



# The New York Times

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## In Tehran, more death by hanging



Roger Cohen

OPINION

So Kavous Seyed Emami, an Iranian-Canadian university professor and environmentalist, “commits suicide” in Tehran’s Evin prison two weeks after his arrest. His wife Maryam, summoned last Friday, is shown his body hanging in a cell. He is buried four days later in a village north of the capital, without an independent autopsy and after his family has come under intense Revolutionary Guard pressure to accept the official version of events.

Tell me another. Emami’s death is an outrage and an embarrassment to the Islamic Republic.

**The supposed “suicide” in prison of a professor is an outrage that reflects heightened tensions in Iran.**

I met him in Iran in 2009, on the eve of a tumultuous presidential election that would lead to massive demonstrations and bloody repression. The theocratic regime that promised freedom in 1979 only to deliver another form of repression stood briefly on a knife-edge. Emami was a thoughtful, mild-mannered man, a sociologist and patriot with a love of nature. The notion that he would hang himself in a prison where they remove even your shoelaces strikes me as preposterous.

“I still can’t believe this,” his son Ramin Seyed Emami, a musician whose stage name is King Raam, wrote on Instagram.

Since anti-government protests began late last year, mainly in poorer areas that had been strongholds of the regime, Emami is the third case of a supposed suicide while in custody. In him, several of the phobias of Iranian hard-liners found a focus.

He was a dual national of the kind President Hassan Rouhani, a reformist, is trying to lure back to the country to spur growth. He was an environmentalist, one of the founders of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, at a time when mismanagement and reckless dam building by the Revolutionary Guard and its front companies have contributed to water shortages. He was a Western-educated Iranian of the Rouhani camp, whose confrontation with the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is in a particularly delicate

COHEN, PAGE 13

## Majesty of the everyday in Obama portraits

WASHINGTON

Artists say paintings reflected the couple’s openness and presence

BY ROBIN POGREBIN

For 50 years, the official paintings of the nation’s former leaders at the National Portrait Gallery have been composed of white presidents painted by white artists. But when the curtains fell this week from the two latest portraits, they revealed the first black president and first lady, Barack and Michelle Obama, painted, for the first time in the gallery’s history, by black artists, Amy Sherald and Kehinde Wiley.

“I’m also thinking about all the young people — particularly girls and girls of color — who in years ahead will come to this place, and they will look up and they will see an image of someone who looks like them hanging on the wall of this



Fishermen working on nets this month before sailing from the Chinese archipelago of Zhoushan. The authorities have ordered a ban on fishing in waters affected by the Jan. 6 spill.

## Menace of a ghostly spill

ZHOUSHAN, CHINA

Rich fisheries in Asia threatened by huge leak of a nearly invisible toxin

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS AND JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

A fiery collision that sank an Iranian tanker in the East China Sea a month ago has resulted in an environmental threat that experts say is unlike any before: An almost invisible type of petroleum has begun to contaminate some of the most important fishing grounds in Asia, from China to Japan and beyond.

It is the largest oil spill in decades, but the disaster has unfolded outside the glare of international attention that big spills have previously attracted. That is because of its remote location on the high seas and also the type of petroleum involved: condensate, a toxic, liquid by-product of natural gas production.

Unlike the crude oil in better-known disasters like those of the Exxon Valdez and the Deepwater Horizon, condensate does not clump into black globules that can be easily spotted or produce heart-wrenching images of animals mired in muck. There’s no visible slick that can

be pumped out. Experts said the only real solution is to let it evaporate or dissolve. Absorbed into the water, it will remain toxic for a time, though it will also disperse more quickly into the ocean than crude oil.

Experts say there has never been so large a spill of condensate; up to 111,000 metric tons has poured into the ocean. It has almost certainly already invaded an ecosystem that includes some of the world’s most bountiful fisheries off Zhoushan, the archipelago that rises where the Yangtze River flows into the East China Sea.

The area produced five million tons of seafood for China alone last year, according to Greenpeace, including crab, squid, yellow croaker, mackerel and a local favorite, hairtail. If projections are correct, the toxins could soon make their way into equally abundant Japanese fisheries. Exposure to condensate is extremely unhealthy to humans and potentially fatal. The effects of eating fish contaminated with it remain essentially untested, but experts strongly advise against doing so.

“This is an oil spill of a type we haven’t seen before,” said Paul Johnston, a scientist at Greenpeace Research Laboratories at the University of Exeter in England. “Working out the impact is actually a huge task — probably next to impossible.”



On Jan. 10, days after the tanker Sanchi erupted into flames following a collision with the bulk carrier CF Crystal in the East China Sea, the authorities were still battling flames.

For China, the disaster has become a test of its ambitions as a global and regional steward of the seas, especially at a time when it is reinforcing its territorial claims, including disputed territories with Japan in these waters. Given its proximity, China has taken the lead in investigating the disaster and monitoring

the spill, but it has faced some criticism for what some see as a slow and inadequate response thus far.

Officials in Beijing announced on Feb. 1 that samples of fish taken within four to five nautical miles of the sunken ship contained traces of petroleum hydrocarbons. SPILL, PAGE 2

## President of South Africa faces ouster vote

JOHANNESBURG

His A.N.C. party plans no-confidence motion as early as Thursday

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

The extraordinary confrontation between South Africa’s president, Jacob Zuma, and the leaders of his African National Congress party highlights the internal power struggle within the party, which has governed the country since the end of apartheid and has become less known for its heroic past than for widespread corruption and mismanagement.

That power struggle has paralyzed South Africa, which has the continent’s largest economy.

In what appeared to be a turning point, the A.N.C., for the first time, moved decisively against the leader it had shielded for the past nine years from a seemingly endless series of accusations of misconduct, asking him to step down on Tuesday.

But in an indication of what may be the limits of the A.N.C.’s self-inquiry, party leaders stated that Mr. Zuma was being dismissed because he was harming the A.N.C.’s prospects — not because of the ethical issues surrounding him.

“President Zuma has not been found guilty by any court of law,” Ace Magashule, the party’s secretary general, said. “And when we took these decisions, we did not take these decisions because Comrade Jacob Zuma has done anything wrong.”

On Wednesday, party leaders stepped up the pressure on Mr. Zuma by announcing that if the president does not resign, they would try to remove him through a vote of no confidence in Parliament as early as Thursday, the latest in a series of extraordinary moments in the history of the party, which has shielded the president for nearly nine years through a series of scandals and corruption charges.

“The ball is in his court,” Paul Mashatile, the party’s treasurer general, said at a news conference.

Mr. Zuma also came under pressure on a new front Wednesday, as the police raided the residence in Johannesburg of the Gupatas, a family with wide-ranging business interests and close ties to one of the president’s sons and his political allies.

Local news outlets reported that three people, including a member of the family, had been arrested as part of a new police inquiry into influence-peddling.

The drawn-out negotiations over Mr. Zuma’s future have cast a pall over the optimism that followed Cyril Ramaphosa’s election in December to succeed him as leader of the A.N.C. and his pledge to steer South Africa on a new ZUMA, PAGE 4



The unveiling of the official portraits of former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama with the artists Kehinde Wiley, left, and Amy Sherald, right.

great American institution,” Mrs. Obama said in her remarks at the ceremony on Monday. “I know the kind of impact that will have on their lives, because I was one of those girls.”

While they were interviewing artists for the portraits, Mrs. Obama said, she knew immediately that Ms. Sherald, 44, was the one. “We started talking and Barack kind of faded into the woodwork,” the former first lady said. “There was an instant sister-girl connection. That was true all the way through the process.”

When Ms. Sherald walked in, “she was fly and poised,” Mrs. Obama added. “She had this lightness and freshness of personality.”

Mr. Obama, in his remarks, said he, too, bonded with his artist of choice, Mr. Wiley, 40, though “maybe not in the same way — this whole sister-girl thing.”

“He and I make different sartorial decisions,” Mr. Obama continued, a joking reference to the Mr. Wiley’s bold clothing choices (he wore a black-and-white patterned suit to the ceremony). “But PORTRAITS, PAGE 2

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# World

## Come for the herring, stay for the chitchat

HAMBURG JOURNAL  
HAMBURG, GERMANY

City plan to close cafeteria older residents depend on saddens patrons and staff

BY MELISSA EDDY

Ask the regulars seated at the sturdy, rectangular tables in the Staff Restaurant Billstedt, the cafeteria for workers in the basement of a municipal building in Hamburg, whether they have a favorite dish. They all give the same answer.

"It's all good," insisted nearly a dozen patrons, most of them over 60, packing four rows of five tables each, when asked about their favorite meal on a recent Wednesday.

"You can get salads, soups, a proper meal and whatever you choose, it is good," said Karin Ahlf, sitting at a table along the back wall watching patrons arrive, hang up their coats on a row of hooks beside the door and head past the tables for the rack of melamine trays at the counter near the back.

"I have been coming here every day for more than 20 years," she added.

She's not alone. Many older people in this heavily immigrant district of Billstedt have come to depend on the cafeteria, which, although intended for city employees, is also open to the public.

They like the traditional German fare, affordable prices and the willingness of the chef, Stephan Kulosa, to cut slabs of meat into bite-size pieces for guests who have trouble managing a knife and fork.

Some days, patrons wait 30 minutes in line for plates heaped with slices of juicy roast pork and boiled waxy potatoes, terrines of steaming semolina pudding topped with blueberries, or silvery strips of Hamburg's traditional herring fillets covered with a sauce of sour cream, apples and onion.

Some diners regularly ride several stops on the subway, or drive six miles, just for the lunch.

But the canteen's very success among the retirees — and increasing lack of popularity among city workers — has become a problem for the Hamburg authorities. They plan to close the cafeteria



Many older people depend on the Staff Restaurant Billstedt in Hamburg, Germany. Although it is intended for city employees, the cafeteria is open to the public.

at the end of June, citing the need for renovations estimated at around 1.7 million euros, or about \$2 million. That is too high a price, they say, for the income the cafeteria generates.

Jennyfer Dutschke, a lawmaker with the opposition Free Democrats in the Hamburg legislature, asked the government about the decision to shutter the canteen. The answer she received further provoked patrons' ire; in a formal response, the government said the cafeteria was intended as a place where municipal employees can enjoy one another's company over a quick, warm meal and suggested that "the missing atmosphere of a staff canteen, given the many 'foreign guests,' may be a reason many city workers choose to stay away.

Although Hamburg is booming, Billstedt has remained the port city's poorest district, with an average annual income of €21,400, less than half the pay in the city's hip districts. It is also home to a large number of immigrants, whose culinary traditions are visible in the fast-food shops selling falafel and kebabs.

"Kebabs and more kebabs," Ms. Ahlf said, shaking her head. "There are three Chinese and several Italians. But since the department store closed, no one else offers traditional German food."

Elke Horn, 77, nodded as she cut bites of her green beans, praising their tenderness and her meal's affordability. "We are all asking ourselves: Where are we supposed to go?"

Ms. Horn and Ms. Ahlf, who would not give her age because "all of the men who keep asking me for it would be able to find it out," are among the nearly 18 million Germans aged 65 or older, according to Germany's Federal Statistics Office.

Over the next two decades, the number of older Germans is expected to increase to more than 23 million, nearly a third of the population, posing challenges to society and the government over how to provide for them under a social system that is already straining to meet their needs.

Many retirees live off ever smaller state pensions. The number of older people applying for welfare benefits to pad their pensions more than doubled

between 2003 and 2015, according to the Sozialverband VdK, an independent social justice lobby group based in Berlin.

Mr. Kulosa, the cafeteria's chef — a big man with an equally large laugh — offers city workers the right to skip the long line of retirees waiting for their meals, and provides a carryout option for those who would rather eat at their desks. His brother, who runs the cash register, takes the meal of anyone in a wheelchair to their table.

Mr. Kulosa did not intend to become so popular among Billstedt's older residents when he took over the place 22 years ago, he said over a plate of feta cheese baked with tomatoes and peppers. It just happened over the course of time. What hasn't changed are the quality of his offerings.

"I make everything myself: no powders, nothing from a package," he said. At 54, he would like to continue running the cafeteria but does not have the money to put into the renovations himself, even if that were a possibility. "Either I stay here or I have to look for a new job," he said. So would his wife, brother and daughter — half of his staff.

Reinhard Neuling is doing his utmost to prevent that. The head of the 60-plus group of the local chapter of the left-leaning Social Democrats, he went table to table in the cafeteria to gather more than 1,000 signatures for a petition to urge the mayor to reconsider the decision to close.

Mr. Neuling, a Billstedt resident since the 1970s and self-proclaimed "cafeteria guy," is steeped in the social history of staff canteens. He worries that the tradition is dying out, leaving a generation with nowhere to go for a square meal.

He points to the restaurant in the district's municipal culture center, which he said had changed hands. With the new owner came a new name, the Palace Kitchen, and a new menu that Mr. Neuling describes as "three leaves of salad on a plate with a few other bits and bobs, all of it organic," for what he said was three times the price.

"We don't want a kitchen palace, we just want our canteen," Mr. Neuling said, gesturing to the window sills lined with potted green plants and framed jigsaw puzzles on the walls. "It's beautiful just as it is."

