

# CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

## Pax Ethnica: Where and How Diversity Succeeds

Public Affairs, Global Ethics Forum TV Series

**Karl E. Meyer, Shareen Blair Brysac, Joanne J. Myers**

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us.

Our speakers today are Karl Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, both veteran journalists who have written several books independently but together have published two outstanding ones, entitled *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East* and *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire*.

*Pax Ethnica: Where and How Diversity Succeeds* is their latest work. It is about how traditionally hostile groups can overcome their differences to live in harmony. This latest collaboration confirms that for those who embody scholarly expertise, insights collected by two can often be better than those gathered by one.

For some time now, events related to ethnic and religious strife have been making headlines. We've learned that mutual suspicion, misunderstanding, and fear are fuel that flame instability and prevent coexistence between groups of people with divergent backgrounds. In fact, about three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension, which can leave us wondering whether there are, or ever can be, any communities where people of different ethnicities may live in peace; and, if they do exist, what explains their success, and why haven't we heard more about them?

To answer these questions, our speakers undertook a two-year exploration of what they call "oases of civility," places notable for minimal violence and for tolerance, and understanding. For this mission they chose five places where multiculturalism has been successful. They are the Indian state of Kerala, the Russian Republic of Tatarstan, the city of Marseille in France, the city of Flensburg in Germany, and the borough of Queens in New York.

Though scores of interviews, they were able to document that it is possible for those belonging to different cultures—socio, political, or ethnic subgroups—to live peacefully in the same space.

How then were ethnic tensions diffused? Although there is no universal recipe for ensuring multiculturalism, it can be made to work. Karl and Shareen write that they have seen how successful and thoughtful leadership, as manifested in wise economic, educational, political, and cultural

policies, can turn ethnic diversity into tolerable and tolerated coexistence. Accordingly, our two guests have come up with recommendations which they have witnessed and have shown to promote civility and overcome differences.

Please join me in welcoming these two excellent reporters who are gifted storytellers as well, Karl Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

## Remarks

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Thank you very much, Joanne, and thank you all for coming. It's nice to see so many friendly faces in the audience.

I am going to give a short introduction. Then Karl will take over and give a summary of the book. That should leave us plenty of time for your questions, which we would welcome.

Karl and I have written three books together and have, as you can imagine, given a number of book talks. One question we are always asked is, "How did you come up with the idea for the book?"

The genesis of *Pax Ethnica* happened over lunch one summer afternoon. We were sitting around and saying, "You know, we always write about history, and we tend to always end up talking about ethnic cleansing, genocide, ancient hatreds." And, as you can all imagine, it gets very depressing after a while, certainly after three books. "So," we said, "why not write about a place where people actually get along? Surely there must be places like this that we don't hear about because they are not at war with one another."

Karl had just read an [article](#) in *Smithsonian* magazine on Marseille, France. He said, "Well, Marseille didn't go up in flames in [October-November 2005](#) when the rest of France, the major cities—Lyon, Paris, Nantes—went up in flames, and the author had some ideas why that was true."

We said, "Why don't we try and find some other place? We could start with Marseille."

We immediately thought of Queens, New York, because Queens, New York, is, as you all know, the most diverse place on earth. That seemed to be close at hand. That was fine.

We got some foundation funding and then we went off to the places that Joanne has so nicely described in the introduction.

In pursuit of ethnic peace, we conducted nearly 100 interviews with majors and maharajahs; lower-caste Dalits and Brahmins in India; factory workers, doctors, nurses; women's rights advocates; rappers, in Marseille, Kazan, and Naberezhnye Chelny Chelny; diplomats and druggists, schoolteachers, college professors, journalists, publishers, musicians, imams, priests, rabbis, social workers, youth organizers, and sports and cultural ministers.

How did we decide on the title, *Pax Ethnica*? Well, *pax*, as most of you know, is Latin for peace, and *ethnos* is Greek for people.

How did we choose the places to study? First of all, they had to have a mix of ethnicities. Then, as in the case of Marseille versus Paris, Tatarstan versus Chechnya, or Kerala versus Gujarat, these places had similar histories but they had very different outcomes, so we could do comparative political science and we could then ask, "What went right?"

With that, I'll let Karl take over.

**KARL MEYER:** Thank you, Shareen, and thank you, Joanne.

Well, it's very interesting that as we were writing this book the very word "multicultural" went viral. Its failings were decried in 2011 by the leaders of France, Germany, and Britain. Soon-to-be-former-President [Sarkozy](#) in a television [interview](#) said, "If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is a national community. If you don't want to accept that, you are not welcome. We've been too concerned about the identity of the person who is arriving, not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him."

