

The UNESCO COURIER



FEBRUARY 1994

WORLDS WITHIN WORDS

✓ LANGUAGE AND
CULTURE

✓ THE LIFE AND DEATH
OF LANGUAGES

✓ BABEL REVISITED

INTERVIEW WITH
PALAEOLOGIST
YVES COPPENS



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We invite readers to send us photographs to be considered for publication in this feature. Your photo should show a painting, a sculpture, piece of architecture or any other subject which seems to be an example of cross-fertilization between cultures.

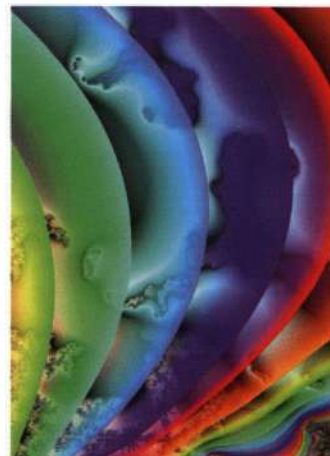
Alternatively, you could send us pictures of two works from different cultural backgrounds in which you see some striking connection or resemblance. Please add a short caption to all photographs.

EXU

1980, wood and horse's teeth (height 80 cm)
by Chico Tabibuia

"You learn from books, I learn from dreams," says Chico Tabibuia, a former wood-cutter who has become one of the masters of contemporary Brazilian folk art. The sculpture shown here, like his other works, first appeared to him in a dream. It depicts Exu, a divinity of fertility and the power of creation in "umbanda", an Afro-Brazilian cult. The Brazilian museologist Paulo Pardal, who discovered Tabibuia and has encouraged his work, sees in his sculptures "the unconscious presence of age-old universal myths."





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L'arc du verbe (1993), a computer-generated image specially produced by Ezéchiél Saad for this issue. Languages are visualized as waves of colour propagating thought through the universe.

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YVES COPPENS

talks to
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A palaeontologist of international reputation, Yves Coppens is professor of palaeoanthropology and prehistory at the Collège de France (Paris). He has carried out extensive fieldwork which has led to the discovery of many fossil hominids and the oldest known manufactured stone tools (over three million years old). He has also constructed models to explain the origin of hominids (eight million years ago), and the origins of Man (three million years ago), as well as a cultural model to explain the evolution of thought.

Among his recent publications are: *Préambules, Les premiers pas de l'Homme* (1988); *Le rêve de Lucy* (1990, in collaboration with Pierre Pelot and Tanino Liberatore); and "The Origin and Evolution of Man", which appeared in *From the Stars to Thought*, no. 155 of *DIOGENES*, the quarterly review of the International Council of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (published with UNESCO support by Berg Publishers, Providence, U.S.A., and Oxford, U.K).

■ *Gauguin painted a famous triptych that depicted naked dream figures of Tahitian women together with animals and a native goddess. He made this brilliant fantasy of colour and imagery a haunting symbol of the human situation by entitling it: "Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?" Could we say that Gauguin's questions summarize the goals of anthropological investigation?*

—Absolutely. They were probably also the first three questions that occurred to man's earliest conscious mind, what some recent philosophers have termed "existential anguish". This triptych by Gauguin is so symbolic of these basic questions in our field that I used it on the cover of a volume in the series of scientific publications

entitled *Les Cahiers de Paléoanthropologie*, which I have edited for fifteen years.

■ *Dinosaurs are a subject of great popular interest, these monsters that roamed the Earth 220 million years ago, persisting through the Jurassic and Cretaceous before disappearing about 70 million years ago. Various explanations have been advanced for the extinction of the dinosaurs. What is your view?*

—The problem of massive extinction of species is linked to the different episodes of Earth's history, such as expansion and contraction of the seas. During the last 500 million years, thirty-five such extinctions have been known. This means that the extinction of the dinosaurs, with that of certain molluscs at the same time, is not an exception. The meteorite theory of the "Death Star" crashing into Earth is for me a romance as big as some dinosaurs! For cosmic reasons, the position of the Earth on its parallax and consecutive alterations of climate mean that the history of life consists of successive periods of expansion alternating with periods of slow decrease or even a quite rapid extinction of species.

■ *Is it not possible that the very size of these monsters has influenced theories concerning their extinction? A fierce carnivore such as Tyrannosaurus Rex, 15 metres*

FRANCIS LEARY
is an American writer and journalist.



long, couldn't just quietly fade away. Surely some great catastrophe was needed for its exit?

—I think that you are right. The extinction of the invertebrates called trilobites 200 million years before, or the disappearance of the beautiful molluscs, the ammonites, at the same time as the dinosaurs, have not inspired such romantic theories.

■ *Are the birds we see today descended from dinosaurs?*

—Definitely, yes. The earliest birds known, the Archaeopteryx, of the Upper Jurassic, were very like dinosaurs, with anatomical similarities, such as teeth and long savage claws, to the small dinosaur, *Deinonychus*, discovered by Dr. John Ostrom of Yale in

1964. Archaeopteryx, however, was also warm-blooded, with feathers for insulation, like birds.

■ *To get the time-scale of Man's origins into focus, true apes, the very remote ancestors of Man, emerged about 20 million years ago. After several million more years, the line of primates split, giving rise to apes such as chimps and gorillas on the one hand and hominids on the other. What brought about this split, without which we would never have existed, at least in our present form?*

—After fifteen years of digging in East Africa between 1963 and 1978, I was surprised not to have collected any fossil remnants of chimps or pre-chimps and gorillas

or pre-gorillas among hundreds of thousands of fossil vertebrates distributed along geological levels dating from eight to one million years. In contrast, I found in these sites hundreds of hominid remains. As molecular biologists and geneticists were then claiming that the African apes were obviously Man's closest relatives as far as the genetic card and proteins were concerned, that is, chimps and gorillas were cousins and we shared with them common ancestors, I thought it interesting to try to solve this curious enigma. The African apes and ourselves were cousins, yet in the field were never found together.

In 1982, I suggested at a conference in Rome and subsequently in other places and in many papers a model to explain this

There is a good possibility that Man had an *Australopithecus* as progenitor. But which one? It's not yet known for sure.

apparent discrepancy, a model that I called "The East Side Story". Just before the split occurred between apes and hominids, eight million years ago, our common ancestors were living all across Equatorial Africa, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, in very low-lying humid country, covered with a dense forest and wooded areas.

A tectonic event intervened. The Rift Valley sank 4,000 metres, while its perimeter thrust up 4,000 metres, forming a barrier between west and east. This had important ecological consequences. Cut off from the east, the western region between the Rift and the Atlantic remained humid and wooded, while the eastern area between the Rift and the Indian Ocean became open country, much less humid and only seasonally watered by the new-born system of monsoons.

Our common ancestors, the apes, were divided into a large western group and a small eastern one. The western apes, in their forested niche, could have been ancestors of chimps and gorillas, while the eastern apes, having to adapt to the new open grasslands, could very well have been the precursors of hominids, *Australopithecus* and *Homo* in succession.

■ *So that's how our ancestors got down from the trees.*

—They got down because they had to! With the trees disappearing, they had no choice.

■ *The fossil skeleton of a female was discovered in the Afar Valley of Ethiopia in 1974. Dating from about three million years, this skeleton was more complete than that of any previous find. She was christened "Lucy", after the Beatles' song Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. Can you discuss this Afar expedition and its significance for palaeontology?*

—The Afar palaeontological sites were found by a French geologist, Maurice Taieb, in the 1960s. As I knew him well, I was the first to be consulted and I gave him the approximate geological age of these sites, according to the determination of the fossil remains collected, which was two to three million years.

In 1972, Taieb organized an expedition under international leadership: two French scientists, Taieb and myself, and two Americans, Don Johanson and Jon Kalb, which constituted the International Afar Research Expedition. We conducted five field campaigns over a period of six years. The chief discovery was that of Lucy, an *Australopithecus* about three million years old. It was the first time that such a complete skeleton from that epoch had been found and we could as never before get a good idea of the size of the specimen, the proportions and how the joints worked.

In my own lab, I had ten theses done on this analysis, each one over three years; in other words a total of thirty years trying to

understand Lucy's behaviour! We finally created the extraordinary picture of a pre-human female, probably twenty years old, between 1 metre and 1m. 20 in height and weighing 20-25 kilos, with long arms and short legs. She ate fruit, roots and tubers and may have had primitive stone tools. She stood erect and walked as a biped but with short steps, rolling her shoulders and hips. With her flat feet and prehensile big toe, the curved phalanges of her hands and feet, she was still climbing trees.

■ *Where would you place Lucy in our family tree?*

—Lucy was probably a cousin but descended anyway from one species of *Australopithecus* to which we gave the scientific name *Australopithecus afarensis*, which also became the genus *Homo* that appeared in East Africa three million years ago. This appearance was linked to another environmental event that I had discovered in 1970 in the sediment of the Omo River Valley, in southern Ethiopia. That's why, making a pun, I called it the (H)OMO event.

Between 3.3 million and 2.4 million years ago, an important climatic crisis occurred—a prolonged drought. The number of trees drastically decreased, as we know from fossils contained in geological levels of three million to two million years. The entire fauna altered, trying to adapt to the changed environment. For hominids, the genus *Homo*, with a much larger brain, was the solution. Poor Lucy had a brain of only 340 cc., while *Homo*'s brain was 800 cc. *Homo* was also equipped with a dentition adapted to a much more varied diet than that of *Australopithecus*.

■ *In 1972 the Kenyan anthropologist Richard Leakey discovered on the shores of Lake Turkana in Kenya some hominid fossils dating from about two million years.*

These hominids had walked erect, "with an easy striding gait like that of modern humans." Homo habilis could have been a progenitor of Man, with a brain capacity of 800 cc., or more than half that of Man today.

—As the earliest men had been found in East Africa, where the earliest *Australopithecus* had also been found; as australop-

ithecines are the beings with the nearest resemblance to Man; and as the earliest australopithecines are older than the earliest men, there is a good possibility that Man had an *Australopithecus* as progenitor. But which one? It's not yet known for sure.

Australopithecines were vegetarians and only exceptionally carnivores out of necessity. Because of the climatic crisis of

three million years ago, the *Homo* (*Homo habilis*) are both vegetarians and meat-eaters; thus, they could very well have been the first killers, sometimes scavengers but hunters as well.

■ *Controversy over whether Man inherited an instinct for killing from ancestors millions of years ago first began with Raymond Dart. This South African professor of Anatomy concluded that a skull found in 1924 at Taung near the Kalahari Desert was that of an Australopithecus, six years old and living three million years ago. The creature walked erect, with a brain the size of a gorilla's. The evidence of the teeth convinced Dart that it had been a carnivore. Was he right?*

—Dart's interpretation of some animal bones that he associated with *Australopithecus* as tools, called by some writers "Dartifacts", was perhaps partly correct. But now it seems more likely that, according to the analysis of marks on the occlusal surface of their teeth and the analysis of the tooth morphology, the australopithecines were vegetarians, not carnivores.

One day in Antananarivo, Madagascar, I had to give a lecture on the "Taung baby" and the organizers of the event had the idea of making a large poster with the restored image of the *Australopithecus* infant. Shortly before the lecture, I saw two Malgache ladies looking at the poster and one said to the other, "This lecturer seems really very young!"

■ *Neanderthal Man, whose fossil was discovered near Dusseldorf in 1856, was said to have descended from Australopithecus robustus, a slow-brained, heavy-jawed, plant-eating hominid. He faded from the picture, the pace a million years ago too much for him, but was said to have survived in Neanderthal Man, who had some-*



what similar characteristics. He gave way in turn to Cro-Magnon Man. What happened to Neanderthal Man?

—*Australopithecus robustus* is one of the answers of the hominid family to the (H)OMO climatic crisis, that is, a new *Australopithecus*, heavier, taller and stronger, with a very peculiar dentition, tiny front teeth and enormous molars for a quite specialized tough vegetarian diet. And it now seems to us that *'robustus* became extinct one million years ago.

It seems also that the first *Homo*, because a bigger brain had made it more daring and because of an omnivorous diet, which made it more mobile, was the first to expand its territory. These adventurers soon reached the Middle East from East Africa and then went on to Europe and Asia, gradually transforming themselves into what we used to call *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens*, which are not in fact true species.

But the successive glaciations of the quaternary period, covering the Alps and Scandinavia as well as Germany and Poland, isolated the first hominid population. In such a case, a genetic drift happens to the population. In western Europe, *Homo habilis* became *Homo erectus* as elsewhere, but a particular *Homo erectus*, already with some Neanderthal features, and this *Homo erectus* became *Homo sapiens* as elsewhere, but a very distinctive *Homo sapiens* that we call *Homo sapiens Neanderthalensis*.

So Neanderthal Man is not the descendant of *robustus* but is what *Homo* became in an island called western Europe. This genetic drift only came to a stop between 30 and 40,000 years ago, when *Homo sapiens sapiens* came from the Middle East to Western Europe. Otherwise, the Neanderthal phenomenon could have given birth to a new Humanity, unable to interbreed anymore with the other one, that is, with Cro-Magnon Man.

■ *Darwin's thesis of the "survival of the fittest" has often been used to justify a claim to the superiority of white people over others, blacks and Amerindians, for example. What do you think about this?*

—Every scientist, in any discipline, has, like any layman, more or less preconceived ideas. Everything is all right as long as such ideas are just working hypotheses. If these

hypotheses are confirmed, it's fine, but if they are not, the true scientist must forget them and change his thinking. That's the way to recognize a good scientist.

Darwin was an outstanding scientist, with particularly clear and synthesizing concepts, but he was quite wrong when he tried to apply, without any correction, his conclusions obtained from plants or ani-



imals to Man and human societies. He forgot that Culture interfered, bringing liberty and responsibility while dramatically changing the rules.

■ *On entering the Paris Musée de l'Homme, of which you were formerly the director, a large sign tells one to leave "Culture" in the cloakroom and concentrate on the universal biological affinity of humankind. Yet, as we may see every day on TV, people can be violently aroused by both physical and cultural differences, producing outbursts of rage and hatred.*

—It's true that there are differences between people and it's true that people are often divided by economic, territorial and religious rivalries, causing violent behaviour. But it's also true that these differences are essentially superficial. We are all *Homo sapiens sapiens* and share the same genetic characteristics, separating us from the apes.

■ *Some people have seized upon discoveries in anthropology as demonstrations of divine intervention, on the grounds that no scientist has been able to explain fully the development of the human mind, with all its complexities and achievements. How does one account for Man's unique stature in the animal kingdom?*

—The invention of the first stone tools was an essential stage in Evolution, the introduction of culture in Nature. My own expedition in southern Ethiopia found the earliest tools, 3.3 million years old. After the natural environment has prevailed for four billion years, suddenly, three million years ago, a new environment is created by a hominid. This changes everything because Man will respond to the solicitations of the natural environment faster than Nature, adapting to them before biology does. Thus, biological evolution will decrease and finally stop.

Man is the only animal to have "chosen" to develop his nervous system at this level for his adaptation.

The quest for an explanation beyond Evolution, born of consciousness and the effort to reduce the "*angoisse existentielle*", is outside the realm of science. The end of our scientific research is to describe the world through its history; to find an explanation of how it works. And the natural explanation cannot solve the supernatural question.

Every step in the history of life has been extraordinary—the origin of life itself, only known for a brief hour in palaeontological time, the appearance of pluricellular beings and of sexuality, the respiration of air, the development of vision, of thought, of speech, the invention of culture. Thanks to prehistorical studies, we know about the intermediate steps between the first tool-maker and Cro-Magnon, as well as, for example, those between Cro-Magnon and the civilization of Sumer and Akkad.

Man is the only animal to have "chosen" to develop his nervous system at this level for his adaptation. Other animals have chosen the transformation of their limbs in order to run faster or of their teeth to improve their diet. A scientific answer would be: confronted by such an environmental event, it so happened that Man adapted to the new conditions by the development of a big brain, but it might just as well have been the horse. A philo-

sophical response would be: this event occurred in this area and not elsewhere and at that time and not at another time and Man was the member of the animal kingdom who developed his brain.

■ *Can human nature be so modified as to prevent the extinction of our race by all-out war, by the destruction of our fragile environment, or by runaway demographic problems?*

—I must say that I am optimistic. Since the emergence of consciousness about three million years ago, humanity has developed knowledge of itself and of its environment, losing its primeval instincts and gaining its liberty. Though formidable individual or collective problems remain, the way we are organizing answers to these problems is very impressive.

