KALEIDOSCOPE JOURNAL FALL 2011

For a global mentality and community at Boston College

Brought to you by the International Club of Boston College
Fall 2011

Letter from the Editor

My name is Omeed Alerasool and I am a freshman in the College of Arts and Sciences here at Boston College. After joining with ICBC, I became Editor-in-Chief of Kaleidoscope.

My vision for Kaleidoscope was that of a journal, printed once per semester, that meshes global cultures and personal experiences with international affairs, politics, and history. That is exactly what the Kaleidoscope team and I strove to accomplish, and we hope you, the reader, will enjoy the experiences and insights of your fellow students.

I am an Iranian-American; accordingly, I have found an appreciation for the diversity of experiences and cultures of the world. It is my belief that in a supportive community such as BC, we can make the effort to learn and appreciate other cultures. The more we learn about each other, the more we learn about ourselves. And with that final word, I would like to welcome you to the Fall 2011 issue of Kaleidoscope!

A special thanks to the Editorial Board Staff: Ryan Herbst, Maddie Montgomery, Léa Oriol, Sacha Ramjit, and Jessica Zuban!
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Request a PDF version of Kaleidoscope by emailing: KaleidoscopeICBC@gmail.com
Lorainne Lopez
President
A&S 2012 Economics & International Studies Minor
Favorite Place: Boracay Island in the Philippines.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-Danced on stage in a Wu-Tang Clan concert
-Climbed to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro
-Visited 3 countries in 3 continents within one weekend

Konstantinos Efstathiou
Vice-President
A&S 2012 Economics
Favorite Place: Island of Milos in the Aegean.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-Scuba dive.
-I love Nascar.
-I love American football.

Raoul-Edgar Paltzer
Vice-President
CSOM 2012 Finance & Corporate Reporting Analysis
Favorite Place: Gstaad, a beautiful Swiss ski resort.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-Love cheese
-Love chocolate fondue
-Love skiing

Samantha Koss
Secretary
A&S 2014 International Studies & Political Science
Favorite Place: Washington D.C. embodies the American dream.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-For two years I dated an Italian who lives outside of Venice.
-I was an extra in Transformers 3.
-On the Press, Politics & Public Affairs team at the British Consulate

Alice Hua Luo
Treasurer
CSOM 2013 Finance & Philosophy
Favorite Place: Beijing for its history & Shenzhen for its modernism.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-I love eating meat, especially steak.
-My dream is to become an entrepreneur in the future.
-I do not like making friends with people from around the world.

Thaiza Alvim
AHANA Caucus Rep.
A&S 2012 Economics & IS Minor
Favorite Place: Angra dos Reis, beautiful beach 2 hours from Rio.
Two Truths & One Lie:
-I speak French
-I am Brazilian
-I speak Arabic
EXECUTIVE BOARD

Omeed Alerasool  
Editor-in-Chief &  
Freshman Rep.  
A&S 2015 Economics  
Favorite Place: Princeton, NJ  
Two Truths & One Lie:  
- My parents and sister live in Germany  
- I have fallen into Niagara Falls  
- I was born in West Virginia

Jennifer Liem  
Director of Social Events  
CSOM 2012 Accounting & Finance  
Favorite Place: Bali, good beach and scenic bars.  
Two Truths & One Lie:  
- Does not like to travel.  
- Speaks Indonesian  
- Enjoys socializing.

Tushar Hathiramani  
Director of Social Events  
A&S 2014  
Favorite Place: Eleko Beach in Nigeria.  
Two Truths & One Lie:  
- Accent changes depending on the people I’m around.  
- In Nigerian pidgin English, “chop” means eat, not cut.  
- All Indians talk like Apu from the Simpsons.

Noele Illien  
Director of Social Events  
A&S 2014 International Studies  
Favorite Place: Sprungli for the most amazing desserts!  
Two Truths & One Lie:  
- I had my first ever burger this year.  
- I did not know anyone at BC before I came.  
- I’m quite short

Lama Al Fulaij  
Director of Academic Events  
CSOM 2012 Finance & IS Minor  
Favorite Place: My grandma’s house, best food and company.  
Two Truths & One Lie:  
- I can drive a motorcycle  
- I have skydived in Australia  
- I am one of five sisters
In-Between Asian

“So where are you from?”
“The Philippines.”
“No, no, where in the US do you live?”
“On campus…?”
“No, no, no, I mean what state are you from?”
“I’m an international student.”
“Ohh.”

This exchange occurred a few weeks into my first semester at Boston College: my professor insisted on everyone coming to office hours in order to get to know us better. Thus began my inquisition into my racial identity- I realized that the professor, who had earlier informed me that I was doing extremely well, was so muddled about my origin because I was acing his English class. He probably did not think that this was because I attended an international high school back home. There, race was invisible to me until I began my university studies: race was taken for granted, and everyone accepted everyone else regardless of where they were from, how they spoke, or which peers they associated with. It is here and now in a primarily white setting that I am confronted daily with how my classification as an Asian and a minority shapes my place in society: I view this as an opportunity.

According to Mary Waters in “Optional Ethnicities,” the fact that I “come in close contact with many people who are different from oneself . . . should influence my personality” (Waters, p. 217), as ethnicity is a “social phenomenon, and not a biological one” (Waters, p. 222). Since I have arrived, I have not experienced racism or discrimination, nor do I ever feel oppressed or inferior due to my race; I was not offended when my English professor could not grasp my speaking “without an accent.” I merely passed it off as BC’s lack of diversity. But at the same time, I began to note that being a different race is a big issue on campus: there are numerous clubs dedicated to this cause, the International Club of BC is the main one that I am involved with. All of our social interactions within this group have to do with the fact that we are a “rare specie” and have something unique to share with the rest of the college: to some extent this does make me feel different and a little special. Even at the smallest level that I may be unaware of, the new society that I am in has definitely affected the way I interact and my “personality.”