Earlier, Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) called multiculturalism "an utter failure." This was during a nationwide debate stirred by a best-selling book [[Germany Is Doing Away With Itself](#)] written by a German [central banker](#) claiming that Muslim immigrants had made his country "stupider."

Merkel's comments were echoed in Britain by Prime Minister [Cameron](#), who [claimed](#) that "under the doctrine of state multiculturalism we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives apart from each other and the mainstream."

On its surface this disillusion seemed paradoxical because the European Union itself is a vibrant example of multiculturalism. It blends 20 republics and six monarchies; its 500 million citizens speak 23 official languages, three of which (English, German, and French) are working languages.

However, it is not the usual Slavs, Celts, or Hellenes that provoked these lamentations. It is a specific minority, the predominantly Muslim, non-European migrants who began arriving in large numbers after the [Second World War](#).

Today, there are about 20 million Muslims in Europe, or about 4 percent of the total population. Muslim newcomers and their offspring comprise an estimated 7.5 percent of France's population, 5 percent of Germany's, and 4.6 percent of Great Britain's, at least so reckoned the respected [Pew Research Center](#), as of January 2011. I should stress that all such figures are estimates, since definitions are plastic as to what beliefs and which genes identify a Muslim.

Incontestably, however, as Islamic cultures have multiplied, so has European concern about a possibly hostile incubus. A quasi-populist backlash has spread from the Baltic to the Adriatic, along with avowedly anti-immigrant parties. Their more extreme leaders claim these Islamic interlopers are responsible for rising crime, juvenile delinquency, and the abuse of women through forced marriages and honor killings.

Played down by the alarmists is the soft factual basis in their worst-case scenarios. Discounted or ignored is the fact that newcomers are either secularist, many of them, or minimally observant and that most aspire to a normal life within their host countries.

Minimized also is the hard fact that Christianity and Islam both revel in diversity, and that its adherents are of many quarrelsome minds. In fact, we ought to remember that before any of the Muslims were coming as migrants to Europe, the predominantly Christian countries of Europe for two centuries were continually at war with each other.

A prime example is our first example, the city of Flensburg in northern Germany. I'm just curious. Has anyone here been to Flensburg? Zero.

If you were reading a newspaper 75 years ago, you would know about Flensburg because it was the epicenter of the famous [Schleswig-Holstein dispute](#), which for two centuries had embittered relations between Denmark and Germany. It was the source of [two wars](#) between those countries and, after [World War I](#), the source of plebiscites, riots, all kinds of problems.

Then an interesting thing happened. We went to Flensburg to find out why this city, that had been the seat of quarrels, that nobody goes to except tourists interested in a beautiful port city with fine restaurants, why it is so calm.

We got the answer, a very persuasive answer, from the Danish consul-general in Flensburg. He explained that after World War II, the Danes, being part of the allied coalition, were approached by the British. The British said, "Would you like to get Schleswig back?" The Danes thought about it and said, "Well, thank you, but no thank you, because that would mean incorporating in our territory a hostile minority that would be the cause of ongoing troubles."

"Instead," the Danes said, "why doesn't the new federal republic make an agreement to treat the cultural, political, and civil liberties of the Danish minority in Flensburg and Schleswig as equal to all other citizens, and on that basis we would be glad to have German rule continue there?" So in other words, very shortly, the Danes exchanged territory for peace, land for peace.

It's very interesting that the experiment worked so well that not one of you have been to Flensburg, that it is off the radar screen completely, and that when you go there you find, as we talked to people on all sides, you can choose if you want to be Danish, you can choose if you want to be German, and no one can question your choice.

That's an interesting thing because just this morning I was [reading](#) in the *Financial Times*, there's a big row between Serbia and Kosovo because there is a Serbian minority of 40,000 people right near the border between Kosovo and Serbia, and there is a question of autonomy: Can they be given cultural autonomy? The Serbs said, "No, they have to be part of it; we have to count them as a part of our system," et cetera.

Here you see the kind of situation that has come up again and again in Europe, where in some cases it has been well satisfied. Alto Adige, which is the northern province of Italy and had once been part of Austria, was ceded to Italy after World War I; then, after World War II, a similar [deal](#), based partly on the precedent in Denmark and Germany, was reached where the people in that region can be educated in the language of their choice. Again, by and large, it has been a very successful outcome.

That was our first place.

But then we went to a very different place. We went to Tatarstan in the former Soviet Union. I have to say, first of all, has anyone here been to Tatarstan? One, okay. That's 100 percent better than the last few book talks we have given.

The interesting thing about Tatarstan is that it is actually where the Russian Empire got its start when [Ivan the Terrible](#) conquered Kazan, incorporated it into Russia. Again, it went through a very interesting history under the Soviets. It was one of 17 autonomous republics—the joke being they were neither republics nor autonomous.

