

2007 Ethics Center Student Fellows

Translations

Six Stories of (Mis)Understanding



The International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life • Brandeis University

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Introduction

DANIEL TERRIS

Director, International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life

During a presentation to the Brandeis community in December called “Unpacking: Six Journeys Towards Understanding Communities Around the World,” the 2007 Ethics Center Student Fellows brought their suitcases to the Brandeis Library to share an inside look, in more ways than one, at details of their travels. In the same way, they carried their baggage—literally and metaphorically—as they moved during the summer of 2007 from continent to continent, from community to community, from home to home. They also scrutinized it closely. What was the meaning of the contents of their suitcases: of the clothes, the iPods, and the toiletries that they brought from home . . . of the photographs, the pamphlets, the gifts, and curios that they collected along the way?

So just as they spent the summer unpacking their literal baggage as they undertook their work and travels, these Brandeis students spent the autumn “unpacking” their experiences. They looked deeply within themselves to explore their own motivations for wanting to help create social change in Africa, Asia, Central America, and the United States. They scoured their encounters with colleagues, friends, and acquaintances to understand the inner dynamics of their interactions with others. They analyzed the inner structure of the organizations where they worked, seeking clues about the combination of idealism and practicality that provides the most effective challenge to the status quo.

The narratives in this volume are the work of these student fellows, six Brandeis University undergraduates. Over the past ten years, more than 50 Brandeis students have served as fellows of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life. They are chosen during the fall of their sophomore or junior year in a competitive process based on their academic achievement and their previous experience in working for social change. As part of the application process, students identify and line up field placements for a summer experience supported by the Center.

The fellowship consists of three parts. First, students choose a course in their spring term that will prepare them intellectually for the work that they will be doing in the summer field project; they also participate in a series of meetings and retreats designed to prepare them for the challenges of living in unfamiliar and sometimes difficult environments. In the summer, students work for eight to ten weeks in an organization where they have the opportunity to learn “in the field” about how practitioners address issues of coexistence, development, democracy, education, and other approaches to social change. Finally, in the fall

term, students return to campus and enroll in a writing workshop where they have the opportunity to integrate their academic and practical learning.

Students produced these writings during this fall course, co-taught this year by Mitra Shavarini and myself, in which they shared their work with one another, and explored in our weekly meetings issues and problems of common concern. The students were far-flung geographically, with placements in Rwanda, Guatemala, the United States, Tanzania, India, and Kenya. Their areas of interest varied widely, but a common thread was their ability to draw in significant ways on their previous academic and extra-curricular work at Brandeis. Jamie Pottern brought her experience as an environmental studies major and as president of a student environmental organization to the edge of a shrinking African rain forest, where she encountered close-up the difficult tensions between preserving the environment and ensuring the livelihood of local people and communities. Dan Koosed and Margot Moinester, who had travelled to Mississippi to explore issues of race and justice in a previous Brandeis class, found themselves addressing, in very different settings, the difficult aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Rachel Kleinbaum’s work on labor issues on the Brandeis campus served her well in Guatemala, where she witnessed and studied a labor movement beset by social, political, and economic forces. Ramon De Jesus built on his leadership work in the Posse Foundation as he reflected on issues of race and class in a camp for seriously ill children in North Carolina. And Neena Pathak found, somewhat to her surprise, that her previous studies of liberation theology in Latin America shed light on issues of organic farming in India. Together, over the course of the fall, these students “unpacked” their ideas about the nature of social change and their own role as outsiders in the communities where they lived and worked.

The narratives in this volume oscillate between big ideas and detailed descriptions of small moments in the lives of the students and of the people whom they came to know over the course of the summer. They represent simultaneous commitments to the tools of scholarship, learning through experience, and a passion for social justice.

Four of my colleagues deserve special thanks this year. First of all, it was a pleasure to work with Mitra Shavarini in teaching the fall course. Mitra brought to the class a wealth of experience as a scholar and writer on culture, education, and gender. Her accounts of her recent work in Iran and our “sneak peek” at her latest writing were enlightening and inspiring. And the students benefited tremendously from Mitra’s wise and conscientious commentary on their writing.

Barbara Strauss, in her role as the Ethics Center’s department coordinator, contributed her energy and enthusiasm to the fellowship program, as well as her administrative acumen. Lewis Rice, the communications specialist of the Ethics Center, somehow managed to find time between a welter of other commitments to cast his fine editorial eye over the contents of this volume.

Finally, Marci McPhee, the associate director of the Ethics Center, has been the backbone of the ECSF program since its inception. Her leadership of the selection and placement processes, her guidance at the retreat and other preparatory sessions in the spring, her wise e-mails to students over the course of the summer, and her gentle but strict reminders to students about their obligations, are the foundation on which the program is built.

Stars in the Sky: Race, Class, and Security in Randleman, North Carolina

RAMON DE JESUS '08



Allow me to reintroduce myself...

The drive down from Worcester, Massachusetts, was long and boring. Fourteen hours of trees and highway whizzed by my head as I drove down to Randleman, North Carolina, home of the Victory Junction Gang Camp (VJGC), where I was to spend my summer. As I pulled into what I thought would be the end of my drive, I was confronted by a dirt road and came to the realization that I had driven into a trailer park. Those hours spent toying with Mapquest were for absolutely nothing, and although livid, I quickly composed myself in order to pull the fastest U-turn I have ever performed. Too exhausted to explain what I was doing hundreds of miles away from home at 2:00 a.m., I found my way out of the trailer park before the couple drinking beers in front of my headlights could approach my car.

This long drive down, and the subsequent summer experience, had actually started during the summer of 2006 when I worked at Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camp (HITWGC), the flagship camp of The Hole in the Wall Gang Camps, located in Ashford, Connecticut. I learned of the HITWGC the same way I had learned about Brandeis: through the Posse Foundation. Every spring, the Posse Foundation publishes an internship booklet for its scholars containing opportunities with partner organizations. Within this booklet I found the HITWGC, and after reading the description I was hooked. I had never attended summer camp during my own childhood, and thus I wanted nothing more than to work at this camp. After a long application process I was hired to the position of cabin counselor, and the fun began.

Taking a step back, however, one thing that stood out to me in that summer of 2006 was the reason behind the camp's partnership with the Posse Foundation. Although it is true that Posse participants were being offered positions because of our leadership abilities, it was also true, due to the demographics from which Posse draws its applicant pool, that we were being selected to increase the number of minority staff members. This does present us with a question to be answered: why is there such a shortage of minority applicants to work at summer camps? This question, which I believe to be one of both race and class, became my main query for my 2007 summer experience at the VJGC.

Refocusing on my journey, once I was back on a main road, I phoned the camp director, who safely guided me to the camp entrance. At this moment I noticed that even before you arrive at the VJGC gates, there is a security system in place to keep the "outside" world out of camp. Although this first level of the system is probably unintentional — I don't believe that there is a Mapquest conspiracy to keep you out of Victory Junction — I do believe that faulty directions will keep uninvited guests out of the camp. This is a security system that I would become very familiar with over the course of the summer, as it would continuously play a part in the day-to-day happenings at camp. Furthermore, its many facets would reveal themselves as the summer went on and would end up being referred to as the "bubble." After such a long drive, however, I was not willing to give this too much thought, as the only thing on my mind was crawling into bed.

Saving the detailed introductions for the following day, I was escorted to my cabin where I quickly fell asleep. That night, with only partial awareness of what was to come, I embarked on a journey that would be like none other before it. For the next two and a half months, I would be immersed in a place like none other in the world. Victory Junction became a place that would challenge my ideas of security while giving credence to some of my thoughts about the intersection of race and class.

Over the course of the summer I would grapple with the many interpretations of security that were present at camp while struggling to understand the race and class dynamics that were at play.

Unbeknownst to me, when I agreed to become a cabin counselor at the VJGC, I was also agreeing to live in an area of the U.S. that was very adamant about legal possession of firearms. To my surprise, many of my co-counselors, who are some of the most gentle and kindhearted people that I have ever met, had licenses to carry concealed weapons. One of my coworkers even had a safe-like structure in his house that was filled with an assortment of firearms. Although they were for hunting purposes and handguns were not included in the arsenal, they were firearms nonetheless. The idea of benevolent individuals who carried concealed weapons was very foreign to me, and served as a stark contrast to my upbringing. After all, I grew up in a place where only two kinds of people carried weapons: criminals and police officers, both of whom I grew up learning to distrust and

fear. Being in this new kind of environment in North Carolina would challenge my ideas of security so much that by the end of my experience my outlook on firearms, and the people who owned them, completely changed.

Over the course of the summer I would grapple with the many interpretations of security that were present at camp while struggling to understand the race and class dynamics that were at play. Enriched with stories from my childhood and accounts of the interactions that took place throughout the summer, what follows is a detailed description of my experience at Victory Junction.

From the outside looking in...

Located on 72 acres of private land in Randleman, North Carolina, the Victory Junction Gang Camp, a NASCAR-themed year-round camp, serves a unique population. As a member of The Hole in The Wall Gang Camps, Victory Junction provides a free-of-cost camp experience to children with a range of chronic illnesses. Although the HITWGC association was founded by Paul Newman, Victory Junction itself is the creation of Kyle and Pattie Petty, a tribute to their son Adam Petty, who passed away as a result of a fatal car accident on the race track. Operated solely on donations from corporations and individuals, the camp is able to meet the needs of children suffering from conditions such as sickle cell anemia, HIV/AIDS, cancer, and spina bifida, just to mention a few. This experience is an opportunity that very few places in the world offer; Victory Junction is one of the places where these children can have a safe camp experience.

Throughout the summer the camp runs week-long disease/condition-specific sessions. That is to say, each week, a different group of children will enter through the camp gates and participate in activities with children who are afflicted by the same illnesses. Although the majority of children participate in camp during the summer, camp is also active during the other seasons. Outside of the traditional summer camp experience, VJGC has family weekends during the fall, winter, and spring. During these weekends, up to 32 families will come to the campgrounds and participate in many of the activities that the camp offers during the summer.

In my previous paragraph, I used the phrase “traditional summer camp experience,” but as you could have already guessed, VJGC is anything but “traditional.” While it has much to do with the population being served – for example, there is a full-time medical staff comprised of doctors and nurses, all buildings are handicap-accessible, and there are handicap showers/stalls in every cabin – it also has to do with the physical look of the place.

For starters, at the entrance to the camp, there is a mansion-like black iron gate with a keypad in front; to enter, you either need to know the keypad code or call the camp to be let in. Once inside, you are greeted by a state-of-the-art welcome center donated by Wal-Mart; it’s big, fancy, and does not give off the “You are at a camp” vibe. For this reason, the atmosphere that is usually associated with a summer camp, of authentic nature and “the wild outdoors,” is in direct conflict with the visuals presented by the welcome center. Once you absorb the sheer size of this initial structure and come to grips with whether or not you are comfortable with the presence of Wal-Mart, a company that has been accused of poor treatment of employees and gentrification of small family-owned businesses, you are faced with the Temkin Tunnel. The Temkin Tunnel separates the welcome area of camp from the portion of camp where the children are. This tunnel, a donation of the Temkin racing family, is a massive structure that has neon lights inside of it; the lights are only active during the night and are never seen by the children, begging the question: why is it there?

Past the Temkin Tunnel is Cabin Row and as is plainly obvious by its name, it is the area of camp where the cabins are located. Not so obvious in the name, however, is that at the end of Cabin Row, where the “Red Unit”¹ cabins are, there is a cul-de-sac that gives the cabin area a suburban feel. Furthermore, following the theme found in the Temkin Tunnel, all the cabins have neon lights that surround the individual cabin names.² While the images that one is presented with upon first viewing the welcome center and cabin areas are definitely shocking, the activity area, also known as Victory Circle, is positively jaw-dropping and awe-inspiring.

Among the first things that a visitor notices when walking around Victory Circle is Adam's Race Shop, a giant building in the shape and colors of Adam Petty's racing number, 45. With my first viewing, I wondered why this building was shaped like a race car and upon entering Adam's Race Shop, that question was quickly answered. Inside of "45," the campers are greeted by racing simulators, four actual NASCAR vehicles, a television with a library of NASCAR films, and a tire-changing station. When I first saw this, I wanted to ask why all of this was necessary, but I didn't have time to question the giant race-car building because the second thing I noticed was an even bigger shock than the first.

Stepping out of Adam's Race Shop, one is confronted by the Jumbo-Tron, an oversized television screen facing the cabins that is left on all night and is sometimes used for movie screenings on the lawn.³ As I moved around Victory Circle, I was completely numb from the first sights and fell into a zombie-like state that did not allow me to react. Circling around, I took in the fully staffed infirmary, the dining hall that has cars suspended from the ceiling, and the gym that has a self-belaying rock wall, theater, bowling alley, and tree house. By the time I arrived at the pool, I was so awestruck that I took for granted the water park, which contains a lazy river, a pool with a basketball hoop, a hot tub, and giant motorcycle water slide. The amount that the first-time viewer takes in is simply too much.

For all the superfluous expenses that camp has afforded these children, the buildings are not the embodiment of camp. The truth of what is important to the campers was revealed on a nightly basis during "Cabin Chat," a nightly activity comprised of questions that all cabin members would take turns answering. These questions would range from playful: "if you had an empty pool and could fill it with anything in the world, what would you fill it with?"—to heartfelt: "who in the cabin made you smile today and what did they do to make you smile?" Most important of these questions, because it illuminated the essence of camp, was one posed at the end of every week. The night before the campers went home, the question asked was usually one that dealt with the campers' favorite moment at camp. Rarely responding with an answer that glorified the physical spaces found at camp, campers typically pointed out things like: "I enjoyed playing basketball with the counselor because I beat him" or "the time that I raced my cabin mate in a water chug."

If reduced to the "bare bones," one could argue that the VJGC is just like any other summer camp. It has a pool, cabins, a dining hall, and various other activity areas, all of which are standard in the genre of summer camps. The campers enter the gates, play, share laughs, and have fun just like at most other camps. The difference here, however, is that unlike a traditional summer camp experience, a counselor will be there to support his or her hemophiliac camper through their "first stick."⁴ On countless occasions, a counselor will be there to cheer on his or her camper when he climbs the tower, all the while telling him that the cancer ravaging his body has not made him too weak to climb. These are bond-forming experiences that cannot be found at a traditional summer camp.

With the creation of the VJGC, the Petty racing family has created a place that not only has all the bells and whistles any kid would love, but also provides an atmosphere where children can have extremely meaningful interactions. While the physical spaces at camp play an important role in helping the staff engage the campers, the heart of the camp experience can be found in the interactions between the human beings on the camper side of the Temkin Tunnel.

It's the drugs, basketball, and the rap. There's more to us than that...

The sights and sounds that I experienced in Randleman, North Carolina, could not be further from the realities of my adolescent years growing up in the Bronx. As a child neither I nor any of my close friends ever participated in sleep-away camps like that of Victory Junction. In fact, this was something that if given the opportunity to partake in, many of us would dismiss as "something white people do"; our "street cred" at the age of 10 was already more important than participating in things that looked like "Bug Juice," a television show about a summer camp that featured a predominantly white staff and camper population. Our dismissal of camp as something meant for whites was not only substantiated by the majority of the participants on "Bug Juice" being white, but was also given credence by the fact that we had never been offered the opportunity to attend a sleep-away camp. Looking back now, it is very possible that a subliminal cultural message was being propagated to us, which made us believe that camp was something not meant for inner-city youth.

In her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Beverly Tatum examines the development of racial identity, but more importantly provides us with David Wellman's stellar definition of racism. Though controversial, Wellman defines racism as a "system of advantage based on race" in which the dominant (white) class, knowingly or unknowingly, benefits from racism. Furthermore, this definition goes on to state that racism is a system of "cultural messages, institutional policies, and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (Wellman, pg. 7). So in essence, whites are given an advantage simply on the basis of their skin. While this is something that many believe to be common knowledge, it was interesting for me to dwell on these thoughts throughout the course of the summer. With the issue of race in mind, I began to wonder if these advantages spread into the realm of camp. In other words, are there factors in play that perpetuate the idea of camp as something meant for middle-class America?

On countless occasions, a counselor will be there to cheer on his or her camper when he climbs the tower, all the while telling him that the cancer ravaging his body has not made him too weak to climb.

A very powerful example of what can be considered institutional racism was given to me straight from the VJGC director. One afternoon while speaking with Chris, he revealed to me some information pertaining to the difficulties of hiring black male staff members. Chris and I discussed the lifestyles that are made readily available to young men of color from low-income neighborhoods. We both acknowledged that the options seemed very slim; or as Talib Kweli puts it: "Brothers getting caught in the trap. For the cash it's the drugs, basketball, or the rap." As the conversation continued, certain hypothetical, but very real, situations came into discussion. For example, if a young man had created a lucrative lifestyle for himself by selling drugs, the appeal to work at a summer camp is simply not there. The staff population that was missing at the VJGC, young men who are poor and of color, are often in situations where they have to provide for their siblings, parents, and offspring. Coming to the conclusion that there was little incentive to work at Victory Junction if your income on the street was exponentially greater than that of a camp staff member, Chris and I agreed that this issue constituted a strong deterrent to the missing population. Essentially, many are placed in this situation because of their income levels, and although this is not the foremost reason for low percentages of minority applicants, it is certainly a cause to be considered.

No light at the end of tunnel, we're trapped in a bubble...

As I mentioned earlier, the system of security, which protected you both emotionally and physically, came to be known as the "Bubble." Throughout the summer one noticed very subtle components of the "bubble" which were put in place to keep you immersed in nothing more than camp. One example is the fact that the only television accessible to staff members is a good distance from Cabin Row, where counselors and campers are housed. During the day it was an average of 93 degrees; coincidentally this was the portion of the day when you had your time off. Simply put, it was way too hot to trek down to the staff lounge just to watch television. Combine this with the reality of working no less than 17 hours a day and you have a situation where all you want to do on your free time is rest. This summer, no one at camp really knew what was going on with Britney Spears, what the situation was in Iraq, or who was fighting over the Anna Nicole Smith estate; it simply took too much effort to keep up with these things. Thus, very few staff members were distracted by the happenings that took place outside of our "bubble."

While there were very subtle features of the "bubble," there were also very "in your face" facets of it. The most notable was the multi-level security system that you first notice at the entrance to camp. When you pull up to the main entrance of the camp you are faced with seven-foot-tall black gates that bear the letters VJ in gold. About seven feet in front of these gates is a keypad with a code that changes throughout the course of the summer.

In addition to the physical obstacles presented by the security fence, there are also multiple hidden video cameras on the outside of buildings that continuously monitor the happenings at camp. In conjunction with an employee familiarly called "Stan the Security Man," the camp has created a surveillance system that constantly watches over the camp family. As Stan makes his rounds, he keeps an eye open for camp-issued name tags, which serve the purpose of identification and thus grant permission to be on camp grounds. If you are found without a nametag and staff members fail to recognize you, chances are you do not belong on camp. At this point, you will be kindly escorted off the premises by Stan with a high probability of the Randleman sheriff's department waiting on the other side of the gates.

During the evening hours, the security detail at camp "beefs up" with armed sheriffs who circle the camp on Polaris ATVs (speeds up to 70 mph). From midnight until 6:00 a.m., all activity is restricted to Cabin Row, where the nametag system is strictly enforced. At night, however, if you are seen without a nametag, a phone call to the camp director is usually in order. If you happen to indeed be a staff member, you are usually admonished for not carrying your nametag. For those who are not staff members, trespassing charges are likely to be pressed.

This security system, which seems a bit much, is not without warrant. Due to the popularity of NASCAR and the obsessive nature of some fans, there have been incidents of trespassing on the campgrounds. Due to these incidents, security is taken very seriously, and although there is a relatively high level of precaution, it all helps to keep the children as safe as possible during camp sessions.

The last level of the security system, the sheriff, had an interesting effect on the camp. Part of the reason that other portions of camp were off limits was due to forms of entertainment being located there, such as computers and video games. From my previous summer at the HITWGC, I can honestly say that these are distractions that can keep you awake much longer than you should be and make interaction with other staff members less frequent during the evening hours. By making it so that you had to be on Cabin Row from midnight onwards, an evening "hang out" scene was created on Cabin Row. Without us knowing, we were in essence being forced to spend time with each other. The time that was spent on Cabin Row often transformed into talks about how to deal with certain behavioral issues, or how to communicate better with one camper who seemed a bit distant. It was as if these late-night sessions were used to give tips to each other on how to deal with certain situations.

The final manifestation of "the bubble" came in mandatory events scheduled during intercession, the days between sessions where there are no campers present. The first one of these events came right in the middle of the summer. We were all gathered at the end of the

session and told that we were not to leave camp on the day the children departed because we had training and were also going to be placed in new cabins with new co-counselors. In addition to remaining on camp grounds for departure day, we were also prohibited from leaving camp grounds the following day due to the presence of outside speakers who were going to come in and host various workshops. No one, to my knowledge, was particularly thrilled over having his or her precious “time off” taken away. Although we were all upset over this, we took it in stride and buckled down in preparation for training.

The following day we were brought into the theater and as we readied for guest speakers, it was announced that we would not have guest speakers and instead were going to Carrigan Farms, a beautiful water-filled rock quarry that promised fun and relaxation. Everyone rushed the camp director and gave him the biggest hug he had ever felt. That day, I am 100% sure that everyone in the staff made a connection with someone who they were unfamiliar with, and everyone left the waters of the quarry feeling as if they had just quadrupled their friendships at camp. Activities like this, in which we were obliged to stay together as a staff, forced us to interact with all of camp and establish bonds that would enrich the lives of anyone who stepped through the VJGC gates.

One could interpret the strict security measures as too intense and perhaps a bit tyrannical on the part of the camp administration, but the reality of the situation was nothing like that. In the end, the ones who benefited the most from the “bubble” were the kids. Yes, we were protected from the ugly things that were taking place outside of the gates, but by proxy, so were the children. Furthermore, because the staff spent so much time together, our communication skills greatly improved as the summer went on. I can recount many times when I did not need to use verbal communication to convey certain thoughts to my fellow staff members. The outside world was both a distraction from the work that we had to do and a distraction from the bonds that we were to form. Were it not for the creation of the “bubble,” the community at VJGC would have been a very different and less welcoming place.

In addition to what the bubble did for the community, I will speak for myself when saying that never have I felt safer than I did this summer at Victory Junction. I never had to worry about my physical safety, nor that of the children, a feeling that was very foreign to me while growing up in the Bronx. The constant circling of Stan the Security Man made me feel protected and helped me realize that nothing was going to enter those gates and be able to harm the campers or me. This feeling of complete security is something that many people long for and invest thousands of dollars in the form of alarms, bodyguards, and video cameras. Who knew that I wouldn't have to spend a dime – all I had to do was drive down south.

The Growth

*“S to the A to the double M Y, Sammy hands! Sammy hands!
S to the A to the double M Y, Sammy hands! Sammy hands!”*

By the end of the summer, Sammy had his own cheer at camp. And in an environment where cheers are being done throughout the entire day, this was huge. His cheer, which was based on his inability to speak without his hands, swept through camp like a wildfire. At this very moment, you are probably wondering what I mean by “inability,” and yes, I assure you that we are both working with the same definition of inability; Sammy really could not refrain from using hand gestures while speaking. The most persistent of these gestures, thus earning the title “Sammy Hands,” involves Sammy shaping his hands like the ASL letter B, and pointing at individuals while speaking to them. While using the Sammy Hands, he would say things like, “I’m gonna need you...” followed by whatever he needed you to do. When asked about why he was unable to speak like a “normal human being,” he would bring out the Sammy Hands and explain that they were used when he needed to be assertive; I guess that he just always needed to be assertive.

In any case, we never came to a conclusion about whether or not this cheer was a good or bad thing. Was he being poked fun at by his peers who created it? Was it created for the pure enjoyment of the children? Or was it a little bit of both? Although I believe it was a little bit of both, none of these questions are important because no matter the motive, all of camp was doing the “Sammy hands.”

When I first met Sammy I thought to myself, “Thank God, I’m not alone.” This was due to Sammy being the only black person at camp, and although I myself am not African American, at the time I believed that he was the person who I would be able to relate to the most. This assumption, however, would prove to be a big mistake. I would find out very quickly that Sammy and I were from two completely different worlds. Not only this, but I often received the impression that Sammy didn’t see himself as black. He just saw himself as Sammy.

Because I was there to gather information on how to recruit a higher number of minority staff, I thought it made perfect sense to introduce the idea to the first person of color that I saw. My game plan involved seeking out the minority staff members, getting to know them, and interviewing the ones that I felt most comfortable with. I assumed that we would have shared experiences, thoughts on race, and similarities in our reasons for loving camp. Furthermore, I thought that these questions would be met

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with a welcoming attitude and a general enthusiasm to speak about the race dynamics at camp. To my surprise, however, my questions were met with confusion. For example, after getting to know Sammy through multiple casual conversations, I told him what my purpose at camp was. He nodded as if to say “I understand, that’s cool,” but looking back on the experience, he might have just been stretching his neck.

One day, believing that it was a good time to ask him some questions, I jumped right into an informal interview by asking him how he felt about being the only African American staff member at camp. To this question, Sammy responded with, “What do you mean?” I tried to rephrase the question in different terms, and when I finally got a response, it wasn’t what I expected. I expected Sammy to speak about how he thought he would serve as a positive role model for the kids during sickle cell session. I expected him to speak on how people assumed he was a good dancer and loved hip hop (neither of which were true. The boy couldn’t dance to save his life and I will spare you the details of the time we took him out to a club). To the contrary, Sammy informed me that no one treated him as if he were any different than they were, and he also told me that I was the first person to make a “big deal” about his race. Because of the lack of attention his race was given by the rest of the staff, he didn’t pay too much attention to the color of his skin and just saw himself as Sammy.

As I got to know Sammy even better, he revealed to me that he had grown up in a very affluent part of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, that his father was a business owner, that he had grown up going to camp all of his life, and that he didn’t have many friends of color back home. In one way, this affirmed what I had entered camp believing, which was that the reason for there being a deficit in staff of color was due more to culture than to ethnicity or race alone. This affirmation, however, still did not make up for the fact that Sammy had turned my world upside down. His stories of attending camp, having very few friends of color, and growing up in affluence were responses that I expected from the Caucasian staff members. Through these conversations I came to the difficult realization that I went into this experience with many assumptions, and although the Sammy Hands were one of the strangest phenomena I have ever encountered, he did teach me a valuable lesson. When you assume, you make an *ass* out of *u* and *me*.

Every tool is a weapon, if you’re holding it right...

It was a hot summer afternoon in 2001, and like many afternoons before it, my friends and I were sitting outside of Sam’s building enjoying time off from school. Games like “poke you in the eye” where one of us would randomly try to poke the other in the eye with our pointer finger, quickly became a dangerous, yet entertaining, staple of the summer. This afternoon, however, would be like none other before it. We had all experienced violence in our everyday lives. The previous week we had a huge block fight in the middle of the street due to someone threatening

to beat up my cousin, and every night we literally fell asleep to the sounds of gunfire. But none of us had ever experienced a shooting while we were all out in the open.

Although our attention should have been drawn to it – the man had circled the block at least three times before we heard the shots ring out – none of us had noticed the bicycle that continuously rounded our neighborhood. We were probably too concerned with the ongoing “poke you in the eye” and the safety of our vision to notice the bicycle that kept appearing on our street. When we heard the distinct sound of gunfire, however, we all ran into the building as fast as we could. Lungs burning, I ran up the stairs in Sam’s building, skipping two and three at a time, until I reached the top floor and could go no higher. For a while we just stood on the final landing repeating the same curse words over and over until we thought it was safe to go back out. By the time we had made our way down the stairs, the street was flooded with people, young and old, trying to figure out what had just happened. We would later find out that someone selling drugs in another dealer’s territory sparked this altercation. At the end of the day, one of our neighborhood drug dealers lay dead on the street.

Looking back on my childhood, in relation to events like the one I have just finished retelling, I realize that there was never a time when I associated firearms with security. I was raised in an environment where police, who were there to “serve and protect,” were mistrusted and feared; those who were there to provide security for us were not looked at in a positive light due to their documented abuses of power. Even when thinking of them as a means to secure your “spot” from another drug dealer, I always saw firearms as an instrument of offensive violence and not defensive security. This summer, however, my view of guns was tested and my notions of what they were meant for were pushed.

The first time that issues of weapons entered my mind this summer was one night after we had put all the kids to bed. Sitting in the common room, my volunteer for the week, a middle-aged insurance salesman, asked me how I ended up at camp. I went on to tell him about my experience working at The Hole in The Wall the previous summer and followed that story with details of how I had recently been the victim of a street crime in Guatemala. “When I was mugged, I saw it as a sign for me to come home,” I ended my story. He replied, “If you had a gun on you, that would’ve never happened. If anyone ever tried that on me and I was carrying my weapon, I would have no problem unloading on them to protect my friends and family.” This comment caught me so off guard that I did not respond. My hesitation then created a window that allowed him to continue commenting on how he would protect his loved ones at any cost and that he had purchased firearms for both of the women in his life, his wife and daughter. At first, all I heard was “guns, guns, guns – violence, violence, violence.” After I had let the comments sink in, however, I realized that what this man was talking about was not violence. It was a very simple affirmation of a belief that we both

shared; if someone threatens those that we love, we would do anything to secure our loved ones' safety.

That same night, after I had finished my conversation with my volunteer, I stepped outside to talk to my co-counselor Steven. I related the whole conversation back to him and as soon as I had finished my story, he responded by saying, "If only you could see Johnson's house." Steven told me that Daniel, a staff member thought of as the "golden boy" of camp, had a massive collection of firearms in his home. Steven told of a giant safe similar to the vaults that are held inside of banks, except that this safe was not filled with money; instead it contained many different firearms. While many of the guns were used for hunting purposes, they were firearms nonetheless and were as effective on a human being as they would be on a deer.

Balancing this apparent obsession with instruments of violence was the fact that Daniel was a "good Christian boy." He went home every weekend to spend time with his parents, never cursed, and sometimes led camp worship services the morning before the campers arrived; simply put, Daniel would never be described as a violent individual. Further solidifying Daniel's status as a kind individual was a story circulating around camp about a homeless man who was in the process of building his home on Daniel's family land – free of cost. In Daniel's case, one could argue that even the most gentle of individuals are capable of violence. Many times, when dealing with cases of people being accused of violent actions, friends and family will often testify that the person was very kind to all whom he encountered. What is important to note here, however, is that these comments are always made after a horrible event has occurred. With no precedent of violence set by Daniel, wondering about a hypothetical violent act really serves no purpose. While I agree that everyone is capable of violence, there are certain factors that need to be given some thought. For example, given Daniel's family background, work with chronically ill children, and involvement in his faith, I highly doubt that this kind of hypothetical thinking in relation to possible acts of violence is appropriate.

Both of these interactions, the one with my volunteer, and the one with Steven where I was informed of the firearms in Daniel's safe, taught me valuable lessons. First of all, because weapons are often used as instruments of destruction, it does not mean that they cannot be used for safety. I never received the impression that my volunteer was someone who looked forward to using his gun; it was simply a means of insuring his security in certain situations. From my own experience, growing up in an urban high-violence neighborhood, I cannot recall knowing anyone who legally owned a firearm. In my opinion, illegal possession of firearms, which are often used to protect investments in drugs, are more likely to result in violence than legal possession of firearms. This is simply due to the nature of what is being protected, and illegal activities will surely bring about a higher concentration of violence than legal ones.

