

CONSCIOUS



a student produced global awareness magazine

5th

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Dear Readers,

Well, this is my last semester working with Conscious. It is now time for me to leave my college career in pursuit of the rest of my life out there in the real world. I have enjoyed working with my fellow Conscious-members throughout my stay at UVM, and I hope that I have contributed to the increased global awareness of the student body here in Burlington.

I feel that the publication has gradually improved with every issue, therefore, I am proud to bring you the 5th edition of Conscious magazine. This issue includes veteran writers, as well as some new names. The photos have been taken by your fellow students, or more specifically Miss Sophia Fraioli, graduating in May 2010. She will be pursuing photography post-graduation; you can find her work at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sophiafraioli/>. A special thanks to professional photographer, friend and Marnie's (writer) father, Mr. Michael Fairchild. Michael has been contributing his photographs to Conscious steadily since its conception, for which we are all very, very grateful. You can browse more of his work at <http://michaelfairchild.com>.

I will be leaving the survival of Conscious in the hands of sophomore Allie Beauregard who is more than capable of keeping our mission alive. If you are interested in joining Conscious, just shoot her an email (abeaureg@uvm.edu) introducing yourself.

I bid you all farewell. Good luck with your remaining time here at UVM, and please enjoy our original, intuitive and analytical work. Conscious writers dare to question the contemporary issues often disregarded as too contentious to address. They flirt with cultural complexities and subtleties and they work to provide our readers with an interesting story or thought. In doing so, Conscious strives to motivate a perpetual global dialogue within our own minds and amongst one another. We should all be thinking and talking of the issues, no matter how far removed from us in the U.S. or on UVM's campus, pertinent to dictating the future of our world.

Enjoy.

Chloé, editor

The Uighur Minority as Expendable?

words by Marnie Fairchild

The Old City in Kashgar is home to a majority of Uighur (wee-gur) residents, a national minority of Muslims living in China. Historically, the Uighur Chinese have been an oppressed minority living in the crucial cross roads city of Kashgar, on the ancient Silk Road route. From the days of Marco Polo to Mao Zedong, the Uighurs have been coercively marginalized, nevertheless their city has survived for the most part as a living artifact. As of 2009 the current Chinese government has implemented a 500 million dollar resettlement project to recreate the Old City of Kashgar, which will tear apart the historic Old City and relocate its Uighur residents with a proposal that includes new apartment complexes for original Old City residents.

Roughly 85% of the Old City is estimated to be lost, according to Smithsonian author Michael Christopher Brown, 10% of which is preserved for tourist activity. Sadly, this will most likely satisfy the needs of incurious tourists for the “authentic Uighur experience.” The Han Chinese authorities have cracked down on the minority populations of Kashgar, citing several “terrorist” incidents involving small bands of ethnic Uighurs. By creating a notion of fear and widespread Uighur terrorist cooperation, the authorities have been able to limit mobility around Kashgar and monitor individuals very carefully. According to the Human Rights Watch, the Uighur terrorist groups are minimal and pose very little threat to the established order.

The proposed logic of the resettlement program is to prevent loss of life in the event of earthquakes, (which do occur in the Kashgar region). However, the current

structures were built to withstand nature and have successfully stood the test of centuries worth of weathering.

The international media has been quick to vilify the Han Chinese, who are a dominant majority, and control most of the commerce, business, government and resources of Kashgar. The fundamental and repeating struggle between the modern, ruthless versus the traditional, helpless ultimately simplifies the issue, and takes voice away from the Uighurs.

It seems obvious to condemn the “evil” racial majority for insensitivity towards the ancient and beautiful culture of the Uighur and for their careless destruction of irreplaceable history. After considering the circumstance however, there doesn’t seem to be a nation that hasn’t experienced blatant disregard for traditional cultures for the advancement of



Photo by Michael Fairchild

financial and social goals of the majority. This doesn’t excuse or justify the actions, but it is worth considering when trying to make sense

of this situation.

It is not unrealistic to assume many Uighurs will experience anger and resentment, having to face potential homelessness and hardship after the destruction of their homes. However, it is also not unrealistic to imagine that within the Uighur community there would be citizens who when moved into new housing establishments would welcome the change.

off antiquity. Why is it then when minority people are involved, in a living artifact such as the Old City of Kashgar that improvement and restoration can't be favored instead of destruction and starting over?

The underlying problem of the resettlement project is not whether or not the motives of the Han Chinese are pure or intentionally malicious. Rather, the



Most of the Old City by modern standards has inadequate plumbing, sanitation and standards of health. A double standardizing ignorance exists among modern society, specifically in the West that romanticizes traditionally functioning societies. On the one hand, it is believed that traditional societies want to be modernized and need help, but on the other hand these communities should be preserved in their cultures as living artifacts. What seems to be missing from this argument are the needs of the people themselves. Uighurs are the only people who can decide what is best for Uighurs.

Over the last decade, China's Great Wall has been refortified and restored. The existing structure was improved as far as safety is concerned. No one would dream of smashing the Great Wall of China and creating a new one, losing the original remnants

problem that tragically repeats itself through history is the lack of autonomy granted to disenfranchised ethnic minorities. Grouping opinions of distinct individuals together based strictly on the grounds of ethnic identity takes away from the beauty of individual freedom. Being in the racial majority has given the Han Chinese access to better education, job connections and resources. These advantages inevitably lead to higher quality of life, and by world standards this usually translates into greater decision-making power.

Changing the tradition of how decisions are made and who makes them while also trying to benefit the greatest number of people is a weighty task, and is wrought with hypocrisies. Intercultural understanding and equity within communities is an attractive goal but the steps to get there are difficult to discern.

The Persecution of the Honeybee

words by Heidi Bergt

If you've seen the news recently, you might have heard that the glaciers are melting, coral reefs are bleaching, and the world is precariously balancing on the ecological tipping point of doom. Although terrifying, these events bear intangible costs in our everyday lives. However, a new phenomenon within nature has emerged in the past decade that strikes a little closer to home. They may be a mere buzzing annoyance to most, but the honeybee in your backyard is becoming equally as important as melting glaciers in Alaska.

In 2006, researchers were dumbfounded when they realized that nearly 1/3 of all honeybee colonies in the United States had disappeared. Since then, the number has continued to rise at a rapid rate. This inexplicable disappearance has been deemed Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), and its underlying causes continue to elude researchers. So, why is it so important that all the bees are dying?

Approximately 1/3 of the United States' agriculture depends on honeybee pollination. The majority of these crops are fruit and seed crops, including almonds, avocados, cashews, raspberries, cranberries, and mangoes. Most of these crops cannot reproduce without the help of pollinators. If honeybees were to potentially die out, our access to these foods would be restricted or even nonexistent.

Beekeepers around the nation truck their bee colonies from state to state following the growing season of these crops. Although other insects and birds also act as pollinators, the massive scale of modern industrial agriculture demands the use of bee pollination services. Farmers that rely on bee pollination tend to have higher production per acre, improved size and shape of produce, and even better taste.

Bees are one of the most essential pollinators on the planet, and their disappearance not only threatens our food supply but also the billions of dollars their work contributes to the agricultural industry. Bee pollination is responsible for a projected \$15 billion in added crop value each year. Since the benefits of bee pollination contribute to so many different sectors of the agricultural industry, decreased supply could have adverse economic effects across the country. Demand for the products that bees help supply won't magically disappear, but consumers will have to pay more for them. Effects of a diminishing bee population are already putting a dent in farmer's wallets. The rental cost of a honeybee hive has tripled in the past five years to around \$150 per hive.

Surges and declines in animal and insect populations are not uncommon, and cases of extreme honeybee disappearance have been documented in the past. However, it is impossible to compare the severity of this decline in relation to prior cases, and the circumstances of this occurrence are peculiar.

