Dear Readers,

As our committee struggled with this year’s wide array of submissions, a revelation occurred. There was no logical cohesion between pieces save one; they were all about the world we live in. Naturally, a grouping centered on “the world” is a broad concept, one that is impossible to fit into our concise 24-page format. Thus, the intellectual quagmire continued as our committee fought to condense the world into three reader-friendly headings without losing the diversity that these pieces presented. What we came up with is a concise portrayal of Washington University students and their experiences with the global community in the classroom, out of the classroom and in their daily lives.

This year’s issue of The Summit focuses on three ways to partake in the world: Live, Look, Learn. The “Live” aspect comes from the experiences of study abroad and the messages our peers send back to our community. Although very brief, the “Look” portion provides us with a unique viewpoint, a shot of a once in a lifetime experience or a glimpse of a landscape, building, or festival that gave us pause. This is an opportunity to observe what our peers have witnessed. Finally, the “Learn” section is the culmination of our magazine. It directly links to the philosophy of our IAS honorary- we must apply what we learn at Washington University to what we experience. This section demonstrates the high-caliber writing and analysis that our students use to relate a lesson in a lecture or discussion to an interaction outside of the classroom walls. This work comes from the minds of our students who have lived in, looked at and above all learned from the World. We present their views to you with great pride and sincerely hope you enjoy the Spring 2011 issue of the Summit.

Sincerely,

Liz Hay
Editor
Table of Contents

Spring 2011: The World

Live
Teeth of the Gods 4
The Little Things 7
Midnight Musings 8
Hunting and Gathering for a Better way of Life 10

Look
Images of Unrest in Greece and Egypt 12

Learn
Time Keeps On Slippin’ 14
Sri Lanka 17
The Effects of Sovereignty Discourse on Policy 19
Outcomes 19
A New Way to Think about Charity 21
Observations about Microfinancing 22

The opinions expressed in The Summit represent the views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Washington University in St. Louis, the International and Area Studies Program, Sigma Iota Rho Honorary Society, or the editorial staff. Inquiries, comments, and corrections may be submitted to SIRthesummit@gmail.com.
Teeth of the Gods
What happens when religion and rock climbing mix atop a Guatemalan volcano?

By Nadav Rindler

A thousand feet above the ground, vultures twist on thermal currents. The birds wheel in unison and peer down at the valley floor. Below them lies the Llano del Pinal valley; a patchwork quilt of farms. The fincas, farms, claw up impossibly steep mountainsides and etch terraced fields into the slopes.

The triple peaks of Cerro Quemado frame the western sky. Cerro Quemado, Burnt Hill, is an imposing 3,200 meter tall volcanic dome. It is said that the volcano once stood at over 6,000 meters. A magnificent eruption blew away the entire eastern face and sent viscous lava flows cascading towards Llano del Pinal. Today, more than a mile of jagged, broken, and blank rock end abruptly in a row of cliffs.

I stand below these cliffs and from my perch I am level with the vultures. Below me the ground drops away to the valley, and behind me I feel the looming presence of the mountain. In the distance, I can barely make out the urban sprawl of Quetzaltenango from behind the Cerro Quemado’s eastern flank.

“Falling!” I turn just in time to see Anthony lose his grip on an overhanging rock face and drop towards the earth. He is attached to a rope that catches his fall in a gentle arc. Lost in the beauty of our surroundings, I remember too late that I am tied to the other end of the rope. Anthony’s weight yanks me up and swings me into the cliff with a smack.

I landed in Guatemala with an old Army surplus duffel tied shut with a piece of rope. Inside the bag was climbing gear, Tums (“The water will make you sick!”), gummy bears (to remind me of home), and a copy of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. By the end of the first week the candy was gone and I had resorted to eating Tums for the sugar. The book had been read so many times that the edges were getting tattered. The climbing gear, however, was yet to be used.

From “Guate,” as the capital is lovingly called, I made my way to my first stop Antigua, Guatemala’s tourist enclave. The journey was short but incredibly dangerous. American school buses, retooled and painted gaudy colors, take blind hairpin turns on two wheels. I was too scared to even have time to be sick.

After a brief stay in Antigua, during which I celebrated surviving the journey with a few fellow foreigners, I departed for my final destination: Quetzaltenango.

The rope slides smoothly through my hand as I clip it into a carabineer set sixty feet above the ground. I am on a single pitch slab route, balancing delicately on a narrow ledge. The face is smooth but the rock sharp, cutting through callused hands. The cliff is rent by a vertical crack, like a lightning bolt, that is visible all...
Quetzaltenango, or Xela (SHEY-la) as it is more commonly called, is Guatemala’s second largest city. Big industry and bustling markets jockey for space with a quarter-million inhabitants and more than a few chickens. Xela is my home in Guatemala and the base of Quetzal Trekkers, a non-profit organization. Anthony and I are guides and today we are leading clients on a day of rock climbing.

Our destination is La Muela, The Molar. True to the name, from below the cliffs appear as a jagged set of teeth on the horizon. But La Muela is more than just a hub for rock climbing – it is a sacred place. Hundreds of Guatemalan tourists flock from across the highlands to descend on the lava field and cast their prayers into the void.

To come to La Muela is to seek solace in that marginal place between civilization and God. La Muela is Guatemala’s Mount Sinai, a place of revelation. Pilgrims to La Muela seek to transcend the limits of human mortality, whether by defying gravity on a cliff or through the reflection of prayer. Devout Guatemalans and rock climbers alike are drawn to La Muela for its spirituality and the stark, harsh beauty of the landscape.

“Buenos Dias, buenos días,” chorus a crowd of worshippers as they file past us. The women wear traditional clothing: red hand-woven skirts embroidered with intricate designs. They have come a long way across the highlands to pray here, “four hours from Chichi [Chichicastenango],” they say.