Overall, humanity is becoming a thinking, rational and organized society, aware of its responsibilities. But it is not easy: over three million years we have had to learn to deal with hundreds of thousands of people, then with millions. Now we have to cope with billions. Education, the acquisition of more knowledge, the colonization of our solar system and, in the distant future, of other systems will bring us to a better understanding of our world, better control of ourselves and of our planet and an increase in freedom. ■



THE GIFT OF TONGUES

■ by Stephen Wurm ■

The world's peoples have devised ingenious strategies for communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries

STEPHEN WURM, of Australia, is Professor of Linguistics in the Research School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University in Canberra. Among his 300 publications are *Papuan Languages of Oceania* (1982), *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area* (1981-1983) and *Language Atlas of China* (1987-1990).

MORE than 5,000 different languages are currently spoken in the world, with a very much larger number of dialects. Many of them are mutually unintelligible or virtually so, and are spoken by small groups of people.

The need for communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries—which has become even more pressing and widespread in recent decades as a result of dramatic increases in the movements of people in many parts of the world—can be met in a number of different ways. One common method is for speakers of two different languages that are used adjacently to each other to learn to speak, at least to some extent, the language of their neighbours. This is called active two-way bilingualism. If only one



Above, a dancer of the Trobriand Islands (Papua New Guinea) during a festivity associated with the *kula*, a ceremonial form of economic exchange.

Opposite page, the leader of a village community at Ccatca in the department of Cuzco (Peru) holding his silver-tipped staff of office.

of two groups that speak different languages learns the language of its neighbours, this is called active one-way bilingualism. For instance, if two neighbouring groups live near the seashore but only one of them has access to the sea and possesses a commodity such as salt or fish that the other group is eager to acquire, the sellers of such commodities are in an economically more powerful position than the potential buyers, and their language takes precedence over that of the inland tribe when contact occurs.

Ambassadors and negotiators

One interesting case of bilingualism has been observed among certain traditionally hostile tribes in Papua New Guinea who speak different languages but need to communicate with

each other in order to settle disputes. These tribes customarily exchange children who then learn the language of the tribe that has adopted them, in addition to their own. Afterwards, they act as ambassadors and interpreters, helping to negotiate settlements or other matters arising from tribal disputes. Their safety is ensured by strict laws on both sides.

Members of very small language communities which are surrounded by larger linguistic groups usually learn to speak several of their neighbours' languages. Such people may play an important cultural role as interpreters, negotiators and intermediaries.

Another solution to the intercommunication problem occurs when the speakers of two or several closely related neighbouring languages

learn to understand, but not to speak, their neighbours' languages. Participants in such situations speak their own language and are understood by all their communication partners, and vice versa. This is called passive bilingualism or passive multilingualism. It is especially common between speakers of different Turkic or Mongolian languages in Central Asia, but is also found in parts of Africa and New Guinea.

Lingua francas

The cases mentioned so far involve languages that are native to at least one of the communi-

cating groups. However, there are many situations in which languages not native to any of the speakers are used as a means of intercommunication. They occur frequently between speakers of European and non-European metropolitan languages, such as when a Frenchman, a Norwegian, a Hungarian and a Japanese communicate with each other in English. Such a contact language used for wider communication is called a lingua franca.

There are many of these languages in the world, and they achieve their status for a variety of reasons, one of which may be that their



Left, sports day at a school in a Paris suburb.

Opposite page, villagers walk to the fields on the island of Java (Indonesia).



speakers possess some appealing cultural features or achieve cultural or political supremacy, which makes their language prestigious in the eyes of speakers of other languages. Many of them emerge as a result of trading relations in which the speakers of a given language take their wares far and wide for sale, and use only their own language, which their customers have to learn, at least rudimentarily, in order to trade with them. Examples of such traders' lingua francas are Kiswahili in East Africa, Bazaar Malay in the East Indies (though it is now receding before Indonesian), and several trade languages in the New Guinea area. In centuries past, Iranian languages such as Sogdian and Middle Persian, and later Modern Persian, were used as trade lingua francas on the silk route across Asia.

Pidgin languages

The majority of such trade lingua francas become simplified when used as such, but they continue in their original full form within the communities that use them as their native tongues. Some trade languages have become pidgin languages, that is languages that are sharply reduced in their grammatical complexity and vocabulary. Examples include a Russian-Chinese pidgin used in the Chinese-Russian

border areas in Siberia from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, a number of pidgins developed from local indigenous languages in parts of New Guinea before the time of European contacts, and an Inuit pidgin used between Inuit and Alaskan Indians in northern Alaska during the nineteenth century.

A more common way for a pidgin language to emerge is as a means of communication when representatives of a metropolitan culture establish a colonial-type rule over indigenous populations. Quite often, however, such tongues become lingua francas that permit wider intercommunication between speakers of different local languages. This is especially true in areas in which many different tongues are spoken, as is the case in Papua New Guinea, and parts of Africa, northern Siberia and South America. The grammars and sound structures of these pidgins reflect, in varying degrees, features of the language or languages of the local indigenous population, while their vocabularies are usually, but not always, based on the metropolitan language with an admixture of indigenous elements. Most such pidgins, where they are still spoken, have become the first language of communities, replacing their original native languages. Such languages are called creoles.

There are, however, some parts of the world in which very prominent and widely-used pidgin languages have not, or have only to a very limited extent, replaced local languages. These areas include New Guinea and regions adjacent to it, where several large pidgin languages play very important roles because of the enormous multiplicity and diversity of the local tongues. Nevertheless, the indigenous populations adhere tenaciously to their native languages, which are their most cherished symbols of cultural and ethnic identity.

Many pidgin languages that are in close contact with the metropolitan languages on which much of their vocabulary is based tend to gradually approximate to that language in both vocabulary and grammar and to move towards that language via what is called the post-pidgin (or post-creole) stage. Eventually they become sub-standard forms of the metropolitan language concerned.

Messages of religion and power

The so-called mission languages, also known as church languages, constitute another type of language of wider intercommunication. These are local languages originally adopted by European mission organizations as the vehicle of their activities. When the missions extended their work beyond the boundaries of the indigenous language they had adopted, they usually continued to use the adopted local tongue in the new areas, making it thereby an artificially-introduced lingua franca. With the reduction of missionary work in many parts of the world and the nativization of religious activities introduced by Westerners, such languages have in some cases turned into secular lingua francas.

A somewhat similar situation is that in which a local language is adopted as the language of administration by a colonial or conquering power. The language chosen for this purpose is usually fairly widely spoken in the area in question and enjoys some prestige. The Dutch introduced Standard Malay as the official administrative language and general lingua franca in what is now Indonesia. In the same way, the post-colonial rulers of Indonesia adopted Indonesian as the official language even before the country became officially independent. (Indonesian is based on Standard Malay, which made its introduction fairly easy.)

An example of the introduction of a conqueror's language as the general language in the invaded area was the compulsory introduction of the Quechua language of the Incas in what is today Peru in South America. This took place a comparatively short time before the arrival of the Spaniards.

The metropolitan languages of present or past colonial or similar rulers constitute another type of lingua franca in certain areas. Even after most colonies become independent, the languages remain lingua francas, usually among members of elite groups. Their use is beginning to spread in former colonial areas, especially among members of the young generation, at the expense of other lingua francas, in particular of pidgin languages. ■

A procession of gods chanting ritual words is depicted in this Zapotec painting (c. 5th-7th centuries) which adorns a tomb at Monte Albán, a pre-Columbian site in Mexico.





Peninsular Malaysia

Putting languages on the map



Thailand

These three maps are details from *Language Atlas of the Pacific Area** (1981) produced under the general editorship of Stephen Wurm and Shirô Hattori. The Atlas is one of a series sponsored by the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies with the financial assistance of UNESCO, which encourages the safeguarding and revitalization of endangered languages as part of its programme for the preservation of the cultural heritage. Atlases on the languages of China and Korea have already appeared, and an Atlas of the World's Languages has just been published by Routledge, London. Other atlases are in preparation on languages of intercultural communication in the Pacific, African languages, and the indigenous languages of South America.



Northern Borneo

* Published (in Canberra) by the Australian Academy of the Humanities in collaboration with the Japan Academy. Distributed by GEO CENTER, D-7000 Stuttgart 80, Postfach 80 08 30, Germany (fax: 49 711 7889354).



BABEL REVISITED

by Peter Mühlhäusler

Linguistic diversity is a resource whose value has been widely underestimated

IN the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, the descendants of Noah tried to build a tower leading to heaven, but God frowned on their presumption and sabotaged the common language that enabled them to communicate. This story, which portrays linguistic diversity as a divine punishment, has dominated Western thinking about languages for centuries and as a result many people believe that a multiplicity of languages is undesirable.

I believe, on the other hand, that linguistic diversity should not be seen as a problem but as an essential resource and that there is an urgent need to reverse policies and practices that currently

threaten thousands of small languages. Unless this is done, the chance to learn from the cumulative insights, successes and errors of a large proportion of the human species will be lost forever.

The attractions of a single language

There have been many attempts to replace the diversity of human languages with a single language. This goal was vigorously pursued by the philosophers of the European Enlightenment and, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, by the supporters of artificial languages such as Volapük and Esperanto which attracted millions of followers around the globe. Many Esperantists hoped not only that Esperanto would one day become a universal auxiliary language but that at a later stage it would be the world's *only* language.

The idea of the modern nation-state also provides a powerful inspiration for those who are committed to reducing linguistic diversity: a common language is often seen as a necessary binding ingredient for new nations. Only 200 years ago, French was not the mother tongue of the majority of people born in France, whereas today, non-French-speakers living in France belong to a small and shrinking minority. What happened in Western Europe in the past is being repeated nowadays in states such as Indonesia, where Bahasa Indonesia developed from being a small auxiliary language into the country's main language and will soon be the mother tongue of more Indonesians than any other language.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the choice of a single national language is often regarded as a precondition for all modernization. No matter what language is chosen—an introduced language such as English, French, Mandarin or Russian, or a newly-developed language such as Filipino—a basic requirement is

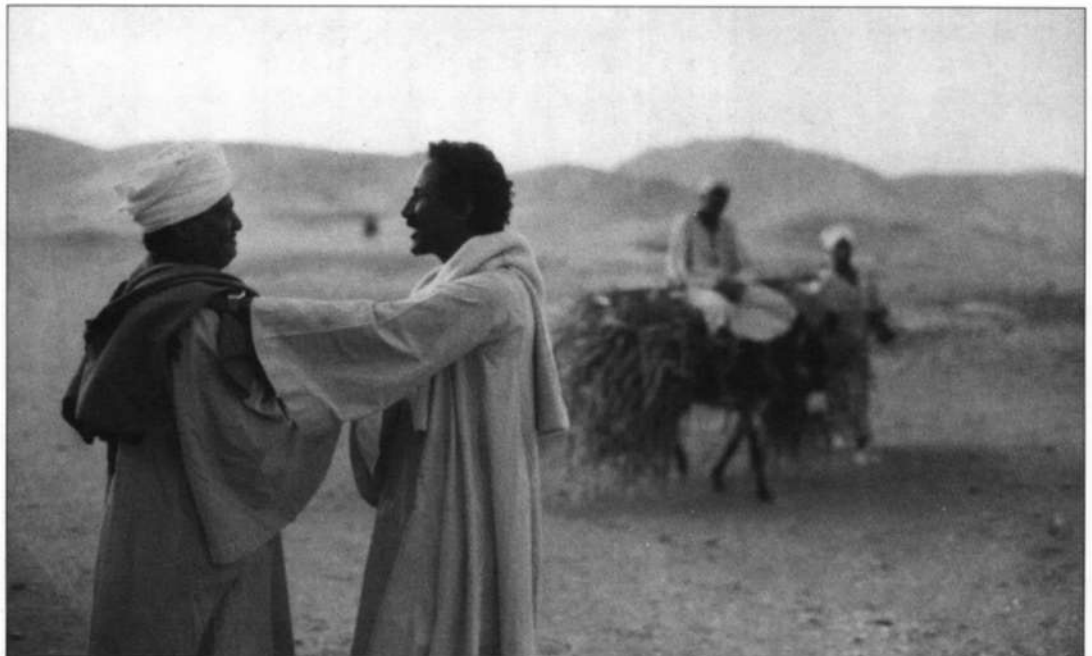
that it should be fully intertranslatable, that is, capable of expressing the concepts and distinctions that are needed in the modern world. But the need for intertranslatable languages has an unfortunate side effect—the destruction of small languages as outmoded and irrelevant.

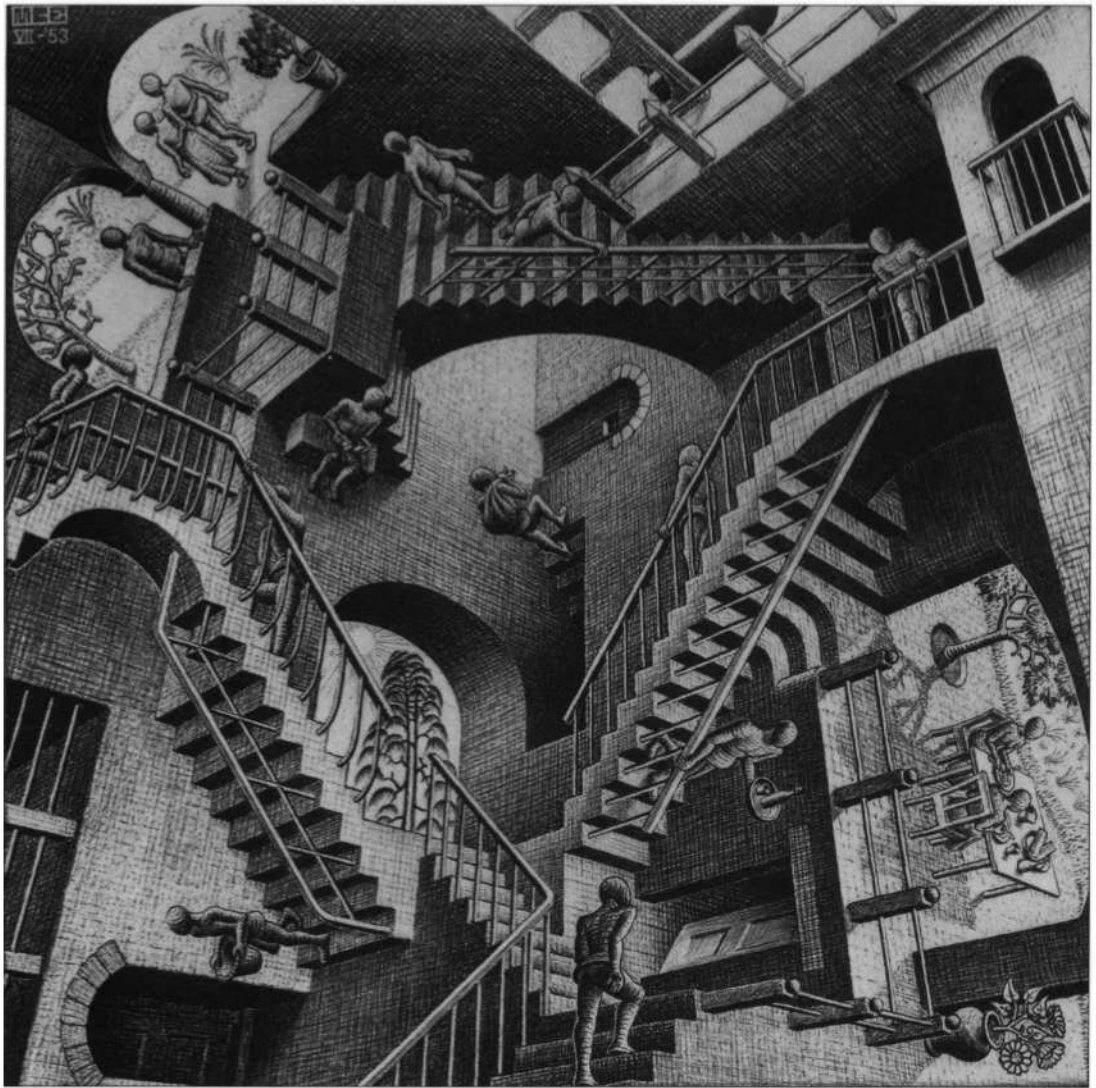
The processes of streamlining which are taking place in the field of language can be compared to the streamlining of the world's plant and animal species. Both developments have been promoted by people acting with the best of intentions—reducing the cost of communication in the first case and feeding the world's growing population in the second. Regrettably, those people had only a very limited understanding of the nature and function of diversity.