# L'ORÉAL

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**RECORD  
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(1) Like for like sales growth, based on a comparable structure and identical exchange rates.

(2) 2017 operating profit / consolidated annual sales.

(3) 2017 net profit after non controlling interest.

(4) Personal and household goods category.

## WORLD



Kathy Robinson, left, and Ethel Kroska, selling lottery tickets in Merrimack, N.H., last month. The state says there is a public interest in revealing the names of lottery winners.

## Putting a price on privacy

NASHUA, N.H.

A lottery winner wants to be anonymous, risking her \$560 million prize

BY KATHARINE Q. SEELYE

The winner of a \$560 million Powerball lottery jackpot has yet to claim her prize, but her lawyers say she is already being preyed upon and is highly stressed.

When the winner, known in court papers only as Jane Doe, said last month that she wanted to remain anonymous, New Hampshire officials said they could not give her the money — the seventh-largest jackpot in United States history — unless her name was made public.

Since then, her lawyers have been deluged with offers from around the world of ideas for how she might get the money and still keep her privacy.

Dozens of people offered to legally change their names to match Ms. Doe's in order to collect the money for her — for fees of \$1 million or more.

A homeless mother of five in North Carolina offered to turn in Ms. Doe's winning ticket in exchange for a six-bedroom house, a used car and a small trust for each of her children.

Someone in Costa Rica would accept the winning ticket on behalf of Ms. Doe in exchange for \$1 million, travel expenses and “warm clothes to wear in New Hampshire.” Other people wrote simply asking for handouts.

The outpouring of appeals, outlined by Ms. Doe's lawyers in legal papers, underscored the point they tried to make on Tuesday in a courtroom in Nashua — that sudden wealth exposes an unsuspecting citizen to vultures, swindlers and other parasites who harass the winner in an attempt to leech off some of the money for themselves.

The lawyers said they want to keep their client's real name private to protect her from what they described as “violence, threats, harassment, scams and constant unwanted solicitation” that have befallen previous lottery winners.



Charles R. McIntyre, above, chief of the New Hampshire lottery, and Steven M. Gordon, at right, a lawyer for the unidentified winner.

But New Hampshire's lottery commission takes a very different stance, arguing that the state has an overriding interest in disclosing the names of lottery winners — not to satisfy the curiosity of neighbors or promote sales of tickets, but as a hedge against corruption.

The commission oversees hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues and prizes a year. “When somebody wins a public lottery of \$560 million, there is a public interest in knowing who the winner was, and that it is a fair and equitable process,” John J. Conforti, an assistant attorney general representing the lottery commission, told the court.

The state gave little credence to the argument that identifying Ms. Doe would jeopardize her safety, saying that any risk could be managed by engaging a security detail. Ms. Doe's lawyers said they were already lining up bodyguards.

Most states view the names of winners of significant prizes as a matter of public record, though a few permit winners to keep their identities private. Some states, including New Hampshire, allow trusts and not just individuals to claim winnings.

For almost two hours Tuesday, Judge Charles Temple of the Hillsborough County Superior Court heard arguments in the case, which has made headlines around the world for the eye-popping size of the prize and for an “if only”

twist in Ms. Doe's plight.

When Ms. Doe realized she had the winning ticket, she followed the instructions on the ticket and on the lottery commission's website to “sign the ticket.”

If only she had talked to a lawyer first, she might have avoided the entire issue. She could have set up a trust that would sign the ticket, claim the prize and be the public face of the winner, rather than Ms. Doe personally. But lottery officials say the chance to do that ended when she signed her name.

Ms. Doe's lawyers — Steven M. Gordon and Billy Shaheen, high-powered attorneys in the state — said the ticket and state's website were misleading because they did not explain that by signing a ticket, winners give up their anonymity. Nowhere, they said, does the website advise the winner “that there is an option for a trust to claim a prize.”

Lottery officials said they urge winners to sign the ticket as a safeguard in case it is lost or stolen, and that the lottery could not dispense legal advice.

The fact that New Hampshire already allows trusts to sign the tickets, effectively allowing a winner to remain anonymous, undermines the state's argument that a winner's identity must be publicly disclosed to protect the integrity of the process, Mr. Gordon said.

Before going to court, Ms. Doe's lawyers talked with the lottery commission

to try to resolve the matter. Ms. Doe's lawyers suggested that she be allowed to “white-out” her signature in front of the commission — a procedure used at least once, in Ohio — and then have a trust sign it.

The commission rejected that idea, saying removing her name would alter the ticket, which is against the lottery rules, and thus render it void.

Ms. Doe's lawyers also suggested that the original winning ticket could be photocopied and put under seal, while her signature on the photocopy could be covered up and replaced with the name of the trust.

For each day that passes, Ms. Doe is forgoing about \$14,000 in interest on the unclaimed winnings.

The two sides indicated that they were close to agreeing that while the judge mulls his decision about whether to make Ms. Doe's name public, the money could be transferred to her.

But that will take at least a few days. Charles R. McIntyre, executive director of the state lottery, who called the winning ticket “the most valuable piece of paper on the planet, more valuable than a Rembrandt,” said it would take some time “to get that much cash in the state.”

After court, Mr. Shaheen, one of her lawyers, told reporters that his advice to her was simple: “If you like your family and you like your friends and you like your relatives, don't tell anybody.”

## South Africa in turmoil as party waits on Zuma

ZUMA, FROM PAGE 1

course. Although Mr. Ramaphosa, deputy president since 2014, has a mixed record in both politics and business, he has spoken forcefully against corruption and is allied with A.N.C. officials who have reputations as reformers.

A no-confidence vote would bring renewed attention to the widespread corruption in the A.N.C. and expose the governing party to charges of hypocrisy. It has used its dominance in Parliament to quash eight previous opposition-led motions of no confidence, as recently as last August.

In a meeting with party leaders Monday night, Mr. Zuma was defiant, insisting that he had done nothing wrong and refusing to resign, according to South African news media.

Mr. Magashule said that Mr. Zuma had asked to serve for an additional three to six months before stepping down. But Mr. Magashule said that party leaders rejected the request, saying, “the period is too long.”

Officials pushing for Mr. Zuma's early exit had argued that the longer he stayed in power, the harder it would be for Mr. Ramaphosa to rebuild the A.N.C. before national elections in 2019.

Mr. Magashule said that the uncertainty over the presidency would “erode the renewed hope and confidence among South Africans” since the party elections in December.

Mr. Magashule, a longtime ally of Mr. Zuma's, dismissed suggestions that the party's move had also been influenced by corruption charges and inquiries that the president is facing.

The A.N.C.'s decision to dismiss Mr. Zuma was the culmination of a week of high-level party meetings and direct talks that failed to resolve an impasse between Mr. Zuma and Mr. Ramaphosa. Seeking to avoid a confrontation that could deepen a party split, Mr. Ramaphosa had pressed Mr. Zuma to resign voluntarily. Under the Constitution, Parliament selects the president, effectively putting the decision in the hands of the A.N.C.'s top leaders.

A vote of no confidence was already scheduled for Feb. 22, and opposition

parties have demanded that it be moved up to this week.

The A.N.C.'s leaders hammered out their position in a marathon meeting of the party's national executive committee at a hotel in Pretoria, the executive capital, which started Monday afternoon and lasted until early Tuesday.

Around midnight, Mr. Ramaphosa's motorcade was seen making its way to Mr. Zuma's residence, where Mr. Ramaphosa directly asked for the president's resignation.

Mr. Magashule, who accompanied Mr. Ramaphosa, said that Mr. Zuma pleaded again for more time.

“Our discussions were very cordial,” Mr. Magashule said.

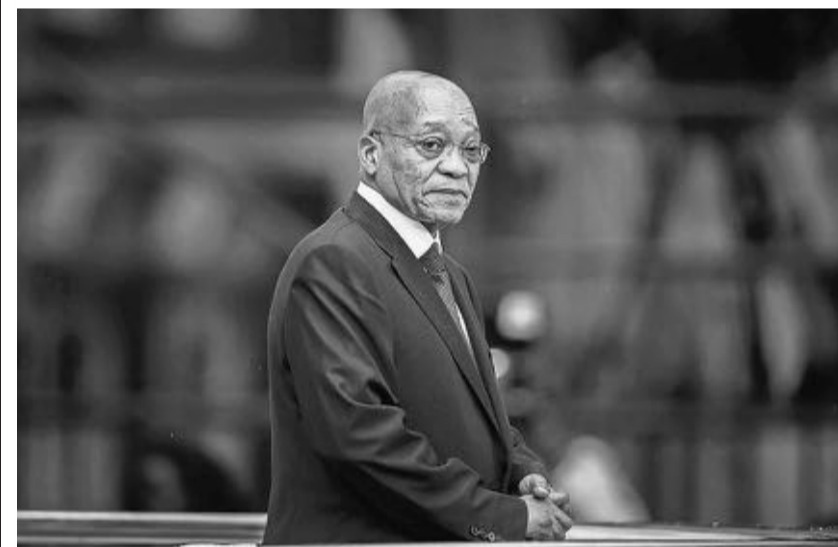
“The ball is in his court,” said Paul Mashatile, the A.N.C.'s treasurer general.

After the president refused to step down, Mr. Ramaphosa's motorcade returned to the hotel where, in a tense meeting over the next few hours, Mr. Ramaphosa pushed members of the executive committee to formally demand that the president step down.

The developments amounted to a setback for Mr. Ramaphosa, who had confidently told South Africans increasingly weary of the continuing power struggle that Mr. Zuma's future would be decided during the meeting on Monday.

The situation appeared to be moving in Mr. Ramaphosa's direction last week. A scheduled executive committee meeting was suddenly canceled after he began direct talks with Mr. Zuma, which he had optimistically described as “constructive.” But despite Mr. Ramaphosa's reputation as a skilled negotiator, the talks ultimately proved unfruitful.

At the A.N.C. elective conference in December, Mr. Ramaphosa's margin of victory over Mr. Zuma's chosen successor was slim, indicating the deep party split and presaging the difficulties he would face in pressing Mr. Zuma to step down as the nation's leader before his term expires in mid-2019.



Top, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa in 2015. The confrontation between Mr. Zuma and his party, the African National Congress, heightened a power struggle that has paralyzed the country. Above, Ace Magashule, the party's secretary general.



Top, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa in 2015. The confrontation between Mr. Zuma and his party, the African National Congress, heightened a power struggle that has paralyzed the country. Above, Ace Magashule, the party's secretary general.

## The man who could bring down Israel's prime minister

JERUSALEM

Attorney general to decide whether to formally charge his political benefactor

BY ISABEL KERSHNER

Israel's attorney general, Avichai Mandelblit, was Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's favored candidate for the hillsborough County's top legal job. Now, Mr. Netanyahu's fate lies in Mr. Mandelblit's hands.

Critics suspect that Mr. Mandelblit, having previously served as Mr. Netanyahu's cabinet secretary, and once widely considered a Netanyahu loyalist, remains beholden to the prime minister who promoted him. Admirers say the law is Mr. Mandelblit's only agenda and his moral compass.

Either way, Mr. Mandelblit, who rose from relative obscurity as a military prosecutor, is likely to become the most scrutinized person in Israel in the coming months.

After the Israeli police on Tuesday recommended that Mr. Netanyahu be



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel with Avichai Mandelblit, right, in 2013, when he was cabinet secretary. Mr. Mandelblit became attorney general in 2016.

charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two corruption cases, Mr. Mandelblit became the one who will ultimately decide, in consultation with state prosecutors, whether the evidence warrants taking Mr. Netanyahu to court.

Mr. Mandelblit rose through the ranks of the military justice system to become the military advocate general. He was catapulted into the political limelight when Mr. Netanyahu appointed him as his cabinet secretary in 2013. In his

mid-50s, and a father of six, Mr. Mandelblit is known to be an avid soccer fan. He became an observant Jew in his mid-20s and wears a black skullcap.

His appointment two years ago to the post of attorney general was criticized by some legal experts as too swift a transition into a role that requires absolute independence as the guardian of the law and the public interest.

Although Mr. Netanyahu has blamed the left and the news media of plotting to oust him by legal means because they cannot beat him at the ballot box, Mr. Mandelblit hardly fits the profile of a politically motivated insurgent intent on bringing down the government, often described as the most right-wing and religious in Israel's history.

On the contrary, Mr. Mandelblit, who has closely followed the police investigations all along, has been accused of dragging his feet to stall them. What started as small, weekly demonstrations on Saturday nights outside Mr. Mandelblit's house in the city of Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv, recently grew into several mass rallies in Tel Aviv against corruption and what many of the protesters saw as procrastination by the authorities.

The police recommendations relate to

two cases in which Mr. Netanyahu is a suspect: a gifts-for-favors affair known as Case 1000, involving the Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and an Australian businessman, James Packer; and a second scandal, called Case 2000, in which Mr. Netanyahu is suspected of back-room dealings with Arnon Mozes, publisher of the popular newspaper Yediot Aharonot, to ensure more favorable coverage.

Mr. Mandelblit has not shied from controversy.

His supporters say Mr. Mandelblit has exercised caution regarding the cases, aware of the responsibility of potentially bringing down a prime minister. If he indeed decides to press formal charges, Mr. Netanyahu will be the first sitting prime minister in Israel to be indicted.

