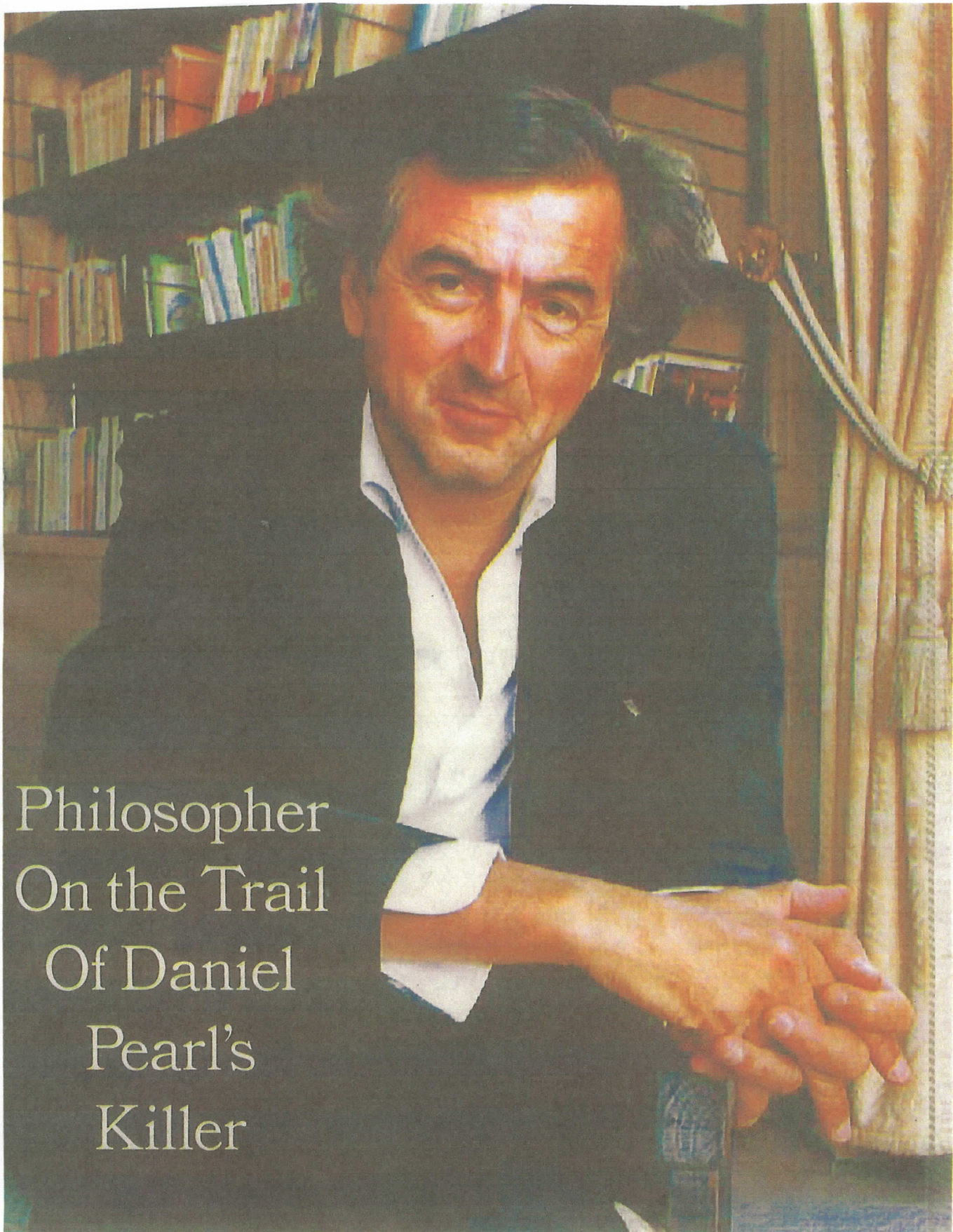


# Arts & Ideas

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## Philosopher On the Trail Of Daniel Pearl's Killer

Diana Matar for The New York Times

Henri Lévy speculates that Daniel Pearl was killed because he was investigating a link between Pakistan's intelligence service and terrorists.

By ALAN RIDING

PARIS, Aug. 29 — Bernard-Henri Lévy does nothing that goes unnoticed. He is an intellectual adventurer who brings publicity to unfashionable political causes. He is also a handsome man married to a glamorous actress; and his wife, Arielle Dombasle, are regularly mentioned in French gossip magazines. Now 55, Mr. Lévy is well used to celebrity. For 25 years he has been known here simply by his initials, B. H. L.