Honeybees are considered a biological indicator, which means that their health is a reflection of the general wellbeing of the environment.

CCD is characterized by a hive with no, or very few adult honeybees present, but with a live queen and no dead honeybees inside the hive. Immature honeybees reside inside the hive and honey is present as well. In short, CCD represents the mass disappearance of the worker honeybees--the pollinators. The most controversial part of this issue (besides the fact that it threatens the consumption of all my favorite foods) is the why factor. Rumors of a primary cause have been thrown around over the past few years, but the only circumstance researchers can truly agree upon is that it is highly unlikely that CCD is caused

by a single factor. Rather it is attributed to a “perfect storm” of environmental stressors that have compromised the immunity and social structure of bee colonies. Anthropogenic activities have likely played the leading role in the culmination of this storm through habitat destruction and increased use of chemical pesticides. Premature blooming of flowers due to global climate change has also led to poorer nutrition in honeybees. Another suspect is a possible parasite or pathogen attacking the bees, and because other stressors are already weakening the immunity of colonies, they are more susceptible to disease. In response to CCD, the US Department of Agriculture has allotted \$20 million for research into causes and potential solutions.

Such a massive loss of bees could be signaling a notable decline in the health of our environment. Honeybees are considered a biological indicator, which means that their health is a reflection of the general wellbeing of the environment. Continued decreases in honeybee populations could be the beginning of a much more serious environmental issue. However, although CCD is surrounded by an air of mystery, the answers may be more obvious than we realize.

The domesticated honeybee is not native to the United States. Therefore, they actually compete with native pollinators who are already threatened by the same foes of the honeybee—habitat destruction, pesticides, etc. Because of a decline in native pollinators, farmers who once relied on wild bees for pollination are now forced to rent the managed colonies in order to grow their crops. These domesticated honeybees are being promoted as the solitary pollinators in today’s agricultural industry. In doing so, the benefits of native pollinators are being overlooked and underutilized.

This homogenization is not a new trend in agriculture. It bears resemblance to the same way farmers grow endless fields of one crop or plant genetically modified seeds that will bear identical fruits. Our food system has transformed from our most sacred relationship with the earth to a struggle to conform nature to our ever-increasing demands.

The majority of the crops that depend

on bee pollination are fruit and seed crops while staple crops such as wheat and corn rely on either wind or self-pollination. Essentially, these are all foods that we do not need despite our appreciation for them in our diets. Their nutritional value is beneficial, but unnecessary for our survival. Although crops dependent on pollination only account for 6% of food consumption, the fraction of agriculture that requires pollination has increased by 300% in the past 50 years. These crops have lower yields per acre and therefore require significantly more land to produce enough food.

Colony Collapse Disorder has been framed as a natural phenomenon, but how natural is it? We overlook the paradox that the situation presents. The more people that there are, the higher the demand for food, which leads to an increase in habitat destruction. This is one of the main contributors to declines in bee populations. Because of this decline, farmers bring in domesticated bees, which impose additional stress on the existing pollinators—and the cycle perpetuates.

I will be the first to defend my consumption of avocados and almonds, and I am in no way condemning the honeybee industry. Instead, I see this as a microcosm of a larger issue. As we stretch the limits of the earth’s carrying capacity, a struggle has emerged to mass-produce. Nevertheless, nature does not work under those conditions, and our disrespect for the cyclical nature of the earth has resulted in an array of retributions. Perhaps if we are able to modify our perspective, this phenomenon will cease to be a mystery.



This article is attributed to the New York Times, pbs.org, United States Department of Agriculture, vegetus.org, & the CCD Working Group.

DRUMMERS AT THE HAITI BENEFIT SPONSORED BY CONSCIOUS AT METRONOME

PHOTO: SOPHIA FRAIOLI



Uganda's Karamojong & the Sacred Cattle

words by Elliot Boblitt

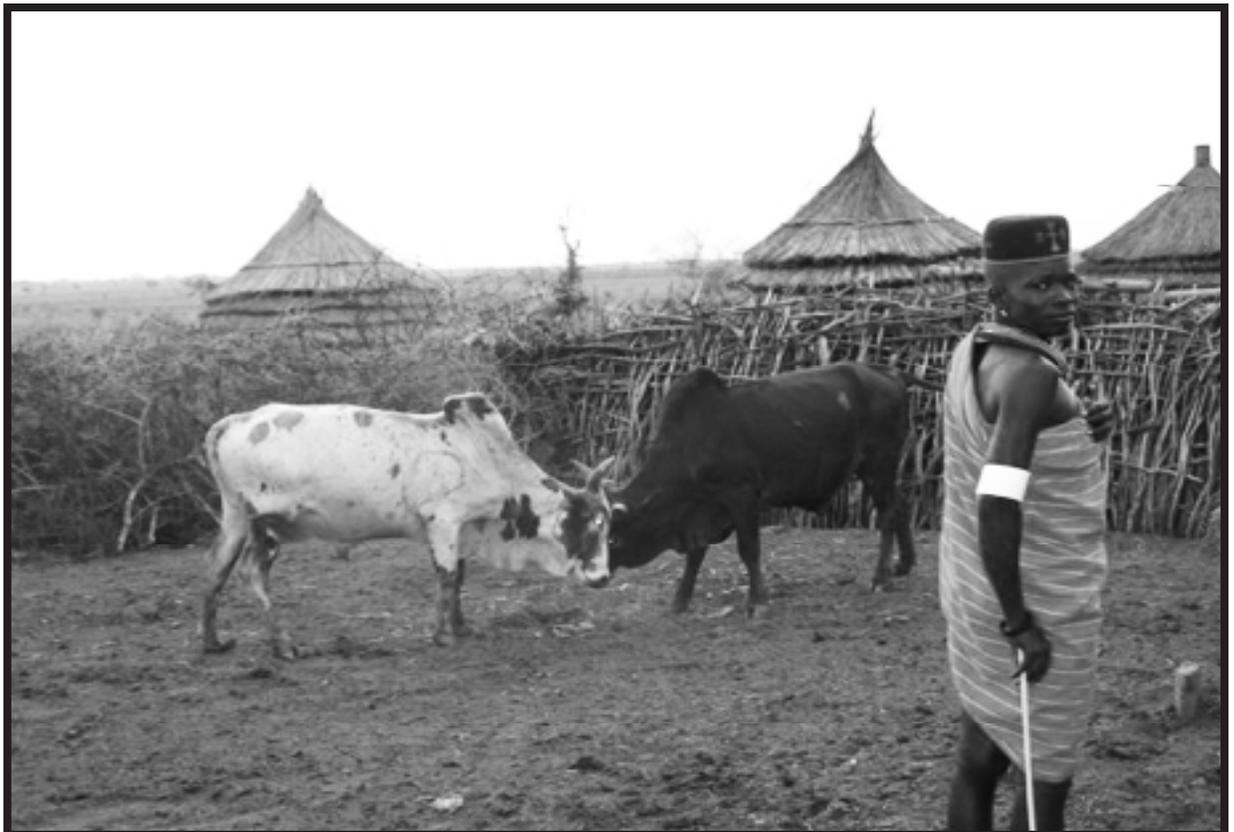
On the foothills of Mount Elgon and on the border of Kenya, the district of Kapchorwa in eastern Uganda is home to some of the most beautiful sites in the world. Three roaring waterfalls, known as Sipi Falls, and a conservation center that leads day hikes up the slopes of Mount Elgon bring most tourists only a few miles into the district. 10 more miles down the lone road, built only 7 years ago, and you will find the Kapchorwa center, a place few outsiders visit.

