

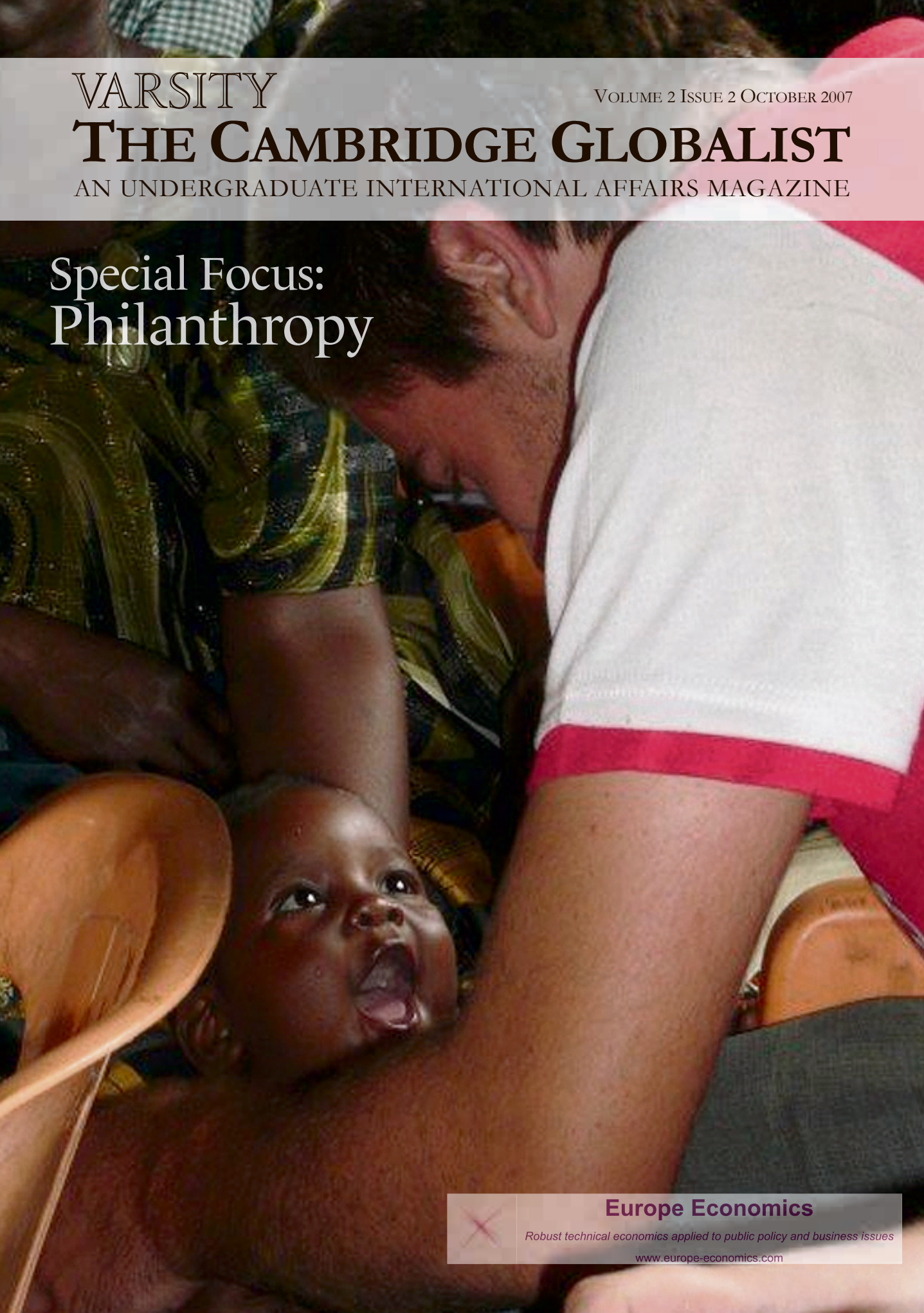
VARSIY

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 OCTOBER 2007

# THE CAMBRIDGE GLOBALIST

AN UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MAGAZINE

Special Focus:  
Philanthropy

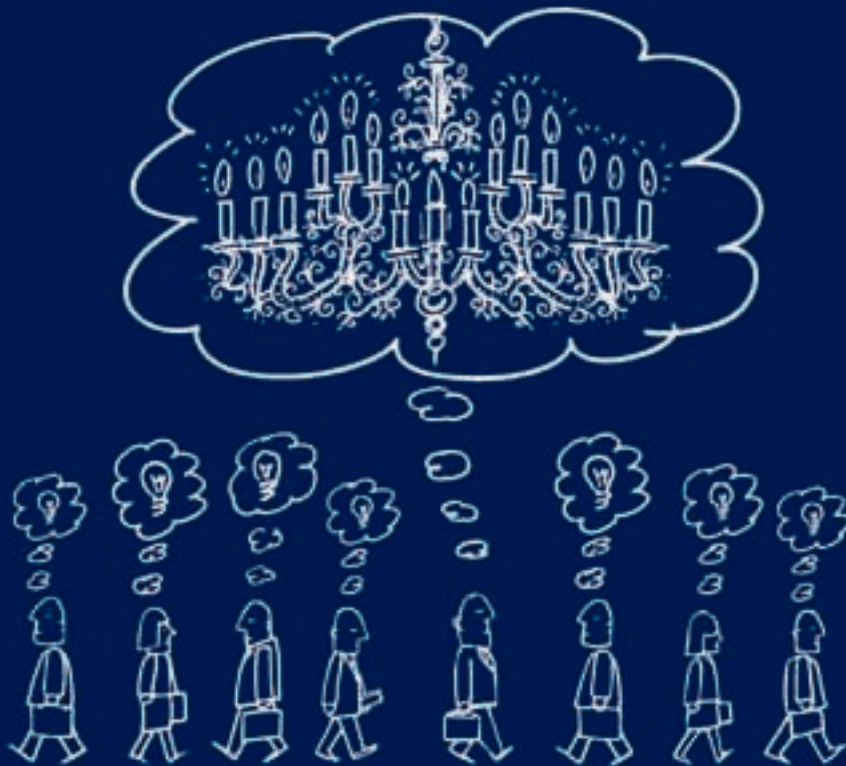


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## VARSIITY

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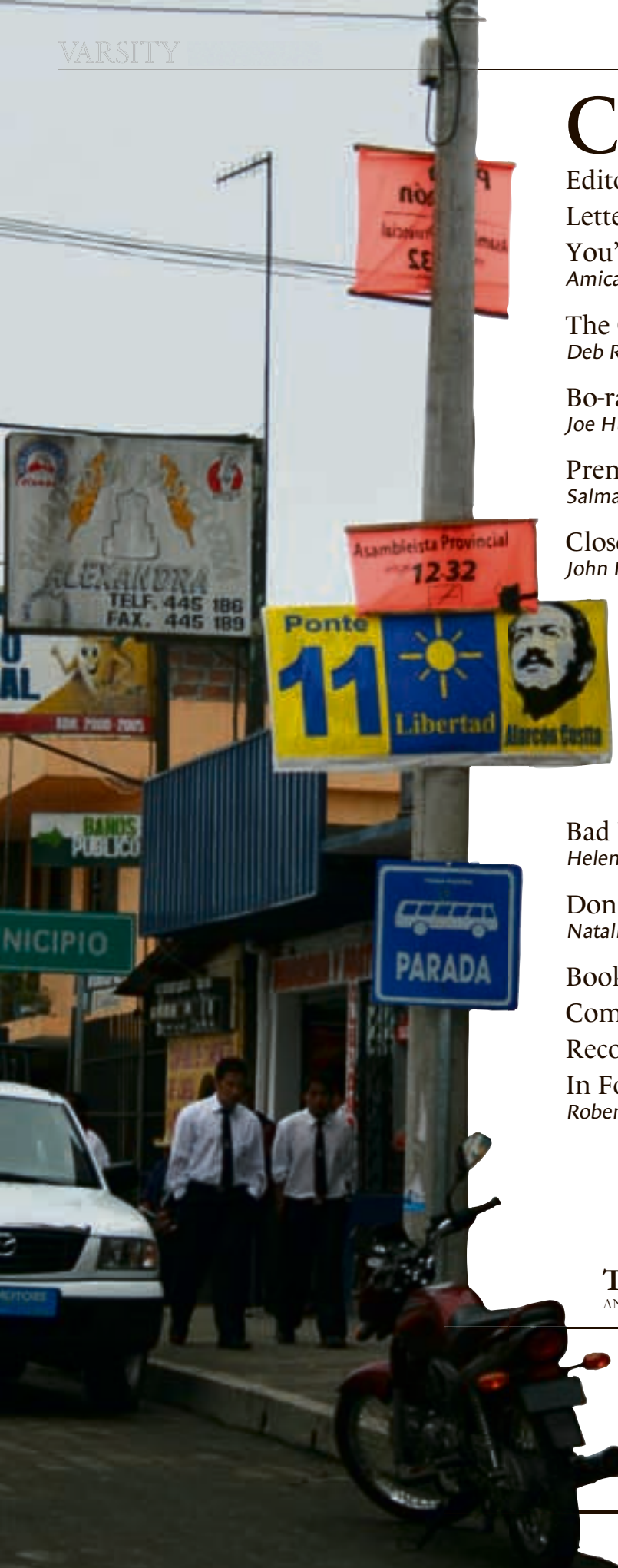


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## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

I was pondering about what we should put on the front cover as the 'theme' of this issue and, on the way to choosing Philanthropy, I thought maybe More, More, More might be a viable option; in this issue of the Globalist, we have managed to build even more on what we achieved last time which, if you remember, was quite a radical turnaround. We are now a subsidiary of that much-respected and lauded publication, Varsity, which means our print run is now 11,000.

I am especially pleased that the FT and Associated Press have recognised the potential of the Globalist, and are supporting a true journalistic cause, by agreeing to place advertisements in the magazine. It is a real endorsement that national papers are backing us all the way.

The layout is much smarter and neater now, and there is some wonderful graphic play to be witnessed as you leaf through the pages...

Perhaps the greatest advancement is in the standard and variety of articles we are printing now. Some of the University's most critical and concise writers have contributed this time round, and we've got some excellent book and record reviews. Don't miss that competition, which is supported, very kindly, by Penguin Books.

Look out for some constructive criticism on the Letters page, and also our own ads, which are there to appeal to any talented and innovative journos who might want to take over from the current Editorial team when we relinquish our positions after the next issue.

So now sit down with a cup of tea and let yourself fizz with inspiration...

Best wishes,  
Guy Kiddey  
Editor

## THE CAMBRIDGE GLOBALIST

is part of Global21, formerly known as The Globalist Foundation. Global21 is a network of student-run international-affairs magazines.

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## LETTERS

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your lively revamp of the Globalist. I hope Matthew d'Ancona's lazy pronouncements on the future of Europe are not allowed to go unchallenged. It is a particular British fallacy that the EU can work to shape our response to globalisation without itself being made stronger. Policy reform is all very well - we do it all the time in the European Parliament - but makes no sense unless it is connected to a reform of instruments, competences, powers and procedures.

That is why the constitution is coming back under the German and Portuguese presidencies of the EU, and why many of us are using the opportunity offered by the treaty's rejection in France, Holland and the UK to improve it substantively in a number of ways.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Duff MEP

Leader, UK Liberal Democrat European Parliamentary Part Spokesman on constitutional affairs for the Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your May edition. It well illustrated that 80s injunction to think globally and act locally. Whilst the range and diversity of the articles was a source of strength, some of your readers may welcome a more explicitly thematic approach to future issues, albeit on an occasional basis.

Do maintain the photo reports. They are a terrific innovation and read the places that print doesn't. And I think you are absolutely right, editorially, to emphasise the connections between political and economic movements, and social relations and culture generally. More power to your elbow.

Yours,

Dr Len Masterman

Honorary Research Fellow University of Liverpool

Dear Editor,

Many congratulations on the new Cambridge Globalist. It warmed our global hearts here in Norway (or I am being a trifle 'environmentally incorrect?') Nice size, good layout, varied articles... but no crossword. Of course, it would have to be a nice simple one for me: mortar.....? bored/board? The groves of..... acne? academe? "I don't make jokes - I just watch the professors/government and report the facts!" (Will Rogers) We wish you well with your relaunched magazine. May it prosper and be well received.

