

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR WEEKLY

*"The object of the Monitor is to injure no man,
but to bless all mankind."*

— MARY BAKER EDDY

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The fabric of Lebanon's resilience

I've never been to Lebanon. As with many in the United States, much of what I know about the country comes from news reports that paint Lebanon as a victim of geographic circumstance. That has been particularly true in recent months, as intense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah has displaced thousands of Lebanese people. This week's cover story by Scott Peterson adds both geostrategic and human context to this latest round of conflict.

But before you read that dispatch, I'd like to share what else I have learned about Lebanon in recent weeks. Christiane Karam, a friend of mine who grew up in Beirut during the civil war, has just returned to that city to support her aging parents. I asked her to tell me about the Lebanon she loves. What follows is entirely in her words, though slightly edited for clarity and length, as told to me on a video call from Beirut.

— Noelle Swan, Weekly edition editor

“Safe” is a big word these days. This region, or this country in particular, we can't catch a breath.

My parents have spent the entirety of their lives surviving – overcoming and surviving. And that appears to be the case for our generation, too.

But there's a miracle in that. There's resilience in that, too.

We've been attacked and invaded and hit and bombed so many times over the years. Our entire childhood was spent in bomb shelters. I spent my entire life wanting to believe that I had somewhat overcome that trauma, and that I could find my home anywhere, and I couldn't be too close to here because of what it triggered in me.

Now, it's almost like I don't want to be anywhere else.

Lebanon is a very, very special place. It's a beautiful tapestry, but also a very fragile equilibrium. And at the same time, it's just unspeakable strength and fortitude that the people share.

There's a lot of very, very different people and religions and ethnicities and cultures all kind of crammed in this tiny piece of land. But there's something very ineffable that makes us all Lebanese. Across all kinds of conflicts, there's this beautiful sense that we all belong together – and that is the very fabric of our resilience.

I could go on and on about all the ways Lebanese people are insane and creative and resilient. I'm just so moved by the things we come up with to figure it out every single time. It's amazing.

I'm very invested in spending as much time as I can here, caring for my family, first and foremost, but also exploring ways that I could be part of this just extreme creative resilience. This place, it's just, it's incredible. It's miraculous. ■

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Israeli settlers see Trump's win as aiding goal of annexing West Bank

By Dina Kraft / Special correspondent

Bezael Smotrich, Israel's hard-right finance minister, posted a comment on the social platform X the day after Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election that reflected the delight of the pro-settlement camp.

Using the biblical terms for the occupied West Bank, he wrote, “2025 is the year of Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria.”

Bitter responses followed from some Israelis, who berated him for not wishing instead for more consensus outcomes: the end of the multifront war that the country has been battling since coming under Hamas attack in October 2023, and the bringing home of the 101 hostages still held in Gaza – an ongoing national trauma.

But the pro-settlement movement in Israel – including Mr. Smotrich, its main advocate in the government – is exulting at what it perceives as a possible green light from the incoming Trump Middle East team to pursue annexation of the West Bank.

In constructing the current government coalition, the most religious and far-right in the country's history, two years ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu granted Mr. Smotrich unprecedented power to oversee Israel's settlement enterprise and civil administration in the West Bank.

Many experts say annexation of the part of the West Bank where most Jewish settlers live has already become a reality, sparking ire both regionally and internationally. For decades the growth of settlements have been an obstacle to forging a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians.

In the last year, with most Israelis' focus on the post-Oct. 7 war in Gaza, settlement construction in the West Bank has ballooned alongside new roads and infrastructure, including a dramatic increase in the establishment of unauthorized settler outposts.

In a new report, Israeli human rights groups describe what they say are significant structural and legal changes by the government that “alter the face of the West Bank and the structure of Israeli control there.”

The government, the report says, is “methodically implementing a strategy designed to achieve the political vision of applying full Israeli sovereignty to the West Bank, while establishing a reality of Jewish supremacy and forcing the Palestinians living in the area into to the smallest possible geographical space.”

A long-term plan for annexation?

Yael Berda, a legal scholar and professor of sociology at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, says the recent spike in settler violence is not haphazard, but fits into a plan to transfer Palestinian residents from what is known as “Area C,” the 60% of the West Bank that has both Jewish and Palestinian communities.

“They are [de facto] annexing where there are Jews living, which is why the fight is so intense to get Palestinians who live there off the land,” says Dr. Berda, author of “The Bureaucracy of the Oc-

WHY WE WROTE THIS

The pro-settlement movement in Israel is exulting at what it perceives as a possible green light from the incoming Trump Middle East team to pursue annexation of the West Bank, even without the support of the broader Israeli public.

cupation in the West Bank.”

Palestinians have long claimed all areas of the West Bank as part of their own future state, while settlers see the territory as their biblical birthright. For them, Palestinian statehood is not only a security threat, but also anathema to historic Jewish claims.

The violence in Area C, which has included deadly settler rampages, led the Biden administration to impose sanctions on a key settler group – a development that Israel’s right-wing is hoping a Trump White House will undo.

According to Dr. Berda, the main goal of the government’s controversial judicial overhaul plan, which elicited months of massive pro-democracy demonstrations in Israel in the months before the Israel-Hamas war, was West Bank annexation. By weakening the Supreme Court and the state’s legal advisers, she argues, the government had hoped to stymie the very institutions that have served as the primary check on the settlement project.

Under Finance Minister Smotrich, almost 6,000 acres of West Bank land have been declared state land and 50 new settler outposts have been established with organizational and funding support from the government, according to Hagit Ofra, who leads Peace Now’s Settlement Watch division.

With these outposts, “Small groups of settlers take over huge amounts of land and on a daily basis kick out Palestinians from their land, not allowing them to go there with their flocks or cultivate their land,” says Ms. Ofra. “They are taking hill after hill, and the government puts \$75 million into their development – something we had not seen before. ... What I suspect we will see under Trump is the expulsion of Palestinians will be even more organized.”

The most recent example of one kind of rule for Jewish settlers and another for Palestinians in the West Bank is the November decision by new Defense Minister Israel Katz to end administrative detention only for settlers – a step the Biden administration condemned. Administrative detention is a tool used by Israel to detain terror suspects without trial.

In an act of brazenness Nov. 22, Jewish settlers even attacked senior Israeli military officers, including a general in charge of the army’s command in the West Bank.

“The brave man ... seizes the opportunity”

Yisrael Medad, a spokesperson for The Yesha Council, an umbrella group of West Bank settlements, condemned violence of any kind carried out by settlers, saying its perpetrators were outside the movement’s mainstream.

He says he is encouraged by Mr. Trump’s victory, noting that in his first term, settlements were declared not to be a violation of international law, reversing longstanding U.S. policy.

“The brave man is the one who seizes the opportunity, and that is what we have to do now,” says Mr. Medad.

According to Eitay Mack, an Israeli human rights lawyer who has represented Palestinians in the West Bank, “If full annexation happens, there will no longer be a hybrid regime of democracy within the Green Line [the official borders of Israel] and authoritarianism in the West Bank – but just an authoritarian regime based on race.”

Mr. Smotrich, who says there is no such thing as a Palestinian people, said following Trump’s election, “We will apply the sovereignty, together with our American friends.”

Among those friends is Mike Huckabee, Mr. Trump’s pick for U.S. ambassador to Israel. The former Arkansas governor and evangelical minister has said he doesn’t view the West Bank as occupied land, nor the half-million settlers there as occupiers.

Signaling the opportunity he sees in Mr. Trump’s return to power, Mr. Netanyahu has appointed Yechiel Leiter, a former settler leader and an advocate of annexation, as Israel’s ambassador to the United States. ■

Supreme Court hears largest transgender rights case in US history

By Henry Gass / Staff writer

At the U.S. Supreme Court, issues of child welfare, gender identity, and constitutional rights are converging in one of the most significant cases the court will decide this term.

Transgender issues have been at the heart of America’s culture wars in recent years. Legally, lawsuits concerning transgender rights have been percolating in the lower courts. The case before the high court asks whether the state or parents are responsible for protecting vulnerable children.

Transgender issues are relatively novel for the courts, and the justices have issued few rulings directly affecting them. The decision in *United States v. Skrmetti* – a complex, emotional lawsuit pertaining to medical care for transgender youth – has the potential to be a seismic one.

As the visibility of transgender Americans – and their rights under the law – have grown in recent years, so has pushback. Hundreds of anti-trans bills, such as legislation restricting bathroom usage and banning the discussion of gender identity in schools, have been enacted in 2024 alone, as states react to perceived threats to equality of the sexes and a rise in youth identifying as transgender.

The U.S. is seeing an increase in the number of minors receiving a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, a mental disorder defined as a person’s distress at the mismatch between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth. Treatments, which range from therapy to medication and surgery, are intended to help a person align their outward, physical traits with their gender identity. (Surgery is rarely prescribed for those under age 18.)

Some of these treatments, known broadly as gender-affirming care, have been prescribed for decades to children and teens without controversy. (One example is to prevent early puberty in girls, which can lead to adverse health effects.) But state lawmakers have been limiting their use to treat gender dysphoria, concerned that children could undergo permanent physical change for a mental illness that could be transient.

In the past three years, 26 states have enacted laws and policies limiting youth access to gender-affirming care. The *Skrmetti* case challenges a law enacted by Tennessee.

“Its impact depends on how narrowly or broadly the court rules,” says Craig Konnoth, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law. “It could decide the effect of trans rights cases around the country.”

On constitutional questions, this Supreme Court is committed to interpreting the founding document in line with the original meaning of its authors. Thus, the decision in *Skrmetti* could hinge not on the text of the Tennessee law or on the science behind medical treatments for gender dysphoria, but on history and tradition.

That analysis may focus on one conflict: the rights of parents versus the rights of a government when it comes to the health and well-being of a child. These are arguments that have brought together some unlikely bedfellows.

In one amicus brief, a group of scholars argues that there is a

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Who should decide the best way to protect vulnerable children – their parents, or the state? That question lies at the heart of an emotional and complex case before the high court.

strong history and tradition of states having limited powers to interfere in medical decisions that parents make for their children. Two of the scholars are William Eskridge, a Yale Law School professor central to the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights in recent decades, and Steven Calabresi, a co-founder of The Federalist Society and former clerk to conservative Justice Antonin Scalia.

“From the beginning, American ‘family life’ has been a ‘private realm’ that ‘the state cannot enter’ without strong public justification,” they write, quoting a 1944 Supreme Court opinion. The 14th Amendment “translated traditional responsibilities of parents into constitutional rights – with due allowance for states to adopt neutral public health regulations,” they add.

Other scholars take a different view. When there is no clear medical consensus on the safety or effectiveness of a pediatric treatment – as Tennessee claims in this case – the state has an especially strong interest in regulating the availability of that treatment, says James Blumstein, a professor at the Vanderbilt University Law School.

“This is part of a longer tradition of governmental protection of children,” he adds. “When a state faces this clinical uncertainty, it can protect minors from the use of surrogate decision-making.”

Behind the rise in trans youth

Transgender Americans account for about 1% of the U.S. population, and roughly 1 in 5 of them are aged 13 to 17, according to a report from the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law. The percentage of teens who identify as transgender almost doubled between 2016 and 2022, the Williams Institute reported. In about the same time span, according to clinicians, gender dysphoria diagnoses have “increased significantly,” or “nearly tripled.”

Exactly what accounts for this trend is unclear, experts say, and scientific research on the benefits and efficacy of gender dysphoria treatments is mixed. All these details tie in to the Skrametti case. However, the high court only needs to resolve one question: Does the Tennessee law violate the equal protection clause of the Constitution?