In recent years there has been a growing realization of the importance of biological diversity, and even more recently the voices of those advocating linguistic and cultural diversity have become louder. However, the importance of linguistic diversity has not yet aroused widespread public concern; nor has the notion that “linguistic ecology” needs the same amount of care as natural ecology. There are, however, a number of parallels between the two. First, all present-day diversity is the outcome of processes that took a very long time: millions of years in the case of biodiversity, at least 100,000 years in the case of linguistic diversity. And once genuine diversity is lost, it cannot be easily restored, in spite of progress in bioengineering and linguistic engineering. A second, equally important similarity is that linguistic diversity and diversity in the natural world are both functional. The 10,000 or so languages that exist today reflect necessary adaptations to different social and natural conditions. They are the result of increasing specialization and finely tuned adaptation to the changing world.

Left, *The Tower of Babel* (1990), acrylic on canvas by the French artist Robert Combas.

Right, *desert greeting* (Egypt).





One world or many?

To understand the nature of this fine-tuning, we need to contrast two theories about the relationship between language and the world. One theory, known as the mapping or labeling view, maintains that we live in one world that consists of many parts and each language provides a different set of labels for the same set of parts. According to this theory, the differences between languages are only superficial and all languages are fully intertranslatable.

The second theory holds that most perceptions of the world and parts of the world are brought into being and sustained by languages. Speakers of different languages, therefore, do not perceive the same world. Instead, different languages emphasize and filter various aspects of a multi-faceted reality in a vast number of ways.

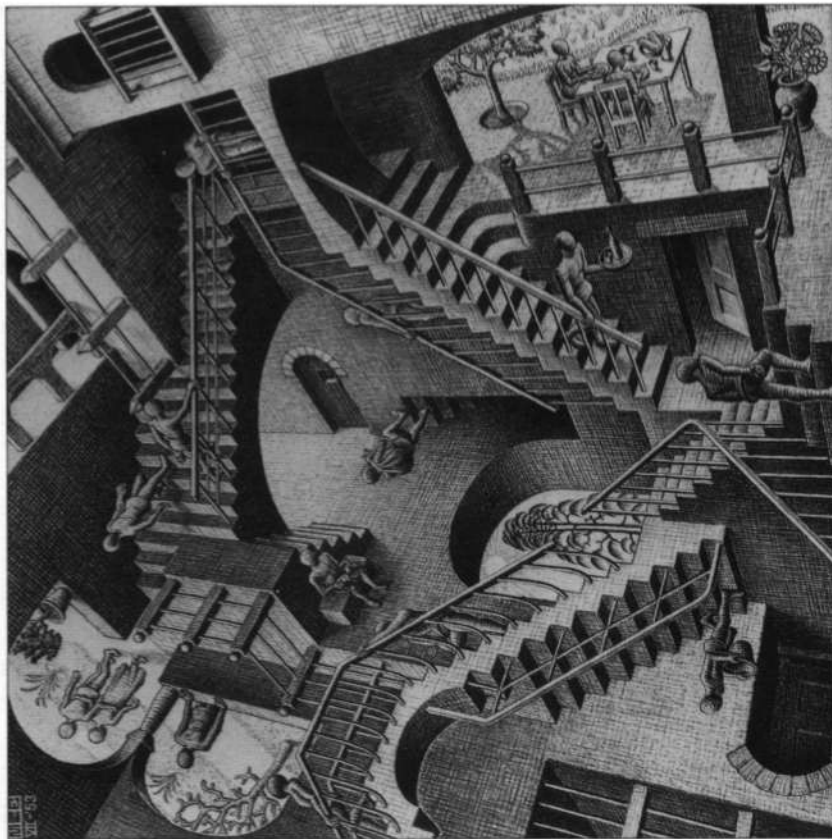
If we accept this theory, each language may be seen as a provisional interpretation of a world so complex that the only hope for understanding it is to approach it from as many different perspectives as possible. If we regard each language as the result of a long history of human endeavour to gain knowledge of the world, we may begin to

see why linguistic diversity is an invaluable resource rather than an obstacle to progress.

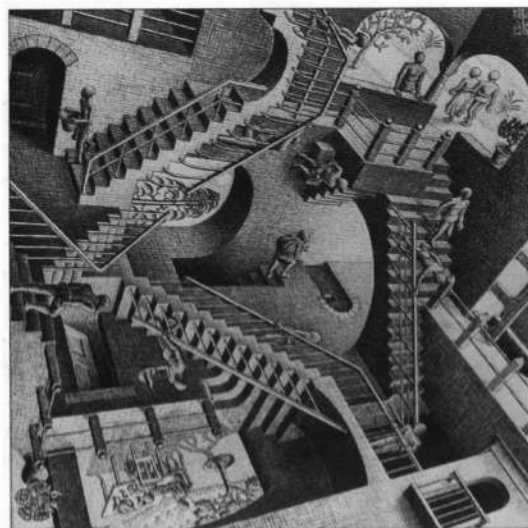
Different languages communicate different perceptions of reality in a number of ways. These include differences in vocabulary, differences in the grammatical information that is expressed, and differences in the boundary between what is regarded as literal truth and what is regarded as metaphorical.

Virtually all human knowledge depends on having criteria with which to determine similarities and differences. Doctors need to know, for instance, whether or not the red spots on the foreheads of two patients are symptoms of the same disease. Psychologists need to know whether two forms of behaviour are manifestations of the same psychological state, and biologists need to know whether two animals are members of the same species. In most instances, reliable criteria for similarities and differences are difficult to come by and decisions are usually determined by the available lexical resources.

One well-known area is that of colour names. The same area of the colour spectrum may have one name in one language, two names in a second language, and three names in a third. Not making a lexical distinction between, say, green and blue



Relativity (1953),
a lithograph by
the Dutch graphic artist
Maurits Cornelis Escher
(1898-1972).



(as in the Welsh *glas*), means not focusing on the difference between the two colours in real life. In the field of plants, there are again considerable differences. Where certain plants are central to a culture, an amazing degree of lexical fine-tuning can occur. Many New Guinea languages, for example, make dozens of distinctions between different types of cordilyne leaves, according to whether such leaves are used for dressmaking, decoration, magic or other purposes. Similar fine-tuning can also be observed in the sub-languages spoken by specialist groups in Western societies, for example, the sub-language of motor mechanics, painters, doctors or bankers.

Suddenly to get rid of all these fine distinctions

developed by specialists over centuries would greatly impoverish a language such as English, making it incapable of referring to anything except in general terms. Abandoning language diversity could have similar consequences on a global scale. Specialist vocabularies and specialist knowledge about phenomena as diverse as types of snow, useful plants, types of weather or ways of dealing with children would suddenly be lost.

Language and the breakdown of traditional societies

One area that offers many examples of differences of this kind is kinship. Anthropological linguists have accumulated a vast amount of evidence as to how different languages focus in different ways on the shared properties and differences among family members. While in English, the word “sister” refers to the female sibling of both males and females, in Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea, a pidgin language that often reflects a Melanesian interpretation of the world, the word “sister” means sibling of the opposite sex. A brother calls his sister “sister” and a girl calls her brother “sister”. In some Aboriginal languages in Australia and other languages in Melanesia, the same word is used to refer to both grandfather and grandchild. In these instances, having the same label usually means getting the same treatment. Such labels reinforce solidarity within the group. For example, giving the same name to members of different generations can be a way of reducing generational conflict. The rather impoverished inventory of words in most modern Western languages may not be sufficient to sustain complex extended family networks, and the replacement of an indigenous language with more distinctions by a Western language with fewer distinctions could be a factor in the breakdown of traditional societies.

Another area in which there are considerable differences between languages is the naming of parts of the body. In many languages, including some spoken in West Africa, the term “hand” covers either the whole arm or the arm up to the elbow. The West African practice of gripping another person’s lower arm when “shaking” is a reflection of a different linguistic organization. In my own native Alemannic, the terms “foot” and “leg” are not distinguished lexically, something that caused me considerable confusion when learning High German, where the distinction is made. In Melanesia, dogs are said to have two arms and two legs rather than four legs, and centipedes are perceived as having many arms rather than many legs.

Most of the examples given so far have dealt with the different ways in which languages lexically subdivide a fairly tangible reality—the reality of colour or the reality of plants and people. There are other less tangible realities where perception is even more closely linked to language: for example, the names of emotions or states of mind. The German word *Gemütlichkeit* does

not compare neatly with the English word “cosiness”, nor is “depression” the same as the outmoded “melancholy”. The absence of words for depression or sadness in certain Polynesian languages would seem to correspond to the absence of the associated phenomena.

Language is even more directly involved in the creation of philosophical and religious approaches to the world. It sustains the meaningfulness of ideas such as solipsism, “the view that self is all that exists or can be known” or of elements in systems used to explain the workings of the universe such as “phoneme” in linguistics or “phlogiston” in eighteenth-century science. Death in traditional Polynesian languages is described by a number of words, ranging from initial permanent unconsciousness to the ultimate disintegration of the body. The practice of “reburial” reflects this linguistic distinction.

Another important difference between languages relates to the ways in which they require speakers to make important choices about the people they are addressing. This is well known to English speakers who find that when they learn French the neutral English second person singular pronoun “you” has to be translated into “tu” or “vous”, depending on the degree of politeness or solidarity being shown towards the person addressed. When using nouns, some languages do not have number distinctions at all, while others like Fijian need to express at all times whether the speaker is talking about one, two, three, a few or more than a few entities. In some New Guinea Highland languages, a sentence such as, “The pig broke the fence”, cannot be said in this kind of neutral manner. Using grammatical endings, the speaker has to indicate whether this is a report of what he or she has actually observed or whether it is an inference from indirect evidence such as pig droppings or hearsay.

Metaphorically speaking

The expression of social distinctions, numbers or the credibility of a piece of information can lead to interesting quandaries. One wonders what advertising is like in Aiwo, a language spoken in the Solomon Islands in which all words referring to useless objects have to be given a prefix indicating uselessness. How could one describe a nuclear power station in Aiwo? Would one have to use a prefix indicating the class of entities that are dormant but liable to sudden change?

The influence of certain semantic distinctions may be so strong that it leads languages to interpret reality in very different ways, that may be described as either event-dominated or object-dominated. Many standard European languages can be regarded as object-dominated because of their strong tendency to convert processual verbs into abstract, object-like nouns. For example, the subject matter of linguistics is not perceived as the activity of speaking but as an object termed “language”. One of the consequences for this area of enquiry is that, while speaking always involves people, and a spatial, temporal situation, the abstract term *language* suggests an object

that can be analysed as something self-contained.

Equally important in Western languages is the very strong presence of causality. Verbs such as “to teach” or “to cure” can be paraphrased as “to cause to learn” and “to cause to get better”. However, there is a very different, equally valid way of looking at what goes on in the classroom or in a doctor’s practice, as seen in languages such as Wintu, an American Indian language spoken in California, which favours comitative, or “being with” interpretations. In a Wintu’s perception, the doctor takes part in the patient’s recovery and the teacher shares the learner’s learning progression. It is not at all clear that a causative view of these matters necessarily leads to better teaching or healing practice.

Languages, finally, differ according to the metaphors their speakers live by. Western life tends to be dominated by a small number of metaphors. The saying “time is money”, for instance, reinforces cultural practices such as charging by the hour, trying to save money by getting things done more quickly and the view that there are more economical and less economical uses of time. Needless to say, such a metaphor does not occur in non-monetary, traditional societies where work and gain are measured in terms other than quantity of time “spent”. Another prominent Western metaphor is that of “rule”, the idea that there is an abstract ruler of the universe who has laid down the rules of nature. So deeply entrenched is this metaphor that scientists believe that it is literally true and are convinced they can discover the rules of nature, a belief that has only recently begun to weaken as a consequence of discoveries by chaos theoreticians. Researchers on neural networks are now beginning to question the idea that language

Right, a dancer from the Fine Arts University of Phnom Penh (Cambodia). Her dress consists of a rectangle of cloth specially fitted and sewn before each performance.

Below, a Tahitian woman (French Polynesia).





learning involves rules and rule systems, a dogma of linguistics for many decades. It is quite likely that metaphors of other cultures not dominated by the idea that the world needs to be governed by rules may produce future breakthroughs in scientific thinking.

Environmental discourse provides a striking example of why learning from different languages may be very important. Western languages have many gaps in their ability to express aspects of the environment. The number of edible plants the average Westerner can name contrasts very unfavourably with the many hundreds of names known to the average speaker of a South American Indian language.

There is now a growing awareness of “green” issues, and “green” vocabulary is on the increase. We have words such as “biodiversity”, “recycling” and “lead-free petrol” but not all of these terms are equally suitable for environmental discourse. For instance, the word “resource” suggests that the notion of regeneration is applicable to both renewable and non-renewable resources and the very term “environment” suggests a division between humans and what is around them, an idea that is not widely found in the languages of the world.

The combined propensity of Western languages to emphasize human causativity and control and their object-dominated character suggests that the best course of action is one of establishing control over a small bounded area and not, as other languages would suggest, learning to understand an undivided whole.

Note also the underdifferentiation between

different types of control in languages such as English, where the possessive pronoun “my” can be used to express three situations:

A controls B = my child (A’s child)

B controls A = my father (A’s father)

A and B reciprocally control one another = my partner.

In Barrai, a language of Papua New Guinea, these three categories are clearly distinguished by different pronominal forms. Interestingly, to express the notion of “my land” in Barrai, one uses the pronoun for mutual control suggesting interdependence, the need for balance and co-operation between people and the land. Western metaphors of the land are dominated by the distinction between human beings and the non-human world, and the idea that human beings are a privileged species, the rulers or controllers for whose benefit the rest of the world was created. Recent metaphors such as “Spaceship Earth” reinforce the idea that the Earth exists predominantly for the benefit of its human inhabitants, and the idea of environmental management and eco audits is just another version of the old picture of human beings as rulers over the rest of creation.

I would suggest that Westerners are trapped within the limitations imposed on them by their languages and this is one of the principal reasons for the lack of genuine progress in the environmental sciences. This example of environmental discourse illuminates the dangers of monolingualism and monoculturalism and shows how many different interpretations—and many different languages—are necessary to solve the problems facing the world.

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NIGERIA'S CHOICE

■ by Ayo Bamgbose ■

The thorny questions facing a nation of 400 languages as it seeks a common medium of communication

DEVELOPING nations, in general, rarely consider language questions a priority unless problems arise in connection with the implementation of controversial language policies. Nigeria is no exception, and economic problems are popularly perceived there as being more immediate and important than language problems.

However, social, economic and political upheavals since independence have brought language into the spotlight as a crucial factor for the country's social and political stability. As a result, questions about language have featured in the deliberations of two Constituent Assemblies set up to create new constitutions, in the national debate over the framework for political governance, and in successive constitutions since 1960.

Like most African countries, Nigeria is multilingual. There are about 400 languages—not dialects—and three of these languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, are spoken by about half of the 88.5 million population of the country. In addition, another 10 per cent of the population is made up of speakers of other languages who are nevertheless able to speak at least one of the major languages as an additional language.

Although Nigerian languages are usually classified as either major or minority languages, this is grossly misleading because next in numbers and importance to the three major languages are about ten main languages that serve as the principal languages of some of the states. Such languages include Kanuri, Ibibio, Efik, Tiv, Ijo, Edo, Fulfulde, Urhobo, Nupe and Igala. The other languages should not be dismissed as "minority" languages, since the combination of all those who speak them adds up to a substantial proportion of the population. We may thus conclude that there are three functional types of languages in Nigeria: major languages that have a role at the national level, main languages whose role is at the state level, and small-group languages that function mainly at the local level.

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Diversity and divisiveness

The fact that a country has several languages is often seen as an intrinsic problem. Nigeria, with its 400 languages, is deeply concerned with the problems of divisiveness and tribalism, and the need to achieve national integration. One of the popular myths in multilingual countries is the association of a multiplicity of languages with divisiveness. In spite of the prevalence of this myth, it is important to stress that it is not multilingualism as such that causes divisiveness, but the exploitation of ethnicity, by linking it with language differences. In some countries the myth of divisiveness has been used to oppress speakers of small-group languages. Fortunately, this has not happened in Nigeria.

