Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq shoved Islam down our people's throats. You couldn't get a job in my [physics] department unless you could rattle off certain holy verses. Education was drastically changed and fashioned into a propaganda tool, and the mass media became a means for indoctrination. This strategy created the infrastructure for fashioning the mujahideen into a force that ultimately defeated the Soviets. But it also created the fanatics who later attacked their former masters, both American and Pakistani.

Why is the Pakistani Left insignificant on the national scene?

Before General Zia-ul-Haq took over [in 1978] the Pakistani Left was relatively strong. That Left should be credited with unionizing industrial and railway workers, helping peasants organize against powerful landlords, inspiring Pakistan's minority provinces to demand their rights, and setting standards of writing and journalism. But even at its peak during the 1970s, the Left could not muster even a fraction of the street power of the Islamic or mainstream parties.

Whatever you do and say in Pakistan has to be judged according to Islam. That has limited the appeal of progressive movements among the masses.

A mindset is created wherein young people imagine that they, and their religion, are beset by enemies lurking behind every bush

Consider the following: one of the most hated words in Pakistan is 'liberal' because that is seen as un-Islamic. But you can't be leftwing without being liberal. By liberal, I mean one who values the freedom of expression – personal and political. A liberal says you have the right to dress and wear the clothes of your personal choice... to eat and drink as you will, pray often or pray never, and choose your religion or not have one at all. In the liberal mind, covering a woman's face or head should be entirely optional. So every leftist is a liberal by this definition but all liberals are not leftists.

What would a more enlightened US foreign policy in the Middle East look like?

I have no expectations of Donald Trump, but if there were someone decent in the White House they would need to make three major shifts for an enlightened US foreign policy. First, a declaration that the US will withdraw all support to Israel unless it agrees to a Palestinian state comprising of territories more or less along the pre-1967 war borders. This would be an important step towards justice for the Palestinians, as well as take some wind out of the sails of those who peddle anti-West hatred. For too long the US has looked at the Middle East through Israeli eyes. This must change.

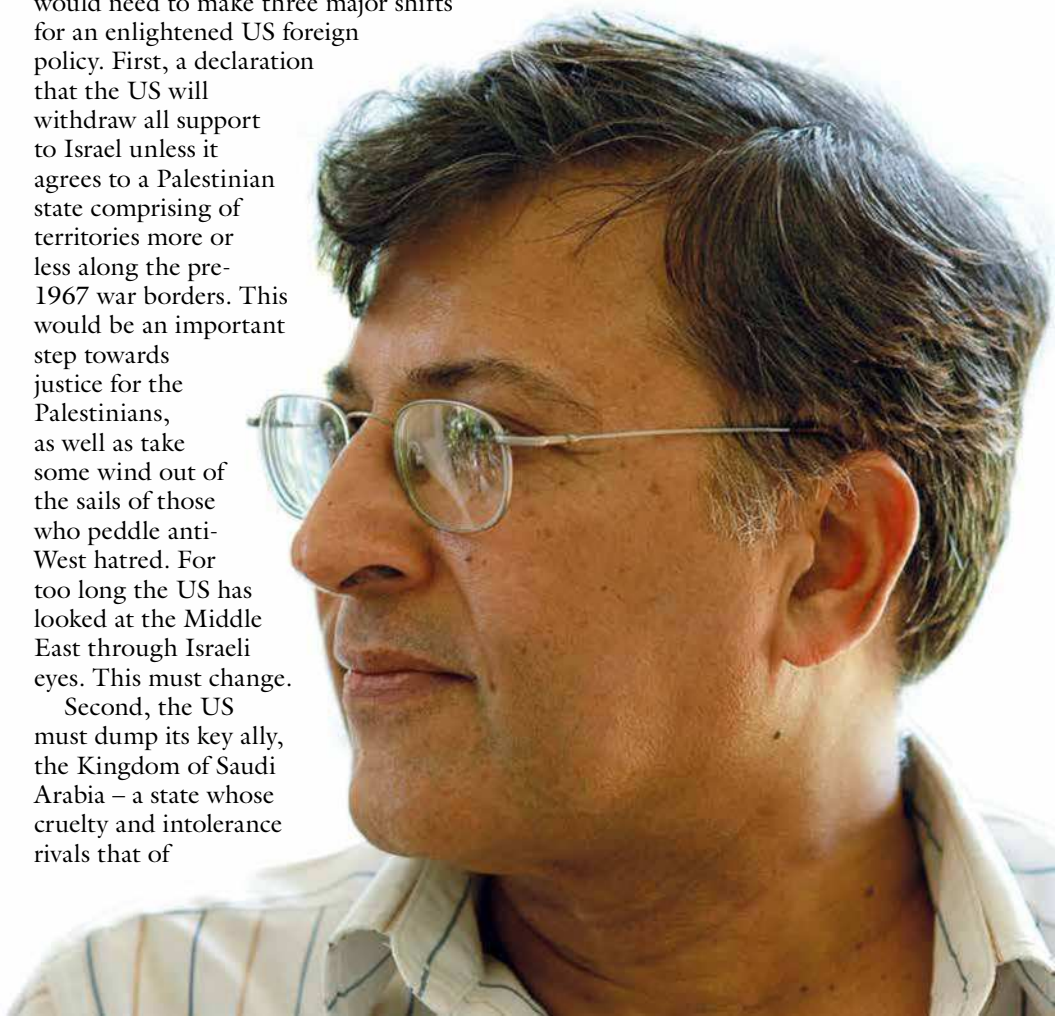
Second, the US must dump its key ally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – a state whose cruelty and intolerance rivals that of

