

THE OXONIAN

Globalist

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Unmasking Tyranny

Inside the
OCCUPY
Movement

Scotland's
Democratic
Upheaval

The Saharawi
Struggle for
Statehood

Reconstructing
Libya's Education
System

Brazil's Landless
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DEAR READERS,

This past year, a clarion call of defiance echoed from the crumbling palaces in Tripoli to the occupied streets of New York City. Sparked by the self-immolation of a disgruntled market worker, protests in Tunisia ignited a wider movement for political change that spread across a region shackled by censorship and government control. In cities scattered across the world, stagnant economic conditions prompted millions to converge on public spaces in a plight to stem the tide of rising inequality. Elsewhere, local and national struggles, bereft of global media coverage and widespread fanfare, gained momentum.

Against this backdrop, this issue of *The Oxonian Globalist* presents a snapshot of various communities engaged in struggles against tyranny. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement gained an unprecedented global following, yet failed to articulate a coherent vision for an alternative to the status quo. In Brazil, leaders of the mass movement comprised of agricultural workers assumed great personal risks in their campaign to attain a fairer distribution of land. Some barriers obstructing the road to statehood were overcome by both Scottish nationalists and the stateless Sahrawi people. If successful, leaders will face a myriad of challenges in their plight to design efficient government structures, attested by public servants charged with crafting education policy in the wake of the Libyan insurrection.

Other articles in this issue confront the nexus between Christianity and homophobia in Africa, the pernicious effect of no-smoking signs, the growing influence of Esperanto, and education policy in Singapore.

We hope you enjoy this issue. If you have any thoughts or comments, please e-mail editor@toglobalist.org.

Thank you for your continued support,

Stephen Wan

M Longhurst

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Politics



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Missing ■ Mass online media is fast becoming widespread in China

Child Trafficking in China

The Age of Social Media

Jane Huxley-Khng

Online social networks are becoming effective tools to reunite trafficked children and parents in China

WHILE the Great Firewall still blocks (well, fetters) access to Twitter and Facebook, their Chinese equivalents are thriving. For Facebook, China has Renren; for YouTube, YouKu; and for Twitter, Sina Weibo. Predicted to hit 120 million members by 2012, Weibo's micro-blogs offer a real-time forum which China's censors can't quite keep up with, becoming an oasis of free speech and an unexpected platform for mass mobilisation in China.

Weibo has been credited by the Western media with spreading the news of Ai Weiwei's detention, supporting Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Peace Prize and calling for China's own "Jasmine Revolution". Yet within China, Weibo is fast becoming famous for a cause equally controversial though less known to the outside world: child trafficking.

Although the official figure is 10,000, it is estimated that as many as 70,000 children are trafficked every year in China. The lucky ones are adopted: with China's one child policy in place it is often cheaper to buy a child with all the necessary paperwork included, rather than pay the fines an illegal birth would incur. The unlucky ones are forced to work as beggars – beaten, starved and even disfigured to bring in money for their handlers.

Capturing Children

In January, a human rights activist and professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Yu Jianrong, set up a Sina Weibo microblog urging the public to take pictures of street children and upload them. The project gained momentum, picking up extensive media coverage, 100,000 followers and 2,000 photos within the first few weeks.

The *Global Times* (sister publication of *China Daily*) was quick to criticise the online campaign. Despite its good intentions, the campaign had apparently "unexpectedly resulted in many homeless families being wrongfully targeted, or family members being separated". Those described as "volunteer netizen cops" were advised to leave it to the real police.

Yet in the few success stories of reunited families, parents have not relied on the authorities. The day before they posted their criticism of Yu Jianrong's campaign, the *Global Times* covered the story of Peng Guofan, whose three year old son, Wenle, was kidnapped. After Peng Guofan spent three years searching for him, turning his telephone centre into a search centre and sending letters to President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabo and the State Council, Wenle was finally found when his photo, posted on Sina Weibo by a Hong Kong journalist, went viral.

When Peng first approached the police after his son went missing he was told "human trafficking disappeared in Gongming over a decade ago". His suspicions of abduction were dismissed and

While wary, the Chinese government should see the campaign for what it is: not a threat, but the positive use of social media towards the public good

when the investigation finally began it was slow and not given priority. Families across China have faced similar situations and, failed by the authorities, are

forced to think up increasingly inventive ways to find their children. Some hire private detectives. Others pay for their child's photo to feature on the back of playing cards in decks that are distributed in villages across China, free of charge. Weibo is the latest development.

A Silent Problem

Despite the government's "National Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Women and Children (2008-2012)", tightened laws and the introduction of a DNA database to help match children to their families, real results are yet to be seen. For every happy ending and reunited family, thousands still plead for help. Unable to cope with or even acknowledge the true scale of the situation, the government has banned "missing child" posters and prevents parents from speaking out to the foreign press. The official government standpoint is that China needs to stop "pointing fingers" and "attack the roots" of the problem.

The government is right: the fault does not lie simply with the police, who probably lack both resources and training to deal with child abduction. Nor is it simply a result of current family planning policies, which create a demand for children. However, the "roots" of the problem are still out there waiting to be attacked. The central government needs to get local governments under control, strengthen the rule of law, stamp out corruption, improve their welfare system, increase legitimate means of adoption and get rid of illegal ones (Taobao, China's Amazon or eBay, even has a section for "adoption", where child traffickers often pose as parents).

The Social Network

That's a long to-do list. In the meantime, social movements such as academic activist Yu Jianrong's microblog offer parents alternative means to find their missing children when the police give up. Interviewed with Wang Yukai, Secretary General of China's Administrative Reform Research Committee, at

► the beginning of the year, Yu Jianrong argued that the Chinese government had “demonised mass events” in the interest of “maintaining stability”. He argued that what is seen as a “normal expression of interest” in other countries is seen as a security threat in China. The *Global Times*’ criticism of Yu Jianrong’s campaign reflects the government’s ambivalent attitude towards social networking, the mass event of the early 21st century. Yet the overwhelming support from internet

users and celebrities, which has drowned out the lone voice of the state controlled press, has shown the growing plurality of the Chinese media.

While wary, the Chinese government should see the campaign for what it is: not a threat, but the positive use of social media towards the public good. ■

Jane Huxley-Khng studies Oriental Studies (Chinese) at St Anne’s College.

Violence in Guatemala

A State of Collapse

James Enoch

Violence, insecurity and drug trafficking hinders progress in Guatemala

IN the public consciousness, Guatemala remains a power on the very edge of the world stage, vaguely known to be dangerous but far from remarkably so. A recent review of the hard-hitting BBC TV series, “The Toughest Place to be a Paramedic”, by Tim Dowling of the *Guardian*, opens with the lines: “Did you guess Guatemala? No, me neither. It wasn’t even among my first 50 guesses, if I’m honest, but it’s certainly a qualified candidate.” As this suggests, a minimal amount of delving beneath the surface dredges up an alarming picture. Whilst the drug-related violence in Mexico is well known, it is its southern neighbour Guatemala which is bearing the brunt of the violence, relative to its population size. The murder rate in Mexico stands at 26 homicides per 100,000 of the population; the figure is more than double for Guatemala, at 53, and at 108 for its grisly capital Guatemala City. And yet behead-

ings, shoot-outs in restaurants and the murders of bus passengers do not tell the whole story of the crime and lawlessness plaguing the country.

There is a self-perpetuating and vicious circle at work here; the fact that the severity of the situation in Guatemala is underestimated by policy makers means the state is given little international support to help in the fight against the Mexican-based drug cartels whose sphere of violent influence has spread southwards so dramatically. The Mérida Initiative, a US-led partnership with Mexico and the countries of Central America to crack down on the activity of drug cartels, gave Guatemala a paltry US\$15 million (£9.6 million) out of the total US\$465 million (£300 million). In a country which has understandably never bounced back after a bloody and debilitating (and, arguably, US-initiated) civil war of 36 years, this sum is grossly inadequate. Unable to effect any significant improvements with such limited support, the country remains anarchic, and it is becoming increasingly easy for policy makers to dismiss it from the outside as a “failed state”, where the drug barons act with such impunity that one may as well leave the economically weak, politically unstable and ethnically fragmented country on its own and focus all efforts in the fight against drug barons on the economic giant to the north.

So what has brought a country with an industrious population and abundant natural resources so close to becoming a “failed state”? Aside from a lack of sufficient external support, why has Guatemala become a uniquely attractive breeding ground for drug gangs?

Out of the Woods

Part of the problem lies in Guatemala’s geographic location. The most obvious consequence is that Guatemala is becoming a refuge for drug gangs forced south by the Mexican president Felipe Calderón’s hard-line crackdown, and it so happens that the regions closest to the border naturally make perfect bases. Much of the criminal activity is taking place in the steamy, sparsely-populated rainforest of the Péten department, just south of the Mexican border. Formerly

the cradle of Mayan civilisation, these vast and impenetrable swathes of jungle are almost completely off-limits to an already overstretched and underfunded police force. And what potential does this police force have anyway?

The figures are telling; while the law enforcement forces of Central America’s high flyer, Costa Rica, seized 27 metric tonnes of US-bound South American cocaine in 2007, the Guatemalan equivalent seized a mere 730 kilograms. Even Nicaragua, in many ways as politically and economically fraught as Guatemala, succeeded in seizing 13 tonnes. Corruption is rampant among the police and forces of justice, meaning that the small sums that are provided by the US in the fight against drugs amount to much less in real terms. Those who cooperate with the gangs have infiltrated the highest ranks of a police force that is struggling to cope with the near daily murders (including the recent lynching of four men in a suburb of the capital); the past

97% of murders are unsolved by the authorities

year has seen the removal of two Guatemalan police chiefs, Baltazar Gomez and his predecessor Porfirio Pérez, on alleged charges of complicity in drug trafficking.

With the police and forces of justice poorly paid by the state and among the most exposed of Guatemalans to the gang violence, it is not difficult to understand how so many of them neglect their public duty and enter into complicity with the drug cartels to protect themselves and their families. To boot, this public police force is small, numbering only 26,000, while revealingly, employees in the private security sector are estimated at 120,000, demonstrating a widespread lack of faith in the law enforcement authorities. In such an environment, where 97% of murders are unsolved by the authorities, it is not hard to understand why drug gangs are so happy to carry out their activities here. And while murders carry little threat of conviction, there is nothing to stop the rate from increasing.

Yet it is clear that these murders aren’t carried out just by Mexican drug lords pushed south and continuing their turf war in territory where they have more free rein. Plagued by social problems, Guatemala also makes a fertile recruiting ground for the drug cartels. The World Bank estimates 75% of the population live below the national poverty line. Yet it is by no means homogeneously poor. By almost all measures, Guatemala has one of the most extreme levels of income inequality in the world, with 90% of the Mayan majority living below the poverty



Rudy Girón via Flickr

Shielding violence? ■ Antiriot
Police at the Palacio del Ayuntamiento,
La Antigua, Guatemala



line, while a handful of Guatemalans of predominantly European ancestry own the vast majority of the land. The fact that the pattern of land ownership has changed little since the colonial era when Spanish colonisers received huge swathes of land reflects the absence of social mobility. Poverty is of course linked with crime all over the world. What is unique is that many Guatemalan drug gangs are often the successors of deeply-rooted guerrilla cells whose origins can be traced back to the Civil War. It was only in 2007 that a civilian intelligence office was formed to combat organised crime, but in a country with feeble state resources in comparison to the scale of the problem,

it is perhaps a case of too little, too late.

Conviction Politics

A glimmer of hope was seen in 2007 however, with the establishment of the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) to investigate clandestine groups and help bring them to justice. This step can be interpreted as proof of Guatemala's inability to support itself, but it shows an international commitment to restoring the ramshackle system of law and order. Unfortunately, its most bitter opponents are not the drug barons but members of the business and political elites, whom one would expect to have the greatest vested interest in its success. For CICIG has admirably – in the face of death threats against its members – sought to expose corruption at all levels, which has seen the former president Alfonso Portillo accused of embezzlement of US\$15 million (£9.6 million) of state funds, with countless others undoubtedly waiting to be uncovered. Business, political and legal officials high up in the state hierarchy, often themselves in CICIG's firing line, are frequently at loggerheads with this body, and it also works the other way, compromising its efficacy. The former head of the Commission, Carlos Castresana, resigned in June 2010 saying

that in the light of Guatemala's weak laws and the failure of the government to introduce anti-impunity legislation, he could do nothing more for the country.