A complementary myth to that of divisiveness is the myth that a single language can unite. In Nigeria, the English language, which was



the official language in the colonial period, is widely considered the best candidate for a unifying role. It is well-entrenched, having been used as the language of government and education, thereby “uniting” elites from the different ethnic groups. Furthermore, because it does not belong to any ethnic group in Nigeria, it is believed to be a “neutral” language. However, a common language does not automatically induce unity unless there are already unity-inducing factors in the communities concerned, and it is simply not true that a language can be neutral, since it inevitably comes with the baggage of the culture it represents.

Three major questions have dominated Nigeria’s language policy since independence: What should be the country’s official language? Which of the languages should be accorded the status of a national language? What language should be used in education?

English: overwhelmingly dominant

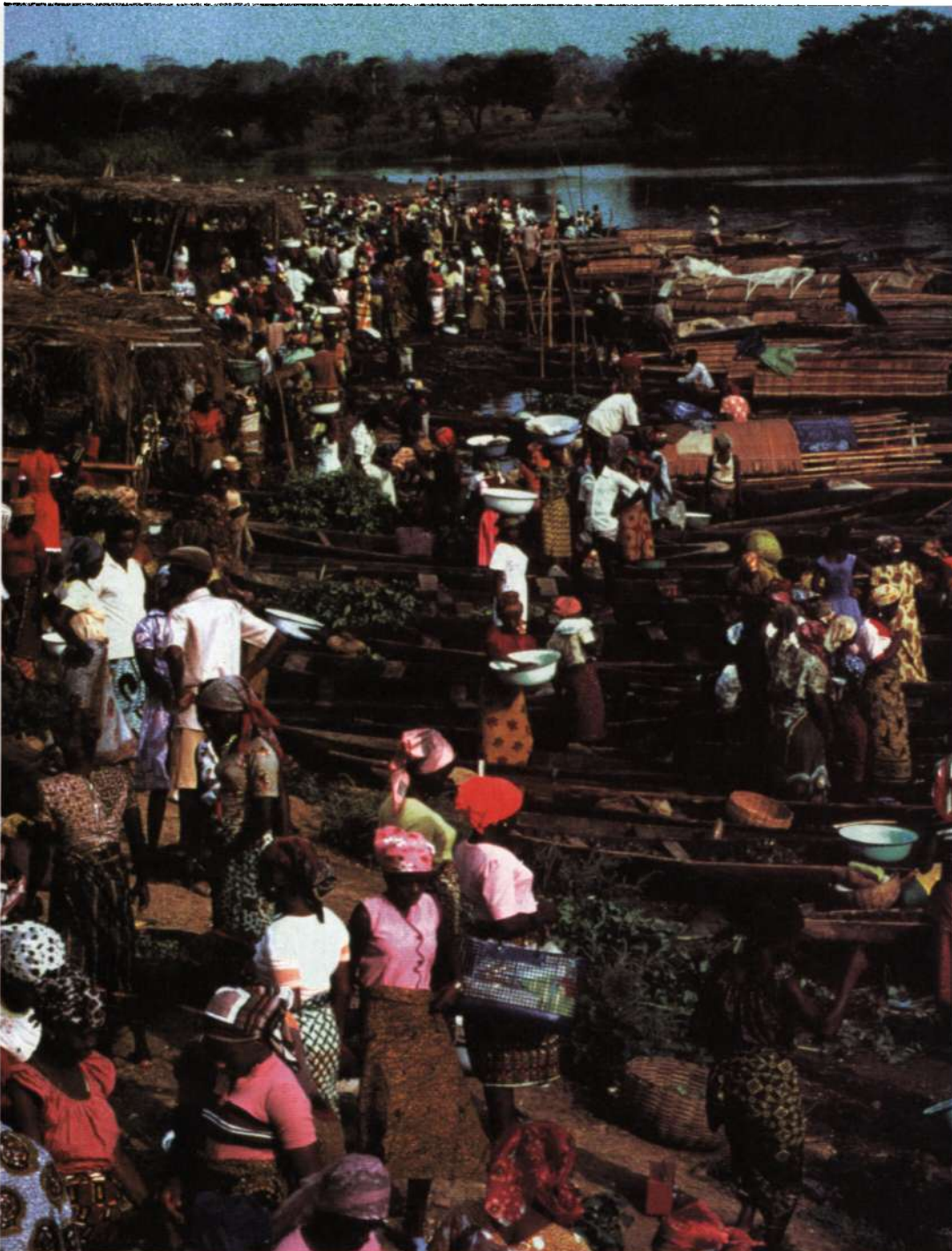
For some, the question of an official language has been predetermined. Given the colonial heritage of the use of English for practically all official purposes in the pre-independence era, the possibility for change in this practice is almost nil. The dominance of the English language is truly overwhelming. It is the language of government and administration, including the proceedings in the National and State Assemblies, the language of education at almost all levels, the main language of the media, the language of science and technology, and the language used by many Nigerian novelists and poets. Even the debate on the desirability of change has to be conducted in English!

Attempts to reduce the use of English as an official language have been singularly unsuccessful. For example, the 1979 constitution provides for the use of the three major languages as

additional languages in the National Assembly, but only subject to adequate arrangements. Such arrangements include the compilation of legislative terminology, the training of translators and interpreters, the installation of simultaneous interpretation facilities and printing equipment, and hiring personnel for the production of the Hansard, the official record of the proceedings of the Assembly. Of all these requirements, only the first one has been completed to date. Hence, no Nigerian language is used for the proceedings of the National Assembly.

A much-discussed and recurrent language question is that of the evolution of a lingua franca as a national language for the country.

While nationalistic sentiments ensure majority support for an indigenous national language, that is where consensus ends. The real problem is how to decide which of the 400 Nigerian languages should be selected for this prestigious role. Here is where the fear of domination crops up again, with speakers of smaller languages fearing that they may be overwhelmed politically, economically and linguistically by speakers of the major languages. Even among speakers of the three major languages, there is no consensus about which one should become the national language. In frustration, some Nigerians have offered solutions ranging from the absurd proposal to create an artificial language from a com-



Left, the market at Calabar.

Right, election posters on a wall in a Nigerian town.



posite of elements of several to the deliberate adoption of a small-group language in order to marginalize speakers of larger group languages and so put most people at an equal disadvantage.

While the difficulties of choosing an indigenous national language have led others to propose the adoption of a foreign African language such as Kiswahili from Eastern Africa, or the promotion of English from official language status to national language status, the official government policy has been to encourage the learning of the three major languages in schools in the hope that one of them may emerge in the future as an acceptable national language. This, of course, means that English, by default, will continue to perform the functions expected of a national language, even though it is not called by that name. It is this unsatisfactory position that has led some other observers to propose that Nigeria should opt for three or more national languages in much the same way as Switzerland operates nationally in three official languages (German, French, Italian) and one regional language (Romansh). Although this may turn out to be very expensive in the Nigerian context, it is at least a positive way of resolving an impasse that effectively leaves the country with English as a national language by default.

Education as the key to change

Changes in language habits are not easy to enforce, but education provides a good opportunity to modify language use. It is for this reason that much of Nigeria's language policy is predicated on the educational system. The principles on which the educational language policy are based are: equal opportunity of access to the language of education; thorough grounding in the child's own language; thorough mastery of English; and bilingualism in two Nigerian languages.

Equality of access to the language of education is promoted by starting primary education in a child's mother tongue or, failing this, the language of the immediate community. Adult literacy is also taught in the local language of the adult learners. Through this policy, a language is not ignored simply because it is small. However, there are practical constraints. Some languages are not yet written languages, and some have not been studied enough for literacy materials to be produced in them. In such cases, education is conducted in the language of the immediate community. The situation is not static as more and more languages are being analysed by linguists and becoming written languages.

A thorough grounding in the child's mother tongue is supposed to be ensured through an



A school class in the town of Aba, in southern Nigeria.

introduction to reading, writing and arithmetic in the child's native language, and the use of this language as a medium of instruction for the first three years of primary education. Apart from the constraints mentioned above, which may militate against the realization of this objective, the attitudes of parents and guardians often run counter to the principle of mother tongue education. This is because many children from elite homes are sent to fee-paying schools where they are taught in English.

Thorough mastery of English is promoted through the introduction of English in the first year of primary school and its later adoption as the medium of instruction for the rest of the child's education. In spite of the enormous amount of time devoted to the study of English, a frequently heard complaint is that the standard of English in Nigeria is poor. Proof of this inadequacy is the poor performance often recorded in school certificate as well as university entrance examinations. The underlying cause of this problem appears to be the dissociation of mother tongue teaching from the teaching of English. In experiments where the two have been related, significant success has been recorded. The point is that it is not how long one learns English but how well.

One drawback of the present practice is that it assumes that every primary school teacher can teach English well. Yet this is not always true: some primary school teachers have very

poor spoken and written English. An approach that provides for specialist teachers of English alongside teachers for other subjects taught in the mother tongue has been shown to provide excellent results in terms of mastery of both English and the mother tongue.

The requirement that every Nigerian child should learn one of the three major languages in addition to his or her own language is meant to facilitate the eventual emergence of a Nigerian lingua franca. The policy is meant to be enforced at the secondary school level, subject to availability of teachers. Many schools have sought refuge in this escape clause and several state governments have not made any effort to produce teachers for major Nigerian languages. Instead, soft-option alternatives such as the use of untrained native speakers to teach only spoken forms of the language have been adopted, with disastrous results. There does not seem to be much enthusiasm for the implementation of this policy, which may well be connected with ambivalent attitudes to the national language question.

In Nigeria, there is an acute awareness of some of the most important language problems. There are also spirited attempts to tackle them through the formulation of appropriate language policies. What has been lacking is the will to implement the policies. This may be due to a lack of faith in the policies not only on the part of the people, but also on the part of the policy-makers themselves. ■

GREENWATCH

THE UNESCO COURIER — FEBRUARY 1994



CAN ANGKOR BE SAVED?

BY FRANCE BEQUETTE

BENEATH the aircraft's wing at sunset, the broad marshy moat dotted with white egrets, the three rectangles of covered galleries, the terraces and the five high, sculpted towers of Angkor Wat are all tinged pink. We are privileged to be flying over the best-known temple of the unique complex of monuments that is Angkor—in old Khmer, the name means “the city”

or “the capital”. Here, on a plain 200 square kilometres in extent in north-eastern Cambodia, between the Kulen plateau and the Tonle Sap (“Great Lake”), a dozen Khmer rulers of the ninth to the twelfth centuries built seven capitals containing many temples. Some are hidden in the jungle, where they are even more inaccessible because of the presence of the Khmer Rouge,

Restorers have decided to leave some Angkor ruins in the powerful hands of giant trees. Here, the roots of a kapok tree grip stonework of the temple of Ta Prohm.

CAN ANGKOR BE SAVED?

who after holding power from 1975 to 1978 and killing upwards of a million Cambodians, took refuge in this region near the Thai border. The temples are all that now remains of the ancient capitals, for only the gods had the right to stone or brick buildings. The palaces and dwellings were built of wood, and they have since disappeared without trace.

RECONCILING TOURISM AND CONSERVATION

Nature, not human wrath, has destroyed these marvellously rich monuments. The heat and humidity of the tropical climate encouraged the unbridled growth of kapok and "strangler fig" trees, popularly associated with ruins because their roots destroy monuments.

Today the principal temples have been freed of the vegetation that held them in its grip. Only the Ta Prohm temple has deliberately been left in the midst of the thickets in which the French missionary Charles Bouillevaux and, later, the naturalist Henri Mouhot found it in the mid-nineteenth century. Since 1898, the year in which the French Far Eastern School (the Ecole Française d'Extreme-Orient, or EFEO) was founded, a steady stream of archaeologists have worked on the site. They patiently cleared away the undergrowth, dismantled and then reassembled the monuments, and in 1908 created the "Conservation d'Angkor" to which the most threatened statues were taken.

According to Bernard Philippe Groslier of the EFEO, a former curator of the site, "There is hardly anything in the world comparable

to the Angkor complex in terms of the number, size and perfection of its buildings." But this masterpiece is in grave danger, and in 1989 the four main Cambodian political parties asked UNESCO to assume the coordination of international activities for the preservation of the monuments of Angkor. In December 1992 Angkor was placed on the World Heritage List.

In view of the scale of the conservation problems involved, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee placed a number of conditions on Angkor's inclusion on the List, insisting that a legal framework for conservation work and a management plan should be drawn up, and that an authority should be established with the resources to manage the entire Angkor area. UNESCO's first task was to help the government to set up a Cambodian Authority for the Protection of the National Heritage, which was formally approved in February 1993. UNESCO has also worked with the Cambodian government and a group of international experts on a Zoning and Environmental Management Plan (ZEMP) for the authorities, donors and local people as well as visitors. This comprehensive document takes into account Angkor's assets as well as the dangers threatening the site.

The archaeological treasures are particularly at risk from lichens, microscopic algae and bacteria that proliferate in the guano of the many bats living in the ruins. The ZEMP also cites the destructive effects of monsoon rains, the vegetation, and variations in the underground aquifer that influence the stability of the buildings. Other factors include

uncontrolled agricultural development after deforestation, the influx of thousands of tourists and the construction of hotels to replace existing facilities that are not up to international standards. The region badly needs revenue from tourism, but there is also a risk that it may suffer from it. Angkor is a "new" destination that travel agencies are now adding to a circuit that includes Thailand, Laos and Viet Nam.

Statistics show that in 1992 35,000 tourists visited Siem Reap, the base for excursions to the temples. If forecasts turn out to be accurate, between 300,000 and 700,000 foreigners and between 100,000 and 500,000 Cambodians will visit Angkor in the next five years. The figures represent a sizeable market, and fourteen big hotel chains are already hoping for a share of it. There is growing concern since two hotels had been built previously beside the moat of Angkor Wat with little regard for the site. (They were subsequently burned down by the Khmer Rouge). Is it only a matter of time before there are pleasure boats, theme parks and neon signs?

To avoid this kind of desecration while permitting sustainable development of the region, the ZEMP suggests dividing the site into zones. The Angkor Parks, comprising five of the ancient capitals including Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and Preah Khan, would be given maximum protection. They would be located within an Angkor Cultural Reserve. On the other hand there would be no restrictions on new residents coming to join the 350,000 people already living in the area, nor on their techniques of farming or forest management.

A WAY THROUGH THE MINEFIELDS

Much remains to be done for the management of water resources before Angkor can reclaim the reputation it once had as a "hydraulic capital". The prosperity of the early Angkor empires was closely linked to irrigation. A network of dykes and canals served to control flooding and to provide water in the dry season from huge reservoirs called "barays", all of which are now abandoned with the exception of the Western Baray, which has been restored in this century. The temple moats were both sacred boundaries and sources of water and of food in the form of fish and lotus, whose fruits contain a mealy substance from which bread can be made. Now, however, they have silted up and are clogged with vegetation.

Other, more immediate dangers



Sculptures in the conservation area of Siem Reap are protected by barbed wire to prevent theft.



also threaten the Angkor region. There are estimated to be twelve million mines in northern Cambodia. A French company, COFRAS, which has trained Cambodian mine disposal squads, has been attempting to clear the eight minefields identified at Angkor. Three hundred and sixty mines have already been removed. The only way one can reach the temple of Ta Nei and the eastern entrance to Angkor Thom—the so-called Gate of Death—is by following a mine disposal squad. Countless people—adults and children—have been killed by the mines or have lost limbs. In addition, armed and trained Khmer Rouges are operating in the vicinity, terrorizing the local population by sporadic raiding.

In these circumstances, it is very difficult to prevent the looting of sculptures that every year causes the sanctuaries to deteriorate further. The thieves prize loose with chisels the wonderful faces of the heavenly dancers known as apsaras, cut the heads off statues, and in some cases remove the statues wholesale, even those weighing more than a ton. The protests of the Cambodian government, of UNESCO and of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

have no effect on the traffickers, who know where they can get vast sums of money for the statues.

The task of co-ordinating international aid that the Cambodian government has entrusted to UNESCO is a difficult one. Only one archaeological excavation is currently under way, and that is the EFEO's investigation of the Terrace of the Leper King. Without co-ordination and political determination to protect the site, Angkor could well fall into the hands of unscrupulous businessmen seeking quick profits from the curiosity of tourists and the poverty of the local population.

Angkor has a special place in the memory of humanity. Let us hope that the international community will wake up to the fact soon enough to take the urgent action that is needed to save, protect and rationally develop this irreplaceable treasure. ■

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Aerial view of the temple of Angkor Wat, masterwork of Khmer architecture (early 12th century).