In Waters’ piece, associating with a certain ethnicity can have benefits, and indeed the culture clubs reinforce this: we in ICBC are viewed as exclusive to foreign students (although we are not). I personally am bonded to the group in the sense that we are all global nomads, and the interactions that take place here are based on learning about the differences of our cultures, and learning to transcend them. The rest of the student population stereotypes that international students only hang out with other international kids. This is sometimes explained as “banding together defensively because of perceived rejection and tension from whites” (Waters, p. 223). I personally do not agree with this statement and feel that there is a different social implication at work. Peggy McIntosh states in her piece “White Privilege” that she can “arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” (McIntosh, p. 293), she explains that for those of other races it becomes a judgment on their deviance from the norm or the “Not-A”(Nancy Jay, 1981) but for whites, it is acceptable. I feel that this view is partially due to their being a majority that it is easier to find peers of your own race, but as international students in a school that lacks diversity, we, too, need a shared background and comfort zone, which for me is the real meaning behind forming such groups: there is a need to conform to feel comfortable. Here, we can conciliate feelings of isolation or disassociation.
Generally, people in society aim to conform to the “normative values that govern behavior” (Merton, 1938): it is part of how humans as meaning making beings navigate all the information in our environment, which is me on a college campus. We try not to breach these norms, and different sets of people have different norms; however, in a new society I must find out what these new norms are on a daily basis in order to be able to project what George Mead calls the “I,” and thus by interacting I create the socialized “me.” At times this can cause conflict, such as how Anthony Walton needed to “learn how to be a black man” (Walton, 200) and created a “double-consciousness” (DuBois, 255). I can relate similarly: there was an instance when I frequented meetings with one of the Asian Caucus groups, and soon I found that I had to act more Asian than I actually am in order to fit into the group’s preexisting norms, and I was expected to associate mainly with members from that group. Later on as I attended less often, some group members were offended and rejected me from their group: there was conflict created as they felt I was “devaluing and denying core identities” (Waters, 223) by branching out of the group’s solidarity. Here, it became ever more evident to me that identities are extremely powerful in societies with so many different divisions, especially those as pronounced as race. These expectations can influence the way I act: this again resounds Mead’s idea of the “generalized other” (Mead, 70) and how others in the community affect the “I” and how we become socialized to act a certain way: Walters’ idea of an influenced personality.

Still again, I at times find myself at the most basic question of who the “I” is: My identity in the United States is much different from my identity in the Philippines: here, I am an Asian and an international student; back home, I am more specifically a Filipino-Chinese. And yet in both countries, people assume I am Asian American or part white (or something else) because my features fit none of the stereotypical looks of each ethnicity. I often look at myself in a mirror and at my sisters and try to place them as well, and observe as inter-ethnic children which sister got which features. Thus I begin to see how different the definitions of a race or ethnicity is on a continental basis, and how the members of a society truly socially construct what defines race, and how I must navigate these stereotypes. It seems that I have developed this “double consciousness” that Walton narrates. I question myself, too, as to how I can consolidate these beings. Perhaps I thus possess many different “me’s” depending on who I am socializing with to see this “me” or this certain side of my identity. Perhaps, too, the “I” changes over time due to my experiences or becoming socialized.

Viewing my everyday activities walking around college can seem nonchalant and commonplace, but really, there is a framework that dictates the way I and we all act for a smooth running of society. Expectations that are constantly formed, projected, and broken down must be met as humans try to make sense of the world, and go about their daily activities. With the matter of racial identities added to the already complex interactions, much learning and responding is transmitted from individual to individual. However, there is a common need for people to keep to the norm; it becomes a question of what exactly the norm is, and how individuals act to maintain and appease this norm. Despite all of these, we are still able to compromise our place in the world today, and form identities that make us us. This is what, I feel, makes humans as social beings incredibly resilient and extraordinary beings.

Shanghai Wonton Recipe
by Chantal Choi

Ingredients:

Ground pork (the fattier the better)
Chopped Bak Choy (big fat ones that have white stems)
Wonton wrapper (you could make it yourself but I buy mine from an Asian market)
Soy sauce
Wine
Sugar
Sesame oil (more wine and sesame oil is preferred)

Instructions:

1. Chop the bak choy and fry it with ginger and a little salt. Let it cool while the pork is marinating in soy sauce, wine, sugar, and sesame oil.

2. After the bak choy is cool, add them into the pork and mix them together. Now we are ready to wrap the wontons.

3. First take a piece of wrapper and scoop a small portion of pork mix in the middle.

4. Using water to wet the four sides of the wrapper and fold it in half.

5. Then flip the longer side up and using your middle finger as the center, curl the two side towards the middle. Then close the wonton with some water. The wontons should look like a gold sycee. (yuanbao)

6. Boil a pot of water and put in the wontons. Give them enough free space to move around. Once the wonton rise to the top and the filling is cooked, they are ready to serve.

7. To make a simple soup, add some soy sauce, sesame oil and scallion into the boiled water.

If you want to keep the wontons, DO NOT cook them first. Once wrapped, put them on a piece of parchment paper and put them in the freezer. This is a great dish for any meal and any occasion.

8. Enjoy :)
The Philippines
A Photodiary by Kayla Margarita Po

Top: Shangri-La Resort in Boracay
Right: Boracay, Philippines
Bottom: Boracay Beach
What has ICBC been up to?

Student Activities Day
Day of the Dead

Co-sponsored by ICBC, along with OLAA and PSBC, the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration in the O’Connell house was a hit this year!
International Prom

On November 5th, ICBC held another successful International Prom. Held in the Yawkey Center’s Murray Function Room, International Prom featured cookies, refreshments, and a great DJ. We are all looking forward to ICBC’s International Prom next year!
Upcoming ICBC Events

November 14th - 18th is International Education Week. Boston College’s on ICBC promoting several events including Global Passport Night and a lecture series!

The week’s events include:

- **International Office Fair**
  Lyons Dining Hall
  11am-3pm Monday, November 14th

  Higgins 310
  4-5:30pm Monday, November 14th

- **Global Passport Night- International Club of Boston College (ICBC)**
  Walsh Function Room
  7-9pm Monday, November 14th

- **Occupy Wall Street Event with Charles Derber and BOCOC (Boston College Occupies Boston)**
  McGuinn 121
  8-9:30pm Tuesday, November 15th

- **“Are All Immigrants Created Equal?” with Peter Skerry and Amnesty International**
  Gasson 300
  7-8:30pm Thursday, November 17th

- **International Trivia Night**
  Lower Dining Hall- Second Floor
  9-11pm Thursday, November 17th

Come to the Lyon's Dining Hall (the “Rat” to learn about exciting international and cultural opportunities available to you on BC campus, in Boston and abroad.

The IEPPE seminar series features speakers from the academic world with experience in policymaking and/or a record of policy-relevant research.

The aim of the event is to promote different cultures around the world, especially those represented at Boston College. We would have different tables for each culture club to represent their different cultures.

ICBC is presenting a talk regarding the Occupy Wall Street movement to discuss its root causes and effects to the country and around the world.

ICBC and Amnesty International are collaborating to present an Immigration Discussion with Professor Skerry.

Nights on the Heights and ICBC are collaborating to present an International Trivia Night!