“Watsch ikhhh,” how are you, I reply, drawing out the guttural sound as I invoke one of a handful of phrases I’ve picked up in Quiché, the regional Mayan dialect. My feeble attempts never fail to elicit a round of laughs; whether from my horrible pronunciation or the surprise of hearing a gringo speak Quiché, I will never know. In this part of the highlands Quiché is the dominant language, with almost a million native speakers. Spanish comes in a distant second place. In many more remote areas, the language of the conquistadors is barely spoken.

The Guatemalans stop to watch Anthony climb. The men and women crane their necks to the sky, their faces wrought by shock and amazement at the sight of him so high up. One man with a gold tooth films with a cell phone camera. Two teenagers approach me and I let them feel the rope. Under their traditional woven jackets the boys wear t-shirts commemorating Michael Jackson and Metallica. They laugh and tell me that the rope would never hold.

As if to prove them wrong, Anthony whoops and plummets towards the ground. The crowd gasps in fear but, seeing Anthony and I laugh, they are put at ease. “Just putting on a show, hey?” asks one of our clients.

Rock climbing is a completely foreign concept to the worshippers, and a controversial one at that. They naturally object to the thought of entrusting one’s life to a skinny rope and a few metal trinkets set haphazardly into rock. Their shock and disbelief reminds me that rock clim-
ing is inherently quixotic and my trust in technology unnerving.

In many ways, the prayer groups are equally foreign to me. I find the religious practices both strange and fascinating. For instance, exorcisms are not uncommon at La Muela. I reflect on my own demons as I listen to a priest call forth the Devil from a woman’s trembling body. It is a humbling experience.

In this reverent country, religious practices are a constant source of intrigue. The main religious denominations are Evangelical Christian, Catholic, and Mayan. Though after months in Guatemala, I am still unable to discern where the Christian rites end and the Mayan traditions start. The jumble of religions reflects larger forces at play contemporary Guatemalan culture.

Guatemalan culture is difficult to define. Guatemala is a nation divided – economically, socially, and politically. The divide manifests in a million little ways. Farmers dress like American cowboys, organic coffee growers drink Nescafé, cell phone towers serve villages that are not accessible by paved roads. The list goes on.

A narrative of oppression and resistance runs strong, particularly in indigenous areas. Guatemala suffered four hundred years of Spanish colonial oppression followed by a divisive thirty-six year civil war. The enduring Mayan culture, religion, and languages are a testament to resistance to cultural imperialism and an overwhelming force of violence.

On the other hand, globalization and the accompanying Westernization are not unequivocally bad. Technology brings cell phone access to even the most remote areas and better healthcare to the cities. The fact that farmers dress like American cowboys is illusory; it does not reflect cultural imperialism, but instead an example of people appropriating a foreign style and in doing so creating something new and different.

La Muela highlights the ongoing process of defining Guatemala in the 21st century. The syncretism of religious practices, hybrid Spanish-Quiché, and combination of traditional and Western clothing are but a few examples. In this way, La Muela serves as a microcosm of Guatemala.

Some might see Guatemala as a country of contradictions, but to me it all makes sense. It makes sense just like rock climbing makes sense. The land is beautiful, the people laugh and give thanks, and the rock is there just waiting to be climbed.

Night falls. Having made the pilgrimage to La Muela, neither the climbers nor the worshippers are ready to take their leave. We set up our tents at the base of the cliffs, fifty meters above shanties set up by church congregations. Though it is too dark to climb, it is never too dark to pray. I lie down to enjoy the star-studded sky, but my reverie is broken by the electric hum of feedback. A church congregation sets up speakers and an electric piano for their vigil. Song and instrumental music fill the cool evening air.

It’s going to be a long night.

Nadav spent three months in Guatemala in 2009, volunteering for a sustainable ecotourism nonprofit called Quetzal Trekkers.
The Little Things

By Elizabeth Morrow

Sometimes we forget the subtle aspects of our culture, and it is only when we become the foreigner do we finally acknowledge the beauty of these differences.

Ever since I arrived in Toulouse, France almost a month ago I’ve realized one major thing that no Washington University in St. Louis study abroad preparatory class could ever teach me – it’s the little things that count. Life in Toulouse, as I am sure is the case in every other foreign city, is filled with nuances – a subtle gesture, an unspoken exchange, a purposeful glance. These small, seemingly unnoticeable actions are the driving force for how people live, move, and interact in France and are present in almost every setting – at home, school, and on the street.

A couple weeks ago, while I was on the metro, I noticed that when people ride the escalators here they naturally stand to the right to allow space for others to pass on the left. There are no signs indicating this rule, no markings on the escalators stating this policy – it is just engrained in the minds of the French. In American airports, there exists a similar courtesy when using a moving sidewalk – those who choose to stand must stay to the right side while those who choose to walk may use the left side. However, in the United States, this rule is always clearly and explicitly marked on the moving sidewalk itself with a bold white stripe down the middle of the walkway. In addition, painted on the left side of the walkway is a sign that reads “Walk,” and on the left side, “Stand.” Realizing that this common courtesy existed in Toulouse was an eye-opening experience for me because it is these small, effortless habits that are the most important things for me to learn during my time here. Because although you can read all about a country’s food, history, and politics from the comfort of your own home, you cannot truly understand a culture until you understand what makes it tick. And in France, it is these small implicit actions that maintain cordiality and peace between strangers and ultimately keep the fabric of French culture together.

Elizabeth studied in France in the fall of 2010.
Well hello again friends!

It has been at least two weeks since I assaulted you with information so it is clearly time to do it again. In the time since we last exchanged news of our worlds (a phenomenon that actually only happens when people write back to these emails hint hint) I have started classes, gotten ridiculously lost while going through ice cream deprivation, participated in La Noche en Blanco and eaten a gluttonous amount of churros.