Da'ish (otherwise known as ISIS). Saudi Arabia is the principal exporter of conservative Islam across the world and the fountainhead of Islamic radicalism in the world.

Third, while vocally criticizing the human rights situation in Iran, the US must work with this Shi'a nation rather than see it as an adversary. Iran is not an ideal partner to work with but the defeat of Da'ish must take precedence over all else. The Middle East today, with its current artificial boundaries, is bound to change. By taking Iran, Russia and China as partners, the US could help engineer some minimum-pain solution in Syria, Iraq and Libya.

Aggressive US imperialism has played a huge role in bringing about the terrible tragedies occurring across the Middle East. But for the 2003 invasion of Iraq there would have been no Da'ish. Still, you cannot turn back the clock. Adopting even an ideal US policy today will not eliminate extremism in Pakistan or in the Middle East. ■

Andy Heintz is a freelance writer from Iowa, US. He is writing a book called *Dissidents of the International Left*, which features more than 50 interviews with leftists from around the world.





Shutting down guns and greed

Two of the most important recent developments in US politics have come from social movements involving schools. Each has a different look and generational profile, but they are united in a common tactic: the use of disruptive power.

The first movement rose after a horrific mass shooting: on 14 February a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida opened fire on students, staff and teachers, killing 17 people.

Given America's toxic gun culture, such incidents happen so frequently that there is a well-established pattern of response: the public expresses horror, politicians extend thoughts and prayers to victims, and then the National Rifle Association's ruthlessly effective lobby squelches any real action as soon as headlines die down.

This particular case has unfolded differently for two reasons. First, students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas forcefully asserted that they would not tolerate stonewalling or empty pledges. Second, they showed themselves to be brilliant organizers. Students descended upon legislators, spoke on every major morning talk show and started planning school walkouts. On 14 March, students from across the US walked out of their classrooms to protest inaction on gun control.

At one rally, student organizer Emma Gonzalez (right) expressed the movement's determination: 'We are going to be the kids you read about in textbooks; not because we're going to be another statistic about mass shooting in America but because... we are going to be the last mass shooting.'

Ten days later students led a huge nationwide 'March for Our Lives', with more walkouts planned for coming months.

The second major mobilization was led not by students, but by teachers. On 22 February, union educators in West Virginia went on strike, denouncing skyrocketing healthcare costs and the persistent underfunding of public schools. In a place where generations of coalminers had battled against state troopers and company thugs, the teachers galvanized widespread public support for their massive, statewide disruption. Some wore red shirts and bandanas to recall the famous 'Battle of Blair Mountain', one of the most storied strikes in US history.