Interested in international politics, history, or culture? It’s never too late to join the International Club of Boston College! Join our Facebook group, come to any events, and enjoy!
OCCUPY

the movement, their demands, and a forecast of what’s to happen

with Prof. Charles Derber & BC Occupies Boston

Tuesday, November 15
8 - 9:30 pm

Mc Guinn 121
Are All Immigrants Created EQUAL?

Thursday
November 17
7 pm
Gasson 300

Prof. Peter Skerry
Professor of Political Science
and Nonresident Senior Fellow at the
Brookings Institution
One More Unpunished Massacre

On this past July 28th, Yuriana Armendariz and the peace movement she belongs to spoke to Mexico's Congress about the injustices of unpunished crimes and how they keep the country marginalized. Yuriana told the Congressmen about the massacre that had taken place at a small town called Creel in Chihuahua, Mexico. Thirteen people, including Yuriana's only brother, six students, six workers, and an infant were brutally killed by a group of hired assassins. Before the incident took place, the local police had been advised of what was about to happen, but they hid themselves, leaving a free entry for the hired assassins and leaving all the innocent people defenseless.

Two weeks later, the Governor of Chihuahua went to visit Creel. The people of Creel begged for justice, security, and military corps at the entrance of the town. However, there was still no security of any kind to defend the people of Creel. The people, angry and indignant, broke out in a series of protests. Nevertheless, due to the lack of security, one of the protestors and father of one of the students killed at the massacre was assassinated a few days after protesting. This murder remains unpunished to this day.

Yuriana and other people of Creel made an entire investigation of the massacre; they discovered that the man responsible for the planning and the carrying out of the massacre was the state governor's nephew. The results of the judicial investigation were basically useless; only three were arrested, two in process of being sentenced, and one was let free for providing information.

In February, President Calderon went to visit Creel. Unfortunately, he was not only aware of the massacre, but he also refused to listen to the necessity of security of the townspeople. Yuriana and a fellow supporter once again pleaded with President Calderon and told him that they had received threats and escaped attempted attacks. They might as well have not said anything because Yuriana's supporter and the woman's son were assassinated a week later.

Unpunished crimes and massacres are not rare in Mexico. Corrupted government officials are the ones who make these unpunished crimes possible by failing to work for the peace and justice of all Mexicans. The drug war in Mexico continues to generate more and more deaths, and Mexico continues to be deeply hurt by the government's neglect.
The Pyramid of Kukulkán in Chichen Itzá, Yucatan, Mexico. – Natalia Montaño

The Pyramid of Kukulkán is the best-known construction of Chichen Itzá, an ancient Mayan city located on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Chichen Itzá was founded around the 6th century CE and most of its constructions were considered sacred to the Mayan people. Archeologists believe that the Pyramid of Kukulkán was built mainly for astronomical purposes; this is because during the autumn and the spring equinox the pyramid casts the shadow of a snake crawling down the pyramid. The serpent represents one of the Mayan gods, Kukulkán. Chichen Itzá is an UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.
“Equidad y Calidad,” she declared breathlessly: equality and quality. Su, a 24 year-old student at Universidad Alberto Hurtado who near-shouted these words at me as she reached her peroration, is quintessential of the students carrying the widespread protests movement in Chile. She is perturbed by social inequalities, political apathy, and the legacy of the dictatorship. She is looking for change.

My four months living in Santiago, Chile has taken me from dinner tables quietly conversing with stay-at-home mothers to classrooms hosting the fiery deliberations of students and professors. It has even brought me to the streets blanketed with ascetic billows of tear-gas and behind the protest banners amongst the chanting masses. All of this has only acted to further substantiate my first impression that the Chilean student movement is complicated, dynamic, and wholly entangled in the history of the Dictatorship of Pinochet. I will provide a very basic synopsis of the movement partially pulled from my term paper La Institutionalización de la Brecha Educativa Chilena y La Dictatoria: Las Raíces del Movimiento Estudiantil Actual.

To provide a greater historical context, I will briefly go back to the global crisis of the thirties, which we know as the Great Depression. Chile reacted in 1932 by adopting one of the most insolated markets that focused on a planned and protected national economy in lieu of its former liberal market that was based in international trade. By 1952, the planned economy lost its mandate and political tensions between the radical left and the far-right exploded. This eventually led to the “golpe militar” or the military coup d'état of Pinochet over the socialist government of President Allende. Pinochet installed a dictatorship that lasted from 1973 to 1990 marked by human rights abuses. Under the tutelage of the Chicago Boys, a group of influential economists trained at University of Chicago by Milton Friedmen, Pinochet developed a neoliberal economy that is still the underlying philosophic basis of the Chilean state.

Now we come to the current education movement of 2011. This movement signifies the first true challenge to the neoliberal model. Any substantial reorganization of the education system would necessarily include altering the Constitution proposed by Pinochet in 1981 and adopted in the post-dictatorship government (Figueroa-Clark, 2011). This is to say, the Chilean educational system is a manifestation of the neoliberal project. As such, it is not merely educational policies but the fundamental rational of the state that is in question. Unlike the 2006 Revolución de los Pingüinos, a Chilean protest movement for secondary education that ultimately failed, the current protests are experiencing widespread popular support from numerous sectors. This suggests a more profound discontent with the neoliberal legacy of Pinochet; according to the Centro de Estudios Publicos, eighty percent of the population opposes the for-profit education that represents the neoliberal ideals (Bodzin, 2011). As Iranian documentarian Cyrus Omooomian suggests in his Voces de Chile, the widespread discontent and calls for change is integral in the Chilean development of their democracy (Voces de Chile, 2011).
After discussing the historic context and the current significance of the movement, the question remains as to what exactly are the student grievances. In accordance to with the neoliberal model, public funding for education in Chile is one of the lowest level in the world (The Economist, 2011). In 1981, Pinochet eliminated the gratis university program of the socialist Allende to impose a neoliberal privatization of the educational institutions. Furthermore, in 1990, he implemented the Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza (LOCE) that reduced the state to a mere regulator while delegating teaching responsibilities to the public sector (Smink, 2011). Currently, private universities that are for-profit are supposed to provide the majority of university level education.