Now, do I believe that I need a weapon to protect myself? Not at this very moment, but out of this summer I gained the understanding of why someone could look to firearms as a means of security. If in fact I was in possession of a firearm that night in Guatemala, I have little doubt that I would have used it to defend Rachel, her friends, and myself. It is important to note, however, that although my views on firearms have changed, I am not advocating for widespread adoption of these instruments. I do worry about the unintended consequences of widespread gun ownership. Issues like accidental discharge, and otherwise harmless fistfights turning into fatal gunfights, the latter being a serious problem in my neighborhood, are both very problematic outcomes. In the end, any weapon is only as dangerous as its user and although guns have the power to take life, it is the finger on the trigger that grants it said power.

Though it seems like we just met, you're the one I won't forget...

At the VJGC we had a saying in relation to goodbyes. More often than not, on the last day of camp, many of our campers would let all their emotions out and cry in the arms of one another. This was especially common in the older campers who at the end of the session would come to the realization that they had "aged out" and were now too old to come back as a camper. When this happened, we would explain to them that even if they were not going to see each other for a long time to come, the experiences that they shared that week, and the lessons which they learned, would be a part of them forever. Because the memories of these experiences would remain deep within their hearts they could always look back on the summer, never having to say goodbye to their friends, and instead saying "see you later" to the experiences they would later recall.

As I drove out of the campgrounds the morning after the closing ceremony, the words that I had said to calm my campers week after week suddenly came to me. For two and a half months I participated in an experience that would forever change my perceptions of race, class, and security. Many of the friends that I made over the summer are people whom I will never forget due to their profound impact on me and who I will actively seek to keep in touch with. People like Sammy, who challenged my ideas of race and class by shedding light on his middle-class suburban upbringing, taught me that it is never safe to assume. I am indebted to individuals like Daniel, who made me realize that weapons are given their power by the people who use them; by themselves, they are just pieces of metal.

Furthermore, I came to the conclusion that due to the history of race relations in our country, certain populations have been allowed to move up the social and financial ladder faster than others. Because of this harsh reality, when compared to their white counterparts, many minority children have access to a much slimmer range of

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opportunities. One such opportunity that these children miss out on is access to a summer camp experience, a problem that can only be corrected via a significant culture shift. Throughout my experience, I explored how issues like subsidized housing, low income, and the appeal of street life have affected Latino and black populations in a way that has restricted access to opportunities that most of white America has access to. Until the aforementioned institutions are altered, these cycles will continue to perpetuate themselves.

As the gates closed behind me, I knew that I was not saying goodbye to the experiences or the people with whom I had spent the previous months. This summer, I learned a lot about myself and, through my many interactions with different individuals, my outlook on various issues were changed. Many of the experiences that taught me valuable life lessons this summer will continue to have an effect on my life. Because of this, I did not say goodbye to my summer. Instead I said “see you later” to the experiences that I carry with me every day.

Notes

1. The cabins are divided into four units: Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow. During each summer session the units are populated by children in the same age group and consist of two male cabins and two female cabins.
2. Keeping in line with the NASCAR theme, each cabin has been named after a NASCAR speedway.
3. The Jumbo-Tron is on 24 hours a day because if shut down, it takes a very long time to warm up.
4. This term is used to refer to the first time that a hemophiliac camper uses a syringe to self-infuse with factor.

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¡El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido! The People United Will Never Be Defeated!

RACHEL KLEINBAUM '08



People are always surprised when I return from Guatemala without a tan. I always found it necessary to wear a sweater in Quetzaltenango, despite its proximity to the equator. Set high in the mountains of Guatemala, Quetzaltenango, or Xela as the locals refer to it, always has a slight chill in the air, especially in the rainy season, from May through August, when I visit.

Despite the less than desirable weather, I have been in love with Xela since the first time I visited. The summer after my sophomore year, I stayed in Xela for six weeks learning Spanish and exploring the city and culture. I immediately took to the warm, friendly people I met there and to the city itself. It's small enough to feel like a community, but large enough to have some diversity. It is a foreign-friendly city, but is not overwhelmed by tourists; the people who travel to Xela mostly work in its non-profit sector. My first summer in Xela, I was fascinated by labor struggles that I witnessed, and saddened by the inequality the country still faces. At the end of the summer, I knew I would have to return.

My interest in labor and inequality made working for a union the next summer a logical choice. I decided to intern for the Union de Trabajadores de Quetzaltenango (UTQ), a coalition of labor unions. I came in expecting to struggle with ideas of privilege, community organizing, and how to maintain hope in an economic context that

favors free trade and ignores the rights of workers. I expected the UTQ to be a vibrant force leading the labor struggle in Xela. While the UTQ did not meet my expectations, I did face many of the issues that I had expected to grapple with. I befriended people from different areas of Guatemalan society, from the indigenous and marginalized to those working to address Guatemala's issues to the upper-middle class. I was saddened

by the inequality in the country--despite being the largest economy in Central America, 56 per cent of the population remains below the poverty line.¹ I saw how community can contribute to social change, in such settings as everyday work at the UTQ and at a Mayan celebration. On the other hand, I saw how community among the more affluent can reinforce the status quo; this point was driven home

at a birthday party for a friend's daughter that I attended. Every day I was confronted by the growing violence in the country. Latin American violence is often exaggerated by the press in the United States, but it does make community more difficult to achieve. I was saddened by the UTQ's inability to maintain the community it had created, and by its slow decline. My entire summer was colored by the backdrop of intense, and occasionally violent, electoral campaigning.

Lo que ha Pasado

Guatemala is a deeply divided nation. Not only is there a huge gap between the rich and the poor, but race also drives people apart. Despite being 40 percent of the population², indigenous peoples, Mayans, are marginalized and ignored by many *Ladinos*, or people with Spanish ancestry. After a CIA-backed coup of the democratic government in 1954, the country found itself embroiled in a civil war. For 36 years, guerrilla forces fought for indigenous, labor, and civil rights against a repressive government that began a campaign against all Mayans in order to wipe out the guerrilla forces and procure the little land the Mayans owned. There is much debate as to whether the Mayans were innocent bystanders or whether they took part in the guerrilla movement, but no one denies the persecution and massacres they faced at the hands of the army. This violence includes the "razed earth" campaign in which entire villages were burned to the ground during the civil war. After decades of violence, the Peace Accords were finally signed in 1996; however, the Mayans remain on the fringes of society, and violence continues to be a major issue in Guatemala and has affected this year's elections.

During most of the 36-year civil war between the military and guerrilla movements, civil society was not allowed to exist in Guatemala. Unions and other organizations were brutally repressed when they tried to form. In the early 1980s, the military relinquished nominal government control

Not only is there a huge gap between the rich and the poor, but race also drives people apart.

to civilians, and civil society, though heavily monitored, was again allowed to exist. The UTQ was established during this time in order to strengthen the labor movement that was finally able to exist after years of repression and violence.

The UTQ began organizing factory workers, like Oswaldo Saquich, my boss, who used to work in a beer factory. As the organization grew, and Guatemala's plight became known in the international community, unions from Europe and the United States began making large contributions to aid the UTQ's struggle. With this funding, the UTQ hired 25 full-time employees to run various programs, such as health care, childcare, and legal aid, and it hired instructors to run an organizing school. The organization had enough funding to build the "Casa del Pueblo" to be the center of the UTQ community and operations.

The UTQ became a place for various unions to collaborate and offer each other support. During its heyday the UTQ served as a community gathering place where meetings were held, protests were planned, classes on leadership were taught, and legal services were provided. Due to outside funding, UTQ was able to continue its work and begin offering many services that not only improved people's work situation, but their quality of life. The childcare and medical services the UTQ made available show that it had a holistic vision for how to improve the lives of its members. The UTQ fought not only for workers' rights, but also for the rights of indigenous peoples, who were and are principal constituents of the organization. Because of its size and power, the UTQ was able to build relationships with the *alcaldes*, the mayors of Xela. This gave the organization some political influence over local politics. After the Peace Accords were signed the UTQ remained active in monitoring progress made (or lack thereof) on the agreements the government, military, indigenous groups, and others determined.

While the Peace Accords ended the 36 years of physical violence, structural violence against indigenous and other marginalized members of society has not ceased. Guatemala remains a stratified country with huge disparities between rich and poor, urban and rural, ladino and indigenous. Despite the problems that continue to plague the county, international aid has moved to other countries that are receiving more attention in the international media. This has left civil society in Guatemala, including the UTQ, at a loss.

Trabajadores en Xela

Despite its status as the second largest city in Guatemala, Xela does not feel like a large city to me, since I grew up ten minutes outside of New York City. There are very few buildings that boast more than two stories, and from the roof of my hostel (another two-story building) it was possible to see most of *Zona Una* (Zone One). Zone One, the oldest part of the city, is the Xela that most foreigners know. Lining the narrow colonial streets are hostels, hotels, restaurants, and Spanish

schools, all catering to the significant, but not overwhelming, expatriate and tourist populations. Interspersed between the businesses catering to tourists are *tiendas* (small stores), *comedors* (small restaurants), residential buildings, and *mercados* (street markets), which generally cater to the local population and more adventurous foreigners. None of the buildings have windows facing the streets; it always felt like I was walking down a brightly colored corridor. In the center of Zone One, *Parque Central* offers a respite from the dangerous task of walking through the streets, dodging cars, *colectivos* (minivans for city transportation), and chicken buses (converted school buses for journeys outside the city), all of which have little concern for the lives of pedestrians. Surrounding Parque Central are the only cultural buildings in the city, the large museum that serves as a cultural, historical, and science museum in one, the cathedral, and other old buildings dating back to the time the department of Quetzaltenango attempted to become its own country.

Intense pride in Xela remains a common characteristic of many locals. According to the owners of my hostel, every Guatemalan wants to live in Xela. It's hard to refute this bold statement considering the large influx into the city of migrants from rural areas. Many of these migrants come searching for better opportunities that no longer exist and wind up working in the informal sector. I was able to interact with many of them through my internship at the UTQ.

The UTQ is located in *Zona Dos*, a 30-minute walk from Xela's bustling city center. In fact, on my way to my first day interning, I almost turned back several times. Zone Two felt so different that I thought I had gotten lost and accidentally left the city. While Zone One's architecture of brightly colored cement walls remained the same, most of what was familiar in Zone One changed. Gone were the narrow cobblestone streets, cafes, restaurants, hotels, and gringos talking and laughing loudly. Sit-down restaurants gave way to simpler comedors where there is no menu; you eat the one meal they're serving. When I saw cornfields and a cow grazing along the road, I decided it was time to turn back.

At the moment I had given up, I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, turned, and was rewarded with the sight of a tan building proudly proclaiming in large brown letters, "CASA DEL PUEBLO, UTQ." Set slightly off the road, at the bottom of a steep hill, UTQ's building is easy to miss. Perhaps if it had been built in a more central location in a more prominent position, it would not be on the brink of collapse as it is today.

A building is an incredible resource for an organization. It can provide a space for members to gather and meet other members. These social ties build community and strengthen commitments to each other and the organization. A building can be used to build ties with other organizations and to create revenue to keep the organization sustainable. It can be a place that stores institutional memory,

reminding members of the accomplishments and challenges of the past so they can learn from their mistakes and build a more successful future. It is clear that the Casa Del Pueblo did serve these functions for a long time; however, now it is debatable whether the building is helping the UTQ remain afloat or is holding it back.

On my first day interning, the UTQ only had two full-time staff, and their only remaining program was the organizing school. The UTQ has given up on factory workers and now focuses on the informal sector, mostly street vendors. On this particular day, I only waited a short time for someone to respond to the doorbell; however, depending on my luck at other times I waited anywhere from 30 seconds to 10 minutes before I was rewarded with the sound of scuffling feet running up the ramp to open the door. The sight of Camillo's awkward smile as he opened the door quickly became familiar and his greeting, even after three months, never changed "Pase adelante.Rrrrrraquel" with a long pause that I always suspected meant he was struggling to remember my name. Occasionally he'd chat with me, but more often than not, he quickly scurried away, back to his own mysterious work.

The architecture of the building is typical to Guatemala and most Latin American and Spanish buildings. Immediately upon entering the building, I was confronted with a courtyard garden that, depending on the week, was out of control or indifferently tended. Around the courtyard are doors opening to single offices, a suite of rooms, and the large conference room. When a large conference takes place, the courtyard is filled with chatting participants — men and women; some dressed in traditional *traje*, others in Western attire. On a typical day, various people hang out in the courtyard, talking and waiting to speak to Oswaldo, my boss and head of the UTQ.

The building itself is a raft, keeping the UTQ afloat. As long as the building exists, the UTQ can remain a community center and provide some resources. Unions can use the spaces provided for their events, and the UTQ can hold its own events designed to support the unions. The conference room holds an *actividad* (which I have taken to mean anything including a conference, workshop, meeting, or celebration) at least three times a week. From the kitchen has come countless lunches for participants in these *actividades*. Ties are built with other like-minded organizations through renting extra office space at low rates. CONALFA, a literacy organization, and the local left-wing political party, the URNG, both take advantage of this service.

While the building keeps the UTQ hanging on by a thread, it also speaks of better days and the slow decline of the organization. Despite the great care given to the building (the first thing we did every day was clean), the vacancy and lack of funding is always apparent. Paint is chipping off the walls. Broken windows abound. I was always struck by the disrepair of now vacant rooms; posters, calendars, diplomas, and awards from years gone by peeling off the walls, and everything is covered in a film of dust.

I can only imagine how the building appeared in its heyday ten years ago — offices bursting at the seams with lawyers, doctors, organizers, rank-and-file members. Children of the workers running around and playing on the now broken swing set. Participants of an *actividad* filling the dorms at night laughing and dreaming of creating change. I can picture last-minute preparation for a rally or large event — people everywhere making signs, running across the courtyard to inform Oswaldo of an unforeseen complication. What it must have been like back when the UTQ had funding and legal, medical, dental, and childcare programs. Where did the staff of 25 work?

I'm quickly shaken back to the reality of a ghost building. A staff of three emphasizes the vacancy almost more than if no one had been there. Even with two extra organizations sharing the building, offices are never filled to capacity. The dorm beds remained vacant all summer. I remember that the UTQ is no longer what it was, but wish I could have seen it in its glory.

Perhaps the building is also a crutch. Constant reminders of days gone by could be inhibiting the way forward. Maybe the solution is not for the UTQ to look and feel and act as it did in the past. It is a different political and economic landscape now, both locally in Guatemala and globally in international trade. Organizations need to respond to the needs of today rather than the shadow of yesterday. While the building remains a community center, community can be built in other ways. I have learned through my organizing efforts and through organizing classes how important relationship building (and thus community building) is to an organization. A physical space is not necessary to accomplish this task. Only time and dedication and willingness to train and talk to people are needed to build relationships, and as a result, organizations. What would happen if the UTQ sold its building and used that money in a new organizing effort? Would the organization totally collapse? Or would it finally be released from the shackles of the past?

Las Problemas

Oswaldo's narrative of the demise of the UTQ focuses blame on the international community's desertion of Guatemala. Because of the lack of interest in Guatemala and its labor struggles, the UTQ began to lose funding, and one by one, its staff diminished, programs were slowly cut, and the UTQ began to lose power.

While I do believe that losing funding accelerated the UTQ's decline, I think that only touches on part of the story and does not excuse the

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UTQ from blame. The Peace Accords were signed more than ten years ago, and the UTQ still has not developed an economically sustainable plan to stay afloat. In truth, the UTQ should not have relied solely on international funding in the first place. Many issues both practical and theoretical come up when one relies on outside funding to sustain an organization. If members do not sacrifice for the organization, they don't have as developed a sense of ownership over and commitment to the organization³. When an organization receives funding from an outside source, it becomes indebted to that organization and some of their autonomy is sacrificed. The largest problem, which the UTQ is experiencing, is that once the outside funding is lost, the organization doesn't know how to proceed⁴.

I believe that another major factor in the UTQ's decline is the shift in international trade and increased globalization. As a result of free-trade agreements including CAFTA and the termination of quota-led trade agreements like the Multi-Fiber Trade Agreement, it became increasingly difficult to organize factory workers. Previously, countries could only export a certain amount of a product to the "Global North" (i.e. the United States and Europe). This limited international competition between factories. Even if a factory in China sold an identical product less expensively than a Guatemalan factory, a US company could not purchase more than China's quota for that product. While this system was not perfect and there were major violations of workers' rights during this period, it allowed workers to demand higher wages and maintain their jobs. As the quota system has since dissolved, factories are forced to compete with other factories all over the world. Now, if a Chinese factory sells an identical product cheaper than a Guatemalan factory, the US company can and will buy from the Chinese factory. The easiest way to cut costs is to cut wages. When workers organize for higher wages, if they win, the factory cannot continue to compete, and the factory closes, putting the workers in a worse situation. This has made it impossible to organize factory workers or maintain the unions that were a part of the UTQ. According to Oswaldo, there are only two factories in the entire country that are still unionized.

When I arrived at the UTQ, it was struggling to survive. The organization had cut medical, childcare, and legal services. It had lost many of its affiliated unions as the international and national economic climate shifted. What remained were a building, the organizing school, and a handful of street vendor and taxi driver unions and indigenous rights groups. Oswaldo's days were filled with meetings and conferences, some of which he led and others in which he participated.

Despite Oswaldo's seemingly busy schedule, these events never seemed to build towards anything. I frequently had the image of someone running on a treadmill, working hard and never moving forward.

Actividades, Reuniones, Demostraciones

The spring before I left for Guatemala, I took a class on community organizing. I learned both the theoretical and practical skills of mobilizing people to create change. One of my goals while working at the UTQ was to practice the skills and theory I had learned in class. I thought I would have the opportunity to see a different style of organizing and be able to gain a better understanding of how to organize. This class taught me that organizers must build community, and empower members to become leaders and take responsibility. What I find to be one of the more challenging roles of an organizer is letting go and take risks, and give others responsibilities that you know you can do better yourself.

The role of an organizer seems overwhelming, but when done right, I can imagine the rewards. As described by my professor, Marshall Ganz:

Organizers identify, recruit and develop leadership; build community around leadership; and build power out of community. Organizers bring people together, challenging them to act on behalf of their shared values and interests. They develop the relationships, motivate the participation, strategize the pathways, and take the action that enable people to gain new appreciation of their values, the resources to which they have access, their interests, and a new capacity to use their resources on behalf of their interests. Organizers work through "dialogues" in relationships, motivation, strategy and action carried out as campaigns.

Organizers challenge people to take the responsibility to act. For an individual, empowerment begins with accepting responsibility. For an organization, empowerment begins with commitment, the responsibility its members take for it. Responsibility begins with choosing to act. Organizers challenge people to commit, to act, and to act effectively.

Organizers build community by developing leadership. They develop leaders by enhancing their skills, values and commitments. They build strong communities through which people gain new understanding of their interests as well as the power to act on them.⁵

I was disappointed, but not surprised, to learn that this is not the way the UTQ works. Oswaldo had a superstar idea of leadership. He did most of the work and did not allocate much responsibility to others. Not only is this kind of leadership exhausting and inefficient, it also does not allow members to take risks and develop their own leadership. It does not give them a stake in the organization and does not empower them to create change.

Oswaldo would lead weekly meetings of representatives from each street vendors' union. However, attendance was sporadic at best; most of the unions did not send a representative every week. He also would

head some meetings of individual unions trying to give them advice on how to address their problems. Many of the meetings that I witnessed Oswaldo lead began with him remonstrating everyone at the meeting for poor attendance and their lack of commitment. His frustration at the UTQ's decline was always apparent at these meetings. While I sympathize with his desire to yell and scream until things went his way, I know that that is not the way to organize. An organizer must make an organization relevant to his or her members and build relationships to pull in people who have similar needs. Oswaldo's ranting frayed the edges of the community he was trying to foster.

The workshops that the UTQ led and attended were informative but tended to be poorly organized and had no call to action at the end. I have learned that to increase attendance at an event organizers have to put in a lot of legwork. They need to get members to commit to attending well before the meeting and then continuously remind them of their commitment. This job is impossible for one person to do alone. Oswaldo does not have the time to contact every member of the UTQ; however, he did not utilize other leaders within the UTQ to do this either. The members who do come to these workshops are generally talked at and are given no opportunity to discuss methods to create change. I attended a workshop on the current political state of Guatemala. For six hours the other attendees and I were lectured about the major issues Guatemala faces, including violence, unemployment, and internal migration. We were also told about the different political parties running for president in September and why they should vote for the URNG-MAIZ, one of the most left-leaning groups. I could see the other attendees become disengaged, and at no point were they asked to contribute. While it is important to educate people about the political climate in Guatemala, especially with an election coming up, this did not seem to be the way to empower people.

Los Vendedores de la Calle

My summer was divided into two distinct parts at the UTQ. For the first few weeks, I spent a lot of time with Camillo. We overcame my rusty Spanish and his shyness and maintained a steady dialogue about Guatemala, the upcoming elections, the United States, and our lives. Similar to many people living in Xela, Camillo was from an indigenous community outside of the city. He spoke Quiche, one of the Mayan dialects, and was fiercely committed to addressing the inequality between Mayans and Ladinos. He worked at the UTQ in exchange for free room and went to the public university at nights in order to obtain a degree in sustainable economics, which he hopes will help him be more effective. We would walk for hours around the city interviewing street vendors. We made signs for the URNG-MAIZ, the left-wing political party, and traveled to surrounding towns to talk to members of indigenous rights groups. In the second half of the summer I mostly followed Oswaldo to his many meetings and helped with preparations for meetings and conferences that the UTQ held.

The most exciting job I participated in was interviewing street vendors. Camillo and I would walk to different markets around Xela and interview the secretary-general of each union. The questions covered demographics of the union (gender make-up, place of birth, and literacy rates), successes of the union, challenges for the union, and future goals. Talking to the street vendors shed light on many realities within Guatemala. Statistics on literacy, health care, poverty, and rural-to-urban migration that had just been numbers became real in my interactions with the vendors, both in interviews and conferences. These two weeks were the perfect way to get to know the city and the predicament of the street vendors. Camillo explained to me what was going on in the campaigns for the upcoming elections in September for everyone from *alcades* to *diputados*, senators, all the way through the president. I learned that 14 different political groups were running for office, and Camillo told me each one's political ideology and which group/candidates he supported and which he prayed would never be elected.

Street vendors form unions based on location rather than type of product they sell. The area that a union covers is normally a couple of blocks covering anywhere from 20 vendors to 200. In a market that tends to span many blocks, there are often four or five different unions. The unions have formed because selling merchandise on the street is technically illegal. This leaves the street vendors open to exploitation by shop owners and police. The unions have formed in order to advocate for legal permission to sell on the street and to generally improve their conditions.

Most of the unions were made up of indigenous people who had migrated from rural areas. Over the past decade, migration from rural areas has increased significantly due to the changing economy of Guatemala. Land ownership in the rural areas is concentrated in the hands of a small wealthy population. The poor people in these areas have little to no land and are reliant on large farms for any sort of income. People come to the city expecting jobs, but the cities no longer have the jobs to sustain this influx. As technical citizens of a different municipality, migrants don't have the right to vote in city elections. As a result, government officials are less likely to address the migrants' issues.

Migrants are further marginalized by their lack of education. Rural areas are given fewer social services, including education and health resources. As a result, many of the street vendors are illiterate, further exacerbating their problems.

**While I sympathize with his
desire to yell and scream
until things went his way,
I know that that is not the
way to organize.**

Despite these challenges, the street vendors have made some impressive gains. Many of the unions now have a legal right to sell on the street, and are less harassed by police officers. They want to create a new indoor market where they will be protected from the elements and be in a cleaner environment.

However, the indoor market solution would not address systemic problems. As soon as street vendors vacate their places on the street and move indoors, other migrants will take their place. The real problems to address are issues of land ownership and unemployment. While Oswaldo sees this contradiction, many of the unions were more concerned with helping their own members rather than trying to create social change. The issues of land rights and unemployment are not within the UTQ's power to tackle alone. The UTQ does work with indigenous communities on land rights issues and has helped cooperatives of farmers set up fair trade coffee farms. However, the organization is based in a city, far from the rural areas, and its ability to assist these communities is limited.

The union members are interested in helping the members of their own community, but not the larger community of marginalized Guatemalans. Until a broader vision of community is used, this dilemma will not change.

Una Actividad de los Mayas

The Pan-Mayan movement attempts to create a broader vision of community within the different Mayan populations. The Mayans' situation has improved since the Civil War. They are no longer physically persecuted; however, they are still subject to poverty and a life of struggle. In order to improve their situation, Mayans have begun to organize and advocate for themselves. This is a complicated and difficult process as the Mayans are isolated from each other and Ladinos by language and geography. In Guatemala, there are 22 distinct Mayan dialects; many do not speak Spanish. Most Mayans live in rural areas where it is difficult to travel between communities and are not given a voice in the cities. Even their dress is different. Most Mayan women wear *traje*, which is a traditional dress, and each pattern is specific to a different community, so it is possible to identify where a person comes from by sight alone. Mayan activists have begun to battle these divisions through the Pan-Mayan movement, trying to embrace their similarities and work together to improve their situations. This movement is controversial; some Mayans are worried about a loss of individuality and tradition as they try to merge into one group, while others believe that creating a larger community is the only way to foster change and are willing to forfeit some tradition. Tradition and what is "authentically" Mayan have since become politicized. Some argue that embracing tradition and identity can be empowering for Mayans, while others feel that remaining in a static culture is impossible and constraining and doesn't allow the community to improve.

This process is not only coming from within the Mayan movement, but also from without. In her article, Carlota McAllister (1996) examines a Mayan Queen contest and explores how the ceremony contributes to ladino (or Spanish descent) influences that have tokenized Mayan identity and used it to maintain cultural hegemony. McAllister attended a ceremony where Mayan women competed for the title of "Mayan Queen" based on how authentically Mayan they were. The ceremony she saw was an effort by the government to showcase Mayan culture as one of the natural wonders of Guatemala. McAllister discusses the theme of authenticity and its effects:

Authenticity has often served as a source of empowerment and its availability mutually to tactics of resistance and strategies of power shows it should not be laughed off. Without detracting from critical struggles that base themselves in authenticity; however, the structures which generate the authentic should be recognized. They lay its burden only on certain shoulders and transform the inauthentic into the corrupt.⁶

Throughout my time at the UTQ I spent a lot of time with Rosario, the secretary. Like Camillo, she was also Mayan and spoke Quiche. While Camillo moved away from his family and into the city, Rosario continued to live with her family outside of Xela and continues to wear *traje*. She's two years older than me, and we became fast friends. We told each other about our families and lives. She tried to teach me Quiche and I tried to teach her how to swim, both with varying degrees of success. A friendly and kind person, she invited me to "*una actividad*" during my first week interning to celebrate the Mayan culture. I tried to understand her explanation of the activity, but was only able to catch key words like "*reina*," and "*cultura*." I wondered whether Rosario might be talking about a similar celebration to the one McAllister wrote about. Not wanting to miss a chance to get my own perspective, or miss a chance at making a friend with Rosario, I eagerly accepted the invitation.

I had only a vague idea of what to expect as we got off the bus and walked up the dirt path to a small house. From piecing together information I had learned from McAllister's piece and questioning Rosario further, I assumed that the activity we were going to was an election for the Mayan Queen of a community. Rosario said that these ceremonies were part of an effort to preserve the Mayan culture and that she was the Queen for the UTQ. I realized she wasn't competing, though she still played some sort of role in the celebration that I had not yet discovered.

It turns out that the ceremony I witnessed and the ceremony McAllister discussed were different in more ways than that one was the election of the Mayan Queen and the other was the celebration of the winner. This ceremony was organized by the community and was clearly a way of celebrating Mayan culture and building community. The community did not seem to have a static definition of authenticity; throughout the night I noticed inconsistencies that clearly demonstrated that they were willing to adopt technology that suited them. We ate dinner with the

other contestants and their families in the house of the community's winner from last year. As I looked around the room, I ate my tamales and rice off of Styrofoam plates and listened to the music of live musicians while a stereo and TV sat dormant to my left. Men and children walked around in Western-style clothing, while the women wore *traje*, traditional Mayan clothing.

Eventually, we all began to march out of the house and down the dirt path. The procession was cut short as the rain began, and we all loaded into pick-up trucks that took us into town. We came to a large meeting hall, in which the floor was lined with Eucalyptus leaves, and I could smell more burning. I sat for an hour or so while preparations continued. Rosario had abandoned me for her friends, and I was able to sit and observe until I was called upon to take picture upon picture of Rosario and her friends, who would switch clothes and model again for the camera. Eventually, the ceremony (and my confusion) began. Several long speeches were made followed by performances by traditional dancers.

Finally, the announcer began to call up the girls, and one by one they danced their way to the stage and each gave a speech discussing the importance of preserving culture. They then sat on stage and watched further cultural performances. However, they looked as restless as I felt. I was surprised and amused to see them begin to take out their cell phones on stage to take more pictures and make and receive phone calls.

While these intrusions would not have been permitted in the national event that McAllister witnessed, they did not seem to be treated as intrusions in this community-based event. Rosario and other members of this Mayan community believe that the way to preserve Mayan rights was to preserve the culture. These celebrations help the community come together and celebrate their culture. This strengthens the social ties they have to each other, and as a result, the Pan-Mayan movement.

Feliz Cumpleanos

Sitting in a *colectivo* with a friend, I felt an uncanny sense of déjà vu. Why do I recognize this road? I know I haven't been in this area before. It wasn't until we arrived on top of a hill that I understood. Out in the distance, I could see the words *Granja Penal* in large white letters on the grass, and even farther I could just make out a familiar dilapidated building. From the beautiful large house with sweeping lawn, where I was attending the birthday party of a 13-year-old named Alejandra, I could see the orphanage where I occasionally volunteered the summer before. The contrast between the upper-middle-class birthday party and my experiences at the orphanage was striking. From these two experiences, I could see how children are socialized depending on their class and how that reinforce social inequalities. I also learned how community can sometimes be used to maintain the status quo, rather than effecting change.

When my friend and I arrived, many of the adults were sitting outside talking and watching Marlene, Alejandra's mother, organize activities for the children. We were all (including my friend and I) divided into teams for a series of races and games. The partygoers, ranging in age from 4 to 15, listened carefully to Marlene explain the rules and waiting their turn to receive the supplies for each race. We had an egg toss, three-legged race, and other games. The children all followed the rules to the letter. No one complained when they lost or bragged when they won. After lunch, the adult-supervised games were over, so the kids organized games themselves. Again they played fairly. After working and interacting with children in the States, I was shocked at how well these children played together. I learned that the private school these children attended, beyond providing an elite education, emphasizes cooperation and camaraderie between the students. When Alejandra, or one of her peers was struggling in school, their parents would help them with their homework. If this failed, they would hire private tutors, including my friends at the hostel, to help their children in the areas that they struggled.