But Mr. Mandelblit has not shied from controversy.

In September, he said that he intended to bring fraud charges against Sara Netanyahu, the prime minister's wife, pending a hearing, accusing her of misusing some \$100,000 in public funds

for takeout meals and mismanagement of the prime minister's official residence.

Mr. Mandelblit has avoided giving interviews but has been outspoken at legal forums, often on camera.

During his time in the military, Mr. Mandelblit worked with human rights organizations, saying he valued their contributions in dealing with Palestinian complaints and helping uncover the truth.

He has more recently broken with Mr. Netanyahu on issues regarding land ownership in the West Bank, insisting on the evacuation of an illegal settlement outpost that Mr. Netanyahu and his political allies were trying to salvage.

Mr. Mandelblit also opposed legislation to bar the police from issuing recommendations to charge public figures. After a concerted effort by allies of Mr. Netanyahu, legislation barring the police from issuing recommendations passed in December — but only on the condition that it would not apply to the current investigations against the prime minister.

Irit Pazner Garshowitz contributed research.



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# Fashion New York

## The popcorn apocalypse

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

New York Fashion Week finally came to life Tuesday evening in the shadow of the valley of — well, not death exactly. More like a post-apocalyptic prairie seen through a B-movie lens. Toto, what happened to Kansas?

Raf Simons buried it under 50,000 gallons of popcorn.

Or, to be fair, he buried the floor of the American Stock Exchange building under 50,000 gallons of popcorn, trucked in for a wackadoodle Calvin Klein show. It piled up in drifts around the weathered sides of four skeletal barns hung with blood red Sterling Ruby mop heads and papered with spectral black and white Warhol reproductions.

It was crushed under the shoes of guests, so little motes of popcorn dust blew through the air. They landed on the coats and skirts and hair of Michael B. Jordan and Nicole Kidman and Millie Bobby Brown (among many other famous people), making everyone look as though they had an unfortunate case of dandruff or had wandered into a Food Channel version of nuclear winter.

Then a model in a bright orange hazmat suit and waders appeared. Let's rephrase: Welcome to the pop-calyipse.

Since he arrived at the brand that bluejeans and minimalism built, Mr. Simons, who is from Belgium, has been fixated on defining his own brand of twisted Americana, largely built on the twin pillars of Laura Ingalls Wilder and "On the Road" (the Netflix versions) — after the rot set in.

This season he took it even further, with women in giant tweed coats over sweeping lawn skirts and men in sweater vests that looked more like life vests over skinny suits and shirts buttoned tight to the neck. Everyone wore knit Fair Isle balaclavas and often big firefighters' gloves in silver foil, which also was used in false-front A-line cocktail dresses trimmed in white lace that turned into camper-blanket sheaths at the back.

Also the two-tone cowboy shirts and placket trousers that Mr. Simons has used in every collection since his Calvin debut, and skinny striped sweaters and sweaters with Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner knit in, plus apron dresses with nothing underneath, so the breasts were exposed (a strange segue into Naughty Nellie from the general store). Quilting squares were pieced onto crisp



CALVIN KLEIN

SHAWN BRACKBILL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

white shirts and reworked as bias-cut chiffon evening gowns. The effect was all very survivalist. Simon & Garfunkle's "Sound of Silence" played in the background. So did "California Dreamin'" by The Mamas & The Papas.

It was both a reductionist view of the country's most accessible myths and also stomach-churningly right. That's where we are now: drowning in a sea of puffed corn kernels and empty calories, appropriating the appropriators.

You might not like it all (though it's not hard to imagine those homespun balaclavas becoming a thing the next time the temperatures hit minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit), but it was viscerally recognizable, the way really good fashion — which is not the same thing as wearable clothes — is supposed to be.

The kind of fashion that suggests a different way of expressing how you think of yourself or your world at that moment. The kind of fashion that has been largely missing from the runways this week.

Instead it has seemed like most designers were strolling around, heads turned to the sky, la-la-la-ing and minding their own business (in every sense) rather than pushing themselves to confront the cultural mutation occurring around them. Maybe it takes an out-



COACH

RICHARD DREW/ASSOCIATED PRESS

sider's perspective, or gumption. It's risky to pontificate on national identity.

Fashion often likes to talk about how it offers an escape from everyday ugliness, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with beauty for beauty's sake, but at a time of turmoil it can feel a little empty.

Confrontation often isn't pretty, but it gets you somewhere.

It's probably not a coincidence that

Stuart Vevers, the creative director of Coach and a Brit, shares many of the same American obsessions as Mr. Simons, especially when it comes to the Badlands and biker dressing. It's expressed differently — his men and women look like luxe hobos, loaded up with tiny prairie florals in vintage lines, rough shearlings, laces and lamés, everything dangling tassels and charms — but the ingredients are similar. So, this

season, was the sense of dystopia.

Though instead of wading through snack food, Mr. Vevers' models had to wend their way through a forest of denuded trees, like something out of the Brothers Grimm or "The Blair Witch Project." Maybe that's why the bags and knapsacks they all carried were cavernous enough to fit a large part of their worldly goods inside.

(For what it's worth, big bags are a trend this season. They were everywhere, including at Monse, which had a top-handled carnie-striped version that also can be folded and squished under the arm. So are amped-up white shirts: See Vaquera's dress versions, sporting portraits of its fashion bearers, including Vivienne Westwood and Miguel Adrover, over the left breast. And wide-whale corduroy — Maria Cornejo did an especially appealing cherry red jumpsuit in her Zero Maria Cornejo line.)

But back to Coach.

"I was thinking, 'What is our goal?'" Mr. Vevers said backstage before the show. Then of the people who populate his imagination: "What are they doing here? Where are they going?"

He didn't have an answer — his Elvises just left the building — but he did have a convincing proposition for a look. We all have to start somewhere.

## Playing the Generation Game

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

There was something awfully appropriate about the fact that Michelle Obama's official-for-posterity portrait by the painter Amy Sutherland was unveiled smack in the middle of the New York shows. In it, the former first lady and great champion of the American fashion industry is depicted in a Thinker-like pose while wearing a halter-neck evening gown in a geometric print by the designer Michelle Smith, founder of the accessible luxury line Milly.

Milly? The times they are a-changin'. During her tenure in the White House, Mrs. Obama was known for wearing clothes from approximately 90 percent of the names on the fashion week schedule, from up-and-coming designers to the tent pole brands of the industry, providing all of them with an enormous boost to their name recognition.

This choice was fully in line with that legacy. She had always treated the most formal outfit with a certain throwaway ease, and had no truck with traditional hierarchies.

They are breaking down nonetheless. New York fashion is suffering some sort of identity crisis, and not just because designers are decamping for foreign shores (that's the easy excuse), or making movies instead of shows (get ready for Monse) but because it's in the midst of generational shift — both internally, with founders of a certain age preparing to hand over power, and externally, when it comes to what the customer may want. Athleisure? Streetwear? Gender fluidity? Ball gowns? All of the above?

As a result, the big brands that used to dominate the city no longer have quite the same aesthetic authority. When Ralph Lauren cruises from barefoot-in-Jamaica (where he has a vacation house) in lovely blue and white and faded denim sundresses to Cap d'Antibes in bright red, yellow, blue and green sequined minidresses, patent leather sweats, and an Art Deco ocean liner print, it's hard not to feel a little lost. The clothing compass is pointing in too many directions at once.

It also got a little wiggly at Carolina



RALPH LAUREN

LONDON NORDEMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CAROLINA HERRERA

VINCENT TULLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



THE ROW

pants with deep cuffs and squared-off jackets; pencil skirts with slouchy sweaters sporting jeweled bouquets.

There were lots of the usual party dresses, to be sure. Presumably, many will end up on the red carpet at the Met Gala in May, for the opening of "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" (or even at the Oscars' next month). But hidden among all the sparkle was one genuinely new idea: Many of the untucked shirttails poking from under the jackets were not actually shirts at all. They were fake-tails that belted around the waist, so they read as casual without the layers.

They made sense — more so than the horses and . . . wait, was that a cow? — that reared across the linen serapes and shirts of Derek Lam's otherwise understated and sporty Western-inspired sueded and slouchy trousers. Just as the lyrical, swaddling suiting in earthy shades at The Row makes sense. (The more ecclesiastical evening wear would also be good for the Met Gala, if anyone is feeling a little party Puritan.)

For Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, the



OSCAR DE LA RENTA

CASEY KELBAUGH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Herrera — who is herself sailing off into the sunset, at least sort of, by becoming the brand's global ambassador, and anointing Wes Gordon as creative director — made the admirable, if not always successful, decision to look forward instead of back, swapping her usual florals for a lame leapin' leopard print in glinting lamé.

The awning stripes she favors were still in there, as were the polka dots (sequined, on a flowing cape), but the mix-

ing of ostrich feather and silver ribbon on a skirt and coat had less direction than the parade of floor-sweeping faille skirts in a rainbow of shades paired with crisp white shirts and belted in contrasting colors that closed the show.

A homage to Mrs. Herrera's signature style, it was the best look on the runway. There's often a lot of pressure on new designers to "youthify" older brands, but here's hoping that Mr. Gordon — who presented his boss with a giant bouquet

of red roses during her bow — sticks with it.

In this, he might take a page from Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia, who have been smartly diplomatic about updating Oscar de la Renta without reinventing it. This season, a trip to the Cloisters inspired a host of tapestry prints, parchment shades and stylized florals, not to mention chain mail and silver filigree embroideries, all balanced by a stripped-down silhouette: narrow

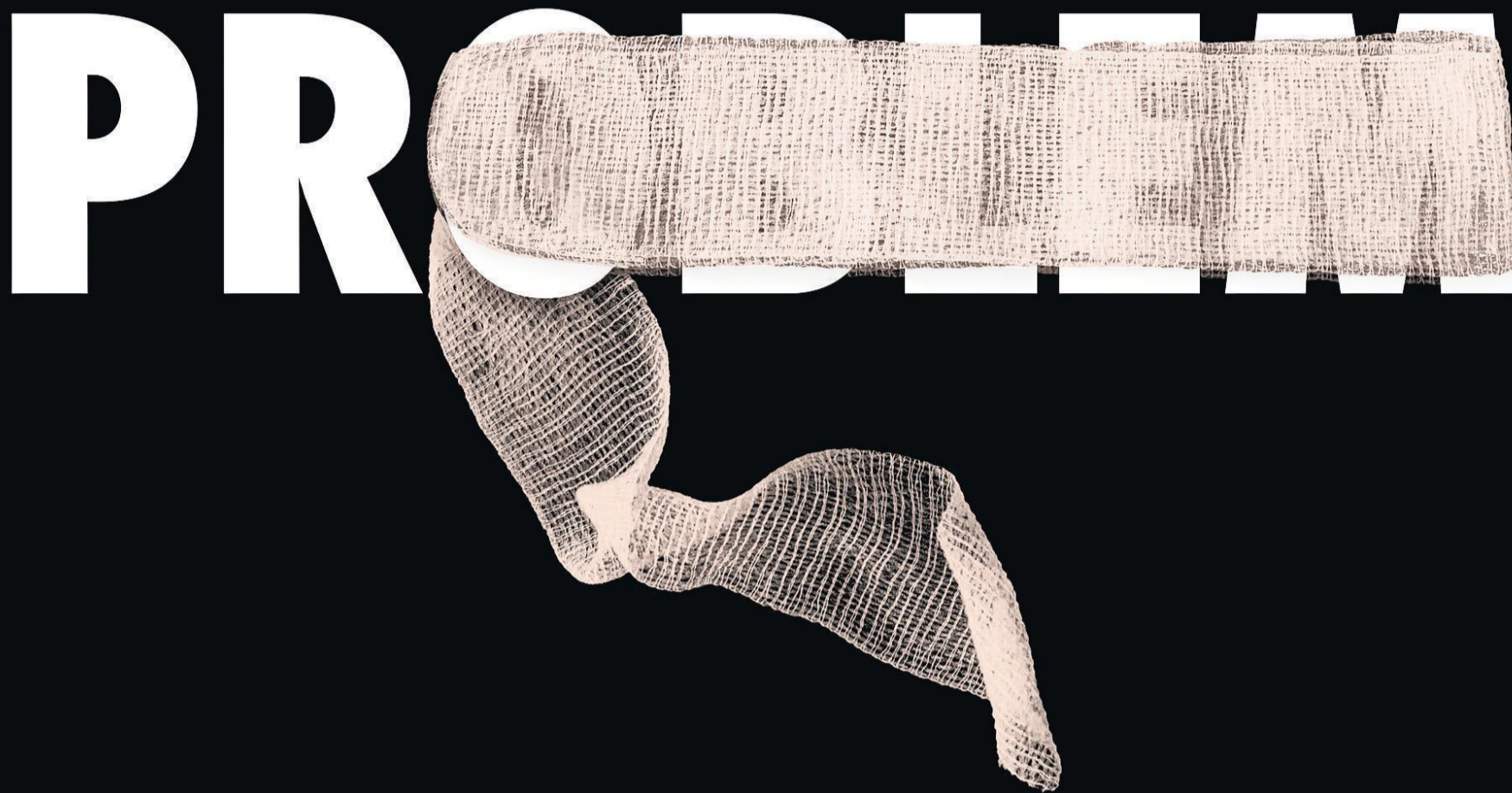
brand's designers, it's all about the inside, and the tiny detail: jackets cut in a classic hourglass or pulled just off-center, a single lapel flying out like a scarf; a trench coat secured by one button just above the waist. The show was held in a makeshift gallery spotted by 13 Isamu Noguchi sculptures on loan from the artist's foundation.