When the head of such a body makes such a statement, it gives little reason to hope. Yet the work of CICIG has nonetheless been important, helping secure the conviction of many officials and police officers. They may not be helping to lower the impunity rate amongst perpetrators of gang violence on the streets, but in creating an environment where government officials are under scrutiny, there is some hope for a more stable and transparent administration, which may be able to – in the long-term – get Guatemala back on the right track. While policy makers have their eyes fixed on the situation in Mexico, they also need to bear in mind the violence that is disabling the fragile state to the south. The international community, especially the US who is at the root of so much of the anarchy in their Central American 'backyard', should seek to provide more support for Guatemala before it becomes too late. ■

James Enoch studies French and Classics at Trinity College.

Homophobia and Christianity in Africa

The Missionary Position

Clara Mead-Robinson

The rising numbers of conservative Christians in Africa is having a devastating effect on attitudes towards homosexuality

THE relationship between Africa and Christianity is complex. Whilst there has been a religious presence since the first century, Christianity in Africa has established itself as a symbol of the imposition of Western imperialism during the Colonial missionary era. Today, Africans have forcefully claimed Christianity as their own, and the church in Africa is a vibrant, spiritual institution that gives hope to many who face poverty and political instability. Amid a broad range of competing denominations, the Anglican community has a central presence, with 44 million followers in Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and beyond. Given that there are 79 million Anglicans worldwide, these African dioceses represent a major voice within the Anglican Communion.

Beneath the call for Anglican brotherhood lies ever increasing divisions between African and Western dioceses. Since the appointment of openly gay Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire in 2003, homosexuality has become

the centre of the controversy. Robinson is a member of the Episcopal Church, an American branch of Anglicanism with two million members. His appointment was met with furious opposition from African bishops. In 2008, at the Lambeth Conference, a quarter of bishops, many from Niergian, Kenyan and Ugandan dioceses, boycotted the meeting because they felt their views on homosexuality were ignored.

In these countries, there is a continuing interdependence between church doctrine and cultural norms, which places a large amount of responsibility and power in the Church's hands. Bishop Christopher Senjoyo, a leading Ugandan Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights activist, has urged the church not to incite hatred against gays. However, the Ugandan Church's conservatism was revealed in their response to the 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill, which criminalised homosexuality, and in certain cases imposed the death penalty as punishment. Ugandan Archbishop



At a crossroads ■ *The Church of England faces a dilemma about homosexuality in Africa*

Orombi recommended Christians love and care for those affected by "homosexual disorientation". However, his report stipulated that homosexuality was incompatible with scripture and a serious threat to young people and to the traditional family. He urged the government to "ensure that homosexual practice or

- ▶ the promotion of homosexual relations is not adopted as a human right.”

These comments are at odds with Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, who has stated that “Any words that could make it easier for someone to attack or abuse a homosexual person are words of which we must repent.”

In the Name of God

In some cases, the Church engenders a culture of aggressive homophobia. In January, Ugandan LGBT rights activist David Kato was beaten to death outside his home. This tragedy came three months after a list of names and addresses of 100 homosexuals was published in a Ugandan tabloid, accompanied with the headline “Hang them”. In the Anglican Primates’ meeting a week after Kato’s murder, many Church leaders, including Rowan Williams, spoke passionately against the publication. One bishop urged Anglicans to “find a way out of the absurd stalemate we are in over human sexuality.” In reality, however, many African Anglicans espouse conservative views on homosexuality. Kato was condemned even in death when the Anglican preacher at his funeral gave a sermon against homosexuality and villagers refused to bury Kato’s coffin.

African homophobia can be traced to Western colonialism. Many anti-homosexuality laws in Africa have their roots in British colonial laws against sodomy. Conservative African churches

have found an ally in the American religious right. Kapyra Kaoma, an Anglican priest from Zambia believes that the homosexuality debate in Africa has given rise to a new insidious form of cultural imperialism. In the 2009 article entitled “Globalising the Culture Wars – U.S. Conservatives, African Churches & Homophobia”, Kaoma describes how Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda have become pawns in a proxy war between the Amer-

Beneath the call for Anglican brotherhood lies ever increasing divisions between African and Western dioceses

ican religious right and liberal Christians. Kaoma has criticised Western religious conservatives, who “have enticed African religious leaders to reject funding from mainline denominations...and instead to accept funds from conservatives, further empowering the U.S. evangelical viewpoint while giving local bishops the opportunity to line their pockets.”

In the month preceding the proposal of Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill, Ugandan politicians met with religious leaders and representatives from the American Christian right. At the conference, leading American anti-gay activist Scott Lively, stated that homosexuality

was on a par with paedophilia and bestiality. Lively accused LGBT activists of “manipulating the facts in order to push their political agenda” and compelled Uganda to fight the gay movement.

The Straight and Narrow

In this context, Rowan Williams must carefully balance differing cultural norms: if Williams appears too conservative, the Church of England will lose the support of the next generation; however if his views appear too liberal, especially regarding homosexuality, he will likely lose support of the Anglican church in Africa who may align themselves with the American conservative movement.

One important factor will shape the future of Christian politics in Africa. The Anglican Church will likely continue to wield substantial influence over development in Africa, particularly over discussion of poverty, political stability, and AIDS. The shift towards secular values must not overlook the complexities of the situation, nor risk alienating liberal Anglicans who are able to stem the rise of Christian conservatism. The voices of Williams, Kaoma and Senjoyo who oppose homophobic leanings within the Anglican Communion must not be drowned out by American religious leaders. ■

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Global Maternal Health

Forgotten Rights

Isabella Mighetto

Discrimination and stigmatisation surrounding women’s rights perpetuates preventable maternal deaths

GOVERNMENTS and international organisations have recognised that the vast majority of maternal deaths throughout the world are preventable, yet today, one woman dies every minute due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Improvements in maternal health are linked to the realisation of sexual and reproductive rights, promotion of gender equality, eradication of retrograde and androcentric systems and the general empowerment of women. Research shows that as many as 74% of maternal deaths could be averted if all women had access to services that prevent or treat pregnancy and birth-related complications. There is no doubt that the staggering number of maternal deaths can be easily reduced, but first, women’s rights need to appear on the political agenda.

At the core of maternal mortality lies

deep-rooted, institutional and insidious discrimination against women and girls worldwide. Women with the highest risk of maternal deaths are consistently the poor, young and least educated. Despite 99% of maternal deaths occurring in developing countries, a disproportionate amount of resources are provided for the most affluent sectors of those societies. In Chad, for instance, a mere 1% of the poorest women are attended by a skilled health professional during their delivery, compared to 48% of the wealthiest women. Poverty remains a key factor in preventing maternal deaths, and prohibitive costs of medical care are an obstacle to accessing reproductive health services.

Culturally Denied

Sadly, racial issues also play an important role. In the United States, African-American women are nearly four times more likely to die during pregnancy than white women; an inequality that has not changed for the past 20 years. Indigenous women in Peru often face racial prejudice in health centres, where they are denied the request to give birth in an optimal vertical position. A majority of Peruvian health workers are unable to speak indigenous languages, increasing the risk of inaccurate medical diagnoses.

In many cultures, a woman’s low social status and submission to her husband or male relatives means that the decision to use contraception, frequent family planning services, or visit a health facility, is out of her hands. An estimated 200 million women worldwide are unable to access contraceptives, despite family planning being one of the most cost-effective and simplest means of preventing maternal deaths. In Burkina Faso, the resistance to contraception is entrenched in the belief that women exist in order to both please their husbands and produce many children. The oppression of women and the continuation of certain traditional practices – including the levirate, where widows are forced into marriage with their deceased husband’s brother, as well as underage marriage and female genital mutilation – are culturally ingrained.

Preventing Progress

There is a stigmatisation attached to sexual and reproductive health, propagated by rooted beliefs and customs. In rural areas in Sierra Leone, for instance, it is widely thought that obstructed labour is caused by a woman’s adulterous behaviour. There are innumerable cases where valuable time and resources have been

- wasted in an attempt to extract a confession of infidelity from women instead of providing them with the emergency obstetric care required.

Since Peru raised the age of consent from 14 to 18 years of age in 2006, many teenage girls fearing punishment or pressure to reveal the identity of their child's father, forgo visiting health centres and instead choose to have clandestine abortions. In countries like Nicaragua where abortion is banned, women who miscarry are often too scared to seek proper treatment, fearing that they might be accused of attempted abortion. A survey of media reports between 2005 and 2007 shows that the overwhelming majority of girls who fell pregnant as a result of rape or incest (172 out of 198) were between 10 and 14 years old. In Nicaragua, both women who seek abortion services, and

health professionals who provide any form of abortion assistance, are subject to harsh prison sentences. Dr Oscar Flores Mejia, from the Nicaraguan Society of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians, describes the dilemma facing doctors: "If I act to intervene in a pregnancy, I will be pursued by

200 million women worldwide are unable to access contraceptives

the law and punished. If I don't act and I leave the pregnancy to continue and as a result both the foetus and the mother die, I could be accused of medical negligence by the woman's relatives and taken to court." Amnesty International, a non-governmental human rights organisation, argues that the criminalisation of abor-

tion in all circumstances is unenforceable, unreasonable and unlawful.

Governments must act collectively to decrease the instances of maternal deaths worldwide. In the words of Mahmoud Fathalla, former president of the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: "Women are not dying of diseases we can't treat... They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving." The current condition of maternal health, as well as sexual and reproductive rights, is a worldwide human rights catastrophe that demands immediate attention. The international community must act swiftly to defend the rights of the violated, oppressed and unheard. ■

Isabella Mighetto studies French and Spanish at Trinity College.

Samoa's Time Zone

Time to Change

Annette Chau

Time travel promises economic prosperity for Samoa

IT is not the first time the Samoan prime minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has introduced unusual policies for a usual economic objective: enhancing commercial links with important trading partners. Two years ago, Samoan drivers were legally obliged to switch the side of the road they drive on, to make it 'more economical' for Samoans to buy cars designed for left-hand driving from Australia and New Zealand, putting their automobile markets in sync. It was characterised by the government as a practical economic move, reflecting the fact that the island of 180,000 is looking increasingly westwards towards Australasia.

The next step, apparently, is time travel. This year, Samoa is hopping westward over the international dateline, skipping the last day of December to align its time more closely with Australia and New Zealand. The island-state is respectively 21 and 23 hours behind those countries, meaning that they share only four working days a week. The change will make business with key partners "far, far easier and more convenient", says Mr Tuilaepa, the first Samoan to earn a masters' degree in commerce. It isn't the first time Samoa has had such a temporal transition: 119 years ago, it celebrated the fourth of July twice to shift across the dateline and better accommodate American and European traders. The prime minister points out that "our trading partners have dramatically changed since."

That is true. Still, not everyone is happy. The local tourism industry is anxious about losing the unique right to boast of Samoa as being the last place in the world to watch the sun set each day. After the change it will become the first place to see the sunrise – a much harder attraction to sell. Comfortingly, and characteristically, Mr Tuilaepa notes that tourists will enjoy the opportunity to celebrate birthdays, weddings and anniversaries twice, by way of an hour-long flight across the dateline between Samoa and neighbouring American Samoa, a US territory.

The move also inconveniences some of Samoa's neighbours. Residents of American Samoa, a close business partner, have expressed annoyance. Tokelau, a fellow Pacific island highly reliant on Samoa, feels obliged to follow it across the dateline. The date change may be a nightmare for cartographers and administrators around the world.

Fortunately, the government is used to controversy: the proposal to switch the side of the road traffic drives on was met with the largest demonstrations in Samoan history and a new opposition party being founded to protest the change. Compared to that, moving the island a day forward seems uncontroversial. That might not be the case for Mr Tuilaepa's next bright idea. ■

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Aaron Overington

Only a matter of time ■ *A clock in Samoa stands ready for a new age*

Economics



Mike Bitzenhofer via Flickr

Debt traps ■ *Differences in priorities distinguish credit unions from Public Limited Companies*

British Credit Unions

People Over Profits

Cornelius Christian

Credit unions may present a model for a better financial system

BRITISH credit unions are rare creatures, but their origins are very much British. In the UK, modern cooperative associations, like weavers' societies and consumer mutuals, arose amidst the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution. Robert Owen, a Welshman, is recognised as father of the cooperative movement. Infuriated by the urban poverty of 19th Century Britain, he established worker-owned cotton mills in New Lanark, Scotland as a solution. Owen's experiment yielded tremendous benefits for the workers, who invested the mills' profits in education and social programs. Cooperatives caught on and soon financial cooperatives, like Christian "friendly societies" that encouraged thrift among the working classes, proliferated across the country.

Credit unions today are owned by those who bank at them, much like friendly societies in the 19th century. As a result, credit unions' aims do not include profit-maximisation, but rather the promotion of thrift, and the provision of credit at competitive rates. This seemingly odd business structure has fared surprisingly well in the face of tumultuous economic conditions, including the ongoing financial crisis.