Let’s begin with classes because I want to remind you that I am here strictly for academic purposes. I am taking Spanish Civilization, Spanish Language, Spanish Literature, Spanish History and a course on Spanish Journalism. All classes are in Spanish and the Spanish Journalism class is taught with the real Spaniards. Thus far, I have had to read a story, buy a newspaper and fake till I make it as a real Spaniard. The first two tasks were easily accomplished which left the third and most troublesome.

Fortunately, I have only been asked really simple things. Where is the other part of campus? How do I get to the train? No worries, I got you on that Spain. I did have a lovely time on the train the other day conducting a random conversation with a freshman at Carlos III, my school. She was completely baffled by the train system. I, being the elder and a Spanish public transport expert, offered her my wisdom. We ended up chatting about the differences between Spanish and American education for a half hour until I showed her to her next metrostop. Or at least what I think was her next metro….We parted with besitos (the typical Spanish custom of kissing the air at the side of a person’s cheeks that is a fundamental part of friendship).

Now, as already noted, I am an expert in finding my way around this city--sometimes. On two separate occasions in the past five days, I have ended up taking two-hour jaunts around the city, once to find a discoteca and once to find a cine. Epic fail on both accounts. I am not going to say that I didn’t enjoy myself (it’s impossible not to walking around this city!) but I also learned a few important facts about Madrid that I would like to now share with the world. Fact one: you cannot find ice cream after 2am in central Madrid. Fact two: if you see rather squalid looking vendor on a street corner they are trying to sell you beer out of backpack. Fact three: men apparently cannot find restrooms after 3am here but they make do. I’ll leave that to your imagination. Just know that my counts of this happening are up to seven. This is what I would call the seedy underbelly of Madrid, mostly because you can’t find ice cream after two. Shame on you Spain.

On the other hand, Madrid is awesome! If you haven’t heard of Noche en Blanco let me explain and please note that I am literally smiling as I write this. Noche en Blanco is a night of free entertainment that encompasses the whole city. On every corner there is a concert, or a photo exhibition, or live art, or a massive beach ball fight, or a dance. You get the idea. I left my house
at 11pm and did not return until 8am. My night began with a concert in Plaza España and the sultry tones of Depedro, a Spanish band that I will now proceed to be obsessed with. To get to the concert, we proceeded down a grass covered hill. Though almost all the other women doing this were wearing ridiculous heels I was the only one to fall halfway down the hill. Plus side? I got to the concert first! Were we in the front row swaying and singing (like we knew the words) with the rest of Depedro’s most loyal fans? YES. There was one song of his about the wind where the entire crowd threw up their arms and acted as if a huge wind was whooshing amongst us.

Our next stop was Gran Vía, a historic and now very touristy street close to the city center of Madrid. On this night, Gran Via is closed to cars so HORDES of people come to Gran Via to walk in the middle of the street and take obnoxious photos of themselves under traffic lights. You can see mine proudly displayed on facebook. Midway through our wanderings on Gran Via whistles began to blare and sirens went off. In a complete relapse into the American mindset, I immediately attempted to vacate the street (the typical Spanish response is to walk slower). However, my fear proved unjustified as moments later 200+ skateboards flew down the street and whizzed amongst the enchanted crowd. I was particularly gratified to see someone besides myself fall down! This moment was a cross-cultural collision for me (thankfully not in the literal sense). I found myself immersed, surrounded by Spanish culture and not feeling in the slightest bit isolated. It struck me as odd that I didn’t feel like a foreigner. I felt like a participant. It wasn’t that I was a Spaniard, it was more like I was part of a delighted community all joined by the joy of the night’s activities and the thrill of being part of something bigger than ourselves.

After a brief vasito (not alcohol but rather cheesecake and brownies) at VIPS (think Ihop) we returned to my friend’s home for a brief recovery period. At 6am we were off again! This time it was for churros at San Gines and the sunrise at Palacio real. This was the ideal end to a beautiful night/day.

Hasta pronto mis amigos,
Sara

Sara studied in Madrid, Spain in the Fall of 2010.

Photo by Colleen Yard/Galicia, Spain
Hunting and Gathering for a Better Way of Life

By Aaron Lesser

About a week ago I asked myself, what do I know about hunter-gatherers?

Well, they hunt and gather for their food. They live difficult lives. The whole day is spent searching for nuts and berries or hunting. They live primitive lives. There is very little time or energy spent on leisure or enjoyment. Their lives are short, nasty, and brutish. Small changes in the weather can have a drastic effect on them—the smallest drought can wipe out entire populations. They only survive by rejecting every aspect of the cultures that surround them.

Except for the first sentence, the above paragraph is entirely false.

We just returned from spending a week with the Hadza, traditional hunter-gatherers living in the Yaeda Valley of Tanzania. They shattered every conception I had of the hunting and gathering lifestyle, and the only reason I’m not seriously considering dropping everything and going to live with them is that I’m pretty bad at most of the skills necessary to survival in Hadzaland.

The Hadza diet consists mainly of roots. They are rich in nutrients and actually taste pretty good. Hadza women do all the gathering, and they can get enough food to provide enough nutrients for themselves and the men in about three hours of gathering. You might think it’s unfair for women to do the gathering, but the Hadza have a completely egalitarian society. Traditional gender roles evolved in our society because a long time ago men were able to control wealth and make women dependent. In Hadza society, women provide men with the nutrients they need to survive. They are consulted equally in every major decision the group makes and whenever the men kill an animal they give the women an equal amount of its meat. The egalitarianism extends past gender lines; even the weaker members of the group who are unable to hunt are given meat and consulted in decisions that affect the group.