That clause, a provision of the 14th Amendment, holds that no state can “deny any person ... the equal protection of the laws.” Over the past 160 years, the clause has been read to protect the rights of various minority groups, from newly freed slaves to same-sex couples.

The Tennessee law, SB1, bars health care providers from treating minors with puberty blockers, hormones, or surgeries when it’s for the purpose of “enabling a minor to identify with, or live as, a purported identity inconsistent with the minor’s sex” or treating “distress from a discordance between the minor’s sex and asserted identity.”

Though the treatments are allowed for cisgender youth, or those whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth, Tennessee claims that, because the law applies based on age and medical condition, it doesn’t run afoul of the equal protection clause. Fundamentally, the state argues that it has the right, and the responsibility, to protect children from risky and potentially irreversible medical treatments.

“The supposed benefits of these interventions are ... unproven at best and illusory at worst,” state officials write in their brief.

Last year, a District Court judge disagreed, blocking the law in part because it “expressly and exclusively targets transgender people.” Months later, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit reversed that decision, reinstating the law.

Three transgender teens diagnosed with gender dysphoria filed the lawsuit, and the Department of Justice has intervened on their behalf. Their argument is also a simple one. Because SB1 applies only to minors diagnosed with gender dysphoria, they claim the law inherently discriminates on the basis of sex, and thus is unconstitutional.

Tennessee “categorically bans” treatments only for gender dysphoria, meaning the treatments are banned for “a tiny fraction of

minors, while [remaining] available for all other minors,” the U.S. writes in its brief. “By defining the prohibited medical care based on the patient’s sex assigned at birth,” the U.S. adds, “SB1 classifies based on sex, through and through.”

The 2020 transgender case

The Supreme Court’s last major transgender rights decision was a shock 2020 ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. The high court held that a federal antidiscrimination law protecting employees from being fired “because of [their] sex” also protects employees from being terminated based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Since *Bostock*, the court has become more conservative, with Trump-appointed Justice Amy Coney Barrett replacing Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Another variance, experts say, is that while *Bostock* involved interpreting a statute, *Skrametti* will involve interpreting the Constitution itself.

The case is certain to be historic: Chase Strangio, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union, is the first openly transgender lawyer to argue before the Supreme Court. And the case could be a landmark in other respects. The justices’ decision could also inform how courts view other laws affecting transgender Americans, from their participation in sports, to their use of preferred pronouns in schools, to their ability to update their sex on government documents.

“How the court decides this case will tell us a lot about whether and how aggressively they will ... permit politicians to pursue an anti-LGBTQ agenda,” says Professor Michael Boucai, at the University at Buffalo School of Law. ■

BEIJING

Marco Rubio wants to take a hard line on China. Will Trump let him?

By Ann Scott Tyson / Staff writer

On Thanksgiving 2019, tens of thousands of democracy activists rallied harborside on Hong Kong island. Singing and waving American flags above a sea of glittering cellphone lights, they celebrated a new U.S. law to sanction Chinese authorities for suppressing the basic freedoms of Hong Kong’s 7.4 million people.

A cheer arose as a video of the law’s author, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, appeared on a screen. “I hope the people of Hong Kong know that they have served as an inspiration to the world,” Mr. Rubio said. “Your cause,” he pledged, “will continue to be our cause.”

But until the last minute, then-President Donald Trump had wavered on signing the law. “I stand with freedom,” he explained. “But we’re also in the process of making the largest trade deal in history” with China.

Today this same tension – between ideology and pragmatism – will play out in the incoming administration’s China policy. As nominee for secretary of state, Mr. Rubio is among “hawks” Mr. Trump has selected for his Cabinet, whose stances toward Beijing have been tougher than their boss’s. But he will also have allies for a more transactional approach, like entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Either way, Mr. Trump is expected to bring heightened confrontation and increased volatility to the relationship between the

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Several of Donald Trump’s Cabinet picks are China “hawks.” His choice for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, shows the tensions between ideology and pragmatism that will be at play in his administration’s relationship with Beijing.

world's two superpowers.

"We watch all this very carefully, with suspicion, to be honest," says Da Wei, director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University in Beijing. "President Trump could be very hawkish toward China, or could be transactional – we don't know."

Beijing is hoping to establish informal channels to size up the new administration's goals. It will do this by leveraging relations with business executives such as Mr. Musk, who sees China as a vital market for his Tesla electric vehicle company and has cordial relations with top Chinese leaders.

Meanwhile, the strategy Mr. Trump adopts toward the administration of leader Xi Jinping, whom Mr. Trump has called "a friend," could determine whether the two powers deepen their conflict over issues such as Taiwan, trade, and technology. Key dialogues may or may not go forward – such as preventing accidents between formidable militaries, as well as cooperation on critical issues such as global warming, analysts say.

The Trump administration is likely to take "a more hawkish approach" than that of Joe Biden, including new tariffs and technology restrictions, says Scott Kennedy, senior adviser and Trustee Chair in Chinese Business and Economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ideologically driven, Mr. Rubio has championed human rights in China and repeatedly authored laws aimed at defending groups such as western China's ethnic Uyghurs. At The Heritage Foundation in March 2022, Mr. Rubio laid out his view of China's Communist Party as a threatening, power-hungry regime bent on weakening the United States and dominating the world.

Mr. Rubio attributes his anti-communist views in part to his upbringing in the Cuban exile community and to the profound influence of his late grandfather.

"Due to his family background, he knows that people suffer under communism," says Sunny Cheung, an exiled Hong Kong democracy advocate and associate fellow for China Studies at The Jamestown Foundation in Washington. "Beijing is not happy" with the choices of China hawks, he adds.

Indeed, in 2020 China sanctioned Mr. Rubio, with a Foreign Ministry spokesperson saying the U.S. senator "behaved egregiously on Hong Kong-related issues." As a result, America's next top diplomat could be barred from traveling to China at all.

Still, experts say Beijing is relieved that Mr. Rubio has not called for the U.S. to pursue a policy of regime change toward China, as did a predecessor, Michael Pompeo. ■

THE EXPLAINER

Trump targets temporary protected status. What that could mean for Haitians in the US.

Donald Trump campaigned – and won – on countering illegal immigration. But he has signaled plans to curb certain immigrants' legal protections, too.

Those include temporary protected status. TPS was designed by Congress to shield immigrants in the United States from violence and natural disaster back home. Mr. Trump has said he'd "revoke" it for Haitians. If confirmed by the Senate, his Department of Homeland Security secretary pick, Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota, could

carry out attempts to end its use.

TPS doesn't provide lasting legal relief like asylum. Still, advocates on the left say it's an important authority that keeps immigrants safe and lets them work. Critics on the right say it encourages illegal immigration under the guise of protection and no longer lives up to the name of "temporary."

Q: What is TPS?

The U.S. Homeland Security secretary may designate a foreign country for TPS when conditions there – like armed conflict, natural disaster, or other "extraordinary and temporary" developments – make it unable to receive its nationals safely.

In 1990, Congress created this authority, and President George H.W. Bush signed it into law. People fleeing a civil war in El Salvador were the first to benefit.

Immigrants who receive TPS are protected from deportation and can obtain a work permit. However, as the name suggests, this status is intended to be temporary. There is no direct path to a green card, much less citizenship, once it expires. TPS can last up to 18 months, which the Department of Homeland Security can decide to extend.

Importantly, this status is available only to immigrants already in the U.S. as of a certain date. How they arrived here doesn't typically matter. Currently, 16 countries are designated for TPS, including Afghanistan, Sudan, and Venezuela. Haiti is another.

Q: Have Haitians received TPS before?

Yes. Following Haiti's catastrophic earthquake in 2010, the Obama administration offered TPS to Haitians and repeatedly prolonged it. The Trump administration initially extended TPS for Haitians, and then announced its termination. Through litigation, however, Haitians were able to hold on to that status.

The Biden administration renewed Haitians' protected status in May 2021, citing "political crisis and human rights abuses," along with other security and health concerns. Two months later, Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated. Chaos, including gang violence, continues. This November, the U.S. announced a temporary ban on flights to Haiti due to planes hit by gunfire.

The White House has renewed the country's designation, with current protections for Haitian TPS holders set to last through February 2026. More than 200,000 beneficiaries had that status as of 2023, estimates the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Haitians in Springfield, Ohio, made headlines as Mr. Trump elevated misinformation about the group, including at a presidential debate. An influx of Haitian immigrants to the city has strained road safety and schools; the immigrants have also filled jobs.

Mr. Trump kept Haitians in the news in October when asked about the community in Springfield. He told NewsNation that, in terms of TPS, "Absolutely I'd revoke it, and I'd bring them back to their country."

The Trump transition team didn't directly respond to a request to clarify. In an email, spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said voters' reelection of Mr. Trump is "giving him a mandate" to implement campaign promises.

Q: Can Mr. Trump revoke TPS?

It's unclear whether the next Trump administration would – or even could, legally – revoke a TPS designation before its scheduled end. Refusing to prolong it would be more standard. It's likely "more politically expedient, or practically expedient, for an administration to let one lapse," says Greg Chen, senior director of government relations at the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

If their TPS isn't renewed, an immigrant could risk living in the U.S. without authorization – and being deported – unless they apply for another protection that extends their stay. But, "That presumes that an incoming administration would actually follow the law, and

respect people's due process and civil rights," says Mr. Chen.

Immigrant advocates have pushed, unsuccessfully, to secure paths to permanent residence for TPS holders – some of whom have lived in the U.S. for over two decades. Those supporters forget that the “T” in TPS stands for “temporary,” says Ira Mehlman, media director at the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

“If the system is going to have any sort of integrity, then we need to make sure that people do go home – once, you know, the immediate crisis has passed,” he says.

When that day will come for Haitians is unclear.

– Sarah Matusek / Staff writer

HUMANITY BEHIND THE HEADLINES

MYKOLAIV, UKRAINE

Why many in Ukraine oppose a ‘land for peace’ formula to end the war

By Howard LaFranchi / Staff writer

Standing on the shrapnel-pocked steps of Mykolaiv's Black Sea National University, second-year engineering student Yevhen ponders the seductive appeal of the formula “land for peace” for ending Russia's war against Ukraine.

And then, like many of his fellow Ukrainians, he firmly rejects the idea.

“The truth is that if you give Russia one meter of territory, they will see that as weakness, and they will not stop until they take everything,” says Yevhen, who asked that his last name be withheld.

“We Ukrainians know this,” adds the student, whose city was blasted and bombed – but never occupied – following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

“But it's something the world must understand as well.”

For months Russia has advanced along much of the war's battlefield. That has fueled doubts that Ukraine's military will ever reclaim significant swaths of lost territory. Russia's steady gains have fed resignation that any peace deal will entail giving up much if not all of the 20% of Ukrainian territory Russia now occupies.

The impending return of former President Donald Trump to the White House is only the latest element in mounting pressure on Ukraine to reach a negotiated settlement with Russia.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Nov. 15 about ending the war, their first conversation in nearly two years. The German government said Mr. Scholz expressed full support for Ukraine.

Even so, the outreach was panned by some NATO members and widely interpreted as another sign of fading Western interest in sustaining Ukraine's military effort – and growing interest in a negotiated settlement.

Even President Joe Biden's decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S.-supplied missiles to strike deeper inside Russia is seen by many analysts as an effort to position Ukraine better for the negotiations

Mr. Trump is expected to push for, rather than to boost Ukraine's ability to win the war.

Signs of escalation before any negotiations continued in late November, as Ukraine said Russia had launched an intercontinental ballistic missile armed with conventional warheads at the central city of Dnipro. Russia refused comment, and U.S. officials reportedly said it was more likely an intermediate range ballistic missile. On Nov. 20, President Biden authorized supplying Ukraine with antipersonnel mines.