Sustainable regards,

Dr Paul Hosker

Norwegian Pollution Control Authority

### EDITOR

Guy Kiddey  
glsk2@cam.ac.uk

### DESIGNER

Amica Dall  
amica.dall@googlemail.com

### SUB EDITOR

John Russell  
jpar2@cam.ac.uk

### ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Jeremy Hor  
zjh23@cam.ac.uk

### SUB EDITOR

Rhiannon Williams  
rmw48@cam.ac.uk

### BUSINESS MANAGER

Xing Wei Niam  
xwn20@cam.ac.uk

### SUB EDITOR

Katherine Underwood  
kmg2@cam.ac.uk

### VARSITY BUSINESS MANAGER

Michael Derringer  
business@varsity.co.uk

# You'd Probably be Better Off Backpacking, says V.S.O.

Another year, another V.S.O. report. But will this one make any difference? *Amica Dall*

Nobody expected the deluge of young gap-year and student volunteers descending upon the third world armed with only with malaria tablets, hiking boots, and colouring pens to receive a collective Nobel peace prize. And few people outside the international development sector expected the thorough and decisive condemnation issued by the international aid charity, Voluntary Service Overseas this August- except those who had read the press-release they issued last year.

The practice of using agencies to facilitate participation in international volunteer projects as part of a gap-year or long vacation is generally accepted, even by the mildly sceptical, as 'character building' and eye-opening for the volunteers. At worst, it is thought to be harmless, even where the efforts of the volunteers fail to contribute in any effective or sustainable way to the development or protection of the communities and environments they profess to be helping. A fairly radical challenge to this attitude is presented by the way in which V.S.O. is attempting to direct attention to the possible negative effects that some, often very expensive, volunteer projects can have on host communities, environments and volunteers alike. V.S.O. released their latest statement on the 14th of August, in the week before the publication of A-level results.

Last year's warning that 'voluntourism' was in danger of becoming "the new colonialism" failed to make any measurable impact on either the number of 'voluntourists' or the kind of projects offered. This time

round, V.S.O. opted for a simplified message, shifting the emphasis from the wider ethical and long-term problems caused by sending inexperienced, largely unskilled volunteers to developing nations, and instead focussing on the more direct effects on individual travellers.

Not only was their pared down argument framed in terms that were easier to relate to, it was phrased in an altogether more headline-grabbing style. They advised students planning to spend time abroad to "ditch (un)worthy causes," warning "it may be better to travel rather than take up spurious voluntary work in developing countries." They certainly succeeded in provoking a reaction- the next morning the statement was reported and commented on by everyone from the BBC's Today programme and The Sunday Times to internet forums run by youth organisations. The report was not only noted by journalists; this year, like last year, a rally of voices was raised by aid and development professionals in support of V.S.O. The question is whether the more digestible, sensational message delivered by this year's statement will have a more lasting impact than the last.

As yet, nobody has been able to detect any signs that the U.K. is willing to be divested of the gap-illusion. As a nation, particularly the aspirational, better-funded part, we are committed to the practice; it has become, as V.S.O head Judith Brodie points out, "almost a right of passage." We invest a huge amount of money too - the Mintel estimates published in the press release suggest the average gapper spends £4,800. With up to 200,000 volunteers travelling, this amounts to 10% of the U.K.'s outbound travel expenditure.

Given this investment alone, it is no wonder the medicine has proved hard to swallow. A general reaction of confusion and annoyance was recorded and compounded by the British media, who tended to report the comments as somewhat over-zealous, hypocritical and unfair. A wide-spread reaction, certainly, but probably not the one V.S.O were

looking for. Perhaps the shift in focus of this year's report on to the individual volunteers is more than partly to blame. One of the greatest obstacles to a change of attitude is that it does not follow that a young volunteer, exposed to poverty or a complex environmental problem for the first time, unfamiliar with the local culture and most probably not fluent in the native language, will be able to judge the validity of a project, even after six months in residence.

What has angered many industry

**It may be better to travel rather than take up spurious voluntary work in developing countries.**

insiders, sympathetic to the intentions of V.S.O, is that the media reaction to the statement included a call for ex-volunteers to defend their work, rather than seek comment from aid and development professionals. Did 19 year-old Dom from London think his £3000, six months' hard work and heartache was wasted? Unsurprisingly, probably not.

The difficulty of judging the worth of a project is complicated by the fact that the distinction between a good project and a bad one is not black and white. There are a huge number of projects that bring limited but nevertheless important support to a community, whilst indulging in a sufferable level of exploitation. Even the most profit-minded, unethically run volunteer projects sometimes bring some form of localised benefit to their hosts, albeit a less sustainable and effective one than would be made by responsible and careful management. But a localised benefit brought to the



hosts does not equate to a positive effect on the wider community, society or, indeed, nation as a whole.

I try out a list of questions on one US-based international volunteer company. Unfortunately for their sales person, I already know a great deal about the group of projects on which I am questioning them. The company's website, which can be found on the first page of a google-search for "volunteer abroad", is populated with pictures of grinning

## As yet, there haven't been any real signs that the U.K. is willing to be divested of the gap-illusion

orang-utan orphans, groups of teenagers up volcanoes and classrooms full of enthusiastic, malnourished children with their hands in the air. The introductions promise of air-port pick up, cultural immersion and free language lessons. A close read of the small-print blurb underneath the project descriptions satisfactorily covers over half of the V.S.O. check-list.

I e-mail the company with a list of questions, in response to which I receive a stream of very reassuring and eloquent answers. I turn for extra help to The Observer's gap-year check list, which was published on the 19th of August in response to the release of V.S.O.'s statement. I move on to a telephone investigation (toll-free), posing as a potential volunteer fresh out of college. Having made little progress, I drop my guard and asked some fairly aggressive, direct questions. I learn that money that is not spent on insurance or "basic" administrative costs goes directly to the local organisation running the project, and covers all the project costs. I am e-mailed a complicated pie-chart. I also learn that my individual skills and trip aims will be discussed upon arrival and I will plan, in conjunction with the local operators how I can best spend my time and utilise my expertise, energy and desire to help. I am all but disarmed.

The only reason I am not is that I know, and the man I am talking to on phone does not know that I

know, that the group of projects are unethically run, badly organised and profit-orientated, managed independently of communities and without consideration of their long-term development needs. In the worst cases, their actions amount to ruthless exploitation of desperate people, and at best, their effect is indifferent, due to disorganisation, incontinuity and entirely ineffective in-country support. Of the \$30 dollars he is proposing I "donate" to his company per day, only \$13 will make it to the local operator, based in the capital city, who will deal with airport transfer, provide the alleged 24hr support and own the wooden hut I am to sleep in.

Of that \$13, only \$2 will reach the family who would be feeding, guiding, training, entertaining and otherwise supporting me, and precisely none of it will filter further into the community. I have been promised fishing, horse-back riding, time in an arts and craft work-shop and hiking. The community providing these "services" does so partly through benevolence, partly through curiosity, and partly on the understanding that they will be able to try and sell arts and crafts to me.

Due to the extraordinary endeavour, enthusiasm and resourcefulness of the communities, many volunteers come and go, aware that they are not quite earning their keep in terms of work, but unaware of the scale to which the local people are being exploited. I have come across other such cases in one community, volunteers staying in an organisation-owned house were paying \$30 US a day, and laying a water pipe line. The money covered the cost of food and a local cook and cleaner. Although the community was desperately in need of a water pipe, the combined \$210 dollars a day could have paid for materials of twice the quality, the wages of seven local men desperately in need of employment, and the living costs of the all volunteers in existing local accommodation with money left to spare.

I spoke to a family of artisans working in the community which acts as uneasy host to one of the projects. "It is true that most of the community here feel that we are being used by ----, and when we try to discuss our grievance with the staff, we only receive anger. However, me and my family need someone to sell our crafts to, and if the foreigners stop coming, then no one will be here to buy from us. They don't pay us a fair price,

but all the same, I'm glad to have a market. Even a small one." The last thing this family needs is for their modest stream of customers to dry up entirely. Communities hosting projects, particularly those straddling the border between good and bad impact, regularly put up with low level exploitation, rather than lose the precious little help brought to them by volunteers.

V.S.O is very aware of these problems, and besides developing their own youth volunteer programme, Global Xchange, they are working in conjunction with a number of other agencies, such as The Year Out Group to make it easier for the determined volunteer to make the right choices. The Year Out Group aims to act as a kind of self-regulation to the volunteer industry, asking development and aid professionals to comment on the projects run by its members.

Perhaps it needs re-stating that V.S.O were clear and definite in asserting that young volunteers could, and sometimes do, have a long term positive impact on the communities and environments with which they work. The advice of the report for the would-be volunteer was as clear as its criticism, that it is the responsibility of each individual to find out about the organisation with whom they plan to travel, the project and the exact role they would play as

## Did 19 year-old Dom from London think his £3000, six months' hard work & heart-ache was wasted?

a volunteer. The task facing such a person is a long and an arduous one. Even though their press release is proving unlikely to be the beginning of a cultural shift, V.S.O are determined to help, and the message from all sides remains clear; a few weeks of good research is probably more worth your while than ten wasted gap-trips.

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# The Great International Mess

*Deb Roy* considers where priorities should lie

The idea that a sovereign state has the sole authority to decide all affairs within its borders has led to many humanitarian catastrophes in the past, Darfur being an exemplary example. The Sudanese Government's policy of supporting militant attacks on civilians, efforts at effacing Christian Africans, non co-operation with the larger international community, and lust for commercial profit, has resulted in more than 400,000 deaths and over 2.5 million internally displaced people (hereafter IDPs) within Darfur.

What differentiates a refugee from an IDP is an international border, the crossing of which brings a refugee under the protection of international law. An IDP, on the other hand, is dependent on the country of origin for protection; the international community including foreign governments, UN and other

international NGOs cannot lawfully intervene. Article 2(7) of the UN Charter states "Nothing should

## The integrity of the Treaty has been afforded greater importance

authorise intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." Even though the Genocide Convention of 1948 made an exception to the rule in cases of extreme crimes against humanity, not much has changed

since. The case of Darfur has proved, yet again, that the integrity of the Treaty has been afforded greater importance than the underlying humanitarian crisis.

The Sudanese situation has been widely written about and discussed. The Khartoum government's agenda of wide scale 'Islamisation' with the eradication of African Christians, supporting and sponsoring the militia group Janjaweed to carry out its agenda, and its interest to prosper from oil trade has led to an unprecedented genocide, violence, rape, uprooting and burning of villages. Government measures prevent non Arabs from exercising their right to be represented in local, state and national government bodies; furthermore, they also help maintain a labour pool of impoverished persons willing to work for meagre wages or be recruited into national armed







forces. In most cases, the forced relocation of the IDPs is made to 'peace villages' close to the borders of Sudan, which keeps the civilians under a constant threat of further violence.

Responding to the government induced violence is the rebel group Sudan Peace Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), which has, in the past, found support in the neighbouring countries of Uganda and Kenya as well. The 1951 UN Convention on the Rights of Refugees was the first step towards refugee protection that set out categories to help determination of status.

However, the ambiguity of terms such as 'persecution', 'member of a particular social group' and 'political opinion' have led to flagrant subjective interpretation and abuse. The provision for protection of the rights of refugees is also enshrined in the African Commission (Article 2, 12.3, 12.4) where no one fearing persecution should be arbitrarily expelled from another state or face discrimination on the basis of a number of protocols, including race, sex and ethnicity.

As Sudan plays its game of 'safeguarding its sovereignty' by keeping international peacekeeping forces, NGOs and media out of its borders, the international players benefiting from the internal politics of Sudan also help the country maintain its

status quo by applying their power in bodies like the UN. China and Russia, for example, are allies of the Khartoum Government and exercise their veto power in the Security Council often to prevent resolutions to be passed against the Sudanese Government's policies.

### **...flagrant subjective interpretation and abuse...**

With the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002, there was a formal shift from the policy of non-interference between African states to that of non indifference in circumstances of war crimes or genocide. This led to the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in 2004 which signed an agreement to establish a Ceasefire Commission, with the deployment of AU observers to Darfur. However, AMIS had less than 7000 troops and was poorly equipped for the mission and predictably failed to do much.