A traditional technique is used to extract sap by fire. The sap is used as a fuel for lighting or for caulking boats.



THE DANGERS OF MINERAL DUST

According to World Health Organization (WHO) experts, the health of millions of workers around the world involved in the extraction, refining and use of minerals may be at risk. People who are exposed to mineral dust over many years inhale particles which stay in their lungs, where they can cause serious illnesses such as the pneumoconioses (e.g. silicosis and asbestosis), bronchitis, emphysema and lung cancer. The degree of risk is related to the duration of exposure. In Zimbabwe, 20 per cent of workers were found to suffer from silicosis after 20 years or more of exposure in gold, copper and chrome mines. In India, silicosis rates were higher than 50 per cent among slate pencil workers, 35 per cent among stonecutters and 30 per cent among lead and zinc miners. WHO recommends closer medical surveillance of workers, which is not always easy to implement in poor countries. Perhaps a good first step would be to take a hard look at mining methods. ■



Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), and aimed at the countries in the Sahel and on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Fifty thousand copies have been printed. There is no charge for the book, which is published in French. For further information, please contact CIRAD/PRIFAS, BP 5035, 34032 Montpellier cedex 1, France. ■

readers. The book gives a planetary overview of environmental problems followed by a series of fact sheets on a range of subjects including nuclear energy, biodiversity, acid rain and the greenhouse effect. It also features a multiple-choice quiz. Written by François Cazalas, *Manuel d'initiation à l'environnement* is published by Les Editions de l'Environnement, Paris. ■



CARTOONS AGAINST LOCUSTS

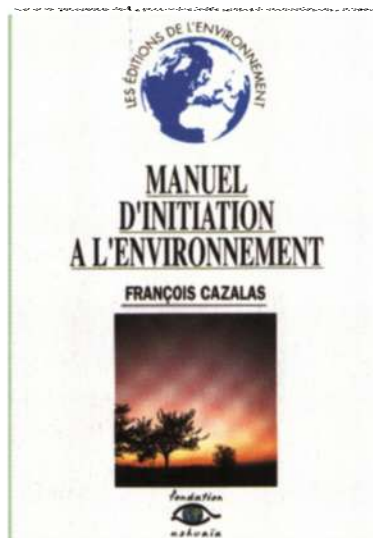
Boukari is a small farmer in the Sahel. Tired of standing by helplessly while his crops are destroyed by clouds of locusts, he takes a course that teaches him how chemicals can be used to fight these devastating insects. When he has learned how to use the insecticides, he returns to his village and shares his knowledge with the community. This story is told in an unusual full-colour strip cartoon book published for France's Centre de Coopération

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT

UNESCO has contributed photographic material to *Manuel d'initiation à l'environnement* ("A First Environmental Reader"), a new book that presents major environmental issues to non-specialist

THREATS TO MARINE LIFE

Two centuries ago a marine mammal weighing up to 10 tons known as the Steller's sea cow lived peacefully in the icy waters of the North Pacific. It took just 27 years of harpooning to make this harmless, edible species extinct. A new study entitled *Global Marine Biological Diversity*, published by the Center for Marine Conservation in Washington, D.C. (U.S.A.), shows that the sea creatures of today are increasingly endangered and calls for action to protect the whole chain of global marine life. Pollution and overexploitation of marine flora and fauna are responsible for the most visible damage, but other factors also play a part such as trawling and coastal construction, the introduction of alien species, and the addition to the atmosphere of substances that increase ultra-violet radiation and cause climate change. *Global Marine Biological Diversity, A Strategy for Building Conservation*



into *Decision Making* is partly funded by the World Bank and includes contributions from more than 100 authors from 40 different countries. It can be obtained from the Center for Marine Conservation, 1725 DeSales Street NW, Suite 500, Washington D.C. 20036, U.S.A. (price \$27.50). ■

BHUTAN'S LUCKY CRANES

Ever since the day in 1600 when a Buddhist monk spotted two black-necked cranes near a site at Jakar where a monastery was being built, these birds have been considered sacred in Bhutan. The cranes, which arrive from Tibet in October and stay till March, are treated with reverence by the inhabitants of the valleys where they feed. But the tourists who flock to see them often go too close to their roosting places and dazzle them with flashlights or torches. Local people advise the visitors not to disturb the birds, and their efforts seem to be paying off: 175 cranes were spotted last year in the Phobjekha Valley, as opposed to 139 in 1992. ■

A SANCTUARY FOR WHALES?

At the 45th meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Kyoto last year, Dominica, Grenada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Solomon Islands voted against continuing the international moratorium on commercial whaling. Norway subsequently gave notice of its intention to kill 296 minke whales for scientific purposes. (The North East Atlantic minke population is estimated to be around 80,000). There are hopes that a proposal to establish a Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary in the Antarctic will be adopted prior to this year's IWC meeting in Mexico. Meanwhile, the whale situation remains critical. ■

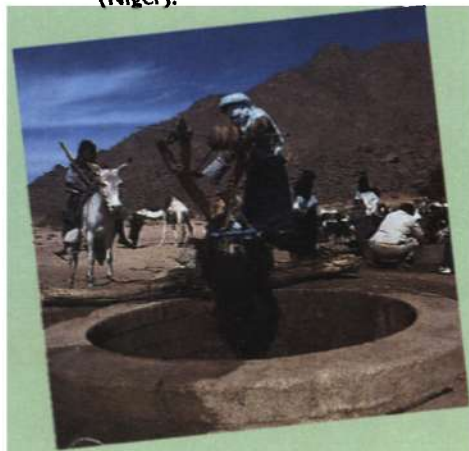
THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION: AN ALLIANCE TO CARE FOR THE EARTH



An outdoor green turtle hatchery on the coast of Pakistan near Karachi. (*Chelonia mydas*)

THE World Conservation Union (IUCN) has its headquarters in a light, airy building set amid maize-fields near the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. This influential body, set up jointly by UNESCO and France in 1948, brings together 62 sovereign states, 99 government agencies and 575 non-governmental organizations, and is backed by the work of 6,000 specialist volunteers worldwide. It spelled out its programme in *Caring for the Earth*, prepared in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 1991. This document outlines a strategy that, if implemented, would bring our lifestyles and development paths within the limits of what nature can sustain. But the task is immense: "In less than 200 years the planet has lost six million square kilometres of forest. . . ; water withdrawals have grown from 100 to 3,600 cubic kilometres a year. . . . Since the mid-eighteenth century, human activities have more than doubled the methane in the atmosphere; increased the concentration of carbon dioxide by 27 per cent;

Tuareg nomads drawing water from a well in the Air massif (Niger).



and significantly damaged the stratospheric ozone layer."

Confronted with this situation, IUCN has prepared, in co-operation with governments, national conservation strategies for some 50 countries. It is increasingly decentralizing its operations in order to improve efficiency: more than two-thirds of IUCN's secretariat is now based in regional and country offices around the world. The regional emphasis also helps to get local people more involved—the only way to reconcile environmental protection and sustainable development. IUCN's priorities are saving species, maintaining biodiversity, managing habitats and preserving wetlands, national parks and protected areas.

In Congo, for instance, IUCN is helping to plan the management of the Conkouati Fauna Reserve and of the immense wetland forest of Lac Télé. In Costa Rica, where the last lowland tropical rainforest on the Atlantic coast is being destroyed at a rate of 8 per cent a year all round the relatively small Tortuguero national park, IUCN has worked with the government and the European Commission to persuade the main local landowner to reduce the spraying of pesticides on his banana plantation and to stop expanding the plantation into the forest.

One of the biggest IUCN country programmes is in Pakistan, where a National Conservation Strategy was adopted in March 1992. The policy changes it advocates are being carried forward in the 8th Five Year Plan, which has a section on the environment for the first time. Since 1987, IUCN has also been carrying out a major programme in Africa's Sahel region, where it is helping the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad to prepare national conservation strategies and plans for the management of wetlands, forests, semi-arid grasslands and protected areas. The plans stress the importance of enlisting the support of local residents.

IUCN makes its experience available not only to states but to non-governmental organizations, associations and individuals. It produces a steady flow of documents, books, brochures and bulletins, many of them in several languages. For further information, contact the Information Office of IUCN at 28 rue Mauverney, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland (Tel: 41 22 999 00 01; fax: 41 22 999 00 02). ■

LANGUAGE DEATH IN SIBERIA

by Vladimir Belikov

Many of the world's languages today face extinction. The story of Siberia's minority peoples is a telling example of the threat to cultural diversity

WHILE cultural change in many parts of the world is usually spontaneous, in Russia it has been the direct result of decisions made by the Communist Party. Shortly after the communist revolution, a policy of "cultural engineering" was announced, with the aim of developing different national cultures, languages and traditions in order to build a new type of culture that would be "national in its form and communist in its content".

Some of the early achievements of this policy were actually very impressive. A tiny village in the Poltava district of Ukraine, populated mainly by Swedes, used Swedish as the official language of the local administration; the first (and perhaps the only) school primer in the Gypsy language was published; the state financed periodicals in the native languages of small communities of Estonian and Latvian immigrants in Siberia. Indeed, for a time, "the blossoming of national cultures", became a common phrase in official communist propaganda.

Cultural assimilation

Unfortunately, by the mid-1930s the blossoms had begun to fade. The authorities had discovered that their policy did not accelerate the development of communism and sometimes even hindered it. Although it was never publicly announced, a policy of cultural assimilation for minority groups began to be encouraged.

In many parts of the country, especially those traditionally influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church, the cultural differences between rural people of different ethnic origins were not great, and the ethnic identities of various minority groups were not very pronounced. In these regions, acculturation was a slow but steady process, and as the years went by linguistic and cultural boundaries disappeared.

For example, Russians had lived for cen-



A team of reindeer in the Kamchatka peninsula.

turies among the Komi, a Finno-Ugric people who formed the majority of the local population on the banks of the lower Pechora river in the north of European Russia. Over time, the number of Russians living in the area grew and so did the influence of their language, until Russian came to be used in the school system and all the local Komi became bilingual.

Many years ago, I met a Komi fisherman who told me a story which ended with a quite extraordinary sentence. Although the speaker didn't realize it, all the roots and auxiliary words he used were Russian, though the grammar was still Komi. It went something like this: *Takeoff-tim ring-se* and *findout-tim that duck-ys spend-winter-toma France-yn*. (In this anglicization the Komi suffixes have been left as they were used by my informant.)

I have not been in this part of Russia for twenty-five years and do not know for sure whether this dialect is still in use, but even if it is, it has been so strongly influenced by Russian that it is no longer an effective tool for maintaining Komi culture. This linguistic mixture has no chance of competing with Russian even as a basic means of communication, especially since thousands of newcomers came to the region in the 1970s to work in the oilfields and many of the Komi fisherman became industrial workers.

This story illustrates a typical process of linguistic change within the acculturation process. However, it is not the only possible result of cross-cultural contact. If two ethnic groups come into sudden contact and a marked gap exists between them, it is very likely that one of the cultures will die quickly, especially if it is generally perceived to have less prestige than the other. Deculturation may have tragic consequences for the weaker ethnic group. It usually leads to widespread distress within the community, high crime rates, mass alcoholism, declining life expectancy. A culturally unique human group may even become extinct. This threat now hangs over many small ethnic minorities that are scattered in the depths of the Siberian taiga forests and Arctic tundra of the Far North.



The threat of cultural extinction

In the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the Russians took over the area known as Siberia without much fighting. They did not even consider the area to be foreign territory. For centuries Russia had no eastern border and Russian pioneers simply moved further and further eastward. Most of them settled permanently on a narrow strip of land in southern Siberia, where cultivation was possible, and the few who settled further north often lost their Russian language.

The local societies were highly stable until the 1930s, when the importance of the timber and mineral resources in the Far North was realized. They had no special educational institutions, but from early childhood girls learned female skills from their mothers, and young boys learned male roles from their fathers and older brothers. The authority of grandparents was undisputed and any serious problem—curing the sick, locating hidden things, sending a dead soul to the upper world—was solved with the help of a shaman. (The word shaman comes from the Tungus language.)

The situation began to change in 1924 with the formation of the Committee for Assisting the Peoples of the Far North. This committee led to the creation of administrative offices to help different ethnic groups change their ways from traditional to communist—"in one step, during the life of one generation".

The first Russian teachers came to remote Siberian areas in the late 1920s. At that time, textbooks for primary schools were written in at least thirteen of the languages of the North, but their content was the same: biographies of Lenin and Stalin, the crimes of the predatory czarist regime, the deeds of the heroes of the revolution, the achievements of industrialization and collectivization.

The books for Siberian minorities also had a section dealing with local affairs. The essence of it was that old people lack any true knowledge, all their habits are wrong, traditional culture is a silly jumble of ignorance and prejudices, and shamans are servants of the counter-revolution who deceive people to achieve their ignoble goals and stop the development of communism.

Komnata



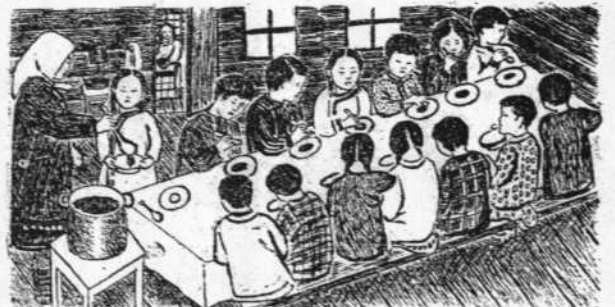
ausikci



tatusikci

Ausikci. Tatusikci.

gəgbini.



digasikci



guasikci

Digasikci. Gwasikci.



Right, a Komi story-teller.

Left, illustrations from a primer in the Udihe language showing boarding school life. The book was burned by the authorities in 1938.

In those days, no-one even considered whether or not communist concepts made sense for traditional societies of hunters and gatherers. It was assumed that collectivization and industrialization would form the economic foundation of their new cultures, and traditional land tenure and social organization were declared reactionary. Thus people were deprived of their lands and rivers, the very foundations of their life.

An enemy of the people

While traditional cultures were ruined, native languages were sometimes still used, especially in schools—for a time. However, in 1938, Eugene Schneider, the author and translator of the first books in the Udihe language, was denounced as “an enemy of the people”, arrested

and shot. One of my informants remembers how KGB agents came to his village, gathered all the books from families and the school library and took them into a courtyard, where they were set on fire. The bonfire burned through the night and in the morning my informant, who was a young boy at the time, managed to steal a half-burnt favourite book of folklore. The written language of Udihe was banned.

For many other languages, misfortune arrived soon afterwards as a result of a new policy whereby children were sent away from their families to study in boarding schools. At first, the boarding schools were intended for children from semi-nomadic groups in which families were scattered across large stretches of territory because they were shepherding Arctic



A camp of Komi reindeer farmers in the tundra (above left).



A residential quarter in Syktyvkar, capital of the Komi Republic (above right).

reindeer or hunting wild animals. But soon the boarding schools were established even in large villages and children were only allowed to spend time with their relatives on Sundays.

Gradually, the only language of instruction became Russian. Sometimes children were forbidden to speak their mother tongue in the school building. Parents did not protest, and even if they had protested it might not have made much difference because their children considered them archaic because ties between the generations had been broken. Even folk-tales, which were central to traditional cultures, were lost.

Meanwhile, Russians became more numerous in the remote parts of Siberia, and more influential in local administration. Neither they nor the Russian communist elite paid any attention to the traditions and real needs of the people. Then, in 1957, the death sentence was imposed on many Siberian languages by a Communist Party resolution, "On the Measures for Further Economic and Cultural Development of the Peoples of the North."

An irreversible process

A key measure within the resolution called for combining the settlements of ethnic minorities and transferring them, which meant closing schools, shops and medical posts in small, old villages and forcibly relocating Siberian minorities. With this measure, people were deprived of their traditional hunting and fishing grounds and scattered among large numbers of newcomers. As a result, even those groups that used to have official territorial autonomy became small minorities in the new settlements. The history of the ethnic composition of the Chukchi Autonomous Region serves as an example. Between 1926 and 1989, the total population of the region increased elevenfold, from 15 thousand to 164 thousand. In the same period, the Chukchi component sank from 79 per cent to 2.4 per cent, while the percentage of Russian and other newcomers rose from 2 per cent to 95.3 per cent.

These days, the degree of knowledge of an ethnic language depends on general ethnology in the region in which it is used; the written status of ethnic languages isn't changing very much. Extreme examples of this are provided by the modern position of two Siberian languages, Oroks and Nganasan, neither of which have been used in schools or in print.