After the [collapse of the Soviet Union](#), there was an interesting question what would happen. Here you had 3.5 million people who were roughly equal parts either Russian Orthodox, Christians, or

Muslim Tatars. I should explain again, because this is such an obvious point of confusion, that it's not to be confused with the five "-stans" in Central Asia, which are all independent entities. Tatarstan was and it still is a part of the Russian Federation.

But they had a very interesting leader of the Communist Party in Soviet times, named [Mintimer Shaimiev](#). Shaimiev thought about the option of trying for independence. This was in parallel with Chechnya. Indeed, at the time there was a referendum in which the people of both places voted not to accept the then-ongoing Russian constitution that was being negotiated.

But Shaimiev also was a realist. He took into account the fact that Tatarstan is completely surrounded by other Russian territories; it has no common border with a foreign entity; that it has oil, but to get the oil out it needs pipelines through other territories. It has a significant Russian-speaking minority, which has been also helpful in its economic development. It has what is said to be the world's largest truck factory. It has other industrial components.

So Shaimiev made an offer to [Yeltsin](#). He said, "Supposing we can make an agreement, a treaty, that will last 10 years, and in that treaty it will specify that the people of this republic can enjoy their own independent, freely chosen cultural identity that again nobody can question? In return, we would also like to have some tax breaks and some other benefits for a quasi-autonomous region."

Well, the interesting thing is that Shaimiev, who was a very shrewd guy, had also seen what was happening in Chechnya. He made no secret of the fact when he talked to the Soviets that, "We also have an Islamic population and you see what's happening there. I suggest that if you take my offer you might save yourself another war and another civil strife in a republic with a largely Muslim population."

Yeltsin agreed. In fact, he at one point said, "Take all the sovereignty you can swallow."

There was a sovereignty referendum. This was in 1992. The interesting thing about the sovereignty referendum—it was very cleverly phrased—nowhere is the word "independence" mentioned. It talks about equal rights and about equal respect, but not of independence. In his interviews, Shaimiev made it clear that he did not want to use the word "independence" because that was the source of what was going to be an ongoing problem of trying to define it.

The agreement was renewed by Boris Yeltsin. Some of the benefits were shaved and the elected president, which Shaimiev had been, is now an appointed president. But substantially, Tatarstan has kept its own way. As a result, you have this extraordinary phenomenon. In the Kremlin that crowns the capital of Kazan, there is one of the largest mosques in Europe next to the Orthodox cathedral, both having been dedicated in the year 2005.

In fact, this was so interesting that when we were there visiting [Hillary Clinton](#) decided to make a visit to go to see what was going on in Tatarstan and Kazan. We were there. She came and went. It was a big fuss there. It didn't make a blip on the news media. Nothing is more boring than lack of conflict. [Laughter]

Well, we now come to Marseille. Marseille is absolutely fascinating. It's not only the second-largest city in France but it is home to Europe's largest Muslim community. There are around 240,000 out of 840,000 citizens of Marseille that are Muslim. There are, in addition, sizable Jewish and Orthodox Christian minorities, roughly 80,000 each. There is also a multiplicity of ethnicities that range from the Comoros Islands to all the places of North Africa.

This seemed to be a place where in 2005 there was a bonfire waiting to light. Relatively nothing happened in Marseille when there were car burnings all over. There are a number of reasons that we discovered when we talked to people, including the mayor and the representatives of all the communities.

One is that the people of that great port have a strong local identity, a local identity reinforced by a soccer team, *Olympique de Marseille* (OM), composed of many different nationalities.

Also, pride is one of the interesting facts about Marseille. It's surrounded by mountains, so it does not have the outlying suburbs that Paris has. It's a much more compressed place. But it is composed of strong neighborhoods. Each of the major neighborhoods has a mayor. Each of them has part of the voice in what is called *Marseille Espérance* (Marseille Hope), in which the meetings of all the different ethnic communities talk regularly, particularly when there is a serious problem that they have to come to a common viewpoint about.

But there is also something else that we discovered about Marseille when we saw the mayor, *Jean-Claude Gaudin*, who has been mayor for 10 years, a conservative centrist but a very practical politician. He went through a list of things—the beaches, a good climate, and why things were quiet there.

Then he paused and he said, "Although there's something else I should mention."

We leaned forward and said, "Yes, Mr. Mayor, what is it?"

He said, "Well, you may have heard we have a narcotics trade here and we have something called *le Milieu*."

We said, "Yes, we have heard about that."

He said, "Well, in our neighborhoods you do have this problem. The leaders of these criminal communities do not want to see kids burning cars in their neighborhood because it brings in the police. They have a vested interest in law and order." [Laughter]

This was, I would say, part of what you found in Marseille. For an American, it was a little like Chicago. There was a pragmatism about it. Special arrangements were made to get around the official French policy. The official French policy is that you never can take account of anyone's religion, ethnicity, or anything in giving jobs, this that or the other thing. They get around that in various ways.