The mission's suggestion that the Janjaweed be forcibly disarmed was also ignored. Another problem faced by AU was that the ruling National Congress in Khartoum had the de facto power of a veto over all missions that had to enter Darfur, which immediately dismantled the AU's efforts.

Further developments were made in the form of the Darfur Peace Agreement in Abuja, Nigeria, in early 2006 as a result of the seventh round of the AU's series of negotiations between the Sudanese government and the rebel groups. However, just as every small conflict resolution step is met in the region with inevitable roadblocks, so was the agreement signed by just one section of the SLA, while the other part went on to form a new rebel group to escalate further violence.

Even as the AU was seen as a body with potential to perform better than the UN because of its regional character, it lacked the resources to do so. Thus, in August 2006, the UN approved the idea endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council of the transition of AMIS to a bigger peacekeeping force, to be deployed to Darfur. Also, the year saw the Security Council threatening financial and military sanctions, and the referral of major suspects of war crimes to the International Criminal Court

(ICC). However, most international governments refused to send their

## Who then is to take the responsibility?

troops for the peacekeeping forces without the Khartoum government's permission.

Most nations in East Africa and

the Horn are busy dealing with their own populations of IDPs and refugees from neighbouring countries. The problem of civil war is common to many. Also, most nations are bound to each other by political alliances which might be harmed if they attempt to intervene in another nation's internal matters.

Who then is to take the responsibility or the blame? What solution can be hoped for? Endless suggestions have been made by researchers, academics, UNHCR reports, and it would be a familiar repetition if the list were reproduced here. The most recent development at the time of going to press is the Resolu-

tion 1769 wherein the UN Security Council voted unanimously to authorise and mandate the establishment of an AU/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur, to be called UNAMID. There are refugee and IDP concerns the world over, and the global community is becoming immune to fresh bouts of violence, civil wars, further cases of displacement, or mass refugee movements. It is this very global complacency that is responsible for crises like Darfur, and it has never been more incumbent on the international community to strengthen its stand, make its presence and pressure felt, and bring such crises to an end.





# Bo-ra-n-ti-a

*Joe Hunter* recounts his gap-year struggles, muddles and troubles.

When I made the decision once and for all that I would take a gap year and travel after my A-levels, I was immediately filled with a sense of foreboding. Not because I was afraid of being murdered and dumped in a bush in some far-flung part of the world, but because I realised that a very tedious process lay ahead of me: 'shopping around'. I knew I didn't really have the money to spend all my time travelling, and that organising such a trip would be a major headache. I decided that I needed to arrange my gap year exploits through a specialist organisation. But which one?

Thousands of them flood the internet. My parents are V.S.O veterans and assured me of the calibre of that organisation, but I had no particular skills or experience to offer and anyhow V.S.O generally cater for longer-term placements. All I really knew was that I wanted to avoid Camp America – as much as I like the idea of living and then travelling in the USA for much less than it would otherwise cost, the prospect of spending months looking after over-privileged American kids was

cost of six months on a volunteer placement in Japan was advertised as just under £1000, including flights. Other costs came later once I was actually there, but this wasn't much of a consideration at the time.

I made a snap decision: rather than drive myself to distraction trying to sift through the multitude of companies claiming to be the best, most established, and most reliable, I would simply plump for the one that had printed the pamphlet in front of me. It seemed to be as good as any, if not better, and weren't all these organisations more or less the same anyway? The forms were filled out and dispatched, and I soon found myself attending an interview intended to assess me and thus decide what type of placement to assign me to.

The questions asked were very non-specific and not searching in any way; it seemed almost as if I was just there to have a chat with the two very friendly women who 'interviewed' me. At the time I assumed that their aim was to get an impression of the interviewee's character, in an attempt to ascertain

'caring' placement at Nishio Roken Healthcare Corporation in Nishio City. I would be leaving in just over two months, which gave me some time to earn money for my travels. At no point before I flew to Japan was I given any real information about the job I would be doing: i.e. what my specific duties would be, what kind of hours I would work and so on. That I did not pursue this and find out for myself was, I admit, a mistake, but I do feel that at least a share of the responsibility lay with the organisation sending me to the placement.

Very soon after I arrived in Nishio and started work I realised that I, or perhaps somebody else, had made an error somewhere down the line. I was expected to work long hours, six days a week, and was informed that I would be entitled to no holiday during my time there. This by itself would not have been a major issue: anybody can put up with a bit of hard work if they put their mind to it. It was compounded however by other problems. This 'caring' placement involved looking after the patients of a retirement home and day care centre for very old people in varying stages of senile dementia and with various physical disabilities.

My duties included undressing and dressing them, feeding them, and some other small tasks such as cleaning floors and emptying bins. I was completely unprepared for the reality of the work, and I realised quite quickly that most of the placements available in Japan were really intended for people who aspired to make a career in medicine or social care in the future, and wanted to gain some experience during their gap year. Many of the other volunteers were in this exact situation.

The biggest issue however was the language barrier. I was completely unable to communicate properly with the patients or the staff, something that proved to be a major handicap considering that a large part of my job was to entertain the patients and keep them occupied. Almost none of the volunteers who arrived in Japan at the same time as me spoke any Japanese: we had been assured that it would not be a significant problem, and as far as I know a working knowledge of the language was not stated as a requirement for any of the projects. I

**Not because I was afraid of being murdered and dumped in a bush in some far-flung part of the world, but because I realised that a very tedious process lay ahead of me: 'shopping around.'**

more than I could stomach. However, after a trip to a careers fair at college, my dilemma, or so I thought, was solved.

I acquired a promotional pamphlet from a certain gap year organisation which shall remain nameless. It was glossy and attractive, and succeeded quite quickly in persuading me that I need look no further. This is a charity organisation that runs volunteer placements all around the world, and it was the page on Japan that caught my eye most of all. This was my chance to visit a country that had long fascinated me – to live there in fact – and for a very attractive price. The

how well they might adapt to fulfil a particular role. With hindsight I think alarm bells should already have been ringing. The truth was that the two women I spoke to, who had almost complete control over where in Japan I went and what job I was given, were actually very detached from what actually goes on in these placements, and made an arbitrary decision about where I was sent based upon answers I gave to vague questions such as: 'Are you willing to try new and unfamiliar things?'

A few weeks later I received a letter informing me that I had been assigned to what was termed a

became disillusioned and frustrated, and in the end I left the placement two months early.

Now, two years on, I can sit back and analyse the whole experience with a degree of detachment. As a

## Very soon I realised that I, or perhaps somebody else, had made an error somewhere down the line.

result, some things have become clear. One important factor in my being sent to the Nishio placement was that I was a paying customer, and I had asked to be sent to Japan, so I was. It so happens that the organisation that sent me only runs 'medical' and 'caring' placements in that particular country and so I was assigned to one of those despite the fact that my suitability and

preference was for a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) or school placement. The company's status as a charity distracted me, causing me to forget the power of the customer in these situations. The issue here is that even if an organisation such as this is a charity it must, to some extent, conduct itself like a business. A gap year organisation may be 'not-for-profit', but it still has to compete in the same market as all the other travel companies vying for the same customers.

To succeed, and therefore to make money for the cause they support, even a charity has to be on the ball with regards to marketing and publicity; even aggressive and competitive. (For an example, take a look at Oxfam's new stores and website. Snazzy, no?). In my case, I was a paying customer who demanded to be sent to a country in which there were no placements that suited me. Rather than lose my business they simply sent me anyway in the hope that I would just get on with it.

The gap year companies that organise volunteer placements abroad vary vastly, making generalisation difficult. However, the point I am trying to illustrate with reference

to my own experience is that these companies do not necessarily have the best interests of the (often young and naive) people they pursue as well. As well as the cynical business and money-making side of things, the projects themselves are often far removed from the glossy pamphlets and websites seen back in the UK, something which is generally not made clear to those that apply to be sent on them. Recently V.S.O warned that there is a growing trend of 'voluntourism': young people being overcharged to work on projects that have no real use for them. In many cases, they say that 'gappers' would be better off backpacking instead. Perhaps surprisingly given my experience, I disagree. Working and living in an alien culture, rather than simply drifting on its surface, was an incredible experience that I value greatly and would recommend to anybody who is even slightly inclined to do something similar. The import thing is, as I learnt to my cost, do the research, know what to expect when you arrive, and avoid being taken in by flimsy promotional material. Put simply, you need to know what you're letting yourself in for.



# Premier League 1914-1918

Pick a day, any day. Any day that springs to mind, say, in September... asks Salman Shaheen

Was your day September 11th? If so, then I don't blame you. It was, after all, the historic day Salvador Allende fell to the 1973 CIA backed coup that kicked off Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile. Not to mention the little known event of 2001 that concluded the brief period beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall, during which many in the West could quite easily have deceived themselves into thinking that history had all but ended; and that Pax Americana would, if not consign conflict to the same dustbin as said history, at least relegate it to periphery schisms and the "strange thoughts [that] occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso." Our chosen day in September, the tensions and forces that fed it, together with the conflicts that have arisen as a result of it, would seem to make such fanciful thoughts the stuff of naïve hopes and dreams. It is, however, another day in September to which I would like you to turn your attention. No one

would pretend that 21st September, the UN's annual day of global ceasefire and

non-violence, or the Peace One Day campaign which sought to establish it, is the sole solution to our ever unfolding history or to the wars that claim the lives of soldiers and civilians around the world every day.

**You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. There's Chris Martin for a start. And Jimmy Cliff. And Dave Stewart.**

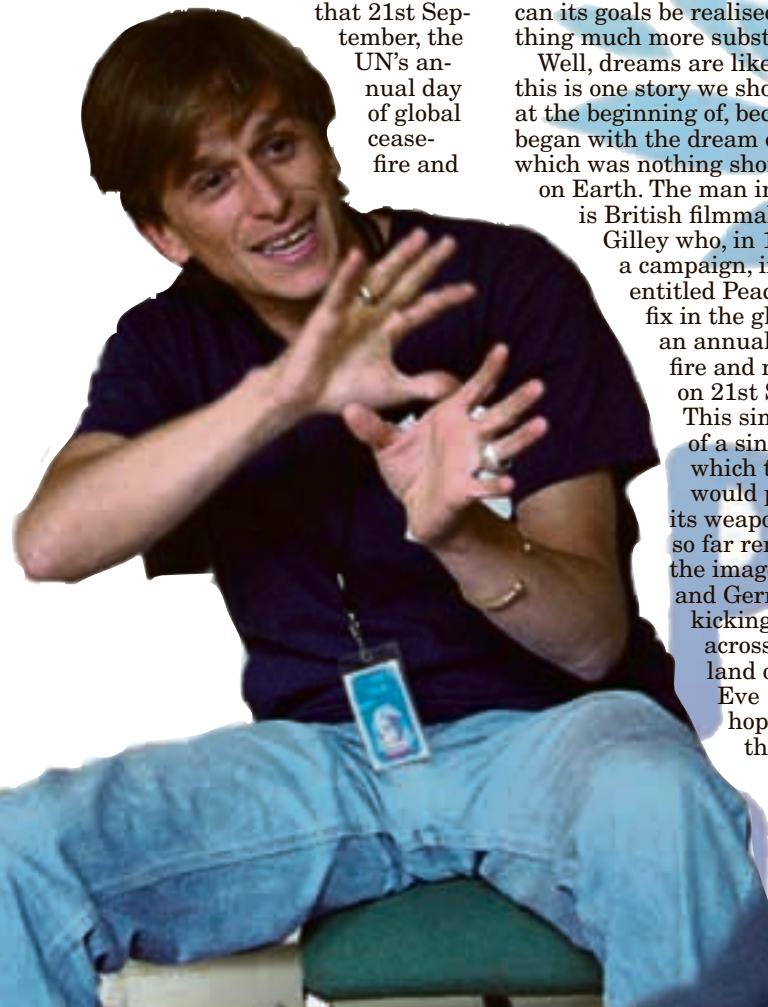
But is the idea behind this day just more naïve hopes and dreams, or can its goals be realised to be something much more substantial?