Public opinion shift

As the war wears on, more Ukrainians are shifting in favor of entering negotiations with Russia.

Moreover, a growing number appear to have resigned themselves to the once-taboo prospect of ceding territory to reach a deal.

A Gallup poll of Ukrainians published in November finds that more than half want negotiations to start as soon as possible – up from about one-quarter a year ago. The same proportion, 52%, says the country should be willing to give up territory to end the war.

That view is echoed by Black Sea student Yevhen's friend Andrii, who says Ukraine's priority now must be ending the loss of life.

“There are two sides to this question of giving up land for peace,” says Andrii, who requested that his last name be withheld. “I understand that for some people, giving up land would be dishonoring the soldiers and others who died defending Ukrainian territory,” says the engineering student. “But if by giving up land for peace you save Ukrainian lives, that view has value, too.”

Yet even as more Ukrainians appear ready to accept ceding territory, many remain adamant that Ukraine's existence as an independent nation is at stake. The notion remains strong that Ukraine's acquiescence to Russia on the territorial issue would send a devastating signal to the world that force prevails over the rule of law.

“False promise”

For many Ukrainians, their country's long history with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now Mr. Putin's Russia, proves that no deal involving Russian-occupied territory will satisfy Mr. Putin's real goal: reconstituting the former USSR.

“With this war, we are talking about two very different things, either an independent Ukraine that sets its own course and decides its own future, or Ukraine as part of Russia,” says Anastasiia Khmel, dean of the faculty of political sciences at Black Sea National University. “We have come to the conclusion that part of our territory would not be enough, [that] just the occupied lands would never guarantee peace,” she says.

Professor Khmel says Russia's real goal is domination of Ukraine. That, she adds, means more than just territorial control, but “repression of Ukrainian identity and Ukrainian culture as it has occurred throughout the past 300 years” of Russian imperialism.

Others agree that ceding land would mean much more than a smaller Ukraine.

“In Russia they don't have a normal conception of national borders; they are thinking in terms of what were the borders of the Soviet Union,” says Mykhailo Ziatin, a Mykolaiv poet and mathematician who has joined a nearby military unit. “That means Russia is not a normal entity you can negotiate with, but an aggressor who would see a land deal as a step and not an end.”

And there is another dimension to the land issue that Ukraine is confronting, not just for itself, Mr. Ziatin says. “We Ukrainians don't want to give up the lands we are responsible for to evil; we are taking a stand that force is not right,” he says. “That is a conviction that should matter to our Western neighbors and to the world.”

For the Western democracies that support Ukraine, Mr. Ziatin says, the question is “Are you OK with rewarding the monster who wishes to make our democracy impossible; do we really want to give up anything to that beast?”

Distrust of “guarantees”

That Ukrainians do not trust Mr. Putin to abide by any settlement for very long is hardly news, given how he has been seizing Ukrainian territory since 2014.

More surprising perhaps is their deep mistrust of any “security guarantees” they anticipate Ukraine’s Western partners would offer as part of a “land for peace” deal.

“We already learned the hard way that any deal based on vague security assurances comes with no means to enforce it, and that is the definition of a bad deal,” says Yevhen Hlibovytsky, director of the Frontier Institute, a Kyiv think tank. “If Russia is rewarded now for its bad behavior, why should it not return to that bad behavior in the future?”

As many Ukrainians are wont to do, Mr. Hlibovytsky refers to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, under which a newly independent Ukraine gave up the world’s third-largest nuclear arsenal in exchange for assurances from world powers, including Russia, that the “inviolability” of its borders would be respected.

The deal “obviously didn’t work,” Mr. Hlibovytsky says.

“If Ukraine has to cede territory in exchange for another set of vague security assurances,” he says, “that’s an invitation to broader nuclear proliferation.”

Mr. Hlibovytsky says average Ukrainians carry in their hearts the same basic convictions about the rules for achieving international peace.

“People on the street will tell you the same thing, just with more four-letter words than a smooth-talking academic uses,” he says. “They sense that Ukraine is something like a test for what rules and order govern the world going forward.”

“If the West is not committed to what it has said are its own standards and values,” he adds, “then they feel they have been fooled, and Ukraine is being betrayed.” ■

SCIENCE AND NATURE

OLUM, NIGERIA

Loggers were stealing the forest. These women started stealing their chain saws.

By Saint Ekpali / Contributor

The forest had given Doris Ofre everything. When she was growing up in southern Nigeria, it was her family’s supermarket, pharmacy, and ATM. If her mother needed cash for her schoolbooks, she sold oranges and mangoes she picked in the forest. If they wanted adventure, Ms. Ofre and her friends played hide-and-seek beneath the tree canopy, and tossed bananas to the monkeys hanging in the branches.

So when the forest that had given her so much was threatened by illegal loggers, Ms. Ofre didn’t hesitate.

She picked up her machete, and with 20 other women, marched toward the scene of the crime.

Globally, the world’s forests are receding at a rapid clip, with more than 40,000 square miles disappearing annually, according to the United Nations. Nigeria is on the front lines of this crisis. The country has lost 13% of its tree cover since the year 2000, according to Global Forest Watch, which tracks deforestation around the world. In Cross River state, where Ms. Ofre lives, that loss is particularly consequential. With the state being home to half of Nigeria’s rainforest, communities there have long relied on the forests for their survival.

That’s why, in 2018, Ms. Ofre, who is a farmer, and five other women in Olum decided to form an informal forest policing squad to stop their forests from being chopped up and carried away. Armed with machetes, hoes, and the authority to name and shame locals who participate in illegal logging, they have helped vastly reduce the practice here, according to local authorities and environmental activists.

Because illegal logging is so lucrative, men in the community might have allowed it to continue, says Fredaline Akandu, the king, or paramount ruler, of the Boki district. “But women don’t tolerate it.”

The scramble for Boki’s trees

Ms. Ofre’s connection to the forest began early in life. She grew up in Olum, a farming village carved into the mountainous rainforest near Nigeria’s southeastern border with Cameroon. As a child in the 1960s and ’70s, she says, she was taught that the forest was her community’s wealth. The forest was where her family and neighbors went to cut down wood for their houses, taking only as much as they needed. Women collected vegetables there to cook with and sell.

However, beginning in the 1980s, Ms. Ofre began to notice the trees disappearing. It started with the growl of chain saws. Then huge trucks would appear at the edge of the forest. They arrived empty, but left loaded down with wood. Usually, the men cutting down the trees were locals working for outside companies. Occasionally, Ms. Ofre even saw people she knew personally.

Soon, they noticed other changes. Foraging for once-abundant wild mushrooms became a treasure hunt. The monkey population dwindled so much that when Ms. Ofre’s children were growing up in the 1990s, she had to take them to a nearby monkey sanctuary to see the animals at all.

The 16 villages surrounding the forest weren’t the only ones that recognized the problem. In May 2000, the state government established the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary in Ms. Ofre’s backyard. The reserve was meant to provide protection to the region’s several endangered species, including the Cross River gorilla, one of the world’s rarest great apes. It also prohibited logging anywhere in the park grounds.

But the carving up of the forest continued. Now, increasingly, Ms. Ofre saw Chinese loggers, who seemed to particularly like a swirl-patterned amber wood called *bubinga*.

In July 2012, the consequences of this scramble for Boki’s trees were laid bare when a landslide tore through Buanchor, one of the villages bordering Afi Mountain. It flattened houses and the local secondary school.

The soil had become loose and exposed because of the logging, says Peter Bette, a local environmentalist. “It is possible we wouldn’t have had the landslide should the felling of trees not [have happened].”

Finally, Ms. Ofre and other women in the community could take no more. In 2018, a small group that included Ms. Ofre and local Queen Faith Akandu formed the Women Association of Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary to fight back. They joined a growing cadre of community and conservation groups patrolling the forest. Some were searching for poachers, others wildfires.

But the Women Association was the first to specifically target illegal loggers.

Caught in the act

It began to scour the forest for felled trees and other traces the loggers left behind, which they reported to local authorities. Sometimes, though, the women happened to catch perpetrators in the act.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

JUSTICE

Nigeria, like much of the world, is losing its trees at a rapid rate. For one group of women here, enough was enough.

One day in May 2020, for instance, Ms. Ofre says she was home at her farm when she heard a chain saw roar to life in the distance. She and her colleagues followed the sound to its source: a local man cutting down a large tree. The women demanded he hand over his chain saw, and then they marched him to the king's palace.

That kind of policing is possible in Olum because everyone knows everyone here, and families go back generations, locals say. That means if someone breaks the rules, they must either face the music or leave the community entirely.

"We see the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary as our oil. We don't joke with it," explains King Akandu, who is also a longtime environmental activist in the region. When the women bring him loggers, he warns or fines them, he says.

"The works of the women are effective," says Mr. Bette. "[In the past], anyone could jump into the forest to start cutting wood. But that has stopped in Olum and Buanchor."

Now, the group is thinking bigger. It wants to expand its patrols to other communities around Afi Mountain, where it says many locals are cutting down trees themselves, and leaders have been bought off by logging companies. It's tricky work, Ms. Ofre acknowledges. But she never thinks of giving up.

"We are protecting the remaining forest for our children so they will experience what we experienced," she says. "I believe women always achieve their goals when they unite." ■

PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

BOSTON

Purpose Over Pain supports families reeling from gun violence

By Jacob Posner / Staff writer

Dre'shaun Johnson loved children, especially his nieces and nephews. When he played with them, they jumped and ran all over the place, says his mother, Linda Smith. She recalls sending them outside to Healy Field, a park in Boston's Roslindale neighborhood, "so they could really have enough room to move their whole body."

For the past 2 1/2 years in the same park, Ms. Smith has held a back-to-school giveaway of backpacks filled with supplies in her son's honor. It's next to the gas station where he was killed in 2022.

Ms. Smith has decided not to resign herself to grief over losing her son to gun violence. She has chosen action instead. She participated in walks honoring others lost to violence. She overcame her shyness to tell her story to large groups. And she parted with cherished items – her son's baby shoes, a Red Sox T-shirt representing his love of Boston sports – to be included in The Gun Violence Memorial Project. "He never leaves my heart or my mind, but me doing positive things is [more] helpful than sitting in the house," Ms. Smith says. "In the house, you're just crying, crying."

The Gun Violence Memorial Project, a national traveling exhibit that the Chicago-based organization Purpose Over Pain helped create, features personal objects contributed by the loved ones of people lost to gun violence. So far, more than 1,000 lives from 30 U.S. cities have been commemorated in the exhibit, which has previously been displayed in Chicago and Washington, D.C., and is on view at three sites in Boston through Jan. 20.

Purpose Over Pain aims to facilitate healing by offering lifelines to those who are in the depths of grief. Pamela Bosley and Annette

Nance-Holt know this grief well. They founded the organization in 2007 after their sons were killed in shootings. They say assisting others – whether mentoring youths, supporting people who have lost loved ones, or raising money to pay funeral costs – has helped them cope with their own traumatic losses.

The inspiration for the memorial project came to Ms. Bosley and Ms. Nance-Holt in 2018 after they traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, and visited the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which commemorates the historical toll of lynching on the United States' Black population. They then pitched the idea of a national gun violence memorial to Model of Architecture Serving Society Design Group, the Boston-based nonprofit that designed the Alabama memorial. In partnership with Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund and Purpose Over Pain, the design group worked with conceptual artist Hank Willis Thomas to bring Ms. Bosley and Ms. Nance-Holt's vision to life.

Ms. Nance-Holt, who is the fire commissioner in Chicago, says that through the project, "Other people will know who our children were. You might only see a little bit of them, but you will know that they lived, that they were part of society – and that your child is living on in this exhibit."