To understand why, a basic grasp of the "principal-agent" problem of economic theory is required. This phenomenon occurs when a principal, like a retail bank's board of directors,

hires an agent, like the bank's CEO. It is impossible for the board of directors to perfectly monitor the CEO's performance, and therefore difficult to award compensation based on performance; for example, astounding year-end profits could be due to the CEO's hard work, or sheer luck.

A Good Performance

If agents can be better monitored, then designing compensation schemes becomes less of an issue: pay can be more closely tied to performance. Because credit unions' aims do not include profit-maximization, a credit union CEO's job is to instead directly benefit credit union members, through higher savings rates and lower loan rates. In this case the principals – credit union members themselves – can effectively monitor whether the agent is fulfilling their obligations. In this sense, the essential paradigm of CEO performance is judged by a completely different set of values.

This emphasis on community welfare over net worth prevents credit unions from becoming the financial behemoths that Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds TSB are. By the same measure, it also prevents credit unions from taking lethal risks in the relentless pursuit of profits. Investments in toxic securities and under-regulated complex financial instruments, which major UK banks were heavily involved in, engendered the

current financial crisis. Credit unions, by contrast, were not tempted by these investments and instead prioritised conservative management practices to benefit their member-owners.

The benefits are indubitably apparent. Unlike RBS and Lloyds, which have both received substantial bailouts, credit unions have not required such government largesse. According to the Financial Services Authority, from 2009 to 2011 credit unions increased their membership, total loans, and total assets. They remain well-capitalised, possess sound liquidity and are active in their communities; South London credit unions are even offering financial assistance to victims of

Credit unions are an important solution to the problem of unbridled greed

the recent riots.

This suggests that in order to mitigate the effects of future recessions, stakeholders should move away from a rigid understanding of corporate governance structures traditionally taught in business schools. The shareholder-owned "Public Limited Company" (PLC) is a good model in theory, yet in practice it suffers from serious flaws and is plagued by weak and indolent boards, executives who only care about short-term gain, and CEO-appointed board directors. Even a recent McKinsey & Company survey casts doubt over the leadership ability of corporate boards. Is it really any wonder then that PLCs, such as the hardest hit banks, coped poorly during the economic crisis?

Credit unions by contrast were born ►

- in dire economic conditions and for the benefit of those who overwhelmingly suffer from them: the poor. Because the penurious are frequently alienated from the established banking system, credit unions arose to meet their needs and did so efficiently and effectively.

Credit unions arguably prioritise people over profit, and therefore protect

their members' interests during harsh financial conditions. In an age of what some consider crony capitalism, when the gap between rich and poor in both developed and developing countries continues to widen, perhaps cooperative structures like credit unions are an important solution to the problem of unbridled greed.

At a time like this, when our memo-

ries are still fresh from the fiascoes of the bank bailouts and economic turmoil of 2008, we will do well to pause and consider the options for a better financial system and a better world. ■

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Indian Microfinance

Boon, Bane and After

Joanna Kozłowska

The Indian crisis has transformed perceptions of microfinance worldwide

MORE than a year ago, microcredit was a miracle. As Grameen's Muhammad Yunus received the 2006 Nobel Prize in economics, and Dambisa Moyo's 2009 book *Dead Aid* unleashed a wave of criticism of 'dependency-creating' direct aid, few had doubts about the "empowering" microfinance as a panacea for the Global South.

The picture over the last 12 months could not be more contrasting. After the crisis in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, stories of Third World paupers-turned-entrepreneurs largely gave way to "death trap for the poor" in newspaper headlines. The news about a string of suicides (arguably due to default and coercive loan recovery practices) shocked the global public. So did reports of "popular rebellion" against the Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) as Andhra's population allegedly refused to repay en masse. As the crisis threatened other parts of the world's largest microfinance market (as banks stopped lending to MFIs nationwide in response to Andhra's severe legal restrictions), things started to look serious.

But was it all about rogue MFIs trying to make a profit out of Andhra's poor? The state government's scenario lays the blame on the spread of a new, for-profit model of microfinance companies. SKS Microfinance, Spandana and Share emerged as the alleged culprits – all of them partially owned by shareholders. This commercial orientation, and the resulting search for expansion and profit (the government story goes) led them to push unnecessary loans on an already indebted population. It was arguably to prevent staggering debts and abuse during their collection that the Andhra officials passed the draconian ordinance of October 15th 2010. Its terms (particularly the ordering of loan recovery solely in government offices, and the need to seek government permission before taking out a loan) were arguably designed to paralyse MFI operations in the whole area.

Owing Up

However, was the ordinance really a response to popular outrage and "spontaneous defaults"? Neither this, nor the idea of MFIs pushing superfluous loans on a saturated market seems certain. According to a survey funded by the Indian Banker's Institute for Rural Development, multiple loans were frequently taken out at the same time and for the same purpose. This would suggest that many loaners simply needed more credit that could be obtained from one place at a time, instead of using one loan to pay off another. Moreover, a high proportion of informal, usually more costly loans (82% of Andhra households were found to have such a loan outstanding) seems to contradict the idea that the Andhra market is saturated by MFI lending.

There are also reasons to suspect that the 'popular anti-MFI rebellion' was at least partly orchestrated by government officials. According to the IMFR Centre for Microfinance, repayment rates before the passing of the ordinance were in the high nineties. They also continued to be high in other Indian states afterwards. Hence the act itself seems to have sparked off the wave of defaults. Interestingly, one of the gravest accusations which led to the whole situation had come from an Andhra state agency promoting the rival,

government-subsidised Self-Help Group programme.

Officials associated with the programme (notably the project director of one of the District Rural Development Authorities and the CEO of SEPR, the SHGs' monitoring body) publicly accused the MFIs of provoking defaulters to commit suicide (to gain compensation from insurance companies). Before an independent judicial enquiry could be carried through (as the MFIs self-regulatory body demanded), the Andhra government passed its sweeping

Many loaners simply needed more credit that could be obtained from one place at a time, instead of using one loan to pay off another

ordinance.

The alleged wave of suicides remains. However, a causal link to MFI recovery practices is far from obvious. Seventeen of the fifty-seven women for whose suicides MFIs were blamed were indeed clients of one of the three major "commercially oriented" MFIs. According to Vikram Akula of SKS, none was in default. Moreover, the Andhra tragedies must be viewed in the context of an alarming rise in Indian farmers' suicides in general. This, according to Rupashree Nanda of CNN, results mostly from deeper systemic changes. Rapid economic transformations, scissors crises and lack of counselling are often listed as major factors. ►



Microfinance crisis ■ Once considered the solution to many of India's problems, microfinance institutions have recently been branded "death traps for the poor"

► Selling Dollar Signs

This is by no means to suggest that Andhra MFIs are entirely blameless. The pressure placed by investors and shareholders for profit was always likely to create a loosening of operational control. However, a look at the Indian legal framework suggests a number of ways to diminish the probability of abuse.

The supporters of “MFI commercialisation” see it as a chance to improve sustainability, as well as to gain independence from government subsidies and pressures. However, reconciling shareholders’ interests with a MFI’s professed mission can surely prove tricky. Muhammad Yunus himself fiercely criticised the decision to offer SKS’ shares to the public. Yet the “for-profit” model seems well established throughout the world, with Bolivia’s BancoSol, Peru’s Mibanco and Indonesia’s BRI among the world’s most prominent – and rather less controversial – MFIs.

Is there anything special about the Indian ‘for-profits’ and their legal environment? Elizabeth Rhyne, managing director of the Center for Financial Inclu-

sion at ACCION International (a major non-profit MFI), claims that ownership patterns may be the key. In Indian microfinance, NGOs are prohibited from becoming shareholders. In contrast, owners of Mibanco or BancoSol after their “commercialisation” include the original NGO (arguably keeping the focus on the ‘mission’) as well as social investors and local shareholders. In India, NGO participation has been replaced by an idea of “client ownership”. SKS, for one, has a client trust giving the loaners a stake in the company. However, voting rights stay with the board of managers, whose decisions can largely go unchecked.

Lending a Hand

The ban on MFIs taking deposits is another peculiarity of Indian microfinance. Unlike the world’s other major ‘for-profits’, Indian MFIs cannot offer savings accounts, which could both protect the clients from debt traps and allow the institution to raise funds locally, making them less dependent on shareholders’ money.

A further clarification of the legal

status of commercial MFIs would also be needed, as well as a decisive response from the central government. It is worth noting that a lack of swift reaction to the Andhra crisis led many banks in other Indian states to stop lending to MFIs, threatening a nationwide collapse of the system.

Both MFI and rating agency representatives called for national-level regulation during the National Microfinance Conference in New Delhi in mid-March. So far, a report in January 2011 by a committee led by Y. H. Malegam has made a number of recommendations – among them, an instant withdrawal of Andhra’s microfinance bill, and submitting MFIs to the control of the Reserve Bank of India rather than local state officials. The federal government seems to share the view that while Indian microfinance is surely in need of legal revision, draconian restrictions on the Andhra model can do more harm than good. ■

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London’s Bicycles

Learning to Share

Mark Longhurst

A massive release of cycling data provides a glimpse of a brighter future for spatial analysis

PARTICIPANTS in London’s cycle-hire scheme will likely be pleased with the release of an interactive graphic about real-time bicycle availability. A sundry of throbbing, variegated aureoles allows customers to expeditiously survey the geographic distribution of bicycles across London. Viewed over time, the geovisualisation depicts the roaming of an elegant symphony of cyclists that commute daily between suburbia and the city centre.

In the last decade, technological advances have allowed corporations and public entities to effortlessly monitor

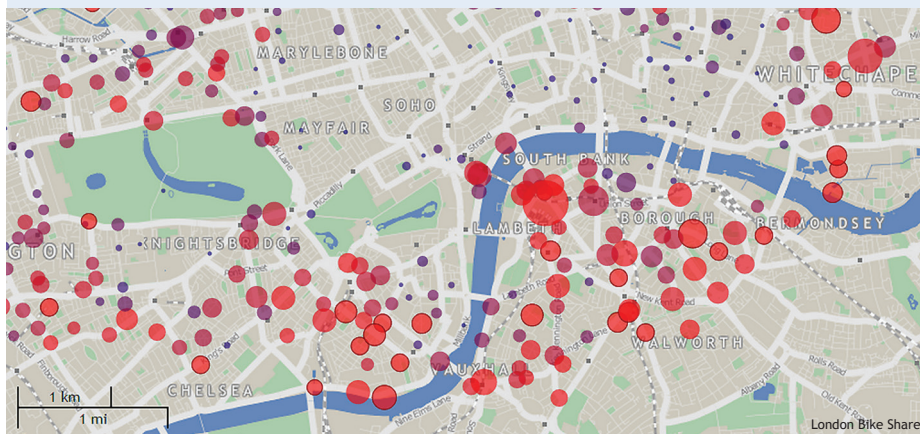
the precise movements of a large number of individuals. Modern consumers interact daily with a variety of devices that record their location, including mobile phones, automatic teller machines, automotive GPS systems and Oyster cards. Aggregated, these records, if released, would provide economists and policy-makers with a valuable source of data that describes how individuals interact spatially with their surrounding environment.

The latest release of cycling data serves as an effective model of how to responsibly disseminate spatial data. The data

describes the movement of five thousand bicycles between 315 docking stations operated by Barclays’ Bicycle Hire, a bicycle-sharing scheme established by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. In October 2010, Transport for London released a rich and mammoth dataset to the public that contains information about more than 1.7 million bicycle journeys. Since this time, cycle-loving number crunchers, including open data advocate Adrian Steele, have presented this spatial data in captivating forms that highlight interesting cycling trends.

The Transport for London dataset is unlikely to yield any significant, paradigm-altering insights in the long-term. However, the release of the information serves to illustrate that spatial location data can be disseminated to the public without compromising the privacy of individuals. Corporations currently possess immense datasets that likely provide a much more detailed description of the movements of people than census or migration data. The release of this information, in a form that ensures that privacy is not violated, could provide society with fascinating insights. ■

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The bigger picture ■ *New uses of publicly available data could potentially bring huge benefits*

Theme: Unmasking Tyranny



Camping for change ■ A panorama of the “Occupy London” protest outside St Pauls Cathedral, London

Wall Street Protests

Bleeding Hearts of Liberty

Cornelius Christian

The Occupy movement, an ostensibly worthy crusade, knows its enemy very well, but does not know how to defeat it

ACCLAIMED historian Howard Zinn once boldly proclaimed that “democracy doesn’t come from the top, it comes from the bottom.” Indeed every generation has struggled ceaselessly against the overwhelming tides of illegitimate authority. From the Hebrews fleeing slavery in Egypt, to women demanding suffrage in recent times, common goals of freedom and democracy have been hard won.

