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TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

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Vanishing Point Canaries in the South Pacific

By Vijay Prashad

Ten years ago, the islands of Abanuea and Tebua Tarawa in the state of Kiribati vanished under the waters. The island of Tepuka Savilivili lost its coconut trees due to salination. Kiribati, located in the center of the Pacific Ocean, takes its name for a certain pronunciation of the last name of Captain Thomas Gilbert. On the way to China after having dropped off a boatload of convicts at Botany Bay in 1788, Gilbert chanced on these islands. They took his name. One of them had an earlier name, Abanuea, which means the beach which is long-lasting. It lasted a long time, but could not withstand the rising ocean in 1999. That's when it went

under. The Gilbertese lost two islands that year. Others have since followed.

The fate of the small island is to disappear. Abanuea, the island with beaches that were fated for forever, was the canary.

Kiribati's president Anote Tong has become an important spokesperson for islands and island cultures that totter on the edge of extinction. "Already we have whole villages being washed away. There's no running away from the reality that the sea levels are rising. There is no running away from that reality." From Kyoto to Durban, from one Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report to another, the certainty

of increased or stable carbon emissions, of rising average global temperatures and of rising sea levels is now clear: nothing short of a global compact to reduce and cut-back on carbon can possibly help turn back the tide.

But the situation seems hopeless. The Durban deal of 2011 saved the Kyoto protocols, but certainly not Kiribati: once more there will be deliberations on how to act, and once more there will be chatter about a Global Climate Fund for mitigation and technology development. All this is at the expense of the attempt to make sure that the global temperature increase will remain below 2 degrees Celsius (most expect that the feeble Durban deal, which postpones action until 2020, will allow average temperatures to rise to about 3.5 degrees Celsius by 2020 – the death sentence for Kiribati).

PRASHAD CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Pakistan and America Caught in a Bad Romance

By Charles Pierson

Is it time to divorce Pakistan?
– Bob Schieffer, moderating the third Obama-Romney Presidential Debate, October 22, 2012

We can't just walk away from Pakistan," Republican Presidential nominee Mitt Romney told Bob Schieffer at the third and final Romney-Obama debate. President Barack Obama agreed. Neither candidate gave any indication that he cared what Pakistan thought in the matter. Does Pakistan want a divorce from the United States?

Every Pakistani I know would answer: "Yes."

Pakistan never wanted the match to begin with. To this day, Pakistanis carry

huge loads of resentment toward the United States following the effort to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan in the 1980s. As Pakistanis see it, the United States used Pakistan, then dumped Pakistan as soon as the war was over. In October 1990, Uncle Sam, that ingrate, reimposed sanctions it had placed on Pakistan before the war in order to halt Pakistan's drive for a nuclear bomb. The United States hadn't cared about Pakistan's nuclear program so long as Pakistan was of use in Afghanistan. (The American sanctions failed. Pakistan exploded two nuclear devices on May 28, 1998.)

As we learned during the third presidential debate, the United States has decided that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal

still matters very much. As Governor Romney explained: the United States "just can't walk away" from Pakistan because its more than 100 nuclear weapons may fall into the hands of jihadists. Never mind that Pakistan's nukes are tightly controlled by the Pakistan army, the most efficient, most disciplined institution in the country. Forget, too, that Pakistan is already paranoid that the United States will try to seize its nuclear arsenal. "Loose nukes" will be the go-to pretext for any future US intervention in Pakistan.

Shortly after 9/11, Pakistan again entered an alliance with the United States. Pakistan was less than enthusiastic about the courtship. However, this was the period in which President George W. Bush warned other countries: "You're either with us or you're with the terrorists." This shotgun wedding solved a problem for Pakistan's military dictator General Pervez Musharraf who had seized power two years before. The alliance with the US lent the Musharraf

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No wonder that Sarah Jayne Clifton of Friends of the Earth International bemoaned the situation. “Ordinary people have once again been let down by our governments. Led by the US, developed nations have reneged on their promises, weakened the rules on climate action and strengthened those that allow their corporations to profit from the climate crisis.”

President Tong lives with his nightmares. “For some time I did not sleep because I didn’t have a solution to a problem that there wasn’t a solution to. What happens to us in the future? Do we disappear as a culture?”