The homeland of the Oroks people lies on the mainland opposite the island of Sakhalin. It was heavily invaded by Russians in the 1930s, when railroads, new towns and seaports were built. In the new surroundings there was no place for traditional culture and no reason for young people to acquire any language except Russian. As a result, by 1989 only 15 per cent of the Oroks people had any knowledge of their ethnic language at all.

On the other hand, the Nganasans, who wander with their reindeer on the Taymyr peninsula, managed until recently to preserve many of their traditional habits and cultures. Their land is characterized by an extremely severe Arctic climate and has attracted hardly any immigrants. Even the system of boarding schools didn't affect them until the 1960s. The 1989 survey found that 90 per cent of the population still had some knowledge of their language.

In recent years, perestroika has prompted the renewal of ethnic nationalism among many groups in the former U.S.S.R., but not among Siberian minorities. In the last few decades, talented Siberian youths have been drawn to Russian culture and left their villages. Some of them have good jobs in the cities while others have come back to the Far North as teachers and physicians. But they have lost their ethnic identity.

Efforts to revive local languages and cultures in Siberia are now doomed to failure. People are ashamed to speak their ethnic languages or to distinguish themselves from Russians. Many consider Russians the best marriage partners. "Our children will be more beautiful," they explain, "and more happy." ■

VLADIMIR BELIKOV

is the senior research fellow of the Pacific Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Since 1989 he has been working on a series of textbooks on the ethnic language of the Udihe minority of the Russian Far East.

THE CHICKEN AND THE BANANA

SOME of the world's most unusual languages are spoken in the Santa Cruz Islands, a volcanic archipelago located between the Solomon Islands and the islands of Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) in the southwestern Pacific. The languages, which belong to a small, interrelated group, are spoken by a population numbering about 5,000. They are remarkable for the ways in which they subdivide and minutely categorize the world into sets or classes—some forty of them in all, each indicated by a special prefix.

Some of these classes of words reflect complex ways of thinking. In one of the languages, Āyiwo, for example, the basic meaning of the word *paa* is “sliver”, but it never occurs without a class prefix. It may be combined with *nyi-*, the pointed objects class prefix, to make *nyi-paa*, which means “a chip”, or, literally, “a pointed sliver”. With the prefix *no-*, which refers to indistinctly separated parts of a whole, it becomes *no-paa*, which means “pieces of bark peeling off a tree trunk”, or, literally, “slivers indistinctly separated and still attached to the thing to which they belong and of which they form a part”. When preceded by *nyo-*, the class prefix for moving away into the distance, it makes *nyo-paa*, which means “type of arrow” or, more exactly, “sliver-type object that moves away into the distance”. With *te-*, the class prefix for something foreign, particularly of Polynesian provenance, it becomes *te-paa*, meaning “a nail”, literally a “sliver of foreign metal, probably of Polynesian origin”.

Another such word is *-modyi*, which means “concept of the right hand and strength”. It also only occurs with prefixes of this kind, so that when combined with *lo-*, the class prefix for acquisition through labour and effort, it makes *lo-modyi*, which means “small adze”, literally “something used for acquiring something else through labour and effort by one’s strong right hand”. Combined with *mo-*, the class prefix for extending far, it becomes *mo-modyi*, meaning a “small outrigger canoe”, or, in the literal translation, “something that goes far when using one’s strong right hand for paddling”. And with *oyä-*, the mangrove class prefix, *oyä-modyi* means “a type of mangrove with very strong wood”.

Another feature of this language is that many of its nouns are descriptions based on verbs, with a class prefix added. The verb *va*, for instance, means “to be immature”. When class prefixes are added to it, the following words emerge. The addition of the masculine human class prefix, *gi-*, produces *gi-va* meaning “male baby”. The addition of *si-*, the feminine human class prefix, produces *si-va* meaning “female baby”. *Me-va* means “human babies” (*me* being the collective human class prefix). *Pi-va* means “adolescent” (*pi* being the prefix for the half-developed human class).



Vä-, is the prefix for the chicken class so that *vä-va* means “small chicken”. And since *u-* is the banana class prefix, *u-va* means “small, undeveloped banana”.

While such multiple class systems, though with fewer classes, occur in other parts of the world, the Santa Cruz Island languages add another highly complicated, quite different class system to indicate possession, with the object possessed determining which of the numerous possessive classes should appear in any given case. For instance, if someone wants to say that a chicken belongs to them, the word indicating “my” would be different depending on whether the chicken was thought of as food or as a pet. What’s more, the chicken class prefix would also have to be added to the “my” word chosen.

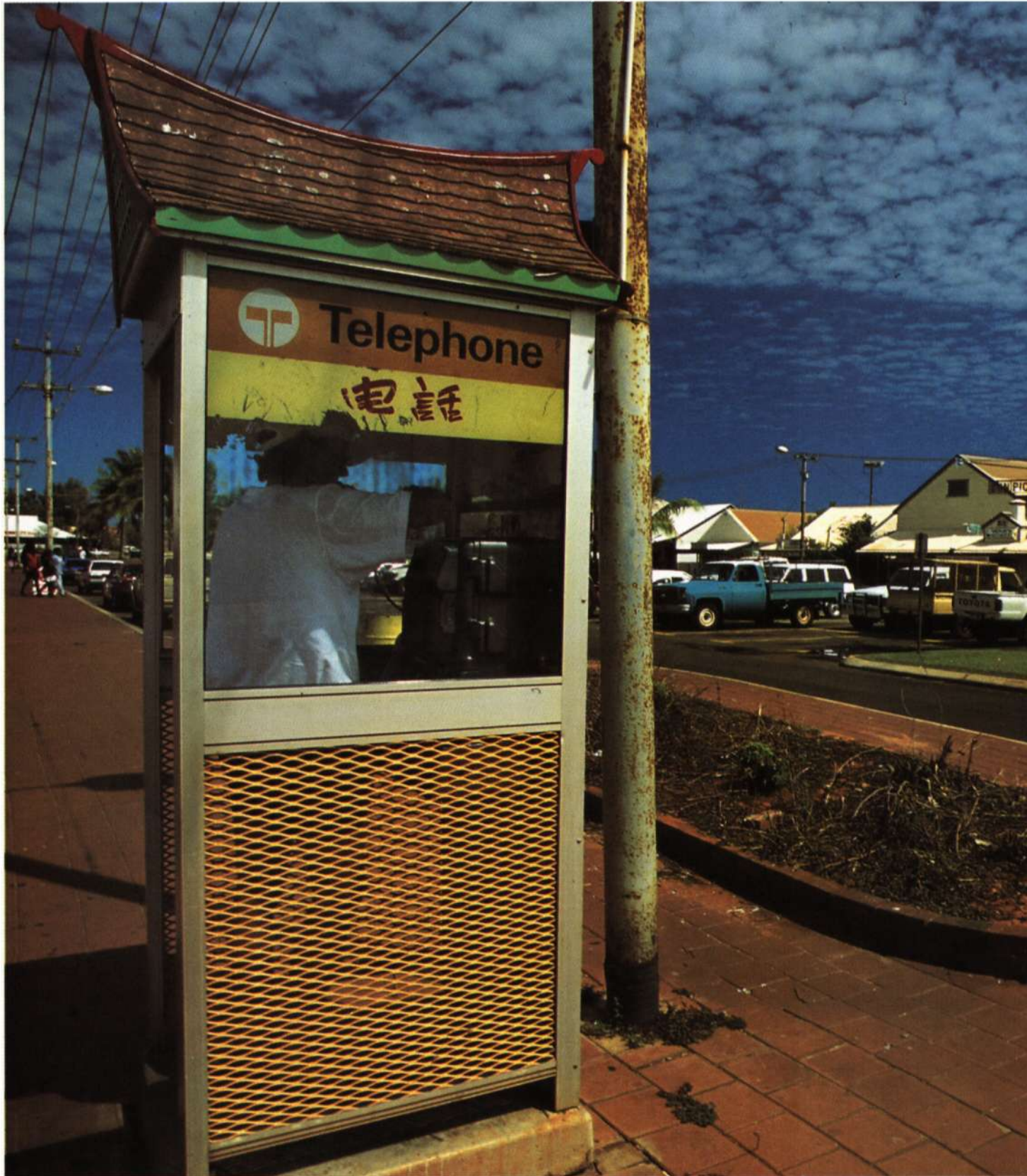
Verbs are also put into classes indicated by prefixes, according to whether the action referred to is carried out using one’s hand, a tool, or a knife. For example, *vä-gäte* means “to tear apart by hand”, while *tä-gäte* means “to tear apart with a tool” and *lä-gäte* means “to slit with a knife”. Other prefixes indicate other activities carried out by exerting energy, or constituting a single violent action, etc.

There is also a system that uses verbs to precisely indicate the location of an action in relation to the speaker (i.e. near, at some distance, behind, near the person addressed, or not close to either the speaker or the person addressed, etc.); the general direction of the speaker or the person addressed (upwards or downwards); and the direction of the action (towards the speaker, or the person addressed, or a third person). ■

Vä-va (a small chicken) and **u-va** (small bananas).

This text was compiled by Stephen Wurm from information supplied by speakers of the languages of the Santa Cruz Islands, especially Patrick Bwakolo, John Mealue and Ini Lapli.

For Chinese immigrants in Australia, overcoming cultural differences can be just as nerve-racking as learning a new language



OF GIFTS AND GAFFES

■ by Jia Tian ■

A Chinese woman who has lived in Australia for more than twenty years recently told me the following story. Shortly after she arrived in the country, already speaking fluent English, she had a birthday and an Australian friend invited her over for dinner to celebrate. When she turned up at the house, she was presented with a gift wrapped in beautiful paper. She thanked her friend profusely and put the parcel away. Puzzled by her response, the Australian asked, "Don't you want to open it?" The Chinese woman replied, "Oh, no, no! I don't want to open it now! Certainly not!" It was not until much later that she realized that she had unwittingly made a "cultural mistake". While it is generally considered common courtesy in Chinese culture not to open gifts immediately in front of the giver, Anglo-Australian culture takes the opposite point of view.

It is often said that one of the biggest challenges for people who have emigrated to a new country is learning a new language, and it is true that many Asian immigrants to Australia find it difficult to learn English. However, even when they speak the language excellently, they can still find themselves making social blunders because of their lack of knowledge of different cultural values and customs.

Language and ritual

Immigrants may encounter a variety of difficulties if they are not aware of these cultural differences. When two people brought up in the Chinese culture meet in the street, they often ask: "Where are you going?" (*ni shang nar qu a?*) or "Have you had your meal?" (*ni chi fan le ma?*). Greetings such as these may be regarded by people from English-speaking backgrounds as intrusive, irritating and rather odd, because respect for an individual's privacy is a widely-accepted cultural concept in most English-speaking countries.

Typical ways of greeting people in Australia include "How are you?" and "How are you doing?". Although phrased as questions showing concern for the addressee's well-being, they are actually not meant to be taken literally.

They are examples of the ritual phrases of greeting which are a salient feature of most languages. In general, speakers would expect a ritual answer such as "Fine" or "Not bad", even though the addressee may not actually feel well.

Many Chinese immigrants find it hard to understand why their Anglo-Australian friends and colleagues expect them to give a positive reply to such questions instead of a truthful one. Some have asked me, "If they don't really want to know how I feel, then why ask me all these questions? It's pure hypocrisy!" It may take years before they realize that they are making assumptions based on Chinese cultural norms and codes of behaviour.

Sometimes an Anglo-Australian might greet someone by saying: "Hello! You're looking smart today!" Here the speaker may not be referring to the addressee's dress sense but be asking a tactful question such as: "Would you please tell me whom you are going to see/where you are going?" To which the response might be: "Oh, I have to see my boss today" or "We're having a party tonight."

In many Asian cultures, when friends or acquaintances run into each other in the street, they stop and exchange greetings, which are



Left, street scene in Broome, Western Australia.

Right, welcome to Sydney's Chinatown.



followed by short or lengthy conversations, depending on the closeness of their friendship. It is considered rude to simply say "Hello", and keep walking. Even if one of the parties has urgent business, he or she is still expected to stop and answer questions politely.

In Australia, however, where people are more casual, it is quite acceptable for someone to say, "Sorry, mate, I have to hurry" or simply "Hello!" and keep on walking. Chinese immigrants who do not understand Australian casualness and informality interpret such behaviour as abrupt and unfriendly.

Eat! Eat! Eat!

Chinese immigrants often feel confused on social occasions. The following scenario is typical. A Chinese immigrant couple invite their Australian friends to dinner at their home. When the Australian guests arrive, their host and hostess point to the sofa and say, "Please! Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Sit! Sit! Sit!" Somewhat startled, the Australian guests sit down without saying anything. After a few drinks, the guests are asked to take their places at the dinner table. The hostess brings food to the table and the host, pointing at the food with his chopsticks, urges his guests with great enthusiasm, "Please! Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Eat! Eat! Eat!"

The guests, knowing little about Chinese culture, appear ill at ease. The hosts, on the other hand, repeat, "Please! Don't just sit there! Eat! Eat! Eat!" Now the Australian guests look even more uneasy, thinking to themselves that their hosts' manners are rather odd. In the meantime, the hosts are increasingly bewildered by their guests' reticence. They do not realize that they have just made a "cultural mistake".

Whereas in Australia, hosts often show their

hospitality by using phrases such as "Would you like to sit down?" or "Please make yourself at home", their Chinese equivalents say, "Zuo! Zuo! Zuo!" and "Chi! Chi! Chi!" which literally means, "Sit! Sit! Sit!" and "Eat! Eat! Eat!" The repetition of the words "sit" and "eat" is an attempt to create an informal, hospitable atmosphere.

What the immigrant host and hostess failed to understand was that "Sit! Sit! Sit!" and "Eat! Eat! Eat!" are imperatives that in English are usually reserved for commands for young children and pet dogs. Because they transplanted their original cultural scripts to the Australian setting, they achieved the opposite of what they had hoped for: they made their guests nervous and uncomfortable.

Never say no

In many Asian cultures, gift-giving involves reciprocity and mutual obligations. In the Chinese culture, for example, when someone is given a gift, he or she is expected to give something back of equal value. To do otherwise is a breach of etiquette.

This give-and-take is an important aspect of Chinese culture. It promotes friendship, creates harmony and strengthens bonds among family members, relatives, friends and colleagues. Yet in the Anglo-Australian culture, gift-giving is seen merely as a way of saying thank-you or showing appreciation. Often the recipient is under no obligation to give a present in return. Instead, he or she might offer to do something useful for the giver such as helping them move house or looking after their pets while they are on holiday. Because of these differences, many Chinese immigrants feel hurt when their Anglo-Australian colleagues or friends accept gifts with a mere thank-you .



Above, students at the University of Sydney.

Left, in Sydney, Australians of Chinese and non-Chinese origin perform a Chinese dragon dance during the celebration of *Chun Jie*, the Spring Festival.



Declining and accepting invitations also cause problems. In the Chinese culture, people usually abide by the principle of reciprocity when they receive a dinner invitation. In other words, they are expected to return the hospitality soon afterwards. Under normal circumstances, those invited try to attend the dinner, but if they have other commitments or do not like the host, they decline the invitation with an excuse. The excuses are often “white lies”, but the host accepts them because he or she understands that they are a way of turning down an invitation in a diplomatic, indirect and most important of all, culturally acceptable way.

This is perhaps the area in which many Chinese immigrants in Australia experience the greatest “culture shock”. An important concept in the Chinese culture is “saving face” (*gei mian zi*), which may be translated, depending on the circumstances, as preserving someone’s pride or ego, respecting the dignity of others, not hurting somebody’s feelings or not putting another person in an embarrassing position.

When declining an invitation, people from the Chinese culture try their best to “save face” for the other party by not using the word “no”, which is considered offensive.

Because of this, some Chinese immigrants feel deeply offended by Australians who decline invitations in a straightforward way: “Sorry mate, I can’t come tonight. I have to fix my lawnmower.” Such a reply is often interpreted by Chinese immigrants as unpleasant or downright rude. The misunderstandings here are not really caused by the words but by the casual manner of Anglo-Australians, which differs considerably from the greater formality of the Chinese.