After spending nearly two weeks on the picket line, and after courageously turning down an inadequate settlement offer, the teachers won. They defeated rightwing measures to eliminate union protections and won substantial raises not only for themselves, but for all state employees. The upheaval provided a major surge for the beleaguered US labour movement. Inspired, educators in Oklahoma, where teachers have not received a raise in a decade, have vowed to strike this spring if the legislature does not increase education budgets.

Students organizing around gun control have also made an impact. In Florida – a place

sometimes known as the 'Gunshine State' – the conservative state legislature passed initial restrictions on firearms, although the students are pushing for far more.

Frances Fox Piven, the great theorist of disruptive power, argues that the major moments of democratic reform in our society occur when 'people cease to conform to accustomed institutional roles'. This happens when workers withhold their work, when tenants refuse to pay rent and when passive pensioners form crowds that flood state offices demanding relief.

Berkeley Free Speech activist Mario Savio poetically explained the idea in 1964: 'There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious... [that] you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.'

Sadly, such action is too rarely deployed. The number of strikes, for one, is at a historic low. Between 1950 and 1975 there were an average of 281 work stoppages each year in the US involving more than a thousand people. Last year there were seven.

Disruption is power. We need to use it. ■



Mark Engler is the co-author of *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-first Century* (Nation Books). He can be reached via DemocracyUprising.com

Puzzle Page by Axe

The crossword prize is a voucher for our online shop to the equivalent of £20/\$30. Only the winner will be notified. Send your entries by 23 May to: New Internationalist Puzzle Page, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK; or email a scan to: puzzlepage@newint.org
Winner for 229: Dimitry Fedotov, Sheffield, England.

Crossword 231

CRYPTIC Across

- 8 Greek island Brussels, making a point, put through the crusher (6)
- 9 Indigenous West Indian's a Green; also known as close to Republican (8)
- 10 University college, the last in Denmark in a country campus, but not in old Zealand? (8)
- 11 One tabloid's against Spanish monarchy (6)
- 12 Americans seen on the west coast after embarrassing Carolinas 'fin'... (12)
- 14 ...many of them leaders in dull reactionary states (7)
- 16 Lap-dancing, Ms Breckenridge, in an old Syrian locale (7)
- 19 New York's capital place (along with Kildare, for example), to get a cool onshore breeze (6,6)
- 22 Remote alien thing? (6)
- 23 Iranian province beheaded Beethoven's prisoner (8)
- 24 New Englanders to expel those from Sarajevo (8)
- 25 Accountant's help being reviewed to create a Cajun community (6)

CRYPTIC Down

- 1 Agra UK nun went round with a caste dissenter (4,5)
- 2 Japanese island house at which most of the clan

- 3 A vehicle reversed in Dijon row to flee the tribe (6)
- 4 Fop's got no yen to get round: no good above Chinatown! (7)
- 5 Cuban city? Spanish spoken here (2,6)
- 6 Doldrums, they say, defines Asian people of the tropics (6)
- 7 He explored Africa, Botswana included (5)
- 13 Southern constellation divided navigators with no time to dwell (4,5)
- 15 Edmonton chap goes to Acton on vacation (8)
- 17 American vessel's guns are brought up, going after Scot's oil from here (8)
- 18 BBC-type could be mustard nationally (7)
- 19 Entrance to the underworld's cavernous interior (6)
- 20 Dodecanese river animals, the first pair from this part of Greece (6)
- 21 Doctor, doctor, I'm getting a little red! (5)