In May this year, at the UN’s Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Pacific Island nations came to talk about climate change and their cruel fate. Kiribati’s Finance and Economic Development Minister Tom Murdoch announced that his small island state established the largest marine protected area in the Ocean – the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, which is more than 400,000 sq. kms, or 11% of Kiribati’s Exclusive Economic Zone. “The Ocean is fundamental to our cultural identity,” Murdoch said, “Our green economy is very ‘blue.’ It has been said that we are not a small island

developing country but rather a large ocean developing economy.”

Tuvalu’s Minister of Trade Lotoala Metia said that his country is trying to move from fossil fuels, on which the island is totally dependent, to renewable energy by 2020. There is something obscene about these pledges, coming from countries that barely contribute to the climatic shifts. Out of the 186 countries that reported figures for greenhouse gas emissions, Kiribati came in at 185. The three biggest emitters are the USA, European Union and China. It is worth recollecting that at the 2011 Durban meeting, the major environmental NGOs wrote to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointing out that the US was the “major obstacle” to any progress in global talks. Even the European Union openly criticized the US for “overlooking the facts” of climate disturbances.

Behind the scenes, as the Wikileaks tranche demonstrates, the US colluded with the Europeans to scuttle any attempt by the UN and by the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) countries to create an effective treaty. Despite the public declarations on behalf of climate legislation by President Obama, his administration used every dirty trick, including withholding aid, to secure votes against effective climate legislation at Copenhagen and Durban. Michael Froman, US deputy national security advisor, wanted to deny the BASIC states a victory not only for climate negotiations but also to break their political momentum. “It is remarkable how closely co-ordinated the BASIC group has become in international fora,” Froman wrote from Brussels, “taking turns to impede US/EU initiatives and playing the US and EU off against each other. BASIC countries have widely differing interests, but have subordinated these to their common short-term goals. The US and EU need to learn from this co-ordination and work much more closely and effectively together ourselves, to better handle third country obstructionism and avoid future train wrecks on climate, Doha or financial regulatory reform.”

The newly confident Global South did not roll over. The largest states, the BASIC countries, stood by their view that any cut back on carbon would have to come with technological transfers

and financial assistance to facilitate “leap frogging” over a carbon modernity towards a non-carbon civilization.

No such program has been accepted by the North. It would rather try to use its minuscule foreign aid program to break the coalitions of the Global South. In 2010, the Danish Ambassador to Bolivia told the US chargé in La Paz, “Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen spent an unpleasant 30 minutes with Morales, during which Morales thanked him for [\$30m a year in] bilateral aid, but refused to engage on climate change issues. The Danes said they were ‘fed up’ with Bolivia and the ALBA countries, who continue to mount legal and propaganda arguments against the Copenhagen Accord, but that they would continue to consult with their European Union partners on ways to influence the [Bolivian Government’s] position.” No such luck. Morales remained obdurate. Unfortunately, the imperatives of rapid economic growth has dented Morales own commitment to people-centered, non-carbon development. Pablo Solón, Bolivia’s former ambassador to the UN and the coordinator of the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and The Rights of Mother Earth, resigned his positions and wrote an open letter to Morales in 2011 protesting the road being built through the Indigenous Territory and National Park of Isibore Secure, “One cannot speak of defending Mother Earth and at the same time promoting the construction of a road that will harm Mother Earth, doesn’t respect indigenous rights and violates human rights in an ‘unforgivable’ way.”

Dr. Kosi Latu, a leader of the small island states, complains about the direction of the climate debate, and joins President Tong in his despondency. “For us in the Pacific, it’s more than [poverty reduction and green technology]. I’m talking about the survival of our peoples in the sense that due to climate change impacts, we stand to lose our land, our histories and cultures, our nationalities.”

When the island vanishes, the material basis of the culture of its people will also go. Those who survive will become “climate refugees,” a term that the UN is trying to establish. They will move to New Zealand or even Zambia (whose late president welcomed the I-Kiribati) – it will become impossible to live in New Zealand as if they are still on their

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beautiful set of islands. Lives will alter. The basis of the I-Kiribati will shift. There is nothing wrong with that in essence. Culture is not eternal – social forms from elsewhere transact into our lives, and if these enrich our cultural world in some way they stick. But what is to take place to the I-Kiribatis and their fellows is not the essence of normal cultural interchange. What is at issue is the forewarned but cataclysmic annihilation of the social basis of I-Kiribati cultural life – an annihilation that is comparable to the cultural genocide visited upon the Native Americans by the Colombian crossing.