I met this wonderful and warm group of people through the owners of my hostel. For most of this past summer, I stayed in Hostal Don Diego. I lived with a group of other foreign volunteers and travelers. The more permanent residents, who like me were staying for at least a couple months, had time to become close to each other as well as with the owners of our hostel, Ivan and Andrea. As we became closer to Ivan and Andrea, we were brought into their circle of friends. Ivan and Andrea grew up with many of their friends. This group of friends is incredibly supportive of each other and is warm and welcoming to others. They invited us to different get-togethers, like birthday parties and other celebrations. As I spent more time with them, I could see how close they all are, and ready to help each other out with a personal or business problem. For example, Ivan connected many of his friends to English tutors who were staying at the hostel, and his friends often recommended customers for Ivan.

Though I had a great time playing with the kids and talking to Ivan and Andrea and their friends, I couldn't help but occasionally glance over at the orphanage at the bottom of the hill. Last summer, another friend, Stefanie, volunteered at the orphanage; I would occasionally tag along with her. The orphanage, which sleeps around 50 children, is about as large as the one-family house of the Alejandra's family. It was on about the same amount of land as well. The term "orphanage" is deceptive, since many children at the orphanage had parents; however, the parents could no longer afford to support them. These children were the poorest of the poor and had little positive influences in their lives to encourage them to succeed.

These children were the poorest of the poor and had little positive influences in their lives to encourage them to succeed.

There was little to no adult supervision at the orphanage, and our responsibilities were to play with the kids and make them feel loved and entertained. This job proved to be trying as organized games fell apart quickly, often before they began. If we could explain a game and its rules well enough to begin to play, it would generally dissolve into cheating and fighting. I gave up on organized games and would try to play with some kids one on one while the rest of the children ran around with little to no structure. The

children went to school in the mornings, if they were able to wake themselves up in time for the bus, and were encouraged to do their homework, but weren't given individual attention and help.

These two experiences were more illuminating than anything I could read about. The affluent community supports its members, the sense of community and camaraderie fosters business relationships, and the community can keep itself in power this way. By sending their children to an affluent school that teaches this kind of cooperation, the parents reinforce these values in the young. When their kids are struggling in schools, more affluent families can afford to hire private tutors. This is not to say that the values this school teaches are bad, or that the children at the orphanage are always wild and mean to each other. The wealthy children have had the opportunity to attend a school that has the resources to teach these values in an effective way. They have parents who are present and have the time and money to reinforce these values, and support their children in other ways. Poorer children who attend public schools do not have access to schools of that caliber. The children at the orphanage also do not have parents to reinforce these values or a network of family friends who can employ them when they are old enough to work.

I am lucky that I had the opportunity to interact with members from different social strata of Guatemalan society. I could see how the ties built between the more affluent families reinforced the status quo. These were not bad people but merely want to help themselves, and those they love, to succeed. I saw how hard poorer members of society worked to no avail, and do not see an easy future for the children at the orphanage. I know Ivan and Andrea and their friends would never want a child to live the way the children in the orphanage do. They are loving people who care about others. However, because they are comfortable and they have a support network, they will not work for the social change necessary to help the impoverished. Community can be used to maintain the status quo rather than working towards social change, and inequality reinforces structures and communities that make it more difficult for social change to occur.

Violencia y Política

Recent Guatemalan Headlines:

“Guatemala’s EPIDEMIC of KILLING”

“Guatemala campaign DEATHS mount”

“EU ALARM at Guatemala VIOLENCE”

“BULLETS overshadow Guatemala ballot”

Throughout the summer, I followed the presidential campaigns. All of the 14 candidates promised to change Guatemala. The most left of these groups, the URNG-MAIZ promised to tax the rich (who notoriously avoid paying taxes) and create more social services for the poor. The more right-wing groups, of which there were many, promised to crack down on crime. In early September, the first round of elections eliminated 12 of the 14 presidential candidates. On November 4, there was a run-off election between Alvaro Colom and Otto Perez Molina. Colom ran on a center-left platform promising social and economic reform. Crime has been a central issue in this election, within the political parties alone; there were 50 political deaths. Both candidates promised to fight crime, but along with Molina’s other ultra-right policies, his slogan “*Mano Dura*” (strong fist) promises a no-tolerance, all-out war on crime. His campaign appealed to many who are afraid of the growing gang and drug problems; however, human rights groups and others were worried about the implications of Molina’s possible presidency, fearing he would instate martial law and suspend constitutional rights.

The UTQ attempted to address the issue of violence and the political context in typical fashion — by holding an *actividad*. A woman from Guatemala City came to the UTQ and did a presentation on crime and the different political parties’ strategies on addressing crime. As usual, there was no real call to action beyond trying to convince the participants to vote. While the UTQ wished the URNG-MAIZ’s candidate would win, presenters pragmatically asked people to vote for Colom, whom they believed was the best option of those who had the money to win. While I thought the meeting was ineffective, the information on crime and impunity was useful and stunning to me.

In 2006, there were 5,885 homicides in a country of 12 million people⁷. Violence and impunity seem to have taken over the country. Both in and out of Guatemala, I read reports of the increasing violence against women, the ever-rising homicide rate, the news that this was the bloodiest election season in 20 years, and the lack of police effort to do anything about these problems. I was told by locals to never walk alone at night. I was practically ordered to stay away from Guatemala City, where all my local friends had a horror story about themselves or someone close to them.

In 2006, 97% of all homicides were not investigated⁹. And why would the police punish perpetrators? Many of the police *are* the perpetrators of these violent crimes. The *Policia Nacional Civil* (PNC), the national police, is made up of hundreds of ex-military soldiers; ex-officers fill 30 of the most powerful positions within the PNC⁹. These policemen were not punished for their war crimes and don't seem interested in punishing others. Many people I spoke to were more afraid of the police than they were of criminals among the broader citizenry.

In 2006, there were 17 homicides a day. Where does this violence come from? What has made Guatemala so violent? Crime is not just a result of impunity. One must look at the international and national contexts in order to fully understand why Guatemala is so violent.

Part of the reason seems to stem from the 36-year civil war. Thirty-six *years*. That's longer than I've been alive. Despite the Peace Accords that were signed, no effort seems to have been made to heal the country. Mayans still live in poverty, they are still subject to discrimination, and the disparity between the rich and the poor, and urban areas and rural areas, is overwhelming. Most Mayans are illiterate; I saw this firsthand at conferences when I had to write many participants' names for them.

Because of the poverty and inequality pervading the country, many people have migrated to the States to try to create a better life for themselves. In the States, they live in cities and their children are marginalized and exposed to gang culture. Often the children who get involved in gangs are caught and sent back to Guatemala, where they bring with them a culture of violence. This is not to blame the States for the gangs pervading Guatemala, especially in the capital city; it is just one aspect of crime. Guatemala is also a stop for drug traffickers traveling from Colombia to the States. As many Guatemalans are poor, they become involved in the drug trade in order to survive.

Mi Propia Experiencia

I experienced some of the reported violence firsthand. Towards the beginning of my trip, a few friends and I were walking back to our hostel around 10:30 pm. We did not think to be cautious as 10:30 is still relatively early and there were five of us. As a result, the five men who mugged us took us by surprise. I did not even realize what was happening until one was digging through my pockets looking for valuables. We were lucky. Aside from a few scrapes and bruises, none of us were injured. They took some cash, our cell phones, and my passport, all things that could be replaced. The worst parts were the inconvenience of getting a new passport and the fear they instilled in me.

However, I did not stay afraid for long. Despite these statistics and my own brush with violence, fear and violence were not a part of my

everyday reality. Xela was not a particularly dangerous city to me. My attitude was that I could get mugged anytime, in any city, anywhere in the world. In fact, even after the mugging, Xela felt safer than other cities I've visited. Perhaps it's the sense of community throughout Xela. All the locals seem to know each other. After only a few weeks, it became impossible for me to walk more than three blocks without running into someone I knew. Or perhaps it's the openness and generous spirit of everyone I met. Within minutes of meeting new people, I would feel welcome in their lives, and was often invited to their homes. Perhaps its naïve, but I can't imagine anyone I met committing a violent crime.

The community in Xela made me feel safe, but continued violence erodes community. When people don't feel safe leaving their houses at night, they lose social activities that build connections among each other. When people don't trust their neighbors, community is further eroded.

Realidad?

It's hard to explain to people that while the statistics on violence are real and something the country must deal with, that is not the everyday reality. This task is made more difficult by what they know of my experience and by news coverage of Guatemala. In the weeks and months leading up to the elections, I read both *La Prensa Libre*, a popular Guatemalan newspaper, and international newspapers. When I read *La Prensa Libre*, I read articles discussing each candidate, the debates they were having, and the issues they would have to address. Upon my return to the States, as I eagerly searched the media for news of Guatemala, all I could find were articles peppered with shocking headlines discussing Guatemala's fast spiral into violence and impunity.

It's hard to express the despair I feel while watching a place I love dissolve into violence. But I also feel incredibly frustrated at the disparity between the Guatemala I saw and the Guatemala in the news. Guatemala is not just a state on the brink of failure. It's a country where people took me into their homes and patiently listened to my halting Spanish and answered my barrage of questions.

I didn't see the pervasive violence, but I saw poverty and discrimination every day. I witnessed the marginalization of the Mayan communities. If these problems, along with a corrupt police force, cannot be solved, the violence will not cease. In order to foster change, communities must be strengthened and given a larger voice. On November 4, Colom, the UTQ's practical choice, was elected. He promises to use a multi-pronged strategy to combat crime. Eradicating poverty and inequality, and thus addressing structural violence, is a key tactic in his strategy. With a new president and new vision, perhaps Guatemala will be able to move beyond its bloody past and into a more optimistic future.

Notes

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Sentences and Words: Language and Legacy Inside the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

DANIEL KOUSED '08



My flight from London to Nairobi, Kenya begins with an apology. The booming voice on the airplane loudspeaker informs us that the “noise in the back of the plane” – hitherto unnoticed by me – is the sound of an illegal immigrant from Cameroon attempting to resist extradition from England. We are assured that the criminal is both handcuffed and accompanied by three “escorts.”

At first I think this is honestly some kind of distasteful joke. But no, this is simply the beginning of my journey beyond the invisible curtain of the First World. The airplane is mostly filled with “spiritual tourists” – white, Midwestern college-age American Christians heading to Kenya for a ten-day mission trip. A conversation with two of them sitting next to me leads me to think that this is a thinly veiled euphemism for an exotic vacation. But then again, why am I on this plane myself? Why am I traveling to Arusha, Tanzania, to work at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (the Tribunal)? I try to stay conscious of the precarious balance between self-interest and lofty idealism that has led me here. I truly hope that I may be able to make some kind of contribution, no matter how small, to the unquestionably important and progressive work of the Tribunal. But I’m also here to “play the anthropologist,” hoping to gain some kind of unique insight into the social structure of the institution. And of course I may not forget how great this will look on my resume. I look around at the fresh-faced excitement and nervousness of these modern missionaries around me. I wonder if any of them feel a kind of vague tension about the true purpose of their journey. Tonight we will fly over both Darfur and the Nile.

Upon my arrival at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, I was quickly greeted by a very amiable Kenyan man named Evans. He helped me retrieve my luggage, engaged me in conversation about Barack Obama, and assisted me in securing a \$50 bus ride south to Arusha through the Bobby Shuttle bus company. When the bus pulled up to the airport 45 minutes late, I was dismayed to see only one seat left on the small bus and no room for my luggage apart from the narrow aisle between the seats. After a bit of rushed maneuvering and an overwhelming feeling of being the “cumbersome American” traveling with too many belongings, I manage to squeeze myself into the last seat on the bus for a bumpy and dusty journey south towards Arusha, Tanzania.

Most of the other passengers were Arab and spoke an unusual, half-familiar sounding combination of Arabic and English. The man sitting next to me was named Salid. He told me that he was from Nairobi but that he traveled to Arusha regularly to work for a small NGO dealing in small loans to independent agricultural businesses in the area. I asked him if he was familiar with the Tribunal and what his opinion of it was. Salid told me that he had partied with many ICTR interns and that they liked to have a good time. Fair enough. Feeling comfortable now, I asked him the question most fervently burning in my mind: What do Tanzanians think about Americans? He told me that they appreciate the economic benefits that come with the seasonal influx of American tourists to the area but that East Africans generally have a better relationship with the British. There were two reasons for this, he explained: as the British own a majority of the tourist companies, they have a visibly positive impact on the regional economy through the creation of jobs. The second reason was that, as he said, “the British civilized us.” It was difficult to hide my surprise at this explanation. He elaborated, citing the construction of schools and hospitals as evidence of the civilizing forces of British colonization. I could hear my father’s advice ringing in my ears, telling me that while in Africa I would have to be a “post-post-colonialist” and resist the temptation to simplify things into neat moral categories of “good” and “bad.”

After about two hours, we approached the border between Kenya and Tanzania. I must have been the only one on the bus for whom this was the first time crossing, as no directions or advice were provided. I had no problem figuring out how to fill out the paperwork required to exit Kenya, but as I waited in line to have my passport stamped I knew I would be at least temporarily on my own. The bus, with all of my important worldly possessions, drove away into the crowded distance. Disoriented, I nearly got taken for a different kind of ride. Trying not to outright *run* but hurriedly rushing towards the direction I saw the bus leave, a man stopped me and told me that I *must* change

my money before crossing the border. Alone, in sight of not even a face as familiar as one from my bus, I let him lead me to a ragged booth from which a boy offered me 5,000 Tanzanian shillings (TZS) for \$50 US in return, as I unhesitatingly pulled out of my wallet in front of them. The overwhelmingly unfamiliar nature of the situation caused me to forget that \$1 US = 1,200 TZS. Fortunately, however, avarice got the better of these guys as, seeing the first \$50 bill, the man quickly asked, "You don't have one hundred?" I pulled the fifty out of his hand, gave the boy his shillings back and resumed hurrying towards the border. After only a few steps another man tried to stop me more adamantly, yelling "Hey! Hey! You can't cross until you get your passport stamped!" The force of his voice gave me pause, but I just said no and finally crossed through the metal gate of the border to find the bus waiting for me.

A few hours later we reached Arusha. Located in northern Tanzania at the base of Mount Meru, about an hour's drive from Kilimanjaro, Arusha is the gateway to safari in East Africa. Arusha is also the central locus of internationalism in the East African region. Documents granting independence to Tanzania were signed by the British here. The Arusha Accords, the failed peace treaty signed between Rwandan insurgents and the government, were signed here in August 1993, eight months before the Rwandan genocide began. On August 28, 2000, Bill Clinton gave a speech at the Tribunal in which he described the city of Arusha as "the Geneva of Africa."

Fortunately, this city is more like a small town. Before I arrived, all I knew was that I would be staying with a woman named Suzanne Chenault and that she lived in the center of the city across the street from the Arusha Hotel. The bus dropped us off at the Impala Hotel, a few miles from where I needed to be. I shared a taxi with Salid and he directed the driver to the Arusha Hotel. Sleep-deprived and wide-eyed, I dragged my bags into the lobby, which was clearly well guarded and, thus, a comforting place for a complete newcomer to leave his things. I wandered outside past the gate of the hotel entrance and started to walk around, hoping for some sign of direction towards Suzanne's house (she was not available to meet me because she was at a conference she had organized). After about two minutes, one of the "street boys" who walk around Arusha selling *batik* prints of Maasai warriors and idyllic African landscapes to tourists approached me. The sky had been darkening all day and it felt as though it would start raining at any moment. Seeing the colorful pictures wrapped into the cylinder of brown paper he held under his arm, I was about to tell him that I did not want to buy anything. As if he could sense my anxiety, he asked me if I was looking for someone. I told him that I was trying to find the house of Suzanne Chenault. His face lit up and he exclaimed, "Oh yes, Suzee! She lives very close, I can take you." He was kind enough to walk me to her house about a block away.

Damaria, one of Suzanne's house workers, welcomed me at the gate, saying, "Karibu, you are welcome." She led me down the serpentine path of Suzanne's driveway, separating the busy energy of the city street from the tranquil garden that is Suzanne's home. As soon as I had pulled myself and all of my things into the living room of the house, it began to rain. Slightly dazed from over 40 hours of traveling across three continents, it was difficult for me to fully absorb my surroundings at first. It was simply surreal. The walls of the house are painted in bright, passionate purples, oranges, and reds, applied in waves and swirls of color delicate and unobtrusive enough to look like clouds. There were so many windows in the room that the rain only accentuated the feeling of being in a greenhouse, with water shimmering down the innumerable green leaves or the family of blue monkeys swinging from the branches of the tropical forest that was Suzanne's backyard. I kept telling myself that this could not be the place where I would be staying; it was simply too beautiful, clearly the product of a profoundly aesthetic individual.

I became connected to Suzanne through Leigh Swigart, director of Programs in International Justice and Society at the Brandeis Ethics Center. She informed me that one of her professional acquaintances worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda as a jurist linguist and head of the Continuing Legal Education Programme. Suzanne and Leigh had been collaborating on the formulation of a "legacy symposium" intended to focus on issues surrounding the court's end-date of December 2008. Leigh told me that Suzanne had generously offered me free housing in a "little bungalow" upon my arrival in Arusha. To my amazement, this "little bungalow" was actually an entire guest house, complete with a loft bed and a shower with hot water! This was supposed to be a temporary set-up until I found adequate room and board with other interns working at the Tribunal over the summer. However, I ended up staying with Suzanne the entire two months I was in Arusha.

Suzanne quickly became my host, internship supervisor, and friend. She is a slender redhead from California who jokingly refers to herself as "a woman of a certain age." She speaks English and French, regularly drawing upon French words and pronunciations to express herself more colorfully in English. Her stunningly beautiful home is located two blocks from the Tribunal, a circumstance that would prove invaluable to me, as I wanted to interact with as many local people as possible during my two-month stay in Arusha. A passionate believer in the value of higher education, Suzanne holds degrees from Harvard and UC Berkeley. She has lived in Arusha and worked at the Tribunal for more than eight years. As the position does not exist in the domestic courts of the US, I was intrigued by the nature of her official position of "jurist linguist."

This position, as I observed it, is what anthropologists refer to as "liminal." Her responsibilities as jurist linguist technically designate hers as the final word in the translation of documents between English and French, the two "working languages" of the Tribunal. In

reality, however, her responsibilities are so diverse and scattered that they would be better defined as “general linguistic consultant.” Questions of syntax and grammar, the revision of poorly written or translated decisions and motions, and the ghostwriting of all types of legal documents constitute the majority of her day-to-day work. She essentially takes the responsibility of filling in the “gaps” often overlooked by colleagues whose names appear on the finished products. Suzanne provided me with food, housing, advice, transportation, and intellectual insight for which I don’t think it possible to repay.

Generosity is the first word that comes to mind when describing Suzanne, generosity to such a degree that it can easily be mistaken for a kind of deferential anxiety. Through her generosity of spirit, Suzanne compels herself to take upon her own shoulders the work of the Tribunal *as a whole* but the well-deserved pride that she feels in her linguistic abilities and passionate commitment to her work regularly becomes obscured by the lack of official recognition for her efforts and visible credit for her words. Her incisive intellectualism is only matched by her profound idealism. In this sense, she embodies the very work of the institution of the Tribunal itself in its efforts to reconcile the tragedy of the Rwandan genocide through the application of Western “rationality,” a goal inherently idealistic in its aspirations.

The Legal Labyrinth

The ICTR is unique both in its contribution to international criminal law as well as the nature of the criticism directed at it. Its creation was called for by the new RPF leaders of Rwanda, a member of the UN Security Council during the genocide. However, when it came time to vote on Resolution 955, establishing the creation of the Tribunal, Rwanda’s was the sole vote *against*. The new leadership of the country claimed to have envisioned a “Nuremberg-like” military tribunal located within the state of Rwanda and capable of enforcing capital punishment against those convicted. They also objected to the limitation of the court’s jurisdiction to crimes committed between January 1 and December 31, 2004 (Bantekas and Nash, 340). The Tribunal was obligated to determine sentencing according to current standards of international law, including the prohibition of capital punishment. It was also to be located in Arusha, Tanzania, where the failed Arusha peace accords had been signed. Thus, from its inception the institution found itself in a precarious position. Criticized from the outside for the slowness of its proceedings and the limits of its capacity for outreach and reconciliation, the Tribunal has also existed in constant tension with the very nation whose name it bears. This has created a situation within the Tribunal in which a certain degree of structural paranoia has become part of the Tribunal’s internal “culture.”

The Tribunal is located within a larger building complex called the Arusha International Conference Center, locally known as the “ICC,” not to be confused, of course, with the International Criminal Court in

The Hague. An imposing and monumental presence in the city, the Tribunal is composed of three large buildings triangularly arranged and connected by elevated walkways. Each building is named after a natural wonder of the Tanzanian landscape. There are three main branches of the Tribunal: the judges’ chambers, the Office of the Prosecutor, and the Registry. Serengeti is used exclusively by the Office of the Prosecutor. Ngorongoro is shared by those working on Defense for those on trial as well as a number of other safari and newspaper companies. I worked on the seventh floor of Kilimanjaro, home to the ICTR trial chambers, judges’ offices, and the Registry. Its perimeter marked by a red metal fence, the triangular complex of buildings is home not only to the ICTR but also the East African Law Society and the East African Community headquarters. The sign in the front courtyard welcomes visitors by informing them: “We Bring the World to Tanzania.” I could not help but wonder exactly to whom this “We” referred: the individuals working in the buildings or the world-famous tourist sites these buildings were named after.

This place struck me as simultaneously intimidating and strangely familiar. I had never even visited an international court before and I was anxious to meet the standards of formality and decorum I imagined to be inherent to such a place. I was relieved to discover that the Tribunal is organized very much like any large office complex created for the bureaucratic undertaking of Western business or, in this case, justice. It was this *generic* quality of architecture and organization of the institution that surprised me the most, particularly because it was this very quality that paradoxically made the place complex and confusing for an outsider to navigate; both the buildings themselves as well as the floors of each building are essentially identical to each other, apart from those containing the judges’ offices or organizations not directly connected to the Tribunal. It took me a whole month before I finally figured out how to get from one place to another without getting lost.

The aspiration towards maximum visibility is central to the organization and operation of the Tribunal. The proceedings of the criminal trials are explicitly intended to be as “public” as possible; while sitting in the gallery of one of the four courtrooms, which are open to any member of the public (local or foreign) who possesses a valid form of ID, one may either watch the proceedings through the bulletproof glass separating the gallery from the courtroom or on one of the two television screens located on either end of the gallery. Hours of

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translation and transcription are undertaken each day in order to update the public record located on the Tribunal website under the headings of “Daily Case Journal” and “Daily Case Minutes.” By all appearances, transparency seemed to be inherent to this place.

During my second week of work at the Tribunal, I attended the orientation seminar for interns working during the summer 2007 season. Representatives from each of the Tribunal’s organs and branches spoke and I carefully took notes and wrote down the names of a number of individuals who spoke to us as suitable candidates for my research. After the orientation, I sent e-mails to about ten of them. I received only one response, about five minutes after I had sent the initial email. I was overjoyed to see that it was from Moustapha Hassouna, protocol and external relations officer for the Tribunal. A large, imposing man with an even larger and more imposing voice, Mr. Hassouna had provided the interns with an overview of the Tribunal’s history. I was particularly interested in his brief description of the Tribunal’s modest beginnings; according to him, the first documents drafted by the Tribunal were produced on a typewriter in a hotel room in Arusha. I was fascinated by the potential of this story as an illuminating insight into the nature of this place. Anxious but excited to begin my research in earnest, I immediately called Mr. Hassouna’s office (four floors below mine) and arranged a meeting to be held ten minutes later.

Mr. Hassouna greeted me with visible pleasure and interest in the nature of my work. Indeed, his initial responsiveness towards my request for an interview seemed to prove the genuineness of his desire to help me gather information. Thus, I was disheartened and surprised when, after describing the nature of my questions and emphasizing my commitment to strict confidentiality regarding the identity of interviewees, Mr. Hassouna simply told me no. No, he could not give me an interview. I told him that, in addition to the anonymity I was obligated to provide him should he request not to be named, we could conduct an *unrecorded* interview; I thought perhaps he would be more comfortable if I put the tape recorder away. But this did not make the idea any more palatable. I believe his unwillingness was equally attributable to the nature of my questions – which were focused on *personal* reflections and opinions about the Tribunal and its operation – as well as the voice recorder I had in my hand as I entered Mr. Hassouna’s office. But I was still quite confused. In my initial email I had quite clearly stated my purpose: to conduct formal interviews in order to elicit personal perspectives of the Tribunal in relation to the varied cultural backgrounds of those working inside of it. I had been “transparent” myself. Why had he invited me so apparently eagerly only to tell me he could not help me?

It was not until much later that I began to consider the idea that perhaps he had never intended to give me an interview in the first place; more likely, his unwillingness had nothing to do with the nature of my questions or the voice record I was holding. As protocol and external

relations officer, Mr. Hassouna had a vested interest in acquainting himself or “checking out” anyone who – like me – had expressed a desire to elicit personal, and therefore potentially negative, opinions on the inner workings of this place. And, considering that virtually all of the publicity the Tribunal has enjoyed has been overwhelmingly negative, one could hardly blame him.

I had planned on conducting anthropological fieldwork in conjunction with my internship at the Tribunal. The methodology I had planned on using would require me to conduct oral interviews with individuals operating at as many levels of the Tribunal as possible, ideally “from judges to janitors.” These would be formal, recorded interviews. I drafted two sets of questions that I intended to ask each willing interviewee. The first question set would focus on the interviewee’s personal and cultural background: Where are you from? How long have you been in Tanzania? What is your favorite kind of music? What do you enjoy doing when you are not working? My second question set would focus on the Tribunal itself: How long have you worked here? What is a typical day of work like for you? In what way do you feel the work of the Tribunal has been successful? How has it failed? Anthropologist Mary H. Nooter’s article titled “Secrecy: African Art That Conceals and Reveals” provides a compelling discussion of the centrality of secrecy in African art, exclusive social groups, and anthropological inquiry itself. Many of its themes resonated in my mind as I formulated question after question about this strange yet familiar organization that seemed to be simultaneously open and closed to me as an “outsider” working inside of it.

As I would soon come to realize, the naïveté of my faith in this method squarely placed me in an old ethnographic dilemma:

“Seldom are researchers... trained to negotiate the burdens they will bear as they acquire knowledge, or find themselves excluded from it. They only know that they must emerge from the field knowing more than they did when they went in. The tools they bring with them, from pens and papers to cameras, flashes, binoculars, tape recorders, and video equipment, are themselves designed to recover, even extract, bodies of knowledge otherwise hidden or dormant.” (57).

These are the tools of both the voyeur and the anthropologist. More importantly, however, they are also the tools of modern proceedings of criminal law.

I began to conceptualize this place as an “open secret,” a paradox central to the social function of secrecy. Nooter describes “the fact that the secret is frequently right on the surface for all to see. Transparent, like glass it is visible yet impenetrable...A secret, in other words, is only secret when identified as such” (68). As an *organization*, the Tribunal is explicitly and visibly dedicated to precisely this mode of transparency. But it is this very aspect of

organizational transparency that seemed to preclude any possibility for *personal transparency* on the part of the organization's individual members.

As an organization, the Tribunal may be described in three general ways: (a) a UN institution; (b) a bureaucracy; and (c) an institution of law. Secrecy or "confidentiality" is in fact integral to the functional operation of all three types of organizations. This fact rendered my intended methodology, reliant as it was on the use of a voice recorder, simply impossible to use. While I was able to *speak* to many people working at all levels of the Tribunal on both a professional and personal level, the moment the word "interview" entered the conversation, an almost visceral aversion to the idea would reveal itself on their faces. Interestingly, the two groups of people most visibly unwilling to make any kind of personal statement on record were the two ends of the social continuum I had hoped to navigate through: judges and janitors.

It is now clear to me that my methodology of formally recorded interviews – an anthropological "norm" of conducting research – essentially amounted to a kind of "interrogation" in the minds of these individuals. Submitting to an obligation to answer questions on record would be the exact inverse of the judges' roles in the courtroom. And the dynamic of agreeing to answer questions posed by a foreigner on record seems to bear a strong resemblance to the court proceedings themselves, consisting of exclusively African defendants on trial before "the international community" of foreign judges and lawyers. The ultimate goal of my proposed project of interviewing "judges to janitors" had been the identification of *commonality* between the perceptions of these two disparate groups of people. Ironically, I was able to make this identification in the mutually shared unwillingness to answer questions on record.

The Sound of Silence

Amari is an 11-year-old Tanzanian boy. Born Omari Hussein, his Muslim parents fell victim to the AIDS virus currently ravaging Africa. He was seven years old at the time. His closest living relative was his aunt who, having several children of her own, decided that she would be incapable of caring for him. Desperate, she appealed to Suzanne Chenault, a local white woman who had employed Amari's father as a painter. Presenting herself as a "friend of the family," the aunt claimed that Amari had no living relatives left. Suzanne, unmarried and having no children of her own, acted out of profound compassion for this newly orphaned boy who could not speak a word of English. She took him in, committing herself not only to this young child but also to the unknowable pain of his childhood and loss.

Although her mother was Jewish, Suzanne is an ardent Christian. Her house, located directly in the center of urban Arusha, is part of the property of the Anglican Church of Tanzania, which sits directly in front

of the house. Perhaps the first decision she made regarding this boy's fate had thrust into her hands was that he was to be brought up as a Christian. He would learn English and be instructed in the Western mode of critical reasoning and scientific inquiry. Through Suzanne, Amari would be given more than a "second chance"; he would be given all the opportunities the "First World" bestows upon its youth.

For Suzanne, the most difficult part of this transition was the silence. Every time she would confront Amari about a mistake he had made, he would retreat into a cold, unreadable silence. When Suzanne brought up this issue during one of our many long conversations, I tried talking about my own struggle for expression in confrontational situations. I told her that I too often go silent or "shut down" when confronted with anger or harsh criticism, and I expressed my own observation that although Amari exhibits a remarkable proficiency in the English language, the "international school" that he attends merely teaches students to repeat what is stated by their instructors; he had been taught how to put words together in English but he had never been taught to *express himself* in English.

This seems to bear a profound connection to one of the problems of the Tribunal itself. As surviving victims of the genocide, Rwandan witnesses are called upon to provide testimony. They do not enter the court as "injured parties" speaking on their own behalf, but rather as "sources of information" summoned for the exclusive purpose of transmitting that information. Consequently, they are subject to the often hostile process of cross-examination; the parameters of their statements are narrowly bound by the questions posed to them by lawyers, many of them foreign. There is, essentially, no room for "storytelling," a process central to the healing of trauma. And this is one of the central ironies of the entire Tribunal "project" of using law to facilitate reconciliation and democratization; it is through adherence to the procedural requirements of Western, common law – the right of a defendant to cross-examine prosecution witnesses – that this legal process may actually work against its own perceived substantive purpose: reconciliation.

Dr. Judith Herman's groundbreaking work on the nature of trauma and secrecy provides great insight into the problem of adjudicating trauma, describing the adversarial legal system as an inherently "hostile environment; it is organized as a battlefield in which strategies of aggressive argument and psychological attack replace those of physical force" (*Trauma and Recovery*, 72). And here we come to the critical question: are the preservation of defendants' rights and the appropriate treatment of trauma victims mutually exclusive in a court of law?