"My goal was to help the next mom"

Brooklynn Hitchens, an assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Maryland, says the nature of gun violence in communities complicates the already complex grieving process. Family members often live near the crime scene and must constantly relive difficult memories.

Finding meaning in loss is critical for loved ones dealing with the aftermath of gun violence, which can lead, for example, to severe depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, Professor Hitchens says. "Sometimes that [resilience] comes through activism," she notes. "They feel like the [loved one's] life wasn't in vain. 'I can do something about it now. I can make sure that his kids have a better life.'"

While The Gun Violence Memorial Project is national in scale, Ms. Bosley and Ms. Nance-Holt also support grieving family members back home in Chicago. This September alone, Purpose Over Pain began helping almost 50 parents affected by gun violence, Ms. Bosley says.

The key to aiding people who have lost someone to gun violence, she notes, is to listen. She never takes over the conversation or offers advice. She makes clear that whatever someone is feeling is OK. And then she waits until the person tells her what they need – whether it's managing the logistics of memorial services or just helping buy groceries – before springing into action.

After her son Terrell was killed, Ms. Bosley says, "I went through the whole year by myself. And I tried to take my life twice."

Her grief was so great that she often couldn't get out of bed. "Just putting my foot on the floor ... was a major step for me, and just smiling and just even eating again," she says.

All these years later, the grief has stayed with her. But she has learned to channel the force of her sadness into helping others. Through such work, she says, she can avoid disappearing back into depression.

"My goal was to help the next mom," she says.

Keeping their names alive

Ruth Henry got to know Dion Emmanuel Taylor while working at a Boston-based nonprofit aimed at reducing violence through arts programming for youths. She says Dion was a photographer,

WHY WE WROTE THIS

RESILIENCE

Losing someone to gun violence can leave loved ones despondent. But the force of that sadness can also be channeled into helping others.

muralist, and poet who advocated for peace through his art.

“He had been way too affected by violence already” for someone age 17, she says. Despite losing his best friend and others, “He still showed up with just a big, beautiful, bright, warm heart and charismatic smile,” she adds.

He was killed in fall 2005, less than half a year after he and Ms. Henry became friends. His family made T-shirts showing one of his murals, which Ms. Henry had helped him create. The mural depicts a large eye with bars and a padlock at its center, and a teardrop reading “freedom.”

A poem he wrote appears on the back of the shirt. The final line reads, “I think violence is hard because everywhere you look, there’s violence.”

In August, with permission from Dion’s family, Ms. Henry donated to the memorial project a picture of Dion and his older sister, the T-shirt with his mural, and his poem printed on a bookmark. The sister, Stacy Ann Taylor, had raised Dion. In grieving Dion’s death, Ms. Henry says, she became close to Ms. Taylor, who died in 2022.

Contributing objects to the memorial project was a powerful experience for Ms. Smith, too. She hoped to help people outside her community understand the impact of gun violence – and how special her son, Dre’shaun Johnson, was. A chain featuring his photo was among the items she donated.

The chain helps Ms. Smith’s 2-year-old niece, who never met Mr. Johnson, feel as if she knows him and what he means to his mother. The toddler points to the chain and says, “This is Linda,” Ms. Smith explains, “like she knows he’s a part of me.” ■

COVER STORY

Finding refuge in Beirut

Amid Israeli attacks, tens of thousands fled their homes. As they return, residents in Lebanon express support, and anger, for Hezbollah.

By **Scott Peterson** / Staff writer

BEIRUT

The makeshift tent on this Beirut beach could not be more meager.

It was once a canvas-topped frame used to protect swimmers from the sun. It became a breeze-blown temporary refuge for a Lebanese man named Ahmed and his brother, both in their 60s, displaced by Israel’s airstrikes.

Unfinished trays of donated rice sit on the sand beside camp chairs. Bedsheets lie crumpled on cots. A wet swimsuit dries with a methodical drip, drip, drip near packages of bottled water stacked in reserve.

The Shiite Muslim men live in the nearby southern suburb of Dahiya – a stronghold of Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shiite militia, and where nearly a million people live. The sprawling community was pummeled almost daily by Israeli warplanes, with a final surge just before a 60-day truce starting Nov. 27.

Relegated by Israel’s bombs to this flimsy tent, the brothers said the previous few months have been surreal. Such a situation would have been unimaginable last summer.

They well know the destruction that has been meted out on Hezbollah. In a mass-scale attack on the Shiite militia’s leadership in mid-September, a sophisticated Israeli operation caused thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies to explode, killing more than 30 Hezbollah operatives and wounding nearly 3,000 others.

On Sept. 23, however, the brothers were forced to flee their home after Israel dropped 83 tons of explosives just two blocks

from their apartment, an attack that killed Hezbollah’s lionized longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah, in his underground bunker. On Oct. 1, Israeli forces also mounted a ground incursion, finding and destroying complex networks of Hezbollah tunnels as they battled Hezbollah fighters.

“We didn’t expect that Hezbollah would collapse this quick,” says Ahmed, a grizzled veteran Shiite fighter of decades past. Yet he remains defiant: “Resistance can’t be collapsed; Hezbollah can,” he says. “The struggle will remain.”

The brothers practice a deeply ingrained religious optimism, honed by decades of Shiite doctrine about righteous battle against the injustice of a stronger enemy.

“It is not necessary that Hezbollah is the side that will bring victory,” continues Ahmed. “This is a struggle of thousands of years. It isn’t just the struggle of Hezbollah or Fatah or Hamas,” he says, mentioning Palestinian factions. “They may go away or be destroyed, but others will come.”

Just down the beach from Ahmed and his brother, Loyal Shahrour remains among Hezbollah’s staunchest supporters and is unwilling to write it off just yet. No amount of personal suffering detracts from Hezbollah’s destiny of victory, she says, despite sleeping pre-ceasefire on a thin mattress beneath a wood platform raised just 3 feet above the sand.

“Myself, I love Hezbollah more than before,” says Ms. Shahrour, who’s wearing a black abaya. She says her father was once taken captive by Israel, her brother killed in skirmishes before the war.

“They lost their hands and eyes for us to live in dignity,” she says, referring to Israel’s exploding pagers and walkie-talkies. “They are fighting for us to stand in our house with dignity. Hezbollah will win, even if you see difficulties.”

Ms. Shahrour can’t believe Israel really killed Hezbollah’s revered leader Mr. Nasrallah. “He’s not dead,” she says. “Even if he’s dead, he’s alive in our hearts.”

She longed for home, to Dahiya when the war was over, she says: “We are looking for a good future.”

In his makeshift tent, Ahmed expressed a similar sentiment – even if that future at home is altered by the defeat of Hezbollah. “Maybe some change won’t be bad – life must go on,” he says.

Just a day earlier, he had returned to his apartment to check the damage and collect some clothes. It was still intact, but its windows were smashed and its doors were blown open. Inside, everything was covered in fine powdery dust.

The smell of smoke was everywhere, with an abnormal chemical tinge. He could stay no more than 15 minutes. “I saw many wars. I know the smell of [gun]powder; I know the smell of fires,” says Ahmed. “This one was not like any of those.”

Not far away, displaced children played on the beach on climbing bars, singing as they swung. For a moment, the battering of Hezbollah and questions about its postwar future could not be further away, as the sun begins to set and the warm breeze blows.

But Ahmed is thinking of battles to come. “Israel, she will fight this generation, next generation,” he says. “And one day, she will not have the American support – she will not hold as now.

“She is struggling for 70 years, and 100 more years will fight wars, and wars, and wars,” he says. “It will never be their land. As Muslims, we cannot believe we are not going to win – not today, but tomorrow,” Ahmed says. “It’s coming.”

FOR DECADES, HEZBOLLAH CAST ITSELF as the most powerful arm of Iran’s network of regional militias, dubbed the “Axis of Resistance.” Iran built and supported this array of armed allies – which also

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Israel has decimated Hezbollah’s leadership and curbed its ability to fight. After ceasefire, supporters and opponents wonder what comes next.

includes Hamas in Gaza, various Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen – to fight Israeli and American influence across the Middle East. Most critically, these allies were to serve as Iran’s first line of defense against a direct attack.

As Iran built up other elements of its Axis, Hezbollah was part of a “unity of arenas” strategy, such that Iran’s proxies would be “effectively surrounding Israel with a ring of fire” if any individual member were attacked, says Michael Young of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

The result? “With supreme arrogance and recklessness, Hezbollah carried Lebanon into a conflict which it knew the country, still reeling from the economic collapse of 2019-2020, could not sustain,” writes Mr. Young in an analysis for Carnegie’s “Diwan” blog.

Hezbollah may have indeed been the tip of Iran’s “Axis of Resistance” spear against Israel. But with its leadership decimated and its fighters still reeling, Iran’s first line of defense has been severely weakened.

As Israel has gained momentum in the air and on the battlefield, it appears capable of upending the precarious, long-standing balance of deterrence and threat between Israel and its enemies.

Now, after years of preparation for conflict by all sides, and after dire predictions about the dangers of a regional war, Israel has shown itself determined to destroy its decades-long foes – with the near-complete military support of the United States.

The strategic if unstable equilibrium instantly changed Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a cross-border invasion of Israel from Gaza, killing 1,200 Israelis, nearly all of them civilians, and snatching 250 people as hostages and taking them to Gaza.

Israel vowed to “eliminate” Hamas in Gaza. The military campaign that followed has destroyed much of the coastal strip, killing more than 44,500 Palestinians, about 70% of them women and children, according to the United Nations’ Human Rights Office.

The relentless assault has also brought unprecedented levels of mass displacement and hunger to Gaza civilians.

The International Criminal Court, in an unprecedented ruling Nov. 21, issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for “crimes against humanity and war crimes” committed in Gaza, as well as for Mohammed Deif of Hamas. Two other Hamas leaders the ICC intended to charge have been killed by Israel.

Yet Hamas continues to fight back; Israeli officers say their troops are not likely to withdraw before 2026.

Israel has targeted other Axis militias in Syria and Iraq, which were also firing rockets and drones at Israel. Both the U.S. and Israel struck Houthi targets in Yemen.

On the day after the initial Hamas attack, Hezbollah began launching rockets into northern Israel, calling it a “support front” for Hamas. Israel responded, setting into motion a relatively controlled, incremental back-and-forth escalation over the next 11 months. The fighting caused 60,000 Israelis and 110,000 Lebanese to flee their homes in border areas.

Then Israel and Iran began to engage in unprecedented and direct exchanges of rockets and missiles. An Israeli attack Oct. 26 wiped out key nodes of Iran’s air defenses, potentially paving the way for deeper Israeli strikes against Iran’s energy or nuclear facilities.

Hezbollah’s role as chief deterrent to Israel for Iran, however, now seems to feature little in Israeli calculations, after continued pummeling of Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon.

This has raised questions: What remains of Hezbollah’s once-vaunted fighting prowess? And what about its estimated prewar arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles?

“It may take decades for the Shiite community to recover from the devastation it is now facing,” writes Mr. Young of Carnegie, noting Israel’s “systematic” razing of Shiite regions, similar to the destruction in Gaza.

“Even though Hezbollah still has thousands of combatants, and

the support of a large community, it seems highly improbable, not to say impossible, that it will be able to engage in any kind of effective military activity against Israel for years to come.”

THROUGHOUT THE ESCALATION – and despite demonstrable blows to Iran and its Axis allies – anti-Israel rhetoric has not dimmed amid predictions of eventual victory over Israel. Yet it is in Lebanon where the fate of Iran’s Axis strategy is being put to the test.