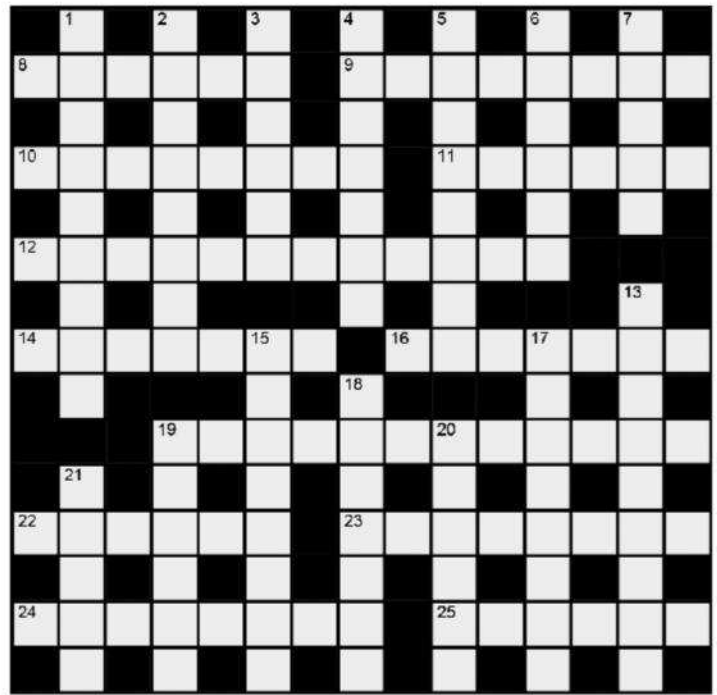
QUICK Across

- 8 Greece's second-largest island in area (6)
- 9 Aboriginal American, forced out of the Greater Antilles by Caribs (8)
- 10 Largest city in Aotearoa-

- New Zealand in population (8)
- 11 Former kingdom and modern autonomous region of Spain (6)
- 12 Citizens of the 31st, 'Golden' state... (12)
- 14 ...and two contiguous states separated in 1889, capitals Bismark and Pierre (7)
- 16 Ancient Syrian city said to be built by Solomon, desecrated by so-called IS (7)
- 19 Cool breeze blowing inland in W Australia off the Southern Ocean (6,6)
- 22 Small solid extraterrestrial body that hits the earth's atmosphere (6)
- 23 Most common spelling for an Iranian Zagros Mts province, capital Khorramabad (8)
- 24 Former Yugoslavians (8)
- 25 Old name for Nova Scotia, before the ejection of the French (6)

QUICK Down

- 1 Indian religious leader who founded Sikhism (4,5)
- 2 Most northern of Japan's main islands, capital Sapporo (8)
- 3 Native American; with 300,000 members, the largest federally recognized US tribe (6)
- 4 Formerly called Antung, China's most northerly ice-free deep-water port (7)
- 5 Capital of Cuba (in Spanish!) (2,6)
- 6 Asian peoples whose name is given to the world's largest archipelago (6)
- 7 Italian father and son New World explorers (5)
- 13 Southern constellation now subdivided into Puppis, Vela, Carina and Pyxis (4,5)
- 15 Native or resident of one of Canada's prairie provinces (8)



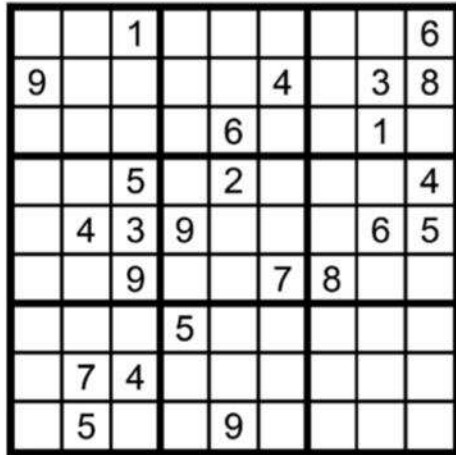
- 17 Historic port, aka Ujung Padang, straits between Sulawesi and Borneo (variant spelling) (8)
- 18 International language, by assumption (7)
- 19 Lake -----, Italian name for the mythological entrance to the underworld (6)
- 20 Member of one of the four linguistic divisions of the prehistoric Greeks (6)
- 21 Classic claret from west bank of the Gironde (5)

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION

Across: 8 Demerara, 9 Atomic, 10 Latina, 11 Amorites, 12 Lake Tana, 13 Adonis, 14 French Indo-China, 18 Aviles, 20 Orcadian, 23 Brisbane, 24 El Paso, 25 Napoli, 26 Illyrian.
Down: 1 Kerala, 2 Belizean, 3 Masada, 4 Bahasa Indonesia, 5 Pago Pago, 6 Bonito, 7 Nigerian, 15 River Tay, 16 Hispanic, 17 Hyde Park, 19 Lisbon, 21 Creole, 22 Anshan.

Sudoku 77

The Sudoku that thinks it's a word game!