For Suzanne, it is Amari's *silence* that has come to represent all of the traumas, both real and imagined, that he has endured in his short life. Indeed, Suzanne's intuitive perception that this silence is an index of traumatic memory is most likely quite accurate: "In their predominance of imagery and bodily sensation, and in their absence of verbal narrative,

traumatic memories resemble the memories of young children” (38). Thus, it is the *absence of language* that speaks most directly to that insatiable demon of fear. Here we see the dialectic of language come full circle. If trauma is primarily remembered and processed wordlessly, the only way to make this trauma knowable is by *creating a vocabulary* for it. Indeed, it is the *articulation* of such unspeakable memories that should be viewed as the ultimate goal of an institution such as the Tribunal. So perhaps this, then, is the real question: Is the “truth” of our rational legal system of objective evidence and the inherently nonverbal truth of individual trauma mutually exclusive? Is there any way to reconcile one with the other? If history has taught us anything, it is that if the truth remains unspoken, there are more than enough lies to take its place.

Origin of Species

In Tanzania, July 7 – known as “saba saba” (“seven seven”) – is an annual national holiday, celebrating the creation of the Tanganyika African National Union in 1954. On saba saba saba, July 7, 2007, I found myself wandering through the ancestral plains of the Great Rift Valley.

A member of the Maasai tribe of semi-nomadic cattle herders who roam the fields of rural Kenya and Tanzania, Saitoti, whose name means “one who has killed a lion,” had worked for Suzanne as an *askari* or guard since before my arrival here. Suzanne, in her generous way, employs as many local people as guards and domestic helpers as she can. But Saitoti, the one I was least able to communicate with verbally, was paradoxically the one I felt the strongest connection with during my stay with Suzanne. The Maasai speak Swahili as a second language, *Maa* being their first. Regardless of the fact that Saitoti’s English was only a little bit better than my Swahili, I felt a certain affinity with him. Occasionally Suzanne would send me and Saitoti to walk her dogs at night. With Saitoti at my side, these walks allowed me to explore the city of Arusha during the dark hours of night. I could never have done this alone.

I seized the opportunity to accompany Saitoti to his home, located in the semi-arid plains of the Great Rift Valley in rural Tanzania. Saitoti is a member of what is essentially the last remaining “tribe” in Tanzania, the Maasai. The Maasai are semi-nomadic pastoralists; they roam over the countryside with their cows during the day before returning to their mud-and-stick huts. The *boma* or traditional Maasai village, consists of a small number of huts arranged in a circular pattern around a central area reserved for cows, donkeys, and chickens. Each *boma* is composed of a single family.

Tanzania consists of over 120 tribes, virtually all of which have become assimilated into the ever-widening system of global capitalism that primarily emanates from the US but has now come to extend to the

very ends of the earth. The Maasai, however, have retained many elements of their culture from ancient, pre-colonial times, including their unmistakable dress, their language, and the structure of their communities. However, it has become increasingly common to see Maasai draped in the vibrant colors of their traditional garments with a walking/herding stick in one hand and a cell phone in the other. Artistic renderings of traditional Maasai life have virtually monopolized the “tourist art” trade in northern Tanzania, from rosewood carvings of stoic male warriors to mass-produced *batik* fabric watercolors of Maasai lovers entangled in a surrealistic embrace, black limbs twisted and elongated on a bright purple background. It is an ironic twist of global capitalist logic that the same culture that has most visibly resisted the forces of modernization in Tanzania has become one of the most ubiquitous “products” of mass-produced tourist art in East Africa. Interestingly, this process is effected through the *image*, not the word. Perhaps by “capturing” the image of the last traditional culture of the region, the masses of modernized tribes in Tanzania betray a nostalgic sense of their own loss of tradition and native culture over the past half-century.

I departed from urban Arusha with Amari, Thomas (another *askari*), and Saitoti. Suzanne dropped the four of us off at the Arusha bus station, an anarchic mass of bodies, commodities, cars, buses, and diesel fumes. After a short negotiation in a language I did not understand, the four of us got into a battered station wagon: our taxi to the countryside, I presumed. The economics of transportation in East Africa dictate that an empty car seat equals a profit lost and as the car filled with passengers I found myself wedged between the driver and a local woman, sitting in the center “seat” which consisted of nothing but the space between the two seats to either side of me. The car was a manual shift, which meant that each time the driver shifted gears he had to reach between my legs. The speedometer was broken and the windshield cracked. After a ride of about half an hour towards the countryside, we were dropped off. At first I thought that we had reached our destination but upon closer inspection, I realized that this was simply a stop on the way to the boma. We had arrived at a Maasai market, which looked like a construction site, the rudimentary foundations of modern commercial architecture surrounded by men, women, children, cows, and garbage. Saitoti told me that the large building under construction there would be a “real” market when it was finished.

I waited with my companions until a ride showed up; they would know when this would happen and what it would look like. After about an hour of waiting in the midday sun, a blue Toyota pickup overflowing with Maasai came rumbling through the dust and up to the market. To an outsider, the Maasai give the impression of existing as one extended family; everyone seems to know each other. As soon as the pick-up’s cargo unloaded itself, Saitoti engaged in negotiations with the truck’s driver, asking for a ride to his village. In what had by then come to be a stingingly familiar situation, the driver’s price was quite steep: 25,000

Tanzanian shillings (about \$20). This was an astronomical price and an example of what many foreigners come to understand as a “mzungu tax”: he was charging a premium for a white-skinned passenger.

After about an hour of long and seemingly complex negotiations, Saitoti finally managed to persuade the driver to take us for no more than the cost of gasoline, about 7,000 TZS. We drove for 20 minutes on the same highway we had taken to the market until we turned off the paved road and into the vast plains that the Maasai call home. I chose not to sit in the seat at the front of the pickup truck, preferring to stand on a bench placed in the back in order to take in the landscape more fully. As we entered the undeveloped landscape of desolate beauty leading to the boma, the eyes of those we passed were fixated on me. Apparently, I was rendered a spectacle by the relative remoteness of this area in terms of common tourist routes and safari expeditions.

It was quite fortunate for me that when we arrived, Saitoti not only warmly introduced me to his entire family but implored me to take a multitude of pictures of his family and his home. I was especially struck by the beauty and intense curiosity of the children here. I was told that these children had never seen a white person before. Most of them regarded me with a countenance of reserved fascination; put simply, they stared at me with a mixture of fear, interest, and shyness. Very quickly, however, the more assertive and extroverted of them began to ask me questions, laughing at my lack of understanding and dumb, nodding smiles.

We had arrived hot, tired, and a bit sore from the bumpy ride, so after introductions and some preliminary family pictures, the four of us joined the men for lunch under a nearby tree. The menu consisted of goat leg roasted on an open fire and our utensils were machetes and fingers. When I asked where all the women were, I was told, simply, that men and women eat separately.

After lunch, we departed the *boma* to explore the countryside. The ecological diversity of the area was absolutely shocking; in this place, home to the most ancient of human experiences, desert, forest, mountain, and plain converge into an environment impossible to describe by any name but “Earth.” The remnants of past volcanic eruptions carved scars of ash across the dusty plains of the Valley. Bushes made of thorns dotted the landscape and tugged at our clothes as we passed. The Rift itself divided the land like a serpent. This place, which gave birth to the first human thought, looked as much like the end of the world as the beginning.

We hiked for hours, stopping to rest occasionally at a camel, cave, or cliff. Finally, when we had reached the furthest leg of our journey and I the saturation point of exhaustion, we came to the top of a very steep hill. One Maasai man was curing a strip of animal hide hanging from a leafless tree. At the edge of the precipice was a young Maasai girl who

immediately caught my attention. Her eyes contained a fierce, passionate curiosity equaled only by the reserved shyness that tempered it. My gaze reflected hers as the intensity of her stare drove me to a self-conscious shyness myself. Thomas asked her if she spoke Swahili. She shook her head. School? No. I somehow knew that I had reached the furthest point of my journey. And in the eyes of this girl, with whom I could never communicate with words, I felt as if I were somehow...home.

As we began our hike back to the *boma*, this girl’s gaze burned into my memory as a kind of psychic landmark of a place beyond my memory yet somehow familiar. Just as it is through images that the Maasai have become one of the most profitable “cultural products” of Tanzania, the image of this young girl’s stare formed for me a kind of wordless connection to a past beyond memory.

That night the only visible light was provided by stars, rendering my eyes – dulled by the incessant glare of electric light – virtually blind. When it was time for bed, two of the children mercifully took my hands and guided me towards the hut I was to sleep in that night, as if they could sense my blindness. I slept in the hut of Saitoti’s mother and, while the smoke from the fire lit inside the hut for warmth and light burned my eyes, I slept relatively well. The next morning the children were much more open in their curiosity towards me. When I knelt down to try and interact with them face to face, they all reached out to run their fingers through my strange-looking hair. I let them each try on my glasses and they laughed in turn at their relative blindness through the lenses.

The next morning being a Sunday, Saitoti asked me if I would like to go to church with him. The Maasai, who have always practiced a form of monotheism, were converted to Lutheranism by the Germans. The Germans were the first to colonize this area in the late nineteenth century and the Lutheran Church is one of the remnants of their conquest. While waiting for the service to start, Saitoti brought me into the office of the church, a small room adjoined to the main building. He explained to the church council who I was and where I was from. They told me, through Amari, that I was welcome; the only requirement would be that I introduce myself to the congregation and state whether or not I would be joining their church. As Amari, a child of 11 years, possessed the greatest understanding of both English and Swahili, he was compelled to serve as my translator. Here’s what I said:

“Hello and good morning. I would like to thank all of you very much for welcoming me into your church. It is a great blessing to me to be able to hear your music and your words. My own grandfather was a Lutheran preacher but I myself am a Jew, from

As we entered the undeveloped landscape of desolate beauty leading to the boma, the eyes of those we passed were fixated on me.

the tribe of Israel. So, while I cannot join your church, it is a great honor to be here with you that I will be happy to take back home with me. Thank you."

Towards the end of the sermon, the preacher addressed me directly in English: "People here like you. You are very welcome."

Constructing a Legacy

The opportunity to contribute to the formulation of a "legacy symposium" scheduled for the November before its final year of operation in 2008 provided me unique insight into the "institutional culture" of the ICTR and how this culture shapes the Tribunal's view of itself. In the process of drafting several documents related to the preparation of the event, including invitation letters, contact lists of individuals, and organizations, the event program, grant proposals, and general project descriptions, I collaborated daily with Suzanne and Timothy Gallimore, spokesman for the prosecution and an infinite source of valuable insight. Together we deliberated about the nuances of the language we were to use in describing the event as well as the list of topics. We settled on a list of seven:

1. Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes: Case Studies in Criminal Responsibility
2. Freedom of Speech and Incitement to Criminal Activity: A Delicate Balance
3. Sexual Violence Under International Law
4. Fairness of the Proceedings
5. Outreach of International Justice: How Can the Work of an International Criminal Tribunal Foster the Rule of Law in National Jurisdictions?
6. Transfer of ICTR Jurisprudence to Rwanda and Beyond
7. East Africa and the Future of International Law

The structure of the topics was intended to be both retrospective and forward-looking, beginning with a discussion of the past work of the Tribunal and the jurisprudence it has developed and ending with an evaluation of this new law's potential for promoting a legal culture of human rights in Rwanda and the East African region. On June 11, during my first month at the Tribunal, the prosecutor filed the first official request for the transfer of a case to the national jurisdiction of Rwanda, where lawmakers had officially voted to abolish the death penalty earlier in the month. The question of how to transfer the work of the Tribunal itself to Rwanda was one of our main concerns in structuring the program.

As judicial decisions under international law are technically non-binding, unlike decisions in the common law system from which the Tribunal draws the majority of its procedural standards and conventions, the question of *what to do* with this body of law is valid and indeed crucial. As an *ad-hoc* international court created by the UN Security Council, the

Tribunal is a temporary court. Its autonomy and authority are bound by the limitation of time as well as the transparently political origins of its foundation. Thus, an accurate evaluation of its contribution to the world will remain problematic at best and impossible at worst until many years after the court's mandate has expired.

One of the documents I drafted was a synopsis of the event titled "Information on the ICTR Symposium on the Legacy of International Criminal Courts and Tribunals for Africa." Apart from the bureaucratic formalism immediately apparent in the very title of the document, the use of the preposition "for" is illustrative of an inevitable sense of superiority both latently and explicitly embedded in the culture of the institution, most clearly exemplified by the institution's name itself: the UN International Criminal Tribunal in Rwanda. This attitude is most clearly evident in the Tribunal's description of its "Outreach Programme." At first, the element of superiority is obscured by the liberalism inherent in the Tribunal's self-perception; a document on the Tribunal's website titled "The Tribunal at a Glance" under the heading of "Future Outreach" reads:

Despite its achievements, the ICTR still faces the challenge of informing Rwanda's rural population of its progress... It is envisaged that outreach activities will be expanded to provincial levels. This project will engage key target groups, inform them about the ICTR, mobilize them to promote human rights and foster the culture of accountability inside and outside of Rwanda.

This statement of purpose includes both procedural ("engage... inform... mobilize") and substantive ("promote human rights... foster the culture of accountability") goals. However, there is a certain disjunction of logic evident here. This statement encapsulates an attitude towards the value of information that is generally Western and particularly bureaucratic. This statement belies a fundamental assumption implicit in the culture of the institution itself: that the concealment of knowledge is inextricably correlated with undemocratic forms of social and political interactions; thus, the dissemination of knowledge becomes both a means and an end in itself. The relationship between the information to be spread and the cultural effect this information will have is assumed to be self-executing. According to this understanding, the ostensibly simple action of "informing [Rwanda's rural population] about the ICTR" will serve as an adequate mechanism for the accomplishment of the Tribunal's substantive goals of human rights promotion and the fostering of a culture of accountability.

However, such logic is both circular by nature and profoundly resonant with the history of proselytization and colonialism in Africa. Whether it be the New Testament or the judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, "the Word" is socially constructed as possessing a quality of universal truth that is self-evident upon its acquisition by hitherto "ignorant" masses. Official Tribunal trips to

Rwanda are called “missions.” In order to become truly effective, efforts at outreach undertaken by the “international community” must become aware of the limitations inherent in this approach and its resonance with historical models of religious colonial hegemony.

But this has no bearing whatsoever on the value of these efforts’ substantive goals. I believe that the ICTR is an institution that possesses an unprecedented awareness of its own limitations and that this awareness is a product of both the material limitations under which it is obligated to fulfill its broad mandate as well as its unique position within the trajectory of institutions of international law since Nuremberg. This unique awareness is central to the Tribunal’s conception of its own legacy and what this legacy will look like.

The “Information” document I worked on, which is available on the Tribunal’s website, states that, in light of the Tribunal’s rapidly approaching dissolution, “a myriad of issues related to the impact of the Tribunal’s work and its subsequent repercussions within the complementary fields of national and international law have emerged.” The nature of this “complementarity” is central to an understanding of the Tribunal itself. And here we encounter a paradox. As stated in Article 9 of its governing statute, the Tribunal is expressly delegated the authority to “have primacy over national courts” and “may formally request national courts to defer to the competence of the International Tribunal.” Thus, the Tribunal is rendered an authority superior to any possessed by any domestic, national jurisdiction. However, as the Tribunal’s mandate is *temporary* in nature, this supremacy is rendered equally ephemeral. Subsequently, a discussion of the Tribunal’s legacy is really a discussion about the *transference* of this authority – embodied in the Tribunal’s jurisprudence – to the domestic jurisdictions over which it has “reigned supreme” during its existence.

Here we encounter a question on the international level strikingly similar to the question of the court’s outreach to Rwandan citizens on the domestic level. The presentation, discussion, and dissemination of jurisprudence take center stage as the primary mechanism of effecting the changes inherent to the transformation of society that the institutional culture of the Tribunal values as paramount. *Presentation* of this jurisprudence is the first step in this process as envisioned by the synopsis: “The ICTR’s jurisprudential developments will serve as the starting point for discussion directed towards the formulation of ideas and initiatives intended to strengthen Africa’s capacity to serve as a global centre of international law.” Next, *discussion* is conceived of as the next step in the process of legacy creation, the value of this discussion determined by its adherence to democratic principles: “The follow-up discussions will facilitate mutually beneficial interaction between participants and presenters by incorporating the perspectives of all. The ultimate goal will be the attainment of a great diversity of voices and opinions.”

Here we see again a well-intentioned conflation of means and ends. The event’s purpose was to be the formulation of policy recommendations for the transference of law from the international to the regional and national levels. But the method proposed to effect this formulation – discussions designed to include a maximally diverse array of opinions – is one that rarely lends itself to the coherence and unity necessary to create such policy recommendations. There is an underlying assumption here that if the discussion itself is conducted in a democratic way, then the discussion will have a democratic *effect*.

Both the procedural and substantive ambitions of the symposium are summarized as follows:

...this symposium will serve to accomplish multiple goals, drawing upon a maximally diverse roster of participants and speakers in order to contribute to the development of deeper and broader understandings of the correlations between international criminal law, democratization, reconciliation and the implementation of human rights.

Here we confront a nexus between the legal, the political, and the cultural, a nexus that, I argue, contributes to the uniqueness of the institution itself as well as the problems it faces. Shoshana Felman’s *The Juridical Unconscious* explores the ways that critical legal events exist “precisely at the juncture – at the very critical convergence – of the legal and the political” (63). The legacy symposium may be viewed as an event located at the critical convergence of several junctures simultaneously: between the legal and the political; between the international legal community and the legal community of the surrounding region; between presenters and participants; and, most importantly, between the Tribunal and Rwanda.

The Tribunal’s utilization of jurisprudence as the primary tool for effecting positive legal change in the East African region is revealing. Felman expounds upon the potentially transformative use of legal verdicts upon society and collective memory: “In their arbitrating functions between contradictory facts and between conflicting versions of the truth, verdicts are decisions about what to admit into and what to transmit of collective memory. Law is, in this way, an organizing force of the significance of history” (84). Indeed, the legacy symposium is an event that seeks to consolidate the Tribunal’s role as “an organizing force of the significance” of the Rwandan genocide itself. The *consciousness* that the genocide was a result of simultaneous legal, political, and cultural “failure” on both the international and domestic level is a central element in the particular culture of the Tribunal itself, an element that renders the institution unique in both its approach towards post-conflict resolution and the problems inherent in effecting this approach. This consciousness is clearly evident in the conceptualization of the legacy symposium in particular and the Tribunal’s institutional doctrine of outreach in general. Both require the Tribunal as an entity entrusted with the

credibility of the international community to transcend the exclusively legal and to engage with its potential effect on the political and cultural realms of the East African region.

“French Soldiers Were Playing Volley Here”

Towards the end of my two months in Africa I was presented with an incredible opportunity: the chance to visit Rwanda. As a Tribunal intern, I was eligible to take the private UN plane reserved for legal officers and witnesses alike. Fortunately, although I had not planned this journey in advance, I would be accompanied by two other Tribunal interns: Vikas and Nate. Vikas was of Indian descent and Nate half-Italian and half-Ethiopian. While all three of us were American, I remained the *mzungu* of the group.

The motorbike roared like a chainsaw as it persisted up the winding, unpaved Rwandan road towards the top of the hill it was hugging. One of the most common and popular ways to travel in Rwanda, these “moto-taxis” are just large enough for one passenger; drivers always carry an extra helmet with them for their clients. Having been in the country for two days, I had decided that now, delving furthest into the “heart” or center of the African continent, would be the perfect time to take pictures of the landscape rushing past me.

The splendor of seemingly endless, vernal green hills quickly spun my mind into a euphoric happiness. Not only death but life in Rwanda looks more vivid to the outsider. I had finally immersed myself, successfully just being where I was, trusting in the elements of humanity and nature around me. I didn’t even know where the moto-taxi I was riding was going, having abandoned the knowledge of place for the experience of it.

The day before, Vikas had met an extremely amiable local man who agreed to show us around Butare, a province in south Rwanda that borders the country of Burundi. Probably because of the barely manageable language barrier between us, our guide did not tell us anything about Murambi apart from its name. I knew that some of the worst massacres of the genocide had occurred in Butare but Vikas, Nate, and I had spent the day visiting the local university and national museum. Neither place really gave us any vivid insight into this fact. When we reached the top of the large hill and dismounted from our moto-taxis, I quickly pulled my helmet off and looked at the pictures I had taken. They were absolutely amazing, by far the most beautiful pictures of an African landscape that I had captured. The fact that I had shot them while riding a speeding motorbike up a rough dirt road made them even more impressive to me. I enthusiastically showed them off to Vikas and Nate. I was so absorbed in the images I had captured that I did not notice the group of about 40 Rwandans standing about a hundred feet away from me.

As we headed towards the plain, uniform buildings ahead of us, I stared, entranced, at the view of the landscape that this hilltop gave to its visitors. I had enough time for a few more pictures until everyone began walking towards the building complex. This place consists of several mundane looking rectangular buildings, made out of right angles and brick, surrounded by fertile hillsides. A perfect example of what may be called “bureaucratic architecture,” its outward appearance betrayed nothing of its nature; it could be a prison, hospital, library, office complex, or dormitory. It was in fact originally designed as a technical college. In 1994 it became used as a French military post and a mass grave for the victims of massacres in the area. Now it is a memorial.

The rooms are filled with powder white skeletons laid out on tables, twisted and mutilated beyond recognition as anything except a horrifying reflection of something which was at one time human. Some of them are still wearing clothes. Many of them are quite small.

I walked through each room, my horror tempered only by my curiosity. The pungent aroma of lime burned in my nostrils. I had never seen anything like this. As I walked from room to identical room and building to identical building, my mind compulsively flooded with images of the Holocaust. It occurred to me that at the level of bone we are all identical.

The shock of these exposed skeletons forced me to reconsider the way I had conceptualized my “place” in Africa, particularly in terms of “privilege.” From my experiences in Arusha, an undeniably poor but relatively stable tourist town, I had struggled with the fact of my privilege in primarily economic terms: I am from a rich country; I am in a poor country. While this is an obvious simplification, it was this basic fact that came to mediate my interactions with local people in often frustrating ways. Regardless of these frustrations, however, I had spent all of my time until now coming to terms with the fact itself. But Murambi shattered these reflections. I am privileged because I have never had to even consider the possibility of my *right to life* being violated. I am privileged simply because I am *alive*.

I still had my camera out and I used it. I took six photographs of the skeletons, bones and skulls laid to rest. I told myself that I was taking these images for myself as much as for everyone I cared about back home. After a few minutes, one of the Rwandan visitors let out a cry of mourning and collapsed. Before we left we saw a Rwandan woman crying with her face covered, escorted by several friends or family members. I could not help but wonder whether her face would have been covered had I not been there.

The grounds were marked with a number of memorial signs. Most of these signs indicated areas where mass graves were located during and after the massacres that claimed 50,000 human lives. The skeletons laid out in the rooms were taken from these mass graves. Next to one of them, a sign reads:

*“French soldiers were playing volley here
Les soldats Francais jouaient au volley ici
Aho ingabo z’ubufaransa zakiniraga volley”*

As I reached the site of the mass grave at the edge of the hilltop, I was shocked to see houses and people only a few hundred feet from where I was standing. As a small boy ran towards me, the faint echoes of children and cows in the close distance washed over me. Confronted again with the stunning beauty of this place, I felt for the first time that intimate embrace between beauty and horror.

I came to Rwanda thinking myself aware of the limitations of my own capacity for understanding the lives, history, and culture of this country. I knew that despite my own Jewish heritage there would be no possible way for me to even begin to comprehend. My fundamentally complete ignorance about Murambi seems almost proof of this fact; the inner experience of the genocide – that thing I came here to “study” – is essentially unknowable to me. In revealing to me the extent to which I *cannot know*, these bones spoke volumes.

The Legacy of Arusha and the Promise of Nuremberg

I believe that the legacy of the Tribunal will be, as are all meaningful legacies, one of mixed success and failure. By the Tribunal’s very first judgment in *Akayesu*, it had already accomplished an unprecedented goal in passing a conviction on the crime of genocide, the first in history. Thus, the Tribunal’s legacy is inextricably linked to Nuremberg and its “promise.” The Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of Allied Powers was not, as it is now remembered to be, a “genocide court.” The word “genocide” never appears in the Charter or judgments of that historic tribunal. While Nuremberg was undoubtedly and influentially progressive in its attempt at prosecuting crimes against humanity, it was primarily concerned with prosecuting individuals for war crimes, crimes against peace, and conspiracy to commit any of these actions – essentially putting on trial the crime of “war” itself, not genocide. Crimes against humanity were considered legally justiciable only within the context of these “larger” crimes and were subsequently rendered extrajudicial in nature as crimes of their own (Schabas, 40). Furthermore, the prosecution of Nuremberg took a predominantly “documentary” approach towards evidence, attempting to avoid the potentially disrupting effect of calling upon recently traumatized individuals to provide evidence in court.

This is not a fact commonly attributed to the Nuremberg Tribunal for two main reasons. The first is that much of the evidence against the defendants was based on their involvement in the deportation and extermination of Jews. Because of this, Raphael Lemkin, the man who created the word “genocide,” stated that “[t]he evidence produced at the Nuremberg trial gave full support to the crime of genocide” (Lemkin, 147). And this leads directly to the second reason that Nuremberg’s

failure to establish genocide as a crime unto itself has been forgotten: with the explosion of Holocaust-consciousness that erupted in the early 1960s, following the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the significance of the Nuremberg proceedings changed. As the concept of genocide began to become more and more consciously accepted and considered, Nuremberg became (at least in America) the collectively agreed upon model for using the “rule of law” to enforce international human rights. Thus, the “promise of Nuremberg” is a remarkably accurate phrase; as Nuremberg is commonly credited for establishing a legal norm it never actually established, the legal conviction of individuals guilty of the crime of genocide *as such* was a project left unfinished, just as a promise refers to a future action.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has fulfilled the promise of Nuremberg. By creating the legal framework for the prosecution of genocide as a crime, the Tribunal’s very first judgment established this as a fact. However, this success of the Tribunal is also the root of its central problems and difficulties. Nuremberg was undoubtedly a crucial model for the work of the ICTR, particularly in the use of simultaneous translation systems and the fusion of two different, albeit Western, legal systems: common law and civil law. The limitation in using Nuremberg as a model is most apparent in the Tribunal’s effect on traumatized witnesses, because Nuremberg was not intended to prosecute the crime of genocide. Due to the nature of the crimes prosecuted at Nuremberg, the dynamic of the cross-examination as a “battlefield” was appropriate to the type of information needed to prosecute these crimes. However, in order to accomplish goals very different from Nuremberg’s, namely the ICTR’s stated goals of “reconciliation” and “democratization,” a serious and non-ideological evaluation of the adversarial legal system’s potential to *re-traumatize* survivors of genocidal violence needs to be undertaken. This problem is an example of what sociologist Max Weber described as an “iron cage” in which bureaucracies apply procedural rules in ways that harm those they are intended to serve (Brubaker, 173).

In order to accomplish this and begin to formulate alternative models for the adjudication of genocidal crimes, I believe we must open the doors of legal admissibility to non-verbal forms of expression. Contemporary psychological understandings of trauma must be incorporated into the judicial process of assigning responsibility for the infliction of such trauma. If, as Felman states, “what has to be heard in court is precisely what cannot be articulated in legal language,” we must redefine our conceptions of the admissibility of verbal evidence provided by traumatized individuals in an adversarial courtroom (4). As trauma is often experienced and remembered as an image-like imprint, the incorporation of non-verbal evidence would render these proceedings less “objective” in the strict sense but would actually hold the potential for *less translation to be required*. When the words to describe such crimes fail even the most articulate, we must look beyond words.

**I am privileged simply
because I am alive.**

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Uzi Kurinda Imana We: A Story of Resilience in Rwanda

MARGOT MOINSTER '09

Land of One Thousand Hills

As my two-and-a-half day journey from Memphis to Kigali comes to a close, the mist parts outside my small, oval airplane window, revealing the blazing red soil and lush vegetation that drapes Rwanda's "land of 1000 hills." The rolling panorama of Rwanda's verdant terrain lies in stark contrast to the reel of bloody images scrolling through my mind. While struggling to sort through reality and preconceived notions, my eyes' breathtaking snapshots of Rwanda become overshadowed by images of bloodshed ingrained in my imagination.

Peering down at the fertile land that lies beneath me, I begin to picture exposed, mutilated corpses. The red soiled roads weaving in and out of wooded areas and through small farming communities morph into bloody streams, drowning powerless men, women, and children in their midst. For the past few years, my perceptions of Rwanda have been shaped by the genocide, but as I sit anxiously in my window seat, I begin to move beyond my one-dimensional view of Rwanda and see its complex beauty.

Rwanda's topography reveals a geology that constructs continuous struggle. As each hill arches up and down again, gradually coalescing into the next, the land is fused together. Deep beneath the soil lie sturdy roots, intertwined to create a strong, supportive foundation. Above, the vegetation enveloping the land sways back and forth from the force of the wind. Struggling to remain rooted in its fertility amid numerous forces of destruction, Rwanda's terrain transcends traditional interpretation as each step taken north, south, east, or west provides a different angle from which to see, and interpret, the land and the events that have shaped it.

During my first few days in Kigali, as I navigate the streets that begin to form the roadmap of my experience, I am engulfed in the hustle and bustle of the city. Surrounded by vendors selling fruits, shops filled with vivid African fabrics, and motos speeding by, I am invigorated. Yet I remain haunted. Approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were brutally murdered here with machetes, clubs, guns, and sticks in merely 100 days. The Human Rights Watch estimates that at least 250,000 women were raped. Women became sex slaves, raped over and over again until the assaults led to gruesome internal wounds



where maggots began to fester, crawling in and out of reproductive organs. Many were gang raped, raped with objects such as gun barrels or sharpened sticks, and sexually mutilated with machetes, knives, sticks, boiling water, and even acid. Children watched as their parents were assaulted, skulls smashed and limbs severed. Neighbors were forced to turn against one another and many Rwandans were tortured into killing their friends and even families. Babies' heads were bashed against walls, and machetes tore against flesh and bone. Achilles tendons were slashed, and individuals unable to flee, died slow, torturous deaths. In the span of 100 days, blood was spilled throughout the country; families were decimated, children were orphaned, women were left infected with HIV, many of them pregnant. Yet 14 years later, all I see are scrumptious mangos and pineapples balancing delicately in baskets resting on women's heads, bright, vivid colors, and life happening all around me.

How can I begin to reconcile these two spheres in which my mind resides? Meandering through town, I find myself attempting to comprehend the vivaciousness around me within a mental framework that fails to coincide. Am I a perpetual outsider, unable to develop even a glimpse of insight into the remnants of the genocide and its impact on individuals' daily lives because of my Western lens and inability to speak Kinyarwanda? Or, am I a superficial observer, unable to unpack the complexity of present-day Rwanda simply because I am not looking deep enough? As I continue to stroll the streets of downtown, struggling to piece together a more comprehensible picture of the country, I encounter numerous beggars showcasing their amputated limbs and large disfiguring scars that mark the places where machetes had been taken to skin and bone during the genocide. I realize I am a superficial observer.