“The most potent weapon that Hezbollah has in Lebanese politics is not its weapons only,” says Makram Rabah, an assistant professor of history and archaeology at the American University of Beirut. “It is the fact that it can control the [Shiite] sectarian narrative.

“All other communities have the same, but the difference is that, in the case of Hezbollah, you don’t have a local selfish agenda – your agenda is directly connected to Iran. This is why I don’t call them Hezbollah; I call them the Revolutionary Guard, Lebanon branch. ... Nasrallah forgot that he was Lebanese to begin with,” Dr. Rabah says, referring to its assassinated leader.

Indeed, Hezbollah’s overt ties to Iran have drawn opprobrium from Lebanon’s other religious sects. Shiite groups like the rival Amal movement accuse Hezbollah of dragging them into a destructive war that was not their own, never mind how increasingly prevalent that view is among Christians and others.

“The Shiites of Lebanon are definitely divided, because the most wicked part of the Israeli attack is that they are not going after Lebanese, they are not going after Shiites,” Dr. Rabah says. “They are going after Hezbollah, and all others are collateral damage.”

Hezbollah still retains 13 members of parliament. But its rivals are working to diminish its influence and disarm the only Lebanese militia that still has weapons 34 years after the end of Lebanon’s 15-year civil war from 1975 to 1990.

Other sectarian militias have since disarmed. But Iran helped create and train Hezbollah as an armed resistance to Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

For years, Hezbollah has refused to discuss disarming, or to allow its vast arsenal to be absorbed into the Lebanese army, which was meant to be the only force deployed along the southern border with Israel, according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, passed in 2006 at the end of the last all-out Israel-Hezbollah conflict.

Instead, Hezbollah kept its fighters and weapons deployed along every section of the border with Israel, in the name of “defending” Lebanese sovereignty, and it engaged in sporadic and limited cross-border exchanges of fire.

The new truce follows the same contours of the 2006 deal, requiring a Hezbollah withdrawal north of the Litani River some 18.5 miles (30 kilometers) from the border, but with a stronger enforcement mechanism and reported agreements to allow “defensive” action. Continued strikes, especially by Israel, signify the fragility of truce.

Mr. Nasrallah’s successor as Hezbollah chief, Naim Qassem, said two days after the ceasefire that Hezbollah achieved a “divine victory” against Israel. He said Hezbollah would work closely with the Lebanese army’s deployment in the south. “To those that were betting that Hezbollah would be weakened, we are sorry; their bets have failed,” Mr. Qassem said in a prerecorded address.

Yet Hezbollah, now assaulted like never before, is facing a reckoning. The high cost to Shiites has turned some former supporters against the Iran-backed militia.

“They will not disappear, but it depends on the result of the war,” says a longtime supporter of Hezbollah, a businessman who gave the name Hussein, a pseudonym, for safety. “Because Hezbollah is not just a group of people, but consists of every family in the south, every house on the border.

“Hezbollah existed for a reason, because no one defended these places,” he says. “If our army were protecting people, we would not need Hezbollah. This came from the absence of our government.”

Hussein lost 16 members of his family in an Israeli airstrike

on Beirut in 2006, and expected that Hezbollah would satisfy his desire for revenge by hitting Israel “hard,” as its leaders promised. But it failed to deliver.

“We need someone to defend us from this enemy,” Hussein says. “Israel is killing kids, women in Gaza, and now targeting United Nations troops. They respect no law, no people, no government. That’s why, if you ask people why they are supporting this, it is because [Hezbollah is] standing against those killers, those enemies.”

But the continued onslaught against Hezbollah by Israel and the extraordinary cost to Lebanon’s Shiite community, including in Dahiya, where Hussein does his business, have caused him to reconsider.

“For now, after what happened, we want our army to protect us – no one else,” says Hussein. “We want great powers like the U.S. to allow our army to have the weapons to defend us, because we want only the Lebanese army to defend us, our land, and our houses.”

There is also resentment against Iran, and against Hezbollah for putting Iran’s priorities of battling Israel ahead of the welfare of their own Lebanese.

“We need to be careful to tell the Shiites: ‘We will not pay the political bill for Iran’s adventures,’” says Dr. Rabah of the American University of Beirut. “‘You will be part of the Lebanese political system. And you will have equal rights with everyone else.’ But it will take time.”

JAD HAMDAN, MANAGER OF THE UPSCALE MEZYAN RESTAURANT in the central Hamra district in Beirut, wants to help the people displaced by Israel’s relentless airstrikes.

He, like other Lebanese who feel solidarity with their fellow citizens, has felt an impulse toward unity amid conflict.

With fewer customers – business dropped 70% in the months since mid-September, he says – Mr. Hamdan trimmed his working chefs from six to three. But they cooked an average of 300 meals a day, delivering food by scooter to families in need across the city.

He’s watched displaced Shiites from Dahiya pour into more upscale and safer downtown Beirut locales, with entire families sleeping on the waterfront corniche in Martyrs’ Square – and, of course, on the beach.

Lebanese from all sects swung into action, sometimes opening their homes to displaced people, other times providing food, mattresses, clothes, and diapers to families who left their homes with nothing.

Other Lebanese, however, refused to help, citing Hezbollah’s unilateral decision to attack Israel, which has brought such hardship, displacement, and destruction to their doorstep.

A courier named Firas Kashko delivers a Mezyan meal of meat and rice to a Shiite matriarch named Amal. She lives temporarily in a ground-floor apartment in a Beirut residential block. The meal will feed 17 people, she says, seven of them children, across two displaced families.

“It is too important, these daily deliveries of food,” Amal says, adding that these families receive no other help. Mr. Kashko, himself a refugee from Syria, said he would make 12 deliveries that day to people exhausted by the war.

At the restaurant, which has a classic, warm ambiance, Mr. Hamdan oversees the cooking for displaced people while serving his remaining customers. Mezyan played a similar role during the pandemic, as well as after the August 2020 Beirut port explosion – which broke the restaurant’s windows.

“We don’t know if [the war] is short or long. We are doing our best to help people, day by day,” says Mr. Hamdan, as he receives requests for help on his phone.

If families have other resources and don’t need Mezyan’s deliveries, he moves to the next family on his waiting list.

Mr. Hamdan’s own home village in the south has been bombed more than a dozen times, with a number of houses destroyed. He

brought his mother and grandfather to Beirut for safety, but his father insisted on staying. Much of the restaurant staff is from Dahiya and is also displaced, he says. They help distribute food.

“As much as we can, we are doing,” says Mr. Hamdan, who receives contributions from nongovernmental organizations and individual donors. “A month, a year? I don’t know, but we are doing as much as we can, and with funds from others, we will stay every day.

“Even if we close our doors, we will just keep cooking for the people,” he says. ■

EDITOR’S NOTE: A cover story on a 17th-century eating club in what is now Nova Scotia (Nov. 25) oversimplified the nutritional supports provided to colonists by the Mi’kmaq. The Indigenous group helped colonists access a variety of sources of vitamin C.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

THE MONITOR’S VIEW

Building peace by disrupting lies

Surveys of public attitudes about democracy in Africa reveal a contradiction. “Growing majorities call for government accountability and the rule of law,” Afrobarometer reports, yet “Opposition to military rule has weakened.”

One not-so-hidden explanation for this is disinformation. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies in Washington has tracked a fourfold increase in sophisticated campaigns of deception across nearly 40 countries on the continent since 2022. They attack the credibility of elections, undermine health systems, and promote autocratic leaders. Russia is behind nearly half of them.

A new voice has now pierced that fog of dishonesty. “I helped keep my country in chaos,” said Ephrem Yalike Ngonzo, a journalist in the Central African Republic paid to spread false information provided by a Russian contact. “I want to denounce everything, to make amends, to free myself from my shame and my regrets,” he told the French paper *Le Monde*.

Societies that have turned to truth commissions to chart healing paths out of conflict have sometimes held up remorse as a standard for judging the sincerity of people atoning for the harm they have caused. Mr. Ngonzo’s desire “to make amends” points to what some experts in conflict mediation see as a deeper, more transformative commitment.

“Remorse is a genuine empathy-based expression of one’s regret over hurting someone else,” clinical psychologist Dr. George Simon has observed. “Contrition is that very rare but absolutely essential feature of changing one’s life for the better. It requires a true metanoia or ‘change of heart.’ And even more importantly, it requires work – a lot of very hard, humble, committed work.”

Contrition may be the common element in the diversity of conflict-solving approaches that turn perpetrators of harm into restorers of community. That includes former guerrillas in Colombia now protecting farmers and forests as well as gang members working as conflict disrupters in Chicago.

Mr. Ngonzo offered a detailed, inside account of how Moscow cultivates African journalists and activists through the Wagner paramilitary group and other Russian agents. They are lured with money and then entrapped in fear, he explained. Convinced of the harm he was causing, he slipped away quietly, arriving in Paris in June after moving furtively through neighboring African countries. He was helped onward by European civil society groups that defend

whistleblowers in Africa.

When a lie is exposed, the world is no longer quite the same. Mr. Ngonzo has marked a route for others from dishonesty to conscience that the sowers of disinformation may note. Motivated by contrition, he is “no longer afraid.” ■

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

The Senate as a guardrail

Four years ago, just days into the Biden administration with the Senate divided down the middle, the senior senator from South Dakota rose in eloquent defense of deliberation and compromise.

“Our Founders recognized the importance of putting safeguards in place to ensure that majorities wouldn’t curtail or eliminate minority rights,” said John Thune, a Republican, from the Senate floor.

“They made the Senate smaller and senators’ terms of office longer, with the intention of creating a more stable, more thoughtful, and more deliberative legislative body to check ill-considered or intemperate legislation or attempts to curtail minority rights.”

Those words are freshly relevant. Mr. Thune is the newly elected leader of the incoming Republican Senate majority. Amid a hail of controversial Cabinet picks from Donald Trump, he vowed to preserve the filibuster – a legislative tool that compels consensus. That decision was unlikely to curry favor with the president-elect, who prizes loyalty and urged the Senate to abdicate its constitutional role of weighing nominations through “advice and consent.” But it reinforced a legislative guardrail on the appointment process.

The Senate’s early gestures of independence underscore that governing rests on ideas as much as it does on the people who hold powerful jobs. The framers of the American Constitution established a system of checks and balances among three equal branches. In the Senate, that equilibrium draws on what James Madison called “the stability of character.”

Republicans claimed a broad mandate after winning the White House and both chambers of Congress. Yet unified government is no guarantee of unanimity in governing. Since the election, many in the Senate have tempered party allegiance with individual reason.

“All Americans, whether or not they’re in the majority, deserve to be represented,” Senator Thune said four years ago. Deliberation “requires more thought, more debate, and greater consensus.” ■

BEHIND THE SCENES

What keeps our reporter in Gaza going

How do you report a story like the war in Gaza accurately, while navigating the danger and chaos of living in a war zone?

By **Amelia Newcomb** / Managing editor
and **Mackenzie Farkus** / Associate multimedia producer

On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas fighters poured into southern Israel from Gaza, killing more than 1,200 Israelis and taking hundreds of hostages. One year later, the fighting expanded dramatically, with widespread destruction and death in Gaza, conflict

and evacuations on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border amid fighting with Hezbollah, and an incursion into Lebanon by Israel. Tensions between Israel and Iran have soared.

Amid intense strife and humanitarian disaster, how do you report the story accurately and compassionately? How do you recognize the complexities of a war in which intense suffering exists alongside a powerful humanity and an effort to cling to hope?

Monitor correspondents Ghada Abdulfattah in Gaza and Taylor Luck in Jordan joined our podcast to talk with Amelia Newcomb, the Monitor’s managing editor, about the challenges they face – and, in Ghada’s case, how she navigates the danger and chaos that confront her every moment of the day as a resident of Gaza. They agree on one thing in particular: that the scale of the conflict has been sobering.