Not that everyone takes him seriously. His carefully cultivated public persona, which includes black suits, unbuttoned white shirts and long, dark hair, is frequently mocked on a televised puppet show, and he is often hit with pies by a Belgian who claims to target the self-important. The satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* once asked of him, "Rimbaud or Rambo?"

Yet France has always had a place for high-profile intellectuals, from Victor Hugo and Émile

## Bernard-Henri Lévy, celebrity intellectual, tries to solve a brutal murder.

Zola to Jean-Paul Sartre and André Malraux. And from an early age, Mr. Lévy set off in their footsteps. He earned his spurs in the late 1970's as one of several "new philosophers" who enraged the left by attacking the Soviet Union. He then turned his guns on the right, warning that 1930's-style fascism was still rooted in French politics.

Since then he has constantly been in the limelight. He has tried his hand at fiction, theater and movies (although his only feature film to date, "Day and Night," starring his wife, was a flop).

using a shoe bomb to try to sabotage an American airliner en route from Paris to Miami. In reality Mr. Sheikh was preparing the kidnapping 12 days later.

Mr. Lévy said he had been fully briefed on the meeting by Mr. Pearl's assistant, Asif Faruqi, but his "novelist's instinct" told him to stay in the hotel. And what he observed, he said, led him to discover that the I.S.I. used the Akbar to house Kashmiri fighters and other Islamic radicals. In other words, he writes, Mr. Sheikh set up the meeting with Mr. Pearl in a hotel "controlled, almost managed, by the I.S.I."

The bulk of Mr. Lévy's investigation involved reading police and intelligence files and interviews. To help draw his admiring portrait of Mr. Pearl, for instance, he met the reporter's parents and widow, Marianne, who (unlike *The Wall Street Journal*) cooperated with him. (He has dedicated the book to Adam Pearl, the child that Mrs. Pearl was carrying at the time of her husband's death.)

In London Mr. Lévy interviewed Mr. Sheikh's brother, former friends and some fellow students from his years at the London School of Eco-

airport taxi, he already sensed how the country had changed. "What is your religion?" the taxi driver asked him. He was taken aback. "Atheist," he finally replied. "My religion is atheism."

He said he first imagined writing a long report for *Le Monde*, but was soon drawn into a more ambitious project, one that he felt equipped to carry out.

"I don't think any American newspaper would have taken the risk of sending a journalist — especially a Jew — in the steps of Daniel Pearl," he said. "I had the luck of being French, with the French position on the Iraq war well known. I still had a diplomatic passport. I played with ambiguities, telling people I was doing something I wasn't doing then: I was writing a novel, I was an official envoy. I was far less exposed than any American, although still at risk as a Jew."

He has assumed a different risk by writing what he calls a "romanquête," part roman, or novel, part enquête, or investigation. He mentions Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" and Norman Mailer's "Oswald's Tale" as precedents, but he has raised eyebrows by imagining the thoughts of Mr. Pearl as he was about to have his throat cut and those of Ahmed Omar Sheikh, the British-born son of Pakistani immigrants who is the convicted mastermind of the murder.

Most of the book, though, is reported on-the-ground. Mr. Lévy made five trips to Pakistan, two each to India, the United States and Britain, and one each to Bosnia and Dubai. And his conclusion is anything but fictional: that Pakistan's military secret service, the Inter-Services Intelligence, widely known as I.S.I., is deeply involved with both the Islamic fundamentalist groups responsible for Mr. Pearl's death and with Al Qaeda.

So why a romanquête?

"I am also a novelist, and I suppose that the book has a tone more of a writer than of a traditional researcher," said Mr. Lévy, whose earlier book, "Sartre: The Philosopher of the 20th Century" (Polity Press), has also just been published in English. "But the real reason is that, by introducing elements of speculation, it was possible to move forward when the investigation seemed stuck. There are moments when I have the intuition of a novelist, moments that serve as sparks to illuminate and advance."

He cited his decision to spend a night at the Akbar International Hotel in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, where on Jan. 11, 2002, Mr. Pearl met Mr. Sheikh. Mr. Pearl had been told that Mr. Sheikh could put him in touch with Sheik Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, a Muslim cleric reportedly linked to Richard C. Reid, a Briton accused of

And he has continued to campaign for what he considers noble causes, from Bangladesh to Cambodia, from Afghanistan to Bosnia. In a book published in 2001, for instance, he wrote of forgotten wars in Sudan, Angola, Burundi, Sri Lanka and Colombia.