We saw the head of the transit authority, who was a Muslim, former soccer player. We asked about this. He said he was trying to diversify. All of this is quoted in our book. We taped all our interviews.

He said, "Well, I'll tell you. We're a bit hypocritical about this in France. We say that we shouldn't take account of these things, but in fact we notice a person's name, their address, what they look like, and we can make a fairly good guess as to what their ethnic background is. We have tried to bring in people that represent the whole community here." They have succeeded.

In Marseille, also, I should say we discovered, as we've discovered elsewhere, a surprising thing. That is the role of rap music. Of all of America's cultural exports, I think rap and hip-hop rank with blue jeans as the most ubiquitous things that you see all over the world.

In Marseille we interviewed the rappers. They speak in a Marseille dialect, which is distinct from

standard French. They discuss a lot of the frustrations and the alienations that immigrant communities face. But it has been a wonderful source of release and comfort to those people. We found that elsewhere, including, I should say, in Tatarstan.

From there we went to Kerala, India. Kerala, I have to say, is one of the most phenomenal places on earth.

Let me just sketch it. It's about the size of West Virginia, a narrow strip of land on the western southern coast of India. This state has 32 million inhabitants, which exceeds the population of super-sized Australia and Canada. Yet, in this very crowded piece of territory, where you have Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, substantial communities of each living side by side, since [Indian independence](#) the people live in peace.

There are several reasons, some economic, some cultural, and some unique, that explain it.

Economic: When you talk to Keralites (or Malayalis), they will tell you, "Everything in our state has to be of export quality, including our people." They have a large migratory force in the Arab Middle East. More than 1 million predominantly Muslim Keralites work in the Middle East. The remittances that they get—Shareen, what is the figure on the remittances?

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Six billion.

**KARL MEYER:** Six billion a year, which is greater than the tax rebates that they get from New Delhi. So that migrant force has been a formidable economic asset to Kerala.

Then I mentioned the fact that you have a cultural difference. That is, the three major religious communities have a long history there. The Arabs and Christians came, not as conquerors, but as merchants 1,000 years ago, and so they have lived together for a long time. They have learned a common language. They also celebrate each other's religious holidays, as we found.

But then you have something unique in Kerala. That is that you have a communist party that chose the electoral path, unlike communist parties elsewhere, and you had a leadership, a lot of them being Brahmins, upper-caste Hindus, who decided that they could use the democratic system to bring about substantial change, which they did.

As a result, you have a unique pattern in Kerala, that every five years, more or less, for the last 20 years, the people of Kerala vary from a leftist-led, communist-led coalition to a Congress Party (which is now in power), a more centrist coalition. The decisive votes are usually cast by the Muslims, who constitute about a fourth of the population. Where they go helps determine it.

And you had again an interesting leader. You had a communist party leader who said, "In this state, where there is no one majority, we have to learn to get along together and make deals through a coalition."

So they were able to have these achievements: highest literacy rate in India, highest life expectancy in India (68 to 70 for men and women), the best example of empowerment of women in any state through vigorous promotion of women's rights on the theory that women are not only an economic asset but are role models and are essential elements in social affairs. And you have all kinds of institutional organizations where people of the same occupation get together to discuss common problems, something that does not happen, let's say, in Gujarat, where there has been a sequence of riots and disorders between the Muslim and Hindu communities.

We saw this in Kerala—but I have to say that, there again, there are these twists that you don't expect. We saw the mayor of Thalassery, a city of about 140,000. He was a communist. We asked how he got along with Muslims and Christians. He said, "Here's my deputy; he's a Muslim. There's another one over here; he's a Christian."

Then questions came up. This was in a room where we were sipping through straws in a coconut shell. This was being filmed, so there's a certain nervousness about what was being said.

We asked a slightly problematic question. We said, "Mr. Mayor, we have heard that before you and your party make major decisions that you consult horoscopes to see if the signs are propitious."

The mayor looked around. There was a lot of whispering back and forth. Finally, one of his deputies said, "Yes, in Kerala old traditions continue." That I think was an explanation of a kind of pragmatism that would have astonished and amused [Marx](#) or [Lenin](#). [Laughter]

From there I have to say that we went to Queens, New York, which is unbelievable. Queens, New York, has 3.2 million people. If it was a separate city, it would rank as the fourth-largest in the United States, behind Los Angeles, Chicago, and Brooklyn, if Brooklyn also were separate. Brooklyn has 3.5, not 3.2, million.

In Queens, we discovered, 138 languages are spoken. There are communities from every imaginable part of the planet. This was partly a result of an accident of history and geography.