Language is a reflection of culture. It is just as important for migrants to learn to understand a new culture as it is to master a new language. At present, the resources of language teaching for migrants tend to be too narrowly focused. Only when the dynamic relationship between language and culture is fully understood can a language be learned properly and used appropriately. ■

JIA TIAN

is an Australian journalist who has published many essays, reviews and features on the arts, theatre and films in various Chinese- and English-language newspapers, magazines and journals. She is currently preparing a study on Asian immigrants in Australia at the Australian National University.



UNESCO IN ACTION NEWS BRIEFS

ENERGY ON DISKETTE

The 3rd edition of the *UNESCO International Directory of New and Renewable Energy Information Sources and Research Centres* has just been published by James & James Science Publishers, London. The volume, which contains 3,864 entries, is the printed version of the ENERGY database, also available on diskettes and CD-ROM, which provides information on governmental organizations, research and information centres, professional and trade associations, networks, training and education institutions, databanks, journals and reference publications in 172 countries. Further information on the database may be obtained from: the Engineering and Technology Division, UNESCO, 1, rue Miollis, 75732 Paris Cedex 15, France. Tel: (33-1) 45 68 39 41; fax: (33-1) 40 65 95 35.

EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH

The 1993 UNESCO Einstein Gold Medal, struck in 1979 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the great scientist, has been presented by the Director-General to Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The award recognizes the Authority's outstanding contribution to the conservation of World Heritage and the advancement of environmental education.

AWARDS FOR SAVING THE SEAS

March 1st 1994 is the deadline for the receipt of applications for the International Marine Environment Award established by the World Underwater Federation (CMAS) to honour a person, organization or company whose work has made a major contribution to the protection of the marine environment. CMAS, which was founded in 1959 by the French underwater explorer Jacques-Yves

Cousteau, seeks to develop underwater activities in fields including sport, science, education and archaeology. It currently has a membership of several million people from more than 80 countries. The prize, together with the Prince Tomohito Mikasa International Marine Award, will be presented at a ceremony to be held at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters in September. Application forms are available from Marine Awards, CMAS, Viale Tiziano, 74-00196 Rome, Italy.

OPEN DOORS AT UNESCO

Free guided tours of UNESCO Headquarters, including lectures and filmshows, are available on request during weekdays. Both individual visitors and groups are welcome. For further information, please contact Visitors' Service, 7 place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP (tel: 45 68 03 71). The nearest Metro stations are Ségur or Cambonne.

UNESCO ISSUES 2 NEW MEDALS

What do the following have in common: the Old Town of Dubrovnik; the Jesuit Guarani republic; Pablo Picasso; Jawaharlal Nehru; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? The answer is that they have all featured on UNESCO commemorative medals. Since 1974 UNESCO has issued two medal series, one illustrating threatened monuments and sites, the other devoted to anniversaries of eminent people or historic events. The most recent additions celebrated respectively the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Catalan painter Joan Miró and the inclusion of the city of Potosí (Bolivia) on the World Heritage List. By purchasing the medals, which are struck at the Paris Mint in vermeil, silver and bronze, people can contribute to UNESCO's efforts to preserve the cultural heritage and to promote understanding between peoples. The medals may be obtained from UNESCO's Philatelic and Numismatic Service, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris.

CORRECTION

We apologise for an error in the short article on the monuments of Pagan (Myanmar) that appeared on page 72 of the July-August 1993 issue of the *Courier*. In the second paragraph, "the temple of Ananda" should have read "the temple of Nanpaya". ■



COMMENTARY

by
**Federico
Mayor**

This article is one of a series in which the Director-General of UNESCO sets out his thinking on matters of current concern

THE SPIRIT OF GRANADA

UNESCO is proud to have organized last December in Granada (Spain), an international symposium at which Israeli, Arab and European intellectuals met to discuss the intellectual aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation process.

Among all the geopolitical, ideological and strategic changes that mark the tumultuous closing years of this century, it is inspiring to see the desire for reconciliation expressed by two parties who have long been embroiled in conflicts so absolute and so deep-rooted that many had given up all hope. At the beginning of the 1980s, anyone who had predicted such developments as the ending of the Cold War, the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, or Israeli-Palestinian dialogue would have been greeted with derision.

The process that has brought Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table is also of enormous, and universal, moral significance.

TRANSFORMING DESTINY

A tribute is due to the architects of this reconciliation, those responsible for the historic gesture made in Washington in September 1993. Transcending the tragic scenario of resentment and mistrust, they demonstrated courage, reason and vision. They preferred the sweet promise of future innocence, however fragile, to the bitterness of experience. In so doing, and in accepting the risks they were running, they reflected what is most noble in human nature, for, as Aimé Césaire has observed, “man is distinguished by a special propensity to defy destiny and transform it into history.”

What they have done is truly a challenge to destiny. The idea of peace, now miraculously illuminating the sky of the Middle East, is very fragile. We must all join in the efforts of the peoples of that region to ensure that peace is strengthened. Political co-operation, economic development and the reduction of military spending are certainly necessary for that. However, I believe that the essential task is to let the idea of peace take root and to consolidate the moral and intellectual solidarity of individuals and peoples.

The ethical, cultural and human aspects of peace are of paramount importance. Without them, no political or economic agreement can be viable. With them, the culture of peace can be firmly grounded in all areas of the life of society; national

capacities can be built up and strengthened; knowledge and skills can be mobilized, and the potential of each individual can be developed for the common good.

Almost fifty years ago, UNESCO defined as its most important goal the combat against racism, antisemitism, prejudice and stereotypes, and the defence of human rights and peace, hoping to prevent any return of the hideous ideology of which the Jewish people had been the victim. Later, in accordance with those same aims, UNESCO undertook various activities designed to help the Palestinian people, deprived of sovereignty and forced into exile, in several Middle Eastern countries. For years the Israeli-Arab conflict, with its many reverberations within the international community, caused heart-rending divisions in UNESCO.

These rifts now belong to UNESCO's past. But the values set forth in its Constitution—notably the need to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men and to strengthen the moral and intellectual solidarity to which I alluded above—shine out with undiminished radiance and are more relevant than ever.

A NEW CHAPTER IN HISTORY

The past cannot be changed. The future, unlike the past, is not yet written; it can be changed. It is the only part of our common heritage that is still intact. The key to the relaxation of tension, understanding, good neighbourliness, solidarity, conciliation and reconciliation is the “memory of the future” rather than memory of the past. However long the conflict lasts, there always comes a moment when the adversaries shake hands. We must strive to ensure that this moment comes as soon as possible, so as to avoid immense suffering, so that people do not die for causes that deserve to be lived for.

Of course, the memory of those who have been wounded in their person or their dignity during the long years of confrontation must be respected. Morality no less than practical reason demands it since a common future cannot be built on the flouting of memory. Yet while forgetting is impossible, determination to open a new chapter in history can ensure that the memory of the future prevails over that of the past. It is necessary to look beyond present realities. “Only those who can see the invisible can achieve the impossible”. Shortsightedness in politics has already caused too much harm. We must now discover new ways of seeing.

Arnold Toynbee

The way to coexistence

In 1935, as the dictators were tightening their grip on Europe, the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation organized a conference in London on the theme of collective security. One of the participants was the English historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), author of the vast and controversial A Study of History (1934-1961), which seeks to elucidate the laws governing the birth and evolution of civilizations. In face of the dangers presented by the rise of authoritarian nationalism, he proposed as a route to peaceful coexistence the creation of a new world order established by mutual consent on supra-national foundations.



Arnold Toynbee in 1975.

OUR Rapporteur, Maurice Bourquin, has explained the fundamental difference between the notion of individual security and that of collective security in the following words:

"Nations have always sought to obtain security, that is, to protect themselves against external aggression. How have they gone about it? In the first place, they have tried to organize and to increase their own forces; the natural, instinctive reaction, under the circumstances, is to rely upon oneself.

"The principal form that this reaction takes is clearly the policy of national armaments. Then, by a logical consequence, this policy of armaments gives rise to a policy of alliances.

"There is already, in this policy of alliances, a sort of collaboration; but this collaboration is scarcely different in spirit from the purely individualistic method. What is it that distinguishes the collective solution from this formula? The aim here is not the special security of a few states,

but the security of all. A collective organization of security is not directed against one particular aggression, but against war considered as a common danger. The organization of a system of collective security is a new experience which separates us from tradition. Are there profound reasons for trying to induce the states to take this path? Do this conception and this system lie within the domain of practical possibilities? Or have we here a Utopia, an idea which is perhaps seductive but which is unattainable?"

One very obvious difference between the two notions lies in the fact that individual security is a considerably older notion than collective security. As our Rapporteur pointed out, collective security is a very recent idea. Really it is only in our own life-time that collective security has begun to be seriously studied as a practical possibility.

The idea of individual security is older. I would like to say in passing that it is not a *very* old idea. It hardly goes back more than four hundred years, and four hundred years is a short period even in the history of our Western World. The notion of individual security would have been quite antipathetic and alien to our medieval forefathers, who would have regarded it as a frankly immoral and anti-Christian idea, in which I believe they would have been right. At the moment I will simply point out that this idea of individual security has held the field for about four centuries.

Then, rather abruptly, in our generation we find ourselves being compelled to consider, and reconsider, and come back to this new idea of collective security.

The question one asks oneself then is, why, when individual security has apparently more or less worked for a period of four hundred years, we should suddenly find that it no longer suffices.

I think the answer is that, while absolute local sovereignty has been the theory of our international life for four centuries, it has by no means been the practice till quite recently. During the greater part of the modern age, the Western world has been partly insufficiently equipped, and partly too wise and too much under the influence of an older and a better tradition to carry out the principle of local sovereignty and the allied principle of individual security to their extreme logical conclusion. It is only in our generation that we have seen the absolute totalitarian state—a local totalitarian state—emerge from the theoretical handbooks of the jurist or political philosopher and become a living reality in the actual world.

That is why the present situation is so serious, because a development towards absolute local sovereignty, which has been implicit in our history for four centuries, has in our generation suddenly become a reality.

I hold—it is controversial, but I throw it down for discussion—that this principle is essentially unworkable, and that as soon as the principle is really put into effect—as it is being put into effect in our generation—we are bound to seek a remedy for it. If absolute local sovereignty and a complete application of the principle of individual security had been in actual operation during the whole of the modern age, disaster would have overtaken us long ago.

Then let me make a further point from that, that when once you have a world consisting of sixty or seventy local states, which are putting into practice complete local sovereignty, then such a condition of international affairs is by its very nature transitory. One can prophesy with assurance that, a hundred years from now, or fifty years from now, if states continue to try to be absolute in their local sovereignty, there will not be sixty or seventy separate sovereign states in the world; there will be far fewer of them—perhaps only one!

Often in life, I think, one finds oneself in a situation something like this: that one

can see that there is a certain goal ahead of one which is inevitable, which one is bound to travel to; and I think in our international life the inevitable goal now ahead of us is the abolition of absolute local sovereignty—but often in such a situation one still has a choice of the roads by which one may approach the single inevitable goal; and, of course, it makes the whole difference, very often, which of the roads we choose. The single goal may be inevitable; the alternative roads offer us a choice; and it is desperately important to make the better choice rather than the worse choice between the alternative ways of reaching the single goal which we must ultimately arrive at.

If our goal is the disappearance of local sovereignty—and I think that, in a world armed with the powers of technique and organization which we possess, it is hardly a controversial thing to say that communities armed with those powers cannot exist side by side in the same world, for long, without disaster overwhelming us all, if they claim absolute local sovereignty—if, then, absolute local sovereignty is doomed to disappear, is bound to disappear, what are the two alternative roads by which we may approach its disappearance?

I think that, as always, there are roughly two ways. One of them is evolutionary—a way by agreement and forethought and non-violence. That is the road of collective security. If one wishes to solve this problem of reaching some kind of world order in a peaceful way, then collective security is the road. It is because we rightly feel the immense importance of travelling by that road and not by the other that we are brought back again and again to this insistent question of collective security now. If we can achieve collective security, the abolition of sovereignty will be qualified and relative.

We must face the fact that collective security means a diminution of local sovereignty, but along this road the diminution will be gradual. The present local states of the world will fit themselves by voluntary agreement into a world order in which they will each retain their local culture, their traditional life, their local administrative autonomy. If local sovereignty is got rid of in that way, the process



Text selected and presented
by Edgardo Canton

will hardly be felt as a loss or a sacrifice.

So I would make an appeal to those present who stand for the view that nationality and the local national life is the supreme good. I would say to them that the people who hold that view—a view from which I personally dissent—ought, more than any of us, to be eager to achieve collective security, because collective security is the way in which the necessary sacrifice of local sovereignty will be exacted from us in the least possible measure.

But if we fail to achieve collective security, there remains only the alternative road, which is a very ancient road and a very familiar one, and that is the road of violence and conquest. These immensely arrogant and highly armed totalitarian states will in that case grind against each other like icebergs in a stormy sea—clashing and grinding against each other till they break each other to pieces—and the inevitable world order will come about in an ancient and a most destructive form, a form which will produce a totalitarian world-state, the kind of super-state that none of us desires to see, a world-state produced by force and resulting in the complete destruction of local life and local autonomy.

If that does occur, perhaps there may be one victorious survivor. I do not think that the fate of the victorious surviving state will be appreciably happier or more prosperous than that of the other states which it has destroyed. But if there is a survivor, I feel very certain it will not be my own country. I do not think it will be any European country. It may not even be any country of European origin. We might have great surprises, in a forcible unification of the world, in the matter of the actual state or community which achieved the task in the end.



UNESCO IN ACTION
HERITAGE

The royal palaces of Abomey

by Jasmina Sopova



A lion, emblem of King Glèlè (1858-1889).

*"The shark who does not fear the
cayman!
The king who saved Dahomey from
dishonour
Is the Master of the Universe who will
fulfill the country's hopes!"*

EACH day at dawn Panlingan, crier of the court of Gezo, king of Dahomey in the first half of the nineteenth century, used to chant his sovereign's praises in these words in the main courtyard of the royal palace of Abomey. He would then prostrate himself and throw dust over his head. The custom had originated two centuries earlier, when King Ouegbadja had ordered his court crier never to address anyone without having first proclaimed his glory. It passed down from king to king until the fall of the last ruler, Behanzin, a hundred years ago.

Through that same courtyard today, visitors enter one of Africa's largest ensembles of historical monuments, the royal palaces of Abomey, a site which in 1985 was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The site, which extends over forty hectares, includes not just the main palace complex, which now houses a museum and craft centre, but also an archaeological zone containing the ruins of other, earlier palaces. Each of the two sections has a

tale to tell of the great kingdom's history. The archaeological zone evokes its birth and growth as a small city-state, while the main palace complex recalls the golden age and the decline of the kingdom, as well as its enduring heritage.

A CENTRALIZED STATE

Located 160 kilometres north of Cotonou in what is now Benin, the town of Abomey was for three centuries the capital of the Fon kingdom that was created around 1620 by Do Aklin, a prince of the royal Allada family. His son Dako was to become the first king of Abomey five years later, but it was Dako's son Ouegbadja (1645-85) who made the kingdom a powerful one.

Ouegbadja laid the foundations of a social hierarchy whose pinnacle was the court; local chiefs were appointed by the central government. Responsibility for ritual matters was entrusted jointly to a priest and to a minister appointed by the sovereign. Having thereby distanced himself from religious affairs, the king was free to concentrate on problems of state. The priv-

ileges granted to the royal wives were shared out equitably, thereby removing, in principle at least, the risk of jealousy or plots. In terms of political influence, none of the wives could rival the queen mother, enthroned at the same time as her son and invested with important administrative functions. An ingenious system of succession permitted the ruler to choose his own heir, enabling him to distance his own sons, if necessary, from the throne. Brothers of the reigning sovereign were often killed as a preventive measure.

Thanks to its solid political, social and religious organization, the tiny city-state rapidly became the principal power in the region. Sadly, only one ruined entryway survives of the palace of Ouegbadja, who was considered the father of his country.

In 1685 Ouegbadja was succeeded by Akaba, who continued the task of enlarging and enriching the kingdom. He built a dwelling for himself that had more than one storey, a rarity at the time (though other rulers were later to follow his example); one imposing wall still survives. Following custom, he built a new palace for himself





Above, thrones of the kings of Abomey (Benin) are displayed in the ceremonial throne-room.

Left, detail of the tapestry in the throne-room.

near that of his predecessor, constructing a new precinct that was linked by passageways to its neighbours.