We had the opportunity to go on a hunt with some Hadza men. Because meat is supplementary to their diet, much to our disappointment, there was no urgency on the hunt. In fact, it was almost like a recreational activity. The men were relaxed and joked with each other as they collected honey. They have a special axe that is only used for collecting honey. The honey in Yaeda Valley is highly prized for its medicinal properties, and the Hadza are the only ones who harvest it. If the honey is so valuable, you might wonder why they Hadza are the only ones who collect it. I did as well until I saw the process.

The hives are located within hollowed out trees, and their only outward sign is a tube a few millimeters in diameter that the bees use to get in and out of the inside of the tree. When the Hadza spot a hive they build a fire using two sticks. Then they use the axe to cut a hole in the tree just beneath the hive. Then they insert a smoking stick into the hole. The smoke disorients/angers the bees and they buzz around the tree angrily. Then the Hadza will reach into the tree and pull out recently vacated pieces of honeycomb. Needless to say, they are usually stung several times, but they don’t care. At one point a local non-Hadza man watched them collect honey and he had the same shocked expression on his face as we did. The honey is sweeter than anything you’ve ever tasted. They told me they eat as much as 20 pounds of honey a week.

Since independence in 1964, Tanzania has experienced many droughts. Every group of people has known hunger and starvation except the Hadza. They use their land sustainably. When they harvest roots they don’t kill the tree, when they kill an animal, they don’t wipe out the whole population, when they take honey, they don’t
destroy the hive. Their land looks pretty much the same as it did 100,000 years ago, and if they can keep living there, it will look the same 100,000 years from now.

Since independence, however, the Hadza have lost 90% of their land. Because they don’t contribute anything to the economic development of Tanzania they get almost no protection from the government. The encroachment on their land has slowed in recent years due to efforts by foreign organizations. Despite all this, they’re not scared of outside influence. They just don’t have the same need to constantly progress that we have. They readily accepted gifts like liters and nails they could pound into arrowheads, but they would laugh if you tried to give them a mirror or a calendar.

I guess what I’m trying to say is that there are things we can learn from people like the Hadza. It seems as though some of the most important problems of the modern world are non-existent in Yaeda Valley. Even though I have only been here for a week, I feel like my perceptions of this culture are greatly changing through my adventures with them. They have gender equality, freedom from hunger, and sustainability. Goodbye class struggles, starvation, and global warming. Just something to think about.

Aaron is currently studying in Kenya with the St. Lawrence program.
Images of Unrest in Greece and Egypt

The first half of 2011 saw a revolutionary spirit sweep across the Middle East and North Africa, and the change currently unfolding there serves as a testament to the power of everyday citizens to shape their future. The beauty of such human agency is evident in the following photographs from both Greece--the birthplace of democracy--and Egypt--the site of January’s Jasmine Revolution.

Left, Graffiti on the Polytechnio, the national university in Athens. The text, which reads “Resist,” commemorates a boy who died in 2008 in an annual protest marking the anniversary of the 1973 student strikes against the state’s military regime. Above, such past violent conflict is juxtaposed with more recent peaceful protests during the final days of Kostas Karamanlis’ presidency in November, 2009.

Photos by Olivia Hassan/Athens, Greece
Taken in the midst of internet shutdowns and the removal of foreign press, these images of Alexandria serve as rare glimpses into the censored sphere of Egyptian expression during the recent Jasmine Revolution. Riots began on January 25th, 2011, as people inspired by events in Tunisia took to the streets to protest poverty, corruption, unemployment, and the autocratic government of President Hosni Mubarak.
Time Keeps On Slippin’:
Memory, Narrative and Aesthetics in
Chungking Express and A City of Sadness

By Nick Dalke

The post-socialist era of late twentieth century China gave rise to a new form of cinema. The submission of the cinema to the state propaganda machine in the mainland evaporated, and so too did the Taiwanese reactions to such propaganda, such as the genre known as “healthy realism.” Two films in particular exemplify the new subservience directors began to take to the formal traits celluloid itself. In A City of Sadness (Taiwan, 1989), Hou Hsiao-hsien uses his newfound freedom of expression as well as the formal qualities of editing and mise-en-scene to tear away at the myth surrounding the KMT massacre of February 28, 1947 (a.k.a, the “228 incident”) and construct a memory of that massacre from the point of view of the populace. In contrast, Wong Kar-wai’s Chungking Express (Hong Kong, 1994) uses these same elements to demonstrate the protean nature of Hong Kong’s identity and its anxiety towards the expiration date of its return to China in 1997.

A City of Sadness embeds the effects of the 228 incident straight into the stylistic qualities of the film through the use of editing and its infamous elliptical narrative. Elliptical narratives are hard to demonstrate with a shot analysis because by definition if you ellipse something it’s not there, but the complement to this is Hou Hsia-hsien’s use of the long take. One shot in particular is emblematic of his cinematic reflection on violence. This is the long take where the characters Wen-ching and Hinomi sit in front of the record player listening to Lorelei in a medium shot that lasts over a minute. They sit directly across the room from where their friends, Taiwanese intellectuals, are discussing the abusive actions of KMT troops on the island and the likely continued ravaging of Taiwan at their hands.

Yet the two lovers write each other notes as if they are both deaf to the obvious threat that surrounds them and hear only the sweet sounds that serenade them.

Huo uses the long take here to compare the images of violence, those A City of Sadness ellipses through, to the continuity of the peace of everyday life that such violence disrupts. This tranquil shot provides a contrast to the threat being discussed by giving us two characters who are about to be in love, probably falling in love as we watch them now, listening to the soft melodic tones of that peaceful Rhineland. Additionally, the length of this shot lulls the viewer into a sense of comfort in this image of tranquility and creates hope that this sort of domestic serenity will continue. Huo Hsiao-hsien’s point in creating this contrast, however, is that it will not. Every man in the room will be dead by the end of the film.