While the natural beauty surrounding Kapchorwa has a lot to offer, the town's trading center has far less. The trading center is densely overcrowded, with small shacks made from interlaced layers of mud and wood panels. Here, there is no sanitation, no running water and diseases such as typhoid are extremely common. There are only a few

shops, owned solely by Indians and all of the food is imported from Kenya or Kampala. In addition to the environmental degradation from deforestation, soil erosion and extreme weather patterns including drought and flash flooding, their northern neighbors have created more problems for the people of Kapchorwa.

The Karamojong of Karamoja district lead semi-nomadic lives and hold an obsession with cattle. While they have traditionally believed themselves to be the divine owners of cattle and have consistently throughout history conducted cattle raids on their neighbors in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan, they have only recently come in contact with modern weapons. This has had extremely negative effects on their neighbors to all sides, who have been forced to relocate far from

KARAMOJA
DISTRICT
PHOTO:
TOM
LEAVITT



their homes and even into refugee camps.

These are the same problems that plague many of the people who used to live in the “low lands” of Kapchorwa. Forced to flee their homes because of cattle raids, many have relocated to trading centers similar to Kapchorwa. In a country where over 85% of the population relies on subsistence farming, the people forced from their homes by violent cattle raids have lost not only their cattle, but also their land and their food source. These problems have not only affected the people relocated into these areas, but it has also had extremely negative impacts on the land itself, which cannot sustain such a large population.

The Ugandan government had taken steps towards disarming many of the Karamojong, but so far these have not proved

to be successful. Many people do not want to disarm, in fear that once they no longer have that protection they will be raided by neighbors who have refused to forfeit their weapons.

These conflicts have heightened the awareness of the international community of Karamoja land and its people, but this attention and subsequent aid has not spread outwards to other affected areas throughout northeastern Uganda. While the pressure from the Ugandan government and other international organizations may convince the majority in Karamoja to finally put down their weapons, what will become of the hundreds of people forced to flee their homes? Attention needs not only to be placed on those in Karamoja, but also to those effects as far away as Kapchorwa.



The Unemployment Problem

CURRENT ISSUES REGARDING RECORD HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

words by Charlotte Doggett

In the past decade, the United States has faced terrorist attacks, record high rates of poverty, the highest budget deficit in the history of the country, and an unemployment rate that has more than tripled since the year 2000. Unemployment often was seen as an individual’s lack of drive, education, or just sheer laziness. Before 2000 it was believed that if you were unemployed, you had no one to blame but yourself. However, in recent years this feeling of relative deprivation has been replaced with a sense that “we are all in this together”. Unemployment is no longer a feature associated with the uneducated and those in the lower class, something that is widely ignored by the wealthy and powerful upper classes. Unemployment can no longer be taken for granted. Americans of every race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic

level are facing this problem, and it seemed, for the first couple of years, that nothing was being done except finger pointing and blame shifting as the unemployment rate steadily rose.

My dad, David Doggett, lost his job in early 2007 and struggled to find new employment. We live in Philadelphia, a short fifteen-minute drive from the downtown area, where thousands of people commute to work everyday. My dad graduated with a PhD and was employed in Philadelphia as a Medical Research Analyst for 20 years before he was fired because of downsizing at his company. He began looking for jobs in Philadelphia and the surrounding area but soon realized it would not be that easy. With his high level of education and specialization, he was hard pressed to find a position that suited his abilities. Like most cities and states

across America, the unemployment rate in 2007 was 6% and on the rise. That meant that my Dad was competing with thousands of other people searching for jobs. By 2008, my Dad's unemployment checks had stopped coming, and he began using his retirement fund to support himself. Like so many other Americans, things were becoming desperate. My parents are divorced, but, for the most part, they try to share the cost of raising me and my three other siblings. However, in the years of my dad's unemployment, my older brother was enrolled in college, and my younger sisters and I were enrolled in a private school. The combined cost of keeping

in the labor force who was unemployed. In February 2009, Obama put a name on his promise to end unemployment in a bill called The American Recovery and Restoration Act (ARRA). ARRA was one of the many stimulus plans that Obama was putting into action, in hope of creating jobs and increasing consumer spending during a time of recession. ARRA was worth \$787 billion of spending, which was to be used towards federal tax cuts, expansion of unemployment benefits, social welfare provisions, and healthcare. Under ARRA, \$200 million was given to study the effectiveness of medical treatments by allocating over 200 grants to approved applicants. Approved areas

Will I have to put my education on the backburner and work at a job that I am not interested in just to support myself?

all four of us in school was over \$70,000 a year! This does not even include our living expenses, not to mention my dad's own living expenses. My mother's salary alone was not enough to support all of us, and as a result my parents were forced to seek financial support elsewhere, in this case my grandparents. This is the situation that millions of Americans face on a daily basis. Adults who have supported themselves for decades, with high levels of education and specialized skills, who once were making upwards of \$100,000 a year, are being forced to swallow their pride and ask their elderly parents for help. And this is the best-case scenario. Of course the majority of the unemployment falls on the shoulders of the lower class.

In November 2008, a slight glimmer of hope could be seen. When President Obama was elected into office, the buzz about reform and stimulus and change was deafening. People who'd been jobless for the past couple of years began to feel that there were going to be jobs for them. At the time of Obama's inauguration in January of 2009, my dad was one of these 15 million American citizens

of research were known as Challenge Topics, and a list was created that focused on specific gaps of knowledge, new technology, data generation, and a number of other topics that would give a jump start over the next couple of years to biomedical, behavioral science, and public health. One of the grants was given under a program known as Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER). CER worked to evaluate different options available for treating certain medical conditions and provide this research to medical practices. Of the \$1.1 billion allocated for health research under ARRA, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) received \$300 million for CER. Some of AHRQ's newly acquired funds were allocated to Johns Hopkins University Evidence Based Practice Center. In November 2009, Johns Hopkins hired my Dad under the title of Project Administrator. In speaking to my Dad about his new position and the job opportunities that ARRA's grants to AHRQ has provided, he explained to me that AHRQ has doubled in size because of the funds, and Hopkins's Evidence Based Practice Center has also doubled in size.

On a more personal level, my dad was forced to move out of Philadelphia, two hours south into Baltimore. As sad as this was for my siblings and I, it came with an upside. My dad is finally employed again and can resume contributing to our education and living expenses. Although this grant and many others like it have worked to employ hundreds of people, a grant is temporary and only helps until the money runs out. When I asked my Dad if he considered this job to be permanent, there was a long pause followed by what sounded like a smirk, even through the phone. "Nobody knows, hopefully Obama will provide other funds to keep doing work like this." He then added, "there are other funds at Johns Hopkins that I could get work from."

To some, this might sound like we're eliminating the problem of unemployment, slowly but surely. In some ways, we are. However it is very slow progress; so tiny that it has not yet been seen in data on the national unemployment rate. In fact, unemployment has actually risen since 2009. Since the enactment of ARRA in February of 2009, the unemployment rate has climbed from 8.9% to 10.4%, a very substantial change. Although my Dad and hundreds of other people were employed by ARRA, this is only a fraction of the number of people still unemployed in the U.S. People are continuing to lose their jobs on a daily basis, and the various stimuli packages that Obama has enacted are simply not enough. Thousands of citizens are being forced into poverty everyday, far more than those who are given new jobs. On top of this, a large portion of the employment that is being offered is temporary. The grants given to AHRQ and other organizations similar to it are only expected to last three years at the most. Jobs that require less education are even more temporary. Non-salary jobs are unstable and do not offer enough benefits to their employees. At the same time, salaried jobs are becoming less and less attainable, and those that are attained are becoming increasingly unstable. Among the many other issues that were handed over to Obama, unemployment seems, to me, to be one of the

most pressing. If our citizens are not able to support themselves, not only will the economy continue to suffer, but so will the people. The number of children in poverty is at an all-time high, and this seems to be a direct effect of the lack of employment opportunities for their guardians. This job instability has begun to have lasting causes for our country, and if it is not dealt with in a more timely matter, these effects may become irreversible.