Yet, student tuition to these expensive universities that are notable for their poor-quality goes straight into the pockets of the proprietors instead of being reinvested into the university and the student’s education itself. Furthermore, it is these same owners that are on the governmental educational boards that have been so resistant to any reform of the for-profit policy. For this reason, political discourse without the pressure from the protest movement is bound to fail. The expensive fees for these for-profit universities drive the students into debt. However, unlike the United States, there is no comprehensive system of subsidised loans or student grants (The Economist, 2011). Need-blind admission simple does not exist. Nevertheless, students from the upper class, or “cuicos” in popular chilean slang, have access to the prestigious tradicional universities that ensure them a good education. This amounts to the institutionalization of the socioeconomic gap: the affluent can attain an education necessary for high-salary positions where as students from low to middle class backgrounds will never get the opportunity. Mario Garcés Durán, direct of the non-governmental ECO Educación y Comunicaciones, labels it as a “system of the reproduction of inequality” (Smink, 2011, Translation: Sam Kent).

There also exists a problem with the secondary educational model. In Chile, there exist three types of secondary education: 45% attend state schools (escuela municipal) that receive 100% funding from the municipality; 50% attend voucher schools (particular subvencionado) that receive governmental subsidies in a voucher system but can still turn a profit; and 5% attend elite private schools (particular pagado) that are funded exclusively through tuition fees (Long, 2011). The problem with the municipal funding paradigm is that “most children go to schools where the quality of education depends on the income of the surrounding areas” (Figueroa-Clark, 2011). It is an indirect way to educate based on class. Thus, once again the neoliberal educational model of Chile acts to maintain the socioeconomic class structure. Without access to the decent schooling of the affluent barrios, a child from the impoverished Cerro Navia community will never experience a decent education. The correlation between municipal schools and performance on the Prueba de Selección Universitaria (PSU), which is the Chilean equivalent to the SAT or ACT, further substantiate the deterministic effect of the municipal educational model. Even to access a voucher school often drives a student into debt before even reaching the university level. Of the 65 countries that are part of the PISA tests, Chile ranks 64th in terms of social class segregation in the educational system (Long, 2011).
For this reason, the Chilean students have taken to the street. Countless high schools and universities are en tomo where the student body have taken over the school and barricaded themselves in using an assortment of desks, chairs, and bookcases. Some schools have been en tomo for over six months. Others have gone en paro where the student body or a department protests classes. During the night, especially prior to or after a large-scale protest, you can here the cacerolazos or clanking pots and pans together to a certain beat. This was a form of protest that was developed during the dictatorship to maintain anonymity that remained in the protest culture of Chile. Another holdover from the dictatorship is the brutal police response to the protests – on August 4th alone, 900 people were arrested (El Dinamo, 2011). Piñet has employed legislation from the Pinochet epoch – la Lay de Seguridad del Estado – to repress these protests (America Economica Internacional, 2011).

Special riot police called tortugas ninjas or the ninja turtles, this name refers to the heavy padding they wear, have acted severely. There are unconfirmed yet selectively accepted rumors of los infiltrados or police-sponsored infiltrators that destroy property to justify harsh police response and delegitimize the students. The police – carabineros is the proper, respectful term but pacos is the common, derogatory word – utilize bombas de lacrimógeno or tear gas canisters excessively. I have even witnessed one officer lobbing a canister over the wall into a university to smoke out some protesters hiding there amongst the students. It is sufficient to say that the protest has taken many forms, several which are uniquely Chilean.
To conclude this brief synopsis, I would like to provide some context to what the future may hold. Personally, I see a connection between the success of the educational movement and the gradual collapse of the neoliberal project and the legacy of limited state access. Currently, the state finances 25% of the educational system (Smink, 2011). Does the state have the resources to provide more assistance? Absolutely. The copper industry, which is the motor of the Chilean economy, is witnessing near unprecedented profits due to the current copper market. Last year alone, the value of copper extracted was enough to give every Chilean about $2 million (Smink, 2011). Yet, 60% of Chileans have the same income as the average Angolan (Smink, 2011). The question comes down to the state division of national resources.

There are three potential outcomes of the student movement: (1) the state maintains control and thus ensures the neoliberal model in the face of this current challenge; (2) the state makes compromises and, in doing so, begins the gradual transformation away from the neoliberal paradigm; (3) the social movement and popular unrest force a more rapid transformation away from the neoliberal paradigm. If the state continues to invest disposable capital into the large army-police force and hard-industry economic development, the protest will move beyond educational reform to a multi-issued popular-based social movement, as occurred in the national strike of August 24th and 25th this year. While Piñet tries to maintain a focus on the good macroeconomic performance of the Chilean economy, he fails to realize that Ben Ali and Mubarak had the same macroeconomic statistics to support them prior to a discontented mass overthrowing them. While seemingly nothing so radical is in the future of Chile, I do believe that the Chilean education movement of 2011 will at least check the excess of the neoliberal model if not initiate the transformation from a strict neoliberal economic system.

by Sam Kent

Alabanza a mi tierra riqueña

de Christian De Los Santos Rodríguez

¿Qué sería de mi Puerto Rico, sin sus raíces tainas y españolas?
¿Qué sería de esta tierra de amapolas, sin el amanecer del café rico?

En las playas las olas retumban dando la alerta de los conquistadores, mientras los indios con sus tambores conquistan a los dioses que alaban.

Soy la patria que me vio nacer en ella, y recogiendo el café de mi tierra, adiario veo un nuevo amanecer.

El sol radiante ya me entierra un fuerte ardor en mi piel canela. Patria mía ya quisiera renacer.

Praising My Homeland

by Christian De Los Santos Rodríguez

What would my Puerto Rico be, without the Taíno and Spanish roots?
What would this land of radiant poppies be, without the exquisite morning coffee?

On the beaches the waves resound signaling the arrival of the conquerors, while the Indians with their drums conquer the gods they worship.

I am the pride of my birth place, and while picking up the coffee of my land, I see the daily sunrise as a new beginning.

The bright sun buries in me a strong, burning sensation on my mestizo, colored skin. My beloved country, I would simply vanish just to be reborn.
La Vie en France
Traditions

In France, when you greet someone you always kiss them on the cheek three times. It does not matter if you know them, are just meeting them or have never even been introduced. There is no obligation to say anything, not even your name, but you absolutely must kiss on the cheek. I always knew it was polite and sometimes even necessary to follow custom, but I never really realized how much people kept to their traditions until I was invited to a French girl's soiree. I had never met the girl, Clem, but had been introduced, over Facebook (as a typical child of the 21st century) by another mutual friend. Determined to take any opportunity to meet new and especially French students, I decided to accept her invitation. As soon as I walked through the door she embraced me with the three customary kisses on the cheek. I assumed since we were girls, had previously communicated and had just met face to face, that was only to be expected. But two more guys who came in right after also came up to kiss my cheek, and five more after. They did not sit down until each and every one of them had kissed me. A few moments later another girl walked in. All the guys that had previously come in were sitting down around a small table in the living room. There were seven guys in total. No way, I thought to myself, no matter what custom dictates, will this girl kiss every single one of these people. But she did, three times. To me, it looked bizarre. Back in the US so much of what we do is driven by comfort, and kissing everyone in the room, three times on the cheek would definitely be a hassle. But here, in Montpellier, customs like these not only still exist, but are alive and will keep going, as the generation of today abides by them consciously.