Well, dreams are like stories and this is one story we should start at the beginning of, because it all began with the dream of one man, which was nothing short of peace on Earth. The man in question is British filmmaker Jeremy Gilley who, in 1999, began a campaign, innocently entitled Peace One Day, to fix in the global calendar an annual day of ceasefire and non-violence on 21st September. This simple idea of a single day on which the world would put down its weapons is not so far removed from the image of British and German soldiers kicking a football across no man's land on Christmas Eve 1914. It was hoped, however, that it could engender a much more enduring kind of peace. Doing what comes

naturally to a filmmaker, Gilley documented his journey from its humble beginnings, through its peaks and pitfalls, its missteps and its steps forward, to his meetings with world leaders, politicians, religious authorities, activists, Nobel Peace Laureates and, dare I say, the odd celebrity here and there; using his film to promote the cause of the campaign before the humble and hegemonic alike.

On 7th September 2001, it seemed the campaign's efforts had been successful and that their goal was more than make-believe when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution to establish 21st September as the official annual day of global ceasefire. Four days later the twin towers fell and one month to the day after the resolution was passed, the bombing of Afghanistan began. The periphery schisms became conflicts at the core and the possibility of peace appeared further from hand than ever before. And whilst the resolution to pin down an annual ceasefire day was unanimously accepted, to this day no government has signed a ceasefire on 21st September.

If, then, like history, this is a story with no easy ending, the most monumental task surely lies in the middle. For two years Peace One Day had campaigned tirelessly to establish one day of peace and that was the easy part. The greatest challenge? Letting the world know. It should be obvious where my own sympathies bed down. I might find it harder these days to consider myself a pacifist than I once used to, but since watching Gilley's film on 21st September 2004, I continue to believe that one more person aware of the significance of that day is one more step, no matter how small, towards a goal for which we should all, within reason, strive. One day of peace alone allows for lives to be saved, if only through providing aid in the calm before the storm resumes. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. There's Chris Martin for a start. And Jimmy Cliff. And Dave Stewart. And with Angelina Jolie, Badly Drawn Boy and Corinne Bailey Rae, it's a veritable ABC of celebrity. Of course, it's a double edged sword. Turning crucial issues into a celebrity circus might give them short-term prominence,



but may, in the long-run, serve to downplay or dilute the efforts of millions of activists and in the course of time end up blunting both edges of our sword. Poverty, after all, is not history, even though the media has moved on. But with the campaign continuing to grow each year, and with 27.6 million people pledging to mark the day and spread the word in 2006, that, hopefully, will not be the outcome of the Peace One Day campaign.

Naturally, this begs the question of what the outcome of an initiative such as this can be, no matter how strongly supported it is by students, activists, campaigners and prominent voices across the globe. It would be naive to assume that dreams like this can offer easy *deus ex machina* means to right the wrongs of the world. For Marx, just as class conflict arises because of exploitative relations between workers and the owners of production, conflicts between

nations arise because of exploitative relations between rich and poor countries. Once the workers of the world had settled accounts with their own bourgeoisies, so the theory goes, such international disputes would, in turn, be settled. This is, of course, too simplified an account for our modern, globalised, disjunctive world. However, a key point remains and it is one best phrased by soundbite stalwart Martin Luther King, who said that: "True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice." As long as there is injustice, occupation, exploitation and imperialist aggression, and as long as the people of Albania and Burkina Faso find the strange thoughts of Western governments to be oppressing their own, peace will remain elusive because it is the right of oppressed peoples to resist their oppressors.

Achieving lasting peace, then, can never simply be about a single

day of ceasefire. Without addressing the underlying causes of conflicts, 21st September can only be one day of peace amongst 364 days of war. It is not enough for the Iraqi resistance to put down their weapons on the 21st if on the 22nd their country remains under occupation. Can we be pacifists just for one day? Perhaps not. But that, I would say, was never truly the objective of Gilley and his campaign. The point of a global day of ceasefire and non-violence should be to promote dialogue and understanding through which the most crucial issues can be addressed, and a long-term peace can be realised. As Gilley himself says, "It's not just symbolic, it's only the beginning." Because it was never about kicking a football across no man's land on Christmas Eve 1914. It was always meant to be Premier League 1914-1918.



IMAGE SOURCE: PEACE ONE DAY WWW.PEACEONEDAY.COM: JOHN TRAMPER

# Closer to Shangri-La

John Russell explores the seldom-visited Indian region of Ladakh

Ladakh, nestled between the Great Himalayan Range and the Karakoram Mountains in the northernmost reaches of India, has more in common with Tibet than the rest of the Indian sub-continent.

**Shangri-La is a fictional utopia set in a mystical valley in the western end of the Kunlun Mountain range, invented by James Hilton in his 1933 novel, 'Lost Horizon.'**

Dotted with monasteries, castles and other remnants of this once great Buddhist kingdom, Ladakh is a high-altitude desert plateau. Crossing over the Himalayas from India's great northern plains, you leave behind more than monsoon rains. India is a famously diverse country, but the area of Ladakh, with its separate history, culture and geography make this one of India's most distinctive areas.











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# Bright Signs of Progress

Election fever paints the face of a nation. Photos & text- *Amica Dall*

Election hype reached fever pitch in Ecuador in the last weeks of the run up to ballot day for the New Congress. The air of optimism is pervasive, even though this is set to be the 12th government to take the helm of this insituationally corrupt, unstable and disorganised nation in the last 11 years.

Ecuador is a troubled country, where the doctrine of "divide and rule" has allowed countless statemen to use political power for systematic theft. Temporary reprieve from the apathy caused by repeated crushed hopes and failed revolutions has seen 165 candidates rise to the election

**This will be the 12th Government to take the helm of this insituationally corrupt nation in 11 years.**

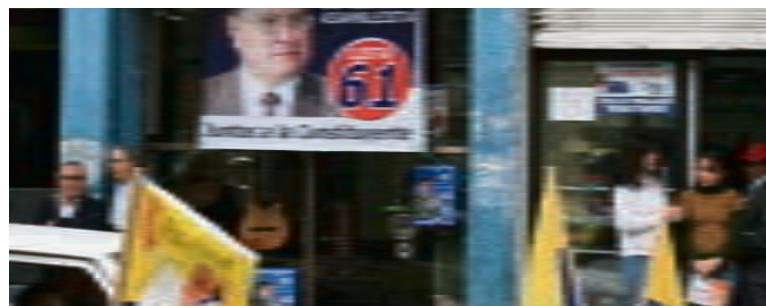
challenge, and with each candiate chosing a number and a two-tone colour scheme, ballot sheets that look little different from a Pokemon catalogue.

Neither do any of the candidates have a track-record to judge them by. A definite bias against anyone even loosely connected to any old insitutions has given rise to motley crew of candidates, everyone from TV presenters to bull-fighting farm owners. Everyone wants change, everyone promises to be different, new, revolutionary.

The preferred campaign method is graffiti- candidates pay people to paint the front of thier houses, shop fronts and their cars. They cover every available public space that they can't paint with posters, bunting and flags. They donate football strips in their colours to poor rural communitites, and employ teenagers to stand on street corners and road junctions waving flags.

Once you have found out the colour scheme, ballot number and buzz word of a candidate, further information is very difficult to come by. Some candidates give out post cards with a vague outline of policies, some have web-logs, some have even had songs written about the changes they envisage for their country. As this suggests, it is almost impossible to make an educated descision about how to cast your vote.

I ask Maxilliam Moreno, doctor, ex-politician and director of the Ecuadorian N.G.O, Eco-trackers, how he was going to go about making his decision. He shrugged noncommittally. "I'll choose my favorite colours, I suppose."





ALAS

ALA CONSTITUYENTE

Hasta la victoria  
Siempre...



ANDRES  
PAVON

SARA

VOTA  
TODO

ROSALES

7

PRIAN

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# “Who’s job?”

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Interviews will be held during Week 1 of next term.

# Growing Pains

*Joanna Heath* discusses the trials and tribulations of South East Asia's newest democracy

The night of 20th May 2002, when the tiny nation of East Timor was formally granted its independence in a grand ceremony, was a unique moment in modern history. Here was the birth of a new, albeit very poor, nation. After decades of struggle against various occupying powers and less than five years after the incredible violence inflicted upon it by its most recent master, Indonesia, it had achieved its ultimate goals: independence, sovereignty, and the right of self-determination. The shared optimism for the future was palpable, marked by street celebrations and the speeches of world leaders present. One of the loudest rounds of applause for the evening's ceremony was when independence hero and newly appointed East Timorese President Xanana Gusmão brought Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri on stage in a gesture of solidarity.

At this point, a cautious optimism for East Timor's future would have been well placed; the turnaround achieved since Indonesia withdrew was indeed remarkable. Particularly impressive was the willingness of the Timorese to forgive the Indonesians and those who had collaborated with them. Since then, however, the mood in East Timor has changed decidedly.

In its first four years of independence, East Timor's political landscape was dominated by the political party Fretilin, led by Mari Alkatiri, also East Timor's first Prime Minister. In the first Constituent Assembly

elections in 2001, prior to independence, Fretilin took 55 out of 88 seats in the parliament, easily making it the dominant party. As the centre for pro-independence activity, Fretilin had the sympathy of the vast

the nation in 1999, when members of the Indonesian armed forces launched revenge attacks on civilians who had voted in a UN-organised referendum on independence from Indonesia. This time, however,

## In the first Constituent Assembly elections in 2001, prior to independence, Fretilin took 55 out of 88 seats in the parliament.

majority of Timorese and had little competition. Gusmão, who had once been a key figure within Fretilin, had left the party in the early 1980s and gained the Presidency on an independent ticket.

In May 2006, close to the fourth anniversary of independence, Fretilin's dominance had become a problem. 600 members of the nation's army staged a five-day protest against their sacking, arguing that they had been discriminated against on the basis that they came from the part of East Timor closest to the Indonesian border. When the protest turned violent, Alkatiri ordered the army in to control the situation. By the end of the night, 60 people had been shot, and 5 killed. What followed was a period of civil unrest similar to that which engulfed

the combatants were not foreign, but factions of the armed forces – those loyal to Alkatiri, and a rebel army and police faction who had turned against him. The crisis deepened when evidence was brought to light that seemed to prove that Alkatiri had given weaponry to a civilian militia, the 'Fretilin Secret Security Team,' and given instructions to eliminate the army protestors, opposition leaders, and members within Fretilin that opposed Alkatiri's rule. In the ensuing power struggle, Alkatiri was forced to resign by President Gusmão and was replaced by José Ramos Horta, a member of Fretilin but opposed to Alkatiri, and an ally of Gusmão.

Following the obstacles of 2006, East Timor's fledgling democracy faced perhaps its toughest test earlier this year. In the Parliamentary elections held in July, votes for the two leading parties (Alkatiri's Fretilin and CNRT, a new party led by Gusmão) were evenly split - Fretilin just ahead with



29.02% of the votes, CNRT with 24.10%. With no party gaining an outright majority, the formation of a government depended upon negotiating a coalition. The rival parties held the nation in limbo for a number of months as they fought for political power and the right to be Prime Minister. The situation was thrown into further disarray by Alkatiri's announcement during negotiations that he would be contesting his old post, as Fretilin's candidate for overall leadership. At the eleventh hour, Gusmão and his party managed to negotiate a coalition with other parties that, together, held enough seats to win control and gain Gusmão the Prime Ministry. Alkatiri hit back with the claim that Gusmão had not won at all, and that Fretilin, which gained the most votes in the election but did not hold enough seats to form a government on its own, had the right to form a minority government. Dismissing CNRT's move as 'unconstitutional' and 'illegal', Alkatiri threatened to withdraw Fretilin from parliament and said that he would not recognise the new coalition government. Alkatiri urged his supporters to protest against the new government, which effectively amounted to an invitation to civil disobedience and violence. In the unrest that followed, Fretilin supporters torched a reported 600 houses.

East Timor's dilemma reveals much about the business of 'installing democracy' in countries that have no tradition of it. Popular participation in the early independence campaign and an incredible turnout (98.5%) for the referendum that gave East Timor its independence, along with leaders – namely Gusmão and Ramos Horta – who advocated negotiation, diplomacy and forgiveness over violence, made East Timor a natural candidate for parliamentary democracy. The body charged with laying the groundwork for the new political system was the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), a peacekeeping operation sent in to rebuild East Timor after the violence of 1999. Treating the island nation as a *terra nullius* with no existing political infrastructure, UNTAET and its head, Sergio Vieira de Mello, practically became the government of East Timor for the length of its tenure, assuming all executive, legislative and judicial power under Security Council Resolution 1272.