What most annoys his critics, however, is that Mr. Lévy is often the star of his own stories. And the complaint has been heard anew about his latest book, in which he sets out to solve the murder of Daniel Pearl, a correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, who was killed after his kidnapping in Pakistan on Jan. 23, 2002. Yet, conversely, if the book has sold more than 200,000 copies here since April, it is also because Mr. Lévy's name and passion continue to draw French readers.

Now, with the publication next week of the English translation of "Who Killed Daniel Pearl?" (Melville House Publishing), Mr. Lévy is entering

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In Pakistan to verify details obtained from police records, Mr. Lévy visited the abandoned Karachi house where Mr. Pearl was killed. He met Pakistani officials who openly attacked the United States and, specifically, Jews. And with considerable trepidation, he paid an unannounced visit to the Sunni madrasa, or Islamic seminary, of Binori Town, where Mr. Sheikh is said to have slept some nights before the kidnapping.

More critically, as he advanced in his research, Mr. Lévy came to view the official Pakistani version that Mr. Sheikh acted alone as a cover-up for a far darker reality, one that placed Mr. Sheikh at the heart of a

## Critics say a high-profile intellectual is often the star of his own stories.

complex network of Islamic fundamentalist groups, many linked to the I.S.I. and Al Qaeda.

Less clear, Mr. Lévy admits, is why Mr. Pearl was killed. He nonetheless speculates that Mr. Pearl was pursuing evidence that Al Qaeda and North Korea were receiving nuclear secrets from Pakistani scientists with ties to the I.S.I. and fundamentalist groups. "In other words," Mr. Lévy writes, "I bet on a Daniel Pearl busy gathering proof of Pakistan's collusion between the leading rogue states and terrorist networks of the world."

Paul Steiger, managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, said the newspaper had no evidence that Mr. Pearl was investigating any such conspiracy. "The *Wall Street Journal* was not involved in any way in the preparation of this book," he said in a statement responding to the book. "However, we urge all the authorities involved in the investigation to review the book to see whether it provides any useful information which could help in the effort to bring Danny's killers to justice."

While Mr. Lévy does not hesitate to proclaim Pakistan itself a rogue state, he chooses to end his book on a conciliatory note, evoking moderate Muslims he has known in Bosnia, Algeria, Morocco and Afghanistan. "There is this gentle Islam towards which, in spite of everything, until the last minute, Daniel Pearl wanted to believe, as I want to believe," he writes. And he adds, "It was the true subject of this book — homage to my posthumous friend and a call for the sharing of light."

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unknown territory. Not only is his name less known in the United States than Mr. Pearl's, but the question also arises as to why a French intellectual should investigate the murder in a far-off land of a man who was an American, a journalist and a Jew.

"If I had to pick, I'd say it was because he was Jewish," said Mr. Lévy, who is himself a nonpracticing Jew. "Amid my shock at his death was the realization that we were entering a century in which a man could have his throat cut for saying, 'My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am a Jew.' As I read his work, I also understood he was not just a Jew. He was a Jew who believed in reaching out to moderate Islam. And I recognized myself in his way of being Jewish."

But there was another reason, Mr. Lévy explained in an interview in his comfortable Left Bank apartment. "I am hardly a fan of today's American government — I opposed the Iraq war from the beginning — but I am nonetheless strongly anti-anti-American," he said. "I am alarmed by the way anti-Americanism is becoming globalized. Through Danny Pearl's experience, I had the feeling that the idea of America as a magnet for the worst was becoming a global phenomenon."

Mr. Lévy nonetheless tells the story as a narrative of his own investigation, something that irritated some French critics. "B. H. L. is an intellectual whose most accomplished work is the construction of his own biography," Pierre Assouline, editor of the literary monthly *Lire*, noted acidly. Others were more generous. In *Le Monde*, Alain Frachon said he found the book convincing. And, writing in *Le Figaro*, Jean de Beot praised it as "a splendid journey to better understand the fragility of the world."

Mr. Lévy was on a diplomatic mission to Afghanistan for President Jacques Chirac when he heard of Mr. Pearl's death. After completing his work in Kabul, he flew immediately to Karachi, returning to Pakistan for the first time since 1971. And in his airport taxi, he already sensed how the country had changed. "What is your religion?" the taxi driver asked him. He was taken aback. "Atheist."



Bernard-Henri Lévy with his wife, Arielle Dombasle, at a film festival in Morocco.

nomics. He also tracked Mr. Sheikh's steady radicalization: his identification with the plight of Bosnian Muslims, his move to Pakistan, his jailing in India on kidnapping charges, his release in exchange for a hijacked Indian plane and his ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan to verify details obtained from police records, Mr. Lévy visited the abandoned Karachi house where Mr. Pearl was killed. He met