Is there a future of the “sea of islands”? Not if the carbon civilization continues its pace onward. The rising seas will reclaim our ground, sings the I-Kiribati poet Jane Resture in 1999 as Abanuea sinks under the sea, while far away they pour their fumes into the clear blue sky not knowing and never caring why the world is beginning to die. **CP**

Vijay Prashad's latest books are *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* (AK Press) and *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today* (New Press).

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regime international legitimacy. And the billions of dollars in US aid were certainly welcome.

Still, the relationship was marred from the start by fundamental incompatibility between the parties. The two countries want different—in fact, conflicting—things from the relationship. America's central concern is Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. After the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan which followed 9/11, many Taliban and Al-Qaeda fled to Pakistan's tribal areas on the border with Afghanistan. From the tribal areas, militants launch attacks against NATO in Afghanistan. The US wants these attacks stopped and demands that Pakistan clean out the militant safe havens.

This Pakistan has been reluctant to do. Here's a riddle: what's the difference between the American military in Afghanistan today and the Soviets in the 1980s? “Nothing,” Pakistanis answer. Most Pakistanis are not fans of the Taliban. The Taliban's harsh brand of Islam is not the religion of most Pakistani Muslims. Yet Pakistanis regard the

Taliban as engaged in a justifiable fight against a hostile occupier. Pakistanis view the American war in Afghanistan as just the latest in a long string of “Crusader” attacks on Muslims.

There is another reason Pakistan has no enthusiasm for the fight in Afghanistan. Pakistan has always regarded India as its real enemy. This hatred dates back to the 1947 Partition of India when Hindus and Muslims killed each other to the tune of two million people in all. The two countries have gone to war several times since then. It is an open secret that Pakistan has for years supported militant Islamist groups in Afghanistan, including the Taliban. The reason? To counter Indian influence in Afghanistan. Pakistani planners are committed to the notion of “strategic depth” which means maintaining Afghanistan as a friendly neighbor. The Taliban will inevitably form part of any future Afghan government. By supporting Afghan militants Pakistan hopes to ensure a friendly government in Kabul after the US withdrawal.

India, too, seeks a friendly Kabul. India sees Afghanistan as a gateway to the oil-rich regions of Central Asia. There is also wealth inside Afghanistan itself and Delhi has inked a mining deal with Kabul for access to the country's minerals. Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met again on November 10-11 to discuss further collaboration between their two countries.

Reinforcing Indian interest in Afghanistan is India's strategic doctrine. Indian defense planners follow the ancient Hindu Arthashastra, the world's oldest manual of realpolitik. The Arthashastra lays out a “checkerboard” theory of international relations. The occupant of the next square is your enemy. The wise country will make friends with the country one square beyond. This is what India is attempting to do in Afghanistan. This strategy explains the proliferating number of Indian consulates in Afghanistan and the \$1.2 billion in reconstruction and development money India has earmarked for Afghanistan since 2001. It also explains the role India has accepted in helping train Afghanistan's security forces. (Meanwhile, American troops are being killed in a mounting series of so-called “green-on-blue” attacks by Afghan

forces.)

India's activities in Afghanistan make the Pakistan army even less willing to take troops from the Pakistan-India border in order to send them to the tribal regions. When the Pakistan army does venture into the tribal regions—after much goading by the United States—it does its best to avoid targeting the Afghan Taliban and Taliban allies such as the Haqqani network. The army reserves its fire for the homegrown Pakistan Taliban which launch suicide bombings and other attacks within Pakistan. It was the Pakistan Taliban which killed former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007. And it was the Pakistan Taliban who last month attempted to murder a 14 year old girl, Malala Yousafzai, whose work on behalf of girls' education the Pakistan Taliban deemed “obscene.”