Traditions seem to sneak up on you in the weirdest ways. I would have never considered bringing a bottle of wine to a dinner party strange, let alone rude. However, when I mentioned my intention of buying wine for Clem's party, my roommate Eva was shocked. Eva, a student at University of Minnesota, has been living in Montpellier for the year, studying as I am at the university here in Montpellier. She has come to know both the French as well as the familiar American customs, and understand how discrepancies can so easily turn into huge cultural gaps. I did not want to bring wine to dinner, she said, because in France that implies that the host (usually the person also preparing and serving the meal) does not have good taste in wine. To an ignorant American like me, bringing wine to a dinner party seemed like a perfectly legitimate idea. And so I decided that this one time I would be different, and instead of trying so hard to fit into the French mold, instead of trying and failing at being French, I would just be myself. So I purchased a bottle of nice red wine and decided that since I was American, and since in America wine is what you brought to a party, it would be my way of embracing the fact that I was, after all, the American at the party that night. I would stand out with or without the wine. Thankfully, the students I met at Clem's were much more typical students than they were typical French. Almost every single one of them brought some sort of drink, and some even brought chips and snacks.

by Iulia Padeanu
The night was an awkward, mellow affair, but I was delighted to be surrounded by a group of people that talked about similar and completely different things than what I was used to. They talked about movies, but movies I had never heard of. They played music, some which was very familiar, and some that was totally unfamiliar. They were loud and happy, much like a group of American students would be. One thing I doubt any of them really understood was exactly how poor my French comprehension was. I don't think it was difficult to understand that my French conversational skills were basic at best, but I definitely think they overrated my ability to understand them, as they fired across the room French slang in a typical southern accent. I spent most of the night speaking to a guy named Emanuel, who had, just four months before, emigrated to France from Reunion, a small island just right of Madagascar. To be fair, he was the one doing most of the talking, I was just struggling to listen and try to understand. It was frustrating to be among people my own age, interesting, fun people, and have absolutely nothing to say, not for lack of interest or ideas, but simply because I had no idea what they were saying, nor really how to contribute to the conversation. There are so many more things I could have asked Emanuel, things he said I probably did not understand, and so many more things he probably would have said if I had anything more than the basic head nod to add to our conversation.

They say that French people are the worst at accepting foreigners, the ones most willing to correct you or ignore you. In some ways it is true, but as with all stereotypes, there are plenty of exceptions to break the rule. During the first few minutes at Clem's apartment I spoke very briefly to the first few guests, in particular two guys who seemed nice but quite shy. They asked me very basic things, among which what my nationality was. It must have been my accent, or maybe my name that gave it away, so I said casually: “Je suis roumanian.” You mean “Roumaine,” one of the guys corrected me sharply. I was not sure what his name was, and I did not speak another word to him the rest of the night, but he did make sure to correct the only word I spoke to him. On many occasions I have felt the glaring eyes and judgmental stares of store clerks, taxi drivers and waiters who seem just simply annoyed with this silly American that has trouble ordering a coffee. However, I have found just as many French people, like Clem, who seem genuinely interested in learning more about foreign students, that are happy to accommodate for my poor language skills and lack of French culture. It has not been easy starting conversations in French, when English comes so much easier, and it has been quite demoralizing having store clerks talk back to me in English as soon as they realize my French is not yet fluent. But it would mean defeat allowing negative attitudes and impatient people to influence my approach to this semester. It is in the American tradition to keep going against all odds, and that is one tradition I am willing to carry on. So I will keep speaking French, even if it is exhausting, embarrassing and sometimes even ridiculous.
France
A Photodiary by Narintosh Luangarth

Top: Espresso
Right: Cathédrale St. André. Bordeaux, France
Bottom: St. Émilion, France
Left: View from the Centre Pompidou. Paris, France.

Top: Versailles. Versailles, France.

Right: View from Château de Beynac. Dordogne, France.
Speculations about the break-up of the European Monetary Union emerged during the height of the 2007 U.S. financial crisis. Initially, the European Union dismissed any need for a coordinated fiscal action or reconstruction because leaders were not convinced that their regions were going to be affected by the crisis. However, when it became evident that the European financial systems were being attacked, the EMU had limited capacity to deal with multiple national bank failures, for the Union did not have a unified fiscal system. More recently, as the EU recovers from this financial crisis, there lies a growing distance between economically stronger and weaker EU countries which threaten the unity of the EMU. In this paper, I aim to discuss some parallels between the EMU and the former Bretton-Woods; their economic goals, strong leadership and concentration of power among a few states. But unlike the latter system, I believe that the EU is strong enough to surpass the threats of dismantling the EMU and its Euro.

The development of a transnational union such as the EU is a phenomenon in itself. One of the unique characteristics of a nation is the primordial bond that gives people their sense of identity, which is strong enough to hold the citizens’ unwavering loyalty and enables them to work for a common economic, political and social goal. Hence, it comes to no surprise that when transnational unions are proposed, they are usually faced with doubt and criticism. Despite previous failed attempts of transnational unionization through the gold standard or the Bretton Woods system, the European Union has emerged successfully and continued to stay strong in the past two decades. Moreover, the success of the EMU and the use of the Euro as a single currency conveyed great coordination and agreement among the member-states.

The EMU was founded on the belief that a single currency can help establish a strong centralized European market with an independent central bank. This can result to low inflation that will increase growth and foreign trade with non-EU countries, and help domestic businesses overall. Similarly, the foundation of the Bretton Woods system can be attributed to the desire of developed countries for economic stability following the Second World War. In order to avoid another international financial crisis and worldwide depression that occurred in the inter-war years, developed countries coordinated to work for a common goal of preserving capitalism through the development of an international system with fixed exchange rates to stabilize international political economy and trade.