The unemployment rate hit very close to home for me as well as for many of my friends whose parents also encountered financial difficulties. As a sophomore in college, I'm already bombarded with the reality of this problem. Where will I find a job when I graduate? How will I afford to live while paying off my college loans? Will I have to put my education on the backburner and work at a job that I am over-qualified for simply to sustain myself? I hope that in the next decade these rates will begin to drop, and that my generation, along with those already in the labor force, will witness an increase in the availability of jobs so that we will not be forced to look for help from our government, or even worse, our parents.



This article is attributed National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, HealthAffairs Blog & Google State Unemployment Rates.



ANGELA DAVIS

CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND KEY NOTE
SPEAKER AT THE UVM BLACKBOARD
JUNGLE SYMPOSIUM ON
MARCH 25, 2010



PHOTO: SOPHIA FRAIOLI

Haiti Beneath the Rubble: A Volatile History Not Even Nature Can Shake

words & photo by
Allison Beauregard



Exploitation, deforestation, slavery... poverty, AIDS, political corruption...and then there was an earthquake. Given such a chain of events, it is no wonder that Burlington resident Cal Hopwood saw hope in the wake of Haiti's most recent devastation. Of course the atrocity of the earthquake left Cal confounded and gravely concerned for Haiti, the smaller of the two nations on the island of Hispaniola, especially when he was personally acquainted with individuals who were physically crushed by the destruction. But what Cal also felt was a notion I had been contemplating ever since the earthquake, and that was a sense of frustrated relief that Haiti was finally getting the attention it deserved.

Unfortunately, my knowledge of Haiti, its history, and its people was slim and skewed, as it is with most Americans. I had heard of political disputes and violence on the news here and there; even the word "Haiti" I knew to associate with underdevelopment and paucity. However, given the way our system of democracy and government influences education, this knowledge I had, or lack thereof, is no surprise. But in March 2009, I would experience realities that would educate me more than any classroom lesson thus far in my life. I decided to take a travel study class on the topic of migrant Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic in which for ten days I would travel to the Dominican Republic. I would stay on a batey - the communities where these workers lived - and contribute to funding and building a house for a Haitian family. I would also get to experience market day, where every Thursday at the border town, Haitians are allowed to come into the Dominican to barter and sell any goods they have. Before departing for Hispaniola, my

classmates and I were required to do extensive reading and research on the history of the island and its people. More importantly, we were continuously reminded that we were not going to "help" the individuals we would meet, but merely immerse ourselves in their culture and history to understand why it is in the current condition.

The origin of Haiti's tribulations is predictably a product of imperialism. Derived as a slave nation under French control, Haiti was fated to be viewed as inferior. There was hope when the Haitian slaves revolted successfully, the first and only rebellion in global history, but it quickly died out when their so-called freedom came with a price tag. In the 200 years of Haiti's existence, the Haitian people and their land have been controlled by anyone but Haiti. This does not come across as shocking to many, for the typical outlook on developing countries is that they are developing because they have not yet attained the level of nationalism and power that the acclaimed developed nations possess. While in some senses this statement is true, in terms of levels of infrastructure or human health and well-being, how much of this truth can really be accounted for by lack of democracy? According to nations such as ours, the answer is simple - all of it.

First, the powerful European and North American nations, namely France and the U.S., caught onto the treasure of Hispaniola - the sugar cane. The sugar industry is a powerful and deadly one, putting locals to work under life-threatening conditions for little or no pay. The once fertile soil of the island provided immense sugar crop of high quality. This was Haiti's and the Dominican Republic's staple export and backbone to their economy. The

in-power nations started off as customers to the sugar trade, demanding more of the sweet crop. Then, with their Westernized mindset, the powers realized not only could they obtain the product but control the sugar trade.

First, it should be known that Haiti was already inferior to its Dominican neighbor due to political instability in both countries. The Dominican Republic, already somewhat better off, had a fraudulent dictator determined to increase this slight supremacy by making a race barrier between his lighter people and their dark skinned, supposedly savage neighbors. This was encouraged by the treatment and attitudes towards both countries by the in-powers. The Dominicans began using the Haitians for slave labor and exporting their sugar. The Haitian government, even more unstable and corrupt, had to comply with the harsh and violent demands of the Dominicans. Meanwhile, the Dominican Republic was still not a developed country in the sense of power, control, or stamina. The U.S., who obviously was, then began adulterating the sugar product coming from Hispaniola so that it could be altered in the U.S., making this exploited product more desirable than that of Hispaniola and enabling the U.S. to now have the “better” sugar as their own export. In this, Haiti was now being exploited by the Dominican Republic who was then exploited by the U.S. At the same time, the U.S. participated in several occupations of Haiti in attempts to implement democracy, as if this would solve everything. The Roosevelt administration at the time urged Haitians to overthrow their dictator, while supposedly this dictator was under U.S. payroll.

However, not all of the problems in Haiti can be placed on U.S. intervention. For instance, also part of this history is a Haitian dictator who took AIDS relief money and dispersed it



Batey Libertad, Dominican Republic

among his peers and family for personal gain. There were numerous massacres between the Haitians and Dominicans over racial disputes and political distress. The wealth that the sugar brought to Haiti compromised its environment; 2% of the forest that existed several centuries ago still remains today, merely because the land had to be cultivated for sugar to supply the people with product and occupations. Deforestation leads to issues with water purity and cleanliness. It prevents the land from rejuvenating so it can be used for other types of farming, or to just exist for the incentive of nature. The poverty imposed on the nation by the corrupt debt demanded by developed nations leaves people without access to medicine and health care. Altogether, these problems create a nation where land degradation has led to disease,

malnutrition, lack of jobs, undrinkable water (if there is even access to it) and all the while the only stable governments interested in alleviating these issues are foreign and come at an unaffordable price, placing Haiti forever in debt.

My experience in the Dominican Republic can only be described as otherworldly, yet accurate in my new learned expectations. The batey housed Haitian families of overwhelming sizes. They resided in tin shanties, some in cement-like huts. Children with swollen bellies, ringworm infected scalps, and no clothes ran bare-foot through the mud alleyways. There was a river in which clothes were washed, bodies bathed, bodily excretions made, and sometimes, water retrieved for drinking. One

little girl wore a costume dress resembling Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. It became clear to me that this

disposed garment had at one time belonged to an American child, thrown away after one use at Halloween. The Haitian girl wore that dress the entire time I stayed on the batey.

I was told that because many workers on the batey had snuck over illegally from Haiti, not only were they undocumented in the Dominican Republic, but any child of theirs born on the batey was equally undocumented. However, the relationship between Haitian immigrants crossing into the Dominican Republic is similar to that of Mexicans in America. This means that if a Haitian baby on the batey becomes ill, they cannot be cared for in the Dominican Republic or they will be deported. No aid can be found over in Haiti after this, for the undocumented birth means the baby technically does not “exist.” Without being legitimized or accounted for in the world, these children will never be permitted an education or health care and will be forced to follow in the footsteps of their parents, only to make the same choices all over again.

One aspect of life on the batey that

struck me and made me realize how much I take for granted was in the health center on the batey, established by UVM several years ago. Because of the unsanitary water, everyone in my class was given a prescription for a general antibiotic “just in case.” I did not plan on drinking any water that could potentially make me ill, so I had the pills in my backpack, unopened and never used. I was in the health center when a batey girl a few years younger than me came in with a swollen abdomen that she said had been there for weeks. She had trouble urinating and when she did it was in severe pain. The constant discomfort was unbearable and making her physically ill. It was clear that this girl suffered from a urinary tract infection, a sickness that my “just in case”

pills happened to alleviate. So I gave her my prescription and the instructions were translated for her. It was mind-blowing

that something so minimal to me that I wasn’t going to use, could potentially save a life, a life that otherwise would have never had the chance to get the care she received that day.