Throughout my journey, I continually struggle to process the myriad sights, smells, and sounds over-stimulating my senses. As time progresses, however, I begin to understand that beneath the beautiful veneer lie countless reminders of the ethnic struggles that have marked this country for nearly a century. The reminders are there at night when I am haunted by an eerie silence transfixing the air, caused by an absence of barking. During the war, dogs were murdered to prevent them from eating rotting corpses, and to this day, they are rarely seen or heard. The reminders are there when I sit in a restaurant with friends enjoying a cool, refreshing Fanta, and the waiter removes the tightly sealed lid of my drink in my presence. Poisoning was a common occurrence in Rwanda in the mid-20th century. They are there when I see convicted genocidaires (perpetrators of genocide) in light pink jumpsuits riding in large truck beds as they are transported through town to their next work site. They are there on my daily commute to work via minibuses, when I pass billboards promoting Gacaca courts, which combine traditional local justice with modern jurisprudence to try individuals for crimes committed during the period of the genocide. And, the reminders are there on numerous trips I take outside of Kigali, when I pass vivid purple ribbon strewn throughout the country along trees, on churches, in front of graveyards, all marking the places where Rwandans were murdered or where corpses have been found. The reminders are always there.

Though it was not obvious to me at first glance, my time in Rwanda has taught me that Rwanda's history of ethnic strife and bloodshed continues to live on in the daily lives of survivors.

Though it was not obvious to me at first glance, my time in Rwanda has taught me that Rwanda's history of ethnic strife and bloodshed continues to live on in the daily lives of survivors. Whether it is triggered by something physical or an intrinsic emotional reaction, Rwandans are plagued with inefaceable reminders. For the women who contracted HIV through genocidal rape, the horrors of the genocide did not end in June of 1994, but rather they continue to be relived every day when they take their antiretroviral medication, and their impact continues among the youth who are products of rape and the infants who are born HIV positive.

From an altitude of 30,000 feet, I was unable to comprehend my panoramic view, but while strolling the streets of Kigali, I begin to realize that beneath the hilly contour and vibrant vegetation is a land that has not fully buried the memory of 1994.

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Women's Equity in Access to Care and Treatment (WE-ACTx)

While thousands of Rwandan women infected with HIV during the genocide are left to die, their alleged rapists are receiving anti-retroviral treatment in prison. It is in response to this unjust and dire reality that Rwandan women's associations issued an international call in 2003 to aid women infected with HIV from genocidal rape. These associations, often led by survivors themselves, help thousands of widows, rape survivors, and orphans. The leaders of these groups recognized that their members needed antiretroviral care, as well as post-traumatic stress counseling, access to support groups, food, housing, job training, and education about their illness and treatment options. In 2004, a group of US-based activists, physicians, and scientists responded to their call and established Women's Equity in Access to Care and Treatment (WE-ACTx). At its conception, WE-ACTx joined with four Rwandan women's associations to launch an HIV treatment program that now serves over 5,000 women free of charge.

The seeds of WE-ACTx's work were sown long before the 21st century. The needs the organization serves are rooted in Rwanda's history, stemming from the impact of colonization and its remnants, which functioned to build a backdrop for the 1994 genocide and its aftermath.

WE-ACTx has established three clinics that provide Rwandan women with access to trauma counselors and nurses, antiretroviral treatments, as well as HIV testing and treatment for their children. WE-ACTx has embraced a grassroots empowerment model, integrating medical care with psychosocial support, while simultaneously addressing barriers to care for these women, including poverty. In addition to its clinical work, WE-ACTx has a research center and provides non-clinical services, including a peer education program, community legal aid training program, and an income generation project.

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The sound of the women's chatting fuses with the rhythmic chanting of the sewing machines. Feet move up and down, driving needle and thread in and out, intricately weaving together vivid African fabrics and bonds between the women. At times one of the women will begin to sing, softly vocalizing her deep, rich voice, enticing the others to join in by the sheer beauty and purity of sound. The voices stretch over the noise of the machines as words begin to take shape and change with the rhythm of the music. The soft, melodious beat of the sewing provides soulful percussion as the singing and the pedaling fuse together into an enchanting masterpiece of music, of woman and machine.

In Kigali I worked primarily with WE-ACTx's income-generation project known as WE-ACTx Ineza. This project consists of a sewing and craft cooperative and is geared towards providing job training and economic

support for women who are patients receiving services from the organization. In particular, I helped connect the cooperative to the U.S. market and worked with the women to design a line of bags made out of traditional African fabrics, kitenge, for export to the United States. In addition, I interviewed many of the women, compiling their stories for the organization as well as gathering their thoughts on the cooperative and goals for the future.

The lives of the women of Ineza have each been dramatically shaped by Rwanda, its history and present-day economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Each woman's involvement in this project signifies a joint financial and physical struggle as a result of a shared national identity that for over a century had been marked by colonization and its remnants, ethnic struggle and bloodshed. The women of Ineza are all on antiretroviral medication (ARVs), and though these women come from varying backgrounds and have contracted HIV through different modes of transmission, they are united and bonded by their common struggle. Regardless of each woman's history and her ethnic identity, five days a week these 25 women come together in a small, cozy brick home and sit and sew on a traditional Rwandan woven rug whose colors have faded with time, or at an old fashioned Butterfly sewing machine under a bright blue tin awning. Located off of a narrow dirt path on the back side of a large multi-lane well-paved road that is lined with office buildings, stores, bus stops, and small communities of homes, this house is insulated by a large brick wall on all four sides, walling in an environment that is free from the stigma, poverty, and struggle that are characteristic of these women's daily lives outside of the safety of the WE-ACTx Ineza project.

As I sit, designing and producing patterns for new prototypes, I listen to the women's soulful singing. I watch as Sophie, the cooperative's trainer, closes her large brown eyes and begins to slowly move her head to the beat of the music. When the song transitions into its chorus of Uzi Kurinda Imana We ("God's Protection is Supreme"), Sophie's voice becomes louder and her entire body begins to morph; her arms stretch up over her head, while her hands start to clap and her hips swivel. I watch as she is swept off her feet by the collective effervescence transfixing the air. Sophie is a woman of deep faith, and as I sit enchanted by her movements, I see the manifestation of her faith in song and dance.

The women of Ineza are all spiritual, and the songs that are sung at the WE-ACTx Ineza house all pertain to Imana, God. Historically, Rwanda has been the most Christianized country in Africa, with Christians representing more than 80 percent of the population. However, for many Rwandans, religion holds a negative connotation, due to the involvement of religious leaders and churches in exacerbating ethnic tensions. The leadership of Christian churches, particularly Catholic churches, played a key role in the creation and the furthering of racist ideology during and after colonial rule. Moreover, during the genocide,

many of the massacres occurred in and around churches, and at times religious leaders even conspired in these murders. Rwandans are a people of deep faith, and during past periods of unrest as well as during the genocide, tens of thousands of individuals fled to churches for protection, believing that no individual would dare murder another in God's home; however, in 1994, this belief was tragically shattered.

Post-genocide Rwanda has engaged in a dialectic struggle with religion, and specifically with Catholicism, attempting to reconcile faith in God with feelings of betrayal by the Catholic Church. Though a substantial portion of Rwandans have grown disenchanted with the Catholic Church, spirituality and belief in God remain strong. Recently, there has been a surge in conversions to Islam and to numerous born-again Christian faiths. Small and large places of worship rest on nearly every block of Kigali and its surrounding areas. Minibus paraphernalia often include large iridescent images of Jesus accompanied with his name in bold print along the back and/or side windows. In addition, references to God are incorporated into language and various elements of daily life. For the majority of WE-ACTx Ineza women, too, faith and religion remain a substantial constant in their lives. Some of the women are Muslims and some identify with born-again sects of Christianity; however at the WE-ACTx Ineza house, passion for God transcends traditional boundaries of organized religion.

The Ineza house is more than a structure that houses sewing machines and workers; it is a place that fosters personal growth, community building, and support. The women of Ineza have constructed a community that provides personal as well as economic empowerment, and the women's unwavering belief in God is a shaping force in the construction of this community. Their resilient faith in the aftermath of mass violence illustrates that for these women, religion is a means of coping, enabling them to come to peace with the past and to look towards the future. In addition to being a force in the shaping of community, religion is a catalyst for social change as these women take charge of their lives and become leaders in the fight against AIDS. Whether they actively attend religious ceremonies or not, as the words of the women's singing transfixes the air, God is ever-present, providing support and strength, propelling these women into the fight for social change.

While the women work at the income-generation project, weaving needle and thread in and out of fabric, reinforcing seams, they are simultaneously weaving together and reinforcing their support network. For the majority of these women, there are many ups and downs, sick days and good days, days with food and others without; however, as the women's soulful singing of Uzi Kurinda Imana We coupled with the melodious beat of the sewing machines reaches my ears, I realize that through these women's tumultuous times, their faith in God and in this community remains constant. Uzi Kurinda Imana We.

Murambi

As I begin the three-kilometer hike from the town of Gikongoro to Murambi, I am guided up the dirt road through luscious, breathtaking countryside by vivid purple ribbons hanging mournfully from the branches of trees. The rich, red soil of this long, winding road lies in stark contrast to the vibrant green hills that hover over the small communities of homes and people residing along its side, cradling those in its midst into an enchanting state of comfort and safety. While walking and inhaling the cool breeze and the savory aroma of burning wood, the word *mzungu*, white person, echoes in my ears. People I pass greet me with curious stares and introductory phrases that fuse French and Kinyarwanda, “*Mzungu, Bonjour!*” As I continue up the path framed by verdant rolling hills, I am struck by the beauty and vibrancy of life that lies along this road to Murambi Technical Institute, a large two-story unfinished school complex that now houses and displays the remains of 50,000 Rwandan men, women, and children brutally murdered the week of April 21, 1994. This large, brick building lies nestled in the surrounding hills, encapsulated by the sheer beauty and spirit that engulfs and enchants the entire area. Concealed is the horror and terror that has marked this school as the site of one of the most gruesome massacres during the Rwandan genocide.

When I reach the arched entrance of the Institute, the other visitors and I are met by a middle-aged man on a bicycle and an elderly man who staggers in our direction and introduces himself. After exchanging some words between themselves and then with us, the younger man guides us in the direction of dormitories that lie hidden behind the main school building. I follow the silent gentleman’s lead as he points to the first room filled with shrunken, brittle corpses. It is within the confines of these bare, cement walls that in early April of 1994, thousands of Tutsis took refuge, at the advice of local government officials. For nearly two weeks, these individuals struggled to survive on contaminated water and no food until the Hutu militias arrived.

I tentatively peer in, and see the horrified expressions engraved on dozens of faces and read the stories of their excruciating murders; there are distorted body parts, limbs severed by machetes, and skulls smashed by clubs. Twenty-four rooms constructed in the early 1990s to house ambitious university students have since 1995 served as the final resting place of 800 corpses preserved in lime. Outside the dormitory, an auditorium, vacant of human activity, sits with wall-to-wall clotheslines and cupboards on which the deteriorating clothing of the dead are neatly strung and folded, providing a visual representation of the magnitude of 50,000 lost lives.

Prior to visiting Murambi, I listened to a Public Radio International broadcast entitled *The World: The Rwanda Series*. One of the reports was about the Murambi massacre, and the reporter interviewed the

same two men who guided me through the memorial. One, a survivor who lost his wife and children in the massacre, had said in the interview, “We’re always here, we are always here explaining things to people, we are always in pain. But we have no choice. We can’t ask someone who didn’t lose someone here to work in such a place, so we stay, we explain what happened and that gives us some relief.”

I noticed that throughout the tour, this man pointed to rooms but never fully went in, never fully looked at what lay inside. Instead, he stared out at the rolling green hills, disengaged from the individuals who snapped photos and commented to one another casually. In her report, the reporter depicted these two gentlemen as loquacious and willing to tell their stories, as if telling these stories to visitors is not only important in preventing future genocides but is also therapeutic. When I met these same two men, I did not sense these objectives and emotions. Maybe this disparity in perception is a result of her power to edit her experience in a way that supports her desired story, or maybe it is because of the very limits of interpretation in events so horrifying that they defy traditional comprehension, I am not sure. Regardless of the reasoning behind our strikingly different perceptions of these men, I know that while there, I could not help but feel that my presence only served to exploit these men, their stories, and their pain. I yearned for these men to speak to me and appease my guilt in coming; I wanted them to validate my presence for at the time. I felt like an intruder.

While walking up the isolated road that led me to the Murambi Memorial Center, I felt that my whiteness betrayed me as a tourist and that my presence in this remote area, like the ribbon which signifies mourning, served as a reminder of the massacre that occurred just up the hill. Prior to arriving, I felt invited to come by the very fact that Murambi is a memorial; however, once I arrived, isolated from the hustle and bustle of city that provides some semblance of comfort and protection within the confines of the fast-paced, busy atmosphere, I felt exposed and forced to confront my own presence. I was forced to engage in the process of contemplating what a memorial is and who a memorial serves, as well as how my conflicted feelings about my own presence fit into the greater context of a memorial’s purpose.

How can Rwandans remember but still move on? Silence is not the answer, for in Rwanda, those who fail to bear witness to the atrocities committed become complicit bystanders to the perpetrators by virtue of their silence. Therefore, memorials serve as an institutionalized form of collective memory, recognizing the existence of a shared national tragedy, while simultaneously honoring those who perished. However, does the need for breaking the silence around the genocide extend to outsiders? Like Rwandans, do I too have an obligation to share what I saw while at Murambi? I am still struggling with my own feelings of discomfort revolving around my presence at the memorial, but maybe Murambi serves a dual purpose: it is a place that

honors the dead while simultaneously educating visitors on the horrors that unfolded, so that next time, the promise of “Never Again” may not be simply futile. Maybe memorials, and the institutionalization of collective memory in an educational fashion, serve as a means in and of themselves to striking a balance between remembering and moving on.

School Fees

My friend and I exit the small, tightly packed minibus and board the back seats of two motos (motorcycle taxis) early one hot Saturday morning. I relish the cool breeze and comfort that the moto’s high speeds and cushioned seat afford me. Straddling the back seat as the driver intricately weaves in and out of traffic and around numerous holes and bumps in the road, my eyes suddenly gravitate towards a large crowd of Rwandans gathered around a small, one-room brick building located a few hundred feet up ahead. While pondering what type of community event could be occurring, my moto abruptly stops just short of the gathering. My driver looks back at me expectantly, making it clear that this is our final destination. I pay him the 350 francs (approximately 85 cents) we had previously negotiated, and I tentatively step down. Before I can even finish saying murakoze cyane (“thank you very much”), the drivers are already gone, leaving the last few syllables of my words lingering in the dust filled air and my friend and I, two white 19-year-old college students, standing in the midst of over 400 men, women and children awaiting our arrival.

As we meander through the crowd of people, gradually making our way to the small schoolhouse, I am bombarded with greetings from young children being pushed in my direction by their elders’ outstretched arms. Engulfed in this teeming group of people, I begin to realize the extent of poverty that ravishes this community. Everywhere I look there are dozens of malnourished children with large protruding, swollen bellies. I see children with no shoes garbed in old, disintegrating clothing hanging loosely off their weak, thin limbs. I see children with cases of ringworm and others with swarms of bugs flying around their dirt-encrusted faces. Despite the apparent despair and a precarious future, a palpable feeling of excitement is prevalent around me. These 300 children and their friends and family members have gathered in the hopes of being on the list compiled by Solidarity (a Rwandan organization that partners with WE-ACTx) to receive school fees for the upcoming year. Currently, attending school is too expensive for a large proportion of Rwanda’s population. Though not officially affiliated with WE-ACTx, a few of my colleagues decided to start this program in 2006, and on this particular day, it was the responsibility of my friend and me to photograph the children already enrolled in the program and to update their information. Furthermore, we were asked to photograph and record the information of 100 additional children who had been chosen by Solidarity as the “neediest.” These photographs and profiles are then sent to the United States, where each Rwandan child is linked with his/her respective donor.

What is your name? What is your sex? How old are you? What is your class year? Is your mother alive? Is your father alive? How many siblings do you have? How many meals a day do you eat? Are there any health problems in your family? What is your favorite subject in school? These are the questions I was given to ask every child after taking his or her photo. Sitting at a rickety, old, wood table in the schoolhouse next to my translator, Bob, a 23-year-old secondary school student currently enrolled in the program, I hastily type the answers that he provides me:

- 8-year-old female, 1st year primary school, no mother, no father, 2 siblings, 0-1 meals a day.
- 11-year-old female, 3rd year primary school, HIV+ mother, no father, 5 siblings, 1 meal a day.
- 16-year-old male, 2nd year secondary school, no mother, no father, 10 siblings, 1 meal a day, favorite subject: French.
- 9-year-old female, 3rd year primary school, no mother, no father, 0 siblings, 1 meal a day, favorite subject: math.

The list goes on for 11 pages.

Beset by grinding poverty, malnutrition, infectious diseases, the remnants of colonization and of the genocide, Rwandans today are in a crisis fueled by social and structural violence, and on this particular day, the manifestation of this crisis is illustrated in the hundreds of lives surrounding me. While navigating through the crowd, the children I pass will most likely not attend school this upcoming year unless their names are on the list compiled by Solidarity. In addition, for those whose names are on the list, there is no guarantee that the funding will go through for their fees. To attend school for one year in Rwanda costs approximately 30 to 40 U.S. dollars per student, depending on his or her grade level. This fee includes the costs of books, uniforms, and a small stipend for teachers’ salaries; for the people gathered at this schoolhouse, it is an impossible price to pay. For five hours my friend and I work to find, photograph, and document the 200 children whose names are on the lists provided. When we finish, nearly the same number of children remains, patiently waiting outside under the hot, Rwandan sun for their names to be called. As I leave the building, I am forced to face these children. In their minds, their fate for the next year rests in the white, privileged hands of my friend and me, and we fail them.

To this day, I am unable to fully grapple with the myriad emotions I feel when I recall the times I spent collecting information for the school fees program both in the outskirts of Kigali and in a small mountainous

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While working on the school fees project, I am overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of despair that appears in the hundreds of eyes focused on me.

village on the border of the Congo. Though I had no control over who was on the list while collecting children's information, I was perceived by the children and families to have all of the power. My academic studies at Brandeis thus far have taught me about the larger structural forces that perpetuate poverty and the disproportionate vulnerability of some individuals and communities. Despite this education, when face-to-face with a teenage boy who has followed me for nearly a half-mile down the road, pleading with me to take his picture and record his information, I am unable to turn towards scholars such as Philippe Bourgois and their analysis of structural forces for guidance on how to respond.

Rwanda is stuck in a multiplex crisis rooted in the legacy of colonialism and structural oppression, and it is the impact of this crisis on the lives of millions of Rwandans that serves to further the cycle of poverty and dependence. While working on the school fees project, I am overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of despair that appears in the hundreds of eyes focused on me, and I struggle to contextualize this experience within a greater intellectual framework. In retrospect, I begin to see the importance of a multi-dimensional approach that works to address structural inequalities while simultaneously not losing sight of the individual amid the masses, for it is the individual who addresses the consequences of the resulting privilege and disadvantage in his or her day-to-day life.

National Liberation Day

On July 4th, my friends and I boarded a bus to Rwanda's national stadium in Remara, an area on the outskirts of Kigali, to attend the national Liberation Day celebrations. In Rwanda, this date commemorates the day that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of Kigali from the Interahamwe (Hutu militias) during the genocide, and a large celebration occurs annually to honor the military and their heroic feat.

When we arrived at the stadium around 7:30 a.m., tens of thousands of Rwandans who had traveled from all over the country to see the festivities welcomed us into their midst. The stadium, which is painted in the national colors of yellow, green, and blue, was particularly festive this morning, strewn with ribbons and banners and packed with people sporting Rwanda's official colors. When President Paul Kagame arrived at 10:00 a.m., the parade officially began. Because of my American upbringing, I had envisioned that the parade would include Rwandans on large floats waving flags in the air while a marching band led the way around the stadium. Although I was right about the traditional

band component of the parade, my imagination failed to register the significance of Liberation Day, and subsequently, the fact that large floats and Rwandans in elaborate and playful costumes were not part of the program.

As the marching band entered the stadium, 70,000 people were suddenly brought to their feet by the sound of the national anthem, *Rwanda Nziza* ("Rwanda, Our Beautiful Country"), which was altered in 2001 to break from Rwanda's violent and bloody past. Following the playing of the anthem, the stadium erupted in jubilation as the soldiers began to enter by the hundreds. With every commandment delivered by a drill sergeant, the soldiers, who were lined up in formation, assumed their positions and adjusted their weapons. The crowd sat fixated by the demonstrations, entranced by the soldiers' coordinated manipulation of their weapons and their military prowess. Over the course of two hours, the soccer field and the surrounding track vanished beneath the feet of thousands of soldiers who entered the stadium and followed various military commands for the ecstatic crowd.

Engulfed in this extremely militaristic environment, I struggled to understand why Rwandans expressed such extensive enthusiasm towards the military when they themselves have endured so much bloodshed. While watching the crowd's reaction to the demonstrations, I realized that the Rwandans in the stadium are invested in each move these soldiers make. Many of the men who stood before us in the stadium were the same soldiers who defeated the Interahamwe in 1994. These soldiers were proving their military strength, and the crowd responded by basking in their glory and the comfort it provides them.

Throughout the parade, the Rwandan Patriotic Front was presented as Rwanda's liberators, and for the tens of thousands in the stands, these soldiers are the physical embodiment of the message "Never Again." Fourteen years after the genocide, Rwandans are still working to heal the wounds of their past and find comfort in the present. As each step taken north, south, east, or west in the land of one thousand hills provides a different angle from which to see and interpret the land and the events that have shaped it, so too does it provide Rwandans with a different direction to turn towards for support. Whether they turn towards the mystical realm of religion, towards a memorial, or towards the strength and power of the RPF, resilient Rwandans are struggling to reconcile the inefaceable reminders of their past with a determined eye to the future.

To Sophie and the women of WE-ACTx Ineza:

Their lives, shaped by colonialism and post-colonialism, genocide and AIDS, gave me new definitions of strength and resilience. Without them, my experience of Rwanda would have been shallow and incomplete. The future of Rwanda as a nation is only as strong as the resilience of individuals like these women.

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Coercion and Conversion: The Organic Farming Movement in Maharashtra, India

NEENA PATHAK '08



Says Tuka

In the classic Marathi text *Tukaram*, the poet protagonist Tukaram devotes himself to practicing the word of God in every aspect of his life. Having endured the death of multiple close family members, as well as the pain and suffering involved in famine and subsequent debt, Tukaram develops an unbridled sense of compassion for his fellow beings – an understanding that is only heightened by his growing connection to Krishna, an incarnation of the preservation god Vishnu.

In his translation of this epic poem, Maharashtran poet Dilip Chitre writes:

I have nothing

Left.

I am too deep

In debt.

My harvest

Has been

Looted.

My wife

And my children

Have to beg.

I borrow

Left and right.

Nothing

Seems enough....(37)

Where shall I go now?

What shall I eat? (39).

Upon reading this verse for the first time during my first week in India, I could not help but connect these lines from 17th century Maharashtran literature to the agricultural crisis in modern-day India. Fixating on phrases like, “Where shall I go now? / What shall I eat?” and “I am too deep / In debt,” I remembered the farmer suicide epidemic that had ravaged rural Maharashtra as well as other states throughout India.

With the advent of trade liberalization in the early 1990s as a part of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s structural adjustment program, large transnational corporations, such as Monsanto-Maycho, were permitted to sell genetically modified seeds to small farming communities in India, even though the environmental and societal impacts of these seeds were not sufficiently considered before they were sold. Corporations would often purchase the land of the farmers and consequently make it mandatory for them to buy the expensive seeds they were selling. Other times, companies or even government officials would discourage or prohibit farmers from keeping seed banks in which they could reuse natural seeds from season to season, lowering the input costs on their farms. The historic tradition of exchange and interdependence between Indian farmers was being trivialized by advertising campaigns that employed convincing depictions of Hindu and Sikh gods to sell small farmers hybrid seed varieties (Shiva *Stolen* 10).

As a result, corporate monopolies stripped the farmers of their agency, leaving them no other options to access renewable seeds. Instead, many had to buy expensive genetically modified seeds that could not be saved for future crop cycles, causing large debts that these small farmers could not repay. This trend was a consequence of the Green Revolution (which spread from Mexico to India in the mid-1960s), which noted economics professor Harry M. Cleaver, Jr. defines as “...the rapid output in Third World grain output associated with the introduction of...a combination of improved grain varieties, mainly rice and wheat, heavy fertilizer usage and carefully controlled irrigation” (177). While this seemed like a sound plan to increase food production, especially for overpopulated nations struggling to feed their masses of underfed citizens, Cleaver went on to explain that the Green Revolution has created a cash crop system rooted in farmers’ dependency on

commercial inputs. Farmers were forced to buy inputs for their farms and sell a portion of their yields in order to acquire the money required to purchase inputs for the next season. Proponents of this system encouraged small farmers to want more for themselves and buy commercial goods from stores to raise their standard of living, which contradicted the farmers' original philosophy of collectively working to meet community needs (179). The capitalist inclination of agribusinesses to reduce research costs created incomprehensive reports that failed to account for the extensive devastation of entire ecosystems after the use of many hybrid seeds (184).

Initial high agricultural yields from hybrid seeds and chemical fertilizer use proved unsustainable (Shiva 169), turning into lower yields and higher debts in only a few years. Facing high interest rates (up to 25 percent) and irreversible debts, many farmers looked to suicide as their only option, often ending their lives by drinking the pesticides that had killed their livelihoods in the first place. Others hurled their bodies down wells or set themselves on fire, as if to scream that the violence in taking their own lives felt better than enduring the wretchedness of irresponsible agricultural policy. At a rate of three farmer suicides per day in Maharashtra, the epidemic is creating a generation of children who must grow up without their fathers, and widows who must suddenly support their entire families by themselves. The direness of this situation is aggravated by government financial compensation packages that fail to address the structural shortcomings of Indian agricultural policy and rarely reach the people who need them most (Ahmed 1).

Eager to begin work with the Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation (MOFF), a non-governmental organization meant to promote organic farming as a means of resisting corporate exploitation, I had inadvertently begun processing new ideas by connecting them to what I knew about agriculture in India. Upon rereading the phrase, "Tuka(ram) says the *company* is not so good and true," I thought to myself, sarcastically: even a 17th-century poet could foresee the injustice of future neoliberal policy in favor of corporate capital gains. I didn't share my sentiment with Dilipmama¹, which is how I referred to the aforementioned poet Dilip Chitre, who I knew as an uncle on my mother's side of the family. Nonetheless, through several conversations, I learned that Dilipmama had spent over 20 years studying and translating *Tukaram*. He believed that Tukaram reclaimed religion as

a method of liberation for all people, and not just for high-caste elites. He further noted that existing social conditions informed how Tukaram interpreted the message of God, making me wonder how the agricultural crisis would inform an understanding of modern Hinduism, and vice versa. Dilipmama planted a new seed in my mind: Do religion and colonization have an inverse relationship in rural India?

Having spent less than a week in India, still awaiting the beginning of my internship, I realized I was getting ahead of myself. Keeping this question in the back of my mind, I began to explore Maharashtra.

On Movement and Motorcycles

Early morning Pune blasted from the windows. Hindi music played outside – the shrill, whiny voice of the female singer accompanied the low groans of the song's featured hero. Motorcycles grunted across the potholed roads, and the *tsht-tsht* of street-sweepers sounded like a whisper.

It was 5 a.m. Still jetlagged, I woke up brusquely with a nosebleed, probably due to the thick, dry heat and red dust that hung like a fog in Pune. Unable to go back to sleep, I relaxed on the thin, firm mattress in the apartment of Dilipmama and Vijumami², where I would stay for a few days before moving into a women's hostel on the other side of town. I savored the solitary dawn, my only company the discordant melody of incessant honking five floors below me.

Later that day, I greeted this noise from the back of my cousin Abhijit's motorcycle. He gave me a tour around Pune, eagerly trying to help me orient myself in this city that I would so very soon have to navigate on my own. Clutching his shoulders tightly, I grew petrified and overjoyed at the same time as we weaved through tangled traffic jams.

Traffic in Pune felt like vehicular anarchy. On many roads there were no lanes, with the right-of-way governed solely by common sense: If you can go, go; if you cannot, don't – and honk. An average Punery (person from Pune) seemingly honked as much as a person from the States did not. Everyone honked, because not honking meant not communicating with the other drivers. It meant speaking up and claiming space. Trucks encouraged honking, with signs painted on their backs boldly stating, "Awaz do," which literally translates to "Give noise" in Hindi. Rumored

to have traffic problems greater than those in Mumbai (Maharashtra's capital city, as well as the most populated city in India), Pune's rapidly growing population and lack of infrastructure to accommodate the population made niceties inefficient. Communication had to be blatant, without the patience that tough traffic cops and suppressed road rage afforded drivers at smaller cities in the States.

People tended to drive slowly, (out of necessity, because there was always someone or something else in the way to maneuver about). Apparently, traffic anarchy worked at low speeds. Nothing seemed to dominate over anything else - bikes, two-wheelers (what everyone referred to the motorcycles and scooters as), cars, trucks, people, cows, dogs. I encountered very little road kill. Two cows sat in the middle of the road, and all the vehicles went around them, as if to declare that the cows had as much of a right to claim the road as the drivers themselves did. Everything seemed equal on the road. However, this initial absence of domination in road relations became a violent presence during accidents. Bikers bore the brunt of regular fender benders with rickshaws, with legs splayed under tiny rickshaw wheels and helmetless heads exposed to littered pavement. Cars moved through masses without waiting their turns, and the responsibility for avoiding traffic accidents remained chiefly with pedestrians and bikers – those who would feel the consequences of an accident more than the people inside the cars. If equality was indeed an aspect of Pune's traffic situation, then equality was relative.

People busied themselves everywhere. Street vendors, flocks of uniformed children on bikes returning from school, doormen at expensive Westernized stores. A gruff looking man on a moped wore a bright yellow T-shirt that said "Bride to Bee," with a picture of the bee accompanying the text. The man was not being ironic. He was probably being resourceful. The discontinuity between each block, from person to person, coupled with the noise and the commotion echoing in the streets all boiled down to everyone seeking their space in the web of contradiction that Pune had become.

With a population of almost five million, Pune is often referred to as the cultural capital of Maharashtra, a state located in Western India. Nearly two hours southeast of the coastal Maharashtran capital, Mumbai, Pune touts Marathi culture as much as Mumbai renounces it to make room for a more globalized metropolitan culture. Home to several prestigious universities, such as the University of Pune, and a booming information technology sector, Pune boasts economic growth and development, consequently attracting many people from all over India to study and work in the city. This pride stems back to the 1600s, when Chhatrapati Shivaji founded the Maratha empire after defeating Shahistekhan, uncle of the later famed Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Remnants of the Maratha Empire, a branch of the Kshatriya (or warrior) caste, are visible at several historical sites around the town, including Lal Mahal, Shivaji's former home, and Sinhagad, the site of a famed battle in which Maratha forces conquered the Mughals ("History" 1). Marathas still make their

presence known primarily through political parties in Pune, such as the Maharashtra Naunirman Sena.