But we will not see their deaths. The thematic decision to ellipse over the majority of violence in A City of Sadness is a result of the historical context in which this film and indeed all of the Taiwanese New Cinema was produced. As Yueh Yu Yeh and Darrell Davis point out in their chapter “Navigating the House of Yang,” for decades the Taiwanese KMT government had forcibly suppressed the memory of the massacre and it was A City of Sadness that finally “threw the door open to reflections on the dark areas of Taiwan history that had been officially out-of-bounds during martial law,” (Yeh and Davis, 93). As a result of this suppression, the first open attempt to remember the event forty-two years later first had to reconstruct it through the many holes and fragmented spots
in the nation’s collective memory. Holes that are symbolically present in the film in the form of what it leaves out, of ellipses.

The main difference between A City of Sadness and Chungking Express is that while A City of Sadness deals with the past and is trying to imagine an uncertain past, Chungking is an expression of anxiety over an uncertain future in the face of a rapid change of pace in everyday Hong Kong life. The time-image of Wong Kar-wai’s film is the result of this elusory identity.

Nothing captures the time-image better than Chungking Express’ opening sequence, more specifically, the shots where Cop 223 runs into the unknown blonde-wigged woman (played by Brigitte Lin). In a tightly framed medium shot delivered via handheld camera Cop 223 runs through a crowded Hong Kong market and elbows his way straight through the woman. The camera is also running in this shot but in the opposite direction, straight towards 223 and trapping the woman between the camera and the policeman. The instant 223 makes physical contact with her, we cut to a clock on a wall that instantly changes from 8:59 to 9:00 on Friday, April 28th. The next shot cuts back to the completion of the physical interaction, shown in slower motion than before, and adds the voice over “This was the closest we ever got. Just 0.01 of a centimeter between us.” All of this takes place set to an atonal, dissonant, repetitive soundtrack.

The speed, timing and incomprehensibility of these images combine to form what is called “chrono-space,” (Tong, 48). The physical image of the film in these shots is built to reflect the rapid passage of time (hence, time-image). The quick editing and handheld camera combine to make Cop 223 sprint against a blurred background that only gets more and more blurry as we try to look at it and take it in, the entire point being that we never can. This background is literally the changing landscape of Hong Kong, a place modernizing at such a pace that Wong Kar-wai occasionally couldn’t even expect to always find the same shop in the same location twice when he went back to shoot his film. What’s more, Cop 223 and the Blonde woman are not out of focus themselves. Wong’s image allows us to see the same period of time happening at two different speeds; for Wong Kar-wai, time is as subjective as one’s relationships and this is shown through his use of new wave editing, on-location realism, and narrative dissonance. The mise-en-scene here also calls out time as a governing force of human interaction. We see the clock strike 9:00pm to mark an event neither we nor 223 have any idea of the grander significance of, and wouldn’t except for the voice over.

A City of Sadness uses mise-en-scene quite differently. Rather than sewing temporal connections between characters, the physical distance of the camera is employed to achieve a distanciation from them. The attack of the gangster A-ga by cronies of his former henchmen turned murder-victim “Red Monkey” in the mountains of Taiwan shows how and why Huo strategically uses the distance between his camera and its subjects.

This shot, set in the quiet mountains of Taiwan, begins with a man standing idly on a road. As A-ga’s carriage approaches, this man walks towards it and he takes his time, a machete hidden behind his back. As he gets there and runs at the carriage, more men rush at A-ga whose bodyguards counter-attack, and the scuffle goes from the beaten path into the bushes on the left of the frame. All of this takes place in the same stationary long shot seen from where the first attacker was originally waiting.

A-ga’s attacker begins this shot by walking away from the camera; he takes a while to do so yet the camera makes no attempt to follow him. The staging here tells us that the violence occurs away from the viewers in this film. Accordingly, we don’t even follow them when they take their scuffle into the bushes. It’s not for us to witness because it’s not the most important aspect of this sequence, as shown by the next shot that cuts out and gives us a panorama of the mountains, diminishing the significance of the violence on screen by making it physically smaller. This isn’t to say the violence is unimportant, but rather the cut out is done to historicize the violence against the backdrop of the island and Taiwanese life. To suggest that it will be forever in this land now that it has occurred. This distance focuses the viewer’s attention away from the visceral effects of violence and instead refocuses us on its consequences for the identity of the nation that will have to go on living with the suffering of KMT genocide.

Through such displacement of the camera and numerous ellipses A City Of Sadness raises the question of how the Taiwanese are to incorporate
Learn

an event no one has full knowledge of into their collective memory. The 228 incident was something the Taiwanese encountered and lived through, not something they immediately understood. Only by looking back after the fact at a violent massacre could they hope to make coherent sense of out its events and answer the question, “why?” Why us, why now, why machine gun people in the streets?” A City of Sadness posits that there really is no logical, causal answer to this “why” and consequently there is also a lack of cause-effect relationships between images in the film.

The mise-en-scène in Chungking Express is also integrally connected to the historical moment that gave rise to the film and the rest of the Second Hong Kong New Wave movement. Wong Kar-wai’s particular incarnation of the movement obsesses over the countdown to being handed back to China and this is reflected in the copious shots of clocks, expiration dates, girlfriends, would-be girlfriends, and spinning CD’s. As the date approached, people in Hong Kong started to wonder as to what would stay or leave from their lives after Hong Kong became Chinese again. Chungking Express raises the question, what were they going to miss?