Market day was an experience in and of itself. It was difficult to breathe let alone walk through the clustered cobble-stone streets of Dajabon. And there was everything, literally everything for sale. Tarps and vendors of all ages were shouting at passersby prices and bargains and shoving item after item. It could be a pair of Apple-Bottom jeans, a bootlegged VHS in Creole, or even a pair of socks or a tooth brush. The Haitians brought whatever they thought they could sell into the city. And the river separating the neighboring nations was just as crowded with women and men trekking across with bundles of produce and bags of flour and other goods on their backs or in wheel barrels. While in America the idea of a market day might bring feelings of excitement and guilty consumerism pleasures, here it was clearly a means of survival and a necessity.

**...the only democracy they respect
is the one they control and the only
fruits they are interested in are the
ones they can steal from us...**



This class took place in the spring of 2009, almost a year before the earthquake. When I saw news of the earthquake, which at this point has taken over 200,000 lives and left over 1.3 million without any shelter, I was immediately heartbroken. My first thought was not how can I help, but how will Haiti come back from this? A nation known to have more poverty and percentage of AIDS cases than any other, a nation I had met refugees from and learned tragic history about, has suffered a tremendous earthquake? Quickly, it seemed the earthquake was the only incident to be covered by the news. Celebrities, talk show hosts, news anchors, the First Lady – everyone was setting up relief funds and donating money to aid recovery efforts. UVM is still having numerous campus events and benefits urging everyone to give what they can for a more than just cause. This is necessary, yes, and good. However I felt a bit of cynicism towards the sudden movement that was becoming a trend of relief giving. I kept thinking “of course Haiti needs our help; they needed our help 5, 10, 50 years ago!” It killed me how an already devastated nation barely off of our coast, practically our neighbor, had been living in such inhumane conditions for decades, even centuries, possibly at the hands of our government, and it took a natural disaster to put it in the spotlight.

In my confusion and frustration, I found someone who not only shared my opinions but had hands on experience beyond mine. Cal Hopwood, a 21 year-old student currently residing in Burlington, has had the opportunity to travel and stay in Port au Prince six times in the last four years, both on his own and with his family. Cal’s mother Donna Thomas, a nurse at Fletcher Allen, first volunteered in Haiti through a local group within the hospital back in 2006. After experiencing the devastation and potential that the mountainous communities near Port au Prince had in terms of sustainable rebuilding, she and fellow nurse Kimball Butler started the Vermont Haiti Project (vermonthaitiproject.org). On that first trip down, Donna became very close friends with her driver on the trip, a Port au Prince local. So close in fact, that

she is now the godmother of his child and travels back at least 4 or more times a year to work on various projects and visit friends. Intrigued by his mother’s efforts and skilled in film and photography, Cal began traveling with Donna, becoming acquainted with the community, landscape, and society of Haiti. Cal has produced several documentaries for his mother’s non-profit as well as others over the years and has made Haiti his second home.

Cal also informed me that his mother founded an orphanage-turned-education center called Foyer D’Espoir (Center of Hope) which now holds over 200 students. According to Cal, educational access in Haiti is not based on quality, but quantity. Quantity, that is, of money that students’ families possess. This makes up only a small portion of Haitians who are educated, leaving the rest to a life in the sugar cane industry or other impoverished labor.

The issue of water sanitation and access is one Cal and Donna are passionate about. In the city Cal witnessed children gathering rain water and runoff from the gutters and street to be used for cleansing and drinking. Apparently before effort had to be turned towards earthquake relief, Donna had started a program where water filters sold at \$30 each would provide clean water for at least half a dozen families up to 5 years. Aside from the issue of water, Cal has always noticed the very apparent contrast between the wealthy and the poor in the city. He said that even if it is out of sight, there are sections of the city that live in great luxury and drive BMWs. However this population is so minute that there is no middle class in-between these individuals and those children drinking the water collecting in drainpipes. Today, Donna is back in the city ensuring the continuation of her orphanage and school. She has told Cal that residents of Port au Prince are still so shaken that they choose to sleep in the streets under tarps, frightful to be crushed under their roofs while asleep one night.

It was rewarding to talk to Cal about his experience and all the work Donna and Kimball have been doing in the past 4 years.

The message I am hoping to convey through these personal accounts and history is that while Haiti does need our help now more than ever, it should not take a catastrophic disaster for this need to be recognized. I know that there are nations, cities, even in America, that every day struggle to eat, work, and survive. There will always be economic and racial disparities in the world from local to global scales. I hope to bring attention to a scenario that, who knows, with earlier help may not be in as devastating as a state today. We as the upper hand are not necessarily all-powerful or all-knowing. It is just as important to learn about and understand one another before we can effectively provide help. So while your favorite TV actor might be encouraging you to txt a donation to Haiti, why don't you instead turn off the TV and do a little research

to see what cause you are actually supporting and what else there is out there. For when Americans are thinking "the Haitian people deserve a democratic form of government and they deserve the ability to have the fruits that the international community is trying to give them," really the politically and historically conscious Haitians are thinking "the only democracy they respect is the one they control and the only fruits they are interested in are the ones they can steal from us."



*This article is attributed to Cal Hopwood & Pat Chin's
Haiti: A Slave Revolution.*



YOGA VERMONT BENEFIT FOR HAITI
PHOTO: SOPHIA FRAIOLI

The Industrial Culture Degrades our Environment: Meat Consumption

words by Erin Duffee

With concerns about our environment growing larger everyday, “living green” has become a top priority for many. It has become a widely accepted truth that the efforts we make today will determine the health of our planet in the future. Of course, some people are more dedicated than others, but most people are willing to make at least some sacrifices. Re-usable bags, biking instead of driving, composting leftover produce; practices that were once considered “radical” or “crunchy” have now become commonplace, especially here in Vermont. But did you know

Supporting animal farms of this size requires incredibly high amounts of resources, such as: water, antibiotics, feed, energy, and land space. Also, these large farms spew out billions of tons of animal waste, which then become toxic pollutants in our environment. CAFO’s are responsible for air and water pollution, land degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss. But as an industry that seeks maximal output with minimal cost, these commercial farming operations are unconcerned with their negative impact as long as they are continuing to make money. And they

**The bottom line is any effort towards reducing
and your own peace of mind.**

that decreasing your meat consumption, even by just one meal a week, is one of the most effective contributions you can make?

In 2006, United Nations labeled the meat industry as one of the top contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global. A lot of the damage is the result of Concentrated Animal Feedlot Operations, or CAFO’s. CAFO’s are large, commercial farms where animals are packed in high-density confinement. This system of meat farming was developed by big business corporations with the intent to drastically raise production levels and lower costs.

This big-business plan has worked, but at what cost? When most people think of animal farms, they imagine idyllic red barns and broad green pastures and cows munching on wild flowers. The modern-day reality could not be further away from that dream...CAFO’s are dark, crammed, and incredibly unsanitary. Animals must be physically restrained in close confinement cages or crates to avoid complete mayhem and few will ever see the light of day.

certainly are making money; commercial meat production has increased 500% since 1950.

At times, industrial agriculture can seem too overwhelming to fight. All you really have to do though is pay attention. Consider where the meat products you buy come from, how you can buy less of them, and how the products you do buy will impact the environment. The culmination of many efforts, big and small, can make a difference.

According to the Environmental Defense, if every American substituted 1 chicken dinner for a vegetarian meal each week, the effect in carbon dioxide emissions would be equal to removing more than half a million cars off the road. The bottom line is any effort towards reducing your meat consumption will benefit the environment and your own peace of mind.