If Pakistan will not clean out the tribal areas, who will? America's answer: send in the drones. Drones may be Pakistan's biggest grievance against the United States. Attacks by unmanned aerial drones in Pakistan's tribal areas were initiated by President George W. Bush and have escalated dramatically under

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President Barack Obama. There have been more drone strikes during Obama's four years in office than during all eight years of the Bush Administration. Pakistanis hate the drones because they violate Pakistani sovereignty and kill innocent bystanders as well as terrorists. The well-respected New American Foundation think tank which closely monitors drone attacks estimates that 16% of those killed by drones are noncombatants. Estimates from within Pakistan are considerably higher: as high as 90% in 2007, according to the Pakistani government. The Pakistani NGO Pakistan Body Count has claimed that civilian casualties have run from 75% to 80% since the drone strikes began. Anti-American sentiment in Pakistan runs high. Asked why, Pakistani Foreign Minister Rabbani Khar'd answered with one word: "Drones."

Pakistan and the United States have more grievances against each other than will fit in a short article. We close with just a few more:

A major US grievance is Pakistan's closing of NATO supply routes. More than 80% of supplies for the war in Afghanistan travel through Pakistan. The alternate northern routes which begin in Europe or Russia and run through Central Asia are longer and cost more—two or three times as much as bringing materiel into Pakistan's port of Karachi and then through Pakistan by truck to Afghanistan. So it was a serious setback to NATO when Pakistan closed the supply routes late last year. The Pakistan move was in response to a US helicopter assault on a Pakistan army outpost on November 26, 2011 which took the lives of 24 Pakistani troops. (The United States has claimed that it mistook the Pakistan army outpost for militants. On its side, the United States has charged Pakistan with cross-border shelling of NATO positions in Afghanistan.) Pakistan did not reopen the supply routes until June. This was not the first time Pakistan closed the supply routes. Don't expect it to be the last.

Another US grievance arose last year when the United States discovered Pakistan shacking up with someone else: Osama Bin Laden. Did Pakistan know that Bin Laden was living next to their largest military academy? Maybe not, but Bin Laden did go next door every Wednesday to use the pool. If the

Pakistani government was unaware of Bin Laden's presence this would mark an intelligence failure of heroic proportions.

Earlier, Pakistanis had become enraged at America over the Raymond Davis spy scandal. Davis thrust himself into the world spotlight on January 27, 2011 when he killed two men on a street in Lahore. Davis claimed that the men had been following him and tried to kill him. Davis, a graduate of the Maxwell Smart School of Espionage, was found by police to be toting a curious collection of objects suggesting covert work: a flashlight attached to a headband, a pocket telescope, a long-range wireless set, and a Glock pistol. The United States claimed that Davis was a consular employee entitled to immunity but Pakistanis believed he was CIA. (Davis' self-defense claim may have been the only true part of his story. The two men Davis killed

There have been more drone strikes during Obama's four years in office than during all eight years of the Bush Administration.

may have been militants. Found in their possession were two bags of prepaid cell phones. Militants use a cell phone once and then discard it to prevent their calls from being traced.) Davis' killings caused outrage throughout Pakistan. Pakistanis demanded that Davis be tried in Pakistan for murder. Davis was returned to the United States only after the United States paid *diyya* (blood money) to the families of his victims, a practice allowed under Pakistani law.

This is the brief for divorce. The United States has never had the full cooperation of Pakistan and never will. The alliance only exists because of American arm-twisting. American involvement in Afghanistan is nearing an end with American troops scheduled to withdraw in 2014. It is time to admit that the relationship is over. But the US shouldn't be sad. I hear Yemen isn't seeing anyone.
CP

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The Path to Change in Ethiopia

By Graham Peebles

It is a new-year in Ethiopia, (belated) happy 2005 one and all. With it comes a new prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, deputy PM under Meles Zenawi who died some time in August or was it July. A fog of misinformation and uncertainty surrounds the final months of Meles' life, ingrained secrecy being both a political and national characteristic that works against social and ethnic cohesion, strengthening mistrust and division.

It is unclear what route the deputy PM, a Protestant from humble beginnings in the small, desperately poor Wolayta community, took to step into the prime ministerial shoes. Some believe the US administration through its powerful military machine Africom, engineered the sympathetic replacement. The US is Ethiopia's main donor, giving around \$3 billion a year. Ethiopia for its part and in exchange for such generosity perhaps, allows the US military to station and launch drones from its sacred soil into Somalia, or indeed anywhere the Pentagon hacks choose and the deadly drones can reach.