The torch of liberty has been passed to this generation, and the clash of the powerless with the powerful has manifested in the form of the Occupy movement. This strange phenomenon has been misunderstood and misanalysed by a hostile and condescending corporate media on the one hand, and overly optimistic leftist intellectuals on the other. The fact is that the Occupy protesters know what they are protesting, but are nonetheless unable to articulate a cogent alternative.

Their fight is against an international menace that has permeated societies, breaking apart families, destroying the working class, and poisoning the environment: institutionalised economic injustice. Corrupt organisations, mostly corporations and governments, have tainted the democratic process with lobbying, profligate bailouts, and foreign wars that are perceived to benefit predominantly the wealthy.

Business of the State

This link between the business class and the state is not new. An implicit understanding between business and political interests built the U.S. economy itself. Founding Father Alexander Hamilton implemented a system of tariffs and subsidies to aid American manufacturing. The U.S. military massacred Native Americans to clear the land for railway tycoons. And the original U.S. Constitution condoned slavery, much to the delight of Southern cotton farmers.

In this sense, the Occupy movement is long overdue. The richest 1% of Americans now control 40% of the wealth. Over the past thirty years real wages have stagnated while top incomes have risen, as the rich steadily steal productivity gains from the working class. The

United States’ income inequality now parallels that of totalitarian Iran and oligarchic Russia. A few miles from the White House, one can find Washington D.C.’s poorest districts, while in St. Petersburg, the penurious live in the shadows of the prosperous; there are no in-betweens. Is it any wonder then that the rage simmering beneath the surface has now exploded into a cacophony of sound and fury?

This is perhaps why, to shallow observers, the Occupy movement appears inchoate in its aims. A walk through Occupy London, for instance, reveals a potpourri of causes: socialism and anarchism, environmentalism, pacifism, animal rights. There appears no semblance of commonality. Regardless, a careful observer realises that economic injustice underlies many of these societal ills. After all, in modern democracies, the affluent have

The Occupy protesters know what they are protesting, but are nonetheless unable to articulate a cogent alternative

more political power than the impoverished, where the former maniacally twist the instruments of dominance towards their own designs against the latter.

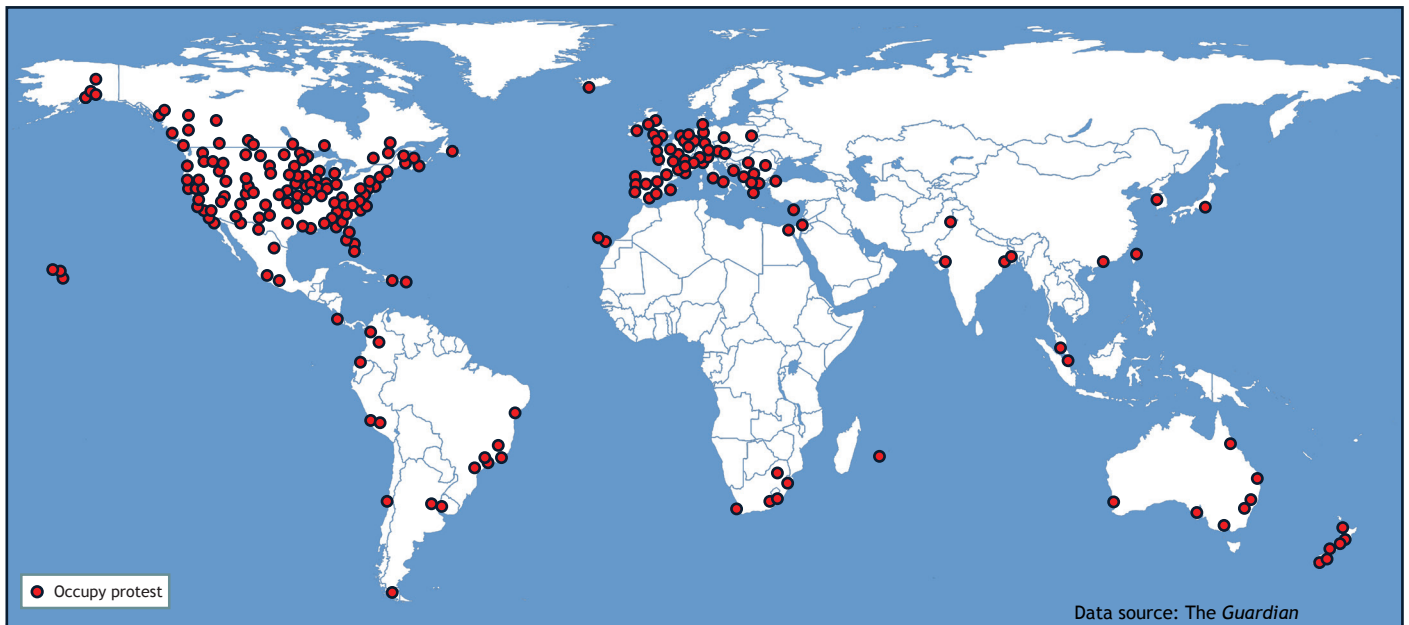
That, then, is the problem. The solution is much more difficult to articulate. Some occupiers endorse greater government largesse, others demand an end to bailouts, and still others seek to abolish the state altogether. Cries for “socialism” occasionally ring out among the troubled masses, but there is no agreement over how to break the cabal that bankers and politicians have established.

The Occupy protesters would rejoin by drawing attention to their particular brand of direct democracy, the general assemblies, whereby key decisions are discussed – anyone is theoretically allowed to speak – and then put to a vote. This experiment in consensus decision-making is just that: an experiment that is unlikely to be adopted by society-at-large. Besides, it is not even that democratic; assembly facilitators can steer conversations as they please.

Engaging Ideas

Is there any truth then to the media’s caricature of protesters as dim-witted ideologues keen on marijuana and two-cent philosophy? Perhaps, but at least occupiers have, finally, engaged the public in dialogue about the intrinsic links between state and corporate avarice. The first step towards recovery is identi-





Occupied ■ A map marking areas which have witnessed Occupy movement protests

► fying the problem.

But now protesters must focus on recovery itself. Socialism is probably not the answer; the class war has already been won by the capitalists. Voters can seek only to make our current system more fair and equitable. Some elements of the Occupy movement made broadly reasonable demands; an end to corporate welfare programs and hazardous public sector cuts, for instance. They could also have demanded better financial regulation,

tighter limits on corporate lobbying, and a return to the Bretton Woods international monetary system. In short, protesters should call on governments to restore the financial system to its original purpose of lubricating the economy, not destroying it.

Still, the light of liberty flickers on from Cairo to New York. ■

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Democracy in Scotland

A United Kingdom?

Rachel McLellan

Recent Scottish election results raise questions about the future of the United Kingdom

CONSTITUTIONAL change appears to be coming to the UK, although not quite as the country had expected when it went to the polls on May 5th. The election, which was anticipated to bring about a minor change in the electoral system, has instigated a chain of events that has the potential to sever a 304-year-old union. While the Alternative Vote (AV) electoral system proposal was defeated 69% to 31%, the Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland returned with a majority of the government for the first time in its Parliament's history. Few predicted this landmark result. From mid-2010 until March 2011, opinion polls had indicated that Labour was consistently ahead. The leader of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP), Iain Gray, seemed confident despite his low profile. A poll for the *Herald*, in early March predicated a Labour landslide. According to their figures, Labour maintained a 15-point lead over the SNP.

The results that actually came to pass, however, were fundamentally different and brought the future of the United Kingdom's union into serious peril. The SNP increased their vote share to 45%, gaining a majority for the first time. In the north-east region comprised of Aberdeen, Dundee and the surrounding areas, the SNP won all ten constituency seats. Moreover, they gained a top up seat from the regional list, an event considered statistically impossible when the system was designed. Indeed the voting system, which consists of first-past-the-post (FPTP) constituency votes alongside multi-member Proportional Representation regional votes, was constructed to prevent any single party from gaining a majority. This system envisioned

either a minority nationalist government or a unionist coalition of some combination of colours. Up until now, the Additional Member System had done its job efficiently.

A Grey Issue

It was Labour's election to lose and they lost it spectacularly. In Scotland, the media has singled out Labour leader Iain Gray's incompetence as a primary factor in this historic result. Dubbed the "grey man" by news media, Gray's lack of charisma allowed Alex Salmond, leader of the SNP, to dominate the leadership debates in late March and April. Soon after, Labour's poll ratings began to tank.

The SNP have gained massively from the wider context in which the Scottish Parliament sits. Developments in Westminster ►



New seat of power?

■ The front side of Holyrood, the Scottish Parliament

- ster have shored up support for both the SNP and Scottish independence. The coalition's sweeping budget cuts are at odds with the Scottish people's expectations from their government. While the Conservative-led UK government continues to slash public services for those in England, the SNP government at Holyrood has chosen to protect and expand public services. Prescription charges have been eliminated and the lump sum graduate tax abolished. These changes have been widely welcomed by the Scottish people, who are eager to support the SNP's bid for a second term.

However, the interests of union and nation seem to be diverging. The public's support for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in Scotland has collapsed. The Conservative leader, Annabel Goldie, lost her constituency seat. The Liberal Democrats have suffered most, with representation diminished from 17 seats to five. The party of government until 2007, the Scottish Liberal Democrats now hold only three more seats than the Greens. These election results suggest that disaffected, unionist voters have shifted their allegiance to the SNP.

It was Labour's election to lose, and they lost it spectacularly

The long-term impact of this election remains unclear. Upon gaining a majority, Salmond announced his plans to hold a referendum on Scottish independence. The coalition government at Westminster have announced that they have no intention of blocking this vote. A referendum had been planned for this year, but was abandoned when the previous SNP minority administration realised they had no hope of passing the bill

through parliament. However, this obstacle no longer exists. A referendum is an all-or-nothing gamble for the SNP. Their *raison d'être* is working toward an independently governed Scotland. If the electorate rejects independence, they will reject the party's underlying ideology. If the electorate backs it, the SNP will be vindicated and will subsequently sweep to power.

Uniting Around Division

Commentators are divided over whether the referendum will pass. Scottish elections are unusual; they are both elections for government and referenda on devolution. SNP support is invariably higher than support for independence. However, if the popularity of the party persists, support for independence will grow.

The political skill of Salmond and the SNP should not be underestimated. The SNP have sought independence since they first entered government. First Minister's Questions are dominated by retorts from Salmond dismissing Scottish problems as side effects of the union. The schools' curriculum has been amended to focus more thoroughly on nationalistic periods of Scottish history. SNP policy on Trident, education and the NHS is at odds with UK government policy. With the other parties effectively decimated and directionless after the resignations of the leaders of the SLP and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scotland is more vulnerable than ever to Salmond's slick SNP political machine. The future of Scottish independence depends on how successfully Salmond can convince the Scottish people that their identity and their interest lies only in Scotland. ■

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Land Reform in Brazil

Conflict and Power

Benjamin Parkin

The struggle for land is causing violence and bloodshed in Brazil. Grassroot movements may offer a solution

ON May 24th 2011, José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva, a grassroots environmental activist in the Amazonian state of Pará, was ambushed and killed by two gunmen while riding home on a motorcycle with his wife. At the scene, 15 bullet cases were found, and Ribeiro was reported to have had his ear cut off as a gruesome trophy.

His fate is not uncommon in the struggle for land in rural Brazil, where those who fight for the redistribution of land or the protection of the forest face substantial risks. A year before his death, Ribeiro spoke about the threats made against him: "I will protect the forest at all costs. That is why I could get a bullet in my head at any moment – because I denounce the loggers." Two other people, Eremilton Pereira dos Santos and Adelino Ramos, were murdered shortly after, also by hired killers.

Over 1,000 rural peasants and activists have been killed in the Amazon in the last 20 years. In 2008, the Pastoral Land

Grassroots movements such as the MST and activists such as Ribeiro are crucial to democratisation and reform in Brazilian society.

Commission (CPT), a Brazilian human rights organisation, gave a list of 1,800 names of people who have received credible death threats in recent years. Dozens of those on the list have now been killed, and many others have survived assassination attempts.



Fighting for rights ■ MST members demand the redistribution of land from unethical estate owners

It is largely because of an ineffective and corrupt police force that these conflicts often end in murder. Very few of the killers have been prosecuted, and the loggers, ranchers and estate owners behind the murders are rarely brought to justice. In response to the four killings, President Dilma Rousseff promised more resources to protect activists and combat the perceived lawlessness of rural Brazil, attempting to end "an era of impunity for illegal loggers, ranchers and agribusiness."

From the Ground Up

This violence emerges from one of the most contentious issues within Brazilian society: land reform. Brazil is a country where 1% of the population own roughly half of the arable land. Large landowners and agribusiness corporations create vast plantations, industrial farms, and, in the Amazon, are responsible for the cutting down of trees and destruction of the forest to create cattle ranches. These agribusinesses use vast amounts of

- ▶ Genetically Modified Organisms and pesticides, all to grow mono-crops primarily for export, such as soy, sugar cane and coffee.