This article is attributed to goveg.com.

Is Sustainable Development Ethnocentric?

words by Laurel Chen

A Google Scholar search today for articles on “Sustainable Development” returns over 637,000 results. Prior to 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) first popularized the concept, sustainable development was rarely discussed. Since that landmark meeting, it has become a major catchphrase within discourses on environmental policy and management, international politics and developmental economics.

Herman Daly explains in his book “Beyond Growth,” that the sustainable development concept “rose to the prominence of a mantra,” for international agencies, businesses and, in all its triteness, our global future. To many scholars, the concept of sustainable development presents a solution to the ensuing crises surrounding the environment and the marginalized peoples of developing countries.

Even with its prevalence in so many fields and policies, the concept remains somewhat unclear. The WCED Report of 1987 defines sustainable development as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Numerous interpretations and thus questions result from this vague definition; what is development, what are the needs of the present and future generations and what constitutes a compromised ability for future generations?

It is not my intention to completely devalue the concept with such questions because the problems addressed by sustainable development are indeed inherently difficult and all-encompassing. There are blurred political, economic, religious, social and ecological components that create a problem that extends to all realms. One of the key challenges facing proponents of sustainable de-

velopment is the ethnocentrism that essentially bore the concept and itself now impedes its practical application. Steps must be taken in our own country and abroad to address the crises surrounding the environment and the marginalized peoples of developing countries; this reality is indisputable. There is also a clear link between economic prosperity and poverty alleviation. However without a thoughtful look at how our own world views differ and come into conflict with those of the indigenous and traditional societies, exporting Western notions of sustainable development to those abroad is an ethnocentric endeavor that is likely to fail.

I cringe whenever I come across the phrases of western ideology. Such terminology separates ‘us’ from ‘them’, as if the West and East are separate planets, inhabited by distinctly different people. However despite my disapproval of such terminology, it is clear that “sustainable development”, as anthropologist Deborah McGregor states, “is a concept derived from conventional western ideology. It is the product of a particular world-view and its interpretation and implementation reflect Western culture and values.” This Western world-view attaches economic prosperity and progress to development. Our Western notions of development are born from our capitalist society, in which economic growth and continuous production are vital. There are undeniably advantages to living in a capitalist society. I am protected from meningitis by the scientific advancement of the meningococcal vaccine, and I never worry that I will have to hunt my own food because of our industrial food system. However on the downside, our Western paradigm is also the reason that sustainable development merely exports our own ideologies of “more, more, more,” to societies that do not work under

the same framework. Moreover, sustainable development says that so-called “developing nations” must implement our practices, with the final goal of instilling our own ideologies into their culture. Basically, the concept says that success for developing nations will come only when they throw out their own ideas and adopt our world-view of increased economic prosperity and development. This concept is just another form of colonialism and reeks of ethnocentrism.

While Western frameworks define sustainability as the capacity for future generations to continue fulfilling their needs, with due concern for the environment, other societies may not even have a synonymous term in their vocabulary. It is nearly for other people who do not have the same cultural world-view as Western development programs, to successfully cooperate in our exported efforts to manage and protect the environment. For example, the people of the

No. 39 Indigenous First Nation of Ontario were unable to grasp the idea of sustainable development after sitting in on conferences and meetings with scholars who were speaking of the topic. Anthropologist Deborah McGregor could only begin to help those of the First Nation understand sustainability when she stopped attempting to fit their ideas into the existing framework and instead acknowledged their world-view. McGregor argues that our sustainability concept is closest to their Creation Stories: “to be sustainable means to take responsibility and be spiritually connected to all of Creation. . . Over many years Indigenous people developed ways of living that sustained this relationship with all of Creation. This relationship was based on giving. From an Indigenous point of view, all of Creation matters. Sustainable development therefore means the survival, not just of the

people, but of all Creation.”

Therefore, it is the ethnoecology (people’s ideas about the relationship between themselves and the environment) of the No. 39 First Nation that lead to ideas of sustainability that differ from our own. In their case, it is the concept of ensuring survival for all of creation instead of just for human success in future generations. Without research on the world-views of traditional societies, such as the work done by McGregor, indigenous ideas would be misunderstood or overlooked. Such misunderstandings can lead to resistance and counterproductiveness in environmental efforts. This is not to say that Western ideas are completely ineffectual, but without due thought to and implementation of the world-

views of the people of developing nations it is like trying to fit a square block into a circle hole. There must be reconciliation between the differing ideologies surrounding sustainable development and the environment in order to produce a non-ethnocentric, effectual model.

Such a model must include Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). TEK refers to indigenous and traditional societal views surrounding the environment and their relationship with it. Ecologist Fikret Berkes, in his book “Sacred Ecology,” defines TEK as “a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission about the relationships of living beings with one another and their environment.” Clearly societies that are not considered “Western” have much knowledge about their environment and have been doing something very right for thousands of years. Proof of the power and validity of TEK is found in the fact that such experiential knowledge has

Western paradigms are based on objectivity, and objectivity inherently leaves no room for experiential knowledge or any emotional connection to the environment.

helped traditional cultures adapt and survive thousands of years of direct contact with the environment, with their survival being directly dependent on their environment and the knowledge of it they held and still do hold. Consider the indigenous adults of the Amazon who are able to identify hundreds of tree types because this knowledge is imperative for their survival, whereas the adults in the US can probably identify no more than twenty. Another example of the effective use of TEK is the controversial slash-and-burn technique enacted by many indigenous groups in Africa and South America. Western researchers who view the fires immediately jump to sometimes erroneous conclusions about indigenous mistreatment and overexploitation of the forests. However several studies portray the actual beneficial effects of setting fire to forests in order to make way for new and increased vegetation and fertile land.

An important component of TEK that diverges from Western ideas of the environment is the fact that TEK is not just a body of knowledge but is a complete way of life that affects the actions and beliefs of the people. Such knowledge is holistic, including spiritual and ethical values, and thus is not compartmentalized like objective scientific knowledge. Everything—animals, plants, people, even material objects— all constitute one whole. Thus they are in tune with true ecological awareness, engaging in a reciprocal relationship with nature built on responsibility and trust. This type of relationship is more in line with environmental protection and management, in comparison to Western notions of taking from nature and giving nothing back. The reality is that the human universe and the economic and social spheres that it comprises have never been and never will be separate from the natural universe; the human and natural universe are fluid and dynamic. For example, in her work with the No. 39 Independent First Nation of Ontario, anthropologist Deborah McGregor realizes it is the natives' Creation stories that lead them to live sustainably. To the people of the First Nation of Ontario, "to be sustainable means to take responsibility and be spiritually con-

nected to all of Creation. . . Over many years Indigenous people developed ways of living that sustained this relationship with all of Creation. . . Sustainable development therefore means the survival, not just of the people, but of all Creation."

Thus projects and policies surrounding environmental protection and management must be based on the application of holistic thinking through a more dynamic approach. Western paradigms are based on objectivity, and objectivity inherently leaves no room for experiential knowledge or any emotional connection to the environment. Many environmental management areas reduce forests to tree heights and biodiversity to graphs of endangered species. But we are not computers. As humans, we need more than science to create true connections. Purely ecological factors are not separated from the social and spiritual factors that exist.

In order to succeed at efforts of environmental management and protection, environmentalists and policy makers must realize the importance of both TEK and of creating beneficial relationships both between the West and traditional societies and between the environment and ourselves. Travelling to developing countries and implementing "sustainable development" programs, in which the locals do not even understand the concept within their own world-view, is fundamentally myopic and ethnocentric. A refocusing on the holism surrounding environmental management, a step back from a purely objective approach, a sensitivity for other world-views and a more intimate relationship with the environment can lead to a model of development that is sustainable, understood and respected among all cultures.