The participating countries favored tight regulations on the market to control the value of currency, and eliminate the “beggar-thy-neighbor” policies in the preceding years. Government intervention was necessary to regulate the fixed exchange rates of the different countries, in order to provide an environment conducive to international trade alongside domestic stability. The countries agreed to keep a standard reserve currency and peg their currency to a single unit, which in this case is the U.S. Dollar. The countries accepted the leadership position of the United States because the countries were suffering great economic losses from the World Wars and needed aid to rebuild their domestic economies. The leadership position of the United States gave a strong foundation to the system and provided confidence and security to the other countries because of the country’s strong financial power. Moreover, both the Bretton Woods system and the EU distributed their power among only a few states, which makes the union easier to regulate.
In the EU, it was the leadership of President Nicolas Sarkozy that prevented the spread of the Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008. This highlights the importance of a strong leader amidst any kind of union in order to form a united front. It was also under his leadership during the current financial crisis that initiated talks and action towards possible reforms through a summit in 2008. Initially, the member-states have been hesitant to enact a coordinated action tactic due to the fact that each country will be burdened with other countries’ bank failures. Moreover, the economically stronger countries were still in disbelief about their own banks being affected. It was later on that they agreed to an EU-established aid for the member-states, after most of the countries started to suffer economically.

The cause of the delay of action of the EU was due to the fact that there was a lack of coordination and strong leadership among the members. There were fiscal policy considerations that were overlooked, including those that could have paid great dividends in the future. The leaders failed to see the benefits of coordination because they were focusing too much on the rehabilitation of their own nation’s financial system. Control over their fiscal policy was one of the few things that each nation had left to their own sovereignty and were unwilling to give it up.

Complacency and lack of coordination led to the now financially unstable state of the EU, especially the idleness of the European Commission and the Eurogroup. The break-up of the single monetary currency have been speculated upon, as each nation is fighting to take control of their monetary systems. Stronger states have the incentive to leave the EMU so that they can let go of any responsibility to aid other states in the name of the Euro, and strengthen their national currency. Weaker states also have the incentive to leave the union and fall back to a “beggar-thy-neighbor” policy; they can devalue their currencies to gain competitive advantage in the market. This is the problematic decision the EU member-states are facing towards its proposed referendum to Greece. Conversely, the Greek government is working towards promoting this bail-out to their increasingly aggravated public, who are unwilling to comply with the austerity measures that accompany the referendum.

These are strong ideas to consider, but there are deterrents to leaving the EMU. The initial concern would be the cost of the turnover from the Euro back to the national currency. Also, I believe an even stronger deterrent could be the repercussions from the other members of the union, especially for the smaller states who are vulnerable to soft power measures; the member states can choose to provide barriers to entry against them.

Overall, the idea of a break-up of the Euro is not unfeasible, but greatly impractical. The European Union is strong enough to hold on to the loyalty of its member-states because of their shared history and deep interrelations. Germany can credit much of their post-war success and recovery to the EU, especially France. And although it can be said that the balance of power is shifting from France to Germany, there is solidarity between the two. I also believe that the EU can learn from the financial crisis and work towards strengthening their coordination. Lastly, unlike the Bretton Woods system, the countries are not pegged to the currency of one country, but to a currency as a whole. This does not only bind the countries together economically, but bond them as a region. There is an emergence of European nationalism among most of the EU-countries that would be hard to reverse with a simple policy change.
Greece
A Photodiary by Christina Koutsourades

Discovering Greek roots, Santorini.
Top: Pride in Troubled Times, Athens.

Bottom: On the Edge, Santorini.
The Case for War: Analytical Perspectives of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

The media circus that accompanied the United States deployment to Iraq in 2003 largely obfuscated public perception of the motivation for war. Talk of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and references to the recent tragedy of September 11 made the rationale behind the decision to invade difficult to determine. In an attempt to explain this decision, this essay will explore two main analytical perspectives of International Relations theory – constructivism and liberalism. Some scholars might argue that my conclusions are flawed since I do not consider realism; however, I contend that realist policy prescriptions do not fit with the circumstances of the Iraq War from either the point of view of Waltz’s defensive realism or Mearsheimer’s offensive realism. Since the United States’ engagement in Iraq did little to boost America’s power – relatively or absolutely – one could hardly argue that the Bush administration employed realist thinking. In fact, the mobilization to Iraq served to weaken the state’s military capabilities (and thus weaken both its relative and absolute power) by opening another theater of war outside of the Afghanistan conflict. The oversimplified argument that the desire to acquire oil powered a realist drive to invade simply does not hold water. Liberalism and constructivism offer far clearer insights into the decision to invade, with the constructivist point of view ultimately best explaining the origins of the Iraq conflict. Overall, the decision to go to war originated in normative ideology within the Bush administration, a phenomenon supported by the constructivist model and supported by liberal ideology.

Liberalism is an analytical perspective in which there are various important actors. The liberal point of view holds that individuals, political or societal groups, states, and international institutions all play a crucial role in the international system. It stresses freedom of the individual, and states’ right to sovereignty. Additionally, the liberal point of view does not agree with the narrowly focused balance-of-power doctrine put forth by realist scholars. Walt notes three main branches of liberal thought, one that “argued that economic interdependence would discourage states from using force against each other,” one “more recent theory…that international institutions…could help overcome selfish state behavior,” and one that “saw the spread of democracy as the key to world peace.” The latter branch described by Walt reflects the ideology of republican liberalism, the form of liberal theory that most closely explains the circumstances of the Iraq War. It suggests that democratic institutions reduce uncertainties in the anarchic international system, creating “a special peace among liberal states.” Furthermore, it recommends the promotion of free trade and democracy throughout the world in order to achieve stability.

Republican liberal theory would expect this desire to spread democracy to compel the Bush administration to invade Iraq, and to some extent this represents what actually took place. Long before they reached the White House, key Bush advisers were involved in political organizations dedicated not only to the democratization of the world in general, but also to Iraq specifically. Mazarr notes that, among them, “two of the leading [propositions] were that American power ought to be vigorously asserted to bring order to a potentially disintegrating post-Cold War world, and that Saddam Hussein had to be removed from power.” Vice President Cheney, in particular, held a commitment to a “radical, pro-democracy reorientation of the Middle East.” President Bush personally reflected this commitment as well. In his second inaugural address, he stated “The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies’ defeat,” clearly illustrating the doctrine of republican liberalism. This theory would also expect collaboration between liberal states against the Iraqi regime. The sharing of intelligence between the United States and the United Kingdom reflects this notion. In fact, UK-supplied intelligence on Iraqi WMDs (though ultimately unsupported by evidence of such weapons) provided a key catalyst for public support for the invasion.
Despite the various ways that the liberal point of view sheds light on the causes of the Iraq conflict, it presents an almost self-contradictory value system pertaining to Hussein's regime. Liberalism stresses the fundamental need for individual freedom and self-determination, presenting a clear case for intervention in Iraq – a state in which the dictatorial government showed complete disregard for basic human rights. On the other hand, as Doyle notes, “the basic postulate of liberal international theory holds that states have the right to be free from foreign intervention.” These conflicting motivations make it difficult to analyze the Iraq War solely from a liberal perspective. Additionally, while the example of United States collaboration with the United Kingdom does reflect the cooperation between liberal states that is expected by republican liberalism, the fact that many liberal nations did not support the invasion undermines this point to a great extent. Finally, liberalism does not examine the normative behaviors of individual actors in the United States policy-shaping community. In the case of the highly ideological Bush administration, such an analysis is of crucial importance, further making liberalism an incomplete, albeit helpful, perspective for considering the causes of the Iraq War.