Political billboards lined major roads, with pictures of political leaders posing stoically above slogans that promised justice and prosperity for all. Below these billboards were homeless people, losing their individuality and humanity as they blended into the landscape of the city. The sheer multitudes of men, women, and children whose homes were confined to garbage-filled street corners made it difficult to process how each of these people had a story that reflected the realities of "economic development" in Pune, whose benefits were funneled only to a privileged few. Since the Green Revolution hit India in the 1960s, food production has increased hugely, but food security has been on the rocks ever since. Unable to afford the new technologies necessary to modernize their small farms, many small farmers lost their land to wealthy agribusinesses that grew rich off of the labor and resources of the small farmers. As agriculture became less sustainable, farmers had to seek out their livelihoods elsewhere, causing rapid urbanization, evident in traffic density, pollution, and sprawling slums throughout major Indian cities (Clever 182). Pune was no exception.

As my eyes widened at the sight of urban sprawl pouring from the streets into makeshift neighborhoods, I could not help but notice the vibrancy of the reds, yellows, and browns in Pune. Red like the sticker bindis that the women wore on their foreheads, or dust known as "kumkum" that frequented the foreheads of religious Hindu men and women. Brown like the dirt that billowed up into the sky as masses of rickshaws, two-wheelers, and some cars created dense traffic jams in order to get from point A to point B. Bright yellow like the flowers that adorned various temples and shrines around the city, inviting everyone to take off their shoes and enter to be blessed by one of many gods. Red like mendhi that decorated the hands and feet of new brides, as well as young women who wore this fashion with jeans and blouses, creating an aesthetic fusion of East and West. Brown like the mixture of betel nut and tobacco rolled in a leaf known as paan, which men chewed frequently around their favorite *paanwallas*³. This paan stained their yellow teeth with a sticky reddish brown.

And yellow like the Alphonso mangos I threw up all over the littered street earlier that day, with golden remnants of my afternoon snack ironically splattered right in front of a United Colors of Benetton store. I had been ill for the past few days. My mouth said yes to everything and my stomach said no to everything, much like my senses welcomed the sights, sounds, and smells while my brain could not quite figure out how to process them. For instance, whizzing by barefoot children weaving in and out of traffic, I could not fathom how miserable rural life in India could be to cause a family to choose urban homelessness as their better alternative. Still focusing on the colors of Pune, I fixated upon the terracotta splotches of dirt and sand that streaked the unkempt hair and faces of numerous street dwellers, as if to mark the social prejudices against them.

These prejudices stemmed from the Hindu caste system. Divided into five main castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras, and Dalits – the caste structure stems from the Vedas, Hindu religious scriptures dating back hundreds of years before Christ. The Brahmins were known as the priestly or philosophic caste, followed by the warrior Kshatriyas. Below these high castes were the traders and farmers of the Vaisya caste, and the manual laborers of the Sudra caste. Dalits, or Untouchables (also known as “scheduled caste”), were considered unholy, and were often forced to work at the least desirable jobs, including the cleaning of excrement from the streets. This system of social stratification created such an intense stigma around Dalits that some people even today fear sully themselves through physical contact with these people (Pillai 1).

Scheduled caste men and women often crouched against walls, next to small businesses, on street corners, as if their social status manifested through their poor posture. They often had no shoes, even when the sun beat down on the dusty roads and the ground sizzled like a barbecue grill. Though Pune enjoys considerably cooler, more pleasant weather than the rest of Maharashtra because of its fortunate location between the Western Ghats and Deccan Plateau, it still experiences a broad range of climatic conditions, such as fierce monsoons, sweltering summer heat, and chilly winter nights (Brahme 107), which the homeless must bear with only their skin serving as an umbrella or a blanket. Though the Indian Constitution outlawed caste discrimination in 1976 as a part of its 42nd Amendment, generations of socially conditioned reactions to caste as an acceptable form of social organization have branded caste prejudices into the minds of modern Puneries (Pillai 1).

We had been riding for about 45 minutes now, and I could not differentiate the neighborhoods of Pune from one another. Divided into peths and nagars, or localities, the neighborhoods in Pune each had their own flavor of bustle and clamor. The peths were older parts of the city, often named after days of the week. Ganesh Peth, home to a large temple featuring the elephant-headed god, attracted many of Pune’s pious poor that tied red strings around their wrists to display their blessing from God. Kalyani Nagar welcomed people down the road that led to Koregaon Park, a tourist area also home to the Osho Ashram, where wealthy international Indophiles visited to free their minds, bodies, and wallets to get closer to God. In major shopping centers like Camp and Deccan, Punery youth spoke Hindi and English, ditching their Marathi (or other home language, depending on which region in India their family was from) for the hip vernacular of Bollywood feature films.

At Sinharar Road, big bazaars of fruits and vegetables stood across the street from Big Bazaar, a newly opened one-stop megastore that bragged to customers about the clothing, food, and home goods that could be bought there. Pune sprawled into a messy star shape, and at the rate it’s growing now, will soon become an amorphous blob.

Abhijit mentioned the names of various streets to me, but I struggled in remembering which was which as I could not identify easily viewable street signs that I had grown accustomed to using as guides to orient myself in the States. I started remembering landmarks instead. Senapati Bapat Road was home to Simbiosis, or “Sim-boy-sis” as Puneries called it, where students from all over India went to study management and information technology. After Simbiosis on the right was Om Gallery, an art gallery with its name bursting from the building in bold green letters. We stopped at a traffic light and busy intersection, at what I later learned was Gokhale Nagar Chowk (“chowk” meaning square in both Marathi and Hindi), but yet was never able to find a single sign indicating that that indeed was the name of the chowk. Taking a right at the light, I noticed a vendor selling large white and orange flower garlands meant to be hung over religious idols or pictures of deceased ancestors as a sign of respect. I hoped desperately that the flower vendor always stood at that same corner to sell his goods, so I would be able to see him and immediately have some sense of where I was. We passed a series of shops, all cramped together as if a child with building blocks had haphazardly constructed this structure that only his mother could appreciate as an architectural masterpiece. I noticed a rusty yellow gate to my right, and a large sign that read “Siddhi Glass House” to my left. Later, I learned to use that glass house sign as a marker to know that my turn was coming up. We turned left, then made another right before Cosmos Bank. My cousin took me to the end of the street – a dead end. “*Aapun khootay aahe?*” I asked, wondering where we were.

He replied, “MOFF.”

On Conversion and Cooperation

With enormous resolve and a concentrated sternness running through the lines on his crinkled forehead, Baradkar-saheb declared, “We need to convert them.” While he paused for emphasis, I mulled over his statement. The word “convert” evoked images of religious or ideological coercion, chalk-full of violence and cultural imperialism similar to that which occurred during the Crusades. He finished his thought, “We need to change their entire mindset. We need to change their way of life to organic farming.”

I had been working with MOFF for about two weeks when my boss, Baradkar-saheb⁴, enthusiastically agreed to let me interview him. He sat behind his desk where he had displayed an abundance of organic samples, including sorghum and green gram, used in *bhakri* (a hand-kneaded flat bread) and *usal* (a spiced legume dish), two staples of Maharashtran cuisine. Having just explained which crops should be cultivated together and how to produce maximum yields to visiting small farmers, Baradkar-saheb could hardly contain his convictions about the benefits of organic farming. Wearing a dusty gray long-brimmed cap, gray slacks, and a button-down gray shirt, he looked outstandingly plain.

His square-framed glasses plopped firmly on his large, curved nose. A mustache sat comfortably on his upper lip, trimmed neatly by the corners of his mouth. His skin, a rich chocolate brown, looked leathery, as if years of exposure to the sun had only toughened, rather than damaged, his epidermis. The only feature that ruptured the monotony of the rest of his appearance was his eyes. Serious, yet gentle, they commanded attention before his words could, boldly proclaiming that he was only interested in speaking and hearing the truth.

Born in Nanded (about eight hours from Pune, in western Maharashtra), Diliprao Deshmukh Baradkar grew up in a farming family. His first surname, *Deshmukh*, means “landowner,” and like many other farmers who owned their own land, his male ancestors included “Deshmukh” in their family’s name as a sign of status. As the first male-child born in a family of six children (including three sisters elder to him, as well as one sister and one brother younger to him), he enjoyed the perks of a culture that valued males over females, attending school and eventually making it to college. After receiving a post-graduate degree in etymology from a small agricultural university, Baradkar worked for Syngenta, a multinational agribusiness corporation that sold genetically modified seeds and pesticides around the world. From 1970 to 1980, he swore by chemical farming – Syngenta was his livelihood, and he believed in its practices without once doubting its environmental and human consequences.

However, in 1980, after years of exposure to a variety of chemical agents, Baradkar developed lymphatic dermatitis, a skin condition marked by inflammation and irritation. He wanted to continue working, but he physically could not. His condition worsened, spreading to his entire body. Doctors were unable to isolate the irritating agent, for even after Baradkar stopped working, his rashes persisted in droves across his arms, legs, and torso. When allopathy failed him, he turned to homeopathy as a last resort.

By chance, Baradkar met Manohar Parchure, a farmer from Nagpur (the second capital of Maharashtra situated on the eastern border of the state in central India). After discussing Baradkar’s health problems (not uncommon for Indians to do, even in conversation with a relative stranger), Parchure offered Baradkar a glimmer of hope by suggesting that he try organic farming and then organic eating to cure his ailments. As Baradkar retold this segment of his personal history, his eyes lit up and he exclaimed, “This was the turning point in my life!”

Thus, after 25 years of chemical farming experience (including his years with Syngenta, as well as the years he spent on his personal farm using chemical agents), Diliprao Deshmukh Baradkar rejected his entire agricultural mantra and adopted a new way of farming, and consequently, a new way of living. However, he approached organic farming with a profound degree of skepticism. While willing to try anything to end the pain and discomfort spawned by his lymphatic

dermatitis, he could not fathom how high-quality crops and substantial yields could be produced using only organic products. Nonetheless, as a self-confessed skeptic and meticulous record keeper, Baradkar would soon involve himself in a life-changing movement that would define his *dharma*, or duty, in life.

As he converted plots of land on his own farm from chemical to organic, he recorded the amount and quality of yields during each season. Baradkar had also kept extensive records on the quality and quantity of seeds and crops produced by Syngenta; comparing these records to his organic records, he was floored by the success of his organic crops. After each season of organic farming, Baradkar noted more nutrient-rich soil, as well as tastier crops. His records showed that after years of chemical farming, initial high yields dropped off abruptly and the quality of crops diminished. The promise of chemical farming was not completely false, but its benefits were just temporary. Organic farming, on the other hand, produced steadily increasing yields (before leveling off eventually) and environmental renewal. The success of organic farming was rooted in its sustainability. As his diet consisted solely of organic products, and his exposure to chemicals was curbed greatly now that he had transformed his farming method, his lymphatic dermatitis disappeared – its painful trace lingered only in his memory.

After the success of his personal organic farming endeavors, Baradkar made it his mission to spread the word of organic farming as if it were the word of God. Relocating to Vidharbha, a region in northeastern Maharashtra, he began giving presentations on organic farming to Krishi Vigyan Kendras (Agricultural Research Centers), where many policymakers and agricultural scientists were reluctant to listen to his theories. However, after inviting various government officials, scientists, farmers, and others to his farm to see firsthand the progress of his organic crops, Baradkar began to develop some clout in the world of Maharashtra agriculture. He received awards for his educational presentations, and with this prestige came the promise, in his mind, of the implementation of organic farming on a larger level.

“But, I feel we are lacking in the field of systematic organic practices.” Baradkar interrupted the positive tone of his account with disappointment, before continuing to expound upon his own involvement in the systematization of organic farming in Maharashtra. His initial efforts to build systematic practices began in 2000, when Baradkar met Vikram Bokey.

Bokey was an ex-IPS (Indian Police Service) officer who had resigned abruptly due to a conflict of interests between his established career as a police officer and budding career as a politician. In 2006, Bokey was elected president of the Maharashtra Naunirman Sena (Maharashtra Revitalization Army). This party was founded by Raj Thackeray (nephew of Bal Thackeray, the founder of the conservative Shiv Sena political party) to break away from his uncle’s party due to alleged corruption.

The Naunirman Sena sought to promote Maharashtra nativism, as well as the rights of the Marathi people over other regional groups in the state. Its motto is, "I am of Maharashtra, Maharashtra is mine."

Interestingly enough, as regional intermingling in urban centers diluted strict Maharashtra pride, Bokey turned to rural Maharashtra to spread the word of the Naunirman Sena, as if it were the word of God. However, as famous Indian author and social critic Arundhati Roy aptly described, "India does not live in its villages. India dies in its villages," (Roy 1) and Bokey witnessed rural strife on every village visit.

Bokey's interest in rural Maharashtra seemed hardly pure, and the benefits⁵ he would reap (in terms of political power) from mobilizing masses of poor farmers for his political party seemed much greater than the benefits the farmers would receive from supporting him. Through his broad network of contacts, Bokey was told about Diliprao Deshmukh Baradkar, a leading organic farmer in Maharashtra state. "Bokey visited my farmhouse and saw my mosambi⁶, chiku⁷, turmeric, mango, bajra⁸..." Baradkar-saheb expressed proudly. "I had kept this farmhouse for over 25 years." Impressed by the low costs of production, strong crop yields, and overall health of the farm, Bokey decided that organic farming needed to spread to Maharashtra's villages. He asked Baradkar for help, as Bokey himself had had little experience with organic farming, let alone farming of any sort (though he claimed in all of his speeches to be a farmer just like his audience – the "farmer" that Bokey described himself as, however, seemed more accurately described as a "landowner," with other farmers actually tending to the 1,200 acres of farmland in Amravaty and 400 acres of farmland in Pune that he owned). Eager to convert the minds of Maharashtra, Baradkar obliged.

On November 30, 2004, Bokey founded the Maharashtra Organic Farming Federation (MOFF), declaring himself "Chairman," and Diliprao Deshmukh Baradkar "Vice-Chairman." While the position seemed to fulfill Baradkar's self-proclaimed life mission, I wondered how aware he was of the politics of his situation. Was Baradkar a type of organic farming evangelist, willing to work in conjunction with Bokey to make small strides in the organic farming movement in Maharashtra, even while realizing that the political career of Bokey would probably benefit more than the movement? One of Bokey's advisors mentioned to me that the two men did not get along particularly well, yet Baradkar's attention to status and respect made it difficult to notice any subtle hints of resentment towards Bokey. My questions remained unanswered, mostly because I could not imagine a tactful way to ask them.

Nonetheless, as we continued our interview, Baradkar-saheb was visibly excited by his work at MOFF. Declaring that organic farming had given his life meaning, he asserted that if others could only see its benefits, India's agricultural crisis could be solved. As if to pay homage to his mentors and colleagues, Baradkar-saheb placed several books and pamphlets on his desk, including *One Straw Revolution* (1978) by

Masanobu Fukuoka and *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (1992) by Vandana Shiva, for my perusal. Taking note of the word "revolution" in the two aforementioned titles, I wondered if organic farming was indeed as revolutionary as Baradkar claimed it was. As if reading my mind, he stated, "Organic farming very much transformed everything about me. I owe my life to Manohar Parchure."

I wondered if organic farming was indeed as revolutionary as Baradkar claimed it was.

On Multilingualism and Efficiency

"Neena-madame⁹, what is the English word for *chintza*?" Pandey-saheb asked me in Marathi as he translated a document from Marathi into English after just having his Marathi draft okay-ed by Baradkar-saheb. I hesitated. I had heard the word a million times before in my mother's kitchen. I knew it had a strong flavor, and I remembered eating it in *pani-puri*, a roadside specialty of puffed crackers with masala-spiced legumes, potatoes, and water mixed inside. But it was always just *chintza* to me. The English name that I vaguely knew sat on the tip of my tongue and refused to budge.

This sensation of vague familiarity resurfaced as a trend throughout my entire summer in India. As a second-generation immigrant, I had been born and brought up in the United States; however, my upbringing was governed in part by the Indian culture my parents had spent their formative years in, prior to their immigration to the United States in the early 1980s. Having only met India through my parents, and a couple of family visits to Maharashtra and Gujarat, I wanted to explore Maharashtra personally and politically. Popular analysis of the growing economic relationship and social change taking place as a result of the connection between the United States and India frustrated me immensely, as it generally seemed to be rooted in how India had encountered economic growth due to neoliberal policies that supported the upper and middle classes in further consumption, and consequently created large returns for transnational corporations. I wanted to examine India outside of a framework that equated capitalistic consumption with development, and instead delve into a nuanced look at the effects of globalization on the people whose voice may not be as loud as the voice of lucrative multinational firms. Nonetheless, the goal of my exploration of Maharashtra not only included my desire to understand one of India's most relevant agricultural justice movements, but also my strong willingness to learn about how Maharashtra culture had informed my experience as an American child of Maharashtra immigrants. And in the most immediate sense, that meant struggling with elusive Marathi words on the tip of my tongue, while Pandey-saheb sat patiently in front of me, unaware of the mental workout that went along with being a member of the second generation.

Pandey-saheb was Baradkar-saheb's right-hand man. Every morning, he'd ride to MOFF on his motorcycle, often clad in an entire rain-suit, meant specifically for drivers of two-wheelers during the monsoon season. He sat at the desk across the room from Baradkar-saheb, under newly packaged organic goods stocked neatly on shelves. In charge of reviewing the needs assessment surveys completed by agricultural villages all over Maharashtra, Pandey-saheb had a monumental task in front of him.

Across the room, Baradkar-saheb had been working on the Self-Sustainable Biovillage Project Proposal for the village of Jambharun. I had been working on editing a similar proposal for another village called Dhotra. As he didn't know how to use a computer, Baradkar-saheb would handwrite everything, and usually then gave it to his secretary, Sangita-madame, to type. Impressed by my typing skills, however, Baradkar-saheb made me the new typist, allowing Sangita-madame to work on MOFF's accounting and funding management. Baradkar-saheb would handwrite his documents in Marathi first, then translate them to English (I would help translate a few words and phrases here and there). Then I would correct it, and type it (or I would type it as I corrected it). Sangita-madame typed carefully in the adjoining room, with two index fingers slowly pressing each key. She seemed grateful at having a break from transcribing Baradkar-saheb's intelligent yet sometimes unintelligible chicken scratch.

Pandey-saheb, Baradkar-saheb, and I sat in this bland room, tossing around the Marathi and English names of spices and grains and fruits with vibrant and distinct tastes. While Baradkar-saheb and Pandey-saheb sat at opposite ends of the room at their desks hunched over scattered documents and folders, I sat in between them on a folding chair, without a desk, next to some boxes filled with MOFF's promotional pamphlets. Once I started bringing my laptop to work, I reassured my bosses that my lap would suffice as my workspace. Plugging¹⁰ it into an outlet next to a pamphlet box and pulling up an extra chair to place paperwork on, I noticed that my colleagues were amused at my peculiar space-saving set-up. On a more conscious level, I knew I always worked with my laptop on my lap, and that I was indeed very comfortable with this cramped set-up, as evidenced by my similar working tendencies at Brandeis. However, on a subconscious level, perhaps I was trying to take up as little space as I could, as if my small work space would speak to how I didn't want to be a burden on the organization, but instead be of use in whatever way possible. My posture paid the price for this fence I walked on – between confidence and arrogance, humility and meekness – as I tried to navigate my place in this NGO.

I generally began my days with a meeting with Baradkar-saheb, in which he would inform me of the tasks he wanted assistance with or invite me to observe or participate in meetings he was to have that day with a variety of visitors, including farmers, scientists, researchers, government officials, and students. While farmers were in and out of

MOFF throughout the week, some would specifically show up on Fridays to attend farm school sessions, where Baradkar-saheb or Pandey-saheb would talk about various growing techniques and often hand out seed samples. These initially practical talks would quickly evolve into motivational speeches, which would encourage farmers to take charge of their communities and take care of their families through sustainable agriculture. Rarely did I verbally participate in these sessions. Instead I just actively listened, soaking up a little bit of Baradkar or Pandey's zeal for organic farming, words that helped me stay motivated while working on my tasks throughout the week.

These tasks were not always as stimulating as I had hoped for them to be. I found myself writing some letters (in English) for fundraising purposes, and figuring out ways to connect MOFF and Maharashtra's small farmers with the global organic farming movement, as solidarity with other communities fighting for similar causes could only strengthen each community and each movement. However, these endless Google searches felt futile, because the small farming communities we were trying to help were not hooked up to the Internet and did not share a common language with people of other communities. Furthermore, no one served as a long-term liaison in keeping these various communities connected. My two-month stint at MOFF wasn't going to solve this problem. Furthermore, I was convinced that these farmers didn't care about the struggles of other farmers abroad, when the injustices that plagued their lives were more than enough to deal with without having to relive the pain of other people's agricultural strife. International solidarity, in this sense, seemed like a privilege that these farmers couldn't afford. Meanwhile, I struggled and wondered how my efforts of connecting Maharashtra (or Maharashtra's NGOs, rather) to an international movement would be beneficial.

While observing and participating in various meetings, including those with prominent Maharashtran thinkers such as economist Sulabha Bramhe and writer Usha Kelkar, I began to slowly understand, from a variety of perspectives, both the strengths of organic farming, as well as its shortcomings. Each time I raised a concern over one of these shortcomings, including the belief that organic farming cannot feed the most populous nation in the world, or the thought that organic farming is far too labor intensive, Baradkar-saheb would immediately write down the names of books, articles, or weblinks that I should seek out to help to educate myself. He insisted that if I was actually going to thrive at MOFF, I'd have to have faith in the cause and its merits; however, he encouraged my skepticism, not wanting me to blindly accept his claims. At the end of the day, as Pandey-saheb was tidying up his desk and getting ready to leave the office, I exclaimed, "Tamarind!" He looked at me, puzzled. "*Kai zaala?*" He wondered what happened that had made me blurt out this word. "*Chintza* is tamarind!" I remembered, proudly. Pandey-saheb laughed as he noted the translated word on a piece of paper. He zipped up his rain-suit and zipped away through puddled potholes and endless rain.

On Gender and Empowerment

Part of the reason why I was attracted to MOFF was because I was inspired by its focus on women's involvement in sustainable agriculture. It seemed true to the tenets of ecofeminism, which emphasizes the connection between the oppression of women and the deterioration of the environment, thereby suggesting that women's empowerment has a direct correlation with environmental sustainability (Shiva *Stolen* 74). MOFF seemed to be trying to shift the power that companies have sucked out of the hands of the people (and into their own corporate hierarchies) back to the people – especially to the women who have historically been deeply involved in the planting and harvesting of seeds, and in daily crop cultivation (17). One of MOFF's defining features was its establishment of self-help groups for men and women within various communities, which were supposed to create accountability within members of the community in meeting community needs geared toward sustainability. This could involve reviewing growing techniques, managing microcredit loans, and assessing community needs together.

I had imagined self-help group meetings to involve women keeping tabs on each other to help repay microcredit loans, and gathering to talk about a variety of other community problems, ranging from alcoholism to suicides to domestic abuse to the education of their children. My imagination had to suffice for my first few weeks working at MOFF, before I got to see my first self-help group in action. Until then, I had met many farmers who were members of self-help groups when they visited MOFF. They would ask Mr. Baradkar for advice, review surveys and needs assessments that they had collected from town, or attend a farm school session. However, what was striking was one similarity between all the farmers that had been coming to MOFF – they were all male.

There have been plenty of women who have come to MOFF with agendas related to organic farming. Some were students and researchers, others were coordinators of other NGOs with similar causes looking to collaborate with MOFF, and some were marketing representatives who were working on income-generation programs for some of these farms that were starting to go organic. In Pune and other growing cities, women were upwardly mobile and making a profound footprint in business, nonprofit, and IT sectors. But rural agriculture was a different ballgame. And I hadn't met any female farmers in the office.

That was until I visited Maval, a *taluka* (similar to what would be considered a county in the United States) approximately two hours from Pune city, where I met many female farmers. Testing my skepticism of the organic farming movement, I helped to document the progress of villages going organic through taking pictures and collecting data from meetings of women's self-help groups. After introducing myself as an American student trying to learn about organic farming in Maharashtra, I added that I was staying in Pune for the monsoon season, hoping that this would encourage some conversation about a place we were both somewhat familiar with. They said nothing. I asked the women how

often they went into Pune. They laughed, and while some mentioned that they had been there a handful of times in the past, others replied that they had never been. Some explained how they had visited some neighboring villages in their taluka, but never beyond that. However, getting these answers was a bit of a struggle.

Whenever I asked any questions to these women or told them a little about myself, they would usually giggle and look away. At first, I thought it was just my funny accent and poor grammar (and I'm sure that this was part of the reason that they were pretty amused). Then, many of the men started to answer for the women. They would goad the women into answering, saying things along the lines of "Why don't you tell them about who gathers all the money and how you meet on Mondays?" or "Come on, this girl has come all the way from America to learn – not for you all to just sit there and laugh, but for you all to answer her questions!"

One man even scolded a woman much older than him, saying, *Maushi, aaikte ka tum?* ("Auntie, are you even listening?"). Though I was uncomfortable, the women seemed at ease. After a little more of their male counterparts' "encouragement," they would finally repeat what the men had coached them to say. I made a mental note about how I felt that Maval's males' "Come on, be more empowered!" approach to women's empowerment was not working. I noticed that when men were not present, the women were candid in their responses about their isolation from resources inside and outside their villages.

Later in the day, I went into one home, with a thatched roof and tightly packed dirt walls that were different shades of coffee brown depending on how much sunlight they absorbed. As always, I was barefoot¹¹ and the warm rough ground felt nice on my wet feet, soaked from monsoon rains. I ate lunch with Mr. Baradkar, as well as several other male leaders in Maval. The women served us food (fresh *bharit*, a mushy blend of roasted eggplant and spices, and *tandoori roti*, a flat bread made of rice flour), and hurried back into the kitchen. One man, a leader in the male self-help group, opened up the conversation by elucidating the shyness of the women to me. He mentioned how the women didn't like to talk when the men were around. He finished his sentiment by chuckling, and saying that the women wouldn't know what to say anyway. I forced a smile. I realized that my own femaleness had taken the backseat. I was eating lunch with these men because in their eyes, my Americanness, my college education, and a variety of other factors raised my status much higher than that of the native women of Maval. The men were kind to me and were eager to answer my questions. To

I noticed that when men were not present, the women were candid in their responses about their isolation from resources inside and outside their villages.

Every day, as I worked with MOFF both in the office and in villages, I frequently found myself perplexed at the role of religion in the organic farming movement.

accompany that aforementioned smile, I said, "Maybe if the men would stop talking so much, the women would have a chance to respond." The man laughed and understood what I was getting at. He invited his wife out to the room, where she spoke with me briefly, and then invited me back into the kitchen after I finished my lunch.

I noticed that when the women had a little time to get used to me, and after the men were not within an earshot, the women were willing to talk. Struggling with my desire to set up a safe space for open dialogue at the women's self-help group meetings versus my

reluctance to overstep my boundaries as a foreign intern just scratching the surface in learning about their culture created a mounting tension within me. However, the time restraints of my internship established that this safe space would not be possible. Nonetheless, while my impulse to be proactive was limited, my observation of alleged women's empowerment in Maval helped me to realize that empowerment is not something that can be bestowed upon another. Vandana Shiva states:

For more than two centuries, patriarchal, eurocentric, and anthropocentric scientific discourse has treated women, other cultures, and other species as objects...For more than two decades, feminist movements, Third World and indigenous people's movements, and ecological and animal rights movements have questioned this objectification and denial of subjecthood... Ecological feminisms recognize the intrinsic worth of all species, the intelligence of all life, and the self-organizational capacity of beings. They also recognize that there is no justification in a hierarchy between knowledge and practice, theory and activism, academic thought and everyday life (Stolen 74).

Instead, empowerment is personal growth that only a woman herself can measure in her own way. When a woman claims choice, space, and agency on her own terms, she is empowered.

On Images and Imagination

In terms of the aforementioned choice, space, and agency, I asked myself whether I was contributing to or detracting from women's empowerment in Maharashtra each time I removed my camera to photograph them. While they welcomed me to take many pictures of them, and proudly displayed their homes, their families, and their land, I felt uneasy. I wondered how taking pictures of these people would ultimately benefit them. After all, it was me who – in the end – would get to keep the photograph. I informed them beforehand that I would be giving the pictures to MOFF to use in publications, and that I would be showing their pictures to my university to share with others what I

learned from them. Everyone smiled and agreed wholeheartedly, finding me overly formal and silly even for asking so many times if it was okay that I take their pictures.

Dilipmama, also a photographer, mentioned to me how one owns herself, but not her image – the image is a malleable feature that is dictated by the various perspectives of others. Keeping that in mind, with each photo I snapped, I thought about the image that I was producing. Was I exotifying a community? Would these pictures simply validate my trip to Maharashtra, and serve as evidence of my learning and experience, instead of showing anything that the people of these communities truly wanted to share with others? My conclusions were always changing, especially as I noticed an imbalance of power in so many relationships I had been witnessing.

On Liberation Theology

In addition to gaining exposure to gendered versions of rural life in Maval, I also noticed that each home I visited had a small shrine set up, with pictures and statues of deities and either incense or a small candle lit in honor of different gods (or different manifestations of the same, all-encompassing energy of one god – however you want to look at it). Women had their arms and hands tattooed, sometimes with images referring to God. Men wore bright red, pink, or orange bracelets on their hands, which they had received from temples and usually would wear until the bracelet tore or fell off. Each morning, to begin the new day, men and women would place loose, fragrant flowers or stringed garlands in front of idols at community temples or personal shrines, making sure not to inhale the scent of the flowers so as to save it for the god being honored.

Though India is officially a secular nation, religion strongly shapes daily life. Because religion is such a strong institution, many farmers in villages, at MOFF, and people away from my internship were surprised by some of my questions concerning the subject – not because the questions themselves were particularly pointed or inappropriate, but instead because the religiosity I was asking about was a normal aspect of life that they had ceased to notice. Discussion of religion in the popular press was rooted in an analysis of the tension between religious groups in India, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians; yet, the impact of religion in shaping social organization, apart from inter-religious antagonism, was seldom explored. As a result, with half-smiles and hesitation, many people answered my peculiar religious queries about their rituals with, "For God. We're doing this for God."

Every day, as I worked with MOFF both in the office and in villages, I frequently found myself perplexed at the role of religion in the organic farming movement. In thinking about other social movements, outside of a farming context, outside of India, I wondered why they so

often tapered out or failed. Because people frequently participate in movements as separate causes external to their lives, their investment in these causes grows peripheral to their day-to-day life. For instance, in the current movement against the war in Iraq, it seems like people free up a Saturday to go to an anti-war protest – and then they get back to their regular lives. But, what happens when people do not have the privilege to externalize their participation in a movement?