Wong Kar-wai doesn’t definitively answer this, however one shot in the film teases the viewer about the possibilities of something valuable passing unnoticed right before their eyes. As viewers of the film will know, Chungking Express is divided into two stories, the first is the deadline Cop 223 sets for when he will forget about the girlfriend who just left him and move on with his life. The second is Cop 663’s inability to get over his. The following shot is presented to us in the first story, within the first twenty minutes of the film. This shot is a long shot from across the street as Brigitte Lin (disguised as always) stands in front of a colorful glass fronted shop full of Western consumer goods like coca-cola and stuffed toys. A man passes in front of the cam-era, then a car, and then Faye Wong, who we will not meet until the second story, comes walking out of the store holding a giant Garfield. She then exits frame left.

Wong Kar-wai is toying with the nature of disappearance in this shot. How something can be right in front of our eyes without us ever seeing it.

In “Wong Kar-wai: Hong Kong Filmmaker” Akbar Abbas argues just this and calls it “deja disparu,” saying “that which is merely seen is hard to see,” (Abbas, 48). That which is hard to see in 1994 and is about to disappear is the modern manifestation of Hong Kong itself. Faye Wong and her giant Garfield are a visual metaphor for the images of a culture of consumption and commercialization that are so ubiquitous in Hong Kong as to not be worth noticing for the moment, but may be on the eve of disappearing from Hong Kong’s very sight.

A City of Sadness and Chungking Express are two cinematic representations of the New Cinema in Taiwan and the New Wave Cinema of Hong Kong that are thematically and aesthetically classifiable as post-modern. Both stories present fragmented, non-linear narratives that are cinematic perspectives never seen before in Chinese Cinemas. Compared to the earlier movements of Chinese Cinema and the litany of realisms that preceded them, both forms of New Cinemas constitute a massive divergence from the didacticism and un inventive forms that characterized the preceding century of Chinese film.
Sri Lanka:
A New Opportunity in South Asia

By Sam Taffer

The increased economic and strategic importance of the Indian Ocean, as described by Robert D. Kaplan, is no longer mere speculation ("The Revenge of Geography," Foreign Policy May/June 2009). Several nations have realized the growing significance of the region, pouring investments into South Asian countries for a piece of the pie. China, in its continuing quest to establish economic influence throughout the region and the world, has established relations with Sri Lanka, an island which could provide China with a dominant position in the Indian Ocean. As stability is slowly restored to a war-torn Sri Lanka, the world must ask itself a new question: what role will a Chinese-Sri Lankan partnership play in the future of South Asia?

In an interview regarding the future of Chinese-Sri Lankan relations, Kaplan spoke of the geographic importance of Sri Lanka’s location in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka has direct control of the primary sea lane between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal and can serve as a shipping port for trade between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Without a direct landline to the Indian Ocean, China has sought to expand its influence around Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. In an effort to gain further control of the region, the Chinese have been heavily invested in the development of a canal through the Isthmus of Kra in Thailand. Sri Lanka’s position on the exact latitude of the proposed canal could provide China with a major trade hub in the Indian Ocean. Kaplan cites Sri Lanka as a part of “China’s plan to construct a string of pearls,” a strategy where China will assist in the development of ports that it can use for trade in the Indian Ocean (Totten 1).

Filling in the Gaps

As Kaplan states, the 26 year-long insurgency in Sri Lanka led directly to China’s near hegemony in the country. The human rights violations that have been committed by both combatants have driven away military aid from the United States and other Western countries. In September 2008, the UN and several other international humanitarian organizations withdrew from Sri Lanka after the government stated that it could no longer guarantee their safety. Filling the vacuum of international assistance, China stepped in and began providing arms and ammunition to the Sri Lankan government.

Why would China support the Sri Lankan government? Because it is much easier to build development projects under a government that represents the majority of the people. The Sinhalese Buddhists make up approximately 75% of Sri Lanka’s population, whereas the Tamils only make up around 18%. Culturally diverse countries where the minority rules the majority are notoriously unstable and would only contribute to continued chaos in the region, undermining Chinese investments.

China’s assistance in the Hambantota Port Development Project (HPDP) in January 2008 revealed Beijing’s desire to increase economic relations between Sri Lanka and China. The project would provide China with a deep water port for both its navy and its merchant fleet in southern Sri Lanka, opening trade opportunities in the Indian Ocean. The first stage of the HPDP was opened on November 18, 2010, with China continuing to invest approximately one billion US dollars over the next few years. The Hambantota Port is one of several Chinese development projects in Sri Lanka, and more projects are expected to begin as China’s investment grows and Chinese-Sri Lankan relations improve.

A Conflict of Interests

Economic strategists in New Delhi who support the idea of Indian control over the Indian Ocean must now consider the possibility of a Chinese naval and merchant presence in the region.
as early as April 2011. While Sri Lanka has fairly good relations with India, the completion of the HPDP will probably cause India to distance itself from Sri Lanka as China builds a larger presence in the region. If history is any indication, the close proximity of China and India will result in competition between the two economic powers over influence in the Indian Ocean.

China, who already shares a border with India in the northeast, might also try to use its presence in Sri Lanka and the greater Indian Ocean as economic leverage against India. China’s strategy of investment in Sri Lanka is strikingly similar to the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, where President Bush sought to increase an American presence on both sides of Iran. This time, instead of using its military, China will use economic initiatives on India’s border as a way to pressure New Delhi. Such a strategy would incite fierce competition between the two powers, perhaps even requiring the presence of international conflict mediators.

**A Shift in Focus**

Current American policy toward Sri Lanka undermines potential US gains in the Indian Ocean. As a nation heavily influenced by ideology, the US withdrew military aid and assistance to the Sri Lankan government in the midst of its human rights violations. Now, with violence waning in the aftermath of the civil war, the US must change its policy toward Sri Lanka to address its deteriorating infrastructure, its restrictions on the media, and its oppressive policy towards political competition.