In the 1960s, they changed the immigration laws to allow more liberal access for immigrants from Latin America, Africa, Asia, et cetera. JFK Airport (then Idlewild Airport) became the Ellis Island of this influx. We're talking about millions of people coming through JFK. Well, a lot of them settled down right in the area. You see the same thing near Heathrow in England; a lot of immigrant communities are right around Heathrow. So they're right there in the area.

But it was more than that. It was an education. I've lived in New York for a long time; my wife and I are both here. We thought we knew Queens.

We had never heard of the Flushing Remonstrance. The [Flushing Remonstrance](#) was in 1657, when Long Island was part of New Netherlands, and they were hard up for getting farm workers, and they wanted to bring in some Quakers. They had to get the permission of [Peter Stuyvesant](#), who was then the governor of the whole area. Stuyvesant was a hard-line Calvinist. He said, "Absolutely no, we can't have heretical Quakers here."

So the farmers, despite his refusal and harassment of them for their audacity, appealed over his head to the governors of the Dutch West India Company, and they reversed the governor's decision.

As a result, what is called the Flushing Remonstrance, which is a piece of paper, is framed in the state public library in Albany. It was the first articulated statement of the American commitment to religious freedom. If you go out to Queens, you can go to the actual farmhouse where the farmers met and sketched the whole thing out. That was among the things that we learned.

Some things we had heard about faintly. Queens has a kind of way of anticipating things to come.

For example, in 1945-1946, when the United Nations was founded, there was no place for it. But there were leftover pavilions from the World's Fair of 1939-1940, and that became the initial home of the United Nations. It was there for four years until new quarters were found. It was there, in Flushing



also, that the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) was drafted, later adopted in Paris. So the roots of the UN were also in Queens.

In fact, [Ralph Bunche](#), one of the heroic figures in the early history of the UN, had his house for 30 years right near where the borough headquarters are. The present president of Queens is [Helen Marshall](#), herself of Afro-Caribbean descent (her family came from Guyana), who was a former schoolteacher, a former librarian, and former state assemblywoman. For the last five or six years, she has been president of Queens.

She initiated what she calls the Marshall Plan. [Laughter] Her Marshall Plan included having a general assembly in which you have the representatives of the 30-40 major ethnic groups in Queens meet regularly to discuss common problems.

She also has something that I think is quite ingenious. That is, she has a calendar, about 40 pages long, that lists every major religious and national holiday of all the communities in Queens.

I asked her, "Do you ever find any that you didn't hear about?"

She said, "Well, yes. There's a small Polish community right near the Brooklyn frontier. I went there the other day. It was a national day. I didn't know about them, but they were doing the polka. I was a former dancer"—she's in her eighties now—she began dancing. So she's quite a spirit.

I have to say she has a predecessor, the first woman to be borough president, [Claire Shulman](#), who helped lay the foundations for a lot that went on there.

Helen Marshall has also led the way. There were two things about her career that are fascinating.

One is that in Queens you have community boards. The community boards serve as a platform for ambitious people to get together and discuss community problems. They are the springboard for many political careers, as we discovered, including Helen Marshall's.

The other thing is libraries. The Queens Public Library is independent of the New York Public Library. It is an autonomous borough-centered thing. It consists of 60 branches. We were going to the Flushing branch, which is the single busiest, in terms of usage, library branch in the United States. In fact, Queens leads the country's library system in terms of its usage. But it's not only the books and DVDs and CDs that circulate. Also in every library you will see a whole section devoted to giving people advice on how to prepare a c.v., how to cope with health care problems, how to become a citizen and what the process is, how to learn English, et cetera.

When we were there just a couple of weeks ago, we found this flyer for "A Celebration of Eastern European Culture Featuring Original Music." There was "The Fifth Annual College Fair," in which people go and then can learn about their possible choices for college. One that I particularly liked was for Chinese speakers on how to deal with an aging parent who's a little delusional.

When you go to these libraries and you see the mixture of people, you see that these are indeed what [Andrew Carnegie](#) hoped libraries would be: "a lighthouse for the poor."

All of these things together have helped explain why, when you go to Little India in Jackson Heights, you will find people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, who normally in their own areas don't get along, shop side-by-side, play soccer together and cricket—cricket is very big in that community.

Likewise, when you go to Astoria, as we did, it's quite interesting. They have a large Greek community, now diminished, on Steinway Avenue. Steinway is the place where the pianos are made, started by a German immigrant in the 19th century. On Steinway Avenue you will see a synagogue right next to a mosque. As we passed one of the coffeehouses there, we saw a young, obviously Muslim guy with a water pipe in one hand and his BlackBerry in the other. [Laughter] So it really has been a mesh of old and new.