While undoubtedly necessary for the urgent task of reconstruction, such authoritarian power was not a good start for Timorese democracy. At the time of UNTAET's handover to the new independent government in 2002, de Mello remarked, 'faced as we were with our own difficulties

in the establishment of this mission, we did not, we could not, involve the Timorese at large as much as they were entitled to'. This lack of involvement in the earliest stages of development meant that there was little opportunity for democratic values and a functional civil society to be established at a grass roots level. With a negligible sense of ownership of the political process, it is perhaps no surprise that a suspicion of democratic institutions, manipulated by figures such as Alkatiri, has developed in the population.

While it is almost certain that East Timor will face problems in its future, condemning it as Asia's newest failed state may be premature. East Timor is experiencing the kind of turmoil that well-established Western democracies went through hundreds of years ago in the internal struggle for political legitimacy. We must hope that the same will not be required of East Timor, in a region that is volatile and vulnerable to extremism. The Timorese people have showed extraordinary faith in their decades-long fight for independence – if the same faith can be placed in the political institutions of the nascent democracy, and if those who are not prepared to support it are brought to account, then a stable future may well be within East Timor's grasp.



Both Images: East Timor's independence celebrations of 19-20 May 2002

BOTH IMAGES: GEOFFORY C. GUNN

# Bad Education

What's best for black boys? asks *Clementine Stott*

Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed, according to Joseph Stalin's famous aphorism. And if the upcoming generations of young black British men are increasingly turning to a life of low aspiration and social segregation, this aphorism would lay the blame squarely at the door of the British education system.

It is a fact recognised, but not yet faced by policymakers that black boys as a demographic group are somehow being failed by the system. Their downward trajectory begins with academic underachievement in school and a sense of alienation from white middle-class peers, and increasingly graduates to unemployment in later life – possibly even to crime and imprisonment.

The Commission for Racial Equality in 2005 found that although black boys in the UK start school with some of the highest assessed initial ability levels, their GCSE pass rate is just 27% at grades A-C – appallingly distinct from a national average of 53%.

A 2004 study commissioned by London mayor Ken Livingstone, and conducted by Diane Abbott MP, found the academic underachievement of black boys to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy; Abbott cites “low teacher expectations” and “inadequate levels of positive teacher attention” as key factors. Even more concerning, the research was to uncover unorthodox behavior management practices, such as disproportionately high numbers of exclusions issued by teachers to punish black male pupils.

What Abbott described as the “conflict and fear” in relationships between teachers and black students seems indicative of attitudes throughout the education system. A rigid determination to remain politically correct at all times seems to have spawned a non-

confrontational approach, and even a denial of the problems at hand. One of Gordon Brown's rather rose-tinted new education objectives, for example, is to extend school leaving age to 18 – a hugely unpopular suggestion, which experts warn would undoubtedly result in the disenchantment of those whom the system has failed to teach basic skills, and increased aggression and disruption in class.

Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a seminal figure in both academic criticism and literature, and fierce critic of the neo-colonialist values still harboured in Western power structures, is not afraid of affronting the PC-brigade. Speaking to me on the issue of black boys underperforming in school, in both Britain and America, Ngũgĩ argued that their success hinged not only on “set[ting] the highest possible standards for themselves”, but crucially, “hav[ing] the self-discipline to live for those standards... or rather hav[ing] the self-discipline and the necessary work input to realise their dreams.”

So perhaps academic underachievement, particularly from boys whose ability levels are so promising at the outset, is a sign that certain neo-colonialist values in the establishment have been internalised, and that the stereotype of the unacademic black boy is holding them back? “It is very important that young people, wherever they are from... particularly if they are from Africa, or black kids... they must be brought up to realise that the world is theirs, that they don't live in a corner of the world,” Ngũgĩ muses, “but whatever corner they occupy, they should and must interact with the world.” Ngũgĩ's views converge with those of many British academics and ethnic minority activists, when he argues that it may be a case of boys simply not aiming high enough. “In terms of social conditions and history in Britain, or in Africa, the cards are really stacked against

them [black male students],” Ngũgĩ admits; but, he reasons, they cannot passively wait for more favourable conditions. The more the odds are stacked against these boys, he urges, “the more we must aim even higher, to overcome these difficulties, and to reach for the stars.”

Ngũgĩ himself is, of course, a fantastic role model for young black boys seeking inspiration at the start of an academic career. A prolific author since 1962, Ngũgĩ has struggled against opposition and adversity for over four decades, and has risen to pre-eminence in his field – that of high academia, once the preserve of white middle-classes. He attached great value to academic schoolwork, having promised his mother that “I must never be absent from school, however hungry we were”. He subsequently taught at the best-regarded universities in America, including Yale, and now holds a dual professorship in Comparative Literature and Performance Studies at the University of California – and is thus a case in point of the utter redundancy of the ‘unacademic’ black male stereotype.

There is a distinct lack of black male role models for burgeoning students to look up to and emulate in the world of academia, particularly in Britain. Well-intentioned, but damaging, claims such as that made by Livingstone's commission in 2004, that an academic-based curriculum was “archaic” and “inappropriate” for black male students, have done much to perpetuate the stereotype of a black schoolboy who excels in sport and physical or ‘creative’ enterprises, but little else.

According to statistics obtained by the Association of University Teachers, there were only 29 black academics with professional grades in the 1999/2000 academic year, out of 11,000 university professors. Overall, the figures, compiled by the Higher



Education Statistics Agency, show that ethnic minorities make up less than 2% of professors. At that time, there was not a single black academic in the three top ranking positions of any British university. And these figures seemed to have direct correlation with the racial segregation of their students, very few of whom made it to the old traditional universities, having come from ethnic minority backgrounds – around 4% of total intake, in fact.

This is not necessarily to criticise the approach of the individual universities to broadening their access across the social spectrum – although they will have to work hard to dispel their prevailing image as fusty and out-of-touch. The true heart of the problem, experts agree, seems to lie with the academic expectations of black boys themselves. Application of effort to serious academic study, and ensuing application for a university course, does not appear to be seen as a recognised (or indeed desirable) path to follow. It is seen as a question of facilitation, of bringing together two very disparate cultures, the culture of the street and the culture of academia, in a mutually-beneficial conversation.

One project which aims to stimulate this conversation is Generating Genius, brainchild of prominent academic, columnist and education policy consultant Dr Tony Sewell. Sewell, who seems deeply uneasy with the concept of remote role models as figures of hero worship and undeserved adulation, has based the project around the concept of peer mentoring – a method designed to knock down the walls of resistance with which so many young people surround themselves, in accordance with the dominant anti-school counter-culture.

The project makes use of various innovative teaching methods, to draw promising boys out of their shells, and to re-introduce them to learning – as they've never seen it before. The core group of Generating Genius Scholars (a prospective 100 by 2010) are targeted early, ideally at age 12-13, before disillusionment with school and anti-studying machismo really kick in. These carefully-selected, focussed boys are then steered down a high-achieving, academic career path, with experts on hand at every stage of the process to intervene and motivate.

Generating Genius is, primarily, a 'science leadership programme', centred around summer camps and internships in the field of science and industry. But if successful, the project should have much wider repercussions. Although the main focus is on science, the students are also encountering the world of academic

and business high-flyers for the first time, vastly expanding their horizons – and they are armed with the practical skills to realise their new, soaring aspirations.

Dr Sewell's project demands boys with a fierce work ethic, and a voracious appetite for knowledge. The "science Spartans", as Sewell terms them, must apply themselves wholeheartedly to their work to ensure the project's success; yet if they do so, they may provide what is so desperately needed by their underachieving peers: "credible ambassadors" for academic study. The long-term impact of the project should be cultural regeneration, and revised perceptions all round.

The project seems unusual, in that its chief objective is to provide "high intellectual challenge" for the boys concerned – in contrast to the projects underway which abandon the cerebral for sports training, for example. Although well-intentioned, isn't the stereotype of the black male athlete a rather damaging one, in that the academic expectations from young black students are set very low as a result? According to Dr Sewell, such low expectations are tantamount to a kind of cultural ignorance regarding these boy's true potential. Black boys are simply perceived as living lives "a world away" from that of high academic achievement, he argues; and his scheme is doing much to change attitudes to what might at first have seemed a "total juxtaposition" of cultures.

"Working-class people, black or white...can they really be good scientists?" Such is the question Sewell imagines middle-class people posing to themselves in response to his project; and to some extent, he's right. The image on the project website of a young boy proudly displaying the product of an experiment is, shamefully, eye-catchingly unfamiliar – because the boy in it has shoulder-length dreadlocks. I ask whether Sewell considers it rather patronising to suggest, as many have done, that an academic-based curriculum is somehow "inappropriate" for many black boys. A curriculum which is "academic in the sense of textbooks, [use of] blackboards," is, Sewell agrees, "boring these children to death"; yet with a radicalised approach, Sewell believes the obstacles are not insurmountable.

The methods employed by Generating Genius, to demonstrate the point, are far from stuffy. Use is made of popular culture, providing a sort of lingua franca by which the boys can access, and be accessed by, their teachers. Complex scientific principles of engineering, bio-technology and so on are fused with competitive television show formats,

such as CSI and The Apprentice, to add a frisson of excitement to what is traditionally seen as a dull and difficult field. Boys can also mirror real-life research teams. The boys investigate science in enjoyable new ways, whilst at all times (according to Sewell) "keeping its integrity" as academically rigorous material.

Whilst such projects do what they can to redress the imbalances in the education system, Sewell acknowledges that bigger-scale changes are sorely needed. "Conversation", he believes, is necessary between policy-makers and universities, and the grass roots pupils and teachers, if anything truly significant is to be achieved. Despite all the individual initiatives, the fact remains that male black students are, for whatever reason, not applying to universities. It is, he considers, a "strange situation", where despite millions being spent by various organisations on target and access programmes, we are "not really making a link between university and student...that's what's missing."

The question of what is to be done to address the issue remains, for now, unsolved. Despite claiming a general willingness to improve the figures, government policy-makers have done little to put their money where their mouth is, in real terms; the Generating Genius project, for example, failed to secure the funding which would have seen 200 boys taking part in this year alone. One suggestion would have black teachers, as positive role models, fast-tracked through the system, and welcomed into the profession with so-called 'golden handshakes' – a measure which would surely be greatly resented by equally able white peers, and smacks unpleasantly of positive discrimination.

Perhaps the government alone cannot be trusted with undertaking such a vast task. Dr Sewell suggests that the private sector should be playing a part to engage inner-city young people; and, in the context of diversity agendas in the workplace, it is hard to see why projects such as Generating Genius are not attracting the interest of large-scale corporations, and specifically the pharmaceutical industry.

Perhaps the last word on the subject should go to Ngūgī, however. Whilst government policy-makers and universities continue to fight the losing battle to capture black boys' interests, Ngūgī reminds us of what is fundamental to the issue: aspiration. "It doesn't matter, the conditions of life into which they are born," he declares; "They have to struggle to rise above them...and reach for the stars."

# Bad Hijab

Will Iran ever see its women? Queries *Helen Guy*

Iran's modern and youthful population is ruled by an out of touch and undemocratic government. It is an Islamic Republic with an increasingly secular population and even the most religiously devout criticise the government's actions. Upon my arrival in Tehran, a bank employee gestured towards the pictures of Khomeini and Khamenei proudly displayed on the wall, laughed and said 'lizards'.

A former resident of the notorious Evin Prison kindly explained the Republic's political system. Laughing angrily he declared 'those animals' in reference to the entire government.

During my stay I was struck by the restrictions imposed on the lives of Iranians, particularly the hijab and relations between men and women. However, the ordinary people whom I met were ingenious in their ability to overcome these restraints. Indeed, they were delighted to teach me the skills for living in Iran.

All women in Iran are obliged by law to wear Islamic hijab from the age of twelve. Posters reminding women that the hijab is their protection are displayed in public places, including train stations and even in fast-food chains. Despite this, Iranian women seem to need to be reminded more forcefully of the law. Fati-kommando is the politically incorrect title for women who, along with the police, enforce this law. The name comes from Fatima, the daughter of Mohammad and wife of Ali, transformed into a commando. However, any commando-like activity is restricted to running after offending young students.