The new Prime Minister has worryingly vowed, the BBC reports, to continue Meles' "legacy without any change," a legacy littered with human rights violations and injustices, which has little to recommend it. Meles ruled over a single party state in all but name, for, as the International Crisis Group (ICG) make clear, "Meles engineered one-party rule in effect for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and his Tigrayan inner circle, with the complicity of other ethnic elites that were co-opted into the ruling alliance, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)." A dictatorship in fact and form and as is consistent with such regimes, brutal, controlling and intolerant. No matter the accolades expressed on Meles' death by senior politicians and diplomats around the world, who like nothing more it seems than a friendly tyrant.

Hailemariam was chosen, it is alleged, simply to give the appearance of an ethnically balanced leadership, that he will have little independence, and

dutifully tow the ideologically driven line of Revolutionary Democracy. Whatever the method, Hailemariam and deputy Demeke Mekonnen, are now enthroned, let us wish them well for there is much work to be done within Ethiopia.

Human rights issues cry out to be dealt with, starting with the immediate unconditional release of all so called 'political prisoners', tried and imprisoned under the internationally condemned Anti-Terrorist Proclamation, for the heinous crime of publicly disagreeing with the TPLF dominated government. The Ethiopian government should, Human Rights Watch demand, "amend the law's most pernicious provisions, which are being used to criminalize free expression and peaceful dissent." Journalists, mainly working outside of Ethiopia and supporters of opposition political parties are the common targets, tried in absentia in Ethiopian courts by a judiciary that functions as little more than a sentencing body for the government and thinks nothing of handing down life sentences to dissenting voices, based on fabricated charges. HRW make this illegal pattern clear, stating "the use of draconian laws and trumped-up charges to crack down on free speech and peaceful dissent makes a mockery of the rule of law," both Federal and International.

The government, immersed in paranoia and determined to control all forms of debate and platforms of expression, fire off accusations of terrorist activity to anyone seen to disagree with their disagreeable policies. The ambiguous provision of 'conspiracy to commit terrorist acts' is usually cited as criminal activity, or the even more foggy crime of offering 'moral support', which has little or no specific meaning and as HRW assert, "is contrary to the principle of legality." Such ill-defined terms are employed to criminalize dissent and justify the unjust.

Each urgently required reform flows into and out of the other, connected, as they are by the fundamental need to observe basic human rights, at the heart of which sits freedom and justice. Constitutional law provides for the statutory observation of all freedoms of expression that are nevertheless denied in practice or at best grossly restricted. The press, TV and radio are almost exclusively State owned, television is

firmly under government control and with literacy resting at around 48% of the adult population is the arm with the greatest reach and influence. Control of the Web is also in the hands of the EPRDF, the sole telecommunications company being listed in the extensive business portfolio of the government, who control and restrict both Internet expansion and use. Over 80% live in rural areas and currently a mere 0.5% (400,000) of the population have Internet access, the second lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa.

With between 70 and 80 tribal sets within the seven major ethnic groups and a 45/35% Christian, Muslim split, cooperation tolerance and unity are essential factors in the country's well-being and strength, as well as its internal security. As imperial nations have long known, a united civilian population is a threat; divide the factions, separate the ethnic groups, fragment the people, make them compete, even fight among themselves and maintain dominion. This, contrary to the EPRDF's policy of Ethnic Federalism devised in 1991 when they took power, has consistently been the regime's approach. All political authority rests firmly within the party controlled by the TPLF, as the ICG report makes clear, "behind the façade of devolution, [the EPRDF] adopted a highly centralized system that has exacerbated identity-based conflicts."

Self-determination and rule for the major regional groups was, on paper, a central component of Ethnic Federalism. However, as the international human rights group Advocates for Human Rights (AHR) in its report on ethnic groups in Ethiopia found, the government, "actively impedes the rights of disadvantaged ethnic groups to self determination." Far from building partnerships and cultivating cooperation and tolerance, policies flowing from the TPLF/EPRDF's desire to maximize control in all areas of society, including the powerful religious groups work to encourage fragmentation, create religious dissonance, strengthen ethnic divisions and deny much needed social unity.