“Initially, my expectations were shaped by the previous wars that we lived through,” says Ghada, speaking by phone from Gaza. “But the scale of this war and its violence and the rapid escalation were unprecedented.” ■

PODCAST

Correspondents Ghada Abdulfattah in Gaza and Taylor Luck in Jordan recently joined the Monitor podcast “Why We Wrote This” to discuss the challenges of covering war in Gaza.

Find the full interview at www.CSMonitor.com/WhyWeWroteThis.



HOME FORUM

Cracking Icelanders’ frosty facade? I found the steamy secret.

Six months of darkness would chill anyone’s demeanor. Here’s how I broke the ice.

I first traveled to Iceland in the early 1980s. In a bid to learn the language, I got a stint on a remote Icelandic farm, with a family that didn’t speak a stick of English. I quickly learned something central about the Icelandic character. To wit: There is no such thing as an uncomfortable silence. I recall driving many miles with my farmer host when not a word was uttered. No small talk. No chitchat. No comments about the weather. I acknowledged this as a cultural trait and went with the flow.

This conversational stillness goes beyond the rural areas. Even in the cosmopolitan capital, Reykjavik, when people pass one another on the street, it’s eyes forward, expression deadpan, and mouth firmly closed. Of course, if one recognizes a neighbor, it’s only natural to greet that person. But a stranger? Never.

Which is where the hot tub comes in. Iceland is studded with public bathing areas supplied with geothermal water – a boon of living in a volcanically active country. I recall my first visit to a popular swimming hole in Reykjavik. After changing (in silence) and showering (in silence), I made my way to the hot tub area and immersed myself with a sigh of ecstasy.

For a while I had the whole thing to myself. Then an older, pleasant-faced woman arrived and descended – in silence – into the water. We both soaked for a few minutes until, “It’s good to

be in the hot tub, no?” the woman remarked while smiling in quiet contentment.

“Why, yes, yes it is,” I replied, taken off guard by the experience of an Icelander talking, unbidden, to me, a stranger.

The conversation took wing from there. When the woman discerned, from my accent, that I wasn’t Icelandic, it only whetted her curiosity, providing fodder for more conversation. As we spoke, a young couple entered the tub. “Look at this man,” said my new acquaintance. “He’s an American, but he speaks Icelandic.”

The young man’s face brightened. “You don’t say!”

I now became the object of intense interest, a kind of linguistic oddball who had learned an antique language spoken by fewer than 400,000 souls. The mood was convivial, more like something I’d expect from ebullient Italians. I quickly discerned that there was something about the community of the hot tub that unlocked the “inner Icelander” that was otherwise kept under wraps. Further, there was an equalizing effect between the loquacious me and the normally reticent Icelanders, resulting in us finding a sort of middle ground where meaningful, if measured, conversation became possible.

Eventually, it was time for me to get out of the tub because, paradoxically, one can get dehydrated in hot water. And so, reluctantly, I said my goodbyes and departed. As I pulled my things together, my mind wandered to the masterpiece of science fiction by Robert Heinlein “Stranger in a Strange Land.” The protagonist is a human born on Mars and raised by Martians. Coming from a desert planet, he brings with him a ritual called “water sharing,” whereby a glass of rare, precious water is shared between two people, creating a lasting bond. Something similar happened in that hot tub. Before leaving, I was extended an invitation for tea and Icelandic pancakes with cream in the young couple’s home.

Since my inaugural visit to Iceland, I have made frequent returns to that island nation, where I now have dear friends. Icelanders are still a rather laconic folk (six months of darkness may play a role here), but I am no longer discomfited by the lack of a greeting on the streets, or the silent bus rides. I have my ace in the hole, because no matter where I travel in Iceland, there is a hot tub nearby, the geothermal water serving as a lubricant for conversation, which might lead to friendship, and the possibility of Icelandic cream pancakes.

– Robert Klose

A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Blessedness that brings lasting joy

At one time or another we may have felt great happiness when a weighty problem was resolved. That’s a pretty normal response to a positive outcome! But what about our state of thought when answers are nowhere in sight, or when we’re suddenly confronted with a new challenge?

Happiness that just comes from improved circumstances is not something that can be depended upon if the waters get rough again. But there is a dependable source of joy and peace that we can rely on: God. An abiding sense of spiritual blessedness comes from understanding our unity with God.

From beginning to end, the Bible is filled with praise and celebration of God’s goodness, which is poured out all the time to His deeply loved creation – which includes all of us. The New

International Reader’s Version describes our God-given blessedness so beautifully this way: “Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. ... They belong to us because we belong to Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

Decades ago, I felt anything but blessed and was struggling overall with a sense of happiness that came and went all too often. Then I began to study Christian Science. And the God-given blessings of His goodness that I was learning about transformed my thought and experience.

More and more I began to see blessedness as spiritual and permanent, like a thread that couldn’t unravel, for me and everyone. This resulted in feeling less and less the coming and going of a happiness based on circumstance.

The teachings of Christian Science have been such a powerful light to me over many years. They brighten and make ever clearer the truths of the Scriptures. For example, consider the use of “Christ” in the previously mentioned Bible verse. In “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,” Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, describes Christ as the “divinity of the man Jesus” and “his divine nature, the godliness which animated him” (p. 26).

Jesus’ teachings and healing works reveal that blessedness is inherent in our true identity – which is wholly spiritual because it comes from God, who is pure Spirit and Love. In other words, the peace and freedom of spiritual blessedness stem from the constancy of our God-derived nature.

The Christ light, which comes to human consciousness at every moment, communicates a steady joy that uplifts.

Because the spiritual reality of our blessedness comes directly from God, it is unlimited. We can drink in our divine state of blessedness and let it purify our motives and thoughts. This results in lives healed and uplifted to a more permanent joy – beyond the shifting scenes of human experience.

Blessedness rests securely in God, whose direction always brings calm, comfort, and confidence.

– Elizabeth Mata

ARTS AND CULTURE

Want a less commercial holiday? Gen Z tries ‘underconsumption core.’

By Cameron Pugh / Staff writer

Stephanie Noble hasn’t gone shopping in months. For the social media star and self-described “shopping addict,” that’s a major shift. It’s one she plans on extending through the holidays and into next year, from Black Friday through summer. “You won’t catch me slipping,” she said in a TikTok video shared with over 82,000 followers in October. “I’m sticking with it.”

With the holidays around the corner, Ms. Noble says that she’s more focused on spending time with her loved ones than on finding the perfect gift. What presents she and her family members do buy for one another, she says, will cost less than \$50. She hopes that will inspire more creativity.

“I’m trying ... to focus more on the memories we create vs. the things we buy,” she writes to the Monitor. “It’s helping me slow down and be more present with my family.”

Ms. Noble isn’t the only one who, like Charlie Brown, is trying to make Christmas less commercial. Others are turning away from

the traditional hustle and bustle of holiday shopping in favor of a quieter season that's less driven by "stuff" and more focused on community. And it's not just for the holidays. These frugal shoppers' desire for simplicity is growing out of larger movements that seek to reduce consumption to protect the environment and nurture a less materialistic culture.

Recently, a wave of TikTok users has embraced a viral trend dubbed "underconsumption core." In clips garnering millions of views and often set to "Don't Know Why" by Norah Jones, users narrate how they squeeze every last drop out of their personal care products, sew up old clothes, and fill their homes with secondhand furniture.

Variations on a minimalist theme

Both historically and in modern times, many people lived "underconsumption" lifestyles long before Generation Zers and millennials made it chic by adding "core" after the word. (They called it being "thrifty.") Other internet trends, such as last year's "de-influencing," have similarly encouraged social media users to buy less and reuse more.

Yet it's ironic that TikTok would be the cradle for such a trend. The app is a major driver of online commerce. Americans spend \$7 million a day on its built-in shopping section. Worldwide, TikTok generated \$3.84 billion in consumer spending in 2023, according to a report by Capital One. Legions of influencers use the app to promote products as their full-time job.

In an age where influencers constantly push their followers to buy what's en vogue, underconsumption core might feel like a panacea against an increasingly intrusive consumer culture.

"I actually think this new interest in minimalism is a huge reaction to social media," says Daniele Mathras, a professor at Northeastern University's business school. "We are constantly bombarded, all the time, with advertising. ... I think that a lot of consumers are ... not wanting to be a part of it."

Videos from those using the hashtags #underconsumption or #underconsumptioncore cite economic, environmental, philosophical, and even mental health concerns as motivators. Omar Fares, a lecturer at Lazaridis School of Business and Economics at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, points out that high interest rates and inflation have recently crunched consumers' wallets. Over the past two decades, he says, shoppers have also become more concerned about the environmental – and human – cost of their purchases.

The financial incentives may be a strong motivator for young people, who have been particularly buffeted by economic headwinds, Dr. Fares says.

Larger, generational shifts in spending habits may also be driving minimalism trends. A 2014 survey by EventBrite found that 78% of millennials would prefer to spend their money on a memorable experience or event, such as a concert, than on a physical object. Interest in the "experience economy" has only grown since the COVID-19 pandemic.

That resonates with Ms. Noble, who says her family plans on gifting experiences rather than material things for the holidays this year. "That way, we're making memories," she says.

Though those modern factors might be behind the emergence of underconsumption core, the roots of such trends reach further back in history. The Voluntary Simplicity Movement, for example, encouraged participants to only buy things that served a purpose. It became popular in the latter half of the 20th century, but existed as early as the Great Depression.

Dr. Mathras sees parallels between that movement and more recent ones. Voluntary Simplicity participants, for example, were concerned with how their purchases impacted the environment and the workers who produced goods.

"We have different words for it now," she says, pointing to terms like "minimalism" in addition to underconsumption. "But I think they really are some of the same things."

Spread by viral videos and packaged into easy-to-swallow challenges, ideas about the best ways to spend less find it easier to get exposure. That can also create a supportive community where people can share in each other's triumphs.

That's been a cornerstone for Ms. Noble, who since summer has limited herself to buying groceries and other perishables. So far, she says, she's made one exception for a hobby. She's gotten an outpouring of support from her followers since she started publicly posting about her no-shopping journey. "I was shocked at how many people could relate and how many people were cheering me on," she says in an interview.

A trend by any other name ...

In some ways, TikTok is the new kid on the block. Versions of "underconsumption" have long been popular in other corners of the internet.

Liesl Clark calls it "buy nothing." That's the name of the online group she co-founded with her friend in 2013. She found herself concerned about how much plastic washed ashore in her city of Bainbridge Island, Washington. Ms. Clark bills the Buy Nothing Project as "the world's largest network of gifting communities." United by more than 8,000 Facebook groups and an app, some 12 million participants exchange items for free.

The Buy Nothing Project aims to create a "local circular economy where you don't have to go out and buy new," Ms. Clark says. The power of that becomes especially clear during the holidays.

Ms. Clark says that the number of participants nearly doubles as people get into the holiday spirit and diligently search for gifts for their family. The platform can be especially effective for parents. That's something she found out through personal experience.

"Kids don't care. They're not thinking, 'Oh, it wasn't new,'" she says. Over time, she adds, "We were able to acquire incredibly wonderful and meaningful gifts for our kids, all the way through their younger years."

Potlucks are another popular holiday feature of Buy Nothing groups. Awash in leftover turkey and stuffing, participants often gather to exchange food in the days following Thanksgiving. "Usually the day after Thanksgiving is huge," Ms. Clark says.

Ms. Noble says that for her, consuming less is partially about finding balance – and not just in her spending habits. Shopping less has been a boon for her mental health. She's gotten time back. The pace of her life has slowed. She's journaling more often, and making a point to check in on her own emotional needs.