Universities employ Fati-kommandos to keep students dressed correctly. On the university bus one approached me and after making polite conversation, pointed to another girl's regulation headscarf and said 'tomorrow you will wear one of those'. This was the *maghna'eh* which is a triangle of cloth with sides sown together so that you can poke your head out of a hole at one end whilst leaving your neck and shoulders covered. The Fati-k congratulated me the next day and from then on we got away with hijab murder and plenty of hair on show. Later three rather more serious Fati-kommandos in Esfahan's Naqshe Jahan Square must have spotted me from afar. It seems I had

failed to learn the proper skills, and when caught, they forcefully tugged my scarf forward until my hair had disappeared from view entirely.

There are Iranians who would choose to wear hijab, but many would not. The Iranian penal code states that 'women who appear in public without a proper hijab should be imprisoned or pay a fine'. Most of the women I got to know only wore the acceptable minimum hijab in public. In the mountains, where middle-class Tehranis spend their summer weekends, headscarves were worn even more scantily. I even saw a bare-headed girl brazenly walking in a half-dark village.

Both in the cities and in small mountain villages Iranian women take great care of their appearance. The current Iranian fashion is for emaciated, fake-tanned women wearing heels, with tight cropped jeans and a *manteau* on top. This is a dress, usually black, but ideally as bright a colour as the wearer dares, which buttons down the front. She can take it off as soon as she enters a house. During the day a silk scarf is folded into a triangle and knotted loosely under the chin.

Hair shows at the front, neck shows at the back. The bolder continually untie the scarf and re-tie it again, showing off everything but the crown of their head. At night a long thin scarf is wrapped on top of hair that is dyed and piled up into an enormous quiff at the front. Religion makes people do funny things.

In her film, *The Day I Became a Woman*, the director Marzieh Meshkini addresses, among other things, the issue of hijab. The young female protagonist Hava is told by her mother and grandmother on her ninth birthday that she is now a woman, and must wear a *chador*. Just as the young woman absent-mindedly re-ties her headscarf, so Hava forgets about the hijab and she trails the *chador* behind her. The young girl is more interested in sweets and toys than the protection the hijab might afford her.

Women tend to wear hijab correctly at times because they feel they need to protect themselves from the authorities. An important aspect of breaking the hijab law successfully in Iran is knowing when not to push things too far. 'It's dangerous in this area, pull up your headscarf', I was warned by fellow students. This was not to protect me from predatory

males, but from the police. Iran is in the midst of a serious crack-down on bad hijab. According to reports, in the second week in August 20,363 men and women were being held on Hijab charges. This new development is seen to be the increasingly unpopular President Ahmadinejad's personal attempt to drag Iran backwards and affects even young men who sport 'big hair' and body piercings.

For many reform-minded Iranians the severe application of the hijab laws is just one very visible example of the government's conservative policy. This is not just restricted to clothing but all areas of social policy – attempts are being made to strengthen the already illiberal family law. A new bill, called Family Support Legislation, is to be put before parliament. This has been dubbed the 'Male Support Legislation' by groups such as Change for Equality. The 23rd article will remove the need for the first wife's permission if a husband wants to take a second wife. Polygamous families are few and far between in Iran and as such this is unlikely to affect the young woman in her smart *manteau*.

The concern is that this will further entrench a repressive attitude to the law, making life harder for poor and vulnerable Iranian women.

The government does not follow the lives of its people - it is ironic that polygamy would be made easier at a time when young peoples' relationships are becoming more and more Europeanised. Young Iranians have, and spilt up with, boyfriends and girlfriends. They have friends of the opposite sex. They go out in mixed groups. Some of my best memories of Iran are those of being crammed into cars with boys and girls. We would be four in the back and three in the front making clumsy conversation over the loud, forbidden, pop music.

Modern Iranian society is far more complex than the current media focus would suggest. It is because of this and because of my memories of the country that I have chosen not to address the international issues surrounding Iran. Its people would democratise and modernise the revolution, if they were ever given a chance. For the moment they will continue to break the rules, when they can.

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# Don't judge me by my backpack.

Natalie discusses the problems and benefits of the tourist trail in Guatemala.

Last night I watched as an old Mayan woman stood chuckling over her new-born grandchild in the local shop at San Pedro. A common sight perhaps, but it was not the baby's own wide-eyed little face that this gap-toothed elder was cooing over. It was an image on the screen of her new video mobile.

In this small town on the edge of Lago Atitlan in Guatemala, traditional indigenous customs are continually confronted by the gadgets, values and visitors of another, 21st century world. This is not yet another example of the commonplace disaster that follows upon the arrival of hordes of backpackers in a primitive, picturesque setting, for the foreigners and the locals of San Pedro seem to have discovered a way of easy and tolerant co-existence.

In an internet cafe you are just as likely to be sitting next to a Tz'utujil speaking Mayan dressed in the full traditional outfit of huipil skirt and faja, as a tanned traveller complete with beads and pyjama trousers sending accounts of his latest adven-

ture to friends and family back home. Now the fear has changed to hospitality, the majority of tourists and locals exchanging warm greetings in passing, and many people like the place so much that they stay and become a part of the community themselves. Maria Josefina, the curator of the town's small museum, attributes part of the change in attitude to the new classes of tourists arriving. 'Now they come to learn and relax,' she explains, 'Not so much to take drugs.' Despite the undeniable 'bohemian vibe' that still exists in San Pedro (and that draws in many a traveller) Maria Josefina's words are reflected in the growing popularity of language schools in the town. Increasing numbers of students are favoring San Pedro - with its stunning natural scenery, friendly teachers, relaxed atmosphere and lower prices - over the cosmopolitan-meets-colonial atmosphere of nearby Antigua.

Although the some of the locals are happy with the improved living conditions, education rates and job availability that come with tourism,

in the minority. One wizened soul comments that 'Judgment is easy, tolerance is harder'.

Perhaps the long-term tourists who claim San Pedro as their own should learn from the example of the locals whose 'small paradise' they are actually occupying. At times a visitor's wish to become part of the Guatemalan culture may go too far; last week for example I felt genuinely uncomfortable as I passed a blonde American wearing the full dress of an indigenous woman. However, even with this the local people demonstrate their tolerant ways. 'Some may think that she is stealing our culture', a local woman told me, 'But she is not stealing it, just imitating. I wear trousers like a western woman when I visit the capital. Is that wrong?'

Perhaps what the author of those provocative scribblings failed to consider is the consequences of putting a stop to this new, gentler tourism. In the nineties, after years of political discrimination and even genocide against the Mayan people, the teaching of indigenous culture in the classroom became obligatory as the government realised that the growth of tourism related to the Mayan culture was of economical, not just personal, importance. Before, people used to ask what their culture could do for them.

Now it has value again. Indeed, the tourism industry has served to revive the indigenous culture of San Pedro hugely, with many local people now using their traditional customs to earn a living. Women sell handicrafts from intricately woven shawls to beaded bracelets; they help tourists to discover Mayan signs and their significance; they teach classes in weaving and 'tejer', and sit embroidering 'fajas' to sell whilst they work in internet cafes helping visitors to burn their holiday photos from digital camera onto disk. A growing number of local families are even opening up their homes to language students, offering not just food and board but genuinely warm hospitality and a true home-from-home in Guatemala.

In every aspect of life in San Pedro the new and old, the foreign and the familiar are mixed; but rather than destroying the indigenous culture the influx of visitors has strengthened it. On street corners foreigners spend hours chatting

## Indeed, the tourism industry has served to revive the indigenous culture of San Pedro hugely, with many local people now using their traditional customs to earn a living.

tures to friends and family back home. At the river's edge tourists sit and admire the volcanic scenery whilst local women scrub their clothes on the concrete washboards in the lake, and in the evenings there are activities such as ping pong tournaments of 'San Pedranos' versus 'foreign friends'.

However, the relationship has not always run this smoothly. Tourism got off to a shaky start in the small town many years ago when a local boy was killed by an intoxicated traveller; many residents remember a time when they were told by their mothers to hide in the nearest house if they saw a foreigner whilst

these feelings are still not necessarily shared by all. Graffiti on the bathroom wall of the popular travellers' haunt Nick's Place show the anguished scrawlings of one of the many foreigners seeking to escape the trampled backpacker's trail, 'All you Lonely Planet Syndrome people, please quit polluting small paradises with your ignorance and wealth'. However, one would have to have a serious case of 'Montezuma's Revenge' to spend enough time in this bathroom to read all of the enraged retaliations of self-professed 'Lonely Planetters' seeking to 'shed ignorance and support independent businesses': negative sentiments are

to Mayan women selling pastries, and in the afternoons language students sit in tranquility by the lake and help the local children with their homework as part of the 'Niños del Lago' scheme. Last week I saw two young indigenous girls in their traditional costumes, a camera in one hand and a fast food take away bag in the other. It was a surprising

sight, as I'd been warned time and time again by guide books to avoid offending Mayan people with my camera. Maybe in our eagerness to learn about and understand other cultures we forget that they too can benefit from our own. I may wear a necklace with my Mayan birth sign, but I do not claim to be indigenous: a Mayan may use a mobile but this

does not make her western. There is nothing wrong with benefiting from another culture whilst still embracing your own. As the Mayans know, your true identity is about who you are on the inside. That it something that all the gismos, gadgets and tourists of the modern world cannot change.







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# The Future of the Image

by Jacques Rancière

A student of Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, French philosopher Jacques Rancière came to prominence when he co-authored the book 'Reading Capital' (1968) with his mentor, with whom he later publicly parted ways over his attitude towards the 1968 student uprising in Paris. Thereafter, Rancière went on to explore relations between the proletariat, ideology and the role of masses in the production of knowledge. More recently, Rancière's aesthetic theory has become a point of reference in the field of visual arts. 'The Future of the Image' is a collection of five such lectures and publications in which he discusses the role of images in all forms of media, and the political function of art. The combination of philosophy and politics with aesthetic theory lends a radical touch to his lectures, and takes the book to a level beyond a mere discourse on art.

Rancière deconstructs the traditional meaning of 'mimesis' and attempts a reclassification of the word 'image', simultaneously charting the historical process of the continual and conflicted redefinition of its meaning. He claims that in the 19th century, an image no longer represents something outside itself, but speaks for itself. The importance thus shifts from the idea an image represents to the image, and therefore to the artist who creates it.

He traces the parallel development of art movements and history, and observes how different artists have used their powers of interpretation to relate art to society. The belief that any form of art can be apolitical is denounced, and it is emphasised that even 'Art for Art's

sake' is the voicing of a political choice – that of silence or absence. The book is replete with juxtapositions of such incommensurable opposites, of presence and absence, of representation and the lack thereof, visible and intelligible. The 'image', traditionally seen only as the 'visible', now goes on to include the 'invisible' as well.

An artist's political sentiments are present in all forms of art, from mainstream cinema, to paintings, billboards and commercial advertisements. Rancière emphasises that the purpose of art is continuously to challenge its conservative definitions and not be trapped by the mystification of its forms and products. He speaks of how art is used to express the artist's engagement with socio-political issues ranging from everyday cosmopolitan middle-class life to the horrors of genocide. The book discusses an artist's conscious choice to combine and contrast unrelated mediums of art to express a thought that does not obviously emerge immediately, because of the unconventional juxtaposition of various elements. This juxtaposition becomes an act of self assertion by the artist in questioning and upturning conservative expectations.

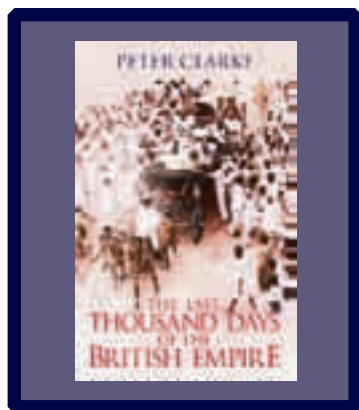
The separation in history of the traditional relations between text, image and object brings to the forefront the disjunction within arts that results from the lack of a common means of measurement. However, this same disjunction, when read as a reflection of the psyche of modern societies, becomes the common link between the three elements of art and leads to the

immeasurable potential of their inter-mixing, to produce an effect more powerful. 'The law of the great parataxis, of the condition of art today, is that there is no common measurement, the common factor of dismeasure or chaos gives the art its power.'