A key group in this struggle is the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), or the Landless Workers' Movement, who are the largest social movement in Brazil, with 1.6 million members. Their members largely consist of the rural poor, such as landless peasants and labourers. Their lack of education and colour of their skin often place them within the most marginalised strata of Brazilian society. They seek downward land redistribution, exploiting a passage in the 1988 Constitution, which states that land not being used for social good may be acquired by the government and passed on to others.

They operate through large-scale occupation of ranches and farms, setting up makeshift camps and remaining there, against the intimidation and brutality of the landowners and police, until they acquire the title to the property. They are said to have redistributed 35 million acres of land, and settled 400,000 families.

They are committed to ethical and sustainable use of the land, creating small scale co-operative or family farms, which grow natural food for domestic consumption. They have also set up thousands of schools and health clinics, as well as a university and a natural medicine factory.

They emphasise the importance of keeping the rural population out of the cities and preventing further large-scale migration to urban slums, which are often built precariously on any available space. The dangers of this were made apparent earlier this year, when nearly 1,000 people were killed in Rio de Janeiro by large mudslides that destroyed slums built on steep hills.

Organising for Rights

For the people involved, the importance of being in groups such as the MST cannot be underestimated. Through these sorts of organisations, people who would otherwise be working in slave-like conditions for industrial farms or living in the slums of the major cities are given opportunities for acquiring land, education and healthcare. These people gain rights and dignity that they would otherwise never have.

Grassroots movements such as the MST and activists such as Ribeiro are crucial to democratisation and reform in Brazilian society. Those who would otherwise be voiceless are empowered through direct action, which includes occupying land and buildings, blockading highways, and marching from city to city.

While the former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was often celebrated as a champion of social welfare, land reform remained one of his less progressive policies. While traditionally seen as an ally of those who sought land reform, Lula is now perceived by the MST to have taken sides with the large landowners and agribusinesses, by helping to considerably expand their practices throughout Brazil.

Between 2003 and 2007, state support for the rural elite was seven times higher than that offered to family farmers, even though the latter represented 87% of the work force and produced the bulk of domestic food consumption. A leader of the MST is reported to have said that their former friend, Lula, "has now become a friend of our enemies." His successor Dilma is also seen to have inherited this particular mantle.

Brazil's Tensions

While programs such as Bolsa Família and Fome Zero have helped to raise millions out of poverty and provide them with basic security, groups such as the MST argue that they do not



provide the structural reform that is necessary to combat the extreme inequality, exclusion, division and racism that is present in the old structures of Brazilian society. Brazil's economic successes have helped to turn it into one of the world's most powerful economies, but soaring GDP has not solved the country's social problems. Instead, the MST and others would argue that it has merely benefited a select elite.

This sort of activism marks the tensions within Brazilian society. Other examples of class conflict involve street gangs, drugs and violence. It is important that grassroots movements continue to push

for environmentally and socially sustainable use of the land, protecting the forests and providing dignity and security to the poorest and most marginalised Brazilians. ■

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Western Sahara Conflict

Stuck at Stalemate

Fiona Foulkes

The Western Sahara conflict affects the lives of many stateless Saharawi people

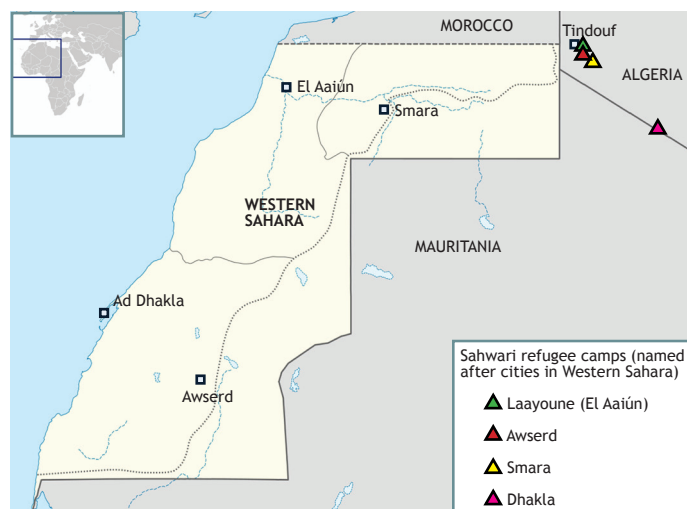
WHEN one thinks of a stalemate, the usual thought that springs to mind is playing a game of chess, when neither side can win and both will declare "Game Over" in order to finish. When one thinks of conflicts, and in particular the Western Sahara conflict, one is reminded a little of a game of chess: with the people acting as the pieces, the history being the moves made, and both Morocco and the Saharawi (indigenous people to the Western Sahara) refusing to cede a win to the other side.

Yet, there is a further twist to this game. Morocco does not recognise their opponent as the Saharawi. Rather, they believe their opponent to be Algeria, who recognisably backs the Saharawi people but makes no claim over the Western Sahara region. The Saharawi people largely live in refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, relying on food rations from international donors and living in severe conditions. There are no official estimates, but ▶



Evan Schneider via Flickr

No place like home ■ *The Saharawi do not have a recognised state*



- ▶ Algerian sources say there are as many as 170,000 Saharawi living in refugee camps.

Denying the Saharawi

The conflict began in the 1950s with the decolonisation of North Africa, which developed into a military affair after the Moroccan King called for “a peaceful liberation of the southern states” following the Spanish withdrawal. The liberation was named the “Green March” and took place in November 1975 – just a year after the International Court of Justice had confirmed Saharawi self-determination in an Advisory Opinion. Approximately 350,000 Moroccans moved into the area which is recognised as being the Western Sahara territory: 252,120 square kilometers bordered by Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Atlantic Ocean.

While Morocco entered the Western Sahara from the north, Mauritania also attempted to take control of the area from the south. However, Mauritania was unsuccessful and was ultimately forced to withdraw in 1979, having been defeated by the Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro (POLISARIO). POLISARIO is the recognised representative of the Saharawi people. The group is outlawed by Moroccan Authorities, who regard it as a rebel force. In fact, the characteristic Moroccan view is that the Saharawi do not exist, believing that Algeria is holding them in the camps against their will and that they are actually Moroccan citizens.

A Line in The Sand

Following Mauritania’s withdrawal, POLISARIO have retained control of the southern Western Sahara. This separation from the north was made permanent by the building of

a large sand wall, known as the “Berm”, in 1985. The Saharawi people refer to this area as the “Free Zone”, hidden behind the “Wall of Shame”, which is their name for the Berm. The 2,700km long wall is lined with thousands of densely packed land-mines on the POLISARIO controlled side, and is patrolled by Moroccan troops. The Saharawi say that it is not uncommon to walk through the camps and see people with limbs missing as a result of a mine explosion. This is a tragic reminder of the difficulties of living in the Western Sahara, the place that the Saharawi regard as their homeland.

The fighting continued between POLISARIO and Morocco for about 15 years, only ending when the United Nations pushed for a ceasefire in 1991. This was supposed to be followed by a referendum, as suggested by the International Court of Justice in their 1974 Advisory Opinion, which would allow for self-determination within the region. Yet, despite the United Nations’ attempts, a referendum has never occurred and a stalemate developed ten years later in 2001. The main problem the United Nations faced was identifying those who would be eligible to vote, as the Saharawi were formerly a nomadic people. Despite the United Nations identifying 86,425 eligible voters according to the 1974 Spanish Census, Morocco adamantly rejected the list. Having to deal with each of these cases individually meant that the length of time taken to work out the eligible voters became impractical.

Despite various attempts at negotiations, none has so far been successful. Many mediators involved with the situation in the Western Sahara have regrettably concluded that unless the

There are as many as 170,000 Saharawi living in refugee camps

situation changes, an agreement would not be reached. Perhaps the only way to resolve the stalemate is through compromise on all sides, but the Saharawi seem unlikely to compromise their own identity and homeland, while the Moroccans are reluctant to relinquish territorial control. The international community has provided humanitarian aid to the Saharawi. However, continued support seems uncertain as rations continue to be cut for the refugee camps located in the hostile desert environment. Nevertheless, the Saharawi carry on in their struggle for national identity, instilling the same perseverance within their children, who are likely to have lived in refugee camps their entire lives. They are spurred on by a sense of injustice, and this, it seems, is what maintains the Saharawi spirit. ■

Fiona Foulkes studies English Law with German at Hertford College.

Libyan Education

Lessons To Learn

Charlotte Locke

Gaddafi’s fall represents only the first stage for the reconstruction of Libya

MUAMMAR Gaddafi’s violent death on October 20th officially ended his 40 years of rule in Libya and propelled the country into an uncertain but hopeful time of change. One of the most immediately contentious issues in Libya is the role of religion in public education, serving as an indicator of Islam’s possible role in the new government. With a literacy rate of 87%, the highest in Northern Africa, Libya’s population is relatively well-educated. Indeed, since his 1969 coup, Gaddafi had instituted compulsory and free public education through high school.

Yet Gaddafi’s educational system was also hugely inconsistent and corrupt, as Dr. Feisel Krekshi discovered on his first day on the job as the new dean of Tripoli University. Aided by young students eager to return to school from the front lines of the rebellion, he discovered war prisoners, intelligence files on students, and a suspicious suite near Gaddafi’s favorite lecture hall containing a Jacuzzi, queen-size bed, and gynecological examining table. Krekshi is also determined to clean the corruption and ineffective teaching from the university, describing the faculty as “90% contaminated” by Gaddafi’s Revolutionary Committees, which previously ran higher education in Libya. Indeed, Krekshi has vowed that “people who called us rats”, those who expressed opposition to the rebel forces, “can’t stay with us.” Some pro-Gaddafi professors have already fled following student protests.

Such vehement attempts to settle old scores have reached beyond the quad to the playgrounds of Tripoli as tensions between Gaddafi loyalists and revolutionaries resonate in their children. Gaddafi’s regime had attempted to insure loyalty ▶

- through financial means, and many residents of impoverished neighbourhoods remained true to Gaddafi until given word of his death. According to Abdullah al-Ashtar, a local school official in Tripoli, Gaddafi's loyalists of all ages must keep resentment towards revolutionaries "in their hearts" in order for Libya's wounds to heal. It is a tall order for provoked students on the schoolyard, some of whom have refused to sing the new national anthem.

Expressing Faith

Unlike the ideological repression representative of Gaddafi's era – students at Tripoli University were hanged for dissident beliefs in the 1980s – current leaders, such as the secular temporary Prime Minister Mahmoud Jabil, have promoted ideals of religious tolerance and moderation. Mustafa Abdul Jalil, chairman of the Transitional National Council, has called for a "united and not divided" Libyan people, without "any extremist ideology, on the right or the left." Yet many individuals, including some able to show outward indications of faith in Islam for the first time in 40 years, have criticized Jabil's temporary government for being too secular. In a speech in September,

A literacy rate of 87%, Libya's population is relatively well-educated

Jalil attempted to deny these claims of secularism, explaining his position in "seeking to establish a state government by law and welfare – and Sharia, Islamic law, should be the main source of law."

As Libya moves forward into the first weeks and months of independence after Gaddafi's death, the debate over secularism in education will continue to serve as a harbinger of future issues

to be resolved in the new government. Mahmoud Shammam, spokesman for the Transitional National Council, has spoken of the government's respect for "the right of people to express their views peacefully" in "the new Libya", indicating an openness to discussion and a possible shift into a more tolerant model of Islamic government, striking a balance by offering more rights and opportunities to women and minorities while remaining under Sharia law. ■

Charlotte Locke studies Humanities at Calhoun College, Yale University. This article is reproduced with permission from the Yale Globalist.



Central perspective ■ *A view of the city centre of Tripoli, Libya's capital and largest city*

ALLEN & OVERY

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Science



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Shrinking forests ■ *The increasing loss of forests could have drastic effects on the global environment*

Conservation Biology

Redefining the Grassroots

Chris Rands

Conserving forests is vital for protecting terrestrial biological life, including humans

DURING the world's 4.5 billion year history there have been five occasions when the vast majority of life on the planet has been rapidly wiped out. These mass extinction events, the most famous of which included the disappearance of the dinosaurs, were probably caused by meteorite impacts, super-volcanoes, or other rare non-biological factors. It has been suggested that humans are currently in the process of causing a sixth mass extinction event. While such an apocalyptic statement seems quite sensationalist, the rate at which species are currently becoming extinct has been estimated at 100,000 times higher than normal. Approximately half the large mammal species have become extinct in the last 50,000 years, and amphibians are declining at an even faster rate. Conservation biology aims to stem this trend by preventing species extinctions, and maintaining a high abundance and distribution of biological diversity.