In our conclusion, we go through 11 guidelines on what it is in all the places that we have been that helps account for diversity.

I should say that one of the things that is absolutely essential—and again I saw this in the *Financial Times* today. Here they have a whole [chart](#) on the Middle East showing the minorities in each of the major countries in the Middle East. You see that in each of these countries you have significant populations of different religions—Kurds in the case where there are all Muslims, although they are a different ethnic group.

People ask, "Why doesn't this hold true in the Middle East, all the things you have been talking about?"

Well, there's a big difference. The big difference is this. Where you have multinational/multicultural communities living together, if they are left alone, as in Switzerland—in Switzerland in the 19th century all the Swiss's neighbors (the Germans, the Italians, the French, Austrians) by common agreement felt it served their mutual interest to have a neutral place in the middle where they could, among other things, keep their secret bank accounts. As a result, you don't have the Italians calling for the independence of the Italian-speaking cantons of Switzerland.

However, if you look at the Balkans and former Yugoslavia, in what I think was one of the most disastrous decisions that postwar Germany made, in 1991, the Bonn Republic decided to recognize [Croatian independence](#). That was the domino that sent the others toppling, because soon you had the Russians favoring the Serbs, you had the Greeks favoring ERFA [phonetic], you had the Arabs favoring the Bosnian Muslims, and so on. What had been an isolated area became a [war-ground](#) fought over by proxy armies.

That's essentially the big problem in the Middle East, as you can see right now in [Syria](#), where you've got five-six major factions and you have a tug-of-war between the Sunnis and the Shia, between the Turks and the Saudis, between the Iraqis and the Lebanese, and so on. That's why you need a degree of peace and autonomy for people of different places to get together.

Have you got anything to add to what I have been saying, Shareen?

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Yes, two things.

Flensburg is the home of the [European Centre for Minority Issues](#), which is interesting. That's where they based it. I thought that was a very interesting precedent.

The other thing I would want to add is one of the things we discuss in our guidelines is the sense of identity with where you are from, almost a mantra, almost like brainwashing. When you go to Tatarstan, you will hear it in Russian, you will hear it in English, and you will hear it in Tatar, "The mosque is right next door to our cathedral in Kazan." You hear this over and over.

When Hillary Clinton came, she said, "I came here because the mosque is next to the cathedral on

the Kremlin."

If you say this enough, people would tell you, "We've always gotten along with Russians." Well, yes and no. Ivan the Terrible decimated them. That was a few hundred years ago, but still, historical memories are long.

In Queens, Helen Marshall says, "Come to Queens and see the world." She gives you a button and a motto. Everyone in Queens will tell you about diversity in Queens. They may not know that there are 138 languages there, but everyone will say, "I live here because it's the most diverse place on earth."

In Marseille people will say, "I feel like a Marseillaise. I am from Marseille." In Paris you won't hear that from Muslims. Parisian Muslims don't feel like they are part of Paris. They feel themselves as a very foreign element because they are on the peripherals and they are very marginalized in Paris.

So what's important is how people perceive themselves within a community. I can't stress that too much.

**KARL MEYER:** I would just add a footnote. In writing about New York, I was interested to discover that civic branding also is very important here. One of the things that helped Mayor Lindsay go through a very turbulent period in the 1960s and 1970s was that his visitors' commission came up with the idea of "the Big Apple." "The Big Apple" was a phrase used by a sports writer in the 1920s. Now if you go online and find out how many Big Apples there are, there are over 100 of them. There's "Big Apricots"—you name it. In each case, it has been an interesting device of branding, which does help people identify in a positive way with their community.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** One of the things about Queens—our sort of *cicerone* [guide] was a professor there, called Andrew Hacker, who's a political scientist and a professor at Queens College. He said, "Nobody lives in Queens."

We said, "Oh?"

He said, "No. You live in Ozone Park, you live in Kew Gardens, you live in Astoria. If you send a letter to 'such-and-such address, Queens, New York,' it will be returned because people won't know where that is. I'm talking about without a ZIP Code; if you have a ZIP Code, it's probably a little different. But people identify with that community and they will tell you, 'I live in Astoria,' not, 'I live in Queens.'"

**KARL MEYER:** There are five ZIP Codes for Queens, each cluster of local neighborhoods. So you have to say, "Astoria, New York" and then the ZIP Code. "Queens" does not exist.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** James Starkman.

What are the lessons to be learned specifically from the positive Kerala community aspect in respect to Kashmir?

And also, what is to be learned from the Jewish communities in the diaspora all over Europe, both positive and negative, as it impacts this type of situation?