This almost reflects the Nietzschean affirmation of power of choice over and above the nostalgic mourning of the loss of the mystified essence of the 'ideal'. He warns against the desire to produce 'ideal images', as it often results in essentialism, and rejects it as a 'dream of purity'. Such desires for nostalgic purity are overpowered and defeated by the schizophrenia of *melanges*. The prominent Marxist streak in Rancière is obvious; art becomes a junction with the voice of the masses and all hierarchies between high and low forms of art are rejected within the artistic regime. It becomes a political tool of the expression of modern society, where all things become equally important subjects.

The book, almost completely based on references without explanations or detailed footnotes, takes for granted a readership that has a sound knowledge of aesthetic theory and artistic productions, besides being well grounded in political and philosophical schools of thought. Sweeping mention and comparison of works and thoughts of Manet, Duchamp, Bresson, Godard, Adorno, Lyotard, Foucault result in huge portions of the book where a novice to the history of art and philosophical movements would find him or herself rather lost.

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# Rock me Amadeus

by Seb Hunter

“Why, just because I like popular music, should I be so comprehensively watermarked as an intellectual retard?” Many have asked themselves more or less the same question, I am sure. What is it that makes classical music so culturally sophisticated, that people feel they have to know about it? The fact is that many people think they know, but really don't. Granted, they might appreciate the music, or pretend to, as Hunter discovers at the Proms where retentive protocols govern the show, but nobody really knows, as judgement in this field is so subjective.

In this rip-stop musical pilgrimage, Seb Hunter sets out to refresh his perspectives, to ditch his beloved popular music and ingest only classical tones for the duration of his journey, which takes him from Mediaeval to Modern. The trip is more than metaphorical; there is touring across Europe and into Russia, and a wealth of sometimes funny, other times tiring and teenaged, anecdotes to complement the crusade.

Once it is realised that this is not meant to be an academic tome, or a profound work of literature, the free-flowing and casual prose is easy to read and appreciate. It's a bit slow to get going, but maybe this was just

**In this rip-stop musical pilgrimage, Seb Hunter sets out to refresh his perspectives.**

my acclimatisation period. There is definitely, at times, too much effort put into the humour, which is usually beer-fuelled and blokish, and the sense that some of the chapters are padded to up the word count. But I did laugh as, conversely, there are some clever observations and very witty images generated in the mind's eye.

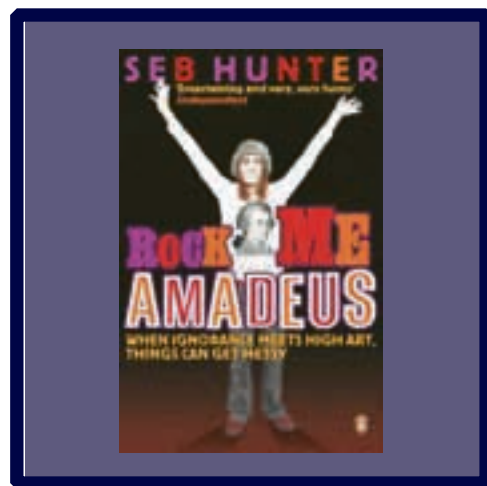
I like the structure of the book. It's uncomplicated, as perhaps you might expect from a novice's approach to classical music; think Howard Goodall meets Stuart

Maconie. The key players from each era are highlighted, their works investigated, and finally, assessed. Music is graded according to the ambulance rating: in place of a star, or a score out of ten, a small ambulance is drawn. The more ambulances, the better. This is Hunter's perverse sense of humour coming through; you'd expect more ambulances to mean more damage and less pleasure, but Hunter relishes the damage. His comical self-destruct button is very active, even though he moans, admittedly only initially, about how tortuous the journey is and will be. Unsurprisingly, torture is replaced by intrigue, then, to some degree, deep reverence for the art form that generates so much musical snobbery and pretentiousness. The artist is given a score out of ten in each of three ironically named categories: drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll. Mozart scores full marks for rock 'n' roll.

We begin with “to all intents and purpose the world's first-ever composer”, Hildegard von Bingen. She was a nun, and composed monotonous chants. But as Hunter investigates, he discovers that Hildegard was something of a polymath, her talents including poetry and herbalism. She set quite a precedent, as all subsequent stars of classical music had a quirk, from grumpiness to downright perversion. Mozart, again, springs to mind. In a poem written to his mother, he writes

The concerto I'll write in Paris,  
it's fitting,  
For there, I can dash it off while  
I'm shitting.

But the first really big star was Handel. Hunter identifies a quotation from Beethoven which hits the nail on the head: “Handel is the greatest composer that ever lived...I would uncover my head and kneel down upon his tomb”. What a eulogy! He was to classical music what the Beatles were to the Sixties. It gets better, however. Could such fame be beaten? Yes. Because Handel was no sex machine. “I've deduced that Handel was gay, and got plenty from those castrati.” No, it was Liszt who made the ladies wriggle; he was the first to enjoy a barrage of bloomers on stage, girls screaming and panting in the audience. Maybe not quite, but you get the idea...



Interestingly, and revealingly, the pace of the book speeds up after the Romantic era, after Debussy and Satie had shaken things up a bit with

**The concerto I'll write in Paris, it's fitting, For there, I can dash it off while I'm shitting.**

their new music of “dabs, feelings, moods, colours...”, the quality of the music declines rapidly. Classical music is classical because it's in the past, it's old, it's been and gone. The classics are the only ones worth listening to! So what is already a rip-stop tour becomes very very quick after Russia has been investigated; Hunter notes late on that, throughout the history of music, Russia seems to have had very little input until the Romantic era had almost ended. Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky were the only ones to get a note in edgeways. Hunter is not the only one who feels this decline. An apt quotation included in the closing pages of the book rather bluntly imparts the message: “Listening to the fifth symphony of Ralph Vaughan Williams is like staring at a cow for forty-five minutes.”

This is a very good book. It's as popular in its lexical style as Harry Potter, yet as informative as a well-written broadsheet article. It's entertaining, so the information sticks, which is useful, I suppose.

# The 11th Hour

Directed by Nadia Connors & Leila Connors Petersen

Following his appearance in last year's critically acclaimed issue-tainment film, *Blood Diamond*, Leonardo diCaprio has progressed from highlighting the injustices of the diamond trade to a much larger, and, according to this film, more significant subject: The End of the World. *The 11th Hour* asserts that we are now at the 'tipping point' of history and that the future of our species, and possibly even the Earth, is threatened by the onset of cata-

## As they said at Cannes, this really is diCaprio's 11th Hour.

strophic global warming.

If you want to see a light-hearted comedy, then steer clear of this film. It opens with a catalogue of bleak statements about the fragile state of the Earth, and even bleaker predictions about its future. However, the mood brightens to give an optimistic look at the potential for the human race to achieve, in a rather dramatic paraphrasing of Winston

Churchill, 'our finest hour.' The filmmakers turn the audience's early guilt into a desire to do good. It is somewhat contradictory that a film about the potential demise of mankind should end with statements such as "there has never been a more exciting time to be born". Indeed, inconsistency could be the byword of this film.

*The 11th Hour* is, in effect, an educational and instructional film, composed of an extended series of interviews interspersed with documentary footage. The interviewees are a varied host of scientists, politicians, economists and academics, and include luminaries such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Stephen Hawking. However, despite the appearance of Cambridge's very own Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, the big star, splashed across the credits and titles in his role as 'Writer', 'Narrator' and 'Producer', is undoubtedly diCaprio. As they said at Cannes, this really is diCaprio's 11th Hour. The presence of a Hollywood A-lister will certainly encourage more people to see this film than went to view Al Gore's superior yet famously dull project, *An Inconvenient Truth*. DiCaprio's screen time is, however, limited, and the hard work of explaining the often complex scientific concepts is left to the experts. The frequent use of graphics made for easy understanding, even for a self-confessed science phobe such as me.

There are a number of factors to blame for the current trend in global warming. Amongst these, political subservience to the financial might of big business, as well as the development of our materialistic consumer society, are singled out particularly. How ironic it was that the special screening I attended was littered with corporate promotions and 'special thank-yous to our sponsors'! Solutions are offered to change the current mentalities fuelling climate change. Sustainability within big business, especially acting to lessen reliance on fossil fuels, is one. At least this



argument is economically reasonable; if renewable energy becomes the cheaper option, then business will have to change its ways.

I take issue with the presence of documentaries in the cinema. Some recent films, such as box-office successes *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Supersize Me*, can just as well be watched on television. But *The 11th Hour* works on the big screen because its cinematography is perhaps its greatest asset. While it does not pertain to be a work of art, and that is far from the filmmakers' intentions, it will be the striking visuals afforded by the footage, such as New Orleans' devastation at the hands of Hurricane Katrina, rather than the accompanying dialogue, that will hit home hardest.

But suggested schemes such as "change through the ballot box" are clearly not viable in less democratic nations, and the world's fastest rising polluter and major rising economy, China, was not mentioned once in the 90 minutes of film that I watched. This is a work with noble ideals, but no substance.

*The 11th Hour* is not serious enough to engage the green movement, who themselves hardly need educating, while it is too radical to engage the general public. The filmmakers really misjudged the tone and it comes across as condescending. It is tiring to sit through an hour and a half of self-righteous proselytising by diCaprio, a man who arrived at the Cannes premiere in a private jet. Will this film change the world? Do enough people really care to make a difference? Sadly for our endangered planet, the answer to both questions is no.

John Russell

## Cal

### Album by Son de la Frontera

Flamenco music for me, as for many people, evokes an idea of a Spain that I wish was the truth; a mediaeval place of ancient Catholicism, whitewashed walls, baking heat during the day, cool evenings, wine and passion. More of a feeling and an emotion than a reality, this image of a 'lost Spain' that perhaps never existed has more to do with the writings of Laurie Lee than any personal experience. Spain, of all the countries in Western Europe, is a place of dramatic change and development. The rocky plains and hills of Andalusia are still there, but spanned by power lines and scarred by large-scale industry.

The flamenco of Son de la Frontera echoes Spain's relationship with old and new. The driving rhythms of Paco Amparo's traditional flamenco guitar,

accompanied by the hand-clapping compás and wailing vocals of Moi de Moròn seem to give the listener what they expect, and yet there is a great deal more to this group than simply copying the old styles. Cal is innovative as much as it is traditional; the addition of the Cuban *très* guitar adds a new dimension to the sound. Much of Son de la Frontera's music pays tribute to the work of Diego del Gastor, a legend of flamenco guitar and a native of Andalusia. However, Raul Rodriguez's aim is to re-vitalise and re-imagine the old styles and songs, which he does with great success.

What Cal provides then is a comfortable marriage of old and new, something that Spain as a country and a culture is struggling to achieve. But more than this: Son de la Frontera gives us beautiful music.



Cal washes over the listener like a tide, and, especially in 'Soleà del amor', shows the uninitiated what good, modern flamenco is all about.

Joe Hunter

## Sofera

### Album by Rajery

Germain Randrianarisoa, or 'Rajery', is a remarkable figure. The story of his musical career is one of a self-made man who has overcome great difficulties. Whilst attending a wedding as a child, he touched a piece of poisoned meat, which resulted in the loss of his right hand. He came from a musical family, but such a handicap spelled a bleak future. Nevertheless, at 14 Rajery set out to learn to play the vahila, the emblematic instrument of Madagascar. The vahila is made from a bamboo tube strung (traditionally) with bicycle brake cables; a challenging instrument to choose, since it usually requires great dexterity with both hands. With a great deal of practice and determination, Rajery developed a method of playing, strumming with the stump of his right hand and using his left to create the melody. He then wrote a book entitled *The Secret of the Vahila* and began to teach others to play. It was with some of his students that he founded a group, Akombaliha, whose line-up included ten vahilas. Other enterprises of Rajery's include a vahila factory, a music school, and the establishment of a Madagascan festival for handicapped artists and athletes.

Since recording his first album in France, on which he played all

of the instruments himself, Rajery has become something of a force in world music, often being asked to collaborate with musicians from diverse backgrounds, from rock to reggae. He has been influenced by many types of music, especially jazz. Sofera however is decidedly traditional. The lyrics deal with a wide range of subjects concerning Rajery's homeland, from tales of bush fires ravaging the countryside to songs advising young people to 'be careful and to avoid dubious company'. However to a listener unable to understand the language, the vocals merely form part of the melodic tapestry rather than imparting wisdom or providing any kind of narrative. The sound of Sofera is pleasant and upbeat, if a little repetitive. The standout tracks are the instrumentals, along with 'Tsy Mandry Ny Tanana', a beautiful two-minute vocal harmony which is a good deal more soulful than the rest of the album. Rajery's music is evocative and atmospheric, but perhaps better suited to being played in the background rather than as something to be listened to carefully and attentively.