Biodiversity has many tangible benefits for humans, including providing vital products such as foods, fuels or medicines;

Humans are currently in the process of causing a sixth mass extinction event

maintaining natural processes to regulate the climate through carbon storage and sequestration; as well as less quantifiable benefits like aesthetic value of natural environments. Despite the fact that an economic valuation of biodiversity will by nature be a crude approximation and overlook some non-material benefits, it has been estimated that the financial

benefits of having biodiverse ecosystems are ten to 100 times greater than the costs of maintaining such biodiversity. Mainly due to the work of numerous conservation organisations, such as the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, appreciation of this enormous value of biodiversity has increased. This has led to internationally recognised conservation initiatives, including the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity, one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. In 2005 this helped ensure the incorporation of conservation targets into the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Year of the Forest

However, despite the multitude of conservation measures being taken, the world's biodiversity continues to decline. This year a positive step was taken to rectify this situation: the UN declared 2011 the "International Year of Forests". Forests are declining at a rate of approximately 200 square kilometres per day, and only 7.7% of forests are under sustainable management. This is extremely concerning: forests are key to the environmental stability of our planet due to the diversity of life they contain. Although forests now cover less than a third of the land's surface, they are by far the richest habitat for terrestrial species, containing over 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. Furthermore, forests produce over 40% of the world's oxygen, are inhabited by approximately 300 million people, and directly supply vital resources or services for around 1.6 billion people. In 2003, the total global value of forest trade products was estimated at US\$327 billion (£209 billion) – nearly 4% of all traded commodities.

This UN declaration endorsing forest conservation is in contrast to the traditional perception of conservation of the "charismatic vertebrates", such as tigers, pandas, or rhinos. Although conservation ventures may be promoted by flagship species that evoke particular interest and emotional responses in the public, conservation is most effective when implemented to maintain entire ecosystems, rather than focusing on a single species. For example, mountain gorillas are an emblem for conservation in Rwanda, but in reality ensuring the maintenance of gorilla populations requires extensive ecosystems to be protected, not just the gorillas themselves. Earlier this year, the Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative was set-up in Rwanda as part of a UN scheme. As a Rwandan minister accurately stated: "This is not just a gesture to placate conservation organisations trying to save the mountain gorilla. Rwanda has been forced to make this a national priority to end soil degradation and to safeguard our rivers and forests. Our population will double in the next 30 years, and survival depends on us maintaining and restoring our forests."

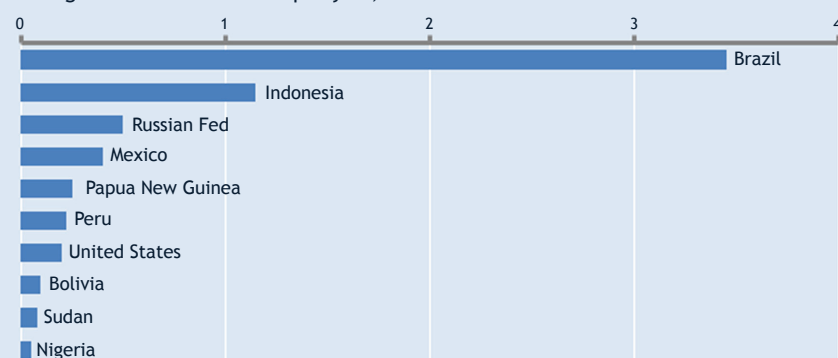
Keeping Trees Public

Preserving forests has also been a topical issue in the UK this year, with the coalition government reconsidering their proposal to sell 258,000 hectares of publicly owned forest. While government management of the forests through the Forestry Commission may be inefficient, this seems a price worth paying to avoid running the risk of private companies exploiting forests in search of short-term profits. Perhaps more importantly, the issue highlighted a strong public interest in conservation, with 84% of the British public opposing the proposal, according to a YouGov poll.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is an international UN initiative that illustrates the multiple benefits of forest conservation. REDD originally focused

Countries with highest deforestation of natural forests

Average millions of hectares per year, 2000-2005



Source: FAO 2005 Global Forest Resources Assessment

► on reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels, rather than conserving biodiversity in itself. However, REDD+ takes into account the added value that forests provide for livelihoods and biodiver-

sity. By providing financial incentives to promote forest preservation, REDD+ treats forests as a public commodity. This commodification of forests must be carefully regulated, with appropriate institu-

tions ensuring such a market delivers efficient and sustainable outcomes. Crucially, REDD+ operates above a national level, which is often necessary in order to be effective.

Conserving biodiversity is clearly imperative for the well-being of humankind. By focusing more on conserving forests, a critically important habit for terrestrial organisms, conservation is truly becoming a grassroots movement. However, this should increasingly turn the term "grassroots" on its head, transcending a local emphasis in favour of a broader international framework for conservation policy formation and implementation. ■

Chris Rands is studying for a D.Phil in Genomics at Hertford College.

Quantum Physics

A Conversation with Peter Grünberg

Mark Longhurst

The father of spintronics sheds some light on the future of material sciences and life as a Nobel Laureate

IN 2007, Peter Grünberg was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on Giant Magnetoresistance. This discovery, in 1988, paved the way for computer technology manufacturers to produce the first single-gigabyte hard-disk drive. In early 2011, Mark Longhurst spoke with him about his ongoing research. The interview below is an edited account of their conversation.

What made you interested in studying the Giant Magnetoresistance? Was it the practical implications or the physics problem that intrigued you?

I cannot say that I was particularly interested in the beginning. For me, it was the result of a development which started in a completely different way. If someone would have asked me, "What will you do in twenty years?", at that time I would have said, "I don't know." I find I'm very interested in light scattering from spin waves. I find spin waves very interesting. Then I started to work on these.

You have to isolate yourself from others in your work. Follow one goal. Follow one idea

Basically, I also tried always to have some continuity in my work. So, I started with light scattering, then I came into spin waves, then I changed the experimental method, but I never changed too much at the same time. So, in a way, simply

by going slowly from one project to the other, it guides you somewhere.

Your main goal as a physicist is to produce good publications, and to be as successful as possible when you go to conferences. You want to be able to tell your colleagues something that is exciting and interesting so they will also invite you to their laboratory to give another seminar there. So, the main goal is to have something interesting. And in this way I drifted from one topic to the other.

There have been a number of practical consequences and applications of your research. Which of the future applications excites you the most?

The spin current-induced switching in computers. Also, MRAM (Magnetoresistive Random Access Memory) in the context of energy saving. All together, it is incredible how accessible information has become and what we can do with information. For example, as somebody who has a slight tremor, I have more and more difficulty writing. Computers are helping. Computers give me a lot of assistance. I find science so interesting, and I would like to go on studying this in my life. I like it very much. But this is a really strong handicap for me to write something down. But if I had speech recognition, that would certainly help.

Professor, I know you are in retirement, but are you working on any projects at the moment?

Yes. I am. However, for many prac-



Ken Lee via Flickr

Quantum leap ■ Grünberg's discovery of Giant Magnetoresistance has important implications for data storage and retrieval

tical reasons, doing experiments is not feasible for me. I cannot go back to my lab because many people ask me to give a seminar somewhere, or give an opening speech or a dinner speech. Under these conditions, it is not possible for me to go again to the lab. It was most enjoyable for me to go to the lab and ask myself: "What have I learned today? Does this work?" You have to isolate yourself from others in your work. Follow one goal. Follow one idea. Not being disturbed too much. This is not possible in this situation.

So, I'm now working with computer models. I know some theoreticians who can help me with my research. I allow my theoreticians to guide my work. But I do a lot of computer work. I like that very much. I like computer programs and numerical studies where I can change the parameters. That gives me a better understanding of what is going on qualitatively. I can better understand things qualitatively by undertaking quantitative studies.

Finally, looking to the future, what do you think the main challenges will be for young physicists who want to work in the field of spintronics in the next twenty years? What challenges need to be overcome for the next generation of ►

► **devices?**

I can tell you that I believe that in physics and science there will be a tremendous amount of big, big problems. For example, in material science, indium is running out. There will no more in a few years. It's running out. We need lithium batteries. Lithium is a very important element for batteries. Lithium is one of the rare elements. Also, copper. Now, in Germany, probably many other countries probably, they collect copper. When you leave some device or apparatus

for the garbage people to collect them, they come with a pair of pliers, cut off the cord with the copper, and leave the rest.

The point is, in material, we need many new other elements to replace some elements which we use now to improve some qualities of some alloy. So, there is a huge amount of problems coming up for scientists and physicists in material science. ■

Mark Longhurst is studying for a M.Phil in Economics at Hertford College.

Psychology and Smoking**A Cancerous Irony**

Brian Earp

No-smoking signs may subconsciously spur smokers to light up more frequently

IN 1863, Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote, "Try to pose for yourself this task: not to think of a polar bear – and you will see that the cursed thing will come to mind every minute." According to a recent research paper from Oxford's Department of Experimental Psychology conducted by the author and his colleagues, Dostoevsky's observation on ironic thought processes has public health implications for no-smoking signs. This research suggests that smokers may be more likely to light up when they encounter the common image of a lit cigarette with a red line through it. Walking past one of these signs can remind smokers of their craving for cigarettes, whether they consciously notice the sign or not.

Objects, words, and symbols in our everyday environment can influence people's thoughts and behaviour, often outside of conscious awareness. Decades of research have shown that "subconscious priming" is a real and pervasive part of our daily experience. Rain outside a window, if not consciously noticed, can make humans feel that their gloomy mood must stem from dissatisfaction about life in general; the presence of a briefcase in the room can boost economic drive; holding a warm cup of coffee makes people likelier to trust a stranger; and scrubbing one's hands can wash away moral guilt.

Even when people consciously notice certain messages, if they're framed negatively, as with the "no" in "no smoking", the brain tends to subconsciously discount the negation. Freud noticed this back in 1925: "We never discover a 'No' in the unconscious."

A Smoking Gun

The new finding stems from an experiment conducted at Yale University in

2010 in which a group of smokers were randomly assigned to two groups. The first group viewed a stream of photographs depicting everyday scenes and locations (a sidewalk café, an airport lounge, a playground). A subset of these images included a no-smoking sign placed in an inconspicuous location in the image (above a door-frame, on a table). The second group (the control group) viewed the same images with the no-smoking signs digitally removed. Participants were asked to judge whether a professional or an amateur photographer had taken each photograph. This was designed as a distraction task to occupy participant's attention, so that the exposure to the no-smoking signs was truly passive and incidental.

Once the smokers had viewed the stream of photographs, they participated in a "joystick" craving task. In this task, the participants were showed a series of objects on a computer screen and told to "knock them off the screen" using the joystick as quickly as they could. The objects shown were everyday items (a pair of tennis shoes, a pencil, a can-opener) mixed with a few smoking-related objects (a lit cigarette).

Previous research suggests that when people move their hand toward an object in a certain way, the brain treats this movement as an avoidance gesture. In a joystick or lever paradigm, people are generally quicker to move the lever (and consequently their hand) toward objects they are motivated to avoid, as if pushing them away. Conversely, moving a lever towards the body is treated as a "pulling

toward" motion. Given these motivational orientations, when participants are instructed to move a lever in the "pushing away" direction, they are quicker to perform the motion when they are shown an image of something they wish to avoid, such as a snake, and slower to perform the motion when shown a desirable object, such as an ice-cream cone. If instructed to move the lever towards the body, this instinct is reversed. By instructing participants in the smoking study to move the lever first away then toward the body, split-second differences in response times could be recorded for each object, and a score generated that revealed the degree to which participants were motivated to approach or avoid each stimulus.

**"We never discover
a 'No' in the
unconscious."**

This method of experimentation allowed the experimenters to assess levels of craving without participants' knowing what was being measured. The finding? Incidental exposure to no-smoking signs dramatically increased the rate of cigarette-approach movements in smokers, all outside of participant awareness. This suggests that smokers who were exposed to images with no-smoking signs were more drawn toward the smoking-related images than smokers who had been exposed to images with the no-smoking signs removed.

Igniting Debate

Researchers must next evaluate how this subconscious effect manifests itself in the lives of smokers. While not every smoker who casually observes a no-smoking sign will be prompted to reach for a pack of cigarettes, a weak influence on behaviour can be enough to tip the balance when an individual is on the edge between one course of action and another. Experimenters should employ blunter, noisier, and more ecologically valid methods to tease out the real-life limits of the phenomenon.

This research, while just a first step towards evaluating the impact of no-smoking signs, should prompt public health advocates and policymakers to reconsider their signage strategy. With millions of smokers worldwide passing multiple no-smoking signs several times per day, even the smallest boost in craving could have compound consequences in the long term. Plastering a city with thousands of bright-red craving reminders is surely not the most effective way to curb public smoking. ■

Brian Earp studied for a MSc in Experimental Psychology at New College.