Several signs in Sri Lanka suggest that an American presence is welcome. Sri Lanka, one of Asia’s oldest democracies, is predisposed to approve of the American process of leadership and organization. As one of the strongest naval powers, a US presence in Sri Lanka can contribute to increased trade and profits for both countries. In addition to support from the Sri Lankan government, evidence suggests that the US would have approval from the Tamil population as well. During the civil war, the Tamil insurgency refused to train Islamist terrorists in an attempt to gain favor with the West, suggesting that American development would be welcomed by the vast majority of Sri Lankans.

The most important incentive for American assistance in Sri Lanka, however, is the elimination of Chinese economic hegemony in the country. Kaplan criticizes the current American policy toward countries around the Indian Ocean, warning that “while we’re obsessed with Iraq and Afghanistan, the Chinese have a fully developed world view;” They are thinking about several countries at the same time. As American control over world politics continues to wane, Kaplan suggests an alliance with India as a way “to gracefully retreat from global domination, by leveraging others to take up responsibility.” But such an alliance would be inefficient if India is forced to compete with China over influence in the Indian Ocean. The US now has the unique opportunity to dilute Chinese influence in the region as Sri Lanka breaks free of its violent insurgency. It should act before it is too late.
The Effects of Sovereignty Discourse on Policy Outcomes

By Eliana Wilk

Mexico’s relative weakness to the United States and other world powers throughout its post-colonial history has bred a constant need to preserve and assert its sovereignty as an independent nation. Particularly since the market-oriented reforms that began in the 1980s, Mexico has welcomed private and foreign (particularly U.S.) investment and involvement in many sectors of the economy, but has ardently stood by a protectionist strategy in the oil sector. What does Mexico’s historical resistance to private and foreign involvement in the oil sector have to do with sovereignty? Since the nationalization of the oil industry in 1937, PEMEX has stood as a powerful symbol of Mexican sovereignty. The nationalistic sentiment that originated from this defining moment in Mexico’s political and economic history persisted as Mexico became one of the leading oil exporters in the world, and oil became consolidated as the source of wealth, power and pride for the Mexican people. Indeed, Mexico’s sovereignty rested on protecting its national oil company, a fact that explains the inextricable link between oil and sovereignty, and the special role PEMEX plays in defending national sovereignty.

The oil reforms implemented in the fall of 2008 illustrate the historical weight the concept of sovereignty carries in Mexico, and its consequently sizeable contribution to the formation of national identity. The management of oil and its wealth became increasingly important with the falling production and drastic decline of reserves, as Mexico had to face the prospect of losing its position as a leading oil exporter. Although some high-minded debate that considered thorough assessments of effectiveness and productivity in the oil industry took place, the discussion surrounding the reform was principally centered on highly polarizing political posturing. “Sovereignty discourse” was continuously utilized by a variety of important actors in the policymaking process, most visibly for halting the initiative proposed by the executive, which was passed only after numerous rounds of negotiation and amendments, and failed to produce significant changes in the status quo of PEMEX. A powerful opposition in congress led by left-wing “nationalists” was able to halt comprehensive reform, primarily by rallying support around the principle that oil reform threatens the sovereignty of the nation. Among the relevant actors in the opposition is Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a high profile politician and former president of the left-wing PRD, who in 2008 launched the Movement for the Defense of Petroleum as a response to the president’s “privatizing” initiative. The movement and its leaders emphasize the claim that the reform undermined the constitutional clause explicitly guaranteeing state ownership and management of hydrocarbons, an argument that has proven extremely powerful. The prospect of surrendering PEMEX’s constitutionally mandated monopoly position in oil production has raised the question of sovereignty due to the significance of PEMEX to national identity, making the left-wing argument effective in opposing reform.

In response to the left-wing led resistance (or arguably anticipating it), the president and his party (the center-right PAN) have defended comprehensive energy reform as one that in fact restores Mexico’s national integrity and acts as an avenue for strengthening Mexico’s position in the international economic environment. The literature disseminated by the federal government, as well as statements released by members of Congress who support the president’s initiative, emphasize that Mexico’s “national treasure” must be properly exploited to guarantee national strength and autonomy. Indeed, the “sovereignty” argument is as explicit in the case made in support of the reform as it is in the case made against it.

The use of sovereignty discourse by both sets of actors in the debate has made the question of national identity surface. Two very distinct notions of Mexican identity emerge from the debate: one that is protectionist and one that is outward looking. On the one hand is the belief that identity
is being broken or compromised by allowing for private and foreign participation in the oil sector. On the other hand is the belief that such a change will strengthen national identity. As the juxtaposition of postures makes clear, both sets of actors utilize sovereignty discourse to advance their notion of what is occurring to the Mexican national identity as a result of the changes in the management of oil. A noteworthy example can be found in a debate organized by the Mexican Employers’ Association in August of 2008, in which senators Graco Ramírez from the left-wing PRD and Rubén Caramillo from the center-right PAN were invited to express their positions regarding the president’s proposal for energy reform. Ramírez’s argument was grounded on the notion that the reform is an attempt to dismantle PEMEX as part of a long-term scheme to systematically “privatize” the oil sector. The problem, he asserted, is not the absence of private and foreign investment, but rather debt and flawed administration. Ramírez talks about rescuing the oil sector from the right-leaning neoliberal administrations that have governed Mexico since 1983, and have sought to create an environment for the eventual privatization of PEMEX. That the government has taken deliberate steps to create a dependency on foreign petroleum by debilitating PEMEX financially and denying it the resources necessary for its development is perhaps the most radical of left-wing arguments, yet most part from a fear of eventual “privatization.” The formation of a “protectionist” notion of Mexican identity is evident in the left-wing argument, and was made extraordinarily apparent in the process leading up to the 2008 reform by the numerous accusations from the left that the proposed reform was a “privatizing” project. This argument was utilized to draw attention from the public to the deeply exaggerated fact that our national oil company is being handed over, and gained incredible momentum with the increasing radicalization of the left. Though based on rather false notions of privatization, this fear has become widespread, and the mentality that national identity is being compromised has produced a sense of protectionism and resistance to reform in the oil sector.