The constructivist model provides a better alternative for understanding the origins of the Iraq conflict. Constructivism is often considered the most intangible of the main analytical perspectives, largely because where realism and liberalism focus primarily on material factors and visible structures, constructivism considers ideas, language, and behavioral norms, which are significantly more difficult to identify. Walt remarks, “Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes.” In constructivist theory, these interests and identities both cause and result from behavioral norms. Katzenstein illustrates how these norms are formed in a socio-political context, writing,

“Self-reflection does not occur in isolation; it is communicated to others. In the process of communication norms can emerge in a variety of ways: spontaneously evolving, as social practice; consciously promoted, as political strategies to further specific interests; deliberately negotiated, as a mechanism for conflict management; or as a combination, mixing these three types. State interests and strategies thus are shaped by a never-ending political process that generates publicly understood standards for action.”

As evidenced by this extract from Katzenstein's work, norms and policies can change and – as socially-driven constructs – are strongly affected by the individuals within the international system. Another important aspect of constructivism is the importance of language to state policy. Weldes notes that national interest “is created as a meaningful object, out of shared meanings through which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood.” In essence, Weldes describes the process through which the use of certain terms, labels, and the implicit understandings behind them shape national interest. A final important aspect of constructivist theory is that it has no policy prescriptions like realism and liberalism; therefore, one thinking from a constructivist point of view could not expect certain actions to take place. It is strongest in retrospection, identifying normative causes that led to given effects. For example, the constructivist scholar might not have expected the Iraq War before it began, but he or she could easily identify the normative development that led to its inception.

Generally, constructivism explains the origins of the Iraq War to a great extent. The Bush administration engaged in a lengthy process of socio-political “norm-creation” leading up to the invasion. First, they tried to associate Hussein with a normative idea of terrorism, utilizing what were at times questionable sources of intelligence. The administration presented a two-fold case: first, that Iraq presented a danger to the international community, and second, that under UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (2002), United States military operations in Iraq were legally justified. The United States argued that the Resolution 1441 perambulatory clause recalling Resolution 678 (1990) permitted military intervention, because it “authorized member states to use all necessary means to uphold and implement its
resolution 660 (1990)…and all relevant resolutions subsequent to resolution 660 (1990) and to restore international peace and security in the area.” This attempt on the part of the Bush administration to gain United Nations support also illustrates normative behavior, for such backing is generally viewed as a prerequisite for military intervention. Even though the UN did not support the invasion, one could still argue that the Bush invasion took place under the administration's conception of normative behavior, based on socio-political constructs within the domestic sphere. Norms had been created within the neoconservative policy community that permitted such a move. Over time, individuals within that community had developed a norm among themselves — that democratization of the Middle East and the removal of Saddam Hussein were an essential aspect of United States foreign policy. Shannon and Keller argue that the personality traits of important individuals in the Bush administration enabled internal norms such as this to supersede international ones. Through a behavioral study, they illustrate how pro-invasion advisers scored highly in distrust, task emphasis, and in-group bias. These traits established a psychological process in which internal norms were considered more important than external ones. When the neo-conservative element came to power, they transmitted this normative concept to the American people. As constructivism would expect, this process relied strongly on the use of particular language. For example, in President Bush's National Security Strategy document, the word “freedom” appears 46 times and “democracy” 12 times. The real issues inherent to discussion of the Iraqi conflict were simplified to this highly politicized and highly palatable diction. The public, still affected by the tragedy of September 11, 2001, was more likely at this time to be swayed by this language — the national interest could be easily defined. This is a clear example of what Mazarr describes as a “policy window.” He remarks,

“Ideas developed within policy communities will generally lie dormant for years, until such time as such a window opens: a crisis occurs; a new president gets elected who is interested in an issue; and a foreign government makes an unprecedented offer. Policy ideas do not migrate into the implementation phase accidentally, but make the trip through such a window of opportunity, when the time is ripe for change.”

For better or worse, the Bush administration took example of this policy window to garner support for war with Iraq, a policy that had been socially-constructed years before. Adoption of this policy and the administration's subsequent communication of it to the American people in highly politicized language both can be well explained by the constructivist model.

Though the constructivism provides more insight to the origins of the Iraq War than republican liberalism, it too is an imperfect perspective. Despite the normative formation among the neoconservatives and their psychological inclination to favor internal norms, one cannot ignore that the Bush administration clearly violated international norms by acting against the decision of the United Nations. Shannon and Keller remark, “Lacking UN approval or credible evidence of imminent danger necessitating immediate preemptive action, the invasion's counternormative nature was evident in the widespread condemnation of statesmen and general publics alike.” They emphasize this violation of normative standards; which, although weakened by the proposition that Bush administration actions were guided by internal norms, still detracts from the efficacy of utilizing the constructivist model to explain the Iraq War; thus, while constructivism does explain the origins of the Iraqi conflict to a great extent, it does not provide an explanation for all aspects of the situation.
I turn now to consideration of the other side of the conflict – Hussein's regime. Unlike the case of the Bush administration, for which there exists extensive documentation and research, the inner workings of Saddam's state remains unclear. Despite this difficulty, constructivism appears to provide the best insight into Hussein's actions which led to the Iraq War. Realism, which would put importance on state survival above all else, does not fit; surely Saddam would have recognized the United States’ overwhelming military advantage and sought more diplomatic methods of preventing conflict. Instead, he chose to provoke the United States by maintaining anti-democratic rhetoric and pressuring UN weapons inspectors. Republican liberalism, of course, does not fit at all because it calls for democratization, something Hussein had no interest in. Constructivism, at first glance, does not seem to adequately consider Saddam's motivations, because there is a clear international norm against the use of chemical weapons (like those used by Iraq against the Kurds in the 1980s) and normative expectations for welcoming UN weapons inspectors. On the other hand, just as the Bush administration had been acting on internal norms, Saddam likely was as well. Describing the foundation of the Ba'ath Party, Hashim notes the importance of its slogan, “Unity, Freedom, and Socialism.” He further notes that these principles “were understood as integrated elements, none of which could be attained without the other two.” Though Hussein would stray from the socialist aspect of Ba'athism, he maintained the other two (though the idea of freedom was reserved for the government, not its people). This sense of pan-Arab unity and state freedom from western interference is, in itself, a norm. It explains why Hussein would be unwilling to cooperate, or at least legitimately pretend to cooperate, with UN inspectors and why he maintained violent anti-American rhetoric before the invasion.