Ethiopia has the third largest population of Muslims in Africa and is thought to be the birthplace of Islam in the continent as well as the cradle of African Christianity. The government has for long controlled Muslim affairs via

the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, which is simply a mouthpiece for the ruling party. There have, as Crescent International reports, "been no election in the council for the last 13 years. The council has remained against the rights of Muslims including wearing hijab and congregational prayer in universities." Muslims have been calling with increasing intensity for the removal of the unelected council and the State sponsored imposition of Al-Ahbash (The Abyssinian) Islam, a movement that blends elements of Sunni Islam with Sufism. Protests against government meddling are now a regular extension to Friday prayers in Addis Ababa. The *Washington Post* reports the new PM speaking to parliament on October 16, stating, surprisingly given the EPRDF's involvement in all things religious, that "the government fully respects freedom of religion" and "would not interfere in the affairs of religion just as religion would not interfere in matters of politics." It does indeed seem he is determined to follow in word and deed in the dictatorial duplicitous footsteps of his predecessor.

The Government with predictable consistency has labeled these legitimate demands the actions of 'religious extremists' and in July this year resorted to violent means in an attempt to settle the issue, killing four Muslims at prayer and arresting scores more. HRW reported "Ethiopian police and security services have harassed, assaulted, and arbitrarily arrested hundreds of Muslims at Addis Ababa's Awalia and Anwar mosques who were protesting government interference in religious affairs." Religious extremists as we all know means terrorists, the US Army definition of terrorism is worth relating at this point. It is, they say "the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature...through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear." Accordingly if name-calling is the name of the game, the EPRDF's policies qualify them unconditionally for the terrorist label, prefixed with the title, 'State'

Regional divisions are being strengthened as ethnic groups are forced to compete for life-saving handouts administered by the EPRDF through their network of regional councils. The Kebeles and Woreda's reach into every village and household, stomach and mind

in the country, distributing a range of development support from international donors, including emergency food relief determined by allegiance to the ruling party. Along with this illegal immoral act that needs the urgent attention of donors, whose silence and apathy makes them complicit in the regime's criminality, AHR found the EPRDF use discriminatory tactics to "interfere with the rights of disadvantaged ethnic groups" in all areas of civil society.

Employment is all too often conditional on party affiliation; teachers thought to be supporters of opposition parties are harassed, trade unions, supported within the liberal constitution, if not affiliated with the regime party face dismantling, the members and leaders intimidated and threatened. And Oromo business people, AHR discovered, "are denied business licenses without explanation and face police harassment targeted at customers, suppliers, and employees."

In schools and colleges both teachers and students are exposed to political indoctrination and 'encouraged' to join the ruling party; continued employment and studies being a carrot, unemployment and expulsion the stick, membership of the Oromo Liberation Front a guarantee of both. In areas relating to culture, AHR found "Oromo's e.g. do not feel free to speak Oromiffa in public or to use distinctively Oromo names," leading Oromo cultural figures have been persecuted and the Charities and Societies Proclamation – another poisonous piece of legislation that needs revising or scrapping, restricts the development of cultural relationships with members of the diaspora.

Ethnic groups forced into villagization programs by the government as they sell off large tracts of land to foreign corporations, make easy targets for a regime pursuing the fragmentation of society and the exploitation of the people. Large numbers have been forcibly relocated, in Gambella alone HRW report, "approximately 70,000 people were slated to be moved by the end of 2011," into settlements that provide no health services or clean water and often lack schools. Quick to capitalize on the child's plight Government officials, AHR report "force schoolchildren in these villages to abandon their studies to provide labor for constructing shelters." An illegal

action adding further, to the catalogue of State criminality or to give it its US army title, State terrorism.

It is projected that if the herding of indigenous people continues at the present rate, all rural dwellers – that's 80% of the population – will be living in one or other of these government created villagization centers by the next decade, without any consultation with those affected, no matter the party line on participation and voluntary movement. It's hard to discuss social engineering and ancestral land rights with armed soldiers whilst your home is demolished. Violent coercion is widespread, HRW again 'security forces enforcing the population transfers have been implicated in at least 20 rapes in the past year. Fear and intimidation are widespread among affected populations.'

Divide and rule extends into the very heart of ethnic communities, families are routinely broken up when driven into the villagization settlements, making women and children particularly vulnerable, as AHR found "in rural areas typically populated by disadvantaged ethnic groups are often victims of human trafficking. The Government has taken no meaningful measures to prevent such trafficking or to provide assistance or support to victims." Trafficking of women within Ethiopia and overseas, often to the Gulf States, almost always equates to prostitution or forced domestic labor, where sexual abuse, violence and degrading treatment is the common experience.