That's a pretty ambitious connection to imply. But as the old order shifts, there's room at the top.

# Opinion

## Puerto Rico needs more help

The island's power and water utilities require wholesale rebuilding to achieve resilience against the next big storm.



SELMAN DESIGN

### Mekela Panditharatne

Four months after Puerto Rico was battered by Hurricane Maria, Congress last week approved more badly needed emergency assistance, including \$2 billion to repair the island's severely damaged power grid. An additional \$9 billion will be directed to recovery and restoration projects in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The expectation is that this aid will help provide relief not only to the hundreds of thousands of utility customers in Puerto Rico who are still without power but also to the more than three million islanders as a whole, who are still being warned to boil water before drinking it. But the money from Washington falls far short of the island's requirements.

Puerto Rico needs more than band-aids. It needs to rethink and redesign its electric, water and wastewater systems, both to protect them against the next big storm and to provide the dependable service they were failing to give residents before Hurricane Maria. To accomplish that and other rebuilding needs, Puerto Rico had

sought \$94.4 billion in total disaster aid in November. That included nearly \$18 billion to rebuild the power grid — nine times what Congress has provided.

Achieving resiliency in the face of powerful storms will require the wholesale rebuilding of the island's utilities. Simply patching them up will not be enough. If that's the extent of the fix, the island is likely to find itself back in the same place after the next big storm, with taxpayers asked to spend new billions on more life preservers.

Even before Hurricane Maria, decades of disinvestment had left Puerto Rico's energy grid and water and wastewater systems particularly vulnerable to hurricanes.

Among its many problems, a storm-damaged dam is putting 70,000 people downstream at risk, and the island's water system is old and leaky; about half of the water conveyed by its pipes disappears. These leaks make the system vulnerable to contamination by microbes in the ground and water — a problem worsened by hurricane-induced pressure loss.

And, of course, when the power goes off, water and sewage treatment systems shut down. Millions of gallons of untreated sewage and contaminated

water were released after the hurricane. Even today, Puerto Ricans remain at risk of bacterial contamination in their water.

Before the storm hit, Puerto Rico had the worst drinking water quality of any state or territory in the nation. Nearly 70 percent of the island's water customers received their tap water from systems that were found to have

**A storm-damaged dam is putting 70,000 people downstream at risk, and the island's water system is old and leaky.**

unlawfully high levels of contaminants like coliform bacteria, volatile organic compounds and harmful by-products of disinfection, or that were not treating their water in accord with federal standards. The island's largest utility, the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority, which operates water and wastewater systems, was under several court-enforced agreements to end sewage discharges from degraded wastewater plants that violated the Clean Water Act. Making matters worse, the Environmental Protection Agency cut off funds to the utility

because it was unable to repay earlier loans.

Before Hurricane Maria, the island's water and wastewater utility said that it would need to invest \$2.4 billion over the next decade to fix these longstanding issues. That number would be higher now: Puerto Rico's government has said that a majority of its water and wastewater treatment infrastructure was damaged by the hurricane.

The island's brittle electricity grid provides another lesson in disaster mitigation. Before Hurricane Maria, the grid was prone to blackouts. Puerto Ricans experienced power failures four to five times more often than did the average utility customer elsewhere in the United States. Transmission lines cutting across the island's mountain regions often failed. In 2016, a fire shut down the entire grid for three days. Even when it worked, electricity was expensive.

Investment in renewables like solar power and improving energy efficiency would increase Puerto Rico's resiliency. The use of microgrids that combine solar power and battery storage could significantly cut fuel consumption and help hospitals, water treatment plants and schools keep working in a weather-induced blackout. Such

microgrids would also provide more reliable power to isolated communities.

Whether or not a plan announced recently by the island's governor to privatize Puerto Rico's energy utility is carried through, the funds set aside by Congress for the island's power grid will still allow Puerto Rico to release this latest federal money to private utilities for resilient, sustainable rebuilding.

Scientists point to the possible contribution of climate change to Maria's intense rainfall — as well as to the rainfall of Harvey and Irma, its predecessor hurricanes. The Caribbean is already seeing changes in land and ocean temperatures that mimic global climate trends. The mass movement of Puerto Ricans to the mainland after last fall's hurricanes may provide one of the first examples of a large-scale climate migration in the Americas.

It's no surprise that Hurricane Maria wreaked the havoc that it did in Puerto Rico. The island's fragile infrastructure was ripe for a clobbering. These lessons shouldn't need to be learned twice.

**MEKELA PANDITHARATNE** is a lawyer with the *Natural Resources Defense Council*.

## What the White House knew about Rob Porter

Maybe he was a great staff secretary. You can't separate that from the allegations against him.

**Lindy West**  
Contributing Writer

The White House knew about problems with the staff secretary Rob Porter's security clearance nearly a year before he was forced to resign, F.B.I. director Christopher Wray said this week. We know now that the hold up on his clearance was tied to allegations of domestic abuse — and the Trump White House seems to have known that by last November, too.

This contradicts Trump aides' reassurances that they were as shocked as anyone to read about Porter's alleged misogynist violence in the *Daily Mail* last week. (I fail to see how the notion that the executive branch gets its intelligence from the *Daily Mail* could possibly be reassuring to any sentient creature crawling this planet's sizzling crust, but many things are beyond me these days.)

Wray testified that the F.B.I. sent the White House a partial report about the "problems" with Porter in March 2017, following that with a full background check in July, and a further update in November. The investigation was "administratively closed" in January, several weeks before Donald Trump presumably — according to the White House's initial timeline — heard about the allegations against his buddy.

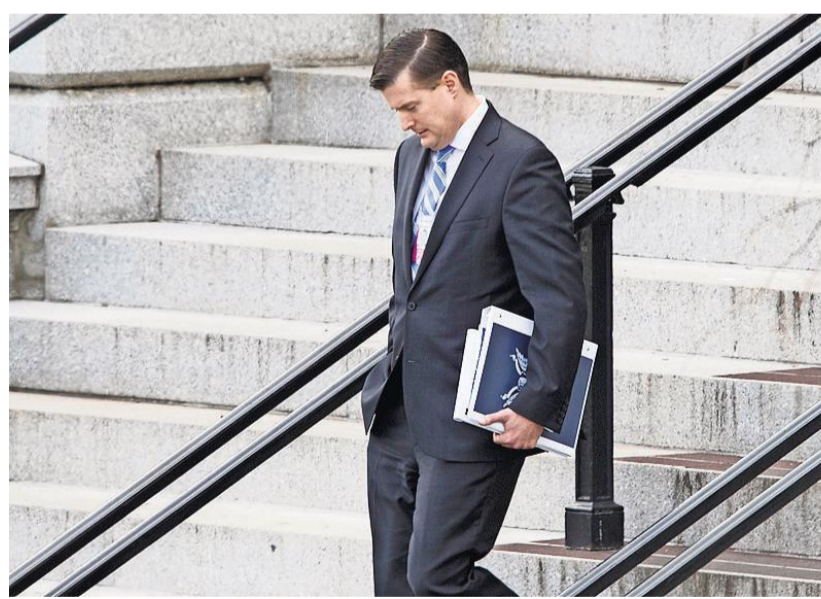
True to form for the Trump White House, even doing nothing was an unachievably high bar. Not only was Porter allowed to remain in his position (and briefly defended by the administration after the allegations finally became public), at the time of his termination he was reportedly being considered for multiple promotions: speechwriting, an expanded policy portfolio, a crack at deputy chief of

staff. CNN reported that chief of staff John Kelly, aware of the allegations for months, "told associates that Porter was one of the few competent professionals on his staff and wanted to ensure that he was being used to his full potential." One wonders if Kelly saw the photographs of Porter's ex-wife's face, the gold and the purple nimbus around her eye, the angry swell, the throb of it.

What a luxurious degree of compartmentalization we afford white men — to not only separate Porter the guy-whose-ex-wife-filed-a-protective-order-against-him from Porter the guy-who-is-pretty-good-at-being-a-staff-secretary, but then to weigh their relative importance and choose the latter. (I believe that unit of measurement is called "capitalism.")

Inasmuch as we can judge a person's interior based on their actions, it's fair to say that a man who disregards women's physical and sexual boundaries, as President Trump reportedly has, does not care about women. If it is possible to simultaneously care about women and subordinate their wishes to yours, to prioritize your sexual urges over their bodily autonomy, then what does "care" even mean? I think it's also fair to say that a man who lashes out at women with physical violence, as Porter allegedly has, harbors some degree of hatred for them. What else does "hatred" mean if not this — the object of our fury, the thing we love to hurt?

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Trump White House shrugged at the safety of two individual American women; after all, it is expressly hostile to the safety of 125 million. This is an administration that campaigned, explicitly, on a promised return to some midcentury mirage of American "greatness," when white men ruled



Rob Porter, former White House staff secretary, in Washington in January.

unfettered and the rest of us resumed our places on the spectrum between property and servitude.

The Trumpists long to disembowel the health care system and force pregnant people to give birth against their will. They are wholly obsessed with shoring up intergenerational poverty and leaving the most vulnerable to die. They seem determined to irreparably rend gay families and immigrant families and ship the sons and husbands of impoverished women off to frivolous vanity wars and sacrifice the sons and husbands of black women to our "Anglo-American" law enforcement traditions. What is that but carelessness and hate on a global scale? When have they demonstrated genuine, substantive care for any women other than their token pets?

Porter's "problems" and his superiors' indifference to them are not anomalous in Trump's White House; both are foundational to its ethos. It's no coincidence that Steve Bannon (himself an accused domestic abuser) perceived #MeToo and #TimesUp as a direct response to the Trump presidency itself.

This quadrangular tug-of-war — private violence, public service, public atrocities, private kindness — has sprung up around the #MeToo movement in a similar way. Before the ink was dry on the first wave of allegations, somber heralds of a supposed "backlash" began attempting to drag the movement back into the shadows. Where will it end, they asked? What about due process? What about separating the art from the artist? But he's

so nice! He never tried to rape *me*. (The same fatal flaw lies at the heart of every "humanizing" media expedition into Trump country. But they love soup! They take care of their pets!)

It's true that we have a lot to figure out. The very foundations of our culture are marbled with violence, exploitation, and exclusion — the work of brilliant abusers (and mediocre ones), the institutional scaffolding that enabled them, and the conspicuous absence of their victims. Separating art from artist, to some degree, may not be a choice. We can't un-Miles-Davis music, or de-Alfred-Hitchcock film — nor, necessarily, should we. I don't know the answers. There is doing harm, there is making amends, there is being better, and there is hoping the world will take you back. Being forgiven is not a guarantee, nor is being remembered. But it is a privilege, not a burden, to get to witness and participate in this conversation, to build better institutions and better systems together.

The question of whether we can separate the art from the artist — or the fairly competent secretarial work from the domestic violence allegations — is bigger than Harvey Weinstein, or Quentin Tarantino, or Rob Porter. It is bigger than art. It is bigger than politics. It's the question of whether anything at all can be truly divorced from its context. Americans are, arguably, too adept at such compartmentalization. It is our defining sickness. We separate the founding of this country from the slave-owning founding fathers. We separate the theft of this continent from our own bodies standing on it. We separate the present from the past.

Sometimes the past catches up.

**LINDY WEST** is the author of "*Shrill: Notes From a Loud Woman*."

## OPINION

## The New York Times

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## HOPES AND DOUBTS AFTER KOREANS MEET

Uncertainty about the North's sincerity shouldn't block efforts to end a nuclear standoff.

After its charm offensive at the Olympics, North Korea's delegation has returned home from South Korea, leaving some questions behind. Chief among them: Can the new opening between the two Koreas, begun amid the feel-good spirit of the Winter Games, be nudged and nurtured into serious dialogue over North Korea's nuclear program?

While still a long shot, there's a somewhat better chance of engagement now owing to two developments since President Moon Jae-in of South Korea, Vice President Mike Pence, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and the North Korean delegation, including Kim Yo-jong, the only sister of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, attended the Olympic opening ceremony.

First was Mr. Kim's surprise decision to dispatch his sister, his most trusted envoy, to carry his personal invitation for Mr. Moon to join him in a summit meeting in the North. Mr. Moon and Ms. Kim met four times during the Olympics, the highest-level contact between the two Koreas in years. Mr. Moon's visit would be an even rarer event, since the reclusive Mr. Kim has never met another foreign leader.

While many officials fear that North Korea's primary goal is to drive a wedge between South Korea, which has been eager to engage the North, and the United States, which has resisted engagement, close coordination between Washington and Seoul would keep the alliance strong.

At the very least, the North-South contacts provide a communications channel for Seoul to directly explain to Pyongyang what it and the United States are doing and saying and why, thus hopefully avoiding any miscalculation that could lead to military confrontations in this fraught period.