In his article, “Oral History of the Chilean Movement, ‘Christians for Socialism,’ 1971-1973,” David Fernandez Fernandez explains how Catholicism grew to extend beyond the spiritual realm into a socially conscious movement. Communities began using their Catholic worldview to address social injustice, especially following the election of Chile’s first socialist president, Salvador Allende, of the Popular Unity (Unidad Popular – UP) party. “[T]he Unidad Popular appeared as the cohesive force for all the social and political movements which sought liberation from oligarchic capitalism and imperialism. The aim was to put an end to poverty and break the ties of dependence which kept Chile in a state of underdevelopment” (Fernandez 284). The ties between religion and social consciousness birthed the Christians for Socialism movement (Cristianos por Socialismo – CpS), setting the groundwork for the Catholic Church’s staunch stand against the Pinochet regime, which had overthrown the democratically elected Allende government in 1973. As many Chileans were stripped of their human rights during and after the coup, many no longer had the choice to externalize their participation in the social justice movement; more than ever, the social and economic oppression (based in the neoliberal exploitation of their country) they had been fighting against grew into political oppression that affected their lives as much as the lives of those less fortunate for whom they were initially fighting.

Using ideas from the Cuban Revolution’s martyr, Che Guevara, many priests in Chile (including those from abroad who had come to express solidarity with their Christian brethren) “wanted to be faithful to Jesus Christ through the revolution, interpreting the signs of the times so that their faith was not something apart, but profoundly involved in the life of the people and their struggles” (289). By understanding the needs of the poor members of their community, many Catholics began to become politicized, seeing the political left as more sympathetic and responsive to the needs of the poor and the oppressed.

Upon learning about the liberation theologians’ interpretation of faith as a means of revolution, I remembered Dilipmama’s assertion that Tukaram sought to conquer existing social strife as a means of fulfilling God’s vision. This 17th-century lesson extended to the 20th century, during which Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement. In 1942, at Gandhi’s urging, Indian men and women prepared for “an all-out offensive against imperialism,” demanding the immediate end to British colonial rule in India (Namboodiripad 11). Part of Gandhi’s ability to mobilize masses of Indians revolved around his inclusion of all people in the fight against imperialism, regardless of their caste.

More conservative freedom fighters tended to direct their energies at mobilizing higher-caste members of the upper and middle class; as a result, issues like rural poverty and agricultural justice were not talked about, and poorer, low-caste Indians had no incentive to lend support to a cause that did not accommodate them (Mondal 425). Rudolf Heredia, a professor at Maharashtra’s renowned St. Xavier’s College, states:

[T]he ethic that Gandhi was trying to introduce and inscribe into Indian political life was that real swaraj [self-governance] would not be the acquisition of authority by a few but the acquisition of the capacity of all to resist authority when it is abused... The basis then of his swaraj could not be just rights, it had to be duties [dharma] as well. For Gandhi real rights are legitimated by duties they flow from, for both are founded on satya [truth] and dharma (1).

Employing the belief behind liberation theology that religion could be used to inform social change, along with the Gandhian notion that dharma mandated involvement in social justice efforts, Mr. Baradkar imparted words of encouragement rife with religious imagery upon a self-help group of local women in Maval. I paused for a moment and put aside my reference points of religion as something that had to do with brainwashing and coercion. These women proceeded to explain microcredit to me, and how they would pool their money in order to get bank loans, which they would then use to gather some essentials they needed for their community. They explained how these self-help groups were spaces where they could discuss their problems. I asked them what they wanted most for their village, and one woman named Sayindra responded, *Pani ani shaara* (“Water and school.” Irregular rain patterns left Maval with long periods of drought, followed by huge monsoons, and there still was no system of harvesting excess water during monsoons and making it potable during drought (Brahme 108). And formal education in Maval only went up to seventh grade; families wanted their children to get better educations, but they had nowhere to send them, and no one to teach them.

I thought about Sayindra’s answer to my question. The women had just finished telling me about how they spend their days cultivating rice paddy and tending to domestic work, and Sayindra mentioned wanting some basic needs taken care of in her community. I thought about religion again. I wondered, if these women were spending the majority of their time working to satisfy their immediate needs, maybe farming in itself was a kind of religion, or at least a very tangible supplement to traditional Hinduism. These women prayed for good weather for their crops and spent their waking hours making sure that different tasks on the farm were completed. Maybe MOFF and Mr. Baradkar had a point – if these women were actually going to begin organic farming, they needed to look at it as something that reached all aspects of their life.

While liberation theology in Chile involved a concerted attempt to engage the Church as an institution to actively participate against the abuses of the dictatorship, liberation theology in a Hindu context

meant using tenets of Hinduism to necessitate involvement in the organic farming movement. Like the Chilean Catholics whose belief in Christianity propelled them to work for the benefit of the poor, and later the politically oppressed during the Pinochet dictatorship, Mr. Baradkar was invoking Hinduism and the concept of dharma to help the women of Maval understand agricultural injustice, and how they could change it. He had already expressed to me in conversation that he felt it was his dharma to spread organic farming throughout Maharashtra. He went on to explain how it was the duty of women to care for their children, which meant making sure they had food, education, and the resources they needed. However, he pressed pointedly, how could they fulfill their dharma if major corporations were taking the profits of Maval's land and community, leaving their children with nothing?

So perhaps these words that initially made me uncomfortable – “convert” and changing someone's entire way of thinking – were ways to speak the same language as the women of Maval, whose reference points revolved around farming and God. The theology of liberation, it seemed, was not something that had to be rooted in Christianity. Liberation is a universal concept, and understanding it in a Hindu context was what the women of Maval were just beginning to do.

Says Viju

According to the Human Rights Law Network, over 10,000 farmers have committed suicide in India in the past five years (Dogra 1). Vikram Bokey, proclaiming himself the spokesperson for the agricultural justice movement, gave an example of the benefits of going organic on behalf of MOFF, stating, “Our studies have shown that the chemical cost per acre for sugarcane is Rs. 17,000 in order to yield 35 tons of produce, while an organic farm costs Rs. 2,200 per acre for an output of 60 tons” (“India” 1). His analysis, fervently backed and probably originally conceived by Baradkar-saheb, raised the question regarding why so much energy would be invested in unsustainable farming techniques. In his article, “The Contradictions of the Green Revolution,” Harry M. Cleaver, Jr. responds to this question, stating:

The Green Revolution provides a striking illustration of how imperialist intervention, no matter how well-intentioned, can have far-reaching negative effects on the Third World. The problem of hunger in the capitalist world has rarely been one of absolute food deficits, particularly when the productive capacity of the developed countries is taken into account. It is one of uneven distribution caused by a system that feeds those with money and, unless forced to do otherwise, lets the rest fend for themselves (186).

However, Cleaver's qualifying statement that explains how the haves can oppress the have-nots “unless forced to do otherwise” provides a glimmer of hope for the organic farming movement in India. This

hope challenged the power differential between India's rural masses and the Global North's hegemonic industries that fed the overarching social structure of agricultural injustice in India.

For instance, in terms of colonization, multinationals were the new colonizers, benefiting from their relationship with India's small farmers by pillaging labor and resources. In terms of politics, Bokey benefited from the support of the farmers, gaining political power and wealth that never seemed to trickle down to the masses. In terms of the implications of being an American college student working abroad at a social-justice NGO, my pictures and my experience had a voice, while the subjects of my pictures had only faith in my representation of them, which I did little to merit. Nonetheless, this is how power had developed under the guidance of globalization. But, as Indian activist Arundhati Roy states, “The only thing worth globalizing is dissent.” In this context, the “dissent” she speaks of could indeed mean organic farming.

While working at MOFF, I felt that Hindu dharma informed how many activists and small farmers alike viewed organic farming. If liberation was tied to fulfilling one's dharma, and dharma was tied to feeding one's children and caring for one's community, and multinational corporate influence made it difficult to care for one's children and one's community, the transitive property would suggest that liberation meant working against irresponsible corporate influence. MOFF chose organic farming as the route to address agricultural injustice in Maharashtra, but this only addresses a part of the problem. Patriarchy within rural communities and a lack of education made communities increasingly defenseless against corporate control. However, what religion did was provide hope to communities whose remaining threads of optimism for a better life had been severed by suicide.

Cleaver's aforementioned quote begged the question: What can force the haves to shift some power back into the hands of the have-nots? I found myself sitting once again in the apartment of Dilipmama and Vijumami, overwhelmed by the interconnectedness of the agricultural-justice movement with the gender, caste, and other social-justice movements in India. However, sensing my bewilderment, Vijumami lovingly placed her hand upon my shoulder and gently, but firmly, stated, “Don't get confused.” But, having spent only a little over two months learning about the organic farming movement in India, it was only natural that I had more questions than answers. “If you really want to learn about India, you can't just come here once,” Dilipmama added, to which Vijumami added, “Now you have to come back!”

Off to a solid start in understanding the dynamics of power and religion in India's organic farming movement, as well as the nation, culture, and family that had strongly affected my own upbringing, I have all the more reason to return to Maharashtra.

Notes

- 1 The Marathi suffix “*mama*” means “maternal uncle.”
2. The Marathi suffix “*mami*” means “wife of maternal uncle.”
3. The Marathi suffix “*walla*” means “vendor,” thus creating the contraction, “*paanwalla*” that translates to “vendors of paan.”
4. The Marathi suffix “*saheb*” means “boss.”
5. His luxury SUV complete with leather seating, automatic gear shift (a rarity amongst cars in India), two television screens on the backs of the driver and front passenger’s seats, and air conditioning indicated that his political clout had afforded him economic power as well. His designer jeans and sunglasses furthered this thought.
6. “Mosambi” means “sweet lime.”
7. “Chiku” means “sapodilla fruit.”
8. “Bajra” means “pearl millet.”
9. Office culture at MOFF felt very formal. All of the men were addressed by their last name and the suffix “sir” or “saheb,” and the women were addressed by their first name and the suffix “madame.”
10. This habit of plugging in my laptop often served no purpose, as frequent power outs in Pune (including the infamous Thursday power outs that would last up to eight hours) occasionally left me with a low battery.
11. Following a cultural custom, everyone always removed footwear before entering homes, and in villages, we’d tend to remove our sandals even to enter schools, meeting halls, or almost any other structure.

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Kakamega: Living and Learning in Kenya's Last Remaining Rainforest

JAMIE POTTERN '09

*My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.*

— Adrienne Rich, from *Natural Resources*

The taxi ride from Kakamega Town to the village was 40 minutes long. Peter sat in the front next to the driver, and I sat in the back, my elbow leaning out the open window. We had left town by mid-morning to avoid the daily afternoon rain that would soon turn the roads into an impassable sea of mud. Our beat-up vehicle rattled away as we swerved to avoid massive potholes, cows, and people.

I had met Peter one week earlier when I arrived in Kenya, dazed after a series of long, sleepless flights from Washington, D.C., to London to Nairobi. Peter Khamusali Ingosi, who is the program director of Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD), is a bright, good-natured man in his forties, recognized by his wide, million-dollar smile. He, along with the two American Program Coordinators, had taken me and the other FSD interns on a whirlwind trip through Nairobi and then onto Kakamega Town, a 10-hour bus ride north along a dusty, treacherous road. After our week-long orientation and Swahili language lessons, we were all set to begin working with different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with whom FSD had partnered us. We were being dropped off, one by one, at our host families' homes in different regions of Kakamega. Because I was to be working with the Kakamega Environmental Education Programme (KEEP), my host family was located the farthest away from town, in the village of Isecheno, at the edge of the Kakamega Rainforest.

Outside the confines of the dirty town, the air was deliciously refreshing. Instead of the ever-present vehicle exhaust that burned the back of my throat and stung my eyes, the air blowing into the taxi window was noticeably cooler and thick with sweetness. I was overcome by the lush greenery everywhere and the rich red color of the earthen embankments on either side of the road. Everything, spatially, felt wide open. Contrasting all the places I have been to in my life with this unbelievable



patch of earth, I was headed, quite literally, into the unknown. I could not draw on any memory, any past experience that could hint at what was about to happen. All I knew was that somewhere, at the end of this road, there was a family with whom I would be living for the next nine weeks. Wide open too were all the possibilities of what the summer would hold and how it would, inevitably, change me.

As I gazed out the window, my whiteness drew the stares of locals, who were either walking or sitting idly on the sides of the road. I could not hide my face—my *otherness*—so I averted my eyes, focusing instead on the way the light breeze rustled the leaves of the tall eucalyptus trees. I had spent the past week trying to come to terms with my new identity as a *mzungu*—Swahili for white person or foreigner—and what that new role meant for me. In the town, the *mzungu* name-calling was a constant, and although not threatening in any way, it was still hard to get accustomed to. I had *not* come as a tourist, but as an intern to help develop sustainable projects and work with the community to conserve Kenya's last remaining rainforest. As I left the constraints of the town, I hoped that—despite the color of my skin—I could also avoid this stigma.

Next to me in the back seat of the taxi sat my large blue duffel bag, which contained everything I could possibly need for my stay: malaria pills, a first-aid kit, clothing, bug spray, a pocket knife, books, batteries, travel documents, a flashlight, a shortwave radio, a laptop computer, an iPod, and a *Lonely Planet* travel guide. I was also preemptively armed with all the vaccinations for a tropical region: typhoid, flu, hepatitis, yellow fever, tetanus, and even rabies. Physically, I felt invincible, yet something about my dependence on all of these material luxuries was disconcerting. It felt excessive, privileged, and undeniably *American*.

The question that one might ask is; why was I, a white, middle-class woman from America, sitting in that taxi? What had moved me to pick such a remote location, a quarter of the way around the world from home? The truth is that I wanted answers, answers that I, as an environmental studies major and environmental activist, had to seek. In order to learn how to improve ecological conditions in developing countries and promote more sustainable development, I needed to glean an understanding of what I—and other advocates around the world—are up against. The Foundation for Sustainable Development, I felt, could afford me just that opportunity: to work on the ground with a local NGO and the surrounding community to learn about the ecological problems and to come up with sustainable projects to tackle them. FSD's mission, after all, is to "raise international awareness of the economic challenges in developing countries and support cross-cultural communities in finding more effective solutions to development issues."

This seemed to be a perfect fit for my passion for the environment and my desire to affect change around this issue. Yet in the back of my mind, a small voice prodded my conscience. It asked me quietly, but over and over, this question: what does it mean for a white, female environmental activist coming from the richest and most wasteful society on the planet, to go to a developing country and tell people who survive almost solely off firewood that *they* should be living more sustainably? Rattling along the bumpy road with all my amenities in tow, getting closer and closer to the forest, I could not answer this question anymore than I could predict what lay around the next bend. Instead, I quieted the voice for the time being, down to a persistent hum, almost undetectable.

Little did I know, as I sat there in anticipation of what was to come, that over the course of the summer my entire perception of sustainable development and NGOs would alter. Little did I know that I would become part of a Kenyan family and community, yet still maintain my role an outsider. Little did I know that I would subsist almost solely off two staple food items, or that I would truly come to know what it means to be resourceful. Little did I know that language comes in many forms, that it has the power to silence or liberate you. And little did I know that stirring up an organization would be infinitely harder than stirring up a large pot of *ugali*. I could not know any of these things as the canopy of the forest came into view and we turned onto another dirt road that led to my new home. The taxi slowed to a halt. I took one long deep breath, as I pushed the door open and stepped outside.

Nyumbani (Home)

A dirt path between two small plots of bright green tea leaves leads to my host family's compound. It consists of five houses with tin roofs—four made of mud and one made of cinderblocks. Outside there are two small kitchen huts with thatched roofs, a small garden, a dilapidated wooden structure for the cows, and a pit latrine and washroom that are hidden by a small plot of corn stalks.

My tiny room is in the sturdy, permanent house made of cinderblocks. It is simple, but cozy, and the large mosquito net that hangs from the ceiling is tucked under my thin foam mattress, making me feel as though I am in a warm, safe cocoon. The nights are the darkest I have ever known, there being no electric lights or light pollution. But on the rare nights when it is not cloudy, I see that the billions of stars extend to the very edge of the horizon on all sides. The moon beams down brightly, illuminating the path to the pit latrine, as I make my last rounds before heading off to bed.

Pamela

My host mother, Pamela, is 27 years old. Her short black hair is braided tightly against her scalp, and she always wears a long skirt with a floral pattern and an old T-shirt or blouse. Tall and thin, she exudes extraordinary strength: every muscle in her body is defined from having performed manual labor every day for most of her life. She rarely rests between the many tasks she must carry out.

Pamela is married to Kenneth Azango, and they have two children, Jacobeth, 3, and Joel, 9. As the daughter-in-law of the grandparents—Mama¹ Phoebe and Mzee² Azango—who own the land and compound, it is Pamela's responsibility to cook, clean, collect firewood, tend to the crops, fetch water, take care of the children, and additionally, to see that I am properly cared for. The Azango family is being compensated by FSD for my stay on the condition that they provide me with three meals a day, a morning bucket bath, boiled drinking water, and a lock on my door. This contract did not require them to accept me as a member of the family, but my hope was that somehow I would find a way to bridge the cultural divide and the extensive language barrier.

Twende Kucheza (Let's go play)

I walk home from work, and when Jacobeth spots me, she jumps up with glee and sprints across the lawn and into my open arms. I spin her around in circles, and then tickle her until she giggles uncontrollably. I want to go into my small room, and lie down and rest, but she grabs my hand, and looks pleadingly into my eyes. "Twende kucheza!" she exclaims! Let's go play! She is completely irresistible in her little pink dress, and though I'm exhausted from a full day at KEEEP, I play soccer with her and Joeli in the yard for over an hour.

I sit down on back steps to drink my strong tea that Pamela has prepared for me, and Jacobeth grabs my hand again. Twende kucheza! "Sawa sawa" (Okay okay!), I reply, as I put down the ceramic mug and swing her around some more. I take the vine that Jacobeth has found, and show her how to use it as a jump rope. After her many failed attempts and the resulting laughter from the whole family at her little spectacle, I let the children chase me around in a perpetual game of tag, in which the person who is "it" is never quite clear.

My Swahili is very poor—well below the level of three-year old—but it seems not to matter. I have always enjoyed games and sports, and here I learn that the "language of play" is universal, that it defies the bounds of traditional language. While my frustration at my inability to speak more Swahili grows when trying to converse with the grandparents, when I am with the children, I find that I am never lonely. With them, in an unparalleled feeling of love and acceptance, I forget that I am a mzungu.

* * *

I was happy to be home from work. Martin brought me some strong tea and peanuts that Pamela had roasted that morning. As I sat on a stool in the yard, I was entertained by Joeli and Jacobeth, who were spinning around in circles until they fell over. I am sure their mother is pleased I taught them that game....

After my tea was finished, I played with the kids, drawing designs in the dirt. I drew a hopscotch game and attempted to show Jacobeth how to play. I demonstrated a few times, but she didn't quite get the gist of it. Joeli and I had a good laugh over it. We were all drawing, and because Joeli is learning English in school, I drew out the alphabet and had him read me each letter aloud.

Somehow, we started game of tag, in which Jacobeth tried to catch me and I kept dodging her. This turned into both of them coming after me, as I took off barefoot across the compound, tripping over my long skirt. This game went on for about 20

minutes, and they couldn't catch me. We all finally gave in, laughing, smiling, and breathing heavily. Walking back to the yard, Jacobeth took my right hand, and Joeli took the other. It was in this exact moment that I finally won Joeli over. He had never held my hand before and had never come too close to me without running away. Who would think that you could win a 9-year-old's heart just by outrunning him?

Matatus, Boda bodas, and Bargaining

As I grow into a more integral member of the family, I also learn to navigate my way around by the various forms of transportation. The trip into town and back is daunting. Yet I learn that one can get used to anything and that one must accept the dangers as another fact of life. *Matatus*—the local "bus" system—are essentially old pickup trucks, with seats in the bed of the truck and a covering overhead. Over 20 people are crammed into these vehicles, which are nearly falling apart as they rattle down the muddy, rut-filled roads. Accidents are frequent, and because the roads into the forest are not paved, getting stuck in the mud is a daily occurrence.

After one night of especially heavy rains, the road into town turned into a six-inch sea of mud, causing the vehicle to slide back and forth. We nearly toppled, but then rammed, instead, into the earthen embankment, and stuck. Locals helped pull us out of the mud by tying a rope under the belly of the *matatu* and pulling; then we got back inside. I did not question this incident. These rides made me appreciate the amenities I have always taken for granted, such as seat belts and traffic laws, and forced me to renegotiate my definition of personal space.

Being a *mzungu*, the *matatu* money collectors labeled me as an easy target to be taken advantage of. I became more experienced at bargaining and holding firm to the price that I knew was appropriate to pay. I also learned how to negotiate the proper price when riding a *boda boda* back to the forest. *Boda bodas* are bicycles ridden by young men, sporting a cushion and handlebars on the back. My *boda* rides were often 30 minutes long, up and down dirt roads. I was forced to put my personal safety in the hands of strangers, and trust that they would bring me home without harm. This trust was out of sheer necessity, but even when caught in torrential downpours, I always made it home safely.

Maziwa Chai (Milk Tea)

*Wilma [another volunteer] and I finished using the internet café in town, and decided to head back to the forest before the rains came. At the *matatu* stop we piled into a nearly full *matatu* headed for Shinyalu. We were harassed by men trying to sell us various items through the windows. "Mzungu, mzungu..." I have gotten better at ignoring it.*

On the ride back, we saw that the sky was turning black. There was no alternative transportation, so we hopped on boda bodas toward the forest. Halfway there it started to rain, and then pour, in big, cold droplets. Our drivers were pedaling frantically to get us there. If we waited out the rain, we'd be stuck because the roads would become impassable. We were completely soaked when we finally arrived back at the gate. We must have looked absolutely ridiculous: two mzungus, utterly drenched, slogging through the mud.

My family laughed at me when they saw me trudging home like a sad, wet puppy. But actually, I wasn't sad or upset at all. I was so completely soaked and humbled by the situation. I went into my room, dripping everywhere, laughing at the hilarity of it all. I peeled off my wet clothes, dried off, and crawled into my warm, dry pants and my sweatshirt.

Pamela called for me to come drink some tea and I was pleased to find that it was milk tea— just the perfect thing to warm me up.

KEEP

The Kakamega Environmental Education Programme is located in a lone concrete building, at the entrance to the southern part of the Kakamega Rainforest. A colorful, life-like rainforest scene is painted on the front outside wall, and KEEP's logo, a large rainbow, is painted on the side of the building— bright, but beginning to fade. The sturdy structure, built about 10 years ago, has two rooms. One is an office, which contains a long wooden table, benches, a few desks for the office staff, and cluttered cabinets full of various files. A defunct computer and projector are stacked silently in the back corner.

The second room is a classroom with tables, benches, a blackboard, and cabinets full of various books that comprise a makeshift library. On the walls are outdated maps of Kenya and posters with endemic bird species on them. A child's sign made out of construction paper above the doorway reads, "We must understand the forest in order to protect it." Outside, a large plastic rain tank sits under the gutter, waiting expectantly to be filled. Atop the building, on the hot tin roof, lie three small solar panels, baking in the sunlight.

KEEP is a small, locally-run NGO that was started in 1995. It was founded by a man named Wilberforce Okeka and other local forest guides who saw the detrimental effects of unsustainable practices on the forest: deforestation for agricultural purposes and firewood collection, cattle grazing, and gathering of medicinal plants. The mission of KEEP is to educate the community about the importance of forest conservation, and to provide a number of sustainable income-generating projects that attempt to improve community members' lives and livelihoods. KEEP is loosely organized into three departments: education, income-generating projects, and eco-tourism.

KEEP's education department performs outreach to local schools and provides lessons on the importance of forest conservation. The staff members also invite schools to the KEEP premises to give guided tours of the forest and environmental lessons in the classroom. Since KEEP was founded, it has educated over 10,000 local school children about the importance of the Kakamega Forest and the necessity for its protection.

The income-generation department is comprised of numerous "sustainable" income-generating projects, such as a tree nursery, a butterfly farm, a gift shop, fuel-saving basket stoves, a "botanical garden," a "snake park," and a "factory" located in town that processes sustainably-harvested *mondia*, a medicinal plant. Lastly, the eco-tourism department (also a means to generate income for KEEP), is comprised of KEEP's *bandas*; traditional huts that tourists pay to stay in overnight, with an on-site cook and basic accommodations. Tourists often pay for guided tours of the forest, increasing overall profits.

I began my work at KEEP by performing simple tasks upon the request of the KEEP staff: working in the tree nursery, sweeping the leaves outside the bandas, or pulling weeds. To me, this work seemed to be quite a futile endeavor in the middle of the rainforest, where leaves fall down and weeds grow back up as part of the natural ecological process. In my search for more meaningful work, I began to pursue ideas for a potential, sustainable project that would benefit the community. After all, this is what FSD has sent me there to do, and I wanted not only to uphold my commitment to them, but also to feel that my time there would be worthwhile and fulfilling—for KEEP and for myself.

Ninafanya kazi (I am working)

I discussed with Gabriel, the education department head, that I wanted to work on a project that would help the community. He suggested a needs assessment by way of a survey to community members, stating that one cannot develop a project without knowing what the most pressing needs are.

David (a German volunteer), Gabriel, and I wrote up the survey together, and Gabriel helped us make sure that the questions were culturally appropriate and would be understood by those being interviewed. The dual aim of the survey was to assess the living conditions in the communities as well as to gauge community interest in sustainable,

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income-generating projects. Our survey—comprised of 48 questions—was designed to show how these living conditions correlate with forest exploitation, and we sought to use the data on income-generating projects to find ways to reduce human pressure on the forest.

Trying to generate ideas for potential projects, I spoke with another FSD intern, who was working for an organization called CARD (Community Action for Rural Development) in Kakamega Town, which loans beehives out to farmers for income-generation. I thought this would be a perfect project for KEEP, since it was already up and running, and we added some questions about community interest in beekeeping onto the survey.

The next week, we all met with the chairman of KEEP to finalize each question. He was very open and amenable to our ideas, and was very pleased that we wanted to do this project. He was hopeful about the partnership with CARD, and agreed that it would be a worthwhile endeavor. We all agreed on sending six KEEP members to six different villages, which were chosen based on their relative proximity to KEEP and the forest. Together we planned a training session for the field interviewers during which we asked Gabriel and the Chairman to go over all the questions in the survey and stress how the interviews should be conducted.

Knowing we lacked a certain level of cultural awareness about Kenyan interviewing procedures, we made sure that Gabriel and the chairman were the ones to specifically touch on themes of cultural sensitivity, how to handle health-related questions, and thoroughness. We didn't want to appear as if this was written solely by the *mzungus*, and we really wanted KEEP to embrace it as their own project. While our presence at that training session showed we had a prominent role in the project, Gabriel did a phenomenal job of stressing why the survey was important and that each interviewer was given a crucial responsibility that would help the community.

Each of the six interviewers was asked to administer the survey to 40 people over the course of four days (ten families, four people from each family). While we were a little unsure of how realistic this goal was, after four days, we successfully got back all 240 completed surveys. Finally, after two weeks of compiling and sorting usable data and organizing all the numbers into charts and tables on my computer, we sat down to write a report of our findings. We realized, however, that we didn't necessarily know how to write a social science report or

even who our audience was supposed to be. Was the report for KEEP's edification, for CARD, or for requesting international funding? We finally decided to simply write an exact, factual report with everything we did, our results, and all our recommendations included. That way, KEEP could have all the information, but the report could be re-written at a later date to be used for funding or grant proposals.

The extensive data that we gathered for the report show that living conditions, levels of income, and education have a direct effect on the exploitation of the Kakamega Rainforest. In the communities surrounding KEEP, poverty, unemployment, sickness, and lack of knowledge essentially force people to depend solely on products from the forest for their basic needs. Thus, to help reduce over-use of the forest and conserve it for future generations, KEEP must provide the community with effective alternatives.

Sustainable income-generating projects, if done properly, provide community members with a source of income and a means to improve their social status. However, through personal experience, observations, and asking questions of the KEEP staff, we found that most of the existing projects are ineffectively run, and new projects are often started before old ones become sustainable. We concluded in the report that organizations like KEEP should focus on pre-existing projects and on improving their internal structure and capacity, instead of rushing to implement new initiatives.

KEEP needs to continue training its members and perform greater outreach to the community to educate villagers about these problems and to provide them with the skills necessary to reduce their own impact on the forest. One example is training them to make fuel-efficient mud stoves, which reduce the amount of firewood needed. While it is impossible to prevent members of the community from entering the forest, we concluded that education, training, and effective income-generating projects are potential solutions that address some of the root causes of forest exploitation.

Being the only native English-speaker at KEEP, I crafted much of the actual wording of the report. David, Wilma, and I would discuss what we wanted written in the report, and then I would come up with the appropriate, formal language. We were not social science researchers, and oftentimes, I felt that we were going at the process partially blind. Our resources were extremely limited, but we made extensive use of what we had at our disposal. We often referred to KEEP's library or asked questions of the other KEEP members, volunteers, or researchers on-site.

We had no access to the internet, except one day a week when we took the often treacherous journey into town, to the painstakingly slow internet café. Despite our lack of resources, we strove for as much accuracy and precision as possible. Though we sought answers from

the KEEP staff, much of our analysis was our own, as were the data we chose to include, the charts, and the pictures. It was KEEP's project, but we, effectively, owned it.

The report was forced into existence out of our sheer willpower to complete it. We wanted to leave a lasting document that incorporated all the data and could be used for a variety of purposes by KEEP or future volunteers. Yet in the process of generating the report, we had not only distanced ourselves from KEEP members, we had also generated a document of more than 30 pages that few there could easily comprehend. Who at KEEP would really take the time to read everything, and what information was actually useful or comprehensible to them? Our recommendations section discussed our advice based on the data we had collected from KEEP members and from the field, and on our own observations of which projects at KEEP were successful or unsuccessful. We had filtered the facts through our own lenses.

My quick-fix partnership idea with CARD was determined to be infeasible at the time. Our data from the report, our observations, and a meeting with CARD had indicated to us that both NGOs currently lack the organizational capacity, accountability, and infrastructure to start the partnership. Still, Gabriel asked me multiple times about when we could start getting beehives from CARD. If these same observations written in the report were not grasped when expressed verbally, why would a written document make the information any clearer? We were so wedded to form and precision that we neglected to discuss how KEEP members could be more involved in the report-writing process. We neglected to incorporate the voices of those whom we were representing.

We had spent the vast majority of our time there generating the report, and left only 20 minutes on my last day to share and explain all that we had done. Though we wrote the report for KEEP, we used it as a vehicle to express how things are and our vision of how they should be. We wanted it to be KEEP's report, but in the end it was still ours.

The Solar Panel

A solar system works by converting the sun's energy directly into electricity and channeling the electric current through an inverter inside the building, which converts the DC voltage of the solar cells into AC for use with common appliances. The current, when not used directly, is stored in solar system batteries so electricity can be provided on cloudy days or at night. With KEEP's solar panels, however, this was not the case. If too many appliances were plugged in, or if a cloud passed in front of the sun, the inverter would arbitrarily shut off. Working in the office on my laptop computer, I would hear a loud click and then silence. From the corner of the room, where I sat nearest to the electrical outlet, I had a full view of the daily happenings in the office. When the inverter

turned off, which occurred quite frequently, most others in the office continued about their business, undisturbed. I would then get up and try to coax the inverter back to life so that the other volunteers and I could keep working on our report. Being far more dependent on technology than those around me, I felt physically and culturally distanced from the people at KEEP. I felt like a separate entity, disassociated from the others, wired to the outside world.