Now, using the key below, substitute letters for the numbers in the north-east block...

1=K; 2=J; 3=I; 4=N; 5=S; 6=U; 7=A; 8=L; 9=E

...and make as many words as you can of four letters or more from the nine letters in the keyword, the extra clue to which is: 'Incomplete kind of box found among west-facing French islands and contracted by one who fought the Crusaders'. You cannot use the same letter more than once, nor use proper nouns (excepting the keyword), slang, offensive words, abbreviations, participles or simple plurals (adding an 's' or 'es').

GOOD 70 words of at least four letters, including 20 of five letters or more.

VERY GOOD 75 words of at least four letters, including 25 of five letters or more.

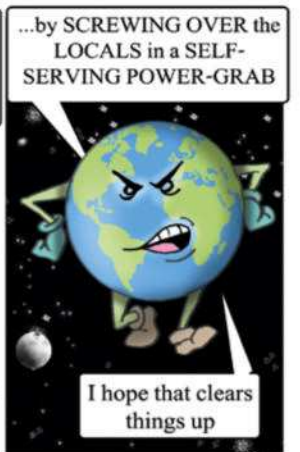
EXCELLENT 80 words of at least four letters, including 30 of five letters or more.

Last month's Sudokey keyword: 'Shortland'.

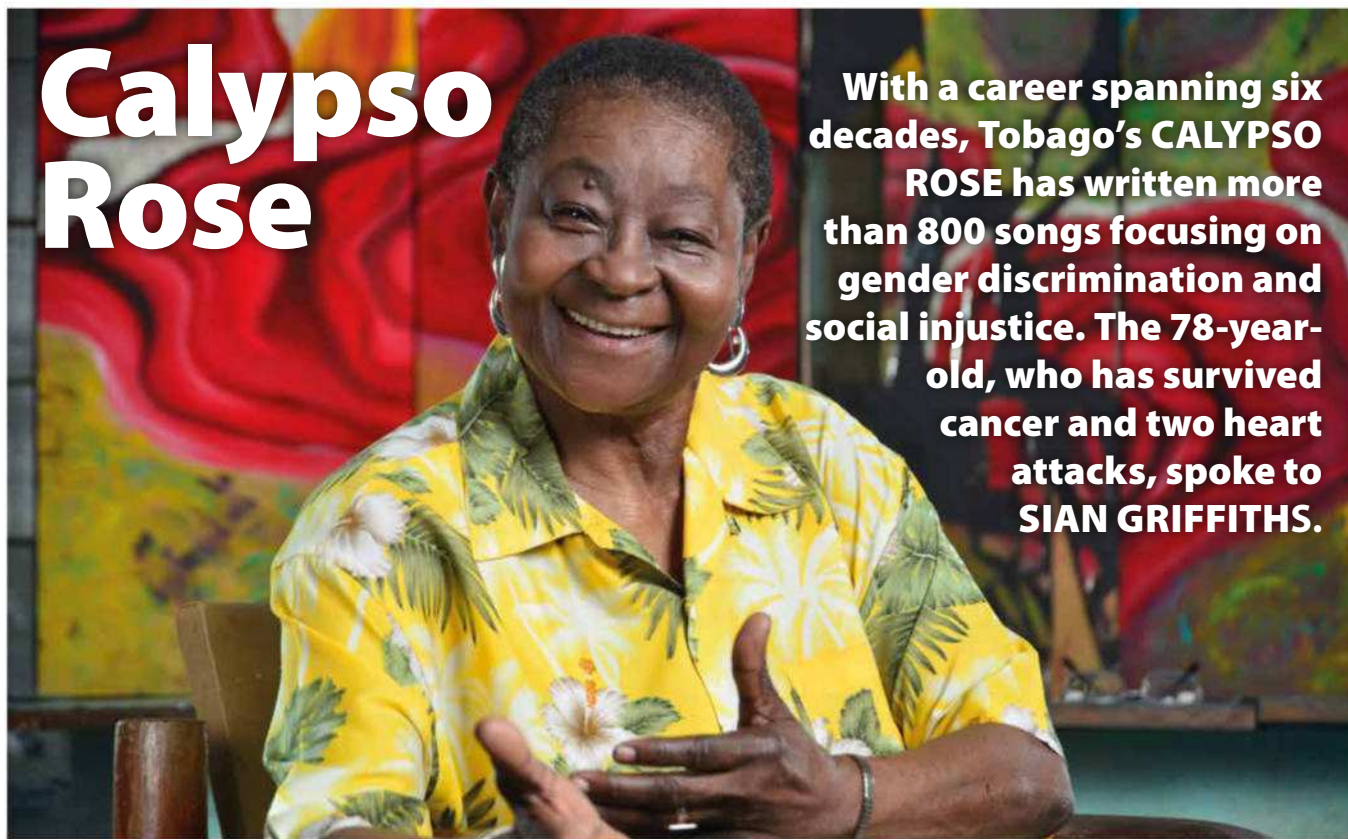
Solution to Wordsearch 76 The 14 countries with small populations were: Andorra, Belau, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Micronesia, Monaco, Nauru, San Marino, St Lucia, St Vincent, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