Signs of smoking ■ *Research raises new questions about the impact of no-smoking signs*

Culture



electrobrainpdx via Flickr

The verda stelo ■ *A green, five-pointed star on a white background is a symbol of mutual recognition among esperantists*

Esperanto

Lingvo Sen Espero?

Hannah Corinne Smith

Esperanto may dig its own grave between Edomite and Etruscan before it ever gets a chance to live

IN 1887, L. L. Zamenhof expounded a spectacular vision in *Unua Libro*. The Polish linguist, under the pseudonym Doktoro Esperanto (Doctor Hopeful), developed his *internacia lingvo* with lofty political aims – it would not have to be anyone's first language, but it should be everyone's second. Based largely on Slavic and Romance tongues, Esperanto is easy to master; furthermore, its inherent political neutrality should, wrote Zamenhof, foster peace and international understanding in an increasingly fractured political landscape.

Esperanto has enjoyed moderate success. The most comprehensive survey to date estimates two million speakers at "professional proficiency", though less canonical figures range from 10,000 to an optimistic 30 million. One figure suggests there are even 2,000 native speakers. These are usually individuals born to international households or children of particularly devoted Esperantists, like Hungarian-American businessman George Soros, son of a famed Esperanto writer.

Speakers of Zamenhof's brainchild are not limited to just enthusiastic linguists. In a programme piloted by the University of Manchester, four primary schools in Britain offer instruction in Esperanto in an attempt to improve future language acquisition. The system works: American, Australian, and European studies confirm that students of Esperanto learn a second foreign language – like French or German – with markedly greater success. The International Academy of Sciences in San Marino uses Esperanto as its language of instruction, thereby ensuring diverse international scholarship. Many adult speakers of the language begin their study with an aim to join the *Pasporta Servo*: a hospitality service wherein Esperan-

tists open their homes to other travelling speakers of the language, often for weeks at a time. The adherents of the *Pasporta Servo* argue that this service furthers Zamenhof's goal of international communication and support. Their members enjoy world travel without the fear or inconvenience of communication barriers.

Esperanto Rules

The key to Esperanto is its simplicity: Claude Piron, Esperanto author and UN translator, argued that Esperanto "differs from all other languages in that you can always trust your natural tendency to generalise patterns." Esperanto possesses no special cases, strange conjugations, or exceptions to its fundamental rules. Every noun ends in -o, and consistent modifications, -j and -n, denote noun plurals and the objective case. Speakers recognise adjectives by their -a ending; adverb formation uses an -e. For example, "bela" means beautiful while "bele" signifies its adverb, beautifully. Most speakers of Romance or Germanic languages could probably comprehend a substantial portion of a simple Esperanto paragraph with no prior Esperanto knowledge.

On the other hand, opponents of Esperanto criticise it as ugly. They argue that the simplicity that allows Esperanto to be easily learnt has also resulted in Esperanto's alleged lack of beauty; it is too communicative to be graceful. It has been suggested that Esperanto poetry feels a bit like a Monet landscape replicated in finger-paint – and with only three colours. Nevertheless, Esperanto poets exist. For instance, Scottish poet William Auld, who received three nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature for works written in Esperanto, found the language "especially suited to verse".

Feminist critics of the language testify to a more specific concern: its adherence to male-dominated power structures. Because Esperanto possesses no grammatical gender, male and female forms cannot be differentiated in usual ways. Masculine nouns such as "patro" for father, "viro" for man, and "princo" for prince, do not have equivalent female

counterparts. Critics attack this system as furthering the inherently flawed worldview that motherhood is a subset of fatherhood, womanliness a mere shadow of the stronger and more essential manliness. Reformist scholars have proposed updates to the structure of Esperanto, but none has achieved mainstream success.

Lost in Translation

Broadly, cultural quirks and linguistic idiosyncrasies supply each other. Every language has its own examples. When members of the Pirahã tribe in Brazil count, they name one, two, many; consequently, Pirahã can accurately reproduce counts of two or three items but not four or more. Northern Australian aboriginal languages tend not to use relative directional terms like left or right. Instead, they may ask someone to come and sit south-west of them. If asked to put a sequence of photos in sequential order, native speakers of these languages don't do it the English-speaking way, from left to right, or the Arabic-speaking way, from right to left. They place the pictures from east to west, no matter where they are or which direction they face. Understandably, it took perplexed English-speaking anthropologists many trials to resolve the apparent discrepancy.

The word for "key" is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish; when

Students of Esperanto learn a second foreign language with markedly greater success

asked in English, and therefore without grammatical gender, to describe general features of keys, Germans name them hard, heavy, and jagged. On the other hand, Spanish speakers emphasise the feminine qualities: intricate, lovely and tiny. The results were reversed for a word like bridge, which takes the feminine form in German and the masculine form in Spanish. Esperanto lacks these curious anecdotes: it is straightforwardly European. It sacrifices the nuances that can only come from hundreds of years of

- evolution for the sake of communicative simplicity.

Clearly, linguistic success proves difficult, if not impossible, to measure. A language's use, or lack thereof, could signify triumph or failure until one considers that Latin is dead while Simlish, the gibberish spoken by avatars from the computer game *The Sims*, arguably lives and evolves with each new release. Esperanto has the qualities for success: people use it to communicate with families, friends, and strangers; it boasts credible poetry and prose; and the Esperanto

Wikipedia has the 27th highest count of articles – more than Serbian, Bulgarian, or Hindi. On the 150th anniversary of Zamenhof's birth, one of Google's famous celebratory doodles featured an Esperanto flag, to the over-excited cheers of some and the understandable confusion of most. The language has gained legitimacy through its recognition by UNESCO in 1954.

If the historically-minded insist upon judging Esperanto by its creator's original goals – universality in communication and like-mindedness in understanding

– then they must denounce the language a failure due to its tiny percentage of speakers. This disheartening fact fails to stop thousands, if not millions, of disparate and devoted Esperantists from celebrating Zamenhof Day, attending the annual World Conference of Esperanto, or pestering friends and family with incessant linguistics chatter. Perhaps Zamenhof wouldn't be too disappointed in the fate of his creation after all. ■

Hannah Corinne Smith studied for an M.St in English literature at Regent's Park.

Chilean Music's Outreach

Notes of Success

William Barns-Graham

Chilean music has captivated the interest of listeners across the globe

CHILEAN musicians should consider moving to Europe or New York. Claudio Arrau – one of the most celebrated pianists of the 20th century – was born in Chile and received a ten year grant from the government to hone his skills before resettling in New York. A century later, little has changed. Chile's current crop of world-renown musicians are not to be found in Santiago, but instead they ply their trade throughout Europe and America.

Ricardo Villalobos is perhaps the most renowned Chilean artist. He moved from Santiago to Germany, aged 3, in order to escape the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. His music is influenced by European music, with Depeche Mode cited as an inspiration. Within Europe he has established himself as one of the top DJs in the world, placing sixth in *Mixmag's* "DJs of All Time" competition in January while topping *Resident Advisor's* "DJ of the Year Competition" in 2008 and 2010. Nonetheless, his minimal techno music does contain Chilean style: according to *Mixmag*, his mixes have "characteristic South American warmth" and his rhythms are often said to be influenced by his Latin American heritage.

At the same time as achieving international acclaim, Villalobos and his contemporaries have helped to build the electronic music scene back home. Their contributions have included setting up and promoting various music clubs and festivals around Chile. Since the mid-1990s Villalobos, Nicolet and Dandy Jack have inspired Chilean producers to create what is regarded as an engaging style of music that blends electronic music with Latin beats.

Electric Success

Alejandra Iglesias, known as "Dinky", has been influenced by European artists such as Depeche Mode, Prince and Aphex

Twin, before finding success in New York. She has gained popularity in the clubbing scene with her mix of differing musical styles, encompassing house, deep minimal techno, experimental, old school, funk and soul. Her albums "Black Cabaret" and "Maybe Later" furthermore contain a 1980s allure mixed with 1990s techno.

Nicolas Jaar is another Chilean producer who is gaining much acclaim in New York, and his style of music has already reached European audiences. In March he released his first album, "Space Is Only Noise", on the heels of the momentum garnered by successful releases over the last couple of years. Raised in Santiago, this comparative literature student incorporates elements of house, down-tempo and jazz to create what is considered to be mysterious, unsettling, engaging music. Jaar is creating great excitement amongst music journalists and seems set for an illustrious career.

The music of Felipe Venegas, another Chilean DJ who emerged from the 1990s wave, is also popular in Europe and New York. His "Espiritu" EP is most heavily influenced by his Latin American heritage, with its pan flutes and Aymara percussion feeding into his jazzy techno.

Rising Stars

While the electronic scene is where Chile has gained particular renown, it is not the only genre that it has excelled in. Chilean metal is not to be overlooked, with bands such as Mar de Grises and Asunto leading the way in South America. Fans of American tech metal bands like Cynic and Atheist can find much enjoyment in listening to Coprofago. Their albums, "Genesis" and "Unorthodox Creative Criteria", are deemed excellent productions. Meanwhile, Poema Arcanus have supported grindcore stars Napalm

Death and doom metalists Candlemass on tour.

Popular within Chile itself is a brand of the folk-inspired genre Nueva Cancion. This was prominent in the 1960s when Victor Jara was getting under the skin of the Chilean government with his politically assertive message. The contrast between the themes of his songs – love, peace and social justice – and the brutal way in which he was murdered transformed Jara into a symbol of struggle for human rights across Latin America. In modern Chile, the artist Gepe is a fine example of the direction that Chilean folk music is currently taking. He has been described as the new guru of Chilean folk for combining the sensibilities of 1960s and 1970s Chilean folk with a minimalist, electropop sound.

Los Prisioneros are often credited as being the first band to really overthrow the primacy of the Nueva Cancion of the 1960s, following the success of their 1980s brand of power rock. The lead singer, Jorge Gonzales, has become a pop icon for the country and continues to succeed with his new band Los Updates, which has played at clubs around the world. La Ley, who were influenced by Los Prisioneros, have won two Latin American Grammys as well as a worldwide Grammy for the album released of their performance on *MTV Unplugged* in 2001. The last two La Ley albums, "Uno" and "Libertad", have established the band as one of Latin America's leading musical artists.

Although Chile has produced various successful rock and metal bands, it is the electronic style that has attracted the largest international following. It is widely recognised as a contemporary sound which incorporates beautiful Latin rhythms. Following the successes of Villalobos, Jaar, Dinky and Venegas, Chile appears set to continue producing musicians with the ability and creativity to entertain listeners from around the world. ■

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Perspectives



Dreaming spires ■ *Despite its manicured lawns and golden walls, does Oxford really teach students how to think for themselves?*

Transatlantic Educational Differences

Across the Pond

Sahiba Gill

A visiting student reflects on the teaching styles in Oxford and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

IN October of last year, I walked down St. Giles, past Merton and Trinity and Blackwells and centenarian pubs, to the Radcliffe Camera, and sometimes I would walk just a little bit faster when the sun peeked out behind the clouds and the walls at Oxford began to glow yellow. Being at such a place is thrilling because it tells you that if you achieve a certain standard, you will catch that ever-floating-just-beyond-reach winged golden snitch: “success”. Trinity courtyard told me with its manicured lawns, its wrought iron gates, gilded crest, and high arch, that when I walked out of a tutorial victorious and through its path that I, a lowly American from quaker-simple Swarthmore, had made it.

I have come back to Swarthmore, a highly ranked liberal arts college just outside Philadelphia, and the gilt, pomp and circumstance are gone. The manicured lawns remain, and so I sat on one in a sturdy wooden Adirondack chair, the traditional purview of New England seaside homes, while contemplating where I had been and where I was now. When I was at Oxford, I studied PPE – primarily Kant and Post-Kantian philosophy, and

international relations. In response to the requirement of two essays a week, I had organised a neat mechanism of writing one of these papers: get reading. If philosophy, skip the primary reading (who can master *The Critique of Pure Reason* by reading Kant himself?) and deal with the *Routledge Guide*, *Cambridge Companion*, or *Kant Dictionary*. Read secondary literature furiously. Identify one argument that appears to have logical inconsistency, ambiguity, or flaw. Critique. Write essay. Go to tutorial. Look at essay – 70 – win! Go to dinner. Drink. Sleep. Repeat.

A Very Different Class

At Swarthmore, I am enrolled in the Honors program, which is based on the Oxford tutorial system, with four seminars and final exams at the end of the course. I do not get as much attention in class: while I still have class only two times a week (I am taking two Honors seminars) it is shared not with one other student, but with an average of eight. I do not write as much – students either write short, ungraded papers every week, and just a handful of students write longer papers.