This article is attributed to World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), Deborah McGregor, Herman Daly & Fikret Berkes' book Sacred Ecology.

The Irony of Israeli Humanitarian Aid

words by Erin Duffee



The nation of Israel is mentioned daily in newspapers around the world. The violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a controversial issue and both countries have suffered from subsequent global scrutiny and negative attention. Recently though, Israel has been garnering attention for another reason. In the past few years, Israel has become one of the most prominent providers of international humanitarian relief. The most recent country to receive Israel's aid was Haiti, in January of 2010.

Less than a week after a devastating earthquake hit just outside of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, Israeli rescue teams were already on the scene with over 250 doc-

tors, nurses and rescue workers. There were many other countries that also responded to Haiti's desperate situation,

but few were able to match Israel's efforts. Haiti is not the only country to receive such generous aid; in recent years Israel has provided over 140 different countries with significant disaster relief.

But not everyone is convinced that Israel's actions are so impressive. Recently there has been great debate over the country's true motivations for distributing such relief. It seems unfair to cast aspersions on any country that is doing so much good, but on the world stage almost no action can occur without political commentary, even actions of a humanitarian nature.

For many people, it is difficult to separate Israel's humanitarian efforts from their violent behavior in the Middle East. These critics condemn Israel for turning a blind eye to suffering in the nearby Gaza strip, while simultaneously providing extensive foreign aid.

Gaza is a small strip of land, approximately 25 miles long, bordered by Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. Palestinian refugees have been the primary inhabitants of the area since the 1940s, when they were violently expelled from home during the creation of the modern Israeli state. Government control of Gaza is quite convoluted, possession having changed hands several times between Egypt, Israel, and the socio-political organization, Hamas. High political tensions have resulted in perpetual violence and suffering in Gaza. In 2008, problems escalated into an all out war among the Israelis, Palestinians and Hamas.

Just 22 days after the start of the war, Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire;

however they have since

refused to give up occupation along the border. The Israeli government has essentially set up a blockade, controlling all passage in and out of Gaza. Despite the desperate need for assistance, a severe restriction has been placed on the passage of humanitarian and medical aid into Gaza. The situation has become so severe that the United Nations has deemed it a "humanitarian crisis," and a "human dignity crisis". In March 2010, the blockade reached a disheartening 1,000-day milestone. It is this juxtaposition between Israel's mercilessness and their compassion that has confused critics around the world.

Some hypothesize that Israel's foreign humanitarian efforts are a calculated diversion from their problems with Palestine. Endless attention towards the Israel-Palestine conflict has immersed both countries in a seemingly inescapable cloud of contro-

It is inevitable that Israel's actions in Gaza will continue to cast a shadow over their humanitarian reputation.

sy. With Israel being portrayed as the Goliath more often than the David, it's no wonder that their government might want to generate some positive media attention. There is no country that doesn't consider public diplomacy or their international reputation. That is why there are press conferences, political advisors, speech writers, media teams and slanted news station--because every government and politician knows that the perceived image of a state matters. But the question remains: does a lack of genuine humanitarian concern devalue Israel's relief efforts?

Realistically, it is a difficult issue to analyze given our geographical distance, both literally and figuratively from the conflict. It is hard to imagine that the desperate victims of a tsunami, earthquake, or governmental persecution, would be as quick to criticize the Israelis. In the aftermath of a catastrophe, motivations for aid are much less im-

portant to those in need than the fact that aid is on its way. Whether or not Israel's relief aid has been self-serving is therefore irrelevant. While the country reaps some benefits from providing humanitarian relief, it is also contributing to global security.

It would be wrong for us to ignore Israel's past and present violence. It is inevitable that Israel's actions in Gaza will continue to cast a shadow over their humanitarian reputation. But even so, the compassion they have shown to other countries should be recognized. Perhaps the best way to consider the situation is to recognize its complicated duality; giving both credit and critique where it is due.



This article is attributed to BBC & Attending the World.

Possoms: New Zealand's Speed Bumps

words & photo by Brian Burke

It's just after midnight and we're heading north somewhere between Auckland and Pahia. Around another turn and we see it reflecting in the distant glare of the headlight. Stefan points and yells "GO!" I swerve into the left lane and step on the gas. In an instant it's over, "Brushtail Possum, That's number 3, we're doing well tonight," Stefan mutters as we head on through the night.

After spending 3 months studying conservation and ecology in New Zealand, I feel conflicted. The eradication of pests seems to be against the very ethics for which conservation stands. But as I have learned, it is much more complicated. Unfortunately for possums in New Zealand, they are viewed as an ecological menace and signs stating "Possums, New Zealand's Road Bumps" are commonplace.

The story began as the archipelago of

New Zealand formed. For over 80 million years the native plants and animals of the islands evolved completely separate from the rest of the world. One of the most interesting features is the lack of native mammals besides two small bat species. Through human colonization, first by Polynesians later by Europeans, mammal stowaways and intentionally introduced species ranging from mice and rats to brushtail possums and cats have invaded the landscape. Because the native New Zealand species evolved without mammalian predators, they have no defense mechanisms and their populations have been severely diminished by introduced mammals. As the mammals have no predators and access to a variety of food sources, they have experienced unchecked population growth at the cost of native plants and animals.

New Zealand is home to hundreds of endemic animals and thousands of endemic

plants, species that can not be found anywhere else in the world. Many of these species, including 60 different birds, are listed as threatened or endangered. While there are many factors that contribute to declining populations, invasive pests have had devastating effects. For example, since the arrival of humans in New Zealand, nearly 42% of native bird species have gone extinct. Rare birds including six species of parrots, the flightless Kiwi as well as the ancient relative to dinosaurs, the Tuatara are at risk today.

“100% Pure” is New Zealand’s tourism motto and it is widely justified. In comparison to other parts of the world, the natural environment experiences stress from development but for the most part remains breathtaking. The Department of Conservation (DOC) has taken a rather controversial stance in

order to protect an integral part of New Zealand’s ecosystems, the native plant and animal life. For roughly 50 years, DOC has been using poisons to protect the country’s biological heritage and eradicate invasive mammals. The poisons, in the form of pesticides such as, 1080, are widely dispersed through both aerial application and ground laid bait traps.

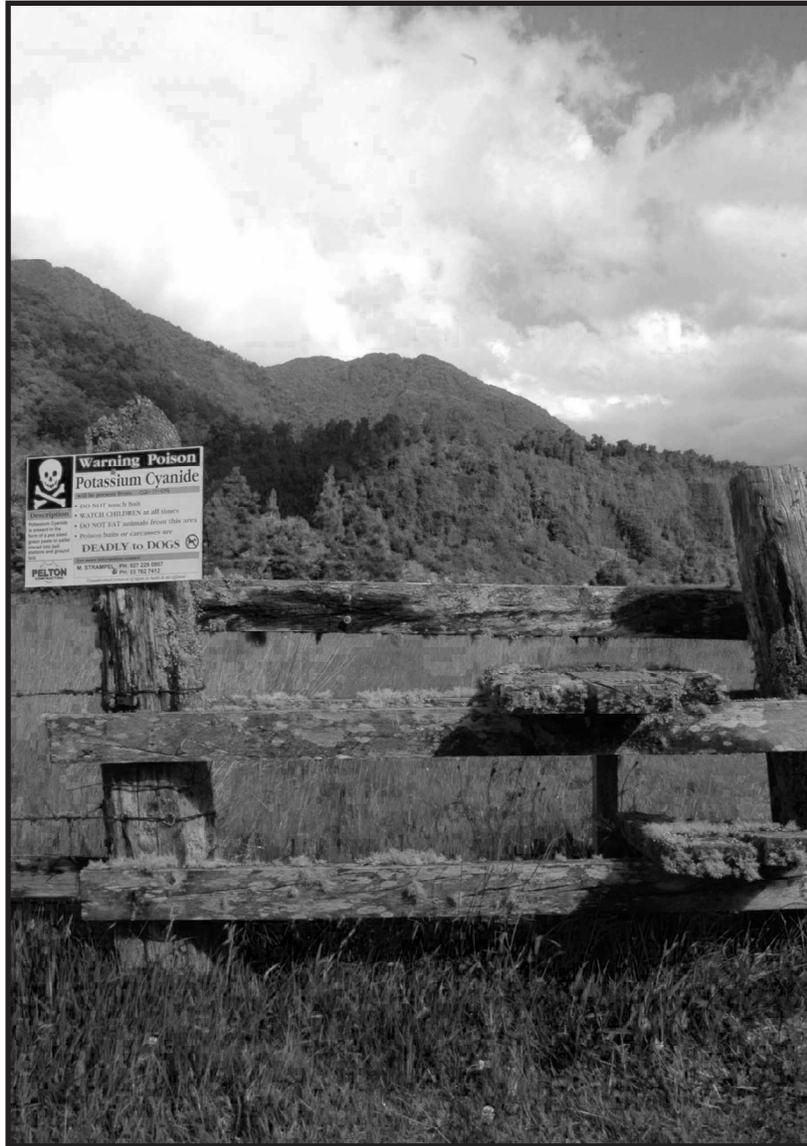
However, critics have evolved from several groups such as hunting associations, pet