Wordsearch 77

Find the 21 US presidents hidden here.



marc roberts 2018



Richard Holder

Calypso Rose

With a career spanning six decades, Tobago's CALYPSO ROSE has written more than 800 songs focusing on gender discrimination and social injustice. The 78-year-old, who has survived cancer and two heart attacks, spoke to SIAN GRIFFITHS.

Which of your songs means the most to you?

'Fire In Me Wire'. I wrote that song in three islands. The first verse was in St Croix, the US Virgin Island; the second verse was in Barbados and the third verse was in Trinidad.

In St Croix, I was performing and went straight through the stage! The police took me straight to the hospital. I got some fractured ribs. In St Kitts, I was singing 'Fire, fire in me wire', and, when I flinged the mic between my feet, the cord hooked on my ankle and I sprained it. In Barbados, when I flinged the mic up, I couldn't bring my hand down. I'd dislocated my shoulder! So, 'Fire In Me Wire' is a Calypso song I can never, never, never forget.

It has now been sung in nine different languages. The Japanese are the last to pick it up.

Who inspires you?

Bob Marley. We worked together in New York and then again in Miami, Florida. He was an entertainer. After he finished praying, he picked up his guitar and hit the stage. Dynamic!

What impresses you?

My fans. My fans are the ones who have kept me alive.

What's your earliest memory?

My great-grandmother was kidnapped,

bought and sold and ended up in Tobago. She never went back to [her home of] French Guinea. Every evening, she would sit by the seaside and would always shake her head and say 'no man know their burial ground'. She also taught me '*un, deux, trois, quatre*'.*

You've fought injustice your whole life – what do you feel most passionate about now?

The situation still goes on. When I look at the television and I see the newscasters, the men have on a suit and a tie. Why is it that females, who are now working, [have to deal with] their bosses wanting to have sex with them? Why? It should not be!

What is your biggest achievement?

My biggest achievement was to receive the Victoire de la Musique from France. I was really, really surprised. You know I have a pacemaker? When I heard my name I thought that it was going to drop out of my body!

You live in New York now. What do you miss most about your home island of Tobago?

I miss the sea area a lot. I grew up by the seaside and my father was a fisherman who had two boats. Every evening we were down by the beach.

How do you relax?

Sometimes with my guitar and my keyboard next to me.

How did you react when Caribbean Airlines named an airplane after you?

It's a different honour but it's great to know that 'Calypso' is being flown all over the world now. We will soon be flying CR77. It's the first time I will be flying that plane. I'll put on my captain's hat!

How will you be celebrating your birthday?

I never work on my birthday. I crawl into any church and thank the Lord I am alive and ask the Lord to give me strength to see the next year. ■

Calypso Rose was the first Caribbean entertainer to receive a Victoire de la musique for best international album for *Far from Home* (2016). In 2017, the album was awarded platinum sale status in France, a first for any artist from Trinidad and Tobago. For current tour dates, see: calypso-rose.com/live.html

Sian Griffiths is a former London-based BBC producer and reporter who now works as a writer and radio journalist in Ottawa, Canada. She has a special interest in social, humanitarian and indigenous issues.

**Calypso Rose dedicated the song, 'Back to Africa', to her great-grandmother.*

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