The other seemingly positive development was Mr. Pence's telling The Washington Post that the Trump administration was willing to hold preliminary talks with North Korea even as Washington continues to toughen sanctions and apply other pressures. Only days earlier Mr. Pence insisted there would be no talks until the North made concessions, including taking steps to give up its nuclear weapons.

The new iteration would align Mr. Pence with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. President Trump, who has dismissed engagement with North Korea as "appeasement," hasn't repudiated Mr. Pence's comments.

The administration has long been hostile to the North and critical of its participation in the Games. In recent days, Mr. Pence used increasingly hostile language, calling the North the most tyrannical regime on the planet.

He wasn't the only critic who felt the attention paid to North Korea's delegation was unseemly given the brutal nature of the regime. Yet it is impossible to know how even a brief exposure to South Korea, the world's eighth largest economy and a democracy, could impact attitudes among North Koreans used to living in a country with many deprivations.

Mr. Pence did not shake hands with, or even smile at, Ms. Kim, as he sat in front of her at the opening ceremony. He could have at least stood when South Korean and North Korean athletes marched in together.

North Korea is a reprehensible regime and the world must never forget that. Mr. Pence made that point by bringing the father of Otto Warmbier, the American college student who died after being jailed by North Korea, to the Olympics and meeting there with North Korean defectors. Still, leaders seeking solutions to major problems like North Korea's nuclear program don't have the luxury of picking their adversaries. Mr. Pence might have used the occasion to raise American concerns with Ms. Kim directly, although the South Koreans say she didn't seem to want to speak with him, either.

All of which leaves unresolved the question of whether North Korea is exploiting South Korea's desire for peace in order to secure economic or other benefits and break the alliance with the United States, or it wants to resolve the nuclear crisis and other disputed issues.

Neither does anyone know whether Mr. Trump, who has been effective at winning international support for tougher sanctions against North Korea, is serious about pursuing negotiations. Both are wild cards. Much will depend on how the North-South dialogue evolves.

But a special burden rests with North Korea, whose nuclear program violates United Nations Security Council resolutions and is a real threat. If Mr. Kim is serious about resolving the crisis, he could send an early signal by releasing the three Americans still held in North Korean prisons or announcing a pause in his nuclear and missiles testing.

## Israeli students and Auschwitz

Shmuel Rosner  
Contributing Writer

**TEL AVIV** This month, Poland decided to outlaw claims of Polish complicity in the Holocaust. This was widely — and rightly — condemned around the world. But for understandable reasons, no country has responded as angrily as Israel, the Jewish state and the guardian of Jewish interests.

"The law is baseless; I strongly oppose it," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. "One cannot change history." The opposition, which rarely agrees with Mr. Netanyahu, joined him in condemnation. Tzipi Livni, the former foreign minister, called the law "spitting in the face of Israel." Yair Lapid, a member of the Knesset and the son of a Holocaust survivor, wrote that "hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered without ever meeting a German soldier."

The Poles were unimpressed with the righteous rhetoric of faraway political leaders. To drive the point home, Warsaw even canceled a planned visit from Israel's education minister, Naf-tali Bennett, who had been especially critical of the new law. ("I am honored," he said in response. "The blood of Polish Jews cries from the ground, and no law will silence it.") Relations between the two countries — which had recently been warm — are now in crisis.

But with crisis comes opportunity. Obviously, Israel should continue to try to convince Poland that the law does more harm than good. But more important, Israel should take this chance to change its relationship not with Poland but with the Holocaust. The debate over the Polish law and Po-

land's role in the Holocaust forces a spotlight on how the mass murder of Jews in the 20th century is remembered in Israel today.

Each year, tens of thousands of young Israelis (mostly students and also soldiers) visit Poland in what feels like the culmination of their Holocaust education. On these trips — encouraged by the Ministry of Education and undertaken, according to some measures, by about a third of Israel's Jewish students — teenagers visit the sites of the ghettos, the cemeteries and the death camps. They see the remnants of a once great Jewish center and learn about the killing machine that ended it. They often wrap themselves in Israeli flags; they often cry. How can anyone visit Auschwitz and not cry?

This visit, almost a rite of passage in today's Israel, is a powerful tool — "first-class education" as Mr. Bennett put it — for instilling in students the need to remember what happened to the Jews of Europe. Nonetheless, it is time to end these trips.

And it may likewise be time to end Israel's participation in the March of the Living, an annual program in which Jews from around the world converge at Auschwitz and then walk to its companion death camp, Birkenau. Israel shouldn't end its participation in these programs to save its relationship with Poland — but rather to save Israelis.

There's no doubt that these trips have merit. They certainly make Israeli students appreciate the scope and

severity of the horrors of the Holocaust. These trips also force young Israelis see with their own eyes what can happen to a people when they are hated and defenseless — a lesson that is as important today as it ever was.

So why end these trips? First, because they contribute to a misperception by many Jews that remembering the Holocaust is the main feature of Judaism. Second, because they perpetuate the myth that Israel itself is born only of the ashes of Europe.

That the memory of the Holocaust has in some ways become the main manifestation of commitment to Judaism is well documented. The Pew Research Center found that 73 percent of American Jews believe "remembering the Holocaust" is essential to being Jewish — a higher percentage than believe following Jewish law or caring about Israel is essential to their Jewish identity.

Among Israeli Jews, 65 percent say remembering the Holocaust is an essential part of their Jewish identity, more than living in Israel or working for justice and equality. That Israeli teenagers spend a hefty part of their schooling preparing for a trip to death camps in Poland suggests that the next generation will feel similarly.

A healthy society cannot be defined by the memory of a tragedy. A healthy culture does not make a trip to where it was almost eliminated its main point for pilgrimage. Jewish youngsters would do better to focus their energies on the site that all generations of Jews have wanted to make pilgrimages to: Jerusalem. Auschwitz should not be elevated to sacredness.

Altering Israel's historical education will also help to change the perception in the country that the Jewish state is here only because of the horrors of Nazism. Israel's existence should not

be seen as compensation for the butchery of Jews in Europe. But pilgrimages that connect Poland and Israel, or those using Poland as a tool with which to bolster the commitment of young Israelis to their own country, send exactly this message. There is a tragedy, and then rebirth.

But there is no resurrection. The dead are still dead. The Jewish culture that was destroyed in Poland and across Europe will never re-emerge. Israel is not a compensation for Auschwitz, and its marching teenagers, with their flags and their songs, with their we-are-still-here spirit, spite only the ghosts.

When I was growing up, in the 1970s, there were no trips to Poland. My high school Holocaust education did not include a gut-wrenching visit to Auschwitz. Nonetheless, I remember the murder of Europe's Jews by the Nazis.

I think about it, like many Israelis, almost daily. When I say that we should end the teenage Holocaust tourism to Poland, I am not calling for forgetting. I do not want to trivialize or marginalize that history or tell Jews that they need to "get over it."

What I believe we Israelis need is a realignment. We need to remember the dead without forgetting them or forgiving their butchers. We need to draw the proper lessons from the Holocaust — one of which is that there is no merit in dying and Jews must be proactive in our quest to keep living. So let's not confuse ourselves by making Auschwitz the axis of our culture and the culmination of our civic religion. Let's keep our March of the Living where it belongs: here, in Israel.

**SHMUEL ROSNER** is the political editor at *The Jewish Journal* and a senior fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute.



Visitors wearing Israeli flags take photographs after touring the death camp complex known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, this month.

## What will you give up for Lent?

Rick Hamlin

Lent is here, and as a practicing Christian, I know the question is inevitable: "What are you planning to give up?" It's a tougher decision than it sounds; I look with awe at a woman who gave up sarcasm one Lent. Now, that would be a real hardship.

Lent is the penitential season in the Christian calendar that traditionally runs from Ash Wednesday to Easter. It is 40 days long, not counting Sundays because Sundays are feast days (that woman could indulge in sarcasm on Sundays), and it marks the 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the wilderness before he began his ministry.

Forty is one of those biblical numbers that means a long time and is linked to periods of trial, like the 40 days and nights that the torrential rains floated Noah's ark, and the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after escaping the pharaoh's clutches.

You can see why the idea of giving up stuff is linked to this period — "fasting" like Jesus did in the desert. Indeed, many people give up certain foods, going without chocolate or red wine or desserts. A little bit of self-imposed suffering to mark the season and a

reason to kick up your heels with chocolate eggs and jelly beans when Easter finally rolls around. Even if you're not a Christian, the idea of going without for 40 days is not so bad. Call it a diet.

But there's something else in this Gospel story that I'd rather honor. What does it mean to wander in the wilderness for 40 days and nights and face your demons? How would I do that today? How do you give up all distractions and listen to that inner voice that tells you what you need to be doing but you can't quite face yet? The idea fills me with a weird combination of joy and dread.

Years ago a wise friend — O.K., he happened to be an Episcopal priest — told me that when religious norms start excluding an essential practice, it pops up elsewhere, often in a secular garb. I feel like that's one reason meditation has boomed recently, practiced by everybody from Silicon Valley executives to kindergartners. The church forgot how important a regular discipline of emptiness is, something so easy to do in prayer — but its flock didn't.

I guess it's not unlike something I do already. I started praying regularly on my morning commute on the subway. I discovered how the external stimuli of doors opening and closing and wheels creaking on the tracks could be chan-

nels for some of my own inner doors opening. As long as I kept my eyes closed (funny about that).

Then I took up the practice sitting on the sofa at home. When you get silent you hear a lot of the noise in your head. Sometimes it will masquerade as a fabulous idea that you have to pursue *right now*, or some item on your to-do list that if you don't get up from that sofa and log on to your computer, you'll forget.

**Even if you're not a Christian, the idea of going without for 40 days is not so bad.**

You won't. In fact, what I look to is the forgetting. In the 14th century an anonymous author wrote a wonderful book on contemplative prayer called "The Cloud of Unknowing." "Whatever you don't know and whatever you've forgotten are 'dark' to you," he says, "because you don't see them with your spiritual eyes." (This translation of the original Middle English is by Carmen Acevedo Butcher.) Emptiness is this process of unknowing.

It seems a happy accident that Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day are on the same day this year, love and mortality meeting. Not long ago, my twenty-something son stood on a New York

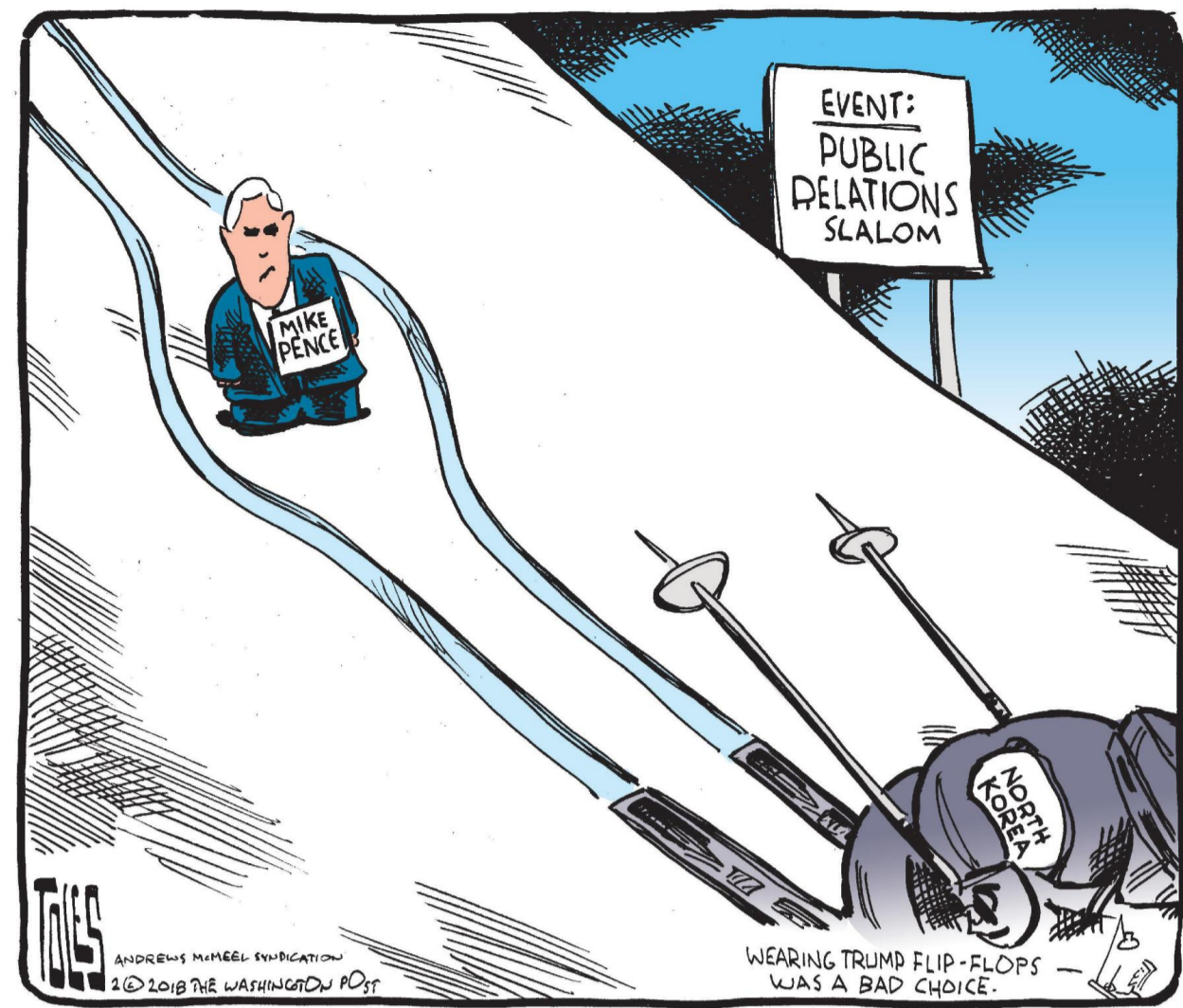
City street corner with some of his church pals and marked anyone who asked with the traditional cross of ashes on their forehead one Ash Wednesday. He even did it to a bus driver who pulled over to the curb and called him inside, an extraordinary moment of spiritual intimacy on a busy day.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we are forced to remember that our lives are short indeed. "Lent" has its origins in an Old English word for spring, but I sometimes like to think it's a reminder that our lives are not a right. They're a gift. In a way, they're "lent."