owners, and some conservationists. The use of poisonous baits has led to the eradication of game animals and fatal effects on domestic pets such as cats and dogs. Another issue of contention is that the long-term environmental effects of many of these pesticides are unknown. Public dissent regarding the use of

pesticides can be seen anywhere from slogans on bumper stickers to roadside signs to protests. However, without a control measure for invasive species, there is little hope for the survival of native plants and animals. The national consensus believes that pest control is required but the most effective means have sparked controversy. While the debate continues, the use of pesticides has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on restoring the rare endemic flora and fauna of New Zealand.

The invasive species issue in New Zealand is a reality and has had devastating effects on the archipelago’s

ecosystems over the past 200 years. In retrospect perhaps our guerilla pest control tactics were exaggerated, but I would argue that we successfully paid tribute to the rare and beautiful plant and animal life of New Zealand.



An Entrance to Westland Tai Poutini National Park, Westland, South Island, NZ.



This article is attributed to the New Zealand Department of Conservation.

American Brides of the 21st Century

words by Sophia Fraioli

Veiled in white, the American bride walks with her father down the aisle, while friends and family members sit in pews, silent, admiring her sparkling gown. Her father with tearing eyes, hands her over to the groom, kissing her cheek as he sees his little girl finally all grown up. The bride and groom say their vows, dedicating to love and care for one another until the day they die. As they kiss she officially becomes Mrs. Joe Smith, or Mrs. Bob Howard, or any other name that is not her own. She is happy because she has finally found the man of her dreams and she can now start a family of her own. They now walk down that same aisle, hand in hand; it is the beginning of a new chapter, with a very old set of rules attached.

A friend once expressed that out of all the fingers to lose on her hands, the most detrimental would be the ring finger on her left hand. In questioning her decision, there was a short, confused response, "because that's the finger my ring will go on when I'm married." Women are socialized from a very young age to believe that it is their destiny to get married. The white dress, a knight in shining armor and the big diamond are staples of the American wedding franchise that tell women what they want, when they want it, and how much it is going to cost. Through television ads, Disney movies, and fairytales women are left with little choice when it comes to their big day. With the script already laid out in front of them, they line up at the altar, waitresses and CEOs alike, to the tune of a traditional wedding ceremony. Though in the end, their mar-

riages don't resemble those of the 15th century, their role in the wedding remains very similar. America's ever expanding culture has made vast changes over the last few centuries, however much like the rest of the world; our ritualistic traditions remain timeless.

The first decade of the 21st century is quickly coming to a close and within the past 10 years there has been a huge sense of achievement among women. 57% of college graduates are women and they constitute almost half of the American workforce today.

Though they still earn less than men and are more likely to stay at home after having children, steps are being made in the right direction to correct many inequalities that have plagued them for centuries. However, there is still one part of American culture

...it is the beginning of a new chapter, with a very old set of rules attached.

where woman have remained frozen in time, and that is the wedding. Traditional marriage ceremonies in America have remained almost exactly the same and without the change in bride wealth laws, a wedding in 2010 looks almost exactly like one from the 15th century.

With divorce rates on the rise, it may be important to understand why couples decide to get married. The media portrays the bride as a fantasy that every woman would want to partake in; the wedding becomes "her special day", a time in her life where she is the center of attention and her husband is the prop attached. The question becomes whether couples today have sacrificed finding the "right person" for society's standard of the "right time". Women are bombarded with images everyday ranging from TV ads to movie story lines, giving the "normal" bride as a young

and thin woman, blushing and happy, excited for the rest of her life. It is almost impossible to escape these images and while little girls are presented with Disney fantasies, boys are exposed to monster trucks, fire engines and transformers. With girls being exposed to this phenomenon at such a young age, it is not surprising that by the time they are 13 they have already chosen their wedding dresses, along with their husband-to-be. A recent bride, Wendy Johnson, explained to me her ideas of getting married, "I was that little girl who drew her first wedding dress in grade school - early grade school, actually. Right after I saw the Little Mermaid if memory serves me correctly. I always wanted the fairy tale wedding with the handsome prince. I wanted a big poufy ball gown and a beautiful church wedding. I knew the man I would marry would be strong and chivalrous, preferably a Southern gentleman to make my daddy happy. I expected he would be blonde with blue eyes, older and considerably taller than I. When I was 14 I pegged my wedding date as late April 2009. Funny how it worked out- I was married to a blonde-haired, blue eyed man from Charleston in mid-May 2009. He was over 1 year my senior and about 5 inches taller. We had the fairy tale wedding I always wanted. I wore the ball gown, he wore the tailcoat, and we were married in an 85 year old cathedral".

After women are enticed to get married, their wedding planning begins. This is where industries really begin to capitalize; wedding magazines and websites outline exactly what they believe a ceremony should look like. Everything is pristine, white and expensive but no amount of money holds brides back, some going into a considerable amount of debt just to buy the perfect dress. The Knot is a website on the Internet that most women interviewed followed religiously before getting married. The website outlines everything

anyone would ever want to know about planning a wedding, from vows to napkin holders; also providing member forums to discuss with other brides how their planning process. As one woman said to me, "the knot.com is like crack. It takes over your life...and wedding. It also helped a lot, but I know lots of the items I had to have for the wedding were because I saw it on the website or in the magazine."

However, material wealth is only one aspect that women pick up from the wedding industry. All of these media outlets tell brides how they should act, what their vows should look like and even how to deal with the "inevitable name change". Though these suggestions can be ignored, it is hard to overlook them when the message is so prominent. Each of these specific "rules" that seem to be set by the wedding industry, all fall back on tradition. The vows are the same for each religious ceremony, but also for non-denominational weddings. These traditions have remained unchanged throughout centuries, though it is quite obvious when examining them closer they are rooted in history that saw women as material objects.

In a society that boasts equality amongst the sexes, we still perform traditions that systematically place women into roles of subordination. The media is a driving force behind "wedding fever" and the pressure to have a traditional wedding ceremony. But marriages can become equal if we are conscious about the traditions we are following and the hand the media plays in dictating our perceptions and our actions.



Sophia is currently writing her thesis on the role of women in modern weddings and marriages. Her research has been done through a series of personal interviews.

Thank you for reading.

To get involved, please contact us at cnsccsmag@uvm.edu.