"I want to be more mindful about the way I participate in capitalism and the way that I consume for the environment and things like that," she says. "But I just feel so much less anxious, and that alone is the biggest win ever." ■

WHY WE WROTE THIS

BALANCE

Americans used to call it being thrifty. Then it was Voluntary Simplicity. Today, Generation Z is exploring eschewing materialism as "underconsumption core," with an eye for more meaningful holidays and less stuff.

Five-star ‘Flow’ and chatty ‘Moana 2’ offer animated delights

Two films, both centered on water, touch on the power of connection.

It’s been an auspicious year for animation aficionados. To name only a few of the most recently heralded: “Inside Out 2,” “The Wild Robot,” and the more adult-themed “Memoir of a Snail.” “Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl” is on the horizon. Recently arrived are two more of note – “Flow” and “Moana 2.”

Let’s start with “Flow,” a graphic wonder from the Latvian director Gints Zilbalodis. It’s no secret that the best animated movies can enthrall us in ways every bit as immersive as any live-action film. “Flow” is a triumphant case in point. Although it could certainly qualify for a best animated film Oscar, it is Latvia’s Oscar entry for best international feature. And why not?

The film is set in a flooded, postapocalyptic, wordless world in which apparently no humans have survived. A black cat escapes a gushing tidal wave in a thickly forested landscape by jumping aboard an abandoned, orange-sailed skiff. Soon the feline is joined by a slew of fellow survivors: a friendly capybara; a strutting secretary bird; a playful golden retriever, breaking from his pack; and a mischievous lemur, who periodically hops ashore to hoard discarded trinkets.

What disaster has befallen this world? It’s possible to imagine all manner of climate change scenarios, but Zilbalodis wisely never lets on. To do so would have diminished the film’s poetic power. The multihued CGI effects are so evocative that the lack of language soon becomes irrelevant to the experience. Who needs words when the soundtrack is flush with the rush of natural sounds – the groan and crack of swaying trees, the whoosh of water. When the action dips below the water, it’s as if we, too, are submerged right along with the animals and sea creatures and darting, rainbow-colored fish. There is a kinesthetic pleasure in how this film – which is mostly seen through the cat’s big, bright eyes – sinuously unfurls.

Zilbalodis doesn’t discount the dangers in this world. The sheltering animals become a makeshift community of help-mates, but marauders onshore, and in the air, abound. As the boat journeys on, we see the wreckage of what humans have left behind: Mayan ruins, maybe, Native American totems, Egyptian obelisks. Perhaps a decayed Venetian palace? The lack of specificity gives the imagery an immanence. Timelessness in an animated movie has rarely been so hauntingly invoked. “Flow” is my favorite animated movie so far this year.

And what of “Moana 2”? Like in “Flow,” water, in all its many modes, occupies a crucial place in the narrative. Unlike “Flow,” it’s certainly not dialogue-free. I don’t think I’ve ever seen an animated movie with this much chatter. But then again, there’s a lot of story to get through in this sequel to the 2016 hit. Maybe too much story.

Since we last saw her, Moana (voiced by Auli’i Cravalho) has become a VIP wayfinder on her thronged, convivial island home in the South Pacific. For her next voyage, prompted by visita-

tions from her ancestors, she seeks to raise up the sunken island of Motufetu. Cursed by Nalo, the god of storms, the island was once a meeting place for all the peoples of the sea. Not a people person, Nalo put an end to all that. Along for the ride are some familiar faces from “Moana,” including the pig, Pua; the chicken, Heihei; and the shape-shifty demigod Maui (Dwayne Johnson), who seems a bit more respectful of Moana this time around. As he should be.

It’s all visually sumptuous and entertaining, with a serviceable score. But for all that, the movie seems too hectic and overengineered. It’s as if the filmmakers worried we’d be bored if there wasn’t something constantly pounding the screen. Quiet moments, as the best animators know, can be every bit as effective as loud ones. Think of the greatest films of Hayao Miyazaki. Or “Flow.” At times, it’s as if the co-directors – Jason Hand, Dana Ledoux Miller, and David Derrick Jr. – were attempting to simulate a nonanimated action film. It’s no surprise that Disney is, in fact, prepping a live-action version of “Moana.”

“Moana 2” touts the power of human (and nonhuman) connection, and the film will certainly connect with its target audience. But it doesn’t trust viewers enough to feel for themselves. There is more than one way to reach audiences and move them and widen their eyes.

■ “Flow” is rated PG for peril and thematic elements. “Moana 2” is rated PG for action/peril.



ON FILM

BY PETER
RAINER

Q&A with Curtis Chin, author of ‘Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant’

Curtis Chin learned about the world through the four walls of his family’s restaurant.

“Even though I worked in the family business for as much as 80 hours a week, I still felt like I saw the city, because the city came to our restaurant,” says Mr. Chin from a boba shop.

For six decades, Chung’s Cantonese Cuisine was a cultural crossroads. Its tables served everyone in Detroit, from the city’s first Black mayor to its drag queens to Jewish families seeking Christmas meals. For young Curtis, it was home. He did homework in the dining room, read newspapers at empty tables, and engaged with the many people from all walks of life who graced Chung’s.

“I thought that’s what my life would be,” continues Mr. Chin. “I thought I’d just be a waiter because my dad had inherited it from his dad, who had inherited it from his dad.” Instead, he became a TV screenwriter, documentary filmmaker, and co-founder of the Asian American Writers’ Workshop in New York.

His 2023 memoir, “Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant,” is a coming-of-age tale set in the 1980s against Detroit’s declining auto industry. Packed with humor, it chronicles Mr. Chin’s upbringing, from running food orders after school starting at age 10 to becoming a first-generation college student at the University of Michigan.

Now on a 300-city book tour, he stops at historic eateries like China Pearl Restaurant in Boston. He hosts roundtable talks with family-owned businesses to raise awareness of the struggles of Chinese restaurants and Chinatowns.

The Monitor’s Troy Aidan Sambajon caught up with Mr. Chin in Boston’s Chinatown to talk about his memoir and new project: a six-

part docuseries on the history of Chinese restaurants in America. Their conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: In your memoir, you recount your experience growing up in Detroit's Chinatown. What does Chinatown mean to you, and how has that changed over time?

Food and family – that's what Chinatown means to me. I have great memories of my childhood, despite the fact that there were all these terrible things going on in Detroit.

But now there's this combination of feeling nostalgic in Chinatown, yet recognizing that so many family-owned businesses are under duress. You find a favorite restaurant, and then suddenly it's gone. ...

I see that happening everywhere. The Chinatowns are shrinking. They're under pressure from gentrification. The population is moving out. So I'd like to help in any way to sort of preserve these spots, because they're still necessary.

Q: In the book, you portray your family's restaurant as a vital community hub. How do restaurants function as anchors for their communities? [Chung's closed in 2000, after the death of Mr. Chin's father.]

I always grew up understanding that the restaurant was important to my family because we saw it as an opportunity. But I didn't realize that what my parents were also doing was providing the community with a space – not just for the Chinese but also for the local Detroit community.

Detroit through the '70s, '80s, and '90s was really falling apart, and there were fewer and fewer places to build connections. One place you could always turn to was our restaurant.

I've actually been really dismayed that we live in a world that's very divided right now. We don't talk to each other. Chinese restaurants are one of the few places where you can go and see people from different races, classes, or socioeconomic backgrounds. If we can just use that opportunity to start talking to each other again – even if it's just leaning across the table and saying, "Hey, what are you eating?"

These are the baby steps we need to take as a country to start getting along with each other again.

Q: You're on a 300-city book tour – including 14 stops at historic Chinese eateries – that you've called your crusade to save Chinese restaurants. What does a community like Chinatown lose when businesses like Chung's close?

The building that housed our restaurant – which has been abandoned for 20 years – was recently renovated, and I was approached about reopening our family's business. That's how beloved the restaurant is 20 years later. People still ask, "Would you be reopening the restaurant?" These days, I still fantasize about it.

[When a restaurant closes] it's not just a loss for that family and that part of history, but think about all the customers that may have been going there for multiple generations.

If I can raise some awareness, maybe it can help a restaurant get through the month. ... I mean, having 10 extra customers every week might be the difference, right?

That's really the thrust of this tour. I'm trying to build those connections and allow the restaurant owners to tell their own stories. These restaurants are beloved in the community. But because they've been here so long, it's very easy to forget they're still struggling.

That idea of an immigrant family, starting a family business and working their way up, and using education as an opportunity, is still very strong in America. It's a vital link in the immigrant story. ■

Five art books bring the gallery to your couch

The images in these beautiful volumes offer color, light, and joy to art lovers.

By Heller McAlpin / Contributor

The best art books lend themselves to exploration, exhilaration, and contemplation. They open you up to other cultures and eras without leaving the comfort of home. No jostling for an unobstructed view in crowded museum galleries, and no rush. You can spend hours happily turning pages or being absorbed in a single image.

These five books will transport you to early-19th-century Japan, late-19th-century England, and mid-20th-century America. They will heighten your appreciation for the magnificence of the planet's tallest plants – and the soaring possibilities of human creativity.

Prolific Japanese master

You're going to need a big coffee table to accommodate two magnificent large-format books on the life and work of Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). The prolific master of Edo period woodblock *ukiyo-e* art – "images of the floating world" – is best known for his series "Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji," but as these books demonstrate, he was proficient in other media.

Hokusai's work, rooted in naturalism, is said to encompass some 30,000 prints, drawings, and paintings (including scrolls in ink and color on both paper and silk, book illustrations, and mass-produced copies). His subjects include landscapes, seascapes, bridges, cranes, warblers, mystical lions, and floral blossoms. He features scenes of daily life, including rituals and ceremonies, as well as portraits and caricatures of actors, poets, sumo wrestlers, courtesans, and laborers.

"Hokusai: A Life in Drawing," published by Thames & Hudson, offers 150 detailed, full-color illustrations. Taschen's monumental "Hokusai," which runs to more than 700 oversize pages, encompasses a more comprehensive, chronologically arranged selection of his work.

Hokusai frequently incorporated poetry into his art, though neither book provides translations. Much of his early work featured crowds of people painted in earth tones accented by touches of pink, pale green, and burnt orange. His later, more familiar woodblock landscapes are rich in graduated shades of blue and green. One particularly alluring example depicts a group of men and women clad in blue-patterned kimonos gazing from a temple deck toward Mount Fuji.

Giving women their due

Publishers are continuing their initiative to honor long-overlooked women artists with several books this year, including "Great Women Sculptors" and the photography monograph "Consuelo Kanaga." Particularly beguiling is "Women Pioneers of the Arts & Crafts Movement" by Karen Livingstone, which features 33 innovative women whose work helped shape British home decoration between 1880 and 1914.

Among the artists profiled are cousins Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, who co-founded the first woman's interior design business in England in 1874 to create wallpaper, carpets, and furniture. Ethel Mary Charles, the first professional female architect in Britain, designed houses and cottages in the arts and crafts style in the early 20th century with her sister, Bessie Ada Charles. Kate Faulkner created

the still-popular Mallow wallpaper design in 1879 for Morris & Co.

The range of crafts featured in the book encompasses painting, weaving, jewelry making, enamel and metalwork, bookbinding, stained glass, wood carving, and hand-painted pottery for big studios such as Minton. But many women, including those who operated the tapestry looms at Morris & Co., did not receive credit for executing the work of husbands and other collaborators. So it's good to see Scottish artist Margaret Macdonald given her due for her significant contributions to the work of her husband, Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Celebrating trees

"Tree," the 10th title in Phaidon's Explorer series, which also includes "Bird" (2021) and "Garden" (2023), offers a stunning visual survey of arboreal history in art and culture that spans continents and millennia. The sheer breadth and variety of the more than 300 images are phenomenal, with works as disparate as a 3,400-year-old Egyptian bas-relief and a 20th-century painting by David Hockney, "The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011."