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Kerala is interesting for the Muslim situation. Muslims comprise about

25 percent of the population of Kerala. But, unlike Muslims in most of the rest of India, they are not poor. They are quite well-off. A lot of it has to do with remittances from the Gulf, because most of the people who do go to the Gulf are Muslim—not everybody, but a lot of them are.

They are the decisive factor in elections. So people have to—whether it's the communists or whether it's Congress, they have to try and get those 25 percent Muslims on their side.

Also, the Muslims do not speak Urdu; they speak Malayalam. The communities in Kerala—particularly since the riots in Gujarat and places, the Muslims have banded together in ghettos basically in lots of parts of India, just for safety purposes.

In Kerala it's not possible. The neighborhoods are all integrated. The Muslim family lives right next door to the Christian family, who lives right next door to the Jewish—well, there are only about 13 Jewish families left in Kerala. Most of them have emigrated, but not because of prejudice or anything, just for better economic opportunities. But at any rate, the Muslims and the Hindus are right next door to one another.

We interviewed two Muslim freedom fighters, fairly elderly men nowadays. They both bought into the cause of Indian nationalism. They said, "You know, we celebrate *Eid*, the last day of Ramadan. We invite our Hindu friends. We come and we celebrate Diwali, which is the Hindu festival of lights, with them. We've been doing this for years and years. The last real problems between Muslims and Hindus were in the 1920s in Kerala, the famous Mappila riots in the late 1920s."

That in fact is what is different about Kerala and their Muslim population. The Muslims are well off.

**KARL MEYER:** About the diaspora, it's a very interesting thing, because in the 19th and early 20th century most of the immigrants who came, came with the idea that they were severing their relations with where they had come from, that they were rooted in a new society; whereas today, because of jet airlines, because of the Internet, because of Skype telephone calls, you have much more of a connection between the new immigrant groups and their relatives back in their homeland. This is regarded as a problem by some people, but it has several very positive aspects.

One positive aspect is that in a monolingual country like the United States, you've got a lot of people who continue speaking useful languages. They have a school in Flushing, called the East-West High School—actually it's 12 grades—where you have to speak one of three Asian languages to graduate. It's a very popular and very successful school. So they have maximized the benefits of having the diaspora connection.

Several people we talked to used the interesting image that it's not so much "the melting pot" today as "the salad," where you have different elements but together they make an appetizing dish, but they maintain a higher degree of separate identity than used to be the case.

**QUESTION:** William Verdone. I live in Forest Hills, Queens, and I can't wait to return. [Laughter] I may not even finish this question.

I know Ms. Marshall and I've always admired her sense of community, particularly when she said to me that she thought of Queens and the sections of Queens as perhaps the ingredients of what will be the meal, which is Queens. I mean, Maspeth has been German. Sunnyside is an amazing melting pot. There are more Chinese in Flushing than in Manhattan's Chinatown. Jackson Heights, as you mentioned, is amazing for the Indian population.

I've lived in Forest Hills for a long time and until today. What makes it work? How does it all come together? Is English the unifying thing? Is it the education? Is it the tolerance? Is it the sense of celebration?

I'm proud to say I'm from Queens, and now I'm going to leave. [Laughter]

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** We put a lot of weight on this library system as the entry point for immigrants. You've got to have a way to assimilate all these people. They have reading groups in Korean. They have homework help in Hindi. The libraries are packed. You cannot believe how many people are in the Flushing Library, the Forest Hills Library, every day of the week, all day long. It obliterates anything in Manhattan, it really does.

**KARL MEYER:** Let me just get in something, though. I'm glad you're from Forest Hills, because I think you'll confirm what I'm about to say. One of the benefits of the way Queens evolved is it has a good transportation system, good bus lines, subways, but it has also developed horizontally rather than vertically. That is, you don't have whole areas of Queens dominated by 40-story warehouses for working people. In fact, Lefrak City is one exception. But by and large, the apartment houses in Queens are seven-eight stories at the most. The dominant things in Queens are single-family homes that you see everywhere.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** One of the things we get to in our book is the [garden city movement](#). That was extremely important. Jackson Heights, Sunnyside, Forest Hills were all part of the movement in the early part of the 20th century to have garden cities, to look at urban planning in a different way. So Queens was made that way. It was intentional that they did that. The developments in Flushing and Rego Park came much, much later.

**KARL MEYER:** Rego Park was started by the Real Good real estate company, and they named their area "Rego Park, real good." Now it's the home to a very interesting mix of people.

One major group are the Bukharian Jewish community. These are people who come from Uzbekistan and who for the last 20 years have developed a real community there, with excellent restaurants among other things, in Lefrak City and elsewhere. They generally get along well with Muslims from North Africa, for very practical reasons. One is that both communities have lived for a long time next to each other. So the Bukharians know about Muslim culture.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Well, except—if I may interrupt you here—they had one problem. If you know Rego Park, the problem was we have these small houses with large front yards which used to have gardens in them, because it was really an Italian community. The Italians just like to grow plants, flowers, vegetables, and all in these gardens.