Often, when the solar power was not enough, we had to turn on KEEP's portable generator to use the printer, charge the laptop, show educational films, or charge cell phones. The generator made a loud whirring noise, disturbing the tranquility of the forest. It required petrol and oil, both of which were expensive and polluting. While my knowledge of solar systems was very basic, I knew that using the generator with so much free, available sunlight was impractical. I started to ask questions, and the more I learned about the history behind the solar panels, the more I became convinced that there were deeper, structural problems at hand.

The exact origin of the solar panels, to my knowledge, is unknown or forgotten. I imagine that they were donated a few years ago, like the other various expensive pieces of technology that KEEP owns, by a volunteer or by a grant from an international environmental organization. This dearth of information surprised me: I could find no record of who had purchased it, installed it, or if anyone had ever repaired it.

By the time I arrived, the batteries were already three years old. Solar system batteries are only made to last three years—unbeknownst to my fellow KEEP members and me—but the battery company only gives a one-year warranty. The used inverter that KEEP had purchased the year before had died within a week (inverters are supposed to last for decades), so they were borrowing one from the Forest Department that was only half the wattage needed. (There was some bitter dispute about to whom this inverter actually belonged.)

A fellow American at KEEP, who had returned for her second summer in a row to give health-related trainings to KEEP members, told me that the year before, KEEP's solar system was non-functioning and the generator had to be used to power all of KEEP's operations. Upon her return to the States after last summer, she had encouraged her students to fundraise to help get KEEP the money needed to repair the system. The students raised over \$2,000—well over what was needed—which was sent back to KEEP. When she returned this summer, she learned that the money had not gone to the solar system at all, but instead had been diverted to fund a snake park project, a mile away. The snake park is now a half-built building on an empty field. This woman felt hurt and betrayed that the money had not gone towards its intended purpose, in which she had invested a great deal of time and effort.

Despite the troubled history behind the solar system, the other volunteers and I determined that there was still a great need for it to be repaired. We wanted KEEP to be able to have the sustainable, constant stream of electricity that the panels were supposed to be providing, so KEEP could perform daily operations, charge appliances, and turn the building into a resource center in the evenings for the entire community to use. We set out to find a solar panel company to come evaluate and fix the problems. However, because there was no record of by whom or when it had been installed, what voltage the panels were, or any listing of companies who fix solar systems, we had to start from scratch. Complicating our search for a company was the fact that there are essentially no addresses in Western Kenya—at least that I saw—only P.O. boxes, and virtually no websites to find those companies, if they do exist.

We found one lead on a website for an electrical company located in Kisumu, the closest city from the forest, about a two-hour drive by public transportation. Our treacherous journey proved fruitful, eventually leading us, by way of a series of *boda boda* rides, to a battery company called Chloride Exide. We arranged for a repairman to come check the panels the following week. Upon arrival, he determined that the batteries were fine, but that we needed the contacts repaired and would have to transport them ourselves to Kisumu. We paid for a taxi for the long journey, only to have the company tell us that the batteries were in fact almost dead, and that we needed to purchase two new ones, in addition to the new inverter. The total cost for everything was under \$1,000.

The Chairman

The chairman of KEEP is a sharp, talkative man, recognizable by his white, knitted head covering. Thin, wide-eyed, and expressive, he spews out words a mile a minute and is always on the go. It was always difficult to track him down, yet in all of our meetings together, he seemed to be agreement with the ideas that I—and the other *mzungus*—suggested. However, while he technically runs KEEP's four branches and has the responsibility of making many important decisions, there never appears to be anyone in charge.

After multiple interactions with the chairman, I realized that our conversations remained almost strictly one-sided, with him usually deferring to my opinion. Seeing as I had far less experience than him at KEEP, I wanted an open dialogue. Yet although he agreed with me, there were never any action steps taken. The initiative was unquestionably upon me and the other volunteers to follow through with our ideas. Permission wasn't even necessary, and mostly we were left on our own to work on our projects.

When we addressed the issue of the solar system and the need for a new inverter with the chairman, he enthusiastically agreed that it was very important and should be purchased. Yet he refused to put forth more than half the money needed, claiming that the rest was reserved for the snake park—the very project that had taken away the money intended to fix the solar system a year earlier.

I reasoned, in my discussion with the chairman, that KEEP would be unable to function without electricity; he replied that we could not divert the funds and that we could just continue to use the generator. Having finally made all the appropriate contacts at the battery company and not wanting to leave without fixing the solar system, I made the decision to utilize some funds I had to pay the difference. The Chloride Exide repairmen came in a truck, bearing a brand new inverter and two new batteries. Everyone in the office seemed unsure of what was going on and why. They saw that I was handling the situation, and that I paid the repairman after the work had been completed. I felt isolated and alone, my huge wad of Kenyan shillings further distancing me from my colleagues in the room and reaffirming my role as an outsider.

T.V. Incident

With the solar system repaired, KEEP now had full electricity during the day. When I came back from lunch, I saw that nearly every single KEEP worker was inside the classroom, watching a movie on the television, instead of doing work. Even the Chairman was in there. I got up and turned off the inverter. I could hear the TV in the other room go silent, and then everyone filed out, since the excitement was over.

I asked to speak with the Chairman privately and I explained to him the situation and how upset it made me. He said that they really need to set out some rules, and I kept stressing that he needs to set out the rules and ensure that other people follow them. Then I discussed making KEEP into a resource center in the evenings, which was one of biggest reasons that ensuring solar power was so important. He always says how everything should be, but never how he's going to go about doing it. I kept asking who was going to arrange it and be responsible for it. I didn't get a straight answer.

The Mzungu Lady

An automatic assumption about *mzungus* is that they are well-educated, wealthy, and that have so much money that they can share it to help everyone around them. At least these first two assumptions, in most cases, are likely to be true.

In retrospect, I realize that I fulfilled this stereotype perfectly. With the solar panels, we did exactly what was expected of us as *mzungus*. We worked out all the logistics, and because we had the money, we used it to fix whatever we deemed needed fixing. In this instance, as well as numerous other times throughout my experience, I was put into uncomfortable situations, which required me to pit my wealth against the poverty of others.

I exhibited my wealth and perpetuated my outsider role every day, using my laptop computer and various appliances at home and in the workplace. At work, my ability to tap into funds created an unequal power shift, which often resulted in KEEP staff, including my superiors, deferring to my opinions or suggestions. While I strove for collaborative dialogue, they would often accept my ideas without giving their own input, thereby isolating me and reducing overall productivity. I felt that I was not understood, and the lack of open communication made it that much more difficult to bridge our cultural divides.

Structural Problems

The most prominent aspect of the rainforest is its intrinsic resourcefulness. Plants and animals live, die, and then their decaying matter creates the foundation for more life. The people who live there are equally resourceful, wasting nothing, living frugally out of sheer necessity. But KEEP as an organization lacks crucial resources that limit its effectiveness. While “we must understand the forest in order to protect it”—as the sign in KEEP’s classroom preaches—knowledge of the forest is not always enough to counter the many forces acting against its preservation. Knowledge alone will not bring sustainable development.

It was not until well after returning home that I understood the position of the chairman, and the reasons behind the attitude toward the solar panel itself. The discrepancy between my expectations of what KEEP’s priorities should be and the decisions that KEEP made stem out of some larger issues. One is that well-intentioned visitors or organizations frequently donate expensive equipment to KEEP without actually training KEEP members how to use these items properly. Thus, instead of KEEP members taking ownership of these valuable high-tech gadgets and having their maintenance be a top priority, they see the solar panel as a foreign object. They have not been given the experience or skills necessary to reap the benefits of such technologies. Instead of involving the other KEEP members, we took it upon ourselves to fix the solar system, thereby re-associating the technology with Western privilege.

Despite coming from a rich, technologically advanced country, I myself did not know much about solar system batteries or inverters. How could KEEP staff members be expected to focus their priorities on these complicated objects, which they were not given instruction on how to use and which need constant repair? It makes perfect sense

that they would put that money instead into something familiar and relatable to the environment; something like a snake park.

A second issue is that KEEP, and locally run organizations like it, lack the basic foundations—at least from a Western perspective—for success: education, leadership, organization, transparency, and accountability. Most KEEP workers and community members have only a primary level—perhaps secondary level—education. While free primary education was institutionalized by the Kenyan government in January 2003, secondary schooling still requires costly school fees for exams and uniforms. With limited education and a lack of exposure to Western, capitalistic practices, many people are not experienced on how to run an effective organization. Thus, in an office whose treasurer is not trained in accounting, where records are not always kept, and where most workers are volunteers, it is not surprising that money goes missing or ends up being diverted to other projects. It is no wonder that there was no documentation on the origin of the solar panel.

I realize now that the obstacles to achieving sustainable development extend so much deeper than mere financial assistance. Taken in light of its colonial history, these problems extend back to the very roots of poverty itself—unemployment, corruption, lack of free and proper education, and lack of access to adequate health care—for which there are no blanket solutions. For small NGOs like KEEP, these same structural problems have parallels all over the world. While these issues are vast and complex, a gleam of hope resides in concrete measures that can be taken. From my experience at KEEP, actions such as more trainings, workshops, advertising, and focus on long-term solutions can help improve the effectiveness of these organizations and pave a more sustainable route in the wake of such incalculable forces.

Martin

Martin, one of Mama and Mzee’s many grandchildren, is 30 years old. There is no work to be found and he cannot afford to go to training college, so he helps out in the field or takes the long journey into town to look for a job. He always comes home empty-handed, yet still cheerful enough to help Pamela with some of the cooking. Martin is fascinated with America. He asks me if there are forests where I live. I try to explain shopping malls, the four seasons, Big Macs, and big cities. Almost everyone I’ve talked to here wants to go to America. They think it’s the land of plenty; that it’s made of gold, and I suppose the television would not have shown them otherwise.

Martin says that one day he wants to go to America because it has a lot of opportunities and you can work your way up the ladder by working hard. I try to explain that, just like in Kenya, there are different social classes, and it is often the people who have the money that get the opportunities at the expense of those who don’t. I tell him how there are still issues of poverty and health care and poor education systems

in America, although of course on an entirely different level. In a world that is becoming increasingly desensitized, at least here I sense a strong importance placed on family and community. I want to tell Martin never to go—to keep him here in his world that somehow exists, despite the odds against it. But what right do I—the white American at the top of this social hierarchy—have to say this?

In My Mind's Eye

I am sitting in my usual spot at my host family's house, in the living room, on the sofa by the back wall. The sun is setting and the rain is tapping lightly on the tin roof. In the fading light, I relax and sink down into the seat cushion, letting my eyes rest upon the various objects in the room. I have the time here to weigh each item: to take into account its shape, its significance in the larger context of life in Isecheno.

I notice the familiar armchairs, positioned around the periphery of the room: five of them in all, along with two sofas, covered with bright blue and green floral tablecloths. Matching napkins are draped over the small stools that convert the room from a sitting area to a dining room and kitchen. In any Western country, these simple pieces of cloth might appear tacky, out of place. But here, they have a very practical touch, keeping the couches, tables, and stools clean in the midst of so much mud, spilled stew, and children.

In nearly every household I enter, I see a similar setup. Cleanliness, I have learned, is a sign of respect, and great value is placed on taking care of expensive items that one owns. Very few people can afford to buy new furniture, so each piece is constantly protected and repaired when necessary. One day, I saw two men construct a gorgeous set of sofas out of wood, foam, and nails, using only a hammer and a panga (a long, curved blade). It looked like it could have been purchased in a Western department store. One can do a lot with very little, especially when other options are limited or non-existent.

Such tablecloths, along with all types of clothing, are purchased in town. No clothing stores exist. Instead, garments are yanked from massive piles of used clothing, which appear to have somehow been transported from distant Salvation Army stores and Goodwill bins in America or Europe, to the small, bustling market place in Kakamega Town, Kenya. These piles lie adjacent to wooden vendor stalls, filled with the most eclectic assortment of fresh fruits, vegetables, flashlights, knives, thermoses, ropes, and any other item imaginable with a functional value.

To me, everything looks mismatched, a patchwork quilt. Yet I realize that in a place where nothing matches, consequently, everything matches. In fact, the concept of color coordination appears not to exist. I recognize that I have a different conception of what dressing well means. Here, expectations are defined by the status quo. Everyone wears used clothing, and so, effectively, it is not "used." Expectations are based on what is most resourceful, on what is necessary. A businessman, returning to visit his birthplace in the village, may be admired and respected for his fancy, pressed suit and gleaming tie. However, he does not represent the average person. Practicality and the idea of repair and re-use still win out over fashion sense.

This ingrained resourcefulness, which I have observed from the purchase of used tablecloths and clothing, also reminds me of the children in the village and the toys that they make out of seemingly nothing. Plastic bags bunched together and tied with string make a ball, a vine makes a jump rope, a stick and the red earth make a drawing pad. Toys and games are left up to the pure imagination of the children. I have seen an old bicycle tire and an old dull blade used interchangeably as props for impromptu games. Such inventiveness reminds me of stories I have heard along this vein: an American child opens a birthday present and disregards the actual toy inside, in favor of playing with the box that the toy came in. A box has infinite possibilities, while a manufactured toy has an innate purpose, and thus limits a child's imagination.

The sun has lowered in the sky, and my eyes now move and fix upon the black-and-white television atop the wooden bureau, opposite from where I am sitting. The TV is run by a small solar panel on the roof, and it sits next to a large stereo player with a long antenna. The television will be on all evening, watched religiously, as the whole family sits under the dim, solar-powered light. Diagonal lines of static run across the screen, and foreign sights and sounds jump into this quiet, rural scene. Loud jingles are sung, promoting Western products. They say you cannot live without Coca-Cola, without vegetable oil, without skin products.

Much of what my host family sees on TV is a world completely outside of their realm of experience. It temporarily transports them to places they have never been, and most likely will never go. They are bombarded with advertising for products they can never afford and that they surely don't need. Much of the nightly shows are 1990s American sitcoms that reveal a culture full of violence, drama, romance, wealth, and relative luxury. This television is a portal to a life that exists elsewhere. It exemplifies what globalization means for many—it means they get just a taste. It implies "look but don't touch."

Lining the upper section of the walls are family photos, most black-and-white and not smiling, tipped forward as though they are looking down, sternly. Their eyes seem to fall upon a foreign object in the room: me. They seem to sense that I don't belong; that I am otherworldly. It now occurs to me that I belong to the world of that television, the world that they cannot have, but perhaps, the world that they most aspire to be a part of. I came to stay only briefly, bringing a laptop, a digital camera, an LED flashlight. I ask too many questions, I don't understand the language, I have mixed-up ideas about gender roles and religion. I have altered the very fabric of the room itself.

*Despite being very happy with my living situation, I have been feeling more and more like an outsider. My inability to communicate has caused me to retreat more often into the safety of my small room. A silent wall has been built between me and my host family. I realize, finally, that I am a direct product of globalization. I begin to understand the source of the discomfort I felt from the very beginning in bringing such luxury items with me to Kenya. My personal sense of excess for owning such goods means nothing when I exhibit—flaunt even—my dependence on those goods. I realize that I am exactly what they cannot have. The barrier that I sense is not just my whiteness—my *mzungu* status—it is the stereotype that I constantly reinforce.*

The world to which I belong is one I often resent, while still retaining the benefits of having been raised and educated in it. It is a world that gives me the privilege of sitting in this very room, oceans away from home, and question at whose expense I—and others like me—are living. It gives me the privilege to see, to ask, and to learn, and then return to my world, even after stumbling upon the painful answers.

The Closing Circle

In 1971, biologist Barry Commoner wrote a book titled, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology*. While a bit arcane, this book discusses many issues that are still pertinent today, including the growing disconnect between the demand of short-term profits and the actual needs of mankind, which is contributing to our current ecological crisis. More specifically, it touches on the role technology has played in separating us from our environment and the way we perceive it.

Commoner discusses an “ambiguity” in our relationship to our environment. We participate biologically in the environmental system, yet “human society is designed to exploit the environment as a whole, to produce wealth” (Commoner 28). Here we have a paradox, in which we are at the same time participant *and* exploiter in our natural environment. This duality distorts our perspective of our environment and our relationship to it.

However, when Commoner writes about “human society,” he is referring to advanced nations, not—however culturally insensitive—to all the distinct cultures and nations that comprise the human race. In highly developed countries, our sophisticated technologies have led us to believe “that we have made our own environment and no longer depend on the one provided by nature” (29). Our seemingly endless flow of running water, air conditioning, electricity, refrigeration, and fresh foods create a “nearly fatal illusion” which is a root cause of our mass exploitation of the earth’s resources.

People who live in Isecheno, outside the Kakamega Rainforest, have no such illusion. Those who live there are directly dependent on and in tune with their environment. They are both participant and exploiter, but their situation calls for a keen awareness of nature, day to day. The biggest difference between those living in advanced nations and those living in Isecheno is choice. Advanced nations can *choose* whether or not to waste or conserve; they have that freedom. In Isecheno, there are few alternatives because resources and the means to acquire them are limited.

Based on data I collected and compiled for KEEP, those who live around the Kakamega Rainforest rely almost wholly on firewood to sustain themselves. Some who can afford it purchase charcoal, and an almost negligible number purchase gas. It would seem that such sources of energy, as compared to the power plants and electrical grids of developed nations, would be highly sustainable. But due to increasing population pressure around the forest, combined with growing rates of unemployment and disease, the forest is being over-utilized for fuel wood, medicinal plants, building materials, crops, and grazing for livestock. All of these factors have caused the forest to be reduced by over 50% in the past 25 years. As the last remaining forest in Kenya dwindles and population pressure increases its exploitation, what other options are there?

Working for KEEP, which promotes and educates the local community about the importance of forest conservation, I often asked myself how effective our efforts were. The reality is that everyone around me—KEEP members included—all took firewood out of the forest, despite it being an illegal act. Every day, I spotted men, women, and children carrying huge bundles of firewood on their heads out of the forest and back up the dusty roads to their compounds. My host mother, Pamela, carried such bundles. How else could these people eat and sustain themselves? But at the same time that I was witnessing this firewood removal, I was, by default, contributing to the very exploitation of the

As the last remaining forest in Kenya dwindles and population pressure increases its exploitation, what other options are there?

forest that I was trying to curtail. The irony, at least for me—as an environmentalist and a proponent of sustainable development—was that despite the firewood used to cook my meals, this was the closest to sustainable living that I had ever been.

While one of KEEP's main objectives is to promote and train community members to begin their own sustainable, income-generating projects, they run into a series of problems. First, KEEP lacks basic funds for educating its own members on these projects in order to do outreach and training to the community. If they are able to train their members, they still have to inform the community about the trainings, and often community members will not come without an incentive because of the far distances or the fact that they are busy working or tending to their children. If both of these initial steps are successful, the same problem arises where the community member does not have the available capital necessary to invest in the project. Even when projects are started, their maintenance is difficult, and people will often resort back to their unsustainable habits.

This observation has led me to the question of what it means to live sustainably. In the United States, our lifestyles are inherently wasteful, by nature of our comparative luxuries and excess. To live sustainably, one must actively use less. If one is determined enough, he or she can go so far as to live off the power grid or utilize renewable energy sources. Some of us have the luxury of being able to *afford* to live in a more holistic, sustainable fashion. Again, the difference is the freedom to choose.

“It's better to be buried alive”

My last night in forest before returning to the States, I stopped by Wilberforce Okeka's house to bid him farewell. He is the founder of KEEP, and though he no longer works there, his opinion is highly valued and respected. I wanted to share with him all that I had learned in my nine weeks at KEEP, and convey the many structural issues and problems that I had observed. He listened and nodded in agreement.

It grew dark, and one of his daughters came out with a large bowl of ugali and fish, and I was then obligated to eat with his family. We talked and ate by the light of the oil lamp, as the rain began to pound on the tin roof.

Wilberforce told me this saying in Swahili: “It's better to be buried alive.” He explained that when someone is sick, no one has any money to give him for treatment or to take him to the hospital. However, when this person dies, suddenly everyone starts fundraising projects to buy him a casket, pay for the funeral, and get him a nice suit. Why didn't they clothe him when he was alive

or pay for him to get better? That's why it's better to be “buried alive.” I chuckled, but I realized that he was right. People have the means to help others, but not always the will.

“The Impossible Will Take A Little While”

What we often neglect when we think of sustainable development are the realities on the ground. Telling individuals who are unemployed, sick, and only moderately educated to stop making use of their only source of fuel and sustenance is unrealistic. Under such circumstances there isn't even a question for those people as to whether or not to take firewood or medicinal plants from the forest: they will do it because they must.

In reality, KEEP is faced with an almost impossible situation: population pressure is growing, people need to eat, and the forest is therefore dwindling. The longer I worked at KEEP, the more this fact began to weigh down heavily upon me, until a deep pessimism set in. But Commoner, writing at the beginning of the momentous U.S. environmental movement, found a source of optimism that still rings true today— even in this increasingly complex world. In fact, it is the “very complexity of the issues generated by the environmental crisis” that gives us a flame of hope (32). “Once the links between the separate parts of the problem are perceived, it becomes possible to see new means of solving the whole” (32). When we can see the direct link between lack of access to adequate health care and increased forest use, we can therefore try to address the problems within this specific, narrower framework.

Another source of optimism lies in the fact that the very nature of the environmental crisis is not as a product of man's biological capabilities, but of his “social actions, which are subject to more rapid change” (32). Our agency is therein restored. If we can learn to better manage our global environment, we can effectively transform the utilization of the world's resources to be more equitable. As Commoner wrote over 30 years ago, human beings have broken out of the circle of life by “conquering nature,” and following the rules of profit-seeking instead of those that “govern nature” (33). In order to survive and reverse our own destruction, we must actively work to close the circle.

Commoner believes that “crisis means change.” Yet after the energy crisis in the 1970s, when people rallied around greater environmental protection and lifestyle changes, it was assumed that conditions would ultimately get better. Although unprecedented environmental legislation has been passed since then, the state of the world has ultimately degraded to disastrous proportions, with 3 billion additional people to support. Global greenhouse gas emissions are increasing astronomically, and as a result, our atmosphere and oceans have become dangerously warmer. Global climate change is the greatest threat to the health and future of our planet and ourselves.

With increased global warming, we are already feeling the effects all over the world in the form of melting glaciers, rising sea levels, more numerous and severe hurricanes that have devastated coastal areas around the globe, droughts, heat strokes, floods, the extinction of thousands of species, and a resulting loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and numerous other environmental, economic, and social crises. The United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed what has been growing more and more apparent each year: that human activities in the form of burning fossil fuels, cutting down trees, and exploiting natural resources are inextricably linked to the steep rise in global temperatures over the past 100 years, and specifically over the past few decades. According to the IPCC, 11 of the last 12 years (1995 -2006) rank among the 12 warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature (since 1850).

The IPCC, which recently won the Nobel Peace Prize—along with former U.S. vice president Al Gore— has come out with a serious of four climate change reports over the past 20 years. Each one of these has been more scientifically convincing and dire than the last about the current state of our planet and future implications. They predict that global emissions must be reduced by 80% by the year 2050 in order to mitigate some of the worst effects of climate change. Yet every year emissions are increasing at astronomical rates, turning scientists' climate models into devastating realities.

In light of these frightening predictions, it may seem that focusing our energies on a small, dwindling rainforest in western Kenya would be an insignificant drop in the bucket. Yet we must realize that we cannot look at these problems in isolation. Often we forget that our environment is a vast, interconnected system. Environmental degradation in one part of the globe is integrally linked to all the other parts.

However, while we are all literally and figuratively in the same boat, climate change will not affect everyone equally. It is consequently the world's poorest who are suffering—and will continue to suffer—the greatest. These are often the people living in the worst, most vulnerable conditions, with the least means to relocate or handle the severe environmental, economic, and social effects. Yet the United States, the richest nation in the world, has refused to take the necessary actions to curb its emissions. In fact, with less than 5% of the world's population, the U.S. contributes to 25% of the world's global warming pollution. The United States must utilize its vast resources and wealth to change its unsustainable practices, thereby curbing the largest sources of pollution and degradation.

Although the realities of this interconnected global system are detrimental and unavoidable, we can also use the interconnectedness in a positive way to *mitigate* the effects of environmental problems.

Combining scientific knowledge with growing international efforts, we as a global society now have the capacity to aid developing countries and foster positive environmental practices. This will take the initiative of wealthier countries—especially the United States—to creatively facilitate sustainable development projects, while at the same time drastically reducing their emissions and sustainably reallocating their resources. The U.S. and other “First World” countries must now practice what they preach, if they are to assist with the sustainable development of “Third World” countries. Throwing money at the problem does not work, as exhibited by my solar panel scenario. International aid alone is *not* effective: there must be an attempt to remedy the problems on the ground and train NGOs in a way that meets their cultural and financial needs.

Twende Nyumbani (Let's go home)

Jacobeth and I were playing in the yard after I got home from work. The sun was setting, and I climbed up on the wooden fence to get a better view of the great ball of orange-red fire, as it started to sink below the horizon. Jacobeth climbed up and joined me, a piece of chapatti hanging out of her mouth. I decided to hop down and explore the cornfield behind the house. Together, we followed the path, until we reached a clearing and spotted another house in the distance. Jacobeth stopped walking, grabbed my hand, and pulled me back in the direction of our compound. “Twende Nyumbani,” she urged. Let's go home. She said it again, and I realized that she had specifically said nyumbani (home), instead of nyumba (house). Sensing we had wandered too far, she wanted me to take her back to her home, to where she sensed that she belonged.

I looked around at the open field, devoid of trees, and sensed the encroachment of civilization on the forest itself. I picked her up and carried her back through the field on my shoulders. In 20 years, I thought to myself, will she still have a home? Will the forest still be here for her? I asked myself this question, but couldn't bear the weight of such a frightening reality. I gripped her little hands tightly. Unassuming and unaware of her future, she broke free from my grasp, and ran the last stretch home.

Mitigation Strategies

Listed under the Forest Sector as one of the “Key Mitigation Technologies and Practices Currently Available” in the IPCC's most recent report are: afforestation, reforestation, forest management, reduced deforestation, harvested wood product management, and use of forestry products for bioenergy to replace fossil fuel use. According to the IPCC, this is just a short-term step, and clearly one of many others: energy supply, transport, buildings, industry, agriculture, and

waste management. Tackling all of these sectors is necessary because they are all *fundamentally* interrelated.

In a place like Kenya, which is rapidly developing, it is critical to not only mediate the new industries, such as energy, buildings, and industry, but also to stress the importance of sustainable development in the pre-existing areas such as the Kakamega Rainforest.

Besides being home to exquisite natural beauty, a wealth of biodiversity, and a lifeline for millions of people, the Kakamega Rainforest is also a huge carbon sink, naturally soaking up carbon dioxide emissions at a time where technologies to perform this same service are not readily available. From my experience of living and working in the area, it is a source of sustenance, shelter, warmth, medicine, and income. The view of the Kakamega Rainforest through this lens of the ecological services that it provides is critical.

In an October 2007 *Scientific American* magazine article entitled “Conservation for the People,” Peter Kareiva and Michelle Marvier discuss a new approach to conservation. This approach takes the focus off specific “hot spots”— areas with the highest density of biodiversity in a particular region— and instead focuses on improving ecosystems that affect the health, livelihoods, and well-being of *people*.

Often, we tend to neglect the “ecological services” that our ecosystems provide: wetlands protect people from severe storms and flooding, and coral reefs and forests provide habitats for our food and resources to fuel our stomachs and economies. “These services include products for which there are markets, such as medicines and timber, as well as processes whose economic value usually goes unconsidered: water filtration, pollination, climate regulation, flood and disease control, and soil formation” (Kareiva & Marvier 53). When economists attempted to place a dollar value on those processes, they found that “the yearly value of such economic services outstripped the gross domestic product of all countries combined” (53).

The emphasis on preserving “life raft ecosystems” — areas with high rates of poverty, where a large portion of the economy depends on natural systems and where ecosystem services are severely degraded— is critical to protecting both the people who live there, and the ecosystems on which they depend for survival.

If we are to mitigate these problems, we must focus on how to best facilitate the improvement of environmental conditions in places like the Kakamega Rainforest, which can then serve as models for conservation measures and sustainable development in other parts of the world.

As an environmental activist, seeing what has been done to this planet, it is exceedingly frightening and disheartening. Yet in a recent *New York Times* article, Commoner, now in his 90s, stated that he still classifies himself as an “eternal optimist.” For someone whose warnings were largely ignored for decades, this sense of hope is truly remarkable. The United States, specifically has failed to step up to the challenge of reducing its ecological footprint. If crisis does indeed mean change, as Commoner claims, then the time to act is *now*.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”

I decided to plant a tree seedling at KEEP, to contribute to one of their income-generating projects. I was given a plank, on which I used a stick and black paint to write the tree species, my name, the date, and a quote:

Prunus Africanus

Jamie Pottern- Brandeis University, USA

August 8, 2007

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”

I smiled with satisfaction at the plank, waiting for it to dry. I don’t know if I’ll ever get to come back, but the image of returning in a few decades and seeing my huge *Prunus Africanus* tree standing tall, with my faded sign and Gandhi’s inspirational quote beneath it, was comforting. It reminded me that summers always end, but our influence keeps on spreading throughout the world.

I don’t know what my time in Isecheno necessarily accomplished. I learned a great deal about the culture, about the forest, about being a *mzungu*, and about the forces impeding sustainable development. I don’t know what I gave back, except for a long report, two solar batteries, a solar inverter, and some foreign ideas. Somehow I gained the love of a family, especially two small children.

If nothing else, I had at least planted a tree that will hopefully grow into something bigger and greater than myself.

Kwaheri, ninapenda wewe (Goodbye, I love you)

Ned, my Program Coordinator, came to pick me up in a taxi. I stood on the side of the dirt road, outside the compound, my gigantic blue duffel bag at my feet. I said goodbye to the entire family, who kept expressing how much they would miss me. I knelt down and whispered goodbye to Jacobeth. She smiled at me. I didn’t know enough Swahili to explain that I was leaving and was probably never coming back. I couldn’t tickle my way out of this conversation, so I hugged her tightly instead, not wanting to let go.

The taxi arrived, I threw my belongings in the back seat, and we drove away, leaving my nyumbani in a cloud of dust. I sat with my arm resting on the window sill, getting my last look at the beautiful forest. Men, women, and children were walking on both sides of the road, all carrying huge bundles of firewood on their heads. With this wood they would survive another few days, weeks, months. Meanwhile, boda bodas swerved to avoid hitting them. At one point our taxi, inevitably, got stuck in the mud and we had to get out. Some local teenage boys, who had been sitting on the sidelines watching, jumped up with excitement and pushed the vehicle out of the hole. Our driver gave them a few shillings as compensation. I climbed back inside the taxi, and shut the door.

Notes

1. In Kenya, Mama is a respectful title for a married woman.
2. Mzee is a respectful title for an older man.

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