This is an excerpt from Eliana’s paper for Alfred Darnell’s Politics and Identity class.
A New Way to Think about Charity

By Jill Greenfield

For the longest time, I’ve only ever heard people talk about charity in one way: “give,” “donate.” We donate money when there is a disaster; we give of our time to people in need. Our recent past is littered with tragedy, Katrina and Haiti to name a few, and our response? Donate to the Red Cross. And that’s great, there’s nothing wrong with donation. It helps a lot of people. But the 10 dollars you dropped in a jar on the way out of the supermarket, where exactly did it go?

I have no idea, and therein lies the problem. What if there was a way to follow your dollars, to know exactly who you were giving to, to learn their story? A new field – microfinance, has transformed the concept of charity. It’s not give anymore; now, it’s lend.

Another standard destination for our donation dollars is poverty. Half of the world is living on less than 2 dollars a day. That’s a problem, and donation can’t fix it. One step in the right direction, however, is microlending. First world lenders like you or I can lend as little as 25 dollars via the Internet to an entrepreneur in a developing nation. Our entrepreneur of choice will invest the money in his/her business and after a year or so that 25 dollars comes back to us. We can then reinvest that same money in a new entrepreneur, so our money goes further and helps more people than it ever could as a donation.

Websites such as Kiva.org, a peer-to-peer lending site, connect us with borrowers half way around the world. On the site, we can see a picture of the entrepreneurs, their name, where they are from, and how much they are asking for, which is often only a few hundred dollars. Then they tell us about their situation, their family, and what they will use the money for: to buy more inventory for their general market, to invest in a vehicle for their taxi service, to get material for their sewing business, the list goes on. This makes for a very tangible, transparent connection with the entrepreneur we are lending to. Click a button and our money, together with the money from other lenders around the world, is off to the borrower, whether they are in a city in Nicaragua or a remote village in Uganda.

The profits from these businesses might go towards buying a new house, towards food, or most commonly, towards sending the children in that family to school. Microlending does more than encourage entrepreneurship and help those in need. It raises income, creates jobs, removes barriers to credit, and encourages employment. It is a sustainable way to pull people out of poverty. And by allowing a family to send their children to school, it also stops the cycle of poverty. The effects of a microloan don’t stay just with one person; they spread. The benefits can improve the lives of all of the members of the borrower’s village.

Another powerful facet of microfinance is that it empowers women. Over 97% of the microloans given out by Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, one of the first microfinance banks, are to women. This gives women in traditionally conservative nations the opportunity to earn income and become more independent.
And here’s the magic number. The repayment rate is 99 percent. That’s huge. That means that only 1 percent of the money put into the system doesn’t find its way back, which is unheard of anywhere else in the finance world.

Microfinance is a young field and so far, it’s done incredible things. Whether or not it’s the silver bullet for poverty is still unknown. It started with Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his pioneering work in the field. I only found out about microlending recently and have been drawn to it ever since. I am compelled by microfinance for all the reasons enumerated above, but more than anything, it renews my faith that a single person can make a difference. This is why Sunny Seelamsetty and I co-founded micrOlin, a new student group at WashU dedicated to microfinance. We are currently lending through Kiva to create a portfolio of microloans, fundraising to sustain and augment our portfolio, and we are educating and raising awareness about micro-lending, its benefits, and how to get involved.

Microlending removes any excuse we may have for complacency. Making a loan on Kiva takes one minute and 25 dollars; it couldn’t be easier. So here’s my call to action – get involved. Come to a micrOlin meeting. Visit Kiva.org.

Microloans are about supporting people so that they can support themselves. We’ve all heard the saying “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” But what if he knows how to fish and just can’t afford the fishing pole? You can be the person that provides someone their fishing pole and their livelihood. So the next time you think about charity, think microfinance; think lend.

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Observations about Microfinancing

By The Summit Editorial Board

Since the 1970s the popularity of microfinance has increased dramatically. It has progressed from a concept that won its founders the Nobel Prize to a trendy and accessible tool frequently employed by small organizations seeking to maximize the impact of their charitable fundraising efforts. However, while the attractiveness of microfinance increases its popularity, an academic debate surrounding the effectiveness and sustainability of microfinance programs has emerged.

Primarily, the issues under contention include the effectiveness of microfinance in decreasing poverty levels, who benefits most from microfinance loans and savings programs and the sustainability of microfinance programs. The following bullet points briefly contextualize the recent debate on microfinance:

--The universal effectiveness of microfinance is unclear. Many studies supporting microfinance are anecdotal or rely on individual case studies. A lack of sufficient empirical evidence coupled with reports of coercion to increase loan repayment rates and the threats of microlending dependency beg further investigation into microfinance’s overall social impact.

--Current literature is inconclusive on who microfinance helps. Some studies contend that microfinance programs benefit the moderately poor more than the starkly poor. This makes the target of microfinancing unclear. (is there anything else that can be said here? the first and third sentences in this bullet point repeat each other)

--Microfinance is currently not a sustainable practice. According to Niels Hermes and Robert Lensink’s article in The Economic Journal in 2007, “Providing microfinance is a costly business due to high transaction and information costs. At present, a large number of microfinance programmes still depend on donor subsidies to meet the high costs, i.e. they are not financially sustainable.” While for some this presents a problem, others are fine with the current model, arguing that microfinance should be looked at as philanthropy rather than business

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Learn

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