It would be a mark of false humility to tell you what I plan to give up or take on for Lent, if anything. But as I consider the options, I hold on to this idea of self-emptying, wilderness wandering.

Which brings me to one final comment. People will say, "If you're giving up something for Lent, isn't it something you should be giving up anyway?" Oh, come on. Enjoy the rhythms of life, savor the seasons, listen to what they ask. How wonderful that there is this time to not do more but to do less. Happy Lent.

**RICK HAMLIN** is the executive editor of *Guideposts* magazine and the author of "Pray for Me."



## The Ivanka Trump of North Korea?



Frank Bruni

Where does Ivanka come in? The response to North Korea's overtures at the Olympics was epitomized by what quickly became a popular characterization of Kim Yo-jong. South Korean journalists called her "North Korea's Ivanka." Straight-faced American journalists repeated it.

I get it. Both young women attempt to put a pretty, pert face on a clan — and a government — of transcendent ugliness. Both decided to do that in the context of triple axels and the luge. Ivanka is due in South Korea for the closing ceremony.

But not all ugliness is created equal. Donald Trump is not Kim Jong-un, the United States is nothing like North Korea and to come anywhere near that suggestion is nuts. Be outraged about what's going on in America. Don't be ridiculous.

**Don't blur the difference between a rogue state and America.** In doing her father's bidding, Ivanka Trump is trying to tell the world that a sexist racist really cares

about equal opportunity and that a narcissistic plutocrat is acting in the high-minded interests of the little people. She's willfully delusional, totally complicit and compiling one hell of an Instagram feed, which is what she's ultimately all about.

In doing her brother's bidding, Kim Yo-jong is airbrushing a dictator who authorizes public executions that, according to defectors, must be watched by all adult citizens, so that they can savor the wages of disobedience. She is diverting attention from his roles in the murders of his half brother, who was smeared with a fatal toxin while walking through an airport, and of many senior government officials, slaughtered in grotesque ways. Is it any wonder that she's making the effort? The alternative, apparently, is

being drawn and quartered.

So bizarrely nonjudgmental was some of the chatter about her that BuzzFeed News published what it cheekily labeled a public service announcement. The headline, referring to a disapproving glance that she'd thrown at Vice President Mike Pence, reminded Americans that she was "not your new fave shade queen," and the article bluntly asked those who seemed to be so taken with her, "What the hell is wrong with you people?"

In National Review, David French floated some answers, positing that hatred of President Trump was so blinding that his opponents regarded all international incidents as potential diminutions of his administration. To these appalled critics, Pence exists on the same level as Kim's sister — or even below it. French filed this under the rubric of overheated partisanship, which is indeed a problem but not tidily applicable here. Anti-Trump fervor has as much to do with his out-of-bounds actions and words as with any reflexive tribalism.

And Trump himself has been guilty of galling equivalences. When he campaigned for the presidency and made goo-goo eyes at Vladimir Putin, he famously minimized Putin's reputation for having journalists and political adversaries eliminated, telling Joe Scarborough, "Well, I think that our country does plenty of killing, too, Joe."

Both French's complaint and the BuzzFeed News article touch on something troubling and important: a tendency — in the media and beyond it — to treat all of public life as a pageant and a public relations contest, with winners and losers determined less by their souls than by their sizzle. Kim Yo-jong got points for being a fascinating distraction. That's a role that Trump has long played.

But there can be no mistake: America is in a rotten moment. North Korea is rotten to the core.

## In Iran, death by hanging

COHEN, FROM PAGE 1

phase. Why delicate? Because nobody knows how to handle the succession to Khamenei, who is 78, has ruled for almost three decades and, as divine arbiter (a man standing in for the occulted 12th imam until his expected reappearance), embodies the anti-democratic intrusion of heaven on a system with a veneer of democratic institutions.

Women now chafing at compulsory use of hijabs, and tearing them off in public, are just one manifestation of exasperation with an ossified system. Far from revolutionary, the Islamic Republic is stuck, its internal contradictions more conspicuous than ever and much of its young population estranged.

Raised expectations induced by the lifting of sanctions that accompanied the 2015 nuclear deal have met incompetence, bank failures and corruption. At the same time, tensions have flared, particularly in Syria, with Donald Trump's United States, Mohammed bin Salman's Saudi Arabia, and Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel itching to fight Iran.

Rouhani, in a speech this month marking the 39th anniversary of the Islamic Republic, suggested that if there were differences, "We should refer to the vote of the people and a referendum." That's unlikely to happen; it would be the death warrant of the regime. Still, its mere mention was audacious.

Enter Emami, a man who returned to his country after the Revolution and fought in the war against Iraq, a family man with a quiet determination to usher the country to a better future, and a man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"He fell victim as a pawn," Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the Center for Human Rights in Iran, told me. "The official account has no credibility. Why no autopsy? Why terrorize his family? Emami's death is an indication of the gathering storm in Iran."

In a written statement to The New York Times, Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, demanded an accounting. She said: "We are seriously concerned by the situation surrounding the detention and death of Mr. Seyed-Emami." Freeland continued: "A Canadian has died. We expect the Government of Iran to provide information and answers into the circumstances surrounding this tragedy."

Iranian authorities say Emami confessed to spying. They say they have a video of him preparing his suicide. Mohammad Javad Zariif will be at the Munich Security Conference this weekend. Perhaps he would elucidate on this unlikely sequence. Certainly, he should be pressed.

When I met Emami in 2009, at the height of the Green Movement for political change, he told me that the surging turnout meant that, "It's become impossible for Ahmadinejad to win 50 percent in the first round. And that means a second round."

This conclusion was based on scientific polling. The second round never happened, of course. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won a second presidential term in the first round — divine intervention. He proceeded to reward his Revolutionary Guard cronies, whose business interests saw a bonanza. A reckoning was deferred. But, as Emami's death suggests, it is inescapable one day because the Iranian people will demand it.

### FROM READERS

#### A lesson from Britain?

Re "How Nations Recover," by David Brooks (column, Feb. 7):

While there are lessons to be learned from Britain's ability to revive itself, one should never forget that the racism against Irish Catholics was so pervasive during the Irish potato famine from 1845 to 1852 that more than a million Irish died and a million more were forced to emigrate because of the unwillingness of the British to see them as human beings.

So even the most enlightened and politically adroit of political systems can still be guilty of the most unconscionable acts of inhumanity, and maybe that is the real lesson we can learn from this history.

MICHAEL SCOTT, SAN FRANCISCO

#### SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

To submit a letter to the editor, email [nyletters@nytimes.com](mailto:nyletters@nytimes.com)

### CORRECTION

An Op-Ed essay "My Simple Italian Town Is at Risk of an Oscar" (Feb. 10) about the setting of "Call Me by Your Name" misstated where it was filmed. It was shot in and around Crema, Italy, not entirely in Crema. The article also mischaracterized the origin of the name of a character in the film. Mafalda is the name of a similar character in the book that inspired the film; the movie character was not named in tribute to the elderly woman whom the actor Timothée Chalamet befriended.

## Syria: You own it, you fix it, so just rent it



Thomas L. Friedman

Two weeks ago, standing on the Syria-Israel border in the Golan Heights, I wrote a column positing that this frontier was the "second most dangerous" war zone in the world today — after the Korean Peninsula.

Your honor, I'd like to revise and amend that column.

Having watched the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics, where North and South Korean athletes marched last week into the stadium together in a love fest; and having also watched Israel shoot down an Iranian drone from Syria, bomb an Iranian base in Syria and lose one of its own F-16s to a Syrian missile; and after U.S. jets killed a bunch of Russian "contractors" who got too close to our forces in Syria, I now think the Syria-Israel-Lebanon front is the most dangerous corner in the world.

Where else can you find Syrian, Russian, American, Iranian and Turkish troops or advisers squaring off on the ground and in the air — along with pro-Iranian Shiite mercenaries from Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan; pro-U.S. Kurdish fighters from northern Syria; ISIS remnants; various pro-Saudi and pro-Jordanian anti-Syrian regime Sunni rebels and — I am not making this up — pro-Syrian regime Russian Orthodox Cossack "contractors" who went to Syria to defend Mother Russia from "crazy barbarians" — all rubbing against one another?

As The Washington Post pointed out, "In the space of a single week last week, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Israel lost aircraft to hostile fire" in Syria.

The term "powder keg" was invented for this place. And the term "3-D battlefield" doesn't even begin to capture its complexity. It is a multidimensional battlefield that requires a

quantum computer to sort out the myriad number of actors, shifting alliances and lines of conflict.

But if this story has crept up on you and left you confused as to what U.S. policy should be, let me try to untangle it for you.

The bad news and the good news about the war in Syria is that all the parties involved are guided by one iron rule: You don't want to "own" this war. This is the ultimate rent-a-war. Each party wants to maximize its interests and minimize the influence of its rivals by putting as few of its own soldiers at risk and instead fighting for its goals through air power, mercenaries and local rebels.

They've all learned — Russia from Afghanistan, Iran from the Iran-Iraq war, Israel from south Lebanon, and the U.S. from Iraq and Afghanistan — that their publics will not tolerate large numbers of body bags fighting any ground war in the Middle East.

**Everyone's so loss averse that it's unlikely anyone will get too reckless.**

Vladimir Putin wants to be able to tell Russians that "Russia is back" as a superpower and that he's the kingmaker in Syria — but he isn't putting any Russian soldiers at risk. Instead, Putin is using Iran to provide ground forces and

enlisting contractors, like those Cossacks from a private Russian company named Wagner, to fight and die — as dozens did the other day in a U.S. airstrike — on the ground. Iran, which just witnessed an uprising by its own people, demanding that Tehran spend its money at home, not in Syria, is subcontracting the ground war that Russia subcontracted to Iran to Iran's proxies — Hezbollah and various Shiite mercenaries from Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. This way Iran can control Damascus and use Syria as a forward base to put pressure on Israel but pay "wholesale," not "retail."

U.S. Special Forces are arming and advising Kurdish fighters from northern Syria to carry out the ground war against ISIS. Turkey is using Sunni rebels to fight the same Kurds. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan all use vari-

ous Sunni rebels to fight the pro-Iranian, pro-Shiite regime forces, and Israel is using the long arm of its air force.

In 2003 I wrote a column in the run-up to the U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein, which I supported, in which I warned: "The first rule of any Iraq invasion is the pottery store rule: You break it, you own it. We break Iraq, we own Iraq."

So in Syria today, the abiding rule is, "You own it, you fix it." And because no one wants to own responsibility for fixing Syria — a gargantuan project — they all want to just rent their influence there.

They all want to use as many proxies or air power as possible to secure as much influence as possible and weaken the influence of their rivals as much as possible for as a cheap as possible. There is something very 21st century about this war.

But this is distressing. It means none of the local parties has enough power, resources — or willingness to compromise — to stabilize Syria from the bottom up, and none of the external parties is ready to invest enough power and resources to stabilize it from the top down.

The "good news," sort of, is that because everyone is so "loss averse" in Syria, it's less likely that any party will get too reckless. The Iranians and Hezbollah will most likely continue to prod and poke Israel, but not to such a degree that the Israelis do what they are capable of doing, which is to devastate every Hezbollah neighborhood in Lebanon and hit Iran's homeland with rockets; Israel knows that its high-tech corridor along its coastal plain would be devastated by Iranian rockets coming back.

The Turks don't want a war with America. America doesn't want a war with Russia, and the Russians just want to siphon off as much oil as they can from Syria, and use it as a base and an ego booster, without clashing with anyone — because they are much weaker than they look.

Maybe, eventually, the players will get tired and forge a power-sharing accord in Syria, as the Lebanese eventually did in 1989 to end their civil war. Alas, though, it took the Lebanese 14 years to come to their senses. So get ready for a lot more news from Syria.



**The truth is hard to find.**

Near Afghanistan's Highway 1, C.J. Chivers, a Times journalist, rode with U.S. paratroopers as they searched for outlaws and insurgents threatening the main roadway between Kabul and Kandahar. C.J. is one of more than 1,300 expert journalists in 150+ countries, covering stories for The New York Times.