The EPRDF has divided, inhibited and controlled the people of Ethiopia. Fear and intimidation their weapons of choice, wielded without recrimination, compassion or regret, the 'international community', who supply a third of the national budget seem uninterested in their brutality. The opportunity presented to and by the change of Prime Minister has (to date) proven to be nothing more than a hollow hope. The cry of the people ignored once more, their voices cast into the darkness and dismissed.

To date, the political opposition, fragmented and dysfunctional, offers no vision of change. CP

Graham Peebles is director of the Create Trust. He lives in London.

Panthers in Sweden

By Gabriel Kuhn

When speaking of "suburbs" in Sweden, one must think of the French "banlieues": concrete settlements on the big cities' outskirts, characterized by everything that the intersections of a class society and racism imply in contemporary Europe: a weak infrastructure, cuts in social spending, high unemployment, omnipresent police units, and a population that largely consists of recent immigrants. In Sweden, these account for 90% of the population in some suburbs, which makes the country one of Europe's most segregated. Among the most notorious Swedish suburbs are Rinkeby in Stockholm (namesake of the so-called *Rinkebysvenska*, a kind of Swedish Ebonics), Rosengård in Malmö (home to the famous soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimović: "You can take a boy out of Rosengård, but you can't take Rosengård out of a boy") – and Biskopsgården in Gothenburg.

In Biskopsgården, an organization was founded in early 2011 that claims an unexpected heritage: the "Panthers"; *Pantrarna* in Swedish, see themselves as direct descendants of the Black Panther Party. As their spokesperson Murat Solmaz explains, they see similarities to the goals and methods of the Black Panthers and feel inspired by their struggle. Solmaz rejects the argument that it is inappropriate to transfer a political concept from the USA of the late 1960s to contemporary Sweden: "If the ideas and methods make sense, why not? We can identify with people who fight against social injustice and racism."

The Pantrarna consist mainly of youth living in Biskopsgården. Panthers in their early twenties are already veterans. According to Solmaz, the core of the organization consists of about forty activists. Total membership stands at about 150, and there are well over a thousand sympathizers. The immediate reason for the Panthers' foundation was the fight for a local youth center. This fight has been won: the city of Gothenburg decided to provide an office building and three million Swedish crowns (about half a million US dollars) in order to open *Pantergården*, the "Panther Center", in 2013. The Panthers are directly involved in the planning

and will play a central role in the administration. This is the result of occupying city council offices, tireless petitioning, and broad local mobilizing.

The youth center was but a catalyst for a broader struggle for social justice and self-determination. Since the Pantrarna's founding, they have organized lectures, study circles, and summer camps as well as campaigns against police violence, security cameras, and a media coverage of the suburbs that focuses almost exclusively on crime, car arson, and street battles with the police.

Support of former Black Panthers for the Pantrarna is assured. Bobby Seale came to visit Biskopsgården in the spring of 2012. On May 1, he spoke to a young and admiring crowd on a Biskopsgården square. Before returning to the US, he declared his steadfast support for the Pantrarna on Swedish radio: "We are talking about progressive social change. We are talking about dealing with all the social problems, whether they are in Sweden or in America. That's what they are about, and that's what we in the Black Panther Party were about."

The Pantrarna have hit one of Sweden's most sensitive spots: the old Social Democratic dream of the *folkhemmet*, the "people's home", has lost much of its promise due to the plight of the immigrant communities. For many years, the Swedish suburbs have been serving as a symbol for "failed integration policies". It doesn't help that most politicians avoid the issue in embarrassment. It only allows the extreme right to exploit it. Representatives of the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, who entered parliament in 2010, regularly speak of the suburbs as "no-go zones", in which even medics and firefighters are attacked by out-of-control youth. A self-confident political organization formed precisely by these youth shakes up the picture significantly.

The Panther's presence in Biskopsgården cannot be missed. When, during a visit to Gothenburg in late October, I step into a streetcar to Biskopsgården, I run into Amanda Ruiz Jönsson, a former Swedish national youth soccer player. Since a doctor messed up a knee surgery, her soccer career has been put on ice. "That's what happens if you can't afford private health insurance," she says with a shrug. The Social Democrats introduced the privatization of social

services in Sweden already in the 1990s, not wanting to miss the neoliberal boat that apparently was the only way forward. Since a center-right coalition took over the government offices in 2006, this process has only been accelerated. Most strongly affected by the undermining of public services are the suburbs. This also has significant economic consequences. Ruiz Jönsson does not have much time for organizing with the Panthers right now. "If you go to school and need to hold a job at the same time, well, there is not much left."