Yet I don't much mind. Because of the fewer papers and larger groups, Swarthmore Honors seminars emphasise group discussion, free inquiry, and original thought over pedantic critiques. The good students know these critiques, but the Swarthmore professors who run Honors seminars would tell them that “that's not really the point”. Easy meaning, like easy money, doesn't come cheap. To say something both sound and original requires applying the text to real-world examples, making strides away from the text itself, and fighting with

Students are encouraged to leave their literature-crutch behind

fellow students across the seminar table, rather than writing a paper alone, hearing critiques, and simply returning to the Bodleian to smack one's head against the books for another few hours. Students are encouraged to leave their literature-crutch behind, and walk freely on the map of the text, forging their own paths along the way.

This, admittedly, has not been an easy transition. I leave my Adirondack chair and the well-manicured, sloping lawn to return to the library, stopping on the way to examine what is likely the most famous spot at Swarthmore. It is no Bodleian, but it was featured in an “Oprah Book Club” book, which among certain suburban, TV-watching circles is

just as good. In front of me is a plaque from 1921, grouted into the stone exterior of our central building. It reads, “Use thy freedom well” and is the source of the title of Jonathan Franzen’s American epic novel *Freedom*, first published when I arrived at Oxford last year. Franzen’s book captures the theme of the American tendency towards destructive excess, but seeing as I know the spot personally, I like to look at it sometimes and remind myself that we are all free to think as we will, to be brave enough not to be a mouthpiece

for the books of giants but to stand, as Newton did, on the shoulders of giants – or, at least, to try to. Despite the gilt and shapely lawns and glowing walls and cobbled stone of Oxford colleges, those who walk among them must find, as I did not, their own meanings anew.

Now, I am off to the library. ■

Sahiba Gil studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Trinity College.

Education in Singapore

An Elite Assistance Plan

Owen Tan

Are we preserving Chinese values, or preserving Chinese elitism?

ON the surface, it is easy to buy the argument of how a 1979 scheme called the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) has been beneficial to the education landscape in Singapore. One just has to read the official history books to know why. Lee Kuan Yew himself admired the “Chinese values” that were taught in certain Chinese schools and asked for them to be preserved, something a teacher of mine used to remind me of when I was in a SAP school myself. This wish eventually grew into the SAP scheme, which will soon welcome its eleventh selected school in Nan Chiau High School next year.

But a good question arises when one digs deeper into the issue: what exactly did he mean by “Chinese values”? Surely it is not only the Chinese who believe in the value of education? After all, a Teachers Training College (now the National Institute of Education, or NIE) publication in 1968 chronicling “150 Years of Education in Singapore” emphasised how all of Singapore’s races, not merely the Chinese, stressed the importance of education.

These SAP schools are no ordinary schools: today, almost every single one of the SAP secondary schools have either become independent or “autonomous”, which is a category of semi-independent schools that have more control over school administration. Any school that holds on to such a status enjoys an added prestige: indeed, independent and autonomous schools have seen an increase in the number of applicants since the introduction of these schemes in 1987 and 1994 respectively.

“Over the years the children in SAP schools have been given multiple advantages over those in Ordinary Schools”, Michael D. Barr, a historian on South-east Asian politics, wrote in an article to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in 2006. He says that these students have been given “special consideration” for

pre-university scholarships, among other things.

Independent Learning

Such non-government schools have traditionally been seen by the public as elitist: while Raffles Institution, which turned independent in 1988, used to charge less than SGD\$10 (£5) for annual school fees, it now charges SGD\$10 (£150) monthly, effectively pricing out the poorer segment of the local population. The handful of schools that were allowed to become independent, are also almost exclusively located within the notoriously affluent Bukit Timah locale – an area that has four independent schools alone.

Schools need to go through a stringent process of applications in order to

Segments of the population who do not learn Chinese have been frozen out of the top schools in the country

successfully become independent. In an interview, Wee Heng Tin, the former Director-General for Education, justified the strictness of the process, and stressed that these schools had a “need for fairly strong tradition in order to marshal community support...and strong alumni links. Not many schools in Singapore would be able to get that kind of assistance from the community.”

When Mr Lee – who had as Prime Minister allowed his government to experiment with introducing schemes bordering on eugenics, such as paying for low-income males to have vasectomies – was asked if the geographical locations of these schools were elitist, he answered that Singapore should be more concerned about providing maximum support for

the gifted rather than providing an egalitarian educational system. But the electorate, disgruntled by what was perceived to be a general rise in regressive policies, returned Mr Lee’s PAP into power in 1991 with four fewer seats in Parliament – the biggest setback for the party since the Barisan Sosialis last won 13 seats in 1963.

Grading Schools

Mr Lee’s successor, Goh Chok Tong, tried to cushion the damage of the electoral setback by setting a cap for independent schools, stating in 1992 that there were “not enough outstanding principals and teachers” to lead these institutions. He then introduced a new scheme where schools that had the required capabilities could become “autonomous”. These schools would have some leeway to introduce their own educational curricula while enjoying some government support, which effectively keeps their school fees low. This was to “cope with the excess demand of independent schools”, he said.

But autonomous schools have an important difference from independent schools: they did not have to undertake rigorous rounds of application that the independent schools had to go through. “We were told to wait for an official announcement by the Minister”, said a principal of an autonomous school in an interview with Associate Prof Jason Tan of NIE published in his 1996 dissertation. As of 2011, all SAP schools – except Nan Chiau – have been promoted to either independent or autonomous status.

Officially, the reasons for the choices of SAP schools as part of the inaugural batch of autonomous schools were its strong academic background and alumni support. But as Associate Professor Tan points out in a 1997 article, it is not clear to what extent these schools had a role in the success of the students (given that these students were already “smarter” than the rest of the average population when they applied to these schools). Also, the strength of the schools’ alumni organisations may be due to the fact that its alumni have found themselves in more “prominent and prosperous positions” in the first place, and were better able to attract a greater amount of support.

Chinese Values

SAP schools may only remain marginally Chinese – it no longer conducts classes in Mandarin, for instance – but they still strongly retain their “Chinese values” and require all students, regardless of race, to take Mandarin. If the introduction of independent schools widened the gap in education standards between the rich and poor, then the launch of autonomous schools (many of which are part of SAP) seems to suggest that segments of



Lesson time ■

In Singapore, there is a worrying trend towards elite-focused education

- ▶ the population who do not learn Chinese have been frozen out of at least the ten top schools in the country.

If this was meritocracy, then one must think that the Chinese are therefore considerably smarter than the rest of the population – but that conclusion is not only fallacious, it also goes absolutely against Singapore's stance on racial equality. The fact is, the playing field of education – the great “social leveler” – is not level. Indeed, SAP schools cater to the Chinese, who make up 76% of Singapore's total population, and I, along with my Chinese peers, have stood to gain tremendously – if unfairly – from it.

Independent schools, according to

Lee Kuan Yew, helped bring out the “more than ordinarily endowed” portion of the population – the elites who are deemed smarter and more capable. SAP schools, then, seem to encompass the sizeable proportion of the population who are not academically capable to make it to the elite, but are smart enough to form a second tier of elites to appease the majority-Chinese population. It is a well-crafted vision, but I doubt it has much to do with meritocracy. ■

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Shanghai Antiques Market

Just Browsing

Nicholas Lee

An antiques market in Shanghai is just one example of an increasingly mixed Chinese culture

FLASHLIGHTS on the corner of a Shanghai street. A few figures clustered around a tatty blanket covered in curios and jumbled “antiques”. People drifting in to examine the objects while the flashlights send shadows spinning out onto the empty road.

It is 4am on a Saturday morning. We are near the Yew Gardens, a market area redeveloped to mimic what China should look like to Westerners (think upturning eaves and dragon statues). Except, the tourist bazaar is closed at night and a separate market is taking shape on the dark streets outside.

We're waiting for a flight. Or rather, waiting for the subway to open so we can go to the airport and wait for a flight. The night has been long, and dull, but stumbling across this fair reminds us that in China nothing is to be taken for granted and every turn can throw up something completely unexpected.

At this time there are no crowds of internationals milling about, no mass produced parasols on offer, and no rickshaws clattering past looking for custom. Just the blanket, its curios, and the growing crowds.

In just 15 minutes, the entire street is lined with similar groups. Local dealers arrive on scooters or push-bikes laden with suitcases full of whatever they think will sell. There is a continuous rustle of newspaper as the sellers unload their wares and line the narrow street with their blankets. An incredible array of objects is assembled and a bustling antiques trade begins.

So, at 4am the narrow street funnels antiques enthusiasts, most armed with notebooks or shopping lists, down a gauntlet of blankets. Inkpots and vases change hands to the tune of cheerful haggling, while the torch beams reel from chopstick holders to statuettes of Mao.

Tea sets abound. But it is not just the usual junk available here. The interested buyer could pick up anything from moth-eaten calligraphy to a rusted iron radio, enthusiastically touted by its owner as “Communist made! Communist made!”

Not only is there a fascinating range of objects, but also a vast range in quality. Many pieces are in bad condition, such as the dilapidated alarm clocks which can be seen at most blankets – but rarely heard. It is certainly not antiques dealing with the reverence shown to such curios in Europe, but a chaotic Chinese take on a new found market.

Mao figurines in ceramic and bronze, along with stacks of that famous Little Red Book, testify to a legacy of political fervour. In the midst of such an atmosphere, semi-legal at best given China's strict legislation regarding antique sales, we are confronted with two sides of China. One is the recent communist past, and the other is the country's current free market explosion.

This night market is evidence of small trade on a large scale, taking place at whatever time is convenient for buyers and sellers to meet without disrupting Shanghai's more lucrative tourist industry. It is an economy in which the Maoist heritage is just another commodity.

The whole scene (the whole surreal scene given that this is when most of the city is, for once, asleep) makes for an interesting comparison with a Chinese antiques store I browsed in Charlottesville, Virginia. In that store, the furniture was lovingly restored and the silk paintings carefully hung to appeal to Western eyes.

There was a real sense of pride in the Virginian shop. A sense of presenting a quintessence of Chinese art to an American audience and wanting them to be impressed. Very different here in Shanghai. One blanket is flanked by a fractured shell of a wardrobe, the doors and decorative panels torn off and lying on the pavement to be sold separately.

In Charlottesville, they would have been restored and sold as something to treasure. As something more than a commodity, and as a flavour of China.

Perhaps it is a characteristic of most emigrant communities to want to present the very best face of their cultural heritage to their new home. The heightened awareness of what defines your culture that comes from being immersed in another can be an incentive to preserve the past more reverently.

Many residents of Chinatowns around the world even see themselves as the standard-bearers for Chinese culture, believing that back home the traditional values are disintegrating under modernity and government influence.

One symptom of decline that these emigrant communities cite is the prolifer-

- eration of Western fashion in China. Not only is this changing the Chinese citizen's appearance, but also the city itself. Shanghai plans to build a series of satellite towns, each modelled on a foreign nation. Britain's is "Thames Town."

An article in the *Washington Post* in 2007 entitled "West Rises in China's Backyard" describes this cultural cocktail: "The ding-dong from the neo-Gothic church next door signals to Wu Yuqing that it's time to wake up. On her way to the grocery store each day, she walks past the Cob Gate Fish & Chips shop and bronze statues of Winston Churchill, Florence Nightingale and William Shakespeare." Finding something to relate to in her surroundings must be difficult for Wu Yuqing.

Disintegration would, of course, be too strong a term – no culture is so monolithic that it does not experience flux – but China is changing particularly quickly and in many different directions. In Shanghai, at the same time old propaganda posters are sold to tourists, wealthy Shanghaiese settle down in their own little Kensington.

On an abstract level, public intellectuals in the People's Republic of China have been very concerned over the last few decades as to how China's present relates to its past. A brand of "New Confucianism" has gained momentum as a way



Figures from the past ■ *Figurines that have survived the Cultural Revolution at a market stall in Shanghai*

of reconnecting modern China to its rich heritage, something that would have been unthinkable during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the most vocal in this new school, Tu Wei-ming from Harvard University, has even been invited to speak at Peking University, a sign of the People's Republic of China's gradual relaxation of cultural restrictions – though Ai Wei Wei would suggest there is still some way to go.

The title of Tu Wei-ming's paper, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center", neatly summarises the sense of

cultural dispersal felt by many Chinese citizens and Chinese emigrants.

Yu Dan, a professor at Beijing Normal University, has called for China's intellectual legacy to be incorporated into the present. She suggests that Confucius's *Analects* offer directions on how to live a good life in the modern world. As a self-proclaimed hedonist, her argument has a certain appeal for a generation searching both for the latest fashion accessory and a link to their past. ■

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