Well, the Bukharian Jews came in and they gradually took over. They're desert people. They do barbeques and they do cement. They do not do gardens. [Laughter] They don't know from geraniums. This caused a lot of tension in the neighborhood, because they were cementing over the front yards.

There was a problem recently in Flushing between the Koreans and the Chinese, which, alas, the media got hold of and said, "There's all this ethnic tension between Chinese and Koreans."

Well, we talked to some people in the community who really knew the situation. It's not about Chinese vs. Korean; it's about [parking spots](#). [Laughter] The Koreans tend to have cars. The Chinese do not have cars for the most part. There has been tearing up and building in Flushing.

You'd never know there was a recession if you go to Flushing at all. It's a real estate bonanza.

At any rate, they are building these malls and things. In order to do that, they have had to tear up the streets and all that. Well, the Korean merchants were up in arms because people couldn't park, and that's how people shop. The Koreans come and park.

So there are all sorts of little things that have to be solved, which are often in the media portrayed as inter-group tensions but actually turn out to be about something much more basic, about one-way streets, about access, all this sort of stuff.

**KARL MEYER:** All of this we've said is detailed in our book. We draw heavily on the interviews that we had with people. I have to say that the real pleasure of our research on the book was to talk to this wonderful caravan of different peoples who do get along.

I have to say that I am dismayed at how little fuss is made about success in this area and how the focus is relentlessly on the failed states around the world. So even in New York, when we talk to people, eyes widen when we describe Queens, because it's not well-known.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** One of the persons we interviewed was the imam of the Jamaican Mosque, who is a Bangladeshi. As we were going in to interview this man, we noticed a placard on the side of the mosque that every Saturday they have a Jewish doctor and a Muslim doctor and they do a free health clinic. They have a Jewish dentist and a Muslim dentist and they do free dental work in this community. Nobody makes anything of that. But that's a really important service that they are providing.

Karl forgot to mention one of the wonders of the Flushing Library is they have a huge number of DVDs in six Indian languages.

**KARL MEYER:** We counted them.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** It's quite amazing. We've all heard of [Bollywood](#), right? Has anyone heard of [Nollywood](#)?

**VOICE:** Yes, Nigeria.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** Nigeria. And they have Nollywood films in the Queens Library. This is actually the third-largest film industry in the world after Hollywood and Bollywood.

**KARL MEYER:** Mostly in English.

**SHAREEN BLAIR BRYSAK:** They found that they had a market, so they got some Nollywood films for the library.

We asked [Fred Gitner](#), who is the librarian. Queens actually has a full-time demographer, at the Queens Library. So every time they get a census, they look and they say, "We've got 5,000 Afghans coming into Flushing. We need to get some books that the Afghans can read." He's the one who decides about Nollywood movies.

We said, "Fred, have there been any problems with this?"

He said, "The only problem I can think of recently was between the Serbs and the Croats. The Croats came in and complained that the Serbian books were higher on the shelf than the books in

Croatian." [Laughter] So they do have these problems every now and then.

**KARL MEYER:** I should add that they also have a problem, the Queens Library, with the City of New York. It's now an annual rite. The annual rite—and it has gone on for three or four years—is that the mayor has what is called an executive budget, and the executive budget has substantial cuts in all city-wide public libraries. Then, that executive budget goes to the city council. In the past three years, the city council has overridden most of the cuts and kept intact the thing. This is now going on. We're going to see. May is when the city council meets to discuss the library thing.

But I think this is a testament partly to the political efficacy of—we went to a meeting in Lefrak City's library. There is a city councilman named [Daniel Dromm](#). This is an interesting footnote. He's of Irish-American origin, and he is openly gay and speaks for the gay community. In Jackson Heights, there are particularly a lot of Latin American gays from Colombia. He is wonderfully popular. He leads pep rallies for the library. We were at one.

He said, "What do you do if you're a real friend? What do you do? You stand up and fight, don't you?" He said, "We need you to go down to city hall." And they did.

So we are going to see what happens again on this annual melodrama.

**JOANNE MYERS:** I thank you for a wonderful discussion.

### Audio

The headlines are full of stories of deep-simmering hatreds and ethnic strife. How about some good news for a change? Historians Meyer and Brysac explore places where diversity is actually working, from Kerala to Queens. What can we learn from these "oases of civility"?

### Video Clip

The headlines are full of stories of deep-simmering hatreds and ethnic strife--how about some good news for a change? Historians Meyer and Brysac explore places where diversity is actually working, from Kerala to Queens. What can we learn from these "oases of civility"?

### TV Show

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