Joe Hunter





# Agamemnon's Daughter

by Ismail Kadare

Ismail Kadare is a name you could be forgiven for not recognising. Albania, his country of origin, is a nation on the fringes of Europe both geographically and culturally; a nation ruled by the totalitarian Communist regime of Enver Hoxha for more than half of the twentieth century. Yet Kadare, in 2005, was awarded the first International Man Booker Prize. This award was established to challenge the supposed predominance of English and American authors amongst winners of the Booker prize. The International award can be given to any author whose writing has, at some point, been translated into English, and is judged on the basis of an entire body of work. This is certainly applicable to Kadare, who rose to prominence in Albania in the 1970s and was published in France in the 1980s, and yet has had only a dozen or so of his more than fifty books translated into English.

It is the experience of living under Albania's totalitarian government that informs Kadare's writing, but he has never claimed the label of a 'dissident writer'. Speaking out and condemning the regime was not an option for any individual who didn't like the idea of facing a firing squad. The three stories contained in *Agamemnon's Daughter* are imbued with what could be termed a mentality of hopelessness, a sense that one man alone will always be powerless against a majority. Kadare's protagonists are not instigators; they are pulled to and fro by circumstance, left helplessly to watch events unfold as they are dragged along by the current.

Some detractors have even gone as far as to suggest that Kadare did more than merely survive under the brutal regime of Hoxha; that he was a pro-government author and his success stemmed from this position. However, the general tone and message of his earlier translated work, *The General of the Dead Army*, is distinctly anti-establishment. Indeed, Kadare fled Albania in 1990 to seek refuge in France. He has since been quoted as saying that "being critical of a regime is a normal state of affairs for a writer".

*Agamemnon's Daughter* is the longest of the three stories collected in this volume, and perhaps the most directly 'anti-regime'. Set in Albania at the height of totalitarianism, its subject matter consists of the kind of issues one would expect Kadare him-

self to have had to deal with during his twenty or so years as a professional writer under the Hoxha regime. The unnamed protagonist works for the television broadcasting arm of the government, and the recollections about government inquests lead one to suspect that Kadare is writing from personal experience, especially since his protagonist recounts how he kept his head down and weathered the storm while others were hauled away and revealed publicly. The action of *Agamemnon's Daughter* covers the space of a day in the life of the protagonist, who has been summoned to watch a government parade from a VIP box at the top of the grandstand: a dubious honour which he feels he has done nothing to deserve. He is in a delicate emotional state, as his affair with an up-and-coming government minister's daughter, Suzana, has been ended by her only a short while previously. He becomes obsessed with the parallels between Suzana and the story of *Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia*. Suzana had ended the relationship at the request of her father who wanted to present an image of wholesome orthodoxy, supposedly to aid his rise through the governmental ranks.

## Kadare's writing and characterisation is excellent.

Iphigenia, according to legend, had been sacrificed by Agamemnon to appease the elements before the Greek army set out for Troy. However, both stories are complicated by uncertainties and ambiguities; for example it is unclear whether Agamemnon really did sacrifice his daughter, or whether it was an elaborate ploy with a political motive. Also, Kadare's protagonist is unable to figure out why Suzana's father would ask her to make such a sacrifice. Additionally, the reason for the narrator connecting these two stories is ambiguous, the obsession perhaps finding its root in Suzana's yielding of her virginity to him.

*The Blinding Order* and *The Great Wall* are very different both to each other and to *Agamemnon's Daughter*, but contain many of same stylistic features and nuances of tone characteristic of all three stories. *The Blinding Order* is set in a fictionalised version of Albanian society under the Ottoman Empire. A decree is is-



sued by the government which states that those found to possess the 'evil eye' will forcibly be blinded by an institution set up for the purpose. There is a horrific contrast between the insubstantial and un-provable nature of a crime, and the barbaric physicality and finality of the punishment. Against this background is set the story of a young woman who, after sleeping with her fiancé before they are officially made man and wife, discovers a new world of sensual pleasure which she greedily explores.

*The Great Wall* is narrated from the perspective of, alternately, a Chinese officer charged with re-building a section of the Great Wall, and a nomad ordered to watch the Chinese soldiers do it. In this strange, atmospheric, and very short story, the wall itself is the focus: what it represents to different people and its relationship with the society that built it.

Though the three stories are different with regards to setting and character, they are united by a theme which Kadare has often stated he is very interested in exploring in his work: the effect that a certain state of mind, a certain atmosphere, has on people and upon human society. That is, an atmosphere of constant, mutual paranoia and surveillance. This is evoked in all three stories; in *Agamemnon's Daughter* the protagonist advances the view that the first to suspect has the moral high ground.

Kadare's writing and characterisation is excellent. He is proficient at creating an almost intangible atmosphere within his narrative that gives the work great depth and power. However, one is left with the impression that, as a reader of his work in English, there are nuances and implications of which we are deprived. I do not profess to know a great deal about Albania, or its brutal totalitarian regime. I am forced to read Kadare's work not in Albanian or even French, the language into which it was first translated, but English—a kind of 'third best'. The impression I am left with is similar to viewing a beautiful painting from a distance. I can appreciate the colours, the form, even the bold brush strokes; but I am denied the pleasure of enjoying the

# Colony

by Hugo Wilcken

It has become something of a norm in modern days that French literature has three defined, though eloquent, topical themes: death, love and adultery. That Hugo Wilcken, currently residing in France, has in his new novel *Colony* decided to disregard these topics may just about be justified by his British heritage.

Against the backdrop of the penal colonies in French Guyana, the first part of *Colony* introduces Sabir - protagonist, criminal, war veteran and a painstakingly ambiguous character. Within moments of meeting Sabir, the reader is lulled into a feeling of travelling with an old friend, yet with that slightly awkward sense of not remembering much, if anything, about him. The year is 1928 and Sabir is on a prison ship bound for a penal colony. On arrival he is sent to a work camp deep in the jungle where he poses as a gardener, gaining the trust and perhaps even empathy of the idealistic and reformist Commandant of the camp. Amidst the slow terror of a place where time is as suspended, and the leaden atmosphere of the jungle which fills hearts and minds with apathy or desperation, Sabir plans his escape with a speckled group of fellow convicts. The fates of the charismatic, upper-class Edouard, the brutish and pragmatic Bonifacio and Carpette, the faded, jealous lover of Edouard become inescapably interwoven as the reader then follows the group on their quest for freedom.

Yet appearances can be deceptive, and as their adventures unfold it becomes clear that, albeit a journey towards freedom, the red line is their search for an identity, for a past and, not least, for belonging. The characters, each representing an extreme

within humanity, come together in a volatile and dangerous fusion where their eccentricities can only be overcome by a final appeal to the innately humane in each of them. At the heart lies the fundamental question - are the pieces of the puzzle going to fit together, or has each been too deeply affected by the brutality and rawness of the camp and the jungle? Their passage towards their inevitable destiny glints in places with a striking resemblance to both Camus and Kafka in its blend of crime, normative society and identity.

Wilcken's style is alluringly uncomplicated; the scenery is described with a critical yet detached eye, and the characters come to life not through their thoughts and feelings but through carefully considered actions and authentic conversation. The story unfolds with a precise and unobtrusive rhythm, and the events are given life with a grey and halting prose, emphasising what one assumes to be the feelings of the characters. For, in vein, with the rest of the story the reader is told little about the crucial point of the book - how did these characters end up in the penal camp, what has shaped them, what is their history, their life? Whilst morsels are dropped along the way, such as Sabir and Edouard's friendship from the war or Edouard's privileged background as a botanist, it is never sufficient to form a complete picture. Frustrating at times, Wilcken manages to keep the reader searching for answers and desiring more, reflecting the perceived futility of the penal camp and indeed, a subtle pinch to the fading era of colonialism. The book thus transcends genre and resonates on a deeper level; it fulfils the requirements of its type yet manages to span an array of areas blurring the borders between dreams and reality, present and past.

The protagonist is abandoned in the jungle, leaving the reader to ponder his fate, offering no absolution or finality. He is promptly replaced by a new character, Manne, a former colleague of Edouard and an official visitor to the camp. This time around the reader is shown the camp not through the eyes of the prisoners, but through those of an impartial bystander. The result is a complete change of air, deftly illustrating Wilcken's cunning use of his characters to contrast the biased colonial life. Continuing the theme of doubts, identity and adultery, Manne be-



comes enthralled with the Commandant's wife, Mathilde, and is willing to risk everything to help her escape, confirming unmistakable parallels to the first part where Sabir would daydream about her, only to escape with the other convicts. As Manne's infatuation becomes more intense he swerves away from his initial quest to seek out Edouard. Yet through his bond with Mathilde and his subsequent escape attempt he unwittingly follows in Edouard's footsteps only to suffer a very similar fate. The irony of the analogous destinies of the outcast prisoners and the upper-class visitor is prominent and reverberates on a multitude of realities; the tangible journey is paired with an increasingly primitive state of mind searching for a catharsis and desiring a physical freedom. At times Manne is a virtual alter-ego of Sabir, blending the time-frame of the story and questioning the distinction between dreams and reality.

Hugo Wilcken's first book, *The Execution*, was an existentialist thriller. While this second book has retained his talent for philosophical narration, a reader expecting a fast-pace, nerve-wrecking storyline will be sorely disappointed. There certainly is a story in the book but unlike a thriller, the reader is cut off from the adventure just before it is completed. The focus is not on the end itself, but rather on the themes and decisions encountered on the way and carries with it a political critique of the colonial backdrop of the book. Wilcken's factual descriptions allow him to touch upon areas like identity, dreams, obsession, reality and detachment with very few missteps and without ever sounding contrived. *Colony* has managed to leave the reader wanting more, probing and searching for answers.



# In Fourteen Hours

Istanbul at Ramadan- an enlightened but hungry Rob Percy tells us all about it.

Though Turkey became progressively more secular in the 1920s, and is still fiercely proud of the fact, 98% of the population identify themselves as Muslim, and the Islamic history of Istanbul is obvious amongst the proud imperial mosques that dominate the hills of the city.

The present-day expression of the religion is equally unmistakable, most immediately felt in the Adhan, the call-to-prayer which echoes between the minarets of the city's 2691 mosques. Conversely, because of the relaxed approach of the Turkish people and the subjective nature of the tours through which most people see "history," it is certainly possible for a visitor during Ramadan to pass through the city without appreciating the impact of this holy month.

While in other predominantly Muslim countries close down to a degree and relations with strangers become tense during the festival, Istanbul swells as people come in from the vast suburbs and the countryside to worship at the great mosques

and see the events put on by the city. Considered to be the most holy month in the Islamic calendar, Ramadan is meant to be a time for religious observance, charity and, most importantly, fasting.

From the dawn prayer until dusk fourteen hours later, nothing is supposed to pass the lips. This simple proviso affects the city rather subtly. The surface appears to remain the same; the ferries dodge tankers on the Bosphorus, fishermen are jostled by tourists and suits on Galatta Bridge. But there are changes.

The hawkers in rug shops and the grand bazaar relax their business and lapse into gentle conversation amongst themselves. Where there is a quiet spot or patch of grass, men can be found dozing in the shade, waiting for life to start again at sunset. After seven the sun starts to sink.

Queues develop outside patisseries, which are loaded with special baklava, and around the fish shops along the Golden Horn. In Sultan-

amet and Takim, the historic and modern centres of the city respectively, things start to kick off. With the call to evening prayer and a loud flare, which completely throw the unsuspecting visitor, the fast is broken and eleven million people go looking for a bite to eat.

Along the Hippodrome, stalls spring into life offering sweets, kebabs, popcorn, coffee and a selection of other foodstuffs. Many more families camp out, with ten o'clock picnics around Sultanamet park. An alcohol-free carnival develops with Ottoman music, political debate and fortune telling rabbits- a lifestyle invisible to those remaining within the confines of the hotel bar. I bailed out at two.

The feast continued well into the morning. The nocturnal city which was once more lively and more relaxed than the daytime. Fourteen hours of restraint leaves a good appetite, for more than just food..







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