There are lovely botanical drawings of chestnut leaves by John Ruskin dating from 1870 and chestnut flowers by Mary Delany from 1776. Familiar works include Lucas Cranach the Elder's "Adam and Eve" from about 1526 and Walker Evans' gnarly rooted "Banyan Tree, Florida" from 1941. But there are also plenty of happy surprises and witty juxtapositions, such as Keith Haring's "Tree of Life," which shares a spread with Dr. Seuss' "The Lorax."

More sobering are several works that show the devastating effects of clear-cutting rainforests, including Niklaus Troxler's "Dead Trees, 1992" and Jacques Jangoux's bleak, monochromatic Amazon landscape, "Destroyed Rainforest, c. 2015."

A handy timeline tracing the history of trees from 470 million years ago to the present strengthens this book's compelling case for conserving these magnificent woody plants, which provide 28% of the Earth's oxygen and absorb about 30% of carbon emissions.

Mid-century modern geometrics

You may not recognize the name Alexander Girard (1907-1993), but if you're a fan of mid-century modern design, chances are you'll recognize his abstract and geometric-patterned textiles.

Highlights of Girard's long and varied career include collaborations with Charles and Ray Eames during the years he led Herman Miller's textile department, which still produces many of his bold designs. Concurrently, Girard created chic, modern furniture for private clients. His brightly colored, folk art-inspired design for the Latin American-themed restaurant La Fonda del Sol brought a ray of sunshine to Manhattan's Time & Life building in 1960. In creating a distinctive new look for Braniff International Airways in 1965, Girard perked up the company's image with a custom typeface and 56 textiles in stripes, checks, solids, and a futuristic black-and-white fabric that incorporated the airline's new logos.

Girard is also known for his collection of folk art, which has been displayed since 1982 in a wing he designed in Santa Fe's Museum of International Folk Art. It is impossible to capture in photographs the scale of this exhibit created to "disturb and enchant the eye." But there's enchantment aplenty to be found in this book. ■

The best of 2024

From literary fiction to biographies, these are the titles that captivated Monitor reviewers this year.

FICTION

James

by Percival Everett

"With my pencil, I wrote myself into being," asserts James in Percival Everett's National Book Award-winning novel. This is Jim of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" fame, now at the helm of the story. A self-educated man, James confronts a vivid cast of ne'er-do-wells, enslavers, and fellow escapees as he wends his way north in the hopes of buying his family's freedom. It's a gripping tale of reinvention and determination.

The Mighty Red

by Louise Erdrich

From the masterful Louise Erdrich comes the story of a North Dakota farming community whipsawed by crises. At the book's center is Kismet, a high school graduate who gets pulled into a questionable marriage, and her truck-driving, devoted mother. The tale's many threads pull together into a rewarding portrait of renewal and honesty.

Frederick Douglass

by Sidney Morrison

Frederick Douglass roars from the pages of this meticulous novel, thanks to the voices of his steadfast wife, Anna, and their children, plus confidants, paramours, and even enslavers. A complex man emerges. Proud and persistent, fickle and flawed, he's inseparable from the era's tumult and hard-fought triumphs.

Tell Me Everything

by Elizabeth Strout

Elizabeth Strout's warmhearted novel brings together her best-loved characters, including Olive Kitteridge, Bob Burgess, and Lucy Barton, in the fictional town of Crosby, Maine. "Tell Me Everything" is about how stories about others' lives – and how really listening – help us understand and connect.

The Fallen Fruit

by Shawntelle Madison

Since the late 1700s, the Bridge farm in Virginia has offered a haven for its freeborn Black owners. But there's a caveat: A child born to each Bridge man will fall back in time. As the novel opens, Cecily, a mother in 1964, begins investigating her ancestors' time-traveling troubles. It's an engaging take on freedom and free will.

I Cheerfully Refuse

by Leif Enger

In a rickety sailboat on storm-tossed Lake Superior, a grieving musician flees a powerful enemy. Set in a speculative future in which the supply chain has failed and a lethal drug holds sway, Leif Enger's latest novel steers a harrowing course through a broken world. Yes, it's grim, but in Enger's capable hands it's also a riveting story of resilience.

Time of the Child

by Niall Williams

Niall Williams' novel returns to the Irish village of Faha during Christmas 1962. When an abandoned infant is brought to the lo-

cal doctor on a cold, wet night, it leads to a situation that proves transformative for the widower and his solitary eldest daughter. And it marks a subtle turning point in a community ruled by the twin authorities of church and state.

The Lion Women of Tehran

by Marjan Kamali

Fierce women fill the pages of Marjan Kamali's engrossing tale of friendship, class, betrayal, and politics in Iran. Ellie is a smart, lonely girl desperate for a sense of family after the death of her father. Zesty, optimistic Homa would rather study to be a lawyer than attract the attentions of a future husband. As girls in 1950s Tehran, the two forge a bond that's tested over decades.

Come to the Window

by Howard Norman

War overseas. Pandemic fears. A shocking scandal. Attacks on "the other." Howard Norman's gem of a novel unfolds not in the recent past, but in Nova Scotia in 1918. Indelible characters, taut prose, deft pacing, and resonant questions about bearing witness make this a winner.

The Restless Wave

by Admiral James Stavridis USN (Ret.)

Former NATO Commander and four-star Adm. James Stavridis creates a gripping novel about a young Navy officer tested during the early sea battles of World War II, from Pearl Harbor to Midway and Guadalcanal. The novel is action-packed, and filled with insights into leadership and courage.

Mina's Matchbox

by Yoko Ogawa, translated by Stephen B. Snyder

Yoko Ogawa's gemlike novel is a coming-of-age story about 12-year-old Tomoko, who goes to live for a year with her delightful cousin Mina and her family. The girls become kindred spirits, sharing secrets, wonderment, and several key world events. Ogawa's storytelling is radiant.

Wandering Stars

by Tommy Orange

Tommy Orange weaves a fictional Cheyenne family into such real-life events as the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, dramatizing the impact of historical events on subsequent generations of Native Americans. "Wandering Stars" is the engaging follow-up to his award-winning first novel, "There There."

Catalina

by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

Catalina Ituralde is navigating her senior year at Harvard amid fears of deportation and dreams of love, fame, and literature. This lovely debut novel explores the immigrant experience through the lens of an ambitious, funny, smart, and sometimes fragile young woman.

Beautyland

by Marie-Helene Bertino

Adina, a human-looking alien growing up in 1980s Philadelphia, adores astronomer Carl Sagan. "He is looking for us!" she enthuses to her otherworldly superiors in one of many life-on-Earth dispatches. Adina navigates human childhood while her single mother, unaware of her daughter's true identity, struggles to keep them afloat.

My Friends

by Hisham Matar

A teenager leaves his cherished family in Libya to pursue higher education at the University of Edinburgh. Protesting against the Qaddafi regime results in exile from his homeland. Hisham Matar

provides insights into life under revolution and in exile.

Sipsworth

by Simon Van Booy

In this charming novel about an English widow whose life is slowly awakened by a stray mouse, novelist Simon Van Booy reaffirms his talent as a master prose stylist. The themes, which include the pain of loneliness and the redeeming power of community, resonate. But in his story about serendipity, Van Booy has given us a tale that is, in its larger dimensions, truly timeless.

NONFICTION

An Unfinished Love Story

by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin was married for more than 40 years to Dick Goodwin, a speechwriter and adviser to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. In the years before Mr. Goodwin's death, the couple went through hundreds of boxes of his memorabilia from those administrations. This affecting book, blending history, memoir, and biography, is a personal account of a pivotal era.

Paris in Ruins

by Sebastian Smee

Impressionism emerged in late-1860s Paris. But the movement took off only after the horrors of the Franco-Prussian War drove artists to create works focused on the impermanence of life. This deeply researched and well-written book combines art and biography with political and military history to shed fresh light on the origins of this seminal period in modern art.

The Light Eaters

by Zoë Schlanger

Atlantic staff writer Zoë Schlanger debuts with an exploration of the new science of plant intelligence. In elegant prose and with a sense of awe, she describes plants' remarkable adaptive techniques, communicative abilities, and social behaviors.

Bringing Ben Home

by Barbara Bradley Hagerty

Ben Spencer was wrongfully convicted of murder in Dallas in 1987. This compelling book tells the story of his flawed trial, the barriers built into the Texas legal system that made it nearly impossible to get the decision overturned, and how he and a small group of supporters worked to secure his release. Barbara Bradley Hagerty has written a true-crime story that reads like a legal thriller and, at same time, recounts the systemic failures of the judicial system. It is eye-opening, discouraging, and inspiring.

Audubon as Artist

by Roberta Olson

Much has been written about bird artist John James Audubon as an American original. In "Audubon as Artist," Roberta Olson harnesses her insights as a museum curator to reveal the European traditions that informed Audubon's art. Drawing on masters as varied as Rembrandt and David, this richly illustrated survey explores Audubon as one of the great dramatists of the natural world, one whose complicated legacy is still shaping our debates about conservation.

Our Kindred Creatures

by Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy

This fascinating history traces the shift in American attitudes toward animals in the decades after the Civil War. The authors describe the era's widespread mistreatment of animals and profile the activists

Crossword

Across

- 1. Where many get into hot water
- 5. The one ___ got away
- 9. Possessive pronoun
- 12. Monumental work
- 13. Smart and then some
- 14. Drops on grass
- 15. Stars of "M*A*S*H"?
- 17. Perrier, to Pierre
- 18. Convent resident
- 19. Honey bunch?
- 21. Mexican empire
- 24. Old monarch
- 26. Majors in television?
- 27. Comet ___ -Bopp
- 29. Play area
- 33. Superhero name ender
- 34. French for 'school'
- 36. Curriculum vitae
- 37. Choral voice range
- 39. Knocks lightly
- 40. Fuel in a cylinder (abbr.)
- 41. Appointment question
- 43. Godiva asset
- 45. Subway station sight
- 48. "Golly!"
- 49. Young Scot
- 50. Followers
- 56. Every last iota
- 57. Summer cooler
- 58. Pate de ___ gras
- 59. Single layer
- 60. Takes out often
- 61. Brood

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
12					13					14		
15				16						17		
			18					19	20			
21	22	23				24	25					
26				27	28				29	30	31	32
33				34				35		36		
37			38		39					40		
			41	42				43	44			
45	46	47					48					
49				50	51	52				53	54	55
56				57					58			
59				60					61			

© Lovatts Puzzles

Down

- 1. Infused leaves
- 2. Delivery company
- 3. Take it from the horse's mouth?
- 4. Prospect
- 5. Romulus or Remus
- 6. The dude's
- 7. Consult an oracle, say
- 8. "The Gondoliers" flower girl
- 9. Brain trust offering
- 10. Shed thing
- 11. Done laps, perhaps
- 16. Pleated lace edging
- 20. Motive, essentially
- 21. Michigan city or college
- 22. Fervor
- 23. Collapsible shelter
- 24. GM president Alfred
- 25. Mayday!
- 28. Farmland measure
- 30. Ready and willing partner?
- 31. Torn and Van Winkle
- 32. Pursues relentlessly
- 35. Word with poly-
- 38. Pooh pal
- 42. Garbage piles
- 44. Perils at sea
- 45. Puck stroke
- 46. Kind of tale or order
- 47. Passively
- 48. Becomes solid
- 51. Female hare
- 52. Long-handled farm tool
- 53. NIMBY opener
- 54. Dad's-day gift?
- 55. Join with thread