The walls surrounding these inner enclosures were dwarfed by the gigantic ramparts, from five to eight metres high, that surrounded the entire palace complex. The fortress, which housed barracks for the royal guard and was flanked by dwellings, was further protected by a ditch and a huge barricade of thorns. At the height of the kingdom's prosperity, its outer walls

stretched for three kilometres. It is not hard to understand why the place became known as Abomey, which means "within the walls".

Sadly, the complex was twice ravaged by fire. In Akaba's reign, a conflagration reduced much of the site to ashes. Two centuries later, when the palace had been further enriched with seven additional royal residences, another fire—this one started deliberately, as we shall see—was to cause further damage.

The remains of Akaba's palace and of the multi-storey cabin built by Agadja (1708-1740), his successor, provide valuable evidence of the time when the kingdom began to increase its links with the coast so as to monopolize the provision of slaves to European traders. The slave

trade had become the foundation of the economy of Dahomey, and it sparked fierce competition with the Yoruba of Oyo, who took a share in the traffic and even managed, between 1728 and 1818, to force four successive kings of Abomey—Tegbesu, Kengala, Agongolo and Adandozan—to pay them an annual tribute.

THE GOLDEN AGE

Adandozan was notorious for his incompetent handling of the economy, his despotic temper and his contempt for tradition. He was deposed by Gezo (1818-1858), Abomey's best-known ruler who, according to an English commodore who had dealings with him, bestrode the earth as though it should be honoured to bear



Above, the palaces of the 19th-century King Gezo and his son Glèlè are today a history and art museum. Among the exhibits is this carving of a hornbill, one of Gezo's emblems.

Below, the courtyard of a royal palace of Abomey. The walls are adorned with coloured low-relief carvings.

such a burden. Besides Gezo's personal dignity, there was much to impress foreign visitors in the splendours of his court, which was served by some 10,000 people including an army of about 4,000 female warriors.

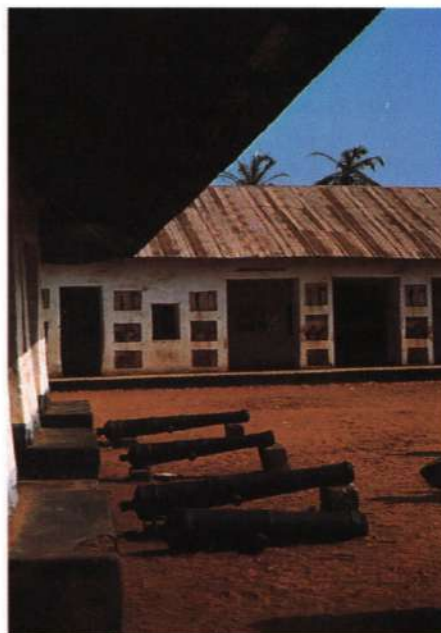
Even today, despite the ravages of time, an aura of nobility surrounds Gezo's palace. Following the example set by his predecessors, he organized the area within the ramparts into three separate, walled-off courtyards. His multi-storey cabin opened on one side onto the main square (*singbodji*) and on the other onto the outer courtyard (*kpododji*), which was used for religious ceremonies and military parades. The "seat of power", the throne-room, the sanctuary and the royal residence were all situated in the private courtyard.

To differentiate religious structures from those with other uses, the former were circular while the latter were rectangular. In either case, the roof was an important feature. Gezo's residence, which had a huge verandah and seven doors, was covered by a straw roof that in its original state was twice the size of what could be seen of the walls. There were good practical reasons for the roof's imposing dimensions. It protected the building from the torrential rains of the wet season and provided insulation, while also lending an air of majesty to the

entire courtyard. Furthermore, it came down so low that visitors were forced to stoop to enter the building, thereby showing their respect for the monarch, and also giving them an opportunity to admire the magnificent polychrome low-reliefs decorating the foot of the walls. To enter some tombs in the complex, people almost had to get down on all fours.

The roofs, which were built on a frame of branches, have not stood the test of time. Now the straw is supported by corrugated iron, which has substantially reduced its volume. The famous low-reliefs, painted with natural pigment, have also suffered damage, particularly from tornadoes in 1975, 1977 and 1984.

Since the site has been included on the



List of World Heritage in Danger, restoration of the dwellings, the roofs, the bamboo ceilings, the low-reliefs, the sculpted doors and windows and what is left of the fortifications has been taken in hand.

The royal residence and throne-room—where you can see Gezo's throne, among others, resting on the skulls of four enemy chiefs—now serve as galleries for the Abomey museum, as do the jewel room and the armoury in the private courtyard of Glèlè, Gezo's son.

DECLINE AND SURVIVAL

The courtyards of the palace of Glèlè (1858-1889) were as rich and elaborate as those of his father. He established two dwellings and two roofed shelters for weavers, copperworkers and sculptors, where present-day craftsmen still practice Abomey's traditional arts. The descendants of the royal families continue to live within the walls of the complex and are responsible for maintaining the tombs and sanctuaries.

In Glèlè's reign, Dahomey underwent radical political and economic change. On the one hand the slave trade was declared illegal, and agriculture was developed, as was palm-oil trading. On the other, Glèlè's conservatism in foreign affairs produced a climate of tension in his relations with Europe that soon turned to open hostility.

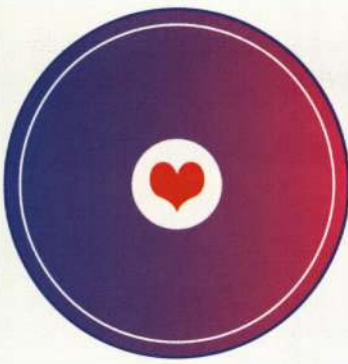
By the time Behanzin came to power in 1889, conflicts with France had escalated to a dangerous level. The French complained of "the insolence of the king of Abomey", who had once asked "Have I gone to France to make war on the French?" The people of Dahomey were not prepared to pay the price demanded for peace: "flying the French flag in Abomey and handing over the arms of all the warriors". Both sides took to arms. A series of engagements over a period of months ended with Behanzin being forced into exile.

Abomey was made a French protectorate, and in 1894 a brother of Behanzin named Agoli-Agbo replaced him on the throne. His succession can be seen as an act of family treachery or as a colonial intrigue; whichever the case may be, Behanzin is regarded as the nation's last independent king. Before leaving the palace complex, he had just enough time to set it ablaze.

That desperate gesture, a final response to the challenge issued by history to the ancient kingdom, could stand as a symbol of the decline of a renowned civilization. But vestiges still survive in spite of fire and the violence of men. In preserving them from destruction, UNESCO has put this major site back into the history books. ■

JASMINA SOPOVA

is a Macedonian essayist who has written many articles and studies on the art and literature of black Africa, the Indian Ocean region and the West Indies.



RECENT RECORDINGS

by Isabelle Leymarie

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

CHINA
The Art of the Pipa
 Lin Shicheng (pipa)
 CD Ocora Radio France
 560046

The *pipa*—a wonderful antique lute, originally from central Asia—was the favourite instrument of Tang-dynasty China and is still played by many Chinese today. Shanghai-born Lin Shicheng is one of the instrument's most accomplished exponents, and is his generation's sole representative of the Pudong School, one of four historic schools of *pipa* technique. Most of the pieces on this disc are taken from the so-called "literary repertoire", one of the two main categories into which *pipa* pieces are grouped, while the alternative, "martial" repertoire is represented by one track, "The King Takes Off His Armour". The music, which draws on very ancient poetic symbolism, can be sedate or lively but is always entrancing. The sublime art of the *pipa* still works its magic today.

MADAGASCAR
Possession et poésie
 CD Ocora Radio France
 580046

Madagascan art is little known, yet it has treasures in store. This disc provides a sampling of ritual music recorded during spirit possession sessions among the Vezo, a seafaring people of the south-west coast. There are also herdsman's songs that recall the chanted poems of the Peul, and a fine

piece of improvisation by male voices. The instruments include bows, rattles, African zithers, drums and diatonic accordions. Although Madagascar lies at the crossroads of Africa and Asia, it is the African element that predominates here, in the rhythmic conception and in the timbre of the voices. The disc is exciting evidence of the island's many delights.

GUADELOUPE
Le gwoka. Soiré léwoz à Jabrun.
 CD Ocora Radio France
 560030

Gwoka, the traditional music of the Guadeloupe countryside, is currently experiencing a comeback both in the Caribbean and in France, symbolizing the vitality of the island's black culture. The name *gwoka*, which is derived from a type of drum, the *ka*, that is played in various parts of the Caribbean and in New Orleans, covers a variety of rhythms, including the *toumblack* and the *léwoz*, a word that has become almost synonymous with *gwoka*. Dancing is accompanied by two kinds of drum, the *boula* and the *makè*, and by songs whose lyrics often evoke local incidents. Recordings of the oldest forms of black music in the West Indies are hard to come by in Europe, which makes this disc, recorded in the Baie Mahault district on one of Guadeloupe's last surviving plantations, all the more precious.

JAZZ

BRANFORD MARSALIS TRIO
Bloomington
 Branford Marsalis (tenor and soprano sax), Robert Hurt (bass), Jeff "Tain" Watts (drums)

Branford Marsalis is enjoying

a career just as successful as that of his elder brother Wynton—whose band he used to play in—even though their styles are very different. Branford's lyricism, inventiveness and technical skills have made him one of today's most popular and admired saxophone players. On this outing he opts for the austere sound of a pianoless trio, thus taking a difficult route on which Sonny Rollins was one of the leading pioneers in the 1960s. In these profoundly spiritual compositions the musicians juxtapose different rhythms and dispense with the usual structural guidelines without falling into amorphous free jazz. Hurst and Watts are familiar with the techniques and the pitfalls of the music, and they share Marsalis's escapades on this unfamiliar musical journey.

TRAVIS SHOOK
Travis Shook (piano), Bunky Green (alto sax), Ira Coleman (bass), Tony Williams (drums)
 CD Columbia 473770 2

This is the first recording by Shook, a young pianist born in Washington state (U.S.A.) who reached the finals of the Jacksonville jazz festival piano contest. Backing him are Miles Davis's old drummer, Tony Williams, and Ira Coleman, a rising star among the bass-players of Shook's generation. Shook is a craftsman who works in delicate shades, creating a subtle music that sometimes brings Bill Evans to mind in the handling of the chords while recalling Ahmad Jamal in its swing and phrasing. Shook reworks standards like "Love for Sale" and "My Foolish Heart" with intelligence and a fine sense of pitch, a quality often lacking in European music that gives the notes extra sonority.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

SARAH CHANG
Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto, Brahms: Hungarian Dances
 Sarah Chang (violin), with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Colin Davis
 CD EMI Classics 7 54753 2

Violinist Sarah Chang, barely twelve years old, is the new prodigy everyone is talking about. On this disc she interprets Brahms's Hungarian Dances and

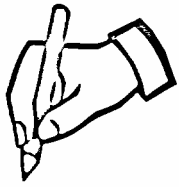


Tchaikovsky's beautiful concerto—something of a showpiece for young violinists—with passion and a keen and wholly individual sense of rhythm, making light work of the most demanding technical problems. Her phrasing, agility and sense of contrast are astonishing.

LOUIS SPOHR
Octet/Sextet/Quintet
 L'Archibudelli & Smithsonian Chamber Players
 CD Sony Classical 53370

Louis ("Ludwig") Spohr, who was born in Brunswick in 1784 and lived at the court of the Duke of Saxe-Gotha, in Vienna and in Frankfurt before moving to Cassel where he died in 1859, was a remarkable violinist, conductor and composer. An admirer of both Bach and the young Wagner, he is a representative figure of the period of transition between classicism and romanticism. His intensely lyrical Octet, Sextet and Quintet for string instruments are performed on this disc on violins, violas and cellos from the Smithsonian Institution's Stradivarius collection. Describing the Sextet for *The Musical World*, a reviewer in 1853 called it "a work which, while showing all the experience of age, displays in an astonishing degree that freshness and spontaneity which are supposed to belong only to youth. One of the last chamber compositions of Dr. Spohr, this *sestet* is equally one of the finest and most captivating of them all." ■





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WHY I NO LONGER BELIEVE IN THE UNITED NATIONS

A *UNESCO Courier* subscriber for many years, I have long admired the magazine and have introduced others to it.

I am still interested in culture, science and education. For a long time I thought they could help humanity to advance by fostering greater understanding between peoples, improved living conditions, a more highly developed spirit of civic responsibility and personal morality, and so on.

At the age of fifty-eight I have reached the bitter conclusion that the noble edifice I dreamed of is at best a façade, of which UNESCO, admittedly, is the most beautiful part. But that's no longer enough for me! I prefer organizations that are smaller and closer to the grassroots.

You are part of the United Nations, an organization which is mandated by the world's great nations. What are these countries actually doing? While their diplomats work to maintain or restore peace, their armaments industries are flourishing and delivering weapons to those who will one day ignite conflicts and massacre populations. The danger is now ubiquitous because international gangsters can get their hands on highly sophisticated and destructive weapons.

There are too many unscrupulous, cowardly and greedy countries. To save their conscience they engage in activities with cultural and humanitarian goals or create organizations to achieve these goals.

GUY SCHOENHAUER
RAMBOUILLET, FRANCE

A HUMAN CHAIN

In response to my offer to exchange back issues of the *UNESCO Courier* which appeared on the letters page of your June 1992 issue, I have received letters from people in many countries.

The response from the Netherlands UNESCO Centre was particularly rapid and efficient. This dynamic, active centre deserves praise for helping to promote the ideals promoted by the *UNESCO Courier*,

ideals inspired by a humanitarian, philanthropic spirit, a thirst for knowledge and, above all, a desire for peace.

I should like to thank UNESCO for making this human chain possible.

HAROLD M. LA BESSE
12 AVENUE BENOIST LÉVY,
94160 SAINT-MANDÉ, FRANCE

P.S. If anyone has available copies of the July-August 1956 and January 1982 issues of the French edition, I'll be happy to take them!

WILL ART LOSE ITS SOUL?

For those who think about the future of art, Sonia Youman's remarkable article in your July-August 1993 issue provided plenty of food for thought. Perhaps it would be useful to redefine the word "image", which has assumed a much broader meaning in the world of contemporary art. It is undeniable that art has developed to a prodigious degree as a result of techniques for the transmission and mass production of images. But these techniques (photography, the cinema, information science) have gradually come to replace the human touch in the creation of images as vehicles for an artistic message. This is an alarming development.

In view of the extraordinary potential of technology, is it not possible that "hand-made" images, so rich in emotional content, will fade into insignificance and eventually disappear altogether? Will they gradually be replaced by the soulless products of super-robots, as George Orwell grimly predicted?

Will the artists of the future have any desire to learn the traditional gestures of the painter and the sculptor, or will they simply have to choose between the computer keyboard and kinds of formula art increasingly bereft of sensibility?

As we prepare to assess the achievements and failures of this century, let us hope that the balance will be redressed and that art will be rehumanized. If this hope turns out to be vain, we must be prepared for the worst: infantile art without soul or structure, mindlessly flickering on and off our screens.

HENRY CHRISTIAEN
GRENOBLE (FRANCE)

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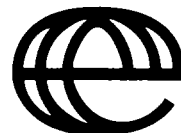
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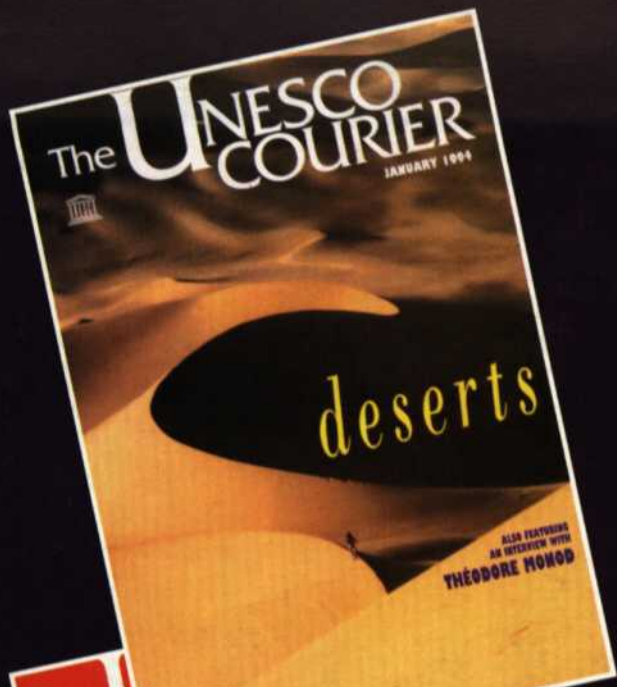
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