*Trouble on a Vital Road in Afghanistan*  
By C.J. CHIVERS/December 3, 2007

The New York Times

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# Culture

## In class, this topic is killer

Film enthusiasts devote themselves to the horror genre in a scholarly setting

BY ERIK PIEPENBURG

A figment of H. P. Lovecraft's wicked imagination, Miskatonic University is the Harvard of his horror stories. It appears to be a typical New England college, but elements of the occult are never far from the surface.

In contrast, at the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies, which takes its name from the fictional university, frights are the reason it's alive.

During a recent class in the darkened hall at Film Noir, a microcinema in the New York City borough of Brooklyn that houses the real Miskatonic, the topic was "Penda's Fen," an obscure 1974 film about a boy who has encounters with an angel and a crucified Jesus. A ghost light illuminated the instructor's face.

Formed eight years ago in Canada but now existing in branches in New York and London and one set to open this fall in Los Angeles, Miskatonic is the brainchild of Kier-La Janisse, a film writer and programmer. Ms. Janisse started it after she grew tired of people dismissing horror "because they thought it was for complete morons," as she put it.

**The Miskatonic Institute was formed eight years ago in Canada but now exists in branches in New York and London.**

The institute has operated out of its current location in Brooklyn since September, offering courses led by writers, scholars, directors and others with a passion for the genre. This spring, classes in New York are about two and a half hours, and cost \$12 (in advance), \$15 (at the door) or \$50 for a semester pass. Teachers are paid. There are no homework assignments or tests, and students who attend every class both semesters are considered graduates.

"When I was a teenager, I hated school," Ms. Janisse, who lives in Toronto, said. "But I read Lovecraft and became obsessed with this idea of how we romanticized academic life, with scholars that worked in libraries and solved mysteries. It made me want to go back to school."

Ms. Janisse, the author of "House of Psychotic Women," about female neuroses in horror films, runs the Brooklyn Miskatonic branch with the writer Joe Yanick. Besides exploring film, classes this semester will cover the novelists John Gilmore and Shirley Jackson, and the preservation of genre cinema.

The Miskatonic course calendar would look at home in any film studies curriculum; its class this past Tuesday was called "Black Horror: The Revolutionary Act of Subverting the White Gaze." Its scholarly approach follows decades of horror studies that have produced influential texts like Carol J. Clover's "Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film." The field has its own journal, and there are stand-alone courses and webinars on the subject. But the institute is unique in its all-horror focus.

Sukhdev Sandhu, who taught the class on "Penda's Fen," said the school was an example of "underground scholarship."

"People are creating spaces in their living rooms affordably and cheaply in order to create a different model of education, and Miskatonic is part of that," said Mr. Sandhu, an associate professor of English at New York University, where he runs the Colloquium for Unpopular Culture.

But Miskatonic is also tapping into the golden age of horror in the wider culture, propelled in part by the Oscar-nominated films "Get Out" and "The Shape of Water." Adam Lowenstein, a professor of English and film and media studies at the University of Pittsburgh, cited



VINCENT TULLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



VINCENT TULLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



BBC

**Clockwise from above: the Film Noir Cinema in New York, where the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies holds classes; a scene from "Penda's Fen," the topic of a recent class; and horror-themed items at the cinema.**

Miskatonic as one of many passionate players in "a watershed moment for the study of the horror film." This fresh academic embrace dovetails enthusiastically with the new vogue for horror, which hasn't resonated with such urgency since 1968, the year of "Night of the Living Dead" and "Rosemary's Baby," Mr. Lowenstein said.

"To understand the change, it would be like if 'Night of the Living Dead' got an Academy Award nomination like

'Get Out' did," said Mr. Lowenstein, the author of "Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema and the Modern Horror Film."

"That's mind-boggling, and thrilling," he added.

What's different now is a new generation of horror filmmakers who are hitting the raw nerves exposed by current social movements. A feminist critique of horror has long been a staple of horror studies, thanks to the genre's fixation on

male villains and female victims. But with Jordan Peele's "Get Out," a "Twilight Zone"-style indictment of liberal racism, it's race that's most prominently capturing scholarly attention.

The writer Dianca London Potts, who is teaching Miskatonic's "Black Horror" class, said Mr. Peele's film was a sobering conversation starter.

"The movie crept me out in a way I haven't experienced since the original 'The Hills Have Eyes,'" she said, men-

tioning Wes Craven's 1977 exploitation shocker about a family terrorized by psychopaths. "There's something so terrifying about what we do as a people. Now because of 'Get Out,' people are willing to sit with being uncomfortable." And that, Ms. Janisse said, is good news for Miskatonic and its quest for a "balanced education" of history, theory, production and, perhaps most important, community building.

"A lot of us come from a place where

horror was maligned," she said. "But in the classroom, people are enthusiastic about horror."

Derek Boeckelmann of Brooklyn, a student in the "Penda's Fen" class — his third at Miskatonic — said he grew up watching horror movies. A film studies graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara, he said horror was being taken more seriously in part because it was where box-office success met the political consciousness of the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements.

"There's this spotlight on horror because the genre is good for a lot of the social stuff, like 'Get Out,'" he said. "It's a great genre for female directors and writers."

And for parents who question the validity of a film studies class: Mr. Lowenstein said it could be quite beneficial.

"Because horror films have a vocabulary for the horrific, the painful, the traumatic, the things we don't want to look at or see or think about, they really give us an invaluable opportunity to understand and perhaps change the things in ourselves and our society that need changing," he said. "Horror is healthy."

## Love, betrayal and a little cannibalism

OPERA REVIEW  
PHILADELPHIA

An opera about the making of a medieval manuscript is turbulent yet subdued

BY ZACHARY WOOLFE

"Written on Skin," an opera about the creation of an illuminated manuscript, isn't an open book. At my first live encounter with this 2012 work, at the Academy of Music here for the premiere of a new staging by Opera Philadelphia that runs through Sunday, I was struck by how reserved George Benjamin's score is.

Not that there aren't passages of loud density or idiosyncratic instrumentation — a typewriter, pebbles, sets of small tablas and glass harmonica augment the traditional orchestra — but on the whole the music gives the sense of being artfully curbed. It's as though "Pelléas et Mélisande" or

"Wozzeck" had been partly quieted, even half-vaporized, the roiling energy kept — and sometimes not — at bay.

Will Kerley's stage direction in Philadelphia amplifies this impression of reticence concealing glinting, surging colors. The set, designed by Tom Rogers, is a giant gray box that rotates on a turntable and reveals, as doors open and walls push aside, a labyrinth of shifting spaces: raw wood incompletely painted a radiant blue and studded with panels with the jewel tones of stained glass.

This is the home of a married couple in medieval times. The wife (referred to sometimes as the Woman, sometimes as Agnès) is restive; the husband (the Protector), controlling. Commenting on and guiding the action from our own moment, and dressed in this staging in futuristic, Sprockets-style black, is a trio of angels, vaguely sinister in its affectlessness. One of the three doubles as the Boy, who enters the household under commission to depict the Protector's dominion in images and letters.



The Protector (Mark Stone) and his wife (Lauren Snouffer) in "Written on Skin."

Representing the world in art is portrayed by Mr. Benjamin and the librettist, the playwright Martin Crimp, as a complex, empowering, exposing, explosive, inevitably destructive enter-

prise. (Their next opera, "Lessons in Love and Violence," will have its premiere in London in May.) Agnès, her mind fired with new possibilities, begins an affair with the Boy. When

they're discovered — the Protector, of course, reads about it in the book — he is murdered and she, after a cannibalistic climax that suggests "Salome" and "Titus Andronicus," kills herself. A coda reflects on the angels' "cold fascination with human disaster."

A story about a woman's defiant emergence into selfhood and her repression by a brutal husband obviously resonates differently now than it did just a year ago. But the detached, enigmatic text keeps our sympathies distant and implicates our own fascination with disaster as much as it does the patriarchy it shows in action. We perceive onstage not personalities but vivid puppets, drawn to their doom by forces outside themselves.

Pity is particularly hard to summon in this new production, which conceives the central couple as more aristocratic, in a Disney "Sleeping Beauty" way, than the rough, flinty country gentry imagined by Katie Mitchell's staging, in which the opera was first seen, captured on DVD and widely traveled. Barbara Hannigan,

the Agnès in that premiere version, gave a performance of virtuosic vulnerability — dirty and wide-eyed.

In Philadelphia, the penetrating soprano Lauren Snouffer is more poised and self-possessed, more equal to her husband (the baritone Mark Stone, booming even in desperation) in presence if not in rights. As the Boy and First Angel, the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo adroitly navigates the luminous and piercing, the gentle and chilly sides of his two-sided character.

Corrado Rovaris leads a muted account of the score — a coolly paced, grayish take that emphasizes the opera's aloofness more than its expressiveness or range.

It's not the most richly satisfying conducting. But the excellent cast and resourceful staging further burnish the reputation of Opera Philadelphia, a company that, with the recent inauguration of an annual fall festival focusing on new work, has swiftly become one of the most creative and ambitious in the United States.

# Pondering a move rightward in Europe

## THEATER REVIEW

A play about an actress doing a voice-over job echoes and re-echoes

BY BEN BRANTLEY

"It's not theater."

So says the director to the actress. Spoken with jokey reassurance, this disclaimer is delivered in the opening moments of "Returning to Reims," an all-too-timely rumination on working-class disaffection and nationalist politics from the German director Thomas Ostermeier, running through Feb. 25 at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn.

What Paul (Bush Moukarzel), the director, means is that the performer, Katy (Nina Hoss), needn't worry about fluffing lines. After all, they're in a studio where she'll be recording the voice-over for a film by Paul, and mistakes can be erased with the flick of a dial.

But audiences familiar with the work of Mr. Ostermeier, and his Schaubühne Berlin company, may hear a different, more confrontational meaning in Paul's words. Mr. Ostermeier, whose productions of classics like "Richard III" (seen at the Brooklyn Academy of Music last fall) seemed not so much to push envelopes as to rip them apart, is celebrated for redefining how theater should behave.

But even his longtime fans are unlikely to be prepared for the seeming noneventfulness of the first half of "Returning to Reims," adapted from a 2009 memoir by the French philosopher Didier Eribon. Most of what happens during that hour seems to be willfully, even numbingly anti-dramatic.

The spectacle, such as it is, consists almost entirely of Ms. Hoss reading the words of Mr. Eribon, while annotative video footage (some featuring Mr. Eribon himself) is projected onto a large screen behind her. It's true that a lot of what is said — about the disavowal of progressive politics by the blue-collar provincial society from which Mr. Eribon emerged (and escaped) — provides rich food for thought.

It is also true that Ms. Hoss, best known to American audiences for playing Astrid the German spy on the Showtime series "Homeland," is an attention-worthy narrator. She reads in a low-pitched, deceptively neutral voice that inflects ostensible objectivity with the slightest whisper of lamentation.

The charisma of its central interpreter aside, what distinguishes "Returning" from a presentation at an academic conference or perhaps, given its European glamour quotient, Davos? The answer emerges by furtive degrees, in ways that remind us that what is being discussed here is by no means just academic. The show is definitely worth seeing, but you may not think so until after it's over.

The production, which is performed in English, was conceived by Ms. Hoss in response to the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States. Like many members of the urban intelligentsia, Ms. Hoss was surprised and alarmed by the sharp rightward turn among American voters, which reflected a similar political drift in her native Germany and throughout Europe.

She found that Mr. Eribon's memoir expanded thoughtfully on similar questions. Like Edouard Louis's best-selling French novel, "The End of Eddy" (2014), "Returning to Reims" portrays a gay, bookish youth growing up in a provincial, blue-collar town where homosexuality and intellectualism are anathema.

The adult Mr. Eribon, now living in Paris, revisits that world after the death of his father. It is a journey that prompts its own, outward-reaching odyssey of self-examination.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARA KRULWICH/THE NEW YORK TIMES



Top, Nina Hoss in "Returning to Reims" as the actress Katy, reading the words of the French philosopher Didier Eribon while video footage is projected behind her. Above, Ms. Hoss with Bush Moukarzel as her director.

How, he wonders, did the sort of people who religiously voted Communist when he was growing up among them come to support the populist National Front of Marine Le Pen? Mr. Eribon further considers how the

intellectual left, his adopted tribe, has contributed to such alienation, even to the point of waging "an implacable war" against blue-collar interests.

Mr. Eribon's language may be academic, but it is infused with anguished

passion. And it soon becomes clear that those involved with the stage version of "Returning" — and by that I mean both its characters and their creators — take this material very personally.

As she reads into the microphone, Katy reveals intermittent flickers of uneasiness — not with Mr. Eribon's words but with how Paul has edited them, and with the accompanying footage. She interrupts, tentatively at first, with her objections. Paul and Toni (Ali Gadema), who runs the studio, point out that they have deadlines to meet.

**It soon becomes clear that those involved — both the characters and their creators — take this material very personally.**

"That's insane," she says to the men. "We're doing a political movie here and you can't have a political discussion?"

Those of us watching from our seats may extrapolate that since Ms. Hoss and associates are doing a political play, shouldn't we too be part of the political discussion? Of course, we should. And we are.