Once I arrive in Biskopsgården, I go to Idénpunkten, an austere citizens advise bureau, where the Panthers were founded a year and a half ago. A meeting has just ended. Representatives of the city council were looking for solutions to the "suburban problem". Two Panthers also assisted. One of them, Yassin Ben Salah, says that Pantrarna get invited to two such meetings a week. He explains that the organization's approach was purely pragmatic and had nothing to do with being co-opted by the system. "We know that the politicians don't talk to us because they want to, but because they feel forced to. We turn this to our advantage. We do not negotiate, we demand."

This tactic has led to some surprising results. *Göteborgs-Posten* is Sweden's second biggest daily. After the Panther Diren Öz was shot dead outside his home on July 5, the *Göteborgs-Posten* articles focused on little more than the unnamed victim being "known by the police". The Panthers got to work. They used social media to mobilize against the paper, covered the suburbs in posters, and called for a big demonstration outside the *Göteborgs-Posten* offices. After a few meetings with the editors, the paper accepted all of the Panthers' demands: 1. A public apology. 2. An explanation in the paper. 3. Concrete steps to ensure more balanced reporting about the suburbs. A first such step was *Göteborgs-Posten* financing the production of the journal *Wazzup Biskop* by Biskopsgården youth. In an article from October 16, the paper explained the project thus: "It began with the Pantrarna, a group of younger people from Biskopsgården, criticizing the mass media coverage of the suburbs, especially by *Göteborgs-Posten*, as ignorant, one-sided, and negative." Sometimes, politics can be this simple.

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Close to Idénpunkten, in the midst of street vendors selling produce, children playing soccer, and pensioners looking for refundables, I meet two more Panthers, Muhammed Hällgren Abdulrahman and Homa Badpa. Badpa wears a T-shirt with the picture of the murdered Darin Öz. For her, the success of the *Göteborgs-Posten* campaign proved that “we can sometimes achieve more than we believe possible”. That parts of the Swedish left accused the Panthers of “collaborating with the bourgeois media” reflects the Panthers’ complicated relationship with the traditional left. While the Panthers name social justice as their number one political priority and often use anti-capitalist rhetoric, they are not impressed by what they conceive as self-righteousness, romantic projection, and ideological bickering among the left. Ben Salah evokes, once again, a pragmatic approach: “If you’re not prejudiced in the way that most people on the left are, you are ready to work with all sorts of people. I don’t care where people come from or what they do; if they want to work for positive change, I will work with them.”

Solmaz sees the Panthers as a contemporary form of political organizing that is replacing the traditional left. Apart from overcoming ideological barriers and more openness, he particularly emphasizes the role of the youth: “Normally, one tries to change the youth through parents and teachers. We look at it the other way: we want to

For many years the Swedish suburbs have been serving as a symbol for “failed integration policies”.

change the adults through the youth.” In this context, Solmaz doesn’t hesitate to speak of vanguardism: “We are clearly a vanguard. We set examples that others can follow.”

The Panthers are no isolated phenomenon. In Stockholm, they have a sister organization called Megafonen. Megafonen was founded in the suburb of Husby, but has now also groups in Rinkeby and Hässelby-Vällingby. It is

based on principles that echo those of the Panthers. Both groups emerged at around the same time without knowing of one another. “It was like Darwin and Wallace,” Solmaz states. Basar Gerecci, one of the founders of Megafonen, confirms the common origins of the groups: “We were frustrated with the situation in the suburbs, with social conditions in general, but also with the established left. We wanted to focus on our own neighborhood and on organizing with the people we share our everyday life with.”

Given temperatures near freezing point, I spend the rest of the day in one of the Panther’s apartments with börek, nuts, and cola. When it is time to head for the last train back to Stockholm, the Panthers’ upcoming journey to Malmö is mentioned. Locals want to found a Panther chapter there. Solmaz considers the expansion of the suburban movement inevitable: “This is the future. We breathe new life into radical politics.”

Gabriel Kuhn is an Austrian-born writer and translator living in Stockholm, Sweden.