Overall, while I have found the constructivist model to be the most applicable to the circumstances of the Iraq War, I conclude with a caution against reliance on only one analytical perspective. Relying on a single model to explain incredibly diverse circumstances is limiting, if not altogether folly. While the application of models can be useful for understanding the complexities of the international sphere, it can also prevent broader thinking and innovation. In the case of the Iraq War – though I find constructivism more useful than liberalism in explaining its origins – both analytical perspectives explain different aspects of the situation. It is perhaps best to consider these models of international behavior with a degree of hesitancy and open-mindedness so as not to lose sight of important aspects of global problems, because each perspective may have a critical role to play in understanding our highly complex world.

by Christopher Fitzpatrick

The Trans-Atlantic Powerhouse

Stephen Walt asserts that the “American Era” has come to an end. Scholars and reporters are increasingly pointing towards what might prove to be the elephant in the room—perhaps America’s status as what Samuel Huntington deemed in 1999 to be the “lonely superpower” of a unipolar world has since begun to shrink, potentially to the level of a major power in a multipolar world. As China’s economy and subsequently its sphere of influence begin to expand, American influence in the region may face challenges. Same is the story elsewhere as Brazil, Turkey, and India are beginning to grow and enter the global economic radar. This growth abroad comes at a time when the United States is unable to exert monetary assistance nearly comparable to that which we have contributed in the past, e.g. the Marshall Plan of 1948, which has always been instrumental in American soft power.

The tides may slowly be shifting against the US in terms of economic and political dominance, but perhaps the more pertinent question is that which asks where we currently stand with our closest allies. After the United States’ revival of war-torn Europe, creation of a security blanket over European democracy and capitalism throughout the Cold War, continuous promotion of European integration, cultivation of successful cooperation in out-of-area campaigns such as the Gulf War and the Kosovo conflict, and then the entrance of the US into the controversial Global War on Terror largely without European support, where will become of the relationship between the United States and Europe?

Recent history has shown a divergence in the power, threat perception and political values of Europe and the United States. However, as challenges to our common ground arise in the form of the effects of Arab Spring or the Eurozone crisis, the transatlantic relationship may be restored through a joint effort to maintain the influential standing that together the United States and European Union have enjoyed—that is, should the United States rise to the occasion. The EU’s reaction to Libya provided an excellent example of European Union’s ability to pursue an objective, secure the cooperation of the United States, and see success through the utilization of each partner’s strengths. Such an effort on the side of the United States would prove the alliance to be highly effective.

What effect could a stronger transatlantic relationship have on the influential power of the United States, particularly in this changing age of international relations? While American and European interests do not always correspond perfectly, it is certainly in the best interest of each to have the political, economic and information-sharing commitment of the other. As our number one trade partner and ally in the UN and the world, the EU could play a role in the maintenance of US influence so long as American sway continues to be in the best interest of the Europeans. Working at British Consulates has given me an inside look at the British-American relationship and a better idea of where the United States stands with the European Union, and it seems as though there is a genuine desire for concurrence and cooperation in the wake of this turbulent past decade. The ball is in the United States’ court; to maintain its influence, the US must go deeper than the current superficiality of its alleged commitment to diplomacy and bilateralism and strive for a more personal, sincere bond with its longtime, vital European allies.
Turkey
A Photodiary by Omeed Alerasool

Top: Inside the Hagia Sofia.
Top Right: Egyptian Obelisk in the Hippodrome.
Right: The Walls of Constantinople
Vegetarians Beware

How to kill a chicken. That must have been it.
That must have been the lecture my high school teacher gave on the one day I decided to sleep in class because I had stayed up too late the night before going to the midnight showing of James Bond.
I’m sure that if I had stayed awake, I would have been prepared, would have known what to do when I was assigned cooking duty with my friend Richie that late afternoon in an unmapped Tanzanian village. It was getting close to dinnertime. I think the dialogue went something like this:
Me: “What are we making for dinner?”
Richie: “Kuku. Chicken.”
Chicken: “Squawk Squawk.”
Me: “Uhhh?”
Richie: “You want to do it?”
Me: “Yeah, I want to try.”
Richie: “You sure?”
Chicken: “Squawk Squawk.”
Me: “Hamna shida. No problem.”
No problem. Yeah, right.
Richie hands me the knife and shows me how to hold the chicken down. I begin sawing at the chicken’s neck, at which point I realize that the knife is fairly dull and I’m going to be forced to listen to the undesirable noises that a chicken makes in its death throes for a long time. I continue cutting until the noises stop.
“Okay?” I ask Richie.
“Okay.”
Not okay. The chicken is not dead, and as soon as I release my grip on it, it begins to run around. Being unfamiliar with what to do in this situation, I stand in shock as my jeans continue to be splattered with chicken blood. On the other hand, Richie, a Tanzanian, knows exactly what to do: catch the chicken and finish the job, which he does with ease.
This anecdote proves three points. First, I have a tendency to grossly overestimate my own abilities. Second, I’m pretty good at making a fool of myself. And third, some of the most important things in life cannot be learned in the classroom. Killing a chicken may not be the most applicable example, but other subtle yet essential skills, such as how to tie a tie, ride a bike, or drive a car, can only be learned through experience. Only by getting out and exploring can we learn what the world is actually like and what part we want to play in it. It is impossible to learn truly new things if we never leave our city, state, or country and expose ourselves to different peoples, cultures, and ideas.
In fact, the ability to quickly grasp new concepts may be the most important skill of all. Think about all the people who graduated from college only 10 years ago. Who could have predicted Sept. 11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a global economic recession? How many graduates could have known that designing applications for the yet-to-be-created iPhone would be a way to make a living? What kind of abilities will we need to survive in the real world 10 or 20 years from today? It is impossible to know for sure.
All that we can do is learn as much as we can, not only by engaging in the classroom but also by humbly venturing into unfamiliar territory and taking our best shot at understanding the newness that surrounds us. And that can only be achieved by asking questions and keeping an open mind to the vastness that is our wonderful planet. You may never have to slaughter a chicken for dinner, but you can never know for sure what life has in store for you.
Photos and written submission by Karl Lockhart
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