From that point, the fourth wall between stage and audience becomes increasingly porous. Comments and asides are now occasionally and casually pitched directly to the house. Toni turns out to have a sideline as a rapper, and he performs for us with support from Paul.

In other words, the line between us and them becomes blurrier, making us think about the bigger, class-oriented

division between another Us and Them at the heart of this production. Speaking of which, is Paul's interpretation of Mr. Eribon's book itself guilty of intellectual dishonesty?

We find ourselves newly contextualizing earlier encounters among Katy, Paul and Toni, which had a whiff of sexual and professional condescension. It is Katy, as a woman and actress, who is mostly the recipient of such attitudes.

But it is also she who prevails. By the end, she is presenting what amounts to her own film, an account of the life of a German political activist and idealist of optimistically expanding vistas and pursuits. His name is Willi Hoss, and he is the father of the actress Nina Hoss.

As I said, "Returning" takes its politics personally.

In the viewing, this production is rarely exciting in the terms of conventional drama. Nor is its portrayal of the creation of a film entirely credible. But it's smart in expressly theatrical ways, and its effectiveness is subliminal. Even the seeming somnolence of Ms. Hoss's voice-over narration has its purpose.

Ideas have been planted in your head without your even being aware of it, as if while you were sleeping. The conversation conducted on such different levels on the stage is likely to keep talking, and talking, in your head the next morning.

# Two tales in tune in a deft debut

## BOOK REVIEW

### ASYMMETRY

By Lisa Halliday. 275 pp. Simon & Schuster. \$26.

BY PARUL SEHGAL

Anthropologists studying a tribe in southern Africa in the 1970s distinguished between two kinds of stories: those told during daylight — gossipy anecdotes, your average water-cooler chat — and those told at night. Around the fire, stories turned starkly philosophical, full of allusions to the ancestors and the spirit world. Nighttime tales seemed to speak to a different human need.

Among the abundant pleasures of "Asymmetry," a scorchingly intelligent first novel by Lisa Halliday, is that it satisfies both these appetites — it's a clever comedy of manners set in Manhattan as well as a slowly unspooling tragedy about an Iraqi-American family, which poses deep questions about

free will, fate and freedom, the all-powerful accident of one's birth and how life is alchemized into fiction.

The first section follows Alice, a 20-something assistant at a publishing house, as she tumbles down a rabbit hole of a relationship with Ezra Blazer, a literary eminence 40 years her senior who bears a terrifically unabashed resemblance to Philip Roth (with whom Halliday had a relationship while in her 20s).

For all the obvious imbalances in their relationship, the pair meet at a moment when they're both at a precipice. Alice longs to fully enter the world, to write and create; Ezra struggles with leaving it, his body starting to break down. Each becomes the custodian of the other's dignity. He pays off her student loans and teaches her how to pronounce Camus. She picks up his Mylanta from the drugstore and gets him a new cord for his reading glasses. They watch baseball in bed together and talk writing. "If there's a gun hanging on the wall in the first chapter, in a later chapter it must

go off," Ezra instructs Alice, passing along Chekhov's famous rule. She responds in her customary deadpan, "If there's a defibrillator hanging on the wall in the first chapter, in a later chapter must it go off?" (Does it ever.) In the distance, there is the rumbling of the American invasion of Iraq.

It's a fresh twist on a familiar story — a May-December romance that so shrewdly anticipates and skirts expectations, I would not have minded if the novel had trundled along in this vein for another 200 pages. ("Asymmetry" joins a group of recent acclaimed debuts by women that revolve around the theme of a young woman, usually a would-be writer who takes up with an older male artist — Sally Rooney's "Conversations With Friends" and Hermione Hoby's "Neon in Daylight," to name just two. The younger woman, handmaiden to genius, has been such a curiously central and peripheral figure in fiction; it's as if she's being energetically reclaimed.) But Halliday shifts course, and the book's scope widens.

We're transported to a holding room



Lisa Halliday.

in London's Heathrow Airport, where Amar, an Iraqi-American economist, has been detained on his way to Kurdistan to see his brother. This section is delivered in first person, and by a narrator as different from sweet, somnolent Alice as you can imagine. Amar is introspective, given to scrutinizing his not only own motives but those of

everyone around him, of whole cultures — it's how he has survived, or has tried to, as he's watched his family and Iraq decimated by war.

The two stories never explicitly intersect. A third section, a radio interview with Ezra, hints at the link between them, but the game — and real pleasure — for the reader is to trace deeper resonances. What does it mean that these lives coexist? Alice in Manhattan, preoccupied with her erotic and intellectual ambitions, and Amar in Baghdad, watching his family's life being choked by checkpoints, travel restrictions and constant threat.

The questions that crop up — about the illusion of choice and the fateful hand of luck, of birth — form the philosophical core of the novel, but luckily they come to us largely through Amar, and are handled lightly, leavened by his sarcasm, his mournful wit.

As you search for the symmetries in "Asymmetry," you won't find one key that will unlock all its mysteries — this book is musical, not architectural in structure; themes don't build on one

another as much as chime and rhyme, repeat and harmonize, so what we receive is less a series of thesis statements than a shimmering web of associations; in short, the world as we know it.

You hunt for buried clues — the repeated references to a Stephen Crane quote, the mentions of an abortion. You do close readings of the fragments of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "Eichmann in Jerusalem" that appear. On every page, you interrogate every detail: What are you doing here? Why do you matter? "Asymmetry" is not complicated, but it cannot be read complacently. Like it or not, it will make you a better reader, a more active noticer. It hones your senses.

Toward the end of the book, a radio interviewer asks Ezra what it's like to grow old. He responds, "The short answer is that you go about your business reminding yourself to look at everything as though you're looking at it for the last time." Why wait? Halliday challenges us. Start now.

## TRAVEL

## In land of innovative brews, less is more

## HEADS UP

Swedish capital sees an uptick in venues selling low-alcohol craft beers

BY INGRID K. WILLIAMS

To understand the rigidity — and some would say absurdity — of Sweden's alcohol laws, step inside a Systembolaget, a government-run liquor store, on a Saturday afternoon. It's predictable chaos because these shops are the only retailers permitted to sell beverages containing more than 3.5 percent alcohol by volume (A.B.V.). At precisely 3 p.m., the doors will shut until Monday morning, and anyone hoping to buy a bottle of wine for a spontaneous dinner party or a few beers for a Sunday cookout will be out of luck.

But increasingly, Stockholmers have other palatable options.

Grocery stores are allowed to sell what is known as folkol ("people's beer"), containing 2.8 percent to 3.5 percent A.B.V. Long maligned as tasteless, watered-down pilsners, these low-A.B.V. beers are now getting a reboot by craft brewers seeking to shake up the Swedish market. At the same time, a wave of new folkol-focused bars and bottle shops — all opened in the last two years — is fueling interest in this formerly low-prestige beverage.

In a country known for its innovative craft beer, which often are high-alcohol India pale ales or sour ales, this emerging trend in the opposite direction is being driven by Swedes' interest in healthier living, but it's also a way to skirt Sweden's strict alcohol laws. Whatever the reason, it's making the city's drinking scene notably livelier.

First up was Bottl3.5hop, which opened in June 2016 as a low-alcohol bottle shop, a designation that necessitates neither a liquor license nor a kitchen (Swedish regulations require that bars also serve food).

The shop doubles as a bar with low-alcohol beers on tap and a rotating assortment of about 120 different bottles from around the world.

At the forefront of the trend in Stockholm is Omnipollo, a beer producer founded here in 2011 by Henok Fentie



and Karl Grandin.

"For us, it's always been about getting as good beer as possible into as many hands as possible, to be frank," Mr. Fentie said. "We want to replace your average beer for something that's more unique."

One of the top folkol options available right now is Omnipollo's Bianca Mango

Lassi Gose — "an Indian-beverage-inspired German-style sour beer, which sounds quite far-fetched, but it worked really well," he said.

"I shied away from low-A.B.V. beers for a very long time because part of the truth is that flavor does go hand in hand with higher A.B.V.s," continued Mr. Fentie, who has a reputation for brewing po-

tent I.P.A.s and sublime stouts with double-digit A.B.V.s.

"But as we progressed as brewers and also as consumers, it's become more of an enticing challenge to try to create a lower A.B.V. beer that has a lot of flavor," he said.

"The other part of it is that we're parents," he said, and lower-A.B.V.s make



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIKA GERDEMARK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left and above, customers at Omnipollo in Stockholm. Omnipollo, one of Sweden's leading craft breweries, offers low-alcohol brews like Bianca Mango Lassi Gose, below.



western Sodermalm.

"I think everybody has this mind-set that they want to drink for pleasure, not for effect," she said.

The couple, both former homebrewers, had noticed an uptick in quality of low-A.B.V. beers, especially among Swedish craft brewers such as Poppels, Oppigards, Brekeriet and Omnipollo.

"I realized there was a big trend going on with the folkol," she said. "More brewers were brewing it, and the quality was becoming better and better, and it still is to this day."

Folkolsbutiken, another bar and bottle shop that opened on Sodermalm in August 2016, is focused on promoting Nordic, primarily Swedish, brewers.

Despite increased buzz, many fledgling craft breweries struggle to get their beers to consumers, said the owner, Johan Palo, noting the difficulty of landing a spot in Systembolaget's inventory.

To introduce flavorful folkol to a wider audience, Folkolsbutiken also has a beer bike pouring sour beers and low-alcohol I.P.A.s at Hornstulls Marknad, a weekend market open April through September.

"It's a coincidence that we opened at the same time," said Mr. Palo of his fellow folkol-focused establishments. "But it definitely says something about how Swedes want to drink now."

## Stately, stylish accommodations

## CHECK IN

BY RATHA TEP

BRISTOL HARBOUR HOTEL & SPA, BRISTOL, ENGLAND

## RATES

Doubles from 165 pounds (about \$230)

## BASICS

The 42-room, four-story Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa provides a dose of 21st-century chic to Bristol's Old City and its stately Victorian and Georgian facades. The British-based Harbour Hotels has turned two ornate bank buildings, including one inspired by a 16th-century Venetian library, into stylish accommodations. It opened in late 2016. Public spaces now burst with vibrant colors and exuberant modern design set against a backdrop of curving stone walls and intricately carved friezes that are more than a century old.

## LOCATION

The property is in the heart of the cobblestoned Old City just opposite St. Nicholas Market and its bustling glass-covered arcade, along with lots of restaurants, bars and night life. Most of Bristol's main attractions are within a 20-minute stroll, including the massive ocean liner-turned experiential museum S.S. Great Britain, the local history museum M Shed, the Wills Memorial Building, and two works of street art from the city's most notorious son, Banksy.

## THE ROOM

We had booked a Superior Double, the lowest tier available, but got upgraded to a Deluxe Double, the next tier up. At 323 square feet (32 square feet more than a Superior), it was surprisingly roomy. The comfortable king-size bed had a tall tufted headboard and was topped with a fluffy white duvet, a tan and gray coverlet and plenty of pillows. Matte gold reading lamps flanked the bed, as did a wooden writing desk and nightstand. There was a burnt orange velvet sofa at the foot of the bed, as well as a brown leather armchair with a seat cushion upholstered in a bold floral-patterned fabric. The complimentary gin and sherry, in mouth-blown glass decanters, along with crystal glasses, were a nice touch. But despite a double set of windows and heavily lined drapes, we could still hear the faint bass beat of a nearby club going late into the night.

## THE BATHROOM

The bathroom, entered by a set of double doors, was amply sized, with a bathtub and separate, spacious stall with a rainfall shower head. There was an extra-wide sink and plenty of marble counter space. Numerous thick white towels hung from a heated rack, and



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRISTOL HARBOUR



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRISTOL HARBOUR

The Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa, which opened in 2016. Above, the Gold Bar.

plush white bathrobes were also provided. High-end toiletries by the White Company were scented with notes of rose and jasmine.

## AMENITIES

Situated in the former bank vaults underground, the hotel's small spa offers a hydrotherapy pool, sauna and steam room that are free for guests, while treatments such as hot stone massage cost extra. The next-door gym is well-equipped with treadmills, exercise bikes, weight machines — and an original bank vault door.

## DINING

The lobby-level restaurant, the Jetty, is decorated in shades of blue, a reference to both Bristol blue glass, once produced throughout the city — it forms a decorative border around the room's extra-large windows — and the sea, which inspires much of the menu. Addictive, lightly floured cockle "popcorn" arrived

hot and crisp in a miniature copper pan, and lobster bisque topped a creamy cheese soufflé. The stylish Gold Bar served creative cocktails like the Clear and Breezy, a fizzy, zesty twist on the classic Dark 'n' Stormy. Our lush breakfast, ordered up to our room, included delicious grilled kippers with caper beurre noisette, and toast accompanied by butter served in a scallop shell and a selection of Wilkin & Sons jam and honey. Unfortunately, it took an agonizing 50 minutes to arrive.

## BOTTOM LINE

The Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa offers plush accommodations and high-gloss design in an Old World setting, conveniently located near many of the city's main attractions. Just make sure to bring earplugs.

Bristol Harbour Hotel & Spa, 55 Corn Street, Bristol, England. bristol-harbour-hotel.co.uk

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